

visceral statements about the "duality" of man and his ever-changing universe; they symbolize the dual personality of man and the changes in his psychic and physical composition; they are powerful reverberations of the paradox of revelation in concealment and vice versa: masks are devices for *concealment* and *disguise*, but in the process they *reveal* the multifarious forms and attributes, polarities and essences of life, being, and existence. That is, they present double and multiple images of the psycho-physical composition of man and phenomena. Thus, in a relatively parallel argument, Robert Benedetti (1972: 72) concludes that the mask idiom is a principal psycho-physical "mechanism . . . designed to project a sense of the self."

This idea or concept has been similarly and variously expressed and amplified by other theorists, practitioners, and critics in contexts slightly different from, but, nevertheless, adaxial to Benedetti's. Stanley Macebuh (1974), for example, believes very strongly that the mask probably holds the key to the profound psychological contemplation of the essence and meaning of life. In Soyinka's view, the role, function, and significance of the mask are inextricably woven in collective ("communal") consciousness, in the "communal" metaphysics and cosmology from which the mask derives, and in terms of the "masonic" bond that exists between the mask and the community. Therefore, he argues, the mask could be the means or device for the "spatial definition of being within phenomena" (Soyinka 1976: 1-60). Jon Baisch (1977: 8) similarly argues that the mask could be a mechanism designed by man as "part" of man's attempt "to solve the mystery of his own identity." From these views, we could deduce, at least, three important universal absolutes about the mask, namely: the mask is a (1) melange of cosmo-physical powers and attributes, (2) symbol of the universal paradox and duality of the cosmo-human personality, and (3) visceral matrix for the comprehension of the metaphysical paradox of man and phenomena. W. T. Benda's germane conclusion that the mask breathes and possesses life (1944: viii) crystallizes the argument that the *primum mobile* of the mask derives from the cosmo-physical agglomeration which characterizes and defines its nature and essence.

The *geist* therefore of, and beliefs involved in, the charisma of the mask probably have their origins and roots in the cosmological power and vital energy innate to all organic and inorganic matter. The hypothesis contends that a mask will naturally assume or inherit the melange of attributes innate to all the elements that compose it. And, this ever-present *force vitale* is a volatile, active, cosmic force that is at once creative and destructive, attractive and repulsive, empathetic and alienating, exciting and alarming, etc., however sublime, exotic, commonplace, fierce-looking, or unbalanced the mask may appear in form and substance. Macebuh recalls, for instance, that masks have been used in traditional Africa as instruments of warfare,

to strike terror in the hearts of the opposing forces precisely because it was assumed that the sight of so unharmonious and unbalanced a spectacle would presumably remind them of the unnaturalness of war (Macebuh 1974: 17).

The moral, philosophical, and even metaphysical foundation for the functional configuration of the mask was precisely to compel the human society to contemplate and discover "the psychological significance of the beautiful," the aesthetic, and the sublime (*ibid.*); to nurture man's ability to discriminate between aesthetic, ethical, religious and moral values; and, to inform and regenerate the thought and behaviour of posterity towards the profound, the orderly, and the sublime (see Ebong 1976). In fact, as we have noted elsewhere,

Ugly and fierce-looking masks were not necessarily intended to frighten spectators but to amplify the religio-metaphysical powers which they represented, as well as to create and establish that feeling of awe and reverence that was vitally necessary for holding together the social, political and religious structures of the community. Thus the grotesque and the terrifying combined in a strangely unique way to become an important aesthetic, socio-religious and socio-political factor in traditional African recreational and leisure arts (Ebong 1980: 90-91).

3. Masking for the Theatre

The paradoxical synthesis manifested by every mask derives from the masonic bond that exists between their physical and metaphysical components. The mask wearer who is automatically