

Diversified Moves of a Specialised Ecology: Can This Art-form be Sustainable?

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Abstract

To maintain and nourish any form of practice or activity, that practice or activity must be of value to human populations, the measure of that value being exponentially related to the demographic extent of the population concerned. Dance, as a multitude of selected and refined forms of movement, would seem historically, anthropologically, socially, politically and spiritually to be unquestionably sustainable. All human groups, with some rare exceptions when dance was linked with particular concepts of evil, have and do dance for a range of purposes.

However, narrowing the dance focus down to those movement activities that constitute an art-form in the context of contemporary western culture raises quite another view of the sustainability terrain. In this frame, dance mainly relies on a high degree of specialised training that culminates in performances or financially expensive presentations in likewise specialised venues. Far from being a basic element in the ecology of human behaviour, dance in this context becomes an elite activity within a cultural ecology that claims to be rooted in the identity formation of everyday life and, yet, services relatively small sections of the community.

What value lies in dance as an art-form? Or perhaps more pertinently, why is dance as an art-form of limited value to the general population? Over the years, we have offered innumerable reasons why this art-form has been 'robbed' of its value, specifying among other culprits, repercussions of the mind/body split in western philosophical thought or its inability to compete with the popularism of sport, its absence as a discipline or learning tool in mainstream education or the profound ephemeral nature that prevents academic documentation and, hence, credibility. While such phenomena do have a bearing on the societal value withheld from dance as an art-form, arguments outlining their influences have been unable to alter the situation. Furthermore, just as expenses of training and

presentation are rising, public funding to maintain and nourish the art-form, at least within the Australian scene, is shrinking which is a disturbing indicator that its social value may simultaneously be waning. So how then do we, the small group who believe in the art of dance's intrinsic value, work towards demonstrating that dance artists, their works and the research of which they partake can be a sustainable cultural ecology? How do we ensure that dance as an art-form is valued as integral to our national culture so that the required resources of today can be replenished for future generations?

To maintain and nourish any form of practice or activity, that practice or activity must be of value to human populations, its measure being exponentially related to the demographic extent of the population concerned. In the first instance, I am not referring to value in an economic sense but to an emotional, psychological meaningfulness by which people gauge their lives. Dance, as a multitude of selected and refined forms of movement, would seem historically, anthropologically, socially, politically and spiritually to be unquestionably sustainable. All human groups, with some rare exceptions when dance was linked with particular concepts of evil, have and do dance for a range of purposes. Indeed, from this perspective, which I suggest might be seen as an ecology of human behaviour, prohibiting dance would be far more difficult and even dangerous than its ongoing maintenance within an organically sustainable system of behaviour.

However, narrowing the dance focus down to those movement activities that constitute an art-form in the context of contemporary western culture raises quite another view of the sustainability terrain. In this frame, dance relies on a high degree of specialised and high-contact-based training that culminates in performances or financially expensive presentations in specialised venues. Far from being a basic element in an ecology of human behaviour, dance in this context becomes an elite activity within an ecology of 'refined' culture that claims to be rooted in the identity formation of everyday life and, yet, in Australia services relatively small sections of the community. As members of this select community, we tend to confound the elite and highly specific cultural ecology with that broader and more complex system of human behaviour noted above, arguing for resources to support the specialisation without addressing the pressing issue of why sustaining dance as an art-form has been and increasingly continues to be an uphill battle.

What value lies in dance as an art-form? Or perhaps more pertinently, why is dance as an art-form of limited value to the general population? Over the years, we have offered innumerable reasons why this art-form has been ‘robbed’ of its value, specifying among other culprits, repercussions of the mind/body split in western philosophical thought or its inability to compete with the popularity of sport, its absence as a discipline or learning tool in mainstream education or the profound ephemeral nature that prevents academic documentation and, hence, credibility. In today’s world, the proliferation of digital technologies threatens the corporeal substance of dance even further with life-like motion capture and animations that, if not simply cutting-edge mediums which attract and absorb the limited funding available, may easily surpass the vulnerable human body in skill and imaginative situations. While such phenomena do have a bearing on the societal value withheld from dance as an art-form, arguments outlining their influences have been unable to alter the situation. Furthermore, just as expenses of training and presentation are rising, public funding to maintain and nourish the art-form, at least within the Australian scene, is shrinking which is a disturbing indicator that its social value may simultaneously be waning. So how then do we, the small group who believe in the art of dance’s intrinsic value, work towards demonstrating that dance artists, their works and the research of which they partake can be a sustainable cultural ecology? How do we ensure that dance as an art-form is valued as integral to our national culture so that the required resources of today can be replenished for future generations?

An ecology, in biological terms, describes the interconnected life systems of species that inhabit a particular environment. The fundamental concept underlying the complex layering and interactions of the animate and the inanimate is the balance of the system’s diversity within the forces of destruction and regeneration. Thus, an ecology or ecosystem is not a static phenomenon but a balancing of incessant micro and macroscopic changes that could be likened, within the concurrent limitations and expansiveness of language, as an intricate and highly involved dance. To disturb the balance by depleting an environmental element or introducing or eliminating one of the species threatens the viability or ‘health’ of the system. Alan Jones of the Australian Museum notes that the “most important things we should sustain are healthy, functioning ecosystems and their species. Not only do they provide us with life-support services such as food, water and oxygen, they also nourish us aesthetically and

spiritually” (Jones, 2003). Thus, sustainability applied to environmental contexts “is the term used to describe developments that meet the needs of today without compromising the ability to meet the needs of tomorrow” (Jones, 2003). Briefly then, from such an environmental blueprint, I would like to examine the two ecologies of which the human dance activity partakes within the frames of diversity, change and balance to see if environmental thinking can shed some light on the problem of the art form’s viability.

An ecology of human behaviour

Although by no means definitive, dance in its manifested plurality can be identified as bodily-enacted meta-commentaries or physicalised “stories that a group tells about itself” wherein people self-reflexively re-enact their interpretations of experience. This recognition of the explanatory foundation of dance, of its potential to communicate, comes from the discipline of anthropology whose exponents have been very much concerned with the reasons *why* people engage in the whole gamut of human behaviour. In this instance, Victor Turner borrows the phrase from his colleague, Clifford Geertz, to explain the socially charged symbolism and conflict management found in the rituals of a ‘traditional’ African society as much as in performing arts’ activities in a city like New York. The point in our context is that, in both instances these societies offer blueprints of dancing as storytelling or explanation and storytelling/explanation whether scientific or imaginative is arguably the most potent manifestation of the human condition in any type of social organisation.

Alternatively, analyses reveal the multi-functionality of dancing or storytelling for that matter. For instance in her study of the Warlpiri of Central Australia, Megan Morais (1992) claims that the community uses ritual music and dance for the following purposes:

- Education---learning about life practices
- Expression of the aesthetic values of the group
- Confirmation of religious values and beliefs---all dance is concerned with, and sanctioned by the Dreamtime
- Maintenance of social roles
- Tension management---dancing cannot take place when there is considerable social disharmony

- Entertainment
- Exchange and barter
- Adaptation and acculturation---incorporating non-Aboriginal practices into the Warlpiri tradition

That is an impressive list of powers for one form of activity, like dancing, to encode and actuate, leading many commentators to explore dance as a form of language and others to pose the phenomenon as a crucial source of all languages.

What is of concern to this discussion, however, is the diversity of dance, its proliferation of styles, purposes and meanings within an inordinate variety of cultural and sub-cultural groupings. To emphasise this point and pursue the notion of dancing as an imaginative prototype species in the human behavioural ecosystem, I would like to address aspects of an admittedly generalised social life within an Australian environment in which dancing plays a visible role, prompted by Judith Lynne Hanna's, *To Dance is Human: A Theory of Nonverbal Communication* (1979).

Although in many ways a marginalised or at least perceived as under-emphasised components of 21st century life, ritual and ceremony still mark occasions of transition, transcendence and remembrance in which movement from march to waltz, jive to ecstatic spontaneity are hardly ever absent. These former markers of human interaction with the sacred or supra-human through worship, dedication, deification, sacrifice and so forth may not nowadays invoke the mercy or pleasure of the gods and goddesses but weddings, ANZAC days and Olympic opening ceremonies do involve communication of the extra-ordinary through altered or heightened states of consciousness. Dance critic, Janet Roseman points to a widespread notion of the extra-ordinariness of artistic creations and experiences, echoing ideas such as Dostoevski's 'heightened sense of consciousness,' Eugenie Barba's 'extra-ordinary states' and Victor Turner's notion of 'liminality,' when she quotes Robert Henri: "[t]he object which is in the back of every true work of art is the attainment of a state of being: a state of high functioning, a more than ordinary moment of existence" (Henri in Roseman, 2001, 130). The point to note is that the production of extra-ordinary states of

consciousness begins and continues through grass-roots rituals as much as in specialised works of art.

In westernised lifestyles, symbolic levels of ‘spirituality’ which once provided the axes of ritual may have been subsumed into the more materialistically construed and, from many perspectives, problematic ‘sense/s’ of identity that have become prominent in current rhetoric: in the stories we tell ourselves or don’t as the case may be. Identity is both a pivotal concept in coming to terms with human experience and a smokescreen covering unfulfilled desires and, perhaps, losses of certainty about purposefulness that infiltrates notions of the self, the immediate personalised group, the nation and that super-grouping, the global community. Nonetheless, in spite of the potential threats of postmodern fragmentation, government manipulation and cyborg prostheses, expressions of identity from rebellious break-dancing to reiterated ethnic celebrations are stamped, literally and figuratively through dance. Dance signals identity in a forceful and potentially liberating way especially in group contexts.

Intimately connected with displays of identity, matchmaking is another facet of behaviour in which dancing plays a major role, so major that this form of physical communication is often labelled dangerous and, thus, powerful. The diachronic and synchronic resilience of these sexual contexts of dance, historically shown to prejudice its claims to academic or aesthetic ‘purity,’ should indicate how significant this dancing species is in the metaphorical ecosystem. Instead of denying its dangers, dance practitioners should examine and perhaps celebrate its access to sexuality and gender formation. Pleasure, body image, social status, control and abuse are but a few of the abiding threads in the complex webs of sexual relations which, ultimately, cannot be divorced from politics itself, which is another functionality of dance albeit in public display or private intimacy. Though there is no Louis Quatorze leading disgruntled factions in the fine-tuned harmony of a minuet in our parliament, scrutiny of sexual relations danced at rave parties, ballrooms, discos, clubs and casinos across the country do have ramifications in those rarefied halls and corridors of power.

Percolating through the above roles of dance, almost akin to invisible chemical reactions, are the ways in which movement, especially that movement intended or selected for expression

in dance, communicates and educates. Disco dancing is not as mindless as popular perception would suggest because movers learn, in that remarkable/unremarkable ‘school’ of ‘cabbages and kings,’ of a multitude of skills both positive and negative for the maintenance, negotiation and change of the stuff of the human environment. Pivotal, this engagement enables people to participate in the creation and re-creation of the multiple guises of culture. More directed avenues, like school arts’ programmes, private arts institutions, community arts and multicultural groups, enable individuals to channel these acts of creation into acknowledged visibility, wherein the satisfaction that invariably arises from demonstrating the uniqueness of the self in conjunction with others is made manifest. Indeed, the act of creation may be a profound stabiliser in human life, an affirmation of purpose. Not that the creative arts hold exclusive property rights over creativity. Parenthood creating new life must lead the way and setting up a business or marketing a brand cannot but involve imaginative approaches to making and doing, but what lies intrinsically with the creative arts and dance among its numbers is an inimitable opportunity to *create* simply to express an engagement with life, to colour a given environment with unthought meanings, to enlarge the landscapes of possibility. Here function, in most instances, is an afterthought. To return to the ecological analogy, creativity sustains the environment, human as it must inevitably be, aesthetically and spiritually. Embedded in the condensation of Cezanne’s enigma, “[man] absent from but entirely within the landscape,” are complex issues of human perception, creativity, subjectivity and knowledge (quoted in Deleuze & Guattari, 1994 ed. 169). Creativity enables us to *see* and constantly re-*see* in phenomenological terms where and who we are.

The specialised ecology

For the purposes of this paper, the specialisation that shapes art forms has arrived hand in hand with economic dependency, one that has passed, over and above the first hand exchange of box office, from the aristocracy to government agencies and, to spin the wheel again, to private corporations. This economic dependency is the most acute manifestation of our present dilemma because in a very basic sense specialisation is an expensive process, from training to performance. Ironically, specialisation in the current climate has been notionally handed over to the forces of privatisation where specialisation only commands interest if able to sell and gain profit from commoditisation. Consequently, current rhetoric favours artists as ‘content providers for the information superhighway and as the source of innovative ideas in

inventing the future' (Throsby & Hollister, 2003, 11). In this recent Australia Council report, *Don't Give Up Your Day Job*, Throsby and Hollister further observe that "the concept of creativity---a central and indisputable element in artistic practice---has been coopted as the driving force of the new economy" (Throsby & Hollister, 2003, 11). While it is rewarding to see public/governmental recognition of the value of creativity, the danger lies in 'creativity' being relegated solely to the role of commodity wrapping or to *sell* another profession like science. Whatever irregularities and injustices surfaced with its establishment, the political formation of nation states valued the nurturing of identity as a fundamental tenet of its being in contrast with the economised identity predominating present multi-national configurations of power. In the latter, value is framed exclusively in economic terms. Back in the eighties, arguments by artists and art policy leaders highlighting the role of the arts in the national economy assumed that the cultural values of the arts remained valid and understood. Now, I suggest, the frames of perception have shifted so far that we are now forced to consider, alike environmentalists, articulating dollar values for 'intangible' human assets. For instance, how much money will be saved in educational, jural and health costs by intervention strategies of the arts in primary education to rectify anti-social youth behaviour? Instead of the value of the arts being normative, we have to resort to bandaid mentalities, to making a special case in order to be heard. Are not such situations the incarnation of Michel Foucault's insights into the 'institutionalisation' of deviance? This example illustrates a worst case scenario but, nonetheless, should indicate that reliance on economic arguments may force the creative arts into untenable positions wherein the value of human experience plays subsidiary roles to the central performance of profit in the society. This point was made patently clear in presentations by politicians and bureaucrats during the inauguration of the Council for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (CHASS) recently in Canberra. Government rhetoric pronounced culture (along with Keating's promotion of the elite arts) as defunct, favouring instead 'social value' and 'education' as the attributes to pursue for the sector to register on the political monitor.

The second major consequence of specialisation may lie ironically with flaws in our own strivings towards performance perfection and refinement. Professional activity wherein dancers and dance-makers aim to sustain their economic viability as 'artists' is constructed through training in a particular technique or combination of techniques to obtain the required

skills of the aesthetic determinants of the guardian institution/s of the art form. Since the emergence of prestigious avant-garde artists in the early twentieth century, this establishment also embraces those who challenge the system/s in an ongoing and ever-changing testing of the parameters. Nonetheless, the resultant diversification of styles and approaches remains constrained by the dictates of taste within the specific discipline.

Consequently, stylistic philosophical underpinnings tend to become ‘in-group’ political statements, as for example in the spectacle and aristocratic lineage of ballet vying for superiority over the democratic modes of contemporary dance where non-literal relationships are favoured as signs of intellectual status. For argument’s sake, this tension is exaggerated but, nonetheless, exists in competition for scant resources, audiences and social status. In both ballet and contemporary dance, technique plus philosophical position tend to take precedence over stories that confront socio-political issues and communal manifestations of identity to become ‘the stories we tell about ourselves’. Often, the potential diversity is unintentionally submerged beneath the group’s institutionalised aesthetics, constructed and reinforced through training institutions, peer assessment, leading artists, funding bodies and government policy/attitudes. This observation (as controversial as it may be) suggests that the age-old concerns of dance have been neglected in favour of cerebral or intra-disciplinary pursuits which have little relevance to the society in general. Rarefied investigations must continue but as *part of* rather than *in competition with* an inclusive spectrum encompassing all those areas through which dancing has traditionally touched people’s lives.

Are there strategies to alleviate or turn around public perceptions about relations between expenditure and an alienating elitism of dance as an art form? Assuming plurality is as advantageous to culture as to the environment, could principles of maintaining ecological diversity make sense in the dance paradigm, taking into account a re-integration of the two inter-related yet currently distinct ecologies into a complex, cohesive system? Philip Sutton, Director of Policy and Strategy of Green Innovations, states that “to be maintained, the diversity of life and the basis of its productivity must not be systematically diminished ... [and] must be restored where it has been diminished” (Sutton, 2000, www.greeninnovations.asn.au). It would appear that the replenishment of interconnections between the ecology of human behaviour and that of dance as an art-form is a crucial factor

in maintaining the health of the whole. The following observations are adaptations of the social attributes which Sutton states are required if biological diversity is to be sustained. Translating these attributes into dance terms then, this society must be:

- **participatory:** People generally need to be more conscious that ‘their’ dance is part of the wider scheme, while artists need to be more aware of the motivations behind grass-roots participation in dance activities and how such motivations may relate to the content, locations, marketing or framing of the art form. Conceivably, the participation that already exists needs to be promoted, not only to the authorities but to the participants themselves. Can we take up New Yorker, Donna Walker-Kuhne’s suggestion that, in order to attract culturally diverse audiences, we need to build bridges to make people feel at home within the performance venue and the values it generates (John, 2004, 10-13)? Or as Madedline Wilson reports on Tracks, develop a relationship where “[b]ecause we use the community the work actually has a lot more meaning and a lot more connection for the audience” (Wilson, 2004, 15)?
- **diverse and prepared to experiment:** Tradition should command as much respect as cutting edge experimentation, research should be as vibrant as spontaneous demonstrations of identity, if we are to demonstrate the significance of dance to the community at large. Knowledges of and the scope of embodiment require celebration and access by dancers and non-dancers alike.
- **inclusive, caring, cohesive, tolerant:** Diversity of forms need sustenance from interconnections between all dancers or groups of dancers, choreographers, teachers, community animateurs, researchers, policy-makers and practitioners in allied professions. The formation of CHASS is a high-level example of pooling resources for advocacy purposes. Other types of communications, informal and formal within and across the strata of society, need momentum and visibility in the public eye.
- **critical:** Especially in terms of decisions which may effect the plethora of dance activity in the future, evaluation and examination of training, advocacy, products and processes, communication and support mechanisms require constant attention. Research through performance of itself and criss-crossing with salient aspects of human behaviour and dance’s relationship to other fields and economies is crucial if we wish to highlight the significance of embodiment in human experience/knowledge and justify investments in its sustenance and growth.

- **creative and skilled to achieve win-win solutions:** Being sceptical about ‘win-win’ situations since the logic defies the workings of so-called ‘natural’ ecologies, I would prefer to see creativity and skill, intrinsic markers of dance in most contexts, employed towards maintaining a fluctuating *balance* of participation and specialised performance, of exploiting economic data and demonstrating the vital human values of dance as heritage, critical commentary and future.
- **anticipatory:** Though difficult, questioning today’s aspirations and decisions in the light of what they might mean for the next generation is decisive. For example, how do we negotiate the current rhetoric of economic viability without becoming entrenched in a system of profitable commodities? Do tendencies of funding bodies to favour youth or interventions of the new technologies mean that maturity in performance is never reached or that ‘live’ performance is ultimately prejudiced?
- **conservative of valuable aspects of present/past:** Histories in many ways are stories of accumulations in as much as they are stories of change and that balancing is delicate and difficult. Culture in its broadest sense weaves the new or the unknown into the fabric of what time witnesses and, paradoxically, time sometimes is changeless. The Aboriginal Dreamtime is ever present alongside Bangarra Dance Theatre whose works bridge different experiences of loss for urban Aboriginals, traditional communities and white Australians. Contradictions are plentiful and valid but what Bangarra represents is not a replacement of Dreamtime itself. Rather new expressions interconnect with *that which always is*. If the limited history that I heard at school in the 50s of Aborigines as a ‘dying race’ had been more than a misconstrued perception, neither Dreamtime nor Bangarra would exist and the breadth of our cultural system would be much impoverished as a result. On the other hand, that survival and diversification has been traumatic for the peoples involved. The issue is complex and deserving of concerted critical attention, particularly in the current propulsion towards the ‘new economies.’
- **committed to the achievement of the social good:** While this attribute is incontestable in many respects, social good can be a stick to wield for less than productive ends. The definition of ‘social good’ is a moveable feast, depending on agendas of those who wield the sticks. Explicit engagement in social problems where dance can make a difference (obesity, youth management, stimuli for aging

populations) gives practitioners and management opportunities to demonstrate the far-reaching flexibility of dance languages and activities. We should, however, remain alert to 'social good' of a more diffuse nature, to the everyday benefits of movement experiences and their concurrent extraordinary capacities of transformation whether towards spiritual or intensified consciousness states.

- **able to give adequate time to civic activity:** Artists are not generally renowned for their endorsement of citizenship due to a tendency to challenge perceived ills, apathy, hypocrisy, megalomania and so forth within the social state. Ultimately, these confrontations aim to safeguard social well-being but their radical means can provoke public mistrust. However, once again, everyday activities and processes at all levels provide microcosms of civic collaboration, of individuals working together to extend communication and share responsibilities. Moreover, many arts activities, especially but not exclusively within the community arts sphere, directly address environmental and social enhancement and/or activism.
- **adequately resourced and equipped with infrastructure, knowledge and skills:** Australian dance can pride itself on a highly successful organisational model, Ausdance, marshalling a critical mass across the diversity to support a varied range of interests. Less successful in operating on limited resources are the companies and choreographers, project groups and independent artists striving to produce their hues of excellence. Unfortunately, the diversity and wide-ranging participation, that I believe holds the key to an ongoing sustainability of the cultural ecology of dance, lies in opposition to the scant resources currently available to maintain the spread of options and manifestations. Could a 'frugal' use of resources advised by environmentalists apply to our situation too? Frugality is almost synonymous with some performance modes (contemporary, multi-cultural, community arts, hybrid arts), so that in one sense a moderate increase in funding, sponsorship or the audience base would tend to give these groups/individuals the impression of being bestowed with a financial downpour. By the same token, if dance performances could draw on a larger audience base then economic resources would automatically increase, generating the prestige to attract further support. Fears of commercialisation tend to emerge when suggestions of audience-friendly products arise. But is there a balance somewhere? Is there a way to be frugal with the generation of creativity without compromising

integrity or pampering to the masses like the ‘reality tv’ phenomenon? Ideally, a far-sighted government or benign corporation (if there be such entities) should invest in the infrastructure and resources to generate a vibrant and integrated constituency of dancing but recent history warns us that such a vision will not eventuate until we, the multi-vocal community of dance, demonstrate the value of that investment. Could it be that such an un-businesslike approach, so daunting at the offset, will ultimately prove to be the right path for the physical, psychological, emotional, social and spiritual values of our multitude of dances? Can we fly in the face of current economic rhetoric?

- **democratic and equitable** (so the above are possible): Cultural sustainability requires that an activity be valued by the people in a ‘democratic’ sense, affecting voting habits within political mapping. Dance has not the same emotional power as has the environment to permeate people’s lives. However, arguably the creative arts pitted together are integral to cultural formation, to its maintenance and change. In turn, culture frames how people see themselves and their environment, thus permeating the sources of all life.

One primary attribute of a society able to support the cultural ecology of dance that is unlisted above is its manifold resource of imagination. The surprising, fantastical and astounding are not other-worldly qualities but the quintessential play of experience whereby humans discover their unique capacities and stories. The following extract from the Chairman of the National Council of the Arts in Singapore gives prominence to the value of the imagination. When such a public acknowledgment of imaginative power emanates from a nation known for its economic single-mindedness, it is time to take note.

We must also not forget that the arts are about asserting our national identity, about expanding our mental space, about exploring new inner landscapes, and about nurturing ourselves. The importance of the arts goes far beyond economic value. As the nation engages more in these activities, the quality, depth and originality spill over into other areas of economic activity.
(http://www.nac.gov.sg/corporate_chairmans_01.html)

Solutions or more questions?

If, as suggested, our greatest strengths derive from imaginative capacity, then I would like to think that we could approach the complex problem of sustainability of the art form ecology with an unpredictable play of ideas. Instead of neat solutions or even any tangible solutions, the complex issues involved may provoke more questions, deeper probing and further unorthodox visions. In this metaphorical juxtaposition of environment and culture, diversity and interconnectivity emerge as difficult yet prized goals. In contrast to the reductive tendencies of specialisation, the cultural ecology of dance as an art form needs the sustenance of its beginnings in human behaviour, needs the diverse aspirations of this behaviour to be reflected in its 'stories' if the art form is to regain its relevance to society. Diversified in approach as much as it is multi-formed in content, performance dance needs to refract issues of access and identification, its distinctiveness as well as an embracing holism, its explorative and expressive daring and ordinariness together with its embodiment with and within diverse spheres of endeavour. The multiple knowledges encoded in dance practices require visibility, acknowledgment and, above all, respect. The intricate interactions found in living ecosystems are no less pertinent to the flux, contradictions and struggle inherent in a healthy cultural system.

How to achieve such a complicated system of relationships? Where to start? What are the priorities? Perhaps the only answer, as tenuous as it may be, is to begin with the small moves in imaginative play, extending outwards to connect with other human beings, other spheres, other perspectives. Just imagine what an educational campaign we could initiate simply beginning with our own resources, stepping out of the bounds of our dance to meet other dancers? Can training institutions embrace the challenges of diversity while striving for excellence? Can funding policy empower age and experience, alternative aesthetics, radical interventions of social class and politics? What if the market forces were to promote transformative experiences with spiritual rather than economic ends? Can we counter globalisation momentums with demonstrations of cultural exchange wherein our trading benefit may be intangible profits like experiential enrichment and learning?

Questions have the potential to trigger renewed energy, transforming time and space into exhilarating and meaningful movement. Surely, inter-related species of dancers can lead the way in such a revolution?

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