

The Role of Equality Dance Lab as A Medium for Forming Awareness of Space and Body in Producing Empathy for Gender Issues in The Social Space

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Abstract

The body is the most important element in a dance work. When the body is involved in the process of a dance work, it means that the body is in a conditioning related to the theme, a clue to represent the purpose of the work. Body conditioning does not only involve the dancer's body, but also their minds and instincts work automatically and simultaneously. Conditioning the body means giving the body a stimulus. In this stage the body will respond organically then produce a new stimulus and create a new response. This can also be said as a repeated action-reaction that produces interaction (empathy) in the dancers' conditioning environment. My research during the process of practicing the equality dance work in Hujan Hijau Dance Lab Lampung is to foster a sense of empathy in a very patriarchal social environment. During I stay in Lampung, I witnessed many women who lost opportunities to develop themselves because of the patriarchal system. This patriarchal system in the family usually originates from father to daughter or husband to wife. Even though families that practice an egalitarian system have succeeded in placing their daughters or wives in a proud position. Referring to the experiences of Ken Wilber and Thich Nhat Hanh about breath and emotion, I collaborate the body lab and basic body technique with conditioning theory by Ivan Pavlov. The conditioning body lab process lasts for weeks. The bodies of the dancers and male participants involved in this body lab experience changes in response which freely give room for women to make movements in their midst. Through bodily events that are experienced directly, it is hoped that in the future there will be no more daughters and wives who lose the opportunity to achieve their goals.

Keywords

body, empathy, impulse, adaptation, action-reaction

Introduction

Dance is a medium of expression conveyed through the body. Through dance our bodies are not only connected to the emotional center and thinking center within ourselves. Beyond that, dance can actually connect our emotions with those who see it. That's why it is very important to learn dance since we are small so that we get used to practicing our empathy for the situations we face and the conditions of other people. However, the problem that is often faced this time is the loss of feelings of empathy among Indonesian people, especially women. Be it men against women or women against men.

According to social media (*Instagram*) comment data that I have collected since 2016, many people lose their feelings of empathy because they spend too much time on social media, so they lose time to deal with social life in real terms. On social media, people are also busy criticizing and judging other people's problems. Without feelings of empathy, these people are busy making cynical and evil comments as if they are the judges of other people's problems. And it's rare for people to make comments full of empathy for other people's problems.

As depicted on social media, that is what happens in real life. Many of us are not sensitive to other people's situations and often underestimate other people's problems. Empathizing with others is not about how big the problems other people are facing. Being a supporter for someone to get through the problem or situation they are facing is the main point in bridging feelings of empathy to reach someone who is facing a problem. The sense of empathy that we give, or show will become their capital and strength to have the courage to face problems. So, it is not surprising when people make decisions to commit suicide, drink and use drugs because there is no sense of empathy maintained in their living environment.

Empathy is not a given. We can create empathy by conditioning ourselves in an environment that always prioritizes empathy. The steps taken by researchers are to directly involve people in the problem or situation that someone is experiencing. In dance, this method is called participatory. Participatory is commonly used in performing arts and laboratories (workshops) to directly involve the audience or observer so they can feel the thoughts, emotions and situations the performer is facing.

In participatory, researchers use several stages in the conditioning method and are believed to be able to reach participants' emotions so as to create or foster a natural sense of empathy. This conditioning method is divided into 6 stages, namely: positioning, witnessing, resonating, identifying, emoting and behavior. The results obtained are an organic action of the conditioning process.

Results and Discussion

Dance allows for kinesthetic empathy between viewers and performers and could create a bridge between our internal experiences and the experiences of others. and how that vulnerability can be used to connect with others. Kinesthetic empathy is a phenomenon that viewers experience where they "feel they are participating in the movements they observe, and experience related feelings and ideas." The connections associated with the feeling of kinesthetic empathy could be an incredibly powerful tool in connecting people from a variety of cultures to each other. By allowing a viewer to feel as if they're a part of the performance, they are able to integrate into specific parts of the culture and feel a sense of true connection to the creators.

Kinesthetic empathy is one of the key elements of a dance/movement therapist, where kinesthesia represents sensation of movement and posture, and empathy as the ability to understand and respond to somebody else's inner experience. Thus, kinesthetic empathy is viewed as the ability to understand an individual's inner experience through body and movement [1], [2], [3].

He believed that simply by listening attentively, without appearing to advocate anyone or to promote a particular point of view, the patient would naturally develop a sense of identification with the analyst that would allow a deeper exchange to begin. Following Freud, empathy developed in psychology as a cognitive understanding of another person's feelings, more than simply sharing them.

Alternatively, empathy acquires the status of a “personality variable.” Continuing the nineteenth-century practice of objective quantification of parts of the social body, empathy became something that could be measured through socialization-related behavior among students in the classroom, inmates in prisons, nurses in hospitals, and so on. In another study, empathy was assessed in terms of estimates of generosity, selflessness, or friendliness, again using a quantitative scheme to determine the amount of feeling. Much of this research identifies the object of empathy as the “target,” a nomenclature that suggests a theory of empathy as a projection, but one that is specific and measurable. In both the therapeutic and sociological branches of psychology, empathy is pursued as an attribute of the soul in which there is no element of muscular response. Therefore, Rainer's need to qualify the empathic response as kinetic marks the absence of any physicality in it. The notion of empathy developed in the social sciences and is widely used.

Only in phenomenology, with translations into English of Edith Stein's on the Problem of Empathy [1917] and The Phenomenology of Perception [1945] in The 1960s is a physical feeling maintained. As a student of Edmund Husserl, Stein distinguished two types of consciousness, primordial, when one is physically present, and non-primordial, as in memory, expectation or fantasy, when the actual absence is located in the same place as the imagined experience. Empathy is the non-primordial experience of living in another world. Empathy can be distinguished from memory because in memory, a person still has a feeling of continuity to a past self, whereas in empathy, the two subjects, the self and the other person, remain separate. In contrast to Vischer and Lipps, Stein argues that in the most complete experiences the empathy of the observer and the observed does not merge. If they did, there would be no recognition of empathy, because self and others would feel it indistinguishable. Taking, for example, the performance of an acrobat, Stein proposes that instead of fully participating in his movements, the observer instead undergoes a non-primordial experience of movements in which the observer feels “led, or accompanied by his movements.” For Stein, empathy is the physical experience of feeling connected to one another, while also knowing that one is not directly experiencing the movements or feelings of another. Beerglass further argues that multiple subjects can experience empathy collectively, creating a distinction between “I” and “you,” while embodying a “We.” Rather than a feeling of oneness with another person, empathy affirms difference and connectedness, offering a means to enrich one's experience.

Although he did not discuss empathy specifically, Merleau-Ponty in his study perception is also based on understanding other people's physical experiences with their own body. The physical becomes the fundamental medium in which consciousness and the world are continually co-produced. Like Gibson [4], Merleau-Ponty [5] believed that the entire body works actively to synthesize various forms of sensation to produce information about the world, and he emphasized the continuous nature of that process. Whereas Lee launches his analysis of empathy from the position of the self that encounters the world, and those experiences kinesthetic sensations about it, Merleau-Ponty identifies his bodily experience as the basis for all conscious experience. As a result, intentions and actions cannot be separated both in other

people and in oneself. Understanding another person's body movements, it is “as if the other person's intention inhabits my body and mine.”

Specifically connecting research on mirror neurons with the earlier insights of Stein, Merleau-Ponty, and Mead, neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese [6, 7] began to develop a neural basis for the human tendency to feel what others feel in the late 1990s. His conception of empathy emphasizes not only emotions but also emotions as well as physical sensations, thus reaffirming the connection between empathy and kinesthesia. Gallese argued that mirror neuron networks provide a functional mechanism, which he called embodied simulation, that sponsors in us the capacity to share “actions, intentions, feelings, and emotions with others.” Because the same neurons are active when an action is performed and when that action is witnessed, we are constantly performing actions at the neural level that we see around us.

All the references above stimulate researchers to formulate Conditioning theory (Ivan Pavlov) into practice. Conditioning is divided into three stages, namely the stage before conditioning, the stage during the conditioning period and the stage after conditioning. The observer adjusted these three stages to the needs of this research, resulting in several new stages, namely: Positioning, Witnessing (Mirroring and Simulating), Resonating, Emoting, Identifying, and Behaviouring.

1. Positioning

Positioning is the initial stage that provides an overview of a person's body state or condition to the audience or observer. How the body shape and movements presented by the performer will determine the interest of the audience or observer. The more vulnerable the performer's condition or body shape, the more focused the audience will be in seeing that condition. While the words of certain gestures and styles of dance vary throughout the world, certain aspects of body language show different levels of comfort and tenderness while others can express discomfort and fear to audiences from a variety of cultures.

In Sumatran tradition, women are an image of balance or are often referred to as balance keepers. Balance starts from the household. The harder women try to maintain balance in the household, the better the behavior of the people in the house in social life.

In this workshop, the performer is the main body that is used as observation by the observers, who are almost all men. We can also call the performer a mover, because the performer's body is used to moving. The performer's body is positioned in a vulnerable situation, where the performer stands on a bamboo stick with only one leg for an hour. This body balance position is a depiction of Sumatran women in tradition. The performer's body looks very calm and does not move at all. But the body actually wants to convey emotions. There is pain, imbalance, fear and defense. The situation and body emotions seen by the observer will send a stimulus to the observer's body. This stimulus will work to deliver messages and focus on forms, emotions, thoughts, and what he sees then becomes a new experience.



Picture 1. Performer Position (Doc. Denni Cidaik)

2. Witnessing (Simulating and Mirroring)

The vulnerable situation found by the performer will be a reflection of the body for observers who see it. In this phase the observer is being a witness to the performer's body which is in a vulnerable position (imbalance). Much of their choreography involves the use of empathy, and that deeply impacts how their messages are received. At the stage of receiving this message, the bodies of people who see this vulnerability have received stimulation that allows these experiences to be moved in a way that feels right by following their body impulses. Through this body conditioning were more commonly understood and internalized than others, bodies interact with one another.

The reaction occurs when a performance guide gives permission to the observer to take a closer look at the performer who is in an imbalanced position. There are conditions that must be met by observers to get to the closest position to the performance. The observers had to stand on a bamboo stick and cross the puddle with the help of a bamboo stick.



Picture 2. Crossing as Simulation (Doc. Hujan Hijau Dance Lab)

I call this stage the simulation stage, which involves the observer in a situation that is almost the same. This action is carried out so that the observer not only has a visual experience but also a real bodily experience. Both stimuli from visual observations and bodily observations can

provide specific experiences not only of the mind, but of the body and emotions. "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... until you climb into his skin and walk around in it" [8]. This is how empathy feels.

Mirrors and simulations are the most effective bridges for the body and mind to convey specific experiences to the process of resonance, emotion, identification to produce specific understanding. Mirror neurons are neurons that respond to actions that we observe in others. For example, they may evoke feelings of joy while listening to music or watching a dance performance. This is because sensorimotor stimuli are auditory, visual, olfactory, etc. and are activated in the brain (Berrol, 2006).



Picture 3. Mirroring Situation and condition (Doc. Denni Cidaik)

3. Resonating

Specific experiences from the witnessing process are a connection or stimulus for neurotransmitters in our body to produce resonance. This resonance spreads through memories, feelings, and the muscles in our body. The resonance that reaches the audience's body in this case is not in the form of sound, but in the form of a signal that comes to the mind, can be felt by our body and feelings. A metaphor that best describes the correspondence between what is observed, and the biological movement performed is physical "resonance." It is as if the neurons in these motor areas begin to "resonate" as soon as appropriate visual input is presented. This "resonance" does not necessarily produce a movement or action. It is an internal motor of representation of observed events that can then be used for different functions, among which is imitation.

It also explains what Gallese calls "contagious behavior" frequently experienced in everyday life, where the observation of an action results in the repetition of that action by the observer, including behaviors such as yawning and laughing. More like the vibrational acoustics metaphorized by eighteenth-century physiologists to describe sympathy than the suction or magnetic attraction of one set of atoms toward another set of atoms Digby envisioned, this neural network activates deeply and immediately the connection between one's body and what one sees in the world.

4. Emoting

Emoting is a stage where the observer receives various types of emotions, bodily experience in the form of muscle responses, and the mind learns to translate the resonance which turns into a stimulus which turns into an impulse to carry out an action. This impulse itself takes the form of an organic birth of an impulse resulting from visual stimulus and bodily stimulus. Most simulations use direct experiments on the body and involve the use of empathy. That greatly impacts how their message is received. From a neuroscience perspective, mirror neurons play an important role in incorporating kinesthetic empathy.

5. Identifying

After passing through the stage of experiencing emotional and bodily experiences, the body will automatically identify these emotional memories and bodily memories. Then the newly received memories will confirm the old memories to find a new bodily solution to the situation the observer's body is currently facing.

Finding new bodily solutions is the same as discovering new perceptions. When the body is faced with a situation of vulnerability, the body will automatically work to find a solution or safe position. At this point, awareness, stimulus and resonance provide information to each other, then produce impulses to create new perceptions or understanding. At the same time, the mind also works and captures understanding from the body so that this understanding becomes understanding which we often call consciousness.

6. Behavior

Awareness is the initial bridge that can provide navigation for observers to take new actions. Human consciousness begins as another self-identity, and this co-existence precedes the understanding of the dichotomy between self and other. This action is the birth of observer empathy for many women who are positioned as guardians of balance. the ability to perceive those physical actions around us is the basis on which socialization and social experiences occur. We can not only measure empathy by the generosity of the observers by saying words of support to women. Empathy can also be measured by being involved in helping women maintain household and social balance. Getting involved in activities is also a form of generosity to feel and lighten the burden of balance that women must maintain.

Conclusion

Our bodies are a vessel of containment for our felt experiences. Essentially, kinesthetic empathy is a pathway through which connection is established with the self and with others in relationships (Rova, 2017). The response of each individual's mirror neural network is based on the person's experience history as well as the capabilities of his or her mental state. Where phenomenology underlies the universal exploration of the subject's consciousness, where is the alignment of perception and simulation: "Every instance of mirroring is always a process in which another person's behavior is metabolized by and filtered through the unique experiences, capacities, and past experiences of the observer's mental attitude." Each individual's eyes may thus follow different paths across the face, paying attention to specific features that are relevant to the history of perception itself, so in the embodied simulation, this research trains the movement of paths that are specific to the history of perceptual shifts in finding new

understanding and awareness. So the perceiver no longer improvises contact with the environment, but instead practices and simulates almost the same actions, both through his own actions and other actions. In the process of practicing this action, the individual formulates the self, not as an entity that will then carry out an action, but as the performance itself. Habitus, as Berthoz identified, although it substantially influences individual perceptual processes, does not “control” our actions. Instead we embody those habits through our actions.

This resonance is responsible for the ability to predict the actions of others, and to know what will happen if we move in a certain way. It also explains what Gallese calls “contagious behavior” frequently experienced in everyday life, where the observation of an action results in the repetition of that action by the observer, including behaviors such as yawning and laughing. More like the vibrational acoustics metaphorized by eighteenth-century physiologists to describe sympathy than the suction or magnetic attraction of one set of atoms toward another set of atoms Digby envisioned, this neural network activates deeply and immediately the connection between one's body and what one sees in the world.

The resonance that connects objects does not function according to the logic of cause and effect. Mirror neuron processing does not mean seeing something and then responding to it. Rather, attunement to the self and the world determines its preconditions for responses to various possibilities. As in Gibson's theory of perception as an active engagement with the world, resonance occurs before any action, enacting a simulation of some subsequent response. Thus, the observer responds to the performer's appearance, not because of the logic of the scene or because of the sense of alertness he must feel, but based on what he has rehearsed.

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Biography:



Academic Experiences:

Kiki Rahmatika complete her Master Choreography from Indonesian Institute of The Art Yogyakarta in 2016. Since 2015 she actived involve as speaker in some conference like International Conferenvce Asia Pasific for Arts Studies (ICAPAS) about dance and social science until currently and International Conference Performing Arts (ICPA) to speak her research about dance. And some of her research was successfully published in International Journal Creative Arts Studies (IJCAS).

Profesional Experiences:

Kiki had made some choreography since 2016 and had been performed in Asia Tri, Jogja International Street Performance, ArtJog, Kaba Festival. She also active give workshop from her method “Body Deconstruction and Spontaneity” since 2018 in Malaysia, Bali, Yogyakarta and Lampung. Kiki is the founder of Hujan Hijau Dance-Lab and has been an Artistic Director since 2017 until now and becomes the person responsible of dance research and body laboratory.

Another Experiences:

In 2021 Kiki involved as Indonesian Delegation in Asian Arts Media Roundtable (AAMR 2021) and collaboration with Singapore International Festival of Arts (SIFA). And then in 2022 Kiki was selected as participant in the CP3 (Certificate Programme for Critical Practice in Contemporary Performance) from Dance Nucleus Singapore with mentors Arco Renz, Nanako Nakajima, Padmini Chettur. August 2023, she get Short Residency ‘Laku Dalam Ruang’ Pekan Kebudayaan Nasional.