



Fig. 3: Madu Jakite (center), Musa Kamara (right), and an anonymous drummer (left) engage with a solo dancer; Bamako 1994 (R. Polak).

ships,⁸ and, second, by special action roles that are intentionally designed to maintain order.

Let me shortly touch on the indices in the dancers' behavior that allow everyone to foresee their actions. A first and fairly obvious cue to their intentions is that they have to stand up or break from the bounding circle before they approach and enter the focused performance region. Some, moreover, prepare themselves by straightening up and stretching for a moment, by stripping off their sandals and gathering and tightening the bindings of their dresses, or by taking up a spring in their steps, already in time with the musical rhythm. These are quite clear indices to the meaning of the action they are about to develop. Beyond this, there is a way of symbolically assigning the role of performer-to-be by throwing a scarf to someone or winding it around his or her waist. Some self-confident would-be dancers, conscious of their performance role, carry out all these minisequences of action more dramatically in order to make the indices particularly visible and clear, as if to say, "Hey, here I come to dance!" They sometimes even conspicuously walk around the inner fairground to fish for scarves while stretching and tugging at their dresses like

athletes on the sidelines, eager to substitute other players.

Talking of ordinary activities such as standing up and stripping off one's sandals might seem pedestrian in that they seem lacking in cultural specificity and weight. However, they are of great functional significance concerning the social constitution of performance. The drummers in particular constantly monitor the situation for such signals, because they have to always be prepared a second or two in advance of a spontaneous performance in order to be able to appropriately react and control the unfolding interaction. Yet the indexicality of the spontaneous dance activity is essential for the dancers themselves, too, because they not only have to observe the engagement presently going on in order to recognize the exact moment when their own turn comes, but they have also to take a glance to the left and right to see whether there are other aspirants waiting for an encounter. They thus can spontaneously decide whether to try and get there first, to stand back and wait a turn,⁹ or to go regardless of their competitors, running the risk of creating situational disorder, thus spoiling the possibility of a successful engagement for anybody for the moment.

As regards special roles that maintain the order of interaction, two are of outstanding significance at wedding celebrations in Bamako: One is played by self-appointed "guardians of space," whose duties I will discuss in the next section. Another is

⁸ Harold Garfinkel's (1967: chapter 1; cf. Heritage 1984: chapter 6) ethnomethodological approach emphasizes that indices which render visible and explicable ("accountable" in his terminology) the sense which interaction partners have to make of actions are implicit in these very actions, while Goffman in his dramaturgical approach (1959) emphasized that expressive aspects of social interaction are explicitly worked out. It seems to me that both aspects are important to understand how social interaction works.

⁹ Missing a turn is problematic, because it is difficult to maintain one's energy at the appropriate (extremely high) level for even ten seconds without taking action.