DANCING IS AN ECOSYSTEM SERVICE, AND SO IS BEING TRANS

by LOUP

FR  Loup entretient différentes pratiques de facilitation : danser par le milieu, jardiner, organiser des funérailles, générer des modes de résurgence, de réparation et de résolution de conflits pas seulement humains. Iel co-conspire l’émergence de communautés queer rurales, avec le soutien secret du Rhizomatic Squad for Caring Technologies. En 2016, iel a fondé le collectif dance for plants qui propose ateliers, séminaires et performances dans des jardins, des universités, des forêts, des appartements ou des musées, et travaille actuellement à l’instauration du groupe Morts Vivantes qui s’intéresse aux relations des mort·e·s avec celles qui ne le sont pas encore. Loup vit en Auvergne, à Cros Bas, un lieu dédié à l’échange et l’articulation de pratiques et savoirs qui fabriquent des collectifs plus qu’humains.

EN  Loup is entangled in different practices of facilitation: dancing from the milieu, gardening, organizing funerals, generating modes of resurgence, reparation and conflict resolution. They co-conspire for the emergence of rural queer communities, with the secret support of the Rhizomatic Squad for Caring Technologies. In 2016, they founded the collective dance for plants which offers workshops, seminars and performances in gardens, universities, forests, apartments or museums, and they are currently working on the unfolding of the group Morts Vivantes which is interested in the relations of the dead with those who are still alive. Loup lives in Cros Bas (central France), a place dedicated to the exchange and articulation of practices and knowledges that compose more-than-human collectives.
In 2001, the United Nations defined the notion of Ecosystem Services (ES) as the many and varied benefits that humans freely gain from the natural environment and from properly-functioning ecosystems. For example, the production of oxygen in the air, the natural purification of water, the biomass that feeds domesticated animals, the pollination of crops, etc. Also included are the amenities offered by nature like the beauty of landscapes.

I don’t know what it’s like for you, but I notice that conceptualization of Ecosystem Services often has a disturbing effect on people. I remember, for example, Donna Haraway speaking about the moment she first heard about ES and saying, “I remember how deeply it struck me when I heard that – beyond the emotional aspect of the reaction, which I think is not completely innocent – was that personally, I felt exactly the opposite. The day I first heard the expression ES, I had a revelation. “Ha, so there exists a concept to speak about what I do in life.” It sounded like a kind of magic formula. Later, I googled it and found it really creepy, but it didn’t depress me. In fact, it rather excited me. I said to myself, “so they found the words but they misunderstood what they meant.” It’s kind of like that strange moment when my queer ancestors said to themselves, “Wow, that really describes exactly what I am, so they found the words but they didn’t understand what they meant.” I like it. It is as if it is describing exactly what I am, and maybe even what I need to be in this world, the way in which I want to be seen and understood, the relationship I want to have and what I am to be said to be normal. Yes I am, queer as fuck.” And so I started spontaneously doing these performative somatic enactments that I call reenactments. Just as the process of reenacting queerness was a superempowering movement to celebrate our bodies and our “unnatural” relationships, this process of reenacting the conceptualization of Ecosystem Services has become the very spell I needed in order to acknowledge, to make visible, and to share my daily work. Dancing is an Ecosystémic service. When the creation of the collective dance for plants in 2016, one of our favorite activities is to let relationships generated by this statement unfold, to allow the emergence of slightly-secret stories, at the threshold of the sayable or hearable. In general, just before admitting that they talk to their plants when they are home alone, people start by posing questions – often, notably, the question of who really benefits? Who pays for the service and who pays the plants? Do you dance for the plants for yourself?

My dances are addressed to plants, I dance for them, but it is as if I were dancing in their name or in their place, as if they needed it in order to move. Incidentally, I am not one of those people convinced that plants dance when they move, and that reason for which they come to be said to be not with. In fact, I wouldn’t advise dancing with someone who doesn’t clearly want to (because I am not romantic, I don’t really want to dance for someone who doesn’t know it, doesn’t want it or doesn’t really expect it – maybe who doesn’t know it, doesn’t want it or doesn’t really expect it – maybe who doesn’t know it, doesn’t want it or doesn’t really expect it). The dance for someone who doesn’t want it or doesn’t really expect it – maybe who doesn’t know it, doesn’t want it or doesn’t really expect it – maybe who doesn’t know it, doesn’t want it or doesn’t really expect it – maybe who doesn’t know it, doesn’t want it or doesn’t really expect it – maybe who doesn’t know it, doesn’t want it or doesn’t really expect it – maybe who doesn’t know it, doesn’t want it or doesn’t really expect it. I think of my socialization as a human clay, as a source that feeds domesticated animals, the pollination of crops, etc. Also included are the amenities offered by nature like the beauty of landscapes.

In my experience, dancing with people and being trans with people (we can speak about what it means to dance and ‘be trans’ far from others another time) are two things that can be particularly exhausting and extraordinarily empowering, each in their own way. Each triggers intense emotions and unexpected secretions in the bodies of other humans. They both thicken the milieu, provoking at once a hyper agitation and a radical slowing down of things and signs. Both are extremely demanding forms of work and I dare say fundamentally necessary ones.

(Just to be clear, ‘being trans’ corresponds to an extraordinary number of situated and distinct experiences, the varieties of which is infinitely precious and delicate. What I am sharing here today is not solely bound to me but based on my own experience and my ability to articulate it, both of which depend on a unique assemblage of privileges, oppressions, and specific utterances.)

At this stage, it is important to clarify that being ‘trans’ is not contrary to dancing, is not a choice, nor a practice in and of itself, no more than being a girl, being bisexual, white, in love, or sick. These are not things that you choose, like you would pick a dress to wear today (even though one could argue that some of these things are the complex results of a certain number of choices). And yet, each of these things does and undone a tremendous amount of other things and therefore is in a way inevitably associated with a range of situated practices. Each forms and informs their milieu while being formed and informed by it. Politicizing one’s intimacies is a practice. Redefining roles is almost always redefining the game. Cosmologies are softer than one thinks.

TRANS, for me, is the name of a hole, a rift, a gap. It is the name of the distance that separates me from what I am not (and what I am not sorry to be not). TRANS is the name of the difference for me from what I am not (and what I am not sorry to be not). TRANS is the name of the difference.
between the strange moving and unfinished thing that I am and the quite ambitious project of bringing together the teeming multiplicity of animal lifeforms into two dubious categories. It’s the name of a structural defect of the imagination.

Indeed, the question is not a light one and can easily be due to a form of shock or even panic. And, still, I say, no longer allow ourselves not to team up with those susceptible of rendering us capable. It is an urgency to ground, to listen.

Perhaps the most beautiful thing that your body can give to the world is in becoming capable of listening. Serving, entering an ecosystemic commerce is becoming capable of sabotaging the infernal alternative – the one that would have us replace our current destiny of profiting, pumping, extracting, emptying, mining, tearing down, exterminating, ad libitum, with a providential role of protection, regulation, preservation, saving, management, and salvation (as if being content to stop destroying was our best bet at this point).

If I have spoken a lot about listening while supposedly talking about dancing, it’s an attempt to articulate something that for me is physically evident but that I continue to find cosmologically precarious. Listening is an active gesture. It is a form of receiving so dense that it cannot not simultaneously be the gesture of a radical gift. To listen is to become the intimate of things, it is a metonymic adventure of the milieu. It is necessarily an ES. To listen is to hear oneself breathing-with, it is literally to be conspiring. It is to let oneself be invaded by the world, to let oneself be mutated, to choose to be transformed by what you could have just ignored. It is becoming an ecosystemic Trojan horse: if I’m part of the world let me be the world, I technically upset the world, or at least part of it.

The verb ‘to heal’ has two meanings, and it is ecologically impossible to silence one when you beckon the other. To heal oneself is to heal the world, to take care of things is already taking care of oneself. To listen deeply to oneself, to let one’s needs bloom and ask for the space of their actualization, is to grow ears in the depths of the world. Any performative listening, the one that moves bodies when it happens, that triggers hurricanes in the collective mitochondria, is a modern anomaly, a bug in the heterotriarchal matrix, an epistemic mutation. I argue that any mutation, any facilitation of transition from a single binary world to a multitude of multiple worlds is an ES. Reseeding our ontologies-in-ruins is to make worlds flourish, to let oneself be invaded by the world, to let oneself be mutated, to choose to be transformed by what you could have just ignored. It is becoming an ecosystemic Trojan horse: if I’m part of the world, let me be the world. I technically upset the world, or at least part of it.

But before finishing, I need to backtrack to the Transgender Day of Visibility in the forest and I am sure that the trees know why. Coincidently, all of the members of dance for plants are queer, and I wonder if I should even wonder why. I do not believe that coincidences need to be commented or explained. Rather, I am convinced that they need to be fomented, generated, and narrated without a specific chronologial order. Coming across a person you know while crossing the street is a practice, neither total accident, nor fate. The family of practices that I am invoking here in the singularity of the anna tsing calls the art of noticing – and not only that. They also demand, I believe, the joyful, insidious becoming and the particular thickness of conspiracy. And it is from this place of conspiracy (etymologically con-spirare – breathing-together) that I would like to characterize the type of enmeshing necessary for the activation of a decolonial ES.

Before finishing, I need to backtrack to the Transgender Day of Visibility in the forest and I am sure that the trees know why. It has less to do with ‘who receives’ than with ‘who can really give, and give what!’ This is perhaps the ‘golden spike’ of our epistemic stratigraphies, the ultimate hesitation of the Ouroboros about to bite its own tail, as one ends up wondering, and me, what do I give to the world? Indeed, the question is not a light one and can easily lead to a form of shock or even panic. And, still, I propose to ask it and to actively caress the risk of letting it lure its own answers. The urgency to take the time to become responsible entails a concomitant urgent potential, eventually functional (that is to say, to no longer allow ourselves not to team up with those susceptible of rendering us capable). It is an urgency to ground, to listen.

The question of understanding if I am trans because I dance for plants would require more time and processing. We know a lot about the world, but we are still people. We are the epiphany of the Enlightenment. And this massacre continues. Every day. The people that in our current moment we call trans, intersex, or ‘gender non-conforming,’ have existed everywhere at all times, in any case, way before the epiphany of the Enlightenment.

If we are ‘non-conforming’ to something, it is to a colonial ontology that is relatively recent and it’s time to let it finish collapsing. (By the way, for those who don’t know, I officially stopped being a ‘mentally ill’ person three days ago [May 25, 2019] according to the World Health Organization – my gender has now become merely ‘incongruous,’ according to experts.

Let yourself be contaminated by the epistemic doubt that you slowly become capable of manifesting. And you, what are you mourning because of the political fictions of gender?

Ask with Alok Vaid-Menon, ‘What feminine part of yourself did you have to destroy in order to survive in this world?’

Listen to your gut.
Give way to resurgences.
Give up your quest for heterosexuality,
allow your body to be attracted
to what you have not been invited to desire.
 Latour almost wrote it, ‘We have never been heterosexual.’
Nothing obliges you to be a sexual creature.
If you choose to be, foment a desire that is etymologically hetero,
a desire of others in all their otherness.
Take the time to allow more and more bodies
capable of arousing desire in you.
Turn this process into a party.
Celebrate and contaminate.
Reclaim the splendors of what you’ve been taught
to find repulsive.
Rejoice in the bizarre.
Create beauty in all the interstices,
facilitate transitions everywhere and all the time.
Cultivate the practices of disidentification,
fluidify your gender expression,
learn how to dare to be vulnerable.
Do all of this while acknowledging your own privileges.
If you’re white,
learn all about the history of intersectionality
and start listening and making space instead of using
that very concept to explain life to people.
Listen to everything without your ears, especially
that which makes no noise.
If you don’t do it for yourself, do it for the climate.
Do it for the trees and butterflies.
Choose for who or what you are doing it at this
precise moment,
even if it is always for everyone at once.
Become capable of addressing things.
Do it as an ecosystem service.
The climate crisis is a heteropatriarchal colonial project,
a manifestation of white supremacy.
Every concrete action against your own racism, your
own transphobia, your own misogyny, your own ableism,
your own self-hatred, is a concrete action of climatic
resurgence, a direct and immediate gift to the koalas.
While you were grieving the extinction of the white
rhinoceros last week, three black trans women were killed in
different regions of the most brilliantly developed
of our colonies (the United States of America).
Three black trans women killed within eight days.
If you feel powerless in light of the sixth mass extinction, under-
stand that providing financial or organizational
assistance to setting up shelters for trans femmes is not
just another umpteenth cause to support, aka ‘we can’t do every-
thing’ aka ‘there are already so many.’
It is urgent to acknowledge the entanglement of massacres.
Monoculture crops and the non-consensual operations on inter-
sex people are part of the very same epistemic machine systemati-
cally eradicating resurgences.
Fighting for social justice is a service that is literally ecosystemic.
If you experience white fragility,
relax your sphincter.
Breathe.
Shut up.
Feel the air surrounding you.
Listen to objects and things.
Don’t create guilt.
Nobody wants that here.
The plants don’t need your guilt.
The ice caps don’t either.
Learn to love yourself, it is an ecological responsibility.
Get indebted.
Make yourself immensely and joyfully indebted:
indebted to the plants that make you breathe,
to your microbiota, to the people that you don’t
quite understand yet.
Even here, in a closed room in the middle of the city, remember
that there is not a single dioxide molecule
that you breathe that wasn’t produced by a plant or by
phytoplankton, that hasn’t passed through their bodies
at some point in time on Earth before going through yours.
Make space for this cellular intimacy in your daily life.
Acknowledge your interdependences in order to celebrate them.
Give thanks, create new ways to give, over and over again. Foment strategies to become capable of feeling it in your body. Dance for plants. Dance for yourself, dance for the world, dance for this tiny part of the world that you are. Move your body like a giant articulated ear, an ultra-sophisticated receptive technology, move as a precise gift to everything, as a manifestation of structural gratitude, move to invent new places of pleasure in the muscles of things. Listening [entendre] is also getting along [s’entendre], creating agreements. Dance with other people, foment factions to share more-than-sexual pleasures. Organize. Connect people that want to dance together, create moments to dance in the shadows. No need for classes or institutions to gather. Dance in a room, in a square, in a park. Even in Paris, there are interstices to follow everywhere. Dance as an ecosystem service. As a conspiratorial technology accumulating revolutionary methodologies in your bones. Think like an ES. Make art, science, and stories as an ES. Hate the police and the prisons as an ES. Fight in order to facilitate any form of repair or structural healing. Make of love the ES that love has never stopped being. Require consent at every stage of all of your choices. Imagine new ways to feel seen, to acknowledge your work and have it acknowledged. Our practices bring us together, they make swarms of us, they mix our bodies and the forms of our thoughts. We have never been individuals and we have what it takes to reinvent that every day. Names are vicious and magnificent movements, monsters doomed to decay and devour each other. Let your names go extinct. Foment a joyful vigil, allowing other strange names to flower from the flesh and bones of your dead ones. Don’t forget to check out the performance of things. It is moving, and you are part of it.