

## SPACE, TIME AND BODILINESS IN DOGON FUNERALS: A PRAXIOLOGICAL VIEW

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### *Introduction*

THROUGHOUT this essay, space, time, and bodiliness are considered as the main vehicles for constructing ritual meaning. Tracing back praxiology to one of its main roots, the French *Année* school, I first discuss bodily and spatial ritual behaviours and how they relate to meaning construction. Secondly, I discuss temporal aspects of ritual praxis, both syntactically (the notion of a processual development of rituals) and semantically (the notion of context, i.e. the ritual as a historically situated performance). In a third section—also to a large degree indebted to the *Année* school—I show how the general patterning of funerary ritual affects the meaning of its constituent parts, and how this allows for the structural meaning of the Dogon funeral. The ultimate aim, however, is to proceed to an alternative praxiological interpretation of the Dogon funeral, which I confront with the socio-structural interpretation of Barbara DeMott (1982).

### 1. *The Human Body, Spatial Thresholds and Boundary-Transgression in a Ritual Context*

The notion of the body is commonplace in anthropology today (e.g. Blacking 1977), but already in 1936 Mauss had published an interesting essay on bodily

techniques (Mauss 1950; Eng. transl. 1979). It remained unnoticed, however, for a long time, although it obviously influenced Bourdieu's *'théorie de la pratique'* (Bourdieu 1980). For Mauss, bodily techniques are understood as 'les façons dont les hommes, société par société, d'une façon traditionnelle, savent se servir de leur corps' (Mauss 1950: 365).<sup>1</sup> This socially determined habitus (ibid.: 368; the terminology may be compared interestingly with Bourdieu's) is not in the first instance an individual way of behaving, but expresses a social belonging: 'elles varient surtout avec les sociétés, les éducations, les convenances et les modes, les prestiges. Il faut y voir des techniques et l'ouvrage de la *raison pratique* collective et individuelle' (ibid.: 369, my emphasis).<sup>2</sup> If we add a Marxist dimension to Mauss's statement—for example, the concepts of 'class', economic determinism and 'collective misjudgement'—we are already very close to Bourdieu's *'sens pratique'*. Habitus is, according to Mauss, imposed by education and not primarily by imitation. Bourdieu translates this statement into his idiom of the 'incorporation' of the habitus and adds the Weberian notions of 'authority' and 'legitimation'. Two variables seem to determine, for Mauss, the differences of habitus, viz. gender and age (ibid.: 373), discussed respectively in Chapters 2 and 3 of his essay; everywhere we come across hints and insights that have been taken up and elaborated by Bourdieu.

Independently from Bourdieu, Devisch (1984) has developed a comparable body-centred outlook on cultural phenomena. What is remarkable is that his approach—as well as Bourdieu's—seems to have been developed primarily within, that is, as a reaction against, French structuralism. Devisch considers the body as a dynamic unity in space and time that actively interiorizes (through participation in activities) and exteriorizes (through activity in the world) a social and cosmological world-view. Perhaps one of the most marked aspects of orthodox structuralist theory is the use of binary oppositions in cultural analysis, the basic opposition being the nature/culture opposition in all its more specific variations (raw/cooked, female/male etc.). However, more important than these static oppositions are the continual dynamic transgressions between them, that involve concrete bodily actions (such as cooking and sexuality). In addition, these practices are often ritualized, or more generally, they involve certain cultural codes. This 'ternary logic', as it could be called to distinguish it from its binary counterpart, is present implicitly in Lévi-Straussian structuralism. But while Lévi-Strauss is mainly concerned with logico-cognitive boundary transgressions, these are correlated by both Bourdieu and Devisch with concrete bodily activities and the social and cosmological world they 'embody'. Both call themselves

1. '...the ways in which from society to society men know how to use their bodies' (Mauss 1979: 101).

2. '...they vary especially between societies, educations, properties and fashions, prestiges. In them we should see the techniques and work of collective and individual *practical reason*' (Mauss 1979: 101; my emphasis).

'praxiologists' because concrete practices rather than mental categories are their focus of observation and interpretation.

Within this 'oppositional thinking', rituals are conceived of, first, as procedures for creating or (re)emphasizing existing (social) oppositions, and, secondly, as means of mediating or transgressing oppositions or dissolving contradictions that are inherent aspects of their arbitrariness. To make this general discussion somewhat more concrete, I shall now examine two proposals more closely.

Devisch's semantic praxiology is the more explicit with respect to bodiliness. The structuralist heritage is acknowledged in his 'Beyond a Structural Approach to Therapeutic Efficacy' (1983). His main criticism of structural approaches relates to their dualism: they are insensitive to cultural practices as generative, self-contained processes, but instead explain them by reference to some other underlying code, such as formal and logical structures (Lévi-Strauss) or social structures (Turner). Devisch (the key reference here is 1984) tries to capture the auto-generative processes of cultural practices by concentrating on aspects of bodiliness as the main metaphor and referent in cultural symbolization. Underlying the conceptualization of the body-self, bodily functions and activities, the body in social interaction with others, and the body as a micro-metaphor of the world-view, we can discover a great number of cultural encoding orders (cf. Turner's 'root metaphors' (1974)) that are often based on relational, spatial or orientational metaphors (cf. Lakoff and Johnson's 'ontological metaphors' (1980)), thus encoding meaning in terms of up/down, in/out, front/back, on/off, central/peripheral, linear/circular and vertical/horizontal. These spatial metaphors are, according to Devisch, 'transferred' to such other domains as bodily functions and activities (e.g. ingestion, sexuality, commensality...) and life-cycle events (e.g. rites of passage). In combination with the model of metaphorical consonance between the bodily, the social, and the cosmological—inspired by Douglas (1976)—an integrated study of the relevant dimensions of culture becomes possible.

Bourdieu, especially in his *Le Sens pratique* (1980), is somewhat less concrete concerning the bodily referents of his theoretical framework, but he nevertheless qualifies his outlook on culture as an 'almost corporeal view of the world' (ibid.: 111).<sup>3</sup> Bodily actions interiorize or exteriorize 'a limited set of principles which are practically coherent' (ibid.: 125) and are representative of a particular socio-economic field (*champ*). In other words, a certain *croyance pratique* constitutes, and is constitutive of, the belonging to a certain field. The most apparent socio-economic division is the one between the sexes; it has a bodily foundation and is the fundamental principle underpinning the division of labour. In the symbolic associations established mainly on the basis of the male-female opposition, the body—with its properties and movements—functions as an 'analogical operator establishing all kinds of practical equivalences between the various divisions of the social world' (ibid.: 120).

3. Unless indicated otherwise all translations into English are mine.

These general principles concerning bodiliness can be translated into ritual behaviour and its symbolic meaning (the key reference here being *ibid.*: 333-439). The logical principles underlying practice are expressed in ritual through bodily actions: 'ritual gestures...translate into unthinking movements, turning right or left, entering or leaving, turning upside down, tying and cutting, the most characteristic operations of ritual logic, unite, separate, transfer, reverse' (*ibid.*: 362). The central concern of cultural world-views is the establishment of order in the apparently chaotic world, but any ordering necessarily implies the introduction of distinctions between two opposed but complementary opposites. Thus, the pre-eminently cultural act is the *arbitrary* introduction of conceptual *limits*, and the 'function' of, for example, rites of passage and ritual in general concerns the *legitimate transgression* of these limits. The most basic cultural division, the separation between the sexes, acts as a paradigm for the two crucial ritual-symbolic practices: the *unification of separated opposites* (for example, in marriage) and the *separation of united opposites* (for example, in circumcision (*ibid.*: 366-67)).

Despite the importance of aspects of bodiliness and bodily movements in both these recent theories, I do not know of the existence of any general study relating aspects of bodiliness to spatial aspects of ritual behaviour. This is one of the reasons why what follows should be considered only an outline.

The human body as a closed 'container' distinguishable from the surrounding environment in its upright position, bilateral symmetry and sensory frontality leads to an 'innate' tendency to spatially discriminate in and out (centre/periphery), up and down (transversal axis), left and right (orientation), and in front of and behind (the latter two taken together constituting direction in a relative or an absolute sense). These basic spatial dimensions of the body coincide with those required to establish the Dogon metaphor of time, the spiralling movement (cf. Griaule and Dieterlen 1965: 164-5).

So, in a first, *static* approach, we can distinguish the following fundamental spatial *oppositions*:

in/out : centre/periphery  
 up/down : transversal axis  
 left/right : orientation  
 front/back : (absolute) direction

A more *dynamic* reading concerns mainly the *transitions* by means of bodily movements between these opposites:

inside/outside : entering/leaving (horizontality)  
 upwards/downward : ascending/descending (verticality)  
 to the left/right : turning counterclockwise/clockwise (circularity)  
 forwards/backwards : approaching/withdrawing (proximity)

These spatial dimensions, separately or in combination, constitute a list of ritually relevant spatial behaviours, directly related to bodily activities and, in the case of

the Dogon, a temporal metaphor. So far, I do not claim the list is of more general relevance; I only claim that it is a useful heuristic device for analysing the ritual behaviour of the Dogon.

The concrete 'ternary logic', which concerns first of all the points of transition, the thresholds, or the *boundaries*, changes with each concrete context. They have a different reference when we talk of the human body, domestic space, or any particular spatial arrangement, but they are conceptualized analogously. For example, when we refer to the body in its *physical* aspect, we are mainly concerned with the bodily surface with its orifices, entries and extensions. Some of these are considered as establishing contact with the outer world (the most obvious example being speech), while others are in the first place receptive of outer stimuli. In other words, we inevitably enter the world of *social* bodiliness, the body in interaction with its surrounding social world. Simultaneously, we enter the area of symbolizations of (aspects of) the body, which cannot be discussed in any general way. There exists a huge literature on various aspects of this topic, but so far as I know it has never been integrated into an encompassing viewpoint on bodiliness. Common to all these aspects of bodiliness is the concern with areas of interaction, of boundary-transgression, that are metaphorically transferred to other cultural domains.

The body is, however, not only a 'closed container' in interaction with the environment. The individual performs actions *with* his body; he uses the space surrounding him, he moves around and gesticulates. These actions can be of various sorts; they include technical actions, social (inter)actions, random actions, and so on, but also ritual actions. This latter, special class of actions seems to display one remarkable characteristic: they are to a high degree stereotyped. This is also true of a lot of purely technical actions: in order to achieve a certain aim, I have to do this and that. But ritual action is different from technical-scientific action in that it does not seem to attain goals; it is *repetitive* action in its purest form, *without any direct purpose*. Contrary to random action, ritual is not only repetitive, it is also to a high degree *non-random*. Almost every action, every movement, appears preconsidered. For example, the spatial dimensions used in ritual action often relate to the basic spatial dimensions outlined above. Ritual action makes use of simple spatial distinctions, and all they can represent metaphorically, to create meaning.

The danger of projection involved in these viewpoints is not to be neglected. If ritual action makes use mainly of spatial distinctions, and if the spatial distinctions I make are really basic, and if these spatial notions really refer to underlying aspects of time, social structure, and world-view, then—and only then—will what I say make some sense. All I can say in defence of this proposal is that it seems at this moment the only model that is able to allow for a fresh outlook on the disparate data at hand concerning the Dogon. It is a generative model; it enables the development, on the basis of a limited set of principles, of an integrated view of the way Dogon conceive of the world and give it meaning.

## 2. *Temporality: Process and Meaning*

In a very general sense, ritual develops 'in' time. Its performance is often concerned with seasonal changes (cyclical rites) and individual life-cycle changes (rites of passage). But also internally, within the ritual performance, temporal aspects occupy a crucial role: ritual actions are repetitive, ritual dances are rhythmic and require synchronization. It is not, however, to these properties that I want to draw attention in the first place, but rather to the more general question of the relationship between processual aspects of ritual and the meaning of ritual action. In other words: how is meaning constructed in the processual development of ritual actions?

Recent anthropological theory shows a growing concern with process (Vincent 1986). A first expression of a processual approach to ritual can, however, already be found in Van Gennep's classic study, *Les Rites de passage* (1969; orig. 1909). Van Gennep considered the meaning of ritual actions to be dependent on the specific position they occupy within the three-phase ritual structure he laid bare. Van Gennep's approach must be considered in the first place as an attempt to supersede a *syntactical* meaning-component; meaning is related to the structure of rites of passage.

Ritual is situated temporally in yet another way. A common feature of a lot of recent theories is their concern with context as a *semantic* selector: the cultural context in general, but especially the internal ritual context establishes specific relationships between ritual symbols, actions etc. These relationships, such as contrast, opposition, before and after, influence their meaning. Bourdieu's theory of ritual, for example, stresses that each interpretation of ritual action has to take into account the global cultural context as well as the place the separate actions occupy within the course of the ritual. According to Bourdieu, the meaning of ritual actions is simultaneously determined by paradigmatic relationships of meaning within the cultural system or subsystems (organized, according to Bourdieu, on the basis of a 'logic of distinction'), and by the paradigmatic relationships between the different elements of the ritual that limit the arbitrariness of their meanings (1980: 18-19).

In Dolgin, Kemnitzer and Schneider's (1977) view on contextual meaning-selection, symbols and meanings are not considered as objects, but primarily as relationships. The relationship between a symbol and its meanings is seldom established by means of pure reference, but rather by means of metasymbolic aspects, such as the context within which they appear. In view of their conception of symbols as being polysemous, the context has to determine which meaning becomes dominant in each concrete appearance of the symbol or symbolic action:

[all meanings of a sign] are equally part of the shared meaning of the sign. What makes one meaning 'primary' is the fact that it is the meaning which is normatively proper for that particular *context*; all other meanings associated with that sign, but in other contexts, become subordinate...the argument we are making, therefore, is that the *structural-processual* description of the cultural system as a whole...is

necessary to and part of understanding any aspect of it, any one act or event. (ibid.: 29)

They thus emphasize the close relationship between structural and processual aspects in the analysis of the meaning of symbolic acts. Structural analyses of meaning are possible, but only the historically situated performance within a culturally defined context will give insight into the particularity of meaning. Since only the concrete context of appearance can determine the meaning of the symbols and actions, symbolic theory has, according to Dolgin *et al.*, to evolve towards a praxis-theory that leaves room for the adjustment and production of meaning in a historically unique performance (ibid.: 36-8).

### 3. *Funerary Ritual Patterning and Meaning*

The basis of anthropological theory concerning the ritual accompaniment of death was laid by two sociologists of the French *Année* school, Arnold Van Gennep and Robert Hertz. In *Les Rites de passage*, Van Gennep presented a general scheme applicable to all rites of passage, including funerals. The general scheme he proposed is ingenious in its simplicity and of wide relevance. It is based on the principle that one conceptual category (e.g. death) creates a binary difference (e.g. alive/dead) that requires a ternary structuring to overcome the opposition (e.g. living/dying/death) (cf. Huntington and Metcalf 1979: 9). So, rituals in which a passage between categories is established will possess a triple structure, viz. separation from the first category, aggregation to the second category, and an intermediary, transitional liminal phase full of ambiguity (see also Turner 1969).

Of more immediate relevance to the meaning of funerary rituals is the study of Hertz (1907) concerning the so-called second funeral. The originality of Hertz's study lies in his coupling of the degeneration of the physical body with the transition of the spiritual principles. The disintegration of the corpse is a precondition of the final aggregation of the 'soul' to the ancestral world. Transition into another world presupposes destruction in this world. The mourning period between first and second burial is intended to make this decomposition of the corpse possible. Hertz distinguishes three factors involved in funerals—mourners, corpse and soul of the deceased. According to which two factors are coupled to each other, he gives three different explanations for identical practices. To illustrate this, I shall discuss briefly the well-known fear of the body of the deceased. Fear of the corpse results from its metaphorical coupling with the soul; as long as the corpse is not decomposed, the soul of the deceased threatens the living. The relationship between body and soul determines the *shape* of the ritual (e.g. double burial). Fear of the corpse is not of a psychological, but of a sociological nature. The deaths of a child and a group leader, for example, are reacted to differently. The attitude of the mourners *vis-à-vis* the corpse is an

expression of the social order and determines the importance and the *impact* of the ritual. The pollution emanating from the dead body is a consequence of the gradual elimination of the deceased as a social individual. This elimination seriously disturbs the relationships between the living, in the sense that they are also in a transitional phase that gives rise to a redefinition of the social relationships (for example, the wife becomes a widow, the oldest son becomes head of the family, and so on). These general aspects (three phases, gradual uncoupling of body and soul) still constitute the basis of anthropological interpretation. In addition, funerary rituals have other marked characteristics: the prominence of the integratory rituals (third phase), their strong processual structuring, and the mutual interdependence between the various factors involved, to which I now turn.

In funerary rituals, the emphasis is unmistakably on the aggregation of the deceased to the ancestral world. This was already noticed by Van Gennep (1969: 209-10). Secondly, the transition of the deceased is not realized through one ritual performance, but through a complex ritual cycle. The strong proliferation of the liminal period (the mourning), gives rise to a long interval between the actual, physical death and the final integration. Although this is true for other rites of passage too, they never seem as marked as in the case of funerary rituals. The difficulty of the transition, and the strong ambiguity *vis-à-vis* the corpse can partly account for this state of affairs. While other rites of passage establish the individual as a whole in a new status, the 'goal' of funerary rituals is precisely the de-structuring of this unity. The individual is split into separate entities that are symbolically irreconcilable and hence require separate ritual handling. On the one hand, the physical body, impure, dangerous, and contagious, has to be discarded; on the other, the spiritual principles, also dangerous but at the same time beneficial, have to be (re)integrated into the 'hereafter'. The gradual separation of body and soul has, in addition, strong repercussions on the position of the close kin, who remain in mourning as long as the transition and the separation is not completed. This already shows how the situation of, and the attitude towards, the three funerary 'protagonists'—the mourners, the body, and the soul—are strongly interdependent. Hertz (1907: 73-4, 82) especially stressed this third property of funerary rituals.

After the fruitful period of theory-formation by members of the *Année* school, there were many substantive contributions to a general theory of funerary ritual. Till late in the 1950s, anthropology was stuck in an atheoretical and cultural relativistic period, from which it escaped only fairly recently with the rising interest—especially in France—in thanatology. Nowadays, we can speak of an 'anthropology of death' (Bloch and Parry 1982; Huntington and Metcalf 1979), which is mainly an attempt to bring about a synthesis of the more sociologically inspired tradition of Hertz and Van Gennep with the symbolical tradition that dominated anthropology in the 1960s and 1970s.

#### 4. Dogon Funerals: Description

The Dogon funerary cycle consists of three important rituals: the funerals proper that concern us here, the Dama—a kind of second burial, and the Sigi—a sexennial rite of regeneration (for the latter, see Verboven 1986).<sup>4</sup>

Immediately after a death, the funerary toilet is begun, including shaving the hair of the dead, temporary residence of the *nyama* (the vital force) and the *kikinu say* (the positive souls), fixing a bandage over the lips, and wrapping the corpse in a shroud. After the toilet, the younger children and the widow are brought to the body.

If the deceased took part in a Sigi ritual, on the first night after his death the Great Mask will be exhibited by the *inne puru* (impure men) against the wall of his house in an adjacent street, while his male and female relatives mourn on the roof of the house. The Great Mask is leaned against the wall and a male member of the family standing on the roof attaches a live chicken to the top of it. After this 'sacrifice', an *inne puru* takes the Great Mask in both arms to dance with it.<sup>5</sup> The Great Mask is brought back to its cavern where the chicken is sacrificed and divided between the *inne puru*.

On the next day at sunrise, the corpse is wrapped in the funerary blanket belonging to the patrilineage (*ginna*), and fixed on a stretcher. Outside, the Tegi Tegi (*action de grâces*) ritual is performed, which consists in a long declamation thanking the deceased for everything he realized during his life and wishing him a safe journey to the other world. On the stretcher, an *inne puru* sacrifices a chicken, given by the son or the father of the deceased, while the men stand in a row facing eastward and the oldest among them recites a long prayer. As soon as the prayer is finished, the men are replaced by the women, who kneel near the stretcher, and offer cowrie shells ('*qui reviendront par la suite aux ine puru*') and cotton ('*qui sera remis au chef du clan voisin*').

Finally, the funerary procession leaves the village in the direction of the burial-place. The stretcher, carried by the *inne puru*, is accompanied by an orchestra and the relatives of the deceased, one of them carrying the calabash containing the hair. When they reach the burial-place, the guard opens the entry to the cavern and enters first, followed by some young male relatives. The funerary blanket is left outside, while the corpse, together with the calabash containing the hair of the deceased, is deposited in the cavern, its feet pointing towards the exit. The funerary shroud is removed and the bandage covering the mouth is cut through. The entry to the cavern is closed, and for six consecutive nights, until the beginning of decomposition, the cavern is guarded.

4. This description is based on the following sources: DeMott 1982; Dieterlen 1941; Griaule 1938; Imperato 1971; Leiris 1933, 1934.

5. The spatial connotations of these dances (vertical mask/horizontal corpse, up/down, before/behind, left/right, centre/periphery) are obvious (see Griaule 1938: 284-6).

From the late afternoon onwards and during the evening of the day of the death, mock battles take place on the terrace of the mortuary house. The male relatives, under the leadership of the eldest among them, go to the mortuary house and assault its roof-terrace, brandishing their lances and shooting in the air. In the course of the evening, groups of men from other families attack in turn the mortuary terrace, imitating war and hunting scenes. Finally, each group conquers the terrace, says thanks to the deceased, and descends to the yard, where they are offered millet beer. Afterwards, each group leaves for the *tay* (the public square). Successive lineages thus perform mock fights with the relatives of the deceased, who stay on the terrace until the next morning.

During these mock battles, the female relatives are present in the streets surrounding the terrace. They make vague dance movements and point their calabashes in the direction of the terrace. Kneeling down, the widow, the mother, and the sisters of the deceased scratch the ground with their calabashes. At a certain moment the sisters of the deceased arrive holding millet stalks, which they beat on the ground four times (left, left, right, right); holding their arms horizontally, they balance laterally. The women 'congratulate' each other, roll themselves in the dust, and throw sand on each others' heads.

As mentioned above, each group of assailants goes to the public square, north of the village, after the mock battles. The first group to arrive there is stopped by an elder, who engages in a hand-to-hand fight with the eldest of the arriving group, but finally has to surrender. New groups arrive, and all the men engage in hand-to-hand fights, some of them simulating getting into trouble or behaving as if dead; but always the elders intervene and separate the fighters with apparent blows with the fist or by knocking their straw hats, while at the same time always congratulating both sets of adversaries.

On the second day around noon, a group of men from lower Ogol, including adolescents and children, leaves the village and goes to the place called *yagama tay*. They are divided into two groups and a battle develops, leading to a general muddle, after which hand-to-hand fights develop. Meanwhile, the women have also reached the place by a different road. They line up to the east of the men, together with the orchestra. Suddenly, a fire flickers up to the south of the fighting scenes; after a short round dance it is extinguished. Men and women return separately, but following an identical route, to the village.

Meanwhile, the archery has started on the *tay*, beginning with the children, followed by the adolescents, and finally the adults. Some marksmen approach the target in a row and threaten it with their bows. They return to the centre of the *tay* where one of them launches an arrow, without bothering much about the target; they are encouraged by the surrounding women, the more so as they mimic and feint. From time to time, the archery is interrupted by salvos of gunfire by mourners from neighbouring villages who also attack the target. In the middle of the *tay*, near the rock or stone *anakade dumma* (*pierre du brave*), the mortuary blanket is exhibited, surrounded by women, relatives and the widow. New arrivals first attack the target and then greet the blanket, brandishing their lances and

exchanging congratulations with the relatives. The widow sits squatting while she receives condolences.

During the afternoon of the second day, five masked dancers, preceded by an orchestra and non-masked dancers, arrive on the *tay* from the east to perform the Baga Bundo.<sup>6</sup> Hastily, the women leave the *tay* and watch the ritual from the surrounding terraces. Four Bede masks encircle a Mulonu (who will later on address the audience), the Sirige mask standing in the centre in front of the funerary blanket, and a sister of the deceased (the future *yasigine*, who initially imitates the movements of the four Bede masks but later sits down at the feet of the Mulonu). After a while, the four Bede masks kneel down at each side of the funerary blanket, beating the ground to the left and the right of the blanket with millet stalks. They change places three times. During the preceding action, the Sirige mask positions itself at some distance from the funerary blanket and bends its long plank towards it, touching the ground with its extremity to the left and the right. Finally, the Mulonu addresses the audience, and the masks return to the cavern of the masks.

After a while, hunters appear on the *tay* from the west. Some of them carry game with them, and they make a tour around the square in a counter-clockwise direction. As soon as they have formed a circle, they turn their faces towards the centre and move on laterally. After some time they form a compact group moving towards a group of menstruating women, who flee away towards the centre of the square, where other women have also gathered. In a group, the hunters encircle the mourning women gathered in the centre around the funerary blanket and return to their starting-point. Next, they climb on a rock one by one and aim their guns at the women, who withdraw to the periphery. The hunters surround the stone, *anakade dumma*, the funerary blanket, the widow and an elder with a drum, who are still present in the centre of the square. The direction of the dance changes regularly, and the dancers squat and stand up again repeatedly. Meanwhile, the elder plays the drum and the widow scrapes with her calabash to the left and the right of the rock to the rhythm of the drumming.

By dawn, a torch, a lance, a powder-horn and the gun of the deceased are drawn up in the middle of the square, and everyone kneels down before them. Again, complex imitations of hunting scenes are performed. Meanwhile, the Na Oyi (*mère donne*) ritual takes place. One of the male uterine relatives of the deceased steals (or at least simulates stealing) the funerary blanket but is caught by the agnatic relatives. In exchange, they receive a goat.

As soon as the funerals have ended, the arrow of the deceased is broken and the pieces deposited in a special cavern where drawings are executed. During the following six days, the funerary blanket is exposed on the yard of the mortuary house to give late arrivals the opportunity to greet and honour the deceased. After that period, it is washed and returned to the head of the patrilineage.

6. For diagrammatic representations, see Griaule 1938 and Verboven 1986.

### 5. *Structural Meaning and Bodily Aspects of the Dogon Funeral*

From this description of the funerary rituals, some structural aspects are immediately apparent.<sup>7</sup> We can distinguish two major 'behaviour complexes', linked to two different spaces inside the village, viz. the actions performed in, or in the neighbourhood of, the mortuary house on the one hand, and the actions performed on the public square on the other. These 'behaviour complexes' are also temporally differentiated: the rituals at the mortuary house are performed (mainly) in the evening and during the night following the death, while the main rites on the *tay* take place during the day following the death after the disposal of the corpse. Also, the general aspects of bodily behaviour are markedly different. These 'behaviour complexes' are thus each other's opposite in most respects, and the transition from one to the other requires the performance of several actions outside the village.

The night following the death, several rituals are performed on the terraces and in the streets adjacent to the mortuary house, in which sorrow and grief seem to be expressed in actions in which several objects, groups and individuals come into relationships of sharpened opposition. The most marked behavioural opposition is that between the aggressive and upright attitude of the men, simulating attacks on the mortuary house, and the passive behaviour of the women, creeping around on the ground or dancing in a semi-prostrate position in the streets below the terraces of the mortuary house.

However, the group of men does not behave as a unit. The male relatives of the deceased, that is, the patrilineage, try again and again to defend the terrace against the attacks of the visiting groups of males, but each time they 'lose' the fight. Afterwards, the visiting men go to the public square where they engage in ritual drinkings and face-to-face fights. On the whole, the behaviour displayed at the mortuary house is aggressive, chaotic, and uncontrolled, and stresses the oppositions between different social groups. At that moment, the corpse of the deceased is still present in the mortuary house and it is 'visited' by the Great Mask (if the deceased was a member of the Awa society). The mask is put against the wall and a live chicken is attached to it. Afterwards, and while the chicken is hanging from the top of the mask, a 'dance' is performed with the Great Mask. This dance is remarkable, the more so since it is the only occasion on which the Great Mask executes a dance, since it is extremely rich in spatial connotations. The liminal capacity of the Great Mask has also been noticed by DeMott (1982: 76):

the Great Mask seems to serve as a vehicle for the spirit of the deceased to aid his passage to the supernatural world...The dance of the Great Mask for the deceased and the sacrificial chicken seem to represent a form of sympathetic magic which

7. For diagrammatic representations, see Griaule 1938 and Verboven 1986.

first attracts and contains the spirit of the deceased in the animal vehicle and then released it into the bush, the domain of the supernaturals, through the sacrifice.

At sunrise on the second day several actions are performed that permit the transition to the second phase of the funerary ritual. The corpse of the deceased is wrapped in the funerary blanket, which is the property of the patrilineage, and carried to the burial-place outside the village. The funerary blanket, containing the beneficial spiritual principles of the deceased, is brought back into the village, more particularly to the public square where it is exposed. Almost simultaneously with the funerary cortège, two groups of young men and women belonging to the village of the deceased, which means that they belong to the same patrilineal clan, leave the village and go separately to the place *yagama tay* situated outside the village. After a rite focused on a fire, they return together to the village square.

It is high noon by now, and on the *tay* the funerary blanket has been exposed, next to which the widow is sitting, surrounded by female (uterine?) relatives. On the square, various ritual actions are performed that seem to possess as a major connotation the unity of the patrilineage (as opposed to the uterine relatives), but also the recognition of the necessary complementarity between men and women (marriage being exogamous at the level of the clan) to assure fertility and offspring. The men behave as a unit; the relatives of the deceased, as well as the other male participants, take part in the same activities, such as the hunting scenes and the archery. In contradistinction to the rituals performed during the evening and, especially, the night before, all actions are very strongly controlled, almost 'stylized', although the actions themselves still refer to potentially mortal activities. If aggression is simulated, it is directed against the menstruating women, representing (temporary) infertility, or the group of uterine relatives, who still have a certain moral right to the offspring of the deceased. The Baga Bundo ritual, in which a male Sirige mask and four female Bede masks participate, seems to express in symbolic action the necessary interdependence between male and female for overcoming individual death by procreation.

## 6. *Towards a Praxis-Based Interpretation*

I do not intend, and in fact I am not able, to interpret the funerary rituals of the Dogon in all their symbolic richness and complexity. A coherent, Western-logical integration of all the relevant components of meaning seems out of the question; or as Bourdieu (1980) would say, cultural meaning is not shaped by a *logique logique* but based on a *logique pratique* full of ambiguities and contradictions. However, I do believe that a 'generative logic' underlies the Dogon worldview and funerary rituals, based on some 'simple' space-time conceptions and their bodily behaviours, as well as their metaphoric extrapolations.

A recurrent property of rituals concerning death and decay is their connection with regenerative phenomena (Bloch and Parry 1982; Zahan 1970: 62). The greater part of the ritual symbolism can only be understood from this perspective of restructuring, reorganizing and regenerating the society confronted with death. Funerary rituals reintegrate the deceased into a new state, at the same time restructuring society itself. The funerals and the *Dama* are respectively the beginning and the ending of a funerary cycle concerned with the consequences of the death of an individual. The *Sigi* occupies a special position; it is also concerned with death, but at a conceptual level (Verboven 1986).

In the first phase of the funeral, the expressions of grief are very marked. The first night following the death, several rituals are performed on the terraces and the streets adjacent to the mortuary house, in which the corpse of the deceased is still present. Successive groups of related men engage in aggressive attacks on the terraces of the mortuary house, which is defended by the male patrilineal relatives of the deceased. They brandish their lances and shoot in the air with their guns. As they have defeated the male relatives of the deceased and conquered the terrace, the groups of males go to the public square, where face-to-face fights develop. The fighters are separated by the *Mulonu*. While the struggles at the mortuary house and on the *tay* continue, the women—and especially the closest female relatives of the deceased—creep around on the ground below the terraces of the mortuary house, making vague dance movements in a semi-prostrate position, and pointing their broken calabashes towards the mortuary house or scratching the ground with them. The behavioural oppositions between men and women are also noticed by DeMott, as is clear from the following quotation:

The male kin of the deceased thus engage in public displays of aggression and destruction which are associated with the masculine concerns of hunting and warfare...(the female kin) dance in a semi-prostrate position in the courtyard below the *ginna* terrace while striking millet stalks and broken calabashes on the ground...the women exhibit more passive and personal expressions of grief that are associated with the cessation of nurturing (the broken calabash) and the feminine concerns of sustenance (the millet stalks) ... the male vertical and dynamic posture may be contrasted with the female horizontal and more passive posture. (1982: 75-6)

The mock battles are regularly interrupted by other actions, such as the visit of the Great Mask, the dance of the sister of the deceased with the millet stalks, a recitation by an *olubaru*, or a ritual focused on a fire. On the whole, the behaviour during the evening and the night following the death is chaotic and aggressive. Several groups come into sharpened opposition with each other. The behaviour of men and women is markedly different, but also the men do not act as one group but confront each other individually and as groups of related men.

The next day, in the morning, the corpse is transported to the burial place. As with the mortuary toilet, the funerary cortège concerns almost only the close relatives of the deceased. The corpse is wrapped in the funerary blanket, which

is the property of the patrilineage and refers to the basic structures of the human world, viz. the social structure and economic activities. After the disposal of the corpse outside the village, the funerary blanket will be exposed on the public square.

While the relatives accompany the deceased to the burial place, two groups of youngsters—one male, the other female—leave the village separately. They meet each other on the place *yagama tay*, and after a short fight and a fire ritual, they return together to the village, more particularly to the *tay*, where meanwhile the archery has begun. According to DeMott, this is an expulsion ritual 'simulating the path of the deceased to the land of the dead' (ibid.: 76).

The actions performed on the public square of the village are completely different from the ones performed during the previous night. The males again act as one coherent group and even the patrilineal relatives of the deceased participate. The actions have not fundamentally changed in nature, but they have changed in quality. Although the actions in themselves still refer to such aggressive, blood-shedding activities as hunting, they are performed in a very controlled, almost stylized, manner, as if to suggest that death and the activities related to it are again under control. The women only participate passively; they surround the funerary blanket. At that moment, five masks enter the square to perform the Baga Bundo ritual and everyone moves to the periphery of the *tay*. This ritual sequence was interpreted by DeMott as a rite that is symbolically *parallel* to the rituals performed at the mortuary house the night before:

The *Baga bundo* seems to symbolically parallel the male and female roles of the mourners at the funeral. The four *bede* masks seem to assume a feminine role since they kneel, strike millet to the ground, and take a more passive part in the rite...The *sirige* seems to assume the masculine role, since the vertical superstructure of the mask suggests the dynamic, vertical posture of the male participants, and the up-and-down movements of the *sirige* performer mirror the ascent and descent of the male combatants during the mock battles at the *Ginna* house. Therefore, the *Baga bundo* appears to represent a symbolic enactment of the archetypal male and female roles at the funerary rites. (ibid.: 77)

This seems improbable to me, since my analysis is based precisely on the opposition between both 'behaviour complexes'. While the rituals at the mortuary house seem to express the disintegration of the social group as a consequence of the death of one of its members, the main connotation of the Baga Bundo appears to be a symbolic restructuring of the human world. In other words, I consider it as a reintegrative ritual sequence, in which the basic structure of the universe is expressed. The male *Sirige* mask stands in the centre of the scene, as a kind of *axis mundi* and faces the funerary blanket, temporarily containing the beneficial spiritual principles of the deceased. Symbolically, the mask refers to the patrilineal ancestors. The four female *Bede* masks circle around the *Sirige* until they kneel down at the four sides of the funerary blanket, beating the ground three times to the left and three times to the right of the blanket. During this action, the *Sirige*

dancer bends his long plank mask towards the funerary blanket and touches the ground to the left and to the right. In this action, all basic spatial (and temporal), social and economic distinctions of Dogon society are symbolically present and reactualized after their disturbance by the death of a member of the community. After the masks have left the square, the hunters appear on the *tay* and, as one group, surround the menstruating women, representing infertility, and chase them to the periphery of the *tay*. Implicitly, the complementarity of men and women for establishing offspring is recognized, but marriage being exogamous the uterine relatives have to be compensated a last time for their loss. The normal human order having been re-established, the closest relatives of the deceased enter the mourning period until the performance of the Dama.

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