



BOTH IMAGES: BMC WORKSHOP
PHOTO: OTTO RAMSTAD AND OLIVE BIERINGA

BY BONNIE BAINBRIDGE COHEN, OLIVE BIERINGA & ALYS LONGLEY

PRESENT AND LISTENING AND CURIOUS AND OPEN TO DIFFERENCES

The following is an edited version of a conversation between Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, Olive Bieringa and Alys Longley. Bonnie had just completed four days of teaching embryology to a large group of over 70 movement practitioners from all over NZ and Australia.

“By embodying the process of embryological development, we discover the primal roots of our structure, perception, the ability to respond and to be present”

EMBRYOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF MOVEMENT,
BONNIE BAINBRIDGE COHEN WORKSHOP
1-4 APRIL 2017, AUCKLAND

The workshop explored patterns of movement drawn from Bonnie’s research in embryological development. This work challenged many assumptions embedded in the conventional teaching of dance, yoga, Pilates and other fields, and opened space for the development of movement research practice in Australasia.

Olive: Bonnie, you’ve had this experience in Australia and New Zealand and you’ve taught in so many places. What have you learnt? Or how has this workshop in Titirangi been new or different?

Bonnie: I feel like there’s something here, there’s a receptivity to explore. There was total invitation for whatever I wanted to share, and improvise with it in the mind of the room. For me it’s a sense of place, that’s very, very strong. Also, I was really challenging a lot of basic beliefs. Nancy Stark-Smith and I just created a new article, it will be in the next *Contact Quarterly* and part of it was about suspending your belief system. Anyway, so what



I feel often is that certainly I am asking people ... I am challenging their belief systems, all of this 'core' business and muscle stuff.

Alys: Can you explain that a little, that we're suspending our belief about the 'core', that we need to strengthen it?

Olive: Or just, how to be able to put preconceived ideas to the side and find a different set of relationships inside your body and with others and in relationship to space?

Alys: When people in the workshop found the developmental pattern, it was such a breakthrough ... because suddenly we don't need to work so hard ... that realisation that over-developed core strength can prevent the organs from finding the space needed for the body to be in its healthiest alignment.

Alys: I had another thought, about politics. It's to do with the first day of our workshop ... Bonnie you ran an exercise that enabled us to see the different backgrounds we were coming from. We stood up in groups to acknowledge our training and practice. Somebody said something about 'community outreach' and Bonnie said "everybody should be standing up, it's political. It's important that we feel that this work can be shared". So, I just wanted to ask: What is the politics that needs to be opened up, what is it that somatics creates space for that needs to be shared with communities?

Bonnie: At this time, we have to step into community, we have to be *in* a community, not just invisible, or visible, we have to actually be active. Because the world needs our voices, our movement, our presence, whatever way we do it.

Alys: What do you think is enabled by the somatic practice that the world needs?



BONNIE BAINBRIDGE COHEN

OLIVE BIERINGA



Bonnie: People being present and listening and curious and open to differences.

Olive: And something Bonnie said in Australia was about the importance of not apologising for taking up space. To *take* space and not apologise for who you are.

Bonnie: The one who differs from everyone else, maybe has the clue. That's happened so often in history, that the culture's one way, the new something comes in and its rejected but that's the one that's going to lead into the next round.

Alys: It's a real skill to know when it's time to stand out and make that political point about the importance of having practices that are about listening and responding rather than dogmatically embodying a pre-set technique.

Olive: Bonnie, how for you does the embryology fit into that conversation?

Bonnie: That we were present when we came into body. We actually have our history as a current practice. Isn't that extraordinary? It's extraordinary!



BMC WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS / PHOTO: ALYS LONGLEY

Olive: It's almost like we're time travelling (in embryology work) when we touch our tissue or we touch our partner. It's given me a very tangible approach to work with others, from a sense that we're creating space and that the space has consciousness.

Bonnie: When I put my hands on someone I don't know what I'm going to do. There's a trust in not-knowing. No matter how much experience, just keep not-knowing because we don't know. But be present and talk to each other, whether non-verbally or verbally.

Alys: Having come into this work and being a real beginner in it, the practice of working with the body that I am now and the body that I was as an embryo has helped me to open new possibilities of alignment and movement.

Bonnie: We can guide somebody but they have to remember it. You can't teach it, you can only guide, to help them remember at the cellular level, and then the head level after that.

Olive: What happens too is that we're learning this embryology material but we're also learning how we learn. There's all kinds of ways to learn BMC. Is it best for them to watch? Is it best for them to look at pictures? Is it best for them to just receive hands-on? Or to move? So, all of those things are happening in the room ... also sleep ... It is an act of being present to yourself, and to the room. Then you also come to the material in a way that you're ready to. That can be very different for different people.

Bonnie: And that there's room for that.

Olive: I always love that from the first day to the last day of a workshop, watching people ... The first day they always come up to the assistants and talk about how they're not getting things and then by the end they're in a different place where they realise ... they're unlearning the cortical kind of attachment of their nervous system to get all of the information...

Bonnie: From the teacher

Olive: They're realising there's multiple ways in the room that they can access the information and maybe it's best if they just spend the whole-time dancing on their own in the corner, just letting come in what comes in. ■

A transcript of the full conversation between Bonnie, Olive and Alys can be found on the DANZ website:

danz.org.nz/present+and+listening

**By 2020 new websites
will deliver much more.**

Why wait?

Find more at
flightdec.com

Contact Fraser Carson
021 669 101 or 04 475 9500
fraser@flightdec.com

 **flightdec.com**
websites Your future, right now.