

# **Portals of Conscious Transformation: from Authentic Movement to Performance**

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## **Abstract**

This chapter discusses the journey of inner witness consciousness and the transformative experience of ten women who participated in a choreography project with the discipline and practice of Authentic Movement at its core. Dancers and non-dancers accepted an invitation to practice the dyad form with the author as external witness in order to create a piece of choreography from instances of ‘being moved’. The movers then shared their dances with the collective of movers in the project and in subsequent public performance. Although not an objective of the project, the choreography became dances that heal through four portals of transformation: to be seen, to see oneself being seen, to be seen by the collective and to be seen in public performance. The author’s and participants’ reflections and the video accompanying the article illustrate the project’s complexity: how, on a physical, emotional and healing level, creating their dances became a process resulting in personal transformational choreography.

**Key Words** Authentic Movement, transformation, inner witness, to be seen, being moved, choreography, non-dancers, transcendence, healing, performance

## **Introduction**

With an international following of practitioners, Authentic Movement has evolved from its roots in dance, dance movement therapy and a base in the Jungian practice of active imagination

(Whitehouse 1958, 1963, 1979) to a formalized movement practice that brings body, mind and spirit together. For many, Authentic Movement offers a way to live in the body and to value all that it can bring to consciousness, including a healing of the body/mind separation which so many seek to move beyond. Mary Starks Whitehouse, the pioneer of this movement work, initially called it "movement in depth" (1958 p.41). It was further refined by two of her many students in two main directions: one direction taken by then dance movement therapist Janet Adler, who developed it into a formalized practice and subsequently named it the 'discipline of AM'<sup>1</sup> addressing how the work develops inner witness consciousness. The other direction taken by dance movement therapist and Jungian analyst Joan Chodorow was in the research and study of Authentic Movement principles in a clinical setting. However, in early 2000, Adler (2002) shifted her practice away from the development of the form to the study of mysticism and the influence of energetic phenomena, a state of higher consciousness, that arose during individual or collective practice of the discipline.

After evolving for approximately fifty-four years, the practice called AM has become as varied as the people who have studied and taught it. It is both practiced and taught in various ways, both in the formalized discipline as created by Adler and informally with practitioners using only specific elements of the practice. A few uses include: as a creative source for visual artists, actors, dancers, choreographers; as meditation and mystical practice; as training for dance movement therapists to experience and to understand somatic transference phenomena. I studied with Janet Adler through the 1990s in the European group which helped her work out questions of the discipline. A former professional dancer, choreographer and dance teacher before I became a dance movement therapist, my learning of Authentic Movement paralleled

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<sup>1</sup> Adler has named the formal discipline, the Ground form, which consists of a developmental sequence of practice with specific names: the dyad , triad , breathing and long circle stages whereas the exchange of what is known as mover and witness roles within each stage addresses the changing relationship and growth of 'inner witness consciousness'. Adler, J. (2002) *Offering from a conscious body [check that body is one word]:the discipline of authentic movement*

beginning Buddhist vipassana meditation practice, which resulted in my confronting experiences and questions in both approaches (Plevin 2005), which continues today. The impulse to bring Authentic Movement into performance germinated in me for quite a while and when I finally began to let it grow, I was not aware of all its ramifications. For me, a memory of an extraordinary moment on stage always hovered about wanting to be understood. I remember dancing Shirah, a piece choreographed by Pearl Lang, who was a soloist in the Martha Graham Company and had her own company. It was a technically difficult piece. Standing on stage, with my head tilted back, eyes in the lights directly above me, my body moved down into a first position grand pliè to the music's opening sounds. I remembered at that moment leaving my body. It was not I who was moving. I was being danced from another source. It wasn't until I met Authentic Movement that I could begin to comprehend what perhaps had happened. That moment on stage held a direct encounter with something other than my ordinary dancer self. My body became a portal – an entry or doorway to another level of consciousness. I had a direct embodied experience with transcendental phenomena. I was both very present to myself and my surroundings and using what is known in Authentic Movement as inner witness consciousness. I was both in this world but not of it. This experience catapulted me into what is defined in Adler's ground form, as a unitive or higher consciousness which can lead to energetic phenomena.

Authentic Movement practice reveals its complexity and simplicity by three essential components: 1. a person who moves who is named 'the mover'. 2. a person who observes and gives testimony to the mover who is named a 'witness'. 3. The intra psychic and inter psychic relationship that develops within and between the two people or two roles.

These three components together form the basis of what is known as the ground form of the discipline defined by J. Adler (2002). Adler (1987) describes the working of the practice in one of her early articles, “Who is the witness?”

The outer form of the work is simple. One person moves in the presence of the another [...] The witness, especially at the beginning, carries a larger responsibility for consciousness as she sits to the side of the movement space. She is not ‘looking at’ the person moving, she is witnessing, listening, bringing a specific quality of attention or presence to the experience of the mover. The mover works with her eyes closed in order to expand her experience of listening to the deeper levels of her kinaesthetic reality. Her task is to respond to a sensation, to an inner impulse, to energy coming from the personal unconscious, the collective unconscious or what Wilbur (1980) calls the “superconscious”....After the mover moves, the mover and witness usually speak together about the material that has emerged during the movement time, thus bringing formerly unconscious processes into consciousness. (p.142)

What is described above is the dyad stage within the development of the AM discipline, a portal through which a transformative experience becomes available to the one who moves and may also occur for the one who witnesses. The term portal refers here to the entry way mentioned above. It is a passageway, facilitated by the presence of the outer witness, which changes self-awareness through what is known as inner witness consciousness. This consciousness first develops by ‘being seen’ by a trusted and non-judgemental external witness. The safety and intimacy established by a relationship of trust allows for the mover to close his/her eyes, facilitating contact with unconscious or conscious thoughts, images, emotions, or memories that may arise in the self. The mover is encouraged to surrender and be moved by her inner impulses or to use her will to practice how she wants or must move. It is a way of touching deeply the inner core of the self and its needs in the moment. She stays in a conscious relationship to how she/he

moves or does not move, through the body's kinaesthetic sense, "a set of sensory signals that originate peripherally in the body, and inform the brain about positions and movements of parts of the body in space" (Jola 2010 p. 216). In a similar way, the external witness becomes conscious of what he/she experiences internally while observing the mover. A changing relationship to trust, intimacy, safety and courage in one's self and in the presence of others is the cord which brought the participants in the project through the portals of transformation.

### **Authentic Movement to Performance**

The project was structured in four phases, which became the four portals of conscious transformation. The template of the phases was: 1. the invitation to participate in the project, and the acceptance to do so. The first portal of "being seen". 2. the practice of Authentic Movement in the dyad stage, "seeing oneself being seen". The dance making choreographic phase. 3. performing the dance in front of the collective who were the movers in the project - which opened awareness of transpersonal phenomena, 4. performing their dance in public. These phases seemed to broadly mirror a developmental path that Adler (1996) mapped out in the practice of AM: acceptance of the invitation to practice AM, affirming one's individual self within a relationship (in this context through our relationship and the making of a dance), performing this dance for the collective (being seen and acknowledged by the group of people involved in the project), while recognizing transpersonal phenomena within the collective and lastly to bring it out into the world.

More than ten women, from ages thirty-five to sixty or, as is called in Authentic Movement, 'movers', responded. Two benefit performances were given in the Vascello Theatre in Rome to collect funds for UNICEF to aid Japanese children after the tsunami of March 2011. Another invitation was given to the movers after the performance to write about their experience about the project from any angle, how it began, its unfolding, or the ending. It was up to them. On an

average, I worked with each woman individually twelve times, an hour and a half each time. The length of the dances ran from two and a half to five minutes.

Remembering and repeating movements that emerge from AM practice to create a dance or set them into choreography is not a part of the practice. However, the nature of the movements that appear in the practice, the relationship of the mover and witness, and the formality of the discipline can at times be related to both dance performance and to the art of theatre prompted me to begin this project. The choreography I focused on is the result of a dance making process by which the moments of moving in the dyad stage formed themselves into a repeatable dance through the AM methodology of witnessing and the relationship created between us. This was done by the mover returning with eyes open to the instant of being moved. She bodily and emotionally recalled it into being, bringing those moments into conscious awareness and also with the possibility of giving form to the movement material. The context and meaning of the dance became clearer as movements were repeated, amplified or discarded on their way to becoming form in the physical space. This process brought the women and me through portals of transformation both in relationship to their inner witness and to my own internal witness as I witnessed them. The dances seemed to answer a need to integrate a small part of a mind/body split that they discovered within the dyad stage.

#### Foundations for healing within the dance making - choreography

The reflections of this author and the mover's writings, will illustrate the complexity of the undertaking: how on a physical, emotional and healing level, sourcing movement from Authentic Movement, creating their dances and performing them became a transformational experience for the participants. At the end of the article an accompanying video\* is available and described, but is not necessary to view in order to understand the project. Creating a dance was the conscious goal -- the invitation for the project. J. Chodorow (1978) specifically

addresses how C.G. Jung developed his methodology of active imagination in order to transcend the opposites of unconscious and conscious tension pulls in the psyche to realize original wholeness of being. He has named this healing function the transcendent function. Within Authentic Movement practice the mover's inner witness consciousness may recognize and work with unconscious movement material at times to transcend the opposites. I believe this function can be traced throughout the process of this project. The healing that came out of the practice by going back into unconscious moments of movement and working them as one would with clay into a dance became choreography that heals. By healing, I mean the unifying nature of experiencing wholeness, as Jung addresses, rather than curing, which implies bringing an end to an ailment. Healing came through awareness of the changing relationship the participant felt in relationship to her inner witness. At every portal, there was another shift, an expanded consciousness in their relationship to themselves, to the dance and to this author. The project seemed to develop and reinforce inner witness presence in the movers. Whitehouse, Adler and Chodorow (in Pallaro 1999), have written extensively in their seminal essays about how the practice engenders healing and have offered explanations about how the healing may be brought about and connected to inner presence which is a bare unadorned non-judgemental awareness of the self. Through evolution of the practice one can see these connections between healing and presence as well in dance performance (Olsen 1993), somatic psychotherapy (Stromsted 1998), meditation and spiritual practice (Avstreith 2007, Field 2007, Plevin 2005), dance ritual (Lowell 2007) theatre performance (Koltai 2007) and in other contexts. Deeper self acceptance as a consequence of integrating unconscious aspects of themselves became evident as the women and I moved through the four transformational portals: to be seen, to see oneself being seen, to be seen by the collective, and to be seen in a public performance.

### **From 'Being Moved' to dance making to choreography**

There can be a locus, a common joining point of mental, physical and energetic phenomena in Authentic Movement, which reveals itself in the mover as a qualitative shift in the movement.

This qualitative shift comes from what Whitehouse (1979) has identified as ‘being moved’.

[...] I move’ is the clear knowledge that I, personally am moving, I choose to move, I exert some demand (not effort) on my physical organism to produce movement. The opposite of this is the sudden astonishing movement when ‘I am moved’. [...] The moment when ‘I am moved’ happens is astonishing both to dancers and to people who have no intention of becoming dancers. (p.82)

Something in the mover shifts which may or may not be available to his/her consciousness. It does not matter how fast or slow, strong or light a mover is moving or the movement itself: it is a change of embodied presence, a change of relationship in the mover to the movement. I am in awe at what I feel and see. I feel a spaciousness open up in my body and mind, there is more ‘room’ for seeing and witnessing. I see a natural aesthetic and a ‘rightness’ to whatever the mover is doing or not doing, that seems to light up the body from within. This is a subjective physical and mental perception which is hard to describe in words. I experience it as a metaphysical change of light and space which marks a shift in the mover’s consciousness. This could be understood as a unifying light and sense of space connecting the unconscious and conscious parts of the self. The state of being in the mover’s movement or stillness is transmitted to and embodied, as well by the witness. It is an experience that may or may not have words, may or may not be able to be talked about.

Adler (1992) writes about an internal state of being that is needed for transformation “To transform we must descend into the body” (p.187). She follows this statement by a quote from contemporary mystic Satprem, ‘The more we descend, the higher the consciousness we need, the stronger the light’ (in Adler, Satprem 1984, p.260). She calls upon the experience and

statements of mystical spiritual leaders Sri Aurobindo, the Mother and again Satprem who she says write about 'luminous vibrations' (in Adler, Satprem 1984 p.284).

Adler's experience, my own and others in the field talk about changing levels of consciousness, the aligning of energies, something takes place out of the ordinary, yet that could be part of an ordinary experience.

Segal (1990) speaks about an alignment of energies through attention, which I understand as a pre requisite to witness consciousness.

Attention is the quintessential medium to reveal man's dormant energies to himself. Whenever one witnesses the state of the body, the interplay of thought and feeling there is an intimation, however slight, of another current of energy. Through the simple act of attending one initiates a new alignment. (p.76)

There is no one way to perceive this alignment. Seeking to describe my inner experience as outer witness, I offer the following examples: I witness a mover's arm lift weightless from her side. Within me I do not sense or perceive a source of the movement. Its rising in space is both ethereal and other worldly. She moves from a source that seems not to be of her, but is her. In speaking about this experience, she says she was being taken by her arms from a force within her self, that she perceived as inevitable as her own inner witness observed the movement. In addition, I witness a mover pressing his back into the floor and sense a power and strength in me as this energy moves through him. He spoke about not finding strength in his body but of being "strengthened" and sensing both the physical possibility and limits of his body. His mind was for him curiously quiet and calm, and brought with it a state of wholeness. Adler (2004) speaks to this direct embodied moment as a unitive state of being within the mover that is described by one of her own students as eternal, universal, beyond that which is ego or self. These instances embody a qualitative shift of presence in both mover and witness. These instances capture and

hold my attention as something wanting to break through and establish a communication between the mover and witness. All stages of the Authentic Movement practice allow for a spontaneous transmission of embodied sensation within and between both the mover and witness. This transmission can be transformative to the consciousness of all movers and witnesses participating in that session and carry on outside the practice into daily life. The movement I am witnessing may be as simple as walking, running, jumping, lying on the ground, moving hands and feet or coming into contact with another mover.

A mover's movement, or the movers' collective work together generated by moving from the unconscious, referred to by Adler (2002) as a descent into matter into the material of the body, held me enraptured and in awe of a natural aesthetic that this state of being can reveal. With eyes closed, this descent can release powerfully emotional movement and gesture. As a witness, I asked myself whether this common, ordinary aesthetic found by the mover/movers could be given form through the mover/witness dyad relationship, molded into a dance and brought into performance? Could the original spark, that qualitative shift, be maintained in the light of consciousness and then public performance? What would be gained - what would be lost?

Whitehouse (1979) acknowledges these moments of being moved in the following way,

It is a moment of unpremeditated surrender that cannot be explained, repeated exactly, sought for or tried out. If it is used as raw material for a dance something is lost, but something has to be lost since that moment was an instant, a happening in and of itself - the structure needed for a lasting work of art is something else (p.82).

The question for the women, along with myself, was how to keep in a true relationship with these moments. What, if any, meaning was being articulated by them and what kind of a dance, a piece of choreography could come of it?

In hindsight, the project confronted dualities also found in the discipline of AM: the polarity of will and surrender and the polarity of inside to outside, or internal to external body experience. C.G.Jung's transcendent function was constantly being solicited. Each woman's will to participate in the project brought her to experience moments of being moved by the unconscious. When brought to consciousness movement was selected to be shaped into a choreographic form both by her will and in response to witnessing. Phrases of movement were developed to remember to repeat, and then finally she had to surrender to what would happen on the stage. Continually, there was the process of shifting between inner sourcing of movement, being present to what was felt intimately *in* oneself and how it would change when it came *out* externally into a form. Could the spark of the original material remain intact? How would the performers reach a place of seeing the audience seeing themselves... how out can one take the intimate self? The journey of the participant's inner witness relationship from the invitation to participate (first portal) to the dyad sessions (second portal), to the collective viewing (third portal), to the public performance (fourth portal) offered a pathway through which it became possible to track how the healing dances came into being.

### **The first portal – I am seen**

As indicated previously, the first portal, the invitation, was based on simply being seen, being acknowledged. According to Authentic Movement language, the invitation was the result of a 'seeing', a recognition of people who had studied with me in Authentic Movement practice, had trained in Creative Movement, or were dance movement therapy colleagues, only a few of whom had formally studied dance or were dancers. These individuals were 'seen' and acknowledged by myself as being able to participate in the project, as having solid enough ego boundaries to enter into and to come out safely of unconscious movement work which emerges in Authentic Movement practice. The proposal was to co-create a solo dance together,

opening the second portal, from movement emerging from AM practice, and to perform the dance in front of the other participants of the collective, the third portal, and finally to bring it, the fourth portal, into public performance. The dance piece would be created in the dyad stage of the discipline, the second portal. In the spirit of being the witness which, in the AM context, means to practice 'mindfulness', to be open to whatever arises in myself or the other, I would respond to the movement and together we would find a way to shape and form it into a repeatable dance, a piece of choreography

Accepting the invitation became the participants' first inner witness relationship, acknowledging that they had been seen. To accept the invitation was a statement from each of them to "commit to an unknown." Not all were like Costanza or Valentina (the women's real names, used with permission), who decided immediately that they would participate.

Upon receiving the invitation, Alessandra wrote about her experience of hearing her judgmental inner witness that told her she was fat, not a dancer, so she discarded the prospect immediately as preposterous. She returned a few moments later to write: "Stop this, let go, throw yourself into it or you will feel remorse for the rest of your life. Life? How much time do I have left to live? Do it!"

Luisa felt fear that had no form or name that the project would fail, that it would be better if she was not involved. She recognized something big was being asked of her and decided to head into it accompanied by the others.

Betta, in her mind's eye, witnessed herself playing. She imaged a wardrobe trunk from which she pulled out or let playfulness and enjoyment fall out. Her question was: could she come out to play?

Valeria immediately said yes to the project but after four months of dyad work and two nights before being seen by the collective of women (the third portal of transformation), fear

paralyzed her. She could not be seen by others in such an intimate place. I accepted that this could be a possible outcome. What melted her fear was the warm non - judgemental response and acceptance of herself by the collective.

### **Second Portal – I see you seeing me as I see myself**

After accepting the invitation, we began the AM practice in the dyad form. We would greet each other in the studio, speak for a few minutes and then begin.

I witnessed one of the movers close her eyes, which allowed for a descent into what can metaphorically be considered a well, a dark unknown place where she waited for the impulse to move or began to move from her will. After moving for what could be ten or twenty minutes, she stopped moving naturally or I indicated by words or a sound that it was time to come out. We acknowledged together her movement work, particularly movement or gesture where we both felt an internal qualitative shift had taken place, a place of being moved. I allowed myself to speak about where I felt in my own body a movement wanted physical expansion, a rhythmic beat, perhaps with more force or stillness. There may have been a movement not spoken about that I spoke to in words or demonstrated with my own body. These were instances where I intuitively sensed lay an unconscious truth, which I held in consciousness. All the women agreed that I could bring these movements out if they were not seen by their own inner witness. We were stimulated by what could be that lay in the shadow of consciousness that may want to be found. Was it ready to be seen? The mover could decide to work with what was found in that session.

The decision to choreograph and how to develop that which was revealed became the central axis of our mover witness dyad relationship. We were both using the practice to find the material yet seeking to stay with the quality of that astonishing moment, to work it like a sculptor stays with the clay, marble or with whatever material, to hone and bring it into a form. The decision to

stay or not stay with being seen in sensuality, anger, sadness, grief, even happiness or to hold the emptiness of form, to do nothing, became an opportunity for transformation, many times to accepting unacceptable parts of themselves. No longer only witnessing the mover, I became, at times, a mover in a shared process playing and collaborating on the piece. It was not important to capture the instant of being moved but to embody the qualitative shift which brought more attention and presence to their movement. The mover and I would both feel this place in our bodies, a shared knowing. From that felt sensation came movement phrases that began to shape and form itself into choreography.

Two questions emerged in the initial period of this portal. How could the choreographer in me get out of the way in order to see the other clearly? How does a mover who may not be a trained dancer remember her movement decisions? The response to the first question was in firmly holding the witness position and field. Adler (2003) refers to her witnessing position in relationship to movers as being able to " [...] discover the gift of themselves, the gift of their own authenticity." (p.27). Different from certain approaches to choreography in which dancers are expected to hold the movement vision of the choreographer's mind, I constantly asked myself, "Where is the mover going in her piece?" I was not interested in a vision of where I wanted her to go. I was seeing the mover as she was, what she had chosen to work with: my role was one of midwife to her creative process. As the performance date drew closer, my choreographic intuition held a sense of timing. What does this woman need to find closure with her piece? Both similar to and in opposition to Authentic Movement practice, the witness does hold the timing for the mover but in practice the mover is not finishing a piece. With these women, I pushed the boundaries in the practice by proposing choices of how to end through the mover's own movements. If we were in formal Authentic Movement practice, she could go back into the movement portion of the work and by her will chose to work that piece of

movement to see where she would want to go or be present when a movement incessantly appears time and time again asking to be seen. Closure of the piece gave it a frame and aided adapting to the reality of the performance.

Being present to the kinaesthetic sense, the internal body position and place of the body in space, was the response to the second question of remembering movements. The fear of not being able to remember movements or movement sequences brought heightened internal attention to the kinaesthetic life of the mover's inner witness. In Authentic Movement practice, remembering is remaining in touch with movement and the emotion/sensation of that memory. It is a memory of a dance encoded within the kinaesthetic experience of the dance's movement ( Sheets-Johnstone 2011). Once a quality of movement was found in the dyad relationship and woven into a phrase of repeated movements, it was the kinaesthetic memory and emotion of that spatial/muscle memory that recalled it.

Francesca

Francesca had completed a training in creative movement and was fairly new to Authentic Movement. She shared the following: "My inner attitude towards Authentic Movement alternated between the fear of losing control, to find the unknown and my wish to let myself flow into the unknown." Her first memory in our dyad work was very strong: she recalled, as she was sitting on the ground, her hands and arms around her shoulders, an intimacy which opened, as she put it, "a warm sensation in her heart" Her body softened, she cried softly. It was, as she wrote, "out of the ordinary." Little by little, the fear of this intimacy became apparent, together with symptoms of nausea, when she moved freely in space. If nausea came while she was moving from repeating movement phrases in setting her piece, this became a signal to heighten consciousness, to become aware of kinaesthetic sensations, and in particular, to plant her feet on the ground. Kinaesthetic sensations, the feedback loop of her body to her

inner witness, and being seen by the external witness, all helped her find a more knowledgeable place, a lived in relationship with her body and aided in memorizing her dance.

Valeria

Valeria was aware after years of practicing AM that repeatedly she began her movement with her back to her witness. This would be a place of healing if she could know it. Facing and moving towards me became a central part of our dyad work and found its way into her dance.

This is an excerpt of a poem she offered about this challenge.

[...]I am a snail rolled into myself,

The gesture begins to dig from within

an extreme gesture that is born from my cave,

my body is a cave.

I move forward

overburdened

inevitable

out

there is no space[...]

She continued, “My dance needed to have space for my impetuous fury, my aggressiveness which comes out every time there is a cause. My witness encouraged me to go back into the practice to find this place in myself. No form came. A horrible fear to be seen in this rapacious

place came instead. We found together that hiding my eyes, protecting myself made more sense. I walk forward with hands over my eyes.”

Valentina

About to finish her training as a dance movement psychotherapist, she made the following revelation while improvising one section of the choreography

My witness guide suggested I try a brief sequence of movements to practice waiting until one movement came to a close in order to sense the emergence of the following movement. It seems simple to say but the more I tried to do this I realized that I could not do it. I broke into tears with the astounding consciousness that I did not have faith in my body. I do not have faith in my body?! But are we kidding?! [...] I, who always talked about how important it is to listen to the body, [...] I discovered that in my deepest place exists distrust in what I feel are body sensations that make me anticipate successive movements, fearfully thinking that they could not emerge by themselves. [...] I discovered something that gave me permission to risk more, to let myself go, to try to go beyond the fear, the risk to feel nothing. Risking not to feel, I could wait and feel the movements coming into being developing from my body instead of my head. I began to sense my body in a new way.

Valentina had awakened her body and mind connection.

Betta

Betta was concerned with the time she had to complete her dance. “In the middle of the project I meet an inner mechanism that I know very well. I use my will to find forms that will tranquillize me. An old story. I arrive for my meeting with the witness and show her steps and phrases fixed to a piece of music.” After seeing it I asked her, “Where is your dance?” It had disappeared, had become external with no deep contact with her essence. She found the courage

to reopen her wardrobe trunk to, as she wrote, “play, give myself caresses, shift my weight, scribble, squiggle, throw, push, be liberated by a dance which came.”

Alessandra

During AM practice previous prior to this project, she became conscious of an inner witness that automatically “commanded her like an owner.” She understood it as an authentic part of a past life that had grown stale. This project brought new emotions that were not encoded, halted or sabotaged by these commands. She found what for her was unusual: stillness and small movements. Could she be still and not judge herself harshly, not look for approval? Silence and time, agents of Authentic Movement practice, had transforming effects. Alessandra experienced the absence of a judging audience or more specifically her own self as the harshest audience negating and obstructing any possibility to witness what was happening in her body clearly. As a former actress, she needed to distance herself from the actual but more difficult internal audience, to learn how to wait in silence and emptiness without fear. “Walking,” she said to me during a session, “I need to just walk and see what happens.” Alessandra walked in the space until she found stillness. From holding stillness she experienced being moved.

### **Third Portal - I see myself being seen by the collective**

We had completed four months of dyad work and were close to the public performance. The next phase, being seen by the collective, became a developmental passage which both rooted their individuality and transcended the process into something greater than themselves. Adler (1996) speaks about the ‘unitive’ state of the practice found within collective relationship. She admonishes;

If you are me, you know how afraid I am, how hopeful, how doubting, how strong, how vulnerable I am. You know that I’m doing the best I can and how deeply I need to be seen, embraced. If I am you, I know of your fear, your hope, your doubt, your strength and vulnerability. I know you are

doing the very best you can and that you desire to be loved as you are. Remembering that ‘I am because we are’ can encourage a freedom of fear and doubt. Such freedom enables hope and strength. (p.194)

As their primary witness, I held the knowledge that these women belonged together even though they had never seen each others’ dances before this moment. The evening of our collective showing, I invoked the same non-judgemental atmosphere that I tried to maintain in individual sessions. Each had been seen in my reflecting eyes and their own inner witness. It was now time to be seen in the larger circle. They were about to practice the art of silent witnessing for each other and to see themselves being witnessed by the collective.

Luisa wrote, “[...] there was this ‘other’ that accompanied the voyage, this other that was close by but we never saw. This created expectation and the fear of being seen that revealed itself as a great treasure.” She added, “[...] I like to think it is because the breath of each one of us left in the studio was breathed in by the other who entered.” Francesca wrote, “I felt we were always united even as the witness worked with each of us individually. My experience in seeing the dances of all my companions of this voyage were of synchrony, as if in seeing the birth of each dance, I gave birth to each one myself.”

Coming face to face with owning one’s truth, performing and sharing it with the collective reinforced the ownership of their individual dances. It also put them into a transpersonal relationship with emotional themes they were all working with[,] giving them a sense of belonging amongst themselves and not only to the project. Paradoxically, their own courage to face the unknown also proved to hold fear of being judged. Before the showing, Valeria wanted to pull out of the project. Her inner witness held paralyzing fear which was softened by the welcoming witnesses that pulled her back in. She held what, I believe, was the fear of being judged by all the women.

Fourth Portal – the Performance, I see myself being seen by the public

An invitation to shift from audience to witness

Before the performance, I spoke to the audience briefly about the practice of AM and the project. I told them that there would be time to comment on the performance afterwards. I shared with them that,

In the beginning I was the witness for each of the women in the creation of their piece, they then became witnesses for each other and were seen in the larger collective. Tonight I want to orient you, the audience, to be witnesses as well, to give testimony, because that is what you are doing here tonight, giving testimony to a journey of deep personal work. I invite you to open a non-judgemental attention to what will be seen; a difficult task, as if bringing attention to something means to naturally judge it. Instead, I ask you to bring attention and consciousness to the lens out of which you see: that the dancer and the dance is her gift, a haiku poem to be read through her body. Although still in your chair you may experience ‘moving’ with each of the performers connecting the space that separates you. You are both observer and participant.

### **A call to be mover / performer**

The collective’s support found in the third portal became the foundation from which the mover/performers could step onto the performing space and be seen by an unknown public. The final portal was at hand. The women were seated in the front row of the performing space with, as Alessandra writes, eyes like “burning embers.” Behind them was the audience. They were not in the circle of formal AM practice but sitting silently. Each one was ready to enter the performance space to be seen and to witness their companions.

Costanza wrote that it took courage to witness naked emotions, her own and others. “To feel the thread that also connects our dances, the existence of one body dancing, to feel us together in front of all those eyes...” Betta, on the other hand, not only found playfulness but amused herself in the performance. “In telling it I feel it is more true. I am present to every moment of my dance as I never have been before; I amused myself with myself...” Giovanna talked about her inner witness becoming an ally helping her focus on each and every moment. While space held an emotion for Francesca, “I have found space for more love inside me,” Valentina witnessed and felt that the soul (anima) released by each mover raised the soul consciousness of the audience to an archetypal and universal dimension, the goal of theatre. Being seen in one’s truth led to strengthening the self, and taking one’s place in a collective, finding one’s relationship to the whole, and transcending this to a collective place are all portals of transformation in the practice of Authentic Movement.

## **Conclusion**

The initial goal of the project was to see if movement found in AM practice could find a meaningful form for dancers and non-dancers and subsequently be brought out into the world. This is what we accomplished. The public responded by talking about the courage needed to reveal oneself, about seeing presence, how they witnessed and became emotionally involved and more present to themselves and to the mover/performers. The gifts of the entire project were different for all, but what was crucial and became apparent in the process was that these dances enabled healing. Authentic Movement practice, where the outward roles of mover and witness are accompanied by inner witness presence respectively, produces what is best called transformational choreography that brought to performance has the power to heal. Every woman opened up to change, found it through the choreography and owned it. Each found her piece of wholeness within her life at that moment. Years before, dancing Shirah, another

choreographer's piece, I was moved to transcend my body, yet I held an inner witness presence.

I was a witness to help birth their dances into existence. Transcendence and then wholeness were found through the base of Authentic Movement practice.

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\*The video complements the article by illustrating segments of the theatre performance, the final portal of transformation. Envisioning the project, it's process and theoretical constructs on which it was based are found in the article. From imagining in word what the dances could be like images of the dances can actually be seen. There is no audio for the images since the movement and dance found through AM practice emerged in silence. After the dance was created music was found and integrated with the movement.

The three basic components of Authentic Movement practice are; to be seen, to see and the relationship between the two. By seeing the video you become the observer/ participant in this process by becoming the one who sees.

You will witness all the women in a brief segment in the beginning of the video in a group dance which the author composed of movements from each of the choreographies. Each woman's name appears with her movement piece.

A CD is available of the entire performance with the music chosen for each piece. Running time is fifty seven minutes.

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I want to acknowledge the editing suggestions of the authors of this book and most warmly, the initial structuring of this article by my dear cousin Arlene Plevin who rearranged words and thoughts dancing on the pages.