

The dancing body: trance and healing

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Title

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Abstract

This presentation is excerpt from the authors study in the magazine “Arts Sacrés” N° 35 (2017) . It is an essay to clarify the ancient mechanism which associates “enthusiasm”, rhythmic movement and healing. From the lullabies, through Dionysos and the Sufi mystics to the contemporary “rock and beat”. A healing for humans but also a salvation of humanity from the chaos.

Introduction

The lullaby, primordial dance, ecstatic and beneficent in the arms of the mother exists everywhere and since immemorial time. Plato was the first to see in this swing a jubilant mode of care by which the mother soothes the child, which she enchants with her voice.

Plato compares this with the healing -through a trance dance – of a psychomotor disorder called the Corybantes disease (1)

The Corybantes were priests of Cybele the Mother of the Gods in Phrygia, and they leaped or danced under the influence of the divinity banging with swords on their shields.

Let us try to clarify this millennial mechanism which associates the “enthusiasm” of movement with the healing.

1 Swaying and cadence

Cadence is a kind of regular and repetitive rhythm.

In ancient Greece, Dionysus patronizes music, trance and healing. He goes **back and forth** between the Earth and the Underworld, balances between life and death, from where he is awakened by the

nymphs who cradle him. He has the attribute “Dionysos liknitès” (God in the cradle), He is the god of life who has won over death. In his Mystery Cults, the initiated find both spiritual life and healing in rebirth from a symbolic death.

The link between music and healing is perpetuated in the Mediterranean world: patients have been listening to music in hospitals in Turkey since the 13th century and many Arab and Persian authors give examples of this music therapy (2). The musical trance is often danced and perpetuated in “tarantism” in southern Italy, the cult of the “jnoun”(djins) or the saints in the Maghreb (north west arab Africa), as well as the shamanism and possession cults from all over the world.

The Occident, which thought that it had eradicated trance by desacralizing dance and reducing it to mere entertainment, has seen it coming back since the beginning of the 20th century through a mass music whose swing and beat evolved to “rock and beat”. The simple rhythmic organization called cadence, involves the periodic and well-marked return of the highlights: the hammers strike the anvil in rhythm, Cadence is always the schema of swaying and 'enchanting' according to Plato; it introduces us into a second world.

2 Trance from Eleusis to Rock n'Roll

More than 2000 years after Plato, Hegel wrote that to cure a mentally ill, it is best to put him on a swing . (3) Roustang, a French philosopher, regards this action as a **hypnotic induction (4)**. Like the snake which hypnotizes its prey by swaying. The hypnotic effect of swaying is a general phenomenon in the living world.

The hypnotic state, or trance, is another state of consciousness, in which one perceives a reality inaccessible in ordinary time. We traverse (trans) from one state to another, passing through an unknown world populated by invisible forces that defy the usual laws. The body in trance does not feel the pain, does not burn, does not bleed and, as a result, hypnosis is a healing technique that is as old as humanity because it mobilizes these unsuspected resources that man possesses to put them at the service of healing.

Trance is often associated with a supernatural state. The Greeks gave it the name of **ecstasy** (being **out** of oneself) and invented the word **enthusiasm** (the god **in** oneself) to designate especially the trance of the initiates in the Mysteries. The word has lost its force today, but continues to evoke a momentum that, in contact with something particularly beautiful or moving, raises, upsets, causes overflowing joy.

The cadence is a trance inducer recognized since a long time. The great Persian poet Rumi (1207-1273) fell into ecstasy when he heard a hammer struck on the anvil of a goldsmith (5) and begun dancing. He evoked a mystery without revealing it: **“in the cadences of the music is hidden a secret, if I reveal it, it would upset the world” (6)**

Rumi is a Sufi (Muslim mystic), he seeks union with God, but if it is Him whom he finds in the rhythm, why not reveal it? If it is something else, it must be sublime because the trance puts us out of the ordinary limits (**sub-lime** of the Latin **limes**, limit).

Nietzsche, the visionary, knew it: **“it is only by dancing that I can read the symbols of the most sublime things” (7)** . He is atheist but his walking, which in his personal case replaces dance and trance, fills him with a sacred drunkenness, a 'divine' enthusiasm inside which he secretly hopes to find God. He confides, by the voice of Zarathustra: **“I can only believe in a God who knows dancing” (8)**. As he cannot find a word to name him, he gives this unknown God the name of Dionysos and announces his return.

Was he a prophet? Could it be Dionysos Bromios (noisy/ broom) who re-emerges in the 20th century in the thunderous rock music where under a frenzied beat, dancers of all countries break out, helped or not by a substance with the evocative name, ecstasy?

3.The ear of the heart

The heart of Dionysus is immortal. The god is reborn from the underworld thanks to the goddess Rhea who gets his heart beating out of his corpse torn and devoured by the Titans. The initiate in the Mysteries perceived in the striking of the musical cadence, and the repetitive gesture of the dance, the immortal beat which, from generation to generation, perpetuates the life of man, victorious over death, like Dionysus.

Rumi, hearing a day in a bazaar a fox skin salesman repeating Dilkou Dilkou (the fox), begins to dance by repeating Dil Kou, Dil Kou (where is the heart)? What kind of immortal heart is he seeking? Like all mystics, he sees beyond the muscular pump thanks to which blood circulate, he associates the heart with love, a love greater than ordinary love, a sublime love, divine, eternal.

Enlargement of love to a larger object is also claimed in techno or hip-hop group dances; they aim to overcome the love awakened by the dance in couples; they seek, by the beat, to unite the dancers to a giant heart that brings together men of all nations in the same love of humanity (9)..

Therefore a question arises : Are the simplest music, the barest rhythm, the electro boom-boom or the hammer strike sufficient to reach sublime love? One might wonder why a poet like Rumi, familiar with the rhythmic and melodic complexities of Arabic poetry, did not need them to meet God. However, the stirring mystery revealed to him by the cadence is the **meaning of words**. A millstone, in his screeching, seems to pronounce 'subbuh quddus', the glorified the saint (10). What he hears makes sense to him. Gilbert Rouget, a French ethnomusicologist, emphasizes that the trance does not come from the sound, but from the meaning that one puts in the sound. (11)

The Sufis, following the Fathers of the Church, call "**ear of the heart**", the capacity to access the **other** state of consciousness beyond appearance. The sense (meaning) appears when all the senses unite under the primacy of the deeper understanding; then they contemplate the invisible, listen to the unheard, give body to the immaterial.

Where would this miracle come from, if not from love, that intoxicating state which, as everyone knows, shows what only appears to the one who loves? The heart is the source of the 'sixth sense'. Its ear is connected to the invisible world, the **meaning, the Word, the Logos**.

The spiritual audition of the rhythm makes all mystics swing, dance or whirl. Animists, Hassidic, Sufi, orthodox Christians barefoot on embers in modern Greece (12), dance united to the Divine who bears various names according to the cultures, but Who is everywhere perceived as the 'Other' not accessible to ordinary consciousness. Even the psychoanalysis recognizes a transcendence by gratifying it with capital letters: **it is the Other, the Symbolic, the Language**, which transfigures the ordinary world.

4 A Remembrance

Sufis developed a ritual of spiritual hearing (“samâ”) coming from repetitions of sacred formulas. During the remembrance (“dikhr”), a musician – beating a drum -invites the listeners to repeat the formulas through movement and respiration, and thus to evolve **from listeners of music to music players**, to evolve from the passive enchantment of the receiver cradled by the voice of God to the joy of the emitter who is intoxicated with “playing God” with his own voice.

Music and dance have a similar function, to revive the trajectory of the human being- through the language - to the Other, represented initially by the voice of the mother. After enjoying it passively in the lullaby, the baby discovers the joy to dialogue with her through rhythmic vocal games that put the baby to the active position. However the baby experiences moments of distress: every time she walks away from him, he feels himself dying, and then comes back to life when she returns.

The baby tries to alleviate his pain by imitating, replaying, these heartbreaking alternations using pairs of opposites .

In the example described by Freud under the name of “fort-da” (far-here) **(13)** Freud’s grandson after crying loudly for some time after his mother walked out of the house, he started playing with a reel coming and going from behind to the front of his bed. In this game the baby “sees” his mother disappearing / appearing . He thus discovers the substitute which re-presents her 'differently', **the symbol**. He will no longer be annihilated by her absence. This game becomes necessary for his 'resurrection' and he is intoxicated now as it frees him from the mortiferous dependence . This rhythmic repetition is incorporated by the child in a beat of annihilation and recurrence.

This jubilant beat resurrects from the mortal chaos of confusion and opens to the joy of 'another' love, the union. The repetitive gesture of the dancer has made sense, it is the dancer’s reel, his “fort-da”. It makes the dancer 'marry' the cyclical movement of life, which calls him insistently, pushes him to become what he is, abandoning the law of gravity for the drunkenness of dance: **“That all that is heavy becomes light, that every body becomes dancer, every spirit bird: and, in truth, this is my alpha and my omega** says Nietzsche**(14)**

The love of the mother is the source of the love of the Other, the Symbolic ('God') who makes **her** immortal. Beyond the mother, there is the love of Life and, even further, the love of the Creator of the Universe, of the Cosmos whose invisible order provokes the rotation of the stars. The ear of the heart of the mystics, since the Greeks (Pythagoras), hears it in **the music of the spheres**.

In conclusion, the discovery of the divine parents, the Mother Earth -Creator of Life, the Heavenly Father inventor of the Symbolic Order, was probably the ecstatic secret of the initiates in the Mysteries of Eleusis, defining themselves as 'children of the Earth and the Starry Sky'. Would this two-faced symbol be the unknown god of Nietzsche, the one the dancers seek in the enthusiasm of rhythm to heal the world, to save it from chaos?

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