Rhythmic Remembrances

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Rhythmic Remembrances

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RÍT莫斯, RITUALES Y RECuerDOS DE LA SABIDURÍA
Antes de bailar, cantar o tocar, hay ritmos, rituales, y recuerdos. Antes de bailar, cantar o tocar los tambores, tenemos que saludar a Elegba, Elegbara, el niño de negro y rojo y de la diversión y abiertas. Es el que nos da permiso a cruzar la puerta y comunicar bailando. Es el al principio que nos ofrece la sabiduría del baile.

[Before dancing, singing, or drumming, there are rhythms, rituals, and memories. Before dancing, singing, or playing the drums, we must greet Elegba, Elegbara, the playful child of black and red. It is he who gives us permission to cross the doorsill and communicate spiritually as we dance. It is he who first offers us dancing wisdom.]

In the dancing and music-making communities that I study, I see power, endurance, joy, and rapture; I see this in the visual display of worshiping, performing, believing dancers and musicians. When I witness the most common scenes of ritual performance in Haiti, Cuba, or Brazil, I am reminded of a stage full of Chicano couple dancers in California’s Cinco de Mayo celebrations, large groups
of young Irish girls performing to bagpipes on St. Patrick’s Day in Massachusetts, and hundreds of Pacific Islanders performing traditional hula in San Francisco at the Ethnic Dance Festival. These are all, like my study groups, large ensembles enacting unison dance movement, and it is awesome as well as curious.

When unison movement is augmented exponentially in hundreds of performers, as it is in these secular, civil celebrations, the viewer is privy to a greater sense of what many dancing and believing ritual performers experience as they express themselves bodily in religious celebrations. Where there is ensemble movement based on a unison dance vocabulary, there is doubled and tripled power, vivid and often chilling dance/music expression. The ritual communities I have lived among have been performing as a unified ensemble with the same movements to the same rhythms for centuries. This essay focuses on those rhythms and deciphers rhythmic significance over time in the African diaspora.

My field research has unfolded what I call “embodied knowledge,” many sorts of knowledge within performance, such as botany, philosophy, physiology, psychology, history, mathematics, ethics, gastronomy, music, dance, and so on. While my companions within ritual communities do not name this knowledge as I do, I cannot avoid the standard disciplines that this knowledge references in nonritual institutions and societies. Since I am sharing what I have learned about different values and behaviors with members from my own society, I use the meaningful terminologies and relevant analogies of my society in an effort to explain understandings from other societies. In this essay, I concentrate on rhythm in danced, sung, and drummed knowledge in the religions of Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba, and Brazilian Candomblé.

OVERVIEW OF AFRICAN-DESCENDED RELIGIONS

In ritual contexts of Haiti, Cuba, and Brazil, strong belief systems initiate regular, routine ceremonial performances. The ceremonies that have developed concentrate heavily on either the human body or the suprahuman body—that is, a human body that has been transformed by a spiritual incorporation. The communities meet according to a ritual calendar and form a mass of dancing bodies in periodic ceremonies. The dancing bodies accumulate intensity, energy, and spirit; they display power and enact, as well as disseminate, knowledge. Worshiping performers reenact what they have learned, what they have been told, what they feel, and what they imagine. They re-present spiritual understandings that are held within religious families, temples, or “houses.”

Haitian famis, Cuban familias de santo, and Brazilian terreiros da santo are...
extended ritual families that are re-created in the image of a consanguine and religious ideal. In the countryside as well as in urban areas of these three sites, a head of household or a formally elected member of the ritual community serves as ritual leader, healer, and diviner for his/her blood relatives, many adopted members, and a few honorific members. It is within the ritual family, small or large, that proper performance instruction takes place.

The historical circumstances of enslaved African descendants have created a deep reliance on the abstract expressiveness of the dancing body and on non-verbal, communicative procedures. Meaning registers within visceral responses to kinesthetic and musical affect. As worshipers perform, they sense and learn. As they continue to perform over time, embodied knowledge is deciphered and consulted. For example, community members are first exposed to specific elements and processes that give general ritual knowledge. They are taught chants in archaic ritual language; they are introduced to unaccompanied drumming, as well as drumming with an array of dance sequences. They are encouraged to have a formal familiarity with flowers, plants, and herbs (including their specific placement in- and outdoors, their uses for bathing, and their recipes for drinking). They are taught distinct body manipulations (codified handshakes, turning salutations, bows, and other gestures on the floor). Also, members sustain short and long periods of isolation and quiet.

When the silence is broken, they are often asked about the bodily sensations they have experienced. Inevitably, community members are directed indirectly to survey what the body is communicating and to give voice to its mute delivery. The introduction of specific ritual elements, the inquiry, the focus on quiet, and the assessment of bodily discoveries all result in an ongoing method of observation, referencing, and periodic consulting. There is a dynamic, practical, current-referencing of the body that can mean many things over a lifetime of performance and reflection.

The general objectives of dance/music ritual are to achieve balance between the spiritual and human worlds, to praise the supreme Divinity and celebrate divinities, to gain individual strength and dignity, and ultimately to maintain and secure the social solidarity of the ritual community. The methods used to accomplish these objectives are instrumental and vocal music-making, dancing, praying, and spiritual transformation. One of the by-products of these efforts is awareness of stored knowledge within the dancing and music-making body. Over time, the musicians and dancers, those whom I call the “experiential librarians” of ritual practice, become consciously aware of the vast knowledge that exists within African diaspora religious performance.
EMBODIED RHYTHMIC KNOWLEDGES

Experiential librarians store understandings and perspectives inside their bodies. They contemplate on and digest the knowledge that is found in observation, practice, and communal rituals. They sing, drum, and dance the codified and sequenced rhythms of the ancestors and provide opportunities for others to experience and learn.

Chants, Songs, and Singing

Through regular performances over time, whole and abbreviated texts of ritual prose and poetry have been repeated and passed on in prayers, but mainly in chants and songs of African nations. Many versions of these were conserved by the continuous input of arriving Africans in the transatlantic slave trade from the sixteenth to the late nineteenth centuries.

The Spanish and Portuguese initiated Africanness in the Americas, but they were not alone. The Spanish brought ladinos, or Afro-Spanish descendants, from the European immersion in African culture for over five hundred years, that is, through “Moorish” descendants in Spain and by means of their early exploration of both island and mainland territories of the Americas. Portugal intervened in continental African slavery and spread it north to Portugal and Madeira and eventually west across the Atlantic Ocean. Portuguese forts at Sao Tomé and “Angola” (now Gabon to Zambia) held supplies of Africans coming from Upper Guinea (now Senegal to Sierra Leone) from 1441 to 1700. Africans from Lower Guinea (now Sierra Leone to Cameroon) and “Angola” were the main sources for human trade from 1700 to 1888. However, the Danes, the French, the English, and the Dutch were also heavily involved in the Atlantic slave trade. As a result of the continuous flow of African cultures, customs, and values across the Americas for four centuries and despite the horrific interruption to hundreds of African cultures, worshiping practitioners were able to retain many African chants and songs in the Americas. They did not always understand the lyrics in African languages, since the enslaved were often forced to take on the languages of the colonizers. Still, hundreds of songs and chants in African languages and some in European languages are sung as central elements in all three religious sites. The accumulated plant knowledge of the African-descended community can be found within the lyrics of this vocal literature; that is, ritual chants and songs reveal an embodied botany.

Plant knowledge spread from African herbalists to the larger African-de-
scended community as medicinal knowledge; however, plant knowledge spread not only through ritual specialists but also through community singing of rhythmic texts and repeated religious stories. African descendants retained specific words, word concepts, and religious poetry that referenced plants. They adapted practices that were associated with the words and understandings, although in new contextual orders and perhaps occasionally with new meanings.

Embedded in the archaic and evolving African languages of ritual chants—and, importantly, also in ongoing social instruction—were references to the attributes of plants and their relationship to behaviors, characteristics, and preferences of cosmic divinities. Rhythmic singing of religious chants connected divine understandings and plant life. Sung rhythmic references kept religious history alive and simultaneously reinforced belief in cosmic divinities, their attributes, leaves, and herbs. In effect, the chants maintained knowledge for well-being and health by referencing botanical information that could be used for medicinal purposes. While ritual chants functioned musically to initiate the forward progress of a ceremony, they also functioned educationally to connect specific plant names and medicinal properties to specific African divinities.

In the research findings of Michel Laguerre and Harold Courlander for Haiti, Pierre Verger and Robert Voeks for Brazil, and Lydia Cabrera and Morton Marks for Cuba, we find lush examples of codified plant knowledge. Regarding Cabrera’s vast contributions, ethnomusicologist Morton Marks says,

A complete botanical entry in Lydia Cabrera’s *El Monte* thus consists of a Spanish common name, a scientific classification, the plant’s Yoruba and Kongo names, and an *orisha* “owner.”

Afro-Cuban herbalists knew the *orisha* owners, ritual applications, and curative powers of hundreds of trees, roots, barks, grasses, herbs, vines and flowers. In their exploration and classification of the Cuban forests and savannas, they were undoubtedly guided by the cognitive categories anthropomorphized as the “*orishas*.”

Also through the translations of Yoruba chants to English by John Mason, we know that the chant liturgy is filled with *oricha* details including associated leaves and herbs and favored plants. In fact, the sung chant texts in each of the three sites made botanical information declarative; rhythmic singing of chants and songs made the texts forceful enough to be remembered and effective enough to assist healing and curing practices. The rhythmic remembrances within sung rituals of Haiti, Cuba,
and Brazil have helped to maintain botanical references as embodied botany within their sacred mission.

**Drumming**

Dance analysis and cultural interpretation of ritual performance indicate that ritual music is predicated on a body of mathematical knowledge that was linked to it ages ago. In order to maintain the rhythmic relationships that structure and ignite spiritual transformations in ritual performance, important intervallic relationships and sequences are linked in the vital rhythmic content of liturgical music. I call this linkage “buried mathematics,” the recessed or hidden mathematics of African-descended drumming traditions. I am referring to a fundamental rhythmic relationship between the tones or intervals that are heard in liturgical drumming. This relationship comprises the sequences of rhythms that render shape, form, and content to the religious drum traditions of Haiti, Cuba, and Brazil.

Musical relationships can be reduced to numerical expressions in the analysis of drum traditions. When pitches or tones of a drum are sounded, they are understood primarily in terms of musical relationships; however, they can also be expressed as intervallic, numerical, or ratio relationships. When the *batá* are readied for playing, for example, ideally their larger heads, or *enus*, and the smaller heads, or *chachas*, do not have the same pitches. All three drums (Iya, Okonkolo, and Itotole) are tuned by the shape of the drum itself, the stretch, tension, or predetermined inner dimensions of the skins, in relation to one another. If the *enu* of the *itótole* is the same pitch as the *chacha* of the *okónkolo*, drummers perceive the tone as “low” and tend to tighten the head of one or the other, so that there is a distinction (a “personalized sweetness”) that characterizes each pitch. In mathematical terms, the drums have an intervallic relationship, that is, a second (2nd), a third (3rd), a sixth (6th), and so on, between each head.

While the drums are not tuned to relative or exact or tempered intervals, as a guitar or a piano is tuned, they are most often heard as 2nds, 3rds, and 6ths in relation to one another or to the primary *iyá*, or mother drum. The drummers I have interviewed have all agreed that even though Cuban ethnologist Fernando Ortiz and the *batá* masters of the 1950s explained the tuning of the drums in *solfeggio* terms, or in “Western” music-oriented terms, they did so for better understanding within a lay public. Most drummers say this is not the way of tuning in common practice today. Rather, they look for the “ring,” for overtones of each drum head, and, most important, for a separation of pitches...
or tones among all heads, that is, for six heads to have six different tones or usually four to six pitches (some may be doubled at the octave). When they strike or manipulate the drums with their fingers instead of their hands (called a “muff”), the drum pitch moves up a half step; so the three-drum orchestra could potentially have twelve pitches as its basic tonal repertoire.

The mathematics of the drums (or of the twelve pitches) is ultimately the rhythms themselves. Even within one rhythm, like that of the güiros or chékeres (gourds) that play a single rhythm repeatedly for hours in a ceremony, the sounded variation of syncopated patterns is a nonrandom series of fractions. At some point in the history of the rhythms, the language of sacred orichas, liturgy emerged in the form of a specific regulated pattern for each drum. Through the marriage of the three rhythmic patterns within a drum orchestra, a consequent rhythmic core was created. Thereafter, the sequence of several successive core or fundamental rhythms, or a sequence of trataos, was established and retained.¹⁷

Music and rhythmic organization are a synthesis of sounded time, patterned fractions in mathematical, as well as tonal, relationships. A drum liturgy or a specific religious drum tradition is an order or a long series of specific rhythms, or trataos. Buried in the resultant music that is heard are not only musical but also numerical intervals, patterned fractions that make up the combined rhythms. Rhythmically timed relationships are fundamental to African descended drum liturgies, and they affect human response behavior in specific predetermined (spiritual) ways.

Each tratao has the potential tonal and rhythmic substance to initiate spirit, to move the dancing, believing, or prepared body. Much of ritual drumming assumes, but also attempts to initiate, a progression of emotive as well as rhythmic patterns. Ritual singing is in synchrony with specific rhythms that are effected into sound, repeated, and intensified (sometimes exactly in synchrony and sometimes “floating above” the resultant rhythms). As ritual singing intensifies rhythmically and tonally, as the drumming is augmented in terms of speed and intensity as well, and as rhythmic dancing is repeatedly performed in unison, the human body is sensitized, affected, pulled into communion with a community of knowing bodies and with altered consciousness.

When there is an indication that a dancer’s movements have intensified such that the body is “open” within the style of the dance, is “ready” for or “on the edge” of manifesting divine spirit, ritual drummers support the worshiping dancer’s energy. Sometimes they simply play steadily, and that firmness gives rise to the shift between the material and spiritual worlds, the divine moment of transition or “crossover.” At other times, drummers give insistent slaps,
kassées or “breaks,” to push for change or transformation. Still at other times, drummers make “differences”: they play a completely different rhythm; or they play faster, louder, more forcefully; or they use “muffs” and insert rhythmic and tonal changes—all to generate the proximity of the spirit world, all to effect an opening of the delicate but necessary gateway into the spirit world.

When the dancing body is readied—that is, when the dancing body has penetrated the sacred gateway—the central core of the trunk is either extended with the extremities spread apart or contracted and vibrating rapidly and erratically. Often the worshiping priest/medium/performer hops on one foot, then arches the back and exposes the entire body. Within the characteristic dance patterns for each divinity, there is a climax or augmented motion; a full-bodied display results, sometimes in sustained energy, as in a slow and complete body undulation (e.g., in the feint of yenvalu), and sometimes percussively, as in the preparation for a rapid strike or at an implosion of energy (e.g., in the broad steps of Changó or the swift and erratic shifts of Yansan).

Musicians in Fon, Yoruba, and other African ethnic groups of the past came to understand that specific codified intervals, sounded as drummed rhythms in a series, were able to produce physical, emotional, and spiritual transformations inside the believing and prepared body. Later, musicians in Haitian, Cuban, and Brazilian ritual communities replicated the rhythmic remembrances, the rhythmic series for affect in the bodies of dancing worshipers. The repeated “sequencing” of specific rhythmic patterns that are made up of sounded codified intervals and series of fractions corresponded to emotional changes in the dancing body, that is, other states of consciousness in the worshipping body. Over time, musicians savored the formulas of musical mathematics as traditional rhythms for each divinity of each African nation. They exclusively rendered the rhythmic drum sequences on ritual occasions. Without verbal articulation of the numerical expressions, intervals, or mathematics that underlies each rhythmic pattern and comprises each drum tradition, musicians have played a “buried” or “recessed” mathematics for centuries.

Today, master drum musicians understand this type of mathematical knowledge as musical knowledge, but they express it as “love of the ancestors” in rhythmic remembrances. They share with their apprentices the sequenced sacred rhythms that constitute what the analyses here refer to as “hidden mathematics.” The ritual community is grateful for the layering of properly timed musical relationships because proper musical mathematics helps to accomplish ritual objectives, that is, spiritual transformations and balance between the human and spiritual worlds. In predetermined rhythmic, tonal, and intervallic re-
relationships (or “variable,” “shifting,” and “acceptable” musical relationships), ritual musicians display the “buried mathematics” of the dance/music liturgy. In order to facilitate human dancing and suprahuman transformation, they rely on rhythmic remembrances.\(^{19}\)

**Dancing**

Within the religions of Vodou, Cuban Yoruba, and Candomblé, the human body is mapped by the divinities themselves, and the specialized tissue of a given part of the body, with its associated internal organs, is understood in terms of its anatomical, associated physiological, and emotional functions. Consequently, anatomy, physiology, and psychology are linked within the danced rhythms of African-descended religious rituals. For example, in Haitian Vodou, a particular part of the body is associated with each of the Haitian divinities, or *lwas*. Dancer, researcher, and one of my teachers, Madame Lavinia Williams Yarborough stated that in teaching Vodou dances,

The feet are dedicated to the god of war, Ogoun Feraille; the hips to the Congo’s spirits of beauty and love; the chest to the brave warriors, the Ogouns [and Ibo spirits, 1970: personal communication]; the spine to the snake god, the water god and the rainbow goddess, Papa Damballah, Maitre Agwe, and Maitress Ayida Wedo respectively. The hands are dedicated to the spider spirit, Ghede Zarien.\(^{20}\)

From Yarborough’s description and from discussions with other dancing worshipers and ritual specialists, I constructed the accompanying chart for my three ritual sites.\(^{21}\) Most of the African nations that were on the island of Haiti at the outset of the Revolution in 1791 are displayed in terms of *lwas* on specific parts of the human body. In the Cuban context, the mapping of the body with Yoruba *orichas* is slightly different from Brazilian Candomblé *orixás*, even though these two are both Yoruba belief systems in the Americas. This difference helps to remember and emphasize that there is tremendous variation within the African practices of the Americas.

My dance consultants have cautioned me to make clear that the dances for the *lwas*, *orichas*, or *orixás* utilize the dancing body as a whole and that performers are concentrated fully within their entire bodies as they perform in routine ceremonies for and with the ritual community. Within the dances for each divinity, however, the divinity-associated body parts are usually empha-
sized. For example, in the *yenvalu* dance of Haiti, the constant whole body undulation (in the torso, in the rippling of the back and the lift and fall of the chest) emphasizes the stories and importance of the snake, called “Papa Dambala.” In Haiti, the snake is coded with notions of ongoing life. Two snakes together, Dambala and his wife, Aïda Wèydo, make an alliance and, in an arch, cover and protect the Vodou world. Their typical undulating movements reference continuity of life, copulation, birth, and rebirth. Continuous life is thereby codified in the *yenvalu* dance through the visual undulation of the torso and back, and *yenvalu* coincides with the specific Haitian *lwas* that are mapped on the spine.

Yoruba dances also articulate the associated body parts of each divinity, mainly in hand and arm gestures and/or foot patterns, despite the entire dancing body’s involvement. In Cuba, Ochun is sparkling, bubbling, silky-strong water. She splashes over the whole body and, in her womankind essence, spreads water or honey over the entire body with her arms and hands. Her body stroking links her to all the blood vessels throughout the body, but she emphasizes her lower abdomen and the genital area to invoke her power in fertility and reproduction or childbearing. In Brazil, Yansan’s hands and arms—waving in the air, beating the air as if in a storm—characterize the *orixá* as air, breath, the wind. Yansan’s dance uses alternating rib and hip shifts over a fast-paced foot pattern, activating the body areas with which she is identified. Accompanying chants, stories, and life histories of the divinities also reveal their associated body parts. Similar anatomical associations lead to physiological understandings when coupled with associated medicinal plants, all of which combine within spiritual knowledge.

African-descended dance/music rituals are carefully constructed sets of rhythmic and sensory stimulation that result in specific emotional and associated physical behaviors. While the ritual practices unfold religious liturgies and sacred orders of chants, drumming, and dancing, the rituals also compound and layer physiological principles of the body, which result in ecstatic psychological experiences, both conscious and unconscious. Concentration on specific parts of the body implies knowledge about what occurs inside the human body within repetitious, codified and mostly unison dance behavior. Rhythmic dance sequences are structured events that have been calculated over time to reach the full range of any one body’s physiological and psychological capacities. With multiple bodies in strong, unison and repeated movement, however, the rhythms stimulate affect tremendously. What results from the
rhythmic remembrances of dance performance is suprahuman performance that displays embodied physiology and psychology.

CONCLUSION

For over five hundred years of enslavement, colonization, and postcolonial dominion of the Americas, there have been periods when the drums were outlawed and ritual paraphernalia were destroyed. Prejudice and repression against African-descended religious practices have been rampant; however, the ritual systems, the dancing religions, have continued in Haiti, Cuba, and Brazil. The dancing and music-making body has held forth, repeatedly enunciating Fon, Yoruba, Kongo-Angola, and other African understandings and displaying embodied rhythmic responses. African descendants in the Americas have consistently joined together in ritual practice to articulate the resultant rhythms and the ensemble unison dancing of their heritages; that is, worshiping musicians and dancers did remember. Unison dance expression of codified rhythmic patterns have constituted not only their religious faith but also their faith in the power of the dancing and music-making body, called aché in Cuba, axe in Brazil, and espri in Haiti.

In rhythmic rituals, the dancing/music-making worshiper was able to reinforce memory and enable, as well as retain, the embodiment of all sorts of knowledge—over centuries and across geographies. Embodied philosophy continues to frame the values and behavior of worshipers and reveals an understanding of a suprahuman and interactive world within ritual performance. Embodied botany continues to emerge from within sacred chant texts that have survived in the vocal repertoire and healed the bodies of worshiping African descendants. Embodied physiology continues to surface within the particular parts of the human body that are associated with spiritual divinities and also from within the totality of dance/music performance. Embodied psychology continues to unfold in efficacious transformations, supported and/or initiated by codified, rhythmic drum and dance sequences. Embodied mathematical knowledge ultimately directs drum orchestrations, excites choral singing, and instigates powerful unison ensemble dance movement, in order that worshipers experience and store knowledge bodily.

The accumulation of knowledge in ritual practice and the transposition and application of that knowledge to social life yield the wisdom within the dancing religions or embodied knowledgeS. Rhythmic rituals have guarded
those knowledgeS, and those of us who dance and make music store them as rhythmic remembrances, only to share the resulting wisdom repeatedly in ritual performances. There have always been rhythms, for centuries—rhythms inside the drums and within the dancing body—and rituals continue the rhythms. There are also memories, images that surface from within the rhythms inside the rituals. The memories echo infinitely across time and geography. They send bodily messages, rhythmic remembrances. Dance rhythms, rituals, and remembrances leave us transformed, centered, balanced, fresh, and full. We in the ritual community dance the ancient body knowledgeS, the wisdom of aché, axe, and espri.

Al final de bailar, cantar o tocar, tenemos que reasumir a Elegba
Para llamar a sus dimensiones de Ena y Echu, las cerradas.
La dualidad inmensa de esta fuerza vital nos deja organizados,
en orden, completos y satisfechos a final del túnel espiritual.
Nos dejan rezando.
Nos dejan transformados.
La sabiduría siempre nos deja bailando.

[When we finish dancing, singing, and drumming,
we must return to Elegba in his closing forms of Ena and Echu.
The immense duality of his vital force leaves us clear, centered,
completely satisfied at the end of a spiritual path.
The two sides of Ena leave us praying, transformed.
Wisdom always leaves us dancing.]

Notes
This essay is taken in large measure from my book Dancing Wisdom, which was condensed for a keynote address at the Atlantic Initiative Conference, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, March 17, 2005. What follows is a more concentrated inquiry on rhythm. It is dedicated respectfully to the following musicians who have assisted my classrooms, my research, and my ritual life: drummers Gerald (Mamadi) Victory, Rick Blanton, the late Wilfredo (Fredi) Moreno, Victor (Papo) Sterling, Abi Holiday, Nelson Lebron, Michael Wingfield, Hiram Rivera, Nestor Citron, Butch Haynes, Tobagi Stewart, Ralph Eaglefeather, Sheila Escovedo, Pete Escovedo, Juan Escovedo, Dobru, Jessie, Edner, Fanfan, and Richard Doest, as well as pianist Julius Robinson—my fantastic friends and musical support.

1. There is always a measure of variation within “unison”; it is the intent of unison movement that differentiates it from genuine variation. Here, the term unison movement
presumes the variation that always exists among performances of the same dance mate-
rial, either in repeated performance of any one individual or among the performances of several or many performers intending to execute the same dance motions, activities, or behaviors.

2. The communities I draw my examples from can be seen in my videos: Public Vo-
dun Ceremonies of Haiti and in the Palo section of Cuban Dance Examples. These show ensemble ritual dancing, which can be compared with solo performances in Cuban Dance Examples.


4. Ibid., 148–62; Bolivar, Los orichas de Cuba; Desmangles, Faces of the Gods; Brando,
Santería from Africa to the New World; Harding, Refuge in Thunder. The authors of religious texts that are referenced within the present essay owe tremendous debt to the courageous undertakings of earlier investigators of African religious practices in the Americas: see, for example, Herskovits, Life in a Haitian Valley; Hurston, Tell My Horse; Courlander, Haiti Singing; Landes, City of Women; Bascom, “Focus of Cuban Santería,” Ifa Divination, Shango in the New World, and Sixteen Cowries; Deren, Divine Horsemen;
Cabrera, El monte, La sociedad secreta abakua, Yemaya y Ochun, and Reglas de congo; Verger, Notes sur le culte des Orisa; Métraux, Voodoo in Haiti; Jahn, Muntu; Bastide, African Religions of Brazil; Dunham, Island Possessed.

5. Excellent examples of the psychological and physiological connection of dance affect can be viewed within the following ‹lms and tapes: Deren, Divine Horsemen (1967); Kramer, To Serve the Gods; Brewer, Bahia; Gonzalez Martin and Gallardo, Ache Moyuba Orisha; Quinones and Soto, Nganga Kiyangala; Vega, When the Spirits Dance Mambo.


7. Sweet, Recreating Africa, 13–86.

8. Ibid., 30. The trafficking in Africans ended slowly over a century in the sites of study—officially in 1804 (1791) for Haiti, in 1886 for Cuba, and in 1888 for Brazil.

9. See, respectively, Willocks, Umbilical Cord, 47–98; Saiton et al., Histoire et Civili-
sation; Williams, From Columbus to Castro, 136–55; Hartog, Curaçao, 159–90.

10. For example, many songs and chants in both Cuban Palo and Brazilian Angola rituals are in Spanish or Portuguese, due in part to the early introduction and continu-
ous assimilation of “Angola” or Kongo-Angola peoples to the languages of the colonizers from the sixteenth century forward. By the nineteenth century, the linguistic reper-
toires of these African-derived groups were diminished, and the languages of the dominant masters were often substituted in songs and chants—sometimes with just a few words or phrases, but at other times, they were fully transposed.

11. See, for example, Mason, Orin Orisa; Laguerre, Voodoo Heritage; Courlander, Haiti Singing and Drum and the Hoe.

12. Laguerre, Voodoo Heritage; Courlander, Haiti Singing and Drum and the Hoe; Verger, Éwé; Voeks, Sacred Leaves of Candomblé; Cabrera, El monte; Marks, “Exploring El monte.”


16. I am especially grateful for discussions I had during February, March, and April of 2008 with three knowledgeable batá drummers in the San Francisco/Oakland Bay area: Dr. Umi Vaughan, Rick Ananda, and Sandi Perez. What I posit here is heavily impacted by their views; however, whatever faults may be found in my argument are entirely mine. My consultants shared with me immeasurable insights to the path of those dedicated to the drums; some of their more descriptive words appear in quotes. I thank them here publicly.

17. Among Cuban professional dance specialists, the rhythm of the güíros or chekeres is most often called iyesa, and so is the dance step that accompanies that rhythm. These terms are not to be confused with the Iyesa drums, which are single-headed, more conical than barrel or hour-glass shaped, and used mainly in separate celebrations for Ochun. The Iyesa drums have a different set of rhythms than those used by güíros or chekeres.

18. The terms used in examples here refer to specific dance practices, dance names, and the divinities who are associated with each dance.

19. See also Fleurant, Dancing Spirits; Amira and Cornelius, Music of Santería; Klein, Yorùbá Bátá Goes Global; Summers et al., Bata Rhythms from Matanzas.


21. The chart is a skeletal account of what was generally accepted between 1990 and 2002. I am grateful to Haitian dance masters Jean Léon Destiné and Louinés Louinis; Brazilian dance specialists Pai Carlinhos, Augusto Soledade, and Isaura Oliveira; and Cuban dance specialists Ana Perez and Lourdes Tamayo. See also the computer drawings by Leah Smith of the human body and the spiritual divinities of Haiti, Cuba, and Brazil in Daniel, Dancing Wisdom, 62–63, 75–76.

22. Walker, Ceremonial Spirit Possession; Bourguignon, Trance Dance; Deren, Divine Horsemen.

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