for women, genitals for men—is due entirely to their basic physiological difference as outlined above: Cavity of Qi (breast area) in women, Ocean of Qi (genitals) in men.

Bibliography


Scoring Daoist Energy

A Rhetoric of Collaboration

DYLAN BOLLES & LYNETTE HUNTER

This article explores using embodied principles of flexibility, change and collaboration from the perspective of Daoist philosophy within the site-particular as articulated by Ilya Noé:

Site-particularity offers a long-term dynamic of to-and-fro within locational possibilities and limitations, made and remade.[It is] . . . a conversation, a process of collaborative construction: a reciprocal and simultaneous way of shaping and being shaped, a continual relearning, rehearsing and improvising of different ways to recognize and respond in the moment and with full awareness. (2009, 208)

Because Daoism is learned through various media—written, embodied, aesthetic, etc.—it generates many ways of thinking and being. One of us (Lynette) is a historian of rhetoric, interested in exploring the shapes, structures and strategies through which Daoist practice trains people. The other (Dylan) is a musician who works on attention and awareness with a range of musical instruments and practices from around the world. We undertake these tasks through a collaborative practice that has led to performances of Dylan singing with Lynette doing one-word

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1 We would like to thank Desmond Murray, President of Lishi International, for his insight and guidance, and senior students Alex Boyd, Clive Nunnington and Claire Scollan for participation and feedback during exploratory sessions.
story-telling. It allows us to approach from a Daoist perspective the rhetorical work of tuning, resonance, sympathetic dissonance and energy, according them more detailed listening strategies through the story-telling that supports the play with vocal sound.

Our first contact was talking about indigenous practices of throat-singing in Tuva and in Nunavut (Hunter 2005). Tuvan throat-singing often occurs in a natural landscape, as performers meld their voices to trees, water, wind, and other elements, recalling the energy of the past into the present by picking up dissonances between vocal mimetic memory and present mimesis (Levin 2006, 77-78). The word “mimesis” here signifies a practice in which a present body inhabits a mediated score held in any medium: sound, visual, musculature/visceral (Hunter 1996, 199-218). It is not banal copying, but a rehearsal of the score through embodiment (Lepecki 2010) that makes that score responsive to the needs of the present. Daoism opens this signification by underlining the experiential connection to an ecology of energies in the lived context of the performance that necessarily changes the way the body presents itself through the instrument. Inuit throat-singing usually involves two people singing toward one another, playing with the different “presencing” of a vocal story-sound score.

While this was our contact point for the performance, prior to this we had been training in Lishi, an ancient movement tradition based on Daoist energy practices. This is a complex practice from north-eastern China that retains the health-related energy techniques of a family system. Transmitted as a set of embodied texts, Lishi carries generations of traditional knowledge in breath, alignment, and energy techniques, skills, and practices. It has its own forms of taiji quan, daoyin, kaimen, and many other forms of traditional Daoist movement. It follows Daoism principles that infuse artistic practices from calligraphy through music to dance. The principles are concerned with concepts of equilibrium, rootedness, and “feeling” or affect. Daoist equilibrium focuses on the need to keep movement going through apparent stillness, so that there is no point of stasis that could possibly lead to stagnation or fixity. Rootedness involves skills for rooting down yet at the same time uprooting, so that we can ground experience at the same time as keeping profoundly flexible and ready to change.

This embodied Daoist approach suggests that affect is not necessarily something done to you or by you, but a collaborative experience of a moment of sensory connection such as touch or sound which only happens in the context that enables it and which changes everything and everyone participating. Collaboration in Daoist practices invokes other principles such as “yielding” that need careful intention and concentration, working with and redirecting the energy around us. The change that collaboration generates is sometimes welcome and sometimes needs time to embed in the changed life that comes about. Sometimes the change is never materialized. At times you think the change has happened and then realize that further change is happening.

Daoist principles move the concept of practice radically into process. Daoism is a philosophy that does not allow people simply to mimic back cultural power, but makes new ways of approaching culture, society and self that are infused with an energy that draws on the world rather than imposes upon it. Hence Daoist training in breath, alignment and energy techniques offered us a way to work on the aesthetics and performativity of vocal story-sound and the presencing of vocal mimetic memory. Dylan in this practice was developing his vocal chords as an instrument. Lynette took the concept of one-word stories from Inuit story-tellers, and

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2 The distinction between site-specific and site-particular is further enabled by work on situated textuality (Hunter 1999) based on feminist work in science and technology, especially that on situated knowledge by Donna Haraway (1988), on time/space by Doreen Massey (2005), and on ecological epistemology by Lorraine Code (2006). This genealogy opens up the links between Daoist philosophy and situated textuality as a rhetoric of the particular.

3 http://technorati.com/videos/youtube.com/watch%3Fv%3DqRM0BIA95I

4 Feeling and sensory perception are central to many discussions about affect that are currently taking place in the theory of aesthetics and performance. The philosophical principle of “feeling” in Daoism casts a particular light on this discussion, and offers a remarkably helpful approach to embodied knowledge and experience (Csordas 1999).

5 This is a “performativity” that does something different to Judith Butler’s notion of performativity as identities constructed iteratively through complex citational practices (1993), and is closer to, but still different from, Diana Taylor’s sense of the “perfomatic” that mediates between hegemonic discourse and hegemonic agency (2003). For a short critique of the latter, see Hunter 2008, 7.
brought it to her work on language poetry, etymology and the cultural and embodied history of rhetoric and language (see Hawhee 2005). In practice and in performance, Dylan supports the speaking with singing and Lynette supports the singing with the sound generated by the morphemic, syllabic, consonantal, vowel and other sounds of words opening up. What becomes central to the site particular performance is the process-type Daoist rhetoric of that collaboration.

Making the sounds, just as practicing the Daoist movements, creates and directs energy that generates affective interplay among people and materials in the particular site. While it is not difficult to get into a resonance with the environment and the audience, but it has proved difficult to make this critically legible as we speak from the position of embodied and traditional knowledge rather than written knowledge. We want to underscore the contribution of Daoist philosophy to the current surge in situated knowledge, phenomenology and aesthetics, what many philosophers and critics now call "performativity," even though the media of the embodied and the written are often opaque to each other.

Situated knowledge processes are not closed. In common with Daoist practices they do not prescribe rigid sets of rules or fixed delineations of content that can easily be reduced to statements of fact. They are intensely practical rather than pragmatic. But if situated knowledge is an increasingly well-known western framework for thinking about ways of knowing, including the knowledge generated by performance, it lacks the Daoist principles of flexibility, change and collaborative affect, needed to root it in the particular. Systemic knowledge, as the Daode jing reminds us, is important for maintaining the myths that sustain the status quo. The particular, in contrast, connects us to the present moment, to need rather than desire, to attentive awareness, and, central to that awareness, is the mode of collaboration upon which Daoist philosophy insists. 6

6 Situated knowledge brings together epistemological studies of ways of knowing not central to or not recognized by mainstream society or culture that are often from communities outside accepted forms of communication, with studies of learning that take place in the process of engaged observation and practice. An example of the former might be Black feminist thought from the 1980s and 1990s, or the group of people such as Donna Haraway, working around the knowledge production by women in science. An example of the latter, might be children’s acquisition of language, or craft work in silver, or storytelling (Hunter, 1999, 207).

The particular is always in danger of being erased by the systemic because it takes more time, attention and energy, but we suggest that artistic practice can recall itself to work within the energy of performativity by listening to the embodied knowledge of Daoist texts, just as, in this case study, we used embodied Daoist practice to build such a collaboration. The Daoist approach helped us to become aware of the energy work in the rhetorical strategies of tuning, resonance and sympathetic dissonance, and to think more radically about opening up the site specific to the site particular. In what follows we have taken the approach that critical discourse can also be a kind of storytelling that can pass through the writer/speaker, becoming embodied in its own particular way, and much of the essay consists of stories.

**Tuning**

The support we offer each other while practicing always differs in effect and changes the textuality of each performance. It could be explanatory, or central/peripheral to the energy of the practice; it could support through a kind of awareness and chronicling; and it could be a free write, shaping the textuality with collaborative listening. We try to work consistently toward the last: a collaborative listening that asks us to pay attention to the effects of the support, to pay attention to the body through sound. One of the elements contributing to that collaboration is what Dylan calls “tuning” and Lynette calls “finding appropriate energy.” With tuning you need to connect to the environment you are in, and create relationship with its material. In a situated sound practice, how do you get appropriate vibrational energy or resonance into the site.
Searching for resonance at Steamer Lane, Zachary brings a local guy and I bring my 5-year-old daughter, Naima [always coming home]. I was singing for the dying sea lions and they were listening. When they listen to something “in the air” is it a bit like us listening to something “under water”? Approach the memory of the way the sea has variously bore on these rocks, the point, the sand spit, and a smallish chamber: I’m playing their song. Characterizing the style she remarks how, “You just go up there and sing the song – like it’s nothing.”

The lions were dying on the rocks in the cave around the corner from some mucking surf I sang [I’m a long time travelling here] and the voice that was that music is nothing but the world continuing to vibrate—death a body forever. [destination] I had to ask Zachary. It wasn’t our place to leave. Recording the sound of their passing, their arriving in and out. Something extra in the voice. It’s no good trying to remember it, not even necessary. We are made of that vibration heads tilted back. To listen? To sing. The sound of dying sea lions is one human voice, there were others, and the sound of surf. A song written for someone else, re-composed. I sang to the limit of my emptiness, trying to hollow the bones made of trying. “Nothing special,” as Suzuki says (1976, 42).

Every space has a different acoustical potential (Minh-Ha xiii). Just as the embodied texts of Daoism teach about movement, each time a sound is made, there’s a different place the voice goes in feedback. The resonance sound makes as it creates particular space and time, alters our perception (Massey 2005, 42-45). With tuning time shifts, and a sense of changed time lingers as if time is a muscle that learns to want to be extended.

Doreen Massey, in For Space, re-imagines “space” as a product of interrelations, with a contemporaneous multiplicity that is embedded in material practices always in a process of being made. She notes “Perhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far” (89), and goes on to argue that “space” is both temporal and spatial in a way that involves continuous dislocation (2005, 53).

If time unfolds as change then space unfolds as interaction. In that sense space is the social dimension. Not in the sense of exclusively human sociability, but in the sense of engagement within a multiplicity. It is the sphere of the continuous production and the reconfiguration of heterogeneity in all its forms. (Massey 2005, 61)

Massey’s development of space into space/time and new approaches to the concept of “boundary.” echoes the lessons of embodied Daoist texts that boundaries are not only continually negotiated but also porous to each other; when you travel through space you not only alter it “a little” but it alters you (2005, 118).

Resonance

Site particular tuning seeks resonance within the environment of the event. All elements in the environment engage, since all things, including sentient being, animals, plants and other materials, have the ability to resonate. The attentive awareness to all these elements that occurs in tuning, generates an ecology of space/time that is always in process: it doesn’t worry about whether it “likes” the sound, but follows the resonance. As with appropriate energy in Daoist science, the energy of an encounter moves faster than the conceptual mind, there is no “time” to mentally address it, although it enables an embodied thinking that moves with the moment.

Story 2: Resonating with Landscape [Dylan]

I heard of a large river at the bottom of the property and insisted we walk there. Nathan Lynch, a frequent collaborator, CCA professor, and my employer for the weekend, was reticent to take me, only because he knew that there is where I would likely stay. The Yuba river, is a big energy. Down by the river I found both beauty and a great wound: a mining tunnel, shot straight through the
There is a long tradition of developing voice in collaboration with energetically charged environments (Park 2003, 162-3). I have tested and shaped my voice by oceans, rivers, and freeways; in caves, tunnels and army batteries. I made plans to return with some rubber boots and warm clothing and then, as a kind of greeting, lowered myself naked into the icy water.

I was invited to give a performance the next day after dinner. Nathan and I, with 10 years of collaborative art-making behind us, hoped to make something together, but we were rusty, out of practice. The next morning, up on the mountain I tried to feel deep below the earth, below what we think of as solid, what we so often forget is also in motion, to feel a presence which is made in the feeling of it. I decided to walk deep into the tunnel and sing, walk back up the mountain, and then sing the energy of those depths from those heights: Nathan would spend the day on top of the mountain, dowsing for our performance location. I would stay by the river.

Inside the tunnel, my bare feet clinging to wet rock, I did my hour-long vocal practice, sounding on each full out breath, and learning the place by listening. At some point I began to hear drumming and almost lost my nerve. Questioning the decisions which led me there, I would draw back from the frequency and then slowly enter it again. The drums would recede and return. I stayed. Later, there were too many notes in too perfect an interval. I felt my mouth was open, but it wasn't me who was singing. I felt the danger of openness. Of what can be taken in and what can be released. Near the end, the sound of rushing water seemed to recede and a very strong and human voice moved clearly about it—my own.

When I arrived back to the kitchen it was half-an-hour past the schedule, people were hungry, and I said, "now, let's go do it." Nathan had chosen two spots, and I chose the one under tree cover. There were two stones with suitable depressions for playing water whistles. I asked Nathan to lie down on the ground and play the low one while I told the story in sound of my experience in the tunnel. Over dishes, Welly asked: "Were you okay in there? What happened?" She knew already and so I told her: about the drums and the fear and the shifting. She saw a change in me that will persist in some sense forever.

Coming back from the resonance of a situated performance, the site particular, is akin to being "bushed," being in the wrong ecology. Lorraine Code develops ecological thinking as an "instituting imaginary" (2006, 33), in which "ecological knowings are enacted and ecological principles derived within a transformative, interrogating, and renewing imaginary" (2006, 28-29).

In our attempt to explore the site particular through a collaborative performativity we extended this definition of ecological thinking into tuning, knowing that we had to be prepared for change depending on the particular ecology. Approaching tuning and resonance through concepts about collaboration learned through embodied Daoist texts underlines that they happen not only with non-human materials but with other human beings—those directly involved in the performing and the audience.

Sympathetic Dissonance

The audiences require a kind of deep listening and awareness of resonance that engenders collaboration and in our case study we turned to a mixture of musical vocabulary and Daoist practice. Resonance is often discussed in terms of consonance and dissonance. In sympathetic resonance, consonance lines up all the vibrational energy. If this builds a bigger and bigger consonant loop it can be harmful. Dissonance, in contrast, has negative connotations, but is actually sound that is more complex than expected (Schoenberg 1975, 282-3). There are different kinds of dissonance, or: dissonance has different rhetorics. Site specific work often knows and disturbs a genre, knows and listens for the dissonant effects. Site particular work, which needs lengthy training and experience to engage the moment, is in process making dissonance but it does not know what will happen, the dissonance is unpredictable.

Story 3: Daoist Practice for Movement and Voice [Lynette]

We had the opportunity of making sound/singing with Desmond Murray, the senior teacher of the Daoist movement practice Lishi, and three of his students. We're in a large open room with Desmond Murray. The room has a sprung wooden floor and full-length glass windows along two sides. Dylan moves out into the central space and starts singing. One by one the five other people enter the space, singing notes that join his.

to join: to come together in a group to join: to hinge: to bring different things in touch so they hold

At first we found ourselves falling into consonances. Murray talked us through Daoist principles of creating appropriate time and space, by being open...
to the way others need to respond, and knowing the feeling of what is needed collaboratively – what he called appropriateness in a landscape. Dylan called this strategy “sounding,” casting sound (energy) out to learn about the energy/resonance of the room and the materials in it, including people.

Dylan says, “I try to listen so I can’t predict the sound that will come out.” We see Dylan lifting his arms to lift the breath, and work on different body positions/stances to find the body’s pitch and vibration, listen to the resonance, and learn to “be there” with it.

Sound and body: attentive, surfacing, not on the face of it but rising from the bones to open out the skin. Hearing, a drifting toward the possibilities of resonance, resonance, making the sound again. Listening, a re-hearing of the sound through the body in the present. Listening with qi: expanding out into the peripheral as if the body gets bigger, softer, porous. Feeling where the responses emerge. Separating out the habitual/ teasing out the elusive, choosing the more difficult/ touching my attention on them, mel ting choice with feeling to listen, energy meets/ overlays/ joins/ plays.

We come back the next day. Dylan talks about tuning not being consonance, not vibrating with the same frequency as others. Alex recalls the five Daoist monks whose morning practice was cacophonous singing – an ability to let the differences in sound be there in the space and not to resolve them. Desmond talks about the different kinds of relationship you can build with energy that maintains dissonance. He stands at the centre of the room and sub-vocalizes sounds. We find ourselves moving inward or away,

Listening for dissonance: locating those points in the body as it emerges with others, in place or environment, resonance. As the sound re-makes itself in the body, choosing to fill it with energy from the inside, and as that energy eases off finding the space. Getting inside the dissonance, feeling the patterns of tension and intention. Loosening the structure.

This exercise generated a larger spectrum of consonance and dissonance, especially singing alongside others. Practicing with other people is quite different from working on one’s own. It trains us in awareness, alerts us to ways in which we can negotiate a wider range of energies in the material world. At the same time, the animal and the non-sentient remind us of the assumptive logic, the common grounds we establish to define “human,” and of the possibility for imagining ourselves outside of that definition.

Later we meet outside on a wooden bandstand surrounded by trees bordering by a river. We try to listen to the sub-vocalized vibration around us. Dylan sings and we walk around him, following and amplifying the feeling of dissonant co-vibration that comes from the pull between the environmental vibrations and our own. At moments in this third practice we find ourselves following the energy of the dissonance. Sound becomes momentarily effortless.

Murray described a series of Daoist principles for moving with others, the most subtle being “sympathetic reaction,” a kinesthetic interaction within an ecology analogous with multitudinous space/time, reciprocal topography (Lepecki) and situated textuality. “Sympathetic” can widen the energy to pick up more resonance, or, as in the site particular, it can play with dissonance, allowing the play to lead the movement. This latter kind of rhetoric we call here sympathetic dissonance.

Energy Work

Sympathetic dissonance requires skill, craft, technique to work with energy. In Lishi practice sympathetic dissonance is hard to keep going. You have to work at effortlessness, for sympathetic dissonance is continually in process. These embodied texts are far from casual. Practitioners train for decades to engage the density of the present. Tuning cannot happen without consonances and dissonances that arise from particular materials, and training enables you to grow your abilities to interact with these in complex ways. Ilya Noé says:

A particular approach attends to site not as something that pre-exists either formally, conceptually, or ideologically, but as something constructed performatively out of the exchanges between artist, environment and audience. It is an ongoing series of inter-relational and open-ended processes: always partial, always situated, multiply layered, often contradictory and messy, and produced by active agents negotiating between all kinds of positions and working through all kinds of relationships. (2009, 207)

9 André Lepecki suggests that if you turn your body into a “thing,” by definition existence outwith the conceptual horizon of “human” and available to objects as well as sentient beings, then compositional choices change. Lepecki calls these “reciprocal topographies” that insist on “adventure,” the affirmation in giving up humanity for a moment that fuses the organic with the inorganic.
Situating the tuning depends on each particular ecology, and what you build in a place where you do not know what will happen, where process takes over.

The rhetoric of embodied Daoist texts helps us to recognize that when we place ourselves in the process of situating, the dissonances we make between ourselves and other materials, change us. Collaboration is a process in which tuning tunes us, activates us into an embodied dissonance, into disagreement which invests us in others (Nancy 1991), discards assumptions about essential sameness and difference.

After the joint practice in Lishi Daoist movement, and the workshops with Desmond Murray, we developed our six-month collaborative practice with sung and spoken voice in preparation for a performance at a Daoist conference. We provided the following text to the seminar participants:

Story 4: Program Notes for a Performance [Both Authors]

“Scoring Daoist Performance”

Why is this performance practice Daoist? Because it moves energy.

Collaboration: being tuned; an activation into the embodied through a sympathetic dissonance; appropriate energy.

Daoist philosophy involves a culture of collaboration that asks people to become open to the way others need to respond. The transmission and valuing of knowledge in Lishi is parallel to the way Dylan has structured his compositional world. Knowledge is not stable but always in process – this is also an epistemological field carefully delineated by situated knowledge.

Situating: practicing in a place where we don’t know what will happen, where process can take place, where we connect to the energy of the space/time we also make and are made by.

Tuning: attentive listening to the energy of a particular time/space that we are both affecting and affected by.

Attentive listening: a kind of deep listening, a getting to know the materials of the environment in a collaborative way. Listening past the consciousness of listening, you necessarily do not know what you are doing or who you are or where the body ends; nonetheless, you perceive changes both outside and inside such that you are never again what you are now.

Sympathetic dissonance: occurs with us and within us, and needs effortless technique. It does not know what will happen, it can never think “this is what it is.” Sympathetic dissonance builds resonance within the particular materials of the space, in ways that also affect time, or the experience of time.

Sending sound energy into the space to see what it makes of the time, casting about, filling the belly with the in-breath while emptying the mind; next, as the sound emerges, my face registers your surprise, the wideness of the tone sends a multiplicity of sound energies, providing a measure, allowing for feedback at many frequencies.

Effortless technique: doing/not doing; constant engagement with the potential of sympathetic dissonance; being able to love what you need.

Music/sound/energy: Sound carries the potential for music – is activated as music by genre (the set of conventions whereby a community makes sense of sound).

Noise, like silence, speaks to a particular absence announced by and dependent upon a particular presence. Neither music nor sound depend upon discerning audible frequency as vibrational energy moves easily between mediums – voices in our heads – feeling the vibe – hearing the page through compositional and linguistic symbol systems.

Daoist practice: moves energy in a continuous field of particularities.

It’s good to have a practice. Daoist teaching tells us that there is always a gap, a moment/space when process is possible and energy is making. In this performance we offer the possibility of a collaborative making. How do you feel?

Collaboration

Story 5: Site-particular Performance [Both Authors]

Taking the practice into performance tested the way Daoist principles from embodied texts had changed our ideas of the site particular and the process of situating. In the practice we follow the energy of the sound, not critically distinguishing between the “interesting” or the “banal,” but simply continuing. The piece for the conference is time-based – if something happens that we don’t aim toward, we have to use our craft, our knowledge, to make it part of the world.

This needs skill although it looks like chance. Two notes that are recognized culturally as “the same” may have been produced by changing the distribution of partials while changing the vocal chords, a change that may or may not set up the same resonance. Investigating words in spoken one-word story practice, Lynette calls not only on sound, but on a deep Lishi-trained understanding of the relationship with the feeling of the word and which parts of the body have to engage to get it to come out of the mouth so that if one word is said twice, each time is different.

Dylan and Lynette agreed to start with him opening with singing is about extending the rhythm of the sound, catching the other people in the room into the rhythm, and then extending that rhythm into talking, so people listen to the
talking with a different attention. It's about releasing a strong energy, taking it partly away with the talking, and creating a space where the audience is already questioning and helping to fill that space. But to generate a multitudinous space, a reciprocal topography, a situated particularity, that will enable the kind of horizontal synesthesia that both challenges individual separation and insists on dies-unified values and feelings, the performers need to be collaborating through a sympathetic dissonance. Embodied Daoist knowledge suggests that a supportive collaboration will establish the mode of interaction needed for tuning and attentive listening, and make the boundaries of identity, like skin or fiber, porous: incorporality and excorporality, embodiment. Mimesis becomes not only how one body inhabits a score, but how the moment’s ecology of all sentient and non-sentient things passes that score through their materials.

In performance, Dylan began singing and Lynette picked up a space in the rhythm to start talking. The singing stopped as she introduced the Daoist energy concepts being used. Dylan turned sideways to the room to make sure he had an angle that could widen his voice toward the audience of thirty people. He knew he had to make it possible for them to respond but feeling the space left a flat energy. These were academics and possibly rather embarrassed at the singing, certainly as Lynette's introduction began to break down into the sounding of one-word stories, many became anxious, a couple of people left. Dylan drew out his absence partly because he didn't want the audience to get too comfortable: Lynette’s talking, is he going to sing again? Is he not? When Dylan comes in the second time there’s relief, not only that the singing is there, and that it fills the space, but also that the mode of supportive collaboration is being materialized.

One audience member later commented that they were trying to understand what was going on. It's hard for an audience because there are two “performers” up front but they aren’t performing for an audience in a generically recognizable way. When this audience member realized that it was their body that was needed here, and it changed the space, only then did they let go, relaxed, and although the situation was unusual the sounds started unfolding space within the body.

When the singing came back in, working with the one-word stories in felt dissonance, it created a particular shelter for this audience, a sense of relief that the journey is happening, a willingness to participate with attentiveness. People came back into the room. This kind of tuning, was needed to do the work the performers came to do, they had to make the space. They were situating the process, making the particular. Once made, Dylan toned the volume down, took care that the audience could find a settled space to listen. Then the collaborative work of performers and audience, each making sound and listening, could engage in a common practice exploring dissonance.

The wideness of the performance and the intense discussion that followed seemed to have caught the audience into the practice in a place where its dissonance made sense, literally, to them.

Coda

How do we make this critically legible? In Daoist movement practice “qi” energy is a general word for many different kinds of energy, including a “qi” energy that is particular to the torso and a “li” energy that is in the materials around us. The embodied knowledge of li energy patterns is found throughout nature – in the (ir)regularities of a snowflake, the fractals of a shoreline, the hexagons of a beehive, or the apparent randomness of frost on a window (Wade 2003). Li patterns can score resonance, rather like the rhetorical schemes score repetition, variation, and rhythm, providing continuity across bodies —figures and tropes of rhetoric, the elements of composition, or stories, or actual bodies. Unexpected dissonance, or noise, on the other hand is what has not been scored, and when it is contextualized it becomes sound, it moves from the process work of sympathetic dissonance to more predictable dissonance and consonance, from the site particular to the site specific.

Is making something critically legible making it site-specific? It is difficult to communicate the subtlety of embodied Daoist texts and their site particular work, to tune it into a social medium where it can be recognized as critical discussion in aesthetics. Some will find it situating doesn’t “know” it but has a practice that lets them listen to it as site particular.

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Feldenkrais' Spontaneous Action and Laozi's Wuwei

FELIX BREUER

Moshé Feldenkrais in his book The Potent Self (2002) presents a uniquely Western approach to body and personality transformation that works strongly with spontaneous action. Seen from a Daoist perspective, his vision can be understood as a valid interpretation of Laozi’s concept of nonaction (wuwei). Without making any claims about the original intended meaning of either The Potent Self or the Daode jing, I would like to argue that they each contain insights that illuminate the other and that their joint interpretation yields a consistent philosophy of action.¹

Feldenkrais’ Spontaneous Action

Moshé Feldenkrais (1904–1984) was a physicist and Judo teacher, who developed the so-called Feldenkrais Method. At first glance a set of gymnastic exercises, it is a subtle method of personal development that involves bodily movement and has philosophical underpinnings.

The subject of his teachings is maturity. Feldenkrais wanted to enable people to achieve potent, mature behavior, which means the ability to act spontaneously. Spontaneous action is perhaps the most important concept in his work. It requires careful explanation, “the idea behind it being not that spontaneity is enacting any wild urges that happen to exist, but that all action is spontaneous when it is not compulsive” (F153).

¹ I use the letter “F” to refer to Feldenkrais’s book, followed by the page number. “L” stands for Le Guin 1998, my preferred translation of the Daode jing. “L” is followed by the chapter number.

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