

The Integration of Surface with Depth

Watsu and WaterDance originated independently of each other at about the same time, in the early 80's in the US and Europe respectively. Healing Dance arose from Watsu and then was much influenced by WaterDance, reaching its own definition in the late 90's. In 2000, this third level of Healing Dance, Above and Below, came into existence in an interesting way. In a Healing Dance class Inika was teaching, students watching an old video of mine told her *that* was what they wanted to be studying. She proposed the idea to me and since I had always wanted to create a course based on the material in the video, we were on. We met for ten days at Harbin, working each day in the pool and on land to put together a sequence and an approach.

As Watsu, Healing Dance and WaterDance have been coming into contact through their practitioners and teachers, they have been interweaving and flowing into each other. We have witnessed a natural wedding of these sister arts in which the one inspires the others to a fuller expression. Each reigns in her own domain while blending into and enriching the others. They were meant to dance together.

The synthesis of aquatic techniques has produced an expansion of principles so that sessions on the surface can include WaterDance's freedom and scope. Watsu's nurturing rest and Healing Dance's expanded vocabulary and sensitivity to rhythm and shape likewise enhance subaquatic sessions. And so there arises a greater beauty, a wholeness, when the entire spectrum of yin and yang, of gentleness and power is represented in a session.

Each technique has its particular strengths and enchantments, which do not lessen the value of the others. Harbin practitioners, however, in their first excitement of learning WaterDance, had a tendency to undervalue Watsu. It was like falling in love, where in the words of the 50's song, "I only have eyes for you." Maturing in their practice, though, they grew beyond the need to compare or judge and were able to appreciate whichever technique they might employ for a given client. This is the vision of today's aquatic bodyworker conversant with a range of techniques.

Of the three, Healing Dance and WaterDance have the most in common. They share the full range of dynamics, releases, three-dimensionality, a focus on freedom, and most significantly, the same movement as their foundation: what the wave is to Healing Dance, the snake is to WaterDance. Only the terms differ; the movement is fundamental to both techniques. It is only natural then that waves generated on the surface are carried under water, and snakes taking birth in the depths undulate up into the light. The natural translation of surface waves to underwater and back up again expresses the essence of the integration of surface with depth.

In an Above and Below session, the above and below water dimensions integrate through flowing submergings and surfacings. One of the first principles Arjana inculcated was to submerge partner ever so gently, and then to plane her gradually

up to the surface so the face would not pop up abruptly. The material in this course further explores how to smooth out the moment of submerging and surfacing. It simplifies the process by making the transition into and out of the underwater kingdom more fluid, so that there is less surprise at the “border crossing”. It is about creating bridges for people (Feedback from practitioners and receivers verify this.) These bridges consist of a *continuity of rhythm, movement shape and body position*. The Healing Dance technique of “pre-setting” the hands is applied to these three elements of movement. When rhythm, movement shape and body position are pre-set at the surface, the receiver experiences a less radical change at the moment of submerging. Crossing back over the bridge in the opposite direction, that is, surfacing with this continuity, likewise lessens the division in our partner's mind between above and below. The gifts from below are then conveyed to the surface without loss, similar to the dream recall technique in which the sleeper remains still in the position of awakening in order better to remember her dream. Simply put, we learn to create more relation between above and below. The rhythmic field then, is utilized to dissolve the artificial barrier between surface and depth. The underwater moves become part of something begun at the surface, and the surfacing is a continuation of something begun below, not an ending. For givers, the two surface phases, before and after each dive, will be metaphors for aspects of experience. By gauging our resistance or comfort with these preparatory and integrating periods we may learn something about ourselves.

When rhythm and movement shape accomplish the takedown, the submerging occurs more subtly, without an overt downward pressure, without fanfare or effort. The submerging simply happens in the seeming absence of an intention from the giver, and more importantly, with less change to adjust to. When Watsu's Basic Moves are taken under water in the phase of initial submerging, the receiver dives into the unfamiliar in the comforting envelope of the familiar. The coursework of Healing Dance Above and Below begins there and extends this idea to the whole session, introducing a wider variety of takedown moves from the repertoire of the Healing Dance. Indeed, much of the course material consists of taking the movements of the Healing Dance underwater. This use of an expanded range of entry points to initiate submerging encourages surrender. The security that partner feels on the surface is retained as the position submerges and then blossoms to incorporate freedom in the “deep space”. On the other end, surfacing directly into familiar positions and movements gives a feeling of safety to balance the unpredictability and dynamic of the underwater dance.

For the practitioner, a greater choice of takedowns enriches a session, and gets him out of the routine of floating partner still and "dead in the water" before signaling. He can expand confidently into surface techniques, knowing he can submerge at any time. Additionally, positions that take some finesse to arrive at under water are easier to preset on the surface, step by step, at leisure. The approach could be summarized as follows:

- 1) Establish a position, movement cycle and/or rhythm on the surface prior to submerging it.
- 2) As soon as the head becomes unweighted in the takedown, allow it full freedom.
- 3) Position the arm under the head before surfacing, so that as it breaks the surface and becomes weighted, it is already supported.
- 4) Continue the surfacing movement a few cycles or seconds longer on the surface.

From the feedback of practitioners working with Healing Dance Above and Below we know that it is indeed making going under possible for people previously unable to allow themselves to be submerged. These experiences underscore the awakening consciousness that diving underwater and staying there is a normal human impulse, just as natural as being on land and breathing air. When once a person deprograms himself from collective or personal fears associated with water, a healed relation to water opens up, in which being underwater is safe and fun, an adventure to explore. Receivers are surprised and delighted at how long they can stay underwater, that they don't want to come up. The latest I and a few others have experienced is that it is possible to submerge in all positions without a noseclip, allowing water to enter the nose without discomfort. As the Aquatic Ape Theory shows, our anatomy and physiology are very much suited to this underwater state.

The body mechanics principles of Healing Dance I apply equally to Above and Below. Both techniques have the practitioner traveling with sliding steps, necessitating greater groundedness and knowing how to get leverage and power from as low in the body as possible. To create the larger scale movements of either technique the practitioner moves by example and creative imbalance, using her "dolphin flippers" to transmit force, setting impulses and awaiting responses. The subtler points of Healing Dance body mechanics, such as scanning, visualizing and channeling movement also enrich the underwater work.

Is life poetry or prose, flowing or fixed, process or destination? For those who live and grow through aquatic bodywork it is a significant question. In our work we aspire to a seamless flow where transitions become part of a continuous stream of movement. This is symbolic of the miraculous, graceful way that life works out when we surrender. Movement teaches us there is a flow we can trust, in which each moment evolves out of the previous one, connected to it with no artificially imposed divisions. Indeed, all is one moment, a timeless, flowing Now.

In knitting together surface and depth, they cease to exist as separate realms. In a state characterized by a sense of oneness, the signal becomes only a footnote, not a chapter heading. As the sense of duality diminishes, that of totality increases. Receivers arrive at an exhilarating stage where they don't know, and it doesn't

matter, whether they are below or above, with breath retained or breath released. A roll at the moment of submerging or surfacing interrupts the receiver's spatial orientation and also promotes that sense of not knowing that leads to surrender.

In the context of a session, one who can relinquish the control and certainty that belong to the normal expression of Will has a symbolic experience of surrender to life's greater currents. In allowing life to overwhelm us, to sweep us beneath the surface, we discover we are those depths.

As we voyage into the uncharted waters of interactive underwater work a certain minimum of form and structure is helpful. The giver synthesizes the dance in response to her partner and out of a background of techniques in her subconscious, a sort of kinetic data bank. Therefore, as we deposit these set skills of the practice sequence into our "bank accounts", let us remember what is most essential for the holistically oriented practitioner: the challenge of holding a space, of relating, of being sensitively present with our partner and with ourselves.