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ABSTRACT

The central role of gestural language in Buddhism is widely acknowledged, as in the story of the Buddha pointing at the moon, the point being the student's seeing beyond the finger (as object) to its gesture (as act). Gesture's role in dance is similarly central, as noted by scholars in the emerging interdisciplinary field of dance studies. Unsurprisingly, then, the intersection of these two fields is well-populated, including the formal gestures (called "mudras") Buddhism inherited from classical Indian dance, and the masked dance of the Mani Rimdu Festival. In this investigation, I will articulate a new Buddhist philosophy of gestural language, based on a new conception of emptiness that I locate in the work of contemporary U.S. choreographer Deborah Hay, as influenced by Nāgārjuna and Zen. And this, finally, suggests that contemporary Western philosophy should incorporate this compassion as a normative dimension to its own theorizing and practice.

The mudra [gesture] of the dance is a reflection in the mirror of enlightenment.
-Lochen Dharmashri
Dancing and singing are the voice of the Dharma [sacred duty].
-Zen Master Hakuin Ekaku

In this article, I will articulate a new Buddhist conception of emptiness that I find in the dances and writings of contemporary U.S. choreographer Deborah Hay, whose elements I trace back to Nāgārjuna's (1995) *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (*MMK*) and Senzaki's (1998) *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*. In short, emptiness in Hay's work can be parsed as playful embodiments of situated theorizing, inflected by compassion for bodies as gendered linguistic vehicles. Put differently, we generate and revise our theories as needed in specific sociohistorical contexts, are constantly engaging in the practice of performing those theories in improvisational ways. And the goal of both theory and practice is to enact compassion for the vulnerable, impermanent bodies that serve as the vehicles of language, where language is recognized—with the help of dance's nonverbal languages—as consisting of empty, impermanent, interdependent physical motions.

The structure of these analyses is as follows. First, I will utilize dance as a lens through which to interpret Nāgārjuna's claims in *MMK* about the emptiness of

language (and emptiness) itself. The upshot of this reading is that what Jay Garfield calls Nāgārjuna's *reductio ad absurdum* undermines not only emptiness as metaphysical principle, but the very notion of a timeless and transcendent theory or discourse. What survives, though, are socio-historically situated theoretical encounters.[1] Second, I turn to the school of Buddhism most adept at illuminating the emptiness of language, namely Zen. Guided by interpretations of the Zen koan form by Steven Heine (2014), Isshū Miura (1965), and Masao Abe (1985), I will turn to Nyogen Senzaki's populist compilation, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, which suggests that we are obligated to show compassion toward language and its gendered embodied vehicles. Third, I will turn directly to the choreographic 'koans' (her word) of Hay's (2000) *My Body, The Buddhist*, which constitute situated discourses facilitating gendered compassion through embodied playfulness. More precisely, Hay's Buddhist-informed theory-infused practices undermine consciousness' tyranny over bodies' many 'voices,' and give rest and credit to bodies for co-creating the linguistic productions misattributed to 'the self.'

1. Nāgārjuna: emptiness as situated theorizing

It is worth noting, in connection to Hay, that she has been directly exposed to Nāgārjuna, through Trungpa's (2002) discussion of the latter's work in some detail in *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism* (190–191). And to repeat, the central point I wish to emphasize from *MMK* is that its skeptical reduction of emptiness itself leaves us with an understanding of theorizing as necessarily socio-historically situated. For my analysis, I will utilize Jay Garfield's English translation of a Tibetan translation of the original Sanskrit text.

In both content and form, Chapter 2 of *MMK* necessarily addresses contemporary dance. In content, this is because the chapter has been interpreted as focusing on (1) change in general, (2) physical motion specifically, and even (3) the physical motion of walking in particular.[2] Correspondingly, (1) all dance involves change, (2) most dance involves physical motion, and (3) much postmodern dance (including some of Hay's dance works) even concerns mere walking. Moreover, dance is even suggested by Nāgārjuna, via his repeated use of the phrase 'a city of Gandharvas,' the latter being the invisible, flying demigods worshipped by the temple dancers, from the name of which demigods (*Devas*) the dancers get their name (*devadasis*).[3]

And in form, Chapter 2 connects to dance in that Nāgārjuna's method of *reductio ad absurdum* (etymologically, 'off of the absurd') resonates with Deborah Hay's dances insofar as the latter are famous for their riddles, paradoxes, jokes, and other content which, in a professional dance context, is absurd.

Also dance-resonant is Garfield's description of Nāgārjuna's reductio method as 'a logical tightrope act,' since it calls to mind Nietzsche's (2006) tightrope walker—in German, literally, 'rope-dancer'—in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (89). In other words, both the philosophical position toward which *MMK* gestures, and also these delicate gestures in themselves, constitute a kind of dance by Nāgārjuna, through which he joins the *devadasis* as they weave their fingers dancingly round the invisible flying limbs of their *Devas*. On a related note, Hay also evokes the Nietzschean rope-dancer 'on the high

wire,' not long after concluding a chapter with a verb form of the word and concept 'emptiness' (60, 76).

When Garfield turns his focus to *MMK* Chapter 2, he explains that it concerns the implication, lingering from Chapter 1's denial of essentialist causation, that constant motion is the only reality. And in doing so, Chapter 2's first stanza (as follows) also resonates with dance:

> Neither form itself nor from another,
> Nor from both,
> Nor without a cause,
> Does anything whatever, anywhere arise (I.1).

To see the dance connection here, consider the numerous failed attempts, across Western history, to establish a causal foundation for dance as an independent art. The original such failure concerns dance's origins as a dependent art within the operatic theater, in which dance was reduced to (1) being caused by 'something else,' as a *representation* of the world (as in classical and Romantic ballet). Second, in the early twentieth century, dance was reduced to (2) being caused by 'itself,' as the *expression* of the dancer-subject (as in Martha Graham's modern dance). Third, in the mid-twentieth century dance was reduced to being caused by 'both' the world and itself, as the interaction of *representation* and *expression* found in the moody abstractions of George Balanchine's modern ballet. And finally, in the post-WWII era, dance was reduced to being 'without a cause,' in that dance lacked music, formal structure, and/or movement (as in the minimalist 'chair dance' of the Judson Theater group, in which Hay trained). In short, each of these historical movements reified dance into an essential thing that it is not, claiming to identify the true cause of the best kind of dance. It is thus not a stretch to understand the opening of *MMK* as applying directly to dance.

Returning to Chapter 2 of *MMK*, it begins with the apparent implication (from Chapter 1) that all is constant flux and motion, and that this constant activity must itself be the only real and essential thing in the world. But this leads to logical problems, Nāgārjuna's solution to which (as summarized by Garfield) is that motion depends on movers and movers depend on motion. That is, movers and motion are co-dependent in order to bear the descriptors 'motion' and 'mover.' To take another example from dance, for Nāgārjuna, there can be no absolute identity of the dancer, nor is there an absolute identity of the dance. Instead, dancer and dance co-arise with each performance. Consequently—and this is directly expressed in Deborah Hay's choreography, as I will relate below—we can create dances anywhere, and in anything—from out of the flux, and into (temporary, strategic and conventional) focus.

The most important implication of this point for contemporary theories of language, finally, is that language, too, is co-dependently arising, even at the level of physical motion. My argument for this conclusion is as follows.

(a) All motion is empty qua co-dependently arising.

This is simply a restatement of the outcome of Chapter 2 (as interpreted by Garfield).

> (b) Dance constitutes, among other things, a nonverbal language which consists primarily (or entirely) of physical motions (in gestures).

It is presumably noncontroversial to claim that nonverbal languages in general exist, including American Sign Language (ASL), and that without physical motion, they would be impossible. Similarly, it would seem apparent that dance consists primarily of physical motions. Even apparent exceptions, such as the moving images of cartoon characters dancing, include a kind of metaphorical dance of one or more body parts. (For example, the animator's pen on paper, or fingers on the keyboard, 'dance' in the process of animating the images into simulated motion).

That dance qualifies as one such nonverbal language, however, may not be obvious to those outside professional dance and dance studies. Even a cursory glance at the secondary literature in dance studies confirms, however, that there is a broad consensus on this point. For example, the ubiquitous phrase 'dance vocabulary' describes the gestural semantics and syntax of different dancing sign systems, including those of classical ballet and Martha Graham's modern dance. Some of these vocabularies include gestures with easily translatable verbal meanings. (Examples from classical ballet include the curtsy, which means 'I submit to you,' the raising of the chin, which means 'I defy you,' and an opening sweep of the arms, which means 'Welcome to my domain'). Other dance vocabularies consist of gestures with more vague and suggestive connotations. (Examples from modern dance include Graham's contract-and-release movement, which conveys inner turmoil channeled into catharsis).

> (c) When one considers any verbal language, in light of (b), it becomes clear that even verbal languages (and indeed all languages) consist ultimately of physical motions as well.

In other words, dance's nonverbal language simply makes vivid what is implicitly and less-obviously true of verbal languages as well (and thus of language in general). For spoken language, these physical motions are above all (as poet laureate Robert Pinsky memorably puts it), a vibrating column of air suspended in one's chest. For written language, the primary physical motions are the movements of hands to mark the writing surface, and the movements of eyes to transform those markings into visual images. And for mental language, in various analytic philosophers' posited phenomenon of 'mentalese,' the required physical motions are those of the electrical signals crossing synapses in the central nervous system (CNS).

> (d) Language is therefore empty even at the level of gestural, physical motion, which disqualifies it, and the ideas it conveys, from being able to claim a transcendent essence.

That is, if physical motions are empty, every language reduces to physical motions, and every idea can only be expressed in language, then one cannot express any idea as timelessly and transcendently true.

Perhaps some will grant that motion is involved in the physical performances of language, yet object that I am conflating such performance with language 'itself.' The problem with this objection, in the context of *MMK*, is that it reifies language into the kind of inherent, permanent existence that Nāgārjuna's analyses undermine. Put in

Chapter 2's terms, this objection allocates the physical form of the words (whether in sound waves, or ink on paper, or neurochemical signals) to 'the mover,' and allocates the information form of language to the 'motion' itself, which leaves us again with two distinct motions (corresponding to vehicle and message) within each linguistic motion.

Perhaps others will grant (c), yet object that it appears to make no difference to language itself, let alone the world, that language is co-dependently arising even at a fundamental physical level. My first response to this objection is that it is significant that it required an unusual distortion of language, on Nāgārjuna's part, to facilitate this insight into language, namely his method of *reductio ad absurdum*. More broadly, language's physicality tends to disappear into its translucence (if not outright invisibility) in its form as vehicle of semantic meaning, leading us to misunderstand language as value-neutral, and exclusively semantically communicative. That is, given the success of Nāgārjuna's crossing over into paradox and back in revealing language's physical co-dependent arising, I will follow his steps from *MMK* to Zen. It is here that *MMK* has had its greatest influence, on thinkers who have danced with superlative creativity along the path of language's physicality.

(e) Finally, therefore, the language of MMK itself, and the ideas conveyed thereby, cannot claim to be timelessly and transcendently true (even when they appear to do so, for example in reference to reincarnation).

What is left, then, are expressions of time-bound, immanent ideas and theories, produced in the situations in which the bodies that are language's vehicles find themselves. That is all, therefore, that Nāgārjuna could have been doing, and all that he could by his own logic hope to do. And that, in turn, brings us to Zen, as the most situation-sensitive and gesture-maximizing school of Buddhism.

2. Senzaki: emptiness as compassion for bodies as language's gendered vehicles

Before turning directly to Senzaki's stories, I will begin with some supporting analyses from the secondary literature on koans as literary form. I begin this brief survey with Steven Heine's book, *Zen Koans*. First, contrary to McMahan's (2008) claim (in *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*) about the non-centrality of meditation in traditional Buddhism, Steven Heine insists, in *Zen Koans*, that the essence of koan instruction is on the disciple's 'developing innovative interpretation,' since 'imitating others is labeled "phony" or "the slobber of foxes"' (26).[4] By this traditional standard, therefore, my own innovative interpretations of the Zen stories below are at least on the right track in that regard. Heine also supports another aspect of my interpretations—namely their being straightforward and pragmatic—when he insists that koans in general are not merely absurd and irrational. Instead, he emphasizes the need for interpreters to recognize and appreciate 'the sensible side of koan discourse' (71). This point merits further attention.

To wit, 'a practitioner accomplishes spiritual goals by following a strange and unorthodox pathway that is actually based on a clear and cogent plan of action standing behind apparently unfathomable words' (74). More precisely, Heine identifies two types of koan, 'transformation' and 'transmission' and the following three parts of each: for transformation, (a) 'doubt,' (b) 'experience' and (c) 'expression'; and for transmission, (c)

'mythology,' (d) 'monasticism' and (e) 'succession' (85). Thus, to repeat, if my readings below strike the reader as too reasonable and practical, this could be attributed to my recognition of this crucial aspect—without which conduct-guidance toward the Mahayana primacy of compassion for all sentient beings would be threatened.

In support of Heine's claim is the work of Masao Abe, a practitioner from the famous Kyoto school of Zen Buddhism in Japan, which arose in response to D. T. Suzuki's seminal popularization of Zen in the United States. Although Abe repeatedly insists that Zen 'is not a philosophy,' he nevertheless adds that Zen 'embraces a philosophy,' and specifically one that is much like Hegel's dialectical system (4, 19). More precisely, in the philosophy that Zen embraces, first, the ego is negated, after which the non-ego is negated, and at the end of which process there occurs an affirmation of what Abe terms the 'true Self' (13). Abe parses the latter as—not 'I am empty'—but rather 'Emptiness is I' (13). To return to the point of supporting my pragmatic interpretations of the koans, Abe (like Heine) emphasizes the centrality of practice and compassion (56). In Abe's case, this emphasis is found primarily in his praise of the founder of the Soto school of Zen, Dōgen Zenji.

In other words, for both Heine and Abe (as well as Hay and myself) compassion is both the impetus and the necessary correlate of the wisdom that struggles its way to visibility in the koans. For example, Abe quotes D. T. Suzuki's quotation of a *mondo* (question and answer) about the famous Zen master Jōshū, as follows:

> Jōshū (Chao-chou) was approached by an old lady who said, 'Women are considered to be heavily laden with the five obstructions. How can I be freed from them?'
> The master said, 'Let all the other people be born in Heaven, but may I this old woman be forever drowned in the ocean of suffering' (78).

As Abe interprets it, 'Chao-chou's seemingly harsh reply springs from great compassion in which no distinction between Chao-chou and the old woman exists and in which Chao-chou himself is willing to suffer much more than or in place of anyone else' (78). In summary, Abe notes, 'In the view of [D. T.] Suzuki'—whose translation Abe is using here —'a Zen person is apt to seem to make too much of *prajñā*, the great wisdom, rather neglecting *karunā*, the great compassion' (79).

Finally in support of this point, the famed Japanese Zen Master Isshū Miura begins *Zen Koans*, a lecture series on koan ritual practice in Rinzai monasteries, with what are known as the 'Four Vows.' 'Every Buddhist,' Miura writes, explaining the central importance of the vows in monastic life, 'not only recites the Four Vows morning and evening, but tries to keep them always in mind and to carry them out to the best of his ability throughout the course of his lifetime' (35). And the first of the Four Vows, to return to my point, concerns compassion: 'Sentient beings are numberless; I take a vow to save them' (36).

Additionally, like Heine, Miura also distinguishes different subtypes of koans that are studied in sequence in Rinzai monasteries, as well as the proper sequence for working through them. Included among these subtypes are *hosshin* koans, which concern the true undifferentiated body of reality, *kikan* koans, which involve successful differentiation of things as they are, and *gonsen* koans, which involve the study of words (48, 49, 52). In connection with the latter, and in further support of my interpretations of the

koans, Miura quotes the Zen Master Ekaku, in the context of the limitations of words, that 'Dancing and singing are the voice of the Dharma' (53).

Having thus established the central importance of compassion and practicality in interpreting kaon in general, I now turn to Senzaki's '101 Zen Stories,' based on the thirteenth century text *Shasekishu* (*Collection of Stone and Sand*), written by the Zen master Muju (1985) ('non-dweller'). Through these stories, I will attempt to show, against the background of *MMK*'s revelation of the situated-ness of all theorizing, that the primary concern in such situated theorizing is to show compassion toward bodies as the gendered vehicles of language—especially in regard to those who are vulnerably-gendered. The reason for this is that the linguistic absurdities in '101 Zen Stories' foreground language's physicality qua its embodied vehicles, which physicality brings language into closer proximity to vulnerability (particularly in terms of gender) and sentience (in the thoughts its bodily gestures articulate). In other words, given (from *MMK*) that all theorizing is socio-historically situated and immanent (rather than timeless and transcendent), '101 Zen Stories' illuminates how that theorizing is carried out by vulnerable, gendered bodies in pursuit of liberation, which entails that language itself should constitute a locus of compassion.

There are numerous interesting examples of this theme of gendered compassion in '101 Zen Stories,' but for reasons of space I will focus on just six stories.[5] It is important here to keep in mind the connection between (a) language's emptiness as situated theorizing through physical motions, and (b) the compassion shown in and for language and its gendered vehicles. In my first example, story #3 (entitled 'Is That So?'), a male Zen monk is falsely accused by a terrified young mother of having fathered her child, yet he placidly agrees to raise the child when it is dropped at his door. And his only linguistic reaction to the accusation is the mild titular question: 'Is that so?' Then, a full year after the child is left with him, after the mother confesses that the monk was not in fact the father, he releases the child, with equal placidity, to the care of its abashed grandparents. And again, his only reaction is 'Is that so?' In a traditional Western moral narrative, by contrast, there would be heavy judgments leveled against the young woman for having sex before marriage, lying, defaming a respected cleric, and abandoning her child. Consequently, the most that would be expected of the cleric would be for him to refrain from judgment, and even that much would typically be considered 'supererogatory.' In Zen's compassion-centered philosophy of language, however, one must be constructively involved. From this case, one could distill the following linguistic ethical imperative: *(#1) respond to blame only with compassionate questioning in regard to vulnerably-gendered others*.

In my second example, story #6 (entitled 'No Loving-Kindness'), an aging patroness burns down the shack where she has supported a male monk for twenty years, in order to punish him for showing cold unfeelingness to a young woman. More specifically, the patroness sent the young woman to test him by throwing herself at him in his shack. And his failure, the patroness explains, is as follows: 'He need not have responded to passion, but at least he should have evidenced some compassion' (17). Most Western moral narratives, by contrast, would praise a cleric for such disciplined resistance to temptation (like the famous temptation of Sir Galahad 'the pure' in the Arthurian legends). In Zen's compassionate virtue-centered philosophy of language, however, one must positively do the right thing (and not merely avoid doing the wrong thing).

From this case, one could distill the following linguistic ethical imperative: *(#2) respond to temptation with warm gestures (rather than cold indifference) toward the other, including mindfulness of any gendered vulnerability.*

In my third example, story #14 ('Muddy Road'), one male monk reprimands a second male monk for carrying a beautiful young woman 'in a silk kimono and sash, unable to cross the intersection,' across a muddy patch on the road. The first monk's justification for his criticism is that it is 'dangerous' for male monks to 'go near females' (31). The story concludes with the second monk's response, as follows: '"I left the girl there," said Tanzan. "Are you still carrying her?"' In a traditional Western moral narrative, one cleric would be justified in reprimanding another for breaking a sex-related rule. In Zen's compassion-centered philosophy of language, however, it is more admirable to show compassion toward women, as it does not necessarily imply forbidden passion, which is actually more likely to be present in those without compassion for them. From this case, one could distill the following linguistic ethical imperative: *(#3) suspend written rules of gender-relational propriety in favor of compassionate (rather than passionate) gestures.*

In my fourth example, story #37 ('Publishing the Sutras'), a male Zen devotee named Tetsugen endeavors to publish, for the first time in the Japanese language, 7,000 copies of the Zen scriptures. In the process, however, he ends up spending all the money he has raised for two disaster relief efforts, before finally completing the project on his third try (thirty-three years later). The first disaster is a famine, the second is a country-wide epidemic, and both phenomena have been shown to harm children disproportionately, and thereby also women, as the default caretakers of those children under patriarchy. (Men, by contrast, tend to have an adult's resilience, as well as greater flexibility to work harder and travel to survive). The story concludes as follows: 'The Japanese tell their children that Tetsugen made three sets of sutras, and that the first two invisible sets surpass even the last' (65). In a traditional Western moral narrative, by contrast, it would be more important to study and share sacred texts than to show beneficence (as for example when Jesus, in the Gospels, praises Mary for listening to his verbal language, and criticizes her sister Martha despite Martha's gestures of service). In regard to Zen's compassion-centered philosophy of language, however, the following three points here are worthy of note: (1) gestures of disaster relief are explicitly thematized as sacred linguistic acts (that is, the 'publishing' of verses); (2) these gestures are even valorized as superior to the written language of the literally-published verses; and (3) this valorization of the nonverbal gestures appears to derive from the gendered-inflected compassion of those gestures, since disaster relief privileges women, whereas scriptural publication favors the male-dominated world of religious study. Together, these points could be distilled into the following linguistic ethical imperative: *(#4) suspend written language aimed at educating the privileged (including in their gender), in favor of gestural language directed compassionately toward the vulnerable (including in their gender).*

Finally from this collection, and on a dancing note that anticipates the work of Deborah Hay, in #101 ('Buddha's Zen') Buddhism's founder is presented as claiming that he 'look[s] on the judgment of right and wrong as the serpentine *dance* of a dragon' (151, emphasis added). This indicates both a skepticism toward cold condemnation, and also an aesthetic appreciation of dance. (The latter, in that it links dance to the famously most graceful and powerful animal in the East Asian imaginary). I will now elaborate on this closing quote by paraphrasing the four imperative offered above. Perhaps these

could be interpreted as the four steps, or 'moves,' in the dragon's ethical dance, a fittingly flexible dance notation for a Zen philosophy of nonverbal language.

(Step 1) *When blamed by the vulnerable, respond with questioning.*

(Step 2) *When tempted by the vulnerable, respond with warmth.*

(Step 3) *When blamed by the invulnerability of written texts, disregard that blame in favor of any vulnerable who may be affected.*

(Step 4) *When tempted by the invulnerable of written texts, disregard that temptation in favor of any vulnerable who may be affected.*

Thus understood, ethical language in Muju and Senzaki's '101 Zen Stories' is a gentle dance which sways from both blame and temptation, yet compassionately lingers with the vulnerability that both conceal. Inspired by Zen's dancing dragon, I wind forward to the dragon-fierce, gendered compassionate dance work of Deborah Hay.

3. Hay: emptiness as playful embodiment

As noted dance theorist Susan Leigh Foster explains in her 'Forward,' *My Body, The Buddhist* 'describes the development of several recent works, focusing especially on how the dances emerge from Hay's daily dialogue with the body' (xii). The works in question are the following six dances: *my heart* (1995), *Exit* (1995), *Voilá* (1995), *1–2-1* (1996), *FIRE* (1999), and a nameless dance (from 1993). The title of the latter, according to Hay, is best understood as an invisible symbol implied by a gesture of drawing in the air with two sets of fingers. The next best understanding is as a literal drawing of two concentric circles almost touching, with a dark spot inside them, and one slash bisecting both circles off-center. Least appropriate for understanding the title, is its verbal paraphrase, *Tower of Babel Revisited*.

Here, I will focus on just two (of many) of what I take to be Hay's elaborations on a philosophy of language involving gender-mindful compassion. To rehearse my introduction, these elaborations consist of (e) a conscious choice to undermine a kind of totalitarian conscious control of the body's other means of communication, and (f) a bestowing of rest and credit to the bodies of oneself and others, in part as an acknowledgement that these bodies are vital creative partners in one's linguistic productions. Before turning directly to Hay's text, however, I will briefly consider one more relevant feature of Susan Leigh Foster's 'Foreword.'

According to Foster, (what I call) Hay's koans serve not only as chapter-headings, but also as the foundational first stage in Hay's choreographic process. Foster's detailing of this role reveals multiple striking similarities with Zen, further establishing the profound impact of Buddhism on Hay's work. To begin, in a given training session, Hay's dancers 'spend anywhere from forty minutes to three hours experimenting individually and collectively with one such directive [or koan] as the generative principle and conscious focus for dancing' (xiii). During this process, Hay, like the Zen masters in '101 Zen Stories,' 'speaks very little' according to Foster, and instead 'encourages students to investigate on their own, and interactively with others, the myriad movements the directive inspires' (xiii). Also in harmony with the Zen stories, 'Hay reminds students that they are teaching themselves by attending rigorously to the body's impulses' (xiv).

In Hay's own 'Introduction' to *My Body, The Buddhist*, she first mentions Buddhism in the second paragraph, affirming its 'politics of nonviolence' (xxiii). In this, she

foreshadows her later reflection on the ethical language of compassion as a tool in the politics of nonviolence. The introduction's third paragraph then details some of Hay's research in Buddhist thought, including Tibetan monk Chogyam Trungpa's *Cutting through Spiritual Materialism* (2002) and *Heart of the Buddha* (2010: xxiii). From the latter text, Hay quotes Trungpa's advice to 'Touch and go' instead of 'hanging on' to the 'presence of life' (xxiv). Hay is careful to demure, however, that she has no formal expertise in Buddhism, nor in philosophy more generally. Instead, she writes, 'I study riddles, some of which are *what ifs* that arise when I am dancing,' such as the koan: 'What if alignment is everywhere?' (xxv, xxiv)

In other words, it is not Hay's mind, but only her body—and even then, only 'at moments'—which is a Buddhist master. That is, Hay's body-qua-Buddhist teacher engages in a questioning of Hay's mind-qua-Buddhist disciple. For this reason, Hay observes that her relationship to her body, at certain moments in her choreographic and dancing practice, is like that of 'the devotion of a dog to its master' (xxiv). At other moments, however, she notes that the body too needs training. For example, Hay remarks on the way these *what ifs* 'thrill and annihilate the body's reasoning process,' which she then claims is 'similar to the experience of beginner's mind in Zen Buddhism' (xxv).

With the stage set, I now return to the central implication I highlighted in '101 Zen Stories,' namely (d) the obligation to show compassion in and for language and its embodied vehicles. The most important chapter of Hay's book in this regard is Chapter 5, 'my body commits to practice,' in that it offers the book's most detailed account of the dance inspired by the linguistic phenomenon that is the Tower of Babel. Hay prefaces her discussion of the dance with what she describes 'this fleeting logic' of her dances in general (20). 'I feel,' Hay writes, 'like a tower of babble. Millions of voices speak from my body at once—no one voice more dominant' (20).

Attending to this note of linguistic plurality, Hay then introduces the first of several dichotomies to describe this dance (and thereby her work in general). 'Tower is the continuity of my performance. Babble is the energy' (20). On this surface, this distinction might seem to map naturally onto the nonverbal/verbal and body/voice dichotomies in the following way: Tower/nonverbal body//Babble/verbal voice (with the tower of the body as the substrate and guiding thread for verbiage's meaningless excesses). Hay's subsequent descriptions, however, suggest that the reverse may be closer to the truth, to which I will return shortly.

Hay explains that the symbolic form of the dance's title was inspired by her and her daughter viewing a meteorological halo (or nimbus) around the moon. Thus, the title was inspired by what I elsewhere describe as a celestial dance of heavenly bodies. Hay favored an image in general (for the dance) over a name, Hay elaborates, in order to ask 'the audience to enter a movement-based world without clutching the few words that usually help mediate approaches to art' (21). She does not, however, merely undermine verbal language in favor of nonverbal language in general. She then goes further, emphasizing the gesture as process over the image. In her preferred form, she explains, the title should be

identified by an index finger circling two times, then all the fingertips of the same hand clustering together and vibrating in a single locations inside the invisible circle, followed by the fingers releasing and the index finger bisecting the imagined circle and stopping. This was going on all over town [Austin, Texas], wherever members of the cast or friends of the dance company spoke about the new piece (22).

Thus, the dance/title for this dance about language, originally inspired by the dance of the ice crystals in the atmosphere between Hay and the moon, reaches what for her is its most authentic form in a dance of the fingers.

Turning from the title of this dance about language to its textual subject, Hay then explicitly rejects the traditional interpretation of Genesis's Tower of Babel, namely that the tower of was destroyed by God in order 'to punish mankind' (22). Instead, Hay 'propose[s] that it was destroyed as a challenge to humans to independently locate god consciousness within' (22). Similarly, she rejects 'physical height' from her 'perception of the tower' (22). Instead, she writes that 'Tower is where I am in all of my pretense, belief, control, and absence of control' (22).

Attending to this note of surrendered control, Hay then slips into a stream-of-consciousness memoir, as follows: 'I practice remembering my toweringly singular dance: the rightness of nothing much, including absurdity and to the choice to surrender anything that wants definition' (22). For example, 'I talk nonsensically. I sound like a schmuck… Everything I hear is complete, whole unto itself. Language and voice lose meaning. There is only music' (22). And in the process of performing the dance, the dancers' 'imaginative bodies seemed inexhaustible' (23). In this way, as I noted above, 'Babble' rather than 'Tower' is connected to the body. Finally in regard to this Babble/body linkage, Hay's final pair of tower/babble dichotomies lends further support to my interpretation.

> Tower is a metaphor for consciousness. Babble is the reality check. The Tower of Babel is a metaphor for performance. Tower is the attention. Babble is each moment of movement (23).

This passage, I wish to suggest, constitutes Hay's valorization of the dancing gestural language over the written verbal language that seeks to control it from above—from the tyrannical top (as it were) of the Tower.

I turn now to Hays' elaboration of the conception in '101 Zen Stories' of compassion in and for language and its gendered vehicles, namely giving rest and credit to bodies (both one's own and others) for their co-creation of the linguistic productions misattributed to the self. I find this discussion primarily in Hay's own explicit exploration of the theme of compassion, which is presented most directly in the chapter titled the following koan: 'my body seeks rest, but not for long.' The substance of the chapter is a reflection on Hay's performance at a memorial service for her (female) friend's (female) guru. From a short list of possible themes suggested by the friend, Hay chose compassion, despite (or because of?) Hay's conflicted relationship with compassion itself.

'I do not,' Hay admits, 'as an experimental artist, bother to feel love and compassion of the self who is dancing, or of the self who has danced for fifty years' (25). In other words, Hay as choreographer/speaker had failed to show compassion for Hay as the female vehicle of the choreographer's gestural language. As to the reason for this lack of compassion, Hay observes (drawing implicitly on a Buddhist conception of compassion) that compassion seeks that 'all beings be free from suffering'—whereas the liberation from suffering is 'practically the antithesis of being an artist' (25). To explain the latter, Hay goes on to quote a description of being an artist from Martha Graham, the most influential pioneer of modern dance. 'There is no satisfaction,' Graham observes of the artist. Instead, there is 'only a queer, divine dissatisfaction: a blessed unrest…' (25)

This is ethically problematic already for artists who work alone, in terms of the ethical obligation to self and one's own body. But it is much worse in the case of artists who use other

humans' bodies in their art, such as choreographers. More precisely, Hay and Graham's position implies something controlling, even tyrannical (like the Tower of Babel) in at least Western choreography. That is, choreography as such forces the verbal language of the choreographer onto the bodies of dancers (often including the choreographer's own body), and demands that these bodies translate the verbal commands into nonverbal gestural linguistic productions. Perhaps, therefore, the lack of compassion evident in our verbal language can corrupt the dancing language of even so experimental a choreographer as Deborah Hay. One reason to believe the latter contention is that it could answer the question that for Hay remains explicitly unsolvable at the end of this chapter: why does she 'never return,' Hay asks herself and the reader, 'to that dance' of compassion? (26) For her part, Hay's best guess returns to the artist/compassion opposition as follows: '"I am not an artist." I wish that I meant it, but I did not' (26).

One might be tempted to conclude from this chapter on its own (out of the larger context of the book) that Hay is simply anti-compassion qua artist. This becomes untenable, however, in light of the end of Hay's introduction, where she writes that '*My Body, The Buddhist* could as well have been titled *My Body, The Artist*' (xxvi). Hay admits in the following last line: 'I find this parallel very intriguing' (xxvi). To relate this back to the alleged artist/compassion opposition, substituting 'Buddhist' for 'artist' and defining artist as 'anti-compassion' results in titles that are contradictory (rather than parallel): *My Body, The Anti-Compassionate [Artist]*, and *My Body, The Compassionate [Buddhist]*. To apply this back to the final line of the chapter on compassion, one should instead reinterpret Hay's uncertainty and confusion as indicative of an unresolved tension regarding compassion, specifically at that point in book's larger narrative.

To follow that larger narrative forward, as it clarifies the exact nature of this unresolved tension, Hay's later chapters specify it as a persistent guilt for her lack of compassion for dancing bodies, both her dancers' and her own. More precisely, she describes an alleged dream she had one night, later incorporated as follows in the spoken accompaniment to her 1995 dance *Voilá*:

> A man dressed in medieval hunting clothes grabs a small bird by its tail feathers. He presses the tip firmly onto a table. As the bird frees itself, some of the feathers remain on the table and scatter. The man turns to me and says, 'This means looting' (28).

Hay's interpretation of the dream is that it represents the 'recurring bouts of guilt' she experienced after she incorporated her dancers' improvised movements into one of her dance, for which she received sole choreographic credit (65, 66). Hay goes on to describe how she worked through that guilt with the help of a Jungian support group. The catalyst for the healing was her specification, during the group session, of the dream's content:

> When he [the man dressed in medieval hunting clothes] said 'This means looting,' he lowered his voice and opened his arm toward the scattering feathers. As I made this motion with my arm, this, referring to the feathers, replaced looting as the subject of the story for the first time.
>
> *This* is adaptation, transformation, integration, art, and life (66).

That is, the gestural language of Hay's arm sweep is what dislodged the spoken word 'looting' from its previously fixed place at the center of her dream narrative.

Thus, to use terms borrowed from my previous analyses of her Tower of Babel dance, Hay was healed by a nonverbal, dancing transition from (1) tyrannical control (i.e. the grasp of

the man in medieval clothes), to (2) the liberation of the people (i.e. the feathers of the bird). Put differently, the move from tyrannical-theft to freeing-art is enabled by compassion for the embodied vehicle—in this case, the bird feather bodies of Hay's dancers.

The success of this dancing therapy for Hay is evidenced in two later discussions in *My Body, The Buddhist*. The first discussion concerns Hay's several-day solitary resting vacation, in which she describes herself as (for once) treating her body well, and thereby achieving peace.

Hay's recounting of the vacation concludes on a compassionate note as well, in regard to her being inspired to dance again by watching the non-professional dance of a married couple in the drawing room of their shared hotel. More specifically, Hay notes how the husband gently supported his wife's body against his, 'exerting just enough pressure to her back so that her breasts familiarly met his chest' (52). In terms of compassion, his dancing embrace was neither too restricting, nor too distant, but instead found a kind of middle way.

And the second discussion takes place in the chapter beginning with the koan 'my body equates patience with renewal.' There, Hay reflects on resting itself, including a comparison of the chapter's koan to a medical drug which she 'injects' into her body (78–79). Finally, toward the end of this chapter, Hay describes how a group of her female friends helped her understand why she had been feeling 'low and out-of-sorts' (80). 'You have just performed every night for three weeks,'' one friend says to her, 'and your community is without a tradition for honoring you' (80). In response, Hay writes, 'Without pause, my tears began running' (80). To summarize these two discussions, they show how, with the help of compassionate others (the dancing husband at the hotel, and Hay's circle of friends) who show compassion to women's bodies (the wife's, and Hay's own), Hay finally manages to show compassion to her own body, and then herself.

4. Conclusion: gendered compassion in contemporary philosophy of language

This, finally, is the insight—legitimated by Nāgārjuna's revelation of the situated-ness of theorizing (given language's emptiness as physical motion), focused through Senzaki's Zen stories of gendered compassion in and for language's bodily vehicles, and elaborated in Hay's playful embodiments—that mainstream philosophy of language most needs to incorporate today. We in the twenty-first century's global world need a compassion-centered philosophy of language to remind us that language is always embodied, and thus always normative, finding its expressions through the vulnerable, gendered bodies that are its vehicles. Without such compassionate recognition of bodies' creative powers, language remains yet another weapon for tyranny and its needless suffering. With such compassion, however, language can become more often a resource for healing and liberation for all.

Notes

1. While there has been significant research on the role of unconventional language in the Chan Buddhist tradition, growing out of Nāgārjuna (and especially *MMK*), none of it has addressed gestural language in particular, such as that of dance. For recent examples of the former, see Wang (1997), Nelson (2010), Rudolf-Cantor (2010), and Zong (2005).

2. The latter was suggested in Garfield's correspondence with Ven. Lobzang Norbu Shastri (125n35).

3. For more on classical Indian dance in connection to Vedanta philosophy, see an extended discussion of the topic in [citation removed to preserve anonymity].

4. See Heine, 26. As he elaborates later, 'True insight could never be the result of memorizing the dialogues or delivering expected or cookie-cutter interpretations' (47).

5. In both of two stories which I omitted for reasons of space, 'The Story of Shunkai' and 'Ryonen 's Clear Realization,' a young female Zen practitioner is fetishized, envied, underestimated, and otherwise mistreated because of her beauty. In 'Shunkai, ' the woman dies in miserable poverty, provoking guilt in all who knew her(27). And in 'Rynonen, ' the woman intentionally disfigures herself to remove her attractiveness (83). And in both cases, the text 's judgment falls on those who fail to show compassion —in both gestures and words —for the person beneath the beauty.

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