

CHAPTER 7

TOWARDS A SPIRITUAL GAZE AND CULTIC HABITUS



The angel comes with windy upward drafts, with transcendental longings; the duende arrives with demonic undertow, with downdrafts of emotion. Both are fundamental inner disturbances, fissures of being, ways of putting the self at risk, liberating figures. They are extremities of the human imagination.

—Edward Hirsch, *The Demon and the Angel*

The present chapter extends the discussion of the former, addressing the Rastro Gitanos' *making of mercy* and penetrating further into the 'inner disturbances' and human 'fissures of being' that are manifested in their ritual practice of *el culto*. My focus lies predominantly on the self-generating capacity of *el culto* – that is, the way in which *el culto* produces the *creyentes*, who in turn re-produce *el culto*, in an endless circle. More specifically and based on my examinations of *el culto* 'in its own right' (e.g. Handelman 2004), I argue that this self-generating capacity creates a ritually shaped habitus (Bourdieu 1977, [1984] 1999) and 'spiritual gaze', enabled by the *creyentes*' ritual procedure of putting their egos aside and momentarily freeing themselves from social constraints and rationality in order to connect with each other and the divine (e.g. Csordas 1997).

Central to my discussion are the transcendental experiences of the *creyentes* in *el culto*, and the innate potential of these experiences to shape their bodily, emotional, perceptive and interpretative apparatuses, in the direction of a 'cultic habitus'. I take this habitus to include certain aesthetic preferences, modes of passion, creativity, knowing and reasoning, ways of moving one's bodies and putting one's minds to use, the relation between emotion and cognition, notions of personhood and conceptualizations of the self and other, as well as an idea about God's omnipotence

and omnipresence. At times, the analysis overlaps with the discussion presented in Chapter 5 and 6, revisiting prior arguments either in more depth or from a different angle. For instance, I return to my interpretations of the *creyentes*' opening up for *el Espíritu Santo* as an 'act of mercy', but in this context I connect this act to the shaping of a cultic habitus. At other times, the chapter takes a completely new turn. While the analysis relies on a phenomenological approach of the *creyentes*' cultic practices, I start out the chapter with my own personal experience of what one might call an altered state of consciousness or a state of trance, which occurred far from *el culto* – in both time and space – but allowed me to gain embodied knowledge about what it feels like to be in such a state.

MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Despite spending many hours in *el culto* during my fieldwork, I never personally experienced any spiritual elevation or transcendental state of being. In fact, the closest I came to this was in my reaction to the spiritually transporting, repetitive, intense and loud music. Hence, even though I spent considerable time with people experiencing all kinds of strongly felt and transportive emotional, bodily and spiritual states, I did not have a bodily understanding of these states myself. I did not know what it *felt* like to be transported and transformed from the 'inside'. I only had the *creyentes*' explanations and my own observations. Yet, about a year after finishing my fieldwork, in 2013, I had an experience that on reflection resembled the trance state of the *creyentes*, as I imagine it to be.

The background to this experience was that I, at the very end of my fieldwork, became ill with a disease called myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME) – a devastating multi-systemic illness that causes dysfunction of the neurological, immune, endocrine and metabolic systems. One of the many symptoms I was experiencing was an extreme sensitivity to light. One year after my fieldwork, the situation was so grave that I had to stay away completely from all light and deprive myself of all possible stimuli until my condition improved somewhat. This meant staying in bed all day in a light-proof room – 'a mattress grave', in Heinrich Heine's ([1851] 2010) words. Though I kept my head underneath the duvet and tried to relax, my vision would nevertheless be filled with something resembling intense disco lights, which blinked, glowed, trembled and flickered about. I imagined these to be neurological signals of my brain 'running wild'.

As is the desperate concern and outlook of so many sufferers of this disease, I did not know if I would ever be able to 'escape' the condition or the darkness ever again. At the time, I did not dare indulge this thought too

much, as I knew that if I panicked, my chances of recovery would be minuscule. Instead, I sought deep relaxation and calmness through meditation and breathing techniques, and I directed my attention towards joyful memories. I would leave the room after sunset, taking small walks outside in the dark, always with sunglasses on. But even on these trips, I would suffer: a candle burning at the kitchen table in my house, or a dim streetlight outside would 'burn' my eyes and brain, creating additional stress for my body. Thus, most of the time I stayed in bed.

Gradually, as the disco signals in my cerebrum started to disappear, I actually began to appreciate, in a sense, the tranquillity of this existence. Then, at one point during one of the many periods of time I spent in darkness seeking profound relaxation and calmness through breathing and meditation, I felt as if my spirit, soul or self was lifted up and out of my body. I felt completely free, as if the poor state of my body was no longer affecting me, and death did not seem very frightening; in fact, none of this mattered, because I had freed myself. It felt as if I had been transported outside of my body and was now circling above it – in an almost sensual sphere of undulating warm and somewhat glimmering field of sensation. I was liberated from 'the crypt' of my body, and I felt profoundly happy – filled with joy, calmness and freedom – and I think, in fact, a sensation of eternity.

Marina Tsvetaeva's ten-part poem, *Insomnia* (1906), described as a 'dark prayer, a joyous hymn to the night' (Hirsch 2002: 93), always brings me back to those days in darkness:

She pleads to be liberated from the bonds of day and throws open her doors wide into the night, eagerly relinquishing her social life in order to be inhabited by something stranger and more mysterious ('and people think perhaps I'm a daughter or wife/but in my mind is one thought only: night'). (ibid.: 92)

Although my 'exile' was not of the optional kind that Tsvetaeva pleads for in her poem – as I was profoundly terrified of being cut off from the bonds of day-to-day life and my social obligations – the effects of my condition, however, a nightly liberation from daily constraints, resembled her hopes.

I was later reminded that in the days around this episode my mother – understandably worried – asked me if I was unhappy or even depressed. My answer baffled her. I told her that I had never been happier. After the disco lights left my vision and my fear of darkness – of being cut off from life – evaporated, what filled my very sick body and mind was a sensation of calm, inner joyfulness. Even though the systemic illness still had me in its firm grip, I was also newly married and, although not consciously aware of it at the time (my body though was), pregnant with my first son. Perhaps this fact combined with my sensory deprivation brought on this spiritual experience.

My trance-like experience in the darkness was a one-off event. Several times I tried to re-create that state through conscious effort, but to no avail. I was not trained in the relevant techniques. After what turned out to be a month-long period of complete darkness, I periodically still engaged in many shorter stays in darkness to calm my nerves and other bodily systems that were working overtime due to the disease. These hours spent in darkness with my eyes closed and taking deep meditative breaths often transported my mind back to my fieldwork and, little by little, in the direction of an anthropological analysis of my empirical findings. Most of the analysis presented in this book was actually worked out in my body and mind whilst lying in this relaxed state, in complete darkness. I do believe that parts of the book bear testimony to this particular creative process.

I write about my experience here as part of a phenomenological argument, and because when it happened to me one of my first thoughts was: *this is what it must feel like to reach a state of spiritual transcendence*. We can reflect on the fact that my experience of an altered state of consciousness had an ‘inward’ expression, while the experiences I observed in *el culto* often had a very outward, ecstatic expression. Generally, we can say that there exist three main paths to the sublime, bliss, transcendence or whatever one might call it. Very briefly, the ecstatic road of transcendence is related to the ideals of Romanticism and Dionysus. The ascetic pathway is associated with the guiding principles of the Enlightenment and Apollo. Finally, there is the subtler pathway of mysticism, which is often associated with religious practices such as African voodooism, Jewish Kabbalah or Afro-Caribbean cults. In the context of *el Rastro*, although ecstasy and mysticism seem to be the guiding principles of the cultic realm, I would argue that their sacred unfolding equally depends on the ascetic profanity of the *creyentes*’ everyday lives.

What I am trying to say here is that my experience gave me embodied knowledge to draw on in my analysis of the *creyentes*’ cultic practices. My utterly unintended experience of transcendence was the product of the ascetic, having been deprived of all sorts of stimuli, particularly light and sound. The deep joyful calmness I sought was reached through time spent in muted darkness trying to escape the ‘ferocious lights’ of my own nervous system. When these merciless lights finally went out, my transcending experience was one of circling in the darkness, looking down at my abandoned, dysfunctional corpus.

To gain a hermeneutical understanding of a phenomenon and to gain a phenomenological understanding of the same phenomenon are epistemological activities of quite different sorts. In his attempt to comprehend the Ilongot practice of head hunting, Renato Rosaldo (2013) wrote about the tribesmen’s claims that severing and throwing away a head was the same

as throwing away anger at death. However, as Rosaldo describes it, it was not until tragedy struck his own life that he *really* understood this ritual. When Rosaldo lost his wife (Michelle Rosaldo), he felt not only sad but also angry – enraged even, and although he did not want to sever anyone’s head (and nor do present-day Ilongots), he nevertheless phenomenologically understood that the pain of grief could not be thrown away without radical action.¹

In comparison, before I gained the embodied knowledge of leaving my very sick body through spiritual transport and entering a transcendental state of mind, my fieldwork efforts to understand the *creyentes*’ experiences with trance and ecstasy were limited to my observations and interpretative skills. I would argue that my time spent in *el culto* – as well as my month in darkness changed my ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu 1977) quite radically. Thus, in the following section, I will connect this ‘learning’ or socialization and the concept of ‘habitus’ to the context of *el culto*.

A RITUALLY SHAPED CULTIC HABITUS

Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977) ideas of ‘cultural practice’ and ‘habitus’ are perhaps the most widely applied concepts in anthropological (and sociological) writing. According to Deborah Reed-Danahay (2004), Bourdieu’s concept of habitus blends both Norbert Elias’ ([1989] 1996) psychological theory of habitus and the embodied perspective on working habitus in Marcel Mauss’ ([1935] 1968) essay on ‘the techniques of the body’. Bourdieu’s (1977) concept takes a cultural practice perspective, underscoring the dynamic relation between each person and society or sociality. It refers to people’s mental dispositions (e.g. Jenkins and Jenkins 1992; Swartz 1997), embodied knowledge and experiences (e.g. Farnell 2000), as well as the sociality of each person. According to Bourdieu ([1984] 1993: 87), habitus can be understood as a transformative ‘machine’ that allows us to reproduce social affairs that we ourselves have already created. This theoretical concept also provides a lens through which to examine how cultural practices and ideas become internalized, embodied and naturalized. Habitus can thus be understood as the result of a process whereby social practices and ideas are incorporated by individuals and put into action through their being and doing in the world. In this sense, it describes a ‘matrix’ of preconceptions and dispositions that are applied in a variety of situations (Bourdieu 1990: 94). Habitus is comprised of acquired, forgotten and embodied knowledge; thus, it is not necessarily intellectual but *physical* social knowledge embedded in the body. The implication of this is that we ‘remember’ just as much with our body as with our head, and that our body is both shaped by and expressive of our habitus.

As emphasized in the introduction to this chapter, my use of ‘habitus’ as an analytical concept begins with my understanding of *el culto* as a ritual that creates the *creyentes*, who in turn re-create *el culto* (e.g. Handelman 2004; Kapferer 2004). Moreover, my focus is on the *creyentes*’ bodily, emotional and spiritual experiences, expressivity, aesthetics and motions, and how these suggest a particular kind of being in the world. I also examine the way in which *el culto* shapes the Gitanos’ perceptual and interpretative apparatuses (e.g. Csordas 1990, 1997; Merleau-Ponty 1962, 1964), both within and outside the church walls. I refer to this as their ‘spiritual gaze’, which is shaped and informed by the inner ‘ritual dynamics’ (e.g. Kapferer 2004) of *el culto*. I understand *el culto* as a ritual practice that is creative, affirmative and legitimizing of the *creyentes*’ ‘cultic habitus’, yet it is also a practice that enables *creyentes* to position themselves ‘directly within the habitus’ and adjust ‘its parameters’ (ibid.: 49).

WHAT IS BORN?

In Chapter 5 and 6, I attempted to answer what *el culto* does. A related question is: What does *el culto* make? With Handelman (2004), this question could be rephrased as: What is born from ritual? Or with Hirsch (2002): What kind of ‘fresh light’ is revealed through this ritual effort? All these questions connect to the concepts of habitus (presented above) and ‘spiritual gaze’ (presented below), in their examination of the social and spiritual production and reproduction of the *creyentes* through the ritual practice of *el culto*.

Gitano Pentecostalism, like other forms of Pentecostalism, has its origins in eighteenth-century Anglo-American Protestant evangelism – specifically the revival movement known as the ‘Great Awakening’ (e.g. Cantón-Delgado et al. 2020). Evangelical Christianity, including Methodism and Baptism, rests on the notion that it is not sufficient for one to be born into faith; one also needs to be converted. Hence, strong conversion experiences – often expressed in terms of rebirth – are essential.

In the context of *el culto*, as elsewhere, the experience of conversion and rebirth is marked by the act of baptism. In this process, soon-to-be *creyentes* draped in white clothing are often brought to the Manzanares river, which runs through Madrid. The baptism is conducted in full daylight, with an atmosphere of sacredness, joy and festivity. Often, it culminates with a great collective picnic along the riverside. The *creyentes* frequently describe their lives in terms of ‘before’ and ‘after’ conversion, particularly within the *testimonios* (‘testimonies’) they give in church. However, I understand their idea of rebirth as a broader and deeper ontological phenomenon that has

to be repeated on every ritual occasion (and there are many!), through the *creyentes'* acts of mercy – that is, the opening up of their minds and bodies – enabling a communication with God that involves a plea for liberation from their own social and rational selves. In *el culto*, such acts seem to be carried out continuously.

The concept of ‘birth’ can operate as a metaphor for (re)productivity. As I see it, the creative act of *el culto* has many (re)productive layers. For example, it gives birth to sociality, as well as the Rastro Gitano collectivity (*el pueblo Gitano*) and a ritually grounded Gitano identity in the context of el Rastro. Cantón-Delgado et al. (2020) even argue that Gitano Pentecostalism is today the main reproductive force for Gitano sociality, identity and continuity in Spain. I would argue that *el culto* is not only socially productive and reproductive but also ‘harmonizing’ in the way that it intimately unites Gitanos from a range of socio-economic strata, backgrounds and kinship groups – in the context of el Rastro and elsewhere. In so doing, it produces *community* by ‘smoothing’ conflicts, divides and even political fragmentation (e.g. Gay y Blasco 1999; Kaprow 1978).

Moreover, with Kapferer (2004), I would stress that a certain kind of ‘cultic other’² is ‘born’ – or at least fortified – by this ritual. By this, I mean that through both liturgy and ritual improvisation, the practice of *el culto* creates a particular perception of remoteness and closeness between those who have been saved (*el pueblo de Dios*; ‘God’s people’) and those who are damned (*el mundo afuera*; ‘the world outside [of *el culto*]’) (see Montañés 2016: 4; Williams 1991: 87 for similar findings). From a *creyente* perspective, this divide also overlaps with the boundary between *el pueblo Gitano* and *el mundo de los Payos* – a boundary that is reborn and reinforced by the ritual inclusion of the ‘otherness’ of the ‘other’.

CREATION THROUGH SACRIFICE

Referring to the artist’s battle in his or her meeting with *el duende*, Hirsch (2002: xi) writes that ‘art is born from struggle (darkness) and conducts a fresh light’. As explored in the previous chapters, in the context of *el culto*, this battle is manifested in the *creyentes'* ecstatic meeting with *el Espíritu Santo* and the ego sacrifices they make in order to bring about this meeting. While the above citation refers to the ‘creation of art’, the ‘art’ or creative product of *el culto* is not artwork, *per se*, but an aesthetic processual creation produced by and for religious purposes. What is sought in *el culto* is understood to include a connection with God, the transcendental, the sacred or the divine (i.e. the product) and the bodily, intellectual and spiritual process of opening up for such a connection (i.e. the process).

I locate the direct and concrete ‘struggle’ of the continuous creation and re-creation of *el culto* by its participants in the emotional, bodily and spiritual energy and risk they invest in opening up and setting aside their own egos, social positions and rational minds to invite *el Espíritu Santo* in. I also recognize such risks and battles in the material sacrifices the *creyentes* make to attend *el culto* nearly every evening, prioritizing this ritual above work, leisure and relaxation, as well as personal health, time and money (through, for instance, *la ofrenda*; ‘the offerings’). As a dedicated participating observer, I felt the sacrifice involved in attending *el culto* almost every night in the heavily ‘disturbed’ feeling I had each evening, for the fact that my social life outside this arena was stripped bare. My social life *was* that of *el culto*, and my bodily felt frustration over this situation was also in fact at times shared by many of the *creyentes*, who told of the sacrifices they made to attend *el culto* on such a regular basis. It felt like there was hardly any social life lived outside of *el culto*.

To summarize thus far, I see the ritual of *el culto* as a creative act – an act that, each night and over time, produces something ‘new’ from something ‘old’; in that very gesture, it also reproduces the ‘old’. Thus, through *el culto*, Rastro Gitano identity, sociality and lifestyle – that is, their *habitus* – is constantly ritually created and re-created as something intrinsically spiritual.

A FRESH LIGHT

In Chapter 5 and 6, in line with Kapferer (2004), I emphasized how *el culto* refashioned the *creyentes*’ perceptive and interpretative apparatuses. In a perceptual sense, the ‘fresh light’ granted by the refashioning, inner dynamics of *el culto* parallels the fresh light cast on the world after an experience of having opened to God’s presence. As ritually ‘reborn’ with a profound ‘spiritual gaze’, the *creyentes* thus learn to see the world ‘revealed’, through fresh eyes or vision. The pastor calls the *renovacion* (‘renewal’) of the *creyentes* in *el culto* a moral and spiritual ‘*ajuste de la vision*’ (‘adjustment of the vision’). Indeed, through the ritual, the *creyentes*’ perception of the world – and particularly the social world – is readjusted into what they consider a truer version.

‘*Me lleno de tí*, say the *creyentes*, meaning, ‘I fill myself up with you’. On a near daily basis, they ‘fill’ their bodies and minds with the words of God – and even God, himself, in the shape of *el Espíritu Santo*. From my perspective, this fulfilment works as a kind of spiritual healing, incarnating the holiness of God to create healthiness and wholeness within the mind–body self. This process generates a profoundly religious *habitus* that is not abandoned between *culto* sessions. More so, this is not just a mode of

embodied being that is created as a ‘fresh light’, it is also connected to the Rastro Gitanos’ cosmological and ontological notions of the world and its inhabitants, encapsulating ‘dualities in motion’ and accentuating cultural values of paradoxes, simultaneity and flexibility/rigidity (e.g. Chapter 6). To put it bluntly, if there is one art that is born from the struggle of *el culto*, it is the art of living, as enabled by the creation of a ritualistically shaped habitus – a ‘cultic habitus’. Hence, as I see it, what is celebrated and with great effort joyfully re-created in *el culto* is both God’s Work of Creation and the continuous creations of man on earth. With respect to the latter, this refers to the Rastro Gitanos’ own making of meaning and materiality in church, at the market, in their homes and elsewhere – in short, their making of life *a la manera Gitana* (‘the Gitano way’). *El culto* celebrates these makings.

A RITUAL AESTHETICS OF SIMULTANEITY

In Chapter 5 and 6, I introduced an aesthetic language drawing on the metaphor and tensional duality of Apollo and Dionysus, empirically manifested in the creative principle and artistic mind of *el duende* and the spiritual force of *el Espíritu Santo*. In the present section, I develop this line of inquiry further, accentuating how dualities and seemingly paradoxical combinations are given space in *el culto*, thereby producing a ‘ritual aesthetics of simultaneity’ that combines oppositions that otherwise and elsewhere would be held separate – situationally and/or institutionally. In the analysis, I apply the literary imageries of the ‘joyful darkness’ of *el duende* (e.g. Lorca [1933] 1981) and the ‘ferocious light’ of the angel – that is *el Espíritu Santo* (e.g. Emerson 1844), which, in themselves, illustrate simultaneously existing tensional oppositions.

As demonstrated in the empirical material and analysis provided in Chapter 5 and 6, we can say that the cultic meeting between the creative principle akin to that of *el duende* and the spiritual force of *el Espíritu Santo* is born from three dimensions. First, there is the Apollonian liturgy of Pentecostal rituals and services. Second, we have the *creyentes*’ ritual techniques and skills. The third element has to do with their intense spiritual efforts, participation and passion collected from the Dionysian depths of life. It is nothing short of a conundrum then, that these three contrasting elements might transform into a ferocious struggle within the ritual body – shaking it, ‘burning’ it, twisting it and tormenting it. In combination, I argue, these three cultic elements – and the dynamics between them – enable the *creyentes* to enter and exit states of what we might call ecstatic trance.

In the following section, I turn to broader ethnographic descriptions in my examination of how the simultaneous ‘joyful darkness’ (akin to that of *el duende*) and the ‘ferocious light’ of *el Espíritu Santo* are manifested in the three social categories of women in *el culto*: *las mozas* (referring to the unmarried, young female choir members), *las mujeres* (referring to the middle-aged, married women) and *las viudas* (‘the widows’). In *el culto*, the women outnumber the men. They also outperform the men in spiritual engagement. In general, during my fieldwork, I was also able to follow more women than men, both within and outside *el culto*. In sum, I therefore use the abovementioned categories of women as examples of the ‘ritual aesthetics of simultaneity’ that I see as an intrinsic aspect of the *creyentes*’ ritualistically shaped habitus (e.g. Bourdieu 1977, 1990) and bodily techniques (e.g. Mauss [1935] 1968).

FEMALE CULTIC AESTHETICS

Las Mozas

The evening’s *culto* session has gone on for some time already. Gabriela speaks in tongues, checks her Facebook account, chats with her friends over WhatsApp and engages in old-fashioned conversation with the woman next to her, all at the same time – as in a great *bulería* (fast flamenco style). The ‘moonlight’ of her mobile phone lights up her face, emphasizing her round double chin atop a strong neck. She is wearing an elegant black blouse with an image of a roaring tiger made up of gold and silver pearls; underneath it, glamorous letters spell out: ‘I’m bad!’ She starts drumming her fingernails against the back of the bench in front of her, in rhythm with the intense flamenco-like psalms sung by the choir. She is a *moza* – a young, unmarried woman. Though she usually sings in the church choir, she is taking tonight off because of a sore throat.

As aesthetic expressions in and of themselves, *las mozas* in the choir accentuate bodily attraction and concealed procreation (e.g. Chapter 5); as Apollonian ideals, they communicate distance and an almost cold or dismissive attitude, together with fresh, clear voices. The ‘joyful darkness’ and ‘ferocious light’ they bring to *el culto* could be exemplified by their individual talents brought to life in the ritual setting. For example, the high-pitched voice of a particularly beautiful and talented lead singer provides a ‘silver lining’ to the comparatively darker, Dionysian dimensions of the ritual – and

she gets all kinds of strong emotional feedback in response, in terms of praises, avowals and heightened spiritual enthusiasm from both the pastor and the congregation. When the choir sings in harmony – as one collective body – expressing earthly strength and divine connection through synchronized voices, clapping and other body movements, they work equally to spiritually transport the congregation as the abovementioned ‘silver lining’. At an intersubjective level, it seems like the relation between the ‘God-sent’ lead singer, the inspired choir, the pastor and others present can be characterized as one of *interference*. Interference (from physics) is the phenomenon when two or several waves (water, sound, light or radio) appear at the same time and place, and together cocreate a new wave pattern. Metaphorically applied to the cultic setting, we can say that the new ‘waves’ of embodied musicality, emotions, spirituality and expressivity appear in the intersubjective relation between the spiritual efforts of the *mozas* of the choir and those of the rest of the congregation. The dynamics of the waves work increasingly on each other to escalate the situation into what we might identify, in Kapferer’s terminology (2004), as the realm of the ‘virtual’ or the transcendent. This ‘virtuality’ can further be characterized as the domain beyond meaning, semiotics and rationality, where both light and darkness, joy and fury can expand without concepts and interpretation. Virtuality, in Kapferer’s (2004) terms then, describes the state of a ritual when the inner dynamics of the rite – the embodied and intersubjective emotional expressivity – begin to produce a space of cultural creativity and potentiality.

Las Mujeres

As aesthetic ideals, the middle-aged women of *el culto* project mature beauty, strong spiritual virility and, from my perspective, social warmth and community that, time and again in my fieldwork, enveloped me. If we speak in metaphorical terms, the ‘joyful darkness’ and ‘ferocious light’ they carry with them to *el culto* appear most often in the shape of a strong collective body – a ‘gathering’, in Rappaport’s (1999) sense – working as one. In Dionysian terms, they empathically ‘dissolve’ into one another. In singing and clapping, in sitting and rising, in silent and spoken prayer, in shouting and avowing, in laughter and lament, in deep alertness and concentration, in light-hearted chat and distraction, in rejoice and protest, their bodies are often synchronized and harmonized. However, despite this ritual synchronicity and harmony between them, they are not free from social conflict; at best, they may be said to be temporarily liberated within the ritual setting. Hence, while joys and sorrows, their dramatic performances, their deep-felt needs, their health difficulties, their financial and family issues and their religious ‘thirst’ are expressed individually by each person, each of these acts

and utterings appear as part of a larger collective ‘voice’ comprised of many simultaneously working and intersubjectively connected voices, bodies and hands. From my perspective, this is the fundamental aesthetic mode of *las mujeres* (the middle-aged, married women) in *el culto*. It goes without saying that they too of course bring personal expressions and talents to this realm of the virtual or transcendental. For instance, when *el Espíritu Santo* is summoned, each of these chthonian, middle-aged female bodies may become mediators: indeed, it is mostly these women who receive visions, prophecies and the ‘inner, burning power’ of *el Espíritu Santo* in *el culto* – collectively and socially highlighting their personal spiritual efforts and abilities.

Las Viudas

Gabriela’s sister, Paola, is sitting in front of her in *el culto*. She is crying the most intensely felt tears, with her entire body shaking. Her long, black braid – like a second spine – splits her back in two, all the way down to her slim waistline. ‘Ay Jesus ... I love you, Jesus. I am sorry, Jesus. I am small and you are great, Jesus’. Paola straightens her back and raises her skinny arms, her palms flat as if holding a newborn up to the ceiling. Her eyes are closed. ‘Icharmbatapatapaaa ... icharambatapapa ...’ The intense music of *las alabanzas* (‘songs of praise’) reverberates in the dark.

‘Amen!’ answer her fellow brothers and sisters.

‘Ay Father’, she finally whispers, then falls back into silent meditation.

Paola is a *viuda* (‘widow’) with pale skin marked with acne scars. She is young – not a day over 30; however, her face bears the same lines as the grey-haired *viudas*, of whom at least twenty are in church this evening. Paola’s three children flock around her. They want *chicles* (‘bubble gum’ or ‘candy’). Paola presses a coin into each of their small hands, and the children run to the back of the church, where an elderly *viuda* stands behind a table of amazing, colourful goodies. Wide-eyed, they lick their mouths and point with thick and joyful fingers to the most exciting and mouth-watering pink and lime green candies in front of them. The old *viuda* hands over the *chicles* in a highly ceremonial manner, sending the children off with a conspiratorial wink of the eye: ‘Now get out of my face, you small ones! Get out of here!’ They run off giggling, and she smiles and lifts her eyebrows as if saying: ‘Oh those cute little ones, what can you do ...’

The *viudas*, both young and old, have a significantly withdrawn position in *el culto* compared to that of *las mujeres* and *las mozas*. However, they are of no less social importance. Their bodily aesthetics encompass dark clothing, gleaming white or silver hair pulled into a tight knot, no make-up, and no jewellery or other accessories. Lines and wrinkles of old age criss-cross their faces, and their bearing suggests a strong social position in *el pueblo Gitano*. The *viudas* move slowly towards their seats when they enter the church, and they sit close to one another – like other age and gender groups during *el culto*. They typically do not rise to their feet to share a prophecy, prayer or vision. I never saw any of them speak in tongues, with the singular exception of the woman who referred to me as *la guapa* (see Chapter 6); of course, she stood out in other ways, as well.

The sound of the *viudas*, when speaking and singing, is attuned to their controlled and subdued presence, and their emotional expressions are equally restrained. In *el pueblo Gitano* (both inside and outside of church), these women hold great respect, and they are approached in the same gentle manner they approach others. Their expressions are tame and refined, Apollonian in conduct yet with Dionysian powers slumbering just beneath the surface of their dark appearance – powers that might be awakened, for instance, in the event of a death in the community (a subject I will return to).

To further explore the social significance of these ritually accentuated female aesthetics, the subsequent sections will describe the lives of these women outside the sphere of *el culto*.

LIFE'S STRUGGLES

Observing these women outside of *el culto*, I noticed how they all seemed to struggle in distinct ways. Early in the morning one can observe many *viudas* in the streets surrounding the Chinese wholesale stores in el Rastro, transporting heavy loads of goods on their crooked backs. They are also active at the market as *comerciantes*, and during my fieldwork, I saw many of them accompany small children to and from school. They hold strong positions amongst kin, with most living with children, grandchildren, nephews and nieces, and they contribute to domestic affairs. They are also much sought after for advice regarding social affairs in *el pueblo Gitano*. Thus, they are in no sense socially 'dead' but rather granted general high esteem and respect in accordance with their age, the status of their family and the way they participate at the market, in *el culto* and the social life of *el pueblo Gitano*.

Outside *el culto*, the unmarried *mozas* of el Rastro still ‘belong to their father’s house’ or ‘live under their father’s roof’, as they express it. Their social status generates a pattern of social obligations, including a particularly harsh workload, restrictions on their social relations and expectations of good moral conduct that does not always match the women’s own desires and beliefs. Some even stated that they felt like ‘slaves’ in their own homes, working from early morning until late at night. In conversations we had, when depicting their everyday life situation, they frequently described their dream of finding the ‘right man’, as well as their fear of never finding him, because access to ‘good enough’ men was rather limited. In church, almost all the men were married, too young or too old, they said, and far fewer in number than the marriageable women. And besides, men often turned out to be both ‘lazy and unhelpful’ in matters of the house and home – or so they feared. All in all, the impression I got was that it was as if these unmarried women of the church choir, some of them way into their 30s, felt somewhat at a loss in terms of how they were to move on in life. Living under their ‘father’s roof’ and with too few marriageable men to choose from, it seemed like they felt stuck as perpetual *mozas*. Some older women of *el culto* had in fact chosen to stay solitary all through their lives (or ended up as such) – ‘married to none but God’, as they phrased it. Nevertheless, the *mozas* contribute as *comerciantes* alongside the other women and men of el Rastro. They are also seen as the carriers of their families’ honour and moral standards, held intact, in part, through the maintenance and protection of their chastity.

In contrast to the young *mozas*, most of the middle-aged *mujeres* were married and had their own households and family businesses to manage; thus, they had other dreams and worries. A large proportion of these women worked alongside their husbands and other family members as merchants. They also had a household to think about, and my impression was that they worried just as much about the wellbeing of their family members in other households as their own. For these women of el Rastro, if a sister or brother, grown-up daughter or son, aunt or uncle, father or mother, niece or nephew, or any other family member lacked food, clothes, books, school supplies or proper medical care, they would exert great effort in finding the resources to help. For example, by using some of the money their husbands gave them to buy dinner for these family members. Or, as Bobola and Manuel did on most days, they would invite several family members to dinner – perhaps eating in turn due to limited space around the table. In sum, these women fill the role as community creators *par excellence*.

I have now very briefly mentioned a few of the social dimensions concerning these three age categories of women found in *el culto*. Based on these preliminary descriptions, I now move on to explore related issues

of the *creyentes*' cultic habitus, as these unfold in the cultic setting. Firstly, I deal with the issue of health and especially the women's role in health matters.

HEALTH AND WEALTH

To better understand the cultic habitus of the Gitanos of el Rastro, I will now turn my attention to the subject of health. The gospel of 'health and wealth' or 'prosperity' has been viewed as a vital aspect of many Pentecostal traditions around the world (Robbins 2004), albeit with significant cultural particularities (see, e.g., Coleman 2000, 2002; Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001; Gifford 2001; Hunt 2000). Although debating and even resisting financial prosperity due to their ritual belief and practice, the *creyentes* consider health a critical issue, as exemplified by the *mujeres* (the middle-aged women) of *el culto*. During my fieldwork, I had the impression that almost all the Gitana *mujeres* I met in el Rastro struggled with at least one disease – the most common being diabetes, high blood pressure, fibromyalgia, fatigue/exhaustion, migraines, cancer, heart disease and depression and anxiety, and they brought these to *el culto* with the hope of receiving help from *Jesu Cristo*, their saviour. As with financial or domestic affairs, the *mujeres* showed major sympathy towards other people's health issues. In general, all *creyentes* – men and women – were highly concerned with those struggling with poor health, and they directed many prayers to their own and others' health troubles, as exemplified by the following incident, which is illustrative of how health issues were brought up in prayers during *culto* seances.

An elderly gentleman sitting across the room from me gets up. He has his walking stick with him and is elegantly dressed in a suit, tie, waistcoat and hat, accessorized with a sophisticated silver pocket watch that he brings out from time to time. With his head tilted a bit backwards and his hands raised to the 'heavenly' ceiling, he exclaims: 'I also beg you, Father. I pray, Father, for my father-in-law, Father, who is sick, Father, and for my mother, Father, who is also sick, Father. Ay Father, I pray for every person and every soul who is here with us tonight, Father. I pray for their families, Father, for their economy, Father, for their houses, Father. I pray for Spain, Father, for all of those who are going through hardships. Ay Father, I pray for the father of la Duquesa de Alba [the Duchess of Alba], Father. Help him, Father! Help hiiiiimmmm! I thank you, Father, for the bread you bring us every day, for your infinite heaven, Lord Father, for your eternal love, beloved Lord

Father, and your mighty glory and omnipresence, Heavenly Father. Ayyyyy Fatheeeerrrr, thank yooooouuuuuuu. In the name of the Son, the Father and the Holiest Holy Spirit, Amen!' 'AMEN!' shouts the congregation enthusiastically in return.

Prayers directed towards issues of health and healing, as that just described, were given daily in *el culto*, indicating its major significance in the ritual setting. The *creyentes*' deep concern about health, in both their ritual and daily life, makes love and death at times almost indistinguishable, as they become part of each other's realm. For example, much of the energy, rapture and, in fact, joy (!) produced in *el culto* stem from the *creyentes*' prayers and other efforts to promote the health of members of *el pueblo Gitano*. In fact, their worries about their own and others' health issues and spiritual needs bring forth such strong sentiments and embodied engagement that they, in their own powers, carry the potential to create joy, healing and a feeling of wholeness (i.e. holiness). Yet with death, it is different; as far as I could see, death never brought about ritual excitement and enthusiasm – the *threat* of death could, and in fact did so – but actual deaths were met with an almost deafening, collective silence and a very palpable absence of joy and rapture. Comparatively, Assumma (2005: 207) writes that *el duende*, as expressed in flamenco, can possess different 'faces'. Sometimes that face is violent and dramatic; 'other times it is just an instantaneous, almost imperceptible but definitive tremor ... a trembling, impalpable fluid which flows about here or there on tiptoe, along the course of the whole interpretation, or in a passage from it'. The emotional manifestations in *el culto* in response to death resemble this imperceptible yet strongly felt agony, sorrow and longing, with *la viuda* ('the widow') functioning as the personification and cultural symbol of this response.

According to Hirsch (2002), the underlying subject of Lorca's writings is that *passion* comprises the deep purpose and cause of both life and death. In the context of *el culto*, passion comes in various expressions, ranging from mild to extreme ecstatic manifestations of desperately joyful madness to impalpable grief. In the following sections, I will address this passion as it is expressed in the form of enthusiasm and divine inspiration.

ENTHUSIASM AND INSPIRATION

In the *modus operandi* of *el culto*, enthusiasm, rapture and intense joy combine with lament, longing and agony. It is through these emotions – embodied, I propose, as 'emotional imageries' or 'images-in-consciousness' (e.g. Csordas 1997: 79–84) – that the *creyentes* express the emotional

peaks and powerful undercurrents of the ritual. While I am sure that duty, habit and social pressure and sanctions are motivating factors in getting the *creyentes* to church almost every night – dragging them off their couch and away from their dinner table, work, homework, conversations, lovemaking and what not – I would argue that the draw of such Apollonian patterns of routine and convention (i.e. social pressure, duty, habit and so on) could never overpower the *creyentes'* motivation to experience the all-embracing, saturating and profound Dionysian force that fills their bodies, hearts and minds at *el culto*.

The *creyentes* describe the presence of *el Espíritu Santo* in their bodies as 'flames burning inside' or a 'burning sensation' that 'fills' and 'inspires' them. Etymologically, 'inspiration'³ connects with the idea of 'in-breathing' or 'indwelling', which may be taken to result in a form of spiritual alertness. As Manuel once formulated it, 'the coming of *el espíritu* creates an inner spiritual space for reflection and contemplation'. Indeed, in the thirteenth century, the Word assumed the meaning of the 'immediate influence of God'. The Latin *inspirare* means to 'blow into, breathe upon' – figuratively to 'inspire, excite or inflame'. Further, 'inspiration' has roots in 'enthusiasm', which historically meant 'divine inspiration', related to *enthousiazēin* ('to be inspired or possessed by a god', 'to be rapt', 'to be in ecstasy') and *entheos* ('divinely inspired', 'possessed by a god'; *en* 'in' + *theos* 'god'). Interestingly, under the Puritans, 'enthusiasm' acquired a derogatory sense of 'excessive religious emotion through the conceit of special revelation from God' (1650s).⁴ Both in kind and content, the inspiration and enthusiasm experienced, produced and expressed by the *creyentes* in their meetings with *el Espíritu Santo* bear much resemblance to these etymological descriptions; that is to say, from the *creyentes'* own point of view, the enthusiasm and inspiration they experience in *el culto* is produced simultaneously from 'above' and from 'within', through – as we shall see – talent, self-teaching and Godly implantation.

SELF-TEACHING AND DIVINE INSPIRATION

When explaining the exquisiteness of the artistic performances in church, the Rastro Gitanos connect their inner talents and skills to divine inspiration. For them, talent means having been born with abilities – that is, Godly gifts or creations – that hold *potentiality*. To cultivate a talent then, they emphasize self-teaching and socialization – *a la manera Gitana* ('the Gitano way') – as opposed to formal education. Once skills are acquired, divine connection may enter the *creyentes'* minds, hearts and bodies to help them release and actualize their talents. 'We are God's creations', the *creyentes*

say, implying that God exists within them as divinity in man. The general idea is thus that one is born with a certain talent or potential (a Godly creation) that one can cultivate through Gitano socialization and divine help in order to actualize it as an ability.

Similarly, the ancient Greeks held that self-taught minstrels derived their creative power from a supreme source; thus, they understood creative inspiration as a combination of self-teaching and Godly implantation – characterized as a power from without and within (Dodds 1951). Equally, for Plato, ‘the Muse is actually *inside* the poet’ (Hirsch 2002). In the context of *el culto*, these ideas resonate with the *creyentes*’ bodily experience of *el Espíritu Santo* as simultaneously a creative power from a supreme source and a physical and emotional power from the body itself.

I have so far described self-teaching (as opposed to formal education) and divine inspiration as two central sources mentioned by the Rastro Gitanos to explain some people’s special creative, artistic or spiritual abilities. In addition, they mentioned a third aspect – their Gitano belonging and the collective sufferings of the Gitano people. So, when the *creyentes* describe the excellency of the cultic musicians and singers, they emphasize that they not only carry the torment of centuries of persecution (leaving *cicatrices*; ‘psychological scars’) but also how they are moved by *el Espíritu Santo* (i.e. God). Both of these attributes are understood to be equally important and necessary; working together through performers’ bodies, they evoke emotion and enthusiasm of great intensity from the ritual gathering. Building on these ideas, from a Gitano perspective, the combination of talent (inborn potential), self-teaching and divine connection, as well as *cicatrices*, are essential for the cultic performance – be this the musical performance of the band and choir or the communicative performance of the pastors or *creyentes* when sharing prophetic visions and dreams. These critical ingredients ‘set the stage’, so to speak, for both ecstatic (external) rapture and enthusiasm and (internal) profundity and passion. I would argue that they also make up the main ingredients of the Gitano *creyentes*’ ‘cultic habitus’, which I return to shortly.

Thus, we can perhaps see the enthusiasm, passion, profundity, rapture and joy as fundamental ‘energies’ of the ritual dynamics of *el culto* – socialized and embodied through ritual repetition and intensity. These energies are not purely positive – that is, unburdened and untouched by the weight of life – but connected to the precariousness of the *creyentes*’ lives and the considerable health issues that many people struggle with. Importantly – as I tried to explain earlier regarding the positive energetic potential brought forward by the threat of a death in the community – the negative aspects are no less creative than their positive counterparts. Taken together, these emotional poles dialectically strive towards profound and

complete wholeness and holiness, incorporating enthusiastic fury, desperate longing, rapture and passionate joy, as well as the unbearable insecurity that arises when self and other are left behind and only immediate creation exists.

According to Peter Althouse (2017: 36), Christian Healing Ministries (CHM) in Jacksonville, Florida, promote emotional, spiritual and bodily healing through a variety of charismatic prayers. These prayers become embodied with both scripted and non-scripted kinaesthetic movements and are accompanied by high levels of emotionality. Importantly, says Althouse (*ibid.*), negative emotions such as anger, fear, anxiety and sorrow also surface and are, in the context of prayer rituals, expected to bring greater joy, love and compassion once they have been expressed and experienced. 'Anger is good', said the pastor of *el culto* in one of his sermons, 'and so is pain'. Anger and pain are universal human emotions, potentially of a very strong kind. Human emotions will always manifest in a particular sociocultural local 'costume'; for example, through an embodied ritual language and practice.

Interpreted within the context of *el culto*, the statements 'anger is good' and 'pain is good' resonate well with other practices combining dualities within this ritual context. They bring forth feelings and interest among the congregants, thus the pastor gets their attention. On a further note, as stressed by Althouse (2017), by saying that feeling strong negative emotions is good, that venting them is good, this might help to heal the *creyentes*. Furthermore, and perhaps even more importantly, it brings a whole lot of emotional energy and vitality to the ritual.

With Csordas (1990, 1993, 1997) and Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1964), we can say that through ritual the *creyentes* emotions and expressivity become shaped to fit into a sociocultural-spiritual frame. Looking specifically at the pain expressed in *el culto*, to paraphrase Lorca, in his poem 'The Ballad of Black Pain' (1928), this pain is not anguish, because in pain one can still smile; nor does it blind, for it never produces weeping, despite the certainty that 'death is breathing behind the door'.⁵ Drawing on the empirical material presented thus far, I understand this culturally shaped unification of feeling and form (e.g. Langer 1942; 1953) to hold (or at least strive to hold) joy and pain, light and darkness, creation and destruction, simultaneously.

Thus far, my analysis of the *creyentes*' 'cultic habitus' has revealed how *el culto* brings a new light, a fresh start – a spiritual and cultic 'rebirth' – through its shaping of emotional and aesthetic expressivity in the direction of passion, profundity and simultaneity. In the next section I will move on to look at how *el culto*, on these same grounds, can be said to shape the perceptive and interpretative apparatus of the *creyentes*.

TOWARDS A SPIRITUAL GAZE

In the following, I analyse the *creyentes*' way of seeing the world through a spiritualized interpretative apparatus, with the empirically inspired analytical concept of 'spiritual gaze'. My analysis of the *creyentes*' all-encompassing religiosity and tautologically created spiritual view of cause and effect resembles the totalized and self-affirming worldview of other Pentecostal practitioners in specific localities in the Global South (see Eriksen, Blanes and Maccarthy 2019). It is as if the world has taken on a new totality for the *creyentes* that gives reason, meaningfulness and explanation to everything that happens within it.

This 'spiritual gaze' is descriptive of the *creyentes*' all-encompassing religiosity and tautologically organized world view but it also refers to the methodological-anthropological gaze I had to develop to 'see' the world through a similar lens as my spiritually engaged Gitano companions. My concept of the spiritual gaze takes inspiration from the French Surrealism movement of 1920s Paris, made clear by James Clifford in his essay 'On Ethnographic Surrealism' (1981), in which he proposes seeing ethnography and surrealism as 'modernist' orientations to cultural order, 'taking as [their] problem – and opportunity – the fragmentation and juxtaposition of cultural values' (ibid.: 539).

Surrealism sprung from the Dada movement of the First World War, and it held that excessive rational thought and bourgeois values had brought on the brutality of war. Thus, surrealism took as its project the liberation of imagination, the resolution of the previously opposing conditions of dreams and reality and the confrontation with prevailing ideas (Clifford 1981). In my abductively imagined link between surrealism and the Rastro Gitanos' way of living and thinking, I connect the idea of the 'surrealist gaze' to the Gitanos' spiritually induced mode of interpreting signs, tokens, visions, prophecies and dreams. Entering fieldwork (and after), I was not religious as my Gitano companions, and I did not possess their spiritual gaze or interpretative apparatus, which is vital if you are to accept empirically observable and non-observable phenomena as the workings of Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit, as well as Satan and his demonic helpers. However, in addition to my previously mentioned personal experience of transcendence, a surrealism-inspired ethnographic-interpretative mode helped me to bridge that gap.

After conducting his fieldwork and publishing his classic ethnography on *What it is like to hunt for a witch in Central Africa* ([1937] 1976), Evans-Pritchard outlined his transition out of a reality-dependent perspective: 'You cannot have a remunerative, even intelligent, conversation with people about something they take as self-evident if you give them the

impression you regard their belief as an illusion' (ibid.: 244). Along similar lines, Shweder (1997) emphasizes that we anthropologists must permit ourselves the experience of reframing the 'really real'.

How do we learn to 'see' as anthropologists? To orient ourselves in the 'opaque space' (Cerwonka 2008: 1) of ethnographic richness? I never 'saw' processes of meaning making during my stay among the Gitanos of el Rastro, yet I was still able to explore these processes empirically, analytically and theoretically. One cannot really *see* processes of meaning making. What we see are actuated signs of social processes – signs that one can learn to see and interpret, distinguish and evaluate. As one's sensitivity increases in the research context, a new, hands-on feeling of meaning grows. We have thus learned to 'see' in a new way, with a new gaze (e.g. Strathern 2015). In my fieldwork with the Gitanos of el Rastro, who perceived God as literally walking amongst them, I had to eventually accept their interpretative spiritual gaze of the world, and even partly incorporate it myself. In other words, I had to do some serious reframing and reconfiguring of my own mode of interpretation.

EL PROPÓSITO DE DIOS

As I will show by the empirical examples presented below, the Gitanos of el Rastro see their dreams, thoughts, actions and events as carrying a deeper, spiritual meaning. They are interpreted as divine visions, auguries and prophecies – Godly tokens or omens with reference to the past, present or future. These often arrive as something visual, often combined with a strong feeling or intuition. And from a *creyente* perspective, they communicate *el propósito de Dios* ('God's purpose' or 'God's will'). When the Rastro Gitanos describe something as *el propósito de Dios*, they take it as an intervention or message from God. For instance, on several occasions I was referred to as *el propósito de Dios* – meaning that my actions (e.g. coming to el Rastro in the first place) were his premeditated will (see, for instance, Chapter 5). A person's bad health could also be considered *el propósito de Dios*, as could someone tempted to switch churches. Bobola and Manuel, for example, had experienced such a 'call' to switch church a few months before I arrived in el Rastro, and they referred to it as *el propósito de Dios*. Thus, I would argue that through their highly emotional, bodily, spiritual and collective participation and deep engagement in – particularly – *el culto*, the Gitano *creyentes* of el Rastro learn to see, live and feel God, divinity, miracles, dreams and other extraordinary phenomena as part of their daily lives. A central observation connected to this argument is that, within prayer, conversation, visions and regular socialization, religiosity, sociality,

health, finances and the family become interwoven, interdependent and inseparable, co-constituting the Rastro Gitanos' lives and 'cultic habitus'. The following example reveals this immanently spiritual way of seeing and being in the world.

In the first row sits an elegantly dressed elderly man. In '*el pueblo Gitano*' of el Rastro, he is known as Tío Carlos ('Uncle Carlos'). On this day, Tío Carlos is wearing a brown and green flannel suit, and his hair is neatly combed back. He is about 80 years old, a widower, the father of many children, including Bobola, and the grandfather of even more. For most of his working career, he was an antique dealer, with a shop in el Rastro – like many of the other men in church. One of his customers, he once told me after we enjoyed a swim in his daughter's pool, had been the King's cousin, who 'because their relation had gone on for years' had bought a pair of marble columns from him. 'Those were good times ...', laughed Carlos, with his exposed belly jiggling up and down a few times. 'We were 70 people gathered around the table Christmas Eve', again his belly jiggling, 'we drank a lot, and ate even more ... *Ay Padre, gracias a Dios* [Ay Father, Thanks to God], those were good times. Now it's different, very different.'

In the last line, Tío Carlos is referring to the economic hardships so many went through following the 2008 financial crisis. By that time, Tío Carlos had survived three severe heart attacks, 'thanks to God'. It was indeed a miracle that he was still alive. Of course, he had had the best surgeons – that was crucial – but why he had got those surgeons and why he had ultimately survived, that was 'God's work' and *el propósito de Dios*, resulting from his prayers and his surrender to God. 'I have a pure, Christian heart', Tío Carlos concluded, and for that reason, his friends and family explained, he made a full recovery – something even his doctors doubted was possible.

EL CULTO AS POTENTIAL

Thus far, I have argued that the ritual practice of *el culto* – and especially this practice in its most 'inward curving' mode (e.g. Handelman 2004), when the inner dynamics of the ritual become self-generating – lies at the base of what it means to be and become Gitano in the context of el Rastro. Analytically, Kapferer's (2004) concept of ritual as 'virtual reality' highlights the way in which the dynamic realities of ritual aim at 'entering directly within the habitus and adjusting its parameters' (2004: 49). Kapferer describes this virtual aspect of ritual as 'a means of engaging immediately with the very

ontological grounds of being' (ibid.). The ritual as virtual reality is thus simultaneously an imaginal space and a technical site for working with the dynamics and potentialities of reality. Hence, I see the aesthetically driven dynamic potency of *el culto* and the religious experiences and engagement of the *creyentes* not only as 'comfort for the needy', as many Pentecostal analysts indicate (see Robbins (2004) for an overview), but as spaces for opening up to other modes of reality and being, and thereby simultaneously opening up to the cultic reshaping of one's habitus.

This argument rests on an idea of *el culto* as *potential*, implying an existence beyond the person, the self and the group, the immediately perceptible and the already existing, an existence governed by the potencies yet to come or that which is becoming. To paraphrase Hirsch (2002), when we give up the 'optative mood' and take a downward, darker turn, abandoning ourselves to darker or divine forces, and suddenly find ourselves confronting death itself, perhaps then we may find it possible to make a new turn – a turn of creation, existence and joy drawn from the very fundamentals of life. I would argue that the simultaneous presence of something akin to the 'joyful darkness' of *el duende* (Lorca [1933] 1981) and the 'ferocious light' of *el Espíritu Santo* (Emerson 1844) can be seen to represent a 'ritual aesthetics of simultaneity' or, said differently, the aesthetic unification of binary oppositions. Moreover, this aesthetic unification of binary oppositions can be said to represent a unity of feeling and form (e.g. Langer 1942, 1953), as these are bodily, emotionally and verbally produced and expressed by the *creyentes* in *el culto* – at least, *el culto* as typically experienced.

When *el culto* marks the occurrence of an actual death, the situation is different. On such occasions, the inward curve and self-generating potency of the ritual bears other aesthetic expressions: visual darkness, silent prayer, bowed heads, contemplation, adoration and meditation. The band plays quietly, the singing is gentle, and the words of the pastor are those of comfort, humble reflection and spiritual healing. The atmosphere is one in which, if someone were to make a loud sound, a sudden movement or a happy gesture, something essential would be lost. From my perspective, the atmosphere on these occasions seemed draped in taboo, and all expressions of lightness, joy, enthusiasm and vivacity seemed potentially dangerous, possibly ruining what had to be socially, symbolically and spiritually reconstructed after the death. On these occasions, the 'inward curve' (e.g. Handelman 2004) is even more closed than usual – more separated from mundane life and more open to 'the beyond' (for lack of a better word).

As previously mentioned, my argument about *el culto* as potential, resembles that of Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1964) in his conceptualization of the pre-objective or the pre-reflective. These theoretical constructs reflect the idea that *from potential and through perception*, we all engage directly and

creatively in a perpetual process of actualization, in a constant production of the social world. Further, with Bourdieu (1977) we can say that through our perceptual and interpretative apparatuses we produce the social world that produces us (and our cognitive apparatuses), and so on and so forth. However, because *el culto* works culturally and socially transformative by opening up the realm of potentiality and ‘virtuality’ (e.g. Kapferer 2004), we can simultaneously see it as a pre-objective creative act (e.g. Merleau-Ponty 1962, 1964).

OPENING UP AND LETTING GO

As I explored in Chapters 5 and 6, the *creyentes*’ ‘acts of mercy’ refer to the very creational processes they engage with in order to ‘open up’ and ‘let go’ of their own self, rational day-mind and social status so they can let *el Espíritu Santo* in. This process of liberation enables communication with God through the oncoming of *el Espíritu Santo*, which again contributes to further transcendence through spiritual baptism. The back-and-forth wave-like movements of the *creyentes*’ spiritualized process of liberation resemble Travis Cooper’s (2017: 77) description of Pentecostals’ conceived capacity to ‘tune in’ to divine ‘wavelengths’:

Often employing communications metaphors, Pentecostals conceive of their bodies as having the capacity to “tune in” to divine “wavelengths.” An ecstatic experience signals to penitents the effective attainment by the worshiper of communication with the Holy Spirit, evidenced by activities not limited to operating in the gifts of the Spirit, seeing prophetic images, speaking words of comfort or knowledge to fellow worshipers, experiencing non-normal bodily states, and transcending to temporally brief realms of emotional ecstasy. In social scientific language, such experiences sometimes constitute altered states of perception, awareness, consciousness, or liminal states.

We can thus understand the state of trance experienced in *el culto* as both a process and the product of that process. In this context, the convulsive bodies and other trance manifestations do not emerge out of ‘thin air’ but from a place of deep tranquillity and contemplation; only gradually do they build towards a breaking point or climax, at which point the erogenous, Apollonian visit of *el Espíritu Santo* can bring forward erratic motions and emotions of deep Dionysian proportions. Reflecting on this gradual build-up to climax and the soothing calmness thereafter, we might consider the visitation of *el Espíritu Santo* erotic, even sexual; a saving grace inflamed by a profane desire for divine love. In this experience, the *creyentes* are ‘filled’ and ‘emptied out’, as they express it. Therefore, I take it

as feasible to describe the summoning of *el Espíritu Santo* as a potentially transformational process for the cultic subject; through the losing or letting go of the ego, she merges with divinity and eventually finds herself again, perhaps in an elevated, relieved, renewed or reborn state. As such, in the Pentecostal lifeworld of the *creyentes*, transcendence and immanence are co-constitutive religious processes (e.g. Reinhardt 2016: 76). We have, in other words, a complex and overlapping system of otherworldliness and inner bodily experience characterizing their ritual practices. Hence, divine inspiration, enthusiasm and expressivity become products of a notion of ‘divinity in man’, an amalgamation of God – in the shape of the Holy Spirit – and *creyente* into one and the same figure. The cultic habitus of the Gitanos of el Rastro comprises this amalgamation to the extent that they see themselves as ‘God’s chosen people’.

El Espíritu Santo must be ‘invited in’ to work on the *creyentes’* inner bodies and selves. In the event of death in the Rastro Gitano community, I observed that the *creyentes* seemed to open up in a very different way during *el culto*. Normally, there is a two-way movement, a full-force release of that which is inside, be it emotional distress or joy, to let *el Espíritu Santo* in. The opening up of those in grief appeared to me as equally directed towards God and his healing powers but with energies and emotions turned inward rather than outward; it was as if the *creyentes’* grief was muted. The deceased person was never mentioned by the pastor or others, and I was only ever made aware of the situation in a very discreet manner. My interpretation of this is that there was obviously something at risk here and that the situation is draped in taboo. As previously explained, when the *creyentes* open up in a normal *culto* session, their selves are imperilled, pushed against their limits, and this happens by means of ecstatic expressivity. The mourners, it seems to me, could not take that same risk of letting go of control; too much was at stake.

In general, I found it immensely difficult to open up and give myself over to that which the *creyentes* wanted me to, maybe for that exact reason – my fear of losing myself in a sense. Yet, ‘those who are willing to be vulnerable move among mysteries’, writes Roethke (Hirsch 2002: 55). So, for those who do let go and open themselves up to the realm of the transcendent, the divine and the unknown, rewards presumably await. We can thus infer that it is precisely these acts of mercy and pleas for spiritual liberation, in simultaneously opening up and letting go, that put the *creyentes* in the ritually creative position to access the dynamic potencies of *el culto*. Furthermore, it is these same inner movements, ‘with God’s *grace*’, that eventually also release them from this grip. The ritual abolishment of the self can further be understood to happen in a creative moment of ‘double-consciousness’. This is best illustrated by the examples given in Chapter 5 and 6, in which

some *creyentes* described the act of letting go of themselves as a potentially humiliating affair; they never knew which part of the trance was steered by themselves and which part was beyond their control. They could also, with ease, enter and exit states of trance and switch between profane and sacred modes of attention, equally indicative of a kind of ‘double’ consciousness.

In the words of Edward Hirsch (2002: 28), ecstatic trance and embodied emotional ecstasy can be experienced and explained as ‘joyous release and habitation ... transfiguring intensity ... freedom and transport’. Moreover, it often includes both selflessness and energetic peace; herein, I suggest, lies its attraction. Although there is a risk of completely and forever ‘losing it’ (i.e. one’s ego, reason or social status and position), ecstatic trance and emotional release also grant ‘access to self-forgetting without self-destruction, and it’s a moment that can seem worth almost any price, even the *torero’s* [bullfighter’s] ultimate risk’ (Kennedy 2001, in *ibid.*). From my perspective as a participant observer – one who was increasingly cognitively, emotionally and (not least) bodily involved and saturated with the dynamics of *el culto* as my fieldwork progressed – these words seem to describe my phenomenological view of the *creyentes’* most profound experiences in *el culto*. Based on my observations, I would argue that the moments in *el culto* when the ritual structure and dynamics are most ‘inward curving’ (e.g. Handelman 2004) – that is, beyond meaning, representation, function and politics – are simultaneously the ones that are the most transformative, liberating and creative. Within these creative moments, *el culto* offers the potential for profound joy, transfiguration, freedom, transcendence and ‘self-forgetting without destruction’; and therein, I say, lies its most profound attraction. Therein is also where the transformative power of the rite is at its most potent.

A CULTIC CREATIVE JOY

As a participant observer – even a phenomenologically inspired participant observer – as descriptive of a certain feeling, I could never directly observe the Rastro Gitanos’ ‘joy of creation’,⁶ only the manifestations and somatizations of this joy. Some of the Gitanos I came to know during my fieldwork were artists – either painters or flamenco artists – and ‘every’ Gitano of el Rastro seemed to have an artist in their immediate family. The musical performers in church could also be described as artists. However, although such aesthetic expressions are important for the Rastro Gitanos, they comprise only a small aspect of their ‘joy of creation’; rather, in my usage, this concept applies more strongly to their everyday creations – in church, at the market and in other arenas where Rastro Gitano social life

unfolds. In short, it refers to the meaning and materiality of existence *per se* as the Gitanos create it *a la manera Gitana* ('the Gitano way') – in the context of el Rastro.

As perceived through their ritually created 'spiritual gaze', the Rastro Gitanos understand dreams, accidents, strange affairs, bad health, sudden turns of events and other occurring situations as being either messages from God, signs of God's existence and/or incidents of Godly intervention. They further attribute the meaningfulness of each occasion to God; he is the meaning behind the cause, so to speak. However, for the persons observing these events, the divine dimension of everyday happenings may not always be obvious or immediately discernible; hence, there is a need for interpretation and explanation – and we might add, creation. As I see it, this is where the joyful, creative 'play' begins. The *creyentes* say that the interpretive act implies the discovery and unveiling of a Godly a priori meaning. From a more secular position, we might say that the *creyentes* themselves are at the core of the creation, actualization and attribution of meaning to these 'messages from God'. Either way, the creative exercise and play involved in the interpretation of signs and events appear to provide an inexhaustible source of satisfaction. This spiritual game of interpretation entails, as I see it, both the joy of immediate creation – by giving meaning to everyday life on earth – and the joy of engaging with *Creation* as such – that is, God's creation of heaven, earth and everything in between.

In *el culto*, the joy of creation finds its strongest aesthetic expression – that is, the strongest unity between feeling (joy) and form (creation) – in the rhythmic, emotional, bodily expressions, impressions and transactions (both personal and interpersonal) that are created during the ritual. This becomes particularly obvious when the ritual action involves states of deep spiritual concentration and participation (e.g. trance). Here, a multitude of delights can be recognized pertaining to the creation of a certain sociality, identity, spirituality/religiosity, comfort, love and community – in short, the spiritual creation of existence *a la manera Gitana* ('the Gitano way') – in the context of el Rastro.

With Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1964) and Csordas (1990), I would argue that all these creations represent 'makings of the moment' – makings that are re-made again and again, six times a week, year after year. However, these 'makings of the moment' may also carry such profundity as to reach far and deep into each *creyente* and their very ontologies of existence, and even seem, for a split second, infinite. Thus, for the *creyentes* there are obvious personal gains to be made from *el culto*. However, in addition I would argue that perhaps an even bigger reward is their partaking in the act of creating something larger than themselves, an intersubjective transcendental mode of reality where another being is made possible. Moreover, as a

prolongation of this collective and spiritual creative act, through *el culto*, the *creyentes* also contribute to the constant re-creation – and rebirth – of *el pueblo Gitano*.

Both *el culto* and the *creyentes* are affected and stirred by the ups and downs of everyday life. Similarly, mundane life and the Rastro Gitanos are affected and stirred by the inner dynamics and workings of *el culto*. Both arenas have their own dynamics, and both impact each other through the minds and bodies of the *creyentes*. Following the continuously repeated immediate creations and experiences of *el culto*, we can thus say that the *creyentes* leave the church each night slightly re-created, renewed and reborn. Hence, neither the joy nor the creation of *el culto* ever leaves the ritual participants, since both feeling and form (e.g. Langer 1942, 1953) – the passionate joyful darkness and its creations and manifestations – are unified in the *creyentes*' ritual aesthetic body, spiritual gaze and 'cultic habitus'.

FROM EYESIGHT TO VISION

One aim in Chapters 5 and 6, as well as the current chapter, was to explore the potential of transcendental states to shape and adjust the *creyentes*' perceptive and interpretative apparatuses. As I understand it, for the *creyentes*, this transformation pertains, in part, to a move from eyesight to 'vision' (e.g. Csordas 1990). During *el culto*, physical darkness sets the ritual scene and that which can be otherwise apprehended in daylight (both by eyesight and through 'enlightened' reasoning) is consciously left behind and replaced by darkness and 'vision'.

The *visiones* ('visions') the *creyentes* experience may be associated with one of the nine 'gifts of grace', more broadly however, it illustrates their spiritual 'vision' of the world, as a world 'moved' by *el Propósito de Dios*. I argue that this transformation of the *creyentes*' perception and mode of interpretation has far-reaching consequences, also outside the ritual context, as it contributes to their generation, actualization and attribution of *meaning* in a range of social arenas. A passage from Charles Simic's 'Street Corner Theology' (1992) is illustrative of how, from my perspective, the *creyentes* give meaning to and create wholeness in their urban surroundings: 'The disorder of the city is sacred. All things are interrelated. As above, so below. We are fragments of an unutterable whole. Meaning is always in search of itself. Unsuspected revelations await us around the next corner.' To create such a vision of the city, one needs to believe or have *faith*, and when I talk about faith here, it is the emic notion that I refer to.⁷ 'Faith is hard because it is a decision to live as if a set of claims are real even when one doubts'

(Luhmann 2012: XIV). In Pentecostal Christian theology, it is the belief or faith alone that connects you to God. For the *creyentes*, belief and proclamations of faith seem, in fact, not sufficient – even in their creation of a spiritual vision of a city; as they say, '*la palabra es para mañana, ser Cristiano es para hoy*' ('the word is for tomorrow, to be Cristian is today'). Thus, I would argue that by attributing meaning and divine interconnectivity to their urban surroundings the *creyentes* enact and actively induce their belief through spiritual perception and interpretation, as part of a tautologically reaffirming habitus – a ritualistically shaped 'cultic habitus' that, in their eyes, is indicative of both God's existence and their own belief in that existence.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: A FRESH START, A NEW BEGINNING

The present chapter has focused on the *creyentes*' creation of a ritualistically shaped 'cultic habitus' and 'spiritual gaze'. Through my analysis, I have come to identify the *creyentes*' acts of mercy – that is, their embodied rehearsed and automated techniques, socialized skills and intended acts of opening up and letting go of their own egos and rational day-minds – as vital for the creative remodelling of their bodies, aesthetics and emotions, and their interpretative and perceptive apparatuses. As I have discussed, it is possible to see the *creyentes*' ritually shaped cultic habitus as containing an aesthetic unification of feeling and form (e.g. Langer 1942, 1953), combining physical and emotional expressivity on both 'positive' (e.g. enthusiasm, rapture and joy) and 'negative' (e.g. lament, agony and longing) poles. Moreover, building on the arguments explored in Chapters 5 and 6, I have presented the ritual aesthetics of simultaneity – that is, the aesthetics of simultaneously existing tensional oppositions – as intrinsic to this habitus. A further aspect of this cultic habitus is the dynamic between intellectual control and emotional release, a dynamic that I see as descriptive of the *creyentes* in their states of trance but also of relevance in arenas outside of *el culto*. Finally, the cultic habitus blends the ideas of self-teaching and divine inspiration, implying a notion of 'divinity in man' and the joy of creation, involving both the creation of a particular Rastro Gitano existence and the creation of what it means to be Gitano – in the context of *el Rastro*.

I began this chapter by asking: What is born from *el culto*? And what kind of fresh light is born from the dark struggle involved in this ritual? The *creyentes* identify with the early apostles and their work to establish the first churches. While such an identification is not uncommon for Pentecostals across the world (Robbins 2004), the Rastro Gitanos' early battle with the Francoist authorities upon establishing the first Gitano Pentecostal

churches affirms this link of identification. The Gitanos of el Rastro often emphasize that nothing and no one stands between them and God, and they do not believe that humans should be sanctified, idolized or iconized, as in the Catholic tradition. Rather, a relationship with God should be direct and personal, unspoiled and unburdened by the steering words and directing hand of man. It should be built on a love of God. The following quote captures, in my view, the *creyentes'* motivation for establishing and continuously reproducing their own Pentecostal churches: 'Instead of making *cathedrals* out of Christ, man, or "life", we are making it out of ourselves, out of our own feelings ... From the cathedral of our own feelings, from the void of the blank canvas, then, comes the space for revelation, "real and concrete"' (Newman, in Hirsch 2002: 166–67).

Based on the empirical and theoretical material presented thus far, I would argue that the *creyentes'* cultic habitus thus generates a feeling of being *free* – or somehow *liberated*. While *culto* sessions are of course *not* completely cut off from 'criteria', dogma, sociality or history – Gitano or Payo – it is nevertheless a ritual with a high degree of autonomy, self-generation and self-reference. Thus, not unlike the dynamics between structure and anti-structure/*communitas* (e.g. Turner 1969, 1974), my argument in this chapter has been that through participating in *el culto* the *creyentes* seek to question, delegitimize and cut societal 'chains' in order to achieve newness and freedom, which can further contribute to new societal orders, ideas and practices.

In each of the three Pentecostal Gitano churches in el Rastro, *el culto* is repeated six days a week for two hours each night. The ritual provides beauty, desperation, rhythm, warmth, comfort, sharing, divine and communal support, the pleasure-pain of creative destruction – of music and aesthetic expressions – meditation, reconnection with one's inner self, reconnection to the collective body (i.e. '*communitas*'), and new perceptions and interpretations. Thus, in my view, it provides a continuous fresh start, and my argument is that it is this perpetual new beginning that lies at the very heart of the *creyentes'* ritualistically shaped cultic habitus.

Although each *culto* follows a given liturgy and procedure, I have emphasized that the ritual is nevertheless a creative act due to its inner 'dynamics', 'virtuality' (e.g. Kapferer 2004) and variations, which, each night, find a slightly new expression. Hence, part of what is achieved through the *creyentes'* personal experiences with ecstatic trance and their observations of others in the same state is a de- and rearrangement of the senses. In this way, ecstatic trance is simultaneously the result of their 'cultic habitus' and creates that habitus. Bearing in mind the frequency of *el culto* sessions, I have also argued that the ritual over time refashions *creyentes* into persons who perceive the world through a spiritual interpretive gaze.

NOTES

1. In *Knowledge and Passion*, Michelle Rosaldo (1980) writes with ethnographic and theoretical beauty, complexity and perspicuousness about the emotionality and sociality of the Ilongots' concept of *liget* as it connects to marriage, hunting and killing. In her account, *liget* is not only connected to anger (and grief) but also to passion and energy. The Ilongot's *liget* has its counterpart in the Japanese concept of *ki*; neither good nor bad, both concepts bring the psychoanalytical concept of libido to mind, in Carl Jung's terms, understood as (psychic) energy, desire, will, interest, and passion.
2. An expression borrowed from Paglia (1990).
3. For a definition of 'Inspiration', see Online Etymology Dictionary: https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=inspiration&ref=searchbar_searchhint.
4. For a definition of 'Enthusiasm', see Online Etymology Dictionary: <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=enthusiasm>.
5. Interestingly, as mentioned in Chapter 5, and with reference to this certainty 'that death is breathing behind the door', one *creyente* is tasked, as the attentive reader might remember, with spraying the church with chemical 'fresh air'. His main target being the 'bad spirits' that enter through the crack beneath the door separating *el culto* from *el mundo afuera* ('the world outside').
6. This concept takes inspiration from Schumpeter ([1934] 2000), but only to the extent that (as explored in Chapter 4) the Gitanos of el Rastro are understood as 'existential entrepreneurs' driven by 'creative destruction' (ibid.) and the 'joy of creation'.
7. Building on Rodney Needham (1972) and several proponents of the 'ontological turn', I address the conceptual problems related to 'belief' and 'faith' in the introduction to Part IV.