

Ancient Greek dance as therapy and Antiquity in the countemporaneous therapy dance

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French abstract ma communication s'interrogera non seulement sur les formes de danse thérapie dans l'Antiquité grecque (il existait au moins les danses pratiquées chez les Corybantes) mais aussi sur la manière dont les danses thérapies actuelles ont parfois recherché des éléments dans l'Antiquité

Abstract : this papers questions the types of dance therapy in ancient Greece (for example Corybant dance) and how nowadays some types of therapy dance research elements in ancient Greece

### Introduction

Ancient Greeks writers say often that dance is a good practice for body and spirit. First, they recognized the kindness of dance for body. For Lucian, *Saltatio*, 71, dance brings flexibility and lightness. It is a balanced sport. And the unceasing movements of dance are good for people. For this last idea, Lucian depends on Plato (*Laws*, VII, 790c-e) who writes that the movement is very important to sleep babies. For the most of Greeks, dance was especially for the young because they connected it with beauty. But dance is also a soft activity for the body and old people can practice it. As says Xenopho, *Symposion*, II, 17-18, Socrates did not like acrobatics but he enjoyed dancing. He did not praise technical feats but loved the beauty of gestures, and he would take willingly lessons with the syracusan ballet teacher. He said also that dance could help to reduce his tummy. The dance that Socrates spoke is good for old people<sup>1</sup>. It is without physical danger and it shows the qualities that ancient Greeks associated with old age, *sophrosunè* and *sophia*, even if the most of Socrates' s companions smiled when the philosopher wanted to learn dancing because he was already an old man. For ancient Greeks, dance is good for the health. According to Pindarus, fr. 6, the Hyperborean men's myth told about their dance and said they were never ill or old. Much more, as says Anacreo (fr. 37), dance helps to keep a young spirit. For philosophers, dance was good. In the Pythagoras' way of life, dance was important (Porphyre, *Pythag.*, 32). But for Plato, *Laws*, VII, 814e-816e, dance is a good sport for spirit but only if you practice a beautiful dance, because beauty or ugliness influences your soul. So performing an unattractive dance, as the *kordax* of comedy, makes an unsightly spirit. And even he does not classify Dionysian dances, he thinks they are not for the citizen and the citizen's

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<sup>1</sup> Defining old people in Ancient Greece is not easy : old age begins between 56 and 63 years old. See A. Catrysse, *Les Grecs et la vieillesse d'Homère à Epicure*, 2003, p. 225-226 ; S. Byl, "La vieillesse dans le corpus Hippocratique" in F. Lasserre and Ph. Mudry, *Formes de pensée dans la collection hippocratique*, Genève, 1963, p. 85-95, especially p. 86.

women and girls. In *Law*, VII, 795, Plato says that dance is a part of gymnastic with the fight. Pyrrhic is the most beautiful dance because it prepares the war and the knowledge of war is very useful for ancient Greeks. Plato liked also emmeleia i.e. pacific dance because it was not dionysiac. The philosopher speaks about physical qualities (dance is a part of gymnastic) but more about mental (classification in beautiful and unattractive dance). Plato's conception was not shared by his contemporaneous. In the IVth century BC, time where Plato writes, people practiced pyrrhic in competition but preferred Dionysian dance : this type of choreography brings the feeling of freedom, especially for women who could be in a trance.

We know that ancient Greeks danced in all circumstances : birth, wedding, death, private or public festivals for gods. We know ancient Greeks often danced and loved doing it but did they use dance as therapy ? we will study the Corybantes' dance which was really practiced as therapy and we will research how ancient doctors from Hippocrates to Galenus spoke about dance and if they used it as therapy. In second we will study how nowadays some therapy dances are inspired by Ancient Greece or take element in this civilisation.

## **I- Corybantes' dance, a therapy and ancient doctor's position about dance**

Dance was also curative for Plutarch (*De Valet. Tuenda* VI, 15) but how ? In all ancient Greek dances, we know only one dance who was practiced by people for therapy. It is simultaneously a war and Dionysian choreography : the Corybantes' dance (Strabo, X, 3, 7 = C466).

### 1- The myth and the cult

In the myth, the Corybantes' dance is very noisy with the jumps and the shock of weapons. It is performed by the Corybantes who were the seven Combeus and Sôcos's sons : Prynneus, Mimas, Acmon, Damneus, Ocythoos, Idaeos, Melisseus. They are from Evia but their parents hunted them and after they traveled through the Greek world<sup>2</sup>. In other stories, Corybantes are Gaia's sons or Hera and Zeus' sons or Danais and Apollo's sons and their number can change<sup>3</sup>. They can be also the children of the mother of the Gods (Cybele) and the father's name, hidden, is revealed only during initiations (Diodorus of Sicilia, III, 55). In Phrygia, they reared Dionysus (Nonnos, *Dionysiaca*, IX, 162-166) and they danced around him to protect him from Hera's jealousy. They are

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<sup>2</sup> See P. Grimal, *Dictionnaire de la mythologie grecque et romaine*, PUF, Paris, 1951, sv. Curetes p. 110 ; On the eubean versio, see P. Chuvin, *Mythologie et géographie dionysiaques : recherches sur l'œuvre de Nonnos de Panopolis*, Adosa, 1991., p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> Grimal, *op. cit.*

like the Curetes, who did the same thing to protect Zeus from Cronos's voracity (Strabo, XIV, 1, 20 ; Lucian, *Saltatio*, 8) but they are not exactly the same because they are Dionysian (Strabo, X, 3, 21 = C 473). They are sometimes confused with the Cabires (Strabo, X, 3, 19 = C 472)

As says Strabo, Corybantes are Cybel's priests and they dance in a trance (Strabo X 21 = C473). They are very ancient because they are quoted by Alcman (fr. 146) at the VIIth century BC. The Corybantes' trance is defining by Plato (Phedre, 228c) as a frenzy and this delirium provokes a temporary mental disorder (Plato, *Io*, 534a). When they dance, Corybantes can have auditory delusions. According to Plato (*Symposion*, 215d), Corybantes believe hear *auloi*.

## 2- initiation and dance therapy

But Corybantes do not dance alone. They can give initiation to other people (Plato, *Euthydeme*, 277d) as thinks E. R. Dodds<sup>4</sup> (*Les Grecs et l'irrationnel*, Paris, Flammarion, 1977, p. 86). We have an example of initiation in Aristophanes' *Wasps*. Bdelycleo wants to take care of his father Philocleo. Philocleo is ill because he loves to judge too much. First, Bdelycleo speaks to his father with kindness. Second, he bathes him for purification (Aristophanes, *Wasps*, 115-118). But Philocleo is always ill. So Bdelycleo takes him to the Corybantes. But the therapy fails and Philocleo runs away with the tympanum (Aristophanes, *Wasps*, 119-120) ! The corybantic therapy is integrated in a group of therapy. But what was it exactly?

The aim of the therapy was to quiet the patient's internal phobia. The corybantic dance could not relieve the external symptoms but could regularize them : it integrated them in a shape of religion. Dodds, who depends on Plato (*Io*, 536) thinks that corybantic ritual was a musical diagnosis<sup>5</sup>. The patient listened several types of sacred music. And priests could study the patient's reactions and research what god was responsible for the illness. When the god who sent the disease was known, began the second part of the ritual. It was a sacrifice offered by the patient to this terrible god. Then, followed a dance celebrating the pacified god. If the therapy failed, the patient thought that no god honored by Corybantes sent the illness. Then he could try to see Asclepios, another quack god. In Aristophanes's *Wasps*, 121-124, after he Corybantes' cares, Bdelycleo takes her father to Asclepios's sanctuary but the therapy failed, as to say that Philocleo is an incurable patient.

The patient could also see a doctor but the cures were very different. For the doctors, to take care is to be opposed to the disease (*Winds* c1 ; *Aphorisms* II, 22)<sup>6</sup>. So doctors considered that sacred therapies were charlatanisms (*Sacred*

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<sup>4</sup> E. R. Dodds (*Les Grecs et l'irrationnel*, Paris, Flammarion, 1977, p. 86).

<sup>5</sup> Dodds, *op. cit.*, p. 103 and n. 102.

<sup>6</sup> See J. Jouanna, *Hippocrate*, Paris, Fayard, 1992.

*illness* c1). Doctors could suggest different remedies (to purge, to bleed, to drink pure wine or wine with water, to eat ptisan...).

If the doctors did not like the sacred therapy, what did they think of the dance ? Did they consider it is a balanced sport and sometimes a good therapy ?

### 3- Ancient Greek doctors' views about dance

According to the doctor Oribasios, the dance could help to bring down the bad moods which were in the head (Porphyre, *Pythag.*, 32). The Hippocrates' corpus and the *Hippiatrica* do not give occurrences about the dance. They use the word *orchis* which is a medicinal plant but they never use the words, *orcheisthai*, *orchestès*, *orchestikos*. Galenus and pseudo Galenus speak often about *orchis* and sometimes about dances. In Galenus' works, we find *orcheisthai* three times, *orchesasthai* one time, *orchestès* six times and the adjective *orchestikos*, *è*, *on*, five times. Pseudo Galenus use only time *orchestès* and one time *orchestikè*. Galenus' views are very shaded. He thinks that dance is one of human activities (story of the monkeys who copy human activities, cf. *De usu partium*, 3, 80, 9 ed. Kühn). He writes that dance is a good sport for human people, as pancrace, fight or walk (*De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis*, 5, 3, 23, 1) but it is more than that. There is also the idea of good proportions (*De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis*, 5, 3, 23, 1) and Galenus's views seem like Plato. As says Plato, dance is good if it is beautiful and if it keep the straightness of the lines (*Laws*, VII, 815b). And he praises the pyrrhic dance. Galenus does not speak about the pyrrhic but pseudo Galenus thinks that courageous men dance especially the pyrrhic (*De partibus philosophiae*, 29, 9). So, Galenus and pseudo Galenus think that dance is particularly a sport.

According to the ancient doctors, the dancer must have some qualities. For Pseudo-Galenus, the dancer is very swift (*De partibus philosophiae*, 29, 12) and the pattern is the famous cretan Merion who know very well war dances in *Iliades* (*Iliades*, XVI, 67). In Galenus' works, the dancer must be flexible (*Quod animi mores corporis temperamenta sequantur*, 4, 778, 11 ed. Kühn).

Third views, the dance can quiet people and this idea is squeezed out two times in Galenus (*Thrasylbulus sive utrum medicinae sit an gymnastice hygieine*, 5, 861, 8, et 5, 855, 4, ed. Kühn) but the dance is not used as a therapy. Galenus does not think that dance can become a therapy. Only one time, he says that dance help to evacuate bad humours (*Quod qualitates incorporeae sint*, 19, 475, 13 ed. Kühn) but he never writes that dance is a therapy.

If the ancient Hellenic dance was not often a therapy, Antic Greece inspired sometimes contemporaneous therapy dances .

## II- Ancient Greece as inspiration for some contemporaneous therapy dances

All the schools of therapy dance do not use Ancient Greece in their work. For example the Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) which is practiced in USA, UK, Australia and sometimes in other countries, except some teachers. This is the same for the Gabrielle Roth 's five rhythms dance, the Rolando Toro's biodanza and the Susannah and Ya'Acov Darlin Khan' s medicine dance<sup>7</sup>. So we are going to speak only about the therapist which are inspired by Antiquity

### 1- Primitive dance

Primitive dance is a technic of the body created by the Haitian HERN Duplan et introduced in France since 1970. This type of therapy dance expanded from an artistic stream called primitivist, which exists in France since the beginning of the XXth c. and which aims at reaching the essential thing, simplifying style<sup>8</sup>. In France, primitive dance was picked up again by the psychoanalyst France Schott Billmann who created the DRLST, an international network of rhythm practitioners which gives diploma after a training of 450 hours. The aim is to help psychologists or artists to become dance therapist. Each student receive a bibliography where you can find some books about ancient Greece, as Maria Daraki, *Dionysos*, Paris Arthaud, 1985 or as Walter Otto, *Les dieux de la Grèce*, Paris, Payot, 1981, or Jean-Pierre Vernant, *L'univers, les dieux, les hommes*, Paris, Seuil, 1994. In her book, *Le primitivisme en danse*, F. Schott-Billmann wrote a chapter about Dionysos. She evokes the main lines of the myth and she is very interested by Dionysos Zagreus which was killed by Titans when he was a baby, discovering his picture in a mirror, and was born again as man<sup>9</sup>. This death is a symbolic death which marks, for France Schott-Billmann the

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<sup>7</sup> M. Houseman, « S'expérimenter autrement ensemble. A propos de la danse des 5 Rythmes et de la Biodanza », Atelier "La danse comme objet anthropologique", dir. M. Houseman, G. Wierre-Gore et M. P. Gibert, 13 novembre 2014, CNRS, Ivry.; M. Mazella di Bosco, « Attitudes, gestes et ressentis dans les interactions dansées typiques des séances de 5 Rythmes / Danse Médecine », Atelier "La danse comme objet anthropologique", dir. M. Houseman, G. Wierre-Gore et M. P. Gibert, 12 mai 2015, CNRS, Ivry.; ; M. Mazella di Bosco, *Modelage des sensibilités et des interactions dans les pratiques de danse dite "libre" en région parisienne (France). Une ethnographie des Danse des 5 Rythmes, Danse Médecine et Open Floor*. thèse de doctorat en préparation à l'Université de Paris X sous la dir. de M. Houseman.

<sup>8</sup> F. Schott-Billmann, *Le primitivisme en danse*, La Recherche en danse, Paris, 1989, p. 7 et 28. Primitive dance is also in the same approach that Picasso' s work, evoked by Jacques Prévert in his poem "La promenade de Picasso" : lorsque the artist wants to paint an apple, he cannot do it because the apple evoks too much objects and and concepts. But Picasso who went here eat the apple and only remains the pips (pépins in french), the terrifying snags of reality (that we translate in french : "les terrifiants pépins de la réalité". In french pips and snags are translated by the same word : pépins).

<sup>9</sup> F. Schott-Billmann, *Le primitivisme en danse*, La Recherche en danse, Paris, 1989, p. 106-107.

renouncement of nature and the separation of child and mother<sup>10</sup>. For the dance therapist, Dionysos is interesting because he condenses all the elements that child needs to accept her mother 's absences, with symbolization in "father's name" (as does the game of strong - da told by Freud). This myth is connected with the children's increasing autonomy, with fusion and separation<sup>11</sup>. Dionysos has a double origin, maternal and paternal, biologic and symbolic, so he becomes also the symbol of dyad (mother-child), of human speaking, of conscious and unconscious and he allows to switch from one state to another<sup>12</sup>.

I followed the primitive dance classes d around 80 hours<sup>13</sup> and I can say that some elements are inspired by ancient Greece and sometimes by ancient Greek dance. Each teacher must create his class with exercises (for example jumps in all directions, presentation of each dancer, large pliés, walk with gestures, dervish with turning movements, walking with different postures, final choir) but all these sequences are driven by a myth or a tale : for example the little ugliness duck, the red shoes but also Herakles or Dionysos' adventures. This narrative guides all the class and the exercises. The teacher suggest different exercises but these follow the same order. The first half hour is constructed on a slow throbbing : dancers take beat in their feet, at the same place and they mark only time on tow ; then they walk and they wave to each other, with a rhythm given with the hands which follows the beat of the feet and which change at each class ; after they research the four cardinal point, with doing a round trip to each direction ; then sing and dance an invocation (which change each month)<sup>14</sup>. The second part of the class (a half hour) is founded on a quick throbbing : each part of the body must work in an increasing speed, sometimes cut buy a stop which fixes the movement<sup>15</sup>. This helps the dancer to experiment ecstasy in speed and in motionlessness. Then dancers walk, turn, jump and do a lot of various movements, as dervishes, in connection with a centre<sup>16</sup>. In the third part of the class (more short, not more ten minutes), there is a concluding polyphonic choir : the dancer are in a circle and are divides into groups who question and answer with movements suggested by the teacher. Then at the end of the class, all the dancers come together with a collective vibration on half toes to feel trance and take the strength of the group<sup>17</sup>. All that is not especially ancient but can reach Antiquity when it is connected with an ancient myth.

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<sup>10</sup> F. Schott-Billmann, *Op. cit.*, p. 107

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> F. Schott-Billmann, *Op. cit.*, p. 109

<sup>13</sup> workshop 50h in august 2014 and workshop 30h in april 2015.

<sup>14</sup> F. Schott-Billmann, *Op. cit.*, 1989, p. 25

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> F. Schott-Billmann, *Le primitivisme en danse*, La Recherche en danse, Paris, 1989, p. 28.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

France Schott Billmann has a lot of pupils, and his method keeps an original character with each teacher : follow Sletlana Panova's class<sup>18</sup> is not the same that Eleni Chatzigeorgiou<sup>19</sup>, Katerina Stavrou or Mariana Drakopoulou classes<sup>20</sup>

## 2- Other schools : some examples

I never experimented the other schools (only some master class around 30 minutes each) but I have seen some of them in the 33rd World Congress on dance research which was organized by CID in Athens in 2012. I quote two interesting methods

Fabienne Courmont created a method which call the Dance of Being and she thinks this dance is an initiatory travel to discover oneself. She says that the dance of being is inspired from Isadora Duncan, the Tai-Chi, The No drama, the Butô, the indian dance, the dervish dance and the Sri Aurobindo's yoga<sup>21</sup>. So it is not connected only and directly with Ancient Greece but with Isadora's vision of Antiquity and other works. F. Courmont speaks about the importance of the breathing and we know that Isadora worked a lot on respiration. But No drama, Butô, indian dance, dervish dance and yoga explored also this way. F. Courmont took to Isadora the idea to find in the nature the most beautiful movements and she tried to recreate a link between human, earth and sky. She took also to Isadora the idea of a holy dance but she mix it with other sacral aspects in indian or dervish dance. Fabienne Courmont's performances are very nice and we can see her interest for other civilizations, interest that goes beyond Ancient Greece and Antiquity. I cannot speak about the therapist aspects of the Dance of the Being, because we did not experiment them.

Hilda Wengrover belongs to DMT but she wants to integrate Dionysian and apollinian modes<sup>22</sup>. She considers "dance movement therapy as an interdisciplinary profession that stands on the knowledge of the Humanities, basically from dance, body techniques and philosophy, and on the knowledge of

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<sup>18</sup> I followed a short work shop in august 2014.

<sup>19</sup> She teached a class during *33rd World Congress on dance research* org. par le CID (International Dance Council), Athens, 21-25 november 2012.

<sup>20</sup> Short classes with K. Stavrou and M. Dracopoulou in the workshop of april 2015.

<sup>21</sup> F. Courmont, "From dance-therapy ... to the Dance of Being. Towards the sacred dance revival", *Panorama of Dance Therapy, 33rd World Congress on dance research* org. par le CID (International Dance Council), Athens, 21-25 november 2012. Publication on line : <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1R8k-IXaYA3vJuqYZDfeHxiXxvEp7MCYQ3795m4TdvEc/edit?pli=1>

<sup>22</sup> H. Wengrover, "Integrating Dionysian and Apollinian modes in the education of Dance Movement Therapy student", *Panorama of Dance Therapy, 33rd World Congress on dance research* org. par le CID (International Dance Council), Athens, 21-25 november 2012. Publication on line : <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1R8k-IXaYA3vJuqYZDfeHxiXxvEp7MCYQ3795m4TdvEc/edit?pli=1>

psychology, psychotherapy and anthropology"<sup>23</sup>. She took her first idea in Nietzsche work. Unfortunately we have no more information.

### Conclusion

Therapy dance was not used in Ancient Greek world as it is done nowadays. We know only one dance therapy, the corybants' practice. We think often that Dionysian dance was used by Maenads as therapy to set free because they were oppressed by men but it is not exactly that : they danced because it was a tradition and this activity was not seen as a therapy like Corybant's cult. Nowadays, some therapy dance are inspired for some elements by ancient Greece, or by Isadora Duncan. But the most important part of therapy dance is inspired often by other sources as Oriental World, and they mix a lot of sources and technic.

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*