ECSTATIC DANCE

by

ERIKA BOURGUIGNON

The Ohio State University

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Other people's religion always appears a little foolish.

François Mauriac.

It is well known that nearly all the social ceremonies of savage peoples consist of a feast combined with music, singing and dancing. The latter term is usually employed to include various processional and saltatory movements; these may vary considerably in rapidity of action, for in some ceremonies the movements are sedate or even solemn in their character while in others the actions of the performers are lively and may even seem grotesque. It should, however, be borne in mind that actions which appear to us to be grotesque may not be so, and perhaps never are, to savage and consequently there is a danger of misunderstanding them owing to an employment of misleading terms. Native actions should be regarded from a native and not from an European point of view.

A.C. Haddon, 1895
(The Secular and Ceremonial Dances of Torres Straits).
The Italian physician, L. Brambilla (1), writing in a psychiatric journal in 1959, reported a curious illness he had observed among the peoples of Eritrea and Amhara (Ethiopia). The illness was called "cherbó" or "devil's illness". Attacked by it, the patient executes movements and gestures in tune to the rhythm of the singing and playing of music provided for him by a circle of men and women gesticulating frantically. The patient is believed to be possessed by a devil or "cherbó" and the rhythmical dancing constitutes not only an expression of the illness but also an attempt to cure him of it. While possessed by the evil spirit, he is in a state of trance or dissociation, only tenuously aware of what goes on around him. Afterwards, he may remember none of the events. His illness consists of periodic attacks of such possession trance states, which may be provoked by the music of the cure, and the cure consists precisely in inducing the attack through the characteristic music and dancing. During the performance, an attempt is made to exercise or drive out the "devil".

In Apulia, in southern Italy, a team of anthropologists under the direction of the late professor Ernesto de Martino (2) studied a rather similar phenomenon in 1959. This is an illness known as tarantismo and in similar, other forms are found the origins of the most famous of all Italian dances, the tarantella. In Apulia, persons who believe that they were bitten by the tarantella, and who suffer from various emotional and psychosomatic disturbances, undergo a special cure every year on the days of Sts. Peter and Paul (the 29th and the 29th of June): at home, in the circle of their relatives and friends, to music specially provided for the occasion, the patient is made to dance to exhaustion. Later, in a public ceremony, all those in the region, who are afflicted by the disease of tarantismo gather at the Chapel of St. Paul in the town of Salento. Here a sizeable number of persons experience states of dissociation that
are frequently of considerable violence, and which terminate in a loss of consciousness. These ceremonial cures are repeated every year. Similar practices have been reported from Sicily, from Andalusia, from Spain and in former times they occurred in the South of France as well.

Dance epidemics spread through Europe periodically during the later Middle Ages and extended all together over a period of several hundred years. Writers who have described these phenomena (1), tell us that there were sects of "dancers" who believed in dancing as a form of ritual and worship. Their modal years to have become contagious and to have been followed by others. Some of these could not help themselves and found themselves forced to dance compulsively. Certain members of the clergy viewed these activities as manifestations of demonic possession and as a result they intended to drive out the devils and to exorcise the dancers. In spite of this negative view by some of the priests, remnants of dance as ritual, healing and protective ritual, have come down to the present. In some towns in Belgium and Luxemburg, such dancing processions are still held annually. In the Belgian coal mining region of the Borinage, where the young Vincent Van Gogh spent some months as an evangelist, in the region of Charleroi, one of the most impressive of these processions is to be seen. The priest, carrying the Host, follows the procession. As they step on to "l'île des danse", the place where legend says the dancing mania manifested itself, the entire group, and the priest with it, begins to dance, moving forward across the open space. It is she if the ground on which they step irresistibly forces this dancing motion on them, as if they were seized by it. In contrast to the dancing procession at Echternach, in the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg, which is perhaps better known and more famous, they do not move two steps forward and one step back, but the dancing is limited to the special area reserved for it. Today, these are ritualized, formalized performances
and they attract numerous onlookers and curious visitors. Still, they serve to remind us of the compulsive, dissociated nature of the dance of the great epidemics, even though the dancing processions today are not only such a reminder but are themselves a part of ritual and worship as well.

These examples are chosen almost at random from several hundred known to us. In them, we find dance and worship, belief in spirits who may possess people, and the experience of trance—or dissociation—we find ritual and illness and therapy. Religion, medicine and art are all intermingled here and the art of the dance is seen in its multiple forms as expressive of ecstasy and of illness, and at the same time, also as having the power to heal and to undo illness.

Let us look at these themes a little more closely. The belief in possession by spirits, evil or helpful spirits, which may take control of the human body, is very widespread indeed. It occurs in all parts of the world, but it is more widespread in Africa, in Europe and in Asia than elsewhere. Spirit possession may manifest itself in a variety of ways: in physical illness, in the acquisition of supernatural or superhuman powers for good and for evil, in mental illness or deviant behavior in states of dissociation or trance, which form a part of ritual practices rather than of illness. States of dissociation, whether ritual or pathological, are, of course, not necessarily interpreted by the people among whom they occur as due to such possession. Other explanations occur with equal frequency. Instead of being explained as evidence of possession, they may be interpreted as being due to being bewitched, to having lost one's soul, to supernatural inspiration or to a variety of other causes.

From the point of view of the scientific observer, rather than
that of the participant and believer, we may speak of trance in somewhat different terms. We may define it as a state of altered consciousness, that is, a state in which one or several psychological and physiological changes occur: a change in the perception of time, of form, of colors and brightness, of sound and of movement, of tastes and odors, a change in the feel of one’s own body, in sensations of pain, of hot or cold, of touch, a change in memory, in notions of one’s own identity and many others. Such changes may last for shorter or longer periods, may be of greater or lesser intensity, may be frequent or rare or even a single unique event in the life of the individual. They may be fleeting experiences, given little or no cultural interpretation or value, they may be terrifying events of major proportions, and again, they may be prized and cultivated, intentionally induced, means toward a supreme experience of the self or of the powers of the universe. The reader will recognize in these comments some of the things that have been said about the effects of hallucinogenic drugs; the whole field of altered states of consciousness has in recent years acquired a popular fascination and an aura of familiarity. But drugs are only one of many ways to achieve such altered states. These states have been sought, feared and avoided, given cultural explanations and treated ritually in many hundreds of human societies for thousands of years. The “psychedelic movement” and the “psychedelic experience” in contemporary America represent only a special local variant of a major theme of human cultural history.

While trance states can be, and often are, induced by drugs, in the ritual context these methods are especially typical of South American Indians and of some North Asiatic native peoples. Where drugs are used, the aim will be to have visions, to communicate with spirits, to gain special powers, to send one’s soul on errands to find lost objects or to bring back the abducted souls of sick persons. Indeed, the Siberian
or South American shamans send his soul "on a journey" we are not very far from the Hindu term "to take a trip." Elsewhere, particular
in Africa and among descendants of Africans in the Americas, drugs are
very rarely used for this purpose. Nor are dissociative states among
them generally utilized to attain visions or insights. Instead, they
are part of public ceremonial occasions, in which dissociated individ-
uals are believed to be possessed by certain spirits and they act out
the behavior of these spirits. Typically, musical rhythms, which are
tranced dance and the characteristic steps and movements of the spirits,
are associated with them. In trance, they generally do not wear masks,
skins representing the group of spirits associated with them. A different
type of possession trance and the frequent association with the dance and, most particularly, the fact
that both involve the impersonation of spiritual entities by human
beings. The fact that they rarely occur together is therefore a matter
of some interest, and we may stop to consider this finding for a mo-
ment. In addition to the similarities between possession trance and
the mask is used primarily for that purpose, rather than to
in fact, in general, in the case of possession trance, involvement of the wearer is generally unknown, or at least it seems
desirable that it be unknown. Thus, masks are frequently used by secret
organizations.
societies, which attempt to use police powers: the Fante in Liberia or the Ku Klux Klan in the United States are no exceptions to this. Masks also appear in the context of tribal initiations, where the young—and the women—are supposed to believe that the spirits, in the form of the maskers, have really come to the village. Part of the initiation into manhood consists in finding out the truth. Women, incidentally, very rarely wear masks; this is generally the privilege of adult men.

In contrast to what we have said about impersonations using masks, in the case of possession trance the identity of the impersonator is known to all. Instead of covering the face and body with a mask or disguise, the body, so to speak, itself becomes the "mask" which clothes the identity of the spirit, who now inhabits the body. While the actor manipulates the mask, the "possessed" person is, as it were, manipulated by the spirits that are temporarily incarnated in him. The transformation of the trancer then is much more fundamental than that of the masker. Because this radical and dramatic transformation is visible to all through the physical and psychological signs and symptoms of the trance state, the discontinuity in the personal identity of the trancer may be emphasized and heightened, as in Vietnam or in Korea, by placing a cloth over the person's face at the moment of the spirit's supposed entry into the body of his human medium.

Through spirit possession public proof and demonstration of the reality of the spirits and of their intervention in human affairs is given. Thus no mask is needed. The mask, we might say then, represents an external transformation, a change in the appearance of the actor; possession trance, on the other hand, represents an inner transformation, a change in the impersonator's essence.

As we have said, some people use both masks and possession trance to impersonate spirits on different occasions. This is the case, for
example among the Alaskan Eskimos, where the difference is strongly emphasized. Thus, Margaret Bantis (b) tells us that among these people, as among many others who use masks for such purposes, it is believed that the spirit resides in the mask itself, not in the masker. Indeed it is considered important that the spirit stay in the mask; it is therefore so constructed that the wearer can only look downward. This is done to prevent the spirit of the mask from entering the person wearing it, which it would do otherwise.

Like the mask, the possession trance phenomenon is intimately related to the dance. Indeed, this is the kind of trance state (or dissociational state) most frequently linked to the dance, although this is not exclusively the case. Non-possession trance, particularly the drug induced variety, is essentially a passive, subjective and private experience, even when it occurs to several persons at the same time or to one person in the presence of others. The effect of the drug is likely to alter the perception of sound, of music and rhythm and to limit more or less severely the controlled, co-ordinated and disciplined execution of patterns of motion. This in itself would tend to make dance performance unlikely. Possession trance, with its emphasis on impersonation, as we have just seen, is, on the other hand, an objectively demonstrated, active, public phenomenon, requiring an audience, not only to validate the experience, but in most cases, to bring it about in the first place. Furthermore, possession trance may at times be indeed more significant for the group that observes it than for the individual, who experiences it: this is particularly true when, as is frequently the case, the experience is not remembered by the subject. The dance, and the accompanying music, may be used to initiate dissociation, or, in the language of the believers, to "invite" the spirits; or the dance may be the characteristic motion of the spirit, or, again, where the spirits are to be dispatched, forcing the dancer to dance to exhaustion, to
unconsciousness, may be the preferred method of exorcising or removing the possessing, interfering, alien spirit.

Dance, together with rhythm, music, handclapping, singing, costuming, the presence of an expectant and participating audience, a ritual setting at an appropriate place and time, all these are ideally suited to produce the desired effect both of induction of dissociation and of the therapeutic results of the ritual. Expectation and suggestion are obviously of great importance in bringing these about. Furthermore, the ritual occasion is also an occasion for learning the appropriate behavior during dissociation from the model of others, learning of dance steps, of the love of the spirits, their characteristics of behavior and expression, and learning of the various elements of ritual as well. The musical rhythm, with its increasing frequency and intensity, facilitates rhythmic movement and itself has a clear psychological effect: it may help to release the dancer from part of his responsibility for his movements and actions. But it may have a physiological effect on the brain as well, helping to induce dissociation. The dance itself will contribute to an alteration of breathing patterns; it may bring about, in particular, hyperventilation, and, if prolonged, partial exhaustion, both of which again facilitate dissociation. Another significant factor, however, is to be found in the frequent movements of whirling and turning, of circular and rotational movements. These tend to affect the sense of balance and of equilibrium and thus tend to lead to dizziness. Disturbances of balance are likely to be experienced as involving a loss of control over the body, and thus over the self. It may be an indication of the impending loss of consciousness. If furthermore, a disturbance in the sense of balance is believed to be a preliminary to possession, to being "mounted" by a spirit, as it is so frequently phrased, this in itself will contribute to the likelihood of the occurrence of trance.
To recapitulate, then, what we have said so far: there are many types of ritualized, patterned forms of trance; there are many types of beliefs in possession by spirits. In fact, several such types of trance and several such types of spirit possession beliefs may co-exist in the same society or in different segments of the same society. When trance is interpreted as due to spirit possession and when spirit possession finds its expression in states of trance, then we are also likely to find a linkage between trance and dance. Non-possession trance more rarely uses the dance as its vehicle of expression and it is least likely to do so, when hallucinogenic drugs are employed. Where spirit possession trance occurs, the transes impersonates the spirit, but he is unlikely to utilize masks as his accessories. Possession belief that explains phenomena other than dissociation is not particularly relevant to a comparative study of the dance.

Ritualized, formalized dissociational states are found worldwide, are given a great variety of cultural interpretations and are embedded into many different institutions, customs, traditions and practices, most of which, however, are religious in nature. The very wide distribution of these states among the peoples of the world, today and in the past as far as we can tell, would suggest that they are very ancient indeed. We cannot trace their origins in the nearly two million years of human evolutionary history and to speculate about these origins would be a rather pointless enterprise at the present state of our knowledge. Furthermore, it is much more instructive and rewarding to consider these states and the beliefs to which they are linked as functioning and significant elements in the life of societies available for us to study now. This is surely a more reliable and valid procedure than to consider them as "survivals" of some speculatively reconstructed earlier state of mankind. Such theories of "survivals" depend on fragmentary evidence in which the gaps are filled by fanciful
speculations and theories about the evolution of customs and other unwarranted notions. Many such theories of survivals were developed during the past century, only to be replaced by other favorite survivals and evolutionary stages dear to subsequent writers. Most of these theories and stages are based on flimsy comparative evidence at best and usually on an illegitimate use of inference and therefore cannot stand up to serious scientific scrutiny. They have over and over again been debunked and discredited as misleading and without adequate facts to back them up. In the nature of the case, the evidence that would be required to establish them is simply unobtainable and therefore one speculation is as good—or as bad—as another. Unfortunately, the use that historians of the dance, and others, have too often made of anthropological material tends to be marred by their adherence to various outdated 19th century theories of cultural evolution and of survivals. Modern anthropology, indeed, has more promising contributions to make to our understanding of human activities, the ecstatic dance among them.

However, if we are more modest in our aims and look back to the span of five thousand years of recorded history, we meet a good many ancient examples of ecstatic dance, involving experiences of dissociation and often quite explicitly a statement of belief in supernatural possession or union with the Divine. Our own Western tradition has its deepest roots in the Mediterranean world of Jew and Greek and we find what we are looking for in both of these traditions. Indeed, we find it in a variety of forms. For example, we are told in the Bible (1 Samuel 16:13) that Saul travelled with a company of ecstatic prophets: "And David danced before the Lord with all his might." (II Samuel 6). He leaped and danced ecstatically before the ark, while he and his men played on such instruments as harps and psalteries, timbrels, cornets and cymbals, as the King James Version lists them. Ecstatic and dissociated behavior, visions and voices, appear throughout the Bible, both in the Old and
New Testament. The dancing sects and dancing epidemics of the Middle Ages and the dancing processions of present-day Belgium and Luxemburg are all reminders of these Biblical traditions and practices. And so were the ecstatic dances of the Hasidim among the Jews of Eastern Europe, which, incidentally, inspired so generously the choreography of Fiddler on the Roof. In all these dances, there is a heightened sense of participation in the mystic powers of the Divine. All of our examples refer to group dances, to forms of collective mysticism. There is no acting out here of the characters of diverse specific spirits, of impersonation or role playing, for there is only one Spirit in the power of which all share.

The impersonating, acting out type of possession trance, however, appears to have played insignificant part in the other ancestral cultural stream: the religious life of ancient Greece. The cults of Dionysios and of the Corybantes are only sketchily known to us from a few fragmentary references in the remnants of Greek literature and iconography. However, we know that the cult of Dionysios, which gave rise to the theater and to the art of dramatic representation in its classic form, also involved periodic trances of the gods followers. There is every reason to believe that Euripides play, The Bacchae, contains a strong element of historic truth in its representation of the frenzied, disassociated states of the Maenads. Greek painting and sculpture offer examples of the movements and faces of the Maenads in no uncertain terms, so that we may be quite sure that the artists who created these representations had in fact seen what they showed. However stylized, these are no works of pure imagination. The few references we have to Corybantic rituals tell us about dances and music specific for each spirit that is invoked and of the use of these spirit rituals in the treatment of "mania" or madness. The French classical philologist, H. Jeanmaire (5) has, in fact, suggested, that these practices bear
strong resemblances to those of the zar cult in modern Ethiopia, and
that a study of the zar cult may help us to understand the small number
of tantalizingly brief references to these ritual practices by ancient
Greek authors, which have come down to us.

There are, however, at least two kinds of ecstatic, dissociational
dances and dance rituals in the cultic area of classical Greece, which
have survived to modern times and which are likely to reveal at least an
element of direct continuity with the past. First of all, we find in
Northern Greece and in neighboring Bulgaria as well, rituals of fire
dancing. Fire dancing (or walking) has a wide but spotty distribution
in many parts of the world and we may safely assume that its origins go
back into the distant past. However, the form and significance of these
practices and of the psychological experiences associated with them
vary widely from region to region and from culture to culture. In
modern Greece fire dancing is celebrated on the day of St. Helena, in
memory of her recovery of the True Cross. Today, in addition to its
religious significance, it has acquired another: it is a major tourist
attraction. Indeed, the development from religion to performance, from
ritual to theater, is one that has taken place over and over again and
is a process we may observe occurring continuously. Still, it is not
without interest that modern fire walking occurs in Thrace, a region
which is one of the purported homelands of Dionysus.

A second ecstatic practice of ritual dance of this area, which has
also been turned into an annual performance is the striking dance of the
whirling Mevlevi dervishes of Konya, in central Anatolia. This town
is unique in Turkey, in that it originated and still maintains this
somewhat deviant form of Muslim brotherhood. Trance dancing appears
to be absent elsewhere in Turkey and the Konya dervishes, together with
other Muslim practitioners and practices, had been outlawed by the govern-
ment in the 1920's. Today, the annual public performance of the whirling
ecstatic dance is preserved and permitted as an attraction and as a museum piece. But in the local folk practices of Konya the whirling dervishes still play a role in the religious and religio-medical life of the people. Konya, too, is one of the ancestral homes of the Phrygian Dionysos.

We do not know with any certainty, whether the ancient Greek cults have any connection with diverse other ecstatic dancing practices in the Mediterranean basin in later times: tarantism and related patterns in Apulia, Sardinia, Spain and Provence, the war cult of North-East Africa, the Stambuli or Sori cults of Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco and several others. Still, the occasions for contacts for groups of diverse cultural backgrounds throughout this region were many. Christianity is known to have incorporated various Greek and other pagan elements and thus to have helped in their diffusion. Nevertheless, however fascinating such speculations about possible contacts might be, we risk being led to unfounded and hence useless conclusions by this sort of guesswork. We can, as we suggested earlier, learn more by looking at the concrete examples of contemporary peoples, whom we can study at first hand, observing their activities and finding out from their own statements, and in answer to our own questions, what these activities represent to them.

As already indicated, we can say with some assurance, that the ecstatic dance, the dance connected in some way with the phenomena of the trance—or dissociation—is a very widespread phenomenon and undoubtedly a very ancient element of ritual. It appears in many forms, taken on many cultural styles, including a variety of styles of dance. It is also linked to a great variety of beliefs and of social and ritual practices. However, to put some order into our materials, we may distinguish to basic types of ecstatic dance, and these will be our main concern in the pages that follow.
I. The dance as a vehicle for achieving mystic states.

When the dance is employed in order to bring about mystic states, as we have already seen, this is typically a group phenomenon; in contrast, in private, individual attempt to achieve such states, the dance appears to be rarely used and other methods are given preference. The dance is found in this context in various aspects of Jewish, Christian and Moslem traditions: we have found it in ancient Israel in the accounts of Saul and David, we have found it in the recent past among the Hasidim. An interesting secular adaptation of such ecstatic dancing is to be seen in the hora, the ecstatic whirling circle dance of the Israeli pioneers. It is secular, in the sense that no supernaturalism is involved in this intense experience of personal abandon. Rather, it is a kinesthetic reaffirmation of the group, of belongingness, indeed of the primacy of the group over the individual. The hora is a device for the experience of intensification of group identity, of meal and of devotion. This is quite explicitly stated in some of the texts of the highly rhythmic, monotonously repeated songs which accompany and structure the dance:

Hora', ali', ali'!
Bob hidli! belibi'!
(Hora, rise! rise!
light a fire in my heart!)

In Christianity, we have found ecstatic dancing, or traces of it, in the dancing sects and dancing manias of the Middle Ages and in the dancing processions of today. There is a trend toward this type of behavior also in the singing, slapping and stomping to be seen in some American Pentecostal Churches—white as well as Negro—together with other ecstatic manifestations such as speaking in tongues (glossolalia), faith healing, and even falling and losing consciousness temporarily. A Tent revival in the Middle East or South is a good place to observe these practices. Among Christian sects, to whom the ecstatic group
dance was an essential part of worship, we must mention the Shakers, who flourished in the United States in the 19th century, but of whom only a small remnant is now left. Similarly, pronounced patterns of ecstatic group dancing, associated with receiving the Holy Spirit, is found among various Christian churches in the West Indies, groups that have their basis at least in part in the traditions of Methodism. Among them are groups who are known as Spiritual Baptists in Trinidad and on the island of St. Vincent, and related groups in Jamaica as well. Some of them, as those in St. Vincent and in Haiti, in a bit of terminological confusion, are also known as Shakers, as are certain American Indian Christian churches of the Northwestern United States. My associate, Jeannette M. Henny, studied the trance behavior of the St. Vincent Shakers in great detail and it may be of interest to cite briefly her graphic description of this phenomenon: After describing how single individuals might go into trance during the hours-long hymn singing and sermonizing, during which rhythm is kept by handclapping and foot stamping, but where no instruments are used, she tells us about a second, group, level of dissociation: "Not only are the sounds of breathing kept to a precise tempo, but the motion patterns are depersonalized and unified, so that each person...is reproducing the same movement." And later she writes: "Each person was bent over at the waist, knees were bent, and they all bobbed up and down simultaneously, keeping the rhythm." Afterwards, the trancers...were not singing or humming, but they were producing gasps, groans, sighs, and shouts in profusion. They...appeared to be bewildered and perhaps breathless from exertion. The scene was one of confusion." (6)

As far as ecstatic dance in Islam is concerned, we have already explicitly mentioned the dervishes of Konya in Turkey, but so called "whirling dervishes" have a very wide distribution, and such orders or brotherhoods are found in a great arc from the Atlantic Coast of North Africa to Malaya and Indonesia. The mystic practices of these orders
involve the repetition—sometimes hundreds of times—of the prayer formula of the _dhir_. These repetitions are performed in unison by a group of men, chanting in response to a leader; the responses are accompanied by typical rotational, rhythmic motions of the torso, if not by actual dancing and whirling, and by a characteristically patterned intake and release of breath. The rhythm of the chant and the movement is accelerated, first slowly, then more and more rapidly. Many, if not all of the participants may reach mystic states, and go into trance.

The goal of all these practices, in their great variety of form and specific beliefs, is that of attaining unity with the Divine, to achieve a state of strengthened hope, a feeling of release, of salvation, of sacred euphoria. It makes you "feel good" or "feel happy" in the way it is often expressed in American Negro churches of a Fundamentalist or Pentecostal sort. The experience is a very personal, even intimate or but it is accomplished in a group setting, often through a shared effort with others, whether of prayer and evocation, of rhythmic singing and dancing or other spiritual exercises, and perhaps usually a combination of several of these. During the period of dissociation there is a narrowing and intensification of the field of awareness and afterwards there is a memory of a sublime and often inexpressible joy and satisfaction. The experience may be terminated by a brief period of unconsciousness, as in the falling to the ground so typical of American tent revivals.

Some Messianic movements, as well as established religions, have made use of the ecstatic dance as a method of achieving individual and collective mystical experiences. For example, in the late 19th century, a movement which came to be known as the Ghost Dance, swept through the Western Indian tribes of the United States. We are fortunate to have a splendid detailed first hand study of these events by a contemporary anthropologist, James Mooney. (7) The Messianic message, brought by the
prophet Wovoka, spread through some thirty or thirty-five tribes toward the late 1880's and seems to have contributed curiously to the Sioux outbreak of 1890. The message was modified somewhat as it was passed from tribe to tribe and so were some of the elements of the rite. The essential theme, however, combined ideas of the coming end of the world, the return of the Indian dead, and of the buffalo, with a special pattern of dance and ecstatic visions. These visions were interpreted by medicine men as due to hypnotism. The dance, which was the crucial element in this ritual, was a simple circle dance, in which as many as five hundred men, women, and children might join. The dancers moved slowly, with dragging feet from east to west, with clasped hands and intertwined fingers. Special songs were sung and repeated, but in contrast to other Indian dances no musical instruments were used. As the dance continued, some persons might go into trance, falling rigidly to the ground. Afterwards they related visions they had seen, and often they imitated and acted out the events of the visions. Then they attempted to induce trance in others, so that a great many individuals might go into trance in the course of the period of dancing. The message of the Ghost Dance, the intense personal experience of the visions, and of the contact they claimed to have with their dead relatives during these visions, gave the defeated and overpowered Indians hope and courage. That hope and that courage, however, resulted disastrously in the bloody massacre of the battle of Wounded Knee, which ended the Sioux uprising, and with it, Indian resistance.

Among other messianic movements, which have utilized the ecstatic dance, are a number that have sprung up among various South American Indian groups over the years. A rather recent development, for example, is the Hallelujah movement among the tribes of the Amazon basin, in Brazil and in the Guianas. Like the North American Ghost Dance, and as its name implies, it includes a variety of Christian elements. However, for several hundreds of years, probably going back before the European conquests of the continent, indigenous "end of the world" movements existed. These seem to have recurred over and over again, in waves, and to have taken various forms. In the historic and ethnographic
reports, they are spoken of as the "terre sans mal" movements— the search for a land without evil, without death. While these movements appear to be ancient in origin, a more recent example of it was en- countered in the early years of this century by the German-Brazilian anthropologist, Kurt Nimuendajú (8). He tells us that he met a strangling band of South Brazilian Indians, who, far from their home-land and under the leadership of a woman shaman, were, they said, on their way to the shores of the eastern ocean, an ocean which they had never seen. There they would dance, to become light, so they believed, in order to be able to rise up into the air and cross the ocean; in this way they would travel to the land without evil. Unable to persuade them to give up their hopeless project, Nimuendajú accompanied them to the coast. And there—indeed they danced fervently and seemingly endlessly. Yet they were not transformed into the weightless creatures they had hoped to become and, temporarily, they had to admit to the failure of their dream. This particular account illustrates, how a theme taken from a general; traditional belief system can be incorporated into a special social and religious movement, how it can be put to new uses, to meet a new need. The theme to be considered here is that of "becoming light through dancing," which is one of several constant aspects of South American shamanism. The shaman dances in the course of his rituals to become light, to be able to send his soul abroad, the dancing, thus, is intimately linked to the traditional belief in the shaman's power for spiritual voyages, sending his soul on various missions, be they of curing or of causing harm. The concept of lightness appears to have its roots in a real experience, in real bodily sensations of the dancer. Thus, it appears to have a relationship to something which we have already mentioned: the alteration of body sensations through intense and prolonged movements of dancing, perhaps even the feeling that the dancing becomes independent of the will of the dancer once he has overcome the initial feeling of exhaustion. This is a
manner, which, I suspect, might deserve closer and more systematic scrutiny.

II. Ecstatic dance as the ritual enactment of a role.

Quite a different utilization of the ritual ecstatic dance may be found in the case of possession trance, here the dance may be used in connection with the impersonation of spirits as part of the ritual of possession cults. Examples of such cults exist in many parts of the world. They are best known in West Africa and among the descendants of West Africans in the Americas: in Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti, Trinidad and in Brazil. Another famous series of possession trance phenomena is to be found in Indonesia, particularly in Bali, and in Southeast Asia, particularly in Malaya and in Vietnam.

a. Possession cults of worship.

While there are, of course, many variations in specific rituals and beliefs among possession cults, the religious practices I have in mind have a number of significant elements in common: the cults involve organized groups, sometimes based on a family unit, but often involving complex hierarchies and rules of membership; some portion of the ritual consists of a dramatic, theatrical (or semi-theatrical) impersonation of various spiritual entities by members of the group; this impersonation is carried out in a state of dissociation, but the actions of the dissociated performer (or trancer) are ascribed to the possessing spirit or spirits, rather than to the actor; some portions of this impersonation involve dancing: dancing and music to invite the spirits (and also, by the same token, to induce dissociation), as well as dancing as part of the characteristic and typical behavior of the spirits; the ritual is public or, at least, it involves an audience as well as one or more performers; typically, the experience of dissociation and impersonation is followed by amnesia, that is to say, the trancer does not remember what happened and what he—or rather the spirits who took over his body—
said and did. Moreover, he is generally not supposed to remember. An additional point that might be added to this list is the following: most reports appear to indicate that the majority of trancers in these groups are adult women, although men and sometimes even children may also experience trance states at times.

It is important to remember that in a society, in which such possession cults exist, there are also likely to be other manifestations of a belief in possession, other types of impersonation, other ritual actions and other types of dances as well. In the Afro-American religions of the Caribbean region and of Brazil, for example, we find the added complication of a co-existence, and often a fusion of syncretism, of African beliefs and rituals with Christian, particularly Catholic, elements. In Indonesia and in mainland Southeast Asia other types of fusion and co-existence are found, in which Islam and Hinduism, among other traditions, play an important part.

We may be able to obtain a clearer picture of possession cults in their social and cultural contexts if we look at one such situation in greater detail. We may take Haiti as our example. The Haitian situation happens to be one which I was able to study at first hand. It is also one for which we have a great many reports, although it is regrettable that, for a variety of reasons, the popular view of Haitian religion in this country has been tinged with much phoney exoticism and mystery, superstition and ignorance. The popular term for the Afro-Haitian folk religion itself has contributed much to the confusion; in the United States, this system of belief and ritual is usually referred to as voodoo, a word which the Haitians do not know. In the United States, however, the word voodoo or hoodoo is a general term for black magic, particularly as practiced by lower class Negroes, synonymous with "hex" or other terms for folk beliefs in witchcraft and
sorcery. With the possible exception of Louisiana, an Afro-Catholic system of belief and practices, as found in the Caribbean region and in Brazil, never appears to have developed in the United States.

To the Haitian peasant, vodô is a type of dance and, by extension, a type of ritual to which this dance is central. The term vodô, like its North American variant, is derived from an African word: Among the Fon people of the West African country of Dahomey, vodun means ancestor or ancestral spirit, and their religion was (and is) centered about the worship of these ancestors. In particular, the ancestors of the royal house were given great public celebrations. Those among the Dahomeans, who were sold into slavery to the Americans during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, the three hundred years of the great slave trade, brought with them the tradition of worshiping their ancestral spirits, the vodun. Where the Dahomeans were among the earliest or the largest of the slave groups, the term vodun (and its variants) became established, at times losing its basic connection with ritual and belief. Other terms were introduced by other groups; for example, Shango in Trinidad (or Xango in Brazil) centers about an ancestral divinity of the Yoruba people of Western Nigeria, who is known by the name.

Besides the words, there are many elements of ritual, of dance, of music, of symbolism, of belief, etc., etc., which demonstrate the close connections between the Afro-Americans and their African, particularly their West African, cousins. This is so, although many of the faithful themselves may be unaware of such connections. This is so, in Haiti, inspite of a separation from Africa of a century and a half, and in spite of much fusion with beliefs and practices from other sources on the one hand and much local diversity and innovation on the other.

Indeed, this local diversity, and even individual innovations, is one of the most noteworthy elements of Haitian folk religion;
one of the major errors committed by some writers on Haiti has been to attempt to discover an integrated theology and cosmology, a generally shared system of ritual and belief and perhaps even some centralized religious organization or the hierarchical arrangement of a priesthood.

In fact, while there is a general agreement on some basic beliefs, there is great freedom of innovation and great diversity of practice. In explanation of this, people say that new spirits may reveal themselves in dreams or in states of "possession", that is, during ritual possession trance. Other persons may simply claim that their familial traditions require a practice distinct in some particulars from that of some other family's traditions. Cult centers and their priests (hunfò are priests and mambò are priestesses) are independent of each other, except for ties of kinship, or perhaps, apprenticeship. They have no authority over each other. There are no "high priests of voodoo" or "bishops" or "popes" or whatever.

Central to the beliefs of this tradition is that there are a great many spirits, under Bon Dieu, and that these spirits, who may be referred to as loa or saints, play an important role in the life and health and welfare of human beings. The loa have names, personal identities, various abilities, tastes, character traits, etc. These identities are composites of features of African gods and Catholic saints. They are associated with human beings, in that they may be invited to participate in rituals; they respond by coming and "mounting their horses". This is the feature of this syncretic religion which concerns us most here. Rituals, however, involve various aspects, as can be seen in the painting by the Haitian primitive painter, Wilson Bigaud: They involve acts of sacrifice, slaughtering and butchering of animals, preparing food both for the consumption by the spirits and by human beings, they involve prayers and offerings, with ritual gestures such as the pouring of libations, kneeling, ritual objects such as candles, machetes, bead neck-
laces, rosaries and crosses. A cross, however, concerns the loa Gede, rather than any Christian idea. Snakes, which are small and harmless in Haiti, have maintained their spectacular African imagery and symbolism.

A major portion of many of the rituals consists of dancing. Dances are used to honor the spirits, to invite the spirits and, in many instances, they are performed by the spirits, that is by persons in possession trance. The dances, and the songs associated with them are accompanied by drums. There are two major types of loa and each has its own battery of drums. Drums, called ountor or hunter, are sacred and must be given special ritual treatment. They are baptized by a vodú priest in the presence of a godfather and a godmother. They are given names and a baptismal certificate is written out. Drums, like the loa, are represented by ground drawings, made of flour, coffee grounds, ashes, etc. Drums are played by men, never by women. Their power consists in their ability to call the spirits and to invite them to appear; each spirit has its own songs and rhythmic patterns and associated dance steps. Sometimes, these dance steps involve a veritable choreographic representation of the loa: the coquetish dances of the female loa Erzulie Freda (who is somewhat incongruously identified with Our Lady of Sorrows), the stooped and bent movements of the old woman loa such as Granm (grandmother) Erzulie, the aggressive, machete swinging of certain male spirits such as Ogun, the suggestive hip movements of the Gede: spirits of fertility and of death, the writhing motions and trees

For a musical transcription of 186 Haitian songs and drum rhythms see the contribution by M. Kolinski in: The Drum and the hoe, Life and Lore of the Haitian People, by H. Courlander, University of California Press, 1960.
motions and tree climbing of the snake spirit Damballah, and many others.

In addition to drums, other percussion instruments, such as maraccas and iron bars are also used. Rhythms are often complicated and the drumming as an insistent, compelling, driving quality, which undoubtedly contributes to the induction of trance. At the beginning and at the termination of trance states, there may be temporary disorders of balance and coordination, and, as our painting shows, dancers will then be supported by by-standers. Care is taken that trancers do not hurt themselves or others and that no offenses against modesty occur.

Rituals involving possession-trance usually, but not always, occur in the evening; a large number of people may be present, many dancing and going into trance simultaneously. Often this means that several persons may be possessed by manifestations of the same spirits at the same time or that a number of different spirits are present together. Also, a given person, in the course of a long evening, may be possessed by a number of different spirits. Each possessed person is dressed in the attributes of the possessing spirit, involving more or less elaborate costumes. Yet there are no true disguises and no masks are used. Everyone knows who the possessed person is, even though a most remarkable change of appearance and attitude, posture and expression may be undergone by the trancer. Women are frequently possessed by male spirits and men sometimes by female spirits. Possession trance may last from a few minutes to several hours and, reportedly, even for several days.

Group dances generally involve a counterclockwise movement around a central pole. There are no group figures and each dancer carries out his or her own patterns. Some, but not all, dancers at any given time may be in possession trance, but the level of control and coordination and the complexity of movements is often such that the casual observer may not be able to distinguish them. About two dozen named ritual dances
are known (9), some associated only with a particular spirit or group of spirits, some danced only in a particular region of the country. Some individuals are virtuoso dancers and certain steps or movements of shoulders or hips may involve much skill. Most of the ritual dances appear to be West African in origin and some, together with their musical accompaniment, can be located easily among Dahomeans, Yoruba or other West African groups as well as in other Afro-American areas. It is noteworthy that dances and some other aspects of trance behavior clearly involve learning and often also considerable control and reality orientation. At the same time, there is usually also a great deal of individualization in the behavior of each tranceer, and there is some partial loss of awareness as well, perhaps also some loss of sensitivity to pain and other stimuli, and by all indications, there is considerable modification of self-concept during the possession trance.

An evening of voudou ritual may involve a variety of activities and an alternation between highly organized, stylized ritual performances and diverse and complex interactions of human beings and possessing spirits, all dancing, singing, talking or eating, watching sleeping, etc. The prime aim of all of this is to entertain the spirits. Only to a limited extent is such a public gathering an occasion for seeking advice or cure or providing initiation into the cult group. Most of these activities are carried out in more private rituals, in which only a few, if any persons present may be in possession trance and in which dancing is not the primary ritual activity. Often, indeed, the dancing and drumming, with their invitation to the spirits, follow other rites. The activities that Bigand represents as occurring simultaneously in his painting in fact take place in sequence, perhaps even over a period of several days. For the Haitian, then, the principal function of the possession dance rituals is to experience the tangible reality of the spirits, to reaffirm and strengthen a living religion, to perceive in his own body a concrete manifestation of the supernatural world. Indeed, the distinction
implied here between "natural" and "supernatural" would make little sense to him.

Vodú, in its ceremonies and dances includes the belief in possession in the context of trance and ecstatic dance, there is also a belief in possession of a very different kind. This is possession by the spirits of dead persons, which is called upon as an explanation of certain types of illness. These possessions are the result of the work of sorcerers, who send or dispatch such a dead person against the victim to cause him illness and perhaps even death. At least, that is the widespread belief among Haitian peasants. Such possession by the dead does not involve trance, or ecstatic dance on the part of the patient. Still Vodú priests are likely to be the ones who make such a diagnosis and the assistance of their loa will be sought in an attempt to cure the patient. While this matter has nothing directly to do with our main subject, the ecstatic dance, it illustrates the fact that possession beliefs may concern events other than those of trance, and it serves as a warning against the casual use of language, which tends to identify "possession" with possession trance, and the "possessed" with the trance

Vodú ritual, as we have seen, provides an occasion for the impersonation of spirits by means of possession trance. Quite a different type of impersonation occurs during carnival. In carnival, we find the impersonation of a broad variety of characters by means of masquerading. Masks are made of a great variety of materials, indeed of whatever opportunity and imagination provide. Competition between bands of maskers is great and their dances through the streets provide a high point of entertainment. The music, dances and general behavior of the maskers have little in common with the activities of the vodú cult and are to be considered entirely secular. Similarly, the competitive dances of the Mara bands during Holy Week appear to be primarily a source of entertainment. It should be noted that both Mara and carnival appear in rural
areas, far from any tourist attractions, as well as in larger cities. Kasa also includes some traditional patterns of folk drama, which are absent in carnival. In addition to these types of dances, there are social dances ("bamboche") involving the ever popular meringue and many imported as well as local dance styles.

In Haiti, then, there are ritual, traditional and secular types of dances, there are folk plays and disguises and ritual possession trance impersonation. There is a belief in possession by the loa, manifested as trance, and there is a belief in possession by the dead, manifested as illness. Each of these activities occupies its own sector of life, has its own, often overlapping, groups of participants, its own styles of ritual music and dance. These folk traditions are heavily characterized by their African ancestry, but show evidence of a great many other cultural contributions and, in various ways, are continuously open to change, modification, borrowing, fusion, and also some cultural loss. An interesting aspect of Haitian folk life, however, is the fact that there appears to be no formal mythology, no formal tales concerning the spirits and their activities. Instead, the myths, the reality of the spirits, are acted out ever anew in song, and dance and impersonation and ritual, in the intensely personal and public experiences of possession trance, as well as in dreams.

Over the years, there has been some discussion by various writers on Haiti as to the nature of the possession trance. Some have argued that this is a phenomenon of mental illness, of nervous instability, of propensity to hysterical neurosis, if not also a proof of intellectual and cultural "backwardness". Others have argued that this is normal, culturally learned behavior, in a society where such behavior is prized, and have pointed to the many differences between a ritual picture of possession trance and a clinical picture of hysteria. Still others have claimed that ritual possession trance, in the controlled setting of the cult group, may be therapeutic for mental illness, like psycho-drama or group therapy, or the
such rites have a preventive, prophylactic function.

As long as we look at the Haitian religious situation in isolation or compare it only with the staid denominational religions of the United States or Western Europe, we do indeed have a "problem". If we look, on the other hand, at this matter in a broader comparative and historical scope, the phenomenon changes its complexion considerably. Our discussion so far has already indicated that ritualized dissociational states are a very widespread religious and cultural phenomenon, and this is true for the narrower category of possession trance as well. We must therefore not attempt to explain it on the basis of some special unique aberrations. Rather, we must look for explanations that have a wider application. It is clear that possession trance in Haiti is historically related to what is essentially the same phenomenon in West Africa and in other West African-derived societies in the Americas. It is part of a complex, ever-changing religious tradition and consequently appears to be culturally learned as other other capacities, such as sensitivity to musical and choreographic rhythms and styles is learned. If we observe crowds at Haitian vodou rituals, it is striking to see small children, babies among them, eagerly watching the going on. A favorite pastime of Haitian children is the playful imitation of possessed persons, that is, of the spirits themselves. Rather than being considered sacriligious, this type of game is encouraged by grown ups; it is not infrequent for adolescents to experience their first true trance states as a result of such initative impersonations. There is every evidence, then, that this behavior is learned in its formal and informal aspects, as the beliefs and associated ritual actions are learned. Not only is it learned, it is also rewarded: possession by the loa is considered a sign of supernatural approval, a sign that the gods like the person whom they chose to be their "horse". During the possession trance, the responsibility for all behavior of the "horse" is that of the spirit and not that of his human medium. The person, then, in this state, is free to engage in
activities that would be tabooed otherwise: assertion of authority and power, greediness, coquettishness, anger and many others. Assuming that these are in fact repressed aspects of the personality, it is true that the cults provide an outlet, as a safety-valve or balancing mechanism, for such repressed strivings. It must be remembered, however, that it is a very different thing to engage in dissociational activities at specific times and places, performing socially rewarded and socially significant roles and to do so intentionally, than to be the unwilling plaything to unconscious strivings that cannot be controlled. The Haitians consider that there is something seriously amiss, if an individual enters into possession trance unintentionally, frequently, outside the ritual context and outside of the reach of formal controls on his behavior. It is felt that the relation of such an individual with his spirits is not in order and requires the intervention of a skilled vodou priest, perhaps initiati and sacrifice, to set matters right.

We might say, then, that we need to know something about the historical and social factors that are associated with the ritual patterning of possession trance states. We need to know what such institutions do for the society in which they operate; that is, only a combination of a historical and a functional analysis can tell us "why" such institutions exist in some societies and not in others, or in some segments of some societies and not in others. On the level of the individual, on the other hand, it makes a considerable difference whether the dissociational state that is experienced are part of a socially learned and socially approved behavior pattern, or whether they are part of an individually learned and socially disapproved pattern. In Haiti, it is clear that we are dealing with the former. The cults, for some individuals, provide an outlet, a safety-valve and may thus be prophylactic; for others, they may be therapeutic. For still others, they provide a socially sanctioned way of expressing deviant or blocked strivings, and for still others, they may be none of these. That is to say, the level of social and cultural
analysis is no substitute for an understanding of individual experience and motivation. An understanding of the individual, however, is not truly possible outside of a cultural and historical framework and is no substitute for a socio-cultural analysis. Both must be undertaken to help us develop an understanding of a given pattern of behavior; neither is a shortcut to the whole picture.

It seems to me, then, that the vodú cult of Haiti can be understood as being clearly derived in many of its major features from its African ancestral forms. It represents, however, at the same time a peculiar and unique mixture of various African, European and indigenous traditions which resulted from the lengthy isolation of Haiti from the outside world since its revolution and independence in 1804. The peculiar political, economic and social conditions of Haiti have greatly contributed to the present state of this institution. It appears clear, for example, that the cult is now being manipulated for political ends. It seems equally clear that in the past it has represented a powerful bulwark for the survival of the Haitian peasant in his abject poverty and misery, and has provided an enormous source of strength and gratification. At the time of the revolution, it appears to have been a revolutionary force; now it appears to be a stabilizing and conservative force. It is conceivable, but doubtful, that it could again become a revolutionary force.

Cults incorporating the ecstatic dance linked to possession trance, involving a belief in spirits of African origin, with greater or lesser admixture of Christian belief and practice are found in many places in the Caribbean region: such groups were widespread, for example, in pre-Castro Cuba, where a variety of African-derived languages were still found to be spoken in the 1920's. Today, such cults exist in Jamaica in Timbúland and in the Guianas, and in Brazil as well. In some places, the practice of these cults has been maintained in communities originally founded by runaway slaves. This is true, for example, for the Maroons
of Jamaica, a group of whom we have a very interesting description in Katherine Dunham's book, *Journey to Accra*. In Jamaica, and in Trinidad as well, such Afro-American cult groups exist side by side, and sometimes in competition, with groups practicing another sort of ecstatic dance, one which rather belongs to our first type and which we have already mentioned briefly: for example, groups such as the Spiritual Baptists of Trinidad, and similar pentecostal churches in Jamaica, where trancers believe they are possessed by the Holy Ghost, and where few African elements are to be seen clearly in ritual and belief.

In many ways, however, the most interesting situation is that found in Brazil. In the cities of the Brazilian Northeast, in the city of Salvador in the state of Bahia, and in the city of Recife, in the state Pernambuco, we find elaborate African cults, which have preserved their traditions with great fidelity and orthodoxy. Thus, some cult houses, for instance, have preserved the Candomblé tradition, while others have kept that of the Ifọruba of Nigeria. They possess a wealth of ritual detail and are strongly aware of their African ties, inspite of the identification of African gods with Catholic saints, which has taken place here as well as throughout the Caribbean. These Afro-Catholic cults are known as Candomblé in Salvador and as Xangô in Recife. Elsewhere in Brazil, less elaborate forms and somewhat less African ones are known variously as batuque and mambêje. As in the Caribbean region, the more elaborate rituals, the larger and wealthier cult houses, the greater ceremonial display, all these occur in the cities rather than in the poorer and more remote rural areas. Indeed, although one might expect the rural areas to be more isolated and consequently more conservative and therefore to maintain their ancestral traditions with greater purity, this seems to be only rarely the case, and this, apparently at least in part, for economic reasons. While the greatest appeal of these traditional cults is, as one might expect, to the Afro-Brazilian sector of the population, some acquaintance with the cults is part of
the general popular culture of Brazil, and photographs in a Brazilian magazine will show that there are sizeable non-African elements among the participants and spectators of the cults. This is most strikingly true of a modified Afro-Brazilian religion, which has been developing in recent years, most particularly in the urban centers of industrial southern Brazil. This relatively new and rapidly growing religious movement is known as Umbanda. Umbanda incorporates in its beliefs and rituals Catholic, African (or, more correctly, Afro-Brazilian) and spiritualist elements, as well as themes that are believed to be of American Indian origin. The practices of possession trance and ecstatic dance are central among its activities; most strikingly, its adherents are largely urban, lower middle class persons of European and mixed as well as African backgrounds. Indeed, membership appears to include virtually the entire broad range of the Brazilian ethnic and racial spectrum, indeed, even persons of Oriental background are found among the Umbandistas. The African heritage is one of several of which Brazilians are proud, and of which, at least to some extent, they are more knowledgeable than North Americans in a somewhat parallel situation. Umbanda, then, is a fascinating social phenomenon for several reasons: it expresses and symbolizes Brazil’s multi-ethnic, multi-racial cultural, social and religious origins and achieves a synthesis between them. It reveals the Brazilian’s attitudes toward these diverse origins and manages a shared participation for all in this symbolic expression of their common past, which is also a highly sophisticated expression of the Brazilian self-image. Again, these features acquire a special significance when we contrast them with the North American situation. Furthermore, Umbanda is a religious movement, which appears to meet the needs of many people, particularly of a major segment of Brazilian society which is oriented toward modernization, urbanization, industrialization and other aspects of social change and social mobility. It should be emphasized that it does so primarily by religious means rather than by political or economic means. It employs a mystical and ecstatic rather than a
"rational" approach to the explanation and sometimes the solution of practical, personal problems. Through the element of Spiritualism, however, this mystical approach is clothed in a scientific (or pseudo-scientific) language. Surprisingly little has been written about Umbanda outside of Brazil and surprisingly little is known about it in this country, although its influence in Brazil appears, by all indication to be widespread and growing. My own interest in the subject has been stimulated by a study recently conducted in Sao Paulo by one of my associates, Miss Esther Pressel, and the preceding remarks are largely based on her reports and observations.

Like Haitian vodú, Umbanda consists of a great many independent cult centres and there is little of a common creed, beyond some basic features of belief and ritual. The central belief concerns spirits of dead persons (old, Negro slaves, Indians, children and wicked persons) who may possess individuals, when they have been invited through proper ritual means. These ritual means include dancing. Persons, who are possessed by these disincarnate spirits are in a state of dissociation, that is, they feel their actions and attitudes to be controlled by the possessing spirit rather than by themselves. It is the spirit, who dances, smokes, drinks, and most importantly, who talks. As in the more orthodox African cults, possessed persons may be referred to as the "horses" of the spirits, or, in Spiritualist parlance, as mediums. On certain days of the week, mediums assemble at cult centers, invite the spirits through dancing and singing, to the rhythms of drums, and through other ritual means; when the spirits have come, they are available to anyone for consultation. These consultations concern illness, pro-

However, for a description by a Brazilian journalist, who is himself also a cult leader, see: Jesus of the Spirits by Pedro McGregor, Stein and Day, Philadelphia, 1967.
fessional success or failure (including the passing of examinations), matters of love and jealousy and, generally, vast array of personal problems. Contrary to North American or European Spiritualism, there are no séances, no calling up of the spirits of deceased relatives, table turning or other features associated with Spiritualism in this country. Rooms are brightly lit and activities are, generally, public and open. Some illness or other disturbances may be interpreted by a medium or cult leader (or rather by their spirits) as desire by certain spirits for the sufferer's development of his or her mediumistic capacities. It is in the process of this development that, among other ritual activities, dancing plays a crucial role. Cult leaders conduct sessions in which mediums, or potential mediums are, in essence, taught how to enter into a dissociational state. This involves turning and whirling the candidate to induce disorientation, but at the same time preventing him from falling or losing consciousness. In the process, the rhythms and dance steps characteristic of each group of spirits are of course also learned, although these may not be taught quite specifically. Thus, the spirits of the old Negro slaves are bent and worn, but kindly, the Indian spirits are aggressive and powerful, the child spirits are appropriately childish and engage in much regressive behavior, while the spirits of wicked persons, or exuo, have knowledge of black magic and power against it. Where illness and other disorders are thought to be due to the need to develop one's mediumistic powers, it is reported that persons may indeed feel much improved when they become active cult members, participate in the dancing and in the possession trance experience and generally do the bidding of the spirits.

A Brazilian psychiatrist, Dr. David Akstein of Rio de Janeiro, has reported a medical adaptation of some of the cult practices under the name of "terpsichoretrancetherapy" (11) and claims excellent results for it for certain types of psychoneurotic patients. He uses the cult's dance methods of inducing trance states in a group setting.
cipients are primarily middle class patients, who do not have any
connection with the African cults. The belief in possession and other re-
ligious aspects of the cults are omitted and we consequently have here
a thoroughly secularized utilization of the ecstatic dance, employed
for purposes of therapy rather than for spiritual ends.

Perhaps it is a long way from the cult of divinised royal ancestors
of ancient West African kingdoms to scientific group therapy in one of
the largest and most modern industrial and political centers of the
Western world. The protean transformations undergone by what appear to be fundamental expressions of the human spirit surely are a
phenomenon worthy of note. The human capacity for modification as well
as for maintenance and reinterpretation of cultural materials, for
borrowing and adaptation, rather than invention and novel creation are
all illustrated here.

b. Possession trance in other settings.

After this migration across continents and centuries, it will perha-
no longer come as a surprise to find some altogether similar and yet
distinctive types of possession trance and ecstatic dance in quite a
different part of the world. One of the major centers of such practices
is to be found in mainland Southeast Asia and in Indonesia: In Malaya,
Java, and Bali as well as in the more remote islands and regions of
Indonesia and also in Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. This, too, is an
area where several major cultural streams have met: Hindu and Moslem,
Sino-Buddhist and earlier aboriginal patterns have interpenetrated each
other. The resulting scene is one of bewildering variety and historical
and cultural complexity. Yet patterns of possession trance, expressed
often in a multiplicity of forms, but frequently in dance and dance drama
are a recurrent feature of this area.

Perhaps the situation in Bali is best known and is the most famous
of all. The Mohammed domination, which submerged the cult of the Hindu gods in the strict monotheism of the worship of Allah in Malaya and in Java, did not reach this far. Here, Jane Bel (12) tells us, trance (i.e., possession trance) occurs in several different types and, essentially, in that many or more different cultural contexts. These types are: "trance doctors" and "mediumistic ceremonial practitioners", impersonators of the major masks in the ritual drama, kris dancers—male and female—who fight and stab themselves while in trance and who also have their places in the ritual drama, and interact with the maskers, "occasional trancers", little girls who act as child trancers for a period, but who cease this activity when they grow up, and finally "folk trancers" who enact parts of animals and objects while in hypnotic states. All of these have a primarily religious significance, for even in the case of the folk trancers, one explanation given is that spirits of various classes (such as gods, followers of gods, demons, etc.) are thought to "enter" the trancers and that this accounts for their behavior. All of these activities also involve dance, either as part of the possession trance performance itself or as part of the over-all ritual setting in which the possession trance takes place. There are, strictly speaking, no true possession cults involved here, although a number of mediumistic ceremonial practitioners might be attached to the same temple, participate jointly in a given festival occasion and go into trance more or less simultaneously, each possessed by his or her own particular spirit. The ritual through which one becomes a trance doctor or mediumistic ceremonial practitioner is referred to as a "wedding" ceremony and links the trancer and his spirit; but while this constitutes in effect an initiation into a ceremonial role, there is apparently no initiation into a cult group or membership in such a group. An illness, perhaps a fever of some sort, often precedes this initiation and has to be interpreted by a diviner. It may be diagnosed as due to a spirit's desire to "enter" the patient, to have him or her become his medium. It is not diagnosed as due to possession by a spirit, however. The symptoms
appear to be primarily physical in nature.

While all possession trance contexts in Bali are religious, they are also dramatic and aesthetic in nature. They involve one or more performers or players, that is persons who will go into trance, and they also involve an audience, whether it be, at one extreme, petitioners seeking help from a god through a trance doctor, or spectators at a folk trance performance at the other. The same thing is, of course, also true in such other Balinese activities as the puppet dramas and the non-trance dramatic and dance performances. These, however, do not directly concern us here, although we must keep the entire religious and aesthetic complex in mind for a fair appreciation of the Balinese scene.

Perhaps the greatest synthesis of drama, dance, art and religious ceremonial in Bali is found in the elaborate ritual dramas, centering about the characters of Hanyda, the Witch and Narong, the Dragon (or animal mask). The performances take place in the courtyards of ancient temples. There are musicians, players and audience. Among the players, there are temple priests who perform the necessary ritual manipulations, before and after the performance and there are the masked impersonators, one for the witch and at least two for the dragon. But in a performance of several hours' duration, different individuals may take turns with the masks. There are the groups of kris dancers, men and women who enter on stage at appropriate times in the action, there are little girl actresses and a cast of various others, where female roles, including that of the witch, are played by men. Some participants are elaborately costumed and, as already indicated, during part of the proceedings some of the protagonists are masked. Also, during some portions of the performance some of the actors enter into trance states and perform their roles in states of trance of various depths (12). The witch, for example, is masked during part of the time, but not throughout the play, is masked part of the time, and is in trance partly while masked and
partly while not masked; the two elements of impersonation are interwoven and their relationship is complicated. Most spectacular, perhaps, are the kris dancers, who appear on cue at a given point in the proceeding. They dance, the men engage in paired combat, go into trance and then turn their krisses against themselves, but are not hurt. They then fall to the ground in convulsive fits and are carried off. The priest calms them with incense and they later return, dancing toward the witch in a somnambulistic state. Throughout, various scenes are enacted and various characters or groups of characters carry out elaborate stylized gestures of ritual dance, in trance or otherwise. The drama is folklore and ritual, theater and masquerade; it combined spectacle, dance, possession trance and, at the end, sacrifices to the spirits who are being sent away, to return on another occasion.

The dances of Bali are highly stylized and professional dancers study their craft from childhood. The movements are graceful and elegant and so are the elaborate costumes and headdresses of the women dancers. Trance, as indicated, may be of varying depths, ranging from somnambulistic states, in which motions remain graceful and fairly well-controlled, to violent and convulsive seizures. Little girl trance dancers are said not to be trained and yet to be able, while in trance, to perform the graceful gestures and patterns of Balinese ritual dance, and some spectacular feats as well. Among these feats are various acrobatic actions, including standing upright and even dancing on the shoulders of men. Trance appears to be induced by music, by the highly organized programming of performances, by contagion and by ritual acts such as being exposed to smoke and incense from braziers. It is doubtful, however, that the incense induces the trance, that is, has narcotic qualities for it is also used to calm trancers and to terminate trance. However, the pattern of whirling and rotating dancers and would-be-trancers, which we discussed for Brazil, appears to be absent.
What about the relation of possession trance in Bali to mental health or to psychotherapy? Belo tells us, that trancers and non-trancers did not differ in their performance on psychological tests and that little girl trance dancers stop their activities as they grow up and are then indistinguishable from other women in their villages. There seems to be nothing especially significant about the illnesses prior to initiation, which are reported by trance doctors and mediums. These people themselves vary greatly in personality features and do not conform to any characteristic pattern at all. There is, however, one noteworthy observation which might be mentioned: Belo remarks that the Balinese are very unaggressive people (something which, incidentally, has often also been noted concerning the Brazilians!) and that beside them Europeans and Americans appear particularly "irascible". Much of the behavior in trance states appears to look like an expression of aggression and of great anger and trancers themselves, as for example in the case of the kris dancers, report that they feel a very great rage which forces them to turn their knives first against others and then against themselves. And this picture of unalleviated rage is seen in a typical mental illness of this part of the world: smok. Note that this juxtaposition of observations raises a question, it does not propose to answer it; yet there remains the possibility that possession trance performances provide the actors, and perhaps also the spectators, with some sort of balancing mechanism, the nature of which, if indeed it does exist, still needs to be clarified.

While we cannot consider the Balinese situation in all its remarkable complexity, we may just add another word on the subject of the folk trancers. Belo describes a very full development of this form in a particular district of eastern Bali. In this area, little folk dramas center about entranced individuals who, in their trance state, "become" some twenty different kinds of beings and things, among them snakes, pigs, puppies, horses, monkeys, potlids, brooms, puppets, etc. The actors are
dressed up for the ipaparts, the audience sings and teases them and in this setting, a remarkable mimicking of the animal or object is carried out by the trancers. One type of such performances, however, which is also known in Java and Malaya, is that of the hobby horse trance dancer. As Belo describes it: "...The player would start out riding the hobby horse, being so to speak, the horseman. But in his trance activity he would soon clearly become identified with the horse—he would prance, gallop about, stamp and kick as a horse—or perhaps it would be fairer to say that he would be horse and rider in one. For though he would sit on the hobby horse, his legs would serve from the beginning as the legs of the beast.) Sometimes several hobby horse performers appear in a single event. In Java, we hear of travelling troupes in which the hobby horse rider is directed by a showman, a veritable "trainer" who, in effect, puts him into trance. In Malaya, we hear of races run by hobby horse trancers, and of animal imitations in trance practiced as a game by boys. Hob y horse dancing of course is known to have a very wide distribution, from China to France, but it is only the form linked to trance, or possession trance, which concerns us here. The hobby horse trancers illustrate a theme which we have already referred to: the line between ritual performances and performances for aesthetic or entertainment purposes is a fine one, and one that is crossed and crossed again in the case of virtually all the types of ecstatic dancing which we have been discussing. It is interesting that this transition is apparently not only associated with processes of secularization and loss of faith, but may well occur within a sustained religious tradition. It must be remembered that the idea of religious ritual as solemn, and even dull, ascetic and sparse, and thus often without aesthetic merit represents a narrow and perhaps provincial view. Religions, as we observe them on a broad comparative basis, tend on the contrary to enlist a maximum of human emotional involvement and the aesthetic and playful capacities of man, even the capacity for humor, are often employed for religious ends. Furthermore, religion is, perhaps more often than not, essentially this-
worldly, that is, it is a way of finding solutions for the problems of living in this world in the here and now, rather than a denial of the world and the body and its ills. It is striking that in Southeast Asia such a this-worldly tradition can exist side by side and indeed in close interchange with an ascetic, other-worldly tradition of Buddhism and of certain aspects of Islam as well.

The relationship between ritual and drama has been discussed in a most interesting analysis for Malay, specifically the state of Kelantan, by the British anthropologist, Raymond Firth (16). In this area we deal with a type of practice, in which men act as spirit mediums and their activities are primarily concerned with the diagnosis and treatment of illness. The performance is enacted in the presence of the patient, his family, a group of villagers and spectators. Since the patient's illness may be due to possession by an offended spirit, the medium goes into trance, to discover the source of the difficulty. He dances and speaks as the spirit, who reveals the reason for the patient's illness as well as the means for his cure. We may quote a portion of Firth's description of one such occasion: "The central performer, now believed to be possessed by his ancestral influence, began to dance. His movements, though without the refinement with which we are familiar in classical Indian dancing, did have a certain rhythmic grace of their own, and were marked particularly by delicate symbolic gestures of the fingers. He danced for about a quarter of an hour in the small, central space of the shelter. Then, to a rally of music, with his head nodding rapidly in time to the rhythm, he went into a kind of paroxysm which sud only stopped as the music ended. Then began the diagnosis of the patient's illness[;] (17) This involved a variety of manipulations and discussions with the master of ceremonies, who carried on a dialogue with the medium, or rather, with the spirit possessing the body of the medium. "At last, the patient himself, ill as he was, rose and danced in the middle of the floor, the medium encouraging him and as it were instructing him. This was the
sign that benign influences had come to him and that he would be better (16). As part of his complex analysis Firth shows the aspect of dramatic spectacle in such a ritual performance, the significant role of the spectators and the potential for the development of such a ritual into a more or less secularized folk drama. In doing so, he takes his cue from Jane Harrison’s analysis of the development of Greek drama out of earlier possession cults. However, from the point of view of the dance I find some other features of interest in Firth’s description: dance is part of the ritual performance itself as well as of the dramatic enactment or imitation of the ritual performance. Indeed, the dance is a significant portion of what makes the performance a spectacle, that is, something worth seeing as an aesthetic or entertaining event, yet it is only part of a larger whole with music, singing, dialogue, ritual manipulations, the interaction of spirits and human actors, performance and spectators. And most of all, there is the dramatic tension, the question of the struggle between illness and cure. In this struggle the medium is the hero who goes out to set things right and the health and well-being of the patient is the central dramatic issue. The ritual dances of rural Kelantan are derived from classical Hindu dancing and even in this disassociation, the medium is able to maintain a significant level of control over his movements to be able to produce “delicate symbolic gestures of the fingers.”

To summarize, then, we find that the spirit mediums of this area are men, in contrast to the women we have so often encountered in this role in other parts of the world. Spirit mediumship is directed importantly, though not exclusively, to the business of curing, but it is in the hands of specialists and there are no cult groups who support the principal trancer and, indeed, only one person appears to be in trance at a time. Furthermore, there are two manifestations of the idea of possession here: possession can be expressed as trance and impersonation, as in the case of the medium, but it can also be expressed as physical
illness in the case of the patient. Possession and possession trance, as we have seen before—for example, in Haiti—are not synonymous. Because Malay is one of the cross-roads of the world, the possessing spirits can be identified as having a variety of cultural origins: some are derived from Hindu and Indonesian traditions, others are Moslem djinns and still others are local pre-Moslem and pre-Hindu spirits. The people, however, think of themselves as faithful Moslems.

Jeanne Cuisinier (19), who studied ritual dances throughout Malay, Indonesia and Indochina, finds many similarities between these Malayan practices and those of Vietnam. However, the Vietnamese spirit mediums appear to be mostly women and their activities take place in a setting of Buddhism, rather than of Islam as in Malay. It is interesting that current news reports suggest that spirit mediumship has been on the increase in Vietnam, in Saigon in particular, as a result of the war. The implication made seems to be that affluence among the Vietnamese middle class, especially among the women, is a prime factor in this development. Again, both religious and entertainment functions play a role here. In Vietnam, spirit mediumship has long existed in the various groups of that country's highly diversified population: among urban, semi-Westernized groups as well as among villagers; among Annamese, Cham, Montagnards, etc. Where urbanization and money come into play, the role of entertainment and spectacle seems to come to the fore, as faith is on the decrease—if that is, indeed, the case. The dance and the theatrical impersonation of the spirit as a vehicle for this spectacular aspect of the performance must of course be stressed.

Yet the traditions of spirit mediumship in Vietnam tie in with those of other South Chinese peoples and are part of a much larger culture area. Indeed, the spirit medium tradition of South East Asia appears ultimately related to that of China, Korea and Japan. And this, in turn, links up with the ancient traditions of Siberian shamanism to which it
still bears striking resemblances. In the areas of complex civilization, these patterns have been documented in history and legend to have a high antiquity. However, they have also been utilized by modern artists. Western audiences, for example, will remember the impressive dance and spirit invocation of the medium in the Japanese film, Rashomon.

c. Therapeutic ritual in possession cults.

Yet a different type of possession trance pattern is found throughout a major portion of Africa. This pattern is embodied in a series of possession cults, of which the zar cult of Ethiopia (19) is the most famous and for which it may serve as a model. The zar cult appears to have originated in Ethiopia; it has spread within that country to various of its ethnic groups and then beyond its borders South to Somalia, North to the Sudan and to Egypt and thence East to parts of the Arabian peninsula and even to Southern Iran. Similar, but probably unrelated cults exist also along the East African coast, and still another apparently independent variant of the general type is found in a more or less unbroken line among the non-Muslem Bantu peoples of East and Southeast Africa. Similar cults also exist among Negro groups, in particular in North and Northwest Africa, under such names as Boré and Stambuli. Our first example, the "devil illness" reported by Dr. Erambilla from Ethiopia, also appears to belong to this broad picture.

What are the over-all features that these possession cults have in common and which make them distinctive? First of all, we need to stress that, like Haitian vodú and Brazilian Umbanda, they are indeed cults. That is, they involve groups with specific membership, into which one enters through initiation. The members meet to carry out rituals, of which possession trance, in the context of ecstatic dance, is an essential part. The trancers impersonate various spirits and act out their roles, often in fine detail. Dancing is an important feature of this performance itself, but it is also often used to induce
trance, which may end in a loss of consciousness. Furthermore, many
of the possession cults of this region consist exclusively of women.
This is particularly true in the Islamic area of this vast region under
discussion, so that the cults appear to form a special sector of female
activity and even female religion, in contrast to the masculine world
of Islam. Most notable, however, and clearly distinctive, is the fact
that initiation into the cult is considered therapeutic and that members
and usually cult leaders as well, are all x-patients. That is to say,
many types of illness and disorder, including sterility, may be thought
of as indicating spirit possession. A cult ceremonial is organized when
other attempts at therapeutic measures have failed and the spirit, who
is presumed to be possessing the patient is persuaded or forced to speak
and identify himself. Possession trance is induced through dancing,
and whirling and rotational motions play an important part here.

Now it is true that in many other parts of the world illness may
be believed to be due to possession by spirits and exorcistic rituals
will be used to banish these harmful spirits. The New Testament contain
examples of such exorcistic cures and the belief in the possibility of
demoniacal possession and exorcistic cure is deeply rooted in the Judeo-
Christian tradition. The Dybbuk and The Tenth Man are theatrical ex-
pressions of a part of this tradition. Aldous Huxley made the case of
The Devils of Loudun familiar to many who might not have known of this
famous case of a veritable epidemic of demoniacal possessions in 17th
century France. Similarly, traditions of exorcism exist throughout
Islam, as well as in India. However, the peculiar and noteworthy feature
of the zar cult and of the other possession cults of this type is pre-
cisely that their emphasis is not on exorcism at all. While it is some-
times resorted to, their desire in general is to work out an accommodation
with the possessing spirit, to identify it, to discover its wishes, in
short, to "make a deal" between the spirit and its host, or as they say,
its "horse". It is believed, that if the spirit is given what it wants,
it will desert from causing further trouble and may, indeed, be transferred from a harmful spirit into a protective one. The wishes of such a spirit may be many and diverse: sacrifices, dances, bagles for the possessed person, perhaps some release from certain work loads, but above all, membership in the cult group. The requirements of sacrifices and gifts, etc. impose of course a considerable responsibility on the patient’s family as well as considerable expense. This may mean, in a polygynous society, that a man may not be able to afford the addition of another wife. It may mean that a wife, who has been neglected, must now become the center of attention for a while. The mean may be sceptical with respect to these illnesses and cult requirements of the woman, and yet the scepticism is rarely profound enough to lead to outright refusal to obey the will of the spirits as expressed through the mouths of their "horsee". Membership in a cult group involves periodic attendance at possession trance rituals and consequently in occasions for the patients to engage in ecstatic dances and to enact the roles of the spirits. It also provides, in societies were women are secluded and isolated, an important center of women’s social life, entertainment and religious activity.

If these cults do indeed have a therapeutic role, then this role must be seen as resulting from a variety of aspects and not merely from the experience of the possession trance as induced, at least in part, by the dance. If the possession trance activity does indeed represent repressed or prohibited impulses, the cults bring these under control. Rather than exercising the spirits, that is "driving out", expelling the forbidden strivings, the cult provides a setting, a time and a place and a group of fellow sufferers among whom these strivings can find expression. The impulses are thus socialised and brought under control, rather than condemned. There is, however, yet another facet to the activity of the cults: being possessed by spirits does, in fact, alter the relationships among human beings and consequently changes the social situation in which the patient must operate. Relatives, husbands
must take note of the illness, must pay attention to the patient, must obey the demands of the spirits—that is, of the patient speaking in possession trance—and of the cult leader. There may be a reduction in the patient’s work load, in responsibilities, a second wife may be avoided, and so on. This aspect of the cults, which changes the reality with which the patient must deal, is of considerable importance and must not be minimized. The cults have sometimes been compared to group psychotherapy in the Western world, but this capacity to change reality is one which seems to make them distinctively superior in effectiveness.

Our description cannot do justice to the great variety of social and cultural features involved in these cults, ranging as they do, all the way from traditional and relatively isolated pagan societies, to Copite Christianity, Moslems and Ethiopian Jews, from Capetown, to Alexandria, to Dakar. Yet the theme of possession illness as a prerequisite to membership in the cults, therapy through possession trance induced through the dance, accommodation with spirits as opposed to exorcism, the predominance of women, all these play a crucial role in the picture that we are presenting here. The group of features we have described makes these cults distinctive; also, they have a relatively limited geographic distribution, although we can spread their spread eastward from the African coast. The closest parallel to match them outside of this region we well be found in the Corybantic and Dionsian rituals of ancient Greece which we have had occasion to refer to before and for which we have unfortunately only such a tantalizingly fragmentary record.

Like Umbanda in Brazil, these cults have fascinated psychiatrists and anthropologists in Egypt and Ethiopia, in Senegal and South Africa. However, I am not aware of any attempt to apply their lesson to therapeutic methods of a secular, Western type, as has been done in Brazil.
Social Change and Dissociational States.

We have seen that possession cults may, in various ways, be of use in dealing with problems of individuals and thus they may play a significant role in the life of a society. They may also deal more directly with some of the general concerns of a society, such as the collective worship of ancestors. One of the most interesting aspects of possession cults and possession trance may be found under circumstances of rapid change, of modernization. We have numerous examples, in particular again from Africa, to show that new experiences may be made more meaningful by integrating them into the world of spirits and into the context of the possession trance. Among such people as the Hausa, the Songhay and the Zerma of Northern Nigeria and neighboring Niger, a whole series of "European" spirits have made their appearance at possession trance ceremonies. These may be the spirit of the District Commissioner, the Sanitary Inspector, the Engine Driver and so on. The most dramatic and interesting presentation of a cult group centering about such new spirits is to be seen in a splendid film, entitled "Les Maitres Fous" by the French anthropologist and cinéaste Jean Rouch. A portion of the ritual we see here involves dancing and highly stylized and dramatic behavior by trancers, most of whom, in this instance, are men. A great many foreign items of language, clothing, gestures as well as objects and symbols of European origin are incorporated into these rituals. The disturbing influences of the strange and forbidding foreign world appear to be mastered in this way and Rouch argues that the release provided by the powerful experiences of these possession trance rituals represents a strong support for the mental stability of the participants.

Westernization also plays its role in another type of trance ritual and ecstatic dance which we have already encountered: the introduction of Western, sometimes specifically Christian, ideas into religious movements which anticipate or hope to bring about the end of the world, or
at least, the end of the world as it now exists. An example of this, which we have discussed, was the Ghost Dance of the North American Indians. We might add, as another example, thecargo cults of Melanesia which follow a somewhat similar pattern. It is interesting, also, that many semi-Christian healing cults have developed in various parts of Africa in recent years and these often employ trance or possession trance and ecstatic dance in their rituals.

Still a different example of ecstatic dance and possession trance in the service of adaptation to modern conditions is found in the Umbanda cult in Brazil. This cult, as we have seen, seeks to help its members with the many problems which they encounter in their daily lives precisely because of the stresses and strains of the modernization process which their society is undergoing.

The constant elements of dissociation and ecstatic dance in these examples are combined with a great many different intellectual and ideological approaches, with different belief systems and different social circumstances. And yet, in a great many of these we can discern a number of common features in their approaches to what are, after all, their common problems. The theme of emotional, as well as intellectual, maste or rather, the need for such mastery, of circumstances beyond one's rational understanding and empirical control is a prominent recurrent feature. This mastery seems to be most satisfactorily achieved if the new and disturbing elements can be integrated into one pattern with previously familiar conceptions and operations. The ecstatic experience and the ecstatic dance are such operations and the translation of material phenomena into the world of spiritual entities is another. The dissociational state brings these apparently philosophical conceptions to the level of direct experiential apprehension, apprehension in one's own body. It thus acquires a reality beyond argument and discussion, a certainty of a personal and direct kind in a world of changing realities and rampant uncertainty.
In this context, it should be noted that rituals in general and rituals of an ecstatic nature in particular have had a major appeal to many contemporary artists. We have cited various films and stage productions throughout this presentation. Some modern choreographers and dancers appear to have felt the need to study native dances, in some cases going to the Caribbean or to Africa to see at first hand and to acquire a deeper understanding of the materials they wished to use. Among those who have produced works centered about ritual themes and native dances, we need only mention Katherine Dunham, Earl Flora, Lester Horton and most recently again Geoffrey Holder with his 

Prodigal Prince. What might ask what the basis of the appeal of this material is for the choreographer, the dancer and the American audience as well. There are surely aesthetic considerations at work here, as well as the intrinsic appeal of the exotic. One may wonder whether there is not also a desire for vicarious identification, by American audiences, with the intense experience of the supernatural which is presented to them in stylized and polished form. To what extent are we faced by a reverse process here: we have seen the development of ritual into drama and ballet. Do we now witness the development of drama and ballet into ritual? That this is more than an idle question seems to be indicated by the work of some choreographers who do not primarily deal with exotic materials at all, artists such as Béjart for example, who seek to express message and meaning in innovative presentations. But here, I think, we are no longer talking about dissociation and surely not about possession.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.

In the preceding pages we have considered the ecstatic dance in several of its manifestations. We have, of course, only been able to cite examples and in no way could we claim to have presented more than a brief survey or sampling of these fascinating phenomena. Basically, we have limited ourselves to two broad types of ecstatic dance: the
ecstatic dance associated with a trance state—or state of altered consciousness—of a mystical kind in which visions and other hallucinatory phenomena are often experienced. On the other hand, we have also considered the type of ecstatic dance in which the dissociated person is thought to be possessed by some spiritual entity and impersonates this entity. We have referred to the first type of experience as "trance and to the second as "possession trance". There are, of course, types of trance and possession trance unconnected with the dance, for example, there are trances induced by drugs or by ascetic exercises such as meditation, fasting or self-torture of various kinds. Similarly, certain forms of possession trance may not be related to the dance, as for example the trance of the American spirit medium, who carries out her contacts with the world of the spirits outside of any choreographic ritual. The central character of Menotti's medium does not dance. Where possession belief concerns states such as physical illness, or the powers of a witch, as in many parts of Africa, ecstasy or trance is not involved at all and neither is the dance.

Thus, while the field we have surveyed is broad indeed, it actually constitutes only a segment of a much broader area of experience, activity and belief. What, then, is the relationship between the dance on the one hand and states of altered consciousness on the other, be they trance or possession trance? Dance, as we have indicated, appears to have two principal points of contact with such states: One, as a means of inducing them and two as a means of acting out the prescribed behavior during such states. In the visionary trances the former appears to be primarily the case, while in states of possession trance both appear to be equally relevant and important. In particular, the behavior of the possessing spirit, or more accurately, the spirit who is supposed to and believed to possess the trancer, may involve characteristic choreographic features.

As we consider this point for a moment, it becomes clear that the expectation of the group among whom these phenomena take place, the
spectators ad rebel as the trancers themselves, their beliefs concerning the possessing entities and, indeed, their beliefs concerning the person in trance, are highly relevant to the actual behavior that will be exhibited. That is to say, these expectations and beliefs structure the behavior of the trancers; they act, consequently, much like the commands the hypnotist gives to his subjects. All of this indicates how variable trance behavior is, how much it is modified and patterned by specific traditions. It indicates the significance of cultural learning as it affects this often spectacular and extraordinary, presumably often super-human or at least non-human, behavior of dissociated individuals. It must be stressed, therefore, that whatever idiosyncratic, individual innovations and embellishments may occur in any given ritual situation, such trances and possession trances are above all culturally stylized performances and experiences.

We may look at the whole matter from yet another point of view: we may consider the ecstatic dance as a psycho-kinetic experience of the dancer and as an aesthetico-religious experience of the spectators. Since it is both, it is clear that any attempt at as full an analysis as possible of what is taking place must indeed take both of these aspects or poles of the situation into account.

The dancer undergoes physiological and psychological changes as a result of several factors in the situation: the activity of the dance itself, with its stylized, usually rhythmic movements; exertion and often hyperventilation are involved; there is a modification of various types of sensory experiences, such as balance and spatial orientation; an intensification and a narrowing of attention both occur; there is an awareness of the goals of the dance and of the expectations connected with this awareness; patterns of previously observed and previously experienced alterations of consciousness and of behavior during trance play their role; a significant factor is the knowledge concerning the
identity of the entities to be impersonated and of their special characteristics; at the same time, there is a release from the normal expectations concerning one's own identity; an awareness of the spectator and of their expectations; the effects of the music and of other sensor stimuli, such as the smell of incense or of fumes, heat light, noise, crowd effects and so on. The duration of the induction phase of the trance may vary from a few minutes to several hours. This will depend both on the traditional programming of the performance and on the degree of habituation of the trancer, among a variety of other factors. The trance itself may have an impact on the individual subject or performer for a variety of physiological and psychological reasons, although some of these are as yet poorly understood; some of the trance activities may be violent seizures or prolonged trembling, cataleptic states of prolonged duration etc. It has been argued that these involve subcortical areas of the brain and bring about significant modification of brain functioning as a consequence, somewhat analogous to what is supposed to happen under electro-shock treatment. Analogies have also been made between trance experience and religious conversion on the one hand and brain washing on the other, bringing about, as they do, an alteration of attitudes, memory functions, world view, self-concept and so on. Whether these results are to be ascribed to physiological, psychological or social psychological factors or several of these in interaction remains to be seen. It may be, for example, that trance permits the acting out of prohibited and repressed impulses or provides an opportunity of being, for once, someone else, perhaps someone important and does so in a sacred and sheltered setting. This may then be a type of social-psychological process which makes a difference to the individual in his interaction with others and with himself, rather than neurological or physiological or biochemical changes in the brain. Or all of these.

For the spectator, other factors come into play. There is, first of all, the heightened excitement and expectation aroused by the performance, and the possibility of interacting with trancers and most like
with the spirits themselves, of gaining help from them, through advise, or curing, or blessings or whatever. There is the added assurance of the reality of the spirits and the truth of the religious teachings which are so graphically demonstrated by the very presence of the spirits among the people in the case of possession trance, and of the possibility of establishing contact with them in the case of visionary trance. And this demonstration is as strong or stronger for the trancers themselves. There is thus the religious as well as the practical and aesthetic satisfaction in attending such a performance. There is also, for the audience, the vicarious experience of the powers and emotions demonstrated by the trancers. The experience of the performers and that of the spectators are thus complementary and one would be meaningless without the other. In many societies, those who are spectators at one time may be performers at another and vice versa. For children particularly the performances represent important learning experiences, where it is possible to see how trancers, or spirits, behave.

For a full study of the ecstatic dance, for an understanding of its functions and meanings, we must not stop here. We must attempt to see how such a performance of the ecstatic dance fits into the larger fabric of the society we are observing. How similar, or how different, are individual performances? How much individuality or stereotypy is there to be found? Who are the participants in the ritual, performers and spectators alike: do they belong to the same or different segments of society? Do they represent the entire society or only some particular section of it; men or women, persons of high or low status, minorities of race, or caste or ethnic group, natives or foreigners, and so on? Do the beliefs acted out in these performances represent those of the society as a whole or do they express only one among several, perhaps competing, views of the world? Are these beliefs and rituals, as well as their practitioners, a force for conservatism, for stability or for change? Do they help to maintain the social system or to change it, or is their principal effect to help individuals to live with the changes that are,
in fact, occurring?

The ecstatic dance, in its cultural context, may then be said to express some aspects of the life of a society in symbolic terms. On the other hand, it also fulfills a function in the maintenance or modification of a society. It is interesting, then, to consider that the ecstatic dance seems to play no role in the formal religious life of this country. And yet, any observer of contemporary teen-age dancing and music will surely be struck by the intense, dissociated, ecstatic character of this activity. They appear to be utterly involved, utterly oblivious to the external world, except for the music, the beat, and the motions of the dance are expressive rather than communicative. Frank Zappa, writing in Life, celebrates the sexual liberation of this music, the glorying in the joys of the body and so on. But the dancer addresses himself only to himself; this is sex without a partner, only his relation to himself and to the music remains. Zappa, again, speaks of this music as "aggressive" "malting" the music "eats you alive" "you are possessed by the music" etc. The satisfaction seems to be not only of solitary sex but also of a masochistic experience in contact with the music. Or that is what he appears to be saying. What matters to the dancer is his relation to the music, to the singer. The high level of noise, the loudness of the music, heat, crowding, the effects of lighting and smoke all contribute to the setting in which, as one teen-ager described it to me, there is a loss of self: "After a while," she said, "I'm no longer there. There is only the dancing and the music. And I couldn't stop, as long as the music lasts, even if I wanted to." The ecstatic dance, here, appears to be a means of releasing individual tensions, of providing pleasure and pain. If it is sex, it does not involve love, a relationship to another human being. Clearly, we are far away of the romance of cheek to cheek dancing of former years! The singleness, the isolation of the individual in the crowd stand out as the most striking aspect of this type of dancin
If we compare the ecstatic dancing of traditional societies with that of teen-age America, if we ask what all this tells us about the society and what it does for the society, we find some interesting points of contrast: In traditional societies, ecstatic dancing links the individual, and through him frequently the group, with the forces of the universe. Teen-age dancing is entirely secular and leads to no such religious intensification. It concerns only the individual and not the group. Traditional ecstatic dancing serves purposes of sorship, of therapy, of release for the individual and the group and sometimes for the world as a whole. Teen-age dancing is an end in itself. The traditional society is group oriented and the actions of the individual reflect and further the ends of the group. American society seems to rely largely on anonymous crowds in which the individual seeks to find a pace by seeking satisfaction for himself and by establishing a more or less imaginary connection with figures of power or symbols of authority. The musician plays this role for the dancers. One other theme is expressed here, in addition to sex and violence, loneliness and self-centering, anonymity and the search for an identity link up, and that is the revolt of the youngsters against the egotism of their parents whom they perceive as fettering and handicapping them.

Such an analysis can lead us far afield and would require a searching view of contemporary American society. Rather than seeing in this ecstatic rock dancing of the young a passing fad, it would appear that we should see it as expressive of several important themes in American society, and we should ask what its implications are for the future change which are now occurring in this society. Perhaps, then, it is not necessary to to state again in conclusion that the ecstatic dance cannot be seen meaningfully in isolation, in purely aesthetic or culture historical terms. It must be clear by now that it represents a vital form of human expression in the context of a particular, larger, cultural whole and must be seen in each instance within that cultural whole, and yet, we must be aware that it represents not merely a particular local invention but a local utilization of a universal human capacity, which has been used in many societies throughout human history.
NOTES.


2. de Martino, Ernesto: La Terra del Risorgo, Milan, 1961


5. Lantin, Margaret: Alaskan Eskimo Ceremonialism, Seattle, 1947


12. Transcultural Psychiatric Research, April 1968


14. See also the film: Trance and Dance in Bali, by G. Bateson and N. Heard.

15. Bello, op. cit., p.375


17. Firth, Raymond: Ritual and Drama in Malay Spirit Mediumship, Comparative Studies in Society and History, 1967 (9)190-207

18. ibid., p.193

19. ibid., p.184


22. Messing, S.D.: Group therapy and social status in the zar cult of Ethiopia, American Anthropologist 1958(60)1140-26