

Ecstatic

Emily Woof. 27 August 2026. London: Wilton Square Books.

I met Gabrielle Roth in the late autumn of 1996. I had been to some of her electrifying workshops in London in the early nineties, moved by Sarita's passion for her work, and was left dumbstruck by the experience. Gabrielle would punctually come to London from her home in New York in the early days of November, days of remembrance, also the theme of her deeply experiential dance marathons. With her guidance, I moved ("It's not dancing, it's movement!" she corrected me emphatically a few times during our meeting). And move I did – stepping out of complaisance and the obligation to look cool. I had asked for an interview with her on behalf of an Italian magazine that fancied itself countercultural. The unpaid job was an excuse to hang out with artists whose work I loved and admired: Patti Smith, Carolyn Cassidy, Paolo Conte, Steve Jansen of the terrific band Japan, and several others.

Not only did Gabrielle accept my request but suggested we have lunch before the interview in the afternoon. We met at the now defunct Café Flo in Belsize Park. She arrived a few minutes after me, raven black and radiant. I was wearing a light purple jumper, newborn from my first week of *sesshin* (a traditional zen retreat) and up for anything. She ordered toast and scrambled eggs, hardly ate any. Outside a sunny day and the familiar tricks of all Indian summers. Graceful interaction between us, mistaken by any bystander for mild flirtation, both gliding on simple appreciation, absence of need or wanting to prove anything, impress and least of all bore the other stiff with gratuitous 'self-expression'. A rare space of blessed relief. She was writing her second book, the follow up to the milestone *Maps to Ecstasy* (Roth, 1989) and asked me point blank to suggest a title. I proposed 'Dancer's Mind', buoyed up by my zen enthusiasm, a nod to Suzuki Roshi's classic *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* (1973). In Zen we say *shin*, heart/mind, one and the same thing. None of the bungled split between the two. She was open to that suggestion. The book came out a year later with the more apt and inspiring title *Sweat Your Prayers* (Roth, 1997). I was pleased to see that the opening quote from the book was from Suzuki Roshi's text. Do you think the Pope is ready for the Five Rhythms? – she asked swaying her arms and torso in a playful way. Not ready but it will be good medicine, I replied. Unlike the current Pope Leo, striker of tyrants and autocratic, murderous buffoons, the Pope then was the arch-conservative Karol Wojtyla.

Later that afternoon in the Hampstead hotel room where Gabrielle is staying, I switch on my recorder and we start talking. Gabrielle sits on the edge of the bed and her students Susannah and Ya'cov Darling Khan sit on the floor, eyeing me with intent, evidently ready to diffuse with their fixed stare all potential bad vibes that might be oozing from my purple jumper. I

relish the memory of that conversation to this day and I am grateful.

Inspired by traditions as diverse as dance, zen, shamanism, rock music, the transformative therapeutic work of the legendary Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California, Gabrielle devised the Five Rhythms, a unique and very personal synthesis of all the above. Steeped in her own existential, religious, and candidly related personal struggles, she managed to create a (non-) method that is soulful movement and spiritual practice, with soul never ousted by spirit and the self refreshingly ousted by both. Its uniqueness stems from the obvious perception one has in approaching the Five Rhythms with an open mind that her attempts at universality originate in singularity. Not perverse subjectivism, the curse of our narcissistic era, but singularity; that is, the ability to generate new forms from the depth and marking a breaking point. Is the original soul of Five Rhythms still alive? The question is a trap – a naïve belief in the fable of origins, the pristine word of ground-breakers that may lead to dismiss offhandedly the work of followers and disciples. I don't really know. I also know I am not drawn to its current incarnations, even though I am elated by Sarita's radiance when she comes back from her movement practice or being in awe of the freedom of the way she dances at a party.

My life has been in this respect a movement from one thing to the next: Osho brought me to Zen. Gabrielle brought me to Butoh. They did it unwittingly, one practice effortlessly leading to another. A year after meeting Gabrielle, I started practicing and later performing Butoh, a practice Gabrielle mentions in her book as example of the fifth Rhythm, stillness.

Offshoots of Gabrielle Roth's creation are still present in different forms and shapes. It is a mixed bag. Teachers hooked on spouting insta-spirituality and transcendental platitudes, hiding behind amateur DJing and erratic playlists. Drowning the subtlety and purity of the Five Rhythms wave in a sea of sermonising, vocal fry, anodyne choirs over anodyne beats, confessional tracks, amateur piano and strangled voices spelling out faux-naïve homilies courtesy of the likes of Ane Brun, Blue State, Moondog... you get the drift. I may be simply owing to a generational gap here. So, what? Give me Gabrielle's vocal improvisations, New-York poet-punk drive anytime (her many collaborators included Lenny Kaye of the Patti Smith band and Cyro Battista, percussionist with Laurie Anderson). Gabrielle was no DJ. She was raw and real, seducing us to ourselves, inciting us to move unfussily and with no flourish in the midst of imbalance, demureness, and always on the verge of falling. Take all the space, there is not a particular place where it's 'really happening'. You do what?

Visualisations for a thriving and creative life? I'm just glad I am here! That is my prayer. I nearly got hit by a London bus on the way here. I am just glad to be alive. She would throw a plastic water bottle across the room in exasperation at the manipulative coyness and studied wildness of her dancers. She was the original urban shaman. She created that role from scrap and impersonated it to flawed perfection; it breathed from every pore of her electric body. To me Gabrielle's 'shamanism' was shorthand for an incitement to personify and amplify the complexity of the psyche and recognise its water-in-water embeddedness, its Heraclitan nature of being already the soul of the world. I read her work as Zen-in-motion and differentiate it from the circus of Western magical-thinking shamanism instigated by the dodgy scholarship of Mircea Eliade.

What we have now is at best suburban shamans, bargain reproductions whose hyper moisturised bodymind and studied designer disarray betrays the fact they have never heard of Hell, let alone been there. They have never scrambled up Lucifer's immense, terrifying animal body forever stuck in ice in the bowels of the Earth and in climbing up at last see the frail beauty of the stars at dawn. What we have now are bearers of a torch powered by plastic batteries, self-appointed lineage holders, infamous cultural brownface appropriators of indigenous lore, facilitators of puking ayahuasca weekends (a vivid memory comes back to me: a hotel in Lima with all the young gringos asleep or zoned out in the lounge after a week of going native in the Amazon Forest. Why do we hate ourselves so much that we have to go on cleansing?), short-order brewers of cacao in diarrhoeic ceremonies touted as facilitating emotional openness and 'mindfulness'.

In the events she led – close to the spirit of experimental theatre – Gabrielle was flanked by live musicians; crucially, music to dress up percussion rather than percussion to drive music. Rhythm rules (its etymology means flowing movement) instead of the frosty sentimentality of pop tunes that glamourise insecure attachment styles. Gabrielle wrote well, inspired in the nineteenth century meaning of the word, breathing in the Holy Spirit; imbibing the breath of the Romantics' vision. Her writing pirouetted on the page, merging the deeply personal to the pedagogical, the associative to the anecdotal.

Slivers of the original Five Rhythms DNA are found in Emily Woof's remarkable forthcoming novel *Ecstatic*, a book that sketches an overheated, abstractedly turbulent near-future London and echoes traits of contemporary

movement practices aligned with the Five Rhythms. Woof's novel, her third after *The Whole Wide Beauty* (2010) and *The Lightning Tree* (2015) – alongside a string of notable writing and performing for the stage and performances in some well-known movies – matches in its moments of limpid and soaring prose the best passages of Gabrielle's books. I don't know of any other text on this particular form of dance/spiritual practice able to capture the experience so vividly.

The suburban shaman is exemplified in the novel by Sarah Flint, a harmless but shifty character with 'teaspoon words', in a memorable turn of phrase, who makes two brief appearances. She is a dealer in plant medicine, bodywork, healing. She has to face Ange, the wild woman whose road of excess will lead to the palace of madness.

Ecstatic is a choral book, perspectives glide from one character to another, tributary streams in the pulsing and troubled life of London, all of them converging for the sporadic and precious chance of transient encounters at The Gathering at St Cuthbert's Church in Shadwell, at a time when the town is under siege by turmoil and the increasingly suffocating pressures of obscure forces of repression. These are only sketched in the novel. The reader does not get a real sense of what is going on in the wider world outside the controlled pressure cooker of The Gathering. This might be (unwittingly?) the novel's real accomplishment, showing us how thoroughly self-absorbed these spaces are, how deluded the participants in their belief that dance can heal the world. Their belief is shaken by doubts, as with all neophytes in near-cultish assemblages and it is the occasional voicing of these doubts that makes the novel breathe.

The above split is merely a glaringly visible manifestation of the generalised artificial division between individual and society we all cling to like there's no tomorrow. How long until the notion of transindividuation, first formulated by Gilbert Simondon in 1958 and later expanded by Bernard Stiegler, will begin to percolate in current discourse and practices? Another fifty years? Another hundred years? Transindividuation takes in the emergent, the pre-individual, both of them collective by default. It traverses in one swoop fields as wide as the body, the mind, society, the dreamworld, psyche, the spiritual domain, the soul, dead cells and dead thoughts, discarded memories, dreams and aspirations to come, past and future lovers, friends and enemies – all who affected us and were affected by us.

I don't dance to express myself. I dance as nothing. I dance with the dead and the unborn. I invite them to crawl inside me and all over my frail limbs. I dance as my poor mother dead at fifty-one. I dance as Jean Genet ecstatic and unrepentant in a cell in Fresnes prison, teaching himself how to write by reading the whole of Proust's *À la Recherche* and producing that masterwork *Our Lady of the Flowers* twice, the second time from

memory because the prison warden had confiscated and destroyed it. I am done with the Judgment of Nature who dictates that I act naturally and move naturally, whatever the fuck that means. I am done with the ravenous need to feed on everything I see, and go on collecting 'experience' and shreds of flesh for future wistful wanking in the toilet of this rickety old train destination unknown. As I dance with my butoh comrades I see the dead hovering on the ceiling, watching us quiver and shiver and kill time in slow motion, and after the dance as I walk home and all is quiet, I see the dead in the night sky on a cold night in May and I think of Hijikata dancing as his dead sister and I weep.

At an international psychotherapy conference in Vienna in 2018, at a time when Austria had a far-right coalition in power, I loved being in the city and a couple of times sneaked out of the conference to have repeated glances at Egon Schiele's remarkable paintings at the Leopold Museum. His bodies substantiated by unspiritual light, traversed by the dynamism of active and passive forces, provoking a thermal effect on my own body: heat and impersonal affect. Schiele, the anti-yuppie *par excellence*, his art still turning the open-hearted viewer from voyeur to accomplice in a process of near transubstantiation.

During a coffee break I ask my Viennese colleagues how it is to live and work in Vienna. It's great, I do my therapy work, yoga practice, Five Rhythms, and have a fun social life in this lovely city. And what about the government and their stance on migrants? Oh, we can't let people steal our jobs you know, we must protect our borders. At the time I still naively believed that people involved in some kind of psychological and spiritual exploration are by default progressive. My colleagues saw themselves as liberal, but their supine acceptance of the status quo made me gasp. That was also the first time I realised the other face of fascism; no longer crude and murderous coercion of people but repressive desublimation: Do your alternative things, darling, have your little pleasures, enjoy your psychic explorations and packaged liberties in a multicoloured cocoon. That will keep you happy; you won't have time or energy to look at the fucked-up state of the world. You won't notice that today is Nakba day; the genocide in Gaza will be white noise; nor will you hear the murderers at the top chanting their prayers out loud. Be happy sweetheart, be a free spirit; do your thing; dance your little dance, sing your little song while we turn the country into a jingoistic cesspit.

Things have surely changed since then, and for the worse. We are now deep in the throes of conformist rebellion and transgressive populism,

heralded on 6th January 2021 by the assault on the Capitol by a mob of right-wing thugs, members of the Oath Keepers and Proud Boys as well as new-agers, among them QAnon Shamans and others proponents of conspiracy theories blended with yoga, wellness and all sorts of crackpot beliefs. Transgression is no longer transformative but another gimmick in the arsenal of the ego-self. Turns out that breaking the norm on a weekend workshop only reinforces the norm. Transgression is now firmly within the ideology of fascists and the far-right. Steve Bannon had urged to flood the zone with shit, and the basket of deplorables chastised by Hillary Clinton did just that: they embraced their deplorability with relish by smearing their own excrement on the walls.

What is the nature of the venom spreading on a sincere soul quest? At present one plausible answer is the all-pervasive Californian Ideology, that lethal post-hippie/yuppie combination. In the novel, the Crucifix at St Cuthbert's church, named after the 600 AD Northumbrian hermit and where *The Gathering* takes place, is perceived by Bridge, dance teacher Lois's devotee and for a short time her assistant, as alien and separate from the dance event she is helping organising, as a prophet of the old religion superseded by what she sees as a new brand of hedonists and heretics. One gets the impression that Bridge's verdict on the old and new religion also reflects the novel's perspective. But there could not be a wider gap than the one between hedonists and heretics. Hedonists are irredeemably trapped within the cage of a mind-numbing self whose desire for constant gratification betrays lack and desperation, and whose only 'creativity' is the elaborate checklist of all tomorrow's parties and all futile exertions to come. Their zenith is Burning Man, the annual corporate fest in the Nevada Black Rock's desert, quintessence of all corporate con-spirituality, barefoot rich people in shorts chasing the phantom of liberty in exchange for a wad of cash, guided by a bunch of wannabes whose nose job led them straight to God.

Heretics are on the other hand steeped in the very heart and soul of religion. They always demand more intelligent, at times mystical interpretations of sacred texts and practices; they claim a far more rigorous morality than the mere blabbering of liturgy for social and political advancement. There are no heretics to be found in these pages for nearly all (no matter how wildly they semaphore their self-expression) swims in the dire and scenic drama of their own gossamer. Nietzsche, patron saint of the novel, whose notorious quote about chaos being necessary for breeding a dancing star is the novel's epigraph, was above everything else an ascetic. His boundless

freedom was rooted in discipline, his exuberance steeped in affliction. ("You need discipline to be free," I remember Gabrielle saying). Nietzsche was no trendy guy out for a good time, high on a keto diet and supplier of a beyond-good-and-evil morality-while-u-wait. His notion of the Dionysian, which he pretty much invented for the modern world, is steeped in Christ. Dionysus vs. the Crucified is as true as Dionysus precursor of Christ. Lest we forget, Dionysus, son of Zeus, was dismembered by the Titans. I blame the Romans and their Pixar-style, infantile version we inherited from them for turning the dangerous transgender god, patron of the marginalised and blesser of the dissolution of self through war, violence and orgiastic madness into a tipsy Bacchus down the pub. Misreading Nietzsche is what we do, and that includes the existentialist tradition and many existential therapists who routinely turn him into a self-mythologising blustering champion of immorality and do-whatever-you-want pseudo-philosophy.

Christ is the Prince of Decreation, illegitimate son of the child god Dionysus, witnessing from his agony and final surrender in the inconspicuous corner of a smelly old church in Shadwell the sweaty bodies of amateur self-expressionists busy purging themselves. An impossible divide. Self-expression – chasing after the phantom of liberty only to end up bolstering and redeccorating the golden cage of the self. Decreation – expecting nothing, seeking nothing, grasping nothing, becoming nothing and letting the ocean flood the dewdrop.

The Crucified becomes nothing in abandonment (*Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachtani* – my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?), a place of complete anguish and complete ecstasy, for the meaning of ecstatic is to stand beside oneself, to stand apart, to be displaced, to give up possession on oneself. This is the one true step into the absolute (to set free, untie, loosen), the final shedding of all frills and flounces. What do suburban shamans shed exactly in their weekend exertions, through their transient assemblages in dilapidated churches, alone, in pairs, in fours, in groups of eight? Sadness falls like snow so silent so sweet after sweating out one's inscrutable prayers, a tribute to the nothingness that we are, stalked by the pressure to fill the void that is our wonder and aura, the space that gives a passing deity a chance to show up and spell it out in a language incomprehensible to post-hippies and yuppies alike, to trainee counsellors and their spiritually constipated supervisors, to waitresses and baristas and the jobless coming to The Gathering from myriad of cubicles scattered across a city traversed by the dark river through the traffic and the heat, the shouts and merry cries and desperate cries of a city perennially asleep and perennially wired on the artificial awakenings of chemsex and the bunged up yelps of air-conditioned dungeons.

Ecstatic? Sure, why not. But who we believe ourselves to be, this scrawny ghost courtesy of René Descartes, scrambling for a semblance of self-

existence is already *ek-static*, outside itself, non-self-identical, differentiated from the start.

The crowds rioting in the London streets far from The Gathering are also ecstatic, beside themselves, distraught, outraged. Certain bodies don't really need to go to a Saturday ecstatic gathering with a dodgy soundtrack. With their lives displaced, ungrieved, ungrievable, traversed by grief, by sacrosanct political rage, by shame and exclusion, they have no choice but being beside themselves.

Mari meets her old friend and once lover Lovren, who is now a successful curator. He praises The Triptych, painted across three huge panels, one of her first big works and wants to exhibit it. It is a *pietà* in reverse, "a young Christ, broad and vulnerable like the Welsh farmers' sons she'd known back home, holding the small body of his mother" (p145). The work is now in Berlin, and the owner will lend it for the exhibition of her work Lovren wants to put together. Her current work is non-existent, however, and his insistence is both annoying and appealing to Mari who wants to do art again despite her current circumstances. She sidesteps his overbearing attempts at bewitchment by suggesting they leave the café where they are sitting and walk. And as with other passages where the gaze turns to London itself, the writing becomes literal ecstatic, Mari absorbing the ugly scenery around her, barely hearing what Lovren says, including his jaded declaration that he loves cities.

Cranes thrust upwards into the sky. Massive drills are poised like daggers to skewer the earth. The builder's hoarding boasts BRINGING LIFE TO THE CAPITAL – to which someone has added in spray paint – IST. And above it is scrawled ENOUGH IS ENOUGH...

The building site looks dead: no workers, no noise, the machines frozen in place. At Battersea they slip through the gap in the wall and go down the shore...The water is flat and smooth as milk. Two dredgers on the far bank scoop silt from the riverbed making a distant lazy clanking.

(p146)

The vital force within Mari is a daimon called Fox, and Fox urges her on to leave the stale and the decayed. The Triptych is old and useless, Mari says to herself – what is the point of showing it?

It references an old religion that has nothing to say, like those stone virgins in the church where she dances. It is past – there is

only now. Unfolding newness. She feels suddenly trapped and cannot bear it. She must keep moving forward, surviving and adapting to what presents itself. Fox takes her chances. Fox doesn't ask if they are deserved or sanctioned. Fox scavenges for what she needs. Fox has swagger. Fox has confidence.

(p147)

While the novel on the whole inevitably misreads Nietzsche and the Dionysian, the Fox evokes Nietzsche's spirit accurately. His fundamental understanding of the psyche as labyrinth, of the psychic landscape being populated by a myriad of affects with their own 'personality' and *modus vivendi* is key (Bazzano, 2019, 2023, 2025, 2026). True, this remarkable insight has been appropriated and duly sterilised by that Swiss bourgeois doctor, Carl Gustav Jung, but it remains powerful all the same. In this lies the potential for transformation, that is, metamorphosis, as opposed to cosmetic change and temporary release from the burdens of middle-class ideology in whose clutches we are all hopelessly stuck.

Lovren is stuck with their past, their old story as well as what she used to paint. Mari challenges Lovren to ask her what she is painting now and when he does, she replies she is painting the body, dance and – you guessed it – the Dionysian. They strike a deal: she will exhibit the old and the new, a replica of their own relationship. Fox takes her places in the end, one of the outlets of the artistic drive to self-expression if a rare one. Success. On her way to the opening, Mari in Stockholm sipping champagne in a red dress “tailored at the waist and an emerald shawl pinned with a brooch of dark pewter. High heels for confidence” (pp291-2). She looks at her new work and can't take it in.

It's full of the rhythm of chaos. Two figures dance in the side panels, filled with their own maelstroms. In the centre is the beast. It is unsettling and urgent. A creature – anguished and tormented. It looks as if it will tear free from the flat canvas, rip itself away from the scarred skin of the earth...

I have a buyer for it, says Lovren. We need to talk about your next commission.

(p293)

Every work of art, Adorno reminds us, is a crime not committed. And for every artist who momentarily succeeds in taming Fox or Wolf, Hecate or Valefor and turning them into gilded artefacts, there are thousands whose talent is to yield to those daimons and let madness reign. Enter Ange – feral, fierce, slave to the rhythm. She was once Lois's lover and continues

to be Lois's complement, priestess of the Chthonic Earth, unavoidable counterpart to Lois's benign allegiance to the rosy notion of Gaia as self-regulating organism. She embodies to aching degree the destiny/destination awaiting those stuck in the pursuit of freedom and become prey at some point or other to the psychiatric police who do not recognise a Baccha when they see one. In both cases the mistake – for the successful artist as well as for those unfortunates who glimpse the whole of the moon – is not pursuing freedom but turning it into an idol, having a picture of it in oneself.

For all the shamanistic drama on display there are no real encounters in *The Gathering* but only pale reflections of them. The dancers' intention is self-expression, a vibrant route whose final destination is gleeful narcissism. The other – others, people as much as God – are mostly absent. Dance here means dancing away from. It is difficult not to fall for Mari at first, Mari with her struggling existence, her keen attention to the world and her aesthetic sensibility, the only one with Ghyll who is really moved by the dance and close to falling in love with him. Ghyll is a trainee therapist and the way his sessions with his supervisor and later his first client are described may be seen as a caricature until you realise that therapy has become a caricature of itself. Mari decides that Ghyll is going to entrap her and for that reason he will be her Muse, not her lover: nothing like a touch of dissociation for feeding an artistic endeavour and collecting a handful of trophies. During the Long Dance, a three-day marathon immersively and convincingly described as a collective bad trip of exhaustion and confusion, Mari sews up a patchy solution to her persistent dilemma of whether to allow herself to be affected by her feelings for him or scavenge instead on his live body as research for her next canvas: she pushes him down a backroom's concrete floor and fucks him.

Inasmuch as it draws on the Five Rhythms experience, *Ecstatic* is a remarkable novel on the third rhythm, chaos. Chaos, Gabrielle Roth (1997: 114) writes, is where “the rhythms of flowing and staccato collide”. Chaos, followed by lyrical and stillness “probably describes most meetings of the feminine and the masculine, whether within our psyches or at the Pravda bar on Lafayette Street”. You don't land straight into chaos but go through flowing and staccato first. And what arises is unpredictable and often close to adolescent memories.

Chaos is like deep-sea diving. We plunge down into the ocean of our being and marvel at the images floating around within us, images that stir tremendous feelings. Often these images provoke sadness, for they represent parts of us that have been hidden and denied. Sometimes they take us back to our adolescence when the voices of our desires and dreams were first drowned out by a cacophony of advice and instructions blasting from our parents and teachers. This early loss is particularly tragic, as chaos is the gateway to the intuitive mind, the part of us that holds the key to our destiny, our purpose, our contribution, our presence, and our individuality.

(ibid: 117)

In a reverse of the Cartesian body-mind split revered by mainstream discourse, the most dedicated dancers in the novel often disregard the mind, which becomes the domain of sweet, nerdy men who idealise the ‘freedom’ of wild women dancing away like there’s no tomorrow. Why is it that novels and books and TV series from the British Broadcasting Corporation portray men either as downright assholes or bumbling weeds? Fareed is a researcher at the Cognitive Research Lab and has been invited by Siski Pogjak to The Gathering in response to his brief on the Online Dance Forum. He is bewildered by the atmosphere of sheer intensity and wildness and hilariously rationalises it afterwards a

...physiological event. A coordinated neurological response to rhythm and proximity. Motor cortex, cerebellum, basal ganglia – all doing exactly what they evolved to do, sending billions of signals into muscle and bone. Synchronisation increases heart rate, blood flow. It releases oxytocin. Dopamine. Serotonin. Known effects. Documented. Predictable

(p49)

But something in him moves and it is genuinely touching to witness a new vitality stirring up in him. He himself has been touched but also baffled by Siski Pogjak, by her “range of displacement and trajectory, her velocity and direction...She moved with impossible freedom, like wind, like water...She was ineffable, beyond the constraints of his technology. Siski Pogjak can never be reduced to a set of data points” (p79). It is tempting to be as mesmerised by her dancing as Fareed is, to be seduced by a ‘body’ free to roam and a ‘mind’ cast in a remote corner of the psyche. Siski Pogjak as Cartesian shaman, whose freedom we are invited to idealise and venerate is expressed by the elegant able body of

the young and the good-looking. But what happens to a Cartesian shaman's so-called 'mind'? Call me a killjoy, but I have met too many free people in my life whose freedom does not extend to others, let alone the fucked-up world we live in. I have known too many beyond-good-and-evil peddlers who go and vote for the Tories after having drawn everybody's attention in the room to the free display of their so-called freedom. How wonderful it would be if experimentation with movement would spill out in an emancipatory political act. Involuntary memory of dancing to live music with face paint and wild clothes in Bologna in 1977 front of the riot police. Granted, dancing makes us more alive. But what is it to live? Here is a tentative response: to follow the rupture, the breach in our habitual sleepwalking to its ultimate political consequences. To be faithful to the event occasioned by our dance in order to give birth to a new truth that detonates into the world and brings about an articulation and an intelligence capable of counteracting the profound imbecility of the present. I see glimpses of this in Woof's novel. I bet that would be chastised as too 'heady' by the Cartesian Dancers Network. To think? To think differently? To create new concepts that translate the sorrow and joy and commonality of our dance into a political project? Nah. It is too heady, we are too spontaneous for that. We believe in grunts, shouts and wild gesticulations and shun all else as belonging to the 'head'. What is to live then, beyond the bourgeois phantom of free expression? It is, my comrade Michalis Tegos (2026, p133) would say, "to bring into the world that which the world cannot contain – and to remain faithful to it. To be present in the present".

The novel begins and ends with Lois, the dance teacher and instigator of The Gathering. Idealised by her dancers as "Teacher of Grace" who "lived in Siberia and received wisdom from Mother Standing Tree who drummed her into being from the realms of animals" and who can see "the animal spirit inside people" (p39), she is in fact a refreshingly ordinary woman who lives alone with her dog George. She still dreams of Ange, of her skin and hair, of lying together on flat stones in New Mexico's high desert. She has managed to create a community of sorts, a place of refuge where a handful of misfits can for a brief moment feel the blood sing in their veins and dance their joys and sorrows to the high heavens. No small feat in our atomized existence of quiet desperation and dramatic bursts of equally desperate merriment.

And if the old wave has died out, a new one is already gaining momentum. A new opening, an event that might draw us near the otherness within and

without we never touch. We bloom and wither and bloom and wither again, entrapped as we are in the carousel of time and in the space between gaze at the faraway stars.

Manu Bazzano

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