

CHAPTER 6

DUALITIES IN MOTION



For two hours each night, six times a week, the practice of *el culto* constitutes a ritual separation of the Rastro *pueblo Gitano* ('Gitano people') from *el mundo afuera* ('the outside world') and *el mundo de los Payos* ('the world of the Payos'). Moreover, *el culto* implies fixation and flux: the *creyentes* set profane time and 'reality' into flux inside the sacred realm of *el culto*, and, simultaneously, this time and mode of reality becomes fixed – that is, it is as if *el mundo afuera* stands still while *el culto* unfolds, and only when the *creyentes* leave church after a night's session can mundane life and time again resume. Finally, while the the ritual sequences and liturgy of *el culto* imply Apollonian order, rigidity and stasis, the 'inner dynamics' of *el culto* (e.g. Kapferer 2004) imply Dionysian energy, motion and transformation – in an empowering and life-giving sense but also in a way that can be devastating and destructive in nature.

I believe that it is precisely these embodied experiences and confrontations with opposing forces and dualities that attract the *creyentes* to *el culto*, night after night, year after year. They come to experience both the dissolution and unification of these opposites within themselves, in *el pueblo Gitano* and in the world, through the creative friction and force of *el Espíritu Santo*, which I was told holds the potential to 'awaken' and fulfil the *creyentes* in body, mind and soul. Thus, in a way, I would say that for *el culto* to function as a place where the world is made 'theirs' (i.e. 'Gitano'), it depends on ritualized action that seeks to bring antagonistic social orders into dialogue. Moreover, although these dualities never cease to oppose each other, the ritual gives them the space to exist – ontologically – simultaneously, often elevating them to a third position or logic. Hence, I take *el culto* to be a ritual through which dualities are brought 'to the table', so to speak, in order to be played with, tested, stretched and challenged – something that the following sections bear testimony to.

Following up on the literature about the creative principle and artistic state of mind of *el duende* from Chapter 5, we begin with Lorca ([1933] 1981), who has described ‘the dark sounds of *duende*’ as the dark ‘counterpoise’ to Apollo’s light (in Zwicky 2005). As a creative principle, *el duende* and its evocation relies closely on something resembling Friedrich Nietzsche’s account of the Dionysian in *The Birth of Tragedy* ([1872] 1994). For Nietzsche, the path to the sublime is all-inclusive, for a closeness of experience and direct contact with one’s emotions. His approach can be contrasted with an Apollonian reach towards the sublime through alienation and critical distance. For Nietzsche however, the latter would separate man from his essential connection to the self and thus make it impossible to reach the sublime.

At first glance, it would seem as if, in *el culto*, the creative principle of *el duende* represents a Dionysian contribution and the spiritual force of *el Espíritu Santo* represents Apollonian inspiration. On the surface, this may be true, yet empirically it is only the starting point. For example, even though, as ‘embodied imagery’ (e.g. Csordas 1997), *el Espíritu Santo* represents a range of Apollonian ideals, by descending from above – from the Christian clear blue heaven – it enters the bodies of the *creyentes* with ‘burning’ force, shedding light on worldly matters by means of clarifying visions, prophecies and glossolalia, through which notions about morality, virtuosity, purity, asceticism and chastity are communicated.

Paradoxically though, the carnal expressions (e.g. shaking, trembling, vibrating, eye rolling, arm swaying, tongue and lip flapping) of *el Espíritu Santo* are of a deeply Dionysian nature; under this influence, waves of energy move back and forth between participants, who seek a loosened control of themselves and their present situation. In this context, I would argue that the dialectics between the Dionysian and the Apollonian cause creative friction or tension – a tension that could also be read as *potential* for both emotion and motion. In the following, I will explore how both observable and non-observable dualities are managed, played with and rearranged through the ritual practice of *el culto*. In doing so, I will provide illustrations from both the spiritual and non-spiritual spheres, drawing parallels between the ways in which these dualities are broken down and worked both within *el culto* and outside the cultic realm.

LIGHT AND DARKNESS

In everyday language, light and darkness are often ascribed to the physical qualities of an object or the psychological conditions of a person. Depending on their use, they can be strictly normative or heavily descriptive and loaded

with metaphorical content, symbolism and meaning. Darkness belongs to the night and the shade, the hidden and the occult; light, in contrast, is the daytime, clarity and that which is 'out in the open'. In these spheres, people and activities may either bear or struggle to bear the clarity the light brings or the obscuring force of darkness; hence, symbols of dark and light carry great potency.

Within the context of *el culto*, light and darkness – evoking the guiding principles of Apollo and Dionysus, respectively – are played out and worked with in a very concrete manner. At the beginning of the ritual, intensely bright (eye burning, in fact) lights are switched on. Symbolically and metaphorically, I take this light to represent mundanity, the profane realm of the waking ego and daylight energies and activities. While this light remains on, people mingle and engage in casual conversation inside the church while children play out in the street. Then, on the signal of the pastor or the master of ceremonies, the band begins to play and the choir starts to sing with immediate, immense volume. Normally, at this point, the 'profane' lights are still on. While the choir's *alabanzas* bounce off the church walls with great intensity, the *creyentes* slowly find their seats on the benches. The lights are then turned off in most parts of the room, with only the pastor lit by a dim column of light – a single Apollonian beam cutting through the Dionysian darkness.

As he stands over the Bible in silent meditation, the band and choir play on and participants continue to chat, check their cell phones, buy *chicles* ('chewing gum') from the small candy shop at the rear of the church or fall into silent prayer. The lights are then turned completely off, resulting in total darkness. Increasingly, silent prayers are replaced by presentations of *el culto* to God, exceedingly loud prayers and bursts of ecstasy and glossolalia. The band, the choir, the pastor and the participants are set into co-motion, as passion, prayers and moments of highs and lows undulate between them. As I see it, in this divine sphere of cultic darkness, the boundaries between bodies, time and space collapse and are transcended. The ritual darkness is like a Dionysian 'swamp', an 'in-between' state or, more precisely, a state of *simultaneity* – that is, the simultaneous existence and unification of binary oppositions. In this realm of Dionysian darkness, there is no vision, because there is no light; hence, other senses become central to the experience. During my fieldwork, I was anxious before going to *el culto* each night; however, I felt at ease and almost at home in this cultic darkness, which could be either relaxing and meditative, comforting or energizing, depending on my emotional state on a given evening.

In *el culto*, several references are made to light. For example, the expression 'seeing the light' may be used to urge participants to 'see' God or to see the world as enlightened or illuminated by God's light and to be in

connection with divinity. A similar function is carried by the word ‘enthusiasm’, which comes from the Greek *enthousiasmos*, meaning: ‘a wild state of holy inspiration. The devotee was *entheos*, “full of the god”. Man and god were fused ... a union of human and divine’ (Paglia 1990: 96). From the moment a *creyente* ‘sees the light’, he or she has experienced God’s existence; for most, there is no way ‘back’ from this. Comparatively, the creative principle of *el duende* has been described as an ‘electric current’ illuminating certain works of art, making them appear as if ‘lit from within’ or as if carrying a ‘soulful spirit’ with a ‘dark emotionality’ (Hirsch 2002: 37). Based on my own experiences of *el culto*, I would argue that these descriptive aspects apply equally to the *creyentes*’ states of mind, spirit and body during the ritual: as struck by an electric current, illuminating them from within, producing a soulful spirit and dark emotional tides. Thus, as metaphors for more or less perceptible emotional and embodied states of being, I propose that light and darkness work simultaneously and in tandem to reach every part of the *creyentes*’ spiritual experience.

At *el culto*, the time spent in ritual darkness can go on for 20 to 90 minutes, depending on the profundity and depth achieved by the participants, as well as the general mood of the congregation and the plans of the pastor. The potential ecstasy and other deep emotions that are experienced in the darkness tend to be called to a halt, abruptly, when the half-Apollonian, half-Dionysian figure of the pastor signals for the lights to be turned on. At this point, he announces ‘*la ofrenda, por favor*’ (‘the offerings, please’), and two or three men jump up, each holding a small basket, and start to gather offerings. While the band and the choir will have eased their volume somewhat in the darkness, during *la ofrenda* they play and sing with revived energy. In the full ‘profane’ light, many toss a good proportion of the day’s earnings into the offering baskets. Then the lights are once again dimmed, and it is time for the pastor’s sermon. As he speaks, the pastor is often accompanied by some ‘light’ music from the band, and the spotlight above him ensures that he is the brightest object in the room, drawing the congregation’s attention and focus. Nevertheless, sometimes the pastor struggles to sustain the congregation’s attention – they are too busy chatting, texting and sharing candy – and he will give them a short but firm correction at the end of the service. Sometimes the congregation’s lack of attention is a protest – often a Dionysian female power performance – against the pastor’s overly paternalizing interpretations of the Bible that evening or something else that the community finds bothersome, such as male struggles for power and position.

The metaphor of light versus darkness (Apollo versus Dionysus) has long been applied to religious contexts; *el culto* is no exception. With respect to light – that is, rational thought and reasoning – ‘think before

you act' and see with 'a clear vision' (*una vision clara*) are frequent dictums delivered by the pastor. One might argue that the use of these and similar phrases by the pastor and others is indicative of a combined Christian/bourgeois, counter-impulsive virtue, whereby ideas of light and darkness are employed to guide the *creyentes*. Such mottos are also delivered with the intention to ease, mitigate or prevent conflicts among the Gitanos of el Rastro. In a community in which action and *la palabra* (emically, 'the spoken word' or 'agreement') universally reign over the written text, conflict can arise from impulsive acts and hastily spoken words. Thus, 'think before you act or speak' could be considered a peace-creating mantra – an Apollonian defence against Dionysian chaos and conflict.

The concepts of light and darkness can easily be put to use both symbolically and semantically. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the figure of the 'Romantic Gypsy' came to symbolize the ideals of Romanticism, including a love of nature, fantasy, feeling and freedom – all Dionysian ideals, in contrast to the Apollonian ideals of the preceding Enlightenment era, emphasizing rational thought and reasoning. This stereotype of Gypsy people is still prevalent, both in el Rastro and elsewhere. In Spain, the Gitanas frequently carry this projection. In association, Manuel often told his wife Bobola that she needed to see things '*con claridad*' ('with clarity'), as opposed to 'moving in the dark', before acting or speaking her mind. This idea was frequently repeated and emphasized by Gitanas (women) as well, when speaking amongst themselves about how they needed to see things '*con claridad*' before deciding or saying something that might cause harm. I observed this rhetoric both in church and in the Gitano NGOs that I visited, but for the Rastro Gitanos, I take *el culto* to be the main source of inspiration for this manner of thinking and expressing.

Returning to *el culto*, at the end of his sermon, the pastor asks someone to give a final prayer. Following this, with the lights still dimmed, the congregation rises almost collectively and exits into the Madridian night. Metaphorically and symbolically, the dimness of the church room – blending both Apollonian and Dionysian forces – meets the profane darkness outside, as the crowd spills into the streets outside the church, at 10 PM. As thematized in the following section, for Payo spectators, the crowd of Gitano *creyentes* that fills the streets of el Rastro after the nightly *el culto* sessions represents an unknown and frightening (Dionysian) darkness.

Symbolically, Gitanos, Gypsies, Roma and other similar groups have frequently been associated with dirt and darkness; on their part, they have also embodied and given meaning to such notions (e.g. Okely 1983). Today, Gypsies/Roma continue to be perceived as European 'anomalies', much as they were in the past; in Mary Douglas' (1966) terms, they are

‘matter out of place’. Many consider them dirty, filthy, bawdy, obscene, a risk to society and, to use Bauman’s terminology (2004), a ‘by-product’ of modern times. The rise of radical right-wing movements in Europe, and their strong anti-Gypsy ideas, is a very extreme example of such notions, found in all civil and political spheres and strata of European societies today.

When Payos in Madrid shared with me their thoughts on the Gitanos of el Rastro, they often described them as ‘dark’ – using this word to refer to several (perceived) aspects of the Gitano people: black hair, dark skin, alluring eyes, seductive women, a black economy, shady activities, an occult religion, palm reading and a generally secret way of life. Interestingly, the Gitanos of el Rastro often used a similar vocabulary when describing the Madridian Payo population. Payas (women), for example, would be depicted as rough, dark and dirty, ‘because of their foremothers’ long working hours in the fields’. The label ‘Payo’ is etymologically connected to ‘farmer’, and it seems that the dirt and burning sun of the fields in which Payas once toiled has been eternally branded on their present-day daughters and granddaughters. In comparison, the Rastro Gitanos described their ‘own’ women as refined, classy and elegant, not ‘damaged’ by hard work in the fields; that is, they emphasized them as Apollonian Artemises, strolling the streets of the finer Madridian neighbourhoods.

The blonde-haired god of Apollo provides a figurative example of light. Paradoxically, to underscore the link between physiognomy and origin, the Gitanos of el Rastro see blonde hair as a marker of Andalusian origin – something that, in turn, is thought to suggest a more ‘true’ and ‘pure’ Gitano identity. Hence, many of the second- or third-generation Gitanas I met of Andalusian descent in el Rastro dyed their hair blonde, symbolically embracing this as a common colour for Gitanas ‘from Andalucía’, as the burning Andalusian sun would bleach the hair. In contrast, the Rastro Gitanas, ‘*de toda la vida*’¹ (‘having lived in el Rastro all their lives’), dyed their hair black. In so doing, I propose, they also sought to underscore purity and truth, but this time more in line with the stereotype of the dark-haired Gitana. Furthermore, to underscore their religious devotion, they seemed to insist that a rigid and cold appearance, like that of the goddess Artemis, was most suited to raven black hair. With their dark hair and often dark clothes and veils – especially during *el duelo* (‘the mourning period’) – the Rastro Gitanos ‘*de toda la vida*’ were seen by others (and considered by themselves) to be more traditional, strict and private than the Rastro Gitanos of Andalusian origin, something that their appearances were meant to communicate.

THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE

As shown above, the aesthetic liturgical pattern of *el culto* undulates between periods of profanity (the beginning of the ritual and during *la ofrenda*) – performed in bright, Apollonian light – and sacredness (silent meditation or experiences of ecstasy) – which occurs in complete Dionysian darkness. A third category exists somewhere in between, when the lights are dimmed and the pastor delivers his sermon. In fact, it appeared to me as if the *creyentes* seamlessly slipped in and out of these modes of sacredness and profanity; some even seemed to exist in both, simultaneously. During the expression of a particularly intense prayer, for example, when both emotions and spirituality were vividly articulated through body movement, verbiage and music, the *creyentes* could easily slip into gossiping, texting or sharing candy. In this way, it seemed as if they had one foot on the ‘gas pedal’, accelerating towards ecstasy, and the other on the brake. In my view thus, the *creyentes’* ecstasy is never frenzy ‘gone wild’ but an experience that relies significantly on socialized skills and ritual techniques (see also Csordas 1990, 1993, 1997). Because many of the *creyentes* possess such skills, they seem able to turn their ecstatic state of being ‘on’ and ‘off’, at will. Thus, I infer that when they speak in tongues or experience other bodily and spiritual movement due to the presence of *el Espíritu Santo* in their bodies, they do so with reference to a practised technique of bodily control (e.g. Bourdieu 1977, [1984] 1993; Mauss [1935] 1968) and ‘embodied imagery’ (Csordas 1997). For instance, such ‘possession’ always follows a similar pattern: *el Espíritu Santo* is evoked in a certain manner, and it enters and leaves the body in a particular way each time. I would thus say that, for the *creyentes*, the evocation of *el Espíritu Santo* is the result of an embodied, sacred and profane skill, technique and effort. In this process, the sacred and the profane work simultaneously together to shape the *creyentes’* embodied cultic experience, as do the vertical movements of rising and falling, as explained below.

RISING AND FALLING

I mentioned earlier that because of their position as simultaneous insiders and outsiders in Spanish society, one can argue that the Gitanos of el Rastro carry class-transgressing qualities akin to the Simmelian (1908) stranger trope. Although unique in its personal character, the story of 80-year-old Tío Carlos resembles other stories I heard in el Rastro about other businesspersons who constantly moved between upper- and lower-class relations. Tío Carlos had his antique store in el Rastro for about fifty years, and

it attracted prominent customers such as the former King's cousin, members of the Spanish Parliament and other high-ranking officials of Spanish society. For half a century, these men and women became not only his loyal customers but also made up his central social circle and network. In conversations I had with Tío Carlos, or when I talked about him with others, it was clear that this group of elite people made for an important personal point of reference, identification and status for Tío Carlos – both in his own eyes and from the perspective of many other Gitanos of el Rastro. Alongside his business with the societal elites, he acted simultaneously in *la venta ambulante* ('itinerant trade') as a salesman of secondhand clothes to the villages surrounding Madrid. Although still prospering from and identifying with the financial and social relations of upper-class Madridian society, when I met him in 2013, Tío Carlos was moving between the homes of his three grown-up children. He had no house of his own, and Bobola (his daughter) and her husband Manuel provided for his food and wellbeing. As many others, he had experienced heavy economic loss during and after the 2008 financial crisis; nevertheless, his respect and status within the *pueblo Gitano* of el Rastro were still intact, connected to his position as a strong and capable family head and a prosperous salesman of antiques, as well as still having the former King's cousin as one of his closest friends. Tío Carlos never belonged to one single social strata or class, and his story is an example of how class transgression, rather than class belonging, is a prominent life path for many of the Gitanos of el Rastro, pertaining to the socio-economic status of their customers and the fluctuation of the markets at any given time.

As *comerciantes* thus, we can say that the Gitanos of el Rastro are used to vertical movement in terms of their relations to people of both high and low socio-economic status and their own fluctuations between financial heydays and downfalls. Metaphorically, these vertical movements between socio-economic classes connect with the cultic lives of the Gitanos of el Rastro. As *creyentes*, they seem to move vertically between moments of expressive ecstasy and bliss, introspection and contemplation – connected to the *upper* sphere of heaven – and moments of control and release, connected to the *lower* sphere of earth. One can thus contemplate how this vertical movement between heaven and earth, and the highs and lows in society, might hold a profound position in their lives. To examine this, I will give more examples of ethnographic value, from both within *el culto* and outside it.

In *el culto*, congregants are asked to '*levantar su voz*' ('raise their voice') and '*bajar su cabeza*' ('lower their head'). They get up on their feet in expressive worship, and they fall to their benches in silent adoration. The *creyentes*' spiritual upward movement towards ecstatic heights is further

enabled by a simultaneous play between the descending *Espíritu Santo* and their own ascending or elevating state of mind and body – akin to the creative principle of *el duende*. Their vertical movement between heightened and lowered intensities is also expressed in the undulation of the singing and music between calm and vigorous – resembling the shifts that are observable in the *creyentes*' prayers and bodily movements. A similar dynamic is present between individual performers and the congregation. In this context, the movement never stops; it is a continuous play between high and low, intense and calm, hot and cold, inspired and expired, euphoric and woeful, elated and despairing, controlled and free. From a Rastro Gitano perspective, as I interpret it – either in life or in *el culto* – it appears that none of these positions can exist without the other, not merged as a dichotomous rupture but as simultaneously and paradoxically coexisting complementarians.

I will give yet another example of the abovementioned vertical movements of the Rastro Gitanos, from the perspective of their lives as *comerciantes*. In a moment of confidence and contemplation, Concha once told me how her husband, Pablo, had gone from being a prosperous salesman before 2008 – selling expensive jewellery to high-end clientele, including lawyers, businessmen and *diputados* ('members of parliament') and owning four large shops, a 180m² home in the middle of el Rastro and no fewer than four luxury cars, priced at (respectively) 60,000, 80,000, 110,000 and 150,000 euros – to losing everything in the aftermath of the financial crisis. Other Gitanos in similar situations attributed such 'falls' to *el propósito de Dios* ('God's purpose'), implying that God had some reason for making them suffer.

One Gitana whose husband had experienced something similar to Pablo after the 2008 financial crisis said the following about her husband's 'fall from grace' (as she called it):

To be honest with you, I think God keeps him poor now and will do so for quite a while, to make him live humbly and as a Gitano. Because if not, if he regains his former fortune, I think he will once again go out and party and live as a crazy man again, as a Payo, as he did before. Therefore, I think God finds it better to keep him poor and calm.

I was also told about a Gitano in his 40s who was suffering from terminal stomach cancer. Although he had attended *el culto* for twenty-five years, he was violent towards his children and wife. People told me in confidence that they thought his cancer was *el propósito de Dios* ('God's will or purpose'); his death would be the only way his wife and children could get peace.

Paglia calls *tragedy* 'a male paradigm of rise and fall' (1990: 7). The stories I heard from the Rastro Gitanos about life's 'ups and downs' stated that

in times of economic prosperity and ‘rise’ the Gitanos historically fell into patterns of substance abuse (drugs or alcohol), extramarital sex, spending big, *mucha vida, rueda y movimiento* (in short, ‘a lot of partying’). This situation was often presented to me as a male drama, with a pattern of amorality and free will, approaching hubris and tragedy. However, I was told such times of prosperity were typically accompanied by calm and modest periods, in which God deprived the respective Gitano and forced him to contemplate his Christianity and true Gitano being.

Similarly, in the ritual setting, the altered creative mind akin to the creative principle of *el duende* and the spiritual force of *el Espíritu Santo* can be seen to represent cosmic, vertical power. While both forces enter and work through interior and exterior bodies, they do so – importantly – from different points of origin. The rising creative principle of *el duende* and the falling angel, *el Espíritu Santo*, not only connect and combine earth and heaven (i.e. the sacred and the profane) through the body of the *creyente* but, if seen as a metaphorical parallel to the Rastro Gitanos’ everyday lives, they also balance each other out.

As addressed above, one can argue that through their cosmological worldview the Rastro Gitanos perceive their lives as a series of highs – Dionysian moments of prosperity and *mucho movimiento* (‘a lot of movement’; i.e. partying) – and lows – Apollonian moments of difficulty, virtue and *tranquilidad* (‘tranquillity’). These polarities are rhetorically connected to their potential success or failure as merchants, and although most people long for the high points, they accept the low points as a moral necessity, in order to live ‘humbly’ and to reconnect with one’s inner, ‘true’ Gitano. This Apollonian state of ‘true Gypsiness’, involving chastity, moderation and control, includes the emic moral notions of being *sincero* (sincere), *sencillo* (‘straightforward’ or ‘simple-hearted’) and *humilde* (‘humble’), and living *con calma* (‘calmly’) and in *tranquilidad* (‘tranquillity’). During fieldwork, such notions were often emphasized by the Rastro Gitanos, in conversations about correct moral conduct, but also by the pastor, at his pulpit: ‘*Soy solo un gitánico sencillo*’ (‘I am only a simple little Gitano’). As managing owners, investors and entrepreneurs in their family businesses, the Gitanos of el Rastro run the risk of experiencing both upswings and downfalls. Allying Bourdieu’s social analysis of cultural and social practice as ‘necessity made into a virtue’ (1977: 77), we can say that the Rastro Gitanos’ cosmology and life philosophy not only capture these ups and downs, but have made them a virtue; it is in fact how life *should* be. A good life is seen as a life of certain uncertainty – it is a life that moves up and down, a life of scarcity and prosperity – at times with a lot of Dionysian rumble and partying, at other times following Apollonian ideals of ascetic calmness and tranquillity.

HIGH AND LOW

In the context of the vertical movement of rising and falling, I have proposed to understand the positions of high and low – as cosmological metaphors, symbols and signs – as fundamental for the Gitanos of el Rastro. As symbols of power, ‘high’ and ‘low’ are applied, for instance, in the Payos’ depiction of the Gitanos as ‘lower’ status, and vice versa. From a Rastro Gitano perspective, internal demarcations amongst Gitanos in Spain tend to stratify vertically, in terms of high and low status and class belonging. Such demarcations are often based on *cultura* (‘culture’) and one’s level of *formación y educación* (‘training and education’) (see, e.g., Chapter 2). Power relations among the Gitano *comerciantes* in el Rastro are also determined by the *comerciantes*’ respective clientele, with those who serve customers of *la alta sociedad* (‘high society’) enjoying heightened status also within *el pueblo Gitano*. However, as I argue in Chapter 4, money is not the primary determining factor of status among the Gitanos of el Rastro; rather, *respeto* (‘respect’), *cultura* (‘culture/cultivation’) and moral conduct are paramount. Thus, Rastro Gitanos who are well-off financially might have a poor reputation, and poor Gitanos of el Rastro might enjoy great respect and, indeed, class belonging – if they demonstrate a significant level of *cultura* and moral conduct.

As I have sought to show in the previous paragraphs, the Rastro Gitanos constantly play with and transgress high and low positions in a variety of ways – across religious, commercial and social spheres. This is not to say, however, that power differences do not exist for the Rastro Gitanos, or that they are inherently flexible. If anything, the opposite is closer to the truth. The Gitanos of el Rastro are very aware of the theological and sociological topography of highs and lows – including moments of the sacred and the profane, moments of personal prosperity or failure, or as used to define internal status and rank. However, as I see it, it is their in-depth knowledge of the workings of these highs and lows in all areas of life – and the tension between them – that enables the Rastro Gitanos, on occasion, to play with, challenge and transcend them.

ATTRACTION AND REPULSION

The duality of attraction versus repulsion might seem unexpected in this context, yet it was forced upon me in my observations of the *creyentes*’ bodily expressions, aesthetics and techniques during *el culto*. I consider this duality somewhat connected to that of boisterous behaviour versus bourgeois virtues and manners (see Conclusion), as well that of Apollonian versus Dionysian aesthetics.

One Gitana in church always greeted me with ‘*Hola guapa, cómo estás?*’ (‘Hello beautiful, how are you?’), and I would respond to her in the same manner. She was a voluptuous woman in her late 60s with large breasts that stretched all the way down to her aching hips. She was, to say, not particularly attractive in a conventional sense. Supported by crutches, she moved slowly. She wore threadbare black mourning clothes, and her teeth were few and crooked. She certainly gave an impression of being in bad health and a difficult financial position, but her always present humour, warmth and energy made her a strong and respected character in church. She was like the very incarnation of a Dionysian tragicomedy. The woman often shared her visions and prophecies during *el culto*, where she would also speak in tongues. However, perhaps due to her poor health, she never had the most uncontrolled trances or ecstatic experiences.

Neither she nor I was anywhere near the Gitana aesthetic ideal. Therefore, our exchange of ‘*Hola guapa, cómo estás?*’ struck a particularly ironic and humorous note. Other Gitanas around her age mostly dressed modestly (wearing, e.g., low heels, long trousers and long-sleeved blouses, revealing very little skin); however, they were always elegantly – and almost festively – dressed. From a Gitano perspective, the beauty of these middle-aged women lay not primarily in their surface appearances but in their ‘cultic self’ – in what their bodies and minds could achieve spiritually during *el culto*. These were mothers and grandmothers – women who had felt and lived through nature’s chthonian forces during pregnancy, birth, menstruation and probably also menopause. Their beauty, status and respect in *el pueblo Gitano* of el Rastro lay precisely in these Dionysian experiences, evokements and inter-nalizations of the deep human and divine forces of the universe.

In contrast, my impression of the Gitanas closer to my own age (*las mozas*; ‘the unmarried ones’) was that they dressed for *el culto* to show off their young bodily features, fashioning themselves into idols of Apollonian objectification, hiding the murky, procreative side of the feminine while simultaneously arousing sexual attraction in their male counterparts. For *el culto*, they wore the highest of heels, the shortest of skirts and the tightest of shirts; their hair reached far down their backs and their long fingernails were always painted, as were their faces. Virtually every night, they walked as if they were on a red carpet entering a great film premier. For them, *el culto* was not only a place of celestial worship but an arena for carnal sensuality and attraction. ‘Eroticism is society’s soft point, through which it is invaded by chthonian nature’, writes Paglia (1990: 15). These *mozas* were definitely the ‘soft point’ of *el pueblo Gitano* in the context of el Rastro – desirable objects to be controlled and protected.

The road to marriage for young Gitanas is quite different to that of young Gitanos in el Rastro. I was, for instance, told that teenage boys are supposed

to practise their sexual skills prior to marriage, so they can later satisfy their wife. Teenage girls, on the other hand, are meant to protect their chastity until marriage. This poses a dilemma for the boys: from whom shall they acquire their sexual skills? One way of resolving this dilemma is by collecting sexual experiences from *el mundo de los Payos* ('the world of the Payos'). Another quite common method explained to me is for young unmarried Gitano couples to engage intimately and sexually but without vaginal intercourse. I was also told that the very symbol of female virginity – the marital *pañuelo* ('handkerchief') – may, at times, be 'manipulated' for the bride's virginity to appear intact. In this ritual, a group of older Gitanas of el Rastro check the bride's virginity by pushing a *pañuelo* into her vagina. If the bride is 'intact', small drops of fluid from glands will paint the handkerchief yellow. But if the test fails, the old women will often produce an extra *pañuelo* with the correct stains on it, to show to the bridal couple's families and guests. After this ritual, the young couple is expected to engage sexually with each other.

In my interview with Sophia, a 23-year-old Gitana from the Madridian suburb of Vallecas, she told me how she broke with her family after they had arranged for her to marry her cousin. Neither she nor her cousin wanted to marry one another; hence, at the wedding after the *pañuelo* ceremony, her cousin 'escaped out the window', as Sophia phrased it, and her Gitano boyfriend entered to have sexual intercourse with her – in order for the wedding ritual to be completed. At the time of the interview, Sophia was married to a Latin American man, with whom she had a 2-year-old son. She told me that she had no contact with her Gitano family because she had broken off the marriage deal with her cousin.

In the context of *el culto*, we can metaphorically liken Paglia's bodily description of the ancient Greek goddess Artemis, Apollo's twin sister, to the *mozas*. According to Paglia (1990), the ancient myth informs us that Artemis' light was like a ray of blinding Apollonian daylight – so cold and intense that it burned like fire. Both her appearance and her chastity appeared strong and rigid: she seemed distant, inaccessible and frightening, even while she exposed herself, leaving nothing to the imagination. Her streamlined female form further suggested that she repressed and rejected her female procreative nature. We might thus understand the Artemisian beauty of *las mozas* in *el culto* as something akin to a pure Apollonian beauty and as implying their simultaneous recognition of surface aesthetics and of hiding one's chthonian, procreative nature.

In the metaphorical language of Apollo and Dionysus, sexual intercourse requires women to connect with their socialized human body and their deeper chthonian nature simultaneously. As mentioned, for the *mozas*, sexual intercourse is only permitted when sanctified by marriage. Thus, in

the Gitano cultural and religious context of el Rastro, the chthonian procreative power of the *mozas* must be hidden until the marriage ritual verifies their status as virgins. Only then can the Apollonian *mozas* become *mujeres* ('women') and reject their Artemisian/Apollonian appearance and allow Dionysus in (or out).

Fashion and beauty standards are conceptualizations created and projected by each cultural practice. In the context of *el culto*, chastity can be seen as an Apollonian virtue and triumph, and the *moza* as a sanctified, isolated and 'atomized' human object. We can thus ask if the beauty of the *mozas* – with their bright, shiny, glamorous and arrogant coldness, and their tough Apollonian appearance – could be seen as part of a performative act of unbending chastity and virginity. If so, the *moza*, with her merciless Artemisian beauty, can be seen as hiding her female regenerative potential while she searches for a decent husband and carries the honour and respect of her family on her shoulders. Yet, upon becoming a wife and mother – and thereby actualizing her regenerative potential – she enters the web of family relationships in a new way and becomes less of an atomized human object and more of a member of *el pueblo Gitano*, (re)producing continuity.

During my fieldwork, I observed such a change in appearance for many Gitanas following their shift from *mozas* to married mothers. Through this transformation, many of them gained weight, began to dress more modestly and made less of a show when entering church. Similarly, their aesthetics changed from a strictly controlled Artemisian style and surface ideal to a more profound Dionysian ideal, linked to their newly gained social status. With Mauss ([1935] 1968) we can say that their bodily techniques shifted in accordance with their social status in *el pueblo Gitano*.

As previously described, the lead singer of the church I attended the most was a Gitana from the outskirts of Madrid. She was a plump woman in her 30s who was almost bald but had a 'mind blowing', raspy, 'God-sent' voice. No one could evoke the creative force of *el duende* and the transcendental force of *el Espíritu Santo* during *el culto* as she could. When I heard her sing, it gave me goosebumps, and both shivering chills and a burning heat ran through my interior. I was not alone in that experience. Simply by opening her mouth, she was able to transform the church from a simple room for social gatherings to a space of transcendence and divine connection. Because of her looks, the *creyentes* had a somewhat disparaging nickname for her, yet they adored her and praised her for her voice, grace and grandeur. Her brother, who had equally little hair on his head and teeth pointing in all directions, had the important job of operating the church's spray box (!). Spraying canned 'fresh air' in the crack underneath the door separating *el culto* from *el mundo afuera* ('the outside world') apparently repelled 'bad spirits' from joining in. His efforts probably also prevented

cockroaches from entering and eased the smell of the many *creyentes* gathered in the small church space. In quite distinct ways, both brother and sister thematized the dimensions of attraction and repulsion. She with her poor bodily aesthetics and low socio-economic position, yet heightened musical expression and spiritual elevation, and he with his equally poor bodily aesthetics, yet his beautiful and elevated task of protecting *el culto* from the ‘bad spirits’ of *el mundo afuera*.

Moreover, I see both the toothless and joyful woman who always greeted me cheerfully and the voluptuous lead singer of the choir to be bodily manifestations and personifications of Dionysian aesthetics, incarnating the chthonian procreative principle associated with pleasure-pain and spiritual (re-)birth. Theirs was not an aesthetics of the eye but of emotion, passion, aggression, procreation and pain. In fact, repulsiveness is not in the Dionysian vocabulary:

Dionysus is the all-embracing totality of mother-cult. Nothing disgusts him, since he contains everything that is. Disgust is an Apollonian response, an aesthetic judgment ... Aestheticism insists on the Apollonian line, separating objects from each other and from nature. Disgust is Apollonian fear at a melting borderline. (Paglia 1990: 93)

In my view, the unmarried *mozas* of *el culto* skilfully manage the ‘melting borderlines’ between objects and society and nature by enacting a ‘rigid visibility’ of bright beauty and firm chastity. However, these borderlines melt entirely when the *mozas* become married and mothers. Regarding the lead singer, on the other hand, we could understand her Dionysian procreative powers in the evangelical context of *el culto*, as bringing forth and enabling spiritual rebirth for herself and her fellow *creyentes*. These procreative powers of hers were manifested in the strong effect that her singing had on the other ritual participants, making people get up on their feet, speak in tongues, ‘open up’ and ‘let go’ of their rational mindsets, egos and social selves in order to experience ‘baptism in the spirit’.

The play between attraction and repulsion in *el culto* also appears in the bodily expressions of the *creyentes* when experiencing trance and ecstasy. When in trance, the *creyentes*’ bodies are taken over by cataclysmic Dionysian powers manifesting in chthonian convulsions and spasms. They become body drums on which the cultic rhythm beats – a rhythm that renders, tears and mangles their minds and bodies – a rhythm that cannot be defended against. I know this because I took these rhythms and pulsations to bed with me each night, no matter how hard I resisted. At the height of its intensity, *el culto* is like ‘a vibration, a tremor or temblor reducing the visible to the tangible, a brute laying on of hands’ (Paglia 1990: 96). In my attendance, I fought these impulses with great effort. I enjoyed observing

them, but I resisted full emotional, spiritual and bodily participation. On my final night attending *el culto*, however, after having spent about a year there, on Raquel's request, I was invited to the pulpit to say a few words. Finally, in the eyes of the *creyentes*, I was 'touched by the spirit', as they put it. I ended up delivering the most loud, intense and emotional speech one could imagine, full of crying and sobbing. I spoke directly to the crowd, thanking them and playfully referring to myself as they had done, as '*la vikinga Gitana*'. The background to this event was that I had just spent 24 hours at the hospital, receiving intravenous nutrition and providing a range of blood samples, and I was exhausted. My health condition combined with the ritual setting and the opportunity to speak directly to the crowd overwhelmed me, and I think this carried me to the point where I was able to transcend self-reflectivity, if only for a short moment. Afterwards, one of the pastors laid his hand on my head to heal and bless me, and the crowd went wild with enthusiasm to see that I had finally, in their eyes, 'opened up' and 'let go'.

The expressive aesthetic of the cultic body in trance can also be described as 'a deep and tender human cry of communication with God through the five senses' (Lorca [1933] 2010). The cultic body is one of sensuality, emotion and spontaneity. It is a body that is released (at least partially) from constraint and control. Similar to Sigmund Freud's (1961) description of the 'oceanic' feeling connected to spiritual experiences, the *creyente* body in trance is free of the ego and, for a brief moment, eternally connected with divinity. The cultic body, as I came to know it in the context of *el Rastro*, is at once attractive and repulsive, erotic and chaste, alluring and disturbing, conscious and unconscious, and rational and emotional. In its ecstatic state, it transcends inner puritanism and asceticism (Apollo), through the forces of mysticism and emotionality (Dionysus). And as I have sought to show, the alluring danger of the cultic body of the *creyentes* lies not in its in-betweenness but in its simultaneity – that is, in the constant fight between the fixed principles of Apollo and the dissolving powers of Dionysus. On these grounds, in Chapter 6, I explore and analyse *el culto* as constitutive of a ritually created 'cultic habitus'.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: *EL CULTO* – WHERE THE WORLD IS MADE 'THEIRS'

In this chapter, with the metaphorical language and guiding principles of Apollo and Dionysus, I have focused on the simultaneous workings of the transcending force of *el Espíritu Santo* and the creative principle of *el duende* – in the context of *el culto*, and, more concretely, how these

opposing powers and elevated states of mind reflect a range of dualities that are played with and experienced during the ritual.

I see the cultic manipulation and reordering of dualities, as broadly explored in this chapter, as one of the main ‘products’ of *el culto*, and I take it to include a rearrangement of the senses and the *creyentes*’ ways of perceiving, objectifying and being in the world. In this, I find support in Csordas’ writings (1990, 1997), which are in turn firmly supported by Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1964) and Bourdieu (1977, [1984] 1993) on the ‘existential beginnings’ brought forth in the ritual setting – that is, the very embodied moulding of perception and objectification within each practitioner through their active participation in the rite. In other words, my focus has been on the very threshold where their culturally shaped ritual practice comes into being through that very same practice. To put it plainly, for the Rastro Gitano *creyentes*, *el culto* seems to be where the world is made ‘theirs’ – through their perpetual re-creation of the rite and, simultaneously, themselves. Chapter 7 builds on the empirical material presented here, and I further explore this argument by delving more deeply into the role of *el culto* in shaping the perceptions, cognitions, emotions and bodies of the participants, in the vocabulary of their habitus.

NOTE

1. My Gitano friends explained that if you ask persons from Toledo or el Rastro where they come from they will say ‘*Soy del Rastro de toda mi vida*’ (meaning something similar to ‘I was born and raised in el Rastro’) or ‘*Soy Toledano de toda mi vida*’ (‘I was born and raised in Toledo’), in order to differentiate themselves from people in the surrounding villages, whom they consider less cultured and of a lower social class. The Rastro Gitanos’ attachment to place – either place of origin or el Rastro – is obviously a big part of their self-understanding and self-identification.