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Dancing my true dance: reflections on learning to express myself through ecstatic dance in Hawai'i

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While I was doing fieldwork with hippies and drop outs in Hawai'i, my mother came to visit. During her visit I took her to an ecstatic dance. At this dance one of my research participants, Stan, told me, "Lucy, I've been watching you dance today and you've really learned to express yourself". Discussing it later, my mother remarked, "Yes, but what he meant was that you've learned to dance like everyone else". In this paper I explore how the same piece of dance could be interpreted so differently by these two observers. I identify the importance of "acquired movement vocabulary" for rendering improvised dance intelligible to observers, so that Stan, trained to identify the point of such a dance – self-expression – through my dance could see self-expression where my mother, trained in observing how well her daughter fits in with others, saw something entirely different.

Introduction

In Hawai'i I learned to dance. I also apparently learned to "express myself" through this medium. So stated Stan, a research participant whom I frequently met at various spiritual dances and elsewhere. During one ecstatic dance, to which I had brought my vacationing mother to give her a taste of "the field", he remarked, "Lucy, I've been watching you dance today and you've really learned to express yourself". Deeply flattered by the remark and proud that I might actually be fitting in, and perhaps even "getting" drop out social life on some embodied level, I told my watching mother, who replied, "Yes, but what he meant was that you've learned to dance like everyone else". It is this pair of remarks that lies at the heart of this paper. Experienced at the time as an irreconcilable contradiction, this paper explores ways in which one dance could be simultaneously interpreted as self-expression and dancing like everyone else. Taken in the context of local values of independence, autonomy and the refutation of any notion of self as intersubjectively constructed, these remarks signified that I had both learned to move in the sorts of ways locally recognised as ecstatic dance and that I was combining these movements in a way that was less overtly imitative and more unique to me; I had learned to express my "self" through movements recognised by others as appropriate to self-expression through spiritual dance.

This paper begins with a brief overview of "dropping out" before turning to other anthropologists of dance, with whom I found myself out of kilter, yet, like my research participants, we were all apprentices of dance. From here, I locate ecstatic dance in the context of consciousness and Libertarianism to get at how what appeared as a form of apprenticeship to me (and my mother), was made sense of as a highly personal journey through the self to research participants like Stan. Having stopped off to talk to a couple of facilitators of spiritual dance to get their views along the

way, the paper ends with me, my mother and Stan once again, and an appreciation of how a pair of throwaway remarks can offer so much insight into the values of Puna drop outs and my own, sometimes conflicting, views of their world.

The fieldwork setting: "drop outs" in Hawai'i and spiritual dance

The fieldwork for this paper took place in the Puna district of Hawai'i in 2004-2005. I spent time with older hippies and younger drop outs, exploring the ways in which members of this immigrant group embodied a sense of "alternativeness" from a perceived mainstream "America". These drop outs ranged from 1960s hippies who shortly after Woodstock or the collapse of the "scene" in San Francisco found their way to an isolated, fertile corner of Hawai'i replete with cheap real estate, ideal for growing '*erb* (cannabis) and building self-sufficient communes, to college kids on a summer break. In between were people who had dropped out to live on a commune for a while, families who had sold their trailer park home on the mainland and bought a plot of land and built a home from reclaimed materials instead, a host of backstreet mechanics who made an erratic living maintaining the many uninsured, MOT-free "Puna beater" cars that cruised the area, and large numbers of young people living off welfare cheques, many of whom were also cannabis growers. All had "dropped out" of "America", although what that America was varied. For older hippies it was frequently the oppressiveness of life as a 1950s housewife, or a system which targeted and penalised you for growing your hair too long or smoking a joint. For the younger ones (and some older hippies too) it was corporate America and the military-pharmaceutical-governmental complex. This was the case for Erika, a gardener in her twenties who lived on a work-trade farm and did odd-job gardening on the side. (Work-trade refers to the system whereby owners of large – usually around 5 acre – plots of land offered free accommodation and food to young people, usually new arrivals, in exchange for around 2-3 hours of labour a day.) Erika told me that America's

> soda culture [gets] kids hooked on sugar and caffeine from an early age, then they've got ADD [attention deficit disorder] and so we give them drugs as adults to make them not care, and now we're giving these drugs to children too, which is making money for the pharmaceutical companies, who are all in with the government anyway.

For many, then, to drop out meant stepping outside of a corporate-governmental system that placed profit above ensuring that citizens lived meaningful lives.

For many dance played a role in both everyday sociality and developing a meaningful life. Dance took place in many settings, including at the beach at the weekly drum circle, monthly raves around the island, or as part of informal social gatherings. It also took place in more formalised settings, such as trance dance, Sufi dancing, ecstatic dance or Gypsie Nation; I collectively term these latter dances "spiritual dance" for the explicitly spiritual and meditative quality they all shared. It is these latter dances that I am interested in here.

Spiritual dances were usually regular weekly events. The longest running and most popular of these was ecstatic dance. It followed a format in which there was a warm-up period of around 30 minutes when electronic music which increased and then decreased in tempo was played, during which people arrived, removed their shoes, stretched, danced or chatted off the dance floor with friends. This was followed by

"opening circle" in which all dancers sat in a circle on the floor while Neil, the facilitator, outlined the rules (no talking on the dance floor) and provided a theme for the dance, such as marking the transit of Venus, manifestation or sending spiritual postcards. The main dance lasted about two hours and followed the same tempo format with a sustained period of high tempo music, and was followed by "closing circle" and "shareback" in which dancers reflected on the theme and their experiences during the dance.

Gypsie Nation followed a similar format but lasted only a few months in Puna, although it has now been rolled out quite successfully across the United States mainland. With the same structure, in this dance the facilitator, Skywalker, outlined the rules (no talking on the dance floor, respect the rights of people not to want to interact with you), and the purpose of the dance (to connect with community, ancestors and the land). Neil and Skywalker interacted quite differently with the dancers during the dances; Neil DJ'ed but Skywalker danced after having pre-programmed a laptop computer with the music for the dance. Both struggled with the guru/facilitator/leader label they felt dancers ascribed to them.

Trance dance was similar to ecstatic dance and Gypsie Nation in terms of musical tempo and structure. However, all dancers were blindfolded in order to focus dancers' energies within, rather than without. Unlike ecstatic dance and Gypsie Nation, in trance dance punctuality was important and no later-comers or observers were accepted: thus as a dancer at no point could you see others dance.

Sufi dancing was somewhat different to the above forms of spiritual dance and attracted an older crowd. Also known as Dance of Universal Peace, Sufi dancing was a form of circle dancing with a facilitator/guitarist/singer and accompanying drummer positioned in the centre of the circle. The facilitator would either sing or teach words to simple songs and accompanying dance movements and all dancers would sing and move in co-ordination; there was a strong emphasis on bodily and eye contact with fellow dancers.

Studying dance

A number of anthropologists have studied dance, generally coming to dance after having worked or trained as a professional or semi-professional dancer (see, for example, Cowan 1990, Desmond 1999, Ness 1992, Novack 1990); such a background inevitably informed not only their chosen subject area but also their approaches to it. By contrast, I arrived in Hawai'i with no formal dance training, and, in fact, no intention to study dance at all. Introduced early on to ecstatic dance, I enjoyed these dance events as an opportunity to meet and meet up with research participants, but also as an excuse to let my hair down and have a good boogie. From ecstatic dance, fellow dancers introduced me to other forms of spiritual dance, and from this my interest in spiritual dance grew.

Although my background in terms of dance was at odds with that of some of my anthropological peers, the more I dwelt upon it, the more fitting my lack of training and prior exposure seemed to be; I was as unfamiliar with what I was supposed to be doing at these dances as many new arrivals in Puna. This lack of familiarity meant that I had to learn what to do; I had to learn to move properly. Anthropologists of dance, including those cited above, all reflect in their work on learning to dance. Cowan (1990:xi) first engaged with Greek dance "in the choreographic, if not the

social, sense" while at university and sought out social dance events as well as joining a Balkan dance group before fieldwork. Desmond (1999), already a trained dancer, attended hula classes ranging from those held for children in shopping malls to professional choreography as part of her fieldwork in Hawai'i. Ness (1992), again already a trained dancer, explicitly sought out choreographers of *sinulog* in the Philippines under whom to train, and writes evocatively of her emergent understanding of both the dance form and wider Filipino society through the patient repetition of the movements of this dance. Novack (1990), formerly a professional modern dancer, turned her eye to contact improvisation – a dance style that emerged in 1960s North America as a reaction to choreographed dance forms such as ballet or modern dance – and learned specifically to improvise within the context of contact improvisation. I had never really danced except for ballet lessons as a child ("something had to help you stop stomping about like a clumsy elephant," said my mother) and going out on weekends with my friends. I had never sought to find myself or particularly express myself through dance – although I was to encounter both in the field. I, then, had limited training to prepare me.

Yet in this I had something fundamentally in common with my research participants. They too had generally arrived on the island in their twenties, and they too often had little experience of the types of spiritual dance available, or indeed of formal dance training. We all had to learn how to do these dances together. In the anthropology of teaching and learning, the focus generally lies on children (see, for example, Toren 1999) and on the intersection of formal and informal learning (Evans 2006, Henze 1992). Others have focused on young people and apprenticeship (Herzfeld 2004, Lave and Wenger 1991), and a recent piece by Tim Ingold with Ray Lucas (2007) reflects on the dual processes of students learning from lecturers and lecturers from students (as well as the insights, challenges and joys of more embodied forms of learning) within an anthropology course at the University of Aberdeen. For the drop outs of Puna, learning to live there and learning to move was something undertaken as an adult, in an almost entirely informal context, and with no clear apprentice-teacher roles. I, like they, had to learn from watching others, including perhaps people as inexperienced at living there as myself.

Formal instruction was rare. In fact, I could only find one instance of it in my fieldnotes: a young organic farmer asked me if I knew how to "shaka", which is to perform a wave-like movement ubiquitous in Hawai'i in which the thumb and little finger remain extended while the remaining fingers are folded down towards the palm of the hand and then waved. I explained that I did (having learned it in Honolulu before moving to the Big Island) and demonstrated. I was told by him that the fingers were not supposed to be held tightly or the wrist held rigid with the wave coming from rotation at the elbow, as I had been doing it. But rather, "It's gotta be loose, man. So your like fingers are all loose, yeah, it's hang loose, you know what I mean. And it comes from the wrist, yeah? So just kinda let it all be loose and floppy." What he showed me was a shaka in which no parts of the hand touched, and where the movement for the wave came from the wrist, rather than the elbow. No part of the arm, wrist or hand was held rigid; rather everything was held loosely. This small lesson, given as we walked along the boardwalk through the centre of the village, was exceptional in its emphasis on explicit instruction, but also served as a moment in which I really saw the connection between the movements I had come to see predominated in dance reflected in other, non-dance, ways of moving and wider values of "going with the flow", fluidity and generally "hanging loose".

I began attending spiritual dances not knowing how to do it properly. I had to learn somehow. I saw myself in the American woman described by Henze (1992) who while at a circle dance at a Greek party approached an expert dancer leading a circle dance and indicated to her that she wanted to learn.

> Pulling the American woman along, the aunt continued to dance as an expert does [doing *figoures* or special moves involving more creativity or skill than the regular dance steps done by others in the circle], her only accommodation to the learner being perhaps a slightly heavier stress on the downbeat. Watching the American woman's confused feet and puzzled, frustrated facial expressions, I realized that she and I shared certain expectations about how one teaches another person to dance that were not being met. We expected the dance steps to be broken down into simpler components, but the aunt was doing nothing of the sort. She expected the American woman to "learn by doing" – perhaps not the first time, but cumulatively over successive events. (Henze 1992:xi-xii)

In this model of learning, the novice dancer had to learn by doing, without explicit instruction or broken-down choreography. She did not, as did the apprentices with whom Herzfeld (2004:107) worked, have to "steal with the eyes", but she did have to learn by observation, mimicry and imitation.

As I came to dance increasingly confidently – by observing fellow dancers, mimicking their moves or taking inspiration from their actions – I spent more time watching interaction and less time trying to learn. I noticed that certain movement forms predominated: the spine was often loosely held, rarely ramrod erect and often moving left to right or forward to back, the head followed the movement of the upper body with no fixed gaze, there was strong use of the pelvis to direct movement, and feet were usually placed a comfortable distance apart for ease of balance. In common with contact improvisation, but in contrast to theatre dance forms such as ballet, bodies were never held to create tableaux, but were almost constantly in motion. Dancers dressed for comfort, most often in loose, comfortable and sometimes very bright and/or flowing clothes; dancers always danced with bare feet. Movement could be minutely small or expressive and large but always with a strong flowing tendency, with few sharp, angular movements and a strong emphasis on arcs, curves, twists and twirls.

Acquired movement vocabulary

In this paper, then, I am arguing that one learns to improvise. In a paper later critiqued by Puri and Hart-Johnson (1995), Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (1981:399) contrasts improvisation with choreography: "The dancer who is improvising […] has agreed to follow the rules, as it were, of a dance improvisation, rules which might very generally be summed up under the rubric: dance the dance as it comes into being at this particular moment at this particular place". This is glossed by Puri and Hart-Johnson (1995:160) as "the only reference to 'rules' consists of the rules of the improvisation itself, meaning, to do anything one wishes". Illustrated by the South Indian dance form Bharata Natyam in which dancers improvise within a highly prescribed range of movements, they argue that in dance – be that improvised or choreographed – dancers make choices not from an unlimited range of possible movements but from those belonging to an "acquired movement vocabulary" (1995:166).

One must thus first acquire the vocabulary, and to extend their language metaphor it is only once proficiency is gained that it becomes possible to pun, jest and play with it while still being understood. Or, to use a different analogy, in basketball a novice becomes a skilled player not through the acquisition of rules and representations "but at the point where he or she is able to dispense with them" (Ingold 1993:462, cited in Pálsson 1994). Following Puri and Hart-Johnson (1995), improvisation entails a vocabulary of movements which dancers in a particular dance style – in this case spiritual dance – employ in order to move in a way recognised by fellow dancers as that particular form of improvised dance.

However, this "acquired movement vocabulary" must be acquired somehow from somewhere. It is not formally "taught" as Henze (1992), Ness (1992) or Desmond (1999) were taught Balkan, *sinulog* or hula dancing. Rather, the mode of learning was something closer to learning in contact improvisation, where the audience sat in a circle around usually two dancers improvising together in a style emphasising weight, balance and flow. Participants learned by observing and by doing – without choreography, classes or explicit instruction. Learning to dance in contact improvisation and Puna spiritual dance could be linked to apprenticeship. For Herzfeld (2004), apprenticeship exists in contrast to book learning, and entails not only the acquisition of skills through repeated bodily action but also learning how to be in the world: learning by "stealing with the eyes" entails not only learning how to do a particular task, but learning how to learn and how to behave as a master – as well as an apprentice – artisan. In reference to enskilment, Pálsson (1994) similarly contrasts apprenticeship – learning by doing – with "normative" learning, and emphasises the importance of master/apprentice distinctions. For both, participation is central and for both the distinction between apprentice and master is clear.

Such clear distinctions are present in most of the examples cited by Lave and Wenger (1991), for whom the central characteristic of apprenticeship is legitimate peripheral participation. It is worth, however, taking a moment to look at one of the examples of legitimate peripheral participation they cite in which there were no clear apprentice/master roles, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). In AA new participants are gently guided through example and correction to tell the story of their addiction and recovery in an appropriate way for this setting; one could say they come to tell their stories through an "acquired [narrative] vocabulary". They learn to tell their stories appropriately through listening to others' narratives and being rewarded for telling their own through the AA frame. I danced and danced and one week was rewarded by being told I had learned to express myself. Perhaps I had been expressing myself all along, but only now was I doing it through the "acquired movement vocabulary" of spiritual dance.

Yet this is not how my research participants saw it. This is not what Stan was complimenting me on. During an interview with Neil, the facilitator of ecstatic dance, he compared the ecstatic dance he ran in Puna with the one he had attended when living in Austin, Texas.

> - It [ecstatic dance in Austin] was very different from what you see here in the ecstatic dance, very different.
>
> - Why?
>
> - There was a lot more contact dancing, there was a lot more touching and a lot more vigorous contact with other dancers and you really had the freedom to really push your limits as far as what you wanted, to move through or

> move with or kind of explore in yourself mentally or physically […] Here it seems people are a lot more internal, people are doing their own thing and they're having their own kind of, erm, it looks more like a meditation, more of a moving introspection.

This sentiment was shared by other facilitators and dancers alike: spiritual dance was primarily a moving meditation, an opportunity for introspection. Spiritual dance was not a dance form that could be taught or learned, but rather a medium through which one could draw to the surface that which lies within. It was not possible to teach the expression of self through moving introspection, but it was possible to learn it.

Introspection and drop out life

Introspection was incredibly important to my research participants. Certain forms of knowledge – and thus ways of learning – were valued over others. Bodily knowledge was valued more highly than analysis, thought and intellectualisation. While he was living on the other side of the island for a while, I went to visit Stan. A well-known astrologer and author of a number of books on the subject, Stan was at this time developing an interest in sacred geometry. Discussing this during a walk on the beach, I tried to make sense of what he was explaining to me by repeating and paraphrasing what he was saying (or so I thought). I received an admonishment: "Stop trying to analyse it, Lucy, *feel* it". The first question I was always asked after experiencing acupuncture, faith healing, electro-pulse therapy or other forms of body work and healing was not "what did you think?" but "how do you feel?"; I was rarely permitted to interview body workers or healers without acquiring direct and bodily knowledge of that in which I was interested: "You have to experience it," I was told, "to understand it". I could try to garner knowledge through others, but ultimately, only direct, corporeal experience could furnish me with true understanding. And only by relaxing and allowing understanding to enter me through becoming receptive to "feeling it" could I facilitate the level of understanding that words, thought and analysis could not. Introspection, rather than analysis, seemed key to "feeling" new knowledge and understanding.

Introspection also took another, critically important form, namely that of *consciousness*. The commonly stated goal of "raising my consciousness" referred primarily to making choices about, it seemed, every aspect of one's life. The people I spent time with had thought through and held opinions on, for example, when and in what situations their children wore synthetic or natural fabrics, how they cleaned their bottoms after going to the toilet, how frequently to shower and whether to wash their hair, multi-tasking or focusing on one thing at a time, as well as more obvious things such as sources of income, diet and recreational and medicinal drug choices… the list goes on.

A similar process is identified and called "individualisation" by sociologists Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2006). In "our" (whose that might be I do not know) state of modernity,

> The indispensable role [internalised routines] play in enabling people to lead their lives and discover their identities within their social coordinates […][is] being replaced, in greater or lesser steps, by the individual – confused, astray, helpless and at a loss. (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2006:6, 8)

This process is one in which the familiar, the known, those internalised routines are

being displaced by endless choice. However, as the tone of their writing suggests, they do not view this endless choice as liberation, but rather as the stable ground beneath our feet turning into shifting, sinking sands. The freedom to choose, here, is the obligation to choose; the obligation to choose a condition of modernity that leaves us "confused, astray, helpless and at a loss".

This was not a view shared by my research participants. Instead they talked enthusiastically of "raising my consciousness" and of "creating my own reality". Many eagerly sought to displace the very taken-for-granted, routine activities that Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2006) regard as central to security, to understanding one's place in the world. And they did so in the name of "raising my consciousness" and generating a sense of self as a unique individual, following their own path, living the life of a true individual, one not dependent in any way on the lives, values or even existence of others.

Such a view of the self is a radical one. For many anthropologists "self" does not exist or develop in isolation. Toren (1999:2) argues that we "literally embody […] the history of all those we have encountered in our lives"; subjectivity emerges out of the unique complex of relations with which all people grow up. Jackson (1998:6) argues that for many non-western people identity is "mutually arising", embedded in relationships rather than "selfhood as some skin-encapsulated, seamless monad possessed of conceptual unity and continuity". Yet such a vision of selfhood is central to Nozick's (1974) seminal libertarian text *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, and libertarianism is central to local ideas about self and social relations among drop outs in Hawai'i. The "self" which operated in both Nozick (1974) and everyday drop out life in Puna was strongly reminiscent of Macpherson's (1962:3) possessive individualism, in which the individual is "essentially the proprietor of his own person and capacities, owing nothing to society for them". The resultant responsibility for utilising one's own person and capacities to best effect increased the emphasis upon choice, heightened further by a moral climate in which "you create your own reality".

This was an argument put forward in the highly popular 2004 film *What the Bleep Do We Know?!* Creating your own reality, raising your consciousness and individualisation all entail the obligation to make choices about every facet of life. This, then, requires a certain level of introspection, which, as Neil revealed in his comments about ecstatic dance in Puna, was something that dancers – and others – in Puna were particularly attuned to. Based on a view that people have a view of the world and work towards creating scenarios in which this is played out in order to be secure in their knowledge that the world is so, people made choices that reinforced their view of how the world is. And by making those choices they then "created" that reality.

However, reality creation in Puna extended beyond even that. On my way to see Stan during the visit mentioned above, I arrived late, having been stuck in very slow moving traffic following a road accident. When I told him why I was late (because a traffic jam had occurred following a road accident), he explained that I was late because I had manifested the traffic jam in order to reinforce my perception of Kona as an unpleasant, too-busy place to be, and thus remain secure in my knowledge that Kona was, indeed, unpleasant and busy (and indeed I did dislike Kona for these very reasons); Stan had at this point not yet seen *What the Bleep Do We Know?!* Reality creation in this community took introspection and choice-making so far that one's desires could actively shape the external world. Reality creation carried with it, then,

the obligation to choose, and consciousness became the vehicle for all that choice.

Choice is also central to the political theory of libertarianism. Taylor (1979), in a critique of *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (Nozick 1974), points out that in such an individualistic society as libertarian society necessarily would be, choice is central. "All choices are equally valid," he says, "but they must be choices" (Taylor 1979:48). While this marries with Nozick's argument, in contrast to Nozick, Taylor then points out that this obligation to choose entails a demand that we become capable of choice, and that this need for people to be able to make autonomous and self-conscious choices entails a particular sort of political education.

Where Nozick (1974) sees humanity as born with an innate sense of freedom (the ability to recognise and exercise individual rights), critics such as Taylor (1979) or Narveson (2001) see these values as social rather than innate in nature. For Taylor (1979:68), "freedom and individual diversity can only flourish in a society where there is a general recognition of their worth". In other words, contrary to Nozick's doctrine, libertarians cannot be concerned exclusively with the exercise of their own individual rights and those of the people with whom they come into voluntary association (as Nozick argues), for these are dependent on a wider social context in which these values are actively valued and promoted. Narveson (2001), in his analysis of libertarianism, contrasts liberalism (of which libertarianism is one form) with conservatism, the common duality in United States politics. However, he notes that libertarianism as a political doctrine could well be the conservatism of a given community: "What the community rams down the throats of its members from infancy onwards could be the universal right of everyone to the maximum freedom compatible with a like freedom for all" (Narveson 2001:12).

The community of United States hippies and drop outs on the Big Island of Hawai'i that I have been describing here was broadly libertarian. While few described themselves as such, that which is identified by Narveson (2001:7) as the central tenet of libertarianism, that every individual has a sphere of rightful liberty in which they are free to do as they please so long as it does not infringe on the rightful liberty of others, was highly valued and actively promoted. Individualisation, according to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2006), rests on endless choice, as does Taylor's (1979) libertarianism. The freedom, and obligation, to make endless choice was recognised, valued and celebrated as consciousness in Puna, and required introspection and contemplation in order to make the right decisions about everything from how to make a cup of tea to how to earn an income.

In terms of dance, this tendency towards introspection reached its apotheosis in trance dance. In this spiritual dance form, dancers were blindfolded and accompanied by "spotters" whose role it was to gently guide dancers away from potential sources of injury. At such dances, no spectators were present: only those dancing or spotting were there. Once a dance started no new arrivals were allowed to enter, thus dancers could neither see nor be seen by non-participants. This not-seeing was central to trance dance, as it enabled dancers to only look within rather than without to guide movement. Through the use of blindfolds, these dances were explicitly introspective in intent and the dance was considered by dancers and facilitators alike to be truly expressive of an inner self.

Delphi, the facilitator of one semi-regular trance dance, explained to me that:

> You know from your own experience, your body is moving and you are not

> necessarily paying attention, that's what the blindfold is all about, so you are looking very deeply within. And I think that there is a potential for participants to feel, well, "I might look really foolish". That is often a big issue and really having people let go, encouraging them to really express themselves [is important] while they are doing this kind of work.

As facilitators all had experience of being spotters, and spotters had all been dancers, there was no way – not even for an anthropologist – to see this dance without experiencing it first. And to experience it necessarily meant being unable to see it. There were no visual clues or cues to help a dancer know how to do it "properly". Delphi acknowledged that trance dance was not a popular form of spiritual dance, and felt that this had to do with the potential for participants to feel that they looked foolish; hence all the efforts to ensure that dancers knew they were only being watched by "spotters", all of whom had experience of being blindfolded trance dancers themselves. In this dance form the rhetoric of introspection, of inspiration coming from within, was not only articulated but rigorously enacted. As a dancer you simply had no idea what others were doing, and I was shocked time and time again by just how oppressive I found it, how much I struggled with the weight of the sense of not knowing what to do. Taking a friend to such a dance once, he explained afterwards that he had sat and meditated in the same spot throughout. And he refused to come with me again.

This spiritual dance form did not entail apprenticeship, learning from observing masters or those more experienced than yourself, but put the rhetoric of other spiritual dance forms and wider social life into practice: that knowledge comes from within, that external movements are the manifestation of *self*-expression. It remained unpopular, I believe, because we were all apprentices, drop outs and anthropologists alike; we all had to learn to value introspection, to place the self at the very heart of one's existence, one's reality, to do libertarian sociality. We all had to learn how to dance.

Dancing *my* true dance or *the* true dance?

Let me return now to Stan's comment, "Lucy, I've been watching you dance today and you've really learned to express yourself". In the light of this discussion on consciousness, choice and libertarianism, his comment made sense as a compliment. In a community that valued following one's own path and the expression of a fully autonomous self, to be told that I had (finally) learned to express myself, at least through dance, was high praise indeed. Stan's compliment made me feel pleased, pleased that I was learning to fit in, that I was learning to express myself, which was clearly a good thing.

Yet my mother's remark acted as a warning to retain my critical edge, it suggested that the story was not so simple: "Yes, but what he meant was that you've learned to dance like everyone else". I wasn't just on a journey towards consciousness with an end point at which I would come to value the right to exercise personal choice above all. I was also being an anthropologist, trying to move like my research participants in order to deepen my own understanding of the words they uttered and the activities they participated in. Ultimately, while everyone was free – and encouraged – to do their own thing, this took place within a fairly narrow range of activities: the drugs of choice were cannabis, alcohol and psychedelic drugs (heroin, crack cocaine or crystal methamphetamine had no place here); socialist political views were suspect, or at the

very least alien and untrustworthy; the rights of communities played second fiddle to the rights of individuals; nothing ranked higher than life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; no-one wore a suit or worked in an office.

I had not so much learned to express my true self through dance as learned to express my self through the fluid, arcing movements favoured by dancers in spiritual dance. I had lost my erect posture and learned to let my head follow my torso, to be in constant motion, to lead from the hips. I had learned to move in ways that were recognisable to my research participants as spiritual dance. That day I achieved what had been described to me as a sought-after moment of transcendent bliss in which you lose awareness of the music, other people, in fact all external cues, and know only your body in motion. And it was indeed a blissful – and all too fleeting – moment's sensation. I no longer cared how I looked, whether I was doing it "right", lost as I was in revelry of my muscles, sinews and nerve endings. I had learned to achieve a moment of bliss, and I had also learned to seek it out and to recognise that sensation as such. In seeking to transcend dance to achieve a moment of sublimation through movement I was – to an observer alert to the transcendental goal of "moving introspection" such as Stan – expressing myself, but to my mum I was moving like everyone else. In the end I was neither dancing just like everyone else, nor expressing a truly unique "I" through movement. Rather, I had finally learned the movement vocabulary of spiritual dance and to speak it intelligibly to my research participants; I had learned the rules and learned how to break them.

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