

EMBODIED LIVES

*Reflections on the Influence of
Suprpto Suryodarmo and Amerta Movement*



Edited by: Katya Bloom, Margit Galanter and Sandra Reeve

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OPEN ACCESS

Chapter 9

The Echo of Life

Daniela Coronelli

Edited by:

Katya Bloom, Margit Galanter and Sandra Reeve

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A Balinese Saying

Ilmu Padi (a lesson from the rice plant)

semakin tua semakin berisi, dan semakin merunduk
(the older, the fuller, and the more it bows)



CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	x
INTRODUCTION	1
1. PRESENCE	9
Beate Stühm (Germany)	
2. AMERTA MOVEMENT AND ARCHAEOLOGY	18
Keith Miller (UK)	
3. CULTURAL ASPECTS OF THE MOVEMENT WORK	28
Christina Stelzer (Germany)	
4. AMERTA AND TIBETAN BUDDHISM	35
Monika Förster (Germany/Holland)	
5. THE EYE OF THE HAND	43
Steve Hopkins (UK)	
6. A DOG PRACTICING ‘TALKING BODY’	55
José Mulder van de Graaf (Bolivia)	
7. “MAKE LESS THE HOPING”	64
Sandra Reeve (UK)	
8. TOUCHING FORGOTTEN REALITIES	72
Bettina Mainz (Germany)	
9. THE ECHO OF LIFE	83
Daniela Coronelli (Italy/UK)	
10. I ALWAYS DO THREE THINGS	92
Shantam Zohar (Israel)	

11. A PRESENCING DIAL	98
Margit Galanter (USA)	
12. AMERTA MOVEMENT AND SOMATICCOSTUME	108
Sally E. Dean (USA/UK)	
13. CRYSTALLIZATION-PERFORMANCE	122
Lise Lavelle (Denmark)	
14. BEING AND DOING IN THE WILD GARDEN	132
Susanne Tümpel (Germany)	
15. 'MANTRA GERAK'/MOVEMENT MANTRA	142
Agus Bima Prayitna (Indonesia)	
16. THE MUSICAL PORTAL	152
Tim Jones (UK)	
17. NEAR THE UNKNOWN	160
Franca Fubini (Italy)	
18. FAMILY	170
Una Nicholson (UK)	
19. THE INFANT'S LANGUAGE	179
Katya Bloom (USA/UK)	
20. "GOING OUT OF THE SITUATION" AND "STOP, DON'T FOLLOW THAT, WALK!"	189
Regula Nell (Switzerland)	
21. AMERTA MOVEMENT AND AUTISM	201
Sean Williams (UK)	

22. "FIND YOUR POSITION"	211
Susan Bauer (USA)	
23. "BODY BODY"	221
Helen Poynor (UK)	
24. EVER-SPEAKING BEING	231
Michael Dick (Germany)	
25. MOVING IN THE LAW	241
Simon Slidders (UK)	
26. THE BREATHING EYE	249
Andrea Morein (Germany)	
27. JOY	263
Anita Lüdke (Germany/Bolivia)	
28. "RE-MEMBERING" BUTTERFLY BEACH	276
Melinda Buckwalter (USA)	
29. I WILL TRACE THE CONSTELLATION OF MY STARS WITH MY FINGERS	283
Ellin Krinsly (USA/Australia/Mexico/Ethiopia)	
30. AWAKENING ART AND DHARMA NATURE TIME	295
Diane Butler (USA/Indonesia)	
AFTERWORD: A PRAPTO COMPANION	306

9. THE ECHO OF LIFE

Developing Resonance Through Amerta Movement

Daniela Coronelli (Italy/UK)

My journey with Amerta Movement evolved out of my interest in the practices of Mindfulness and Shiatsu, and subsequently in the related practice of Seiki. Right from the start, Prapto's training invited me to embody every aspect of the practices of Mindfulness and Shiatsu, through the language of movement, so I could become familiar with the resonance such embodiment had in myself, in the immediate environment and in the group of people I was sharing this work with. This in turn fed back into and greatly enriched my Shiatsu and Seiki practice, helping me to communicate and respond to clients and students through resonance and guiding, rather than from a position of fixed knowledge and experience. In this chapter I want to describe how all these strands have woven themselves together and how I apply them.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a form of meditation that invites practitioners to bring conscious embodied attention to their response to what is happening in their lives, with an attitude of open curiosity, kindness and equanimity. Mindfulness gives the opportunity to transform distressful life tendencies and to embrace ways of living that cultivate wellbeing and health (Kabat-Zinn 1990).

I was introduced to the practice of Mindfulness initially by my first Shiatsu teacher, Sonia Moriceau, and later by John Garrie Rōshi.

John Garrie had laid a foundation of understanding in me as to how we perpetuate certain patterns that can either lead to wellbeing or reinforce tension and limitation. These patterns then translate to a particular physical posture and behaviour, in daily movement. He presented Mindfulness as a vehicle for transforming these patterns of behaviour, which can lead to illness and involve resistance, holding on to or being apathetic towards the realities of life experience.

In addition to verbal teachings on the way of Mindfulness as first outlined by the Buddha in the Satipatthāna Sutra, and how this approach can give awareness of common human causes of health and disease, John Garrie had devised a 'hara'-based exercise and postural health system that reflected our life tendencies and how to change them through mindful awareness (Garrie, 1998).

Shiatsu

Shiatsu is a touch-based holistic healthcare system originating in Japan. It stimulates the body's vital Ki energy to flow, by applying pressure – deep tissue massage and movement – to specific body areas, acupuncture points and meridians (European Shiatsu Federation 2011). My teacher, Sonia Moriceau, had developed a form of Shiatsu called 'Healing-Shiatsu', which incorporated an extensive training in Mindfulness Meditation.

Through studying the Healing-Shiatsu form I was able to build on my understanding of how types of posture and ways of moving are associated with personal inner and outer perception and attitudes. From this perspective, these physical habituations are indicative factors in a variety of physical and/or mental illnesses.

Proprioception

From both Mindfulness and Healing-Shiatsu trainings, I received an important lesson: how crucial posture and movement (proprioception) are in relation to attitudes held, as well as the health consequences that follow when certain attitudes and ways of embodying them are perpetuated in time. Through Mindfulness practice, this fundamental correlation between proprioceptivity and health development became clear, both in my life and in my work with clients.

Seiki and Resonance

In my work as a Shiatsu practitioner and teacher, the influence of Amerta Movement moved me more in the direction of Seiki, a contemporary Japanese Ki manual therapy, a style of Shiatsu that invites the receiver to recognise and follow their own natural movement towards balance and harmony, through the process of resonance.

The word ‘resonance’ originates from the Latin verb *resonare*, meaning ‘to sound again’, as in an echo. Here, I use the term to refer to our ability to ‘resonate’ with another, to feel empathy with them. In Seiki, as with some other touch-based therapies, resonance plays an important role, and empathic listening is refined and nurtured through training and direct embodied experience. The practitioner develops the ability to sense and feel the key areas where the client’s need for touch lies. That touch often initiates the release of long-held tension in the receiver, be it at a physical, emotional or cognitive level. Such release may manifest simply as a change in body temperature and spontaneous movement like sneezing, twitching or crying, along with deeper breathing. In Seiki, these areas are known as ‘resonance areas’, and can only be recognised through the direct contact between giver and receiver, in the moment-by-moment process of resonance. There are no theoretical or rehearsed bodywork techniques that can point to these areas, as each client’s body has its own map. The practitioner, through maintaining an aligned posture, a mindful, empathic presence and an awareness of their client’s breathing, invites areas of resonance to emerge in the body, where sensitive touch is then applied, opening up the possibility of a healing change to occur in the client (Kishi & Whieldon 2011).

Our understanding of the phenomenon of resonance has recently been strengthened by discoveries in neuroscience, specifically in the field of mirror neurons, which offers possible neurological evidence of how attunement and resonance take place. It is an evolutionary survival development that enables our awareness to sense and respond to non-verbal messages (Lewis, Amini & Lannon 2000). In my understanding of Seiki and Amerta Movement, both receiver and giver are invited to exchange with each other through resonance,

or 'the echo of life', as an expression of both environmental and cultural influences, and to find fulfilment in life, in a spirit of respect, moderation and co-operation.

Amerta Movement and Contact with our Condition

The main difference between the methodologies of both Mindfulness and Shiatsu and the Amerta Movement practice of Prapto is that the former two approaches started and evolved from a centralised form and structure informed by stillness and direct observation, whereas, in Amerta Movement, form and structure are in a continuous process of change. Movement here could start from anywhere: a physical area, a feeling or an idea, and develop from either a source of stillness or movement. Listening to, and following, the inner guidance of the present condition was encouraged; a condition that is always moving with the awareness of direct experience.

In the unfoldment in movement of what appears from moment to moment, there is continual contact with the inner condition and with what is being perceived, staying with what unfolds, gradually lessening the sense of identification and attachment that may arise. With this approach I have found that ingrained habits are often unravelled, and even though they may resurface again and again, their potency lessens in correlation with a decrease in the sense of identification with them. I have also observed this in clients, especially when a strong memory would arise that was connected with a traumatic experience. They have found the movement to be a supportive and safe vehicle for embodying and moving through their condition. So when a memory arose, it would be met with a sense of allowing, in the movement of it, staying present with the feeling of it, with less resistance or clinging. Whilst not based on a fixed form or structure, the movement work enables clients to access and move aspects of themselves that have been frozen in time. I have found this to be an effective and healing approach for my own development and in my Shiatsu and Seiki practices.

Shortly after I encountered Amerta Movement I became aware of how it had the potential to expand the practice of Mindfulness. When Amerta Movement is applied to rigid mental and physical patterns, an opening often unfolds which enables us to explore more deeply the nature of ill health and contracted ways of thinking. This gradually leads to an embodiment of postures, movements and attitudes that inform wellbeing. Amerta Movement is not intended as a solution to any problem, but its practice illuminates many issues.

Amerta Movement training encouraged me to integrate movement work into my life as a Shiatsu practitioner, which greatly enhanced my healing ability, my self-development and enabled me to support others in these processes.

Through Amerta Movement one may also feel more connected, in a fluid way, and there may be less identification or fixedness. From such a position, one may easily enter the form of giving Seiki, whilst also bringing the quality of movement into it, enhancing the ability to work through resonance whilst giving Seiki.

Combining All These Practices

John Garrie Rōshi's work resonated strongly with the origins of Shiatsu, the world of Zen meditation and art, including healing, martial arts, Zen calligraphy, Tea Ceremony, etc. He demonstrated how vitality, wellbeing and creativity can be realised by an experience of life which stems from mindful awareness of movement originating from 'hara' – a Japanese term for a specific location in the abdomen region, considered to be the core of being of the person. Here in this centre, thinking, emotional, as well as physical, processes are being witnessed and experienced in mindfulness as passing life events, rather than cognitive, dis-embodied phenomena that have to be sorted out and accommodated to suit our personal or cultural beliefs. With Amerta Movement (which partly derives from Mindfulness/Vipassana) there was no fixed structure or framework for approaching this, and because of this absence of structure, the doors and windows to Mindfulness were very much left open and were in expansion, able to embrace the bigger picture, the wider environment, free from any self-imposed limitations.

Integrating mindfulness into daily life is one of the greatest gifts shared by both Amerta Movement and Seiki, and this foundation informs both the professional and creative aspects of life. Each action – be it sitting, standing or moving – can be experienced fully, with awareness, as we place ourselves in relation to our kinaesthetic perception and our inner condition. In Seiki, the body landscape of the receiver is no longer sensed through an interpretation of how the meridians feel, as it is in Shiatsu. The ability to observe how movement unfolds in the receiver, in present moment awareness, is essential in Seiki and, through resonant contact, the giver may actually feel where the receiver is in their life and tendencies. With this embodied feeling it is easier to bring attention to where inner

movement wants to flow again and to guide their awareness to it, so that transformation can occur.

Whatever arises in the therapeutic space, in Seiki, is felt through direct embodied experience and is shared, through resonance, rather than controlled by mental planning of what should happen to bring about recovery. In Seiki, as in Amerta Movement, there is no aim to correct any distortion or restriction of movement that has caused a particular ailment, although there is a different process of embodied guidance on how to recognise the inner condition that gives rise to such a change.

In Amerta Movement, there is awareness from moment to moment of the internal condition and of how it changes in response to the context and the environment we are moving in. Working with Amerta Movement, a teacher, guide or facilitator can enter a deep resonance with the location where the movement is taking place, with the physical elements or the atmosphere contained within it, and with the people sharing movement, be it an individual or a group of students. Mindful of such resonance, as it unfolds, they can guide a process of change for the individual or the group by embodying a quality of movement that emerges and connects with the interaction of all the elements involved, rather than from an external application of a teaching technique.

In Amerta Movement, we are invited to sense each and every part of our body as being a ‘member’ of our whole body-mind, and to feel that connection in our movement. We are also very much a ‘member’ of the environment in which we live and move. Not only do we walk on the earth, but we are supported by the earth, which is a part of what we are. Earth, sun, moon and other people are all a part of the inter-connecting whole – not something that is separate. Amerta Movement is rooted partly in Mindfulness (Vipassana) and Sumarah Meditation (a form of meditation practised in Indonesia). Resonance, in Amerta Movement, is the outcome of ‘surrender’, in the sense that I surrender any fixed position or attitude I may have; I am open to what arises.

Guiding and Being Guided Through Resonance

The experience of one of my students, Roberta (name changed), serves as a case study of the richness of these practices as they become integrated.

Whilst moving with a group outdoors, the interaction with the physical elements of the location and the group process triggered a

childhood memory in Roberta, which she experienced as physical and emotional pain. Even though her memory was not accurate, she was convinced that her father had attempted to kill her, after an operation on her tonsils at the age of 4, by covering her up so tightly that she could hardly breathe. This memory now manifested with acute pain in the lower back and a strong sense of fear and agitation, as she had a flashback to the original experience. Initially there was a sense of being overwhelmed and she entered a contracted, held-back posture and displayed an anxious facial expression.

Moving with Roberta, in guidance, I first felt a sense of compassion and tenderness towards what was happening in the space and then my attention shifted, as I felt movement coming from my legs. I invited her to sense the contact with the ground with small steps, at first, and then by taking longer steps and lifting her knees, until movement from her legs began to gather its own momentum and shape. Moving from her legs changed the way she was experiencing her back pain and her initial contracted response. This gave Roberta the confidence to engage with what was happening in the front of her body, her present level of vitality and her ability to move through and interact with it. By allowing her condition to be, and shifting her attention to the front of her body, Roberta was able to accept her memory with curiosity and friendship. Afterwards, whilst talking about her experience, the sense of fear had subsided, together with the pain in her lower back, and she continued to fully embody her front as well as her back.

Often, when I work with students in a group or individually, through a process of empathy, I can feel in myself the resonance of a memory that the other is experiencing. Through guidance, when relevant for the other and/or the group, I may invite that person to follow the movement that is arising, consciously, while moving with them, so they can allow the memory to unfold naturally. This has the effect of en-lightening their presence in the space and, as a consequence, the communication taking place amongst those involved. During a Seiki session, resonance with the client's process and observation of their breathing and movement pattern guides me to touch particular areas of their body. Through this contact a spontaneous physical movement is often released. The client remains completely conscious during the movement and aware that the unwinding taking place is releasing a part of themselves that felt stuck or that they were not previously aware of. Afterwards, clients often report feeling more open and present in their body and clearer about where they are in their lives.

For a number of years, I have been facilitating a series of workshops that combine Seiki, Mindfulness Meditation and Movement. These are mainly attended by Shiatsu and other touch-based and movement therapists, who find these skills useful for their personal and/or professional development. On one such recent workshop, I invited a group of Shiatsu and Seiki practitioners to move with what Prapto calls the quality of *Oval* (purification in circulation/language of nature), and afterwards to exchange Seiki with each other. The quality of *Oval* relates to the natural world, including 'nature within ourselves' – our perception, our body functioning, immune system, respiration, etc. All the elements (earth, water, etc.) are at play within ourselves, and in our physicality there is also a tendency towards objectifying the world as outside of who we are. In seeing all this, we can bring this awareness into our Seiki work, so there is no sense of separation between giver and receiver.

Later, we worked with sound, which comes from the sense of hearing, listening, therefore from the quality Prapto calls *Circle* (bowing in prayer/spiritual language). The quality of *Circle* relates to our sense of the spiritual, self-enquiry and our purpose in life. It also embraces qualities of compassion and empathy, which are valuable qualities to embody when practising Seiki. In working with sound, in the form of chanting specific vowels, whilst maintaining a 'listening' stance, certain qualities of feeling were awakened. When this was translated into touch, it brought with it quite different effects for those who were receiving, in terms of posture, fluidity of movement, response, breathing and in terms of confidence. The movement work is introduced in this way so that participants may appreciate how movement can happen from any part of the body, from the feeling or from the mind. It is also an opportunity to observe the contrast between this Movement model and Seiki, which comes more from the 'hara'.

In Amerta Movement, the space of 'enquiry' is the quality known by Prapto as *Square* (unity in diversity/human language). It facilitates communication, encourages co-operation and offers the flavour of welcoming new possibilities. There is a sense of communication happening, rather than the controlling of it into a particular direction. It invites an open attitude in which communications flow without hindrance. This quality resonates well with the attitude in Seiki, where the flow of resonance between giver and receiver is of prime importance. Amerta Movement has much enhanced my work with Seiki, supporting as it does the facilitation of resonance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, both Seiki, with its more formal expression deriving from the Shiatsu tradition, and Amerta Movement, involve a commitment to remaining adaptable and mindful of ‘what is’, in the reality of the present moment. Such commitment creates a resonant and empathic rapport with the people one is working with. It is a commitment to stay aligned and to keep moving through any lassitudinal tendency, keeping alive the ability to sense what others are feeling, so they may also become aware and alive to such possibilities. My experience with Seiki has been much enhanced by my background in Amerta Movement, and my familiarity, through Amerta Movement, with the art of resonance. I will be forever grateful for this.

~ ~ ~

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www.lifehealingarts.org

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