**Authentic Movement as Well-Being Practice**

**Abstract**

Authentic Movement practitioners might refer to this practice as one that embraces all aspects of wellbeing (physical, psychological and social). As a practice it was developed by Mary Starks Whitehouse and has its roots in the depth psychology of Carl Jung. Dance movement psychotherapists and practitioners who work with the form usually employ an holistic notion of wellbeing that includes psyche, soma and spirit which I believe is crucial to the sense of transcendence and wellbeing often generated.

Entering this movement practice invites that which is beyond ego consciousness and possible transformational experiences. Often movers have a sense of expansion or inner peace but what happens to those whose life experiences have generated a lasting feeling which is the opposite of being well? What happens when the shadow side or the ‘me’ that is unacceptable and difficult to incorporate into conscious bodily attitude becomes more present? Authentic Movement, or ‘active imagination in movement’, often generates what might be called a deeper sense of ‘me-ness’ but might it also, in some instances for some individuals and groups, be re-traumatizing?

Using personal and clinical examples I explore the philosophical and psychological underpinnings of Authentic Movement practice in order to expand our understanding of who and why this practice may be a practice that invites and develops wellbeing. We develop appropriate strategies to engage the body as moving container (Adler 2002) as well as articulation strategies for ‘carrying forward’ moving experiences into language (Gendlin 1978, 1991). These allow for a sense of ‘authenticity’ which might invite and incorporate difference, fragmentation, known and unknown. This sense of transformation is often robust enough, with the right circumstances, to transform traumatic experience and create a sense of something we might label psychological or emotional wellbeing.

**Keywords:** authenticity, authentic movement, phenomenology, mystical, trauma, direct experience, body

**Biographical Note:**

A practitioner/scholar, Director of *The Choreographic Lab* and Editor of *Choreographic Practices Journal, s*he has studied Authentic Movement with Janet Adler, Tina Stromsted and Helen Payne. She is Professor in Dance, Performance and Somatics at the University of Chichester and has a private practice as a Jungian Analyst, Focusing Trainer and Authentic Movement practitioner. Her key interest and commitment is to creative processes, artistic and psychological, and ways in which we might ‘articulate something’ *from* experience drawing on psychological and spiritual approaches such as ‘focusing’, ‘active imagination’ and ‘mindfulness’. Recent publications include ‘Her body finds a voice in an imaginal world’ *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy Journal*, 2012), ‘Sitting Practice: Reflections on a Woman’s Creative Process’ (*Gender Forum online,* 2010); ‘The voice of her body’ (*Dance and Somatic Practices Journal,* 2010); ‘Psyche Moving: ‘Active Imagination’ and ‘Focusing’ in movement-based performance and psychotherapy’ (*Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy Journal*, 2007). Practice-led research includes *Sitting Practice (2010-11)*; *Psyche’s Witness (2009-10),**Myths and Stories by Her* (2007-09); The Choreographic Lab (2004-07).

Contact Details:

Prof Jane Bacon

University of Chichester, Bishop Otter Campus

College Lane, Chichester, PO19 6PE

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**Introduction**

Authentic Movement (AM) offers individuals and groups the opportunity to explore what it means to be ‘authentic’ human subjects and this, in turn, may lead to a sense of well-being.[[1]](#endnote-1) This term, ‘authentic’, will be explored from a psychological and philosophical perspective to substantiate my claim. Being authentic, in philosophical and psychological terms, as well as pragmatically is fraught with difficulty particularly in a contemporary society that bombards us with images and information about how to live, what to look like and how to fix what we don’t like about ourselves. Mediatized notions of an idealized body image are pervasive and serve to objectify the body from the human subject. The viral spread of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) has, I would argue, done the same thing by putting the brain in charge of the body. But perhaps there is also the danger that body and movement psychotherapies have also colluded with this troubling trend. Luckily, there are researchers and practitioners – medical, philosophical and psychological/psycho-anaytical – who are countering this Cartesian notion that our brains control our bodies, or conversely that our bodies have all the answers and provide the ‘royal road’ to our unconscious processes (Orbach, 2006). I will draw on some excellent researches throughout this chapter to highlight how Authentic Movement (AM) gives us a space where cognition and experience are each given equal value and an opportunity to explore what it really means to be ‘authentic’ and ‘being well’.

Authentic Movement, or inner-directed movement, is a body based (or somatic) practice that is practiced individually, in dyads (duet form) and in groups by tens of thousands of people in many parts of the world. Although the form emerged from a Jungian perspective and is often referred to as a therapeutic practice, it is now used in a variety of ways: as a form of physical expression, creative stimulus, religious practice and therapeutic technique. Authentic Movement practitioners may be, for example, psychotherapists, body psychotherapists, dance movement psychotherapists, choreographers, movement improvisers or artists.[[2]](#endnote-2) This suggests a larger system of meanings, or an ideological position, for a diverse group of individuals with well-being at its core.

According to Don Hanlon Johnson, Authentic Movement is closely aligned to phenomenology as well as psychology and so the implication of an ideological position may not be stretching my point here.

The tens of thousands of people who are engaging in these practices are moving into the foundational rethinking of their lives in relation to others, the earth, and social institutions. In that sense, body practices, like phenomenology, have implications for the reshaping not only of psychology and medicine, but also many other aspects of our social world ranging from schools to spiritual organizations. What Whitehouse and Adler articulate about the nature of their movement practices reflects a principle central to many body practices, the search for fresh bodily expressions as a gateway to liberating us from the stale ideas which continue to dominate our social thinking.

(Johnson, 2004)

What Johnson is saying, and I will develop, is that many of us may be searching or yearning for new ways to experience ourselves, to understand our lives which are beyond and outside the dominant discourse of rationality. AM invites us to be honest with ourselves, to be clear and present, to embrace what we do not know, the irrational and the sublime, as if to allow the river (our energy or libido) to run smoothly on its course. And this is not a romanticized, ‘just listen to the voice within yourself’, because we must be clear and sensible in acknowledging the worlds many millions of children and adults who have had traumatizing experiences who may long for a sense of well-being. So my philosophical and psychological musings have a particular bent – to see how this theoretical underpinning suits the practice. And as subsidiary questions: how can we participate in Authentic Movement without being overwhelmed by traumatic experiences? And, can Authentic Movement help us to move beyond the re-traumatizing that often continues after the initial shock of trauma and give rise to a possible lifetime resource we might call a ‘well-being practice’?

**What is Authentic Movement?**

Janet Adler says we long for practices such as Authentic Movement because, “Illusion or not, separate is how we feel” (Adler, 1996:190) and Authentic Movement offers an opportunity to been seen by and see the Other. It is a process of making sense or meaning of our lives so we transform and recreate ourselves again and again with the help and support of our practice of Authentic Movement. Jung called this process of transforming and coming into consciousness, and our longing for it, ‘individuation’, “a process of differentiation…having for its goal the development of the individual personality” (Jung, 1913:757) and from this expanded individual personality we offer ourselves back into the world.

AM is not a codified form of dance and it relies on the individual having a particular attitude of openness toward working with the body. The process can be described as follows: one person moves, another watches/witnesses. They agree an amount of time for the process and the witness is the timekeeper. The witness sits where the mover asks, then the mover closes his/her eyes and waits for an inner impulse to move. Whitehouse, the founder of Authentic Movement, said, “It is a moment when the ego gives up control, stops choosing, stops exerting demands, allowing the Self to take over moving the physical body as it will” (1979/1999, p. 82). During the time the witness does not move or in any other way intervene. When the time is finished, the two sit together with the mover speaking her experience and then the witness offering her reflections. Both mover and witness speak about the anatomical, physical experience and the individual’s internal or imaginary experiences. Both work to be aware of the experience of moving and an internal sense of being moved. In other words, both are concerned with “an awareness of what I am doing and what is happening to me” (Whitehouse,1979/1999, p.82).

According to dance movement therapist, Fran Levy, Authentic Movement is a process whereby we allow an inner sensation or impulse to take the form of physical action and this allows for a psycho-physical connection to be made available to consciousness (Levy, 1998:65). Joan Chodorow, a prominent Jungian Analyst, describes Authentic Movement (AM) as ‘active imagination in movement’ (1999). In Authentic Movement we work to embody our internal world and allow it to take shape in our moving body. Marion Woodman, Jungian Analyst who uses Authentic Movement in her *BodySoul Rhythms* practice, says “images have body…and our body creates images” (Aizenstat, 2005, p.96).

Following the inner sensation, allowing the impulse to take the form of physical action, is active imagination in movement, just as following the visual image is active imagination in fantasy. It is here that the most dramatic psychophysical connections are made available to consciousness (Whitehouse,1963/1999, p. 52).

Waiting in this way with eyes closed in the presence of a witness, the mover allows herself to give shape and form to whatever arises and is not checked or mediated by a conscious attitude relating to what one should look like or how one should behave. As Johnson describes,

The practice involves teaching people how to wait for movement to arise and evolve as one gives oneself to it within an atmosphere of quiet attention, often with one person acting as a non-interpretative witness for the other. It is a sustained, tutored, disciplined waiting for movement to come from the self, instead of from habitual movements or moving as others would have us.

 Johnson, 2004

The process provides a particular structure with uninterrupted time and space. The (limited) rules are clear – speak from my own experiences, only speak about my feelings and experiences and always try to avoid language that implies that I know or can speak for someone else’s experience of being in the world.

 Writings about AM usually introduce the practice in much the way I have done here. What is not often said is that sometimes a mover may find herself in a dark and dangerous psychological state. Practitioners do have excellent screening processes and most usually any one interested in AM is recommended to have a psychotherapeutic relationship where material that arises in the practice can be more deeply processed. Throughout this chapter I will draw on the writings and my personal experience of working with Janet Adler, to explore how we work with these dark and dangerous places and how we might learn to name and then transform them.

Janet Adler uses the term ‘direct experience’ when speaking about AM practice. She explains,

We are studying the distinction between symbolic experience and direct experience. Direct experience evolves without a particular philosophy, without analytic inquiry, without narrative language. We are practicing awareness of the grace of direct experience when it occurs. The meaning, if any occurs beyond the experience itself, cannot be known until after the experience of conscious embodiment.

Adler, 2007:264

As psychoanalyst Ogden reminds us, some things ‘cannot be translated, transcribed, recorded, explained, understood or told in words’ (Ogden p 2005). For Adler, these direct experiences are difficult to name and when we do try to bring more to consciousness we do this by carefully working with experience rather than speaking *about* that experience. Speaking the direct experience is an invitation into that experience rather than a distancing from it. Speaking ‘the’ experience, rather than ‘about’ it, is an attempt to move away from the problem of a troubling objectification of the body so redolent of Western patriarchal culture still steeped in the visual, as well as an acknowledgement of the power and problems that inhabit the spaces between experience and language.

In AM we work to value the experience of the mover just as it is. I work to value my own experience just as it is. But what happens when we work with someone who has been deeply traumatized in early life or may be carrying the trauma of past generations. Does the practice re-traumatize? How do we help the person into an internal relationship with themselves rather than dissociating. This is Annie’s AM story

I notice the wind and rain outside. I am like a child, I see and touch green grass delicately, just skimming/touching the surfaces. I go close to the ground- I gently tap with my fingertips, listening to what lies beneath. I know this tapping, it is familiar, but a different texture. I remember being on all fours with my wrists together. Then I am sitting in a pool of sunlight and it feels so wonderful, I am something like regal

After Annie moves I ask if there is a particular place in the moving session she would like to explore more deeply. At this point she closes her eyes again, as if still in that place, then speaks about particular ‘pools’ of movement (these are groups of clusters of movements).

I am on all fours and I feel like I am begging or praying or both. I can feel my wrists are close together. It reminds me of this book I am reading ‘Someone Knows My Name’ (Hill, 2007**).**  There is a section where this woman is describing being tied up by her captors and she tells a young boy she will always remember her home, that she will have sense of belonging that will remain inside her no matter where the slave traders take her (she is crying).

I ask her to tell me more about crying at the slave’s ‘sense of home’. ‘I have a deep longing for home, to be at home in my skin’. As the fifth child of a Jamaican family who moved to London in the 1950s, she knows little or nothing of her Jamaican heritage. She says, ‘but I have had a home all my life and it has been the same home and a stable home’. She has no knowledge of a connection to the slave trade, but here in her ‘begging hands’ she feels a deep and personal connection. Working with the background of inter-generational trauma has helped Annie incorporate previously unknown aspects of her self into her conscious attitude.

Adler might describe Annie’s moving experience as seeing an image and then moving into it (‘I see and touch green grass’), followed by a movement that creates an image (‘tapping’) and finally moving inside an embodied image (‘I feel…regal’). Adler [paraphrased below] describes what she calls a ‘simplistic’ means of describing the various ways in which we experience this practice:

1. seeing an image from outside myself (*I see myself sitting…*),

2. Seeing the image outside myself but moving into or toward the image (*I pull myself into the cave*…),

3. The movement itself creates an image (*I touch the stone and I can feel it…*),

4. Moving inside an embodied image (I*am holding emptiness…).*

5. She also suggests movement arises without any internal image with a vivid awareness of the body and we might call these ‘visions’ that occur ‘out there’ or ‘fully within’

(Adler, 2007:265-268).

This clarity of articulation about the different ways we might experience both image and moving in AM practice helps us to befriend and expand our internal life, our relationship to what the mystics might have called the Ultimate, what Jung called Self, what Heidegger called the *truth of Being* and what Merleau-Ponty called *Becoming*. Before going more deeply into these conceptual/experiential frameworks I would like to offer a definition or context for ‘well-being’.

**What is well-being?**

Well-being is most usually discussed in contemporary cultures in the West using quantitative measures of our happiness or health such as wealth, health. According to the UK National Account of Well-Being, well-being is

the science of subjective well-being suggests that…people need…a sense of…vitality…to undertake activities which are meaningful…and make them feel…autonomous (and)…a stock of inner resources to help them cope…Well-being is…the dynamic process that gives people a sense of how their lives are going.

http://www.nationalaccountsofwellbeing.org/learn/what-is-well-being.html (accessed 17/07/2012).

Importantly, the Institute of Well-being reminds us that well-being has been the concern of philosophers since the ancient Greeks but now is more in the domain of the scientists who are amassing evidence about what contributes to the quality of our lives. Perhaps AM is particularly named as a counter-balance to the attitude that our body is simply a machine to be fixed, tuned-up, souped-up or replaced when faulty.

In Helen Payne’s (2006) article, ‘The body as container and expresser’, she claims that AM helps individuals and groups to engage with transpersonal experiences, develop an emotional literacy, interpersonal skills and processes, body awareness, somatic intelligence” (Payne, 2006:162). She adds, “Authentic Movement…can be used to promote emotional wellbeing and health” as it aims to increase connections between body, mind and spirit in the context of a group approach to health and wellbeing, embodiment and wellbeing through movement” (Payne, 2006:162).

According to body psychotherapist Michael Soth, “The body is fast becoming a postmodern fashion accessory, treated like a car as a substitute for self, an advertisement for self” (Soth, 2006:113). He continues, that this is an objectification of the body even though we might think of it as a more positive objectification than previous more callous and sexist images of the body. These images neglect, and invite us to neglect, the spontaneous life of the body in favour of an unattainable image. We use our bodies, or bodies use skin and deeper fascia to record or sense all that goes on around and within it (Pinkola Estes, 1992/96:200). According Jungian Analyst Pinkola Estes, it might be helpful to imagine that it is the body that helps the soul adapt to mundane life, “translates, gives the blank page, the ink, and the pen with which the soul can write upon our lives” (1992/96:206).

Philosopher Alva Nöe suggests that “the locus of consciousness is the dynamic life of the whole, environmentally plugged-in person or animal” (2009:x). Nöe works from the premise that consciousness is experience. He goes on to say “the subject of experience is not a bit of your body. You are not your brain. The brain, rather, is part of what you are” (2009:7). But there are many cognitive scientists who believe all experience can be explained through the mapping of brain functioning. But there are those who speak from the other side, as it were, like Nöe, or Lakoff and Johnson, Shusterman and Damasio. For these philosophers, neuro- and cognitive scientists the body plays a central role and is more than the vehicle of the senses and the means by which we receive impressions of the world (Gold, 2008:3). The work of Damasio (1994) reminds us that the brain is part of the body and that emotional processing takes place in the environment of our bodymind. These he calls ‘somatic markers’ and psychologist Gendlin (1978) refers here to the ‘felt sense’ (1978). And C.G. Jung, spent an entire career with an implicit knowledge (that he struggled to make explicit) about the inter-dependence of body, mind and spirit.

Perhaps I would say that my sense of well-being is enhanced when I continue to attend to and then replenish my processes of inner visualizing, my storehouse of symbolic material, in order that the meanings in my life and the lives of others are not reduced to the cognitive processes of rationality that are the bedrock of 21st century living. I have had numerous psychotherapy clients and students tell me that they do not understand why they cannot control their emotions more like a computer, or that they are unclear why they feel as they do when they have neatly put this or that feeling or traumatic experience tidily in a box. One client said ‘I just have one faulty wire in my brain and if I could fix that I would be fine, but it is like they are just not connected. I can see both ends of the wire and I can see the experience it might be connected to as well. There is a feeling I have when I am in my life that the disconnection creates, but I just can’t connect them’. This client decided to leave therapy because I could not connect her wires quickly and efficiently in the way the computer repair-person might do.

**Inviting Authenticity and the truth of Being**

Adler says, ‘direct experience’, as experienced in AM, “evolves without a particular philosophy” (2007:264). But there are particular philosophies that resonate with AM practice, just as there are psychological approaches and mystical practices that resonate too. Merleau-Ponty explains that our understanding of events is constituted by experience and its opposite. Light is known to us because of darkness. The following passage could be mistaken for the kind of writing that emerges from the experience of AM.

Between the seeing and the seen, between touching and touched, between one eye and the other, between hand and hand, a blending of some sort takes place—when the spark is lit between sensing and sensible, lighting the fire that will not stop burning until some accident of the body will undo what no accident would have sufficed to do” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964**:**162**).**

Merleau-Ponty is referring to painting, suggesting the artist must extend themselves into the world (with eye and hand) to extend and manifest consciousness. This kind of experience is similar to those experiences in AM difficult to describe in words or to define without becoming lost in the conceptual framing of philosophers or psychologists. But, as Johnson reminds us, AM practice might help us to reshape our theoretical understandings,

Whitehouse, Adler, and their associates are exploring a much wider realm of different kinds of non-deliberate movements, opening up different realms of feeling, memory, and image… Adler extends this direction of movement into language and thought itself.  This breadth of bodily exploration, seeking primal roots of movement and words in many new areas…Practice is in the foreground, constantly being the norm against which words and theory are being reshaped. (Johnson, 2006:6).

By placing practice in the foreground, we work with ‘direct experience’ and allow language to emerge. Adler reminds us that “Direct experience creates intuitive knowing” (Adler, 2007:262) and we attend to this experience through an awareness of “embodied detail, felt by the senses one by one” (Adler, 2007:263). Adler calls this ‘tracking’ which is a means to work with direct experience. In relation to the question of re-traumatising, ‘tracking’, when done one to one rather than in a group, offers an opportunity for an individual to be seen just as they are and to be contained by the psychotherapist/Authentic Movement practitioner in a way that gives time and careful attention to ‘embodied detail, felt by the senses one by one’.

Bethan was interested in Authentic Movement but was also afraid of what she might discover. She had experiences of past abuse and neglect. In this instance, learning to ‘track’ was vital and allowed body and brain (Damasio, 1994) or left and right hemisphere of the brain (McGilchrist, 2009) to integrate and so process the past trauma. But this was difficult. Naming (‘My right arm is raised’) required her to stay fully present in a moment rather than allowing her ability to dissociate to take control. We often began with tiny tasks of only one minute. ‘Let’s just be together and you work on tracking your moving experience and if either one of us feels you have somehow left the room or cannot remain present then we stop’.

Adler explains the importance of using language that helps us to embody our moving experience. She warns against ‘the arm’ saying this is like an internal voice asking a rhetorical question, ‘what do you think’, rather than owning our intention, ‘I think…’. This aids an inner dialogue with a self that is disconnected from parts of me. So for Bethan to be able to say ‘I lift my right arm’ shifts her internal dialogue from a body that is objectified and in this instance often dissociated, to a human subject with body and mind who choses to lift her arm and then can discover what more she knows about ‘I lift my right arm’.

Here is another example of an AM experience where the subtle use of language has had an objectifying effect on the mover.

*My head returns to the spot where the sensation on the tip of my nose returns. A sharp point. My nose hovers there, sensing the minutiae of this floor fragment, this tiniest of spots, unseen by all, here on this floor. In this moment another part of me is realising there is no landscape here, only this tiny point on the floor. There is also no-body, just nose and perhaps head.*

The mover could be encouraged to return to this in the witnessing process, being gently guided to question in order to know more about this experience: ‘who is it turning her head’, ‘what more do you know about this floor you are lying on, what do you know about smelling the floor, is it something about the floor that is important or is it your smelling of the floor that is drawing your attention, is this ‘other part of me’ familiar – what do you know about him’. Only then might nose, head and floor become the fullest, authentic, experience of a person in this moment. I would suggest this is similar to Merleau-Ponty in his insistence on the body as the centre of perception. To perceive the world, to be shaped by it, is an embodied process. We might say that this process engenders my ‘authenticity’.

Whitehouse reminds us of the practical reasons for the use of the term: "When movement was simple and inevitable, not to be changed no matter how limited or partial, it became what I called 'authentic'- it could be recognized as genuine, belonging to that person."(Whitehouse, 1999, p. 81). But Johnson suggests that Adler, and others in the AM community, use the term ‘authenticity’ in a similar manner to Heidegger in *Being and Time*, taken from the Greek origins and meaning ‘self-posited’.

My core being is mine to be in one way or another. That core being…is in each case mine. . . But only in so far as it is essentially something which can be authentic” (Heidegger in Johnson, 2006:6).

Johnson may be right about Adler’s use of ‘Authentic’ being related to Heidegger, but in my work with Adler her focus is always on what she refers to as ‘direct experience’. She is not, as previously stated, concerned with philosophical concepts of ‘authenticity’. Still, it may be helpful to explore the connections between the philosophical and the practice of AM.

Psychoanalyst, Jon Mills, drawing on Heidegger’s question of Being *(Sein)* offers the following reflection on the enigmatic question of authenticity:

For Heidegger, authenticity is a uniquely temporal structure and a process of unfolding possibility. It is a state of being that is active, teleological, contemplative, and congruent – an agency with quiescent potentiality. As such, authenticity is the process of becoming one’s possibilities and by nature it is idiosyncratic and uniquely subjective” (2003:117).

According to Mills, for Heidegger, “authenticity is ultimately self-relatedness (within world-relatedness) and marked by Dasein’s (*Being there)* responsibility toward genuine *care*. This care, in other words, is an ownership of Dasein’s freedom and opens a space for authenticity. For Heidegger, this process necessitates the ‘call of conscience’, the voice…that summons us to respond to an authentic appeal and transcend the public everydayness of Being” (Mills, 2003:134). In AM practice, this ‘call of conscience’ allows the hurt or damaged inner child or adult to be heard and seen just as she is. In this process, we allow our conscious body to take us on a journey to become our possibilities and we might know we are on the right path by a felt sense (Gendlin, 1978) of the experience, in that we know in our bodies the feeling and sensation of our potential, our unfolding possibility and we also know its lack.

*My feet don’t feel right, as if they don’t belong to me and my way of being. I’m using them to stand on. It’s as if in some way I don’t feel altogether real.*

Later the mover writes a note of reflection that indicates an awareness of the lack of congruence and ‘authenticity’.

*Uncertain with being upright on my feet brings me lower and lower to find a balance. The feeling of “authentic” in the here and now has to be discovered. You can’t just fit into it or get to it by way of familiar habits.*

If we look further back into philosophical history we see that authenticity, for Nietzsche, was “the person who is not afraid to stand up to the anxieties of living” (Thompson, 2003:196). But the postmodern turn in philosophy has divested our thinking of such fantasies as the ‘authentic hero’ or ‘ideal man’ and Heidegger asserted that there was no such ‘authentic hero’. No longer is authenticity to be found and kept, we will not emerge as a new and ideal person free from neuroses, we cannot attain our ideal no matter how much we diet or undergo cosmetic surgery, no matter how much psychotherapy, meditation practice, or development of our powers of positive thinking. And yet we often find in ourselves, and those we work with, a longing to be whole.

Now, from Heidegger’s perspective, “Authenticity is characterized instead as a specific act or moment in any individual’s life where the context in which a situation arises offers an opportunity to behave authentically” (Thompson, 2003:196). He says, “we might, when a moment allows us, be honest with ourselves” (Thompson, 2003:196). Perhaps, in the examples above, the mover has to notice or become conscious of the possibility of something more than her or his current body and ego position but has not yet had an experience we might call ‘authentic’. As Heidegger says authenticity can be ‘in a moment’, and we hope we might be honest with ourselves, we hope we might allow ourselves to see the truth as we experience it in that moment. To do that we will need to do to embrace the lightness and the dark.

*I close my eyes and hear a wondering – ‘what or who lies in the darkness?’*

In AM we are practicing well-being in each moment when we allow our flesh to become a part of our Being rather than subjecting ourselves to the confused and unhelpful notion of the body as concrete matter that can be altered to suit current media images of an objectified body.

For Heidegger ‘authenticity’ is an attempt to think beyond social expectations, our ego-led imperatives, and allow the truth of *Being*. But for Jung, a psychologist, our authenticity (not a word he used) was to be found in the process of individuation, a ‘relativization of the ego’ and through our experiences of the ‘numinous’.

**self, being, Becoming, Self**

As I have previously mentioned, AM practice is inherently therapeutic but is not therapy per se. It is also practiced and facilitated by people with wider concerns beyond the therapeutic and into the existential or transpersonal. In this section I want to bring together the work of the phenomenologists with Jung in order to posit another aspect of AM practice – its spiritual or transpersonal nature; its potential to allow time and space for the possibility of ‘numinous’ experience, which Jung, said contained the power to transform and heal. Samuels, Shorter and Plaut define Jung’s use of the *numinous* as “more than an experience of a tremendous and compelling force; it is a confrontation with a force that implies a not-yet-disclosed, attractive and fateful MEANING” (Samuels, Shorter, Plaut, 1986:100). This implies that a connectedness between mind, body and spirit may make our lives more meaningful but also that contemporary living makes it difficult to live a life where mind, body and spirit speak to one another and work together, as one, for our wellbeing.

As previously stated, working with AM invites a “direct experience’, a deep listening to the subtle voices of the body. Jung might have used the word ‘psyche’ to express the unity of mind, body and spirit internally and externally experienced, consciously and unconsciously. Like the phenomenologists, Jung was concerned to distance, or to reconfigure, dualist notions of mind and body imposed since the Enlightenment and Descartes’ infamous ‘I think therefore I am’. The body is not merely a machine to be used by the thinking mind. Jung believed self and body are the same, saying “the difference we make between the psyche and the body is artificial…In reality there is nothing but a living body” (Jung and Jarret, 1989:396). Furthermore, and paradoxically, he says “we must assume that the self really means us to live in the body, to live that experiment, live our lives” (Jung and Jarrett, 1989:403). In other words, our living potentiality is spirit and body and these two are essentially the same. For Jung the “symbols of the self arise in the depths of the body and they express its materiality every bit as much as the structure of the perceiving consciousness…Hence ‘at bottom’ the psyche is simply ‘world’” (Jung, 1940:par 291).

Adler (and other AM practitioners) also know and work with body as conscious and unconscious, as our potential to be both subject and object to ourselves (as I hope these examples are helping to reveal). And in AM practice we have particular strategies for working and developing our conscious attitude to our subjective experience – in other words, as previously stated, we work with language in the present tense. This subtle shift in language, to present and first person, keeps experience central and located as my own. I allow into consciousness more than the sensation of stretching up to reach for something, more than the personal memory of lifting my arm for permission to speak or to protect myself from being hurt. Now I lift my arm, and in lifting I learn about my place in the world and my connection to other people, places and things in this (and other) worlds. “Where you are, where I am, here you are, here I am: these words can reflect a developing intimacy with our bodies, our temples” (Adler, 2007:262). It may also allow space for that which we do not yet know to arise through the medium of the body.

For Adler, Authentic Movement is a mystical practice (Stromsted, 2007). It is different from a “moving self and inner witness being merged or in a dialogic relationship” (Adler, 2007: 262). These direct experiences, according to Adler, are synonymous with “surrendering images of self, of an identity of self as one has known it”, of a moving into and through “the archetype of God, or the symbolic nature of God, into a clear silent awareness, an infinite emptiness” (Adler, 2007:262). Here is an of such an experience

*I feel a light appear in the far distance above me. Suddenly there is a stream of light from the source moving through the darkness until I feel it touch my chest. My heart beat is clear and present, the light is touching my skin, penetrating my surfaces, connecting me to this source. I see clearly the line of light, the energy, connecting me to the source. I lay in stillness for sometime allowing my heart to be filled with the light and the light to be filled with my heart.*

I would describe this as a ‘numinous’ experience. Jung advised “in as much as you attain to the numinous experiences you are released from the curse of pathology” (1973, vol.1: 377). The mover experienced an intense light associated with heart energy but also felt an expansion or something more or bigger than ‘me’. Light is a word that has been used to help explain such things as spiritual illumination. As metaphor, ‘light’ sits in our intellectual understanding in an oppositional position to ‘dark’. The witness responds to the mover, ‘this energy that arises from *within* you’. The mover must now consider this light as something that has arisen within, it is not separate, apart or external; it is a direct experience of the ‘light’ and a longing, yearning and searching for the ‘light’.

Such experiences offer radical healing and, for Jung, come from ego’s recognition of our own (and world’s) overpowering, numinous, unconscious structure. According to Capobianco, Jung insisted that therapy was a ‘re-binding of conscious­ness with the unconscious process, a re-consideration by consciousness of the “overpowering,” “numinous” unconscious process’ (1993:30).  Heidegger’s version of the ‘numinous’ might be his ‘Being as Holy’. “Being as the Holy is the endless presencing process which is awesome, but also wholesome; and Dasein who dwells in nearness to the Holy is made whole, is healed” (Capobianco, 1993:31). For both Jung, Heidegger and many AM practitioners, it is the God-image within, that compels us.

In much the same way as Heidegger suggests that we are only ‘authentic’ in certain moments or as Merleau-Ponty entices us into a more expansive embodied engagement with the world, Jung suggested ‘relativization of the ego’ occurred when we come into relation with Self (differentiated from self with a small s to denote an ego position) and this happens most profoundly when we have numinous experiences. Edinger suggests, “If when the individual is thrown back on himself through the loss of a projected religious value, he is able to confront the ultimate questions of life that are posed for him…If he is able to work consciously and responsibly with the activation of the unconscious he may discover the lost value, the god-image, within the psyche” (1972:68). This is what Heidegger would call the truth of Being or the mystics might call Ultimate.

Underhill writes, “What the world calls ‘mysticism is the science of ultimates…the science of self-evident Reality, which cannot be ‘reasoned about’…’(25). A mystic is one who yearns for firsthand knowledge of that which is Ultimate, but one who recognizes that this Ultimate may not come to be known through the use of intellect alone” (in Guildford, 87). Underhill says the mystics believed that “humanity has an instinctual attraction toward the Ultimate” (Guildford, 89). Similarly, Jung spent much of his life on a personal journey into the darkest reaches of the Unknown. But he also said “I restrict myself to the observations of phenomena” (Psychology and Religion:CW11, par.2) and this is a crucial link back to AM practice which also is concerned with phenomena. Authentic Movement is our *practice,* our phenomenological study, not of these psychological and philosophical theories, but of our ‘Being as Holy’, our radical healing through connection to the deep, numinous unconscious structure and our work to allow our instinctual attraction toward the Ultimate. Heidegger’s meditative thought, perhaps like AM, “contemplates the meaning which reigns in everything that is” (Discourse on Thinking, 46) and is available to us simply in ‘dwell[ing] on what lies close to us and meditate[ing] on what is closest…’(47). This, according to Guildford, is a similar method to that employed by many mystics. “[T]he method by which Heidegger seeks to experience the truth of Being to be essentially the same as the method by which the mystics seek to experience the Ultimate” (Guildford, 93). And, I would offer, the method by which Jung seeks experiences of the Self is essentially the same as both Heidegger and the mystics. And most importantly then, the method of AM is also the same as Jung, Heidegger and many mystical scholars. It is the practice, our lived and embodied experience that allows us to connect to our deepest well of Being.

**Conclusion**

AM offers us a way of knowing that many other forms of experience may overlook and, as I have suggested, is a well-being practice. It draws our attention to perception and to experience and that allows us to really notice who we are, where we are and with whom we are. Much of our daily experiences require us to work toward some sort of adaptation to others, either in the workplace, in our families or in other settings. This external processing often means we become lost to our inherent potential for an inner adaptation. Jung suggested that ego, our conscious attitude that navigates our daily living processes, needs to come into relation with the Self, or the internal God image. That process he called individuation. To return to the words of the founder of AM, Whitehouse

What I began to understand during the beginning of my work in movement in depth was that in order to release a movement that is instinctive (i.e., not the 'idea' of the person doing that movement nor my idea of what I want them to do), I found that I had to go back toward not moving. In that way I found out where movement actually started. It was when I learned to see what was authentic about movement, and what was not, and when people were cheating, and when I interfered, and when they were starting to move from within themselves, and when they were compelled to move because they had an image in their heads of what they wanted to do; it was then that I learned to say 'Go ahead and do your image, never mind if you are thinking of it,' and when to say 'Oh, wait longer. Wait until you feel it from within.' (Whitehouse, 1999, p. 23).

In my opinion, AM practice offers a path of individuation. It offers an opportunity to integrate past trauma, when carefully handled, and is an excellent approach to well-being which does not foreground physical over psychic well-being or vice versa because of the inherent inter-relatedness of the psychological and physical. In AM we are allowed to ‘wait until you feel it from within’ and we are seen in all that we are. And even if what you feel from within is, to begin with, painful and troubling, AM is a process of integrating and processing these experiences so that they become meaningful aspects of our lives rather than splintered, fragmented aspects of personality that form the basis of your pathology. If we are not recognized in this way then our psychic development, our sense of identity and worth, may be marred, thwarted or more deeply damaged. Without a deep recognition of ‘who I am’ I may find myself yearning to be seen, to be known by an Other or I may find I lose my way in my life and yearn to find myself on the path or journey towards my self once more. I want to allow for things beyond my conscious awareness and believe that such experiences (so long as we have enough ego strength to contain and work with them – and who can know how much ego strength is ‘enough’) offer a sense of expansion, like the experience of the ‘light’ or ‘numinous’, ‘authentic’, experiences, that little else can. This is the search for Self, the Ultimate, God or whatever name we choose. These give us (to return to the definition of well-being) a sense of ‘vitality’ because we are engaged in ‘meaningful’ experiences that enhance our sense of agency and these experiences, brought to consciousness, offer us a life-time of ‘inner resource’.

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1. Don Hanlon Johnson writes about Focusing, Rolfing, Sensory Awareness, Hakomi, Body Mind Centreing as practices working to connect us with our bodily experience (2004, 2006). I have written elsewhere about Authentic Movement and Focusing as processes that aid a bodily knowing that might be unavailable in other systems of thinking (philosophy or psychology) (Bacon, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2010) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The practice is useful for people from any walk of life so long as they have sufficient ego strength to sustain an exploration of the unconscious. For this reason most who teach or facilitate Authentic Movement groups ask if participants are in psychotherapy or have a supportive therapeutic practice where they can discuss the material that emerges from moving. This is because AM itself is not therapy but can be therapeutic. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)