



Transcendence Via Active Imagination: Ritual, Culture and Choreographic Offerings

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Abstract

This paper concentrates on the presentation of a California Bay Area Jungian focused study group for the 50 Anniversary of the American Dance Therapy Association Annual Conference. Examining the evolution of Jung's basic psychoanalytic perceptions over the years, this panel of presenters offered an in-depth study of related topics via lecture in the morning and its amplification via authentic movement in the service of dance/movement therapy in the afternoon. The latter included embodying and transforming remnants of participants' morning reflections, channeled via authentic movement (AM). Panelist took turns leading an AM experience related to her morning's topic and concluding by pairing or grouping participants to demonstrate and relate his/her personal journey. The final presenter initiated a process of transcendence in which the parts are amplified into choreography. Our panelists demonstrated a clinical approach to healing in which authentic movement stokes active imagination, elevating unconscious problematic issues to conscious awareness. Overtly expressed in choreographic form, such revelations can enable integrated therapeutic closure to group dance/movement therapy sessions.

Keywords Dance · Therapy · Active imagination · Authentic movement · Psychology · Transcendence

Introduction

Preparing for the American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA) 50 Anniversary full day Intensives in 2016 was at once exhilarating and daunting. Our California Bay Area Jungian focused study group has been holding monthly seminars, facilitated by Joan Chodorow, for a couple of decades. Examining the evolution of Jung's basic psychoanalytic perceptions over the years, we have interwoven in-

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depth study of related topics with authentic movement in the service of dance/movement therapy (DMT). Titled, “Amplification of Dance/Movement and Active Imagination,”¹ this paper concentrates on the author’s presentations of her sessions, in addition to summarizing related others.

Devoting the morning session to lecture, each panelist offered a slice of Jung’s multilayered psychology theories and practices, framed by our individual preferences and interests. Topics ranged from Jung’s analytical method of active (aka, creative) imagination and the Archetypal Affect System, a theory of the basic emotions and their role in psychological- symbolic development; the importance of implicit knowing in clinical work; examining the fluid patterns of culture and active imagination from an anthropologic perspective (based on Henderson’s theories of cultural attitudes) vis-à-vis dance and movement through the centuries; integrating and embodying ancient cultural alchemy recycled through a Jungian lens, authentic movement and the somatic unconscious (2016 ADTA Intensives).

Engaging the process of active (aka, creative) imagination, the entire afternoon concentrated on embodying and transforming remnants of participants’ morning reflections, channeled via authentic movement (AM). Each panelist took turns leading an AM experience related to her morning’s topic. Congruently, each concluded her segment by pairing or grouping participants to demonstrate and relate his/her personal journey.

Part 1 Morning

This Panelist’s Presentation

Examining the fluid patterns of culture and active imagination: An anthropologic perspective.

Henderson’s Cultural Attitudes

Viewed via an anthropological lens, this section is heavily flavored by Henderson, a very important disciple of Carl Jung. Joseph Henderson (who lived from 1903 to 2007) conceived the concept of cultural attitudes when he first went to Zurich, Switzerland in 1929, the year of the great depression in the US and a world in turmoil. After having spent a year in Germany he arrived in Zurich to study with Jung, to gain insights into his own unsettled psyche. Interestingly, while attending Jung’s regularly scheduled seminars, he became quite fascinated with how the other

¹ Chodorow explains in her book “Jung on active imagination” (1997) (also see Jung, 1965, pp. 170–199) the term emerged in the process Jung’s own self healing after his traumatic break with Sigmund Freud (about 1912). He discovered that the unconscious could be accessed through relaxed imaging of fantasies, daydreams and even childlike play. He spent several months, deeply emersed in these explorations (pp. 170–199) in which aspects of his conflictual issues surfaced to conscious awareness and led to his own healing. Likewise, Jung came to conceive the creative arts as conduits to these submerged issues. He referred to this aspect of therapy as Active (creative) Imagination. Authentic movement has often been employed as a means of bringing submerged issues to conscious awareness. Jung, a very skilled visual artist, represented his insights via highly symbolic paintings.

participants were relating to Jung, and importantly, how they were projecting their personal attitudes unto him. Some of them identified with Jung because of his religious perspective, some because he was philosophical, some admired his social outlook, and some, the artists among them, because he was aesthetic (Henderson, 1984). In fact, Jung was quite a skilled artist who used his art in the process of his own self-healing. So, here we have the four cultural attitudes Henderson first identified: the Religious, the Philosophical, the Social and the Aesthetic.

Underpinning the Religious attitude was the sacred, the probable source of ritual practices of all native cultures. Invoking the presence of gods or spirits and mediated by a shaman, priest or medicine man, some designated figure that embodied the Religious. The Social centered on the physical and general well being of each member as well as the entire tribe; active participation ensured the tribe's spiritual welfare, spawning unity and identity. Manifesting the Aesthetic were elements of performance: special ceremonial garb was worn; stories chanted; movement patterns choreographed and performed, accompanied by some sort of rhythmic drumming. Of significance, the Philosophical interwove these various threads, providing a rationale for their tribal lore and practices, that is, an explanation of the mysteries of life (Henderson, 1984).

Although tribal cultures varied from one another, Henderson pointed out (1984), they shared common basic elements centering on all aspects of existence, from birth to death. In essence, they provided the scaffolding for all life's passages including: birthing, coming of age, marriage, fertility, hunting, requesting and thanking, death and mourning and, of course, healing. Dance underscored all of life's rituals and ceremonies.

Emotions Vis-à-Vis Culture

Henderson (1984) noted, that underlying the functions of personality and behavior are psychological constants, including the basic elements of the archetypal affects (i.e., the basic emotions.² In contrast, the personal unconscious, when propelled to a conscious level, is strongly molded by cultural attitudinal influences. Thus, the four cultural attitudes, he asserted, are “in a continual process of change and reformation” (p. 76).

Synchronistically, Eric Erikson, in his oft sighted text, “Childhood and society” (1950/1995) contended that ego development, across the entire life span, was more dependent on social-environmental factors shaped by the influences of culture—that is the “interpenetrability of individual and culture—than any earlier developmental models” (p. 143). Such agreement strongly supports the contention that patterns and attitudes of culture are dynamical phenomena.

² Emotions: fear, grief, anger, shame/contempt/disgust, startle, joy, interest/curiosity (p. 77) (Chodorow, 1991).

Pearl Primus and Africa

An authentic exemplar and an active witness-participant in African culture is one of the first African American dance anthropologists, Pearl Primus, who lived from 1919 to 1997. She spent a number of years in Africa studying dance and tribal rituals; her first experience, (sampled below) is rather remarkable.

In the early 1940s Primus received her MA degree in Anthropology from Hunter College in New York City (NYC). Relatedly, in the summer of 1944, Primus visited the Deep South to research the culture and dances of Southern blacks. Likewise, curiosity and interest (see, footnote on basic emotions) motivated her to visit over seventy black churches as well as to pick cotton with sharecroppers. Finally, in 1978, she completed a Ph.D. in Anthropology at New York University. A point of great interest here is: in 1969 she was invited to and presented at the ADTA's Fourth Annual Conference. Her presentation topic was *Dance in African Cultures* and her subsequent related article appeared in the Nov. 1969 Annual Proceedings titled "Life Crisis: Dance from birth to Death."

The Prelude to Primus' first experience in Africa began in 1947, following her performance as the Witch Doctor in a production of *Emperor Jones*. Serendipitously, the president of the Rosenwald Foundation (in New York City) happened to be the audience. So impressed with the power and authenticity of her dancing, he was surprised to learn Primus had never been to Africa. As a result, in 1948 she was awarded a four thousand dollar fellowship from the Foundation for an eighteen-month research study of the dance and cultures in the north and western parts of Africa (Wikipedia, 2015). A key point to bear in mind is, her experiences reflect a much earlier era; cultural changes in Africa in the years since have been extreme, in fact, unrecognizable.

Primus quickly adapted to the tribal environment. In fact "her unique and powerful dance style and ability to assimilate into tribal life so impressed the African people, the Oni tribe in Nigeria adopted her into their community, naming her Omowale, meaning, "the child who has returned home." They said, "She possessed the spirit of the ancestors" (Wikipedia, 2015). So she was able to learn and participate in their dances and rituals (DeFrantz, 2001; Primus, 1993). Primus sensed there was a "strange, hypnotic marriage between Life and Dance" (Primus, 1969, p. 2).

Since one of her responsibilities was taking care of the children, including getting them off to bed, she had to learn their bedtime stories and the accompanying dances. Studying with the storytellers, she learned to tell the stories as well as to teach the dances. These tales usually contained societal lessons re morality and behavior. For example, in the story about Mr. spider, the moral was: to "teach the children, not to be greedy" (Primus, 1969).

Based on her personal experiences in Africa, Primus (1969) concluded and wrote: "Culture is the totality of man's learned behavior. It is all that is not biologically inherited" (p. 2). Primus was very much in sync with Henderson and Erikson (noted above) when they asserted that overt consciousness or learned behavior, is strongly molded by cultural influences.

Cultural Differences

A quite different and rather strange exemplar of cultural diversity in relation to our child rearing traditions is the percepts relayed by anthropologist Lancy (2008). Lancy studied the cultural practices of a village in Fiji, New Guinea—an Island in the South West Pacific—that contrast significantly with our child rearing constructs. He distinguishes the approach between the two, labeling the US and other western societies as “pick when green” versus “pick when ripe”. He points out that in Fiji’s, pick when ripe culture, babies and toddlers are paid little attention until they are old enough to be of help with small chores, that is, to be of use to the adult world. In fact, he informs, they are not formally named until after being weaned. His conclusion regarding normal development: “they grow up just fine”.

Conversely, “pick when green” is child centered; caregivers nurture their babies, try to establish secure attachments, attune to their needs, cuddle and play with them. A child centered paradigm embraces a loving home in an secure environment in which children can develop and thrive according to natural patterns of maturation.

Child psychiatrist, John Bowlby is commonly associated with the concept of infant attachment, began developing the theory in the 1930s. He asserted that early secure attachment, i.e., attentive, focused interactions with primary caregivers, is considered essential to creating a solid foundation for normal, healthy emotional development (Bowlby, 1969, pp. 38–57).

Stern (1985/2000) has written much on early child development, beginning with preverbal communication between mother and child. Attunement, he asserts, that is, mutuality in terms of vocal sounds, facial expression and reciprocal body-gesture-movement afford a “shared framework of meaning” (p. 125) that the infant internalizes. This process sparks subjective affects in which “a new domain of intersubjective relatedness” (p. 125) is formed, one that nurtures the evolving empathic process. Attunement, Stern informs, although beneath the level of conscious awareness, begins with imprinting (i.e., the initial bonding with caregiver), in essence, a rudimentary preverbal “prototype” of communication. Further, attunement, asserts Schore (1994), establishes the underpinnings of intersubjectivity and social cognition. Thus, these early interactions are believed to stimulate and develop the neuronal networks upon which attunement (i.e., intersubjectivity) and empathy are predicated. Of significance, described here are the essential underpinnings of the therapeutic relationship.

Rituals

The ubiquity of rituals and ceremonials within all our diverse societies do appear to be biologically programmed, regardless of the multitude of variants. Marie Mockett (2015), for example, in her memoir regarding the traditional practices of Japanese burial and mourning, describes age-old death and burial rites many Japanese still follow. Although American born, her family in Japan are still deeply involved in practices, dating back to a period when monasteries and monks played primary roles in this lengthy procedure. She recounts her recent personal family experiences, a process that led her to an in-depth study of the different extant monasteries in Japan.

Her travels throughout the country, regardless of size or place, revealed long practiced rituals still play a vital role. An unanticipated discovery, it led her to conclude that ritual practices were somehow wired into the brain. Likewise, Group DMT has groundings in ritual, often starting and ending with the circle—a primal form that goes back beyond recorded history—engendering a sense of connection, safety and communication.

Carl Jung, in his later life, was drawn to the study myths, and legends of ancient cultures. He would probably have interpreted these cultural rites as long practiced expressive exemplars of active imagination. Here too, we shift to ancient times and the emergence of cultural products of active imagination.

Folk/Fairy Tales and Myths

Active imagination generated folk tales, fairy tales myths and legends. The most ancient stories, such as folk tales evolved from preliterate, oral traditions; Thus when passed down from generation to generation, they underwent multiple variations. Later, in literate times, when stories or fairy tales—as they were subsequently called—were written down, they sustained fewer changes.

Folk tales were stories evolved from real-life phenomena, often as a means of dealing with inexplicable difficulties within a community. Fairy tales, in contrast, were pure fiction, involving magical creatures such as dragons, ogres, witches, and unicorns. Both fairytales and folk tales were instructive, often lessons of warning of the possible consequences of particular unacceptable cultural behaviors or attitudes (Gray, 2016; Konner, 2010). Nevertheless, both contained much superstition and magic, based on an anthropomorphic world that generated fertile ground for active imagination.

One example is the very old and still ubiquitous story of Little Red Riding Hood. Commonly Red Ridding Hood is portrayed as young girl. However, in cultures where females would not be allowed to venture out alone to visit Grandma, or any one else, her gender is conveniently changed to male. Further, in some versions, Little Red Riding Hood and Grandma are eaten by the big bad wolf. Magically, when the bad wolf is killed and splayed open, Little Red Riding Hood and Grandma emerge, alive and well.

When we next explore the genre of the ancient mythology, where archetypal gods and goddesses prevail, concepts of religion and archetype now enter the scenario. Archetype stems from the Greek “arkhetupon”, meaning the original version or prototype of something. The archetype is said to be a universal imprinting having no material existence of its own. However, it’s objectified or given life via symbols, metaphors and images, such as through myths, religion, societal codes and philosophical principles of existence (Henderson, 1984). In essence, they have influenced and imprinted their signature on all cultures throughout human history.

The evolution from mythological and pagan practices to the emergence of the biblical period in which Judaism, Christianity and Islam evolved, spanned many centuries, creating a cascade of massive shifts in the western world. Beginning with the medieval period, history records the monumental cultural evolutionary as well as revolutionary metamorphoses the universe has undergone.

Consider our modern diverse society, the culture in which each of us grew up. Reflect, for a moment on the relayed folk and fairy tales, the ceremonies and celebrations in which we took part and still do, They all played some role in shaping the belief systems and attitudes we absorbed and assimilated.

Conclusion

From our interactions with our first caregivers, the blue print is established. It then, branches out into a confluence of factors that mold our learned behaviors. So we evolve from family practices, and the neighborhood(s) in which we lived, to the schools we attended, to the, workplace, the city, state, country, and beyond. Shaped by many weighty influences, we develop from the personal to the global as we absorb and integrate a profusion of complex environmental ingredients. This means, we are participants and observers, as well as change agents in these dynamical shifts. In fact some current qualitative DMT research models explore populations and include direct contact in which the researcher(s) join with the sample group, entering a collaboration that simultaneously induces change.

Likewise, consider the cultural practices and attitudes within our current lives that have been, or are in the throes of transformation or, transcendence, an ever-going evolution. And so we move to dance/movement within the context of transcendence.

Part 2. Dance/movement Experientials: Active Imagination and Authentic Movement

Introduction

Significantly, rituals of early cultures (as alluded to above) were objectified through dance, whether for healing or other societal practices. Likewise, active imagination, generated the folk tales, fairy tales and legends that for centuries seeped down through the ages to our present day diverse and convoluted world. Part 2 concerned the movement experiences in which authentic movement served as a catalyst for active imagination, to fuel the process of transcendence, that is, integrating fragmented pieces into a unified choreographed whole.

Transcendence

A familiar term addressed within Jung's theoretical writings is, transcendence. Dictionaries commonly define it as an experience that exceeds normal physical or spiritual limits. Jungians describe it as a natural process in which the unconscious and conscious conjoin—a coming together of opposites (Chodorow, 1991). In this section, it refers to objectifying active imagination by way of: the union of movement accessed via the process of authentic movement, i.e., the going inward (the unconscious) and then overtly, or consciously reshaping and molding selected parts of that experience into a shared satisfying whole. All participants joined in

exploring and transforming the mornings “archetypal, amplification of cultural and symbolic premises”.³ Presenters concentrated on developing one of the following topic areas illuminated below:

Elements of Moving, Witnessing and Practicing

After a brief warm-up, three presenters introduced components of authentic movement and the dynamic process of the mover witness relationship. Focusing on a different aspect of that process, the respective presenters incorporated individual mover-witness experiences and then, his/her symbolic insights.

Concentrating on their inner processes, with closed eyes, each participant was asked to allow any movements or sounds—based on their morning’s impressions, sensations—to emerge. After an allotted time, the suggestion was to: select a few specific gestures or movements, and possibly, accompanying sounds that stood out for them; to arrange them into a patterned sequence; to pair up and teach the sequence to their partner; and finally, share reflections of their process and discoveries.

Embodied Alchemy as an Experiential Journey

The fourth therapist continued to amplify her morning’s presentation of the alchemical process using a series of prints all had viewed in the morning, i.e., the finely drawn color figure prints symbolizing and embodying each element of the 12-step process of the alchemical journey leading to wholeness. This authentic movement experience focused on each participant identifying the image(s) that resonated with her or him, and with closed eyes, turning inward, to engage with or embody the image via authentic movement. Joining in groups of two or threes, dancers shared and taught their movements and lastly, reflected on their experiences and insights with their partners.

Transcendence: Transforming Movement Elements Emerged from Within into Overt Choreography

The Final Presenter Significantly, the rituals of early cultures (as alluded to in Part 1) were objectified through dance, whether for healing or other societal practices. This therapist has chronicled the movement experiences in which active imagination initiated the process of transcendence: the parts amplified into choreography.

Trudy Schoop (1974) in her iconic text “Won’t You Join the Dance” (and with whom this presenter briefly studied) believed that movement material emerging during the therapy process needed to be finalized into a choreographic entity in order to be fully integrated. Dance, the essence of her group therapy, undergirded her approach; likewise, other therapists employed comparable methods.

A major point of interest is that in earlier years most of our backgrounds were strongly rooted in dance; in fact our professional moniker was “dance therapist”. In

³ This title is referenced in the 2016 conference brochure.

the 1990s the term “movement” was inserted so as to represent greater inclusivity such as movement for relaxation, breathing exercises, social dance, common folk dances, et cetera. The name modification implied increased flexibility in adapting treatment to the needs of a broader range of populations and cultural groups than earlier, when therapy was generally conducted in psychiatric facilities. Consequently, creating dance as a means of integrating movement into a unified whole (connectivity)—the goal of wellness and healing—tends to be lost or neglected, replaced, in many instances, by isolated movement fragments.

This section embodies aspects of Schoop’s belief in dance/movement therapy in regard to its healing potential via transcendence of emergent movement explorations, discoveries and insights into “the dance”.

Transcendence

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Preparation and Process

When the late, highly esteemed choreographer, Merce Cunningham, was asked his definition of dance, he said: “All dance is movement, but, not all movement is dance.” Ergo, what are the elements that distinguish dance? What makes dance, dance?

First, we have the basic locomotor movements—the archetypal givens that emerge as part of normal development: walk, run, jump, leap, hop. By combining two of these elements in an uneven slow-quick rhythm, they morph into skip, gallop and/or slide. So rhythm becomes a primary element as well. Reviewing the infinite variations derived from these basic ingredients, we briefly note the elements of Laban’s Effort/Shape system of analysis (a course requirement in approved DMT programs), a construct engendering the qualitative, the expressive elements that create meaning.

Armed with the basic tools as a starting point, the 32 participants divide into six groups of five or six, with instructions to use a part or parts of any of the shared movement patterns previously created. With these base materials—as in the alchemical process—the challenge is to transform the parts, derived from the unconscious, into a unified, relevant whole. Given these numerous options, groups could mold, reconfigure, augment or vary in any way the multiple possibilities employing: time, rhythm, space, level, qualitative dynamics and varied groupings

(unison, duets trio, solos) in connecting and performing the sequenced patterns. The piece was to be a repeatable composition, several minutes in length.

One at a time, as each group performs their pieces while the rest of us witness. The outcome of the six dance scenarios reveals a display of uniqueness and dynamic diversity, each, a singular exemplar of “active imagination in action”. We end with the group by sharing experiences of this approach, along with relating discoveries, insights and personal meanings.

Our panel presenters demonstrated a clinical approach to healing in which authentic movement stokes active imagination, elevating unconscious problematic issues—which Jung referred to as “the shadow side” in his writings (1965)—to conscious awareness. Overtly expressed in choreographic form, such revelations can enable integrated therapeutic closure to group dance/movement therapy sessions.

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