

PERFORMANCE DANCE AS A NUMINOUS PRACTICE

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INTRODUCTION

Below a hypothesis is constructed. It is based on an earlier one articulated in my article entitled, *Numinous Experience, Imagery and Art in Contemporary Society*.¹ The first hypothesis is concerned with what numinous experience may be, how it might be caused or allowed to arise and the state of mind through which this takes place. The extension of this first hypothesis into a second creates a body of thought through which I am trying, in practice, to construct a genre of dance performance that could provide the centre and focus of a numinous life-style.

A summary of the elements of the first hypothesis is as follows.

1. There exists a distinct category of experience that causes life to seem profoundly metaphysically meaningful. This category is a priori, not because we must have it, but in the sense that we have a predisposition towards it. I call it “the numinous”.
2. Although we have a predisposition towards numinous experience, or in a sense it is natural to us, such experience can be, and in contemporary society at least often is, blocked.
3. There is a state here called “numinous receptivity”, which can also be understood as a process of “numinous transition” (the moment and process through which ordinary experience becomes numinous). Through it numinous experience is not blocked. Thus ordinary experience becomes numinous. In

this state or process of mind and body our predisposition to have numinous experience is enabled.

4. This state or process is of semiconsciousness and of trance in the sense that it involves acute and consequently limited focus.
5. Jung's use of the term "archetypes" is accepted and perhaps extended. They are understood, in this hypothesis, to be the apparatus or elements of mind that allow numinous experience and make it natural. This state of numinous receptivity activates, allows or causes to be effective, these a priori objects, lenses or channels of mind. They are a priori in the sense specified in 1. above.
6. Numinous experience is accessed through these archetypes and their imagery and only through them.
7. Numinosity arises when the essence of our experience is found to be, in a non-ordinary sense (that cannot be specifically articulated), wonderful, beautiful and/or worthy of love. We find the world to be filled, or coequal with, an energy perceived to be of a special quality. This leads it to sometimes seem appropriate to call it spirit. The world can be perceived in this way to a degree that causes our lives to seem not just meaningful but profoundly or overpoweringly so.
8. The perception of this essence can be understood as the perception of the "archetype of spirit" because it is a priori and numinous in the sense that the other archetypes are.
9. All archetypal imagery and experience is informed by this archetype of spirit.

10. Imagery and experience thus informed, and so all numinous imagery and experience, gain their quality and power through manifesting, possessing or transmitting this essence of the archetypes.

11. While the archetype of spirit can be perceived through the other archetypes it can also be experienced directly without imagery or without their aid.

The second hypothesis has three main branches. These are that;

- dance may be potentially naturally numinous,
- profound experience generated within the performer by the dance might also be made visible through it,
- a life focusing on the making and presenting of performance dance forms I call 'pararituals' might be brought to form a life-style or numinous practice.

THE NATURAL NUMINOSITY OF DANCE

In considering the possibility that dance may be naturally numinous I will examine a strain of thought provided by Curt Sachs and Suzanne K. Langer. While I will find it necessary to criticise this body of thought I believe there are important elements of truth in it. Langer bases her thought on a central conviction. It is that as, "Dr. Sachs has said quite truly that all dance is ecstatic."² Langer and Sachs appear to say that such ecstasy can provide, or perhaps is, numinous experience.

Langer begins by suggesting that religious experience begins as that of "...concentrations of forces not theoretically calculable in mathematical terms...".³

Then, basing her argument on assumptions she makes about a supposed primitive dance form, she says there was a special means of generating the experience of the

above mentioned forces within the self. “The first recognition of them [is] through the feeling of personal power ...through a bodily activity.... ...The activity is known as ‘dancing’.... The dance creates an image of ...Powers...”.⁴ Langer is claiming that the internal experience generated through dance was at first perceived by dancers of primitive times as numinous energy within. The mind then naturally transformed this imageless experience into images or the perception of divine beings.

She believes this took place because symbolisation is “an act essential to thought, and prior to it”.⁵ The mind is “a great transformer. The current of experience that passes through it undergoes a change of character.... ...it is sucked into the stream of symbols...”.⁶ The symbols created are those archetypal beings that make up the mythology of a society.

I have said that here are problems with Langer’s argument. It is primarily based on an analysis of a primitive ritualistic dance form. Yet she is not specific about the nature of this form and provides no proof that it existed. This and other instances of incompleteness of thought and the use of non-specific terminology, particularly as regards the term like “ecstasy” lead to unsubstantiated assumptions. I discuss some of these below:

As concerns incomplete through about energetic dance, ecstasy and numinous experience;

Langer and Sachs both seem primarily concerned with dance that is intensely energetic. Not all dance is so. They do not appear to take into account that some ecstatic dance may not be highly energetic. Nor does it weigh heavily in their analysis

that some ecstatic dance, whether of high or low energy, may not be numinous. It may only be exciting.

As concerns incomplete thought about dance viewed as a distinct art form;

Any numinous power of primitive dance is likely to have owed something to the simultaneous perception of other elements such as music, verbal story telling and design in the form of costuming, props, sets and chosen setting. Dance performance is seldom only made up of dancing. Langer speaks of the experience of the dance event as if it only included the perception of movement whether from within (by the performing dancer) and from without (by witnesses).

As concerns incomplete thought about the unique powers of dance;

It is possible that, as Langer claims, dance (whatever elements this might include) has been a “very process of religious thinking, which begets the conception of ‘Powers’ as it symbolises them”.⁷ Langer seems to imply that dance was unique in accomplishing this. Yet, if a “process of religious thinking” has been possible through dance it may also have taken place through other art forms.

As concerns incomplete thought about difference that may exist between dance the modern and prehistoric worlds;

Dance may have been naturally numinous for individuals Langer thought of as ‘primitive’ and who lived in a pervasively religious society. It may not follow that is so for the individual living within the secular part of the modern world.

As concerns incomplete through concerning any evidence that all dance is ecstatic;

Even if some primitive dance and some dance of today can be shown to be ecstatic it does not follow that it is correct to say that “all dance is ecstatic”.⁸

Nevertheless, there is documentation that may support much of what Langer and Sachs claim. Specifically such documentation supports the lesser notion that some and perhaps much dance is or can be essentially ecstatic where such ecstasy is numinous or potentially so. I will use an example that also lends support to the notion that such numinosity results from the perception of internal energy.

An ecstatic dance-centred ceremony which could, until recently, be seen as living ritual in the Kalahari has been studied.⁹ In it Lewis-Williams says dancing “shamans” were the source and centre of a numinous performance practice. “Recent research has shown that the trance dance¹⁰ and the spiritual experiences of the shamans lie at the heart of San rock art”.¹¹

The aim of the dances is to produce *kia*, an altered state of consciousness dependent on the welling up of *num*, a primordial life energy within the body and perceived as infusing all things in varying degrees. When awakened during the trance dance, the *num* rises up the spinal column, generating a great heat.¹²

You dance, dance, dance. Then *num* lifts you up in your belly and lifts you in your back, and you start to shiver. *Num* makes you tremble; it’s hot.Rapid shallow breathing draws *num* up. What I do in my upper body with my breathing, I do in my legs with the dancing. You don’t stomp harder, you just keep steady. Then *num* enters every part of your body, right to the tip of your feet and even your hair.

When we enter *kia*, we are different from when *num* is not boiling and small. We can do different things.¹³

The experience of *num* or “primordial life energy” left mystical knowledge after it among the dancers. They appear to have been able to express it through poetic language after the dance was over.

Explanations regarding physical life and metaphysical life are ...gained in trance states. ...the (San) Bushman are able to recall and describe their states in a highly poetic fashion. Other members of the group learn this information in various ways.¹⁴

The dancing shamans (num kausi) are not always a particularly élite collection of people since "...a high percentage of ...adult males and one-third of adult women learn to kia".¹⁵

Yet the experience of Kia dance did not end as the experience of energy only. Lewis-Williams points out that San rock art depicting Kia dance records three phases that are common to much ecstatic experience.

In the first stage all people ...‘see’ luminous zigzags, grids or vortices, sets of lines, merging lines, other geometric forms. ...(in the second stage) people try to make sense of the entoptic phenomena. They elaborate the forms into objects important to them. ...(in the third stage) They themselves are drawn into their visions and become, as it were, part of their own hallucinations ...a person may become combined with an animal.¹⁶

This description of the phases of ecstatic experience seem to support Langer’s account. In the quotations above she describes ritual events in which the dancers achieved numinosity, first through the perception of internal energy (which she calls “feelings of personal power”) then through entering a divine realm and finally through experiencing themselves as divine beings (which she calls “images[s] of power”).

Kia ritual, and indeed Langer’s theory, then appear to provide a partial model for the dance I am seeking. It is a practice that generates numinosity in the performer through dance in which the experience of the energy of the body is perceived as the

archetype of spirit. It subsequently provides performers with the experience of being archetypal mythic beings.

MODERN DANCE AND PROFOUND EXPERIENCE¹⁷

The notion that some dance may provide profound and even numinous experience is also suggested by the testimony of Modern Dancers. Though, in most cases, they rejected the religion of their society many of them thought they were involved with the spiritual in an age which was not.¹⁸

Rudolf Laban says, "...man's real purpose (is) to create a life with festive occasions ...with a spiritual attitude...".¹⁹ His dance events were "sacred acts". "The whole design of the spaces and places for festivity fitted in with the character and form of the sacred act".²⁰ The dancers experience what could be called "spirit" since it is "...an energy behind all occurrences and material things for which it is almost impossible to find a name".²¹

This energy provides or is knowledge "...about things and realities important to us all,".²² It is knowledge beyond rational comprehension. This is perhaps why Laban says, "...a dancer seeks to experience and not merely to comprehend".²³ He claims a religious sense of oneness is available through perseverance, in dance. "We are all one.... ...Our endeavours towards this goal ...became visible as our art developed".²⁴

Laban does not specify what kind of dance generates the special experience in question. We might conclude that all dance does. This, as I have said above, is unlikely to be true. Seeming to realise this Mary Wigman, Laban's disciple, took the

next logical step. She appeared to recognise that since only some dance generates profound experience this, and the ability to do it, must be sought. To have the ability to do such dance is for her to acquire its “technique”. She says Laban did not concern himself with dance technique of any kind.

I desired more and plunged myself into work on a dance technique, a notion which then did not yet exist for the new free-style dance. Even Laban did not show much interest in it. There was neither model nor guide-lines.²⁵

In claiming, as Laban did, that the experience of dance can approach a sense of religious oneness Wigman reveals something about her attitude to technique.

...I gave myself up to the intoxication of this experience ...for seconds, I almost felt oneness with the cosmos. I turned and turned until I succeeded in tracing its secret ...to bring these turns back into the sphere of their ecstatic experience.²⁶

It becomes clear that the purpose of Wigman’s technique was not only to teach the dancer to dance better. Its objective was to render an ecstatic feed-back experience.²⁷

Isadora Duncan writes of dance experience comparable to that of energy perceived as “vibrating light”.²⁸ This became its own expression through a meditation-like focusing of mind.

I had learned to concentrate all my force to this one Centre. I found that thereafter when I listened to music the rays and vibrations of the music streamed to this one fount of light within me - there they reflected themselves in Spiritual Vision.... ...from this vision I could express them in Dance.²⁹

Based on what she believed she could experience and express through dance Duncan through of herself in terms of the artist as spiritual leader. “I had come to Europe to bring about a great renaissance of religion through Dance...”.³⁰

Ruth St. Denis also claims non-ordinary experience through dance. This is like religious experience in that it brings awareness of a superior reality.

When I am dancing ...I am near reality and in a more harmonious state of being than at any other time. I find a real escape from the limited sense of life that I ordinarily have. Human relationships are suspended and the sense of age.³¹

Martha Graham’s concern with something like transformative religious experience was projected to many of those around her. De Mille says of her group “...they had the religious fervour of a medieval religious cult.... people banded together to work with similar dedication, faithfulness and sacrifice.”³² De Mille, who knew Graham well, reports, “ ‘Where the dancer stands’ says Martha, ‘that spot is holy ground,’ ”.³³ For Graham performance was at best “...a religious celebration ...she felt the experience as a deep revelation of life”.³⁴

It appears that Martha Graham came to understand the special experience of the dancer better through a knowledge of Jungian theory. She had first learned of Jung, in the 1940s, through Erick Hawkins (her husband and a dancer and choreographer), Joseph Campbell (a writer on mythology) and Isamu Nogouchi (an artist and one of Graham’s stage designers).³⁵ In her autobiography *Blood Memory* Graham credits her ability to recognise “the blood memory in each of us”³⁶ to Joseph Campbell. The term “blood memory” seems a reference to Jung’s “collective unconscious”. This is a

memory in the sense that it is “the repository of man’s psychic heritage and possibilities”.³⁷

Graham had another source of Jungian information. She called Francis Wicks her analyst³⁸ although De Mille says,

Martha was never psychoanalysed. She merely talked conversationally to Mrs. Wicks, the lay analyst and writer who had been Jung's mistress and who was a devout apostle of the master.³⁹

So Graham knew of Jung through a number of sources. She would have known of his belief that deep experience of the psyche was numinous experience or, as he put it, that of God.⁴⁰

Graham built dance movement based on kundalini theory. De Mille says the concept of kundalini, “seemed to bring enlightenment to Martha”.⁴¹ Through this Graham's class exercises seem to include the intent of profound experience. Some of her exercises, particularly in the floor work (done sitting, kneeling or lying on the floor) of her class, are based on the asanas of hatha yoga. The exercise below is a part of a series of exercises called “the breathings”.

The breath in the body goes way down from the genitals up through the waist, through the throat, and through the top of the head, and then down again. ...In the next development the head goes all the way back and the gaze is turned upward. The back arches and then the energy returns. The dancer works always from the base of the spine all the way up through the centre of the body, the navel, the heart, the mouth, the head. ...not an arm was lifted without the rising energy of the breath.... She had taken a spiritual idea and made it physical.⁴²

After dancing with Martha Graham, Robert Cohan taught his London Contemporary Dance Theatre work he called “Graham based” for over two decades. He danced with

her from 1946 to 1967. Like Graham, Cohan's class exercises had more than a physical purpose. "Dance exercises the whole being".⁴³ I know, through discussion with him, that like Graham also he believed this took place through Jungian-like confrontation with the self. "As you try to improve your body's movements, you will collide head-on with your emotions - which may have been in control of your body until now".⁴⁴

For Cohan the event of the "class" is

...a ritual which you have to experience every day.... ...it is going through a pattern of familiar movement ...in order to find yourself you need to go through the ritual form.⁴⁵

Cohan says, "...for me the training ...has always been like a form of Yoga. The outer changes were only symptoms of that inner discipline".⁴⁶

Although Cohan and Graham have not claimed religious leadership in the way earlier Modern Dancers did he says,

She (Graham) is an extremely religious person.... ...she had a great sense of what is holy about life and that influenced me a great deal. Outside of that I looked for my own ideas of what is sacred in life.⁴⁷

In summary then; Laban assumed profound experience would arise through dance for those whom he prepared through a special life style. Wigman went further seeking a technique through which a dancer could attain profound non-ordinary experience or ecstasy. St. Denis believed dance could provide something like spiritual experience while Duncan had similar notions. Both set up schools to teach how they could be realised.⁴⁸ Graham and Cohan valued a non-ordinary experience of the "inner

landscape” understood as a special or numinous realm in something like a Jungian sense. It seems that all these artists not only believed it possible to obtain profound experience by dancing but also that this could be made visible through their dance.⁴⁹

THE VISIBILITY OF THE NUMINOUS EXPERIENCE OF THE DANCER

I have said that Kia dance provides only a partial model for the dance form I seek. It is a model in that what is said of it suggests that numinosity can arise through the experience of the energy of the body. This is perceptible as the feed-back experience that emerges out of the act of dancing for the dancer. However, Kia dance is not a full model in that I have found no evidence that the numinosity experienced by the dancers was made visible through it and so transmitted to witnesses. Outsiders like western anthropologists, who watched Kia dance, appear to have seen only the *physical effects* of the experience of num, and of Kia, without being emotively effected by these. They report, for example, that they witnessed that the dancers trembled or shook, bled from their noses, fell backwards and lost consciousness. They do not report experiencing numinosity through being present at the dance. More important, nor do they say that witnesses among the San expected to do so. A profound, emotional or supra-emotional effect upon witnesses is not recorded. We are told that descriptions, reports or characterisations of the divine experience Kia generated were provided after the dance was over through words. According to such testimony direct numinous experience of the divine realm, in the Kia event, was only open to the dancing shamans. They did not make it visible through the dance.

On the other hand Modern Dancers have worked through the assumption that dance can not only generate profound experience in the performer but also make this visible

for witnesses.⁵⁰ We can accept that they held this assumption, even in if they don't speak of it, because all of them made dance devised to have effect upon audiences. Unlike the reports of Kia, however, only a little of what Modern Dance artists specifically say supports the notion that numinosity arises through the experience of the internal energy of the body.⁵¹ This was not a clearly and consistently expressed notion among them.

To build the hypothesis I am proposing, I am putting together something from what Modern Dance artists say about their endeavours and something taken from the reported theory of how Kia Dance works. I am suggesting a theory made up through linking;

- the largely unconscious and consequently not necessarily rational or completely thought out theory behind the work of Modern Dance artists as they articulate it (and)
- the theory of Kia Dance as reportedly rationally explained and consciously held by the San.

The hypothesis in question thus suggests that it is possible;

- that dance can generate profound experience in the performer and make this visible to witnesses thus being its own expression (as Modern Dance artists imply),
- and that profound experience that emerges in the dancer arises through the perception of the energy of the body as dance heightens, generates or unlocks this (as reports on Kia dance testify).

But I must add that this double notion did not come to me after having read of *Kia* dance or of *Modern Dancers*. It came earlier. The moment came after having re-read, with some scepticism, Langer's and Sachs' claims for the ecstatic nature of dance. It was provoked through looking at the pictures on the walls of my room at Rambert School which were covered with photographs of students who had impressed me.⁵² I was, at this moment, surprised to find that these photographs seemed to capture not just high points within class, rehearsal or performance in terms of skill or physical prowess. The photographs reminded me of what, in retrospect, I believe were profound experiences had through my own body as well as while witnessing such moments made visible in others. These photographs caught, all but caught or hinted at the existence of non-ordinary and possibly profound experience within the dancer being made visible.⁵³

That such special moments appeared, at least to me, to lie behind dance when it is most arresting suggested there might be some important truth in Langer's statement that "the eternal popularity of dance lies in its ecstatic function".⁵⁴ It seemed that dance might indeed be potentially naturally numinous.

This was of interest because for as long as I could remember intimations of this kind had been very important to me. They arose through the perception of natural things like the wind, forests, mist or the sound of the sea. I had perhaps allowed myself these through the influences of Romantic thought and art. It was as though I was beginning to learn to allow myself to experience of the numinous made visible through the flesh of dancers. Such experience is perhaps not so far away from that Wordsworth called, "something far more deeply interfused, whose dwelling is light of setting suns".⁵⁵

So I can say that Kia dance, the reports of Modern Dance artists and, perhaps most powerfully, moments of my own experience provoke for me the belief that the experience of some profoundly important and deeply interfused essential thing that human beings throughout their history have called their highest experience might be coequal with one that can be generated in the performer and simultaneously made visible to witnesses through dance.

NUMINOUS EXPERIENCE AND ARCHETYPAL IMAGERY IN DANCE

So far in this article I have discussed the possibility that numinosity might naturally arise through the heightened experience of internal energy as generated in the act of dance itself. In making dances for cathedrals I have also begun to investigate another means. It is related to what Jung called, 'active imagination'.

This is a process that facilitates the rising of unconscious archetypal material into consciousness. It is accomplished through what Jung calls, "thinking", in the sense of experiencing, through mythic imagery (divine or mythic beings, stories or situations) and mythic language.⁵⁶ In the pararituals performers and witnesses are encouraged to respond to the mythic imagery of the dance as this is represented or presented through the mythic or ritualistic roles that dancers take on. We seek response similar to that of the practitioner of active imagination in relation to the archetypal figures that rise out of the unconscious. Jungians say that the response to archetypal figures should be "...in a spirit of utter seriousness ...figures which emerge must be treated as actual experiences".⁵⁷

This attitude, it is suggested, can trigger the transformative power Jung says archetypes have this power being loaded into the psyche but normally dormant.

Active imagination, as it is being considered here, is an opening of oneself to normally unconscious material and power thus rendering numinous perception through archetypal experience. Jung thought it would benefit many of us in secular society if mythic imagery had greater exposure. The pararituals might provide this or a vocabulary and indeed a practice that allows active imagination to function.

PERFORMANCE DANCE AS A NUMINOUS PRACTICE

I have discusses a dance form centred on the emergence of numinous experience within performers. I have spoken of the experience, in this, of performers and to a lesser extent witnesses at the moment of performance. A wider discussion is beyond the scope of this article. However, I will say here that I am working towards dance as a numinous practice in the sense of a full life-style.⁵⁸

As regards dance performers it is the case that they spend more time in class, rehearsal and perhaps touring than in performance. Then their lives are more than professional. They are private also. I am working towards a practice that might inform the whole of the performers existence. Within such a practice all aspects; class, rehearsal, touring, even daily life, would contribute to or re-enforce the experience and knowledge of the numinous.⁵⁹

Yet a full consideration of this proposed dance form would not end with the performer and witnesses in the sense of an audience. The dance form I am considering would

ideally be one that provided a full life-style or contributed in a major sense to one for others involved with the process of making such dance and indeed for those whose role would be limited to witnessing it.

As regards witnesses, in the sense of audiences and in the sense of other involved in the making of the dances, it might be possible that the other aspects of their lives might also be brought to re-enforce the numinosity of their existence even if the act of witnessing this dance form was the centre of this process.

To accomplish such things the present character of performance dance needs to be guarded against. I am not seeking a dance form that is primarily owned and for a group who, in their self-imposed and preserved separation from much of the world, are monk or nun-like and under the age of thirty as is the present case with professional dancers. Nor is it to be a form of interest to those who find a voyeur-like interest in this group although they are not, due to age of other circumstances, part of it. The envisaged form is to be one that would be, in a number of ways, consonant with and inform the lives of people who live, 'normal lives', who have children, who deal with the problems and concerns of life that arise after the period in which most performers pursue an active career in the present professional dance world.

THE SECOND HYPOTHESIS

I can now set out a hypothesis concerning how Transmitted Numinous Dance Experience might form the basis on which a ritual-like performance event could be built.⁶⁰

HYPOTHESIS

CONCERNING TRANSMITTED NUMINOUS DANCE EXPERIENCE

The experience of the performer, as it is raised through performance, can be the source of the numinosity of that event. This experience, if made visible, might form its own expression and so evoke numinous experience for witnesses.⁶¹ The imagery of the event, that is everything in it perceptible to performer and witness, can potentially be the source of a rising spiral. The elements of the event are:

1. the experience of the performer;
2. that, being visible, becomes its own expression;
3. which becomes the experience of the witness.

This process might develop into an ascending spiral when,

4. the experience of the witness is perceptible to the performer (and);
5. this generates greater intensity, energy or depth in the experience of the latter.

The process might be made specific to dance through the use of two means;

1. the act of dance itself,
2. the dancing of mythic archetypal imagery as roles.

The first means above I call “a primary means of numinous dance experience” because it is unique to dance and alone must be present in order that the event can take place. Through it might be provided the experience of spirit through sarkistasy.

The second means is “secondary” in that taking on mythic archetypal roles can be

accomplished through other means than dance. The two means seem to act as catalysts to each other.⁶²

¹ McKim, R. Numinous Experience, Imagery and Art in Contemporary Society. *Faith and Freedom*, Vol 58, 1, no 160, 2006, p 69-83

² Langer, S. K. *Feeling and Form*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1953, p 191.

³ *Ibid.*, p 188.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p 190.

⁵ Langer, S.K. *Philosophy in a New Key*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979, p 41.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p 42.

⁷ Langer, S. K. *Feeling and Form*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953, p 190.

⁸ If all dance is ecstatic, in the sense of at least potentially numinous, any dance would serve my purposes. My experience tells me that only special forms of dance can do so and that my search should be for one of these.

⁹ Lewis-Williams, J. D. *Discovering South African Rock Art*. Cape Town: David Philips, 1996, p 28.

¹⁰ It seems that by "trance dance" Lewis-Williams means the kind of dance Langer and Sachs call "ecstatic". I wish to be clear about why I use the term "trance", what I mean by it. In psychology the term tends to mean a state in which normal bodily functions are reduced to the degree that the individual may seem asleep (Reber, A. *Dictionary of Psychology*. London: Penguin, 1985, p 783). As a religious term, and particularly if applied to dance, it can imply energetic, vigorous and even frenzied activity.

I use the word because it may suggest a quality common to the experience of sleep as this might be mixed with that of being awake. I speak of it as a state in which it is as if some function of normal waking consciousness is "turned off" in order that another function of perception can be "turned on". It is thus a state of limited but acute awareness (Weir, D. *Trance*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: Trans Media, 1996, p 30). It also seems that the mind in trance, through adhering acutely to its subject, encourages constancy or flow in whatever means is used to facilitate or accomplish it.

The term derives from the Latin for "passage". I shall use it to mean the physical and mental state of being and/or quality of experience which is like a passage to, and might include, ecstasy and sarkistasy. For my purposes the term denotes a condition that need not be profound, quasi-numinous or paranuminous or numinous. However, it might be any of these things. I will not use the term unless I think the state referred to may be, at least potentially, a passage to one or all of them.

¹¹ Lewis-Williams, J. S. *Discovering South African Rock Art*. Cape Town: David Philips. 1996, p 44.

¹² Devereux, P. *Shamanism and Mystery Lines*. London: Quantum, 1992, p 140.

¹³ Kinachau cited in Devereux, P *Shamanism and Mystery Lines*. Quantum, 1992, p 141.

¹⁴ Newman, A. The Bridge Between Physical and Conceptual Reality: The Trance Experience of the !Kung Bushman. *Dance Ethnologists*, 3, 1979, p 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p 3.

¹⁶ Lewis-Williams, J. D. *Discovering South African Rock Art*. Cape Town: David Philips, 1996, p 56-57.

¹⁷ By Modern Dance is meant here styles emerging from the beginning of the twentieth century, within the traditions of Western Theatrical Dance which largely rejected Ballet. Most of these grew through dance techniques built out of the physical capacities, as a dancer, of a choreographer to facilitate his or her creative needs. They are often labelled with their creator's name. Contemporary Dance here refers to mixes of Modern Dance styles. These mixes are often influenced by Ballet.

¹⁸ In this they reflected an attitude not uncommon among artists of their time. Wassily Kandinsky wrote *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* as Modern Dance was emerging. He speaks of "...the internal truth which only art can divine, which only art can express by those means of expression which are hers alone." (Kandinsky, W. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. New York: Dover, 1977, p 9) Artists will be the spiritual leaders of the future for "...this new spirit ...is going hand in hand with the spirit of

thought towards an epoch of great spiritual leaders”. (*Ibid.*, p. 57) A number of Modern Dance artists seem to have thought of themselves as such leaders believing their authority was based on what they experienced through dance.

¹⁹ Laban, R. *A Life for Dance*. London: MacDonald and Evans, 1975, p 84.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p 88.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p 90.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p 94.

²⁵ Wigman, M. *The Language of Dance*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1975, p 52.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ On the subject of dance technique as being devoted to generating not skills but numinous experience it is worth noting that the ability to do Kia dance has been said to be “a learned process”²⁷. This is to say that there was a technique to it while the purpose of that technique was to gain numinous experience.

²⁸ Duncan, I. *My Life*. London: Sphere Books, 1988, p 28.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p 59

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p 65.

³¹ St. Denis cited in Shelton, S. *Divine Dancer*. New York: Doubleday, 1981, p 206.

³² De Mille, A. *Martha*. New York: Vintage Books, 1991, p 127.

³³ *Ibid.*, p 96.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p 132.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p 250.

³⁶ Graham, M. *Blood Memory*. New York: Doubleday. 1991, p 163.

³⁷ Samuels, A. Shorter, B and Plaut, F. *A Critical Dictionary of Jungian Analysis*. London; 1986, p 31.

³⁸ Graham, M. *Blood Memory*. New York: Doubleday. 1991, p 186.

³⁹ De Mille, A. *Martha*. New York: Vintage Books, 1992, p 279.

⁴⁰ Jung, C. I. London: Routledge. p 14.

⁴¹ De Mille, A. 1992, p 250.

⁴² Lang cited in De Mille, I New York: Vintage Books, 1991, p 251.

⁴³ Cohan, R. 1986, p 10.

⁴⁴ Cohan, 1986, p 14.

⁴⁵ Cohan, 1976, p 1.

⁴⁶ Cohan cited in Gow, 1972, p 187.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Duncan wrote of the “Seminary of Dancing Priests of Rome”. She says of its students and her school, “...their dance influenced and elevated their audience as medicine for sick souls. It was of such expression that I dreamed when I first formed my school...” Duncan, 1988 (1928), p 216.

⁴⁹ It is likely that the aspiration towards religious experience through dance separates my concerns from those of most Contemporary Dance artists. Even Graham and Cohan worked at a time when the search for a religious function of dance seemed to be waning among Modern and Contemporary Dance artists. In a general, since the day of the early Modern Dancers there has been a move away from concern with the numinous.

⁵⁰ From the information I have it seem only Laban claim that the dancer’s experience is more significant than that of witnesses. He says, “The remaining people can but get a taste of this vital nourishment through the enjoyment they derive from artistic works of dance” (Laban, 1975 (1935), p 90). I can find no record of other Modern Dancers making this claim. Even Laban does not claim that no intimation of the performers experience reaches witnesses.

⁵¹ Indeed none of the Modern Dance artists I have cited here provide a fully thought out theory of what happens in their dance in the way anthropologists have done in the case of Kia dance. I have to some extent done this by combining what they thought with what they seemed to have unconsciously assumed. These people were artists first and theorists second.

⁵² I have been Director of Rambert School since 1985.

⁵³ I say this being aware that we can probably never know if someone who has the appearance of having non-ordinary experience has actually done so. Of course these dancers might have had the appearance of non-ordinary experience but not that experience itself.

⁵⁴ Langer, S. K. 1953, p 201.

⁵⁵ Wordsworth, 1990, p 360.

⁵⁶ Jung, CW vol 8, p 402.

⁵⁷ Stevens, 1991, p 203.

⁵⁸ It is my experience that numinous transition requires a special atmosphere. Work with the objective of what is effectively numinous trance is difficult or impossible with dancers who come to it with only the normal approach and expectations of their profession.

⁵⁹ I am aware this is a large ambition and one almost certainly not to be realised in my life-time. I am, however, allowing myself here to theorise on how such a practice might be created for the performer. This discussion falls short of speculating on how it might be realised for witnesses although that would seem its logical extension.

⁶⁰ I do not suggest this hypothesis describes the only way numinous experience might be generated through performance dance.

⁶¹ I recognise that the experiences of the dance performer and witnesses would be different if dance stood alone and separate from other perceptible elements like sound or music. In speaking of the experience of the dancer and witnesses here I mean this as it includes the contribution or affects of such other elements.

⁶² Other secondary means of numinous dance experience could be imagined. Dance as prayer is an example. It is a secondary means that could be called “dialogue”. Meditation is perhaps another possible secondary means of numinous dance.