

## THE EMBODIMENT OF HOPE: A DIALOGUE ON DANCE AND DISPLACED CHILDREN

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### Introduction

Again and again, when faced with a concept or phenomenon that I try to understand more deeply, I find myself asking: how does it feel? What does it do? Where does it dwell? Such contemplations may relate to both everyday life and professional contexts. As a dance educator and scholar, I feel at home with knowledge creation through bodily sensations and felt experiences, acknowledging that such an approach is by no means only available to dancers.

My interest, commitment, and incessant academic curiosity towards “knowing in my body,” or embodied knowledge stems from the intertwining of wide-ranging bodily practices, including dance, yoga, and meditation. Thus, exploring the significance of bodily experiences in knowing, learning and interacting has occupied my days in academia, and has led me to finding inspiration for my practice as dance educator and researcher from embodied, performative, arts-based, and artistic approaches to research (Pelias, 2005; Gergen & Gergen, 2012; Guttorm, Löytönen, Anttila & Valkeemäki, 2016). Such research practices involve attending to multisensory experiences and aim at connecting thinking with sensing.

Thus, when reflecting on the notion of hope, I find myself wondering: how does hope become embodied? What does it do? How does it feel? These questions take me beyond conventional discourses on hope that consider hope often from psychological, philosophical, and theological perspectives. Hope has been studied for centuries by philosophers and theologians, and most of them have recognized the significance of hope in regard to human motivation, religious belief or politics (Bloeser & Stahl, 2017, para 1.). In psychology, hope has been studied since the 1950's, and defined as “the perception that one's goals can be attained”, or as “the belief that one can find pathways to desired goals and become motivated to use those pathways” (Snyder, Rand, & Sigmon, 2002, p. 257). Snyder, Rand and Sigmon, the authors of what they refer to as the ‘hope theory’ (2002), also propose that hope “serves to drive the emotions and well-being of people” (p. 257). What surprises me is that in these discussions hope seems to be connected to a desired outcome or

goal. The goal may be realistic or unrealistic, but nevertheless, it is somehow distant or “out there.” Such definition seems disembodied. My intuition points towards hope as fuel waiting to be ignited, or a flickering flame within – a flame that needs oxygen, nevertheless. If so, how can hope be nurtured, what could be the oxygen for hope?

In my own practice as dance educator since the 1980’s, I have witnessed how shared moments of expressive movement ignite joy and meaning within learners and how such moments enliven shared social and physical spaces. My practice-based research has laid ground for unearthing the notion hope from an embodied perspective. However, my work has mostly taken place in my native country, Finland, and although the contexts have by no means been unadventurous (e.g., Anttila, 2003; 2008), I am curious to learn how dance may ignite joy and hope in exceptional settings and arduous conditions. In order to deepen my insights regarding hope through dance education I have engaged in a dialogue with a Danish colleague, Anamet Magven, who has taken part in a dance education project at a Russian orphanage, which is a setting rarely discussed in arts education literature. Her work caught my interest back in 2010 when I read her article on this dance project (Magven, 2010). In the article she discusses the phenomenon of *attunement*, which for her, refers to working with understanding the sensed. This notion seems closely connected to my experiences and interest in embodied ways of knowing. Through engaging in dialogue with Magven, my purpose is to understand the notion of hope from the perspective of sensing, living body, and in connection to the practice of dance and arts education.

Other partners in this dialogue are scholars and authors who have explored hope as action and as affect. Both action and affect relate to embodiment, and thus, seem relevant in this venture. First, I will revisit Paulo Freire’s (1921-1997) work, especially his thinking on “pedagogy of hope” (1996). Freire has inspired me greatly for the past 20 years, ever since my doctoral work on dialogical dance pedagogy (Anttila, 2003). Freire’s (1996) notion of “critical hope” (p. 8) has been central to progressive education. I acknowledge that many critical educational scholars (e.g., hooks, 1994; Giroux, 1997) have built on Freire’s legacy and brought it to other contexts and current times in significant ways. However, I will make a detour from these developments and instead search for support for an embodied perspective on hope from the notion of affect. This notion has gained increasing scholarly interest during past few decades (e.g., Anderson, 2006; Braidotti, 2016; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Thrift, 2008). This literature, albeit complex, resonates greatly with my personal, bodily experiences in as a dancer, dance educator, and in everyday life. I am curious to find out how Freirean education in hope, the notion of hope as affect, and the dialogue with Anamet

may enrich my understanding regarding the embodiment of hope, and support my quest for hopeful dance education.

## **Education in hope**

There is hope, however timid, on the street corners, a hope in each and every one of us. (Freire, 1996, p. 8)

Hope is a central theme in Paulo Freire's work. For him, it is an ontological, existential need. I understand this to mean that human life is inevitably and completely bound to this notion of hope. The lack of hope, or hopelessness, is a distortion of that ontological need, as Freire asserts:

I do not understand human existence, and the struggle needed to improve it, apart from hope and dream. Hope is an ontological need. Hopelessness is but hope that has lost its bearings, and become a distortion of that ontological need. (1996, p. 8)

For me, Freire's words mean that hope, even when "losing its bearings," lingers in human consciousness, waiting to be brought back to life. The reminiscence of being hopeful, of having experienced hope, is difficult to erase – it is part of our constitution of being human.

British educational scholar Darren Webb (2010) compares Freire's thinking with psychological hope theory that separates cognitive and affective domains of human existence. Webb states that Freire (1996; 1998; 2007) refuses to recognize this separation, and "regards hope, like knowledge, as an experience of the entire body, involving emotions, desires, dreams, thought processes and intuitions" (p. 329). Freire's view on hope thus departs from dualistic views on consciousness, knowledge, and learning. Dualistic conceptions have dominated educational research and shaped pedagogical practices for centuries. Such models and practices often fail to engage learners fully, as sensing, feeling, and acting human beings. Herein lies Freire's (1996) key idea of pedagogy of hope, which reflects "a need for a kind of education in hope" (p. 9) that is grounded in the idea of hope as an ontological need, as something that is an integral element of being human. Education in hope connects the mind and the body; it is grounded in practice and involves action. Instead of "instilling" hope into learners, as the psychological approach suggests, *education in hope evokes hope and gives it guidance* (see Webb, 2010, p. 329). I understand this to mean that hope is contagious – it spreads, flows, moves. When hope animates and mobilizes educators, they may

become critical, progressive educators, able to encounter and work with disengaging, immobilizing, or even paralyzing forces in society. While all children and all learners, in my opinion, are entitled to education in hope, such an approach to education is urgent especially in contexts in which conditions are dire. I believe it is critical hope that mobilizes educators, like Anamet, to step outside their own comfort zones towards such contexts and unknown territories.

### **Critical hope and social change**

Critical hope mobilizes human beings towards guided, concrete action, and enables them to take part in social change. Critical hope seeks to “unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be” (Freire, 1996, p. 9). It is “characterized by outrage at the obscenity of injustice but restrained by a concern with concrete material data that keeps one’s feet placed firmly on the ground” (Webb, 2010, p. 337). Freire (1996), indeed, warns against sheer hopefulness:

As an ontological need, hope needs practice in order to become historical concreteness. That is why there is no hope in sheer hopefulness. The hoped-for is not attained by dint of raw hoping. Just to hope is to hope in vain. (p. 9)

This concreteness means, for me, taking actual steps of acting upon justice. Anamet did not find herself in a Russian orphanage by chance. Her project was preceded by many events and was made possible by individuals who foresaw the significance in the work, and were dedicated to its realization. A key person in this case was Lev Shulman, a Russian dance producer with a wide international and national network. Lev, according to Anamet, worked from personal curiosity and interest, often seeking certain kinds of special situations and conditions for work. Lev has also been a central figure in the development of contemporary dance in Russia, a development fuelled by Gorbachev's Perestroika and Derrida's deconstruction. (Vasenina, 2011). Yekaterina Vasenina (2011) elaborates:

Non-classic, non-totalitarian movement wasn't necessarily expressed as a protest. It became possible . . . Freed body was happy to misbehave, be delirious, unexpectedly brake or assert itself in a new way, draw newly gained senses, expressing through the body developing and transforming liberties . . . Such dance would exist simply because there is a body. People wanted to sing different, new songs, they wanted to dance different dances without knowing

exactly how but having much enthusiasm, which for a long time remained the main fuel for Russian contemporary dance community.

This account, for me, illuminates how hope may become manifest within and among moving, breathing, living bodies, as movement and dance. My interest is in these kinds of embodiments, in movements that become realized both as physical actions, and as inner shifts or affects. For me, actions and affects intertwine in dancing, and thus dance may indeed, be a powerful practice within education in hope.

### **How does hope take place?**

Thus, I shift focus now to a discourse on affect. In this endeavour my main inspiration comes from Ben Anderson's (2006) article entitled "Becoming and being hopeful: towards a theory of affect." In this article he explores "*how hope takes place*" (p. 741, italics added). His approach to the study of hope exceeds the common assumption that hope is an intentional act directed towards the future. Instead, he explores hope as flow of affect that moves between bodies and become expressed as bodily background feelings that refer to bodily states not (yet) recognized as emotions (2006, p. 748). Based on my own experiences, I understand this to mean that hope is something that moves among and within human beings, which stirs and energizes individuals and communities.

Anderson (2006) states that hope, and hoping, are taken-for-granted parts of contemporary Western everyday life (p. 733). He highlights how descriptions of hope most often remain elusive, "frequently likened to the immaterial-matter of air, or sensed in the prophetic figure of the horizon, hope anticipates that something indeterminate has *not-yet become*" (p. 733, author's emphasis). He also presents questions, that I find quite intriguing and related to the ones I have posed earlier in this chapter: what can a body do when it becomes hopeful? What capacities, and capabilities, are enabled? These questions are related to non-representational, poststructuralist literatures on affect. These literatures, although contested and diverse, frame contemporary discourses on what Anderson posits as "more-than or less-than rational – including affect but also mood, passion, emotion, intensity, and feeling" (p. 734). This makes me contemplate how often I, despite of my background in dance and bodily practices, have to remind myself of the value movement as such, without symbolic meanings, representations, purposes and benefits. I take a breath, contemplating how movement may also simply mean what it is, and at the same time, may mean more than can be grasped and put to words.

As an alternative to modernist views on emotions as either subjective and inherent (in here), or objective and socially constructed (out there), Anderson sees affect as a transpersonal capacity, as two sides of the same dynamic shift in the body. Affect understood this way, as ‘Being affected – affecting’ does not, thus, reside in a subject or body, and is not an object possessed by a subject. Instead,

‘Being affected – affecting’ emerge from a processual logic of transitions that take place during spatially and temporally distributed encounters . . . The affectivities of different types of relation can be witnessed in the qualitative differences that energetically enhance or deplete the living of space – times. (Anderson, 2006, p. 735)

This shift from seeing hope as either an individual possession or as a socially constructed, learned aptitude towards conceiving hope as a transpersonal phenomenon — as affect — transgresses subject-object ontology. Hope as affect, thus, may be envisioned as energy or matter that moves across human and non-human bodies. How hope takes place as a human experience, then, is through this movement of affect that becomes “expressed through those proprioceptive and visceral shifts in the background habits, and postures, of a body” (Anderson, 2006, p. 736).

It is these proprioceptive and visceral shifts that spark my thinking and allow the notion of hope as affect to link concretely to dance and movement practices. The proprioceptive system is a part of the nervous system and provides information on bodily posture, balance, position in space and muscle tone. Together with the vestibular (balance) system it is commonly understood as part of kinaesthesia, that is, sense of movement. The visceral system, then, transmits bodily signals arising from the heart, lungs, stomach, bladder, and other internal organs. As such, the visceral system is an essential element in fostering bodily awareness and a sense of self. Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio (1999), among others, assures that a sense of self emerges as an organic, bodily process, and that “the sense of self is the first answer to a question the organism never posed” (Damasio 1999, 25).

These bodily systems become highly differentiated through dance, and they play a central part in all skilled, or conscious movement as well as in our everyday, habitual bodily actions (Cohen, 1993). If and when these systems become similarly central in how affects become expressed and experienced within human bodies, their significance for meaningful human life becomes amplified. When assigning such importance to organic forms of life and (human) physiology, for example from the

point of view of education in hope, it is important to keep in mind that affect emerges from relations. Through relations affect creates a “transpersonal sense of *life* that animates or dampens space – times of experiences” (Anderson, 2006, pp. 736-737). This notion of transpersonal sense of life relates to being connected to non-human forms and vital forces of life (Braidotti, 2016). Sensing such vitality in nature or in culture, as non-human forces, may indeed be one key in understanding hope. As an example, Anderson describes how music can animate the proprioceptive and visceral senses and thus, form “a hopeful site of experience” (p. 743) that may be detached from of any particular content of hope.

Hopefulness, therefore, exemplifies a disposition that provides a dynamic imperative to action in that it enables bodies to go on. As a positive change in the passage of affect it opens the space – time that it emerges from to a renewed feeling of possibility . . . Feeling hopeful, in this case, is characterized by a yearning to live . . . Becoming hopeful is marked, therefore, not by a simple act of transcendence in favour of a good elsewhere or elsewhen but by an act of establishing new relations that disclose a point of contingency within a present space – time. (Anderson, 2006, p. 744)

Relations and connections, both social and material, as well as animation, evocation, and action, seem to be notions shared by affect theory, as presented by Anderson, and Freirean education in hope. For me, these elements form the core of critical arts education. By this I mean education that is grounded in body-mind unity and in embodied action, and understood both as inner sensations and actual movements. It embraces the sophistication of bodily systems and the way they are entangled in a complex web of relations that tie together human and non-human agents. This intricate web, then, either carries and ignites hope, or fails to do so. Strengthening the passages of hope — and thus removing obstacles so that hope can flow through these passages — may be the task of the critical arts educator. Igniting and evoking hope in learners may happen through affecting and being affected — through animation and action.

With these thoughts, I will now turn to a dialogue with Anamet, whose work at the at the Orphanage # 9 in St. Petersburg, Russia seems to be aligned with critical arts education, or education in hope. Her experiences and the context in which she had worked have occupied my thoughts when contemplating hope and dance education, although she frames her work through attunement rather than directly speaking about hope. She agreed to my request for an interview, and we talked on January 2, 2018, for about an hour.

### **There is more to life ...**

Zelyonyi Dom, or Greenhouse in English, was a dance education project that engaged 20 children from eight to 12 years of age. Anamet participated in this project as part of her dance education degree at the School of Contemporary Dance. Within this project, she was responsible for leading a ten-day workshop for a group of nine children in March, 2010. As an indication of her enthusiasm, Anamet remembers agreeing to this possibility of taking part in this project immediately. She frames her initial experience at the orphanage with the significance of Lev's presence, and how he "was there every day with us in the studio. He was personally very engaged in the project and in the process – he was sitting there all the time, observing everything." She describes how Lev was "like the anchor" in midst of this new context where she and the children did not have a common spoken language. She had wondered, "how do we move forward, how do we understand the reactions of the children, and how can we create somehow a common ground to stand on from their work." In the light of the development of Russian contemporary dance (briefly referred to earlier), I find it thought-provoking to find out about such commitment and support by Lev for this project: from seeking funding, finding international collaborators, and by being present at the orphanage throughout the project. His commitment to the project directly impacted others, and here, hope seemed to flow from a one artist/educator to another, while animating both in the process.

This orphanage, or children's home is one of many institutions in Russia for minors whose parents could not take care of them for one reason for another, and thus, had been taken in the custody of the state. However, the children had contact with their parents in different ways. This contact might have in part maintained a sense belonging to their families, and as such, Anamet contemplated that they must have experienced constant insecurity in terms of the possibility of someday being reunited with their parents and leaving the peers and caretakers, and the institution. In her view, insecurity characterized the everyday life of these children. Thus, hope in terms of a future beyond living at the institution was there, but it was very vague. For children who grow up in these institutions, getting an education, making a meaningful life for themselves, and obtaining a self-sustained life was not easy. Anamet remembered Lev being very happy when a boy residing in the orphanage was accepted to the renowned Vaganova ballet academy. He believed this would be a path towards a better life for this boy.



All children in the orphanage took part in therapy sessions, which were mostly based on spoken language. Anamet related to this reality with a creative dance approach that was not framed as therapy, since her interest was more geared towards exploring the educational possibilities of dance. However, for her, creative dance has inherent therapeutic aspects, but still, “not having the therapeutic focus can somehow open up for the children. . . this physical expressive space.”

Anamet’s notion of “physical expressive space” bears a close resemblance, in my view, to Anderson’s (2006) notion of “space – time” (pp. 736-737). In her view, this kind of space, or learning environment where children are encouraged to move in an expressive way and interact physically with each other “was clearly releasing tensions within them.” She continues,

*. . . it [the physical expressive space] is not something that we have to understand, —where is it coming from and what should we do with it. But it has another focus than ‘how are you’ and all these things in life that are quite heavy, they are not in focus. It is something else that is in focus, which is much easier to share, which is common for all of us. We have a common goal that we can focus on and then all this tension which released on the way.*

By a common goal she referred to a process of creating a dance performance together. This performance project seemed to give a possibility for the children to explore something that they had not experienced before.

[INSERT CH4\_FIG\_1 HERE]

*Figure 1: Young dancers from "Zelyonyi Dom" project. Photographer: Sergey Urzhumtsev*

For Anamet, releasing the tension in the physical level and in the social level “creates space in the conscious level for them as well. They are not actually interested in sitting and talking too much – they are interested in getting up and doing something.” These reflections are connected with Freire’s holistic approach to education, as well as his emphasis on action. The elements of hope as an embodied phenomenon began to emerge for me as our conversation continued. Anamet reflected how significant it seemed that the children were now, for the first time in their lives, creating their own movement phrases and ideas for the performance. In such a creative process, children may “experience that **you are more than you are in everyday life**, so you can express yourself in so

many different ways in dancing, or in moving, in space together with others that like.” Since we both acknowledged that we can only imagine how the children experienced this work, and make interpretations based on our observations, I asked Anamet to describe her own bodily experiences within this project. She contemplated on her experiences:

*. . . this is what I feel myself as well, this is what I see as well, and this is what I remember as well, in these kids, when I think of our sessions in the studio. There is this sense that **there is more to life** . . . I can also be this and you can be that and we can do this together, and that’s like a new experience, it is **adding something to life** as well, it is not just a new experience, but it is also meaningful . . . there is this attunement happening in space like that—the whole space, we can all feel it, everybody in the space can feel that there is something happening now and we can all describe it differently; we can all see it in each other’s eyes that it is now.*

Anamet’s notion of attunement resembles Anderson’s (2006) notion of a transpersonal sense of life that animates space – times of experiences. In this sense, attunement seems to refer to a space in between, a space that connects human beings and carries their movements, actions, and interactions through time and space. Through this process, a passage for hope to flow may be created. Anamet describes how she and the children all danced and improvised together with the musician who was also part of the project. The children would follow Anamet’s movements, respond to them with their own movements, break off into smaller groups, and come back as one group again, sometimes close together, sometimes far apart:

*Sometimes we could hold that energy for quite a long time, like half an hour; we were just playing, being in space communicating and moving. In some of those moments there was this attunement, yes. And it was clear that they enjoyed it, I enjoyed it, the musician enjoyed, the ones watching enjoyed it . . . It’s magic, it’s some of the magic in life. It’s hard to describe what it is. But it is something that every human being aspires towards in one way or another.*

Again, Anamet points towards energy, which relates to affect. For Anderson (2006), as I noted earlier, affect refers to qualitative differences that energetically enhance or deplete the living of ‘space – times’. Here, Anamet’s reflections also seem to echo Freire’s idea of hope as an ontological need – that is, if we conceive hope as an embodied phenomenon. Regarding the

embodiment of hope, I asked her to describe how she feels hope in her own body. Anamet described that for her, hope “defies gravity, it gives you lightness also, it is much easier to jump... you can very quickly move from one place to another, just like that.” Hope described as a sense of lightness relates to a concrete bodily sensation, but lightness could also be a metaphor that reflects relief, support, and ease. Such bodily experiences may linger in our memories as something valuable to hold on to. Anamet contemplates how,

*. . . for these children especially, to have these kinds of magical moments to draw from is important, because looking at the statistics, life is not going to be easy growing up.*

Reflecting on my conversation with Anamet, I ponder about the nature of this energy that enhances and animates humans within their ‘space – time’ experiences? Where does this energy come from, and what does it need to flourish, grow and be sustained? In Anamet’s account, such energy concretely carries the body, takes off weight, and defies gravity. The resulting sensation of lightness becomes experienced through the proprioceptive and visceral system, and becomes expressed as distinct movement qualities that yield new kinaesthetic sensations. What, then, instigates and feeds this process, or as Anderson (2006) frames it, a “hopeful site of experience” that enforces “a yearning to live” (p. 744)? Although the possibility for a better life in the future may somehow drive critical educators to seek situations where they can work with those who are underprivileged in one way or another, it seems that education in hope is about life itself, opening up as something more and more immediate. Such hope emerges through social and physical relations, through action, and is experienced in the proprioceptive, visceral level as lightness — as energy that supports and carries human beings, enabling them to go on (Anderson, 2006).

At its best, dance activates all senses. It communicates through movement as a multisensory phenomenon, involving sensing, hearing, and seeing others. Moreover, being heard and being seen creates a shared, reciprocal experience of belonging, of being connected, and of not being alone in this world. In Anamet’s words, seeing others during moments of collective connectedness confirms the existence of such shared moments: “we can all see it in each other’s eyes that it is now.” Such moments and experiences may, indeed, ignite hope even when facing difficult circumstances.

## **Closing reflections**

My attempt to connect embodied and organic processes with critical pedagogy may be eclectic at best and futile at worst. However, I wonder about their relationship, and ask, how could critical arts education learn from what takes place in the bodily, or non-representational level? An emphasis on reason, purpose, and future goals in education may bring about an overload of symbolic representation and social construction of meaning that may negate the vitality of life beneath these layers. It is important to remember that all creative expressions may mean what they are, and at the same time, mean more than can be grasped and put to words.

I often contemplate the potential for education to give greater value to the present moment and life itself, and find meaning beyond symbolic representation. From the viewpoint of critical posthuman thought, Braidotti (2016) introduces a notion of “zoe” (p. 19), referring to non-human life, or a geo-centered ethical approach that “requires a mutation of our shared understanding of what it means to be human” (p. 23). For her,

Life, simply by being life, expresses itself by actualizing flows of energies, through codes of vital information across complex somatic, cultural and technologically networked systems. This is why I defend the idea of being ‘worthy of our time’ as a way of engaging critically and creatively with vital processes and the expressive intensity of a life we share with multiple others, here and now. (p. 24-23)

Then, I wonder if there is a way from this passage of posthuman ontology back to Freire’s (1996) ontology of hope, which sees humans as the only species capable of hoping, and of educating hope in others. However, even for Freire, human hope cannot thrive in a vacuum. Rather it depends on material and social relations, as depicted in the following account, in which Freire describes his search for hope in deep depression:

That rainy afternoon, with the sky dark as lead over the bright green land, the ground soaked, I discovered the fabric of my depression. I became conscious of various relationships between the signs and the central core, the deeper core, hidden within me. I unveiled the problem by clearly and lucidly grasping its “why”. I dug up the archeology of my pain. (p. 30)

This experience gave Freire the insight into how to practice education in hope, and how to relate to

the fabrics of concrete histories of oppression that others have lived through. With this, I return to the notion of the flickering flame that needs oxygen, or to what Anderson (2006) speaks of as a “dynamic imperative to action in that it enables bodies to go on” (p. 744). This imperative for action may generate the oxygen within progressive arts educators and energize them. Thus they may carry on their mission of education in hope, enabling all bodies, human and non-human, to go on, against all odds.

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