



Affect and Perception: A Posthumanist Perspective on Amerta Movement

by Yuliana Meneses Orduño

JOGED AMERTA is described as a body movement meditation practice originated in Surakarta, Central Java, by the artist and philosopher Suprpto Suryodarmo¹. This practice synthesized his interest in philosophy, archaeology, meditation, traditions, rituals, and multiculturalism, amongst other things. Over time, this turned into methodologies of practice and teaching that he called Joged Amerta for his own movement, also known as Amerta Movement in his work with other people. Within the practice, *dialoguers*, *messengers* or *movers* (as Pak Prapto used to refer to them), notice how *bodies* (movers and material environment) start to develop a form of communication between each other: with *affect* as a way to interact and perceive the surroundings.

1 Suprpto Suryodarmo, Surakarta (1945-2019). He started to develop his practice in 1970, but it was towards the end of the 1980s that he condensed his methodology. Suryodarmo (2009) uses meditation movement or a meditation dance for example to name and define what Joged Amerta is: "Amerta is a word that has a meaning of "life or essence of life". While, the elements that are contained in Joged Amerta are free movement, Vipassana, and surrendering."

The implications of affect are in our daily life and in the way in which we relate to each other, which means that there is a relation of response between bodies. Also, a common starting point for Joged Amerta is daily life, from the way we move as if it were a response to or an effect of the conditions of the quotidian. Following this, we can say that affect is a primary characteristic and fundamental expression of the human being, that is always developing with others, creating an effect between action-reaction which has an impact on our body movement. I will try to relate the theory of affect and Amerta Movement, in order to understand what happens in the experience of the body when it's moving.

The term *affect* has been used in Posthumanism to understand a more sensitive link between the human and the non-human, that implies the recognition of the vitality that inhabits the world. Posthumanism as a contemporary philosophical current opens a debate on the actions that human beings have carried out throughout history and that have had a considerable impact on all aspects of life: political, social, economic, ecological, technological, and others. Thus, it suggests the displacement of the figure of the human to the *post-human*, that is, a human capable of rethinking his role as the central axis of the world in order to

decentralize and put other vital agencies at the center. Rosi Braidotti explains that this posthuman condition is in a “process of becoming”.²

Pak Prapto's practice of movement has much to do with his conception of life and the human in Javanese philosophy. According to Lise Lavelle (2006, 3; 227-228), he “intends to pioneer in Java a new concept of the human being, one based on respecting and re-vitalizing the traditional *kejawen* outlook of life [...] to enter a dialogue with modernity.” She also suggests that he is developing “a humble attitude to Life as a divine force”, “with prayer”; a humble attitude that we can practice to honor and respect Life. I want to suggest that this attitude of humility towards life is given by the *affect* through movement, as a process that facilitates the perception of vitality creating an effect on the daily life of the practitioner.

Amerta Movement creates an impact on the way bodies perceive their spaces, their history, their “natureculture” environment and relationships with other bodies. The primary way of approaching is through sensitive

2 For Braidotti (2013, 12 and 193): “Becoming-posthuman consequently is a process of redefining one's sense of attachment and connection to a shared world, a territorial space: urban, social, psychic, ecological, planetary as it may be. It expresses multiple ecologies of belonging, while it enacts the transformation of one's sensorial and perceptual coordinates, in order to acknowledge the collective nature and outward-bound direction of what we still call the self.”

listening, attention, and observation that acquires subtle forms of movement. This way of moving, seeing, and touching from subtlety modifies everyday perception, arousing *affect* between the different bodies—both human and non-human—that inhabit space. This way of experiencing the world implies different manners of understanding, inhabiting and being present in a “body” by “moving”. This is something that the Amerta practitioner experiences that definitely will affect their daily life. Everything becomes vital (or alive) and practitioners move with awareness of this. They move not alone, but with the different agencies they inhabit, acting together. In this sense, I will refer to “conjoined actions”, moving together in an “assemblage”.

In this process, the Amerta Movement practitioners' bodies become more sensitive to other non-human bodies' agencies. What is interesting

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to note is that this form of body movement can alter the perception of daily life. Brian Massumi (1995, 97) defines affect as something continuous in everyday life, “like a background perception that accompanies every event, however quotidian.” Our daily life—and the movement that accompanies it—is on a continuous plane of perception. In the case of Amerta Movement, it could be that the decision to understand life as a vital force influences the way we move. The perceptual modification of the vitality and the reception of affect is what gives rise to an extra-quotidian bodily experience.

After a certain amount of time of practicing Amerta, the everyday aspect of the “background perception” will expand to other perceptual layers, unleashing an impact on the way we see and live the quotidian. A practitioner can allow themselves to be affected more by “*zoe*”—non-human, vital force of life—and vital materiality in a more conscious way.³

3 Braidotti (2013, 60) explains why she uses *zoe* instead of *bios* in posthumanism. *Bios* is “traditionally reserved for anthropos”, and *zoe* is a wider scope of animal and non-human life. This term has a parallelism with vital materiality for New Materialism, which recognises that matter is not inert, but has vitality. For Jane Bennet (2010, 14), “We are vital materiality and we are surrounded by it, though we do not always see it that way”. We can see an example of this not only by practicing in nature but in sites like temples when it is possible to arise affect through their *vital materiality*.

The “background perception” is transferred to the foreground, which leads to the body’s own experience of the vitality of life in the movement. In Massumi’s (1995, 97) words “one’s ‘sense of aliveness’ is a continuous, nonconscious self-perception (unconscious self-reflection).”

The experience of the practitioner will be essential as a source of contrast and support of this theory. This is a proposal that I found convenient as a way to understand what happens during my practice. I consider that, since affect is a process of correspondence, we can first invite self-reflection on our perception of the *vitality* in our daily life and how that influences our bodily experience and our movement.

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