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# Exploration on Autobiographical Discoveries from Creative Work based on Hooded Crane Dancing

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## Abstract

This paper explores the practice of using hooded crane dancing as an aesthetic and spiritual journey towards creative experiences through a gradual understanding of hooded cranes. I first became involved in individual and group performances that observed and mimicked hooded cranes via video clips. A documentary film on the hooded crane (Doori) played a strong role in increasing my awareness and understanding of the ecology of the Suncheon bay wetland conservation area, including hooded cranes. As I became more immersed in my performances, I became more adept at particular movements and reached the level of doing choreography work on my own. In this paper, I have tried to investigate how I was able to reveal my inner self while searching for ideas, modifying story-lines, selecting music, doing choreography and performing a final piece on stage. Data collection was done between September 2014 and May 2016, including field notes, reflective memo taking, photos, video clips and self-recollections. After data analysis and interpretation, I was able to grasp almost 13 aspects related to creative work following Root-Bernstein (Root-Bernstein & Root-Bernstein, 1999).

As a professor/researcher/artist, I enjoyed playing with my ideas and body movements, heavily shaped by knowledge accumulated through my understandings on hooded cranes. I also needed to transform existing resources and carefully select an appropriate piece of music for my choreography work by coming up with images or abstract concepts. The course of this journey inwards, enabled by my intimate contact with the world of the Hooded Crane was uplifting, aesthetically and spiritually. Additionally, the course of the journey toward my own creative space in the Suncheon wetlands, where I existed in harmony with the Hooded Crane, lifted my spirit up and allowed me to reach a better place, aesthetically and spiritually.

Keywords: Crane dancing, movements of hooded crane, biographical case, creative thinking

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Everything moves in nature. The wind, people, leaves, cars, all are in motion at various times. I am also often in a state of flux in my daily life, moving between an awakened state and a dreaming-like state. Even while sleeping, I must move somehow as I live by breathing. Movement opens up a whole new world to me. When I explore something new in me while walking or taking a rest, I sometimes come across an aesthetically pleasing moment. I sometimes imagine journeying into unexplored territory within myself, where inner creative forces that have not yet been revealed well. As a university professor, I am used to focusing on caring for students and others, not myself. However I reached the turning point in my life after many frustrations around 2001 led me to a state of spiritual and physical exhaustion. My attempts to recover my sense of self saw me seeking approaches outside of mainstream western points of view.

What follows is an autobiographical narrative (Kim & Zimmerman, 2017) that reveals a creative, aesthetic and spiritual journey from performing hooded crane dancing. Most of my research was based on autobiographical works in the area of dancing (Ahn, 2007; Go, 2013; Oh, 2013) and general art-based work (Barone & Eisner, 2012). In this paper, I tried to investigate how I was able to reveal my inner self while searching for ideas, modifying a story-line, selecting music, doing choreography and performing a final piece. Data collection was done between September 2014 and May 2016, including field notes, reflective memo taking, photos, video clips and self-recollections. As a professor/researcher/artist, I employed art-based research methods, in particular a/r/tography (Irwin, 2006; LeBlanc, Davidson, Ryu, & Irwin, 2015) and a case study (Stake, 1995) to explore the practice of using hooded crane dancing as an aesthetic and spiritual journey towards creative art work.

## **An excursion into breathing meditation and martial arts movements**

My whole being was gradually transformed into something new after engaging myself with breathing meditation. This was totally new to me, even though I had been exposed to oriental approaches long before I studied abroad. I asked myself sincerely: “Everyday I breathe, so why do I need breathing meditation”? As I lay down on the ground, I gradually became aware of my body as a whole entity. Previously I had not paid any attention to my body as part of myself before. Breathing meditation allowed me to breathe in fresh air, to clear my mind, to refocus, and even to delve deeper inside of myself. Today energy flow circulates along with

the meridian system in my body. I feel a delicate brightness going around my body, heart and spirit and expanding further into outer space. Sometimes I am fascinated by the bounty of brightness circulating inside and outside of my body. These in-between moments of time and space used to uplift me to a higher plane (Witz, 2017).

Reflecting on my earlier days on breathing meditation, I am surprised by how I was caught up with martial arts movements. Standing with one leg and staring at the air as if looking into an empty world. Bending my body downwards while spreading out two arms firmly and as straight as I could, readying myself to attack with two fingers. These kinds of martial art movements captivated my attention and gave me chances to strengthen my body when combined with breathing meditation. I was in the countryside with other people where pure, cloudless skies softened the air with its brightness. A pretty grove of persimmon trees with fully ripened fruit seemed to joyfully celebrate the autumn season. The persimmons were almost ready to fall to the ground. The trees look too hard to hold their creative products. I walked amongst the trees peering up into the sky, looking for the combinations that excited my body movements. I practiced my movements on top of a rock near the trees with joy and awareness. I felt such changes while being vaguely aware of the martial art master who had stopped to watch us and to give some hearty comments on our body movements.

It took a few years until I was ready to participate in the Suncheon Bay Garden Expo as part of a cultural performance team. The idea of combining martial arts and the crane postures had led me to perform more than 10 times in 2013. At various venues where we performed there was an audience composed of mostly adults and children (see Figure 1). The outdoor performance was composed of a sequence of martial arts movements followed by improvisational dancing. A stream provided us with intimate contact with the natural environment while dancing circular movements. Another performance took place in a Korean traditional house with lighting effects based on sunset.



Figure 1. Outdoor and indoor performance on May 2013

## Performing “bird movements” with foreign university students

As I practiced my body movements for group performances, I realized that motion in space and time can be applied to any form of movements. Martial arts postures are not separate from dancing movements. They provided me with inseparable forms of inner and outer streams of energy and feelings during performances. I was also given an interesting opportunity when I met a group of European university students and taught them some body movements. They were quite interested in combining art and education as part of their performance. We all enjoyed the performance of bird movements in the Suncheon city festival and on the university indoor stage (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Crane dancing with foreign students in 2012 and 2013.

The major piece was composed of circle dancing movements and martial arts postures. They were interpreted through bird movements and a circular harmony in each performance. Slow movements allowed us to be aware of each other while standing in a circle spreading hidden wings. I continued exploring the meaning of bird movements while moving on the stage and walking along the riverside. I needed to gain opportunities for revealing aesthetic work in my performance.

Fragments of practice and performance gradually converged into the tiny space of creative efforts. One day, after a conversation with one of my colleagues in university about the meaning of wings, he asked me. “What do you want to represent with your bird movements? What is the artistic meaning out of it?” I murmured and was not sure about the answer. I was close to a dreaming-like state, but I hoped he

was more thoughtful and observant. He commented, “Maybe you want to reflect something that was lost, and you are assuming everyone was born with wings that we no longer possess, and that we had not all been aware of it so did not even try to fly.” At that time, I was enthralled with his comments, and not just from an artistic viewpoint. The moving images of bird movements prompted a rush of feelings and memories about my previous efforts toward artistic revelation of my performance piece. I needed more creative time and space.

### **Creative work with schoolchildren and teachers**

As a university professor, I often went on journeys to find creative spaces during weekends or vacations. Informal ways of playing with ideas or other people sometimes gave me opportunities to see novice students or even teachers as creative actors. I personally felt that creativity could not be taught but was coaxed out or brought to notice, for example through body movements. Based on this I wanted to offer informal programs that encouraged students or teachers to experience something derived from their own actions (Jun, 2017a; Jun & Lee, 2018), and so started a series of workshops.

Sometimes I invited an extraordinary schoolteacher to the program. He emphasized the use of body, hand, and heart for experiencing technical artwork such as manipulating electrical sawing machine which students use to cut wood into smaller pieces in order to create a moving domino as in the work of the Rube Goldberg. Whenever I walked into this workshop space, I become acutely aware of my need to escape from my ordinary ways of thinking and presuppositions. Though my perceptual skills are often attuned to the nuances of bird movements, I needed to recreate my performance. This happened again when I happened to dance with one of the more energetic teachers who volunteered to dance with me after my solo performance. She expressed her inner feelings fully with her dramatic gestures after putting on her favorite music. I was impressed by her improvisational dramatic expressions (Ahn, 2007), and with how she interacted with me and the other teachers in the audience, and it was a great finale for the creative teacher workshop (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Solo performance and dancing with teachers in 2014

Another invited guest for the weekend program was a drama actor who used to encourage her students to be creative. The educational drama approach was her favorite work. Even though bird movements might not have been the most attractive theme for multi-cultural students (Jun & Lee, 2018), we showed them a documentary on the hooded crane that was filmed by a local TV company in 2001. Together we all visited the Suncheon bay wetland area early one morning and observed the soaring of hooded cranes at dawn to the rice field area. This kind of eco-environmental integration of science and art work was new to them. The drama teacher guided them to another space where they could enjoy drawing self-images with others in a collaborative way. They also enjoyed moving freely in a space while closing their eyes with the help of the partner. Creating masks for birds was another type of craftwork we engaged in. Later they participated in creating a drama-like dancing performance based on the hooded crane's life (Jun, 2017a). The hooded crane (Doori) was treated as an outcast and frustrated, but later he recovered with the help of his friends and finally soared into the sky. Through their movements and music, I was deeply impressed and touched by their short performance. The impressions that I had were so relational, emotional, and evocative. Their collaborative movements demonstrated several different meanings of harmonizing for me. It embraced another side of the world that evoked something creative in me.



Figure 4. Crane dancing drama with multi-cultural students in 2016

## Hooded crane dancing

My excursion to the Suncheon Bay wetland gives me to appreciate more than 30 species of birds and other wetland living organisms. One of the representative birds is hooded crane. The cranes arrive at the wetlands in the end of October and stay until they leave for Siberia in early April each year. When summer draws near, baby cranes rapidly grow and play, fluttering their wings like their father and mother. Often, they usually plume their feathers or hunt for food with their parents, and they must prepare for their long flight to the southern regions. As the harvest starts in the countryside in Korea, the chicks have to bravely soar up to the sky and fly to a far-away southern region like Suncheon bay wetland. They at last fly over the water and head for their final destination. They are flying into the blue sky, looking up at the sun and moon.



Figure 5. Hooded crane dancing performance at the world migratory bird day in the Suncheon city, May 2016

Cranes never allowed me close observation. The only way I could observe them was via video clips or pictures. The more I observed them, the deeper my understanding of them and my sensory awakening became. I tried to be a hooded crane as I got into a dream-like state during breathing meditation. I told myself: “I am a hooded crane (Doori).” I was walking into a natural studio and composing my body movements according to music that I had carefully selected. Applying my improvisational body movements into space, no matter how planned it may be ahead of time, is never an act of artistic domination over space and time (Irwin, 2006). I was in a constant conversation with hooded cranes (Doori) via music, body movements and perhaps energy flows between them and I (Jun, 2017b).

As I became empathetically intimate with a hooded crane (Doori) and gained more understandings of Doori’s life, all of my artistic efforts expanded further (Jun, 2017a). My next creative challenge occurred when I was asked to write up my experiences on hooded crane dancing for a chapter in a book. I then composed texts and pictures in order to illustrate how I got involved with dancing. The other authors in the book were active ornithologists in Korea, Russia and the United States. After the publication of the work I had the chance to interact with an audience in a city-based reed festival. The forum-like festival program allowed me to perform the Hooded Crane dance in front of several eco-environmental experts, photographers and visitors. We all enjoyed the body movements as if we were hooded cranes, underneath a sky with brilliant sunshine.



Figure 6. Book concert at Reed Festival Nov 2016



Last year in 2017, I visited the ICF (International Crane Foundation) where 15 different species of cranes are protected and taken care of by bird experts. Here I was able to have first intimate contact with many different species of cranes including hooded cranes, red-crowned cranes, and whooping cranes. What a wonderful moment that I could observe and know more about those cranes! It was the special mother's day when the visitors including retired people appreciated my solo performance and encouraged me with their graceful smiles at the end.

### **Reflection on creative work for hooded crane dancing**

The biographical narratives gave me a mirror with which I could reflect on myself (Kim & Zimmerman, 2017). It was long journey towards a creative space where I could reveal my inner self while encountering a martial arts master, performance group members, hooded cranes, schoolchildren and teachers, and even a drama actress. Fortunately I had also had opportunities to talk with faculty members in Art departments. Such an environment awakened and guided me to step into creative spaces.

Personally I prefer playing with new things and tinkering with unknown things. I used to enjoy my own methods for exploring or seeking new ideas. As I peeled off layers of vagueness, I was able to step into an unknown world. When I was exposed to a hooded crane exhibition, I felt that "I wanted to try and mimic hooded crane movements. Why not?" Since that time, around 2012, I have been gradually touched with the world of migratory birds. The more I practiced and learned about crane behavior, the more I understood the cranes, their daily lives and seasonal features etc.

I was also fortunate to twice perform hooded crane dancing at the international symposium for hooded cranes. There were many ornithologists in attendance, who offered their professional presentations on the migratory birds. I was surely steered towards greater understandings. Such scientific knowledge sometimes hit me, and forced me to come up with images or ideas on how to create crane dancing by selecting a certain piece of music, movements etc. After performing crane dancing in front of cranes at the ICF in 2017, I had vision of identifying myself with a crane while concentrating on performing myself in terms of "I", in the sense of "A single "consciousness-and-'I'" (Witz, Lee, & Huang, 2010). I sometimes felt like I really a hooded crane by integrating the body-heart-spirit from a crane's perspectives while dancing (Witz, 2017).

What about creativity? Much of my work is based on spontaneous

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improvisation, though I adopted several tools for my creative work for crane dancing, including Root-Bernstein's 13 thinking tools (Root-Bernstein & Root-Bernstein, 1999) that creative people use. It turns out that I had unintentionally employed such tools for my personal challenge of mimicking hooded cranes in terms of my own version of dancing. First, I contemplated on cranes' behavior and to interpreted it (or thought I did) through my own body with careful observations. My interpretations then were used to form a choreographed work recognizing patterns of crane behavior and forming still new patterns. Second, in this course, I tried to emphasize the hooded crane's life through my body movements and thus analogized certain movements to extract social meanings out of watching the hooded crane video clips. Third, I needed to transform the existing resources and carefully select the appropriate piece of music for my choreography work. This called for me to come up with images or abstract concepts while playing with my own ideas or imaginings. Fourth, I pursued a modeling approach to gain scientific knowledge on hooded cranes' food chain using NetLogo programming language. Often I searched for a hidden dimension that might be break-through for a non-cliché type dancing work of traditional crane dancing routines. Finally, most of the practical work was tightly synthesized with the story line, music, a sequence of body movements (choreography) and a little work with costumes. As the rehearsals went on, I modified some parts of the piece immediately, as if I were a director or choreographer in my work place.

All the creative work has been motivated by a combination of both outside resources including cranes and inner inspiration or images that emerged from my appreciation of certain moments that evoked a higher aesthetic direction (Witz, 2017). I tried to be capable of receiving a new world with fresh perceptions and an acute awareness through both an embodied and imagined understanding of hooded cranes. As a professor/researcher/artist and a leader (Irwin, 2006; LeBlanc, Davidson, Ryu, & Irwin, 2015), I enjoyed playing with my ideas and body movements by instantly transforming myself when alongside others as I explored what it means to be human versus a hooded crane. When I listened to music and concentrated on my body movements I was completely absorbed in the performative action, I was freed from the bondage of the mundane world and soared upwards towards a higher state, like a crane soaring in the sky (Jun, 2017a). The course of my inwards journey and its intimate contact with the hooded cranes' world uplifted me aesthetically and spiritually.

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*Korean Abstract*


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**흑두루미춤을 토대로 한 창작 활동에서 나타나는 자전적 발견에 관한 탐구**

전영국 (순천대)

이 논문은 순천만의 흑두루미를 주제로 한 몸짓과 춤을 만들어 가는 대학 교수의 자전적 사례에서 창의적 활동이 나타나는 양상을 다루고 있다. 연구자는 순천만 야외에서 흑두루미를 관찰하고 모방하는 활동을 자발적으로 하면서 점점 순천만과 흑두루미에 대한 관심을 더 갖게 되었다. 2013년 이후부터 개인 또는 동아리 형태의 공연 활동을 전개하면서 흑두루미에 대한 관찰과 모방을 통한 놀이 활동이 몸짓에 관한 형상화 작업으로 발전되어 나갔다. 특히, 순천만에서 실제 일어난 흑두루미 두리의 이야기를 접목하여 몸짓을 통하여 두리의 입장에서 험난한 과정을 헤쳐나가게 된 구체적인 몸짓을 형상화 시키고 흑두루미의 동작에서 패턴의 인식하여 형상을 만들어 나가는 안무작업을 자연스럽게 하게 되었다. 이 글에서 '나'는 창작에 관한 구상, 스토리 전개, 음악, 안무 및 시연에 이르기까지 과정에서 경험한 내면의 상태를 토대로 창의성의 발현에 관한 지점을 탐구하고자 하였다. 자료 수집은 2014년 9월부터 2016년 5월 사이에 걸쳐 창작 과정에 관한 현장 노트, 성찰 메모, 사진, 동영상 및 자전적 기억 자료를 중심으로 이루어졌다. 연구자는 자료 분석과 해석 작업을 거쳐 창의적 사고에 뛰어난 인물들을 연구한 Root-Bernstein이 제시한 13개의 창의적인 측면(Root-Bernstein & Root-Bernstein, 1999)과 밀접한 관련성이 있음을 포착할 수 있었다. 나는 흑두루미에 대한 이해가 높아지면서 흑두루미의 몸짓에서 패턴을 추출하여 변형하거나 추상적인 이미지 작업으로 나아갔다. 이 자전적 사례는 순천만습지에서 흑두루미와 인간이 서로 조화롭게 살아가는 공감각적 관점에서 다양한 방식의 앎과 느낌을 통합하는 방식으로 창작춤 활동을 전개해 나감으로써 자신을 심미적이고 영적으로 고양시키게 해 줌을 보여주었다.

 주요어 : 흑두루미춤, 두루미 몸짓, 자전적 사례, 창의적 사고
 

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