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MASTER IN DANCE MOVEMENT PSYCHOTHERAPY

FIRST YEAR PART-TIME

MODULE: THEORETICAL APPROACHES IN DANCE MOVEMENT
PSYCHOTHERAPY

TITLE: EMBODIMENT AS INTEGRATION OF AN AUTHENTIC
SELF AMONG OTHERS

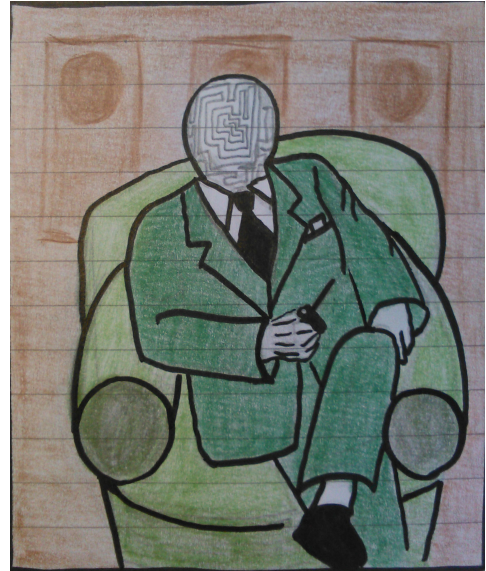
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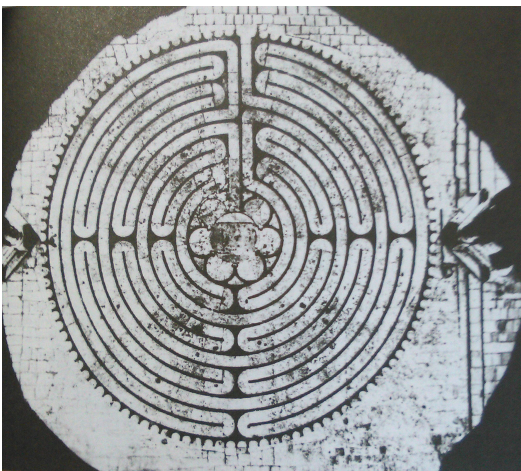
EMBODIMENT AS INTEGRATION OF AN AUTHENTIC SELF AMONG OTHERS

I see the process of embodiment in dance movement psychotherapy as deeply interconnected with the Jungian process of individuation. The contribution of the Jungian approach is to have given insight into the dynamics of the psyche and to have shown what it can mean to grow 'on a vertical plane', that is to say to undergo a process of unfolding¹ of the true Self, which corresponds to the most integrated manifestation of the spiritual essence of a human being. The unconscious is powerful and can guide as well as destroy one person. It is like a **labyrinth** in which one wants to enter in order to find who he² is, but the risk is that of being 'eaten up by the Minotaur' if someone does not possess the 'Ariadne's thread' in order to still be able to step out of it.

I mention this archetypal image because I recently had a dream that caused me an embodied reaction of panic³: C.G.Jung was seated on his swivel chair and I was seeing him from the back, then he was suddenly turning around and facing me, revealing - instead of his face - a labyrinth. Then the labyrinth was turning and expanding on a horizontal plane and I was finding myself in it. By seeing the labyrinth from above I could recognize an harmonious structure like that of a mandala.



An image I drew in my log after having a dream about Jung whose face was a labyrinth.



Labyrinth of the cathedral of Notre-Dame of Chartres, France (1220-30)

'Inside a labyrinth one moves in an unpredictable way, going continually forward and back⁴, turning in a circle, in a dance whose steps create a **container**, solid enough to contain an experience that was previously intolerable'. (AAVV, 2010:714)

At one point of his life Jung was aware of the devastating power of the unconscious which was immersing him almost in a parallel reality, so that he needed a point of support 'in this world' such as the professional work and his family (Jung, 1961:214).

One of the greatest difficulties for me lay in dealing with my negative feelings. I was voluntarily submitting myself to emotions of which I could not really approve, and I was writing down fantasies which often struck me as nonsense, and towards which I had strong resistances. For as long as we do not understand their meaning, such fantasies are a diabolical mixture of the sublime and the ridiculous. It cost me a great deal to undergo them, but I had been challenged by fate. Only by extreme effort was I finally able to escape from the labyrinth. (...) I felt not only violent resistance to this, but a distinct fear. For I was afraid of losing command of myself and becoming a prey to the fantasies - and as a psychiatrist I realized only too well what that meant.

(Jung, 1961:202)

I think that the Jungian approach is a very valid method for exploring the potential of dance therapy, especially by researching in the work on symbolism connected with the body: the Jungian analysis utilizes mainly symbols that come to consciousness through dreams, but the body is also a place where symbolism can take place (through dance, movement or simply posture) and reveal inner images, archetypes and the world of the psyche. The limit of the Jungian approach though is that it can be inaccessible to the majority of people. It requires a revolution in the way of thinking and the ability to change oneself according to the suggestions of the unconscious.

The dangerous aspect of the unconscious and the need for self-care

Being aware of the double aspect of the unconscious is very important for a safe process of self-discovery. Jung asserts that:

the negative aspect of the unconscious is the most dangerous of all, precisely because the self is the depository of the most relevant psychic power. It can cause men to 'build up' megalomaniac fantasies or else illusory, that grip them and 'possess' them. Who finds himself in this state thinks, with a growing sense of proud, to have tackled and solved the knots of all cosmic problems, and loses every contact with the concrete human reality. A reliable symptom of such a situation is the loss of sense of humour, of the enthusiasm for human relationships.

(Jung, 1964:194)



Detail of the painting 'Theseus kills the Minotaur' by anonymous Italian painter, probably recognized as Maestro di Tavernelle.



During the experiential about Marcia Leventhal we were asked in the classroom to draw a healing symbol and I drew this (image on the left): when I finished it, I felt a sense of panic and of nausea rising in my belly, without knowing why, since the colours gave me a rather positive feeling. After some time of reflection on it, I can see that this is like a seed with roots, or an embryo contained in an ovoidal circle. I recently discovered that in the psychosynthesis founded by R. Assaggioli there is a similar symbol of an ovoid and a star, symbolizing the Self and the consciousness.

This idea of containment and protection of *a content in becoming* is something that touches me deeply. My embodied reaction was very powerful: I became aware of how much space I need for myself and how cautious I have to be in order to keep strong boundaries and prevent any external invasion from happening.

Embodying and integrating the Shadow

The 'Shadow' is another major aspect of the Jungian approach and I found very singular that Mary Wigman, the German pioneer of the free dance, gave voice through her work to the collectively repressed parts of the woman - such as "the Priestess" or "the Witch" - and created through dance an atmosphere, a vibration (not an aesthetic code of movement such as in ballet). I found inspiring that she created dances that involved a confrontation with taboo topics, such as death, mystical and transcendental aspects, emotional aspects, monstrous aspects of the human nature. It may be said that Wigman's attempt has been that of abolishing any censor in expression, which is what originated free dance, in a historical context of war, oppression and homologation (time of nazism). In a way, I see her attempt as an embodied equivalent of the Jungian process of individuation.



Mary Wigman in 'The Witch Dance'

Working with DMP is a valuable way to sustain the process of individuation, I believe. Through Authentic Movement (previously called 'Movement-in depth'), as Mary Whitehouse did, the unconscious becomes accessible: people are encouraged to 'move by being moved' and to trust their bodies progressively. The body speaks and knows, embraces realities which we may not yet be aware of. Through the 'felt-sense' (Gendlin, 1996, 1981) or the synchronicities that happen, or simply by perceiving in one's body the existence of the collective unconscious, it is possible to penetrate the articulated world of the psyche, as if it was a new language that needs to be learned and spoken.

Last year, on a workshop for actors⁵, I experienced clearly how embodying for about thirty minutes time the *body* of a friend, by using active imagination, brought me to some important intuitions about this friend of mine. I could perceive how certain movements corresponded to specific thoughts, emotional states or generally a hidden meaning I never grasped before. For instance, the fact that she was swinging her weight from the right to the left foot without keeping a center in her posture made me feel how unstable and off-centre she was feeling, almost on the point of madness. In addition, holding so much tension at the back of the neck and turning the head really slowly made me feel as if she was living behind a mask. Moreover, I noticed in the experiential about Gestalt therapy, when a colleague of mine was repeating a very delicate and beautiful floating gesture with the hands - but was holding a lot of tension in the jaw - that someone may show something in order to hide something else (*cf.* Laban was talking about Shadow Movements⁶), preventing in this often unconscious way 'uncomfortable' or socially unaccepted from being seen.

However, active imagination can be used to access the personal and the collective unconscious, but there are risks involved. Protection is therefore very important on many levels: protection from others - as I could learn in the experiential on boundaries - allows to keep one's vital space safe and prevent undesired invasions or violations from happening, as well as protection from the contents of the unconscious, which may be destructive whenever there is a lack of grounding: in fact, a sudden contact with the numinous or with an archetype may be very dangerous, if the person has not got the resources to digest and assimilate the contents of the unconscious. Even in working with bioenergetics it is important to listen to resistances rising in the body during certain

experiences of emotional release, because the person may be too vulnerable to contain and process emotions.

Jung's concept of psychic energy can assume two different directions: a progressive one of continuous adaptation to the external world and a regressive one, which can induce psychic disease by reactivating ancient inner conflicts (cf. Cioffi et al., 2000:225)

From an unembodied to an embodied Self, from a false to a true Self



'The Maze' - exhibited at the Bethlem Museum of the Mind, London, painted by a patient, William Kurelek. 'The left-hand section contains scenes from his past and present life, forming a maze in which a white rat (representing himself) is trapped at the centre.' cf museumofthemind.org.uk

R.D.Laing in the book 'The Divided Self: an existential study in sanity and madness' depicts the condition of experiencing an 'unembodied self', particularly in the schizophrenic subjects, where the self is perceived as

'more or less divorced or detached from the body'. (Laing, 1960:69) The body is no more felt as 'the core of the individual's own being', the body is felt as the core of a 'false self'. The person who cannot express substantially their true self is prey to a 'false-self-system' of impersonating socially adapted ways of being, to avoid being perceived as a threat. The impossibility of continuously playing a part and being 'likeable' (Laing, 1960:72) on the one hand, and the impossibility of giving shape, space and voice to a core being or self among others, creates a split in the personality, with dangerous consequences. The true self is experienced exclusively in solitude and isolation from others, on a mental level, that is to say without a body, without a real, concrete and physical manifestation. This shuts down a person's vitality and authenticity. The 'hidden shut-up self' (Laing, 1960:75) experiences oneself as being impoverished in his inner world - he is unable to be enriched by outer experience as this would mean denying one's existence - and ultimately 'the individual may come to feel he is merely a vacuum' (Laing, 1960:75).

'When the self partially abandons the body and its acts, and withdraws into mental activity, it experiences itself as an entity perhaps localized somewhere in the body.' (Laing, 1960:75)

In a similar way Marcia Leventhal in the article 'Knowing and beyond' (1992) seems to echo the same problem when she states that:

usually at the cost of feeling real joy, real satisfaction, real love, we have a loosely constituted persona or 'self', which is acceptable to our perceived outside world, but usually not to our inner, psychic, deeply intuitive 'soul-self'. We may also 'completely separate the one from the other and live out our lives as compliant servants of a persona we have created but usually never satisfied.

(Leventhal, 1992:28)

Marcia Leventhal refers also to 'the fear of being weird' which I think can be addressed by working through DMP in a group, allowing freedom of expression to break patterns of conformity and social adaptation. After the first stage of the warm-up, Leventhal's second stage involves the discovery of various protective personae which constitute the false-self. The whole process which she facilitates is an holistic movement from a state of distortion to a fluid shaping of the 'soul-self'. She suggests that the 'cut off, the fragmented 'parts' can be accessed and 'danced' '.

Relating to a similar context, Eric Fromm, in the book 'The Fear of Freedom' talks about 'static' and 'dynamic' adaptation (Fromm, 1942): the latter is the most dangerous, which occurs for example when a boy submits to the strict and threatening parent and becomes a 'good boy'. The subsequent development of hostility (often repressed), of anxiety and deeper submission leads generally to disintegration, such as the manifestation of neurotic phenomena, of strong destructive or sadistic impulses in social groups and a loss of a feeling of communion and belonging, a 'lack of relatedness to values, symbols, patterns', an intolerable 'moral aloneness' (Fromm, 1942:15)

To sum up I believe that DMP can be used as an instrument to accompany the person through the process of recognizing the false self (socially adapted self), by integrating the repressed parts of the Self (the 'Shadow'), as well as developing the 'Animus' and the 'Anima', those complementary components that need each other for a healthy evolution of the personality. I see dance as a vehicle for a journey of self-discovery, because in my experience the body never lies. Whenever a symptom arises - as the psychosomatic medicine states⁷ - it is a sign of disharmony in the psyche, which can be addressed in the moment that someone consciously looks at his conflict and solves it. Moreover, because dance is a dynamic form of movement and expression, I believe that there can be a positive repercussion on a physical as well as on an energetic level: moving can unblock the stagnant energies in the body. By combining bioenergetics, psychosomatic medicine, a thorough knowledge of the meridians (Chinese medicine) and of the chakras (yoga) I am convinced that it could be possible to articulate dances which would involve a work on a spiritual and on an emotional level, by reactivating an awareness of the energetic field around and in the physical body.

The body is a temple in which all things come to a rest and fruition. Without integration the temple is empty and the spirit has no home. Therefore the heart, as force that integrates, is the definitive centre of the Self.

What does it mean to bring ourselves in the centre of our heart? It means to feel our body, its needs and emotions and to bring these feelings on a plane of wisdom and comprehension. It means to consider our actions for the effect they have on others and nevertheless to maintain the consciousness of the individual Self. It means to make concrete our wisdom and to not blindly accept the certainties without testing them through the truth of the body.

(A. Judith, 1998:27)



Bartolomeo Veneto, XVI sec.
'Portrait of a gentleman'

Notes:

1. Marcia Leventhal uses often the term 'unfolding' for the process of revealing the true Self, or 'soul-self'.
2. For a matter of brevity, I use the masculine pronoun 'he' to refer to both women and men.
3. 'In the initiation rites the labyrinth is often used to create a temporary disturb to the conscience that confuses the initiate, letting him lose the way, that is to say the rational and linear orientation'. (2010:714) *Il libro dei simboli - riflessioni sulle imagine archetipiche*
4. It is like losing control in the labyrinth and therefore letting the unconscious emerge and speak, making meaning and holding opposites together like in a mandala.
5. 'Character Analysis and Movement Psychology' which was a workshop for actors taught by James Kemp, based on the teaching of Yat Malmgren, who applied the Laban Movement Analysis to drama studies.
6. Shadow Movements 'movements performed without conscious volition yet expressing inner attitudes or externalized drives.' cf. *Mastering Movement: the life and work of Rudolf Laban* by John Hodgson, Published London: Methuen 2001.
7. cf. T. Dethlefsen e R. Dahlke, (1986) *Malattia e destino*, & Dethlefsen, T. (1995) *Il destino come scelta*.

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"The ovoid and the star", Roberto Assaggioli cf. <http://www.psicosintesi.it/istituto/cosa-psicosintesi/ovoide>