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Dan Ge Performance: Masks and Music in Contemporary Cote
d'Ivoire (review)

Z. S. Strother

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McNaughton, Suzanne Preston Blier, Allen and Polly Nooter Roberts, Doran Ross, Christopher Roy, Roy Sieber, Robert Farris Thompson, and Susan Vogel. He also cites German scholars and his Belgian compatriot Jan Vansina. Pertidis is careful to qualify his own factual statements about the individual works of art, particularly in assigning dates, and geographical and ethnic origins. Qualifying remarks such as “probably,” “possibly,” “is not clear,” “cannot be confirmed,” “little is known about,” and “remain a mystery” are common throughout the book, serving to underscore the challenges that confront the discipline of African art history.

South of the Sahara includes a fairly extensive bibliography but no index. It is useful as a general reference on sub-Saharan African art and will please art historians, collectors, artists, and students alike.

Mary B. Vogl
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, Colorado

Daniel P. Reed. *Dan Ge Performance: Masks and Music in Contemporary Côte d'Ivoire*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003. 212 pp. Photographs. Bibliography. Index. \$59.95. Cloth. \$24.95. Paper. For related audio and video recordings, see <http://iupress.indiana.edu/reed/>.

The ethnomusicologist Daniel Reed has produced a powerful study of modernity, demonstrating that “traditional arts can be a means through which performers ingest and digest the world, selecting new ideas and reshaping them to represent and shape their identities and feed their own needs” (174). His focus is Ge, a performance complex rooted in the religious system of the Dan of Côte d'Ivoire, famous for the variety and brilliance of its masquerading. Reed discovered that Ge experienced a renaissance in the Ivorian city of Man (pop. 100,000) and set out to understand “why and how Ge performance mattered to Ivorians in the 1990s” (171). He succeeds masterfully in evoking the pluralistic environment of Man, with its religious and ethnic rivalry, where Ge takes on “multiple meanings” as entertainment, religious system, marker of ethnic identity, political or economic strategy, and even actor in the Ivorian judicial system (173).

This is a highly self-conscious text in which the author seeks to develop a “representational style that matches [his] ethnographic experience” (14). His method entails cycling back to explore his subject from the vantage point of differing questions and methodologies. He first introduces the life of Ge in the city as an uninitiated Dan might experience it, through performance. Chapter 2 evokes the cosmopolitan nature of Man. In chapter 3, Reed analyzes the interrelationship of “tradition” and “modernity” in the resurrection of Gedro, a “rejoicing spirit,” whose cross-ethnic appeal stems in part from the performers’ creolization of pop music references. Chapter 4 asks “What is Ge?” and refuses to oversystematize religious belief.

Chapters 5 and 6 analyze the song texts associated with Ge performance and the critical role of the master drummer. In chapters 7 and 8, Reed represents two seminal Ge performances, but through a radically different format. He experiments with alternating verbatim texts from his field notes with analysis composed at home in an attempt to “deconstruct the ethnographic process” (14). A brief conclusion follows this engaging section, assessing how Ge allowed some of his primary field consultants to articulate contemporary experience.

Whereas much of the earlier literature on the Dan has addressed the phenomenon of masquerading, Reed emphasizes that “music is *the* most fundamental instrumental force in manifesting power” in Ge performance (143). Music has this capacity because it can attract *yinnanu*, spirits who bring joy and gifts for physical or social healing. The degree to which Reed disassociates music from dance is surprising, although he acknowledges their fundamental unity in Dan thought. When explaining that Ge can manifest without a costume, Reed quotes Mameri Tia: “When I enter into the dance, into the group, with movement, that creates a presence of the mask The face of the mask is resting in the sacred house over there, but . . . since it is the drum which makes the mask move, the drum which wakes up the mask, . . . the mask which is over there [in the house] acts within me. When it acts on me, on the spot, I do the dance steps of the mask . . .” (88). Mameri Ti’s commentary supports Reed’s argument that it is the drumming that calls the spirit(s) and moves the performance forward. However, it also resonates with Eberhard Fischer’s and Hans Himmelheber’s assertion that the Ge is fundamentally linked to a face mask whether or not anyone wears it. But perhaps most important, when the music wakes the Ge and it acts on the speaker, he is moved to dance, and the movement “creates a presence.” Acknowledging the importance of dance need not reduce the role of music to “accompaniment” (105). Instead, it bolsters Reed’s argument about the instrumental importance of music: not only does it call the spirits, it also inspires the performers and audience to dance. It is to be hoped that future scholars will build on Reed’s rich research to explore why dance has such resonance in this society.

How readers respond to this book will depend in part on how they feel about the new ethnography. Reed is present on each and every page. The theoretical import of rendering the ethnographer’s position as intermediary is that it forces the reader also to negotiate meaning self-consciously, to question the conditions and consequences of interviews. Reed, therefore, stimulates the reader to think deeply about the experience of modernity in Africa and at the same time about how we make claims to knowledge in other societies.

Z. S. Strother
 University of California, Los Angeles
 Los Angeles, California