

Trance Healing

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Introduction

During the 17th century, there emerged in Southern Italy a psychological illness called Tarantism. The diagnosis tied the hysteric behaviour to the bite of a tarantula or wolf spider. The afflicted, whether a bite had occurred or not, was advised that the only cure from the spider's toxic venom was to dance it out of their body to music, with similarly quick rhythmic patterns to that of the Tarantella dance.

This phenomenon was referred to in many ways but universally understood as the "dancing mania."

In my research and personal experience, I have come to see the value and revitalizing capacity provided by the state in which women engage in a kind of feverish dance. I call this the “trance state”, a safe space where women, mostly, were possessed in a semi-meditative, semi-hypnotic state of consciousness, within which they felt this irresistible compulsion to dance in order to regain balance.

No matter the pretext for the affected, these women were using this dance as an outlet for expression, releasing their emotions and casting off the societal conditions of oppression .

Trance in science

Charles T. Tart, a pioneer in altered states studies, provided us with information on the induction and sensory modalities causing trance. "Kinesthetic driving" is experienced through dance, yoga, mudras, walking meditation, juggling, asanas, and even running. "Auditory driving" is the process where we experience a trance state through the sense of hearing like entrainment, repetitive percussions, chanting, mantras and storytelling.

During my first group healing at Globe institute, I suddenly was transported back to my childhood in Gabon, Africa. Each of us took turn in laying in the center of the room while the rest of the class surrounded the person to provide healing. We used shakers, drums, crystal bowls, gongs and others used voice by singing and sometimes yelling.

Everyone in the class was in a state of trance, and I suddenly realized that what I had experience back in Gabon as a young girl, was trance healing, another modality that is used in sound therapy.

In the northern parts of Mawali, the "Vimbuza dance" which is an healing dance, is performed to heal mental illness in a patient amongst other ailments. The "Ngoma" which means drum, is specifically used throughout Central and South Africa to perform healing rituals using repetitive rhythms to help patients dance their disease.

After the diagnosis by the healer, the patient goes through a healing ritual where trance is induced by the village gathering in a circle. Children and women sing songs to invoke helping spirits.

Despite the great effort to suppress it over the years of colonization, the Vimbuza dance is an important part of the indigenous healthcare system.

Jitka Cirklová Ph.D. – Charles University / Prague, Czech Republic, explains in her essay on religious trance, that during the sixties laboratories measured activities in the brain and the body. They found that the blood serum compounds were indicating stress like adrenaline and cortisol levels dropped, and at the same time, the brain started synthesizing good feeling hormones like beta endorphin which explains the intense joy felt after being in a trance.

They also discovered that the blood pressure dropped at the same time the pulse started to rise. The EEG did not show alpha waves known for meditation, but instead, the theta brain waves exhibited in the range of 6-7 cycles per seconds.

She further explains that typically this paradoxical behavior of the body happens only when in extreme conditions like when someone bleeds to death or when about to die.

Jitka Cirklováe further points out that although this research explains the physiology effects of the state of trance, they left out the culture, religious or social context and just focused on the psychological aspects.

I support this feeling and In my opinion by only isolating trance as a something that happens in the brain, scientist are only telling one part of the story, and by not including what the role of the community plays in these rituals, it is giving us an incomplete description of the experience. Nonetheless, I see it as a beginning in the exploration of the effects of altered states.

In the next video, Ruth Chabala uses her abilities as a healer but also acknowledges the importance of modern medicine.

She explains, that three spirits possess her and that through her they perform the healing. Patients are induced in a state of trance to invite healing spirits to help them dance out their illness, with the help of women, children singing and men drumming in a circle.

Community

Mary Douglas was a British anthropologist who specialized in the area of sociology. In particular, her work on human culture and symbolism. She explains the role that religious trance play in society, is a reflection of how free or closed the social community is. She primarily focused on the consideration that trance might be dangerous for society that have rigid social control and it may be regarded as disruptive but sees that society that have more complex understandings of cosmology will use trance, spirit possession, and shaman ceremonies to preserve the balance of cosmic laws.

Many Native American tribes comes to mind, living in harmony with the land, cosmic laws and individual respect is an important part of their way of life. They understood the powers that lay in the role of community, music as part of rituals and shamanic trance journeys.

In Korea shamanism is the oldest belief system. It stems from central Asia connected to the northern shamanistic tribes, like Siberia which the term "Shaman" comes from, and northern parts of Scandinavia. Even though this practice at previous times considered as "low" countryside culture, it never disappeared completely. There was a revival of these practices in the mid-nineteenth century and it is a part of everyday rituals, like of an inauguration of a new skyscraper for example.

You can become a shaman by either being born in a family of shamans or end up as one through a mystical experience or an illness called "inbyeng" or "chosen by the spirits". The hereditary shamans usually don't go that far, they engaged themselves more in the "gut "or "kut rituals" which is the celebration of the harvest to bring good fortune or to wear off epidemic illnesses. they wear colorful dresses and sing in an ecstatic trance.

Most shamans families are important artist in Korea because they give their children training in art and music.

Conclusion

I have noticed so far, that these type ceremonies are always community-based and that trance is readily available compared to the western religious trance, It is not widely experience or accessible to the mainstream. Perhaps it's because most of these rites have been persecuted or kept as taboo.

I imagine living in a community where it safe to experience Trance, where you can cry, dance out your illness, with the support of neighbors or family members.

My experience at Globe institute during the summer intensive was very similar to this idea of healing within a community.

My last example is of the "Candomble" ceremonies in Brazil, where communities get together in a trance ritual.

The ceremonies are heavily prepared with house decorations and food preparation by the initiates. During the ceremony "saint children" or initiates invoke the "Orishas" or "divine spirit" and fall into a trance state, usually women. And the priest dressed in distinct spirit attributes, performs a symbolic dance with the Orishas qualities. The leading male priest carries the group with songs to please the spirit; the ceremony ends with a big banquet.

Candomble music is an important part of the ritual, the songs are in Yoruba (African language) and the rhythms are from African influence. The word "batuque" is now part of the everyday language which means "rhythmic percussion music".

Trance healing is a powerful modality to help us heal especially in instances where we are unable to understand the root of our dis-ease, having a community to support that is even more powerful.

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