

Anthropological Trends in the Study of Folk Theatre in Soule Valley¹

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Drama erritualizatuen eta folk-teatroaren ikerketa garrantzitsua izan da antropologia sinbolikoan. Hau dela-eta, bai historiari buruzko irudiei, eta bai tokian tokiko talde ekonomiko eta politikoei begira, Zuberoako drama folklorikoa ikertzea halabeharrezkoa da, txosten honen egilearen ustetan. Folk-teatroen aurkezpenetan sinboloak jendaurreratzeko dira; erran nahi baita, beren esangurak aukeran aukera hautatzen dira. Beraz, folk-teatroaren estetika gako da. Estetika honen ikerkuntzari ekitea proposatzen da.

Giltz-Hitzak: Herriko antzerkia. Estetika. Jarduna.

El estudio de las diversas formas de teatro folclórico en relación con la proyección de imágenes históricas que contienen, al igual que en relación con los grupos económicos y políticos que los organizan, es un campo de reflexión de enorme interés dentro de la antropología simbólica. Este ensayo versa sobre cómo las representaciones de dramas folclóricos en el valle de Soule constituyen un espacio de interacción donde los múltiples símbolos y elementos estéticos se interpretan selectivamente. Debido a que la estética ritual y dramática del teatro suletino juega un papel determinante en el proceso de producción de significados, el autor de este ensayo propone un estudio exhaustivo de ella.

Palabras Clave: Teatro folclórico. Estética. Función.

L'étude des diverses formes de théâtre folklorique en relation avec la projection d'images historiques qu'elles contiennent en relation également avec les groupes économiques et politiques qui les organisent, est un champ de réflexion d'un énorme intérêt au sein de l'anthropologie symbolique. Cet essai traite de la façon dont les représentations de drames folkloriques dans la vallée de Soule constituent un espace d'interaction où les multiples symboles et éléments esthétiques sont interprétés sélectivement. Etant donné que l'esthétique rituelle et dramatique du théâtre Souletin joue un rôle déterminant dans le processus de production de significations, l'auteur de cet essai en propose une étude exhaustive.

Mots Clés: Folk Théâtre. Esthétique. Performance.

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INTRODUCTION

Year by year the villagers of Soule valley, Zuberoa in vernacular, the most eastern area of the French Basque country, celebrate two forms of folk drama: one in Carnival time; the other in the summer. From 1991 to 1992 I have conducted fieldwork research on these two forms of Basque peasant theatre. Also I have elaborated on the ethnographic data then collected.

I have focussed on the phenomenon of the folk drama from a symbolic and historic perspective. That is to say, I have been interested in the study of expressive culture, as well as in the study of figurative language and ritual performance in their relation to wider economic, political and social processes.

As exceptional domains of expressive culture, both kinds of performance offer the scholar a rich field of study. My interest in both Carnival performances ("Maskaradak" in the Basque language) and summer performances ("Pastoralak") addresses different issues.

First, there are those aspects related to verbal and non-verbal performance and aesthetics, since versifying, masking, disguising, and dancing play a very important role in them. Performers do not talk, but they address each other by singing verses. Verses are sung in Basque and follow certain rules of meter, rhythm, and image creation. Carnival performances represent legends and stories, which makes the performers wear elaborate masks and disguises that symbolise mythological personages. Dances are long and complex, which requires prolonged training and considerable expertise.

Second, I am strongly interested in the study of these ritual performances in relation to the social and economic contexts in which they take place. Until recent times, all the villages of the valley competed among themselves for the right to represent Maskaradak and Pastoralak before the other villages, and to take part in these performances has been for the inhabitants of the village a matter of pride. They have been largely understood both as a medium for social criticism and as a device to enact social identity and prestige, since the different villages compete for having the finest dancers and versifiers. Present circumstances have forcefully changed the character of the representations, since we no longer can talk of them as being undertaken by all the villages of the valley today. Urban migration and a shift of cultural values have played a very important role. Inhabitants of this Basque valley (with a population of fourteen thousands) are mostly farmers and sheep herders. The lack of industry in the province forces the young to migrate to urban, industrialised areas of France in search of jobs. Consequently, older people form the majority of the population. Today, generally speaking, Basque language, culture and tradition, in this province are associated to the older people and a subsistence farming or sheepherding way of life. French culture, language and conventions, on the other hand, are seen as proper to urban areas and to "modern" life. Not only have many young people left the Basque country for industrial cities, but they have ceased speaking Basque or taking part in activities identified with their parents' cultural expressions as well. These circumstances have clearly influenced the character of meaning of the performances during the last decades. Thirty years ago, Basque language was the primary vehicle of communication in the valley, and every village of the valley had enough trained people to compete with the others in organising a 'Maskarada' or a 'Pastorala'. Today, only ten out of fifty villages are capable of undertaking a performance. Therefore, any study of folk drama in the valley must address how those villages still organising performances, understand the relations between cultural values.

Third, I am interested in the politics of popular culture. In this sense, taking into consideration that the Basque nationalism movement claims an independent state for the

seven Basque provinces (four in Spain and three in France), in order to enable Basque culture to face the dominant and stronger Spanish and French, these popular forms of cultural expression can be viewed as providing an arena for performing Basque identity. In other words, in as much as the claim for an independent Basque state is grounded on cultural difference, performing Basque culture becomes a visible support to maintain such a claim. 'Maskaradak' and 'Pastoralak' compose such a medium for performing Basque culture.

Although there are ethnographic descriptions of dances and masks as well as compilations of the verses, a study of these two kinds of Basque popular drama in relation to a wider sociocultural context has yet to be done. Such a study requires a movement toward integrating the perspectives of anthropology, history, performance and ritual.

ANTHROPOLOGY, RITUAL AND HISTORY

In other works on folk theatre in Soule Valley I have advanced a strong interest in the examination of the relations between history and ritual (Kepa Fdez. de Larrinoa 1993, 1994,). Throughout the following lines I will discuss some of the theoretical and ethnographic work which directly relates to my own views and research on folk theatre in this valley. Particularly, I will comment on the theoretical issues coming from recent research in symbolic anthropology which I consider crucial in the study of 'Pastoral' plays today.

I will start this essay by briefly reviewing two extreme and opposite studies: Bloch's (1987, 1989) and Sahlins' (1981, 1985). Of Bloch's inquiry into ritual and history it has been said that it "has provided a powerful synthesis of structural-functionalism and political economy" (Kelly & Kaplan 1990:125). In trying to discriminate the realm of religion from that of culture, he has argued that ritual constructs authority and mystifies the process of that construction.

The anthropological tradition has largely examined ritual as essential to the constitution of society. Bloch's work has shown ritual as a political force in the production and legitimation of hierarchy and ideology. The Portuguese anthropologist Pina-Cabral (1987) has echoed Bloch's ideas on ritual and history (particularly those exposed in Bloch's examination of the Merina circumcision rituals) in a brief analysis of certain kind of peasant drama called "autos".

These "autos" are celebrated in the Alto Minho region of Portugal, and, their morphology and structural make-up resemble those performances staged in Zuberoa during summer time. Pina-Cabral puts the question in the following terms: "literacy is manipulated by peasant society but not controlled" (1987:723).

Moreover, these "autos" display "historical information which is gleaned from literate sources (...) and is used to a-historically construct a repetitive symbolical universe" (1987:723). He therefore concludes that there is an explicit manipulation of provinces of meaning. Interestingly enough, these comments on peasant society, literacy, drama performance and history can be tested within the Zuberoan folk drama.

These performances are staged by most members of a community (until recent times illiterate farmers) who contract the services of a person who lives in the valley. This person makes the arrangements to procure a play or a person to design it; he is in charge of the rehearsals and costumes; he chooses between the villagers 'who' will perform 'what', according to voice, dancing skills and other significant attributes. This person is called "errejenta" (when using the Basque language) or "instituteur" (when using the French language) – "teacher" in English translation. Yet, in general, he is a farmer or craftsman.

Because the knowledge required to accede to this status is usually passed from father to son, it is associated with particular families of the valley. Furthermore, these families hold the ownership of the manuscripts already performed under their guidance, as well as the rights of prospective presentations.

Therefore, these performances are, on the one hand, closely related to literacy and status differentiation within the families of the valley; and, on the other hand, regarding the content of the stories publicly displayed, they are intimately associated with notions and interpretations of history. Zuberoan drama can be approached within this last sense as projecting particular historical events and personages within newly meaning, and thus interpreting history.

Pasqualino (1977) has studied a particular type of puppet theatre in Sicily which is quite popular among the peasants of the area. This puppet theatre tells stories involving similar personages as are found on the Zuberoan human stage: Christians and Turks. Pasqualino has examined their capacity for creating and legitimating particular conceptions of values and political attitudes in peasant social life: in other words, as vehicles for ideological expression.

My interest in the work of Maurice Bloch is directed toward the analysis of the construction of ideology as mystifying force, and the creation of hierarchical differentiation in social life by means of ritual practice. His ethnography provides not only a theoretical framework which focuses on ideology and on how ideology is historically constructed, but also a line of argument which allows the scholar to approach the capacity of social groups to manipulate an authoritative and legitimating symbolic system.

In this vein, Warman (1972) has examined the ritual feasts of Moorish and Christians in distinct, historically separated contexts, and he has concluded that a manipulation of their symbolic system has been produced. First, his analysis of these feasts in Medieval Spain shows that they were organized by the most dynamic social groups of the time, as well as being used to legitimate the new Christian state and its violent expansion. Following him, these feasts worked as rituals of political expansion.

Second, he sees that later on these same feasts were similarly performed overseas by the Spanish conquerors in their colonial enterprise, while declining in size and importance in Spain. He concludes that with the passing of time these dramas ceased being rituals practised by the newly formed urban social groups, and then become characteristic of peripheral peasantry.

Third, Warman has focused on some Latin American performances which today follow their former structural pattern. However, Warman points out meaningful variations: on the one hand, Moorish have been replaced by native Indians; on the other hand, their symbolic content has being altered, for Indians are now the heroes, whereas Christians are depicted as the adversary to be defeated. The Zuberoan dramas, particularly 'Pastorala' performances can be approached from a similar angle, since they now present stories whose hero is a Basque who fights against an external invader.

The anthropologist Marshal Sahlins too has addressed the relations between history and ritual. Friedman (1988) has delineated Sahlins' diverse positions in anthropological theory thus: "from neo-evolutionism to social structuralism to cultural structuralism; from materialism to cultural determinism" (1988:7).

Sahlins theory of history is a culturalist one. He focuses on the relation between structure and practice, namely between historical process and cultural order. Therefore, the relation

between social structure and cosmological orders acquires a critical character in Sahlins's analysis. As Jonathan Friedman has put it, "the entire concrete history of a particular time period is always the expression of an ultimate drama" (1988:19).

My work on Zuberoan drama concerns the relations between structure and history. Yet, for my research purposes, I understand structure not simply as a local system of social relations (Sahlins' position), but as the product of the interaction of local and wider processes. Similarly, I understand history not as a temporal representation of already given cultural models (Sahlins' understanding), but as the interplay of two other meanings of history: history as giving place to a particular ordering of social relationships, and history as people's experience of such social structure.

My examination of Zuberoan folk drama focuses, therefore, on the articulation of the latter two notions of history. I thus analyze them as specific modes of collective representation of history which take place in concrete historical moments. This judgment makes me take into consideration Sider's work (1986) on Carnival masking in Newfoundland.

Sider has an ethnological-historical approach to cultural expression. In so doing, he examines the notions of cultural hegemony and class experience in a fishing community. Throughout the last decades, Zuberoa has been a centre of peasant migration toward the urban areas of Aquitania (Bordeaux, Bayonne, Pau), as well as to Paris and to America.

It is worth noting that, on the one hand, those who work in the nearby urban areas usually go back home during the weekends and summer holidays, and, on the other hand, that these persons are the most active and dynamic in the organization of folk drama in the village. Sider's work departs from a precise analysis of social formation, to then offering the reader the Newfoundland fishers' social-institutional and economic history, and going on to examine a folk-cultural action – mumming.

Sider thus considers the nexus between class and culture, and I try to do the same while examining the socio-cultural content of the 'staged' plays in relation to the social background, as well as the economic and political expectations of the 'everyday' *dramatis personae*.

In the examination of the relations between drama and history, two other books are worth noting: Grimes (1976) and Peacock (1968). Grimes and Peacock depart from Turner's work on public ritual: ritual as a system of public symbols. In this sense, they have focused on ritual as providing an arena for symbolic endeavour. For them the study of drama is the analysis of the symbolic forms displayed during ritual performance. Consequently, they have addressed popular drama as symbolic action taking place within social processes.

There are three spheres of analysis in Grimes' work which are pertinent to my own research. First, he examines Santa Fean (New Mexico) drama as a system of public symbols in which conflicting interpretations and valuations of civic, civil, religious and ethnic symbols of three cultures are dramatized. Second, he undertakes a study of the symbolic use of space and its transformation in meaning by means of the metaphorical content of the staged imagery. And third, he pays attention to tourism and commercialization as emerging features in Santa Fean festivity and celebration. On the whole, his essay is concerned with the struggle over symbols of power.

In the same vein, James Peacock offers a study of popular Indonesian drama in relation to a wider social process. He sees that meaningful social changes are taking place in the societal arena – changes which bring about an emphasis on novel cultural values and understandings. In other words, there is a shift from agricultural village life (that is, from traditional spheres of social relationships) to factory life and urban as well as modern social

situations. Ritual drama “helps persons symbolically define their movements from one type of situation to another” (1968:6).

In Zuberoa two languages co-exist: Basque and French. Basque is spoken at home, within the farm and among farmers. We can say that it is used within the most private spheres of social life. French, on the contrary, is the language used in public spheres of communication. French is almost exclusively spoken in Mauleon, the valley's urban town where shopping, amusements, state administration and most social services can be found. Similarly, T.V., radio, newspapers and public school use the French language as primary vehicle of expression.

Furthermore, it has been noted that during the last decades children tend to speak the French language among themselves, and are rather predisposed to answer their parents in French even though the latter address them in Basque. It also happens that most adolescents emigrate to urban areas outside the Basque Country, and, with the passage of time, this makes them restrict their fluency in the Basque language, and, consequently, they commonly conduct their conversations in French when being at home on weekend and summer vacation.

In terms of my own research, two points are worth keeping in mind: first, in Zuberoa the Basque language is hardly spoken outside the farming sphere; second, constant emigration to urban areas far away from Zuberoa (today's population sums up half the amount of people that inhabited the valley at the end of last century) has generated a heart-felt conviction that “Zuberoa is dying”.

On the one hand, organizers of ‘Pastorala’ plays say that, by giving these plays, Basque culture is publicly activated. This is seen as a powerful display of ‘Basqueness’ facing the official, stronger ‘Frenchness’. This is reflected in how the symbolic system is usually manipulated. Several features are significant. In the ‘Pastorala’ folk theatre, actors are distributed in two main groups. These two groups are supposed to face each other, as well as distinguishing by means of their colour.

In these performances, blue and red (blue for Christians and red for Turks) have been the opposed colours for several centuries. A meaningful change has taken at the beginning of the 1990's. As usual, a village organized a ‘Pastorala’, but organizers understood that ‘blue’ was ‘Napoleonic’ and represented the ‘French’. They decided not to employ the blue colour and introduce a ‘green’ one instead. It was selected on the grounds that this colour was the one that better could express ‘euskaltasuna’ (i.e., ‘Basqueness’). Afterwards, several villages have made explicit their desire to follow this modification. Yet since 1993 the “blue” has taken over again.

On the other hand, when a village judges that time has come for them to present a ‘Pastorala’ play, and villagers meet to make the appropriate arrangements, organize rehearsals and distribute work and occupations, it happens that the most active persons are not farmers.

Guidance and administration is on the hands of those who usually work outside the village and return to it on weekends and vacation time. As a rule, they hold urban jobs in Pau, Bayonne (one-hundred kilometres away from the valley), or Mauleon. I consider crucial for a fully anthropological research a study of this contrasting physical residence, occupational job and language use within everyday life in relation to the symbolic display within drama performances.

On a different plane, it has to be said that during the last decades these performances have undergone a substantial shift in terms of financial investment and reimbursement . First,

whereas costumes used to be made up in the village and most of the formal aspects of a performance were accomplished within the village by community members, since the last decades costumes are rented from a theatre company in Bordeaux.

Similarly most materials employed to build the stage are now rented in Bordeaux (two-hundred kilometres away). Second, since the 1970's they are advertised in Basque periodicals of the Spanish-Basque Country. Third, plays are now printed and music recorded and sold before the performance, being edited the text in three languages (the dialectal Basque of the valley, French and Spanish). This means that fluency in Basque is no longer necessary to understand a play. This also means that the composition of the audience has significantly changed during the last decades. Fourth, until recent times 'Pastorala' plays have been performed after Eastern time; however, they are now presented on the last two Sundays of July. It is said that because both the weather is better and it is vacation time, more people attend the event.

To conclude, three aspects are therefore worth noting in the examination of today's presentations: (i) there is a serious investment of cash; (ii) 'Pastorala' performances imply a new set of relationships between actors and audience which go beyond the physical boundaries of, first, the village and, second, the valley; and (iii) an ongoing commercialization and response tourism is detected. Accordingly, I understand that a serious analysis of Zuberoan drama must illustrate its symbolic content in relation to the ongoing social and cultural changes.

CULTURAL PERFORMANCE AS DRAMA AND COMUNICATION

The American anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1980) has written that "in recent years the 'drama analogy' has developed as one of the major trends in anthropological thinking" (1980:165). A radical use of the drama analogy is found in the work of the sociologist Erving Goffman (1959), who saw theatre everywhere in everyday life.

Goffman has made an important distinction between 'on stage' and 'back stage' behaviour. Similarly, he has noted the sense in which human beings as role-players are preoccupied with the presentation of multiple facets of the self in different contexts.

Within social anthropology, Victor Turner's work on social change and conflict instituted the term "social drama", which he used to describe social disturbances and disputes as processes involving a regular, sequential direction: breach, crisis, redress, reintegration or schism (Turner 1957, 1974). His concern is with how conflicts within a village community are resolved.

The anthropologist A. Cohen (1974) has used the term "key dramatic performance" when examining those realms of social interaction where social groups are able to manipulate significant cultural symbols by means of which they acquire identity and thus became "visible".

On a different plane, some anthropologists have followed Geertz's (1972) interpretation of the Balinese cockfight as "social meta-commentary" or "people telling stories about themselves", and have then approached cultural performance in terms of "culture in action" (cf. Manning 1983).

MacAloon (1987) suggests a more restrictive approach to performance. Following him, between Geertz's extreme formulation that everything is imprinted by culture, and therefore 'staged performance' (cf. Geertz 1980) and that of Goffman's idea of social life as theatrical

performance, there is Hymes' (1975) understanding of performance: "performance" is to be differentiated from both "culture" and "behaviour".

Hymes' notion of performance applies to that particular kind of human action which is not identified with "simply anything and everything that happens" or with "shared principles of interpretability", but "with that particular class or subset of behaviour in which one or more persons assume responsibility to an audience and to tradition as they understand it" (Hymes 1975:220).

My research on folk drama in Zuberoa departs from this understanding of performance, since it properly involves two important ethnographic features of Zuberoan peasant drama. On the one hand, there is a *responsibility to an audience*, an audience which not only is constituted by those persons physically attending the event, but the whole valley, for performers are enacting the village's identity, as well as displaying the village's expertise before the rest of the villages.

A Zuberoan performance is in this sense understood as the outcome of a competing social atmosphere within villages in the valley. The rest of the valley need not be present as spectators – it is enough that they will hear that a performance took place for comments and criticism to start being pointed. In this sense, they are present even when physically absent.

On the other hand, there is a *responsibility to "tradition"*, what Zuberoans call "uxantza zaharrak", a particular kind of ritual knowledge which has to be 'taught', 'learned', 'passed on' from generation to generation and 'displayed' following precise rules and conventions. In this sense, my fieldwork has focussed on *the kind of social responsibility to audience and to tradition that is established when a village assumes the presentation of a drama performance* in Zuberoa; namely, I am interested in both the distinction of and the dialogue between the "knowledge/what" and the "knowledge/ how", as Hymes (1975) has put it. Borrowing the expression from Singer (1972), this means that performance always includes "an organized program of activity".

A next step in an anthropology of performance – and consequently in my own research on the performance of popular drama in Soule valley – is: How can the ethnographer approach the kind of activity undertaken in ritual performance?

Approaches are varied. First writings on the topic, mostly those that developed within folklore studies, attempted to study performance in genre classificatory terms (cf. Dorson 1974; Bauman & Briggs 1990); that is to say, distinctions between and studies within genres and subgenres were emphasized. Further research stressed cognitive and communicative features (Cf. Bateson 1972; Goffman 1974), and notions such as "frame", "message" and "meta-communication" were introduced.

Performance was thus approached in terms of its distinguished and framed character. Two main distinctions developed: "play-frame" and "ritual-frame". Following Handelman (1977) play and ritual are perceived as different orders of reality in form, in content and in their logic of composition.

He further argues that the contrast between play and ritual can not become a contrast between play (understood as unserious, untruth) and serious life, for both play and ritual are very serious activities. In this sense, "make believe" is the play-frame's premise, while the ritual-frame's premise is "let us believe". Consequently, he concludes, ritual and play are similar domains of experience in their logical composition; complementary, yet mutually exclusive in contrast to their relations to the social order, which they both influence.

I consider this notion of play crucial for the fieldwork researcher in Soule valley, since one prototype of Zuberoan drama is performed during Carnival time and shows social inversion and rule transgression at particular phases of the drama performance, a formal characteristic in ritual performance which has been defined in symbolic anthropology as being carried out within a “play-frame” (or subjunctive mode) of communication (cf. Babcock 1978).

In both cases of play and ritual, the frame gives the participant a means for interpretation of what happens within the frame. This interpretation is always given in relation to the premises settled by the frame, which is also settled by the premises.

The anthropologist Victor Turner (1977,1982) has echoed this contrast between play and ritual in his later work, and has incorporated it into his “structure/anti-structure” analytical schema (cf. Turner 1969). For Turner, both play and ritual occur within liminality, namely, both play and ritual are liminal phenomena. Yet they produce separate experiences of the social order.

Following Turner, therefore, meta-communication in play is the experience of a “communitas-like state”, as well as what communitas says about structure –a social critique. On the other hand, the experience that meta-communication produces in ritual is that of an intensification of the social order– a public reinforcement of structure.

Interestingly enough, Roberto da Matta (1977) has focused on images and formal composition of two Brazilian national rituals in relation to everyday life and social order through this ‘frame’ approach, and he has detected a strong political component in cultural performance. This political dimension of performance has been the subject of A. Cohen’s (1982) work on Carnival festivity and celebration in London. His observations are highly illuminating: “politics and culture are dialectically related in the development and structure of Carnival” (1982:81).

In the same vein has expressed MacAloon (1984) after analyzing the Olympic Games of Puerto Rico: “...ludic and ritual performances may play a primary role in constituting political formations and institutions in the first place, in actively making history rather than reactively expressing it” (1984:313).

Following up this line of investigation, I propose to study folk drama in Zuberoa not only as a public arena where history and notions of history are displayed, but as a meaningful medium whereby contrasting social groups, economic interests and local politics are at play (see also Moore & Myerhoff 1982).

In sum, dramatic performances are generally viewed by anthropologists as ritualizations of cultural values, as well as enacting political and economic interests. Inquiry into ritual behaviour has underlined the unique ‘language’ of ritual expression, that is to say, its manner of ‘saying things’.

‘Expressiveness’ is an essential element of ritual performance, it has been studied as communicative and symbolic language (Leach 1976). The symbolic dimensions of dramatic behaviour (ritualized expression) gain their meaning in relation to the ‘everyday’.

This relationship, however, has been the subject of much debate among theorists of ritual and celebration. Some ritualizations, most notably carnivals, seem to ‘reverse’ aspects of everyday life, what anthropologists have referred to as ‘symbolic inversion’. Community celebrations, on the other hand, characteristically express a collective past –whether historical or mythical– by symbolically intensifying’ certain elements of daily life (cf. Duvignaud 1976).

Through reversal or accentuation, or by a combination of the two, ritual dramatizations create contrast. Contrast and divergence from everyday life, then, is at the very heart of social celebration. My own research in Soule valley has focussed on two kinds of popular drama which parallel this distinction between 'inversion' (a relevant characteristic of the Zuberoan Carnival performance) and 'intensification' of collective past and images of history (a conspicuous theme of 'Pastorala' performances).

RITUAL PERFORMANCE, DANCE AND 'STAGED' AESTHETICS

Dancing, masking and singing absorb most of the energy involved in the presentation of folk theatre in Zuberoa. Therefore, this role of aesthetic exhibition and movement in ritual performance has to be examined.

The extraordinary aesthetic efficacy in ritual action is well portrayed in Kapferer's (1983) examination of exorcism and healing in Sri Lanka – rites in which the aesthetic elements (music, song, drums, dance and drama) "effect key transitions and transformations in identity, experience, meaning and action" (Kapferer 1983:xiii).

Since "dantza" ("dancing"), "bertsetak" ("sung dialogues"), and "sonua" ("music"), as well as "maskak eta jantziak" ("disguising and masking") are key figures in Zuberoan ritual drama, I will briefly describe some of the issues I am particularly interested in.

In examining the anthropological approaches to dance throughout the last one-hundred years, Royce (1977) has distinguished five trends: (1) the evolutionary approach to dance, which related dance to homeopathic magic; (2) the culture trait approach, which, by stressing cultural relativism, studied dance as differentiating culture areas; (3) the culture and personality approach, which focused on dance in order to illustrate psychological states; (4) the problem oriented approach, which stresses situational analysis and examines dance in terms of 'dramatic event' or 'social drama'; and (5) the 'dance as a unique phenomenon' approach, which emphasizes dance as a *sui generis* form of expressive behaviour, and studies its form and structure, particularly basic units of movement and their combination.

Spencer (1985) submits a more elaborate report, and reviews the ethnography of dance in terms of "themes": dance as a safety valve; dance as an organ of social control; dance as a cumulative climax leading to excitement, tension and transformation; dance as setting group boundaries and social identity, confrontation or competition; dance as ritual drama; and dance as a self-explanatory structural entity. Dance, therefore, has been understood in anthropology as a bodily activity that carries information at different levels: from a grammar of gesture and movement, as well as space manipulation, to social identity and political statements.

Dance is both movement in space and quality of movement – movement which in most cultures and societies is accompanied with songs and performed with distinctive costume. This is also the case in Zuberoan folk drama. My research is relatively unconcerned with describing the structural or morphological features of particular Basque or other dances displayed through a Zuberoan performance, unless they deliver a significant 'social meaning' to participants.

Hence, to analyze ritual dancing in Zuberoa is not an easy enterprise, for dancing implies an intricate, dynamic web of social as well as cultural conventions. First, there is the fact that dancers represent a village. Access to village membership, and thus the right for an individual to represent a community as a dancer, are provided by physical residence, birth or marriage within the village.

Second, dancing is both a 'house' and a 'village' concern. At the age of five, children are taught dancing privately, at home by their parents. Here, they learn some dancing feet movements and a particular style which distinguish their house from other houses. Later on, the most gifted meet in what can be called 'village dancing school'. Here they learn from mature dancers those specific movements that characterize their 'village' dancing from the dancing of other villages. What makes the dancing distinct between houses within a village, and villages within the valley are the "puntuak" or 'steps'.

"Puntua" is the minimally meaningful combination of feet movements which 'makes sense from the native point of view'. There are diverse "puntuak" within a dance, and how they are harmonised in a dance distinguishes a village from the other.

Third, there is a gender content attached to ritual dancing in Zuberoa. On the one hand, there is the circumstance that dancers have traditionally been male. It has been during the last decade that women have started to actively take part in ritual dance. Yet not without obstacles and criticism within their own villages.

On a different plane, we can observe a change in attitude towards dancing: the young men are lately reflecting a lack of interest in learning ritual dance, having shifted from dance-rehearsing to playing rugby. Consequently, we can not approach ritual dancing in Zuberoa from a single angle, for meaning is conveyed at different levels of physical movement and social interaction: dancers enact group boundaries, social identity and gender distinctions; however, changing conceptions are at work and separate models develop. I therefore examine dancing in Zuberoan folk drama as an observable microcosm of what is taking place within larger social and cultural contexts (cf. Abu-Lughod 1986; Crocker 1977; Gell 1985; Ortner 1978; Schiefflin 1976).

Music is also of capital importance. Each group of actors, as well as each group of dances have their own melodies and rhythms which accompany them when moving through the stage. Music also informs people of what is going on during the presentation. Stories are designed to be enacted following a restricted, ordered sequence of episodes, and there is a particular air with which each of them conforms.

Research on music and ritual has stressed that music modifies our consciousness of being, and it gives time and space a density different from their everyday density. As Rouget (1985) has put it, "it (music) indicates that something is happening in the here and now; that time (and space) is being occupied by an action being performed, or that a certain state rules over the beings present" (p.121).

By focusing on the aesthetics of folk drama, my concern is with their social meaning, namely, with the social aspects of performance. Thus, my analysis of masking in Zuberoan drama is based on the assumption that these kinds of behaviour occur within a meaningfully defined social context.

Animal or otherwise disguises in ritual behaviour has been subject of detailed examination by anthropologists. The analysis of European animal disguises has been undertaken from several angles (cf. Dumézil 1929; Catwe 1978). Several authors have studied their original, historical meaning, and have related it to the *modus vivendi* of societies established thousand of years gone-by. Most European folklorists have followed this line of interpretation. My line of inquiry, however, comes along a different point of view.

Most anthropological literature has underlined that masks appear in conjunction with categorical change. In this sense, masking has been approached within anthropology as

informing on cultural ambiguities and paradoxes, as well as informing on social boundaries (cf. Gell 1985, Crocker 1982, Napier 1986). Studies done on disguising and masking in peasant European contexts have showed that ritual masking intends a concealment of social identity which generates a challenge to a culture's rules about law, order and etiquette (cf. Bakhtin 1968, Bristol 1985, Burke 1978, Cox 1969, Heers 1983, Le Roy Ladurie 1979).

On a different plane, an analysis of masking (and popular culture, in general) in peasant European societies implies a serious study of the relations between the church, civil authority and peasantry, for both local priests and authorities have usually shown a strong disapproval, and even prohibition, of Carnival performance, 'Pastorala' plays and masking.

CONCLUSION

In sum, the study of popular and folk drama in relation to history and local political and economic groups is of much interest. Performance and folk drama should be understood as arenas where symbols are displayed and the latter's many potential meanings are selectively interpreted. To this end, aesthetics play a crucial role.

We should not see ritual aesthetics exclusively as coercion and constraint (Bloch's formalized language and illocutionary force) – a Cartesian view of rhetoric and political oratory. I rather hold to an Aristotelian tradition, which considers aesthetics as vehicle for the circulation of poetic (namely, metaphoric and symbolic) statements about the social order. This means that constraint, resistance or revelry may be enacted through the aesthetics of ritual performance (cf. Abu-Lughod 1990).

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