

NOTES AND DISCUSSION

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ETHNOMUSICOLOGY

IN RADIO AND TELEVISION

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SCIENTIFIC ETHNOMUSICOLOGY AND MASS MEDIA OF COMMUNICATION

The idea of this study¹ stems from two considerations: on one hand Western civilization has brought the audio-visual recording and broadcasting media to such a level of technical perfection that it has become possible to collect and broadcast documents regard-

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¹ Edited two years ago on request of UNESCO this text constitutes a contribution to the Table Ronde de Salzbourg (22-29 august 1965) which dealt with the problems of musical spectacles for radio and television. Its aim therefore was to ask the non-specialists to bring their attention to bear on the problems posed by the study of the manifestations of music and dance of the peoples with an oral tradition and their usefulness as "spectacles" documented for a Western public. Preparing the text today for publication, we have added only the notes and a few clarifying details because it is not possible to rewrite it entirely in order to adapt it to the exigencies of readers of *Diogenes* who are more numerous and more specialized.

We wish to express our gratitude to Miss Nicole Becquemont whose help in correcting the French form of this piece was precious.

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ing primitive peoples even in the most difficult conditions; on the other hand ever-widening strata of the "civilized" world are interested in the products, attitudes and spiritual world of primitive peoples which these technical media are now able to make known to them.

In this way, people that were always considered, when their existence was known, strange and terrifying, inhabitants of the regions "at the ends of earth," known only to conquistadores, missionaries, explorers and daring and isolated scientists, have now drawn closer to us, become so familiar, even in their physical aspect, that we can say that any person in the West who has a minimum of culture, has some knowledge of them. This phenomenon corresponds with the development of a science, ethnology, which has the precise and exclusive object of studying the life and culture of primitive peoples.

Behind the scientific activity of ethnologists, and the adventurous curiosity of many of the first travellers, there was and still is much more than the popular attraction of exotic, far-off, foreign things. Often pushed by their inability to adapt to their own culture, they turned to the observation, study and loving preservation of the cultural heritage of primitive civilizations the disappearance of which they were and still are unable to prevent.

Many of them, more or less consciously embodied or embody a kind of guilt complex of Western civilization in regard to the people it conquered and destroyed spiritually and sometimes even physically.

On the other hand, not only anthropologists, but also philosophers, writers, artists and art critics have shown a vivid interest in the artistic manifestations of primitive peoples: the philosophic writings of J.-J. Rousseau, the literary work of Victor Segale, cubism and surrealism in painting, the influence of the oriental theater and of magic ceremonies of the Mexican Indians on the theatrical theories and realizations of Antonin Artaud are good examples of the wide range and depth of this attitude. Therefore we are saying nothing surprising when we state that the knowledge of primitive civilizations has enriched and can still enrich Western culture and consequently the culture of the future which will arise from it in great part and which perhaps one day may constitute the cultural heritage of a homogeneous world.

TECHNICAL PROGRESS AND THE BIRTH OF A NEW SCIENCE:
ETHNOMUSICOLOGY

While mass communication media, such as magazines, radio, cinema and television place or may place within the range of understanding of the public a part of the cultural reality of primitive peoples (which until now was accessible only to specialists and intellectuals anxious for new experiences), the technical progress on which these media are based have begun to render precious services to ethnology and partially influence its development.

Photography started being useful very early but for a long period of time its usage was extremely limited by the difficulties of transportation and by the long exposures which the first cameras required. Thus, for example, Schmidt, companion and photographer of the great German explorer and ethnologist, Théodor Koch-Grünberg, did not succeed in photographing an important secret ritual of the Amazonian basin, including dances and music, so that still now we know of their existence only through written descriptions and very vague drawings.²

Then there were the first recordings on magnetic cylinders and a new science sprang into life, ethnomusicology. The cylinder had the defect of wearing out too rapidly and of giving imperfect reproductions of the recorded original. These deficiencies were gradually abolished with discographic recording and recording on magnetic tapes. At the same time the cinema was improving so much that it found its voice.

Many ethnologists and the first ethnomusicologists soon became aware of the extraordinary services that these new technical media could render to the ends and methods of their disciplines. Already in 1928, Carl E. Seashore underlined the importance of research uniting sound and cinematographic recording:

In this age of extraordinary spread of civilization into the remotest parts of the earth, primitive folk traits have been obliterated and lost at an amazing pace. Shall we preserve the Native songs of our Indians, our Negroes, our Hawaiians, our Philipinos? Shall the scientific collection of the songs of the most primitive peoples be taken seriously,

² Theodor Koch-Grünberg, *Zwei Jahre unter den Indianern, Reise in Nord-West Brasilien*, I, Berlin 1909-10, pp. 188-198.

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together with other anthropological collecting? Let us hope that the present trial of instruments and methods of collecting songs in the field may arouse investigators to a recognition of the great value of this type of collection and the necessity of doing it at an early date unless we shall forever lose the opportunity of recording permanently some of the most interesting expressions of folk life which are now being wiped out by the march of civilization.

Our experience in the present project has demonstrated the necessity of not only recording objectively the actual song, but going back to create and encourage the natural atmosphere of the singer on his own soil and to make an objective record of essential features. The future collector must carry not only the phonophotograph camera, but also a moving picture camera or record the social setting in which the singing is done.³

Now this kind of research is possible, even if it is always difficult to realize, and ethnomusicologists who at the beginning were inclined to work on any kind of collected document, are more and more exacting today and mistrust any recording that has not being made according to a strictly scientific method. The following lines of the very well-known ethnomusicologist Claudie Marcel-Dubois are an example of their attitude:

The development of audio-visual processes and the present stage of relative perfection of the instruments facilitate the acquisition of this type of knowledge. Making good sound recordings becomes easier for everyone day by day, on condition nevertheless that one have professional instruments and a certain technical ability. If one also has the gift of being a good reporter, one can bring back good recordings that might even be of interest to the ethnomusicologist as a basis for further study. Still one would not have the documents of an ethnomusicological investigation. The collection will still retain some aspects of a newspaper report and will have undergone the hazards of journalism or tourism, or even depend on the phase of renewed interest in folklore which dominates in some countries. The ethnomusicological investigation, to the contrary, coupled with modern methods and techniques, brings together the observation of the musical event and of the phenomena which are both connected and complementary. Its structure is completely different from that of an amateur's collection; its aims and purposes also differ so that there

³ Carl E. Seashore, Introduction to Milton Metfessel, *Phonophotography in Folk Music*, (Chapel Hill) 1928, pp. 16-17.

is between the documentation gathered during a collection-report and that gathered during an ethnomusicological investigation made by a person accustomed to these consignments and observations, the same difference that exists between a private collection of *objets d'art* or of curiosities and a reasoned series of specimens selected for scientific use. The aim of the first one is either personal delectation or commercial: broadcasts, recording companies. The second is conducted in a professional way and its documentary material, gathered together for reasons of study, is destined to be used for scientific and cultural instruction. There is, and allow me to insist on this point, a basic difference between a collection made by chance, a trip, the gathering together of radiophonic broadcasts or discographic editions and the reasoned exploration of near or far countries by means of a series of ethnomusicological investigations.⁴

Excuse the long quotation, but this page explains very well the present attitude of specialists of folk music, even if we know how often, even today, the institutes of ethnomusicology deem it wise to buy for their archives and study documents collected almost at random by non-specialists.

All this has been said to remind the reader that progress and world-wide diffusion of technical methods of audio-visual communications, while very useful and even indispensable to the progress of ethnomusicology, also lead it to a more marked scientific exactness. We should keep this in mind when discussing the specific problems of the radio and television broadcasts of musical and mimic rituals of primitive peoples. In fact we shall see to what extent radio and television organizations should or could yield to the methods and prudence of specialists.

If we have spoken mostly of the importance of the new technical media in regard to the development of ethnomusicology we did not do so because we underestimate the great services that cinema and sound recordings can render to the science of ethnology in general, in all its branches (sociology, economics, linguistics, art, etc.) but because we think that these media are utilized most of all in order to study the music and dances of primitive peoples, a study that without those media could not even exist.

⁴ Claudie Marcel-Dubois, "Principes essentiels de l'enquête ethnomusicologique: quelques applications françaises," *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, XIII (1961), p. 14.

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LIMITS OF THE STUDY

Our subject has two major limits. A first one because among all the aspects of primitive civilizations that are and may be studied, recorded and be the object of radio and television programs, we isolate the field of musical manifestation and dances. A second one because among these manifestations we essentially consider those that have from their origins a ritual and sacred character. Such limits call for some explanations. In fact one can reasonably point out that if every society or cultural group acts and thinks, that is to say "functions" as an organic whole, as an ensemble, it is more true in those societies that we call "primitive" for the sake of convention. It therefore may seem arbitrary to restrict ourselves to consider only one aspect of them.

The particularly unitarian character of primitive cultures has been underlined many times by anthropologists and has been related to the exclusively oral tradition of these peoples (which compels all individuals to retain almost the totality of the heritage of knowledge acquired throughout the centuries) and to the non-existence or the lack in most of these cultures of social stratifications and technical specialization, that is to say, to what has been called inaccurately "primitive communism." Now if it were necessary to defend the roles and the importance of ethnology among human sciences, one of the major arguments would be that this science has for its object the study of human groups among whom the introduction of writing and the enormous technical progress linked to it has not yet complicated the structure of society so that the laws of function hence become difficult to understand. In most of these cultures, moreover, urban revolution and demographic growth have not yet endangered the possibility of grasping their unitary character fully and completely.

Even if this is true, perhaps we may justify the limits of our subject by recalling that songs and dances, music and ceremonies in general of primitive peoples are the aspect of their culture which, since the earliest contacts, have most aroused the curiosity of travellers, and the reports of these travellers shocked and fascinated the "popular imagination" of the civilized West. They are also the aspects which best lend themselves to spectacular audio-visual broadcasts.

We must add, as we will try to do in the next pages, that the music and dance of the primitive peoples are activities of an almost solely sacred character, even if there are examples of purely recreational music and dance. We know now that among these peoples all manifestations and phases of individual and collective life are considered sacred just as we consider them secular. Sacred ceremonies in which music or dances are performed are the recurring ritual cristallization of a generalized religious attitude towards the world that practically covers all spiritual and practical life. The study of the actual contents of these ceremonies, the definition of their nature, reveals far more about these primitive cultures than a comparable study based on Christian theology and liturgy would ever reveal about the substructure of Medieval European civilization.

One could also object that it is very difficult to speak in a general way about the ideas and practices of primitive peoples in regard to music and dance, but the works of the specialists have shown that wide comparisons are nevertheless possible and that almost everywhere similar conceptions are to be found. As the great musicologist, Marius Schneider, wrote in one of his best studies:

What struck us in the course of our research was a fact which at the same time facilitated our work of reconstruction: the great uniformity of these ideas, which lead us to assume their common origin, notwithstanding the many geographic and historic variants. Yet we do not know if these conceptions, homogeneous as they are, had as their point of departure an elementary datum of human psychology or if they owe their formation to one or many determined cultural cycles.⁵

DANCE AND MUSIC

There are virtually no serious studies about the dances of primitive peoples since no ethnologist had or has a sufficiently wide and heterogeneous ground experience to elaborate general theories. It would be necessary to set up cinematographic archives with

⁵ Marius Schneider, "Le rôle de la musique dans la mythologie et les rites des civilisations non européennes," *Histoire de la Musique*, Encyclopédie de la Pléiade, I, Paris, 1960, p. 131.

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recordings of primitive dances of all continents and cultural areas in order to build up a real science of primitive dances. Since, to our knowledge, such archives do not exist yet, the studies on dance develop on the fringe of ethnomusicology and that is why we owe to ethnomusicologists some of the more penetrating remarks on the character of the dances among primitive peoples.

Besides in any culture, including our own, dance and music are indissolubly linked. Gilbert Rouget, the ethnomusicologist, writes about certain musical rituals of Western Africa:

The singing is done by the dancers themselves who, we might say, sing their dances—we could also say, dance their songs—in such a way that the architecture of the song and the development of the dance are like the calking of one another.⁶

But one also ought to remember perhaps that the tight link between music and dance does not imply an absolutely reciprocal relationship, because if there is no dance without music, it is certainly true that music may exist independently of dance and, logically at least, precedes it. It seems in fact that dance may be defined as the exteriorization by means of gestures and “images” of the musical rhythms that man feels and creates according to his own nature and that of the world around him. This is particularly evident among primitive peoples where the movement of the dance often seems to rise directly from the fundamental physiological rhythms of the human body (breathing, heart beats, etc.). Besides among the peoples having an oral tradition, as we will see further on, even music seems to have been born originally from these rhythms (and from the rhythms of nature) or from their imitation, so that they could be considered as the common source of music and dance. Only “later on” (such expressions are to be taken more in a logical than in a historic sense) dance will begin to model itself on music and comment on it as in contemporary Western ballet.

Besides primitive dance born of a rhythm, of an interior music, creates an external rhythm and often produces sounds; therefore we can say that in many cases there is music which rises from the rhythms of dance.

⁶ Gilbert Rouget, “Un chromatisme africain,” *L'Homme*, Sept.-Dec. 1961, p. 35.

The complex and very intimate relationship of these two arts is still very evident in Africa:

Music and dance in Africa are still linked in such an intimate way that very often both are in reality only two aspects of one and the same activity and by disassociating them it becomes impossible to understand them whether one's point of view is musicological, psychological or sociological. As far as musical instruments are concerned, some of them exist only in function of the dance... Their rustling is only the sonorous aspect of the movement of dance, and at the same time the movement itself is conceived and felt only in function of the noise it produces. With such instruments which are so close to the body that they are almost part of it, the dialectics of movement and sound asserts itself in the most evident way. All these clashing instruments, which in Europe are not even considered musical instruments worthy of this name, give flavor to African music whose riches and delicacies can not be imagined if one has never heard it.⁷

We will return to these facts later on when speaking of primitive ritual music and in those paragraphs dedicated to the peculiar convergence existing between that music and some aspects of contemporary music.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF PRIMITIVE MUSIC RITUAL

Many ideas and concepts that we will enumerate, always based on the research and the conclusions of known field specialists, may seem too complex, too elevated or too "philosophic" to constitute in truth the conscious cultural heritage of those who have been called for so long "the children of nature." One might observe that maybe no primitive has ever felt and expressed ideas in such a form. We can refute henceforth this objection recalling that recent research of cultural anthropologists on the structures of kinship, social organizations, economic systems and lastly on mythology and also the research of psychologists on the individual and collective unconscious (even if the studies on the latter are not very advanced) has proved irrefutably the existence of a logical

⁷ Gilbert Rouget, "Musique de l'Afrique Noire," *Histoire de la Musique* cit, pp. 235-236.

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and coherent functioning of human thought at an unconscious level. Why should we deny that equally complex and elaborate values are present in the musical manifestations of primitive peoples? The fact is that we Westerners tend to assimilate the concepts of the unconscious and the irrational and to see in this last term the definition of the lack of sense.

We must not forget also that in some cases ethnological research has revealed the full consciousness and knowledge of a whole complex and elaborate "metaphysical" system among individuals belonging to primitive cultures. It is enough to quote the extraordinary interviews given to Marcel Griaule by the old hunter Dogon Ogotemmelé. Too often ethnologists did not even bother to investigate in order to discover if among the tribes they visited there were people capable of explaining in a coherent way the meaning of their rituals and their social customs. It took fifteen years of research and regular contacts with the Dogons before Marcel Griaule and his équipe succeeded in making the old indigenous understand the meaning of their work. He then called for them and decided to reveal to them the essence of the sacred tradition of his people. It is an exceptional case, but consider how many practicing Christians would be able to explain the deep meaning, the mystery of the sacrifice of God-Man in the Communion or how many Buddhists would know how to state the essential points of the doctrine of Nirvana? Very few, probably, but nonetheless we do not doubt that these contents exist and are present in the ritual practices which manifest them, because we know the written text that transmit their meaning. The exclusively oral tradition of primitive peoples prevents us from referring to similar documents.⁸

THE RITUAL AND MIMIC MUSICAL MANIFESTATIONS

We have mentioned already the fundamentally religious or sacred character of most manifestations of music and dance among prim-

⁸ Marcel Griaule, *Dieu d'eau. Entretien avec Ogotemmelé*, Paris, 1948. Griaule notes in his preface (p. 9): "Certainly, this people does not always have a profound knowledge of its gestures and prayers but in this it resembles all peoples. One would not charge the Christian dogma of transubstantiation with being esoteric on the pretext that the man of the street does not know this word and has only the vaguest ideas on the subject."

itive peoples. But it seems to us that adjectives such as “religious” or “sacred” may give way to many misunderstandings. In fact, if Western civilization removed very soon all the sacred characteristics of the dance when some magical and esoteric traditions of Greco-Roman antiquity were forgotten or destroyed, it nonetheless continued producing “sacred” music for a long time. At this point, it is important to underline the fact that any assimilation between Western sacred music and primitive ritual music would rest on an equivocation and any radio-televised transmission that would not take this fact into consideration would give the public, accustomed to a certain idea of what is religious and sacred, a false idea of primitive musical rituals. The religious character of a mass by Guillaume de Machaut or by Palestrina is not comparable to that of any primitive ritual music. The composers of Western sacred music composed music to accompany the rite. The music remained foreign to the rite inasmuch as basically it was not an essential element. The primitives sing songs, perform music and dances which *are* the rite itself. As Gilbert Rouget said in a study we have already quoted about the chromatism of some ritual music of western Africa:

Being the expression of a complex and intense religious life, the cult of the *Vaudou* and the *Orisha* has a great number of ceremonies during which almost all ritual acts are accompanied by music; perhaps it would be more exact to say that they *are* music and very often, dance.⁹

This fact produces some consequences concerning the execution of the musical rite. The Maoris, for example, still refuse to perform the traditional chants if they are not completely sure of being able to do it with perfect exactness as regards the words and also the musical part. Each error would be considered as a serious sacrilege bringing misfortunes to the one responsible and to the whole tribe. The priest who had made such a mistake in the ancient times was punishable by death.¹⁰

In fact, the exactitude of the rite in every detail is the guarantee

⁹ Gilbert Rouget, “Un chromatisme africain” cit., p. 33.

¹⁰ Mervin Evan McLean, “Oral Transmission in Maori Music,” *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, XIII (1961), p. 59.

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of its validity for the preservation of the whole community and of the universe around it, it is a condition of the cosmos, of the natural and supranatural order and the symbol of that continuity in the repeated present which made those peoples be called falsely "the peoples without history." We will return to this example when speaking of the oral tradition and the problem of esthetics.

THE CONTINUITY OF THE MUSICAL RITE

Another important formal trait of the majority of primitive dances and music lies in their absolute continuity. Silence or halting the movement are very rare in these manifestations. The Maoris, whom we have just evoked, do not tolerate interruptions of the ritual chant, not even for an instant, and for this reason they rarely perform sacred chants individually as they would necessarily be interrupted by the exigencies of breathing. In collective chants they are careful, that the rhythm of no individual's breathing coincide with another's.¹¹ We note that maybe just such preoccupations among many primitive peoples provoked the development of "poliphonic" musical forms.¹²

Professor Ettore Biocca, on his return from a long expedition along the Rio Negro and the High Orinoco, related to us how the indigenous Yanoama, who practically have no instrumental music but have developed remarkably the choral chant of a poliphonic type, were extremely astonished and also amused when a missionary tried to make them sing in unison.

It seems evident that the reasons for all this are more of a religious than of an esthetic nature. Music is considered the most efficacious way of entering in contact with the gods who are often conceived as having an acoustical nature (some pre-Buddhist Indian texts even identified the divinities with ritual chants that sing their praise). On the other hand, it has been noted that in most religious traditions, the initial act of creation is brought about by god by means of an acoustical emission. This seems to explain the continuity of the musical ritual, any interruption of the ritual

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹² The forms of "primitive" music have a history as long as those of European music: one cannot be too careful in the formulation of genetic hypotheses of this type.

in fact breaks the rapport of mystical communion between man and the divinity by eliminating the mediating term. Moreover if the chants and music are god in themselves, any interruption would drive them away before their, "acoustical sacrifice," could be carried out, before the mediation between the earth and the skies, the natural and the supranatural, man and the divinity can be perfectly realized. There is no intermediate way for communing with the Divine, it can only be total; to interrupt the ritual music or to grope while performing it is a sacrilege, as it would be sacrilege to dismember God or to recognize him hesitatingly.

As regards the ritual dances of primitive peoples, we find analogous concepts, with this difference however. The Divinity does not identify himself nor does he express himself by means of sounds but takes complete possession of the dancers. The fundamental rhythms of nature which correspond to the rhythms of the creation of the universe manifest themselves in the dance by means of the rhythms of the human body.

We find in these religious conceptions of the primitives this correspondence between natural macrocosm and the human microcosm on which was based for a long time the philosophic thought of highly developed cultures.

If what we have written is true, we may say that in this kind of sacred manifestation music and rite are not exactly identified but rather that there is no real rite, since everything proceeds without real images and a state of mystic identification with the divinity (or with natural universe) is reached by means of pure rhythmic conceptions. When actual rite intervenes the music more or less loses its absolute value.

This is one of the meanings we can attribute to this passage by the Chinese historian, Sseu-ma Ts'ien:

Music and rites manifest the nature of the sky and the earth. They penetrate to the virtues of supranatural intelligences. They make the spirits descend from above, and they make the spirits come out from below. They realize the substance of all beings. Music is practised internally, rites are established externally. Music corresponds to the sky, rites to earth. Music unifies (the image and the sound), rites differentiate them.¹³

¹³ Marius Schneider, "Le rôle de la musique..." cit., p. 192.

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We are only offering incipient hypotheses about facts which we have not yet thoroughly considered. It may be better to return to these facts and say something about music and imitative dances.

MUSIC AND IMITATIVE DANCES

Primitive peoples generally have developed an extraordinary artfulness in imitating, synthetically and precisely the behavior and more than “the essence” of beings and natural phenomena by means of sounds and musically organized actions. Probably this was one of the first musical activities of man, who “is the only one in the whole earth who has the faculty of imitating directly or indirectly a great number of other rhythms and fundamental rhythms of nature.”¹⁴ It is certain that the forms of such musical imitation, that we may find now among primitive peoples, are the products of many centuries of elaboration and perfecting.

Thus Marius Schneider writes about imitative music:

All the investigations we may carry out as far as this is concerned lead us to believe that, since very ancient times, mankind has considered imitative music as an instrument of direct action and as the deepest source of wisdom for constituting the most substantial and succinct expression of phenomena. The most tangible reason—even if never formulated theoretically and clearly—for the existence of such a concrete role assigned to such an abstract art as is music, seems to lie in the opinion that sonorous rhythms are the true substance of phenomena and that space and visible objects do not count very much as far as the identification of the true nature of phenomena are concerned. Objects in space are only containers—significant but of secondary order—filled by one rhythm or another, depending on the time and the place, that animates these divided forms in space, producing in them the life and perpetual change which are so characteristic. The instability of objects does not allow primitive mysticism to consider them realities. Only the rhythm that invades them makes a reality, and the *highest and most essential of such rhythms is the sonorous rhythm*.

In this way time is considered an essential factor because of its function of creative rhythm, while space matters very little. Starting

¹⁴ Marius Schneider, *El Origen Musical de los Animales Símbolos en la Mitología y la Escultura Antigua*, Barcelona 1946, p. 5.

from this basis, music becomes the most pure terrestrial manifestation of creative rhythm and imposes itself as the supreme form of knowledge. In this natural science, which is anthropomorphological (for there is no object in this world without a voice), the essence of every phenomenon seems to express itself through the rhythm of sound, while the matter of the phenomenon manifest itself through the timbre of this sound. Music also knows the dimensions of space, its height, width and depth; however its extraordinary faculty consists precisely in being able to reduce the dimensions of space in the acoustical plane (height, motion, harmony) and to express, moreover, all the intensive and extensive qualitative aspects of phenomena.¹⁵

Also, according to the same author:

The rhythm and timbre of the voice seem to constitute the essential rhythm of all phenomena, therefore, beyond any doubt for the primitive mystic the acoustical plane is the highest plane of the creation ... This way of investigating is more the work of an artist than of a sage, more an intent to give a spontaneous structure, or to restructure (imitate) than a work of analysis. ... In fact, imitative music, reduced in our culture to a purely esthetic role is the art, or better the science par excellence of primitive cultures.¹⁶

It is therefore a form of cognitive apprehension of the world indissolubly linked to the conviction that the essence of each being and each phenomenon is of a spiritual nature. The first great specialists of primitive cultures gave the rather vague name of "animism" to this ensemble of deep belief.

THE MAGICAL ASPECT OF PRIMITIVE DANCE AND MUSIC

When considering imitative music one is led to speak of "science," as we have seen. In fact these forms of musical and mimic activities are based on an acute penetration in the observation of beings and natural phenomena and in the reproduction of their fundamental rhythms that primitive peoples have in common with ancient Oriental civilizations. It is justly called "anthropological

¹⁵ Marius Schneider, *El Origen...* cit., pp. 17-18.

¹⁶ Marius Schneider, *El Origen...* cit., p. 16. We have the impression that this major work by the great and learned German is not yet well-known or fully appreciated even by specialists of ethnomusicology: for this reason we quote long passages from it.

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science” by Marius Schneider because the natural entity is seen in a relationship of analogy with man, this analogy can not be realized on the level of ritual if not by means of spiritual mediation. (Western civilization has developed a system of technological mediation in regard to the natural world by reifying the subject, that is to say by making man and every natural being into something that can be controlled, dominated and possessed. It realizes this domination by means of a technological science based on the principles of physical causality).

The success derives from the ability to integrate harmoniously the spiritual human forces with those equally or still more spiritual of natural entities and spirits. This purely spiritual mediation, that Western civilization has limited to its rapports with the divinity, to the field of religion, is applied to all fields of their existence by primitive cultures. By organizing a whole system of subtle analogical correspondents, primitive man tries to reconstitute the lacerated unity of the cosmos; with music and dance he tries to eliminate the Fall, to fill the gap between the divinity and him. “To make music, sing and dance, here are three perfect ways of obtaining the favor of a god;” among the Aztecs for example, where the king used to say to his sons, according to Sahagun: “Apply yourselves to the dance, to the handling of the sacred drums and the rattles.”¹⁷

But his attitude also differs in such a way from the appropriately religious one of highly technological civilizations that it is impossible to say that the latter have simply reduced the realm of the sacred; there is a fundamental change in the relationship with supranatural entities. In fact the religion of primitive peoples does not foresee, or hardly, a spoken rapport with the divinity, a rapport based on the logic of language, but on the contrary, as we have seen, seeks contact by “sympathy” through musical emissions and ritual gestures.

When original sound, which constitutes the element of creative mediation in many primitive cosmogonies, is substituted by the Word, the Verb, religious thought appears and perhaps with it philosophic thought, mother of science.

But in the cultures we are considering this transformation

¹⁷ Enrique Llano and Marcel de Clerck, *Danses indiennes du Mexique*, Bruxelles, 1939, p. 19.

generally has not taken place and man keeps a magical view of the world according to which he has the power to identify himself with any natural being through music and dance above all. That is why music and dances for the recovery from sicknesses are so numerous in the world, and still exist in particular in the folklore of Spain and Southern Italy. Through music one tries to act directly on the sicknesses or on the spirits which cause them (often the spirits of people who have died recently have to be pacified and helped to become resigned to their new condition). Dancing medieval processions, accompanied by floggings and often by music, which took place in case of serious epidemics, were also disfigured survivals of conceptions of the kind.

Imitative music and dances of primitive peoples imply therefore a theory on the fundamentally acoustic character of natural phenomena and supranatural beings. We have seen that they were the best mediation possible between humanity and gods, they sometimes obliged the gods themselves to come down and to make themselves heard (Schneider would say "to sacrifice themselves") as Joseph Schmidt noted in regard to ritual music obtained with certain flutes by the natives of the northern part of New Guinea.

PSYCHOPHYSIOLOGIC EFFECTS

Thus through music and dance, man can invoke the gods and enter in contact with them. But he would fail if, at the same time, thanks to the same music, he did not achieve a particular spiritual state capable of making him aware of that contact, of making him feel it in an immediate and physiological way, in short making him achieve a mystical state. A psychological effect on him that can include a whole community, is the necessary condition of the magic efficacy of musical and mimic ritual. It has been observed that primitive peoples, and even more ancient Asian civilizations, seem to possess very deep and precise knowledge of the possible effects of some types of music and dance on the individual and collective psyche. Alain Daniélou, who studied the problem for a long time and founded in Berlin a center of studies for comparative music which does research especially of this kind, recently wrote:

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Two elements seem essential to the physical and psychological union of sonorous systems. They are rhythmic formulas established in relation to vital rhythms and the absolute precision of the persistence of sonorous rapports conditioned by certain numeric values in relation to our mental systems of classification. On this last point, cybernetics and recent works about electronic computers have given us very precise information. The music must have a direct and effective psychological action and therefore necessarily calls for the establishment of rhythmic and modal frameworks, rigorously precise and invariable, inside of which some variations may occur on condition that the framework not be affected by them.

... It is therefore not surprising that musical art has been considered as the most effective medium to realize mystical states of trance, freeing man from the torment of his mental thoughts and creating the climate in which mystical experience becomes a real possibility, and justifies the primordial importance attributed to music among the sciences of many civilizations.¹⁸

Some attempts have been made to study these aspects of primitive music from the formal and esthetic point of view of a Westerner. We once again agree completely with Alain Daniélou when he says that such a step can not lead to anything interesting just because primitive and Oriental music is based on principles that differ in character from those upon which the Western musical tradition has been founded for centuries. Moreover, even if transcriptions are possible and useful, although always approximate, and even though they may reveal interesting formal structures, from this point of view Western music has developed so many more elaborate and complex forms, that nothing new and vital can be brought to it by the knowledge of primitive forms.

To the contrary, we quote Daniélou again:

In order to understand and utilize the possibilities of the psychological and, let us say, magical action of musical forms we must shift to completely different bases in our methods of analyzing of sonorous rapports and musical instruments. Our methods of analytic perception are not founded at all on the same bases as our physiological reactions. In other words, we do not understand unconsciously the difference between sounds that act on our organism in a different way, just as

¹⁸ Alain Daniélou, "Valeurs éthiques et spirituelles en musique," *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, XVI (1964), pp. 12-13.

we do not taste necessarily the difference between things that are detrimental or beneficial. That is why we can understand the effect and value of forms of music only by starting from the observation of physiological reactions and audio-mental phenomena and not on the basis of conventional analysis of musical grammar and approximative transcriptions.¹⁹

It is very important to notice the impossibility of transcribing primitive music and some Oriental music because it implies a "scientific" method of approach other than those commonly utilized. It seems in fact that music has been deeply changed since it started making use of a written tradition and ceased modelling itself directly on man and things, but almost on itself, on its own texts, in a way analogous to that which occurred to religious and philosophic thought of the West and of Oriental civilizations.

DANCES AND MUSIC OF POSSESSION

Dances and music of possession are common among primitive peoples and still exist in the countryside of southern Europe. They are related most of all to magical medical practices. Some of the traditional knowledge about the music and dances described above can be applied to them.

We have to notice that in this case, the relation between music and dance is often inverted, at least starting from a certain moment. Music, in fact, creates the dance, gives it its rhythm, but once the dance begins, once the dancer is really possessed by the god the music only follows underscoring its movements and cadences. This fact has been studied in particular by Gilbert Rouget in Western Africa and with the collaboration of Jean Rouch he succeeded in tape-recording and filming it. For example, in a film about the chants and dances of a group of young girls coming out of a period of initiation one can see very clearly the very tight and subtle relationship existing in that kind of manifestation between music and dance. One can conclude not only that it is impossible to analyze and understand the musical structure of such rituals without taking into account the structure of body movements which correspond to it; but also that to a great

¹⁹ Alain Daniélou, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

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extent this music is “directed” and modeled by the dancers’ action.

It is useless to recall that studies and recordings of the kind are still very rare and it is impossible or very difficult for the moment to make clear in a general, and at the same time, precise way the character of the relationship between dance movements and music in such ceremonies.²⁰

That this kind of music and dance, which can provoke a particular psycho-physiological state among musicians, dancers and audience, is incompatible with the systems of a written musical tradition, is proven by the fact that in the contemporary Western world the only phenomena which approach it are the jazz of black Americans and some rural European ceremonies which depend on the pure oral tradition:

Negro spirituals, some forms of jazz, the music of Iranian dervishes, Indian Bahjana-s and Kirtana-s and most African music utilize elements of sonorous language which have an undeniable psychological action and which create a climate which is extremely favorable for mystical ecstasies.²¹

FOLKLORISTIC RITUALS

What survives in modern Western culture of all this ensemble of conceptions and concrete abilities that are present in a more or

²⁰ Because technical progress has made possible the construction of rather manageable synchronous moving-picture cameras, it has become possible to record at the same time, or better still, on the same time, dances and music. This is not always without technical or other problems when it is a question of recording primitive rituals in the often very difficult conditions of the area of ethnographical inquiry as has been clearly indicated by G. Rouget who, with the collaboration of Jean Rouch, made one of the first perfectly synchronous sound-motion pictures. The subject of inquiry was a group of Dogon beaters. In writing about this experience Rouget said, among other things that “... synchronous cinema can render the greatest services to ethnomusicological research,” and that the documents collected “enable us to show that films made in this way, by making evident the relationships which exist between music and the movements from which it springs, can play a determinant role in the study destined to make up an inventory of the different sounds put in motion by a given music; a study, as indispensable to musicology as it is to linguistics, that of the articulative movements for the inventory of the sounds of a language.” Rouget, “Un film experimental: batteries Dogón. Eléments pour une étude des rythmes,” *L’Homme*, April-June 1965, pp. 126-7.

²¹ Alain Daniélou, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

less refined form among primitive peoples and Asian peoples with an oral tradition? Nothing or almost nothing, it seems to us. Still we may find traces of similar traditions in two different and nearly opposed areas of Western civilization.

On one hand there are the theories (because we know almost nothing of the practices) of some philosophico-musical schools of classic antiquity, such as the Pythagorean school, of a clearly esoteric and initiative character. On the other hand, we have some rapidly disappearing survivals of it in the popular musical folklore of Europe, mainly in those areas where it remained linked to archaic agricultural structures. There is no space here to speak of the first of these manifestations since trace of it can be found only in ancient texts, but we deem it useful to pause briefly and discuss musical folklore. It seems to us that the studies of folklore and ethnology (i.e. the science of popular tradition in highly developed cultures and the study of totally primitive cultures) have been confused too often. To draw a distinction between them is of extreme importance for our subject.

In highly developed civilizations, at least in the West, popular culture which preserves folkloristic traditions is only a retarded aspect, or rather an "enclave," of the superior culture which develops on the basis of written tradition and technological progress. For centuries and still now popular culture is influenced by the superior culture and, in regard to the musical rituals which interest us here, we may say that if precise traces can be found of a preceding stage, on the whole they have lost their sacred and mystical character, they are no longer even rites but manifestations of an essentially recreational nature. An intermediate case between these two forms may be represented by some music and dances of bees that are performed still or were performed until recently in Provence and which exist in a similar form among some primitive peoples. In Provence, the magical character of the ceremony is partially preserved but the sense of participation or the mystical identification of the performers with the natural entity with which one wants to establish a relationship has been lost. We quote Marius Schneider:

These differences of conception are evident, also in common forms, because of the discrepancy of its internal structure. When a primitive man tries to establish a mystical rapport with the bee he transforms

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himself with all his soul into a bee, imitating the buzzing, the external aspect and the angular movements of the bee's flight. Contrarily, in highly developed cultures, the common rhythm which establishes the rapport with the bee is obtained without direct physical participation (dance), but only by means of a metallic gong. Since the color of the gong is yellow and its sound very much like the buzzing of bees, it is sufficient to play the gong, imitating the rhythm of the bees, in order to dominate them. The active participation of the body is replaced by an instrument. The primitive man becomes a bee by putting himself at a bee's level while the magical man of highly developed cultures dominates the bees. In highly developed civilizations the dance of the bees is only considered an artistic model, a ballet, a stylized form.²²

Western folkloristic music and dances, having acquired already an almost entirely secular character, present problems of recording and radio-televised broadcasts that differ from the problems we are dealing with, problems with which the International Folk Music Council has already dealt and therefore it is useless to discuss them here.

On the other hand, it would be a mistake not to see some formal analogies which exist between Western folk music and primitive music, analogies which present themselves under two aspects: that of the musical form and that of certain possibilities of a psychophysiological hold on the actors and audience, i.e. that magical aspect to which we already have alluded. It seems evident that these two aspects are intimately linked since one cannot speak of some possible effects of music on the human mind and body without speaking of musical form, and we cannot deal with that form among primitive or Asiatic peoples without taking into account the fact that their cultures, at least in regard to music, are founded upon an essentially oral tradition.

FORM AND ESTHETIC VALUE

We have discussed certain characteristics of mimic and musical rituals of primitive peoples, considering them from the primitive point of view. We have seen some of the spiritual motivations for musical and coreographic forms. Now we must return to our theme

²² Marius Schneider, *El Origen...* cit., p. 5.

in order to see if this primitive music and these dances may be of interest also to the Western public, accustomed as they are to the tradition of classical music and ballet, setting aside any intellectual curiosity of an ethnological nature. We therefore must deal with the problem of the esthetic value and the form of primitive dances and music.

First, it must be pointed out, even if it is a known fact (inspite of the old idea, still prevalent among the great public, according to which the esthetic manifestations of primitive peoples are “instinctive” and more or less due to chance) that the research of the last forty years has demonstrated not only for painting and sculpture but also for music and dance, that primitive peoples are perfectly conscious of formal values and they know very well the difference between a good and a bad executor. As Dreyfus noted in South America:

It has appeared... that not only a form exists in Indian music but moreover we find different forms integrating musical processes which differ a great deal from one population to the other even when these populations have a very similar cultural level.²³

And Rouget more generally:

... the form is also consubstantial with oral music—be it Australian, Eskimo, Sardinian, Bulgarian, Indian or Berber—as well as with written music, because music is everywhere and always an architecture of time and in this regard the civilizations with an oral tradition have nothing to envy, at least until now, of those with written traditions, living in a time much more artistically structured as ours.²⁴

It seems that a good part of the musical processes which have been developed and systematically organized in Western music are present in primitive music. There are many examples; it will be sufficient to cite here the rhythmic chants of the Maoris, the vocal chromatism of Dahomey, the astonishing forms of choral

²³ Simone Dreyfus, “Formes de musiques rituelles chez les Indiens d’Amérique du Sud,” *Actes du VI^e Congrès International des Sciences Anthropologiques et Ethnologiques*, Paris 1960, T. II, vol. 2, p. 101.

²⁴ Gilbert Rouget, “A propos de la forme dans les musiques de tradition orale,” *Les Colloques de Wegimont*, vol. I, 1954-55, Paris-Bruxelles, 1956, p. 142.

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poliphony which Ettore Biocca discovered in north western Brasil²⁵ and the extraordinary “armonic” effects of the music of the great sacred flutes in the same region, which gave the first travellers who heard them the impression of an organ being played in the bush.²⁶

PRIMITIVE MUSIC AND CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

Since the last century, Western composers often have been inspired by European popular folklore music. More recently they have been inspired by the musical tradition of the Far East. (Consider the influence of the Zen doctrine on the ideas and works of the most important contemporary music school of the United States, that of John Cage).²⁷

In the last years the works of some composers made us often think of some formal traits of primitive ritual music. One of them, the composition called *Sonant* by Mauricio Kagel, which we liked very much, has curious characteristics of structure of the rhythms and sonorous timbres which reminded us of “primitive” music. (The composer himself, besides told us after the execution that our impression was correct since he first had been inspired for this work while listening to Indian voices in the pampas of Argentina in the middle of the night. Now South American Indians never make any noise at night, if not for ritualistic reasons).

Let us now take the example of a long magical healing ceremony among the Yaruro in Venezuela; the analogy seems striking as

²⁵ Ettore Biocca, *Viaggi fra gli Indi, Alto Rio Negro - Alto Orinoco. Appunti di un biologo*, Roma, 1965-66, vol. IV.

²⁶ A.R. Wallace, *A Narrative of Travels on the Amazon and Rio Negro*, London, 1853, pp. 348-9.

²⁷ It is necessary to keep in mind, however, that Oriental doctrines and practices have only an indirect influence on the works of the best composers of the American “school” (as it does on all compositions by the serious composers who have been inspired by them); for these it is a question in fact of finding a new way of thinking about music in relation to our culture (and from which we cannot escape in any case), much more than borrowing ready-made determined musical modes and materials. The American composer Morton Feldman was asked at a lecture if he did not think that Japanese music had had a great influence on his own music. He answered by telling how a young Japanese composer, after having heard recordings of all his compositions, had exclaimed: “But to my ear that sounds absolutely like Beethoven!”

regards the rapport between the part recited and the part sung, with the only difference being that the sung part in *Sonant* is replaced by an instrumental part. Here is how Dreyfus describes the end of that ritual:

The musical architecture modifies itself as the session goes on. One of the apprentice shamans recites some litanies, without interruption, while the shaman pronounces formulas which vary from one chant to the other and all is sustained by a chorus of women. Then the shaman, definitely detaches himself from the chorus, and at the same time as the chorus, gives a long recitation. It is then that the spoken sonorous background transforms itself into a second chant, melodically and rhythmically independent from the first, thus creating a *vocal heterophony* that never occurred previously in the course of the ceremony.²⁸

In another work by Kagel, called *Heterophony*, written for a full orchestra, the audience cannot notice unless it already knows, in which moment the piece begins because the instrumentalists begin playing as soon as they arrive, tuning their instruments as prescribed by the score. (First part: tune up, please); now whatever be the musical value of this process, the fact that interests us here is that one often hardly understands the exact moment in which a traditional musical rite begins. In general there is a whole initial phase during which the players of instruments and also the dancers and the singers seem almost undecided about what they are going to do and search for the exact tone and rhythm; as in the work by Kagel there is no solution of continuity between that first phase and the actual execution of the musical rhythm.

On the other hand, thanks to the progress of acoustical techniques, as it became increasingly possible for ethnomusicologists to study thoroughly the music of oral tradition, they discover that there is no abyss between it and the most elaborate products of the European musical tradition. In this way, for example, Rouget in the course of his analysis of African chromatism feels authorized to note "that without fail all this brings us to think of Webern," and concluding the same study, to note that maybe dodecaphonic

²⁸ Simone Dreyfus, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

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atonality will be connected, for the majority of its fans, to one of the two immemorial sources of music.²⁹

As far as dance is concerned, it is useless to recall the importance of indigenous dances (African above all) for contemporary ballet.

All this to remind the reader once again of the vital interest that musical and choreographic art can have in deepening the knowledge of primitive dances and music. Ethnomusicology should be justified also on a wider plane than the scientific one, as it has been noted by Gilbert Rouget:

The purpose of ethnomusicology does not lie solely in collecting and studying the music of the oral tradition, whose existence is gravely threatened by the evolution of the contemporary world. Its purpose is also and as much to make it known while respecting and restoring as faithfully as possible their most precious qualities, that of being very often irreplaceable and beautiful examples of art.³⁰

THE ORAL TRADITION

Is it possible to note along with Marius Schneider that “the finesse of acoustic observation in man seems to achieve the highest point of development in primitive mysticism, while in highly developed cultures this faculty progressively diminishes in favor of sight”³¹ and relate this to the fact that all highly developed cultures are based upon a written tradition? Moreover, can we agree with Professors W. Jong S.J. and McLuhan who think that the contemporary progress of audio-visual media, in particular that of television, are leading human civilization once again towards a more auditive than visual phase and may we see in this one of the hidden reasons for the great interest, even the fascination, that primitive oral cultures exert on modern culture?

Contemporary man, whose individualism based on the classical tradition is gravely threatened by the continuous progress of technics and by the generalizing of an economic system based more and more exclusively upon industrial production, considers with new interest these communities which seem to have realized

²⁹ G. Rouget, “Un chromatisme...” cit., pp. 40 and 46.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

³¹ M. Schneider, *El Origen...* cit., p. 28.

an absolute communitarianism. Moreover, being helplessly excluded from any possibility of possessing completely the cultural heritage of his own civilization, he inclines with a certain nostalgia towards these cultures that still are *à mesure d'homme*, in which, at least theoretically, every individual has the possibility of knowing and of knowing how to do everything that the other members of the society know and know how to do.³²

Since music has been written, the greater part of knowledge has been lost because of the impossibility of transcribing exactly its essential elements. This knowledge was and still is particularly profound in Oriental music, where a certain freedom of improvisation on the themes seems to exist, linked to a precision and a rigourousness in regard to the way the music must be executed that in no way compares with that of learned Western music, where to the contrary the themes are performed in a rigid way. We quote once again Daniélou, the great expert in these problems:

The systems for writing music are extremely imprecise, as are all executions based on a written form. Contrarily music improvised according to certain rules can be extremely precise. If we write music we fix its form but lose its substance. Improvised music, oriented from the interior towards the exterior, even if the form is simple, has a far greater effect than that of a complex piece of music whose elements are less precise. When we speak here of precision, we do not refer to more or less consonant chords, but to intervals that our ear does not analyze easily, the exactitude of which is of the order of the hundredth of a second. This has nothing to do with the vague approximations which are made possible by the power of adaptation of the ear, so often called upon to justify the existence of aberrant forms of musical esthetics which are completely disassociated from the physiological effect of sounds.³³

In any case, the fact of being founded only on an oral tradition

³² This seems true also for the doctrines which appear more esoteric as Marcel Griaule has made very clear *à propos* of the cosmology and the rituals of the Dogons of Africa in a work we have already quoted: "Although it is not known in its entirety but by the old and certain initiates, this doctrine is not esoteric because each man who has reached old age can know it. On the other hand, Totemic priests of all ages know the parts corresponding to their speciality. More over the rites relating to these groups of beliefs are practiced by the people as a whole." (M. Griaule, *op. cit.*, p. 9).

³³ A. Daniélou, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

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deeply influences the nature of music and dance among primitive peoples. For example the extreme precision in the execution of music, among the Maoris applies also to the dances of the Aztecs

The most insignificant step was executed according to the protocol of a traditional ritual. Any stray impulse to improvise was immediately rejected as an impious and calamitous act.

They were afraid that the unexpected and unfortunate movement might destroy the beneficial action and that instead of attracting the sacred force and making it flow over the audience, it might attract the witchcraft of the irritated gods,³⁴

and is due, one has here the confirmation, to deep religious reasons and seems also to be consequence of a purely oral tradition. In fact if a Western performer "betrays" a composition by playing it too freely, whether for reasons of taste or for lack of ability, the original text remains nonetheless written in a definite way and the deviation has only an episodic value, while only a very limited freedom of invention and variation can be allowed to the executer of primitive music, under penalty of confusion and a total loss of the traditional musical heritage. Gregorian chants, intimately linked to the Christian religious experience of the Middle Ages and transmitted to us by both written and oral means, is a very interesting example of an intermediate case between these two forms, because its summary notation, which is the constant and immutable basis of its execution, also permitted a great number of particular evolutions, due to local interpretative traditions that become evident only over long periods. However it must not be forgotten that even modern Western notations are far from being absolutely precise, for instance, in regard to the determination of rhythms and heights.

In this world which grows smaller everyday, we are faced with the music of oral traditions which cannot be transcribed (or, in any case, its transcription would necessitate the drawing up of systems of homologous notation of the musical concepts upon which they are founded) and written music which sometimes cannot be played (for instance, some compositions by Bach, in which it is impossible to bring into being its transparency without

³⁴ E. Llano and M. de Clerck, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

sacrificing its force and *viceversa*; some passages of the last piano sonatas by Beethoven where there are indicated *crescendos* that are virtually impossible to play; a sonata by Schumann where there is written on the first page *il più presto possibile* and on the second page *accelerando* and many passages by Schönberg, etc.). Therefore, if in the Western world we can write music beyond the real possibilities of execution, it is not astonishing, exploring the unexploited possibilities of written tradition, that for many amateurs and experts of that music the most important experience is to *read* it rather than to listen to its execution (always imperfect). Could one imagine an attitude that differs more from that of civilizations with an oral tradition?

On the other hand, we have already had occasion to observe that the oral tradition favors the conservation from generation to generation of the very subtle knowledge of the nature of sounds and their properties of psychophysiological action on man.

We have seen that contemporary composers, ethnomusicologists, the Center at Berlin where Alain Daniélou proceeds with his research, etc. work a great deal with these problems. But is there really hope of preserving and renovating this musical tradition, of having it become part integrally of the ensemble of Western culture? Peter Crossley-Holland recently answered this question:

It is easy enough to speak about *renewal* of traditional music. But, without two essential requirements all this is an empty dream. These requirements are first the *renewal of traditional society* itself, and, secondly, the *manifestation of genius*. Let us frankly admit that neither of these is at our disposal. We have nevertheless at this moment a vital part to play. Like Noah in his Ark on the rising flood, we have to collect and preserve materials, to recognize and compare principles and be ready to disseminate them when and where they are needed again.³⁵

³⁵ Peter Crossley-Holland, "Preservation and Renewal of Traditional Music," *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, XVI (1964), p. 18. The "manifestation of genius" of which Crossley-Holland speaks cannot produce itself, it seems to us, but within a culture which can find the sense of its totality. Now, this culture would not know how to form itself by means of recuperating elements from completed or exotic civilizations. This is admirably expressed in a page by René Daumal, taken from his essay *Les limites du langage philosophique et les savoirs traditionnels*:

"It is impossible to create out of nothing a traditional knowledge embracing

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RITUAL, SPECTACLE AND THE PUBLIC

We may conclude therefore that the dances and the music of primitive peoples have an undeniable esthetic values, even if what we said previously about the contents and the sacred meaning of such manifestations is not taken into account. Now before concluding with some remarks about the possibilities of radio-televised broadcasts of these rituals, we must consider briefly the problem of the public.

In fact, it seems evident that if we envisage the possibility of transmitting mimic and musical rituals of primitive peoples for a Western public, we are bound to consider them as spectacles and not as sacred rituals. There is an enormous difference, because the audience of a primitive ritual can never be compared with the audience of any Western spectacle, even if it does not take part in the musical and mimic action. Here the participation of all members of the society is total. This is manifested clearly in the rites of possession. A Western public would be tempted in fact to consider the one possessed as an actor, while far from playing a personage, he incarnates it completely, he is completely filled by it. His individual personality wears away, gradually disappears and at the end he is really possessed by forces which are supernatural and social simultaneously. Supernatural because those forces are other than those of everyday-life and social because the releasing of the mystical experience would not be possible without the participation of the whole community. We cannot insist enough on the fact that such participation is extremely active: we could even say that the one who celebrates, like a medium, is possessed by the demons evoked by the community of

all human thought and activity. But it is also not possible to imitate a foreign tradition, nor to give life to a dead tradition; for peoples as for the individual; the law of one may be the death of the other. Nonetheless, the analogy of the Hindu tradition may suggest to us that traditional knowledge must always be built on the basis of a collective myth linked to institutions and maintaining concrete relations with nature and society; I see at present only scientific knowledge, linked to technical development and modern economic evolution, which tends to answer to this definition: this is a mythology and not the literary genre which one commonly refers to by this name. Perhaps it is on this basis that a new culture can be edified. It is difficult for us to conceive of our scientific knowledge as a 'myth' since we are so enveloped by it. But the 'myths' of the ancients were no more 'mythical' for them." (René Daumal, *Chaque fois que l'aube paraît*, Paris, 1953, pp. 160-1).

participants and therefore his role is rather passive by comparison to that of the community.³⁶

Mystical identification which we spoken about, therefore does not involve only the actors, the players of instruments, the singers or the dancers but also the audience. One can say that this same total identification of the audience is the social condition necessary for the success of the mystical identification of the performers. The musicologists Marius Schneider and Gilbert Rouget whom we have often quoted as two of the best experts of ethnomusicology, in different periods have made nearly the same remarks about the comprehension of primitive ritual music.

I quote them again in the order they are mentioned:

Clarifying these phenomena is rather difficult, because a complete understanding—not only logical and formalist—requires that the reader be informed by direct hearing. In their essence all these phenomena escape analytic investigation, because their dynamic nature subtracts from them any intention of decomposing into partial elements. In order to be informed it is necessary to *live* these forms.³⁷

The notion of the totality deserves a moment of reflection. Just as Stravinsky said that he needed to *look* at the instrumentalists, so it is also necessary to see and not only to hear some music—if not all—to understand them. The cinema and magnetic tapes, recording simultaneously image and sound, will renew soon no doubt, the methods of musicological investigation.

Moreover, this music should be heard, should be seen and should be played in order to be understood.³⁸

³⁶ In writing this we think above all of the rites of Haitian Voodoo. Is there need to recall that these far too general considerations could not be adapted such as they are without nuances and clarifications to the very different examples of rituals of possession that there are in the world? As Rouget says: “There are too many different types of possessions and consequently too many different types of music of possession for it to be possible to generalize on the basis of one single example...” (G. Rouget, “A propos de la forme...” cit., p. 142). But what seems important for our present subject is that to our knowledge there exists in no culture of oral tradition possessions which do not require more or less codified emissions of sounds and body movements in relation to these musical manifestations.

³⁷ M. Schneider, *El Origen...* cit., p. 19.

³⁸ G. Rouget, “A propos de la forme...” cit. p. 143 n. 1.

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RADIO, TELEVISION AND CINEMA IN THE DIFFUSION OF MUSICAL AND MIMIC RITUALS OF PRIMITIVE PEOPLES

It is clear that such a form of participation is practically excluded for the Western public, especially for radio and television audiences, who are much more separated, who can participate much less in the performances they listen to or watch than can the audience of a theater or cinema. Perhaps an analogy with the primitive ceremonies reconstitutes itself at another level, as far as television is concerned: in fact some televised broadcasts reach an enormous part of a country's population proportionally, and in the extreme it could reach the totality of it. That is exactly what happens among primitive peoples, but with a completely different meaning.

Therefore the problem lies in organizing broadcasts for a Western public in which precise ideas are given about the nature and character of the religious content of the primitive musical and mimic rituals and in which are shown by which musical and choreographic methods the total effects are achieved.

But for all those who, really love such manifestations of primitive cultures there is only one thing to do, to go and see the dances on their own ground, if they want to succeed in living its meaning and deep beauty, and they must hurry because the traditional cultures in which these ceremonies exist in an alive and pure form are disappearing more and more quickly. We have to say nonetheless that some are still aware of their spiritual force; thus on a record, edited by Gilbert Rouget to accompany one of his studies, we find the indication that its diffusion is forbidden in Dahomey, because of the sacred character of the music recorded.

As far as cinema is concerned, it maybe has more chances of providing us with some interesting realizations on the rituals of primitive peoples. In fact, the cinema is less linked than television to the indiscriminate totality of the public, it may find and choose *its* public even outside of the centers for ethnographic research. Some recent examples, unfortunately many of them vulgar, have shown the interest that this kind of subject stirs up.

André Martin, in his beautiful report on ethnological art films rightly said:

What purpose would talking films have served if they did nothing to save not only popular chants and dances, but also those precious

examples of exteriorized poetry of rural traditions, made up of the movements of the body, song and words, if they have not recorded these gestures and voices that the practice of writing suppresses and transmitted to us some of the secrets of the languages of tones, Indian or African psalmodic poetry, of Chinese or Balinese theater.

Mechanized civilization is incapable of offering us the equivalent of the accumulated and too neglected values of the popular arts and learned traditions. From the movies dedicated to this field the public may expect not only occasions for amusements and artistic joy but also much more intense personal echoes, elements of cultural exchange and also concrete factors of curiosity and international understanding. Science will find in the talking images some unpublished methods and points of departure for new research.³⁹

It seems important to us that while trying to achieve a more precise and possibly more complete vision of the different motivations which have a role in the mimic and musical rituals of primitive peoples, that an academic and pedantic attitude should not be adopted. "Because traditional music is not a mummy that should be surrounded by the specialists' respect, but is a seed that should be planted alive as the grain of Egyptian tombs" as Pierre Schaeffer, Director of the Services de la recherche de la radio-télévision française.

We have seen that primitive music influences contemporary music, even if mainly from a formal point of view. We also have seen that some research is being done now about the psychophysiological effects of music of oral tradition. According to us, what have not been studied enough are the contents, the ideas. They are catalogued in general as mythic dreams and their value is forgotten.

The intention of this study was just that of stirring up the problem of these contents and ideas. We would like therefore to conclude by quoting a passage by Antonin Artaud:

What is most urgent is not so much the defence of a culture whose existence has never saved a man from the anxiety of living better and being hungry, but the extraction of what is called culture, ideas whose living force is identical to that of hunger.⁴⁰

³⁹ Report edited upon request of the UNESCO.

⁴⁰ Antonin Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double*, Œuvres complètes, IV, Paris, 1964, p. 11.