

THE WAY OF THE CRANE

Alexandra Fidyk

Abstract

Using pastiche, a dreamscape and reflection upon it, offers entry to a centring practice. In holding both, a new image emerges. The dreamscape—an unexpected scene of cranes in joyous dance—unfolds as actual dream and offers a metaphor for understanding the dreamer's life. By extension, the dream returns practice as a syn-aesthetic engagement, which she calls expressive arts pedagogy. In this condensed yet nuanced rumination, personal and professional, poetic and haptic, participating and witnessing blur. This practice, the way of the Crane, is timely because it introduces, by embodying its own phenomena, a relational pedagogy for our troubled times—a pedagogy that integrates image, movement, storying, silence, sound, rhythm, and synchrony, while touching the pulse of life beyond human. As an intrapsychic and interspecies image, the dream symbolizes the richness that breaks forth when holding complementary opposites in tension. It privileges somatic, intuitive, creative, and contemplative processes. It, too, signals the centrality of testimony and witnessing—potential companion enactments. This earthen practice calls us to lean into the ancient wisdom of centring—illustrating the way the centre of the dance entwines with the centre of oneself and one's work and the centre of the world. It is an old wisdom reconfigured for contemporary challenges.

Bio

Alexandra Fidyk, professor, philosopher, and poet serves the Faculty of Education, University of Alberta, Canada. She engages with youth and teachers on issues of wellbeing through body-centred and creative-centred processes. Her transdisciplinary scholarship integrates her background in poetic inquiry, hermeneutics, process philosophy, and life writing. She has won awards for her research, scholarship and teaching at institutional and national levels. Balancing these domains, she is a Jungian somatic psychotherapist; Integrated Body Psychotherapist; Somatic Experiencing Practitioner; Sandplay Therapy Trainee and Expressive Arts Therapy Trainee. Contact: fidyk@ualberta.ca



*Dreamscape*¹

I was near the shoreline—where grasses reach waist-high; young blades sway in the breeze, their warm bitter fragrance rides the wind. It was near dusk, when twilight begins to transmute all things. I had been walking for hours through native grassland, adorned with wild flowers, when I ascended a slow sloping knoll. I had a feeling, before seeing, that something extraordinary was near.

Initially, I was struck by the subtle verdant shades of parakeet, olive, and pine, which differentiated grasses—bearded wheat, foxtail, sweet grass, fringed brome; and then, the buzz of flying life among stalks and leaves; the blue of Old Man's Lake—a true mirroring of the early June sky of northern Saskatchewan: Australian opal.

Soft trumpeting in synchrony with prancing, an almost indiscernible sound now dominates my senses.

As my eyes adjust, it takes a moment to comprehend the scene, as its rarity makes it unimaginable. It might best be described as ecstatic dancing.ⁱⁱ Agile bodies adorned by exquisite feathers—cool slate, soft steel, muted silver—gorgeous wings, extending several feet in all directions and directing the evening air; fine boned legs prance, defying their appearance; bodies sweep; wings arc; wryly necks bend as if independently partnered. Each element fraternizes with the other. Each in harmony as a whirling whole. Sufi dervishes dancing.

The scene must reflect the origins of ritualistic dance. Raw energy. Trance. Youth in the woods, discovering the rapture and disorder of bodies edged to the limits of endurance and desire. Dust kicks up, ancient sand lands lightly upon feet and legs. White and black blur—a mass of goose grey throbbing. Red flashes through *jetés, assemblés* and *temps levé*.ⁱⁱⁱ Sunrays pierce wet amber; radiate gold. From this centre, the eye focuses the whole. One dancer.^{iv}



Dreamscape Ruminations

This dream symbolizes my current situation. External elements conjoining—teaching, writing, research, psychotherapy, reading, and training after a decade of intense treatment for tick-borne illness. Bodies of theory and practice, defined by distinct fields, requiring years of focus, dissolve once-enfleshed-

by-living. Internalized, their borders grow porous, not only by somatic, intuitive, and contemplative processes but also by testimony and witnessing. A process of nearly two decades reappears as flash synaesthetic images.^v Joy resounds because each touches the other, amplifying capacities and softening boundaries, including my own. Just as each crane^{vi} leaps, *sautés*, spins—following its own heart—they marry in rhythm and breathe as one.^{vii}

This movement offers a kind of testimonial. I sense that the culmination of years of discipline, sacrifice, suffering, and loss has stilled. From its elongated, slow undoing, a seed has birthed. Almost imperceptible, almost unbelievable, a seed, a hybrid, takes centre. A centre we cannot go beyond. We can only go through, and down, down, down, as a 20-year descent with chronic illness required.^{viii} Only now has a long blackening silvered—a movement of other directions. Blackening describes a time when light and fire disappear and all things move with unbearable slowness. Where earth encasement by coldness and isolation numbs, and the life force can dissolve.

Of this placement, Jung (1989) says, “the center is the goal, and everything is directed toward that center” (p. 198). Through the dream, I understand that through dance—authentic movement governed by instinct, attunement, and adherence to an ancient call—comes freedom. “Everything in the world has its own centre, that place where the sacred manifests itself in totality,” whereby “to overlook the archetypal world is to dismiss the possibility of healing. Psyche must include the entire spectrum—from instinct to archetype” (Harris, 2001, p. 22). Feather with leg, bone with wing, loss with acceptance, suffering with attendance. In this dance, the definition and contrast of white and black lose their edges. They round; they blur; and in time, *if* grace appears, there can be a centring.

To go into the dance, we must be able to let the intensity—“the Dionysian rapture and disorder and the celebration of chaos, of potentiality, the experience of surrender—[move;] we must be able to let it live in our bodies, in our hands, through our hands into the materials” with which we work, including psychic material (Richards, 1964, p. 12). “We must be steady enough in ourselves, to be open and to let the winds of life blow through us, to be our breath, our inspiration; to breathe with them, mobile and soft in the limberness of our bodies, in our agility, our ability, . . . to dance, and yet to stand upright” (p. 12). To go into the dance is to let the centre of the dance meet the centre of you with the centre of your work.^{ix} Centre to centre—guides our movement. It keeps us out of binaries and in paradox and synergy with the mystery of existence.

To go into the dance, the way of Crane, is kin to the manifestation of a union of the complementary opposites, a *coniunctio*, felt as “an unstruck sound beyond the realm of the senses—silence” (Markell, 1998, p. 107). As in the relationship between parts and whole, sounds and silence, movements and stillness, we see the Eastern understanding of the “fullness of emptiness”—an experience of “*being a witness in the body itself*” (Markell, 2002, p. 111). This paradox is the centre. In many cultures, the centre is the eye; the eye symbolizes the Self, wholeness.^x And, the eye bears witness to the peculiar and spontaneous creative activity in matter; the primordial image expresses the intrinsic and unconditioned creative power of the psyche” (Jung, CW6, para. 748). Long revered, the eye is associated with second sight, prophecy, and visions. Eye images sculptured in wood, metal, and sand as play or therapy, “most frequently appear after the constellation of the Self, as the process unfolds at the vegetative level of the natural, instinctual life” (p. 110). Importantly, eye renderings “indicate that the transformation itself is being perceived by the receptive mind, revealing at the deepest level that the body-mind has been openly and directly present. This in itself is a wordless or preconscious process” (p. 110).

As in the symbolism of Crane as waterbird, equally agile in air, water, and earth, I am reminded of the years attending illness, trauma, and psychological complexes whereby the dream evidences integration underway between upper and lower, thought and feeling, air and earth—the intertidal zone where “consciousness and the unconscious meet concretely” (Weinrib, 1983, p. 69). As I am learning further in my sandplay process,^{xi} letting my hands work in earth loosens unconscious material to form images and scenes of importance to my consciousness. This unfettered play^{xii}—as I did in my youth with sand and clay and today gardening and writing—mediates between complementarities, such as “horizontal and vertical dimensions, the mysterious and the concrete, matter and spirit, conscious and unconscious” (Markell, 2002, p. 108), in the same way that dance unites.

How might the way of the Crane renew our teaching where we grow more conscious of the ways our practices are always already rooted in ancient images? Where word is always tied to the body? How might we hold tension, with complementarities, that breaks open, offering us new directions? How might our pedagogical practices centre, round, call upon the unconscious, image, sound, storying, silence, movement, rhythm and synchrony as ways of being-becoming and knowing? And, how might we invite dreamscapes to crystallize into new practices for artful teaching?

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Endnotes

ⁱ This dreamscape offers a pastiche of an excerpt from Jung’s (1989) *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. Pastiche is a literary technique that leads to the creation of an original work yet in the style of another author and the structure of the text. Imitating the authorial choices of a writer can be an effective way to demonstrate appreciation of their artistic work. This technique encourages close attention to rhythm, form, and affect; as well, it pays homage to Jung’s art by writing of the very thing of his life’s work: dreams, symbols, and psychological maturation. Of relevance, this dreamscape imitates structure and syntax as a way to illustrate that even form is rooted in synaesthetic image.

ⁱⁱ While this movement focuses on dance, it becomes more complete with a vast sensorial interplay of colour, light, texture, image, sound, silence, rhythm, synchrony, and its unfolding story and meaning-making. The dreamscape impacts deeply because of its synergistic relations that extend beyond any one element. The combination of these elements embody the substructure of Expressive Arts Therapy which utilizes various arts that transition from one modality to another, unfolding as a composite through imagination and play. Expressive Arts Therapy is a “circumscribed form of psychotherapy grounded in arts-based methodology and ‘bottom-up’ approaches that [accentuate] the sensory-based qualities of movement, music and sound, visual arts, dramatic enactment, and other forms of creative communication” (Malchiodi, 2020, p. xi). I use this therapeutic modality to introduce “expressive arts pedagogy,” which engages learners in multiple conjoined arting processes and practices within a lesson as a teaching-learning strategy.

ⁱⁱⁱ Five types of ballet jumps include: 1) Sauté is any jump from two feet landing on two feet; sometimes, one foot to the same foot; 2) Temps Levé is a hop from one foot to the same foot; 3) Jeté is any jump or leap from one foot to the other; 4) Assemblé is a jump from one foot landing simultaneously on two feet; 5) Sissonne is a jump from two feet, landing on one foot (Hungerford, 2016).

^{iv} There is one more layer to reveal in this dreamscape, one that also centres the eye. In 2005 at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, I met with a Blackfoot shaman who initiated a vision quest. Sitting upon his enormous buffalo hide with sweet grass burning, we journeyed into the past. . . . When we returned, I carried a shiny, wet amber eye, framed by sleek grey-brown feathers, capped with white and red. As visionary, seer, he saw me dancing with cranes. It was on this day that I was gifted with and by Crane.

^v Here, “synaesthetic image” conveys a multi-sensorial experience where seeing, hearing, orienting (balance, temperature, etc.), and feeling for example. “Image” is not meant to mean visual only.

^{vi} Revered by many First Nations across the Americas as a storytale bird, as one of the oldest living bird species, the Sandhill Crane claims the longest successful tenure on earth, a pre-eminent position in the world of birds. The Sandhill stands “as an emissary from an ancient and largely unknowable age” (Grooms, 1992, p. 39). “We owe it the respect due a time traveller, whose eerie yellow eyes have witnessed the birth and death of glaciers and the innumerable scramblings of the North American species” (p. 39).

^{vii} The Crane Dance has been performed at fertility rituals since pagan times. According to myth and historical accounts by Plutarch, and described in detail by Homer in *The Iliad*, this is the dance that gives meaning to dance as ancient ritual, possibly one of the first where men and women danced together (Price, 2001).

^{viii} This 20-year descent does not contradict the ten years of intense treatment stated earlier in the paragraph. I lived and suffered nearly a decade (September 2001-December 2009) with undiagnosed lyme disease and multiple co-infections, manifesting as separate illnesses such as gall bladder attacks (removal) and ovarian tumours. Once diagnosed and confirmed via Canadian, American, and German testing, aggressive treatments took an additional decade before the spirocete entered remission (April 2019).

^{ix} By “work,” I do not mean job, task, or externally required responsibility. Rather, I mean a calling, a thing-ing which gives our lives joy and purpose.

^x Across cultures, children begin drawing with circles, vertical and horizontal lines. When drawing what can be likened to a face or person, the eyes are large spherical shapes. The eye has been associated with the third eye, healing, medicine wheels, mandalas, circles, and soul as well as transformation and wisdom.

^{xi} As a requirement for Sandplay Therapy training, I amplified a symbol of importance to me and drew connections between it and my therapeutic practice. I amplified Crane. In doing so, I found significance not only in therapeutic terms but also philosophic and pedagogic. That is, the ancient presence of Crane speaks to resilience, evolutionary adaptation, and the power of eco-education. The symbol amplification brought to the foreground the complexity of specie longevity as well as impact on personal life though studying an image in depth through multi-modal means (sonic recordings, documentaries, lived experience, myth, story, archival documentation, and so on).

^{xii} Dora Kalff, out of her own personal analysis and analytic training in addition to her work with Margaret Lowenfeld, child psychiatrist and developer of the World Technique, created Jungian-centred Sandplay Therapy. Sandplay Therapy is a nonverbal, therapeutic modality that uses sand, figures, and water to create images, scenes, and miniature worlds that reflect a person’s state of being—thoughts, struggles, concerns, challenges. Free and protected space is central to the player being able to drop into their inner worlds and recreate them in the sandbox.

