

Mindful Motion – Bodily and Dance Practices in Contemporary Spirituality

22.05.2024 to 24.05.2024
University of Fribourg, Switzerland

Organizers:

Prof. Oliver Krüger, PhD. Manéli Farahmand , PhD. Marie Mazzella di Bosco
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Wednesday, 22.05.2024 / University of Fribourg - PER 21 E230

16:30 - Arrivals and Registration

16:45 - Conference opening by **Oliver Krüger** (University of Fribourg)

17:00 -18:00 - Keynote lecture by **Anne Koch** (University of Freiburg)

Why is dance so vibrant? An interpretation of current (neospiritual) motion practices from aesthetics of religion

Discussant: Oliver Krüger (University of Fribourg)

Thursday, 23.05.2024/ Le Point de Vue/ Théâtre de l'Équilibre, Pl. Jean Tinguely 1, 1700 Fribourg

9:00 - Introduction by **Manéli Farahmand & Marie Mazzella di Bosco**

Axis 1 - From the Individual to the Collective. Commitments and Their Impact

(Chair: Marie Mazzella di Bosco)

9:20 - 10:00

Alexandra Brown (Amsterdam University College)

Atmospheric collectivities? The potentials of shared practice at Tattva Yoga Amsterdam

10:00 - 10:40

Ana Rodriguez (University of Lausanne)

Liberating bodies? Contemporary dance as resistance in Palestine

10h45 - Coffee break

11:00 - 11:40

Lina Aschenbrenner (University of Erfurt)

The "Gaga" body between collective and individual embodiment: the movement improvisation practice Gaga as a site of (trans)formation

11:40 - 12:20 – General discussion led by **Marie Mazzella di Bosco** and **Emmanuel Thibault**

Axis 2 - Care, Healing, Therapies, Psycho-spiritual Shift: A Major intersection

(Chair: Emmanuel Thibault)

14:00 – 14:40

Ricarda Stegmann (University of Fribourg)

Sufism as self-realisation: the special involvement of the body in the Inayatiyya Movement

14:40 – 15:20

Sara Le Menestrel (CNRS, CENA/Mondes Américains)

The practice of (self-)compassion in healthcare. Bodily technique and professional ethic

15:20 – 16:00

Anja Lüpken (University of Münster)

Meditation des Tanzes – Sacred Dance as aesthetic formation of a spiritual body group

16:00 – 16:30 - Coffee break

16:30- 17:15 - General discussion led by **Marie Mazzella di Bosco** and **Emmanuel Thibault**

18:00-20:00 (upon registration, places are limited)

Experimental workshop: “Ecstatic Dance workshop & Sacred Cacao Ceremony” with Talia Medicin’Art

Friday, 24.05.2024/ Regina Mundi, RM01-C0.101

Axis 3 – Mobilities, Circulations, Rewritings. Comparative and historical Perspectives

(Chair: Michael Houseman)

9:00-9:40

Manéli Farahmand (University of Fribourg/CIC)

“Whispering to the spirit of cacao”: practices and aesthetics of Cacao ‘Medicina’ in Swiss neospiritual dancing scene.

9:40-10:20

Chi-Fang Chao (University of Roehampton)

Between the moving agent and the moved body: a primary study on dancing as the spiritual empowerment among the Christians in Taiwan.

10:20-11:00

Alice Aterianus-Owanga (University of Neuchâtel)

Dance religious convers(at)ions: the circulation of sabar and Baye Fall aesthetics in France and Switzerland.

11:00-11:30 - Coffee break

11:30-12:30

Conclusions by **Michael Houseman** (EPHE) and open discussion with all participants

12:30 *End of the Symposium*

“Mindful Motion – Bodily and Dance Practices in Contemporary Spirituality”
22.05.2024 to 24.05.2024, University of Fribourg, Switzerland

Symposium abstract

The twentieth century witnessed the development in Western societies of bodily sensibilities based on movement, awareness and self-discovery. Focused on aspects like breath, sensations and attention, these methodologies are part of the field known as meditative movements (Chenault et al., 2013: 182)¹. These practices, often drawing inspiration from Eastern traditions (*ibid*: 192), encompass a wide range of disciplines, including the Alexander technique, Pilates, Sophrology, Tai Chi Chuan, Psychomotricity, Body-Mind Centering, the Feldenkrais Method and various meditation techniques. Some of these methodologies are being reinvented in the wake of the countercultural movements of the 1970s and 80s. The Esalen Institute, a pioneering New Age community in California, inspired the emergence of innovative practices centered on movement, bodily and sensory exploration. These approaches encompass concepts such as the body’s memory, the quest for authenticity, interrelationship between the body and its social and natural environment, the discovering of inner authority, the recognition of a “sacred Self” within each individual (York, 2004)², the attraction of ritualized trance and emotions release. Mindful or “conscious” body practices, encompassing bodily and kinetic techniques imbued with a “spiritual” and often implicitly therapeutic dimension, were mostly born in the final quarter of the twentieth century, echoing the ethos of Esalen. They represent the evolution of bodily methodologies that had earlier roots in Western practices (Bigé, 2015; Vigarello, 2014)³.

Within urban social context, a culture based on holistic approaches has thrived, devoted to the rediscovery of oneself through mindful bodily movement, sensory perceptions, and inner introspection. This phenomenon has spread across transnational networks. Based on individual experiences, the contemporary scene of somatic and dance practices will bring together a diverse spectrum of disciplines, practitioners, and approaches. It resonates with contemporary spiritualities and the alternative health and well-being milieu. New Age spiritualities have evolved into multitude of networks promoting spirituality *through* the cultivation of mindful and expressive bodily movement. These practices use the body, the senses, intimacy, intuition and emotion as ways of knowledge. It thus raises questions about what such a turn towards “motion and emotion” as fundamental elements, does to contemporary spiritualities; how this shift redefines their boundaries and integration within Western and urban societies.

An approach grounded in bodily, kinetic and affective dimensions, nurtured through the exploration of practices involving movement, dance and consciousness practices appears both essential and promising for understanding the changes within contemporary religious landscape. Rather than a macrosocial approach centered on institutions, a microanalysis of sensitive and kinetic (inter)actions will enable us to grasp social dynamics, all the while outlining the boundaries of a diverse and complex field of study.

Following on from the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF) project “The Dynamics of Ritual and Embodiment in Contemporary Religion and Spirituality”, dir. Prof. Oliver Krüger (University of Fribourg), this symposium will explore these settings from three main perspectives, bringing together scholars from different disciplines (anthropology, sociology, religious studies), as well as various fields including dance, the body, health and new spiritualities. The conference’s objective is to discuss these settings by focusing on the following overarching axis:

Axis 1 - From the Personal Experience of the Body to Communal Engagement and Global Commitment. Exploring potential commonalities, shared experiences, and their socio-political impacts

The interplay between the individual and the community in traditional rites and religious practices, along with their collective nature, appears self-evident. However, as pointed out by C. Bell (2021)⁴ “in the contemporary individualized

¹ Chenault M., Hamard A., Hilpron M., Grison B., 2013, « Les techniques de conscience du corps : éthique non-compétitive entre orient et occident », *CNRS Éditions « Corps »*, 1 (11), pp. 181-194.

² York, M., 2004, *Historical dictionary of New Age movements*. Lanham, Md, Scarecrow Press.

³ Bigé, R., 2015, « Sentir et se mouvoir ensemble. Micro-politiques du contact improvisation », *Recherches en danse*, 5, pp. 1-16.
Vigarello, G., 2014, *Le Sentiment de soi. Histoire de la perception du corps (XVIe-XXe siècle)*. Le Seuil.

⁴ Bell, C., 2021, “Ritual”, in Segal R. A. & Roubekas N. P., *The wiley blackwell companion to the study of religion (Second)*, Wiley-Blackwell John Wiley & Sons.

forms of spirituality called New Age, ritual activity has moved from the public domain to the more private one". The settings under discussion involve collective practices, bringing together several dozens of participants in a shared physical space, engaging in similar actions, and constantly emphasizing the "power of the collective", the "sense of community", and "tribal belonging". However, these practices are based on intimate, individual experiences, centered on bodily and emotional sensations. This raises the question of how a "common" can be established, what kind of "collective" is forged, and whether it can extend beyond the practice's immediate context. Concretely, how do we move from practices deeply rooted in individual bodily experiences to the creation of community and collective commitment? This connection is by no means obvious and raises the question of the broader socio-political ramifications of these settings. Between the discourse of emancipation and the construction of (new) norms, how do the body and movement - seen as places of social development (Mottier and Cohen, 2016)⁵, places of worldviews, political choices and identity processes – give rise to their own subjectivities and forms of commitment (Houseman and Mazzella di Bosco, 2020)⁶?

Axis 2 - Care, Healing, Therapies and the Psycho-Spiritual Shift: A Major Intersection as a Place of Convergence, Misunderstanding, and Confusions

Whether we consider the "shifts" from the spiritual to the psychological (Garnoussi, 2013; 2011)⁷, the question of the spiritual entering nursing care (Paley, 2006; Pépin and Cara, 2001)⁸, reflections about the concept of "care" (Mossière, 2023)⁹, the intersections of spirituality within the medical field (Obadia, 2015)¹⁰, or even the "spiritual" as a form of resistance against biomedical authority (Jobin, 2011)¹¹, the interplay between spirituality and healthcare, or health in general, is evidently pivotal and has started to garner attention. This axis seeks to closely examine the particular role of body awareness and movement milieu within spiritual paradigms that encompass concepts of healing, care or even therapy. More broadly, it aims at discussing therapeutic approaches within this context that draw upon references to a form of spirituality, the quest for meaning, or personal transformation. This section delves deeper into this connection in order to reveal the circulations and influences, ambiguities and boundaries, identify points of convergence or misunderstanding, all with the aim of redefining these complex categories.

Axis 3 - Circulation and Multiple Appropriations: Comparative and historical Perspectives

The fluidity of representations, practitioners, rituals, practices, and knowledge continually reshapes the boundaries of the field. This axis aims at raising the "circulation issue" from a transnational perspective. It deals with the multilateral and multidirectional nature of exchanges and displacements (from the periphery to the center, from the South to the North, and vice versa). These dynamics multiplies references, anchor points and power relationships (Capone, 2010)¹². The transnationalization of consciousness and bodily movement practices leads to various forms of restructuring, including re-semanticization and re-signification, cross-cultural interpenetration, and cultural appropriations. This axis delves into the dynamics of transnationalization processes in religion/ spirituality, with a particular emphasis on the repercussions of interactions between ethnic groups and the New Age (De la Torre & Gutiérrez Zuniga, 2013)¹³, as well

⁵ Mottier, Anouk et Damien Mottier, 2016, « Pour une anthropologie des matérialités religieuses », *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 174, pp. 349-368.

⁶ Houseman, Michael & Marie Mazzella di Bosco, 2020, « Dances of self-development as a resource for participatory democracy », in Pike, Sarah M., Jone Salomonsen, and Paul-François Tremlett (éds.), *Ritual and Democracy: Protests, Publics and Performances*, Equinox Publishing.

⁷ Garnoussi, Nadia, 2011, « Le Mindfulness ou la méditation pour la guérison et la croissance personnelle : des bricolages psychospirituels dans la médecine mentale », *Sociologie*, 3 (2), pp. 259-275.

2013, « Des glissements du spirituel au "psy" », *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 163, pp. 63-82.

⁸ Paley, J, 2006, « Spirituality and secularization: nursing and the sociology of religion », *Journal of clinical Nursing*, 17 (2), p 175-186.

Pépin, J. et C. Cara, 2001, « La réappropriation de la dimension spirituelle en sciences infirmières », *Théologiques*, 9 (12), pp. 33-46.

⁹ Mossière, Géraldine, 2023, « La normalisation de la spiritualité dans le contexte de l'humanisation du soin », *Ethnologie Française*, LIII, 2023, 1, pp. 69-81.

¹⁰ Obadia, Lionel, 2015, « "Guérir le monde" : intersections et hybridations mondialisées du caducée et du goupillon », *Histoire, monde et cultures religieuses*, 34, pp. 109-130.

¹¹ Jobin, Guy, 2011, « La spiritualité : facteur de résistance au pouvoir biomédical de soigner ? », *Revue d'éthique et de théologie morale*, 266, 131-149.

¹² Capone, S., 2010, "Religions en 'migration': De l'étude des migrations internationales à l'approche transnationale", *Autrepart*, 56 (4), pp. 235-259.

¹³ De La Torre, R. et Gutierrez Zuñiga C., 2013, "Introducción", in De La Torre R., Gutierrez Zuñiga C. & Juarez Huet N. (eds.), *Variaciones y apropiaciones latinoamericanas del New Age*, pp. 13-27. Guadalajara : Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social.

as the shifts between locally and culturally rooted practices and the globalized realm of holistic spiritualities (Farahmand, 2022)¹⁴.

This third axis opens up a double space for discussion. On the one hand, around the borrowings, inspirations and reinterpretations of non-Western practices and cosmologies within contemporary and urban spiritualities. On the other, it takes a comparative and historical perspective on practices that interweave bodily movement and spirituality.

Lastly, a common thread will weave through these three axes: what are the specific challenges, obstacles, and opportunities of empirical research on these topics? The idea that the researcher's body serves as a tool for understanding cultural landscapes and a medium for generating knowledge, - both as an object and a method - is not new (Brito and Pesce, 2015; Classen and Howes, 2014; Dansac, 2020; Halloy, 2006; Motta, 2017; Pink, 2009)¹⁵. However, there remains a need for reflecting on challenges raised by such methodologies: from participant observation to "full participation" (Halloy, 2016)¹⁶, where the involvement of the researcher's body and emotions, often necessary in such fields, can give rise to a great deal of skepticism and debate among scholars. Discussions within the field of anthropology of dance, for instance, may provide insights into the ways to "construct an anthropology of movement and through movement" (Beaudet and Fléty, 2021)¹⁷.

About the organizers:

Krüger, Oliver

Professor of Religious Studies, Department of Social Sciences, University of Fribourg (Switzerland), Scientist of Religions; Socio-historians;

Research areas: religions and new media, funeral rites, theories of religion, evangelical movements, bodily practices, aesthetics of religions; posthumanism and transhumanism.

Farahmand, Manéli

Director of Cross-cantonal Center of Information on Beliefs (CIC/ Geneva), SNSF post-doctoral researcher, Department of Social Sciences, University of Fribourg (Switzerland); Socio-anthropology;

Research areas: transnational studies, circulation of indigenous practices, neo-indigeneity, contemporary shamanism, contemporary spiritualities, ecstatic dances.

Mazzella di Bosco, Marie

Research affiliate, LESC, University of Paris Nanterre (France); Anthropology;

Research areas: dance practices, contemporary rituals and spirituality, freeform mindful dances (5 Rhythms, Movement Medicine), healing and spiritual pursuit, dancing and healthcare system, emotions and relational dynamics, movement analysis.

¹⁴ Farahmand, M., 2022, *Néo-chamanisme Maya. Passé revisité, pouvoir au féminin et quête spirituelle*, Éditions Antipodes, Lausanne.

¹⁵ Brito, O. et S. Pesce, 2015, « De la recherche qualitative à la recherche sensible », *Champ social*, 2 (8), pp. 1-2.

Classen, C. et D. Howes, 2014, *Ways of Sensing: Understanding the Senses in Society*, London: Routledge.

Dansac, Y., 2020, "Embodied Engagements with the Megaliths of Carnac: Somatic Experience, Somatic Imagery, and Bodily Techniques in Contemporary Spiritual Practices", *Journal of Religion in Europe*, 13, pp. 300–324.

Halloy, A., 2006, "Un anthropologue en transe. Du corps comme outil d'investigation ethnographique." In Joël Norel, Pierre Petit (dirs.), *Corps, Performance, religion. Études anthropologiques offertes à Philippe Jaspers*, Paris : Editions Publibook, pp. 87-115.

Motta, M., 2017, « L'esprit qui ne dit pas son nom. Un rituel de possession laborieux à Zanzibar », *Terrain Anthropologie & sciences humaines*, 68, pp. 109-113.

Pink, S., 2009, *Doing sensory ethnography*. London: Sage.

¹⁶ Halloy, A., 2016, « Full Participation and Ethnographic Reflexivity. An Afro-Brazilian Case Study », *Journal for the Study of Religious Experience*, 2, pp. 7-24.

¹⁷ Beaudet, J-M. et L. Fléty, 2021, « Qui danse quoi? Une anthropologie du mouvement. Introduction de la publication », *Ateliers d'anthropologie*, 50, pp. 4-15.

Presentations abstracts

1. Anne Koch (University of Freiburg, Germany, anne.koch@theol.uni-freiburg.de)

Why is dance so vibrant? An interpretation of current (neospiritual) motion practices from aesthetics of religion

The keynote has two interests. One is to understand somatic movement in a social context and the other is to ask what are the reasons for such a vibrant (neospiritual) dance scene today. 'Neospiritual' functions here as a tentative term for very heterogeneous cultural subsystem-specific embeddings. The first interest brings together insights from aesthetics of religion into social and embodied cognition to tap into the aesthetic side of movement. The second research interest distinguishes between dance traditions, which are very heterogeneous, and asks about their cultural-local and global embeddedness and to what extent they pursue political goals or have to be seen in such broader relationally.

2. Alexandra Brown (Amsterdam University College Netherlands, a.e.brown@auc.nl)

Atmospheric collectivities? The potentials of shared practice at Tattva Yoga Amsterdam

This paper explores the potentials for collectivity embedded in the practices of an Amsterdam yoga studio. While Tattva Yoga's bodily techniques and teachings on personal transformation arguably constitute practices of neoliberal subject formation (Brown, Jain), Tattva Yoga classes are not reducible to their discursive or corporeal dimensions. This paper thus seeks forms for collectivity in the extra-discursive, non-representational atmospheres which characterize Tattva Yoga classes. First, the paper charts two registers of atmosphere which intermingle in a Tattva Yoga class. The classes are sites of the generation and cultivation of affective atmospheres (Anderson, McCormack, Stewart), the fluctuating intensities to which practitioners attune bodily. Moreover, classes give rise to atmospheres of breath, as both discursive teachings and corporeal practices render explicit and intervene on air that surrounds, permeates, and emanates from bodies within the space of practice (Choy, Górska, Škof and Berndtson). Second, the paper argues that these intermingling atmospheres illuminate the nature of the potential collectivity afforded by Tattva Yoga classes. The form of such collectivity is indeterminate and diffuse, ambivalent and ambiguous, and generated through the circulation of affect and breath rather than in shared commitments, ideologies, or emotions. The paper thus concludes that while the neoliberal character of Tattva Yoga practices cannot be dismissed, Tattva Yoga classes also contain the potential for a collectivity that is itself atmospheric.

3. Ana Rodriguez (Université de Lausanne, Suisse, AnaLaura.RodriguezQuinones@unil.ch)

Liberating bodies? Contemporary dance as resistance in Palestine

At the conclusion of the Ramallah Contemporary Dance Festival's opening ceremony in July 2021, the event's hosts expressed solidarity with Atta Khattab, the artistic coordinator of El-Funoun, a traditional dance troupe. Khattab had been detained six months earlier by the Israeli occupation forces, and the hosts conveyed a message on behalf of Palestinian artists and companies: "Your body is free, despite their chains." This articulation embodies the idea of dance as a tool for "self-emancipation," a concept originating from the inception of modern dance and permeating the globalized domain of its successor, contemporary dance (Suquet 2012; Neveu Kringelbach 2013). In the Palestinian context, marked by nearly 60 years of military occupation and an apartheid regime, this representation takes on added significance. How does this "emancipation of the self," focusing on individual interiority, correlate with liberation from the material constraints and limitations faced by Palestinians? How does the freedom rediscovered through dance contribute to the commitment of those striving for the long-awaited national liberation? How does this individual emancipation play a role in the collective emancipation of the nation?

This contribution seeks to address these inquiries by scrutinizing the discourses and practices of Palestinian artists from the West Bank, Israel, and the diaspora. It draws on an ethnographic research conducted over five years in the translocal world of Palestinian contemporary dance, and which delved into the construction and performance of politics within this globalized art form. By exploring the quest for freedom within dance, the contribution sheds fresh light on the political dimension of this art form in the context of Palestine, analyzing how individuals connect their inner selves and physical bodies to their capacity to effect change in the world.

4. Lina Aschenbrenner (University of Erfurt, Germany, lina.aschenbrenner@fau.de)

The “Gaga” body between collective and individual embodiment: the movement improvisation practice Gaga as a site of (trans)formation

The movement improvisation practice Gaga has gained a worldwide group of practitioners of professional and non-professional dancers. Central to the Gaga practice is the creation of holistic sensory awareness, coupled with movements that arise from and inform sensory awareness. Conscious movement becomes the key to changes in body knowledge that Gaga seeks, such as increasing endurance and strength, altering posture and range of motion, or enriching and controlling movement qualities. Despite Gaga’s emphasis on individual free-form movement, the practice leads to a specific Gaga “body and movement “ideal.” While professional dancers value Gaga for the contemporary dance approach it teaches, non-professional dancers practice Gaga for certain positive effects they experience: the heightened emotional states during and after class, the therapeutic experiences on various psychological and physical levels, and the knowledge they gain while practicing that allows them to adjust or change their identities or worldviews. In all these aspects, Gaga practice seems to meet the needs of practitioners embedded and socialized in a neoliberal consumer society where, for example, self-optimization, well-being, aestheticization, and individualization are valued. In my presentation, I first focus on the embodied creation of a collective Gaga body through specific bodily techniques related to sensory perception. I trace the bodily changes perceived by Gaga participants and the perceived impact of these changes on their lives after Gaga practice. Second, I focus on the boundaries of collective embodiment. During Gaga practice, Gaga teachers guide sensory awareness and movement through verbal and simultaneously enacted instructions. The task of embodiment lies with the individual perceiving Gaga participant, and the conditions of embodiment are multiple: individual bodily history and abilities, sensory preferences and training, body and movement education, and socialization. From this perspective, the creation of a collective ideal through Gaga practice necessarily remains an “illusion.” I conclude my talk by noting that a collective embodied subjectivity still exists, but is tied to a collective situatedness rather than the actual performance of movement.

5. Ricarda Stegmann (University of Fribourg, Switzerland, ricarda.stegmann@unifr.ch)

Sufism as self-realisation: the special involvement of the body in the Inayatiyya Movement

One of the main reasons why people from Europe or the Americas have been joining Sufi teachings and practices since the 1960s is the search for a spiritual master and the search for breathing and meditation techniques that will take them further on their path of self-awareness. Sufi teachers from the West and in the West have met the concerns and requirements of their audience by integrating the language and concepts of modern psychology into their teachings and practices. The Sufi sheikh as therapist has long become a common topos in the relevant academic literature. In this paper, various contemporary Sufi teachers in Europe and their approach to the fusion between psychology and Sufi spirituality will be presented. However, the focus will be on current practice and theory of the Inayatiyya movement, which integrates the body into its Sufi path in a special way. The Inayatiyya was founded in 1914 by the Indian Hazrat Inayat Khan and is currently led by his grandson, Pir Zia Inayat Khan. The body is involved in individual and communal practice, particularly in the form of various breathing meditations and awareness exercises. In the teachings, the body is often assigned the form of a miniature of nature, in the same way as human life is regarded as a microcosmic mirror of the macrocosmic universe. Based on analyses of online materials and field research visits, the different levels of involvement of the body are described and, where possible, anchored in religious, psychological and spiritual traditions.

6. Sara Le Menestrel (CNRS, CENA, Paris, France, sara.le-menestrel@ehess.fr)

The practice of (self-)compassion in healthcare. Bodily technique and professional ethic

Based on a multi-sited ethnography in France (Paris) and in the United States, this paper explores the mobilization of (self-)compassion as a medical protocol (Mindful Self Compassion), as a specific field of research and as a practice that has become inseparable from mindfulness meditation, particularly in the field of mental health. I will contextualize of the emergence of the notion of compassion for oneself and others, which is an integral part of the professional ethics of mindfulness meditation teachers and is widely promoted among healthcare professionals in the United States and now in France. I will then explore the somatic techniques implemented within health professionals training and patient programs to ensure that all practitioners – health professionals and patients alike - “embody” (self-)compassion through a sensory channel. This involves specific meditative practices based on gestures, posture, prayers, inner voice, metaphors and cognitive therapy tools. Beyond the moral discourse associated with this practice, its purpose (to internalize a “compassionate voice”, to become one’s “best friend”) and its promotion in healthcare raises the question of the constitutive entities of the Western self.

7. Anja Lüpken (University of Münster, anja.luepken@uni-muenster.de)

Meditation des Tanzes – Sacred Dance as aesthetic formation of a spiritual body group

Meditation des Tanzes – Sacred Dance is a specific form of Christian/spiritual circle dance developed in the 1980s. Following Bernhard Wosien (1908–1986) who invented ‚sacred dance‘ in contact with the New Age community in Findhorn (UK), his student Friedel Kloke-Eibl (*1941) developed her own version of this dance form. Gestures, postures and spatial forms are symbolically charged, individually interpreted and imaginatively translated into movement. The origins of the dance movements are classical ballet and folklore dances. The motifs of dance names, song lyrics, and framing texts are taken from Western European Christianity (ecumenical), esotericism (astrology, harmony, symbolism), and partly other non-Christian traditions. Through the shared aesthetic knowledge of music, dances, imagination, and the shared practice of individual meaning-making, the groups form aesthetic body groups. They create physiological homeostasis by movement synchronization, physical presence and contact, and emotionally regulate in such a way that feelings of well-being, joy and being touched are reported by the participants. Two of the main factors in the aesthetic formation of this body group are the embodiment of music, and the automatization and synchronization of the choreographed movement. Additional factors are: shared habitus (Christian, middle class), co-presence, touch, unconscious sense of security, shared embodied imagination, and practice of meaning-making. My hypotheses are: a) They don't talk about community because they experience community in their practice. b) Meditation des Tanzes – Sacred Dance is an example of a spiritual dance practice that emerged out of the context of the New Age community in Findhorn that differs highly from the body techniques developed around Esalen (choreography vs. improvisation, lead movement vs. felt movement, outside in vs. inside out, community vs. individual). Therefore, it is an example to refine the view on contemporary spiritualities evolved around Esalen regarding community, body technique, and spirituality

8. Manéli Farahmand (University of Fribourg, Switzerland, maneli.farahmand@unifr.ch)

“Whispering to the spirit of cacao”: practices and aesthetics of Cacao ‘Medicina’ in Swiss neospiritual dancing scene.

In Switzerland, cacao is increasingly integrated into neospiritual dances, such as 5Rhythms, Dance meditation and Ecstatic Dance, taking the form of what is referred to as “ceremonies”. Within these dance sessions, cacao is shared either by people with Latin American roots, following oral tradition, or by Westerners initiated at New Age festivals. It may also be provided by people initiated by “traditional *cacaoterra*” who have traveled to share their teachings. Ceremonies with the “spirit” or “medicine” of cacao, serve psycho-emotional and physical functions for participants. These functions include the release of emotional blockages, exploration of new sensations, being more connected to one's inner world, “inner divinity”, or to “Mother Earth”, “Pachamama”, and “Mother Nature”. Cacao is also valued for its nutritional elements such as zinc, magnesium, and iron. It is believed to act as an anti-depressant and anti-inflammatory. Practitioners also associate cacao with ancestral medicine and indigenous rituals dedicated to healing. “Cacao ceremonies” preceding dances typically follow specific gestures and bodily behaviors, engaging the senses (taste, smell), exchanges or individual interactions with the “spirit of the cacao” (whispering intentions, speaking or praying to it), and conscious consumption through singing and breathing. Beyond its ceremonial role, cacao is privately used within family contexts to foster sisterhood bonds or accompany women's physiological cycles. It serves as a daily beverage or is used to celebrate significant occasions. My paper aims to understand imaginaries, uses, and representations surrounding cacao based on an ethnography of the neospiritual dance field in Switzerland. I will also explore whether these imaginaries are rooted in transnational experiences, trajectories, and mobilities.

9. Chi-Fang Chao (University of Roehampton, UK, chifang.chao@roehampton.ac.uk)

Between the moving agent and the moved body: a primary study on dancing as the spiritual empowerment among the Christians in Taiwan

This presentation explores the cultural manifestation of ‘spirits’ and their embodiment, which is central to the understanding/realization of dancers’ perception, interpretation and creation of religious experiences. The discussion will be contextualized in contemporary Taiwanese Christianity after 1980s, as a reaction to the more widely-spread trend of global Pentecostalism and evangelism (Coleman and Hackett 2015). One major phenomenon of this shift is to resume the power of Holy Spirit as the direct approach to knowing God more deeply, directly, and intimately (Luhmann 2004). The other side of it is to exorcize the evil spirits which ‘are contrary against’ the Holy Spirit. In this presentation, I will follow scholars who have viewed the personized body metaphorically as the ‘battle field’ in which the Holy Spirit and the evil ones are ‘in conflict’ or ‘at war’ (Csordas 2002, Chen 2012; Tsai 2012). My main questions are how the kinesthetic experiences of dancers/dancing bodies have been integrated into this spiritual realization. To answer the questions, an

ethnographic study composed of interviews is conducted from July 2020 till January 2024 among selected Taiwanese Christians, especially those who have dancing experiences and relate them to their religious epistemology. Through this research, I hope to unravel the creative force of dancers' body, which not only own special social lives and skills but are also able to negotiate the heightened lived experiences that manifest the reborn body-mind-spirit oneness.

10. Alice Aterianus-Owanga (University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland, alice.aterianus-owanga@unil.ch)

Dance religious convers(at)ions: the circulation of sabar and Baye Fall aesthetics in France and Switzerland

This conference will draw on an ethnography of the transmission of Senegalese sabar dancing in France and Switzerland to discuss how the religious pathways of sabar enthusiasts bear witness to many modes of adoption or rejection of Mouride and *Baay Fall* aesthetics. I focus on several portraits of students in order to highlight three modalities of the relationship with *Baay Fall* aesthetics, faith, and religious knowledge, ranging from the dissociation between dance and religious meaning to conversion and immersion into *Baay Fallism*. I defend the importance of elaborating post-exotic anthropological tools – such as the ideas of ethnophilia or religious conversations – in order to grasp the nexus of affects, embodied experiences, and intimate relationships that are conducive to and mediate the religious pathways of sabar enthusiasts.