

Universidade de São Paulo,
São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil.

JOHN C. DAWSEY

rites of passage: dionysus and the chorus of satyrs¹

ABSTRACT

At the origins of Greek tragedy, in the chorus of satyrs of Dionysian theater, Greeks stared into horror. This observation by Nietzsche is the starting point for a discussion of rites of passage and, particularly, of liminal experience. Contributions from contemporary performance and theater highlight aspects of this experience. So also, the studies of Julia Kristeva deserve attention. A hypothesis inspired by the writings of Walter Benjamin emerges at the end: vital elements of rites of passage and Dionysian theater have to do with what may be called “margins of margins”. In focus, the double removal of masks (everyday and extraordinary), the subterranean regions of symbols, and the experience of f(r)iction (with the *r* between parentheses) in relations between masks and bodies. Paraphrasing Pascal, the body has its reasons of which culture knows not. At margins of margins a double optic is formed: the astounding (or extraordinary) everyday, no surprise in the astounding.

keywords
rites of passage,
margins of
margins, f(r)iction,
astounding or
extraordinary
everyday
experience,
corpoiesis

1. This article results from research developed as part of the Project “Mother images: drama and montage” (*Imagens de mães: drama e montage*), Processo CNPq 308691/2012-1.

I. DIONYSUS AND THE CHORUS OF SATYRS: STARING INTO HORROR

I would like to invite listeners on a trip: a discussion about rites of passage.² Our guide: one of the gods of Ancient Greece, the god of wine Dionysus. In the beginnings of Greek tragedy, and of the theater of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, one comes upon the cult of Dionysus. At the origins of this cult, the songs and dances of a chorus wearing goat masks: a chorus of satyrs. Tragedy arose from this chorus (Nietzsche 1998, 52; Berthold 2003, 104).

Hence, the etymology of the word “tragedy”: *tragos* (“goat”) and *ode* (“song”). “Tragedy” means “goat song”. The satyrs of Dionysian celebrations of Ancient Greece have the legs, hoofs and horns of goats, and, sometimes, the ears and tails of horses. A reminder to our listeners: we will need those ears.

As artists and scholars of Western traditions, we frequently look to Greece of this period as a fleeting eruption of some of the most beautiful human expressions. The Greeks, in turn, looked at their world and sang goat songs from the place occupied by the chorus of satyrs – as expressions of the inhuman.

What did they see? They stared into horror, says Friedrich Nietzsche (1998, 63).

In Aeschylus’ plays, the horrors of war (Romilly 1998, 62). In *Seven against Thebes* the chorus sings:

Argives surround the city of Cadmus,
terror spills over with cries of war.
Bridles on horse jaws
chants and songs of death. (Ésquilo 2011, 41)

The leader of the chorus exclaims:

Son of Oedipus, I am horrified
by the rattle of cars.
The neighs of horses puncture my ears. (...)
The ground of the whole city shakes and trembles. We are

2. This essay was presented as the inaugural conference at the meeting “Archaic Encounters: shades and laughter of Dionysus”, organized by Alexandre Nunes, Luciana Lyra, Robson Haderchpek and Veronica Fabrini, which took place at the Department of Arts of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte, Natal, Brazil, during the period of September 10-14, 2014.

surrounded. (...)
What horror! The clatter at the gates is unbearable.
I am scared to death. Fear pulls out my tongue.
(Ésquilo 2011, 46, 48-50)

The chorus responds:

Flames of terror rise up (...)
Widows, women old and young,
dragged like mares
by manes, the cloaks
in shreds, ransacked
the city in tears.
(Ésquilo 2011, 52-53)

In *The Persians*, the horrors of battle and carnage:

Ships are destroyed; the ocean disappears entirely beneath a mass of wreckage and bloody cadavers; shores and rocks are covered with dead bodies, and chaos breaks loose in desperate flight of wrecked barbarian vessels; while Greeks, acting like tunas freed from nets, beat, massacre, with broken oars, fragments of wreckage! A wailing sound mixed with sobs covers the immensity of the ocean. (Romilly 1998, 62; cf. Ésquilo 2013, 46)

In Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, a horrified king pierces his own eyes when he discovers himself to be the author of incest and parricide (Romilly 1998, 71; Sófocles 1998, 62). In Euripedes' *Medea*, a monstrous mother slaughters her own children (Eurípedes 1988, 56; Romilly 1998, 105). In *The bacchae* mother and sisters slash into pieces their son and brother (Eurípedes 1988, 92).

When looking straight into the sun, says Nietzsche (1998, 63), we see dark spots which emerge from the unbearable flash of light. In the case of Greek tragedy, he comments, the luminous figures of heroes result from looking into unbearable darkness (Nietzsche, 1998, 63). The Greeks stared into horror.

II. RITES OF PASSAGE: DISPLACEMENT OR DISLOCATION OF THE PLACE FROM WHERE THINGS ARE SENSED

In a paper on Bertolt Brecht's epic theater, Roland Barthes (1990, 85) defines theater as activity which "calculates the place from where things are seen". With slight modification, so as to include, along with the sense of vision, the other senses as well, this definition

may also apply to rites of passage. Such rites calculate the place from where things are sensed, or felt. They provoke displacement. According to Arnold Van Gennep (2011, 30), rites of passage consist of three moments: 1) rites of separation; 2) rites of transition (or *limen*); and 3) rites of integration. As such, they occasion the passages from a certain age, occupation or situation to another, as required for living in society.

There are different types of rites of passage. For example, the passage from one territory to another. Places of passage and danger: crossroads, streetcorner *despachos*³, doors, portals, thresholds. Places have markers: obelisks, arches, standing stones. In Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, China, writes Van Gennep (2011, 37) there were “guardians of the thresholds” in monumental proportions: statues, sphinxes, winged dragons, and all sorts of monsters.

During moments of passage, offerings are made to geniuses or spirits of the place. Michael Taussig (1980) describes offerings made by Bolivian miners to the spirit of the mountains, Supay, at entrances of tin mines.

Pregnancy and childbirth (Van Gennep 2011, 53). Among many peoples, pregnant women withdraw from social life. Among the Todas of India, there is a ceremony called “village we leave”. Women leave the village to live in a special hut. They return during the seventh month, after establishing social fathers for the unborn children (the Todas practice polyandry). Margaret Mead (1976) has shown how husbands are supposed to simulate pregnancy and pains of childbirth of their wives among the Arapesh.

Betrothal and marriage (Van Gennep 2011, 107). Such rites articulate different social groups. Either bride or groom, or both, will have to separate from his or her groups of kinship and residence. New social ties will be woven. There are exchanges, dowries, gifts and counter-gifts.

Funerals (Van Gennep 2011, 128). At first, one might think that rites of separation would be most evident at funeral ceremonies. However, in such cases, rites of incorporation tend to stand out: the dead are incorporated into the realms of the dead.

3. Literally, “act of dispatching”, “transaction”. Also refers to offerings made to an *orixá*, or Afro-Brazilian divinity. Such offerings are oftentimes made to *Exú*, the messenger divinity, at streetcorners, crossroads or intersections.

In this presentation I intend to give special attention to initiation rites (Van Gennep 2011, 71). These rites, particularly, which involve the initiation of individuals into groups or social states, tend to enhance experience which erupts at the margins or liminal spheres of social life. I wish to focus on liminal experience.

The nature of displacement calls attention. In rites of passage, people are led to look at themselves and their world from margins (*limen*) and astounding places of social life.

III. LIMEN PLAYING WITH DANGER

In rites of passage, societies play with danger. They interrupt the flux of everyday life. And produce distancing or estrangement effects in relation to themselves. Elective affinities between Brechtian theater and rites of passage call attention. Such rites also produce estrangement effects, *Verfremdungseffekt* (cf. Rosenfeld, 1965, 152). As in the theater imagined by Antonin Artaud, “masks fall” (Artaud, 1999, 29). Social roles are suspended. Face to face, people see themselves without the masks of everyday life. In liminal spheres, Victor Turner (1977) suggests, people may come to experience *communitas*. In hardened crusts of social life a seismological movement is produced, with astoundment and displacement.

From the Indo-European root *per* – “to take risks, go on adventure” – possibly derives the Greek word *perao* – “pass through”. From *perao*, the idea of rites of passage. From *perao* also derives the term “peril”. And other terms as well, such as “pirate”. (Note: One of the mythical episodes involving Dionysus occurs on a pirate ship; despite repeated efforts, pirates are unable to tie down the god of wine.) The word “experience” also derives from *per*. Experience has to do with peril. Passages are dangerous. They produce unusual experience (Turner, 1986, 34; 1982a, 17; cf. Gagnebin 1994, 66).

According to Artaud (1999, 24-27) true theater may be compared to plague. Liminal experience can be like a plague. It leads to degradation, decomposition. In Dionysian cults, attention is drawn to the *sparagmos* or dismemberment of the body. Through *sparagmos*, Artaud (1976b) would suggest, is produced a “body without organs”.

Powers of horror, horrors of the abject, says Julia Kristeva (1980; 1982). Neither subject nor object: abject. Primordial mother. Lilith. In abject experience lies the experience of a mother: a daughter or

a son from a mother is born; neither she, nor not she. For daughter and son, the mother is neither them nor not them. The umbilicus is charged with memory. A mother's body is a place of risk and pollution. Women are well acquainted with the liminal. In *limen* they give birth.

In Mary Douglas' *Purity and danger* (1976) – which inspires the work of Kristeva – filth has to do with the ambiguous and anomalous. It threatens social life as a classificatory system. It is dangerous, out of place. It inverts and subverts things. Order is undone. Language itself breaks down. Categories which organize experience, and which make things visible, are shattered. Things disappear. They turn into ghosts. Or become invisible. In liminal spheres, one acquires powers of invisibility, as demonstrated by Dionysus before King Pentheus (Eurípedes 1988, 76).

TOMB AND WOMB

“Tomb and womb”: with these terms Turner (1989, 99; 2005, 144) describes liminal experience. Paradoxical and antithetical processes occur in rites of passage. On one hand, death; on the other, rebirth. The cult of Dionysus in Ancient Greece becomes especially visible at two moments: at the rural festivals of pressing the wine, in December; and at the flower festivals in Athens, in February and March (Berthold, 2003, 103). Death in winter; resurrection in spring. Among different peoples, huts used in rites of initiation are shaped like tombs and wombs. Recurrent images in such rites become multivocal symbols (Turner 1989): serpents (which seem to be reborn from the shells of death when changing their skins); the moon (which wanes and becomes full); nakedness (which may evoke the image of a newborn baby, or of a cadaver).

CRUELTY

Observe the rigor. The experience of being torn to pieces. Theater of cruelty. “When creating, the occult god obeys the cruel necessity of creation. (...) Death is cruelty, resurrection is cruelty” (Artaud, 1999, 119-120). Pierre Clastres (1988, 126-127) speaks of the agony of torture. The body is perforated, torn, dismembered. The passivity of neophytes calls attention. Bodies become inert, and are mortified. Like bodies of the dead – cadavers. They are ready to be remade. They become malleable as clay, the raw material of ceramists. Like stones they are sculpted. One hears the sounds of stones and of objects “charged with fulminating energy” (Artaud, 1999, 5). Sophocles was an admirer of

Phydias, the sculptor who discovered in stones the forms of life, or life-giving forms (Berthold 2003, 109).

Neophytes become like dolls or marionettes discussed by Gordon Craig (1996) – prototypes of ideal actors, capable of evoking the dead and ancestral shades. Inhuman, they acquire the capacity of being other. Divested bodies: stripped, undressed, dispossessed. The “naked unaccommodated man”, such as King Lear (Shakespeare, 1975, 992). The body is reduced to gesture and erupts with the force of Grotowski’s “poor theater” (Grotowski 2002). The violated body, revolved as hardened clay by the force of a plow and transformed into fertile soil, charged with humus – porous, fecund.

In lower bodily strata (Bakhtin 1993) are located dangerous and life-giving entrances of the body, similar to those of volcanic, embryonic worlds. Witches condemned by the fires of Inquisition, shows Carlo Ginsburg (1991), ride on goats. And discover entrances into subterranean worlds.

PATHS OF CREATION

In Dionysian theater, as noted, a particular gesture calls attention: the *sparagmos*, or dismemberment of bodies. Just as a grape vine, whose branches are cut so that they may produce the fruits of wine, so also Dionysus’ body is dismembered. Due to vengeance of the titans against Zeus, or, according to another version, because of Hera’s fury, his body is dismembered. As an agonistic god, Dionysus dies and is reborn. In early Winter, the pressing of wine; in Spring, the festival of flowers. Grape vines are renewed. From the forces of chaos cosmos is recreated. Amid ruins and wreckage emerge social and symbolic worlds.

MEMORY AND DISMEMBERMENT: SUBTERRANEAN REGIONS OF SYMBOLS

From processes of dismemberment memory is restored. Past and present come into relation, revealing arcane and suppressed elements in danger of falling into oblivion. “The seeing eye is the organ of tradition”, says Franz Boas. In liminal moments, lenses of everyday life are of no help. Classificatory systems, which allow us to see, decompose. We experience blindness. Things disappear. Then, suddenly, we feel as if blindness helps to see. And we come to see with new eyes what we had not seen before. Liminal beings emerge from subterranean regions.

Powerful symbols are recreated at margins. And decompose into montages charged with tensions. *Limen* reveals subterranean regions of symbols (Artaud, 1999, 146). Over the ashes of the ancient cult of Tonantzin, the maternal principle of the pre-Colombian Aztec world, originates the cult of Our Lady of Guadalupe, a symbol of the Mexican nation. At moments of margin and celebration, the embodied repertoires of devotees reveal the energies which erupt from below (cf. Turner, 1974, 105; 2008, 98; Dawsey 2013b). At such times, as in the true theater envisioned by Artaud, one detects the agitation of ghosts.

Two stage devices of Dionysian theater of Athens, in Ancient Greece, deserve attention: 1) the so-called “stairs of Charon”, a subterranean stairway leading to the *skene*, facilitating the emergence of apparitions coming from Hades, the inferior world of the boatman Charon and of the river Lethe, the waters of forgetfulness; and 2) the *ekkyklema* (“thing which rolls out”), a small mobile platform used for purposes of revealing crimes and atrocities committed behind the scenes (cf. Berthold 2003, 115, 117). By such devices, Dionysian theater illumines backstages, and submersed and subterranean regions of symbols.

SACRA: GROTESQUE AND ASTOUNDING

In initiation rites, neophytes enter into contact with *sacra* – the sacred images, objects, stories and forms of knowledge. In such experience, the presence of the grotesque and unshapely deserves attention (Turner 1989, 105). Disparate fragments sometimes enter into abrupt and surprising relations. As multivocal symbols, such images oscillate, awakening multiple meanings. Images in relief, made out of proportion, become objects of reflection. They are good to make one think (Artaud 1999, 76). Besides being reflexive, they are also transformative. They provoke bodily innervations. They arouse and mobilize bodily senses. By means of bodily senses the senses of the world are formed (Classen 1993).

As satyrs of a Dionysian chorus, with astonishment, Greeks discover themselves as other. Their bodies acquire the ears and tails of animals, and the hoofs, legs and horns of goats. At the center of attention, one sees a disfigured body, a dismembered god. In his analysis of popular culture of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, Mikhail Bakhtin (1993) shows how grotesque and astounding forms reveal the unfinished nature of the world, and the merry, carnival-like transformation of things. As an expression of such experience Dionysian laughter erupts. In arcane regions are heard stories which have not yet come into being.

POWERS OF THE WEAK

Agonistic gods are fragile. Fragility may be a source of power. Liminal figures which, from a structural point of view, are considered to be weak, may be revealed to have extraordinary powers. When classificatory systems ossify or lose vitality in such a way as to impair communication of the parts with the whole, anomalous or ambiguous figures may emerge from the margins with force, unifying multiple planes. Connections are thus created with vital elements submersed in memory and in social life. Channels are opened to lower regions – considered to be fertile and energizing.

Ndembu people are constituted by the juncture of two groups: Lunda invaders and Mbwela autochthonous people. The Kanongesha chief is Lunda. His power emanates from the Kafwana headman, who directs the installation rites. The Kafwana is Mbwela. Relations between the Mbwela autochthonous people and the land on which Ndembu people live run deep. From the hands of Kafwana the Kanongesha receives the *lukanu* bracelet made of human genitalia and sinews, and bathed in blood of slaves. With the *lukanu* bracelet come life-giving powers whose sources are located in the substrata of social and symbolic life, through which Ndembu people and their relations with the land are renewed (Turner 1977, 98-101). Such powers coming from below have less to do with mastery over the land than with skillful knowledge of relations between land and people.

In the zoology of the Lele people, of Central Africa, one creature deserves special attention: the pangolin, a liminal figure considered to be hard to classify. This creature has the scales of a fish but climbs up trees; it has the features of a lizard, but reproduces like a mammal; and it distinguishes itself from other small mammals by procreating one offspring at a time. Among Lele, the pangolin is subjected to scorn and ridicule. Pangolins are not usually considered to be good to eat. However, during periods of crisis, when relations in villages become charged with tension, and the forest no longer offers its fruits, the pangolin cult gains prominence. Like an agonistic god he is led to the village. Like a king he is placed on a throne. He subsequently becomes a sacrificial victim. In this fashion, life returns to villages and forests (Douglas 1976, 203-204).

In Tallensi villages, which are organized according to patrilineal principles, the maternal lineage is structurally submersed. However, at some time during their lives, young people are expected to

make a trip in search of knowledge, gathering objects and establishing relations with people belonging to their maternal lineage. At the end of their quests, guided by gods or spirits of the submersed lineage, they build a bakologo temple. Here they place sacred objects which they have gathered along their journeys. During times of sickness or social crisis, people seek protection in this temple (Turner 1977, 113-118).

MASK REMOVALS

There are two types of mask removals which occur in initiation rites. In both, roles are suspended. The first type, which has already been mentioned, makes possible liminal experience: the removal of masks used in everyday life. A second type also calls attention. When neophytes meet up with gods or monsters which, on festive occasions, bring terror to villages, these extraordinary beings remove their masks revealing themselves to be ordinary creatures – they belong to one's everyday acquaintances.

The central act of initiation rites of native peoples of North America and Australia, says Van Gennep (2011, 81-82), consists of the revelation which is made to novices that the bogey-men of their childhood are simple *sacra*, Amerindian masks, in one case, and Australian bull-roarers, in another. Initiates learn how to handle *sacra*, trying on masks and producing sounds. During initiation of Zuni children to the Katcina (*Ko'tikili*) fraternity boys are beaten with yucca branches by four gods. Afterwards the four gods remove their masks and initiates discover that they are men of the village. Upon receiving their own masks and branches, novices do as was done to them, beating the men (Van Gennep 2011, 80-81).

One of the high moments of Arapesh life takes place during nights of celebration when the *tamberan*, a bogey-man or monster, the supernatural patron of men, arrives at the village. The *tamberan* brings terror. His voice is like thunder, and makes women and children run for safety. During initiation, children learn what women probably already know, even when pretending otherwise, that the thunderous sounds are actually produced by men of the village using whistles, gongs and gigantic bamboo flutes. Upon initiation, all doubts are removed: there is not even a *tamberan* mask.⁴ There is only the noise of men (Mead 1976, 84-91).

4. Marcel Mauss (2003) makes note of a possible etymology of the term *persona*: *per-so-nare*, the mask through which voice resounds.

The double movement is striking. The removal of everyday masks during liminal moments makes possible experience of the extraordinary. In this way an estrangement effect is produced in regard to everyday life. At the same time, the removal of masks of monsters and gods, revealing them to be fragile and human beings, provokes another type of estrangement, now in regard to extraordinary experience. In the first instance, conditions are created for what may be called a religious illumination. In the second, for what Benjamin (1985a, 33) would call a profane illumination.⁵

If initiation rites reveal the mysterious aspects of life, they also act in an opposite direction, avoiding an emphasis on the mysterious side of the mysterious. Thus they produce a double estrangement effect, in relation to the everyday and extraordinary alike. In everyday life, with astoundment, horror is revealed. At the same time, no surprise in the astounding. Dionysian laughter has to do with this double movement. In the face of horror, the chorus of satyrs discovers laughter.

F(R)ICTION

Questions regarding contact between neophytes and masks deserve attention. As a result of friction between body and mask both are transformed. While a mask is capable of awakening the *poiesis* of a body, or its *corpoiesis*, which manifests the unending capacity of a body to become other, so also the body is able to alter or shape the mask with which it is in contact.⁶ During the process of f(r)iction, which I like to think of with the *r* between parentheses, the body acquires mastery over its relations with the mask.⁷ This point should be emphasized: such mastery has to do with the knowledge one gains in one's relations with a mask, rather than with any type of mastery over the mask itself. As a mask becomes real and has a life of its own, it may also be altered, refashioned or even destroyed when coming into relations with the body. Thus, the same mask which produces terror may also provoke laughter.

5. Walter Benjamin's (1986, 189-190; cf. 1985, 33) observation about the dialectical optic of surrealism is instructive: "For histrionic or fanatical stress on the mysterious side of the mysterious takes us no further: we penetrate the mystery only to the degree that we recognize it in the everyday world, by virtue of a dialectical optic that perceives the everyday as impenetrable, the impenetrable as everyday". In a study on shamanism and the culture of terror, Michael Taussig (1991) discovers similarities between procedures of surrealism and of shamans of the Putumayo.

6. The term *corpoiesis* – which is used here in a specific sense – is inspired by the book of José Lima Júnior (2013).

7. In several essays I have developed the idea of f(r)iction. Cf. Dawsey 2006; 2009b; 2013a; 2013c.

MEMORY AND THE INHUMAN BODY

When proposing a “theater of cruelty” Antonin Artaud finds inspiration in reports concerning initiation rites. Some of these, such as the narratives of warriors of the Great Plains, or of the Mbaya-Guaicuru of the *Chaco* of Paraguay, discussed by Pierre Clastres (1988, 126-127), reveal a startling repertoire of torture procedures: hangings, amputations, lacerated flesh, daggers buried in wounds, *derradeira corrida* (“last run”) and perforations of penis and nipples. By such means, says Clastres (1988, 128), “society impresses its mark on the body of youth”. As mnemonic devices, the furrows created within bodies during initiation rites impede forgetfulness. “Body is memory” (Clastres 1988, 128).

Distorted, lacerated body. In wrinkles, folds and deformities of bodies images in danger of falling into oblivion come to nestle. The body has its hiding places and caverns where precious and prohibited things are saved. Like a flock of birds or bats, when least expected, images charged with memory irrupt from such places. The figure of the little hunchback evoked by Walter Benjamin in his essays on Kafka (Benjamin 1985b, 159; 1992, 123) and on Berlin childhood (Benjamin 1993, 142; 2002, 385) rouses images from these depths. With sudden appearances of the little hunchback come “Greetings from Mr. Clumsy” (Benjamin 2002, 385). In the body deformed one finds an altered form of the body – the inhuman.

Benjamin (1992, 128; cf. 1985b, 157) writes that Franz Kafka “did not tire of picking up the forgotten from animals”. In Dionysian theater Greeks listened and transformed themselves into choruses of satyrs with the ears and tails of horses, or the legs, hoofs and horns of goats. Benjamin (1992, 133; cf. 1985b, 162) writes: “it is a tempest that blows from the land of oblivion.” In rites of margin bodies are transformed and joined into a social body. At the same time, through cruel means they assume the forms of the inhuman (Artaud 1999, 50). The body has its reasons of which culture knows not.⁸

STRANGER: “I /S OTHER”

Known as the “Stranger” (Eliade and Couliano 2003, 164), Dionysus became the most popular of Greek gods. The son of Zeus and of the Theban princess Semele, his origins are located in regions of Thrace and Phrygia. When drinking wine, or the blood of Dionysus, Greeks discovered themselves as other. By means of the

8. Paraphrasing Pascal’s saying: “the heart has its reasons of which reason knows not”.

chorus of satyrs and “goat songs”, they entered into another state and body (Nietzsche 1998, 60). According to Benjamin (1992, 128; cf. 1985b, 158), “the most forgotten alien land is one’s own body”.

IV. DIONYSUS’ JOURNEY

Among Greeks, Dionysus is a unique god. His father is divine, his mother human. From the union of Zeus and Semele Dionysus is born. At the moment of birth, Semele dies in the lightning flash of Zeus’ splendor. Dionysus’ journey leads him not to his father on Olympus, but to the depths of Hades where he meets his mother. Dionysian laughter has less to do with the heights of Olympus than with the subterranean regions of Mother Earth.

The mother’s body is a region of passage: neither object nor subject, it is an abject body (Kristeva 1980; 1983). In this body, Kristeva says, flourish the powers of horror. “The Feminine”, says Artaud (1976a, 273; cf. 1999, 169) “is thundering and terrible.” A mother is both dangerous and fecund. One detail calls attention: this region is also the place where children first play (Winnicott 1971). And where the experience of the actor is formed: not me, not not me (Schechner 1985a, 4, 6; 1985b, 110, 112).

In carnival processions follow Dionysian maenads. Deliriously they dance, ready to slash into pieces men whom they meet on their way. In an attempt to put an end to the Dionysian cult, King Pentheus pursues devotees. His body is dismembered by women. Among the maenads, or bacchantes, are the mother and sisters of the king.

It was savage tumult: Pentheus gasped, with little breath remaining, as bacchantes shouted in triumph. One carried an arm, another a foot, with shoe and all. They dismembered the body, ripping off flesh from the ribs. With blood-stained hands, all of them played ball with Pentheus’ flesh. (Eurípedes 1988, 92).

V. CHORUS OF SATYRS: LUCIDITY AND FOLLY

As said at the beginning of this presentation, the chorus of satyrs “stares into horror” (Nietzsche 1998, 63). And it looks into the depths of folly. Not, however, in everyday masks. Under the influence of wine, chorus members sing like goats, and applaud and stomp their feet or hoofs like satyrs.

The ritual theater of Ancient Greece, says Margot Berthold (2003, 105), was preceded by a procession which came from the city and

ended at Dionysus' sanctuary. The climax of the procession was the car of Dionysus, the god of wine, pulled by two satyrs. The car was actually a ship on wheels (*carrus navalis*) carrying the image of the god, or, in its place, an actor crowned with leaves of a grapevine. A ship of fools. Greeks saw themselves being seen by Dionysus.

Dialectics of intoxication. With wine Dionysus produces a lucid perception. The chorus of satyrs stares into horror.

VI. BOOS

As we approach the end of this essay,⁹ I imagine a satyr or member of a Dionysian chorus – just as artistic vanguards of the beginnings of the twentieth century would have it (Goldberg 2001, 16) – producing a resonant boo. Take note, he or she would say, of the interruptions and fragmentary form. Pay attention to the incoherent and abrupt passages of the course which has been followed. In this discussion on rites of passage, notice the displacement of thoughts and images, torn from context, and the unexpected quotations of (Western) contemporary theater and performance – Artaud, Brecht, Craig, Grotowski, Schechner. This is an errant essay, a foolhardy exercise, she or he would say (with a wink of the goat's eye). In this way one may cause a short-circuit, with sparks and smoking wires, in the story which Turner (1982b) tells from ritual to theater, or, even, in the two-way stories told by Schechner (1988) from ritual to theater and back. Instead of a continuum between theater and ritual, as Schechner suggests, we come up with a series of overlapping elements, with montage effects. Even if not in complete agreement with Aristotle, or with what the philosopher has to say in the *Poetics* (Aristóteles 1973, 447) about Greek tragedy (“a catharsis of emotions of pity and terror”), his absence would seem strange. So also, the absence of Brecht's criticism of Aristotelian theater would be felt. One detail deserves note: in regard to Brecht's idea of *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation or estrangement effects, in German) our satyr would smile: Germans owe a lot to the Greeks.¹⁰ On the stages of history, the satyr would clap hands or hoofs: in “poor theater” of Grotowski, “epic theater” of Brecht, and “theater of cruelty” of Artaud, among others, we hear some of the voices (and goat sounds) of the chorus of satyrs.

During the course of our analysis (with guidance of an errant god), a hypothesis may take us by surprise: some of the vital elements

9. In Portuguese, the word for “essay” is *ensaio*, which is also used for theater rehearsal.

10. This essay was written at a time when debates regarding Greek indebtedness in the European Union occupied the headlines of some of the major newspapers in the world.

of rites of passage, and of Dionysian theater, have to do with what may be called “margins of margins”.¹¹ Although our objective has been to discuss liminal experience, a theme which is dear to anthropologists such as Victor Turner, Mary Douglas and Arnold Van Gennep, our route has taken us – in the footprints of Walter Benjamin, Julia Kristeva and Dionysian satyrs – to the margins of *limen*. Among satyrs, the figure of Michael Taussig (1991).

In some of the fragments, which may now be highlighted, this idea comes to the surface.

SUBTERRANEAN REGIONS. As Victor Turner suggests, powerful symbols oftentimes emerge at margins of social life, from liminal experience. In rites of passage we may find ourselves in subterranean regions of symbols. As noted, stage devices of Dionysian theater (rolling platforms and “stairs of Charon”) open up to these regions, including backstages and submersed places or underworlds. The location of Dionysus’ theater in Athens is suggestive. One notices the double displacement: at the margins of or next to the agora (the center of public life of the polis), are built the temples of the city’s patron goddess, the Parthenon and Athena Nice (“victorious”), on the peaks of the Acropolis; on the exterior grounds of the Acropolis, in its inferior regions, is located the theater of Dionysus. On top of the Acropolis, the temples of Athena; at bottom and margins, the Dionysian theater.

MASKS. In our analysis of rites of passage we have also called attention to a double removal of masks. The first involves removal of everyday masks and the experience of the extraordinary. The second refers to removal of extraordinary masks. This dialectical movement may evoke Benjamin’s ideas regarding profane illumination and the double optic of surrealism.¹² At margins of margins a double movement is produced. And a double estrangement is created in relation to the everyday and the extraordinary alike.

Many ritual and theater forms dispense with the gesture of the second type of mask removal. For, as Richard Schechner (1985, 6) has shown, in different traditions of performance no effort is made to hide the bodies of those wearing masks. In such cases, the moments in which bodies behind masks are revealed occur during

11. I have discussed the notion of “margins of margins” in various essays (cf. Dawsey 2005; 2006; 2009a; e 2009c).

12. See previous footnote regarding the dialectical optic of surrealism.

performances themselves, before the audiences. In Dionysian theater one's daily acquaintances are recognized as masked goats.

BODY. The body itself may be discovered at margins of margins. This has to do with the ways in which ritual theater or other forms of performance may produce, in relations between bodies and masks, the experience of f(r)iction – as I like to think, with the *r* between parentheses. When using an extraordinary mask, the body is altered and enters into regions of *limen*. As Bakhtin has shown (1993), masks reveal the merry transformation of things – and of the body. At the same time, one might add, the masks themselves – however frightful, astonishing and real they may be – are also altered in the process. They are fragile. At the flash of the body – “the most forgotten alien land” – masks are transformed. Once again, one observes a double movement, from not me to not not me, as the writings of Schechner (1985a; 1985b) suggest, borrowing from Winnicott (1971). Or, as I suggest in this essay, from the f(r)iction or rubbing motion of the mask on the body (*limen*) to that of the body on the mask (margins of margins).

In short, during the course of the essay we have rehearsed a type of Dionysian journey. Instead of ascending to the top of the Acropolis, or to one of the temples of Athena, the goddess of polis and civilization, we have descended to subterranean and submersed regions. This is an errant essay. Julia Kristeva has much to tell: we search for Semele, the mother of Dionysus – the all-too-human and mortal mother pulverized by the rays of Zeus' splendor at the moment of birth of her son. *Purity and danger*, Athena and Semele. In the first is revealed the feminine principle of civilization and of the symbolic world. In the second, the abject woman – neither subject nor object (Kristeva 1980; 1982) – the creative principle which can be found in submersed and subterranean regions of symbols. As Artaud knows well, the “thundering and terrible” feminine is a source of cry and of laughter. Kristeva, the satyr might add, knows where goat songs come from.

On stage, before the eyes of the public and of the chorus of satyrs: the horror. One perceives the calculus of the place from where things are seen (and heard). (As said at the beginning, we will need those ears.) Notice the first displacement: the public flows to the ritual theater, at the margins of the Acropolis. And the second: the public recognizes itself in the chorus of satyrs. At margins of margins, one detects the skilled knowledge required when

relating to masks and narratives of horror: astounding everyday experience, no surprise in the astounding.¹³

As a collective body, a chorus of satyrs entering into a state of f(r)iction rubs against masks of horror. Not even the most powerful forces of terror dressed in frightful masks can resist the *corpoiesis* and laughter (or boos) of a chorus of satyrs.

translation

John Cowart

Dawsey

text received

07.07.2015

13. The idea of extraordinary or astounding everyday experience is also developed in other essays (cf. Dawsey 2005; 2013a).



REFERENCES

Aristóteles. 1973. Poética. In *Aristóteles*, 439-471. São Paulo: Abril Cultural (Coleção Os pensadores).

Artaud, Antonin. 1976. To have done with the judgment of God: a radio play. In *Antonin Artaud: selected writings*, ed. Susan Sontag, 555-571. Berkeley, California: University of California Press.

_____. *O teatro e seu duplo*. 1999. São Paulo: Martins Fontes.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1993. *A cultura popular na Idade Média e no Renascimento: o contexto de François Rabelais*. São Paulo: Edunb.

Barthes, Roland. 1990. Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein. In *O óbvio e o obtuso: ensaios críticos*, 85-92. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira.

Benjamin, Walter. 1985a. O surrealismo: o último instantâneo da inteligência européia. In *Obras escolhidas I: magia e técnica, arte e política*, 21-35. São Paulo: Brasiliense.

_____. 1985b. Franz Kafka: a propósito do décimo aniversário de sua morte. In *Obras escolhidas 1: magia e técnica, arte e política*, 137-164. São Paulo: Brasiliense.

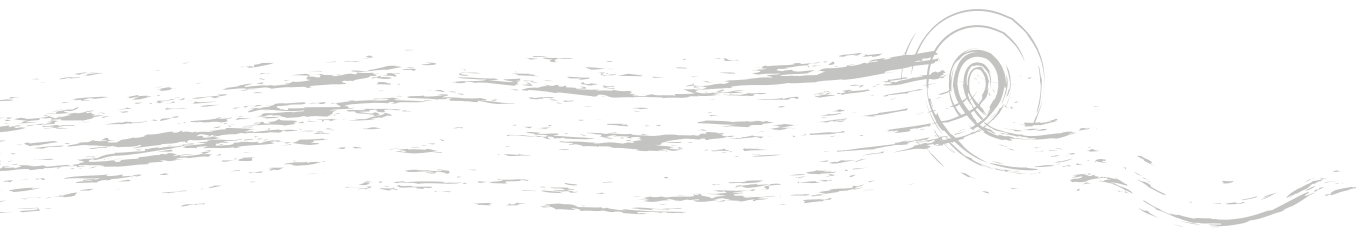
_____. 1993. Infância em Berlim por volta de 1900. In *Obras escolhidas 2: rua de mão única*, 71-142. São Paulo: Brasiliense.

Berthold, Margot. 2003. *História mundial do teatro*. São Paulo: Perspectiva.

Classen, Constance. 1993. *Worlds of sense: exploring the senses in history and across cultures*. Londres: Routledge.

- Clastres, Pierre. 1978. *A sociedade contra o estado: pesquisas em antropologia política*. Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves.
- Craig, Edward Gordon. 1996. The actor and the über-marionette. In *The twentieth-century performance reader*, ed. Michael Huxley and Noel Witts, 159-165. Londres: Routledge.
- Dawsey, John C. 2005. O teatro dos boias-frias: repensando a antropologia da performance. *Horizontes Antropológicos*, v. 24: 15-34.
- _____. 2006. O teatro em Aparecida: santa e lobisomem. *Mana*, v. 12: 135-150.
- _____. 2009a. Por uma antropologia benjaminiana: repensando paradigmas do teatro dramático. *Mana*, v. 15, n. 2: 349-376.
- _____. 2009b. Corpo, máscara e f(r)icção: a fábula das três raças no Buraco dos Capetas. *Ilha: Revista de Antropologia*, v. 11, n. 1: 41-62.
- _____. 2009c. História noturna de Nossa Senhora do Risca-Faca. *Revista Estudos Feministas*, v. 17, n. 1: 135-158.
- _____. 2013a. *De que riem os boias-frias? Diários de antropologia e teatro*. São Paulo: Terceiro Nome.
- _____. 2013b. Tonantzin: Victor Turner, Walter Benjamin e antropologia da experiência. *Sociologia & Antropologia*, jul.-nov. v. 3, n. 6: 20-35.
- _____. 2013c. Descrição *tensa* (*Tension-thick description*): Geertz, Benjamin e performance. *Revista de Antropologia*, v. 56, n. 2: 291-322.
- Douglas, Mary. 1976. *Pureza e perigo*. São Paulo: Perspectiva.
- Eliade, Mircea e Ioan P. Couliano. 2003. *Dicionário das religiões*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes.
- Ésquilo. 2011. *Os sete contra Tebas*. Porto Alegre: L&PM.
- _____. 2013. *Os persas*. São Paulo: Perspectiva.
- Eurípedes. 1988. *Medéia/As bacantes/As troianas*. Rio de Janeiro: Ediouro.
- Gagnebin, Jeanne Marie. 1994. *História e narração em W. Benjamin*. São Paulo: Perspectiva.
- Ginzburg, Carlo. 1991. *História noturna: decifrando o sabá*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.
- Goldberg, Rose Lee. 2001. *Performance art: from futurism to the present*. Nova York: Thames & Hudson.

- Grotowski, Jerzy. 2002. *Towards a poor theatre*. Londres: Routledge.
- Kristeva, Julia. 1980. *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*. Paris: Seuil.
- _____. 1982. *Powers of horror: an essay in abjection*. Nova York: Columbia University Press.
- _____. 2002. *The Portable Kristeva*. Nova York: Columbia University Press.
- Lima Júnior, José. 2013. *Corpoética: um passeio pela palavra*. Campinas: Texto & Cultura.
- Mauss, Marcel. 2003. Uma categoria do espírito humano: a noção de pessoa, a de "eu". In *Sociologia e antropologia*, 369-400. São Paulo: Cosac Naify.
- Mead, Margaret. 1976. *Sexo e temperamento*. São Paulo: Perspectiva.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1998. *O nascimento da tragédia: ou helenismo e pessimismo*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.
- Romilly, Jacqueline. 1998. *A tragédia grega*. Brasília: UnB.
- Rosenfeld, Anatol. 1965. *O teatro épico*. São Paulo: Buriti.
- Schechner, Richard. 1985a. Points of contact between anthropological and theatrical thought. In *Between theater and anthropology*, 3-34. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press.
- _____. 1985b. Restoration of behavior. In *Between theater and anthropology*, 35-116. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press.
- _____. 1988. From ritual to theater and back: the efficacy-entertainment braid. In *Performance theory*, 106-152. Nova York: Routledge.
- Shakespeare, William. 1975. King Lear. In *The complete works of William Shakespeare*, 973-1010. Nova York: Random House.
- Sófocles. 1998. Rei Édipo. In *Sófocles/Ésquilo: Rei Édipo/Antígone/Prometeu acorrentado*, 21-68. Rio de Janeiro: Ediouro.
- Taussig, Michael. 1980. *The devil and commodity fetishism in South America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- _____. 1987. *Shamanism, colonialismo, and the wild man: a study in terror and healing*. Chicago e Londres: The University of Chicago Press.



_____. 1991. *Xamanismo, colonialismo e o homem selvagem: um estudo sobre o terror e a cura*. São Paulo: Paz e Terra.

Turner, Victor. 1974. Hidalgo: history as social drama. In *Dramas, fields, and metaphors: symbolic action in human society*, 98-155. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

_____. 1977. Liminality and communitas. In *The ritual process: structure and anti-structure*, 94-130. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

_____. 1982a. Introduction. In *From ritual to theatre: the human seriousness of play*, 7-19. Nova York: PAJ Publications.

_____. 1982b. *From ritual to theatre: the human seriousness of play*. Nova York: PAJ Publications.

_____. 1986. Dewey, Dilthey, and Drama: an essay in the anthropology of experience. In *The anthropology of experience*, ed. Victor Turner and Edward M. Bruner, 33-44. Urbana e Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

_____. 1989. Betwixt and between: the liminal period in *Rites de Passage*. In *The forest of symbols: aspects of Ndembu ritual*, 93-111. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

_____. 2005. *Betwixt and between: o período liminar nos "Ritos de Passagem"*. In *Floresta dos símbolos: aspectos do ritual Ndembu*, 137-158. Niterói: EdUFF.

_____. 2008. Hidalgo: a história enquanto drama social. In *Dramas, campos e metáforas: ação simbólica na sociedade humana*, 91-144. Niterói: EdUFF.

Van Gennep, Arnold. 1960. *The rites of passage*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

_____. 2011. *Os ritos de passagem*. Petrópolis: Vozes.

Winnicott, Donald W. 1971. *Playing and reality*. Londres: Tavistock.