

## *Performance and Ethnography*

In 1979 I published a book called *African Rhythm and African Sensibility* (Chernoff, 1979). I subtitled the book *Aesthetics and Social Action in African Musical Idioms* because my discussion focused on the nature of the rhythmic medium in African music, and the central argument was a symbolic interactionist description of modes of communal participation in African musical contexts. The model of community I discussed in *African Rhythm and African Sensibility* is one that is not held together by ideas, by cognitive symbols or by emotional conformity. The community the book describes is established through the interaction of individual rhythms and the people who embody them. Somehow, and particularly dependent upon people coming from different individual places within the rhythmic structure of the music, a tightly cohesive whole is created, a whole that is more than its individual parts at the same time as it enhances them. Moreover, the process is not complicated but simple. Musicians and music-lovers could understand it easily. Even children can understand it, and a friend and I used the argument in the book to demonstrate the social dynamics in African music to more than 20,000 children in elementary schools in our home town.

To receptive ears, the book has the ring of truth, even though the communalizing process of rhythmic interaction is qualitatively different from the way social scientists habitually think about whatever ties people together. After all, what kind of communication exists in rhythmic relationships? The rhythms have affinities with language and perhaps are a kind of language, but one would really have to stretch the notion of a symbol to call rhythmic interaction symbolic. Those who find such a concept difficult to work with are not only social scientists: scholars of the arts as well, I still feel, would do well to consider that the book discusses not only a philosophical conception of artistic potential but also an empirical manifestation of an art that exists. Rhythmic interaction presents a different kind of pedagogy from the verbal and written discourse typical of much Western learning, one also different from pedagogies based on images, as are found, for example, in certain iconographic aspects of Christianity, in the controlling forces of meditation in a spiritual guide like the *I Ching*, or in the configuration of cast or settled objects in some systems of divination. Nonetheless, the book's descriptive metaphors and unabashedly analogical style were somewhat successful in demonstrating that inside rhythmic interaction is a socializing force for the comprehension of generative cultural themes.

In a related theme of the book, through my own story of my initial experiences with African music and those who molded me with their teaching, the book also suggested that felicitous participation in such a context can be learned by anyone who approaches African music with sensitivity and patience. During the thirty years since the book was originally published, I have watched with pleasure as African music extended its reach in other musical realms. A new musical diaspora, assisted by modern technologies of communication and transportation, has brought together musical idioms that formerly were connected mainly at their roots. Top bands from Africa play at clubs in America and Europe every week. You hear their music on the radio or internet. Thirty years ago, it just wasn't like that. Nowadays too, even in medium-sized towns, there are dance groups led by expatriate African and Afro-Caribbean artists and by African-American artists who are qualified in Katherine Dunham technique or who trained in African-American groups like those of Chuck Davis or Arthur Hall.

Why are musicians and dancers and music-lovers interested in African music? It is true that African rhythms and songs are musically inspiring, and those who become competent within African idioms often discover that they get more ideas and find more things to play. It is also true that African music offers a path into deep traditions of cultural wisdom. But the attraction of *African Rhythm and African Sensibility* was not merely that it offered an introduction to African music: the music has always been there, as have many worthy discussions of it. What the musicians and others are looking for in African music is an inherent quality that could be described as spiritual or communal, a transient quality whose themes I explored with the notion of participation. For those who are searching to make music that is appropriate to our day and age, African music presents a model way of bringing people together to experience certain feelings that sometimes seem difficult to achieve. I believe that, primarily, the book appealed to musicians and music-lovers because it discusses African music as creating a certain type of community and inviting our participation.

The book's argument, grounded as it was in my experience learning to perform in several African musical idioms, was persuasive because the book also addressed musical experiences and intimations that many people had had and could understand. And I do not think that the argument in *African Rhythm and African Sensibility* would have been convincing had its readers not been already prepared to recognize its validity in their own experience, which was there for them mainly through the efforts of African-Americans who had preserved the soul of the African musical tradition and extended it to the broader American community during the middle part of the twentieth century. As it turned out,

therefore, the first audience for the book was not scholars but musicians and music-lovers, and their reason for reading it was that it helped to give them a vocabulary and a set of concepts for talking about, for listening to, or for working with African musical styles. Browsing in the book these days, I myself am pleasantly reminded of how enthusiastic I was, how thrilled I was with the step-by-step progress of my learning. There is very little I would change in the book, even though there were some things I did not understand well at the time I wrote it.

For example, I didn't know that musicians and music-lovers would be the book's first audience. The book was a dissertation. I spent months trying to make it relevant to an audience of scholars. Perhaps I was able to be informative or evocative to some in that audience, but I should have thought more deeply about my own footnotes, which included some resonant references to the notion of rhythmic community within our intellectual heritage. Among them was a passage quoted from the work of Saint Augustine of Hippo, an African (1964:195):

Now consider what kind of man he is, who relates, not to mere pleasure, but to the preservation of his bodily self all such rhythms whose source is in the body and to the responses of the affects of the body, and who brings into use the residue from such rhythms retained in the memory, and others operating from other souls in the vicinity, or extruded in order to attach to the soul those other souls, or their residue retained in memory, not for its own proud ambition to excel, but for the advantage of those other souls themselves; and who employs that other rhythm, which presides, with an examiner's control, over such rhythms of either kind which subsist in the transience of perception, not for the purpose of satisfying an unjustifiable and harmful curiosity, but only for essential proof or disproof — such a man, surely, performs every rhythm without being entrapped in their entanglements. His choice is that bodily health should not be obstructed, and he refers every action to the advantage of his neighbor, whom by bond of nature he must love as himself. He would obviously be a great man and a great gentleman.

This amazing statement, to which *African Rhythm and African Sensibility* itself could arguably be considered a footnote, is sixteen hundred years old. But reflecting further now, I note that sixteen hundred years of Western intellectual activity have not resulted in much fruitful development of St. Augustine's insight. Where is the critical or philosophical tradition that this passage could have spawned, and why has it not materialized? This is a very sobering question to

those of us who would remain within our intellectual heritage and would work to revive St. Augustine's insight and revitalize its implications.

It took me a little while to understand that whatever the theoretical statements I thought I was making to sociologists, philosophers, critics, anthropologists, and others, I should be more happy that the book encouraged others to pursue their own interests in African music and culture, and to do so in their own way. In a manner I had not foreseen, the book achieved a theoretical impact, and perhaps a better one than I might have anticipated. People were inspired to become involved, and those who were involved were sustained. People are always telling me that the book helped them, that "I read *African Rhythm and African Sensibility* and did this," and because of that effect, I made my peace with the book's limited impact on critical theory, for I saw people carrying on the musical traditions that have persisted despite the fact that they have not much complemented our intellectual discourse. I'll return to this idea shortly.

There was something else I didn't understand. If I ever do have a chance to change something in the book, I will elaborate on a section of the introduction. In the lengthy *Introduction* to the book, entitled "Scholarship and Participation," I described several ceremonial and religious experiences I had when I began my learning in the several contexts that provided me with examples for my later discussion. I did not understand these experiences thoroughly at the time. In the book, I wrote that the ceremonies were ways in which my teachers and friends found a place for me among themselves, ways in which we acknowledged our relationships with one another and our commitment to achieving our intentions. I was not wrong in interpreting the ceremonies like that, of course; I just did not go far enough, because what they were telling me was more than that. In Western culture, we normally celebrate our learning *after* we have achieved something, though a graduation or confirmation that we have completed one stage of learning and are ready to move on to the next stage or to apply its knowledge. What I described, however, was done before my instruction or in its earliest phases, and the ceremonies reaffirmed a major theme that I presented in other ways but did not evoke in my assessment of the ceremonies' meaning. What my teachers were telling me was that if I wanted to become involved with their musical tradition and learn how to perform within it, I had to reorient my attitude about many things, including myself and my purpose for being there. They wanted me to feel initiated into another realm of discourse, which needed no translation into other realms, but which needed advocates and devotees as vessels into which to pour itself, as vehicles by which it would travel to another generation in time. Their notion of an

initiatory rite of passage suggested that without that commitment, it was useless to start. And I have seen the truth of their prescription personally as well as with others I have observed or taught.

In any case, I got the message. I worked at learning with patience and openness. And I also believed that I was going to become a good drummer. I never told myself that what I had learned was good enough for me. The relationships I established with my teachers were based on taking the performance of the music seriously. And of course the reason I chose and followed them was that they really wanted me to learn; they wanted me to play just like them. The idea that I was an outsider and limited in many ways was something we excluded from possibility. Why? We didn't want to demean what we were doing, and we didn't want to demean the drumming. After all, whenever I was playing, it was I who was playing, and what I was playing was a manifestation of the musical tradition. It was not something that should be joked with or reduced. I'm not saying I am a good drummer. I'm talking about an attitude. Within the strategic lie that I was no different from any of them was the truth that everybody comes to the drumming as a stranger and has to learn it. The understanding involved was simply that the drumming is a tradition, and I was performing it. And at that point, I was a vehicle for the tradition to continue — through me and what I was doing. And I learned to perform it to my extent.

On a scholarly level, meanwhile, what I thought my writings were about was demonstrating that African music has a place of significance on the world stage. As I continued learning, and after I had written *African Rhythm and African Sensibility*, I was still looking for a way to develop my interpretation of the aesthetic issues. I was hoping to go deeper into a single place and find ways to examine the nature of the rhythmic medium in a particular culture. What happened is that I never got very far with that idea, and I often wonder whether we will ever get beyond the very general level of understanding of African rhythmic aesthetics that is now only a postulate for guiding research observations, that is, that the groove is something people in these cultures have going for them when they have serious cultural work to do. Perhaps what I'm saying is merely a challenge for the next generation, but I'm telling you where I ended up in my focus on performance.

The place where I concentrated was among the Dagbamba of northern Ghana, in a traditional state called Dagbon. What happened to me in Dagbon was that instead of getting more insight into the nature of the intelligence behind the basic aesthetic conception, I was pushed in another direction by my Dagbamba teachers. My continuing involvement with the music led me into the realm of

politics and history and family. When my drumming reached a certain point, they didn't press me into a goal of greater technical excellence; rather, and even as I continued to develop my playing, they told me that there were certain things I had to know if I was going to call myself a drummer in their terms. I spent the next fifteen years receiving the knowledge that they had of their culture, and instead of doing aesthetic theory, I became an ethnographer, preparing a huge book that describes their customs in detail (Chernoff *et al.*). That book is the way it is because my experience learning to perform music led me to rethink the purposes of ethnography.

These days we are relaxing the boundaries of participant-observation as a research method. It is commonly accepted to think of learning to perform other cultures' arts or lifeways as a strategy that gives a researcher a set of associates and an acceptable role that will facilitate research with enhanced closeness and sharing. My teachers knew that I mainly wanted to learn drumming and I hadn't been asking many questions beyond it, and I had trouble seeing that there was any unifying ground between my training in performance and their giving me a lot of information and wanting me to write it down in a particular way. It's easy to say that it was part of their drumming tradition in that place, and that these were the contextual details. That much is merely obvious. The link that I eventually saw was grounded in the idea of being a vehicle of tradition based in performance. That point is clear enough on the artistic side, but it's not always clear on the ethnographic side, where the types of understanding we're looking for are supposed to explain things and hook the explanations into abstracted generalizations of broader relevance. The ideal is that what you're doing in Southeast Asia should be of interest to me in my West African research, and vice versa, and a worthy ideal that is. But there are problems. As the world has become smaller in many ways, it has become much larger in terms of information. It is difficult to keep up with the literature on even a small part of the world, and viewed against the depth of localized knowledge, global generalizations can seem shallow and of limited applicability. Many anthropologists are struggling against this fact like tragic heroes, but I made my peace with the boundaries of local knowledge. My Dagbamba teachers and I may believe that Dagbon has a place on the world stage, but our ethnographic orientation was to focus a single spotlight on Dagbon and leave it there.

In my particular location in the field, as with my mimetic learning of musical performance within which I tried to play as they played, when I worked with the self-consciously ethnographic information the Dagbamba drummers were giving me, I served as their amanuensis. The type of ethnography they wanted

was focused on details of living and historical origin: this is how we do that; this is what happened and we started doing this. Max Gluckman, whose work I respect greatly, complained about this type of ethnography in the first chapter of *Politics, Law and Ritual in Tribal Society* (Gluckman, 1971:20-22). He noted deficiencies in Henri Junod's *The Life of a South African Tribe* (1927), faulting it mainly for talking endlessly about all kinds of ceremonial procedures and dealing too briefly with the task of abstracting secular patterns of institutional relationships, that is, for a bias which, for example, would describe in detail the procedures for marriage and divorce and be too brief with the description of married life. To Gluckman, the bias of such early ethnographers as Junod lay in the selection of what he called "oddments of information," "what struck them as being interesting in itself, and as likely to be of interest to people at home." Junod, who as a missionary had spent many years among his subjects, didn't have a social scientist's sense of what is important, and Gluckman said he was bored by such work because the customs were not portrayed within a general context of social action. My perspective on Gluckman's comments, based on my experience, was rather that the bias of Junod and similar ethnographers was that of their informants, that they were indeed writing down what was important for social action — important in the sense that they were preserving the information necessary for the people to continuing performing this or that aspect of custom.

I had made a similar observation nearly forty years ago when I was at the University of Ghana, where I noted that the books which were always circulating and hard to get were old, descriptive ethnographies like those of R.S. Rattray and M.J. Field, and not the landmark studies of more modern anthropologists. People had use for Rattray's and Field's work because they showed them how to deal with things they knew they had to do in their cultures, and the books also talked to them of things they already knew about. The many literate members of what were formerly nonliterate cultures can use ethnographic writings — both descriptive and critical — as a vehicle to regain sympathy for and access to traditions from which they are alienated. What my teachers wanted me to write down was the same kind of detailed description found in early ethnographies. At root, they believed that their culture was protected and transmitted not by the forceful logic of their discourse but simply by faith and commitment, by those who engaged their energy and their faculties with sensitivity to its value as a way of living. The point is that, like modern technocrats, my teachers looked to the realm of discourse less as a source of empowerment or construction or representation or any of the other buzzwords of discourse analysis but more importantly as a practical means of communicating techniques and procedures. Looking at what was important to

them, I came to feel that those old-fashioned ethnographies were perhaps more concerned with performance than many of the ethnographies written since the metaphor of performance became one of the dominant metaphors of social theory.

Putting aside efforts to refine the concept of performance in theoretical terms, what does performance theory imply about the link between local knowledge and global generalizations? Performance theorists have been saying that cultural experience is embodied in ritual experience, that cultural experience is given a transient reality in the performance itself. I think this notion of embodiment forces us to rethink our ideas about the nature of theory and insight. When I reread St. Augustine's words, I infer a definition of culture — the embodiment of rhythms whose source is in the body and attached to the affects of the body, the embodiment of rhythms to attach the soul to other souls in the vicinity and to the residues of souls retained in memory — and it is not surprising that the cited passage did not make the transition to dogmatic theology in the High Church culture. Nor is it surprising that the experience of using the body to learn about other cultural experiences — whether in music or sorcery or yoga or whatever — leads to a different type of understanding about the details and purpose of cultural acts, within which abstraction does not always enhance continuity. Nor is it surprising that we have been seeing more and more ethnographies that dwell in the issues of establishing relationships and sympathy. These days, perhaps we have been sensitized by our African musical roots to St. Augustine's neglected truth.

Thus informed, we need not be defensive about the absence of abstract generalizations that would subsume the world's cultures under a single science of culture. A.R. Radcliffe-Brown's program for a scientific anthropology may remain an ideal for some, but even in Gluckman's view, Radcliffe-Brown understood culture to be a moral order sustained by sentiments (Gluckman, 1971:33). For many people today, the link between cultures, whether distanced by place or distanced by time, has as its repository not an abstraction but a human being. Implicit in this focus on the individual as the vessel and vehicle of cultural knowledge, we have seen that the formerly explicit issues of method, authority, and generalization have become emergent properties within contemporary interpretive ethnographies. In their own way, interpretive ethnographies informed by the notion that cultural experience is embodied in performance assert a global purpose. They verify a unified conception of our species, based on recognition, the ring of truth, the common ground of experience that speaks between the lines of the text, the themes that cut across distance, the parallels that reveal commonality in the sense of being members of an incorporated body. How does



our information become meaningful to those on the outside? Truly, it often doesn't. As our literary critics have been telling us, we have to leave to the reader his or her share of the text. Whatever cultural insight is embodied within an ethnography, its meaning exists only as a possibility within the ethnography itself. The meaning is there for those who want it or need it or who have the desire or opportunity to recognize it and perpetuate it, thus to give it their particular interpretation that will carry it beyond itself.

These various interpretations are not something to struggle over, yet the thought that there is really nothing to be proved has not altered the argumentative temper of our intellectual style. We are so sophisticated these days about the positioning of our discourse that it seems as if the most privileged social science has become the sociology of knowledge. Intellectual squabblers have found an easy weapon in the allegation that someone's interpretation of a given cultural expression has excluded a subgroup or ignored the influence of larger social processes. To me, our self-conscious sophistication in this regard has not been as responsive as it could to its own premises. As ironic victims of the insights of liberation, many scholars still believe that increased sensitivity to current issues is going to lead to something resembling truth, and that their work is about establishing standards. We would do well to remember that hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation, derived its name from Hermes, the unreliable messenger of the Greek gods. The hermeneutic problem was founded in the problem of translating words that were supposedly not written but revealed as truth, and the hermeneutic question was whether the revelation could be transferred to the new idiom. It is worth acknowledging, therefore, that the goal of hermeneutic methods is not a better interpretation: the goal is transformation. In this context, openness to the possibility of transformation is the hidden link between information and performance. By extension as well, the challenge of reflexive ethnography lies not merely in being self-conscious or in achieving a type of higher objectivity that comprehends our position relative to the ethnographic setting; the reflexive goal is accomplished through the effort to involve our informants and associates in our own crucial concerns which we work through together in a process of cross-cultural recognition. The hermeneutic transformation is borne by shared concerns. This movement, this attention to what has taken us to that wherever place, this working through of what is important to those who are involved in the research, establishes what seems to me a kind of authenticity that can lend broader relevance to local knowledge.

In his influential essay, "Blurred Genres" (1983 [1980]), Clifford Geertz noted that interpretive anthropology has tended to approach the idea of culture

with three main analogies employed analytically — that of a game, that of drama, and that of a text. The notion of social action as a performance, although it has affinity to the dramaturgical model, reflects elements of all three approaches. Beyond that, though, the performance model implies experience or action sustained and supported by a willingness to believe, or at least the suspension of disbelief. This implication of sympathetic understanding, which even before Aristotle was clear in the performance of art, applies no less to the performance of any cultural act, including ethnography. Such an understanding characterized the sensibility of my drumming teachers as they brought their drumming to the service of cultural recreation. In attaching me to their mission, they looked beyond their own lives, and mine as well, with the belief that our work would sustain their experience. They realized that those from whom they acquired cultural knowledge had learned from others they did not know, and that they themselves would not know the beneficiaries of their efforts at preservation.

Philip Rieff has said (1968) that our modern culture is the most revolutionary culture in history, contradicting all faiths in the sacred communal orders of past and present cultures and replacing commitments of faith with what he calls therapeutic commitments, which lack depth and a sense of moral truth. One can doubt that the purity of heart which we idealize in our conception of faith has ever existed free of the doubt and alienation that are faith's dynamic counterparts. But the message of performance is that even when truth is relative and all talk is lies, authority is still based on faith, and faith is rooted less in belief than in commitment. How strong can the binding power of ideas be if they are not tied to the passions of the heart? What we have seen to temper our modern disillusionment is that faith or commitment becomes reality when it is grounded in doing. When I look at the religions of the world and ask how anyone could believe the premises and assertions inside them, it seems clear that religious acts — from meditation to prayer to rituals to good works to ethical discussions — all are the *performances* that enable an *unabiding* faith to overcome the intimations of the emptiness of religious discourse. This point is not anything new: the masters of cultural knowledge have always suspected that the performance of these acts merely offers solace and the possibility of continuity, yet that it is through the transient realities of such performance that faith is actualized and culture is recreated.

When social action is viewed and discussed as a performance, therefore, we shouldn't be confused about which reality has priority of focus, the performance itself or the analysis that would comprehend it. I think it is safe to say that much modern scholarship still tends toward the realm of the latter and a heritage of

ascetics and theologians. As priests of the moral order of culture, and threatened ourselves by the modern cultural revolution, we scholars today find common ground and common cause with those who teach us in other cultures, who are equally apprehensive of the emerging social order none of us can fight. The revolutionary democratic culture and its technocratic elites do not exclude our conservative role and its tempering influence, weak as it has always been in the face of necessity. We are vessels or vehicles charged with sustaining the humanizing and transient realities of cultural performances, or at least the possibility thereof. Ethnographers have many answers to the question of what they are doing in their research venues, yet what else but *preservation* is the purpose of going to a particular locale and learning how a traditional or customary practice is performed? Such a limited task is a destiny worthy of anyone's energies, because in every localized context, the situation is never hopeless. Cultures have always been threatened, yet we can look at devastating circumstances of historical diasporas and see that cultures have been kept alive, that, for example, there are still Jews in the world, and there are people still worshipping Yoruba gods in Cuba, in Brazil, and in Brooklyn.

Such miracles make a focus on performance more attractive to me than some of the other intellectual trends of our time. My advice to those who learn the techniques of performance in other cultures is to take their training seriously. Such seriousness is not merely a research strategy but also a pathway to experiencing the binding force of culture. My perspective on ethnography, based on the type of training I had as a drummer, is that the discourse about cultural performance is often quite different from the discourse that enables people to continue or enhance or become involved with the performance. My practical focus on learning performance techniques made me reflect on myself and what I was doing there, and I believe that the values involved in learning performance can inform every aspect of academic work, from substance to style. In short, the extension of the performance metaphor lends support to certain types of ethnographic purpose, particularly that we are there to revitalize and not to devitalize. Even so, there is no guarantee that the ironies of history will not turn our work into an agent or a victim of the rival forces we contend with. That is why my Dagbamba teachers who watched the defection of their young people from the compelling authority of Dagbamba tradition, yet who wanted me to make a record of their way of living for posterity, told me that, "One does not blame the current generation; one prays for them."

Most of the people who taught me are now dead, and I am also looking at a new generation. I'm realizing that the personal respect that bound me to my

teachers was fundamentally a cultural respect that moves across generations through people. What is there in the transience of an African musical event, and our desire to make it fine, is not different from what is there is the transience of a life's work. This motive was not lost on my associates who came out of their houses and their normal routines to work with me. In his final instructions to me, my drumming master in Dagbon presented me with a parting lecture that echoed the reasons anthropologists have heard time and time again about why people collaborate with us in ethnographic work (Chernoff *et al.*, III–27).

When it's daybreak, it is my white heart [*suhu pielli*; figuratively, happiness, good intentions] that I bring to you, and it is the work of white heart we've done to one another. And as I was showing you our living and our tradition, I was coming with my white heart. If you get a stranger and he comes to meet you and he says, "I want you to teach me this," you should think much inside your heart, and you should make your heart white. And you should take the white heart and be teaching him. What you know, you will teach him. And what you don't know, you will be asking people, and add to it. It is because you don't want shame to come inside the work. Truly, the coming I was coming: it was shyness [*vi*: shyness, a sense of shame, modesty; the related concept is *vizora*; a relationship based on respect]. Dagbamba have a saying that it is shyness which is a human being. And so you should let shyness be inside your eyes. And so shyness, and the way a human being lives, it is because of this I come here.

If a stranger comes to meet you, and he comes from far to get something, you the one from the town, if you want, you can be as heavy as anything, you should leave your heaviness and put it down, and you should decrease yourself and come. If you are a weak person, you should still be a weak person and come, because you don't know what he has seen and he has come to you. Whatever work you are doing, there are people who are more than you. But if someone asks you for a way, and you show him, it is nothing bad. And I took my sense and my foolishness, and I was talking to you. And I took my white heart, and I was coming to you.

And I was coming because you are from far away. And coming because we did not know one another and we came to know one another. And coming because you are a white man and I am a black man, and you have taken me as a friend. And coming again because you are somebody who is heavy in your town, and you have come here to lower yourself and follow me. And coming so that you will catch the talk you want from me, and it will be good for all of us. I came so that all of us will benefit.

And I was coming because I want my town to increase. My town to increase in what way? As I come, many people see the two of us. As they see, they say to the whole town, and they hear it too: “This fellow, look at where he comes from. And this man Ibrahim the drummer is free with him. And so Ibrahim the drummer is doing well. And if the white man bluffs, he does not take his bluffing to move with Ibrahim the drummer. And as the white man does not take his heaviness to move with Ibrahim the drummer, he is also doing well. And if the white man should go, he will praise our town. He is somebody who will go and the name of our town will increase.” And this is what many people say, and this is why I come here.

And I come again so that all of us, our families and those who follow us, will increase. Whatever happens, no one will forget of the other. And even our grandchildren and great grandchildren, whether they see one another or they don't see one another, they will not forget one another. Whatever happens, somebody will come and remember, “My grandfather did this.” It is because of all this that I was coming.

This litany, focused as it is on ideas of generations and the expansion of relationships that are at the root of cultural continuity, looks at the present as the seed of the future. Surely, in ethnography, what bind us to those with whom we work are our intentions and the hope that the knowledge we share will benefit generations to come. Why did my Dagbamba drumming master assume that our grandchildren would not forget one another? His valediction in praise of our capability for respect and friendship was a preamble to a final concern and a final instruction on the cultural capability of ethnography. When he and I began working on an ethnography of Dagbon, he told me that the book we were preparing was something that should stand for our relationship, something we were putting down for others and for the future, something that people could see. With the same logic that I used to understand my performance as a drummer to be a proving ground of commitment, I accepted as an important goal of our ethnographic collaboration a way to make our friendship tangible. My master thought of his drumming as not merely playing music; his fundamental self-image was that he was holding the words of his elders who had trained him, as they had held the words of their ancestors, and he was passing their knowledge through himself to me. This image of preservation and recreation suggests an affinity between the premises of our ethnographic collaboration and the spiritual goals of musical performance. In Dagbon, the drummers' performances enable people to dance the dances their ancestors danced, a conscious effort to embody the residues

of souls retained in memory. Such performance is a tangible manifestation, all we can see, of the inheritance of the intangible. For them, the vocation of cultural knowledge and performance offered ways to access their dead people and to perpetuate that possibility. Thus too is an ethnography a performance, a presentation based on a sentimental pretense that made it possible and should not be demeaned. This understanding of ethnography allowed me to appreciate the effect of *African Rhythm and African Sensibility* that I had not anticipated, nor had need to, the various ways it nurtured the ability of music to challenge and stimulate others to become involved in its continuity within their own paths.

Therefore, the final instruction that concluded our work emphasized an aspect of the intended ethnography that would demonstrate respect for both the tradition and the vehicle through which it would pass. My master told me (Chernoff *et al.*, III-27):

The work we have done, hold it with your two hands. Don't hold it loosely. Never let what you hold in your hands to be lying on the ground. If you are trading and you want to sell something, and what you are selling is good or bad, then if it is small, when you take it to the market, you should put it in a beautiful tin and cover it. If somebody comes to say he wants it, then you just open the tin a little way for him to see inside. Whether it's a nice thing inside or a bad thing inside, you don't have to open it wide. You just open it a little, and he will say, "Open it all the way and I will see." And you will tell him, "Oh? Am I not opening it?" He will put his hand inside and take some and go. And so the talk we have talked and we have all collected in our hands, when you get home, you should try your best. If you get home, don't take it and spread it roughly in America as if you didn't struggle or suffer to get it. Get a beautiful tin and cover it.

## Note

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