



The Choreography of Resolution: Conflict, Movement and Neuroscience' Michelle Le Baron, Carrie Macleod, and Andrew Floyer Acland, *EDITORS*

Reviewed by Aileen O'Brien and Mary Lloyd

This is an exciting book, containing many revolutionary ideas that challenge mediation ideology and practice. The book starts with a quote from James Joyce about Mr. Duffy, who “lived a short distance from his body”. This humorous statement aptly captures how many involved in conflict and conflict resolution live in their heads in a state of disconnection from their body. Mediation and mediators are embedded in modern culture with belief systems that privilege mind and sight over body, spirit and imagination. The body mind split propounded by Descartes centuries ago continues to hold sway in our society. The *Choreography of Resolution* shifts this paradigm of the world, moving to a comprehension of life and conflict resolution that focuses on dance, movement and somatic experience. Anyone reading this book will be challenged to revisit their relationship with their bodies and the significance of dance and movement in their lives.

Michelle LeBaron and Carrie Macleod in cooperation with the Canadian Dancer and dance instructor, Margie Gillis created a four-year project highlighting “our bodies as paramount in both the origin and transformation of all conflict” and “to make the case for including those same bodies in our conflict resolution work, through invigorating conflict theory and practice with a physical vocabulary”. Experienced conflict resolution scholar/practitioners gathered in Saas Fe in Switzerland for this project and to experiment with conflict resolution through dance. This book is the outcome of this gathering written by the participant practitioners with LeBaron, Macleod and Acland.

In the Introductory chapter to this book ‘Let’s Dance’ LeBaron and Macleod set the goals for the book, to “foreground the body as essential in the genesis and the transformation of conflict and to make a case for the inclusion of an aesthetic, physical vocabulary in conflict theory and practice” (P.xx). To these ends they highlight the significance of the physical realm in our lives, how conflict affects our bodies, how “modes of engagement in conflict are filtered through complex systems of somatically braided cognition” (P. xxvi), and how artistic endeavour informs conflict resolution. They set out a number of questions in the project which are reflected in the book. These are:



- ‘What insights and understandings of conflict complexities can be generated from body based modes of inquiry?’
- How can a body-based vocabulary and sensibility inform intervention and transformation of actual conflicts?’
- What practical and theoretical links exist among dance, movement, and conflict transformation, and what research questions arise from these links?’
- How might interdisciplinary research on dance and kinaesthetic learning inform effective strategies for pedagogy and practice in intercultural conflict transformation?’ (P. xxiv)

The first section of the book ‘Why Dance?’ contains three chapters looking at why dance for us is so important. The section begins with Emily Beausoleil’s ‘Dance as Neuroscience’, written as an aid and resource for legal practitioners, ending with her contention that Western thought is such that it has discounted the use of body as a way to transform conflict. She asserts that the challenge for practitioners is to understand the importance of the body in movement and to find a way from such understanding to transform conflict. The chapter is divided into two sections; the first looks at insights from Neuroscience and the second is the way in which movement and dance can help.

Insights from Neuroscience show how the mind and body connect through the perception of how we see ourselves, the effect of memories and emotions on how we feel: “The body and the brain are in constant communication” (p 5). The author looks at the effect of movement and how a gesture can shift our thought process: “Nonverbal processes may offer a means to reach new understandings when verbal communication cannot” (p 7). Beausoleil then looks at three ways in which the movement of dance can help us: bringing our bodies to the table through embodied empathy, sensing the actions, intentions and feelings of others; dance as embodied empathy; and the implications for conflict practitioners. She concludes with the following “Neuroscience is proving what dancers have known for years - that emotion, cognition, memory, communication, and empathy are all embodied processes. The body holds the key to shifting unconscious factors that shape perception and behaviour into conscious, flexible ones,” (p 14) whereas linear and verbal approaches to conflict only address one half of a conflict story.

In the second chapter Tara Ney and Emmy Humber consider ‘Dance as metaphor’. They suggest that dance metaphors can shape conflict theory and practice in ways that promote peace, arguing that “physical wisdom contained in the metaphor of dance is an essential element missing from conflict theory and practice” (p 16). The authors then go on to look at the metaphor of war employed by Machiavelli as compared to those of peace of Gandhi to achieve their respective goals and the long term consequences of each. The authors also explore Dance and Metaphor. Dance is flexible, is attuned, improvises and is relational, being in the moment. Equally it allows for tension and differences, it evokes co –creating. It is as important how things are said as much as what is said. The authors contend that as peace builders we need to envisage ourselves as artists to find the essence of the issue; movement fulfils and supersedes the



function of words, it stirs the senses and emotions, and it is dignified. As Martha Graham observed that truth resides in the body “the body says what words cannot the body never lies” (p 25). As humans we process experiences physically not just cognitively and intellectually. The authors ask whether in a conflict setting we can be time sensitive in our engagement, intuitive during the process, flexible in our approach, creative in finding solutions, and fluid in our agreements. They believe dance metaphors can yield more collaborative processes and outcomes. Metaphors exert power by creating fields of meaning that shape communication, and focus the attention on connectivity and reciprocity and ethical value.

Ney and Humber argue that our futures may depend on the metaphors we choose to guide us. They emphasise being radically intentional about the metaphor we choose to shape thought and action, coupled with the importance of timing and rhythm and the necessity of creativity and intuition. The final chapter in this section is ‘Dance as Praxis’ by Margie Gillis. Like the previous authors Gillis believes that one of the missing elements when working with conflict is the body. As a teacher of dance she maintains that dancing from the inside out gives an understanding of how our bodies work, how we sense things through our bodies such as our feelings and emotions, and how through this awareness we come to explore questions about ourselves and our relations with others. In order to work in this way, we need to have health, which she sees as having the strength and flexibility to move freely in a range of situations and the ability to embrace opposites. The theme that runs through her chapter is the need to create safety, to be aware of where we are in this moment, and to take small steps and gestures to allow space to create alignment to enable us to shift, open up and create other possibilities and solutions. Towards the end Gillis states that “I hope this book can be used to help lawyers explore, transform, and heal on multiple levels” (p 41). She concludes by saying her hopes arise from witnessing the potential of human transformation using dance as a tool.

The next section is entitled ‘How Dance?’ and comprises three chapters. All three focus on some practical ways our bodies move and how our bodies can affect the processes of communication, negotiation and resolution.

In the first, ‘Choreography of Conflict: Refinding Home,’ Carrie MacLeod describes the Post Conflict Reconciliation programme in Sierra Leone where there were mass amputees. She then goes on to focus on work done on immigration tensions within refugee communities in Canada. Both of these examples illustrate how people through movement in dance can reclaim their identity in conflict situations. Looking at Sierra Leone MacLeod states that West Africa is a collective society with community adherence taking precedence over individual autonomy. As amputees and ex- combatants lived in close proximity, using the body in dance was used as primary translator between past, present and future: “Dance created a ritual framework that fostered its own choreography of community accountability” (p 47). Whereas Truth and Reconciliation commission and aid agencies were time limited the communities themselves through dance helped to bridge the gap between youths and elders which is ongoing. With immigrants and refugees in Canada the author describes the arts-based refugee settlement programme for youths and women throughout Vancouver. For displaced refugee youths dance and music became an ongoing way to find a home for them. Through dance it helped these youths to make the



transition from a crisis model of survival to a new model of resilience.

In the chapter ‘Choreography of Space: Transforming Conflict through Movement’, Andrew Floyer Acland recounts how the experience of dancing as an exercise in Saas-Fe opened up for him a different dimension for him in the way he practises as a process designer and mediator/facilitator of dialogue. There was an unfolding for him in the enhancement of his mediation practice. Starting to move/dance with a partner moved away from the “word-heavy roles” (p 60) he was used to into a world doing something unsafe and unfamiliar, becoming aware of the space between him as a dancer and his partner and the importance of that space.

Like mediation, dancers communicate in the poetry of movement rather than the prose of movement like sport. He sees mediators as artists, like a sculptor who discerns hidden possibilities that can take shape and evolve in the spaces between people. Trying out his new ideas on a case: “Seeing the meeting as a dance helped me notice the flow of energy within and between the participants” (p 60), looking at participants as dancers he could discern more of what they are thinking and feeling. Interestingly what he came away with was that his experience of dance added strength and depth to his existing skills. This article in particular sets out clearly the journey of the author moving from reluctance to dance to wholly embracing it and its consequences for Practice. It is an important article for all mediators, facilitators and lawyers.

In the final chapter ‘Choreography of Negotiation; Movement in three Acts’, Christopher Honeyman and Rachel Parish look at the way in which people with different skills find ways to work together.

The authors ask whether consciously using multiple intelligences can help negotiations. To illustrate this, the authors take two examples. Honeyman distinguished between a group of scholars from around the world coming together to work in Rome, and working together in Istanbul; the latter showed negotiation effectiveness and creativity by working with the local people as compared to the former where the group did not engage outside themselves as a group. The second was Parish’s theatre production. In theatre “artists communicate with and apply knowledge from the multiple intelligences in order to create a production” (p 75). Here each performer had a different skills set which corresponded to one or more forms of intelligence. The authors build up their thesis by using the model of theatre in particular to highlight the different kind of intelligences among the artists, such as; intuitive, intellectual, technique, kinaesthetic. The authors say that their chapter “constitutes tentative theorizing” (p 84). Like previous authors they support the view that Dance is used more in non-Western countries and the challenge for further development is how Dance can be incorporated into our way of learning and being.

‘Teaching Dance’ is the book’s next section and begins with ‘Building Kinaesthetic Intelligence’ by Nadja Alexander and Michelle LeBaron. They address the topic of developing somatic empathy, arguing that cognition and emotion are processes braided together, integrated with the body and integral to ways of knowing. Dance and movement are therefore expressions of human experience and potent tools for teaching. They hold that everyone who moves can dance and that the “suppleness, creativity and resilience” (p 91) required for working with conflict can be developed through dance and movement.



They challenge us to let go of words and find out how we can creatively manage non-verbally. They also highlight another facility, somatic embodied presence, the essence of mindfulness, a vitally important state for a conflict intervener which can be developed through breath awareness.

Charlie Irvine's 'Building Emotional Intelligence: A Grid for Practitioners' is the title of the second chapter in this section. The author begins by recollecting some of the experiences and the learning he gleaned from participating in the Saas-Fee Workshop. He describes the range of emotions he experienced through the physical movement of dance at the workshop, and found that: "It engaged the complexity of my emotions in a way that many, many hours of conflict-resolution training and teaching rarely have. It revealed the intimate connection between body and emotion, a connection that features little in conflict-resolution literature" (p 108).

Irvine goes on to contend that conflict intervention training in general tends to focus on mediating "from the neck up" (p 108). He cites the work of Antonio Damasio, and others, on the relationship between cognition and emotion in perception, and he refers to the distinction between feelings and emotions. The author argues for the need for mediators to be attuned both to their own emotions, and to those of clients in mediation; for mediators to understand emotional triggers in conflict; and for the value in supporting clients towards a greater capacity for appraisal and regulation of their emotions in conflict. The author introduces the 'Emotional Grid' as a suggested practical tool to help identify and assess the emotional volume and intensity, and the relationship between the two. He promotes the grid as an aid to self-reflection and self-awareness, towards understanding our own emotional triggers, and as a complement to mindfulness. He ends his chapter with this interesting and challenging observation:

"Rather than relying on models, perhaps we need to approach our work as dancers might; engage in daily practice and discipline so that when we rehearse we can use our whole range without inhibition. Then when it is time to actually perform, we interact afresh with a new audience, tailoring our moves to the nuances and minute details of each human interaction" (p 121).

The next chapter 'Dancing through Conflict: Developing Intuition for Mediation' is by Simon J.A. Mason, Susan Allen Nan and Virginie van de Loe. The authors' purpose in writing this article is to consider how mediators can develop intuition through dance and how this can be developed in mediation training. As "Intuition is one form of decision making often used in highly complex and uncertain situations - such as one's mediators typically are dealing with" (p 123) it is therefore a prime tool for mediators. They define Intuition in part as "knowing without fully knowing where we got the knowledge from" (p 123) and then go on to summarise some of the different aspects of intuition. This article is particularly useful for mediators as the authors say "Mediators use intuition in designing the process, relating to the parties and clarifying the issues" (p 126). They show how using dance develops intuition which in turn helps the healing process for mediators themselves who hold stress from working in high conflict situations. The authors look at a number of exercises which can be used in Mediation training as practised by the participants in Saas-Fee, and introduce some useful ideas for training.



‘An embodied Pedagogy for Conflict transformation; Stepping into New Practices’ by Margie Gillis is an interesting chapter where Gillis has “created a comprehensive map that encourages us to think not only *about* the body, but *with* the body” (p 135). This is intended for those who facilitate “movement - based exercises for peace building and conflict transformation” (p 135). Gillis looks at how connections between neuromuscular responses and movement patterns will help show how the physical is a component of the mental. And she says “Embodied conflict transformation asks us to mobilize our muscles to reorganize neural pathways that influence habitual responses” (p 135). Gillis then sets out the body movement exercises the facilitator asks the participants to do either with a partner, on their own or with the whole group. The focus is varied depending on the exercise and engages different parts of the body. The exercises are progressive and the purpose is manifold. Each of the exercises is followed by its reflective component. It will be interesting to see if Gillis’ exercises will be incorporated into mediation training programmes.

The Dance and Resilience section comes next and comprises five chapters, looking at international examples, with the primary focus on Ireland and Cambodia. ‘Finding Meaning: Dancing out of Conflict’ by Maureen Maloney begins this section. Maloney positions herself as one of the Irish diaspora, coming from a first generation Irish family living in Britain, with summer visits to Co. Clare. She writes about her participation in Irish step dancing then, and the fact that it carried for her a cultural significance, linking her back to her Irish heritage. Maloney sets the origins of modern Irish dance in the late 19th Century, driven by the Gaelic League as part of a nationalist drive to assert the distinctness of the Irish Cultural Irish identity, and as a form of resistance against the British colonial rule. The author then looks at a more contemporary dance performance in Ireland: ‘Hanging in There’ (a production of Legitimate Bodies Dance Company), an interpretive dance depicting negotiations on Good Friday peace Agreement, in which the movement and immobility of the negotiations leading up to the Agreement are depicted as a dance interwoven with language. She concludes by saying: “Dance has expressly been used in Ireland to collect shared memories and share collective memories, to mediate the pain and the loss associated with these memories, and to provide a space and place to re-enact and share those memories across generations and centuries” (p 178).

The second chapter, ‘Finding Meaning: Melting the Stone in Relational Disputes’ by Geoffrey Corry is also set in Ireland. He describes the impact of ‘Polarization Dynamics’ in Northern Ireland during the ‘Troubles’ where the two opposing groups divided in to camps where each ‘demonised’ the other, thereby having a ‘dehumanising’ effect on themselves. Corry talks about the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that many experienced as a result of this experience, and charts the process of trauma recovery. He argues for the need to include body based work in this recovery in order to ‘return to balance’ and recover from the trauma held in the body, as well as finding their voice, and being facilitated to tell their stories. Corry then gives an example from Bosnia, describing ‘Speak outs’ where victims from the Bosnian War were facilitated to tell their story to each other, as part of the healing process. Another example by the author of a concept that describes the barriers of self- protection towards re-humanisation



is that of the 'Double Wall' (Dan Bar-On) where emotional walls of self-protection are constructed on each side. In order to de-construct this wall, mediators engage in 4 layers of Interactive storytelling. The layers consist of: 1) Creating a safe space. 2) Hearing the story through one's own voice, and exploring beneath presenting issues. 3) Productive dialogue: supporting each to engage and acknowledge what is important for the other. 4) Dissolving of hostility as each feels validated by other, as a new relationship emerges. In terms of the metaphor of melting the stone, Corry explains that through this process the frozen position of the stone begins to melt: "... in the process, the humanising dialogue interrupts the trauma from being passed on to the next generation" (p 196).

The next chapter, 'Finding New Futures: Dancing Home by Toni Shapiro-Phim,' describes the significance of dance and music in recovering from conflict experiences in Cambodia and Liberia; specifically, for people who have been geographically displaced and are living in refugee camps. Shapiro-Phim talks about the potency of dance and gives examples of how repressive governments and colonizers over time have sought to suppress dance, or to manipulate and control the types of dance and music permitted, because of the threat to the dominant order that it posed.

In the Liberian experience, with the background context of two recent periods of a civil war in which large numbers of civilians were killed, and many others forced to flee, the author describes a well-known Liberian singer and dancer's experience of going into refugee camps and performing song and dance, and appealing to the soldiers to put down their arms. When referring to Cambodian dance examples, Shapiro Phim sets the context against the background of the Khmer Rouge regime, which forbade classical dance (which had previously long been considered a very potent symbol of the Cambodian national identity) and forced new formulaic dances.

She explains that, after the defeat of the Khmer Rouge in 1979, the PRK (People's Republic of Kampuchea) tried to resurrect the traditional/classical dance and music. Resources were put in place to find and support dance and music teachers who had survived the genocide. Dance and music became part of refugee camp life for those displaced, and the author describes how even when shelling was going on, hundreds would turn out to watch the performances.

This is followed by 'Finding New Futures: A Case Study of a Dance and Music Association in the Tonle Bassac Community' by John Burt with Andrew Dilts. This chapter details the rebirth of the traditional dance and music forms in Cambodia, and seeks to demonstrate "... that dance is not only a marker of social resilience and a tool of post-conflict cultural reconstruction but also a carrier of hope" (p 209). The authors explain the birth and growth of the Cambodian Living Arts (CLA), now one of the largest NGOs in Cambodia, which was founded as a result of a speech at a large Amnesty International gathering in New York in 1984 by a Cambodian refugee, Arn Chorn-Pond. Chorn-Pond and his associates have worked with a number of organisations who served as models and catalysts for reconciliation and cultural peacebuilding since then, promoting the use of traditional Cambodian Arts, (music and dance) to heal after atrocities of Khmer Rouge, to bring back what had been lost through the genocide.



Cambodia is also the focus for the final chapter of this section, 'Dancing in the Eye of a Storm: Principles of Practice When Working with the Arts Therapeutically with Traumatized Communities' by Carrie Herbert. Herbert describes the eye of the storm as holding "...the paradox of both stillness and intense turmoil" (p 217). She puts forward what she considers to be the essential elements needed for effective therapeutic work using the arts with war refugees; the primary need being to establish safety and trust within the therapeutic relationship. She also emphasises the need for congruence in the therapists. The author talks about the ability of the arts to 'hold paradox and internal conflict', and, maintains that, through the 'multivalent' nature of art, it has the capacity to convey a complex range of opposing symbols and emotions, therefore gaining insights, increasing embodied awareness and can have a much deeper transforming effect than is possible with verbal dialogue alone. She encourages therapists to expand their repertoire when working in the peacebuilding field: "Through images and metaphors, a therapist can help create an awareness of the blocks in the person's physical body" (p 220). She cites examples using a kinaesthetic approach, and working with clients utilising the 'imaginal realm' to help mediate traumatic memories through arts. Herbert emphasises the need for therapists to ensure that the necessary conditions for safe and effective therapeutic practice are adhered to by therapists when working with traumatized individuals and groups. She cautions that this work can bring the most vulnerable states of being to the surface, so that there is a serious ethical obligation and responsibility on therapists to "cultivate a safe framework" (p 226). She counsels therapists on the essential need for clinical supervision in their work. In the five chapters in the 'Dance and resilience' section, the authors demonstrate the connection between the arts and resilience through case examples set in conflict/post-conflict situations. In some chapters there is an emphasis on the power of dance and music as a resistance to oppression, and as an assertion of a collective identity. In others, the focus is on the significance of therapeutic embodiment-focused processes in healing trauma, and strengthening resilience. The spiritual dimension, and the carrying of the cultural heritage through dance and music is also brought out.

The next section 'Organizations: Finding Coherence' explores the relevance of dance to organisations. 'Finding Coherence 1; Observations on Movement and Worldview Conflict in the Workplace' by Mark McCrea begins this section. McCrea focuses on the importance of mindfulness in workplace conflict work. He explains the significance for him of the Saas-Fee Workshop in moving towards adopting a more embodied perspective. "In essence, the dance and movement frameworks in Saas-Fee established a foundation for the participants to become consciously aware of habitual thought patterns and emotions and understand how these factors impact appraisals of and responses to conflict" (p 232). McCrea suggests some key factors that may be influencing workplace conflict currently in the U.S.A., and he provides some statistics on prevalent types of bullying and harassment in the workplace, linked to worldview beliefs. He suggests that dance and creative movement could be used to enhance parties' capacities to change the dynamic and adopt a more mindful perspective. He advocates the use of kinetic facilitation and mindful exercise techniques, together with critical reflection; and he outlines a training framework design called MCE (Mindful Conflict Engagement). The components of MCE" are meant to increase participants' understanding of characteristics and behaviours associated with bullying,



harassment, and discrimination;” (p 238). McCrea details the components designed to be delivered in three segments and consisting of a combination of dance/movement, stories, role plays, mindfulness exercises and communication/conflict styles work. He concludes with the following unequivocal statement: “There is a compelling need for an evidence-based set of key theoretical principles to establish a foundation for movement-oriented interventions involving workplace issues” (p246).

This is an interesting chapter, with an innovative approach to pairing physical movement and awareness with the more conventional approaches to conflict intervention.

‘Finding Coherence 11: Catalyzing Embodied Change Processes in Conflict’ by Clemens Lang is the closing chapter bringing a cultural dimension. When working in an intercultural setting Lang devises interventions that consider the different systems of rationality: “Implicit cultural norms influence cultural dynamics, and effectiveness interventions need to explore the roots of conflict behaviour through the intervention of the senses” (p 247). And working in a multicultural setting with diverse expression of emotions, Lang says “out of this diversity comes the need for emotional intelligence” (p 248) which is required to make collaborative decisions. We can pick up cues of cultural meaning through bodily gestures; however, we need to be aware that the same gesture may have different meanings for different cultures. Arts-based interventions which are non-verbal are continuing to expand as they add a layer of accessibility across linguistic and cultural divides. Lang offers six paradigms for embodied transformative change processes. Each layer is a development of the one that goes before.

He talks about bringing self-awareness and perception to the fore and how he helps participants achieve these; the ability to express emotion in a safe context; knowing and understanding emotions as experienced in the body and how dance was used in this experiment; how an embodied approach can unblock entrenched situations where energy is blocked and what he does to help unblock; tapping into participants creativity and asking then what the desired outcome might look like; and finally a crystallizing ritual. The author ends by saying that although embodied approach to resolving conflict is recognised it is still in the process of becoming a concrete body of learning/knowledge for Negotiators, Leadership Developers and Mediators and this body of learning will come about through its application.

To conclude, the book ‘The Choreography of Resolution’ has a paradigm changing energy, moving the frame of mediation from a technical cognitive practice to a holistic embodied creative and artistic venture. The reader will be, like a match, sparked to refer to and integrate ideologies and practices coming from other sources, not referenced in the book, but supporting the ideas and arguments made (for example, Laban principles of dance [1963, 1975]). Straining to integrate other theories and experience with the knowledge, philosophy and practice in this book is both frustrating and exhilarating. The many different approaches to the subject push out the boundaries of knowledge and practice for the reader and promote a great deal more investigation in this dynamic and stimulating subject matter.



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