

The Twin Plays:
Port-au-Prince
&
Adams County Illinois

by Jackson Mac Low



1966
A Great Bear Pamphlet
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THE TWIN PLAYS

JACKSON MAC LOW

The Twin Plays
Jackson Mac Low

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A “reading-with-actions” of THE TWIN PLAYS took place at the end of Yam Day, a continuous two-day series of performances of musical works, poems, simultaneities, happenings, and other events, presented at the Hardware Poets Theatre (then on West 53rd St., New York), May 11-12, 1963. The performers were Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, Benjamin Patterson, Florence Tarlow, and Jackson Mac Low.

Folk-sayings quoted in ADAMS COUNTY ILLINOIS are all from Folk-lore from Adams County Illinois, by Harry M. Hyatt. (Copyright 1935, by the Alma Egan Hyatt Foundation, New York).

Introduction:

These 2 plays were begun at the vernal equinox (21 March of 1962) & completed soon after. They both require 5 performers skilled at spontaneous improvisation of actions during performances, for all actions in the plays are thus improvised, in accordance with very generalized directions given in the script. Both plays also have exactly the same structure: that of 5 conversations, each of which is literally repeated a specified number of times. Each conversation after the first begins while the conversation before is being repeated. During the 5th conversation any one of the first 4 conversations is repeated again at a specified point, & during the repetition of this 5th conversation, speeches from previous conversations are interspersed as directed in the script. The numbers of speeches in corresponding conversations, numbers of repetitions of them, & combinations of performers employed in them are the same in both plays. So are the generalized directions which are to guide the performers' improvisation of actions during each conversation. Only the words & general character of the speeches in each play are different.

Both plays were composed by means of chance operations. The words of **Port-au-Prince** were drawn from a list of words made many years ago from the letters in the place name "Port-au-Prince." (At the time of the writing of this introduction, this play had become topical because of "disturbances" in this place, the capital of Haiti, which had caused "strained relations" between that country & the USA.) The speeches in this play consist of "pseudo-sentences": punctuated arrangements of words from the list which look as if they have structural meanings but do not. The only meanings in the speeches are the successive lexical meanings of the individual words. The punctuation is only a guide to voice pitches, pitch change, & pauses; - but as such, it must be followed by the performers very exactly, as if it were punctuation introduced into ordinary prose passages. It is to be noted that "Croat" is a 2-syllable word & "Port-au-Prince" is pronounced as in French. The words were drawn from the list, punctuated & arranged by means of systematic chance operations.

Altho **Adams County Illinois** has exactly the same structure as **Port-au-Prince**, all of its speeches "make sense." Each is a folk-saying from Adams County, Illinois, quoted from the book **Folk-Lore from Adams County Illinois**, by Harry Middleton Hyatt (Memoirs of the Alma Egan Hyatt Foundation, New York, 1935).

These folk-sayings have both been drawn from the book & placed in the conversations by systematic chance operations. The details of the structure of repeated conversations common to both plays have been determined by similar operations.

Performers are designated by the letters A, B, C, D, & E. Notations such as “AB” & “CDE” mean “Performers A & B” & “Performers C, D, & E.” “CONVERSATION I (4)” means “CONVERSATION I, which is said 4 times.”

Jackson Mac Low, 5 May 1963, Bronx, N.Y.

Port-au-Prince

CONVERSATION I (4):

Trace: court; retin.

Prone crate tapir outer, crone.

Croat?

Recap.

(AB enter engaged in some conspicuous occupation, which they continue as they say CONVERSATION I 4 times. During their 3rd time thru, AB gradually become less conspicuous, occupying a less prominent position, talking less loudly, &c. At any time during this 3rd saying of I, CDE begin CONVERSATION II. Until this time they will have been either absent, i.e., outside the performance area or offstage, or inconspicuous. At any time during their 4th saying of I, AB may begin any quiet 2-person occupation, such as playing chinese checkers or making love. They continue this occupation quietly while CDE carry on CONVERSATION II in the foreground [in any sense]. As they begin II, CDE engage together in some strenuous occupation totally different from that which AB engaged in during I.)

CONVERSATION II (10):

Roper tapir; tripe-crone.

Inept, crone-Croat.

Retip, retup - croup.

Recap nicer-retin - tapir; caper!

(As CDE say II 10 times, they gradually become less conspicuous, but always remain clearly audible. At any time up until the end of CDE's 5th saying of II, AB become more conspicuous & begin CONVERSATION III. During their later sayings of II & afterwards, CDE may begin & continue any quiet occupation markedly different from that engaged in by AB previously.)

CONVERSATION III (6):

Retap - point.

Riper?

Paint!

Retap?

Ounce.

Route-prate: court.

Trine?

Recap court?

(AB remain conspicuous thruout their 6 sayings of III. At any time during or after AB's 4th saying of III, CDE begin CONVERSATION IV inconspicuously & gradually begin to be conspicuous. They must not begin IV until they have finished their 10th saying of II. AB carry on a conspicuous activity during all of their 6 sayings of III & continue it during CDE's early sayings of IV.)

CONVERSATION IV (7):

E. Roper.

D. Trine - erupt rutin; enact react?

C. Train price pinct; trace-price raper trier count

- retap antre price?

E. React — retap.

D. Print trine recap - antre.

(CDE say IV 7 times, remaining conspicuous until any point in their 4th say of IV, when they suddenly become inconspicuous, aided by the sudden beginning of a new conspicuous activity by AB. This activity may be begun & carried on by AB during their later sayings of III or after them [silently or with cries or other sounds], but AB must begin it during CDE's 4th saying of IV. Whether or not they begin it during their later sayings of III, AB shd continue this conspicuous activity for some time after both their last recapitulation of III & CDE's last saying of IV & also during CONVERSATION V, even tho they participate in the latter.

V does not begin until after a short period of speechless activity by all after CDE's last saying of IV.

During V, CDE lose their identity as a group: each now moves about freely in a separate activity but usually goes up to each previous speaker before saying one of his

own speeches. AB continue to be somewhat related, but are also more individual & separate in their activities during V.)

CONVERSATION V (2):

- A. Riper, trier toper: point.
- E. Tripe.
- C. Croup: inept?
- E. React roper prate trier-roper; raper; rerap;
prate-retup; retip, trine?
- D. Paint?
- B. Tapir-outer, trope; trace-taper; retup retap!
- C. Route; tapir: print-count - Croat tripe-raper-
raper.
- A. Enact count, react.
- C. Outer Croat: train, Port-au-Prince* taupe -
raper, rerap Croat - retap; pinct crate!

(*When C says "Port-au-Prince," a single rapid but clear recapitulation of any one of the previous conversations [I, II, III, or IV] begins & continues simultaneously with the rest of C's speech. If either of the CDE conversations is recapitulated here, C speaks his speeches in this previous conversation on cue between the words of this ["Outer Croat . . ."] speech. C shd speak this speech slowly in order to produce a clear contrast between this speech & the speeches of the recapitulated conversation, which, whether spoken by C parenthetically or by others simultaneously, shd be spoken rapidly, tho always clearly & audibly. If necessary, the recapitulated conversation is continued thru the following speech [of A], which is also to be spoken slowly. If A, D, B, or E has to say any speeches of the recapitulated conversation during the following speeches of V, they, like C, are to speak them rapidly, but clearly & audibly, as parenthetical insertions between the words of their own speeches in V, or before or after these speeches.)

- A. Tripe.
- D. Print.

B. Pinct paint - print - erupt price!

E. Nicer; taper - Croat!

A. Nicer; print trace-prior - trace.

B. Crier; taupe?

E. Ounce - pinct nicer-prate-riper: roper-erupt-recap.

(At this point, A recapitulates the first speech of this conversation [V]. Before E says the 2nd speech ["Tripe."], B, C, or D says any one speech of theirs from any of the 1st 4 conversations [I, II, III, or IV]. Then E says this 2nd speech ["Tripe."] but before C says the 3rd speech ["Croup: inept?"], A, B, or D says any one of his own speeches from I, II, III, or IV. Then C says the 3rd speech ["Croup: inept?"], followed by any speech of A, B, or D from a previous conversation, & so on. Note that it is always one of the 3 performers who has not just spoken in V, & who is not to speak next in V, who thus inserts speeches from previous conversations between those of V during the recapitulation of V.

However, when C reaches the word "Port-au-Prince" in the 9th speech of V, ABDE each says - immediately, rapidly, clearly, & audibly - but simultaneously with the rest of this 9th speech of V - any one speech of his own from one of the previous 4 conversations. After C says "crate!" [at the end of the 9th speech of V], B, D, or E says any one of his own speeches from one of the 4 previous conversations, & then A says his next speech of V ["Tripe."], followed by B, C, or E, & so on as before, to the end of the recapitulation of V & the end of PORT-AU-PRINCE. No speech from one of the previous conversations shd be said more than once during the recapitulation of V.)

End of PORT-AU-PRINCE.

Adams County Illinois

for Spencer Holst

This play has exactly the same structure as PORT-AU-PRINCE & shd, whenever possible, be presented along with that play, with the same persons performing in both as ABCDE.

CONVERSATION I (4):

- A. The sign of the Twins is a good time to plant tomatoes.
 - B. To permit another person to pass between you & your companion, when you are walking, means death for someone in the family.
 - A. Is it true that “if you will plant radish seed with your cucumbers, the bugs will not bother them, for the bugs don’t like radishes”?
 - B. If you dream of a bird in a cage, it indicates an approaching wedding.
- (AB enter engaged in some conspicuous occupation, which they continue as they say CONVERSATION I 4 times. During their 3rd time thru, AB gradually become less conspicuous, occupying a less prominent position, talking less loudly, &c. At any time during this 3rd saying of I, CDE begin CONVERSATION II. Until this time they will have been either absent, i.e., outside the performance area or offstage, or inconspicuous. At any time during their 4th saying of I, AB may begin any quiet 2-person occupation, such as playing chinese checkers or making love. They continue this occupation quietly while CDE carry on CONVERSATION II in the foreground [in any sense]. As they begin II, CDE engage together in some strenuous occupation totally different from that which AB engaged in during I.)

CONVERSATION II (10):

- C. “If you wear your shoes out on the toe,
you will spend money as you go.”
 - D. It is the token of a new friend, to have your right eyebrow itch.
 - E. To sneeze six times is the indication of a journey.
 - C. For kidney trouble, drink tea made of plantain seed!
- (As CDE say II 10 times, they gradually become less conspicuous, but always remain

clearly audible. At any time up until the end of CDE's 5th saying of II, AB become more conspicuous & begin CONVERSATION III. During their later sayings of II & afterwards, CDE may begin & continue any quiet occupation markedly different from that engaged in by AB previously.

CONVERSATION III (6):

- A. Sliced onions placed in the room of a typhoid fever patient will suck up the poisonous odors. The onions will turn black.
- B. Is a considerable amount of lowing among cattle a sign of rain?
- A. Catnip tea is good for worms!
- B. If you cook clover blossom & make a tea, is it really very good for dropsy? Will all the water in your body pass with your bowels?
- A. It is the sign of bad luck to have a bat fly into the house.
- B. When pepper is spilled, you can avoid a quarrel by mixing a pinch of salt with the pepper & throwing it over your left shoulder.
- A. What makes a lot of noise in a house with one door,
And if it sits in a draft you can hear it no more?
- B. Is it a bird in a cage?

(AB remain conspicuous thruout their 6 sayings of III. At any time during or after AB's 4th saying of III, CDE begin CONVERSATION IV inconspicuously & gradually begin to be conspicuous. They must not begin IV until they have finished their 10th saying of II. AB carry on a conspicuous activity during all of their 6 sayings of III & continue it during CDE's early sayings of IV.)

CONVERSATION IV (7):

- E. Never tell a woman having change of life anything that will worry her or she will brood over it & it will cause her condition to be bad.
- D. If a pitcher walks around another pitcher to start the inning off, will it give the other pitcher the jinx & cause him to lose the game?
- C. Do horses play & gallop about for some days before cold weather?
- E. To make a good-natured man of a male baby, let him suck a piece of fat bacon.
- D. Any ailment of the stomach can be cured by drinking tea made of the horsemint plant.

(CDE say IV 7 times, remaining conspicuous until any point in their 4th saying of IV, when they suddenly become inconspicuous, aided by the sudden beginning of a new conspicuous activity by AB. This activity may be begun & carried on by AB during their later sayings of III or after them [silently or with cries or other non-verbal sounds], but AB must begin it during CDE's 4th saying of IV. Whether or not they begin it during their later sayings of III, AB shd continue this conspicuous activity for some time after both their last recapitulation of III & CDE's last saying of IV & also during CONVERSATION V, even tho they participate in the latter.

V does not begin until after a short period of speechless activity by all after CDE's last saying of IV.

During V, CDE lose their identity as a group: each now moves about freely in a separate activity but usually goes up to each previous speaker before saying one of his own speeches. AB continue to be somewhat related, but are also more individual & separate in their activities during V.)

CONVERSATION V (2):

A. Never go thru a swinging door & let it swing after you, or you will have bad luck.

E. "If anyone is talking in their sleep, & you want to know what they are saying, lay a horseshoe on their breast with the point up & they will tell all they know. Years ago we were living on a farm out in Burton & my brother came to town. When he got home he forgot what he did with the money. I said, 'Mother, wait until tonight & I will find out.' So when he went to sleep, I put the horseshoe on his breast & he started to tell what he did with the money. He bought a girl a cheap dress & a pair of stockings. The next morning I told him what he did with the money. He bought a girl a cheap dress & a pair of stockings. The next morning I told him what he done with the money, & he said he did buy them."

C. If a lamb of yours is killed or dies, & you cut out its heart & bury it in your yard, will this bring you good luck?

E. If March comes in like a lion,
will it go out like a lamb?

D. Is a peach tree blooming prematurely an omen of death?

B. “A man thought an old witch that lived in his neighborhood had bewitched his kidneys, for he was having so much trouble with them. He suffered all the time. So he thought he wd get even with her. Someone had told him, that if you wet in a bottle & hang it up where they cannot find it, they will suffer just like you do. So he put a cork in the bottle so it wd stay strong, & hung it way up in the chimney, then started a fire. If you do this, the soot will go right to the person that has bewitched you & will stick all over you (I mean, the witch) until you take that bottle out of the chimney. As soon as the fire was burning good, the soot flew right over & just covered this old witch. Her kidneys got to hurting so she cd not stand it. She went to this man & wanted to know what he had done, & begged & begged him to take the spell off. Said she was suffering so she cd not stand it, & the soot wd not wash off. He said to her, ‘You old devil, I am going to torment you until you die.’ & he did. This woman got so she cd not even pass her water. Even got black in the face, suffering so over this bottle being up in the chimney. At last her bladder busted & she died. & this man said she cd not bewitch anyone else now!”

C. To pick up a crooked pin will cause you bad luck.

A. A cold may be cured by drinking tea made from mullein leaves.

C. Throw flowers or a note into the grave*,

so that the party will not rest until he or she does what you want them to!

(*When C says the word “grave,” a single rapid but clear recapitulation of any one of the previous conversations [I, II, III, or IV] begins & continues simultaneously with the rest of C’s speech. If either of the CDE conversations is recapitulated here, C speaks his speeches in this previous conversation on cue between the words of this [“Throw flowers . . .”] speech. C shd speak this speech slowly in order to produce a clear contrast between this speech & the speeches of the recapitulated conversation, which, whether spoken by C parenthetically or by others simultaneously, shd be spoken rapidly, tho always clearly & audibly. If necessary, the recapitulated conversation in continued thru the following speech [of A], which is also to be spoken slowly. If A, D, B, or E has to say any speeches of the recapitulated conversation during the following speeches of V, they, like C, are to speak them rapidly, but clearly & audibly, as parenthetical insertions between their own speeches in V, or before or after these speeches.)

A. To remove moles: “Take a pinch of nitre & white cream of tartar, pound separately. Then mix it & after sifting, put it in a deep dish until it burns up & becomes like cake. Then put it in another dish. Pour water over it. Stir with the finger till it dissolves. Afterwards strain thru a filter. Pour into a new earthen pot upon the fire but do not boil. Just dry & pulverize. After this is done, take 9 ounces of distilled vinegar, 2 ounces of brandy. Put into a glass & mix the powder. Let it remain in the sun 3 days & save it. Wash the moles morning & evening & in a few days the moles will disappear.”

D. Anyone who is ugly in the cradle
will be beautiful in the saddle.

B. “If you die angry at old folks you will go to hell.”

E. You can secure long or large cucumbers by planting them on June 21st, the longest day of the year.

A. To dream of opening & eating walnuts is a sign that you will receive money.

B. “If you want to get rid of your husband, take a pair of his dirty socks & roll them up in a little ball, then go down to a freight train that is leaving town & throw the ball in any empty box car, so he will travel the same way the socks go. About 7 years ago I wanted to get rid of my husband, so one day I took a pair of his real dirty socks, rolled them up into a ball, went down in the railroad yards, & as a freight train was leaving town, threw the ball of socks in an empty box car, & he sure did travel from home; has not been back for 7 years.”

(If B is performed by a man, he shd preface the following speech with the words: “An Adams County lady once told me how a woman can get rid of her husband; she said, ‘If [&c.]’”)

E. Outwit the speaker when your ear burns by spitting on it & saying, “If it is bad, I hope you will bite your tongue.”

(At this point, A recapitulates the first speech of this conversation [V]. Before E says the 2nd speech [“If anyone is talking in their sleep, . . .”], B, C, or D says any one speech of his own from any of the 1st 4 conversations [I, II, III, or IV]. Then E says this 2nd speech [“If anyone . . .”], but before C says the 3rd speech [“If a lamb . . .”], A, B, or D says any one of his own speeches from I, II, III, or IV. Then C says the 3rd speech [“If a lamb . . .”], followed by any speech of A, B, or D from a previ-

ous conversation, & so on. Note that it is always one of the 3 performers who has not just spoken in V, & who is not to speak next in V, who thus inserts speeches from previous conversations between those of V during the recapitulation of V.

However, when C reaches the word “grave,” in the 9th speech of V, ABDE each says - immediately, rapidly, clearly, & audibly - but simultaneously with the rest of this 9th speech of V - any one speech of his own from one of the previous 4 conversations. After C says “. . . you want them to!” [at the end of the 9th speech of V], B, D, or E says any one of his own speeches from one of the 4 previous conversations, & then A says his next speech of V [“To remove moles: . . .”], followed by B, C, or E, & so on as before, to the end of the recapitulation of V & the end of ADAMS COUNTY ILLINOIS. No speech from one of the previous conversations shd be said more than once during the recapitulation of V.)

End of ADAMS COUNTY ILLINOIS - & End of THE TWIN PLAYS

This edition of THE TWIN PLAYS is dedicated to Dick Higgins &
Emmett Williams.

Jackson Mac Low

was born in Chicago September 12th, 1922, studied music there from the age of 4, began composing music and poetry at 15, and did work in philosophy and comparative literature at the University of Chicago from 1939 to 1943. After moving to New York, he continued his musical studies, worked at various jobs, co-edited an anarchist magazine, and obtained a B.A. in Greek at Brooklyn College in 1958.

In 1954, with his 5 biblical poems, Mac Low invented a kind of verse in which the unit is the “event” rather than the foot, syllable, stress, or cadence. These works, composed by chance operations, incorporate silences, each having the duration of any word, and a degree of indeterminacy in performance.

His play *The Marrying Maiden*, written in 1958, is constructed with a vocabulary of words and phrases from the Chinese Book of Changes (*I Ching*), chosen by objective systematic chance operations. Similar operations supplied the characters, speeches, divisions of scenes, gradations of loud and soft and fast and slow, and a set of adverbs and adverbial phrases serving as “regulations of manner” for the actors. The play was produced in New York in 1960 by the Living Theatre, directed by Judith Malina, with décor by Julian Beck, and a score by John Cage, the use of which was determined by dice throws.

Mac Low’s *Stanzas for Iris Lezak* (his wife), which the Something Else Press will publish early in 1967, is a book of stanzaic-acrostic chance poems written in 1960. The separated stanzas, with words and phrases drawn from such widely different sources as newspapers and scientific treatises, have been copied on more than 700 cards and used as texts for simultaneous performances comprising musical sounds and noises.

Mac Low’s poems and articles have appeared in periodicals and anthologies since 1940, and more recently his works have been published or performed in Denmark, France, West Germany, Great Britain, Holland, Japan, Mexico, and the USA. In addition to music, poems, plays, and simultaneities, he has done paintings, collages, and constructions, and remains active in the peace, civil rights, and anarchist movements.

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