

Part Two: To Dance Is (More than Just) a Radical Act

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To dance is more than just a radical act.

It is *generative*.

Dancing offers more than just a critical purchase on our mind over body, individual first, word-webbed, sedentary ways of living. Dancing is a primary resource for generating alternatives. One who dances knows otherwise.

Dancing, we practice learning and imagining and making new bodily movements. As we do, we cultivate a sensory awareness of movement outside of ourselves--visual, aural, tactile. We cultivate a sensory awareness of movement within ourselves--of muscles and organs, bones and breath, rhythms and waves.

As our ability to sense these movements within and without grows, so does our ability to respond in patterns of coordinated action. We dance and are danced by the energies coursing through us. And as this dancing orients our senses, we grow more and more capable of imagining ideas, principles, and paradigms that express the careful attention to our bodily selves that our dancing demands.

Dancing, then, yields a kind of knowledge that we need now: knowledge about how to create mutually enabling relationships with the nature at work in us, through us, and around us.

Why do we need this knowledge now?

In the last four hundred years, we have been bent on building boxes designed to insulate us from the vicissitudes and variability of nature. We travel in vibrating metal boxes; dwell in wood, brick, glass, metal, and concrete boxes; sit on four-legged boxes, while gazing into portable boxes whose screens dazzle us with images of the nature we are missing. We create conceptual boxes that reduce nature to a material substance, distinguished from the spiritual nature of our thinking selves. We learn to want whatever fuels, funds, and furnishes our beloved boxes. We learn to want to be the minds who can and must exercise this control over our bodily selves. We want to be warm, well-lit, awake, clean, dry, and fed any time of the day, season, or year.

We have been living in a way that makes nature--including and especially our own--a problem. We fight against our aging, plumping, desiring bodies, so as to shape them in the image of what "we" want. We turn to technology for help. As the saying goes: Mother Nature did the best she could. We humans can do better.

What difference could a dance-enabled knowing make?

1. The movement I make is making me.

A great irony of our boxed life is how hard we work to deny the very source of our resilience, creativity, and adaptability as a species. Humans are uniquely able to learn, remember, mobilize, and transmit new patterns of movement. We can do so and must do so because we are born helpless, unable to move ourselves in ways that will sustain our living.

The fact that we can and must learn to move means that the movements we make are always relational--always oriented towards or away or around and through. We thus cannot not learn to adapt, to form habits, to become creatures marked by their styles. The movements we make make us who we are; the movements we make create the relationships that support us in our becoming, our growing, our giving.

Yet, in our boxed life, as we learn to ignore our bodily selves, we learn to want to make movements without having those movements make us. We want to eat without feeling full or gaining weight. We want to have affairs without harming our primary relationships. We want to drive our cars without emitting carbon dioxide. We want to siphon water from the earth without draining our aquifers, and deluge our crops with pesticides and herbicides without killing wildlife in the earth, air, and water. We seek technological fixes that will enable us to move as we want without having to "suffer" the "side" effects.

In the name of "freedom" we deny the power of our own movement. We work against our bodily, relational, interdependent nature. Such freedom from the source of our vitality is not freedom, it is suicide.

One who dances knows: the movement I make is making me. As such, our greatest hope for creating the world in which we want to live lies in our bodily ability to discover and learn and make new movements--movements that relate us in mutually life-enabling ways with the nature of which we are a part.

2. Pleasure is the path.

We humans are pleasure-seeking creatures. We seek pleasure as evidence of what will nourish us, sustain us, and protect us. We seek pleasure by creating the relationships with the people, the places, the projects and problems that will support us in becoming who we are and giving what we have to give. When we move in ways that do, the pleasure is palpable, primal.

Yet, trained as we are by our boxes, we come to equate pleasure with ease. We come to believe that we will find our greatest pleasure by ignoring, overwhelming, or otherwise numbing our bodily sensations of discomfort. When the movements we make are making us stressed and depressed, heavy or ill, hobbled by aching backs and pounding heads, unable to sleep or wake, we still think the path to pleasure lies in a technological fix for

our "symptoms." Again, we fight our bodily nature, seeking freedom from the efficacy of our own movement making.

One who dances knows: pain is a vital, valuable guide along the path towards the pleasure we seek. The pain calls our attention to what the movements we are making are creating. If I keep moving in ways that produce pain, I will injure myself and be unable to dance. Pain is not the enemy on the path to pleasure. Even when the pain is a result of accident or tragedy, the pain is guiding me to move in ways that will not hurt--ways that will align my thought and feelings and actions with the forces of nature at work in me, healing, affirming, and ever creating.

Pain is a potential for pleasure I have yet to unfold.

3. Desire is the source.

Our desires are the surest expression of our will to live, moving us towards what we believe will grant us the pleasure we seek. All of our desires--whether for food or touch, vitality or belonging--are rooted in a fundamental impulse to *connect* with whatever will enable us to be. Our desires stir within us as the energy that funds our movement, impelling us to find and figure out how to make the movements that will create the life-enabling relationships we seek.

Yet, living in our boxes, it is easy to lose touch with primal bubbling of our own desires. Instead, we allow our feelings of want to be buffeted and distracted by the images mediated to us.

One who dances knows: the deepest human pleasure lies in moving our bodily selves in ways that nourish our living. It isn't the food, the sex, the awards, the money, but the relationships with these things that the movements we are making are enabling. And it is a sensory awareness of our own pleasure and pain that guides us in discerning the wisdom in our desires.

4. The goal is to play.

One of the most pernicious effects of living our boxed lives is how we reduce our idea of bodily movement to "exercise." Bodily movement is the medium of our living. It is our primary practice of problem-solving, the source of our freedom and creativity. It is our ability to find and field and make new moves that allows us to learn to walk, to talk, to be, to love.

Yet, we tend to think of bodily movement in terms of the calisthenics we do as a means to some desired end. It is a way for us to demonstrate self-control, burn calories, and make "our" bodies fit. When we exercise, we need to count how long, how far, how much. We monitor ourselves in minutes, miles, and muscle strain. We cannot imagine that moving our bodies simply for the sake of moving our bodies--for the pleasure of making new moves--is enough.

Engaged in such exercise, we fail to cultivate a sensory awareness of our own capacity for making movement. We lose degrees of our freedom.

One who dances knows: the reason we "exercise" is to play--to find the play in the moment, to release the capacity to play within ourselves. Dancing, we explore the possibilities for movement alive in the moment. We cultivate a receptivity to impulses to move as they arise in our bodily selves. We improvise. We imagine. We allow our bodily selves to guide us in new patterns. We follow a toe, a finger, a nose, the waves of our breathing into new spaces of sensation.

When we do, we "exercise" a creative resilience that serves us in every aspect of our lives. We open up a sensory awareness that gives us a space within ourselves for exploring our fears, untangling our desires, and receiving impulses to move that align with what we most want--the pleasure we most desire. We cultivate the ability to know what we can and should and must do to align our agency with the forces of nature on whom and on which our lives depend.

Nature is stronger than any box we create to hold her in, out, down, or back. Dams break. Towers tumble. Pipelines crack. Oil rigs explode. Ships sink. Desires erupt.

It is time to remember what one who dances knows: our greatest strength as human beings and our greatest hope for survival on this planet lies in working with rather than against the forces of nature.

In this project, the practice of dance is one of our greatest resources. Dancing, we cultivate a sensory awareness that helps us discern how to think and feel and act in ways that honor nature--the nature surging through our veins, crackling in our thoughts, roaming with our senses, moving in and out of our bodily selves--as a creative power greater than we can imagine, in which we, nonetheless, participate with every move we make.

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