

What is Continuum?

By Cherionna Menzam-Sills, PhD, OTR, RCST

Diving into deepening awareness of the fluid body we inhabit, we find ourselves often beyond the scope of words. How do we describe such profound, often primordial experience?

When newcomers arrive in my Continuum classes, I find myself speaking of certain elements of Continuum that seem to me essential to its practise. As Emilie Conrad, founder of Continuum points out, our tissues shift depending on context. We talk in Continuum classes to alter our conceptual context in which to practise. Without understanding the basics of Continuum, we tend to act by default according to our usual patterns and contexts. We might think about moving an arm, for example, and bend and straighten it as we know how to do. The intention of Continuum, however, includes opening to and challenging ourselves to the new, the unfamiliar, the unknown. Here, then, are some basic concepts and intentions that can support us in deepening under our set patterns and issues into our inherent fluidity.

Inquiring into our Fluid Nature

For approximately forty-five years, Emilie Conrad has been investigating the fluidity which we are. Her method, the evolving practise of Continuum Movement, includes using breath, sound, body movement, and awareness. In classes, we generally learn a particular sequence of breaths, sounds, and movement. The sequence is different in every class, with variety supporting our pursuit of fluid, rather than patterned rigidity.

The sounds we make in Continuum sometimes sound like beautiful, harmonious tones like those of a choir, but our intention is quite different from singing. Continuum sounds are usually not projected outward for an audience to hear. They don't need to sound beautiful, although they may. In Continuum, we usually intend to make sounds into our bodies. I think in terms offering a gift to the body. Our tissues, being fluid, vibrate in resonance with the sounds we make. The vibrations of the sounds we make gently shake and loosen our tissues, dissolving whatever tension or patterns they hold.

Our intention is to melt, to return to our fluid source.

Questions in this fluid inquiry include: why are we composed primarily of water? What are the qualities of this water that we are? How do we access a more direct experience of our watery selves? Why and how have we, at least in the modern, western world, apparently forgotten this essential aspect of human being? How can we return to it, and, if we do, what does this offer us?

Over the years, Conrad and her students have discovered great benefits of diving into our fluidity. One is that it apparently enables us to deepen under our patterns, our stories, our personal histories and their effects. It is as if we can return to a more primordial state, prior to our history, and re-form ourselves. How might this occur?

The Three Tissue Anatomies

Modern, western culture does not generally support fluid being. In everyday life, we tend to become tense and focused. We speed up to meet the demands of our lives. In the process, we narrow our attention. We move in linear, automated, repetitive ways. Conrad notes that, in this context, our tissues also become narrow, dense and rigid. She terms this the *Cultural Anatomy*. Our tissues conform to cultural influences.

Being focused can be extremely useful. To write this article, for example, I need to be able to concentrate on my thoughts and the keyboard. To read it requires you focus on the page. Similarly, driving a car, one must focus on the road. Preparing a meal requires orienting to the task at hand. Emergency situations particularly demand alert, focused attention. If I have lost my focus while cooking, and start a fire by forgetting the stove is on, I need to be able to act quickly to remedy the situation or escape the fire. My tissues coalesce to support this action.

In short, we need to be able to enter into the Cultural Anatomy. Problems begin, however, when we remain in this state. In our modern culture, we often stay in an accelerated emergency state, with our sympathetic fight flight nervous system activated. We are designed to be in dynamic balance between this emergency state and our parasympathetic rest and rejuvenation nervous system. Often, however, surrounded by electronics, high speed driving, and constant stimulation, as well as our unresolved traumas, we don't slow down and never really rest. Instead, we collapse in front of the TV, dissociate through intellectual pursuits, or engage in various addictive behaviours.

What happens if we actually slow down? And how do we manage to get under all that conditioning to a slower, more peaceful state?

In Continuum, the way we breathe, the sounds we use, and subtle movements we engage in or are aware of all help us to slow down. As we begin to settle under our everyday state of over-stimulation, we begin to melt. Our movement becomes more flowing. Our perception widens. We deepen into what Conrad terms the *Primordial Anatomy*.

In this primordial state, we become more watery. Our connective tissues shift from a relatively solid gel state to a more fluid sol state. They soften and spread, becoming less dense. We experience more connectedness and wholeness. Our bodies move in a more holistic fashion. Rather than moving one arm or leg in isolation, our movement ripples through us as a whole. Our movement may resemble that of other organisms, as we become more species inclusive. In this relatively dissolved state, we can borrow from the wisdom of other creatures, like the fluid strength and flexibility of the octopus, or the multi-directionality of a unicellular creature, or our own cells.

Here we can experience ourselves as being more like a tiny fetus floating within the womb. Like the embryo, we sense ourselves as relatively unformed, undifferentiated. In the early embryo, any cell can become any kind of tissue in the body. Gradually, cells become more differentiated, behaving and appearing as heart cells, bone cells, brain cells, etc. Once they are differentiated in this way, they tend to stay on one track. A liver cell remains a liver cell. Muscle tissue stays as muscle tissue.

As we melt in a more primordial state, we seem to undifferentiate. It is as if our cells and tissues can once again rearrange themselves to become whatever is needed at the time. We access again the amazing potential of the early embryo.

Conrad points out that embryo can be seen as spiralled water. The cosmos, too, is composed of spiralled water. As water, a highly resonant element, we resonate with the cosmos. In this primordial state, we have access to resources we are cut off from in our everyday density.

We are wave phenomena. We are intended to resonate with slow, subtle rhythms, such as the Schumann wave of the earth. Our daily acceleration and multiple forms of electromagnetic activity in our environments, apparently interfere with our ability to respond to these rhythms. We thus lose touch with an important source of information. Our bodyminds then organize themselves within the cultural context, losing essential orientation to our bio-context. Slowing down and deepening into the Primordial Anatomy enables us to re-set our nervous systems and re-tune to the subtle rhythms of life.

When we slow down even more, we find ourselves in what Conrad calls the *Cosmic Anatomy*. Here, our movement becomes increasingly subtle. We may experience a quality of lightness as our tissues lose their density. An arm or leg feels like it has been lifted by an unseen force and is held suspended within a larger field. We feel nourished, sustained, supported and replenished. It is to me like returning to our mysterious source, where I am fed and renewed. Whatever information I may need seems to be downloaded in this state. I emerge feeling more ready to handle whatever my life may present.

Isolation and Health

Conrad's research has led to a profound appreciation of the field we access as we practise within a group. We know that each of our cells, each organ, each body emits bio-magnetic energy in the process of metabolism. Those involved with energy work of various kinds feel and/or see our energetic fields. As we come together in a group, or through a common intention, a field is created and/or accessed. The field we experience in Continuum seems to be highly supportive of our health and well-being.

Conrad notes that tissues in a diseased state, like cancer, have become isolated from the larger field of the body they are part of. Cancer cells act as if they are independent agents. They multiply without regard or apparent awareness of the needs of their fellow cells. They seem unaware of the possibility of participating in the cellular community around them. Where other cells in the body communicate through resonance, cancer cells act more like people with some forms of severe mental illness, who have difficulty staying in contact with the shared reality. Their behaviour becomes bizarre and unrelational, outside accepted norms and expectations. This can be a lonely, frightening experience, an extreme of the isolation characterising modern culture.

If we return to our essence, we discover we are not as alone as we may have believed. In a primordial state, we remember connectedness. As we slow down, we can once again return to resonance with our wholeness, with others in our field, and with the larger, more expansive energetic field supporting us all. Our tissues can be replenished as our bodies begin to re-orient to health.

Fluid Strength, Resilience and Creativity

Diving into the ocean of our being, we often experience ourselves as less limited, outside the bounds of time and space, connected to all beings and to beingness, itself.

Conrad's current inquiry is guided by the question, if we were not bound in time, would we be susceptible to the effects of our environment? In our rapidly changing, often toxic world, can we be nourished and sustained? Can we flourish in these challenging times?

Continuum takes us into dimensions yet to be explored. We challenge ourselves in our movement time to orient to the unfamiliar, to what is beyond or deeper than the patterns and habits we know too well. We extend our boundaries, broaden our perception, and establish new neural networks. In the process, we can discover a new kind of fitness. We use our muscles in unfamiliar ways. We find ourselves moving in ways we could never have imagined. Our bodies demonstrate a strength based on fluid fullness, rather than rigid hardness. We find a watery softness where, like a river winding its way around rock, we meet whatever arises in our lives with alive, creative resiliency. New possibilities become apparent as we are open to perceive all available resources.

In a world of increasing pollution, radiation, unexpected catastrophes, and diminishing resources, Continuum offers hope. Perhaps, we can learn again to access the bio-intelligence that formed us so miraculously in the womb. Perhaps, there are other ways to support and be supported that we have yet to encounter. I can not imagine a more important time than now to be exploring our fluid potential and the resources Continuum can re-connect us with.

Cherionna Menzam-Sills is an authorised Continuum teacher who has recently relocated to the UK, where she has a private practise. Her work draws on over 30 years experience teaching and practising various therapies and bodywork. She currently teaches Biodynamic Craniosacral Therapy and Continuum across North America and, more recently, Europe. More information on Cherionna is available at her website at: cherionna@cherionna.com.

To learn more about Continuum and Emilie Conrad, please visit the Continuum website at: www.continuummovement.com.