



## Fluid Mutualism

This is the class catalogue for the History of Art and Visual Culture's Seminar — Experiments in West African Dance facilitated by Professor Genevieve Hyacinthe — containing students' reflections on West African Dance as Practice and Aesthetic underpinning of West African and Black Atlantic artforms across media. We are grateful for the Creative Citizens In Action Program and Professor Vreni Michelini-Castillo for her Fluid Mutualism Proposal. Our class explored Fluid Mutualism in relation to the notion of JOY. Please continue reading for a more detailed description of our project and an acknowledgement of all the wonderful people that we wish to thank for supporting our class and making the Creative Citizens in Action Program possible! Sincerely,  
The Experiments in West African Dance Collaborators, Fall 2021, California College of the Arts



Photo of Doundounba Wedding Celebration in Conakry, Guinea (2013). Photo credit: Genevieve Hyacinthe

**The 2021-22 Creative Citizens in Action Series @ California College of the Arts continues with Malian Dance Specialist, Djeneba Sako, of Bamako, Mali and Denver, Colorado who will hold a workshop and discussion in the History of Art and Visual Culture's 3000-4: Experiments in West African Dance seminar with Assistant Professor Genevieve Hyacinthe on Thursday, November 18, 2021, 8:30-10am (PST).**

The 2021-2022 Creative Citizens in Action @ CCA theme — Fluid Mutualism — is foundational to West African Dance.

This semester, students, have been studying the idea in relation to the dynamic of the Fluid Mutualism category, Joy. West African dance follows the Jeliya performance traditions of West African griot (jeliw), designed to bring community together for the purposes of joy, in all of its variations.

As Jeliya “dictates,” students learn that joy is heterogeneous: Joy can be in the sense of happiness and the ecstatic, the joy that comes from flirtation, gaining an understanding of one’s familial or communal history, the establishment of social peace and artistic harmony from dance and drum to all media (textile design, strategies of adornment). Fluid Mutualism as Joy is socially manifested as the Bamana concepts fadenya (that of the elders, history) and badenya (that of communal synchronicity, the everyday) of Mali.

The public-facing aspect of the project will be a catalogue created through the assembly of the students’ semester-long, reflective portfolios that will be released in February 2022 as part of the CCA@CCA forum. In the publication, students will share their

carefully-curated, critical and personal engagements with Fluid Mutualism’s Joy through the insights and vocabularies of West African dance and Jeliya formats.

We are filled with appreciation that Djeneba Sako has made the time to come to our class and we

are also grateful to Professor Vreni Michelini-Castillo for suggesting this academic year’s beautiful theme and for the generosity of Deborah and Kenneth Novack for sponsoring the CCA@CCA series. We are also thankful for the expert support and coordination provided by Jaime Austin, Director of Exhibitions and Public Programming, and Bryndis Hafthorsdottir, Gallery Manager, Exhibitions and Public Programming, Academic Affairs. Thank you to Elizabeth Mangini, Chair of History of Art and Visual Culture, and TT Takemoto, Dean, Humanities and Sciences Division, for their support of Experiments in West African Dance as a new CCA HAAVC course.





## Fluid Mutualism

The Experiments in West African Dance  
Fall 2021 seminar collaborators are:

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Andrianna Scott  
Mengyao Xiu  
Luyao Vicky Xu  
Keqin Vanessa Zhong

Professor Genevieve Hyacinthe

The collaborators' reflections are listed in the  
catalogue according to alphabetical order.



Beautiful portrait of Experiments in West African Dance special guest artist, Djeneba Sako, originally of Bamako, Mali. This amazing rendering is by course collaborator, Katia Pontillo. Katia truly depicts the JOY emanating from Djeneba as a brilliant person, artist, and dancer. Djeneba generously shared that JOY with us during her special workshop for our seminar. We are very grateful to Djeneba. We also thank Katia for this portrait and Vanessa for creating the flier for Djeneba's workshop (previous page)

## ***Mary Graham, Experiments in West African Dance Portfolio***



I am a fourth year Individualized major, with a focus on painting and performance, although my work is very multidisciplinary. The work is about the ancestors, and reflecting upon our collective ancestry. This semester in Experiments in West African Dance, I'm considering West African performing arts philosophy, the ideas about maintaining balance, the importance of the exchange, and the connection with the spiritual world. I'm also reflecting on feminism as it relates to West African philosophies about womanhood, beauty, strength and virtuosity, and the importance of mastering one's craft.

### ***The Aesthetics of Cool***

#### ***Learning How to Greet People***

##### ***Drum Circles***

*September 9th*

A greeting in kikamba from Kenya (which is east africa, I know, but the greeting tradition I think still stands). The elder person says "wacha" and the younger person says "aa." There is a follow up question, but I don't remember it. Wacha is "how are you", and aa is "fine." There is a level of respect here, a recognition of status, and a sign of belonging. Anyone younger than the person greeting them responds with "aa" regardless of age. As a tween, being greeted in this way made me feel pretty young and embarrassed, now I don't mind. I wish I could find a video of the exchange.



The drum circle in the park is African American at its very core. History is being made, and carried in the bodies of the drummers and dancers, and it's an African American history. Black culture will reveal itself over time in this way. We now have the tremendous opportunity for exchange between all these different parts of the diaspora. People from all around the world begin to share stories and parts of their cultures with one another. The idea would be that anyone with an open heart, a willingness to learn, and a level of humility might participate in parts of West African culture. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to learn more deeply about this part of the world, in a way that we have not been afforded in our total of nearly 16 years of schooling.

Who has claim to "African-ness"? None of us, really. Unless we have African relatives or parents. As I will state in my "call and response" response, I am constantly looking for West Africa in every part of mine and my father's identity. And as a biracial person, I feel a strange pressure to provide evidence to myself of my own claim to blackness. My father's father told him "a still tongue makes a wise head" a valuable idiom that he passed onto me. Is this afro-cool? Or is it just a valuable idiom? My father tells me to remain calm in tricky situations, and has always remained poised and logical when we find ourselves in trouble. Is this afro-cool? Or did he learn this from experience, from his folks? From reading Lau Tzu? From admiring the logical Mr. Spock when he was a little boy? We celebrate Juneteenth, my mom braided my hair carefully every morning when I was a kid. Is this black culture? Is this "African"? I say the same thing a bit differently next week, but what of our original place do we carry? Just the soil that the seeds might have been planted in, I think, but maybe not the seeds. I think the flowers grow in a deep and inscrutable garden, or have grown into something that sustains us, but that is made very different by new weather.

## ***Jelilya: The Art of Jelimuso***

September 16

This week I connected the lecture and video to the concept of afro-futurism. As traditions are passed on from generation to generation, as they are adapted, and as they can be enhanced through the use of technology. I'm also thinking about these traditions and the importance of their practice as we envision and document a post colonial world.



Here is a composite image I made using one of Seydou Keita's portraits, and Constantin Brancusi's "beginning of the world" sculpture. I have titled the image "Seated Woman Holding The Beginning of The World." I can't speak to my original intention in making the piece beyond the urge to represent a west african woman catalyzing the birth of a new world. So in that way, I feel the piece is afro-futurist in a way. I draw from the past, and envision the future. She holds the future gently, cradling it. She acknowledges us, we are present to document this event that has not happened yet.

Seydou Keita and Malik Sidibe documented post-colonial Malian culture as it embraced its pre-colonial traditions, and created new ones. In these images, it was often women who dressed traditionally, while the men wore more contemporary fashions. I think this speaks to the idea of women being the holders of culture. Women are often the parents that first give language to their children. Women, I've noticed, are often very protective of culture and are the first ones to protect it and stand against threats to it.



Above are two prints I made as part of a series of afro-futurist images. The one on the right I've titled "The Inventor and Her Androids" and the one on the left is called "The Lady Detective." Most of the drawings I do are futurist in nature, and reflections of what I want to see in the world. The robots usually are more a metaphor for the character's ingenuity, and the characters in turn are metaphors for the creativity, virtuosity I observe amongst my peers in the real world. In all my female characters, their beauty is a symbol of their goodness, and their creative spirit.



## ***Malick Sidibé's Rhythm and Dance Photography***

September 23rd



This might be one of my favorite photographs. I love the closeness, the way I can feel the next step coming, the shyness of her expression, the way they're looking at each other's feet while they dance. I love the tenderness and intimacy of the photograph. It tells a love story. I wonder if they've just met, if they've known each other for a long time. The empty chairs in the background are so evocative, with a shawl draped over one, and bottles on the floor, they hint at the presence of others at this party, but in this moment you feel what the dancers must feel; the world has melted away, and it's just you and your partner dancing in harmony.



Here is another print from my afro-futurist series, which I thought mirrored Sidibe's photograph in a way.  
This is a domestic scene between two lovers, a moment of tenderness.

## **Call and Response & the Audience**

September 30th

*"I think therefore I am" - Descarte*

*"I feel therefore I am free" - Audre Lorde*

*"I am because we are; and because we are, therefore I am" - John S. Mbiti*

I'm reflecting again on how these philosophies offer insight into how a group understands the world. Are we individuals, bound to seek excellence independently, and in competition with our peers? Do we use our intellect and wits, prioritizing them over our intuition, emotion, and spiritual sensitivity? Or-- in opposition to a worldview that dictates that the value of one's personhood is decided by one's learning-- are we emotional, human because of the knowledge that our bodies possess, and thus free? What is individuality? Are we free and human and present amongst our peers, a piece of a greater whole. Alive because all of us are alive. As long as we continue to be, we will continue to be.

And so dance and performance within West Africa are a practice of this philosophy in motion. The soloist calls, and seems to ask for confirmation of life, and receives it. Art, and celebration is done as a group. Even in the case of jeliya, the jeli speaks to the history of the people they sing to. They honor the collective. The individual is strengthened by the group.

In exploring more deeply into the dance and performance traditions in West Africa, I find myself witnessing the origins of black diasporic culture/s. I'm thinking about a netflix docuseries I watched called "High On The Hog" an exploration of black american food; the first episode of which takes place in Benin. These explorations, even as we return from whence our ancestors came, lead us to a home that still welcomes us, but has transformed without us, as we have transformed without them. I'm thinking of the longing I feel, as I learn of these dance traditions, as I watch food being prepared, as look into people's faces-- a longing toward a culture that I as a black american, cannot claim for myself, and yet feel an undeniable familiarity toward. Having been taken from our homes, we have been forced to make and recreate home, in hushed tones, for our children to interpret from the stories we do and do not tell. With excitement they hold onto our every word, even if the words are pained and few.



## ***Sounou I: Exploring Feminine and Jelimuso Beauty***

### ***Nyama (total energy) and Basigi (improvisation and personal virtuosity)***

*October 7th*

Here I'm thinking about the quality of coolness, the subtlety, and the building of the dance as the tempo progresses, I'm thinking about the virtuosity. There's a balance where the whole body is engaged, but there is an effortlessness to the movement, even in the movements that require particular strength. Even as the music builds, and builds, the dance builds also, but the women maintain their cool. The man performing the dance embodies the feminine when he dances sounou, the grace and the roundness of the movements, the slowness, the subtlety, and the power.

One of my favorite movements was toward the end, where the dancers' heads are bowed, the majority of the movement is in the hand gestures, and the changing pressure of the feet on the ground. These movements evolve into one which is more open, engages the whole body, as the chest is opened, the arms are opened, the tempo reaches a fever pitch, we are in the midst of a crescendo, and then the dance is over.

I liked the drums as well, the deep melodiousness and increasing tempo are accompanied by a steady luminous ringing in the background. It creates a pleasantly dissonant sonic space where the sensuality of the dance is accentuated.

*"The power in clay is most intense at its source, the clay pit"*

This resonates with me as an artist. There is a tremendous amount of potential energy in materials that are untouched. I can compare this with the medium I am most intimate with which is song. In singing, the material I work with is the energy of the space. The conditions must be right in order to begin singing. And prior to the song, there is a great deal of anxiety, testing the waters, fear of failure. Clay is clay, but when the artist is present, the clay is awakened, the vein is followed, the energy is alive, and one must be careful. Space is just space, but when I intend to sing, when I enter the space as a singer, the space is alive all around me. Although singing comes easily to me, I am in no way a virtuoso. There is a level of comfort and mastery that I have yet to hone, particularly when singing and improvising in public. The tension, and the fear of failure only serve to tighten and worsen the quality of sound.

Here are some still images from one of a series of improvisations.



*Examining the space*



*The initial breath*



*The first note*

*"Identifying and quantifying what the best potters did to achieve their success is not easy. **These women make what they do seem effortless.**" -Frank*

*"To be able to immediately recall a move with certainty and confidence is demonstrative of one's basigi, composure and professionalism. Basigi is developed through a certain type of tenacity as in the will to tame one's nyama or power for the purposes of achieving a focused art form. **Without basigi, nyama in the form of rampant spiritual power, in this case, remains potential energy never fully developed or actualized as a complete art form.**" -Hyacinthe*

Nyama, as I understand it and interpret it, is the will to create, the potential energy, the concept, the idea, the pit of clay. Basigi, the action and the skill. Nyama, the anxious intake of the breath, the first parting of the lips and basigi the utterance of the note, the condensation of disparate wave-forms into melody.

## ***Exploring Traveling Beauty***

### ***Performing Femininity***

#### ***Coolness and Virtuosity Across Genders from Mali to Guinea***

October 14th

Something I thought of was the character Lauren from Octavia Butler's *Earthseed* books. A young woman who finds herself the leader of a small community in the midst of the country collapsing into chaos around her. She and her family are forced to leave their home and venture up the coast of California. Along the way they encounter friends and foes, and create tentative alliances rooted in the philosophy that Lauren has been developing since she was a child-- that of "Earthseed" and the principle that God is change. The novel is optimistic about human nature. Amidst the deeply troubling setting, and the misfortune that befalls the group at every step of the way, the group (despite their differences) believe in each-other, and in a way are forced to believe in a better future waiting for them in the land that they settle in. It's been about a year and a half since I read the story. It's not nomadic, and it's distinctly American in its subject matter and themes.

Another book that comes to mind is *Who Fears Death* by Nigerian-American author Nnedi Okorafor. It's set in a futuristic sub-saharan Africa, with a fabulous blend of sci-fi and magical realism. The protagonist here, Onyesonwu is a powerful and volatile young sorcerer, who must gain mastery over her abilities before confronting her father. There's constant tension; to control her impulses, or to follow them. Her greatest power lies when she's true to herself, and yet it's the power with the most consequences. A power lacking virtuosity. The story follows her journey north in search of her father, who she has seen in prophetic dreams watching her with the intent to kill her. Her lighter complexion marks her as a child of assault in the eyes of everyone she encounters. I wonder if her name, Onyesonwu (Who fears death?) is a reference to the whiteness of one's skin making one akin to the spirit world. Onyesonwu is full of duality, simultaneously perceived as beautiful, and not beautiful. Teetering on the edge of mastery and volatility. She is of her community, and yet marked away from it, a perpetual traveller. The book is complicated, intense like many good books are.

(I hope my thought process makes sense, I'm attempting to interpret aspects of these books with Sounou in mind.)



## ***Touki Bouki***

*October 21st*

I'm thinking about the beauty of the traveler, and the feminine beauty of the traveler. A traveler is someone with agency, perspective and knowledge of other people and places. The travelling woman is beautiful because she has all this knowledge and perspective. She's open minded, and flexible. She's better able to understand and relate to those around her. Undoubtedly, Anta from *Touki Bouki* embodies this beauty.

It has been many weeks since I watched *Touki Bouki*, and it remains elusive to me, not in meaning, value or impact, but rather I still can't seem to find the words to describe it. I will say the film felt distinctly African, even as someone who has only traveled to eastern Africa (Kenya). It felt African in the sense of style, the fashion sense, the communal aspect. The marriage of the traditional and the contemporary. There's an energy that I detect, an ever present tension between the colonial and the pre-colonial. This energy and this tension was depicted well in the film.

In learning about West Africa, I begin to connect the dots a bit more. I detect some sense of grief from those who remain on the continent, and some sense of longing in the diaspora. It's two sides of something torn asunder. A righteous fury, and sense of pride, that we seem to share. Although I could be wrong, and am most certainly generalizing.

I can't go without mentioning the scenes of animal slaughter, which were very difficult to watch even just seconds of. I've seen a chicken being slaughtered, which was very unfortunate to behold (but delicious to eat), but never larger livestock. There's a frankness about the inclusion of this material in the film. In my opinion it depicts how we have been living sustainably and closely with our environments for the past millennia. But it does not read as a positive in the film, because no matter what it's a horrible thing to witness and probably also horrible to carry out. It is a way of life, but life is not always good. It's hard to describe.

***Chi Wara and D'mba***

***Women and Beauty***

***Competition and Complementarity for Communal Joy and Goodness***

*October 28*

I'm as interested as ever in the concept of beauty and its relationship to virtue and morality. A large part of American moral identity is tied to the acquisition of money and capital. In the Western art making tradition, beauty is a symbol of virtue. Here, beauty means the beauty of the white woman, and her virtue is her material appeal to the male gaze. Beauty has been expanded in the contemporary, to become associated with brand, object, and commodity. I think it's safe to say that in the West, a beautiful woman is an object, and the idea of her beauty is used, often, to reinforce the power of a white man, or an agenda rooted in white patriarchy. The "beauty" I'm exposed to in advertising and on social media is a reinforcement of this material beauty, and is not harmonious with the beauty I encounter on a day to day basis as I observe and interact with the people around me.

D'mba describes the beauty of women I have encountered many times, and women who I think all of us know in one way or another. D'mba is a dark skinned woman, a woman with sagging breasts, a woman full of grace and brilliance, beauty, and nurturing. I'm moved by her activation within the community, and intrigued by the dance being practiced by men. It reminds me of a balance between genders and within the culture. Although she represents an ideal, she does not strike me as an ideal far removed from the truth. In her representations, her features are abstracted, she is tall, her raffia skirts fly, the person that dances her activates her spirit so that her qualities come alive. She feels at once like a goddess, and yet she feels like she lives in all of us.



On the right is D'mba. On the left is a sculptural face I made, which is one of a series of many sculptural heads and faces with calm expressions, and (I hope) a spiritual, and earthly beauty reminiscent of individuals and loved ones from our own lives.

The importance of Chiwara as the foil to D'mba, is that we all carry Chiwara within us as well. Where there is goodness, and perfection there has to be it's opposite, it's balance. Where there is only perfection, paradoxically we're left dissatisfied. Where we are allowed to hold both within us, we give ourselves space and grace to be imperfect, and in the end, be more authentically ourselves.



## ***Strong Men And Joy***

***Doundounba in Guinea, The Strong Men, Donso in Mali, Sun Ra***

*November 11*

I'm thinking about gender roles for this week, and the graceful subversion of them as women begin to perform the strong man dance. I'm thinking about queerness within traditional cultures, I'm curious how it manifests, how non-queer folks within the culture feel about it, and what the attitude toward it was both with the input of colonial christianity, and prior to it. I will say that here there are indeed very prominent gender roles, but it seems that there is an equality that is fundamental within the culture that allows for balance, and embodiment of both the masculine and feminine within everyone.

I'm thinking about African-American gender-role subversion. I'm thinking about Sun-Ra's flamboyance, and all those who came before him and after him who history likes to forget. Who defy expectation at every level by being themselves, whether they are queer or gender non conforming, or not. It's a topic I have some interest in, but am far from well versed in it and unprepared to try and unpack.

# PORTFOLIO



**Zoe He**

**My name is Zoe and I am studying in CCA's interactive design major. I come from Shenzhen, China. Because of my major, I like works that require logical thinking. I generally produce graphic design or interactive design works, such as software architecture or interface. As we all know, China is a country with a long history, and I think Africa is too, so I really want to learn about the diverse cultures of Africa. It is undeniable that dance and sculpture are both very important parts of African culture. By learning African dance, I think I can feel the profound spirit of African culture.**

## PORTFOLIO #1

In the article "Greeting Creates Community Excerpt", author Steven Wooten described in detail the scenes of people dancing and singing with djembe drums as accompaniment in Lemmert Park in Los Angeles. When I read the article, I didn't know what djembe drum is. When I searched for it further, I found that I had seen it appear in a movie. The djembe drum can be said to be the oldest musical instrument in the world. It is not only used by Africans. Many Indonesians also make musical instruments similar to African drums. They are called Indonesian drums. Although they are similar in appearance, they are quite different.

It is mentioned in the article that this rally is to use traditional African music to give African Americans a deeper understanding of their own history. I very much agree with the main drummer Najite's idea. I also think that music empathy must have a lot to do with culture. It is difficult for Chinese people to hear the deep meaning of Western music, and it is difficult for Westerners to understand the meaning of Chinese folk music. Every country feels different about a word. For example, there is a very complicated piece of African drum music. If you are not from that area, you may not be able to tell whether it was used for morale boosting before the war or for dancing and making friends. These two emotions are completely different. In many cases, cultural background will affect people's understanding of the same music to convey feelings. Then, when people with only incomplete cultural background can make up for their cultural background through music?

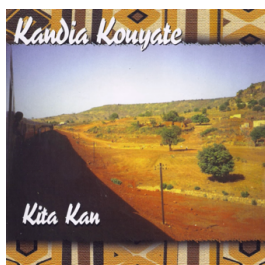
In my opinion, although the article discusses that African drums help African Americans understand their own history more easily, I think the article shows more of the struggle of African Americans with their own identity. These experience community activities or local community activities can help strenuous Americans to penetrate into the most native black culture.



## PORTFOLIO #2

When I read "The Jelimuso Song and Dance of Tata Bambo Kouyate and Performing Jelimusolu Beauty", I didn't understand what jelimuso is at first. At first I thought it was a form of dance or a form of music. As I slowly read the following content, I realized that jelimuso represents a kind of artist or a kind of musician. The article describes that being a jelimuso cannot only have beauty, but also needs their performance. They use their own style to sing, move or interact with the audience, and strength and elegance are indispensable in the performance.

The article also wrote that Kouyaté is regarded as the standard of jelimuso. I further searched for kouyate's performance video, but there seems to be only her song video on the Internet. In her songs, I can feel the presence of strings and drum beats, but it seems that they all exist as a foil, making the sound our focus. As far as my personal feeling is concerned, her voice is full of emotion and empathy. Listening to her songs, I feel that I am in the grassland of freedom. And although I can't understand what she sings, I feel that she seems to be telling a story elegantly.





### PORTFOLIO #3

When we talk about performances under African culture, the first thing we think of is music. Drums, singing, or dancing seem to have become a stereotype among Africans. I always think that music art is not just entertainment, it should be something more profound. In the article "The Dialogic Performative in Critical Ethnography", author D. Soyini Madison believes that many people feel that the performance of dialogue acts has a sense of urgency, but it is not all. He also believes that many dialogue performances are pipelined clones of the same type. This is not right. Creators should not just be limited to creating a single type of the same type, but should create different things based on their own experience and culture and show them to the viewer.

Although the article mentioned more about dialogue performance, I think it is also linked to all art. People should use their imagination to create. Although the performance is only fictional or reproduced, the performance should be more distinctive. It should not be stylized repetition. At the end, the author also mentioned a very important problem that artists all over the world will encounter: there are a hundred Hamlets in the eyes of a hundred people. Some people like you, then some people don't like you.



## PORTFOLIO #4

As I know Mendiani is an international West African dance. This dance is named after a girl named Mandiani. In the video about Mandiani dance, we will find that the drums are the most important presence in the background music, and the dancers dance with the drums and wave the colorful cloth full of patterns in their hands or lift up their children.

Compared with the planned performances in current dance videos, African dance videos are more of a lack of planning to express their feelings about music. In a sense, the expression of this dance form may be related to the same definition of dance in their mind. Modern dancers are more to show their superb skills and present a planned and diverse visual stage. On the other hand, Mendiani dance most happens in the celebration. Dancers dance more likely to build relationships with the audience and relax themselves. This is related to their culture. For them, every action is a performance, and every performance requires interaction between people. In dance, performance and audience are equally important.



## PORTFOLIO #5

When I saw Sounou's video, I felt happiness and joy. Unlike some ceremonial performances that are gorgeously dressed, the dance in the video will be more relaxed and casual. The viewers sat with the band and dancers, and there seemed to be no gap between them. Everyone is like a group, without the participation of the stage, everyone is like a connected group. The drummer starts the music first, and the dancer listens to the music before dancing, which is like an impromptu performance. With the music, the dancers swayed their arms, following the music, moving on the not-so-wide open space. Even across the screen, I can feel the dancers' confidence, happiness and satisfaction. In the video, the only male dancer is holding a white cloth in his hand, with a smile on his face waving the cloth in his hand to the music. Sometimes he will do some moves that are rare in modern male dance. Some people may feel a little girlish, but his self-confidence affects everyone present.

I think in today's society, dance has become more standardized, and sometimes it makes me feel like a product on the assembly line. We have clear standards for what is good and what is bad, but are the dancers really happy? They dance because they like it because they are happy, not to win any competition awards. If we go to watch a dance performance, we often see dancers standing on the stage or as a foil to others, which makes it impossible for us to have a spiritual connection with them.

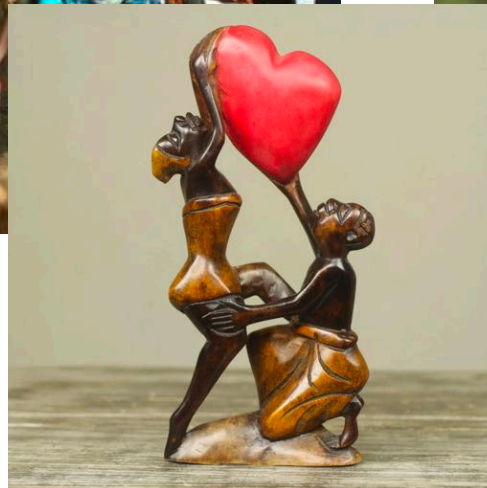




## PORTFOLIO #6

In the reading, author described Sounou's performance again in detail. The article mentioned that Sounou dancers need to cooperate with drummers. This reminds me of the dance in the video last week. The dancers dance to the rhythm of the drummer. They use all parts of the body to show it. This week's article is more about the symbolic meaning of Sounou dancers, which takes feminine beauty and the power of flirting as the core, and emphasizes women themselves. The article also mentioned that the main theme of this dance is "girls try to attract men's attention." Compared with modern people using words to convey love, dancers use more enthusiastic music and dance to woo.

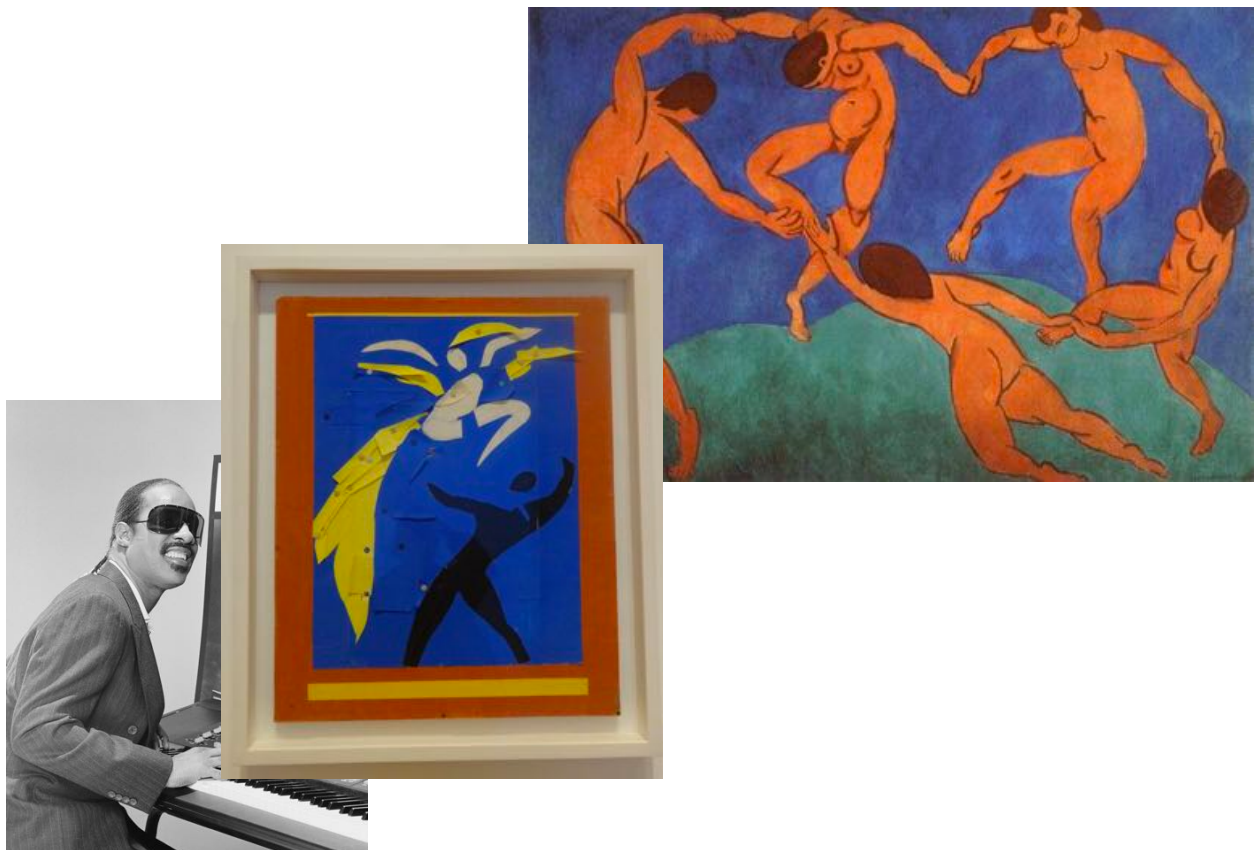
This reminds me of the courtship behavior of many creatures in nature. Compared with words, the behavior is more direct. This is the primitive behavior we passed from our ancestors. We should have all heard a sentence that words can deceive and do not. When love is conveyed in the dance, the dance will only be more attractive.



## PORTFOLIO #7

In the article "ReShae Washington Drum Circle Excerpt for West African Dance", it mentioned a painting called La Musique. This artwork mainly uses the three primary colors of red, blue, and yellow. The woman in a blue jumpsuit is holding her guitar-like instrument and seems to be playing it. The woman in a yellow dress next to her is leaning on a stool, and on her right hand is an unfolded piano sheet. From the perspective of my senses, the whole picture is full of cozy atmosphere, like a temporary rest in a certain afternoon. In the article, the author Genevieve also mentioned that the screen is full of "warm and safe".

The same shows a similar picture in the second black and white photo, with a man and a woman immersed in music. Although this photo is not in color, as a viewer, I can feel the peace and happiness in my place. These two works made me feel that the people in the pictures really love music or express their inner emotions with music.





## PORTFOLIO #8

In the article "Lamp Dmba West African Dance See the Music Hear Dance", it describes in detail what D'mba is. The D'mba mask is a performance prop worn on the head and shoulders of young male dancers and used on the dancers. In the performance, the dancer usually wears a plant material skirt, and a long blue dyed cloth covers the dancer's body. Because D'mba masks are generally used, the mask will be higher than the dancer's head, so the dancers hold the mask with their front legs and look through the small eyes between D'mba's chest.

Although D'mba is generally performed by men, it represents a mature female identity. In the previous art history class, I found that the earliest artworks of our ancestors had many similar symbols. For example, the earliest sculpture artwork: Venus of Willendorf, it also symbolizes mature and healthy women or the image of a mother and childbirth.

Although the dancers wear heavy masks in the dance, the performance is indeed very energetic. In this dance, there are many acrobatic choreography, among which there are many dances of tumbling or jumping on the roof.



## PORTFOLIO #9

In the article "Reading about Sun Ra A Joyful Noise", this article is not so much a description of a documentary about musicians and band leaders, as it is how to deliver music without the plot and dialogue while shooting. As the builder of the film, the director's narrative ability is his foundation, grasping the rhythm of the film is experience, and the deep meaning of the film and the beauty of the picture are talents. The control of scripts, editing, soundtracks, and cameras are the basic qualities a director must possess. It is mentioned in the article that the shooting of music is a severe test for the director. The vast majority of movies we see are "solid" films, which are their own feelings that the audience associates with narratives. The music film is "floating in the air." Rather than telling a story, it is more about the director's personal understanding of the artist being filmed. People are multi-faceted, so the director may be talking about the side he sees. In this aspect, there are many directors' own aesthetic characteristics mixed in.

"A Joyful Noise" by Mugge is mentioned in the article as a good example. Mugge filmed the performances of artists, mainly to show all kinds of artistic concepts, including costumes, dances, songs and overall wonders. For the author of this article, this film contains complex and contradictory meanings, an expression, but also a kind of concealment.



## **Experience with Djeneba Sako**

To be honest, before I took this class, I cared more about African history and culture than dance. As the class progressed, I felt very relaxed. This class has always been like a safe haven for me.

The arrival of Djeneba Sako made me have a deeper interest in dance. The peace that dance brings is like relaxing and swaying in the wind. I really like her cheerful atmosphere and cheerful dancing.

# Experiments in West African Dance

By: Jendayi Ingram

# Artist Analysis on Movement



As a dancer, I've been able to experience what it feels like to release generational trauma. Growing up my mother was an African dancer and seeing her move her body move between slow and fast movements really open my eyes to how you can move in various ways while still being affective with your movement. I've noticed that when dancing you tend to dance a certain feelings when you're happy you are dancing more in a cheerful manner when you said use your body starts to move in more so slow movements when you're anxious you start to be very frantic but the list goes on to how your body moves through emotion. It as if movement is another signals to the brain to show how it expresses itself.



## Week 2: September 9. Aesthetics of Cool, Learning How to Greet People, Drum Circles

Considering the understanding of the definition of "cool" you instantly think of 1. the idea of someone acting "cool" or 2. something or someone that is physically cold or anything relating to temperature. However, In West Africa, the term "cool" is described to have the ability to act nonchalant or to have no emotion at the right moment. Considering this understanding, it's connected to how African dancers relate to the art form. One could describe that African dancers are superheroes because they show no emotion but can get the job done. Whenever you watch dancers in motion, you rarely see the dancers smiling. The dancers give more a stern expression that's illuminating always from their movement. This observation is crucial to having a better understanding of the art movement because dancers have great awareness of their body control, breath, grace - while portraying a serious look and "cool" stance

## Week 3: September 16. Jelilya: The Art of Jelimuso (Griotte) & The Get Down Quality

Based on the readings and videos from week 3, I was able to grasp a better understanding of how African Dance has a higher substance than just the physical aspect of the art form. Another element that is crucial to African dance is the music that we hear and how it connects with movement. In the article “Art in Motion” the author discusses the importance of how music flows by saying “African Dance has a tendency for gradual style” between high and low, and gentle and sudden. This is interesting because when doing African dance the same technique is required in certain steps. For example, bending your knees closer to the ground brings more fluidity to your movement and symbolizes clear communication with the drummers that are watching you give the next break. All of it has to connect, the singing, dancing, and drumming forms collectively to bring a masterpiece.





Nuit de Noël. (Happy-club) 1963

Malik Scuder TGS

2008



Week 4: September 23. Bamako: City of Art and Culture &  
Malick Sidibé's Rhythm and Dance Photography + Self  
Check: Where are you [the student] in this dance?

When thinking about dialogic performance and movement, one thing that comes to mind is community. The dialogic performance is charged by a desire for a generative and embodied reciprocity, sometimes with pressure and sometimes with pain. Continuing with this idea, The rich black and white photo series "Midnight in Bamako" by Malick Sidibé is a great example of connecting and engaging with your surroundings, physically and emotionally In the article " The dialogic performative in critical ethnography" the reading emphasizes heart, and it is not just you anymore the image "soirée familiale" by Malick Sidibe, you're able to identify the importance of closeness and physical touch. Though each individual has In the frame has a different expression - some happy, content, or confused. Overall, all these emotions connect with what the artist was striving for.



## Week 5: September 30. Call and Response & the Audience

The Call and Response gesture and expression are important to African dance community. It symbolizes unity, order, and collaboration. Which is all involved and prevalent in drum circles, dance circles, chants, and even songs. For example, drummers use it to indicate the next rhythm pattern, dancers use it to alert the next steps , and singers use it to lead the song .



Week 6: October 7. Sounou I: Exploring Feminine and Jelimuso  
Beauty, Nyama (total energy) and Basigi (improvisation/ personal  
virtuosity) & Complementarity in Malian Dance and Life  
[Fadenya & Badenya]

The peach pink and dark purple pottery (located on page 27) truly highlights the detail mande potters embody. In the readings, you're able to understand the importance Blacksmith women carry in their community and in the field of pottery. Black Smith women are the main breadwinner in their families. Mande women in the southwest of Mali, have the roles of being an artist of pottery, being a mother, and a wife.

Week 7: October 14 & 21. Sounou II & III: Traveling Beauty, Performing Femininity, Coolness and Virtuosity Across Genders from Mali to Guinea, and Touki Bouki - Please be sure to watch the Touki Bouki film posted to week 8 and do the reading for Oct 21

In the short excerpt, Traveling beauty, you learn to appreciate the dance of Sonounou, especially hearing the transition the women experience. The discovery of whom "Sonounou" is discovered in this article. The article discusses how they believe the woman that was centered around the "Sonounou" dance was a woman from the Fulani tribe. This is suggested because of their lighter skin, elaborate coiffure, and striking strategies of adornment. The article also states that women with a lighter complexion traveled a lot. This analysis could connect to why the Sonounou dance has reached so many countries.



Week 8: Sounou Women  
from Mali to Guinea and  
Senegal. Sounou forms  
and Djibril Mambety's  
Touki Bouki



One of the greatest films  
that truly shifted  
cinematography, especially  
for Black people.



Week 9: October 28 - We will meet to finish the dance, Sounou. Please also do the readings on Chi Wara and D'mba: More on Women and Beauty, Competition and Complementarity for Communal Joy and Goodness

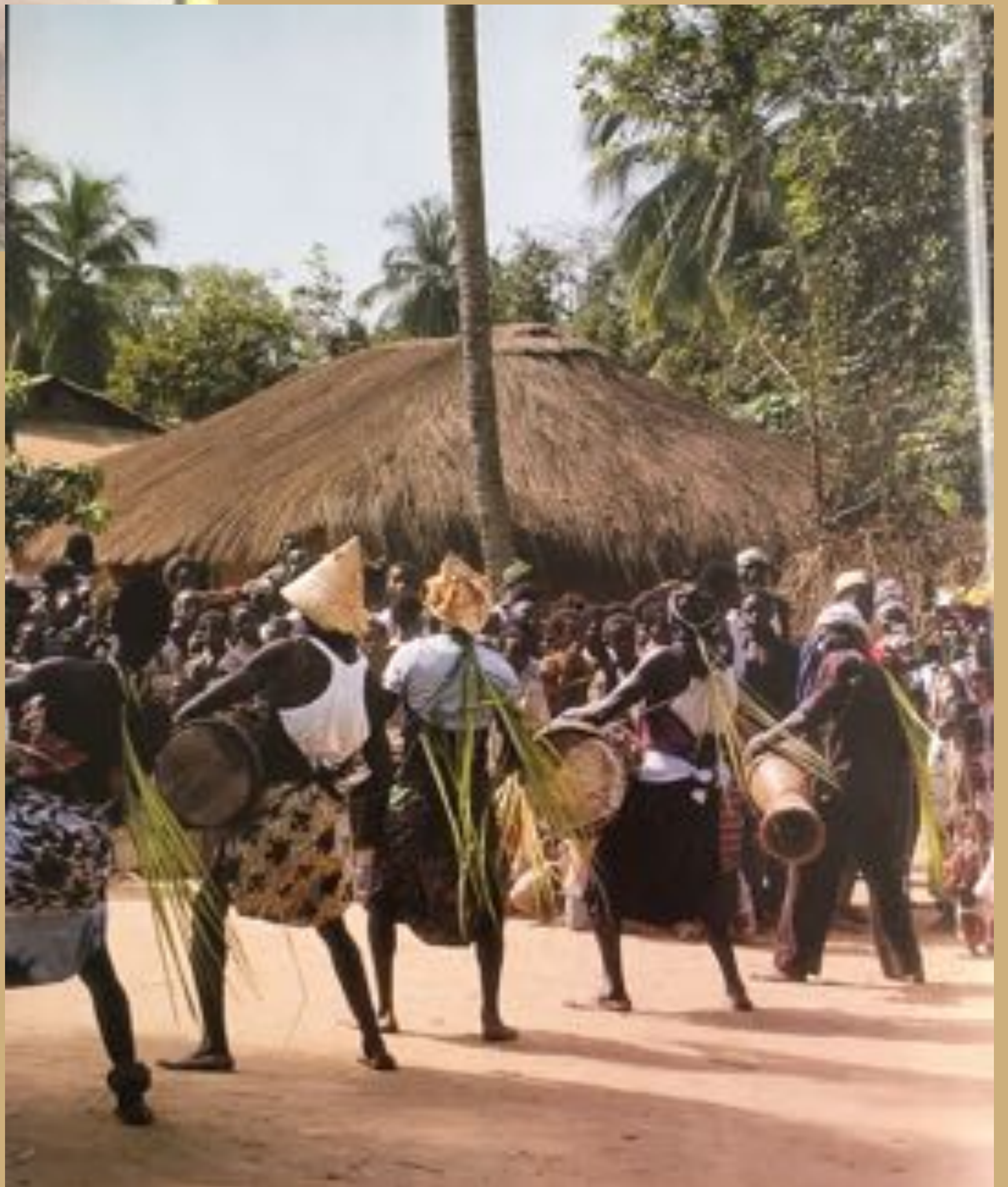
Carved to honor that original mythical being. Under Ci Wara's guidance, humans first learned to cultivate the land and became prosperous and able farmers.

The chi-wara taught humans how to farm the land, but left after humans grew careless and wasteful. The Bamana people created the chi-wara head crests and dance as a way to commemorate the gift of the chi-warm spirit. The Bamana males wear the head crests and perform the chi wara dance at times of planting and harvest. "Anything that reproduces must come in male and female form. So for Chi Wara, you can never one without the other."

Week 11: November 11. Strong Men and Joy: The Dance of Strong Men - Doundounba in Guinea, The Shirts of Strongmen - Donso in Mali and the Strong man Mystic, Sun Ra

In "The Shirts that Mande Hunters Wear" I was able to understand that Mande Hunters were characterized as extraordinary individuals. They hold unique positions In West Africa because of what they embark on. Mande Hunters love what they do. However, their process is what sets them apart from others. For Example, isolating themselves, have a thirst for adventures, being extremely passionate, self-possessed, and self-independent.









# AFRICAN DANCE PORTFOLIO

Leticia LI | HAAVC-3000-4 | Genevieve Hyacinthe



# BIOGRAPHY

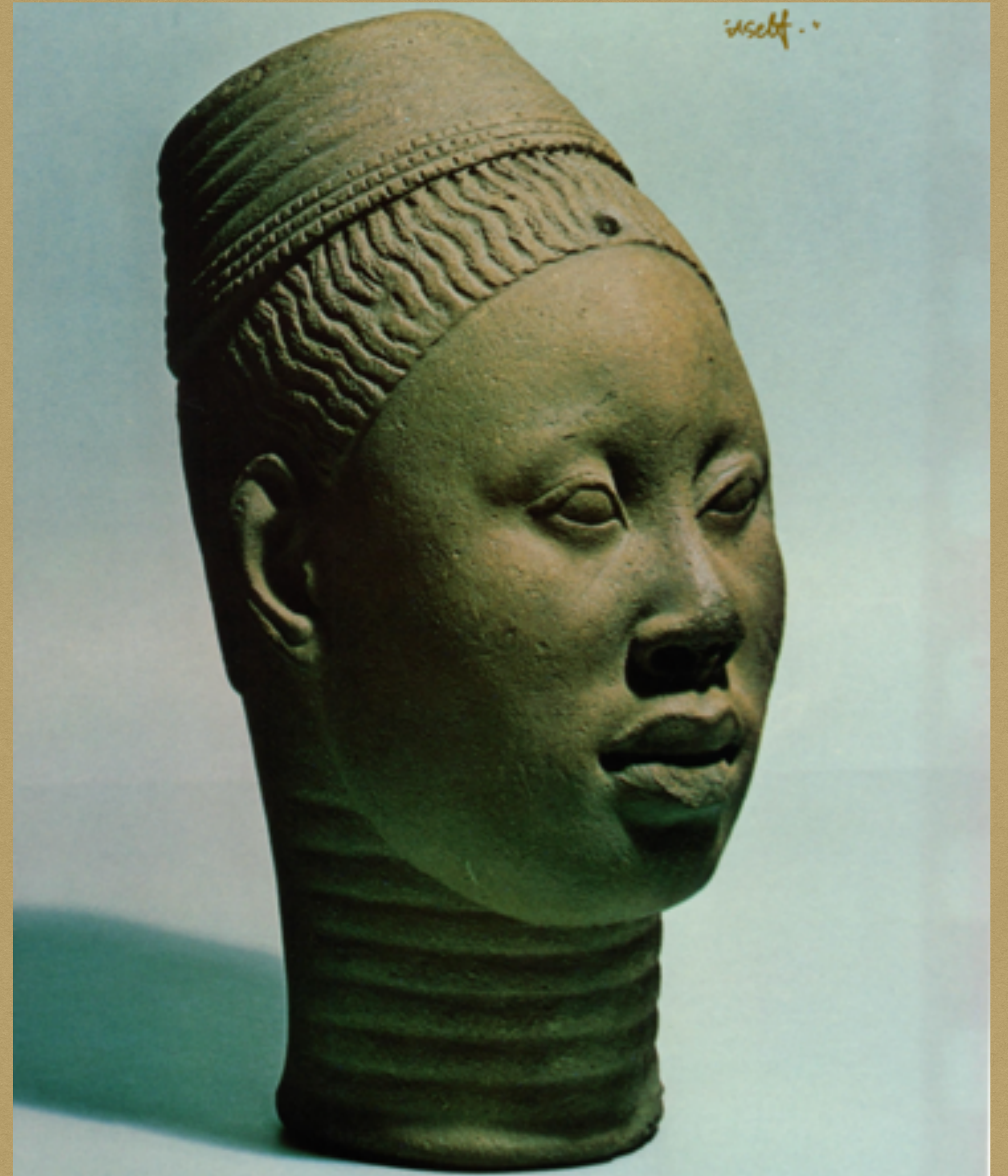


Hello, I'm Leticia. A junior graphic design student. I come from China, and I am taking online classes in China this semester due to the epidemic. I first became aware of African art in the solo exhibition of Ryuichi Sakamoto, a Japanese musician. His works incorporate a great deal of spoken dialogue, the languages of different countries and the sounds of natural objects. His love of African art, enhanced in his autobiography of his work, cannot be replaced.



# WEEK 2: SEPTEMBER 9

Aesthetics of Cool, Learning How to Greet People, Drum Circles





# QUESTIONS

## Thompson Aesthetic of Cool excerpt

1. “Women are admired for a surly detached expression, and sommambulistic movement and attitude.”

Q: Dance always came with music. What kind of music with women dance? Always Drum?

2. “The cooler a person becomes, the more ancestral he becomes.”

Q: Meditation is also a way to relax and elude preoccupation. Is there a ritual like meditation in African tradition? Is dance also a kind of meditation?

3. “How- ever, no matter how ordinary his face, it is important for the chief to dress as beautifully as possible in order to attest his fineness of position in appropriate visual impact.”

Q: Is it necessary to keep outlook as clean and beautiful as possible? Is this sentence means out looking is not as important as soul?

4. “Man starts not from a premise of original sin but from the divine spark of equilibrium in the soul which enters the flesh at birth from the world of the Gods.”

Q: In China, we believe people are born with kindness and purity. Is this concept as same as African culture?

5. “The concern with herbs(green) and the disk of the sun(orange) immediately suggests a vivid sense of contrast in nature harnessed for a higher order. (Yoruba diviners sometimes wear beads of alternating green and yellow color, symbolizing the mystic complementarity of heat and coolness, chaos and order, in the world of divination.”

Q: I’m inspired by the meaning of both green and orange in African culture. Are there any other color important in Africa?

2. “It is going to seek the water...because water has the power of sustaining...”

Q: In a lot of cultures, water is a important symbol. Can I get more information about the meaning of water?



# REFLECTION

Based on the reading for this week, I listed a lot of questions. I'm surprised by the similarities between Chinese and African cultures. It's my first time to get know about the meaning of cool in African culture. To become cool is to be control, having the value of composure in the individual context, social stability in the context of the group. It is particularly admirable to do difficult tasks with an air of ease and silent disdain. In China, we use Ying and Yang to represent two opposite sides of the world. As a person, it's the life goal to find a balance between this chaotic world created by Ying and Yang.

According to the reading, coolness has to do with transcendental balance. The cooler a person becomes, the more ancestral he becomes. In other words, mastery of self enables a person to transcend time and elude preoccupation, which This is the state of mind that Chinese people have always believed in and pursued.







# WEEK 3      SEPTEMBER 16

Jelilya: The Art of Jelimuso (Griotte) & The Get Down Quality





# REFLECTION

“Kouyaté sings into a microphone hooked up to amplifiers positioned around the space for optimum voice projection. This system amplifies her voice as well as the sounds of the various accompanying string instruments. The documentary’s narrator informs us that Kouyaté is the “first woman to develop a modern microphone and performance style,” suggesting that she has standardized the form of *Jelimusolu* to her own performance. This reflects *basigi* (or composure) manifested through her control over her art form.” This is the part of the reading and the video that I feel the most. As a woman, she is very tolerant of the development of science and technology and new things. She mastered the advantages of new things and took advantage of them. Unlike most of the guardians of traditional art, she is afraid to face new things. Instead, she found a balance between tradition and modernity, and spread her appeal with new inventions.

In my opinion, lowering the body to the ground is a kind of homecoming. As we grow, we get taller and farther away from the ground. As the drums change, the dancers press their bodies to the ground. It meant growing up for me, but getting back to where I started, finding myself.

# history keepers.

- 1. ancestry bring to history (performance).
- 2. Acknowledgement.



beautif colour of neck.

The most important thing is she knows how to perform the history.



beautiful on their  
dressed, cool, calm  
and quiet.

their face as come  
as the mask which  
represent "coolness."

grillage

perform themselves & history.



## NOTES



# WEEK 4    SEPTEMBER 23

Bamako: City of Art and Culture & Malick Sidibé's Rhythm and Dance Photography





“Nothing is more frightening than the absence of an answer”

—*Bakhtin*

# REFLECTION

“ I am inspired by autobiographical performances that enact ecologies of the self and speak in the multiple tongues of their own worlds, where the self is a composite of interpenetrating and polyvocal experiences, intents, and desires within itself and with Others. In these performances, I have witnessed how the self can be Other to itself, as well as Othered in the order of the social. These performances deeply touch and excavate momentous<sup>1</sup> details that tell an existential and sublime truth we would otherwise never know.”

The greatest charm of African dance and music lies in its integration and inclusiveness. Just like the dance we rehearsed in the past few weeks, almost all the students could keep up with the rhythm and have fun. One of the things I was really surprised about was how web-based our courses are. No one physically touches each other, but with music and movement, we resonate in different parts of the world. We try to feel the same frequency of dance, the emotion of dance and the joy of dance. This kind of cooperation makes me feel less distant. I took this course in the early morning, but I felt very happy and energetic in every class. I think it's the energy of dance and music and people working together.



# what is the **dialogical** performative?

by dialogical, we can think about the dialogue going on during performance.

do we dialogue with ourselves?

if so, how?

- My answer is, yes. In the first week, we got ideas about "self".

The question is asking, asking people need to have conversation with themselves, what is wrong? what is right? who am I?

the self conversation always improved after the dialogue with others.

to dialogue with others, suggest conversation.

to dialogue with each other, may be more expand...



- **predetermined**: expectation.

- **reciprocity**: give & take.



"taxi"

I have saw the same car at  
news press on Xinjiang  
China.

I will open a dialogical performative act to appropriate dialogues of difference or essentially two states of superposition possibilities. I will open the dialogical performative in order to realize the state of our current and to show more space for others to come and take. Sometimes we are journey on how have having others behind and taking up too much space for ourselves. We are having little space for others to take. That journey is not so interesting, it is following without others to perform with and to help to create the different conflicts, discussions, and possibilities within the landscape of our journey. I will open a conversation of our thinking about the others through a theme of the dialogical performative because we hope to find a will do what thought. Malick as dialogically describes "the role place as a single cell but as a dramatically spreading architecture of multiple possibilities" (2002).

"The mirrors must be doubled, creating the endless regress of possibilities, opening out into infinity..."

mirror & I.

how many identities about I  
try to find myself?

Second, the dialogic performative can be described as always embedded and purposeful within a designated time and space that evokes the **imaginary**. The very notion of possibility exists with those who can imagine other ways that the smallest thing and the largest thing are or can be; we need the imaginary to envision the world and ourselves differently." Although the performative falls under the rubric of



## NOTES



# WEEK 5    SEPTEMBER 30

Call and Response & the Audience





# REFLECTION

"Everyone in the show knows they are going to be part of the show, so everyone will dance. "That's the part I remember the most. As a design, most of the time our work is actually a one-sided emotional transmission. The audience assesses our intentions, history, and emotions through our visual art. The emotional connection between us and the audience lacks the most direct communication. The African party looks like a game to me. Everyone is ready to participate, there is no audience in the game. The lead singer and lead dancer convey their spirit and blessings with their performances, and in response, the audience joins in. Such performances are not one-sided emotional output. It's a conversation. No one gets bored in such a conversation.

# Call & Response.

## poetic response.



"mounted voice"  
he is the caller in call & response—

celebration = important moment as equivalent of a good leader.  
dancer, dancer, artist.

explanatory —

the responder don't have  
to find the voice



They feel his goodness and  
respond harmoniously rather than  
"looking out another" - selfish, rather, or leader."



In singing,  
the body moves and breath  
important, but also the way  
that the body moves.

celebrating — celebration of the act of

The audience, is also the celebration of

African songs are entangled.

— being by a selfish and a shared  
call & response in shared

OVERLAP = not in selfish — whole the  
shared response.

definition  
- 1st

**Abstract.** — Performance, as seen for instance in the works of  
Erving Goffman or Karin Barber, is often defined by a rather  
strict distinction of roles between performers and audiences.  
Traditional celebration culture in Mali, however, provides  
social situations that offer structures not only of role distinction  
but also of role switching and role blurring. It is a key feature  
of the audience in vernacular celebrations in Mali that the  
experience of responses to performance includes taking part in  
performance. The present analysis of social interaction during  
gender drumming performances in Bamako, Mali, thus might  
help to differentiate our theoretical conception of performance  
and audience, and contribute to the anthropology of celebration  
and the history of media practice in West Africa. Drumming  
performance at celebrations is participatory performance. It  
provides a context of public representation and embodiment  
of community at the same time. (What performance, audience,  
celebration, interaction, gender drum)

poetic artist —

that we as "audience" bring our purpose to a particular song.

bring me on there!

audience is shared.

Audience in this sense refers not only to some  
group of listeners or spectators who are not  
themselves performing, but to all participants in a sit-  
uation who perform social roles which are con-  
temporaneous to the performance of another role  
and function in the course of interaction. This  
is in contrast to the performance of any social  
role's "self-ness" or its "otherness" (Goffman  
1983: 15). The emerging concept of performance  
and audience is broadly relational and dynamic:  
each act of audience is another performance,  
and each act of performance of performance and  
audience changes the present social context. This  
concept does not refer to relationships between  
social groups, but to relationships between roles in  
interaction. In contrast to Barber's definition cited  
above, it includes everyday interaction marked by  
singing songs, or in talking, greeting, or playing  
games.



The circle are overlapping  
to illustrate it is a shared concept  
experience.

audience is not the performer  
as the performer is not the audience,  
audience is not the performer  
as the performer is not the audience.

bring me there that they come for participants to  
share.

call = "invitation of spirit"

call is a signal for "spirit to come for  
you or leave the circle."

"first & last" — first — last — shared — shared.

call is a signal for "spirit to come for  
you or leave the circle."



call is a signal for all participants to share  
(shared).

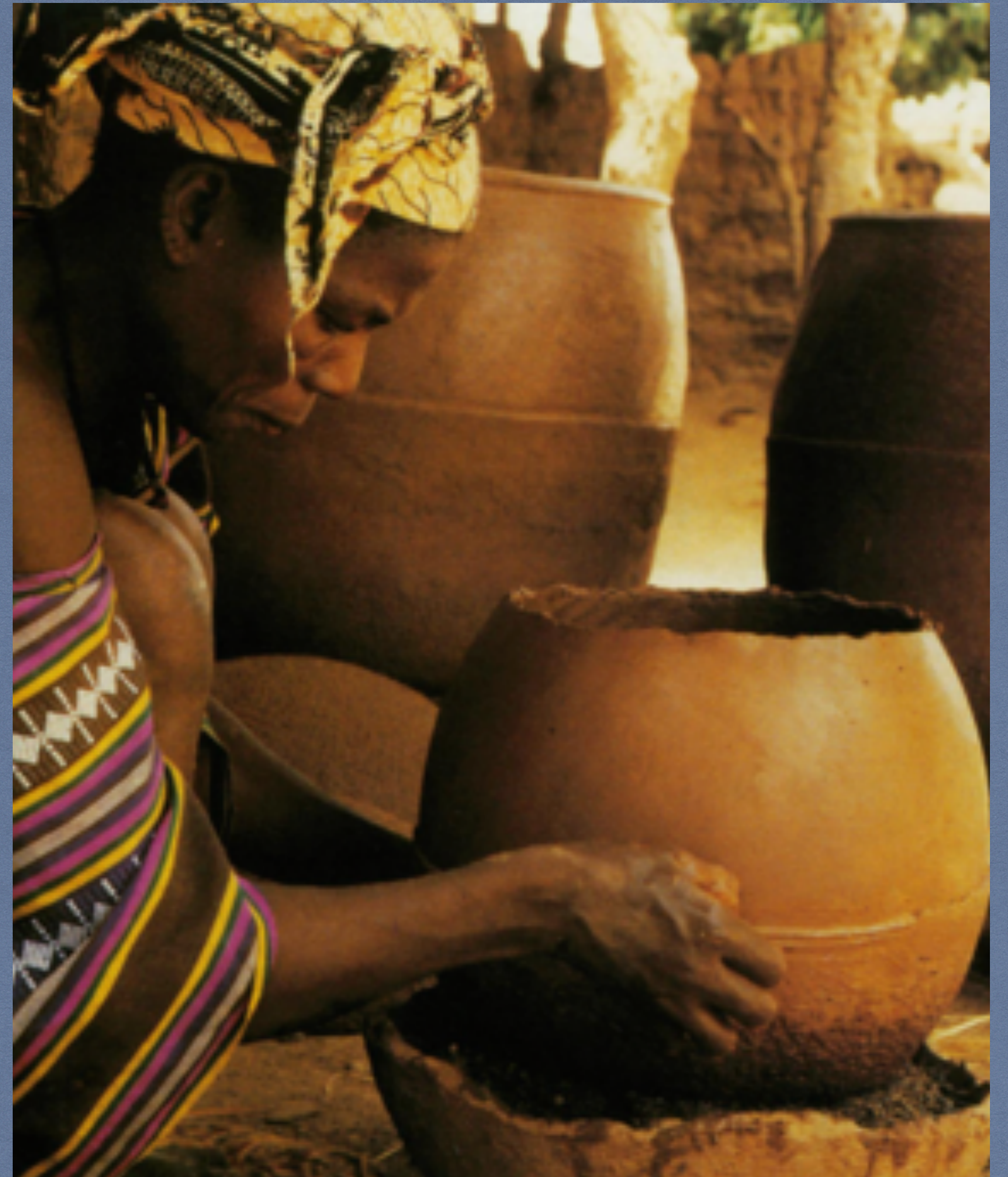


## NOTES



# WEEK 6    OCTOBER 7

Exploring Feminine and Jelimuso Beauty, Nyamaand Basigi &  
Complementarity in Malian Dance and Life





# REFLECTION

When I was a freshman, I took pottery as an elective course. As I majored in graphic design originally, I chose the pottery course because I wanted to feel the process of materials being shaped and endowed with meaning in my hands. From the ceramic works created by African women, I feel that their works contain their attitudes towards life and their responsibilities. In my ceramic works, I show more of my self-recognition and expression. My forms are inspired by myself or my life. But women in Africa showed their value and strength through pottery. Their pottery is their way of life.



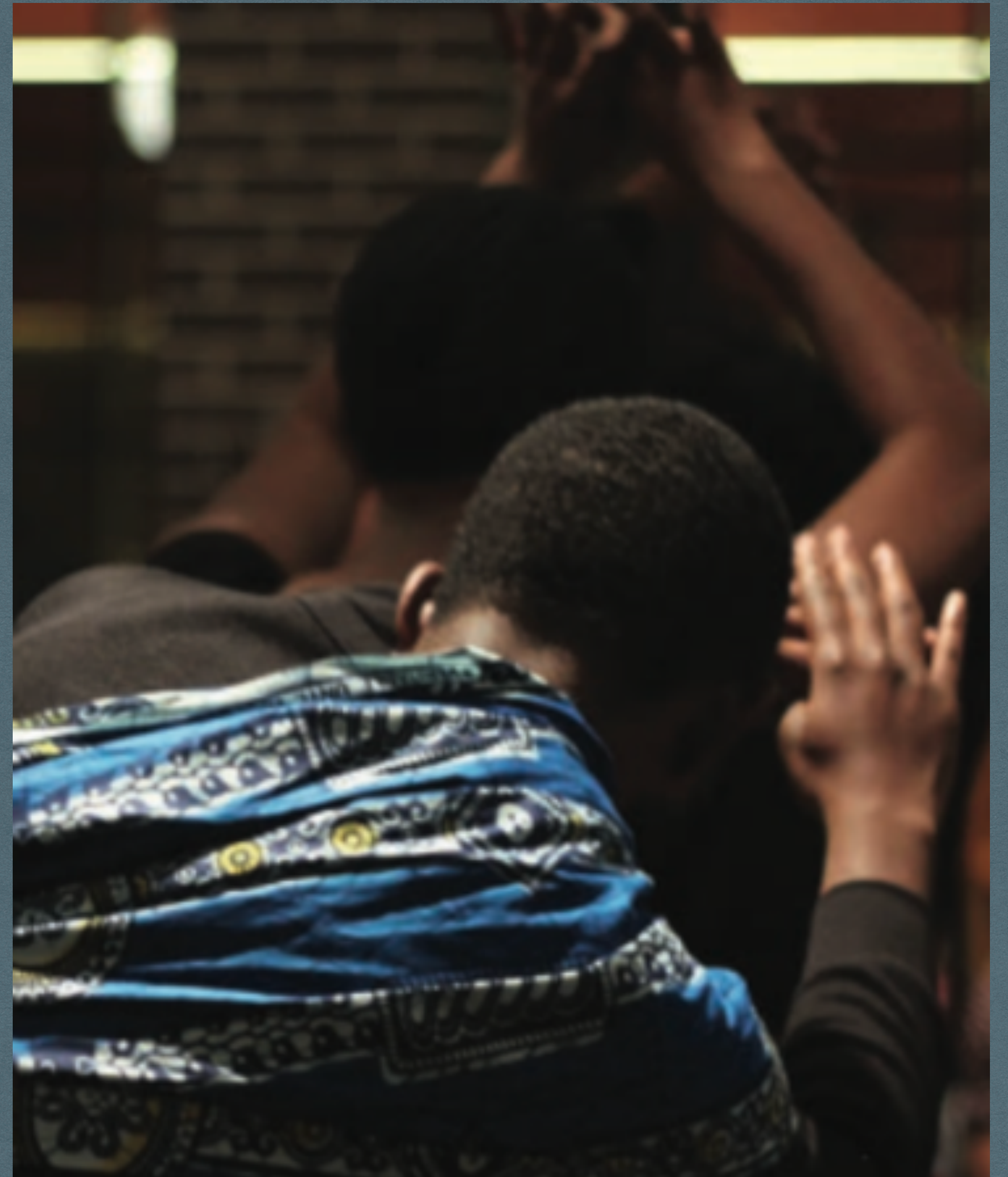


These two photos are my ceramic artworks. Both of them represent part of my self-portrait.



# WEEK 7    OCTOBER 14 & 21

Sounou II & III: Traveling Beauty, Performing Femininity, Coolness and  
Virtuosity Across Genders from Mali to Guinea, and Touki Bouki





# REFLECTION

I have two focuses in this week's reading. One is the aesthetic of skin color. The importance of color in African traditions I've thought about and discussed in the first week of reading. But the perception of skin color is learned from this article. White itself represents purity and cleanliness. The article argues that white skin is mysterious. The love of white skin is not because of white supremacy but because of what it represents. White is associated with death and ancestors. This slightly sinister and mysterious color is appealing.

The other is the status and attitude of women in relationships shown in dance. I was very interested in the part where women use scarves to choose the man they want. In China, there is a game among children called "throwing handkerchiefs". The children will form a circle, and a child with a handkerchief will walk around the circle behind the children. When he notices a child he cares about, he puts the handkerchief behind him and waits for the chosen child to find it. I thought of this game while reading the last chapter. I love and appreciate that African women are dominant in relationships. And they need to take responsibility for their own choices. If the girl wanted to quit the boy, she was compelled to give on hundred kola nuts, five hundred francs and a sheep.



Citation: Genevieve Hyacinthe, "Sounou's Structure: A Malian Dance Body Detailed" and "Basigi and Nyama: Beauty, Purpose and Form in Sounou," excerpts from Genevieve Hyacinthe, "Traditional Rhythms and Global Remixes: Translating Form in Contemporary Mali Dance Collectives." PhD diss. Harvard University, 2008 (updated).

#### Traveling Beauty

In this consideration, the focus is on how dancers, in collaboration with drummers, present their bodies to reflect Sounou's essence, rather than on how the dance's sensibilities are "represented" by concrete visual forms such as masks and costumes as we might imagine is the case in theater contexts. Evanescent cues within the performance and legend construct Sounou's Malian feminine beauty. Similarly, one understands Sounou's ideal feminine qualities from fragments rather than completely "dressed up stories" and linear narratives.

The question remains, "Who is Sounou?" Some evidence suggests that she may be a Fulani woman, or at the very least, a woman who has arrived into the Bamana area from afar.

Meyace, Meyace, Meyace samsenima  
Meyace, Meyace, Meyace samsenima  
Meyace, Meyace, kaluyafo londo  
Kaluyafo kaluye n'diyarabi foo Konakry  
Meyace, Meyace, Meyace samsenima  
The Sams dance suits you well  
Meyace (a girl's name).  
Say hello to my friend in Conakry for me!



Fulani (Ful) woman with beautiful adornments

described by Sylvia Boone (1986) is also "...thought to live in water, especially the Niger, but he can be

<sup>1</sup> This is from the liner notes of Malian artist, Mamadi Keita's album, *Nankama*, Wassoulou (Trio: Fonti Musicali, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> Imperato, *African Folk Medicine*, 47.

anywhere."<sup>3</sup> A traveler, a person or entity from the outside -- like the Wassoulou *Jelimusofo* (women griotte praise-singers from the Wassoulou region of Mali) who refer to themselves as *konou* because their moves and song messages evoke the symbol of the "messenger" bird in flight -- may be a paramount characteristic of a Malian feminine beauty. Perhaps Sounou is Fulani, aesthetically and ephemerally reflecting their position, gestures and beauty as traveling women and messengers.

For certain populations in Mali, like the Fulani, because of their heritage as semi-nomadic cattle herders, they are still widely thought of as people who travel throughout Mali and its neighboring countries in the Mande diaspora (Mali, Guinea, Senegal, Niger, Ivory Coast, Burkina-Faso). Because the Fulani and other cultures "on the move" travel with frequency, Africanist scholars have argued that their personal strategies of dressing themselves has great artistic import (Appiah 1985, Renne 2013, Rubin 1973): **The body is one's place, so as one might decorate a home with signs of identity and manners of beautification,**

members of highly mobile cultures like the Fulani focus a similar amount of attention on "the decoration of self." For this reason, their outfits and ornamentation approaches are usually especially striking and Fulani women have become visible icons of beauty in the Mande area. While scholars have written that Fulani women's physical beauty is widely admired throughout West Africa because of their "Berber-like physical traits," I am suggesting that Fulani beauty in this context is more esoteric. If lighter skin or "whiteness" is considered "favorable," it is because of its symbolism, rather than due to socio-cultural

"white supremacy"; for example, **lightness or white skin is often associated with death and/or the ancestors.** In a similar vein, Shaw notes that Fulani women are considered by some Mande as alchemists, with knowledge of love potions made from combinations "of a mild narcotic or sedative with aphrodisiac."<sup>4</sup> Other characteristics of Fulani women and their cultural interactions with Bamana in important historical contexts further explains why they may be a "model of femininity" to some Bamana and evoked in some artistic forms such as the dance, Sounou. Jan Jansen's thoughts support the importance of being an outsider as a "beauty aesthetic":

Narratives like the one about... Mamadi Bitiki can be interpreted as dealing with 'modernity' and privileged knowledge, and 'knowledge from outside' is a Mande narrative model that is able to represent modernity, because it can incorporate the histories of Islam and colonialism, trade and books. Pilgrimages to Mecca are a logical category in a Mande etiological legend, since in Mande historical imagination -- as well as elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa -- power (rulers and founders) always come from elsewhere, and knowledge is acquired outside one's society.<sup>5</sup>

Fulani (Ful) woman with movable tent (Mali)



图8. 图8

The outsider informs society. Her position as a traveler and conveyor of new information and experience connects to her beauty. We have now witnessed Sounou performed in Senegalese and Malian forms and have discovered the importance of Sounou references in Guinea and in areas throughout Mali including Kayes and Segou. In closing, we will turn to a last important Sounou legend that comes from Kaarta, Mali.

Sidi Mohammed Joh Camara, a master instructor of West African dance and drum of Boston and Bamako shared his story of Sounou with me on December 5, 2005, as I was completing my Sounou chapter. His story of Sounou, which I was not aware of until this time, fits in with what I have identified **as the art form's essence as the balance of nyama and basigi or beauty and composure intrinsic to Malian femininity.** My experience of this essence was arrived at from my training practicing and performing Sounou as a dancer and choreographer, during which, following phenomenological approaches, I stepped into the work:

Sounou is the name of a person, a girl called Sounou Ba. Gai is the real name of the rhythm. It is from Kaarta. They play Gai for the young ladies and men; It is the occasion for the young people to get to know each other. In daytime, the young men farm and women bring them food. At night the young people have a party. Girls try to get men's attention. Baba is the male. Sounou Ba is the female. These 2 are the best dancers.

Sounou Ba passed away one day. Baba went to the party and he could not dance because he was so sad. That was the day they dedicated the dance to Sounou Ba.<sup>6</sup>

It should be noted that Kaarta is near Segou, the location of the *Ba Sounou Sacko* mosque, though at this point, there is little or no evidence tying the two figures of Bamana legend together. Camara's account links Sounou with the power of feminine beauty and flirtation, and importantly, it also underscores these aspects as formed out of female subjectivity: **"The girls try to get the man's attention,"** as M'ba Coulibaly displayed her virtuosity or *basigi* in which her feminine power was observed in all its grandeur. Improvisations of Sounou steps were performed with such spontaneity and acumen that the drummers' signals were ignored and she found nuances -- or exhibited what Rainer Polak calls microtiming -- to such an extent that the other dancers were left behind and the drummers could only endeavor to keep up with her accents. This is the spirit of Sounou.

#### Virtuosity and Gendered Gestures: Achieving "the Feminine" in Sounou

In Camara's legend, Sounou is performed by men as well. The modulation of *nyama* or power into sensuality and nuance through *basigi* is not only an ability owned by women, but is one that anyone in the process of mastering Sounou must possess. And Doumbia's from the Bamako, 2004, version of Sounou, speaks to this point. All who dance Sounou with virtuosity will be able to command these qualities of Malian feminine beauty.

If suppleness and elasticity, as Farris Thompson notes, is a favorable quality of African dance and sculpture, then, as we see in the Bamako video of 2004, Doumbia gets high marks suggesting that skilled male dancers can perform Sounou with masterful fluidity, even though it is a dance work rooted in the sensibility of ideal feminine beauty and power. A master of the dance, Doumbia creates a self-presentation in Sounou characterized by feminine virtuosity and play [video 1.10. Sounou cue 5. 4:20-7:43]. His body moves as if it is boneless, and like M'ba Coulibaly, he exhibits the acumen of microtiming and flair. Of particular interest is his use of a white scarf which he artfully co-opts from M'ba Coulibaly in his solo. The scarf serves as a gestural device, "essential to the beauty, meaning and identity of African art,"<sup>7</sup> and marks Doumbia as Baba, Sounou Ba's male counterpart.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Sidi Mohammed "Joh" Camara, December 5, 2005, The Dance Complex, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

<sup>7</sup> Blier, *Gender*, 57.

He waves the scarf, the only article of adornment in his attire of jeans and a gray t-shirt, with the spirit of play and sensuality, using it to add drama to his already spectacular maneuvers.

Doumbia's provocative and stylish flourish of the scarf becomes a signifier of the Malian feminine beauty characteristics of mastery and self-assurance when thought of in relation to Camara's Sounou Ba legend. The dynamic between Sounou Ba and Baba may be a foreshadowing of courtship processes engaged by young people in "modern" Bamako communities. This courtship is similar to those described by Africanist ethnographer, Claude Meillassoux, where young ladies took the lead in selecting partners.

Meillassoux informs us that: Every boy [in the bars, or urban youth association] was supposed to have a girlfriend, a *bara-suguru*, but the choice of the partner was made by the girls. Each time the association had four or five new girls, a special meeting was called to give them an opportunity to select their *bara-kamele*. The girls were given a scarf to throw on the boy they elected; choice was restricted to those who did not have a *suguru* already, since "monogamy" was the rule. The selection was supposed to be final, and if the girl wanted to quit the boy she had chosen, she was compelled to give one hundred kola nuts, five hundred francs, and a sheep.<sup>8</sup>

Virtuoso in his ability to achieve "feminine grace" when Doumbia wields the scarf, he evokes the instance of feminine assertion practiced by young ladies in Bamako during the late 1960s -- an updated version of Sounou courtship rites of lore.<sup>9</sup>

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Malick Sidi, Untitled (photograph of a young woman in Bamako), c. 1975

<sup>8</sup> Claude Meillassoux, *Urbanization of an African Community: Voluntary Associations in Bamako* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968) 115.

<sup>9</sup> This is not to say that Doumbia is making a critique of Malian social roles with regard to gender. Instead, the point here is that Doumbia, as a skilled dancer, has the ability to bring forth a feminine sentence, the appropriate sentence, as I have argued, when the dance body, Sounou, is performed.



# WEEK 8 OCTOBER 21

Sounou Women from Mali to Guinea and Senegal. Sounou forms and Djibril Mambety's Touki Bouki





# REFLECTION



What impressed me most in this week's reading was the analysis of Matisse's paintings. In last week's reading, I analyzed dance as a representation of women's status and power in romantic relationships. In photography, the woman in the picture also stands in the dominant position. The man strummed his guitar and looked at the woman as if he wanted to please her. Both paintings depict two people -- two women by Matisse and a young man and woman by Keita. The two couples are close to each other, balancing the tightly cut interior. A sense of sonic space emanates from both images due to polyphonic patterns, the combination of colors, and the fact that in each depiction, one member of each pair plays a guitar.



# WEEK 9    OCTOBER 28

More on Women and Beauty, Competition and Complementarity for  
Communal Joy and Goodness

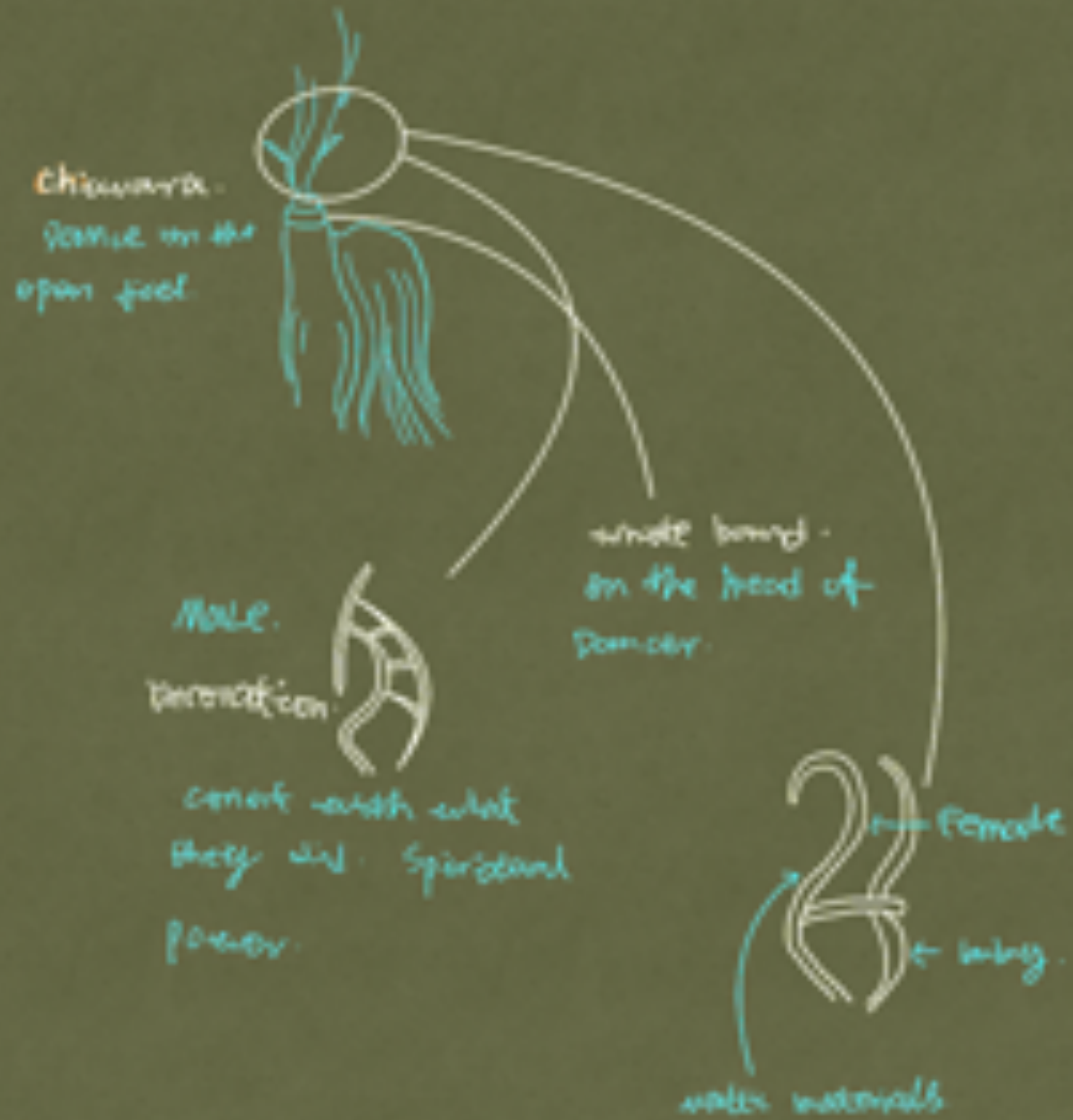




# REFLECTION

“D’mba dances only in the daytime, under the brilliant sun of the dry season, from early morning to late afternoon. Perhaps the reason lies in an iconic association of D’mba with light” This sentence in the article reminds me of the beliefs of ancient Egypt. The Egyptians worshiped the sun as a gateway to the afterlife for the pharaohs. Sunlight plays an important role in every culture. Giving all living things the sun and water they need to grow is one of the most admired elements of nature.





Male always  
has more decorations

Female also has  
a baby.

Male and Female Chiwara. Gender complementarity  
Nayes Chiwara. agricultural production and community,  
as well as Baramba cosmology.



# WEEK 11    DECEMBER 7

More on Women and Beauty, Competition and Complementarity for  
Communal Joy and Goodness





# REFLECTION

He says this while wearing a gold mask, a pink wig, lilac makeup, a gold mesh cap, and strings of white and beige beads. “A Joyful Noise” embodies Sun Ra’s art of self-transformation and of musical innovation, of spiritual aspiration and of separateness—of establishing a collective and communal space, a space of self-display that’s also one of self-exile, of expression that’s also concealment, of a dream of social and political progress that strikes him as so distant, so resistant to achievement, that it’s linked both to science of the distant future and to the recovery of a legendary past, and is accessible, now, only in the form of artistic creation, living myth, aesthetic experience. With the movie’s fusion of substance and style, the force of Sun Ra’s passionate vision emerges, powerfully and movingly, along with the thrilling particulars of his music.





# West African Dance

Serena Ma





## Serena Ma

I'm from China and finished my high school in plano, TX. And now is a senior student, majoring in illustration at CCA.

I love watching animation movies, and Hayao Miyazaki is my favorite animator. I've learned traditional Chinese dance since I was 9 years old and used to be a dancer until my neck was injured by accident.

I had two high school friends from Nigeria and they performed African dance in the talent show. That's my first time to see the African dance performance in person





# Week 1: Introduction

For week one, we introduced ourselves in class and discussed why do we choose this course and if there are any expectation to learn through this semester.

I shared my dancing experience in class. I used to learn traditional Chinese dance when was little and I also love other dance genre like jazz and hip hop.

The first time I get to know African dance was in high school. I had two international friends from Nigeria, who are the twin brothers. They were so friendly and talkative in class. In the talent show, they performed their traditional African dance. My first impression was that the dance was so free and different than what I've seen. I wanted to dance with them together ! So in this class, I was looking forward to learning more about it !



## Week 2: Densa, Drum Circles

The main idea was very interesting :

West American dance music: scientifically related to their body, it can heal people from inside. Among people coming together and participating.

I like how story and tradition that can be transformed through body and gestures.





## Week 3: Jelilya, Dance of Tata Bamboo



Tata Bambo performance is free, traditional and happy. The song is performed in the public and the singer is using a microphone.

Jelilya said: “ In the old days the jali would sit on the ground, there were no microphones, and you just sang out clearly for your host. The microphone has changed the way we sing.”



# Continue on-

In the reading:

## Summary -

Based on the reading, Tata Bambo Kouyata is the performance that gives form to ideas of Malian feminine beauty . Women praise-singers symbolizes freedom, wisdom, and beauty. For instance, Kouyate who sings into a microphone performs in an everyday space, and she dresses in a beautiful, tie-dyed boubou which is a loose fitting garment popular in West Africa typically worn on ceremonial occasions.



# Week 4: The Dialogic Performative

Quote from this week : The dialogic performative is charged by a desire for a generative and embodied reciprocity,

sometimes with pleasure and sometimes with pain. It is a mutual creation of something different and something more from the meeting of bodies in their contexts. The dialogic performative evokes and erupts within the layers of daily living, but under the rubric of performance ethnography it becomes the antithesis of what it means to be alone and fearing the absence of a response, echoing Bakhtin's famous dictum: "Nothing is more frightening than the absence of an answer"



## Week 5: Call and Response

The rights and feelings of others loom very large in African creativity. It does not matter, according to the canon of African call-and-response, how many new steps or verses the person elaborates in his head; if he is of ugly disposition or hatefully lacking in generosity or some other ideal quality, then he may never be given a chance to elaborate his ideas in public.





# Week 6: Sounou Dance

Here's Sounou dance performed in the video on moodle:

The lead djembe player and the lead dancer are related to each other as co-rulers to some extent, and to the other members of their ensemble in a dynamic of “master and entourage.” As the drummers begin to groove, the three women started dancing and begin clapping and singing in time to the deep rhythm. Their dance pace picks up and eventually increases with slow intention as if they and the drummers are savoring each beat and movement for its richness.



## Week 7: Continue on Sounou

They indicate that the dance is well suited for a young woman and intimates that this woman is a traveler. The body is one's place, so as one might decorate a home with signs of identity and manners of beautification, members of highly mobile cultures like the Fulani focus a similar amount of attention on “ the decoration of self “





## Week 8: Touki Bouki

*Touki Bouki* is a prophetic film. Its portrayal of 1973 Senegalese society is not too different from today's reality. All their hardships find their voice in Djibril's film: the young nomads who think they can cross the desert ocean and find their own lucky star and happiness but are disappointed by the human cruelty they encounter. *Touki Bouki* is a beautiful, upsetting and unexpected film that makes us question ourselves.



Scene of the movie

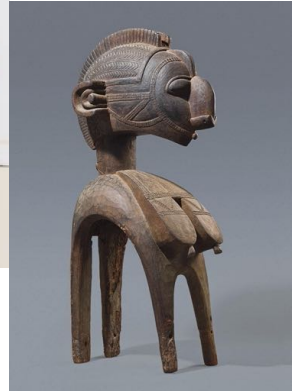


## Week 9: Chi wara & D'mba

There are few ideas that we discussed in class, and I thought they are great to write it down:

Stereotype : men cannot dance frequently. D'mba is stimulate to harvest and it is the figure of foodness. People who wear the raffia is praising her, they are trying to connect with her.

Chi Wara has the male and female body. Male has the baby on and female represents cultivation. They connect with the earth and the ancestors in the earth.



## Week 10 & 11: Strong Men and Joy

**Doundounba** is a strong man dance , transitioning a boyhood to man. Such important dance of Guinea. (Conakry. Medina section of Conakry) It is an interesting art form to identify strength and gender.

In the circle, after finishing your solo, everyone comes to the circle and share the joy with you. The dancer in the circle would feel the love and warmth that others brought in. Also from the dancers perspective, they look really happy and joyful. The joyful comes from the community. ‘



Doundounba





Thank you



# West African Dance Portfolio

Katia Pontillo



# About Me:

Katia Pontillo is an interdisciplinary artist from the Bay Area. She works with materials derived from nature to create hand made paper works, oil paintings, paintings on leather and wood. She explores notions of the body, love, intimacy, ancestry, and grief.



She loves snakes, spiders, and scorpions and incorporates them into the handmade paper she produces.

In her free time she likes to rollerskate. :)



# Drum Circles, Integrating Self and Community:

## Ted Talk - Robin Cardell



The presenter Robin Cardell talks about some key points that I think illustrate the beauty of drum circles. He talks about when he was first introduced to African Drum Circles he had an “overwhelming feeling of wellness and joy”, and a “strong sense of community.” He was essentially describing the joy that drum circles bring people is contagious and creates a sense of harmony in the individual and group.

One thing about the talk that I was slightly disappointed by or maybe skeptical of is the influences that Cardell credited for his inspiration were all white people. I looked up the teachers he mentioned and did a little research and was surprised to find that they were all white people teaching or facilitating African Drum Circles. I thought the people he is inspired by and learning from would be African or of African descent.

I think it's peculiar that the “Father of the African drum circle movement”, Arthur Hull, would be a white man from Santa Cruz. He did briefly mention how Babatunde Olatunji, a Nigerian drummer, and social activist came to the US in 1950 and spread his knowledge of West African Drumming.

I think it's wonderful that people outside of the culture can be so moved and inspired by African Drum Circles, I just think it's important to credit the culture it comes from and acknowledge it's origins and the journey of how it came to be so popularized amongst white people in California.





# Jelimuso, Tata Bambo Kouyaté of Mali



I love how in the video of The Jelimuso, Tata Bambo Kouyaté there is a beautiful interaction between the audience and the Jelimuso performer. The audience respects her and also become participants in the performance as they offer her gifts, money, and approach her with a cheerful greeting holding and lifting her hand.

She sings the ancestral songs of her people keeping this knowledge alive, and she is equally respected for it. The Jelimuso is honored by the audience while in the western world we don't pay as much respect to people who carry on ancestral traditions. The individual embarks on keeping ancestral traditions alive but these individuals aren't monetarily compensated and respected in the same way as the Jelimuso. Tata Bambo Kouyate is an honored member in their society; she has been given a house, cars, gold, sheep, all for her work as a Jelimuso.

My mom was a performer and she deeply moved people with her voice and presence yet it was very difficult to maintain a steady income and feel supported by her community. People often questioned her desire to sing, not seeing it as a valid way to make money. Questioning a musician's lifestyle and whether it was appropriate for her to continue singing when she was raising me. This video makes me appreciative that in Mali the Jelimuso is a treasured member of society, respected and compensated for the priceless ancestral gifts she offers to her community.

# Call and Response



In the reading “*Performing Audience*,” Polak breaks down the rules and the distinctions between the audience and the performer. Usually the two coexist, one supporting the other, however when looking at the roles of the performer and the audience from a West African perspective their purpose and function overlap breaking down this common perception of hierarchy between the two. “Traditional celebration culture in Mali, however, provides social situations that offer structures not only of role distinction but also of role-switching and role-blurring” (p 3). The response to the performance includes being a part of the performance. This allows the important and central dynamic of call and response. The audience not only participates in attentive listening but also partakes in a natural and seamless contribution to the performers through dance, song, or offerings.



# Traveling Beauty and Virtuosity and Gendered Gestures

It's interesting that a “type” of dance (Sounou) is also a person or legend, and that, as I understand it, there is no clear distinction between the dance and the character, and perhaps there doesn't need to be. It seems like they are one and the same. The essence of the dance conveys the character. Or, the essence of the character defines the dance.

Instead, “Evanescent cues within the performance and legend construct Sounou’s Malian feminine beauty. Similarly, one understands Sounou’s ideal feminine qualities from fragments rather than completely “dressed up stories” and linear narratives.”

This form of expression is so at odds with “western” ideas of storytelling, where a legend always has a specific face put to it. A specific individual. Sounou is not about a person, it is a feeling or attitude, and dance can express that the same way a poet can talk about being sad without saying that they are sad.

This artful form of expression that is not reductive but expanding, is similarly reflected in the meaning of Fulani beauty. That they do not consider something beautiful just because of the way it looks. It is more circuitous. Ideal feminine beauty has more to do with symbolism.

The performance of feminine beauty in Sounou is not just about appearance but importantly about composure and improvisation and power of Sounou. The dancer becomes so spontaneous that the music has to change to keep up and reflect the dancer.

# More on Sounou

In the video this week elements of synchronicity, repetitive pattern of the movements, and improvisation of the Sounou dance stood out to me. The dancers and the drummers are constantly in conversation with each other, responding to the energy and vibrations of the drummer's rhythms. The concept of call and response is relevant here. Different dancers take the lead at times, and then seamlessly reenter the group. When a soloist breaks away from the group the other dancers remain synchronized complimenting each other as they dance around them with encouragement. Sometimes, it is unclear which group (drummers or dancers) leads the other. Rather both parties are responding to each other, creating a harmonious composition born from musical cues and collective choreography. Constantly in flux, improvising, creating an improvised collaborative performance executed with artistry and mastery of rhythm with sharp and experienced ears to distinguish both rhythmic and visual cues.





# Touki Bouki Film:



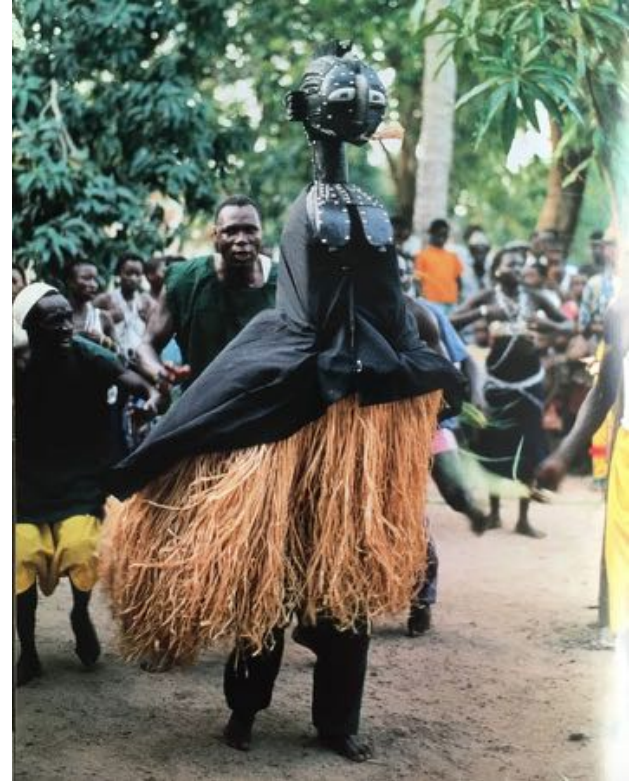
The avant-garde film *Touki Bouki* directed by Djibril Diop Mambety, was very intense to watch. The imagery was vivid and the “jump-cut style” often made it feel dreamlike, at times disorienting, leaving the viewer with a feeling of anxiety or suspense. The motif of animals was present throughout the film adding cultural cues, such as the Hyenas, birds, and Zebus. The presence of the zebu was perhaps the most striking motif, as it had a particular connection to the male protagonist, Mory. The film begins with a sacrifice of the zebu, the zebu’s skull is shown around Mory’s neck as he is violently dragged from a car, and again the zebu is used for a ritualistic sacrifice. A recurring symbol of birds was present throughout the film, often allowing the viewer a moment of pause and release from the repetitive and seemingly fragmented shots that interject and overlap the main storyline. *Touki Bouki* is a story of love and travel, exploring a beautiful relationship between two young people, regardless of the struggles they face.

# D'mba:

Everything has its opposite. Light and dark, night and day. This concept of duality is very clearly integral to the philosophy of the D'mba rituals. D'mba being associated with light and “the best qualities of humankind” represents one side of the coin, so to speak, and the other side is represented by D'mba-da-Tshol. D'mba-da-Tshol represents everything that can go wrong with human nature. This idea of opposites is quite common. What is less common in my experience, is for both sides to be represented equally, if at all. Which of course is necessary for there to be balance. The dances of D'mba and D'mba-da-Tshol are not about conflict between the two opposites as much as it is about balance; D'mba and D'mba-da-Tshol never dance at the same time. It is a recognition that one thing cannot exist without the other.

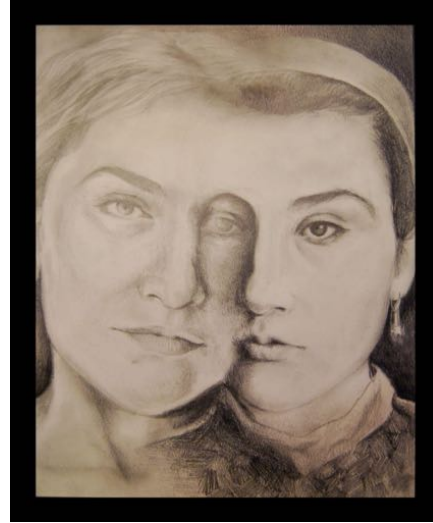
The idea of duality makes its way through many aspects of the performances and how D'mba and D'mba-Da-Tshol are represented. For example, D'mba's mask is finely polished so as to reflect light and adorned with brass ornaments, while D'mba-da-Tshol's mask has a single eye, a single ear, and a crooked nose.

The movements of the drummers alike, reflect the acknowledgment of opposites; in a circle, they face inwards, then outwards, and each for the same amount of time.





## D'mba Cont.



This is a portrait of two different versions of myself that I feel represents a duality within myself. I think it relates to the duality of lightness and darkness in D'mba. In the drawing there is an equal presence of both. Neither compete with each other, rather they coexist simultaneously.

# The Shirts of Strong Men:



Hunters in the Mande society are regarded as highly important members and thus feel the need to distinguish themselves from the rest of society. Clothing becomes the primary means by which they distinguish themselves. There is ambivalence amongst the rest of the Mande society towards the hunters, and their clothing comes to reflect this ambivalence.

Their shirts are called “donson dlokiw”, and contain many symbols. Hunters' clothes are not only used as practical clothes while hunting, but also are worn while they participate in cultural events.

The shirts not only reflect the proud identities of the hunters, but they also form a sort of conceptual model of the very environment to which the hunters identity belongs, the bush. They are adorned with some materials from the bush, such as rawhide, and often dyed with herbal solutions which allows them to camouflage. But it is important to note that the shirts transcend their practical applications and become symbols of identity and vehicles of communication.





## Djeneba's Class

Djeneba brought great energy to the class. It felt really good to do something collectively as a group. It truly did bring me a lot of joy. During Djeneba's class, more people turned their video cameras on. I noticed I was smiling a lot more. One of my favorite parts of the class was when she began to sing and invite us to participate in call and response. Her voice was so beautiful, and grounding. Even though we couldn't come together in person when she sang it centered us as a collective. Her presence resonated through the computer screen.

I've always been really nervous to take dance classes for fear of messing up and not being able to keep up with the sequence of dance steps. That is in part a big reason why I wanted to take this class, to get over my fear of being in a dance class environment and get over my fear of making mistakes. With West African Dance the movements come to fruition from feeling them, instinctually, and letting them arise from deep within your body. Letting that feeling permeate every part of your body extending itself through all of your limbs. In Djeneba's class it was less about being able to precisely mimic the dance moves but more about feeling them and allowing the feeling to take over your body, rather than processing the moves in a strict and rigid way. Everyone was simply doing their best and enjoying the process. I really appreciated being able to learn from observation and repetition. The moves were not explicitly broken down into smaller steps as a way to better understand them, which is how most dance classes I've attended are taught. I much prefer seeing the movements as a whole, and internalizing it myself in one fluid movement. This way there's less room for over thinking which can often lead to making critical judgments and more room to just feel and be in the present moment.



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# Africa Dance Portfolio

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Weidi Qi 12/12/2021





# Self Introduction



## **An interaction designer passionate about UI & UX**

Hello, I'm Weidi(VICK) Qi. I am currently a senior student majoring in Interaction design. In my major, most of the time, I do many works like designing interfaces, creating product experiences and making prototypes. For this class, I believe that learning in other cultural elements, especially in African Dance, can help me expand my horizon of knowledge in different cultures which would be helpful in my design.



# **My takes in the class**



# Experience Jeliya



After watching the videos and the readings about Jeliya, I realized that the performance of “Performing Jelimusolu Beauty” really gives me a concept about the past and the present mixture. In the video, Tata Bambo Kouyaté states that people used to play Jeliya in a very traditional way, such as using their singing and dancing tactics without any assistance from modern musical instruments. And it also includes all kinds of events like praying, meeting, or wedding ceremonies. However, with the technological advancements nowadays, Jelimuso has started to infuse some modern musical instruments and accessories to influence people about their traditional dancing of Jeliya. The ways of infusion in traditional dancing really helps to improve public acceptance, and it can preserve their ancestor’s stories without any loss in the development of the modern civilization. In the readings, the Tata Bambo Kouyaté’s dancing performance also portrays the Malian Feminine beauty, and many aspects highlight the beauty ideas. For example, the Bamana- the interplay between nayama and basigi shows the beautiful feminine beauty of Malian. There are also many other aspects from the dance of Jeliya, such as the wardrobe, the reaction from the audience, the pageantry of the dancing and singing also play a part in the performance. Because of the belief in Malian tradition, people still take the performance from the Jelimusolu as a part of their everyday life.

# Malick Sidibé's Rhythm and Dance Photography



After reading the article and watching some of Malick's photography collection of *Midnight of Bamako*, I feel like Malick's work conveys a sense of Mali's culture and nightlife experience from Bamako (the capital of Mali). In most of Malick's photography, people cannot see the rural African city's feelings; instead, they can see the lively dancing scene and music playing from the young people in Bamako with a western style. Most of Bamako's people have a western-style nightlife because Mali was a colony of French. After the colonial era ended and the French left Mali, they left western-style entertainment for Mali's people and gave them a new western and modern way in music and dancing. And that is the reason why in many of Malick's photographs, people wear western suits and beautiful dressings during their dancing. Beyond that, Malick's works also tell about the freedom spirit and human rights for the African people, because when people looking through the photos from Malick, they can see people are joyful and always seen they are having a swell time. This side of the influence contradicts most of the modern world's media that shows how painful and rural African life and people in the world almost have a stereotype toward the African people. However, Malick does not present to the world misery and sadness. He uses cutscenes from the lively nightlife style in Bamako to argue those stereotypes and prove to the world that there are still many hopes and life expectancy in Mali's people through their nightlife dancing.



# Robert Farris Thompson African Art in Motion



After reading the articles about African Art in Motion by Robert Farris, I found it quite unique to find the call and response pattern in African dance. Initially, I thought west African dance was only like a group dance session for everyone to participate without any rules or patterns. Although it is true for the purpose of their dance, the call and response between each role during the dancing event become obvious for me to notice after I read the articles and slides. At the beginning of the drum dancing video, the lead singer surrounded by the drummer and folks is the most important role because she leads the whole dancing session and controls the call-and-response time. When she started performing her singing and dancing moves, she always co-operates with the drummer to follow the speed of the drum beats. She needs to pay attention to call-and-response elements between each role, such as the claps from the audience, the drum beats from the drummer, and the role-switching. Therefore, the whole dancing session would be successful if the leading singer did her job correctly and all the people would follow her in a correct sequence. Beyond that, the audience also has a chance to role-switch with the lead singer. When the role-switch happening the lead singer would give the signal to the drummer, so the drummer will provide the window for the audience to squeeze in for their performance. The role-switching aspect between the singer and the audience enhances the whole call-and-response idea in the drumming dance, so everyone is cooperative with each other.

# Barbara Frank More Than Wives and Mothers 26 to 35 and photos



After reading the article about More Than Wives and Mothers: The Artistry of Mande Potters by Babara E. Frank, It surprises me about the making process of the pots and the potter's representation of west Africa art. Originally, when I watched some West Africa documentary videos, I usually noticed those pots that women place on their heads in some local village. I thought it was just some usual daily container for them to transport or store food and items. Still, after I read through the article about the potters and the making process for those pots, I realized the potter is the spirit of West African women. They are mostly served as wives and mothers, so it makes me feel more responsible toward the potters. In their daily life, they have to take care of their families and do all the heavy works to support their livings, and it is also not an easy job for them since the life standard in Africa is challenging and scarce in a variety of resources. Such as food, cloth, and water, so those wives and mothers in West Africa have to be strong and take responsibility. They also have a unique name called "numumusow," meaning black-smith women as a representative of endogamous marriage practice in Mande Ideology. They share the experience of the technology of pot production beyond nations for their exclusive right, so it is essential for their roles in the society of west Africa. In addition, although the pots themselves do not look very polished and tidy, the making process is still very thoughtful and in order from the start till the end. In the beginning, the potter must carefully pick the high high-quality clay and wood for the pot-making materials. Then they have to mix the different clay and shape them into separate pots. During this process, they need to press the clay to ensure there won't be any air bubbles in the clay, and different tools will be used, such as leaves and clothes. After that, they will dry the pot and firing it to turn them into a ceramic form. There would be different pots for a variety of uses. Some of them will be cooking containers, and some of them will be a heat source in the bedroom, so the potters in West Africa society play an iconic and unique role in their culture and tradition.

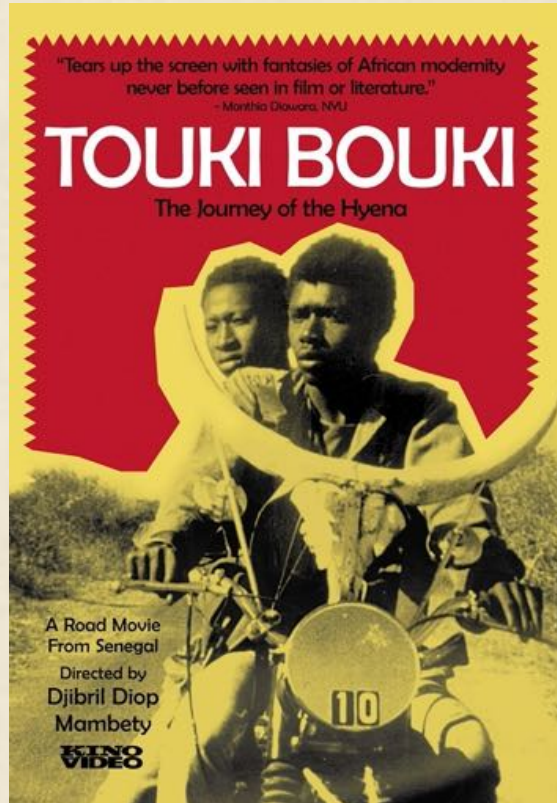


## Sounou II: Traveling Beauty, Performing Femininity, Coolness and Virtuosity Across Genders from Mali to Guinea



After reading the article about Hyacinthe traveling beauty and virtuosity and gendered gestures sounou Hyacinthe excerpt, I have some understandings about the performance of Sounou and their appreciation standard in Malian feminine beauty. According to the article, Sounou is traditional dancing, especially for Malian female dancers. The name “Sounou” reflects people’s concept of the feminine beauty of Malian, and usually, the women who perform have outstanding dancing skills with Fulani women characteristics. Fulani women are Malian’s standard in feminine beauty because they have a light skin tone, elaborate coiffures, and striking strategies of adornments, so they are granted as the messengers from the outside world, which has the Sounou concept in it. In addition, Sounou also has a social feature between the men and women in Mali. Sounou originates from a girl who tried to show their feminine beauty and flirtation side during the dancing to get men’s attention soon, the dance just became a tradition in Mali society nowadays. Therefore, if people pay attention to Sounou dancing, they can see the dancers’ displayed their virtuosity or basic as the representation of their feminine power. There are also some improvisations of Sounou’s steps based on the drummers’ signal that will focus only on the lead dancers’ accents, which means the center of Sounou. Beyond that, some gestures will also be performed in Sounou’s, such as waving the scarf during the dancing. It is a modern way to show Malian feminine beauty characteristics of mastery and self-assurance to associate with the traditional stories, so Sounou is an impeccable dancing performance in Mali’s society.

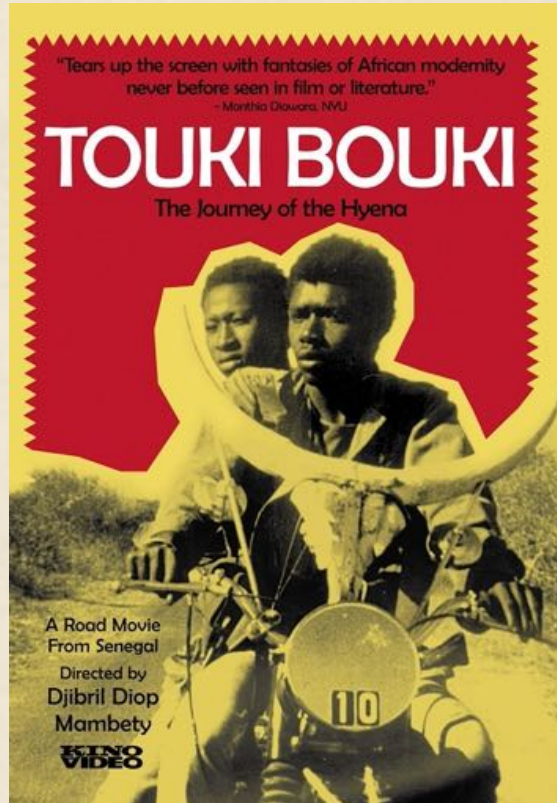
# Touki Bouki



After reading the article and watching the movie "Touki Bouki" by Mambety I think it is a great movie that illustrates the African people's life struggles and expectancy during the colonial period. The movie itself is a breakthrough during its time period because it is the first movie that does not influence by the western appreciation style and was made by their African producer to open a new era of African movies. The story of "Touki Bouki" is talked about two sarcastic young people who were punished by dropping out of school, doing nothing, bluffing everywhere, just to live a luxurious life in Paris. Mouri works in an abattoir, and he has two bull horns installed on the handle of his motorcycle. Anta, his female companion, is engaged in political work. These two good friends rode around and chatted up with passers-by. They believed that all the people from France were "white women and venereal diseases." They fabricated evidence and framed a rich fat man who was obsessed with Mouri. Later, the two were stripped naked, sat naked in the fat man's car, raised their fists, and gave a mocking political speech, and so on. "Touki Bouki" runs through the film with a French dream, but looking at the whole film has very few coherent plots, full of trivial life plots between the male protagonist and his girlfriend, and the drama conflicts are diminished one by one in the triviality. The film is also filled with a large number of experimental empty shots, which have neither metaphorical value nor narrative value. For example, when Mory was fighting with young people, he suddenly edited scenes of sheep killing sheep in a slaughterhouse, or when the hero and heroine had sex on the beach, the ambiguous voices were still there, but the picture was transferred to the wide and turbulent sea. Jumping editing, parallel montage, and sound and picture contrast is extremely modern, eye-catching, and confusing.



# Touki Bouki



In addition to film techniques, the dress and music of the characters in the film all present the characteristics of French hippies. Connected to the origins of France and Senegal, it is not surprising that there is a traceable French flavor. Since the countries that were once colonized on the African continent became independent, their films have not directly told about the history of African colonization or liberation movement, or the chaotic status quo within the country. They all stand in the direction of the country's perspective and have a high foothold. To express and show. "Touki Bouki" abandoned the big entry point of the country and chose the small entry point of the individual. Through an ordinary young man sitting on the French dream in Senegal, he criticized the "French dream" that was soaring in the country at that time. Through the spontaneous awakening of young people and abandoning the paradise of Paris, which is within easy reach, the young people are called to wake up from the daydreams of nothingness. At the same time, a large number of trivial depictions of the daily aimless sound fields of the heroes and heroines in the film are also a depiction of the nihilistic living conditions of the people after Senegal's independence at that time. There is no war, no guns, and no savage and distorted stereotypes of Africans. Director Djibril Diop Manbeti hopes to show Africa's humanity and reality from the outside to the mindset of Africans through this work. Change, using surreal techniques to restore the most real Africa.

# Chiwara



After watching the lecture about the dance of Chiwara and D'mba, I think both of them are very fascinated by their uniqueness with their customs and sculptures during the dancing. For Chiwara, I can feel it directly as an agricultural ritual dance in Mali. Especially their customs have a heavy symbol of nature. On their custom, it looks like many plants' roots and leaves have weaved together as a ghillie suit feeling. Their suits represent their expectation toward the rainy season before their agricultural time. Beyond that, the sculptures on their heads represent the goddess that has the power in nature to bring prosperity to the farmers in Mali. There are two genders in their sculptures: the male and female Chiwara, and they are very distinguished to identify. For example, male Chiwara sculptures usually have a crust on the necks, and female Chiwara has a baby on the back. Their sculptures convey in a very detailed form to let people know about their traditional goddess even in today's standards. The only common point that both sculptures have is the holes on the button. These holes are made for holding the sculptures onto the dancers' heads with stitches, so the design of the sculptures is thoughtful for the dancers' usability



# D'mba



On the other hand, the design of the D'mba sculpture is a whole lot different compared to the Chiwara. Because D'mba symbolizes the ideal feminine beauty for Susu people in Guinea, it is way heavier and tall compared to Chiwara's sculpture. It has a geometric balance shape that reminds people of modern art. People can see many feminine elements in the sculpture, such as the tall slim size, and bigger breasts. One thing to notice is that although it is similar to Sunu's ideal of feminine beauty, it still has some uniqueness in its Susu women hood, like the concept of older women for motherhood and they all represent it on the design of D'mba sculpture.

# Strong man and Joy



After watching the videos about the dance of strong men really gave me a joyful feeling by their dancing movement and elements. Although they are also Doundounba in Guinea, the dance's feeling is more casual than the Doundounba dancing videos I watched from Mali. One of the noticeable elements is that most people wear casually with their daily clothes to engage with the dancing events. This phenomenon gives people a more modern adaptable with fewer series rules or orthodox. Beyond that, I saw people join randomly with their improvised dancing movements, which added more randomness to the whole Doundounba event. This improvising shows how people could break through their restrictions from the past with a more joyful experience. Therefore, this randomness and casual feeling of Doundounba in Guinea is the exactly what I think is joyful for people to experience the dance,



# Reflection about Djeneba



After having a class with the famous dancer Djeneba Sako as our guest speaker and dancer, I am impressed with her dance performance. But, more significantly, her concept about joy and fluid mutualism through the dance is more insightful for me to understand the West African dance and Jeliya format. When Djeneba was dancing, I felt a sense of happiness and ecstatic from her Jeliya performance, representing joy from the cultural perspective and understanding Mali's history. This performance of joyful elements also brings harmony and peace through the dancer to the audience, and I feel everyone is supposed to be engaged in the dance to break their boundaries and limits. Everyone could be a part of the dancing, which brings the idea fluid of mutualism because, during the dance, the crowd of people is seen as a whole unit to share thoughts from their movements. Therefore, the joy and fluidity of mutualism convey through Djeneba's performance, and I hope there will be another opportunity to appreciate her dance again.

# Reflection

By the end of the semester of our experiments in west Africa dance, I have learned a lot from those lectures and videos about Mali's culture and its dancing movements. They are enjoyable and help me define the joyful experience from those dancing exercises and readings. When I dance by myself to follow that rhythm and movements, I feel about those Sounou's spirit and their concepts of beauty in it. Beyond that, the readings and lectures also give me more perspectives about mali's people's traditions and their cultures. They help me be more adaptable to understanding their dancing origin and backgrounds, which feels more natural after learning those background stories. I also really appreciate my professor Genevieve's dancing during the class because it was helpful to me when I was learning the dance step by step with actual performance. Therefore, I hope maybe in the future, after the pandemic end, people will gather again and dance together with a joyful experience.





Portfolio  
West African Dance

**Yecheng**

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# Week 2

- Aesthetics of Cool/Drum Circles

For first week study, I basically know about the little bit of African music and dance culture. The Drum circles performance give me the deep impression, because I was know a part of the African dance before, so this drum is fast and deep. The style of the performance is kind of like traditional African tribal music which make me think about the movie "Black Panther".





# "an aesthetic of the cool"

- The main theme of cool aesthetic is represent the cold emperature or cool style of the African dance and music culture, which can show the specific African aesthetic attitude. This is complex and deep meaning culture. I felt the cool style more, becuase when they dance or singing, they do not show the contact with audiences, and they are always focusing on the performance, I think it is really cool.





# Week 3

- The Art of Jelimuso (Griotte) & The Get Down Quality
- Descending Direction in Melody Sculpture Dance

For this week, I barely understand why African style music or dance are always up and down suddenly. They have their tropical melody, which is a steep rise followed by a gentle sloping down of the tune. This kind of style let me feel strong passion and bring audiences in really fast, and I think the rhythm is really strong, people can easily recognize the African performance with only listening.









# Week 4

- City of Art and Culture & Malick Sidibé's Rhythm and Dance Photography

For this week's study, we know some traditional African music and developing in 20 century. Mory Kante, I have deep impression with her, I think she is combine the traditional music and some modern music together, because she add some new elements inside, like love, loyal and betray. I think the people or artists like her are pioneer for some areas, like Drake, he combine the rap and pop music and make big successful, so I really admire those people, and her music is really good







Press button to play music



# Week 5

## Call and Response & the Audience

For this week's reading and video, we understand that the expressing and replying are really important in African music, and different bands will have different expression which have to be the positive, which can be respect by society.

"Walk by Faith" is a really great performance, I was shocked by that. I like her voice that is passion and strong, and her song is really suit with the rhythm, and this band also make a great song.





# Week 6

- Sounou I: Exploring Feminine and Jelimusso Beauty, Nyama (total energy) and Basigi (Improvisation/ personal virtuosity) & Complementarity in Malian Dance and Life [Fadenya & Badenya]
- I have to say I am more interesting about the first reading, and the front part of reading is take about the pottery production, which is my friend' major in art school. I was taken the pottery class in my first year, which was really interesting, but I did not think about that there were so many habits and religion things in those areas. I saw the reading said that "The sense of distinctive identity that blacksmith women share extends beyond notions about their exclusive rights to the technology of pottery production, into the social arena." It shocked me actually, because I did not think this is a really "the sense of distinctive identity. However, that is why they make pottery so well.







# Week 7

- Traveling Beauty, Performing Femininity, Coolness and Virtuosity Across Genders from Mali to Guinea, and Touki Bouki
- I think this week's reading tell us something about the woman body beauty and combining with music, some woman dancers will move their bodys to work with band, which is really powerful expressing way in my point of view, because I think vjrua expressing in music performance is also important, for example, Kendrick Lamar who is my favorite rapper in recent years is a good musican and "body user". He always move his body and coodinate with rap rhythm during performance, I think it is really strong, and I as a audience always move with him same time.



- In addition, the article talk about a little bit of the racial things about the woman beatuy, I believe artists or normal people have to be confident, and show the beauty of their body, to work with music can make best performance. Whatever black, white, or any color between, be confident and enjoy the music, which can show the most beauty of human body.





## Week 8

- For this week, I want to focus on the film Touki Bouki, I am a film student, so I really interesting with film watching. After I watched this one, I attracted by the skill of this director. This film is showing the real social problem in that age, 1973. Anta and Mory represent the new wave of the African young man (in my own opinion, maybe wrong). They want to get the respect but they go into a wrong way, they steal something to make other people to think they are successful men. I think they are cute people who went a wrong goal. In addition, this film show some racial problem in that age, white people really shock with Anta and Mory on this ship. Anta and Mory want to go to Paris where is the paradise for them, and they work in on that, but the people around them becoming the barriers for this journey, people who show the kind for them just want to their money.



- I like director use some tricks to show the situation (my personal analyze)
- There were already signs before things happened: the big boxes they stole from the stadium were filled with skeletons that symbolized death.
- Mory sat on the stone ladder blankly looking back at what he had done, letting the postman next to him pass by. The postman symbolizes the external world full of temptations.





# Week 9

- Women and Beauty, Competition and Complementarity for Communal Joy and Goodness
- I think Frederick's article tell us that woman body beauty is working perfectly on the dance and music. D'mba gave me the deep impression, dressed bust of a mature woman with flat pendant breasts, which showed the body moving beauty and femininity is expressed.
- I think it is a specific way to show the traditional African dancing/music style. According to the reading, "D'mba dances only in the daytime, under the brilliant sun of the dry season, from early morning to late afternoon. Perhaps the reason lies in an iconic association of D'mba with light," I think it also show the some tradition for African dance, which is also relate with a little bit religion I think.









## Week 11

Strong Men and Joy: The  
Dance of Strong Men

Yecheng





For this week's study, I was deeply attracted by the "Dundunba". It is a rope-tuned cylindrical drum with a rawhide skin at both ends, most commonly cow or goat. The drum is played with a stick. This one is really good drum because the voice is so attractive when I listen it. According to the "Doundoundba Reading": "Dundunba, like all rhythms played in Guinean ballet, is polyrhythmic—it is composed of multiple interdependent parts that combine to make a whole.<sup>1</sup> To hear dundunba correctly is to understand not only the rhythms intricacies but also the dancers movements as one element of a dynamic polyrhythm." by Cohen.





Week 12: Dance with Djeneba

really good dance experience!

I like this kind of dancing style and  
it makes me feel passion and  
comfortable, in addition, rythem is  
great and important for this one!

Ye Cheng





Thanks for this  
semester! I love  
this class!

Yecheng Qu







## **Andrianna Scott**

Hi! My name is Andrianna and I'm a 3rd year Illustration major. I have some experience in dance, mostly casual, and definitely not West African. I've dabbled in Ballroom, Hip Hop, and Belly Dance. I therefore understand the importance and spirit of dancing, and can appreciate it in all forms. That is what motivated me to take this class, and what motivates me to continue including dance within my life.

I grew up in San Francisco, California, with a fairly large family on both sides. One side was white and the other black. They all lived and continue to live in the City or the East Bay, making for a very unique and enriching family environment. Being mixed race before it was trendy definitely contributed to my creative expression. It pushed me to be more, to do more, and to express more. I turned that need of expression towards art and dance. Lately it's been more art than dance, but I plan to change that once the world gets back to normal.

Growing up so close to my neighbors also installed a sense of community within me. This communal feeling was triggered during this class, as I was able to dance with likeminded people again. I believe that the quality of a community and its members' lives tells a lot about a society. The cultures in West Africa seem to value community and therefore nourish theirs. I felt a fraction of this during this class, especially when we all danced together!

## Afro-Coolness

This beginning week was incredibly interesting already, especially the reading on the idea of Afro-coolness. I feel we all often imagine what ‘cool’ is and attempt to achieve it every day, and seeing an African cultures’ idea of cool gives an even larger insight into that thought. On one hand, I really appreciate the Mande women’s



representation of cool—how stoic, calm, and level headed they are taught to be is something to strive for indeed. On the other hand, however, I can’t help but consider how typically, many African and Eastern cultures tend to be misogynistic. I’ll never forget learning about how some African

cultures believe in female circumcision and the like. But then again, we believe in male circumcision, and some women who are circumcised in rituals of coming-of-age are probably happy to be. So, I can’t judge, but I do believe it could cloud my analysis of this idea of an “ideal woman” — the idea that a woman needs strict discipline and guidance and isn’t “woman enough” on her own can be troublesome, but again, most people need strict discipline and guidance anyway.

Needless to say, I’m conflicted about this idea of Afro-coolness, but also incredibly inspired by it. I do believe that everyone, especially women, should have this mentality of

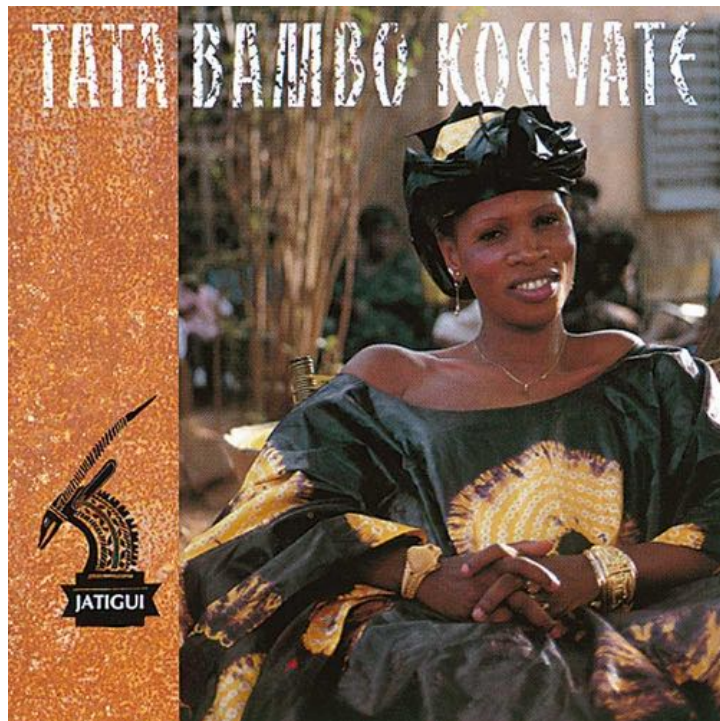




carrying themselves in such a way. We all need to learn to think before we speak and remain calm in certain instances instead of simply reacting. I feel that Americans are definitely taught the opposite— that your gut instinct is correct, no matter how problematic it may be. Most of the world, however, often finds Americans to be rude, impulsive and unnecessarily aggressive— a.k.a., not “cool”. And America’s definition of cool often involves status symbols and flashy possessions that encourage a consumerist attitude.

## The Art of Jelimuso

At first glance, I'm intrigued by the balance of opposition of the Jeli dancer. I admire how stoic, poised and composed they must be, and therefore how energetic, emotional and raw they must be in opposition. The coolness Tata Bambo held while belting out the lyrics into the microphone, while also being active and moving, was powerful despite all the distractions otherwise. Her composure alone is admirable, let alone the ability to perform without a shaky voice or wavering gestures. I also love the use of color in the traditional garb of the Jeli, how expressive and emotional they are meant to be is fabulous. I agree with the readings and videos we did this week— that



African art, and especially dance, cannot be static if it is to be conveyed successfully. After being exposed to how energetic the movements and vocals are of West African music/dance, suddenly all the static art I've seen makes more sense, but then also makes me ask more questions as to what I've missed while not knowing this information.

I also appreciate the focus on innovativeness, or, adaptability. I've always admired those who not only

portrayed more than one side of themselves, but also did so in appropriate ways, channeling adaptability by observing their situation and adjusting to it. In my opinion, that is the true test of strength— to be able to adapt to your surroundings, especially in a social setting. Being a mixed race person, I've always had to 'fit in' in one way or another— either I was too black/urban, or too white/educated. I didn't really fit in with people unless they also experienced a sense of displacement as a full-blooded American but was still treated as a foreigner, almost. For example; other mixed kids,



Asian American kids, adopted kids, and fellow creative kids were within my wheelhouse. Anyway, as kids who had to adapt to more “traditional” Americans, we learned from an early age to do just that. I still only get along with certain people, as do we all, but I feel that for me, personally, it still has a lot to do with shared experiences. I notice that for those who have not been through anything similar to me or vice versa, our relationship is brief, at best.

## Soyini Madison Excerpt



This week's material, and specifically the essay by Soyini Madison, was particularly engaging for me. Her essay explored what she referred to as the "dialogic performative". This concept is completely new to me in literary terms, but incredibly familiar to me in practice. I haven't performed much, especially not by dancing, but when I have I experience something similar to what she's pointing out. She speaks a lot about Others, about self-reflection versus reflexivity, paying attention, and possibility through performance. She eloquently describes the structures taking place within performance done well.

The entire excerpt, being so brief, has plenty of provoking quotes and ideas, but here are some that stuck out to me particularly;

"Somewhere along our journey we have been leaving Others behind and taking up too much space for ourselves," (321)

"...the performative does more than interpret and express, it initiates and incites," (322)

"...paying attention...is the first form of respect," (322)

"...not paying attention is an ungodly insult...an act of flagrant ingratitude," (322-23)

"...by being in the presence of Others, the fully embodied struggle to pay attention is a methodological and ethical necessity," (323)

"...others press upon your bone and skin and heart, and it is not just you anymore (it never was)," (323)



“You cannot ride alone,” (323)

I thoroughly enjoy the last four quotes I’ve provided because they all contribute to a larger idea that I believe we should all live by. When it comes down to it, all these quotes and the context behind them refer to being open, flexible, and adaptable within a community as a social human being. We must pay attention to not only ourselves, but to Others as well, and to the world around us. We must do so in order to respect and learn about Others and all the different worlds we thrive in. The specific quote about people imprinting onto us so strongly that they become ingrained into our physical being— our flesh and bones— is incredibly powerful. I’ve never fully considered this idea to this extent, but I knew and felt what she meant as soon as I read that line. We should care and pay attention to Others because the Others are what make up ourselves and our communities. As she says, “we cannot ride alone,” and we shouldn’t try to. We shouldn’t be constantly trying to divide ourselves, both singularly and collectively. We need one another, and that’s okay. It makes for a more enriching lifestyle and society, and a more intelligent one at that.

## The Collective of Call and Response Performance

This weeks' material led me to a similar conclusion as last week— that the collective society creates variety, intelligence, and overall joy within the lives of its community. The saturation of joy and *nyama* one feels during a live performance is palpable within Mande dance culture. It seems to me like it's a manifestation of pure joy and love. This level of emotion seems to only be possible when the entire group or community is involved. The complexity of stories, traditions, backgrounds, opinions, beliefs and overall personalities creates this layered social construct within the dance and drumming circles. Everyone coming together to form this creative, impromptu production seems like a significant aspect of a successful performance.

Having the audience engaged is proven to increase enjoyability and participation. In addition to that, the audience and performers are sharing the responsibility, enjoyment and energy with one another equally. No one feels left out, superior, or inferior within the hierarchy of the performance. The audience becomes just as necessary for the performance to exist as the music makers within a call and response section. This entire system creates the balance that many West African cultures seem to strive for, which is lovely.

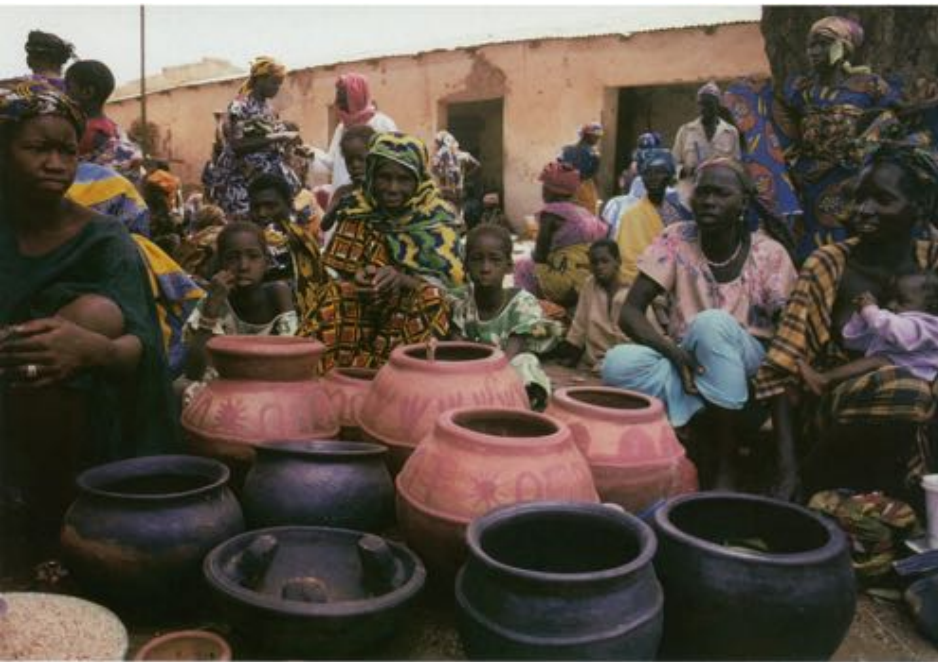




## Mande Potters

One thing that was particularly interesting from this weeks' material was all the spiritual requirements, or, sort of superstitious rules, the potters in Mande culture seem to have. And even more interesting, a lot of them have to do with fertility and virility. I suppose things such as pottery, especially without modern technology, can be very fickle. They focus their energy into the well-being of the clay, the kiln, the pieces themselves, and everything else that goes into the process in hopes for a well-balanced pot. While being a fairly foreign concept to me, I can also relate with this mentality a little. I believe in karma, and that what you put into the world is what you get back. By putting their positive energy into the process, they should therefore get positive results. It seemed a little silly when I first began to read that section, but I quickly realized the potters have the same mentality I do when I create work, or do any task, really.

I also appreciate how respected and important the potters are within the community. The fact that they are a *necessary* part of a good amount of ceremonies alone is impressive, not to mention how responsible they are for the success of the community.



The familial relationship between blacksmiths and potters is also incredibly interesting to me. I enjoy that the women have this place on the same tier as their fathers, who carry the same amount of responsibility, respect, and importance, yet that space stays feminine and unique from the blacksmiths. The women don't need to be

thought of as men or doing the same things as men to be equally respected as men.

## Femininity Within Sounou

This week was an informative and enlightening but brief look into *Sounou* dance. I appreciate the importance put into capturing the essence of female beauty, and the classic balance between *nyama* and *basigi*. I also enjoy this idea that *Sounou* is fluid and spontaneous, and that the dancers are encouraged to find the nuances in the microtiming of the rhythm. Again, these strong themes of adaptability and balance are brought out in *Sounou*, as they often are within all West African dances.

As with feminine beauty, *Sounou* seems to thrive off of the inconsistencies which



are conveyed within the micro-timing that happens within the moves.

Femininity is, if anything, inconsistent, fluid, and adaptive—constantly evolving. The definition of femininity changes from generation to generation, decade to decade.

Everyone also has a different version of femininity, therefore creating a wide variety of feminine aspects and attitudes. While creating some confusion, I believe this inability to statically define femininity is another

one of its strengths. Masculinity and masculine people are confined into a box, especially now more than ever, and to be masculine means one must follow a certain set of rules and regulations. Being feminine, however, can mean a variety of things, as I've stated. It changes from person to person, and can't be tied down by one thing. Femininity therefore functions, as a concept, as fluidly as women in some West African cultures seem to. While there are certain defining aspects of femininity, being feminine is different for each woman in a community. Being feminine in West African culture seems to mean that you are a respected role model and leader of the community, as well as an integral part of the functionality of said community. You would have a hand in just about anything involving the community, and the community would rely on you for



certain things. Many would argue that this concept is seen in most cultures around the world, but the difference with Mande cultures is the amount of respect that comes with the responsibility one has.

## Further Sounou Analysis

Sounou is the epitome of feminine perfection, control, beauty and spirit. Therefore, everything is thought and carried out with the utmost love and care. This concept reminds me of my mother's love for me. Even if she didn't always know best, she knew *me*, and made sure everything was as perfect as possible *for me*. Her love is unconditional, it's protective, controlled, uplifting, combative— all the things that *Sounou* brings to mind for me. Honestly, it makes perfect sense why any culture would worship women through dance, religion, behavior, etc. As said in the lecture, a woman gave



birth to the entirety of the Bamako tribe. A woman is responsible for the bearing and rearing of children, in addition to all the other chores required of the community.

*Sounou* seems to be the celebration of women embodied within one of the most important and defining aspects of West African culture; dance. The reality that one of the most prevalent

and important dances in Mande culture embodies the perfection of womanhood speaks volumes to how respected women are within these cultures. Since African culture, in particular, values non-written communication to later generations, dancing and music is therefore one of the most crucial forms of communication within many cultures and histories. *Sounou* seems to be integral to the establishment of the concept of balance within life— that many cultures, including Mande ones— follow resolutely.

People seem joyous to celebrate women in Mande cultures, and I wonder if that's because allowing women to be in control leads to a more joyful life? I truly wonder what our world would be like if we continued to worship women as often or resolutely as men and male leaders, deities and politicians. If women, especially in many cultures and religions, are more focused on the well-being of the community as opposed to themselves or others within their social groupings, why wouldn't they make good



leaders? I understand that at a certain time in history, we needed male or masculine leadership because of all the global confrontations and wars happening, but in a time of peace and prosperity, why shouldn't we give the role to feminine leaders and whatnot? I suppose, being a woman, whose history, by default, is to be oppressed or ignored, this is a typical opinion to have. However, being a person who can remove their own preferences, I still believe a feminine presence in leadership is just as important, if not more, than a masculine one.

## Contrast Within Balance

This week's theme of balance and complementary contrast was especially intriguing for me. I often focus on contrast and balance in practically everything I do, mainly my visual work. I've always attributed this affinity towards contrast to my mixed race background. In a lot of ways not having to do with race, the two sides are total



opposites, yet they mesh together really well and have for a couple generations now. My parents reflect this behavior as well, disagreeing on almost anything when it comes to personal preference, but can somehow come together like a well-oiled machine. I use this

comparison to better understand the feeling the Ciwara and D'mba are meant to convey. I really enjoy the integration of this idea of balance within the rituals of dance, and how important it seems to be within the Mande peoples way of living.

I really enjoy the amount of respect that goes into keeping the balance as well. It's almost as if nothing else matters as much as keeping the peace, composure, and therefore balance of oneself. I seriously admire this notion and am even a little jealous as I reflect on Western priorities, which mainly value consumerism and materialistic things more than morality and balance within life. Many African cultures seem to focus on what is good for the whole of the community, whereas American traditions emphasize power, control and dominance over the happenings of the world. Americans don't tend to consider their community, and only focus on themselves. While this is useful for a community that relies on individualism and innovation, for other cultures such as many Mande ones, a focus on community seems to be beneficial to the group



and individual equally. Whenever I imagine a perfect world, it includes the encouragement of actions that help the community just as much as it helps the individual. If everyone put as much effort into helping each other in addition to helping themselves, the world would be a much different place.



## Doundounba

The “Strong Man Dance” is an explosion of energy, and therefore emotional expression. Even watching the dancers do the move together, in support of one another, a release of expression can be felt. For me, I feel the most joy when I’m able to express my emotions fully, and freely. I believe that’s what I’m feeling from the strong man dance.

Every week, I’m able to connect to joy through the material my instructor gives us, and this week was no different. Through the raw energy and physicality of the push move from Doundounba and the short film *Sun Ra*, I was reminded that music and other creative forms of expression are the language of the Gods, of love, of the spirit, of humanity, etc. It’s a universal language. Dance is a part of that language, and this week reminded me of my love for music and dance. Somewhere along the way, I stopped listening to music, or trying to find new music. I’ve also lacked energy and creative spirit. Even a taste of what I used to supply myself with in terms of music or dance and I felt more like myself again.





## Djeneba

I missed being in a real dance class!

After Djeneba taught some Malian dance to us— even via Zoom— I was brought back to doing belly dance with my all-girls troupe in a studio and eventually on stage. The energy radiating from me and my peers mirrored that of those girls in the dance studio. As we were all dancing behind our hidden cameras, I could envision us doing the piece Djeneba taught us together, on stage— like the good old days.

Those memories brought back joy, as well as a little hope about the future and eventually getting back to that point as a society where we can gather in spaces comfortably again.

Another connection to joy I noticed was Djeneba's demeanor. She was so energetic and happy to be there, teaching us. She encouraged us to turn on our cameras, or microphones, to engage in group activities like dancing and singing. Her respect for us, the class itself, to our instructor, and to the notion of being present also radiated through the screen onto us that day.



Mengyao Xiu

Professor Genevieve Hyacinthe

Experiments in West African Dance

November 13, 2021

## Portfolio



**ENTRY ONE:** My name is Mengyao, I am a senior currently majoring in Interaction Design. I am from China. I love reading romantic novels and fiction books. My artworks are more focused on the relationship between humans and nature. It is interesting and meaningful to know different cultures from different places. Through the class of learning experiments in West African dance, I feel the spirits of African cultures.

## **ENTRY TWO: Aesthetics of Cool, Learning How to Greet People Drum Circle, Integrating Self and Community**

In this video, I saw the performer unremittingly interact with his audiences and tried to hook the audience's attention by moving his body and pointing out to the audience.



**-“The music and dance moves always can bring the community together.”**



## Dansa Dance



I love this move, because it shows the beautiful body shape of women. It reminds me of the pose in ballet.

### **ENTRY THREE:** Jeliya: The Art of Jelimuso: Get-down quality in the Tata Bambo Performance

*“get-down” quality This idea refers to the same body posture described by Gottschild—a low, squatting, grounded presence. The “get-down” quality can be perceived in music as well as dance, since many African rhythms follow a wavy pattern, as in a repeated cycle of steep rises before gentle slopes. In a similar way, dancers start out high and then gradually close in on the ground before looping back up. The bent spine, along with broader displays of angularity and asymmetry, are prominent characteristics.*

In Sara Stalla’s *Shuffle, Ball[et], Change: African influences on American Dance Forms*, she states that dancers start out high and then gradually close in on the ground before looping back up since many African rhythms follow a wavy pattern, as in a repeated cycle of steep rises before

gentle slopes. The “get-down” movement is infectious and the get-down movements are approachable to everyone. It is a symbol showing respect to their deity.



<https://news.berkeley.edu/2019/07/17/im-a-berkeleyan-latanya-tigner/>

According to Eric Charry, Jeliya, (the art practiced by Jelimusolu = Malian women praise-singers/griottes), is the “shap[ing of] a unique musical world that is visible to all but accessible... to a few... Jeliya is [sometimes] intended to animate dancing; deep Jeliya is for listening and is intended to inspire listeners to act.”

From the performance of Jelimuso, I found out that Jelimuso keeps interacting with the audiences. The audience also gives her responses such as make moves, touch her hands, and put their hands up and down with the rhythm. It is not like a music concert where the audience needs to keep quiet to show respect to the performer. On the contrary, jelimuso will make eye contacts and her fluctuating voices to connect with the audience.

**ENTRY FOUR:** Bamako: City of Art and Culture & Malick Sidibe’s Rythm and Dance photography

**Madison- favorite quote**



I call upon a reinvigoration of our thinking about the Other through a theory of the dialogical performative because my hope is that it will do what Gingrich-Philbrook so eloquently describes: “not take place as a single call, but as a rhizomatically spreading architecture of multiple possibilities” .(321)

I think this quote really opens my mind on the interpretation of the dialogical performance shown in the video in terms of its rhizomatous structure.

### **Oumou Sangare**

The picture below is a performance by Oumou Sangare.



Self Check: Where are you in this dance?



I think I could be everywhere because I can totally involve myself in each place in this dance community.

#### **ENTRY FIVE: Call and Response & the Audience**

I snapshot this still from the Call and Response Demo from Kenya. Throughout this video, I think the call and response performing style can be also interpreted as the spreading of rhizomatous structure because everyone is interacting with each other. The difference is the call and response dance seems more organized and regulated.







In this picture, all the women are motivated to participate in this celebration. The phenomenon resonates with the statement proposed by Rainer Polak in his research *Performing Audience*, the audience not only gathering together and appreciating the formance but also perform themselves.

**ENTRY SIX: Sounou :Exploring Feminine and Jelimuso Beauty, Nyama(total energy) and Basigi( improvisation/personal virtuosity)& Complementarity in Malian Dance and Life**

Sounou

Sounou competition and complementary

Dancing sounou



Learn pottery traditions  
Different signature way of decorating



Tending to their childrens and loved pottery  
There is no separation in this photo.  
It vividly shows the connection between women and childrens.  
-Work for their community also have special taste for arts and crafts  
-The quality of Intimacy

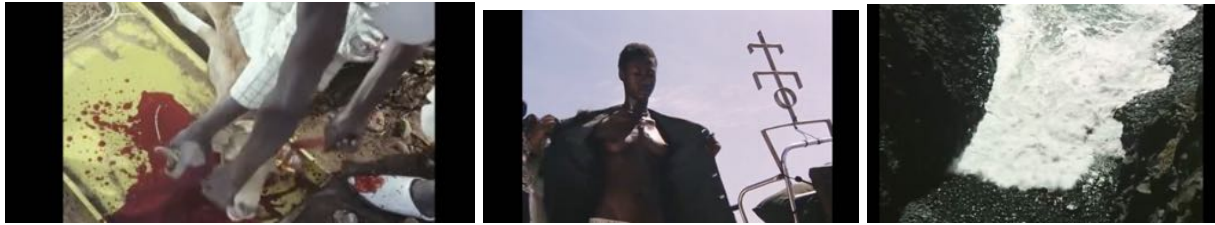
**ENTRY SEVEN:** Sounou Women from Mali to Guinea and Senegal. Sounou forms and Djibril Mambety's Touki Bouki



### **ENTRY EIGHT: The film- Touki Bouki**

The idea behind this movie is really impressive.

-Their dream made them "foreigners in their own country."



I think the transition between those three scenes is beautiful. But I am curious why the director put those three scenes together? It must have some deep meaning behind it.

### **ENTRY NINE: Chiwara and D'mba dances**

Chiwara dancers perform in open fields

Sunsun sticks connecting with the world and humans



Rafia covers their bodies

I love the performance style of chi wara in terms of its gender complementarity and the delicacy of the headdress. Especially the female one, it has a baby figure.

They use rafia and some natural materials to create the headdress.

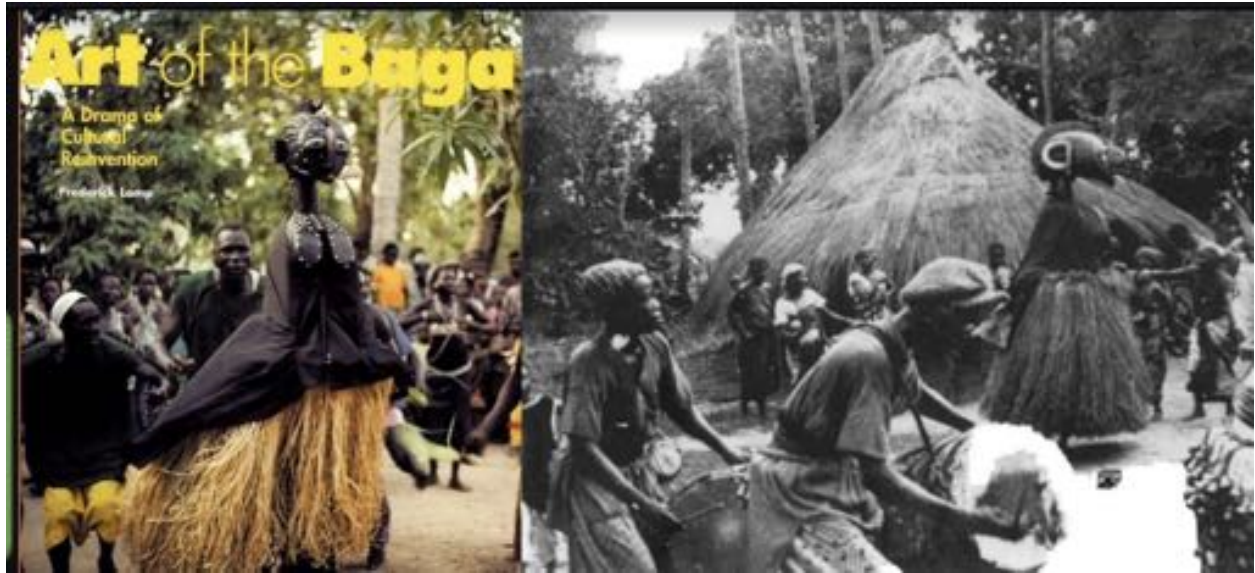
I think its performance style is more like a community-based performance that reflects the true position of humanity in a shared environment.

**See the Music Hear the Dance**

**Where is my mate, the importance of complementarity, a Bamana headdress**

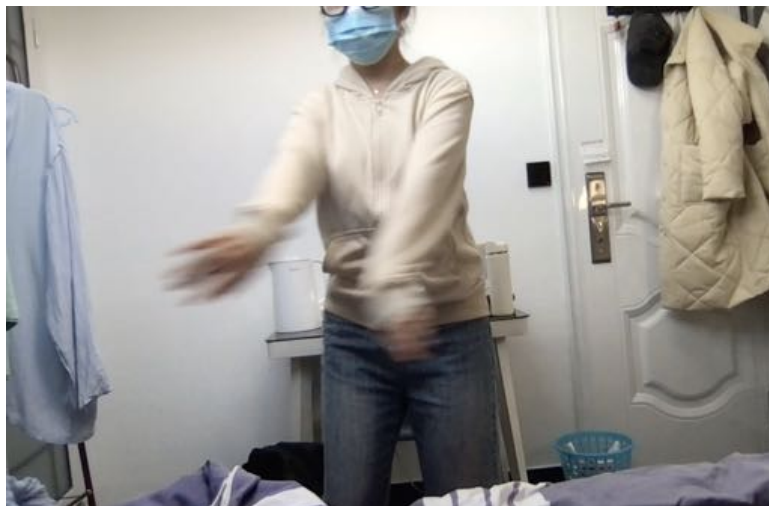
“Anything that reproduces must come in female and male form. So for the Ciwara, you can never have one without the other.”

“Gender complementarity extends to the artistic realm as well.”



The picture shown above is D'mba dance.  
It represents classical beauty.

#### **ENTRY TEN:** Sounou Rehearsal and Portfolio Conversation





**ENTRY ELEVEN:** Strong Men and Joy: The Dance of Strong Men - Doundounba in Guinea, The Shirts of Strongmen

Doundounba dance: it is really powerful.



Sun Ra: A joyful noise





## **ENTRY TWELVE: Class with Djeneba Sako**

I love her class so much. She is so cute and brilliant!



**Dancing Sounou is full of joy.**



# PORTFOLIO

SP2021 | Experiments in West African Dance | Luyao Xu



# ABOUT ME

Luyao Xu, also go by Vicky, is a graphic designer and artist who currently studying at California College of the Arts of the GD senior program. She's a local Chinese who was born in Sichuan, China. She's a health eater and currently a volunteer at a Chinese Non-governmental organization about ocean protection. Vicky enjoy cooking, hand-making, ceramics, sculpture, drawing, poetry, watching movies and animation, biking, and walking in the forest or nature! She loves the style of African painting, which also attracted her attention to African dance. This is why she is in the class of Experiments in West African Dance. As the class progressed, she grew to love dancing (she believed she wasn't good at it before). The short dance learning time in this class every week is the most enjoyable period in this semester!



While reading "Greeting Creates Community Expert", the greeting way Africans greet each other naturally reminds me of the way Chinese people greet each other. Even though these two greetings are different, they are both used in daily activities; they both play an important role in helping people connect, socialize and build relationships: "they help establish the connections that tie people together, and they help convey the ethos that makes those connections so meaningful." However, Chinese will ask first if the other has eaten when they meet someone they know. After that, they will continue greeting the other's family members of the recent trifles of the people they meet.

Also, I have learned more about drum circles after reading "Drum Circle Expert for African Dance", and watching "Drum Circles, Integrating Self and Community". It not only can bring people closer, to get to know each other, and create a more harmonious connection between others, such as the example of djembe from West Africa that Robin Cardell mentioned in TED. Djembe literally means everyone gets together in peace. But also a way for more African Americans and people of other races to learn about African culture! I and the classmates of this class is the best example to illustrate this point!

Greeting Creates Community	
I ni sògoma.	Good morning.
N'ba, I ni sògoma.	Yes, Good morning.
I ka kènè?	How are you?
Tàorò tè.	There is no trouble.
I muo ka kènè?	How is your wife?
Tàorò t'a la.	There is no trouble with her.
I alenka ka kènè?	How are your children?
Tàorò t'u la.	There is no trouble with them.
I alomògòw ka kènè?	How are your house-people?
Tàorò t'u la.	There is no trouble with them.

This basic exchange occurs literally hundreds of times a morning, even in a small community like Niamakoroni. Greeting one's neighbors and inquiring about their house-people is a central component of sociality. It would be odd,

*A fun thing happened this week when I practised the dance: I taught my mom how to dance Dansa 😂😂!*



## Week3\_Short Paragraph

Quote: “As Lucy Duran notes, women praise-singers, symbolize freedom, wisdom and beauty,<sup>1</sup> and are judged not only by the beauty (tied to the meaningfulness) of their words but also by their performance (tied to the sophisticated way that they stylize themselves, actually sing, move and interact with audiences so that a balance between strength and grace is created.” — “The Jelimuso Song and Dance of Tata Bambo Kouyaté: Ordained Beauty”

The Jelimuso Song and dance of Tata Bambo Kouyaté is a performance I've never seen before, and I have to say it's unique. This kind of performance that can be performed in everyday life reminds me of the street singers today, but the difference is, most of them are standing downtown and singing for the passers-by. However, most audiences who come to see Tata Bambo Kouyaté's performance are dressed ceremoniously and will rest. Moreover, Tata Bambo Kouyaté's performance represents a feminine spirit and beauty. Her singing and dancing made me feel the freedom of being in the country or nature, rather than the constraint of being in the city!



Uncertain found: the performer maybe a male?  
(yes he is, which is confirmed after the class!)

## Week4\_Short Paragraph

My favourite quote: “Paying attention discerns sentient beings. I believe it is the first form of respect. One of my favourite lines in literature is spoken by Shug Avery from The Color Purple expressing the sentiment that what really pisses God off is to pass a field of flowers and not notice the beauty in their colour purple. For Shug Avery, how can you pass beauty and not notice; or, how can you hear the cries of Others and not listen. For Shug, not paying attention is an ungodly insult.” (322) - D. Soyini Madison

This quote inadvertently reminds me of one of the current situations in China (it could be similar around the world); I even made a design based on this problem during last summer vacation: As modern people rely too much on social media and Internet life, the majority of their aesthetic and popular trends are gradually deformed. Most contemporary art exhibitions in China are examples of this trend: you don't have to go to an art museum to take a photo, but you must take a photo when you go to an art museum. Therefore, in recent years, a large number of web celebrity exhibitions have become a background wall for participants to take photos. The focus of exhibitors is no longer the design work itself, but whether they can seize the hot spot to survive in the rapidly iterating online world.

However, this act is so-called not paying attention. For me, the art/design works in the exhibition are a way of communication between the artist/designer and the audience. So how do they create a dialogue if people go to an art exhibition and the focus isn't on the art itself? I personally think dance is the same way, people dialoguing with each other by waving their bodies; Of course, it may also be a kind of dialogue when the teacher teaches dance movements to students. Therefore, “not paying attention is an ungodly insult.”

## Call and Response:

*“The repetitive pattern that holds it together/The caller is supported by this response and is free to embroider as he will”*

The video of “Call and Response in Gospel Music” reminds me a sense of Joe (the main character) and the band he joined to perform together in the Disney movie "Soul". But the difference between the two is that Joe's band is playing jazz music in a bar. Instead of singing, they have a woman playing saxophone.

However, the jazz band also performs in a similar way to Call and Response because they also work with each other according to the melody and rhythm of the instrument they play, which means “the caller



is supported by this response and is free to embroider as he will” (p. 27, Call and Response: The Politics of Perfection, African Art in Motion, Robert Farris Thompson).

So, in the scene they're rehearsing, is the woman who plays the saxophone regarded as the Caller, and Joe who plays the piano is considered the Responder? Instead, by the time they officially performed, their roles would be reversed.

It's also cool to know about the celebration of weddings in Bamako/Mali—they performed in a circle, and everyone is free to participate and act/dance. So the definition of performer and audience for them is blurred. The celebrations and the definition of performers and audience are totally different from Chinese or American.



(the band Joe joined)





It's so interesting to know that each woman/dancer would randomly come up with a Sounou dance move: "The first has to do with basigi, the idea of virtuosity or 'knowing one's purpose.' Each woman would call up a Sounou move from her memory with facility." and "The variations of moves and the number that comprise the dance set seem immeasurable. To be able to immediately recall a move with certainty and enough confidence to 'catch the break' – lingo for being able to identify the lead drummer's signal to change moves and for being able to begin the move in the correct time within this signal or moment in the rhythm -- is demonstrative of one's basigi, composure and professionalism." But when I watched the video, I felt that their movements were very powerful and the dancing lasted for a long time. Does this mean that there are no uniform movements and total length of Sounou?

While I was watching the Sounou video, I was so curious why did Doumbia choose to join a solo dance in the middle of the performance? Is that because he was joined as a master dancer (just for this demo), or is it the tradition of Sounou to join a dancer in the middle?



Interesting parts be highlighted while i read:  
Those parts give me a deeper understanding of Sounou!!

In this consideration, the focus is on how dancers, in collaboration with drummers, present their bodies to reflect *Sounou*'s essence, rather than on how the dance's sensibilities are "represented" by concrete visual forms such as masks and costumes as we might imagine is the case in theater contexts. Evanescent cues within the performance and legend construct *Sounou*'s Malian feminine beauty. Similarly, one understands *Sounou*'s ideal feminine qualities from fragments rather than completely "dressed up stories" and linear narratives.

as an exceptional woman... They indicate that the dance is well suited for a young woman and intimates that this woman is a traveler. She carries her dancing abilities and aesthetics with her from Mali, or another location in the region, to Conakry, Guinea' main port-of-call. The path taken by the Fulani nomads may be mirrored by her journey. The Fulani and Bamana have a history

griotte praise-singers from the Wassoulou region of Mali) who refer to themselves as *konow* because their moves and song messages evoke the symbol of the "messenger" bird in flight -- may be a paramount

*Sounou* is the name of a person, a girl called *Sounou* Ba. Gai is the real name of the rhythm. It is from Kaarta. They play Gio for the young ladies and men; It is the occasion for the young people to get to know each other. In daytime, the young men farm and women bring them food. At night the young people have a party. Girls try to get men's attention. Baba is the male. *Sounou* Ba is the female. These 2 are the best dancers.

*Sounou* Ba passed away one day. Baba went to the party and he could not dance because he was so sad. That was the day they dedicated the dance to *Sounou* Ba.<sup>6</sup>

screenshots from week7's reading:  
Genevieve Hyacinthe, "Travelling Beauty" and "Virtuosity and Gendered Gestures: Achieving "the Feminine" in Sounou," excerpts from Genevieve Hyacinthe,

Also, I love so much how the Fulani people's dress!!



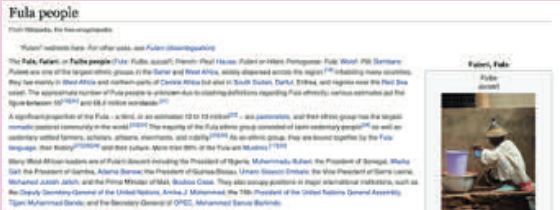
I can't even move my eyes out of them!😂

But the headwear reminds me of the ornaments of Tibet people:



the headwear of Tibet people

I did more additional research about Fulani, cuz I don't really know about this place and its culture:



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fula\\_people](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fula_people)



<https://africa.uima.uiowa.edu/peoples/show/fulani+>



I think I did read the terms from the past two weeks' reading but haven't noticed the difference between the two words! they are sooo similar LOL!

Sounou as a Feminine Art form. This includes the tradition of Malian women's innovation as we see in the traditions of BLACKSMITH WOMEN (plural): numumusow (singular): numumuso

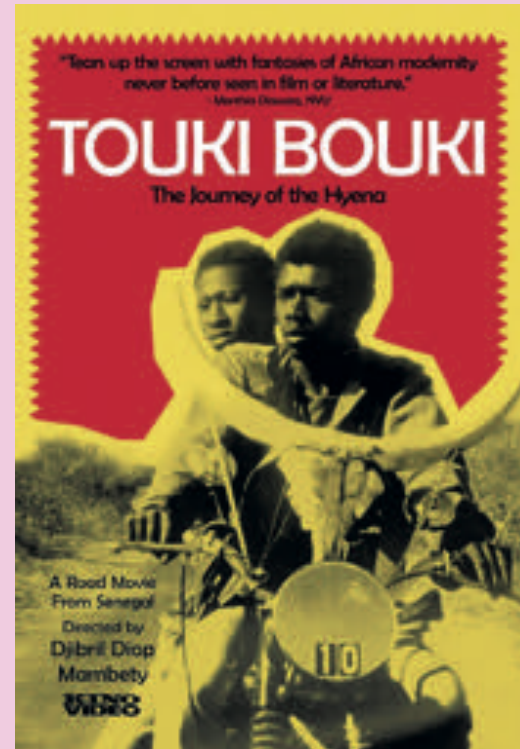
screenshot of Lecture on Sounou

### Touki Bouki:

It talks about two young African adults/partner: Mory and Anta, who are open-minded, independent, and self-seeking, with a strong desire to live a good life in France. The way they dress reveals their desire for the outside world—their dresses are punk/hippie rather than local style.

So they got on their bikes and left their tow; before they left for Paris, they stole clothes and money to buy tickets to Paris. However, When he is about to board the ship, Mory suddenly changes his mind and runs to the city..... Maybe he realized something? But I don't think Anta is selfish because they had planned to go to Paris. But Mory's sudden reversal made me feel that he was a selfish one(? not sure if I have the correct understanding of the movie). I feel even a little sorry that they parted ways this way. I have to admit that the film is contradictory, complex but very interesting(I love this movie even though it's the first time to watch), the relationship between the main charac-

ters, and the background/history of the story is worth ruminating about.



Pictures of Touki Bouki





Chiwara headdress is in the shape of antelopes, and they always come in pairs -- a male and a female, there is also a baby antelope in the female's body. Chiwara is a tribute to the antelope by the Bamana people in a form of art/dance because they believe it was the antelope that taught them how to farm. They always appear as a pair when they dance. The female Chiwara performer usually dances behind the male, inciting him and spreading his power to the assembled community. The staves are used to scratch the earth while the male performers dance, which also represents the antelopes digging with their horns. While the Bamana were farming, some female dancers and singers performed for them beside them, which provided encouragement and blessings—this is like what's shown in Chiwara dance. It's also a good balance for males and females, and also complementarity Chiwara's art with the everyday life of farming.

D'mba is a dance mask of Baga art. It represents

the best of humankind. It portrays the role of an exaggerated perfect woman, whose features were symmetrical and beautiful, and even a pair of sagging breasts proved that she has been fertile. D'mba always represents beauty, commitment, and devotion. On the contrary, Dmba-da-Tshol plays an opposite human nature: "She is represented by a small, grotesque, female bust headdress often with a bulbous forehead, single eye, single ear, crooked nose, twisted mouth, jutting jaw, and single breast. Her costume is a disheveled mess of straw, grass, raffia, old banana leaves, and dirty rags. Her dance is chaotic, with dissonant music, and wildly aggressive movement. Dmba-da-Tshol is the D'mba of the elder men, bearing more volatile power than D'mba in her role as an agent of transformation, as signified in the meaning of her name, the 'D'mba of Medicine.'" ("Sun, Fire, and Variation on Womanhood: A Baga/Bulunite Mask (D'mba)," 53). Dmba-da-Tshol is always needed as a foil at the D'mba dance, but the combination of the two may just right illustrate the femininity and spirit of



Screenshot of the lecture for Chi Wara and D'mba by Genevieve

*Sun Ra = A Joyful Noise. How does Joy work in Sun Ra's musical, performance and collaboration practice?*

To be honest, I could already feel the joy when I watched their performance at the beginning of the movie—they were dressed to the nines and played lively jazz music, which could be seen from the screenshots of the movie. In this day and age, their dress just looks like cosplay. Of course, their distinctive look is still different from that of many bands today. This is probably because they claim to have been born on another planet. They met and found someone similar to them because of the band, so they could do what they really want to do in an environment where they have the same interests. Isn't that a joy, too?

While I watched the dance videos of Doundounba, I've been wondering if their dance moves came from the hunters? In two other dance videos from 2010 and 2019, it can be guessed that the dance has become more life-like: they all wear casual clothes rather than a specific costume. People sit in a circle, and they can be both spectators and performers because they can enter and perform in the circle freely and casually, and also to dance with the dancers who are dancing. But when I watch videos in recent years, the way they dance and perform reminds me of hip-hop( even though I'm not sure if it really affected the development of hip-hop or not).



Screenshot of Sun Ra DOCUMENTARY



“Mugge asks, “Does it have any special meaning for you?” Sun Ra responds, “The requiem? Well, it would be the first time one was wrote for a poor unfortunate man.” On the roof of International House, Sun Ra tells Mugge, “Man has failed, spiritually, educationally, governmentally.” He says this while wearing a gold mask, a pink wig, lilac makeup, a gold mesh cap, and strings of white and beige beads. “A Joyful Noise” embodies Sun Ra’s art of self-transformation and of musical innovation, of spiritual aspiration and of separate-ness—of establishing a collective and communal space, a space of self-display that’s also one of self-exile, of expression that’s also concealment, of a dream of social and political progress that strikes him as so distant, so resistant to achievement, that it’s linked both to science of the distant future and to the recovery of a legendary past, and is accessible, now, only in the form of artistic creation, living myth, aesthetic experience.” (An Extraordinary Documentary About the Art of Sun Ra, 2020)

I strongly agree with the author's last paragraph in this article. Although Sun Ra and his bandmates claim to be from another planet, this planet is only their imaginary world. But this is also an ideal place of self-expression for them in the real world, and where they are free. At the same time, they also expressed their views on society through their ways and music. Perhaps this is why they were able to create distinctive and avant-garde music in their time

***Reflection about the Djeneba experience:***

To be honest, it was a super enjoyable and interesting experience! I enjoy the dance Djeneba taught us, even though I can't practice body twisting very well □. But I love the way she taught us how to dance—she showed us the front first, but turned her back on us as she led us; personally, I find it easier to learn when her back is to us, because there's no confusion about left and right directions. BTW, I also like the flyer Vanessa made because the picture of Djeneba's dance and smile made me feel very happy and joyful!



Some beautiful pictures of Sun Ra I found when I searching the additional information about him.

# Keqin Vanessa Zhong



Keqin Zhong is a junior from CCA Graphic Design Program. She is now living in Shenzhen, a city of China, where she grows up and brings her a lot of beautiful memories. She loves dancing, especially jazz and hip hop. She believes that even though there are many categories of dance, they are still connected, and she would love to keep learning from new dance for her. That is why she takes this African Dance class, since dance always brings her joy.



# AESTHETICS OF COOL, GREETING, DRUM CIRCLES



*Robin Cardell and his partners*



*Robin is leading the audience*

A drum circle is a community function based on rhythm and dance.

Through the video shown in the lecture, what I noticed that audience and dancers form a circle, which is a “real” Drum Circles. The feelings that this dance video brought to me is completely different from the TED video. The Drum Circle in the dance video is larger, causal, and more energetic. The beat is brighter and livelier. The two dancers danced face to face, like they are battling. However, the Drum Circle of Robin is softer, lighter, bringing me a sense of silence. I guess it might be the two styles of drum music, just like music has a lot of genres.

I had a period of locking dance time before. There are some similarities between locking dance and the voguing dance. For instance, the hand-performance, I felt similar when I saw that, which excited me a lot. The catwalk, duckwalk

When I watched the TED video “Drum Circles, Integrating Self and Community” by Robin Cardell, what makes me surprised is that Robin just gave the “common” audience a random beat, then everyone followed well. The “common” means, not everyone has the experience of playing drum circle. The most pleasing is the music heard harmonious. Everyone collaborated tacitly.



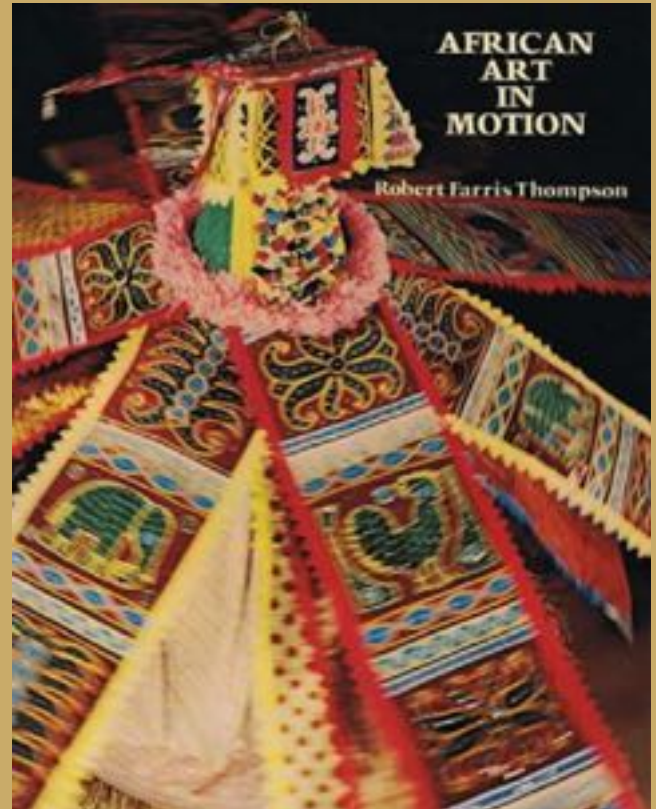
*my sketch of drums*



*dance video shown in the lecture*

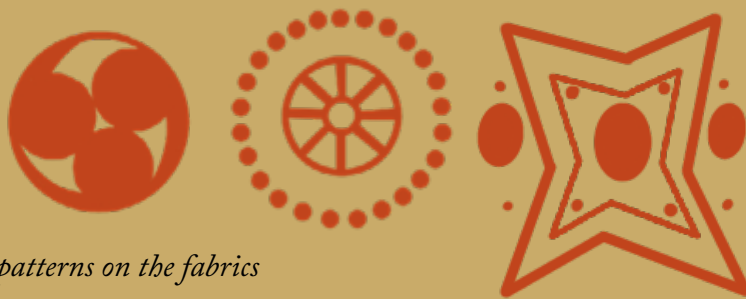
reminds me the cot walk of professional models. Also, the floor performance, that are also some similarities between breaking dance and it. I am curious, do they feel hurt when they do death drop? I guess it would not if the action is correct.

# JELIMUSO & THE GET DOWN QUALITY



*how get down quality looks like*

Get-down quality is completely an aesthetic phenomenon. It is an innovation that strikes us. It is also to activate the fabrics. The spinning fabrics are as beautiful as the train that girls spin when they dance. When the e-gun-gun dancer is doing get-down quality, they will spin themselves, try to disrupt the stability of the ribbons on their clothes. These ribbons or fabrics will dance with them, creating a dynamic beauty. The special patterns on these ribbons will be shown completely, which is quite an artistry.



*patterns on the fabrics*



*capture the movement of getting down quality by lines*

From the video of Tata Bambo Kouyate's performance, I found that her voice was penetrating, powerful, sometimes it makes me feel like a "yelling-singing". Her dance was full of energy, and she was keeping swaying herself when she was singing. She said two things that impressed me: the first one is she had different sing styles with her ancestors. In fact, different generations have different singing styles. Another one is microphone changed the way they sing. I think that make sense to me. Microphone helped to louder their voice, they do not have to sing very hard anymore. She said herself was a "show woman", and she was always innovative in performance. Jeliya is a space of blur which has many possibilities.



# BAMAKO & MALICK SIDIBE & D. SOYINI MADISON



## *Who is D. Soyini Madison?*

D. Soyini Madison (PhD 1989, Northwestern University) is professor emeritus. Professor Madison lived and worked in Ghana, as a Senior Fulbright Scholar conducting field research on the interconnections between traditional religion, political economy, and indigenous performance tactics.

[More information about her](#)

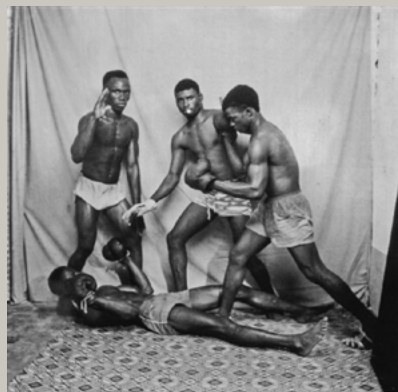


The quote I selected is not from Madison, but from Gingrich-Philbrook: “not take place as a single call, but as a rhizomatically spreading architecture of multiple possibilities”. My understanding to this quote is, we need other people’s idea to help us develop thoughts in different directions. We should not occupy too many resources. We also need to leave more spaces for other people. We live as a community, helping each other to be better, but not limited ourselves through repetitive duplications. It also has some idea about collaboration, which relates to the dialogical performance. That reminds me the drum circle, it is also a collaboration between dancer and dancer, dancer and audience.

Soyini has a strong opinion about performance, and she brings us a concept called “dialogical performative”. It can be explained in two parts: performance as a gift and keep an ethical perspective in performance collaborative. She asked us to think about where we are in performance, and how do we dialogue with ourselves. From my perspective, the role we are playing in dance is an emotion transmitter. If we dance with joy, then we transmit joy to both ourselves and our audience. Trust the infection of our joy. The whole process of transmitting emotions can also be defined as a dialogue between us and others.

## *Malick Sidibe and his photography*

[More information about him](#)



*Boxeurs en Demonstration, 1965*



*The Two Sisters, 1971*

At the beginning, Malick love drawing. Then he began taking photos and fell in love with it. He is good at capturing models’ dynamic beauty, focusing on the background set, costumes, and contrast between different characters.

# CALL AND RESPONSE & THE AUDIENCE



This shot is beautiful for me since the high contrast between these two dancers' clothes. I enjoy their interaction with each other.



*Dance in a Wedding from Mali*



*Dance Call and Response Demo from Kenya*

These two shots are great examples of call and response between the dancers and drummers, the dancers and audience. The Kenyan children's voice drawn me to them. The dancer's dance moves in the wedding is exaggerated, in a big frame. That brings a nice responses to the audience and drummers.



My sketch and notes of the sculpture. The characters in this sculpture plays in different roles. The horses are caller, and the man is the responder who is confident in goodness. This sculpture is about moral and inner goodness of leader.

There are some important definitions that need to be thought about in "Performing Audience". The quote is "Performance' here does not refer to the display of only artistic or other special competence, but to all socially competence behavior... which serves to influence in any way of the other participants." "Audience in this sense refers not only to some group of listeners or spectators who are not themselves performing, but to all participants in a situation who perform social roles which are complementary to the performance of another role and functional to the system of interaction." My understanding to the "performance" here is not just giving other people a show but all your behaviors. To show what kind of role you play in this community. The audience are not only people who watch and appreciate your show, but also interactive with you. They are also participants of this show, but not just bystanders. Here is a quote from the last paragraph on page 10 of *Performing Audience*: "While the drumming and singing are more or less exclusively performed by groups of professionals, participants of all social statuses, professions, classes, ages, and ethnic or regional identities take on the role of dance performance." Through this quote I realized that dancing is an activity that does not have any threshold or limitation. It is full of freedom, the most importantly is to share your joy.

The definition of Call-and-response is, essentially hierarchic in aesthetic structure, nevertheless perennially realizes, within the sphere of music and dance.

I believe that the concept of "Call-and-response" has the similar idea of the "interaction" part in "Performing Audience". It is about social interaction; the dancing can be a judgement of qualities of social cohesion. The society is like a big family.



# SOUNOU, JELIMUSO BEAUTY



“More than wives and mothers” reminds me the experience of taking ceramics class. I understand the process of firing ceramics. But I do not know there are some harmful substances will be produced. Through the images in the article, the modeling of the pots that these women made is relatively simple. However, they are just look like simply, or people might consider that these are simple crafts. In fact, “they belie a sophistication of technical knowledge and a wealth of experience”. The process of collecting materials is basically tough. It is important to keep the appropriate moderation in making pottery. But it is not easy. These women are strong enough to provide primary income for their extended families.



*Process of making pots*

About the Sounon dance, there is an important part, which is the responding between drummers’ musical advances and the dancers’ signals. They cooperate with each other well. I love this quote: “Western Africans cultivate divinity through richly stabilized traditions of personal balance.” I think the personal balance also includes the balance in dancing. The dancers also think the dance is a divine thing. That’s why they put a lot of energy and joy on it.

# TRAVELING BEAUTY, PERFORMING FEMININITY, COOLNESS



*Fulani women*



*Fulani tribe girl, Gossoue © Eric Lafforgue*



*Fulani tribe boy, Gossoue © Eric Lafforgue*

## *Fulani People*

The Fulani, or Fula People, numbering between 20 and 25 million people in total, are one of the largest ethnic groups in the Sahel and West Africa, widely dispersed across the region. Fulani women are a standard of beauty because the culture is nomadic. In many West African societies, travellers are considered special and wise. Many have lighter skin tones than many in Sub-Saharan Africa because the Fulani have some historical roots in North Africa. Spirituality is important to the Fulani. Fulani women are known and admired for their elaborate coiffures and are also considered beautiful because of their lighter skin tone. However, this admiration is symbolic, it reflects their position as a “spirit traveller,” and is not connected to notions of “European White Supremacy”.

## *Sounou dance*



In Sounou dance, male dancers can also perform Sounou with masterful fluidity, even though it is a dance work rooted in the sensibility of ideal feminine beauty and power. For instance, as the screenshot shows, Professor Genevieve’s teacher was dancing and wielding the scarf. This scarf is a symbol of “feminine grace”.

I completely agree with that. That reminds me many jazz teachers are male, but they can dance both the softness and the strength of jazz. Dancing genres should not have gender restriction.



# SOUNOU AND TOUKI BOUKI



*sketch my favorite scene in this film*

I was impressed with the concept of “layers of love”. The contrast between Matisse’s work and Keita’s photography is a novel and creative idea. When look at Matisse’s work on the left, I could not tell the relationship between these two girls. But I know they must be close enough to stay in a small room for a while...

One girl is the emotion-expresser, one is the listener. It also happens in Keita’s photo. As the audience, I can feel these four protagonists’ mood and emotion. The color palette of Matisse’s work is bright and capturing, which includes unique, repetitive texture. The texture brings a strong sense of visual impact for me. Keita also did great job in the environment setting. The blocky texture of the wall, nice pattern on the blanket... I felt as if I were there.

## *Touki Bouki*

This film is talking about a couple, Anta and Mori, who want to break their commonplace, mundane life and go to Paris to pursue the life of their dreams. The scene that they break up at the dock seems tricky for me. Because I thought Anta will at least go downstairs to urge Mori or ask the reasons that he hesitated. But they only stared at each other for a couple of seconds and didn’t say anything. I think this is the artistic expression of this scene. They have similar minds, dreams. After getting along with each other for a period, they began to know each other more and more. Their souls belong to each other. But when they began to have different ideas and separated their ways, they knew they would not stop each other.

There are some metaphors for animals in this movie. I skipped the scenes of the cattle slaughter at the beginning of this movie, but I could still imagine that how brutal it is. The sheep was cut its throat and skinned, it seems to allude to what happened to them on their way to France.

## *Layered in Love on Drumming*



Figure 1. Henri Matisse, *La Musique*, 1939, oil on canvas, support: 49 3/8 x 49 3/8 inches (118.25 x 118.25 cm); framed: 55 x 55 x 4 inches (139.7 x 139.7 x 10.16 cm), Collection Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York, Room of Contemporary Art Fund, 1946, RCA1946-13



Figure 2. Seydou Keita, *Young woman and mother with guitar* c. 1958

# CHI WARA & D'MBA



*Ciwaraw*

## *Chi Wara*

In Bamana world, objects always come in pairs, which represents the union of mythical half-animals and half-human beings. There are also many pairs in our life, such as male and female, the sky, and the earth, the young and the old, positive and negative, etc. This happens in Ciwaraw as well. They are a gendered pair. Also, the Sun Sun connects the upper and the lower world. To some degree, all of these antitheses are opposite, but they are also complementary.

Males and females play different roles in Chiwara dance. Females are important for the Bamana culture. I can get this idea through the meaning of Chiwara because “Wara” means “creature and breast”. Women give birth to life and bring creatures; the breasts are a part of their bodies which feeding their babies. The female blacksmiths or potters are strong enough to provide primary income for their extended families. Also, they make the decorations, the headdresses or the crests of Chiwara. Especially during the Chiwara dance, they hold the fans to make people not get too hot and dissipate energy. Since male and female dance together, people can feel more powerful energy joy both from the two genders.

## *D'mba*

This dance genre is so special that people only dance in the daytime. Because it lies in an iconic association with light. The relationship between D'mba and D'mba-da-Tshol is intriguing. They are antithesis. D'mba represents the best in humankind; D'mba-da-Tshol can go wrong with human nature. Even people can dance D'mba-da-Tshol in funerals. But I think they are complementary as well. D'mba-da-Tshol is more casual and entertaining; D'mba is more formal and elegant. There is a delicate balance between them. D'mba is characterized by the dressed bust of a mature woman with flat pendant breasts. I can feel the importance of women again through this special design. D'mba has the heavy shoulder sculpture, so probably in most occasions, man will be the holder of the sculpture or the crest.





# DOUNDOUNBA AND SUN RA

## *Doundounba*



It is not like the group dance (such as Sounou dance) we have seen before, Doundounba focuses more on the regularity of movement of all members in the dance group. The dancers looked familiar with the dance moves, as if they had rehearsed many times in advance. It is not just the dance moves; they are also unifying their costumes: although the colors are different, the dancers are wearing headscarves which have the similar style. Moreover, they agree to bare their waist and wear black, baggy pants. The different colors of the headbands make them more like a group, each with a unique style, but dancing together in harmony and unity.

The interaction between the dancers helps to set the atmosphere. For example, as shown in the screenshots, it is interesting for the audience to see the dance from a single solo to the battle between two dancers, to four dancers dance together. This process shows how much dancers enjoy the music. That is also the reason why dance can bring joy.

## *Sun Ra*

I started to understand what “a joyful noise” is after watching the video. Musicians have a clear division of labor in the band, playing trumpet, drums... There are many instruments, but the music that they have created is crisp and melodious. During outdoor performances, the conductor plays an important role. His moves of conduction are particularly interesting for me. The whole band looked neat and uniform. There are two other fantastic instruments attracted me: a drum with sticks like hooks, and a piano that sounded like thunder.

