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Small and Slow Movements and Cultural Modal Shift of Seeing in Dance Movement Therapy

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Synopsis

The small and slow movements and the peripheral vision exercise have been utilized for Japanese clients in dance movement therapy. They often induce a different and meditative mental state when they are extremely slow, as described 'painfully slow' in Butoh dance. Extreme slowness often destroys the meaning of the movement, and invites a confused ego state, comparable to an agonizing Zen apprentice on the imposed *koan* enigma. In the exercise with an imaginary thread, the small and slow movement of pulling the thread and being pulled creates an interdependent but positive relationship through the reciprocal behaviour exchange. The concept of *amae* dependency by Dr. Doi (1981) about the Japanese mentality gives a clue to understand what occurs in the dyad. The eye contact and the peripheral vision exercise bring about culturally bound reactions as in the Sapir - Whorf's linguistic relativity hypothesis (1939). There are plural different nouns for the first person pronoun in the Japanese language, putting a Japanese speaker into an unstable ego state even in a daily eye-contact, according to Dr. Kimura (1972). Whereas, people using the language with the fixed first person pronoun, as the linguistic relativity presumes, might find it difficult to take the peripheral vision, a different mode of seeing by putting aside the fovea vision and the self-centered perspective. These DMT exercises disclose our culturally conditioned reactions, and cross culturally produce an altered state of consciousness suitable for therapeutic mental transformation and artistic inspiration.

Synopsis in Japanese

小さく緩慢な動きと周辺視のエクササイズが日本のダンスムーブメント・セラピーに用いられている。その際の動きが、舞踏における「痛いほどの遅さ」のように極度に緩慢なとき、しばしば日常とは異なる瞑想的な精神状態を誘発する。極度の遅さによってしばしば動きの意味が崩壊し、自我状態の混乱を招く。それは、禅の公案を課せられた修行僧の苦悩とも類比される。想像上の糸を用いたエクササイズでは、それを少しだけ緩慢に引いたり引かれたり動きによって、相互依存的なしかしポジティブな関係が、相互返報的な行動交換によって作り出される。日本人の思考形態について土居(1981)が示した「甘え」の概念は、二者間に起こっていることを理解する手がかりを与えている。アイ・コンタクトと周辺視によるエクササイズは、サピア・ウォーフによる言語相対性仮説(1939)に示すように文化拘束的な反応をもたらす。一人称の人称代名詞として異なるものが複数ある日本語では、木村によれば(1972)、日本語話者は日常的な視線交差においても自我状態が不安定化するという。その一方で、固定した一人称名詞を用いる言語使用者は、相対性仮説の想定のように、中心窩による視覚と自己を中心に置く観点を取りやめて、周辺視を用いるのが難しいかもしれない。ダンスムーブメント・セラピーのこうしたエクササイズは、文化的に条件づけられた反応を明らかにするとともに、文化差を超えて、心理療法的な心的変化と芸術上のインスピレーションに適した変性意識状態を産み出す。

*Cultural diversity has been one of the major issues in ECArTE. For the Masterclass in 2015, several exercises of Dance Movement Therapy (DMP) in Japan were introduced to add some different perspectives for a more effective approach of DMT and arts therapies.

Small and slow movements and a mental shift

The word 'dance' implies stereotyped Western dances with swinging limbs, stepping, jumping, turning, etc. in Japan. Because most clients in Japan are unwilling to 'dance' in that way, dance movement therapy has developed preferable body-mind exercises for them by employing small and slow movements. Apart from DMP, in the traditional Noh theatre, Kabuki dance-drama, and Butoh dance, an avant-garde dance style originated in 1950s, small and slow movements are common and frequently seen on the stage. In a Butoh performance, extremely slow movements, slower than Noh theatre, are described 'painfully slow' by dance critics. In terms of DMT, what is important is not only the size

or amount of movement, but also the fact that there naturally arises a cyclic process between the size/amount of movement and its speed: the smaller the movement, the slower the movement, and furthermore the reciprocal process eventually induces a change in one's mental state. For example, the three minute palm opening exercise, a well-known legacy in Butoh dance, demands you to spend three minutes to open up the clenched fist slowly and continuously (Esposito and Kasai, 2016). For the first time it would take a couple of minutes at most, but later it would need longer than three minutes, because the mental state changes while becoming sensitive to small changes in the fingers, palm, hand.

In a 'painfully slow' performance in the so-called dark-black *Ankoku* Butoh, the audiences first become suspicious because the movements are too slow to give any sign of meaningful activities such as walking, nodding, or touching, and etc., and the audiences are gradually put into confusion. Butoh performers would admit that they perform also in a different mental state as follows:

"the loose ego boundaries of schizophrenic mind could be analogous to the mental attitude of Butoh (or Butoh-tai) performed in a different state of consciousness, and both schizophrenics and Butoh-ists are often dangerously open themselves for 'intruders' as if the irrational dream world was actualized in daytime while the ordinary consciousness is left unprotected. S. Freud employed two terms to deal with these worlds: 1) the primary process of the world of dream or the unconscious where unrealistic things and their transformations are usual, and 2) the secondary process where 'reality principle' functions based upon the decision making subject. (S. Arieti explained the close connection between creativity and the primary process, and its schizophrenic 'paleo-logic'.)" (Kasai, 2009, p.22)

Creative artistic moments, in general, need a loose mental state as a prerequisite. If the mysterious Spanish '*duende*' for artistic transformation is *a spontaneous presence of 'something other'* (Hougham, 2015, p.17) in the performers of Flamenco or bullfighting, Butoh-tai mental attitude would create a field for it.

In a therapy session, when a client is instructed, for example, to move one's arm extremely slowly to touch something, his/her body-mind often betrays anxieties about deviating

from the normal speed, and bewilderment about the meaninglessness of slowness that does not fulfill the purpose anytime soon. In body-mind psychotherapy an unstable mental state breaks the logical thinking pattern of cause and effect, or of the purposeful behaviour and its result, and eventually turns one's state of mind into an altered state of consciousness. This would be essential especially for an existential therapeutic approach when a client struggles to get out of a difficult antinomy in life with no rational solutions in sight. This unstable therapeutic phase might be analogous to the Zen dialogues '*koan*' for '*satori*' spiritual enlightenment. A Zen apprentice has to answer an irrational question imposed by his master: a well-known Zen priest Hakuin's *koan* is that "two hands clap and there is a sound, what is the sound of one hand?" (Hori, 2000, p. 289-290) Because there is no logical answer, any plausible reactions would be turned down by the master. The enigmatic *koan* renders the young priest totally at a loss along a *satori* enlightenment process, and the extremely slow movement in DMP puts a client in the similar state and prepares a sensitive body-mind mode for therapeutic discovery.

A small and intimate space

The other role of small movement in dance movement therapy is to create an intimate space between a client and a therapist, because they come closer to see one another well. An exercise with an imaginary thread was introduced in the workshop to demonstrate this point. Each of the pair pinches one end of a short thread, 10-15 cm long but an imaginary one, and the 'client' is asked to pull it slowly and the 'therapist' follows, while keeping the imaginary length of the thread the same. The following case was one of the author's clinical examples concerning this exercise:

One of the DMT participants at a mental clinic was nearly in the schizophrenic acute attack when starting the session. The other staffs looked after the rest of the group, and I took care of her as she participated in my session frequently. Her eyes were wide open, and her body was stiffened. When tears spilled from her eyes, she slowly took a facial tissue and wiped her face. I was thinking how I should try to make a contact with her, or refer to doctors. After wiping tears, she silently ripped the tissue

paper and made a short strip, 10-15cm long, and pinched the one end. I hesitated, but determined to take the other edge of the strip, and waited for her reactions. After 20-30 seconds, she slowly started pulling the strip, and I followed her movement. She stopped pulling, which means in our thread lesson it is my turn to pull. I gently pulled the strip, hoping she could follow my movement. Maybe because we had had various kinds of exercise for behaviour exchange, she slowly reacted to my pulling and followed me. The amount of movement was very small, several centimeters for the first time. I stopped my pulling, which means that it is now her turn to pull, and she slowly started pulling. Her body tension decreased a bit, together with her facial tensions. Her wide open eyes gradually returned to the normal, and her tears stopped. We were absorbed away in the small movement of pulling and being pulled. It took about 20-30 minutes until she recovered her tranquility.

The imaginary thread serves as a connector to combine two people, also as a separator for them to keep a safe distance and boundary. As the movements of this exercise are small and slow, other people around cannot see well what is going on between the two, which makes a closed and safe space for the pair. In this exercise, it is possible to recognize one of the most important cultural characteristics in the Japanese culture. Dr. Takeo Doi published a best seller book "The anatomy of dependence" in 1971. *Amae* is the keyword, used frequently in Japanese daily life, describing a warm relationship that a person is accepted and allowed to be dependent in a preverbal level as if in a healthy baby-mother relationship. He wrote that '*amae is, first and foremost, an emotion which partakes of the nature of a drive and with something instinctive at its base*' (Doi, 1981, p.166). It has nothing to do with dependent personality disorder or co-dependency in a pathological sense, rather it is an anticipation or desire to be accepted. However, it seems difficult to understand *amae* for people with little cultural backgrounds of Japan, or lacking an everyday word equivalent to *amae* in their mother tongue. Discussions in the book (Young-Buehl and Bethelard, 2000) between a psychoanalyst and psychotherapist about '*cherishment*' and its relationship to *amae* gave exceptionally pertinent discussions. In the above case, a time and space for *amae* was formed not by the therapist but by the client expecting those small and slow reciprocal behaviour exchanges with the therapist. If the Japanese *amae* is generalized into a more abstract word in terms of its function, 'the

safety need' seems to be suitable, the second lowest basic need of A. Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943). Fulfilling the safety need of a client is basics in constructing the holding environment by D. Winnicott, also in realizing the acceptance by C. Rogers' person-centered approach.

Eye contact

Making eye contact is a common practice in the countries using Standard Average European (S.A.E) languages, so categorized in a book (Whorf, 1939) arguing the linguistic relativity of Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. It maintains that the structure of a language affects its users' cognition of the world and their behaviour. Cultural trouble about eye contact was shown as an example in the chapter "The body of culture": a female therapist tried to have eye contact with a man in dance movement therapy, but he did not keep eye contact with her. She felt she was failing to establish a relationship, but she did not know that his behavior was normal in his culture, and indicating his respect to an elder (Boas, 2008)

Trying to look at other's eyes would mean that the person takes a high position, and not-looking or looking downward would be socially desirable for him due to the assumed rank. This episode is a minor social discrepancy in most cases, but there might be a much more fundamental cultural difference in terms of the linguistic relativity hypothesis, if he happens to be a Japanese.

The subject of a sentence requires, for example, a personal pronoun, 'I' or 'Je' or 'Ich' and so on, as the first person in the standard average European languages. However, in the Japanese language, the grammatical subject is not always necessary, and there are several different terms for the first person pronoun, and if necessary, one of them is selected according to social situations. It is impossible to say simply 'I am thirsty, because the subject of sentence should be filled with 'watashi', 'jibun', 'boku', 'ore' and others, each different personal pronoun as a situational variable. One's independent self would not be assured if the first person's personal pronoun is always affected by the present or imaginary people that the speaker assumes.

Based on the discussion above, Dr. Bin Kimura, one of the celebrated Japanese psychiatrists, (Kimura, 1972) posed a theory about the instability of Japanese ego structure and its relationship to the forms of mental disorders. Schizophrenic people suffer mental instability because of their loose ego boundary, often with a fear of being intruded by something alien. Dr. Kimura argued that the Japanese ego can be analogous to their vulnerability, but with no pathological connotations. He thought that the instability of the first person's pronoun reflects the Japanese fragile mentality in terms of linguistic relativity because there is no consistent ego due to plural conflicting ego states. Talking without eye contact is not rare in the Japanese society, and avoiding a strong eye contact does not mean disregard, but consciousness of ranks, discretion or shyness, probably based on the passive expectation of *amae*.

Seeing the world with the peripheral vision

In the confusions inflicted by extremely slow movements or by an unreasonable *koan*, two changes usually follow: a) The egocentric perspective is lessened and b) an altered state of consciousness is induced. They make a necessary body-mind condition for therapeutic change or artistic creativity. The following procedure for the peripheral vision was also introduced to show the relationship among the movement size, speed, and the mental state.

- 1) Stretch both arms forward, 2) hold up both index fingers, 3) move the arms to your both sides slowly while seeing the index fingers without moving the eyeballs, 4) move the index fingers a bit to check if they are still seen in the both sides while looking forward, 5) lower both elbows slowly to your sides while releasing the finger tension, 6) start walking very slowly while seeing the partner who is beside you, without looking at him/her, 7) keep walking slowly, not too fast and not too slow, together with the partner, 8) after a while, you may dance together while seeing your partner besides you with the peripheral vision.

During this exercise, people gradually notice that they are entering a non-self-centered perspective in a different mental state. Seeing with the peripheral vision means that the

ordinary visual mode with the fovea vision is lessened. All you do is to rest your eye balls, and to notice the fact that you are not looking at objects but are rather perceiving the outside world passively. To understand this body-mind state, a metaphorical hypothesis about two types of information seeking, a laser beam type and radar type, would be helpful (Endnote 1). In the former type, people intentionally look at a target in order to get necessary information by using the fovea vision, as if emitting a laser beam from the pupils to scan the object. In the latter radar type, the eye balls stay calm and receive all information from the surroundings so as to recognize movement changes.

The peripheral vision is well known among Japanese Butoh performers using the rolled-back white eyes or half-open eyes. Some of them intend to appear grotesque; others enjoy blurring the visual sensation so as not to be much influenced by the visual world, who used to cover all mirrors in a rehearsal room. Historically, the use of peripheral vision dates way back to the sixteenth century, to 'A book of five rings' written by Musahi Miyamoto (1645: translated in 1974). He was one of the most famous swordsmen in the medieval Japan, and in his book about the art of *kendo*, Japanese fencing, described the peripheral vision: the phrases, "never moving one's eye balls, and seeing the both sides", and "being aware of the enemy's sword, but never looking at it" were found in the volume of water. In order to survive a sword duel more than 60 times, he learned two different types of vision for himself, and made the most of the peripheral vision, sensitive and vigilant to suspicious movements surrounding him without moving his eye balls.

In modernized societies, the 'laser beam type' information seeking is popular, using the eye balls to look at objects, and the peripheral vision remains unnoticed because it is not so consistent with the self-centered perspective. Switching from the fovea vision to the peripheral vision then becomes a big modal change of seeing. The author has experienced that this exercise for peripheral vision tends to give a much stronger impact to the Westerners than to the people in Japan, in accord with Dr. Kimura's claim.

In this chapter, the exercises of slow and small movements and the peripheral vision were explained with their effects for therapeutic mental shifts and artistic creativity. Although they have been developed under the cultural backgrounds in Japan, they are also effective for professional training in DMP and arts therapies involving body-mind

activities. By understanding these examples and growing accustomed to the cultural differences, arts therapists can enhance creativity to react to any perplexing or foreign expressions shown by a client while constructing a stable therapeutic relationship.

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1 There are two types of photoreceptor cell in the retina, the cone-shaped and rod-shaped. The cone shaped cells are mainly distributed in the center of the retina (fovea centralis), and are sensitive to the color and the shape of an object. The rod shaped cells cover the whole retina except the fovea area, and are sensitive to movement changes by catching dim light changes.