

# Wave Motion and the Fluid Matrix

BY KEVIN FRANK

*"All search for  
consciousness is  
about mother  
loss."*

—Oscar Ichazo

*"I would say that  
it's about (fluid)  
matrix loss."*

—Emilie Conrad  
Da'oud

In the past year I had the pleasure of participating in two workshops with Emilie Conrad Da'oud and Susan Harper, women who have developed a style of movement and awareness exploration called 'Continuum.'

I first encountered Continuum, without knowing what it was, during my Rolfing training when one of my teachers gave us a chance to get together before class to experiment with some unusual forms of movement. When I finally met Emilie seven years later, I realized that this movement underlay a shift in how I experienced my body and how I did bodywork with clients.

One of the reasons Continuum made such a difference for me was that it opened my perception of the inherent motion of this thing we call 'body.' Before doing bodywork, I spent many years in the practice of Zen meditation, itself an opening of the body/mind. Sitting still, in a place of open awareness, is also part of the Continuum process.

But something specific was triggered in my Continuum exploration. This something was a sense of the body's fluids, specifically their constant complex undulations and waves, that evoked in me an experience like that of being within the watery vessel of the womb. The fetus is surrounded by warmth and support and belongs to an environment that mimics the ocean; it has no question about relationship, and is an open system, continually becoming something new.

These sensations are, for many, a palpable relief from the distress of hyper-alertness in the nervous system, the memory of fetal and infant shock, and more simply, 'stuckness' and repetitive thinking. There is a quality of safety and nurturance that comes from feeling connected to the fluids in which we were and are suspended. The constantly changing fluid motions can also be regarded as an antidote to the brain's repetitive thinking patterns.

In examining human physiology, this experience makes some logical sense because the body is constructed of and by fluids. Embryologically, before there is tissue, there are aggregates of dynamically moving cells existing in a fluid medium composed of something called 'intercellular fluid' which transports the cells and transmits the hydraulic pressures exerted by cell respiration and division. The fluid pressure, in turn, forces the cells to specialize and group together to form tissues and structures. Specialized tissue retains its contact with the surrounding fluid. No process of the body occurs separate from this internal ocean since the intercellular fluid is ubiquitous. This process is dramatically documented by two anatomists, E. Blechschmidt and R. F. Gasser in their book, *Biokinetics and Biodynamics of Human Differentiation*. (1.)

From our existence as microscopic fetal discs to the point where we are grown adults, we acquire more structure and more density to portions of the body's tissues. However, even our densest bony tissue is moist within and suspended in a fluid 'matrix' with which it continually interacts. In fact, all life is evolved from fluid and is primarily made of fluid. Plants, animals, germs—all are mostly fluid, the chemical composition of which is primarily water, but water in many complex arrangements with other ingredients.

Bodyworkers talk about these fluids in the context of the connective tissue which gives the body shape and determines structure. Connective tissue is composed of fibers for structure, and *ground substance* which is a form of intercellular fluid. The ground substance is called a fluid *matrix* because, under electron microscopic examination, it appears to be a complex web of communication pathways and information processors. The fluids of the body — in this case the ground substance — can become more dense as the result of sustained pressures and repetitive motion. When this happens the tissues become more structural and less mutable as fluids within them dehydrate. Rigid and patterned tissue limits how we can move or change.(2.)



Emilie's work addresses the consequences of goal-oriented, repetitive movements that lead to densification of the tissues of the body and, in turn, lead to loss of health and loss of flexibility in the body *and* in the mind. (From Emilie's perspective, how we move is also how we think.) This issue has been addressed before in yoga, Tai Chi, Roling Structural Integration, Traeger, Feldenkrais, and in many other traditions of body work. However, much as I have used and continue to use more familiar tools, Emilie's work adds several new factors which substantially increase the body's availability to change.

At the most basic level of movement, our bodies have an ancient brain section called the brainstem, or what some people refer to as the 'reptilian brain,' which has more value than keeping us breathing if we go into a coma. It tells the body how to do primitive movement such as wiggling, snake-like undulations, and micro-movements which are almost imperceptible to the eye but which mimic the kind of cellular dance occurring in all of us at a microscopic level. Emilie's aim is to wake up our reptilian brains to get us to directly experience what it can do and the means by which she does this is the breath which can wake up this aspect of the brain and stimulate

the fluids in the body.

Emilie offers participants a wide variety of breaths to experiment with, and calls these, 'the spinal fluid breath,' 'the Hu breath,' 'the primordial breath,' 'the luna breath,' among others. The names imply and, in fact, are a combination of movement, breath intention and theater. (What I am calling breath intention is the directing of a breath at or into a particular part of the body with a specific direction and force. Although it may be an unfamiliar idea to some readers, it is fairly simple to learn.) The breath impulses activate, or 'stir up' the fluids throughout the body. Once activated, quiet observation brings the fluid feeling to awareness. The fluid feeling inspires spontaneous movements.

Not all Continuum movement is strictly automatic. There is also intentional and varied experimentation with many primitive forms of movement: some gross movement like that of a dolphin swimming, some tiny like that of an amoebae. The breaths and movement, interspersed with periods of observation, predispose one to something referred to as the 'wave,' or 'wave motion,' of which there are infinite varieties in nature and in the body. The point is not to find or acquire a particular one, but to begin to allow them to 'innovate,' so the body's fluid structure feels and does

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something unconditioned. When we attend to the wave motions we sense the waves continually change, similar to a curious infant testing out what it can do.

Kindling an awareness of these ongoing waves and choosing to pay attention to them is a collaboration of old and new sections of the brain. Undulations and wiggling are ancient and primordial. Our ancestors did those kinds of movements when they lived in the primeval swamps as reptiles. The reptilian brain, the oldest part of the brain, carries this information. Choosing what we pay attention to, using the neo-cortex to make this choice, is a more recent event in evolution. This is what enabled our predecessors to leave the swamp and create civilization, but it can still be limited since it tends to reproduce our familiar goal-oriented movement. By contrast, using the neo-cortex to pay attention to very primitive impulses is, according to Emilie, a break from the past. Each time it becomes something new.

Newness is important; innovation in movement is a chance for change. Movement that comes out of memory represents repetition, and repeated mechanical movement densifies tissue. Dense patterned tissue leads to a condition of closed system decay, more commonly referred to as disease and aging. Inviting wave motion to lead one into new possibilities of movement evokes an autonomous unwinding of patterned tissue. As tissue depatterns, it rehydrates and interacts more fully with its adjacent tissue and fluid and goes back into relationship with the system of which it is a part. This is especially useful since many of the places in our bodies not functioning well are very difficult to touch from the outside. Though not easily touched with a finger or thumb, the tissue gets touched by the fluid. In fact, the fluid has the capacity to stimulate healing in the tissue as it is able to touch it.

I've had the good fortune to be treated by some talented cranial osteopaths skilled at altering fluid pressure changes in the head and elsewhere in the body, places that were affecting my health but inaccessible to direct contact. Having felt the effect of this kind of work in my body, I was further buoyed by meeting Emilie who can teach how to bring about this type of change both in and by oneself.

In her first workshop, Emilie demonstrated how to evoke wave motion in the fluids of both the sacrum (the base of the spine) and the cranium (head). Stirring up the fluids at both ends of the spine temporarily makes the whole spinal system less dense. I found this combination gave me access to the movement of tiny bones and membranes in the head, something very new in the absence of a practitioner's hands facilitating the work.

During the second workshop, after doing a variety of breaths and rolling gently, supine, on a physioball (a three foot diameter inflated plastic ball) with my feet contacting a chair for balance, I found myself in an experience like that of floating freely in water, in a place of safety and sufficiency. This was an experience my body drank in eagerly.

Later, undulating my torso and legs while hanging inverted off of a slantboard I felt new sensations in my legs, pelvis and spine. When walking afterwards, I felt an

effortless increase in the movement, a quality of lightness and enhanced coordination.

Innovative movement makes many desirable outcomes possible. For example, doing yoga after Continuum movement makes the yoga deeper and more three-dimensional. However, despite the obvious virtue of new movement experiences and the revival of our fluids, I think that this work goes beyond achieving astonishing movement. It is also concerned with relationship and feeling tangibly the interpenetration of ourselves with the living environment — including people — that Emilie refers to as 'biosphere.'

The stirring up of the fluid matrix does seem to 'dedensify' us and, in this less dense condition, our assumptions about matter and energy are able to change. That which has been fixed may become mutable. That which has been isolated and closed can be opened and touched.

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Human beings frequently express feelings of isolation and a longing to be more in touch with others. I think it is not enough to feel 'in touch' under ideal supportive circumstances, although it is a first step. Rather, we need to learn what it means to be in touch with our own internal environments and, at the same time, to be able to interact fully and humanely with other people. Without the simultaneous inner and outer attention, isolation is not really contradicted.

Susan Harper, who has also taught Continuum for many years, made reference to the dichotomy between 'local' and 'global' awareness. I interpret this to mean the inner world of movement in one's own body, and the outer world of 'other' — other people, unfamiliar environments, and so on.

In conjunction with this theme of global versus local, Susan led some sessions in which we accessed inner wave motion, breath impulses, and intention of the eyes (gazes both focused *and* soft and receptive), and then juxtaposed that awareness with noticing how we perceived a partner in the group. This was not a technique to achieve a particular state of relationship but, rather, an inquiry that allowed us to examine what gets in the way of relationship.

When we stay present to physical sensation, to openness of perception and, at the same time, present to how we are perceiving another person, relationship itself is innovative, as is the wave motion. Innovation keeps us curious and fascinated. It is, in fact, pleasurable. Thus,

relationship is less likely to be stuck in the known, remembered images.

Given a choice, we do tend to choose pleasure over boredom. I think it is the logical extension of Emilie's work and mention it lest Continuum seem reclusive or rarefied in its approach. I have recommended Emilie's work to many of my clients, especially to those who feel their bodily healing is stuck or that thought dominates sensation. I also feel comfortable recommending these workshops to persons who have concerns about psychic safety. At the second workshop (which took place in the context of a week-long retreat), many participants remarked how supported and safe the atmosphere felt.

As children we learn to judge our body's impulses as right or wrong, and inadvertently learn to inhibit our perceptual fields. The Continuum work teaches a self-referential style of learning that reminds us that there are no wrong sensations in the body and that we don't have to judge any impulses or sensations. Rather, we can find ways to move with all of them. With a broad enough vocabulary of movement forms, we can begin to trust this dictum and trust those with whom we share the exploration.

As previously mentioned, the exploration can lead to discoveries of self healing and access to deep parts of one's body. Empowerment is an overused word, but anything which gives human beings grounded empowerment in their healing process is a useful contribution. Emilie's work gives us another avenue for reclaiming our birthrights as fluid creatures.

*For further information about Continuum write: Continuum Studio, 1629 18th St. #7, Santa Monica, California 90404. Also refer to the article in the Nov/Dec 1987 Yoga Journal. Finally, here in New England, Carol Burstein teaches Continuum classes in the Portland, Maine area.*

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1. Blechschmidt, E., M.D., and Gasser, R. F., Ph.D., *Biokinetics and Biodynamics of Human Differentiation*, Charles C. Thomas, Springfield, IL., 1978.

2. For some introduction to the connective tissue structure of the body reader is directed to the writings of James Oschman who has written for *Convergence*, as well as the book *Job's Body* by Deane Juhan. (Station Hill Press, Barrytown, NY, 1987.) There are a variety of publications by James Oschman, including *A Biophysical Basis for Acupuncture*, and *The Natural Science of Healing*, and are available from Nature's Own Research Association, P.O. Box 5101, Dover, NH 03820.