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Be still and know: Authentic Movement, witness and embodied testimony

ABSTRACT

The article looks at dance narratives and the body, investigating the somatic and spiritual practice of Authentic Movement. Be Still and Know: Authentic Movement, Witness, and Testimony considers the movement practice of Authentic Movement as a possible creative source for 'bodily becoming.' This article also traces the practice of Authentic Movement, which sits on the intersections of dance and spirituality, from its origins to new applications, and even its application to Body Theology. To view this physical practice as a way of meaning-making in the context of dance knowledge, and as a methodology for analyzing the body, arguably adds new ways of reflecting on biblical knowledge. As a bodily practise, Authentic Movement has the possibility of grounding a reflective theologising through the somatic body. This article uses a phenomenology of testimony as a performative mode of providing both location, context, and proof for the experiences that are documented through Authentic Movement practice. In this article I unfold the term 'witness' used prolifically in Authentic Movement in relation to my own religious embodiment growing up in the South as a child of a minister, demonstrating how terminology in Authentic Movement slips its taken-for-granted understandings. Thus, I expand the practice of Authentic Movement beyond its useful application and normative usage.

KEYWORDS

body theology
dance practice
Authentic Movement
embodied testimony
embodied eisegesis

1. Throughout the article, I use British English, as my more recent education and training has occurred in the United Kingdom. This for me speaks to a trans-Atlantic writing style and in some ways a trans-Atlantic identity.
2. These categories are not mutually exclusive.
3. Christianity is a varied organism comprised of multitude of ways of being, interpretations and adherence.
4. Praying, worshipping, receiving the Eucharist, laying of hands, feeding the hungry, etc. are bodily based religious practices. Christianity is an embodied religion; it attempts to control bodies, their movements and meaning made through adherence to spiritual practices of Christianity.

I am not a fan of hippy-dippy dance (i.e., Authentic Movement). I do not want to feel my body, scapula, or pelvis on the floor; but, as I sit here on the dance floor in a studio, I am aware of how still my body is and how busy my mind is. I am also painfully aware that I am the only black man at this authentic movement workshop; and how my Christian upbringing and scholarship colours this experience. I notice I keep saying the Lord's prayer to try and silence my mind, which wants to do everything, and be anywhere but here. I am reminded at how terrified I am of my own body and what I may bear witness to.

What has interested me about religious studies is the way that religion functions as a system that has organized,¹ disciplined, controlled and marked the body; modern dance has also interested me as yet another system of controlling, disciplining and marking the body. I have to be honest (if possible) and position my own thinking in the context of a choreographer who shies away from more somatic forms of dance (Alexander technique, Skinner releasing technique, Authentic Movement or contact improvisation) in favour of more performative forms of dance (Cunningham or ballet).² I have never really been interested in Authentic Movement, or what the branch of practitioners that I am studying with would call 'contemplative dance'. As I merged my research interest in both dance and religious studies (particularly the Christian tradition), I started to see that avoiding Authentic Movement was no longer an option for me, because the performance of religion through movement is somatic. Christianity³ and Authentic Movement are embodied practices.⁴

PERFORMANCE AND RELIGION

In the last five years, a growing number of texts have conjoined religion and performance. These highlight performance, but they usually mean theatre; and when they say religion, they typically mean religious



Figure 1: Mover: Christopher-Rasheem McMillan.

studies, not biblical studies. Lance Gharavi's edited volume of *Religion, Theatre, and Performance: Acts of Faith* (Gharavi 2012), *Performing Religion in Public* (Edelman and Chambers 2013), and the edited journal issue *Congregation* (2008), do seek to gesture towards a broad-spectrum understanding of both the religious and the performative – but there is still a gap in research between, dance (on the one hand) and the biblical (on the other).

My own research starts with David Rhoads (2006, 2010), Samuel Wells (2004), Trevor Hart (2007), Nicholas Lash (1982, 1986) and Richard McCall (2007), who represent a branch of theologians who use performance as a means of articulating biblical or theological concepts. David Rhoads coined the term 'biblical performance criticism' as a methodology to approach both the biblical and the performative in New Testament writings. Samuel Wells uses the apt term 'structured improvisation', as a way of faithful Christian living. A criticism I have of these theorists is that they do not investigate the theoretical underpinnings of performance, as they primarily view biblical and theological concerns as the 'thinking' and performance as the 'doing'. Thus, there is a large body of scholarship missing from their analysis of performance because performance practices encompass both thinking and doing.

Scholars and practitioners Doug Adams (1990), Gordon John Davies (1984) and Carla De Sola (1977, 1990) use liturgical dance as a way of using movement and drama to articulate scriptural meaning that relies on biblical ideas; but dance is more than just the abstract arrangements of bodies in space. I argue that there is more to be offered through dance and the sacred than the dependence on music or representation as the primary mediator between scripture and expression. To put it simply, sacred dance might move past representation, into embodied experimentation. Therefore, I am drawn to Authentic Movement – a spiritual movement practise that is not based on representation, but on embodied experience.⁵

I have found that whenever I announce my religious affiliation or scholarship in dance spaces, I am already suspect. It seems to me that the reason dance practitioners shy away from the spiritual (particularly western-based) is that Judaeo-Christianity has been thought to be in opposition to the body. I am also alluding to a sense that New Age (often Eastern derived) religious practices are somehow easier to accept or make space for than Judeo-Christian religious practices.

In dance spaces, this is not a shock to me considering the ways in which 'Christianity' can be used as a tool for political, personal and, of course, spiritual terrorism. This religion has in some ways become a tool that is neutral until it becomes a pretext for controlling moving bodies. Christianity and dance are both 'technologies of the self'; they are both systems of control and controlling bodies.

As I merged my research interest in both dance and religious studies (particularly the Christian tradition), I started to see that avoiding Authentic Movement was no longer an option for me. How could I avoid it when the practice is asking me to both 'bear witness' and 'be witnessed?'. I was asked by the facilitators to bring my whole self to the practice; this includes my busy mind, my slight scepticism and my religiosity. In essence, I was invited to bring my attention to my spirit and body to form... another way of looking at the body in movement – to be more specific and direct – to look *deeply* at the body.

5. There are performance practices that do integrate embodied experience with spirituality and an example would be INTERPLAY, developed by Cynthia Winton-Henry and Phil Porter; this form integrates forms of witnessing/ Authentic Movement and connect it to spirituality in a rigorous play environment.

Through this article, I will be borrowing the framing of this essay, which presents itself as both academic and personal, from R. J. Nash's concept of the 'scholarly personal narrative' (2004). This means that as I organize my experience of my Authentic Movement practise, I will ground this exploration in my knowledge of contemplative dance, of biblical theology and, most importantly, the knowledge that is generated from my own 'bodily becoming'.

I would like to loosely frame my contemplative dance research possibilities with Foucault's writings on 'technologies of the self', which are described as,

Practices which permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.

(1988: 225)

Christianity, contemporary dance and contemplative dance are all techniques of the body; they are embodied practices I use (in different ways) to build myself and, in some ways, work through parts of my own narrative. I consult biblical scholars, performance scholars and my own personal narrative to articulate possible points where biblical theory and Authentic Movement might have a common cause. Through this article, I weave together my own personal stories, experiences and theoretical concepts.

GETTING OUT IN FRONT OF IT

I proposed that Authentic Movement, as a bodily practise, has the possibility of theologizing through the somatic body. To put it simply, the body is a site for knowledge production, and this knowledge production can be useful for both biblical studies and dance studies. As a movement practitioner who is



Figure 2: Mover: Christopher-Rasheem McMillan.

relatively new to contemplative dance, my primary question when approaching the practice is as follows: what other impacts does the practice have outside of its usual communities of citation? Or to put it in other words, in what other ways can Authentic Movement be used and developed? One criticism that I need to address before proceeding into the fullness of the article concerns the question about the authority of sources and the privileging of knowledge. Alexandra Carter, in 'Destabilising the discipline: Critical debates about history and their impact on the study of dance' (2013), suggests a destabilization in the way in which dance history is used as a canon to regulate 'good versus bad' dance. Carter suggests that there needs to be a consistent way to review and evaluate facts, sources and knowledge. She suggests that the role of the historian has changed, for a historian is not neutral in reordering facts. In fact, the historian shapes those facts through the process of naming and framing them (2013: 10). Carter writes,

We can argue, therefore, that the study of history comprises not the study of neat boxes of knowledge, which embody uncontested facts, but is analogous to the study of clouds. Clouds have the capacity to change shape, to present different images, depending on who is looking at them, and when and why.

(2013: 13)

One valuable source that the Authentic Movement community has been utilizing is the knowledge that comes from reflecting on bodily experience. Carter argues that the debate on what constitutes knowledge is not value-free. She writes that 'traditional history has been accused of celebrating the achievements of [...] dead white European males rather than showing the contribution of women, gays, or other oppressed groups' (2013: 16). Personally, I would advance a step further and say that the question of who gets to produce knowledge is in question, how that knowledge is produced is in question, and how one plans to use that knowledge is also in question; and, given the ephemerality of the body and its ability to not be pinned down, the body is already always suspect. I do not want to just privilege the body as the 'only source of knowledge'. My ideal is to think of bodily knowledge as a constellation, and that various sources (both marginal and central) represent possible prismatic possibilities in the production of knowledge.

In the article 'Beyond somatophobia: Phenomenology and movement research in dance', dance practitioner Karen Barbour (2011b) shares the concern I raised above – how the body is already suspect as a possible site and producer of knowledge. Barbour writes,

Affected by dominant Western culture's denial and repression of the body, and of experience as a source of knowledge, lived movement experience has only recently been studied academically. Feminist Elizabeth Grosz commented that Western culture and knowledge has been profoundly affected by 'somatophobia,' or fear of the body. [...] Sheets-Johnstone also saw phenomenology as a mechanism for reflecting backwards and illuminating the structures of consciousness.

(2011: 32)

Through description, phenomenologists were elucidating lived experience, the world as it is immediately and directly known through a pre-reflective consciousness. This initial and direct knowledge constitutes the foundation



Figure 3: Mover: Christopher-Rasheem McMillan.

upon which all knowledge is built. In this sense, lived dance experiences are a source of self-knowledge, a way of knowing about the world and a way of generating knowledge. Thus 'Dance is of profound epistemological significance' (Barbour 2011b: 35).

Barbour suggests in her writing on embodiment and knowledge production that the 'lived body' is a site of epistemological significance. Here is where Carter and Barbour find common cause. Carter suggests (2013: 16) that sources be thought of as being de-privileged, in essence sources (written, oral or embodied) can be tested by, and in conjunction with, other sources; and sources can be observed 'like a cloud' (changing depending on position). I am not advocating for the body to be viewed as the only source for knowledge, but for this knowledge to be tested by and held in common with other kinds of sources. To practise articulating what one has witnessed through the Authentic Movement practice, is to already have made meaning from multiple knowledges. Barbour writes,

A person views all knowledge as contextual and embodied. The person experiences him/herself as creator of, and as embodying, knowledge, valuing her/his own experiential ways of knowing and reconciling these with other strategies for knowing as s/he lives out her/his life. As an individual using an embodied way of knowing, I attempt to understand knowledge as constructed and, further, as something that is embodied, experienced and lived.

(2002: 234)

AUTHENTIC MOVEMENT

Authentic Movement stands at the intersection of a triad, consisting of spiritual practice, physical practice and therapeutic tool. My particular interest in the practice is its possibility as a research tool for embodied narratives, and as

a possible practise that might reveal the ways in which body knowledge adds to biblical discourse. Authentic Movement can be defined and described in this way:

Authentic Movement, or embodied active imagination, is a simple yet powerful meditative and therapeutic approach that bridges body and psyche through expressive movement. In essence, the individual is invited to move from within, while being witnessed with sensitivity and presence. The process is initiated by closing one's eyes, waiting, and then moving in response to felt bodily sensations, movement impulses, emotions and images. By turning to the embodied self with an attitude of curiosity and open attention, the mover allows himself or herself to be guided by what arises spontaneously. In the process, the mover also learns to experience the 'difference between movement that is directed by the ego ("I am moving") and movement that comes from the unconscious ("I am being moved")'.

(Whitehouse 1958: 43)

In the chapter 'Authentic Movement', dance scholar and practitioner Daphne Lowell articulates and tracks her understanding and development of the practice. The roots of this practice find their beginnings with Mary Starks Whitehouse, a dance teacher who trained with Mary Wigman and Martha Graham (Lowell 2007a: 51). During this process, she discovered that she was not just teaching dance, but she was teaching people; and she was interested in not only the result, but also the process (Whitehouse et al. 1999: 59). Whitehouse created structures and exercises to explore the core of movement experience '[...] the sensation of moving and being moved from which the concept of "authentic movement"' emerged. However, it was dance therapist Janet Alder (1996, 2002), also studying with Whitehouse, who formalized the practice and called it Authentic Movement.

The practice in its most basic form is an opportunity to witness another moving body and then, in the same way, to be moved. The watching practice is called 'witnessing'. There are two related forms of witnessing: inner and outer. Inner witnessing is paying attention to the way in which my own body is moved, and outer witnessing is, in some ways, reflecting on what was seen and felt from another moving body. It is important to note that I am, by no means, attempting to articulate an adeptness at the practice, but I would like to articulate how the practice informs my thinking about my body as a site for divine and personal revelation. Lowell summarized the practice of contemplative dance in this way:

Two or more people gather together somewhere they can move without outside interruption. They greet each other, clear the space, and prepare to move. They clarify details about the session before they begin the session: who will move, who will witness, how long the session will last, to what extent they will allow sound, how they will share after moving.

(2007a: 53)

The sharing process is probably the part of the process that contains the variation, depending on the group and the need. The context and the intention of the practitioner shape what one will find. I also posit that one's location and bodily experiences also shape how one approaches this form. Lowell

suggested that it might range from the therapeutic, to the generation of artistic ideas or artist imagery (2007a: 58). In essence, what you look for in the practice determines what you will find.

WITNESS AND TESTIMONY

The term 'witness', used prolifically in Authentic Movement, conjures up my own history of growing up in the South as a child of a minister. This word for me represents a special time in the Sunday service, a time at which a member would stand up and tell the whole congregation the good that God had done in their lives. This telling served two purposes. The first was to encourage people who may also have been struggling by saying, if God made a way for me, even me, he will also make a way for you. And, the second purpose was to provide proof of God's involvement in one's life. This witnessing followed a cycle of observation, reflection and dissemination. The practice of seeing God clearly comes from the practice of looking for God. One would observe how God would interact in one's life, often on one's behalf, and reflect on that experience in the context of other archival evidence, and then disseminate that account.

In authentic movement, the witness holds the space in a non-judgemental way and then reflects back what was seen, heard and felt. In 'The alchemy of authentic movement: Awaking spirit in the body', Authentic Movement practitioner Tina Stromstead writes:

Through sensitive tracking, the witness, who sits to the side of the space, holds and contains the experience of the mover, so that the mover may descend to the depths he or she is drawn to by the psyche. Essential to the practice is having already developed a strong enough ego position to be able to contain and navigate the upwelling of material from the unconscious.

(Stromstead 1994: 58)



Figure 4: Mover: Christopher-Rasheem McMillan.

When I approach Authentic Movement as a practise, I am being invited to focus my attention on my own bodily responses while focusing my attention on the moving body at hand. I also understand, given my own histories and positionedness, what the use of the word 'witness' means. I know that the way in which I approach the word witness may seem different given my own location as a biblical studies scholar, but the question that arises is how does the 'witness' of authentic movement coincide with the varied Christian concept of witness?

Giving an account as a witness in Authentic Movement bodily disclosures, during the practice, is indeed giving a kind of testimony, a kind of evidence of practice. When scrutinizing the words 'witness' and 'testimony', I am trying to do three things simultaneously: (1) show how biblical theory and movement practice might help frame a 'testimony'; (2) demonstrate how contemplative dance might be a research tool for articulating embodied experience; and (3) recognize that, in some way, my framing of this word comes from theology, while also realizing that this knowledge is infused by my work with my own body.

In Paul Ricoeur's *The Hermeneutics of Testimony* (1979), he argues that testimony should be a philosophical problem, and not just limited to legal or historical contexts where it refers to the account of a witness who reports what has been seen. The term testimony should be applied to words, work, actions and lives, which attest to an intention, an inspiration, an idea at the heart of experience, and history, which nonetheless, transcends experience and history. Ricoeur goes on to articulate the semantics of testimony. In the first instance, he argues that testimony is not the perception itself, but rather a process by which one transfers what was 'seen into what was said' (1979: 32), and that testimony is an intermediate position between a statement made by one person and belief assumed by another (1979: 35). Ricoeur also goes on to pose that a statement is different from a testimony, in that just articulating facts is not the same thing as a testimony. He writes that a testimony is not a statement, but an 'account'. This account is about the framing of said bodily experience. I hold that it is an organized telling. Ricoeur continues that we only give a testimony when there is a dispute, and that this 'offering up' of a testimony is already judicial. Finally, Ricoeur claims that a testimony becomes a kind of 'proof' (1979: 35).

What 'testimony' does for contemplative dance, is first, argue that presenting testimony of the bodily is proof. This critique that performance functions as evidence is articulated and elaborated in Heather DuBrow's introduction to an issue of a publication of the Modern Language Association about the status of evidence, in which she examines the 'power of proof', as opposed to the power of a certain kind of performance that 'silences' demand for real evidence. In fact, she goes so far as to suggest that 'often performance functions as an alternative to the presentation of evidence' and 'that performance often stands in for evidence' (Dubrow, 1996: 16).

I want to be clear about my usage of the word 'performance' in this section. I am not referencing the practice of contemplative dance as a performance (although I do think that it could be done), but I want to give an account of bodily experience – to give a form and a frame to experience – in order to offer an account that functions like a performance (in broad terms). It is to represent what Ricoeur has described as proof. Giving an account as a witness of the Authentic Movement bodily disclosures, during the practice, is indeed giving a kind of testimony, a kind of evidence of practice, particularly if the

6. Colloquially, the Bible in various sects of Christian traditions is often referred to as the Word of God.

practice asks you to be a witness twice over, both as a witness of internal movement and a witness to the person moving in the session.

My bodily experience of my Authentic Movement session and my account (testimony) are tools that I would use to ground my experience, and the knowledge gained from this body-based form, into other kinds of knowledge. For me, my account of my movement experience is one source of information about bodily practices – it is a constellation of both body-based and knowledge-producing practices, and not just one more example of them.

Testimony and doing things with words

Through both the Christian and performance traditions, testimony is used to give agency to those who are marginalized and to provide an epistemological account of one's own participation in history. Testimony allows the speaker to add a counter narrative to the present or frequently understood version of events. A testimony requires meaning-making, a looking back over one's own life, often constructing a story out of it. As Smith explains,

To theorise the autobiographical, we need an adequate critical vocabulary for describing how the components of subjectivity are implicated in self-referential acts ... in earlier explorations of autobiographical narratives, we have defined five constitutive processes of autobiographical subjectivity: memory, experience, identity, embodiment and agency.

(2009: 9)

In J. L. Austin's 'How to Do Things with Words', Austin distinguished three components of the total speech act: 1) the locutionary act 'is roughly equivalent to "meaning" in the traditional sense'; (2) the illocutionary act is what we do in saying something; and (3) the perlocutionary act is 'what we bring about or achieve by saying something, such as convincing, persuading' (1975: 8). I propose that the remembering and the record of those events through the collection and recitation of words can reorder the event, change or even add to the event's actual life; and reinsert the micro-personal into the master narrative through performance. Testimony lies somewhere between an illocutionary act and a perlocutionary act. In one sense, we ask the recipient(s) of the testimony to accept the story as a telling of the event, and also, through its telling, challenge the event's connections to accepted history.

This concept of the performativity of 'The Word'⁶ is not new to theology. Daniel J. Treier (2009) articulates an understanding of speech-act theory in reference to biblical interpretation, namely, that first, scripture records words spoken from God, and is different in action, but not in theory from, second, God speaking in scripture through speech acts. It explores the idea that God can speak in two ways. An example of the first way is that God used words to create light, and an example of the second way is the record of God speaking.

But, at a number of points, the argument depends on the analogy between hearing God's speech via a prophet or theophany and hearing God in scripture.[...]. The verbs for divine speaking (in Hebrews) 3:7–4:30 vary between present, perfect and imperfect and even aorist in 3:18. Without subscribing to any particular theory on the relationship of tense morphology and temporal reference, it is clear enough that 3:7–11, 15 and 4:7 indicate a contemporary divine address through the text: God is speaking (12:25) (see Treier 2009: 365).

Austin's work is useful in understanding testimony because words do change events and our understanding of them. It was during the Eucharist performance that Jesus made the body-to-food symbolism a sacrament, but it was through (divine) speech act(s) that the event moved from a body-to-food symbolism to transubstantiation. Specifically, the ontology of the event and the materials were changed through words – 'Take, eat. This is my body and this is my blood' (Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20). If utterances can construct meaning, marry people, pronounce them guilty or free, then stories and autobiographies, which are collections of words, have the ability to re-create events. It changes the participant's part in proposed history.

The practise of dancing 'creates a dancing body'. The dancing body is rebuilt, through engaging in the practice itself. Dance training is not just the execution of set movements, but also the development of body knowledge, body perception and clarity of bodily sensation in terms of place, shape, space and human connectedness. This becoming of a dancing body could be said to be a 'bodily becoming', a term first used by dance scholar and practitioner Kimerer LaMothe (2004, 2005, 2006), which has been instrumental in my understanding of the intersections between dance and religious studies. Most of her intellectual projects have been linking modern dance pioneers with philosophers thinking about the religious body (2005). In the article 'Why dance? Towards a theory of religion as practice and performance' (2005), LaMothe suggests

By 'logic of bodily becoming', then, I seek to convey the idea that the way in which a body becomes 'what it is' it is never completely determined by society or 'nature' but is a function of how an individual body, as a pattern of sensory awareness and response, *moves* in relation to cultural and environmental factors. Every religion, I argue, represents a way of engaging and exploiting this logic.

(2005: 121, emphasis added)

Although LaMothe has come to 'bodily becoming' through engagement with different philosophers, and her aim is to write about religious studies in general, my aim is to write about the Christian tradition in particular. We make for a common cause in that the practices that we engage in shape and mould how we make and use our bodies, and how we judge and use our experience. It is at this point that LaMothe and Barbour agree. While LaMothe articulates a particular way of arriving at bodily knowledge (in essence through participation in the practice), Barbour is articulating a way of mixing or juxtaposing that knowledge with other kinds of knowledge(s), with the hope that multiple knowledge(s) are, to use Carter's term, 'destabilised'. Barbour writes,

I offer my understanding of embodiment as simultaneously and holistically cultural/biological/spiritual/artistic/intellectual/social/emotional, with recognition of difference in terms of race/gender/sexuality/ability/history/ experience/environment. I move now to considering alternative ways of understanding knowledge and knowing to develop my argument for embodied ways of knowing as an alternative epistemological strategy.

(2004: 230)

I am asked to bring my whole self to my movement practise. I am asked to bring my black self, my queer self and my Christian self in the silence of my

mind, while being mostly still. I find that the structures that govern the way my body moves in space and place (oppression) are easier to see, and (more importantly) feel.

It is because of my connection to the Christian tradition that I am able to juxtapose my experience of being in an Authentic Movement session and the narrative of Jacob recorded in Genesis; and I am better able to articulate and bear witness to how, not only being alone, but also being surrounded by people made me struggle, and that this struggle was not just about wrestling with a physical entity, but about being able to see myself better through the tears and the boredom. I become myself through the process. I hold myself. And, most important, I limp away. The limping may have shown in the first instance that I was damaged, but what it was also gesturing towards was the possibility of just how physical the practice or the struggle is, marking the practice.

STRUGGLING WITH GOD AND SELF

In the summer of 2014, I enrolled in a week-long intensive workshop titled *Contemplative Dance* (Authentic Movement). This workshop was my first introduction to the movement/spiritual practice. Throughout the week, the participants and I had multiple opportunities to witness ourselves and witness others play with active imagination. Towards the end of the week, the facilitators asked us to be a witness to ourselves. They set the parameters of the session: to sit silently with the eyes closed for 30 minutes. I sat with my eyes closed in my own company and somewhere between boredom and thinking this is not dance. I found myself irritated because I was not moving authentically, irritated that I could not 'perform contemplatively'.

Halfway through, I realized that it was not the movements that irritated me, but my own company. It occurred to me in this silence that I did not want to sit with myself for 30 minutes, that my thoughts became something I was afraid of, and that the struggle was having to be in my own space in my body for 30 minutes. I recalled what my grandmother used to say, 'Chile, if you cannot sit in your own company, what makes you think someone else wants to?'. I spent this gift of 30 minutes, if you can call it that, with tears rolling down my face, weeping and wrestling with myself. During this time, I was hit with a wave of emotion. I sat with the parts of myself I try to hide, and more important, I was slightly disgusted and ashamed. It was as if the practice urged me to look deeper.

It was at the end of the silent, moving and witnessing moment that I realized I had just wrestled with God. Now this might seem like an odd thing to say, but as I dried my tears I could not help but see the intersections between this 30-minute torture and an account of Jacob wrestling with an angel. This account is recorded in Genesis 32:22–32, and excerpted here:

That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man.

Then the man said, 'Let me go, for it is daybreak.' But Jacob replied, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' The man asked him, 'What is your name?'

‘Jacob,’ he answered.

Then the man said, ‘Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, [a] because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.’

Jacob said, ‘Please tell me your name.’

But he replied, ‘Why do you ask my name?’ Then he blessed him there.

So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, ‘It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared. The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.’

While reflecting on the session, I saw various parallels with the Jacob narrative. This story has been interpreted in many ways. Some say that Jacob was wrestling with God, with himself or with an angel. Regardless, my experience of Authentic Movement seemed to have several parallels with this piece of scripture. Like Jacob, I was alone with my own voice and my own thoughts; and after my aloneness, my struggle began. It is not enough to say that, through the tears, I wanted and needed other stimuli to save me from my self. This struggle yielded its own discomfort. During his struggle, Jacob was renamed. In fact, this blessing came from the struggle and Jacob’s refusal to ‘let go’ or surrender during this process.

Authentic movement, as a spiritual practice, allows me to consider my body as a site for biblical discourse. It was James Nelson in *Body Theology* (1992, 1994) who articulated that bodies are sites of revelation. He makes the argument that body theology is not a theological description of the body, nor is it a theology that is primarily concerned with the proper uses of the body, but that this theology comes from the concrete experience of the body, while recognizing that those experiences are tied to the meanings we attach to our bodily life.

This renaming or becoming is not simply ‘a speech act’ exemplified through movement, but this change of name, *this becoming*, was instituted through his physical struggle, or the practice of wrestling. It is here that speech acts and bodily becoming merge. If acts have the power to name, then through the process of experience, reflection and testimony, we might begin to see how describing our embodied experience becomes relevant.

LIMPING AWAY MARKED AND TOUCHED, AND A TESTIMONY

I cannot end this article, I will not end this article, claiming that through the practice of Authentic Movement I am better able to love myself or my own company. Through this practice I can testify that it feels less burdensome, I am able in some way to really deal with, and in some way, see the struggle as somewhat joyful. It is a process of tuning into my body and seeing my body as both marked and in process. You cannot encounter God, wrestle with her and not be changed. My queerness and relationship with God has been a wrestling match of opponents who do not really want to fight.

In the chapter ‘Wounds that abide’, Theologian Ben Quash (2012) suggests two very intriguing concepts: (1) holy and perfect are not synonymous, and (2) bodies are inscribed by the situations that they live through. Quash starts by looking at the death of Macrina, the sister of Gregory of Nyssa. He offers a

narrative that gives an account of the holy siblings' last moments together, as Macrina passed away from this life to the next. Quash spends a great deal of time articulating the state of her body as she passes. Not only does her body shine brightly, or gloriously, but a spot above her heart is left as a symbol of the miraculous healing of a tumour she had as a child. This healing left a trace, thus leaving room for this question: Are holy and perfect the same? What does the stigma (mark) of the queer body mean, and is it different from the mark on a holy body?

What I have found in the practice of Authentic Movement is an opportunity to reorganize my body and sit with conflict, sit with the marking. The use of the word 'holy' might be off-putting, but one could exchange 'complete' in place of 'holy'.

The focus of this narrative (Genesis 32:22–32) is usually cited, at least in sermons, as an encouraging anthem: 'Hold on during the struggles of your life because you will receive a blessing at the end'. I maintain that actually, you are changed by your struggles, marked so to speak; and if you hold on too tightly, you might just limp away.

It is noteworthy that Jacob limped away from his encounter; the blessing he received left him broken and not whole, but blessed. For a great portion of my life, queerness could be classified as a 'thorn in my side'. To speak of a stigma (mark) on a queer body is to speak, in part, of the countless times I have been beaten up, scorned, made fun of and emotionally abused because of my sexuality and gender identity, or what I like to call my 'bodily disposition'. As such, I would like to reiterate LaMothe's term 'bodily becoming'.

It is because we are rhythms of bodily becoming that we are able to transform ourselves in accord with our gods and ideals. It is because we are rhythms of bodily becoming that we can transmit (images of) our participation in a larger creativity; or even discern and reveal what it means to be human in relation to the life that breathes through us (LaMothe 2006: 585).

If what LaMothe has suggested is true, that we have the capacity to educate our bodies through movement, to become ourselves through participating in the rhythm of our own life, I say that we are not just simply rippling off nothing – that our decisions and our bodily dispositions are also influenced by how our bodies are acted upon. The mark of queerness is found not just in the self – it is marked through social constructions, so that the mark begins to signify something. Bodily practices are not done in isolation; they are always a response to and from something else.

I wrestle with my own thorn and my own flesh, living in a body that struggles to be reconciled, a body that wants completeness in its queerness, a body that engages in spiritual practices and movement practices or a body that is the recipient of practices that mark this body as queer. This article uses a phenomenology of testimony as a performative mode of providing location, context and proof for the experiences that are documented through Authentic Movement practice. To testify implies the first-person narrative that uses social location and lived experience to then make an account of that experience, and to present that experience as an event. To this point, in 'Theology and the poetics of Testimony' (1998), theologian Rebecca Chopp writes,

Testimonies describe the real in ways that require people to see the events that reason and theory do not count, do not authorize, do not

signify. Testimonies challenge us to (re)imagine theory as the language that serves the fragments, the uneasy nature, the words against word in order to describe the real.

(1998: 64)

So – to write of ‘witness’ or ‘one who is asked to give or serve as evidence of; testify to’, is to acknowledge that body is called upon to speak, to provide an account of an experience. This experience is shaped by the body’s location and practices, by both what kind of body (gender, race, ability) and what kind of bodily practices (sports, sex, art, trauma, cooking, violence) produce a particular lived experience; thus embodied testimony is a phenomenological approach to providing evidence from one’s own account. As I continue to deepen my Authentic Movement practice, it provides tools to sharpen and tune my attention, my perception and approach to my own movement experience in the studio – and my movement experience, of navigating through the world of a body as a queer man of colour.

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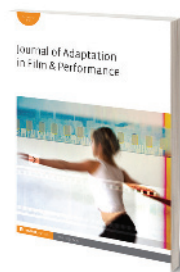
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