

much-cited Weberian "webs of significance." This interpretive significance is not something applied to a world, part of some superstructure of which human beings partake, but the very essence of human existence—hence the ontological priority of culture, and thus Heidegger's relevance to ethnography.⁷ As Geertz (1973: 68) puts it, a "cultureless" human being would not be an "intrinsically talented though unfulfilled ape, but a wholly mindless and consequently unworkable monstrosity." Geertz and Heidegger seem to agree that it is interpretation all the way down. For Heidegger, however, this is not a matter of delving deeper and deeper until finally reaching the *right* interpretation. "The only deep interpretation . . . is that there is no deep interpretation" (Dreyfus 1991: 157).

Although parts of this world, such as kinship systems, political economies, and aesthetic modes of production, can be classified and studied—whether by approximating scientific methods or by turning to interpretive strategies—being-in-the-world cannot be understood ontologically in objectivistic terms as a collection of facts to be gathered, categorized, and analyzed or, for that matter, as a set of cultural texts to be interpreted and rendered meaningful. There is no question that these approaches contribute to the ethnographic enterprise, but they are ultimately only signposts along the way. In themselves, they cannot explicate the way of lived experience that is at the center of phenomenological ethnographic inquiry.

If we are to build a way through questioning—that is, investigating possibilities—then Heidegger (1977: 3) advises us "to pay heed to the way, and not to fix our attention on isolated sentences and topics." I ask the same of readers of this book—to pay heed to the way, to understand the following ethnography as a questioning and thus as an expression of the possibilities of the *Erlebnis* of fieldwork.

Ironically, physics—that "hardest" of sciences—offers an apt metaphor for this kind of ethnomusical inquiry. In a quantum world, reality is filled with the in-between: "something standing in the middle between the idea of an event and the actual event, a strange kind of physical reality just in the middle between possibility and reality" (Heisenberg 1958: 41). Writing ethnography is a kind of standing in the middle. It is not the actual event but an expression of it. Similarly, it depicts a reality that is merely one of many possibilities. My experience of the Tumbuka had much to do with their experience of me. This book is an ethnography of that dialectic.



To Dance and To Dream

At my last research site, the compound of a woman named Luŕemba, I danced *vimbuzza* for the first time. I had met Luŕemba the year before and had been planning to stay with her for some time, because I wanted to include a woman healer as part of my research. In the patrilineal society of the Tumbuka, it is difficult for a woman to set up her own business, and therefore someone like Luŕemba, with her own compound, is a rarity.

Luŕemba is not her birth name but one the spirits conferred on her when she became an *nchim* ("prophet"), a special class of healers among the Tumbuka. As both herbalists and diviners, *nchim* are considered to be the most powerful of the indigenous healers of northern Malawi. Not only do they effect cures for all types of illnesses with their extensive pharmacopoeias, but they also smell out witches, neutralize witchcraft, and, most importantly, divine their patients' ills and misfortunes.

When she divines, Luŕemba "dances her disease" (*kuvina nthenda*). Like all *nchim* healers, she dances to transform an initiatory illness into a divinatory trance blessed with diagnostic power. While entranced, Luŕemba divines the causality of the past and the consequences of potential futures for those who seek her help. In a health care system such as the Tumbuka's, where therapeutic intervention is based on etiology, these prophetic diagnoses are crucial to clinical efficacy.

For the past twenty years Luŕemba had been practicing her healing art. She was now forty-three and divorced for the third time. It is hard

for a woman to be a full-time *nchimí* and also fulfill her obligations as a Tumbuka wife. Luŕemba had recently moved her compound to land that her uncle had left her. Only one building had been completed so far, but it was fairly large by Tumbuka standards. It had enough space to house Luŕemba and her assistants—at that time there were three women and one young man “in training”—plus a large room for dancing *vimbuza* and receiving patients. The compound, however, was nowhere near the size of her previous *chipatala* (lit. ‘hospital’) in Nkhata Bay on the shores of Lake Malawi. There, among the lakeshore Tonga, she was well known for her abilities as a diviner-healer, and many people sought her services. But at her current site on her uncle’s land, she had yet to establish her reputation.

Luŕemba’s compound was located in the Henga Valley, the heart of Tumbuka country, some 100 kilometers from Nkhata Bay. The Henga is well known for its powerful healers, and early on I decided to make it the center of my research activity. Bounded by the Nyika Plateau to the west and the Vipya Mountains in the east, it has within its borders a number of sacred geographical sites. Where the South Rukuru River turns northeast to enter the valley, there is the Njakwa Gorge, a dramatic formation of large boulders that since ancient times has been used as a place to pay respects to the *mizimu* (ancestors). Next to this gorge is Njakwa Hill, which is said to be frequented by many spirits and is regularly visited by healers searching for powerful medicines. Farther north are the Pwezi Falls, the location of an ancient and important rainmaking shrine that is still in use today.¹ The ancient sites and long history of settlement in the Henga Valley—Bantu-speakers first came there some seventeen hundred years ago,² accounting for the valley’s abundance of ancestral spirits—along with the belief that the surrounding hills and mountains are the favorite haunts of spirits of all kinds, have imparted a kind of sacred geography to the whole valley. People from all over this part of Africa travel to the Henga and its environs in order to consult with and receive treatment from one of the many *nchimí* who live there.³

By moving to the Henga, Luŕemba was returning to her ancestral land and, in a sense, to the wellspring of her spiritual power. It was there that she first was struck with the “disease of the prophets” (*inthenenda ya uchimi*). Her symptoms included severe headaches and general body malaise, and she began having dreams of the ancestors, a sure sign of the healer’s calling. Given the concentration of healers in this area, when Luŕemba became sick it was fairly obvious, and not in the least unusual, that she had been stricken with the healer’s disease.

The illness began while she was married to Chikanje, her first husband, an *nchimí* healer himself, who at the time was just beginning to establish his own business along the main tarmac road that cuts the Henga Valley from north to south.⁴ When Luŕemba didn’t respond to conventional treatment, Chikanje danced the question—divined the cause of her illness—and confirmed that she was indeed afflicted with the disease of the prophets. Reluctantly, considering the problems entailed in having his spouse as a patient, Chikanje took his wife on as a *mutwasa*, a “new moon.” Thus Luŕemba started on the path toward becoming a prophet healer, learning about the many medicines a healer must know, about how to interpret and direct her dreams, and, above all, about how to dance her disease. These developments put a severe strain on her marriage, and within a year she and Chikanje divorced. It was shortly after the divorce that she left the Henga Valley and began her own business in Nkhata Bay.

Ten years had passed there, along with two more marriages, when Luŕemba’s ancestors came to her in a dream and told her to move to the land that had been left to her by her uncle. The land was not far from her first husband’s compound, and given her previous history with Chikanje and her successful business in Nkhata Bay, she understandably resisted the move. But the *mizimu*, the ancestors, are demanding, and if one does not obey their wishes then one risks illness or worse (see chapter 2). Shortly after this dream, Luŕemba became ill—she felt “a big lump” in her stomach that was “pulling her heart,” making it difficult to breathe—and had to cease her practice. She quickly realized that the only road to recovery was the road to her ancestral home.

When I arrived at Luŕemba’s compound, her illness had stabilized, but she was still subject to serious relapses, sometimes lasting for days. Although she had yet to establish herself firmly as an *nchimí* at her new location, within a relatively short time she had already begun to attract a substantial following.

About a week after I settled in, I approached Luŕemba about the possibility of dancing. For the past year I had been spending at least two and often three nights a week attending all-night sessions of *vimbuza* dancing. At last I wanted to try “doing” what I had been watching. It was not as though I had not been an active participant in *vimbuza* before this: by the time I asked to dance, I had learned enough drumming to be able to play for the spirits, had taken dream medicine to be able to “see” in my dreams, had had those dreams interpreted by *nchimí* as portents for the future and as indicators of witch activity by locals, had been given special *mbooni* beads to wear around my wrist to

serve as a "telephone to the spirits," and, in general, was considered by most Tumbuka to be someone who was afflicted by the spirits.

For the most part, my transactions with the Tumbuka I lived and worked with were based on their perception of me as an Mzungu, a European, who was learning to become an *nchimi*, a dancing prophet. Most villagers believed that I, too, had the "disease of the prophets" and was living in the compounds of *nchimi* in order to learn their healing art. It was generally assumed that I would go back to America and start my own "business." By dancing *vimbuza* that night, I was merely confirming the fact.

Nchimi such as Luŕemba were well aware of my research intentions but nonetheless often pushed me in the direction of becoming a healer. On more than one occasion they interpreted events as signs of the power of my ancestors, of the spirits inside me, and of their desire that I learn the "business" of *nchimi*. On my part, I neither promoted nor discouraged this perception, but accepted events as they unfolded.

Until I came to Luŕemba's, I had never danced, though for some time I had been interested in trying. For whatever reasons, before my arrival at Luŕemba's the circumstances had never seemed right. Perhaps by the time I was at her compound, I felt my position in the community of healers was secure, and since this was my last research stay, I had nothing to lose. I had not reached the decision to dance prior to my arrival, but once at Luŕemba's, I made a firm commitment to myself that I would dance *vimbuza*.

Vimbuza—a multivocal term, a complex of meanings and references—encompasses a class of spirits, the illnesses they cause, and the music and dance used to treat the illnesses. As spirit, *vimbuza* is the numinous energy of foreign peoples and wild animals; as illness, it is both a spirit affliction and an initiatory sickness; as musical experience, it is a mode of trance. For patients possessed by *vimbuza* spirits, trance dancing is a cooling therapy; for adepts, it is the means for transforming a disease into a vocation, and for healers, it is the source of an energizing heat that fuels the divination trance. Although I was neither afflicted by the spirits nor about to divine anything, when I approached Luŕemba about dancing, she was receptive to the idea and arranged for me to dance that night.

Word travels fast in the North, and by sunset a good-sized crowd had gathered at Luŕemba's to watch the Mzungu dance *vimbuza*. I started to have second thoughts about what I was doing, but in the name of research I decided to swallow my pride, let go of my inhibitions, and participate in the dance as fully as possible, even if it meant

making a fool of myself. This was a distinct possibility, considering that I had never tried to dance *vimbuza* before and had no idea of exactly what I was going to do.

I had heard and seen more than enough *vimbuza*, however, to know the progression of events and generally what kind of behavior was expected from a dancer. After the drums had been tuned by being heated over an outside fire and then brought inside the main building, a few songs were raised by women in the crowd. As these songs were sung, and as the master drum, *ng'oma*, began to sound the spirit-specific rhythmic mode of one of the *vimbuza* spirits, several of Luŕemba's assistants began to dress me in the standard *vimbuza* dance outfit. This kit consists of a number of pieces of dangling metal (idiophones) wrapped around the waist and legs, and a skirt, *mazamba*, made out of either animal skins or cloth that has been cut into many thin strips. The dance paraphernalia both enhances the visual movement of the dance (the skirt sways to the movement of the hips) and transforms this movement into sound through the strategic placement of the idiophones. Iron jingles (*nyisi*) are strapped around the ankles, which gives sound to the rhythmic movement of the feet, and a belt (*mang'wanda*) with many triangular pieces of folded tin hanging from it is worn around the waist. When the hips are shaken, which is the central movement of most *vimbuza* dances, the *mang'wanda* sounds, adding a loud and distinctive timbre to the overall musical texture. In essence, the dancer's body, through these idiophones, is transformed into a musical instrument. This aspect of music making in rituals of affliction such as *vimbuza* has been virtually ignored by ethnographers—including ethnomusicologists—even though it is often an essential part of the performance matrix—but more about this later.

I did not possess a healer's special dress—the most common form being a short red skirt and a top embroidered with white crosses—so I improvised as best I could. Wearing red gym shorts, a black tank top, and the full *vimbuza* kit, I must have been quite a sight. I sat down in front of the drums with my legs outstretched before me, as I had seen so many other patients do, and waited for the music to heat up the spirits.

From the very beginning of this "fieldwork exercise," I held no illusions that the *vimbuza* spirits would actually heat up and possess me. It was not that I questioned the phenomenon of possession by the *vimbuza* spirits, for I had been a witness to that experience, but rather that I questioned what kind of access I could have to this world while still carrying a considerable load of my own cultural baggage. I couldn't

imagine letting go of my ego to the extent necessary to be able to let the *vimbuza* in. My goal was not to become possessed but to approach the experience as an opportunity to encounter at least some of the physical manifestations of dancing *vimbuza*. It had become increasingly clear to me during my research that in order to gain a better understanding of this bodily mode of awareness, I must somehow enter into—as best I could given my limitations as researcher—the physical reality of this danced experience.

As I sat in front of the drums, I felt a bit nervous, not so much about dancing in front of so many people—that was a given—but about the possibility that somehow I would be surprised and in fact the *vimbuza* would come. Somehow, having been immersed in the healing culture of *vimbuza* for the past year, I might have been unconsciously converted to a new way of seeing—or, more appropriately for *vimbuza*, hearing—a new way of being-in-the-world that included possession by the *vimbuza*. Like Maya Deren (1953: 259–60), in her experience with the *loa*, I might begin to feel my body sink into the music. The cultural expectations generated by the context of the performance in which I found myself were so strong that my skepticism about possession by the *vimbuza* was weakened.

I had been aware of the considerable pressure, both covert and overt, applied to new patients in these situations to fulfill cultural expectations of becoming possessed. But to experience these pressures through the filter of my own experience gave them an immediacy and reality that they had lacked in my speculations about the experiences of others. There were well over one hundred people crammed into the *thempi* that night, and as is the case with any new patient, I was the focus of this focused gathering (to use Goffman's [1961] terminology of the everyday). Regardless of what I thought I was doing at the time, people were singing, clapping, and drumming for the explicit purpose of heating the spirits within me.

As I listened to the music, I concentrated my attention on the drums. I tried to recapture previous moments when, late at night, the drumming seemed to transcend its existential space. At those times, distinctions between subject and object began to break down. If I let myself become immersed in the sound of the drums, in the metrical shifting of two- and three-beat rhythmic configurations (see chapter 5), the drumming would sound close to my ears. Within that experience, I would no longer be able to tell whether the sound was coming from inside or outside of my head. But as I listened, nothing changed. Waiting for the spirits, obviously, was going to be a fruitless gesture, and al-

though it wasn't exactly a Kierkegaardian leap of faith, it was with a certain amount of belief that I stood up to dance.

The majority of *vimbuza* dances are centered on a core kinesthetic movement that involves shaking the hips in rhythmic synchronicity with the lead drumming. The purpose of this dance movement does not seem to be purely dance oriented, for it is aimed partly at sounding the *mang'wanda* idiophones that are tied around the waist—hence my earlier designation of the human body as musical instrument. This hip shaking is usually done in a stationary position, with the balls of both feet in contact with the ground while the heels move up and down in time to the drums. The heel movement, of course, causes the *nyisi* (ankle jingles) to sound.

My first attempts at dancing were based on this core movement. To my surprise, and I believe to the surprise of most people in attendance, I began giving a fairly credible performance of the basic *vimbuza* dance. Two things struck me almost immediately: dancing *vimbuza* was physically taxing, and it felt good to dance. When I got my hips to synchronize with the basic six-pulse pattern of the drums, I felt as if the drums were moving my hips for me. Although the dancing was physically exhausting, it nevertheless seemed effortless while I was doing it.

As I gained some confidence in my dancing ability, I began to try different styles that related to different types of *vimbuza* spirits. Often a *vimbuza* dancer will walk over to the master drum and begin playing the rhythmic signature of the spirit that wants to dance next. Trying to "act" in accordance with standard *vimbuza* behavior, I went over to the *ng'oma* and began playing the distinctive rhythmic motto for *vyanzusi* (see chapter 5), one of the most important of the *vimbuza* spirits. By playing this rhythmic motto, I was doing more than indicating a spirit type; I was calling forth an entire historical field of action for the *Tumbuka*.

Vyanzusi is the spirit of Ngoni warriors, an Nguni-speaking people from the Natal region of South Africa who invaded Malawi in the nineteenth century.⁵ They were warrior herders who left their homeland, fleeing the upheavals caused by Shaka, the military chief who forged the Zulu nation. The nineteenth century was a period of turmoil throughout this part of Africa, with the Ngoni raiding and conquering peoples as they made their way to the northern region of Malawi, where they eventually subjugated most of the *Tumbuka* population.⁶ There they found good pasture for their cattle and began to build permanent villages. But as so often happens with conquering peoples, as time passed the Ngoni were gradually incorporated into the local traditions.

Today, Ngoni culture has, for the most part, disappeared in the Henga Valley.⁷ Much of what remains is manifested through the *vyanusu* spirits.

When *vyanusu* possesses someone, the person dances in *vyanusu* style, which is modeled loosely on the dances that were performed by Ngoni warriors in the royal cattle kraäl (Friedson 1994a). Before giving a verbal report to the paramount chief on the details of a battle, warriors would enter the kraäl and recount their heroic deeds through the *ingoma* dance. Only those who had entered the enemy's stockade or who had killed a man were allowed to dance. Often warriors would receive promotions or rewards based on their dancing.

As I played the rhythmic signature of *vyanusu* on the *ng'oma* drum, and as the *mphimingu* supporting drum joined in with its characteristic invariant rhythmic pattern, the women began to raise one of the *vyanusu* songs. Typical of these songs, it was sung in chiNgoni, a language virtually no one could speak any longer, and so no one understood the meaning of the words they were singing:

Mugwede unandi we
Unandi Mugwede uyasula mazilikani
unandi Mugwede

Content in *vimbuza* songs for the most part—and despite the emphasis and importance given to the texts of songs by folklorists, anthropologists, and historians—is not nearly so important to the Tumbuka as the fact of singing, of making music together, something I deal with in more detail later.

It was only just before I left the field that I met one of Luŕemba's "elder fathers" (uncle), a wizened old Ngoni man in his late eighties or early nineties, who could translate the song. He had the traditional elongated earlobes that were physical markers of Ngoni men who had worn large beads of ivory wedged into holes slit in their ears. When I played him the song on my tape recorder, he immediately recognized it and explained:

solo *Mugwede unandi we*
Mugwede is too much.

chorus *Unandi Mugwede uyasula mazilikani unandi Mugwede*
Mugwede troubles the white soldiers too much.

Mugwede was a famous *isanusi*, an Ngoni witchsmeller and diviner. The name *vyanusu* is taken from this chiNgoni word, and there is a rich association *nchimbi* make with the divinatory powers of these Ngoni diviner-healers.

It seems that in the 1920s, the British commissioner for the North, a Mr. MacDonald, decided to expose the "witchdoctors" in his district as frauds. He called all of them together at his station and asked them to explain the blood on his front door and what had happened to his money that was missing. As part of their duties as diviners, *izanusu* (plural of *isanusi*) were often called on to find lost or stolen objects. Of all the *izanusu* gathered, only *Mugwede* correctly divined that the commissioner himself had put the blood of a goat on the door and hidden a coin in his wife's shoe. It is said that all the other *izanusu* were banned from practicing their vocation, but not *Mugwede*, who on that day was "too much."

As the *kwawa* ("choir," a term taken from the church), sang about *Mugwede* and the drummers sounded the mode of *vyanusu*, I was handed a short stabbing spear, which is symbolic of the Ngoni and, in a deeper sense, of the upheavals of all of southern Africa resulting from Shaka's conquests.⁸ I had seen this dance performed many times and had a fairly good idea of what to do. As I danced *vyanusu* and stabbed at the air with the spear, I caused quite a sensation in the crowd. There was much ululation (*inhanguru*) from the women and good-natured laughter from the men. From this point onward, there was a palpable rise in the excitement level inside the *temphi*.

About half an hour into the dance, the special *nkufi* clapping was performed for me.⁹ Clapping in African music is much more than merely an accompaniment to singing; in *vimbuza* it is further differentiated into particular styles that have symbolic import. When singing, most people clap with their hands held flat and parallel to each other. This is generally referred to as *mapi*. For clapping in the *nkufi* style, the hands are cupped and held at a 90-degree angle to each other. This clapping style is traditionally done to pay respects to chiefs and other important personages, and it can be found throughout central, southern, and southeastern Africa (see Wills 1985: 24, 71). In the context of *vimbuza*, it is used to pay respects to the spirits.

While I was dancing, two of Luŕemba's assistants grabbed my hands and pulled me down to the floor. The assistants and Luŕemba gathered around me and began to clap in the *nkufi* style in order to talk to the spirits within me. Clapping in a slow, steady rhythm, Luŕemba apologized to the spirits:

Pepani, pepani
 Sorry, sorry,
Nhenda va mphepo zinai
 Disease of the four winds.

As is always done, she asked them not to come harshly but to be gentle. Lußemba told them that they should not "bind the feet" but feel free "to come play with their children." Then, following standard procedure, as an offering to the spirits, a silver coin was placed in a plate of maize flour (*ufu*), which was then covered with another plate that had a red cross painted on it.¹⁰ These plates are called *mboni* [lit. "witness"], which is also the name for the beads healers wear around their wrists to keep open the lines of communication to the spirit world. As the plates were taken away, a new song was raised, and I began to dance again.

People were singing about the *vimbuza umphanda*, a spirit from Zambia:

solo *Banyimiraachi morozi*
 Why have you dug me [wild tree]?
ndiyo mphanda baliranga
 That's the *mphanda* you were crying for.

chorus *Hele yayi, Zanga undirye*
 Hele yayi, come and eat me.

This song is very old (*kale chomeni*), and no one was really sure what it meant. Some Tumbuka thought that eating the *mphanda* might be about possession by the *umphanda* spirits, while others suggested that the song was about a medicine for this kind of spirit possession.¹¹ Once again, the lyrical content and meaning of *vimbuza* songs do not seem to be a main focus for those who are singing.

The dance of this *vimbuza* is fairly complicated and involves a crossing of the feet. Although I had seen the dance many times before, I was unsure whether I could perform it. After standing up from the *nkufi*, however, I found myself doing the dance without really thinking about it. My body just sort of took over and followed the distinct rhythmic motto of the *umphanda* spirits (see appendix B). I can remember dancing and feeling that my perception was becoming detached from my body. It was almost as if I were watching someone else dance.

When reflecting back upon dancing *umphanda*, it occurred to me that I perhaps reflexively experienced something similar to the way Tumbuka learn to dance *vimbuza*. In a way, no one *learns* to dance *vimbuza* in that no one practices dancing or has someone show him or her how to do it: Children may play at being possessed and simulate the *vimbuza* dance, which may be construed as a kind of practice, but there is no systematic training involved in *vimbuza*. When you become possessed, you dance. In my case, I believe it was a matter of having watched this dance for over a year and, through a process of osmosis, having learned how to do it without rehearsal. From the time they are babies, most Tumbuka are exposed to the world of *vimbuza*, which is simply a part of everyday life. By the time they are adults, Tumbuka are ready to participate fully in this world without the benefit or need of "practice," itself a Western concept not applicable to much African performance.

In the context of *vimbuza* dancing, competence in performance needs to be understood as part of an everyday, generalized, background understanding. And although the content of this everyday background is very different from that of everyday life in the Western postindustrial world, it nevertheless has the same kind of ontological status and function. The difference, of course, is in the kind of world that it reveals.

For the next hour I shifted back and forth between several different kinds of *vimbuza* dance, until I became so exhausted I could no longer stand, let alone continue to dance. The *vimbuza* kit was removed and I sat down in the chair next to Lußemba, exhausted, drenched in sweat, but feeling a calmness that I had never felt before. Dancing *vimbuza* was an intense, cathartic experience that had left me physically and emotionally drained.

As I sat there, I became aware that my internal dialogue, that voice of consciousness, had stopped. My conscious awareness seemed to be much more diffused throughout my entire body, as opposed to being centered in my head. It seems that my physical body had experienced *vimbuza* as much as my thinking self had, if not more. But this is a way of interpreting experience which assumes that the mind and body are somehow separate entities, and implicit in this assumption is the priority of the mind over the body. If anything—at least according to Merleau-Ponty's (1962) phenomenology—in actuality the body always has priority, for conscious awareness comes out of this realm of existence. Nevertheless, for those of us inculcated in the metaphysics of a split between mind and body, it is hard not to interpret experience in these terms. I often—though not always—experience myself as a think-

ing subject. On the night I danced *vimbuza*, however, I experienced not so much the absence of this phenomenon but its transformation.

After I danced, several other people donned the *vimbuza* kit and danced to cool the *vimbuza* spirits inside them. The whole session lasted until the early morning hours, when people left to return to their home villages or found places to sleep at the compound until daylight. I returned to my room, looking forward to a restful sleep.

As I was about to go to sleep, Luŕemba unexpectedly came into my room, handed me the *mboni* plates with the flour and coin in them, and instructed me to put them under my pillow. She told me that by sleeping with the plates beneath my head, I would have powerful dreams, which I should be sure to remember in order to tell her the next day. That night I had a dream I did not understand but which I now believe was pointing toward the reality of the *vimbuza*—a reality I did not realize until well after I had returned to the United States.

The dream had no plot per se, only one concentrated action, but it was packed with emotional content. In the dream I am standing in a featureless landscape, an unformed darkness. Someone comes up behind me, someone I can't see, and whispers in my ear one word, "Mulaula," the name of a *vimbuza* spirit from the eastern shores of Lake Malawi and also the name of one of the most famous *nchimini* in the North. The instant this name is whispered, my whole body seems to leap out in front of me. It is as if my body space is elastic, with the front part stretching outward and upward.¹² Along with the expansion of my body, I feel a tremendous exhilaration. I immediately woke up, feeling this exhilaration but also feeling somewhat anxious, as if I were about to lose part of myself.

The next morning I told Luŕemba my dream. She smiled and told me it was the *vimbuza*, that this was the way the spirits came. I wasn't quite sure what she meant, but I had learned to accept an *nchimini's* explanation at face value. For the next several days I found myself returning frequently to the scene in my dream and puzzling over what it had meant.

The dream, for me, was an expression of unconscious contents in symbolic form, but at the time, nothing came to me about what those contents were or what meaning was embedded in the symbols. Of course, many psychoanalytical interpretations could be read into the dream—inflation of the ego, for one—which may well have been applicable. But whether applicable or not, they would still be unintelligible within the *vimbuza* idiom. I wasn't sure of the significance of the

dream, but what did stay with me was the vivid memory of the intense feeling of exhilaration and anxiety I had felt.

For Luŕemba, my dream was not a symbolic process but an actual encounter with the *vimbuza*. Dreams do not have the same ontological status for the Tumbuka that they have for those of us in the West whose perceptions of the psyche have been shaped by depth psychologies. For the Tumbuka, dreams are *real*. When a Tumbuka dreams of a visit from his dead grandfather or of traveling to a neighboring village, or when an *nchimini* dreams of going into the bush to be shown medicinal herbs by an ancestor, it is not taken as a fiction of the mind but as a reality of the soul. According to the Tumbuka, a person has multiple souls, some of which are detachable from the physical body. One of these souls, a kind of dream soul, can leave the body through the ear when a person is asleep and can travel about.¹³ This is why one must be careful when waking someone up. If the soul hasn't returned before the person awakes, the person could die or become seriously ill. For the Tumbuka, there is no sharp demarcation between the reality of waking consciousness and the reality of dreams. Events in both realms have the same status of reality.

Having the same status does not mean, however, that they share the same reality. The Tumbuka are not lost in a Lévy-Bruhlian *participation mystique* (1923). There is no question that they clearly differentiate between the reality of waking consciousness and that of dreams. They do not, however, dichotomize the two into real and unreal (hallucinatory phenomenal), as we tend to do in the West. For the Tumbuka, these two realities have an equal ontological status.

In this context, someone really did speak the name Mulaula, and my body actually did begin to expand. I eventually began to realize that what Luŕemba was telling me was that the meaning of the dream was not hidden in some deep symbolic content but was, in a sense, on the phenomenal surface of the dream, in the reality of the action. And when I finally began to think of the dream in those terms—which is not a psychological thinking but essentially a phenomenological one—the meaning of the dream became clear to me, at least within the confines of *vimbuza*.

In the dream, the whisperings of the invisible *vimbuza* caused my "self" to expand, creating a space within me, an opening, a clearing. Significantly, it was the *sound* of the word Mulaula that caused this expansion. Reflecting on this experience now, I believe that the dream was an expression of the dynamics of spirit possession. In order to be

possessed by the *vimbuza* spirits, there must be a space created in oneself in order to accommodate the possession. The logic of the trance of spirit possession dictates that another personality takes over the will, and for this to be accomplished, I realized, there must be an opening, or clearing, of interior space in oneself to accommodate the new spirit personality. In other words, I had to be willing to displace myself, my ego consciousness, and the space created by this sacrifice would be filled by the *vimbuza*.¹⁴ The phenomenon of spirit possession is an opening of interior space: the resulting possession is a being-in-it. In *vimbuza*, this space is projected through musical means.

During my stay at Luŕemba's, I had several more of these dreams. In each dream I seemed to be expanding a little further, letting go a little more, but also becoming more concerned about what was going on. I had only a short time left in the field, and one day I found myself deciding that my research was becoming redundant and I had more than enough material to serve my purposes, and therefore it was time to leave. Perhaps the *vimbuza* were becoming too much of a reality for me, and subconsciously I decided I needed to distance myself from the situation in order to maintain my balance as a researcher—to remain a participant-observer and not become wholly immersed in the first part of the equation.

I often think now that eventually, if I had stayed longer at Luŕemba's, one night when I danced I would have taken the final step of letting go, and the *vimbuza* would have entered. The thought has crossed my mind lately, however, that perhaps this already had happened the first night I danced, but I was unaware of the new reality I had encountered.

Kulota/To Dream

My dreaming and dancing, of course, were not the dreaming and dancing of an *nchimĩ* healer. For an *nchimĩ* like Luŕemba, to dream is to communicate with the ancestral *mizimu* spirits, and to dance *vimbuza* is to enter a divinatory trance where potential futures are revealed and the causality of the past is disclosed. The power of a healer rests in this ability to gain access to, and maintain contact with, the invisible world of the spirits. To dream and to dance are essential to an *nchimĩ*'s healing art.

Every Wednesday and Saturday night, Luŕemba dances *vimbuza* at her compound in order to "heat" (*kuwonda*) her spirits (fig. 1). For



Fig. 1. Luŕemba dancing *vimbuza* for divination

nchimĩ, musical heat has alchemical-like abilities in its power to transform phenomenal reality. It is in the act of dancing *vimbuza* that the ancestral *mizimu* and foreign *vimbuza* spirits are "melded together" (the term the Tumbuka use), creating the necessary conditions for an *nchimĩ* to "see" (*kuwonda*).¹⁵ Through the divination trance, Luŕemba diagnoses the illnesses of patients who have come to her for help, and most importantly, she determines the causes of those illnesses—in other words, establishes etiologies. In the indigenous health care system of the Tumbuka, therapeutic intervention is shaped by the discovery of which pathogenic agent is responsible for the illness (see chapter 2).

During the day, before a session of *vimbuza* dancing, Luŕemba spends some time sleeping in order to dream about what will happen that night. According to Luŕemba, dreaming is not something that *she* does; it is something done by the *mizimu*: "Everyone has *mizimu* because you dream—that's what makes you dream. What makes me see

in dreams of home is the *mizimu* goes there and brings me pictures of what is there." Dreams confirm the reality of the *mizimu*, and the *mizimu* confirm the reality of dreams.

From the very beginning of an *nchimbi's* career, dreams play an important role. Special dreams about the ancestors differentiate *nchimbi* from ordinary Tumbuka afflicted by the spirits and are one of the first signs that a person has been called by the spirits to become a healer. Sometimes these dreams are straightforward: Luŕemba's *mizimu* simply came to her in a dream and told her she would become an *nchimbi*. But sometimes these initial dreams can be extraordinary, having an almost visionary or religious quality about them. Such was the case with Mulaula, the healer whose name was whispered in my dream.

When Mulaula was nineteen he died for the first time. This wasn't a complete death but a "small death," or what we would call a coma. One morning on his way to school he unwittingly stepped over *nyanga* [witch medicine] hidden at a crossroads. By the time he reached school he was very ill, and by the time his father arrived to take him home he was already in a coma. During this small death, Mulaula relates, he had the following vision/dream:

A white dove came from the direction of the sunrise, right from the rays. When it got close its wings changed into the hands of a person. A cloud came and covered the dove, and when the cloud opened there was a man dressed in white robes. The cloud closed again and when it opened a second time, once again there was a dove. A third time the cloud closed, and when it opened the man reappeared but this time he was standing over my head. He turned back into a dove and flew away west.

When I asked Mulaula what this dream meant, he explained that it was his first encounter with the *mizimu*, the ancestors, who were calling him to become an *nchimbi*.

Shortly after this dream, Mulaula "died" again and had a second vision: "Upstairs in a house, doves were nested in reeds. The doves had necks like sheep." This dream was, for Mulaula, a further indication that he was to be an "mizimu man" [mizimu is the singular of *mizimu*—in other words, a prophet healer.

If doves, sheep, and white-robed men suggest a kind of biblical imagery, it is no coincidence. Christianity, which missionaries intro-

duced to northern Malawi over a century ago, is now a deep part of Tumbuka culture. Virtually all Tumbuka believe in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, in an everlasting heavenly peace for the righteous, and in damnation in hell for the wicked. Although these beliefs are now universal among the Tumbuka, their application to, and their degree of syncretism with, an indigenous Tumbuka worldview is not uniform. Religious syncretism operates along a continuum from the total rejection of traditional beliefs by conservative members of the Church of Central African Presbyterian (CCAP) to the highly syncretic models professed by most *nchimbi*. The word *nchimbi*, in fact, is glossed as "prophet" in the chiTumbuka translation of the Bible, and healers make a direct connection between themselves and the biblical prophets.¹⁶ *Nchimbi* are the ones who are carrying on the tradition of the Old Testament prophets.¹⁷

Mulaula certainly sees himself this way, and so do many of the people who come to him for help. He was well known beyond the confines of the Henga Valley as a powerful healer for he was the heir apparent to *Nchimbi* Chikanga, *nchimbi ya uchimi*, the prophet of prophets, who for the past thirty years had been the most famous and feared healer and witchfinder in this part of Africa. His *chipatala* [hospital] is even labeled on the official Malawian map of the North (Government of Malawi 1983: map 7).

When I was in the North, Chikanga had just returned from having been exiled for seven years by the central government to the southern city of Blantyre. The authorities had been concerned that he was acquiring too much power, and there were persistent rumors that rebels were infiltrating from the north and west through his compound. Chikanga had literally become a one-man antiwitchcraft movement—seven thousand people had come to see him in one day alone when he traveled to Zimbabwe—and the last thing President Banda's government wanted was another Alice Lenshina, a prophet and witchfinder who had started a virtual revolution in Zambia (van Binsbergen 1981). Chikanga had been back in the Henga Valley for only a month when I first met him, but already thousands of people were coming to his compound every week. But more about Chikanga later; here I want to concentrate on his relationship to biblical prophets, which was even more explicit than Mulaula's.

When Chikanga was nineteen, he, too, died and had a vision. But according to Chikanga and other people I interviewed, he did not die a little death, like Mulaula, but died completely for one day. In fact,

when he awoke (was resurrected?) he found his parents mourning over his body. While he was dead, Chikanga had the following dream:

I went to heaven and there were two ministers from the church. One of the ministers asked me what I was doing there, and I told him I had come to see God. He told me to go with the other minister who took me to another place where I found Daniel, Joseph, Elijah, and some others which I don't know. They gave me a chair, a very good chair, but before I sit down to that chair my grandfather came and said, what have you come to do here? I said I have come to see God, and he said no, no, this is not your time to see God. So my grandfather told those people, no, I want this man to go back. I didn't stop there. I said no, I want to see God. So those people took me to where my grandfather stayed, and then they showed me where God stayed, but it was very far and I could barely see. I was just seeing something funny there. But then I could see that Moses was staying next to God. Then I came back to that place, and those people there gave me an old Bible [Old Testament], a song, and a stick. At that time my name was Brighton, but those people told me now you are Chikanga [lit. "brave"/], do not fear anything. When I woke up there were many people in the house crying.

This dream seems to have a veracity to it—significantly, he did not see the face of God, which, according to the Jungian theory of archetypes, is an impossibility—that transcended his individuality, initiating a life transformation. The young man named Brighton became Chikanga, *nchimbi ya uchimi*, the prophet of prophets.

All *nchimbi* attest that their ultimate power comes from God. Christian prayers are said before each session of divination, and crosses are as common at an *nchimbi's* compound as at the local church. Mulaula wears a rosary around his neck. Luŕemba sometimes holds a Bible while she is divining a patient's troubles, and Chikanje, Luŕemba's first husband, frequently quotes chapter and verse from the Bible to explain to a patient what he has "seen." When I asked Chikanje why he used music and dance when he divined, he replied simply, "Psalms one hundred fifty."¹⁸

Most *nchimbi*, when asked why they became healers, responded that they had no choice, that it was the will of God. But God in this context must be understood as a synthesis of the Old Testament Jehovah and

the traditional Tumbuka supreme deity, Chitura. God is almighty, but just as Chitura created the world and then removed himself from the concerns of everyday life, so has Jehovah.¹⁹ If God is ultimately responsible for who becomes or does not become a healer, it is only in the sense of a "first cause." The spirits, the *mizimu* and *vimbuza*, are the active players in the world of human beings.

In northern Malawi, one does not choose to become a healer; one is chosen. The elect are called to their vocation—it is much more than a profession—through an affliction caused by the spirits. This affliction takes on the basic form that Eliade (1964: ch. 2) calls an "initiator sickness"; the person so afflicted will not get well until the calling is heeded.

Once elected by the spirits, most *nchimbi* undergo a relatively long apprenticeship—usually from one to two years—with an established healer. The choice of the healer under whom to serve one's apprenticeship is most often revealed to the novice by the *mizimu* ancestors in a dream. If an *nchimbi* divines that the person is, in fact, being called by the spirits to become a healer, then the person will move into the compound and become a member of the healer's community. Although many are called—at Mulaula's alone there were twelve novices in training—only a few actually become full-time professional healers.

As novices progress in their training, dreams take on an increasingly important role. Dreams may reveal new medicines (usually herbal compounds, which sometimes also include animal parts), where to find the ingredients in the bush, and for what purposes they may be used. In this manner, new compounds are continually added to the largely shared pharmacopoeia of *nchimbi*, keeping it an open-ended system. Dreams may also begin to foretell the future—the spirits may reveal a death that is soon to happen, or warn of an attack by one of the foes of all *nchimbi*, an *mfwizi* (witch). One morning, for example, Luŕemba told me that the night before she had seen in her dream two witches who were trying to enter the compound but who were turned away because her medicine protecting the compound was too strong. This medicine was itself revealed to Luŕemba by her late mother, who, in a dream, told her to get a white stone from Lake Malawi and special medicines from Tanzania and bury them in her compound. In dreams, one may also take journeys to discover what is happening at other villages or to find out who is responsible for certain illnesses—in other words, who bewitched whom. And, importantly, given the focus of this book, in dreams come many of the *vimbuza* songs that will be used to beat the *vimbuza* spirits and fuel the divination trance. For *nchimbi*

who maintain a correct relationship to their spirits, unparalleled knowledge is revealed through dreams. Future, past, and present are collapsed in dreamtime, giving *nchim*i access to a wider and deeper world than that of their fellow human beings.

Coterminous with this expanded world, and in many respects the gravitational center of the entire healing complex of the *nchim*i, is the *vimbuza* dance. Through the music and dance of *vimbuza*, the *nchim*i gains another entry point or opening to the numinous world of the spirits. It is from this opening that *nchim*i acquire the gift of "seeing." Dreaming is an internal and perforce a private process, whereas dancing is the public enactment of a healer's power and access to the spiritual realm. Much of what a healer achieves in his or her career is, in a sense, accomplished through the *vimbuza* dance, and much of what he or she becomes as an *nchim*i is a direct result of being able to control the spiritual energy generated in the music of the spirits.

Kuvina/*To Dance*

How is an *nchim*i's dancing different from mine? The answer is obvious, for we are worlds apart. More importantly, from a Tumbuka viewpoint, how is the dancing of a healer different from the dancing of ordinary Tumbuka who are afflicted by the *vimbuza* spirits?

After living in the compounds of healers for extended periods of time and observing *nchim*i, novices, and laymen dancing *vimbuza*. I was struck by the divergent possibilities inherent in the musical experience of trance. The same basic music would sometimes elicit a wild and potentially violent spirit possession in a novice or layman and at other times the controlled, remembered divinatory trance of an *nchim*i. Furthermore, depending on the circumstances of a particular trance episode, a novice or layman might have a relatively tame but still amnesic encounter with the *vimbuza* spirits, and under special circumstances an *nchim*i's trance might verge toward the chaotic.

Because music seems to be a constant—some quantitative changes accompany the divinatory trance, which I will discuss later, but they do not affect the point being made here—the locus for the change in the trance process must be in the healer's experience of the music. Locating the change within the healer's experience does not seem to be saying much more than the obvious: there is no different kind of music for the divination trance, and therefore the change is in the healer's relationship to the music. This, in fact, is one of Rouget's (1985)

main points, since for him it is evidence of the mistaken views of Neher (1961, 1962) and other supporters (e.g., Needham 1967, Walker 1972) of a physiological interpretation of music's effect on the phenomenon of trance.²⁰ What is more important, I believe, is that locating the changing nature of the trance within the experience of the *nchim*i turns the investigation into a phenomenological one, rather than a simple objective analysis. It emphatically does not become an analytic of subjective states, an investigation of a healer's internal psychology, but rather a phenomenological inquiry into that which is given. In the temple of a Tumbuka healer, that which is given first is musical experience.

When I asked Tumbuka who were not healers about their dancing, most replied that they didn't remember when they danced. They clearly made the point that it is not the person who dances, it is the *vimbuza* spirits. People don't dance to become possessed by the *vimbuza*, they dance because they *are* possessed.

Most *nchim*i, on the other hand, say that when they dance, not only do they recall the experience but they *must* remember, for if they didn't, how would they know what was wrong with their patients, or how to heal them? Most *nchim*i, however, during their initiatory sickness, become possessed by the spirits, and like ordinary Tumbuka afflicted by *vimbuza*, they dance but do not remember. As the special illness of the *nchim*i matures (*kudankha*) the way a fruit becomes ripe, the *vimbuza* dance is transformed from a trance of spirit possession, with its accompanying memory loss, into the divinatory trance of "seeing," which is characterized by the conscious remembering of the dance experience.²¹ During divination, the *vimbuza* spirits are still activated—that is, "heated" through drumming and singing—but their role in the trance changes from that of possessing spirit to that of numinous source of energy.

This maturation of the disease, which in essence is the transformation from patient to healer, relates to the change in an adept's relationship to musical phenomena. When novices are first brought before the drums, *vimbuza* spirits fully absorb the psychic space; the experience is amnesic. But as adepts learn to focus their dancing style, a "lucid form of possession" occurs (Oesterreich 1966), a kind of consciousness-doubling, which involves the co-presence of both person and spirit.

*Nchim*i healers are not just mouthpieces for the spirits. They are not mediums in the sense of being merely conduits for the spirits, as is the case, for example, with Korekore mediums in Zimbabwe, who are believed "to speak when possessed with the voices of long-dead spirits" (Garbett 1969: 105). In divination, *nchim*i healers speak to pa-

tients as themselves, but this is a self that has been transformed through contact with the realm of the spirits. This transformation involves an expansion of an *nchimí*'s being, for in this case, contact with the spirits involves an incorporation of spirit into the psychological body of the healer. There is no question that it is the *nchimí*, as an individual, who proclaims during divination, but it is an individual who is both himself and more than himself at the same time. The *nchimí*'s trance is not a loss of self—as these kinds of trances are so often described—but an expansion of self.

Consciousness-doubling in Tumbuka divination also entails a doubling of spirit type. The *vimbuza* spirits, by themselves, are not sufficient to enact the divination trance. Diviner-healers need also to incorporate the ancestral *mizimu* spirits in order to "see." The ancestors do not possess a healer during the divination trance but communicate within the trance. Ancestors may convey knowledge through dreams and visions, but they cannot physically possess someone. The foreign *vimbuza* are the only category of spirits who can possess, who can physically enter a person's body. For the Tumbuka, the crossing of the boundaries of the physical body is not a symbolic gesture but an existential reality.

This transformation of the *vimbuza* from possessing spirit to divinatory trance parallels the healer's transformation from novice to *nchimí*. In order for an *nchimí* such as Luŕemba to "see," which is the *sine qua non* of being a healer, she must bring the *mizimu* and *vimbuza* spirits into the correct alignment. As Luŕemba replied in response to my question about how this was accomplished: "Right in the dancing is where the *vimbuza* and *mizimu* mix." The desired configuration is brought about through the music and dance of *vimbuza*, which also involves a phenomenon of rhythmic doubling, something I deal with in chapter 5.

So long as the *vimbuza* spirits fully possess the novice during the dance, people consider them to be too "hot," and the *mizimu*, as it were, are shut out of the process. An important part of an adept's training to become a healer involves cooling the *vimbuza* (see chapter 3) just enough to allow the *mizimu*, as the Tumbuka put it, "to go on top," so that instead of possessing the dancer, the *vimbuza* act as a source of energy that "pushes" the *mizimu* "up," thus creating the necessary conditions for "seeing." This intricate dance of spiritual energy is configured within musical experience.

To understand musical experience in this case, we need first to investigate trance dancing as essentially a clinical praxis. In the Tum-

buka health care system, therapeutic intervention is determined by etiology, which in turn is determined through the divinatory trance of *nchimí* healers. Therefore, trance dancing is essential to an *nchimí*'s medical practice. It is during the public enactment of this divination trance—when healers dance their disease—that the disvalued states of patients are transformed into meaningful cultural forms of illness. Loss of appetite and shooting pains in the chest and legs are no longer just symptoms but part of a witchcraft-induced illness known as *chilaso*, and fast heartbeats, chills, and splitting headaches turn out not to be symptoms of malaria, as they were diagnosed by the medical assistant at the hospital in Rumpfi, but affliction by the *vimbuza* spirits.

In the terms of medical anthropologist Arthur Kleinman (1980), divination turns disease into illness—that is, it turns dysfunctional physical states into culturally shaped experiences. Although this view seems to give disease (at least so far as Western medicine is concerned) a preferential position, as physically "real," over the more socially structured concept of illness, Kleinman's point, as I take it, is that from a phenomenological perspective the cultural shaping of experience becomes part of the tissue of reality—specifically, a clinical reality—when issues of sickness and health are concerned. The "cultural construction of clinical reality" (ibid.: 360) has physiological effects both in the presentation of physical symptoms and in the healing process, something Daniel Moerman (1979: 59) calls the "enacting [of] cultural physiology." In Tumbuka healing, cultural physiology includes an embodied music, a musical experience that shapes clinical processes. Musical experience in the temple of an *nchimí* is first and foremost part of an indigenous medical technology.

Mizimu Radio

It seems strange to call music a technology. Music may be many things in the Western world—aesthetic object, entertainment, or commercial product to name a few—but it is rarely, if ever, thought of as a technology.²² Of course there is technology associated with music—for example, the making of musical instruments or the encoding of musical data on compact disks—but we don't associate the acoustic properties of music with the control and practical application of energy.

Though we do not relate expressive aspects of culture, such as music and dance, with technology, let alone with medical technology, this is exactly how Tumbuka healers speak of dancing prophets and

drummed spirits. When the Tumbuka speak of spirits, trance, and music, they tend to use metaphors that reveal this relationship to technological processes.

For the moment, I want to concentrate on one particular metaphor that I encountered from many different sources and that I believe is telling. It is a kind of linguistic opening for the outsider into the way *nchimimi* conceptualize and experience this technological musical process. Although the metaphor came in slightly different versions, it was put succinctly by Nchimimi Mulaula—the dreamer of doves and white robes—who seemed to have a knack for stating things clearly. When I asked him how *vimbuza* music helped him to “see,” he replied, “*Vimbuza* is the battery for the *mizimu* radio.” This metaphor, framed in technological terms, reveals a conceptual structure, what Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 235) call an “imaginative rationality.” Metaphors are always abstractions; this one is part of an indigenous theory about the relations between music, trance, and healing.

At first, the radio metaphor seemed to me to be an unusual choice to explain the workings of *vimbuza* in the divination trance. What does it mean to equate music with batteries and divination with a radio? Why choose a piece of Western hardware technology to explain the workings of music and spirits? Batteries and radios, as metaphorical concepts, are definitely more “experience-distant” (Geertz 1983: 57) for Mulaula than are *vimbuza* and “seeing.” Simply put, *vimbuza* has been a part of Tumbuka culture much longer than radios have. But as I heard other *nchimimi* use almost identical metaphors, and as I began to connect them with other metaphors people used to discuss divination, the battery metaphor not only emerged as a logical choice but also revealed itself as a core concept in a conceptual structure.

People construct their metaphors from what is at hand. In 1983 there were 1.06 million radio sets in use in Malawi (Government of Malawi 1987: 654); by 1987, the time of my research, there undoubtedly were considerably more. This averages out to be about one radio for every six people, with probably a much higher ratio in urban centers than in rural areas. This ratio is nowhere close, of course, to that in industrialized countries, where the question would be not whether someone had a radio but how many. Still, there are enough radios in Malawi that no matter where one travels, they are a prominent feature of the “soundscape,” to borrow Murray Schafer’s (1977: 3) term.

One of my first encounters with this aspect of the Tumbuka soundscape occurred shortly after I had arrived in the North. I had heard of an old *nchimimi* who lived in a remote village and decided to pay him a

visit. As I approached the village, after hiking for two hours into the bush, the sound that filtered through the trees wasn’t that of women singing as they pounded their maize, or of men passing the time playing the *bango* or *kalimba*, or even of children playing. It was the distorted sound of a radio playing at full blast the latest hit from South Africa.

Virtually every village (and healer’s compound) has at least one radio, which, by necessity, is battery powered, since rural areas are not on the national electrical grid. The radio is the main link with a wider world, the only form of mass communication readily available to rural Tumbuka. For many Tumbuka, radios have taken on more the aspect of a communal necessity than of an entertaining diversion. As a result, C- and D-cell batteries are prized commodities among the rural population. Indeed, the alkaline battery is probably the single most visible—and I should include audible, given its almost exclusive use in radios—sign of Western hardware technology in the rural areas of Malawi.

Batteries are relatively expensive items for the Tumbuka, and great care is taken to get the most use out of them. In that sense, I was a walking gold mine of battery power. My portable tape recorder, which used three D-cell batteries for power, was good for three hours of recording. After that the batteries failed to maintain a constant recording speed, but they were still usable for powering portable radios. Those used batteries became much-desired items because of the cost (and poor quality) of local Malawian batteries. To get more life out of the batteries, Tumbuka would put them in the sun “to heat up” because, according to both Malawian popular belief and some Western technical experts, this gives them longer life. Tumbuka heat *vimbuza* spirits and D-cell batteries.

Because of batteries’ association with radios, most Tumbuka make a direct connection between battery power and sound.²³ Batteries provide the energy that allows one to “open” a radio. Tumbuka don’t “turn on” radios, they “open” them, and when one opens a radio one hears music, the news, commercials, presidential speeches, and the usual panoply of broadcast programs. Nowadays one can, strangely enough, even hear programs of *vimbuza* music on MBC (Malawi Broadcast Corporation),²⁴ the only radio station in Malawi, which puts a kind of doubled mirror twist to the metaphor that “*vimbuza* is the battery for the *mizimu* radio.”

Actually, two sets of metaphors are embedded in Mulaula’s statement: battery/*vimbuza* and radio/divination. “*Mizimu* radio” is not the *mizimu* themselves but the divination trance. There is an internal relationship within each set—*vimbuza* is a battery, and divination is

a radio—and also a correlation between the two sets—batteries are to radios as *vimbuzza* is to divination.

The first metaphor, battery/*vimbuzza*, is about energy technology. Mulaula is making a correlation between two sources of energy—one produces electricity through chemical reactions, the other produces energy through music and dance. That Mulaula, like most Tumbuka and most Westerners, does not fully understand how batteries work does not affect the analogy in the least. Both are technologies in the sense that they are cultural means—batteries with their characteristic chemical reactions are as much a cultural artifact as are music and dance—of controlling energy for utilitarian purposes.

Music and dance in the context of *vimbuzza* are not for entertainment (though they may entertain), but for purposes of healing. Kapferer (1983: 178) makes a similar point in regard to Sinhalese exorcisms: "Sinhalese exorcisms are artistic forms. But their art is turned to the practical purpose of acting upon the problems which affect the lives of human beings in a mundane world." In both cases, music and dance are part of an indigenous healing praxis.

The second metaphor, which in Mulaula's statement is not as explicit as the first, for it is embedded in the phrase "mizimu radio," is about communication technology. Radios and divination transmit information, whether it be in the form of pop music on the radio or the revealing of who is a witch through divination. These communication technologies, for radios as well as divination, give "voice" to the invisible. Radios give sound to invisible radio waves; the divination trance gives sound substance to the invisible spirits. The invisibility of the spirits has important ontological and existential significance in Tumbuka culture, the implications of which I will deal with later.

Finally, Mulaula is saying something about the relationship between two different categories of spirits in Tumbuka culture. The spiritual realm is classified by the Tumbuka into two overarching categories based on a binary opposition that revolves around the origin of the spirit entity and its relationship to Tumbuka society. Any spirit that is not ancestral to the Tumbuka is classified as a foreign *vimbuzza* spirit. *Vimbuzza* are the quintessential spiritual embodiment of the "other." Significantly, during the divination trance, it is not the *vimbuzza* who "see," it is the *mizimu*, the ancestors of the Tumbuka. *Nchimini* never talk about "heating" their *mizimu* spirits. The *vimbuzza* are the source of energy, the "battery," for the *mizimu*, who, in a sense, "transmit" through the *ncimini*.

What emerges from these metaphorical associations—in essence,

what *ncimini* are saying when they say spirits are batteries and divination a radio—is that trance is part of an indigenous medical technology. For the Tumbuka, the music and dance of *vimbuzza* are the essential means by which to initialize and control this diagnostic procedure.

Music's status as part of a medical technology frames its phenomenological presence. This does not mean that healers and their patients do not experience an aesthetic dimension in *vimbuzza* dancing, drumming, and singing, but rather that it is precisely within the dimension of performance that music becomes a numinously charged process designed to call forth and shape spiritual energy. In doing so, it becomes not merely a technology in terms of an instrumentality of means and ends, but a technology in Heidegger's (1977) sense: a technology that reveals a world. The world that *vimbuzza* music reveals, however, is quite different from the one revealed by battery-powered radios and other modern Western technology.

The Technology of Trance

What is revealed through modern Western technology, according to Heidegger (1977: 3–35), is a world that is seen as a "standing-reserve" of energy waiting to be tapped. To say that this technological lens has not only revealed a particular kind of world but also helped to shape it is an understatement. It is an aggressive stance that surveys and orders all it sees as a waiting-to-be-used.

Modern technology approaches the world as a repository of energy waiting to be released, and when it is set free from its binding force in things, it is transformed and utilized in the production of goods. Thus the mountain is no longer part of a chain that arises from the earth but a storehouse of mineral resources. The river no longer is free to meander through the countryside but is a source of hydroelectric power. Even the arts become transformed into products waiting to be produced solely for their commercial potential to be used up.

There is an extreme danger in all of this, Heidegger warns us. The "revealing" of modern technology, of world as standing-energy-reserve, threatens to drive out all other kinds of revealing: "As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object, but does so, rather, exclusively as standing-reserve, and man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of the standing-reserve, then he comes to the very brink of a precipitous fall; that is, he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing reserve" (1977: 26–27). It is

no accident that we now speak of work forces, manpower, labor resources, and, not incidentally for this study, supplies of patients for hospitals. In this kind of unabated attenuation of presence, which is a "challenging" of the world, the possibility exists "that man will lose his true relation to himself and to all else" (Lovitt 1977: xxxiv). Everywhere everything will be brought under the ruling gaze of order and control. The Cartesian subject will reach its ultimate destination by relating all it surveys to itself as the constituting subject. The world will then become "enframed," and thus out of control. Human beings will become invisible as the pure relationship—the standing-reserve—between subjects and objects.

Was there a time in Western culture, Heidegger asks, when technology revealed a different possibility? Was there a way of technology that was a different mode of being-in-the-world? The answer for Heidegger, not surprisingly, lies with the pre-Socratic Greeks, for whom art and technology were one: "In Greece, at the outset of the destiny of the West, arts soared to the supreme height of the revealing granted them. They brought the presence of the Gods, brought the dialogue of divine and human destinings, to radiance. And art was simply called *technē*" (1977: 34). *Technē*, the etymological root of our word technology, was on a different order of revealing from that of standing-reserve, and art was more than aesthetic experience. The early Greeks participated in the very act of the revealing of Being—that is, technology was for them an art.

So it is for the Tumbuka, who, in their healing arts, bring the radiance of the gods through a music that is *technē*. The world that is revealed through the technology of *vimbuza* music is a bringing-forth that is not a challenging but a letting be, which results in a revealing that is, to use Heidegger's terminology, a "bursting-forth." What bursts-forth for trance dancers are the *vimbuza* spirits; it is an unconcealing of the numinous in the everyday—the sacred revealed through the profane, as Eliade (1963) puts it. Through music, the Tumbuka encounter their world in a primary reality that establishes, to paraphrase William Lovitt (1977: xxxiv), true relations to themselves and to all else, including, most importantly, the *vimbuza* spirits.

In Tumbuka divination, medical technology is part of musical experience, and musical experience a mode of being-in-the-world for both spirit and human. This is not merely the eccentricity of a specific cultural style informed by a system of religious beliefs—a medical practice grounded in free-floating concepts—all to be explained away as differences typically uncovered by ethnographers or ethnomusicologists. Mu-

sical experience, as a technological mode of being-in-the-world, takes on ontological significance as an authentic mode of existence. Authentic existence is not to be found in some kind of mystical experience but in the everyday, where possibilities unfold, where existential choices are made. For the Tumbuka, music, spirits, and trance penetrate the very fabric of everyday existence, an everyday where worlds are moved by spirits and spirits are moved by music.

The first night I saw a diviner-healer dance, I turned to the man next to me and asked him what the *nchimi* was doing. "He's X-raying the patients" was his reply. This brings up another metaphor, explicitly technological and medical in its associations. The divination trance is part of the health care system of the Tumbuka, just as X rays are part of Western medical praxis: they both serve in diagnosis. They both "see," but in different ways, revealing different worlds. The Westerner plugs in the machine, the Tumbuka plays music.