

# AN EXPLORATION OF MAYA DEREN'S HAITIAN FOOTAGE AND JEAN ROUCH'S *LES MAÎTRES FOUS*

CAROLINA MARTÍNEZ LÓPEZ

TRANSLATED BY MARTIN BOYD

The objective of this article is to explore the relationship between Maya Deren's Haitian film footage<sup>1</sup> and Jean Rouch's short film *Les maîtres fous* (1955), two film projects that are practically contemporaneous. Although the connection between the two filmmakers has previously been explored in different articles and studies, including the emblematic *Ecstatic Ethnography: Filming Possession Rituals* (RUSSELL, 1999: 193-237), it is my intention in this article, in addition to addressing the cinematographic and anthropological aspects, to focus specifically on the choreographic and, above all, political aspects of these two projects.

Throughout this article, "Deren's Haitian footage" refers to her film project and to all the unedited footage that Maya Deren filmed from 1947 to 1954 on three trips she made to Haiti. The Haitian footage that has been made public is the product of the editing work completed posthumously by Deren's last husband, Teiji Ito, and his second wife Cherel Ito, which was presented in 1985 under the

title *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*, after the book of the same name published by Deren in 1953 with a prologue by the anthropologist Joseph Campbell (DEREN, 2004). For this film, the editors selected what they considered to be the best parts of the footage, to which they then added sound, using the audio from the recordings made by Teiji Ito and Deren in Haiti, together with a voice-over reading extracts from the aforementioned book.

## ORIGINS

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The Haitian project undertaken by Maya Deren, a prominent representative of the New York avant-garde of her day, had its genesis in the studies that she began thanks to grant to study religious dance awarded to her before making her first film *Meshes of the Afternoon* (Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid, 1943), and in her work with the anthropologist and choreographer Katheri-



Pictured, Maya Deren in Haiti (no date). © Tavia Ito

ne Dunham in the 1940s. These two experiences would constitute the foundation for the structure she would use in an effort to combine art and ethnography, further enriched by her study of the footage on Bali edited in 1952 with the title *Trance and Dance in Bali*, shot by the anthropologist couple Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, which would give her a more expansive vision of film as meditation, leaving a profound mark on her work.

The origin of Jean Rouch's film was quite different from the genesis of Deren's project. During the French colonial period Rouch arrived in the capital of Niger, where he would attend his first *Songhay*<sup>2</sup> possession ritual, an experience that awakened his interest in ethnography and his desire to document what he witnessed, first in the form of articles and subsequently on camera. In 1947, he released the short film *Au pays des mages noirs*, and in 1949 his *Initiation à la danse de possédés* won first prize at the Festival du Film Maudit, judged by a jury chaired by Jean Cocteau. In 1954 while he continued alternating between his work as an engineer and his ethnographic research in Africa with his teaching work in France, he travelled to Ghana and resumed his studies of Nigerien emigrants and their social organisation. His experience in Ghana resulted in the short film *Les maîtres fous*, which would win first prize in its

category at the Venice International Film Festival in 1957.

The original cinematic objective pursued by Deren with her unfinished project is documented in the application to renew the Guggenheim grant she received in 1946 (DEREN, 2007: 109-121), in which she proposed a film that would bring together the rituals of Haiti and Bali with children's games, and which would be based on the idea of "equivalent parallelism" (DEREN, 2007: 112). However, according to Moira Sullivan (2001: 212-213), shortly after arriving in Haiti for the first time in 1947, the filmmaker changed this initial idea and proposed as her main objective the authentic documentation of the rituals she was observing. By that time, Deren had already made four short films and had developed her ideas related to the manipulation of time and space through editing and the use of the camera (McPHERSON, 2005). She had also started to formulate the beginnings of her idea of *choreocinema*<sup>3</sup> and to play with the concept of ritual from a formal perspective with her film *Ritual in Transfigured Time* (1946), as well as from a theoretical perspective (DEREN, 2005: 35-109).

## **POLITICAL INTENTION**

What both projects did have in common from the beginning was a clear political intention, which is explained below.

Maya Deren shared with Rouch what for its time was an innovative use of lightweight filming equipment, as she arrived in Haiti with three cameras, various tripods and sound recording devices to become the first person to film ceremonies of the Voudoun<sup>4</sup> religion popular among the Haitian rural class. With *Les maîtres fous*, Rouch would be the first to film the possession ritual of the Hauka movement, a religious sect that spread throughout West Africa from 1920 to 1950, whose members were largely rural emigrants from Niger who came to cities like Accra, in Ghana, where they found work as labourers. The Hauka profes-

sed a type of cult which, in spite of being repeatedly repressed by the French authorities, spread with such force that an agreement ultimately permitted its practice in certain places and on certain days of the week. This was the situation when in 1954 Rouch, at the request of a group of practitioners, shot the film in question, showing the ritual of the Hauka going into a trance and becoming possessed by different spirits associated with the Western colonial authorities in what constituted a form of subversion of and opposition to their power: the governor general, the engine driver, the doctor's wife, the commander, the corporal, etc. The oppressed Haitians would also use possession dances, and the representation and embodiment of their oppressors in ceremonies as a form of rebellion against enslavement and to increase their moral strength and organisation. It is important to note that in these cultures, myth provides a model of moral values, sociological experiences and magical beliefs, and that religion fulfils a stabilising psychological function in an adverse world.

With their work, both Deren and Rouch sought to capture the reality of the side of the oppressed rather than the oppressors. In Deren's case this is made explicit in her book *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (DEREN, 2004, 6), and in both projects we can discern the implicit intention of the political documentary genre to give a voice to the oppressed and recover their history; these are works, as Bill Nichols suggests, where "textual authority shifts toward the social actors recruited" (NICHOLS, 1991: 44). This objective would tie in directly with the political ideas of both filmmakers: Trotskyist in Deren's case, anarchist in Rouch's. Thus, from a Marxist perspective, it could be argued that this form of rebellion of the oppressed against the colonial power is equivalent to the idea of rebellion and dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e., Gramsci's idea of hegemony: "[t]he proletariat can become the leading and the dominant class to the extent that it succeeds in creating a system of alliances which allows it



**Pictured, a Haitian possessed. Still frame from Maya Deren's Haitian footage (1947-54)**

to mobilize the majority of the working population against capitalism and the bourgeois State" (GRAMSCI, 2006: 192). From Rouch's anarchist perspective, however, the objective would be "to destroy the power, not to take the power. I think we are opening all the boundaries, and that with this tool, this media [the documentary film], people, without writing, can transmit their fantasies to some other people and to share that with them. And it was maybe the aim of the first anthropologists" (JOHNSON, 1978). Rouch's objective also ties in with Noam Chomsky's ideas related to the questioning of authority and of imperial systems: "the burden of proof for anyone in a position of power and authority lies on them. Their authority is not self-justifying. They have to give a reason for it, a justification. And if they can't justify that authority and power and control, which is the usual case, then the authority ought to be dismantled and replaced by something more free and just" (WILSON, 2013: 31).

In the case of Rouch's film, the subversive potential was so obvious that it was initially banned by the colonial regime, as it was taken as an insult to the British Empire. In the very beginning of the film, the producer, Pierre Baraunberger, warns us of the "violence and cruelty of some

scenes", suggesting that what we are about to see is "a ritual which is the solution to a problem of readaptation", which "shows indirectly how certain Africans represent our Western civilisation."<sup>5</sup> Jean Rouch also introduces us to the history of the Hauka, explaining that they are the product of the "clash" of young emigrants from the savannah "with the mechanical civilisation" of the big cities. He then underscores the same points made by the producer: "[n]one of the scenes is forbidden, but all are open to those who want to play the game. This violent game is merely the reflection of our civilization."<sup>6</sup> To soften this violence, from the beginning to the end of *Les maîtres fous*, Rouch's voice-over is positioned physically between the images and the spectator, creating a kind of Brechtian distancing effect that helps the viewer to deal with the sometimes brutal force of the images, and that allows the filmmaker to show his active participation in the ritual. Interspersed with the possession sequences in *Les maîtres fous* are a series of images related to the Day of Assembly, an official festivity where we see the actual imperial authorities, whose characters and protocols serve as a model of representation for the Hauka's ceremonies.

In terms of the questioning by the directors of the authenticity of these ceremonies, Rouch exp-



Pictured, a Hauka possessed. Still frame from *Les maîtres fous* (Jean Rouch, 1955)

lains in his comments on the film that this is not important; what really matters is that the ritual, in which for one day the Hauka are the ones in power, fosters a psychological liberation and vests them with the capacity necessary to endure a degrading situation with dignity. It could be argued that these possession dances, as rituals arising out of the world views of these peoples, constituted the alliance that would harbour the hope for social change, a social change supported by Deren's and Rouch's artistic and political acts of exposure and criticism, and which conceptually, both in terms of the filmmakers and of the groups filmed, can be linked with Gramsci's idea of the philosophy of praxis. This philosophy of praxis would serve these communities to establish a new hegemony through action and, according to the philosopher, would allow them "to work out [their] own conception of the world consciously and critically, and [...] to participate actively in making the history of the world, and not simply to accept passively and without care the imprint of [their] own personality from outside" (GRAMSCI, 1971: 58). From this point of view, both projects could also be linked to Hanna Harendt's idea of *vita activa* (2009: 21-30), as both the directors and protagonists of both projects combine observation and action to make a political statement.

On each trip she took to Haiti, Deren immersed herself more and more in the Haitian religion; she was even ordained as a Voudoun priestess and claimed to have been possessed on numerous occasions by the goddess Erzulie. At a certain point she stopped directly questioning the authenticity of the process she was filming to become a firm believer in what she was witnessing.

## THE CINEMATOGRAPHIC PROCESS AND ITS RESULTS

In Deren's case it is not possible to conduct an analysis of the editing process because, as noted above, her project never reached this stage. Four

years and three trips after her first stay in Haiti she completed her book *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*, “a tribute to the irrefutable reality and impact of Voudoun mythology” (DEREN, 2004: 6). In the prologue to the book, Deren expresses her dismay over the unfinished footage that she would never edit herself (DEREN, 2004: 5) and which, as she herself explains, forced her to abandon her ideas about the manipulation of reality through film: “I had begun as an artist, as one who would manipulate the elements of a reality into a work of art [...]; I end by recording, as humbly and accurately as I can, the logics of a reality which had forced me to recognize its integrity, and to abandon my manipulations” (DEREN, 2004: 6). Deren, who until that time had postulated in her films a manipulation of space and time using the resources offered by the camera and the editing room (DEREN, 2005: 110-128), was faced when working in the documentary genre with certain problems that she did not know how to resolve, either theoretically or practically, added to which was the fact of her personal involvement in the Haitian religion. It could be said that Maya Deren suffered the opposite fate of Leni Riefenstahl, who, as Àngel Quintana (2003: 20-21) recalls, never at any moment doubted the veracity of her films, always asserting that they were documentaries, when in reality what she was making were artistic propaganda films without ever questioning what reality she was filming or how she was filming it.

What can be asserted is that the Haitian project played an indisputable role in Deren’s subsequent development as a theorist and avant-garde filmmaker. For Catrina Neiman it was the most provocative project that Deren undertook and through it “she moved away from an intense self-exploration, from a kind of psychological to a mythological reading of the world. In regard to the films, she ceases to be the central figure and becomes more purely the medium” (CAMERA OBSCURA COLLECTIVE, 1979: 183). In the Haitians’ holistic

conception of the world, Deren would also discover a continuity to her ideas about Gestalt theory and its application to filmmaking. While in her previous films she was concerned with the meaning and form of ritual, in Haiti she would complement the ideas she outlined in her 1946 essay *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film* (DEREN, 2005: 35-109), in a sense closing the circle.

In the absence of a final edit of the Haitian footage, we can only analyse how the filmmaker undertook the process. Deren approached the filming in a way that would require minimal editing (“shoot to cut”, as she called it) (DEREN, 2005: 139), representing something of a break with her other work, which was characterised by a meticulous editing process and for never having to shoot the same take over, as this would entail the risk that what she had filmed would not be repeated (Sullivan, 2001: 212). In Haiti she also used a technique she called “planning by eye” (DEREN, 2005: 152), a kind of visual shorthand of what she was going to film. In a first stage, she concentrated on recording the ceremonies from different perspectives, including drawings, animal sacrifices, and numerous possessions; in the second stage she would concentrate on the dance, the ritual movements and the drums. In this second stage, she worked with a series of photographs taken at short intervals; while the individual images do not capture the movement themselves, when they were projected the eye would *read* the movement (SULLIVAN, 2001: 221). It is this stage that Deren felt resulted in something decontextualised and incomprehensible because the image was reduced to the shape of the body and of the movement (SULLIVAN, 2001: 214). On this point it could be suggested that the work method Deren was trying to use was the one she proposed in her *Anagram* (DEREN, 2005: 40), where she encourages the artist to work like a scientist, isolating one element from its context in order to manipulate it and produce a new result. Except for these stages in which she used still photos, she almost always makes use of long and

medium takes that move from the general to the specific. Normally the long takes show the ceremonial context and are followed by medium takes of the *servant* or the devout, so that we can see how the individual is absorbed by the collective, thereby producing a depersonalisation that we can also associate with Deren's Marxist ideas and which are related to her subsequent development as a filmmaker, as described above by Neiman.

For his part, Jean Rouch achieved with *Les maîtres fous* and with his other ethnographic films the perfect communion between cinema and ethnography that Deren did not, thereby becoming the creator of *ethnofiction*. It could be argued that before the official birth of the genre of Direct Cinema, Jean Rouch had already begun to practice it, given that he used a 16mm camera and he filmed without a script, surrendering to the adventure of the shoot, allowing for improvisation and seeking to capture reality in all its immediacy and to transmit the truth; however, he promptly realised that it was impossible to capture reality without taking part in it and without changing it, and so he decided to include himself and the camera as another character in his films, acknowledging his intervention. Unlike Deren, Rouch acknowledged his participation in the rituals he filmed and, in spite of being directly involved in them, he was able to maintain a fictitious distance that helped him produce films that were totally innovative and equally interesting for their form as for their value as documents. Rouch was aware that a true masterpiece is achieved when there is a conjunction between all the participants in each film, revealing the collective intuition, but he also knew that this rarely occurred and that, therefore, it was the director who had to create the right circumstances and shape the project so that the reality that he wanted to represent would be revealed. Colleyn (2004: 537) quotes Rouch as follows: "[w]hen the filmmaker stages reality, he explained, when he improvises its scenes, its movements, its shoo-

ting times, he is doing subjective things whose only code is his own inspiration."

In terms of the technical aspects of the editing of *Les maîtres fous*, the beginning of the film is dynamic, swift and musical, with quite short shots and sequences, leading us from the general to the specific, to the ritual that Rouch wishes to portray. Before exploring the religious ceremony and in order to begin to understand the situation of its protagonists, we are first shown a sample of city life, followed by the different professions practised by the immigrants, and then the different ceremonies and demonstrations that take place in the city on the weekends; after this, we



**Pictured, the crossroads, symbol of the Voudoun. Still frame from Maya Deren's Haitian footage (1947-54)**

are guided through the suburbs where the immigrants live and the centre where the Hauka meet: the Salt Market, where they read the newspaper, play cards, etc. Finally, we are led along a path to the site of the ritual, where the Government Palace and the Secretary General's office are represented, and the governor is represented by a kind of totem. Little by little, the ceremony begins and sequence shots begin to dominate, as the objective

is to try to film as much as possible to capture the here and now, the immediacy of the ritual. At minute 11, the dance begins.

## **CHOREOCINEMA, POSSESSION DANCES AND DUALITY**

With respect to the choreographic dimension, Deren attempted to delve deeper into her research through *choreocinema* and through the idea of ritual as a way of dissolving the individual in the collective through music and dance. From an artistic perspective, her interest also lies in capturing the moving body engaged in dance, the gestures, the drums and other ceremonial elements, and bringing all this together into a coherent whole through pans and changes of focal lenses (SULLIVAN, 2001: 217). Another obvious intention behind her footage was to offer a system of documentation that would integrate mythical symbols through movement, but Deren did not manage to develop it, as she realised that it was impossible to separate the dance of the Voudoun of their cosmology: the rituals were offered to the *loa* or gods in a complete ceremonial act, and in the decontextualised dances we cannot see either their moral meaning or the physical effort that characterises Western dance performances (DEREN qtd. in SULLIVAN, 2001: 208).

In Rouch's film the dance begins with a circular movement. A few Hauka move around an inner circle while others, acting as sentinels with pieces of wood representing rifles, move around an outer circle, supposedly guarding the first, thus initiating the representation of the authorities. The imagery in *Les maîtres fous* is powerful and often disturbing: men possessed with their eyes whirling like the ones we see in Deren's Haitian footage, foaming at the mouth, eating a sacrificed dog, burning their bodies with flaming torches. Also, just as we see with Deren's Haitians, the possession begins first in the movement of the feet, then in the hands, and the shoulders, until it



Pictured, Haukas possessed. Still frame from *Les maîtres fous* (Jean Rouch, 1955)

reaches the head and the dancers are completely possessed by these “new gods” who take the form of the authorities of the British Empire. However, Rouch's approach to filming lacks the conscious choreographic dimension that characterises Deren's material, the dialogue that she pioneered between camera and dancer. As early as her film *A Study on Choreography for Camera*, (1945) Deren had begun to make conscious choreographic use of the camera and the editing process, which she also formulates theoretically in her text *Choreography for the Camera* (DEREN, 2005: 220-224), where she explains that her aim was not to film the dance or the dancers, but rather to create duets between camera and dancer, while also vesting everything on the other side of the lens with movement. To do this she used variations in camera speed, and created leaps in space and in time through the editing process. Deren's way of moving the camera in the Haitian film footage reflects her idea of turning camera and dancer into dance partners. While Rouch simply filmed the dance, Deren contributed to the dance with her camera.

On a conceptual and anthropological level, both Rouch, founder of what has been called “vi-

sual anthropology”, and Deren share an interest in the idea of duality in Songhay and Voudoun cosmologies that underpin the rituals that we see in their respective projects. The main symbol of the Haitian religion is a coordinate axis that reflects the world of the living (the visible) and the world of the dead (the invisible), and this appears repeatedly in Deren’s footage. For the Haitians, the soul of the living is the reflection of the surface of the cosmic mirror, and is fixed to that surface by the existence of the body it reflects; with death, the force that fixed it will sink into the depths of the mirror and position itself at the bottom of the vertical axis (DEREN, 2004: 34-35). This idea is very similar to what Rouch found in his research into the Songhay people and their notion of *bia*, which “designates shadow, reflection and soul at the same time. This *bia* is linked to the body for life, although it can leave the body temporally while it sleeps (in dreams), or occasionally when awake (in a state of daydreaming, reflection or possession). At the moment of death it leaves the body to follow its own path in the next world. [...] Every person has a *bia* or double, who inhabits a parallel world, the world of the doubles. This world is the home of the spirits” (ROUCH, 2007: 32; 40). The concept of duality proposed here could also be compared to Edgar Morin’s view of the human being and the cinema in his book *L’Homme Imaginaire* (Morin, 1965).

The film *Les maîtres fous* ends with Rouch’s voice, leaving a door open to magic, to poetry, to the unknown: “[and] seeing this, we cannot help but wonder whether these men of Africa might not know some remedies that enable them not to be abnormal, but to be totally integrated into their environment. Remedies of which we are as yet unaware.”<sup>7</sup> These words tie in with the objective of Deren’s entire filmography: to show the invisible through the visible; an objective which, for her, should be aimed for by both the artist/magician and the scientist (DEREN qtd. in SULLIVAN, 2001: 212), revealing a certain metaphysical or

transcendental phenomenological dimension in both filmmakers that could be explored in a future study.

## CONCLUSIONS

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From the above analysis of the cinematographic, political, anthropological and choreographic aspects of the two projects that are the focus of this article, a number of conclusions can be drawn.

Rouch and Deren moved in an intermediate realm between art and anthropology, and both managed to become directly involved in the rituals they filmed, overstepping the boundaries between observer and participant. Both filmmakers documented rituals in a poetic way, different from the traditional approach, and began to be concerned about the role of the filmmaker and/or anthropologist, the role of the camera and the way in which the realities filmed were represented, responding to a new type of ethnography that Gregory Bateson (1958: 1) classified as “artistic”.

Both Deren and Rouch also illustrate Morin’s idea of the ethnographic film: “here appears the anthropological purity of the cinema. It encompasses the whole field of the real world that it places within hand’s reach and the whole field of the imaginary world, as it shares both the vision of the dream and the perception of wakefulness. The anthropological field that moves from the objective self (the double) to the subjective self (sense of self, soul), from the subjective world (anthropo-cosmomorphism) to the objective world (practical perception), is virtually in the *field of the camera*” (MORIN, 2001: 152).

We could consider both projects to be political exercises, beginning with the elimination of hierarchies as the filmmakers take part in the rituals, constituting an opposition to the clichéd colonialist cinema of directors like Machin, Poirier or Martin and Osa Johnson. The anti-imperialist Rouch was the first white director to film Africa from within, trying to show the African people

as they really were, free of clichés and prejudices; through his way of working, of sharing his work with the participants in his films, and his conscious involvement, he put into practice an anthropology which he himself described as “shared anthropology” – the same kind of anthropology that Deren would practice in Haiti.

Both directors established a clear precedent for the documentary genre and for the cinema in general, in the way they resolved or tried to resolve the new problems they faced when attempting a cinematic representation of the visible dimension of the ritual, but also the metaphor, the poetry and the invisible universes revealed in the form of that ritual, which constitute a major part of the identity of the peoples who perform it. Rouch's evolution in his works of *ethnofiction* would also lead him in time to develop sociological film exercises like *Chronique d'un été* (Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch, 1960), an attempt to portray French society that could be considered the very first expression of *cinéma-vérité*.

Deren's and Rouch's work had a particularly strong influence on the way that ethnographic documentaries were made. Notable examples of this could be John Marshall and Robert Gardner's *The Hunters* (1957), *A Kalahari Family* (John Marshall, 2002) and *Dead Birds* (Robert Gardner, 1963), or Hubert Smith and Neil Reichline's *The Spirit Possession of Alejandro Mamani* (1973). In Spain we also have clear examples of this influence in the documentary feature film *Dance to the Spirits* (Dansa als esperits, 2010) by Ricardo Íscar, and in Isaki Lacuesta's works *The Double Steps* (Los pasos dobles, 2011) and *The Clay Diaries* (El cuaderno de Barro, 2012). ■

## NOTES

1 Maya Deren's Haitian footage is made up of 6,000 metres of film (stored at the Anthology Film Archives in New York), together with 1,000 photographs and 50 hours of audio recordings (in 1953 the company Elektra

Records compiled a selection of these sound recordings and released it under the title *Voices of Haiti*). As I have not had the opportunity to view all of the material, I have based my analysis of her project on my viewing of certain parts of the footage that have been digitised, as well as on the writings of Deren and of Moira Sullivan. The material edited by Teiji and Cherel Ito is also occasionally taken as a reference. In the Boston University Mugar Library Special Collections, in addition to Deren's sound recordings, notebooks and diaries, there is a document of significant value for understanding the material, which Deren called “Guide to Haiti Film Catalogue”, a kind of visual inventory in which the filmmaker describes the best parts of her footage. In this guide she divides her material into 17 sections: the first eight rolls are dedicated to an eight-day *caille* ceremony filmed in 1947; another four rolls are of the same ceremony, which she filmed again in 1949; and finally, the last five rolls were of dances and ceremonies dating between 1949 and 1954. All the footage is in black and white and was never edited by the filmmaker.

- 2 The Songhay Empire was one of West Africa's oldest empires. It was founded in Kukiya in the seventh century by the Berber chieftain Za Alayamen, who was fleeing the Arab invasion. Until the eleventh century it enjoyed an important position as a trade centre on the banks of the Niger River, where the Islamized dynasty of the Dia established its capital in Gao. According to Al-Bakri, only the king was Muslim, while the population itself continued to practice their animist tradition.
- 3 The term *choreocinema*, according to Moira Sullivan (2001: 215), was coined by the American dance critic John Martin specifically to define the film works of Maya Deren.
- 4 A term originating from the African Fon people of West Africa, meaning “god”. Historians identify the date of the first ceremony of the Voudoun cult as 14 August 1791.
- 5 Quote translated from the French audio-commentary on the DVD of *Les Maîtres fous*.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.

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## AN EXPLORATION OF MAYA DEREN'S HAITIAN FOOTAGE AND JEAN ROUCH'S *LES MAÎTRES FOUS*

### Abstract

This article explores the relationship between Jean Rouch's *Les maîtres fous* (1955) and Maya Deren's Haitian film footage (1947-54), two almost contemporaneous projects involving the filming of possession dances – of the African Songhay in Rouch's case, and of the Haitian Voudoun cult in the case of Deren. Both filmmakers were pioneers who took an innovative approach in their filming of these ceremonies, using lightweight technical equipment and involving themselves directly in the ritual (each in a different way), to produce a respectful and poetic representation that was free of the prejudices and the colonial superiority prevalent among Western filmmakers until that time. While Deren was unable to give her material a final form due to a plethora of ethical and cinematographic obstacles, Rouch would successfully bring ethnography and cinema together in his work, thereby establishing a new documentary sub-genre, known as *ethnofiction*.

### Key words

Maya Deren; Jean Rouch; Ethnofiction; Documentary; Dance; Anthropology; Possession; Politics.

### Author

Carolina Martínez López (b. Cuenca, 1978) is Professor and Coordinator of the Performing Arts degree program at Escuela Universitaria ERAM (Universitat de Girona). She has published a wide range of articles on cinema, dance and the performing arts in Spanish and Latin American journals, and has also edited and translated an anthology of papers on the filmmaker Maya Deren. She has enjoyed an extensive career as a researcher and arts administrator, working for four years as Coordinator of the International Film Week in Valladolid, Spain. Contact: carolina.marlop@gmail.com.

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## TRANSITANDO EL METRAJE HAITIANO DE MAYA DEREN Y LOS AMOS LOCOS DE JEAN ROUCH

### Resumen

El presente artículo aborda la relación entre *Los amos locos* (1955) de Jean Rouch y el metraje haitiano (1947-54) de Maya Deren, trabajos cercanos en el tiempo y dedicados a filmar las danzas de posesión —de los *songhay* africanos, en el caso de Rouch, y de los haitianos, en el de Deren—. Ambos cineastas fueron pioneros a la hora de filmar estas manifestaciones de una manera innovadora, utilizando equipos de rodaje ligeros e involucrándose —cada uno de forma diferente— en el ritual, abordándolo desde el respeto y la poesía, dejando de lado los prejuicios y la superioridad colonialista imperante hasta esos momentos. Deren no lograría dar una forma final a su material debido a que se vio inmersa en una gran cantidad de problemas morales y cinematográficos que se lo impidieron; en cambio, Rouch conseguiría con su trabajo aunar etnografía y cine instaurando un nuevo sub-género documental, la *etnoficción*.

### Palabras clave

Maya Deren; Jean Rouch; etnoficción; documental; danza; antropología; posesión; política.

### Autor

Carolina Martínez López (Cuenca, 1978) es Coordinadora y Profesora del Grado de Artes Escénicas de la Escuela Universitaria ERAM (Universitat de Girona). Ha publicado diversos artículos sobre cine, danza y artes escénicas en medios españoles y latinoamericanos, y ha editado y traducido una antología de textos de la cineasta Maya Deren. Posee una amplia carrera como investigadora y como gestora cultural, habiendo sido durante cuatro años Coordinadora de la Semana Internacional de Cine de Valladolid. Contacto: carolina.marlop@gmail.com.

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