

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 ceux 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.

This text gathers excerpts from a lecture given by Loup at La Gaîté Lyrique (Paris) on May, 28th 2019. Translation by DMB in conversation with the author.

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 depressed I was." What 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 still don't really understand what they mean." It's kind of like that strange moment when my queer ancestors said to themselves, "Wow, that insult, that word queer that people spit in my face, 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 nurture in and around what is said to be normal. Yes I am, queer as fuck." And so I started spontaneously doing these performative somersaults that Americans call *reclaiming*. Just as the process of *reclaiming queerness* was a super empowering movement to celebrate our bodies and our 'unnatural' practices, this questionable branding 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 Ecosystem Service. And so is being trans.

The thing that attracts me in this idea is precisely its catastrophic aspect, its drama, its somatic propensity to provoke emotions and sensations. If I find energy in this misery, it's in realizing that the situations that capture most insidiously are often the most empowering when it comes time to break the spell. They are able to shift, with the same rigor and efficiency, from one spiral to another. It is in its intimacy with our vicious system that the notion of ES seems to me to hold the promise of a counter-spell just as dramatic, allowing for the emergence of precisely the kind of conceptual lever that could become a decolonial apparatus.

An ecosystem is a given intermingling of a plethora of more-or-less-biotic beings. Thinking with an ecosystem means to be immersed in the complexity of its more or less durable benefits, dubious love stories, partial digestions, and

half-innocent services. Whether human, non-human, or not-quite-human-but-not-quite-non-human, whether enormous, invisible, miniscule, or raucous, every body in a given space is intra-acting constantly. We could even say that their relations precede their existence as distinct entities. I think that is only from this muddy intermingling that a decolonized – thus potentially decolonial – Ecosystem Service can start to emerge. One that would allow us to think not only with human or non-human knowledges and practices, but weaving and woven through more-than-human collectives or rather, in our case, more-than-non-human ones, which we can call ecosystems.

This brings us to ask a fundamental feminist question: *Cui Bono*, who benefits? In our case, it is not only who benefits from a given ES, but also and above all, who benefits from such a tool, and who pays the price?

In life, I dance for plants. Since 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, those 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 why? Can you heal my plants? Do you dance for the plants for yourself?

My dances are addressed to plants, I dance for them, but I don't really see myself dancing in their name or in their place, as if they needed me in order to move. Incidentally, I am not one of those people convinced that plants dance when they move, and it is for that reason that I dance *for* and not *with*. In fact, I wouldn't advise dancing with someone who doesn't clearly want to (because I care about consent). However, I do suggest trying to dance *for* someone who doesn't know it, doesn't want it or doesn't really expect it – maybe who doesn't even see you or doesn't even notice your dance. For example, a person with their eyes closed, or someone who is really far from you, miles away, someone who is dead or who forgot you, it could be a lover or a stranger, a cat, a cloud, a computer, a city, or, possibly, a plant. Rather than a molecular call for '*becoming-plant*,' which I find personally a bit romantic, the proposition would be to become capable of dancing in their presence, not seeking to transform into them or to imitate them, but rather to present yourself to them, to dance for them and *because* of them, to let them become a reason for you to be in the world, for a while.

Something that the plants (or at least dancing for them) has taught me is that the movement of giving is also simultaneously a movement of receiving. Giving is often first receiving, to let oneself become interested, as if being opened to receive the receiver. When I dance for plants, I make the plants capable of making me do things that I wouldn't do otherwise. In the words of Vinciane Despret, plants enable me to "gain a body that does more things, that feels other events." I don't dance *their* dance but a



dance they make me capable of dancing, that they allow me to dance for them. I am danced not only by them but by what I allow them to make me become. There is no imitation or even inspiration in my experience. I just listen, and it moves me.

I understand dance as a more-than-human technology of facilitation. When I am asked to dance, I am invited to facilitate some kind of transition. To facilitate something (whether it's a meeting, a talking circle, a gathering, a rehearsal or a coincidence) is to be given a certain role (a certain power) by a group or situation. When given this responsibility, I am rendered capable of enabling a given assemblage of things/people to listen, to listen to invitations issued by everything in this assemblage that is momentarily '*other*' (including oneself or more precisely, what the '*self*' is becoming in this process). The person that facilitates (or that dances) is a relay. The work of relaying can be performed by any person, object, or entity that is offered the role. In short, I could describe dancing as a process of being rendered capable by any given group or ecosystem in order to render it capable of listening to itself. Sometimes I call this a diplomacy of the invisibles or a facilitation through the interstices. Other such examples of facilitations could include storytelling, making magic, putting on a good show, being a whore (in the sense of being a sex worker), cooking for guests, dramatizing, dying (being buried or burned, for example), gardening, healing.

Strangely, I could describe certain aspects of my socialization as a trans person in almost the same way as what I live when I dance. My experience of being '*gender non-conforming*,' of not being recognized either by models of femininity or models of masculinity in the aisles of the local performative libraries, of being visibly femme and visibly hairy, of not making the necessary efforts to become a woman, of not making the necessary efforts to become a man or, in short, being both way too much and not enough, seems to correspond

quite well to this kind of facilitation from the interstices I have just described.

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 variety 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 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, 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 complex choices). And yet, each of these things does and undoes a tremendous amount of other things and therefore is in a way inevitably associated with a range of situated practices. Each forms and informs its 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 not be). TRANS is the name of the difference

MORE-THAN-NON-HUMAN CONSPIRACY

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.

This distance, this hole, this gap, between the norm and me, only exists in relation to this norm. If the norm disappears there is no more in between, nothing to exist outside of, there's no more gap, nothing more to name. It is important for me that this is clear. It's not *me* who is trans. I am trans as long as *you* continue to make the correlation between genitals, a pronoun, a geography of hairs and a social role. TRANS is the name for what you see in me as long as you don't learn to see me for myself. It's not me who is trans, it is all of those who aren't trans yet. You are precisely *transitio-*ning towards your own ability to think and organize collectives without the help of the embarrassing binary myths that we have been pedaling the last few centuries while colonizing the planet. TRANS is the name of a transition that is not just mine. A systemic transition from a single binary world to a multitude of multiple worlds. What I propose to call an ecological transition or an ecology of transitions. Being trans is not about transitioning, it is about making things transition, about facilitating an ecological transition. (And that's good, we already have a ministry for that!) [In France the Ministry of Ecology is called *Ministère de la Transition écologique.*]

For a long time now, I have had the feeling that I dance for plants because I am trans (the question of understanding if I am trans because I dance for plants would require more time and more ghosts). I spend the Transgender Day of Visibility in the forest and I am sure that the trees know why. Coincidentally, 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 chronological 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 intimately relies on what Anna Tsing calls the art of noticing – and not only that. They also demand, I believe, the joyous, 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 honor a delicate, terrifying, and crucial question that I didn't dare pose earlier. 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 urgency to eventually feel capable (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.

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 and I let myself be upset by it, 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 heteropatriarchal 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 in basins of glyphosate, a kind of mundane transubstantiation that loses the Absolute of the miracle in order to become the muck of magic once again.

When you are asked to use a neutral pronoun in place of he or she: do it.

Do not start wondering why, just do it.

Get used to asking people that you meet what pronoun they use,

even if it may seem obvious to you – especially if it seems obvious to you.

Denaturalize your perceptions.

If that requires a lot of effort, acknowledge it.

And if you're able to, do it anyway.

Or rather, do it precisely because it is not yet easy.

Slow down.

Make mistakes,

then make fewer.

The binarity of genders as we know it is a colonial apparatus created by Europeans to control, abuse, and kill in the name of progress and civilization.

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, unders-
 tand 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.