

# Conclusions: the dancer of the future dancing radical hope

Dance plays a crucial role in Jonathan Lear's seminal work on the Native American tribe, the Crow peoples, and their gains and losses in their attempt to sustain communal life under white conquest. Lear pays much attention to the sun dance, a prayer for revenge which lapsed around 1875 and was relearned around 1941, from the Crow's enemies, the Shoshone tribe (Lear 2008). The sun dance was central to the Crow form of life, and intimately related to various other elements of their culture, specifically warfare. Lear asks:

What is one to do with the sun dance when it is no longer possible to fight? Roughly speaking, a culture faced with this kind of devastation has three choices:

1. Keep dancing even though the point of the dance has been lost. The ritual continues, though no one can any longer say what the dance is for.
2. Invent a new aim for the dance. The dance continues, but its purpose is, for example, to facilitate good negotiations with whites, usher good weather for farming, or restore health to a sick relative.
3. Give up the dance. This is an implicit recognition that there is no longer any point in dancing the sun dance. (Lear 2008: 36)

Lear argues that the sun dance, after the Crow's traditional way of life had ceased, cannot be danced; its steps could be repeated but the system of signification that gave it its meaning had been lost. Lear argues that 'concepts get their lives through the lives we are able to live with them' (Lear 2008: 37); further, 'circumstances are such that there is no practical possibility of our performing those acts, or the very acts themselves have ceased to make sense' (Lear 2008: 38). At the conclusion of the book Lear asks: 'is this a maintenance of re-introduction of a tradition – or is the name of "tradition" being invoked to invent new rituals?' He goes on to offer a partial answer: 'it is not for me to answer

this question: that is and will be the task of Crow poets, of Crow leaders and their followers' (Lear 2008: 152). When this statement is read together with option no. 2 and the core argument of this book, we may find another possibility for the sun dance, one for which traces can be found in Lear's argument. Further, we are reminded of Martha Graham's statement, quoted in Chapter 3, according to which it is not for her to understand the meaning of her dance. That possibility is the creation of a conceptual symbolic system that cannot be articulated in words, cannot be signified in existing concepts, but creates a world through the dance itself.

Bonnie Honig critiques Lear's insistence on ethics rather than politics. A move to a focus on politics, she argues, can shed light on the ability to question power and on concepts of inequality and resistance (Honig 2015). In addition, Honig critiques Lear's admiration for the singular leader rather than for action-in-concert. She writes: 'hope insists on the importance of the held hands and not on the courage of a radical individual with radical hope' (Honig 2015: 33). In a response to Honig's essay, Jason Frank asks us to revisit what Tocqueville sees as 'the political itself, the capacity of ordinary people to respond collectively to challenges they commonly face' (Frank 2015: 638). James Martel also critiques the insistence on teleology and the singular leader and the avoidance of politics as action 'on our own' (Martel 2015). I revisit here one of my core methodological assumptions, which, in an argument focusing on inscription, is far more than an underlying method. The interpretation of politics as arising from collective action that always transcends the individual and yet starts from one moving body can be found in Eleanor Marx's essay 'The Woman Question from a Socialist Point of View' (Marx 1886) in which the categories of action used are woman and man; always beyond the individual but starting from Eleanor's own inscription upon history. Further, I draw my use of this text from the powerful reading of this argument in context in Rachel Holmes's groundbreaking biography where the use of those categories is intimately related to Eleanor's understanding of history; in which beyond the dialectical view presented by her father she sees her intervention as the next stage as 'the sequel' (Holmes 2014: 449). Eleanor Marx (known as 'Tussy') provides us with what these radical democratic critiques of Lear's virtue ethics seek: a category of action that in its very becoming unfolds a new future while always being grounded in a collective.

What if, with Martel's, Frank's and Honig's appeal to move away from the singular leader towards the people; what if we follow Tussy and go back to investigate action together, and bring back equality, and start listening to the sun dancers themselves? What if, with Lear's own question,

and with Honig's critique of Lear, we don't ask the poets to narrate the new meaning inserted into the sun dance? What if we do not seek the Crow poet to explain the meaning that is or is not within the dance, but rather ask the dancers who have been practising it, through its turbulent history, without seeing their actions as secondary to those who narrate them? What if we use this tension to revisit Arendt's juxtaposition of equality and difference, and assume that it is because we are equal that we can speak to each other, in words or movement (but it is because we are different that we want to speak to each other and express that natality)? What if we let Tussy invite us into the sequel, a world in which lives collide more and further equality is claimed? A new way of investigating the sun dance emerges. This interpretation has been written upon the argument of this book by its dancing interlocutors: the argument of relational movement which creates an independent world, performing a uniquely danced voice but arising out of embodied equality.

A documentary book and film on Crow and the sun dance offer us a snapshot of this ritual in the actions and movements of its interlocutors. Written by Thomas Yellowtail, with contributions from various Crow elders, both book and film offer an insight into this complex ceremony that is practised over several days. James Trosper, a Shoshone/Arpaho elder, writes: 'in the sundance we pray for the tribe, we pray for our country. Those prayers are really offered for all Indian people, for the whole world' (Yellowtail 2007: 91).

Even in its short trailer ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQrW-3BZtyQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQrW-3BZtyQ)) we see some of the characteristics of dance discussed throughout this book: the sun dance was always relational, never practised alone; it has its own method of inscription, its own form of conduct known only by its practitioners. The old Crow world is lost; but it may be that by repeating the sun dance they will slowly build their new world, which creates a sic-sensuous in its conditions of arising and in its language; learned from their enemies, in the face of cultural devastation, the sun dance renews itself and provides new spaces for generating shared meaning out of re- and misinterpretations. The sun dance releases from the body of the individual dancer, towards dancing with them in the specific time-place in which it is performed. It may be that the steps were relearned by copying the Shoshone, but by rearticulating them and bringing them into new spaces with new participants the Crow are creating a new world. Alternative spaces of dissent for the people of the Crow are unravelled by the sun dance; and its new meaning is created by them, equally contributing to the dance. But the sun dance goes one step further; it releases from that dancing community towards a world in which it will one day make

sense. The dance is performed in a world not yet built; a world in which Crow culture once again is constitutive for their way of life, and in which they can dance the sundance both to inscribe events that accompanied its long and turbulent history but also to unravel a new future. The Crow people dance radical hope. The sun dancers are dancers in a world not yet built.

The sun dance creates its own system of signification that may well not be easily articulated in words and retold as a story, and histories, as well as narratives of cultural oppression and disenfranchisement, are now constitutive of its system of inscription. It starts from a singular contracting body, expressing its uniqueness, and releasing into other bodies responding to it. The world constructed by the dance is never the world of solitary, courageous leaders acting on their own; the dance is relational in and of itself, never practised alone. I read in the example of the sun dance another tension between the strong and weak reading of political dance; only here it is stated that the weak reading no longer exists. There are no words available to describe this dance. This does not stop the reader–spectator from seeking the strong reading of political dance – politics articulated within dance itself, and allowing for a world of signification to unravel through movement.

Honig reads the tribal elders of the Crow as the Greek chorus (Honig 2015). The sundance allows for a reading of a different kind of chorus; a shared space including elders and youngers, spectators and dancers. The chorus of the sun dance tells the story of cultural catastrophe but also the story of radical hope. This chorus unravels a world to be built in the steps of the dancers and engrained on their bodies. This allows us to revisit the woman who wanted to dance the chorus, Isadora Duncan.

Isadora Duncan wrote to her adopted daughter, Irma Duncan, asking about her hopes for the summer of 1925, and expressing an interest in visiting Jerusalem (Duncan 1929: 314). Duncan never made it to Jerusalem. Looking at the argument of Chapter 6 of this book it is hard to imagine that Isadora Duncan would have enjoyed her visit to contemporary Jerusalem; Jerusalem whose space is fractured by checkpoints and separation walls. And yet Duncan allows us to bring some radical hope into the conclusion of this argument. The reader–spectator is reminded that in *The Dance of the Future* Duncan writes about the dancer of the future, the free spirit inhabiting the body of new woman (Duncan 1994). Further, let us revisit the third dancer, larger than all humanity itself. Duncan's dancer of the future, or the third dancer, enables us to imagine a humanity not yet here. Duncan's dancers of the future – leading to further interruptions, and conceptually enabling us to read many other

dancers of the future, from South Africa to Palestine, through protests against gendered violence – not only protest the worlds in which they are deemed unequal; in their intervention they dance in a world not yet built. In that world, their bodies are perceived as equal to those who oppress them; through their dance they show that we are all equal as embodied beings and deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. Moments of sic-sensuous are crucial here, as they not only unravel different forms of meaning through aesthetic and political interventions; they unravel a world in which those meanings will make sense. The dancer of the future, arriving in Jerusalem, unravels a world in which there is equal respect for human rights, dignity and equality of all; a world in which human beings can express joy and pain through their bodies with no fear of oppression or of the silencing of their voices. The dancer of the future brings with her a new interpretation of humanity through dance.

The performance of the argument nearly draws to a close and it is time to summon the interlocutors of this book for their curtain call. From Isadora Duncan, who wanted to dance the chorus, and proved that she was always red, regardless of what she said or wore; through Martha Graham, whose psyche was divided between herself and her chorus, and in turn allowed uninvited audience members to perform their equality, the argument danced equality, solidarity and intervention. It then proceeded to the long line of gumboot dancers, who released in a language they were not entitled to speak, and in this way created a space for themselves, a world in which they were to make sense before it was even built. The argument moves to global responses to Eve Ensler's call for the utilisation of dance against violence, those responses subverting intention at times but creating different spaces in which bodies could meet and heal together. The dance continues through the dabke, allowing for people to join and create a shared embodied symbolic space where international law cannot allow that to be created. The argument then creates an embodied dialogue between the dabke dancers, stalled in checkpoints, and Arkadi Zaides's unravelling of a space for a chorus of Palestinian narrators, made absent by systematic infringement upon their human rights. The argument dances equality and solidarity; dignity and respect. At the same time it allows the less glorious parts of our political lives to be performed and elaborated, in a world that sometimes does not allow those elements to be put forth in words.

Dance releases from one body in motion to the embodied space it unravels. That embodied space has its own unique system of inscription. This world simultaneously changes the ontological position of the dancer: it changes their body; and at the same time it creates a break in epistemology: it introduces radically new ways of knowing and seeing

the world within and without the dance. Dance then allows for the creation of an ontology of a subject in becoming, constituting itself through this process of inscription. Reading dance as a world allows for a wide point of view encompassing various angles of dancers' lives. Some of those points of view have penetrated and tainted other worlds in which those dancers live. Some of those worlds are yet to be unravelled. But the movement of the dance is propelled by hope, and at times radical hope, which has pushed dancers to never stand still even when their experience of humanity had failed them.

This book has provided two larger, conceptual gestures. The first gesture shifts the reader-spectator to question what they read as politics. Politics cannot and should not be reduced to words. People have always danced about politics. In fact, I have argued, people have danced politics in manifold ways. They have created political worlds that at times transcended verbal language. In those worlds dance has enabled both sharing and subversion; both relationality and distinction.

The second gesture pushes the reader-spectator to rethink what is assumed to be dance. I have interpreted dance throughout the book in the widest possible sense, from perhaps the two most iconic names of modern dance in the twentieth century to grassroots practices far from the West. Moreover, deconstructing the dances through close readings has demonstrated that every dance has its own system of inscription, an embodied language unique to that form of dance and to its world. Graham's contraction, the dabke stomping, Duncan's use of the solar plexus, gumboot dance's interplay between singles and unison and Arkadi Zaides's use of the absent dancers as a focal point: all have a unique choreographic logic that makes sense within their world. Ensler's attempt to create a global danced system of inscription created multiple global responses. Human beings have been making sense to themselves through their bodies for a very long time. Every so often, those systems of inscription make sense beyond the danced world and unravel wrongs in other political worlds too. Contracting into a singular body releases a possibility for multiple systems of signification; at times, those systems of signification create worlds that do not make sense yet, but they may do so through multiple dancers of the future.

Every day, numerous people around the world dance. They contract into their embodied selves, investigating their corporeal possibilities, inscribing upon themselves in manifold systems of inscription. At the same time, their bodies release to others, creating dialogues in motion, between two bodies which always live in multiple systems of signification, some translatable into the spoken word, some not. Every day, subjects

create embodied worlds through sweat and tears, joy and pain; they bring their life stories into embodied communication. Through moments of sic-sensuous, in which these dancers challenge what is a politically and aesthetically legible articulation, they release into new worlds that they at times know not themselves. These worlds can bring new possibilities for a life together of respect towards the equality of all human bodies.

Dance is a way to dissent from politics practised in words. It is a way to reclaim spaces where those are not always granted; it is a way to investigate a world experienced by a single embodied subject and in its relationship to others. It allows for systems of inscription to bring it into being as manifold embodied languages; in so doing, it allows its subjects to occupy spaces not always available to them otherwise.

What we, as readers–spectators, must do, is hone our viewing and listening, and be attentive to those embodied voices that otherwise may get lost; bring into our discourse those corporeal dialogues that occur every day and everywhere between human beings. This book has shown that dance opens up a vista for a different kind of political intervention; one which creates a clash between movement and words, bodies and verbal language. We must, then, allow for those voices to be registered not only within a phenomenological independent world operating within its own set of rules but as one that is able to rupture other forms of politics.

Dance moves human beings beyond boundaries – of their own bodies, constantly reinterpreted and reconfigured as spaces; and of their shared worlds, challenging the limits of who they may speak with and who perceives them as equal interlocutors.

At the same time, dance is not all radical hope; indeed, it brings with it some of the illnesses and challenges that other forms of politics bring to human lives; it does not always allow for equality in dignity or respect; but it does allow for tears in the shared sensed fabric in which those deemed unequal carve for themselves a space of their own. The strong reading of political dance allows us to listen to those who often may go unnoticed in other systems of signification, and by so doing to create greater equality in our own political discourse. From the discourse around the two world wars and the Cold War discussed in the reading of Duncan and Graham, to racial inequality in South Africa, to gender violence and to human rights abuses, let us invite more interlocutors about this into our political conversation. We must be attentive to moments in which human beings around the world claim spaces for their bodies and their danced voices; in which they allow dance to move them beyond boundaries. Let us allow ourselves to be moved too.