Let the Gods Dance: Transformation Through Haitian Dance

by Kim Meijer

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Abstract

Let the Gods Dance: Transformation Through Haitian Dance

by Kim Meijer

This thesis is an exploration of the transformation of body and mind through Haitian dance from depth and liberation psychological perspectives. More personally, it focuses on the author's transformational experience while being part of a Haitian dance community in Brooklyn, New York. Haitian dance is ingrained in Haitian culture, which embodies the history of Haitian people, mythology, gods, music, rituals, and ceremonies. This hermeneutic research examines Haitian dance as a way to access the somatic unconscious and support psychological healing and individuation. The research describes the somatic experience of archetypal energies, embodied consciousness, and myths through Haitian dance and how this enhances healing. In addition, this thesis explains how the author's Haitian dance class provides healing for both individuals and a community from a liberation psychology perspective. Through dance, dialogue, and activism, participants gain deeper understandings of themselves and each other's history and experiences.

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Dedication

Music, dance, one love.

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Chapter I Introduction

Prelude

Every Saturday, for the past 15 years, I have gone to an Afro-Haitian dance and movement class. It is a two-hour dance class in Brooklyn, New York, and it is where I find my tribe. Similar to New York's population, people of many different ages, cultures, and walks of life gather together to dance and move. We have a one-hour warm-up followed by an hour of intense physical dance movement across the floor. In the middle and at the end of class, we form a circle where people can jump in and move and express themselves any way they want. Live music accompanies us throughout the class. The rhythm of the drums dictates the movement of our bodies, souls, and spirits. It is a play and exchange between the musicians and the dancers. I have witnessed many cycles of life during the 15 years that I have been a part of this community. Together we have celebrated life, birth, and death. This community has guided me through many transitions in life and supported me in my process towards wholeness. I am grateful to be part of this family where I can fully embrace my spirit and practice the joy of movement and dance.

My personal experience of Haitian dance within my community is the driving force behind this research. My Haitian dance class has supported my personal growth and healing in various ways. The combination of the sense of community, the role of the teacher, the music, and the dance movements has contributed to my healing process. Haitian dance has taught me to be vulnerable and express myself in a group setting in

such a way that I have felt mirrored and empowered at the same time. This dance has allowed me to connect with a spiritual world with my feet planted on the earth.

Depth psychology has long explored the relationships between psyche, mythology, dance, and movement. The theories of Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung (Chodorow, 1991; Jung, 1961/1963, 1943/1983, 1928/1983), mythology scholar Joseph Campbell (2001, 2008), and Jungian analyst Marion Woodman (1985, 1993; Woodman & Dickson, 1996) have all contributed to understandings of how dance and movement contribute to the healing of the psyche. This thesis looks at the healing benefits of Haitian dance from a depth psychological perspective. It explores how Haitian dance can be used in psychotherapy to access the (somatic) unconscious through rhythm, movement, and images by integrating or embodying split-off parts of the unconscious. Unlike depth psychology, Haitian dance is an ancient culture, some would say a religion, that uses specific rhythms, dances, prayers, and songs during ceremonies within a community. Depth psychology, on the other hand, explores the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious and includes psychoanalysis and Jungian psychology. The commonality between depth psychology and Haitian dance is that they both use the connection to the archetypal energies of the unconscious as a way to heal and transform. Investigating Haitian dance from a depth perspective is beneficial because it offers a deeper understanding of how the connection with the unconscious in Haitian dance fosters healing and transformation for both individuals and communities.

Guiding Purpose and Rationale

This research contributes to a deeper understanding of how Haitian dance can provide healing and transformation for both individuals and communities who are open to

working with movement and the body. In this process, this thesis strives to investigate the history and benefits of Haitian dance and explain the roots, form, and function of this rich part of Haitian culture and how it can enrich the therapeutic process. In so doing, this work brings new attention to the healing benefits of an ancient culture and also dispels some of its mystery.

This thesis is based on the understanding that psyche and soma are inextricably bound together (Whitehouse, 1999). Many ancient cultures have healed the psyche through the body. Both therapists in the field of depth psychology, such as Jung (1961/1963) and Woodman (1985, 1993; Woodman & Dickson, 1996), and movement therapists, such as Mary Whitehouse (1999), Joan Chodorow (1991), and Jane Adler (1999), have discussed the connection between body and psyche. Working with the body involves directly working with one's unconscious. Accessing the unconscious in a safe, supportive, and therapeutic environment can enhance profound healing. What is unknown can be brought forward, expressed, and integrated consciously and unconsciously. This is a valuable psychotherapeutic experience that brings the body into therapy and can facilitate a person's individuation process (Chodorow, 1991).

Besides bringing healing and transformation for individuals, Haitian dance can also bring healing to a community of people of different ages and from different cultures. Historically slaves from Africa brought their culture, dances, and customs to Haiti. In Haiti these dances and ceremonies served as a way to bring the community together, worship their gods, and strengthen their spirit against white European oppressors.

The Haitian dance class and community in Brooklyn, New York, offers an opportunity for people of many different cultures, such as Haitian, Jamaican, African

American, White, Hispanic, and Asian, to unite through their love for dance in a world that is often governed by segregation and inequality. This community makes an attempt to transcend historical and contemporary social structures that separate people and discriminate against those of specific races. This community, made up of many individuals who have the intention to break with colonial and hierarchical ideologies of the past and who attempt to find peaceful and sustainable paths forward together, allows for dialogue and solidarity among people of different ethnicities. As I reflect on the intention of this community, I believe it is based on the teachings and intention of our teacher, who embraces everyone in class. With this attitude she sets an example for each student to do the same, inside and outside the community.

In August 2013, some dancers within the community organized a group called Dancing for Action. Two friends of Haitian descent, who have experienced the prevalence of art and dance in Haitian life and culture, led the initiative. The acquittal of George Zimmerman for the killing of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African American high school student in Sanford, Florida, was and remains a devastating blow in the face of the diverse community of Brooklyn, New York, as well as communities around the world, particularly for people of color. Dancing for Action organized demonstrations by way of flash mobs to use the power of dance to protest against injustices perpetuated by laws that target people of color. During these events, Dancing for Action performed a 10-minute Nago dance sequence in public spaces in Manhattan, New York. The Nago dance mimics the gestures of war expressed by combative postures and movements, symbolizing the courage and power of human beings. All the participants are dressed in black and red, the colors of the Nago tribe. This dance serves as a voice for the dancers. It

is a nonconfrontational way to deliver our message, a message that could be understood all over the world without translation. Throughout history, Nago dances set power into motion. Uprisings and revolts of slaves during the 18th century were born from these dances, which continue to have the capacity to strengthen, heal, and rejuvenate. Old traditions live inside us and continue to be a driving force for expression and change. Similar to the Haitian dance community, these flash mobs allow people across differences in ancestry to communicate the common concern for racism and discrimination in society. Liberation psychologies explain that environments of inequality, violence, and repression have powerful psychological effects on everyone, whether these effects are registered consciously or unconsciously. "When there is no public language or space to discuss these effects, they may turn into painful somatic symptoms of seemingly unknown origin that are misattributed to other factors" (Watkins & Schulman, 2008, p. 53).

My Haitian dance class serves as a unique community space, where the effects of inequality among various cultures are processed inside and outside class. For example, one Saturday in December of 2014 the class was dedicated to the African American man Eric Garner, who died on July 12, 2014, after a police officer put him in a grappling hold. My teacher lit a candle in honor of his spirit. Outside of class, the members of the dance class do various activities, such as flash mobs, discussions, and fundraisers, to create awareness about issues of injustice. Often after class, my friends and I gather and discuss past and current individual, national, and global experiences of racism and inequality. These stories and experiences enhance each other's understanding of living in or having grown up in certain cultural environments and the firsthand experience of racism. In this

sense, it also serves as a healing mechanism on a community level and a catalyst for change in the world by enabling access to the unconscious and connecting with archetypal deities through rhythm and dance and clearly communicating a message of resistance. My Haitian dance class has the power to support and create positive transformation in the world.

Methodology

Research problem. There is a wealth of knowledge on talk-only depth psychology and substantial information on the relationship between depth psychology and dance therapy and movement. However, there is limited scholarly research that offers a depth psychological perspective and understanding of the transformational qualities of Haitian dance.

Research question. How does healing occur in the body and mind through Haitian dance from a depth psychological perspective? The sub-question is how has my experience of being part of a multicultural Haitian dance community influenced and supported my healing and transformation?

Methodological approach. The research in this thesis uses a mixed method approach with a combination of hermeneutic and heuristic research approaches. As hermeneutic research, this thesis examines the meaning of Haitian dance as a depth psychological process. It compares and synthesizes literature from the field of depth psychology and the field of Haitian dance. This approach broadens the theoretical understanding of the process and impact of Haitian dance and its application to depth psychology. In addition, I also discuss the healing benefits of an open dialogue within a multicultural community according to liberation psychology.

My involvement in the Haitian dance community has supported me through life's ups and downs, breakups, deaths of loved ones, unemployment, and success, while providing a sense of togetherness. This community has guided me through many life transitions and supported me in my process towards wholeness. Regardless of my life situation, after my Haitian dance class I feel calm, loved, and connected. Somewhere deep inside, I know I have a place and purpose in life. Consequently, I have asked myself what it is about my Haitian dance community that supports me in healing my body and soul. When I was introduced to the works of Jung (1961/1963), Woodman (1985, 1993), and Campbell (2001, 2008) at Pacifica, a light went on. Intuitively I knew that the healing benefits of depth psychology in working with the unconscious are an intrinsic part of Haitian dance. The journey of my weekly dance class has supported me in expanding my identity and sense of self; my appreciation and gratefulness for my body, soul, and ancestors; my feeling of being part of a community transcending race and ethnicity; and my feeling of being one with the world. This experience has taught me that dancing ancient dances, such as Haitian dance, within a safe community can transcend human suffering and bring people together to a sense of oneness and connection.

Ethical Concerns

Contemporary Western society has a long history of slavery, suppressing ethnic minorities, and portraying white people as superior while ensuring they have more power and privileges than people of color.

Race is a social construct, not a scientific or biological fact. . . . Over the years, researchers created differing classification schemes that emphasized a wide range of factors including skin tone, tribal affiliations, nationalities, language families, or simply minority status (Thomas & Sillen, 1972). Underlying most of these schemes was the assumption that races were organized hierarchically, with light-skinned Christian Europeans at the top. (Hays, 2007, p. 11)

I am a white European woman from the Netherlands writing about Haitian dance in New York City. The Dutch played a significant role in the slave trade. They were responsible for the misery of millions of people, instituting systematic racism and discrimination among their colonies, including the establishment of apartheid in South Africa.

Haitian dance and ceremonies were powerful tools during the resistance of slaves against European oppressors. Even though my family background is a mix of different ethnicities, my skin color is white, the color of the oppressor, and yet I now practice an ancient ritual of the oppressed. As I write about this topic, it is important for me to have awareness of and respect for the rich history of Haitian dance and culture. If I do not show awareness and respect, I risk being part of the white superiority complex that is prevalent in our culture, a culture in which systematic racism prevails and European culture is regarded as superior to other cultures.

Through dialogue with my friends of color, I have deepened my understanding of their history, culture, and experiences in the world. I see the possibility of overcoming racial tension only through dialogue and close connection with people of different ethnicities. At the same time, I also believe that no matter where we come from, we are here on earth to support each other and share the experience that is called life.

Overview of Thesis

Chapter II provides a foundational review of Jungian and post-Jungian theories that are related to the psychological value of movement. The underlying concepts, assumptions, and theories of my research focus on the importance of personal transformation through ritual and archetypal energies outlined by Jung (1961/1963, 1943/1983, 1928/1983), personal transformation through embodied consciousness

explained by Woodman (1993), and the importance of myth described by Campbell (2001, 2008). As Haitian dance can also be seen as a symbol of liberation, this chapter also discusses the history, form, and function of Haitian dance.

Chapter III engages a hermeneutic discussion of how healing occurs within Haitian dance. This chapter discusses the literature to expand the knowledge of the benefits of Haitian dance from a depth perspective, as well as my own personal experience. Chapter IV provides a summary of the research and suggestions for future investigation.

Chapter II Literature Review

Introduction

The concepts that support this thesis are based in depth psychology, particularly the approaches by Jung (1961/1963, 1928/1983, 1943/1983), Woodman (1985, 1993; Woodman & Dickson, 1996), and Campbell (2001, 2008). These concepts focus on how transformation and healing take place within an individual. "All depth psychologies believe in the reality of the unconscious and take the whole psyche, which includes both consciousness and the unconscious, as their primary datum" (Coppin & Nelson, 2005, p. 42). The current research expands upon understandings of depth psychology by exploring the body's role and experience as well as the contributions of myth, metaphor, and ritual to this transformation. In addition, it explores the healing benefits of an open discourse within a multicultural community from a liberation psychology perspective. Both historical and current practices within Haitian dance are discussed. This research investigates the various elements that make Haitian dance unique, such as the origins of the music, dance, ritual, and community.

Jungian Theory: Concepts and Terms

Jung (1961/1963) developed the psychological perspective of the *collective unconscious*. His mentor, the father of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud, brought the concept of the unconscious to the forefront of Western awareness, explaining, "Only a theory of an unconscious as a counterpart to the ego consciousness could explain the

meaning and purpose of supposedly irrational behavior" (as cited in Coppin & Nelson, 2005, p. 48). Like his mentor Freud, "Jung uses the term 'unconscious' both to describe mental contents which are inaccessible to the ego and to delimit a psychic place with its own character, laws and functions" (Samuels, Shorter, & Plaut, 1986, p. 155). Jungian analyst Joan Chodorow (1991) described how "in contrast to Freud's emphasis on the unconscious as repressed personal history, Jung understood the unconscious to include both personal and collective history" (p. 50). Jung named the deepest layer of the human psyche the collective unconscious and explained that it contains a combination of universally prevalent patterns and forces called archetypes and instincts. At this level, there is nothing individual or unique about human beings. Jung (1961/1963) contended that all of humanity shares and is connected collectively to universal, primordial themes or *archetypes*:

The concept of archetype . . . is derived from the repeated observation that, for instance, the myths and fairytales of world literature contain definite motifs which crop up everywhere. We meet these same motifs in the fantasies, dreams, deliria and delusions of individuals today. . . . They have their origin in the archetype, which in itself is an irrepresentable, unconscious pre-existent form that seems to be an inherent structure of the psyche and can therefore manifest itself spontaneously anywhere, at any time. Because of its instinctual nature, the archetype underlies the feeling-toned complexes [q.v.] and shares their autonomy. (p. 392)

Archetypes emerge from the unconscious as images and energy around which experiences are organized and given meaning: "For Jung the archetype is a primary source of psychic energy and patterning. It constitutes the ultimate source of psychic symbols, which attract energy, structure it, and lead ultimately to the creation of civilization and culture" (Stein, 1988, p. 85). The theory of archetypes is critical to Jung's overall conception of the *psyche*, which according to Jungian analyst Daryl Sharp (1991)

"is the totality of all psychological processes, both conscious and unconscious" (p. 107) and according to Jung is "a *complexio oppositorum*, a complex of opposites" (as cited in Chodorow, 1991, p. 92). By processing and integrating this inner state of opposites one can develop the wholeness of a personality, ultimately leading to the realization of the Self.

Shadow. Jung (1943/1983) described the *shadow* as "the sum of all those unpleasant qualities we like to hide, together with the insufficiently developed functions and the contents of the personal unconscious" (p. 87). Usually, people tend to resist seeing their shadow and to project unwanted emotions onto others, typically of the same sex, as a way to deny their existence within themselves. This process happens at the cultural and collective levels too, where one culture projects its shadow onto another culture by criticizing it. Jungian analyst Murray Stein (1988) explained, "Generally, the shadow has an immoral or at least a disreputable quality, containing features of a person's nature that are contrary to the customs and moral conventions of society" (p. 106). In an effort to be accepted by family, community, and culture, the psyche adjusts by splitting off into the unconscious those parts of the self that do not meet the established or valued norms. Jung (1951/1983) said:

The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspect of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for self-knowledge, and it therefore, as a rule, meets with considerable resistance. Indeed, self-knowledge as a psychotherapeutic measure frequently requires much painstaking work extending over a long period. (p. 91)

Withdrawing projections, bringing more of one's shadow content into consciousness, and integrating unconscious material lead to healing and a greater sense of wholeness. This is part of the individuation process.

Persona. Jung (1928/1983) described the *persona* as

a complicated system of relations between the individual consciousness and society, fittingly enough a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual. (p. 94)

People develop a persona and create a mask to match the expectations and demands of society and their personal social ambitions. However, it can cause great distress if one's persona is too far removed from one's authentic self. By playing particular roles, adopting a conventional collective attitude, and representing social and cultural stereotypes, one does not live one's own uniqueness.

The overall task of psychological development is integration and wholeness. Stein (1998) explained that integration depends on self-acceptance and fully embracing those parts of oneself that do not belong to the persona image, stating,

The personal aspects of which one is ashamed are often felt to be radically evil. While some things truly are evil and destructive, frequently shadow material is not evil. It is only felt to be so because of the shame attached to its nonconformity with the persona. (p. 123)

By integrating shadow and persona, the transcendent function can appear, which brings wholeness.

Anima and animus. Jung referred to *anima* and *animus* as archetypal figures of the psyche, explaining that "they lie beyond the influence of the forces that mold and shape consciousness of individuals such as family, society, culture and tradition" (as cited in Stein, 1998, p. 127). People tend to project unconsciously their nature onto other

persons, usually of the opposite sex. These "inner" figures have a life and distinct personality of their own. They derive in part from the feminine or masculine archetype and in part from an individual's own life as a woman or man: "The usual shorthand definition is that the anima is the inner feminine for a man and the animus is the inner masculine for a woman" (Stein, 1998, p. 130). Jungian analyst June Singer (1994) discussed these figures as the "eternal feminine" aspect in a man and . . . the "eternal masculine" aspect in a woman" (p.179). She continued:

Because of their archetypal connections, anima and animus have been represented in many collective forms and figures: the man's anima may appear as Aphrodite, Marilyn Monroe, Mary Magdalene, Sophia the embodiment of wisdom, or Kali the embodiment of destruction; while the woman's animus may appear as Hermes, Apollo, Hitler or Bill Clinton. The possibilities are endless—but these figures are all in some way "bigger than life" and evoke something powerful in us as they appear in dreams or imagination. (Singer, 1994, p. 179)

People tend to project their own images, thoughts, and assumptions onto another person rather than seeing the real person. This generates a lot of confusion between individuals. Part of the individuation process is to withdraw the projections of the animus and anima and integrate them into conscious awareness. This supports a person's process of becoming whole.

The self and individuation. Jung (1961/1963) described the *self* as "the principle and archetype of orientation and meaning" (p. 199). "The self encompasses our psychic totality, conscious and unconscious, from the primal untransformed depths to the ultimate development of the individual. It functions as the ordering and centering process of wholeness, the central archetype" (Chodorow, 1991, p. 60). Embracing the self is part of the *individuation process*. "Individuation means becoming a single, homogeneous being, and in so far as 'individuality' embraces our innermost, last and incomparable

uniqueness, it also implies becoming one's own self. We could therefore translate individuation as 'coming to selfhood' or 'self realization'" (Jung, 1961/1963, p. 395). Part of the individuation process is to let go of conditioning by the collective and fulfill one's own distinctive abilities. Singer explained, "The ideal of the individuation process... is the conscious realization and integration of all the possibilities contained within the individual" (1994, p. 134).

The transcendent function. The *transcendent function* is "a psychic function that arises from the tension between consciousness and the unconscious and supports their union" (Sharp, 1991, p. 83). Participating in dialogue with the two contrasting energies and sustaining the tension between them rather than subsiding into one or the other allows for the emergence from the unconscious of the transcendent function. This state allows for both opposing energies to be transformed into something new. There is a polarity at play between consciousness and unconsciousness that "requires an ego that can maintain its standpoint in face of the counterposition of the unconscious. Both are of equal value. The confrontation between the two generates a tension charged with energy and creates a living, third essence" (Sharp, 1991, p. 83). By allowing and integrating this confrontation, new consciousness arises that allows for healing.

Marion Woodman's work with the body. Marion Woodman is a Jungian analyst whose work with the body is rooted in her own healing journey. Woodman was a gifted high school English and drama teacher for 24 years. Her struggle with anorexia and kidney failure eventually led her to study analytical psychology at the C. G Jung Institute in Zurich. During that time, she analyzed her dreams with her analyst and continued to do her own experiential healing work at home. In her own room, Woodman

would relax and warm her body through breathing and movements and then lie down on the floor.

After time to open up the body through relaxation, she would place healing images from her dreams into ailing parts of her body, allowing the images to move and change as they flowed naturally in the tissue and in the expressive movements that unfolded. Working alone with herself as a witness, she tape recorded the stream of images, feelings and associations that surfaced, working with them later through writing, drawing, dancing and analysis. (Stromsted, 2005, p. 2)

Through this process, Woodman was able to heal her kidney condition. These experiences provided the seed for BodySoul Rhythms approach and workshops.

BodySoulRhythms integrates analytic psychology, dream work, art, mask-making, voice, bodywork, structured dance explorations, inner-sourced movements, and improvisations. During this practice, body and soul come together (Stromsted, 2005, p. 2). Woodman stated, "For me, a bodily symptom is one of expressing the unconscious" (as cited in Greene, 2005, p. 190). This bodywork is an effort to connect with the unconscious through the body.

Among Jungian theorists and analysts, Woodman "has been the most vocal about the widespread dissociative relationship to soma in our time" (Greene, 2005, p. 190). At the heart of Woodman's work is the development of conscious femininity. Most men and women have grown up in cultures that favor patriarchal values, such as productivity, goal orientation, success, and intellectual achievement. In her lectures and experiential workshops, Woodman brought consciousness to healing the body/psyche/soul split. Woodman explained that surrender is an essential part of being and feeling connected to this feminine energy, as is listening to the body and the feelings that want to arise:

The work is to let the ego go and *become* the music. So that you are *being* danced. Many people can't sustain that kind of surrender. Their ego becomes inflated with

the archetype; they begin to identify with the archetypal energy. The result is an inflated ego, functioning out of will-power. . . . It's a failed spiritual journey. We can do all we want to try to change something with our will but Jung says it's archetypal energy that heals, and anything else is Band-Aid. (As cited in Stromsted, 2005, p. 15)

The essence of the feminine energy is to surrender and let go. This is how the archetypal energy can move through, heal, and transform us.

Joseph Campbell: Myth and metaphor. Joseph Campbell was an American mythologist, writer, and lecturer best known for comparative mythology and religion. Campbell explained that humans share similar narratives across different cultures and religions. In the opening prologue chapter of *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell (2008) wrote:

It would not be too much to say that myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into the human cultural manifestation. Religions, philosophies, arts and social forms of primitive and historic man, prime discoveries in science and technology, the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the basic, magic ring of myth. (p. 1)

Similar to Jung (1961/1963), Campbell (2008) believed that there are universal images and symbols that are part of the human psyche and arise spontaneously among people worldwide, stating, "For the symbols of mythology are not manufactured; they can not be ordered, invented, or permanently suppressed. They are spontaneous of the psyche, and each bears within, undamaged, the germ power of its source" (p. 2). Even without understanding why, people are moved and touched by the images of myths because they activate the mysterious depths deep inside that people also embody.

Campbell (2008) discussed the meaning of myths and explained how challenging experiences can be seen as initiatory adventures. The hero's journey, as described in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, explains an initiatory sequence. The opening stage

includes the call to adventure, meeting the mentor, and the threshold passage. Once into the adventure, the challenges involve finding allies and guides, facing ordeals, resisting temptations, braving enemies, enduring the dark night of the soul, surviving the supreme ordeal, and winning the elixir. The concluding steps involve returning to the threshold passage, resurrection, and celebration; accepting a role of service; sharing the elixir; and, finally, merging two worlds.

Campbell (2001) outlined the four functions of mythology: metaphysical, cosmological, sociological, and psychological, in his book *Thou Art That: Transforming Religious Metaphor*. Although no myth addresses all four, each addresses at least one of these great questions. As a metaphysical function, myth awakens and supports a sense of awe before the mystery of being. The cosmological function of mythology is to present an image of the cosmos that will maintain a sense of mystical awe and explain everything that a person comes into contact with in the surrounding universe. The sociological function is to validate and maintain a certain sociological system: a shared set of rights and wrongs, proprieties or improprieties, on which a person's particular social unit depends for its existence. The psychological function of myth is to carry the individual through the stages of life. The mythology must do so in accord with the social order of each individual's group, the cosmos as understood by this group, and the monstrous mystery.

In his book *Tracking the Gods: The Place of Myth in Modern Life*, Jungian analyst James Hollis (1995) explained why the study of myth is important for us as individuals and why myths are an important part of Jungian psychology:

The Greek word *mythos* means *word*, *story*, *speech*, related to the notion of expression. . . . Myth, with its substance or symbol, rhythm and metaphor, bridges

from the unknown to the knower and helps the human stand in some sort of meaningful way to mystery. (p. 12)

Myth resonates because it stirs what people already carry in their psyche but is not always recognized by their consciousness. Hollis explained, "Such energy can animate any form that is shapeable. Images can manifest in words, movement, plastic arts, science, architecture or any form of cultural, personal expression" (p. 12). Anything that can be a medium for divine energies can be a temporary vessel for the mysteries, spirit, or the gods and can serve a transcendent function.

Liberation psychology. Similar to the psychological function of mythology, which considers the individual as part of a community and broader world, *liberation psychology* also views the psychology of individuals within their social, cultural, historical, and political contexts. Mary Watkins, a scholar of depth psychology and mythology, and Helene Schulman (2008), a professor of psychology and cultural studies, considered the effect of history and culture on the psyche through the lens of liberation psychology. Both Watkins and Schulman were trained in depth psychology and the psychologies of Freud and Jung, and drew from these approaches in their understandings of the possibilities for individual transformation. Their experience led them to place psychodynamic clinical theories and individual treatment within historical and cultural contexts:

A starting point for psychologies of liberation is creating awareness of how much our most intimate psychological orientation and suffering are connected with the historical and cultural context in which we live and the ways we have learned to think about them. (Watkins & Schulman, 2008, p. 49)

In order to become whole and individuate, people must also have insight into and understanding of their relationship with their family and culture, and the impact of social structures and institutions.

Ignacio Martín-Baró, the founder of liberation psychology, was a Spanish-born Jesuit priest and psychologist who dedicated his work to addressing the needs of oppressed groups in Latin America and ultimately was assassinated as a result of his work. Liberation psychology emphasizes not only liberation from the group, but the evolution of the group and the psychological health of the culture. "Martín-Baró envisioned a psychology that would acknowledge the psychological wounding caused by war, racism, poverty and violence; a psychology that would support historical memory and critical reflection" (Watkins & Schulman, 2008, p. 25). Watkins and Schulman (2008) discussed how oppression and colonialism have left destructive patterns in the psyche of individuals and communities that continue to be struggled with:

During 500 years of colonialism, the dissociative strategies encountered in many distinct cultural locations have been hardened into extremely rigid, destructive, and pathological complexes, affecting both individual personalities and whole communities. Currently these hardened cultural complexes organize many European and American educational institutions and social discourses in ways that generate bystanding, preventing the working through and mourning of the painful past, and mitigating against engagement with the pressing issues of our time. (p. 75)

In their examination of liberation psychology, Watkins and Schulman (2008) discussed a psychological dynamic called *bystanding*, a state where one cannot see or avoids looking, and overlooks one's responsibility and complicity as a witness. "Psychically, being a bystander to injustice and violence breeds disconnection, passivity, fatalism, a sense of futility, and failures in empathic connection" (p. 65). Watkins and Schulman emphasized the needed healing potentials of family, small group, and community-based dialogical approaches to psychological well-being. At the same time, they recognized the importance of the arts for both individual and community expression and visioning.

Research and Literature on Haitian Dance

As a Haitian once said, "when you whites feel religious, you go to church; when we feel religious we dance" (Lekis, 1960, p. 11). Haitian dance is closely interwoven with Haitian culture. Katherine Dunham (1983), an American dancer, author, educator, and social activist, wrote in her book *Dances of Haiti*: "To know the dances of Haiti the life surrounding the dances must be known, and the focus of life is *vodou*. Reduced to its simplest form, the *vodou* is a cult of ancestor worship" (p. 5). Compared to the substantial amount of research on Haitian culture, there is little contemporary research focused on the movements and meaning of various Haitian dances. Lisa Lekis (1960), a writer and researcher of Latin American and Caribbean music and dance, wrote in her book *Dancing Gods*:

Because the history of dance in the Caribbean is a story of prohibition, ban and moral indignation, writing on the subject has not been popular. The importance of dance in the lives of the lower levels of society has been overlooked because this social stratum has received little attention the last twenty years. (p. vi)

Even though Haiti received extensive international attention because of the earthquake in 2010, the majority of poor Haitian people continue to be neglected by the rest of the world. Lekis's arguments on the marginal representation of current Haitian dance remain the same for the most up-to-date research available, as it is hard to find contemporary research on this topic.

Dunham was one of the first African Americans to conduct anthropological fieldwork, and the first anthropologist to explore the function of dance in rituals and community life. "Her observations of dance rituals whilst working as a graduate researcher in 1930's Haiti played a formative role in her dance" (Durkin, 2011, p. 123). Other pioneers include artist filmmaker Maya Deren and Dunham's student Lavinia

Williams. Deren was from Kiev, Ukraine, from which her family fled because of anti-Semitic pogroms and moved to the United States. Dunham was born in Chicago. Her father was African American and her mother was of French-Canadian and Native American heritage. Williams was African American. All three researchers joined with Haitians in their dancing and worship of their gods (Dunham, 1983; Deren, 1953, Yarborough Williams, 1959). Because of the intimate experiences of these women with Haitian dance, they offer a rich resource of information.

Both Dunham's and Deren's research was made possible because of scholarships they received. Williams was invited by the Haitian government to teach Haitian dance in 1953. Dunham's work was largely completed in 1937, while she was in the West Indies as a research fellow in dance and anthropology, financed by the Julius Rosenwald Foundation (1983, p. ix). Dunham (1983) discussed that while researching the dances of the island of Haiti she discovered that accounts of the early voyages contained useful descriptive material. This material showed that both the form and the function of these dances remained relatively constant during the two centuries since the earliest records, excepting for differences in names and perhaps slight alterations in ritual significance:

The dances of peasant Haiti today might well be those of slave Haiti in the seventeenth century. Accounts by such historians as Le Père Labat, Pierre de Vaissière, Peytraud and Moreau de St Méry wrote about the dance of the natives. These early historians, however, did recognize the dance as being part of the culture of the transplanted African and in some way vital to the well-being of the slave-community, at least from a recreational point of view. The names, indeed, have changed very little in the past two centuries and in some cases the actual choreography as reported can be observed today. In function and psychological and sociological import, however there is change even within one generation as acculturation takes place. (Dunham, 1983, p. xix)

Dunham provided valuable information on the form and function of these dances that is still applicable to Haitian dance today. Although changes in the form, function, and ritual significance of these dances is not the focus of this thesis, it is important to recognize the change between generations that has occurred as acculturation has taken place.

Deren (1953) received a Guggenheim Fellowship for "creative work in the field of motion pictures" and embarked on an 18-month journey in Haiti starting in 1947.

During her process, she abandoned her original intention to create a movie and ended up writing a book titled *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* several years later. In her book, she described what happened to her artistic process:

I had begun as an artist, as one who would manipulate the elements of a reality into a work of art in the image of her creative integrity; I end by recording, as humbly and accurately as I can, the logics of a reality which had forced me to recognize its integrity, and to abandon my manipulation. (p. 6)

During this process, Deren realized that although she was required to abandon her original intention as an artist, her personal journey guided her to write a book. When Deren decided to write her book, she devoted herself to studying the works of anthropologists who had been concerned with Haitian culture: Herskovits (1937) and Courlander (1939). During the reading of these works, Deren (1953) discovered that her background as an artist and her initial approach to illuminating areas of Vodou mythology contributed to her having a position with which the standard anthropological procedure had not concerned itself:

At first, and for quite a while, I merely retained an amorphous, formless collection of memories which a professional would have systematized as soon as possible, I having no such commitment, nor professional or intellectual urgency, could permit the culture and the myth to emerge gradually in its own terms and its own form. (p. 7)

Deren's receptive approach supported her in gaining trust from the Haitian community and therefore becoming part of the rituals and ceremonies. This led to her firsthand experience of Vodou. Through this firsthand involvement, Deren realized that the dances cannot be separated from the mythology.

History of Haiti. Haitian dance has been shaped and molded by the violent history of the country, as well as its unique philosophy and religion. Haiti, which is part of the group of island chains known as the Greater and Lesser Antilles in the tropical seas that divide North and South America, is made up of greats plains and high mountains cut by deep valleys. Haiti is the second largest island in the Caribbean and was named Hispaniola by the Spaniards and later Saint-Domingue by the French. Today the Republic of Haiti and the Dominican Republic share the island. Dunham (1983) explained that the island was first inhabited by the Arawak Indians, and invaded by Caribs who came from South America. Before complete Carib conquest and assimilation could take place, Columbus arrived. Most of the Indian population was slaughtered by the European invaders or died under the rigors of slavery during the first year of colonization. Slaves were then imported from northwest Africa; from Sierra Leone and the Gold coast; from Dahomey, western Nigeria, and the Congo Basin; and even, because of inter trading, from the east coast. Some of these slaves were from proud and strong warrior tribes. The history of the island was strongly influenced by the fact that the island was extremely fertile and was the most desirable among the French colonies for produce and colonization.

Consequently spurred by greed the French colonists became careless as to the caliber of Negroes they imported: and they began to include those from the warrior tribes of the Fantis, Agonas, Sosas, Mandingos, and Felas. Traded from the most highly developed kingdoms of Africa, and above all from warrior tribes, it was inevitable that liberators would arise to lead the slaves in revolt until, fortified by repercussions of the French revolution is 1789, a complete and bloody victor was won by negroes. (p. 2)

Through the dark period of slavery, the bloody war for independence, and two centuries of internal struggle, Haitian peasants continued to hold on to the religion of their forefathers, Vodou. Vodou supported the peasants in keeping strength and hope alive by continuing to worship their gods, play the drums, and dance the Vodou dances to preserve ancient rituals and relieve their oppressed spirits.

Vodou. To comprehend the dances of Haiti, the life surrounding the dances must be understood, and the focus of this life is Vodou. Vodou means many things. It means dancing, singing, drumming, and performing rituals for the living and for the dead.

Lavinia Yarborough Williams (1959), a dancer and dance educator who founded national schools of dance in several Caribbean countries, explained: "In an archaic sense voudou means diety, or spirit. It came from the language of the Fon-speaking people who lived in the region of Dahomey, where the word was used to designate superhuman beings" (p. 7). Vodou also means sacred energy. Vodou beliefs are a combination of animism and religions, and the chief rites extending these beliefs are seasonal, ancestral, and agricultural.

The three great families of cult practice in Haiti are the "true" vodou, or *Rada-Dahomey*, the *Petro*, and the various crosscutting of the *Congo*. Within these families are numerous subfamilies. The two most powerful are the *Rada-Dahomey* and the *Petro*. (Dunham, 1983, p. 5)

The Rada is beneficent, positive in intention, and protective. The Petro is perceived as negative, dedicated to destructive or evil practice, and malevolent. The difference is very clear and strong. It affects the expression of the drum pattern and dance and the atmosphere of a ceremony. Slaves from Africa brought to Haiti a strong pantheon of gods who were part of the sky, rivers, mountains, and the forces of nature. Dunham explained, "The gods are called *loas* or *mystères*, and the Priest (*houngan*) of high rank knew each

one by name and knew the ceremony, clothing, food, drum rhythm, and dance that were its own" (p. 6). At times, priests act as intermediaries between these gods and humans and other times they are the instruments for the transmission of ritual ceremony.

Sacred dance is the most common outward expression of participation in a religious state for Haitian peasants. The primary sociological function of the sacred dance probably is religious experience. Deren (1953) discussed how a dancer gets possessed by a *Loa* or archetype:

Like all religions, Voudoun is built on certain basic premises. Briefly it proposes that man has a material body, animated by an *esprit or gros-bon-ange*—the soul, spirit, psyche or self—which being non-material, does not share the death of the body. This soul may achieve . . . the status of a *loa*, a divinity, and become the archetypal representative of some natural or moral principle. As such, it has the power to displace temporarily the gros-bon-ange of a living person and become the animating force of his physical body. This psychic phenomenon is known as "possession." The actions and utterances of the possessed person are not the expressions of the individual, but are the readily identifiable manifestations of the particular loa or archetypal principle. Since it is by such manifestations that that the divinities of the pantheon make known their instructions and exercise their authority. (p. 16)

The various forms of hypnosis, the achieving of religious ecstasy, and the submerging of one's personality in that of the god may be seen as the psycho-spiritual function of the sacred dance. These dances bring healing to both the individual and community.

Sacred dances. There are various functions of the dances of Haiti. Dunham (1983) wrote extensively about the various forms and functions of Haitian dance. The main division is the difference between the secular and the sacred. Within the former dances, another important distinction is the seasonal (large crowd) or occasional (small crowd) dance. The sacred dances can be divided into Cult dances, Loa dances, and funeral dances. Cult dances are for ritual, preparation for reception of *Loa*, secret ritual to induce and break hypnosis, and the establishment of cult solidarity. Funeral dances are

intended to externalize grief and escape from emotional conflict. Dunham explained Loa dances are intended to represent or symbolize Loa and establish contact between an individual and deity:

All Loa dances have characteristic behaviors, songs, and sometimes a special drum rhythm. Each Loa, however, does not have a special dance; his or her dance may fall into a larger general group of dances. For example, the Yanvallou dance honors the gods Aida Ouesdo, Erzulie, and St. Jacques, as well as many others. (p. 51)

Examples of sacred dances that are grouped together under the classification of Rada are Yanvallou, Nago, Mahi, and Ibo. These dances demonstrate the fusion of tradition, custom, and religious belief in Haiti among the descendants of various African nations. "Yanvallou is a Dahomean dance in concept and interpretation; nago originated with the Yorubans, while danse ibo comes from the ibo tribes" (Lekis, 1960, p. 117).

Yanvallou is devoted to Damballah, whose symbol is the snake. Damballah is high in the hierarchy of Vodou gods. The dancers imitate the movement of the snake in honor of Damballah. The undulating movements of the reptile perfectly define the dance. This dance is also characterized by movements of the waves as they rise and fall. The position of the body is with a low back (*dos bas* in French). The entire choreography is performed with the body bent over. In this position, the shoulders roll backward, the torso follows the movement of the shoulders, and the head appears to lose its connection with the body as it moves forward and backward (Lekis, 1960).

Nago is dedicated to the family of Ogouns, the god of war. Nago is a war dance, more vigorous and rapid in tempo than Yanvallou. Lekis (1960) explained, "The name of this dance corresponds to the name of the Yoruban language and the god Ogoun in Haiti has the same character and function as the god Ogun in Cuba" (p. 116). A thrusting

forward of the chest is the basic movement of this dance. The movements are strong and very much aligned. The dance imitates the gestures of war expressed by combative postures and movements. It symbolizes the courage and power of a man who wanted to control the forces of nature and assure himself of invulnerability (Lekis, 1960).

Mahi is suitably named the dance of the feet. Although many Haitian dances concentrate on movements of the shoulders and torso, the accent in Mahi is on incredibly rapid movement of the feet as they maintain the rhythm set by the drums. Mahi is the dance of Ogoun Feraille, another member of the Ogoun family who is part of Vodoun mythology. Ibo is a proud and royal dance, characterized by serious majestic gestures. Lekis (1960) specified, "In the history of Haiti, the tribe of Ibos were known for their pride and aristocracy causing many of them to commit suicide rather than endure slavery. So proud was the tribe that death was preferable even to marronage" (p. 117). Marronage refers to the varying states involved in flight and survival. Ibos did not make subordinate slaves because of their fierce qualities, and the colonists finally ordered the slave traders that they did not want any Ibos. "The gods of the Ibos . . . favored death to continued suffering and misery" (p. 117).

Banda, the dance of Baron Samedi, and Ghede, the dance of the god of death, are considered as part of Rada and Petro. The gods are part of both the Rada and Petro tribes and appear to be a bridge between the two cult forms. Death and the death ceremonies occupy an essential place in the Haitian worship. The character of the death gods is complex. They have a special power because they may take life and they also have the power to extend it, provided that the correct ceremonies and sacrifices are observed. Lekis (1960) outlined:

Ghede himself is not considered a fearsome personality but rather as one who cares for the dead spirit once it is released from its earthly body. His emissary, the Baron Samedi, is the guardian of the graveyard and is much more terrifying. (p. 118)

Since Baron Samedi is the consumer of the souls of the dead and as he may also speak for them, he is the link between life and death. He is both Lord of Eroticism and God of the Dead. His rhythm and dance is called banda and is probably the most erotic, sensual, and suggestive dance seen in Haiti. The Baron is one of the most easily identified Haitian gods, for he usually wears a tattered tailcoat and a battered top hat. His sophistication is exaggerated by the use of a cane, which he twirls casually, or a cigarette held in a long holder. As he is a dark spirit from the underworld of the dead, the baron usually wears dark glasses to protect his eyes and feels no pain even when subjected to severe tests to prove his presence (Lekis, 1960).

Summary

To lay a foundation for the hermeneutic examination of the transformation of body and mind through Haitian dance, this chapter reviewed the psychoanalytical theories regarding the Jungian conceptualization of the psyche (Chodorow, 1991; Jung, 1961/1963, 1943/1983, 1928/1983), healing through the body by Woodman (Greene, 2005; Stromsted, 2005), the purpose of myth and ritual by Campbell (2001, 2008), as well as the psychological function of liberation psychology. It then discussed the literature on Haitian dance and the importance of Haitian dance within the Haitian culture, and provided a description of its various sacred dances. The following chapter describes the various elements of my Haitian dance class in Brooklyn and how healing can take place through Haitian dance from a depth psychological perspective.

Chapter III Haitian Dance: Embracing Embodied Consciousness

Introduction

This chapter explores the healing and transformational qualities of Haitian dance that integrate body and mind and facilitate wholeness. The majority of the focus is on my experience of Haitian dance and being involved in a Haitian dance community from depth psychological and liberation psychology perspectives. The current research expands upon understandings of depth psychology by exploring the transformation that can take place within the psyche and the body. It also looks at the contributions of myth, metaphor, ritual, and the hero's journey within Haitian dance. To demonstrate the movements of Haitian dance, videos of two dances, Yanvallou and Ibo, are included in Appendix A. The concepts within liberation psychology address how healing can occur among individuals within multicultural communities.

Haitian dance and depth psychology. Depth psychology explores the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious and includes psychoanalysis and Jungian psychology. Jungian psychology views archetypes as primordial elements of the collective unconscious (Jung, 1961/1963). All minds and lives are embedded in some sort of myth making in the form of themes or patterns. Haitian dance is deeply connected to the collective unconscious and archetypal energies. Many dances and rhythms evoke the qualities of the experience of the Haitian culture with its many deities. Each dance has a

different rhythm. In *The Drums of Vodou, Featuring Frisner Augustin,* scholar and ethnomusicologist Lois Wilcken (1992) described how music is a reflection of its culture:

All music has meaning that goes beyond the sound itself. It embodies the ethos, the values, and the historical experience of the people who make it. . . . Vodou music has a history that is central to the very dramatic story of the Haitian people. Drum patterns, like the spirits they represent and evoke, are rooted in the practices of enslaved people who labored in the sugar cane field during the colonial period. (p. 17)

Similar to music, Haitian dance also embodies the culture and the origins of the Haitian people. In a way, it is a celebration of the Haitian culture and experience that goes back to Africa and it contains numerous deities, images, stories, and myths.

Archetypal energies. Similar to Haitian Vodou culture, Haitian dance celebrates many spirits, such as Ezili, Damballah, Ogou, and Gede, through music and movement. Each dance is dedicated to a specific archetypal energy. Ezili is considered the Iwa of motherhood, fertility, and birth and she is most commonly represented by the image of the black Madonna. Damballah is the sky god and considered the primordial creator of life. Ogou is the classical warrior, who presides over iron, hunting, politics, and war. Gede is the spirit of death and sex. All these different deities and archetypes represent major life principles and energies. The movements in these dances strengthen the connection with these archetypal energies and enable the individual dancer to have a spiritual connection.

The rhythm and dance utilize movement to suggest the temperament or major life force of that spirit. "Dance, in other words establishes contact between an individual and a deity" (Wilcken, 1992, p. 104).

Possession as transcendent function. Alfred Metreux (1955) was a Swiss anthropologist, ethnologist, and human rights leader who wrote extensively about Haitian

Vodou and spiritual possession and specifically about the dramatic elements in ritual possession. Similarly to Deren (1953), Metreux (1955) explained how members of Vodou described mystic trance as the departure of the human soul that is replaced by a Loa, a spirit. Once this happens, the possessed individual loses consciousness and is an instrument of the god. Metreux explained:

Facial expressions, gestures and even the tone of his voice reflect the character and the temperament of divinity descended upon him. The relation between the god and the man of whom he has taken possession is comparable to that of a horseman to his mount. (p. 2)

During the trance, the surrounding crowd protects the person who is in trance. If the person falls, the other members of the ceremony are ready to catch the person in trance. This supportive participation of the crowd gives the person in trance a feeling of physical and mental security that allows for total abandon. The crowd serves a similar function as a therapist and creates a safe container for the individual.

During the state of trance, individuals are in no way responsible for their words or actions. As people, they have ceased to exist. Metreux (1955) clarified, "The possessed can therefore with complete impunity, express ideas which he would hesitate to voice in his normal state. It is frequently noted that the possessed make statements or commit aggressive acts, which can be explained by hidden resentments" (p. 8). Haitian dance allows for individuals to let go of their persona and for shadow material to surface, since a female or male god can mount in both women and men, and archetypal figures such as the animus or anima can be expressed and released as well. Through archetypal energies within the music and dance, repressed shadow material surfaces and integrates within an individual, eventually leading to wholeness. For example Gede, the god of death, allows for all kinds of shadow material to surface, such as fear of death and sexuality. Feelings

of lust and pleasure are expressed into form, as a result of which, these repressed energies can lose their power within. As an individual allows this shadow material to take shape, there is room for release and a transcendent experience: "The word *transcendent* is expressive of a capacity to transcend the destructive tendency to pull (or be pulled) to one side or the other" (Samuels et al., 1986, p. 150). These various Haitian dances induce the union of opposites, the male and female energies inside the body, which allows for a divine or god-like experience. This spiritual connection serves a transcendent function and allows for individual healing. Experiencing these sacred dances allows the dancer to experience these archetypal energies through the body; heal her or his body, soul, and spirit; and transform towards wholeness (Woodman & Dickson, 1996).

During these dances, various symbols, images, and movements are invoked by the beat of the drums. Through the movements, these images, symbols, and archetypal energies travel through the body. During the Vodou ceremony, the participants completely open up and surrender to the beat of the drum. Woodman and Dickson (1996) discussed the healing power of surrendering to this feminine energy. In Haitian dance, the dancer surrenders to the beat of the drum and movements according to what needs to move from within the unconscious.

My Haitian Dance Experience

My experience with Haitian dance is focused on my experience with my Afro Caribbean dance teacher. Even though my dance class is not a Vodou ceremony, it does have some elements in common, such as the traditional drum patterns, the traditional dances, and the respect for the gods and goddesses that are part of Vodou culture. All these elements together have supported me in my process towards individuation and

wholeness. The structure of the class, the music, the dances, the circle, the connection to myth and ritual, and the hero's journey are all part of the therapeutic process. The community has also played an important role in this process.

Structure of the class as ritual. The structure of the class is always the same. For the first half of the class, we do a warm-up. Usually there are four or five musicians in class: three drummers and a musician who plays the shekere, an instrument from West Africa consisting of a dried gourd covered by a net that is woven with beads. This warmup routine is always the same and we warm up all the parts of the body, such as the legs, feet, toes, hips, torso, arms, and shoulders. At the beginning of the class, the music is very gentle and relaxing and it slowly builds up to a steady pace as we start to move our bodies more quickly to the beat of the drum. After the warm-up, we create a circle. Each of the students can jump into the circle alone or with another student and dance to the beat of the drum. The circle allows for a more authentic type of dance by individuals who are witnessed by the musicians and the community. After the circle, we move across the floor and practice the traditional sacred dances, such as Yanvallou, Nago, Mahi, and Ibo, which are ancient dances that are rooted in Haitian culture. At the end of the dances, we form another circle and honor birthdays, marriages, and friends of the community who have passed on. In this sense, we have two forms of dances within our class, the experience of the sacred dances and the individual dance in the circle. Each form has its own unique healing benefits. At the end of class, we do a cool down and gentle stretching, followed by a moment of silent prayer. During this moment, our teacher silently acknowledges each person in the class. The structure of the class is similar to a

ritual, with beginning, middle, and end sections. This in itself creates a space for healing and transformation.

Sacred dances. To show what these dances look like, there is a video of two Haitian dances in Appendix A. A friend and I can be seen performing Yanvallou and Ibo dances. Yanvallou is dedicated to the god Damballah, high in the hierarchy of Vodoun gods, whose symbol is the snake. The snake is also a symbol for shedding skin and rebirth. The movements are undulating, similar to the movements of the sea and the snake. I experience this dance as an invocation for letting go and inviting new beginnings into my life. The movements are gracious and close to the earth. They evoke feelings of gratitude and humility for being alive and an honoring of Mother Earth. Similar to the snake, I am shedding my skin and continuously changing shape. Step by step, movement by movement, I am letting go gently and graciously, creating space for new experiences to come.

The Ibo dance is a warrior dance. The movements of the Ibo dance are the movements of a person shackled by chains, moving close to the earth, torso bending forward and hands tight on the back. During this dance, the dancer eventually breaks free. By doing the Ibo dance, one can physically sense what it feels like to be chained. The movements are physically exhausting. Being metaphorically shackled is mentally challenging as well. The Ibo dance is important from the personal, historical, and community perspectives. The dance honors the African ancestors who came to Haiti and the Americas as slaves. From historical and community points of view, doing the movements of this dance gives the dancer a glimpse of what it feels like to be chained, submissive, and discriminated against, while being proud and connected to one's spirit.

On a personal level, it is very powerful to experience the movements from bondage to freedom. It is very empowering to feel that no matter what we go through, we have an inner strength and power that can set us free. Experiencing the embodiment of feeling free is a powerful sensation that continues to live inside of me each time I leave class. Dancing these dances together with 60 other students from various cultures and of different ages is very empowering as well. The experience of being on this journey with all these other people and being just a small piece of this world gives me a feeling of awe.

Circle as therapeutic container. Before and after we dance the sacred dances in class, we form a circle. During this circle, dancers are free to jump into the circle and move in any way they want while being witnessed by the musicians and other dancers. This circle allows for movements to arise spontaneously from within each dancer. The circle enables participants to connect with their unconscious and express this through the body. This circle serves as a container for experiencing unconditional love while being witnessed by approximately 60 people. Similar to the above description of the Vodou ceremony, the individual within the circle feels held by the group. The teacher plays an important role in this circle; she both opens and closes the circle. She also welcomes and hugs everyone who takes part in class. The musicians play Haitian drum patterns and call in the archetypal energies. While in the circle, the dancer surrenders to the beat of the drum and vice versa. In this sense, the musicians serve as therapists who listen and mirror the movements of the dancer within the circle. After the dancer retreats back into the circle, all the members of the class honor the dancer by clapping and touching the floor.

Embodied consciousness. My experience in class is that as my body moves to the rhythm of the drums, I have access to an energy field that lives beyond me. My mind

stops thinking and I disconnect from my daily routines. I delve into the realms of gods and goddesses of an imaginary realm. Here I merge with the joys and pains of the human experience. When I hear the rhythm of the drum and move to the beat, my whole body and spirit resonate with that pulse. It is like the vibration of the music moves every cell in my body. I enter a dream state where I descend into the underworld. My physique becomes a vessel for whatever needs to be expressed through me, both my shadow and my light. From the deep dark womb of the earth, the mother, the feminine, embraces me and urges me to dance from within. In *Dancing in the Flames: The Dark Goddess in the Transformation of Consciousness*, Woodman and psychologist and Jungian analyst Elinor Dickson (1996) described the transformative potential of feminine energy:

It is within this chaos that a deeper, intrinsic order reveals itself. This is not an imposed order that we have become so accustomed to in a patriarchal, conceptualized world, an order that is not connected to the creative matrix. Rather it is an order that emerges instead of being imposed. When we are connected to this emerging order we are physically living from the incarnate feminine energy that has within it the possibility of transformation. We are in touch with the rhythms of matter and its deepest wisdom. (p. 39)

As I connect with my feminine energy, I explore, discover, and express the dark corners of my psyche. Here is where I find myself moving freely, laughing, sobbing, weeping, crying, and smiling. It is as if I become a dancing tree. My red anger travels from my roots all the way up through my branches out into the bright blue sky, creating red puffy clouds and travelling over the forest into the cosmos, like twinkling shiny stars at night. I kneel, fall, drop, surrender, and dance. I am one with my group, the earth, and the sky around me. In *Conscious Femininity: Interviews with Marion Woodman*, Woodman (1993) discussed how she experienced embodied consciousness as an essential part of the transcendent experience of moving through the body to the goddess. The feminine side of

God is consciousness in matter; Woodman explained, "The wisdom in the body; the light in the cells: the subtle body. For me that subtle body within my physical body is the receiver that can receive that transcendent experience of the divine" (p. 114). Somewhere in between my movements is where I meet the divine, the union of the body and spirit. Here is where my feminine energy, the earth, and the masculine energy, the spirit, meet and merge. Here is where the transformation of the subtle body takes place and where I find wholeness. This is how I experience the process of individuation. Through my experience of embodied consciousness in my dance class, I embrace my individuality and I move towards wholeness. The vibrations of the music allow my body to become an instrument for the divine. I let go of the veils that cover my essence, truth, and being. As long as I allow myself to be courageous and vulnerable, this journey continues. I can see my beauty and pain, strength and weakness, shadow and light. As I trust in this process of letting go, I am able to surrender to something bigger. Like a flower blossoming, I open up my body and listen to my soul. Here is where I meet the God and Goddess inside of me.

The experience of embodied consciousness and individuation takes place because my teacher and community create a safe container that is similar to the container of a primitive tribe. Woodman (1985) explained, "Primitive societies are close enough to the natural cycles of their lives to provide the containers through which the members of the tribe can experience death and rebirth as they pass through the difficult transitions" (p. 17). In my Haitian dance class, I often have had the opportunity to experience my community as a container and have passed through various transitions in my life and experienced many mini-deaths and rebirths with the support in this community.

Haitian dance and mythology. Myths serve as metaphors for experiencing, connecting, and understanding our human experience. By definition, metaphor means "transformer; crossing over from one state to another" (Woodman & Dickson, 1996, p. 171). Haitian dance is an expression of the Haitian mythology. By embodying these Haitian myths, one can heal and transform spiritual and psychological wounds. Stanley Keleman (1999), a mythologist and writer, wrote in his book, *Myth & the Body: A Colloquy with Joseph Campbell*, "Myths are about the body itself. Metaphor is bodily based. It is experiential" (p. viii). Haitian dance is the experience of Haitian mythology through the body.

Campbell (1991) described the four functions of myths: metaphysical, cosmological, sociological, and psychological. The mythology within Haitian dance serves all four functions. Haitian dance serves the metaphysical function because the dance creates an ambiance of awe for the participants. The beating of the drums and the dances create an energy where the spirit is evoked and individuals become connected with spirit and feel part of a bigger cosmos. Haitian dance serves the cosmological function by being rooted in a religion, a belief system that explains the various stages of life. It also serves a sociological function with clear functions for priests, students, and participants that validate and maintain a certain sociological system: a shared set of rights and wrongs, proprieties or improprieties. In my dance class, my teacher is the priestess and the musicians are like the guardians. A few students, who have been attending this class for more then 20 years, are part of my teacher's support network. Haitian dance also serves the psychological function of myth because the dance carries the individual

through the various stages of life. The dance can also serve as the transcendent function and supports individuals into their journeys towards wholeness.

Hero's journey. My Haitian dance experience in this community has been closely intertwined with my hero's journey. My Haitian dance class seems to be very interwoven with my immigration from the Netherlands to New York. My decision in 1998 to move from the Netherlands to New York and leave my culture and family was the beginning of my adventure. Not long after my arrival, I attended my first class with my teacher and I felt an instant connection to the music, the movements, and the community, even though it is quite different from the Dutch culture in which I grew up. Compared to Haitian culture, there are very few opportunities to channel and experience emotion in a physical and embodied way in Dutch culture. Since my immigration, there have been many lessons, ordeals, and dark nights of the soul. My friends in my dance class are like my allies and guides; they support me and help me face my ordeals. Currently I am not sure if I survived the supreme ordeal and won the elixir. However I do know that I have learned a lot and many good things have happened as well. In a way, each dance class can be described as a mini hero journey. Going into the circle, being vulnerable, and expressing oneself through movements while being witnessed by many people can be intimidating. When inside the circle, these demons and uncomfortable feelings can be triggered and come out, and being able to face your demons and being held by your community is a healing experience in itself.

Community transformation. Not only does this community provide individual healing and transformation, it also supports healing on a community level. Recent events such as the death of the African American man Eric Garner on Staten Island, New York,

and Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, are very confronting for many people of color and a reflection of a society in which racial profiling and discrimination seem to be the norm, especially because the white policemen who killed them were not indicted for their actions. These events have stirred public protests around the country and opened up the wounds of the damaging effects of slavery and oppression that have never been properly addressed in this culture. The effects of inequality among various cultures and people of different skin colors are being witnessed and processed inside and outside this community.

In our Haitian dance class, we process these injustices through dance, dialogue, and activism. Some of the dances, such as Nago and Ibo, have their roots in anti-slavery resistance movements. Both the Nago and Ibo dances are warrior dances and show the strength, pride, and victory of the Haitians. The history and meaning of these dances are discussed in class. The discrimination that existed then continues, in some ways, to exist now. By dancing these dances, we honor the past and present. At the same time, these dances offer ways to cope with the feelings of frustration and injustice. In this sense, they also serve as a healing mechanism on a community level and a catalyst for change in the world by enabling access to the unconscious and connecting with archetypal deities through rhythm and dance and clearly communicating a message of resistance.

In addition to the dances, we have discussions about race-related issues in society, we organize fundraisers for anti-racism events, and we do flash mobs. These various activities support the deepening of understandings of one another in this multicultural community. My friends and I often have discussions about what it is like to be a person of color in this society. They share with me their daily experiences of racism. These

discussions support me in my process of building my awareness of how historical and current white supremacy continues to feed injustice and racism.

In light of the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, Dancing for Action is preparing a flash mob in Grand Central station. The diversity in the ethnicities of the participants in the flash mob is a reflection of the dance community. Here, we realize we are all one. And when our brothers or sisters of different skin colors suffer, we suffer too. Similar to the process of liberation psychology where mutual understanding of each other within a community is key to healing and transformation, we continue to learn about each other's histories and see each other within this context. Through, dance, dialogue, and activism, we transform on individual and community levels.

Clinical Applications

Haitian dance can be relevant to marriage and family therapy and professional clinical counseling in various ways. However, there are many elements that need to be considered and respected to make this a transformative experience, such as the client's fitness level, the teacher's role and responsibility, the music, the structure of the class, the container, and the importance of mutual respect among clients and teacher. As much as I would like Haitian dance to be accessible to everyone, it is important that the participants have a basic level of physical fitness and a willingness to move and dance, even when they might be complete beginners. Similar to my teacher, it will be best if the therapist is capable of embracing the participants with unconditional love and welcoming each one of them, regardless of age or cultural heritage. Gentle encouragement and respect are important aspects of this process as well. The structure of the dance therapy session is also very important: a gentle warm-up; a circle; and a slow cool down with a silent prayer

at the end, during which each student is seen and acknowledged. The beat of the drum needs to be to the right beat so the archetypal energies are called in and sacred dances can be danced. The teacher, musicians, and participants are all integral parts of creating a container where everyone can feel safe. In this safe, magical place, each individual can feel free and let go of what needs to be released, both in terms of shadow and light, so that both can be integrated.

Summary

This chapter explored the transformation of body and mind through Haitian dance from depth psychological and liberation psychological perspectives. Haitian dance is rooted in Haitian culture, which encompasses the history of Haitian people, mythology, gods and goddesses, music, rituals, ceremonies, and dances. Haitian music and dance movements in Vodou ceremonies evoke archetypal energies to arise and for certain participants to become possessed by a Loa, a spirit. This possession is an opportunity for the individual to integrate both shadow and light and experience a transcendent experience while being held by a supportive community. Even though I have never experienced a state of being possessed, I have experienced similar therapeutic qualities during my Haitian dance class. There are various elements of this class, such as the structure, music, dances, circle, connection to myth and ritual, hero's journey, and community that are integral parts of facilitating a therapeutic process. These fundamentals contribute to healing and transformation on the individual and community levels. While dancing to the beat of the drum, I often experience buried and suppressed emotions, such as grief, sadness, and anger. Through the movements, dances, and support of the community, I have felt held and safe to surrender to these energies. This process of surrender through the body allows for an integration of opposites and is a transformative experience, which Woodman (1993; Woodman & Dickson, 1996) described as embodied consciousness. This journey has also supported me in my process of individuation and journey towards wholeness.

Haitian dance contains the four qualities of myth described by Campbell (1991), including the metaphysical, cosmological, sociological, and psychological. The rhythms, rituals, and movements of Haitian dance create an experience of awe for participants. The cosmological function of myth is that it explains the functioning of the cosmos. Vodou devotees in Haiti and in the rest of the world experience this function of Haitian dance. I need to further research this aspect of Haitian to better understand the extent to which this holds true for me. The sociological function is present in Vodou ceremonies and in my Haitian dance class as well and serves as a container. As described earlier, Haitian dance also includes the psychological function, as it guides its participants through the various stages of life. Campbell's (2008) description of the hero's journey is part of Haitian dance as well. My Haitian dance class is closely interwoven with my journey and immigration from the Netherlands to New York. My teacher and my fellow students and friends are my allies who have supported me on this journey.

My Haitian dance class supports healing and transformation for all its participants and the community as a whole. We live in a society in which white people predominantly have more power and privileges compared to people of color. In this culture, the painful experience, aftermath, and wounds of colonialism and slavery have never been properly witnessed and processed. Systematic racism and discrimination continue to exist. These wounds continue to fester and prejudice and social injustice, particularly against people

of color, continue to exist. Recent examples that have received a lot of attention and initiated protests are the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Eric Garner.

In my multicultural dance community, we process these injustices through dance, dialogue, and activism. In dance class, we honor and respect the history of the African diaspora. Many of the Haitian dances have origins in West Africa and roots in slavery. The movements of these dances tell a story and express the trials and tribulations of enslaved warrior tribes who eventually gained their freedom. By dancing these dances, one gains a deeper understanding of the difficult journey of many people of color. Besides dancing, we often participate in fundraising for anti-racism events, dialogues, and flash mobs, and after-class dialogue is an important part of honoring and witnessing each other's experiences. This is a unique experience for me since I am white and I have not had the experiences of social injustice that others have had and fear. We also organize flash mobs in the street and protest against racism by dancing the Nago dance in the street. The flash mobs are a peaceful way for us to gather, unite, and demonstrate. The dialogue and support that I experience through dance, dialogue, and protest has supported me in my discomfort and pain about issues of social injustice. Also, this support has made me realize that I can be an active participant in this healing process. At the same time, it gives me hope that change can come for other communities.

Haitian dance can be relevant to marriage and family therapy and professional clinical counseling in various ways. For Haitian dance to be a truly transformative experience for individuals, groups, and communities as a whole, many elements need to respected and considered. Fundamentals to consider are the participants' fitness level, the teacher's role and responsibility, the unconditional positive regard by the teacher, the

music, the structure of the class, and mutual respect among participants and teacher. The drummers play an essential role in playing the drums in such a way that invokes the archetypal energies and movements and create a safe container for the teacher and the dancer.

Haitian dance has a tremendously rich history, as can be seen in its rituals, mythology, movements, and music. I imagine that there are many creative ways in which Haitian dance and culture can be used as a therapeutic tool in many multicultural communities for the young and old that I have yet to explore.

Chapter IV Summary and Conclusions

Summary

This thesis explored transformation through Haitian dance from a depth psychological perspective. In addition, I looked at my experience of being involved in a Haitian dance community. Providing the groundwork for the hermeneutic research in Chapter III, Chapter II was a discussion of Jungian theory about the structure of the psyche (Chodorow, 1991; Jung, 1928/1983, 1943/1983, 1961/1963) that included defining the concepts and terms as they apply to the topic of this thesis. This was followed by a brief review of Woodman and her work related to psyche and soma (Greene, 2005; Stromsted, 2005); an examination of the meaning of myths by Campbell (2001, 2008); and a brief evaluation of liberation psychology and how the psychology of an individual is connected to its social, historical, political, and cultural contexts (Watkins & Schulman, 2008). The second part of Chapter II described the history of Haitian dance and the function and meaning of the dances (Deren, 1953; Dunham, 1983; Lekis, 1960; Yarborough Williams, 1959).

Chapter III engaged in a hermeneutic analysis, demonstrating the healing transformation that can take place within an individual and a community. It showed that Haitian dance facilitates accessing and processing unconscious material from a Jungian perspective and that of Woodman. Haitian dance is ingrained in Haitian culture, which embodies the history of Haitian people, mythology, gods and goddesses, music, rituals,

and ceremonies. The rhythms and movements in Haitian dance enable connections to the archetypal energies that are part of the unconscious through the body and facilitate the experience of embodied consciousness. These archetypal energies can initiate a transcendent experience within an individual by a process of integrating arising shadow and light that live in the unconscious while being held by a community.

Chapter III reviewed how Haitian dance incorporates the four qualities of myth described by Campbell (2001, 2008), including the metaphysical, cosmological, sociological, and psychological, as well as the hero's journey. The rhythm, ritual, and movements of Haitian dance create an experience that connects the individual to the cosmos while being part of a community and tribe as while. Being part of a bigger whole and extended family is essential to the human experience and to the healing of the human soul. The hero's journey is essential for a person's transformation, individuation process, and process of returning to the self and becoming whole.

Chapter III also studied how liberation psychology applies to my Haitian dance class. Both inside and outside the class, my Haitian dance class deepens understanding and raises awareness regarding racism, discrimination, and social injustice against people of color. During class we dance sacred dances that embody the history of the African diaspora and the challenges, hardship, and victory that is inherent to these tribes. Outside class we continue to address discrimination and social injustices through dialogue, fundraising, and flash mobs. My Haitian dance class supports healing and transformation for all its participants. There are different parts of this class, such as the organization, music, dances, circle, connection to myth and ritual, hero's journey, and community that are integral parts of facilitating a therapeutic process.

Conclusion: Contributions to the Field

The comparison and synthesis of theory in this thesis supports the important contributions of Haitian dance to depth psychology in healing the divide between the mind and body and connecting with the unconscious. The research in Chapter III demonstrated that Haitian dance is a valuable method of accessing the archetypal energies in the unconscious through music, dance, and myths. Haitian dance has the ability to facilitate individuation through the experience of the transcendent function.

For deep transformative change to occur within an individual and a community, one needs to have an embodied experience while being held by a safe and loving community and teacher. Fundamentals to consider are the participants' fitness level, the teacher's role and responsibility, unconditional positive regard by the teacher, the music, the structure of the class, and mutual respect among participants and teacher. The drummers play an essential role in playing the drums in such a way that invokes the archetypal energies and movements and create a safe container for the teacher and the dancer.

In addition, Chapter III explained that my multicultural Haitian dance class facilitates healing and transformation for both individuals and the community through a dialogue that acknowledges the historical and present-day experiences of racism and social injustice of people of color. This dialogue can take many forms, such as dancing sacred dances together, small group discussions, fundraising initiatives, and social activism through dance. This discourse also allows for white people to gain a deeper understanding of the history of the African diaspora with its treasures and horrors. At the same time, the class creates a space where people of color can be seen and heard. Most importantly, it

allows for people of many different colors to share and feel loved and held by each other, which is the only way to transcend our cultural dynamic.

Suggested Research

Since there is limited research in this field, it would be interesting to learn more about how these various dances, such as Yanvallouh, Ibo, and Nago, have evolved and how Vodou ceremonies are currently being practiced in Haiti. It would be especially exciting to find out more how the state of possession takes place during a ceremony.

Similar to Maya Deren and Katherine Dunham, I would like to do the research and have the ritual experience of being in state of possession myself. According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.) (*DSM-5*) (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013), "Dissociative identity disorder is characterized by a) the presence of two or more distinct personality states or an experience of possession and b) recurrent episodes of amnesia. The fragmentation of identity may vary with culture (e.g., possession-form presentations) and circumstance" (p. 292). What exactly is the experience of fragmentation of identity within a Vodou ceremony? How does it differentiate or overlap with an experience of possession in the United States, as defined in the *DSM-5*? What is the neurobiological explanation for the state of possession?

From a cultural perspective of the research on Haitian dance, it would be interesting to learn more about how Haitian dance relates to other dances of the African diaspora, such as those from Cuba and Brazil. Finally, it could be beneficial to organize the practice of Haitian dance in multicultural communities, such as schools, such that students could experience the benefits of the dance and participate in a dialogue among participants to enable deeper understandings of the African diaspora and facilitate healing and transformation.

Appendix A

Yanvallou and Ibo Dance

There are two illustrative dances on the accompanying disc to the thesis.

Yanvallou and Ibo are both sacred Haitian dances. Yanvallou is dedicated to the god

Damballah whose symbol is the snake. The movements are undulating, similar to the

movements of the sea and the snake. The movements are gracious and close to the earth.

They evoke feelings of gratitude and humility for being alive and an honoring of Mother

Earth. The Ibo dance is a warrior dance. The dance is based on the movements of a person

shackled by chains, moving close to the earth, torso bending forward and hands tight on

the back. During this dance, the dancer eventually breaks free.

Appendix B Ethics Application for the Use of Human Participants in a Thesis With a Mixed Methods Approach

Researcher:	Today's Date:
Full Address:	
Phone (Day):	Phone (Eve):
Title of Activity:	
Sponsoring Organization:	Contact Person:
Signature of sponsoring organization:	
Phone number:	
Affix appropriate signatures	
involve risk or the possibility of risk to the	tached application. If I decide to make any nt is injured, or if any problems arise which participants or others, including any adverse port such occurrences or contemplated changes
Investigator/Student:	Today's Date:
I have read and approve this protocol, and conduct the activity as described in this app	I believe that the investigator is competent to plication.
Research Associate:	Today's Date:
Notice of Approval	
	nstitutional Review Board above indicates that in the attached pages has been approved with
Restrictions and Conditions:	

Ethics Application (Continued)

Brief Description: Describe the study in two or three brief sentences.

- 1. Participants: Describe the participant population and how it will be obtained. Who will participate and how will you find/select them? Current clients may not be used as participants in research for the thesis.
- 2. Procedures: Form the participants' point of view, describe how you will involve them in your study. How will you conduct your study?
- 3. Consent: Describe procedures for how and when you will receive informed consent from your participants. Enclose in this application a copy of the informed consent form you will use. (Consult the guideline sheet for developing a consent form).
- 4. Risks: Describe and assess any potential risks and the likelihood and seriousness of such risks. How might participants be harmed during or after their participation in the study?
- 5. Safeguards: Describe procedures for protecting and/or minimizing the potential risks (including breaches in confidentiality) and assess their likely effectiveness. Given the risks, how will you prevent them from occurring?
- 6. Benefits: Describe the benefits to be gained by the individual participants and/or society as a result of the study you have planned. What good will come of this research?
- 7. Post Experiment Interview: Describe the contents of your conversation with people in the study after their participation is completed. How will you inform them of the study's purpose?
- 8. Attachments: Include in this application all of the following supplemental information:
 - 1. Informed Consent Form from participants
 - 2. Verbatim instructions to the participants regarding their participation
 - 3. All research instruments to be used in carrying out this study
 - 4. Other documentation pertaining to the study that will be shown to participants

Informed Consent Form for a Dance Choreography in a Thesis with a Mixed Method Approach

Project Title: Yanvallou & Ibo Dance

1. I understand that this study is of a research nature. It may offer no direct benefit to me.
2. Participation in this study is voluntary. I may refuse to enter it or, may withdraw from it at any time without creating any harmful consequences to myself. I understand also that the investigator may drop me at any time from the study.
3. The purpose of doing this study is:
4. As a participant in this study I will be asked to take part in the following procedures
5. Participation in the study will take of my time and will take place in
6. The risks, discomforts and inconvenience of the above procedure might be:
7. The possible benefits of the procedure might be
a. Direct benefits to me:
b. Benefits to others:
8. The information about this study was discussed with me by
If I have further questions, I can call her/him at:
Signature of Participant
Data

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