

## *Continuum Movement: Fluid New Meanings for Health and Life*

By Mary Abrams

Emilie Conrad, a visionary and teacher, spent five years in the late 1950's living in the non-industrialized culture of Haiti. Returning to the United States in the 1960's she was deeply struck by the differences she saw in the effects that industrialized and non-industrialized cultures have on how we perceive the human body. Seeing this lead her to distinguish the difference between what we call a body, a form that needs to function in a given cultural context; and an organism, an ancient process that is growing and expanding in its capacity for interaction and communication. With this insight her question was, "As a living organism are we participating in activities that lie below the threshold of our awareness? And if we became aware of them, would they be important?"

Her questioning inspired her to explore ways to awaken, and to listen to deep impulses of silent sensation and movement in her own organism. Her exploring grew into a vision for a continuous inquiry into the human organism's expanding capacity for interaction and communication. Eventually, she began to share this vision with others in her teaching. She calls this visionary process and teaching Continuum Movement.

Through her explorations and teaching, one of Emilie's most important insights is that the fluid system occurring in our bodies is a resonant system. We first experience this fluid resonance in our human development as a permeable cell of membraned water. Our cellular origin shares the same fluid movement and planetary process as that of the first living cell that appeared billions of years ago. Cellular fluid movement is in the origins of all species and of all life forms. Throughout our lives, we continue the dance of the first cell and the origins of all life forms in free-flowing, undulating, multi-dimensional wave motions. It is in this fluid movement that we resonate as one unbroken whole: human to human, species to species, with the planet, and with the galaxy.

Eventually this flowing cellular dance develops into an embryo. As an undulating embryo we are enveloped in amniotic fluid. We simultaneously develop our internal fluid systems. One is the circulatory system, a complex array of river-like arteries and veins in which blood and lymph are circulated within the membrane of our own skin. Another is the virtual sea of fluid in which our organs undulate as they perform vital life functions. Yet another system that develops early in our embryonic process is the nervous system, which streams with electrical currents. These currents internally messenger information linking together our thinking and feeling processes. The very nature of our prenatal cellular origins and our amniotic environment defines us as fluid, moving beings. This suggests to Emilie that even as adults and for as long as we live, we continue to move in an undulating cellular and embryonic process that is resonant with the planetary process.

At birth, we emerge from the world of amniotic fluid to life on land. Our fetal breathing is compelled to adjust to the requirements of the earth atmosphere. Our new breathing process involves two aspects. Gently penetrating inhalations inspire us with oxygen to maintain the form of our organism. Exhaling dissolves the form of our organism back into the environment we inhabit, by releasing compounds created by the oxygen we inhale. Inspiring, the taking on of form, and expiring, the dissolving of form, is yet another dance of the original cell. In this dance

the fluid substance within the cell membrane moves throughout its life from a gel, or form state, to a sol, or dissolve state. In our experience the gel state is bound by time, is stable, and organizes our functional activities. The sol state is less bound by time and form, and is one of creative flux and fluidity.

As adaptable and resilient organisms, at birth and throughout our life process we maintain a dynamic balance between gel and sol, stability and fluidity, as we respond to the effects of gravity and to the complex stimuli generated in our external environment. Stability involves functional activities that orient our organism to survive the demands of the planet, species and culture. Fluidity heightens movements in our organism that increase communication with our internal and external environments. Like all creatures who move about in space maintaining stability and fluidity, and who have reached a certain level of evolutionary development in brain function, we embody an affective system. The affective system resides in the earlier structures of our brain. All stimuli in our internal and external environments, and our response to these stimuli, are linked in us by the affect system.

When the stimuli and our response become amplified by affect, the affective system releases a known pattern of biological events that we feel over our entire body. The patterns make the stimuli/response feel important to us, stirring us to create meaning out of our experience. These biological patterns guide us in novel or unexpected circumstances to monitor our well-being. Affects are the motivational and directional movements in the fluid system of our organism, and they are an essential part of the biological roots for our psychological and emotional development.

In a healthy body there is a dynamic flux between the stability and fluidity of movement at all levels—thinking, feeling, and electrochemical. Stability in our nervous system comes in our ability to delay responses. This function resides in the newer part of our brain, which unlike the earlier brain, is not in immediate contact with our current environment. The newer brain is concerned with higher-order functioning and records past experiences. The earlier brain emphasizes lower-order functions that have immediate fluid communication with all stimuli. We characterize the lower order as “spontaneous.” These delaying and spontaneous responses function as messengers that link us as an organism to the challenges of our present environment. The duality of these functions maintains the integrity within us as an organism as long as the proper timing is operating. In a culture that values one over the other (the higher over the lower), the timing is thrown off and the organism cannot maintain its essential fluid movement. We see how this timing gets thrown off in corporate America, where day in and day out the activity is to make a “profit,” which is a higher-order value. In this pursuit, people push themselves to function for extended periods of time without sunlight, fresh air, sleep, and *fresh* food intake. We also see this in spiritual belief systems that identify God as an entity separate from an unfolding organismic earth process, and who can only be contacted by transcending from the body with a higher-order definition of the mind.

As we mature, and our organism continues adapting to the physical requirements of the stimuli in our gravitational world, we also adapt to the affective-emotional and habitual requirements of our social world. This adaptation takes place initially in our family and later as we move further out into our culture. We currently find ourselves adapted to the demands of a hi-tech, mechanistic society, unconsciously—often ritualistically—repeating the same movements, both neuro-muscularly and feelingly day after day. Examples of this are driving a car, sitting at a

computer, and watching television. Unfortunately, repetitive action like this creates a stable sameness feedback loop, which reduces variables and our ability to respond in fresh ways to a complex array of stimuli. Stable sameness also amplifies our silent-level (not words-level) value system for experiencing the same forms and intensities of sensation over and over. This value system diminishes our essential ability to adapt and to be creative, and results in a trapped condition known as over-stabilization. We experience over-stabilization physically by feeling sluggish, dense, and lacking in resiliency; by breathing rigidly and shallowly; and by losing our capacity to recognize and value subtle sensations and movement. We experience over-stabilization psychologically by feeling the same emotions to the same degree in repetitive loops. One very common example of over-stabilization is stress. The lack of fluid movement created by stress takes many forms. In the joints this lack of fluidity becomes a painful paralysis preventing a person from performing simple daily hand functions. Over-stabilization can be brought on by a traumatic internal or external bombardment. Examples of this are the neurological blitz from a stroke and a spinal cord injury from a motor vehicle accident or fall. Both of these often cause neurological damage and paralysis.

Waking up our flow of feeling-sensing-moving appears to be essential in order to insure the dynamic flux within the duality of our higher and lower orders, and to mediate any degree of the paralyzing effects of over-stabilization. To do this, an arousal of motivation (affect) is essential in order to inspire value in us for feeling subtle sensations and movement. An effective way to awaken and inspire our value for and awareness of our flow of feelings--our innate cellular fluidity--is through Continuum Movement.

Continuum Movement is an ongoing process. In this process the over-stabilized organism is able to regain lost fluidity, which enhances communication between all we have highlighted above: higher and lower orders, earlier and newer brain systems, as well as fluidity and stability. This enhanced communication increases the potential for further life processes to develop through two elemental biological functions: wave motion, which began with our original cellular conception; and breath and sound, which began in the womb and adapted at our birth. With wave motion, breath and sound, Continuum Movement seeks to amplify, through interest and enjoyment, a wide range of stimuli at the silent-level of experience. This amplification is a characteristic activity of the earlier brain where the affect system abides. By calling our attention to sensations and feelings, we ignite the affect system and come into contact with the articulate, and sometimes inarticulate, patterns it expresses within our biology. With these patterns or scripts we begin to make meaning out of our physiological experience, and we acknowledge that we participate in the events of our external environment.

Through fluid movement, which can be accessed through breath, sound, and wave motion, Continuum Movement inquires into the possibilities for reorganizing our inarticulate and over-stabilized physiological and affective patterns: with breath and sound we consciously break up habitual breathing patterns by experiencing inhalations and exhalations of different lengths, rhythms, and vibrations; with wave motion we consciously interrupt our habitual neuromuscular patterns by moving from large spatial movements to subtle internal movements in many exciting gravitational planes. In addition, we practice "open attention." In open attention we stop initiating both breath and wave motion, and experience the biological affects at minimum activation. Here, with no practical purpose or goal guiding us, we maximize the positive affect

of *interest* in whatever unfolds in our own felt sense experience. Here, we harvest the wide range of effects that exploring our breath and movement has on us.

When first exploring Continuum Movement, its combined artistry of breath, sound, wave motion, and open attention makes it possible for us to amplify awareness of our body as a fluid complex environment that renews life. Initial benefits recognized by many participants include: relief from chronic pain, delays in aging processes, increased capacity and flexibility in breathing, greater range of motion, more physical strength and mental clarity, and increased immune system health. Further explorations in Continuum Movement take us beyond our physiology and allow us to function as a living process not bound by culture and time. We experience a full connection with all life forms on the planet, and with the dynamic movements of a creative universe. Continuum Movement guides us in accessing our capacity to feel more deeply, move more freely, and realize broader possibilities for living our lives. We discover the meaning of living in a fully communicative and responsive body, one that reveals through unfolding sensation and feeling--silently, mysteriously-- amazing new meanings for health within ourselves and for well-being throughout the planet and galaxy.

MARY ABRAMS is an authorized Continuum Movement teacher and an Emilie Conrad's Jungle Gym Workout teacher. She continues extensive study with Emilie Conrad, founder of Continuum; with Susan Harper in Em'Oceans & Sensations; and with Dr. Gary David, Ph.D. in Epistemics and Affect Psychology. Mary brings 20 years of teaching experience to her work, and currently teaches groups and individuals in her New York City studio and other regions in the USA. For further information contact: Mary Abrams Moving Body Resources, 112 West 27<sup>th</sup> Street, 4th floor, New York, NY 10001; (212) 206-7542; [www.movingbodyresources.com](http://www.movingbodyresources.com)