

SHARING MOVEMENT ARTS ZOOM DURING THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

Zoom one platform to connect - Apps on Google Play and other virtual platforms are here to stay in the post Covid world it is useful for us to reflect on how movements adapted to virtual environments can work to build resilience in our communities. Four themes emerged through the movement, namely exploring resilience through giving value to boundaries; through sharing movement exercises with others; through sharing the atmosphere; and through creativity as evolution. The need to follow a creative path arises from a shared sense of belonging within the artistic community, by the need to cultivate spaces of stillness and presence in movement, and by the need to witness embodied associations that never end. Pain, frustration, disappointment and limitations in the face of the multiple crises caused by Covid 19 and the escalating climate and ecological emergency.

Keywords: Zoom apps, movement arts, Covid-19, pandemic.

A. INTRODUCTION

Look at the wider context of climate change and ecological emergency, it is clear to me that this Covid pandemic may be just one of many challenging events that will occur within the next 20-30 years. With the Covid 19 pandemic, vaccination may offer hope and some immunity but the effects of climate change will be even more physically devastating. There can be no vaccination to protect us from them. We hope we can contribute suggestions for building long-term mental and spiritual health and resilience in the face of rapid change but I doubt that immunity is possible. This enquiry seems to me to be of the utmost importance both for now and for later, for the resilience of our children and our grandchildren.

B. METHOD

This research is field research using a qualitative approach that pays more attention to the condition of the surrounding environment. The data obtained was studied carefully using a qualitative approach, namely data searches carried out through field observations as a whole, conducting in-depth interviews with several competent sources, so that data that is not in the form of numbers can be presented. Furthermore, the data obtained from this approach is analyzed carefully, thoroughly, and in depth. These steps are used to obtain accurate research results in accordance with qualitative principles.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Usually, I teach a program of movement in the real world (which people now call 'offline') both indoors and in nature

'Move into Life'. This is a training in non-stylised movement and creative process. It draws extensively on the principles and dynamics of Joged Amerta, the work of the renowned Javanese movement artist Pak Suprpto Suryodarmo with whom I practised and worked for 33 years, in Solo,

in the UK and around the world. When the pandemic began, I decided to run parts of my teaching programme online via Zoom and learnt many lessons from doing so.

Before I share what I have discovered over the last year, I want to answer the obvious question: why is movement relevant to building resilience in a pandemic?

First, movement is intrinsic to human expression

It precedes and underpins thinking, language and creative art. I experience movement as the most fundamental 'skill', the skill underlying all other skills. Movement can incorporate many layers of experience at the same time, in a way that words cannot.

Second, movement is utterly necessary for our wellbeing. Stagnation can bring depression and despair – just look at stagnant water to understand how movement brings aeration/breath and flow. Moving gives rise to change. (By the way, stillness is not stagnation. Stillness is *part of* movement and can be dynamic.)

Third, the body-in-movement can adapt far better to changes than an unmoving body. My moving body (like yours) is influenced by my environment and, in turn, influences the environment. Through movement, I can learn to adapt, attune, be fluid, accept and be part of the changing situation without losing myself.

So that's why I find movement an intensely important and relevant skill in a pandemic, in a climate crisis or in any other crisis.

Next, turn to 4 themes that I have explored over the past year

In movement and creative process. They are:

1. building resilience by learning the value of *limitation*
2. building resilience through sharing movement practice *in community*
3. building resilience through *sharing atmosphere* with others
4. building resilience by understanding *creativity as evolution*.

Let's spend a few moments with each of these.

1. Resilience and the value of limitation.

A year ago, people suddenly found themselves in a new situation of isolation, restriction, fear and sometimes illness. All around them economic and social systems that had been taken for granted seemed very uncertain and precarious. This brought fear and panic and triggered survival instincts (perhaps most visibly in the richest countries). It occurred to me that we needed to explore the value of limitation, to try to feel freedom within restriction rather than become victims to it. So, in a movement workshop on Zoom called 'Proportions in Motion' I asked:

How can I cultivate a sense of what is necessary? How can I give value to limitation? How can I even enjoy it and allow limitation to stimulate my creativity, to open up new ways of perceiving the world and myself in the world?

We spent the day exploring these issues, for example by moving in a very limited space to explore how inventive we could be. This began to open up new choices as we moved differently. We even began to change our habitual attitudes of looking for more/wanting and began to find a sense of satisfaction, of being and having enough. 'Looking near' as Prapto might say, 'see what you have already and please build from there'.

Similarly, when we were suddenly told to stay at home, it seemed a good opportunity to encourage people to give value to 'staying' as a creative opportunity, to take the chance to understand themselves in their environment more intimately. So, they could begin to appreciate that 'staying' can

make local communities stronger and help people to care for each other, especially where the government cannot do so.

In a workshop called Going and Staying I asked each participant to find somewhere they could move and to arrange their camera so that we could also see each other moving. I set movement tasks in pairs and also set movement tasks which people did off Zoom and then came back to share their experiences together. This hybrid approach was to encourage us to stay connected to ourselves, to our actual environments and from there to be able to include or to incorporate each other through the virtual environment of Zoom. We were following one of the basic principles of Amerta Movement which is to first relax, then receive myself in my environment and only then to receive the other people in that environment. This approach also helped to relax the absorption that can happen on Zoom (where we focus so much on the screen and on other faces that we forget our own environment).

These two workshops gave people somatic resources and reference points to notice how they were responding to the challenges of isolation and restriction. They helped participants to see that we need to do less, to consume less and to remember that we have exhausted natural resources and we need to change our attitudes and our habits, to recognise the necessary planetary limits, if we are to survive as a species.

2. Resilience through a sense of community

Covid 19 brought with its hours of isolation for many. How could I support a sense of community in a digital or virtual world? One way was to establish a regular time for sharing movement practice followed by meditation for those who wished to do so, each in their own tradition. I called these sessions What's Arising? Many said the sessions became an anchor for them in the week, a clear point of reference in the unscheduled time of lockdown. There was very little talking. Each of us was paying attention to our own embodied process in our own place, receiving their condition and from there, slowly slowly opening out to the field of movement that could be perceived in all the Zoom boxes. I asked everyone to keep their sound on so we could feel more connected through the various soundscapes – the wind in Germany, the birds in Ireland, my own actual soundscape. I was one part of the situation and this gave me a different freedom.

My experience was that both in movement and in meditation it is possible to communicate and support each other non-verbally in a way that is deeply reassuring and helpful. Movement can incorporate many layers of experience at the same time – for example, sadness, joy, fear, excitement, acceptance, resistance. It is the joy of a pre-verbal or non-verbal medium like movement that it can hold many realities and many descriptions at the same time. They co-exist and our attempts at reductive linear descriptions may be a poor substitute for accepting the complex 'whole'. By recognising this complexity, and refusing to become two-dimensional or 'flat', we can both see and be seen by the others on Zoom. We can both sense and be sensed by the others and this is deeply healing. I can allow myself to be in my vulnerable moments. We can share our human condition in a pandemic without fear or shame or needing to apologise, as we face the unknown together.

3. Resilience and sharing atmosphere

Another question that arose was how can we feel and respond to a sense of shared atmosphere over Zoom? In a project called 'Beyond Flat', a group of 6 of us offered guided practice to the international Amerta Movement community on Zoom. We spent 12 weeks exploring ways to stimulate and support embodied practice specifically within the environment of Zoom.

This led us to:

- explore together how to relax, adapt and tune in on Zoom
- work with the Zoom box frame: making framing a visual/aesthetic practice
- naming what I notice as I move, as a way to share my experience with others
- pay attention to our tone of voice as an embodied intervention

- work with objects around as to create a 'living composition' to move in.
- explore how to be aware of atmosphere online by paying attention to how we each move in our own environment whilst being aware of the other's environment

This attention to the medium of communication as a shared environment offered us many ways of sensing each other, gave us different points of view and enlivened the virtual experience of embodied practice. It also allowed us to share together the atmosphere of an international community even though we were separated by hundreds or thousands of miles.

4. How can we stimulate individual 'creativity as evolution' in community as a source of health and resilience

Prapto said: *Creation is never-ending and has the quality of blossoming in the garden. I put myself in creation itself as evolution, rather than creativity being one part of evolution. (Suryodarmo 310-12: 2014 Embodied Lives)*

In a 5-day Zoom course called Strata: Autobiographical Movement, I invited participants to work with a life question moving in very different environments. Usually, in 'real life', we move from the top of a hill down through a wood and a valley to the beach. Participants choose one place from that journey to work on a movement ritual or performance. On the final day the whole group travels from the top of the hill down to the beach and along the way visits each person's chosen spot to witness their 15 minutes movement crystallisation. This creates a strong sense of each individual being valued and seen within that temporary community, as well as us all sharing the journey and a common purpose together.

The gift of Zoom was that people could take this journey in their own homes and have the experience of moving in places that held many memories and associations for them. I translated the environments by asking the group to work for one day in their kitchen (which is a space that can hold a communal reference), then in an outdoor space, and finally somewhere else in their home.

The final day of this workshop offered a sense of community, joy, excitement, creativity and communication as we witnessed each other's movement work and perceived each person within their unique environment. The movement revealed mutual influence between each person and their home environment, and shared resonances and motifs ran through the whole group despite people's very different life questions. We had shared something of ourselves, of our immediate experiences in lockdown, of our homes and we had shared a creative process over 5 days which could resource us and help us to adapt to our new situations. Our creative process had brought change and transformation for each of us. Our interconnections gave us a sense of volume and fullness.

The recognition of creativity as an essential part of our lives and of our desire to grow and to blossom, despite the horrors of the pandemic, was very clear.

D. CONCLUSION

As I reflect on these 4 themes that emerged through movement: exploring resilience through giving value to limitation; through sharing movement practice with others; through sharing atmosphere; and through creativity as evolution... I am struck by the need to follow my own creative path within a shared sense of community, by the need to cultivate a space of stillness and presence within movement, and by the need to witness the never-ending arising of embodied associations and memories that I often believe to be 'myself', whilst I also relax any fixed or determined sense of 'myself' – the self that so often experiences pain, frustration, disappointment and limitation in the face of the multiple crises caused by Covid 19 and the growing climate and ecological emergencies.

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