

CHAPTER 5

APOLLO AND DIONYSUS

In the Depths of El Culto



I wrote silences. I wrote the night. I recorded the inexpressible. I fixed frenzies in their flight.

— Arthur Rimbaud, in E. Hirsch, *The Demon and the Angel*

This chapter is the first of three to examine the Gitanos' religious engagement and the Gitano Pentecostal ritual practice of *el culto*. Like Arthur Rimbaud (1837 in Hirsch 2002), I find the experiences, moments and dynamics of *el culto* that seem to defy description the most interesting aspects of this ritual. However, attempts to 'fix frenzy' or to textualize experiences of a spiritual kind are of course contradictory; a more experienced colleague of mine even advised me to refrain from trying. He suggested: 'Maybe there are some things that we should just leave as they are and not try to put into words.' By 'some things', he was referring to phenomena of an 'inner' kind – religious experiences, such as states of ecstatic trance. I sympathize with his view. However, despite a well-known critique of phenomenological anthropology (e.g. Desjarlais and Throop 2011), I would say that there exists no scientific discipline better suited for the task than anthropology. Consequently, in this chapter I embark on the 'risky' journey of accounting for the inner moments, dynamics and processes of *el culto*, which I see as 'stranger than rational logic, deeper than will' – to replicate Hirsch's (2002: 78) description of the products of *el duende*, a concept that I will describe in just a short while.

In this and the subsequent two chapters, I address the following questions: What does *el culto* do? Where does its social productive force lie (i.e. what is produced from this ritual)? Why do participants engage so frequently and deeply? And what is at stake for the participants? I use these

questions as jumping off points for a wider exploration and seek to answer them abductively, à la Tavory and Timmermans (2014), through a constant ‘to-ing’ and ‘fro-ing’ between empirical findings and literary and theoretical resources.

The present chapter focuses on the *creyentes*’ inner religious experiences during *el culto*, often involving states of trance. I understand these experiences to include religious involvement of a particular rhythmic, spiritual, emotional, bodily, cognitive, aesthetic and social kind. Hence, I ‘unfold’ the ritual and its religious experience at both a personal and intersubjective level, with the aim of achieving a deeper understanding of its role in the lives, identity and sociality of the Gitanos of el Rastro.

Some issues along the analytical path of my interpretation of the ritual experiences of the *creyentes* might trigger some questions for the attentive reader. I will first describe and explain my analytical approach and then the reader can hopefully have this in mind while indulging in the analysis of the Pentecostal ritual of *el culto*. For Thomas Csordas (1990), the concepts of the ‘pre-objective’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 1964) and ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu 1977, [1984] 1993) guided his development of a cultural phenomenological analysis of charismatic healing (Csordas 1997) and his creation of a methodological ‘paradigm of embodiment’ (ibid. 1990) in the study of, for instance, glossolalia or healing among Charismatic Christian/Catholic practitioners.

For Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1964), our starting point as anthropologists should be the experience of perceiving because prior to perception we do not have any (culturally defined) objects, hence we need to focus on the experience of the ‘pre-objective’, ‘pre-figurative’ or the ‘pre-reflective’ (i.e. the *pre-abstract*) to be able to say anything about cultural or social productivity at all. Pierre Bourdieu’s conceptualization of ‘habitus’ offers a social analysis of cultural and social practice as ‘necessity made into a virtue’ (1977: 77), and his focus lies on embodied experiences of cultural structures and practices. But how is this shift from necessity to virtue experienced and embodied by its interlocutors? With a focus on how the ritual experiences of the *creyentes* effect both perception and practice, I seek to show the complexities between sensory modalities, social interaction and meaning attribution – through my interlocutors’ (and my own) experiences of these processes – in order to say something more generic about changes and continuities in their social and cultural practices and modes of perception.

Following Csordas (1990, 1993), I would say that one of the great advantages of an analytical focus on immediate embodied experiences and their creative potential for cultural and social productivity and change is its innate potential to transgress dualities. For Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1964), it

was the subject-object duality in the domain of perception that triggered his analysis of perception, objectification and the conceptualization of the ‘pre-objective’. Bourdieu (1977, [1984] 1993), on the other hand, sought to transgress the gap between structure and practice with his use of ‘habitus’. For such transgressions to work out, the methodological figure of the body needs to be non-dualistic as well. Marcel Mauss ([1935] 1968) foresaw what Csordas (1990) calls a ‘paradigm of embodiment’ and how such a paradigm could mediate fundamental dualities such as mind/body, sign/significance, existence/being. I will come back to Mauss later in my explorations of the synchronized, embodied ritual techniques and aesthetics of *el culto*.

Much of the ethnographic analysis of the Rastro Gitanos’ ritual, social and cultural practices that follows revolves around their ways of challenging, dealing with and incorporating simultaneously existing dualities. In fact, contrasting my phenomenologically inspired theoretical ambition of transgressing and even collapsing dualities, I argue in the upcoming chapters that the Gitanos of el Rastro uphold a range of simultaneously existing dualities – by intention or not – enabling the potential creativity that exists between such tensional opposites.

STUDYING RITUAL ‘IN ITS OWN RIGHT’

Central to this study is the power of ritual – and particularly religious ritual – in constituting sociality (i.e. shaping social life) (e.g. Rappaport 1999). I have so far analysed Rastro Gitano value systems, identity, sociality and livelihoods as phenomena produced both in relation to Payo society and *sui generis* – that is, in their own right. To comprehend the social productivity of ritual in the context of the Gitanos of el Rastro – that is, its potential for social re-creation, innovation and transformation – I equally seek to study ritual *sui generis* or ‘in its own right’.¹ Central to my analysis is Don Handelman’s non-universalist model, which aims ‘to comprehend social and psychological forms and patterns from within themselves, from the perspective of their “self-constitution”’ (2004: 29).²

With Turner, Geertz and even Leach, ritual was made into a ‘storehouse of symbols and scripts originating in the world outside ritual’ (ibid.: 2), aimed at informing and somaticizing participants to direct them to proper meaning and conduct in the outside world. This was ritual in Geertz’s (1973) terms, understood as a model of and for cultural worlds; in this sense, ritual is only ever a representation. Understandings of ritual as function follow the same logic as understandings of ritual as representation. Specifically, such understandings would emphasize the function of ritual in maintaining and manifesting social order. As an example, any celebration

that works to enforce the general social hierarchy operates as a functional rite. László Foztó's (2009) study of Roma rituals in Hungary is an example of an ethnographic analysis that seeks to address baptisms, confirmations, burials, oaths-taking and religious conversions in a functionalist way. In his study, he examines 'the communicative dimensions of local religious rituals and practices in order to show the role of religion in the creation and maintenance of the public sphere' (ibid.: 41), in other words, the implications of these rituals for the continuity of locality and local belonging, and for the 'maintenance and transformation of the moral self among the Roma' (ibid.: 121). A third understanding, besides representation and function, sees ritual as an arena for economic, political and social competition and conflict. Thus, although certain rituals may be epiphenomenal stores of cultural and societal treasure, with Handelman (2004) I say that they are not necessarily so, and we should dismiss any a priori theoretical assumptions along these lines. Rather, for us to determine the true role of rituals and their force in social productivity, it is necessary to ethnographically study their inner dynamics and practices.

This analytical choice has important methodological consequences. For this purpose, Handelman (2004) proposes a two-step model, which I see as both a methodological strategy and an epistemological position. First, the phenomenon (the ritual) must be analytically separated from its sociocultural surroundings. Only after the ritual's inner dynamics and self-generating force is carefully analysed can the ritual – in step two – be reinserted into its context to provide insight into the relation between the ritual and its environment. The first step is phenomenological, while the second is hermeneutical, seeking to draw meaning from the ritual's action and consequences. My analysis of *el culto* basically follows these two steps: first I examine the immediate, embodied experiences of the *creyentes*, including their own interpretations of these experiences, then, in a second step, I try to interpret their social effects and creative potential. Hence, following Handelman's approach (ibid.), I seek to identify the constitutive features of *el culto*, including its organization, practice and underlying cosmo-logics, without assuming, a priori, that these features are either representations or functions of the broader cultural and social order (allowing this to be revealed only through ethnographic discovery).

THE SELF-MAKING PROPENSITY OF RITUALS

Analysing a ritual 'in its own right' means paying attention to its self-organizing and autonomous capacity, relative to its sociocultural context. This perspective implies that the 'integrity' (i.e. autonomous quality) of the

ritual is seen as *phenomenal*, based on an assumption that the phenomenal world is constituted by phenomena that are culturally perceived – in other words, perceptually *created* – if we follow Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1964).

Social phenomena express various degrees of intra- and inter-relational complexity, in relation to their context. Hence, they exist ‘in their own right’ (i.e. they have self-integrity) but to varying degrees. So, in enacting his two-step model, Handelman (2004) aims at determining the degree of ‘integrity’ for each ritual: those with less integrity being more representational (e.g. celebrations, ceremonies and so on), while those with more integrity enjoy greater autonomy from the social order.

Followingly, a ritual with a high degree of complexity and capacity to self-organize and self-make – that is, with a strong autopoietic capacity – will also contain an internal organization that ‘produces the components that produce it’ (Bailey 1997: 86, in *ibid.*). To varying degrees thus, a phenomenon produces itself through the actions of its practitioners; in terms of ritual, we can say that participants produce the ritual that, in a sense, produces them (e.g. a ‘cultic habitus’, which I explore in Chapter 7). Such social autopoiesis is further seen to determine the extent of a ritual’s autonomy from its social context.

RITUAL AS ‘A DOUBLE MOVEMENT’

The final element in Handelman’s (2004) model that is relevant for my analysis is his introduction of the concepts ‘lines’ and ‘curves’ to distinguish less and more complex and self-generating rituals, respectively. Rituals with low self-organization draw a continuous parallel line to their social context. Such rituals include celebrations, mourning and baptism rituals, or a cock-fight (see Geertz 1973), the latter, in the context of Bali, serving as a prime ethnographic example.

Rituals of celebration, funerals and baptism appear with less frequency than *el culto* in the Rastro Gitano community and, apart from baptisms, these rites are conducted outside church and amongst close kin. During my fieldwork, I was invited to watch lengthy video recordings of weddings, but I was seldom invited to join such rituals of representation within the family sphere. Hence, my ethnographic material predominantly relates to the daily – and public – ritual of *el culto*.

At *el culto*, I observed that *el Pacto* (‘Holy Communion’, as described in Chapter 4) seemed to integrate both representational and functional qualities. For example, men were served the holy bread and wine before women, much as they were served first during meals at home. The credo that men should eat first was a frequent refrain among my Gitano companions in *el*

Rastro, and their explanation for this was that men provide most of the household income, and their energy level should therefore be prioritized to ensure their capacity to work. This was of course a truth that got contested and challenged on several occasions by both men and women, but it nevertheless functioned as a legitimizing explanation in settings where food was served.

In terms of social representativity, the difference between *el Pacto* and *el culto* as distinct rituals was also underscored by the former's relative lack of emotionality, passion and spiritual depth. Although accompanied by the singing of *las alabanzas* and conducted in a dimly-lit environment, *el Pacto* nevertheless appeared to me as an aspect of mundane life and daytime reality. Compared to *el culto*, *el Pacto* involved more light chatting, joking, mobile phone use and candy shopping by the *creyentes* as they waited to be passed the bread and wine. Thus, the ritual felt more social and economic than spiritual and religious. Even the women seemed to take this ritual with a good dose of humour and an almost festive attitude, despite (or perhaps because?) the men being centre stage. My feeling was that, as they participated in this ritual after a lengthy day at the Rastro Sunday Market, the *creyentes* were preparing for the Madridian night that awaited them, when many would meet up with friends and family and perhaps enjoy something to eat or drink. It was, in short, the ceremonial beginning of a nightly celebration that was repeated the first Sunday of every month.

In comparison, rituals with relatively more self-organization demonstrate more of a curve away 'from the immediate embrace of its sociocultural surround and moves towards self-closure and increasing self-integrity' (Handelman 2004: 12). Such curving, high-complex rituals have the potential to create radical changes in perception, self and society. Handelman (ibid.) considers such rituals a social 'torus', akin to Bateson's 'smoke ring', constituted through a double movement of inward curving and outward torquing. Seen in this light, they are separable yet inseparable from their social surroundings. Thus, through the motion of self-curvature, such rituals (and their participants) produce their own intentionality, organization, depth and direction.

Based on my ethnographic material and the theoretical resources presented thus far, I would argue that *el culto* contains many features of these latter rituals with high self-integrity and self-organization and strong transformative potential. Yet a rigid categorization of *el culto* as strictly 'inward curving' would be overly simplistic. Rather, from one moment to another within the same ritual occasion or from one day to another, *el culto* may shift from high to low autonomy, relative to the social context. Equally, different ritual participants operate differently in *el culto*, with some curving inwardly and behaving more deeply than others. Hence, Handelman's (2004) model

could be helpfully developed by including a relativization within each ritual, rather than only between each ritual and its social context.

The many and varied anthropological accounts of rituals support the idea that rituals do ‘something’. Within the tautological system of an inward curving ritual, cause and effect are brought together in a self-referential manner, with transformation serving as both the process and the product. On these grounds, I would argue that one of the great analytical advantages of studying ritual in and of itself – when the aim is to look at ritual as ‘constitutive of social life’ (e.g. Rappaport 1999) – is the potential to gain insight into the capacity for ritual to generate social and cultural transformation, creativity and innovation, according to its degree of complexity and self-organization.

THE INNER DYNAMICS OF RITUAL

My line of inquiry with respect to the transformative potential of *el culto* on Rastro Gitano perception, self and sociality, and the *creyentes*’ intense engagement with it, follows Bruce Kapferer (2004), who makes the ‘inner dynamics’ of ritual a primary object of study. Thus, with respect to *el culto*, I analyse the *creyentes*’ rhythmic, emotional, bodily, cognitive, aesthetic, symbolic and other movements (as well as pauses in movement), in addition to their moments of stasis and ecstasy, opening and closing, and potential and actualization. By emphasizing such *dynamics* over the ritual *process* (Turner 1969) – whilst acknowledging that both are implicit in the other – Kapferer (2004) argues that we can extend our understanding of ritual beyond that of symbolic meaning, reflexivity and representation. We can here see some parallels between Kapferer’s (ibid.) and Csordas’ (1990) views on glossolalia as carrying great potential for change and transformation due to its non-vernacular, non-semiotic and non-textual, yet embodied and emotionally apprehensible, language.

Seemingly in line with both Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1964) and Bourdieu (1977), Kapferer further suggests that an emphasis on ritual beyond representation and meaning establishes the inner dynamics of ritual as ‘the basis for construction of meaning and the extension towards new horizons of meaning’ (ibid.: 37). Moreover, he understands these inner dynamics as the structure of perception and cognition, ‘in which particular human potentialities both of experience and of meaningful construction may be formed’ (ibid.). In particular, he sees this as an ideal analytical strategy for rituals aimed at altering participants’ psychological and social circumstances, rather than those concerned with presenting the nature of apparent reality (e.g. certain parades and festivals).

Kapferer (2004) applies his analytical gaze to rituals that directly produce, construct and reinvent everyday realities. Building on the works of Van Gennep ([1909] 1960) and Turner (1969), he understands ritual as a process that can generate novel social and psychological circumstances, emphasizing its ability to ‘bring forth’ and change the very grounds of being, through cosmological, cultural, personal or relational inventions. A final point he makes, that is of interest to us here, is that ritual dynamics are first and foremost aesthetic – lying in ‘the quintessential domain of the symbolic’ (Langer 1942, 1953, in Kapferer 2004: 39) – and ‘it is through the dynamics of the symbolic in ritual and in the aesthetic (in the unity of feeling and form) that the distinct capacities of human consciousness and mind and the potentialities of human creativity ... are revealed’ (ibid.).

Ritual ‘dynamics’ (Kapferer 2004: 40) encompass both process and change, staticity and stasis. In the context of *el culto*, such dynamics are empirically present: expressions produce impressions, dynamics produce staticity, and vice versa. As aesthetic and symbolic expressions, ritual dynamics are very apparent on the perceptual ‘surface’ of the *creyentes*’ prayer, singing, clapping, arm waving and bodily swaying, as well as in their shouting, appraising, glossolalia and verbal sharing of prophecies. Simultaneously, on a less perceptible level, these dynamics may run deep in each *creyente* – emotionally, cognitively and bodily – affecting feelings, thoughts and experiences of their self and their social community. In the current chapter and the next one, I explore the inter-dynamics between these two levels of existence, experience and expressivity.

THE METHODIST LEGACY

As already elaborated, several authors of Pentecostalism around the globe have stressed the Methodist legacy of Pentecostalism (e.g. Cantón-Delgado 2010, 2013; Lawless 1988; Robbins 2004; Stromberg 2015a; Wilkinson and Althouse 2010, 2014, 2017). They have underscored the dual and paradoxical nature of this Methodist legacy, emphasizing its combination of inner puritanism and ritual ecstasy and expressivity, and pointed to this paradoxical nature as one of the great attractions of its followers today. It is precisely this dual and paradoxical nature that the present chapter takes as its focus. Inspired by Ruth Benedict’s ([1934] 2005) and Camille Paglia’s (1990) Nietzschean approaches, I characterize the first aspect of this Methodist legacy as Apollonian (i.e. asceticism/puritanism), and the second as Dionysian (i.e. ritual expressivity and sentimentalism), representing the two great opposing principles of Western culture.

Paglia (1990: 89) argues that ancient Dionysian worship produced ‘two rituals of enormous impact on Western culture, [Greek] tragic drama and Christian liturgy’. Based on my material, I see *el culto* and its *creyente* participants as extensions of both these ritual traditions. In this empirical context, I understand the paradoxical combination of the ascetic and the ecstatic/mystic to be substantiated in the creative idiom of *el duende* and the spiritual idiom of *el Espíritu Santo* (‘the Holy Spirit’), respectively. Further, I will argue that it is the tension and play between these opposing ritual forces (the ascetic and ecstatic) in *el culto* that produce potential, creativity and metamorphosis.

It is important to have in mind that while *el Espíritu Santo* is perhaps the most significant aspect of the *creyentes*’ faith and practice, it is also a profound Christian liturgical concept. Hence, the Holy Spirit holds both a local meaning and a wider ecclesiastical meaning, which might both converge and diverge. This means that, understood as a socio-culturally shaped spiritual idiom, it will appear according to the context in which it occurs. In other words, whether one believes in the Holy Spirit or not, and although there will exist many ethnographic similarities between how people experience and perceive the Spirit around the globe, I would still argue that *el Espíritu Santo* in the context of el Rastro manifests in different ways – perhaps even in opposing ways – to that of a mega church in a rural village in Tanzania or another mega church in an urban environment in the Chinese province of Shandong. I support this argument in both general literature on the globalization of Pentecostalism and all its local expressions (see Robbins 2004 for examples) and with Csordas’ (1997) theorization of the way in which charismatic ritual practitioners construct ‘embodied imagery’ in relation to divine revelation and healing practices. These are culturally specific imageries and will thus vary accordingly. Hence, within the empirical context, I explore how such supposedly opposing principles and embodied states of mind can in fact work simultaneously and creatively within the same ritual context.

APOLLO AND DIONYSUS

Inspired by Nietzsche ([1872] 1994), Camille Paglia (1990) applies Dionysian (or ‘chthonian’) and Apollonian lenses to her analysis of Western culture, and my analysis of the inner aesthetic dynamics of *el culto* is significantly inspired by her work. To set the scene, Paglia (1990: 96–97) writes:

Dionysus is identification, Apollo objectification. Dionysus is the empathic, the sympathetic emotion transporting us to other people, other places, other times. Apollo is the hard, cold separatism of western personality and categorical thought. Dionysus

is energy, ecstasy, hysteria, promiscuity, emotionalism – heedless indiscriminateness of idea and practice. Apollo is obsessiveness, voyeurism, idolatry, fascism – frigidity and aggression of the eye, petrification of objects ... Apollo makes the boundary lines that are civilization but that lead to convention, constraint, oppression. Dionysus is energy unbound, mad, callous, destructive, wasteful. Apollo is law, history, tradition, the dignity and safety of custom and form. Dionysus is the new, exhilarating but rude, sweeping all away to begin again. Apollo is a tyrant, Dionysus a vandal.

A secondary source of inspiration, also building on Nietzsche ([1872] 1994), is the work of Ruth Benedict ([1934] 2005), which, although analytically similar to that of Paglia (1990) – in terms of using Apollo and Dionysus as analytical constructs – is distinguishable along several other lines. Benedict ([1934] 2005) uses the concepts ‘Apollonian’, ‘Dionysian’ and ‘paranoid’ to describe and compare distinct ‘patterns of culture’ among three societies in the early twentieth century: the Zuñi of the southwestern United States, the Kwakiutl of western Canada and the Dobuans of Melanesia, respectively. In her study, the underlying categories of Apollonian, Dionysian and paranoid represent ‘destiny ideas’ and ‘opposed interpretations of existence’ (ibid.: 53–54), whereby the values of one are alien and trivial to the others.

Benedict ([1934] 2005) argues that, in distinction to the cultural expression of Apollonian principles by the classical Greeks, the Zuñi Indians of the early twentieth century ‘cast out’ everything that did not fit with their Apollonian virtues, including strong emotional expressions, death, childbirth, violence, drugs and alcohol. This made them into a radical Apollonian society. Classical Greek society, on the other hand, included these aspects of human life in their social model, with the advent of Dionysus as a compensatory principle. As we will see, the Rastro Gitanos bear more resemblance to the classical Greeks than the early twentieth-century Zuñi Indians.

While Benedict’s ([1934] 2005: 80) Pueblo Indians preferred the ‘middle of the road’ experience and the ‘known map’, her Kwakiutl interlocutors ‘valued violent experience, all means by which human beings may break through the usual sensory routine’ (ibid.). Hence, while Apollonian rituals generally aim at maintaining their participants inside ordinary sensory routine, Dionysian rituals transport them outside of this realm. In the context of the Gitanos of el Rastro, one practice that aims at achieving such a Dionysian break would be glossolalia or their way of interpreting dreams and visions as communication with God. Benedict (ibid.: 83) calls such practices ‘a cultural mechanism which gives a theoretically unlimited freedom to the individual’, with the goal ‘to achieve an order of experience set apart from daily living’ (ibid.: 81).

While an Apollonian ritual might be considered a ‘decorous and sober performance, formal and unemotional to the last degree’ (Benedict [1934]

2005: 123), *el culto* could not be described as such; in fact, the opposite would come closer to the truth. Nevertheless, in this chapter I argue that, in *el culto*, the Dionysian and Apollonian principles stand in a dialectic relation, generating a highly creative battleground. For instance, while the *creyentes'* emotions and emotional expressions – be these of anger, love, jealousy or grief – are strong and full of lament and elegy, the *creyentes* also paradoxically promote emotional moderation as a virtue. As I see it, the legacy of Pentecostal Methodism, with its paradoxical duality of inner asceticism and ritual mysticism, bears within it this frictional fight between the principles of Apollo and Dionysus. Similarly, standing in tandem, in continuous contradiction and interdependence, these principles are also constitutive of *el culto*, where they are accentuated with the spiritual idioms and forces of *el duende* and *el Espíritu Santo*. In the following sections, I explore the emic notion of *el duende* in more detail.

EL DUENDE

Bob Dylan has always had it. Leonard Cohen deals specifically in it. It pursues Van Morrison like a black dog and though he tries to he cannot escape it. Tom Waits and Neil Young can summon it. It haunts Polly Harvey. My friends the Dirty Three have it by the bucket load. The band Spiritualized are excited by it. Tindersticks desperately want it, but all in all it would appear that duende is too fragile to survive the brutality of technology and the ever increasing acceleration of the music industry. Perhaps there is just no money in sadness, no dollars in duende. Sadness or duende needs space to breathe. Melancholy hates haste and floats in silence. It must be handled with care. (Nick Cave 1999)

In a Rastro Gitano context, *el duende* is primarily associated with flamenco, *cante jondo* ('deep song') and bullfighting – that is, performative arts that depend on immediate and improvisational creativity, characterized by a deep understanding of the possibilities and limitations of the ground structure of these arts. *Duende* was seen by my Gitano friends in el Rastro as a combined earthly and divine force, ascending from below yet appearing from within. It expresses itself in feeling, passion and suffering rather than style and technique, and it marks the difference between a performative act that reaches the hearts of the audience and one that does not. *Duende* is an emic concept and a literary one (e.g. Lorca [1933] 2010), yet it is not a word that is actively used by the *creyentes* to describe the inner dynamics of *el culto* or the energies of religious contexts. Rather, they more frequently apply it to 'moments of great art'; for example, in the world of flamenco. However, the *creyentes* did recognize *duende* as a force that moves throughout the cultic realm as well, as exemplified by Sancho (I will come back to his thoughts in a short while).

Although *duende* is an emic concept in relation to the world of flamenco, I use it primarily as an analytical tool to corkscrew my way into the personal and intersubjective experiences of the *creyentes* and thereby uncover the inner aesthetic, perceptual, bodily, emotional and cognitive workings of *el culto*. To facilitate this analysis, I apply the concept of *duende* and the literature describing it (Assumma 2005; Hirsch 2002; Lorca [1933] 2010; Maurer 1980) to formulate an aesthetic language akin to that of Apollo and Dionysus (Benedict [1934] 2005; Paglia 1990), built on the metaphors of light versus darkness.

Both in the concept of *el duende* and in the practice of *el culto*, light and darkness operate simultaneously, dialectically and in tandem – not as rigidly separated phenomena (i.e. Apollo and Dionysus), and an argument to be explored in the following is how the creative potential of *el culto* might exist in the meeting between the two. I thus apply this metaphorical language of light and darkness to my analysis, to access those ritual dimensions that defy expression in the written form: the emotional and sensory elements and *inward* movements that bring about spiritual and bodily transport, transcendence and transformation. Hence, in this and the following chapter, I aim at presenting a written analogue to the inner ritual dynamics of *el culto* that, during fieldwork, came to shape both the *creyentes* and myself.

I am of course aware that *el duende* has been used historically to depict the Gitano population in Spain as stereotypically mystic, romantic, in contact with the divine or the underworld, and so on and so forth; that is not my intention here. I do not wish to put equation marks between ethnicity and spiritual forces or to perpetuate prejudices against Gitanos in Spain, rather I seek to use *el duende* – a particular kind of creative principle or artistic state of mind – as an analytical and metaphorical language, to illuminate certain aesthetic aspects of the *creyentes'* ritual performances.

LORCA'S AESTHETICS OF *EL DUENDE*

Perhaps the best-known piece of writing about *el duende*, for both Gitanos and Payos, is Federico García Lorca's *Theory and Play of the Duende* ([1933] 2010). Although not a Gitano himself, Lorca had a Gitana nurse as a child in Granada, and he dedicated most of his life to a quest to preserve, revitalize and protect Gitano cultural expressions. Lorca was – and remains – a great hero and source of inspiration for many Gitanos and Payos, both in el Rastro and elsewhere. He described *el duende* as 'the buried spirit of saddened Spain' and identified it as 'everything that has dark tones'.

In Lorca's metaphorical language, *el duende* is portrayed as an earthly, external force or spirit that scorches, hurts, drains and leaves burned out hearts and inner exhausted landscapes in its wake. Moreover, it is secret and trembling, inherited from Socrates' blithe 'daemon' via the dancers of Cádiz and 'the headless Dionysian scream of Silverio's *siguiriya* [flamenco style]'. The classical Greek *daimons*, or 'guardian shadows' (Paglia 1990: 2), were considered both good and evil. Another daemonic realm is that of Sigmund Freud's sphere of the unconscious, where, akin to the dream world, metamorphosis is the underlying logic (1961). As I see it, the Rastro Gitanos' spiritual powers manifested in *el culto* and in other settings – emically referred to as either *el duende*, *el arte* (art) or *virtudes* (virtues) – carry similarities to those of the Greek *daimons* (ibid.). These Greek *daimons* were creatures of the 'night mind', of Freud's unconscious and of dreams and metamorphosis, all elements present in the sphere of *el culto*.

With respect to the immediate quality of *el duende*, Lorca ([1933] 2010) writes that it never repeats itself but always finds a new form. *El duende* thus implies immediate creation, and is described by Lorca as furiously creative, bringing not only form but also the very essence or marrow of form. Comparably, *el culto* involves significant repetition: night after night, the same *creyentes* gather to hear the same *alabanzas* ('songs of praise'), and sermons, prayers and glossolalia follow the same patterns and address consistent topics. As some *creyentes* complained to me: 'It is always the same.' Nevertheless, *el culto* is *never* the same. For example, in the very *meeting* between four central dimensions of the rite, it always manifests as entirely 'new': first, through the *creyentes'* various use of skills and techniques; second, through the daily lives of the attending *creyentes*; third, through the spontaneous unfolding of the event; and fourth, through the social reality of the divine intervention. Thus, despite its general liturgical repetition, when all the four abovementioned dimensions are combined, *el culto* certainly becomes a product of complex interaction and immediate creation.

While both *el duende* and *el Espíritu Santo* are thought to bring either musical or religious practitioners into direct contact with divine forces, the way they do so is both distinct and alike. Though it ascends from below, *el duende* and its moments of great art, existential battles and divine communication 'has to be roused from the furthest habitations of the blood', writes Lorca ([1933] 1981: 5), who describes it as a dark, secret, trembling and earthly force that arises and *fills* the performer. *El duende* takes the performer and moves the dancer's feet, the guitarist's fingers, the bullfighter's cape and the painter's energetic brush. It enters the bodies and minds of artists and fastens performers in the space between life and death, light and darkness, surface and abyss, enabling them to produce immediate moments of great art.

A meeting with *el duende* is a battle; hence, one cannot simply invite *el duende* in and expect great art to arise. On the contrary, *el duende* must be fought and defeated, in a life-or-death manner. *El duende* is destructive in its creation yet creative in its expression of great art, which, in turn, arises from its destruction. Thus, it creates simultaneous spaces and painful universes of suffering and spiritually inspired creation. According to Lorca ([1933] 1981), within this space of simultaneous obliteration and creation everyone and everything experiences agony.

El duende must in other words be forcefully evoked, and, importantly, it will not appear unless it senses that death is near. Further, we can say that the manifestation of *el duende* carries the artists to an experience of death, because by ceasing time it implies the touch on the end of existence (Maurer 1980). Comparingly, as explained to me by the *creyentes*, the manifestation of *el Espíritu Santo* ('the Holy Spirit') triggers an experience of death by 'burning down' one's ego – disarming the self and the rational mind in order to allow the spirit to enter.

The aesthetics of *el duende* have been described as manifesting in the physical dimension of sound (Zwicky 2005). During fieldwork, I felt the physicality of sound in *el culto*, both in the violent meeting of the sound-waves with my ear drums and the memory of the music that I carried home with me each night. This cultic blueprint existed not only as a sound signature in my cerebrum but also as wave movements in my body, akin to the bodily response that can arise after a considerable time spent at sea, when the ground, one's stomach and one's head still seem to be following the ocean's movements. That is what the volume and emotional intensity of the sounds of *el culto* did to me and others.

EL DUENDE IN EL CULTO

To illustrate popular conceptions of *el duende* (both Gitano and Payo), I will recount the description given to me by Sancho, a 54-year-old *creyente* and *comerciante* in el Rastro:

You ask me about the *duende* of the singing of the Gitanos. They seem to inherit it through their families. It is something genetic. Even [the children], from when they are very small, almost all dance and sing. Like in my wife's family they could all be artists without any problem, and the singing comes from their hearts and souls. It is the inner *quejío* ['lament'/'elegy']. Then, when they are Christians and there is a spiritual transformation, it all converts to something truly spiritual with the force of another dimension, and in church one can say something supernatural. And the Gitanos' singing and dancing ends up becoming something very deep. There is a transformation in becoming Christian, but it is all innate from birth in the Gitanos. It

is transferred from mother to child in a natural way. They are barely months old, and the girls dance in their mother's arms to the rhythm of the music. You ask me what drives the flamenco musician who reaches this place [of *el duende*]. Initially, this is related through the spirit and the heart, the unity, almost the sensitivity of the inner fibers that they carry with them by genetics, education ... it is an inner feeling that almost all of us are born with that at times appears magic.

During fieldwork, I heard many stories of how the laments of the Gitanos – ‘our passionate feelings and expressions of grief and sorrow caused by centuries of harassment and persecution’, as they put it, were a source of inspiration for the artistic and spiritual performers. These presumed internal qualities were thought to give them a special ‘touch’ and feeling that most Payo performers could never reach. In Chapter 2, I described expressions of this inner lament using the emic term *cicatrices*, understood to represent the psychological ‘scars’ caused by centuries of state suppression. An associated concept, also mentioned by Sancho, is *quejío*, identified as ‘the deep, fundamental and essential grief and complaint that expresses the suffering and pain of life and of the human being’ (Cos 2014). *Quejío* can also describe the flamenco shout of an afflictive ‘¡Ay!’ During *el culto*, similar expressions were made during moments of spoken prayer and glossolalia, as exemplified by the following extract from my field notes.

Concha's red hair is gathered in a solid knot. She is wearing little make-up today, and she is dressed in a deep orange shirt that makes her stand out amidst the *viudas* [widows]. Standing in the dark church room, she raises her hands towards the ceiling. With her tough voice, raspy and recognizable after twenty years in the church choir, she starts her prayer: ‘I would also like to give my prayer, Father ... Ayyy, I pray Father for the opportunity to raise my voice this evening ... I pray for my father, Father, ayyy, that is sick, I pray for him, Father, ayyyy Heavenly Father ... that you please help him Father ... please help him, Father, ayyyy, that he will get better every day with your help, Father ... Ayyy ... Faaaaatheeeeerrrr ... Ayyy ...’ Then glossolalia blends in with her prayer: ‘vavavavava ... chalampatakaratampaaa ... chatrakalamnabapatakataaaaa!!! ... I pray Father! Heeeeelp hiiim ... Thaaaank yoooouuuuu! In the name of Jesus! AMEN!!’

From the perspective of the Rastro Gitanos, any performance in church – be it praying, glossolalia, presenting a vision or a prophecy, giving a sermon, singing, playing an instrument or clapping hands – could be done mere technically (i.e. ‘cold’, mechanistically and without feeling) or with ‘spirit’ (i.e. with ‘warmth’, passion, heart and emotion). As previously described, the *creyentes* articulated this difference in their comparison of the old versus the

new pastors, whereby the latter were thought to lack the *cicatrices* required to preach with warmth, heart and feeling. Equally, they felt that while great singers could perform with ‘God-given’ voices, if they did not have *quejío* or *cicatrices*, their performances would fall short of reaching the hearts of their audience.

Other concepts related to *el duende*, *cicatrices* and *quejío* are also of importance. In particular, the word *rajo* is used by the Rastro Gitanos to describe a particularly emotional performance given by, for instance, flamenco and *culto* singers. *Rajo* implies singing to ‘the heart of the listeners’. To achieve this you need a characteristic ‘raspy’ voice and the ability to immerse yourself in the song, conveying true sentiment and feeling. Concha, the former church choir singer, had *rajo* and a lot of it, and people praised her for it.

To ‘feel the song’, the singer needs to both interpret it on a human level and sing it with warmth and emotion. For the listener, ‘feeling the song’ means listening with maximum attention – almost devotion. The ‘Gitano voice’ was often, during my fieldwork, characterized by the Rastro Gitanos themselves as a *voz afillá* (‘strong voice’): rough and hoarse, and a good carrier for the emotional expression of *rajo*. Concha, described above, did not only have *rajo*, but she also had a *voz afillá*, people said, and that if she had not devoted her voice to *el culto* she could have had a great career as a flamenco singer. Echoed in the words of Sancho, due to their *cicatrices* and *quejío*, the Gitanos of el Rastro depict their ability to sing ‘from their heart, soul and inner fibres’ as something simultaneously differentiating them from the Payos. In its unity of feeling and form – that is, its aesthetics (e.g. Langer 1942, 1953) – it also becomes an important identity marker for them.

THE EVANGELIZATION OF *EL DUENDE*

This section will elaborate on what I call the ‘evangelization’ of *el duende*, in the context of el Rastro. But first I make use of literary descriptions of *el duende* (as those mentioned above) to shed light on my own empirical material. I am interested in the literature on *el duende* because it brings forth descriptions of a specific creative principle, artistic mindset and mode of being (comparable to those of the muse and the angel for example) that resonate with my empirical findings, and, moreover, these literary descriptions explore the content, form and function of *el duende* – as opposed to the derogative, essentialized, ethnicized and romanticized version of *el duende*.

According to Christopher Maurer (1998), Lorca’s aesthetic theory of *el duende* contains four main dimensions, that is: irrationality (or the

limitations of rationality), earthiness, a heightened awareness of death and a dash of the diabolical. With ‘irrationality’, I am not saying that the Gitanos are irrational, rather that if the *creyentes* (or any of us!) are to experience the divine visit of *el Espíritu Santo* they need to let go of their rational day-minds for the duration of the rite. This resembles the argument about glossolalia (Csordas 1990) and the inner dynamics of rituals (Kapferer 2004) as lying beyond meaning and representation. With ‘earthiness’ I imply that the *creyentes* need to evoke something deep within themselves during the rite, some real-life existential issues, to experience divine elevation and altered consciousness. Further, and in my view, a ‘heightened awareness of death’ implies that the *creyentes* face high risks when they ‘open up’ for the divine forces of *el Espíritu Santo*. And finally, a ‘dash of the diabolic’ has, in the empirical context, to do with the Dionysian aspects of the ritual – that is, the emotional expressivity of it.

With these insights in mind, I move on to present an ethnographic example of a ritual occasion where the presence of God and *el Espíritu Santo* were felt and expressed particularly strongly by the *creyentes*. In my view thus, the example that follows illustrates the interplay between tensional opposing aesthetic and emotional expressions in *el culto*, both Apollonian and Dionysian in character, and how this interplay affects both the bodies and emotions of the *creyentes* (including, in this instance, myself). For example, there is this constant switching between frictionally opposing dualities – smoothness and roughness, beauty and crudeness, humbleness and extravagance, lightness and darkness, spirituality and sociality – that vividly illustrates the *creyentes*’ ritual play.

‘CON MUCHA FUERZA!’

El culto is about to begin. The church is full, and more people are arriving. The pastor blesses us and encourages us to make the most of the evening’s ritual and to make it as special and spectacular as the evening prior. ‘Let us present ourselves to God’, he says, and he directs the band to play with *mucha fuerza* (much force). ‘Today we will worship God.’ The band begins to play, and the choir starts to sing. The pastor asks us to put our heads down and pray. We put our heads down. Some have their hands folded in their laps, others sit with palms facing upwards. People have their eyes closed. Some pray in silence with mouths shut, others mumble in a low voice and still others begin in a quiet voice and gradually increase in volume until projecting something resembling a roar. The room is dark.

Everything builds up gradually, but we soon perceive that the lead singer is in good form this evening. She gives the intercession, directed to God. The pastor then asks the choir if there is 'one more *hermanita* ['little sister'] who can say a prayer'. A woman in her 40s rises to her feet. She begins calmly and ends in full force, crying out in agony and despair. The crowd absorbs, applauds and answers her intensity. It is hard to describe the direction and strength of what follows. The lead singer is on her feet, with one hand holding a microphone and the other waving about. Sometimes it is pressed to her breast, either fistled or open. At other times, she stretches her arm towards the ceiling, waving it or keeping it steady. Sometimes she presses her hand to her face or squeezes the other hand that is holding the microphone. Occasionally, she reaches down to adjust the sound on the mix table.

On this evening, the lead singer is using her voice in a way that neither I nor anyone else has heard before. She entrenches it, tears it apart and pushes it to its limits, changing between the most sweet, noble and beautiful expressions and the most raw, rough and powerful. The choir responds in kind. In an eversion of her inner state, she projects brutality, and the choir responds with equally intense clarity, profundity and beauty. The congregation also responds. Everyone stands on their feet and rejoices. At times, the lead singer almost whispers blessed and careful '*Aleluyas*' and '*Santos*', until it seems as if she is dragging out her entire inner spirit, pulling out raspily – screamingly – a new verse containing simple phrases – maybe just a word or two – that the choir and the congregation repeat in response. This same scenario goes on for an hour, maybe more. Half way through the séance, the woman next to me gets to her feet. She sways from side to side, stretching her arms towards the ceiling, and her body follows the movements of her arms and the rhythm of the song. When the lead singer delivers one of her most powerful vocalizations, the woman starts jumping intensely, with her arms either still raised or holding on to the back of the seat in front of her. She rejoices, prays and speaks in tongues: '*Santo, santo, ay mis Dios, ay santo mío chhhiimbababapapapa ... santosantosantosanto ... pepepepepepe ... bapabapabapab ... tatatatatatta ...*'

When the music finally stops, the woman next to me sits down; it is clear she has been moved by the experience and continues to speak in tongues, exhaling sighs and groans. Suddenly, someone turns on the lights. The woman next to me is still in her own space. It is hard to

see in the sharp light, as our eyes have not yet adjusted to it. We have been sitting in darkness and music for more than an hour. ‘Vamos a pasar la ofrenda’ (‘Let us pass around the offerings’), exclaims the pastor. Our emotions are still high. ‘We have a guest pastor coming from Alcalá this evening. Therefore, we must end this *culto* now and meet again later tonight at half past 10.’ The pastor asks us to lower our heads and pray. A final blazingly prayer is given, and the congregation dissolves into the Madridian night.

EL ESPÍRITU SANTO

As previously mentioned, Sancho, the 54-year-old Gitano, explained how *el duende* brings forth ‘spiritual transformation’ for the *creyentes* and how the forces of *el duende* converts into something that is ‘very deep’, ‘truly spiritual’, ‘supernatural’ and with the ‘powers of another dimension’ in the context of *el culto*. Following up these ideas, both Sancho and other *creyentes* confirmed how spiritual transformation and the religious dimension of *el culto* contribute to a deeper spirituality and divine elevation to the original cultural form of *el duende*, and bring a profoundness to artistic and ritual performances – such as that of the lead singer and the other ritual participants, in the example provided above.

A particular phrase in Lorca’s piece about *el duende* ([1933] 1981: 6) seems to refer to the Holy Spirit: ‘God sends his primal thorns of fire to those who seek Him.’ To me, this implies that *el duende* and *el Espíritu Santo* (‘the Holy Spirit’) are conceptually connected. For the *creyentes*, *el Espíritu Santo* is said to arise and evaporate much as steam or flames. It can appear with sudden immediacy, yet it is often brought about through the cultic artist or *creyente* after a gradual build-up, frequently in spontaneous interaction with others present. Thus, a gradual increase in intensity seems to comprise an important ‘path’ for *el Espíritu Santo* – as it does for *el duende*. The medium by which ‘the Holy Spirit’ manifests itself is the body interior, which, in these moments, is at once cultural, natural and divine. *El Espíritu Santo* is thought to communicate the words of God to the *creyentes*. The words of God are further brought to the congregation through a receiving *creyente* in his or her ecstatic revelations, dreams, visions and prophecies, as well as glossolalia and other bodily expressions, including shaking, trembling, swaying, arm waving and speaking loudly. While *el duende* has been described as ascending from below, *el Espíritu Santo* descends from above – from ‘our heavenly father’, as the *creyentes* put it. Both, though,

are said to simultaneously arise from within and below/above. The nine 'gifts of grace' (e.g. glossolalia, miracles, prophecies, etc.) are all seen by the *creyentes* as signs of God's presence in *el culto* and the world, and they manifest in and through the *creyentes'* bodies.

The women-only *cultos* were another arena where the *creyentes* would express their experiences with *el Espíritu Santo* through their bodies, souls and minds. *Cultos* for women are typically held one day a week, and I participated in several of them during my fieldwork. In terms of research, these occasions provided me with a lot of insights and proved to be a good source of information, partly because the women were more relaxed on these occasions and were able to relate to me and each other with greater intimacy, confidence and humour. I was also given greater spiritual and social responsibility as a 'co-creyente' at these women's *cultos*; I was expected to participate just as much as they did, by delivering loud prayers, moving my body, holding hands and uttering '*Aleluya!*' and '*Amén!*' when it seemed fitting.

The empirical examples below illustrate the ritual dynamics between cultural, natural and divine bodies at these events, as well as specific dynamics between the female *creyentes*. They show how the women build up or lower the intensity of their spontaneous spiritual engagement, and how God and *el Espíritu Santo* are felt as present among them. They also illustrate the *creyentes'* refined play between Apollonian principles of control and asceticism and Dionysian – bodily – forces of release, ecstasy and ritual mysticism, as well as the potential stakes these women face in their ritual enactments. For instance, to achieve both individual and collective states of trance, I argue that the *creyentes* must set aside their egos and rational selves. While this experience has great allure, it also contains the potential for danger. Thus, from a *creyente* perspective, the temporary abandonment and 'burning down' of the ego and rationality comprises one of the great risks of the ritual play of *el culto*.

'GOD IS TALKING THROUGH US'

The gathering begins, and three benches are organized in a half-circle. Bobola rises from her seat, calling out: 'Come here, Ariana.³ Come and sit here with me.' The bench fills up quickly, so I find myself a seat on the neighbouring bench, next to an elderly woman. The woman cannot be more than 4 feet tall. She has short, dark hair, and, according to her daughter-in-law (who is also present), has 'a great need to come [to church]'. Including myself, there are eight women gathered. 'This night is open, without an agenda', says Bobola, and the

daughter-in-law begins to speak. She is a well-built woman with dyed blonde hair who is now smiling intensely and seems to me almost frighteningly religiously present. The woman starts out by thanking *Dios* (God), *Jesús* and *el Espíritu Santo* for being with every one of us. Then she prays for each of us, mentioning our names, one by one, asking God – and Jesus – to help us. She asks God to help me open my heart to him. She is especially glad that I am here tonight, she says. Then she mentions every woman's name again and asks God to give us all the strength to handle whatever it is we are dealing with, be it poverty, family problems, domestic problems, sickness, bad luck ... While the woman talks, everybody has their heads bowed and their eyes closed, sitting in silent prayer. Some fold their hands, others do not. The woman starts out calmly, at a tranquil pace. However, she is filled with an increasing energy that also seizes the rest of us, seemingly creating an atmosphere where, for lack of a better word, a transcendental space is made available and apprehensible – seemingly spontaneously, with little if any conscious effort – for those of us present.

In general, the work of augmenting, enhancing and intensifying a prayer lies with both the *creyente* delivering the prayer and the other participants. They seem to help each other, supporting and fortifying each other's drive towards intensification. Each prayer ends with '*en el nombre de Jesús*' ('in the name of Jesus'). The end of one prayer is the start of the next, be it spoken out loud or simply contemplated in silent murmuring. The prayer undulates between silent mumbling and loud crying, yelling and shouting. Responses shift from extroversion to introversion, personal petition to that of the commune, and between the particular and the general. The strength and intensity of the prayer build gradually until it reaches climax. It may lie still for a moment, tranquilized, as if rocked in a cradle, waiting for the exact moment before someone picks it up again.

I consider *el culto* a *temenos* – a 'sacred enclosure', somehow draped in taboo and mystery, bolstered by Payo ideas about Gitano Pentecostals and their activities as 'sectarian'. A parallel is provided by Paglia's (1990: 23) reflections on what it means to be a woman and that due to her biology, a woman's body can be seen as 'a secret, sacred space ... a *temenos* or ritual precinct ... The taboo on woman's body is the taboo that always hovers over the place of magic. Woman is literally the occult, which means "the hidden"'. What, therefore, is at stake for the women of *el culto*, who experience both womanhood and cultic ecstatic/mystic spirituality, simultaneously? Why were the women concerned with emphasizing that 'this night is open, without agenda?' at the women's *culto* event above. Paglia (1990) also reminds us

of women's capacity to bear both heavy burdens and great joys, for example in the hazards and joys of pregnancy and giving birth – aspects that are not without relevance for the female *creyente* seeking spiritual fulfilment and healing. *El culto* – and especially the female cultic sessions – can be seen as a transcendental 'melting pot', allowing participants to re-acquaint themselves with their chthonian nature. The inner dynamics of such a nature are perhaps best exemplified in menstrual and natal moments, when the female body is 'locked passively in place, suffering wave after wave of Dionysian power' (ibid.: 91).

There is a potential parallel between the natural hormone cycles of women and their painful waves of contraction, and the wave-like inner motions of *el culto* at its most intense, 'inward curving' mode (e.g. Handelman 2004): both characterized by ascending and descending waves of Dionysian power. Moreover, with Kapferer (2004) we can say that the inner aesthetic dynamics of a ritual like *el culto* – at its most intense – lie beyond reason, meaning and interpretation. And with Csordas (1990), who emphasizes the non-vernacular, non-semiotic embodied language of glossolalia as the very reason for its strong ritual effect. He even says that 'by a semiotic account, then, glossolalia ruptures the world of human meaning, like a wedge forcing an opening in discourse and creating the possibility of creative cultural change, dissolving structures in order to facilitate the emergence of new ones' (ibid.: 24–25). Along these lines, and because of its existence beyond meaning, reason, interpretation and semiotics, one can argue that *el Espíritu Santo* can be seen to partially and temporally destroy the *creyentes'* reason upon entering their bodies. In other words, by allowing the spirit to enter, the *creyentes* leave reason, egos and social selves behind – as we shall see, a potentially dangerous and humiliating affair. I observed that for these women in *el culto* this 'letting go' involves some degree of leaving behind the honour, respect (or lack of such) and obligations related to their position as daughters, mothers, sisters and wives, both in their respective families and in *el pueblo Gitano*. One can ask if this implies a temporal and ritualized flattening and democratization of the hierarchical structure internal to *el pueblo Gitano* of el Rastro. For instance, for those women with a high socio-economic position amongst the Gitanos of el Rastro, the cultic setting at its most inward turning and spiritually elevated state would perhaps put them on equal footing with other women of lower socio-economic status. The same, I would argue, could happen between men and women, old and young. On a further note, Cantón-Delgado et al. (2020) point to the way in which Pentecostalism works democratizing because all newly converted can become future converters, and because all believers and practitioners can equally experience and receive the nine gifts of grace. Hence, both with the altered embodied state of mind and being of the *creyentes* – brought on by

the entrance of *el Espíritu Santo* into their bodies – and with the democratization of conversion practice and the baptism in the spirit, we can say that Gitano Pentecostalism holds at least the potential for a push towards democratization and egalitarianism.

By opening the women's *culto* session with the announcement that 'this night is open, without agenda', Bobola may have hoped to reassure herself and the other women that their social and rational selves would remain intact, even after the Dionysian waves of *el Espíritu Santo* washed over them. This was reaffirmed later in the session, when a second woman rose to pray. With the other attendees' encouragement, she started her prayer in a low – almost mute – voice: 'Tonight, we shall feel free, it is not we who are talking, but God, through us.' These words were met with strong affirmation from the other women, who sat with their heads bowed, their eyes closed and their hands either in their laps or raised towards the ceiling.

In this context, the women claim that it is not them talking but God talking through them and by that lifting some of the responsibility off their shoulders, as they are simultaneously refashioned into mediums for Godly communication and intervention. This is not an insignificant act – either socially in *el pueblo Gitano* or spiritually, as it enables the women to occupy a position in *el pueblo Gitano* that they would not have otherwise had. Although some might argue that 'cultic femaleness is no guarantee for cultural strength or viability' (Paglia 1990: 8), I nevertheless see the 'opening up' and 'letting go' of their reason, egos and social selves as part of what makes *el culto* so attractive for the Gitanas of el Rastro. In the following sections, I elaborate on this topic even further.

After the last woman finished her prayer, Bobola turned towards me. Her eyes, which were closed during the last prayer, were now wide open:

Ariana, God is talking to me in this very moment. God is speaking to me now, Ariana [she moves her arms as if following a stream of light downwards]. God is telling me that he wants you to open your heart, that you open it, Ariana. He says that he loves you. God loves you, Ariana! We too love you. God would like you to feel free here with us, that you are in God's house. He is telling me that you are here in our *pueblo* ('community'), not for the reasons you think, to work here, to study our *pueblo*, but that you are here because God sent you here to us. You are '*el propósito de Dios*' ('God's purpose'). You were born for him, Ariana. You are his purpose. You are here to get to know him. God brought you here for you to open your heart to him. Open your heart, Ariana. Open it! Open it! In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

In her speech, Bobola urged me, with the words of God, to open my heart, and that I should feel free in his and their love; be together with him in his house, and with them. Her insistency held reassurance. If I did open my heart, God's love and their love would be there for me; I would not stand alone in the obvious vulnerability one might face if one's heart is left open. What was it then, that I was being asked to open my heart to? I believe the *creyentes*' act of opening their heart and 'opening up', as they say, implies that one accepts and opens for God's omnipresence and almighty existence, and thus also for his omnipotent grace and mercy (e.g. Cooper 2017). In other words, for the *creyentes* of el Rastro, opening your heart to God basically means to accept that only God can forgive your sins, and with his love and your own repent you can be born again in the Spirit, as described in John 3. It is thus about God's forgiveness, judgement, healing and love, above all.

I find the idea of God's purpose and of *being* God's purpose, as Bobola refers to it above, highly central to the *creyentes*' beliefs and practices. They often said that 'God has a plan and a purpose for all and everyone' and 'he has a plan for all of us'. This idea seems very close to the idea of predestination, however, as I discuss more firmly in Chapter 9, in the context of the Gitanos of el Rastro, I understand it to represent *potential* rather than *predestination*. Hence, rather than involving a given life with a destined future, I would argue that their idea holds this purpose as being something latent or embryonic in everyone, something that is waiting to be realized.

As a response to Bobola's dissemination of God's words to me, the entire group of women now shouted things like: '*Amén*', '*Aleluya*', '*¡Sí, es verdad!*' ('Yes, it is true'), '*Ay Dios mío*' ('Oh my God') and '*O Santo Espíritu*' ('Oh, Holy Spirit'):

They continue singing, clapping their hands, drumming their knees, swaying and rocking, groaning, moaning and crying. Many 'let go' of their daytime selves: they speak in tongues; their bodies shake and their hands wave. Although clinging to my enclosed, rational self, I find myself also swaying from side to side, as if sitting in a small rowboat, completely in touch with the movements of the sea and the perpetuity and continuousness of the waves.

Some of the women stretch backwards with both hands over their heads, their eyes still closed, as in agony or intense pleasure. They exclaim '*Ayy ... Ayy ... Dios mío* ('my God'), you are the greatest!' Or '*Ayy ... I am so sorry God, Jesús ... ayyy ... Espíritu Santo* forgive me! Please forgive me! I ask you God, I ask you God, please, help me God because you are the greatest God, only you God can help me, ayyy *Dios mío*, help me! ... Ayyyy'.

I believe it is apt to ask whether we can see such expressions as representations of a simultaneously pleasurable and painful state of being – both erotic and tormenting, symbolic and physical – perhaps something resembling a Dionysian ‘pleasure-pain’? A state like that of giving birth, although to a spiritual being rather than a human? One *creyente* expressed to me how entering ecstasy or speaking in tongues could be a highly ambiguous, frightening and somewhat humiliating experience because it involved opening oneself up to both sacred and chthonian rulership. In these moments, they said they could never truly be sure whether they themselves were the source of their movements, visions, glossolalia and prophecies or whether the source lay elsewhere. The body’s automatic reflexes and involuntary functions can be depicted as Dionysian. Uncultivated as they are, they are normally hidden, yet in ecstasy, dreams or with the use of substances they surface. Hence, for the *creyentes*, a strong sense of doubt and vulnerability may permeate the ecstatic experience.

Greek Dionysus is associated with *Lusios* (‘the Liberator’), ‘the god who by very simple means, or by other means not so simple, enables you for a short time to stop being yourself, and thereby set you free’ (Dodds 1951: 76). Liberation, of course, can be a frightening affair. The aim of the ancient cult of *Lusios* ‘was *ecstasis* – which could mean anything from “taking you out of yourself” to a profound alteration of personality’ (Paglia 1990: 97). Through ritual, I would argue the *creyentes* yearn for these experiences of spiritual, emotional and bodily shifts, where they become freed from their own egos – albeit for only a short moment. In these enactments they temporarily free themselves (from themselves), but in so doing they also put themselves at risk.

‘Dionysus liberates by destroying’, writes Paglia (1990: 94). ‘He is not pleasure but pleasure-pain, the tormenting bondage of our life in the body’ (ibid.). Similarly, the ‘joy of creation’ (e.g. Schumpeter [1934] 2000) is not a simple, straightforward joy but a joy that is burdened by life and the rough path of creation. This is not unlike the creative principle of *el duende*, where moments of great art and spiritual and emotional depth are created by intrinsically tormenting the bodies it inhabits. Equally, I would say that we can fruitfully understand the abovementioned creative moments of *el culto* as a kind of spiritually induced ‘creative destruction’ or ‘pleasure pain’.

In dreams, we are potentially flooded with metamorphosis, sex and violence. Objects, geometrical figures, animals and persons, as well as feelings and states of being flicker and merge, melt and transform. A proposition would thus be to approach the *creyentes*’ ecstatic experiences as something akin to the hypnagogic state between dreaming and waking life, where

fixed fragments of ‘daytime reality’ blend in disturbing ways with surreal arrangements of the night mind. In this hypnagogic realm of the mind, a person can never be sure of which state he or she is in because it is a state of simultaneity – that is, a dual existence combining oppositions that otherwise would be held separate.

In the context of *el culto*, the ability to enter ecstasy – and to move seamlessly in and out of an altered state of mind – seems to be a well-practised and embodied skill, resembling, I imagine, other meditative techniques that allow people to enter and explore the creative potential of hypnagogic or other ‘in-between’ or dual states of being. Analytically, I suggest that the *creyentes*’ ability to enter ecstasy, to speak in tongues or to experience the embodied presence of *el Espíritu Santo* all involve what Csordas (1997: 79–84) in his study of divine revelation and charismatic healing calls ‘embodied imagery’ or ‘image-in-consciousness’. He is preoccupied with what he calls the ‘existential beginnings in healing’ (ibid.: 8), and in sum his theorizations seek to encapsulate the process in which the ritual practitioners have learned, through repeated ritual practice, to embody and reproduce the highly abstract ideas and images of their religious practice. Said differently, they have engaged in the creative process and the constant reproduction of existential beginnings; of perception and objectification (e.g. Merleau-Ponty 1962, 1964). I come back to the *creyentes*’ acts of perception and objectification later in this chapter and in Chapter 6.

To move on somewhat, glossolalia, visions and prophecies also have a social function. They seem to enable the *creyentes* to say things about specific persons or the community that ‘needed’ to be said but were best said by an ‘outsider’ or an unquestionable authority – in this case, God himself. By speaking the words of God, and not their own, the women of *el culto* were free to utter ‘whatever’ came to them, on the subjects of, for example, conflicts or power struggles in *el pueblo Gitano*, moral and spiritual degradation or the ‘monetization’ of the Gitanos, health issues, family problems, domestic abuse, substance abuse or societal critiques. They would utter visions they were having of judgement, courts and tribunes with the presence of a long-haired man in a white robe, or present visions that underscored the importance of *el pueblo Gitano* pulling together in the same direction, or visions that stressed the beauty of their collective force as opposed to the destructive forces of individual prosperity and success. Mostly, it was the women who experienced and presented their visions in the common *culto* sessions, and, as far as I could tell, they were met with immediate acceptance and recognition. However, I had the feeling that they weighed their words well when offering their interpretations for the others present.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: ON THE *CREYENTES*' ACTS OF MERCY

As in this chapter, my focus in the succeeding two chapters is on four questions concerning the *creyentes*' ritual experiences: What does *el culto* do? Where does its social productive force lie? Why do participants engage so frequently and deeply? And what is at stake for the participants? In this chapter, my exploration of the first question has revolved around the 'burning down' or abandonment of the ego and rational self in order to open up to *el Espíritu Santo*; this, I emphasize, could be a dangerous and even humiliating affair. Furthermore, I have looked at how the *creyentes*' engagement in *el culto* can be attributed to societal dimensions, such as the role of *el culto* in maintaining the continuity of *el pueblo Gitano*, their identity and their collective and social life. Spiritually, I believe the *creyentes*' engagement with *el culto* to be driven primarily by the Dionysian power and 'burning sensation' of *el Espíritu Santo*, which fill their bodies and lead them to a transcendental space – if only for a short period of time. Although at times it feels like torment, the experience also brings relief and feels comforting, sensual and even erotic, something akin to the Dionysian principle of pleasure-pain.

In attempting to approach these questions, I have mainly focused on the *creyentes*' 'acts of mercy' – that is, of 'opening up' and 'letting go', of leaving aside their egos and rational selves – for them to experience the 'burning sensation' of *el Espíritu Santo* and God's grace. Sancho, the 54-year-old Gitano previously mentioned, identifies *el duende* as 'the unity of spirit and heart', and indeed in putting themselves and their egos at risk, through their 'acts of mercy', the *creyentes* connect their body and mind, spirit and heart, as well as a range of other Cartesian dichotomies. By extension, in the next chapter, I explore the ways in which these 'acts of mercy' take part in shaping the *creyentes*' ways of perception and objectification, allowing them to confront, manage, transform and transcend tensional dynamics between other dualities such as ascetic/excessive, light/dark, high/low, sacred/profane, nature/society, male/female, young/old, attractive/repulsive, Gitano/Payo, saved/damned, earth/sky and comedy/tragedy. Chapter 6 picks up where this chapter ends, with the tensional dynamics of *el culto* and its broader social significance.

NOTES

1. Almost four decades ago, Claude Lévi-Strauss called for the study of ritual ‘in itself and for itself ... in order to determine its specific characteristics’ (1981: 669). Frits Staal argues that ritual exists ‘for its own sake’, constituting ‘its own aim or goal’ (1996: 131–32).
2. My broader analytical approach of studying Rastro Gitano identity, sociality and livelihoods in their own right is in fact also highly inspired by Don Handelman (2004).
3. Ariana was the name the *creyentes* gave me at the beginning of my fieldwork.