

Meditation in Movement: Kin(a)esthetic Flow

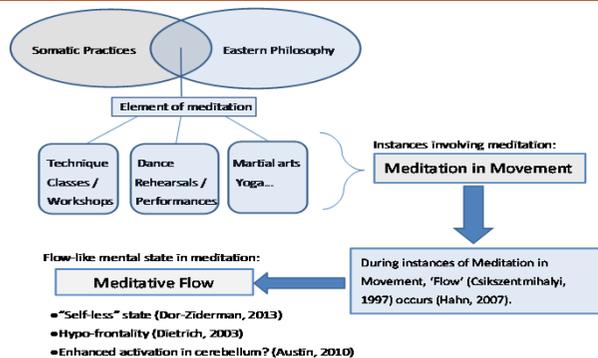
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Outline

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.

Core Concepts



Research questions

- ~ Is there an effective and systematic way to **define** these movement instances in terms which are suitable for empirical studies?
- ~ Can the **relationship** between 'no mind' and refined movement performance be explained **scientifically**?
- ~ Can this relationship be **observed**?
- ~ Can there be a **synthetic theoretical framework** which represents both the scientific mechanism and the phenomenological aspect of this theory?

Phenomenological definitions

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

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

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

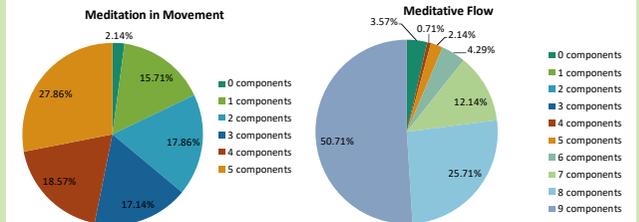
In order to confirm the validity and applicability of these definitions, and online survey was conducted: see "Online Survey" section ⇒

Observing Meditative Flow

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 am currently developing methodological approaches which could effectively shed light on this complex matter.

Online survey

*Directed at dancers & movement practitioners in and out of UK (English speakers, n = 140)



18 people 19.57%
Meditative Flow = 9 components
Meditation in Movement = 5 components

Results

- Out of 140 participants, 39 (27.86%) were familiar with Meditation in Movement.
- Only 3 participants (2.14%) were not familiar with any of the components.
- Out of all participants, 71 (50.71%) claimed to have experienced Meditative Flow.
- 18 participants (19.57%) 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.**

Activities Involving Meditation in Movement

Ranking	Activity	Percentage
1	Improvisation (solo)	56.41%
2	Dance performance	43.59%
3	Somatic practices	35.90%
4	Dance technique	23.08%
5	Dance rehearsal	15.38%
6	Contact Improvisation	12.82%
7	Yoga	7.69%
7	Repetitive exercise	7.69%
7	Meditation-based movement	7.69%
10	Community / recreational dancing	5.13%
10	Movement preparation	5.13%
10	Martial arts	5.13%
13	Choreographing	2.56%

Various dance & movement related instances were found to involve Meditation in Movement:

- Independent movement improvisation (self-directed movement explorations)
- Dance performances in front of audience
- Somatic practices (systemised methods such as Authentic Movement, Body-Mind-Centering®, Skinner Release Technique...etc.)
- Dance technique classes (ballet, contemporary, salsa...etc.)
- Rehearsing / practicing set dance pieces
- Collaborative improvisation (Contact improvisation)
- **Meditation in Movement is embedded in a wide range of dance & movement instances, and all of these instances can elicit Meditative Flow.**

Reference

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