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Dancing Ourselves to Death: The Subject of Emma Goldman's Nietzschean Anarchism

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This article draws together two lively and provocative radical theorists, Emma Goldman and Friedrich Nietzsche, and suggests that a reading at their intersections can inspire political thought, action and resistance in particular ways. The argument is framed through and productive of a particular archetype which emerges from a reading of these thinkers, that of The Dancer. Both Goldman and Nietzsche have been noted for their affect-laden reflections on dance, as an image of the subject which evades capture within frameworks of discipline, morality and *ressentiment* and which instead commits to a ceaseless and creative insurrection of-and-against the self. Here I argue that through this image of The Dancer we can conceptualise a form of critical or anarchic subjectivity which can provocatively interpret and inspire radical political action. Whilst in the article I look at some of the ways in which dance has formed an important component of radical politics, I also argue that dance as understood in the terms established through Goldman and Nietzsche moves beyond corporeal performance, indicating a more general ethos of the subject, one of perpetual movement, creativity and auto-insurrection. I also reflect on the difficulties involved in the idea of 'self-creation'; as we can see from the more problematic dimensions of Goldman's thought, creation is an ethically and ontologically ambiguous concept which, when affirmed too easily, can serve to mask the subtleties by which relations of domination persist. With this in mind, the paper goes on to discuss what it might mean to 'dance to death', to negotiate the burden of transvaluation, limitless responsibility and perpetual struggle which these two thinkers evoke, in the service of a creative and limitless radical political praxis

Only in the dance do I know how to speak the parable of the highest things. (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 110).

To dance to death – what more glorious end! (Goldman, 1970a, p. 19).

Dance-time is here folks, the artistic ballet of fucking it up, and shaking the old world to the ground. (Vaneigem, 1983).

I begin from a problem that has become familiar in contemporary radical political theory, that is, that purported discourses, practices and projects of liberation have so readily coalesced into forms of domination, produced tyrannies which sport and distort the mask and mantle of emancipation. The force of calls to urgency or to pragmatism readily deflects attention from the subtleties by which power and domination operate, such that the most ardently revolutionary or cautiously poised strategies for change so often signify a perpetuation of the same. For all the changes and all the revolutions, too much remains undisturbed. Diagnoses abound, citing inadequate attention to micropower, modernity, intersectionality, privilege, class composition and more. This is, of course, a challenge with which many of the articles in this special issue are contending.

My contribution engages with the work of one important anarchist thinker, Emma Goldman. More specifically it focuses on the specifically Nietzschean dimensions of her thought, suggesting that it is through her encounter with Friedrich Nietzsche that we can read Goldman's most provocative contributions to radical thought and practice, and her most acerbic critiques of established orthodoxies. I argue that an encounter between Goldman and Nietzsche provides an important account of the limitations of radical politics, and of pathways forward which might disrupt some of these limitations. The argument is framed through and productive of a particular archetype which emerges from a reading of these thinkers, that of *The Dancer*. Both Goldman and Nietzsche have been noted for their affect-laden reflections on dance, as an image of the subject which evades capture within frameworks of discipline, morality and *ressentiment* and which instead commits to a ceaseless and creative insurrection of-and-against the self. Here I argue that through this image of *The Dancer* we can conceptualise a form of critical or anarchic subjectivity which can provocatively interpret and inspire radical political action.

I begin by outlining Nietzsche's contested relationship with anarchism, before looking in some detail at Goldman's Nietzschean anarchism. Goldman argued that a meaningful project of liberation must take seriously Nietzsche's critique of morality and suspicion of mass politics, and his emphasis on self-creation; these strains collect around both thinkers' use of dance. As such, I turn to look at instances and examples of dance in the conduct of political resistance, suggesting that they demonstrate the place and importance of play, festival and minor composition. However, I also argue that dance as understood in the terms established through Goldman and Nietzsche moves beyond corporeal performance, indicating a more general ethos of the subject, one of perpetual movement, creativity and auto-insurrection. Before outlining this conception of the subject, however, I reflect on the difficulties involved in the idea of 'self-creation'; as we can see from the more problematic dimensions of Goldman's thought, creation is an ethically and ontologically ambiguous concept which, when affirmed too easily, can serve to mask the subtleties by which relations of domination persist. With this in mind, the final section examines what it might mean to 'dance to death', to negotiate the burden of transvaluation, limitless responsibility and perpetual struggle which the two thinkers evoke, in the service of a creative and limitless radical political praxis.

Nietzsche observes that philosophy tends to consist of 'the confession of its originator', that in writing we offer an 'involuntary and unconscious autobiography' (2003a, p. 4). The implications and complexities of such a claim are beyond the scope of this article. However, I feel I must begin with a small confession of my own: I have absolutely no idea how to dance.

Nietzsche and Anarchism

Nietzsche was famously suspicious of anarchists. He referred to them as ‘the mouthpiece of the decaying strata of society’ (2007a, p. 65), and claims that it ‘is quite justifiable to bracket the *Christian* and the *anarchist* together: their object, their instinct, is concerned only with destruction’ (ibid., p. 156). This suspicion emerged from what Nietzsche saw in anarchism to be a reactive dimension which encountered the world only on the terms of that which was hated, rather than through the impulse or instinct to create the world anew: ‘A word in the ear of the psychologists, assuming they are inclined to study *ressentiment* close up for once: this plant thrives best amongst anarchists and anti-Semites’ (Genealogy 2: 11).

Despite this mistrust on Nietzsche’s part which, as Nathan Jun notes, probably came neither from reading anarchist thinkers such as Bakunin or Proudhon, nor from actual engagement with anarchist movements, but from sensationalist denunciations in newspapers (2012, p. 151), Nietzsche’s work has been influential on a number of anarchist thinkers. Of early 20th century figures, alongside Goldman it is perhaps Gustav Landauer’s readings which stand as the most prominent (Landauer, 2010, p. 64), though Nietzsche’s thought clearly influenced elements of Rudolf Rocker’s *Nationalism and Culture* (1937). Indeed Rocker, a prominent anarcho-syndicalist, also translated *Thus Spake Zarathustra* into Yiddish. More recently a number of treatments have reflected on the similarities, differences and productive tensions between anarchism and Nietzsche, which provide lively analyses of libertarian worker movements (Colson, 2004), the state (Call, 2002, pp. 31-60), epistemology (Koch, 1993), the role of *ressentiment* in anarchism (Newman, 2004), and more.

There is insufficient space here to do justice to either the complexity of the relationship between Nietzsche and anarchism, nor the richness of contemporary scholarship on this subject. My concern in this article is not with Nietzsche and anarchism *per se*, but with Goldman’s interpretations. The discussion clearly resonates with debates about the place of Nietzsche for anarchists (and radicals of all stripes), but does not seek to treat anarchism in its entirety. Similarly the concern is not to examine the totality (or ‘truth’) of Nietzsche’s thought, nor to become bogged down by Nietzsche’s particular (and frequently problematic) political opinions. Rather, it is to ask how a Nietzschean encounter can enliven our sense of the possible, without allowing this sense of the possible to coalesce into some general or grand theory (of either anarchism *or* Nietzsche).¹ It is on such terms that we move to Goldman’s Nietzschean anarchism.

Emma Goldman: The Dancing Anarchist

As Hilton Bertalan makes clear, Goldman has been largely overlooked as an anarchist theorist, attention focussed on her personal and political life at the expense of her theoretical contributions (save somewhat patronising acknowledgements that she ‘introduced’ a feminist element to anarchism) (2011, pp. 209-211). Goldman’s absence from most surveys of anarchist theory (or, rather, her presence as a perpetual footnote) is conspicuous. Despite this, her insistence on self-transformation, on creativity and on a radical politics which infuses and embraces all areas of life remains potent. Kathy Ferguson argues that the moves to see Goldman as an ‘emotional’ rhetorician and propagandist, rather than as a theorist in her

¹ Cautioning against focussing too much on the specifics of Nietzsche’s political pronouncements, Lewis Call suggests that we think more generally in terms of the ‘Nietzsche effect’. Call cites Ansell-Pearson arguing that the most fertile spaces are not Nietzsche’s ‘overt pronouncements...but rather in their ‘style(s)’, in their attempt to communicate a philosophy of the body, in their disclosure of the metaphoricity of philosophical discourse, and in the exemplary way in which they are seen to deconstruct the logocentric bias of western thought and reason’ (Call 2002: 35, citing Ansell-Pearson 1993: 29).

own right, represents ‘an implicit and highly conventional gendering in the distinction between the emotional activist and the theoretically sophisticated intellectual, a recapitulation of patriarchal gender codes that inhibits both our reading of Goldman’s political thinking and our ability to engage theories as kinds of practices’ (2004, p. 31). Against this marginalisation, I argue that we should view Goldman as an important anarchist theorist. That she expressed ideas not just in her writing, but in her speeches, her activism and in her life more generally does not render her ideas less important – indeed, it precisely asks important questions about how we view boundaries between ideas and practices, calling to mind Nietzsche’s response when faced with a scholarly book:

We are not among those who have ideas only between books, stimulated by books – our habit is to think outdoors, walking, jumping, climbing, dancing, preferably on lonely mountains or right by the sea where even the paths become thoughtful. Our first question about the value of a book, a person, or a piece of music is: “Can they walk?” Even more, “Can they dance?” (2001, p. 366).

Goldman could dance.

Despite scepticism towards Nietzsche from much of the anarchist community of the late 19th and early 20th century, Goldman was fascinated by his ideas. She called him ‘the intellectual storm center of Europe’ (Starcross, 2004, pp. 37-38) and gave at least twenty-three lectures across the US between 1913 and 1917 on the relevance of Nietzsche’s thought for topics including atheism, anti-statism and anti-nationalism (ibid., p. 29). Unfortunately, as Leigh Starcross notes in her attempt to reconstruct Goldman’s ideas about Nietzsche, the papers for these lectures were seized in a police raid on the offices of *Mother Earth*, the anarchist newspaper which Goldman co-edited (ibid.). While a full account of Goldman’s thoughts on Nietzsche no longer exists, his influence on her thinking is evident across much of her work. More important than his direct influence on Goldman, for the purposes here, are the ways in which she provides a lively interpretation of important Nietzschean ideas.

Goldman’s most substantive remaining comment on Nietzsche can be found in her autobiography, *Living My Life*, where she recalls debating his ideas with some friends and her lover, Edward Brady:

One evening we were gathered at Justus’s place at a farewell party. James Huneker was present and a young friend of ours, P. Yelineck, a talented painter. They began discussing Nietzsche. I took part, expressing my enthusiasm over the great poet-philosopher and dwelling on the impression of his works on me. Huneker was surprised. “I did not know you were interested in anything outside of propaganda,” he remarked. “That is because you don’t know anything about anarchism,” I replied, “else you would understand that it embraces every phase of life and effort and that it undermines the old, outlived values.” Yelineck asserted that he was an anarchist because he was an artist; all creative people must be anarchists, he held, because they need scope and freedom for their expression. Huneker insisted that art has nothing to do with any ism. “Nietzsche himself is the proof of it,” he argued; “he is an aristocrat, his ideal is the superman because he has no sympathy with or faith in the common herd.” I pointed out that Nietzsche was not a social theorist but a poet, a rebel and innovator. His aristocracy was neither of birth nor of purse; it was of the spirit. In that respect Nietzsche was an anarchist, and all true anarchists were aristocrats, I said (1970a, pp. 193-194).

Brady’s dismissive response to this statement moved Goldman to end their relationship soon after the conversation, such was her depth of feeling on the subject. For Goldman, anarchism is first and foremost a creative philosophy, and though it sets itself against (and works to defeat) multiple forms of domination – whether in the form of capitalism, militarism, patriarchy and more – it was imperative that it do so from

a desire to build something new, something better. It is on such terms that she insisted that Nietzsche's 'master idea had nothing to do with the vulgarity of station, caste or wealth. Rather did it mean the masterful in human possibilities, the masterful in man that would help him to overcome old traditions and worn-out values, so that he may learn to become the creator of new and beautiful things' (1996, p. 233).

In accordance with these ideas about the creative spirit, Goldman also outlined a Nietzschean critique of morality and of mass politics predicated upon the subordination of the individual. These ideas were, for her, mobilised as indistinct from the political struggles in which she was tirelessly engaged, ranging from anti-militarist agitation (for which she spent time in prison for attempt to convince people to resist the draft), to providing information and support about contraception (for which she was also jailed).

Goldman was uncompromising in her critique of morality. She argued that morality has been a tool by which the rich have convinced ordinary people to accept the naturalness and even desirability of their poverty and dispossession; for instance, it 'is Morality which condemns woman to the position of a celibate, a prostitute, or a reckless, incessant breeder of hapless children' (1996, p. 171). Using language reminiscent of Nietzsche, she argues that 'the Lie of Morality still stalks about in fine feathers...it is safe to say that no other superstition is so detrimental to growth, so enervating and paralyzing to the minds and hearts of the people, as the superstition of morality' (ibid., 169). Just as religion 'paralyzed the mind of the people...morality has enslaved the spirit', providing security for the rich more successfully 'than even the club and gun' (ibid., p. 170).

Crucially this disavowal of morality did not for Goldman entail a rejection of ethical responsibility and interconnection, nor the impossibility of taking particular positions. As Bertalan argues, hers 'is not an apathetic, detached, apolitical theoretical exercise lacking a consideration for consequences. Positions *are* taken, identities *are* asserted, injustices *are* addressed, and conceptual and logistical spaces *are* occupied' (2011, p. 218). What is crucial is that these positions are not raised to the metaphysical level of absolute standards, a gesture which will always work to subordinate humanity beneath it. Rather than establish new idols, the task, for Goldman, must be to engage in an ethics of self-creation:

The "beyond good and evil" philosopher, Nietzsche, is at present denounced as the perpetrator of national hatred and machine gun destruction; but only bad readers and bad pupils interpret him so. "Beyond good and evil" means beyond prosecution, beyond judging, beyond killing, etc. *Beyond Good and Evil* opens before our eyes a vista the background of which is individual assertion combined with the understanding of all others who are unlike ourselves, who are different (Goldman, 1996, p. 214).

As I outline in more detail below, this sensibility translates directly into the theme of perpetual movement and the archetype of dance through which we can read Goldman.

Alongside this suspicion of morality came a contemptuous response to any form of radical politics which allowed abstracted or over-strategised notions of 'The Cause' to subordinate individual and affective experience. One famous example here (from which comes the apocryphal quote 'if I can't dance it's not my revolution') concerns Goldman's recollection of a particular evening dancing in New York:

One evening a cousin of Sasha,² a young boy, took me aside. With a grave face...he whispered to me that it did not behoove [sic] an agitator to dance. Certainly not with such reckless abandon,

² Sasha was Goldman's name for Alexander Berkman, her lover and closest comrade.

anyway. It was undignified for one who was on the way to become a force in the anarchist movement. My frivolity would only hurt the Cause.

I grew furious at the impudent interference of the boy. I told him to mind his own business, I was tired of having the Cause constantly thrown into my face. I did not believe that a Cause which stood for a beautiful idea, for anarchism, for release and freedom from conventions and prejudice, should demand the denial of life and joy...I want freedom, the right to self-expression, everybody's right to beautiful, radiant things." Anarchism meant that to me, and I would live it in spite of the whole world – prisons, persecution, everything. Yes, even in spite of the condemnation of my own closest comrades I would live my beautiful ideal (1970a, p. 56).³

This is not to imply that Goldman was unaware of the potential pitfalls of foregrounding the insistence on 'beautiful things' in a context of struggle against poverty and domination. Recalling a conversation with Alexander Berkman, Goldman acknowledges his criticism of spending money on luxuries when so many people were living in poverty:

"But beautiful things are not luxuries," I insisted; "they are necessities [sic]. Life would be unbearable without them." Yet, at heart, I felt that Berkman was right. Revolutionists gave up even their lives – why not also beauty? Still the young artist [Fedya – who had raised the issue] struck a chord with me. I, too, loved beauty (1970a, p. 32).

I would suggest that it is precisely at the fold of this contradiction that we might interpret Goldman's project. She was certainly no apolitical aesthete, and sacrificed money, comfort and even her citizenship in the name of political agitation.⁴ Despite this, she retained her insistence on an anarchism which embraced and sought life and beauty. Whilst particular choices and priorities must be made, excising politics, or beauty, in the name of the other, in more general terms, fundamentally missed the purpose and content of both.

This suspicion of the ways in which ideals of 'The Cause' could be used to subordinate more particular experiences did not rest at Goldman's insistence on the role of affective experience. On a number of occasions she distanced herself from her comrades by supporting causes or expressing opinions that they felt worked against wider strategic interests. Most notable was her decision to criticise the Russian Revolution following her stay in Russia (2003), though her comments about homosexuality are particularly telling:

Censorship came from some of my own comrades because I was treating such "unnatural" themes as homosexuality. Anarchism was already enough misunderstood, and anarchists considered depraved; it was inadvisable to add to the misconceptions by taking up perverted sex-forms, they argued. Believing in freedom of opinion, even if it went against me, I minded the censors in my own ranks as little as I did those in the enemy's camp. In fact, censorship from comrades had the same effect on me as police persecution; it made me surer of myself, more determined to plead for every victim, be it one of social wrong or moral prejudice (1970b, p. 555).

For Goldman, an anarchism which dismissed particular struggles in the name of The Cause was both objectionable and, ultimately, doomed to fail.

³ On the origin of the quote 'if I can't dance it's not my revolution' see Shulman (1991).

⁴ Goldman was deported from the US in 1919.

As she sought to criticise such strategized formulations of struggle, Goldman also turned her critical focus on what was often felt to be the axiomatic subject of revolution, 'the mass'. In her most controversial (and, perhaps, most Nietzschean) passage, she wrote:

That the mass bleeds, that it is being robbed and exploited, I know as well as our vote-baiters. But I insist that not the handful of parasites, but the mass itself is responsible for this horrible state of affairs. It clings to its master, loves the whip, and is the first to cry Crucify! the moment a protesting voice is raised against the sacredness of capitalistic authority or any other decayed institution. Yet how long would authority and private property exist, if not for the willingness of the mass to become soldiers, policemen, jailers and hangmen.

[...]

Not because I do not feel with the oppressed, the disinherited of the earth; not because I do not know the shame, the horror, the indignity of the lives the people lead, do I repudiate the majority as a creative force for good. Oh, no, no! But because I know so well that as a compact mass it has never stood for justice or equality. It has suppressed the human voice, subdued the human spirit, chained the human body. As a mass its aim has always been to make life uniform, gray, and monotonous as the desert. As a mass it will always be the annihilator of individuality, of free initiative, of originality (1969, pp. 77-78).

In this unnerving statement we see many of the above-mentioned features of Goldman's Nietzschean anarchism at their most acute. She qualifies it by citing Emerson: 'I wish not to concede anything to [the masses], but to drill, divide, and break them up, and draw individuals out of them' (ibid.). Her critique is not levelled so much at individuals within as it is at the perpetual folding of these individuals into the collectivity, whereby the only meaningful expression of political action is one which compels self-denial.

Goldman acknowledges that her perspective here will not be popular ('no doubt, I shall be excommunicated as an enemy of the people' (ibid., p. 44)), but nonetheless insisted that at the heart of radical subjectivity must be a commitment to an ethos of dissent and creativity; without this, revolution would only prolong misery and domination under a new idol. It is on such terms that the politics of her Nietzscheanism is most apparent. Chastising poor reading (incidentally an issue which also preoccupied Nietzsche), she condemned 'the shallow interpreters of that giant mind' who did not understand that Nietzsche's 'vision of the *Uebersmensch* also called for a state of society which will not give birth to a race of weaklings and slaves' (1969, p. 44). A politics of the mass, for Goldman, can never be the creative force which will give birth to a society beyond the slavery and cruelties of the current one.

This emphatically does not mean that Goldman did not support collective political projects; she spent her life producing propaganda precisely advocating for them, and shortly after writing the above statement arrived in Russia full of hope for the revolution. She cannot be criticised as an inward-looking individualist in the same vein as Nietzsche. Rather, Goldman's critique was not of collective projects as such, but of the traditional dichotomies between individualism and collectivism which presume that one must eclipse the other.⁵ In particular, where the (image of the) collective was allowed to dominate and subordinate the individual, rather than reflect and build on the desires and creativities of those within, then the project of liberation begins to wither.

For Goldman, nothing was more pressing than the need to overthrow capitalism and the state. She saw them clearly for what they were (and are): a means of organising society which kept the majority poor and enslaved while enriching a small minority. However, for her, a response which was not creative,

⁵ See Goldman (1970a, pp. 402-403) and also Ferguson (2013, pp. 164-166).

or which demanded the subordination of the individual to the mass, would only trap us in this world or foster a new tyranny. Energetic and ethical self-creation must be at the heart of any radical project. In this sense, though she targeted her ire at particular processes, moralities and tendencies, her critique was not limited to these particular forms. She embraced the unknown and insisted on perpetual movement, arguing that ‘finalities are for gods and governments, not for the human intellect’ (1996, p. 49). Bertalan connects Nietzsche and Goldman on this point through the metaphor of dance. Citing Deleuze, he notes that ‘throughout his work, Nietzsche makes use of dance to explain perpetual and creative epistemological shifts...for Nietzsche, “dance affirms becoming and the being of becoming” (2011, p. 214, citing Deleuze, 2006, p. 183) As Zarathustra proclaims, ‘Only in the dance do I know how to speak the parable of the highest things’ (1997, p. 110). Nor should we do Nietzsche the disservice of limiting his statement here to an offhand metaphor – he took it seriously, made sure to note that his dancing was both a spiritual and corporeal concern (2007a, pp. 235-236), and, apparently, could be seen dancing and singing naked in his room (Nietzsche, 2007b, p. 112n70). Emma Goldman’s love of dance was noted in the above discussion of ‘beautiful things’. In another passage she breathlessly recounts a different evening:

At the German Club everything was bright and gay. We found Helena’s employer, whose name was Kadison, and some of his young friends. I was asked for every dance, and I danced in frantic excitement and abandon. It was getting late and many people were already leaving when Kadison invited me for another dance. Helena insisted that I was too exhausted, but I would not have it so. “I will dance!” I declared; “I will dance myself to death!” My flesh felt hot, my heart beat violently as my cavalier swung me round the ball-room, holding me tightly. To dance to death – what more glorious end! (1970a, p. 19).

To dance to death – this was Goldman’s project. Perpetual movement, endless self-creation, and an affective experience of the world which refused to draw lines between the micro-politics of desire and domination and the macro-politics of social change. Whether on the dance floor or shuttling around the US and Europe delivering incendiary speeches and lectures, Goldman never quite stood still; whether consumed with joy at the news of revolution or with grief in the face of suffering, her encounter with radical politics was a deeply affective one. Zarathustra tells us that, ‘though there be on earth fens and dense afflictions, he who hath light feet runneth even across the mud, and danceth as upon well-swept ice’ (1997, p. 284). Engaging in perpetual political action, and enlivened by the sense that ‘it is the *struggle* for, not so much the attainment of, liberty, that develops all that is strongest, sturdiest and finest in human character’ (1996, p. 49), Goldman danced.

Are You Ready For A Brand New Beat?

Organizing to undermine the state, capitalism, and all forms of social domination does not mean that one is faced with a choice between the joys of dancing and revelling and the serious work of class struggle. Far from it. Indeed, if one wants to be a revolutionary, perhaps it is the dancing that one should take more seriously (Shukaitis, 2009, p. 79).

Examples of dance playing a diverse role in political resistance, both historical and contemporary, are plentiful. Enslaved people in Brazil developed capoeira as a martial art which incorporated dance elements, as a means by which to develop skills that would be needed when attempting to escape colonists without raising suspicion. Elsewhere in this issue Adam Barker highlights the role of the Round Dance in asserting a specifically indigenous form and identity during the Idle No More protests in Canada

in 2012.⁶ In 1982, women involved in the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp broke into RAF Greenham Common and danced on top of the missile silos. In the 1990's the 'Reclaim the Streets' movement in the UK saw thousands of people take over major roads and hold huge street parties, both as an assertion of collective ownership of public space and as a challenge to mass car ownership. It is rare to come across a political demonstration of even moderate size that isn't accompanied by a soundsystem, samba band or other musical accompaniment, followed by a mass of rhythmically energised activists. Of course, the specific nature and purpose of these (and other) examples of dance in resistance varies with context, representing and performing very different sensibilities. Without wishing to suggest a general theory, I would suggest that many contemporary examples demonstrate the centrality of joy, festival and play to present-day understandings of creative political change.

Authors like David Graeber have suggested that, over the past twenty years, radical politics across much of the Western world has developed in a direction which has sought to avoid the clichés associated with much of 20th century Marxism; po-faced marches, endless factional debates and cleavages, and a strict separation between the serious work of political organising and the desires of everyday life (2007, pp. 375-418). Though this cliché is something of an overstatement, the desire to do radical politics differently remains important. It represents a move to overcome what Simon Critchley has called the 'active nihilism' which plagues forms of protest which are always constituted only through opposition, and which do not focus on creative and immediate transformation (Critchley, 2008, p. 124), and to respect Raoul Vaneigem's infamous charge, that people 'who talk about revolution and class struggle without referring explicitly to everyday life, without understanding what is subversive about love and what is positive in the refusal of constraints - such people have a corpse in their mouth' (Vaneigem, 1994, p. 26). In this sense, it represents precisely the affect-laden and creative politics advocated by Goldman.

Stephen Shukaitis places these ideas in the context of what he calls 'minor composition'. He argues that political action (whether in the form of protest, occupation, workplace assembly or otherwise) marked by dance, humour, and conviviality has a particular series of resonances, insofar as it reshapes the relations between subjects at the micro-political level. Protest 'becomes a space where intensive forms of social engagement occurs as an integral part of the developing of the collective self of the organising campaign as well as an intervention within the symbolic labour process' (2009, p. 72). He offers an evocative example of one particular (and, up to this point, dull) Mayday demonstration which was rescued from its own trudging monotony by the appearance of a soundsystem, which created 'an affectively richer composition of relations for those involved' (ibid., pp. 78-79). Such moments are not confined to their immediacy: '[m]oments of minor mutation, while often occupying a seemingly insignificant role within the larger social fabric, act as a fulcrum on which larger transformations in collective imagination are initiated' (ibid., p. 14). This faith in the importance of minor composition comes from the sense, shared by Goldman, that a change in macro-level political structures which does not emerge from or alongside a shift in everyday social relations will not fundamentally unsettle the place or nature of domination.

The image of festival has been important in understanding the role of these forces in contemporary resistance. Gavin Grindon highlights the ways in which the alter-globalization movement foregrounded a sense of festival or carnival as a means by which to bring desire, joy and dance into the heart of tactical thinking (2007, pp. 94-95). Of course, as Marieke de Goede demonstrates, the role of festival is not a new phenomenon, though its role has undoubtedly expanded over the previous 20 years (2005). De Goede notes one central dimension of political resistance which involves festival; it is, to a certain extent, content with its own irrationality. That is, it does not define success only in terms of policy

⁶ Indeed, a recently published book reflecting on the Idle No More protests is entitled 'The Winter We Danced' (The Kino-Nda-Niimi Collective 2014).

achievements or the discovery of new hegemonic ideals, but recognises that political transformations are less easily conceptualised or realised.

As dance and festival perform a frivolous irrationality, they also have a deeply playful dimension. Playfulness is a key component of Goldman's dance. Refusing the imperative to be incorporated within a systemic rationality it is valuable precisely on its own terms; nonetheless (and precisely for this reason) play also has deeply subversive implications. Rose Pfeffer, following Nietzsche, suggests that 'play represents an activity that does not aim at any practical utilitarian need and ends, being unconcerned with good and evil, truth and falsity' (1972, p. 207). In one particularly spectacular example, in 2007 a group of anarchists known as the 'Space Hijackers' protested against an arms fair in London by attempting to auction a tank outside the exhibition. Their (hilarious) account of allowing themselves to be chased around London in their tank, outmanoeuvring the police at every turn and successfully arriving at the arms fair in East London, evokes the sense of dance in a playful manner which simultaneously satiates the anarchists' desire for fun whilst highlighting the skewed priorities of the state's hapless security forces, who are playing games with anarchists instead of contending with the violence of the arms fair (Space Hijackers, 2007). Sandra Jeppesen argues that '[a]narchist theory, like anarchist practice, at its rhizomatic roots, is about play. From playing anarchist soccer to sex and gender play and playing with words to playing with a diversity of tactics, playing with the legalities of border-crossings, or playing with fire – play has always been an anti-authoritarian practice' (2011, p. 158).

None of this is to suggest that any one particular example of dance, festival and playfulness is necessarily good, ethical, revolutionary, or even particularly creative. Instead, it is to make the more modest suggestion that the presence of these elements in forms of contemporary resistance signifies a certain understanding about the place of creativity and affect, and of the importance of everyday transformation. How these dynamics work out cannot be determined in advance. As Shukaitis argues, 'the politics of carnival do not have any particular set direction *a priori*, whether radicalizing or stabilizing, but are only determined within particular historical conjunctions' (2009, p. 72).

This remains slightly unsatisfying, however. The conception of dance that I take from Nietzsche and Goldman demands more than that we bring an affective and creative spirit into the project of social change. It poses important questions and challenges to the nature of radical subjectivity. The creativity and joyfulness it demands is not a frivolous performance, even though frivolity may be its manifestation; its affirmation cannot be simple – creativity is too ambiguous and too fraught a task for this. It calls for a ceaseless and creative insurrection of the self. It challenges us to dance ourselves to death. Nowhere is this necessity more apparent than in the complications and contradictions we might identify in Goldman herself. In the following section I suggest that, rather than hold Goldman up as an idol, we might focus on her shortcomings and violences, as a means by which to think about the ambiguities of self-creation and the demands which accompany the Nietzschean imperative to dance.

Ambiguities of Self-Creation

Much of this article has taken Goldman and Nietzsche's pronouncements about dance at face value, has proceeded with a certain series of assumptions about the creative potentials of the dancing subject. However, we can also identify a series of problematic forms or manifestations of dance, which exhibit reactionary, disciplining or conservative tendencies.

William McNeill's anthropological study *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History* examines the ways in which the development of military training and military strategy has drawn on the human affectation for rhythmic solidarity (or what he calls 'muscular bonding'), using the affective

pleasure which comes from collective movement as a means by which to craft militarily effective social units. He essentially argues that militarism as we know it is ontologically rooted in precisely the same human interaction as dance (1995, pp. 101-150). Franz Fanon criticises the way in which dance provides a collective catharsis which saps the energy from more focussed revolutionary activity, arguing that:

...any study of the colonial world should take into consideration the phenomena of the dance and of possession. The native's relaxation takes precisely the form of a muscular orgy in which the most acute aggressivity and the more impelling violence are canalized, transformed and conjured away....When they set out [to the dance], the men and women were impatient, stamping their feet in a state of nervous excitement; when they return, peace has been restored to the village; it is once more calm and unmoved (2001, pp. 44-45).

Shukaitis warns against a confidence which obscures the ways in which spectacular manifestations of dance and festival can be recuperated within a capitalist system always working to commodify popular expressions of dissent, cautioning that 'it is important to not allow the giddiness of line of flight and seemingly endless deterritorialization to obscure the very real line of command of appropriation that capitalist valorization uses precisely in...networks of coding, decoding and overcoding' (2009, p. 73). And Michel Foucault's work in *Security, Territory, Population* demonstrates clearly how contemporary liberal governance functions precisely on the conduct of creativity and movement (2007). Indeed, several working within dance studies have identified the ways in which a Foucauldian gaze reveals the forms of discipline operating in the studio (Ann Ness, 2011; Green, 2002-3). And so, against the evocation of dance as a liberatory, creative endeavour, we have a militaristic, depoliticising, readily recuperated, neoliberal framework. What, then, insulates the form of dance outlined here from these important, even fatal challenges?

I would suggest that, to an extent, there can and should be no insulation, that the radical Dancer must remain perpetually alive to the dangers of her movement. To dance in the footsteps of Goldman and Nietzsche, we need to take the conception of dance beyond corporeal or metaphorical practice, framing it as an ethos of the radical subject. The Dancer is she who is committed to a perpetual project of self-creation. For her, liberation comes when people 'refused to be dazzled by superstitions' of morality and of the necessity of domination and poverty, and instead build their own values, create their own worlds (Goldman, 1996, p. 432). However, the form of radical subjectivity evoked by The Dancer must remain open to and in continual struggle with the reality of those difficult features outlined above. Nietzsche's mobilisation of dance, whilst playful, is also deeply demanding, and not affirmed easily; to engage faithfully, one must contend with the ambiguities of what it really means to 'self-create'. Whilst Goldman was to some extent aware of the difficulties that may be encountered here, there are also certain aspects of her thought which were deeply problematic – principally, elements of cruelty, misogyny, racism and essentialism. In the following discussion I suggest that is through attention to these features that we might gain a broader perspective on the ambiguities of self-creation.

Goldman has received widespread admiration from anarchists, feminists and beyond. The eloquent, passionate and ferocious manner in which she castigates her political opponents for their duplicity, cruelty or stupidity to this day sends shivers down a host of radical spines. However, and particularly when taking seriously the affective dimensions of Goldman's projects, there is something uncomfortable about the ways in which there has been a tendency to cherry pick the parts of Goldman's thought which are more easily affirmed, leaving other more troubling features in the past. As Clare Hemmings has argued, doing so can serve as a sort of cleansing process, by which we reassure ourselves of our own distance from these problematic perspectives whilst obscuring the ways in which these features can persist (however quietly) in our own practices and movements (2013, pp. 337-340). If

political radicalism is to avoid the traps of coalescing into new forms of domination, it must take this process (and the ways in which it reveals the ambiguities of self-creation) seriously.

Hemmings highlights a certain, cruel, misogyny in Goldman's thought. It is true that Goldman differed from many of her contemporaries in refusing to leave the work of women's liberation until 'after' the revolution, and in recognising that dominant relations of production depended precisely on a certain gendered subservience – that is, that women occupied a particular position which situated them as important revolutionary subjects. She also recognised that the form of femininity which rendered women as passive and subservient was not tied to women's natural condition, and that 'true emancipation of women...will have to do away with the absurd notion of the dualism of the sexes, or that man and woman represent two antagonistic worlds' (1996, p. 167). When encouraging women to reject the subservience and consumerism which dominant ideas about gender compelled, however, Goldman exhibited elements of misogyny. She made 'full use of an affective repertoire that includes humour, rage, irony, and rapture, as she positively will[ed] the women she baits to become subjects and not objects of history' (Hemmings, 2012, p. 533); her concern was to 'shake bourgeois women out of their contentment with gilded cages, and to encourage poor women not to risk all for the false promises of consumerism, marriage security and giving birth to sons' (Hemmings, 2013, p. 341). Nonetheless Goldman's passionate style betrays more than this analysis, and 'she frequently moves into characterising women themselves – rather than womanhood as a position, or femininity as a capitalist mode – as stupid and superficial to the core', exhibiting a 'vitriol bordering on misogyny' (Hemmings, 2012, p. 537, p. 541). What is particularly disquieting is the apparent delight Goldman found in making this case; 'the sheer pleasure she takes in her subject – women's dependency, greed and stupidity – means that this has considerably more liveliness than her suggestions for alternatives' (Hemmings, 2013, p. 341). In her affective and passionate style, Goldman 'risks getting caught up in the sadistic pleasures of humiliating those to whom humiliation already attaches' (Hemmings, 2012, p. 537).

Similarities can be drawn between Goldman's chastising of women and her comments on the 'mass' noted above. In criticising 'the inertia, the cravenness, the utter submission of the mass...[which]...wants but to be dominated, to be led, to be coerced', and arguing that 'the majority represents a mass of cowards, willing to accept him who mirrors its own soul and mind poverty', Goldman was engaging in a similar project of trying to excite individuality, movement, disobedience, creativity (1969, pp. 71-73). However, there is an indulgence in her style which establishes her own terms (and shortcomings) as self-evidently superior, in a manner which perhaps closes her mind to other manners of insurrection. As Hemmings argues, 'in the purity of her position and extremity of her feeling, Goldman is unable to consider that the excessive modes she finds so enraging – manipulation, duplicity, nagging – might be resources women take up in a hyperbolic mode not entirely unlike her own' (2012, p. 538). There is in Goldman a hierarchisation of quality and authenticity, by which certain examples of creativity or genius are held above others as idols of liberation; and so, frequent references to 'the beauty and genius of an Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman; an Ibsen, a Hauptmann, a Butler Yeats, or a Stephen Phillips' (Goldman, 1969, p. 71) set a certain standard of taste. Moreover, she sees such figures as struggling *against* forms of oppression in order to express their individuality, failing to consider the ways in which these (mostly white, mostly male) figures also benefitted from those very same structures of oppression. The problem here is not in Goldman's call for an insurrection against stultifying, moralising and submissive modes of being, but in the ways she establishes such insurrections from a privileged vantage point. Her attempted redemption of Nietzsche's aristocrat, as manifesting an aristocracy of the spirit rather than of wealth or caste, nonetheless retains an imaginary predicated on and produced through social hierarchy.

This is not to suggest that Goldman was not capable of being self-critical; indeed, she was very hard on herself when she felt that she had fallen short of her own standards. On one level, it is simply to

point out certain important shortcomings in her analysis, many of which persist in contemporary political thought. And so, to the above issues of hierarchisation and misogyny we can point to the ways in which Goldman evaded more difficult questions about American race politics by highlighting her Jewishness (Hemmings, 2013, p. 337), or the optimism (however cautious) Goldman placed in the idea of ‘human nature’ (1969, pp. 61-62).⁷ I want to suggest, however, that these problematic perspectives might to some extent stem from the overconfident manner in which Goldman invokes self-creation. In one sense, this is a rhetorical move, a challenge for people to defy the conventions of the age (‘how many women are strong enough to face...condemnation, to defy the moral dicta?’ (1996, p. 174)). It also has an onto-political component, rooted in the understanding that ‘man has as much liberty as he is willing to take’ (1969, p. 65), and that it is important ‘to begin with...inner regeneration, to cut loose from the weight of prejudices, traditions, and customs’ (1996, p. 167). However, Goldman does not pay a great deal of attention to the ways in which creation is an ambiguous concept which, despite poetry and promise, never simply removes us from the world in which we have been made. Attempts to create new values, new systems, new subjectivities, never quite shake off their heritage; in the face of confident pronouncements about women’s liberation we find misogyny; in the call for liberation we have familiar images of social hierarchy.

Whilst he was himself uncompromising about the need for self-creation, Nietzsche was more circumspect about its ontological content. In Karl Jaspers’ terms, he was ‘*necessarily* indefinite’:

Nietzsche always treats creation as though it were self-evident, but virtually never takes it as his theme. He does not develop and explain its nature. It is never a possible goal of the will. But his formulations have all the power of an as yet indefinite appeal to recall and to come to grips with authentic being (1980, p. 145, emphasis in original).

Firm or confident proclamations about creation too easily trap us within the dominant order, and blind us to the ways in which we are always produced through and implicated in the violences of the world; as such, a more delicate series of manoeuvres may be necessary:

Nietzsche’s stern earnestness paralyzes every sort of moral pathos. His kind of thinking can not rest content with, or even find edification in, any proposition, demand, law, or specific content. It proceeds indirectly by demanding that one take seriously those profound inner depths that would simply be obstructed by appeal to any derived law and any fixed standard (ibid., pp. 147-8).

The Nietzschean-inspired anarchist Gustav Landauer expressed similar sentiments when he argued that ‘[w]hat most anarchists like to present to us as an ideal society is too often merely rational and stuck in our current reality to serve as a guiding light for anything that could or should ever be in the future’ (2010, p. 89).

This caution about firm prescriptions and recognition of the ways in which purportedly new social forms so frequently reflect that which they supposedly displaced does not mean that we should therefore abandon concrete creative tasks of the sort that Goldman, Landauer and many others were (and are) involved in. It does, perhaps, mean that we might take more seriously Nietzsche’s best known aphorism:

He who fights with monsters must take care lest he thereby become a monster. And when you gaze long into an abyss the abyss also gazes into you (2003a: xxx).

⁷ For a carefully nuanced account of Goldman’s problematic encounter with race, see Ferguson (2013, pp. 211-241). On the contested relationship between anarchism and ‘human nature’, and for critiques of this humanism, see Newman (2007); May (1991); Jun (2012).

Whilst there is no shortage of interpretations of this statement, in the context here I suggest that it might be read both more obviously as a warning against becoming that which one opposes, but more substantially as a reflection of the demands that self-creation poses; seemingly trapped between the overbearing presence of where we have been, and the dizzying, potentially dangerous possibilities of where we might go, the imperative to create stands without ground or content, and yet remains crucial. As Nietzsche points towards the unnerving nature of the abyss, he also draws us towards it; preparing to encounter the idea of eternal recurrence, Zarathustra proclaims to himself ‘Now only dost thou go the way to thy greatness! Summit and abyss – these are now comprised together!’ (1997: 149). The impossible trauma of self-creation, in which we seek to remake the world knowing that we can never quite escape it, and knowing that our (necessary) attempts will always themselves (re)produce forms of oppression, places a heavy and urgent burden, both to continue creating, and to subject these creations to the utmost interrogation. This is not a straightforward waltz into the future, but a dancing on the margins which finds little resting space. As the examples at the outset of this section made clear, dance is not innocent, and can be found in or turned to the service of life-denying forces. The argument I outline here does not diminish this danger, but instead insists that The Dancer in Goldman and Nietzsche’s terms proceeds precisely with a lively and active sense of the possibility of these dangers, and with an understanding that this makes stasis an unconscionable choice. The Dancer must dance herself to death.

Dancing Ourselves to Death

Ye higher men, the worst thing in you is that ye have none of you learned to dance as ye ought to dance – to dance beyond yourselves! What doth it matter that ye have failed!

How many things are still possible! So learn to laugh beyond yourselves! Life up your hearts, ye good dancers, high! higher! And do not forget the good laughter. (1997: 285).

In this paper dance has been used to signify both a corporeal, affective practice of resistance, and as a metaphor for a mobile and creative radical subjectivity. The latter has been somewhat compromised by the recognition that creativity is a deeply ambiguous concept, both necessary and fraught with problems. However, this recognition and its accompanying caution are not intended to constitute a limitation on or dulling of the dancing subject, but are themselves imbued with a certain creative force. Three final comments on the nature of the Dancer serve to situate her as a subject of ceaseless insurrection, creative responsibility, and cheerful irony.

What is striking about Goldman’s conception of radical subjectivity is that it is a ceaselessly mobile one, never resting, always creating, never arriving:

The “arrived” artists are dead souls upon the intellectual horizon. The uncompromising and daring spirits never “arrive”. Their life represents an endless battle with the stupidity and the dullness of their time. They must remain what Nietzsche calls “untimely,” because everything that strives for new form, new expression or new values is always doomed to be untimely (1996, pp. 223-4).

An endless dance which permits few resting spaces and which allows no part of life to excuse itself from the imperative to recognise domination and to create anew. Her challenge is to render oneself vulnerable to this experience, to evade the stasis of morality and superstition and embrace the unknown, to acknowledge and even delight in the fracturing of one’s subjectivity. The Dancer is a courageous figure,

practicing what Nietzsche refers to as the ‘art of separating without creating enemies; not conflating, not ‘reconciling’ anything; an immense multiplicity which is nevertheless the opposite of chaos’ (EH, *Why I Am So Clever*, 9). Bertalan cites Butler, who argues that the ‘unitary subject’ is ‘is the one who knows already what is, who enters the conversation the same way as it exits, who fails to put its own epistemological certainties at risk in the encounter with the other, and so stays in place, guards its place, and becomes an emblem for property and territory’ (Bertalan, 2011, p. 222, citing Butler, 2004, p. 228). Instead, we may choose to hold less tightly to our impressions of who we are:

Nietzsche views humans not as finished beings but as works of art, and specifically works in progress. The philosophy of becoming implies a single ethical imperative: become who you are, create yourself as a masterpiece. And as Nietzsche argues, this involves creating one’s own law (Call, 2002, p. 51).

There is, for Lewis Call, a powerful synthesis between the micro- and macro-political implications here, insofar as an ethic of self-creation undermines the conditions of possibility of statist/totalitarian thought. He cites Rolando Perez, who argues that ‘the overman or over(wo)man is she who no longer needs the State, or any other institution, for that matter. She is her own creator of values and as such the first true an(archist)’ (ibid., p. 52).

These flighty evocations of a multiple, dancing subject are, however, only part of this story. Their cheerful optimism about the space and opportunities for creativity must be read alongside those trends in Nietzsche and Goldman which point towards a weighty responsibility. It is only through engaging with this dynamic that we can really grasp what it might mean to dance to death. Responsibility is a fundamental concept for Nietzsche (though, as with creativity, underdiscussed). Jaspers lays out the challenge well:

Thus Nietzsche’s freedom without transcendence is by no means intent upon simply returning to mere life; it aspires to the life of authentic creation. Just as Nietzsche’s denial of morals does not mean the annulment of all morality but a laying hold upon what is *more than merely moral*, so here his sole intention is to stimulate man to higher achievement. To be sure, without God, Nietzsche’s purpose seems to lead to the radical loss of all bonds: what remains is just to live as before and to allow life to continue as always. But this is to turn Nietzsche’s idea into its very opposite. Its challenge is tremendous, for the entire burden is laid upon the individual...Nietzsche is asking those who abandon morality to bind themselves by still higher and more inexorable bonds (1980, pp. 149-50).

The responsibility here is twofold: firstly, we must create something meaningful, something which does not simply replicate past forms, or flee towards nothingness. Secondly, we must undermine ourselves, seriously. To affirm the challenge of transvaluation while believing it to be easy is to fail, indeed, to not even begin. Nietzsche makes this clear when discussing the idea of cheerfulness; as Ansell-Pearson argues, a shallow cheerfulness is really miserable, because it ‘does not see the sufferings and monsters [it] purports to see and combat...tries to convince us that things are easier than they really are...The cheerfulness we can respond to must come from one who has thought most deeply and who loves what is most living’ (2005, p. 37). An easy affirmation of Nietzsche’s freedom is a chimera, a fraud which misses what is most challenging, profound, and productive. This is a challenge which Goldman made to other anarchists in her injunctions to draw anarchism into every phase of life – though, as we have seen, it is also a challenge with which she herself struggled.

It is here that the seriousness with which Nietzsche took self-reflection contextualises his cheerfulness in important ways – his was the cheerfulness of one who has thought most deeply. And so, he cheekily proclaims:

His step betrayeth whether a person already walketh on *his own* path: just see me walk! He, however, who cometh nigh to his goal, danceth...Life up your hearts, my brethren, high, higher! And do not forget your legs! Lift up also your legs, ye good dancers: and better still, if ye stand upon your heads! (1997, pp. 283-284).

However, he also writes that ‘The most intellectual men, provided they are also the most courageous, experience the most excruciating tragedies: but on that very account they honour life, because it confronts them with its most formidable antagonism’ (2007a, p. 57). Amongst these tragedies involves the recognition that we are more tied to our superstitions, more desiring of domination, more faithful to our idols, than we might wish to acknowledge.

This simultaneously joyful and painful encounter with the world (which one also finds in Goldman) evokes an ironic subject, a perpetually disruptive and partial self. Ansell Pearson points towards ‘the self-referential aspects of Nietzsche’s philosophy, which mock his own authority and draw attention to the personal nature of his principal thoughts and teachings (that the will to power is *his* interpretation of existence; that eternal return represents *his* formula for the highest affirmation of life possible, etc.)...Nietzsche conceives himself, not as another ascetic priest, but as a *comedian* of the ascetic ideal’ (1994, pp. 58-59). Nietzsche pulls himself apart gleefully and self-consciously. As he proclaims ‘I am Dynamite’, he simultaneously ponders ‘Maybe I am a clown’ (2007a, p. 253). He challenges us to cheerfully, seriously cheerfully, dance our way through life, learning to recognise the ways in which we remain faithful to superstition and domination such that we might create ourselves anew: ‘By teaching us that we must pursue a perpetual project of self-overcoming and self-creation, constantly losing and finding ourselves in the river of becoming, Nietzsche ensures that our subjectivity will be fluid and dispersed, multiple and pluralistic rather than fixed and centered, singular and totalitarian’ (Call, 2002, p. 33).

Call suggests that a Nietzschean might criticise anarchism because it constructs itself as a particularistic sect, ‘a political theory which would replace the nations of Germany and France with a “nation” of Bakuninites’. He argues that ‘The dominant figure in Nietzsche’s utopian political imaginary is much more profoundly non-sectarian. She is indeed *nomadic* in character’ (2002, p. 41). The explorations here have suggested that Goldman might be read in just this nomadic light, arguing that a radical politics that will truly change the world must dance, must be creative, joyful, multiple, and must take seriously the challenge of an ethos of self-creation which truly seeks to unsettle our endless complicity in domination, and which recognises that this task is never fully complete, that we must dance to death.

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