

The Dances of the *Orixás*

From Sacred Ritual to Performer's Dramaturgy

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Languages
Faculty of Humanities

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

Spring 2011

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2011

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<http://www.duo.uio.no/>

Print: Reprosentralen, University of Oslo

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ABSTRACT

This thesis studies the sacred dances of the *Orixás*, performed during the public religious rituals in Brazilian *Candomblé Keto*, and their relation to the *Odin Teatret tradition* and Eugenio Barba's theatre anthropology.

The study proposes a transdisciplinary perspective to ritual dance practice, based on performance theory and on theories on myth and ritual. The central idea is to create a method to performer's dramaturgy, departing from the intersection of two contexts: the religious and the theatrical. The further development of the method intends to enhance both the performer's stage presence and the perception of the spectator.

The construction of such a methodology is only possible as the result of a long term research. The present work aims to be the first step in this process, uncovering models and patterns of energy found in the relation between the dances and the myths of the *Orixas*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deepest gratitude goes to my family and to my supervisor, Dr. Anita Hammer.

My special thanks to:

Dr. Armino Bião, Federal University of Bahia

Augusto Omolu, Odin Teatret

Dr. Eugenio Barba, Odin Teatret

Fernanda Branco, ACTS - Laboratory for Performance Practices

Dr. Francesca Romana Rietti, Odin Teatret

Gro Dybvik, theatre director

Grupo Nzinga de Capoeira Angola

Hirton de Macedo Fernandes Jr., theatre director

Jan Ferslev, Odin Teatret

Julia Varley, Odin Teatret

Luanda Carneiro Jacoel, ACTS - Laboratory for Performance Practices

Dr. Mirella Schino, ISTA

Nem Brito, dance teacher

Dr. Nicola Savarese, ISTA

Paulo Atto, theatre director and dramaturge

Dr. Reginaldo Prandi, University of São Paulo

Roberta Carreri, Odin Teatret

Roger Rushton, proofreader

Sandra Santana, Federal University of Bahia

Dr. Sueli Carneiro, *Geledes* – Instituto da Mulher Negra

Dr. Suzana Martins, Federal University of Bahia

Terreiro da Casa Branca do Engenho Velho

Terreiro do Gantois

Valnizia Pereira de Oliveira, *Terreiro do Cobre/Terreiro da Casa Branca*

Dr. Vanda Machado, *Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá*

Verónica Pájaro, University of Oslo

CONTENTS

Introduction	- 1 -
I. Background for this research project.....	- 1 -
II. Introducing the <i>Candomblé</i>	- 1 -
III. The <i>Candomblé Keto</i> in Salvador and the most traditional houses	- 3 -
IV. A note about the spelling of Yoruba-derived terms and the use of literature in the Portuguese and Danish languages.....	- 4 -
V. The Odin teatret tradition and the ISTA.....	- 5 -
VI. Object of study, approach to research and academic queries	- 6 -
1. Theoretical background and research method.....	- 8 -
1.1. Theoretical background.....	- 8 -
1.1.1. Essentially contested concepts.....	- 8 -
1.1.2. Theories on myth and ritual	- 9 -
1.1.3. Theatre theory: Jerzy Grotowski, theatre as ritual and the holy actor.....	- 21 -
1.1.4. Performance theory.....	- 23 -
1.2 Method.....	- 26 -
1.2.1. Performance training at Odin Teatret	- 28 -
1.2.2. Fieldwork in Salvador, Brazil	- 29 -
2. The Odin teatret tradition, theatre anthropology and the dance of the <i>Orixás</i>	- 32 -
2.1. The Odin tradition.....	- 32 -
2.2. Theatre anthropology.....	- 35 -
2.2.1. <i>Balance in action</i>	- 38 -
2.2.2. <i>The dance of oppositions</i>	- 39 -
2.2.3. <i>Consistent inconsistency and the virtue of omission</i>	- 39 -
2.2.4. <i>Equivalence</i>	- 40 -
2.2.5. <i>A decided body</i> : the example of Japanese performance	- 42 -
2.2.6. Concepts of <i>energy</i> in Barba.....	- 43 -
2.3. The ISTA.....	- 44 -
2.3.1. The collaboration with Augusto Omolu	- 45 -
2.4. A short history of the use of the dances of the <i>Orixás</i> outside the religious context.....	- 47 -
2.5. Dancing <i>Orixás</i> at the Odin Teatret	- 48 -
3. The <i>Candomblé Keto</i> in Bahia and the nature of the dances of the <i>Orixás</i>	- 50 -
3.1. <i>Terreiro</i> , the sacred space	- 50 -
3.2. Structure of the system of belief and the cult.....	- 52 -
3.2.1. Mythology and cosmogony.....	- 52 -
3.2.2. The divinatory systems: the oracle of <i>Ifá</i> and the <i>búzios</i>	- 53 -
3.2.3. Sacrifices and offerings	- 56 -
3.2.4. Private rituals: <i>rites of passage</i> and <i>propitiatory rites</i>	- 57 -

3.2.5. Public rituals: feasts and <i>rites of maintenance</i>	57 -
3.3. The <i>Orixás</i> and their dances.....	58 -
3.4. A note about the qualities of the <i>Orixás</i>	68 -
3.5. A public ritual: a fieldwork experience	68 -
3.5.1. Ritual to <i>Oxalufan</i> at <i>Casa Branca</i>	69 -
4. Analysis and discussion: researching the energy of the <i>Orixás</i>	73 -
4.1. The dances of the <i>Orixás</i> in the discourse of the <i>Odin tradition</i>	73 -
4.2. An introductory study of the dances' nature	74 -
4.3. <i>Energy models</i> and <i>energy patterns</i>	76 -
4.3.1. <i>Ogum</i> , warrior energy.....	77 -
4.3.2. <i>Iansã/Oyá</i> , wind energy	78 -
4.3.3. <i>Oxum</i> , water energy: nuances of the feminine	79 -
4.4. Towards a method for the performer's dramaturgy	82 -
5. Conclusion.....	84 -
5.2. Some threads for future research	87 -
5.2.1. Possible contributions to ritual theory	87 -
5.2.2. How the dances are taught and learned in the religious context: contributions to theories on trance and spirit possession and their relation to performance	88 -
5.2.3. Further practical-theoretical development of the method of the <i>energy models</i>	89 -
References.....	90 -

INTRODUCTION

I. BACKGROUND FOR THIS RESEARCH PROJECT

The present thesis, *The dances of the Orixás: from sacred expression to performer's dramaturgy*, intends to study the sacred dances that belong to the religious rituals in Brazilian *Candomblé*, and their application in the *Odin Teatret tradition* and in Eugenio Barba's theatre anthropology.

My interest in the dance of the *Orixás* started in 2006, when I, then in the first year of my BA in Aesthetics and Theatre Studies, visited Odin Teatret for the first time to participate in the Odin Week Festival.¹ As an Afro Brazilian performer who had emigrated to Norway seven years earlier, I was curious about a certain Augusto Omolu, a performer from Salvador, Brazil. Omolu - who borrowed his artistic name from the *Orixá* also called *Obaluaê* - was the person who, many years before, in Salvador, met Eugenio Barba and, together with him, united the dance of the *Orixás* and theatre anthropology.

I started to practise the dances in workshops with Omolu in Salvador, Holstebro, and Wroclaw. It was in Poland, in June 2009, during the preparations of the second version of the performance *Ur-Hamlet*, directed by Barba, that I decided that I wanted to write my MA thesis about the dances of the *Orixás* in the context of the dramaturgy of the actor. There, the dances were used as the main form of dramaturgical work for the 50 invited young performers, who travelled from all over the world to participate in the project. I was one of them. The reflections fostered by the project were fundamental for the later events in my academic development, in which enormous relevance must be acknowledged to the fieldwork carried out in Salvador in the autumn of 2010.

II. INTRODUCING THE *CANDOMBLÉ*

The dance of the *Orixás* is a form of dance that belongs to the public rituals of the Afro-Brazilian religion *Candomblé*.

The roots of *Candomblé* lie in West Africa, in the region of Nigeria and Benin. The huge number of African slaves transported to the Americas from the 16th to the 19th century gave origin to the cult of the African deities in the New World. In Haiti, for instance, there is *Vodou*, in Cuba, *Santería* or *Regla de la Ocha*, in Brazil, *Candomblé*, among other denominations. These

¹ Odin Week Festival, earlier called simply Odin Week, is a workshop, held approximately once a year at Odin Theatre in Holstebro, Denmark. The programme includes attending rehearsals, training, all Odin Theatre's performances and work demonstrations, films, lectures and discussions.
<http://www.odinteatret.dk/workshops/odin-week-festival.aspx>

religious systems have many elements in common, but also show differences in several aspects. In the introduction to her work about the dances in these three religious beliefs, the American scholar Yvonne Daniel explores the similarities among them:

Haitian *Voudou*, Cuban *Yoruba* and Bahian *Candomblé* utilize dance performance and music-making as primary vehicles for spiritual transformation. They concur on divination systems in order to receive information from, and communicate with, a Supreme Being and his/her emissaries. The religions uphold life and death realms that constitute an ongoing vital universe and that involve funeral practices, spiritual manifestations and animal sacrifices, which systematize relations among humans, divinities and the Supreme Divinity.²

In *Candomblé*, the different deities are called *Orixás*, whose definition I present and discuss in Chapter 3. The worship takes place in the *terreiros* or *Candomblé* houses. Each *Orixá* has their own children, which means initiated men and women who play different roles during the rituals, when some of these people go into a trance, during which they are possessed by their *Orixás* and dance the deity's dance.

In Brazil, the cult is known in all regions, but its most remarkable form is found in the North-Eastern state of Bahia, in the capital Salvador. The city has around 3 million inhabitants³ and counts 1165 registered houses of *Candomblé*, according to the mapping project carried out by the Centre of Afro-Oriental Studies of the Federal University of Bahia (CEAO, in the Portuguese acronym)⁴.

African slaves from different regions and naturally of diverse languages were gathered in the same plantations and townships in Brazil. The *Candomblé* cult has developed as an amalgam of African cults. The need to maintain the cult was the prime factor to the grouping of different worship practices, and they ended up in diverse streams, called 'nations', that is, syncretised systems of worship organised according to language and geographical provenance.⁵ The CEAO mapping mentions at least 45 nations⁶, but the main categories are *Candomblé Angola*, with Bantu origins, mostly in Congo and Angola; *Candomblé Jeje*, with roots in the Ewe and Fon culture, mostly in the former kingdom of Dahomey, in present day Benin; and *Candomblé Keto*, which originated in the Yoruba culture from Nigeria and Benin. The other existing nations in the Brazilian *Candomblé* are further syncretisations involving these three main branches.⁷

² Yvonne Daniel, *Dancing wisdom: embodied knowledge in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba and Bahian Candomblé*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 4.

³ Wikipedia. < http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salvador,_Bahia>. Accessed on November 16th, 2010.

⁴ Mapeamento dos Terreiros de *Candomblé* de Salvador (Mapping of the *Candomblé Terreiros* in Salvador). <http://www.terreiros.ceao.ufba.br/terreiro/config>. Accessed on November 16th, 2010.

⁵ Pierre Fatumbi Verger, *Orixás : Deuses Iorubás na Africa e no Novo Mundo*, (Salvador: Corrupio, 2002), 28.

⁶ Mapeamento dos Terreiros de *Candomblé* de Salvador (Mapping of the *Candomblé Terreiros* in Salvador). <http://www.terreiros.ceao.ufba.br/terreiro/config>, accessed on April 26th 2011.

⁷ Ibid.

The religion also has practitioners in Portugal, Germany and the United States, and many people travel to Brazil, especially to Salvador, to visit the *Candomblé* houses. Some decades ago, the dances, the music and the aesthetics of the *Candomblé* were taken out of the houses of the cults by visual artists, dancers, musicians, choreographers and theatre directors. At the same time, academic interest in the cult started to blossom.

III. THE *CANDOMBLÉ KETO* IN SALVADOR AND THE MOST TRADITIONAL HOUSES

Of the more than one thousand *Candomblé* houses registered in Salvador, three are considered the most traditional: the *Ilê Axé Iyá Nassô Oká*, also known as *Casa Branca do Engenho Velho da Federação*, founded in 1735; the *Ilê Iyá Omi Axé Iyamassê*, the famous *Terreiro do Gantois*, established in 1849; and the *Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá*, founded in 1910.⁸

The history of these *terreiros* goes back to the first house of *Candomblé Keto* in Bahia, the *Iyá Omi Àse Àirá Intilê*⁹, or *Candomblé da Barroquinha*, situated in the district of same name. Although the mapping done by the historians from the Federal University of Bahia offers a precise date for the foundation of *Casa Branca*, - which my sources affirm is the direct follower of *Barroquinha* - the most solid piece of work on the subject, namely *O Candomblé da Barroquinha*, by the Brazilian researcher Renato da Silveira, asserts that it is now impossible to set the exact date of the establishment of the first *terreiro*, although the estimated date is believed to be in the XVIIIth century.¹⁰ I suspect that the given date for the foundation of *Casa Branca* includes the years as *Candomblé da Barroquinha*.

However, the history of the institutionalisation of the *Candomblé Keto* in Bahia is very rich and extensive, involving a number of political agreements both between the Afro-Brazilian community - comprising both slaves and free people - and the established social and religious white order, as well as among the Afro-Brazilian people themselves.¹¹

The organisation of the cult is the result of the minutely detailed political work carried out by the priestesses who led this first house. It was at *Barroquinha* that all the *Orixás* of the Yoruba pantheon were worshipped in the same place for the first time.¹² In Africa, each region had its religious practice, organised around the cult of one - or a few - deities.¹³ The number of deities

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ According to historian Renato da Silveira, the exactness of this name may be discussed. Renato da Silveira, *O Candomblé da Barroquinha: Processo de Constituição do Primeiro Terreiro Baiano de Keto*, (Salvador: Edicoes Maianga, 2006), 373.

¹⁰ Renato da Silveira, *O Candomblé da Barroquinha: Processo de Constituição do Primeiro Terreiro Baiano de Keto*, (Salvador: Edicoes Maianga, 2006), 373.

¹¹ Ibid, 10.

¹² Ibid, 457.

¹³ Verger, 17.

one ended up with in Brazil – sixteen out of several hundreds – gives an idea of how many cults had to reconstruct themselves in order to adapt to the new precepts of practice.¹⁴

After the fall of *Barroquinha* due to political persecution around the middle of the XIXth century, the house's religious activity was transferred to the district of Engenho Velho da Federação, where the *Candomblé* house became known as the *Casa Branca do Engenho Velho da Federação*.¹⁵ Conflicts of hierarchy and succession in this house led to the creation of *Gantois* and *Opô Afonjá*.¹⁶

IV. A NOTE ABOUT THE SPELLING OF YORUBA-DERIVED TERMS AND THE USE OF LITERATURE IN THE PORTUGUESE AND DANISH LANGUAGES

In this introductory note, I intend to explain my choices in the spelling of the terminology referring to *Candomblé*. These terms are derived from the Yoruba language and their use has been the subject of discussion in academic circles. There are many researchers from different countries writing about Afro-Caribbean and Afro-American religion, and their use of Yoruba words varies enormously. Just to give an example, the word *Orixá* may be spelled in at least four ways: the original Yoruba spells it òrìṣà, Spanish speakers spell it *oricha*, some English speakers spell it *orisha*, and Portuguese speakers spell it *Orixá*. These differences are present in almost every term derived from the Yoruba language. Nevertheless, reading some newly published books, I identify a phenomenon: the terminology of the different religions has been maintained in their local languages, which means, for instance, Spanish for *La Regla de la Ocha* and Portuguese for *Candomblé*, regardless of which language the work is written in. In this way, the special character and identity of each religious practice is preserved and reinforced, as we can see in Yvonne Daniel's *Dancing Wisdom: Embodied Knowledge in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba and Bahian Candomblé*¹⁷. I have chosen the same orthographic approach in my thesis, writing all the *Candomblé* terms the way they are spelled in the revised Portuguese translation of Pierre Fatumbi Verger's *Orixás* (2002).

Concerning the use of references in Portuguese and Danish, I have translated the citations of works that do not exist in the English language.

¹⁴ Silveira, 457.

¹⁵ Silveira,

¹⁶ Verger, 29-30.

¹⁷ Daniel, *Dancing Wisdom: Embodied Knowledge in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba and Bahian Candomblé*, xv.

Notes on phonetics:

PORTUGUESE	ENGLISH
x (<i>axé, Orixá</i>)	sh
á (<i>Orixá</i>)	open sound of the vocal a
é (<i>Candomblé</i>)	open sound of the vocal e
ô (<i>Xangô</i>)	closed sound of the vocal o
ó (<i>Oxóssi</i>)	open sound of the vocal o
j (<i>Yemanjá</i>)	g
ã (<i>Nanã, Iansã, ogã</i>)	an (nasal sound of the vocal a)
ss (digraph as in <i>Ossain</i>)	strong s

V. THE ODIN TEATRET TRADITION AND THE ISTA

The Odin Teatret is an emblematic group that can be placed among the longest lived in Western theatre. The group was founded in 1964 in Oslo, Norway, by the young director Eugenio Barba, a former assistant of the Polish director Jerzy Grotowski. Two years later, the troupe received the installations of an old animal farm in the small town of Holstebro, in Denmark. There, Barba and the actors established their theatre, renaming it Nordisk Teaterlaboratorium/Odin Teatret, which is still active after almost 47 years, with some of the same actors from the start.¹⁸

A plurality of activities has always been a characteristic of Odin Theatret. According to the theatre's website:

The Laboratory's activities include: Odin's own productions presented on site and on tour in Denmark and abroad; (...) organisation of encounters for theatre groups (...); teaching activity in Denmark and abroad; the annual Odin Week; publication of magazines and books; production of didactic films and videos; research into theatre anthropology during the sessions of ISTA (the International School of Theatre Anthropology); (...) collaboration with the CTLS, Centre for Theatre Laboratory Studies of the University of Århus; the *Festuge* (Festive Week) in Holstebro; the triennial festival *Transit* devoted to women in theatre; children's performances, exhibitions, concerts, round tables, cultural initiatives and community work in Holstebro and the surrounding region.¹⁹

This impressive range of activities has, over the course of years, contributed to the appearance of a particular theatre tradition associated with Odin. This tradition embraces, among other projects, Barba's reflections on dramaturgy and the function of theatre, the research on the

¹⁸ Odin Teatret Website. <http://odinteatret.dk/about-us/about-odin-teatret.aspx>. Accessed on May 5th 2011.

¹⁹ Ibid.

actor's craft, and the collection of an extensive amount of material about the history of theatre laboratories in Europe in the XXth century.²⁰

Through Odin's close connection to diverse Asian dance and theatre forms, Barba created the ISTA, a forum to study and debate theatre anthropology, the theory that appeared in the wake of the artistic practice of the group.

As we will see in detail in Chapter 2, from 1994 on, the dances of the *Orixás* became a part of the *Odin tradition* and the ISTA.

VI. OBJECT OF STUDY, APPROACH TO RESEARCH AND ACADEMIC QUERIES

To be precise, my objects of research are, on one side, the dances of the *Orixás*, as performed during rituals at two *Candomble* houses of the *Keto* nation in Salvador, namely *Casa Branca do Engenho Velho* and *Terreiro do Gantois*. On the other side are the dances of the *Orixás* as performed in the practice and pedagogical activities of Odin Teatret, and Eugenio Barba's theory and research presented at the ISTA (International School of Theatre Anthropology). Other types of performance or projects for the stage that apply the dances of the *Orixás* are also mentioned.

The intention of this thesis is to investigate two contexts in which the dances of the *Orixás* appear, aiming at a deeper understanding of how the dances may be applied, as a practical-theoretical tool, to the development of the performer's craft. Thus, the present work does not intend to be simply research on the theatricality present in the religious practice of the *Candomblé*, but rather to propose, through the complexity of this tradition, the study of different parameters of energy in the field of theatre anthropology, other than those of the Asian traditions. A leading question has been: how can I further develop a method for actor's dramaturgy, departing from the use of the dances of the *Orixás* in the context of the *Odin tradition* and theatre anthropology? Moreover, what contributions may the dances of the *Orixás* give to theatre anthropology's theoretical discourse?

These academic queries will be discussed and explored through the presentation and analysis of the two chosen contexts in Chapters 2 and 3, taking into account my fieldwork and research in Salvador and the experience of the Odin training in Denmark, further explained in Chapter 1. Chapter 4 offers, besides a discussion of the dances from the perspective of the theory presented, a first attempt at the conceptualisation of the *Orixás'* energies. Eventually, I summarise the thesis' findings and enumerate the possible contributions of this research to three fields: ritual theory, studies on altered states of consciousness and the further development of the suggested method for creation of artistic performance.

²⁰ Ibid.

In this scenario, one factor is of great theoretical and methodological relevance: it is not desirable to assume a superficial and utilitarian posture regarding the dances. In this sense, all references to *Candomblé* shall be deeply investigated, starting from the observation of their original context, which means the understanding of concepts such as: *manifestations of the sacred, myth, ritual and trance*.

Hereafter, I will use the terms *performer* and *actor* as analogous. I believe that this work may be useful also in a cross-genre perspective. Therefore, the word *performer* should cover actors, dancers and performance artists, although I am aware of the different theoretical and practical paradigms in which these genres are fundamented.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH METHOD

1.1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In the present work, I will use different theoretical branches as background to approach my research object: for the analysis of the religious context, I will apply theories on myth and ritual¹, as well as studies on alternate states of mind connected to the religious experience. For the context of theatre anthropology, I will apply theatre theory. Eventually, I believe that performance theory will be a point of convergence of the former approaches.

From the theories on myth and ritual, I have chosen to look mainly into Mircea Eliade's concepts of *myth* and *hierophany*, Catherine Bell's studies on *ritual* and Theodor H. Gaster's postulations on the interrelations between *myth* and *ritual*. Furthermore, I briefly explore some recent theories about trance and spirit possession, which are greatly relevant in the study of the individual processes in *Candomblé*. Within the field of theatre and performance theory, my choice falls upon Jerzy Grotowski and Richard Schechner. As an introduction to this chapter, I will make a short exposition of the theoretical condition of the studied conceptual apparatus, through Walter Bryce Gallie's highly enlightening reflection upon *essentially contested concepts*.

1.1.1. Essentially contested concepts

The British social and political scientist and philosopher, Walter Bryce Gallie, (1912-1998) published in his article "Essentially contested concepts" in 1956 some reflections that I consider highly useful in the study of the following theories.

Gallie's intention with his article is, ultimately, to establish common ground in the research on such areas of knowledge whose conceptual apparatus are the object of much discussion and disagreement. For instance, he cites concepts within Aesthetics, Political Philosophy and the Philosophy of Religion.² Furthermore, he points out the fact that these concepts have no standard or "correct" definition or function:

Recognition of a given concept as essentially contested implies recognition of rival uses of it (such as oneself repudiates) as not only logically possible and humanly "likely", but as of permanent potential critical value to one's own use or interpretation of the concept in question (...). One very desirable consequence of the

¹ This branch includes also the myth and ritual theory in the way it appears in the anthology edited by Robert A. Segal, *The Myth and Ritual Theory*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998).

² Walter Bryce Gallie, "Essentially Contested Concepts" in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, Vol. 56, (1955 - 1956): 167-198, Blackwell Publishing on behalf of The Aristotelian Society, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4544562>.

required recognition in any proper instance of essential contestedness might therefore be expected to be a marked raising of the level of quality of arguments in the disputes of the contestant parties.³

Gallie's postulations are important in the theoretical context of this work because they provide a philosophical ground to the study of the several aspects of the concepts *myth*, *ritual* and *performance*. Moreover, the recognition of this basic aspect of my conceptual apparatus has had a great influence on my choice of theory and will colour the later investigation of these concepts within the field of performance theory.

1.1.2. Theories on myth and ritual

The most relevant aspects of the theories on myth and ritual for the present work are:

- Definitions of the concepts *myth* and *ritual*
- Interrelations between *myth* and *ritual*
- Trance and spirit possession

The investigation of the concept of *sacredness*, which lies at the basis of the study of religion, falls unfortunately outside this thesis' scope. However, I will include in my theoretical approach notions around some phenomena characterised as *manifestations of the sacred*.

My search for the approach to myth and ritual that would best suit this research was guided by the studies carried out by Catherine M. Bell. Her account of the history of the field - from the Cambridge ritualists who followed in the steps of Scottish anthropologist James Frazer (1854-1941) in believing that myths were merely literary vestiges of early ritual activity, to the phenomenologists of religion such as Mircea Eliade⁴ - turned out to be of great importance to clarify the different perspectives on *myth* and *ritual* that resulted in the theoretical background of this thesis.⁵

The original query of the field, namely whether the origins of religion rest upon myth or ritual⁶, is not relevant for this work. However, the theories on the interrelations between myth and ritual that resulted from the various views on the theme are of major importance for the understanding of the *Orixá* worship and the *Candomblé* rituals.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁵ Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 5, 9.

⁶ Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, 3.

1.1.2.1. Myth

The Romanian historian of religion Mircea Eliade's (1907-1986) contribution to the field of myth and ritual research cannot be ignored. Controversies around his theories - that have been accused of relativism and subjectivism⁷ - and his methods, that earned him the designation "armchair anthropologist"⁸, could not obliterate the relevance of his conceptualisation of *the sacred, myth* and its role in the structure of several religious systems. Nonetheless, it is important to observe the considerations and developments of his theories made by more recent scholars, such as the Scottish-English historian of religion, Bryan Rennie, and the American philosopher Douglas Allen.

Eliade himself was aware of the risks he was running by attempting a definition of *myth* when he stated that "It would be hard to find a definition of myth that would be acceptable for all scholars and at the same time intelligible to non-specialists. Then, too, is it even possible to find *one*⁹ definition that will cover all the types and functions of myths (...)"¹⁰ Nonetheless, he was able to coin the following description:

Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial Time, the fabled time of the 'beginnings'. In other words, myth tells how, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence, be it the whole of reality, the Cosmos, or only a fragment of reality (...). Myth, then, is always an account of 'creation'.¹¹

Indeed, *myth* is a problematic concept to pin down. This condition may explain the choice made by Eliade, of starting by approaching what *myth does*, instead of focusing on closing the concept into a given ontological structure determined by what *myth is*. This way of addressing a concept seems to signalise a researcher's recognition of the inexhaustibility of the subject matter. As we will see later in this chapter, the concepts of *ritual* and *performance* have been dealt with in the same way by outstanding scholars.

In order to enlighten the ideas of Eliade, Bryan Rennie addresses them critically, confronting them with other lines of thought, such as the approach of British classical scholar Geoffrey S. Kirk (1921-2003). Kirk enumerated a set of features that he considered to characterise *myth*:

- [Having] narrative force, power or charm;
- Offering an explanation for some important phenomenon or custom;

⁷ Bryan Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade: Making Sense of Religion*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 121.

⁸ William G. Doty, *Myth, A Handbook*, (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 95.

⁹ Author's italics.

¹⁰ Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1975), 5.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 5-6.

- Palliating in some way a recurring social dilemma;
- Recording and establishing a useful institution;
- Expressing an emotion in some way that satisfies some need in the individual;
- Reinforcing a religious feeling;
- Acting as a powerful support or precedent for an established ritual or cult practice.¹²

Kirk's set of values embraced by *myth* seems to be complementary to Eliade's view. Moreover, it reflects two of the three styles of interpretation that, according to Catherine Bell, distinguish the development of the myth-ritual research field: the sociological and the psychological.¹³

However, for Eliade *myth is reality*, not fiction. His argument becomes clear through his considerations of the Native American Pawnee, a people who inhabited an area that today comprises the state of Nebraska.¹⁴ According to Eliade, the Pawnee differentiated "true stories" from "false stories", considering true, in the first place, all accounts of the beginning of the world.¹⁵ Eliade postulated that *myth*:

(1) constitutes the History of the acts of the Supernaturals; (2) that this History is considered to be absolutely *true* (because it is concerned with realities) and *sacred* (because it is the work of Supernaturals); (3) that myth is always related to a 'creation', it tells how something came into existence, or how a pattern of behaviour, an institution, a manner of working were established; this is why myths constitute the paradigm of all human significant acts: that by knowing the myth one knows the 'origin' of things and hence can control and manipulate them at will (..).¹⁶

At this point, the researchers of Eliade's work would stop to analyse critically this structure, which regards the motif of the creation of the universe - present in the so-called *cosmogonic myths* - as the main feature in the definition of *myth*. Once again, Bryan Rennie calls upon Kirk, who considered that *myths* are not only concerned with etiology, but also with "the emotional valuation of many aspects of personal life."¹⁷

For the subject of this thesis, the concept of *myth* will be approached as the result of a combination of the studies of Eliade and Kirk as summed up above, always keeping in mind its character of *essentially contested concept* and the view of *myth* as supporting, and/or being experienced through, *ritual*, as we will see later.

Another Eliadean concept of relevance for the present work is *hierophany*. The term, coined through the combination of the morphemes *hiero*, from ancient Greek *ἱερός* - meaning "sacred",

¹² Rennie, 64.

¹³ Bell, 3.

¹⁴ Theresa Jensen Lacey, *The Pawnee*, (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2006), 1.

¹⁵ Eliade, 8.

¹⁶ Eliade, 18. All italics and quotation marks are the author's.

¹⁷ Kirk, cited in Rennie, 68.

“holy”¹⁸ - and post-classical Latin *phania*, derived partly from ancient Greek *φάνεια*, meaning appearance, or manifestation, and partly from *φάνια*, also from ancient Greek, meaning “to show”, “cause to appear”.¹⁹ It is thus conclusive that *hierophany* means “manifestation of the sacred”.

Eliade attributes to the concept *hierophany* the literal meaning of the composed word, adding that “the term involves no further specification.”²⁰ However, he defines it: “Whether the sacred appear in a stone, a tree, or an incarnate human being, a hierophany denotes the same act: a reality of an entirely different order than those of this world becomes manifest in an object that is part of the natural or profane sphere.”²¹

Furthermore, Eliade postulates that there is a common structure to all hierophanies. This structure is characterised by the self-limitation of sacredness, whose manifestation is part of a dialectic relation between the sacred and the profane object through which it is making its appearance. Thus, the sacred is no longer absolute, it relates to the worldly thing in which it is made manifest.²²

1.1.2.2. Ritual

In the early publications by the Scottish anthropologist Victor Turner (1920-1983), *ritual* was defined as “prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in invisible beings or powers regarded as the first and final causes of all effects.”²³ Later on, influenced by other anthropologists, he suppressed the religious element of his previous definition, considering *ritual* “[a] stereotyped behaviour which is potent in itself in terms of the cultural conventions of the actors, though not potent in a rational technical sense.”²⁴

Turner’s definitions are useful as an introduction to the study of *ritual* and its social implications. Nevertheless, it turns out to be much too general, given the enormous variety of rituals existent around the world.

The American historian of religion Catherine M. Bell, postulates that *ritual*:

¹⁸ Oxford English Dictionary Online, <http://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/86798>, “hier-”, accessed on March, 11th 2011.

¹⁹ Ibid, <http://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/142211>, “-phany”, accessed on March 11th 2011.

²⁰ Bryan Rennie (Ed.), *Mircea Eliade: A Critical Reader*, (London: Equinox Publishing, 2006), 87.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid, 89.

²³ Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 79.

²⁴ Ibid.

[I]s not an intrinsic, universal category or feature of human behavior – not yet, anyway. It is a cultural and historical construction that has been heavily used to help differentiate various styles and degrees of religiosity, rationality and cultural determinism. While ostensibly an attempt to identify a universal, cross-cultural phenomenon, our current concept of ritual is also, and inevitably, a rather particular way of looking at and organizing the world.²⁵

It seems more appropriate to approach the concept of *ritual* in the way proposed by Bell: first, by enumerating a series of aspects inherent in what she calls “ritual-like activities” – which opens the reader’s view to phenomena of a non-religious character – and second, by categorizing ritual in different basic genres, thus developing Turner’s theory and negotiating with other researchers such as the American ritual theorist Ronald Grimes.²⁶

According to Bell, there are six general factors that characterise ritual-like activities, though they are neither exhaustive nor definitive: formalism, traditionalism, disciplined invariance, rule governance, sacral symbolism and performance.²⁷ Below I present a brief description of these factors:

Formalism: A ritual activity may present different degrees of formalisation. However, Bell states that “when analysed, formality appears to be, at least in part, the use of a more limited and rigidly organised set of expressions and gestures, a ‘restricted code’ of communication in contrast to a more open or ‘elaborated code’.”²⁸ Bell considers that the formality of rituals contributes to the uncontested maintenance and continuation of the ritual framework.²⁹

Traditionalism: “Most rituals appeal to tradition and custom in some way and many are concerned to repeat historical precedents very closely.” For Bell, a ritual disconnected from tradition would appear atypical to most people. Thus, rituals are inherently connected to traditions and this connection is expressed through the formalised action patterns.³⁰

Invariance: This aspect relates to both formalism and traditionalism. Bell states that “one of the most common characteristics of ritual-like behaviour is the quality of invariance, usually seen in a disciplined set of actions marked by precise repetition and physical control. For some theorists this feature is the prime characteristic of ritual behavior.”³¹ This disciplined set of actions is determined both by form and tradition.

²⁵ Bell, ix.

²⁶ Bell, 93.

²⁷ Bell, 138.

²⁸ Bell, 139.

²⁹ Bell, 140.

³⁰ Bell, 145.

³¹ Bell, 150.

Rule-governance: This feature is also connected to traditionalism.³² The rules that make the framework of a ritual activity are invariably conducted by tradition. It is the set of rules that govern the ritual that make it recognisable to the eyes of the participating community.

Sacral symbolism: The invocation of supernatural entities is one of the main features of religious ritual. This appeal is often made by the use of ritual symbols. The knowledge of the significance of ritual symbols is closely connected to the knowledge about the religious system of which the ritual is part. Often, the ritual place has a strong charge of sacred symbolism. In these cases, Bell points out that: “ritual-like action is activity that gives form to the specialness of a site, distinguishing it from other places in a way that evokes highly symbolic meanings.”³³

Performance: Bell writes:

In recent years, much attention has focused on what ritual has in common with theatrical performances, dramatic spectacles and public events. Most of these comparisons rest on a recognition that a performative dimension *per se* – that is, the deliberate, self-conscious doing of highly symbolic actions in public – is key to what makes ritual, theatre and spectacle what they are.³⁴

The performative feature of ritual will be approached later, in a subchapter dedicated to performance theory, to which Bell has also contributed. Nevertheless, it is curious to observe that this analogy may go both ways: performance may be regarded as a feature in ritual, and at the same time ritual may be considered an aspect of performance.

Bell also organises *ritual* into a number of *genres*. This type of categorisation is useful for researchers to understand the differences between the various phenomena comprised by the same general designation. According to the author, there are six basic genres of *ritual action*: rites of passage, calendrical rites, rites of exchange and communion, rites of affliction, rites of feasting, fasting and festivals, and Political Rites.³⁵ Similarly to most assertions within this field, Bell’s systematisation is not definitive and will be used here as a reference, appropriately discussed in Chapter 5. Many theoreticians before her have done the same, from the French sociologist David Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) to Victor Turner.³⁶ I believe that the criteria of the organisation and the number of genres one ends up with are closely related to the actual examples studied by each scholar. Consequently, these categorisation systems have to be regarded as open-mindedly as possible, due to their great potential to be modified even in the course of one single researcher’s career. In the following pages, I offer an overview of the *ritual*

³² Bell, 153.

³³ Bell, 159.

³⁴ Bell, 160.

³⁵ Bell, 93.

³⁶ Ibid.

genres listed by Bell, focusing on those that are more relevant for the later analysis of the *Candomblé* rituals:

Rites of Passage: Also called *life-crisis* or *life-cycle rituals*, they signalise a person's transition from one social/cultural/religious status to another. Events usually marked by rites of passage are: birth, initiation rites, marriage and death.³⁷ This *ritual genre* was first conceptualised by the French ethnographer and folklorist Arnold van Gennep (1873-1957), who regarded all rituals as rites of passage³⁸, with a threefold structure: *separation*, *transition* and *incorporation*.³⁹ On the specific case of religious rituals, Turner wrote:

The first phase of *separation* clearly demarcates sacred space and time from profane or secular space and time (...). It includes symbolic behavior (...) which represents the detachment of ritual subjects⁴⁰ (novices, candidates, neophytes and 'initiands') from their previous social statuses. (...) During the intervening phase of *transition*, the ritual subjects pass through a period and area of ambiguity, a sort of social limbo, which has few (...) attributes of either the preceding or the subsequent profane social statuses or cultural states. The third phase (...), called *incorporation* includes symbolic phenomena and actions which represent the return of the subjects to their new, relatively stable, well defined position in the total society.⁴¹

Turner's main interest within the structure of the rites of passage was the *transition*, also called *limen* (Latin term meaning 'threshold'), from which he developed his theory on *liminality*.⁴² For the present work, I consider of major importance the focus on the related concept *ritual subjects*, underlined above, which focuses on the individual as an important element in a ritual action. This line of thought will be relevant for my later analysis of the dances of the *Orixás*.

Calendrical rites: Mark the passage of time and are often related to cyclic natural phenomena, such as solstices and changes of season.⁴³ Moreover, such rites may be associated with cults of saints and ancestors, birth and death anniversaries and renewal of vows, among others. However, I consider it important to observe that there are fixed calendrical rites and there are rites that are held periodically. The latter have a looser connection to a special date in the year. For instance, I would cite daily church services or the Sunday Mass. I will here take the freedom to call such rituals *rites of maintenance*, since their importance does not rest upon the celebration of a date or a cyclic event, but upon the significance of repetition to the maintenance of a social, cultural or religious system.

³⁷ Bell, 94.

³⁸ Bell, 95.

³⁹ Turner, 24.

⁴⁰ My underlining.

⁴¹ Turner, 24.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Bell, 102.

Rites of exchange and communion: In some religious practices, these rites are, according to Bell, connected to the offering of sacrifices to a given deity or spirit, in exchange for a reward or the solution of a problem. In some cases, these rites involve sacred killings of animals, whose meat is cooked and prepared in special ways and consumed in a sort of communal banquet.⁴⁴ A rite of exchange may also have a propitiatory character, being held as a preliminary action aiming to appease or win the favour of a certain deity, thus making possible the realisation of other rituals or actions of worship.

Rites of affliction: Bell's definition of this *ritual genre* is based on Turner's: "Rites of affliction seek to mitigate the influence of spirits thought to be afflicting human beings with misfortune."⁴⁵ Nevertheless, this category seems to be related to the previous one, inasmuch as the rituals involving sacrifices and offerings are often made to solve problems believed to be caused by, for instance, ancestor spirits or other supernatural beings whose worship has been neglected.

Rites of feasting, fasting and festivals: For Bell, these rites are more associated with a community's public display of religiosity than with open invocation of deities. "One might say that in these rituals people are particularly concerned to express publicly – to themselves, each other and sometimes outsiders – their commitment and adherence to basic religious values."⁴⁶ She cites for instance the Muslim communal fasting during Ramadan, Christian processions in Europe and South America and the celebration of carnival.⁴⁷

Political rites: "Political rituals can be said to comprise those ceremonial practices that specifically construct, display or promote the power of political institutions (such as king, state, the village elders) or the political interests of distinct constituencies or subgroups."⁴⁸ This *ritual genre* is of special interest for researchers of social relations involving the exercise of power and its structures.

Some rituals may fall into two or more categories or *genres* conceptualised in *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, as Bell herself recognises.⁴⁹ In order to illustrate this basic condition of any attempt at categorising ritual, I propose a quick look at some examples:

⁴⁴ Bell, 108.

⁴⁵ Bell, 115.

⁴⁶ Bell, 120.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Bell, 128.

⁴⁹ Bell, 94.

Ritual	Genres
Procession of the Patron Saint Our Lady of Aparecida in the city of Aparecida in Brazil (Christian celebration).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calendrical/periodical: celebrated on October 12th every year. • Festival: public display of religious faith. • Exchange or communion: fulfilling of vows made to the Patron Saint.
Inauguration of The President of the United States.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Periodical: held on January 20th, every fourth year. • Rite of passage: marks the change of status of a politician. • Political: legitimating the power of an institution.

The definitions of features and genre categorisation of *ritual* treated in this chapter will be of great relevance for the presentation and classification of the *Candomblé* rituals in Chapter 3.

1.1.2.3. Interrelations between *myth* and *ritual*

Catherine Bell is clear in establishing a relation of equivalence between *myth* and *ritual*:

A myth - like a ritual - simultaneously imposes an order, accounts for the origin and nature of that order, and shapes people's dispositions to experience that order in the world around them. The myths put forward by both Frazerian ritualists and the myth centred phenomenologists suggest that there is a coherent and meaningful unity to the diversity of religions, cultures and histories (...).⁵⁰

But before Bell, the British-American Biblical scholar Theodor Herzl Gaster (1906-1992) made an important contribution to the establishment of a more balanced relation between myth and ritual than that suggested by the leading theoretical approaches of his time, which advocated the primacy of *ritual* over *myth*.⁵¹

In his study *Thespis*, Gaster argued that the seasonal ritual activities of so-called primitive communities had a twofold pattern composed by rites of Kenosis, or Emptying, and rites of Plerosis, or Filling. The rites of Kenosis symbolised the "eclipse of life and vitality at the end of

⁵⁰ Bell, 21.

⁵¹ Bell, 7.

each lease”⁵², while the rites of Plerosis, on the opposite track, symbolised “the revitalization which ensues at the beginning of the new lease (...).”⁵³ For Gaster, these processes of eclipse and revitalisation were in fact not limited to the local life of the community, but the entirety of nature with all its elements, both animate and inanimate. Furthermore, he pointed out that these seasonal rites have two concomitant aspects, one punctual and one transcendental: they are both *ritual* and *drama*.⁵⁴

Gaster maintained that *myth* is the connecting element of these two aspects of *ritual*:

The function of myth (so obstinately misunderstood), is to translate the real into terms of the ideal, the punctual into terms of the durative and transcendental. This it does by projecting the procedures of ritual to the plane of ideal situations (...). Myth is therefore an essential ingredient in the pattern of the seasonal ceremonies, and the interpenetration of ritual and myth provides the key to the essential nature of drama. ⁵⁵

So, for Gaster, *ritual* and *myth* are parallel aspects with different and complementary qualities.

Eliade also approached the matter of the interrelation between *myth* and *ritual*, although a little more superficially than Gaster. However, Eliade argued that myths are experienced as reality through ritual. For him, the knowledge of myths “is not ‘external’, ‘abstract’ knowledge but a knowledge that one ‘experiences’ ritually.”⁵⁶

1.1.2.4. Trance and spirit/deity possession

The states of trance and spirit possession may be considered among the most intriguing aspects of religion and religious experience. In the course of the last two centuries, many scholars with diverse backgrounds, from natural science and medicine to humanities, have dedicated their work to the understanding of such phenomena. Lately, the field of cognitive science of religion has gathered scientists and academicians in the pursuit of the nature of trance and spirit/deity possession.

In *The Golden Bough*, from 1890, James G. Frazer made an attempt at a universal definition of possession:

Certain persons are supposed to be possessed from time to time by a spirit or deity; while the possession lasts, their own personality lies in abeyance; the presence of the spirit is revealed by convulsive shivering and shakings of the man’s

⁵² Robert Segal (Ed.), *The Myth and Ritual Theory*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 310.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 311.

⁵⁵ Segal (Ed.), 311.

⁵⁶ Eliade, 18. All quotation marks are the author’s.

whole body, by wild gestures and excited looks, all of which are referred, not to the man himself, but to the spirit.⁵⁷

The study of trance and spirit possession has, ever since its beginnings, been characterised by a number of great problems. For instance: What happens in the mind of the person who goes into such states? What is the difference between the concepts of trance, ecstasy and spirit possession, since researchers in different contexts have used these terms with reference to altered states of consciousness? Are these states related to mental illness?

A quick look at the history of this interdisciplinary field, starting with Frazer, is enough to uncover the problematic relations between object and subject in the research of trance and spirit possession, both in anthropology and psychology. Since it is primarily based on the observations – or analysis of others’ observations – of religious practices of peoples considered “primitive”, the study of altered states of consciousness carries in itself seeds of prejudice and belief in the superiority of the Western rationalist thought. These ideas led to the pathologisation of trance-like states.⁵⁸ However, new perspectives on trance and spirit possession attempt to consider the numerous nuances present in such phenomena.

The difference in definitions and uses of these two concepts has been the subject of much discussion and reflection. The distinction conveyed by the Austrian-born scholar Erika Bourguignon divides possession behaviour into two main groups: possession trances, that is, alterations in the state of consciousness that cause behavioural change, and non-trance possessions, a state that may cause “negative changes in physical health or behaviour, or, on the other hand, enhanced powers.”⁵⁹ Bourguignon asserts that the occurrence of these two types of possession is geographically determined, and that possession trances are closely associated with female participation.⁶⁰ Although Bourguignon is still regarded as an important contributor to this field of studies, her dualist theory has been comprehensively challenged.⁶¹

On a different - but highly relevant - path of thought, Hungarian-born linguist and anthropologist Felicitas D. Goodman (1914-2005) enumerated what she considered to be the “universals of religion”. Among other aspects, she cites *altered states of consciousness* and *alternate reality*:

⁵⁷ James G. Frazer cited by Bettina E. Schmidt & Lucy Huskinson, *Spirit Possession and Trance: New Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, (London: Continuum, 2010), 2.

⁵⁸ Schmidt & Huskinson, 71.

⁵⁹ Erika Bourguignon, “Possession and Trance” in Carol R. Ember & Melvin Ember (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Medical Anthropology: Health and Illness in the World Cultures, Vol. 1*, (New York: Springer Science & Business Media, 2004), 137-144.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Emma Cohen, *The Mind Possessed: The Cognition of Spirit Possession in an Afro-Brazilian Religious Tradition*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 12.

[A] religion can be described using ordinary language, but a religious *experience* can take place only if there are radical changes in the way the body functions, initiating an alteration in consciousness, in the perceptual state. In religious contexts there are in the main two altered states of consciousness that are institutionalized: *lucid dreams* occurring in sleep, and the religious altered state of consciousness, the *religious trance*, leading to experience of ecstasy. Both provide entrance into the *alternate reality*. (...) [T]he alternate reality is another part or dimension of reality as a whole. (...) The alternate reality entered with the help of religious trance or the lucid dream is patterned by the specific culture that the religious practitioner belongs to. (...) [T]he details of a visit to the alternate reality are easily recalled, often being remembered as long as a person lives.⁶²

It is very important to notice that Goodman related altered states of consciousness to physical functional changes. This point of view triggers the idea of the dissolution of the mind-body separation, with which most of the Western research on the human mind operates.⁶³ However, Goodman also worked with a distinction between *trance* and *possession*, relating religious *trance* to spiritual journeys, and *possession* to the temporary presence of a spirit or deity in the mind.⁶⁴

Arguably, for new research approaches such as the cognitive science of religion, this dichotomy has little relevance, as it postulates that spirit possession, regardless of culture or religious tradition, occurs according to universal mechanisms of the human mind.⁶⁵

Notwithstanding the questionable relevance of the trance-possession dichotomy, they are two different concepts. Which one best suits the present work?

The scholars Bettina E. Schmidt and Lucy Huskinson consider that:

Definitions of spirit possession and trance according to their stark contrast and stringent separation can lead to misleading and superficial interpretation, as various case studies demonstrate. When confronted with the ethnographic reality, such a dichotomy cannot be sustained. Experiences of supposed possession and trance phenomena are often too diverse and complex to lend themselves to adequate categorization.⁶⁶

The Northern Irish scholar Emma Cohen, after extensive fieldwork in an Afro-Brazilian religious community, decided to adopt an approach in which acceptance is given to the concomitant occurrence of trance and possession, with no hierarchic relation between them, where “both [concepts are] fused in [mental] processes of perception, categorization and interpretation”.⁶⁷ Accordingly, many works about traditions derived from the African Diaspora operate with such conceptual unification.

⁶² Felicitas D. Goodman, *Ecstasy, Ritual and Alternate Reality: Religion in a Pluralistic World*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 6-7.

⁶³ Bettina E. Schmidt & Lucy Huskinson, *Spirit Possession and Trance: New Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 35.

⁶⁴ Goodman, 42.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 108.

⁶⁶ Schmidt & Huskinson, 6.

⁶⁷ Emma Cohen, 14.

Furthermore, Cohen argues that spirit or deity possession phenomena fall into two categories: executive possession, “that entails the transformation or replacement of identity”⁶⁸ and pathogenic possession, which “envisages possessing spirits as (the cause of) illness and misfortune.”⁶⁹ The variety that I will consider in my further presentation (Chapter 3) and analysis (Chapter 4) of the deity possession of the *Candomblé* devotees is the former. Furthermore, I will use the terms *possession trance* and /or *trance* to refer to the same phenomenon, since in *Candomblé* practice they are inseparable.

I have so far used two different words that necessarily classify possession: *spirit* and *deity*. Unfortunately, the task of further defining these concepts presents much more complexity than I will be able to explore in this work. For the sake of objectivity and conciseness, I will limit myself to two examples that will be approached in detail in Chapter 3: an ancestor is a *spirit*, while an *Orixá*, as a divine being, is a *deity*.

1.1.3. Theatre theory: Jerzy Grotowski, theatre as ritual and the holy actor

The Polish theatre director Jerzy Grotowski’s (1933-1999) visions of theatre assured him a place among the most important figures of the theatrical art in the 20th century. From the Theatre Laboratory 13 Rzedow in Opole - later established in Wroclaw as The Laboratory Theatre - in his home country, to the Work centre of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards in Italy, Grotowski’s work went through four different phases:⁷⁰

- Theatre of productions, from 1957-1969.
- Paratheatre and the theatre of sources, from 1969-1982.
- Objective drama, from 1983 to 1986.
- Art as a vehicle, from 1986 to the present.⁷¹

Grotowski’s ideas were forged over years of theatre practice where the actor’s craft was central.⁷² After the end of the Laboratory Theatre, his interest moved more and more in the direction of research on the performer’s work rather than the creation of performances.⁷³

⁶⁸ Emma Cohen, “What is Spirit Possession? Defining, Comparing and Explaining Two Possession Forms” in *Ethnos* 73 (1), 101-126, also on <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~soca0093/pdfs/CohenEthnos08.pdf>, accessed on March 23rd 2011.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Richard Schechner & Lisa Wolford (Ed.), *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, (London: Routledge, 1997).

⁷¹ After Grotowski’s death, this late line of his research continued under the leadership of Thomas Richards at the Workcenter in Pontedera, Italy.

⁷² Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, (Holstebro: Odin Teatrets Forlag, 1968), 15.

⁷³ Schechner & Wolford, 3.

In *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Grotowski conveys a manifest that expresses his visions of the nature and function of theatre, which he believed to be closely connected to religious experiences:

The theatre, when it was still part of religion, was already theatre: it liberated the spiritual energy of the congregation or tribe by incorporating myth and profaning or rather transcending it. The spectator thus had a renewed awareness of his personal truth in the truth of the myth, and through fright and a sense of the sacred he came to catharsis.⁷⁴

For Grotowski, theatre has two essential parameters. First, the craft of the actor is regarded as the core of theatre art. Second, theatre is defined as “what takes place between the actor and the spectator”.⁷⁵ In the theatrical context idealised by Grotowski, the actor exerts an almost priestly function and is called *the holy actor*.

Grotowski believed that the actor’s work is based on complete surrender and will to self-penetration, that is, the act of giving oneself to a process of apprenticeship whose aim is freedom from daily conventional behaviour.⁷⁶ By challenging themselves through self-penetration, actors also challenge the spectators. Thus, actors become ritual individuals who sacrifice themselves in order to trigger a collective purgation of pain. The idea of actor fostered by Grotowski indicates a fundamental relation between art and ritual.

Self-penetration demands the engagement of the individual’s physical and spiritual power in order to achieve a state of “idle readiness”:

[T]he decisive factor in this process is humility, a spiritual predisposition: not to do something, but to refrain from doing something (...). This means that the actor must act in a state of trance. Trance, as I understand it, is the ability to concentrate in a particular theatrical way (...).⁷⁷

The state of trance that Grotowski mentions may be regarded as the result of a work in which the actors are prepared to become receptacles of something alien to their will, personality or individuality.

Grotowski’s theatre encouraged the daily practice of *physical and vocal training*. The *training of the actor* may be regarded as a preparation to carry out the function of a spiritual intermediary. Thus, the actor becomes a ritual person who acts on the behalf of a collectivity.

My intention in presenting a short fragment of Grotowski’s thought in this thesis was to give an overview of the theatrical tradition in which the work of Odin Teatret was forged, as well as

⁷⁴ Ibid, 22.

⁷⁵ Grotowski, 15, 32.

⁷⁶ Grotowski, 34-35.

⁷⁷ Grotowski, 37-38.

to provide a theoretical background to the analysis of the dances of the *Orixás* in the context of theatre anthropology.

1.1.4. Performance theory

Since the middle of the 1960s, one major question has concerned the American theatre director and scholar Richard Schechner: what features do theatre events from diverse genres share with religious and secular rituals, sports, play, political demonstrations and artistic happenings?⁷⁸

Can the nature of such events be understood by using the same tools and methods?⁷⁹

Schechner's inquiries led to a productive cooperation with Victor Turner. The resulting theoretical reflections were later organised under the name of Performance Theory. For Schechner:

(1)[T]here is a unifiable realm of performance that includes ritual, theater, dance, music, sports, play, social drama and various popular entertainments; (2) certain patterns can be detected among these examples; (3) from these patterns theorists can develop consistent broad based models that respect the immediacy, ephemerality, peculiarity and ever-changingness of individual performances, runs and genres.⁸⁰

Like all *essentially contested concepts*, *performance* is difficult to define and deliniatate. For Turner:

A performance is a dialectic of 'flow', that is, spontaneous movement in which action and awareness are one, and 'reflexivity', in which the central meanings, values and goals of a culture are seen 'in action', as they shape and explain behavior. A performance is declarative of our shared humanity, yet it utters the uniqueness of particular cultures.⁸¹

Turner's definition comprises two aspects that are experienced concomitantly. However, these main aspects involve a series of other factors that may contribute to a deeper understanding of performance phenomena. A closer look at these factors reveals that they may be both puzzling and conflictual.

In his search for the universal features of *performance*, Schechner has elaborated a number of charts and diagrams describing categories and characteristics. This type of presentation

⁷⁸ Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory*, (London: Routledge, 2009 [1977]), ix.

⁷⁹ Richard Schechner & Willa Appel, *By Means of Performance: Intercultural studies of theatre and ritual*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 3.

⁸⁰ Schechner, *Performance Theory*, 296.

⁸¹ Turner, cited by Richard Schechner & Willa Appel, *By Means of Performance*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 2.

material is often useful, as it manages to satisfy the longing we feel for quick and ready answers. Nonetheless, in the case of *essentially contested concepts*, they may seem oversimplifying. I will here make use of the paradigms of the performance chart (Table 1), which may be regarded as an attempt from the scholar's side at a list of the main aspects of *performance* and how they vary according to the nature of the performative event.

Table 1:

Reproduction of Schechner's Performance chart⁸²

	Play	Games	Sports	Theatre	Ritual
Special ordering of time	Usually	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Special value for objects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Non-productive	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rules	Inner	Frame	Frame	Frame	Outer
Special place	No	Often	Yes	Yes	Usually
Appeal to other	No	Often	Yes	Yes	Yes
Audience	Not necessarily	Not necessarily	Usually	Yes	Usually
Self-assertive	Yes	Not totally	Not totally	Not totally	No
Self-transcendent	No	Not totally	Not totally	Not totally	Yes
Completed	Not necessarily	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Performed by group	Not necessarily	Usually	Usually	Yes	Usually
Symbolic reality	Often	No	No	Yes	Often
Scripted	Sometimes/no	No	No	Yes	Usually

***Note: Happenings and related activity are not included as Theatre in this chart. Happenings would not necessarily have an audience, they would not necessarily be scripted, there would be no necessary symbolic reality. Formally, they would be very close to Play.**

For Schechner, the aspects listed in the first column of the chart are tools of analysis that may be applied to all performance types.⁸³ I consider some of these aspects to deserve further explanation.

Time: Performance time is different from daily life time in the following ways:

- Event time: the sequence of actions belonging to the event shall be fully performed no matter how long daily life time it takes.
- Set time: an arbitrary time frame is imposed on the event.
- Symbolic time: performance time is a representation of another time frame.⁸⁴

Objects: in performance, objects may have a different value than in daily life. Their meaning may vary according to symbols and traditions and their manipulation may have great significance for the whole development of the performance event.⁸⁵

⁸² Schechner, Performance Theory, 16.

⁸³ Ibid, 19.

⁸⁴ Schechner 8.

Non-productivity: performance activities generate no wealth and have no economical productivity.⁸⁶

Furthermore, Schechner analyses the parameters of self-assertiveness and self-transcendence separately, ranging them within the following principles:

Table 2:

Performance's relation to the subject⁸⁷

Self-assertive "I" = +	Social "We" = ±	Self-transcendent "Other" = -
Play	Games Sport Theatre	Ritual
Rules established by player	Rules establish frames: "Do" (freedom) "Don't do"	Rules given by authority
Pleasure principle, Eros, id private world, assimilation	Balance between pleasure and reality principles, ego, accommodation	Reality principles, (...) superego

As I suggested above, this chart may be the subject of much discussion. First, the values attributed to each performance type in each aspect vary in a way that is never fully explained by Schechner. For instance, I would like to understand in what sense the value "usually" differs from "often" and what exactly is meant by "sometimes/no". Such inconsistencies show us that performance is a tricky concept that resists categorisation. As I see it, the most important aspect here is to establish the parameters of observation.

Another relevant aspect of performance theory is *restoration of behaviour* or the *twice-behaved behaviour*. Schechner defines:

Restored behavior is symbolic and reflexive: not empty but loaded behavior multivocally broadcasting significances. These difficult terms express a single principle: the self can act in/as another; the social or transindividual self is a role or set of roles. Symbolic and reflexive behavior is the hardening into theater of social, religious, aesthetic, medical and educational process. Performance means: never for the first time. It means: for the second to the nth time. Performance is 'twice behaved behavior'.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Schechner, 11.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 17.

⁸⁸ Richard Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 36.

According to the theoretician, this aspect – considered the main aspect of performance⁸⁹ - has the particularity that the self is divided into several selves and behaviour exists separately from the person who behaves. This condition makes it possible to store, transmit, manipulate or transform behaviour.⁹⁰ In Chapter 4, I will apply this notion to analyse the aspect of the dances of the *Orixás* that relates to how myth is experienced in ritual and, furthermore, how the choreographies can be taken out of context.

Performance theory seems to be a field of research open to the discovery of new features, approaches and methods, and the further development of the basic theoretical corpus presented by Schechner. In the context in which the theory was formulated, it seems to have been more important for the author to propose a study of the concept of theatre beyond the origin issues raised by earlier scholars, and to establish a ground to research theatre independently from literature.⁹¹ In the context of this thesis, performance theory operates as a conceptual level that connects the other theories presented here. This is a fundamental premise for the analysis that will be developed in Chapter 4.

1.2 METHOD

The research methods employed in the present thesis are connected to the fields of anthropology and performance, and may be outlined by two distinct experiences: performance practice through acting training and ethnographic fieldwork. In both contexts presented, the concept of *reflexivity* has been of great value.

According to the Welsh anthropologist Charlotte Aull Davies:

Reflexivity, broadly defined, means a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference. In the context of social research, reflexivity at its most immediately obvious level refers to the way in which the products of research are affected by the personnel and process of doing research.⁹²

In this sense, the outcome of any research is, to a certain extent, the product of the personal process of the individual who has carried it out. Nevertheless, for Davies, the results of research based on fieldwork are expressions that lie on the intersection between the native reality and the researcher's experience.⁹³

⁸⁹ Schechner, 35.

⁹⁰ Schechner, 36.

⁹¹ Schechner, 19.

⁹² Charlotte Aull Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Research Selves and Others*, (London: Routledge, 1999), 4.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 6.

In ethnographic research, the relationship between subject and object is particularly delicate. Often, such relations are guided by notions of *self* and *other*. In her book *Vilje til Viden*⁹⁴, the Danish anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup gives a detailed presentation of this relation in human sciences. Her approach starts with an account of three models of research, concluding with a view on *reflexivity*.

In the first research model, the relationship subject-object is illustrated by the image of cannibalism: the subject “eats” the object, which most often has no right to protest. This event creates a series of problems for the object. Paradoxically, in order to acquire new dimensions, the object must be “eaten” again by someone else. The anthropophagical act presupposes a naturalisation of the object, that is, the other is placed outside the cultural order, thus being alienated.⁹⁵

In the second model, that depicts fieldwork, the subject is split. The situation resembles that of a schizophrenic patient whose perception is divided into two different realities: the researcher is at once subject and object. One part of the self keeps a scientific distance from the researched environment. The other becomes a part of it. Ultimately, the object cannot be observed independently of the observing subject, because, Hastrup argues, there can be no knowledge without the people who know.⁹⁶

In the third model, the subject and the object become one single unit. Here, Hastrup makes an analogy with shamanism. The shamans, when possessed by spirits, become one with the other. Likewise, science is an inherent part of reality. In order to further explain this model, the author gives an example extracted from Levi Strauss: the story of the shaman Quesalid. As a young man, Quesalid was mistrustful of his community’s local shaman. Intending to uncover the deceitful nature of the shaman’s activities, Quesalid engages as an apprentice at the shaman’s, thus learning the secret practices. Some time later, he is called to heal a sick person, and, surprised, discovers that he has become a great shaman. Quesalid became what he intended to investigate.⁹⁷

Hastrup’s three models describe, respectively, the scientific perspectives of positivism, relativism and holism. However, she does not suggest that one makes a choice between them, but rather that researchers become conscious of which form of critical approach they are making in their work. In this sense, *reflexivity* involves the inclusion of the *self* in the *other*. Moreover, since the object of an ethnographic research is always a subject in its original context,

⁹⁴ Kirsten Hastrup, *Viljen til Viden: En Humanistisk Grundbog (Will to Knowledge: A Humanistic Textbook, not translated into English language)*, (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1999).

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 138.

⁹⁶ Hastrup, 145-146.

⁹⁷ Hastrup, 148.

the investigation process implies a transformation and a re-contextualisation of *selves*, both the *researching self* and the *researched self*.⁹⁸

A retrospective look at my research process shows that it has gone through all the three models described by Kirsten Hastrup, although I have always considered the cannibal model less desirable. In the pages below I will present the two methodological approaches I have used in the research that led to the present thesis, as well as the different tools employed in each context.

1.2.1. Performance training at Odin Teatret

At Odin Teatret, all performers are researchers. Since 2006 I have spent several periods of practice research at the theatre's headquarters in Holstebro. Except for the very first time, when I stayed for 10 days in September 2006, my visits to the theatre have had a double character: the interest in studies of the actor's craft that first took me to Odin generated close personal relations that grew deeper as time passed. At Odin Teatret, creative processes are deeply connected to human affectivity.

I participated in several activities during my stays. The nature of my participation varied according to the type of event: workshops, festivals or seminars. Other periods were entirely dedicated to my individual research. This time was often divided between the rehearsing rooms and the archive, where I collected all the material about the history of the group, the ISTA and Barba's theoretic production. In 2008 I spent six months at the theatre, dividing my working time with an exchange at the University of Aarhus. Common to all kinds of activities was my total engagement in the theatre's life and all the processes in which I was involved.

Nevertheless, participative observation has been an important element in my investigation of the Odin tradition and theatre anthropology. While participating in training processes, a performer is also invited to see Odin's performances and work demonstrations, as well as to watch the results of the work of other artists or groups in research journeys.

Furthermore, personal communication and one recorded interview with actress Julia Varley were also methodological approaches used in my research. In the qualitative interview given shortly before my departure to fieldwork, Varley tells how Barba met the dances of the *Orixás*, and gives a highly relevant testimonial on how the dances were first applied to theatre anthropology. Later on, the value of Varley's account turned out to be even greater, as it functioned as a bridge between my own incorporated knowledge on the dances and the powerful encounter with their original context.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 149.

This manifold experience at Odin Teatret promoted my first acquaintance with the dances of the *Orixás*. A more detailed description of this experience is given in Chapter 2.

1.2.2. Fieldwork in Salvador, Brazil

1.2.2.1. Preparation

The time spent dancing *Orixás* at Odin Teatret increased my interest in the original context of the dances. Before spending two months in fieldwork in Salvador, I visited the city twice in order to establish some contacts and deepen my knowledge of the dances at a technical level.

The first time was at the beginning of January 2007. I stayed then for 10 days and attended a practical workshop on the dances of the *Orixás* at the Dance School of the Cultural Foundation of Bahia. During the first months of the year, many *Candomblé* houses are closed and it was not possible to attend any ritual. The second visit was shorter, but I had the opportunity to visit two *terreiros*: *Gantois* and *Axé Opô Aganju*. I also used both visits to buy a great number of books on *Candomblé*.

Back in Oslo, in 2009, I signed up for the courses *Ritual, Media and Performance* and *Theatre and Performance Theory*, both part of the MA program in Theatre Studies and taught by Professor Anita Hammer. At that time, I was already planning my fieldwork, and the courses were timely in providing me with the theoretical ground I needed before departing for Brazil in August 2010.

Moreover, my contact with professors Armindo Biao and Suzana Martins from the MA program in Performing Arts at the Federal University of Bahia offered me the possibility of networking in an academic environment. This contact was of great value, since it facilitated my acquaintance with a number of artists inspired by the aesthetic aspects of Afro-Brazilian religion.

1.2.2.2. In the field

Despite the great number of cult houses located in Salvador, I decided from the beginning to concentrate my research on the bigger, older and more traditional *terreiros*. This choice is explained by the following factors:

- The short duration of my fieldwork did not allow a deep comparative analysis of the practices in many different houses.
- The three historically most important houses, *Casa Branca*, *Axé Opô Afonjá* and *Gantois* gave origin to several other *terreiros*.

- I understood very quickly that the rituals held at the above mentioned places are usually attended by many members of other *Candomblé* houses. These events provided a great opportunity for networking at the beginning of the research, paving the way for further and deeper investigation in the future.
- Practical issues common to big cities like Salvador, such as transport and accessibility.

Already on my first weekend in Salvador, I was invited by an insider to attend the ritual at *Casa Branca*. I also knew a member of *Terreiro do Gantois*, whose festive calendar was about to start. These contacts were fundamental for my later relationship with these houses. However, I realised very soon that the best way to approach the religious environment was just to be there as private person, and not as researcher on ethnographic fieldwork. This decision was based on a *sense of appropriateness*. In the following passage, I would like to make a short examination of this insight and its importance to the present work.

1.2.2.3. *Sense of appropriateness as a methodological tool*

Sense of appropriateness is analogous to what we in daily language call *feeling*. I use this term *feeling* in the present context not as a phenomenon of perception of emotions generated by, for instance, love, compassion or pain. Here I refer to *feeling* as tool for social contact that determines how other people see you. So, in this case, a *sense of appropriateness* is closer to “etiquette” than to “emotion”.

An example is the use of recording devices. I know about many researchers who filmed, photographed and/or recorded the sound of *Candomblé* rituals. I do not intend to judge the value of their work by any means. Nonetheless, it *felt* completely wrong and inappropriate *to me* to ask for permission to do so. The same is true of the private rites, reserved to initiate members. Formal interviews were also discarded in this context. One attempt was made, and was met with great resistance from the devotee’s side.

Later on I realised that the reason for my attitude was that, in fact, *I was feeling at home*. I observed the small children running around the ritual space during the pauses, growing up in the *terreiro*, learning how to sing, play and dance just by *being there*, and I knew that this was the way I wanted to learn. Thus, in the context of this research, I will regard my position as the one of a possible *abiã*. *Abiã* is the lowest level of the *Candomblé* hierarchy, as we will see in Chapter 3. They are the apprentices, that is, believers who intend to become better acquainted with the religion and the *terreiro* before taking the irreversible step of initiation.

However I kept a diary, where I used to write descriptions and impressions after every ritual. I also spent much of my time searching and reading further theoretical references on

Candomblé. This time, in addition to books, I also found some academic studies such as theses, dissertations and essays, mostly from the disciplines of sociology and anthropology.

1.2.2.4. Short note about the sources on *Candomblé*

When it comes to the references on *Candomblé* tradition used in this work, they may be basically divided into two categories: the absolute authorities in the field, who started to research into the religion in the 1950's and 1960's, and the contemporary reviewers of the field. In the first category I place the French Roger Bastide and Pierre Verger (see Chapter 3). Although Bastide and Verger have enormously contributed to changing an academic tradition marked by all sorts of prejudice, in which the devotees were considered inferior beings suffering from a collective mental illness⁹⁹, their work is not free from the seed of naturalisation, that Kirsten Hastrup calls the cannibalistic approach model. Belonging to the second category, I would point to the Argentine anthropologist Juana Elbein dos Santos, who, in the early 1970s, supervised by Bastide, defended a doctoral thesis that would later become one of the most important books about the Yoruba cosmogony, *Os Nagô e a Morte*¹⁰⁰. Already by this time, Elbein dos Santos advocated a comprehensive review of the literature on Afro-Brazilian cults.¹⁰¹ Nowadays, this process of review is carried out, among others, by Brazilian researchers such as Renato da Silveira from The Federal University of Bahia, and Fabio Batista Lima from The Bahia State University. On the subject of the mythology, the sociologist Reginaldo Prandi has the most extensive work.

Not surprisingly, many current researchers on the subject are *Candomblé* leaders themselves, which is the case of the French *Iyalorixá* Gisele Cossard and the Brazilian *Babalorixá*¹⁰² Altair T. Oliveira. Much of this new methodology comes from the desire of some devotees to be the writers of their own religious and cultural history and theory, pointing to new perspectives on the duality subject/object in anthropologic based research. My criteria for selection were based on the following factors: 1) Works based on extensive fieldwork and/or lifelong participation in the cult. 2) Works by Brazilian, Latin American or African authors recognised by the field.

⁹⁹ Roger Bastide, *O Candomblé da Bahia: Rito Nagô*, (Sao Paulo: Cia. Das Letras, 2000 [1958]), 21-22.

¹⁰⁰ Juana Elbein dos Santos, *Os Nagô e a Morte: Pade, Asese e o culto Egun na Bahia [Les Nago et La Mort: Pade, Asese et le culte Egun à Bahia, translated from the French by the Federal University of Bahia]*, (Petrópolis: Vozes, 2002 [1986]).

¹⁰¹ Elbein dos Santos, 22.

¹⁰² The Yoruba-derived terms *Iyalorixá* and *Babalorixá* refer to the religious leaders of the *Candomblé*, as we will see in Chapter 3.

2. THE ODIN TEATRET TRADITION, THEATRE ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE DANCE OF THE *ORIXÁS*

The present chapter approaches the experience of the dances of the *Orixás* in the practical context of the *Odin tradition*, focusing on the actor's dramaturgy, and the theoretical field of theatre anthropology.

2.1. THE ODIN TRADITION

The term 'Odin tradition' is a general term often used to designate the historical, theoretical and practical fundamentals of Odin Teatret's work. The expression is also used in reference to some of the activities during the annual event, *Odin Week Festival*. "The *Odin Week Festival*, for a maximum of 50 participants, is addressed to theatre and dance practitioners, scholars and anthropologists, cultural activists and politicians."¹ The festival intends to introduce the participants to the manifold activities the theatre has developed in the course of its 46 years of existence.² I participated fully on two occasions (2006 and 2008) and was an interpreter and observer at one (2010). According to the information available on the theatre's website:

The actors and Eugenio Barba lead the practical sessions of "the Odin Tradition", which is composed of the different individualities, personal techniques and shared values which exist in the everyday practice of our craft. Each actor gives the participants an insight into their particular creative approach (...).³

From the explanation above we may understand that the Odin tradition has a strong focus on the individual practice of each actor. But how did this practice develop into a tradition?

One of the first concepts we are presented with in the contact with the theatrical practice of Odin is the *training of the actor*. This practice was inherited from the time Barba spent as Jerzy Grotowski's assistant at the Theatre Laboratory 13 Rzedow, from 1960 to 1964.⁴

Grotowski's thought on theatre and the actor's craft influenced Barba so deeply that he has affirmed that he considers Grotowski his theatrical father.⁵ In his article "Theatre Laboratory 13 Rzedow", Barba describes Grotowski's training method as a daily work session that included complex physical and vocal exercises, aiming to prepare the actor in a very specific way:

¹ <http://www.odinteatret.dk/workshops/odin-week-festival.aspx>.

² <http://www.odinteatret.dk/workshops/odin-week-festival.aspx>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Iben Nagel Rasmussen, *Den Blinde Hest*, (Copenhagen: Lindhardt & Ringhof, 1998), 52.

⁵ Eugenio Barba, Opening lecture, Odin Week Festival 2008.

This training results in a decidedly anti-naturalistic style in which rhythm and dynamism are as strictly fixed as a musical score. The actor must be highly skilled and rigorously trained to control a technique which governs each gesture, each breath, each voice tone and which uses acrobatics and gymnastics. (...) [The actor] must play his score correctly - but in a *trance of concentration*⁶ - while deliberately attempting to subjugate the spectator. As a shaman, he must create a magic action and prod the spectator into participation.⁷

These ideas on the theatrical work may be regarded as Odin Teatret's theoretical and practical fundament, which Barba took with him when he left the Theatre Laboratory 13 Rzedow to start his own theatre group in Oslo.

In the beginning, the daily training was held separately from the creative process of the performances. We will later observe that this aspect changed in the course of the theatre's history. The establishing of the training at Odin Teatret may be better understood through the approaches of two actresses from two different phases in the history of Odin: Iben Nagel Rasmussen and Roberta Carreri.

In her book *Den blinde hest*⁸, Iben Nagel Rasmussen, who joined the group in Denmark in 1966, writes that by the time Barba and his actors started work on their second production, *Kaspariana* (performed between 1967 and 1968), they still hadn't developed a training method of their own. Instead, they applied elements from different practices such as acrobatics, jazz-ballet and a sequence of yoga exercises re-elaborated by Grotowski and his famous actor Ryzsard Cieslak (1937-1990). The training sessions were collective, led by the most experienced actors, while Barba observed and sometimes commented or demonstrated some exercises.⁹

Some years later, after the great recognition achieved by the group with *Ferai* (1969-1970), the structure of the training underwent a deep change. According to Barba, that was perhaps the hardest training period in Odin's history and, at the same time, a milestone in the development of the practice that would later become the Odin tradition. This process was triggered by Rasmussen's initiative in creating new exercises, principles and possibilities. Thus, the individuality and personal research of each actor gained greater space in Odin's training.

Roberta Carreri joined Odin Teatret in 1974 after having watched *My Father's House* (1972-1974), the group's fourth production, in Italy. In her work demonstration *Traces in the Snow*, Carreri gives an account of the training routines by the time she joined the theatre.

Since I started at Odin Teatret in 1974, I have experienced three different seasons in my actor training. As I would later understand, the aim of the first season was to

⁶ My italics.

⁷ Eugenio Barba, "Theatre Laboratory 13 Rzedow" in Richard Schechner and Lisa Wolford (Ed.), *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, (London: Routledge, 1997), 81.

⁸ The book is not released in the English language, so it is mentioned here by the original Danish title.

⁹ Rasmussen, *Den blinde hest*, 52.

discover my presence as an actor and to free my body from the automatism of daily life. The second season began when I started to develop my individual training, creating personal principles. (...) In the third season, my training was the space in which I started to develop physical scores that already had a dramaturgical cohesion.¹⁰

Carreri's approach to training throughout her own history as an Odin actress shows that Rasmussen's individual impulse had become an imperative practice at the theatre: the young actors would have teachers – the older actors and Barba himself - only in their first period at the theatre. After that, they were supposed to create their own methods, principles and exercises, learned and applied in the diverse pedagogical activities the theatre organised. Thus, the actors were also prepared to transmit their knowledge to others.

It is also important to remark that Carreri was the last member of the group who was directly trained by Barba. All the actors that joined the group later were trained by their colleagues.¹¹ This phenomenon is closely related to a methodological change in Barba's creative process, which led to the development of the *actor-dramaturge*, a term used by Carreri during a work demonstration about how the production *Salt* (2005, still in the repertoire) was created.¹² The actor-dramaturge enjoys great freedom, but also has enormous responsibility in the creative process. In the process of the production *Talabot* (1988-1991) the actors were required to create stage material related to the director's choice of theme - the life of the Danish anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup. Here, the departing point was one hundred autobiographical texts written by Hastrup. Each actor was asked to stage three of them with the group, taking for a while the role of the director, choosing music, costumes, scenography, props and whatever else they wanted. The results were changed, mixed, wasted, recovered or otherwise further elaborated by the director.¹³ In the process of *Andersen's Dream* (2004-2011), the same method generated several hours of recorded scenes for Barba to work on.¹⁴

After some years, the physical/vocal training started to give more and more space to the dramaturgy of the actor. Thus the training and the creative work at Odin Teatret merged into one practice, suggesting that the training became more and more directed towards the performance event. This development is reflected in the pedagogical work involving the theatre,

¹⁰ Roberta Carreri, "Traces in the Snow" in Johan Andreasen and Annelis Kuhlmann (Ed.), *Odin Teatret 2000*, (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2000), 53.

¹¹ Eugenio Barba, Odin Week Festival 2008.

¹² Roberta Carreri and Jan Ferslev, *Letter to Wind*, work demonstration. Odin Week Festival 2008.

¹³ Rasmussen, 172.

¹⁴ Jan Ferslev, personal communication.

especially in medium and long-term projects, which often culminate in the presentation of performances or works in progress.¹⁵

All the aspects shown here concerning the development of the training and the actor's craft appear during the *Odin Week Festival* under the name *Odin Tradition*. The actors show the participants exercises and principles of physical and vocal work taken from their own individual research, forged in the processes exposed above.

2.2. THEATRE ANTHROPOLOGY

Practical pedagogical seminars have been a part of Odin Teatret's activities ever since they moved into their own theatre in Holstebro, Denmark, in 1966. In the beginning, these activities were both a means of keeping the ties that bound Barba to his master, Grotowski, and a venue for dialogue with some of the most prominent figures in European theatre, such as Etienne Decroux (1898-1991), Jean Louis Barrault (1910-1994), Jacques Lecoq (1921-1999) and Dario Fo (1926 -). Later on, other theatre forms, mainly from Asia, occupied the schedule of the seminars. The table below (Table 1) shows the changes in the thematic dynamics of the seminars organised by Odin from 1966 until 1980. The first seminar with Asian masters was held in 1972 and its theme was the Japanese traditions Noh, Kyogen, Shingeki and Kabuki.

Table 1:
Pedagogical Activities Organised in Holstebro¹⁶

Year	Activity
1966	Training seminar: Grotowski - Cieslak
1967	Training seminar: Grotowski - Marowitz
1967	Czech Theatre Seminar: Krejca - Smocek - Cinoherni Club
1967	The Myth of Commedia dell'Arte: Poli - Dario Fo
1968	Training seminar: Grotowski - Brzozowski - Rodio - Colombaioni
1969	The Scenic Language: Decroux - Lecoq - Dario Fo
1969	Training seminar: Grotowski - Chaikin - Rodio

¹⁵ Examples of this development are the projects *Ur-Hamlet* (2006 and 2009), *The Marriage of Medea* (2008), the workshops "Atlantis" with Roberta Carreri (2010) and "The Actor Who Dances" with Augusto Omolu, Roberta Carreri, Jan Ferslev and Else-Marie Laukvik (2010). With the exception of the latter, I was present in all these processes, either as a participant, observer or spectator.

¹⁶ Odin Teatret Archives, http://www.odinteatretarchives.dk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=142&Itemid=145 accessed on Dec. 29th 2010. The number of participants for each event, part of the original table, was here omitted. No seminar was registered in the archive for the years of 1973, 1978 and 1979.

Table 1 (continuation):

Year	Activity
1970	The Scenic Language: Barrault - Lecoq - Dario Fo
1970	The Myth of the Political Theatre: Group theatre in Scandinavia
1971	Fringe Groups/English Group Theatre
1972	Commedia dell'Arte
1972	Theatre Education at University Level
1972	Japanese theatre No, Kyogen, Kabuki, Shingeki: Hisao & Hideo Kanze - Mannojo Nomura - Sawamura Sojuro - Shuji Terayama
1974	The Mime and the Clown (organized by Scandinavian Amateur Theatre)
1974	The playwright and the Actor (organized by Nordic Dramatic Union)
1975	The Playwright and Group Theatre (organized by Nordic Dramatic Union)
1975	The Living Theatre (in collaboration with DATS): Julian Beck - Judith Malina
1976	Indian Theatre (in collaboration with DATS): Sanjukta Panigrahi - Shanta Rao - Krishna Namboodiri - Uma Sharma
1976	Theatre and Music: Nordic Vasaseminar
1977	South American Group Theatre (in collaboration with DATS): Argentina - Peru - Uruguay
1980	Dario Fo Seminar
1980	ISTA - The Art of Performance: Talent or Science: Japan - China - India - Bali
1974	Balinese - Javanese Theatre: I Made Djimat - Sardono - I Made Tempo
1974	The Mime and the Clown (organized by Scandinavian Amateur Theatre)
1974	The playwright and the Actor (organized by Nordic Dramatic Union)
1975	The Playwright and Group Theatre (organized by Nordic Dramatic Union)
1975	The Living Theatre (in collaboration with DATS): Julian Beck - Judith Malina
1976	Indian Theatre (in collaboration with DATS): Sanjukta Panigrahi - Shanta Rao - Krishna Namboodiri - Uma Sharma
1976	Theatre and Music: Nordic Vasaseminar
1977	South American Group Theatre (in collaboration with DATS): Argentina - Peru - Uruguay
1980	Dario Fo Seminar
1980	ISTA - The Art of Performance: Talent or Science: Japan - China - India - Bali

Nonetheless, Asian theatre forms were not new to Barba. As early as in 1965 he wrote an essay about Indian Kathakali where he made clear which aspect of the traditional performances were most appealing to him: "(...) My main purpose in studying Kathakali was to acquaint myself with a specific technique and assess the possibilities of adapting it for the training of European actors"¹⁷

In 1978, the actors decided to leave the theatre for some time in order to seek new inspiration for their work. For three months, they travelled to different places: some went to India to learn Kathakali, others went to Bali and learned Baris and Legong, some went to Brazil where they learned Capoeira and some dances of *Orixás*. Two actors stayed in Denmark, where they attended a ballroom dance school and learned Tango, Foxtrot and Quickstep. When the group gathered again, the actors demonstrated what they had learned during their sabbatical months. Barba then observed that when an actor performed the different dances, s/he changed from their Odin-actor presence to another, completely transformed, body attitude. However, Barba noticed that, though they had different expressions as a result of the technique they had learned, they all applied similar principles, which were also present in other stage forms such as Japanese performance, Classical Ballet and Corporal Mime. These principles would later become the basis of a new field of research that surpassed the boundaries of Odin Teatret's activities: theatre anthropology.¹⁸

Barba defines theatre anthropology as:

(...) [T]he study of the behaviour of the human being when it uses its physical and mental presence in an organized performance situation and according to principles that are different from those used in daily life. This extra-daily use of the body is what is called technique.¹⁹

For Barba, a transcultural analysis of performance will invariably show three distinct levels of organisation in the work of a performer: first, the individual, second, the genre or tradition related and third, the level of the extra-daily body techniques. These techniques are based upon principles that are both transcultural and recurrent, being part of the performer's presence or stage life, the *scenic bios*. Theatre anthropology defines the level of performance where these principles appear as the pre-expressive level.²⁰

¹⁷ Eugenio Barba, "The Kathakali Theatre" (1965), Odin Teatret Archives, http://www.odinteatretarchives.dk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=352&Itemid=74, accessed Dec 29th 2010, 1.

¹⁸ Eugenio Barba, *A Canoa de Papel: Tratado de Antropologia Teatral*, translated from the Italian *La Canoa di Carta* by Patricia Alves, (Brasilia: Editora Dulcina, 2009), 21.

¹⁹ Eugenio Barba & Nicola Savarese, *The Secret Art of the Performer: A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, (London: Routledge, 2005), 5.

²⁰ Barba & Savarese, *The Secret Art of the Performer: A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, 5.

If the pre-expressive level is the level of the extra-daily techniques, it is true to state that theatre anthropology focuses on performance forms that have one common aspect: they are so-called codified forms. Barba's corpus neither gives a definitive explanation of this concept, nor does it offer any exhaustive list of performance genres that should count as such, other than the forms directly researched. In their original cultural and/or aesthetic context, it is reasonable to say that a codified form has the following characteristics:

- Makes use of extra-daily techniques;
- Presents a semiotic structure, that is, a language-like relation between movements/positions and meanings;
- Has fixed narrative patterns;
- Belongs to a cultural (and sometimes religious) and/or aesthetic tradition, that is to say, it is strongly related to cultural and/or artistic identity in its community of origin.

The recurrent principles according to theatre anthropology are: *Balance in action*, *The dance of the oppositions*, *Coherent incoherence* or *The virtue of omission*, *Equivalence* and *A decided body*. Below, I further present these principles and in Chapter 4 I discuss them in relation to the dances of the *Orixás*.

2.2.1. Balance in action

The basic body positions of the various Asian theatre forms are (...) examples of a conscious and controlled distortion of balance. The performers of their various traditions deform the positions of the legs and knees and the way of placing the feet on the ground, or they reduce the distance between one foot and the other, thereby reducing the body's basis and making balance precarious.²¹

To illustrate this statement, Barba uses the examples of Balinese and Indian Kathakali theatre. In both performing art forms, the actor adopts an 'extra-daily' body attitude. In Balinese theatre, the body weight is placed on the soles of feet, while the toes are free and do not touch the ground. This position changes the centre of gravity of the actor's body and s/he is obliged to bend the knees and separate the legs. In Kathakali, the body weight is placed on the outer sides of the feet, but the effect is the same: the actor assumes a position of open legs and bent knees.²²

According to Barba, this principle reflects a *deformation* of the daily techniques used to walk or stand. The aim is to achieve a state of permanent instability, the *precarious* or *luxury balance*. "It is this dance of balance that is revealed in the fundamentals of all performance forms."²³

²¹ Barba & Savarese, *The Secret Art of the Performer*, 10.

²² Barba, *A Canoa de Papel*, 38.

²³ Barba, *A Canoa de Papel*, 45.

2.2.2. *The dance of oppositions*

In the technique we use in our daily life, we apply the forces that make us move in one given direction, according to our intention. For instance, to grab an object in front of me, I will reach out in one single direction. In the extra-daily techniques, I would positively extend my arm forwards, but at the same time, I would apply a force in the opposite direction, as if somebody were holding my arm back.

Indian dancers usually apply this recurrent principle through a specific form: the *tribhangi*.

The dancer's body takes the form of the letter 'S' (head, trunk, legs): the result is a precarious balance, new resistance and tensions which create the body's extra-daily architecture. The serpentine line of *tribhangi* is also found in the most remote Western tradition.²⁴

The description of the *tribhangi* also uncovers the interrelation between the two first principles in Barba's theory: *precarious balance* and *opposition*.

An interesting aspect of opposition is that it may be considered a twofold principle. The first example I use here is about inner opposition, since the contrary forces are applied on the same part of the body. The second example, the *tribhangi*, is about outer opposition, where different parts of the body are subjected to opposite forces.

2.2.3. *Consistent inconsistency and the virtue of omission*

During the first ISTA session, Grotowski made an important contribution to theatre anthropology. In an interview with Italian scholar Franco Ruffini, he called the principles coined by Barba *pragmatic laws*. On this same occasion, Grotowski talked about *omission*, the third recurrent principle in theatre anthropology, which he called '*energy in space and energy in time*':

It has to do either with causing the process to result in movement as a kinetic quality which is produced in space, or to compress that which is essential to a potential movement in space, to conceal it beneath the skin. The movement's impulses are begun, but then held back. (...) The body is alive, it is doing something which is extremely precise, but the river is flowing in the realm of time: kinetics in space passes to a second level. This is energy in time.²⁵

The principle of *omission* is related to two terms widely employed in the pedagogical activities at Odin Teatret: *expansion* and *absorption* – or *reduction* – of physical actions. But what is a *physical action*?

²⁴ Barba & Savarese, 200.

²⁵ Barba & Savarese, 268.

In January 2009 I participated in a two-week workshop held by Roberta Carreri in Holstebro. Through our practice and readings, we concluded that a *physical action* must have the following characteristics:

- It is born in the spine. This condition is inherited from Etienne Decroux, for whom the torso was the only really important part of a performer's body;²⁶
- It has a clear intention, reflected in the amount of power employed to execute it. The intention is closely related to the concept of *sats*. The term means 'impulse' in Norwegian and in the Odin practice designates "preparation to action"²⁷.
- It changes the former *status quo*.

According to theatre anthropology, *physical actions* may be expanded, that is, made bigger in space, or absorbed, reduced in space, happening in time, within the performer's body-mind.

Barba explains:

Macro-actions, if they are really such and not gesticulations, can be absorbed by the trunk, while their original is preserved. The actions become transformed into impulses, into micro-actions of a nearly immobile body which is acting. This process, according to which the space the action occupies is restricted, can be defined as the absorption of the action.²⁸

Another practical concept that is related to the principle of omission is *immobility in motion*, which may be considered a state of plain *sats* or a complete absorption of a physical action.²⁹

2.2.4. Equivalence

Etienne Decroux believed that, "For art to be, the idea of one thing has to be given by another thing."³⁰

Barba is inspired by this statement when he affirms that "equivalence is the opposite of imitation."³¹ It is the principle in which the daily actions are reconstructed in such a way that its inner tension is preserved, but transferred to another part of the body.³²

This principle is better explained visually than verbally: a clear example of equivalence is shown by the Indian Odissi dancer Sanjukta Panigrahi (1944-1997) in *The Secret Art of the Performer*. There, she demonstrates, in a step-by-step series of pictures, the action of shooting with an arrow according to her dance tradition. Her actions do not give a realistic/naturalist picture of the activity of archery (Image 2, pg. 43). Instead, they elaborate the intentions,

²⁶ Eugenio Barba, *A Canoa de Papel*, 53.

²⁷ Barba & Savarese, 92.

²⁸ Barba, *A Canoa de Papel*, 54.

²⁹ Barba, *The Paper Canoe*, 55. Workshop with Roberta Carreri, Holstebro, January 2009.

³⁰ Barba, 56.

³¹ Barba & Savarese, 94.

³² Barba & Savarese, 94.

rebuilding physical patterns, thus creating a relation of equivalence between “life” (daily techniques) and “art” (extra-daily techniques). Image 1 (pg. 43) shows a real archer for comparison.

Image 1³³



www.shutterstock.com · 951749

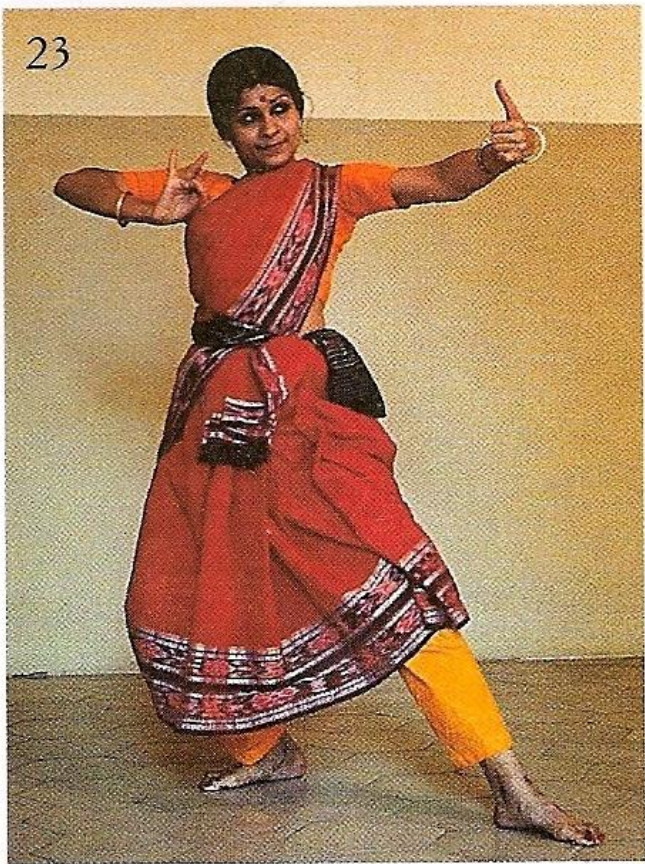


Image 2³⁴

³³ Image downloaded from www.shutterstock.com – Royalty free stock photos. Accessed on January 10th 2011.

2.2.5. A decided body: the example of Japanese performance

Back in 1980 I had worked with (...) [Japanese Nihon-Buyo dancer] Katsuko Azuma³⁵. She taught me a lion dance, fragments of which became a part of *The Million*.³⁶ In order to perform that dance, certain specific muscles had to be tensed. I later recognised the same kind of tension in Butoh dance. I learned these tensions by learning the positions and the choreography. The back of the neck is always stretched out while the chin is pointed downward, as if a steel wire was attached to the occiput bone and pulled upward, while the other end of the wire pulled downward from the end of spine. (...) This position gave my body a complete new feeling. I began to feel the inside of my body as Katsuko Azuma had described it: 'a ball of steel covered with velvet'.³⁷

The testimonial above was given by Roberta Carreri in an interview with Danish scholar Erik Exe-Christoffersen. The position Carreri refers to is the core physical attitude in the exercise called *jo-ha-kyo*, which she still applies in her teaching.

The exercise consists in walking while keeping the core position described above. It begins very slowly: it's the *jo*. The feet are the only part of the body allowed to move. The knees are bent and the belly muscles are extremely contracted. The shoulders are relaxed and the whole upper body, including the head, moves like one single unit. The steps are taken by letting the frontal part of the foot glide forwards. The heels barely leave the floor. It feels like a great force is trying to prevent the body from going forth. A break in this rhythm allows the body gradually to release itself from this resistance: it's the *ha*. In the last part of the exercise, the *kyo*, the body is set free to speed up, though the core position should be maintained. At last, the speed leads to an abrupt stop, where all movement is absorbed. The performer is standing on their toes, in dynamic immobility, engaging an incredible amount of physical and mental energy in order to keep the balance and the core position.³⁸

The Japanese words *jo-ha-kyo* mean respectively "to retain", "to break" and "speed".³⁹ This complex exercise is recognisable in Kabuki, Nihon- Buyo and Noh. It gives an example of a 'decided body' forged on the principles of theatre anthropology. As Barba puts it: "When performers have learned, as second nature, this artificial way of moving, they appear to have been cut off from the every-day space-time relationship and seem to be 'alive': they are 'decided'."⁴⁰

³⁴ Photo and copyright: Nicola Savarese. Image reproduced with permission of the copyright holder.

³⁵ Unknown birth and death dates.

³⁶ *The Million*, performance by the Odin Teatret, presented both indoors and in the open air between September 1978 and October 1984.

³⁷ Exe Christoffersen, *The Actor's Way*, translated by Richard Fowler. (London: Routledge, 1993), 155.

³⁸ Workshop with Roberta Carreri, Holstebro, January 2009

³⁹ Barba & Savarese, 16.

⁴⁰ Barba & Savarese, 16.

2.2.6. Concepts of *energy* in Barba

Barba writes: “One form of essential research, common to both theatre anthropology and our craft’s empiricism, is research into the constant polarities hidden beneath the variety and fluctuation of styles, traditions, genres and different work practices.”⁴¹

Despite the importance of the principle of *consistent inconsistency* and the concept of *sats*, the most interesting aspect of *energy* for the present work is the one that approaches what Barba calls ‘temperatures’⁴² – which here I will call *patterns* - of *energy*.

In physics, energy is defined as “the power of ‘doing work’ possessed at any instant by a body or system of bodies”⁴³. Theatre anthropology postulates that the combination and interaction of opposite and complementary forces present in codified performance forms enhance the performer’s presence and affect the spectator’s perception.⁴⁴ These opposite forces, or qualities of *energy*, are categorised as *animus*, the vigorous energy and *anima*, the soft energy.⁴⁵

Animus and *anima* are concepts coined by Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) as part of the discipline of analytical psychology, connected to the masculine (*animus*) and the feminine (*anima*). However, Barba reinforces his rejection of psychological approaches to the performer’s craft by stating:

On the final level, that of results and the performance, the performer’s presence becomes a scenic figure, a character, and masculine and feminine characterization is inevitable and necessary. It is, however, damaging when this masculine or feminine characterization is also dominant where it does not belong: the pre-expressive level.⁴⁶

Thus, theatre anthropology detaches the energy concepts of *animus* and *anima* from psychological gender related patterns, linking them rather to the classical Latin nouns *animus* and *anima*. The various semantic nuances of these terms may lead to a series of errors and misunderstandings. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *anima* as “air, breath, life, soul, spirit”⁴⁷ while *animus* means:

⁴¹Eugenio Barba, *The Paper Canoe*, translated from the Italian *La Canoa di Carta* by Richard Fowler, (London: Routledge, 1995 [1993], 64.

⁴² Barba, 61.

⁴³ Oxford English Dictionary Online, <http://oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/62088>, “energy”, accessed on May 10th 2011.

⁴⁴ Barba, *The Paper Canoe*, 9.

⁴⁵ Barba & Savarese, 77.

⁴⁶ Barba, 63.

⁴⁷ Oxford English Dictionary Online, <http://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/7734>, “anima”, accessed on March, 6th 2011.

“[M]ind, soul, mind as the organ of thought, mind as the originator of intentions, design, purpose, intention, mind as the seat of desire or volition, desire, inclination, enthusiasm, mind as the seat of feelings and emotions, anger, animosity, pride, courage, disposition, character.”⁴⁸

It is useful to stress, as does Barba, that, in the past, the word “soul” had other connotations than the mainly spiritual one it bears today.⁴⁹ As seen above, the original meanings of the two terms do not only overlap, but have also such a plurality of subtleties that it becomes necessary to be precise that, in Barba’s thought, *animus* and *anima* are two extreme poles in a great range of energy patterns.⁵⁰

The Balinese concepts *keras*, the strong energy, and *manis*, the soft one, are considered analogies of *animus* and *anima*.⁵¹ In Indian dance there are also similar concepts of energy, *lasya*, the delicate one and *tandava*, the vigorous one. Although these concepts from different cultures have similarities, theatre anthropology does not postulate that they are paradigms for only one definition of the performer’s energy. According to Barba, what these concepts have in common is that they show “the necessity to specify, by means of an opposition, the extreme poles of the range in which the performer mentally and practically breaks down the energy of her/his natural bios modulating it into scenic bios (...).”⁵²

For Barba, this conceptualisation is a premise to the research of the performer’s craft. By means of the analysis based on this premise, the performers can acquire the ability to understand, develop and reflect upon their art.⁵³

2.3. THE ISTA

In 1979-1980, Barba created the ISTA, the International School of Theatre Anthropology, in which the actor’s craft is the object of study and the training an important instrument of research. The ISTA was an itinerant school and the idea was to organise regular annual sessions.⁵⁴ The list on next page (Table 2) shows an overview of the ISTA-sessions, their places and thematic focus:

The ISTA managed to bring together artists with widely different backgrounds, who committed themselves to a long-term partnership with Barba. In addition to the above

⁴⁸ Idem, <http://oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/7800>, “animus”, accessed on March, 6th 2011.

⁴⁹ Barba, 65.

⁵⁰ Barba, *The Paper Canoe*, 61.

⁵¹ Barba & Savarese, 77.

⁵² Barba, 64.

⁵³ Barba, 65.

⁵⁴ Eugenio Barba, “Correspondence between E. Barba and S. Panigrahi” (1979), Odin Teatret Archives, http://www.odinteatretarchives.dk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=358&Itemid=82, accessed on Dec 28th 2010.

mentioned Sanjukta Panigrahi and Katsuko Azuma, I can cite among others the Japanese Butoh masters Kazuo Ohno (1906-2010) and Natsu Nakajima, the Swedish mime artist Ingemar Lindh (1945-1997), the Balinese dancer I Made Pasek Tempo (unknown dates) and, more recently, the Afro-Brazilian dancer Augusto Omolu.

Table 2:

Overview of ISTA sessions⁵⁵

Year	Place	Theme
1980	Bonn – Germany	Theatre anthropology
1981	Volterra and Pontedera - Italy	Pre-expressivity and improvisation
1985	Blois and Malakoff - France	Dialogue between cultures
1986	Holstebro- Denmark	The female role as represented on the stage in various cultures
1987	Salento – Italy	The actor’s tradition and the spectator’s identity
1990	Bologna – Italy	Performance techniques and historiography
1992	Brecon and Cardiff – UK	Working on performance East and West / Subscore
1994	Londrina - Brazil	Traditions and founders of traditions
1995	Umeå – Sweden	Form and information
1996	Copenhagen - Denmark	The performer’s bios
1998	Montemor-O-Novo - Portugal	O- Effect: this which is organic for the actor/that which is organic for the spectator
2000	Bielefeld - Germany	Action, structure, coherence: dramaturgical techniques in the performing arts
2004	Sevilla and Rinconada - Spain	Flow: rhythm, organicity, energy
2005	Wroclaw and Krzyzowa - Poland	Improvisation: memory, repetition, discontinuity

2.3.1. The collaboration with Augusto Omolu

During the preparations for the 8th ISTA session, in Londrina, Southern Brazil, the organisers told Barba that they would like him to include in the session a performance genre from one of the numerous traditions that can be found in Brazil. Barba and Odin actress Julia Varley started a trip across the country in order to find a tradition and a performer that Barba could work with for the session.

This search led them to several places, until a friend invited them to Salvador to observe a class of *Orixá* dances with Augusto Omolu. Omolu was raised within the *Candomblé* traditions, being properly initiated as an *ogã* (more about the functions and hierarchy in *Candomblé* in

⁵⁵ http://ista.odinteatret.dk/ista/ista_sessions_frameset.htm, accessed Dec 29th 2010.

Chapter 3) at the age of 8.⁵⁶ In the same period he started his formal education as a dancer, studying classical ballet and modern dance, and ending up as soloist at the prestigious Castro Alves Ballet in Salvador.⁵⁷

From their first meeting, Julia Varley recalls:

The most impressive thing was when Augusto instantly changed from the physical attitude of *Ogum*, [the virile deity of war], to *Oxum*, [the feminine deity of love and fertility]. It was really amazing to see that, because the only person with that ability we had met till then was Sanjukta Panigrahi. She was the only one we knew with this capacity to change presence, energy, even gender. ⁵⁸

After this first meeting, Barba and Varley started attending numerous *Candomblé* ceremonies in different houses. Concomitantly, Varley and Omolu started meeting regularly for improvisation sessions under the supervision of Barba. It is important to remark that the performers improvised from a number of fixed elements that already belonged to their scenic vocabulary. Varley recalled these elements from her physical training at Odin. Omolu, in turn, used the codes of the dances of the *Orixás* to dialogue with her.⁵⁹

According to Varley, the work process was very demanding for the three of them. Omolu and Barba did not really understand each other and she saw herself in charge of building a bridge to make the collaboration possible, both linguistically and artistically. But, at the same time, the communication problems opened a channel for a new approach to the dances: Omolu had not only to show the dance moves to Varley and Barba, he had also to explain in detail the logic behind each dance, each element, each deity.⁶⁰

For Omolu, this process represented a new encounter with his own craft.⁶¹ The dances of the *Orixás* acquired a new dimension: they had become a tool to understand the performer's craft through changes between different qualities of energy.

In the work on the performance for the ISTA Londrina, Barba used the movement repertoire offered by Omolu to compose a piece where the different sacred dances were the main narrative element in Shakespeare's *Othello*. The music was a record of the opera of same name composed by Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901), alternating with *Candomblé* drums playing the specific songs for the *Orixás*.⁶²

⁵⁶ Augusto Omolu, personal communication, May 2010.

⁵⁷ <http://www.odinteatret.dk/about-us/actors/augusto-omolu.aspx>, accessed on Dec. 30th 2010.

⁵⁸ Interview with Julia Varley, Holstebro, August 18th 2010.

⁵⁹ Interview with Varley.

⁶⁰ Interview with Varley, August 2010.

⁶¹ Augusto Omolu, Farm in the Cave Afro-Brazilian Conference, Prague - Czech Republic, December 2008.

⁶² Odin Week Festival 2006, 2008 and 2010.

The performance got the Afro-Brazilian name *Orô de Otelo*: Otello's ritual. Augusto Omolu continues to collaborate with Eugenio Barba and the Odin Teatret in several performances and transcultural projects. The dances of the *Orixás* are nowadays part of the *Odin Tradition*.

2.4. A SHORT HISTORY OF THE USE OF THE DANCES OF THE *ORIXÁS* OUTSIDE THE RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

Two particular, and at a certain level connected, phenomena that happened in Brazil from the 1960s, were the creation of folkloric artistic groups and the appearing of the dances of the *Orixás* in the works of choreographers. These phenomena had a decisive influence on the establishment of a dance genre called Afro-Brazilian dance, which uses movements from several Afro-Brazilian traditions, associated with other techniques such as Classical Ballet, Modern and Contemporary Dance and others.

The first Afro-Brazilian folkloric group in Salvador got the name Viva Bahia and was created by the ethnomusicologist Emilia Biancardi in 1962. At that time, Biancardi gathered masters from all the main folkloric traditions in Bahia, such as *capoeira*, *maculelê* and *Candomblé*. Based on the roots of these traditional forms, she organised the group made of dancers and musicians to present performances of these traditions in Brazil and around the world. Soon other folkloric groups appeared, both in Bahia and the rest of the country.⁶³ In 1988 the Balé Folclórico da Bahia was created.⁶⁴

The folkloric groups perform the dances of the *Orixás* in full liturgical costume. An imitation of the trance is also part of the show.

Other artistic approaches to the dances of the *Orixás* had a connection with Classical and Modern Dance. One of the main artists in this stream is the American dancer, researcher, teacher and choreographer Clyde Morgan, who, in the 1970s, directed the Contemporary Dance Company of the University of Bahia.⁶⁵ Classically trained, Morgan travelled throughout most of the African continent exchanging knowledge on Western dance for training in the traditional forms. He is still active and is a very important name in the history of Afro-Brazilian dance.

Biancardi and Morgan had at least one pupil in common: Raimundo Bispo dos Santos, aka Mestre King. A member of Biancardi's Viva Bahia, he graduated in dance at the University of Bahia, with Morgan as one of his teachers. Mestre King happens to be the master of Augusto Omolu.⁶⁶

⁶³ <http://colecaoemiliabiancardi.blogspot.com/2008/09/trajetria.html>, accessed on March 2nd 2011.

⁶⁴ <http://www.balefolcloricodabahia.com.br/eng/historico.html>, accessed on March 2nd 2011.

⁶⁵ <http://www.fundacaocultural.ba.gov.br/04/revista%20da%20bahia/danca/clyde.htm>, accessed on March 2nd 2011.

⁶⁶ Workshop with Augusto Omolu and Mestre King, Salvador 2007.

Thus, the dance of the Orixás practised at Odin Teatret has its roots not only in the *Candomblé* houses of Salvador, but also in the folkloric groups and in modern dance, having gone through a process of stylisation and adaptation to the stage before being embraced by the ISTA.

2.5. DANCING *ORIXÁS* AT THE ODIN TEATRET

The following passage describes my first apprenticeship experiences of the dances of the *Orixás*:

The training sessions “Odin Tradition with Augusto Omolu” at the Odin Week Festival in September 2006 started at 8 o’clock in the morning. There were two classes of 1.5 hours each, on alternate days.

We entered the room and took our positions randomly, forming four rows, with the instructor in front of us. Omolu’s classes are extremely demanding and usually have a clear structure:

Warm up

The first part of the class is composed of exercises inspired by both yoga and modern dance. All major muscle groups are thoroughly worked. This part has no thematic relation to *Candomblé*.

Orixás

The first deity we dance is *Ogum*. In the public *Candomblé* rituals (see Chapter 3), *Ogum* is always the first *Orixá* to be greeted. Omolu shows us four moves to form a choreography. He explains that *Ogum* is a warrior who carries two specific codifying elements, to be (re)presented by the arms: the sword and the shield. Omolu shows us how important it is to depict these elements with precision: the arm that is representing the sword must be rigorously straight, from the shoulder to the tip of the fingers, which are close together. *Ogum* is a strong, fearless man, and his movements must be performed with vigorous energy. The choreography is very complex and we do not have time to learn it completely.

We jump to the next deity: *Oxóssi*, the hunter. His elements are the bow and the arrow. Once again, the elements must be precisely shown. This deity also has a horse, which we dance in a centaur-like imaginary body division: the feet are the horse, the torso is the hunter. *Oxóssi* has one of the speediest dances of the whole pantheon and an extremely complex footwork that may take years to learn perfectly. But he also offers great room for improvisation and activates the dancer’s imagination: if we point the arrow upwards, we imagine we are aiming at a bird; if we point the arrow to the front, we can imagine a deer or a moose. Thus, *Oxóssi* also allows us to play more consciously with the space around us. A new choreography is created before we move on.

The next *Orixá* is *Yemanjá*, the Queen of the Sea. Her movements resemble the waves and her element is a silvery mirror. She also becomes a whirlpool, a centrifugal movement pattern that makes most of us dizzy. Omolu asks us to release our bodies in order to perform the wavy movements. *Yemanjá* is the last deity we dance on this day.

Questions/Conversation

The last minutes of the class were dedicated by Omolu to answering the participants' questions about the dances. We got further information and instructions about the search for the *Orixás'* right energy, the importance of precision in the codifying elements and the complexity and beauty of the dances. An interesting comment made by Omolu was about the importance of the codes of the dances, which are, according to him, a blend of form and energy, in which the first depends upon the latter. He stressed that the real search is not for the perfect form – that presupposes great technique - but for the inner energy that is particular to each one of the dances. This assertion will be of great importance for my later reflections about the dances of the *Orixás* in the context of theatre anthropology.

In the next training session we continued the work on the movements of *Ogum* and *Oxóssi*, but with a slightly different structure. While on the first day we used the space in the same way during the whole class, on the second one, at a certain moment we were asked to make two lines in one corner of the room. Omolu then showed us the first move, displacing his body diagonally across the room. We followed after him, moving across the space in the way he had just done. When everybody had been through the first move, he started a new one and so forth. This approach, common in Classical Ballet and Modern Dance classes, gave us an opportunity to repeat the moves in a different spatial perspective.

That last class ended with a new *Orixá*, *Oxum*, the deity of love, beauty, fertility and fresh water. Her dance has a quite mimetic character: she bathes in the river, playing sensually with the water. Then she combs her hair, puts on make up and luxurious jewellery, so to show off all her beauty dancing and offering herself in pure seduction.

Some days later, a lecture was held in which Barba and Omolu talked about the inclusion of the dances of the *Orixás* into the *Odin/ISTA tradition*. There, Barba stressed the importance of the differences in the performer's presence and qualities of energy provided by the work with the dances. This lecture/demonstration was followed by a performance of *Orô de Otelo*.

3. THE CANDOMBLÉ *KETO* IN BAHIA AND THE NATURE OF THE DANCES OF THE *ORIXÁS*

As seen in the Introduction to this work, *Candomblé* is the cult of the *Orixás*, the deities of the Yoruba pantheon brought to Brazil by enslaved Africans. The present chapter offers an overview of the organisational structure of the *Candomblé Keto* in Bahia, the set of values that are fundamental to the cult, as well as the nature of the deities, the dances of the *Orixás* and other aspects of the religious practice.

3.1. *TERREIRO*, THE SACRED SPACE

The concept of sacred space in *Candomblé* has been the object of deep reflection from several perspectives. The French sociologist Roger Bastide postulates that, cosmogonically, the sacred space in *Candomblé* has a strong relation to the idea of Africa as the dwelling place of the *Orixás*.¹ This assertion may be challenged in various ways, since it neither takes into account the fundamental relation to *orun-aye* (supernatural world-Earth) in the Yoruba religious philosophy that survived in Brazilian lands, nor the syncretisation processes suffered by African religions in Brazil. With this in mind, I will here limit the concept of sacred space to the physical space of the *terreiro*, using mostly the knowledge acquired during my fieldwork.

The Yoruba-derived term used to designate a *terreiro* is *ilê axé*. In the municipality of Salvador alone, according to the mapping done by the University of Bahia, there are around 1,100 of them.² Some are very traditional and wealthy, being the spiritual home of notable people such as outstanding artists and politicians, while the majority are of a simpler kind and hold a lower profile when it comes to costumes and the general material standard of the rituals.

During my fieldwork I visited five *terreiros*, four of them in Salvador and one in the adjacent city of Lauro de Freitas.³ All of them are traditional *Candomblés* that at a point in their history were given large areas of land to build houses and establish their cult. These *terreiros* have similar spatial organisation, although the architectural structure varies greatly. There is a main house that comprises the big ritual room – the *barracão* – several private rooms where the devotees rest and get prepared for rituals, the kitchen and often a living room where guests are received.

¹ Roger Bastide, *O Candomblé da Bahia: Rito Nagô*, (Sao Paulo: Cia. Das Letras, 2000 [1958]), 72.

² <http://www.terreiros.ceao.ufba.br/apresentacao>.

³ Salvador: *Ilê Axé Iyá Nassô Oká (Terreiro da Casa Branca do Engenho Velho)*, *Ilê Iyá Omi Axé Yamassê (Terreiro do Gantois)*, *Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá* and *Terreiro do Cobre*. Lauro de Freitas: *Ilê Axé Opô Aganju*.

Around the main house there are the different *ilê orixá*, the small houses dedicated to each deity, where the fundamentals and ritual objects belonging to each of them are stored in a very specific way. The whole area of the *terreiro* is often surrounded by white fences and the sacred character of the property is always to be found in symbols, sculptures and other signs used to embellish the place. It is also usual to find many trees and herbs planted in the external area of a *terreiro*. This is explained by the importance that leaves and herbs have in the cult. Knowledge about the plants and their liturgical use in *Candomblé* is a secret that only very few people have the privilege to know.

Thus, the sacred space in *Candomblé* is not limited to the sacred room where the *Orixás* possess the bodies of devotees during public rituals. The whole environment of the *terreiro* is part of the cult and relates to the myths that lie in the roots of *Orixá* worship.

The *terreiros* also have an aspect that depicts their structure as religious organisations: the hierarchy.

Generally, the believers, also called children of saints, are divided into two groups: those chosen to be possessed by deities, called *elegun*, and the others. These unchangeable conditions are given by the *Orixás* and communicated to the believer through an oracular consultation (see subchapter below). However, the *elegun* must go through initiation rites in order to be possessed by their *Orixá*. An *elegun* cannot be possessed by several *Orixás*, only by the one who – in accordance with the oracle - has been connected to them during initiation.

The priests or religious leaders are the mother (*Iyalorixá*) or father of the saint (*Babalorixá*). There is only one priest in each *terreiro*. They are as a rule *elegun*, but there are exceptions.⁴ The lowest position in the hierarchy is occupied by the apprentices, non-initiate believers who are in their first stage of knowledge of the cult, called *abiãs*. The newly initiated *elegun* are called *Iaô*, while the older *elegun*, with more than seven years of initiation, are called *ebomi*. The non-*elegun* are the helpers, and have various functions in the house, according to their gender: the men, whose function is called *ogã*, deal with sacrifices, take care of the liturgical plants, and prepare the ritual instruments. The women, in the function named *ekedi*, are in charge of all the food consecrated to the deities. During the feasts, the *ogãs* are responsible for playing music while the *ekedis* take care of serving the food and, most importantly, provide help and support to the devotees in a trance, the *Orixás* themselves. There is an incredible amount of knowledge and extremely hard work connected to the functions of *ogã* or *ekedi*. We will later see that the *ekedis* have a fundamental role in transmitting knowledge about the dances of the *Orixás* to the new devotees.

⁴ Information obtained during fieldwork.

3.2. STRUCTURE OF THE SYSTEM OF BELIEF AND THE CULT

In his work *Orixás: Deuses Iorubás na África e no Novo Mundo*, the French photographer and ethnographer Pierre Fatumbi Verger states that one is likely to become somehow sceptical towards too structured descriptions of the Orixá cult.⁵ I got a similar impression after my fieldwork, where I both witnessed and heard of discrepancies in the practice in different *Keto terreiros* - in relation the religious precepts found in both early and recent research works (my fieldwork experience will be presented in Chapter 4). With this in mind, I will here present an overview of the structure previously described by other researchers.

There are several aspects which belong to the inner structure of the *Candomblé* cult:

- Mythology and cosmogony;
- The divinatory systems: the oracle of *Ifá* and the game of the *búzios*;
- Sacrifices and offerings;
- Private rituals (rites of passage and rites of exchange or propitiatory rites⁶);
- Public rituals (calendrical rites or rites of maintenance⁷ and *Saídas de Iaô*).

These aspects and their interrelations are explained in detail in the subchapters below:

3.2.1. Mythology and cosmogony

Mythology and cosmogony can be considered the primary structural frameworks in the religious system. The frameworks of the cult – that is, the religious practice – are the sacred space and the sacred time, both of which are determined by the original myths and the cosmogonic view of the Yoruba pantheon.

In order to understand the mythology and cosmogony of the *Candomblé*, it is of major importance first to make the acquaintance of one original being: the messenger *Exu* (a more detailed description of this deity will be given in Subchapter 3.4.1). I will here refer to *Exu* as male, as most of my sources do, but the nature of this being is so multifaceted that it may also be a female personification, an animal, or even resemble some of the other deities.

Notwithstanding, there is not only one *Exu*, but many, with different functions in the cult. He is often considered to be the *trickster* of the Yoruba pantheon. But above all, *Exu*'s main function is to connect human beings to the deities, the *ayé* (Earth) to the *orun* (supernatural world), thus allowing the existence of the *Candomblé* cult.⁸

⁵ Pierre Fatumbi Verger, *Orixás : Deuses Iorubás na Africa e no Novo Mundo*, (Salvador: Corrupio, 2002), 18.

⁶ See Subchapter 1.1.2.2 on ritual genres.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Roger Bastide, *O Candomblé da Bahia: Rito Nagô*, 178-179.

According to these characteristics, *Exu* is communication, change and transformation. According to the Brazilian sociologist Reginaldo Prandi, the mythology of the Candomblé is born from the prime myth, the one that tells how *Exu*, in order to solve a number of serious problems that were threatening life on Earth, travelled through the Yoruba lands and collected all sorts of stories. These stories should tell the dramas experienced by all living creatures, *Orixás*, human beings and animals, their ventures and pains, glory and failure, the challenges concerning the maintenance of health and the fights against death. All narratives should be collected, no matter how unimportant they might seem. *Exu* was also supposed to pay special attention to the outcomes of these dramas, that is, how their subjects acted in order to solve the problems faced. By the end of his mission, *Exu* had collected 301 stories, the Yoruba myths. According to the ancient Yorubas, the number 301 means that *Exu* collected a countless quantity of stories - which he then passed over to a fortune-teller named *Orunmilá*, also called *Ifá*, who has become the deity of the oracle of the same name.⁹

The Yoruba mythological corpus, in the way it appears in Brazil, reflects the original African myths, as Pierre Verger attested in his research¹⁰, but at the same time it gives evidence of the enormous epistemological confluence that took place in the slavery years. As seen in the Introduction to this work, the majority of the slaves brought to Bahia came from various regions in West Africa. The gathering of peoples from different places in the same plantations gave origin to one great pantheon composed of several deities that were originally worshipped independently in different villages.¹¹ The occurrence of discrepancies in the myths concerning the same *Orixá* is not unusual, as we will see in the case of the warrior *Ogum*. This phenomenon is related to the different places where this deity was worshipped. I will show, later in this chapter, how the mythology in all its diversity is the basis of the worship of the *Orixás* in Bahia.

3.2.2. The divinatory systems: the oracle of *Ifá* and the *búzios*

There are two possible ways to establish direct contact with the *Orixás*: one is during the rituals, when they manifest themselves through the possession of their children by the saint (see below subchapter on trance); the other is through the divinatory systems. In both cases, *Exu* is the messenger who makes the communication possible.¹²

The art of divination in *Candomblé* tradition is widely known in Brazil, even by people who do not usually practise the cult. Since each person has one main *Orixá* who governs their life and personality, for those who want to acquire further knowledge about the cult, consulting a

⁹ Reginaldo Prandi, *Mitologia dos Orixás*, (Sao Paulo: Cia. Das Letras, 2001), 17.

¹⁰ Pierre Fatumbi Verger, *Lendas Africanas dos Orixás*, (Salvador: Corrupio, 1997), 6.

¹¹ Pierre Fatumbi Verger, *Orixás: Deuses Iorubás na Africa e no Novo Mundo*, 17.

¹² Prandi, *Mitologia dos Orixás*, 18.

divinatory system is the only way to find out which *Orixás* they should worship particularly, as well as whether and when their main *Orixá* wants them to go through the process of initiation. Usually, people seek the help of the African deities to solve a variety of problems, most commonly issues about health, love and money.

As seen above, *Orunmilá* is the deity of the oracle of *Ifá*, which relates to the myths collected by *Exu*. The oracle is represented by the *opelê*, a metallic chain beaded with eight half palm nuts (see Image 1).¹³ In Africa, the oracle is consulted by specially initiated men only, the *babalaôs*, who must be introduced in the cult to *Orunmilá* and learn by heart the whole mythical corpus, composed of sixteen chapters, each one subdivided into sixteen parts, called *odu*.¹⁴ In total, there are 256 *odu* in the Yoruba mythical corpus.

The Nigerian scholar Isidore Okpewho refers to the *Ifá* divination practice as one example of formal training within African oral literature still in use in his home country. He describes the system as follows:

When a client brings a problem to a *babalawo*¹⁵, the latter listens carefully, then, throws either a divining chain (a string of half nuts) or “sacred palm nuts” on a divining board. The nuts fall into a combination which signifies one of the 256 *odu* in the divination corpus. Each *odu* is a body of narrative verse, subdivided into a number of chapters called *ese*. The number of *ese* in each *odu* is limitless, but as a group they embody (from various angles) the answer to the specific problem brought by the client. After the relevant *ese* has been recited, the *babalawo* spells out for the client the sacrifice he or she must perform to obtain a successful solution to the problem.¹⁶

Another divinatory system is the game of *búzios*. The *búzios* are small shells that can be found on the Southern Atlantic coast, both in Brazil and Africa, which are used for divination in sets of sixteen shells that are cast on a previously prepared board (see Images 2 and 3).¹⁷ Both the *opelê* and the *búzios* refer to the same mythical corpus.

In Brazil, by means of the transformation of religious practice, the *babalaôs* have almost disappeared, as well as the cult of *Orunmila*. Their function was taken over by the *iyalorixás* and *babalorixás*, and the game of *búzios* became the most usual divinatory system in *Candomblé*, due to the fact that women may also intermediate in the consultation with the *Orixás*. Nowadays, only a few men in Bahia possess the full knowledge about the oracle of *Ifá*. The connection between the divinatory systems and the myths has become looser, in the sense that the

¹³ Bastide, 117.

¹⁴ Prandi, *Mitologia dos Orixás*, 18.

¹⁵ Okpewho uses the English spelling of *babalaô*.

¹⁶ Isidore Okpewho, “The Oral Artist: Training and Preparation”. In Henry Bial (Ed.), *The Performance Studies Reader*, second edition, (London: Routledge, 2008 [2004]), 277.

¹⁷ Bastide, 117.

performative act of reciting the *odu*, as is still done in Nigeria, is no longer practised. However, the priest must know the myths in order to interpret the *odus* and give the believer proper advice concerning the solution of the problem. In many cases, this process will involve sacrifices and offerings.¹⁸

Image 1¹⁹:

The *Opelê*



Images 2 and 3²⁰

The *búzios* board and the magnified picture of one *búzio* shell



¹⁸ Prandi, 18.

¹⁹ <http://egbeherdeirosdeifa.blogspot.com/2009/10/as-verdades-de-ifa-texto-do-awo-ifaleke.html>, accessed on January 31st 2011.

²⁰ <http://mitologiafricana.no.comunidades.net/index.php?pagina=1674459812> and <http://orvitordeumbara.blogspot.com/2009/07/jogo-de-buzios.html>, accessed on February 3rd 2011.

3.2.3. Sacrifices and offerings

The sacrifices and offerings are a very important part of the *Candomblé* cult. They are performed in advance of every ritual, be it private or public, and have the purpose of pleasing the *Orixás*, thus propitiating their appearance during the feasts through the possession of the devotees. Besides, sacrifices and offerings may be part of the measures taken by the priests following an oracular consultation. Food and ritual objects are the most common gifts offered in connection with *Orixá* worship. The tradition of offering food to the *Orixás* has given origin to a widely appreciated typical cuisine, represented nowadays by numerous restaurants in Salvador and other major cities in Brazil.

According to Roger Bastide, the sacrifices are not expressly secret actions, though they are rarely witnessed by others than properly initiated people belonging to the given *Candomblé* house and who have a particular function in the event.²¹ Performed following strict rules and precepts by a person specially prepared for this task - called *axogum* - the sacrifices and offerings may be considered rites *in themselves*. In the perspective of the ethics of a contemporary society greatly influenced by Western thought, as Brazilian society is, offerings involving the sacrifice of animals have been subject to much discussion, and the ritual use of the blood has always been a very controversial subject for people outside the religion, often being used to justify prejudicial postures towards the cult. However, cruelty to animals is not a part of the *Candomblé* doctrine and the killings are most often executed from the principle that the animal is sacrificed to serve as food. Though it is a sacred killing, it is seen as a natural step in the process of cooking a special dish.²²

The object of the sacrifice varies according to the deity to which it is offered. The instrument used to kill and the way this is done varies likewise. The sacrifice may be a 'feathered animal' or 'four-legged animal'. Either way, four-legged animals are never offered alone, they are always accompanied by a number of feathered animals. The sex of the sacrificed animals must be the same as that of the *Orixá* who will receive it.²³

After the killing, the food is prepared in the proper way. A generous portion is served to the deities by their sacred stones. The rest of the food is consumed during the public ritual.²⁴

In some cases, depending on its purpose and the deity who will receive it, the offerings are brought to a place outside the *terreiro*. This place may be a forest, a river, a beach or a crossroads.

²¹ Bastide, 31.

²² Personal communication during fieldwork.

²³ Bastide, 31-32.

²⁴ Idem.

3.2.4. Private rituals: *rites of passage and propitiatory rites*

Some rites in the *Orixá* cult are private, that is to say, secret. Only people belonging to the given *terreiro* are allowed to participate, and in some cases not even all the initiates of a house are welcome, but only those who have some function in the rite itself.

Examples of secret rites are: initiation and confirmation rites (first, third and seventh anniversary of initiation), funeral rites and propitiatory rites, that is, those rites or parts of rites where procedures are carried out in order to propitiate *Orixá* possession and the realisation of public feasts. A very important part of any propitiatory rite is connected to the knowledge about the plants, leaves and herbs used in the liturgy. This knowledge is a secret reserved to the sons of the *Orixá Ossain* (see the subchapter below) and is one of the main pillars of religious practice.²⁵

Analysing the literature about secret rites in *Candomblé*, I concluded that these invariably are either *rites of passage* or *rites of exchange/propitiatory rites* (see Chapter 1). In the special case of the initiation, the entire process, that may last several months and is irreversible, is secret, while its conclusion is celebrated with a public feast called *saída de iaô*.²⁶

An important factor relating *Candomblé* to contemporaneity, and that has generated much controversy, is the disclosure of secret rites over the internet and social media such as YouTube.

3.2.5. Public rituals: feasts and *rites of maintenance*

The public feasts are the festivities held to celebrate the *Orixás*, either separately or in groups of deities that can be worshipped together, like those akin, as in the case of the *Olubajé*, which is a ritual to *Obaluaê*, the deity of disease and cure, where his mother *Nanã Buruku* and his brother *Oxumaré* are also honoured. All of this is defined by the mythology: for example, *Xangô* will never appear in a ritual to *Oxumaré*, because in the myth, *Xangô* killed the young *Oxumaré*.²⁷ These rituals are *rites of maintenance* (see Chapter 1), whose main function is to keep the cult alive, through a restoration of the myths. Nowadays, they are events open to everyone. Nonetheless, closer historical research will show that it has not always been this way: for decades, the *Candomblé* houses suffered intense policial persecution, and the religious activities were even forbidden for a period, as we can observe in the history of the pioneer *Terreiro da*

²⁵ Bastide, 125.

²⁶ Bastide, 50.

²⁷ Prandi, 228.

Barroquinha (see Introduction), whose activities were kept somehow secret for the entire period of their existence.²⁸

It may seem that the separation between secret and non-secret rites has always been present in the liturgy of the *Candomblé*. But one may question whether this separation is a precept of the religion or a consequence of the enormous prejudice the cult has suffered, and still suffers.

3.3. THE *ORIXÁS* AND THEIR DANCES

Although *Candomblé* worships several deities, it does relate to a supreme deity, called *Olorun* or *Olodumaré*. The *Orixás* are either deities created by *Olorun* or divinised ancestors from a mythical past who had an eventful life on Earth. They are the supernatural inhabitants of the *orun*, the supernatural world. In Africa, they are very numerous, about six hundred. In her book *Os Nagô e a Morte*,²⁹ Juana Elbein dos Santos explains the nature of these beings and their function in Yoruba cosmogony, philosophy and social relations. For this work, it is sufficient to highlight her definition of these beings.

According to Elbein dos Santos, the denomination *Orixá* is a generalisation of a special group of deities related to *Oxalá Obatalá*, the great father, further described in the subchapter below. The totality of the supernatural beings are originally called *Irunmale*, and they are divided into four hundred *Orixá*, who represent the masculine creative power, and two hundred *Ebora*, related to *Odudua*, the great mother, representing the feminine creative power.³⁰ The myths tell about the complex relations between the deities of these two groups, and how the original masculine and feminine powers gave origin to countless deities.³¹ Elbein dos Santos describes the *orun* the following way:

In the *orun* there are not only the *Orixás* [...] and all types of ancestors, but also the spiritual 'doubles' of everything that exists in the *ayé*. [...] The *orun* comprehends simultaneously the whole *ayé*, including earth and sky, and, as a consequence, all the supernatural entities, whether they are associated to air, water or earth [...].³²

²⁸ Bastide, 25.

²⁹ Juana Elbein dos Santos, *Os Nagô e a Morte: Pade, Asese e o culto Egun na Bahia [Les Nago et La Mort: Pade, Asese et le culte Egun à Bahia, translated from the French by the University of Bahia]*, (Petrópolis: Vozes, 2002 [1986]), 72.

³⁰ Juana Elbein dos Santos, *Os Nagô e a Morte*, 74-75, 78-79. Some myths refer to *Odudua* as male, some others as female. Reginaldo Prandi describes this deity as both male and female. (Prandi, 422-428, 567).

³¹ Idem, 79.

³² Idem, 72. [my translation]

This description of the divine space of the *orun* leads to an ontological consideration of the *Orixás* as personifications of the forces of nature and/or personifications of phenomena concerning relations among human beings, and between human beings and nature and/or the cosmos.

During the public rituals, the *Orixás* are invoked to come down and take possession of the bodies of their correspondent devotees, the *elegun*. As seen, each *elegun* belongs to a particular deity, who was attached to their body during the initiation rites. This connection is permanent, and can only be undone on the occasion of the *elegun's* death. It is not within the purposes of this work to offer a more detailed description of the initiation. Nevertheless, it has to be said that it comprises the symbolic death and rebirth of the initiated individual within the precepts of the *Candomblé*.³³ It is this process of death and rebirth that allows the *elegun* to be the performers of the dances of the *Orixás*.

The dances of the *Orixás* are specific choreographies directly linked to the following factors:

a) The mythological material that describes the archetypical personality, the symbolic objects that each deity bears and that are described by the *elegun's* body and the stories related to each deity, and that rest upon the basis of the religious practice. For Bastide, the stories of the *Orixás* are not merely accounts of events that happened in a mythical past, but living narratives that continuously repeat themselves.³⁴ Each choreography relates to a part of the deity's myths. It is true that there are far more myths than dance movements, but it may also be the case that only a limited number of the original dances has usually been performed in Brazil.

Unfortunately, any assertion in this sense would be mere supposition, since there is very little research on the dances of the *Orixás* in general, and on their historical perspective in particular.

b) The music and chanting used to invoke and honour each one of the deities. The specific songs played for each deity have a close relation to the choreographies. This relation becomes clear if we observe the fact that the *elegun* do not count steps while performing the dances, but simply follow the variations of the rhythm. A closer study of the *oriki*, the praising texts sung and recited to the *Orixás*, stresses even further the bond between myth, music and dance.

c) The state of trance of the *elegun*. In the first part of the public rituals, the *elegun* have not yet fallen into a trance. As I will describe later in this chapter, when the *Orixás* answer the call of the drums and come down to take possession of the devotees, the body attitude is changed. The movements are vigorous and the energy of the deity is clearly recognisable. Among the people of *Candomblé*, the *elegun* in trance are often referred to as the *Orixá's* horses. The trance of the *elegun* has been the subject of much discussion in Brazil. Early ethnologists have even

³³ Bastide, 51.

³⁴ Bastide, 188.

questioned its veracity or have associated it with psychiatric disturbances.³⁵ For Bastide, the trance – controlled through the rituals of initiation – provides a communion between the possessed *elegun* and the deity. The human body-mind becomes the dwelling place of a deity, who makes use of this body-mind fully to manifest itself and restore their myths on, thus maintaining the cycles of worship necessary to keep the cult alive.³⁶

In the following pages I will give a description of the sixteen deities worshipped in the *Candomblé Keto*, the fundamental myths that are the basis of their archetypal personality, their symbolic/sacred objects and their dances. Another important aspect to be approached is the realms where these deities act, both in nature and society. I will offer more detailed descriptions of the dances I have seen during the rituals I observed in my fieldwork. This information is enormously relevant to my analysis concerning the relation between myth and ritual and the practice of the dances in the context of the *Odin tradition* and theatre anthropology.

Exu

Gender: indefinable.

As seen in the subchapter on the oracular systems, *Exu* is the messenger deity of *Candomblé*. But, besides this, *Exu* is a complex being, who has been subject to several studies. Juana Elbein dos Santos describe *Exu* thus:

Exu is not only related to masculine and feminine ancestors and their collective representations, he is also a constitutive element, in reality, the *dynamic element* of all supernatural beings and of the whole existence. [...] In this sense, likewise *Olorun*, the supreme deity, *Exu* cannot be isolated or classified in any category. In resemblance with the *axé*, the realization energy that he represents and transports, *Exu* is necessarily present in everything. As the principle of dynamics and expansion, he is the being without whom all the elements of the cosmic system would become immobile, thus making the development of life impossible.³⁷

Thinking of Creation as the realisation of an idea born in the mind of an anthropomorphic deity, I would postulate that *Olorun* could not relate to their creatures and thus could not be legitimated as the supreme divinity and creator of the universe without the concomitant existence of *Exu*, because where there is an idea there is communication, change and transformation; thus where there is thought there is *Exu*. In this case, *Exu* would not have been created by *Olorun*, but is an inherent aspect of the supreme deity. This assertion deserves time and space to be further developed, in ways that would far exceed the format of this work.

³⁵ Bastide, 21.

³⁶ Bastide, 39.

³⁷ Juana Elbein dos Santos, 130, 131.

Nevertheless, this consideration is of importance for a general introduction about the several aspects of *Exu*.

In the *Candomblé Keto*, *Exu* does not take possession of his children. The worship is done through a private rite called *padê*, performed in advance of every public ritual, in which *Exu* is praised and then sent away in order to propitiate the feast.³⁸ This means that *Exu* neither has a codified dance nor participates directly in the circle dances during public rituals. It is quite a curious fact that the deity responsible for the very possibility of dance does not dance himself.

Ogum

Gender: male.

Ogum is the deity of war, metals and technology. Aggressive and temperamental, has a sword and a shield as his sacred objects. *Ogum* is, according to some myths, the first son of *Odudua*³⁹; in other myths he appears as a divinised ancestor⁴⁰ or even the creator of Earth.⁴¹ However, all the tools used by man to develop agriculture, build cities or anyhow achieve collective progress, especially the forge, were given by *Ogum* when he gave mankind the knowledge of metallurgy.⁴² When possessing an *elegun*, *Ogum* dances with vigorous movements, where the straight arms, which cross in front of the body, depict the swords that open the paths in the forest. Other moves show *Ogum* cutting off the heads of his enemies or preparing for war, in a defying and brave attitude. Because of his pioneer character, *Ogum* is always the first deity to be honoured in public rituals.

Ogum's myths tell of a restless personality who never concedes defeat. Therefore, *Ogum* lives on the roads and pathways, always moving forth, always finding new ways.⁴³

Oxossi/Odé

Gender: male.

Oxóssi, also known as *Odé*, is the deity of hunting, wealth and abundance. Smart and quick, he knows all the animals of the forest. His sacred objects are the bow and the arrow. *Oxóssi* appears in some myths as *Ogum's* younger brother, in others as his son.⁴⁴ I did not see *Oxóssi's* dance in Bahia, because he did not appear in the rituals I observed. Nevertheless, I learned the dance during workshops with Augusto Omolu (see Chapter 2).

³⁸ Bastide, 34.

³⁹ Verger, *Lendas Africanas dos Orixás*, 15.

⁴⁰ Prandi, 89.

⁴¹ Prandi, 108.

⁴² Prandi, 86.

⁴³ Gisele Ominarewá Cosssard, *Awô: O Mistério dos Orixás*, Second edition, (Rio de Janeiro: Palas, 2008 [2006]), 39.

⁴⁴ Verger, 112.

Logun Ede

Gender: half of the year male and half of the year female.

Logun Edé is the son of *Erinlé*, a deity similar to *Oxóssi* and *Oxum*, the deity of the fresh waters. As a consequence of this, *Logun Edé* has a double personality, being a hunter during half part of the year and a mermaid during the other half.⁴⁵ His sacred objects also have these characteristics: he bears both *Oxum's* mirror and *Oxóssi's* bow and arrow. I have not seen *Logun Edé* dance, but some of my informants mentioned that at some moments he dances like *Oxóssi*, at other moments like *Oxum*.

Ossain

Gender: male.

Ossain is the deity of the plants, especially those with healing power and a liturgical function. Therefore *Ossain* is considered to be, together with *Exu*, the main propitiator of the *Candomblé* cult. His sons are responsible for providing the correct plants for the rituals, since each *Orixá* has their special leaves, which should be employed in the right way. It is curious to observe that Bastide postulates that *Ossain* does not take possession of his children.⁴⁶ This may be a mistake due to the belief that no women could possibly be *elegun* of *Ossain*, in a time when only women could be *elegun*. Thus, all his children should be *ogãs*, male helpers specialising in the cultivation of sacred plants. It was a moment of great surprise, then, when I saw a young woman being possessed by *Ossain* at *Terreiro do Gantois*. She was the protagonist of an astonishing dance performance. Using her young and fit body, *Ossain* showed all his greatness in a sequence of movements representing the harvesting of the leaves and the preparation of the sacred mixtures.

Obaluaê/Omolu

Gender: male.

Obaluaê is a deity whose cult is surrounded by great mystery. His true name, *Xapanã*, must not be pronounced. Therefore he is called "The lord of Earth". He is the deity of pox and other contagious diseases and has the power over illness and cure. His favour is often sought by people with health problems. *Obaluaê* shares with *Iansã/Oyá* the responsibility for the passage of the deceased to the spiritual world.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Verger, 115.

⁴⁶ Bastide, 127.

⁴⁷ Prandi, 202-203.

Pierre Verger believes that, in Africa, *Obaluaê* and his mother, *Nanã Buruku*, were already worshipped before *Obatalá* and *Odudua*. This belief is based on the fact that the rituals dedicated to *Obaluaê* and *Nanã* do not make use of metallic instruments, indicating that their cult existed prior to the knowledge of iron.⁴⁸ Furthermore, it is assumed that this deity is the result of the syncretism between several cults among West Africans.⁴⁹

According to the myth, *Obaluaê* was born with his body full of pocks. Horrified, *Nanã* abandons her child on the beach, where he is found by *Yemanjá*, the deity of the sea. *Yemanjá* uses the water of the sea to cure *Obaluaê*'s pocks and makes him a garment of straw in order to cover his skin, which is full of pockmarks.⁵⁰ He also bears several gourds hanging on his clothing, which are believed to contain mysterious substances that can both kill and save.

Obaluaê's dance reveals the physical suffering caused by his disease, when his body shakes with fever and he feels the itching of his wounds and pustules. On the other hand, the dance shows movements that reassert his condition as a great deity of the earth.

Oxumaré

Gender: half of the year male and half of the year female.

Oxumaré, also a child of *Nanã Buruku*, is *Obaluaê*'s brother. S/he is a dual deity, who alternates between the forms of a snake and a rainbow. It is said of *Oxumaré* that s/he is responsible for the rain cycle, that is, the evaporation of the waters of the rivers and lakes, their condensation in clouds and their return to earth. According to one myth, *Oxumaré* produced the rainbow in order to stop a downpour.⁵¹ Besides, *Oxumaré* is associated with all that is cyclic and perennial, symbolised by a snake that bites its own tail.⁵²

The dance of *Oxumaré* displays this deity's double nature. At some moments, the *elegun*'s body makes movements that, like the rainbow, connect the sky with the ground, through vigorous changes of level with the head, the torso and the arms. At other moments, the devotee's movements are fluid and resemble those of a snake.

Nanã Buruku

Gender: female.

A very old lady, *Nanã Buruku* is the great mother of earth, but she also has a relation with water, because *Nanã* is the mud, the blend of earth and water. A Yoruba myth tells that *Nanã*

⁴⁸ Verger, 212.

⁴⁹ Verger, 213, 214.

⁵⁰ Prandi, 215.

⁵¹ Prandi, 224.

⁵² Verger, 206; personal communication during fieldwork.

Buruku offered the material for *Obatalá* to create human beings. Nevertheless, at the end of every human life, *Nanã* demands that the body shall be given back to the earth.⁵³

Like her son *Obaluaê*, *Nanã* was worshipped before the Iron Age. In some places in West Africa, her cult is mixed up with *Obaluaê*'s.⁵⁴ *Nanã*'s dance is slow and her body is inclined forwards due to her old age. Her movements are all made towards the ground and at some moments she goes down to the floor and takes a mud bath.

Xangô

Gender: male.

Xangô is the deity of justice. A deified ancestor, he was king of Oyo, in present day Nigeria, an important Yoruba city. His worship is the very basis of the *Candomblé Keto* in Brazil, as some of the founders of the first *terreiros* were *Yá-Nassô*, the specially initiated priestesses responsible for the worship of *Xangô* in Africa.⁵⁵

Xangô is connected with fire, since he was the one who gave mankind knowledge about it. He is impetuous and violent, but also an appreciator of good food and beautiful women. His myths tell about his three wives, *Iansã/Oyá*, *Oxum* and *Obá*.⁵⁶ His sacred object is a double-edged axe, which, according to the myth, has the power to produce lightning.⁵⁷

Xangô's dance is one of the most physically demanding of all the *Orixás* dances. The rhythms played to this deity are very fast and the choreography demands great coordination between arms and legs. The dance describes *Xangô*'s numerous battles, in which his power over lightning and fire granted him the victory. Some moves show the power he has over the quarries, which were dedicated to this deity after the infamous myth in which he defeated *Ogum* by making a quarry fall down on him. Other moves, in turn, may refer to the myth in which *Xangô* is recognised both in the *orun* and in the *aye* for his sense of justice.⁵⁸

Iansã/Oyá

Gender: female.

Iansã/Oyá is the deity of the winds, hurricanes and storms. She is also connected to the river Niger. *Iansã* has a strong temper and gets angry very easily. She was married to *Ogum*, but left him to become *Xangô*'s first wife. *Iansã* is a woman who does not care about gender-defined

⁵³ Prandi, 196.

⁵⁴ Verger, 236.

⁵⁵ Verger, 28; Bastide, 310.

⁵⁶ Prandi, 260.

⁵⁷ Prandi, 286.

⁵⁸ Prandi, 286, 245.

roles in society.⁵⁹ According to the myth, she is the only woman allowed in the cult of the male ancestors, the *Egun*, one of the secret cults of the Afro religion, held separately from the *Orixá* cult. She got this honour as a gift from *Obaluaê*, and that is why she is always expected in the feasts dedicated to this deity.⁶⁰ Some myths describe *Iansã* as a woman who can turn into a bull.⁶¹ She was also a warrior and one of her sacred objects is a sword.

Iansã's dances are very vigorous and fast. Watching an *elegun* of *Iansã* during the trance of possession is a beautiful event. *Iansã* creates wind as she moves around the ritual room. The movements of her arms refer to her power over the spirits of the ancestors. Another movement shows her sensuality and confidence, and reasserts her position as a queen. Another part of the choreography depicts *Iansã* as a brave warrior, the one who helped *Xangô* to conquer the Muslim territories of West Africa.⁶²

One impressive performance by *Iansã* was given in a ritual at *Terreiro da Casa Branca*. On that occasion, during her dances, the possessed *elegun* approached a daughter of *Xangô* who had not yet fallen into trance, making a turn in front of her. It was like *Iansã's* wind was somehow irresistible to *Xangô*, who immediately came down and took possession of his *elegun*. In that moment, the passionate relationship between *Iansã* and *Xangô* was recalled and re-experienced in the sacred space of the *terreiro*.

Ewa

Gender: female.

Some myths affirm that *Ewa* is the daughter of *Nanã Buruku*.⁶³ In one myth she appears as the daughter of *Oxalá Obatalá*.⁶⁴ One myth, that does not cite *Ewa* directly, tells about an episode in which *Nanã Buruku* gets pregnant by *Obatalá*.⁶⁵ It is questionable how far one can go in concluding that this child is *Ewa*, but these are curious coincidences.

She is a rare deity in Bahia, according to my informants. Also, a female deity connected to water – in this case sources and fog -, *Ewa* is the guardian of the cemeteries and is known by a particularity: she only takes possession of virgin women.⁶⁶ However, Reginaldo Prandi has photographed some *elegun* of *Ewa* in *terreiros* in São Paulo.⁶⁷

⁵⁹ Cossard, 54.

⁶⁰ Prandi, 308.

⁶¹ Verger, 169.

⁶² Prandi, 271.

⁶³ Prandi, 233, 238.

⁶⁴ Prandi, 237.

⁶⁵ Prandi, 198.

⁶⁶ Personal communication in fieldwork.

⁶⁷ Prandi, images 15 and 16.

Oxum

Gender: female.

Oxum is the deity of fertility. The second wife of *Xangô*, she is connected to the rivers, streams and waterfalls. *Oxum* is the name of a river that runs through the Yoruba cities of Ijesha and Ijebu, in present day Nigeria.

In Brazil, *Oxum* is usually considered to have a sweet character, being the deity of beauty and love. This attribution is only partially justified by the myths, in which *Oxum* appears beautiful, vain and seductive. Notwithstanding, in Africa she is also connected to the function of ancestral mother, playing a very important role in the myths of initiation and participating in the feminine secret society of the *Egbè Eléye*, which worships the female ancestors, the *Iyá-mi*.⁶⁸

The dance of *Oxum* has to be carefully studied in order to avoid incorrect interpretations due to the stereotypes described above. The dance shows how *Oxum* bathes in the river or waterfall, how she turns herself into a river, how she offers her breasts as the great mother she is, and how she looks at herself in the mirror she bears as her sacred object. A more aggressive variety of *Oxum*, related to *Iansã*, bears a sword.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, some mimetic moves I have seen performed by folkloric dance groups, which depict *Oxum* as a coquettish woman, are, as far as I have observed, a sad distortion of the *Candomblé* ritual.

Obá

Gender: female.

Obá has a resentful and repressed character.⁷⁰ The third wife of *Xangô*, she is a rare deity in Bahia. In one myth, *Obá* is deceived by *Oxum* and cuts off her own ear to prepare a meal for *Xangô*. Disgusted, the king disdains *Obá*, who flees and later becomes a river.⁷¹ This myth explains why *Obá* and *Oxum* are eternal enemies, fighting every time they happen to come down in the same *terreiro*.

Obá covers her ear with one hand while dancing.⁷² Although this is her best known characteristic, her myths tell stories of a strong warrior, who fought and defeated *Xangô*, *Oxalá* and *Orunmilá*. *Obá* bears a shield and a sword as her sacred objects.⁷³ Therefore it would not be a surprise if, in her rare appearances, *Obá* performed a dance of fight.

⁶⁸ Juana Elbein dos Santos, 86-88. Prandi, 331-332.

⁶⁹ Cossard, 53.

⁷⁰ Cossard, 51.

⁷¹ Prandi, 314.

⁷² Personal communication during fieldwork.

⁷³ Verger, 186, 187.

Yemanjá

Gender: female.

Yemanjá is the deity of the sea. In Brazil, her cult mingled with beliefs based on legends about mermaids, very common in coastal fishing communities in the whole country.

Yemanjá was born in a river, but now lives in the sea. She is considered by many researchers to be the mother of almost all *Orixás*.⁷⁴ According to Elbein dos Santos, *Yemanjá* has many of the same original characteristics as *Oxum*. They are both associated with the greatest feminine power. *Yemanjá* means: the mother of the fish.⁷⁵

When dancing, *Yemanjá* moves with the fluidity of the waves of the sea. Indeed, she *is* the sea, and the movements of the waves are produced by *Yemanjá*'s dancing. Another important aspect of her dance is the back-and-forth movements in the room, which allude to the variation of the tides. Part of the dance of *Yemanjá* is identical to *Obaluaê*'s, yet with a softer quality of movement due to the different natures of these two deities. I do not consider this a coincidence: this aspect recalls the myths in which *Yemanjá* adopts the abandoned child of *Nanã Buruku*.

Oxalá: Oxaguiã and Obatalá/Oxalufã

Gender: male.

Oxalá, also called *Obatalá*, is one of the so-called *Orixás funfun*, a group of deities who only wear white and eat white foods. *Oxalá* is mythically related to the beginning of life on Earth. The myth of the creation of the world has many versions. According to myths collected by Pierre Verger, *Olorun*, the Supreme Deity, gave to *Oxalá* the task of creating our world. Despite his great power, *Oxalá* was not free from some obligations and was supposed to offer a sacrifice to *Exu* before departing. But his pride spoke louder and he refused to make the sacrifice. Furious, *Exu* decided to take revenge and made *Oxalá* desperately thirsty. In order to get something to drink, *Oxalá* cut the bark of a palm tree, from which a refreshing liquid began to flow: it was palm wine. Drunk, *Oxalá* fell asleep on his way to create Earth. *Odudua* found him and ran to *Olorun* to tell about *Oxalá*'s failure. *Odudua* ended up creating the world, while *Oxalá*, after admitting his error before the Supreme Deity, was put in charge of creating human beings.⁷⁶ Like most figures in Yoruba mythology, *Oxalá* has many identities or qualities. In Brazil, the two best known are *Oxalufã*, an old, wise and good king, and *Oxaguiã*, a young and impetuous warrior.⁷⁷

Oxalufã is a very special deity, who causes his *elegun* dramatically to change body attitude when in a trance. The usually agile women become slow, moving with difficulty, and the body leans forwards in the posture of a very aged person. The feet seem glued to the ground and they

⁷⁴ Gisele Ominarewá Cosssard, *Awô: O Mistério dos Orixás*, 50.

⁷⁵ Elbein dos Santos, 90.

⁷⁶ Verger, 252.

⁷⁷ Verger, 256-257.

walk with great difficulty. The *ekedis* cover these devotees with a white cloth immediately after they fall into a trance. On some occasions he may dance for a long time, always slowly and with small movements in which his feet almost do not leave the floor, but in a steady rhythm that demands a lot of stamina. *Oxalufã*'s sacred object is a special staff, towards which his tired and old body leans during the dance.

Oxaguiã, the young *Oxalá*, is a warrior king. This deity is known for a myth associated with the invention of the pestle, which he introduced into Yoruba cuisine in order to make easier the preparation of his favourite dishes, based on pounded yam. His sacred element is therefore a pestle, and his vigorous dance shows the movements of pounding the yam.

3.4. A NOTE ABOUT THE QUALITIES OF THE *ORIXÁS*

Both in the myths and in the practice, the cult of the *Orixás* deals with different varieties of each deity. These aspects are called *qualities* in Brazil.⁷⁸ For instance, Gisele Cossard enumerates some qualities of *Iansã/Oyá*, in a list that should not be considered exhaustive:

Oyá Balé: commands the *Egun*⁷⁹; wears white.

Icu Oyá: carries death; wears white.

Oyá Onirá: connected to *Oxum*. Bears a small mirror.

Oyá Jegbê: she is the oldest one.

Oyá Padá: gives light to the *Egun*. Carries a candlestick with nine burning candles.

Oyá Jimudá: connected to *Oxalá*. Lives in the bamboo forest.

Oyá Cará: she is the fire.⁸⁰

All these qualities of *Iansã/Oyá* are furthermore related to myths and uncover different aspects of this deity's worship. These qualities are also reflected in the dances, creating nuances through variations in the quality of movement, changes in intensity, speed and/or attitude in the *elegun*'s body.

3.5. A PUBLIC RITUAL: A FIELDWORK EXPERIENCE

At the houses I visited, the door is always open during public rituals. Participants are free to arrive and leave as they like. The dress code is an important aspect of the ritual. Women are supposed to wear skirts or dresses, although nowadays many wear trousers. White is always a

⁷⁸ Cossard, 36.

⁷⁹ As has been seen, *Egun* are the male ancestors. The female ancestors are called *Iyá-mi*. (Elbein dos Santos, 105).

⁸⁰ Cossard, 55.

correct colour, but is not obligatory in all rituals. However, one should never enter a *terreiro*, not even in a non-ritual situation, dressed in black.

3.5.1. Ritual to *Oxalufan* at *Casa Branca*

The following passage describes the first ritual I attended in Salvador, on Sunday September 5th 2010:

In the ritual room, men and women sit separately. The space is beautifully decorated in white, with countless rows of flags hanging from the ceiling and figures of doves – a symbol of peace - made of polystyrene foam sprinkled with silvery glitter. The floor is paved with tiles. In the middle of the large room, a wide quadrangular pillar, also beautifully decorated, rises from the ground to the ceiling. A number of chairs, ten or twelve, are placed around this pillar. On the side opposite to the front door, on the left hand side, is the place that may be considered the heart of the ritual: the narrow space where the three sacred drums, *Rum*, *Rumpi* and *Le*, are placed. These instruments are played by especially initiated men, the *ogãs*. Their corner is an exclusively masculine territory. No woman can watch the ritual from this place, nor play the drums or by any means get close to them. Unfortunately for me, this happens to be the very best place to watch the dances from at any *Candomblé* house: the *Orixás* dance to the drums and the dances can't be separated from the rhythms. Some weeks later, in another *terreiro*, I discovered a great way to circumvent this rule without being disrespectful.

As has been seen, *Oxalá*, also called *Obatalá*, is a deity mythically related to the beginning of life on Earth. The cycle of festivities in which I now participate is called *Águas de Oxalá*⁸¹ and has its origin in a myth, namely the story of the unfair incarceration of *Oxalá* by *Xangô*.⁸² Everybody is supposed to dress in white from top to toe.

The ceremony I am about to witness is the second Sunday of the *Oxalá* cycle and is dedicated to *Oxalufan*. I missed the first feast of the cycle, held in honour of *Odudua*. At 9 p.m. the sound of the drums is heard for the first time that evening. It is the sign for those who are outside to come in and take their seats. Soon after, the opening rhythm, the *Avamunha*, announces the entrance of the dancing devotees and the priestess, the *Iyalorixá* Altamira Cecília dos Santos, best known as Mãe Tatá Oxum Tomilá.

There are fifteen women, the youngest appearing to be in their early 30s, but I would say that most of them are between 40 and 55 years old. They are all dressed in white, wearing full skirts with petticoats. Their garments are ornamented with embroideries and the shirts show a

⁸¹ In English: Waters of Oxalá.

⁸² Verger, 260.

variety of lace techniques. They are wearing beautiful jewellery, and a cloth in Richilieu-lace⁸³ tied around the torso, partly covering the beaded necklaces that all devotees wear as a symbol of their *Orixás*. Their heads are uncovered and most of them are barefoot. I saw only a few women wearing white slip-ons. When they enter the room, everybody stands up. They start to dance around the main pillar, in a collective anti-clockwise movement. In the rituals, the *elegun* always move anti-clockwise, towards the mythical past in which the *Orixás* lived. They are not in a trance, but will come to this state later in the ritual.

In this first part, the *ogãs* play the salutation for every *Orixá*, in a sequence of music and dance called *xirê*. The *xirê* has a specific order that is not necessarily common to all houses, but that never changes for one given *terreiro*. That means that, when it comes to its organisation, a *xirê* is never a general term, because it is undetachably related to a specific order within a particular house of a saint. Nonetheless, two deities have fixed positions in the *xirê*: *Ogum*, the warrior, is always the first one to be revered, and *Oxalá* is always the last one. Roger Bastide argues that a possible organisation form for the *xirê* is to start with the younger, more violent and impetuous deities, and end with the older ones. This point of view seems too simplistic to me though, because the *Orixás* have manifold qualities and aspects.⁸⁴ At Casa Branca, the order of the *xirê* is: *Ogum*, *Oxossi (Odé)*, *Logun Ede*, *Ossain*, *Obaluae (Omolu)*, *Oxumaré*, *Nanã Buruku*, *Xangô*, *Iansan (Oyá)*, *Ewa*, *Oxum*, *Obá*, *Iemanjá*, *Oxalá*.⁸⁵ *Exu* does not participate in the *xirê*, as he is worshipped prior to the public feast in a closed ceremony.⁸⁶

During these first moments, in which the *elegun* perform what Bastide calls preliminary dances, the *ogãs* continuously play and chant to the different deities. At this point I am not able to identify all the songs and chants, but Bastide writes that they used to play at least three songs to each *Orixá*.⁸⁷

A curious thing is that, during the preliminary dances, the *elegun* behave in a very every-day way: there are people they know among the audience, and they greet them. They may also have short conversations with each other. This is also a moment when they ask for blessings from the elders in their religious life. In a physical attitude of humility, lowering their gaze, they bend their torso slightly forward and extend both hands, open and with the palms up, in the direction of the other person, who accepts the respect with a head movement. Another way is simply to kiss the hand of the other. Eye contact is generally regarded as a disrespectful attitude towards the elders.

⁸³ Richilieu is a very popular lace technique in Brazil, one of the most typical arts and crafts techniques in the North Eastern region.

⁸⁴ Roger Bastide, 36.

⁸⁵ See the detailed description of each *Orixá*.

⁸⁶ Bastide, 34.

⁸⁷ Bastide, 36.

A very important moment is when the devotees salute the priestess, the drums and *ogãs*, as well as the *terreiro's* front door and sacred corners. This salutation is made by a specific set of movements executed on the floor, called *dobale* if the devotee is consecrated to a male *Orixá*, and *iká*, if she is to be possessed by a female one.

The preliminary dance is characterised by the frequent use of rhythmic steps, followed by swinging movements of the arms. The body keeps a position that the Brazilian researcher Suzana Martins calls the 'basic body attitude', described as follows:

(...) This attitude consists in the vertical alignment of the body (...), with the spine straight. Moreover, the dancing devotees project the torso slightly forwards. The shoulders are relaxed, the arms are slightly bent and the elbows facing outwards. The knees are also bent, while the dancers displace the body with small steps that open and close to the sides, (...) with the arms swinging forth and back.⁸⁸

This basic dance varies with the inclusion of the hand movements characterising the different deities that are being greeted through the drums and the chants. This observation makes me conclude that the *elegun* must know all the dances, and not only the one belonging to their specific *Orixá*. These movements are at first soft, but they get more vigorous when the deity takes possession of the *elegun's* body, as we will see.

At this moment of the ceremony, I notice that the drums are playing with more energy and the room feels hotter. I also see other women in the ritual space. They are not dressed like the dancing devotees, although they are wearing white. They are part of the *Candomblé* house as *ekedis* (see subchapter 3.1.). They are key figures when I experience, later during the fieldwork, a fundamental revelation about the apprenticeship of the dances by the *elegun*.

After a short while, on one side of the room, a devotee falls into trance. Her body shakes and she loses balance. She closes her eyes. One of the *ekedis* holds her so that she won't fall to the floor. Her shoes are taken off. An instant later, she is able to stand on her own and starts to dance, moving towards the drums in order to greet them. The audience applauds. After this first trance, many others happen. The attitude of the *ekedis* varies according to the deity who takes possession of the devotee: in the case of a female *Orixá*, they tie a piece of white cloth called *ojá* around the *elegun's* trunk, just above the breasts. If the *Orixá* is male, the *ojá* is tied diagonally over one shoulder and all jewellery is removed.

Common to all *Orixás* is that, as soon as they are able to start dancing, they greet the priestess, the drums and the front door of the house. This salutation is now different from the first time, before the trance: it is called *jiká* and is made by a movement forward with the torso, followed by a slight shaking of the shoulders.

⁸⁸ Suzana Martins, *A Dança de Yemanjá Ogunté na Perspectiva Estética do Corpo*, (Salvador: Egba, 2008), 46.

After the salutations and the first dances, the *Orixás* are followed away by the *ekedis*. In the private rooms of the house they will get dressed in their characteristic clothing. One hour and a half after the beginning of the ritual, the drums fall silent, indicating a break.

The pause ends with the sound of the drums announcing the entrance of the *Orixás*. At this moment, like in the beginning, all participants stand up. The *elegun* in a trance, that is, the deities manifested in our reality through the body of these women, now fully clad in their *Orixás'* costume, enter the ritual room, helped by the *ekedis*.

The deities start performing their dances, now full of energy and with the recognisable character and movement quality that is particular to each of them. The previous order observed during the *xirê* circle is dissolved, as each *Orixá* follows their own pattern of behaviour, which also reveals the mythical relations among the deities. The difference in the *elegun's* body attitude in relation to the *xirê* is striking. The movement pattern is now marked by a great number of turns, both clockwise and anti-clockwise. Much of what I have seen Augusto Omolu doing is there, yet done in a different way. The choreographies are performed by bodies that are trained within the religious context and not forged by the strict discipline of classical and modern dance.

Shortly after the beginning of this second part, some of the *ekedis*, helped by a number of young women - probably *abiãs* - enter the ritual room with the food that is to be shared by all the participants. First, they serve a paste made of cooked white corn, which we eat with our hands as is the custom in Africa and during the process of initiation in the cult. Shortly after, a main course of poultry is served in the usual way. A delicious smell invades the space. At this point of the ritual, the sensuous experience is complete. I am totally present in the moment. My perception is extremely sharp, which makes me highly sensitive to the wind that comes in through the window, to the touch of the *Orixás'* garments when they pass by dancing, and to the taste of the food. I realise that my spine and the area around the region of the solar plexus are moving slightly to the rhythm of the drums.

The deities continue to dance, with a few pauses. The choreographies are repeated countless times, yet they seem to acquire new dimensions and meanings every time. The ritual ends when the *ogãs* play and sing the exit chants, in the reverse order of the *xirê*, that is, *Oxalá* first and *Ogum* last. These chants send the *Orixás* back to the *Orun*, from where they will continue to be called down to the ritual communion, over and over again.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION: RESEARCHING THE ENERGY OF THE *ORIXÁS*

The following chapter analyses the dances of the *Orixás* in relation to the *Odin tradition* and theatre anthropology on one side; confront the dances with the theory presented in Chapter 1 on the other side; and last but not least, to make a first attempt at a conceptualisation of the energies of the *Orixás* within the conceptual apparatus of theatre anthropology – but also creating my own concepts when appropriate. Such a conceptualisation points to the development of a method for the actor’s dramaturgy on the pre-expressive level of performance, based on the study of myth, music and poetry, in order to access the energetic qualities of the Yoruba deities.

4.1. THE DANCES OF THE *ORIXÁS* IN THE DISCOURSE OF THE *ODIN TRADITION* AND THEATRE ANTHROPOLOGY

The idea of the performer as a ritual persona is connected both to Grotowski’s idea on the idle readiness and Barba’s interpretation of it as a trance of concentration. However, while Grotowski demanded that the actor surrender completely and uncritically to his methods, Barba understood that the individuality of each actor was the key to continuous creative renewal, which eventually contributed to the longevity of his theatre.

The actor fostered by the *Odin tradition* and theatre anthropology is stimulated to create independently of the director. At the same time, the personal processes generated by the *Odin training* are deep and demand self-penetration, like Grotowski’s work.

Upon my return from fieldwork, I was deeply affected by the fact that the dances of the *Orixás* in their original, religious context, appeared to be so much more “authentic” and “true” than I had experienced at *Odin Teatret*. Later I realised that such a comparison, if possible, is unfruitful in absolute terms: how can we compare a religion related to millenarian worship systems with a secular theatrical practice from the end of the XXth century?

Moreover, the experience offered at the *Odin Week Festival* is meant to present a tradition to people that have little, if any, practical knowledge about it. The classes of *Orixá’s* dances are introductory. Nevertheless, it becomes evident that the dances having become a part of the *Odin tradition* does not automatically give them the status of a method to approach the actor’s dramaturgy. At this point, they are tools used in different situations and activities at *Odin Teatret*.

In the practical context of the *Odin tradition*, the dances of the *Orixás* are a part of the individual professional discourse of one performer, Augusto Omolu. In the theoretical context of

theatre anthropology, the dances are historically new. Incorporated into the ISTA in 1994 - 15 years after the creation of the school - they have not been studied as deeply as the Asian traditions. Therefore, the theory of theatre anthropology still has to be properly related to the dances of the *Orixás*.

The relation form-energy in the dances is a very important part of Omolu's instructions in the classes during the Odin Week Festival. The message is: for the actor, the most important aspect of the dances is the *Orixá's* energy, not the form of the movement. Even so, in practice, the choreographic aspect is given way too much attention. Thus, form seems to be more important than energy. Notwithstanding, the apprentices that make the decision to research the dances in depth will sooner or later be confronted with this paradox, and the reflection generated by this process will contribute to their growth.

The different traditions embraced by the field of theatre anthropology, including the dances of the *Orixás*, should not be considered static theoretical paradigms aiming to establish a general set of rules for the performer's craft. Neither should their analysis in this context be regarded as exhaustive. Rather, the traditions should be studied as contributions to creating parameters of energy in a practical-theoretical field that is still alive, changing and expanding. The tools used to create are those parameters of energy, and not the forms, codes or techniques in themselves.

It has been tempting to develop an analytic approach to the dances in relation to every single principle of theatre anthropology. Nevertheless, such an approach is more likely to discuss the validity of Barba's postulations concerning the universality and transculturality of his theory, than to offer a proper study of the dances in the theatrical context.

The principles of theatre anthropology that are closely related to movement analysis, that is the first two, *balance in action* and *the dance of the oppositions*, are useful tools to understand the technical aspects of countless genres of dance. Nevertheless, when it comes to the dramaturgic assessment of the movements of the *Orixás*, the principles of *consistent inconsistency* (absorption and expansion of actions/movements) and *equivalence* are more useful. This evaluation is based on the fact that the latter are principles closely related to the energies of the *Orixás* applied to the body of the actor, as they deal both with the conscious manipulation of energy from the actor's side, and with research into the meaning of diverse codes and physical actions.

4.2. AN INTRODUCTORY STUDY OF THE DANCES' NATURE

The investigation of the dances in the two contexts presented in Chapter 2 and 3 requires a common ground. This common ground is provided by ritual and performance theory. Thus, it is possible to study the dances of the *Orixás* from the perspective of performance, always keeping

in mind the analogies and discrepancies in the relation between the religious and the theatrical contexts.

I have, in different passages of the present work, repeatedly affirmed that mythology is the fundament of *Orixá* worship. In this chapter, this relation will continue to be stressed.

Until now, I have treated the dances in their original context as part of a ritual. Nonetheless, from the perspective of theories on myth, ritual and trance, as well as from performance theory, it is possible *to see each dance as a myth-ritual unit*. A confrontation between some aspects of the dances and the theory presented in Chapter 1 will confirm this.

According to both Eliade and Gaster, myth is experienced in the present time through ritual. In the case of the dances of the *Orixás*, the myths are *hierophanies* in the *elegun's* body-mind, which has entered into a state of trance. This altered state of consciousness functions like a passage for the *elegun* towards a realm that is inaccessible to them in their daily state of mind, and where they are able to restore and re-experience the mythology. In this process, the *elegun* brings to the present time of the ritual not only stories of the *Orixás*, but a set of myths that reveal the several facets of the *Orixá*. Furthermore, the structure of the dances is analogous to that of ritual itself, with thought in the features enumerated by Catherine Bell:

Formalism and invariance: The choreographic structure of the dances of the *Orixá's* is extremely formalised. The sacred objects that characterise the deities in the mythical accounts are symbolised by positions and movements according to fixed codes.

Traditionalism: The sequences of movements and actions are exhaustively repeated during the feasts, in the same way that they have been performed for hundreds of centuries in Brazil and Africa.

Rule governance: The trance may be considered the main rule concerning the dances, but it is also correct to assert that the dances are governed by the rules of the feast.

Sacral symbolism: Evident inasmuch as the dances are restorations of the myths.

Performance: As seen, this feature is closely associated with Schechner's theory. Therefore I will here use the features listed in his performance chart (see subchapter 1.1.4.): The anticlockwise movement direction seen in the initial circle dances, the *xirê*, is indicative of a *special ordering of time*, that is, the sacred and mythical past. Many of the turns that characterise the dances in trance may indicate new dimensions in time, as well as changes in energy, as we will see below. The *special value for objects* is indicated by the symbolism of the dancing body in relation to each *Orixá's* sacred objects, for instance, the straight arms of the *elegun* depicting *Ogum's* sword, or the bent elbows with the strong fist performing *Xangô* holding his *axes*. The dances are also *non-productive* and, as Bell also puts it, they are governed by *rules*. Moreover, they happen in a special place, appeal to others and have an audience. Schechner considers that rituals are not *self-assertive*. Nevertheless, the matter of *self-assertiveness* is discussable,

inasmuch as the experience of myths may also have a role for the individual, as Kirk indicated (see subchapter 1.1.2.1.). On the other hand, the dances of the *Orixás* are definitely *self-transcendent*. They are also *completed*, although the repetitions of the choreographies may indicate a greater complexity in this dimension, as they possibly reveal new aspects of the deity's myths each time they are performed. The connection to myth and the religious trance that characterise the dances make evident their relation to a *symbolic reality*. The formalised character stressed by Bell overlaps with Schechner's idea of *scripted* events. As seen above, the dances of the *Orixás* are highly formalised, following a pre-defined recurrent choreographic cycle.

Moreover, the aspect of *restoration of behaviour* is greatly relevant to show how the myths are restored through the codes and choreographies in the ritual. However, in the pre-expressive level of a theatrical performance, the codes may be reinterpreted in the search for the energy of the *Orixás*. Since the behaviour shown in the choreographies is *twice behaved*, it also has an existence outside the physical existence of the person who behaves. In the special case of the dances of the *Orixás*, this means that the danced behaviour has an existence on its own. That is, according to Schechner, the reason why it can be taught and learned. To me, this indicates that the dances – the *myth-ritual units* – may be reinterpreted, reformulated and reinvented as performance material, that is, energy and actions. As religious expression in ritual, they cannot be taken out of their context, but *as performance*, they may.

4.3. ENERGY MODELS AND ENERGY PATTERNS

The following passage proposes a conceptualisation of the energies of the *Orixás*, dividing it into four categories that I call *energy models*: warrior energy, wind energy, water energy and the oldest deities. Each one of these models is then graded into *energy or behavioural patterns* - that is, the different *Orixás*, their dances, qualities or relations - that fluctuate on a scale between the energy concepts suggested by Barba – from *animus* to *anima*. I will analyse in more detail the energy models of those *Orixás* whose choreographic structure I know best: *Ogum* and his relation to *Xangô* and *Iansã*, and then *Oxum*, who will deserve a special passage about the nuances of femininity.

As seen in Chapter 3, each *Orixá* is characterised according to three different realms: one related to the *Orixás* as having personality and will, likewise human beings; another that deals with the material or natural element inhabited by the given deity; and finally, the one that deals with the deity's influence in social development and relations. These realms are in turn correlated to two essential factors: a) The *Orixá's* qualities and b) The *Orixá's* relation to other deities. The behavioural and energetic patterns uncovered below are subtle energetic nuances

that are not always visible to the eyes of an observer. However the repetitions of the choreography are very revealing. For a performer, finding these nuances is not only a matter of tireless study of the myths. It is indeed of great importance to repeat the choreographies countless times, regardless of the perfection of the form or rather, beyond the pursuit of the perfect shape. Moreover, the study of the rhythms and chants that are sung to each deity is of great value in order to understand the energetic nuances. I will use some *orikis* (sacred verses used to invoke and greet the deities) in order to exemplify these variations.

4.3.1. *Ogum*, warrior energy

Ogum has an aggressive personality, lives on the roads and pathways, and is the deity of war, metallurgy, technology and progress. *Ogum's* dance shows all these facets, as the different aspects of the deity are shown as different patterns of energy. The strong, aggressive mood and unhesitating intention in the movements are shown when *Ogum* is at war, where he is a merciless killer. *Ogum's* energy changes, yet it is still full of power, when he becomes the skilled craftsman who gives mankind the knowledge of the extraction and manufacture of metals. *Ogum* is simultaneously the warrior, the blacksmith who makes the guns, the metallurgist who smelts the iron and the miner who extracts the iron from the earth.

Orikis are usually sung or recited to *Ogum*¹:

We know that *Ogum* guides mankind
It is difficult [to live] without his support²

Ogum has arrived to reap the harvest
Ogum reaps the harvest
He arrived, he reaped.³

We have seven *Ogum* in Irê⁴
He is the lord of the two swords.⁵

Ogum's knowledge of metals and his blacksmith's craft may become visible in the dance if we observe one of the several dimensions of his relation to *Iansã*, the wind, and *Xangô*, the fire. Such relations are indicative of the way the ancient Yoruba saw phenomena related to physics.

¹ Altair B. Oliveira, *Cantando para os Orixás* (Singing to the Orixás, not available in the English language), (Rio de Janeiro: Pallas, 2007), 34.

² In the *Candomblé Keto*, the chants are always sung in Yoruba. Oliveira's book has the texts in Yoruba, a phonetic version and a translation in Portuguese, which was the base for my translation into English.

³ *Ibid*, 35.

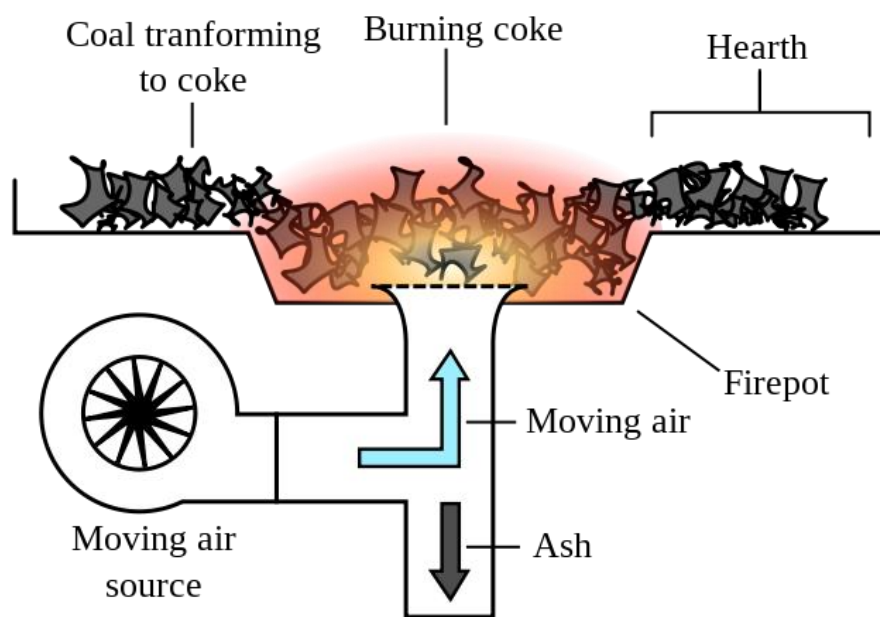
⁴ Irê was *Ogum's* kingdom, located in present day Nigeria.

⁵ *Ibid*, 31.

However, to experience the richness of these relations, it is important that the *Orixás dance together*.

Upon the creation of the forge, *Ogum* was advised by *Ifá* to make a fire, where he was supposed to burn the earth eroded from a hillside.⁶ From this furnace, *Ogum* started to extract iron. With the forge, he moulded the iron, manufacturing it into various tools. Below, I use an illustration of a coal forge in order to give a concrete example of how *Ogum's* energy relates to other elements of nature, in this case fire and air, personified by *Xangô* and *Iansã*.

Image 1:
Coal forge⁷



The myths give a clear account of the relations mentioned above. *Xangô*, with his lightning, gave mankind knowledge about the fire.⁸ Another passage gives an account of how *Iansã's* wind fed *Xangô's* fire, in order to make *Ogum's* forge work.⁹

4.3.2. *Iansã/Oyá*, wind energy

Iansã has a fearless character. She is also sensual, cheerful and playful. The deity of winds and storms, *Iansã* also controls the cult of the dead.

⁶ Prandi, 95-96.

⁷ Wikimedia commons, <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coal-forge-diagram.svg> , accessed on April 15, 2011. The diagram has a typing error; the correct is "coal transforming to coke".

⁸ Prandi, 257.

⁹ Ibid, 303.

The particular energy of this *Orixá* is, as seen in Chapter 3, perfectly identifiable in her dances, that literally make the air move with great power. However, the energy of the wind has several nuances and degrees of intensity. The wind that carries the seeds of the plants, helping to spread the vegetation, is also the one that carries the plague or causes death and destruction.

Orikis usually sung or recited for *Iansã*:

She is the one who understands
The Lord of the *Egungun*
We worship her (...).¹⁰

She is the lady owner of the winds
That blow over her children.¹¹

(...)May her sword not touch us
May she not use her lightning to destroy our house
Oyá has touched the earth (...).¹²

The nature of *Iansã* is difficult to control. Her relation to *Xangô* is so close and intense that she shares his power over fire, when she sends her lightning over the world during storms. However, this relation is strongly marked by power struggles.

On the other hand, *Iansã* is closely connected with *Obaluaê*, from whom she received the power over the dead and the cult *Egungun*. This means that, in the natural realm, she has a connection to earth. Her movements may be explored through the use of several spatial levels and variations in speed.

4.3.3. *Oxum*, water energy: nuances of the feminine

As seen, *Oxum* is sweet, beautiful and vain. She is the deity of the rivers, lagoons and waterfalls. She also governs the realm of feminine fertility and motherhood. *Oxum* is considered to be the supreme feminine, the female sexuality and all the attributes that are related to womanhood.

These characteristics are true, but they are not the whole truth about this deity. Many times, these features are mixed up with passivity, as *Oxum* is often described as a fragile young woman. She is indeed extremely powerful.¹³

¹⁰ Oliveira, 117.

¹¹ Ibid, 119.

¹² Ibid, Ibid.

Orikis usually sung or recited to *Oxum*:

We worship the mother of the river

She will protect us

She is the mother who will guide us in our traditions and customs.¹⁴

Lady of the fresh waters (...)

You are the old mother of the river.¹⁵

She is the queen

She can turn into a trap.¹⁶

One myth tells us that *Oxum* used to spend a lot of time by the river, bathing and polishing her jewellery and her sword. She liked the idea of being observed by a beautiful man, who would fall in love with her. One day, a hunter passed by and saw *Oxum* bathing and dancing in the river. He fell in love immediately, and called her closer to him. As *Oxum* approached him, the hunter got petrified with fear: she had become old and repulsively ugly. Astonished by fear, the hunter intended to run to the village and tell the people that an old witch lived in the river. Furious, *Oxum* killed the hunter with her sword, and transformed herself into a fish.¹⁷

This myth reveals other facets of *Oxum*: old, ugly and revengeful. These characteristics give us a new dimension of the deity, other than the extremely beautiful, loving, generous, protective, charming *Oxum*.

As an energetic model, *Oxum* offers infinite possibilities. Her range of variation is huge and her dance can be explored for hours in its countless possibilities. At one extremity we have small brooks, and on the other, immense rivers. The path of a river from the source, where she can relate to *Ewá*, to the sea, where she meets *Yemanjá*, can also be studied in practice. Likewise, the fascinating paradox of the waterfalls, where a placid stream of water precipitates abruptly into another level of energy.

The relation of hatred and rivalry nourished by *Oxum* and *Obá* is also a great source of physical and dramaturgical material. *Obá* can be seen as the reverse side of *Oxum*, with her strong warrior energy and repressed femininity.

¹³ Prandi, 332.

¹⁴ Oliveira, 128.

¹⁵ Ibid, 132.

¹⁶ Ibid, 125.

¹⁷ Prandi, 327-329.

Unlike the Balinese and Indian systems by which theatre anthropology is inspired, the deities analysed in this chapter offer different energy patterns that cannot be ranged within two extreme poles. The *Orixás* are not fixed patterns, inasmuch as they may transit across various points in their range of energy, according to the myth and the relations that are being established. Below, I give an idea of the different ways an energetic pattern may be positioned, relating to *animus* and *anima* energies. The classification below is a first attempt at a conceptualisation of the energies of the *Orixás*, following the principles of theatre anthropology (see also the deities' descriptions in Chapter 3). Therefore, it is not my intention to present a complete range of patterns. The interesting discovery is that the same deity may appear in different lines, according to the indications given by diverse myths. Another important observation is that *animus* and *anima* are variable qualities; for instance, a warrior *animus* and a water *animus* are widely different things.

WARRIOR ANIMUS ENERGY:

Ogum, the bloodthirsty warrior.

Ogum, the war strategist/the gun maker.

Ogum, the metallurgist/mineworker/inventor.

WARRIOR ANIMA ENERGY:

Obá, the warrior.

WIND ANIMUS ENERGY:

Iansã, the hurricane.

Iansã, the wife of *Xangô*.

Iansã, the air of *Ogum's* forge.

WIND IN BETWEEN ANIMUS AND ANIMA ENERGY:

Iansã, the controller of the ancestor spirits.

WATER ANIMUS ENERGY:

Oxum, the ancestor mother, extremely powerful over both good and evil.

Oxum, the killer of the hunter.

Iansã, the deity of River Niger.

WATER IN BETWEEN ANIMUS AND ANIMA ENERGY:

Obá

Oxum, who makes *Obá* cut off her own ear.

WATER ANIMA ENERGY:

Oxum, deity of fertility and love.

Yemanjá, *Oxum*'s mother.

THE OLDEST ONES:

ANIMUS: *Oxalá Obatalá*.

IN BETWEEN: *Obaluaê*.

ANIMA: *Nanã Buruku*.

4.4. TOWARDS A METHOD FOR THE PERFORMER'S DRAMATURGY

The challenge of such classifications is the definition of criteria. As with all essentially contested concepts, the *energy models* and their *energy patterns* almost defy categorisation. The understanding of such concepts, then, becomes a matter of interpretation of adjectives, such as 'strong' or 'soft'. That is where the mythology, once again, shows its importance, since a deeper clarification of these energy patterns is only possible through the minute study of the actions described by the myths and restored by the dances.

However, the categorisation appears here as a suggestion of how the *Orixas*' energy may be understood in both practical and theoretical contexts. A further study of the myths will bring more complexity to them, and, in the future, new solutions will appear.

The present analysis gives an example of how the dances of the *Orixás* can be approached in practical research that will show unexpected ways of building a performer's presence through the manipulation of energetic or behavioural patterns.

What I have uncovered so far shows that, likewise the myths, the *elegun*'s dancing body choreographically restores not only the individual story of the *Orixá*, but all the links that make the world understandable for human beings. For the training of the actor, I postulate, once the choreographic structures become well known, they lose part of their relevance. The same happens to the strict codes of the dances. Instead, they become references that link the imagination of the actor to the original context. Furthermore, when the imagination is stimulated in motion through continuous research on the poetry (*orikis*), myths and music related to the *Orixás*, new codes will appear. These new codes, which may take the form of both

physical actions and dances, are, in turn, not the *Orixás'* codes, but the actor's, found through the application of the principles of *equivalence* and *consistent inconsistency*. Thus, a multiplicity of scenic possibilities will come to the surface through a training method based on the relations between different patterns of energy in the dancing body of the actor. In this way, the original dances remain in the religious context, which is where they belong. The diversity of *energy patterns* present in the *Orixás'* myths gives actors an immense field for creative exploration.

In the theatrical context, the dances of the *Orixás* may be applied as a research tool that deals with:

- Elements of nature or of human nature and their relations.
- The search for *equivalences* of images extracted from the mythology that are not necessarily related to the choreographies.
- The search for nuances in a given image extracted from the choreography; that means, a dive into one choreographic symbol – a pose, a movement or an action - and its value in different myths.
- Researching the value of different movements or poses through *consistent inconsistency*, or energy in space and energy in time, absorbing or expanding the actions and movements, working with intentions, *sats* and dynamic immobility.

5. CONCLUSION

I will now recall my initial questions:

- 1) How can I further develop a method for actor's dramaturgy from the starting point of the dances of the *Orixás* in the context of *Odin tradition* and theatre anthropology?
- 2) Moreover, what contributions might the dances of the *Orixás* give to theatre anthropology's theoretical discourse?

In the present thesis, I postulate that the notion of energy for the actor's craft is among the most relevant contributions of the dances of the *Orixás* to the *Odin tradition*. However, this contribution has only partially reached the theoretical field of theatre anthropology. Furthermore, in this thesis I pave the road to the development of a method in which myth is suggested as a way to understand the *Orixás'* energy.

The path I have traced in this thesis may be summarised as follows:

In Chapter 1, I conveyed a presentation and discussion of the theoretical background, conceptual apparatus and methodological approach of my work. The essential points are:

Myth is a narrative of sacred history, an account of the sacred origin of reality. Moreover, it explains important phenomena or custom, provides answers to individual concerns and reinforces religious feelings. Myth also operates as a support or precedent for ritual. Although it has an etiological aspect relating to the universe, it is also concerned with the emotional valuation of several aspects of individual life.

Hierophany is any manifestation of the sacred and operates as a self-limiting feature of sacredness, in which the dialectic between the sacred and the profane becomes evident.

Generally, *ritual* is a stereotyped behaviour that is effective in a cultural perspective but not in a rational and technical one. Specifically, it has the following features: formalism, traditionalism, invariance, rule governance, sacral symbolism and performance. *Ritual* can be classified according to the following genres: rites of passage, calendrical rites, rites of exchange and communion, rites of affliction, rites of feasting, fasting and festivals and political rites. *Myth* and *ritual* are parallel aspects of a given rite, where *myth* is durative and transcendental and *ritual* is punctual.

Possession trance or simply *trance* is an altered state of consciousness that leads to the experience of an alternate reality. Furthermore, it dissolves the body-mind border that is usual in daily life. An important type of *spirit* or *deity possession* is the so-called 'executive possession', which entails the replacement or transformation of identity.

According to Jerzy Grotowski, theatre is similar to ritual in nature and function, because it liberates the spiritual energy of a community, incorporates myth and through the myth's truth, generates a process of catharsis in the spectator. Grotowskian theatre has the holy actor as the central driver.

The holy actor is fully engaged in a process of apprenticeship that aims at freedom from daily behaviour. S/he becomes a ritual individual through a process of self-penetration, which leads to a state of idle readiness analogous to trance.

Performance is a concept that deals with certain types of event that share a number of features or aspects, such as play, games, sports, theatre and ritual. For Richard Schechner, the nature of these events may be studied through a series of aspects, such as special ordering of time, special value for objects, non-productivity, self-assertiveness and self-transcendence. The value attributed to each of these aspects in the analysis of different events uncovers some of the problems that characterise *performance* as an *essentially contested concept*. However, the main feature of *performance*, namely *restoration of behaviour*, is of great relevance to understand the interrelations between *myth* and *ritual* in the *Candomblé* practice.

In Chapter 2 I approached the dances of the *Orixás* in the context of the *Odin tradition*. The theoretical and practical material presented in this chapter were further analysed in Chapter 4. The main points presented are:

The *Odin tradition* has a strong focus on the individual actor's training and in the course of the years, Odin actors developed an attitude of autodidacticism. Odin Teatret has its main practical and theoretical fundament in the work of Jerzy Grotowski and his laboratory. The diversity of techniques employed in the training is a characteristic of the *Odin tradition*. Furthermore, the physical and vocal training gave origin to the idea of the *actor-dramaturge*.

Barba's observations of different expressive techniques applied by his actors, along with the collaboration between his theatre and masters of European and Asian theatre, gave origin to research into universal principles in the performing arts under the name of 'theatre anthropology'.

Theatre anthropology focuses its research on codified performance forms that make use of extra-daily technique, that is, non-naturalist techniques of stage behaviour. The level of performance on which the universal principles of extra-daily techniques occur is called 'the pre-expressive level'. Generally, a codified form presents a semiotic structural relation between a movement, a pose or an action and its meaning, has fixed narrative patterns and belongs to a cultural and/or aesthetic tradition.

The principles of theatre anthropology are: *balance in motion, the dance of oppositions, consistent inconsistency or the virtue of omission, equivalence and a decided body*. Some of these principles are in practice a study of physical actions, which may be defined according to these

characteristics: they are born in the spine, having a clear intention, identifiable in the power used to perform it and in its impulse, the *sats*. Furthermore, a physical action changes the former *status quo*.

The basic concepts of energy employed by Barba are *animus*, the strong energy and *anima*, the soft one. *Animus* and *anima* indicate two extreme poles in a great range of energy qualities. Conceptually, they are analogous to the Balinese principles *keras* and *manis* and to the Indian concepts *tandava* and *lasya*.

The International School of Theatre Anthropology, ISTA, was created in order to establish the field and develop research into theatre anthropology. Barba and Brazilian dancer Augusto Omolu, a master in the dances of the *Orixás*, started their collaboration during the preparations for the 8th ISTA session in 1994. Together, they created the performance *Orô de Otelo*, where Omolu, under Barba's guidance, applied the dances to an interpretation of the opera *Othello* by Giuseppe Verdi.

The process undergone by Barba and Omolu was the first step towards the integration of the dances of the *Orixás* into the *Odin tradition*. However, before that, the dances had been adapted for the stage by folkloric groups and modern dance choreographers.

According to Omolu, the most important factor in the practice of the dances as a training method is not the form of the movements, but the particular inner energy of each deity.

In Chapter 3, I offered a presentation of the main structural aspects of *Candomblé* as a system of belief. The most relevant points are as follow:

In this thesis, the *terreiro* is regarded as the sacred space in *Candomblé*.

The believers or children of saint are divided into *elegun*, that is, those who are possessed by the deities, and the non-*elegun*. These are in turn divided into *ogãs* (men) and *ekedis* (women).

The Yoruba mythology is the basis of the worship of the *Orixás* in the *Candomblé Keto*. The oracular systems *Opelê Ifá* and *Buzios* contain the whole Yoruba mythological corpus. These divinatory systems are one important way for humans to communicate with the divinities.

The sacrifices and offerings are a very important propitiatory part of the cult. Sacrifices and offerings may be considered rites in themselves, as they are performed according to strict rules.

The cult has both private and public rites. Private rites in *Candomblé* are often *rites of passage* or *rites of exchange/propitiatory rites*, while public rituals are *feasts* and *rites of maintenance*.

The *Orixás* may be defined as personifications of the forces of nature and /or personifications of relations involving mankind and the cosmos.

In the religious context, the dances of the *Orixás* are fixed choreographies associated with three factors: the mythological source of all *Candomblé* practice; the different rhythms, chanting

and poetry (*orikis*), that also relate to the myths; and the altered state of consciousness of the *elegun*.

In Chapter 4, I analysed the dances of the *Orixás* in relation to both theatre *Odin tradition* and theatre anthropology, using the theory presented in Chapter 1. Besides I made a first attempt at a conceptualisation of the energies of the *Orixás*, suggesting the development of a method for the actor's dramaturgy based on the study of myth, music and poetry. The most relevant moments are:

The dances of the *Orixás* need a further and deeper approach in the theoretical context of theatre anthropology. Furthermore, the relation between the form and the energy of the dances in the context of the *Odin tradition* is problematic.

However, the principles of *consistent inconsistency* and *equivalence* are the most relevant for the study of the energies of the *Orixás*.

The study of the dances at the intersection between the two presented contexts requires a common theoretical ground, which is provided by ritual and performance theory. Based on ritual and performance theory, the dances of the *Orixás* may be regarded as *myth-ritual unities*.

The research of the dances through the study of the myths opens the perspective to a conceptualisation of the energy of the *Orixás*. This body-mind energy was here divided into four *models*: warrior, wind, water and the oldest deities. Each *energy model* operates within a range of *energy patterns*; that is, the different *Orixás*, classified according to myths, qualities, actions and moves, between the two temperatures of energy coined by Eugenio Barba: *animus* and *anima*.

The further organisation of the practical research around these *energy models* and *patterns* will eventually lead to the full development of a method for the actor's dramaturgy. This method will be fundamented in the detachment of myth from the choreographic form, in order to allow performers to create new mythical codes in their bodies.

I believe that the expansion of the energy concepts *animus* and *anima* is the main contribution the dances of the *Orixás* give to theatre anthropology.

5.2. SOME THREADS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

5.2.1. Possible contributions to ritual theory

The *Candomblé* cult is a constructed system of belief, born from the need of African slaves from different places to maintain their religious practice in a new country, under new conditions. That is why the *Candomblé* pantheon is different from the cults studied by the theoreticians of ritual: it is no longer tribal, as it has been moved from its original setting. Nevertheless, the *Candomblé*

rituals also embrace traditions that go back to the customs of different tribal societies. As a consequence of the reunion of the different Yoruba cults into one system of belief, I see in the *Candomblé* religion's manifold character the elements that favour a deeper theoretical study of myth, ritual and religious practices.

5.2.2. How the dances are taught and learned in the religious context: contributions to theories on trance and spirit possession and their relation to performance

In my personal communication with several believers I met, one question always remained unanswered: how do the *elegun* learn the dances? To me, this process has always appeared to be quite informal, happening mostly through observation and imitation. Nobody really wanted to give me a concrete answer, and I gave up asking after a while. However, I found some clues to follow in my attempt to understand this process.

Bastide considers that the fact that in many cases the novices have attended the *terreiros* their whole life before initiation explains the process of learning how to sing and dance.¹ Gisele Cossard suggests a somehow formal process in which the prospective *elegun* is taught the songs and dances in the *terreiro* during a period prior to the initiation.²

I believe that both Bastide and Cossard may be right. However, I still wonder whether or not the apprentices are allowed to practise in a state of trance. According to the rules of the cult, the answer should be no, since the trance is a state that only the initiated can attain. Thus my line of thought was: the initiated believers are supposed to have learned the dances, this means, no apprentices can be in trance. Nonetheless, during the pause in the last ritual I attended at *Casa Branca*, I saw something really intriguing: a youth, possessed by *Obaluaê*, yet wearing ordinary clothes, was dancing under the instructions of one of the house's *ekedis*. The communication was non-verbal as the *ekedi* was slowly showing the apprentice the steps and gestures of *Obaluaê*'s dance.

Several questions were raised by that sight, first in relation to the nature of the trance, then concerning the learning process. Although many of these inquiries belong to a research path that I will continue to trace at a later opportunity, I will here make some considerations:

- There is indeed a degree of formalisation in the apprenticeship of the dances.
- The body apparently keeps memories of events that happened during the trance.
- Learning the dances may involve the preparation of a devotee's body/mind to communion with the deity, which happens during the possession.

¹ Bastide, 50.

² Cossard, 136.

5.2.3. Further practical-theoretical development of the method of the energy *models*

A number of threads remain to be pulled in further practical research on the *energy models*: can *energetic models* and *patterns* be applied to several theatre forms, from text based to dance theatre? Can individual codes be created, based on other mythological sources? Are there any political implications of a practice based on an Afro-Brazilian religious tradition in Northern Europe? In addition to questions of philosophical-aesthetical character, there could also be more *energetic models* to study than those analysed in Chapter 4, as for instance earth energy.

These questions are only a few spontaneous reactions to the practical approach suggested here. However, the only way to approach these questions beyond the initial path indicated here is to transform these ideas in a performance investigation on the pre-expressive level.

Academically, regardless of the where this thesis will take me, these three keys to the exploration of the reflections generated here show that this material offers great possibilities to long term research. I consider the present work to be the point of departure of a fruitful journey.

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