



Fig. 5: A situation of extreme heat at a rural circumcision celebration. Drummers, dancers, and spectators mingle to such an extent that the order of interaction might crumble soon; Sonincenin, Beledugu region, some 40 km north of Bamako, 1994 (R. Polak).

On the other hand, anyone who *does* enter the circle and join the situation is *expected* to perform as audience. Audience first implies showing involvement in the dominant song/dance or drum/dance engagements by attentive listening, watching, and, potentially, responding, for example, by clapping one's hands, singing along, commenting, yelling, and shouting. It also implies that one does not establish alternative main involvements. Participants may, of course, engage in short talks with their neighbors for a time, or observe other people in the circle. But they would rarely form different subcircles, turning their backs to the center, or openly stare in a different direction for long. Finally, the role of audience implies that the members show accessibility to their own engagement in performance activity. Each listener, each person watching performance from the circle is not only invited, but more or less obliged to respond by either rising to dance or making a cash gift when addressed by a singer or approached in their seat by the drummers. Turn-taking in performance as described in the last section is part and parcel of the role of audience.

Participatory interaction at celebrations is essentially dependent on the practice of audience to work and make sense. Audience in a large gathering embodies physical and emotional energy – addressed in Bamanankan as “heat” (*kalanya*) –, a kind of reservoir of performance-oriented agency which is indispensable to interaction in celebrations in Mali. It serves to situate, witness, recognize, and feed performance, it socially validates the gathering and publicly acknowledges its participants’ attachment to the social occasion. In the

following, I will bring forth some evidence of the significance of audience by describing how people try to avoid circumstances that hinder visual publicity.

First, audience – rather than performance – needs light. Thus, people avoid celebrating in total darkness. Evening and all-night celebrations, just as holidays in general, are preferably scheduled around the 10th day of the month, in the second quarter of the moon. While this might have cosmological and symbolic meanings, it is certainly also preferred for practical reasons, i.e., because of the light the nearly full moon provides. In addition, one arranges for electric light, if available, or kerosene lanterns. In the urban context, the video team’s spotlights are doubly effective in lighting and focusing the scene for the camera and for the audience.

Second, audience needs a clear view. Participants have to stay in the circle and keep the inner region clear in order to be able to follow the performance. Sometimes the situation becomes confused when too many eager participants go forward for a drum/dance encounter at the same time (Fig. 4).

The situation may even dissolve into near chaos for a moment if the gathering’s level of enthusiasm rises to such a degree that the whole party starts pressing inwards to get closer and closer to the focused action (Fig. 5). All are in the center, no one spectating from outside the circle: the end of both audience and performance, and of ordered interaction as a whole. Sometimes this is licensed at the very end of a celebration. When it happens in the course of an ongoing event, song, dance,