

## PROCESS

My brother began drumming in the sixth grade. He hasn't really stopped since though he has taken detours into sculpture and painting. Even now, he prefers to play guitar or bass in the bands he is in (currently, an entity known as the Clock Brains). Drumming, particularly on "regular" drums such as the conventional trap set, long ago became boring for him. But drumming has been there for a long time and still is. I will never forget attending a performance he did for his senior project in college. He had some sticks of wood and metal pipes suspended from a wooden frame, two or three wooden desks, and other various substances he could beat on. Each piece was hooked up electronically to various lights. When he hit one of the objects with the one-inch thick pieces of dowels he used for sticks, one or more of the lights were triggered. In front of this set-up, around where the audience eventually stood, was a sculpture made from several grey cinderblocks and some colored, twisted metal rods. Above, behind and to the side of his percussion "stage" was a screen onto which were projected various line-drawings he had made, some with phrases that, for lack of a better referent, read like David Byrne-isms. I ran the slide projector. It was the spring of 1987.

I hadn't had much contact with Allegne since I went to live with my father after our parents had divorced almost a decade earlier. Come to think of it, I hadn't had much contact with him before: we spent most of our "quality time" beating each other up--quite regularly and often quite brutally.

When he started playing I was stunned and spellbound--when, that is, I could get over my own performance anxiety of whether I was advancing the slides at the "right" (my invention, not his) times. He became a whirling configuration of energy and sound as he managed to tease out of these strange materials a deeply compelling base rhythm with layers of other sounds and variations. I was hypnotized. The effect of the lights, while not central to the power his performance held for me, was much more "artful" than I might imagine if given this (inadequate) description.

I particularly enjoyed the personal irony, one that has been greatly deepened in the intervening years, of his use of two lamps that had been my parents', then my mother's, then his. These lamps had a round metal base, a cylinder about five inches in diameter and about two feet tall. He had removed the shades, making more visible the images painted on the cylinders over the tan background: various stringed instruments of the classical variety (cellos, violins, and so forth). There were two or three painted on each lamp. For me, they stood as representations of our childhood and, later, of the college music teachers who discouraged Alleyne from becoming a music major due to his lack of a "proper ear." They were the desire of becoming-bourgeois fragmented by anger. The "musician" had (de)generated into a whirling percussion orchestra,<sup>1</sup> legitimated by the discourse of "performance art."

I have long been convinced Alleyne got all the musical talent in our family. I tried the clarinet for a year in the fourth grade. I gave that up and soon after had a brief stint with the guitar--brief because I lacked the discipline and was frustrated at learning songs like "Michael, row your boat ashore" when I wanted to play "Stairway to Heaven" and the acoustic parts in "2112." I have always enjoyed listening to music, indeed it is a long-

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<sup>1</sup>I want to write "machine." It sounds right here, but for reasons that will become evident, I choose not to.

standing dominant passion, but I have long--since convinced myself that I lack the "talent" to play.

My father was very musically inclined (in the discursive domain of genetics, he "got it" from his mother and "gave it" to my brother). He played the sousaphone in high school and was selected as one of two people from California to play in the Future Farmers of America national band. Quite an honor, I've been told. Years after he had played an instrument, he picked up my clarinet and began playing "Yellow Submarine." This struck me as odd--he never liked the Beatles or anything "modern," John Philip Sousa and anything with a bone-shaking pipe organ in it being his favorites. I asked him how he could play the clarinet so well. He said, "It's not that different from the sousaphone." A few years ago he started up again, playing the tuba in a community band, but it didn't last long. He and my step-mother have a piano in their house--a new one they bought about eight years ago. No one plays it and it has gotten way out of tune (or so I am told--I couldn't tell if my life depended on it). Becoming-bourgeois again, I guess (but always out of tune).

My mother's experience with the production of music was limited to playing the bass drum for a few months in the band class at her small, rural elementary school. She wanted to play, but the music teacher wouldn't help her learn how to keep a steady beat and constantly ridiculed her in front of the rest of the students. He was having a dispute with my great grandfather and my mother paid the price (so the story goes). She loved Elvis and when I was a kid would drag my father (in a state as close to "kicking and screaming" as he ever got) to his performances in Tahoe. She encouraged my interest in contemporary music (unlike my father) and took me to my first rock concert when I was about 11 years old: Paul McCartney and Wings in 1976. I got my inability to keep a tune from her and we both

love to sing along with the radio when alone in the car.

### The Journey

A couple of years after Alleyne's performance, I was in Gaia, a retail store in Berkeley. It's one of those hip new-age/environmental/multi-cultural stores in which spirituality and non-Western cultural traditions can be bought for anywhere from \$12.95 to upwards of a thousand dollars. Gaia is where my parents would have bought something to replace the cello lamps if they had been fifteen years younger and/or hadn't bypassed the sixties so completely: the 1990s new-age version of becoming-bourgeois. I couldn't afford anything more than a poster (ironically, "Earth's Ten Commandments"), but two things captured my attention. The first was a book by Mickey Hart (whom I knew as a percussionist with the Grateful Dead only because of the bio on the back cover--I had always distanced myself from the Dead, even after three years of living in Humboldt County on California's north coast) called Drumming at the Edge of Magic. The second was a beautiful tongue-drum.

This kind of drum is made from wood, beautifully stained, and is box-shaped. Maybe you've seen or played one at your university's periodic open-air marketplace or an arts festival or maybe at your local version of Gaia. On the top surface are several "tongues," a narrow gap cut in between each, that make various tones when struck with a padded stick. I was entranced but the \$400 price tag was prohibitive. Only later would I learn that this drum is the modern (read: warped) descendent of an Aztec or perhaps African slit-gong, a hollowed-out tree trunk often used for long-distance communication and mythologized in so many Tarzan movies. In the traditional African cultures that use slit-gongs, the sounds they produce are heard as the voices of their ancestors. Putting your ear to a slit gong is to hear the voices of the gods--much as I hear the ocean in a seashell only I

seem to have a problem with the spirituality part. To me, the tones of the tongue drum sounded "neat." I had no conscious ideological or spiritual sense of the drum or its sounds. It appealed to me, and by association so did Hart's book.

The following Christmas (oh the joy of bountiful capitalist consumption!) I received Hart's book (written, I later noticed, with Jay Stevens), a much smaller version of the tongue drum, and a few other percussion "toys." I was hooked. I started beating on everything in reach and read through the book in little over a day. Everything I had been studying for the last few years--issues of gender, race, the body, consciousness, and their relations to culture--seemed written all over Hart and Stevens' sketch of the history and effects of drumming and other forms of percussion.

I immediately began constructing drums and other percussion instruments out of whatever was at hand--clay pots, plastic jugs, pieces of scrap wood. Going to the library, I discovered that the one kind of book on drumming that exists in plenty is the how-to guide for constructing "toy" drums, directed toward young children and/or their teachers. By stretching a synthetic material (such as that used for lining coats) over any kind of pot or bowl or jar, securing it with rubber bands and painting several layers of watered-down Elmer's glue over it, I could produce some decent sounding, if fragile, drums for a few dollars.

Around this time (January 1992), I purchased Mickey Hart's Planet Drum CD (the companion to his predominantly pictorial book of the same name). Listening to this recording added a number of dimensions to my percussive journey. First, I now had some percussion-driven music to play along with, move my body to, or simply get lost in. Second, the recording represents not the different stories and traditions and musics of several cultures

(such as those recounted in Drumming at the Edge of Magic) but the fusion of several different traditions and styles. At least on the surface, Planet Drum is a paradigm case of a genuinely multicultural production. The recording mixes the instruments, styles and compositions of percussionists from the U.S., Brazil, Nigeria and India. In addition to a number of other recordings of this type that Hart has coordinated,<sup>2</sup> he also records and produces "traditional" music from around the world, such as the polyphonic chants of the Gyuto Monks; flute, sarangi and tabla music from India; the Latvian Women's Choir; powwow songs of the Great Lakes tribes; and African drumming and chanting from the Sudan, Egypt and Nigeria.<sup>3</sup>

Listening to Planet Drum and these "world beat" recordings, I gained a greater sense for Hart's recollection of the effects of the music of Babatunde Olatunji (a Nigerian drummer who now lives in New York) on Europeans and North Americans: "The room would transform. It was as though the rhythm of the drum was calling something up from these sleek cosmopolitan bodies that had been asleep. There was a power there that I couldn't ignore" (Hart, Drumming 91). Neither could I. That these musics are--admittedly mediated and, to varying degrees, impure--expressions of "traditional," "indigenous," non-Western cultures is significant, a key element in explaining their appeal as well as a source of concern.

Is it that these sounds--heavily rhythmic, percussive, developed out of preindustrial traditions--touch something "primitive," something repressed

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<sup>2</sup>The other "multicultural" percussion recordings Hart has been involved in are the companion to Drumming at the Edge of Magic entitled At the Edge, Dáfos, The Diga Rhythm Band's Diga, and The Rhythm Devils' Apocalypse Now Sessions.

<sup>3</sup>These and other recordings of "authentic musics from diverse nations and styles" produced by Hart are distributed under Rykodisc's series "The World."

in contemporary Western culture? Do they fulfill some need or desire or impulse that goes unaddressed in my cultural milieu? Many of the songs from Planet Drum are based on "primitive" themes: the struggle of life and death ("Udu Chant"), paleolithic rites ("Temple Caves"), and "The Hunt." One of the songs I find particularly powerful and amazing is "Jewe" (meaning "you are the one"), composed by Babatunde Olatunji and produced entirely from the sounds made by the human body: vocals, the slapping of the chest with cupped hands, and the resulting vocal vibrations. Without reading the liner notes I would never have guessed the sounds in this song were produced with "just" bodies.

That predominantly percussive music should demonstrate a cluster of traits associating it with the primitive is unsurprising. Planet Drum draws heavily from the musical traditions of "other" (non-Western) cultures, is centered around preindustrial themes, utilizes the body as an instrument, and is very masculine--thematically, impressionistically, and in that only one of the seven musician/composers is female. These characteristics are quite consistent with the meanings that cluster around the drum in my (culturally determined) experience. The drum is the instrument of the savage, the cannibal, the dark-skinned natives hiding in the jungle in Tarzan movies. I hear the drum used consistently in films, television shows, advertisements and documentaries (e.g., nature shows) to evoke a sense of the primitive, especially in relation to the jungle. A certain genre of drumming--probably coded as "African" by many Euro-Americans--serves as a sign of danger, violence, darkness, evil (The Rhythm Devils' additions to the soundscape of Apocalypse Now, also produced by Hart, are a prime example). Remember those jungle movies when the invisible natives are playing their drums and we are informed--by a native guide or a particularly jungle-savvy white man--that when the "war drums" go silent the group must become concerned because it signifies an imminent attack.

There was also the somehow eerie ability of the natives to communicate across large distances with their drums so that the arrival of the white saviors/explorers/conquerers in the chief's village was expected far in advance (a myth grounded, to some degree, in actual practice).

Crucially, all these images also clearly identify the drum with men. In contemporary Anglo-American music, the drummer is a deeply male figure. A female drummer evokes a much greater impressionistic dissonance, for example, than a female guitar player. And drummers, particularly in rock culture, are seen as more primitive. Recall, for example, the uncontrollably aggressive bouncer in The Commitments who steps in to play drums after their regular drummer leaves. The shift in roles seemed "natural." Hart notes that

somewhere along the line something curious happened to percussion, as anyone who plays it knows. The drum got the reputation for attracting a more elementary personality type than, say, the flute or the guitar. I've heard the expression "Hey, whaddya expect, he's a drummer after all" in all kinds of places. It's generally said jokingly, but with an edge; even guitarists in heavy metal bands warn their daughters: "Just make sure you don't come home with a drummer." (Drumming 30)

Today, building off these cultural codes, the drum has come to stand as an icon of the "men's movement." As men try to recapture their primitiveness, their emotions (interestingly, something generally coded as feminine), as they try to overcome being a "soft man" by finding the "warrior" or "wild man" within, they turn to what is seen in contemporary Anglo-American culture as quintessentially masculine and primitive: the drum. They become "more" masculine, paradoxically, by a return to the body and to feeling. This seemingly contradictory cluster of meanings is embodied in the June 24, 1991 Newsweek cover devoted to the men's movement (what the magazine terms "drums, sweat and tears"): a hairy,



shirtless, thirty-something man wearing a tie, blue jeans and a wedding band, holding a baby in one hand and a drum in the other. The clash of meanings evokes Newsweek's question that stands as the headline: "What Do Men Really Want?"<sup>4</sup>

Against this drumming/primitive/masculinity linkage, Hart's historical/mythological discussion of the drum is surprising and significant.

The first images of drums we find date to around 2200 B.C. and show mainly frame drums, both round and square. I must have glanced at these pictures dozens of times, before I began noticing how many of antiquity's drummers were women--certainly half, maybe more. The classic frame drum image that turned up everywhere showed a couple of Bacchantes--wild Greek dancing women, their hair flying in their dance as they beat on a frame drum. I also discovered that the first drummer whose name we actually know was a woman, the granddaughter of the Sumerian king. She lived in Ur in 2280 B.C., and played the balag-di in the temple of the moon, one of the mother goddess's strongest symbols.<sup>5</sup> (Drumming 75)

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<sup>4</sup>I don't intend any of this as a statement regarding the men's movement in practice. I know nothing of that movement in the sense of direct knowledge regarding its practices or primary documents (e.g., weekend retreats and Iron John). My point here concerns the widely disseminated representations, the meanings associated with and layered upon the movement. In that sense, the centrality of the drum icon and "getting in touch with one's emotions" are found not only in the Newsweek piece but also in the parodies of the movement presented in episodes of Murphy Brown and Designing Women. For somewhat more grounded reviews and variously-positioned critiques, see Gingrich-Philbrook (feminist and queer-identified), Hagan (feminist) and Churchill (Native American).

<sup>5</sup>That Hart indicates that we know her name but fails to tell us what it is is striking. Blades, from whom at least part of this information was clearly taken, gives her grandfather's name (Maram-Sin) but not hers (153).

Drawing on the speculations of archeologists, Hart proposes that the drum was associated with the earth goddess religions that were spread across Europe and parts of Asia during the Neolithic. In these agriculturally-based societies, the connection with the rhythms of the earth manifested itself in religious rites, apparently often led by women, in which drums and other percussion instruments played a central role.

According to archeologist Marija Gimbutas, author of The Language of the Goddess and one of the major scholars attempting to reconstruct the consciousness of Neolithic Old Europe, there was "an intimate relationship between the drum and the goddess." (Hart, Drumming 73)

"Civilization" as we westerners commonly identify it arose during the third millenium before Christ, the paradigm case being the area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Among other signs, these civilizations are marked by the gradual shift from the worship of earth-based goddesses to that of male sky gods, from a focus on the rhythms of the earth to those of the sky--the movements of the stars and planets.<sup>6</sup> Potentially, the percussion-based, heavily female possession trance rituals of the cults of Dionysus and Cybele, which survived into the Roman era and beyond, were the (still vital, perhaps coopted) remnants of these earlier goddess cultures, conquered by the Indo-European culture that "came in successive

<sup>6</sup>I don't think it requires much of a stretch to see this as the birth of idealism, the predecessor to Plato's "eternal forms laid up in heaven." Freud indicates that the observation of astronomical regularities led to the introduction of order, which he defines as "a kind of compulsion to repeat," into human life (46). James Burke, in his tracing of the history of clocks, the assembly line and computers, begins with astronomy and its importation into Europe from the Middle East. I will return to this star-bound theme again, to read Descartes' fetishization of geometric forms up against the violence--in other words, the order(ing)--we do to the earth with the assistance of what the stars have provided us.

waves out of the Central Asian steppes and. . .worshipped the male sky gods we find in place as written history begins" (Hart, Drumming 209). In contrast to my thoroughly naturalized sense of drumming as an exclusively male endeavor, this link between women and drumming opened up a whole realm of new connections and possibilities. The public perceptions linking drumming to the men's movement created an ambivalence in me that, among other things, resulted in self-censorship regarding my new-found addiction. That would soon change.

Within a few months of my immersion in Hart's book and the Planet Drum CD, I heard, quite by accident, of a "drumming circle" being held at Fertile Ground, a local, less "polished" and slightly less commercial version of Gaia. I had never heard of a drumming circle before hearing snippets about the men's movement and had little if any clue as to what it would be like. As a result of attending this circle, my attraction to drumming, particularly on an experiential level, increased exponentially. Soon I--Rich, master of rationality, soma-phobe extraordinaire, and self-convinced musical incompetent--was returning month after month to a room full of 20 or 30 strangers, uninhibitedly participating in the production of the most amazing and powerful sounds I have ever experienced. My body, perhaps my spirit, was awakened. . .my "mind" would even temporarily shut down. The drumming circles I have attended at Fertile Ground, which I have no reason to hold up as either typical or atypical of others that have sprung up all over the country, are far more than people getting together to make noise.

The setting for this particular circle is an absolutely plain-looking room attached to a retail store selling jewelry, books on alternative spiritualities and healing techniques, drums and rattles, incense, and other such "New Age" merchandise. The clientele of the store appears to be

primarily composed of women, most of them middle-aged, and this is reflected in the make up of the drumming circles. The circles are advertised through the store's newsletter along with the other workshops held there. The room lacks any furniture; people sit around the perimeter on pillows. On the first night I attended, I was the only male. The highest proportion of men I have seen at one of these circles was about 6 out of 20. The circles average about 15 people with as few as 5 and as many as 35. Usually there is at least one "baby," but often close to half the group have not previously attended a drumming circle. Some come because friends or family members drag them there, others because they simply like to drum, others because of an interest in shamanic ritual and journeying. Children are not uncommon (recently, a children's drum circle that formed independently has begun to attend sporadically).

The circles last for two hours and are "led" by a middle-aged woman named Betty Travland. Her primary role is setting the tone and putting people at ease, in addition to supplying drums and rattles for those who have none. Betty begins by having us hold hands and center ourselves with deep breaths: one to leave the concerns of the day behind, a second to bring us into the room and a third to bring each of us into our "center." She then invokes the spirits of each of the directions, of the sun, moon, earth and sky, and of the Goddess and the "universal drum spirit." The tone of the ceremony and spirituality is decidedly Native American. (While Betty is not Native American and does not proclaim some kind of "authenticity," she has received substantial instruction from an Iroquois medicine woman.) Betty then lights some charcoal and prepares a mixture of herbs for smudging: sage (a masculine cleansing herb), cedar (a feminine cleansing herb), tobacco (a uniting, community-building herb), and sweetgrass ("for the sweetness of life"). She explains for anyone who has never smudged before that it is a rite of cleansing and purification. Each person smudges the

person on their left, using a special feather to move the smoke around the person being smudged, who sits in a comfortable, open position. The drums and other instruments are also smudged. In a large group, the smudging alone can take 30 to 40 minutes. Everyone sits quietly during this time (though no one openly proclaims any specific behavioral "rules"). The last person in the circle smudges Betty.

At this point everyone quickly introduces themselves and explains why they have come or what their experience with drumming is. Betty makes it clear that no experience is required. She practices what she calls "intuitive drumming" (because, as she sometimes explains, "I am not able to keep any kind of steady beat"). You just drum whatever comes out. There are no explicitly stated or enforced rules (which is not to say there are no norms), no set beats or patterns, no instruction except that Betty tunes into the group's energy and begins with a basic beat. Everyone picks up that beat and then can take it in whatever direction they wish.

Before the first set, the final piece of ritual is the opening of the drums. *Holding the drum in your right hand, you circle the head of the drum in a clockwise direction with your left, slowly letting your hand drift to the center and raise up on your fingers until they are bunched at the center. You then pull your hand out from the drum as if there were a string (an umbilical cord) attached, fully extending your arm, and then bring your fingers to your heart. This links you to the spirit of the drum.*

In the hour to hour and a half that remains after the opening ceremony, there are generally four "sets." The energy and progression of each circle is unique. In some sessions, one beat will predominate all four sets. Other times, fundamentally different beats, tones and energies come out in each of the sets or even several different beats within a single set. Sometimes the group finds a strong, common groove very quickly and other times the sets are fairly chaotic, out of sync (though never completely so).

Sometimes, in the middle of a crescendo the drumming will unpredictably yet uniformly just--stop. Other times it slowly tapers off. Occasionally, Betty will intervene with a strong, identifiable beat (we jokingly call it the Betty beat) that we all "get with" and build into three crescendos, ending with a bang on the third. Sometimes the drumming is quiet, sometimes quite loud, sometimes playful ("Coyote is here," Betty will comment after such a set, in reference to one of the spirits she invokes at the beginning, a trickster figure in Native American folklore).

In between sets there is little talk. Sometimes people take the opportunity to try a different drum, one of Betty's or that of someone who is willing to trade. Before the circle formally begins, people trickle in and generally only talk with one or two people they know. After the circle, this pattern is repeated. People generally leave rather quickly and without talking much, the exception being a small group of self-proclaimed "Betty groupies" (one of which I have, admittedly, become) who talk with her or perhaps each other. In addition to the ceremony at the front-end, the only explicit, verbal framing of the "meaning" of the drumming occurs before one set, usually the third. Betty identifies a "theme" for us to drum for. It may be to drum for the healing of the earth, something or someone in your life who needs healing, good will toward the beleaguered indigenous peoples of the earth, abundance to all peoples, or the beginning of a new season. Occasionally Betty will be somewhat directive about the drumming itself--rattles only or hands only for playing the drums (though she often qualifies her directive with "or something else if that's what you feel like"). After the final set, we close our drums (a similar process to the opening, except that you move your left hand counterclockwise and pull the string from the drumhead out, to your heart, and then back to the center of the drum) and Betty thanks and releases the spirits.

Betty makes drums for herself as well as to sell. She also holds drum-making workshops that involve a fair amount of ceremony, including a drum-induced journey to meet the spirit of your drum as well as the tree and animal that provided the materials. Until recently, these were only for women and the drum-making was done as a birthing process. She now holds some workshops for mixed groups. The type of drum she makes is loosely based on the style of some Native American drums. They are large (15-17 inches in diameter) hoop drums, meaning they are fairly thin (about three inches deep). Elk, horse or deer hide is stretched over one side of a wooden hoop (usually cedar) and laced tightly with rawhide thongs that stretch across the backside of the drum. The intersection of these thongs provides a handle for holding the drum with one hand while it is struck with a padded stick with the other.

Because these are the majority of the extra drums Betty brings for people to play, because she sells them through Fertile Ground and elsewhere, and because many people attending the circles have made drums with Betty, most of the drums being played are this large, hoop style. These drums generally have a full, deep tone that is felt in the chest cavity as much as heard with the ears. Having 10 or 15 of these drums booming together in a small room gives Betty's circles a distinctive, incredibly powerful sound. On top of this deep foundational beat, a heterogeneous minority of other percussion instruments can be heard. People bring dumbeks (a relatively small Middle Eastern-style lap drum with one head and an hourglass shape, usually with a pottery shell), bongos, rattles, claves (percussion sticks), smaller (8-10 inch) hoop drums, or even, on one occasion, some midsized timpani. For those concerned about animal hides, there are "vegi" hoop drums made with fibers from the bark of redwood trees. Occasionally two or three people will begin chanting or making other vocalizations. With few exceptions, most of the instruments brought to the

circle are hand-made, and if not home-made have been purchased through stores such as Fertile Ground. Only recently have the small, mass-produced plastic hand drums sold by Remo under their "world percussion" line begun to show up.<sup>7</sup>

The experience of being in the circle during the drumming itself is difficult to describe. "Words are so inadequate at capturing the spirit of percussion. Prose is okay at eyeplay; it can recreate the visual, but it's lousy at earplay" (Hart, Drumming 28). I usually play with my eyes closed, which allows me to hear better and be less conscious of my actions. I generally feel very few inhibitions in the sense that I don't feel anyone is judging me, either musically or in terms of how I look or act. When I am feeling like I am not in sync or am screwing up a rhythmic pattern I am playing, and I become concerned with how that affects or is perceived by others, I don't have as good of an experience.

As I mentioned earlier, I feel the music in and on my body, especially in my chest cavity, as much as I "hear" it in a narrowly aural, cognitive sense. Sometimes I consciously manipulate the rhythms I produce or even, occasionally, change instruments in order to mesh or contrast with a certain rhythm or instrument I hear someone else playing (which is not the same as the negative experience of being conscious of other's judgments). Most of the time I'm on auto-pilot, playing whatever comes out, going with the flow of the sound. I am in my body in a way and to an extent that I rarely am elsewhere and my "mind" is often almost entirely shut off. When the group really gets into a groove, when everyone locks up, playing variations on a strong, common rhythm, it feels--sometimes all at once, sometimes gradually--amazing, powerful, energizing, and intensely

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<sup>7</sup>The large-scale commercialization of the drum phenomenon is in full swing. Ads for drums can be found in just about any new age, yoga, vegetarian or similar genre of magazine.



intimate yet somewhat impersonal. I don't know most of the people, I haven't conversed with them to any depth if at all, I don't even know most of their names. But I create something with them, I share something with them and they with me. The energy flows around the group and becomes an entity of sorts. I can feel and experience the rhythm and the shared energy of the group on every level of my being that I know how to name or sense--cognitively, affectively, experientially, bodily, aurally, visually. I know it affects me right down to the molecular level though I can't quite say I consciously experience it that way. It sets the matter in my body vibrating, it affects my body's energy fields and rhythms. It tires me and makes my hands sore yet I leave energized. Sometimes, especially if the energy of the circle seemed strange or "off" to me, I will sleep poorly that night. Afterward, getting back in my car and driving home always feels strange.

Although I am a deeply rational person--in the senses of working out of secular explanations of the world and spending a lot more time in my mind than in my body--the experience of drumming changes that. While I still do not "believe" in any set of spiritual values (New Age, Gaia, Christianity, various Native American beliefs), my attitude toward spirituality has been profoundly altered. When Betty calls to the spirits or explains a playful set with the presence of Coyote, I do not scoff outwardly or inwardly. These are deeply meaningful actions and the experience of the drumming would be profoundly different without the ceremonial framing.<sup>8</sup> Primarily, I

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<sup>8</sup>As a result, I am troubled by what I will do in this project. I am going to propose various kinds of secular explanations which will not exactly exude spirituality. Although I do not wish to remove the spiritual dimension, but instead to enhance or add layers to it, the discursive formation in which I operate here pushes for precisely such a removal. On the other hand, I do not want to put the drumming phenomenon in all its contemporary manifestations on a pedestal and limit my discourse to an uncritical acceptance and adoration. I hope the dialectical tensions

believe, this comes from seeing how the earth has been treated by my culture. By contrast, therefore, I find myself unwilling to reject, dismiss or marginalize a set of beliefs that honors the earth, the feminine and the seemingly "irrational" desire to drum.

A different experience I had of the "drumming circle" phenomenon was associated with our local community radio station's "Day in the Park" festival. Two years ago KRCL began to hold a community drum circle prior to the beginning of the string of bands they line up to play all day. I heard it advertised and decided to go. Due to a mix-up in the announcements of the time, people started showing up at about 10 a.m., and the crowd eventually swelled to about 300 by 11 a.m., the "correct" scheduled time. By 10:15 there were probably 50 people with everything from dumbeks to hoop drums to bongos to congas to five-gallon plastic paint tubs sitting around on the grass. People began randomly and unevenly tapping and banging on their instruments. By 10:30 there were about 100 people and the tapping and banging was becoming more regular. By 10:45, before the designated "leader" of the drum circle, an associate of Mickey Hart named Arthur Hull, had even shown up, about 200 people were drumming together, united by a common rhythmic pattern underlying everyone's individual playing. No one led this, no one stood up and said let's do this, no one person established the beat. We were idly tapping on our drums one minute and the next we were a percussion orchestra. It was amazing.

As it turned out, this set up Arthur Hull's theme perfectly. The form that his drum crusade takes is a variation on Betty's. She says she has been

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between my nonrational experiences and love for Betty as a calming presence in my life on the one side and my desire to critically examine the significance of the larger cultural phenomenon on the other will push the project to a different plane of some sort. (How about to a different rhythm?)

called on to heal the earth and her people through drumming; Hull teaches people about building community through drumming. He travels around the country putting on workshops he calls "village music circles." Hull works with community groups, rival street gangs, corporate executives and government bureaucrats. His intent is not simply to help them work better together, but, through the actuality of drumming and the metaphor of the village, to get them to see (better yet, hear) the vital role of each individual within the group. Hull takes drumming from "rhythm dorks," Dead Heads, grass root environmentalists and those desiring an alternative spirituality to corporations such as Motorola and AT&T, Wall Street investment firms and the Canadian National Defense Headquarters. While Hull's practices create a greater degree of ambivalence for me personally, the impact of my experience of "spontaneously" drumming with 300 or so people makes the community-building potential of drumming undeniable.

The second year, the community circle was less successful in a purely numerical sense because it was cloudy and threatening rain. Aside from the physical discomfort of being rained on while sitting or standing in a park, drums made with natural skins don't do so well when they get wet. Even if it remains merely cold and cloudy, the skins loosen up and sound flat. Maybe 150 people showed up. Arthur Hull, returned again, used the opportunity not only to push his new book but Remo's plastic hand drums as well--they work just as well in the cold and the rain as in the sun. (Remo sponsors some of Hull's activities in return for his endorsements and promotional plugs.) For each of the sets we played, Hull asked us to focus on the positive goal of bringing the sun (as opposed to the negative one of making the rain go away). During each of the three sets, and not at all in between, the sun did indeed appear. It did not rain and we played for the

scheduled hour.<sup>9</sup>

This community building can be a threat. During a recent extended interruption of the Grateful Dead's tour due to Jerry Garcia's health, a large group of Dead Heads settled in Arcata, a small college town on California's north coast, to wait it out. Having been introduced to drumming at Dead concerts, they began playing their drums on the town's central plaza. This activity annoyed some of the locals and the surrounding businesses. The city council considered an official ban on drumming in the plaza. When asked about this in an interview before his scheduled visit to Arcata to lead a large circle, Hart explained:

There has been persecution of these drum circles forever. It's thought of as a lesser form, because it makes a lot of noise. It's very strong and powerful and attractive, and it's chaos. It shakes the empires. This is really noise. Rhythm and noise, one of the strongest elements on the planet. Of course the government, they don't like it. ("Interview" 4)

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<sup>9</sup>My experiences with Betty (about once a month) and Arthur Hull (once a year) have been extremely positive. This has not been true of every drum experience. One drum circle I attended headed by another woman was far too directive and lacked the sense of balance and freedom that Betty creates. In another instance, I took a weekend class through the continuing education division of my university. It was called "Drum Talk" and the description emphasized creating communication through drumming. Instead, the teacher, a man who is also a "professional" drummer, simply covered and simplified a desire for technical correctness with some groovy talk about communication. He would constantly tell people they were playing their instrument incorrectly and would both establish the beat each of us was to follow and correct us when we played it "wrong." While the best leaders of drum circles in my experience do not "lead" in a formal sense, their style and presence have a profound impact. I should also note that I and others I know of also drum by themselves or with one or two other people, whether for healing, journeying, guidance, relaxation or pleasure.

Plato banned similar activities, such as the frenzied dancing of the Bacchae and the attendant instruments and rhythms, as unfit for the good citizens of his Republic.

Drumming circles have gained in both popularity and exposure in the last several years. They have become a part of and/or associated with the men's movement, certain forms of therapy, shamanism, Native American ceremony, New Age spirituality, Dead Head culture, environmentalism and other progressive social movements,<sup>10</sup> and a desire to reconnect with the earth and/or the goddess. Babatunde Olatunji recently predicted that by the year 2000 there would be a drum in every household in the U.S. (Cushman). While Olatunji's optimism is undoubtedly excessive, there are circles of various sizes, ideologies and styles organized all over North America and elsewhere. Mickey Hart organized one in Marin County as a benefit for his "Rhythm for Life" organization that had over 1500 participants. The Berkeley-based Sons of Orpheus both performs as a drumming troupe and organizes rhythmic rituals, including one held in San Francisco's Grace Cathedral. Drumming is being taught in universities (such as Arthur Hull's popular courses at UC Santa Cruz and a course titled "Drum Talk" at the University of Utah), used as a form of physical therapy in nursing homes, and as a treatment for Alzheimer's patients. Rhythm for Life is a Phoenix-based organization that promotes the healing power of drum circles in schools, hospitals, nursing homes and prisons.

These activities are getting a respectable amount of press. Hart testified before the U.S. Senate Special Subcommittee on Aging, and publications serving the New Age and Dead Head cultures have served as a

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<sup>10</sup>Though I have been unable to verify its actual occurrence, I heard that a drum circle was planned during the 1993 gay rights march in Washington that would encircle the Washington Monument. Many of the other events discussed in this and surrounding paragraphs are catalogued in Cushman.

convenient conduit for disseminating the return of the drum (e.g., Cushman; Peterson). In the Salt Lake area, to take a different cut, there were at least two medium-sized articles on drumming in the Salt Lake Tribune (Mathews; Monson) and one in the alternative publication Catalyst (Stum and Kirkpatrick) between August and December 1992. Obviously I am not claiming this is a movement to rival the Beatles or the pet rock; I simply want to establish that it is much more than a few thousand people caught up in a year-long fringe craze, that it can serve as an entryway for examining some fairly significant dynamics taking place in contemporary North American culture. Drumming circles are one place these dynamics surface. The movements or meanings associated with drumming--the men's movement, alternative spiritualities and healing, environmentalism--are other, related manifestations. Yet another is "world beat" (also referred to as world music or international music).

Drumming circles and world beat are closely intertwined. One of the ways the interest in drumming has spread is through the recording and integration of the musics of other cultures by the Western music industry. A great deal of this music is heavily percussive. Popular Anglo-American musicians such as Paul Simon, Peter Gabriel, Stewart Copeland, Sting and David Byrne have to some degree integrated indigenous musical styles into their recordings. Undoubtedly the best known example is Simon's African-influenced Graceland project. For his next album, Rhythm of the Saints, Simon turned to Brazilian music, as has David Byrne (who also, with the Talking Heads in the early 1980s, borrowed heavily from African music). Peter Gabriel drew from the artists, traditions and existing recordings of music from North Africa, India, Armenia, Kurdistan and elsewhere for Passion, music he produced for Martin Scorsese's The Last Temptation of Christ.

In turn, Gabriel, Hart and others have produced original recordings of

some of these "traditional" musics and released them through Western labels such as Rykodisc and RealWorld. The most successful "world beat" recordings, however, were not produced under the same circumstances--i.e., with Western "sponsors" who often, paradoxically, relate to the traditional musicians they record as mentors of a sort. The Bulgarian State Radio and Television Female Vocal Choir's first volume of Les Mystere Des Voix Bulgares had a healthy stay on Billboard's pop charts after its 1987 release (doing particularly well in England), the second volume received a Grammy in 1990, and their four tours of North America have been immensely successful. Released through Elektra's "Explorer Series," these recordings were made over a number of decades by Swiss producer Marcel Cellier. The Choir was established in 1952 to preserve and popularize the folk songs of Bulgaria's various regions. Their compositions have been modernized, given a "new authenticity" by contemporary Bulgarian composers, yet retain a vocal quality and musical structure profoundly alien to western European musical sensibilities (liner notes). This music's appeal crosses conventional lines, claiming lovers of rock and classical music alike, and draws lavish praise such as the St. Louis Post-Dispatch's oft-quoted claim that it is "The most beautiful music on the planet."<sup>11</sup> (Admittedly overstated, this claim is difficult to argue with while immersed in this music.)

Other successes in the world beat arena are the recordings of the South

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<sup>11</sup>To the great displeasure of my admittedly problematic purist tendencies, the most beautiful song of this most beautiful music, "Polegna e Todora," is now being used in a television advertisement for AT&T international long distance. An even more troubling recent appropriation of world beat music was the FBI's use of Hart's recording of the Gyuto Monks' Freedom Chants from the Roof of the World as part of their aural psychological warfare against the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas.

African a cappella men's ensemble Ladysmith Black Mambazo (who worked with Simon on Graceland and, while undoubtedly gaining a boost from that exposure, had previously released their own recordings) and Hart's Planet Drum, which topped Billboard's charts for 26 weeks and won a Grammy for "Best World Music Record." It is no accident that the Bulgarian Women's Choir, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, and a CD like Planet Drum are the greater commercial successes of world beat. They are far more suited to the existing music industry framework: they have identifiable artists, are organized at least partially if not primarily for commercial purposes, and their songs are composed (or their arrangements altered from the traditional folk forms) with recording and staged performances in mind. Put in other terms, they are not "purely" organic expressions of the folk cultures from which they are derived. Despite these successes, however, it also is clear that the greatest commercial payback to come from world beat has been reserved for the Anglo-American artists such as Paul Simon who more severely incorporate traditional musics into western terms.

Many of the less popular though by no means unimportant recordings filling up the blossoming "International" or "World Beat" sections in music stores more closely resemble anthropological recordings of somewhat more "authentic" traditional musics (i.e., less transformed by the constraints of recording and other elements of the Western music industry). In addition to the contemporary pseudo-ethnographic recordings being made by the likes of Hart, recordings of indigenous musics from around the world that have lain dormant in the Smithsonian for years are being catalogued and remastered; 2000 such CDs are expected to be released (Hart, "Interview"). In many ways, this is nothing new--the Smithsonian's Folkways label has been doing this for years. Although these recordings are now being taken more seriously from a musical standpoint, instead of merely as pieces of ethnographic data, "world beat" recordings and musical styles have also



gained some popularity in the past, as with Babatunde Olatunji's 1960 Columbia release Drums of Passion and Latin and Caribbean forms such as the mambo and calypso. Now, however, world music is an institutionalized category and has a certain appeal as a category, not just as isolated artists or particular forms (Goodwin and Gore). Rykodisc has "The World," Elektra the "Explorer Series," and so forth. In 1992 The Virgin Directory of World Music was published (Sweeney). Some radio stations (admittedly more so in college and community stations, as world beat is a recognized category but is nonetheless marginal) now have world music programs, such as the "Global Gumbo" program on my local community radio station.

### The Questions

Given my immersion in drumming and, inseparably but to a lesser degree, world beat, the basic questions that formed as an early driving force behind this project (and remain so) are "why drumming?" and "why now?" What is it about this particular historical moment and the cultural circumstances in contemporary North American culture that makes drums and (often predominately percussive) music based in the cultural traditions of marginalized and oppressed groups so appealing? What makes the drum a potent signifier and drumming a pregnant experience? What is the significance, what are the potentials and dangers implicated in Euro-Americans turning to marginalized and indigenous peoples to (re)gain the knowledges of the drum and of rhythm that their (my) native culture has repressed? How do these manifestations and dynamics intersect with the issues of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and the body that hover around the drum? Of what relevance is the knowledge and experience of drumming to the heightened concerns regarding our treatment of the earth, concerns which are a common thread linking many of those involved with drumming? What potential does drumming hold as a site for multicultural interaction?

What are the pitfalls of such interactions?

### The Inspiration and the Challenge

The point at which drumming changed from a curiosity to something that would become the driving force in my intellectual work came relatively early in the journey I have chronicled here, with my cover-to-cover reading of Mickey Hart's semiautobiographical, semihistorical, crosscultural account of the role and importance of drumming, percussion and rhythm. Passage after passage from Drumming at the Edge of Magic: A Journey into the Spirit of Percussion leapt off the page, screaming at me, beckoning me. On the one hand, it seemed to be appealing to something fundamental but deeply buried in my psyche. On the other, connections to the issues and discourses I had been studying for the last several years made this seemingly esoteric topic come alive. Hart and his partner in writing, Jay Stevens,<sup>12</sup> begin by constructing a rhythm-based cosmology:

The conventional wisdom maintains that fifteen or twenty billion years ago the blank page of the universe exploded and our story began. We call this fortunate event the big bang, which is a bit misleading as a name since the conditions for sound didn't arise until almost a billion years later, and the conditions for ears sometime after that.

A better way of beginning might be to say that fifteen or twenty billion years ago the blank page of the universe exploded and the beat began, since what emerged from that thick soup of

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<sup>12</sup>Stevens is a professional writer. His previous book, one with great potential connections to this project, is the excellent historical/journalistic Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream. Currently, Hart and Stevens are working on another book, this one centered on rhythm and comparable in scope, according to Hart, to the Ants book which won the Pulitzer Prize a few years ago.

neutrinos and photons were rhythmic pulses vibrating through empty space, keying the formation of galaxies, solar systems, planets, us. . . .

In the beginning was noise. And noise begat rhythm. And rhythm begat everything else. (Drumming 11-12)

Such a beginning might have led me, prior to my exposure to drumming circles and immersed as I was in various "post" discourses, to dismiss this book as hopelessly essentialist. Such a beginning, combined with repeated references to the Tibetan Book of the Dead, Joseph Campbell, shamanism, the spirit side of the drum, and the universalist concept "Planet Drum," might have led me to dismiss this book as "New Age" claptrap. The challenge (a relatively painless one, it has turned out) was to take it seriously as social theory, as critical history, as cultural criticism--as seriously as Foucault, Kristeva, Bakhtin, Nietzsche, Irigaray, Gramsci. That is the impetus and foundation of this project.

What does this have to do with communication? Let me begin with the passage from Drumming at the Edge of Magic I just quoted. In a book in which the visually-rich and aurally-impoverished nature of Western languages is explicitly and implicitly critiqued, notice the metaphors. For example, the universe is a "blank page." Even in the reconfigured story, dominated by beats and rhythms, the metaphor remains. Notice, too, how this soon-to-be-inscribed surface is singular, to match up with the notion of a universe. A singular origin for a singular existence has been proposed and the logocentrism of Western culture sneaks in, remaining even in its own destruction.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Jahn makes an interesting argument concerning African civilization. He works from Lévi-Strauss's argument that what writing allows--that is, what characterizes "literate" from "nonliterate" cultures--is the formation of cities, empires and caste systems: writing "seems to favour rather the

There is more here than a simple dominance of written language. Its hegemony is complex, structured in contradictions. "In the beginning was noise. And noise begat rhythm. And rhythm begat everything else." In addition to drawing from the "begat" litanies of Genesis, Hart and Stevens have rewritten the first lines from the Book of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and

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exploitation than the enlightenment of mankind" (Lévi-Strauss 292). African cultures were seen by Europeans as primitive because, among other reasons, they lacked writing and architecture (the latter made possible by the systems of exploitation enabled by writing). Sub-Saharan Africans did, however, have a means for communication and the preservation of knowledge and history other than writing: drum languages. While the argument that this ensures a less exploitative social structure can easily be complicated--prior to European colonization Africa did have large empires and systems of exploitation--the sociopolitical implications of a culture which developed a drum language rather than a written one are potentially significant. It would certainly lead to a more radically different view of the cosmos than Hart and Stevens' rewriting of a written tradition with a rhythmic metaphor.

Walter Ong, in his work on the changing status of the word in oral-aural, script and electronic cultures, offers some degree of support for Lévi-Strauss's position that is of particular relevance to some of the directions I will take later in this project (see note 6, above). Ong claims that the alphabet significantly increases the impulse for order and control. "Arrangement in space seemingly provides maximal symbols of order and control, probably because the concepts of order and control are themselves kinesthetically and visually grounded, formed chiefly out of sensory experience involved with space" (45). One crucial manifestation of this drive for order and control made possible by the alphabet is formal logic, which, as I shall demonstrate in the essay on "Order," is intimately linked to a certain conception of rhythm. Another is the use of writing for administrative record keeping, not only economic but genocidal as well: recall the repeated imagery involving typewriters and lists in Spielberg's film Schindler's List, for example.

the darkness has not overcome it."<sup>14</sup> Dialogically, this utterance has been appropriated and infused with a different ideological accent while the echoes of other ideologies remain. "The Word" (logos) has been replaced with noise: the beat. Light has become sound and sound forms an order: rhythm. Christianity, logocentrism and visualism are responded to with "the kind of cosmology a drummer can live with" (Hart, Drumming 12). Dialectically, rhythm is both opposed to logos and deeply identified with it. Logos is more than language in the narrow sense, more than "mere" persuasion--it is power, it is spirit: "the Word [that is, logos] was God."

Sidestepping, for the moment, the explicit argument that rhythm is the origin and fundamental force behind all existence, I want to take seriously the suggestion implicit in this rewriting. Rhythm is not "simply" a form of order, but a form of discourse and a mechanism of power. Rhythm is, at least potentially, in at least some instances, logos.<sup>15</sup> Hart explains that "The power of the drum is the sound that it sets up, the groove that it makes. It allows us to dance and also to travel to other places, to other consciousnesses. That's what the power is all about" ("Interview" 4). The power of the drum is the performance of sound and rhythm; this power is inseparable from the knowledge of how to produce and manipulate such performances. Using drumming as an entrypoint, I want to reconceptualize order, culture, subjectivity and communication through rhythm and sound. To do so is, I believe, to push the limits of our conceptions of discourse and

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<sup>14</sup>See Ong regarding the status of the word in Judeo-Christian tradition.

<sup>15</sup>This is a risky move for me. Rhythm is not just discourse; it is not the same as other discourses. It is not fully reducible to our understandings of that category. Rhythm is also, potentially, antidiscourse. Part of this project will be exploring the discursive and nondiscursive dimensions of rhythm as well as the dangers of theorizing it (that is, reducing it to discourse).

rhetoric and of the categories underlying them, namely mind and body, persuasion and coercion.

That taking rhythm seriously should push these limits is appropriate given that Mickey Hart's work, especially Drumming at the Edge of Magic, has been so central to this project. The idea of "the Edge" is key to his understanding of the importance of percussion. Here is how he explained "the Edge" in an interview:

It's the Edge of different places and different people, strange places. The Edge is where you push to the limits. It's where creativity is found, where real-time art is found. The Edge is the outer limits of your consciousness. When you stretch your consciousness you go into this realm. It could be the sacred. Some people call it the sacred. It's where priorities change, things inside you click over from just being ya ya, to being something more meaningful and far-reaching. You make a connection. You connect. That's what the Edge is all about. ("Interview" 4)

This work will go to some strange places--some far away and "exotic," some frighteningly close to home. It is going to be about art--fascist art and potentially transformative art, everyday "real time" art and the art of the people and the art of intellectuals. It is going to touch on the sacred more than once and look at and listen to a lot of profanity. It will obsess over consciousness. And, hopefully, it will change some "ya, ya" responses into some transformative experiences. It has for me.

### The Approach

A central part of socialization is the entraining of our bodies, our daily routines, and our aesthetic sensibilities into the rhythms of our culture. Contemporary existence--call it postmodern, late consumer capitalism, whatever--is characterized by rhythms and other patterns and types of

organization that close off possibilities for human contact, a care-taking of the body and spirit, and contact with the earth. My rhythms, for example, keep me on concrete and asphalt, in automobiles, in buildings, in libraries (my head stuck in a book), in front of a computer (like now). I mow my lawn and weed my garden (square, contained, largely artificial). I shop at a supermarket filled with anonymity, malls even worse (with fewer and fewer non-mall options outside of mail order). I set aside an hour to exercise, to play racquetball in a totally enclosed, white, artificially lit 20 x 20 x 40 foot box. Much of my less anonymous human contact is rigidly scheduled and constrained by roles, as in the classroom, or must be worked in between the rhythms of work, transportation, exercise and so on. And my life of the last few years has been rather unstructured compared to many!

From the use of non-Western musical forms and artists by Anglo-Americans such as Paul Simon, Mickey Hart and Peter Gabriel to the recording, marketing and touring of groups such as the Bulgarian Women's Choir, Ladysmith Black Mambazo and the Gyuto Monks, radically different forms of musical expression and rhythmic sensibilities are gaining a significant degree of popularity (although, granted, the more "radical"--the less they are incorporated into the standards of the Western music industry--the less popularity). In addition to formalized groups such as these, recorded and marketed through the Western music industry, recordings made by anthropologists and others of traditional musics in their "native" contexts are being restored and released. Clearly, these are not "pure" indigenous forms; they are actively being commodified and used as a source for innovation and profit.

Despite its reworking at the hands of Western music technology and marketing, world beat music still contains, I believe, elements of rhythmic sensibilities associated with what many North Americans may lack: a connection to the earth and the body, both materially and spiritually, and to

some sense of "authentic" community. Drumming circles, at least potentially, go one step farther: in a world where rhythms in general and music in particular are mass produced by others for us, drumming circles allow participants (including those considered by themselves and others as "nonmusicians") to make their own music, their own rhythms, and to feel that--not just hear it through a speaker--in and on their body. As a Remo "World Percussion" advertisement states, "the heartbeat of life is the beating of a drum. It's that rhythmic pulse that reminds us who we are and where we came from." Euro-Americans, drawn into drumming, are turning to indigenous peoples, Native Americans in particular, to (re)learn the "rhythms of life" Remo wants to sell us. Mickey Hart says that his goal as a musician and a rhythmist "is a reawakening of archaic techniques" for using percussion to travel to the Edge ("Interview" 4).

Discursive formations, Michel Foucault argued, provide a set of rules to distinguish truth from falsity. Rhythmic sensibilities, analogously, distinguish order from chaos, music from noise. I am arguing that rhythm is a discourse, that its performance is constitutive of an "order"; therefore, rhythm and the forms of music licensed by a particular rhythmic sensibility are no less important to the maintenance of a social formation than "truth." Rhythm is a kind of knowledge and knowledge is a kind of power. Just as there are "subjected knowledges" that operate against and outside any particular discursive formation, there is more than one kind of rhythm--rhythms that discipline, control, reproduce an order and rhythms that subvert, resist, enact a different order.

Foucault defined his genealogical project as an

attempt to emancipate historical knowledges from that subjection, to render them, that is, capable of opposition and of struggle against the coercion of a theoretical, unitary, formal and scientific discourse. It is based on a reactivation of local



knowledges--of minor knowledges, as Deleuze might call them--in opposition to the scientific hierarchisation of knowledges and the effects intrinsic to their power: this, then, is the project of these disordered and fragmentary genealogies. (Power/Knowledge 85)

Archeology would be the analysis of "local discursivities" and genealogy the tactics whereby subjected knowledges could be brought into play in contemporary struggles. A variety of subjugated knowledges about rhythm, knowledges possessed by many folk cultures, marginalized groups and indigenous peoples, are finding their way into contemporary North American culture through the increasing dispersion of world beat music and drumming circles. I want to explore the counterhegemonic potential of these knowledges and their embodied performances. This project is, in a sense, a genealogy of rhythm, or perhaps a chronicle of the genealogical project being engaged by Betty Travland, Mickey Hart, Arthur Hull and thousands of others. The potential of these projects, I believe, arises out of their reclamation from the technocrats--from the likes of Taylor and Ford to the "composers" of muzak and the cartographers of the human genome--of the ability to compose the rhythms which organize our physiological, cognitive and social existence.<sup>16</sup>

To set about answering those basic questions (why drumming? why now?) and to make the case for my claims regarding the potentials of

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<sup>16</sup>At the same time that drumming recaptures such a potential, it is also implicated in structures of oppression, namely commodification and colonization. The latter involves particularly sensitive and sticky complexities, which I will attempt to explore (if not resolve). Energized by relatively naive nostalgic desires as well as explicitly political endeavors, drumming and world beat appropriate the cultural practices of marginalized peoples toward predominantly Euro-American ends. In the process, programs of well-intentioned resistance risk caricaturing, profaning and exploiting the very cultures and spiritualities they respect and wish to preserve.

drumming, I need to back-track quite a bit from drumming circles and world beat, to develop a sense of the underlying issues, dynamics and implications that are involved. I will return to those questions, claims and the related issues toward the end of this project. First I need to do some archeological work, uncovering or at least making explicit some of the various power/knowledge formations involving rhythm. Put in different terms, I need to construct a context for these questions and the cultural forms they address. Etymologically, "context" is a weaving together (of texts). To weave a context for addressing the significance of emergent cultural forms such as drumming circles and world beat I will pick up four primary strands: rhythmic entrainment as a disciplinary mechanism, rhythm as order and epistemology, the cultural variability and struggle over rhythmic sensibilities, and the relationship between rhythmic sounds and consciousness. These topics serve as entrypoints, as a means for developing a way of hearing rhythm as the performance (in Turner's sense of bringing something into existence) of culture, and are part of my archeological project. The driving force remains, however, a desire to discover (as opposed to the passive sense of "uncover" suggested by an archeological metaphor) how these can be rearticulated in my contemporary context as means of social transformation and resistance.<sup>17</sup>

Each of these four strands, perhaps better read as essays rather than chapters,<sup>18</sup> can stand somewhat independently and each will, without a

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<sup>17</sup>Keeping these characterizations of this project in mind is important (to me) for several reasons. I am not engaged in the production of knowledge in the conventional sense. This project is not, in a disciplinary sense, a piece of musicology, ethnomusicology, history, anthropology or rhetorical criticism. It is an undisciplined attempt at producing possibilities for meaningful sociopolitical intervention, and hence fits my sense of criticism.

<sup>18</sup>Etymologically, "the meeting place of canons." No thanks.

sense of sorrow or apology for the lack, be incomplete. I offer them in the spirit of Edward Said's sense of criticism and the critical essay:

Criticism adopts the mode of commentary on and evaluation of art; yet in reality criticism matters more as a necessarily incomplete and preparatory process toward judgment and evaluation. What the critical essay does is to begin to create the values by which art is judged. . . . Critics create not only the values by which art is understood, but they embody in writing those processes and actual conditions in the present by means of which art and writing bear significance. . . . The critic's attitude is to some extent sensitive [that is, restorative<sup>19</sup>]. . . ; it should in addition and more often be frankly inventive, in the traditional rhetorical sense of inventio so fruitfully employed by Vico, which means finding and exposing things that otherwise lie hidden beneath piety, heedlessness, or routine. (52-53)

The role of rhythm, I am arguing, must be heeded, its routinization denaturalized, heard as more than "mere" physiology or supporting structure.

At the same time, retaining a multiplicity of critical voices and perspectives that may make the project sound fragmented or overly eclectic is important, not because of some naive pluralism, but because it helps counteract what I am doing here. The last thing I want to do is "fix" drumming; the necessarily incomplete synthesis of the perspectives I draw from here acts centrifugally against the centripetal force of theorizing. This is not about the truth (I constantly try to remind myself), about being right. I just think these are neat/challenging/troubling ideas and I thought you might be interested and I might get some better understanding of it all in the process of writing it out and sharing it with others. I hope you are

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<sup>19</sup>In an earlier version of this essay, Said used "restorative" instead of "sensitive."

intrigued or challenged by some of it.