

Making peace with and through your body: Eco-Systems in Movement

Dr. Eline Kieft, 14.11.2019

Rising Festival 2019 Ecosystems of Peace. Panel: The role of culture in Sustaining Peace

You have probably heard many definitions of ecosystems these two days. I like it that it derives from the Greek *oikos*, meaning "home," and *systema*, or "system."^{1,2} So it is a home-system, and a space within and from which we interact with our environment. It is a 'dwelling place',³ a community of living things that interact with each other and with non-material things.⁴ We know that a landscape consists of ecosystems as well, spaces where resources are recycled. All these definitions accurately apply to our bodies as well: what is closer to home than our bodies? We too consist of a community of organisms, or microbes, that live inside and on us. The recycling of resources sounds perhaps a bit abstract, but that happens in our bodies every minute of every day.

However, rather than looking at the scientific meaning of the body as ecosystem, I would like to draw attention to two types of movement practices in relation to today's topic.

Environmental Dance, Ecological Body

First, there are initiatives such as **environmental dance** "to promote and encourage ecological balance."⁵ These often support a "non-anthropocentric value theory that recognises the intrinsic value of all species to the function of an ecosystem".⁶ Somatic practitioner Sandra Reeve speaks of the "Ecological Body," whilst Celeste Snowber writes about ecology of the body, and I quote: *'Our bodies are the earth. The earth is our body. In my practice of walking, dancing and writing in connection to the landscape and seascape I keep living these words.*

¹ <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/ecosystem>, all websites accessed 13.9.19 and 13.11.19

² Ecosystems, Pierre Dansereau

³ <https://scholarship.kentlaw.iit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3247&context=cklawreview>

⁴ Body as Ecosystem human_microbiome_your_body_is_an_ecosystem_stepread1.pdf

⁵ Environmental dance: listening to and addressing the big questions gently

by Joanna Stone in [Contemporising the past: envisaging the future](#)

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My body is the earth – the earth is my body.

At first my practice of walking the edge of a shoreline park at the cusp of land and sea was enough. Here I emptied my busy mind and gave in to the rhythm of my feet to the land and my nostrils to the scents of sea and coniferous woods.'

Dancing Peace

And here we can see the connection with Peace-making. Emptying our busy minds can be a first step to a more harmonious world. But it goes much further than that: Once we become truly present to what is alive inside us, to our emotions, our sensitivities and strengths, this allows us to connect to our shared humanity. We are all living, breathing, utterly vulnerable and utterly courageous human beings, or human becomings (LaMothe) .

I want to underline that such practices apply to all of us. This is not (only) a matter for trained dancers and choreographers. Almost every community on earth, contemporary and historic, dances or danced. We danced to celebrate the harvest, to go through initiations in the cycles of life, to mourn the dead, to build houses, to honour the land. In the West we have largely forgotten that, and lost our connections to dance, or movement, as a way to express ourselves, to vent frustrations, to play, to reconnect with the land, with others around us.

Dance improvisation in general can be applied as an activist practice, “that enables the experiential examination of ecologically sensitive relations, and [discover] how we relate to and embody the places in which dance is made”.⁷ We can also look at dance as a way of **embodying memory**. Rachmi Diyah Larasati argues for dance “as a philosophical strategy of remembering to encounter different kinds of social and political economies of culture”⁸

Here the bridge is made again. Remembrance may lead to activism. Responsibility is a sense of personal agency, a sense of ability to respond, response-ability. Improvised dance can tease out

⁷ <https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199396986.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199396986-e-39>:

⁸ <https://www.freersackler.si.edu/essays/article-larasati/>

“the body’s relationship with the environment at a number of levels including sensory, spatial, temporal, conceptual, social and political.”⁹

I could talk about the myriad initiatives around the globe in which dance is used as a vehicle towards peace, such as the *Dances of Universal Peace*, a worldwide network that aims for unity, peace and integration,¹⁰ or my practice which is called *Movement Medicine*, which includes peace-building workshops in which for example Israelis and Palestinians dance together to resolve their conflicts, anger and despair.

Rather than talking more about this, I would like to invite us all to come up to our feet, and use the open space to your right for a little movement exploration. There is no prior experience necessary, and there are no skills or acrobatics required, so everyone is welcome to join. It is absolutely fine if you don’t want to, but in that case, please take this time not to ‘watch’ the dancers, but to meditate in your own way on the topic of Making peace with and through your body. Thank you.

⁹ https://www.academia.edu/34638165/Twig_Dances_Improvisation_Performance_as_Ecological_Practice Malaika Sarco-Thomas

¹⁰ <https://dancesofuniversalpeace.org>

Rise like a Phoenix: Meditation in Movement

Walk: feel feet on the ground of this monumental cathedral, with the living earth underneath it.

Breath: take a few deep breaths, aware of the breath as an ongoing connection between inside and around you

Wrists: touch each others wrists in passing, know that you are not alone

Come to a still place: Become aware of the space above your head. With your outbreath, focus your attention into your Mind, Heart, Body.

Awakening the Dancer: Feet, ankles, knees, hips, the community of organs in your lower belly, your backbone, your heart, shoulder blades, from which your arms and hands extend. Feel your upper back, your neck, the space in your skull, your face, your jaw, and again the space above your head.

Fill your body like a glove, with your full attention and presence, from the tip of your toes, to the tip of your fingers, and even the tip of your hair.

Take a moment to move with this miracle that your body is, with its minute balance, all its inner processes, and with its fragility.

Without going into the deep emotions of it, remember a situation in your life that was challenging. Where do you feel it in your body? Can you give expression to it through movement? Like the Phoenix, you have risen from the ashes. That is the opposite of fragility. You are a survivor, you are still here, and probably you are stronger for it. Like this cathedral rose from the ashes of the old one. The community is here, despite those we lost, fighting for our freedom. Can we acknowledge the grief, the pain, the loss, the hardship, and still acknowledge / celebrate that we are human?

If you like, connect with that image of the Phoenix, through your body, through movement. What are movements of fire, of transformation, of rebirth?

Without having to make eye contact, become aware of three people moving around you. They are Phoenixes too. We are a Flock of Phoenixes, moving/flying through this magnificent cathedral. Weave through the space together, like we did in the beginning.

Closer... Further away... Tune into each other.

If one stops, all of us stop. If one moves back into motion, we all start moving again.

From moving as this organism, make a connection to the circles you are connected to back at home.

GRATITUDE

DEDICATE

If you like, you can send the energy you raised through your movement meditation, to a place or person you care for.