

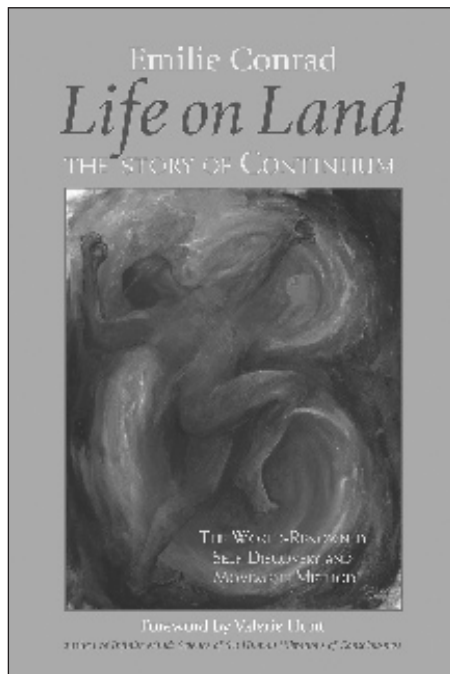
Life on Land: The Story of Continuum, The World-Renowned Method of Self-Discovery and Movement by Emilie Conrad

Reviewed by Gael Ohlgren, Certified Advanced Rolfer™

Emilie Conrad has been my teacher for over thirty years. When I first met her, I recognized that she was pointing to a truth that was not so complicated, yet was obscured as a blind spot in our current culture. Her vision, for me, picked up where Ida P. Rolf's left off. I saw movement communicate through connective tissue rather than muscles and joints. I saw coherency and grace. And I saw that order without fluidity is still limited. Conrad points to the habits of fragmentation in our society that allow us to fall into illusions of separate-ness. Whether it is the specialization within professions that hold one system of the body isolated from another, or the tendency to see the body, psyche, and soul as barely related, we can not help but be diminished by this reductionism.

Emilie's book, *Life on Land: The Story of Continuum, The World-Renowned Method of Self-Discovery and Movement* (North Atlantic Books, 2007), like her vision, takes a daring leap in style from the usual thesis of a life's work. Rather than the typical acknowledgement of pivotal influences, teachers, and epiphanies, Emilie shares the suffering of her family and her childhood that became the compelling drive behind her search for health and wholeness. Her descriptions are raw and compelling. Some readers might feel as if they are being shown too much of the back rooms of life. But I appreciated the lack of whitewash and pretty wrappings. Her very humanness translates later to equal compassion and empathy for the suffering of others: situations like paralyzes in which most of us would prefer to look away.

We are taken into her time in Haiti as if we could see, hear, and smell the infusion of this culture and its enlivening affect on her. Although she does not go into great detail about the traditional ceremonies of Haiti, it is still possible to feel how the power



of these rituals continues to inform some part of her understanding of the process of restoring health through stepping outside of a personal and cultural identity. Links to ancient archetypal energies as well as ancient wisdom for restoring wellness are woven into her teachings. These threads can be Greek, Hindu, Christian as well as Haitian. And yet, her experience in Haiti taught her that total identification and immersion with any culture or any time in history creates limitations for our possibilities to perceive and to evolve.

She takes another unconventional risk when she moves to the spontaneous initiation processes that compelled her to take her personal inquiry to the public. There she shares spontaneous journey experiences that stretch the credibility of anyone attached to literal, rational explanations. She is not offering a cosmology to explain these experiences, but simply sharing the unfolding of her inquiry. All too often we

withhold the trans-rational influences in our life for fear of ridicule. Perhaps Carl Jung in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* was one of the first to acknowledge that the movement of his inner life informed his path in the world. But it is yet again more risky to acknowledge the trans-rational experiences that occur while awake and conscious.

Emilie says that the difference between a madman (or madwoman) and a visionary is the capacity to be relevant to his time, to convey logical meaning to others. This is the next stage of her book. As she moves into the principles of Continuum, she speaks eloquently of the challenges of our time. Never have humans faced such a bombardment of information, pollutants, and other modern demands on our systems. The transition from the machine age to the electronic age has stepped up the speed of communication and is also changing the electromagnetic field around us. It is not so easy to identify with the biological rhythms that nourish our organism. These rhythms are slower by multiples of 10 and 100 to the speed of electronic equipment.

Continuum has been developed to meet the challenges of our time. It is teaching the art form of shifting state from the cultural rhythms and concerns of today to a more ancient aspect of ourselves, which is usually below our awareness. It is a foreground/background shift that puts us back in touch with the bio-intelligence of our organism.

Quoting Emilie: "If one were to boil down to a brief description the purpose of Continuum, one could say that it is a way of restoring personal access to billions of years of intelligence that is spiraled into the swirl of our embryonic coil. Continuum maintains that we are part of an unfolding process that remains intact within us. Whether we wish to call this process God, or higher intelligence, or some other title, the point

is that we are not separate from the awe of primary existence.” (pg. xxix)

Just as Ida Rolf had a vision for human potential that went beyond the scope of science and culture in understanding of the body, Emilie’s perceptions, though full of common sense, seem radical. In Rolf’s day, connective tissue was considered the throw-away wrapping surrounding the substance of the body. Rolf’s idea that it is an intelligent organ of shape and connection was nowhere to be seen in the common or scientific world. Now Emilie is pointing to the intelligence of water; not blood, not lymph, not cerebrospinal fluid. The basic inquiry of Continuum is based upon the theory that the fluid within our bodies, planet, and galaxy functions as a “resonant organ of intelligence.” How to create one’s own connection to this resonant field is the work and art form of Continuum.

As Hubert Godard has been indicating with his work, Emilie says that the scope of fluid variability within connective tissue is primarily governed by the quality of our consciousness that includes our sense of identity. Continuum teaches through movement explorations that are non-patterned and unfold differently for each individual that it is possible to shift from the movements of basic survival and identification with “I-ness” or “me-ness,” to movements that bring a sense of “we-ness.” From this state, one relates to all species and all life without hierarchy. As one starts to feel the innate intelligence of one’s own organism, the sense of belonging to the whole of the matrix of life brings about a state of “oneness” with the field. This capacity to shift identity from “I” to “we” to “one” is what Emilie calls a healthy plasticity of identity, which creates a body that is an open system. It is from this state that the possibilities are available for the body to reorganize and renew at a higher level.

Since I have personally witnessed in Emilie’s classes the innovation of new neural pathways and movement that is considered medically impossible for spinal cord injuries, I know that she is on to something – and not just for extreme injuries. Her method empowers all of us to participate in our own healing and evolving whether our wounds are in the social, physical, or spiritual realm.

Even if movement isn’t “your thing” or you already have a personal practice that you love, I recommend Life on Land for a refresh-

ing viewpoint that is likely to inform your inquiry into connective tissue, pathology, and inhibitions.