

A Reflection: Amber Gray in Australia 2011

International presenter, Amber Gray (authorized Continuum teacher and longtime practitioner of body centered arts and sciences), was in Melbourne in August 2011 to provide an 'Immersion in Continuum Movement'. This three day event was held at the beautiful Abbotsford Convent in Abbotsford. Continuum movement, based on the work pioneered by Emilie Conrad, is a movement practice that allows access to fluid, non-constrained movement and one that does not rely on fixed patterns or postures. The workshop focused on Continuum Movement as a practice that can provide the opportunity for growth and wellness for both the practitioners and clients; as one that provides a means of reducing physical limitations through movement innovation, can counter stress, and increase both perceptual and mental awareness. The practice borrows from the authentic movement principle of witness - to develop the abilities to use the conscious movement practice to discover, uncover and express deep inner experience as a 'root' to thoughts, feelings, actions and stories. We are pleased to publish this lovely reflection from Elise Watts, another new writer to Moving On.

Returning Home: Continuum for the Uninitiated

Elise Watts



Elise Watts is a Melbourne-based Pilates Practitioner, Psychotherapist, Intuitive Healer, Author and Wellness consultant who specialises in mind, body and soul. Elise's passion is facilitating healing through movement, meditation and mind therapies, topics she writes and presents on regularly. She is trained across disciplines such as Pilates, yoga, meditation, psychology, healing and natural therapies. Her sessions combine movement, psychotherapy, intuitive healing and

wellness advice for the ultimate balance of mind, body and soul. Elise competed internationally in sports aerobics and trained to an elite level as a gymnast and dancer. In 2011, her book and DVD "Pilates for Weightloss" was released internationally.

I am not a dance therapist. Despite a background in movement and psychotherapy, the ***Deep Roots: An Immersion in Continuum Movement*** workshop facilitated by Amber Gray was my first dance therapy experience of any kind. I remember walking past a flyer on the notice board of the institute where I was studying at the time; it announced the arrival of a restorative 'bio-intelligent' movement innovation. Little did I know the truth of this depiction or the somatic revolution it heralded. If I had stopped long enough, I would have heard the sound of my cells rejoicing. As was habit, I did not stop to hear this – that would come later. Yet, as I enrolled, a hint that I was opening to something rare and radical was forming.

Sitting timidly upon the wooden floors of the Abbotsford convent, I became aware of the rarity and radicalism of the Continuum experience. Amber, bold and passionate, described her work in war-torn, disaster ravaged countries. Part human-rights warrior-ess, part psychologist, Amber relayed how Continuum had respired life into her own injuries, as well as that of her clients. The brainchild of Emilie Conrad, whose personal history and perspectives are as intriguing as her innovations within movement, Continuum seems well before its time. As the workshop unfolded, so did an extraordinary initiation. Less a 'baptism of fire' than an awakening: a communion with the quiet, patiently stirring waters of my cells. As I learnt the history and foundations of Continuum,

the ancient, watery intelligence of my body seized the moment it had been waiting for – this, the first official opportunity to recognise it with my breath and voice.



Amber Gray demonstrating

Within a day, I had an additional resource. Amber and Continuum helped me to rediscover an internal eddy long ago turned dormant - a dynamic fluid resource, which, for some forgotten reason lay buried amongst the memories of my flesh. What had happened? Had I lost trust in the essential flow negotiating my body? As I lay upon the ground, my fluid system rousing itself once again, I wondered when and why I had chosen to turn this ‘tap’ off. I saw that my body had pushed against obstacles needlessly, and by harnessing my fluidity, I could easily slide past what ‘stood in my way.’ Continuum reconnected me to the slippery instinct all things natural and animal possessed. My movement became uncomplicated once more.

In her own words, Conrad explains that as one increases their resonance with the vital fluids of their bio-cosmic birthright, *“a choreographic freedom emerges that glides, spirals in on itself, expands, decreases and expresses itself with an unpredictable randomness,”*¹ The weekend was spent discovering potentials previously unknown, allowing me to see the healing impact such experiences would have upon the traumatised, broken and exhausted people of the world.

Amber taught us different types of breath, including the ‘Hu’, and my personal favourite, the ‘Luna’ breath. An epiphany occurred for me

during the ‘Luna.’ As I hooked into an internal cascade of breath, akin to a ‘waterfall’ within my torso, an experience of ‘coming home’ took place, harking on in-utero and beyond. For brief moments, it was if the water within me was all I was. My physical boundaries melted away, and the liquid that sat within my cells went in search of the larger bodies of water, the rivers, seas and oceans that surrounded us. As supernatural as it sounds, the experience of my liquescent –self was not frightening. Primitive maybe, healing, definitely, but not for a moment unnatural. On the contrary, my body had been searching for this since birth. In a practical environment, I learnt to use elements of this breathing to help clients experience a soothing paradox of stillness within movement, a shelter within themselves and their movement practice.

I came to understand that if health is maintained via a fluid system, then sound, carried upon this water, would become a call for therapeutic shift within impaired physiology. On this, Conrad said, *“the most efficient way to increase flow in enmeshed fluid molecules is through the use of sound. As we know, water carries sound vibration creating flurries of activities within densely packed molecules urging them to respond.”*² As the group dove into their Continuum practice, we explored the use of sounds, such as ‘eeee’s and ‘oooo’s, each with their unique impact upon our tissue and energetics. Soundings allowed for empowering use of voice, instigating self-healing



and awareness. Like the murmurs of a natural habitat, the convent teemed with the group’s noises of self-reparation and discovery. I found myself moving into deeper connection with my body’s sounds,

something I had grown ill at ease with – afraid to use my voice; self-conscious of the involuntary gurgles, groans and sighs my body emitted. The

¹ Conrad, Emilie. Moving Medicine.

² Conrad, Emilie. Moving Medicine.

soundings promoted more than cellular healing; I learnt physical acceptance and gratitude for my body's tireless service. For those of us disenfranchised from our physiological being, Continuum may offer the opportunity to reunite with the nature we're born with.

We watched videos of Emilie Conrad, revealing impressive examples of Continuum's effect on tissue. As Emilie and her pupils displaying fluid movement unlike anything I had ever seen, a thought occurred to me. At the time, it felt original, but I soon realised, it had occurred to others long before it occurred to me. Nevertheless, it held the key to my Continuum experience, and possibly was the mysterious nudge towards the workshop in the first place. The thought was this: at some point in history, perhaps at the dawning of the industrial age, or perhaps earlier, the modern civilisation lost contact with the nature surrounding it. In doing so we also misplaced our connection to the essential nature within us, intrinsically linked to our environment. Where, for thousands of years, indigenous cultures have used dance ritual, voice and breath to mirror the dance of life, we had forgotten the intricate role our own cells played within the structure of the surrounding ecology. Vice versa, the role that ecology played upon our own health. During the workshop, we explored our misplaced connection to the earth, lying prone, kneeling, on two feet, all the time listening to the earth. It emerged that Continuum was a bridge to return to the time before separation from nature.



As an Aquarian with a treacherously air driven intellect, it's fair to say that listening to mother earth was something I not only needed in spades

but so infrequently partook in that when the time came to commune with her, tears flooded my eyes. It is difficult to describe the experience I had that day in the workshop without using the word mystical, a word that unfortunately does little to entail what I felt. Certainly, it was the first time I had really touched the earth, and for that matter, listened closely enough to hear her response. The release that came with this reignited foundation was profound. I came to recognise the link to roots that Continuum re-establishes, drawing the person closer on all levels, emotionally, physically and even, sacredly, to the music of the earth. The inception of Continuum movement within Conrad's varied influences, including Haitian ritual dance, fits with the grounding effects of the workshop. Aptly titled, the *Deep Roots* workshop established an earthly groundedness, along with an entirely new reverence for the earth.

Last week, I attended a supervision session, a requirement as a psychotherapist. It is an opportunity to share the burdens of your work and gain advice from colleagues and experts. For this session, my fellow therapists and I were required to choose an outcome from our participation. Cards lay upon the floor, each with a message for what we hoped to gain from the day. Participants chose 'listening,' 'empathy,' 'confidence,' all very relevant psychodynamic principles and the things you would imagine a good therapist to be seeking. I chose a somewhat ineffable card that read 'returning home.' The card carried a picture of a boat, floating upon the water, its blue paint weathering in the sun. When asked to explain what it meant to me, I struggled to define more than a 'need for mooring. An anchor into a part of me I may have lost sight of.' My supervisor blinked at me a few times, before quickly moving onto the next participant with, hopefully, something less oblique to contribute. Even I was puzzled by what I had said. A moment later, my mind began to wander. I recalled the experience upon the floorboards of the convent, when I became water, earth and sound within flesh. Continuum informed me, not only of what I needed to keep well, or of what others needed, but also of where I came from, and from whom.

As I sat in my chair, surrounded by eager therapists, talking at length about their problems, the supervisor scribbling them upon the whiteboard, I took my shoes off and pressed my feet into the floor. Closing my eyes, I listened, first to my cells, and then to something beyond them. I imagined myself back in the convent, ecstatically returning home. My mooring into deep roots, an anchor into myself. I found you, once again.