

Editor Note

Letting What Is Be Seen

It was with great pleasure and excitement that we turned the wheel of this *vehicle for moving ideas* over to the able hands of Mary Ramsay, longtime practitioner and teacher of Authentic Movement, to steer us into the rich and varied landscape of that work. As guest editor, Mary called for and received a wide range of submissions, touching on many of the myriad dimensions the work inhabits. She honors the work, its founders and practitioners, and our pages with her enormous contribution.

Authentic Movement is an elegantly simple and profound form of movement practice, crystallized by Janet Adler, inspired by the “movement-in-depth” work of Mary Starks Whitehouse. The practice offers a means to experience movement as a direct expression of the many layers of mystery and intelligence that live within us—in our cells, atoms, genes, muscles, minds—drawing the unconscious to the surface, into movement, where it can be seen. Through the basic “mover and witness” format of the practice, trust is established, allowing participants to relax and move if they feel an impulse to do so, and not if they don’t. Following these impulses animates the body in unpredictable ways; the range of characters, states, and qualities that arise in the movement are limitless and constantly surprising. The witness practices seeing, without judging, what is emerging, in both the mover and him/herself, cultivating an open and courageously compassionate eye. It is a simple practice, but not always easy.

It is of course true that feeling and following impulses into movement is not exclusively the domain of Authentic Movement. But AM’s consistent focus on allowing, and not judging or directing, the movement that arises protects it from other concerns—issues of virtuosity, responsibility for others, needing to communicate or make sense—and keeps it, as Mary Whitehouse calls it,

“the raw material of dance.” Depending on the context in which the practice takes place, this “raw” movement is framed and processed in different ways. But the respect for that raw stuff seems always the center point. In that way it is a beautifully hands-off, deeply generous and generative form.

How does one put this experience into words? Editing the material for this issue with the authors was an intimate process—touching precious experiences and thoughts, and trying to help find the words to match them. Some things are effortlessly clear the first time, others are snags that force us to tease apart, change vantage point on, discuss until the right phrase or idea comes. Sometimes, when probed, things get *less* clear before they finally come into focus. I’m grateful to all the contributors for letting us share in their world through this frustrating and fantastic articulation process.

As a longtime practitioner of Contact Improvisation, I found myself also reflecting, throughout the making of this issue, on the evolution of forms of practice. How a form arrives—a very particular crystallization of discoveries and ideas that preceded it. How the crystallized form contains, propels, indicates a direction, and grows from within, gathering momentum. And how a form can so deftly and consistently direct one’s experience into a particular realm.

I wondered, How carefully does the form need to be maintained to have it continue to be an effective medium for delivering you to that experience? When do the inevitable developments enhance the form, and when do they threaten to shift the emphasis away from what is considered essential to the original practice? And then what happens?

And then what a gift it is to discover that the form has given you access to a state that, because of the practice, you can now get to in other ways as well.



photo: Bill Arnold

In a quiet room in Rhode Island, in California, Argentina, Germany, a woman is closing her eyes as she moves onto a studio floor. In the same room, the mover’s partner keeps her eyes open and attends, witnessing whatever movement arises in the mover as well as whatever stirs in her as she watches. The mover turns her attention inward and waits for an impulse to move.

The finger wants to lift. She lets it lift. She feels a desire to change her position on the floor and does it. Her limbs lifting and reorganizing bring an abstract landscape to mind, its dark blue center calling her to move head first into its depth, and she follows the urge. As she dives into the blueness—moving headlong through the invisible landscape inside the room, inside her movement, the urge to follow it stops; she senses the cessation of that desire and stops moving. She pauses now, with nothing to do, in the middle of an imaginary landscape that is quickly dissolving. Her pause widens as she allows the nothing to be the only thing she needs. A deep breath comes and with it the desire to sit down. Both she and her witness hear the snow sliding off the roof as she begins to make her way down to the floor.

Nancy Stark Smith

Guest Editor Note

Edith Sullwold died just as Nancy, Lisa, and I began production on this issue of *CQ*, which focuses on Authentic Movement. Instead of telling you about Edith's background and accomplishments (see her obituary on page 5), I want to tell you why Edith was important to me in both my Authentic Movement work and my life.

Many of the underlying connections that made this issue of *CQ* happen were instigated by Edith. I use the word "instigated" intentionally, because Edith had a way of seeing the creative potential in and between people and would purposefully bring them together. It was Edith who suggested to Nancy, and separately to me, that we should meet and consider editing together.

And it was Edith who, years ago, conveyed to me the essence of Mary Whitehouse's teaching at a time when my passion for Authentic Movement was strong, yet I was feeling at odds with the direction the work was taking. Edith's stories of Mary revealed a person who was compassionate and daring, who trusted her instincts as she helped people navigate to the core of their being. Edith painted a picture of someone who loved to laugh, particularly at herself; someone who was willing to hang in there with people as they, and she, sorted out their projections and feelings.

And it was through Edith that I met Feather Whitehouse King, Mary's daughter. Edith knew that Feather had Mary's unpublished manuscript to edit.



Edith Sullwold in 1992, on her 68th birthday, holding Calla Ramsay Sonerson.
photo: Kerry Homstead

Beyond that, I'm not sure what she had in mind; but as a result of meeting Feather and getting to know her slowly over the years, she and I have been able to work together on the previously unpublished articles that appear in this issue of *CQ* and in the spring issue of *A Moving Journal*.

In her practice as a therapist, Edith rarely included movement. She brought what she learned from Mary into her brilliant work with children. Edith would set up an environment with an array of materials—tools, art supplies, musical instruments, a sand tray. She would follow the lead of the child as he worked in different media, built and destroyed things, and involved her in his imaginative play. She told me a story of a troubled, preadolescent boy who loved to light fires. Recognizing the potential danger of this desire, she set up a safe place outside where they could make fires together. This led to his spontaneous enactment of a ritual that was healing for him.

I believe Edith's greatest gift to me was her presence in my life as I mothered two young children. She saw the essential nature of each of my children and

reflected it back to me. She helped me recognize how spirit moved through them, and supported my efforts to channel their energy creatively. I learned about merging and boundaries, about not knowing, about trusting my instincts. In this way, life was my Authentic Movement practice, and the kitchen, my studio.

Over time, I have experienced Authentic Movement as a broad net that brings many colorful, flopping fish to the surface. As a practitioner and a teacher, I have experimented with the practice to discover my place in it. Making this issue about Authentic Movement has been yet another opportunity to follow my curiosity and refine my questions.

I will be forever grateful to Edith for the ways she held me and let me go, encouraging me to make the Authentic Movement work my own. With deep respect and love, I dedicate this issue of *CQ* to her.

Mary Ramsay