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Theatrical and dramatic elements of Haitian voodoo

Alcide, Marie-Jose, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1988

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THEATRICAL AND DRAMATIC ELEMENTS
OF HAITIAN VODOO

By
MARIE-JOSE ALCIDE

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate
Faculty in Theatre in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, The City University
of New York.

1988

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ABSTRACT

THEATRICAL AND DRAMATIC ELEMENTS
OF HAITIAN VODOO

By

Marie-Jose Alcide

Advisor: Professor Stanley A. Waren

Voodoo (spirit), essentially African, is the indigenous religion of Haiti, practiced by about 90% of the population. As with many religions, Voodoo is a source of Art. It contains myths, legends, dances, music, songs, philosophy and poetry. The study establishes that Voodoo is a potent theatrical force. However, due to unfavorable circumstances, its artistic resources have not yet been plumbed fully.

This thesis focuses on the relationship between Voodoo and theatre, a subject on which very limited research has been done. The objective is to demonstrate that Voodoo, like some other rituals, encompasses theatrical and dramatic elements which give it the character of a sacred theatre.

Theatrical and dramatic elements are analyzed basically according to Aristotelian criteria.

The research reveals that Voodoo contains eight major theatrical elements: impersonation, mise-en-scene, audience, chorus, music, dance, scenery, costume, and four dramatic elements: plot, character, thought, diction.

These theatrical and dramatic elements make Voodoo a potential model for a secular indigenous theatre in Haiti.

The work is divided into six chapters: The introduction explains the need for the thesis and its significance; the second chapter, the historical background, sheds light on the evolution of Voodoo in Haiti; the third chapter, ritual and theatre, demonstrates the relationship between ritual and theatre in other parts of the world and describes the criteria of drama as perceived by Aristotle; the fourth chapter analyzes the theatrical elements of Voodoo, the fifth, the dramatic elements of Voodoo; and the last chapter, the conclusion, summarizes the findings and shows how the secular theatre can utilize the theatrical and dramatic elements discovered in Voodoo.

Acknowledgments

This work would not have been possible without the aid and collaboration of a host of people. The findings related here owe their authenticity mainly to Voodoo dignitaries, some of whom not only purveyed a great deal of information, but also allowed me into their temples and even, occasionally, lodged me; to the Voodoo devotees who introduced me to their community and offered striking testimonies; to colleagues, friends and relatives who understood the scope of my pursuit and contributed in various ways to help me attain my goal; to my advisors who guided me.

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Special Note

This work is trilingual and not without reason. for the sake of accuracy, I chose to present all quotations in their initial linguistic form. In compensation, the translations, though they never could be totally faithful, will permit the reader to understand the gist of the comments. To facilitate reading, I have included endnotes which will provide the full translation whenever necessary. A glossary is also provided.

It is indicated that the Creole form changes several times in the text. This is not due to inconsistency,, but to the evolution of Creole over time. In the interviews or other statements where I was free to choose a Creole orthography, I used the most recent, nationally adopted one. For instance, the spelling: "houngan" and "hounsi" will appear in my own comments, whereas in a quotation the same word might be spelled: "hungan" and "hunsi" if so indicated by the author. One more point pertaining to linguistics should be underlined: I have chosen to use capital G for all Gods. In some quotations, however, a small g might be used if so indicated by the author. A glossary is included.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between ritual and drama, from antiquity to the present, has been written about so often and to such extent that, at first, there hardly seems a need for further exploration. In fact a number of anthropologists and drama theorists found it important to analyze this subject in Europe, Asia, and Africa. Aristotle, Haig, Nietzsche, Frazer, Gaster, Ridgeway, Murray, Harrison, Hardison, Tydeman, Meade, Kirby, Leiris, Traore, Griaule, Cole, Belo, Graham-White, Schechner developed the rapport between ritual and drama in Egypt, Greece, India, Bali, Japan, Nigeria, Ethiopia. However, Voodoo in relation to drama is not that well known.

A study on the relationship between Voodoo and theatre is meaningful for several reasons: Voodoo - which means spirit, God, that which you can not totally know or reach - stands as the indigenous religion of Haiti and plays a multifold role in that country on the social and cultural level. In Jacques Stephen Alexis Les Arbres Musiciens (The Musical Trees), Voodoo is perceived as:

"L'ame du peuple, sa vraie foi et sa seule
ressource...La politique, la production, le

commerce, l'industrie, l'enseignement, les sports, la culture, les rêves des hommes, tout est influence par la religion populaire."¹

Thus it is legitimate that it be considered as a major cultural source in Haiti. By exploring the relationship between Voodoo and theatre, it is possible to create interesting perspectives in Haiti for the performing Arts and the theatre in particular. Such study will not only bring to light the value of the traditional culture of Haiti but will also contribute to its preservation. A study on Voodoo and theatre in Haiti - as those accomplished in other countries on ritual and theatre - will make the theatrical potential of Voodoo accessible not only to Haitians, but also to scholars of the world. Moreover, although some aspects of the subject have been previously approached, there is yet much to be said about it. In fact, only two books to date have concentrated on Voodoo and theatre: Antonio Louis-Jean's La crise de possession et la possession dramatique (the crisis of possession and dramatic possession), and Franck Fouche's Vodou et theatre (Voodoo and theatre). Meritorious though they are, these works give only a very limited account. Fouche went further than Louis-Jean, embracing a wider range of Voodoo's theatrical aspects than his predecessor. However, even though Fouche analyzed Voodoo and the theatre more intensively, he evaluated his results as follows:

La demarche que nous avons entreprise est aussi une demarche neuve, et si nous ne nous abusons, le

premier travail d'ensemble fait dans ce domaine. Qu'on ne s'etonne pas ici et la de rencontrer des failles, des arguments qui manquent de pertinence, des ebauches ou il faudrait un developpement plus methodique. Nous reconnaissons tout le premier les faiblesses comme les lacunes de ce texte."²

The author's modesty and objectivity give others the necessary incentive to continue the search for Voodoo's theatrical elements, and to endeavor to develop popular theatre in Haiti.

This thesis is far from bringing to a close the research on Voodoo and theatre. Nevertheless, it goes further than the previous works. Theatrical elements are approached here according to clearly established criteria. Mainly, the work uses the standards proposed by Aristotle, the most influential drama critic of all times. However, in some cases, Aristotelian criteria are measured against others or reinforced by them. Thus they are likely to be modified at times. Moreover, other critics are referred to: Grotowski, Stanislavski, Vakhtangov, Schlesinger, Schechner, to name a few. This study develops individually eight distinct theatrical elements of Voodoo: impersonation, mise en scene, audience, chorus, music, dance, scenery and costume. Furthermore, it analyzes another major aspect which has not received any significant attention within the realm of dramatic theory and criticism in Haiti: the dramatic elements - plot, character, thought, diction - in Voodoo. This concept brings to light

another dimension of Voodoo. Most importantly, this work is not limited to a theoretical analysis of various elements of the theatre in relation to Voodoo. One of its major tenets is that it presents a series of observations on live Voodoo ceremonies and a number of interviews and testimonies collected from Voodoo priests and worshippers. These findings based on direct inquiry and participation demonstrate more concretely the rapport between Voodoo and drama and give it a greater scope.

The chapter on the historical background of Voodoo purveys information on its evolution from the beginning to recent times, including moments which I have personally witnessed. Chapter III, Ritual and Theatre, provides some examples on the rapport between ritual and theatre in other countries, which can facilitate a clearer understanding of similar possibilities in Haiti. Chapters IV and V develop the core of the thesis: the theatrical and dramatic elements of Voodoo. The conclusion presents a synthesis and interpretation of the findings, and offers some perspectives.

Voodoo is not an easy subject to investigate. First, it is based on oral tradition and therefore, its philosophy and principles are not readily accessible to the outsider. Second and most important, Voodoo remains a partially clandestine organization. Many of its fundamental components are disclosed only to its initiates. Finally,

very often, the latter are reluctant to discuss their religion. The following incident, which happened to me, shows how difficult it is to penetrate Voodoo.

One of my informants in Haiti, a houngan, (Voodoo priest), prepared in written form a few Voodoo thoughts and formulas which he sent me through one of his hounsis (initiated Voodoo servants). The notebook, before reaching me, fell into the hands of an other houngan who confiscated it, claiming that as a simple observer, I was not allowed to have access to such information.³

In spite of many obstacles, however, I believe that I have succeeded in compiling a sufficient amount of data to demonstrate more extensively than has hitherto been done, that Voodoo, like Greek ritual, encompasses theatrical and dramatic elements which give it the character of a sacred theatre, and at the same time, make it a valuable model for a secular indigenous theatre in Haiti. I have attended as many ceremonies as I could (over 50); I have interviewed Voodoo priests, priestesses, hounsis and researchers. I have exposed myself to Voodoo experiences, or similar ones, in Haiti, in the U.S.A and in Africa. I have attended two major congresses on Voodoo, one in Port-au-Prince, the other in New York. I have seen several films on Voodoo and, of course, read a considerable number of books and articles on Voodoo and theatre.

This research was a journey in which both "anagnorisis" and "revolution" or reversal took place. Indeed, in discovering Voodoo, albeit to a limited extent, I have acquired a clearer understanding of the Haitian people and have come to appreciate and respect their ancestral heritage.

It is for me a privilege to offer this work as a paeon to the indefatigable attachment of the Haitian masses to their traditions.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Voodoo is the religion of the Haitian masses (about 90% of the population), and an essential part of their culture. It contains a galaxy of myths, legends, dances, music, songs, philosophy and poetry. Voodoo is also a potent theatrical force. This popular culture, however, due to unfavorable circumstances has not yet been able to develop fully. A brief historical review is necessary to shed light on the obstacles Voodoo has encountered throughout its existence in Haiti, and as a preamble to further understanding of how Voodoo relates to theatre.

For centuries, Voodoo has been scorned by Haiti's dominant classes. Worse: Voodoo worshippers have been subject to persecution and violence. It is not by accident that a number of Haitians, even some of its own adepts, pretend to ignore Voodoo. Although practiced by about 90% of the Haitian people, Voodoo has never been officially recognized by any Haitian government until March 1987, but has been forced to remain clandestine for a long time. A certain category of thinkers had condemned Voodoo while Catholicism and Protestantism in Haiti remained untouched.

The fate of Voodoo in Haiti parallels the socio-economic conditions created by the colonizers to enrich themselves at the expense and to the detriment of the Negro slaves.

There began an obscene operation in America, namely the Black slave trade, carried out at first by the Spaniards and then by the French. Shortly after 1492, in 1503, the first Africans were brought to Santo Domingo. As years went by, the number of slaves kept rising, but was never faithfully reported by the colonists. Victor Schoelcher proves it in Vie de Toussaint Louverture:

"On n'avait declare en 1789 que cinq cent mille esclaves; mais comme les releves se faisaient par tete taxee a 40 sous et a 3 livres, on ne declarait ni les enfants, ni les adultes de quarante-cinq ans; le nombre de ces deux classes se montait a deux-cent mille"....

L' homicide traite des noirs en importait chaque annee dans l'ile vingt-huit a trente mille.¹

La maison des esclaves (the slaves House) located in the island of Goree, Senegal, still stands as proof of the sufferings endured by Black slaves en route to America. Various ethnic groups were victimized. Jean Kerboull reports:

"Parmi la trentaine d' ethnies que Moreau de St. Mery recense dans la colonie un peu avant la revolution francaise nous trouvons dans la liste des loas, divinites du vaudou, des Aradas aux Fon, des Bissagots, Conga, Caplaou au Congo, des Haoussa aux Ibos en passant par les Mandingues, Mines, Mondongues, Nago, Popo, Soussou et Senegalais.²

Even greater numbers were from the Yoruba and Fon tribes, which explains the dominance of the Yoruba and Fon divinities: Legba, Danbala, Ayida Wedo, Ogou, Ezili, Agwe, Zaka, Shango etc. in the Voodoo pantheon.

The purpose of the Europeans was to transform the Blacks into simple machines and strip them of their humanity. All that, to insure their own domination. To accomplish their goal they submitted the Negroes to inhuman rules. Schoelcher gives a brief account of the ordeal imposed upon the slaves in Santo Domingo:

Le XVII^e siecle etait encore si barbare que l'edit de 1685 portait, article 38: "L'esclave fugitif qui aura ete en fuite pendant un mois aura les oreilles coupees...S'il recidive, il aura le jarret coupe...et la troisieme fois, il sera puni de mort"...le gouvernement des rois "tres chretiens" n'apporta aucun frein au pouvoir absolu des maitres, il les laissa disposer de leurs esclaves comme de leurs boeufs et de leurs mulets. Quelques-uns pousserent la ferocite a un point qui donne le vertige seulement a y penser. Ils n'epargnaient pas plus le chatiment des quatre piquets aux femmes qu'aux hommes, et, lorsqu'une de ces malheureuses etait enceinte, un trou etait creuse dans le sol pour y loger sa grossesse pendant qu'elle recevait les vingt-neuf coups de fouet reglementaires qui dechiraient ses chairs!...On a vu un Caradeu aine, un Latoison-Laboule, qui, de sang-froid, faisaient jeter des negres dans les fourneaux, dans des chaudiere bouillantes, qui les faisaient enterrer vifs et debout, ayant seulement la tete dehors, et les laissaient perir de cette maniere, heureux quand, par pitie, leurs camarades abregeaient leurs tourments en les assommant a coups de pierres!³

Physical abuses did not suffice. The dignity and the identity of the African man was also fair game. Louis Maximilien comments:

Un systeme colonial grossier... admettait que rien de bon ne pouvait sortir de l'esclave et qu'il fallait degrader le spirituel chez ce dernier apres l'avoir degrade lui-meme dans sa chair⁴

Thus, the Negro slave was made to forfeit his religion and his culture. A former Haitian Catholic priest, Laennec Hurbon, sympathizing with his ancestors' plight writes:

"On sait que les esclavagistes faisaient tout pour porter les noirs a oublier la terre-mere perdue....De nouveaux noms etaient donnes par les maitres....Les familles etaient demantelees..."⁵

Laws were passed, forbidding the Blacks to practice their native religion, Voodoo:

An ordinance of 1704 specifically prohibited slaves from gathering at night under the pretext of holding collective dances. Night dances were forbidden to coloured men and Negro freed men after nine o'clock in the evening and in addition, they had to have a judge's license. A planter was fined 300 livres for having allowed a gathering of Negroes and a calenda on his property. When in 1765, a body of light troops was formed and named the first legion of Saint Domingue, it was assigned the role of breaking up Negro gatherings and calendas.⁶

While the law interdicted the slaves from practicing their own religion, it attempted to force them to convert to Catholicism, a religion foreign to them. Laennec Hurbon acknowledged this fact: "Les cultes africains etaient interdits; la Christianisation etait de rigueur, par le bapteme force."⁷ The "civilized" European - who labeled Blacks barbaric - used barbaric means to subjugate them, which crimes have been condemned by many:

"La civilisation moderne et le Christianisme porteront toujours, aux yeux des ages futurs, la honte de n'avoir

su fonder leurs colonies qu'en violant toutes les lois de la justice, de la morale et de l'humanite."⁸

As a result of the forced labor performed by the slaves, the economic situation in Santo-Domingo was one to be envied. Alfred Metraux remarks: "in 1789, St. Domingue was the richest jewel in the French Crown."⁹ The splendor of Santo Domingo is similarly described by Robert Cornevin:

"On imagine mal de nos jours ce que fut cette ile au XVIII^e siecle. A la veille de la revolution, le chiffre d'affaires des colonies francaises s'elevait a 600 millions de francs dont les deux tiers (400 millions) concernaient St Domingue. Ces enormes profits sont produits par 8500 habitations couvrant quelques 500.000 hectares."¹⁰

To maintain the status quo, the French continued to struggle to divorce the Africans from their original beliefs, traditions and roots and to make them believe that they were inferior to the Europeans. Did these colonizers, however, truly believe that the African civilization was devoid of value: the German historian, Leo Frobenius, answers no, and accuses the Europeans of deliberately vilifying the Africans:

Non pas que les premiers navigateurs Europeens de la fin du moyen age n'eussent fait dans ce domaine de remarquables observations. Lors qu'ils arriverent dans la baie de Guinee et aborderent a Vaida, les capitaines furent etonnes de trouver des rues bien amenees Plus au sud, dans le royaume du Congo, une foule grouillante habillee de soie et de velours, de grands etats bien ordonnes et cela dans les moindres details, des souverains puissants, des industries opulentes. Civilises jusqu'a la moelle des os. Et toute semblable etait la condition des pays a la cote occidentale, la Mozambique par exemple. Les revelations des navigateurs du XV^e au XVIII^e siecles fournissent la preuve certaine que l'Afrique qui s'etendait au sud de

la zone desertique du Sahara etait encore en plein epanouissement, dans tout l'eclat de civilisations harmonieuses et bien formees. Cette floraison, les conquistadores Europeens l'aneantissaient a mesure qu'ils progressaient. Car le nouveau pays d'Amerique avait besoin d'esclaves....La traite des noirs ne fut jamais une affaire de tout repos; elle exigeait sa justification; aussi fit-on du negre un demi-animal, une marchandise....L'idee du negre barbare est une invention Europeenne.¹¹

In reality then, the colonizers feared the slaves' religion. Voodoo became a target because it represented an element of cohesion, of unity among slaves.

Persecution of Voodoo continued beyond the era of slavery while other organized religions in Haiti have been and still are free: Catholicism, the Episcopalian church, and various offsprings of Protestantism: the Methodist church, Adventist, Pentecostal, Baptist etc. Nowadays, still other sects have been invading the countryside, among them, the Mormons and the latest product of Catholicism, the Charismatic groups.

Forty-six years after the independence in March 1860, President Geffrard ordered the closing of all hounfo (Voodoo temples), including Souvenance where, according to some sources, he had worshipped the Voodoo Gods until his accession to presidential power. Under him, the Catholic Church was granted freedom to attack Voodoo. President Stenio Vincent, on September 5, 1935, adopted a law forbidding Voodoo, which he called sorcery. In the 1940s, under the government of Elie Lescot, the Catholic Church

once again joined forces with political leaders to try to destroy the African religion. Milo Rigaud sheds light on this phenomenon.

Elie Lescot - president d'Haiti, imagina de donner un surcroit d'intensification a la lutte religieuse entre le hunfo haitien et l'eglise romaine: il met soudain sa garde presidentielle au service arme de l'eglise de Rome qui traque les vaudouisants jusque dans leurs maisons privees, raflant tous les objets cultuels que ses cures pouvaient trouver: tambours conques, assons, drapeaux rituels, attributs rituels des loas tels que les costumes, les chapeaux et les foulards.¹²

This "anti-supersitition" campaign or "rejete" has also been described by Alfred Metraux:

The violent campaign waged at that time by the clergy is known amongst Haitians as la renonce...the Marbial Valley was one of those few regions of Haiti where Voodoo has not been able to recover entirely from the blows which were dealt it. There, the extirpation of idolatry was conducted with brutal energy by a French cure...and by a Haitian cure - a man who, brought up in a Voodoo-practicing milieu, persecuted the religion of his ancestors with tenacious and penetrating hatred.¹³

Later, a compromise was reached: all Voodoo ceremonies were forbidden unless the priests obtained an official paid permit from the police. Other religions, on the other hand, were allowed to function with out any special arrangements. Rigaud provides more evidence:

Le permis de faire un service vodoo est paye par le Oumphor! Tandis que l'etat paye au contraire l'eglise Catholique pour qu'elle exerce son sacerdoce en Haiti a cote du bagui.¹⁴

Scornful and intolerant opponents of Voodoo declared that Voodoo was the devil's domain, Satanism. The Catholic

Church in Haiti called Voodoo priests both "satan's slaves" and "evil doers." One Catholic priest, Jean Marie Salgado, gave Voodoo a humiliating image. To him Voodoo worshippers were "miserable" souls. In 1963, he writes:

Il est clair que tous ceux qui au su de toute une paroisse, prennent une part active au culte du vaudou doivent etre consideres comme "ces pecheurs particulierement scandaleux" commes sous le nom de pecheurs publics. Il s'agira des houngans, mambos et de leurs aides.¹⁵

The persecution of Voodoo practitioners still goes on. According to Franck Etienne, a Haitian intellectual and dramatist, and founder of the committee for the Defense of National Culture, the enemies of Voodoo, taking advantage of the period of political upheaval during which the masses uprooted the former dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier, have reemerged to launch new criminal attacks against it.¹⁶

The situation then was so grave that two organizations in Haiti: Zantray (Zanfan tradisyon Ayisyen - children of Haitian traditions) and the committee for the Defense of the National Culture, called a national conference to denounce and condemn the massacre of Voodoo faithful that was going on. I witnessed this gathering, in Haiti, where various strata of the nation were represented: barefoot peasants, Voodoo dignitaries and worshippers, a few Protestants, Catholic priests, students, professionals,

researchers and artists, all responding in support to Voodoo.¹⁷

At this conference, Max Paul a representative of the bureau of ethnology presented about 62 verified cases of assassinated Voodoo priests and priestesses. In only one region of the South, Grande Anse, 119 deaths were reported, he added. Paul gave an example of a military man helping the attackers:

In Marchand, a mambo (Voodoo priestess) was arrested. The policeman requested \$300 to free her. He kept \$100 and gave his accomplices \$200.¹⁸

A few weeks later the internationally known houngan, Max Beauvoir, affirmed that over a thousand houngans and mambos were killed.¹⁹ The conference not only shed light on the new anti-Voodoo campaign, but issued a warning to Voodoo's enemies.

Dr. Gregoire Dienguele Matsua, an African ethnologist, protested the attacks. He wrote an open letter to the Pope to voice his indignation and ask the Catholic leader to take a stand. He also argued against attempted justification of killings, namely that Voodoo served Duvalier. To that, Matsua replied:

Toutes les fetes officielles du gouvernement comprenaient toujours, entre autres festivites, les "Te deum," messes dites chaque fois par les eveques: les "Te deum" sont des ceremonies Catholiques, non vaudou... Jean Claude Duvalier Avait prete serment devant le crucifix du Christ et non devant un autel vaudou...²⁰

Matsua emphasized that Duvalier worked with hounsans, bishops as well as simple Catholic priests.

The New York times in May 1986, published the following report from Marise Simmons:

A key motive in the attacks on the Voodoo priests and priestesses at first appeared to be popular revenge against the Tontons Macoute militia, the powerful political network that served as the pillar of Duvalier family rule and had included many leaders and priests of Voodoo communities. In some villages, victims were described as "sorcerers" and "poison makers" who used their power against people.

But Christian groups that have often preached against Voodoo as the "work of Satan" have also seized the moment of political change to strike at the strong, rival faith. They are mainly the revivalist sects - fundamentalist Protestants and charismatic Catholics - that have most in common with Voodoo, often practice faith healing, cultivate religious fervor and believe they receive the Holy Spirit.²¹

The colonizers and later, their disciples, relentlessly undermined African culture in Haiti. As a result, numerous Haitians are ashamed of their origins. Voodoo is considered an object of disdain by some. Willy Apollon put it very well: "Etre vaudouisant, c'est s'identifier a une classe sociale qui affronte dans l'angoisse la penurie....Mais c'est aussi accepter le 'me-prix', la meconnasissance, le rejet de ce qui se dit une elite haitienne."²² Others, from ordinary citizens to political powers hide their affiliation to Voodoo. Milo Rigaud observes:

C'est d'ailleurs ce malheureux complexe qui a, le plus souvent, complique l'existence des loa et du culte voodoo en Haiti; l'histoire d'Haiti compte ainsi nombre de chefs d'etat qui travaillent par ce complexe

d'inferiorite cultuelle, se sont livrés maladivement à une guerre d'extermination dans le but de supprimer le culte des loa - alors que, dans l'ombre, ils le pratiquaient.²³

No wonder that Creole a language created by the Black slaves, is equally scorned by a number of Haitians, although it is the only language spoken by one hundred percent of the population, while French remained the sole official language until March 1987, even though less than ten percent of the population can speak or understand it. Massillon Coicou's poem "Complainte d'esclave" reveals how some Haitians feel about their origins:

Pourquoi donc suis-je negre
O pourquoi suis-je noir?
Lorsque Dieu m'eut jeté dans le sein de ma mère
Pourquoi la mort jalouse et si prompte au devoir
N'accourut-elle pas l'enlever de la terre?²⁴

Culturally, elements identified with Voodoo remain forbidden in some areas of life. The drum, the Voodoo musical instrument, considered evil for centuries by the Catholic church, was forbidden in Catholic rituals. About two decades ago, the Haitian Catholic authorities revised their position on the drum and introduced it into their masses. This interdiction, however, still prevails in certain Protestant Churches. Robert Bauduy, theatre specialist, offers this testimony about the Methodist Church in Haiti: The National Institute of Artistic Formation (INFA) offered a summer course in 1972 at a locale of the Nouveau College Bird, built around the church

and sponsored by Methodist pastors. A spectacle was planned at the end of the course, the play Lan Me Jakmel (Jacmel Sea). This play which contains several Voodoo dances, requires drum accompaniment. The schools' chairman, on behalf of the Methodist authorities, forbade the use of the drum, which forced the group to move the spectacle to another auditorium.²⁵ As a former student of the Nouveau College Bird, I know that music is not forbidden on campus. On the contrary, some instruments are highly appreciated there. In the school choir, we sang Mozart, Beethoven, with the accompaniment of the piano. Inside the church, every Sunday, the organ fills the space with its powerful and vibrant sounds; thus, it is clear that the interdiction singles out the drum, the Voodoo instrument and symbol of the popular culture. This same institution which interdicts the use of Voodoo's cultural elements, encourages on the other hand, the study of European drama, where elements of paganism are often brought to light as in Racine's Phaedra. It is equally not surprising that at the Conservatory of Dramatic Arts, run for a long time by a Frenchman, the plays to be studied were drawn mainly from the neo-classical repertoire and the modern French theatre, while Haitian culture was relegated to a secondary position, as affirmed by a former teacher of the Conservatory, Robert Bauduy.²⁶

Some people claim that Voodoo is responsible for keeping the people at a primitive level. It should be enlightening to consider the overall economic condition of the country in relation to this problem. A report on the living conditions of the poor peasants must acknowledge their backward situation.

Paul Moral in 1961, presented a study of the rural life in Haiti in Le paysan Haitien:

Il ne se passe pas d'annee sans que le spectre de la famine ne se profile en quelques regions....La malnutrition aggrave l'etat sanitaire du monde rural...on compte pour l'ensemble du territoire un praticien pour 11,000 habitants environ, mai si la region de Port-au-Prince est relativement privilegiee (1 medecin pour 5,000 habitants environ), les provinces eloignees sont beaucoup plus mal pourvues: 1 medecin pour 20,000 habitants dans l'Artibonite; 1 pour 37,000 dans le sud...l'analphabetisme est quasiment general dans les campagnes...on peut admettre qu'actuellement le taux de l'analphabetisme est de l'ordre de 93 ou 94%..²⁷

Twenty-two years later in 1983, Jean Jacques Honorat, a well-known agronomist, did not offer better news.

La formation sociale haitienne se caracterise par un systeme de colonialisme interne dans lequel une frange sociale urbaine (20% de la population globale) dominee elle-meme par une mince elite occidentalisee (3% de la population) joue les roles sociaux, economiques, politiques et culturels de dominance selon les modeles herites des anciens colons francais, tandis qu'un large secteur rural marginalise (80% de la population) fournit les denrees d'extraction, les provisions alimentaires et la force de travail necessaires au fonctionnement, a l'entretien et a la reproduction du systeme. L'esperance de vie est d'environ 51 ans. L'analphabetisme frappe 85% de la population globale, 96% du secteur rural. Port-au-Prince totalise a elle seule 100% de l'equipement industriel moderne, 90% des service modernes de sante, 100% des commodites universitaires, 80% de

l'enseignement secondaire, 200% du trafic aerien international, 90% de l'equipement touristique, 90% de la consommation d'energie electrique.²⁸

In 1986, on ABC's program 20/20 (New York), Barbara Walters estimated Haiti's annual per capita income at less than \$300.²⁹ More recently, General Henry Namphy, President of the Junta in Haiti, during his visit to the United Nations in the United States in September 1987, evaluated the annual per capita income in Haiti at \$320.³⁰ Evidently, the roots of primitivism in Haiti are economic and not the result of Voodoo. Therefore destroying Voodoo will not change the people's hard conditions.

The war against the popular culture bore some fruits. But Voodoo could not be destroyed. The very context in which it shaped itself earlier in Santo Domingo guaranteed strength. It united the various groups of slaves, enabling them to survive and later to win their independence. Thus, Voodoo fought back in many ways. It structured itself clandestinely, hiding its religious activities under Catholic images. Voodoo Gods were identified with the Christian Saints, leading to Voodoo syncretism. Determined to preserve their tradition, the people never changed the essence of Voodoo. France Schott Billman affirms:

L'esclave venu d'Afrique qui etait astreint a venerer les saints Chretiens continuait en realite a pratiquer son propre culte....quant a la croyance au paradis, elle n'a jamais penetre les noirs baptises chretiens, ce qui a contribue au fait qu'ils ne se sont jamais resignes a leur sort d'esclaves....Les fondements religieux n'ont pas ete touches.³¹

Voodoo remained alive, a dynamic force of liberation under the eyes of the colonizer. The Bois-Caiman Ceremony, which took place under the direction of the Voodoo priest, Boukman, on August 14th 1791, is remembered as an historic event, important in the revolt of the slaves. The historian, J.C. Dorsainvil describes it as follows:

Les assistants, immobiles, saisis d'une horreur sacree, voient une vieille negresse se dresser. Son corps est secoue de longs frissons: elle chante, pirouette sur ell-meme et fait tourner un grand coutelas au-dessus de sa tete. Une immobilite plus grande encore, une respiration courte, silencieuse, des yeux ardents, fixes sur la negresse prouvent que l'assistance est fascinee. On introduit alors un cochon noir. D'un geste vif, la pretresse inspiree plonge son coutelas dans la gorge de l'animal. Le sang gicle, il est recueilli et distribue a la ronde, aux esclaves; tous en boivent, tous jurent d'executer les ordres de Boukman.³²

The order was to fight the colonizer until victory. Brotherhood, solidarity among the slaves was established. A firm commitment was made. As a result, shortly after, on August 23, 1791, the French were under attack. Some attribute the victory of the slaves to the mystical influence of that ceremony. Others question that view or flatly reject it. What can not be contested, however, is the political influence of Voodoo as a clandestine organization which mobilized and guided the slaves in their fight for independence. Voodoo contributed to make Haiti the first Black republic.

In spite of extreme difficulties, Voodoo has survived, is still alive today, and is still active. Once more in 1985-1987, it played a role in the struggle of the Haitian people for freedom. Some people questioned the participation of Voodoo in the uprooting of Jean-Claude Duvalier because they did not see its activities as clearly as they saw those of the Catholic church. The Catholic Church, however has always been given more latitude to function in the open than Voodoo. Therefore, the former's voice was heard by all whereas the latter operated underground, as usual. At the Soukri conference, the houngan Herard Simon underlined the role of Voodoo in the "Operasyon dechoukaj" (operation to uproot Duvalier). On August 15, 1985, he said, a major ceremony took place in Soukri, whose aim was to overthrow Jean-Claude Duvalier. And then, the houngan added, the decisive struggle was launched.³³ The contribution of Voodoo to "Operasyon dechoukaj" was again confirmed by a peasant spokeswoman at a press conference given by a political organization IFOPADA (Union of Patriotic and Democratic Forces) in Port-au-Prince in 1986.³⁴ At the beginning of January, 1986, heavy protests broke out in Gonaives. At the same time, a series of Voodoo ceremonies took place in Nan Badjo, as well as Soukri, both located in the vicinity of Gonaives. The same tension felt in Gonaives was felt in the neighborhood of the two Voodoo sancturies. On my way to

Nan Badjo on January 6, 1986 I was stopped by peasants who had barricaded the road. After much supplication they let me pass. While the city of Gonaives was in revolt, at Nan Badjo, Voodoo was celebrating Ogou, the God of War, with extreme fervor. The drums rumbled. The worshippers sang: "se blese, m'blese, mwen pa we san mwen" ("I am wounded, but I do not see my blood"). They danced all day. They had been dancing for four days. Politics was on many people's minds. Duvalier's name was brought to my attention. A worshipper took me aside and told me: "Lwayo di Tigason - a prale anvan Fevriye" (the Gods said that the boy - meaning Jean-Claude - will be overthrown before February).³⁵ Coincidentally, on January 31, 1986, Larry Spinks, on behalf of the State Department, announced in Washington the departure of Jean-Claude Duvalier. A few hours later, calling it a mistake, the State Department contradicted the news, reannouncing it on February 7, 1986.

The struggle of Voodoo for survival was not in vain. It guaranteed its continuity and has gradually forced distant and unfriendly spectators to take a closer look and some, to even modify their attitude towards it. The Catholic church now uses the drum and shows Voodoo dances in its masses to dramatize its teachings. At the Soukri Conference on May 10, a certain sector of the Catholic church was represented: Father Clerisme, Father Augustin and a former priest, Laennec Hurbon, came not to attack

Voodoo, but to support its struggle. Father Augustin after having underlined some evolution in the Catholic church's views on Voodoo, expressed some remarkable personal opinions:

"Se yon rev. Men gen plizye pe Katolik ki Komansé we ke a lavni gen pi bel bagay toujou Ki Kapab fet. Fos veritab pep Ayisyen, se Vodou. Donk yo pa Ka elimine-li. Ou Ka obteni on rezilta fomidab si ou Konbine fos Katolik la ak fos Vodou-a. Sata va yon Fos estraodine. Sa, se vizyon pa-m."³⁶

Some members of the Haitian bourgeoisie and middle class, defying their social class, have openly affirmed their affiliation to Voodoo as worshipers or priests. Some names are well known: Esther Saint-Lot, Mathilda Beauvoir, Max Beauvoir, Reginald Bailly, Danny Danache, Betty Legros Vaval, Marcelle Laguerre. Many foreign thinkers painted Voodoo in a positive light. Courlander is one of them:

Voodoo is clearly more than the ritual of the cult temple. It is an integrated system of concepts concerning human behaviour, the relation of mankind to those who have lived before, and the supernatural forces of the universe. It relates the living to the dead and those not yet born. It explains unpredictable events by showing them to be consistent with established principles. In short, it is a true religion which attempts to tie the unknown to the known and thus create order where chaos existed before.³⁷

In another work, Courlander defines Voodoo as a "complete ingrained belief utterly convincing and acceptable".³⁸

Voodoo then remains part of the Haitian people's history, part of its struggle for independence, part of its life.

In his acclaimed novel, Lesarbres musiciens, the famous writer Jacques Stephen Alexis writes: "Un peuple sans traditions, n'est-ce pas un peuple sans visage, sans avenir"?³⁹

The Haitian masses continue to treasure their own traditions. As reported by Harold Courlander:

Among the things that were lost in this vast process of adaptation were the traditions of wood carving, bronze and brass casting, and weaving. Remembered, however, were music, dancing, games, religious beliefs, concepts of nature, the supernatural, folk tales and legends. It was the outward, material things that were abandoned and the inward, non-material things that tended to survive.⁴⁰

The Haitian peasants, the Voodoo people, remember Africa, the ancestors' land they were forced to leave. In their songs, in their lamentations, in their prayers they praise their origin: Lafrik-ginen. This expression Lafrik-ginen may be explained as follows: Lafrik: Africa as a whole; Ginen: Jaden Zanset yo (the garden of the ancestors).⁴¹ Several times, at every Voodoo ceremony, Africa is evoked as in the songs:

Mouin gade la cote guinin
Ayizan ca, ce loa guinin
nan guinin la cote guinin
nan guinin, ooh! Abobo

I cast my eyes over Africa
this Ayizan is an African
God from Africa, Africa
ooh! Abobo!⁴²

M kite Loko veille caille
pou moin
Loko rhele Dahoumin
M kite loko veille caille
pou moin
Loko rhele Dahoumin

I asked Loko to keep an
eye on my house.
Loko's name is Dahomey.
I asked Loko to keep an
eye on my house.
Loko's name is Dahomey.⁴³

Moin prale nan Ginin
Kou'm rive nan chimin,

I was going to Africa,
When I reached half of

nou fai moin bliye baton	the way, you made me
moin	forget my cane. Folks,
Krityin vivan, nou move	you are bad. Folks, how
Krityin vivan nou move la	bad you are! I was going
Moin prale nan Ginin	to Africa. When I reached
Kou'm rive nan chimin, non	half of the way, you made
fai moin bliye baton moin	me forget my cane. ⁴⁴

It is evident, as shown above, that the Haitian masses sacrificed themselves in many ways to defend their cultural heritage. Thanks to their determination, Voodoo has been preserved with its religious as well as artistic resources. Voodoo is the expresssion of the people's beliefs, their suffering, their struggle, their hope through rituals and a gestalt of artistic mediums, hence its affinities with theatre.

CHAPTER III

RITUAL AND THEATRE

Voodoo may be viewed through its rich rituals as theatre. The relationship between rituals and aspects of theatre has been observed previously in Africa, Europe and Asia. Traces of rituals have been seen from the earliest ages for it was through ritualistic expression that man communicated his desire to fathom the unknown, to comprehend his own world and to insure his survival. Rituals were generally used to propitiate or celebrate a supernatural being. They contain some basic elements of theatre: impersonation, mise en scene, audience, chorus, music, dance, scenery, costume.

The first references to rituals in Africa date from 4000 B.C. One form of religious drama is the Egyptian ritual known as the Abydos Passion Play which depicts the death and resurrection of the Egyptian God, Osiris. It has been reported that these annual spectacles were very sophisticated. Although rituals in Egypt never gave birth to an autonomous theatre as occurred in Greece later, they contained theatrical aspects. Besides dancing, music, elaborate costumes and scenery, impersonation played an

important part. An account by Ikhernofret, one of the participants in the Osiris festivals, describes the role he performed there. William Ridgeway quotes him in The Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races:

I performed the coming forth of Ap-uat when he set out to defend his father. I overthrew the foes of Osiris; I performed the great coming forth; I followed the god in his footsteps; I made the boat of the god to move...I directed the way of the god to his tomb in Peger....¹

The relationship between ritual and theatre can also be clearly observed in Ancient Greece. A widely held theory is that Greek drama developed from rites performed in honor of Dionysus, the son of Zeus, whose legend - similarly to that of Osiris - treats his death and resurrection. Aristotle in the Poetics, wrote: "Tragedy first arose without deliberate intent, as did comedy also. The former originated with the leaders of the dithyramb...tragedy developed little by little as men improved whatever part of it became distinct."² The dithyramb, relating to the God of wine, started as an improvised revel song. Pickard-Cambridge, referring to Archilocus' account of the first dithyramb, defines it as:

A revel song led off by one of a band of revellers. They do not suggest a literary composition, but rather the singing or shouting of some well-known traditional words or perhaps some improvisation by the leader, with a traditional refrain in which the band of revellers join.³

Later modified and enriched as lyric poetry by Arion and

Pindar, the dithyramb was sung and danced by a chorus as part of ecstatic rituals dedicated to Dionysus.

Greek tragedy evolved in structure as the literary aspect gradually overshadowed the religious character of the ritual. Genuine drama came into being when Thespis, to the lyric poetry strictly sung before, added the first lines to be spoken and introduced the first actor. Spoken dialogue then was established between the chorus and the impersonator. The chorus, later, was deemphasized.

Greek tragedy moved away from ritual, but according to Theodore Gaster,

Greek drama retained the basic form and structure of the ritual, its component rites and ceremonies being translated into successive acts and scenes, thus as Murray has shown, the average Euripidean tragedy (The Bacchae, Hippolytus or Andromache) contains as standard and stereotyped elements: a) a combat (agon), b) a passion (pathos), c) a lamentation (threnos), d) a final epiphany, all of them basic ingredients of the primitive mystery or sacred pantomime which revolved around the combat of the seasons and the passion, lamentation or eventual restoration of the Lord of Fertility.⁴

The European medieval drama of the 10th to 16th centuries, emerged out of the pagan and Christian rituals. At first, the Christian church in Europe confronted paganism, a powerful adversary. Heathen rituals such as those connected with the harvest and the new year, were so deeply rooted in European life that they could not be ignored. In order to reach those it intended to convert, the church adopted some tactical measures: it fused its

calendar of events with the pagan one. For instance, the Feast of All Souls originated from the heathen ceremonies to the dead. James Frazer, in The Golden Bough, affirms that

The nominally Christian Feast of All Souls is nothing but an old pagan festival of the dead which the church, unable or unwilling to suppress, resolved from motives of policy to connive at.⁵

The pagan festivals were rich in theatrical elements: mime, music, dancing, disguise, scenery, etc. The Christian church, in spite of its austerity, combined much of the wealth of spectacle provided by these ludi with its own ceremonials. As they developed, the Christian ceremonials became very elaborate. William Tydeman comments:

From a fairly early date, the Christian church sought to incorporate man's histrionic instincts into its worship rather than to suppress them...The church felt the need to celebrate some of its festal days by giving scope to the mimetic urge within the framework of its liturgy, the officially prescribed canon of worship, the chief feature of which was the observance of Divine offices, including the Mass.⁶

The dramatization of biblical events used many theatrical devices. Symbolic objects were used, such as the Cross in the Good Friday ceremony: Adoration of the Cross. With the tropes or sung lines inserted into the liturgical text, dialogue (between a soloist and the chorus or between two groups) was added to the ceremonies. Another theatrical

device was the mimetic action which accompanies the dialogue, as seen in the Visitatio:

About 970, the Visitatio sepulchri had come to be regarded no longer as a liturgical drama, but as a piece of ritual drama in which the participants sought (to a limited extent) to play the parts of the angel and the three Marys, and not merely to carry out actions symbolic of the original happenings. It has been maintained that through combining such dialogue and mimed action for the purpose of worship, Latin drama had been brought into being.⁷

The Christian church used theatre as an instrument of propaganda.

Medieval drama maintained some religious motivation even after 1200, when the performances were believed to have been removed from the Church.

The Feast of Corpus Christi which opened the way to vernacular drama, introduced secular elements. The drama was then taken over by the town guilds, and churchmen, as well as laymen, participated. Then followed the Mystery and Morality plays.

Early culture in India was similarly marked by ritual ceremonies. The worship of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, and the ceremonials to the king considered as God both included theatrical performances animated by musicians, dancers, and impersonators. According to legend, drama was invented by Brahma who taught it to the sage Bharata. Consequently, the first Hindu plays were based on subjects selected from the mythology. Later, the sacred epics, the Ramayana and

Mahabharata (250 AD), became the playwright's main source of inspiration. The two works presented descriptions of Indian Gods and their descendants, as well as the teachings of the Hindu religion. Even when dramatists parted from the purely religious purpose, as Kalidasa and his colleagues did, their works still preserved, due to the religious influence, a didactic style, some idealistic elements and a mixture of religious and historical knowledge.

The Noh drama, the oldest living form of Japanese drama (late 14th century) is also believed to have originated from religious rites. According to some historians, Noh has its traditions in the Dengaku-no, connected with the harvest rituals, and the Sarugaku, which combined the ritualistic elements of the Kagura - music and dance - with mimicry. Like the Christian fathers in the Middle Ages, the Buddhist priests used the theatrical elements of the Sarugaku-no to propagate their religious doctrine and make it more comprehensible to their communities. Gradually, this form of drama was extended to non-religious sectors and inspired professional performers, such as Kannami, who created the Noh drama known today as a chanted dance drama. Until now, Noh drama features various elements of ancient rituals, including the most striking one, the manifestation of a supernatural being through possession.

The relationship between ritual and drama, widely recognized around the world, has been developed further by Theodore Gaster. To ritual, he attached the concept of myth, as a determining factor in the formation of drama. For him, it is the fusion of both that creates drama. In Thespis, Gaster writes:

Ritual is one of the parents of drama. The other is myth. The function of myth is to bring out in articulate fashion the inherent durative significance of the ritual program. Its method is to construe the punctual order of ceremonies in terms of an ideal situation involving gods or similar transcendent and preterpunctual beings. Its effect is to turn presentation into representation, to introduce the elements of mimesis and confer upon the participants the added and parallel role of actors, so that they are at one and the same time protagonists of a direct experience and impersonator of characters other than their own. Ritual and myth are thus, correlatives in a single whole and it is their organic combination that, in fact, produces drama.⁸

Voodoo has similar theatrical elements. It encompasses functional efficacy and representation of myths. Similarities between Voodoo and theatre have been observed by critics and historians. David Cole comments:

"It is difficult to think of a single scenic aspect of the theatre that is not also an aspect of hunganic ritual."⁹

Metraux also recognizes the theatrical aspect of Voodoo:

"What else can it be called, except 'theatre', when the possessed turn the simultaneous manifestation of several gods in different people into an organized impromptu?"¹⁰

Robert Cornevin expresses the same idea:

"Le phenomene religieux en Afrique est proche du theatre. Il en est de meme du vaudou Haitien."¹¹

What is theatre? Obviously, there are different ways of answering the question. Grotowski, after having eliminated all the elements that he calls superfluous, attests: "We are left with the actor and the spectator. Thus, we can define theatre as what takes place between spectator and actor."¹² Aristotle requires many more. His Poetics, the precursor of dramatic criticism, describes six constituent elements of drama: plot, character, thought, diction, music, spectacle. For Aristotle, the arranging of spectacle - theatrical element - and the poetic composition - dramatic element - necessary to each other, assemble and fuse to produce what he calls "imitation."

Do such theatrical and dramatic elements exist in Voodoo?

CHAPTER IV

THEATRICAL ELEMENTS OF VODOO

The word "theatre" is derived from the Greek, meaning to see, to view. Although the words "theatre" and "drama" are often used interchangeably, "theatrical elements" here will refer to what is enacted and performed before the spectator, to the visual or external aspects, to spectacle. These elements include: impersonation, mise-en-scene, audience, chorus, music, dance, scenery, costume.

The first studies conducted on Voodoo possession presented it as a pathological symptom, the manifestation of a mental disturbance. Dr. Louis Mars, in 1946, referring to the crisis of possession writes: "It is at the price of disequilibrium that the Haitian realizes his history."¹ However, 36 years later, he states that he was mistaken:

Les premieres observations sur le vaudou en Haiti ont ete recueillies par les medecins qui se sont servis de modeles cliniques occidentaux pour diagnostiquer la possession. Peu a peu, nous nous sommes apercus de notre erreur et nous avons porte la correction necessaire.²

Possession may be seen as a theatrical experience, a form of impersonation. The Greeks invoked the supernatural to secure growth and fertility. In these ecstatic rites,

it was believed that the deities took possession of the worshippers and controlled their actions. The sounds and words uttered were considered as prophecies and messages from the Gods. This condition, called entheos-iasmos, the state of having God within one is depicted in the Bacchae by Euripides. Friedrich Nietzsche views this metamorphosis as a dramatic phenomenon:

What happens in the Greek chorus is the primary dramatic phenomenon: projecting oneself outside oneself and then acting as though one had really entered another body, another character. This constitutes the first step in the evolution of drama.³

Mars in his later approach to Voodoo as ethnodrama - religion as drama - defines possession as a "metamorphose ou bien un etat psychologique normal qui reproduit le visage et les gestes des dieux a la maniere d'une personification dramatique."⁴ Michel Leiris in La possession et ses aspects theatraux chez les Ethiopiens de Gondar, subscribes to the same opinion: "La possession en elle-meme est deja du theatre puisqu'elle revient objectivement a la figuration d'un personnage mythique ou legendaire par un acteur humain."⁵

As in acting, where the performer must follow the conventions of a play, in Voodoo, the theatricality of possession may first be attributed to the conventions imposed by the ritual. There is a definite pattern that is strictly followed in a play and in a Voodoo ceremony.

Possession only occurs at desired times (save in rare exceptions). Before the crisis of possession takes place, two sets of prayers must be recited in their entirety: the "priye Ginen" (African prayer) in which the syncretism may be observed. These litanies which include Catholic prayers, are recited in French (language here is often mediocre) and invoke the Catholic saints. Then comes the "priye dyo" (dyo prayer) which invokes the African Gods in Creole. In addition, the preliminary libations have to be offered by the hungan or the manbo. If anyone should fall into a trance before this set of activities is over, most likely the priest would stop the crisis by exercising some counter-influence on the worshipper.

Not only do possessions begin at desired moments, but in general the Gods must be represented in a prescribed order of appearance. When Danbala is invoked, it is unlikely that Ezili Je rouj will come up at the same time. If she comes before her turn, it will create a disorder which will quickly be dealt with. Several times I have seen Guede "mount a horse" before his turn; in each case, the priest begged him to leave and return when he is scheduled, most often at the end, unless the celebration is dedicated to him in particular.

Convention again rules the manner in which each God manifests itself. Every deity has its own characteristics and style and therefore, the possessed is expected to

behave according to the traditional image of the deity he represents.

For many teachers of acting, "acting is believing". Similarly, to truly become a "lwa" (Voodoo divinity) is the privilege of those who believe in Voodoo. Referring to the actor, Stanislavski writes: "Truth on the stage is whatever we can believe in with sincerity....Each and every moment must be saturated with a belief in the truthfulness of the emotion felt, and in the action carried out by the actor."⁶ The same applies to the worshipper. His ability to fuse with the image of the divinity depends on his faith. The deeper his faith, the greater the communion. Faith engenders desire. Because he believes in his Gods, he wholeheartedly gives himself, transcends his own existence and wishes to become the God, his ideal. The combination of faith and desire creates a state of mind, a world of dream, in which the worshipper reaches a climax of passion, euphoria, ecstasy. His being takes on a new dimension and henceforth, becomes able to perform incredible acts as Gods. None of this is foreign to the creative process of the actor. According to Eugene Vakhtangov: "Desire is the motive for action. Therefore, the fundamental thing which an actor must learn is to wish, to wish by order, to wish whatever is given to the character."⁷

Franck Fouche acknowledges the theatrical aspect of possession: "La plus grande manifestation et illustration du Vodou comme pre-theatre, c'est sans conteste, la crise de possession. Elle constitue l'element de base du vodou."⁸ However, for him there exist some irreconcilable differences between the possessed and the actor, for the latter

...sait a l'avance qu'il joue un role. Il sait egalement que meme s'il le remplit a la perfection, l'incarne, il est toujours autre. Il demeure enferme dans sa peau, dans sa vie avec ses problemes, son angoisse existentielle, bref son drame personnel. Le dedoublement, la depersonalisation, des son entree en scene, a partir de sa position zero jusqu'a la chute finale du rideau, ne sera jamais une assimilation reelle, authentique de son 'Je'.⁹

Although it is clear that acting is not religious possession and that an actor must never be lost in his role, Fouche's statement might be found debatable for the following reasons: He presents acting as a fixed and unvaried activity, always executed according to one set of rules; he ignores other acting theories and styles; he does not take into consideration the fact that there are different degrees of consciousness in possession as there are in acting.

Fouche's stand raises a very old controversy: How much distance should exist between the actor and the character he portrays? Already in the 18th century this subject provoked an animated polemic - which lasted a long time - between the emotionalists and the anti-

emotionalists. In his Le Paradoxe sur le comedien (the Paradox of Acting), Diderot states that the "actor must have in himself an unmoved and disinterested onlooker."¹⁰ Further, he writes:

In complete absence of sensibility is the possibility of a sublime actor....He weeps as might weep an unbelieving priest preaching of the Passion; as a seducer might weep at the feet of a woman he does not love...or like a courtesan, who has no heart, who abandons herself in your arms.¹¹

Diderot's approach was supported by some, and rejected by others. Later, around the turn of the 19th century, Sir Henry Irving, a partisan of emotionalism, argues - against Coquelin, Diderot's partisan - that simulation of emotions makes the actor appear untruthful and inferior to the "feeling" actor. "Has not the actor who can thus make his feelings a part of his art an advantage over the actor who never feels?"¹² Also in the 19th century, Michael Schepkin, from Russia, shares the latter point of view. In a letter to an actress, "Wherein lies the difference between actors," he asserts, "an actor of feelings - that's something else....He must begin with wiping out his self...and become the character the author intended him to be."¹³

Constantin Stanislavski, one of the most influential theatre theorists of all time, taught his disciples to break away from artificiality. He taught them to play "truly" to develop their creative spirit, their inner life

and identify with their role. Complete physical and spiritual submergence is required by his "psychotechnique." Contrary to Fouche's statement: "Le dedoublement, la depersonalisation...ne sera jamais une assimilation reelle, authentique de son 'Je'",¹⁴ Stanislavski, in An Actor Prepares, explains through Tortsov's words:

Your head will swim from the excitement of the sudden and complete fusion of your life with your part. It may not last long, but while it does, you will be incapable of distinguishing between yourself and the person you are portraying.¹⁵

Stanislavski's student, Boleslavsky, who taught his master's technique at the Moscow Art theatre, differentiates between the actor who "lives" his part and the "actor imitator". For him

"the former belongs to the class of artist-creators of the living theatre, while the latter will always remain among the so-called utilities of the theatre. Living one's part means complete spiritual and physical self-abandon for a definite period of time, in order to fulfill a real or fantastical problem of the theatre."¹⁶

Jerzy Grotowski would reject the image of the actor "enferme dan sa peau, dans sa vie, avec ses problemes...",¹⁷ as seen by Fouche. He proposes a different formula, psychic penetration, which works against all blocks. "The actor must have time to cast off all the problems and distractions of daily life."¹⁸ Contrary to Fouche's actor, Grotowski's does not merely play a role, he is a "holy" actor who performs an act of self-sacrifice. "The body must be freed from all resistance. It must

virtually cease to exist,"¹⁹ so that the actor may, without limits, reveal himself as the new character. "This means the actor must act in a state of trance."²⁰ The terms: holy, self-sacrifice, trance, although used here in a non-religious context, demonstrate the relationship that exists between possession and one approach to acting. As indicated above, there is not just one concept of acting. For a number of theatre masters, acting and possession appear more similar than Fouche believed.

According to some Voodoo authorities, total possession is accompanied by loss of consciousness. For them, possession might seem different from acting. David Cole, however, referring to the possessed houngan's loss of consciousness or "double consciousness," states: "Any of these psychic states are also possibilities for the actor in performance"²¹ He points out that "even such presentational actors as Charles Dullin, Louis Jouvet, and Jean-Louis Barrault, have testified to the experience of being taken over by a character they are playing."²² It appears then that an actor's self-awareness may vary and that, consequently, his experience remains similar to the houngan's.

On the other hand, some authorities affirm that total loss of consciousness is not always found in possession. T. K. Oesterreich in his work Possession, refers to a lucid form of possession, in which the possessed "remains fully

conscious of what is happening" and is "the spectator of what takes place within him".²³ David Cole acknowledges the same:

The possessed hungan may also enter a strange state of double consciousness in which he is and is not himself....In fact, a shared spectrum of possible states of consciousness is one of the most significant similarities between the hungan and the actor.²⁴

Similarly Richard Schechner calls performing " a paradigm of liminality." He develops further in these terms:

"While watching the deer dance of the Arizona Yaqui in November 1981, I wondered if the figure I saw was a man and a deer simultaneously...At the moments when the dancer is "not himself" and yet "not not himself," his own identity, and that of the deer, is locatable only in the liminal areas of "characterization," "representation," "imitation," "transportation" and "transformation." All these words say that performers can't really say who they are."²⁵

The weakness of Fouche's statement on the relationship between possession and acting stems from the rigidity of his concept of acting and possession.

There are observed cases of a Voodoo believer appearing to become possessed spontaneously, quite independently of his own will. The "fits" come on unexpectedly and may transform the physical appearance of the possessed: the voice, the facial expressions, the whole behavior. Some people see this as an epileptic state. Other cases, however, are less easy to explain. The famous Voodoo priest, Arnold Elie, for example, testified that involuntary possession struck his mother

during her entire life. Innumerable times, she woke up during the night, possessed. In some cases, she predicted events which did occur later. For instance, without knowledge of the fact, the mambo once declared someone sick. In the middle of the night, she fetched this person, who lived far from her house. The person was truly sick and was brought to her. The priestess prescribed some medicine which, in a short time, healed the invalid.²⁶ Similar cases of involuntary possession have also been observed in Africa. Here is a testimony from Oesterreich's Possession:

There are cases where the most sceptical mind must admit to being puzzled - when, for example, the possessed woman disappears by night from the dwelling and is found on the following morning at the top of a high tree, tied to a branch by fine lianas. After a sacrifice has been offered and the lianas which held her have become loosened, she glides like a snake down the trunk, hangs for several moments suspended above the ground; when she speaks a language of which she previously knew not a single word.²⁷

In Haiti, a woman called Marlene Louis, Voodoo initiate, told of her personal experience with spontaneous possession. Her maid got up one morning, possessed by the deity "Madan Lenba" and gave her a warning: "You will be fired this week at work." Marlene, although a believer, laughed at her maid, knowing that she had no difficulty whatsoever at work and that, on the contrary, she had an excellent record as an employee. That same week, the prophecy came true.²⁸ In these instances, there was no

preparation for possession. The individuals did not seek out the "crisis" but were unexpectedly seized by it. Leiris calls this type of possession "authentic".

Voluntary possession, however, takes place under different circumstances. The crisis is provoked. Moreover, the houngan or the mambo, to attain possession, uses procedures also found in acting techniques.

The houngan goes through an internal process. Concentration is an essential factor to him. (This approach is recommended for actors by Stanislavski) From the start of the ceremony, the houngan devises a point of attention. Shaking his "ason" (sacred rattle) every now and then, he visibly works at self penetration, often with his eyes closed. during the period of invocation, if there are disturbances in the audience, the priest will firmly stop them. I heard a houngan tell a hounsi at a ceremony in Bizoton: "Si ou pa ka sispan-n pale, ma flank ou on sel kalot, wa roule soti nan peristil-la ."29

Other factors, such as music and singing, help the houngan mobilize his inner reserves. In addition, collective participation and his relationship to observers contribute to his building of the proper spirit in him just as an actor might be influenced by the presence of the audience. Stanislavski emphasizes such influence on the actor. "It rouses its truly creative energy. In conveying great emotional warmth, it gives him faith in himself and

his work."³⁰ The contribution of the spectators is valued highly by the houngan. In case they do not cooperate enough with hand clapping and antiphonal singing, he will vehemently demand that they do so. I witnessed such an occasion, a Thanksgiving ceremony in Brooklyn, New York, where the priest, Arnold Elie, became highly emotional because the audience did not participate enthusiastically enough.³¹

Dancing also plays a role in the preparation for possession. Delsarte, Stanislavski, Grotowski, all recommend physical exercises as part of the actor's preparation. Grotowski's "via negativa" method which includes rhythmical walking, running on tip toe, leaps, foot exercises, etc., aims at removing tension and releasing action. Dancing has a similar affect on the worshipper. It rids his body of inhibitions, allowing him to give of himself more fully. An atmosphere is created then which heightens his susceptibility to suggestion, contributes to his state of enchantment, and opens the way to possession. This is also encouraged by the Shaman. A passage in E.T. Kirby describes a Shamanistic ceremony:

The effect is literally hypnotic and hallucinatory...the rhythmic music and singing, and later the dancing of the shaman, gradually involve every participant more and more in a collective action. When the audience begins to repeat the refrains together with the assistants, only those who are defective fail to join the chorus. The tempo of action increases, the shaman with a spirit is no more an

ordinary man or relative, but is a "placing" (i.e., incarnation) of the spirit.³²

The manifestations of provoked Voodoo possession are often impressive: when the state of possession reaches its peak, the worshipper ceases being himself. In the believers' eyes, he becomes the God. Roger Bastide describes the manifestation of possession in Brazil:

Ce ne sont plus maintenant a proprement parler les fils et les filles, ce sont les dieux qu'ils incarnent qui viennent se meler un moment avec les spectateurs du Bresil. Ce ne sont plus de petites couturieres a la journee, des cuisinieres ou des laveuses. C'est Omolu recouvert de paille, c'est Xango rouge et blanc, c'est Yemanja peignant ses cheveux de varech. Les visages sont devenus masques, se sont metamorphoses. Ogun guerrier etincelle des feux de la colere, Oxun n'est plus que volupte charnelle. Un moment l'Afrique et le Bresil se sont confondus....Les frontieres entre le naturel et le surnaturel n'existent plus; l'extase a realise la communion desiree.³³

Legba, known as the guardian of the road is, in Voodoo tradition, a very old man. His characteristics will be seen even in a young worshipper who represents him. Milo Marcelin explains:

Quand il monte un jeune cheval (quand il possede une jeune personne) celui-ci presente meme sur le visage, tous les aspects de la vieillesse, boite et marche a l'aide de la bequille et du baton.³⁴

Equally old is Gran-n Ezili, a Voodoo Goddess. "Les personnes possedees by Gran-n Ezili ont leurs membres recroquevilles et marchent sur leur train posterieur. Parfois, elles sont frapees de paralysie."³⁵

I observed an incarnation of Baron Samedi, the patron of cemeteries and the dead. The mambo's cadaverous look,

the distortions of the hands, the fixity of the eyes, the rigid, frozen posture of the entire body were conveyed with frightening believability. She seemed unconscious and remained in that position for over 15 minutes.³⁶ One might argue that such total fusion with an image, which results in actual physical changes, is not the domain of acting. In his book, Holy Theatre, however, Christopher Innes describes a similar scene from Grotowski's The Constant Prince.

"Following Grotowski's principle that the actor must accomplish an act of the soul by means of his own organism, Cieslak's body expressed his psychological state in physical reactions that are usually considered involuntary - sweating profusely while remaining still; a red flush spreading over all his skin; tears flooding from closed eyes - giving an effect of absolute authenticity to the experience presented."³⁷

In the Serpent and the Rainbow, the Harvard Scientist, Wade Davis offers this testimony about a scene of possession seen at Max Beauvoir's peristyle:

Never in the course of my travels in the Amazon had I witnessed a phenomenon as raw or powerful as the spectacle of voodoun possession that followed. The initiate, a diminutive woman, tore about the peristyle, lifting large men off the ground to swing them about like children. She grabbed a glass and tore into it with her teeth, swallowing small bits and spitting the rest on the ground...³⁸

Even more striking are the solo sequential performances, where one performer representing simultaneously a number of Gods, reproduces the characteristics of different deities: The crawling snake Danbala; the aristocrat, well-dressed Ezili Freda; the aggressive and violent Ezili Danto;

Agwetaroyo, the sea God paddling his canoe; the shy, awkward peasant, Kouzen Zaka; the majestic warrior, Ogou Feray, the exuberant, obscene Guede. The men incarnate the female deities as brilliantly as the women incarnate the male ones. Young persons show as much flexibility as old ones.

Another remarkable feature of the possessed is their vocal range, varying from the lowest to the highest pitch, from the softest to the most powerful resonance. Ezili Freda conveys distinctions through her very soft voice. Ogou Feray, the war God, usually angry, speaks in a contained but intense voice, often hoarse, whereas Guede who knows no restraint, uses a loud and clear one. Various types of voices can be heard consecutively in a ceremony such as the "wete mo nan dlo" (withdrawal of the dead from the water), a ceremony - as described by some observers such as Louis Maximilien - where the dead invoked come to speak to their relatives through the possessed officiant. Alfred Metraux describes a "wete mo nan dlo" conducted by a woman, where various types of vocal sounds were performed: first, a "deep voice," it was a Papa Loco, the God invoked to facilitate the operation. Then the voices of the dead:

A mild gurgling was heard and then wretched lamentations...then fresh groans'...later a man's very hoarse voice; it was a kind of mumble,³⁹

After which,

...one of the women in the congregation recognized the voice of her mother, suddenly, an agonized voice...⁴⁰

Next came the turn of "an old grandmother." Directors emphasize the importance of vocal techniques. For Jerzy Grotowski,

...the actor must exploit his voice in order to produce sounds and intonations that the spectator is incapable of reproducing or imitating.⁴¹

As with voice, so language varies. Different dialects are used. The change of dialect is particularly clear when a city priest or priestess represents certain Gods. Kouzen Zaka, in the Voodoo tradition, is a peasant. He speaks as one. The diction as well as intonation is different from that found in city speech. The mambo Marcelle Laguerre executes brilliant portrayals of Kouzen Zaka. A refined and educated lady, Mrs. Laguerre, when acting as Zaka, becomes a peasant with peasant vocabulary and tone.⁴² It is astonishing and funny to watch her.

Proper speech is used by most Gods. On the other hand, Guede's speech exhibits such lewdness that it shocks many people. Some Gods do not speak, but use non-verbal communication as in the case of Danbala, who whistles like a snake. His message may not be understood by all, but his initiates always capture the meaning. Ezili Danto, most often does not express herself verbally, but with facial expressions and bodily action, she conveys her will even to non-initiates.

Voluntary possessions may be interpreted in various ways. Are these the deeds of preternatural beings performed through the medium of humans? For the faithful, the answer is a positive one. For others, doubts remain. However mysterious or not, can voluntary possession actually project the worshipper out of himself? Can he transcend his own reality and temporarily become a new character? Can voluntary possessions actually create physical changes in the initiate? Max Reinhardt acknowledges this possibility for the actor. In the "Enchanted sense of play," he affirms:

...the actor's power of self-suggestion is so great that he can bring about in his body not only inner and psychological, but even outer and physical changes.⁴³

It appears therefore that when the worshipper profoundly believes in his divinities, the power of suggestion alone, if nothing else, may lead him to identify physically and spiritually with them. A voluntary possession is not necessarily a "fake" one. for Michel Leiris, voluntary possession is authentic when it is "soit spontanee, soit provoquee, mais subie en toute bonne foi dans une perspective magico - religieuse ou la transe ne dependrait d'aucune decision consciente."⁴⁴ Voluntary possession may be perceived as inauthentic, according to the same observer, when simulated "deliberement pour se donner en spectacle ou pour exercer sur autrui une pression

dont on tirera un benefice materiel ou moral."⁴⁵ Here, the so-called possession becomes acting for acting's sake.

Several hougans and mambos in Haiti from Archaie, Port-au-Prince and Jacmel, and still others in New York agreed that inauthentic possessions were widespread in Haiti. Many hougans and mambos pretend to be possessed, but are simply acting. Alfred Metraux provides a few examples of inauthentic possessions:

Organizing a fete which I wished to offer Guede, I found the mambo and her acolytes who were allegedly possessed by Guede became only too human when the question of money arose. Once this discussion was over and an agreement reached, they again remembered their roles and behaved like true Guede. I remember one possessed who completely forgot she had a god inside her the moment I gave her news of a woman from her own village.⁴⁶

At other times, fantasies take other forms. It is a well known fact in Haiti that many hougans often sexually abuse women on behalf of would-be spirits.

Financial abuses may be committed in the name of the Gods. An inexperienced believer who thinks he has access to a "lwa," will pay a large sum of money for a treatment or to solve a problem. As a houngan told me: "Yo fe tankou yo gen lwa, yo fe intelijan pou yo rache lajan nan men moun Ki pa Konnen Vodou."⁴⁷ Sincere Voodoo dignitaries deplore the exploitation perpetrated by quacks. The priestess Marcelle Laquerre condemns their actions in the following terms: "Mwen menm, fidel sevite Lafrikginen, mwen deklare moun-sa yo se demagog ak vole."⁴⁸ A Voodoo priest from

Carrefour explained abuses of the "djeks," charlatans who extort money from naive individuals in search of "Ja Lajan" (huge containers of gold left in the country from the time of slavery by the French colonizers). These charlatans give a mini-spectacle, in special costumes, to invoke the alleged spirit, guardian of the gold. Some of them charge staggering sums of money for their fraudulent operations. One woman, the priest, attested, was forced to sell her house to pay a Djek \$35,000 for his simulated possession with its negative outcome.⁴⁹

Divination provides still another means of exploitation for some hougans. I, myself have consulted over a period of four years with a series of card readers who pretend to invoke Voodoo Gods in order to tell one's fortune. Most of the so-called spirits never even came close to the truth. In New York, I witnessed the following: the "divino" (card reader) performed an invocation at the beginning, and after a short while adopted a strange voice feigning that he was no longer himself. He asked me questions which I refused to answer. I made him understand that I was there to hear his analysis and not to provide him with information. He began to mumble stories removed from my own reality. Finally, aware of his blunders, angrily, without any hesitations, and in his natural voice, he asked me to leave.⁵⁰

Inauthentic possessions have also been observed in Africa. Osterreich writes:

These people are not always disposed to show unquestioning belief in all the phenomena; amongst them are sceptics who in some cases, where the state of a possessed is not sincere, obviously give him an embarrassing time.⁵¹

Some Voodoo authorities, such as the houngan and renowned national folklore dancer, Arnold Elie, and the priestess, Marcelle Laquerre, believe that the essence of Voodoo is revealed to the chosen through dreams. Mrs. Laquerre affirms having been instructed directly by the Gods. She adds, however, that she learned many other secrets and principles during the period of initiation. The houngan Max Beauvoir states that Voodoo was passed on from one generation to the other through collective memory. Whatever, Voodoo offers a wide spectrum of rituals, myths, codes, invocation formulae, symbols, songs and dances. Thus, a special education is necessary for the novice. Roger Bastide refers to the "ecole de la brousse" (bush school) for the preparation of the candidates in Brazil.

Elle a assiste aux fetes elle sait pas mal de choses. Mais il lui faut se perfectionner, passer si l'on veut de l'experience empirique au savoir organise.⁵²

The Voodoo neophyte has to undergo a training that may extend from weeks to months. In Dahomey (Benin today), where Voodoo originated, the initiation period used to last 3-8 years. Apparently, it has been shortened lately. In Haiti, in Souvenance where pure Dahomean Voodoo is

practiced, the grand priest Bien Aime, used to require several years of preparation of his candidates. He too, reduced the duration of initiation, due to the difficulties of today's life. I learned from Max Beauvoir and Marcelle Laguerre that most priests nowadays require a 41-day preparation from all novices.

What is taught to the Voodoo pupils during initiation is, for the most part, a secret to outsiders. But some data are available. The actual retreat is marked by two main phases: the "antre kanzo" or "kouche'kanzo" ("putting to bed" of the novice) which shows the symbolic death of the novice; and the public resurrection after a few days. This rite of passage, specifically, the stay in the "Djevo" (initiation room), contributes to remaking the personality of the neophytes. Emerging, they have been conditioned to become the Gods' servants. They have been taught a type of behavior; they are now chosen to represent their "lwa met tet" (chief deity) and perhaps others.

A series of prayers and invocation formulae have to be learned, some of them in a mixture of African and Creole languages. Memorization and fluent delivery, as in acting, are of paramount importance to the effectiveness of the ceremony. A houngan, unable to perform properly, with the expected spontaneity and flexibility, would not be respected nor trusted. His task is difficult and demands considerable effort. The amount of material to master appears formidable when one considers that the invocation

alone - prayers, invocation formulae and songs - in a public ceremony, lasts up to 60 minutes (it varies from region to region). Here is an excerpt from an invocation prayer recited at a Petro ceremony.

Legba Atibon - Marasa Dosou Dosa - Loko Atisou,
 Ayizan Velekete, Danbala wedo Dokan, Ayida Wedo,
 Sobo Kesou, Bade Sikwa, Agasou Jemen, Nouvavou
 Lakwa, Agweta woyo, La Siren La Bale-n, Ezili
 Freda, Zobolo Bosou, Misye Toro, Agasou wedo,
 Kouzen Zaka Medo, Sen Jak Maje, Ogou Badagri,
 Achade Boko, Ogou Balendjo, Ogou Feray, Tout
 Nanchon Ogou, Baron Samdi, Bawon Lakwa, Bawon
 Simitye, Papa Bawon, Bawon Kriminel, Mamman Brijit,
 Guede Lakwa, Ti Pis Lakwa, Pikan Lakwa, Ti Guede
 Lakwa, Pousye Lakwa, Tout nanchon Guede, Met Kafou,
 Met Gran Bwa, Met Simitye, Simbi yandezo, Simbi
 Anbaka, Simbi Zile, Simbi Makaya, Ezili Danto,
 etc...⁵³

It must be noted that the houngan must not only retain all these names (over 50 in total), but must also remember the order in which they have to be invoked. The novice, not often exposed to Voodoo before, learns at least the major prayers and songs from his initiator, but may still have to further his training in the peristyle with the community.

Salutations constitute a very significant part of the rituals. Every movement, every gesture, seems to be carefully calculated. In fact, corporal expression is studied under the supervision of an expert. I observed the first part of an initiation ceremony where the novice who was to enter the Djevo was being directed by the priest in front of the public. After the Ayizan (spirit which

presides over the initiation rite) Ceremony, the Catholic litanies and the flagbearers parade, the novice, preceded by the flagbearers, and held by two mambos, was brought out. She appeared tired, reluctant to participate, but the priest encouraged her. She did not know the movements and looked awkward. The priest slowly turned in front of her and indicated how to salute towards the four cardinal points. Then she was taught how to hold and shake the "ason," the sacred rattle endowed with the power of invocation. Four other priests demonstrated how to behave with the ason. Many times she was corrected, but she was learning. The priest made her salute the drums and kiss the ground near them, then turn around the central pillar and kiss it. At times she showed slight signs of trance, but she fell, not knowing yet how to carry the lwa. Little by little, she gained confidence and assertiveness, until she became the star she was supposed to be that night, singing, dancing, surrounded by priests and hounsis.⁵⁴

Alfred Metraux describes a similar example of directing:

"Several times over the course of the ceremony, the hunsi make the novices repeat the salutations and dance steps which they have taught them. These are the last lessons to be received in public. The pupils perform all together, facing the hunsi, who only take them to one side if they need advice. The mambo does not hesitate to scold the ones who make mistakes and even knock them about a bit - as well as showing them where they went wrong. These repetitions are known as "balancer" (swinging). They also include hand-clap rhythms.⁵⁵

More instruction is given to the novice inside the "Djevo." It is clear that rehearsals of what is to be performed later at the public ceremony are part of the novice's initiation.

Another Voodoo salutation is the "troke ason" (exchange of ason). It requires coordination and control and must be practiced a number of times before the performer masters it. It is a form of sign language, a special dance between two priests or priestesses in which they display their knowledge to each other. In fact one houngan may use it to test the competency of a colleague. Harold Courlander gives a vivid description of the "troke ason" in The Drum and the Hoe:

He was extending the courtesy of his hounfor, sharing his instruments of authority and religious power with his fellow hungan. Then followed an exhibition between the two hungans that was half duel and half ballet. They stood face to face, each of them holding the ason in one hand and the tiny bell in the other. Stephen was 'testing' the young hungan for the benefit of all present. Each tiny move made by Stephen was duplicated simultaneously by his guest, as though he were a mirrored reflection. Every posture Stephen made was duplicated instantly by his guest. The asons and the bells were agitated constantly. The rattle in the young man's hand did precisely what Stephen's did. The two men looked into each other's eyes with intensity as though this bound their movements together and unified them. When Stephen twisted to the left, the other hungan twisted to the right. Every contortion of the young man was an exact replica of Stephen's movements. The two asons rattled out the same rhythms and the same signals; so did the bells. The backdrop for his "test" was provided by the drummers. The faces of the two men broke into a sweat from the intense nervous effort....The

testing ceremony was over. The visiting hungan had been proven.⁵⁶

The salutations of the hounsi to the priest also require control. In Jacmel at Hyppolite's Sanctuary, I saw some well-executed twirls. In the last part of the ceremony, after the exit songs, the hounsis saluted the drums and the "poto mitan" then each, in turn, paid respects to the dignitary. The latter stood majestically, holding one arm high. Every hounsi, one after the other, took his hand, turned under his arm right and left, then gracefully curtsied in front of him. This delicate number was performed by all after 15 consecutive hours of intense celebration.⁵⁷ In the ceremonial of courtesy - between priests, between hounsis and priests, all movements and gestures appear meticulously studied for mystical significance as well as esthetic effect.

In general, the worshipper who is not initiated does not have the proper behavior when in trance. His state of possession takes a confused, disorganized form as expressed in the Voodoo saying "Lwa-a poko batize, se yon Lwa bosal" (the God has not yet been honored by the worshipper; it is still at a primitive stage.) It is the initiation training that will teach him how to embody the divine character:

Le novice apprend peu a peu a donner une forme a cette force initialement sauvage (bossale) qu'il sent en lui...c'est le pretre qui faconne peu a peu cette forme comme si gardien du modele il pouvait ainsi le sculpter a partir de la matiere brute de

la transe. Il met donc en forme la crise de possession.⁵⁸

Several Voodoo priests and priestesses obstinately maintain that possession cannot be learned, that it is a divine gift. However, as France Schott Billman, Claude Planson - a Voodoo initiate married to the well-known mambo Mathilda Beauvoir - attests:

La possession s'apprend. Comme le theatre, il lui faut un metteur en scene. Ici intervient le houngan ou la mambo, non seulement pour diriger la ceremonie, mais encore pour former par l'initiation, ceux qui en sont les principaux interpretes et qui serviront de catalyseurs a l'ensemble du public.⁵⁹

Michel Huet's Danses d'Afrique (a collection of articles) presents a passage by J. Laude on the directorial aspect of Bambara possession:

Le cheval du genie est en possession du code des gestes, attitudes et comportements dont la mise en scene permettra de reconnaitre le genie incarne....Rien de spontane, mais au contraire une connaissance approfondie et detaillee de ce qui peut construire une personne, qui peut faire du corps le lieu d'incarnation provisoire d'une personne autre.⁶⁰

The directorial approach works jointly with the psychological one. The two, intertwined, build in the novice a firm basis for possession.

During initiation, the candidate is put in the appropriate mental state. Sexual abstinence and a light diet are imposed upon him. In addition, special herbal baths are administered.

According to Marcelle Laguerre, the candidate must take seven baths in seven days. Other houngans, such as Jacques Goodwin, require a much greater number of baths. The word "degre" (mystical power) indicates their special significance. They are conceived to purify the aspirant and prepare him spiritually for communion with the Gods. The role of the plants used in the infusions must be of extreme importance in the rite, for the Voodoo authorities categorically refuse to reveal their names, arguing that they represent one of the treasured secrets of Voodoo. Under the effect of these leaves, the novice becomes withdrawn from reality and more susceptible to suggestion. At this stage, the candidate is particularly vulnerable. Pierre Verger, describing the Orisa (vodun) initiation rites, writes: "C'est dans cet etat, sur un esprit lave de tout souvenir anterieur, que lui seront inculques les rythmes particuliers de l'Orisa, ses chants et tout le comportement du dieu."⁶¹ Henceforth, during initiation, implanted in the novice is the seed that he will rely on when necessary, just as the actor using "emotional memory" technique draws from his inner life, his past experiences and sensations, the elements needed to portray a given character. In the Bori experience, directing is also a part of initiation according to Jacqueline Monfouga Nicolas. In Ambivalence et possession, she writes:

La Jakeso est la veritable initiatrice de la future adepte. Elle lui enseigne les moindres caracteristiques des membres du pantheon, un mauvais apprentissage et l'initiee ne sera jamais une grande femme Bori, seul statut veritablement epanouissant au sein du culte.⁶²

Further in the book, Nicolas refers to the "modele gestuel propose par la Jakeso reproduisant et incitant l'adepte a reproduire les gestes des dieux."⁶³

Stage directing may also be observed in the organization of the ceremonies. The celebration is the product of teamwork. The roles are carefully distributed, and each member bears special responsibilities. The priest or priestess performs the religious duties. He/she leads the ceremony. It is his/her task to greet the Gods or appease them when they become too violent. France Schott Billman calls the priest the director of the ceremony: "Comme un chef d'orchestre, il suscite la parole chez certains esprits, en fait taire d'autres, se permet de renvoyer les indesirables....En etroite collaboration avec les musiciens, il regle le ballet des possedes, prolonge ou ecourte les possessions."⁶⁴ He is also the host. If he has a big hounfo (sanctuary), he might take time before the ceremony to show some of the guests the various rooms dedicated to the Gods. The "Laplace" is the master of ceremonies. He is responsible for keeping order in the peristyle. Furthermore, he marches in front of all processions and coordinates them if necessary. Holding his

machete, he and the flagbearers present a choreographed appearance. The hounquenicon conducts the chorus. He is the vocal lead. The hountogui (initiated drum player) and the other drummers not only provide the music, but play a key role in keeping the ceremony alive. At some ceremonies, the main performer is led to the hounfo to change costume each time a new deity is represented. In certain cases, the possessed does not go to the dressing room and the change of costume is made in front of the audience. He is assisted by someone who carries the ornaments.

A Voodoo ceremony may be likened to a theatrical production realized by an organized crew under the supervision of a director. To that crew should be added another group of people who, although not always directly involved, contribute to the activities of the hounfo.

Metraux refers to the support society: The

... 'societe soutien', by means of its subscriptions, helps towards the maintenance of the hounfo, defends its interests if they are threatened and helps the houngan to organize the big feastings of the gods, which he is bound to give.⁶⁵

The audience is indispensable to the actor. Without it, the theatrical event cannot take place. Jerzy Grotowski accorded special importance to it. "The theatre cannot exist without the actor-spectator relationship of

perceptual, direct, live communion."⁶⁶ These same relationships are found in Voodoo rituals.

The private Voodoo ceremonies are limited to the priest, family members, a few hounsins and special guests. In such circumstances, the small audience participates, but is expected to behave differently than at a public ceremony. According to Metraux, in private ceremonies the Gods possess only the members of the family: "If a stranger went into a trance, it would be thought bad taste and he would be asked to remove himself."⁶⁷

Other rituals are open to all. For instance, the "Voodoo dance", as mentioned by Herskovits, "is viewed quite differently, for news of it is widely spread by word of mouth."⁶⁸ I went to a Voodoo ceremony for which formal invitations were sent to a number of people in advance. Here is a copy of the invitation ticket:

Mr et Mme ANDRE JEAN
vous convient a une Messe d'Action de Grace a
l'occasion de la Ste-Rose, le Samedi 30 Aout 86
en l'Eglise St-Charles a 5 hres 30 A.M.
et dans la soiree a la danse traditionnelle.⁶⁹

Women, men, infants, children, old ones, all are welcome. There is no strict separation between officiants and spectators, and the communication between the two is usually intense, save on rare occasions when the atmosphere might be a bit tense. Audience participation is sought in various ways. Spectators are invited to sing, to clap and to dance. This activity contributes to the invocation of

the deities. Contrary to the shamanistic ceremonies where possession is a privilege limited to the shaman, here possession is experienced by any Voodoo faithful. The interaction between celebrant and onlookers was particularly remarkable at a ceremony in Jacmel. The priest poured libations near each member of the audience he could reach. Each spectator responded by bowing and knocking on the ground. Then, he and the hounsisi (about 40), one after the other, shook hands with all. Later, the audience sang, clapped and was invited to dance with the office holders. The ceremony reached its peak as priests, hounsisi, other dignitaries and members of the audience joined together, stricken by the fire of possession, rejoiced with the rest of the crowd in a communion of vibrations, as in an ecstatic revel.⁷⁰

Another interesting aspect of the ceremonies is the dialogue between the Gods and the participants: Guede the buffoon with his lewd speech, courts the women, flirts with them, tries to seduce them and mimes the sexual act as indecently as possible to the amusement of his fans. Zaka collects money and gifts from his friends to put in his djakout (bag) and makes them laugh with his peasant dialect and mannerisms. Some serious problems can also be debated between the Gods and members of the audience. Similarly, in Bali, as Beryl de Zoete notes in Dance and Drama in Bali, the Gods, through the mediums, discuss with the

villagers the problems of the community and express their wishes.⁷¹ Usually, members of the public ask the "lwa" for advice or ask them about their future. Reciprocally, a God may blame a "pitit Kay" (child of the house) for not obeying his orders or may attempt to solve a problem for someone.

Grotowski's early theatre attempted to establish similar intimacy with the audience. He perceived a separation of the stage between performers and viewers as an obstacle to live communion between the two. His conception of the chamber theatre where the "spectator can feel the actor's breathing and smell his perspiration"⁷² was applied in such productions as Byron's Cain, Wyspianski's Akropolis and Marlowe's Dr. Faustus. In Cain, he brought the audience and the actors together by connecting the acting area to the auditorium. For Akropolis, although there was no direct contact between actors and spectators, the latter were integrated into the setting and became part of the dramatic action:

The actors represent those who have been initiated in the ultimate experience, they are the dead. The spectators represent those who are outside of the circle of initiates; they remain in the stream of everyday life; they are the living. This separation combined with the proximity of the spectators contributes to the impression that the dead are born from a dream of the living.⁷³

In Dr. Faustus, audience participation was encouraged in a more concrete fashion:

The audience were seated on benches around three refectory tables which functioned as both stage, setting, props. As they entered, Faustus already seated in the center of the head table, invited them to take their places as guests at what was specifically a last supper. The food served up to them by Faustus was a montage of scenes of his life, acted in front of them. But at the same time as being participants in a metaphoric communion, receiving the sacramental offering of Faustus' sacrificial damnation, they also found themselves representing the banality of everyday existence. The servants' dialogue in the comic scenes, deflating and mocking Faustus' pretensions, was spoken by actors seated among them....⁷⁴

The Living Theatre sought to break all barriers between performers and spectators. Advocating total freedom, the Living Theatre's aim was to develop political consciousness in the public and revolt against the establishment. In Paradise Now, the actors confronted the viewers, as representatives of the social order to be fought. This created the atmosphere of a political demonstration. In The Rite of the Universal Intercourse, the fusion between public and actors reached its peak: "Naked spectators and actors embraced indiscriminately, even copulated."⁷⁵ Although they conceived of nudity, derogatory language and drugs as manifestations of protest against the status quo, the Living Theatre was seen as anarchic by many critics. Commenting on the direct communion of Grotowski's performers, and the Living Theatre's with the audience, Richard Schechner concludes that the two moved from theatre to ritual. "The move from theatre to ritual happens when the audience is dissolved

into the performance as participants."⁷⁶ With the line of demarcation between ritual and theatre so tenuous, the converse process may be observed, namely, ritual changing into theatre. Within the Voodoo context, this phenomenon may be viewed in the following examples.

Leonard Pongnon's huge peristyle in Mariani, Port-au-Prince, called Temple Macumba, offers the atmosphere and characteristics of a theatre. The space, or stage, reserved for officiants is a large square paved with fine sand. That alone makes it look different from most other Voodoo stages which are composed of simple earth. The acting area is separated from the public area; they are not on the same level. There are numerous painted and decorated gradins in cement on which are placed comfortable painted iron seats for the public. Nobody stands near the performers. In the middle of this vast place, there is a tall, robust, red painted central pillar surrounded by steps covered with ceramic tiles on which are engraved iron candle holders. The decoration of the entire house is remarkably modern and elegant: neon lamps, huge colorful murals representing the saints, balloons, big vases filled with flowers and fancy altars dressed with velvet covers. the religious objective remains, but the ritual I saw performed reflects a high sense of theatricality and a concern to please. A display of elaborate costumes adds to the spectacle: Mexican hats, satin capes, taffeta togas

and embroidered bonnets. Compelled by the architecture of the peristyle and the splendor of the spectacle, the audience sat removed, watching like in traditional theatre. Some people sang, some clapped. But the intensity, the intimacy peculiar to the usual Voodoo atmosphere, the heat transmitted from body to body that leads one to seek possession was not felt. In fact, and quite unusual, possession took place exclusively among the priest and the hounsis at the center of the stage. It did not spread and "contaminate" members of the audience. We were not real participants. The distance had broken the communion. At the Macumba Temple, a move from ritual to theatre was apparent.⁷⁷

"Le peristyle de Mariani" run by Max Beauvoir presents similar traits, but goes much further. In an interview with Beauvoir, he describes his stage: "There is a circle with a central pillar for the sacred part and a separate circle with seats for spectators, this is the profane part."⁷⁸ Wade Davis puts the emphasis on the professional aspect of "le Peristyle de Mariani."

Max Beauvoir held a commercial vodoun ceremony every night. Anyone was invited and there was a ten dollar charge for tourists that supported his family and the thirty more people who worked for him. I arrived around ten and was taken into the peristyle, the roofed court of the hounfour, and was led around a semi-circle of tables to the one where Beauvoir sat at the head. A waiter brought me a drink. Beauvoir invited me to scan the assembly of visitors, and eclectic gathering that included some French sailors, several groups of Haitians, an anthropology professor

from Milan, a pair of journalists and a party of American missionaries.⁷⁹

According to Beauvoir, the objective of the ritual remains to honor the ancestors and celebrate life.

In the two cases mentioned above, the audience is not "dissolved into the performance as participants."⁸⁰ The theatrical aspect is paramount.

The chorus in Voodoo plays an important role as it did in the classical Greek theatre. It occupies a double function as an element of spectacle and a major structural feature. Originally, the dithyramb, according to Aristotle, was a hymn sung and danced by a chorus in honor of the Greek God, Dionysus. Even after the dithyramb evolved into drama, the chorus initially remained dominant. In Aeschylus' Agamemnon for instance, the chorus has 773 lines out of a total of 1673. The importance of the chorus lessened after Aeschylus, but it continued to play a role in Sophocles and Euripides dramas.

The Greek chorus resembles the Voodoo chorus in many ways. It is thought that, initially, the Greek chorus was composed of about fifty people. In the ceremonies I attended in Haiti, there were between thirty and fifty chorus members. Voodoo priests gather large numbers of singers. Some houngans even "borrow" a group of houns

from a colleague to add strength to their own chorus. The more powerful the singing, the more intense the ambiance. Both choruses contain a choir master: The dithyramb leader and the hounquenicon. The Greek chorus is presumed to have stood in a circle around the thymele. The Voodoo singers stand in a similar position around the central pillar and, like the Greeks, they always sing in unison.

The Chorus in Voodoo ritual represents an important structural feature; the ritual is shaped around it. Like the Greek, a choral presence is felt throughout the performance. The chorus contributes to the theatrical effectiveness of the rituals with songs and dances expressing different emotions and moods, reinforcing the content and meaning of the ceremony. In Agamemnon, the chorus, as it enters, fills the air with anguish. There is a sense that something horrible is going to happen. It sets the mood by communicating its dark apprehensions to Clytemnestra: "Our fear that works in us thoughts of evil."⁸¹ The Voodoo chorus conveys similar foreboding. For example, when a ceremony shifts from the Rada rite to the Petro, the chorus intensifies the singing and the dancing. With the change in energy, the aggressiveness of the Petro Gods is suggested:

One la mezon.	Hail folks!
Si se gran moun-n Ki la,	if you are brave enough,
ma rantre;	I will come in: if you
Si se ti moun-n Ki la,	are cowards,
ma vire do-m male."	I will leave." ⁸²

The Greek chorus acts at times not as commentator or narrator but as protagonist, wearing costumes appropriate to the role. The Voodoo chorus, too, is, at times, costumed to suggest special action. At some Bohum services (funerary rites) the chorus wears black and white. In Jacmel at a ceremony dedicated to Zaka and Ezili, the chorus changed costumes three times, wearing a standard yellow and white, then black for Guede and red for Ogoun.⁸³

The Voodoo chorus often sings on behalf of the Gods as characters directly involved in the action. In the name of Ogoun they sing:

"Jou Kole m' pa Jwe,	When I am angry,
Jou-m fache, m'pa jwe."	I don't play, when I am
	annoyed I don't play. ⁸⁴

A considerable portion of the repertoire is composed of songs in the first person which heightens their dramatic effect.

The Greek chorus sheds light on the action as it unfolds. In Agamemnon, the chorus has knowledge of the past. It knows there is a curse on the House of Atreus; it understands the meaning of retribution. Gradually, it comprehends the events and becomes the conscience of the play:

So the king did the high gods allow lay low Priam's town, and he came blest with honour of heaven - yet if for the bloodshed in the years gone full price he must pay and must...die for the dead so that others who die may have vengeance....⁸⁵

I attended a kouche kanzo (ceremony of initiation) where the chorus systematically outlined the circumstances. To prepare the arrival of the novice, the chorus intervened with the following song:

La pli tonbe, te-a glise,	The rain has fallen.
nou prale we si na pase."	The ground is slippery,
	we are going to try to
	pass.

This statement underlines the impending difficulties of initiation. While the novice was receiving instruction on the manipulation of the "ason" (sacred rattle), the most important instrument in the invocation of the Gods, the chorus sang:

"Nap prepare pou nal	We are preparing,
regle zafe nou."	in order to take care
	of our problems.

Indeed, the power of the priest is believed to be in the "ason." The expression "pran ason" means to have the power to communicate with the Gods, and therefore, brings hope that the problems of life will be more easily solved. Later, when the priests and priestesses surrounded the candidate to comfort her, the chorus expressed the idea of brotherhood and solidarity:

Fre nou tout se fre,	Brothers, we are all
se nou tout se se.	brothers, sisters, we
	are all sisters.
Si lennmi bare nou,	If the enemy attacks us,
Se, nou tout se se."	sisters, we are all sisters.

Finally, the novice was going to be led into the initiation room to complete her engagement. The chorus now voiced

final warning, for once the oath is sworn by the novice, it is irreversible. A betrayal would result in serious consequences. Therefore, the candidate must be responsible and respect her engagement.⁸⁶

Lastly, both choruses manifest wisdom, take stands against wrongdoings and give advice. In Agamemnon, the chorus, finally, expresses a philosophical point of view. "Reproach meets reproach. I know not who here can hold the balance. The spoiler spoiled. Kill - your life is forfeit. God's law is sure. He who wrongs, to him shall wrong be done - in full."⁸⁷ the Voodoo chorus teaches the hounsisi honesty and humility:

"Hounsi an-yo,	Hounsi, what you see here,
sa nou we la-a,	since the beginning you
depi nou te paret	knew your father was poor.
nou te konnen papa	Ladies, do not betray
nou se te papa malere.	yourselves, do not betray
Medam pa trayi tet	your father. ⁸⁸
nou pa trayi, papa nou."	

The chorus endows Voodoo rituals with an operatic quality. As in opera, the main actions are sung throughout the performance.

According to Milo Rigand, the Voodoo repertoire is composed of thousands of songs, divided into three main types: Rada, Congo, Petro.

Many of the very old songs are known by most Haitians. Others, however, are improvisations of a priest or possessed inspired by special circumstances.

There is great beauty in a number of Voodoo songs. One category in particular, deserves special mention: the bohum or funerary songs, touching in their melodies as well as their lyrics. At a Bohum service in Bizoton, Port-au-Prince, the chorus sang with great empathy for the dead Voodoo dignitary, Elyaza:

Elyaza ou ale avek regre	Elyaza, you passed away
Nan men ki moun ou kite	In whose hands did you leave
pitit ou-yo?	your children?
Kriye pa leve la mo	Tears do not resurrect the
O! si kriye te leve la mo	dead O! if tears could
Elyaza ta kouri leve	resurrect the dead Elyaza
	would at once wake up. ⁸⁹

Some hounguenicons or choir masters display much talent. Male and female, they give the audience pleasure as singers. In Soukri in particular, I heard some outstanding solists.⁹⁰ Voodoo singing is an aspect of Haitian culture which, after four centuries, remains essentially African. The Voodoo singer usually dances while he sings, with the physical activity adding special energy and power to the voice.

Theatre and music have been linked throughout the ages. The Greeks used music as accompaniment to recitatives. the flute, together with the voice, added emotional color to the performances. Nietzsche, who calls tragedy a "product of the spirit of music,⁹¹" using Schopenhauer's words, helps to establish the rapport between the two:

"Music, if regarded as an expression of the world, is in the highest degree a universal language which is related indeed to the universality of concepts...this deep relation which music bears to the true nature of all things also explains the fact that suitable music played to any event or surrounding seems to disclose to us its utmost secret meaning and appears as the most accurate and distinct commentary upon it."⁹²

Further, Nietzsche, himself, corroborates this point of view:

"Image and concept...gain a heightened significance under the influence of truly appropriate music.. Dionysiac art, then, affects this Apollonian talent in a twofold manner: first, music incites us to a symbolic intuition of the Dionysiac universality; second, it endows that symbolic image with supreme significance....Music is capable of giving birth to myth...and above all, to the tragic myth which is a parable of Dionysiac knowledge...the metaphysical delight in tragedy is a translation of instinctive Dionysiac wisdom into images. The hero, the highest manifestation of the will, is destroyed, and we assent, since he too, is merely a phenomenon, and the eternal life of the will remains unaffected. Tragedy cries: 'We believe that life is eternal!' and music is the direct expression of that life".⁹³

The intimate relationship between the musical element and theatre manifests itself in other times and countries. Music was prominent in Medieval theatre. If in the early Christian days, the church was reluctant to approve of any type of music other than the plain chant of the liturgical drama, later when the theatre moved outside the church and the strict context of worship, professional musicians were hired to play before the actors came on stage, during the performance to accompany the choir, during intermission and after the play. Shakespeare made extensive use of music on stage. He inserted background music into his plays, e.g.,

fanfares in battle scenes and royal pageants. The relationship between theatre and music developed further in Italy during the 17th century with Opera. Later in Germany, Wagner explored the music drama, a combination of poetry, music and dancing. Modern theatre employs theatre and music elements as shown in Brecht's plays, particularly The Three penny Opera. The Oriental Theatre - Indian, Chinese, Japanese - offer no exception. Melodrama and musical comedy in the United States also underline the importance of music in the theatre.

Similarly in Voodoo, music occupies a major place. The dominant instrument is the drum. Although the drum is absent in a number of private rituals, its role in public ceremonies is most important. It provides a special life to the whole activity. It accompanies the songs, helps to choreograph the dances, accentuates the rhythms, and creates mood. Even more striking are its psychological effects: it heats up the atmosphere, rouses the worshippers' spirits to a high degree and leads to possession. According to Voodoo believers, the Gods are attracted by its powerful vibrations. The houngan Hyppolite offers these comments about the drum. "Li se chef banboch mistik-la. Se li menm Ki mennen lwa-yo desan-n. Si pa gen tanbou, lwa-yo ap repon-n, men yo pap pran plezi yo menm jan."⁹⁴ Voodoo as Rouget put it, referring to the relationship between music and trance

"creates an upheaval in the structure of consciousness"⁹⁵ of the faithful. In fact, in many cases, it is the drum that provokes the crisis. Some worshippers fall into trance at the signal of the drum and fall out of trance as the drumbeats fade away. The contribution of the drum to a Voodoo ceremony may be compared to the following description made by a Dahomean: "You know how crucial the function of the musicians is at home in all possession ceremonies. One has the feeling that they are the ones who lead the play, that under their power, the possessed are but puppets receiving their orders."⁹⁶ In Haiti the influence of the drum is so ubiquitous that this instrument has established itself as the most popular in the country. In fact, it is commonly believed that very few Haitians can remain indifferent to the magic of a drumbeat.

According to Verger, the drum is sacred and even identifies with the Gods in the Orisa-Vodun cults of Bahia: "Non seulement les tambours appellent et saluent les divinités, mais dans les moments où l'atmosphère devient plus frénetique, les tambours sont la voix des dieux, une sorte d'imperatif sonore où l'orisa exige le corps de ses iyawo pour s'y manifester".⁹⁷ Thus, the drum is not mere accompaniment, it is in itself language, message. Ruth Finnegan emphasizes the importance of drum language in Africa:

"Drum language is used for formalized announcements. There are drum messages about births, marriages, deaths and forthcoming hunts...The announcement of an enemy's approach is also transmitted by a special alert signal and the words beaten out in drum language...Among the Akan and the Yoruba, drum poetry appear in invocations to spirits of various kinds. Important rituals are also accompanied by suitable drum poems"⁹⁸

As in Brazil, in Haiti the drum is sacred.

Worshippers believe it has a soul. In fact, there is a drum divinity called Hounto. For some hounfos (temples) according to Rigaud and Verger, all drums dedicated to the cults are baptized and must be now and then reenergized by means of offerings and sacrifices. Rigaud refers to the "coucher tambour" (putting the drums to bed): "Coucher les tambours signifie analogiquement qu'on les renvoie a Ife pour les recharger de pouvoirs Kabbalistiques de meme que les degres de l'initiation envoient les impetrants a Ife pour leur en conferer les grades".⁹⁹

The drums receive special salutations in ceremonies: Worshippers kneel down to kiss the ground where they stand and pour libations in front of them. Drummers themselves, are given special attention. In Soukri, the officiants and other members of the cult intermittently bring the drummers their ration of Kleren or rum and wipe their faces when they perspire too much. A faithful possessed by the God Yatibwa, in one night gave the drummers cash rewards several times.¹⁰⁰ sometimes, spectators satisfied with the performance of the drummers, also manifest their

appreciation. In a very friendly, even playful manner, they reward the musicians. I saw onlookers glue money onto the drummer's forehead and challenge him to pick it up while playing. Or even funnier, they put the bill in the musician's mouth until he can free his hands to remove it.¹⁰¹

One special drum, the Asoto - called in Dahomey sato or asato - bears the status of a God. Jacques Roumain in Le Sacrifice du Tambour, underlines the difference between the latter and the other drums: "Ils sont les serviteurs, les instruments de la deite tandis que l'assoto(r) n'est pas que cela. Revetu de la peau sacrificielle, il est aussi et surtout le puissant dieu Afro-Haitien".¹⁰²

Grandiose ceremonies take place at the consecration of this drum, as described by Roumain in his monograph.

Courlander, in Haiti Singing, points out the outstanding status of Assoto in the Voodoo worship:

"The Assoto is the greatest of all things in the hounfo. When the Assoto is played, the loas are awakened everywhere...to be an Assoto, the drum must not only have the shape of an Assoto but must be accepted by the loa...The Assoto service is the biggest of all services. It lasts 15 days. The Assoto drum is dressed in the finest of clothing and kerchiefs. It is the king of everything."¹⁰³

In Souvenance, the Asoto indeed receives royal treatment. It is kept in a special room to which no one has access except those in charge, and which is open only on special occasions. A special celebration is offered to

the Assoto regularly every year on the Tuesday following Easter. This is the only time of the year the Assoto is seen in public, the ceremony lasting several hours.

The drums play different rhythms according to the God invoked. In Haiti, three sets of drums correspond to the three basic Voodoo rites: Rada, Congo, Petro. The Rada calls for three drums. The tallest is called "mother"; the medium or "second" and the small, or "bou-la." The Congo set also includes three: "mother," "gronde" and "katabou." The set of three is also found in Brazil: rum (the biggest), rumpi (medium), le (smallest). Similarly, the Japanese theatre also makes use of drums. The Noh orchestra comprises, besides the flute, a set of three drums: a shoulder drum, a knee drum and a flat drum. The last Voodoo rite, Petro, contrary to the above, employs only two drums: The "mother" and the "second".

A few other instruments compose the Voodoo orchestra: the ogan or iron bell. In certain regions, such as Jacmel, an "akodeyon mo-n" (countryside accordion) is played at the "bal vyolon" (violin ball) dedicated to the deity Zaka. The "lanbi" or conch shell may be added to the ensemble, but it is rarely found save in areas such as Cabaret, as observed by Emmanuel C. Paul. In comparison to the drum, these instruments play a secondary role. In ceremonies where there is no instrument, a small group of participants may imitate the sound of the drum with their mouths. This

oral orchestra produces wonderful sounds, though not as powerful as those of the drum.¹⁰⁴ Another type of sound accompanies the "Mare Paket" ceremony. A group of initiates, while singing, must beat on a number of stoneware plates until the latter are broken into tiny pieces.¹⁰⁵ These sounds follow certain rhythms and serve as accompaniment to the songs. They seem to have special meaning, for while they are accompanying the chorus, no drum interferes.

Dance has been called the mother of theatre. Men are believed to have begun to express their emotions through movements of the body. Primitive dances ensured communication among members of the tribe and contributed to its continued existence. Tribal members danced after a war to celebrate their victory and to rehearse battle techniques for the next expedition. Such performances served to instruct future warriors. Hunters imitated animal movements. Men danced to celebrate life in all its stages: birth, marriage, death, but also to honor or propitiate the spirits they believed in. The Egyptians developed dance as a ritual but also as an art. The Dance of Stars, one of their most sophisticated dances, shows their advancement in that field:

"The dance was scientifically designed....Ranged around a fixed altar which represented the sun, priests clad in scintillating clothes, made signs for the zodiac with their hand while turning rhythmically from east to west, following in the course of the planets. After each circle, the dancers froze into immobility to represent the constancy of their earth. By combining mimicry and plastic movement, the priests made legible the harmony of the astral system and the laws of the universe. Plato thought it must have been invented by a god for its ingenuity was entirely divine".¹⁰⁶

The Greeks considered as dance various types of movement. The word *orcheisthai*, (meaning to dance) could describe a procession, a march around the altar, gymnastics, as well as movements of the head, of the feet or of the entire body. On the other hand, *chironomia* consisted of more rhythmical and representational gestures, close to mime. Evidence suggests that during the Classical period, dance played an important role in all three Greek dramatic genres. In tragedy, the *stasima*, or songs, which separated the episodes, were danced. So were the *Komoi* or the chorus direct addresses to the actor. By the fourth century B.C., dances of the tragic chorus were known under the name of *emmeleia*, majestic, noble and grave. Dancing was not limited to the chorus. The actors, too, danced. Louis Sechan, in *La Danse Grecque Antique*, writes:

"Independement du chœur, nous devons aussi tenir compte des danses des acteurs eux-mêmes....De même que le chant surtout avec Euripides, s'est étendu du chœur aux acteurs, de même la danse s'est étendue aux protagonistes du drame soit dans le *komoi*, soit dans les duos - et parfois trios, soit dans les solos ou monodies particulièrement caractéristiques de l'art Euripidien....Dans les Phéniciennes, lorsque Jocaste revoit son fils Polynice, elle danse sous l'action de

la joie. Electre danse également dans Oreste lorsque condamnée à périr avec son frère, elle s'abandonne à une folle douleur. Enfin un rôle comme celui d'Agave dans les Bacchantes est par excellence un rôle danse".¹⁰⁷

In comedy, was found the Kordax, lascivious and licentious and in the satyr play, the sikinnis characterized by its cheerful movements. Contrary to the Greek classical period, as European drama in general evolved, dance became less significant.

Dance is important in the Oriental theatre. Antonin Artaud discusses dance in the Balinese theatre comparing it to Western theatre: "Our theatre which has never had this metaphysics of gesture...our purely verbal theatre unaware of everything that makes theatre...Our theatre might be given lessons in spirituality from the Balinese theatre".¹⁰⁸ In Bali, dance and drama are indivisible. In fact, the words dancer and actor are used interchangeably. Beryl de Zoete explains: "Drama is not the telling of a story, but action, dancing. The same word applies to both, for drama is only conveyed through the height of rhythm of dance, never to the flat pitch of actuality".¹⁰⁹ In the ardja, a sort of operetta, or the topeng, dance is essential. Even more so in the barong or trance dance, an important Balinese folk drama.

Dance also predominates in the Noh theatre of Japan. Noh is defined as a "highly stylized, extremely serious chanted dance drama."¹¹⁰ Acting is characterized by

carefully controlled and elegant gestures. Some movements express a feeling or an action. These are the monomane, close to reality, and even strong at times. But imitation through movements in front of a noble audience never goes beyond the realm of suggestion, for the goal then is Yugen (the flower) based on grace and beauty. In fact, for the master of the Noh drama, Zeami, "a shite had better perform a strong drama in elegant style when in the presence of an audience which appreciates elegance rather than strength even if this causes him to deviate from strict monomane."¹¹¹ Brockett emphasizes the role of dance in the Noh theatre: "A musical dance drama, the written script of a Noh play (typically shorter than the average one-act drama of the west) serves merely as a frame-work for choreographically ordered movement. All Noh plays culminate in a dance."¹¹² In The Poetics, Aristotle underlines the theatrical essence of dance: the art of dancing uses rhythm only...yet its rhythmic patterns too, imitate character, emotions and actions.¹¹³

In Voodoo, dance holds a dominant position as in African cultures in general. Emmanuel C. Paul writes: "Le chant est, avec la danse, le bagage le plus precieux que le negre ait transporte en Amerique."¹¹⁴ Sacred Voodoo dances have several meanings. They are offerings, homages to the Gods. More importantly, they are a celebration of life.

The hungan Max Beauvoir gave me an interview in which he vividly explained these aspects of Voodoo dances:

M.J.A.: Pou Ki sa gen dans nan yon seremoni? Ki sa dans la reprezante pou seremoni-a? Ki fonksyon-li?

M.B.: Pou Komanse, map di-ou Ke Pou mwen tout dans vodou, Kelke swa dans la, ou gen dwa Konsidere-l Kankou Yon Selebrasyon la vi, se ta di Ke nou Kontan nou an vi. Gen yon lot Korole laKay nou Ke ou tandè setenman an Afrik, Ke la vi avan tout bagay se ritm. LaKay nou se yon melanj Danbala ak Ayida wedo. Se ritm nan Ki ba ou la vi. Ou we Danbala ak Ayida ak yon ze nan bouch-ye. Ze, se li menm ki la vi. E Danbala-a toujou an mouvman. Se a pati de la la vi Komanse, la vi Kreye. Zanset-nou yo nan sajes-ye panse Ke yon selebrasyon la vi se toujou yon Kafou "du donner et du recevoir." Savle di wap bay e wap pran. Ou rele lwa-a, wap danse pou li, pase ou bezwen Ki-choy nan men li, men an menm tan, wap ba li on bagay, e sa wap ba li-a, se pa lajan, se ou menm, se meye Kado-a wap bay tet-ou. E se le ou bay tet ou net ke ou kapab resevwa sa ki pi presye nan men li-a, li menm menm kap monte-ou.

M.J.A.: Donk dans-la se yon ofran-n?

M.B.: Se pi gran ofran-n nan. Se sa ki fe sa ki pi enpotan, se pa danse byen.

M.J.A.: Se vibre.

M.B.: Se sa. Vwala. Se sa. Vibre. Se meye mo-a. Se li menm ki "dan"-an. Se sa ke ou genyen nan tout atikilasyon-

ou. Le ou gen la vi, tout atikilasyon-ou mou, ou ka bouje a lez. Osito ou mouri, atikilasyon-ou vini red, ou pedi dan-an, ou pedi vibrasyon-an.¹¹⁵

Dances are spiritual stimuli, one road to possession. In dancing the worshippers find the necessary energy to attain the state of possession. This is true not only in Voodoo, but in other African rituals. The Senegalese ritual, the Ndeup, is called crisis of possession of "Dance rituelle de possession" (ritual dance of possession). In it possession is reached through dance. An article from the review Carrefour quotes:

"Quand commence le Ndeup ou la dance sacree des possedes, c'est d'abord une choregraphie lente et monotone, rythmee sur trois temps, soulignee par un balancement des bras demi-flechis...Et puis, peu a peu, la dance s'accelere; les epaules et les corps ruissellent de sueur...progressivement la dance devient plus violente. Il faut tourner jusqu'au seuil de la perte de la conscience."¹¹⁶

Dance and possession are interdependent. While dancing helps some worshippers enter into trance, others become fine dancers only when they are energized by the heat of trance. The houngan Hyppolite of Jacmel admits that he is awkward as a dancer when he is in his normal state. But he gives breathtaking performances when entranced as I witnessed in Jacmel at his ceremony dedicated to the deities Kouzen and Ezili.¹¹⁷ This phenomenon is also known in Bali, where dancing is related to trance consciousness. The dancer's success depends upon

the degree to which he is possessed. Furthermore, it is believed that passages of certain Balinese dances can only be performed by someone in trance:

If the gods consent to enter the sang-hyang, the dance will be performed; if they do not, the dance will be performed just the same, muscular memory supplying the lack of divine inspiration. The priest however declares that a certain passage in the dance cannot be performed except by someone in trance and the great difficulty of the movement certainly seems to support his statement.¹¹⁸

The same observation about Balinese children is made in Schechner's book Between Theatre and Anthropology.

Schechner states:

"By degrees, the little girls become more and more subject to the ecstasy produced by intoxicating songs, by the incense and by the hypnotic power of the pemangku (priest). The training goes on until the girls are able to fall into a deep trance, and a formal performance can be given. It is extraordinary that although the little girls never received dancing lessons, once in a trance they are able to dance in any style, all of which would require ordinary dancers months and years of training to learn."¹¹⁹

In Soukri Danache, dancers of all ages amaze the audience with their expertise. The worshipper Danny Danache, a very coy man, becomes utterly exuberant and has pins and needles in his legs when dancing as the deity Yatibwa. Among the most astonishing are the children and elderly. Tiyoungit, about 10 years old, demonstrates unusual swiftness and energy. In 1986, she relentlessly danced 11 nights in a row.¹²⁰ On August 18, 1986, I took these notes in Soukri Danache: One woman detaches herself

from the crowd to dance a solo. Soon, another one joins her. The two give a wonderful show. They are both over 50 and very heavy. But with such high spirits, age and weight constitute no handicap. They dance with admirable stamina. In Deronville-Gonaives, at Herard Simon's peristyle, I saw a fascinating Voodoo dance. It consisted of very complicated steps. The dancers gave the impression that they were about to fall, lose their balance every so often. But each time, they bounced back to the center with ease, finding the proper equilibrium to stand straight again.¹²¹ I asked Max Beauvoir his opinion of these performances. He answered:

"Le ou gade moun-n yo ki tapdanse lot jou-yo, ou we yon ban-n Ko Ki tap danse bel. Se ko moun-n yo ou we, men ou pedi esansyel-la, se lespri moun-n yo. Ko-a suiv lespri-ya. Menm si moun-n nan te led, moun-n nan vini bel naturelman, li vi-n meveye."¹²²

Not only does Beauvoir think that the state of possession endows the performer with great talent and flexibility, he also affirms that it increases his endurance:

"Souvan ou we moun danse san rete pandan de ze. Tout moun-n sa yo posede a on seten degre. Otreman, li pa posib fizikman. M gen prev-la. M gen yon seri Ti Medam, on twoup dans Ki rele: 'Le Soleil,' Potoprens, Ki di mwen: Beauvoir, Kite nou vini danse pou wou. Mwen asepte. Byen Ke se te danse pwofesyonel, yo pa dire 20 minit. Apre 20 minit, lang-yo te long sa. Pa te gen yon-n ki te rete sou se-n nan...Vwala tan li pran nan yon dome-n pwofa-n. Donk le-ou gade sakre ya, ou bije ba li yon bagay an plis. Nan fen sware-ya, tout moun fatigue, tandis Ke danse pa mwen-yo, se le sa-a yo pral nan bal, yo pral amize yo. Sa se yon seten degre posesyon Ki ba yo rezistans sa-a."¹²³

Voodoo dances reproduce the character and actions of the Gods. Courlander describes a Legba dance as follows:

"A hounsi, usually a man, comes out of the dance court, wearing a kind of cane-crutch called the baton Legba, or Legba stick. The baton is about the length of a cane with a long, grotesquely twisted handle that fits under the crotch of the legs. The dancer wraps around the stick and walks as though he has only one foot. In the dance, he spins around on the stick, leaps and pirouettes."¹²⁴

Among other famous dramatic dances must be singled out the Yanvalou, the Petro, the Nago and the Banda.

The Yanvalou, especially the Yanvalou Doba (bent-back yanvalou) is called the supplication dance. The dancers keep their backs bent, hands on knees. The undulation from the shoulders to the hips imitates the movement of the serpent and the waves of the sea. E. C. Paul acknowledges the mimetic character of the Yanvalou. "En dansant le Yanvalou, on represente, on joue Danbala symbolise par la couleuvre...la fonction de cette danse est double. Elle sert egalement a rendre hommage a Agwe et a sa femme Ezili, parce que sa mime evoque la mer."¹²⁵

Unlike the Yanvalou, the Petro dance shows no passivity but an impulse to dominate the environment. Vivacious movements reflect the aggressivity of the Petro Gods.

The Nago dance is dedicated to Ogou, "neg la ge" (man of war), hence its extreme vigor. This dance is noted for its pirouettes and the rapidity with which it is executed.

Here, the accompaniment of the drum is as hot as the dance. This is one of the occasions when the drummer himself might reach his peak and even appear possessed.

The Banda is perhaps the best known Voodoo dance both inside or outside the hounfo. This dance mimes sexuality and death, characteristics of Guede whom it honors. The Banda can be compared to the licentious dance of the ancient Greek comedy, the Kordax. Both are lascivious and characterized by suggestive waddlings of the hips. Like the Kordax, the Banda, for many people, is only acceptable as spectacle. To perform it offstage would be considered bad taste, even shocking.

The American researcher and performer of Voodoo dances, Lavinia Williams, commented on the above dances and some others in an interview she gave me in Haiti:

"Every God has a symbol...there is a dance for each and every part of the body. Dance of the feet, called Mayi, war dance for Ogoun. Dance of the hips, Congo, Djouba. Banda, which is really a belly dance...the rib cage dance, Nago, symbolic of war with the thrusting of the chest showing that you are invulnerable to harm. The shoulder dance, Zepol, symbolizes the trembling, the movement of trees, of the earth, for everything around you moves; the spine dance, Yanvalou, in honor of Danbala and Agwe; the hands dance "araignee" in honor of Guede Zarenyn, etc."¹²⁶

She mentioned that there are about 30 types of Voodoo dances. Then Mrs. Williams emphasized form and function in Voodoo. Worshippers do not dance just for the sake of gesticulation:

"The function of the ceremony describes the form everything in it will take. For instance, I have no rain. My children are starving. My harvest has gone down. I have to have rain. So I am going to give a ceremony in honor of Danbala, Met Agwe and Ayida Wedo because they are connected with water. According to the legend, when you see the rainbow and the sunshine, it means the devil is beating his wife. The legend comes from Africa. The legend in Voodoo is that Metres Ayida Wedo who is a rainbow Goddess is cohabiting with Agwe, the God of the sea. Papa Danbala (Ayida Wedo's husband) comes out of the spring and sees her cohabiting with Agwe. So he smacks her for not being faithful. And she cries. Her teardrops are raindrops. That is the most beautiful legend. I want to do its choreography one day. So when I know this and I want to have rain, I am going to give my ceremony in honor of those three lwas: Papa Danbala, Met Agwe and Ayida Wedo, because these three are connected very closely. O.K. That is my function. My function is to have rain. Now what form does this take on? I have to know every inch about Papa Danbala, all about Ayida Wedo and about Met Agwe, I have to know what they like to eat, what songs they like, as well as what dances they like, so that function describes the form my ceremony will take."¹²⁷

Finally, Voodoo dances, by reenacting the deeds or character of the Gods, serve as a vehicle to transmit knowledge of the African tradition. In the collection of articles, Danses d'Afrique," J. Laude notes: "La danse met en oeuvre un processus d'elucidation, de perpetuation et de transmission de la connaissance."¹²⁸ Through dances, as the Voodoo faithful, Aboudja, made clear, the Congo base, Soukri Danache, reminds us of a peculiar aspect of African tradition: tribal life.¹²⁹ The dances are divided according to tribes. There, the crowd changes for each dance. In other words, a given dance is executed not by

every worshipper, but specifically by the worshippers of each lwa to whom the dance is dedicated. When it is time to honor Yatibwa, the Yatibwa faithful take the floor and dance. When comes Laoka or Lenba Zaou's turn, his "divizyon" (regiment) takes over and replaces the previous group. The latter may temporarily leave or stay in the background. In other rituals, worshippers dance for all Gods. However, the tribal element, here, though less accentuated than in the Soukri rituals, may yet be perceived. As a rule, only one God is honored at a time. Never or very rarely do different Gods come to dance together.

Theatre presupposes not only performer and audience, but also an area reserved for the performance, or stage. From the classical Greek theatre to modern times, the stage has represented an important element in theatre. Among the best known stages in history are the Greek circular theatre, with the orchestra and the skene building introduced around 458 B.C.; the platea of the Middle Ages surrounded by mansions (earth, heaven, hell); the Elizabethan playhouses.

Just so, there exists a special space dedicated to Voodoo ceremonies: the peristyle. Franck Fouche calls it the privileged locale and describes it as follows:

"Pour la celebration des ceremonies, le vaudou institue en dehors du temple ou hounfo et ses dependances, le peristyle qui toutes proportions gardees, rappellerait la scene et le theatron grecs. Il est en terre battue, recouverte de feuilles de palmier ou de tole, suivant la situation economique du houngan ou de la mambo proprietaire. C'est une veritable scene ou se deroule l'ensemble spectaculaire du rituel, autour d'un poteau central consacre, appele poteau-mitan."¹³⁰

Basically, theatrical settings are conceived to provide a logical background for the action and suggest the essential meaning of the performance. In Voodoo rituals where the manifestation of the Gods is the ultimate goal, the poteau-mitan, the most remarkable feature of the peristyle, fulfills this criterion: It is a scenic metaphor. For the Voodoo believers, it houses the Gods until the latter descend into it. Hence, the entire ceremony revolves around it. As Metraux writes: "The poteau-mitan acts as the passage for spirits, that is to say, as the ladder by which spirits come down into the peristyle when they are invoked."¹³¹ Louis Maximilien finds the origin of the poteau-mitan in the Indian tradition left by the first inhabitants of Santo Domingo. He also finds its traces in Africa, mainly in Egypt in the ceremonies dedicated to Osiris. Coincidentally, the vertical axis is also honored in Japan. In fact, the Noh drama uses it symbolically. Kirby points out the Yogo Pine used in the decor:

The single pine which is always pictured on the wall of the Noh stage is said to have been inspired by this tree, the Yogo pine, at Nara, but it is actually a generic image, a reference to the ritual sakaki tree in the myth of Uzume and Amaterasu, and a representation of the principle of the tree as conductor in shamanistic trance possession. Thus, the Noh drama retains in every presentation an image of its origins."¹³²

David Cole also identifies a "conductor" in the Renaissance stage.

It has long been recognized that the structure of the Elizabethan public playhouse represented the cosmos...the central opening at the top of the playhouse recalls the roof openings through which shamans are believed to set out on their trips to the illud tempus - a belief reflected in the Buddhist expression shattering the roof as a metaphor for ecstatic ascent. The pillars reaching from below the stage floor up toward this opening suggest (as does the painted pine of the Noh stage) the axis mundi, which the shaman climbs up or down to get to the illud tempus...the Elizabethan public playhouse reflected in its structure not only the cosmos which is the site of human action (the stage which all the world is) but also that specifically theatrical cosmos, that space at once both intrapsychic and social, through which the shaman-actor pursues his journey from an audience to an image."¹³³

Moreover, Cole interprets the presence of the central pillar on stage as a symbol of theatre in its very essence. As the conductor suggests the passage of the Gods from another world to the human world, theatre symbolizes the passage of life from one stage to another: "Theatrical performance is also a moment in which life that has long been latent (that of the image) suddenly comes back to life (that is, achieves presence in the body of the hungan-actor)."¹³⁴ The above considerations show the resemblance

between the Voodoo peristyle with its poto-mitan and other stages symbolizing religious beliefs and the theatrical event per se. It is important to stress the fact that Voodoo rituals organized by Haitians abroad are minus some elements. The poto-mitan, so essential, disappears in most Voodoo settings in New York. There, in general, Voodoo priests do not have the necessary facilities to arrange a peristyle as they do in Haiti. A houngan practicing in Haiti may not have great economic means but he usually manages to own a "lakou" (spacious yard), where he can properly mount his "kay lwa" (divinity dwelling) and his peristyle. Most of the time, Voodoo ceremonies in New York take place in the living rooms of small apartments. Even in more spacious basements, the poto-mitan is not featured. Are these rituals less authentic? Apparently not, for possessions occur there as they do in Haiti. If the poto-mitan does not figure in ceremonies given abroad for practical reasons, some temples, among the oldest and most authentic ones such as Souvenance and Soukri-Danache, do deliberately eliminate the poto-mitan. According to Herard Simon, priest of Soukri, the middle, the equilibrium must be situated but it does not have to be physically represented in the form of a pillar.¹³⁵

The symbolism of the Voodoo stage may be seen and felt in the space where the ceremony unfolds. As in the medieval theatre, space in Voodoo rituals, no matter how

small, is considered infinite. The priest repeatedly offers libations towards the four cardinal points, symbolically embracing the entire universe and thus linking it to his surroundings. In Candomble de Bahia, Roger Bastide describes the symbolic dimension of the Voodoo dancing area, the equivalent of the Haitian peristyle:

"Lorsque les Orisa y dansent dans le corps des filles, ce salon devient l'image meme du monde. Le sol est la terre, la plafond le ciel...le salon de danse est alors le microcosme ou si l'on prefere, le monde reconstitue dans sa realite mystique...Si les quatre points cardinaux ne s'y rencontrent pas sous la forme de colonnes...il s'y retrouvent neanmoins sous la forme des quatre angles de la piece au debut de la ceremonie, lors du pade de Exu; l'offrande de ce dieu qui est le dieu des chemins, le regulateur de l'espace, est presentee successivement aux quatre coins de la salle. Les Orisa ne pourront descendre qu'apres, une fois ces quatre points sacralises par le geste sacerdotal, c'est-a-dire, une fois l'espace symbolique transforme en espace religieux."¹³⁶

Another symbolic token of the Voodoo stage is the "veve", a ritual drawing made on the ground near the potomitan. It represents the God who will be invoked. When the ceremony is dedicated to several Gods, there might be several veves, representing each lwa respectively. The veves are as sacred as the ason. No one is allowed to deliberately step on them until the dancing reaches its peak where everybody becomes involved and some fall into trance. In New York, a houngan gave me the following explanation about the veve: "It may be compared to an invitation ticket. Once the guests come in, the ticket becomes meaningless."¹³⁷ The same applies to the veve;

once the Gods descend into the worshippers, in other words, respond to the invitation made by the veve, the latter loses its sacred character. The veve stands as one of the most evident manifestations of art in Voodoo. Made from flour sprinkled on the ground through the fingers of the priest, the veves, when well designed, present exquisite scene paintings suggesting the object of the worship. The veve may be abstract, barely suggestive, or pictorial. Legba Atibon, Ayizan Velekete, Met Kafou, Ogou Badagri, are often symbolized by geometrical veves, whereas Danbala and Ayida wedo are represented by a snake design, Agwetaroyo by a boat, and Ezili Freda by a heart. Bolder might be the granbwa veve which offers a human shape. While veves seem to be essential to some Voodoo temples, they are never seen in others. Again, Souvenance and Soukri do not draw veves. In an interviews with Herard Simon, he offers this opinion: "Veves are copies of the pentacles the colonizers used to design, to invoke certain magical forces. The slaves added them to their own cult. The veve may be seen as 'l'occident dans le vaudou' (the West in Voodoo)."¹³⁸ the houngan Arnold Elie, draws veves in his rituals, but for him, these wonderful designs are made "pour la beaute du jeu" (for the beauty of the game),¹³⁹ since one simple cross would suffice to invoke the God. Veves are not only seen on the stage floor. Many painters have been inspired by them and adopted their subject matter for commercial or

religious purposes. In fact, painting has become a decorative feature of the city peristyles in particular. Veve murals and deity paintings abound. Some murals are so "alive" that they seem to contribute to the magic and hypnotic tone of the ritual.

Usually the decoration of the peristyle is very colorful: ribbons, small flags, kerchiefs, beads create an atmosphere of gaiety and revel. However, the setting may project a more austere mood at a funerary service, for instance. There the colors are toned down, and black and white prevail.

The rest of the hounfo is decorated as well. From each room emanates the mood of the spirit venerated there. The Rada room with its white or light color adornment offers a peaceful atmosphere in compliance with the serenity that characterizes the rada Gods. The bright tones of the Petro house translates the aggressiveness of the Petro Gods. Courlander gives an interesting description of a hounfo dedicated to Pinga Maza or Bakulu Baka, a violent Petro lwa:

"Here are all the accoutrements and objects sacred to the deity. Everything is red. Pinga's clothing and kerchiefs are red. On the walls are painted esoteric designs - hands, skulls and crosses - all in red. The bottles, magic bundles and govins on the altar are decorated in red cloth, ribbons or paint..."¹⁴⁰

The magic paraphernalia or "props" found in the peristyle, as well as in the other rooms of the hounfo,

include: dolls, plates with or without food, bottles of magic potion, often adorned with pearls or rhinestones, bottles of perfume, liquor, flowers, candles. Altars, luxuriously dressed and garnished with the finest fruits and delicacies, are found in the peristyle and also in other parts of the hounfo. Fancy backdrops sometimes surround these altars.

In Voodoo as in some other religions, there is life after death. Thus, certain obligations must be fulfilled in order to insure peace to the soul, and special settings are used. Some families give "boule zen" ceremonies, one every three months during the first year following the initiate's death. These supposedly will soothe the dead's soul. The first three rites are not obligatory. But one year and one day after the initiate's death, the "wete mo nan dlo" (withdrawal of the dead from the water) must take place. Claude Plawson explains the significance of the "wete mo nandlo" in his book Un Initie Parle:

"Lorsque meurt un homme ordinaire, son ame s'evapore rapidement dans l'univers. Il n'en est pas de meme pour un kanzo. Celui-ci a acquis une telle force par son initiation qu'il ne lui est pas facile de se liberer de ses liens terrestres. Son gros Bon Ange se retire alors dans le lieu originare de toute vie: l'eau, d'ou malgre les secrets qu'il a acquis, il lui est impossible de s'echapper. Sa famille avec l'aide d'un houngan ou d'une mambo devra donc proceder a une ceremonie particuliere ayant pour but de le retirer de l'eau."¹⁴¹

The ideal locale for the "wete mo nan dlo" is a space near a river, a waterfall or a spring. But often, such a

setting is not within reach. Then, the priest uses a basin of water filled with several types of leaves in the peristyle. Generally, near the central pillar, a tent is constructed behind which the ceremony where the dead person is summoned and expected to manifest him or herself vocally to his/her relatives, takes place. No one but the officiant and colleagues knows what goes on behind the tent. Is it actually the dead person's voice that is heard? Or is it a special theatrical effect? Why do we have a special scenic structure instead of the regular open arrangement? Emmanuel C. Paul makes no bones about the possibility of dramatization in the "wete mo nan dlo" ceremony:

"Il ne s'agit ni de bluff ni de fraude. L'explication la plus rationnelle qu'il soit possible de donner sans sortir du cadre de la science officielle, est qu'il s'agit plutot de simulation symbolique suivant les exigences de dramatisation et d'expression de la croyance...Le hungan ne cherche nullement a duper personne...son role est de realiser une action symbolique pour motiver une croyance fondamentale."¹⁴²

The "Wete mo nan dlo" symbolizes the new birth of the soul which has been re-energized by the power of water. This rite also symbolizes the everlasting link between the living and the dead. It is believed that the latter, after having been extracted from the water, will remain invisibly present among their relatives to protect them. A similar belief exists in Gabon and is also dramatized in the

villages by means of special settings. In Rites et Croyances des peuples du Gabon, it is well illustrated:

"D'autres fois, on faisait parler le mort. Pendant la danse, un initie se faufilait dans la bananeraie du village, a quelques pas de la, ou a l'entree de ce dernier. Tout a coup, les lumieres s'eteignaient comme par enchantement, la nuit epaisse regnait dans la mbandja et au dehors. Personne ne parlait, personne ne bougeait, car chacun s'attendait a un prodige, a quelque manifestation surnaturelle. Alors, un des danseurs entonnait une melopee lugubre, moitie chant, moitie priere, qui glaçait de frayeur l'assistance tout entiere et qu'il terminait en criant a haute voix le nom du defunt. Oh! Oh! Oh! repondait le compere blotti dans les herbes, a quelque distance du hangar. Un frisson parcourait l'assistance, mais la joie y faisait bientot place car, plus de doute possible, le mort avait parle. Il etait satisfait des honneurs qu'on rendait a ses restes mortels: Il veillerait desormais sur le village"¹⁴³

In New Guinea as well, the initiation rites revive the memory of ancestors who, through special effects, are made present among the initiates. The material representation of the ancestor is suggested by the whining noise of the bull-roarer coming out of the darkness. Once initiated, the novice discovers the tricks employed to convey the presence of the spirit. He does not consider the disguise as an imposture but as a symbolic action necessary to the rite. As a matter of fact, to him the bull-roarer is a sacred object for it allows traditions and beliefs to be preserved.

The theatricality of Voodoo can not be fully evaluated without discussing costume. The Voodoo Gods attach great importance to their costumes. At a public ceremony in most temples, once the priest falls into the state of possession he is immediately adorned with the accoutrements which characterize the deity represented. In fact, the latter will show much impatience, even anger, if the dresser does not promptly bring him his proper ornaments. In solo sequential performances, it is interesting to watch the next divinity feverishly throw out the costume of the previous one to wear his own, as if other Gods' garments were an offense to his presence.

Costume is so important in the Voodoo ceremony that even the poorest worshippers who may not be able to afford decent clothing for themselves or their children, will make the necessary sacrifice to provide special costumes for their lwas.

In Voodoo as in all theatre, costume adds to the beauty of the action. It not only contributes to the aesthetic aspect of the ritual, but it also contributes to defining the characters of the deities. The costumes are appropriate to the Gods in fashions as well as in color. The houngan or mambo's wardrobe offers a variety of costumes. Among the most popular and striking are the following:

Ezili Freda's glamorous pink dress, described by Milo Marcelin:

"Coquette, on lui fait ses ongles, on la farde et la parfume - ses seins sont poudres et parfumes abondamment. On la revet ensuite d'un jupon brode et d'une robe de satin ornee de dentelles; on la coiffe d'un madras de soie rose pale; on lui met des boucles d'oreilles et des bracelets. A l'index, on lui passe trois bagues: la premiere indique son union avec Badagris, la seconde, celle du milieu, son union avec Agoue, enfin la derniere, son union avec Damballah Oueddo. Sur sa poitrine, on attache avec une broche en or (ou en argent) un bouquet de basilique."¹⁴⁴

Papa Guede's costume is extravagant. The symbol of death, he wears black, or black and purple, or black and white. His costume includes black trousers, a black tailcoat and a top hat. As the song says, in this outfit, he looks like an official personage. "Pape Guede bel gason, l'abiye toutan nwa pou-l monte opale. Abiye toutan blan li sanble you depite. Abiye toutan nwa li sanble you senate."¹⁴⁵ His outfit may be less formal sometimes, composed of black pants and a black or purple shirt. Always, however, Guede wears his glasses, even if only frames without lenses. Another feature is his makeup. His face is generally powdered in white, a mask which underlines his comic traits, but at the same time, symbolizes death.

Zaka, the peasant, wears blue denim pants with one leg longer than the other, a shirt made of the same material, and a straw hat. His knapsack, which contains his food and money, is decorated with several colorful

kerchiefs. To it is attached a mug. Sometimes he carries a cane.

Ogou, the war God, has blue pants and red shirt. Sometimes the shirt is garnished with ribbons, and shoulder straps which suggest that he is a military personage. He might wear a red kerchief around his neck. A machete is a standard feature he always carries.

Legba, the old man, and the guardian of the road, is usually presented with a few accessories. Milo Marcelin gives some details: "Coiffe d'un grand chapeau de paille a larges boards...s'appuie sur une bequille et un baton; comme nos paysans, il fume une longue pipe au fourneau en terre cuite et porte en bandouliere une macoute (sac de paille de latanier)."146

The hounsisi' standard outfit is a white dress and headpiece for the women, white pants and shirt for men. Here the fashions may vary a great deal, although the color is the same for all. If some women wear plain white dresses, others love to parade in elegant white garments garnished with layers of lace and lace petticoats, which they never fail to expose, lifting their skirts while dancing. Some wear silky embroidered white clothes. Certain ceremonies offer a costume parade. On some occasions, instead of the white outfit, hounsisi wear the ritual colors of the Gods. In Jacmel, I saw hounsisi change several times from the standard costume to Guede's black

and white, and Ogou's red.¹⁴⁷ I attended a Zaka ceremony in Brooklyn, New York, where the hounsis switched from their white costume to accompany Zaka in blue dresses embellished with flounces at the bottom with sleeves trimmed in yellow and blue ribbon.¹⁴⁸

A white dress and turban also compose the costume of the novices, along with a long multi-colored string of beads. Often they are covered from head to toes with a white sheet before entering the djevo. The hounsis newly initiated, when coming out of the djevo, add to their outfit the agwesan defined by Claude Planson as a "sorte de scapulaire"...[which] "marque la possibilite d'accéder aux mysteres superieurs."¹⁴⁹

Special too are the costumes of the secret society "zobop" (or vlenbendeng, bizango), considered by many as a combination of Voodoo and raw sorcery. According to Alfred Metraux,

"the zobop wear long red or white garments and are crowned with lighted candles. Sometimes they wear tin horns or a comical straw hat. Holding candles in their hands and cracking a whip, they march in columns like soldiers....Like the baka, they enjoy the faculty of being able to change their appearance at will: they can elongate their heads, stiffen their features and whenever they like, turn into giants, dwarfs, cockerels or ferocious dogs."¹⁵⁰

One cannot help wondering: are these special looks achieved by means of sophisticated costumes or are they the result of what believers call mystical transformation? In

Rites et Croyances des peuples du Gabon, the authors shed light on a similar phenomenon registered in Gabon:

"Leopard ou homme-leopard? Dans bien des cas, il s'agissait réellement de la bête, et non d'un homme....Mais le doute était levé quand on arrivait à capturer de véritables hommes-leopards, parfois revêtus de la peau de l'animal - ou d'une cagoule et d'un dalmatique en écorce battue, tachetée comme la peau de la bête...et armés d'une griffe ou d'un trident spécial en fer dont les redoutables blessures simulaient celles produites par le leopard."¹⁵¹

In other cases,

"ils se badigeonnaient, simplement, tout le corps avec de l'argile mpemba, parsemée de mouchetures semblables à celles du leopard; cela leur suffisait pour se dépersonnaliser. Ces mouchetures étaient faites avec un enduit composé d'huile de palmier et de charbon de parasolier..."¹⁵²

According to these reports we may see clearly how some secret societies transform themselves by means of costume and makeup.

Footwear represents no special feature of the Voodoo costume. In fact, in many traditional Voodoo Lakou, the worshippers are required to go barefoot. This requirement, if nothing else, facilitates dancing. However, in some hounfos, especially in the big cities, many celebrants wear sandals, rarely shoes.

Voodoo costumes range from modest plain cloth to rich, elaborate costumes. In any case, each worshipper always offers his or her the best he can afford. Authenticity is not always essential. In fact, the Voodoo costumes barely demonstrate African Tradition, except for

the turban and the beads. Often, the occidental style tends to prevail. The main concern is to celebrate the Gods with as much pomp as possible. Therefore, almost anything is permitted as long as it contributes to the magnificence of the ceremony. The regalia of the Voodoo celebrants might include hats, tailcoats, kerchiefs, capes, make up, knapsacks, canes, Jewelry and machetes, among other items.

It is evident that Voodoo contains a series of theatrical elements: Impersonation, mise en scene, audience, chorus, music, dance, scenery, costume.

CHAPTER V

DRAMATIC ELEMENTS OF VODOO

What is the difference between theatrical and dramatic elements? Aristotle, although he recognizes the intimate relationship between the two, draws a clear line of demarcation between them. "As for the spectacle, it stirs emotions, but it is less a matter of art and has least to do with poetry, for a tragedy can achieve its effect even apart from the performance and the actors...Indeed spectacular effects belong to the craft of the property man rather than that of the poet."¹ Following this point of view, one might deduce that theatrical elements pertain to the world of performance, whereas dramatic elements rest within the realm of literature.

Drama, which derives from the Greek word "dran" means to do, to act. In essence, it refers to an action or a set of actions. Analysis of the dramatic aspects of Voodoo leads not only to the object or theme of the rituals, but to dramatic structure or plot, and other Aristotelian dramatic elements such as: character, thought and diction.

Aristotle defines plot as the "arrangement of incidents...the first essential and the soul of tragedy."²

In fact, it is plot that gives drama shape, underlining its movement or progression. Plot establishes the internal relationship of the various parts, their linking into a unified whole.

Although most dramas offer a plot, they vary. Complex drama - or one with reversals and discoveries - differs from lyric or static drama with a single mood or state of mind, e.g. Prometheus Bound. Crisis drama, characterized by a condensed intrigue and often observing the three unities as in Racinian drama, diverges from the polylinear panoramic drama, as found in Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra, and even more so from Brecht's epic theatre or the absurd plays where a linear pattern is rejected. In all cases, a sequence of events with a certain degree of organic unity is basic to all drama.

Is there a dramatic structure in rituals? For Harold Waters, "rituals are a holy corpus of actions dealing with one subject."³ According to this definition, not only do rituals comprise a series of incidents, but they also have a structure, a certain unity built around a central theme. This idea is reinforced by Melville J. Herskovits, who develops it in more depth. Viewing rituals as the finest expression of primitive drama, Herskovits affirms that what he calls "primitive drama, is marked by plot...the dramatic elements in what seems a simple dance, on further study may

be found to have the elements of complex dramatic organization."⁴ He goes on to demonstrate:

One learns, let us say, when among the Ashanti of the Gold Coast, that a dance is to take place the next afternoon....As one arrives, the drums are sounding and the dancers already circling the enclosure. There are perhaps ten or twelve of them, some men, some women. All are in a state of possession, or approaching this condition. A shriek is heard - and a woman falls to the ground, rolls along it, attempts to get up. Others come to her assistance, but she signals for a stick; then, painfully rising, begins to crawl about the enclosure, barely able to use one foot. Another dances violently about the circle, arms swinging, facial muscles working, pausing before the drums to dance back and forward, back and forward, always facing the instruments whose tone is the compelling voice of the god. The rhythms of the percussion orchestra, the massed voices and handclapping of the singers, the vividly colored silk and cotton clothes of the spectators, the red of the earth and green of the forest background, the constant movement of dancers and attendants, and, over all, the brilliance of the afternoon sun - these are the settings for the action to follow.

"One man, a priest, now becomes possessed. All follow his magnificent dancing with an intentness that reveals tensions hitherto unremarked. He goes about the dancing space several times, dances to the drums, circles again and then, with a cry, breaks out of the ring and runs into the village. Some - but only those qualified - follow him, and from them soon comes a shout echoed by the spectators as the drums take up the beat with renewed vigor and those left behind bend to their dancing with ever more energy. The woman with the staff throws it from her, dancing as energetically as the rest, to be joined by the priest, who, returning with something in his hands, leads the others in dancing to the drums until he is escorted to the cult house. The dance lasts well into the night, but the priest does not rejoin the dancers; the end of the dance comes when there are no more possessed by the gods.

"A simple enough rite, this. Yet, if one reaches beneath outer form and touches the meaning of the performance, the dance becomes an episode in a representation to expunge evil which threatened the village, and to attain a peaceful way of life. For

some time before this dance, misfortune dogged the group. Crops were bad, houses burned, children died. Divination revealed magic laid against the people. The dance, which brought the gods of the village to the heads of their worshippers, was to seek out and drive away the evil. When the god of the priest possessed him, he became a being incarnate who revealed the hiding place of the charm that actuated the evil. This was why tensions mounted with his possession; why the shout announcing the cause of ill had been found was echoed in the vigorous dancing of the devotees remaining behind. The situation was resolved; the plot had worked to its conclusion. But for all its simplicity of form and directness of line, the dramatic quality of the dance was of the highest, carrying performers to the point of possession and holding spectators bound by it."⁵

Victor Turner also acknowledges the existence of plot in rituals:

"Ritual is in its most typical cross-cultural expressions, a synchronization of many performative genres and is often ordered by dramatic structure, a plot..."⁶

Voodoo rituals reveal structure or plot. They contain a planned action, a clear plot with a beginning, a middle and an end. But as in drama, the complexity of plots in Voodoo may differ. On the one hand, the number of characters as well as the situations may vary without necessarily breaking the unity of action. On the other hand, the linear pattern may be broken as it becomes more difficult to pinpoint a central focus.

In a ritual concerned with healing, the activity may call for mainly two characters: the priest and the "patient," who might remain passive for most of the ceremony. Such a ritual offers a simple structure where

strict unity of action is observed, since the entire activity focuses on one single situation.

Unity of action is also found in more extended rituals, such as the "mare paket" (tying of packets) or the Guede celebrations where more characters are involved in a series of units revolving around one central event. The "mare paket" ritual encompasses several incidents arranged in a linear pattern and all subordinated to the making of the packets. The packets mean a lot to the new mambo or houngan's career. Claude Planson defines them as: "Paquet de soie de couleur vive figurant vaguement une silhouette humaine. Il constitue en sorte le double de l'initie. Utilise également dans le traitement des malades."⁷ Leonce Viaud testifies: "Le paquet, m'a dit l'informateur, est le depositaire des secrets des loas; c'est l'ame du mystere..."⁸ An important Petro ritual, the "mare paket" takes place after the initiation of a Voodoo priest or priestess in order to consolidate the latter's mystical powers. I attended a "mare paket" ceremony which unfolded in the following order: Over 100 songs were performed in the first phase. The lyrics, aside from praising the Gods, and calling for their assistance in that major operation, emphasized various themes pertaining to the houngan or mambo's task and obligations:

- the need for strong faith:

La fwa, la fwa tiye deli Faith, faith prevents

La fwa nou mande
 La fwa eskalye Boumba
 La fwa Brizmontan Kraze
 lezo

offenses Faith, we are
 asking for. Faith,
 Eskalye Boumba,
 Faith Brizmontan Kraze
 le zo.

- the priestess or priest's duty towards the Gods:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1) Charitab O pa kite lakou
- a tonbe, Charitab O!
pa kite lakou - a tonbe | Charitab O! Never turn
your back on the Voodoo
Traditions. |
| 2) Travay, travay, si nou bon
gangan travay pou lwa yo | Work, work, if you
are a good Voodoo
priest, you must
work for the Gods. |

- the importance of leaves which the houngan or mambo will
 often use for healing or magical undertakings:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1) Fe-y nan bwa, sipoze,
sipoze lennmi
bare mwen, fey nan
bwa ka sove mwen | Bush leave, suppose, suppose
the enemy harms me, with the
help of bush leaves my life
will be saved. |
| 2) Fey o sove la
vimwen ye-O! Pitit
mwen malad, mwen kouri
kay gangan. Siou bon
gangan, wa sove
lavimwen ye O. | Leaves O! Save my life. My
My child is sick. I rush to
the Voodoo priest. If you
are a good priest, you will
save my life. |

- The necessity to keep the priesthood's secret:

Ganga loupenba, wi
 Pwen-an, m-pa vle
 moun-n sonde pwen mwen

Ganga loupenba, yes, magical
 power, I don't want anyone to
 probe my magical power.⁹

This first step, the invocation, prepares us for the
 second act, the actual making of the packets. The latter,
 highly secret, takes place in a different room, solely in
 front of priests and mambos, while the general audience
 continues to sing with enthusiasm as requested by the
 officiants.

Two hours later, the prepared packets are brought outside in the sight of all, then are taken to another room of the temple. As the singing continues, we come to the last part of the ritual. In a small pan filled with perfume, a flame is lit, then a choreographed line of priests and hounsis bring back the packets on their heads, along with other sacred objects to be warmed on the flame.

Aristotle, in referring to unity of plot writes: "the various incidents must be so constructed that if any part is displaced or deleted, the whole plot is dislocated. For if any part can be inserted or omitted without manifest alteration, it is no part of the whole."¹⁰ The "mare paket" provides an example of unity of plot. The introductory rites are necessary, indispensable to the making of the packets, for their function is to free the way, work the passage, more concretely, to grant the permit for the operation. If this part were removed, the ceremony would have no mystical value, and the main action, in the second act, could not properly follow. The third incident is as obligatory as the two preceding. The packets would not be completed without it, because, as the officiant Arnold Elie said: "se di fe-a ki pou bayo manb."¹¹ ("It is the fire that gives them strength.") Each part then is part of the whole. The next evening, the ritual moves to a different phase, still focusing on the packets which are then baptized.

In Haiti, I watched a Guede ritual, whose plot extended over two nights while maintaining maximum unity. The line of action never deviated from the main objective: to celebrate Guede, the God of fertility and death. In fact, the dialectical relation between the two nights fused them into one unified period. The plot consists of five inter-dependent acts:

- 1) The invocation (introductory rites)
- 2) The sacrifices to Guede: immolation of three goats and several cocks.
- 3) The communion: the prayers of yesternight having already granted passage, the second evening starts immediately with the communal meal made from the animals sacrificed the previous night. Rice and black peas and cornmeal are served.
- 4) The rejoicing inside the peristyle: music, dancing, singing.
- 5) The Musical procession. A Voodoo orchestra (drum, bamboos, ogan) accompanies the crowd of worshippers who go out and dance about the street with the Guedes.¹²

Plots in Voodoo rituals, however, do not always scrupulously observe strict unity of action. In some cases, although the situations may be linked by one main event, the plot appears more panoramic. Such rituals consist of a series of episodes extending over several

weeks. The annual Soukri celebration furnishes a concrete illustration. According to the priest, Herard Simon of Soukri, the August festivals in Soukri are principally dedicated to Mambo Inan, the Goddess of the water, and the mother of the Congo Gods. I attended the 1986 celebrations of Soukri which lasted several days. At first, all Congo Gods were invoked, including Mambo Inan, Bazou Mennen, Yatibwa, Ganga, Simbiganga, Gangagina, Lenba Zaou, Dam Lawe, Dam Loupenba, Gran-n genge, Zinga Bwa, Zinga Moyo, Manbo zile, Legba, and Kalfou. Although Mambo Inan represents the central motif of these rituals, special tribute was paid not only to her but to at least four other deities: Laoka, Yatibwa, Bazou Menen and Ganga. In fact, it was difficult to determine around which of these Gods the activities actually centered, so important they all appeared to be. Approximately equal time was devoted to the worship of each of them: several hours to Laoka at the portal, to Yatibwa at the "peron," to Ganga at the tree on the hill, to Bazou Mennen at the well, and to the main Goddess, Mambo Inan, at the river.

Food and cakes were offered to Mambo Inan at the river. Offerings were made to others at other locations. Authorized initiates descended into the well with portions of food for Bazou Mennen, the king of the Congo Gods. This episode which lasted about two hours, was accompanied by a musical procession outside the well house. Another food

offering took place near the almond tree climbed by one initiate in order to hang a bottle of liquor on a branch. Food was also deposited on the altar in the peristyle. Sacrifices were scattered in the "lakou" (village yard) on behalf of the different Gods. On August 15, after the invocation, chicken and goats were immolated in the peristyle around the altar. The same action was repeated at the river. But the biggest sacrifice, the cow, was offered (also on August 15) on the hill to the lwa Ganga Bila, who was invoked while the immolation took place. The audience sang: "Bila bila, twa kout kouto, twa kout ponya, rele Bila pou Kongo." (Bila bila, seven stabs, seven dagger strokes, call bila for the Kongos). Even in the manifestations of the Gods, it is difficult to designate which one in particular dominated. Ganga, Yatibwa and Laoka, however, were represented much more often than the Queen, Mambo Inan.

The Soukri celebrations containing a series of subplots, were not linear, but polylinear. Each episode constituted a tableau of its own, albeit related to the others and to the general theme. The magnitude surpassed that of the rituals previously analyzed. In all, the series comprised 26 episodes: three on the opening night, August 14, ten on August 15, the actual anniversary day eight dancing sessions or "ron" which lasted eight whole nights, and five episodes on the last night. The entire

event lasted eleven days and took place at seven different locales, situated around the same village: the portal, the main peristyle, the hill, the river, the almond tree, the well, the Yatibwa peron.

In spite of its episodic character, however, the Soukri annual ceremony contained several unifying elements: the theme as well as the atmosphere. It was a happy event. Every unit of the series: the pageantry, the dances, the sacrifices, contributed to the celebration of the Congo Goddess and the other Congo Gods. A spirit of joy animated all the activities. Furthermore, the series opened with the portal ritual in which all the Congo Gods were invoked, and closed with the same event. In fact, the last day as a whole, represented a recapitulation of many previous episodes. Not only was the portal ceremony repeated, though longer and more elaborate in the finale, but so were the special tributes to Laoka, Yatibwa, and Ganga at their respective locales, and the "ron" or dancing revelry.¹³

This type of plot corresponds to the pattern found in anti-Classic drama where there is virtually no concern for time and place, and where unity of action is conceived with less restrictions. The Elizabethan period, and later, the Sturm und Drang school, favored the episodic plot. Goethe's Goetz von Berlichingen, with its 54 scenes, provides a good example of drama freed from the three unities rule.

The plots studied so far in Voodoo rituals, linear or poly-linear, are what Aristotle called simple plots as opposed to complex ones, characterized by peripeteia or reversal and anagnorisis or discovery. Prometheus Bound has a simple or static plot. In the play, Prometheus does not change. He is made prisoner, bound for life for having flouted Zeus' will by bringing fire to mankind. By resisting Zeus' tyranny, he remains obdurate to the last moment when he is engulfed by an earthquake. On the other hand, the extreme change of fortune in Oedipus Rex gives it its remarkably complex and dramatic woof. At the beginning of the play Oedipus is the confident, revered, powerful, flawless king who dominates the situation. At the end he loses all status and power. He becomes in the sight of all an object of shame, the cause of the plague, the infection, banished from his country. From a dynamic character he changes to a despondent, pathetic figure, a sufferer who plucks out his own eyes. The chorus in the play laments his deplorable fate: "Sons of daughters of Thebes, behold, this was Oedipus, greatest of men. He held the key to the deepest mysteries, was envied by all his fellow men for his great property; behold, what a full tide of misfortune swept over his head."¹⁴

Reversal and discoveries, essential components of complex plots, exist in some Voodoo rituals. The

initiation ceremony is a good example. The complete initiation ritual presents three major reversals:

1) Change of life or status. The novice passes from a profane state to a religious, sacred one. He enters the initiation room as an ordinary person, and comes out a few days later as a consecrated Voodoo servant with the holy grade of hounsi or even more, houngan/mambo, endowed with special powers. He has been transformed, and the change is a permanent one.

By the same token, another change might occur: the novice who perhaps was never possessed before, will most likely, during initiation, be suddenly "mounted" by some divinity, becoming thus the latter's "horse" or receptacle. It must be noted that some worshippers experience possession before their formal initiation; others do not, even some time after. Richard Schechner calls this reversal "transportation" as opposed to the previous one, because although in that state they take on a different character, "they are taken somewhere," at the end, often assisted by others, they are cooled down and reenter ordinary life."¹⁵

The third reversal, though symbolic, is no less dramatic. The novice rises from death (when he enters the initiation room) to resurrection (when he comes out). In fact, Voodoo initiation - and others - are characterized by the symbolic death and the resurrection of the novice.

Jean Gazeneuve explains the nature of such ritual: "D'une maniere generale, l'initiation est la figuration symbolique sous une forme parfois dramatique, d'un changement de personnalite, d'un abandon de la condition humaine....Ce changement est souvent exprime par le mythe de la mort et de la resurrection".¹⁶ The following examples confirm

Gazeneuve's Statement:

"Ainsi, dans une tribu de la nouvelle Galles du sud, c'est un homme acteur qui devant les novices fait semblant de mourir et de ressusciter....En Afrique, chez les kikuyus, lors des ceremonies d'initiation, la mere du neophyte s'assoit et prend le garcon entre ses jambes....On la relie a lui par un boyau de mouton. Elle gemit comme si elle accouchait et le garcon vagit comme un nouveau-ne. On coupe alors le boyau de mouton qui represente evidemment le cordon ombilical. La ceremonie consiste donc a mimer une nouvelle naissance."¹⁷

In the Voodoo context, Planson gives an insight into the two phases as he experienced them, as a Voodoo initiate:

"Nous voici donc le soir de l'entree au temple. Les fideles sont assembles et les tambours battent. Les candidats dansent sur place, face a leur "maman hounгно" et leurs pieds foulent les "veve" des esprits qu'ils ont choisis pour presider a leur initiation. La nuit s'avance et la tension monte; et voici que se produit l'evenement tant attendu. Le "vol" des neophytes a qui on place, a l'improviste un bandeau sur les yeux. Leur famille et leurs amis les entourent et leur font les adieux touchants. Boucoup sont en larmes, car ils savent que les "hounгно" vont mourir et que s'ils doivent renaitre, ils ne seront plus jamais tout a fait les memes...Mais tres vite, on les arrache a ces embrassements et ils sont entraines vers les "guevo", dont les portes un instant entrouvertes, se referment. Dans cette piece sombre, ou regne une temperature etouffante, il vont connaitre les angoisses de l'agonie....

L'initiation touche a sa fin. L'initie est revetu de vetements neufs n'ayant jamais ete portes, toujours de couleur blanche. Sa tete, fragile apres les epreuves qu'il a subies est protegee par un foulard, recouvert lui-meme d'un chapeau de paille....Il porte en bandouliere les 'colliers-maldioques', signes du rang auquel ses efforts lui ont permis de parvenir et une sorte de scapulaire, 'l'agouessan'. Il tient d'une main un bouquet de fleurs sauvages et, de l'autre, une bougie allumee. Les portes du 'guevo' s'ouvrent largement...un cortege se forme, qui va aller saluer toutes les bornes de l'habitation, les arbres reposoirs et les 'caye-mystere'. Puis les nouveaux 'kanzo' vont re-connaître leur hungan ou leur mambo et echanger les saluts tadtionnels avec leurs nouveaux freres et leurs nouvelles soeurs. enfin, ils retrouvent leur famille. Avec chacun de laurs proches, ils echantent trois baisers: sur la joue droite, sur la joue gauche et le dernier, sur la bouche....La ceremonie de la sortie est terminee. L'apres-midi aura lieu une sorte de baptême...et le soir une 'danse' a laquelle participera tout le quartier."¹⁸

Discovery is a change of situation where a character moves from ignorance to knowledge. Oedipus' tragic fall is provoked by the discovery of his true identity. Through the messenger's revelation, he discovers the horrifying truth, which changes his life.

Discovery or recognition is of paramount importance in Voodoo initiation. In numerous cases, it is during initiation that the novice identifies the divinity which claims him or her as his servant. Sometimes, the novice's "met tet" (his lwa) may be known in advance through revelations or guessed according to possessions which may occur before initiation. But even in such cases, it is during initiation that the identity of the "met tet" will

be confirmed. In the Souvenance initiation rituals, recognition emerges with the help of the Dekas (small wooden container or half a calabash). The Souvenance initiate, Betty Vaval describes the scene as follows:

"The priest holds the Dekas full of water over the worshipper's head, while invoking different Gods. The Dekas will visibly shake for a few seconds and the water will fall on the novice's head - thus baptizing him or her - only when the name of the claimant has been called. Then the novice, as well as the priest, discovers to which God the latter should devote him or herself."¹⁹

Discovery produces a more striking astonishment when, contrary to premonitory signs or simply contrary to the novice's wish, the claimant turns out to be other than the one expected. Louis Maximilien describes this phenomenon:

"Le jeudi est le jour principal ou il est procede au manger-tetes. Avant d'accomplir ce rite, le houngan se place devant le pe et il appelle le loa choisi par le recipiendaire qui entre en crise. Ce dieu genralement manifeste sa joie d'avoir un nouveau serviteur; mail il peut etre aussi observe durant la manifestation l'intervention d'une autre divinite qui, pour des raisons provenant de la famille du nouvel initie, reclame d'etre son maitre-tete. La personne alors, sera couchee sur le point de cette derniere divinite; en d'autres termes, elle sera le serviteur de ce dieu."²⁰

The fact is, according to Voodoo belief, the faithful does not arbitrarily choose his/her lwa "met tet." The latter chooses him or her. I witnessed the anxiety experienced by a group of six novices in Soukri on the eve of their initiation.²¹ They did not know which divinity was going to adopt them.

During initiation, there occurs another kind of discovery through dreams, discovery of the mystical world as perceived by the initiate. Some initiates speak about vision instead of dream. Planson offers an impressive testimony about what he discovered during his initiation:

"J'etais couche je ne dormais pas, de cela je suis sur, mail j'avais les yeux fermes et je reflechissais a ce qui m'arrivait....Soudain, 'je vis'. Cela me frappa comme un coup de poing et je me souviens que mon corps se mit a trembler. Il y avait devant moi une foret profonde, une foret comme je n'en avais jamais vu et n'en verrai sans doute jamais plus. La richesse, la couleur et l'exuberance du monde vegetal m'emplissait les yeux et le coeur. Je me dis que le monde devait etre ainsi, a la Creation, lorsqu'il etait neuf et pur de toute souillure. Je pensai ainsi donc, c'est cela 'le paradis terrestre' dont revent tous les hommes, sans jamais l'apercevoir tant il est eloigne de l'imagination la plus exaltee....Cela n'avait ni l'incoherence des reves ni meme leurs couleurs. Au contraire, j'avais l'impression d'entrer pour la premiere fois peut-etre dans la realite..."²²

Planson's discovery is not an isolated case. This discovery is part of the natural process of initiation for the Voodoo believer. Max Beauvoir refers to it in these terms:

"Inisyasyon dure 41 Jou Kote ou fe voyaj dans 'l'autre monde'...Houngan-an kenbe men-ou, men se ou menm Ki ale we tout la Kreyasyon du mond, depi premye jou li te Kreye.

Aristotle defines complex plot as "one wherein the change of fortune is accompanied either by recognition or reversal or by both."²⁴ Based on these criteria, the

Voodoo rituals which comprise major reversals and discoveries may be called complex actions.

Another component of plot is suffering or pathos, "a fatal or painful action, like death, on stage, violent physical pain, wounds..."²⁵ Oedipus' physical suffering is poignant: He plucks out his own eyes. Although Oedipus hides himself to commit the tragic deed, the spectacle he offers afterwards is terrifying. The chorus shouts its dread: "Horror beyond all bearing! Foulest disfigurement that ever I saw! O cruel, insensate agony! O tortured head!"²⁶ Cases of violent physical pain often occur in Voodoo rituals. Some Petro Gods manifest their violence in concrete acts. According to W. Hyacinthe, a faithful possessed by the divinity called "Kriminel" (Criminal) might, in extreme agitation, bite his lips till blood spurts. The lwa Lenglesou eats glass when he is angry and also bleeds.²⁷ Another worshipper reports this case: "The Petro Goddess Marinet pye chech who usually allows her possessed devotee to stand in fire without any harm, exposed one of her horses once to raging flames and let her burn for awhile because the lady had been disrespectful to her."²⁸ When it is not a lwa who creates such terror, it is a "gad," a mystical entity considered not as God but as a special messenger. The worshipper possessed by a gad

rolls on the floor with such velocity that he loses control over his sense of direction. The Voodoo servant, Hyacinthe, reports that once, possessed by a "gad," he fell upon a rock, breaking his jaw. He rolled over a broken glass, cutting himself and had to be rushed to the hospital.²⁹ These cases of physical suffering sow panic among the spectators who, moved by pity and fear, usually scream, "Gras la mizerikod, gras la mizerikod." (O mercy, mercy!)

Voodoo makes several demands upon its servants and when they do not properly pay their dues, the Gods inflict punishments upon them. "Sep" is one of the most spectacular punishments endured by a Voodoo faithful. I witnessed a few "sep" in Soukri-Danache:

A dancer, Linda, suddenly falls. Blocking the dancing area for a moment, she rolls around, crawls and fights her way out through the yard. There, surrounded by a crowd of curious spectators, she keeps crawling in the dust for a long while (about 30/45 minutes), until she forces her entire body into the narrow mouth of Yatibwa's small "tomb." Then she comes out, haggard, unrecognizable, pitifully soiled. She suffered. The dues have been paid. Many other "seps" that day followed the same pattern.

Another worshipper stiffens. One leg wraps itself around the other. The two are tucked in, locked. In this uneasy, extremely rigid position the victim, who cannot sit

down, keeps hopping, in excruciating pain. She remains in this state for some time.³⁰

In Souvenance, a woman aimlessly creeps about the vast habitation. After two to three hours, she ends under a tree. Unconsciously she hooks her big toe to a thick bough. Hours go by. The bough remains firmly between the toes, pressing hard. The woman is freed only after a ceremony has been held around that tree.³¹

Pathos impregnates the initiation rites as well. Sanctions are imposed upon the novices - at any lack of discipline: "Tout manquement a l'obeissance est severement sanctionne, la manman hounгно n'hesitant pas, quand le besoin s'en fait sentir, a employer les moyens le plus fermes y compris le fouet."³² Mental suffering adds a special pathetic note to initiation rites. Planson speaks about: "les angoisses de l'agonie. Le candidate ne meurt pas au sens physiologique du terme, mais je puis attester que les angoisses qu'il eprouve n'ont rien de symbolique. Il s'agit bien des sueurs de la mort."³³ A Voodoo initiate gave this testimony: "Voodoo initiation is extremely hard to bear physically and mentally. So much so, that had I known in advance that it was so painful, I probably would not have exposed myself to it."³⁴

A tragic sense pervades Voodoo rituals. Pain is a test initiates must pass. Gazeneuve explains it as an

"element essentiel des rites qui fait de l'existence sacree autre chose que l'existence profane. La douleur acceptee volontairement correspond a un refus de prendre la vie telle qu'elle est donnee...souffrir sans autre raison que de vouloir supporter la douleur, c'est bien l'une des manieres qu'on transcende la nature."³⁵

Progression of plot in Voodoo rituals deserves some attention. Each major part has a different tempo. In thanksgiving ceremonies, the introductory rites (Catholic litanies) are recited and sung without drums in a calm, controlled, almost monotonous fashion. Then the "priye Dyo" (African prayers), also delivered without drums and on a moderate note, slowly gain in energy as they go on. The point of attack comes with the rumbling of the drums and the songs of invocation. This provokes a drastic change in the course of the action. This new dynamic phase, animated by powerful dancing and singing, accelerates the plot and builds steadily towards a climax. The action surges to its culmination with the bursting of possessions, individual or collective. Wade Davis describes a ritual whose progression can easily be observed:

"The mambo presented a container of water to the cardinal points, then poured libations to the center post in the peristyle, the axis along which the spirits were to enter. Further libations were offered to each of the three drums and the entrance of the temple. Then, with a flourish, the mambo led the initiates into the peristyle and around the centerpost, the poteau mitan, in a counterclockwise direction until they knelt as one before the houngan. Bearing a rattle or asson, Beauvoir led the prayer, an elaborate litany that invoked in hierarchical order, the spirits of the vodoun pantheon. He recited in an ancient ritual language

whose sounds evoked all the mysteries of the ancient tradition.

Then the drums started, first the penetrating staccato cry of the rhythm of the cata, the smallest, whipped by a pair of long thin sticks. The rolling rhythm of the second, the seconde, followed, and then came the sound of thunder rising, as if the belly of the earth were about to burst. This was the maman, largest of the three. Each drum had its own rhythm, its own pitch, yet there was a stunning unity to their sound that swept over the senses. The mambo's voice sliced through the night, and against the rising chords of her invocation, the drummers beat a continuous battery of sound, a resonance so powerful and directed, it had the very palm trees above swaying in sympathy.

The initiates responded, swinging about the peristyle as one body linked by a single pulse. Each hounsi remained anonymous, focused inward and turned away from the audience toward the poteau mitan and the drums. Their dance was not a ritual of poised grace, of allegory; it was a frontal assault on the forces of nature. Physically, it was a dance of shoulders and arms, of feet flat on the ground repeating deceptively simple steps over and over. But it was also a dance of purpose and resolution, of solidity and performance.

"For forty minutes the dance went on, and then it happened. The maman broke - fled from the fixed rhythm of the other two drums, then rushed back with a highly syncopated, broken counterpoint. The effect was one of excruciating emptiness, a moment of hopeless vulnerability. An initiate froze. The drum pounded relentlessly, deep solid blows that seemed to strike directly to the woman's spine. She cringed with each beat. Then, with one foot fixed to the earth like a root, she began to spin in a spasmodic pirouette, out of which she soon broke to hurtle about the peristyle, stumbling, falling, grasping, thrashing the air with her arms, momentarily regaining her center only to be driven on by the incessant beat. And upon this wave of sound the spirit arrived. The woman's violence ceased; slowly she lifted her face to the sky. She had been mounted by the divine horseman, she had become spirit. The loa, the spirit that the ceremony had been invoking, had arrived."³⁶

Suspense rises when a ferocious, feared God is awaited (especially one who rarely manifests himself), or when a complication occurs with a possessed worshipper who shows extreme violence and cannot be immediately assuaged. Tension increases also when important sacrifices are offered. In some places, the Macumba Temple for instance, a hugh cow is killed away from the spectators' sight after having been brought to the Gods.³⁷ In others, the cow is immolated in front of the audience. In Soukri, I witnessed a breathtaking sacrifice: the priests and the hounsisis had just killed a few chickens and goats in the peristyle in offering to the Gods. From there, their chothes bloody, they walked to a hill, followed by the crowd. A cow stood there attached to a tree. A procession went on around it. Then the priests used some techniques to prepare the animal for death. Alcohol was poured on its body. Its bones were massaged, its tail pulled. The worshippers danced and sang intensely. Then came the tragic moment. After having shaken hands with the other dignitaries over the cow's back, the officiant took a dagger and with the help of a hammer, drove it into the cow's head. The cow, showing extreme pain, uttered a hollow bellow and under the weight of its agony, ejected a heavy stream of feces and fell to the ground, dead.³⁸ This type of tension brings about emotional momentum, moves the action forward, possibly to

its highest point. As a matter of fact, sacrifices are often accompanied by an outburst of possessions.

During the communal meal or communion, the action moves downward. This is a relaxation period. The action surges again later with the singing and dancing, until the denouement when the worshippers express their final thanks to the divinity. Thanksgiving ceremonies usually end on a joyous, energetic note.

The funerary ritual, such as the "Boule zen," follows a different trajectory. The plot moves from great vitality to despondency, a sequence of descending tension. I attended a "boule zen" for a dead person in Haiti which unfolded at the pace described as follows: From the initial motion, the drums, dancing and singing gave the ritual a thrust which kept the tension accumulating for awhile. Besides the invocation, this ceremony comprised other important phases, such as the "chire Ayizan" (tearing the palm branches) and the actual "Boule zen" (the burning of pottery). Therefore, there were several moments of climactic action interspersed by quiet periods devoted to litanies. In spite of the nature of this ritual, the motion and the atmosphere remained intense, vehement for the most part. But the unraveling brought a drastic change of tempo and mood. Drums were shut off. A symbolic funeral took place. Worshippers in a quiet procession turned around the center pillar, carrying a chair covered with a

cloth of the deceased. The chair was placed over the flame, then along with the mourning bands, the cloth was burned. The denouement involved dirges that gave way to sheer lamentations among the bereaved and other worshippers as well. The ululation lasted awhile until the crowd gradually dispersed.³⁹

Finally, there is the question of probability. Impregnated with so much mystery, are the actions of Voodoo rituals explicable? In essence, yes. The dynamics behind them lie in the drive of these communities to survive, to control nature, to fight the enemy, to acquire power. They are rooted in human struggle, human conflict, as in most good drama. Any Voodoo ritual, whether it be a "mare packet" to consolidate the priests' mystical strength, an initiation, or a thanksgiving celebration to propitiate the Gods, exposes the worshippers' attempts to satisfy their basic needs. Interaction with the Gods, though inexplicable to many, is a way of responding to the antagonistic forces of existence, such as, social law, nature, their fellow mortals, according to their own beliefs and vision of life. For some anthropologists, such as Victor Turner, "in a sense, every type of cultural performance, including ritual, ceremony...is explanation and explication of life itself."⁴⁰ The search for

security, self-preservation, the attempt to overcome misery, the anguish common to all men, which inspire Voodoo rituals, endow them with what Allardyce Nicoll calls a "spirit of universality."⁴¹ These qualities make them dramatic indeed.

According to Aristotle, tragedy must aim to produce catharsis. Voodoo does not diverge from that goal. By allowing believers to externalize their pathos, their innermost anxieties, by allowing them to reveal themselves completely, Voodoo rituals produce a cathartic, therapeutic effect; a collective exaltation which temporarily relieves them. Under certain circumstances, the sharing of anguish, of tension, of concern for survival, generates a different, deeper type of relief found in a collective consciousness or enlightenment. An example is the Bois-Caiman ceremony which heightened the slaves' desire for freedom and urged them on to revolt.

If plot is the "soul" of drama, the characters which animate the actions are also of prime importance. In fact, the two are necessarily intertwined. Actions often reflect the attributes of those executing them, while by the same token, character may emerge as a product of action. One influences the other. Lady Macbeth may illustrate the interrelationship. Unscrupulous, strong-willed, ambitious,

she encourages her husband to murder Duncan, King of Scotland and to seize his crown. But later, the very actions she helped Macbeth undertake affect her mind. She disintegrates morally and mentally. Sleepwalking, reliving the crimes, she tries to wash her hands of the blood.

How important is character to Voodoo rituals? One can hardly imagine Voodoo rituals without those who bring life to them and most of all, who give them their mysterious dimension. Since the rituals show the relationship between the natural and the supernatural, the human and the divine, there are characters who are ordinary human beings, such as the officiants, the chorus, the audience; the Gods, however, are represented by the possessed. Given the peculiar traits of the divine characters, we will focus on them, especially the more striking ones. Voodoo rituals may be compared to the *Commedia dell'arte*. Both use stock characters. The Renaissance Italian companies, such as the *Confidenti*, the *Fideli* and the notorious *Gelosi*, presented professional players who identified themselves throughout their careers with standardized characters in recognizable situations and stage business called the *lazzi*. As Allardyce Nicholl writes in World Drama: "A *Commedia dell'arte* performance took shape as a repatterning of well-established familiar, stock types and well-known acts or turns."⁴² The clichés in mannerisms and speech were passed on from generation to

generation. In fact, the Commedia dell'arte dominated the Italian stage from the 16th to the 18th centuries with such famous stock characters as the two old men: the Venetian merchant Pantalone and the scholarly type of Bolognese pedant, Dottore; Arlecchino and Colombina, of the servants and clowns group called zani.

Voodoo rituals contain stock characters who show the same basic traits whenever they appear. The qualities attributed to each are so clear and distinct that they are always quickly and unmistakably identified. Character may be identified in several ways: by the outer features or physical attributes, by mannerisms: language, gestures, expressions; by the inner motivations and ethical qualities which explain the characters' action and interaction with others and finally by reputation. Following such categorizing, we will discuss some of the most important Voodoo Gods.

Among the women, the Rada Goddess, Metres Ezili (Mistress Ezili), symbolizes love. She belongs to all men and would like to possess them all. Her fickleness can be perceived through her attitude. When she possesses a worshipper, woman or man, she enthusiastically greets the men around, overtly flirts with them, whereas she only distantly acknowledges the presence of the ladies. Louis Maximilien depicts her character in these terms:

"Erzulie Freda se promene dans l'assemblee, galante, souriant aux hommes, les yeux attendris et vis a vis des femmes, l'air moqueur et dedaigneux, car les femmes sont des coquines qui lui prennent ses maris, en leur tendant les deux petits doigts, d'un air pince, pour les saluer."⁴³

Coquettish, the mulatto Goddess is most of all polygamous and adulterous. She has been compared, rightly so, to the Greek divinity, Aphrodite. The latter too, is Goddess of love and as frivolous as her Voodoo counterpart. Her marriage to Hephaestus does not keep her from seeking extramarital affairs. One of them is with Aries, God of war, similar to Ezili's affair with Ogou Feray, also God of war. Ezili is very sure of her beauty. Vanity is one of her main traits. Usually well dressed, made up, perfumed, she likes to exhibit her toilette, to display herself. Alfred Metraux, who defines her as the personification of beauty and feminine grace, pictures her as follows: "As soon as Ezili posseses a devotee, man or woman, the chosen person is led into this room to be dressed and titivated....At last in the full glory of her seductiveness...Ezili makes her entrance to the peristyle. She walks slowly, swinging her hips."⁴⁴ Here again, she parallels Aphrodite. The latter outshines the Greek Goddesses in beauty and grace, and is no less vain.

Ezili scorns triviality. She speaks in a soft voice and detests improper language. She is non-violent, apparently passive. Sophrosyne or self-control is one of

her qualities. Her sophistication goes to extremes. She shows affectation when she uses pedantic diction or only offers her index finger to salute those she finds unworthy of her company. Presumption, if not hubris, is at odds with her temperance and places her among those characters Moliere categorized as "les precieuses ridicules." For instance, to distinguish herself from others, she often speaks French (even if it is broken French). The legend has it that, although she seduced many other Gods, she rejected Guede whom she believes is beneath her.

The Petro Goddess, Ezili Danto, represents the image of African female beauty. That is why often times a beautiful negress in Haiti is compared to her. As Freda, she also symbolizes love. But contrary to her, she greets men and women equally. In fact, she loves men and women equally. She is hermaphroditic. This trait is so essential to her character, that it is a common belief among Voodooists that under Danto's influence, her devotees become bisexual. Danto is also dangerously jealous and possessive. Her servants affirm that she will show her frustration by casting a spell on a devotee, even preventing the latter from finding happiness in any love relationship. The legend has it that many Ezili faithful can never marry.

Sometimes, Danto is portrayed as a jovial but vulgar character in both manner and speech. At other times, she

appears utterly anguished as if she were experiencing excruciating emotional pain. In that state, she looks majestic, serious, contained, mute. I have seen both. When the second character comes, she mumbles or speaks in sign language, and one has to wait for another God to possess the devotee in order to translate her message.⁴⁵ The mute Danto, at times, moans and roars, bearing some resemblance to a bull. She is extremely strong. I saw her lift her servants, no matter how heavy, and dance with them on her back, to express her attachment to them.⁴⁶ More than strong, she is aggressive, vengeful, passionate, and in some situations, criminal. Voodoo worshippers identify her with the Black Madonna who bears a scar on her face and holds a child in her arms. Some faithful interpret the wound on her face as a token of her belligerent character. Tender as a mother, blood-thirsty as a murderer, erotic as a courtesan, she stands as a tragic figure driven by contending forces. Her split personality, her inner conflicts, make her character complex, contradictory, and for that matter, fascinating. Her burning, ravenous passion and her criminal instincts give her the stature of Euripides' Medea. Madan Lenba, the Congo Goddess, is usually compared to Ezili Danto, especially with regard to her strength and aggressiveness. Both are equally revered and feared by their devotees as two major figures of the Voodoo pantheon.

Among the men, Wa Angol (King Angol) from the Congo, is a special divinity. He personifies Africa. He is a prophet, a sage, a symbol of courage, revered for his exceptional qualities. This God inspires so much respect in Soukri, for instance, that even the old man who serves him as receptacle bears a special reputation in the village. Named after the God by all the villagers, he is considered an outstanding dignitary. The deity brings hope to the devotees and they long for him as expressed by the song, "Wa Angol O! Wale! Ki lewa vini we-m anko peyi-a chanje. Ki le wa vini we-m anko." (King Angol, you are gone. When will you come back to visit me?)⁴⁷

Se veye yo mete-m veye.
M'pap domi, Feray m'pap
domi. M deja gason
lage M pa sa domi.

I have been placed here
to watch. I am not
sleeping. Feray, I am
already a warrior. I
Ought not to sleep.⁴⁸

The song is clear. Ogou is the warrior, the military man who always carries his sabre (with which he is identified.) As iron, he symbolizes strength, endurance. Planson writes: "Chez Ogou Feray, le fer symbolise la force dure. Il manifeste le tranchant, l'opiniatrete, l'inflexibilite."⁴⁹ For this reason, his devotees find special comfort in him: "Kan-m rete m-sonje Ogou Feray ma konsole ma pran kouray-O!"⁵⁰ Most of the time, he looks stern, preoccupied. He has the reputation of a political character who inspired Dessalines, the general in the Independence war. Pierre Verger writes: "Ogun, chez les

Yoruba, gu chez les fon, est le dieu des forgerons et de tous ceux qui utilisent le fer. Guerriers, chasseurs...,⁵¹ Furthermore he refers to him as "Ogun, feu qui balaye la foret."⁵² (Ogun, fire that sweeps the forest.) This quality finds its equivalent in this Voodoo song: "Fere, Feray, Fere, tout ko feray se di fe."⁵³ (Fere, Feray, Fere, Fire runs all over Ogun's body.) Ogou Feray is intelligent and judicious. Milo Rigaud calls him: "La logique, La raison, la sagesse, la philosophie, l'intercession armee et intelligente."⁵⁴ Ogou Feray loves women who, in turn, are very fond of him, for in the legend, he is a handsome and attractive character. His great poise does not go unnoticed. He is the symbol of virility. In the Congo rite, Ganga shares the same attributes as Ogou.

Zaka is an original type. He manifests himself as a friendly, easygoing peasant, appreciated by all. This is perhaps why he is called "kouzen" (cousin). Once he comes around, his first pre-occupation is to fill up his bag (which he never leaves) with food and money. He does not mind begging. The fact is, as an agricultural laborer, Zaka is poor. But he saves every cent that he collects and doesn't like to share his small fortune. Several times I heard worshippers mention that whoever touches Zaka's bag without his permission receives some punishment in return. But in times of emergency, Zaka might lend a hand by

allowing his devotee to borrow from his savings. Zaka is hailed not only as the "cousin" but also as the "minister" (of agriculture), considered a very high title in society - socially and politically - never accorded to a peasant in Haitian politics. His distinguished title does not take away from his simplicity. His language and mannerisms are rustic, without fussiness. Other peasant Gods are Yatibwa and Zinga Bwa.

The Marasa or twins, symbolize childhood. As children they receive appropriate treatment. Envisioned as short creatures, in general they stay close to the ground. Even when they celebrate along with other Gods, their plates are placed, not on the table with the others, but under it, on the floor. While heavy foods, such as rice, meat, fish, plantains, etc. constitute offerings made to the other Gods, theirs include light dishes, such as "akasan", (cornmeal porridge with syrup), popcorn, cookies and candies. The Marasa rarely manifest themselves, but when they do, they have a puerile comportment. They sit on the ground, with their heads down; they cry or whine and play with their food. They, more than the other characters, symbolize Africa's children subjected to inhuman abuses and pain, forcefully cut off from their motherland, slaves in a strange and hostile territory. Representing orphans, they are directly associated with this drama in Voodoo songs:

Marasa Elou e!
Mpa gen manman
Ki pou pale pou mwen

Marasa Elou e!
I don't have anyone
to speak on my behalf.⁵⁵

Though young, the Marasa, for Voodoo faithfuls, are Gods and, therefore, deserve reverence. In fact, they occupy a privileged place in the invocation. They are hailed right after Legba and Ayizan, the oldest deities. They, too, may inflict punishment upon those who do not do homage to them.

Legba is perhaps the oldest of the Voodoo Gods. As the patriarch, he occupies the highest rank in Voodoo. He precedes all others in every ceremony. His role is to link the divine and the human world. As the medium between the worshippers and the lwas, he must grant permission before the latter manifest themselves at a ceremony. He bears the title of guardian of the road, master of the front gate, who opens the way. These two songs emphasize his role:

1) Atibon Legba louvri
baye pou mouin ago-e!
Papa Legba ouvri baye
pou mouin pase. Lo
ma tounin ma salue
lwa-yo! Vodou Leba
louvri baye pou moin
pou mouin ca rentre. Lo
ma tounin ma remesie
loa-yo. Abobo!

Atibon Legba open the gate
for me Ago e! Papa Legba
open the gate so that I can
pass. When I come back I
will thank the Gods! Vodou
Leba open the gate for me
So that I can enter. When
I come back I will salute
the Gods. Abobo!⁵⁶

2) Legba nan ounfo mwen
Legba nan ounfo mwen
Se'ou ki pote drapo
Wa pare soley pou lwa yo
Bilolo.

Legba in my temple, Legba
in my temple, you walk up
front carrying the flag
Please prevent all
conflicts for the other
Gods.⁵⁷

According to Roger Bastide, Exu plays the same role as Legba. He is:

"Le dieu des ouvertures; c'est lui qui commence le rituel, comme c'est lui qui garde le portail....Il est en meme temps le dieu des chemins....On transporte ses offrandes sur des routes ecartees ou aux carrefours la ou les voies de communication s'entrecroisent, parce qu'on est sur qu'a force de courir le monde, il finira bien par passer a cet endroit. C'est justement en tant qu'il preside aux ouvertures et aux chemins qu'il est devenu le messenger de tous les Orixas."⁵⁸

Legba's old age is displayed in his posture. His receptacles, when possessed by him, stoop, limp and lean on a cane. The legend in Haiti presents him as sexually frigid. This picture contradicts some characteristics given to Legba by other witnesses in Africa. Pierre Verger comments: "Il est dynamique et jovial. Les anciens voyageurs ont beaucoup parle de cette divinite qui les frappait tous par son aspect erotique."⁵⁹ In these reports, his phallus, enormous, out of proportion, is one of his main attributes.

Legba's wife, Ayizan, is as old as he or possibly older. She and Gran-n Ezili are the two female figures bent with age. Another indication of their advanced age is the familiar title of "gran-n" (grandmother) given to both.

Guede, Baron, Gran-n Brijit, the Guede family, rule the Kingdom of the Dead. The cemetery represents their home. In their veve (symbol of each lwa), there is a skull and two tibias. There is a Haitian belief that ghosts, or

the zombies, speak in a nasal voice. So do the Guedes. In fact, this is one of the signs that quickly identifies them when they possess their devotees. They usually wear mourning colors. The chief of this tribe is a royal character, a Baron, "Baron Samdi," guardian of the cemetery. He offers all the features of death: his hands, his face, his entire body freeze, apparently helpless. The Baron's wife has similar traits. "Une hounsi possedee par elle s'etendra su le sol avec toutes les apparences de la rigidite cadaverique et on lui mettra une mentonniere et des tampons dans les narines."⁶⁰ The best known of the dead is Guede Nibo. His uncouth but laughable behavior cannot go unnoticed. He belches as loudly as he can. He likes to speak French, but does not do so properly. This funny line coming from a Guede proves it: "Je suis de reveni."⁶¹ Instead of "Je suis revenu." (I am back). He usually carries a big phallus (represented by a wooden cane), a bottle, a loaf of Italian bread, anything erect) which he likes to show and play with. These scenes reflect the grotesque and bawdry depicted in Aristophanes Old Comedy where the phallus was also boldly displayed. While his face is made up with white powder, conveying the lividness of a ghost, his physical activity, extremely energetic, imitates the sexual act. Guede appears sexually obsessed. His actions, his discourses focus on sex, and he makes use of ribald language. His favorite slogan is "I

love to copulate."⁶² More often than not, he seems to have a "singular and unavoidable manner of doing or saying anything."⁶³ In fact, Guede shows no control. Whether in the presence of children or the elderly, his concupiscence knows no bounds, his licentious acts show no reserve. Guede is perhaps the Voodoo God who attracts the biggest crowd. In November, when Guede is celebrated, it is often difficult to find a place in the peristyle or to stay until the end of the ceremony for the audience simply goes wild. People feel close to Guede because he is earthy and because he celebrates a phenomenon utterly natural and human: sexuality, fertility, life. But Guede's popularity seems to be due more to his unconstrained, profligate demeanor than to what he stands for. Guede's real dimension resides in the dichotomy of his character. If he is cheerful and funny, he is at the same time very serious, in essence. On the one hand, he symbolizes life and on the other, the only certain and inevitable reality of life, death.

Guede resembles the Greek God Dionysus in more than one respect. They are both symbols of life and death. Oskar Seyffret suggests Dionysus in the following terms, "the death of vegetation in winter was represented as the flight of the god into hiding from the sentence of his enemies or even as his extinction, but he returned again from obscurity, or rose from the dead to new life and activity."⁶⁴ Both are associated with the phallus, the

emblem of reproduction. Both have a penchant for mirth, orgies and a debauched life. Although contrary to those for Guede, the Dionysus rites conveyed excessive sorrow, they both generate an atmosphere of excitement: "The rites intended to express the excess of grief and joy at the death and appearance of the god were wild, even to savagery."⁶⁵ Both occupy a low rank in the eyes of their fellow Gods. If Legba as the patriarch has the privilege to precede all Gods in all rituals, Guede is, on the contrary, always the last one to be honored, save perhaps, in celebrations dedicated to him in particular. Is he last because he is less important? Or because he symbolizes death, the final phase of everything? One thing is certain, some of his fellow Gods look down upon him. According to Milo Marcelin, Metres Ezili who is known for her love affairs with several other Gods, rejects him, which humiliates him: "Foutre tonnerre! J'aime cette femme. Mais elle ne veut pas de moi." (Damn it! I love this woman, but she does not want me...)⁶⁶ Even from the audience, sometimes, the attitude towards him is not very reverent, which angers him and might bring him to punish his detractors. Dionysus' position is even more inferior among the Olympians. Thomas Carpenter and Robert Gula, in Mythology, write: "He was not received enthusiastically and much of the mythology of Dionysus deals with his struggle for acceptance by gods and mortals alike."⁶⁷ He

is not only considered as an inferior God, even his divinity is questioned, as dramatized by Euripides in The Bacchae. The fact is that he is a demi God born of a union with a God, Zeus, and a mortal, Semele. But Dionysus fought until he won recognition. Another counterpart of Guede is the Egyptian deity, Osiris. Maximilien draws the parallel between Guede and Osiris whose cult he interprets, as: "Vivre est le plus grand bien, mourir la pire detresse. La grande affaire des vivants que la mort guette c'est de preparer les moyens d'une renaissance eternelle."⁶⁸

The Guede family has several members. E. C. Paul cites: Baron Samdi, Gran-n Brijit as the heads of this group and the other members, Guede Mussagne, Guede Nibo, Hu, Gedevis, Ti-Wawe, Jn-Simon, Gede Zaregne, l'Avant Garde, Brutus, Double, Brave, l'Oraye.⁶⁹ I attended a Guede ritual in Haiti, where I saw six additional types: Guede Mazaka, Guede Zel, Demeple, Tipis Vaganbon and Ti22.⁷⁰

Other Gods take on animal or nature characteristics. Danbala Wedo, one of the most important and popular deities of the Voodoo pantheon is identified as the serpent. In rituals, he often crawls on the floor. Some of his devotees, when possessed, give remarkable performances, climbing trees. Danbala symbolizes purity. His ornaments are usually white, his altar is white as the offerings to him: cake, liquor. His egg placed in white flour, lies in

a white saucer. Generosity is Danala's main trait. His wife, Ayida Wedo, represents the rainbow which according to the faithful, is also a serpent. These two deities in Africa are honored not as a couple, but as one entity, androgynous. Verger writes: "Il est connu sous le nom de Dan Ayida Wedo. Il est a la fois male et femelle."⁷¹ But Dan Ayida Wedo has much in common with Danbala and Ayida Wedo: "Il est represente sous la forme du serpent arc-en-ciel. Les offrandes qui lui sont faites consistent en toile blanche, dont en fait les drapeaux...deux poulets blancs."⁷² A pure Dan Ayida Wedo forbids wrongdoing in his presence: "A Abomey,, il est bon d'eviter de dire du male des gens lorsqu'on se trouve a proximite d'un Dan."⁷³ According to Verger, the Yoruba also honor Dan under the name of Osumare, which means rainbow.

Loko is the God of the forests. His knowledge of vegetation gives him great power. He plays the role of the healer, presides at initiations. His symbols are the elements of the forest: a tree, a chameleon, a butterfly or even the wind. His ritual colors are green and yellow.

The stock characters cited above form only a portion of the Voodoo pantheon. Nevertheless, they clearly suggest the cosmic dimension of Voodoo. The universe is represented: Men, women, children, the elderly, the dead, the animals and the elements. Different strata are also present: from the king to the peasant. A variety of

idiosyncracies are displayed from the tragic to the comic, or the tragi-comic. In spite of their supernatural essence, these characters are close to human nature and, therefore, reflect the basic attributes of society. Human emotions, such as maternal love, romantic love, lust, anger, jealousy; human flaws such as fickleness, presumption, vanity, debauchery; human qualities such as beauty, virility, generosity, wisdom, intelligence are all represented. For the Voodoo believer, Voodoo Gods take human shapes to assist their faithful. They speak and act through human bodies and interact with people. Furthermore, they share the lives of mortals. Wedding ceremonies between Voodoo divinities and their devotees take place all year long. Voodoo Gods make certain demands upon their spouses. At least one day per week, sexual abstinence must be observed because this day is dedicated to the divine spouse: e.g., Wednesday to Ogou, Thursday to Danbala. It is also believed that there is sexuality between the conjugal pair, by way of dreams.

Only one personage in Voodoo is never anthropomorphized: "Gran Met" or "Bon Dye", although his name is utterly revered and figures in a number of songs such as the following:

O Dan, bonswa, bonswa
 Bonswa, bonswa Danbala
 Wedo Mape mande koman
 nou ye? Wi nou la, o
 wi nou la! Danbala Wedo,

O Dan, good evening, good
 evening Good evening, good
 evening Danbala Wedo I ask
 how are you? Yes, we are
 fine, we are fine Danbala

la vi-n nan Men Bon Dye Wedo, our life is in God's hands.

This God is almighty. But he is never staged in particular as are the other divinities. What is the difference? Is there a difference at all? Some viewpoints on the relation between the lwa and God might shed light on the question. Max Beauvoir affirms:

Le ou mete tout fos sa yo ansanm, ou we ke yo pa anyen dot ke yon espresyon menm de Vodou-a, sa vle di yon espresyon de Dye. Menm Jan on moun-n gen pye, li gen bra, li gen tet, li gen zorey, li gen cheve, li gen diferan eleman, se tout eleman sa-yo ansanm Ki fe individyi-ya. Se menm Jan-an se tout lwa-yo ansanm Ke nou menm nou rele Dye, pase m-panse Vodou-a monoteyis. Nou rele Dye-a Gran Met, Papa Bon Dye, Pe Etenel."⁷⁵

Thus for those who believe Voodoo is monotheist, in spite of its 101 or 401 lwa or spirits, $1 + 100$ or $1 + 400$ or $1 + \text{infinity} = 1$. This point of view is given some attention in the Serpent and The Rainbow. The scientist Wade Davis formulates the monotheist aspect Voodoo in similar terms: "The Voodooist, in fact, honors hundreds of lwa because he so sincerely recognizes all life, all material objects and even abstract processes as the sacred expressions of God."⁷⁶

Using this philosophy one might deduce that the spirit called "Gran Met" (God Almighty) is not absent from the Voodoo stage. Being the sum total of all lwas, being the whole, he is represented each time a part of the whole (any lwa) is represented.

Others diverge from that point of view. Not only do they see in Voodoo a "complicated polytheism"⁷⁷ but they see the lwas as entities inferior to God. Metraux comments: "In Voodoo, the idea of God seems to get mixed up with the idea of a vague and impersonal power, superior to that of the loa."⁷⁸ Obviously according to this view, God and the lwa do not belong to the same world, do not fuse, which might be another explanation why "Gran Met" or God does not appear on the Voodoo stage.

Aristotle defines thought as: "The capacity to express what is involved in or suitable to a situation...a thought comes in where something is proved or disproved or some general opinion is expressed."⁷⁹ This definition appears somewhat vague and, in any case, limited, for it might tend to reduce thought strictly to the character's verbal expression. This criterion will be modified here. The concept, taken in a wider sense, will be given a fuller scope. Some dramas, more than a dialogue, offer a broader, profounder range of perception. Sentiments can be read or assessed through behaviors, attitudes. Of this process, Pinter's dramas such as the Birthday Party, and The Homecoming, furnish some good examples. As Brockett puts it: "With Pinter, silence is an integral part of language and he treats speech as one type of strategem whereby characters seek to cover their psychological nakedness."⁸⁰ Thus, an "unspoken subtext" is often as important as the

spoken dialogue. Moreover, thought in drama may go far beyond the capacity to express what is involved between characters in the dramatic situation. It might be conceived to raise wider contemporary problems or translate the playwright's views on crucial issues, be they religious, social or political, as in the medieval plays or Ibsen's, Shaw's, or Brecht's. Thought in such plays becomes the illustration of a thesis, philosophy or ideology and, therefore, aims at moralizing, guiding, instructing. Aristotle does not refer to the various facets of thought in drama. He has been criticized for his lack of acumen on the question. Walter Kaufmann writes: "One of the most striking features of Aristotle's Poetics is his failure to discuss thought, which one might expect to be central in a philosopher's discussion of tragedy.... Besides the thought voiced by the characters, there is also the playwright's thought in which Aristotle takes no interest whatsoever."⁸¹ The German critic, Schlegel, examined thought in greater depth. What type of thought does he consider dramatic?

"The characters may express thoughts and sentiments without operating any change on each other and so leave the minds of both in exactly the same way in which they were at the commencement; in such a case, however interesting the conversation may be, it cannot be said to possess dramatic interest."⁸²

For him, a "philosophically instructive dialogue" is the best in drama. Moreover, the dramatic poet "must decidedly

take part with one or other of the leading views of human life and constrain his audience also to participate in the same feeling."⁸³

Voodoo basically conforms to that spirit. Dialogues constitute, as in drama, one of the components of the Voodoo rituals. Here is an example of a speech delivered by a lwa, Ogou, in his dialogue with a devotee:

Ou pale trop. Ou tando sa-m-di-ou? Pa pale koze-ou....Sispan-n kriye, tande. Mesye dam la sosyete, nou tande sa-m-di-l? Tout bagay ou tande, ou rakonte vivan-an li. Men vivan sa-a se fanmi gason-an. Ak moun wa-pepale-a, se'li kape kraze-ou. Se-sa selman m'di-ou. Si ou vle tande-m wa tande-m.⁸⁴

Sometimes, political prophecies may be revealed as in this example. About two months before the November 1987 elections were thwarted by the mind boggling massacre orchestrated by the dictators of Haiti, a worshipper possessed by the Goddess "La Ren-n Kongo" (the Kongo Goddess) made this prediction: "Nou tande mwen Mesye-Dam, peyi Dayiti gen pou l'delivre. Men delivrans pa fet san san. Nou tande mwen mesye-Dam, mare ren nou sere. Gen yon machwe ron Ki pral Tonbe."⁸⁵

At other times, brief theogonic data are given:

"Mwen se Ren-n nan peyi mwen. Se Ezili Danto nou Konnen, men gen lot tou. Nou chak nan yon divizyon, men nou tout se menm. Nan epok esklavaj, nan premye neg Ki te debake yo, Se mwen Ki te devan. Mwen se Ren-n la-Kay mwen. Mwen Kon-n danse. Chante pou mwen danse."⁸⁶

These speeches, interesting as they may be, do not give a full view of the Voodoo rationale. The ideas, the philosophy of Voodoo are given expression chiefly through the songs and prayers. They can also be sensed through the practice of Voodoo, for if thoughts guide actions, actions reflect thoughts, even unvoiced, or generate them. Therefore, sentiments here will be analyzed not primarily as characters' opinions, but as some of the teachings offered by Voodoo: problems of daily life, the struggle for change, fellowship, social equality, cultural identity, nationalism, tolerance, justice, retribution, honesty.

Thought in Voodoo essentially focuses on the people's struggle for survival, contrary to ancient Greek philosophy, where Fate, hopelessness, the unchangeable nature of things seems to prevail. Most plays influenced by the Greek philosophy bear the stamp of an unavoidable tragic destiny. The entire ill-fated House of Atreus from generation to generation is doomed to be destroyed. Agamemnon, Electra, Orestes, must fall. The House of Laius, too, Oedipus, his two sons, Eteocles and Polynices, Antigone, Ismene - all face doom. Most religions convey some degree of idealism, a sense of submissiveness of man to the Supreme Force or Forces in which he believes. Voodoo, however, places an emphasis on self-defense, a combativeness that counterbalances passivity and appears to question the notion of resignation. The themes of the

songs, as well as their content, bring to light the woof of Voodoo philosophy.

Voodoo provides an insight into the living conditions of the people. Their misery is clearly exposed. They are poor:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1) Fey bwa tonbe, resiyol vole
Charite, mande charite
Vila Moye Fe pou mwen.
Si-m pagen bon deye
Charite ma mande. | The leaves of trees
have fallen
The nightingales fled
Beg! Beg!
Vila Moyo help me
If I do not have good
protection I will
have to beg for
Charity. ⁸⁷ |
| 1) Mize-a twop pou mwen
Seye anwo, mizerikod
pou mwen | The misery is too
much for me
God above me, have
mercy on me! ⁸⁸ |
| 3) Nwaye nape nwaye!
Ezili si ou we m'tonbe
nan dlo Pran-m non. | Drowning! We are
drowning!
Ezili if you see us
perish in the stream
Please rescue us. |
| Sove la vi zanafan yo
Nwaye nape nwaye manbo zila | Save your children's
life
Drowning Yes we are
Drowning, Priestess
Zila. ⁸⁹ |

They are exploited:

- | | |
|--|---|
| A mwe a mwe
Dabala e
A la mize. Kontribisyon
deye nu
La komin deye nu
La polis deye nu
Papa Danbala A la
Mize | Help! Help! Danbala,
hey!
What misery!
The Tax Bureau is
after us
The House of Commons
is after us
The police are after us
What misery Papa
Danbala! ⁹⁰ |
|--|---|

Such anguish creates uncertainty: What will tomorrow be made of:

Badji-sa-a
Map mande kote ma tonbe
na peyi-a

Divine forces,
I wonder what will
become of me in this
country?⁹¹

Other songs contain a sharp of analysis of some aspects of society. Besides living conditions, class discrimination and superficiality are examined:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1) Vanite, vanite, Sheridan
Si ou gen lajan, wa rantre
nan pot
Vanite si ou pa gen lajan
Wa rete de yo pou gade yo | Vanity, vanity, Sheridan
If you are rich, they
will let you in
If you are poor, you will
have to stay out to watch
them. ⁹² |
| 2) Sali Legba-e Ayizan
Sali Legba-e! Ou pa tande
Lajan kase roch
Oupa we peyi-a chanje | Hail Legba! Ayizan
Hail Legba! don't you
hear that money has
almighty power? Don't
you see how things
have changed? ⁹³ |
| 3) Yo we'm la-a yo pa konnen
mwen
Malere, pase nou malere
Si-m te gen lajan
Yo ta konnen mwen | They see me there, but
they pretend not to
know me. Poor, because
I am poor. If I were
rich, they would know
me. ⁹⁴ |
| 4) A la on la vi ki tris se
la vi malere
A la on lavi ki red se
la vi malere
Moun de byen yo chita
chita yo
Malere ap pwomennen | How sad is the poor
people's life! How
painful is the poor
people's life. While
the bourgeois are
comfortably resting
The poor people have
to roam about the
streets. ⁹⁵ |

Not only do the people suffer from their material conditions and social status, they are also exposed to all

sorts of abuses. That is why they must be lucid, watchful, for others might attempt to take advantage of them.

Vila Moyo Fe atansyon pou
eskalye Boumba!
M-pa manman Poul
Kap pon-n Ze pou chen
manje
Mpa pentad kap pon-n ze
Pou chat Bwe

Vila Moyo, watch out
for Eskalye Boumba!
I am no mother chicken
who lays eggs for dogs
to eat. I am no
guinea fowl which lays
eggs for cats to
drink.⁹⁶

Poor people must not passively accept their plight.
Nor should they humble themselves in front of their
enemies, whoever they are. They must demand justice.

Anvan yo touye mwen, Fo
yo jije-m 7 fwa
Anvan yo touye mwen, Fo
yo jije-m 7 fwa
Anvan yo touye mwen
Ma mande, Lenba, sa-m-fe?

Before they kill me,
they must try me 7
times
Before they kill me,
they must try me 7
times
Before they kill me
I will ask Lenba, what
have I done?⁹⁷

To raise the voice may not be enough to make justice
prevail. Self-defense then, takes various forms, including
violence. Voodoo abounds in songs on resistance and
defense:

- 1) Agasou, prete-m kouto-ou la
Prete-m revolve ou la
M'deja gason deja
M'pap mouri san pale

Agasou, lend me your
knife
Agasou, lend me your gun
I am already a man
I refuse to die without
fighting.⁹⁸

- 2) Ogou rele: m pa non betiz
ave yo
Depi mekredi maten machet
mwen
Nan men mwen. M pan nan
betiz ave yo

Ogou screams: I am not
bantering with them.
From Wednesday morning
my sabre is in my hands.
I am not bantering with
them.⁹⁹

- | | |
|--|--|
| 3) M bezwen baton pou male
an ba
Remezi Bon Dye m te gen
kouto
Remesi la vyej m te gen
ponya
M'bezwen baton pou male
anba | I need my stick to go
down there
I thank God I have my
knife
I thank the Goddess I
had my dagger
I need my stick to go
down there. ¹⁰⁰ |
|--|--|

The idea of resistance and combativeness is coupled with hope, hope that one day life will change for those who are suffering and they will win:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1) Lenba zaou, kreyol fatigue
Mape mande kote yo konnen
mwen
Jodi pou yo, demen pou on
lot O!
Nap mache pazapa Mize
nan do yo! | Lenba Zaou, your African
children are tired.
Indeed they don't know us.
Today they have it all
Tomorrow it will be our
turn
We are moving step by step
Misery will come onto
them. ¹⁰¹ |
| 2) Jou-a la, jou-a la
Koman rele chen mwen?
Dechouke! | The day will soon come.
The day will soon come.
What's my dog's name?
Uproot! ¹⁰² |
| 3) Sobo, sa nou ye?
gen yon tan ya we sa
nou ye. | Sobo, who are we?
One day, they will
realize who we are. ¹⁰³ |
| 4) M Balanse m'pa tonbe
Yo sou pouvwa e
Na Kenbe la | I swing but I do not
lose equilibrium
They are in power
But we still hang
on. ¹⁰⁴ |

In essence, Voodoo stands for change, a better life as indicated by the following song, one of the most popular of the Voodoo repertoire:

- | | |
|---|---|
| Anonse O zanj nan dlo
O Bakosou miwa lawe lawe
Nan la vil-o-kan e!
Kreyol mande chanjman | Announce it, angels of
the water
O Bakosou miwa lawe lawe
In "lavil-okan" e!
The children of Africa
ask for change! ¹⁰⁵ |
|---|---|

Some prayers also reflect Voodoo's concern for the people's suffering and for change: "Gras la mizerikod, m'mande lame divizyon-an pwoteje pitit-yo pou mwen. Mmande fos kouray pou ane 87 la pa pase nan menm kondisyon-an."¹⁰⁶

Change now. Change here, on earth: Herard Simon defines Voodoo's basic goal: "pemet chak moun viv lib...Kreye yon premye paradi pou wou bo-isi. Paradi-a se liberasyon."¹⁰⁷

Fellowship, unity are also dominant precepts of Voodoo. The brotherhood built during the period of slavery among the various African nations constitutes the very basis of Voodoo. This is reflected in the structure of numerous rituals where Gods from several ethnic groups are invoked successively: e.g., Rada, Petro, Congo. The "Madyonan" prayer further establishes this: "Map rele tout nanchon Rada, Petro, Ibo, Caplaou, Amine, Mondong, Manding, Sinigal, Kita, Congo, Nago, Dahomin."¹⁰⁸

Some temples seem to be more exclusive than others. Soukri honors only Congo Gods, Souvenance only the Dahomean and Nan Badyo only the Nago. But fellowship still exists among them. Worshipers and priests from one temple actively support the others.

The concept of family in Voodoo extends to the entire community:

Kimalada sanble
Ce pa moin seul, ho, qui
pou sevi loa
Bolada yo sanble

It is not only I who
must serve the Gods
Bolada folks, come
together,

Bolada kimalada, O
 kimalada...
 Nou deja Rada, nou Deja
 Rada
 Ce pa mouin seul ki pou
 sevi Ogoun-Feraille
 Famille en pile, ce moin
 youne

Bolada and Kimalada folks
 We are all Rada
 It is not only I who
 must serve Ogou Feray
 The family is immense.
 I am only one
 member.¹⁰⁹

Brotherhood in Voodoo is demonstrated in this opinion offered by the priest Herard Simon: "Vodou se yon group moun ki mete tet ansanm pou yo ka jwen-n on fason pou you viv, e pou yo ka jwen-n yon vizyon di mond." (Voodoo is a group of people who united in order to find a way to survive and in order to find a vision of the world.)¹¹⁰

Brotherhood in Voodoo is not just a religious or philosophical dogma. It permeates the faithfuls' lives and actions. A priest or priestess is obliged to protect the hounsis (servants) of his/her temple. In case of death, he or she must pay the hounsis' burial expenses unless the deceased's relatives take charge. Metraux says: "For his part, the houngan has responsibilities towards the hunsis; he is their counselor and protector, and if they find themselves without means of support, through no fault of their own, he houses, feeds and clothes them until he has found them a job."¹¹¹

Brotherhood may also be observed in the Voodoo society of Bahia, Brazil. Bastide defines the candomble as: "Une veritable societe de secours mutuel, d'entraide fraternele, qui maintient l'esprit communautaire africain."¹¹²

The spirit of fraternity paves the way for social equality, a fundamental teaching of Voodoo. The houngan Herard Simon elucidates:

"Afe de entel kwe ke li siperye pase entel...Nan insiysasyon nou, nou fe resoti sa. Depi ou vini, nou wete tout abiman sosyete oksidantal la ba ou ki fe ou kwe ou siperye tel moun-n."¹¹³

Social equality in Voodoo is more than a theory. Voodoo helps to promote social equality. Anyone, from the poorest strata to the wealthiest, may become not only a Vodoo worshipper, but may attain the highest level of authority, provided that he acquire the required maturity and wisdom. The poorest peasant, ordinarily scorned and humiliated in Haitian society, receives the greatest honors in the Voodoo community if he is deserving. No wonder that in the Voodoo pantheon, the peasant God, "Kouzen Zaka" bears the elevated title of "Minis" (Minister of agriculture). In reality, the Voodoo community in Haiti is perhaps the only circle in which the poor peasants and other "have nots" have real power and recognition. Following the Voodoo concept of social equality, ZANTRAY (Zanfan Tradisyon Ayiti/Children of The Traditions of Haiti) defines itself in the following terms:

ZANTRAY (ZANFAN tradisyon Ayiti) se you oganizasyon kap goumen pou defann ak devlope tou sa ki natif natal ki soti nan nannan tradisyon peyi dayiti.
- Se peyizasyon ki poto mitan ZANTRAY. Tout lot moun ki ladan dwe antre ak one respe pou-neg ak neges andeyo enpi wete chapo devan kilti pep la ki chita nan Vodou-a.¹¹⁴

the attitude of the privileged and "haves" drastically changes once they find themselves on Voodoo territory. It is interesting to watch a member of the Haitian middle class or bourgeoisie bow to the ground to a barefoot peasant or relate to him/her with utter reverence, a phenomenon otherwise unimaginable. Here, temporarily, social barriers and prejudices disappear. Not only does equality prevail, but the peasants are seen as fully capable people and receive due homage for their medical, chemical, therapeutic or mystical competence. Nowhere in Haiti, save in the Voodoo community, do the social classes come so close and share so much. There is a Voodoo hierarchy, but it has nothing to do with favoritism, politics, wealth or social status. As Roger Bastide observes in Bahia's candomble: "La hierarchie depend en dernier ressort de la participation...du tresor de connaissances amassees au cours des ans."¹¹⁵ However, if hougans and mambos are superior to hounsis, the latter mean a lot to the temple. This is made clear in the following song: "C'est hounsi qui fait houngan." (It's the hounsis that make the houngan.)¹¹⁶

The concepts of brotherhood and social equality harmonize with equality shown between the sexes. Voodoo is one of the religions that give women equal rights. Unlike the Catholic church, women in Voodoo have access to all levels of authority, as long as they fulfill the

requirements. They become priestesses, they initiate novices, male or female, own and govern temples, occupy all functions. Planson affirms it clearly:

Il n'existe aucune forme de segregation a l'egard de la femme dans le vaudou haitien. Elle y est au sens strict l'egale de l'homme et personne ne songerait a la cantonner dans les roles secondaires. Au meme titre que le "houngan", la mambo est seule maitresse de son temple. Il lui faut de l'autorite, de la diplomatie, du talent, des competences et une efficacite pour tenir son rang de reine."¹¹⁷

Many priestesses emerge as among the most respected dignitaries of their community. One of Jacmel's best known Voodoo dignitaries is a woman: Madame Nerva. The head of one of the most venerated Voodoo headquarters, La Ville-aux-Camps in Port de Paix, is a woman. One of the most honored dignitaries of Soukri, a historical temple of the nation, is a woman: Mme. Helene Simon, called Empress by her devotees. One of the most popular Voodoo priests abroad is a woman: Mathilda Beauvoir, who presides at a hounfo in Paris. The historic Voodoo ceremony called the Ceremony of the Bois-Caiman (August 14, 1791) which gave the signal for the slaves revolt, was presided over by two priests: a man and a woman. The latter is the one who conducted the "determining" operation. She immolated the pig whose blood was then given to all present: "D'un geste vif, la pretresse, inspiree, plonge son coutelas dans la gorge de l'animal. Le sang gicle, il est recueilli fumant et distribue a la ronde, aux esclaves; tous en boivent, tous jurent d'executer les ordres de Boukman."¹¹⁸

Voodoo teaches its devotees a sense of cultural identity. In fact Voodoo represents the chief institution which keeps alive in the memory of the Haitians, their origins, their traditions and urges them to take pride and maintain the heritage: "Fanmi ginen, ranmase ginen." (Children of Africa, do not abandon your heritage.)¹¹⁹ the devotees must seek a way to preserve the traditions in spite of the opposing forces.

Kote ma mete lwa yo
Moun yo di konsa ya
dechouke houngan. Lwa
sa-a se lwa manman mwen
Lwa sa-a se lwa papa mwen
Yo di ya dechouke houngan
Kote ma mete lwa-yo?

What will I do with my
lwa? The enemies say
they will uproot the
houngans. These lwas
are a maternal heritage
These lwas are a
paternal heritage. They
say they will uproot the
houngans. What will
I do with my lwa?¹²⁰

The sense of cultural identity in Voodoo is linked to nationalism: preserve the culture, preserve the autonomy of the nation:

L'empere Dessalines Oh!
Cle oum pho-a lan main
Ou deja pa quittez li gate
Ou ce vaillant gacon
pa quittez pays-a tonbe
Li lan main ou deja
Loko Miroi-ze
L'empere Dessalines
Pa quittez peyi-a gate

Emperor Dessalines Oh!
the key to the temple is
in your hands Don't let
it fall It is already in
your hands Loko de
Moroï-ze Emperor Loko de,
Dessalines Don't let the
country fall.¹²¹

The spirit of independence and nationalism is expressed even more boldly in this song:

Pito muri passe m-kuri
Desalin Desalin
Demambre Viv la libete

Better to die than run
away Dessalines
Dessalines the powerful
Long live Liberty.¹²²

Voodoo affirms a liberal way of thinking which prevents it from condemning views that diverge from its own, unlike many other religions. This should not be perceived as a sign of lack of self-esteem, of weakness, for it has fought to safeguard its own beliefs. Not only does it accept the existence of other religions, it opens itself to some, as long as Voodoo's rules are maintained. This tolerance is seen in a comment of the Voodoo priestess, Mathilda Beauvoir: "Le scandale est de vouloir imposer aux autres sa propre perception du monde....Pour le reste, il n'y a qu'un Dieu et peu m'importé le nom qu'on lui donne. Je me sens tout a fait a mon aise dans une eglise, un temple, une mosquee ou une synagogue."¹²³ Some other religions adopt rules against certain practices such as polygamy and adultery. Voodoo offers no such interdictions. The wife of an houngan offers this testimony: "Fo on fi gen fyel pou li madanm yon houngan paske lap pran fanm jan-l pito la nan figi-ou."¹²⁴ Actually, sexual freedom is not only the man's; it is also the woman's. "La vie d'une mambo n'est en rien comparable a celle d'une nonne. Elle peut etre celibataire, mariee ou placee, a son gre. Il lui arrive meme, comme le houngan peut etre polygame, de pratiquer ouvertement la polyandrie sans que personne ne songe a discuter son comportement."¹²⁵ Homosexuality, so outrageous to many religions, is not an offense in Voodoo. Many Voodoo worshippers practice

homosexuality. The worshipper's lifestyle then has no bearing on Voodoo. What counts is the worshipper's fidelity to the Gods and his ability to execute the latter's demands. Is this tolerance or openmindedness synonymous with amorality?

Voodoo does have moral standards: Friendship should be honored, in spite of the conflicts that may exist among friends: "O gou, a la neg politik O! Li lese koule pou li gen zanmi. (Ogou, what a diplomat! He makes concessions in order to have friends)¹²⁶

Warnings against betrayal are given: Discretion, secrecy must be observed in friendship: "Jou gen yen zanmi, fo gen yen sekre. Atibon Legba m'pral mande yo sa." (Where there is friendship, there must be secrecy. Atibon Legbe, I am going to tell them that.)¹²⁷ Contrary to the belief that Voodoo is a malevolent cult, the devil's domain, Voodoo forbids injustice and believes in retribution: "Palmannan pinga ou fe trop. Bon dye pini ta, men lipini seve." (Palmannan, do not abuse, for God may take time to punish, but He punishes severely.)¹²⁸ By the same token, righteousness is a guaranteed protection: "Ti jan Petro, devan rezon-m, maji-m ap komande. (Ti Jan Petro, when I am in the right, my magic will prevail.)¹²⁹ "De manye yo di ya touye chwal mwen, se si-m anto." (De manye, they threaten to kill my servant. They will succeed only if I am in the wrong.)¹³⁰

These are some of the major thoughts which flow from Voodoo rituals and from the practice of Voodoo. Clearly, the purport of thoughts in Voodoo is to instruct. They stand for change, resistance, freedom, justice, brotherhood. According to the priestess Ginette Tovar, Voodoo philosophy "essentially emphasizes the defense and respect of the weak."¹³¹ The Houngan Hippolyte says: "Vodou se yon revolisyon. Li pwoteje sevite li kont lenmi. Li se yon pisans pou moun Ki Kwe ladan."¹³² The spiritist, Gerard Philippe Auguste, sees in Voodoo: "The defense of the poor's right and power."¹³³ Most of the thoughts exist in a number of songs. When closely analyzed, they present a compendium of the people's existence, and form a guideline for Voodoo believers. In essence, they give the worshipper the incentive to go on, to change suffering into combativeness. They are not ascribed to one given ritual, but rather are repeated in various types of ceremony.

Diction is concerned with the linguistic aspect of drama. Language in Voodoo, as with the other dramatic elements, repays attention.

Due to the phenomenon of acculturation in Haiti, Voodoo rituals present a multilingual character. French, brought to Santo Domingo by the colonizers, remains, even after Independence, the language of the dominant class, a

very small minority, less than 5%. Until recently it was the official language, relegating Creole - the only language understood by all Haitians - to an inferior position. In March 1987, the new Constitution elevated Creole to the same level as French. For a long time then, most institutions, including the religious ones, used French. The Catholic church, until the second half of the 20th century, used French and Latin as its main instruments of communication in all major religious services. Having incorporated some Catholic prayers, Voodoo ritual in a great number of temples makes use of French -- even Latin - - though to a limited extent. In some fairly traditional temples, many of the introductory rites are delivered in French and Latin as I witnessed in Port-au-Prince, and abroad. French was used at Mme. Sisco's celebration of Guede.¹³⁴ French was used in Souvenance in preliminary prayers before the annual celebration.¹³⁵ At a thanksgiving ceremony in Brooklyn, the French and Latin recitatives were so numerous and lasted so long (about two hours) that many worshippers openly manifested their impatience. One of the worshippers shouted: "An-Nale mon pe, li minwi, li le pou nou traveze." (Let us go, father, it is midnight, it is time to cross over).¹³⁶ This portion of the ceremony was presided over by a special figure called "Pe savan-n" (Savanna priest), considered an expert in Catholic litanies. Other temples reject French and

Latin. I attended a long series of ritualistic celebrations in Soukri - which lasted eleven days - held strictly in Creole.¹³⁷ All Catholic litanies were omitted. Voodoo, though it underwent the influence of foreign languages, retained Creole as its principal language, even in temples where acculturation exists. What is the nature of diction in Voodoo?

The communicative efficacy of the Voodoo language is manifest.

An aesthetic mode makes itself felt in various ways. The marriage of simplicity and emotional power, which characterizes the style of a number of songs, imparts to them great beauty. The affliction, the despair, the sense of loss that exile usually causes, find their echo in these lamentations:

M pas gangnin manman	I have no mother
M pas gangnin papa	I have no father
Marassa Eyo!...	Marassa Eyo!
M'sorti nan guinee	I came from Guinea
M'pas gain gnin fanmille	I have no family
Marasa Eyo	Marasa Eyo
Mpa gangnin fanmille'	I have no family
Caq-va parler pou moin	Who will speak on my
Marassa Ehyo!	behalf Marassa Ehyo.
mpas gangnin personne	I have nobody
Pour parler pour moin	to speak on my behalf
Marassa Ehyo!	Marassa Ehyo! ¹³⁸

With similar poignance, Euripides depicts the state of mind of the Trojan women waiting to be shipped off to slavery after the fall of Troy, the distress of exile being common to all men:

Let the boat go as it chances

sorrow, my sorrow
 What sorrow is there that is not mine
 Grief to weep for
 Country lost and children and husband
 Glory of all my house brought low.
 All was nothing - nothing always
 Keep silent? Speak?
 Weep then, why? For what?¹³⁹

The next piece, an ode of repentance, compels the auditor to share the experience, a cry for forgiveness filled with fear, love and reverence.

M'mande ou padon
 Papa Loko, m'mande ou padon
 Papa m'mande ou padon
 papa Loko, mouin ce pitite ou deja
 Pinga ou mode'm jousté dans os
 M'mande padon, Loko Atisou
 papa Loko, papa, mouin mande padon
 Ah Loko, m ce pitit ou deja
 Pinga ou mode'm jousté dans os
 M'mande padon, Loko Atisou
 Papa Loko, papa, mouin mande padon
 Ah loko, m ce pitit ou deja
 O pinga ou mode m'jousté nan zo...
 Mouin crie Abobo
 Pap Loko, papa
 N'a pralle d'acco
 Pou nou sacre sevice-la
 Sevice cilla, sevice Adanyi
 Adanyi-sobo, Sobokeson bologe
 Atisugwe, min yanvalougie
 gros Loko, min yanvalou mouin

I ask for forgiveness
 Papa Loko, I ask for forgiveness
 Papa Loko, I am your child after all
 Do not bite me through the bones I ask for forgiveness
 Loko Atisou Papa Loko, I am your child after all
 Do not bite me through the bones I ask for forgiveness
 Ah Loko I am your child after all O do not bite me through the bones...
 I cry Abobo papa Loko, we are going to agree to perform the service, This service, Adanyi service
 Adanyi, Sobo, Sobokeson bologe Atisugwe here is my yanvalougie Great
 Loko, here is my yanvalou.¹⁴⁰

The repetition and paralellisms here are not mere vacuums, but poetic devices intended to give the piece rhythmical movement while intensifying its lyricism, its pathos. Herskovits provides an example of poetry drawn

from a Dahomean ritual, where repetitions enhance the beauty of the piece:

Do not weep
 Nothing stays Death
 Nor the day of its coming
 Death troubles us - O!
 Death troubles us
 As the flies fret our backs,
 Returning and returning
 So death troubles us!
 As the pigeons alight on a housetop
 And dance and dance
 So Death dances - O!
 Ai -yo!
 Ai - yo- O!141

A political password conveys a moving tone, thanks to its evocative quality. Boukman at the ceremony of the Bois-Caiman called for political action against slavery with words so vivid that they could not fail to inspire the audience:

Bon Dieu qui fait
 soleil
 Qui claire nous en haut,
 Qui souleve la mer
 qui fait l'orage gronde
 bon Dieu la z'autres
 tendez
 Cache dans son nuage

Good God who created the
 sun
 which shines above us,
 Who stirs up the sea,
 Who makes the thunder
 roar
 Beware you people,
 the good God
 Is hidden in the clouds

Et la li gade nous
 Li wouait tout ca blancs
 fait
 bon dieu mande crime
 Et pas nous vle bienfaits
 mais Dieu la qui sibon
 Ordonnez nous vengeance
 Li va conduit nous
 Li baille nous
 assistance
 Jetez portraits Dieu
 blancs
 Qui soif d leau dans
 yeux nous

And there he watches us
 And sees all the deeds of
 the white men
 The white men's God
 orders crimes
 Ours wants kindness
 but our God, so
 bountiful
 Orders us vengeance
 He will lead us
 He will assist us
 Throw away the images of
 the white men's God
 Who is thirsty of our

Coutez la liberte qui
nan coeur a nous tous

Tears Hearken to the call
for liberty that is in
the hearts of all
of us.¹⁴²

The grave lofty style of the above songs contrasts with the derisive tone of the next ones. Satirical wit occurs in many Voodoo songs. Voodoo worshippers virulently manifest their hostility towards those whom they consider mal-intentioned intruders in their environment. Then, their bitterness bursts out in brutal attacks:

1) Yo vini gade pou
yale pale
Yo vini gade pou yale
pale Se bagay si la
Ki ba-yo ve nan dan:
Verifye Lenba pou yale
pale

They came to watch so
they can go and gossip
They came to watch so
they can go and gossip
this is what gives them
worms in their teeth:
Inspect Lenba and then
go and gossip.¹⁴³

2) Deye do se lan guinen
Dapre koze-m tande
Map viv ave yo
pawol nan dyol yo
se kout kouto
pawol nan bek you se
kout ponya
Dapre koze-m tande
Map viv ave yo

Behind the back is like
guinea
According to what I heard
I will use diplomacy to
cope with them
words from their
"Muzzles" are knife
strokes
Words from their "beaks"
are dagger strokes
According to what I heard
I will use diplomacy
to cope with them.¹⁴⁴

The most intriguing term in both songs is "yo" (they or them). At whom is it aiming? Nobody knows for certain. This subtlety makes the message stronger. One answer seems to solve the riddle: If the shoe fits, wear it! And some people eventually do. I witnessed cases where outsiders came to willfully upset the officiants as well as the

ceremony. Other loaded phrases from these songs are: "Ve nan dan" (worms in the teeth); "Pawol nan bekya" (words from their "beaks"); "pawol nan dyol yo (words from their "muzzles"). These words, far from being clement, though not exactly obscene, are terribly offensive in Creole. The fact is they are meant to be malicious, to wound those at whom they are launched.

Actual polemics, at times, arise in Voodoo rituals. I attended a Petro Voodoo ceremony where worshippers were divided into two opposing camps. They were divided by a serious controversy with respect to the conventions of the ritual. Some argued that the officiant did not respect the regular order of the ritual, that he had too quickly jumped to the Petro phase, thus not granting enough importance to the Rada rite. The officiant replied that he intended to serve his Gods his way. The polemic then translated into songs. Alternately, one camp launched a song, the other gave a rejoinder. This went on all night. As Celimene and Arsinoe in Moliere's Le Misanthrope, the rivals in an apparent pacific co-existence, used words as weapons to break each other. So here, one side claiming to be pure, declared that the other had satanic connections:

A la maji, a la maji	What witchcraft, what
Ki an ba Bilal Ke-m sote!	Witchcraft in this place!
	It startles my heart. ¹⁴⁵

to which the officiant responded in many ways.

Baron O! ma rele Baron O!	Baron O! I call Baron
timoun ap anmede mwen	O!

Immature people are
bothering me.¹⁴⁶

O sa ou we la-a, se sa,
Se lisife Kiban mwen
pwen-an

O! What you see is what
you get
It is Lucifer who gave me
power.¹⁴⁷

Then both camps sang the same song together, but not really in unison, for what appeared to be togetherness was, in fact, sheer irony, a sharper form of hostility. Each used that song to warn the other:

Manyen mwen
Si ou kwe ou ka manyen
mwen
ma rele gade, m pa pe
peson-n

Hurt me
If you think you can hurt
me
I will scream! Look, I am
not afraid of anyone.¹⁴⁸

The verbal stoning took a more acrimonious tone when singing another song together the opponents transformed some of the words to ridicule the officiant:

Fanm okay
Kote ou ye. Ou te met
nan somey
Kote ou ye?

Okay goddess
Where are you? Even if
you are asleep,
Answer me.¹⁴⁹

For the phrase: Fanm okay, kote ou ye, was substituted:
Fanm okay koko mouye (Okay Goddess wet vagina).

The aesthetic mode of Voodoo diction can be perceived through the imagery of the songs. Here are a few examples. The first one cautions that it is prudent not to fully reveal yourself to strangers. Let them search:

Mse zeb a te-a
Yo pakonnen sa kinan ke
mwen
nago m'se zeb a te-a

I am the grass on the
ground
they don't know what's
in my heart
Nago, I am the grass on
the ground

Olisha, m'se zeb a te la
fouye, fouye, yo pa
konnen
Sa ki nan ke mwen

Olisha, I am the grass on
the ground
Dig, dig, they don't know
what's in my heart.¹⁵⁰

The next song conveys the thought: I stay in my own space and do not bother anyone. Yet they do not respect my faith.

Akasya, a la m'se'fey
m'donnen sou branch
mwen
Yo pran ason mwen yo
voye-ljete
la pli pa tonbe, soley
pa leve
Akasya O! Akasya O!

Akasya, I am a leaf
Which blossoms on my
own branch
Yet, they took my sacred
rattle and threw it away
The sun no longer rises,
the rain no longer falls
Akasya O! Akasya O!¹⁵¹

The images in these two songs are very poetic. The implicit comparison between a human being and the leaf, or the grass, the sadness and despair expressed by the absence of the sun and rain, elevate these two pieces above ordinary language and accentuate their emotional charge.

The following expressions reflect a fertile imagination. The God of the sea, Agweta Royo is called "Koki lan me" (seashell). The beauty of a woman is compared to that of a flower: "mape mache, mwen kontre on bel fle, yo di mwen se Lovana".¹⁵³ (While taking a stroll, I met a beautiful flower; they told me her name was Lovana.) A human being is called "kabrit de pye"¹⁵⁴ (two footed goat).

A number of maxims enliven the Voodoo language: "Jete, Bliye ranmase sonje" (to throw something is to forget it. To pick it up is to remember.) "Jou fey la

tonbe nan dlo, se pa jou-a lipouri." (The first day the leaf falls into the water is not the day it rots.) "Mapou tonbe, kabrit manje fey li." (The mapou tree fell, the goat ate its leaves.) The mapou tree symbolizes strength. So this maxim indicates that no matter how powerful you are, once you lose your position, the weakest character will take advantage of you. "Mache prese pa fe jou louvri." (To rush does not make the day break.) "Zanmi lwen se lajan sere; zanmi pre se kouto de bo." (A friend kept at a distance is money in the bank; a friend who is too close is a two-edged sword.) "Deye do pa genyen je, politik se lizay." (The back has no eyes, tact must be used always.) "Pou ou jwen-n non van yan-m fok ou bay bak." (If you want to know my secret name, you have to give a tray of offerings.) In other words, if you want me to reveal my secrets to you, you have to prove yourself to me. "Se nan chimen jennen ou kenbe chwal malen." (It is in a narrow road that you catch a shrewd horse.) "Sizoka pa ka" ("in case" is "no case" - a hypothesis is not a reality). "Si senmitye pa bay, Deyo pa pran piyay"¹⁵⁵ (An outsider can not occupy your territory unless you allow him). Rhythm, various figures of speech - antithesis, allegory, metaphor - embellish these statements. Some of them are verses, even perfect alexandrines such as:

Se nan chimen Jennen
Ou Kenbe chwal malen

and

Si Senmitye pa bay
Deyo pa pran piyay

Another ornament of Voodoo diction is the concord of sounds or alliteration. The nasal sound "an" is repeated several times in this short passage: "Nan pont rouge cila-a, Loman fait Dessalines doucouman."¹⁵⁶ (On this pont rouge, Loman killed Dessalines); Or the glide: "W" in "Wa Angol O! Wale, ki le wa vini we-m anko"? (King Angol, you are gone, when will you come back to see me?);¹⁵⁷ or the stop sound: "K" in: "Ezili Kalika, a la loa ki red: (Ezili Kalika, what a terrible Goddess you are).¹⁵⁸

The most striking alliterations can be traced in the songs and recitatives formulated in "langay," the secret tongue of initiation, also known in certain parts of Africa, such as Togo. F. N. Sougan in Sociologie des Societes Orales d'Afrique Noire, refers to esoteric languages as an important specialty of the initiates: "Il existe des couvents ou le novice Voduno passe 2, 3 ans de seclusion durant lesquels le jeune adepte est initie a la langue Vodou....Les langues du Vodou constituent une specialisation rituelle."¹⁵⁹ Though accessible only to initiates, some passages in "langay" emphasize sounds in a fashion that appeals to the ears of the profane as well. The sibilant sounds: "Dogoue por missan ya wesam Missan gouetor missanya wesam..."¹⁶⁰ The liquid sounds:

O Lele o lele o moa ossagne akassan
 O lele oh
 Miole miala ossagne 161

The lingua velar sounds:

Go gome go go, go, go, go, go, eku gba go, go!
 Ouangan sih-ye, le Guede 162

In the next song, the rhythm and music created by the
 sounds k, g, m, l merely disappear with translation:

Olih kolo mon deh, Abobo!
 A wa na?
 Niva e, Abobo
 Abobo fo laga Jigi legan
 Ikou kati, ko ka mi...
 Ekou mi kpon e ma guon
 O lou iebe ife
 to e me medeh ma non yire
 Lobi olorun 163

The Creole translation strips it of its original beauty
 as does the English:

Ce moin qui pote cecueil
 Abobo!
 Ahz Ce ou minme? Oui,
 ce moin minme mgain
 pouvoi pou m'rete chante
 Empechez lanmo prend-m
 Parce que si ou tuez-m
 ce gnou crime
 Pisque ce grand Roi d'Ife
 cote motels pas janm alle
 Qui ban nou limie 164

I am the coffin carrier
 Abobo!
 Ah! Ah! is this you?
 It is, I Abobo
 I can stop the voices
 Spare me from the
 insatiable death...
 To kill me would be a
 crime
 For, the Great King of
 life where no mortal lives
 Created the light.

Although patterned language, as seen above,
 characterizes much of the oral material in Voodoo, ordinary
 speeches also have their place. The dialogue between
 possessed and onlookers, falls into this category. Some
 prayers do too. Contrary to the preformulated recitatives,
 fixed formulae used in all Voodoo rituals, some prayers in

Soukri break the pattern and take the form of improvised speeches based on current problems confronting the community. At the closing ceremony of the Soukri festivals in August 1986, the officiant prayed as follows:

"Yo te di fet la pa tap fet. Anpil pitit pa vini pou tet sa. Pwoteje pitit yo pou mwen. Sak la pa itil anyen, tandis ke sak pa la kapab pi itil. Gras la mizerikod."¹⁶⁵

This prayer is referring to the massacre of the hougans in 1986, which frightened many devotees and made them stay away from their temples for awhile.

On August 15, 1986, Herard Simon pronounced an improvised discourse which took the form of a political sermon, another style foreign to most Voodoo ceremonies:

Gen yon revolisyon ki soti fet. Vodou-a tou oblije patisipe nan revolisyon sa-a...Chak relijyon dwe pran pozisyon relijyon pa-li...Pa pran relijyon-yo, mele yo ak lot...Katolik la montre nou ke li pa nan Vodou...Li montre ke lap fe kraze, lap fe touye. An tou te gen mil-e-kek houngan ki mouri a trave peyi-a...Katolik la-pwotestan-an, batis-la, advantis la, se yon gren-n tandans li genyen: Koman pou-l rive kraze bagay Vodou sa-a kap bal traka lan peyi-a...Vodou pa-ou la sote lan peyi Afriken...Si yon moun santi ou pa ka swiv Vodou nan Jan Vodou-a, se kite vodou-a nan plas li...Moun ke nou sispek ki te nan kraze bagay hounfo...pa ka fe pati sosyete-a...Nou pap tolere moun vini kraze...Nap fe nou Konnen ke nou menm, nou elimine tout vye kantik: "lanj di seye di a mari:"...Nou pa gen pyes rapo ak la Vyej Mari, Sen Jan Batis etc...¹⁶⁶

Voodoo also makes use of dialect. This is a familiar device in drama. For instance, Synge's play Riders to the sea is famous not only for the emotional power of the play, for its heartbreaking fatality, but also for its dialect. The dramatist wrote about the life of these Irish peasants,

and also about their dialect. In Voodoo, Kouzen Zaka's peasant dialect distinguishes itself from the language of the other Gods.

The rich and imaginative language of Voodoo confirms that diction constitutes one of its important components. The art of words cultivated in Voodoo appears to be an essential quality of oral tradition. With its double function of transmitting culture and wisdom, as well as entertaining, African oral tradition puts great emphasis on style. Referring to the importance of diction in Africa, Alioune M'baye writes: "Le style importe pour chatouiller l'oreille et rendre le message plus accessible."¹⁶⁷

Voodoo is the chief institution to have awarded Creole its due place as the national language. Moreover for the masses, it proved itself a fertile ground capable of insuring the blossoming of their tongue. While other establishments were disavowing Creole, Voodoo acted as its guardian. It nurtured, developed and elevated it so that its beauty can be appreciated and savored as that of any language.

It is clear that in addition to theatrical elements, Voodoo contains a series of dramatic elements: Plot, character, thought, diction.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The existence of theatrical elements in Voodoo has been clearly proven in earlier chapters. In fact, "the arranging of spectacle," "one first and necessary element of tragedy,"¹ according to Aristotle, is a criterion equally vital to Voodoo rituals.

Voodoo, through possession, brings to life its divine characters. As seen before, the resemblance between Voodoo possession and some acting styles, chiefly Grotowski's and Stanislavski's, is manifest. Indeed, Voodoo performers are remarkable for their capacity for psychic penetration or negation of self. Directing plays the same role in Voodoo as it does in theatre. The Voodoo neophyte, during initiation follows a training under the careful guidance of a priest and is moulded by the latter as an actor by a director. Furthermore, the whole activity, which follows a prescribed order, is coordinated according to strict rules by the officiants. An audience is as indispensable to a public Voodoo ceremony as it is to theatre. It is not without reason that some Voodoo priests actually advertise their ceremonies. The chorus represents one of the main

characters of Voodoo. As in the Greek theatre, its presence is not only significant to the structural aspect of the ritual, but to the spectacle as well, for it animates the atmosphere while it underlines the meaning of the activities, thus giving Voodoo an operatic quality.

"Music is most important among the features of tragedy which give pleasure,"² says Aristotle. This is no less true for Voodoo. The drum is one of the chief elements which create the ecstatic mood in which the ceremony evolves. A plethora of sacred dances: Yanvalou, Congo, Nago, Banda etc. celebrate life and express some of the characteristics of the Gods. A variety of costumes, in harmony with each God's tradition, add color and style to Voodoo events which usually take place in a well defined area, the peristyle, the Voodoo stage.

Thus, impersonation, directing, audience, chorus, music, dance, scenery, costume form a whole shared by both Voodoo and theatre. Is Voodoo theatre? Alioune M'baye is among those who favor distinguishing between religion and theatre, and to help support his thesis, he quotes

O.B.Quenum:

"Le possede danse. Danse hieratique, pas et gestes esoteriques qu'aucun n'aurait su imiter avec exactitude. Etait-ce du theatre? K. dansait pour son dieu, il en celebrait la puissance aux yeux des inities des autres cultures vodunistes...theatre pour les profanes, mais pas pour ceux-la....Les Dahomeens qui savent un peu de quoi ils parlent quand ils abordent ce sujet, s'etonneront toujours d'entendre dire que meme

dans leurs pays, theatre et rite initiatique s'interpenetrent."³

Others claim that the demarcation between religion and drama is blurred. Anthony Graham White, alluding to African rituals in relation to theatre writes:

"Because ritual and drama overlap in form and function, distinctions between them cannot be made absolute...the two most useful criteria to apply are whether the performance is conducted for the immediate human spectators or for a supernatural audience, and whether any future effect is to be expected of it. Even these criteria, however, are not absolute, for even when performers seem to be shaping the performance for the entertainment of their fellows, it will still be said to have a ritual function, however generalized or vague, and will ostensibly be given for the pleasure of spirits."⁴

No doubt that the primary function of Voodoo rituals is religious, but it should be pointed out that within that context emerge elements of entertainment. Comic sketches are incorporated in some rituals, especially those dedicated to Guede. I witnessed the following at a Guede ceremony: Two Guedes, after having collected some money from members of the audience, begin to fight jokingly about their fortune. One accuses the other of having stolen his share. He looks around for it. The funny dispute continues. Finally, playing the police, the accusant takes a cane and pretends to beat up the so-called thief, hitting him gently on his back. The two buffoons with their nasal voices, their childish and irrational behavior, amused the entire audience, even the foreigners, although they could not understand the language.⁵ A similar scene took place at a

ritual dedicated to Zaka. Two Zakas make fools of themselves: One of them holds a toy gun and pretends to pursue the other in order to shoot him. The latter screams as if he were frightened and wounded by his aggressor. Then they dance together. Soon, the dance ends, as one declares that the other shakes too much. The latter pleads, in vain, to retain his partner.⁶ Michel Leiris in La Possession et ses Aspects Theatraux Chez Les Ethiopiens de Gondar, reports similar experiences with the Voodoo peasant God, Zaka:

"A Port-au-Prince, j'ai constate que maintes seances de danse Vodou s'achevaient par l'evocation de Zaka, esprits paysans dont la manifestation donne lieu a des saynetes plaisantes, ainsi qu'a des danses de caractere gai et champetre; il semble que cette intervention finale reponde au besoin de terminer la reunion dans une atmosphere de detente."⁷

Some instances of entertainment take an even more profane aspect. In Bizoton, Haiti, at another Guede ceremony, in the middle of the religious invocation, the orchestra, instead of taking a pause, begins to play a profane tune. As the mambo stops it, the audience shouts its disappointment. One worshipper yells: "A! Yo kraze plezi-ya." (Ah! They interrupted the fun!) Later on, while the orchestra was accompanying a song to the lwa "kafou" with much zest, some worshippers experienced so much pleasure that they compared the Voodoo music to Haitian pop: "Sa se'yon konpa Matyavel," referring to the famous Haitian band called "System Band.": In that same ritual

when several devotees possessed by Guede initiated a collective ballet, the orchestra launched the hit of the season composed by another pop band "Bossa Combo." The entire crowd in a heated chorus sang wholeheartedly, "Elo Bosa, elo, elo bosa"! The excitement reached its peak when the principal houngan, also possessed by Guede, gave a superb performance of breakdancing.⁸ It was a moment of sheer exultation. Religious, surely. Recreational, carnal, without a doubt. The manifestation of the profane can assume even greater proportions. In Gonaives, a pop band, "Volcan" in its entirety, was the guest of honor to pay homage to Guede, at Mme. Brutus' peristyle. The mundane orchestra executed some Guede hymns, but also played some of its worldly hits to which the crowd gave the most cheerful response.⁹

Another aspect of Voodoo, the social aspect, is apparent and should be demonstrated. Melville Herskovits describes Voodoo dance:

"The Voodoo dance may be said to function in several ways. Above all, it is an integral part of the worship of the loa and as such, is marked by repeated possessions which indicate the presence of the god. Yet it also offers an opportunity for recreation. Voodoo dances are important social occasions and their success is measured by the numbers in attendance and the enthusiasm of the participants which make the dance chaud."¹⁰

As social occasions, Voodoo rituals perhaps somewhat similar to Dionysian festivals, may be the setting for all kinds of encounters, even love affairs. A man may take

advantage of the atmosphere to court a lady or to flirt with her as I observed in Jacmel at a "pile fey" ceremony.¹¹ (leaf crushing for mystical baths). Or someone may seize the opportunity to foment trouble with an adversary. I witnessed two concubines, both worshippers in the following scene: one of them a member of the chorus of hounsis, utterly provokes the other while dancing. She casts hostile looks at her rival, regards her from head to toe and directs her steps towards her, using her wide skirt to emphasize her scornful gestures. Quietly but visibly the tension keeps mounting until it reaches a climax: The choreutes leaves the circle and runs after her rival who leaves the peristyle with the man they share. She goes inside the room to confront the two.¹²

It is difficult to dissociate the religious functions of Voodoo from its social and entertaining aspects. Moreover, for about 90% of the population, Voodoo provides a form of cultural activity. In the countryside there are no performing groups. City troupes do not tour to perform for peasants. No government to date has endowed the latter's community with any recreational programs. Therefore, Voodoo ceremonies with their theatrical elements, their festive atmosphere help to fill the void. Alfred Metraux supports this concept:

"No society, if it is to preserve its mental health, can do without entertainment. The faithful find in Voodoo not only communion with the

supernatural, but also an opportunity of amusing themselves. The songs and dances are sacred but they afford those who indulge in them an altogether profane pleasure. How dead, how empty, would be the rural Haitian scene without the artistic activities of which Voodoo is at one and the same time, cause and essence."¹³

Many elements of this sacred theatre are compatible with the secular stage. In fact, the latter makes extensive use of some of them. Magic acts, such as glass eating, walking on broken glass, dancing in fire, acts of self torture such as piercing oneself with a machete or other tool, seen in theatrical presentations in Haiti, are similar to Voodoo rites. The worshippers possessed by Lenglesou may eat glass without bleeding; those representing Marinet pye chech stand in high flames; others under the influence of the divinities called "Kriminel," such as Adyasou, may stab themselves without experiencing physical pain. A number of Haitian artists, Carole Jean-Louis and "Gagote," for instance, excel at these performances. This parallels other cultures, where rituals also furnish material to the stage, e.g., Shamanism. "Another paratheatrical performance originating in Shamanism is represented by fire walking, fire handling and fire eating, typical of the type of act once practiced on street corners, in fairs, carnivals and circuses in the western world."¹⁴

Still another by-product of Voodoo is that major Haitian dance companies extract much of their repertoire from Voodoo ritual. The troupes of Arnold Elie, Jean Leon Destine, Louines Lounis and Odette Weiner, and La Troupe Folklorique Nationale, extend the artistic potential of Voodoo on to the legitimate stage. Some foreign performers and choreographers have sought the Voodoo inspiration in dance. Among them are three renowned Americans: Katherine Dunham, Lavinia Williams and Charles Moore. In some dance companies, dancers, mostly active Voodoo worshippers play the double role of performers and servants of the Gods. In the troupe Makandal, aesthetic purpose fuses with the religious element: some dancers fall into trance while dancing and are still able to execute the planned choreographed number while in the state of possession. A member of Mackandal testifies: "Gen yen nan nou ki kon-n pran lwa, sitou nan dans Petro-yo ou byen nan Banda san nou pa pedi Koregrafi-a."¹⁵ This duality of function is clearly seen in some African performing groups. Graham White reports:

"The Gelede Society of the Yoruba in Nigeria, whose function is the placation of witches, gives a ritual performance at night and a public performance the following afternoon. The latter is ostensibly to entertain the witches but it is also for the delight of the populace which was excluded from the ritual performance."¹⁶

The coexistence of mysticism and entertainment impregnates African Masks. Alphonse Tierou, from the Ivory

Coast, writes: "Nous trouvons un acquis culturel tres riche qui s'exprime sous forme de jouissances a la fois profanes et religieuses."¹⁷ Referring to the Jugglers Society, the Sangnoulous, Mr. Tierou adds: "Elles n'est presentee au public qu'apres trois annees de minutieuses preparations. C'est le seule ecole mystique qui se permet d'entreprendre des operations miraculeuses en public et devant les cameras."¹⁸

The traditional carnival of Haiti and its extension, the rural carnival called Rara, or Lara, represent two of the most elaborate spectacles, deeply associated with the worship of the Voodoo spirits. Societies of traditional carnival present varied and colorful costumed pageants, along with dancing, singing and musical accompaniment, in which the public can join. The religious roots of the pageants have been acknowledged by well-informed observers. Some of the groups have their head-quarters in hounfos (Voodoo temples) and are composed mainly of Voodoo servants. Their leaders are believed to receive their power directly from the Gods. Emmanuel C. Paul states:

"Aux Gonaives, dans la Bande Aimable, le gouvernement a un caractere theocratique. Le chef y est nomme a vie, a l'Aco symbole de commandement et est designe par l'esprit de Eliacine appele sur govi....Ajoutons que "Aimable" a de solides traditions spirituelles et possede a son siege social que nous avons visite un hufo ou temple de Vodou. Les membres y sont astreints au rituel de haussement, premiere etape de l'initiation."¹⁹

The houngan Max Beauvoir expresses the same point of view about the traditional carnival:

"Kanaval se yon seremoni relijye kote tout moun patisipe. Si ou vle we kote le relijye, se ke pagen yon sel ban-n kipa soti nan ounfo. Tout bandrol yo se nan ounfo yo ye. Tout pankat yo, se nan ounfo yo kenbe yo. Anvan ban-n nan soti gen yon seremoni pou moun pa blese nan ban-n nan....Le li nan la ri, Fo-l salye 'kafou' met 'kafou' met 'gran chemen', e le yo tounen nan hounfo-a, se pou yo fe yon lot seremoni anko."²⁰

Beauvoir affirms that this is true for 99% of the Haitian carnival groups.

Rara spectacles sometimes reach a high degree of sophistication and originality. The orchestra is well known for its vibrant music and is composed of many instruments. Near Gonaives, in Mapou, the Rara group "Fek paret" provides two big drums, two round small drums, carried around the neck with a rope, four "ogans" of various shapes, two trumpets made of aluminum, two "tcha-tcha" (rattles) and four bamboos.²¹ A special Rara group "Chaopye" sings without an orchestra, substituting the rhythm of feet. The groups "Majinel" and "Ban-n Bwode" gave wonderful concerts for the priest Bien Aime in Souvenance, the musical accompaniment consisting only of "tcha-tcha" (rattles). But the strong movements of the feet pounding the floor sound like powerful drums.²² In the cities, masks take many strange forms such as cowheads, pigheads, and ghosts as seen in Maya Deren's film "Divine

Horsemen." Herskovits describes the variety of Rara performances:

"In addition to musicians, acrobats, jugglers and masked dancers, there are baton twirlers, comedians on stilts and mimes...There are bands of male rubanniers, some of them attired as women...male stick dancers, known as batonni...Other small bands wander about, impersonating characters from folklore or politics."²³ A leading attraction is the baton twirler or "Majo-Jon" who is believed to be a performer endowed with magic powers. His exploits go beyond the spectator's imagination:

"Suivant nos informateurs de l'Artibonite, le major Jonc vraiment fameux peut entrer dans une maison en laissant son jonc suspendu en l'air et le rattraper en sortant. Il peut jouer son instrument des dents et des pieds. Il peut se coucher et faire piler dans un mortier place sur son ventre. Il peut passer entre les barreaux d'un chaise. Il peut se faire enfermer dans une maison et en sortir sans que les portes soient ouvertes."²⁴

Spectacle defines what Rara, the rural carnival, is. Nevertheless, according to many reports, the religious foundations are evident. In the film, "Divine Horsemen," Maya Deren emphasizes that "the spirit of Guede presides over Rara."²⁵ Emmanuel C. Paul also links Rara to the spirit of the dead.

"Dans tous les environs de la ville, par les sentiers étroits et poussiéreux, les bandes poursuivent leurs perigrinations et s'arretent sur chaque tombe de leurs membres defunts auxquels elles rendent hommage."²⁶

According to the same author, in the south of Haiti, Agwe, the God of the sea, is also honored by the Rara groups which offer the divinity a special ritual near the sea.

Courlander also comments on the religious aspect of Rara:

"Tying in with Voodoo ritual, virtually all Rara drums and paraphernalia are dedicated or rededicated before Lent in special hounfo services. And on the last day of Rara, usually in the night, prayers are said, the loas are called upon and some of the festive paraphernalia is thrown into a fire to be consumed."²⁷

I observed the religious aspect of some Rara parades in Mapou, Gonaives and in Pon Leste. Several groups:

"Majinel," "Fek Paret," "Ban-n Bwode," "La Sen Jan," - came to Souvenance to pay tribute to the priest Bien-Aime called "Paren-n" (the godfather). They paraded around the vast yard, then entered the peristyle and gave a concert. Many of the songs executed by the Rara "Sambas" (singer-poets), invoked the Voodoo Gods.²⁸ Some songs belong to the Voodoo repertoire such as "Lenba Zaou, Kreyol fatigue" (Lenba Zaou, the children of Africa are tired), usually sung in Soukri or "Ke-e-ke, Bazou Ke," usually sung in Souvenance. Other songs reflect the living conditions of the people and their combativeness as seen earlier in many Voodoo songs.²⁹

Possessions occur in Rara as in Voodoo rituals. A number of the Rara groups are Voodoo worshippers. I conducted some interviews with several Rara leaders, and these confirm the Voodoo roots of Rara. A samba of the group "Majinel" commented: "Rara se yon plezi, plezi dans

plezi mizik, bel bagay tou wi. Rara ak Vodou, menm bagay. Rara gen chante 'ke-e-ke', genyen chante sa-a tou sovenans."³⁰

A leader from the "Fek paret" summarized his position in a few words: "Rara se-mistik." (Rara is mysticism.)³¹ A representative of the group Ban-n Bwode said: "Rara se'ginen fran. Nap fete souvenans."³² (Rara is pure Voodoo. We are celebrating Souvenans.) A Rara lady offered this opinion: "Rara se'yon distraksyon pou Katye-a, an plis nou evolye non tout peyi-a. Nap fete le sen. Nap fete Souvenans...Rara fe kominikasyon ak tout vodou. Se yon sel la yoye...Moun ki nan Rara dwe pou danse Vodou."³³

A spirit of mirth, revelry, sexuality, animate these spectacular celebrations. It is not surprising that, although dedicated to all Voodoo Gods, they are associated chiefly with Guede (as mentioned earlier by Maya Deren) who symbolizes death on the one hand and life, fertility on the other. The idea of Renaissance emanates from Guede as it does from Rara as well as the traditional carnival. Reginal Bailly defines Rara as "Le Renouveau."³⁴ Max Beauvoir offers these comments on traditional carnival:

"Li gen yon fonksyon esteraodine....Se on fet ke yo fe nan mwa Fevriye, mwa Mas, le tout ti zwazo ap chante nan pye bwa, le tout kabrit, kochon, poul, kok yon-n ap renkontre lot....Je-n ti gason apral renkontre jen tifi ese konsa yo pral marye de tan pi ta. Se sa ki fe yo di ou apre kanaval, se mwa sa-a ki gen plis

pitit ki fet. Bu-a se pemet reyinyon je'n fi ak je-n gason an deyo de tout presyon sosyal."³⁵

This opinion comes close to Gaster's on rites of invigoration, aiming at replenishing life: "Invigoration is also affected by rites involving sexual intercourse. These, as is well know, are a characteristic concomitant of carnival celebrations."³⁶

The traditional carnival and Rara, two grandiose spectacles related to Voodoo ritual, reflect the theatricality present in Voodoo.

Voodoo reveals itself then as an institution in which aesthetics, theatrics and of course, religion are harmoniously blended, and which has an effect culturally, socially and theatrically. True, Voodoo rituals are essentially religious, functional activities. True, they are not theatrical representations which exist for their own sake, but as Oscar Brockett writes: "Not all societies have produced theatre and drama divorced from rituals."³⁷ This is the case for the majority of the Haitian society.

It has also been established in previous chapters that Voodoo rituals contain basic dramatic element such as: plot, character, thought, diction. In effect, Voodoo rituals do not develop at random. Their plots, usually well structured, vary from simple to complex and present many important devices of drama: reversal, discovery,

pathos, suspense, catharsis. In essence, the actions in Voodoo rituals are based on "Social dramas," "dramas of living",³⁸ for while exposing the vicissitudes of life, they aim to reconcile the real world with the ideal world, which is an attempt to solve the human conflicts and redress the perilous situations. Characters in Voodoo are sharply defined. Though numerous, Voodoo Gods, striking stock characters, can easily be identified through mannerism, personality, age, language. Each of them represents an aspect of mankind worthy of analysis. Thought occupies a major place in Voodoo. Philosophical, political and moral views abound in the songs as well as the prayers. As for diction, it stands as one of the most attractive features of Voodoo. As in drama, diction in Voodoo outshines ordinary style. Its emotional power, its vividness, its evocative qualities enhance the value of oral tradition in Haiti.

Dramatists from Greece, Japan, Nigeria have borrowed from rituals and used their substance in a number of plays. Euripides The Bacchae, Zeami's Sotoba Konachi, Wole Soyinka's Death and the King's Horseman are examples. Several Haitian playwrights: Franck Etienne, Enoch Trouillot, Martial Day, Felix Morisseau Leroy also dramatized Voodoo related issues and/or Voodoo beliefs. A discussion of Day's L'heritage (The Heritage) and Morisseau

Leroy's Roua Kreon (King Keon) will provide insights into the adaptability of Voodoo to dramatic literature.

L'heritage mainly pits the Haitian peasant deeply rooted in African traditions against a certain sector of the educated middle class, which indiscriminately rejects Voodoo, the people's culture. Between the two conflicting camps stands the raisonneur, a medical doctor and ethnologist, who strives to restore equilibrium. The agon is serious and moving, with the protagonist and antagonist, father and son, clashing over the familial heritage. The following dialogue between the two elucidates the socio-cultural conflict:

Sebas: De toute facon, fom mouri. Main, il faut que moin pale ac ou. Meme si courage moin ta failbi, meme si l'heu m'ta son-nin, Ogou ta pale avec ou. Ogou pap quite'm mouri sans ou pas recevoi humfo ci la a....Ce obligation familiale, ce de devoi-m pou moin remet-ou li. Ou mem ce devoi ou pou ou sevili, sinon malheu pou la fami. Pitite en moin, l'heu ya rive. Ce l'heu Damballah qui sonnin, ce l'heu Ogou qui sonnin ce l'heu Erzulie Freda Dahomey.

Maxime: Ah! papa! Ca ouap di conca?...Ou connin education moin pa pemett moin occupe bagaille conca. Ouap fait m'rhonte.

Sebas: Ah! Main mot oua! R'honte!...Ce ca qu va tue nou! R'honte! Ce condamnation nou!...si ou r'honte moin, ou r'honte zancet ou, si ou r'honte zancet ou, ou r'honte pays ou...Maxime pitit moin, pran hounfo oua l'heu moin mouri. La loi fanmi yan di conca ce premie gacon chaque generation qui pou sevi hounfo oua. Depi lan ginnin, ce conca pinga ou casse chain la.

Maxime: Non, non, non, jamais! C'est inutile de me parler.³⁹

Besides the argument about Voodoo, Day dramatizes some manifestations of Voodoo rituals. There is the hounfo with its paraphernalia, "govis" and other objects, which the son dares to vandalize, thus showing his scorn for his father's beliefs. Tension mounts when the God Ogou possesses the father, angered by his son's blasphemy. As the play builds to the denouement, the resolution remains: Should the "educated" son break off from the family tradition? Should Voodoo be destroyed? An accomodation is made. Maxime will not become a Voodoo faithful because he does not share the beliefs, but for the sake of tradition, he will execute the ceremony ordered by his father. As for Voodoo, as a religion it has some value that should be preserved: "Toute religion en effet est la matrice d'un art. A ce titre, le Vodou servira de base chez nous a un art vraiment national."⁴⁰

Morisseau-Leroy's Roua Kreon probes even more deeply into the realm of Voodoo. The action unfolds in a Voodoo setting: the peristyle. A Voodoo chorus, formed of a choral leader, the "voua nan govi" (voice from the vase) and a body of hounsis, serves as the narrator who sheds light on the situation. In the foreshadowing, the "voua nan govi" exposes the core of the intrigue: the protagonist, the King, who has fallen sick, must be replaced by his son Emmon. Furthermore, the main characters, some of them based on Greek legend are

introduced: the Queen Eridis, the sister Ismen who covets Emmon's position; Filo, Minis and Tyrezyas, the antagonist, a houngan who stands as the only character Kreon cannot manipulate or destroy.

The Voodoo songs and dances are not simply ornaments to embellish the play. They are important in the dramatic structure. The point of attack makes itself felt with the Petro dance (known for its extreme vigor). The choreography serves as a precipitating force which triggers the course of the action. King Kreon, who has been sick and isolated for three months, at that moment regains energy and is now actively engaged in the intrigue. A stranger to himself, the King interrogates everyone. Another dance sets the mood. Before the King is reminded of his numerous and atrocious crimes, a scene which almost takes on the grave, tragic character of a trial is suggested by a yanvalou (dance which translates suffering). The King's meeting with the houngan-prophet, Tirezyas, leads to other Voodoo scenes: divinations, possession. The action and the resulting emotions are intensified as complications grow. The King, possessed by a spirit that the people qualify as diabolical, confronts Tirezyas possessed by a Voodoo God, Ogoun. The ritualistic scene, similar to a "troke ason" (symbolic exchange of mystical knowledge), presents a special feature. Each man holds a weapon: one, a gun, the other, an ason, the Voodoo sacred

rattle, symbol of mystical power. Though the duel is fierce, though both have tremendous force, one triumphs over the other. In this battle of good versus evil, the ason defeats the gun. The Voodoo lwa, Ogou, overpowers the "djab" (devil). Morisseau-Leroy creates great suspense in the confrontation making it very exciting.

"Pandanstan chante-ap boule, Kreon fonce sou Tirezyas ak baton. Tirezyas pare ak ason. Tirezyas danse douvan Kreon. Roua Kreon danse douvan Tirezyas; yap espadonnin. Roua Kreon chanje min. Tirezyas change min tou. Min goch pou min goch. Li vize Tirezyas ak revolve-a. Tirezyas lonje ason an sou li tankou si se'te zam. Li souke ason-an jouk nan bouch revolve-a. Roua Kreon bo peze gachet la revolve-a pa pati. Tirezyas koresponn ak Roua Kreon nan chak mouvmen dans kon si youn ta pral fese lot ate san mangnin-l, jouk oungan an fe-roua Kreon bouke, Kreon rale ou chez li chita. Tirezyas toujou ak ason-l nan min-l rinmet sapat linan pye-l, li traveze peristil la ak yon diyite oungan-l, san-l pa di yo mo."⁴¹

Another ritualistic scene brings the play to its crisis or turning point: The "Desounen" or transfer of mystical power from one member of a family to another. The son receives his father's diabolical power, along with political authority. As the King dies, the criminal mission continues.⁴² In this play, based on Greek legend and adapted to the Haitian political situation under the Duvaliers, Mr. Leroy's skill confirms that Voodoo and dramatic literature are compatible.

Theatre is at a low ebb in Haiti at this writing. Etzer Charles, the program director for "Le Theatre National" recently inaugurated in Haiti (May 1987) comments on cultural life in Haiti:

"La societe haitienne, en depit de ses riches potentialites ne connait pas une vie artistique intense. Il a toujours manque dans tous les domaines de l'art les structures necessaires a un reel epanouissement de ces derniers. Le sous developpement du pays n'est pas seulement socio-economique, mais egalement culturel; et l'on ne peut parvenir au developpement sans la mise en place d'une politique culturelle capable de mobiliser les esprits, de reveiller l'imagination creatrice et d'engendrer de nouvelles valeurs. C'est dans une telle perspective que nous percevons le Theatre National."⁴³

Haiti's future theatre will probably borrow a lot from Voodoo. As shown, Voodoo has much of the substance needed to propel creativity and help the secular theatre make a significant leap forward.

Possession as a dramatic means of expression provides a possible ground for exploring acting. It corresponds to the style of acting which allows the actor to search for authenticity of emotion. Creative stage artists such as Jerzy Grotowski have found some of their techniques in Voodoo possession. Richard Schechner describes Grotowski's theatre laboratory founded recently (1983) in California:

"The work of the laboratory is designed to facilitate the transmission of specific, objective techniques of performance. These techniques of the master teachers [from Haiti, India and elsewhere: people Grotowski worked with in the theatre of Sources], who are in residence for periods up to six months, are transmitted to the team of [four] instructors to [varying numbers] of students...the

techniques of the master teachers are not all "known" beforehand. They are not all items that have been previously identified and isolated as performables. Part of the work of the laboratory is to transform various liturgical performance modes into technical/performative modes and items....Grotowski's work codes may be religious by origin, but they are in the process of being translated into technical codes by means of the work of the laboratory."⁴⁴

Voodoo provides a model or school where learning never ends. The Voodoo performer reaches perfection with time. In most cases, he starts his career at a very early age (6 or 8), receives a special training during initiation and continues to develop his knowledge until the end of this life. This explains why many of them, after a number of years, attain such perfection in their craft, possessed or not. Max Beauvoir expresses some ideas about the continuous training of the Voodoo faithful:

"Si ou gade kantite le on moun pase anba peristil la, se menm kantite le on moun al le kol...gen diferan nivo konsepsyon...Se yon lekòl de la vi liye. Otreman di, jou ou vini houngan, jou sa-a ou komansè apran-n. Men se tout vi ou pou ou chita apran-n ak lot houngan. Se yon tradisyon ki telman vas, se yon tradisyon ki gen o mwen 10,000 an. Koman ou ka pran yon tradisyon de 10,000 an pou ou kondanse li nan yon inisyasyon de kelke jou? Inisyasyon nan Vodou vle di sa li vle di-a: komansè. Li mete ou sou ray e'a pati de la, sa depan-n de aktivite-ou, sa depan-n de intelijans ou e de kantite tan ou vle pase ladan pou apran-n konnen. Se sa ki fe-ou mwayen houngan, ti houngan ou gran houngan...pou dans yo, fo'ou apran-n pa yo. Le ou inisye, ou apran-n yo tou. Se'sa ki fe inisyasyon dire 41 jou. Gen yon seri de pa de baz ke yo apran-nou e pi res la, se ou menm ki pral devlope-l avek pratik ou. Si pa egzant ou fini inisye e pi ou fe malet ou, ou pa Janm tounen anko, enben ou rete ak sa-ou genyen-an."⁴⁵

The communion between Voodoo celebrants and the audience is another factor that secular theatre can share.

Some of the avant garde theatre (Schechner, the Living Theatre, Grotowski) have based performances partly on such participatory experience.

The ritualistic structures, the didactic element, the social and political awareness, the symbolism, the complex characters of Voodoo provide dramatic paradigms for the professional theatre. The operatic quality of Voodoo found in the interweaving of music, dance and poetry have an aesthetic value similar to that of "total theatre."

Finally Voodoo bears the stamp of the pleasure principle that characterizes classical drama, carrying many elements of the beautiful, the good and the true. Such a model is apt to inspire not an ersatz theatre in Haiti, but a rich and meaningful one. If Voodoo succeeds in displaying so much beauty and art today in spite of its limited means, one can only imagine what its scope might be if it were given, nationally, as some other religions, space, assistance and appreciation.

Contemplating the cultural treasure embodied in Voodoo, one can not help pondering its future in Haiti. Colonialism and its accompaniments caused incommensurable pain and humiliation to the Haitian nation and by the same token, attempted to geld the popular culture, Voodoo. It is an old clever strategy which the Senegalese historian, Cheik Anta Diop, throws into relief in Nations Negres et Cultures "L'usage de l'alienation culturelle comme arme de

domination est vieux comme le monde; chaque fois qu'un peuple en a conquis un autre, il l'utilise."⁴⁶ These crimes, like the Jewish Holocaust, cannot be forgotten. Amnesia with regard to such deep wounds would lead to failure in preventing further attacks. Free passage then would be left to those who desire to exterminate the African heritage in Haiti, to realize their atavistic ambitions. Voodoo is still ubiquitous in Haiti. It is still a force to be reckoned with. But a clear understanding of the past is necessary; collective memory is indispensable if it is to be preserved as the shrine, the museum of Haitian popular culture. Eventually as the socio-economic context evolves in Haiti, Voodoo too will evolve. But it is the privilege of the Haitian people, not of exterior forces, to determine the direction of its evolution. In any case, as it stands today, aside from its social impact, Voodoo made a major contribution to Haiti on the cultural level, which is not to be lost. It paved the way for the creation of a new aesthetic phenomenon in Haiti, an indigenous avant-garde theatre based on the human experience in all its complexity.

ENDNOTES

Chapter I - INTRODUCTION

1. Jacques Stephen Alexis, Les Arbres Musiciens, (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1957), 174.

The soul of the people, its true faith and its only resource. Politics, production, commerce, industry, education, sports, culture, people's dreams, all is influenced by the popular religion.

2. Franck Fouche, Vodou et Theatre, (Quebec: Editions Nouvelle Optique, 1976), 107.

The step that we have taken is a new one and - if we do not indulge too freely - the first overall work done in this domain. Let it be not surprising to find here and there, arguments lacking substance and rough drafts where a more methodical development would be necessary. We are the first ones to recognize the weaknesses as well as the lacuna of this text.

3. Y. Jean-Joseph, Telephone conversation with author, 23 June 1987.

Chapter II - HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1. Victor Schoelcher, Vie de Toussaint Louverture, 2nd ed., (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1982), I, II.

Only 500,000 slaves had been declared in 1789. But given that the statements of account were based on each slave appraised at 40 francs and 3 pounds, neither children nor adults over 45 years old were declared. The number of these two groups rose to 200,000...the homicidal Black slave trade imported 28,000 to 30,000 every year to the island.

2. Jean Kerboull, Le Vaudou, Magie ou Religion, (Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1973), 26.

Among the 30 ethnic groups which Moreau de St. Mery found in the Colony, we find in the list of loas, Voodoo divinities, the Aradas of Dahomey, Bissagots, Conga, Caplaou of Congo, Haoussa of Ibo, Mandingues, Mines, Mondongues, Nago, Popo, Soussou and Senegalese.

3. V. Schoelcher, La Vie de Toussaint Louverture, 8-9.

The 17th century was so barbaric that the 1685 edict stipulated, article 38: "the fugitive slave who will have run away for a month will have his ears cut...If he repeats the offence, he will have a leg cut...and the third time, he will receive the capital punishment...the government of "very Christian Kings" brought no restraint to the absolute power of the masters; it let them dispose of the slaves as of their cows and mules...some of them pushed their ferocity to a point which provokes fits of giddiness just to think of it. They inflicted the punishment of the four stakes upon men as well as women and when one of the latter was pregnant, a ditch was dug in which was lodged the pregnancy while she received the customary 29 lashings which tore her flesh...It has been recorded that a Caradeu Aine, a Latoison Laboule cold-bloodedly ordered that Negroes be thrown into furnaces, into boiling boilers, had them buried alive and standing with just the head out and let them die in that position; happy they were when their comrades abbreviated their torments by stoning them to death.

4. Louis Maximilien, Le Vaudou Haitien, (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie Henri Deschamps, 1982), XXIV.

A rough colonial system claimed that nothing good could come out of the slave and that it had to degrade the spiritual in the latter after having degraded him in his flesh.

5. Laennec Hurbon, Dieu Dans le Vaudou (Paris: Payot, 1972), 75.

It is known that the slave holders did all in their power to bring the negroes to forget their lost mother land...new names were given by the masters...families were dismantled.

6. Alfred Metraux, Voodoo in Haiti trans. by Hugo Charteris, (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), 32-33.

7. Laennec Hurbon, Dieu Dans le Vaudou, 75.

The African cults were forbidden. Christianization was strictly required through forced baptism.

8. V. Schoelcher, Vie de Toussaint Louverture, 10.

Modern civilization and Christianity will always bear the shame of having founded their colonies by violating all laws of justice, morality and humanity.

9. Alfred Metraux, Voodoo in Haiti, 140.

10. Robert Cornevin, Le Theatre Haitien, (Quebec: Lemeac, 1973), 23.

One can hardly imagine nowadays the extraordinary wealth of this island in the 18th century. On the eve of the French Revolution, the French colonies turn over amounted to 600,000,000 francs of which two-thirds (400,000,000) concerned St. Dominique. These tremendous profits were produced by 8500 plantations occupying 500,000 hectares.

11. Leo Frobenius, Histoire de La Civilization Africaine, trans. by Dr. H. Back and Dr. Ermont, 3rd Edition, (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), 15.

Not that the first European sailors at the end of the Middle ages had not made in this domain some remarkable observations. When they reached the Bay of Guinea and landed in Vaida, the captains were astonished to find well-laid streets; more towards the South in the Kingdom of Congo, a teeming crowd dressed in silk and velours, big states, well organized in the most minute details, powerful monarchs, opulent industries. Civilized to the bones. And similar was the condition of the countries of the Occidental Coast, Mozambique, for example. The revelations of the sailors of the 15th and 17th centuries provide the sure proof that the Africa which extended itself to the South of the Sahara was still in full expansion in the brightness of harmonious and well formed civilizations. This efflorescence the European conquistadores annihilated as they penetrated further, for the new world of America needed

slaves...The black slave trade was never a gilt edged affair. It required a justification. Thus they made the black man a demi animal, a merchandise. The idea of the Barbaric Negro is a European invention.

12. Milo Rigaud, La Tradition Voodoo, (Paris: Editions Niclaus, 1953), 42-43.

Elie Lescot, President of Haiti, decided to intensify the religious struggle between the Haitian hounfo and the Roman Church. Suddenly he puts his presidential guard at the service of the Roman Church which rounds up the Voodoo believers inside their private homes, sweeping off all religious objects that could be found: drums, sacred rattles, ritual flags, ritual attributes such as costumes, hats, scarves.

13. Alfred Metraux, Voodoo in Haiti, 344.

14. Milo Regaud, La Tradition Voodoo, 51.

The permit to hold a Voodoo service is paid by the Oumphor! Whereas the government pays the Catholic Church to exercise its cult in Haiti by the bagui's side.

15. Jean Marie Salgado, Le Culte African du Vodou et Les Baptises En Haiti, (Rome: Universite Pontificale, 1963), 56.

It is clear that all those who, to the knowledge of a parish, take an active part in the Voodoo cult, must be considered as these particular scandalous sinners known as public sinners. They are the hougans, mambos, and their aides.

16. Franck Etienne, Soukri Conference, Gonaives, Haiti, 10 May 1986.

17. Soukri Conference, Soukri Gonaives Haiti, 10-11 May.

18. Max Paul, Soukri Conference, Soukri Gonaives, 10 May 1986.

19. Max Beauvoir, Telephone conversation with author, 12 June 1986.

20. Gregoire Dienguele Matsua, "A Son Excellence, le Pape Jean-Paul II," In Haiti Liberee, Port-au-Prince, 13 June 1986.

All government's official events always included among other festivities, les "te deum," masses celebrated by bishops. Jean Claude Duvalier was sworn in before Christ cruxifix, not before a Voodoo altar.

21. Marise Simmons, "Voodoo Under Attack in Post-Duvalier Haiti," the New York Times New York, 15 May 1986, Sec. A. 12.

22. Willy Apollon, Le Vaudou, un Espace Pour les Voix, (Paris: Editions Galilee, 1976), 57.

To be a Voodooist is to identify oneself with a social class which, in anguish, faces penury. But it is also to accept the scorn, the misappreciation, the rejection of those who call themselves the Haitian elite.

23. Milo Rigud, La Tradition Voodoo, 42.

It is moreover this complex that has most of the time complicated the existence of the loa and the Voodoo cult in Haiti. The history of Haiti reckons numerous heads of state who, tormented by this complex of inferiority pertaining to religion, indulged morbidly in declaring a war of extermination against Voodoo while, in the dark, they practiced it.

24. Raphael Berrou et Pradel Pompilus, Histoire de la Litterature Haitienne, (Port-au-Prince: Editions Caraibes, 1975), 459.

Why am I a negro
O why am I black
When I was in my mother's womb
Why did not death, so jealous and swift,
Rush to carry her off the earth?

25. Robert Bauduy, Interview with author, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 13 January 1986.

26. Ibid.

27. Paul Moral, Le Paysan Hitien, (Haiti: Editions Fardin, 1978), 217, 220.

Not one year goes by without famine. Malnutrition worsens the sanitary state of the rural world. On the whole, there is one physician for 11,000 inhabitants, but if the region of Port-au-Prince is relatively privileged (1 doctor for 5,000 inhabitants), the remote provinces are not: 1 physician for 20,000 inhabitants in the Artibonite Section, 1 for 37,000 in the South. Illiteracy is quasi general in the countryside. One may affirm that the percentage of illiteracy varies between 93% and 94%.

28. Jean-Jaques Honorat, *La Peste Porcine en Haiti*. In L'eradication de la Peste Porcine en Haiti, (Paris: Comite Francaise des Droits de L'homme en Haiti, 1983), 5.

The Haitian social structure is characterized by a system of internal colonialism in which an urban minority (20% of the global population) dominated itself by a small Westernized elite (3% of the population), plays the social, political and cultural roles according to the patterns inherited from the former French slavers, while a large marginalized rural sector (80% of the population) supplies the food products, essential goods, and the labor force necessary to the functioning and the reproduction of the system. Life expectancy is about 51 years. Illiteracy touches 85% of the global population; 96% of the rural sector. Port-au-Prince owns by itself 100% of the entire modern industrial equipment, 90% of the modern health services, 100% of the commodities of higher education; 80% of the secondary schools, 100% of the international airbase, 90% of the touristic equipment, 90% of the electrical energy.

29. Barbara Walters, A.B.C. TV program. 20/20, New York, 12 June 1986.

30. Henry Namphy. Speech delivered at the United Nations, New York, 25 September 1987.

31. France Schott Billman, Corps et Possession, (Paris: Bordas, 1977), 36.

The African slave who was forced to venerate the Christian saints, continued in reality to practice his own cult. As for the belief in Paradise, it never influenced the baptized negroes, which contributed to the fact that they never

resigned themselves to slavery conditions. The religion's foundations haven't been touched.

32. J.C. Dorsainvil, Histoire d' Haiti, (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie Henri Deschamps, 1934), 67.

The spectators, motionless, struck with a sacred horror, see an old black woman rise. Her body trembles, shivers. She sings, performs, pirouettes, and turns over her head a large kitchen knife. An even greater immobility, short, silent breaths, ardent eyes riveted on the old black woman, prove that the audience is fascinated. Then a black pig is introduced. By a quick gesture, the inspired priestess plunges her knife into the animal's throat. Blood spurts and is collected and distributed to all the slaves. All drink and swear to execute Boukman's orders.

33. Herard Simon, Soukri Conference, Gonaives Haiti 10 May 1986.

34. Press Conference, Holiday Inn Hotel, Port-au-Prince Haiti, April 1986.

35. M.L. Voodoo Ceremony Nan Badjo, Gonaives Haiti, 6 January 1986.

36. Soukri Conference, Soukri Gonaives, Haiti, 10 May 1986.

It is a dream. Some Catholic priests begin to see that in the future, more beautiful things can be done. The veritable strength of the Haitian people is Voodoo. Therefore, you can not eliminate it. You can obtain a formidable result by combining Catholic strength and Voodoo. It would be an extraordinary force. This is my vision.

37. Harold Courlander, The Drum and the Hoe, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960), 9.

38. Harold Courlander, Haiti Singing, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939), 6.

39. Jacques Stephen Alexis, Les Arbres Musiciens, 57.

A people without tradition, is it not a people without identity, without future?

40. H. Courlander, The Drum and the Hoe, 5.
41. Max Beauvoir, Interview with author, Mariani Port-au-Prince, 7 November 1985.
42. Milo Marcelin, Mythologie Vodou, (Port-au-Prince, Haiti: Les Editions Americaines, 1949), 31.
43. Ibid., 43.
44. H. Courlander, Haiti Singing, 107.

Chapter III - RITUAL AND THEATRE

1. William Ridgeway, The Drama and Dramatic Dances of Non European Races, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 116.
2. Aristotle, The Poetics, In On Poetry and Style, trans. by G.M. Grube, (New York: Bobbs Merrill Co. Inc., 1958), 9.
3. A. W. Pickard Cambraidge, Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1927), 18,19.
4. Theodore Gaster, Thespis, (New York: Henry Schuman, 1950), 55.
5. James Frazer, The Golden Bough, Vol II, part IV, 3rd ed. (London: M^CMillan, 1914), 81.
6. William Tydeman, Theatre in the Middle Ages (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 30.
7. Ibid., 36.
8. Theodore Gaster, Thepis, 49.
9. David Cole, The Theatrical Event, (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1977), 36.
10. Alfred Metraux, Voodoo in Haiti, 127.
11. Robert Cornevin, Le Theatre Haitien, 188.
12. Jerzy Grotowski, Towards a Poor Theatre, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 32.

Chapter IV - THEATRICAL ELEMENTS OF VODOO

1. Louis Mars, the Crisis of Possession in Voodoo, (New York: Read Cannon & Johnson Co., 1977), 60.

2. Louis Mars, Les Maitres de L'aube, (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie Le Natal, 1982), 33.

The first observations made on Voodoo in Haiti have been gathered by doctors who used Western clinical models to diagnose Voodoo. Little by little, we realized that we were mistaken and made the necessary corrections.

3. Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, trans. by Francis Golffing, (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1956), 55.

4. Louis Mars, Les Maitres de L'aube, 33.

Metamorphosis or a normal psychological state, which reproduces the face and gestures of the Gods after the manner of a dramatic impersonation.

5. Michel Leiris, La Possession et Ses Aspects Theatraux Chez les Ethiopiens de Gondar, (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1958), 100.

Possession in itself is already theatre, since it objectively amounts to the figuration of a mythical character or super-human actor.

6. Constantin Stanislavski, An Actor Prepares (New York: Theatre Arts Book, 1972), 122.

7. Eugene Vakhtangov, "The School of Intimate Experience" in Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy (Eds) Actors on Acting, (New York: Crown Publishers, 1970), 509.

8. Franck Fouche, Vodou et Theatre, 65.

The greatest manifestation and illustration of Voodoo as pre-theatre, is indisputably the crisis of possession. It constitutes the fundamental element of Voodoo.

9. Ibid., 66.

Knows in advance that he is playing a role. He knows that even if he plays it to perfection, incarnates it, he is always other than the character, remains locked in his skin, in his life, with his problems, his existential anguish, in short, in his personal drama. The splitting of the personality, the depersonalization, from his entrance to the end of the performance, will never be a real assimilation of himself.

10. Diderot, "The Paradox of Acting," In Actors on Acting, 162.

11. Ibid., 165.

12. Henry Irving, "The Importance of By-Play," In Actors on Acting, 357.

13. Michael Schepkin, "Wherein Lies the Difference Between Actors?" In Actors on Acting, 483.

14. Franch Fouche, Vodou et Theatre, 66.

The splitting of the personality, the depersonalization, will never be a real, authentic assimilation of himself.

15. Constantin Stanislavski, An Actor Prepares, 578.

16. Richard Boleslavsky, "Living the Part," In Actors on Acting, 512.

17. Franck Fouche, Vodou et Theatre, 66.

Locked in his skin, in his life, in his problems.

18. Jerzy Grotowski, Towards a Poor Theatre, 214.

19. Ibid., 36.

20. Ibid., 37.

21. David Cole, The Theatrical Event, 40.

22. Ibid., 41.

23. T.K. Oesterreich, Possession, (Secaucus, New Jersey: Lyle Stuart, Inc., 1966), 40.

24. David Cole, the The Theatrical Event, 40.

25. Richard Schechner, Between Theatre and Anthropology, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 4.

26. Arnold Elie, interview with author, Brooklyn New York, 5 May 1986.

27. T.K. Oesterreich, Possession, 144.

28. Marlene Louis, Interview with author, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 1 December 1985.

29. A.J. Voodoo Ceremony, Bizoton Port-au-Prince Haiti, 11 December 1985.

If you can't stop talking, I will slap you so hard, you will roll out of the sanctuary.

30. Constantin Stanislavski, An Actor Prepares, 247.

31. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn New York, 31 May 1986.

32. E.T. Kirby, U-R Drama, The Origins of Theatre, (New York: University, 1975), 5.

33. Roger Bastide, Le Candomble de Bahia, (Paris: Mouton & Co., La Haye, 1958), 22.

They are no longer boys and girls. They represent the Gods who come to mingle with the spectators. They are no longer the small dressmakers, cooks or maids. It is Omolu covered with straw, it is Xango, red and white, it is Yemanja combing her seaweed hair. The faces have become masks, they metamorphosed. Ogun the warrior, flashes with anger. Oxun is but carnal voluptuousness. For awhile Africa and Brazil fused...the frontiers between the natural and the preternatural no longer exist. Ecstasy allowed the desired communion.

34. Milo Marcelin, Mythologie Vodou, (Port-au-Prince: Les Editions Haitiennes, 1949), 24.

When he mounts
When he possesses a young person
The latter shows
All the aspects of old age, limps
and walks with the help of a crutch
and a cane

35. Ibid., 94.

The people possessed by "Grande Ezili" have shrivelled limbs, walk on their bottom, sometimes they are stricken with paralysis.

36. Voodoo Ritual, Brooklyn, New York, 5 June 1978.

37. Christopher Innes, Holy Theatre, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 49.

38. Wade Davis, The Serpent and the Rainbow, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985), 49.
39. Alfred Metraux, Voodoo in Haiti, 261 - 262.
40. Ibid.
41. Jerzy Grotowski, Towards a Poor Theatre, 147.
42. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn New York, 26 May 1984.
43. Max Reinhardt, "The Enchanted Sense of Play" In Actors on Acting, 299.
44. Michel Leiris, La Possession et Ses Aspects Theatraux Chez les Ethiopiens de Gondar, 100.

either spontaneous or provoked, but undergone in all good faith in a magico-religious perspective where the trance would not depend upon a conscious decision.
45. Ibid.

deliberately to show oneself off, or to exercise on others some pressure of which one will take advantage materially or morally.
46. Alfred Metraux, Voodoo in Haiti, 137.
47. Jules, interview with author, Archaie, Haiti, 11 May 1985.

They act as if they were possessed. They play the intelligent to get money from those who don't know Voodoo.
48. Marcelle Laguerre, telephone conversation with author, 16 May 1985.

I faithful servant of Lafrik Ginen declare these people mere demagogues and thieves.
49. J.G., Interview with author, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 2 December 1985.
50. Divination session, Brooklyn New York, 17 April 1983.
51. J. K. Oesterreich, Possession, 265.

52. Roger Bastide, Le Candomble de Bahia, 33.

She attended the ceremony, she knows many things. But she must perfect herself, move from empirical experience to organized knowledge.

53. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 21 February 1987.

54. Voodoo Ceremony Sou Dal-Carrefour, Haiti, 24 December 1985.

55. Alfred Metraux, Voodoo in Haiti, 197.

54. 56. Harold Courlander, The Drum and the Hoe,

57. Voodoo Ceremony, Jacmel, Haiti, 29 November 1985.

85. 58. France Schott Billman, Corps et Possession,

The novice, little by little, learns to shape this initially savage force (Bossale) he feels in him....It is the priest who slowly molds this form as if guardian of the model, he could sculpture it from the raw material of trance. He thus sets in order the crisis of possession.

59. Claude Planson, A La Decouverte du Vaudou, (Paris: Editions Vecchi, 1978), 219.

Possession is learned. As theatre, it needs a director. Here intervenes the houngan or the mambo, not only to direct the ceremony but also to educate through initiation those who are its major interpreters and who will serve as catalyzer.

60. Jean Laude, La Danse et La "Personne" In Michel Huet (Ed) Danses d'Afrique, (Paris: Chene, 1978), 14.

The horse of the god is in possession of its code of gestures, attitude and comportments, the mise en scene will allow others to recognize the god incarnate. Nothing spontaneous, but on the contrary, a deep knowledge of what may build a character, make the body a space of temporary incarnation of another person.

61. Pierre Verger, Notes Sure Le Culte des Orisa et Vodun (Dakar: L FAN, 1959), 72.

It is in that state, washed from all remembrance, that the initiate is taught the particular rythms, songs and behaviour of the god.

62. Jacqueline Monfouga Nicolas, Ambivalence et Possession, (Paris: Editions Anthropos, 1972), 156.

The Jakeso is the true initiator of the future adept. She teaches her the least characteristics of the members of the pantheon: a bad apprenticeship may prevent the initiate from ever being a great Bori woman, the only true bright status in the cult.

63. Ibid., 180.

pattern of gestures proposed by the Jakeso, reproducing, and inciting the adept to rproduce the gestures of the gods.

64. France Schott Billman, Corps et Possession, 87.

As a conductor, he brings some spirits to speak, silences others, allows himself to dismiss the undesirable ones. In close collaboration with the msicians, he regulates the ballet of the possessed, prolongs or shortens the possessions.

65. Alfred Metraux, Voodoo in Haiti, 72.

66. J. Grotowski, Towards a Poor Theatre, 19.

67. Alfred Metraux, Voodoo in Haiti, 130.

68. Melville. Herskovits, Life in a Haitian Valley, (New York: Octagon Books, 1975), 177.

69. Voodoo Ceremony, Bizoton Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 30 August 1986.

70. Voodoo Ceremony, Jacmel, Haiti, 29 November 1985.

71. Beryl de Zoete and Walter Spies, Dance and Drama in Bali, 2nd ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 93.

72. J. Grotowski, Towards a Poor Theatre, 42.
73. Christopher Innes, The Holy Theatre, 160.
74. Ibid., 161.
75. Ibid., 194.
76. Richard Schechner, Essays on Performance and Theory, (New York: Drama Bookshop Specialists, 1977), 90.
77. Voodoo Ceremony, Mariani Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 26 December 1985.
78. Max Beauvoir, telephone conversation with author, 12 June 1986.
79. Wade Davis, The Serpent and the Rainbow, 47.
80. Richard Schechner, Essays on Performance and Theory, 90.
81. Aeschylus, Agamemnon, In John Gardiner (Ed) A Treasury of the Theatre, Vol. I, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1967), 12.
82. Voodoo Ceremony Bizoton Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 22 November 1985.
83. Voodoo Ceremony, Jacmel, Haiti, 29 November 1985.
84. Voodoo Ceremony, Jacmel, Haiti, 23 November 1985.
85. Aeschylus, Agamemnon, In A Treasury of the Theatre, 26.
86. Voodoo Ceremony Sou Dal-Carrefour, Haiti, 24 December 1985.
87. Aeschylus, Agamemnon, In A Treasury of the Theatre, 28.
88. Voodoo Ceremony, Sou Dal-Carrefour, Haiti, 24 December 1985.
89. Voodoo Ceremony Mariani, Haiti, 13 December 1985.

90. Voodoo Ceremony, Soukri Gonaives, Haiti, 25 August 1986.

91. Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 96.

92. Ibid., 98 - 99.

93. Ibid., 101 - 102.

94. Hippolyte, Interview with author, Jacmel, Haiti, 30 November 1985.

it is the chief of the mystical feast. It brings the lwa down to us. If there is no drum, they will respond but they will not enjoy themselves as much.

95. Gilbert Rouget, Music and Trance, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 123.

96. Ibid., 242.

97. Pierre Verger, Note Sur Le Culte des Orisa et Vodun, 23.

Not only do the drums invoke and greet the gods, but when the atmosphere becomes more frantic, the drums are the voices of the gods, a sort of resonant imperative where the Orisa claims the body of its "iyawo" to manifest itself.

98. Ruth Finnegan, Oral Literature in Africa, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1970), 485 - 493.

99. Milo Rigaud, La Tradition Voodoo, 385.

To put the drums to bed analogically means to send them back to Ife to recharge them with cabbalistic powers, as the initiation stages send the recipients to Ife so that the latter may be granted their rank.

100. Voodoo Ceremony, Soukri Gonaives, Haiti, 25 August 1985.

101. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 27 September 1986.

102. Jacques Roumain, Le Sacrifice du Tambour

Assoto(r) (Port-au-Prince, Haiti: Imprimerie de L'etat, 1943), 9.

They are the servants, the instruments of the deity, whereaas the "Assoto" is more than that, dressed with the sacrificial skin, it is the powerful Afro-haitian god.

103. Harold Coulander, The Drum and the Hoe, 63 - 65.

104. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 26 May 1984.

105. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 27 September 1986.

106. Lincoln Kirstein, Dance, A Short History of Classical Theatrical Dancing, (New York: Putnam Sons, 1974), 13.

107. Louis Sechan, La Danse Grecque Antique, (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1930), 192 - 193.

Independently from the chorus, we must consider the actors' dances. As the singing extended itself from the chorus to the actors, so did the dances, either in the commoi or in the duos - or sometimes trios, either in the solos or monodies which particularly characterized the Euripidian art. In "Les Pheniciennes", when Jocasta is reunited with her son, she dances out of joy. Electra also dances in "Orestes" when, condemned to perish with her brother, she abandons herself to frantic grief. Finally, a role such as Agave's in "The Bacchae" is above all a danced role.

108. Antonin-Artaud, "On The Balinese Theatre," In E.T. Kirby (Ed) Total Theatre, (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1969), 214.

109. Beryl de Zoete and Walter Spies, Dance and Drama in Bali, 18.

110. E.T. Kirby, Ur-Drama: The Origins of Drama, 74.

111. Ze-Ami, Kadensho, trans. by Chuichi Sakurai, Shuseki Hayashi, Rokuro Satoi, Bin Miyai, (Japan: Sumiya Shinobe Publishing Institute, 1968), 75.

112. Oscar Brockett, History of the Theatre,
251.
113. Aristotle, The Poetics 4.
114. Emmanuel C. Paul, Panorama du Folklore
Haitien, 51.

Singing is with dancing the most precious knowledge the
Negro brought to America.

115. Interview with Max Beauvoir, Mariani Port-au-
Prince, Haiti, 7 November 1985.

- M.J.A.: Mr. Beauvoir, why are there dances in a
Voodoo ceremony: What do they represent for these
ceremonies?

-M.B.: To start, I must say that all Voodoo
dances, whichever they are, may be considered as a
celebration of life. It means we are happy to be
alive. On the other hand, there is a corollary to
this point, as you may have heard in Africa: life
is rhythm before all. It is the rhythm that gives
life. In our culture, life is symbolized by
Danbala and Ayida Wedo. You see Danbala and Ayida
with an egg in their mouths. The egg symbolizes
life. Danbala, the serpent, is always in motion.
This is what creates life. Our ancestors taught us
that a celebration of life is always an
intersection where the act of giving and the act of
taking meet. In other words, you are giving and at
the same time you are taking. you invoke the Gods,
you dance for them because you need something from
them. You are receiving from them. But on the
other hand you are giving them something in return.
And what you give is the most precious thing on
earth. It is not money. It is yourself. It is
the best gift. And when you give yourself, you
receive not only what you ask for, but the God
itself, who possesses you.

-M.J.A.: Therefore, the dances are offerings.

-M.B.: It is the greatest offering. That is why
it is not, essentially, a matter of dancing well.

-M.J.A.: The main objective is to vibrate.

-M.B.: That is it. to vibrate. It is the best
word. The vibration is the "dan" or life. That is
what you have in your articulation. When you are
alive you can move. But when you are dead, your
articulations become rigid and stiff.

116. Makhouredia Samb, Le Ndeup, In Carrefour Review, (April 1967): 29 - 30.

When the Ndeup or the possessed's sacred dance starts, it is at first a monotonous and slow choreography, with three-part time rhythm, accentuated by the swinging of half-flexed arms...and then the dance accelerates; the shoulders are shaken and the bodies stream with perspiration. Progressively, the dance becomes more violent. The dancer spins round to the threshold of unconsciousness.

117. Voodoo Ceremony, Jacmel, Haiti, 29 November 1985.

118. Beryl de Zoete and Walter Spies, Dance and Drama in Bali, 74.

119. Richard Schechner, Between Theater & Anthropology, 247.

120. Voodoo Ceremonies Soukri Gonaives, Haiti, 14 - 25 August 1985.

121. Banda Dance, Deronville, Gonaives Haiti 2 November 1985.

122. Max Beauvoir, Interview with author, Mariani, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 7 November 1985.

You saw a group of bodies moving beautifully. But you missed the most important element: the performers' spirit. Their bodies followed their spirit. That is why even if the performer is normally awkward, he will become flexible, beautiful, marvelous.

123. Ibid.

You often see Voodoo worshippers dance for hours without respite. For that they must be possessed to some degree. Otherwise it is not physically possible. I have the proof. A group of young ladies of the troupe Le Soley, asked me to allow them to replace my hounsis in one of my ceremonies. I accepted. But although they are professional dancers, they could not last more than 20 minutes. After 20 minutes, their tongues came out that long. They all left the stage. This is how much it lasts in the profane realm. When you

consider the sacred, you have got to give it more credit. In fact, after each ceremony, when everybody else is tired, my hounsis still have so much energy that they are ready to go to a regular ball to amuse themselves in private. It is a certain degree of possession that gives them such resistance.

124. Harold Courlander, The Drum and the Hoe, 133.

125. Emmanuel C. Paul, Panorama du Folklore Haitien, 56 - 57.

In dancing the yanvalou, one represents, plays Danbala symbolized by the snake...The function of this dance is twofold. It also serves to pay homage to Agwe and to his wife, Ezili, because its mime evokes the movements of the sea.

126. Lavinia Williams, Interview with author, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 28 November 1985.

127. Ibid.

128. J. Laude, "La Danse et la 'personne,'" In Danses d'Afrique, 15.

The dance works up a process of elucidation, of perpetuation and transmission of knowledge.

129. Aboudja, Interview with author, Soukri Gonaives, Haiti, 17 August 1986.

130. Franck Fouche Vodou et Theatre, 63.

For the celebration of its ceremonies, Voodoo institutes outside the temple or hounfo and its annexes, the peristyle which, every allowance being made, recalls to mind the Greek stage and theatron. It is made of beaten earth, covered with palm leaves or sheet iron, according to the houngan's or mambo's economic situation. It is a real stage where the ritualistic spectacle unfolds around a consecrated pillar called: poteau-mitan.

131. Alfred Metraux, Voodoo in Haiti, 77.

132. E.T. Kirby, Ur-Drama, 77 - 78.

133. David Cole, The Theatrical Event, 104 - 105.

134. Ibid., 102.

135. Herard Simon, Interview with author, Soukri Gonaives, Haiti, 18 August 1986.

136. Roger Bastide, Le Candomble de Bahia, 72 - 73.

When the Orisa dance in the bodies of the girls, this salon becomes the image of the world. The floor is the earth, the ceiling is the sky...the dancing salon is then the microcosm, or the world reconstituted in its mystical reality. If the four cardinal points do not meet in the shape of columns, nevertheless, they meet in the shape of four angles of the room at the beginning of the ceremony, during the rite of Exu; the offering of this god who is the god of the roads, the regulator of the space, is successively presented to the four corners of the room. The Orisa will be able to come down only after these four points have been sacralized by the sacerdotal gesture, i.e., once the symbolic space has been transformed into a religious one.

137. W. Ignace, Interview with author, Brooklyn, New York, 5 May 1986.

138. Herard Simon, Interview with author, Soukri Gonaives, Haiti, 18 August 1986.

139. Arnold Elie, Interview with author Brooklyn, New York, 5 May 1986.

140. Harold Courlander, The Drum and the Hoe, 68.

141. Claude Planson, Un Initie Parle, 212.

When an ordinary man dies, his soul quickly evaporates in the universe. It is not the same for a kanzo. The latter has acquired such strength through initiation that it is not easy for him to liberate himself from his terrestrial links. His "great soul" retires to the place where all life originally came from, water, from which he cannot evade, in spite of all the secrets he acquired. His family with houngan or a mambo's help will have to give a particular ceremony aiming at withdrawing him from the water.

142. E.C. Paul, Panorama du Folklore Haitien, 315.

It is not a question of bluff or fraud. The most rational explanation one can give is that is that it is rather a matter of symbolic stimulation according to the demands of dramatization and expression of the belief. The houngan does not at all seek to dupe anyone. His role is to accomplish a symbolic action in order to motivate a fundamental belief.

143. Andre Raponda Walker and Roger Sillans, Rites et Croyances des Peuples du Gabon, (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1983), 113 - 114.

At other times they pretended to make the dead speak. During the dancing, an initiate sneaking into the banana plantation close to the village. Suddenly the lights were shut off, like magic, the thick night reigned in the mbandja and outside. Nobody spoke, nobody moved, for everyone expected a prodigy, a supernatural manifestation. Then one of the dancers started a lugubrious melopeia, half song, half prayer, which froze the entire audience and which he ended by shouting the dead's name. Oh! Oh! Oh!, answered the lad hidden in the grass, not far from the hangar. The audience had the shivers, then joy took over, for, no more doubt, the dead had spoken. He was satisfied with the honors to his mortal remains: From now on, he would watch over the village.

144. Milo Marcelin, Mythologie Vodou, 83.

Coquettish, she is manicured, perfumed, made up, her breasts are abundantly powdered and perfumed. They put an embroidered petticoat on her and a satin dress adorned with laces. They dress her hair with a light pink turban; her earrings and bracelets are added. On her forefinger are placed three rings: the first one indicates her union with Badagris; the second, her union with Agoue; finally, the third, her union with Danballah Ouedo. On her chest, is attached, with a gold pin, a bouquet of basil.

145. Voodoo Ceremony, Gonaives, Haiti, 2 November 1985.

Papa Guede is a handsome fellow. He is dressed all in black to go up to the palace. Dressed all in white he looks like a deputy. Dressed all in black, he looks like a senator.

146. Milo Marcelin, Mythologie Vodou, 17.

Covered with a straw hat, he leans on a crutch and a cane; as our peasants, he smokes a long clay pipe and wears a bag slung across the back.

147. Voodoo Ceremony, Jacmel, Haiti, 29 November 1985.

148. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 3 May 1986.

149. Claude Planson, Un Initie Parle, 312.

A kind of scapular...[which] indicates the possibility of access to the superior gods.

150. Alfred Metraux, Voodoo in Haiti, 294.

151. A.R. Walker and R. Sillans, Rites et Croyances des Peuples du Gabon, 179.

Leopard, or leopard man? in many cases, it was really the animal and not the man. But there was no more doubt when they caught the leopard men dressed with the animal skin or a penitent's cowl and a dalmatic painted with spots similar to the animal skin...and armed with iron claws which caused wounds similar to those produced by the leopard.

152. Ibid.

On their entire body they applied clay sprinkled with spots similar to the leopard's. This was enough to disguise them. These spots were made of a coating composed of palm oil and charcoal.

Chapter V - DRAMATIC ELEMENTS OF VODOO

1. Aristotle, The Poetics, 15.

2. Ibid., 13 - 14.

3. Harold Waters, Black Theatre in French (Quebec: Editions Naaman, 1979), 12.

4. Melville J. Herskovits, "Dramatic Expression Among Primitive Peoples," The Yale Review 1944: 691.

5. Ibid., 691 - 693.

6. Victor Turner, From Ritual to Theatre (New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1982), 81.

7. Claude Planson, Un Initie Parle, 317.

Silk packet of bright colour suggesting a human silhouette. It somehow constitutes the initiate's double. It is also utilized in the treatment of sick people.

8. Leonce Viaud, "Le Houmfor." In Bulletin du Bureau d'Ethnologie, Vol. 2 (1984: 30.

The packet, the informant told me, is the depositary of the gods secrets, it is the god's soul.

9. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn New York, 26 September 1986.

10. Aristotle, The Poetics, 17.

11. Arnold Elie, Interview with author, Brooklyn, New York, 26 September 1986.

12. Voodoo Ceremony, Bourdon, Port-au-Prince Haiti, 15 - 16 November 1985.

13. Voodoo Ceremony, Soukri Gonaives Haiti, 14 - 25 August 1986.

14. Sophocles, King Oedipus, In The Theban Plays trans. by E.F. Watling, (London: Penguin Books, 1974), 68.

15. Richard Schechner, Between Theatre and Anthropology, 126.

16. Jean Gazeneuve, Les Rites et La Condition Humaine, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958), 206.

In general, initiation is, sometimes in a dramatic form the symbolic figuration of a change of personality, of the abandonment of human condition...This change is often expressed by the myth of death and resurrection.

17. Ibid., 330 - 337.

Thus in a tribe of New Southern Wales, it is a man-actor who in front of the novices, pretends to die and resurrect...In Africa, in the Kikiyu Community,

during initiation ceremonies, the neophyte's mother sits down and takes the boy between her legs...He is linked to her by the bowel of a lamb. She groans as if she were giving birth and the boy wails as a newly born. The bowel of the lamb, which evidently represents the umbilical cord, is cut.

18. Claude Planson, Un Initie Parle, 176 - 189.

Here we are on the evening of the introduction to the temple. The devotees are assembled and the drums rumble. The candidates keep step in front of their "maman hounгно" and their feet trample the veve of the spirits they chose to preside over their initiation. The night moves forward and tension increases. And finally occurs the event so awaited: the flight of the neophytes who, all of a sudden, are blindfolded. Their relatives and their friends surround them and sadly bid them farewell. Many are in tears, for they know that the "hounгно" are going to die and that if they must resurrect, they will never be quite the same. But very quickly, they are taken away from these embraces and led towards the "guevo" whose doors for a while partly open, close up. In this somber room, where reigns a sweltering temperature, they are going to experience the pangs of agony...

The initiation is drawing to a close. The initiate wears new clothes, always white. His head, fragile after the hard trials he underwent, is protected by a kerchief, covered with a straw hat, he wears slung across the back, the "colliers maldioques", which indicate the rank his efforts permitted him to attain and the "agouessan", a sort of scapular. In one hand, he holds a bouquet of wild flowers and in the other, a lit candle. The doors of the guevo are wide open...The initiates form a procession and go to salute all the important spots of the habitation, the trees and the rooms dedicated to the Gods. Then new "Kanzo" are going to reestablish contact with their hounган or their mambo and exchange the traditional salutations with their new brothers and sisters. Finally they reunite with their family. With every relative they exchange 3 kisses: one on the right cheek, one on the left one, the last on the mouth. The exit ceremony has come to an end. In the afternoon, the christening will take place and at night, there will be a dance which all the neighborhood will join.

19. Betty L. Vaval, Interview with author, Soukri Gonaives, Haiti, 14 August 1986.

20. Louis Maximilien, Le Vodou Haitien, 84.

Thursday is the day when the "manger-tetes" takes place. Before accomplishing this rite, the houngan stands in front of the altar and invokes the god chosen by the new member who falls into trance. This god usually manifests his joy of having a new servant; but the intervention of another divinity may be observed. The latter, for reasons issued from the initiate's family, claims to be his master. Then, the person will be consecrated accordingly, in other words will become this divinity's servant.

21. Pre-initiation rite, Soukri Gonaives, Haiti, 22 August 1985.

22. Claude Planson, Un Initie Parle, 181.

I was in bed...I was not sleeping, I am sure of that, but my eyes were closed and I was meditating upon what was happening to me. Suddenly, "I saw." It struck me as a blow with the fist, and I remember that my body began to tremble. There was before me a deep forest, a forest as I had never seen before and perhaps will never again see. The richness, the colour and the exuberance of the vegetal world filled my eyes and my heart. I said to myself that the world must have been like that at the beginning when it was new and free from all impurity. I thought: this is the "terrestrial paradise" of which all men dream without ever catching sight of it, so remote it is from the most exalted imagination. It did not have the incoherence of dreams nor their colours. On the contrary, I had the impression that, for the first time, I was facing reality.

23. Max Beauvoir, Interview with author, Mariani Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 7 November 1985.

Initiation lasts 41 days during which you make the journey to the "other world." The houngan helps you, but it is you who go to see the creation of the world from the very first day.

24. Aristotle, The Poetics, 21.

25. Ibid., 22.

26. Sophocles, King Oedipus, in The Theban Plays, 61-62.
27. W. Hyacinthe, Interview with author, Brooklyn, New York, 14 October 1986.
28. R. Sylvestre, Interview with author, Brooklyn, New York, 22 December 1986.
29. W. Hyacinthe, Interview with author, Brooklyn, New York, 14 October 1986.
30. Voodoo Ceremony, Soukri Gonaives, Haiti, 16 August 1986.
31. Voodoo Ceremony, Souvenance Gonaives, Haiti, 19 April 1987.
32. Claude Planson, Un Initie Parle, 175.

All failure to obey is severely sanctioned. The "mamman hounгно" does not hesitate when necessary to employ the firmest means, including whipping.
33. Ibid., 177.

The pangs of agony. The candidate does not physiologically die, but I may attest that the pains he experiences are far from being symbolic. Indeed they are actual terrors of death.
34. J. F. Alexandre, Interview with author, Brooklyn, New York, 8 November 1986.
35. Jean Gazeneuve, Les Rites et La Condition Humaine, 338.

An essential element which makes the sacred existence different from the profane one. Pain, voluntarily accepted, corresponds to a refusal to take life as it is given...to suffer without any other reason than to choose to endure pain, is one of the ways in which one transcends nature.
36. Wade Davis, The Serpent and the Rainbow, 47-48.
37. Voodoo Ceremony, Mariani Port-au-Prince Haiti, 26 December 1985.

38. Voodoo Ceremony, Soukri Gonaives Haiti, 15 August 1986.
 39. Voodoo Ceremony, Mariani Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 13 December 1985.
 40. Victor Turner, From Ritual to Theatre, 13.
 41. Allardyce Nicoll, The Theory of Drama, (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1937), 104.
 42. Allardyce Nicoll, World Drama, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, World, Inc., 1949), 196.
 43. Louis Maximilien, Le Vodou Haitien, 199.
- Erzuli shows herself off in the crowd, courteous, smiling at the men with tender eyes; disdainful and mocking towards the women, for she thinks women are sluts who steal her husbands, thus looking stiff, she only offers them her two little fingers to hail them.
44. Alfred Metraux, Voodoo in Haiti, 110-111.
 45. Voodoo Ritual, Brooklyn, New York, 15 October 1985.
 46. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 21 July 1984.
 47. Voodoo Ceremony, Bizoton Port-au-Prince Haiti, 30 August 1986.
 48. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 28 February 1987.
 49. Claude Planson, Un Initie Parle, 129.
- In Ogou Feray, iron symbolizes tough strength. He demonstrates peremptoriness, unflexibility.
50. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 29 February 1987.
- When I think of Ogu, I find consolation and courage.
51. Pierre Verger, Notes Sur Le Culte des Orisa et Vodun, 141, trans:

Ogu in the Yoruba culture, Gu among the Fons, is the god of the blacksmiths and all those who make us of iron: warriors, hunters etc...

52. Ibid., 148.

53. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 28 February 1987.

54. Milo Rigaud, La Tradition Voodoo, 157.

Logic, reason, wisdom, philosophy, intelligent and armed intercession.

55. Voodoo Ceremony, Bizoton Port-au-Prince Haiti, 30 August 1986.

56. Milo Marcelin, Mythologie Vodou, 15.

57. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 26 September 1986.

58. Roger Bastide, Le Candomble de Bahia, 158.

The god of openings. It is he who starts the ritual as it is he who watches the gate. He is at the same time the god of the roads. His offerings are taken to dispersed roads or intersections because it is certain that by constantly traveling, he will finally come that way. It is precisely because he presides at the openings and the roads that he became the messenger of all the gods.

59. Pierre Verger, Notes sur le Culte des Orisa et Vodun, 109 - 120.

He is dynamic and jovial...the old travelers spoke a lot about this divinity which struck them with its erotic aspect.

60. Claude Planson, Un Initie Parle, 127.

A hounsi possessed by her will lie on the ground apparently rigid as a cadaver and she will wear a chin-strap and cotton pads in the nostrils.

61. Voodoo ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 26 May 1984.

62. Ibid.

63. William Congreve, "Concerning Humor," In Barrett H. Clark (Ed.) European Theories of the Drama, (New York: Crown Publishers, 1978), 167.

64. Oskar Seyffret, Dictionary of Classical Antiques, (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), 192.

65. Ibid.

66. Milo Marcelin, Mythlogie Vodou, 78.

67. Thomas Carpenter and Robert Gula, Mythology, (Massachusetts: The Independent School Press, Massachusetts), 42.

68. Louis Maximilien, Le Vodou Haitien, 120.

To live is the highest good, to die the worst distress. What death is on the look out for in man's life is to prepare the way to an internal rebirth.

69. E.C. Paul, Panorama du Folklore Haitien, 27.

70. Voodoo Ceremony, Bizoton Port-au-Prince Haiti, 22 November 1985.

71. Pierre Verger, Notes Sur Le Culte des Orisa et Vodun, 233.

He is known under the name of Dan Ayida Wedo. He is at the same time male and female.

72. Ibid.

He is represented in the shape of the rainbow serpent. The offerings dedicated to him consist of white fabric, out of which flags are made,...2 white chicken.

73. Ibid.

In Abomey, it is wise to avoid denigrating people when one is in the neighborhood of a Dan.

74. Voodoo Ceremony, Bizoton Port-au-Prince Haiti, 30 August 1986.

75. Max Beauvoir, Interview with author, Mariani, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 7 November 1985.

When you put all these lwas together, you find they are nothing else but different expressions of Voodoo, i.e., different expressions of God. Just as it is different elements: arms, head, ears, hair, etc.; that form a humn being, it is all the lwas put together that form what we call in Voodoo, our God. Voodoo is monotheistic; there is only one God. We call it the Great Master, Eternal Father, etc.

76. Wade Davis, The Serpent and the Rainbow, 172.
77. Alfred Metraux, Voodoo in Haiti, 82.
78. Ibid., 83.
79. Aristotle, The Poetics, 14.
80. Oscar Brockett, History of the Theatre, 593.
81. Walter Kaufmann, Tragedy and Philosophy, (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1969), 62-63.
82. August Wilhelm Schlegel, "Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature," In Barrett H. Clark (Ed.): European Theories of the Drama, 284.
83. Ibid., 287.
84. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 28 February 1987.

You speak too much. Do you hear what I say? Do not divulge your affairs....Stop crying, you hear? Ladies and gentlemen, do you hear what I tell her? Everything you know you share it with this person. But this person is your husband's relative. This person to whom you reveal all your secrets, is precisely the one who is betraying you. That is all I can tell you. If you want to listen to me, fine.

85. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 2 October 1987.

You hear me, Ladies and Gentlemen, Haiti will be free. However, there is no liberation without blood. You hear me, ladies and gentlemen, hold tight! A national figure is doomed to fall.

86. Ibid.

I am queen in my country. You tend to only revere the Goddess Ezili Danto. But you should know there are others. We each belong to our respective regiment, but we are all the same. During slavery time, it was I who led the first slaves who disembarked. I am queen in my country. I know how to dance. Sing for me so that I may dance.

87. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 16 September 1986.

88. Voodoo Ceremony, Bizoton Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 13 December 1985.

89. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 26 September 1986.

90. Laennec Hurbon, Dieu Dans le Vaudou, 99.

91. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 26 September 1986.

92. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 3 May 1986.

93. Voodoo Ceremony, Bizoton Port-au-Prince Haiti, 30 August 1986.

94. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 26 September 1986.

95. Marcelle Laguerre's Repertoire. Telephone Conversation with author, 5 January 1987.

96. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 26 September 1986.

97. Voodoo Ceremony, Soukri Gonaives, Haiti, 16 August 1988.

98. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 6 June 1987.

99. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 26 September 1986.

100. Ibid.

101. Voodoo Ceremony, Soukri Gonaives, Haiti, 18 August 1986.

102. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York 26 September 1986.

103. Ibid.

104. Voodoo Ceremony, Soukri Gonaives, Haiti, 23 August 1986.

105. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 14 July 1984.

106. Voodoo Ceremony, Soukri Gonaives, Haiti, 14 August 1986.

Translation: Mercy on us! I ask the Gods to protest the children for me. I ask for courage and strength for the coming year to be better than the present one.

107. Soukri Conference, Soukri Gonaives, Haiti, 11 May 1986.

Pemit everyone to live freely, create a first Paradise for you here, Paradise meaning liberation.

108. Claude Planson, Un Inititit Parle, 302.

I am calling upon all Voodoo "nations": Rada, Petro, Ibo, Caplaou, Amine, Mondong Manding, Sinigal, Kiba, Congo, Nago, Dahomin.

109. Jacques Roumain, Le Sacrifice du Tambour Assoto(r) 12.

110. Soukri Conference, Soukri Gonaives, Haiti 11 May 1986.

111. Alfred Metaux, Voodoo in Haiti, 71.

112. Roger Bastide, Le Candomble de Bahia, 47.

A real society of mutual aid which maintains the spirit of the African community.

113. Soukri Conference, Soukri Gonaives Haiti 11 May 1986.

In our initiation, we take off the superficial character, given to you by the western society, which makes you believe you are superior to someone else.

114. Zantray Platform, Haiti 1987.

Zantray (children of Haiti's traditions) is an organization which is struggling to defend and develop all that is authentically rooted in the traditions of Haiti.

Peasants form its backbone. Every one else who becomes part of it must pay respect to them and to the people's culture which is found in Voodoo.

115. Roger Bastide, Le Candomble de Bahia, 48.

In the last resort, hierarchy depends upon the participation, the amount of knowledge acquired throughout the years.

116. Jacques Roumain, Le Sacrifice du Tambour Assoto(r), 32.

117. Claude Planson, Un Initie Parle, 72.

There exists no form of segregation towards the woman in Haitian Voodoo. She is, strictly speaking, equal to men and nobody would think of limiting her to secondary roles. Equally as the houngan, the mambo is also mistress of her temple. She must have authority, diplomacy, talent, competency and effectiveness in order to uphold her rank of queen.

118. J.C. Dorsainville, Histoire d'Haiti, 67.

By a sharp gesture, the priestess, inspired, plunges her knife in the animal's throat. Blood spurts, then it is collected hot and distributed in turn to the slaves. All drink and swear to execute Boukman's orders.

119. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 16 September 1986.

120. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 28 March 1987.

121. Milo Rigaud, La Tradition Voodoo, 62.

122. Alfred Metraux, Voodoo in Haiti, 49.

123. Claude Planson, Un Initie Parle, 280.

The scandal is to want to impose upon others one's perception of the world. As for the west, there is only one God and it does not matter much to me by what name one calls him. I feel totally at ease in a church, a temple, a mosk or a synagogue.

124. L. Lavache, Interview with author, Bizoton Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 23 December 1985.

A woman has to be very strong to be a houngan's wife, because he takes as many women as he wants to without hiding it.

125. Claude Planson, Un Initie Parle, 74.

The mambo's life is in no way comparable to a nun's. She may be single, married or she may live with a man, at will. It may even occur, as the houngan can be polygamous, that she overtly practices polyandry without anyone thinking of criticizing her behavior.

126. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 2 October 1987.

127. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 26 September 1986.

128. Ibid.

129. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 21 February 1987.

130. Voodoo Ceremony, Jacmel, Haiti, 23 December 1985.

131. Ginette Tovar, Interview with author, Jacmel Haiti, 29 November 1985.

Voodoo is a revolution. It protects the worshippers against the enemy. It is a power for its believers.

132. Hippolyte, Interview with author, Jacmel Haiti, 29 November 1985.

133. Gerard Philippe Auguste, interview with author, Petion-Ville Haiti, 29 August 1986.

134. Voodoo Ceremony, Bourdon Prot-au-Prince, Haiti, 15 November 1985.

135. Voodoo Ceremony, Souvenance Gonaives Haiti, 17 April 1987.
136. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn New York 31 May 1986.
137. Voodoo Ceremony, Soukri Gonaives Haiti, 14 - 25 August 1986.
138. Bulletin du Bureau d'Ethnologie, N° 2 (1984): 21.
139. Euripides, the Trojan Women. In Stanley A. Clayes (Ed) Drama and Discussion, (New York: A.C.C., 1967), 167.
140. Jacques Roumain, Le Sacrifice du Tambour Assoto(r), 57.
141. Melville Herskovits, "Dramatic Expression Amongst Primitive Peoples," Yale Review no.33 (1944), 698.
142. Claude Planson, A la de Couverte du Vaudou, 14 - 15.
143. Voodoo Ceremony, Soukri Gonaivcs Haiti, 18 August 1986.
144. Ibid.
145. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 21 February 1987.
146. Ibid.
147. Ibid.
148. Ibid.
149. Ibid.
150. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 4 June 1987.
151. Voodoo Ceremony, Bizoton, Port-au-Prince Haiti, 22 November 1985.
152. Milo Marcelin, Mythologie Vodou, 111.
153. Voodoo Ceremony, Brooklyn, New York, 31 May 1986.

154. Alfred Metraux, Voodoo in Haiti, 117.
155. Popular Voodoo proverbs recorded from conversations with several Voodoo worshippers.
156. Milo Rigaud, La Tradition Voodoo, 63.
157. Voodoo Ceremony, Bizoton Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 30 August 1986.
158. Alfred Metraux, Voodoo in Haiti, 117.
159. F. N. Sougan Agblemgnon, Sociologie des Societes Orales d'Afrique Noire (Paris: Mouton & Co, 1969), 30.
160. Claude Planson, Un Initie Parle, 295.
161. Ibid., 298.
162. Milo Rigaud, La Tradition Voodoo, 260.
163. Ibid., 349.
164. Ibid.
165. Voodoo Ceremony, Soukri Gonaives Haiti, 15 August 1986.

They said the feast would not take place, many faithful did not come because of that. Bless them for me! Some of those who are present are not helpful whereas those who are not here could have been more helpful. Mercy on us!
166. Voodoo Ceremony, Soukri Gonaives, 15 August 1986.

A revolution has just taken place in Haiti. Voodoo too should contribute the continuation of this revolution...Each religion must adopt its own position...Do not mix up the religions...The Catholic church showed us that it is ready to break, to kill our members. In all, over a thousand Voodoo priests have been murdered throughout the country...The Catholic Church, the Baptist and Adventist have the same preoccupation: How to succeed in destroying Voodoo which greatly disturbs them in the country...Our Voodoo comes from the African countries...If you do not feel like following Voodoo according to Voodoo's rules,

leave it alone. Those who are suspected to have attacked the Voodoo temples can not be part of the Voodoo society. We will not tolerate that people attack us...We want it to be known that we have eliminated from our repertourie the Catholic songs such as: The Lord's angel told Marie...We have nothing in common with Virgin Marie, Saint John the Baptist and company...

167. Alioune M'baye Le Traitement du Passe Dans le Theatre Negro-Africain, (Dakar: IFAN, 1981), 35.

Style is important to excite the ears and make the message more accessible.

Chapter VI - CONCLUSION

1. Aristotle, The Poetics, 12.

2. Ibid., 15.

3. Alioune M'baye, Le Traitement du Passe Dans le Theatre Negro-Africain, 54 - 55.

The Possessed dances. Hieratic dance, esoteric steps and gestures that no profane dancer could have imitated with precision. Was this theatre? K. was dancing for his God, he was celebrating his power in the eyes of the initiates and other Voodoo cultures...Theatre for the outsider, but not for those. The Dahomeans who know what they are talking about when they approach this subject, will always be astonished to hear that in their country, theatre and initiation rites interpenetrate.

4. Anthony Graham White, "Ritual and Drama in Africa." E.T. J 22, December 1970, 349.

5. Voodoo Ceremony, Bourdon Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 16 November 1985.

6. Voodoo Ceremony, Jacmel Haiti, 29 November 1985.

7. Michel Leiris, La Possession et Ses Aspects Theatraux Chez Les Ethiopiens de Gondar, 62.

In Port-au-Prince, I noticed that several Voodoo ceremonies ended with the evocation of Zaka, peasant god whose manifestation gives way to pleasant sketches

and to rustic and gay dances. It seems that this final intervention satisfies the need to finish the gathering in an atmosphere of relaxation.

8. Voodoo Ceremony, Bezoton Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 22 November 1985.

9. Voodoo Ceremony, Gonaives, Haiti, 2 November 1985.

10. Herskovits, Life in a Haitian Valley, 177.

11. Voodoo Ceremony, Jacmel Haiti 23 December 1985.

12. Voodoo Ceremony, Bizoton Port-au-Prince Haiti, 11 December 1985.

13. Alfred Metraux, Voodoo in Haiti, 363 - 364.

14. E.T. Kirby, Ur. Drama, 14.

15. Carole Jean Louis, telephone conversation with author, Brooklyn, New York 23 January 1987.

Some of us would be possessed particularly in the Petro or Banda dances without losing track of the Choreography.

16. Anthony Graham White, Ritual and Drama in Africa, 343.

17. Alphonse Tierou, Verite Premiere du Second Visage Africain, (Paris: G.P. Maisonneuve et Larose 1975, 1975), 16.

We find a rich cultural attainment which expresses itself in the form of dances and rejoicings that are religious and profane at the same time.

18. Ibid., 18.

It is presented to the public only after 3 years of minute preparations. It is the only mystical school which allows itself to under take miraculous operations in public and in front of cameras.

19. E. C. Paul, Panorama du folklore Haitien, 154.

In Gonaives, the carnival group "Aimable" has a theocratic character. The chief is mominated for life, with the "Aco", symbol of command, and is designated by

the Eliacine spirit invoked from the Govi. Furthermore, "Aimable" has some strong spiritual traditions and possesses at its headquarter, which we visited, a hufo or Voodoo temple. Its members must go through the first phase of initiation called: Rising.

20. Max Beauvoir, Interview with author, Mariani, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 7 November 1985.

Carnival is a religious ceremony in which everybody partakes. Evidence shows that all the groups have their base in Voodoo temples. All the ornaments, all the signs, are kept in Voodoo temples. Before a group goes out, it must offer a ceremony to protect the participants. Once it reaches the streets, it must salute "Kafou", Met Kafou", "met gran chemem" and when they go back to the hounfo, they must offer another ceremony there.

21. Rara pageant, Mapou Gonaives Haiti, 17 April 1987.

22. Ibid.

23. Harold Courlander, The Drum and the Hoe, 106.

24. E.C. Paul, Panorama du Folklore Haitien, 171.

According to our informants from the Artibonite, the main juggler, extremely talented, is capable of leaving his cane hanging in the air, going, inside a house, then coming back to pick it up. He can play his instrument with his teeth and with his feet. He can lie down and make someone pound on his stomach. He can slip between the bars of a chair. He can lock himself in a room and come out of it without opening the doors.

25. Maya Deren, Divine Horsemen, Motion picture, New York 1977.

26. E. C. Paul, Panorama du Folklore Haitien, 196.

In all the areas of the city, in the narrow and dusty paths, the groups pursue their rounds and stop by the tomb of their dead relatives to whom they pay homage.

27. Harold Courlander, The Drum and the Hoe, 109.

28. Rara parades, Mapou Gonaives Haite, 17 April 1987.

Fek paret sang a song to the Marasa Gods (the twins):

Marasa men bwe men manje
 Dosou Dosa men bwe men manje
 Marasa Jimo-yo
 La vi-m nan men Bondye

Marasa here is beverage, here is food
 Dosou Dosa here is beverage, here is food
 My life is in God's hands.²
 La Sen jan group sang to Ogou Badagri:
 Nago pike ke yo, ke yo kase
 Nago m'pral pike ke yo kase
 Nago pike ke yo
 Badagri, mpral pike ke yo ke yo sote¹
 Nago stabs their heart, they are frightened
 Nago, I am going to stab their heart, they are scared
 Nago stab their heart
 Badagri, I am going to stab their heart, they are scared.

29. Rara parades, Pon Leste Haiti 17 April 1987 and Mapou Gonaives 17 April 1987.

Anye, yo mare mwen
 Bifalo moun yo mare mwen
 Ezili Danto kote ou ye?
 Ezili Daome Kote ou ye?
 O Neg yo fem pase mize vre nanpeyi-a
 Ezili kote ou ye?
 Yon jou, ya lage mwen.

Anye, they obstruct my way
 Bifalo, those people obstruct my path
 Ezili Danto where are you?
 Ezili Daome where are you?

O! these people truly cause me a lot of misery in the country
 Ezili, where are you?
 One day, I will be free

The hardships of poverty are underlined here:

Si on nonm malere Fok li pran medsi-n O!
 Fokou pran medsi-n pou-l p se-ou
 Twopikana gen yon chante

Ki di malere pa defo
 Se pa vre, malere so gwo defo
 Depi ou melere, deye kay ou mache
 M'mande kot ma mete ko mwen Bon Dye
 Ras moun sa yo pa vle we-m O!
 Ma rele fanmi mannan m'yo
 Kote nou ye? Dyab la, nou nan men yo

If a man is poor, he must take a laxative
 You must take a laxative to get rid of your poverty
 Twopicana has a song
 It says: Poverty is not a defect
 This is wrong: Poverty is a big defect
 When you are poor, you must stay behind
 I ask: Where should I go, my God?
 These people hate me
 I implore my mother's ancestors
 Where are you? The devil, we are in their hands

One of the "Majinel" songs resounded with protest:

Mwen pa bezwen lajan
 Mwen pa bezwen merit
 Dwa m'bezwen
 Mwen bezwen la vikwa
 Pou mgenyen dwa
 Ayiti bon nouvel O
 Peyi-mva devlope
 Yo papsa vi-n pran-m lkay mwen
 Yo pap sa vi-n pran-m lakay mwen
 An 62 yale
 An 63 yo fe komite, yote di
 yap mete limye ba nou la
 Se manje neg yo bezwen manje
 Pou yo fe la vi neg yo.

I do not need money, I do not need merit
 rights, that is what I want
 I need victory in order to have rights
 Haiti good news
 Then my country will progress
 They won't be able to get me on my own territory
 They won't be able to get me on my own territory
 In 62 they left
 In 63 they formed a committee
 They said they would install electricity for us here
 But all they need is to keep everything to live
 their own life

30. Interview with a Rara leader, Mapou Gonaives
 Haiti, 17 April 1987.

Rara is pleasure, pleasure of dance and music, very beautiful indeed. Rara and Voodoo, same thing. For instance, Rara sings "Ke-e-ke", so does Sourvenans.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

Rara is recreation for our community here. And it also evolves in the entire country. We are celebrating the lwa and Souvenans. Rara is connected with Voodoo. A Rara member is also a Voodoo worshipper.

34. Reginald Bailly, Interview with author, Souvenance, Gonaives Haiti, 19 April 1987.

35. Max Beauvoir, Interview with author, Mariani Port-au-Prince, 7 November 1985.

It has an extraordinary function. It is a feast that takes place in February, March, when all birds sing on the trees, all goats, pigs, chicken, cocks meet one another...young men meet young ladies and as a result will marry later. That is why it is believed that the period that follow carnival is when there are the most newly born. The goal is to bring young men and young ladies together, away from all social pressure.

36. Theodore Gaster, Thespis, 24.

37. Oscar Brockett, the Theatre, 67.

38. Victor Turner, From Ritual to Theatre, 68.

39. Martial Day, L'Heritage, (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie Le Natal, 1942), 34.

Sebas: In all cases, I will die. But before I would like to talk to you. Even if my strength weakened and my life ended unexpectedly Ogou would speak to you. Ogou will not let me die without your taking this hunfo in charge. This is a familial obligation. It is my duty to pass it on to you. In return its your duty to serve it, otherwise the family will be cursed. My son, the time has come. It is Damballah's time, Ogou, Erzulie Freda's time.

Maxime: Ah! Papa, what are you saying? You know that my education does not allow me to take care of such business. I am ashamed of you.

Sebas: Ah! Here is the word! Shame! This is what is destroying us. Shame! This is our condemnation. If you are ashamed of me, you are ashamed of your ancestors, of your country...Maxime, my son, please take care of the hunfo when I die. The tradition of the family demands that the son of each generation be in charge of the hunfo. That is the way it was in Africa. Please do not break the chain.

Maxime: No, no, no, Never! It is pointless to speak to me.

40. Ibid., 70.

All religion is in effect the matrix of art. As such, Voodoo will serve in Haiti as the ground for a truly national art.

41. Felix Morisseau-Leroy, Roua Kreon, (New York: Jadin Kreyol, 1978), 40.

In the meantime the singing goes on, Kreon swooped upon Terezyas with the cane. Terezyas stopped him with the rattle. Terezyas danced before Kreon. King Kreon danced in front of Terezyas. They are "fencing". King Kreon switches hand. Terezyas also switches hand. Left hand for left hand. He points the gun at Terezyas. Terezyas points the rattle at him as if it were a weapon. He shook the rattle right in the gun mouth. King Kreon pressed on the sear. The gun did not fire. Terezyas matched everyone of Kreon's movements as if one were going to knock down the other without touching him, until King Kreon ran out of breath, took a chair and sat down. Terezyas, still armed with his ason, put on his sandals, crossed the peristyle with the dignity of a houngan without saying a word.

42. Ibid., 50 - 51.

43. Playbill: Theatre National, (29 May - 7 June 1987): 3.

The Haitian society, in spite of its rich potentiality does not have an intense artistic life. In all artistic domains, the structures necessary to the expansion of the arts have always been missing.

The country's underdevelopment is not only socio-economic but cultural as well; and it is impossible to reach a stage of development without the working up of a cultural policy capable of mobilizing the minds, arousing the creative imagination and breeding new values. It is in such a perspective that we perceive the National Theatre.

44. Richard Schchner, Between Theatre and Anthropology, 256.

45. Interview with Max Beauvoir, Mariani Port-au-Prince Haiti, 7 November 1985.

If you consider the length of time a Voodoo worshipper spends in the peristyle, you will find out that it is equal to the time one spends in school...There are various levels of knowledge...It is a life school. In other words, the day you rise to the level of priesthood is the day you begin to learn. And all your life you must learn with other priests. It is such a vast tradition, a Tradition that is at least 10.000 years old. How can you condense a 10.000 year old tradition in an initiation that lasts just a few days. Initiation in Voodoo means what it means: to start. It shows you the way and from there, your progress will depend upon your activities, your intelligence and the amount of time you spend to learn. That is what makes you an average, small or great Voodoo priest...As for the dances, you must learn the steps. During initiation you learn them too. That is why initiation lasts 41 days. You are taught a series of basic steps and the rest, you will develop with practice. If after initiation you peak and go without ever coming back, your experience will stop there.

46. Cheik Anta Diop, Nations Negres et Cultures, Vol. I, (Paris: Presence Africaine 1979), 14.

The use of cultural alienation as a weapon of domination is as old as the world; each time a people conquers another, it uses it.

Glossary

- Abobo: Exclamation expressing a salutation or greeting to the Gods.
- Ason: Sacred rattle used to invoke the Gods.
- Asoto: Gigantic drum considered as a divinity.
- Ayizan: Very old Goddess who presides at initiation ceremonies. Palm leaf, symbol of purity.
- Banda: Sacred Voodoo dance identified with the Death God, Guede.
- Baron Samdi: Voodoo deity, patron of the cimetere.
- Bilolo: Exclamation expressing a salutation or greeting to the Petro Gods.
- Bohum: Funerary song.
- Bosal: Wild.
- Boule zen: Funerary rite; rite also observed in initiation ceremonies.
- Chwal: Voodoo Gods Receptacle.
- Danbala: Voodoo God identified with the Serpent.
- Degre: Mystical power.
- Deka: Ritual object in the shape of a small bowl, used in initiation ceremonies in certain regions such as Souvenance, in Gonaives.
- Desounen: Ceremony in which the mystical power is taken away from the dead to be given as a legacy to a chosen member of the family.
- Djevo: Initiation room.

- Djek: Charlatan who claims to have the power to give material wealth.
- Dyo: Series of African prayers, necessary in most ceremonies.
- Ezili Danto: Petro Goddess known for her aggressivity and her sensuality.
- Ezili Freda: Rada Goddess known for her elegance, her flirtatious character and her aristocratic mannerism.
- Gad: Mystical entity considered as a special messenger.
- Govi: Sacred ritual object in the shape of a vase.
- Hounfo: Voodoo Temple.
- Houngan: Voodoo priest.
- Hounjenikon: Chorus leader.
- Hounsi: Initiated Voodoo servant.
- Hounto: Spirit who possesses the drummer.
- Hountogui: Initiated drummer.
- Hounyo: Child, novice.
- Kanzo: Voodoo initiate.
- Kouche Kanzo: First part of initiation ceremony.
- Langay: Esoteric language used by Voodoo initiates usually composed of African words.
- Laplas: Master of ceremonies, principal flag bearer in Voodoo ceremonies.
- Lavilokan: Old Voodoo Temple considered as a Voodoo headquarters.
- Legba: Voodoo God, messenger of all Voodoo Gods always invoked at the beginning of ceremonies to open the "Gate" or give passage.
- Loko: Voodoo God identified with the tree.
- Lwa: Spirit who possesses Voodoo worshippers.

Lwa Met Tet: The Spirit who particularly commands and protects a worshipper.

Mambo: Voodoo priestess.

Maresa: Voodoo, Gods, the twins, known as children.

Mare Paket: Voodoo ceremony given for a newly initiated Voodoo priest or priestess. The packets made in this ceremony are considered sacred, magical instruments used in several magical operations, including healing.

Nan Badjo: Old Voodoo Temple still in existence in Gonaives.

Ogan: Musical instrument.

Ogou: Voodoo God, known as The Warrior.

Peristil: Sacred space dedicated to the public ceremonies.

Petro: Group of spirits known for their violent nature; Rite dedicated to them.

Pile Fey: Voodoo ceremony.

Poto-Mitan: Central pillar found in most peristyles, considered as the House of the Gods.

Pwen: Mystical power.

Rada: Groups of spirits from Dahomey known for their non-aggressive nature; Frite dedicated to them.

Rara: Rural Carnival related to Voodoo.

Sep: Punishment administered to a Voodoo worshiper by a God for disobedience.

Soukri: Voodoo Temple created during slavery time, still in existence in Gonaives.

Souvenance: Old Voodoo Temple, still in existence in Gonaives.

Tcha-tcha: Musical instrument.

Twoke Ason: Choreographed salutations, between two Voodoo priests.

Veve: Magical designs drawn during ceremonies to represent and invoke the Gods.

Vodou: African Spirit, African God.

Wete Mo Nan Dlo: Voodoo ceremony for the withdrawal of the dead from the water.

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