

The AFFLICTED MIRROR

A Study of Ordeals and the Making of Compacts
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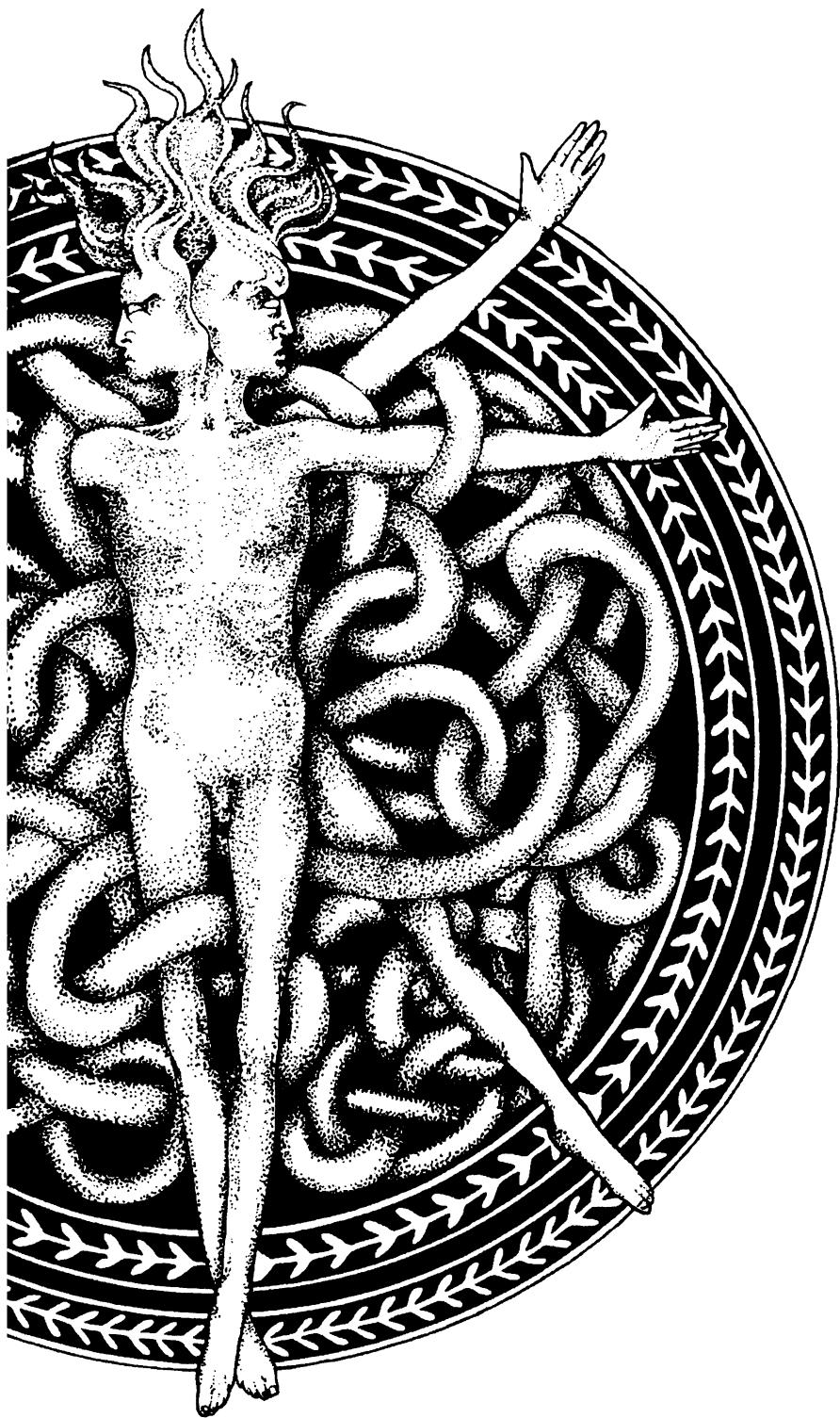


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¶ Introduction



THE MANNER IN which people relate to the metaphysical is dependent on its manifestation. Through the medium of art and narrative, the commonly perceived hidden world is portrayed as existing beyond our physical reality. Not passing for the non-descript, the appearance of the extraordinary depends on accentuating the potentiality of the hidden by reflecting aspects of the living world. How the observer comes to know this world involves the forming of a bond between a perceived physical presence and a disembodied metaphysical absence. Rather than safely relying on an appearance which generates mild impression, the transformative quality of this *Otherness*, which defies absolute definition, appears before the viewer in contorted form and thus gives the absence a discernible presence.

Many of the primary depictions by which relations are made depend on highlighting an alterity which certifies the notion of an existing unblemished physical form. Being different to the inhabited world determines how these images and visions of spirits or Gods are perceived. In some cases the image of another is depicted in its perfection, although this can never be released from its subjective derivation. It is

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normal to therefore expect, when coming into contact with a version of a reified person or spirit, that it will impart purity onto and into the observer. However, if examined carefully, nearly all depictions of spirits, saints, Gods and Devils contain, as a causal marker for engagement, certain imperfections. They may be scarred, beaten, crucified, maimed, deformed, or signal other physical qualities not of this world. It is fair to state that nearly all of these portraits rely on inscribing spirituality with a deformity. In short, the metaphysical cannot exist in the physical as an Otherness, without exaggerating its abnormality or difference to physical perfection.

This opposition to perfect physicality is perhaps nowhere more prevalent than when exploring how affliction has been used as a marker for indicating otherworldly presences. The hidden and revealed world of the everyday anchors circumstantial narratives to projected visual representations. These depict and explain how the metaphysical appears to the viewer. Being in a state of deformation, they perhaps reflect the fragility of our everyday existence, and by doing so echo the incompleteness that we experience in our daily lives.

Interconnectivity such as this suggests the source of the Other's contortion derives from this world. Yet we continue to rely on deformation to make them appear as being in opposition to our perceived norms. The common thread binding the physical to the metaphysical therefore ensures our everyday volatility converts aspects of Otherness into a mutually derived set of shared expressive afflictions.

In a similar manner the spirits also come with their own narratives about how they came to Be, and in turn explanations are given about their appearance. As a consequence differences between the physical and metaphysical exem-

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plify the same experiential moments. For spirits and people alike their mortality and survival depends upon being supported, which in turn cushions them from the fragility of their own existence. In this context, *The Afflicted Mirror* is an explorative exercise on how spirits and people mirror the same defining qualities when coming into contact with their Other. Never truly revealing themselves in their complete form, both parties project partial aspects of their Being. As a consequence each conveys their presence by making the absence of the Other appear as a physical distortion.

There is however a continuity between the world seen and unseen when attempting to apprehend the reflection of our Otherness. What are the spirits, gods and other beings to us if they are not to be realised in subtle abstracted reflections emanating from Self? Across the globe, humans have strived to make sense of their world, not only by explaining what they can see, but also by attempting to understand what they cannot see. Explanations about the dark unknowable mass, exudes a vibrant potential because we reflect back into the nothingness our own imaginings. In distorted and contorted states of Being they emerge as metaphors for our own 'becoming', consequently they lend themselves to making our world. And in this meeting place, located somewhere between civilisation and the wild we begin to understand ourselves through the partial actions of others.

Endeavouring to realise the totality of an Otherness, here inscribed by spirit form, is however unachievable. But to make the metaphysical resonate with magical power does not require full comprehension, and this is illustrated when surveying the formula used for describing the presence of spirits throughout history. As authors to our Otherness, the

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physical plane has been used as a reference point for making sense of the unknown. Accentuating appearance offers a vibrant version with incumbent potentialities for intervention. The conditions upon which manifestations occur depend on their physical composition. If there is something which makes them unusual or suggests an absence such as that of a missing limb, then their ability to breach the physical world immediately becomes more likely.

A singular semblance signifying pure Being cannot however be testified to when assessing the vision's constitution. Nevertheless, their absences occupy our imagination. In particular, the causality behind their comportment is developed from associative narratives. Detailing their existence, the narratives present a contextual parameter for the type of manifestation taking place. The afflicted form is then apprehended by employing an illocutionary force which asserts that any surviving accounts must include details about the trials and tribulations experienced. Qualifying an appearance is then determined by the proposition: that existence is contingent on acknowledging the instability in commensurate physicality.

Appreciating the full extent of this co-existence is brought into relief by the experiential commonality existing between the two planes. Narratives detailing the plight of the subject's hidden world feature thematic reminiscences, which through mutual relevance, acknowledge a salient significance. Narratives on affliction have seldom changed over the course of time and this allows an opportunity to review the reasons for its longevity as a symbolic indicator for "Othering" the unknown. Suggesting the possibility of a permanent motif lying somewhere underneath the stratified

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temporality of passing social conditions, raises deformation, transubstantiation and transfiguration into observable positions where they can be scrutinised. Exposing the body to potentialities across these three transformative states may have remained largely unchanged, however the explanations for why affliction occurs has evolved over a period of time. The manner in which a person, comes into contact with this Otherness, is not so remote, that people are unable to at least meet this notion of difference through their own reflection.

The afflicted mirror constitutes the interplay between “us” and “them”, “I” and “you”. Signifying the interconnecting differences and similarities gives us the ability to substantiate the extent to which we relate to the Other. One particular way of comprehending this difference can be understood by looking at one’s own reflection. As we look into the mirror and see ourselves staring back, so we come to perceive our habitat from a particular position. If I stretch forth and touch my own reflection I do not sense myself, but the cold surface of glass, and yet this surface tells me something about how I perceive another. The face that stares back has an innate resemblance to how I “see” myself, but does not match my impression of how I see myself. The reason for this is that when using the verb “to see” I render an intentional action with a reflexive capacity based on previous encounters. As a consequence when I say “how I see myself”, followed by the subsequent decision to stand in front of the mirror, inevitably results in a retraction of the qualifier because I don’t see myself in the same way all the time. Since I don’t see myself as constituting a complete representation, how the reflection represents a partial me raises challenging questions about how one may perceive. For example, when

moving towards the glass, my perception in terms of my relation to the object gradually changes according to the shifting perspective, facilitated by my making an intentional movement. I become self-aware of the difference to myself in this moment, while also recognising a change in distance from the perceived sentient self of that which stares back at me. This self-awareness colonises the space around me, and by so doing, I continually assess in an attempt to make sense of my surroundings. Self-awareness extends beyond what I can see, since I embody a summation of my surroundings, therefore I come to know myself despite having only part of me in view. In this moment my perception makes for an incomplete image. As I proceed to look outside of my reflection, where there should be connectivity, I find an overwhelming remoteness, especially when comparing myself to the other world looking back. Being unable to observe my location in all of its detail, without having panoramic vision, suggests certain inaccuracies when compared to my previous encounters with the same space. For I have known this room from many different aspects as I have tended to my daily activities, and yet the room as it appears to me now through reflection only reveals a partial presence. The possible reasons for this are many. Have I already predicated the reflection with an anticipatory impression of what I will see? Does the room appear at odds with my experience because the physical engagement with the space has always entailed intentional occupancy? Maybe it is the case that the perspective I am now beholden to is due to the intentional stance of wanting to survey a possible version of my Otherness? The probable answer from asking all these questions is yes, and yet they do not sit neatly as sequential qualifiers on how one comes to

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occupy a pre-designated space. This reflection then has no apparent feelings or emotions that I am aware of because of its partial absence to me. Yet through its remoteness to me as a sentient being, I find that I respond to the absences as part of an innate but not fully quantifiable reflex. I am drawn to this Self that stares back at me, I invade its absence with my imagination and arrive at a stand-off between the logic of this being nothing more than a challenging reflection, and there being something more which can be harnessed. By implanting the absence with an alternative presence, I make it become what I imagine it will be. This, neither confines its potential, nor inhibits its ability to move independently of me. Whether it will or not is neither here nor there, it is more important to know how this image of Self becomes the Other, in the moment when I give it an independence to decide its own choice of movement.

Placed ever further into a stylised form of Otherness, the person who stares back also touches the mirror at the same time, our movements suggesting an agentive synchrony. Responsive and yet passive to my emotional advances our two different worlds collide and compress on the surface of the glass, yet retain a connection through partial similarity. Even when some agreement seems to have been silently reached on what our reflection will or won't do, it is never far away from our immediate perception of Self, that the other might move without any instruction being given by the authorial viewer. There is then an Otherness to that which appears in the reflection and this is recognised by our conscious stance. And while we believe we have a semblance of control over the situation, with it being governed by preconceived rules, the chance of some unusual happening which calls into ques-

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tion the steadiness of our perception can never totally be dismissed.

In the same way as seeing oneself, the afflicted mirror is a metaphor for our partial ability to see the world in its entirety. Evidence for this partial, yet fully enveloping notion about how we perceive, tends to manifest when depicting deformed Gods and spirits. By having only a partial appearance the image of Otherness defines our notion about what it means to be complete and incomplete. Odin having only one eye illustrates the ability of deformation to mean something more than having simply lost his sight. In trading his eye for wisdom, the deformation appears as an afflicted marker which signals not only his divine other-worldly difference to mortal man, but the acquisition of powers embodied by having been deformed. In this way, Odin symbolically represents a form of Otherness. While his disfigurement offers us an opportunity to make an existential connection to his physicality, it also provides further substance for identifying differences between ourselves and those who reside in the metaphysical. Our not knowing or being able to perceive the totality of their Being, presents an opportunity to believe in their capacity to intervene in our lives. And it is here amongst various expressions about deformity that the body takes on a fantastical aspect when combined with a spiritual Otherness.

In the absence of completion, by providing only a partial reflection, the role of the hidden or what remains silent is suddenly occupied by a different kind of potential. As the emptiness reveals itself so we feel a compulsion to make sense of what we don't see. By assigning qualities to absence people imaginatively reassemble dissociative powers to cre-

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ate a new order. There is therefore a certain irony to this endeavour. Gaining efficacy by colonising the empty space shifts the absences into appearing as deformities. It would seem spirits and Gods alike cannot be left to inhabit their absence without suffering from human intervention.

Intervention should not however be thought of as originating solely from the physical side. Our knowledge of an Otherness, with singular or plural dimensions, is placed before us as an object upon which to reflect. Through the medium of appearance, the spirits and Gods converge around uncanny aspects of life that are regarded as having the ability to attract our attention. Their distorted forms resemble images which have been refracted by the consciousness of another. Using the means by which their existence can be acknowledged as a definite reality, they are compelled to exert an impression which obtains a degree of emphatic recognition from the physical world.

Grotesque portrayals convey not only a summation of potential. For in becoming afflicted a link is established between experience and the physicality of life. In *Forms of Deformity*, Lynn Holden examines how angels and demons have been represented. By focusing on physical abnormalities in a number of Orthodox texts she argues that the purpose of deformity in texts is to confuse, elucidate and transform the world.¹ The loss or contortion of a body part lends *gravitas* to this endeavour. By placing the stress on the part of the anatomy which has the most prominent role in a narrative, she doesn't so much highlight an absence rather than accentuate its presence. And we may here have the nub to our fascina-

¹ Holden, L. 1991. *Forms of Deformity*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

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tion, as much as a portion of the Others physical attribution may remain hidden or at least scarred, it creates an engaging narrative, because the unusual aspect, or strangeness of image, attracts our attention.

Each engagement establishes the extent to which the differences between presence and absence have been bridged. The interlocutory narrative is designed to undertake the responsibility of transforming this perceived separation in order to qualify its contribution. Raising particularly interesting questions about what dispositions are suitable when attempting to facilitate congress with Otherness, the narrative acts as the go-between meshing as it develops, intrinsic principles for engagement. In an attempt to extend the practical field so as to match the action of alteration within a context, it is important to look at how these narratives become interlocutory. In many any cases it is not the author but the words written, describing the appearance of the Other which makes the extraordinary feel real.

The style and drama, as well as the predicative unwritten assumptions, drive the account in a particular direction and thereby contribute towards the making of something different. If the physical disposition is then conducive for actualising change, it becomes possible to examine the choice of words which make the Other a substantial reality. This gives us the opportunity to then explore ideas about the composition of Self as well as the Other. Affliction thus becomes a focal point for this discussion because it presents an obvious juncture for gauging the extent of Otherness. While affliction addressed as an event provides some detail about the prevailing conditions, it inevitably leads to limiting the scope of this enquiry. A greater insight can however be

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gained by overriding the event with an account of the circumstances leading up to the event along with what subsequently followed. When the narrative is allowed to move beyond the event moment, it qualifies its interlocutory role by producing a multitude of relevant points of reference for further extrapolation.

When describing an event, the premise of the narrated account involves detailing what took place at the time. Often the initial contact, circumscribed by defining it as an event, occurs when the few who witnessed the moment proclaim that they were present. As a result, the event is always conveyed through retrospection. Trying to capture the moment therefore involves having to expand out from the event itself. Venturing into the actions leading up to, during and after the event, enables the narrative to encompass the circumstances surrounding the moment. In fact, the event only becomes an event for most, once the drama of the moment has passed. Relaying details to another requires a context which in turn predicates how the information is reconfigured into something which has meaning. Substantiating the narrative relies on inbuilt illocutionary mechanisms which stratify information. Extrapolating from the event moment, in order to produce a wider deliberative remit, requires having to give an account of the run up to the moment of contact. Obvious elaborations are therefore not developed in isolation to probability. As a consequence the combining of elaboration with probability enhances the narrative's potential agency. If this action can then be emplotted by describing how people situate themselves then we should be able to constitute affliction in diachronic terms. But how will this help our investigation? It is because all accounts of affliction show life stories

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as following a prescribed cyclical course of temporality, interspersed by fragmented moments of clarity which are then duly followed by a partial re-assembling of the Self. And it is here amongst the analytical and descriptive detail located within an inherently unstable process for articulating the unknown, that we come to understand our torrid relationship with the metaphysical.

Considering how specific aspects coruscate from a narrative, it is useful to examine the underlying assumptions being made about the order of things. With any generative narrative the author tends towards following a linear developmental line, which has at its premise the desire to produce concordance. This acknowledges a principle of order which informs how facts are arranged. In opposition to a narrative's developmental stage, which relies on this semblance of order to create structural parameters, there is to be found, located within an inevitable discordance which details the up surge in misfortune or change. Positioned in a place which exemplifies the difference, discordance challenges the anticipated trajectory of interplay and by doing so gives the plot a transformative quality. This allows the reader to track the development of the narrative from initial situation to terminus. The narrative then explicates a torturous route, encouraging the reader to become emotionally engaged. Only then can "the end" be found to have a satisfactory conclusion. While the dual aspect of order and disorder designate literal movement with all of its accompanying twists and turns, the mutual exclusivity exhibited does not ignore the possibility of conjoining the two into discordant-concordance. A vital aspect to the composition of the narrative the discordant-concordance synthesises emphasises the heterogeneous

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elements within the text. These oppositions manifest a pre-configured crooked course, which enables the reader to participate in the expounding of the narrative. For such an undertaking to work requires the emplotment to obfuscate all possible contingencies, in effect how things could have happened, and it achieves this by replacing the multiplicity of possibilities with a centralised necessity. To make affliction therefore work, to have it stand out from other more common activities and daily interactions, the necessity appears as something surprising or remarkable. The necessity to act in a specific way, to respond in an appropriate fashion to demands being made, only appears retrospectively, since what proceeds must have already occurred before being presented as part of the requisite evidence for transfiguration.

The spectacle of a spirit or God lacking a complete physical semblance pertains to this notion of a discordant-concordant image within the narrative. Lacking a partial physical presence to the one we think matches our own perception of Being informs the interpretative outcome. Rodney Needham in *Reconnaisances* identifies an object's absence as the "unilateral figure".² Examining extant material evidence on partial physical assemblages, he studies personages who consist of one physical side. These personages are depicted as having one eye, one arm and one leg on the same side. In its asymmetrical quasi-human form, he suggests particular spirits and Gods obtain a special place in our imagination.

Not all the examples cited below retain such a distinct asymmetry, because underlying the asymmetrical aspect there can be found a causality which informs the reflective

² Needham, R. 1980. *Reconnaisances*. Tornoto: Toronto University Press.

quality of affliction and the resultant aberration. What is evident from Needham's work is that the unilateral figure uses as its template the human form. This is interesting to consider, when the Other is expected to be exhibiting stark differences to the common perception about the body. It is possible to surmise that the Other appears in our image because it can only be made into Other by using the human form as a reflective foil. Such a close association between the metaphysical and physical is cited by Needham when he refers to Plato's *Symposium*. Of particular interest is how human beings came into existence. To begin with human beings as we know ourselves now were originally joined to another human. We had four hands with an equal number of legs, two identical faces, as well as double back and flanks and these together made the human form into a complete circle. In this absolute state of completeness their strength was insurmountable and so it was that in their arrogance they attacked the Gods. Zeus was so outraged at this sign of rebellion that he cut them in two and in doing so made them weaker. And so it was that Zeus threatened them with a further division if they dared to show such disdain for his authority again. Under the auspices of his authority, humanity would come to understand the moral dilemma of causing further infringements by being afflicted.

The anecdotal quality of this tale follows a strict linear development from concordance to discordance, with the end result that these conjoin in the issuing of a lasting threat, if further infringements should ever occur.³ Under conditions which threaten the integrity of the corporeal form enables

³ Needham 1980:28.

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the extent of our subjectivity to determine the accuracy of our assessments objectively. The dialogue between the different afflicted forms all point to the continual renegotiation of our and their existence across punctuated moments in time. If time is moving continuously in forward motion then the ability to capture a moment, where everything seems to stand still has to become a priority. Of course arresting time is never completely achieved, yet during our daily activities many people find time to rest on a point provincially. Causing these ruptures in the time continuum can attract the attention of our Otherness. In the same moment however, time continues to pull the Self and our Other along in its current, and by so doing it becomes almost impossible to appear as complete, especially as a semblance of Self is left in the suspended moment. If this is true then time creates its own distortions, and as our perception of Self is stretched so we become ever more detached from ourselves. Having attempted to capture moments from within an undisputed time continuum, it follows that corresponding corporeal aspects change or become deformed from having a self-constituted predisposition towards wanting to fragment time into parallel equivalents.

THE SEQUENTIAL DEVELOPMENT OF AFFLICION

¶Fundamental to this study is the appearance of deformation and how this determines our relationship to the Other. Standing as something distant or remote to our sense of Being, the Other qualifies its role as being reflective, espe-

cially when attempting to comprehend present existential dimensions. Cast beyond the physical world this utter difference to ourselves is only made so by retaining attributes which equate to our perception of Self. Resembling what we might expect to see but with accompanying deformation ensures engagement. Not only does this open up the opportunity to extrapolate the conditions of their existence, but it also reflects back onto us. Informing decisions on how we use their form and the ways they have been represented cements our relationship to them. Physical and metaphysical differences rather than repelling the Other draw each closer by depending on the Other. The notion of absences, deformity, and abnormality all of which are encapsulated by the term affliction, generate the terms and conditions for self-preservation through reciprocity. With a binding degree of wanting to explore and learn from a realised Otherness, gives their manifested form certain potency. Our belief in their existence is made more robust by the Other representing an utterly different corporeal figure from anything that we can embody independently. Yet the emotive response to narrated circumstance creates empathy for the Other's plight, and as the viewer finds comparisons or similarities to his or her everyday circumstance, so overtime, the nothingness becomes colonised with appropriate agentive knowledge.

Chapter 1, *The Afflicted Gods*, explores the spirits' alterity to our aspectual givenness. Here the specificity of contextuallyised engagement with the Other is emphasised. Arguing that through the spirits deformity we come to understand our relationship to the occult, so an explanation is given on how the hidden becomes partially visible. The conditions for affliction then become the vehicle for realising not only their

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existence but also our involvement in their fate. Bound as we are to specific ways of knowing them, so the Other depicts power through injury. Citing examples from Catholic hagiography to Haitian Vodou, from the making of fetishes in West Africa's Benin to the witchcraft accounts of deformation in the early modern period of history, the role of affliction is demonstrated as having never strayed very far from being about defining power through the appearance of deformation. Establishing the relevant descriptive detail on affliction further enhances the argument, that any embodied affliction in the physical domain reflects aspects of the spirits condition. This does not necessarily mean there has to be a direct correlation between affliction types, but it does show there is a propensity to replicate the condition, especially when making the existence of the Other a genuine concern.

Chapter 2, *Affliction in its Magico-Social Context*, describes how affliction is used to measure the appropriateness of the candidate to serve the spirits. Drawing on fieldwork carried out in Haiti in the 1990s, the experience of being afflicted is brought to life through Renold, a Haitian Vodou priest. Using this as an anchor point, the chapter counters Lewis' approach in *Ecstatic Religions* to forms of affliction by questioning his assumptions about the relationship between affliction and resource acquisition. Undercutting affliction as a provincial rite of passage allows for an exploration into the importance of having to endure the ordeal. Highlighted as a key aspect in the transformation of a person into a ritual specialist, the chapter focusses on examples of resistance. It will be argued that it is resistance which eventually makes the role of the ounyan or mambo powerful. Only by enduring the ordeal can the candidate be thought of as having

been genuinely contacted and chosen by the spirits. Once installed as a spirit representative, the ritual specialist works as the conduit for the spirits. Attending to the people's needs, by acting as the go between, ensures that the ritual specialist becomes the very mirror into which people must look so as to gain counsel from the other side. These are the broad parameters into which we will venture, in an attempt to better understand the role of affliction in any spiritual enterprise. And yet within these outlined constraints are opportunities to establish similitude between disparate or distinct forms of magical practice.

With the persecution of witches in the early modern period there is evidence, without over reaching, that people acknowledged and continue to recognise a metaphorical divide separating us from the world of spirits. Such a divide, the very mirror itself, the crossroads to which we must all eventually arrive, does not only act as the point into which we inter our hopes and aspirations to serve and learn, but it reflects back upon us notions about Self and Otherness.

In Chapter 3, *The Pact and the Witches Mark*, the topic of affliction adopts a slightly different and yet complementary approach to the previous chapters. Examining some of the historical evidence the chapter explores how the witch's mark became part of the demonological discourse of the time. In particular, this inclusion popularised the notion of the witch as being diabolical, in addition to perpetuating the idea of there being an Otherness. Portrayed as embodying an integral immorality ensured witches were usually portrayed as having an aversion towards civilisation with all of its associative moral etiquette. This 'Othering' meant they came to represent the conduit for accessing the metaphysical. This

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is nowhere more evident than in published illustrations. Using one woodcut example by Hans Baldung Grein entitled *A Group Of Witches* is explored by extrapolating from Zika's interpretation in *The Appearance of Witchcraft*. This highlights the use of the grotesque as an aspect of affliction, but also integrates the importance of imagination when attempting to make contact with Otherness.⁴

THE DESIGN OF THE AFFLICTED MIRROR

The Afflicted Mirror is designed to enable others to extrapolate from evidence presented here. Having a philosophical derivation, the purpose of Otherness is to establish a distance from Self, which otherwise might generate confusion when referring to Gods and spirits. By stripping the flesh from the bone, the object of this design is to present an exposed referential template. This should allow the reader to generate their own set of signifiers by drawing from significant aspects of their lifeworld. It is therefore not the author's intention to explicate comprehensive global comparisons by applying the theory presented amongst these pages. As such it is not the responsibility of the author to suggest the appropriateness of application by citing a multitude of examples from across the world. Avoiding the temptation to draw on a cross-cultural selection of deracinated archetypes has ironically produced its own selection of absences. Awaiting your

⁴ Zika, C. 2007. *The Appearance of Witchcraft: Print and Visual Culture in Sixteenth-Century Europe*. London: Routledge.

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colonisation, these omissions should be regarded as an invitation to find relevancy according to your own predilection.

It should therefore become apparent during the course of *The Afflicted Mirror* that this is a non-reductive exploration on how to comprehend affliction. What becomes evident throughout the text is the reliance on intersubjectivity for differentiating Self and the Other. Without discounting one for the other, affliction depends upon dialogic interaction between the two. This not only influences the outcome, but predicates what will be looked for in the first place. An underlying conclusion from evidence cited below is that affliction appears to be an expression of people's desire to make claims about their world, and in particular, their perceived ownership over it. Whether this manifests, when discussing the condition of Gods and spirits or the ordeal as experienced by a Haitian Vodou priest, the same claim can be made, that whatever position the Other maybe to the subject, the conclusion ultimately rests with us acknowledging the Other as influencing the constitution of the Self. If we assume this meta-narrative informs this exploration, then the absences or presences, both of which embody an impression of something which we assign as significant, becomes the foil by which we reflect the metaphysical and the physical back onto ourselves.

Reflection is then the key attribute to this work along with changing contingencies and time selected circumstantial conditions. And while these provide a broad base upon which to build a satisfactory explanation, they do nothing to deter the implicit differences between worlds apprehended by Self. With differences appearing as salient silences ensures the division between the seen and unseen is ultimately

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retained. Indeed it is not the intention of this book to consolidate the two, but rather explain that it is in their alterity to one another than we come to have a relationship with the metaphysical.

Knowing something about another can never satiate the innate human desire for acquiring more knowledge. The afflicted body then stands as a testament for knowing something more than the observer. As an object of desire it harnesses its terror to dissuade the fool from trying to press home any physical advantage. What we are then left with is a stand-off between presence and absence. These do not encapsulate a totality of Being however, but reveal half formed apparitions which move and change in response to the demands being made upon them. They “become”, when there is an anticipated expectation that they actually exist. It is therefore through the use of the narrative that accounts of affliction hold steady against the thrust of passing time. Acting as receptacles, narratives present the reader with an opportunity to survey and analyse the contingencies employed when attempting to contain an inherently fragile lifeworld.

While the impact of affliction creates in the aftermath a narrative about the importance of ordeal, it also carries a cautionary subtext for those who actively pursue the perceived advantages of becoming a practitioner. Often overlooked by self-claimed magicians, lies the important attribute of humility, and while historicity is saturated with accounts of humility as an indelible indicator of correct selection, extant reports about its ability to disarm accusations of egotism by effacing self-aggrandisement are more often than not ignored. Indeed the examples cited below give credence to the notion of the ordeal as a transformation of the

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ego, as the self-serving individual flenses the necrotic flesh from the subjects' body. It is not without a struggle that the aspirant negotiates the terms and conditions of their new burden to serve and replenish the life force of the spirits. For the status of the candidate is contingent on the ascription of suitable actions, as well as the imputation of others to ascribe value to his or her role as elected interlocutor.



¶¹ The Afflicted Gods



THE AFFLICTED GODS represent through their deformation a symbolic Otherness to the world we inhabit.

Representing their difference through physical alterity indicates a possible deviation from morality. Yet the alteration to their physical appearance cannot safely suggest immorality, because the perspective adopted predicates the reasons for abnormality. Perhaps a stronger theoretical explanation for using affliction as an expression for having undergone a transformation depends on change being made into an integral aftermath signifier.

By having already suffered at the hands of an authoritative regime, the moral or immoral worth of a depicted Otherness will be judged by the moral attitude of the interlocutor. Integrated moral values, embedded as an intervention within the text, extol the moral worth from recorded actions. The morality of any action undertaken is articulated by those who are in a position of authority to report and transcribe accounts as people remember them. As a consequence the contents are rearranged to address a proclivity for wanting to retain control over authorship, while reaffirming a moral

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and ethical standpoint. This however has not stopped the fascination for the abnormal or afflicted form from being used as a metaphor for comprehending that which lies beyond our visible world.

Grotesque forms draw attention away from morality and direct the observer towards possible reasons for their apparent immoral disembodiment. Appearing as a corporeal distortion allays any sense of loss since the imbalance of disarticulation is countered by an increase in aspectual potentialities. This only makes itself known through the accompanying narrative which details specific characteristics about their 'becoming'. Filling in the otherwise vacant form with probability eases affliction away from negative connotation. As it pushes past deformity as a limitation, so it becomes possible to establish a platform for exploring the symbolic metaphysical meanings, which have up until now, been hindered by occultation.

Authors have across the centuries clothed the gods and spirits with reason and intent which has made them appear as transparent entities. Imbibing their attributes with an encompassing visual totality has ensured gravitas, but it has also resulted in obscuring the nature of absence in their figuration. How they came to be placed in relation to other entities and even to ourselves began to take shape when the Other underwent a stylistic restriction. Instead of including a representation's inconsistency, as an added expression of Otherness, it became the norm for people to illustrate the "true nature" of spirits by characterising them as being human in form and attitude. Under these circumstances, transitive moments of contact considered as being important, resulted in the development of human personalities with a

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complementary comportment towards others. Yet during the selective process, aspects which together made for the contorted form, brought on from having been afflicted, were increasingly censored so as to make them appear more human.

Rather than seeking to perpetuate this version where silences brought on by affliction are avoided, the afflicted aspect of the spirits or Gods appearance, personality and agency are accentuated to act as a counter balance to this prevailing representation. Accounts of affliction detailing how they came to lose their totality, punctuated only by the silences in the text, provide the background by which to assess the reasons for their appearance as being wounded. Narratives about the Gods and spirits have therefore depended on recounting life stories in a way which retain significance for current audiences. By doing so, narratives supply the reader with the appropriate contextual substance. Developing specific themes based on their form will ensure subsequent elaborations chasten the extraordinary dimension of the strange with parts more commonly associated with the everyday. Audiences are thereby given the means by which to juxtapose themselves to a metaphysical counterpart. Physical and metaphysical conditions then appear as an exaggerated difference in Being. The capacity of the narrative to close this gulf is achieved by focussing upon certain commonalities. In short, it is the word itself which becomes capable of endorsing our imagination and the subsequent engagement with the Other. Not only does it enhance our understanding of their condition but it also has the potential to open up a space for dialogue. Whatever the reasons are for such an undertaking, indisputable evidence shows

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engagement is reciprocated by suspending empiric ways of knowing.

Images and descriptive depictions of these entities are made more human through injury. The fragile state of life with its daily pressure diminishes the possibility of accessing a complete semblance of meaning. Dwelling in a space configured by time, with all of its inaccuracies and embellishments, demarcates them as being closer to us than we first imagine. Through affliction their deformity resonates with our everyday life experiences. Our commonalities become explicit, especially when we realise that it is not only our difference to one another but our similarity which defines "us" and "them".

Suffering at great times of stress when our conviction to do the right thing is placed in jeopardy, or when our self-affirmed authority is suddenly deposed by another, can result in feeling like we have been scarred for life. Are not these depictions of affliction mimicking or better reflecting our own ordeal when trying to make sense of the world? Are the spirits telling us that we are not alone in our plight as we struggle? In this instance the tales accompanying their transfiguration provide us with explicit details on how they came to be, and how they continue to mirror our own ongoing transformation. There is in this connection between the world seen and unseen a finely polished mirror which reflects back upon both parties an explanation on how we came to dwell amongst others, as well as how we came to be self-aware. In isolation each would serve no purpose at all, and therefore it can only be through dialogue as represented, embodied and lived that we eventually come to learn of our Otherness.

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As with any connection made there remains an ever-present remoteness to the spirits. Only by retaining an edge, in that, we cannot know everything about them or their condition, does it become possible for them to exert a presence. This not only invites supplication but is accompanied by the threat of retribution if we do not attend to their needs. If this assessment does indeed prove to be accurate then we must assume our commonality masks an altogether different determining factor when trying to comprehend the formation of our path. Inhabiting this world and creating a suitable environment for creativity relies heavily on us being able to negotiate with our Otherness. The absence of a total image, one bereft of perfection, forewarns what may befall if we become overly complacent. For although we may face the same fate they are further down the track than where we currently find ourselves. Ordeals endured are for the most part yet to be experienced. And it is this distance between us which has tended to place them at the margins of society. Like the leper, they dwell at the edges, in the wild country, those places where civilisation and its savage resentment for imagining the old ways has yet to make landfall. Many of the spirits however still bear the scars from coming into contact with modernity and the forced migration from their homelands.

Detailed experiences about how these afflictions came about are conveyed through surviving narratives. Determining our understanding of their plight, these texts colour specific ways of knowing, and yet by them favouring the uncanny over normality allows for a partial revealing of their hidden constitution. Maya Deren in her book *Divine Horsemen, Living Gods of Haiti*, describes Legba as having been transformed from an African archetype being in ascendance

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to becoming the decrepit old man found in Haiti.⁵ The gradual deformation is held briefly, signifying the transformation from a resplendent power to something more familiar and 'closer to home'. Being more akin to what we would recognise as the ailments of old age threatens to limit our own sense of Self by not being able to fully fathom the inevitable. In Legba's condition, the image of a stoic man resolute in his resolve to not only stand firm at the crossroads encourages the reader, the watcher, and initiate to commend their empathic sensibilities onto others. Finding the connection that can be made between man and spirits gives our afflicted mirror the ability to reflect back an Otherness onto ourselves while simultaneously projecting forth a range of absences. It is somewhere in this transaction of presences and absences, introducing differently positioned reflective forms, that our "becoming" is provoked into making itself known.

The afflicted form of Legba not only establishes the framework for understanding the seen world but gives us the keys for unlocking the world beyond. The gradual diminishment of Legba's form presents the affliction as being an outward sign of passing time, and this is never more explicit than in Deren's depiction of him when wracked by age, he appears as someone who has already started to be consumed by maggots.⁶ The gradual consumption of the body makes Legba into a vibrant spectacle even at the moment of his demise. The self-realisation of encroaching age being detrimental to physical ability challenges this vision, because it is difficult to imagine the deleterious effects of age encapsulating vital-

⁵ Deren, M. 1953/2004. *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*. New York: McPherson & Company.

⁶ Deren 2004:96-100.

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ity. Yet it is here in the distorted form, at the confrontational epicentre of our own Being, and in direct contradistinction to Legba, where we come to recognise ourselves through his reflection. Everyday life experiences take on new meaning when placed under these new expansive conditions for knowing the world.

When remembering Legba and the encroachment of physical absence, we consign him to a disappearing apparition and because of this we begin to know ourselves and the potential impact of affliction upon our own body. In the full glare of an ordeal, the link which connects us to them is made more apparent through our remembrance of the Other's condition.

Further ordination of Legba's physical condition can be found in the descriptions of St. Jude and St. Lazarus since both of these are his hagiographic equivalents. St. Jude as Saint for the Hopeless and Despaired is depicted as carrying the staff. St. Lazarus is shown supporting his body by using a staff and is commonly seen as a poor emaciated lame man known by many as the carer of lepers. Amongst these seemingly disparate images common motifs abound. Such a synthesis according to Haitian Vodou iconography relies heavily on the Catholic saints for its imagery.

This synthesis to physical condition has resulted in Legba being associated with the poor, lost and forgotten people. Each emanation testifies its resemblance to the others through a sense of an overwhelming loss of Being. Afflicted by everyday forms of absence the physical ailments symbolise gradual consumptive degradation of the Self. Through these representations, the embodying of affliction tells us about the otherworldly qualities being held within the story.

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These are firmly ensconced behind the afflictive condition and are used as symbolic markers. Guiding people into a position where their own state of Being relies on these markers as referential points, only goes to amplify Legba as the gate-keeper. Generating a resolution capability presents Legba as having the ability to relate his experiences to those of his followers. For this interconnectivity to work the afflicted mirror must signify its portents by anticipating the everyday frailty of the physical world. The same can be said for Legba's condition, for his power to mean anything, he must embody elements of the everyday and the future struggle for survival, so as to reduce the physical distance between himself and the physical world.

Measuring the connectivity between the visible and invisible, by using physicality as a signifier, brings another aspect to the fore. There appears to be good reason to believe there is a ratio in physical difference when it comes to observing how the metaphysical manifests partial presences. Exponential distortions correspond to how we retain a level of contact with the Other. When these abnormalities become exaggerated they prompt greater emotive responses, such as fear. By expressing an Otherness in this manner their difference takes on a terrifying dimension which also indicates power. This is illustrated by Legba as *Legba Do Miwa* which refers to his position to us as the "Legba behind the mirror". The impression given through the use of this epithet is that he is literally there on the other side of the door, all one needs to do is open it. Moreover the reflective aspect bears no general sign of being afflicted whereas *Legba Pie Case* or "Legba with the broken leg" is described as being the commander to an

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army of demonic forces.⁷ It would seem the manifestation of the affliction measured by its severity corresponds to the type of spiritual power the spirits wield. In Legba with the broken leg's case this amounts to his associated demonic forces also taking on terrible deformed states of being. These are however far more removed from the physical domain, and operate to exaggerate a further removal or distancing from the everyday reflection of Legba.⁸

Illustrating a further separation from typical normalities, the demonic forces identified as *baka* are regarded as being small red-eyed, fleshless creatures with their skin being bisected into black and red and then stretched over their bones. Under the cover of darkness they are thought to roam the roads and country tracks looking for people to eat. Exhibiting such threatening behaviour towards others makes them further removed from life's condition which may explain their extraordinary appearance. If this is true then Legba must have through his affliction the ability to open different aspects of the road connecting the two worlds. In fact this suggests the existence of countless crossroads populated by various manifestations of Legba, with each ever more incredible affliction corresponding to departures in affiliated form. The strangeness or difference to a norm as perceived

⁷ Desmangles, L. 1992. *The Faces of the Gods: Vodou and Roman Catholicism in Haiti*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press

⁸ When the person is "ridden" by the lwa, the possession experience presents an opportunity for the spirit to bring into view their afflicted form. So while the distancing from the physical may indeed lead to greater exaggerated depictions of affliction, the lwa are capable of manifesting their physical absence by contorting and debilitating the body of their host. In this way the absence retains a potential to become a presence in an instant.

by others contributes towards garnering alien attributes. Each apparition accentuates its otherness to us through its absence and general deformity. Alfred Metraux in *Voodoo in Haiti* says the baka can appear as cats, dogs, pigs, cows and monsters with the latter being so foul they defy description.⁹ One cited story he tells concerns the fate of a man, who on his way home at night finds a small child crying by the side of the road. Taken with pity he returns home with the child. On arrival the child begins to grow and grow until his legs are dragging along the ground, only then does it make itself known to the family as a baka and in that moment spares them from being consumed.¹⁰

Rather than focussing singularly on deformation, this narrative details the proceedings leading up to entrapment. Juxtapositioning moral with immoral intent means the true immorality of the *baka* can only emerge once the transformation has taken place. In this case the integrity of the *baka*'s Otherness to the human condition signifies a moment where absence declares a presence in the making of the Self. For it is in the *baka*'s difference that we see ourselves more clearly and are thereby able to negotiate our presences with perceived absences.

Another great and formative figure in the Vodou pantheon is Ezili and it could be that she offers the greatest detail on various types of affliction and how this relates to the human condition. Karen McCarthy Brown in *Mama Lola* identifies two of the main manifestations of Ezili, although there are countless others. For her at least two of the primary

⁹ Metraux, A. 1959. *Voodoo in Haiti*. London: Andre Deutsch Ltd.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

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Ezili's which show signs of affliction are identified as being Lasyrenn and Ezili Danto. Each of these has a Catholic comparison to the Virgin Mary, Nuestra Senora de la Caridad del Cobre and Mater Salvatoris.¹¹ Ezili is an earthly spiritual manifestation and is therefore easier to approach on a daily basis when needing assistance. Encapsulating the emotive states of care, love, anger, frustration, sensuality and loneliness, she is the mother and warrior, both maternal and frightening. McCarthy Brown considers these female spirits to "mirror and map" the everyday circumstances we all face which in turns make them comprehensible. Providing direction and judgement on how to deal with any given situation which surfaces across the course of time, Ezili becomes the mother to all. Her composure is nevertheless fragile and it can easily dissipate at a moment's notice.

Lasyrenn is depicted as a fleeting presence, submerged beneath the waves she dwells as a dark mass at the back of the mirror.

Gazing at her is like gazing at your truer picture of self than is likely to be found in the mirrors of everyday life. But it is also dangerous to try and get too close or hold on too tightly to the vision. A person who reaches out to stroke her or tries to lie close by her broad and comforting side may, quite simply, drown.¹²

Lasyrenn may not be strictly afflicted but there is something to this description which matches the presence and absence

¹¹ McCarthy Brown, K. 1991. *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 223.

previously mentioned. This image which incorporates a uniltateral impression amounts to her dark side appearing in dreams, while her white side appears when peering into the depths of the ocean.

A salient motif for Lasyrenn is her association with drowning, and there is some narrative evidence which suggests this particular descriptive development derives from slaves who drowned during their forced migration across the middle passage. This submersion extends to people disappearing for three days only to reappear as initiates. During their absence from the physical world the spirits provide instruction on sacred knowledge. Although no lasting affliction appears to take hold, the initiate emerges knowing that any deviation from his or her chosen path will inevitably lead to provoking the spirits wrath.

Ezili Danto has a more explicit afflicted capacity since she cannot speak because her tongue was cut out by French colonialists during their occupation of Haiti. The corresponding attributes and afflicted state is shown in the image of the Mater Salvatoris as the Black Virgin Our Lady of Czestochowa. On her right cheek there are two vertical scars. According to Leslie Desmangles in *Faces of the Gods*, these scars represent her suffering and loneliness which appeared after Christ was crucified.¹³ For in her arms as the Black Virgin she is seen holding the Christ child. Further extrapolations are made when viewing the sign or veve for Ezili Danto which characteristically illustrates a dagger through the heart, thus inferring emotions more commonly associated with loss, suffering and sorrow. There is also some gossip which tells that

¹³ Desmangles 1992:142-143.

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she actually received these scars from a fight that occurred between Ezili Freda, Ogun and Ezili Danto.¹⁴

Although a caring spirit, Ezili Danto has the ability to unleash a torrent of anger towards devotees. Characterised by McCarthyBrown as a “maternal anger” she is capable of unleashing an irrepressible rage upon her attendees, which at times can lack any coherent rational explanation. It may be because of this uncontrollable compulsion to lash out that she has been described by some as a *baka*. Evidence that this may be the case is indicated by making sure she does not come into contact with blood. Even if she is witness to a sacrifice, and she sees the blood, she immediately becomes wildly aggressive. Given her unstable temperament, she is often used, with great effect, in practises where the immediate implementation of a curse is required to level the life of another.

Ezili Danto’s appearance resembles a woman who has suffered, who has known what it means to have experienced loss. Her physical form however has remained relatively complete other than maybe the scars suggesting a darker ordeal. There are however, other Ezili forms, placed on the margins of daily Vodou practice which show more significant signs of physical affliction than that suffered by Lasyrren or Ezili Danto.

Desmangles describes Metre’s Ezili as an old woman who is so physically decrepit that to stand she relies on the support of a cane. In the same vein as Legba, her body is terribly deformed. Suffering from arthritis she apparently trembles

¹⁴ Rey, T. 1999. *Our Lady of Class Struggle: The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Haiti*. Trenton: Africa World Press.

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as she walks. In an attempt to ease the gap between the physical form and her incomplete manifestation, her devotees sing to her a plaintive song so as to illustrate their empathic understanding towards her condition:

*Ezili, I have no bones (to support me)
I have no bones
Ezili, oh! I have no bones in all my body
Ezili, oh! I have no bones*

Metres replies:

*Metres Ezili in back of the gate (of Ginen)
I speak, speak and they refuse to listen to me
I speak, speak, my children.
Ezili in back of the gate
I speak, speak they refuse to listen to me.¹⁵*

Heartfelt in its acknowledgement of her physical absence the song identifies the source of her sorrow. The overwhelming culmination of her physical ailments, embodying an intractable and yet visible frustration, which testifies to her potency being partially spent galvanises her sense of loss. In this embodied position to her Otherness she is able to realise and disconnect her Self from alterity. For it is the absence through formulated poesis, enhancing the perception by having no bones, that opens the way for extrapolating her condition. Under the combined weight of age and wisdom she barely stands or has a presence. Having lost her com-

¹⁵ Desmangles 1992:134.

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pleness it is nothingness which bears down on her. Encapsulating the interior void of Being means the evident power she retains derives from not being able to achieve her goals. Denied physically from having the appropriate attributes, the absence introduces a different notion about Otherness to the audience. When responding to the words as enunciated by the attending company, Metres acknowledges what she already knows as disempowerment, thereby identifying the source of her absence. Straddling presence and absence in this dynamic way the manner in which she acknowledges her condition is only partial. As much as there is a reluctant acceptance, she shows fortitude to endure by refusing to totally accept her situation. But does the lack of total acknowledgement to current circumstance open the narrative up to further potentialities? In Metres' case it does because the response confirms not only the disability but how it impacts on another important aspect of Being, the incapacity to communicate with others.

Afflictions associated with crippling deformation brought on by the ravages of time presents to the observer, whether attendee or devotee, a stage in life where a sense of what it means to be powerful gradually diminishes. Dissipation of this kind does not however mean an absolute loss, for what we witness in the case of Metres is a spirit in transition. The reference to being ignored at the back of the gate therefore constitutes avoidance by the living to face the inevitable fated deterioration of their physicality. Although she may remain unheard, her constitution by being silenced does nothing to limit her significance. Rather, the decoupling from the physical world through protracted attempts to communicate without success, places the emphasis on the physical world

to attend to her needs. Remedying the apparent imbalance or possible distance between worlds, accentuates differences about what it means to Be, and yet the overarching sentiment clearly invites our attention to placate and thereby ease her loss. In an attempt to reach forth and participate in the afterlife, the back of the gate becomes, through the identification of the affliction, a contorted web of paradoxes. This is especially made so by the power Metres is capable of wielding.

Desmangles tells of devotees supplicating her once she has made an appearance so as to reduce the risk of facing her wrath. It would seem it is her deformed Otherness to those who approach which ultimately ensures they adopt the correct composure. Mindful of her ability to inflict harm, the frustration at being afflicted acts as the catalyst by which she becomes powerful. Amidst the deformation she 'becomes'. Her burgeoning strength channelling through floundering weakness, evokes an inner resolve, by which she ultimately prevails, as a partial presence lying at the edge of land between the dead and the living.

Absences and physical deformities appearing at the point where affliction becomes a representation of something other than itself is not confined to Haiti. The exterior–interior tension between appearance and narrative has been systematically embodied across many parts of the world. For in this tension between, what initially appears as a physical deformity and the accompanying meaning to be gained in the subsequent generated narrative, has allowed special qualities to emerge which inform the depiction.

Extrapolating from the perceived differences between physical and metaphysical display, gives the narrator room

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to explore details relating to the constitution of the body. From surface to depth differentials, to notions about how the viewer claims ownership over the image, ensures the condition of affliction will present opportunities for understanding the relationship between the two worlds.

In the Haitian portrayals of absence brought on by affliction the descriptive quality has the ability to generate a sense of depth to the subject. Rather than confining the representation to a flat one-dimensional form, the narrative carves contours into the body. As a consequence the body becomes an inconsistent mass. The same can be said for claiming ownership over the image. Whether a fetish or a lwa, each depend on the amount of time invested in developing significances that resonate with the viewer's perspective. Pre-suppositions may determine the acquisition of the affliction and what it means, but what these unforeseen primary determinants predicate leads to unanticipated illumination. Accomplished by transferring the Self into an Other, one can imagine, even when taking into consideration inherent inaccuracies, what it means to physically experience the afflicted condition. Partial realisations consequently suggest a certain irony in the application of our absences when considering this transference exercise. Displacing the Self by imagining an embodied grotesque vision allows for the possibility to explore other germane characteristics associated with affliction, being as it is an expressive form for empowerment.

Endorsing the displacement of Self to an imagined location reveals new modal ranges for knowing. Notions about containment, exclusion, masking, openness, displacement, synthesis, control and ambiguity all indicate the ability of affliction to address the aspectual givenness to Being. Mikhail

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Bahktin in *Rabelais and His Worlds* goes further when writing that the grotesque form presents to us a provocative image which demands our attention. The grotesque body is considered by him to be a body in motion, changing as it moves towards an eventual, albeit temporary, stasis of 'becoming'.

*Thus the artistic logic of the grotesque image ignores the closed, smooth, impenetrable surface of the body and retains only its excrescences (sprouts, buds) and orifices, only that which leads beyond the body's limited space or into the body's depths.*¹⁶

Across Togo and Benin many of the ethnic groups utilise fetishes to enable dialogue with spirits. As an extension to the spirit's metaphysical presence *bochios* operate as sentient intermediaries by providing protection and empowerment. In *African Vodun* Suzanne Preston Blier argues that an integral part of making *bochio* raw and full of energy is by employing a counteresthetic criteria. *Bochio* emphasise counterintuitive physical contortions, which in turn makes them compelling to behold. With their interpretation for embodying absences, they resemble the imperfections and uncertainties experienced by beninois on an everyday basis.¹⁷

Bochio tend to be roughly hewn from wood, being often restrained by cords and other such matter. Exhibiting missing limbs along with other forms of restraint they act as a focal point for the acquisition of historicity in the present. Em-

¹⁶ Bakhtin, M. 1968. *Rabelais and His Worlds*. Trans. Helen Iswolsky, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 317-318.

¹⁷ Blier, S.P. 1995. *African Vodun: Art, Psychology and Power*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

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blematic of time and the deleterious effect upon the physical form, combined with the life stories about the spirits' transfiguration turns the fetish into a reflexive vessel. Overlooking common conventions about beauty, it is instead the crippling form of affliction which marks them out as being powerful. In their difference to an ideal they challenge the viewer to look beneath their "messiness" to find the attraction in their disability. Witnessing an intended negation of perfection their form presses at the very limit of our perception. As a reversal to the perceived norm the fetish antagonises our sensibilities. Perhaps in an attempt to reconcile our differences to them *bochío* come with prescribed emotive qualities. These emotions are charged through the physical representation of the intermediary fetish. Accounts of them embodying anger, force and strength is evident from them being described as "objects of fury".¹⁸ While violence, stubbornness, hardness act as ancillary values, these attributes together highlight the previously mentioned tensions in social and ritual arenas.

The relationship to people is however ambiguous with the *bochío* being used for reconciliation as well as for cursing. Accomplishing an in-between state is achieved by them not being allied to one moral code or another, instead they operate as respondents. As accepting receptacles for countering attacks by witches or sorcerers they watch over and protect, while under the cover of darkness they can assert a malevolent presence over those who they wish to harm. Duplicitous correspondences give latitude to how people receive and perceive these figures. Overarching themes are nevertheless

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p 31.

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retained in how the figures express their pertinence, many for instance have swollen stomachs, are scarified and show evidence of bondage. These significant elaborations are additional appendages which are added to the basic form to accentuate the affliction. Blier reports a *bochío* carver as saying that the fetish has to take on a fearful appearance, and while the contents of attached packages to the fetish along with signs of having offered libations suggest an embodied power, the receptiveness by the onlooker to the unknown, as represented through the afflicted form of the *bochío*, depends upon being overawed by the image and thereby being convinced that this object is genuinely power.¹⁹ As a consequence the fetish must be seen as galvanising the fears and aspirations of the onlooker.

Embodying a historicity the *bochío* also details its absence to the physical by appearing in afflicted form. Heavily weighed down by nails, fetish packets, chains etc and being deformed emphasises the presence to absence ratio in contorted form, as if a shaft of light was being refracted through the shards of a broken mirror. In this way the affliction conveys a multiplicity of significances. By observing the fetish within its contextual substrate, one is overcome with an overwhelming awe on how this came to be made. For within the image there remains an indented hidden knowledge which informs the detail and the extent of the deformation. Playing on the need to know what it was that inspired the deformity the onlooker responds to the spirit representation by assessing the possible reasons for the affliction.

Drawing from personal experience and the altogether

19 Blier 1995:58.

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not so apparent intersubjective spectrum of prevailing associative influences, underscores the narratives' legitimacy. Under these circumstances the words used to specify the experience contribute towards stabilising our initial deliberative confusion. In the strangeness of the Other we come to compare our own sense of image. There is also a far greater threat to creating a sense of Self, when we ask; what if this image is a fake? Deception and mystification in Benin are closely related since both can infer that a person has been tricked. It is important therefore to not lose the apperceptive anchorage by which one can discern the genuine nature of the object. Maybe it is not even in the eventual discerning of the threat which is truly important, but the capacity of the *bochio* to disorientate any pending equilibrium up to and even after the exact moment when its falsehood is declared. The afflicted form whether discounted or entertained never releases its subject before encountering the occult world. As a consequence affliction firmly situates the observer in relation to the unknown. The details that then emerge, not only inform the world around the affliction, but gives space for negotiating the formation of any subsequent knowledge being taken away from the ritual arena.

Similar accounts of deformed spirits can be found amongst the details of witchcraft and cunning folk stemming from the early modern period of history. Across the late 15th century to the mid-17th century the on-going adversarial saga between God and the Devil and their battle for ultimate supremacy raged across Europe. During these times there existed a mirror image of the holy world, in that as much as people feared the threat of the Devil they couldn't disassociate themselves from his infernal presence. Correspondences

were thus made between sainthood and witchcraft, miracles and maleficium, holy vision and demonic sabbat, and ecstasy and possession. In this instance a pact with the Devil was considered to be the reversal or inverse to having undergone a Christian baptism. Resembling a similar inversion or possible absence of morality, the Devil was depicted as being deformed or as having physically expressive protuberances. This ability to appear as a transformed and often deformed apparition extended to taking the form of another animal. R. Lowe Thompson in *The History of the Devil* says the Devil sometimes appeared in comic form as a duck, as a goose, or sometimes as a youth.²⁰

The one common feature with all of these manifestations was the sense of an enveloping darkness, which would characteristically consume any surrounding light. This notion of a consuming blackness translated into being able to disguise activities and identities after nightfall. In this way people under the cover of darkness could escape from having to endure overriding moral rigour and participate in debauched festivals. As a “profligate parodist” the Devil encouraged dissimulation, while mimicking attributes more commonly associated with God he would through the actions of people attempt to dehumanise, or at least debase humanity.²¹

Such acts of reversal meant the role of the Devil and the witch’s cohort was elevated to a position where moral turpitude defined the fate of humanity. Through accounts of depravity and physical reversal, the Devil became the antith-

²⁰ Lowe Thompson, R. 1929. *The History of the Devil: the Horned God of the West*. London: Kegan Paul.

²¹ Clark, S. 1997. *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 81-84.

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esis to a world where people adhered to a moral manifesto, as inculcated by the clergy and courts.

The physical expression of affliction, being evidence of a dalliance with something other than God, was a major indicator that a person might be a witch. Not only did this further the impression of the Devil as being capable of mimicking life in all its varied contortions, but it also gave credence to the notion that affliction was something imbued with spiritual significance. Johann Weyer in *De Præstigiis Demonum* identifies the source of physical anomalies conjoined with spirit indicators to Aristophanes, who, when describing Empousa is depicted as having one brass foot.²² Descriptions such as this illustrate an underlying theme when it comes to representing Otherness. Geoffrey Burton Russell in *Lucifer* believes the Devil to be the most able of any apparition to evoke a sense of strangeness, embodying as he does the idea of another type of existence where differences are accentuated over similarities to humans.²³ From demonic consorts to the image of the black man, it is the differences found amongst these remote manifestations when compared to our own semblance of Self, that ultimately makes the idea about absence so significant. Images of the Devil as the black man with spiked tail and cloven hoof, as identified by Jonathan Barry in his description of *Tedrake's Illustrated Guide to Bideford* (1894-1895), shows the lengths to which these differ-

²² Kohl, B. & H. Erik Midelfort eds. 1998. *On Witchcraft: An Abridged Translation of Johann Weyer's De præstigiis daemonum*. Trans. J. Shea. Asheville: Pegasus Press, University of North Carolina.

²³ Russell, J. 1984. *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

ences need to develop before becoming significant.²⁴ The black man was also represented as being as tall as the length of an arm, while his eyes were large and he leaped about on one foot, also he wore blackish clothes and had a mouth like a toad. He also appeared to the accused witches as a gentleman, thus disguising his “true” form, although at times he exhibited a capacity for shifting between different “Other” affirming figurations. In this way he might appear as the black man but with Oxen feet, or at other times he turned into a flame, or a dog which grew larger the longer you looked at it.²⁵ Although it would be easy to reduce the significance of these descriptions to an imaginative flight of fancy, they are not so easy to assign designation without considering the relationship to the analogous afflicted mirror.

Assigning the Devil, as already predicated by his title as the “Opposer”, the responsibility for bringing down the morality of man and thus turning him away from God’s plan, has denied us the possibility of exploring the details of the description held within the narrative. As encountered when discussing the manifestation with accompanying attributes of Haitian lwa, the actual deformity from what we may regard as the norm, doesn’t necessarily need to resemble an implicit evil essence. Historians have tended towards viewing the description of the Devil as a reflection of the observer’s position in society at the time, whether it was in relation to the clergy, political power or the indirect influential presence of the Church.

Stuart Clark in *Thinking with Demons* while exploring the

²⁴ Barry, J. 2012. *Witchcraft and Demonology in South-West England, 1640-1789*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 91-98.

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dualistic aspects held within inherent oppositions identifies masquerades as awarding the Devil with the position of trickster. Lampooning the evidential preposterous posturing by the authorities of the day, the Devil presented an opportunity to overturn moral norms, albeit temporarily. And yet the depiction of Otherness is somewhat reduced by this association. Undeniably an aspect of momentary levelling, the aspectual givenness to affliction is nevertheless hard to ignore especially when it comes to identifying the similarities between Haiti and the early modern period of witchcraft. As the Devil or a particular lwa, the salient theme of something being uncanny retains a quality which directs our attention to the relationship between physical and metaphysical domains.

Unnatural occurrences confer a vestigial relevance to affliction being as it is a symbolic marker for understanding how relations with spirits are formed. The mutability in transformative qualities suggests the extent of their power, and determines their capacity to influence humans. Richard Bovet in *Pandæmonium* describes the host of demons as retaining an essence which is ultimately soft,

*subtil, and uncompounded, not manacled with textures of flesh, nor encumbered with solid bones and joints; they can dilate or condense themselves into what forms they please, and appear in semblances bright and obscure.*²⁶

Outside the constraint of human physicality, the notion of

²⁶ Bovet, R. 1684/1975. *Pandæmonium*. Wakefield: EP Publishing ltd, p. 14.

something Other to ourselves, although still relational, given the intersubjective constitution of our being, permits us to enter into dialogue with the hidden realm. Being obscured offers contingencies on how the Other is apprehended. Challenging the given norms, the Devil stands as a principal religious iconic artefact, with his accompanying remit to destroy human morality. He therefore presents an opportunity, to explore ideas about the relational qualities which make affliction such an impressive forum for understanding ourselves and the metaphysical.

This is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in Nicolas Remy's *Demonolatry* from 1595. Although many at the time questioned the validity of witchcraft, it is interesting to note that in *Demonolatry* the diabolic constitution, with all of its explicit descriptions, compiled further evidence in support of the spirit's Otherness.²⁷ It could be regarded as somewhat exaggerated, but our interest in affliction largely bypasses other matters which might obscure this author's contention, that through their difference spiritual certitude is and was assured.

In concert with the Bovet, Remy acknowledges the incorporeal essence of a demon. Assuming mass in air or fire, spirits are capable of taking on material physical forms which have no limit in there range. They can therefore assume the shape of a cat, or a dog or even a fly, a further indication of their ability to condense and expand. It is also not unusual for them to take on the form of a man or woman, but they also have dextral skills beyond that of humans, for instance

²⁷ Remy, N. 1595/2008. *Demonolatry: An Account of the Historical Practice of Witchcraft*. Mineola: Dover Publications Inc.

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they are capable of leaping like a panther, roaring like a lion, barking like a dog. According to Remy they are even able to transform themselves into inanimate objects such as a vessel. These apparitions can only become significant once a person has employed them, fed them, or in other ways has turned to them and acknowledged their worth.

C. L'Estrange Ewen in *Witch Hunting and Witch Trials* provides court indictments for witches accused of entertaining such entities. It is perhaps worth mentioning a few since it further enhances our evidence on the range of manifestations that demons or the Devil could take. For instance in 1662 Anne Silvester of Orsett in Essex was held at Chelmsford gaol for "entertaining, employing, and feeding two evil spirits in the likeness of two whelps" (puppies).²⁸ Bridget Weaver of Harwich also of Essex did feed an evil spirit in the form of a bird. One depiction of a witch with her familiars in the same book by Ewen, entitled "The Strange Woman and Her Spirits" (1621) shows the woman with her back to the picture with creatures surrounding her. Some of these are known to us as common wild fowl while others appear to be demons. Orientating around the strange woman are placed wild fowl, which by having a connection to the homestead and domesticity seem to be looking away from the witch. In contrast the creatures and demons associated with the wild are focused on the witch. The conclusion that can be drawn from this difference in focus and position is that the artist wished to show the difference between the wild and the homestead. It is certainly possible the reason for these depic-

²⁸ Ewen, C.L'Estrange. 1971. *Witch Hunting and Witch Trials: The Indictments for Witchcraft from the Records of 1373 Assizes for the Home Court AD 1559-1736*. p. 253.



THE STRANGE WOMAN AND HER SPIRITS (1621)

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tions derives from them being attributed with the wildness of vacant spaces. In this case the wild fowl look out and into the space beyond while the creatures not of this world look in from the wild. Unruly in their very nature, these creatures from the outside continuously threatened to unleash an untamed unlawfulness upon everyday living. There being in this instance a threat from something unknown, allowed people to measure their own sense of well-being, while also looking for assurances in terms which could be used to convey a moral sense of Self.

Remy's attitude towards this apparent separation along with the incompatibility between the two worlds was to show that any interaction that did occur between demons and people would result in abominations.

*For nature provides physical beauty as a stimulant to propagation, of which Demons have no need, since they were created in the beginning of a certain fixed number. It must follow, then that such intercourse is powerless to generate so wonderful a creation as man. For in the first place, there must be complementary correlation between the species; and this cannot exist between a Demon and a man: so utterly opposite by nature are the mortal and the immortal, the corporeal and the incorporeal, the sentient and the insentient, or any two creatures which are even more opposite and contrary to each other.*²⁹

Constituting such contrasting oppositions allowed for the defining of people and demons by their outer and inner ap-

²⁹ Remy 2008:11.

pearance. According to Russell the monstrous and deformed depiction of the Devil himself was in accord with “his inner defect”. Commonly described as being lame having suffered an injury during his fall from heaven, his incomplete physical presence was measured by man’s physical form. Having knees that faced backwards, possibly an extra face on his stomach, as well as other body parts, blind, horns and tail and yet without nostrils, having a sulphurous odour, and being hooved and misshapen. The spirit associated with such a large quantity of inversions therefore represented an alarming array of absences and deformities. These physical distortions only became apparent when the accompanying narrative contextualised his appearance against the order of things. Yet these deformities offer a very different interpretation when placed under the lens of affliction. Rather than being governed by a moralistic schema, the overt difference to our own sense of Self opens up a line of confronting oppositions. Under these circumstances the oppositions being depicted concern the manner in which we are able to address our notion of Otherness. Being germane to the afflicted mirror, the Devil et al. encompasses powers that are not arbitrary in nature, although Christian commentators at the time of the early modern period preferred to highlight the temporary presence of any power capable of overturning the natural order. This was of course to be contrasted with God’s permanent, although often detached presence.

By associating inconstancy with deformation, the Devil was portrayed as having the capacity for being all things to all men. As such he could appear as an angel of light or the most infernal apparition. For people at the time, this ability to shift and shape his appearance according to the de-

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mands expected of him, illustrated a flexibility and moreover a proclivity for capturing the current social mood. As a consequence, it was the Devil and his cohort who became the interface, the very mirror, from which reflections of the everyday, with all its insecurities, peered back at the world and gave commentary about living under the conditions of the time. And it is through his affliction, for example being lame, that he exerts powers as it reflects back upon the people their own imaginings about the diabolic and the role of deformation when identifying evil.

Dramatic differences to the norm, produce alternative subjectivities which act as a cantilever, and by so doing, they part the veil separating the two worlds. By embodying the grotesque, the Devil is given a voice. As the fallen angel he provided an alternative perspective on how people comprehended themselves and the relationship they had with the world.

Places associated with death, darkness and cold correspond under this pretext as preparatory areas for engaging with this archetypal Otherness. Rather than simply being comprehended as an Opposer, the representation of the Devil, through his extraordinary appearance as the afflicted, encourages an open dialogue with our perception of strangeness. Those being things which escape quantifiable empiric summations about the world we inhabit. Following the same principle as found amongst Haitian lwa, the Devil invites the viewer to challenge preconceptions about what it means to be self-aware. Avoiding an inherent inclination to over determine evidence, presents affliction as the perfect foil by which to question our relationship to the spiritual subject.

Placing notions of deformity with its accompanying ab-

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sences as something which only exists within the confines of a spirit realm is not so easy to press home. Remy has already stated the incompatibility of humans with demons and yet reports of deformed offspring are present in *Demonolatry*. These accounts provide clear evidence of spirit intervention with the offspring visibly showing signs of being partially conceived by an Otherness. Having a preternatural deformity from birth, ranging from having three hands, three feet, two sets of teeth, four eyes, two heads, two bodies, or lacking a certain body part, amputates the semblance of completion from the physical form, resulting in the veil between the two worlds being breeched.

Absence appearing as a visible deformity allowed a dialogue to develop on what were the parameters for discerning morality. Convulsing with pre-given suppositions about the order of nature and its darker side meant the realm where spirits lived was presented as something other than the everyday. In accord with this approach to apprehending the extraordinary, the role of affliction not only marked someone as embodying residual qualities perceived to have emanated from the other side, but it also in and of itself qualified the grotesque attributes of the strange unruly world of unlawful spirits. In short these signals needed to be isolated and quantified according to the schemas of the day. Remy reports that in 1540 Christianus Massaesus observed a “hermaphrodite child with one horn projecting from its forehead, with arms like wings, an eye in its knee, the feet of a hawk, and marked upon the breast with the sign of a V and equidistance cross”. Another spoke of seeing a “hooked beak, a long smooth neck, quivering eyes, a pointed tail, a strident voice, and very swift feet upon which it ran rapidly to and fro as if seeking

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for some hiding place in its stable.”³⁰

As this book contends, affliction is the evidence one needs to prove the existence of an Otherness. Fantastic in its appearance, it is the narrative which shortly follows the event which embellishes the moment of contact. Giving the narrative an overarching structure by using a concordant-discordant schema, the story becomes worth telling because it has been turned into a rhetorical device. In isolation the event of affliction as a deformity or as absence does not make the same impression as when the descriptive quality elaborates on further predetermined contingencies. The Devil in his deformed state is limited by his image alone and the same can be said for Metres Ezili, for the words in the narrative en-flesh and embellish the spirit into being a presence. Whether lame or boneless, it is the physical absence from the perfect form which challenges us by using the salient vision of difference.

Uncanny or strange apparitions are only ever really affirmed when an account about experiencing contact is told. Under these conditions the poetic formation of the image attaches itself to certain aspects of Self, and by so doing it becomes the mirror through which we observe our own sense of Self while also observing the possibilities of an Otherness. Their oddness to ‘us’, discloses an otherwise ignored separation or rather it overturns the seamless stitching which makes for an unquestioned empiric object by uncovering the natural divide. The topic alongside its embedded subjectivities carries with it an implicit need for elaboration. By reconstituting the meaning of these subjectivities into

³⁰ Remy 2008:21.

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a dimensional object which can be perceived, with all of its imperfections, creates an ever more acute intersubjective dimension. Affliction is thus our anvil. Fashioning from what has often been overlooked, the very means by which we can establish an acknowledged co-existence, has given us the ability to determine how we facilitate further interaction.

If the worlds seen and unseen are to be measured by our ability to tend to their and our own needs, then affliction gives clear insight into the extent of difference, placed here as an element by which to counterpoint Self with Otherness. The images presented for your consideration have so far highlighted the extraordinary alterations that the spirits have undergone to gain acknowledgement. Vying for their countenance in an over saturated world of moral images, the spirits impressed upon the population their existence through their deformity. Affliction under these circumstances became the vehicle for their stories to emerge. Forms of terrifying absence and presence tore at the frontier of human endeavour, and so it was with encouraging temerity they sought to instil an alternative universe. For some this would be reduced to basic superstition, with the attached caveat that any societal advancement would be held back by people's ignorance. But for the clamour, the presence of an Otherness never left the population. Terms for engagement changed over the years, but the destructive impulse of these spirits remained intact. Whether imps, sprites, succubi, incubi, lwa, witches or the Devil, their critical message never diminished. The ability to converse with them has almost always been based on their differences to us. Mirroring the injuries people endure while performing daily activities, we have placed upon the spirits our own terms for engagement

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and this has made their absence and presence more convincing. Existence being contingent on their physical distortions has also allowed us to impart our idea of affliction upon them. Witnessing reciprocity on this scale proves deformity is capable of opening up channels for occult orientated dialogue with the invisible.

Initial fears concerning the presentation of the Other as something fearful, horrendous or horrifying with each depending on the perspectival positioning of the Self, hereby turns the object of attention into a manifold manifestation. Absences and deformities resonate with and to the condition of the interlocutor. Being subject to the varied movements between bodies in various states of composition delineates causation as the principal catalyst. Upset or loss followed by eventual disassociation can result in the retraction from the contact epicentre. When faced with something which for the individual produces a fear inducing response, it is normal to assume retreat will be favoured over a stubborn resolve to face that which threatens your Being. Certainly as exhibited by the examples given so far, the overwhelming sense of loss, whether it is the Devil falling from heaven or Legba reaching the end of his life as the gatekeeper, the narrative reaches out and speaks to the reader. Having come to the end of his life Legba appears to be ravaged by time. There is in this instance a certain disassociation from the world as he begins to fade from sight. And yet the waning of his image tells us something about the spirit presence, since through affliction the threat of departure never leaves and yet never actually takes place. Hanging over the precipice, staring into the void, the end never arrives, rather a suspension on the very edge of Being supplants anticipation and replaces the

unknowing with a certain reassuring permanence. The experience of disassociation takes on the purpose of emphasising absences over similarity, and yet the inherent quality in its potential continues to find, through the explicit difference, a vital connection.

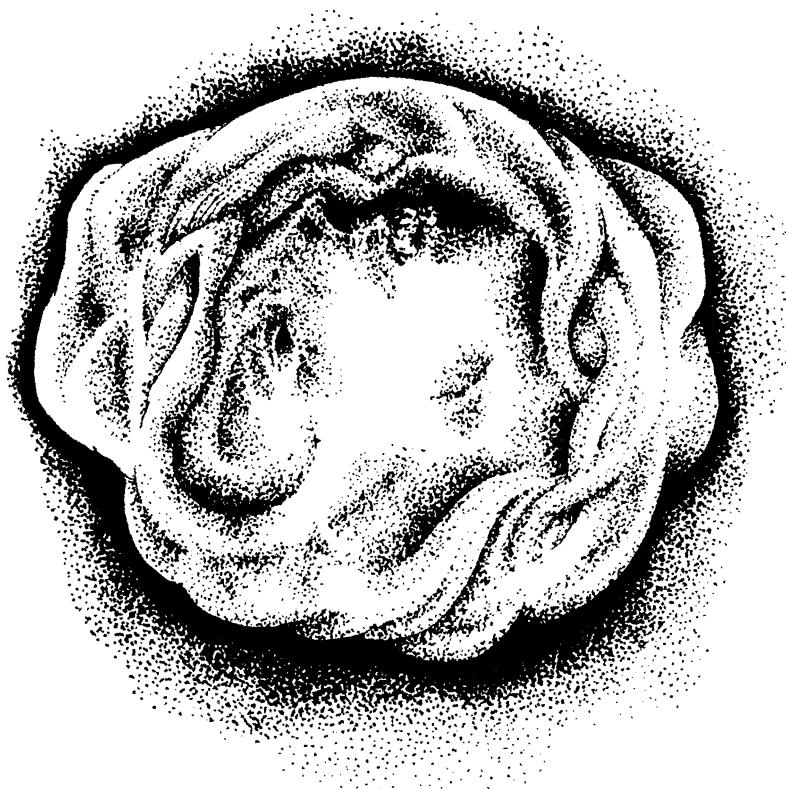
Isolating what it is that draws us towards these images will determine the main thrust of this current proposition. Engaging with the discursive element allows us to probe the details held within the narrative. Giving further reason to the way in which the image has been composed expounds alternative interpretations. Facilitating an expanding field of enquiry on our relationship to the Other. How we then situate ourselves in everyday life, having acquiesced this knowledge from source material, elicits from the words contained therein the accompanying silences. Punctuated by word and space the descriptive approach draws on suppositions and propositions which are not necessarily made explicitly. Calibrated from the dual aspectual givenness of speech and silence, the narrative is itself afflicted; because by becoming evidential, it is unable to guide the reader away from its own perspective. And yet the opportunity to wonder and extrapolate is implicitly built into the words used.

The relationship between words and the deafening silences explains the making of the image, and yet it all depends on a level of trust or commitment in belief for it to validate the perspective. For the words may very well give away formation, but it is the silences, or if you will the absences within the narrative operating as punctuated avoidances, which tell us as much about the subject. Certain lines of enquiry along with associative historicity become obscured as the author avoids certain types of knowledge. Whether as an im-

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plicit exercise or as an explicit device, affliction gradually is reduced to a descriptive artifice, which when needed refers back to encapsulating the moral dimension of the depiction.

Affliction appears within the narrative as a discordant element for maintaining order. As an aspect of the narrative it presents an opportunity to view the deformation of the physical body as an ordeal which must be endured. Yet by the narrative having been produced only by being exposed to editing and refinement, the voice of the people becomes inevitably obscured. Being part of this reification introduces its own set of conflicting interests, as the affliction is emphasised to the possible detriment of other pertinent aspects. Can we then be accused of deforming the source material, or replacing the meaning with something which gives greater clarity to the individual and the *path* being trodden? The images of lwa and spirit alike portray affliction as an affirmative marker for visions about deformity. The presence of silence with subsequent loss of knowledge has already rendered the narrative as a receptive catacomb for the forgotten. Acknowledging the partial nature of the narrative, if only to convey aspects of truth, means we need to move on to discuss affliction as experienced in the physical world by those who have been contacted by the spirits.





‡² Affliction in its Magico-Social Context



LITTLE HAS BEEN written about the importance of affliction as a marker for signifying magical aptitude. Ioan Lewis in *Ecstatic Religion* models the phenomenon of affliction followed by bouts of possession on the social context in which the event takes place.³¹ He argues these events operate as conduits by which strategic expressions alter, albeit temporarily, the marginal social status of the candidates. By imbibing the spiritual quality of a specifically designated form of Otherness, the selected candidates negotiate, from an altogether more empowered position, with those persons who are regarded as representing the elite. In the case of the Bori cult of the Hausa in Nigeria, those who are perceived to be in an already dominant position are obliged to respond positively to the demands made by the afflicted. As a consequence affliction, as understood by Lewis, presents an opportunity to correct the burden of inequality through the accrualment of resources that might otherwise remain difficult to obtain.

³¹ Lewis, I. 1989. *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession*. London: Routledge.

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Affliction in these terms is viewed as a form of possession, and as such, requires the attention of others to tame the wrath of the spirits. By being able to settle the dispute the dominant group are able to reassert their position of authority. Galvanising the position of the elite through supplication suggests an emerging concordance-discordance narrative, where those in a permanent state of high status, exact their ability to stabilise the wildness of chaos, and by so doing, maintain their hold over the weak. Taming the spirit reinforces the centralised moral and ethical stance by making the *word* count as an indicator for authorising their position as legitimate powerbrokers. Central moralistic religions attempt to control ecstatic states, of which affliction is one, by monopolising their expression and by limiting their impact. Taming a spirit indicates to the local society the power of the central moralistic religion over all peripheral forms of spiritual belief. To sustain their control, they must defuse any potential threat from intrusive spirits.

Such uniformity of course would betray some of the inherent complexity to the event aspect of affliction. Sometimes the spirit refuses to be tamed. Dissatisfied with the way it was treated the spirit returns to demand more. Further afflictions result in requesting the local cult to intervene. To domesticate the disruptive as well as intrusive spirit, the afflicted must become a member of the cult. Once secluded in the group the spirit loses its malign intent by regularly being invited to appear during celebratory ceremonies.

In the close confines of the Hausa community the spirits are portrayed as the culprits who cause affliction. With no morality to guide their conduct, they are regarded as being capricious beyond the imagined victim's ethical or moral

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demeanour. Often these attacks take place without warning although this belies the implicit options a person may otherwise have to remedy his or her plight. Socio-economic circumstance may therefore contribute towards developing an environment conducive to spirit contact. As a consequence, the manner in which location specifies how we inhabit space may yet prove a valuable ingredient, and although Lewis relies too heavily on the *opus operandi* of a peripheral and centre dichotomy, the deconstruction of key points during the event remain valid as a broad introduction to this chapter.

Being socially constrained by low status is countered by affliction since this facilitates access to a type of freedom found more commonly amongst the elite. The response to this encroachment on their perceived monopoly is to stop or at least take control of this threatening endeavour to challenge the status-quo. But the victim of affliction is not so forthright, because the threat is not of the individual's making, and yet there is an implicit acceptance the situation will have to be dealt with, culminating in the eventual spirit's propitiation.

Another important aspect to affliction is the response to the victim's plight. Affliction brings to the attention of the community the presence of the metaphysical domain and its intrusion into their physical world. The initial symptoms signify an intervention could be taking place, while the local healer called upon to deal with the potential threat assesses the victim. When the local healer diagnoses the problem and proceeds to undertake the responsibility to cure or at least tame the spirit, the interest of those in close proximity to the victim increases. Engaging in ever greater detail over the condition and treatment creates a platform from which peo-

ple can reflect their position towards the spirits. The action of the healer reaffirms not only his ability to heal but also his status. Treatment may extract the spirit from the victim, but for Lewis it more importantly confirms that a great power is in close proximity to the victim.

The possibility that any cure might be temporary means the ever-present threat from spirit intervention is never far away. Rather than dealing emphatically with the causes of the event, those who are prone to such attacks rely on the existence of a spirit domain, located beyond the safe parameters of the society, to continuously reassess and assert their interests upon another group. Lewis does however distinguish between affliction as a strategy, employed by those who are socially marginalised, and the dominant group who use similar strategies to maintain authority, although the spirits used are of a different calibre. A mystical idiom replaces the last resort strategy associated with the affliction event. Classifying this type of ecstatic state as being particular to more formal mainline religions, rather than that found amongst peripheral possession groups, suggests an on-going unrelenting struggle to assert control over society. Religious leaders attempt to legitimise their position by using highly moralistic spirits who are seen by society as conspiring with the leaders so as to maintain control. The spirits within this exclusive precinct endorse the decisions made by those dominant religious leaders by acting as abstracted censors. The spirits primary responsibility is to uphold and sustain public order according to dominant religious edicts.

Identifying the tensions in a society by using affliction as an example of spirit incursion, isolates one way for understanding abstracted social and economic frictions, but it

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also obfuscates the emplacement of spirits as primary contributors to the way people live their lives. Even when Mircea Eliade in *Shamanism* bypasses the socio-functional aspect of affliction by emphasising the profane and sacred dichotomy, he replaces one effacing construct for another.³² Nevertheless, he does highlight the graduated alteration in the identity of the individual through the affliction experience. He thereby uncovers the process of the event after due ordeal, with the ritual specialist finally emerging as a skilled practitioner, equipped to deal with demands made by the spirits. From this perspective the suffering of the afflicted takes on the appearance of an initiation. Part of this aspectual assumption derives from the torture element that is present in any initiation ceremony. Eliade notes:

Viewed from this angle, any “sickness-vocation” fills the role of an initiation; for the suffering that it brings corresponds to initiatory tortures, the psychic isolation of the “elected” is the counterpart to the isolation and ritual solitude of initiation ceremonies, and the immanence of death felt by the sick man (pain, unconsciousness, etc.) recalls the symbolic death represented in almost all initiation ceremonies.³³

The affliction event does however avoid many of the details that are required to fully comprehend the complexity of the action taking place. According to Lewis and Eliade the ordeal and its possible association with the torturing of the person

³² Eliade, M. 1988. *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. London: Viking Penguin.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

does not extend far enough to see the impact on the body, or how the relationship between the person and the spirit develops overtime. Causation is dealt with in a mechanistic fashion. Whether it is the use of over abstracted distinctions such as sacred and profane, or the dividing of social domains into peripheral and central, the world becomes an authorial portrayal unlike anything the people involved in the action would recognise. As a consequence the separation between the visible and invisible worlds becomes a moot point. While the social, economic and ritual constraints take precedence over the living world, the fragility of a descriptive congress remains largely hidden from view.

It is amongst the personal interactions and relations that develop across the physical and metaphysical domains which makes affliction an important aspect to the practitioner and academic alike. Simply focussing on the social order of things, in the production, reproduction and presentation as outward indicators of group cohesion denies the idiosyncrasy of various phenomena. As Michael Jackson points out in *Lifeworlds* nor can it explain "the antinomian impulse to create disorder, flout routine, transgress boundaries, and tap into the forces of the wild as if these were actually necessary, not inimical to, the viability of an individual life or a moral community."³⁴

The essence of Being does not rest with a transcendental visceral motif about what it means to live, experience and die, rather it regulates the negation of these values, those things that are considered viable in maintaining an existence

³⁴ Jackson, M. 2013. *Lifeworlds: Essay in Existential Anthropology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 13.

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which, when needed, can be reduced to a relational physicality anchored in the living world. The present experience of spirit intervention is in itself non-totalisable, it extends beyond the experience now and becomes part of an on-going anarchy, where the responsibility towards the Other continues to resurface as a refusal to accept the bludgeoning impact of temporal circumstance. There is an immemorial quality to the struggle that awaits the candidate. Contact ordains the introduction of conditional and yet ultimately incalculant terms, which directly challenge the self-preservation of identity. The candidate being dictated to by spirits is forced to invest in their expectations despite showing resistance. At once the relationship is qualified by its negativity as the thematic daily routine becomes a non-thematic provocation by manifesting itself as a trauma. Thrown into this maelstrom the affliction must be dealt with prior to being offered a new vocation. The consciousness of a present can only be given once the candidate has answered the call from the invisible. Spirits leave a mark, an imprint of their worldly presence upon the body, subsequently making it a portal through which they can provide guidance and heal those they wish to acknowledge as being worthy of their attention.

An invisible potential, of minds, thoughts, dreams and aspirations not of the physical world reach us from beyond the veil. And yet, even within this descriptive detail there is a heavy reliance on what spirits are, or are not doing. The detail is of course imaginary, and at best conjectural, yet the presence of lives lived beyond, continues to retain an essential significance when determining how lives are lived here.

Looking at the surrounding world we cannot deny there is a visual harmony to what we see. It is as if there existed a

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pre-established givenness to stability in visual form. Accepting that not all things have a visual calm does not undermine this essential sense of stability. Being part of our human nature we are forever transposing our desire for order onto things. Responses to this interrogation are in fact prompted by what we want images to display. And so it is with the perception of our body when placed in relation to another. Tactile correspondences, exploratory movements, the feel of textures serve to anchor the individual to tangible expressions of the physical. Maurice Merleau-Ponty in *The Visible and the Invisible* situates the body at the centre of all things:

*the body unites us directly with the things that through its own ontogenesis, by welding to one another the two outlines of which it is made, its two laps: the sensible mass it is and the mass of the sensible wherein it is born by segregation and upon which, as seer, it remains open. It is the body and it alone because it is a two-dimensional being, that can bring us into the things themselves, which are themselves not flat beings but beings in depth, inaccessible to a subject that would survey them from above, open to him alone that, if it be possible, would coexist with them in the same world.*³⁵

Such an opening of the body as a virtual correspondent and receiver indicates the possibility at least of spirit intervention beyond any requisite visual cue. There is an invited exposure towards the Other without their being an assumption

³⁵ Merleau-Ponty, M. 1968. *The Visible and Invisible*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, p. 136.

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of any contact or response. Yet contact when it does happen inevitably involves physical disruption as the Other collides with a sense of Self. Captured in the moment of crisis the two wrestle to retain a dominant position within the body, as a consequence it signals an invitation to all watching to question authenticity. Where once it was regarded as inaccessible, the metaphysical invites our attention, although it is not without the threat of having to undergo appropriately harsh ordeals.

Transcending the temporality of a perceived Being by the enveloping disorder which levels the candidate, illustrates to those who have come to observe, the veracity of suffering and the treacherous path he or she will have to be undertake. Disfiguring the physical form manifests an ancient trajectory, an anarchical antiquity fragmented and bereft of continuity, where moments from the past are relived and re-inscribed into the consciousness of the audience. Affirmation of the spirits vital continuance is thus assured as is the expectation to perform services to acknowledge their contribution to the life being led.

Disorder of the body marked initially by the disassembling of ties between the candidate and others, the deformation of the physical form, as well as the overall disruption affliction causes, takes on the appearance of an initiatory ordeal because it separates the candidate from normality. Under these circumstances there is no division to be found between secular and sacred life, between holy and the profane, between the spiritual and the material. Every action, every thought, each moment present and past pulsates with the possibility for experiencing change. For everyone concerned there is a dwelling sense of something that cannot

be fully quantified or qualified through action alone. Left with a range of sensations which are rudimentary aspects of perception, frustrates the acquisition of efficient correspondences to explain Otherness. Advocating the exact difference between physical and metaphysical apparitions proves impossible, since the dimensional depth of spirit complexity cannot be fathomed without observing a referential adherence to the world. The physical expression of affliction accordingly presupposes intentional moral acts.

No incident of affliction, which places the aspirant in danger of being consumed, can avoid discussing the role of morality. Paul Brodwin in *Medicine and Morality in Haiti* challenges the idea that there is a stable notion about how to assess illness.³⁶ By developing a working perspective which focusses on disruption rather than continuity, Brodwin examines the continuity of medical traditions. In particular, he focusses on the interruptions and breaks with consensus and thereby reveals the contestation between different forms of medical knowledge. He shows that it is not a contest about having access to medicine which is important, but how a specific religious affiliation influences opinion and determines the decision on the most effective course of treatment. As a consequence, the flexibility of people to draw from Catholicism or Protestantism in its various expressions, and Vodou, by way of gaining some informed grounding, is illustrated by examining the negotiating process. Uncovering a world populated by moral and immoral spirits Brodwin illustrates the Haitian world to be one which is interwoven with pres-

36 Brodwin, P. 1996. *Medicine and Morality in Haiti: The Context for Healing Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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sures and demands made by the spiritual. Cross cutting any strict religious delineation, Haitians are portrayed as being pragmatic opportunists when it comes to allying themselves to a particular belief system,

Taken together, they do not constitute a rigid, unchanging structure of beliefs and practices, since different religions cross-reference each other and even share key symbols and forms of worship...people repeatedly choose which rituals to attend, which saints and/or spirits to venerate, and which claims to power and moral authority they will accept.³⁷

How people cope by managing their daily affairs so as to bring about a momentary semblance of stability before seeing it once again slip away is something that perhaps all of us can empathise with or at least imagine. In short, human existence is never a stable state, Jackson notes that “human beings tend, as a matter of course, to be more or less dissatisfied with their lot,” recognising the desire for attainment he observes “it is rare to meet a person in any society who does not want more of something and less of something else and who imagines that things could be a whole lot better, even while admitting that things could be a whole lot worse” ³⁸ Uncertainty is therefore ever-present, yet we ignore the possibility of ultimate failure by undertaking practices that may result in achieving our goal. This is further sustained by our imagination which entertains multiple scenarios along with

³⁷ Brodwin 1996:17.

³⁸ Jackson, M. 2007. *Excursions*. Durham: Duke University Press, p. 43.

various possible outcomes. While this alone does not ensure success, we in part prepare ourselves for disappointment as well as success.

Haitians believe that living and suffering are inseparable, and that Vodou is the instrument which allows them to deal with the suffering that is life. Accordingly, Vodou staves off disaster, minimises pain, eases the impact of loss while strengthening survival instincts.³⁹ The drama of Vodou should not therefore be considered as taking place in the confines of a ritual or related circumstance but should be extended to the interstitial places that lie beyond religious modes of practice. The crisis experienced in the lives of its participants situates the motivation for spiritual solace outside any explicit religious confine. This provides a possible rationale for why people seek metaphysical intervention.

The Fa divination system, an integral part of the Vodun cosmology in Benin, is described by Douglas Falen in *Power and Paradox* as a system which provides assurances on the fate of the enquirer, while also certifying the ability of the diviner.⁴⁰ Each in their own right simultaneously qualifies the presence of the Other, while certifying the significance of a wider set of social networks and obligations. This however does not stop or restrict the activities of the enquirer, indeed if Falen is correct that for the Fon a belief in God is enough for them, then it is possible to imagine an open market where broad spiritual conceptualisations encourage the person to seek out advice wherever it is available. In Benin this shifting between various modes of belief may include

39 Brown 1991:10.

40 Falen, D. 2009. *Power and Paradox: Authority, Insecurity and Creativity in Fon Gender Relations*. Trenton: Africa World Press.

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visiting a *bo*: sorcerer, or an *aze*: witch, it may involve the person requesting help from ancestors or from Vodun deities, it might include attending a Catholic church or denouncing (even temporarily) Vodun, and becoming a born again Christian. These are only some of the possibilities, and yet they have a commonality that is determined not by the practitioner but by those who utilise these spiritual facilities. Each offer, though not independent from one another, an option on how to manage vulnerability and the capricious nature of life. This not only includes the obligations that are placed on a person by his/her selected religious specialist, but those that are placed upon the person by the spirit/s. Individual trajectories thereby defy the predetermined structural patterning of social life, as people use their understandings to make choices that at the time seem appropriate to their needs.

Achille Mbembe and Janet Roitman in their article *Figures of the subject in times of crisis* explicitly undertake an exploration into how people weave their existence by tackling incoherence, uncertainty, instability and discontinuity.⁴¹ Their perspective relies on one premise, that while people attempt to make sense of the world, there are others who have a vested interest in dismantling or at least reconfiguring pertinent referents used for maintaining a semblance of stability. Such an engagement with an imagined social landscape, one which is continuously shifting according to imposing vagaries, means that while continuity is sought, attaining the longevity of singularity is never completed. This however, does

⁴¹ Mbembe, A. & J. Roitman. 1995. *Figures of the subject in times of crisis*. *Public Culture* 7: 323-352.

not produce a silence or absence but instead creates narratives by which to accommodate and explain the experiences encountered in everyday life. Mbembe and Roitman believe there is a regime of subjectivities that determine the actions of people, by which they mean

a shared ensemble of imaginary configurations of “everyday life”, imaginaries which have a material basis; and systems of intelligibility to which people refer in order to construct a more or less clear idea of the causes of phenomena and their effects, to determine the domain of what is possible and feasible, as well as the logics of efficacious action. More generally a regime of subjectivity is an ensemble of ways of living, representing and experiencing contemporaneity while, at the same time, inscribing this experience in the mentality, understanding and language of a historical time.⁴²

Not wishing to underestimate the effect of external factors that have in part perpetuated a sense of vulnerability in Africa, Mbembe and Roitman move beyond the crisis itself, while side stepping a Geertzian return to ‘local knowledge’, and thereby avoid a reductionist teleological factor which reduces everything down to cause and effect. By “deconstructing” the crisis they look to how it is constituted in all its unevenness.

Thus one approaches the crisis not as a system, but as a prosaic: the routinization of a register of improvisa-

⁴² Mbembe & Roitman 1995:324.

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*tions lived as such by people and, in this sense, belonging at most to the domain of the obvious or self-evident, and at least to the banal or that which no longer evokes surprise.*⁴³

Creating this type of sensitivity to the problems that all of us experience in our everyday lives overcomes the epistemological problems that are produced when polarities of difference or opposition are constructed prior to knowledge being transcribed. Rather than imposing an order so as to make an analysis tidy and potentially complete, it is the chaos, the unevenness of things, the inconclusive and plurality of social spaces and the relations therein that contribute towards our understanding of everyday life practices.

The incompleteness of this task, the silences and observations made by those whose life one has entered into, can provide reflective material on how the social factors manifest themselves and influence life practices. While at the same time, we must acknowledge that the interpretation of social factors determines any subsequent perspective. It thereby gives us an insight on how to deal with any given situation and furthermore introduces new solutions for solving our own problems. Jackson notes:

one does not need to conjure a God of Small Things to celebrate the value of homely events, homely objects, homely words. In a world of ambitious schemes and dogmatic assertions, grandiloquence is often taken for wisdom and we are persuaded that there is no phenom-

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

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*enon that cannot be named. Under such conditions, it becomes less imperative to get the “the big picture” than to recover a sense of the countless little things that give us a measure of the real, and remind ourselves that a life emerges from unremarked moments, just as the soil or climate of a region impart to a vintage its terroir.*⁴⁴

In regards to Haitian Vodou the relationship between individual and lwa is one filled with love and devotion as much as it is fraught with any on-going tension over whether or not to serve them. Extending beyond the material reality of everyday life pressures, lwa present to the people a residing presence, the demands of which must be assuaged. Having the opportunity to seek guidance on the concerns of the day conditions the appearance of the spirits. Alfred Metraux in *Voodoo in Haiti* asked one Marbial peasant to describe the relationship a person can have with the lwa,

*The lwa loves us, protect us and guard us. They tell us what is happening to our relations who live far away, they suggest to us remedies which brings us relief when we are sick...If we are hungry the lwa come to us in a dream and say “take courage: you will earn money” and the promise comes.*⁴⁵

The service offered is conditional since a devotee is expected to repay the debt by making sacrificial offerings. Metraux notes:

44 Jackson, M. 2009. *The Palm at the End of the Mind: relatedness, religiosity, and the real*. Durham: Duke University Press, p. 202.

45 Metraux 1959:95.

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Whoever is benefited, contracts definite 'obligations', the most important being the sacrifices and offerings which have to be carried out more or less at regular intervals: but the 'obligations can be a promise (a vow made at a ceremony) or participation in certain rites, or complying with orders that the lwa transmit by dreams or through the medium of possession.⁴⁶

To resist the will of the lwa is considered an act of rebellion. Interpreting an action as a form of resistance can only be determined by the lwa. When a person suffers from the anger of the lwa it is said that he has been seized. The severity of the punishment does not necessarily need to be in proportion to the offense. Reasoning for such an unwarranted response is normally put down to the fierce passions consuming the lwa. So when the affliction starts it may seem like a light ailment, however this inevitably worsens over time, to the point where it may prove fatal, unless the person heeds to lwa demands to yield. Negligent devotees anger their spirit affiliations because they have undermined their promise to serve the life force through the offering of suitable supplications. Punishments are administered by affording the lwa the opportunity of disciplining the recalcitrant. By having entered into agreement with them the task expected of the *serviteur* is to keep the connection between the seen and unseen world alive. Often when this line of communication breaks down the person who has absconded from attending to their demands is seized and sent mad. Metraux found that the cause of madness is nearly always considered to hap-

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 96.

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pen because an individual has suffered from a supernatural punishment. He mentions how one particular ounyan

told me that only those who resisted the will of the 'mysteries' go mad. At Marbial someone pointed out to me a certain Florilious who, because he had neglected the cult of ancestral spirits, had become subject to attacks of madness during which he tore his clothes, scratched his flesh and accused himself of having cast spells on his relations.⁴⁷

Providing a cautionary note, Leslie Desmangles in his book *The Faces of Gods*, warns the reader that not all lwa attacks are due to negligence. When attempting to ascertain the causes for why people suffer from supernatural punishment he suggests the lwa can be capricious and hard to please. Reflecting the diversity in human characteristics the lwa such as the lord of the crossroads, Kafou, can simply be taken with an inexplicable malevolence. For instance, Kafou has the capacity of showing no mercy when he releases his demons at night.

The sufferings that he inflicts upon devotees do not stem from human negligence, but from the malevolent nature of kafou and his demons. If vodouisants believe Kafou can inflict disease or even death upon them despite their supplications to Legba, it is because ill-chance is sometimes an inescapable part of human life. As the Haitian proverb says "when the day of suffering

47 Metruax 1959:99.

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arrives even curd milk can break your head.⁴⁸

Another germane example, illustrating the way the lwa can have a direct impact on the welfare of the living, comes from one story about Ezili, who appeared in front of a crowd close to the sacred waterfalls of Saut d'Eau in Northern Haiti. Manifesting as the Blessed Virgin Mary on the branches of a palm tree, located near the Catholic church, created a spectacular attraction for the Vodun devotees. Upon seeing her many of the attending crowd fell immediately to their knees in reverence. People rushed to get the local Catholic priest so he could witness this sacred apparition. Upon arriving he found he was unable to see the Virgin, while everyone about him declared that they could see her. In frustration at this superstitious behaviour, and being convinced there was no sacred apparition, he petitioned the police captain to have his guards cordon off the area so as to stop people from leaving offerings. The guards were ordered to open fire if they saw the apparition, when she did eventually appear they let off a volley of shots. She proceeded to leap from tree to tree, quickly followed by rounds of gunfire which always missed their target. The priest, who by this time was incandescent with rage, resorted to asking the police if the tree could be cut down. As the tree was hewn, so those witnessing the defilement saw Ezili Danto rise into the air with an anger which was not going to be easily assuaged. Before the Catholic priest could return to his presbytery it was raised to the ground without him being able to salvage anything. Shortly thereafter, the priest suffered from an unexpected stroke and

⁴⁸ Desmangles 1992:111.

died. As for the Captain who had been so quick to come to the priest's aid, he was seized by the lwa and could be occasionally found wondering aimlessly in the local area. His fortune improved, when after pleading for forgiveness, he made offerings to the lwa. Trying to seek forgiveness and by showing remorse over his erroneous course of action caused the lwa to eventually reconsider the blasphemy he had committed against them.⁴⁹

This interwoven and textured relationship between lwa and people infers that the fate of the physical domain is contingent on the response by those dwelling in the metaphysical. As has already been showed the lwa are capable of crossing the divide and intruding upon the lives of their followers.

The manner in which this occurs can vary according to the context. The examples above suggest the lwa are capable of attacking and committing acts of physical harm upon the living. Vodou ceremonies offer a safer arena for making contact.

Referring to a ceremony witnessed while carrying out field research in 1996 will allow us to consider how the ritual operates as a reflexive anchor point. For people to negotiate a relationship with their Otherness, the attendees of the ceremony needed to observe great feats of power which were regarded as not being physically possible. The possession of vodouisants by the lwa therefore presented an opportunity for the lwa to display their skills while dispelling any doubt about their existence. From running burning candles through their hair or across their tongues without harming the person being "ridden", the possessed exhibited lwa pow-

49 Desmangles 1992: 135. See Michel S. Laguerre's *Voodoo and Politics in Haiti* for a more detailed history on the role of apparitions in Saut D'Eau.

er to the attending audience.

Bearing witness to these exceptional feats in physicality, the spirits performed a role predicated by their position. Generating a spectacle such as this, not only confirmed their presence and influence over the everyday, but also warned people about their capacity to control the human body. During these possession sagas a further narrative was developed which gave the people a contemporary reference point for negotiating everyday pressures. Words of comfort from the lwa or spectacles of extraordinary strength served to affirm belief and vanquished the cynicism expressed by the Christians attending. Even those who attended and were fundamentally opposed to Vodou were unable to deny the strength and agility of the lwa. The primary difference in their interpretation was that the lwa were either aspects of the Devil, or were members of his diabolic horde. What became apparent from having witnessed the company of lwa who appeared and gave counsel, was the perpetuation of belief in a sentient Otherness. Often in opposition to the demands made by everyday circumstance, the lwa came to address people's hardships and by doing so brought about relief through entertainment and by reaffirming their guardian status.

The relationship between people and lwa however is not always so harmonious especially when it comes to making claims about religious affiliation. Courlander in *The Drum and Hoe* describes how Maurice faced a dilemma regarding the making of a stable spiritual affiliation.⁵⁰ On one side a local ounyan attempted to persuade him that the lwa wanted

⁵⁰ Courlander, H. 1985. *The Drum and the Hoe: Life and Lore of the Haitian People*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

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Maurice to serve them. From the other, his wife's Protestant church knowing of his attendance at Vodou ceremonies, sought to press home their familial advantage by persuading him to become a devout member of their congregation. Maurice was not immediately amenable to the demands being made for conversion by his wife's Protestant church. As a follower of Vodou and Catholicism, his life had always depended on both, and this had up until the point when he married his Protestant wife served him well. However, having been married for a while it had become apparent to both Maurice and his wife that they were experiencing problems conceiving a child. Around the same time his wife started to suffer from serious bouts of headaches and earaches. Maurice looked to gain a possible explanation for these attacks and sought counsel from an ounyan who told him the reason for his wife's ailments were due to the female snake lwa Ayida-Wedo. She had aspirations to become his wife, and in a fit of jealousy at not wanting to share Maurice, had thrown an affliction upon her.

Possibly reacting to Maurice's decision to seek advice from an ounyan his wife's family attempted to intervene. Before he reached a decision on how to proceed, they informed him that the affliction was not due to any attack brought on by the lwa, but was in fact God's punishment for refusing to break his ties with Vodou. In an act of desperation to halt the assault upon his wife, her family pleaded with him to break any connection he had with the lwa and Catholicism. He was given further assurances that once he became a devout Protestant his life would settle down. After much ado, Maurice eventually complied with the demands being made by his in-laws and duly severed his ties to Vodou and Catholicism. He

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continued to hope that they might eventually have a family given the semblance of stability instilled by his conversion. Unfortunately this never occurred, and although the physical symptoms of the attack did subside, Maurice remained convinced the reason for their infertility was because he had turned down Ayida-Wedo's proposal for marriage.

What becomes apparent from Maurice's experience is that he was never left alone to endure his ordeal. Indeed the source for much of the pressure came from those who had a vested interest in persuading him to decide on the appropriate course of action. Biased by their own interests exposed Maurice to the vagaries of having become a topic for local debate. By favouring Protestantism over his long standing affiliation with Vodou and Catholicism, he not only divorced himself from the lwa and ounigan but also from being an active participant in a vibrant community. His decision to therefore dismiss his previous allegiances inevitably reverberated amongst those who knew him.

Breaking away from the spiritual communities Maurice had once served, presents an opportunity to briefly explore the meaning of community amongst Vodou practitioners. By simply disavowing his affiliations he would have indicated to all concerned that he no longer wished to belong. It is expected that the breaking of the physical tie to the metaphysical world temporarily threw his estranged Vodou adherents along with their accompanying lwa into disarray. Yet it is almost certain having lost Maurice that serviteurs would have rallied to safeguard their community. It is here therefore, within the confines of a Vodou ritual, that a sense of community is normally realised. This is perhaps nowhere more evident than when witnessing the individuality of

participants undergoing a process of deconstruction. For in the full thrust of a Vodou ceremony it is not the individual that is marked out as being exceptional but how the participants collectively engage and dedicate themselves to serving the lwa. Egos along with personal interests are temporarily supplanted by wanting to ensure the betterment of the lwa and community. Bound in synchrony, participants sidestep everyday pressures by encouraging the lwa to attend. The lwa behaving in a particular way establish a space for experiencing a temporary catharsis. Normally in a possessed state the lwa “ride” their adherents, displaying as they go, feats of physical wonder which not only confirm their existence but the extent of their power. As an Otherness they channel the frustrations and expectations from everyday interaction and magnify the daily content into a carnivalesque spectacle.

Working alongside the lwa the ritual specialists coordinate their specialities with one another to ease the suffering of those attending. Ever mindful of their condition and circumstance the ounyan or mambo instil a sense of community into their audience by paying attention to their attendees needs. Reflecting back upon them the vagaries of the world lying beyond the ritual precinct, the ritual specialists and the lwa appear to provide comfort and reassurance. In this congenial atmosphere an individual’s conduct towards the lwa, and the keeping of any solemn promise made, is constantly placed under scrutiny. It is not unusual to find a person being admonished by a lwa because they have not kept to their vow to serve and replenish their life force.

Keeping in check the activities of its participants, the lwa and their physical representative bind the adherents together through their common devotion, giving them in the

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process a sense of belonging and protection. Methods used to solidify a sense of community include the caring for adherents during the ceremony itself. For instance food and water over the course of the ritual are distributed regularly amongst those attending. The ritual specialist counsels those who are known to be experiencing a particularly "hard time", and when lwa do appear they often distribute money to those who are deemed to be suffering from the greatest difficulties.

Alleviating the relentless struggle to overcome a fragile existence is for a moment suspended by communing with their lwa. Guided and controlled by the ritual specialist gives the ritual a general sense of order. By choreographing the spectacle with regards to the positioning of salutations and supplications generates a conducive environ for congress. The trials and tribulations that accompany the serving of the lwa do not however mean the ritual specialist remains untouched by daily pressure. Indeed being at the very interface between the two realms places the ounyan and mambo in a precarious position, where the full weight of the lwa's displeasure or the discontent of the adherents can threaten the ritual specialist's standing. For many the wrath of the lwa is not an uncommon ordeal, yet there is amongst the daily demands being made on the physical, the affliction a chosen candidate is expected to endure when selected by the lwa.

When carrying out preliminary field research in Limbe in Northern Haiti in the mid-to-late nineties, I found out about this form of affliction first hand from a Vodou priest called Renold. He told me how the course he took to become a recognised ounyan did not follow any typical initiatory procedure. Instead his narrative detailed an alternative initia-

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tory route, one which relied explicitly on the local populace and lwa for authentication.

Affliction as an aspect of any formal Vodou initiation is not normally accentuated in the same way. Although isolation from the world for a number of days before being reintroduced suggests a type of sensory deprivation, when the candidate does emerge he or she is welcomed back into their local serving community. Whether this correlates specifically with Renold's ordeal remains questionable, because his isolation from a support network initially left him alone and exposed.

The first time Renold knew the lwa had chosen him to serve was when one of them appeared in dream. He was approached by a man who did not tell him his name, yet Renold instinctively knew he was a lwa. The lwa sat before him and said he should serve them. Ignoring his request Renold resumed his daily activities but it wasn't long after the visitation that he began to feel ill. Renold recalled

the spirit chose me although to begin I did not want to serve the lwa. But it was not long after the spirits initially contacted me that I became ill. I became very sick and very quickly developed into me coughing up blood. I also began to lose my eyesight. I found it truly remarkable the spirits could have such an adverse effect upon me. I even went to the hospital, but they could not diagnose what I was suffering from.

Worried about the rapid decline in his physical health having been told by the doctors that his recovery was uncertain, Renold reluctantly acquiesced to the lwa's demands. The

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following night in a second dream a lwa appeared and instructed him to go and buy three handkerchiefs. Upon waking he went straight to the market and bought the three as instructed. Immediately the affliction ceased, he stopped coughing up blood and it wasn't long after that he regained his eyesight. This did not however result in Renold's total compliance with the lwa. Shortly after surrendering to the lwa his ounyan godfather sent a message saying, the lwa had spoken to him and they required Renold to "make" a ceremony. Uncertain on his ability to carry out this request, based on his on lack of knowledge, along with a visceral fear of being possessed, meant he had no other option but to decline their request. Angered at his disrespect, the lwa preceded to go on strike by refusing to work for any other ounyan and mambo in the area. Pressure gradually built up as Renold's steadfast resolve continued to hamper their spiritual activities. After much consultation with other specialists he eventually submitted reluctantly to the making of a ceremony. Yet his frustration and apparent unwillingness to serve the lwa continued unabated. He felt he did not have the requisite knowledge required for treating the people who had started coming to him for consultations. With every turn of event Renold became ever more aware of his inadequacy as a person who had been chosen by the lwa to become an ounyan.

His internal turmoil did not however deter people from continuing to seek his assistance in ever greater numbers. In a moment of frustration at being thrown into this new position involuntarily, he contacted his godfather and asked for assistance. But again a lwa appeared to him in a dream and helped to ease his concerns over not being experienced enough.

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When I slept I saw a person, and the person said 'when you want to call me, this is what you say so I know that I am wanted. First you must make the sign of the cross on your forehead, and then you must say, in the name of Agaou-Djab, I need your presence immediately'. After which the lwa possessed me, thereafter I did not know anything else.

Although Renold did eventually become a very accomplished ounyan in the Limbe area, during the early days he would often be “ridden” by the lwa without being given any prior warning. During these possessions the lwa would appear upset and cry because of Renold’s reluctance to fully embrace his new found destiny as a servant of the lwa.

Renold’s torturous ordeal before and after becoming an ounyan, was never an easy option for raising his social status, nor did it lead to acquiring otherwise unobtainable resources. In contrast to Lewis’s argument, the affliction did not signify an outward challenge followed by self-aggrandisement, but rather brought about dialogic intercourse between interested groups. A key aspect to his transformation was the development of a concordant-discordant narrative, which enveloped aspects of the metaphysical with the practicalities of the physical. For Renold the affliction followed by further threats to comply, forced him into accepting his role. But this wasn’t without first being vetted by the local community, as well as other serving ounyans and mambos. It is therefore possible to conclude, that the trials and tribulations he endured made him an ounyan, rather than the invitation to serve. Moreover, maintaining a level of resistance proved to be a positive attribute, since it illustrated to others

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his inner strength as well as showing it was not part of a cynical ploy to improve his financial situation.

Renold's experience is not however unique. Metraux found the lwa let the person know of their selection through possession or symbolic dreams. Before Tullius became an ounyan, he often had dreams where he would see a gourd, which contained beads and on the outside surrounding the gourd was a snake boned web of interlinking threads.⁵¹ This was the *asson*, a ritual implement conferring priestly status. It is thought that if the *asson* appears in a dream it should be assumed that the person being contacted is destined to become a ritual specialist. The dream certainly indicated for Tullius his destiny, because the *asson* appearing as a central motif of the dream anticipated the summoning role he would eventually adopt.

While dreams operate as the interface between the worlds, it would not have been enough for the chosen person to immediately become a ritual specialist. Although coming into contact with the lwa may be a vital aspect of the ensuing crisis, claiming that contact had taken place would not have been sufficient proof that the person had been chosen. Initial contact examples however set the scene for what will then take place. The actual affliction in this moment remains absent, but what is present is the context out of which the ordeal will emerge.

Agitating the semblance of order, the invitation primes the outcome of this first meeting by introducing the possibility of an engaging crisis. Tullius, despite being singled out by the lwa initially avoided their request and by so doing

⁵¹ Metruax 1959:66.

placed his own health at risk. As with Renold, it wasn't long after having had the dream that he became seriously ill. Yet for Tullius his relationship to the lwa had been somewhat different. Consistently denying their demands from birth, he eventually reconciled his differences because he believed the lwa had grown tired of his inability to concede, this in turn made him feel ashamed at having ignored them for so long.

Though the details of Tullius' transformation vary with that of Renold's, the afflicted drama remains a crucial component to both of their ordeals. A further relevant comparison can be found in Maya Deren's *Divine Horsemen* where she cites the story of Isnard, son of a rural ounyan who was sent to Port-au-Prince to attend school. As he grew up, the city became his home. He felt disinclined to follow his father's footsteps to become a farmer or an ounyan. When his father eventually died, Isnard was expected and obliged to take on his father's ounyanship and the running of the farm, yet he still chose to stay in the city, with the hope he might set up a small business. As Deren points out Isnard didn't exactly ignore the spirits because he retained his ancestral lwa, but at the same time he did not want to commit to being an ounyan. Partially due to feeling ill-equipped at performing this role, as well as not wanting to leave the city, made him determined to ignore the call for him to attend to his family obligations. The lwa, not being satisfied at his reluctance to accept his destiny began to occasionally appear before Isnard in dreams or by possessing other people. Each time they made themselves known to him, they would tell him not to abandon his inheritance. Thinking the lwa were wrong to expect this of him, he continued to ignore their re-

quest. But the longer he continued to avoid the lwa so their clamour for him to yield increased. Becoming ever more insistent and frustrated by his resistance, the lwa eventually had no choice but to afflict him. He eventually became ill, while any business undertaking he attempted to make simply failed. Increasing the pressure upon him, where his everyday existence was being constantly infringed upon by the lwa, eventually made Isnard realise it was imperative that he accept his destiny.⁵²

An intrinsic element to this staging of the affliction is the taken for granted sentient or real life presence of the lwa in a person's life. These are not given over to some strange abstracted apparition, but appear as people who are simply interacting with others from beyond the veil. Although it would be easy to simply assign lwa a metaphysical attribute by which to locate or place their position to the physical domain, the implicit danger in doing so would be to limit the extent of their potential. For Haitians who follow the lwa, the world is not quite as divided, although the lwa may not be seen as you intermingle with other people, there is always the assumption that they are nevertheless present, walking where you walk, going where you go. This may not necessarily be indicative of them following, rather than it proving that there is an element of Otherness in all of our daily activities.

Accepting such potentiality is evident in the accounts of Renold, Tullius and Isnard. Whereas the initial contact through a dream presents an opportunity for the lwa to have a private audience, in isolation to the world, the affliction impacts on the behaviour of all those surrounding the candi-

⁵² Deren 2003:151.

date. For instance, the otherwise stable interiority of Being, which up to the point of contact remained unchallenged, suddenly loses its innate equilibrium with the surrounding world. This is thrown into disarray when the invitation is made. Not only does this literally catapult a person into a position of undecided torment, but the consequences of refusing lwa advances carries with it an explicit threat to their physical integrity.

What we must be sure of is that these events are not happening in isolation to one another. They are part of a wider order of vocational shifts that together produce constant adumbrations, as new versions of a similar type are added. Each account therefore substantiates the role of the lwa. As facilitators for change and continuity they appear to embody causality. Their existence is therefore contingent on making infractions. In these circumstances their presence and subsequent demands depend on their invitation being refused. Such reluctance is tantamount to turning ones back on the religion, the community as it is at least perceived, the family and their associative links to the family lwa. Although we should be cautious to not make this lwa reaffirmation into a functionalist argument, we do need to ask why would the chosen person be reluctant to serve the lwa? If we refer back to Lewis, we see that expressing any kind of reluctance would be a surprising decision to make, especially if the raising of status and the acquisition of scarce resources was responsible for driving the affliction drama. It is therefore useful to survey what the affliction may otherwise signify.

If we temporarily reduce affliction to the transmission of a signal to expectant receivers, we see the response of the people changes as the affliction increases in severity. If any

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of the people cited in our anecdotal evidence emerged the next day from having had a dream and proceeded to let everyone know the lwa had requested they become an oungan, what would the probable response have been? At best, people would have tended towards cynicism, unconvinced there was anything more to their claim than their own desire to be recognised as something more than their current status or position in the wider society.

The introduction of affliction resets therefore the evaluative stage, but even here if the affliction remains relatively mild, it remains possible that the people who will potentially come to seek their advice will remain unconvinced. In short, the affliction has to be severe. By displaying ever greater physical signs of trauma ensures the affliction becomes compelling. In these conditions the narrative begins to assume concordant-discordant qualities. Producing insurmountable signifiers engages the fate of the candidate with that of the local community. Beyond the personal ordeal of the selected, the attack signals something so incredibly strong and yet absent from everyday experience, that the performance bridges the body's physical decline with a qualitative statement that this event is hard to fake. Coughing up blood combined with going blind, introduces to the narrative an emplotted deformation aspect which distorts the physical form, to the point where it starts to mirror the descriptive characteristics of the lwa. External referents to those commonly associated with notions about belonging combine with the lack of any scientific diagnosis to explain the intervention. There is therefore an 'honest' quality to the affliction which people 'tap' into when assessing the validity of the attack.

Scrutinising affliction as it worsens, receivers are aware

of the attempts of the signaller to remedy the illness. The signaller is thereby transmitting information about his own mental state as he resists lwa advances. A reluctance to submit at this point in the crisis inadvertently confirms the power of intangibles over the individual. Amongst the maelstrom, the role of the ounyan as “Master of Gods” takes on an extended significance from that which is happening at the time of the affliction. Mastering knowledge about the lwa and then knowing how to transfer this into ritual practise requires a particular calibre of person. To accomplish this feat the ounyan, or mambo, is expected to acquire a technical ability by undertaking a graduated processional re-education. For the specialist must learn the names of the lwa and know their attributes, emblems, as well as a cornucopia of ingredients, colours, appropriate animal sacrifices, and liturgies for each lwa.

Renold’s case suggests expressing reluctance, affliction, and further resistance contributed towards authorising his new position. A voluntary flotilla of people saw the potential in his crisis. Affirming his ability to serve the lwa and the local community well, validated his new role as ritual specialist. In fact it would be fair to say that if the community refused to pay attention to his ordeal and subsequent conversion his transformation would have meant nothing. The role is thereby contingent on establishing a spiritual stake hold amongst the local populace. For one of the greatest threats an ounyan or mambo faces is the potential mutiny from their local congregation, especially if it is found that certain codes of conduct have been broken. These requisite values are normally imposed by voluntary participants who predicate the conduct of the ounyan and then continue to

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monitor how he or she conducts themselves. If the local populace choose not to attend rituals and don't seek advice, the status of the ritual specialist is accordingly undermined.

In Haiti, people can resort to serving the lwa within their family compounds when it is felt there is not a reliable ounyan or mambo living in the area. There are others who choose to only serve the ancestral lwa. They point out that a real father is more trustworthy than an ounyan. They tell of an ambitious ounyan who bought a *Bossu*, and how his family deities, the good racine deserted him in protest. They told of another who charged fees which went towards decorating his umfo and making an elegant display, rather than attending to the "real task at hand".⁵³

After becoming a well-recognised ounyan, Renold being aware of this communal threat of being abandoned installed counter measures to stop his clientele migrating away from his services. Ever conscious of his precarious position, he placed along every path leading to and cutting across his ritual precinct, a selection of buried bottles. These were "charged" to ensure those seeking advice would always come back to him when they required other problems to be resolved.

But the reluctance of Renold to take on a new vocation may have also been due to more than being under constant scrutiny. Devised as a system of healing, the commitment to serve can be a sacrifice too far. Deren citing the criticism of ounyans says the community are the ones who are

enumerating the very restraints which would make it

53 Deren 2003:174.

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impossible for the ounyan to carry any villainy very far, for he is aware that he is in competition with this recourse that people have to private worship. If he is to build a clientele, he must prove himself in a pragmatic way. He must win a kind of respect normally accorded to the father or mother.⁵⁴

Powerful ritual displays ensure their righteousness. Without being righteous and honest the community would expect the lwa to abandon the specialist. Administering successful cures therefore bestows a high level of confidence and trust upon the practitioner.

Drawing from the experiences of others, as well as the debilitating effect of affliction, meant that Renold gradually became self-conscious about how to successfully conduct himself. At no point did he wish to resume his old life, yet he never totally accepted his destiny until Agaou-Djab offered Renold his support. If people came and asked him to cure their illness, or wanted to find a solution to a bad job situation, Agaou-Djab would appear in a dream telling him how to resolve the person's problem.

What seems to then appear from this experience is a division of Self, between a nonworldliness and worldliness. How these two identify particular types of perception, which together inform the making of Self can only be displayed by adopting a specific perspective. Revealing the Self as the interior subjective opens up aspects of life which might otherwise remain elusive. Yet strangely familiar, this interiority to the Self's partial constitution establishes the basis for ac-

54 Deren 2003:175.

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cepting the existence of the metaphysical. With its penchant for dwelling amongst the Otherness this aspect of Self moves away from the light which threatens to reveal its composition. Formed from a multitude of invisible and yet perceived interventions, means this version of Self depends upon a subtle displacement from the material world so as to make its non-worldly derivation significant.

This is to be contrasted with the Self as an intersubjective object, one which takes on a solid material form through the use of the body as an external signifier and respondent. Under these circumstances the body corresponds to the idea of fragmentation. Any undertaking to perceive the body as complete is undermined by the visual and tactile connectivity appearing at a localised level. For Renold, the affliction manifested itself through the coughing up of blood and the loss of eyesight. Both of these conditions should be considered as the breaking down of the body complete. The relationship between these two physical signs did not however, lead to understanding the overall physicality of the attack. Any constitution of the body based on perception is always imperfect, although its accessibility becomes more pronounced through adumbration. It is when assumptions about the existing body are disrupted that meanings are produced about the Other. As an outward manifestation of lwa contact, the body becomes for the people the gauge for understanding their relationship to the lwa.

The connection Renold had to the lwa was not only through the affliction itself but through the medium of dreams. By the lwa reflecting their potential for 'becoming', Renold began to apprehend not only his subjective body but the intersubjective quality of his Being. In short, he came to

know himself through the intervention of the Other. The affliction, in this case, enhanced how he perceived himself. Zahavi in a moment of erudite perfection says about this relation with Other,

It is only when I apprehend the Other as apprehending me, and when I take myself as the Other to the Other; that I apprehend myself in the same way that I apprehended them, that I become aware of the same entity that they are aware, namely, myself as a person.⁵⁵

When constituted within the context of occult articulation, the Self appears as coherent when challenged by the spirits. Conferring their existence, by overturning any semblance of order, highlights their ethical and moral demeanour towards the living. This indicates the reasoning behind particular candidature selection. As a consequence, intentional interaction with the Other, from both sides, highlights the composition of the Self. When examining affliction, the condition under which contact takes place divests two distinct, yet interrelated changes, as it did for Renold when intervention provoked a change in how he saw himself compared to those around him. It placed him in a space he had not occupied before. Opening up new conditional routes of communication, he relied heavily as did Tullius and Isnard on being identified as different from those who had not been chosen. How they then saw themselves and understood their own identity required them to acknowledge lwa interdependency.

⁵⁵ Zahavi, D. 1999. *Self-Awareness and Alterity: A Phenomenological Investigation*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

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Encountering such a wild expressive Otherness to the being he had known before, rectified the dissimilitude he had towards the spirits and the local community. The attack recalibrated his relationship to the lwa. It not only altered his perception, but reaffirmed the people's general perception. No longer seen as a chosen man, they came to rely on his ability to act as a conduit. As an object which could be attacked, damaged and transmogrified, Renold became conscious that being an object for an Other, brought a revelation on how he related to his own subjective sense of Self. In their recipient relationship, the Vodou priest, the lwa and congregation, from a principle of acknowledged reciprocity, bound themselves to one another and by so doing became something greater than their parts.

To suggest that through affliction there is a reassembling of order after disruption would be to underplay the prevalence of discordance within the narrative. Temporal readjustment and upheaval followed by a long and constant tranquillity does not reflect the fragility of the world most of us live in. Without exception, the same can be said for the spirits, for we all continue to negotiate our existence with the Other.

The lwa's ability to disrupt is perhaps nowhere more obvious than in the many accounts offered by Metraux. Extant relations between lwa and people portray an unsteady equilibrium or truce. In the same way spirits and gods may mirror onto their host aspects of their own affliction, so the affliction of the people reflects back onto how they portray and relate to their lwa. Caught in an endless cycle of affliction and retribution, lwa prepare people for the responsibilities associated with maintaining longevity. In the same instance, there is an expectation lwa will treat their serviteurs "right"

as long as they keep to their promised undertaking to serve.

Deren describes a particular incident with her cook La Merci who suddenly came down with severe abdominal pains. Having sought advice from a local leaf doctor her condition didn't improve. Deren tried to intervene but La Merci refused her assistance. In an attempt to reduce her ever increasing discomfort about her failing condition Deren took it upon herself to request a physician to visit. He diagnosed acute appendicitis and advised she be taken to the hospital for treatment. Again La Merci refused to go, on the basis that when people go to hospital they die. La Merci was convinced it was the lwa who had grabbed her. In desperation Deren resorted to threatening her that if she did not go to hospital she would be sacked, then she tried a different tack and attempted to cajole her into going by promising her rewards, and yet La Merci's resolve was resolute.

When Deren's attempts to assist failed, La Merci returned to her hut, where it was expected news would emerge the following day that she had died. Deren was therefore surprised to see that La Merci's condition had improved by the next morning. That same evening a child appeared at her hut and informed her that his grandmother had been mounted by a lwa and he had a message for La Merci. Following the child back to his grandmother's, La Merci offered up the requisite salutations to the residing Ogun, who informed her that the sickness was not natural. She had apparently not carried out to the satisfaction of the lwa her previous obeisance before leaving her ancestral land. Ogun requested she return home and offer a sacrifice to propitiate the spirits. The next morning La Merci looking ever better along with some money from Deren travelled home with a chicken and some gifts for

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her neighbours. Upon her return back to Deren's residence she was full of energy, and her stomach pains had completely disappeared. The explanation given for her recovery was the reaffirmation of ties to her ancestral lwa.⁵⁶

Identifying the affliction as being born from the lwa, described by La Merci as being "grabbed" brings us to the point where a discussion on the notion of "maladi" needs to take place. The cause of affliction has various derivations according to Brodwin. When discussing medicalization and illness experience he explains there seem to be for many Haitians three distinct forms of maladi. There is the "sent sickness" more commonly referred to as *maladi satan*. This does not however refer to the French Catholic icon, the Opposer, or even to a principle of evil. In this context Satan refers to a sickness sent by someone else. This is then contrasted with *maladi Bondye* which denotes any other form of natural sickness. There is embedded amongst these two archetypal referents *maladi mo* which comes from a sickness sent by the dead. In this case it simply denotes an intervention by the spirit of the dead. Both *mo* and *Satan* maladies refer to the sending of an entity to afflict another which overtime results in misfortune, illness or death. In some instances disease has an association to specific spirits and this can even extend to the spirit's age, distinguished by it being a child or an adult spirit.

The dispatching of a spirit onto someone can be done through various material means, Brodwin mentions two: a "powder hit" and a "lamp hit". For the spirit to be dispatched they are required to be hidden from view, but placed in a po-

56 Deren 2003: 167-68.

sition where the person will come into contact with at least one of them while making the daily round. These are known as traps and are capable of bringing about the same kind of illness and death as the *mo*. In a similar vein to LaMerci's experience, *maladi satan* and *maladi mo* cannot be undone by seeking professional biomedical assistance. This does not mean that people afflicted with an illness avoid seeking professional advice, rather they use their consultation to discover whether it can be treated. If the professional interlocutor does not give a satisfactory diagnosis, the afflicted and the surrounding family assume the affliction must stem from one of the two metaphysically derived maladies.

Each *maladi* offers us a narrative on the role of spirits, placed as they are within opposing moral and ethical ways of knowing, they compel us to consider in contradistinction to commonality the determinants for their appearance. There can be no overarching narrative which extracts a general consensus. Each person comes with an explanation based on shared life experiences and prescribed religious affiliation. As such the antagonistic composition of the narrative Brodwin provides, when describing the plight of a nineteen year old Haitian woman Jerline is worth recounting here at some length.

Jerline worked as teacher at a Protestant church school in Jeanty in the south of Haiti. Many of her peers regarded her as an intelligent articulate erudite individual, and as a consequence there must have been some consternation when she started to show signs of having been afflicted. There was talk she could have been sent a *maladi satan* because people were jealous of her position. According to Brodwin she was one of only 20 women who had a job amongst a local popula-

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tion of 3000. Her position, and with it her acquired status, was thought to have attracted the attention of those who were not so well off. In a fit of jealousy, an individual envious of her position, sought to remedy the difference between them by sending a spirit upon her. She had become through her vocation a prime target for such an attack.

The affliction first appeared when on her way back from the school she stopped at her local market. While buying provisions she saw a shadow pass by her, which immediately made her afraid. Other than seeing this apparition nothing else happened, it was only after she had returned home and cooked her family a meal and prepared some juice that the affliction suddenly descended upon her. After the first attack she resumed, what could be described as strained, but relatively normal relations with her family. At this early stage in her ordeal she was able to identify her attack as coming from someone who had maliciously sent a *maladi mo* upon her. Her ability to clearly communicate with her family however quickly deteriorated as the days passed. She gradually withdrew and became disorientated. The affliction phase took on two particular forms of expression. She would become violently agitated or shows signs of extreme fatigue. Brodwin notes the first episodes of the affliction seem to have been the most violent. It was as if the body was under the influence of an external power, she repeatedly endured aggressive convulsions and violent fits. Unable to recognise her family she proceeded to bite and hit those who tried to restrain her. People around her were of the opinion she was insane *maladi-foli*. For two days they were convinced she was losing her mind, and while this diagnosis allowed others to identify the parameters of the problem it did nothing to limit the range

of probable causes.

There were in this case, three probable causes and with it there came an explanation for defining Jerline's affliction in a particular way. Was it traceable to a break down in her social relations, or possibly a "natural madness", one in which no metaphysical intervention was present, or a "true sickness"? Overarching these potential causalities were the two designations of *maladi Bondye* and *maladi satan*. Brodwin is quick to specify the apparent flexibility that came with diagnosing Jerline's affliction. If indeed it was a "natural sickness" the family were free to avoid the inevitable ounyan consultation which would otherwise follow, and this meant they didn't need to question the reputation or intention of other people living in the local vicinity. But this diagnosis wasn't without a problem because it meant the family had to accept Jerline's good soul was lost to them forever.

Jerline's family deliberated over the possibility of it being a *maladi Bondye* but became convinced through the way the affliction expressed itself that it had to be *maladi satan*. By turning their attention to *maladi satan* they explicitly accepted the affliction as being caused by someone who felt some malicious intent towards Jerline. Not wanting to limit available opportunities to deal with the affliction the family called upon lay Catholic practitioners and an ounyan, both of whom offered very different advice on her condition and on how to find an appropriate remedy. The diagnosis proved to be very different with the ounyan considering the spirit attacking her as a Satan, in this case this meant that the ounyan used a generic inversion of good to characterise the spirit without counter positioning the spirit into a Christian iconography. Whereas the Catholics saw Jerline as embody-

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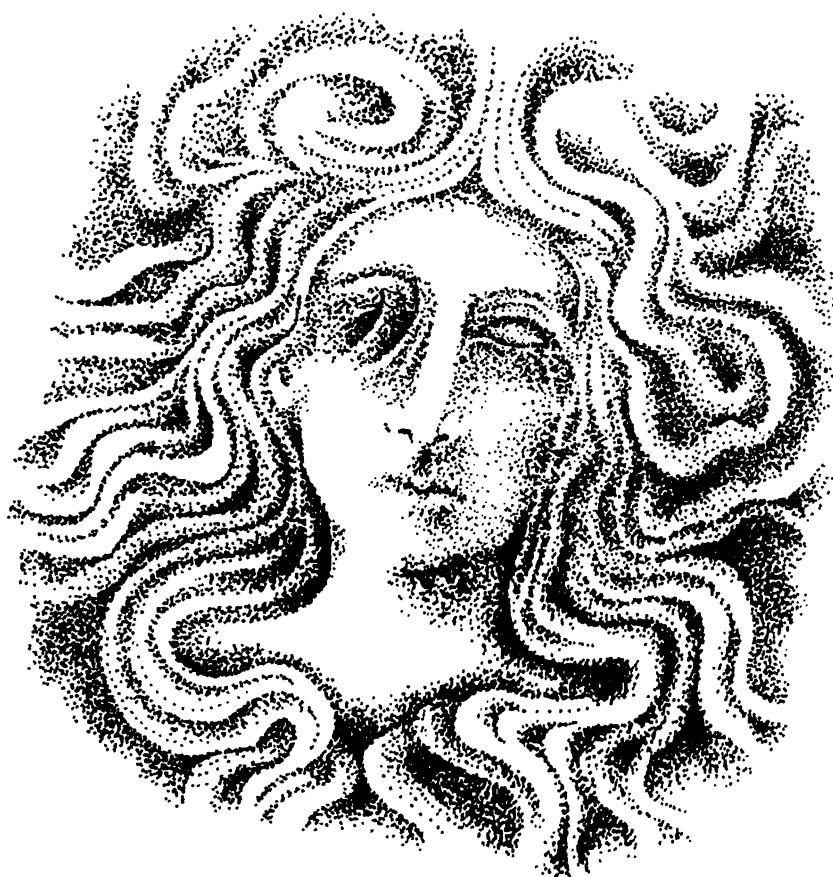
ing Satan, through this diagnosis the evil resided within her flesh thus indicating an absolute inversion to Christ and the notion of being a good Christian. The solution for dealing with this problem manifested itself in different ways according to the diagnosis. For the ounyan he dealt with the affliction as something that needed to be repelled and therefore applied surface protection to stop further physical interventions. The Catholics on the other hand dealt with perceived cavities within her, where the evil resided, and therefore concocted noxious toxins to force Satan out.

It is interesting to note that this case was not limited to Catholic and Vodou practitioners only. Alongside the actual application of a remedy there emerged a Protestant narrative which criticised the activities of all concerned. Denigrating lwa and hagiographic Catholics alike, by associating both forms of knowledge as demonic, construed any ritual action being performed as satanic. Indeed for the Protestant Pentecostal community her illness would have immediately disappeared if she had converted to Protestantism. Moreover, reducing the lwa to entities which are intrinsically evil limited their role as malicious interlocutors sent to do harm. From the Protestant perspective the affliction became more severe as Jerline and her family distanced themselves from God, as illustrated by calling on the services of an ounyan and the Catholic laic group.

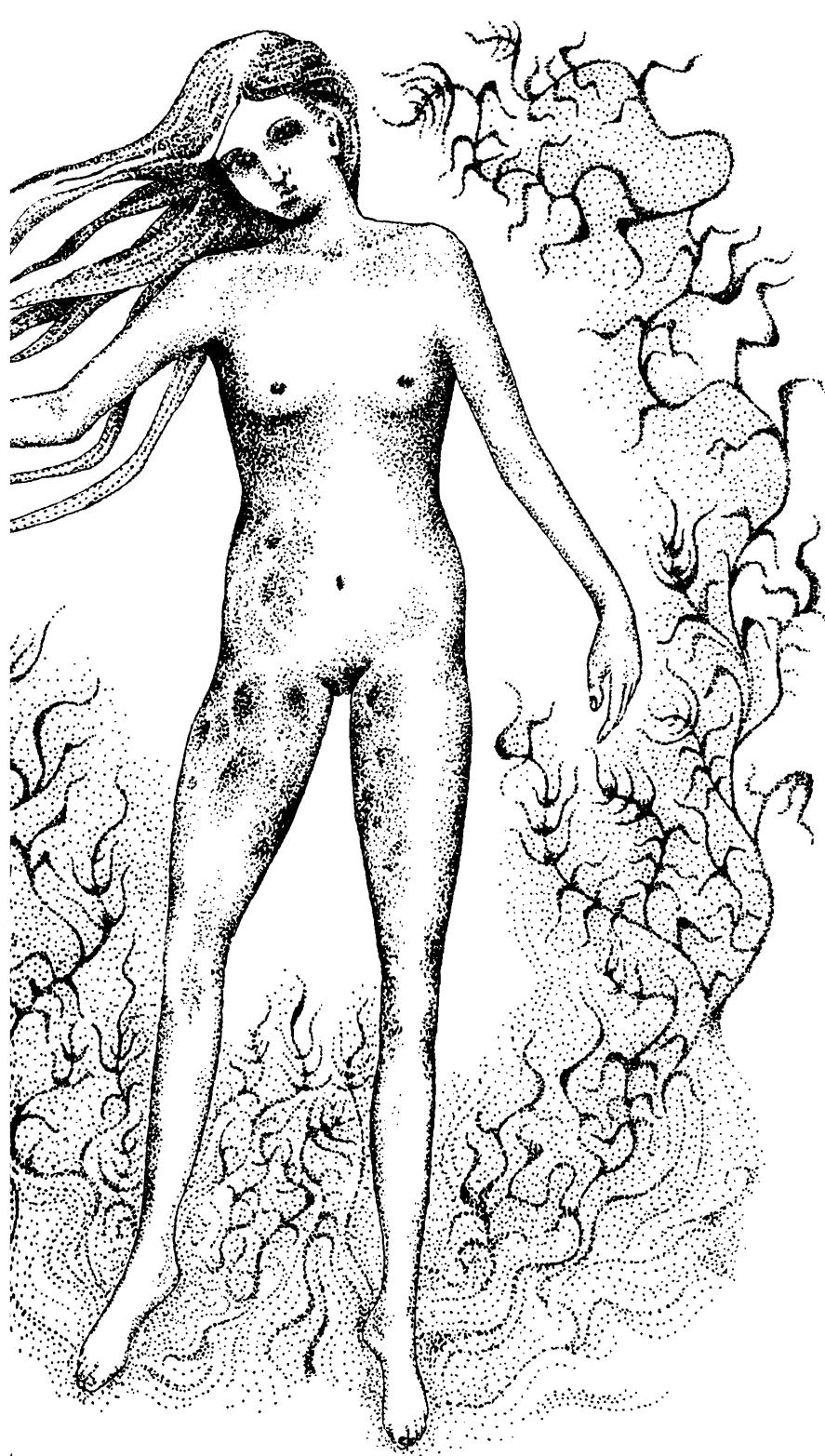
These cases of affliction provide an insight into the way people negotiate amongst themselves in an attempt to gain a semblance of order, as well as illustrating the perpetual dialogue people are in with their Otherness. Showing flexibility in their resolve to make sense of affliction, the attack from the spirits re-engages the physical with the metaphysi-

cal. Not only does this open up opportunities for developing and understanding the position of the spirits to the people, but it also encourages the elaboration of narratives which in turn ground the experiential into a timeless format. Evident relations are made and broken on the back of the perceived differences between the two realms and yet affliction facilitates open dialogue.

Initiating contact, affliction signifies the beginning of an alteration in the perception of Self. It harnesses the fears and aspirations of a people, while also levelling any drive to become something greater than that permitted by others. In this way the *lwa* and their life history determine the form of their aspectual Otherness. Based on reciprocity their existence renders our position to them as being one where their affliction is acknowledged, spoken about and eased through engagement. When it comes to the ordeal of affliction the deformation signifies the transitional move undertaken by the Self. Embracing new ways of knowing bears down as an arduous ordeal, but as has been shown affliction's potential means that it never takes place in isolation to the public arena. For this is all about displaying to others that these entities can and do have a definite impact on how people conduct their lives. Whether moral or immoral, an affliction scars and heals while simultaneously pirouetting to the vagaries of an uneven fragile living world.



‡³ The Pact and the Witch's Mark



CONSIGNING THE WITCH'S pact between the 1550s to the 1670s to an actual act of dedication between individual and spirit has been suggested by historians as evidence of the prevailing consciousness of people at the time. As with the narratives which gave account of how these events of contract took place, any suggestion that a pact had been created always followed an accusation of witchcraft. Notwithstanding the superstitious mind, belonging to the often described popular society, rather than the educated elite, gave credence to these accusations as a way of explaining their misfortune. In Haiti, the cited evidence emphasised the production of many and often opposing narratives about affliction, whereas the evidence for malicious intent across Europe normally involved the taking into consideration of witchcraft as a possible cause. Any accusation which was then made against an individual was normally met with resounding agreement by the local populace. Terms of engagement however were not so different, with the local populace attempting to limit the impact of affliction. Containing the reach of the afflicted field, in an attempt to divert larger scale panic, ensured the production of linear explanatory forms

garnered greater local support. As a consequence, the actual meaning of affliction to the people retained its otherworldy source. In particular, the position of the witch as a conduit for the diabolic became an important causal attribute when investigating affliction.

In particular the use of a mark upon the skin for the purposes of identifying diabolic interactions with spirits developed into a purposeful accusatory category. A narrative's moral imperative for engaging with this topic, avoided any attempt to reason why these marks may have had more than a nefarious intent. Given our investigation so far, it is possible to suggest that these marks, which when described as deformations of the moral subject, were intended to only address one particular aspect of affliction.

Jonathan Sharpe in *Instruments of Darkness* reports during the Essex witch trials of 1566 that Elizabeth Francis confessed to having a cat familiar which her grandmother had given her.⁵⁷ The cat was suitably reported to have been called Sathan. To begin with she used the cat to gain wealth and attract the attention of an Andrew Byles who she coveted with thoughts of eventual marriage. Her desire was not however to be realised and she henceforth started using Sathan for malicious purposes. In order to sustain the strength of the cat she would offer him a drop of her own blood, which she would achieve by pricking herself. In other cases, such as in John Walsh's examination of the same year, the familiar was described as sucking blood. In 1574 and 1579 other accounts emerged of the left forefinger being used to feed the spirit. It

⁵⁷ Sharpe, J. 1997. *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in Early Modern England*. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press.

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would seem there was no body part which wasn't made available to the spirit.⁵⁸ Sharpe follows the gradual development of the witches mark and notes that as the body part motif became more extravagant in its portrayal so it also became sexualised. By the end of James 1 reign the witch's mark had migrated from the face, chin, forefinger, shoulder and wrist, to the genitalia of the person being accused. By this point the mark was regarded as a teat providing nothing but sustenance for the Devil or one of his subordinate counterparts. Over a similar period of time the inclusion of the Devil as a descriptive signifier for malicious intent started to take a central role. Whereas before, the familiar could appear in many shapes, the Devil was now thrust into being given a principal role along with the witch. As discussed above the Devil's difference to the norm was mirrored by the witch's difference to the rest of the physical world.

A person who was found to be bearing a suspicious mark was set apart and dealt with for perverting the right and moral course of life. As an anticipatory device, the Devil's badge confirmed, prior to there being a conviction, that the accused had become a servant for diabolical ends. It is thought the importance of bearing a mark mimicked a saint's stigmata which meant for the supposed culprit being accused of committing an inverse act. Whether the mark was artificial or natural was of no consequence, it was still exposed to the same exploratory method used for identifying unnatural alliances. If nothing else, the impurity of the person was primed and then put on display by the people who were already convinced they had caught a witch. Evidence of having

⁵⁸ Sharpe 1997:71-72.

committed a moral infringement was sought by pricking the mark with a pin. If there was no sign of pain or if it did not bleed it was assumed the person must be a witch.

The Devil's teeth or claw marks proved congress had taken place, but evidence for fraternising with a malefic source could only be confirmed by imparting further physical infringements on the body of the accused. Investigative measures such as these were all part of due process, which at times extended to shaving the whole body in an attempt to uncover abnormalities that would otherwise remain hidden from view. Although identifying marks required that the person be treated with suspicion, the courts acknowledged that the Devil had the ability to remove any external sign which gave away his relationship to the accused.⁵⁹

Remy equates the Devil's mark on a witch to that found on slaves. When the masters scarred their human stock as a way of identifying ownership they made it difficult for them to escape and evade capture.

*And so to-day the Devil brands and seals those whom
he has newly claimed as his own with such tokens of
harsh and inhuman slavery, marking them especial-
ly (as some say) on that part of the body which was
anointed by the priest on the day of their baptism...⁶⁰*

Remy goes on to question this supposition however on the basis that many marks signalling the person's compact were hidden from sight. In a poetic attempt to qualify important

59 L'Estrange Ewen, C. 1970. *Witchcraft and Demonianism*. Trowbridge: London.

60 Remy 2008: 9.

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collaboration by maiming, the Devil is described as marking his kin with talons leaving his servant “defouled and soiled”. On nothing but empty promises for eventual enrichment, people were tricked by his diabolical glamour. Freely entering into agreement to serve, the talon which brands flesh was not normally associated with a witch having endured pain. Scar tissue described by Remy as being hard and insensitive to touch did not bleed when pierced. In offering evidence to support his perspective Remy cites a particular old woman in Essey, France, who was found to have a mark which was then submitted as evidence of her having fraternised with the Devil. As part of the investigative procedure this woman was duly pierced by the sergeant. Upon the blade being inserted she neither screamed nor did the wound bleed. In order to confirm his findings she was once again pierced with a blade next to the mark, whereupon she immediately cried out and the wound proceeded to bleed.

Extrapolating from this evidence, Remy ponders on the quality of the mark, finding the similarity between the accused and demon extended beyond the wound itself to the apparition being cold and insensitive. Other adjectives used to assign significance were “sluggish” and “languid”, along with the witch being described as adopting the apparel of death. In this case, her old age and closeness to death meant the blood had grown sluggish and the body had become frozen with old age. Not wanting to invite ridicule on his findings, Remy observes an untouchable attitude when addressing the evidence, especially given the nature of the mark and its close affiliation to the demon. “But it is the nature of the Demons' touch, of which we are speaking, that the insensitivity which it induces endures for ever, and the farther it

is removed from its cause the more pronounced it becomes." Further evidence comes from him also citing a case about a husband who submitted an accusation of witchcraft against his wife. The husband contended that every Thursday, when they went to bed her body would turn ice cold, it was suggested this was proof that she must be a witch and therefore practising black magic.⁶¹ The notion of the accused having undergone a perversion of Being, resulting in the physical deformation with accompanying moral deviations from the norm, appears to have been a prevailing motif.

Not wanting to adopt a material stance by which I may only consider the hard evidence from the accounts provided, I wish to explore the subjectivities of the body alongside ideas about embodiment. When searching for evidence that the accused was actually a witch, the first requirement was to find a sufficient number of collaborative witnesses. This was then substantiated by submitting indisputable evidence. Under these circumstances the physical integrity of the body became the focal point for moral debate. Not only did the accused present an opportunity to affirm the existence of the supernatural in all its ungodly manifestations, but it also perpetuated the idea of community. Lying in juxtaposition, disorder was set against the societal desire for order by applying a notion about the complete physical form.

Witchcraft was not, however, a functional tool by which local communities were able to recalibrate their moral ethos in times of crisis. Rather witchcraft rendered the world and the bodies inhabiting temporal space with qualities which allowed for the exploration of the physical and metaphysical

61 Remy 2008 10-11.

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domains. The frustration by the clergy towards individuals seeking the advice of cunning folk goes some way towards confirming Christian morality was not as exclusively practised as once supposed. In fact it is possible to suggest that in the same way as people in Haiti use all available spiritual machinations to achieve a better grasp on their everyday existence, so populations across Europe not only entertained the idea of diabolism as an alternative corrective means, but considered it to be an integral part of their lives.⁶² As if to cater for the inadvertent interruption of normality the topic of witchcraft required their attention.

And it is here when looking at how people attend to the strange that we find an underlying theme to ideas about affliction. The description of witches embodying affliction, as realised through different forms of entertainment or accusation confirms their difference to the moral norm was contingent on them agreeing to serve the Devil, being branded by their 'master', and offering their life force to their familiars.

Physical protuberances deriving from natural design or unnatural magical activity were never ultimately disputed. Embodying elements of an untoward Otherness gave narratives the ability to expound possible causes and experiences the individual had undergone to become evil. Transformative in its appearance, the revealing of a suspicious mark meant the accused served a purpose; by which confirmation was sought about the overwhelming threat from a metaphysical world lying beyond the farthest reaches of God.

⁶² I am not trying to suggest that everyone was a closet Satanist. This would be too crass a suggestion; but it is possible, given the proclivity for seeking advice from cunning folk, that they did consider the world of spirits as having a contributive value in their everyday lives.

Claiming ownership over the identifying process meant the presence of the diabolical stigmata perpetuated the role of affliction as a signifier for Otherness. Supplanting the residual autonomy of the person with perceived subjective stances from popular culture drew the accused into a distorted carnival like domain of malefic potentialities.

Conditions determining the investigative outcome reduced the body to an iniquitous vessel. Filled with malice and the desire to overthrow quotidian stability, the witch appeared to represent the deformed underbelly of society. The very notion of community became a referential template with delineated differentials isolating appropriate from inappropriate behaviour. Endorsing the idea of moral perpetuity ensured magical orientated folklore and practice were gradually smothered under the auspices of this stylised form of living. Although this may have given meaning to ideas about how to facilitate a sense of belonging it also avoided having to address the stickier topic of spiritual diversity. This explains the reason why many of the accused witches were considered to be anti-social. Immoral behaviour included: cursing at neighbours who maltreated them, creating disputes, begging, or simply looking at another's stock with an envious eye.

Explanations looked to the unusual in daily events, and in a world where superstitious minds sought comfort from knowing or being able to explain causality, the deformed and wretched, alongside licentious behaviour and the old, produced an array of prime diabolic candidates. Imbibing them with the ability to carry out their suspected deeds could only happen when the accompanying narrative endowed the accused with intent. A range of fantastic accounts were then

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built into the narrative, with the emphasis being on having witnessed an event. Any such abnormality or deformity in this context was then used to challenge a claim of innocence.

There is an obvious peculiarity when endeavouring to try and identify a witch, because in the process of identifying the implicit occult nature, the human condition is brought into stark relief. Affirmation of the Other then appears as an impression which is dependent on the prevaricating audience. While wishing to avoid temptation there remained a desire to assert its existence, so as to substantiate beyond reasonable doubt a level of culpable guilt. To achieve this end, the populace bringing the conviction, were required to transgress the order of the day so as to imbibe the proceedings with their active imagination. Part of the explorative proceedings required a quality of proof which was going to be hard to fake. It is perhaps no surprise to learn therefore that many of these marks took on the semblance of an animal. A hoof, a hare, as well as all manner of other beasts enabled a satisfactory conclusion to the proceedings. And yet the voice of the witch or her recorded exclamations over being manhandled, were for the most part never recorded by prosecutors. It is on this point that silences emerge, bringing with it, as it does, further evidence on the various uses for why people needed to acknowledge affliction.

Accusatory condemnation of deeds done outside the governance of the church was inevitably going to attract the attention of the authorities as well as the local populace. Affliction challenged the Christian orthodoxy and stood as a testament to an alternative world, one which was imbued with properties that opposed the perceived social order. From this supposition we can assume deformity acted as a

temporal physical mask. Propositioning an alternative spirituality the affliction meta-narrative was largely silenced by the weight of censure. In their attempt to limit the potential of this altogether more evocative Otherness, the local populace embarked on a programme to silence the accused. The mark could then be reduced down to proof of the compact between spirit and human. Rather than giving countenance to the possibility that the affliction was a call to engage with the Other, many people found fear where once there may have been hope. In this way the accused was portrayed as a weak and easily tricked individual. Managing daily pressures ensured innovation under this pretext was discarded in favour of a more prevalent malevolence. Afflicted bodies were organised and structured according to the enquiring element of established and renegotiated narratives. At the local level any opportunity to counter this hegemony was shied away from, on fear that denouncing an antagonist might also face a similar raft of accusations. Affliction therefore guided the viewer away from thinking the person accused could have any good reason for their malice, or for that matter partaking in meetings with the Devil. Undermining self-intentionality allowed accusers to colonise the body by usurping the individual's explanation with their own interpretation. Superficial concessions of this kind meant any agreement the local populace reached could not run deeper than achieving a satisfactory outcome. As a consequence affliction became the means by which to justify any action that took place prior to being taken to trial or the judgement which ended proceedings. It gave reason and provided the means to find fault.

Bereft of daily human contact this figure dwelt on the

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edge of human habitation. Cast far from the shadow of the church they wondered from the righteous path, here perceived as an object beyond compare. Restricted mobility alongside observed behaviour added a further infringement to their freedom. Placed under overt observation anticipated the moment when the people could finally prove the deleterious effect on their crops, livelihood and personal well-being was due to a single person or a group of diabolic individuals.

It is possible under these conditions that alternative remedies for managing the increased subsistence pressures, especially having been pushed and shunned by the local populace, began to appear as a viable option. Certainly the depiction of the witch has tended to involve the colourful and rather extravagant portrayal emphasising difference over normality. And yet it is here during this assigning process that the witch begins to represent the interlocutor to a perceived Otherness. When attempting to comprehend the development of the afflicted mirror, with all of its retentive comparative possibilities, enables distortions of the human form to become something more than a descriptive way for visualising deformation. Instead the witch becomes the vehicle to explore the composition of the metaphysical.

At the centre of a narrative account or pictorial depiction depends on tensions and differences between the two worlds for the witch to emerge. As found in Haiti or when making a fetish in Benin, the element of difference and embodied imaginings converge and are thereby transformed into a visceral horror. Forms describing Otherness, ranging from the black man to evidence of deformed offspring, challenges our ability to strictly perceive within the guidelines of a moral edict. Beyond the limits of what we know or have probably

seen, the witch takes on the apparel of something which is not fully understood. This archetype therefore requires us to consider the feasibility of having eroticised areas which provide sustenance for a familiar, to the physical form the witch typically adopts, since both of these inform the making of the impression which we have subsequently come to depend upon for producing oppositional qualities about Being.

For the late modern period of history this engagement with something other than what people physically knew or could fully comprehend gave space for poesis. From the nothingness discursive images began to be formed. Stretching into the darkness, in an attempt to contain the unseen threat, meant the metaphysical had to be explored. The affliction therefore not only challenged the norm but by building on what had been commonly accepted from before it appeared as an evolved composite expression. With each elaboration, the design of the metaphysical became more explicit. As a self-qualifying referent, witches were only accused by those who believed they existed. They became in this instance the vehicle for limiting the unknown, condensing as they did the potential for understanding the relationship to their own notion of a perceived Otherness. And yet by investing time and energy in this interpretative exercise, they colonised the unseen with comparable inversions from their seen world. As they proceeded in developing a convincing narrative the emphasis turned to making distortions from their own intersubjectivities. This was achieved by including transformations to the body which were then imbued with secret symbolic strata onto and into the flesh of the Other.

Converging known explications onto the unknown prevented normality from taking hold. Instead the extraordi-

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nary appeared as a viable proposition. Forging the hidden world into being contingent appeared to rely on making exempt any previous application which may have contained positive attributes. Significant relations, however, retained elements of the quotidian, and it was amongst the disfigurements that evidence of their esoteric understanding about Otherness found an acceptable elucidated avenue. Affliction under these circumstances signalled other-worldly qualities which in its unified thematic course towards eventual inclusion sustained a presence in the minds of the people. Establishing commonality where before there was only disjointed associations determined the extent of the absences present in the depictions. Deformation acted as the portal to their Otherness, for only by acknowledging their difference did abnormality come to embody significance.

Containing the presence of the witch, by inculcating physical absences, has created a focal point for all practitioners of the arte. The perceived potency is not realised by encompassing all aspects of the given, but rather fulfilment is obtained from assessing the explicit absences. Since these convey the difference between the hidden world and the physical world we inhabit, our attention should be drawn to their Otherness, or that which makes them different to ourselves. Often diabolical in content these distortions mask the truth that we are what they are not, and this is the bridge that we have to attempt to cross. Affliction in this context appears as a metaphoric key by which to open the door. For it is not about embodying life history or action but finding within the distortions a principle for understanding Otherness. Reflecting back and into the darkness, the witch as archetype presents an opportunity to create narratives about this relationship.

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Evidence of this transformation through the use of narratives is exhibited when examining the portrayal of witches. Affliction with its associated absences, details the initiatory alteration required for someone to become a conduit for the spirits. Through the imagined and yet possibly observed Otherness, depicted witches are assigned gnosis by becoming deformed. During the process of crossing over they develop distortions to their form. It is possible the mirror itself does not allow us to observe them in their completeness. Our acute perception restricts potential acquisition by only referring to objects as we have found them to exist. The nothingness encompassing their wonderings surfaces to prevent full emersion and by so doing blinds us. Yet the qualifying of their significance can only be measured by their partial absence. Liminal in stature the witch sheds the confines of a world governed by empiric findings.

Breaching the limit of our knowing, the witch through extant narratives and embodied imaginings becomes something more. Greater, larger, and more resplendent the witch image conceals the devices for making them so. Residual signifiers, delineate them as something else, through the concealment of half realised signs. Ambiguity dominates their depiction, although again it is from this impartiality to their Being, which forces them to take on a diabolical appearance. As we struggle to fully comprehend their station in the metaphysical world, so their affliction increases. It is as if their existence depends on us not knowing fully their capacity to bring about change. And it is change or rather becoming the witch that requires physical transmogrification.

There is a difference however between the afflicted person who becomes a Vodou ritual specialist and the witch. One

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of the main aspects missing from historical accounts is the absence of reports about resistance towards the spirit's advances. Whereas in Haiti the ritual specialist is gradually installed over a period of time under the scrutiny of the local populace, the surviving narratives about witches from the early modern period tend to rely on trial records, and this has ensured that any obvious testified claim about resistance has been omitted. Transformative processes are then only brought into relief as part of hindsight. This depends on the installation of remoteness to counter the contention of an otherwise reliable eyewitness. So although the conditions may be different, as we might expect given the location, time and societal differentials, the affliction continues to act as an embodied signifier for Otherness. One example will here suffice, but it is expected that readers of this text will look to other images to find suitable comparisons.

Hans Baldung Grien's *A Group of Witches*, printed in 1510, predates the era discussed above, yet its symbolic significance testifies to a prevalent dialogic narrative about witchcraft. Not only that, but upon being published at the time it contributed towards furthering the development of the witch as a diabolical icon. Zika is quick in *The Appearance of Witchcraft*⁶³ to notice the nakedness of the witches surrounding the cauldron, which is placed within a triangle demarcated by forked staves. Zika identifies these forked staves as cooking forks which were used at the time for tending fires. As already mentioned the cauldron takes centre stage, looking very much like an urn, it has around its edge a cypher in

⁶³ Zika, C. 2007. *The Appearance of Witchcraft: Print and Visual Culture in Sixteenth-Century Europe*, London: Routledge.

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hidden script, which Zika describes as pseudo-Hebrew. The drawing captures the five witches in the process of practising a ritual which involves the offering up of food as seen by the witch with accompanying cloth, while another holds a ladle which she uses to open the cauldron while the witch sitting within the triangle holds a drinking cup. From the cauldron one can see a bilious vapour pouring forth from the cauldron and contained therein a toad is carried towards the night sky.

Zika throughout the course of his description focusses on the sexualised content. This is nowhere more apparent than the backward facing witch, with legs stretched apart, astride a goat riding through the sky. These gestures evoke ideas about a woman's sexuality and yet within the context of the whole picture other possible interpretations begin to make themselves known. Zika mentions and yet cannot explain, why there are skulls lying to the left of the picture, while on the right an animal which looks like a cat stares out into the darkness from behind the witch. He also mentions the convex mirror thought to have been used for ensnaring demons and divination. Indeed the whole scene invites the viewer to be distracted by the sexually exciting content.

Entertaining the mind with possibilities encapsulated by the frenzy of the ritual serves to disorientate the viewer. Exaggerated distortion, alongside the absence of civility causes the viewer to explore the details of the ritual activity. The appearance of two other cauldrons, one being carried by the flying witch and the other being looked over by a goat at the very margins of the drawing, infer the remains of previous ritual actions. Certainly the witch in the sky seems to be carrying the cauldron with intent, having grasped it with another of the cooking forks, the other cauldron sits with what

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looks to be food hanging over it.

Each witch looks to be relatively old and yet stages in age remain an integral part to the narrative of the picture. The most youthful of the witches can be seen flying through the sky, while the two sitting at the forefront look to mirror one another, and therefore are of a similar age, while the old witch seems to be the most animated. This animation challenges us to know more and therefore must be considered to extend beyond simple titillation. Although this must have been a theme to the drawing, it is possible to consider Baldung's drawing as evoking a different level of symbolic strata.

Reflecting an Otherness associated with affliction, *A Group of Witches* may actually depict stages of empowerment with the oldest most decrepit looking to be the most agitated and powerful of all them. Described as a group, it is suggested that in fact this also works as a referential staging post illustrating the gradual degradation of the witch into an afflicted form, in this case defined through the representation of age. However the degree to which this lends itself to our discussion about the afflicted mirror requires a step by step appraisal based on the themes of the work.

In many ways the context of this woodcut is in concert with perpetuating the witch archetype. Having gathered in a wood the drawing does nothing to embellish the witch's surroundings. Our apperception for knowing Otherness is drawn to the actions taking place, yet the location and how the space is occupied cannot be ignored. The ground is bereft of any kind of undergrowth and the only tree in focus, which acts as a supportive spine, is broken and bare. Playing on the notion of fertility and everyday activities, the location demarcates a place beyond the sight and sounds of civilisa-

tion. The wilderness encroaches upon the site, and by doing so contributes towards framing the ritual setting.

In the distance trees are shown to be in leaf, yet the world of the afflicted witch depends on the opposite of light and life. As a consequence the absence of the quotidian presents the viewer with barren surroundings, thus imparting a sign to the observer that this place is not for human habitation. And so we are presented with the ritual arena, the place where conjurations will take place, where the worlds seen and hidden shall converge.

Out of sight and surely out of earshot, Baldung's drawing invites us to witness secret magical activities. Accentuating the importance of the place by being under the cover of darkness limits our perspective, since we can only see what is in the foreground, and as such the quotidian is masked from view. Overlaying such extravagant filters emphasises our innate attraction to the grotesque and supports implicitly our need for entertainment which "fires" our imagination. Claustrophobic in its design the overwhelming presence of the setting predicates the type of ritual being witnessed. For in its isolation the ritual display takes on the appearance of celebratory proportions. Clothes are cast aside, hidden from view the naked form suggests another possible absence or rather a departure from the expected moral demeanour normally on display in villages and towns. Abandoning the robes that conceal the flesh, their nakedness, although acting as a form of entertainment, also suggests a hidden knowledge associated with having the necessary skills to congress with nature. Incapable of sustaining societal restriction, the witches seem to revel in their liberation and yet the aesthetic beauty of the piece lacks any further engage-



HANS BALDUNG GRIEN: A GROUP OF WITCHES

ment. The reason for this is that the drawing's purpose is to give the impression to the observer that he or she is watching the ritual actions of the witches, rather than it necessarily being about summarising their immorality by sexualising the female form. If this was the case then we would not expect to see the accoutrements of their work lying in the foreground.

Zika surmises what these articles might mean to the witches, and as a consequence the significance of their inclusion for the observer. Evidence of the dead is scattered in the left corner, and for this Zika wonders whether they have a necromantic purpose to serve. When considering the common depiction of skulls and death in art at the time, these remains surely suggest something other than nefarious design, for skulls were the vernacular for mortality. It is therefore likely that rather than this referring to necromancy, the body parts convey an aspect of the participants Otherness. The possibility of this being so comes from the bones lacking a focal aspect, instead they lie discarded on the edge of the ritual arena. A transformative quality inscribed by the overturned skull announces to the observer that they have transgressed civility by wandering into the wilderness, and this deserves to be attended too by employing appropriately suggestive imagery.

In the centre of the foreground there are a number of interesting ritual articles: the eye is drawn to the convex mirror already mentioned and yet a bundle of hair, a brush for applying ointment or salves, and a bone not only gives the viewer further insight about their intentions, but clarifies the acquisition of an alternative type of knowledge. Enticing evidence from the drawing brings the affliction to the fore since all the identified articles retain a theme of having the

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ability to bring harm. All of these ritual utensils rely on a level of moral revulsion. Being partnered up with circumstantial conditions makes their difference to the everyday more explicit. As such they stand in opposition to the viewer because in their depiction they seem to have harnessed powers which in any other context would not be understood. Garnering a heightened intensity by acquiring the attributes of the diabolical provides Baldung with the opportunity to build into the picture a warning for those who are tempted to undertake similar ritual procedures. The possibility of becoming afflicted in this instance is then being used as a highly evocative and significant tool for warning people off from walking down this particular diabolical path.

Turning our attention to the central witch, we find she is the only one present who is sitting within a designated ritual area. The triangle marked out by cooking forks indicates a moment when she is conjuring the spirits. By acting as a pivot she becomes an engaging agency capable of dictating the movement of the eye over the depiction. To her back rests a cat, looking away from the ritual activities it seems be staring into the darkness. Being in the right corner of the picture is it is hard to ignore the relationship between death and transformation as illustrated in the left corner. Resting back against back, the cat and the witch are joined in a familiar union. With the witch's attention being on the ritual in a place of Otherness, the cat sits as her familiar, the watcher between the hidden and physical worlds.

Between the witches legs rests the vessel which presents to us the greatest spectacle of all. From underneath the lid a cascade of vapour pours out and rises into the air. Controlling the departure of this phantasmagoric outburst, the

witch partially lifts the lid of the vessel. In an attempt to emphasise the animated strength and life held within the current, a toad appears to be carried along and into the night sky. In direct contrast to an image of procuring food at the homestead the dynamic nature of the vapour from an inert vessel testifies to the power of the witch and her associates.

The witch who sits directly out of the staved triangle looks on, while holding to the sky a cup or goblet in salutatory pose. Her posture adds a further dimension to the drawing, since she sits with her legs open, but this time her exposure faces away from the viewer. Having her back to the picture she sits up against the bones and overturned human and horse's skull lying in the foreground. Her posture mirrors that of our central witch. They therefore mirror given aspects of affliction. The cat as the familiar, feeds from the witch to gain its sustenance, while the salutatory witch, having left the demarcated ritual precinct, conveys the signs of transition. Both are actively engaged in exerting their vision of Otherness through the sequence of ritualised events. Forever moving away from the everyday concerns, Baldung seems to embrace the notion of deformation through the use of these subtle motifs.

The afflicted form is nowhere more apparent than with the old witch standing at the back of the woodcut. Reaching over and into the ritual area she musters the full expressive extent of the afflicted form. In a similar portrayal to the description of Metres Erzili, her being is enveloped by age. Ravaged by time, her body is measured by the grotesque imaginings of her authorial position. Driving the spirit of the depiction forward she becomes the icon of Otherness. Deformed by age, her indwelling energy is at odds with nor-

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mal physical dispositions. Entranced, she holds to the sky the food offerings to nourish the spirits. She is in this moment an oppositional figure to the everyday. By representing through her comportment to the other witches the enraptured frenzied strength of someone who has embraced her Otherness, she commands our attention. As a mirror to the mundane she challenges us to confront the means by which the Self is constituted.

Although beyond the strict remit of this work, Baldung's depiction is replicated in many of his other woodcuts, with this background or transitory vision of the old afflicted witch being emplaced in a dominant position. Between life and death she stands at the gate, and thereby marks the point of transition as well as transgression. She is the leaper who pivots on the edge and stares into the nothingness.

Investing in the hidden world the affliction carries her forward and gives her strength through a deformed exposition about the body. As a consequence she reflects back upon us the potential for making ourselves self-aware. But Baldung's woodcut also reveals a temporal manifestation, replete with exaggerated gestures and body postures. He seems to consciously play with the perception of the viewer through the use of time. Potentialities of Being are consequently acknowledged by him, with the present set of ritual implements and actions delivering an evocative performance. Capturing a moment in and outside of time simultaneously condenses his message. For the witches are defined by time dependent parameters because they are working under the cover of darkness, yet the thrust of this work is that it is itself a timeless abomination. Although moral parameters predicated his depiction with the intention of conveying a warn-

ing by illustrating grotesque aspects in life, the layering of the subject suggests an enticing alternative interpretation.

Whether Baldung was conscious of his endeavour *A Group of Witches* emits a visceral presence by its absence to our present position. The distance gained from the viewer stems not only from the difference in time, but also through the evidential results from having witnessed the portrayal of this ritual performance. Under these circumstances the woodcut rather than operating as a spectacle to deter people from cavorting with witches, or becoming a witch, actually encourages engagement through the visual. Of course that particular possibility derives from a contemporary viewer's standpoint, although it would be difficult to not imagine with all of its inherent flaws that people who first viewed this woodcut weren't taken by the activity being depicted. Resonating with a commonality for the domestic, the ritual implements on display became significant because of their connection to the home. Based on personal experience the use of these specific utensils generated a sense of knowing, simply by there already being a consensus about their identity and appropriate application.

The ability to capture an Otherness without reference to everyday activities cannot therefore be ignored. But what are the connections and disconnections being experienced by the Self when viewing this assemblage of witches caught in the midst of ritual action? Their work is exposed suddenly in this portrayal of magic, naked and oblivious to observation, they are absorbed by the moment. Moments such as these push the viewer into restrictive scenarios where an expectation to imagine brings another altogether more personal descriptive narrative to the vision. Forcing the viewer

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to observe the whole ritual semblance the Self is orientated into an oppositional position. It is impossible to avoid this outcome, because the fantastic element to the visual can only be comprehended by disembarking from the contact site. Separating the subjective Self from the objectification of the Other is more explicitly undertaken because the significance of the portrayal confirms for the person aspects of their knowing as well as inferring the presence of unknowing silences. As such the process of depicting an Otherness substantiates prevailing tensions between different states of Being. On the one hand there is the interaction with a known world, however this particular perception is never completely realised, but instead shifts and changes according to the various types of daily engagement. These combine to make an impression of the subjective identity which itself divides according to the notion of Self as an individual and the impression others have of the person. Each perceptive process has influence over how the self is constituted. Recognising this intersubjective dimension explains how the accumulation of influences makes a person appear as the summation of opinion.

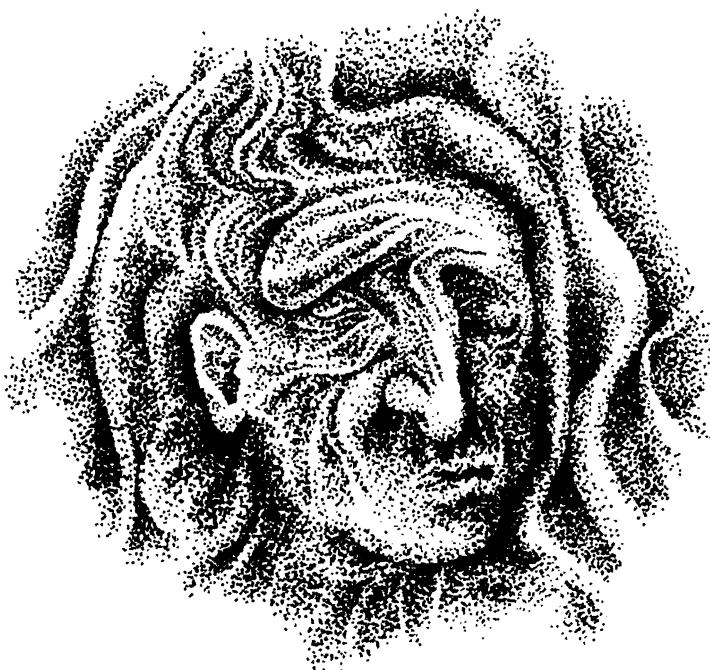
The intersubjective moves the viewer away from the notion that the Self authors the world alone, but is rather subject to external influences. It is in fact a continuous process which is being witnessed. For the need to appraise, so as to make a claim on the world, transforms elements from the everyday into significances for the beholder. When this is applied to affliction and the inherent tension between what is seen and unseen, the same appraisal process appears to take place. Baldung's witches did not manifest out of thin air, but appeared as a composite articulation of his imagination

based on a salient interface between Self and Other.

But this probability runs even deeper, because the idea that we have found a subject worth separating becomes another part of the intersubjective enquiry. Finding reason for why divisions need to exist catches the individual in an endless cycle of 'becoming'. Shifting between temporal states of Being draws out oppositions, which are then raised for the purpose of making sense of the world. According to this cycle of knowledge acquisition, the emotive topics of affliction, abnormality and deformity confront the mind with possible scenarios which threaten to degrade the complete impression a person has of him or herself. It is probable the Self will project a contextual scenario which distorts its own physical capacity to make sense of the Other. Having been exposed to a prevalent sense of Otherness by imagining the extent of an affliction upon a stable constitution opens the individual's sensibilities to these external forces.

Exerting an imagined difference accentuates the witch's position towards the everyday. But this difference, the very face of the Other, extends beyond our imaginative ability. Through affliction the form of Otherness appears as something to possibly fear. The transformative quality it brings subdues any lasting uncertainty people may have towards them. By articulating the mysteries of the hidden world through physical difference leads to the world inhabited by others emerging from the dim recesses of history. This however can only happen because the witch is not limited by the constraints of the everyday. In the world they inhabit, their relationship to their own understanding of Otherness has opened up potentials for comprehending ourselves and the many visible and invisible variables, which together makes

our world compellingly more fascinating than one might have first assumed.



¶ Conclusion



**THE OCCULT IMPLICATIONS
FOR THE AFFLICTED MIRROR**

THE CONCEPTUAL ASPECT of *The Afflicted Mirror* has focussed on the notion of Otherness. Never being defined directly, the narrative of this work has examined the juxtaposition of absence and presence to explain what this prevailing Otherness might mean. Attempting to define this numinous quality which is something different from what we can normally perceive, raises interesting questions about how absence and presence are defined and then used to explain difference. Assumptions abound with regards to how these two oppositions are made. Only in light of the affliction does the idea of difference appear to become accentuated. There remains a difference, in that there is a distinction between metaphysical and physical, yet any individual intentional stance depends on pre-given assumptions. These predicate the reflexive response by presenting to the consciousness possible explanations. Drawing from an intersubjective consciousness where the influence of others has contributed towards how people see the world and their place in it, determines the defining of absence and presence. To assume that there is a universal commonality to a definition has to be considered erroneous, that's if the

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premise of the affliction is to challenge preconceptions about our relationship to the metaphysical, with all of its varied and inherent configurations.

It is possible to run this course even further into the depths by assuming the metaphysical is a stable entity. It could be assumed that the metaphysical only becomes so after the event has taken place, once the event has been told and elaborated upon. Only then does it become something different, although its description even under this light is subject to a specific intersubjective gaze. Yet we still have to acknowledge the possibility that the metaphysical does not actually denote difference but rather sameness. It being the projection of ourselves into a world that cannot be physically touched, the metaphysical extends into the beyond a nebulous nothingness. Nevertheless the extension also works as an intervention since the metaphysical has the ability to impede on everyday activities. Though it may be difficult to assess the trajectory of ourselves in this matter, keen as some may be to see the unusual in our daily lives as an intervention from an Other, it is possible our imaginings about there being an Other informs the intervening style and substance of the experience. This does not take away from the possibility that Otherness has independent intentionality. Rather by questioning its composition the possible dimensions of Otherness provide insight into its significance for the occult world.

Conclusion

THE PRESENCE AND ITS SIGNIFICANT OCCULT PARTICLE

To discern something as being present in a material way requires the acknowledgement of something being there that can be seen. In this way having presence requires a bodily correspondence with something existing beyond the confines of the physical. Having physical form this presence is here considered to be that of an object which lies in a distinct location from that of the body. We see this presence and yet our relationship to the presence is determined by its significance. As a consequence the being in close proximity to the body involves the consideration of what the presence is and what we may think about it. This is in sharp contrast to presence being something which is felt and not necessarily seen say as part of a spiritual experience. And although we will eventually come to this kind of presence, for the time being it is the material presence which requires our immediate attention.

To develop a presence the material object, whether it is a sign, a carving or a statue has to first of all attract our attention. Although everything in the material world has a presence, the accord we give to the object is dependent on our focus, interest and proclivity to identify at the time of making contact. Embellishing the artefact with illocutionary superlatives emboldens the presence of the image. How we address the object and speak to others about it gives the object a greater sense of presence. But how is this possible? It is because presence can never be stable, it fluctuates according to how people approach the object. When people speak of "being in the presence of" it indicates an expansion in de-

tail about the situation at the time of apprehension, while embedding the response by the individual to the object. Indicating a response towards something makes the presence present. A key aspect to there being something which is considered present, depends on engaging with an object on a level where it has become more than it would have otherwise have been. The transference from acknowledging to the making of a signifier verifies the conscious decision, which is required to transform the object into having a presence.

One way of externalising this making of presence is by providing a personal example. Sometime ago I entered an antique market, and having spent some time surveying the stalls I beheld a small bellarmine bottle in a display cabinet. Positioned amongst other nondescript items which I did not stop to take account of, presented a contextual foil which accentuated the incongruity of the vessel's position. Commonly referred to as a witch's bottle these were used to ward off evil spirits across the 16th and 17th centuries. Sometimes found under the threshold of old houses or in the River Thames, these were also thought to have been used as cursing vessels, having been found to include animal parts impaled by nails and pins. My attraction towards this artefact did not diminish even when it was found that these intended objects were no longer contained within. At the time of finding the vessel I was not conscious of any explicit cognitive processes contributing towards this being something I wanted to acquire. Yet my interests predicated my desire to own this vessel. Other contributing factors also played a part, for instance I needed to assess whether this was at a price which could be afforded. Whether this actually gave the object a partial presence is debatable and yet the fact of the matter

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remains that its acquisition depended on its material and subjective value.

My proclivity to find this vessel as enticing illustrated my focus as being somewhat different to the countless others who may have passed the object and had not noticed or had no interest in what it was. Its presence became so because of my inclination towards it as a historical artefact and its relationship to old witchcraft practices. Overarching categories often mask the exact aspects of the connection being made, yet I knew it was not the history *per se* or the sublimated witchcraft practises which truly reified the object into having a presence, but instead the survival of the artefact and its personal yet forgotten history. With this, the importance of it having a presence was made and amplified by the combination of referential factors which together gave it an overwhelming absence. My predetermined inclination for engaging these factors gave the vessel a significant depth. When placed together with a corresponding pre-given proclivity for collecting artefacts which resonate with human magical endeavour the presence became set. Combined with the circumstances leading up to finding the vessel, the choices which were made on where to go, with the potential prospect of finding something significant, also primed the situation with a potential for making an unanticipated encounter special.

Yet with all of this composition, the details of the event where a presence was encountered only occurred after the moment and the subsequent acquisition of the object. Becoming aware of the processes involved which led to acquiring the vessel, gave the initial presence being experienced upon first seeing the object an added significance as the tale

was recounted to others. This doesn't mean however that the processes are ever made explicit, for even when reflections are conveyed there is a certain amount of censure that takes place. In principle the information about the experience is discerned as being relevant by assessing what people need to know. A decision on what details should be included or excluded when the tale is recounted is then determined by relating the pertinence of the subject to the person being told the story.

Experiencing a presence is not exclusively about what one can see. Nor does it depend on prerequisite sensibilities and presuppositions when assessing the aesthetic value of a physical object. Nor does it depend on it having a tactile quality. In the case of the bellarmine there are aspects of its presence which have never been defined by the physical. Keeping with its tradition, the presence of the vessel is about what lies beyond, in the imaginings that inform the purpose, from the intentionality which influences my imagination. This artefact hinders investigation, it is unlikely I will ever discover where it was found, or whether this was ever used as a witch's bottle, and I will never know what the thoughts were of the person who first used it, and the reasons for its use. These silences flood the senses with wonder and cause me to venture further conjecture. Lost to its original purpose, this bottle has a presence through its absence. Lacking a precise historical course invites my mind to colonise the empty spaces and give voice to what has been forgotten. Yet I do not know what has been forgotten and what has been retained. From the point when I first observed it resting in the cabinet I knew it had to be mine, but why? What were the reasons for this decision? Was it because of its presence or because

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of its absence? Not knowing its life history caused me to be fascinated. I pressed my presence into this absence with my partial knowledge and thereby made it my own. I superimposed my impression of meaning into its cavity and by doing so claimed ownership over it. In short, I gave the bellarmine a presence. Although this presence continued to hold no physical importance, it seized me with a desire to belong. Having no guardian, it coursed through centuries seemingly unblemished by its transit.

I now own this artefact, but its meaning will only live for as long as I live, we are connected, my presence gauging its presence by its absence to anything that I can relate too. Born of another time, it remains content to challenge me on how I might acquire its embedded vacant knowledge. This 'insignificant' bottle invites me to tap into its silence, to know its darkness, to understand what it means to forget. These are the emotions invading the absence that create a presence. It is after all, nothing other than a clay fired vessel, yet its function ripples through the ages and causes perpetual motion. There is nevertheless one aspect to all of this that troubles me. Am I not, by divesting my notion of Self into a physical object, afflicting its physical presence with a contorted absence which further leads to me feeling satisfied about making the acquisition? In its absence I am distorting its Otherness so as to accentuate a sense of difference to me. By it having an absence, which I have also authored, I have afforded myself the opportunity to make claims about its presence.

In a similar manner magicians mark their place for conjuring with signs which are in accordance with their fascination. Circles are marked with corn and meal and as they are

THE AFFLICTED MIRROR

formed so they become something significant. The magical circle depends on its demarcation to make it so. It does not exist as a mark of invited congress unless it first appears in material form. In a wood the circle inscribes the intention of the practitioner, it signals to the visible and invisible an intention to serve and conjure. The circle's presence however is only made so by it becoming visible. Its presence to a perceived Otherness only becomes significant once it has appeared before 'them'. The circle like the vessel has a presence because there is an overwhelming absence which cannot be contained. If this is indeed true then practitioners create distortions in their endeavour to "know more". Afflicting the absence by offsetting Otherness enables the presence of the here and now to penetrate the perceived absence with intention. Never complete, its aspect only speaks of one given potential amongst many. From the nothingness the space becomes colonised with our impression of what there should be. Gathering a selection of apposite meanings gives the opportunity to apprehend the extent of the deformation so as to make sense of the prevailing absence.

MAKING THE OTHER AN OTHERNESS

To acknowledge something as being Other involves accepting in the first instance a distance between the body and that which lies beyond the physical form. It carries with it the potential to be what we want it to be. Mutating to the requirements of the situation by adjusting to the conditions from which the perspective is informed, means the Other eludes perception. For it to truly be something different and remote

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it can only be constituted by nothingness. This doesn't necessarily mean it is void, but that there is no adequate measure by which to limit its potential. Although its potential is again predicated by what the viewer thinks the Other is, only then can any attempt to be made to access this phantasm.

Being undefined, this apparition brought on by believing there is something else out there, beyond our sight, has not stopped or limited people's desire to capture and contain that which cannot be held. Evidence to quantify the limit of its existence has been illustrated through the topics covered in this book. Depictions of the Devil, the witch's countenance, the lwa's appearance, all convincingly suggest their constitution pertains to their actual form. As has been argued above, the transformation of the Other, into something which has substance, which can then be related to, has resulted in their depiction relying on distortion. Unable to apprehend the purity of their form, their absence has been transferred into a presence by principally essentialising their imagined Being. Affliction has thus been used to mark their absence with qualities that reflect the contemporary world. Their afflictions thereby resonate with the conditions being experienced at the time. Nothing more than an approximation the Other has become so because it has been placed in opposition to the living world. And if this is true then the Other has been used as the mirror for understanding ourselves.

Throughout the course of time, god names, sigils and signs have been utilised to contain and bring focus to the nebulous. Numinous emanations from the other side have been perceived to be so because a name has been given by which that impression has been contained. Mastering the

occult mysteries has depended on the acquisition of knowledge from a source not of this world. Inspired insight has appeared as divine instruction, yet the circumstances which have led to the making of this gnosis has relied more on the innate proclivity of the individual to make sense of the physical world.

It is perhaps easy to overlook the role of the individual when considering how new magical works have been created. Those who were afraid of witches projected their fears and insecurities into Otherness and as a consequence gilded the witch with a diabolical ardour. Challenged and pilloried these persecuted individuals were doing nothing more than attempting to control their environment.

Evidence from Haiti also details similar examples, the lwa guide their devotees, conceal their true appearance and derail any semblance of equilibrium if their position is undermined. They reflect back onto Haitian society the vagaries of the everyday and the challenges that people face. Neither evil or good, they exist as people exist, and so it is that both lwa and people mirror the others behaviour. The Other in this instant becomes an Otherness, an unquantifiable reflection which distorts whenever an attempt is made to touch it. Like a finger which presses onto the surface of a pool, the ripples from making contact cause the tension of the water's surface to distort without end.

The conceptual aspect of *The Afflicted Mirror* has therefore relied on using the Other as an umbrella term for acknowledging an informed difference to everyday life existence. Given the contextual boundary of this work, recognising the existence of a difference, infers a metaphysical presence most noted by its absence in the physical. How the subject

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of Otherness then emerges from this obvious contradiction or tension between the idea of there being a presence or an absence further delineates the extent by which it is possible to assess the difference. Contained within the juxtaposition is an intentional desire to discover the inconsistencies in prevailing existential reflections. By its absence it is not normally possible to observe Otherness, because by its very difference it is something Other than what we can see. Yet suitably being aware of the constitution of an unstable perception, which relies not only what can be seen, but also what cannot be seen, suggests the relationship to difference depends on being fascinated by its formidable potential.





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