**Meditation in Movement: Kin(a)esthetic Flow**

Aska Sakuta

Since the 1960’s, somatic approaches in dance education have flourished. Williamson (2010) and many others have identified its roots in various movement practices influenced by Eastern philosophy. My research highlights how the concept of meditation is embedded in various dance scenarios, which emerge upon the basis of somatic approaches to dance, and bring forth the notion of altered mental states during such scenarios. I incorporate Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s Flow theory as a guiding concept to solidify and outline these altered mental states as a phenomenon, which has been explored widely in various contexts such as cognitive psychology.

Somatic Practices Eastern Philosophy

Element of meditation

Instances involving meditation:

Technique Dance Martial arts

Meditation in Movement

Classes / Rehearsals / Yoga…

Workshops Performances

Flow-like mental state in meditation:

During instances of Meditation in Movement, ‘Flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) occurs (Hahn, 2007).

Meditative Flow

* “Self-less” state (Dor-Ziderman, 2013)
* Hypo-frontality (Dietrich, 2003)
* Enhanced activation in cerebellum? (Austin, 2010)

**Phenomenological definitions (components):**

Meditation in Movement – a movement-based (dance) practice or instance (training, rehearsal, performance, workshop…) involving the following components:

1. I have the intention to "quiet the mind" or "let go of distracting thoughts".
2. I am continuously focused on one internal aspect (e.g. breath, energy, flow of consciousness, etc).
3. I experience a release of any conscious analysis or judgement (e.g. self-monitoring or evaluation of my own movement).
4. I am not rushed or pushed to attain an external goal such as winning a competition or hitting a target.
5. I do not force my body to move in specific ways.

Meditative Flow – a subjective feeling that one encounters during movement, involving the following components:

1. It is clear to me that the task is to maintain a focused attention.
2. I am aware of my level of attention.
3. I feel that, at that point in time, my ability to maintain focus is sufficient for the task.
4. I feel that I attain stable focused attention (it is effortless).
5. Everything seems to naturally fall into place.
6. Movements just seem to be happening automatically without my conscious decision.
7. I am not concerned with what others may be thinking of me.
8. I lose track of time.
9. Later, I feel that the activity was truly fulfilling and rewarding.

**Online survey** (directed at dancers & movement practitioners in and out of UK)**:**

* Out of 141 participants, 37 (26.24%) were familiar with Meditation in Movement (i.e. participants selected all 5 components of Meditation in Movement as ‘familiar’).
* Only 8 participants (5.67%) were not familiar with any of the components.
* Out of all participants, 69 (48.94%) claimed to have experienced Meditative Flow (i.e. participants answered that they experience Meditative Flow ‘sometimes’ or more on all 9 components).
* 23 participants (16.31%) within the sample group were familiar with Meditation in Movement AND had experienced Meditative Flow during such instances.
* Not every dance & movement practitioner experiences Meditation in Movement or Meditative Flow, but it was confirmed that the concepts & definitions were valid & relevant for the current dance & movement community.
* Various dance & movement related instances were found to involve Meditation in Movement and Meditative Flow (in order of commonly reported):

1. Independent movement improvisation (self-directed movement explorations)
2. Somatic practices (systemised methods such as Authentic Movement, Body-Mind-Centering®, Skinner Release Technique…etc.)
3. Dance technique classes (ballet, contemporary, salsa…etc.)
4. Dance performances in front of audience
5. Choreographing or creating / setting movement
6. Contact Improvisation
7. Rehearsing / practicing set dance pieces
8. Others: community/recreational dancing, meditation-based moving, movement preparation (e.g. stretching, warming up), repetitive exercise (e.g. running, cycling, walking), martial arts (e.g. Tai Chi)

* Meditation in Movement is embedded in a wide range of dance & movement instances, and all of these instances can elicit Meditative Flow.

**Current direction of research:**

Another, more recent direction to which my research has turned is the external observation of such meditative movement and instances of Flow. Writings on some of the traditional Eastern movement practices, which involve meditative moving (Hahn, 2007; Allen, 2015) address this Flow-like mind-body state as a significant instance in performance where the mover exhibits extraordinary “grace” in movement. My research draws on neuroscientific theories of motor control and Kinesthetic Empathy (Reason & Reynolds, 2010) to uncover how the meditative Flow state could affect the mover’s sense of kinetic energy, which could then be perceived (seen or felt) and recognized by the spectator. I would also like to present some methodological thoughts and questions for the group in order to develop an effective approach for this complex topic.

Reference:

Allen, B. (2015), Striking Beauty: A Philosophical Look at the Asian Martial Arts. Columbia University Press.

Austin, J. H. (2010), 'The thalamic gateway: how the meditative training of attention evolves toward selfless transformations of consciousness', Effortless Attention. A New Perspective in the Cognitive Science of Attention and Action, pp. 373-407.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1997). Finding flow: The psychology of engagement with everyday life. Basic Books.

Dietrich, A. (2003). Functional neuroanatomy of altered states of consciousness: the transient hypofrontality hypothesis. Consciousness and cognition, 12(2), pp.231-256.

Dor-Ziderman, Y., Berkovich-Ohana, A., Glicksohn, J. and Goldstein, A. (2013), 'Mindfulness-induced selflessness: a MEG neurophenomenological study', Frontiers in human neuroscience, 7.

Hahn, T. (2007), Sensational knowledge : embodying culture through Japanese dance. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press.

Reason, M. and Reynolds, D. (2010). Kinesthesia, empathy, and related pleasures: An inquiry into audience experiences of watching dance. Dance research journal, 42(2), pp.49-75.