

January 21, 2020

Dear Reader:

The following essay offers a glimpse into my book manuscript tentatively titled *Vodou/Voodoo Bodies: Artistry, Memory, and Imagined Haitian Identities*, which documents and analyses contemporary Haitian dance as an especially potent site for recuperative performances of blackness by Haitians, especially following the devastating January 12, 2010 earthquake. A metonym for Black liberation, the country continues to be belittled as ruinously queer: a hellish “voodoo” place and a “shithole country.”

Through ethnographic research and mobilizing my 20 years’ experience in arts management, I investigate the ways in which Jean-René Delsoin, Roxane D’Orléans Juste, Kettly Noël and Jeanguy Saintus confront pre and post-disaster constructs of Haitianness, within a dialogic artist-presenter-spectator network in Haiti, the United States, Canada, Venezuela, and Mali.

The larger project situates how my interlocutors and their dancers leverage the aesthetics, philosophies and embodied techniques of the Africanist religion Vodou to simultaneously revive and destabilize spectators’ misconceptions about Haitians and their expressions of Blackness. Drawing from Vodou—a danced heritage— enables Haitian choreographers to rehearse non-normative identities and rethink the strictures of human experiences.

To interpret the choreographers’ undertakings, I articulate the theory implicit in the Haitian Kreyòl popular vernacular “*dedouble*.” As previewed in the essay, *dedoublaj* (performances of *dedouble*) invoke a body desiring to unbind itself from time, place, and socio-cultural conventions. My project and this essay intervene in a social history of Haiti that indexes Haitian dancing bodies as pre-modern and primitive, and centered around the pre-1980’s legacy of African-American dance anthropologist Katherine Dunham.

My doctoral research focused on the work of Delsoin, Saintus and Noel. D’Orléans Juste is the latest addition to the project, and is critical because the etiquette of “Haitian” or “Haitian Dance” is not immediately assigned to her artistic endeavors by presenters and spectators, contrary to ways in which choreographies by my other interlocutors register explicitly as Haitian and/or Vodou-influenced.

A version of the following essay will appear in a February 2020 edition of the *Journal of Haitian Studies*. I seek your guidance in mapping it out into a book chapter in which two of D’Orléans Juste’s other Haitian-themed works will be analyzed. Specifically, I plan to further rehearse how her self-identification and self-presentation as a Haitian diasporic person work with or against cultural markers and theatrical expectations tied to Haiti by teasing out :

- 1) how D'Orléans Juste echoes African-American choreographer Bill T. Jones' belief that "a black dance is any dance that a person who is black happens to make...". A Haitian dance is any dance that a Haitian person makes. And
- 2) her North and South American spectators' ability to comprehend her dances and make intelligible their constructions and representations of Haitian bodies and culture.

I'd love to hear what you think regarding the following:

1. What comes across as the essay's argument, objects of analysis, and stakes? Do I do a well enough job defining this?
2. How accessible is the writing to the non-specialist and/or specialist? If not, what are some terms that I don't explain enough?
3. How would you summarize its contribution in a few sentences?
4. Is there any section that is confusing? Any section that can be scaled down?
5. What areas are provocative and could be expanded to read like a book chapter and part of a larger book?

During the February 11 session, I will show footage of choreographic excerpts by D'Orléans Juste and my other interlocutors to contextualize my propositions and generate ideas from us.

Thank you kindly for your attention to this essay.

Best,



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¹ Gottschild, Brenda Dixon. *The Black Dancing Body: A Geography from Coon to Cool*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003 (12).



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SUBJECT TO REVISION

MANBO AYIZAN ON A NEW YORK STAGE:
OR HOW ROXANE D'ORLÉANS JUSTE DANCED
WOMEN'S MOVEMENT INTELLIGENCE¹

She told me about a group of people in Guinea who carry the sky on their heads. They are the people of Creation. Strong, tall, and mighty people who can bear anything. Their Maker, she said, gives them the sky to carry because they are strong. These people do not know who they are, but if you see a lot of trouble in your life, it is because you were chosen to carry part of the sky on your head.

—Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*

In April 2014, Haitian-Canadian dancemaker Roxane D'Orléans Juste stands offstage at New York City's Joyce Theater where she is poised to premiere *She Who Carries The Sky*, a one-woman choreography intricately crafted from the dancer's personal narratives, in collaboration with African-American choreographer Dianne McIntyre. She conjures a childhood memory.

Circa 1970, pre-teen D'Orléans Juste is in a car in the Plateau Central department, where her paternal grandmother Agnes (a.k.a. Madan Do) owns a business. She is returning to Port-au-Prince from a visit to Madan Do's property. A year or so ago, she had left her native Montréal

¹ I would be remiss if I did not express my gratitude to the participants of the 2015 Mellon Dance Studies Seminar for the thoughtful review of this essay's first iteration of as well as to my doctoral advisor Dr. Sandra L. Richards. She and her essay "Yoruba Gods on the American: August Wilson's Joe Turner's Come and Gone" not only inspired the title of this work but also catalyzed my interests in exploring issues related to spectatorship, (in)visibility, and cultural intelligibility of Haitian practices on and off the island, and in non-Haitian spaces. See Richards.

for the first time to reside in Port-au-Prince. Her younger sister Sonia and her French-Canadian mother Bernice are unwell and the family relocated to her father Carlo's birthplace for three years. Her sister and her father are in the vehicle with D'Orléans Juste. It is mid-afternoon. It rained heavily the previous night, and they are waiting for the overflowing river to settle. The stifling heat lulls father and little sister to sleep. D'Orléans Juste, in the passenger seat, is awake. In the blink of an eye, a group of men and women dressed in white from head to toe, appear near the car. They are carrying an unadorned wood coffin. D'Orléans Juste is intrigued. At first, she fixates on the group that floats by. "They didn't walk. They floated," she insists (D'Orléans Juste 2015). No one acknowledges her. She breaks her gaze as the group curls around the car and heads toward the river. The group disappears. She is confused and shaken. D'Orléans Juste recounts her encounter to her father and her sister. Carlo D'Orléans Juste keeps silent. Backstage at the Joyce, D'Orléans Juste's memory fast-forwards to a brief conversation with her father before he passed away. "Do you remember your experience by the river in Plateau Central? Do you know what you saw," encourages D'Orléans Juste père. "Yes, I saw the dead. I saw spirits," the now mature woman answers confidently.

Resonance: *In April 2014, the tall black downstage right wing of the Joyce Theater nearly dwarfs Roxane as she shifts from the ball of one foot to the other. She is waiting for her cue to enter the stage. Slowly, she elongates her arms to the ceiling. She drops them loosely. She extends one leg, then the other. Her loose purple skirt parts to reveal strong calves. She closes her eyes, intakes air slowly, and releases a long sigh that flattens her stomach, lowers her shoulders and lengthens her neck. Eyes still closed, the memory above is her potomitan, her central pillar – her bridge, if you will – to the realm of the Ancestors. She rolls her neck from side to side, then front to back. Roxane lowers her head forward, and places both hands on her*

sternum. She mouths a few words. She inhales. Seconds pass. The lights brightening the stage also bathe her caramel skin with blue and pink hues. A horn plays quietly in the speaker behind her. Roxane exhales. She opens her eyes. They are determined and unflinching. Roxane places her hands by her side. She steps into the theatrical space, and begins a “dans.”



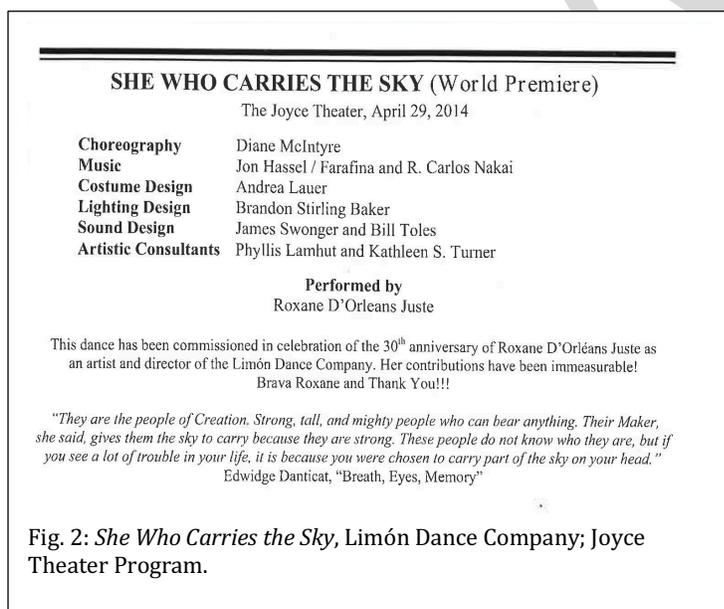
This intimate diaristic essay illuminates how lauded modern/contemporary dancer Roxane D'Orléans Juste (fig. 1) resourcefully tapped into what she terms “movement intelligence” to embody a priestess who channeled the divine in the 2014 choreography *She Who Carries the Sky*. Inspired in part by the epigraph from Edwidge Danticat’s work above, D'Orléans Juste physicalized the legacies of Vodou’s dancing women, the spiritual realm’s conduits to human spaces, “through knowing and sensing with the body, allowing environments and people to be mutually affective, and

drawing from this knowledge to thread movements that animate the message the body projects” (D'Orléans Juste 2014). Born in Québec to a French-Canadian mother and a Haitian father, the performer underwent rigorous training in dance and academic studies in Haiti, Canada, the United States and Europe, which made her a staple of America’s prestigious Limón Dance Company from 1983 to 2016. D'Orléans Juste was the company’s Associate Artistic Director when she devised the piece with McIntyre. Limón’s then Artistic Director Carla Maxwell commissioned the choreography for D'Orléans Juste to commemorate her 30-year tenure with the company.

In re-creating D'Orléans Juste's method for initiating a choreographed, embodied movement practice for the stage that sources and routes Haitian cultural memory on a personal level, this essay tends to its primary concerns: it mobilizes the artist's emic term "movement intelligence" in her process of researching, rehearsing and performing *She Who Carries the Sky* as a representation of the physical and intellectual ingenuity sourced by Haitian diasporic arts practitioners to lead multi-modal, cultural, and directional lives. As such, the essay is deeply attentive to the dance's references and allusions for readers and viewers of the choreography's future iterations; it follows D'Orléans Juste's insistence that a Haitian woman's creative and spiritual methods for moving through spaces, times and socio-cultural knowledge constitute an act of self-determination, alchemized with finesse and careful and sustained labor. To articulate the artist's efforts to create new memories and broaden perceptions of Haitianness for her audiences, I use Haitian and Vodou epistemologies as interpretive lenses that clarify how D'Orléans Juste's contemporary dancing body challenge the investment readers and viewers might have in a specific traditional construct of dance in Haiti and its diasporic spaces.

For instance, interpreting the gendered dynamics of "women's movement intelligence" and unique efficacy of *She Who Carries the Sky* contributes to nuancing a theory of *dedoublaj* I have introduced elsewhere. "Dedouble" is Haitian Kreyòl vernacular which Haitian interlocutors define as follows: "*Gen de fwa se kom si ou wè lot pesonalite moun la*" (sometimes it's as if you see a person's other personalities). "*Kò w rete la. Nanm ou ale on lòt kote*" (the body stays here still while the soul travels). "*Moun nan flashe ale on lot kote*" (in a flash, the person travels to another space). "*Moun nan tounen bèt oswa dyab*" (the person metamorphoses into an animal or

a diabolic being).² These multiple overlapping definitions index practices of teleportation and metamorphosis. The Haitian body labors to unbind itself from time, place, socio-cultural conventions, and heteropatriarchal prescriptions, as embodied by D'Orléans Juste. I assert that *dedoublaj* is an embodied pedagogy that embraces a way of remembering what is *mistik*, *dwòl*, hidden or suppressed, that which is not easily categorized and thrives in the rich messiness of the quotidian. For bodies similar to D'Orléans Juste's who are perceived to be fatalistically "Voodoo" and who actualize their lifeworlds with, alongside or against the Africanist practice Vodou and its trivializations, performing *dedouble* is a mode of witnessing that is not only in the act of creation and production, but also in the act of viewing and registering *the dedoublaj*. It is an engaged work of memory, especially for Haitians whose freedom of expression and association has been closely monitored.



My ethnography of the choreography interrogates: what creative maneuvers does *dedoublaj* mobilize to actualize mutually affective processes of evocation (attention to longstanding affirmations and/or terrors that haunt contemporary realities) and provocation (a critical embodied

persistence to confront and work through those dynamics)? In addition to observing four

² See, Mario LaMothe, "Dedouble and Jeanguy Saintus' Corporeal Gifts," Hemispheric Institute, last accessed January 4, 2020, <https://hemisphericinstitute.org/en/emisferica-121-caribbean-rasanblaj/12-1-dossier/e-121-dossier-lamothe-dedouble-and-jeanguy.html>

presentations of *She Who Carries the Sky* between April 29 and May 4, 2014 (fig. 2) and conducting semi-structured interviews with Dianne McIntyre and Carla Maxwell, I used topical and personal narrative questions during my interviews with D'Orléans Juste to foreground manners in which a Haitian artist incarnates and negotiates social, cultural and historical movements. D'Orléans Juste's review of her process and my own thick descriptions—some of which are left to speak for themselves to avoid diminishing the living voice and perspectives of my interlocutor—contextualizes Haitian Diasporic identity registers and remembering practices as well as “deeper truths than the need for verifiable facts and information” (Madison, *Critical Ethnography* 35). Cumulatively, topical questions about her multi-geographic dance acumen that began in Haiti and stretched out abroad, and personal narratives about her sense of identity and place advocate for an oral history of dance, artistic production, and embodiment by Haitians as methods for understanding larger social performances. Along with contextualizing the eighteen-minute dance's autobiographical and socio-cultural references in this essay, I also spotlight how D'Orléans Juste's embodiment animates the choreography's literary imageries. Haitian-American author Edwidge Danticat's controversial debut novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) scripted the women who primarily inspired the dancing priestess hundreds of spectators applauded on stage. Specifically, the epigraph above, and the only program note, served as the dancer's map to the world of a strong, tall, and mighty female Guinean ancestor D'Orléans Juste inhabited, performance after performance.

“The solo dancer of Vodou dances is always in dialogue,” professed Haitian choreographer Jeanguy Saintus to a largely Haitian diasporic audience at Miami's Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts.³ His assertion is a reminder to make explicit how

³ This occurred during the discussion that followed the February 6, 2016 matinee performance of Ayikodans, the Pétion-Ville Haiti based dance company founded and directed by Saintus. www.ayikodans.com.

D'Orléans Juste's craft is in dialogue and relation with Vodou-grounded experiences. That is how she and other Haitian contemporary dance artists participate in expanding and bolstering the canon of Haitian dance history by illuminating its historicity. In this light, I anchor this essay with vignettes of dances titled "resonance," after Dasha Chapman "diasporic resonance" thick descriptions which depict physical manifestations of Vodou *konesans*—"the knowledge that is a vital force for living a meaningful and harmonious life" (57)—connecting Appolon and his diverse group of Haitian and non-Haitian dance students in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

I lead the essay with one of D'Orléans Juste's diasporic resonances because in conjuring the life-changing memory of her pre-teen Vodou experience, which "coursed through [her] like an electric current" as she performed (D'Orléans Juste 2015), the artist empathized with Patrick Bellegarde-Smith's affirmation: "When I dance, my ancestors dance with/through me. The favorite child carries the heaviest burden. Imbued with wisdom, ancestors legislate. *Konesans* (esoteric knowledge) is simplicity itself, yet complex" (60). At the heart of D'Orléans Juste's performance is her incessant *dedoublaj* to her Vodou encounter by the Plateau Central river, in dialogue with her copious research on the religious practice and her knowledge of Vodou vocabularies, contained in Haitian traditional dances. Much like Bellegarde-Smith, her solo dance performance resounds with the fact that Vodou rituals are also called *dans* because the moving body plays an essential role in guiding practitioners to reach a point of communion with one another and the Ancestors. Via *She Who Carries the Sky*, D'Orléans Juste reflects upon how Vodou is a repository for remembering a past, being in the present and mapping out the future. It thrives on embodied participation, creative (re)invention, and intergenerational transfer of culture. It disrupts complacency and normative socio-cultural conventions.

Ayizan Hermeneutics

If, as Danticat proudly declares, an artist's sustained creative labor is "nothing but a slow trek to rediscover, through the detours of art, those two or three images in whose presence his or her heart first opened" (*Create* 18), then my creation myth for paying sharp attention to *dedoublaj* as a Haitian embodied theory began at a *dans* in Haiti's Lakou Souvnans when I overheard one man compliment another: "Fi a telman danse, li dedouble sou moun" (Girlfriend danced so much, she *dedouble* on us). In addition to the non-normative properties of *dedoublaj* I detailed previously, the exclamation by the queer Haitian proposes that *dedoublaj* is not only a transformative, space-defying, and time-bending action by a person but also its social sphere includes the viewer and witness of *dedoublaj* who names and comments on what the performance elicits for him/her and viewers.

So does D'Orléans Juste's *dans*, this essay submits. I, one of her spectators and witnesses, observed how she made manifest a womanist movement intelligence, and therefore critically consider the aesthetic signifiers that saturate her portrayal of a divinely-guided woman. As her Haitian-American collaborator and spectator, this does not make me a cultural informant. Rather, my spectator-artist exchange with D'Orléans Juste is a co-performance: It is a nuanced conversation that invites me "inside the breath and pulse of cultural performance as a feeling, sensing, being, and doing witness" (Madison, "Co-Performative" 829).

In this light, this account is also my journey to unravel how D'Orléans Juste's dance was a transformative practice spectators and I will not soon forget. It is now one of my creation myths. In D'Orléans Juste's nuanced portrait of a seasoned, caring, and ebullient priestess, I recognized Haitian mothers and grandmothers. Deeper still, I sensed the presence of the divine, on opening night. Within me reverberated the lush voices of congregants I had heard during my field trips to Lakou Souvnans: "*Ayizan mache pou wè kichòy! Rele Ayizan pou mwen. Ayizan,*

nou pral rele lwa anba dlo.” “Ayizan walk to see something. Call Ayizan for me. Ayizan, we’re going to call the *lwa* (spirits) beneath the water.” *Manbo* (Priestess) Ayizan was on stage, in New York City. Only performative writing will honor and satisfy this *gran fanm*, this illustrious woman. This method best captures the ineffable nature of ethnographic/co-performative work – that is to say, textual (and purely analytical) language being woefully inadequate to sum up the soul/affect of the experience of transformation and transcendence.⁴ Indeed, the descriptive sections and narratives that anchor this method reflect my exercise to respect the virtuoso⁵ in D’Orléans Juste. As she *dedouble*, I witnessed that *Manbo* Ayizan walked with D’Orléans Juste, an interpretation I shared with her after her first performance. The artist strongly supports this idea. Choreographer McIntyre steadfastly encouraged D’Orléans Juste to dance her own creation myths – her most profound memories and her life - as the ritual, and as the celebration (McIntyre). In addition to her literary research and prefacing each rehearsal and performance of *She Who Carries the Sky* with the invocation I described in the opening paragraph, D’Orléans Juste was equally inspired by McIntyre’s depiction of Vodou’s mature women that impressed her during her 1970s visit to Haiti, recollections I will detail shortly.

To transpose the queer Haitian words above: *Roxane telman danse, li dedouble an Ayizan sou moun* (Roxane danced so much, she dedouble as Ayizan in front of viewers). Through dance, the consummate artist manifested divine strength, balance, and harmony, attributes that *Manbo* Ayizan epitomizes. My diasporic resonance of the women of dance Ayizan in Vodou spaces

⁴ Performance scholar Pavithra Prasad’s essay “Paradiso Lost: Writing Memory and Nostalgia in the Post-Ethnographic Present,” which inspires this assertion, is a persuasive illustration of ways that performative writing recuses ethnography from inevitable gaps and failures. See Prasad.

⁵ In a Vodou ritual context, virtuosity is an indication of divine presence, states Maya Deren. “For if the mark of a man’s dedication to the loa is selfless anonymity, the mark of a loa’s devotion to man is his most elaborated, realized manifestation. Therefore, virtuosity is the province of divinity. Only the loa are virtuosi” (230). See Deren.

informs how I juxtapose D'Orléans Juste and the conjurer she embodied against crossroads Vodou *lwa* Ayizan who protects the hearth, market place and new initiates. Doing so enables me to address ways that the dancer maintained Vodou pedagogy and inclusiveness as the norm, on stage. Alongside the choreography's aforementioned dramaturgical references, I argue that D'Orléans Juste improvises on Ayizan, "the ancient female spirit who is guardian of ritual purity within the temple" (Brown *Mama Lola* 55). Similar to ways to D'Orléans Juste a seasoned mature dancer might be overlooked in an artistic format that value youthful vitality and physicality, in a *dans*, venerable Ayizan is the only *lwa* considered dispensable. When she is included in ceremonies, she is saluted second after Legba, gatekeeper of the crossroads between the human and divine realms. The towering and graceful palm tree, at the center of the Haitian flag, is her symbol. As such, she contributes to anchoring Haitians' imagined communities. To bring cohesion to the ritual space, congregants *kouri* Ayizan. They run and circle the space with palm fronds to imbue the proceedings with cohesion.

Similarly, to bless the essay with cohesion and highlight the potency of D'Orléans Juste's dance, the introductory description of the artist's meditative moment offstage was of my Vodou resonances. I include three additional vignettes—in the form of ethnographies of Ayizan dances—that index the gestural vocabularies D'Orléans Juste received from McIntyre, her dance classes in Haiti and elsewhere with her own incarnation of various literary figures. This is both my theoretical and methodological move to demonstrate what D'Orléans Juste and her Vodouizan counterparts instruct about women's movement intelligence, and their painstaking yet often loving labor to perpetuate cultural memory and knowledge. Forthcoming resonances will depict women practitioners in Haiti who physicalize the full breadth of Ayizan's complex nature.

This juxtaposition of Vodou dance ethnography with D'Orléans Juste's stage practice is a

dedoublaj, an endeavor with a dual purpose: on the one hand, later resonances redress a slippage D'Orléans Juste experienced at the Joyce Theater. In contrast to how enlivened she and the dance were, surrounded by and in dialogue with her fellow company members, friends and family, in the intimacy of a dance studio without a fourth wall, she felt alone and isolated from spectators on the proscenium stage. This solitude, she shared, tampered with the strength of her invocation. However, the choreography was one of many during the company's annual residency at the Joyce, and a sustained exploration of the politics of theatrical presentations in New York City and other urban hubs will be rehearsed in another project. On the other hand, these embodied resonances illustrate local dancers' agency and creativity in adapting movements that cultural conservatives often exemplify as "authentic" and unchanged because they are performed in a religious setting. These practitioners can only be sincere about the manners in which they deploy their individual experiences in order to transmit their embodied pedagogy. For D'Orléans Juste, this is also true. In addition to recognizing that each practitioner – D'Orléans Juste included - interprets her *lwa*'s dances, songs and drum rhythms according to his or her own experiences and physical dexterity, the more enlightening and instructive approach, Vodou practitioners have advised, is to view even the slightest variation on a dance as gesturing toward an aspect of that *lwa*. These women's variations compose a whole dance. They and their dances nuance one another. So do the dances that D'Orléans Juste learned in Haiti, the United States, Canada and elsewhere.

In short and to be poetic, D'Orléans Juste writes dances and dances ride her.⁶ To begin, I demonstrate these maneuvers by introducing D'Orléans Juste to readers and her dance journey to

⁶ With honor, respect and apologies to Haitian-American theater artist Lenelle Moïse whose words "I am riding a poem. A poem is writing me" I borrowed. She posted these powerful words on her Facebook wall, January 8, 2016.

becoming an Ayizan figure. I then braid D'Orléans Juste's personal narratives about her embodied process with the choreography's literary inspirations to interpret the womanist pedagogies the dancer exchanged with choreographer McIntyre and spectators. Finally, I bridge the Joyce Theater stage to the dance arena of Lakou Souvnans/Haiti by meeting Ayizan dancers for whom D'Orléans Juste served as a stand-in and whose ancestors McIntyre witnessed. Now, additional resonances and core sections follow.

Resonance: *April 2015. The famed 200 year-old Vodou compound, Lakou Souvnans. A mature lady in a knee-length red dress holds the edge of her skirt. She bends her knees and curves her body forward. Her eyes pierce the space ahead of her. Lady in Red's body swings from side to side and her feet pound the temple's earthen floor as she processes forward. In her squat position, she responds to one of the drummers' deafening 4/4 rhythmic pounding of a bass drum as a male singer's gravelly voice encourages: "If you cannot keep up, you'll be replaced." This practitioner is steadfast and purposeful...*



Fig. 3: D'Orléans Juste in *She Who Carries the Sky*. Photo credit: Joseph Schembri. Used by permission of D'Orléans Juste.

I. Walk, Ayizan, Walk!

...With her arms lowered and her shoulders slightly rolled back, the woman's head and torso appear to lift toward the theater's catwalk as she walks the stage in a wide circle. Pastel lights grow warmer around the Manbo as a horn and jazz-infused elektronika guide her feet. She stops in mid track, pricks her ear and swings her back. Her body follows. She surveys the empty space where she had just processed. The Manbo resumes her circle. This time,

she picks up speed as she loosens the purple scarf from her hair (fig. 3).

According to dance critic Deborah Jowitt, D'Orléans Juste has a “gift for tempering small explosions of movement and sharp little gestures with bigger, more melting steps and space-covering runs” as she “stir[s] the air, [] conjure[s] things from the earth” (Jowitt). In their efforts to locate the many dance routes that D'Orléans Juste almagamates in one movement, Jowitt and other dance critics often attempt to frame D'Orléans Juste's stage presence in expansive terms. Jack Anderson, for one, associates her dancing with magic in one of my favorite reviews of D'Orléans Juste. For her solo presentation in 1994, the *New York Times* critic headlines his commentaries, “Presto! Lone Woman Turns Into a Crowd of Personalities” (Anderson). A fusion of the countless and widely available praises D'Orléans Juste has garnered since her professional debut with Colombian-American modern choreographer Eleo Pomare in 1980 characterizes her as innocent, eloquent, exhilarating, percussive, profound, and elusive. Following her Madrid performance of José Limón's challenging fifteen-minute solo *Chaconne* in Spring 1999, a woman stood up, applauded excitedly as she shouted non-stop: “*Divina! Divina!*” After the opening night of *She Who Carries the Sky*, a White elderly woman said to another in a thick New York accent as they exited the theater: “That Roxane is so versatile.” To call her by her first name makes her savvy relatable, if not familiar.

D'Orléans Juste's dance persona bridges the divide between community and divinity. This is at the heart of Vodou's social concern: to participate in replenishing the space between human and Ancestral worlds (Michel 31). D'Orléans Juste is a trickster, and a proxy for characters she furthers in her solo performances, choreographic projects, and teaching seminars. This section provides only a few instructive snapshots of her dance trajectory that address the

ways she engages dance aesthetics in dialogue with (Haitian) women's effort to move through heteropatriarchal prescriptions.

Let us *dedouble* to my first encounter with her, in November 1995. A teenage Black girl sporting pigtails in a yellow dress, dashes, glides and twirls joyously on the Joyce Theater stage. A lavish arrangement of Aaron Copland's upbeat and rolling *Danzon Cubano* seems to lag behind her exuberance. She pauses for only seconds, downstage center, to flash a bright smile and to take her place in a brief tableau that includes a Frida Kahlo character, a death figure, four monkeys, two parrots, and a doe. Seated in the last row, I derive great joy from the young dancer who exudes such unbridled cheer in African-American choreographer Donald McKayle's premiere of *Sombra y Sol* for the Limón Dance Company. Roxane D'Orléans Juste portrays "Young Frida Kahlo," the cast list reads. I skim her biography as the intermission lights are fading. The first sentence lists she is of Haitian and French-Canadian descent. I am doubly impressed that a young diasporic Haitian is so fierce. Following McKayle's vivid homage to the famed surrealist Mexican painter, the evening continues with African-American Ralph Lemon's languid *Pale Grass and Blue, and Then Red* (1995) and American modern dance master Daniel Nagrin's solos *Strange Hero* (1948) and *Spanish Dance* (1949). Modern dance pioneer Doris Humphrey's classic modern dance illustration of the cycle of life and death, *Day on Earth* (1947) closes a dizzying evening of kinesthetic exchange between Black and White American dance makers, which motivates me to work as the company manager of the Limón Dance Company, in January 1996.

"*Bonjour*. I'm Roxane!" The person who breezes in the Limón headquarters in SoHo, New York on my first day there is more mature than I remembered from my spectator's seat. The open face and generous smile is the same. I share my confusion with her. She laughs heartily.

She thinks I am being a trickster. She also danced in the Lemon, Nagrin, and Humphrey pieces. There were three other Black women on stage and none of them resembled the little girl. I thought she was cast especially for *Sombra y Sol*. She is thrilled I was fooled. Perhaps she is a trickster after all. We both laugh. From that moment on, we mainly converse in Haitian Kreyòl and in French. As her last trip to Haiti was as a young woman in 1980, I become one of her conduits to her paternal family's homeland and she collects information from my travels and field work in Vodou sites.

Eighteen years later, in April 2014, we sit on her living floor in Long Island, New York. The audio-recorder is on. D'Orléans Juste often takes me too seriously. Therefore, a hint of laughter brightens my speech about our shared responsibilities as interviewer and participant as we retrace the process by which she characterized and gave flesh to the otherworldly. Particularly, what she learned from her collaboration with the regal Dianne McIntyre intrigued me. "Chronologically and artistically, after Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus, McIntyre was the next major African American female modern dance choreographer," affirms dance scholar Veta Goler (293). A few days before, D'Orléans Juste, Maxwell and I had witnessed the silver-haired McIntyre's *Time is Time* at New York Live Arts' tribute to James Baldwin. A dance version of the African-American author's poem "Song (for Skip)," McIntyre lead a multigenerational cast of four Black dancers and performers in a dance "about blackness becoming many colors," that invoked adjectives such as "contemplative," "restless," and "stirring" (Burke). Such a philosophy and emotionalities permeate *She Who Carries The Sky*.

Remembering the potency of Debra Walker King's concept of "genealogical revisionism" which proposes that an African diasporic creative act "may be seen as one vast genealogical poem that attempts to restore continuity to the ruptures and discontinuities imposed

by history of black presence in America” (5), I asked D’Orléans Juste to tell me about dance studies and professional experiences that shaped her. Her biographical narrative is not a mere recitation of juicy life experiences. It yields critical knowledge in conversation with what Thomas DeFrantz terms “versioning” or “the generational reworking of aesthetic ideals...a way to tell an old tale new or to launch a musty proverb into the contemporary moment” (82-83). I listened and responded to her story as a performance of Haitian transculturalism that “helps us to keep the physical body in mind yet paradoxically refuses any essentialist notion of bodily experience as transparent and unmediated by culture” (Albright 120).” In *Choreographing Difference*, Ann Cooper Albright positions staged autobiographies as exemplifying a kind of “intratextual practice” that marries textual and bodily discourses (125). McIntyre and D’Orléans Juste’s choreography teeters between literary texts and D’Orléans Juste’s embodied experiences in Haiti and abroad as texts. Indeed, D’Orléans Juste’s narration, to invoke Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s geographies of management and imagination, serve to impart that texts should not be geographers of the body’s imaginings, nor should the body be fetishized as an overflowing fount of knowledge (220-23). Additionally, in terms of my African diasporic dance research agenda, analyzing ways the biracial and multinational artist orates her dance lineage contributes much to highlighting Haitian dance’s contribution to Canadian and American dance history. Thus, my current exploration improvises on the aforementioned scholars’ affirmations and aid D’Orléans Juste in assessing the range of aesthetics that shape the conjurer she incarnated for New York spectators.

Her father, Carlo D’Orléans Juste, was part of the first big wave of Haitian immigrants to Québec, Canada in the 1950s. A musician and founder of one of the first Haitian-owned nightclubs in Montréal, D’Orléans Juste *père* showcased renditions of Haitian, Caribbean and

Latin American tunes that attracted the attention of Haitians and many White Québécois such as D'Orléans Juste's mother Bernice D'Orléans Juste (born Castonguay). The dancer is hazy on larger societal pressures that might have affected her parents' interracial marriage and its large brood. The artistic D'Orléans Juste family was well respected in its communities. D'Orléans Juste *père* and his nightclub acts instilled in D'Orléans Juste *fille* a deep enjoyment of Haitian and Latin American music and dances. A group of eight to ten women performed traditional Haitian dances during and between musical sets. The arts created in that environment continue to inflect her sense of rhythm and timing. At the age of four, D'Orléans Juste began ballet training with a former member of Les Grands Ballets Canadiens. When she moved to Port-au-Prince, Haiti's neighborhood of Bois-Verna as a pre-teenager, African-American Lavinia Williams Yarborough's school⁷ was a haven for her and her sister.⁸

The dance mistress taught D'Orléans Juste Ballet and Haitian traditional dances such as *yanvalou*, *kongo* and *Mahi*, which complemented what she had learned from folklore dancers in her father's Montréal nightclub. I asked D'Orléans Juste to describe her classmates and the studio's ambiance. There were nine to ten girls per class. They were all quite young. If racial and social clashes existed among her Black, biracial and White Haitian peers, they surely stayed

⁷ A noted importer of classical ballet and modern dance to Haitian middle class and elite girls, Williams Yarborough's engagements with various American ballet companies, on Broadway, and African American dance icon Katherine Dunham, made her a knowledgeable instructor to mold local dancing bodies. Her participation in the cultural events of "Haiti week" (1951) at New York's Ziegfeld's Theater, earned her an invitation by Haiti's Tourist Office, to reside in Haiti, where she would endow Haitian folkloric dances with rigor (Polyné 42).

Williams Yarborough's 1959 book *Haiti-Dance* chronicles her duties as the national dance teacher, which included instruction at the Lycée de Jeunes Filles (Young Women's High School), the training of Bureau of Sports' monitors, and physical culture and body conditioning classes to the members of National Folkloric Troupe. Williams Yarborough also observed and participated in Vodou ceremonies (2). In 1954, she founded the Haitian Academy of Folklore and Classic Dance that the D'Orléans Juste sisters attended, and where existed, according to Millery Polyné, a marriage of "modern dance, classic ballet and secular Haitian dance in order to create an innovative Haitian folkloric dance tradition" (Polyné 44).

⁸ Sonia D'Orléans Juste was a long-time soloist with Israel's highly acclaimed Batsheva Dance Company, under the direction of Ohad Naharin. She currently resides in Israel where she is a dance teacher and choreographer.

outside of the classroom. Williams Yarborough being “*une personne très soignée,*” a very polished person, with “a beautiful back and shoulders,” all students were expected to be respectful of one another and meticulous about their attire before they entered her studio (D’Orléans Juste 2014).

For the next three years, due to her family’s precarious financial situation, D’Orléans Juste received a partial scholarship from the dance mistress. Before leaving Haiti to continue her academic studies and classical ballet training in Québec, she performed at the national palace for young dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier and his mother Simone Ovide Duvalier. Without this scholarship and Williams Yarborough’s belief in her abilities, D’Orléans Juste doubts she would have had a dance career. At the age of 17, she moved to Toronto for the National Ballet School of Canada’s Teacher Training Program. Workshops after workshops in Canada and in Europe, she landed in New York City. While instructors directed her attention to the Alvin Ailey company because of her “versatility,” she followed a friend’s advice and attended an Eleo Pomare audition. Facing the “renaissance man with a wonderful voice and a silver laughter,” D’Orléans Juste “shook like a leaf” when the radical Black queer artist asked dancers to line up from the corner of the dance studio. Before she was chosen, Pomare gave specific instructions:

“I would like you to walk from this corner one at a time, from the back. I only want to see your back move. Go from this point. Walk from your back. I don’t want to see your face.” Little did I know that [in] *Las Desenamoradas* (1967)—[his choreographic version of Federico Garcia Lorca’s *The House of Bernada Alba* (1936)]—the role of hunchback started from the wings backwards. Eleo said: “Now you are going to walk and you are literally a hunchback and I want to come from your back and move your back as if you’ll never be able to stand erect again.” And the pain...the description of that character is still in my bones...If I could dance that one more time...Maybe I’m too old now, but...(laughter) that would be incredible (D’Orléans Juste 2015).

Pomare who staged social politics around Black bodies, was friendly with McIntyre whose *Sounds in Motion* studio was located nearby, in Harlem. McIntyre surely visited Pomare's rehearsals but D'Orléans Juste was too shy to approach one of American modern dance's living stars. What has stayed in her bones from her Pomare days is the idea that "a movement must resonate from the solar plexus. If there is no gut, there is no life." In terms of what she learned from Pomare that deeply affected her performance in *She Who Carries the Sky*, she states: "The way women were treated in Eleo's work was not at all romantic and I appreciated that. By romantic, I mean the roles were not about femininity per se. It was about being vulnerable in male-female relationships. It was conflicted." In addition to touring with Pomare, she performed the choreographer's lauded *Las Desenamoradas* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's historic festival *Dance Black America*, April 21 to 24, 1983. Lavinia Williams Yarborough and Dianne McIntyre were also participants of the grand *dans*. Some crossroads are insightful, D'Orléans Juste and I agreed. During the *Dance Black America* festival, she was at the crossroads of her past and her future. She was overjoyed to greet her former teacher "who was too polite not to recognize [her]." As the Eleo Pomare Dance Company only performed the first two days of the festival, D'Orléans Juste did not attend McIntyre's *Etude in Free* (1981) on April 23 and 24. Immediately following the festivities, D'Orléans Juste joined the Limón Dance Company. As they parted ways, Pomare asked the dancer to return if, within four years, she was not cast in Limón's *The Moor's Pavane* (1949). Set to the music of Henry Purcell, the choreographic masterpiece distills Shakespeare's *Othello* via a minuet. Four figures dance the Moor, his wife Desdemona, Iago, and his wife Emilia. Limón dancers name a white handkerchief that travels from dancer to dancer "the fifth character" because the prop transforms and drives the choreography's drama to its bitter end—Desdemona's murder by the Moor. Early on, D'Orléans

Juste danced both female roles as well as many of the Limón and Humphrey classics. As both a Limón and an independent artist, she has since collaborated closely with and/or interpreted roles by international master choreographers, accessed dance institutions around the globe as she reconstructs Limón's works, and conducts master classes. In her own artistic pursuits, Haiti is a theme to which she returns. Set to Venezuelan contemporary dance company Coreoarte, her "*Lè Soley Leve*" or *When the Sun Rises* (2011), based on stories of children born and raised in the infamous prison Fort Dimanche amidst the oppressive Duvalier dictatorship, has been warmly received by critics and audiences in South America and the Caribbean.

In addition to the vigor, attack, gravitas and nonchalance D'Orléans Juste acquired from collaborations with Williams Yarborough, Pomare, Donald McKayle, Limón master teachers, Anabelle Gamson and an extensive list of stellar dancemakers, *She Who Carries the Sky* inherits what Limón learned from his mentor Doris Humphrey and her husband Charles Weidman: the body's quality as "the arc between two deaths, or simply put a fall and rebound" (Jones 38). In moments of silence during *She Who Carries the Sky*, Limón technique's attention to breath rhythms arcs D'Orléans Juste's body in mid-air and propels the fast runs she executes. Breath rhythms also initiate and/or further color polyrhythmic phrases, such as a brief moment in which D'Orléans Juste's hand gestures in one direction, as her head swings in another. All the while, she lifts a bent knee to the ceiling. She freezes the tableau as she rises on the ball of the supporting foot. Then she collapses the image by swinging her body forward into a weighted run.

Moving along, true to the spirit of *Manbo Ayizan*, D'Orléans Juste sought to balance her environs, drawing from the knowledge she accumulated over time, and in various spaces. She dug deeply each time to open herself up to the priestess. From an Africanist perspective, deepening one's movement intelligence is akin to achieving "coolness," "in the sense of a deeply

and complexly motivated, consciously artistic, interweaving of elements serious and pleasurable, of responsibility and of play” (Thompson “Aesthetic” 16). Additionally, to synthesize and set the dancing priestess’ cool movement intelligence, D’Orléans Juste and her choreographer turned to the persona’s literary muses. In Haitian-American author Edwidge Danticat’s heartbreaking novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994), a cadre of wounded women textually struggle with the ravages of patriarchy and sexual assault. According to the program note, a steadfast woman descended from Guinean ancestors and danced at the Joyce. A passage in the novel which serves as this essay’s epigraph is both a warning and an encouragement that narrator Sophie Caco hears from her grandmother. Sophie hails from that tribe of women that labors to remember and to love. This narrator, with Lyall Watson’s female shaman Tia in *Gifts of Unknown Things* (1991) as a counterpoint, are two of the fictional characters that bind D’Orléans Juste’s embodied knowledges.

Resonance: ... *The large, festively attired congregation forms two lines in the “peristyle” or temple. As they wait their turn to honor the “lwa” who dances in their heads, they focus attention on the four middle-aged women who process. Next to Lady in Red and barefoot like her companion, a lady donning a brown dress holds her skirt high and wide. Unlike the Lady in Red, her torso is straight, and her head bows to the earth. Her shuffles echo the thin piercing sound that a percussionist playing a triangle emits, Lady in Brown’s head and feet call and respond to one another like a beating heart, Also, how she presses the ball of one foot backward as the other foot lands forward reverberates only her hips and evokes a subtle “grouyad” (hip gyrations). Lady in Brown’s “wisdom” is based “on her knowledge of life’s pleasures and pains as well as their rewards and their consequences...*

II. Calling Upon All Scripted Ayizans

Watching D'Orléans Juste metamorphose into a Guinean Ancestor, I experience a moment of emotional belonging, “in which audiences and participants feel themselves become part of the whole in organic, nearly spiritual way; spectators’ individuality becomes finely attuned to those around them, in a cohesive if fleeting feeling [...]” (Dolan 11). I read signifiers of root *lwa* Ayizan through D'Orléans Juste's dance fusion of a shaman. *Dedoublaj* and Vodou are certainly in the eye and soul of the beholder, similar to ways my Haitian ancestors saw through Catholic iconographies to continue linking with their ontologies and spiritual guides. There is more, however. This Ayizan barely harnesses a world of suffering.

In Anna Wexler's retelling of a myth bestowed upon her by Vodou flagmaker Clotaire Bazile, “Manbo Ayizan is the great queen of Vodou – She was the first to present Vodou.” In the flagmaker's recitation, the root, Dahomean-born *lwa* once housed all the *lwa* and her lakou was the center of knowledge. She was *the* healer, teacher and counselor. Her great power and wisdom induced the jealousy of her brethren who had not yet been “enlightened.” The other *lwa* rebelled. “Each *lwa* who revolted became responsible for something, symbolized something” (Wexler 65-66). In this story, there is resistance to and rejection of the womanist practice that Ayizan nurtures. D'Orléans Juste would qualify this mode of trivialization a [Black] woman's perpetual battleground. Based on one of our many casual conversations, she echoes terms limpidly scripted by Alice Walker:

When we [Black women] have pleaded for understanding, our character has been distorted; when we have asked for simple caring, we have been handed empty aspirational appellations, then stuck in the farthest corner. When we have asked for love, we have been given children. In short, our plainer gifts, our labors of fidelity and love have been knocked down our throats (14).

This sums up what D'Orléans Juste and choreographer McIntyre distilled from their discussion of Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994). Protagonist Sophie Caco receives the message about wise and brave African ancestors from her maternal grandmother. She is a twelve-year-old girl who must leave her aunt, Tante Atie, her guardian since birth. Her mother, a silhouette in a faded photograph, is a Brooklyn resident who supports the family. A few weeks later, following massive riots and killings caused by the 1986 ousting of President Jean-Claude Duvalier, she traveled to Brooklyn, New York and met her mother Martine for the first time. The woman is frail. She is ravaged both by breast cancer and memories of the rape that engendered Sophie. From Martine and Sophie's first contact, every touch they instigate, every breath they take in each other's proximity, every glance at one another is a harrowing reminder that Sophie was an unwanted child, the embodiment of Martine's abuse by a Tonton Macoute—a military henchman of the Duvalier presidents—because she was too pretty and seemingly haughty. Sophie becomes guardian to her suicidal mother. But Martine *tests* 18-year old Sophie—a vaginal exam to ensure that the hymen is intact—after her first date. Sophie marries an older man, moves to Rhode Island in order to raise her daughter Brigitte. She attends psychological counseling sessions. By the end of the novel, Sophie copes with Martine's second pregnancy and her ensuing suicide because she was convinced that the unborn child “has a man's voice” (217).

Sophie holds the funeral in Haiti. The procession passes by the sugar cane field where her mother's body was violated. Fittingly, Sophie returns to the site of memory that, in a moment as brief as touching, inhaling and seeing, has marked all the women in her clan. Sophie, then, unleashes her rage and her anger by thrashing and crying in the exact location where she was conceived. Her grandmother who foreshadowed that she will carry the sky, now questions: “*Ou libéré? Are you free? [...] Ou libéré!*” You are free! (Danticat *Breath* 233). In that cathartic

release, she exorcizes her mother's suffering from her body in order to spare her newborn daughter this spiraling cycle of violence. It is only then that she begins to heal, to understand that Martine was eternally trapped in a cocoon, and that her death was perhaps the only road to peace. Sophie, the wise, opens herself up to intergenerational memories, through various time periods and multiples spaces. This is the burden that her grandmother predicted she would carry and/or relay as a teacher, mother and healer. She too is Vodou. Now *She* is Ayizan.

I am not the first to read Vodou aesthetics in Danticat's characters. Martin Munro's edited anthology *Edwidge Danticat: A Reader's Guide* features noted scholars who critically acknowledge ways that Vodou dynamics thread the celebrated writer's work. Honoring Danticat's intertextual practice, D'Orléans Juste and her choreographer, through the dancing female body, magnify the physical and psychological strains—desired or not—that undergird Black women's centrality to their communities. As the conjurer pricks her ears, shivers, and then grasps thin air to stumble back, viewers might understand that she is reacting to invisible forces that only raw memories can invoke. For the dancer, this was not an easy task. About the efforts required to steer the energies radiating from her multiple selves and to activate a symbiosis with her environments, D'Orléans Juste confides:

The beginning of this dance relates to coming into an environment that seemed unknown but that was extremely familiar. And I had to rely on my intuition and it's as if the space itself was calling me, it's as if when I put my foot down, it was a known place. And I would stop was because a memory called me. Physicalizing that idea took some time. It asked me to be extremely articulate, extremely aware of when I was forming a gesture or when I was using my weight, throughout the whole dance...I point my finger to the sky, I pluck and turn my head. Dianne is an expert at arresting movement in time and punctuating movement in space. There is a physical efficiency of gesture. It was so direct, and almost too fast for the eye. The idea is that, since that being, that person, that woman [on stage] was aware of her environment at all times, she was also called by voices and energies at all time. I could not stay anywhere for too long. Because your whole body had to express where it was called from and what it was reacting to. It's as if you have to let the "selves" dissipate in your spine, and then move on to somewhere else. It's

as if you have to transport yourself from one place to another. Obviously the audience doesn't know we have to go through this transformation, but that's actually what you think about. You're here now and you're not here now. (D'Orléans Juste 2016)

D'Orléans Juste's words are the very utterances of Vodou *dans* participants I have met during my fieldwork. They are mobile hosts to multiple selves and realities, both human and otherworldly. D'Orléans Juste draws a parallel between how Vodou congregants place themselves at the disposal of the spirits and the manners in which she lent her body to ethereal fictional bodies. In other words, alongside the memories of her dancing selves, Sophie Caco was not the only literary person who inhabited her body. The dancer's *Manbo* was saturated with the spirit of Lyall Watson's Tia, a young dancing shaman in *Gifts of Unknown Things* (1991). Biologist Watson's meditative exploration of Nus Tarian, Indonesia's dancing island introduces readers to a community where (wo)mankind is but a fragile element of his or her environment, and not its master. Islanders hear colors, see odors, and radiate an energy that announces their presence to those attuned to such phenomena, regardless of the distance between the emitter and receivers. Central to Watson's vivid description of the interconnectedness between man, flora, fauna and the elements, is twelve year-old Tia. Her body can absorb her community's "terrible vestigial monster, dredged up by [their] collective unconscious out of primeval slime," and then expel it by "giving body to the dust at her feet, adding a spark of soul, breathing on it once and setting it free. Her movements encompass the passage of the stars, the procession of the planets. A tapestry of birth and breath, of life and love, of growing old and dying" (Watson 85-86). D'Orléans Juste explains how she physicalized Watson's poetics:

My personal experience is that these things are already in existence. I'm aware of them in my life, throughout my life. It was an unbelievable opportunity to be able to live it and to become one with those elements or those environments on stage. It's not usually what is required or asked of stage performers. We may create an environment where imagination leads us in a certain direction but this was much

more connected to how I actually feel myself influenced by nature and by the spirit world, so it was chance to acknowledge that realm and to feel free to let it speak to me, through me, to let it come through me, and let myself be swayed by it. There is a physical manifestation of that in *She Who Carries the Sky*. And Dianne is very familiar with these realities; she dialogues with these all the time through her dancing. It was wonderful for me to see that the audience can actually sense that space. To do it through somebody else [McIntyre and the Priestess], like that, that was really a gift. (D'Orléans Juste 2016)

Spectators and I observed the conjurer's restlessness and outbursts of energy as she labors to heal herself and her environs. Surely the effects of violence, trauma and pain on women must be aired out and resolved, as Danticat undertakes and Watson narrates. Yet, as lights fade out on D'Orléans Juste's serene demeanor, audiences learn that positioning women as victims disqualifies them from the womanist-saturated performance described by Alice Walker. As portrayed by D'Orléans Juste, women continuously exhibit moments of fortitude, transformation and liberation. Are we paying careful attention, her *Manbo* questions? I also read a choreography of love and tenderness between human and spiritual bodies. At the end of the dance, D'Orléans Juste's previously hyper mobile and highly kinetic body pauses. She, the ancestors' temporary vessel, looks worn out. She inhales. As she exhales, she is re-energized.

It's not a self-gratifying experience. I can say that to you. This dance is all consuming. There's a point in the dance, I don't think that I can move much more. My breath, my muscles, my blood, my heart, everything is pumping to the extreme. It's just pushed to the extreme. It's fatigued. And because of that, the feeling of being spent, I need to recover somehow. And that's where the piece goes back to the beginning. With the small gesture and the acknowledgement. What Dianne asked is that, at the point, you come back to the same place you realize is *the* sacred place. And you thank the gods. You thank the gods of nature. You thank the mountain. You thank the earth. You thank the trees. And that action brings me breath. It brings me back to my body that is now as able to receive more. In Dianne's mind, she thought: when your physical body can't anymore, the spirit body is there to support you and revive you. (D'Orléans Juste 2016)

I am convinced that being aware of ancestral intervention in human life is the “knowingness” McIntyre sensed in the women she met in Haiti, and that she and D’Orléans Juste relayed to New York City spectators. During our May 2014 interview, McIntyre asserted that the performer was not only a mature woman who could resolutely help her fellow islanders carry their sky but also she is the incarnation of José Limón’s dancing sorcerer, “the great dancer[. Here may be that sorcerer who will practice and master the ancient [dance] magic, in whose hands it will be reborn” (Limón).

D’Orléans Juste is undeniably that sorcerer, insists McIntyre. The dancer had acquired the rare quality of skillfully channeling experiences accrued in Haiti and abroad. At the Joyce Theater, she syncopated rhythms, dances and knowledge from her roots, tapped into the power of Danticat’s and Watson’s texts, and mixed the fusion with the choreographer’s personal memories of her travels to Haiti.

Only a patient, skilled and seasoned dancer with “emotional musicality” could transmute such seemingly disparate ideas, methods and geographies into a dynamic choreography, to paraphrase Maxwell’s intent in selecting D’Orléans Juste for the McIntyre project. Maxwell had long admired McIntyre’s work but a partnership until *She Who Carries the Sky* had not materialized. At the outset, McIntyre and D’Orléans Juste had much in common when they met. Danticat’s oeuvre was one. After speaking with D’Orléans Juste about the Limón dancer’s upbringing, the veteran choreographer remembered that Vodouizan “danced beyond what is” when she journeyed to Haiti in the 1970s to collaborate with Williams Yarborough and observe Vodou dances first hand. As such, the literary texts provided her with imageries toward which D’Orléans Juste could trek. McIntyre endeavored to foster in the dancer a movement intelligence based on creative re-invention, similar to the one Vodou congregants generate as they bridge

Ancestral and human worlds. Specifically, Haiti's "serious women," similar to ones memorialized by Danticat, was a key concept that McIntyre replayed during her choreographic process and our interview.

To further illustrate what McIntyre must have experienced in Port-au-Prince's Vodou spaces and to broaden the scope of my Vodou argument, I have been introducing mature deity Ayizan's practitioners since the second resonance. D'Orléans Juste danced a powerful spiritual leader who gives flesh to the philosophies crossroads deity Ayizan values. Following, section three zooms in on some of the physical interplays that abound in D'Orléans Juste's conjurer and Ayizan's followers at Haiti's Lakou Souvnans.

Resonance: *...In addition to Ladies in Red and Brown, a lady in a salmon dress and another dressed in beige are also members of the Ayizan quartet. They stand slightly apart from Ladies in Red and in Brown. To the eight-person musical section, Ladies in Salmon and in Beige hold their heads high, lace their hands behind their back, as they advance. There is little flourish to their step-touch. One woman tilts her head on occasion. The other one purses her lips. Their faces are serene as they move in unison, like veterans unfazed by a ceremony they have performed repeatedly. The singer urges all participants, "mi yanvalou miso, look at Ayizan! If you cannot keep up, you'll be replaced!" Indeed, they seem to project. Keep up!*

III. Ayizan the Hearth/Roxane's Embrace

Dianne McIntyre, May 2, 2014. *I said: You do something like that (she does a hand gesture where she reaches into space), and a contact with an invisible force causes her to stumble back...Hand gestures depict functional things, like lighting candles, incense, untying the scarf around her head and tying it to her waist...Roxane had to employ languages of the body, and shape the body through the space in ways that would signal her intent to the deities...Roxane*

had to connect the gestures to meaning that would not offend the deities. She had to ask permission before every rehearsal and performance...[She Who Carries the Sky] is an intimate conversation between her and her gods.

As I noted earlier, ethnographies of Haitian Vodou tend to skip Ayizan's entrance during ceremonies. Zora Neale Hurston's compelling narrative of Vodou ceremonies *Tell My Horse* (1938) is one. Also, Katherine Dunham (the reigning Black icon of American dance) who meticulously chronicled her multiple *kanzo* (Vodou initiation ceremonies) does not pay tribute to the divine mistress of ceremony, in *Island Possessed* (1969). In a *dans*, congregants must call Legba first. To understand this deity's significance to Black Atlantic cultures, one only has to read Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s seminal *The Signifying Monkey*. A Vodou ceremony cannot begin without the mischievous gatekeeper enabling communication between the fleshy and immaterial worlds. Several dances and songs are dedicated to Parenn Legba (Haiti/Fon) or Africa's Eshu-Elegba (Yoruba), and then to Loko the *Hougan* or Grand Priest who processes after Legba. Ayizan gets her three-song minimum and the procession continues with more attention being lavished on Danbala, *lwa* of light; Ezili Danto, the quintessential principle of fecundity (Deren 138); and Ogou, war deity. With all due respect to Ayizan, I tend to narrate her as the *lwa* of hospitality. Vodou flagmaker Clotaire Bazile's lively vision of Ayizan's compound as all the *lwa*'s original dwelling⁹ supports my perspective, which is also registered in my collaborators' imagination of the divine teacher. Indeed, Ayizan guides new initiates, protects rites, the hearth and the market place. Yet, in a Vodou *dans*, she is saluted after Legba and the boastful Loko, her divine spouses (Deren 147, Fleurant 80). I joked with choreographer Jeanguy Saintus, a Vodou scholar in his own right, that Ayizan is treated as a servant of a certain age. What proves to be a

⁹ See Anna Wexler's essay referenced earlier.

bad and essentializing joke to Saintus and others borrows from Rosemary Marangoly George's keyword definition of "domestic": Ayizan might represent "the private and its accoutrements and, in a secondary fashion. [She] also refers to the "national" as opposed to the "foreign," and to the "tame" as opposed to the "natural" or "wild" (88). She seems to be classed lower in Vodouists' hierarchy of needs, I insisted. Congregants do revel more in Danbala (wisdom/life), Ogou (war), Gede (death/procreation) and Ezili (love). To me, Ayizan is the homely relative in a glamorous family. Her St. Claire catholic iconography next to Ezili Danto/Our Lady of Sorrows' image is telling. Both images are widely available on the Internet. The first illustrates the way Ayizan's monochromatic outfit symmetrically drapes every inch of her body except for her face and her hands. A pale golden halo, the blue sky and a few clouds frame her body as she fixes a lamp near her heart. She epitomizes balance, sobriety and humility. Ezili Freda stares pensively in the offing, as countless golden and white hearts crowd her space. Her body is tilted on a slight diagonal and her white, blue and red outfit is somewhat askew. A gold crown adorns her head. A heavy gold necklace circles her neck. A sword is piercing her heart, and she can barely contain the jewelry in her arms. She is excessive, extravagant, uneven, and unbridled love.

Rather, my collaborators recommended, I should emphasize what is to be gained by using her pedagogy as an interpretive device for a Vodou-illiterate audience. Ayizan also embodies attributes such as multiplicity and fluidity, tenets of Vodou religion. After all, she is a crossroads *lwa* in the Rada rite, which houses a pantheon of "cool" Dahomean divinities, those born and transported from *Ginen* (Guinea). They are "associated with the achievement of peace and reconciliation" (Thompson "Flash" 164).¹⁰ Also, her name compels a mnemonic association to

¹⁰ For a sustained discussion of Vodou's rites, please see *Vodou in Haitian Life and Culture: Invisible Powers*, co-edited by Patrick Bellegarde-Smith and Claudine Michel, specifically Karen McCarthy Brown's essay "Afro-Caribbean Spirituality: A Haitian Case Study."

“Ayiti,” the Kreyòl word for Haiti. Ayizan is earth-bound. She is trader, teacher, and hearth. Arguably, she is Vodou’s *potomitan* par excellence. Lastly, significant to my lush comprehension of Ayizan was one of Saintus’ points. Ayizan might stand for a mature “wise” goddess to Ezili’s dazzling “dramatic” deity. She is nonetheless a transgressive root *lwa*, with a razor-sharp mastery of public and private space negotiations. She mediates the economics of and within both spheres. She dissolves barriers. My danced resonance of Ayizan’s followers index such as a propensity.

Joined by Saintus and singer James Germain at Lakou Souvnans, I appreciated the touches of Ayizan in the four women who danced her that day. Their faces revealed the “solid, grave, ancient quality” that Dianne McIntyre observed in Haitian women of all social classes. “A knowingness,” McIntyre names this Ayizan feature (McIntyre). “Indications of great movement intelligence,” would add D’Orléans Juste. Unlike the careful hops that signify the cane-holding Legba, the billowy arms, rippling torsos and back that mark dances for the water and light deities, or the flirtatious cadences of the Ezili cohort, Ayizan’s knowingness can be best observed through the ways these four followers dance unhurriedly while adopting serene faces. Lady in Red’s stomps might be considered Ayizan’s trader aspect who must navigate the “market place [] where people are often deceived” and must address victims’ many complaints (Fleurant 81). Unlike her companion’s march-step dance, Lady in Brown’s variation is syncopated. This Ayizan evokes the womb. She is familiar with carnal pleasures as well as the management of its rewards and consequences. Ladies in Salmon and in Beige are teachers, Ayizan the moral compass. Cumulatively, their variations amount to a playful and mutable woman endowed with the gifts of making herself intelligible in diverse social strata. Her body remembers her emanations past. She is simply wiser about the Ezili she might have been. Ayizan

folds that history into the woman she is now. Her greatest trick is her ability to cross axes unremarked to continue the labor of advancing her children's and women's causes.

In a human female, such as D'Orléans Juste, some might perceive this *dedouble* versatility as suspect and disingenuous, especially considering her status in a modern classic dance company whose relevance Gia Kourlas interrogates in a May 2, 2014 review titled "Art Bound by Its Time." That is, what can the mature transnational Limón Associate Artistic Director say about Haitian and Black women now, given that she leads a company that is considered more of a White dance archive?

D'Orléans Juste would attest to the following. Chief among McIntyre's objectives was to choreograph the dance as a safe space wherein D'Orléans Juste could freely acknowledge and relay memories that traverse her body. D'Orléans Juste is indeed a living resource as she dances herself, women devised by all the dance artists with whom she has worked, the literary texts analyzed in this essay, places she inhabits, and other experiences beyond the purview of my research. Each performance, with its spectrum of discoveries, replenishes her body and Limón's archives. This is not an easy magic trick, as Jack Anderson prefaced his review of the dancer in 1994. It has taken D'Orléans Juste over four decades to cultivate her amalgamated dance abilities. Joy and pain have animated her, privately and professionally. Similar to the Ayizan Ladies, the conjurer in *She Who Carries the Sky* painstakingly mediates a movement intelligence that draws from D'Orléans Juste's vast cultural and artistic repertoire. As such, both D'Orléans Juste and the conjurer instruct that women have always lived plural and layered lives, be they from Haiti, Indonesia, Mexico, Canada, the United States and elsewhere. With her dance and intercultural acuity, and embodied knowledge, D'Orléans Juste illustrates this pedagogy by

fusing her private with her public performer's life, perceptions of her "national" Haitian body to "foreign" imagined ones, and her "tame" experienced body with her "wild" inquisitive spirit.

Conclusion

In the choreography, D'Orléans Juste does so by bouncing swiftly from the intricate and speedy foot patterns of a jig her French-Canadian mother taught her to the Haitian *yanvalou*'s physical undulations she learned as African-American Williams Yarborough's student. In moments of silence, one hears D'Orléans Juste's breath rise and fall as she carves the space with her arms while her feet shuffle on the stage floor. Then, she rebounds, runs and halts when the music fades, invoking the Haitian folkloric dancers in her father's Québec nightclubs. Her work in *She Who Carries the Sky* mobilizes what Ladies in Red, Brown, Salmon and Beige enacted individually. That is, as Veta Goler asserts about McIntyre, the choreographer's and D'Orléans Juste's intentions "may not be to speak out with a consciously feminist agenda" (301). Yet, as they lived womanist lives, the otherworldly creature McIntyre devised with D'Orléans Juste "work[] for the betterment of women" (301) in displaying a female dancing body that reconciles, but not necessarily transcends, the binarisms associated with a woman of the hearth. Lastly, although this essay is ending, the dance/*dans* is not over. Roxane D'Orléans Juste envisions a near future in which she will allow Ayizan to ride her on stage, considering what she has learned from interactions with McIntyre, the literary texts, audiences, our dialogues, as well as from navigating her multiple identities—or in her word, selves—in order to give spectators an affirming vision of a Black woman in a state of spiritual bliss. She looks forward to enabling her conjurer's search of new boundaries, guiding her to crossroads which might strengthen her communion with the ancestral realm, and disseminating embodied knowledge generated by Haitians.

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