

**Rainer POLAK**

## **PRESENTING YOURSELF THROUGH DANCE: PARTICIPATORY AND PRESENTATIONAL ASPECTS OF DANCE PERFORMANCE AT LOCAL FESTIVITIES IN SOUTHERN MALI**

### **Abstract**

Drawing on fieldwork carried out between 1991 and 2019, this paper studies local festivities held on the occasion of community celebrations in southern Mali. I offer thick ethnographic descriptions of the situational context and some interaction routines characteristic of these events, e.g., a systematic turn-taking in dance performance. Participatory and presentational aspects of dance performance in this context appear to not only coexist but profoundly interrelate and mutually reinforce each other. The paper thus takes issue with the theorization of the participatory and the presentational as opposite, polar concepts in the fields of ethnomusicology and ethnochoreology.

**Keywords:** participation, presentation, dance, performance, festivity, celebration, Mali, West Africa

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Here is a little anecdote about the social urge to present yourself through dance in a participatory performance context. People in southern Mali associate multiple layers of social, ethnic, regional, professional, kinship, age- and gender-related connotations with the repertoire of drumming rhythms, songs and dances performed on festive occasions [Polak 2004, 2012]. In the afternoon of a day-long wedding celebration taking place in a residential area in Bamako in August 1997, I was performing with a *jembe* drum ensemble when suddenly the lead drummer – the master to which I was apprenticing – took up the drumming rhythm called *fula-fòli*. This piece of repertoire is associated with an ethnic group known as *fula* in the local languages. Both my musical master and my long-term host identified as belonging to that ethnic group and, by extension, they ascribed that identity to me, too. This is a very common, half-joking approach to integrating foreigners in southern Mali, which does not go without serious implications for social interaction, however. One such implication is the social expectation that you will follow specific routines in the ubiquitous greeting rituals that you will likely engage with many times a day. Another one concerns behavior in public celebrations: As specific pieces of music can address specific segments of the community gathered for celebration, the performance of *fula-fòli* at the wedding celebration was recognized by my colleagues as “my” piece, which made them expect me to respond by dancing. The publicity of my being addressed then was further amplified by somebody who threw me a scarf, which is a formalized and conspicuous gesture of explicit personal encouragement. The only appropriate response to the situation now would be to take the scarf and dance. It

was clear to me that if I would not meet the expectation, people would find it weird, at least, if not perhaps arrogant. I was a bit shy, however, and therefore preferred to stick to playing the drum; pretending that taking my job of playing the drum so seriously that I couldn't leave the post was a sufficient excuse. When a few pieces later I passed the drum on to a co-apprentice who took over for me, however, he reproached me – again only half-jokingly: “Hey, what’s wrong with you, are you sick? Why didn’t you dance to your own rhythm, show yourself to the gathering, show that you belong to us?” In southern Mali, therefore, the presentation of oneself and the performance of one’s own identity is associated with taking part in a participatory dance context.

### **Aims and methods**

This paper studies local festivities held on the occasion of community celebrations in southern Mali. I hope to show that participatory and presentational aspects in this context not only coexist, but profoundly interrelate and mutually support each other. The paper’s objective is to critically discuss the theorization of the participatory and the presentational in the fields of ethnochoreology [Nahachewsky 1995, 2017] and ethnomusicology [Turino 2008, 2009] as oppositional, polar concepts.

The paper offers thick ethnographic descriptions of the situational context and some core interaction routines of celebration music and dance performance, illustrated by a fieldwork video recording of a celebration sponsored by a peasant woman’s association in a village in southern Mali,<sup>1</sup> plus some photos. The study draws on thirteen periods of fieldwork I carried out in southern Mali between 1991 and 2019, summing up to a total of three years that I have spent in the country. Beyond my own ethnographic experience, the paper also reads the rich literature on performance and celebration in southern Mali and the neighboring countries.

### **The polar conceptualization of participatory and presentational dance**

The conceptualization of participatory versus presentational modes of performance as a pair of opposite concepts has an intellectual history in musicology. German scholars, in particular, have contrasted functional music (*Gebrauchsmusik* or *Umgangsmusik*) with presentational music (*Darbietungsmusik*) [Bessler 1925, 1959], trying thus to conceptualize the differences between music for dance, work, or liturgy on the one hand and the concert performance context of art music on the other. Recently, Thomas Turino has popularized the theoretical opposition between participatory and presentational modes of performance in anglophone ethnomusicology. He regards these modes of performance as defining distinct “fields” of music making and conceives of the participatory field as particularly valuable because of its ethos of cooperation, sociality and fun, in contrast to the aspects of competition, hierarchy, and artistry that he associates with the presentational field [Turino 2008, 2009; for a review, see Keller 2010].

In the field of English-language ethnochoreology, Andriy Nahachewsky has introduced an analogous opposition in a seminal 1995 theory paper entitled *Participatory and presentational dance as ethnochoreological categories*. In the following, I

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1 The twelve-minute video clip is available for streaming from YouTube. I will cite this clip in the text as Polak 2018 (see list of references for details). Further ethnographic fieldwork footage is available at my private website [Polak n. d.].

will use Nahachewsky's lucid work as reference framework; let me thus quote from his essay in detail.

In participatory dances, the focus tends to be on the dancers themselves. The process of dancing is important. A good dance differs from a less successful performance based on how it feels. Presentational dances tend to be perceived more as a product than a process. The success of a particular performance is judged by how it looks. Participatory dances take place at social events where a particular community comes together to celebrate. This may be on the village green, at the house of a key participant, in a ballroom or in a dance bar. Presentational dances are often performed on formal stages and in other locations where the physical and cultural distance between performers and audience is greater. When comparing these two kinds of dance, I speak of them in opposition. Some readers may imagine that these categories are distinct in practice, creating a dichotomy or division in dance phenomena. Indeed, this is far from true. These two conceptual categories are idealizations, opposite poles on a theoretical continuum [Nahachewsky 1995:1].

In contrast to the predominantly critical approaches in musicology and ethnomusicology, Nahachewsky does not associate any positive or negative valuation with either of the categories he proposes. Specifically, he neither deplors (from a romantic perspective) a lack of socio-cultural authenticity in the staged folk dances, nor a lack of aesthetic, artistic value in the community events (from a modernist perspective). His intention is to develop analytical categories which can serve to recognize systematic similarities and differences between various types of dance performance. However, he is careful to avoid the idea of participatory or presentational performance modes as constituting discrete classes of events, so that any single performance would be expected to neatly fall into one of the two categories. Rather, Nahachewsky regards these two poles as a continuum, along which real life dance performances may be differently located.

Nahachewsky recently applied this pair of concepts in a richly documented analytical paper on dancers' gaze. He demonstrated that the different ways in which Ukrainian folk dancers fix their eyes are systematically related to the issue of whom they mainly address: Participatory dancers mostly watch each other and "use an unfocused gaze, or diverse glances to 'take in' elements relevant to their experience," whereas presentational dancers search for eye contact with their audiences and use their gaze "actively to 'give out' information, while their glances to observe and coordinate their dancing bodies are actively downplayed" [Nahachewsky 2017:44]. A key methodological move in this analysis was to "purposely choose examples that are situated near one or the other pole of the complex participatory/presentational continuum" [Nahachewsky 2017:44]. In the following two ethnographic sections, I will take a different approach. I will not juxtapose, say, vernacular wedding events

and more theatrical genres<sup>2</sup> or staged versions of folk dance<sup>3</sup> in Mali with the intention to highlight their particularly contrasting qualities. I will focus on only one performance context instead, namely, local vernacular celebration culture, and highlight that both participatory and presentational facets contribute equally to its complex characteristics.

### **Participatory performance in southern Mali**

The constellation of multiple expressive modes and a participatory ethos have been described as key characteristics of much traditional performance culture in West Africa [Drewal 1991; Nketia 1988; Stone 1988, 1998]. Local festivities in southern Mali almost inevitably involve song, percussion ensemble music<sup>4</sup> and dance. The events are organized by members of local social groups or networks such as families or village youth associations on the occasion of rites of passage (name-givings, initiations, weddings, etc.), agrarian or religious holidays, the honorable reception of an important guest, or just for the fun of it. The participants emphasize their experience of amusement and pleasure and conceive of their participation as a form of sociability, entertainment and play [Arnoldi 1995; Brink 1982; McNaughton 2008; Modic 1996; Polak 2004]. Various ethnographers working in the region have proposed that a core function of participatory performance in the context of celebrations lies in social integration and the construction of community through the shared aesthetic experience and meanings and values attached to the performances [Charry 2000:193–241; Jackson 1989:129–39; McNaughton 2008:250–52].

Typically, the people attending a celebration consist primarily of members of the organizing unit and their guests. In the case of a wedding, for instance, this would involve family, neighbors, colleagues, and friends. Furthermore, a large number of self-invited youths and children, too, usually gather and expand the ranks. Depending on the occasion, many, especially urban celebrations are predominantly organized and visited by women, while others are predominantly male or less gendered.

As a rule, the crowd is dense yet not at all diffuse. The seated or standing participants form a circle or rectangle which marks the festive ground (see Figure 1). Everybody in the circle is oriented inwards, towards the center. Next to the regular participants, the singers and drummers, too, make part of the circle. Whereas the circle is accessible for anybody to enter from the outside, it bounds and closes off the inside of the circle from the outside. This is where the dancing takes place, which is the focus of everybody's attention (see Figure 2).

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2 In the context of certain ritual frameworks, particularly spectacular types of more theatrical dance performance, such as masked dance [McNaughton 2008], puppetry [Arnoldi 1995], trance dancing [Gibbal 1982], and acrobatics [Brink 1982], are the domain of specialists or precisely defined segments or subgroups within local communities in southern Mali.

3 From the 1960s, folk dance troupes, addressed as *ballets*, have thrived in several of the young nation-states in francophone West Africa, e.g., Mali, Guinea, and Senegal. These institutions represented state-sponsored efforts to construct cultural identities for administrative units through the choreographic appropriation and staging of *danse folklorique* [Cohen 2012; Mark 1994; Polak 2000]. Today, they mostly operate as private enterprises.

4 In the following, I speak of drumming for the sake of simplicity, even though in some regional styles xylophone ensembles are used for dance music.



**Figure 1.** The dance ground for a wedding in an urban residential area is prepared in the early afternoon by placing some dozens of rented chairs, watering the ground (see the woman in the left side) in order to reduce the amount of dust the dancing will raise and setting up a PA system for the singers' microphone (see the loudspeakers in the background). Bamako, 18 January 2019.



**Figure 2.** In the late afternoon, an ensemble of five professional drummers (foreground center) and a singer (with microphone, foreground left) engages with a female guest's dance performance (center), which is observed both by the hired wedding filmer (center right) and the gathered community sitting in the chairs. Bamako, 18 January 2019.



The spectators in the circle play an active role that goes far beyond merely looking and listening. They often sing along or clap along with the music, dancing along with the dance performers and vigorously cheering on them [see Figure 2 and the video sample accompanying this paper, Polak 2018 9:42–9:53]. This can greatly contribute to enhancing the festive atmosphere, which is necessary for a celebration to succeed – the affective “heat,” as they say in the local languages. However, the point I would like to emphasize here is more radical still: The spectators’ response to the performance frequently and systematically extends to joining the performance themselves. It is the members of the community who perform the core of the dancing that takes place in the center of their own gathering.

Most pieces follow a clear-cut two-part structure. A piece usually starts with a singer taking up a song and drummers quickly taking up the corresponding rhythm, or the other way round. Shortly thereafter, some participants start a slow-paced dance performed in single file that moves round concentrically within the circle of spectators [see Polak 2018 0:50]. Individuals who want to take part simply rise from their chairs or leave where they have been standing, one by one or in small groups, and walk towards the inner ground and join the line. This first part of a piece is characterized predominantly by the song and the formation dance, while the drummers still mostly confine themselves to modest accompaniment.

After some time, the tempo and atmosphere pick up and the concentric line of dancers dissolve into either a smaller semi-circle or back into the larger circle [ibid. 3:00–3:15]. Typically, one or two women at a time will now start to break out from the semi-circle or the larger circle in order to vigorously dance directly in front of the drummers. When a dancer has performed a certain move or a sequence of several movements for a while, she is sometimes cut off by the lead drummer with a drum break; in some styles, the dancer synchronically performs a closing gesture. She finally heads off sideways and bounds back to her place in the circle again, thus giving way for the next solo dancer or dancers to come in for their turn. In summary, the second part of a piece typically is marked by the drum ensemble’s loud and rapid rhythms and a swift succession of energetic encounters between the drummers and dancers who come forward, one after the other, individually or in pairs, or sometimes in a less orderly fashion, for a short solo performance [ibid. 3:20–12:10].

To summarize, attendees at a celebration in southern Mali are allowed and invited – if not sometimes even urged – to join the dance performance. It is rare and disputable even for a particularly excellent individual performer to monopolize the dance-ground for very long. The key characteristic of these events is that participants take turns in dance performance. Singing and drumming are the domain of specialists, by contrast, who conceive of their performances as work in service of the participatory community event. Remember that the musicians’ position is in the circle, thus joining ranks and sharing perspectives with the spectators. It is the highly accessible role of dance performance which takes place center-round and thus constitutes the primary focus of attention. This suggests that the participants taking turns in dance performance is what local festivities in southern Mali mainly are about. Participatory performance is at the core of this context of celebration culture.

### **Presentational aspects of participatory dance**

This section argues that the participatory performance as discussed in the previous section comes along with an equally relevant presentational aspect. The first point in support of this proposition is that the majority of participants appear to care a lot about their looks. This becomes particularly evident by a comparison with the specialist drummers, who mostly appear in everyday work clothes. Note that the drummers conceive of their performance activity as a form of labor and a service to the celebration; they rarely conceive of themselves as being in the focus of attention during their performances [Polak 2004]. By contrast, the guests typically wear the most representative dress they currently have available. Sometimes, several of them appear wearing dresses made of the same cloth, thus expressing special respect for the social occasion by having agreed upon investing considerable money in a common uniform (see Figure 3-A/B). One may object that the guests dressing up does not necessarily have to do with whether their dancing is presentational or not. However, it is unlikely to assume that people would care about their appearance while watching other people dancing but not when they dance themselves. Indeed, recent conversations and interviews gave that participants in celebrations in both rural and urban southern Mali certainly are aware of being in the focus of the crowd's spectatorship when they dance.



**Figure 3-A.** Guests at an urban wedding perform a dance in single file. Several of them clubbed together and invested in dresses made of the same cloth. 3-B. Other guests observe the single file-dance. Bamako, 27 January 2019.

A second aspect which is indicative of the presentational character of the dancing is the distribution of gaze in the festive situation. Typically, everybody's eyes are following the dancers most of the time (see Figures 4-A, -B).



**Figure 4-A/B.** The participants (background) in a village celebration keenly observe the encounters between drummers (foreground) and individual or pairwise solo dancers (center). Dogoro, 5 February 2019.

As Patrick McNaughton observed in his study of a village celebration south of Bamako, which centered around a spectacular masked dance performance yet also featured phases of participatory dance performances by the regular villagers: “Participation places performers directly in the scrutinizing gaze of others” [McNaughton 2008:40]. “It is an opportunity to demonstrate capacity and to be admired and remarked upon by others. Dancing is for pleasure, but it is also communication” [McNaughton 2008:56].

A key information that a participant can communicate through participatory dancing is her personal commitment to the social event and organizing community. “It amplifies an individual’s intellectual and emotional involvement in an event through sensual engagement, and it manifests the value of a focused collectivity” [McNaughton 2008:56]. Another type of information concerns the dancer’s own identity, as when the most senior person in a group performs her seniority in public by taking the lead in a formation dance [Polak 2018 1:40]. Furthermore, individuals are eager to demonstrate their personal skills as good dancers. Yet communication never is a one-sided affair. It is the activity of spectating and perhaps cheerfully responding to a performance which generates its publicity and transforms it into a social statement – and this concerns participatory performance in southern Mali as well as any other performance. The role of spectatorship in socially constructing the reality and relevance of an expressive utterance is independent from the existence of an audience in the sense of a discrete group of people strictly separated from the performers. This is evident in the turn-taking of listeners and speakers in everyday conversational language use as well as in the celebratory turn-taking in dance performance that is concerned here. The fact that the community members invest so much effort, commitment, and systematicity in spectating suggests that they recognize the presentational aspect of their participatory performances. By contrast, an activity understood to be non-presentational or only weakly presentational would not require and would be unlikely to permanently attract the attention of community members.

A third argument in support of the presentational nature of participatory performance is related to the second one. Spectating not only requires the spectators to invest their time and energy in this activity, but it also necessitates a situation that offers a clear view of the ongoing dance performances. I argue that clear sight of the



center is among the main reasons why a crowd of people gathered in a circle tend to keep the interior of the circle clear. A hardly differentiated space, where people keep distance only to avoid disturbing each other, would serve perfectly in case of non-presentational dance activities. According to the idea that physical co-presence and density tends to excite the individual participants' moods and collective experience of community [Durkheim 1915], an unstructured crowd would even appear particularly advantageous for non-presentational dancing. Celebrations in southern Mali indeed can become confused sometimes, as when too many eager participants at the same time go forward for a drum/dance encounter themselves. The situation can even dissolve into near chaos for a moment when the gathering's level of enthusiasm momentarily rises to such a degree that the whole party starts pressing inwards to get closer and closer to the focused action (see Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** Cheering for two senior males dance performance, the joyous crowd starts to move inwards and seize the dance-ground.

If everyone is in the center, then no-one is watching from the bounding circle: this is the end of spectatorship and performance alike, as well as of ordered, focused interaction. Sometimes this activity is licensed at the final minutes of a celebration. When it happens in the course of an ongoing event, however, the song, dance, and music will briefly come to a halt, and the situation will break up by everyone taking his or her place again amongst much laughter. Yet the occurrence of this kind of total participation in an imploding situation is an exception. As a rule, the situation remains fairly stable for long hours, despite the often heated and exalted interaction. While it certainly can occur that three, four, or more participants come in for a dance-drum encounter at the same time, after a while an experienced community member would typically remind everybody that dancing one-by-one or in pairs is

the norm. When disorder arises because of people pressing in, typically someone will push people back [Polak 2018 0:20, 1:30, 2:10] or pull a branch off the nearest tree and drive the inward-pushing crowd back in line by threatening to whip the foremost members' legs [ibid. 10:35–10:50]. The role of this “master of the dance-ground” is sometimes officially allotted to a member of the team of organizers, yet can also be spontaneously assumed by a member of the drum ensemble or the singers' party, or indeed by any participant experienced local celebration culture. In a nutshell, the spatial situation of a circle of people who preserve the boundary of the interior of that circle is ideal for spectatorship of that privileged activity which alone can take place there.

Finally, the community sometimes explicitly reminds the dancers that they are on display for spectatorship. Recall, for instance, my introductory anecdote, in which somebody tossed me a scarf in order to persuade me to dance. Similarly, in the video recording that accompanies this paper, participants very frequently throw scarfs to co-participants who have entered the center ground and are about to dance already.<sup>5</sup> This gesture indexes the scarf thrower's appreciation and encouragement of the dancer's performance. It reminds the performer that she is being watched and empathized with, and at the same time draws public attention both to the dance performance and the empathic spectatorship. The gesture thus marks both the dance and itself as performances, in the sense of “showing doing something” [Schechner and Brady 2013:28].

## Discussion

Let me prepare the discussion with a brief summary of the ethnographic study's main findings. Vernacular festivities in southern Mali are community-based and community-oriented events, which are conceived of by the participants as entertainment and play. The participants take turns in dancing, which is the central mode of performance and focus of attention; they switch roles between watching their co-participants' dancing and going center-ground to dance themselves. Performance and audience roles are not stably assigned to discrete groups of people (*the audience* versus *the performers*), but assumed by the same people at different times. However, the participants persistently and enthusiastically observe each other's dancing and the situation is perfectly well designed for such spectatorship. As latent performers themselves, the majority of participants manifestly watch the performance, thereby explicitly encouraging their co-participants to dance. This suggests that the participatory dance performances are carried out not for the sake of the performers' self-experience alone, but as a presentation on display for others to look at and empathize with as well.

Before suggesting some conclusions, I would like to briefly discuss a methodological limitation of the study. While I am experienced in observing participatory dance performance in Mali from up close, my perspective is biased by identifying as a drummer and music researcher, and not a dancer and dance researcher. I have frequently drummed, but only rarely danced, in Mali. As an ensemble member of a hired crew of specialist drummers, what I look at, listen to, and feel, will decisively

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5 See Polak 2018 4:01, 4:36, 5:20, 5:40, 5:48, 6:40, 7:05, 7:20, 7:58, 8:12, 8:21, 9:23, 9:48, 9:53, 9:56, 10:21, 10:53, 11:12, 11:37, 12:02, among other instances.

differ from the experience of a community member attending the same event, whose two main forms of action are to dance and spectate others dancing. Moreover, I have shared my everyday life and carried out interviews generally with drummers, and not dancers. This is why this paper does not speak of dancers' experiences, their views of dance skills and aspirations to become skillful dancers, the criteria by which they evaluate their dancing, and so forth. For instance, I have often observed that most dancers at celebrations in Mali tend to avoid eye-contact with spectators. During the individual solo dances, in particular, when everyone looks at them, their own gaze mostly is directed to the ground or into the sky. While this could indicate that they are focusing on their own experience of feeling the dance, it may also have to do with their intention to not show any sign of self-consciousness in public. While I would love to say more on these issues, I am not yet capable of doing so. The present paper thus is an incomprehensive anthropological exercise that requires completion by more dance-focused, ethnochoreological work, which I hope to carry out in the future.

That said, the ethnographic observations and my interpretations reported above seem to suggest some conclusions. In an earlier paper, I elaborated on Ruth Stone's observation that "the audience in Africa is active, merging in and out of performing roles" [Stone 1988:8]. I argued that performance and spectatorship are mutually constitutive of each other and thus equally characteristic of the celebratory interaction in Mali [Polak 2007]. Here, I make the related claim that the participatory and the presentational aspects of dance performance are equally relevant to the gathered community.

From the point of view of participatory and presentational dance performance theorized as *polar* categories, local celebration culture in southern Mali, which shows characteristics of both categories, would appear as an empirical case lying midway in between them. On principle, an approach such as Nahachewsky's [1995] would certainly allow for such intermediate cases, as it aims to distinguish analytical models rather than to classify empirical cases into discrete categories. However, there is more to the metaphor of oppositional poles than the idea that you can draw a line between them and locate an infinite number of positions on that continuum. Poles represent opposite forces; a midway position involves an equilibrium of two opposing forces balancing each other out. Specifically, a polar conception of participatory and presentational dance means that a gradually more participatory type will be less presentational by the same degree, and vice-versa; you cannot shift a point on a line towards one end without at the same time distancing it from the other. The midway position of the Malian case thus would indicate that it is half-participatory and half-presentational in character. This is where I sense a problem with the polar conception. It would be misleading, in my view, to interpret the dance festivities in Mali as only half participatory because of their presentational aspects. What could be more participatory than everybody in a group of people to take turns in doing something one by one, until the last has had her share? Analogously, it would be misleading to describe these celebrations as only half presentational because of their participatory aspects. It is a prototype – an archetype even – of presentational performance, I suggest, to have a circle of people from where individuals one after the other step into the center for doing something special which is attentively spectated and cheered on by everybody else.

From this perspective, the participatory and the presentational aspects of the dancing do not represent oppositional forces and would not be located as opposite poles on a single dimension. I would rather propose that they represent two different dimensions that both are highly relevant and certainly interact with each other, yet are not directly coupled in an inversely proportional relation. This would allow for a dance context to be more presentational yet not automatically less participatory than vernacular celebrations. For instance, spectacular masked dances in southern Mali characterize contexts of more presentational performance, which nonetheless are experienced as tremendously participatory events by the spectating communities [see Arnoldi 1995; McNaughton 2008]. This suggests a concept of participation that goes beyond considering only the dancer's own experience of how it feels to dance. I here follow (ethno)musicologist Christopher Small [1998, 1999] who persuasively argued that the meaning of music performance lies in the relationship that it establishes between the participants and that it is one's personal involvement rather than one's specific contribution which generates the participatory experience and ethos. Next to performing, to spectate others performing, support the performance logistically, provide board and lodging for the participants, among other things, all can count as valuable contributions to the joint generation of participatory experiences.

Similarly, there are contexts of dancing where the participatory aspect appears even more radical yet no less presentational than at the social celebrations studied in this paper. For instance, I have observed extremely small spontaneous celebrations held by just half a dozen of adults or children, where participation is total insofar as each and every individual takes a turn in dance and one round lasts exactly as long as it takes for everybody to have one turn. On such playful, rather than socially prestigious occasions, where literally everybody is performing, the core mechanism still consisted of each performer taking a turn in the midst of a circle of spectatorship and cheering [see also Lancy 1974:218] formed by everybody else. In other words, to participate still meant to present yourself through dance.

West African celebratory practices seem to share some features such as community members gathered in a circle taking turns in dancing in the center ground, which make it particularly obvious that, in this context, the experience of the dancer and the view of the spectator are two sides of the same coin. The presentational aspects of dance performance in a participatory community context, which I highlighted in the present study of festive interaction in Mali, has received equal emphasis in ethnochoreological work on, for instance, drum-dance performances at local celebrations in neighboring Senegal [see Neveu Kringelbach 2007; Seye 2014a, 2014b]. By contrast, the categorization of specific styles or performance contexts of music or dance as presentational in general tends to be applied primarily to staged art or staged folklore presented to discrete audiences more or less separated from the performers. The case of West African celebration culture suggests that more capacious conceptualizations of the presentational are theoretically advantageous. In its broadest sense, all public behavior is presentational in the sense that people routinely engage in behaviors according to social roles and habitus, thereby "playing" or "performing" or "practicing" aspects of their own identities [Bourdieu 1984; Goffman

1959, 1966; Schechner and Brady 2013].<sup>6</sup> From this perspective, any performance is presentational in that it is meant to be attended, witnessed, and acknowledged by others. For instance, the performance of a speech act becomes an utterance in a conversation only through somebody else taking on the role of listener. Thus understood, my argument that participatory dance at celebrations in Mali is profoundly presentational does not mean much more than to claim and take seriously its status as performance. Seen from these broader theoretical perspectives, the integration of participatory and presentational aspects of performance in West African celebration culture does not represent anything peculiarly African or exotic, but rather a typical feature of human interaction and communication.

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6 Related views have recently gained prominence in the cognitive sciences, claiming that the key distinctive feature of human cognition is its being social cognition [Henrich 2016; Tomasello 1999, 2014]. In particular, proponents of the so-called theory of mind such as Wolfgang Prinz [2012] claim that the human capacities for agency and intentionality are developed by observing and understanding the actions of others and the mirroring process of recognizing one's own behavior as being open to be perceived and understood by others.



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