

SOUNDING SACRED: INTERPRETING MUSICAL AND POETIC TRANCES

Samuel Robert Mickey, B. A.

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APPROVED:

George James, Major Professor

Steven Friedson, Minor Professor

Haj Ross, Minor Professor

Sandra L. Terrell, Dean of the Robert B. Toulouse
School of Graduate Studies

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This essay investigates the relationship between trance and various musical and poetic expressions that accompany trance when it is interpreted as sacred. In other words, the aim of this investigation is to interpret how experiences of the entrancing power of the sacred come to expression with the sounds of music and poetry. I articulate such an interpretation through the following four sections: I) a discussion of the basic phenomenological and hermeneutic problems of interpreting what other people experience as sacred phenomena, II) an account of the hermeneutic context within which modern Western discourse interprets trance as madness that perverts the rational limits of the self, III) an interpretation of the expressions of trance that appear in the poetry of William Blake, and IV) an interpretation of expressions of trance that appear in the music of Afro-Atlantic religions (including Vodou in West Africa, Santería in Cuba, and Candomblé in Brazil).

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PREFACE

The following essay presents an interpretation of sacred phenomena, specifically phenomena wherein experiences of trance come to expression in music or poetry. Before interpreting these phenomena, I explicate the meaning of the phrase “an interpretation of sacred phenomena” in terms of a phenomenological approach to the study of religion. After explicating the meaning of the basic terms of the interpretation, I proceed to elucidate the context within which I (and others with similar modern Western heritages) tend to interpret musical and poetic trance, particularly by showing how the modern understanding generally considers trance to be a degeneration of an otherwise normal and rational personality.¹ By elucidating the hermeneutic context that situates the present discourse on phenomena related to trance, it is possible to investigate different instances of trance while being hospitable to aspects of trance that are completely foreign to typical modern or Western presuppositions. Finally, after making clear the terms of the investigation and the context within which it is taking place, I then investigate two specific examples of trance: 1) the trances of William Blake and their expression in his poetry, and 2) the trances occurring regularly in the religions of the Afro-Atlantic (or “black Atlantic” religions, e.g., Vodou in Ghana, Santería in Cuba, and Candomblé in Brazil) and their expression in musical performances. This narrow selection of examples compromises the breadth of the investigation in the interest of providing an indication of the unfathomable depth that becomes understood through the interpretation of trance.

There are thus four chapters in this essay: I) an explication of the basic terms of the investigation according to the phenomenological study of religion, II) an account of the context

¹ In some sense, “Western” here should be placed in quotation marks, because it does not designate a geographical region but a way of being in the world, which appears in various traditions, including those stemming from Biblical religion, Greek philosophy and science, and the hybrids formed with the confluence of these cultures.

in which this interpretation of musical and poetic trance is situated, and III) an interpretation of the poetic trances of William Blake and IV) of the musical trances of religions of the Afro-Atlantic.

I am not arguing “for” or “against” any particular understanding of the sacred or its relationship to musical or poetic trance. Likewise, I am not arguing “for” or “against” any particular scientific or philosophical theory, paradigm, or school. This thesis is an attempt to develop a discourse that communicates some of the various ways in which trance and the music and poetry accompanying it become understood in relation to the sacred. Furthermore, this is an attempt I am undertaking both to develop my own understanding of the varieties of musical and poetic trance and to contribute to open and hospitable dialogue that is both interdisciplinary and interreligious.

CHAPTER I

INTERPRETING THE SACRED

In this part of the essay, I articulate a method for interpreting sacred phenomena. In attempting to interpret sacred phenomena, one is presented with a two-fold problem: 1) whatever is held to be sacred by one person or people is not necessarily sacred for another, which is to say, there seems to be no single phenomenon (whether a place, myth, belief, ritual, person, etc.) that everybody considers sacred; and 2) whatever is held to be sacred is not given as a merely obvious or readily available thing or concept. The sacred is unlike the phenomena of everyday, ordinary, normal, profane existence.

As Rudolf Otto and many of his successors have said, the sacred (*das Heilige*) is wholly other (*ganz andere*), ineffable, mysterious, and completely different from normal reality (Otto: 25-30; Van der Leeuw 1963a: 681; Eliade 1987: 9_f). The sacred is not an object of everyday concern and curiosity, but is rather an object of “ultimate concern”—a concern that the theologian Paul Tillich described as the defining characteristic of faith (Tillich: 1, 12-16). Accordingly, any interpretation of things considered sacred must account for the difficulty of speaking about various ways in which *other people* experience that which is *wholly other*.

In the following, I indicate how hermeneutic phenomenology can facilitate an understanding of questions regarding the otherness (i.e., alterity) of the sacred and of the other people who experience the sacred. Furthermore, I argue that phenomenology makes it possible to interpret the sacred in a way that is helpful in understanding how the meaning of the sacred is embodied in a material situation. The intertwining of meaning and material is evident in the ambiguity of the word “sense,” which is related to the German *Sinn* and French *sens*, both of

which derive from the Proto-Indo-European root “sent-” (“to go”).² Similar to the way in which the German “*Sinn*” signifies “meaning” in both the ideal and sensuous (*sinnlich*) connotations of the word, the French “*sens*” connotes ideal meaning as well as a directional meaning or orientation.

Merleau-Ponty argues that sense-experience (*le sentir*) does not perceive meaningless data; it orients and directs humans toward the meaningful situation of a world (Merleau-Ponty 1998: 52-53). Jean-luc Nancy summarizes the ambiguous meaning of the word “sense” in his book, *The Sense of the World*: “the sense of the word *sense* traverses the five senses, the sense of direction, common sense, semantic sense, divinatory sense, sentiment, moral sense, practical sense, aesthetic sense, all the way to that which makes possible all these senses” (Nancy 1997: 15). All of these various aspects of the word “sense” are relevant for this present essay, both because they are all involved in the sense of trance, and also because they occur in music and poetry.

To begin elucidating the phenomenological method for interpreting the sacred, I briefly elucidate the history of the term “phenomenology” and its significance for the genesis of the “phenomenology of religion” (I.1). After defining the phenomenological interpretation of religion and the sacred, I proceed to explicate the significance of the phenomenological *epoche* for developing an interpretation that is hospitable to the alterity of what others understand to be sacred (I.2). Following this account of the *epoche*, I proceed to describe the hermeneutic context within which Western discourse interprets trances (II), and then I consider examples of poetic trance in William Blake (III) and musical trance in Afro-Atlantic traditions (IV).

² All Proto-Indo-European roots mentioned in this essay are taken from Calvert Watkins *The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots* (2000).

I.i. The Historical Genesis of the Phenomenology of Religion

The following is a brief summary of the history of the phenomenology of religion.³ This history provides a basic idea of the framework with which I interpret others' experiences of the sacred throughout this essay. Both "phenomenology" and "religion" are terms that cause much confusion, especially when they are used together. I attempt to dispel some of this confusion by exploring some developments in the history of ideas that have led to the explicit articulation of the phenomenology of religion. Through an elucidation of these developments, it is possible to gain a clearer understanding of some of the general characteristics that tend to be attributed to phenomenology in general and the phenomenology of religion in particular. I end this historical account with a discussion of the hermeneutic phenomenology of religion articulated by Gerardus van der Leeuw, whose foundational work on the matter brought together many different threads of research that I incorporate into this present interpretation of musical and poetic trance.

"There is little doubt that the first occurrence of the term phenomenology was in the work of Johann Heinrich Lambert (1728-1777), a little-known correspondent of Kant" (James: 23). Lambert used the term as the title for the final section of his *New Organon* (1764): "Phenomenology or Doctrine of Appearance." According to Lambert, phenomenology is an extension of the science of optics, thus making optics "more *general* and *manifold*" (ibid). Lambert argued that the principles of this extended optics could apply not only to investigations into realms of vision but also into regions of human knowledge, thus making phenomenology a "*transcendental optics*" (24). This phenomenology examines the appearances of all things—visual, moral, ideal, etc.—and proceeds from investigating mere appearances to investigating things as they are in themselves.

³ Much of the following account of the development of the term "phenomenology of religion" is indebted to George James' elucidation of "The Archeology of the Term" (James: 22-47).

Through their occasional correspondence, Lambert and Kant worked toward the “improvement of metaphysics,” toward a philosophy concerned with sensible appearances and not merely with reason, a philosophy “concerned with material and not merely with formal truth” (ibid). In a letter that he sent to Lambert in 1770, Kant refers to this philosophy as a general phenomenology, which determines the principles of sensuality and differentiates them from pure reason: “It seems that a quite special, if merely negative science (*Phänomenologie generalis*) must precede Metaphysics, wherein the principles of sensuality, their validity and their limitations, must be determined, in order that they do not confuse judgments of objects of pure reason” (25). Later, what Kant articulated here as the task of phenomenology comes to be articulated as the “exploration of the *a priori* subjective conditions of knowledge as such” in Kant’s transcendental (or critical) idealism (29).

Moreover, although Kant did not articulate a “phenomenology of religion,” his phenomenological clarification of the principles of sense and their limits with respect to pure reason is relevant to his discussion of *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, wherein Kant argues that religion and God are expressions of the rational moral imperative of human beings.⁴ Thus, although Kant’s rational account of religion is not explicitly phenomenological, the limits of reason are determined by the negative science of phenomenology. When considering Kant’s attempt to think about religion “at the limits of reason alone,” Jacques Derrida makes a similar point, arguing that the phenomenological approach to religion is at work in any attempt to bring religion into the light (*phos*) of appearance (*phainesthai*) and speak of it rationally (Derrida 2002: 46-48). If the phenomenology of religion can be found in any rational discourse on religion, then it would be possible to discern something like phenomenology in many

⁴ For Kant, practical reason is the source of the categorical imperative of morality, which leads to “the idea of a powerful moral Lawgiver, outside of mankind, for Whose will that is the final end (of creation) which at the same time can and ought to be man’s final end” (Kant: 5_r).

philosophical and theological accounts of religion not explicitly called phenomenological, e.g., the discussion in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* regarding the opinions about divinity that have been passed on as a mythical heritage, St. Anselm's account of belief seeking understanding, and the explication of Sacred Doctrine in the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas (Aristotle: 1047b-1047b15; Anselm: 47-53; Aquinas: I.1.i-x).

An articulation of a much more empirical task for phenomenology comes from the works of John Robison and other British thinkers (James: 27f). In Robison's *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article on "Philosophy" (1798), Robison defines phenomenology as a "philosophical history." It is the task of this philosophical history to descriptively classify observable facts and infer the laws that bind them (26-29). Robison argued that Newton's investigation into optics epitomizes this sense of phenomenology. James notes that Robison's understanding of phenomenology (as the part of philosophy that observes and groups facts according to laws) is evident in much of the philosophy and science in England during the nineteenth century (27).

Another dimension of phenomenology is articulated in Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes (Phenomenology of Spirit)* (1807), wherein Hegel scientifically examines the manifestations of Absolute Spirit as they are experienced by consciousness throughout various stages of history (44). Van der Leeuw clearly describes the Hegelian concept of the dialectical stages of history, wherein knowledge "first appears in the form of immediate spirit, which is mere sensuous consciousness devoid of spirit, and then steadily advances toward Absolute Spirit" (Van der Leeuw 1963a: 691f). Through the dialectical mediation of subjective consciousness and objective spirit, spirit becomes realized in history as Idea.

The realization of Idea in history is parallel to the realization of essence in particular manifestations (James: 44). Hegel's phenomenology is a grouping of experienced manifestations

into historical stages according to the degree to which these stages manifest knowledge. As a grouping of data into classes, Hegel's sense of phenomenology is analogous to that of Robison and the British. However, Hegel's phenomenology also greatly resembles that of Kant and Lambert in that Hegel arranges historical experiences not according to laws, but according to the manifestation of knowledge therein. Unlike Kant though, Hegel does not investigate knowledge as merely a mode of human representation, but as a developing manifestation of Absolute Spirit (ibid).

Furthermore, Hegel's posthumously published *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (1832) brings together phenomenology with the systematic investigation of religion (as a "philosophy" and not an explicit "phenomenology of religion") by investigating various manifestations of religion as they approach different stages toward knowledge of the Absolute Spirit (Hegel 1968). Hegel argues that religion is neither the experiences of subjective consciousness, nor merely the objective spirit that becomes manifest to consciousness; rather, religion is the "essential relation between the two" (1-3, 45-46). For Hegel, those types of religions that manifest this essential relation more objectively than others are more advanced in their development than other types of religions. This developmental thinking is rejected (in varying degrees) by explicitly phenomenological approaches to religion (James: 51-52, 63, 152-155, 212-15).

The first explicit use of the phrase "phenomenology of religion" occurs in the *Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte (Handbook of the History of Religions)*, written by Pierre Daniël Chantepie de la Saussaye in 1887, wherein he articulates the task of the science of religion and gives an "Outline of the phenomenology of religion" (Van der Leeuw 1963a: 694; cf. James: 42-45). Employing Hegelian terminology, Chantepie divides his science of religion into two areas

of investigation, essence and manifestations, which are approached through investigations in philosophy and history respectively. However, Chantepie defines the roles of phenomenology, history, and philosophy quite differently than Hegel (James: 45). For Chantepie, it is the task of phenomenology not to investigate historical types in terms of a philosophical or theological concept, but rather to prepare historical data for philosophical analysis through “a *collection*, a *grouping*, an *arrangement*, and a *classifying* of the principal groups of religious conceptions” (43). This sense of phenomenology as a grouping of manifestations is closer in style to Robison and the British than it is to Hegel.

Chantepie’s *Lehrbuch* was highly influential, and many researchers began similar efforts after its publication and its subsequent translation into English and French (141). One such researcher was William Brede Kristensen. At the University of Leiden in 1901, Kristensen was appointed to the first professorship relating to the phenomenology of religion. Some of the material from Kristensen’s lectures on the phenomenology of religion was edited posthumously, and the English translation was published in 1960 as *The Meaning of Religion* (Kristensen: xiii). James notes that Kristensen’s phenomenology follows many aspects of Chantepie’s grouping and classifying of religious phenomena while penetrating further into the intricacies of Chantepie’s phenomenological approach (James: 141-43). For Kristensen, phenomenology is not only affected by historical manifestation and philosophical concepts (as it is with Chantepie), it is also the medium whereby the philosophy and history of religion interact with and affect one another (Kristensen: 9). Thus, although Kristensen’s phenomenology must suppose a particular essence or essential meaning of religion, it transforms the essence by situating that philosophical concept within the typology of its manifestations. This is similar to how Merleau-Ponty describes phenomenology as a way of thinking that “puts essences back into existence”

(Merleau-Ponty: 1998: vii). Whereas theologians and philosophers describe the essence of religion according to their own understanding of religion, Kristensen transforms this philosophical concept of essential meaning by arguing that phenomenology must investigate the meaning that appears to those people who experience the phenomena. Kristensen's phenomenology of religion investigates "the meaning that the religious phenomena have for the believers themselves" (James: 144).

In elucidating the essential meaning of religion in its different manifestations for different believers, Kristensen does not merely classify the various types of its manifestations, but also seeks to understand these various manifestations: "Phenomenology has as its object to come as far as possible into contact with and to understand the extremely varied and divergent religious data" (Kristensen: 11). As a guiding supposition from which such an understanding can be approached, Kristensen appropriates Rudolf Otto's concept of *das Heilige* ("the holy" or "the sacred"), which Otto describes with the expression *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*—a numinous power revealed in a moment of "awe" that admits of both the horrible shuddering of "religious dread" (*tremendum*) and fascinating wonder (*fascinans*) with the overwhelming majesty (*majestas*) of the ineffable, "wholly other" mystery (*mysterium*) (Kristensen: 15-18; Otto: 5-32).

Another important event in the historical development of phenomenological inquiry is the articulation of phenomenology throughout the works of Edmund Husserl. In Husserl's *Logical Investigations* (1900), phenomenology is described as a clarification of the pure logic that founds scientific inquiry (James: 34f). Husserl summarized the first volume of his *Logical Investigations*, saying that it was to serve "as the basis for [...] the epistemological clarification of pure logic" (35). Evoking the sense of phenomenology developed by Kant, Husserl described

the phenomenological “method” as a “critique of pure reason” during his Göttingen lectures (36). These lectures also introduced Husserl’s concept of the “phenomenological reduction,” which was to become one of the key terms in Husserl’s thought, along with related terms developed later, such as “phenomenological *epoche*” and “eidetic intuition” (Husserl 1969: 101_f; 1970: 151_f; James: 37-39). The *epoche* (ἐποχή) is a graded reduction (or “bracketing”) of the given world, whereby the world can be gradually reduced to its constitutive essences. The transcendental *epoche* reveals the essence of pure consciousness (the transcendental ego), and a lesser grade of reduction discloses the essential activities of consciousness such as “willing,” “perceiving,” and “anticipating” (James: 38_f).

In his attempt to apply phenomenology to the foundation of human knowledge and reason, Husserl’s phenomenology resembles that of Kant and Lambert, and his eidetic classification of essences resembles the tradition of the British empiricists (James: 39_f). However, Husserl himself notes that his conception of phenomenology must be understood as he developed it, and not merely in terms of its significance for his predecessors. Similar to Lambert’s effort to make optics more manifold and general, James notes that with Husserl’s work, the “transcendental efforts of Lambert and Kant were extended further yet, making them once again more manifold and general” (40). These transcendental efforts were extended even further when Martin Heidegger, a student of Husserl, articulated a hermeneutic phenomenology in the seminal 1927 publication, *Sein und Zeit*, which focuses on the transcendence of Being and not a transcendental ego (Heidegger 1967). Heidegger describes his concept of phenomenology by recovering the Ancient Greek words from which the word “phenomenology” is derived: *phainomenon* (φαίνόμενον) and *logos* (λόγος).

The word *phainomenon* derives from *phainesthai*, a verb signifying “to show itself”. Thus φαίνόμενον means that which shows itself, the manifest [das, was sich zeigt, das Sichzeigende, das Offenbare]” (Heidegger 1962: 51). Furthermore, *phainesthai* derives from *phaino*, which signifies “to bring to the light of day”; and *phaino* is derived from the stem *pha*, which is similar to *phos*, “the light, that which is bright—in other words, that wherein something can become manifest, visible in itself” (Heidegger 1962: 51).⁵ Heidegger goes on to say that the Greeks identified phenomena as beings or entities, *ta onta*. That which beings manifest when they show themselves is their beingness—the thinghood (*Sachheit*) of things, the “Being of entities” (*das Sein des Seienden*), which “‘is’ not itself an entity” (26, 59-60). Completely other than beings, “*Being is the transcendens pure and simple*” (62). In short, phenomena are beings in Being, things showing themselves in their thinghood. Every being shows itself in Being, and thus shows itself as transcendence, as other than beings. Accordingly, phenomenology must always begin by discussing phenomena insofar as they appear to the being who understands how beings are differentiated from Being; that is, phenomenology begins by investigating the being traditionally called human being, the being Heidegger calls *Dasein*.

Although in colloquial German *Dasein* can refer to various types of existence, Heidegger uses it to refer to that type of existence that belongs to beings for whom Being is an issue, traditionally called humans (*Homo sapiens, animale rationale*)—beings characterized not by a transcendental ego, but by the facticity (*Faktizität*) of being the “there” (*Da*) of Being, by the existential context (*Zusammenhang*) of Being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*), whereby there *is*

⁵ The light and visibility of the phenomenon are indicative of Heidegger’s argument that the primordial sense of phenomena is given to *Dasein* in *aisthesis* (αἴσθησις)—“the sheer sensory perception of something”—which is always intertwined with the noetic idea (ἰδέα) of perception (Heidegger 1962: 57). Perception always discovers (unconceals) the phenomena it perceives, whereas the words and concepts at work in discourse and ideation can obscure and hide what shows itself, rather than pointing to what is manifest. Similar to Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty argues that the primary subject-matter of phenomenology is perception: “By these words, the ‘primacy of perception,’ we mean that the experience of perception is our presence at the moment when things, truths, values are constituted for us” (Merleau-Ponty 1964a: 25).

any being at all (32-35, 78-80, 415-18, cf. Heidegger 1999: 5, 17-27). In other words, *Dasein* is the being who understands *Sinn* (“sense” or “meaning”), wherein “*Sinn*” signifies the structure of factual existence upon which (*woraufhin*) Being, entities, and the world can be apprehended and understood as such (Heidegger 1962: 26ff, 244f).⁶ In sum: beings show themselves in their Being to *Dasein* insofar as *Dasein* has some understanding of how phenomena appear, some understanding of the meaning whereupon anything appears. This understanding of the meaning of phenomena is given according to *Dasein*’s unique relationship to *logos*.

Heidegger explicates the significance of discourse (*λόγος*, Gk.; *Rede*, Grm.) for his hermeneutic phenomenology by appropriating Aristotle’s concept of the *apophansis* (*ἀπόφανσις*) of declarative sentences. Heidegger describes *apophansis* as “Discourse that ‘lets something be seen’ *ἀπό*...: that is, it lets us see something from the very thing which the discourse is about” (56).⁷ Apophantical assertions thus make it possible to point to what shows itself and to let it be seen from itself. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty says that phenomenology points to things insofar as “it shows by words” (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 266). *Dasein* can use discourse to point to the meaning of phenomena because the assertions of apophantical discourse are grounded in the hermeneutic structure of discourse, which is pre-assertoric (i.e., pre-predicative, pre-linguistic,

⁶ Merleau-Ponty also appropriates the word *sens* to designate the structure or framework (*membrure*) upon which all manifestations appear to some perceiving subject (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 197, 215). *Sens* designates the pre-reflective and pre-thematic “relationship of active transcendence between the subject and the world” (1998: 430). The experience of *sens* is thus both sense-experience (*le sentir*) and an experience of an “immanent sense” of the world (35, 52). The act of sensing (*sentir*) and that which is sensed (*sentant*) are intertwined in the experience of *sens*; thus, the sensing human body can be considered a sensing-sensed (*sentir-sentant*) or a visible-seer or seeing-visible (*voyant-visible*) (1968: 151, 220, 260). Moreover, the different aspects of *sens* never completely overlap or coincide, there is always some separation between self and other, the five senses, the touching and the touched, the seeing and the seen, etc. (146f, 248-50, 254-56).

⁷ The basic character of the relationship between the concepts of apophantical discourse in Aristotle and Heidegger is elucidated quite clearly in Thomas Sheehan’s essay, “*Hermeneia* and *Apophansis*: The Early Heidegger on Aristotle” (Sheehan 1988).

and pre-thematic).⁸ It is in this hermeneutic structure that *Dasein* is given access to the difference between Being and beings, access that allows every phenomenon to be interpreted, to be spoken of *as* something (61-62; Heidegger 1999: 5-16). This is the “as-structure” of hermeneutic discourse. It is a bivalent unity of composing and dividing (called *synthesis* and *diairesis* by Aristotle), whereby phenomena appear *as*, i.e., whereby phenomena appear combined, separated, or otherwise related.

The meaning upon which the Being of beings shows itself is disclosed to *Dasein* through the “as-structure,” the structure upon which being and Beings are differentiated and given *as such* to *Dasein*’s understanding (*Verständnis*) (Heidegger 1962: 188-203; cf. Sheehan 1988: 76-80). In short, *Dasein* can understand the meaning of Being insofar as the structure of *Dasein*’s pre-thetic understanding (i.e., the “fore-structure” of understanding) is characterized by hermeneutic combining/separating (Heidegger 1962: 192).

Although Being is not given as a phenomenon, apophantical assertions about phenomena can point to what shows itself and speak of its hermeneutic structure, indicating the differences (combinations and separations) upon which appearances become understood as meaningful aspects of the world. The truth (*Wahrheit*) of phenomenological discourse is thus not one of proof or logical correctness, but rather one of discovering (*entdecken*) the hidden transcendence of phenomena and making meaning unhidden (*alethes*). Heidegger articulates this sense of truth by appropriating the Greek word for truth, *alētheia*, which means un-concealment or un-hiddenness, deriving from the verb stem *lath* meaning “to be concealed” (56-57, 262).

⁸ “Hermeneutics” (ἑρμηνευτική) designates the art or science of interpretation, and is related to words such as “interpreting” (ἑρμηνεύειν) and “interpreter” (ἑρμηνεύς). These words are also related to Hermes, the name for “the messenger of the gods” (Heidegger 1999: 6). Heidegger recovers a meaning of hermeneutics and interpretation based upon an elucidation of different uses of the words in the history of philosophy, from Plato, Aristotle, and St. Augustine, to Schleiermacher and Dilthey (6-11). Hermeneutic language is an important part of Heidegger’s work as a whole and can be found throughout his early and later works (Heidegger 1971: 29-34). For an in-depth account of the place of hermeneutics in the works of Heidegger and his predecessors and successors, see Palmer’s *Hermeneutics* (Palmer: 124-61).

The phenomenological approach to the study of religion developed in Gerardus van der Leeuw's *Phänomenologie der Religion* (1933) appropriates Heidegger's concept of phenomenological discourse as apophantical discourse that points to hermeneutic structure (Van der Leeuw 1956: 775-76; 1963a: 676-77). Van der Leeuw's phenomenology also follows the work of Kristensen, with the ultimate aim of understanding what others experience as sacred (James: 205). Furthermore, van der Leeuw also explicitly calls upon the hermeneutic conception of experience (*Erlebnis*) developed by Wilhelm Dilthey, which is particularly evident in van der Leeuw's conception of understanding as an experience of sense-connection (*Sinnzusammenhang*). Moreover, Dilthey's hermeneutics also plays an important part in Heidegger's concept of hermeneutics, understanding, and experience, as is evident in Heidegger's discussion of "factual life-experience" (*faktische Lebenserfahrungen*) in his 1920-21 lecture course on the phenomenology of religion.⁹ Furthermore, bearing in mind that the hermeneutic tradition has theological roots, it is worth noting Gadamer's insight that hermeneutic research influenced by Dilthey's work tends to communicate in terms of words and concepts "stemming originally from Protestant theology" (such as the un-concealing of transcendence that characterizes "truth" in Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology) (Gadamer 1977: 4).

For van der Leeuw, understanding is the subjective aspect of phenomena, and this subjective aspect is inherently intertwined with the objectivity of any manifestation that might become understood. Van der Leeuw articulates the relation of understanding to understood

⁹ Like the hermeneutic understanding characteristic of *Dasein*, factual life-experience can be described as a bivalent unity of combining and separating, or as Thomas Sheehan describes it, a "dynamic interplay of presence and privative absence (pres-ab-sence)" (Heidegger 2004: 4-13; Sheehan 1979: 315). Moreover, although it is common to translate *faktische* as "factual," future studies may find that "factual" is more appropriate, both because it sounds closer to the German, and because it sounds closer to other English words to which it is etymologically related (such as "facial," "artificial," and "fictitious"). For further references regarding the connections between Dilthey and Heidegger, see Michael Inwood's *A Heidegger Dictionary* (Inwood: 62, 87-89, 105, 118-123, 235).

phenomena according to the schema outlined in Dilthey's argument that the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) are "based on the relations between experience, expression and understanding" ("Verhältnis von Erlebnis, Ausdruck, und Verstehen") (Van der Leeuw 1956: 776; 1963a: 676). Van der Leeuw correlates subjective experience, expression, and understanding with three objective levels of appearing—relative concealment (*Verborgenheit*), relative transparency (*Durchsichtigkeit*), and gradually becoming manifest or revealed (*Offenbarwerden*). The primordial level of phenomenal appearing is the understanding of that which becomes revealed. Upon reflection, this primordial level of the phenomenon's becoming manifest is rendered transparent and opaque: transparent insofar as the meaning of the phenomenon can be expressed, and opaque insofar as the meaning of the phenomenon is concealed in the past experience that is being reflected upon (1956: 769; 1963a: 671). Through discourse, what becomes revealed to the understanding is expressed, thus making transparent the concealed meaning of the phenomenon as it was given in experience. Van der Leeuw defines meaning as interconnections of sense (*Sinnzusammenhänge*), also called "types," analogous to what Dilthey spoke of as structural connections (*Strukturzusammenhänge*) and what Jaspers called comprehensible relations (*verständliche Beziehungen*) (1956: 771; 1963a: 673).¹⁰ Van der Leeuw argues that these structural types are not reality, nor photographs of reality; rather, they are connections of sense that appear insofar as the phenomenon appears to someone.

Because van der Leeuw, like Kristensen, appropriates Otto's concept of *das Heilige* in defining the essential meaning of religion, the concealment which becomes revealed in all human understanding is considered to be the concealment of the wholly other, not only in the sense of a

¹⁰ A thorough overview of the significance of Dilthey's hermeneutic concept of the "experience of structural connection" can be found in Palmer's *Hermeneutics* (114-23). Furthermore, these concepts of comprehensible relations and structural connections are somewhat similar to what Wittgenstein spoke of in his *Philosophical Investigations* as "family resemblances"—the relations interconnecting the boundaries that make up our language games (Wittgenstein: aphorisms 65-69).

wholly other transcendent Being, but in the sense of a sacred wholly other. Thus, the wholly other is first and foremost a matter of the sacred, and only in ontology is the wholly other expressed specifically in terms of the meaning of Being. Insofar as all phenomena un-conceal concealment, all phenomena can be described as appearances of the sacred, appearances that Mircea Eliade designates with the term “hierophanies” (Eliade 1987: 11-12, 20-28). The transcendence of Being is a metaphysical way to speak of the sacred, to speak of the wholly other power that becomes revealed in astonishing moments of dreadful awe (*Scheu*) and wonderful fascination (Van der Leeuw 1963a: 23, 681; Otto: 14-32). The metaphysical understanding of phenomena is one of many ways to express how the sacred becomes manifest. Thus, van der Leeuw recognizes that the religious sense of dread is present in philosophical discourse, such as Kierkegaard’s work on the concept of *Angst* and in Heidegger’s argument that “what arouses dread is ‘being in the world’ itself” (Van der Leeuw 1963a: 463; cf. Kierkegaard; Heidegger 1962; 230). Just as religious dread is intertwined with the fascinating aspect of the sacred, van der Leeuw follows Heidegger in claiming that dread discloses the structure of Being-in-the-world as *Sorge*, the existential structure whereby *Dasein* has concern (*Besorgnis*) for the world, making it possible to care for (*sorgen*) and to deal with (*besorgen*) the meaning of Being (Van der Leeuw 1963a: 339, 543; Heidegger 1962: 364-70).

Because all phenomena reveal wholly other concealments to the understanding, all experiences are ultimately experiences of the sacred, regardless of whether the sacred is given *as such* or not. All understanding is related to the sacred: human being is *homo religiosus*, the opposite of *homo negligens* (Van der Leeuw 1963a: 50, 680).

Similarly to van der Leeuw, Gadamer argues that all hermeneutics must conceive of understanding “in terms of religious experience” (Gadamer 1977: 80). A phenomenological

interpretation of sacred phenomena is thus not an abstract method of schematizing or theorizing, it “is man’s true vital activity [...]: standing aside and understanding what appears into view”(Van der Leeuw 1963a: 676). Or in other words, “all understanding, irrespective of whatever object it refers to, is ultimately religious: all significance sooner or later leads to ultimate significance” (684). Hermeneutic phenomenology is not a philosophical school or theory, it is the way in which humans understand the mysterious other becoming manifest in experience. Similarly, Heidegger says that phenomenology is not a school, but is rather “the possibility of thinking [...], of corresponding to the claim of what is to be thought. If phenomenology is thus experienced and retained, it can disappear as a designation in favor of the matter of thinking whose manifestness remains a mystery” (Heidegger 1972: 82; 1962: 62_f).¹¹ Merleau-Ponty expresses a similar notion, arguing that the task of phenomenological reflection is “to reveal the mystery of the world and of reason” (Merleau-Ponty 1998: xx-xxi). It is the task of a phenomenology of religion to communicate the meaning of what appears, by pointing to connections of sense that manifest the sacred mystery of phenomena.

Phenomenology, as expressed by Heidegger and van der Leeuw, thus contains the possibility of translating all types of religious experience into the communicable discourse of phenomenological interpretation, without however having to reduce religious phenomena to their place within the discursive limits of an ontology or theology articulated in any particular tradition. Van der Leeuw’s phenomenology articulates the possibility of such interpretation, particularly insofar as it interpolates phenomena into the structure of its hermeneutic discourse while restraining this discourse and keeping it from obscuring the phenomena under investigation (Van der Leeuw 1963a: 646, 674-76). By elucidating this attitude of restrained

¹¹ In the German text, this quotation reads as follows: phenomenology is “Möglichkeit des Denkens, dem Anspruch des zu Denkenden zu entsprechen. Wird die Phänomenologie so erfahren und behalten, dann kann sie als Titel verschwinden zugunsten der Sache des Denkens, deren Offenbarkeit ein Geheimnis bleibt” (Heidegger 1988: 90).

interpolation, which is encrypted in the Ancient Greek word *epoche* (“era,” “epoch,” “season”), I indicate how phenomenology can speak hospitably about the meaning of wholly other revelations experienced by others without reducing to mere words or concepts the phenomena of which it speaks.

I.ii. *Epoche*: Hospitable Restraint and Welcoming the Other

Epoche, as was mentioned above, is a term employed in the works of Edmund Husserl. It signifies the “brackets” into which are placed assertions about the world, particularly assertions arising “*from the natural standpoint*” (Husserl 1969: 101-110; Husserl 1970: 151_f, 256_f). The natural standpoint (or natural attitude) is the fundamental situation of the human being, wherein the self is “set in relation to a world [...] a *world of values*, a *world of goods*, a *practical world*” (Husserl 1969: 103). Merleau-Ponty expresses a similar conception of the phenomenological *epoche*, arguing that phenomenology “places in abeyance the assertions arising out of the natural attitude, the better to understand them” (Merleau-Ponty; 1998: vii). Bracketing the natural standpoint is not the same as putting into doubt (as in Cartesian doubt) the notion that the world is there or that others exist. Rather, the *epoche* suspends presuppositions and assertions about what is given in the natural standpoint, thus making it easier to distinguish between the phenomena that appear in the natural standpoint and presuppositions about these appearances. In using the *epoche*, phenomenologists restrain their presuppositions, holding back assertions so that their discourse lets phenomena be seen as phenomena. Considering the literal meaning of the word, one could say that, in using the *epoche*, one recognizes that phenomenological investigations have an age, occurring within the horizon of one’s own historical epoch or era.

James notes that van der Leeuw's use of the term *epoche* has "little to do with its meaning in Husserl's thought" (James: 231). Unlike Husserl's use of the *epoche*, the restraint (*Zurückhaltung*) of van der Leeuw's *epoche* does not seek a constitutive transcendental ego, and still further it "implies no mere methodological device, no cautious procedure, but the distinctive characteristic of man's whole attitude to reality" (Van der Leeuw 1963a: 675; 1956: 774). The *epoche* is not a method that can be applied in some cases and not in others; it is characteristic of all understanding. "Understanding, in fact, itself presupposes intellectual restraint" (1963a: 684). Understanding as such holds itself back so as to sense what becomes revealed in the appearing of phenomena. The *epoche* is the restraint whereby one holds back one's presuppositions so as to let that which is other than oneself show itself. The *epoche* implies that one must turn away from some things in order to turn toward others; one must say "No" to some things to say "Yes" to others. Some things must be suspended or put out of play if one is to understand what appears.

Phenomenological inquiry into religion employs the *epoche* in attempting to let what others experience as sacred appear other. One cannot understand another's experience of the sacred at all without already having some presupposed understanding of the sacred. Without presuppositions, it would be impossible to experience anything. Gadamer makes this point, saying that presuppositions "are simply conditions whereby we experience something—whereby what we encounter says something to us" (Gadamer: 1977: 9). Other people's experiences can be understood as other only insofar as they are other than oneself and other than the hermeneutic context of one's own existence (Van der Leeuw 1963a: 683). From the presuppositions of one's existential situation, one can interpret others' experiences; but without further restraint, the

otherness of these experiences becomes subsumed into one's own presuppositions. With further restraint, one can proceed to understand others' experiences without effacing their otherness.

Furthermore, one's own experiences themselves appear other as soon as one attempts to reflect on them. Any reflection on an experience of a phenomenon is a reflection on an experience that is other than the experience one has while reflecting on it. For example, whether I am trying to decipher a shopping-list I wrote yesterday or I am trying to decipher the Rosetta stone, the expressions that I am interpreting are not expressions of an experience that is presently mine. As soon as I reflect on what I am doing right now, my experience is no longer present; it has already become past, "already become strange" (675). Thus, the phenomenologist of religion employs the *epoche* to understand others' experiences of sacred phenomena, whether these others are people other than myself or simply myself in a past experience.

In restraining oneself so as to interpret what others experience as sacred, one cannot completely restrain oneself without suspending the very hermeneutic context that makes it possible to interpret others' experiences. Where one cannot say "No" to any more of one's own presuppositions and cannot say "Yes" to any more that is other than one's presuppositions, understanding reaches a limit, a threshold (*limen* in Latin). To further restrain oneself would be to dissolve the very presuppositions from which the other can be interpreted as other, and to cease restraining oneself would be to reduce the other to one's own presuppositions. This is the limit beyond which one's own understanding cannot go, the limit at which one's understanding encounters the otherness of that which is understood, where the other person's experience of the sacred appears as other. At the limit where understanding encounters otherness, van der Leeuw argues that understanding loses its name and can only be considered as "becoming understood" (*Verstandenwerden*) (1963a: 683; 1956: 782).

In other words: the more deeply comprehension penetrates any event, and the better it “understands” it, the clearer it becomes to the understanding mind that the ultimate ground of understanding lies not within itself, but in some “other” by which it is comprehended from beyond the frontier (1963a: 683_f).

As understanding interprets the meaning of any phenomenon, it becomes clear that “this meaning is never understood [...], the ultimate meaning being a secret which reveals itself repeatedly, only nevertheless to remain eternally concealed” (680).

Although the concept of an eternally concealed secret sounds more theological than phenomenological, I indicated above how Heidegger argues that phenomena show themselves precisely as beings showing (i.e., un-hiding) the hiddenness of their Being. Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty argues from a phenomenological perspective that for humans to sense anything, the perceiving subject must extend itself out toward things that are not yet perceived or comprehended, remaining open to “an absolute Other” that is reflected in perception (Merleau-Ponty 1998: 325_f). The perceivable parts of the world are adumbrations of an “absolute mystery” continually becoming manifest to perception precisely as that which is absolutely different from one’s own perception (333). Merleau-Ponty also articulates this interpretation of the perception of mystery using the vocabulary of German phenomenologists, saying that the sense-experience of the world is an original presentation (*Urpräsentation*) of concealment (*Verborgenheit*), i.e., a presentation of that which is originally not capable of being present or visible (*Nichturpräsentierbar*) (1968: 218_f, 239, 251).

Insofar as every phenomenon is the appearance of the wholly other, what is disclosed in phenomenological discourse is always the appearance of that which, as such, does not appear. Understanding a phenomenon means that the concealment of the phenomenon becoming

revealed is becoming understood, and that this understanding will never be complete, because that which is becoming understood is precisely that which is other. It is the task of the phenomenology of religion to interpret others' experiences of the sacred, which ultimately means reaching the limit where others' experiences appear as hidden beyond the limits of understanding. Thus, at the limit of restrained interpretation, other people's experiences appear as wholly other; and insofar as all phenomena are manifestations of such absolute mystery, all other people are ultimately wholly other. Derrida discusses the equivocation of the wholly other with each other person in terms of a "play of words" that contains "the very possibility of a secret that hides and reveals itself at the same time within a single sentence and, more than that, within a single language"—*tout autre est tout autre* (*autre* = "other"; *est* = "is"; *tout* = "every"/"wholly") (Derrida 1995: 87). This ambiguous French phrase suggests that each particular other is completely other, wholly other: "Every other (one) is every (bit) other" (82).

Holding back the understanding, phenomenology seeks the limit where understanding loses its name and encounters the incomprehensible other; and in the phenomenology of religion, this incomprehensible other is the phenomenon of another's experience of the sacred. Simply put, the phenomenology of religion uses the *epoche* in an explicit attempt at holding oneself back so as to welcome the other as other, to welcome others' experiences of the wholly other in all of their otherness. John Caputo argues that this gesture of welcoming the incoming arrival of the other (Derrida's "*l'inventions de l'autre*") is a common commitment of many inquiries in hermeneutics and also in deconstruction (Caputo 2000: 42). It is this same welcoming of transcendence and otherness that led Edith Whyschograd to suggest that the approaches of hermeneutics and deconstruction are particularly helpful in approaching a study of religious phenomena (Whyschograd: 58-79). Phenomenology, hermeneutics, and deconstruction—

whether working separately or in conjunction—restrain the structures of discourse so as to not obscure the alterity of the other. To explicate the significance of the *epoche* for the interpretation of sacred phenomena, I further elucidate van der Leeuw’s appropriation of the *epoche* while also considering the relevance of investigations in hermeneutics and deconstruction for interpreting how others understand that which is wholly other.

Van der Leeuw’s appropriation of the *epoche* is most clearly evident when considering what it is that van der Leeuw considers particularly important to restrain. James notes that van der Leeuw puts three aspects of religion into the brackets of the *epoche*: 1) any reality behind the appearance of the phenomenon, 2) any development or evolutionary progression of history, and 3) any judgments that consider alien religious phenomena to be “spurious religion and degeneration” (James: 233). All of these aspects of religion must be held in abeyance if one is to understand the phenomenon as such, as someone’s experience of the wholly other revelation of that which is concealed. If one does not restrain oneself to this extent, one’s interpretation of religion will likely posit assertions about phenomena in such a way as to obscure and efface the other—both the other which someone experiences as wholly other and the other person who experiences it. Brief examples of the three areas of inquiry that van der Leeuw brackets will help clarify how phenomenological interpretation can speak of experiences of the sacred.

1) Similar to Heidegger’s argument that there is nothing “behind” what shows itself in the appearing of phenomena, van der Leeuw argues that phenomenology “is concerned only with ‘phenomena’, that is with ‘appearance’; for it, there is nothing whatever ‘behind’ the phenomenon” (Van der Leeuw 1963a: 675; Heidegger 1962: 60). This follows from van der Leeuw’s separation of phenomenology from philosophy and theology, which are concerned with the metaphysical and theological truth underlying appearances, a truth which Heidegger

articulates with the term “onto-theology.”¹² Accordingly, van der Leeuw does not suppose that phenomena are manifestations of Platonic Ideas or of a Kantian thing-in-itself (*Ding-an-sich*). This also means that van der Leeuw brackets the structures that empirical scientists posit as an underlying reality, such as the position of some psychologists or physical scientists who claim that the world is primarily unformed matter onto which human consciousness projects its own ideals (Van der Leeuw 1963a: 677). Although the rigorous precision of many scientific investigations can yield data and helpful hypotheses that are relevant to what is experienced of sacred phenomena, they cannot and thus must not assert anything about any reality underlying all interpretation, for such reality does not appear to the reflective gaze of the researcher (whether the researcher is an anthropologist, philosopher, chemist, linguist, botanist, etc.).

In restraining all propositions about true structures ‘behind’ or ‘under’ apparent structures, van der Leeuw’s hermeneutic phenomenology holds back the violent tendency of discourse to reduce the incomprehensible, unapproachable, ineffable other to the words and concepts of understanding. Derrida views the *epoche* similarly, arguing that such restraint (which Derrida equates with the “holding” of the German *halten*) is respectful to “sacred mystery,” to that which “ought to remain intact or inaccessible, like the mystical immunity of a secret” (Derrida 2002: 85-86). The restrained holding of the *epoche* is part of an “entire semantic family” involving varieties of “holding” (*tenir*) (which involves tending, attending, extending, intending, etc.) that can welcome or deny the visitation of the other as other (85, 360).

Derrida likens the semantic family of “holding” with the experience of hospitality, wherein

¹² Heidegger elucidates this concept in “The Onto-Theological Constitution of Metaphysics” (Heidegger 1969: 42-76). Throughout the course of this seminar, Heidegger indicates how traditional metaphysical discourse, by focusing on Being merely in terms of the totality of beings and on the Being of beings, has obscured the difference between Being and beings, the difference that allows beings to appear true in the sense of un-concealed. Metaphysics “represents beings in respect of what differs in the difference, and without heeding the difference as difference” (70). This interpretation of difference is appropriated by Derrida in his articulation of a difference that is simultaneously difference and deferral, a “play of differences” that Derrida designates by misspelling *différence* as *différance* (Derrida 1972: 8-10, 27; cf. 1982: 3-27).

hospitality means welcoming that which is beyond all welcoming apparatuses, letting oneself “be swept by the coming of the wholly other” (361). This hospitably restrained welcoming of the unapproachable other is an instance of deconstruction: “deconstruction is hospitality to the other, to the other than oneself, the other than ‘its other,’ to an other who is beyond any ‘its other’” (364). With the restraint of the *epoche* (and also deconstruction and hospitality) comes the possibility of speaking of a “universal structure of religiosity”—a structure that allows different names for the sacred to be translated into one discourse on religion without reducing the wholly other to any of its many names, including the names “sacred” and “other” (86).

2) An important type of structure that must be restrained and deconstructed in an interpretation of the sacred is that which posits any developmental progression for the history of religions. In bracketing the question of history, van der Leeuw “does not deny the historicity of what appears but [...] brackets evolution and development” (James: 233). In this respect, van der Leeuw is following Chantepie and Kristensen, all of whom classify phenomena according to apparent types without defining these types in terms of historically antecedent causes or origins (267-68). Developmental (or evolutionary) accounts of religion are at work whenever a religious phenomenon is evaluated in terms of a causality at work in its historical situation.¹³

An example of a developmental account of religion that van der Leeuw puts into brackets is Hegel’s account of religion as a dialectical progression toward knowledge of Absolute Spirit, wherein magic and the other natural religions are imperfect realization of human freedom in Absolute Spirit (Hegel 1968: 262-65).¹⁴ Bracketing evolutionary accounts does not make phenomenology anti-evolutionary. For in the preface of his work, van der Leeuw says that his

¹³ Hannah Arendt’s warning on this matter is appropriate: “Whoever in the historical sciences honestly believes in causality actually denies the subject matter of his own science” (Arendt: 319).

¹⁴ In contemporary research, the Hegelian account of the evolutionary development of the history of religions is being revitalized in the works of Ken Wilber (2000; 2000a).

“phenomenological comprehension of history” avoids any arguments for or against evolutionary theories of history (Van der Leeuw 1963a: vi). Thus, van der Leeuw considers evolutionary and anti-evolutionary theories of the history of religion only insofar as they are some of the various ways in which the history of religions can be understood. Van der Leeuw notes that while he finds Christianity to manifest the peak in the development of religions, he is aware that this peak would not appear to a Buddhist, who would most likely interpret the history of religions in terms of Buddhist theories and practices (646). The phenomenologist is not concerned with who is “right” but rather with understanding how each interpretation has meaning for those who hold it. Therefore, the phenomenologist not only brackets historical, scientific, and philosophical concepts, but also puts into brackets one’s most basic understanding of what is revealed in the world, one’s own understanding of the sacred, which implies that all theological discourse must be restrained.

3) In bracketing the question of theology, van der Leeuw is bracketing the question of truth with respect to God (the object of theological inquiry): God is not a phenomenon, “at least not so that we can comprehend and speak about him” (687-88). Bracketing theology thus entails that one not evaluate phenomena according to one’s own religious history. James notes that this “a-theological” approach to the study of religion is one of the common characteristics of the phenomenology of religion (James: 6, 52-57, 166ff). Derrida argues that the a-theological aspect of the *epoche* is particularly important because of its potential for “liberating a universal rationality and the political democracy associated with it” (Derrida 2002: 47_f, 57). The *epoche* makes possible a rational discourse on religion that supports both interfaith and international diplomacy. Through the restrained discourse of the *epoche*, it is possible to express a structure that is hospitable to all varieties of religious phenomena, a structure that Derrida calls a

“universal structure of religiosity”—a structure that would allow “global translations” of the various names associated with religion, the sacred, dread, the other, etc. (86). Such a universal structure could indicate how religious phenomena are interpreted as religious, and it could do so without excluding the different appearances that people of other faiths and other nations experience of this structure.

Of course, such an interpretation of interfaith and international diplomacy has its own theological suppositions. Even when rigorously observing the *epoche*, one’s own existential experience “can never be freed from its own religious determinateness” (Van der Leeuw 1963a: 646). It is the task of phenomenology to restrain one’s own religious determinateness as completely as possible, reaching the limit where it becomes apparent that one’s own understanding is incomplete and that “the ultimate ground of understanding lies not within itself, but in some ‘other’ by which it is comprehended from beyond the frontier” (683_f). Merleau-Ponty also speaks of the incompleteness of restraint, claiming that it teaches us the most important lesson that the phenomenological reduction can teach us: that one’s attempt to reflect on phenomena is situated in something other than one’s own reflection, in the transcendence of an unreflective dimension (Merleau-Ponty 1964c: 161; 1998: xiv). It is the recognition of the impossibility of complete restraint—of what Derrida calls the impossibility of hospitality—that makes it possible for an interpretation to speak of the other as other (as inaccessible, unapproachable, overpowering, sacred mystery) (Derrida 2002: 364). Restraint works at its fullest capacity when it encounters that which cannot be restrained, that wholly other transcendence given in one’s own experience of phenomena becoming revealed.

In terms of Gadamer’s hermeneutics, such hospitable restraint toward the other can be spoken of as effective historical consciousness (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*), which

implies becoming conscious of the historical horizon of one's own inherited prejudices (Gadamer 1989: 300-307, 340-79; 1977: 27). This is relevant for all aspects of the *epoche*, including the bracketing of developmental accounts of the history of religions. In becoming conscious of one's own historical horizon, the alienated other (another religion, another person, or the wholly other) is continually superseding and being superseded by one's own presence, thus perpetually renewing contact between one's own horizon and that of the other. Gadamer refers to this contact as a "fusion of horizons" (*Horizontverschmelzung*) (1989: 306-307, 397; 1975: 290; 1977: 94). Fusing horizons, the other is present to one's own prejudiced gaze precisely as that which is other than the horizon of one's own prejudices..

To develop a restrained interpretation of religion, Van der Leeuw restrains all assertions and presuppositions about religious phenomena, holding back any assertion about whether what he sees "has its roots in any ultimate 'reality,'" for he (as a Christian) relegates such questions to theological inquiry (Van der Leeuw 1963a: 646). Thus, while van der Leeuw admittedly interprets other religions from the perspective of his own religious history, he indicates the limit where his own horizon encounters others' interpretations of religion. Similarly, the Buddhist scholar Keiji Nishitani sees the Buddhist experience of *śūnyatā* as the fundamental principle of religion, and it is from this presupposition that he compares various aspects of Buddhism, Christianity, and existential nihilism (Nishitani: 1-45, 86-91). Nishitani's Buddhist standpoint provides a perspective from which he neither denigrates nor disparages other religions; instead, Nishitani articulates many insightful points that indicate important similarities between Christianity and Buddhism, such as the similarity between Christian love (*agape*) and Buddhist compassion (*karuna*) (58-74). Both van der Leeuw and Nishitani speak of other religions in

terms of their own, but what is important is that they clarify their presuppositions and indicate how their horizons fuse with the foreign horizons of practitioners of other religions.

To assign names to the sacred that respect the alterity of others' experiences of the wholly other, one must assign a name with the restrained hospitality of a historically effected consciousness, explicating the presuppositions that contextualize whatever words and concepts are used to interpret the appearances of the other, including words like "God," "Yahweh," "śūnyatā," and "Tao," but also words and concepts that seem universally translatable (e.g., "sacred," "wholly other," "*mysterium tremendum*").

To put it briefly, to allow sacred phenomena to appear as such, one must restrain all assertions about the structures of sacred phenomena, deconstructing hermeneutic structure so as to welcome the other into discourse. For the particular purposes of the present essay, the application of restraint needs to focus specifically on the hermeneutic structure of contemporary discourse on musical and poetic trance. This is the task of the next section of the essay (section II). After completing section II, I proceed to interpret the trances expressed in the poetry William Blake and in the music of Afro-Atlantic religions.

CHAPTER II

THE HERMENEUTIC CONTEXT OF MUSICAL AND POETIC TRANCE

In developing an interpretation that is hospitable to any manifestation of the sacred experienced in phenomena of musical and poetic trance, I observe the attitude of restraint (*Zurückhaltung*), the hospitable attitude of deconstruction, the attitude of the phenomenological *epoche*. The following section of this essay begins this restrained interpretation by elucidating the presuppositions that make up the hermeneutic context within which I (and others who share my heritage) interpret instances of musical and poetic trance. More specifically, this section indicates how rational discourse—particularly that of modern Western peoples—tends to presuppose that trance is a degeneration of the normally functioning person. Upon completion of this section, I investigate the phenomena of musical and poetic trance by interpreting two particular examples: poetic trance as it occurs with the works of William Blake (section III), and musical trance as it occurs in ritual performances characteristic of Afro-Atlantic religions (section IV). In no section of this essay do I posit any particular interpretation of the relationship between music, poetry, and trance as being the best or truest; rather, I indicate how the sense of this relationship becomes understood in different experiences.

As I am speaking of “musical” and “poetic” phenomena, I am already supposing some distinction between these two types of art; indeed, I am supposing that music and poetry can be spoken of as types of art, wherein music can be referred to as sonorous art, and poetry can be referred to as verbal art. Moreover, poetry can be considered a verbal type of music (as opposed to a merely instrumental type), because its verbalizations involve many of the phenomena typically associated with music, such as rhythm, melody, accent, and meter (Dufrenne: 96, 309). However, the groups of instrumental and verbal sounds that I am speaking of in terms of music

and poetry are likely to be spoken of in different terms by people situated in other contexts; which is simply to say, as Judith Becker says in *Deep Listeners*, “Every hearing is situated” (Becker: 69). Even within the history of Western music, one can see that the sense of music as the “art of sounds” (instrumental sounds in particular) is part of a fairly modern context that is much narrower than the Greek sense of music as *mousiche technē*, which the Greeks understand more generically as any “technique or *savoir-faire* of the Muses [...] including all types of execution, recitation, or putting-to-work of a harmony larger and more general than the harmony of sounds” (Nancy 1997: 84; cf. Rouget: 199). Nancy suggests that the narrow conception of music as sound is prefigured in the Greek experience of *aisthesis* (“perception”), particularly because the *aisthesis* originally referred to the sonorous register and is related to words such as “*aiō*, to hear, *aēmi*, *aisthō*, to breathe, exhale, and the Latin *audio*” (Nancy 1997: 85, 188 fn. 90).

Although it is by no means easy to interpret musical and poetic phenomena, it is evident that they have something to do with the experience of sound. However, trance phenomena are much more difficult to discuss. In contemporary scholarly discourse, trance is associated with a variety of phenomena ranging from the sacred to the pathological, including ecstasy, mania, madness, transcendence, altered states of consciousness (ASCs), dementia, spirit possession, schizophrenia, shamanism, hallucination, inspiration, hypnosis, insanity, exorcism, psychosis, and mysticism (Peters and Price-Williams: 5-11). According to *Webster’s Dictionary*, the English word “trance” derives from the Middle English *traunce*, which was used to signify an experience of extreme dread or a dazed semi-conscious state. The Middle English *traunce* derives from the French *transe*, the passage from life to death, which derives from the Latin *transitus* (a passage) and *transire* (to go over/across). *Transire* is related to many other English words like “transcend,” “translate,” “transitive,” “transgress,” and “transform.”

Becker notes that one of the most common uses of the word *trance* in contemporary discourse is “to describe the absent-minded, dreamy state one gets into when driving a car alone and listening to music on the radio” (Becker: 38). This definition of *trance* as absent-mindedness hints at the more general definition of *trance* as an ineffable experience wherein one loses control over all aspects of oneself (one’s emotions, perceptions, thoughts, etc.) (Peters and Price-Williams: 7). Becker describes this general sense of *trance* as an experience that overwhelms one’s everyday sense of self as an individual ego (Becker: 29, 43).

You lose your strong sense of self, of ego [...], you lose the sense of time passing, and may feel transported out of quotidian space. Trancers experience a kind of syncope, an absence, a lapse, a ‘cerebral eclipse.’ Syncope is sometimes viewed as a manifestation of a divine blessing, or a demonic possession, or as a pathology and called a dissociation (25).

This sense of *trance* as a loss of the ego is analogous to what Nietzsche describes of the Ancient Greek phenomenon of Dionysian ecstasy, “with its annihilation of the usual limits and borders of existence” (Nietzsche 2000: 46). *Trance* is a dissolution of boundaries of the self, the ego, time, space, and existence. Nietzsche speaks similarly of his own experience of inspiration—“a complete being outside of oneself with the distinct consciousness of a multitude of subtle shudders and trickles down to one’s toes [...]. Everything is in the highest degree involuntary but takes place as in a tempest of a feeling of freedom, of absoluteness, of power, of divinity” (Nietzsche 1992: 73). Inspiration can also be expressed according to “the idea that one is merely incarnation, merely mouthpiece, merely medium of overwhelming forces” (Nietzsche 1992: 72_f).

With these general definitions, people might readily agree that an interpretation of musical and poetic *trance* should include a discussion of the sounds heard alongside phenomena

such as spirit possession, divine inspiration, mystical union, prophecy, and perhaps also supposedly pathological phenomena (e.g., hallucination, delusion, or psychosis). Of course, the specific categorization of these various phenomena with respect to trance differs considerably from person to person. Disagreements tend to arise regarding specific distinctions, such as whether love is a form of trance, whether trance is merely a hallucination, whether ecstasy is a form of trance, etc. Although ecstasy and trance are often used synonymously, Becker prefers to use trance instead of ecstasy because ecstasy tends to imply a state rather than a transitional, transitory, transitive process such as is implied by trance and trancing (Becker: 7-8).¹⁵

Within the context of this essay, I am using the word “trance” (and “trancing”) in a very general sense, which includes Becker’s sense of trance as well as Nietzsche’s sense of inspiration and Dionysian ecstasy. Trance and trancing, in this present essay, refer to any experience that displaces, eclipses, or otherwise overwhelms the limits of one’s everyday sense of self. In this essay, I am not seeking to resolve such possible disagreements as to what music, poetry, or trance is or should be; rather, I am attempting to communicate how trances involving the sounds of music and poetry become understood. That is, this essay seeks to interpret how music and poetry are experienced in relation to trance. In the present section of this essay, I indicate how the hermeneutic situation that I have inherited—i.e., a modern Western situation—contextualizes my interpretation of musical and poetic trance.

Overall, I argue that contemporary Western discourse tends to presuppose that phenomena related to trance are instances of madness or some sort of degeneration, and that they

¹⁵ Gilbert Rouget interprets trance and ecstasy as two different types of experience (Rouget: 3-12). In the trance experience, there are often some of the following phenomena: movement, noise, other people, and sensory stimulation. Rouget argues that ecstasy generally lacks the features of these phenomena, and is thus associated with phenomena such as stillness, silence, solitude, sensory deprivation (11). I am not adopting Rouget’s typology, as I find that these oppositions are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and they are more often blended than separated, as Rouget himself notes throughout his work. I am adopting the word trance or trancing to signify any experience that displaces the boundaries of one’s everyday sense of self.

should be excluded from normal society.¹⁶ Speaking of contemporary interpretations of trance, Becker makes a similar point: “Trance consciousness remains opaque, unstudied, and suspect as the domain of religious fanatics and the mentally unstable” (Becker: 3). For the Ancient Greeks and Hebrews, some forms of trance were integrated into their societies to help people cure the sick, divine the future, or become closer to divinity or goodness. However, in modern industrialized societies trance is interpreted as a sickness and not a cure, prophecy is often seen as useless occult superstition compared with the objective predictions of modern science, and becoming closer to divinity or goodness tends to entail a stable sense of self rather than the loss of self associated with trance.

Becker notes that the modern ideology that presupposes that there is a “real me” and that we all should be “true to ourselves” is antithetical to the eclipsed sense of self that is experienced by the trancer (38f). Becker also notes that many modern philosophers articulate this ideology of a “real me,” thus following Cartesian rationality, which establishes the certain reality of the ego based on the radical separation of the thinking human being (*ego cogito, res cogitans*) from the extended being of the material world (*res extensa*) (90-92). Moreover, Cartesian rationality and the rational discourse of modernity are themselves situated in the whole history of Western rationality, which is typically said to begin with the science and philosophy of the Ancient Greeks.

Accordingly, the following elucidation of contemporary interpretations of musical and poetic trance must account for the significance of trance for Western rationality in general, as it

¹⁶ An account of the history of madness (and insanity, possession, trance) in modern Western culture is given in Michel Foucault’s work on *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie a l’âge classique*, which is available in an abridged form in the English translation, *Madness and Civilization* (Foucault 1988). (This translation is difficult to work with, because it is only around 300 pages of the original, which is over 600 pages.) Foucault argues that with the advent of modernity, madness lost the religious and transcendent meanings with which it was associated in the Ancient and Medieval periods of Western history. Lacking any transcendent significance, the Age of Reason began describing madness as unreason that should be excluded from society and confined to hospitals and clinics (ix, 115, 210f).

appears from Socratic/Platonic reason through modern reason. Bearing in mind that the Latin word for reason (*ratio*) translates the Greek word *logos*, Derrida refers to Western rationality as a symptom of “logocentrism,” which is characterized by the subordination of difference, absence, plurality, mediation, and writing to the ideals of rationality, identity, presence, unity, immediacy, and spoken discourse (*logos*) (Derrida 1997: 11_f, 18, 71-79; 2002: 158_f). Moreover, this logocentrism is not merely a matter of science or philosophy; it is also found in Biblical religion, particularly insofar as Biblical religion blended with the rationality of Hellenism and developed its own rational discourses throughout Medieval and Modern history.

To describe the hermeneutic context within which the present discourse on trance takes place, I discuss the history of Western discourse on musical and poetic trance, focusing specifically on how Western discourse interprets trance as madness (unreason) that should be subordinated to reason. I explicate this history by investigating trance as it is expressed in Plato’s dialogues (II.1), the Hebrew Bible (II.2), and in the rational discourse of modernity (II.3). In elucidating the logocentrism of Western interpretations of trance, it becomes a more viable possibility to articulate an interpretation that is hospitable to the alterity of trance, an interpretation that does not dismiss trance as pathology or degeneration. Becker expresses this sentiment in her exploration of the relationship between listening and trance:

Historicizing Western trances, deconstructing the inherent bias against trance, can help us reimagine trances everywhere. In order to move beyond the unexamined assumptions concerning trances in Western industrialized societies, it is necessary to shed light on the history of the development of those attitudes (Becker: 13).

II.i. Plato: *mania*, *mousiche technē*, and *poiesis*

The history of musical and poetic trance in Western discourse can be said to begin with the trances that appeared alongside the *mousiche* (μουσική) and *poiesis* (ποίησις) of Ancient Greece, bearing in mind that trance phenomena are not spoken of as such by the Greeks (because the word “trance” is Latinate). In Gilbert Rouget’s work on *Music and Trance*, he argues that phenomena spoken of in terms of trance were often spoken of by the Ancient Greeks in terms of *mania*, which is translated as *folie* or *fureur* in French and as madness, mania, furor, or frenzy in English (Rouget: 188-90). The history of trance in the West is a history of *mania*, an important difference between them being that the latter tends to connote maniacal pathology (e.g., madness, pyromania, kleptomania, nymphomania). Rouget’s claim that the Ancient Greeks spoke of trance as *mania* is based on the connections that appear in many Ancient Greek texts between *mania* and phenomena typically associated with the loss of self in trance: having a god within (*enthusiasmos* and *entheos*), possession (*katokoche*), inspiration (*epipnoia*), being beside oneself (*exallos*), being in the power of a god (*daimon* and *daimonao*), and being out of one’s senses (*ekphron*) (189-91, 342). More specifically, Rouget argues that any attempt to discuss the relationship between music and trance is indebted to Plato, who Rouget considers responsible for developing “the most ancient theory of the relations between music and trance” (188).

Of course, there were people who spoke or wrote about the sounds of trance before Plato did, including people typically considered philosophers; however, these accounts did not yet write explicitly about the way music or poetry relate to trance. For instance, some of Heraclitus’ fragments speak of the enduring truth of the oracular voice of divination (specifically the voice of the Sibyl, also referred to as Pythia, the Delphic oracle), while other fragments speak harshly of Dionysian rituals and the hymns accompanying them, saying that if the devotees of Dionysus

“did not claim the statue of the drunk they worshipped was a god, or call their incoherent song about his cock their hymn, everyone would know what filth their shamelessness has made of them and of the name of god” (Heraclitus: fragments 11, 12, 125-127; cf. Rouget: 139). Heraclitus’ fragments speak of prophecies and hymns related to trances, but without explicitly speaking of the relationship between these different sounds and the different trances they accompany.

The interlocutors of Plato’s dialogues often speak of varieties of poetry or music while considering their relation to *mania*. For example, in a discussion of music in Plato’s *Laws* (790e-791b), the inspiring movement of a Muse (*mouse*) is said to help restore a balanced state of mind to the manic devotees of Dionysus, i.e., to the *bacchae*, who are described as *ekphrones*, “out of their senses” (Rouget: 191, 201_f). To indicate how *mania* relates to music and poetry in the writings of Plato, I show how Plato’s dialogues express a rational (or “logocentric”) interpretation of trance insofar as they subordinate the sense of *mania*, music, and poetry to the love of ideal form (particularly the form of the Good and the Beautiful) as it is reflected in discourse (*logos*).¹⁷ This idealization of *mania*, music, and poetry is evident in the passage just quoted from the *Laws*, which considers music helpful because it restores some rational sensibility to the manic devotees of Dionysus. This idealization is also evident in other passages throughout Plato’s dialogues.

¹⁷ Regardless of what is said in any of Plato’s dialogues, nothing in Plato’s writings represents what Plato or Socrates really thought or what theories they developed regarding *mania*, music, poetry, or any of the themes that appear in Plato’s corpus. Plato indicates in his second *Epistle* (314c) that there neither are nor will be any works or doctrines belonging to Plato: “What are now called his are the work of a Socrates become fair and young.” The thoughts of the original Plato and Socrates are not in Plato’s writings, but rather a Socrates that has become fair and young (which can also be translated as “embellished and modernized” or “reborn and rejuvenated”). Accordingly, Plato’s writings are continuously open to further questioning, as they present not a doctrine, theory, or system to be agreed with, but matters for dialogical questioning. What I am presenting here of Plato is admittedly (and perhaps inevitably) something of a caricature or straw man, but not one which I intend to denigrate or disparage, but one which provides a glimpse of how something of a logocentric sense of *mania*, music, and poetry accompanied the genesis of rational discourse in Western civilization.

Manifestations of *mania* and the music and poetry associated with them appear differently depending upon which form of *mania* becomes manifest. In a passage from the *Phaedrus* (265a), Socrates provides an outline of the varieties of *mania*, of which there are two main types, “one arising from human diseases, and the other from a divine release of customary habits.” Although discourses such as that in the *Timaeus* (86b) focus on *mania* as a disease, specifically dementia (*anoia*), the passage just quoted from the *Phaedrus* focuses on *mania* as it arises from divine release (*theias exallages*), wherein a god inspires a frenzy that brings one beside oneself (*exallos*) and out of one’s habits (Rouget: 189).

Later in the *Phaedrus* (265b), Socrates and Phaedrus recapitulate what they have agreed are the four divisions of this divinely inspired *mania*, naming each form according to the god that inspires it: 1) the *mania* of prophetic divination, inspired by Apollo, 2) the *mania* of rites (*teletai*), inspired by Dionysus, 3) the *mania* of poetry, inspired by the Muses, 4) and the *mania* of love, inspired by Aphrodite and Eros. Of the four forms of divinely inspired *mania*, Socrates and Phaedrus agree that the enthusiasm of erotic *mania* is the best because it brings one to love and remember the ideal truth of beauty, of which all earthly appearances are imitations and reflections (269d-e). Despite the fact that erotic *mania* for the Ancient Greeks was often inspired by a love for boys (pederasty), the account of Diotima’s speech in the *Symposium* (201d-212a) suggests the possibility that Eros more generally inspires a love for the Beautiful (which is intertwined with the Good), and only on the basest level is this love manifest as pederasty (Benardete: 192-95).¹⁸ Diotima explains to Socrates that love begins with bodily love, and then moves toward more ideal forms of love, which finds its highest form of expression in

¹⁸ It should be noted that the *Symposium* (179a) also mentions erotic inspiration with a phrase often associated with *mania*, *entheos*. Eros is said to inspire or en-god people. Translations of this passage as “Eros had entered” (Benardete) or “Love’s own influence” (Lamb) disassociate the divine aspect of *entheos*, keeping the prefix meaning “in,” but not keeping the root meaning god (*theos*). *Entheos* is also associated with divinatory *mania* in the *Phaedrus* (244b) and poetic *mania* in the *Ion* (534b).

philosophical speech (*logos*) (210d). Despite the philosophical sense of love in the *Symposium*, the association of Greek eroticism with pederasty never ceased. Rouget notes that by the Renaissance, the erotic *mania* discussed in Plato's dialogues had become almost impossible for anyone to practice, because it was more commonly associated with pederasty than with any philosophical love (Rouget: 232).

Erotic *mania* is the best type of *mania* according to Socrates because it inspires a love analogous to the love of wisdom inspired by what is called in the *Symposium* (218b) “philosophic *mania*” (*philosophon manias*)—a love of ideal form expressed through the *logos*. This is not to say that any type of *mania* not inspired by Eros should be inhibited or completely suppressed, but that other forms of *mania* are more mediate ways of participating in the Good and the Beautiful. The only type of *mania* that Plato's dialogues ever speak of suppressing is that of ritual *mania*. In both the *Laws* (790e-791b, 875c-d) and the *Republic* (400a-b), the songs, rhythms, and dances that accompany weaknesses of the soul are deemed unfit for the citizens of the ideal city (*republica* Lt., *polis* Gk.), and ritual *mania* is said to be one way in which such weakness of the soul becomes manifest. Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* attempts to overturn the Socratic condemnation of Dionysian madness as degeneration. Against Socrates, Nietzsche argues that this madness was the source of the greatest joy for the Ancient Greeks, and that the rationality and morality attributed to Socrates are negations of life, which are characteristic of the disintegration of Hellenic culture (Nietzsche 1992: 49-51; 2000: 6-8). This Dionysian subversion of Socratic philosophy is evident in *Ecce Homo*, wherein Nietzsche describes himself as “a disciple” not of any traditionally accepted philosophers (e.g., Plato, Kant, Hegel), but rather “a disciple of the philosopher Dionysos” (1992: 1). Furthermore, shortly after going insane

himself on January 3, 1889, Nietzsche's identification with Dionysus is expressed in some of the letters he sent out and signed as "Dionysus" (1996: 345-46).

Even though Socrates speaks of erotic *mania* as the best and of ritual *mania* as a weakness of the soul, in the *Phaedrus* (244a-245a) he speaks of benefits given through each form of divinely influenced *mania*, saying that the "greatest of blessings come to us through madness, when it is sent as a gift of the gods." Like Heraclitus, Socrates says that the prophetic *mania* of priestesses such as the oracle at Delphi is one of the ways in which blessings have come to the private and public affairs of the Greeks. Socrates suggests that if the people who first spoke of *mania* thought that it was something evil, then this divinatory art—"the noblest of arts, that which foretells the future"—would not have been given the name "manic art," which is etymologically related to *mania* (244b). This etymological connection appears in English words signifying different types of divination, such as those using water, earth, or mirrors, called *hydromancy*, *geomancy*, and *catoptromancy* respectively.

Moreover, Socrates and Phaedrus not only agree that the Greeks have benefited from divinatory *mania*, but also from the ritual *mania* inspired by Dionysus, which consists in using prayer, song, dance, cathartic purification, and sacrifice to evoke the arrival of the deity (Rouget 195f). Socrates speaks about how divinatory and ritual *mania* have worked together for the people, with the oracles divining and prescribing the proper rituals to perform in order to invoke a deity to help cure somebody of a disease and bring them back to a sensible state of mind (*Phaedrus*: 244d-e). Rouget argues that this form of *mania* is the closest to what contemporary scholars refer to as spirit possession, wherein one's consciousness is overwhelmed and overtaken by the power of some "other," resulting in different degrees of identification between the possessed and the possessor (93, 196f).

Also in the *Phaedrus* (245a), Socrates speaks of how poetic *mania* has benefited the Greek people, educating later generations about their heritage, “adorning countless deeds of the ancients.” Like ritual *mania*, poetic *mania* is also very similar to spirit possession, but in a much more mediated sense, which is described in the *Ion* (534b-536b) as a type of possession (*katokoche*, derived from the verb *katecho*, “to take hold of” or “occupy”) that forms a chain wherein everybody hearing poetry is said to be possessed by those reciting poetry, everybody reciting poetry is possessed by those who composed the poems originally, and every poet is possessed by the Muse that inspired the poetry. This chain begins with the magnetic inspiration of the Muses and holds in a state of possession all those who speak or hear poetry. Accordingly, anybody reading the text on this very page is thus possessed by me (Sam), by all of the authors of the texts I am quoting, and by whatever divine source(s) generated the enthusiasm involved in all of this poetry.

From the passages just cited, it is evident that Plato’s writings are generally supportive of *mania* insofar as it cures diseases (including diseases of *mania*) and promotes rationality in individuals and in the republic. Plato’s writings are quite ambivalent regarding ritual *mania*, which he writes of both as a weakness that should be withheld from the citizens, and as a helpful means for curing disease and weakness of the soul (Rouget: 197). Likewise, the *Republic* (386a-401e) is ambivalent regarding which parts of the various forms of poetry (e.g., lyric poetry, tragedy, narrative, comedy) and which musical harmonies and rhythms should be allowed into the ideal republic. Overall, the *mania*, poetry, and music allowed in the hypothetical ideal city of Plato’s *Republic* and *Laws* is that which is not a false or slavish imitation (*mimesis*) of the Good and the Beautiful, but that which brings people into reason and into the love of the ideal form of the Good and the Beautiful. It is this mimetic character that makes musical and poetic

phenomena the subject of suspicion in the *Republic* (400a-401e, 597d-599d), for if the arts are only mediated re-productions imitating the presence of ideal truth, goodness, and beauty, then artworks far removed from the truth are likely to do far more damage to the city than are those whose art is closer to the truth.¹⁹ A closer look at Plato's writings on music and poetry will help illuminate this subordination of music, poetry, and *mania* to the logocentric love of ideal form.

Although only one type of *mania*—the mania of poetry—is named according to the poetic inspiration of the Muses, all four types of divinely inspired *mania* relate to what contemporary discourse considers musical and poetic sounds (i.e., lyric and/or instrumental melody, harmony, and rhythm).²⁰ The various sounds that constitute musical and poetic art occur not only in the lyrics and songs of poetic *mania*, but also in the love poems and love songs often accompanying erotic *mania*, in the oracular art spoken in divinatory *mania*, and in the prayers and hymns that accompany spirit possession in ritual *mania*. Furthermore, Plato's writings on *mousiche* and *poiesis* indicate an even more intimate relationship between *mania*, music, and poetry, which is particularly evident insofar as *mousiche* and *poiesis* overlap and relate to all arts and processes of producing, ultimately in terms of the love of ideal form. This encompassing sense of *mousiche* and *poiesis* is quite foreign to much contemporary discourse, wherein music and poetry are understood mainly as sonorous (acoustic/phonetic) forms of artistic production.

¹⁹ Like Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Politics* (1339a-1342b) discusses the difficult problem of deciding what musical arts and artworks would be justified in an ideal city. And like Plato, *mimesis* plays an important role in this discussion. Aristotle's concept of *mimesis* is summarized well in his work *On Poetics* (1448b), where he argues that the mimetic character of the arts does not hinder but rather helps humans have access to the real world. Aristotle considers imitation (*mimesis*) to be a natural characteristic of human beings that makes it possible for humans to learn and produce artwork. Furthermore, Gadamer points out how Aristotle argues in his *Metaphysics* (987b) that Plato's work does recognize the value of *mimesis*, particularly in Plato's concept of the participation of sensuous forms in ideas, which Aristotle likens to the Pythagoreans notion of the *mimesis* of mathematical ideas (Gadamer 1986: 99-102).

²⁰ An in-depth account of the contemporary sense of music as a combination of harmony, rhythm, and melody can be found in Mikel Dufrenne's work on *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience* (Dufrenne: 249-273).

As Allan Bloom says in a footnote to Plato's *Republic* (376e fn.36), the term *mousiche technē* originally included anything "performed under the guidance of the Muses" (including lyric poetry, tragedy, comedy, dance, sacred hymn, sculpture, song, and various other arts and sciences, the specifics of which vary according to the particular account) (cf. Nancy 1997: 84; Rouget: 199). Bloom adds further that the activity most typically performed under the guidance of the Muses was that of instrumental pieces accompanied by the song (*melos*, melody) of lyric poetry (*poiesis*), which is not very different from the contemporary sense of music as instrumental performance or composition (often including voice as an instrument). According to the dialogue in the *Republic* (397b-398c), *mousiche technē* that involves lyrical melody is composed of three things: speech (*logos*), harmonic mode (*harmonia*), and rhythm (*ruthmos*).

Rhythm and harmony are defined in Plato's *Laws* (664e): *ruthmos*, like rhythm in its present usage, signifies the order of movement occurring in the music; and *harmonia*, similar to harmony in its present usage, is a process of differentiating high and low pitches organized into different "harmonic modes" (or more generally, "scales"). It was a common understanding of the Ancient Greeks that the melodies of *mousiche technē* are composed of instrumental harmony and rhythm as well as the poetic sounds of lyrical speech; however, the *Republic* (397b-398d, cf. fn.36) presents a claim that was quite novel to Plato's contemporaries: "the harmonic mode and the rhythm must follow the speech." It is best for the citizens of the republic if the power of harmony and rhythm to "lay hold of the soul" follows the spoken, verbal, rational element of melody (401d-402a).²¹ In the ideal republic proposed within this dialogue, the melodies of

²¹ This subordination of rhythm and harmony to the *logos* is another aspect of Socratic rationalism that is subverted by Nietzsche's praise of Dionysian ecstasy and music. In considering musical sound to be more fundamental than the verbal element of a melody, Nietzsche is also subverting Rousseau's interpretation of music, which holds that music is as an imitation of language that degenerated from a language originally unified with music (Rousseau: 50-71). "Whereas for Plato the melody and rhythm depended on the lyrics, and for Rousseau, in the beginning music and language were one, for Nietzsche music came first. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, the lyrical poem and the dramatic

mousiche techne are to be arranged in a hierarchy that subordinates their harmony and rhythm to their verbal element, their *logos*. If the melodies of *mousiche techne* are subordinated to rationality and morality, then education in music and poetry helps people become good citizens; which is to say, it helps people become civilized. (Holloway: 85-90). In light of this subordination of music to the *logos*, Socrates identifies “unmusical” people with those who hate rational discourse, misologists (*Republic*: 411d).

This subordination of the harmony and rhythm of a song to its *logos* is indicative of the rationalism and idealism typically attributed to Socrates (and to philosophy in general), or more appropriately, it is indicative of what Derrida’s texts discuss in terms of logocentrism. Further evidence of this logocentric subordination occurs in the subordination of all forms of *mousiche techne* (and not merely those of lyric or song) to this same hierarchical structure of lyric poetry, which subordinates the rhythm and harmony of a song to its participation in the *logos* and in the love of ideal form. This subordination can be read in the passages about *mousiche* and *poiesis* that appear in Plato’s *Symposium*.

In the *Symposium* (197a, 205b), poetry is spoken of in a way that may seem strange to modern ears: *poiesis* “is more than a single thing.” In its most general sense, poetry is the cause (*aitia*) of all making, production, and coming into being. According to this sense of *poiesis*, all of the various types of technical know-how (*techne*) are ways of producing; and indeed, even that which occurs by nature (*phusis*), without human technique, is considered a form of *poiesis*.²²

dithyramb both spring up, through Apollo’s intervention, as ‘image sparks’ of a primitive melody evocative of Dionysus’s sufferings and ecstasies.” (Liébert: 27).

²² Heidegger attempts to recover this sense of *poiesis* that includes all coming into being, all “bringing-forth” (*Her- vor-bringen*) (Heidegger 1977: 10-13). With this sense of *poiesis*, technology is understood as a type of bringing-forth grounded in revealing (*aletheia*, truth). However, in modernity, technology is understood as en-framing (*Ge- stell*), which blocks *poiesis* and brings humans to use beings as a calculable, instrumental, standing-reserve (*Bestand*) (19-21, 30). Jean-luc Nancy notes that, as with Plato, interpreting *poiesis* as the name for all coming into being brings Heidegger to give poetry (in the linguistic sense) a privileged position among all the arts (Nancy 1996: 6).

However, even though *poiesis* applies to all types of production, most of them do not receive the designation “poetry.” For the Ancient Greeks as for moderns, shoemakers and carpenters are not normally called poets, and stones and trees are not usually referred to as poems. Thus, it is noted in the *Symposium* (205c) that the name *poiesis* is explicitly used only in a more restricted sense, wherein *poiesis* is anything involved with music and meter. In other words, *poiesis* is any product of *mousiche technē*. The name “poet” is thus given to any practitioner of *mousiche technē*, to anybody who produces something with the enthusiastic inspiration of the Muses.

Furthermore, *poiesis* is also a particular type of *mousiche technē*, lyric poetry. A poet in the most restricted sense of the word is a lyricist. Insofar as all of the musical arts (lyric poetry, drama, hymn, dance, etc.) produce *poiesis*, they are all defined in terms of the same hierarchy as lyric poetry, wherein the harmony and rhythm of the melody are subordinated to the *logos* of the song.²³ Moreover, this logocentric hierarchy is not primarily a matter of either the Muses or of *poiesis*, but of Eros. The text of the *Symposium* (187c) suggests that all of the techniques of the Muses are imitations of the love for ideal form inspired by Eros, which means that knowledge or any *mousiche technē* ultimately requires “knowledge of love-matters relating to harmony and rhythm.” Thus, just as Plato’s writings subordinate all forms of *mania* to the logocentric love of ideal form manifest in erotic *mania*, they also subordinate the harmony and rhythm of all production (*poiesis*) and *mousiche technē* to the love of ideal form reflected in the *logos*.

Before indicating how the logocentrism that appears in Plato’s writings relates to other types of Western discourse on music, poetry, and trance, I briefly summarize what has been said

²³ Of course, harmony, rhythm, and melody have slightly different senses for each of the different musical arts, e.g., dance harmony is more of an interconnection of gestures than of pitches, and the rhythm of a sculpture is much less audible than the rhythm of a song. In Dufrenne’s work on *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, he applies the categories of rhythm, harmony, and melody to pictorial and not merely musical/poetic artworks (Dufrenne: 282-300).

regarding the sense of *poiesis*, *mousiche techne*, and *mania* that appears in Plato's dialogues. Plato's texts describe poetry 1) as a type of musical art (particularly lyric poetry), 2) as any product of musical art in general, and 3) as the cause of all producing. Musical art here signifies any way of producing that involves the Muses. Insofar as all varieties of *mousiche techne* are considered poetic, they must all conform to the hierarchical structure of poetic melody, subordinating harmony and rhythm to the erotic knowledge of the ideal form of the Good and the Beautiful as such form is reflected in the *logos*.

Just as *mousiche techne* and *poiesis* are subordinated to a logocentric erotic knowledge, Socrates says that erotic *mania* is "the best" out of the four types he and Phaedrus enumerated (erotic, poetic, divinatory, and ritual), particularly because Socrates considers erotic *mania* to be precisely the love of that which is Good and Beautiful, an ideal love that transcends the mimetic mediation of musical arts. The other three forms of *mania* can only produce an indirect or implicit love of the Good and the Beautiful, because they must mediate their love with ritual and musical techniques of lyric poetry, sacred hymn, prophecy, drama, and all manner of arts, sciences, and rites.

II.ii. Music, Poetry, and Trance in the Biblical Traditions

Throughout the medieval and modern periods of Western civilization, discourse on music, poetry, and trance recapitulates the distinction that appears in Plato's works between types of *mania*, music, and poetry that bring one closer to the *logos* and types that poorly imitate ideal form reflected in the *logos*. Moreover, this logocentric idealization was already at work in

the Pythagorean mathematical interpretation of music and the cosmos as ideal ratios (*logoi*).²⁴

The logocentric interpretation of music found in Ancient Greece is fundamental to the history of Western music as a whole, as it determines the twelve tones of Western music and the mathematical ratios of their harmony (Ihde and Slaughter: 236_{ff}; Rouget: 229_f). However, the heritage of Western civilization does not have its genesis only with the philosophy and science of the Ancient Greeks. Western civilization has also inherited the Biblical traditions (i.e., “Abrahamic” religions, particularly Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), and thus the logocentrism of Western discourse needs to be understood according to the confluence of Hellenistic and Biblical traditions.

Phenomena involving trance, music, and poetry occur regularly in various capacities throughout all Biblical religions, the common basis for which is the Hebrew Bible, typically referred to by Christians as the “Old Testament.” I give a brief indication of the role of Biblical religion in situating Western discourse on musical and poetic trance by showing how the Hebrew Bible interprets poetry, music, and trance according to the relation between humans and God. Of course, examples from Christianity and Islam are quite relevant here, but in the interest of economy, I am relegating them to a footnote for the present discussion, bearing in mind that throughout the Ancient and Medieval periods of Western history, the Biblical religions tend to share the general supposition that music, poetry, and trance are good insofar as they bring one

²⁴ The Pythagoreans understood music in terms of ratios (*logoi*, logical proportions), and these musical ratios occur on three levels: 1) musical sounds produced by playing instruments and singing, 2) unheard music of the ratio (harmonious or inharmonious) between the human body and soul, and 3) music produced by the movements of the cosmos itself, which came to be called “music of the spheres” (J. James: 31). This threefold schema was quite present throughout the secular and religious music of the Middle Ages, and its theoretical foundations were articulated at length in the works of Boethius and Cicero, wherein these three types of music were spoken of as *musica instrumentalis*, *musica humana*, and *musica mundana* (Rayborn: 71-74; Rouget: 229_f).

closer to a transcendent God.²⁵ Although the specific details of Biblical traditions differ in terms of the characteristics of God and which types of music, poetry, and trance bring one closer to God, an elucidation of some passages from the Hebrew Bible provides a glimpse of the general Biblical understanding of these phenomena.

The Hebrew Bible is sometimes described as a poetic text, particularly because it often employs the poetic device of parallelism. Although the Hebrew Bible does not explicitly discuss the issue of parallelism, it was through an investigation into Hebrew poetry that parallelism was first defined. Roman Jakobson notes that the term “parallelism” was first applied to poetics when Robert Lowth adopted the term in 1778 specifically for the sake of providing “the foundations of a systematic inquiry into the verbal texture of ancient Hebrew poetry” (Jakobson 1987: 146). The Hebrew Bible is thus not only one of the fundamental religious texts of Western civilization, but also one of the earliest poetic texts, along with the Epic of Gilgamesh and the Vedas. Although Hebrew poetry is an exemplary form of Western poetry, its form is not unique to the Hebrews or to the West, but is in fact quite similar to other forms of poetry, including that of the Chinese and other Eastern cultures (147-50). The structure of Hebrew poetry is characterized mainly by parallelism.

Jakobson suggests that parallelism might be the fundamental problem of all poetry, because it refers to all aspects of the linguistic entities juxtaposed within the verbal sequence,

²⁵ Various types of trances, many of which involve musical and poetic sound, play important roles in the Christian and Islamic religions (Bourguignon: 22-24, 32). In general, both Christians and Muslims incorporate the ideals of Greek music into the practice of their religions. For example, chant in Christianity (e.g., Gregorian chant) and in Islam (e.g., Qur’ānic chant, *qirā’ah*) appropriates the mathematically determined scales of the Greeks and uses them to sing the words of their respective religious texts. In these forms of chant, tonal and rhythmic variation is restrained to a very narrow range, thus emphasizing the difference between the limits of the material world and the wholly other transcendence of God (Faruqi: 22-24; Rayborn: 69-71). Some Muslims express this transcendence by dissociating chant from the secular and profane techniques of music (*musiqa*) altogether, specifically by referring to chant not as music, but as *handasah al sawt* (“the art of sound”) (Rayborn: 76). However, many Christians and Muslims also appropriated music and poetry in such a way as to express the immanent experience of God, as in St. Augustine’s experience of the power of musical sound during his baptism, and in the mystical poetry of Sufis like Jelaluddin Rumi (Augustine: 9.6.14; Holsinger: 70-73; Rouget: 264-70; Rumi: *passim*).

including phonological, grammatical, and semantic parallels (Jakobson 1987: 82_f, 146-49, 173_f).²⁶ Jakobson cites the 19th century priest/poet Gerard Manley Hopkins to point to the fundamental importance of parallelism for poetry and for all art: “The artificial part of poetry, perhaps we shall be right to say all artifice, reduces itself to the principle of parallelism. The structure of poetry is that of continuous parallelism” (82). A look at the use of different types of parallelism in the Hebrew Bible provides a general sense of how Biblical interpretations of poetry express relationships between God and humans.

Two instances of synonymous parallelism can be found in Psalm 22:1: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?” The repetition of “My God” is a parallelism using the same words, and the repetition of “why have you forsaken me?” in “Why are you so far from helping me?” expresses synonymous semantics using different words to question (“why”) the distant relationship between God (“you”) and the speaker (“me”). There are many other types of parallelism found in the Hebrew Bible, including constructive parallelism, which occurs when a text says different things about the same repeated theme, such as is found in Psalm 19:7-9, wherein different things are predicated on that which is “of the Lord”:

“The law *of the Lord* is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees *of the Lord* are sure, making wise the simple; the precepts *of the Lord* are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment *of the Lord* is clear, enlightening the eyes; the fear *of the Lord* is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances *of the Lord* are true and righteous altogether” [italics added].

²⁶ Phonological (or simply “phonic”) parallelism refers to the structure of the sounds juxtaposed in any verbal sequence. Grammatical parallelism is the juxtaposition of lexical items, morphological inflections of lexical items (e.g., the affixes for tense or for number), parts of speech, clauses, and sentences. Semantic parallelism includes any relationship between meanings of the verbal sequence, meanings of words, sentences, stanzas, whether the meanings are similar or dissimilar (Jakobson 1987: 171-74).

The “law,” “decrees,” “precepts,” “commandment,” “fear,” and “ordinances” of the Lord are said to be “perfect,” “sure,” “right,” “clear,” “pure,” and “true and righteous” respectively, with adverbial phrases modifying each of these phrases except for the last one.

Other instances of parallelism occur over the course of many verses, such as in Isaiah 9:8-10:4, which speaks of the anger of the Lord against Israel, iterating the following phrase four times: “For all this his anger has not turned away; his hand is stretched out still” (Isa. 9:12, 9:17, 9:21, 10:4). Although I have only indicated a few examples of parallelism in the Hebrew Bible, parallelism occurs throughout the entire text, deepening its significance with the juxtaposition of all its parts, similar to the way that the juxtaposition of two eyes makes it possible to see with the depth of binocular perception (Jakobson 1987: 148).

The poetic structure of the Hebrew Bible could be considered a matter of poetic *mania* in Plato’s sense, because the chain of possession would link God with the Jewish patriarchs and prophets, who would then be linked with all of their descendants, including those who first recited and redacted the Bible, and all of those who have (or will have) read or heard the Bible. Although reading the Hebrew Bible is not typically considered to be a trance experience, and more rarely *mania*, the verbal sequences in the text can inspire the reader, giving the reader a sense of self that is not that of an independent and isolated ego, but a self that is dependent on its inheritance of the Biblical expression of the covenant between God and God’s chosen people. The relationship between the Jewish people and God is not only expressed in the poetry of the Hebrew Bible, but also in the Hebrew interpretation of music.

The first mention of music occurs in the enumeration of Cain’s descendants, one of whom is named Jubal—“the ancestor of all those who play the lyre and pipe” (Gen. 4:21). After crossing the sea in their exodus from Egypt, “Moses and the Israelites sang this song unto the

Lord: ‘I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously [...]. The Lord will reign forever and ever’” (Ex. 15:1-18). There are numerous other indications in the Hebrew Bible that music is an important part of Jewish life (Eccl. 2:8; Isa. 5:12, 24:8-9; Ps. 137). Particularly important for the purpose of this essay is the fact that music played a large role in the trances of the Hebrew prophets (*nabi*) (Rouget: 154-58; 1 Sam. 10:1-7; 2 Kings 3:9-15). Rouget notes that when “the Hebrew prophets were in their state of prophetic frenzy, they were accompanied by a variable number of musicians” (Rouget: 134). When the prophet Elisha is asked to help three kings by prophesying, upon agreement he immediately asks for a musician to be brought to him, and “while the musician was playing, the power of the Lord came on him” (2 Kings 3:15). The place of music in the prophetic trances of the Hebrews is further indicated in the trance experiences of Saul.

When Samuel anoints Saul as the king of Israel, he tells Saul about three signs that will confirm “that the Lord has anointed you ruler over his heritage” (1 Sam. 10:1). Samuel tells Saul that the last of these signs will occur when Samuel meets “a band of prophets” who are playing harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre in front of a shrine while they are in “a prophetic frenzy” (10:5). Then Saul is told that when this happens, “the spirit of the Lord will possess you, and you will be in a prophetic frenzy along with them and be turned into a different person” (10:6). Moreover, this is considered to be a good thing for Saul and not some degenerate act; thus Samuel assures Saul that he can do whatever he sees fit to do when meeting this sign (or any of the signs), “for God is with you” (10:7).

Music and trance are here interpreted as good insofar as they help bring one into contact with the spirit of the Lord. Trances that bring one into contact with evil spirits are to be avoided. For example, when at one point the Spirit of the Lord was absent from Saul, “and an evil spirit

from the Lord tormented him,” Saul’s servants recommend that they find someone “skillful in playing the lyre” to play music that will make Saul feel better (16: 14-17). The servants then bring David to Saul, and he indeed makes Saul feel better by playing music that brings the evil spirit to depart from him and the Spirit of the Lord back to him (16: 18-23). Music is present to some extent in all of the occasions that find Saul going in or out of frenzy (18: 10-12, 19:18-24). In all of these cases, the experience of trance (or “frenzy”) has the potential to be either holy (possessed by the Spirit of the Lord) or tormenting (possessed by an evil spirit), and music has the power to evoke a frenzy that brings the Spirit of the Lord into people, which thus pushes out any evil spirits that may be afflicting people.

The Biblical experience of trance, music, and poetry is definitely different from that of Plato and the Ancient Greeks, but they both share an important similarity in their understanding of the place of these phenomena in their societies.²⁷ In Plato’s dialogues and in the Hebrew Bible, it is recognized that the sounds of music and poetry are integral aspects of the varieties of trance (inspiration, possession, prophecy, etc.), and that musical and poetic trance can be good insofar as they help people become closer to God or the Good. The Ancient Greeks and Hebrews understood that trance can bring one into disease or evil, and that under other circumstances it can be divinely inspired.²⁸ Although these peoples held that some trances should be suppressed, they held that some trances help people discern the ideal form of the Good or the Law or Word of God. However, with the advent of modern rationality, the loss of self that

²⁷ An example of a discrepancy between Western traditions regarding which type of trance is best is evident in the tension between the divinatory methods of astrologers and the prophecy of the Biblical heritage. Thus, while prophecy is of fundamental importance to all Biblical religion, St. Augustine explicitly says that “true Christian devotion rightly rejects and condemns” the art of astrologers, particularly because their practices of divination are based on the movements of the cosmos and not on sacrifice and prayer (Augustine: 4.3.4).

²⁸ Discerning whether evil or holy spirits caused trances became a serious problem with the confluence of Greco-Roman culture and Biblical religion throughout the Middle Ages, particularly because a holy spirit from the Greek pantheon is likely to be interpreted as an evil spirit by a Jew, Christian, or Muslim (Becker: 14).

occurs in trance was dissociated from any divine influence, although not from demonic influence, and it became understood as a type of degeneracy, disorder, or deception.

II.iii. The Modern Bias Against Trance and the Cartesian *Cogito*

There is a general tendency for modern interpretations of trance to consider phenomena related to trance as abnormal and degenerate (whether immoral, inhuman, irrational, unholy, or insane). Becker expresses this point succinctly: “the history of trance in our civilization is the history of perversion” (Becker: 13). While interpretations of trance as perversion can be found in passages from the literature of the Ancient Greeks and Jews, the rational discourse of modernity interprets trance *mainly* as perverse, abnormal, degenerate, etc., while generally excluding the possibility that trance is ever good or holy. Furthermore, trance is considered degenerate regardless of whether it is situated in musical, poetic, and religious contexts.

Although there are many varieties of music and poetry that are generally accepted in modern societies, the affiliation of trance with music or poetry does not make the trance more socially acceptable; rather, it makes the music and poetry affiliated with trance appear less socially acceptable.²⁹ Music or poetry helps make trance more socially acceptable only in those cases when musical and poetic sounds function as cures for trance, as in therapeutic treatments intended to cure madness (Foucault: 178_f). Similarly, the affiliation of trance with religion does

²⁹ A recent example of the suppression of music because of its affiliation with trance can be seen in the legal action taken in the United States against people who listen to musical genres called “Rave” and “Trance,” which are genres that tend to be associated with illegal hallucinogenic drugs (sometimes called psychotomimetic drugs i.e., madness mimicking drugs). On the morning of March 20th 2005 in Flint, Michigan, police raided a nightclub where people commonly sold drugs (Berry and Newman 2005). The police handcuffed and searched the people at the club (including full cavity searches for the women present), making 17 arrests on felony drug charges, and over 100 arrests on the misdemeanor charge of “frequenting a drug establishment.” Many of the 100 people arrested on misdemeanor charges (including the DJ hired for the evening) were only at the club for the music and dancing, but because this music is commonly associated with hallucinogenic drugs, frequenting a nightclub can be considered the same as frequenting a drug establishment, which could lead to up to 90 days in jail and \$500 in fines. Moreover, a similar raid happened in Flint in 1999, when a party was raided and 80 people were arrested—seven for drug possession charges, and the rest for frequenting a drug establishment.

not make trance more acceptable; rather, it makes moderns more suspicious of religion. For instance, Foucault notes how many 18th century physicians suspected that religion—with its moral rigor and its anxiety about life after death—was responsible for arousing madness, melancholia, and delirium: “Religion is considered here only as an element in the transmission of error” (Foucault: 215-217). Some of these modern physicians recommended solitary confinement for any inspired religious person who exhibited a desire to proselytize. In general, religious trances are acceptable to modern societies insofar as they are confined and separate from the public, like the silent and secluded ecstasy experienced by mystics like St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross.³⁰ More exuberant or public trances, such as those of the Pentecostals, run the risk of being interpreted as insanity or delirium, or simply dismissed as a farce that should not be taken seriously (Becker: 13).

Furthermore, in modern discourse, trances are rarely thought to relate to any real deity outside of the trancer’s consciousness. Instead, trances are often interpreted as instances of psychological abnormality (e.g., psychosis, schizophrenia, multiple personality disorder, and dissociation), wherein the supposedly normal unity and identity of consciousness is ruptured or interrupted by subconscious material (Becker: 20-22; Peters and Price-Williams: 26-29). In the rare cases when possession is considered an instance of an actual spirit possessing a human being, it is often interpreted as demonic possession in need of exorcism. Birgit Meyer discusses

³⁰ Rouget argues that there is a fundamental difference between ecstasy and trance in that ecstasy (such as that of St. Teresa of Avila and other Christian mystics) often involves silence, sensory deprivation, solitude, and some memory of the event after it is over, whereas trance often involves singing, dancing, a group of people, and the entranced person often has no recollection of the event after it is passed (Rouget: 6-12). Moreover, Rouget notes that this typological distinction is more of a continuum than a strict dichotomy. I add further that the poles of this distinction are not necessarily mutually exclusive. For example, St. John of the Cross practiced an ascetic mysticism that worked toward suspending the senses, and at the same time, worked toward expressing this mysticism with poetry. In the poem that St. John of the Cross composed and expounded upon in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, he indicates in various phrases how his ecstatic union with the Beloved suspended sense experience, including the phrase that is repeated at the end of the first and second stanza—“my house being now all stilled”—and the phrase ending the seventh (penultimate) stanza, “suspending all my senses” (St. John of the Cross: 113f).

an example of this as she shows how Christian missionaries encountering spirit possession among the Vodou practitioners of Ghana tended to consider the spirit possession to be real, but diabolical, claiming that demonic spirits are possessing the Vodou practitioners and that conversion to Christianity is the only way to avoid these evil spirits (Meyer 1999; 2002).

Of course, there are numerous exceptions to this general bias against trance in modernity. For instance, contemporary Pentecostals are quite open to trance experiences, which occur in religious settings with musical performances and often include glossolalia (“speaking in tongues”) (Becker: 97-100). The writings of many of the authors I’ve cited thus far in this section of the essay also exhibit interpretations of trance that are contrary to the modern bias: Nietzsche, Foucault, Derrida, and Becker all praise trance or madness to some extent. Although some people make room for trance within different regions of Western civilization, whether by going into trance or by developing interpretations that deconstruct the rationalization of trance, they have not changed the general opinion that the loss of ego in trance is a perversion of the normal rational state of the ego, a perversion that should be excluded from normal society.

Becker hypothesizes that this modern bias against trance is inherently connected to the Western interpretation of the self as “a bounded, unique, inviolate self” that does not normally experience any loss of self or of reason (Becker: 89). Similarly, Janice Boddy argues that the rationalizing and reifying tendencies of much contemporary scholarship are antithetical to the permeable boundaries between self and other that are experienced in spirit possession (Boddy: 407-411). Since Plato, Western discourse has interpreted trance in terms of the opposition between rationality and irrationality, but both Ancient and Medieval rationality made room for some forms of trance in society, particularly those forms of trance that fostered a love of the ideal Good or of a transcendent God. In modernity, this rationalization of trance has brought

people to interpret trance as a degeneration or delusion that should be excluded from normal society.

Particularly indicative of the modern interpretation of the self is the Cartesian interpretation of the self as a thinking thing (*res cogitans*), which is certain of its presence to itself and assured against any madness that would eclipse this presence. Although most modern Westerners are not card-carrying Cartesians, interpretations of the self that are analogous to that articulated by Descartes are at work in many contemporary notions. The Cartesian *cogito* appears in notions that interpret the self as an isolated ego or an objectified impermeable whole while interpreting any loss of self as a degeneration of one's reason or one's relation to nature, truth, and God: notions such as mind-body separation, self-control, rational proofs for God's existence, and the mastery of nature (Becker: 89-92). To describe the context of the contemporary bias against trance, I show how Cartesian rationality suppresses trance insofar as it interprets madness as a form of sense deception that does not eclipse one's sense of self, but merely perverts the normal ability of the self to relate rationally to others (including other people and the infinite other, God). Following this, I show how a restrained rationalization of trance, such as is given in Foucault's work on madness, makes it possible to develop a comprehensible discourse that is hospitable to the otherness of trance, using rationality to liberate trance from the constraints of rationalization. Upon completing this section of the investigation, I proceed to interpret others' experiences of the sacred in phenomena of musical and poetic trance.

Whereas Plato wrote in the *Phaedrus* (265a) about *mania* as something that could be caused either by disease or divine inspiration, Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* describes madness as something caused merely by sense deception (Descartes: 18-22). Although Descartes mentions madness in his *Meditations*, he only speaks of it to argue that it is

inappropriate to discuss madness when applying the doubt that characterizes his philosophical method. Descartes argues that if his methodical doubt followed madmen in doubting or denying the truths that appear most evident to other people, then he “would be insane no less than they” (18). Descartes thus quickly leaves behind the topic of madness and moves to an experience of sense deception that everybody experiences—dreams, wherein one imagines “the same things that lunatics image when awake, or sometimes things which are even less plausible” (ibid).³¹ Descartes considers the deception experienced by the dreamer to be more deceptive than that experienced by the madman, but he claims that the dreamer’s experiences are more appropriate for rational discourse because the dreamer, unlike the madman, has regularly recurring waking moments wherein it is possible to reflect on and discuss what is true for others.

Descartes can communicate his *Meditations* to others only if he leads himself and his audience to imagine something that is indubitably true not only for him but also for others, the most exemplary other being that which is completely other than finite substance, i.e., infinite substance—God (Descartes: 49f; cf. Derrida 1978: 55). The madman, unlike the dreamer, does not have lucid moments of reflection, and thus does not have access to the truth of God or other people. Although dreams can be more deceptive than madness, dreams still allow people to awaken and communicate rationally about their dubious experiences, thus making it possible to follow Descartes in reflecting on the truth of others and the idea of God. Descartes thus subordinates madness to rational discourse, and in doing so, defines madness not as a loss of the usual boundaries of the self, but as an inability to reflect on others.

³¹ This analogy between dreams and madness as two forms of sense deception also occurs in Plato’s *Theaetetus* (157e-158e), wherein it is argued that perception does not disclose the truth of things, because the things that are not true are often perceived in dreams and madness. Unlike Descartes, Plato’s dialogue suggests that the deception caused by madness is just as easy to imagine as that caused by dreaming, and that madness and dreaming are equally useful pedagogical tools for demonstrating the incredulity of sense perception.

Even in madness, according to Descartes, it is impossible to lose the boundaries of the self. He argues that if I doubt whether what I am experiencing is true (whether in madness, dreaming, or in relation to a hypothetical “evil deceiver”), I cannot doubt that I am engaging in some sort of cognitive act of doubting. Thus, I cannot doubt that “I think” (*ego cogito*) and that I therefore exist as this ego that thinks. No experience of deception disturbs the self-evident presence of one’s own existence as a thinking thing (*res cogitans*) (Descartes: 27). Accordingly, Derrida notes that the Cartesian *cogito* “is valid *even if I am mad*” (Derrida 1978: 55). Even if the self is completely deceived, the *cogito* is present to itself. No form of deception can displace the certainty of the *cogito*. Madness is simply another state of the *cogito*. It deceives the *cogito* and its comprehension of others, but it does not dissolve the boundaries of the *cogito*. The *cogito* is thus assured against the complete loss of self in any deception, and the presence of the idea of infinite substance (God) to a reflecting *cogito* precludes any experience of madness whatsoever (58).

Although Descartes subordinates madness to rationality, his interpretation of madness is quite different from the rational interpretation appearing in Plato’s works and in other Ancient and Medieval texts. This is particularly because Descartes interprets madness merely as sense deception and not also as a form of divine inspiration, and because this sense deception dissolves the boundaries of the self’s rational sense of others, but not the boundaries of the self. Unlike the Ancient Greeks and Hebrews, Descartes’ *Meditations* suggests that God does not inspire madness; rather, the idea of God can only be reflected upon through rational discourse. This is in line with the modern tendency to consider religion best when it is fairly rational and restrained, unlike “messy, unruly, always contestable ecstatic trances” (Becker: 14).

Two important facets of the modern interpretation of trance are articulated in the Cartesian interpretation of the *cogito*: 1) the supposition that trance is primarily a matter of sense deception or some other psycho-physical defect, and 2) the supposition that trance is unholy or diabolical insofar as the presence of the idea of God precludes the ego-loss of trance. In general, modern discourse considers the loss of ego to be some sort of perversion of normal health or holiness. Whereas Plato wrote of *mania* as an experience that could, at its best, release one from one's customary habits and inspire rational love of the Good, modern discourse exaggerates this subordination of madness to reason by supposing that rational discourse precludes the possibility of dissolving the usual limits of the self and that any such dissolution is mere deception and degeneration of one's health or holiness.

The rationalized suppression of madness in modern societies is criticized in Foucault's seminal work on madness and reason, *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*. Foucault attempts to liberate madness from the confines of modern rationality by writing "a history of madness *itself*" (Derrida 1978: 33_f; Foucault: ix). Foucault shows how modern rationality (in psychiatry, literature, religion, politics, and other aspects of culture) has suppressed and incarcerated madness as a form of unreason, confining madness to hospitals and clinics, disassociating madness from any divine or transcendent inspiration (Foucault: 64, 210_f). Thus, Foucault argues that "madness in the classical period ceased to be the sign of another world, and that it became the paradoxical manifestation of non-being [...]. Confinement is the practice which corresponds most exactly to madness experienced as unreason, that is, as the empty negativity of reason; by confinement, madness is acknowledged to be *nothing*" (115_f). Although Foucault's account of the history of madness helps show how madness has been suppressed and controlled by modern rationality, such an attempt to write a comprehensible

history of madness itself subordinates madness to the ideals of rational discourse, thus perpetuating the logocentric subjugation of madness by elucidating the subjugation of madness.

Insofar as Foucault speaks rationally about how rational discourse excludes madness, he is repeating the Platonic and Cartesian gestures of subordinating madness to reason. However, insofar as Foucault points to the ways that madness has been suppressed in modern discourse, “we must assume that a certain liberation of madness has gotten underway” (Derrida 1978: 38). Thus, Derrida argues that “the revolution against reason,” which Foucault attempts to write, can be accomplished only from within reason (36). In other words, “The liberty of madness can be understood only from high in the fortress that holds madness prisoner” (37). Foucault criticized the modern rationalization of madness with a rational argument, wherein he sought to indicate how reason defined itself against unreason by suppressing the otherness of madness and deeming it irrational. For Foucault, madness is the resource against which reason defines itself and distinguishes itself from unreason.

Elaborating on Foucault’s argument, Derrida argues that all forms of reason (and not merely modern reason) objectify madness, subordinating it to rational discourse. In any attempt to speak rationally about trance, it is inevitable that the dissolution of boundaries that occurs in trance is determined according to the bounds of reason. To speak about trance at all, one must bring within the limits of reason a phenomenon characterized precisely by the dissolution of limits; which is to say, discourse on trance is discourse about that which is beyond the limits of discourse. In other words, the meaning of madness is “the other of each determined form of the logos” (58). Some forms of discourse are more hospitable to the otherness of trance; the main difference being that some discourses consider it possible for trance to be an occurrence of

otherness that discloses holiness, goodness, or rationality, while other discourses consider any phenomenon degenerate if it transgresses the homogeneous, stable, idealized identity of the self.

With ancient and medieval Western rationality, the loss of self was accepted somewhat hospitably into society insofar as trance was considered capable of bringing one closer to God or to the ideal form of the Good. However, modern rationality has been much less hospitable, specifically insofar as the loss of self has been suppressed and interpreted as a deceptive degeneration of one's reflective presence to oneself, a degeneration that does not bring God within (*entheos*), but rather precludes the ability to experience any idea of God. As different types of rationality are more or less hospitable to trance, so are they more or less hospitable to the musical and poetic sounds that express trance. Throughout the ancient, medieval, and modern periods of Western civilization, music and poetry have often been present alongside trance. However, whereas ancient and medieval societies used musical and poetic sounds both to bring one into trance and to bring one out of trance, in modernity, music or poetry is considered appropriate for trancers only insofar as it can help cure them and bring them out of trance and back to themselves (Foucault: 178-80).

The task of the present interpretation of musical and poetic trance is to point to the limit where comprehensible discourse cannot proceed and the otherness of the phenomena becomes understood from beyond one's own horizon, which in this case is the horizon of modern rationality. In the present section of this essay, I briefly indicated that trance phenomena are other than any form of rational discourse and that modern Western rationality tends to suppress trance as degeneration and perversion. Thus, the hermeneutic context of this present investigation is one that subordinates the boundary dissolution of trance to the limits of rational interpretation. It is the task of a phenomenological interpretation of musical and poetic trance to

suspend this hermeneutic horizon, thus facilitating a fusion of this horizon with horizons wherein others experience the sacred in trances that are expressed in music and poetry.

Suspending the presuppositions of rationality and the modern bias against trance, it is possible now to take up an investigation of two specific examples of musical and poetic trance and interpret them with the restraint necessary to point toward the alterity of trance, to point beyond the logocentrism of this present discourse. Suspending the logocentrism of this present investigation, it is possible to speak comprehensibly about phenomena of musical and poetic trance while bearing in mind that what is thus comprehended is the incomprehensible other (i.e., others' experiences of the wholly other), becoming understood from beyond the limits of any discursive determination, beyond concepts like self, truth, reason, divinity, holiness, hallucination, psychosis, and pathology.

CHAPTER III

THE VISIONARY POETRY OF WILLIAM BLAKE

I have indicated in the first section of this essay that an interpretation of any phenomenon is ultimately an interpretation of how the sacred (wholly other) becomes understood by others (including the other who is oneself in reflection). In the second section, I indicated that modern Western discourse tends to interpret the dissolution of the boundaries of the self in trance not as a revelation of the wholly other overwhelming the boundaries of the self, but as a pathological degeneration of the stable, rational, reified boundaries between self and other.

I have shown that the modern Western interpretation of trance is part of the rationalism (or logocentrism) of Western civilization in general, and that a phenomenological interpretation of musically and poetically expressed trances must restrain (i.e., suspend, bracket, deconstruct) this logocentrism so that it is possible to consider these phenomena not merely in terms of rational discourse, but in terms of how others express what has become revealed to them in entrancing experiences. This entails not only bracketing the typical modern supposition that trance is not holy or healthy, but it also entails bracketing the Platonic supposition that those trances involving music or poetry or those that bring one out of one's senses (*ekphrones*)—such as the ritual *mania* of Dionysian ecstasy—are not as good as trances that bring one closer to a rational love of ideal form; and furthermore, it entails bracketing the possible Biblical interpretation that trance is only good if it brings one closer to a monotheistic and/or transcendent God. Moreover, this is neither to say that Platonic, Biblical, Cartesian, or Foucauldian interpretations of trance are false, nor that they are true. Applying the brackets of the phenomenological *epoche* to the presuppositions of Western logocentrism, I hold back all

judgments regarding the ontological or theological truth or falsity of any interpretations of trance, thus making it possible to develop a discourse that is hospitable to all interpretations.

In the third and fourth sections of this essay, I look at specific examples of musically and poetically expressed trances wherein those who experience these trances understand them as sacred, which is not to say that they explicitly call them “sacred,” but that their interpretations of them appear to express experiences of some power or powers that disclose the limits of the normal, everyday, profane world. Although modern Western discourse is generally characterized by a bias against the possibility of trance being sacred, this does not imply that modern Western societies never encounter instances of sacred trance. Rather, it implies that sacred trances were typically suppressed or marginalized by these societies, as in those cases wherein others’ experiences of sacred trances have been interpreted by moderns as pathological, farcical, or diabolical. Such suppression and marginalization have occurred in varying degrees in modern Western interpretations of many types of trance, e.g., in the general public opinion of Pentecostal trances as farce or pathology (Becker: 13), in the opinion of many missionaries working with Vodou trancers in Ghana (Meyer 1999; 2002), in the opinion of some New Yorkers regarding the trances of Cuban immigrants practicing Santería (Gregory 1999), in the case of the United States government prohibiting the use of the mescaline-containing cactus peyote (*Lophophora williamsii*) to occasion trances in Native American Church ceremonies (Smith and Snake 1996), and in cases of police arresting attendees of “Trance” and “Rave” musical performances on the grounds that such music is often affiliated with hallucinogenic drugs (Berry and Newman 2005).

In some cases, Western discourse does recognize that a trance is sacred, but interprets trance as a flight of creative imagination rather than as an overwhelming or boundary-dissolving

experience. This can be seen in those scholars who try to defend William Blake against charges of trance or madness by saying that the seemingly trance-like experiences he claimed to have and express in poetry were only the “fruit of an excessive culture of the imagination, combined with daring license of speech” (Gilchrist: 338; cf. Youngquist: 3).

To show how musical and poetic trances become understood as sacred not only outside of the horizon of modern Western discourse, but also within the margins of this horizon, the examples I look at in interpreting musical and poetic trance come from trancers both internal and external to the modern West. In the following section (III), I interpret the poetic expressions of William Blake, who experienced sacred trances from within a modern Western context. I devote particular attention to the way the sounds of one of Blake’s *Songs of Experience*—*The Tyger*—express an experience wherein the finite limits of the self are overwhelmed by the infinite power of the wholly other. In the section after this (IV), I interpret the polyrhythmic musical expressions that accompany the trances experienced within the horizon of the religions of the black Atlantic, focusing particularly on Vodou in West Africa, Santería in Cuba, and Candomblé in Brazil.

As I indicated in the second section of this essay (II), I am grouping music and poetry together as types of sonorous art, wherein poetry is verbal sonorous art. Musical trances include any trance involving the artistic expression of sound, and poetic trances include any trance involving the artistic expression of verbal sound. I remain open to the possibility that, according to some interpretations, artistic expression may be accomplished by things like stones, trees, and birds, and not merely by humans.³² Such an interpretation appears in the Ancient Greek understanding of poetry (*poiesis*) as the name for all forms of production, whether accomplished

³² David Abram discusses such an interpretation of art as it occurs among the Aboriginal peoples of Australia, among whom it is customary for each person to inherit a “stretch of song,” which is the song that belongs to the stretch of land corresponding to one’s own place in the sacred time (the Dreamtime) (Abram: 163-72).

by humans or by nature. I also remain open to the possibility that sounds can be interpreted as visual, tactile, olfactory, and gustatory perceptions, and not merely aural perceptions. Such a possibility is evident in the etymological connection that Nancy points to between the Greek word for sense perception (*aisthesis*) and the Greek and Latin words for hearing (*aio* and *audio* respectively)—a connection that still appears in the English words “aesthetic,” “aural,” and “audience”—all of which derive from the Proto-Indo-European root “au-” (“to perceive”) (Nancy 1997: 85, 188; Watkins: 6).

The aim of this essay as a whole is to develop an interpretation that restrains presuppositions about musical and poetic sound, about trance and madness, and about the sacred. Through this, I indicate how others come to understand sounds as expressions of trance, wherein the boundaries of the self are overwhelmed by the sacred power of the wholly other. In interpreting the expressions of trance that appear in the poetry of William Blake and the music of Afro-Atlantic religions, I show how trance, sound, and the sacred become understood in these different contexts, pointing to the limits where my own hermeneutic context encounters the otherness of trances expressed in Blake’s poetry and in Afro-Atlantic rhythms.

III.i. William Blake and Visionary Experience

William Blake (1757-1827) was a poet, engraver, and painter. He was born in London and spent most of his life there, at a time when many characteristic events of modernity came to pass (e.g., the rise of industrialization, the American Declaration of Independence from England, and the French Revolution) (Gilchrist: 5_f). Although the frequent mention of religious themes, Biblical scenes, and prophecies within Blake’s poetry has brought many people to describe him and his poetry as mystical, the literary scholar Northrop Frye points out that Blake never uses the word “mystical” to describe his poetry or his own experiences (Frye: 7_f). This is not to say that

Blake's poetry is not mystical, but rather that Blake interpreted his poetry in terms that reflect an engagement with the senses that can appear antithetical to the connotations of "mysticism."

Blake describes his art as "visionary," specifically insofar as he understood his art to show what has become revealed to him in visions (Frye: 8, 21, 30). After elucidating the structure of Blake's visionary experiences, I interpret the expression of visionary experience that can be heard in the poetic sounds of "The Tyger."

Both in his poetry and in his correspondence with other people, Blake often spoke of his visions, which he had experienced since his childhood. Some accounts of Blake's life suggest that he had his first visionary experience between the age of eight and ten (Gilchrist: 7). It is said that while walking, the young Blake looked up and saw a tree with angels on the branches, their wings making the boughs of the tree shine like stars.³³ Some biographical sketches of Blake report that he had his first vision at an even younger age, possibly around the age of four, when "the Almighty put His head to a window and set the child to screaming" (Youngquist: 5). Blake experienced such visions from the time he was in his childhood until he was on his deathbed, and these visions were his main source of artistic inspiration (15, 21).³⁴ As Blake expressed in a letter to one of his patrons, "I see Every thing I paint In This World" (42).

³³ Youngquist notes that when Blake returned home and spoke of his vision to his parents, his father started to become violently angry toward his son for telling a lie, but Blake's mother intervened and prevented the violent discipline that was about to ensue (Youngquist: 17). Youngquist argues that Blake's father's discipline in this matter is characteristic of the oppressive treatment toward visionaries and mystics in the bourgeois world in general (ibid).

³⁴ I say inspiration here in the sense of Nietzsche's definition of inspiration, which is cited in section II of the present essay. For Nietzsche, inspiration is "the idea that one is merely incarnation, merely mouthpiece, merely medium of overwhelming forces" (Nietzsche 1992: 72*r*). Moreover, in his account of the significance of madness and ego-loss in Blake's work, Youngquist also refers to this Nietzschean definition of inspiration as an analogue to the poetic inspiration experienced in Blake's visions (Youngquist: 36-38).

Through his youth and adulthood, Blake interpreted his visions not as hallucinations but as real revelations, and on many occasions he articulated them as prophecies.³⁵ Youngquist notes that Blake would explicitly tell his friends that his visions were actual experiences, and not merely exaggerations or metaphoric figures of speech (Youngquist: 42). Youngquist cites an example of such a statement occurring in a letter Blake wrote to one of his patrons, Thomas Butts, in January 1803. Blake said to Butts, “I am under the direction of Messengers from Heaven, Daily & Nightly,” adding further that “the nature of such things is not, as some suppose, without trouble or care” (ibid). That Messengers from Heaven directed Blake is quite similar to saying that these Messengers entranced Blake or that he was overwhelmed by the sacred power of their appearance. Furthermore, in a poem from his *Notebook*, Blake expresses his continual presence before the very face of God: “I am in Gods presence night & day / And he never turns his face away” (Erdman: 481). An oft-cited remark made by Blake’s wife Catherine confirms that indeed, Blake spent much of his time engaged in visions of the sacred: “I have very little of Mr. Blake’s company; he is always in Paradise” (Youngquist: 5). According to friends of Blake and his wife, Blake was experiencing visions even on the day of his death in August 1827: Blake lay in his bed singing songs about heavenly visions, occasionally whispering to his wife, “My beloved! They are *not mine*. No! they are *not mine!*” (Gilchrist: 381f).

Moreover, Blake’s visions are not *merely* visual, which is to say, they do not exclude other types of sense experience. For instance, the interweaving of visual and tactile experience in Blake’s visions is evident insofar as Blake expressed poetry through the visual and tactile medium of etching, using acid to eat away around the designs he engraved into metal plates

³⁵ Many of Blake’s works take on a prophetic form, such as his *Poetical Sketches* and *The Four Zoas* (Frye: 177, 355). Frye argues that Blake’s prophetic tone is an expression of structures of “social and political liberty,” and that Blake considered “the visionary prophetic artist” to be the most exemplary type of citizen, capable of showing the possibilities that can come out of a changing historical situation (68, 407).

(Marsh: 9). The aural dimension of Blake's visions is indicated insofar as he spoke of hearing voices and music in his visions, such as in the vision he expressed in a letter to a patron named William Hayley (January 1804), wherein Blake spoke of "the sound of harps" that he hears before the sun rises every morning (Youngquist: 43). Sound and vision are intertwined similarly in Blake's expression toward the end of "A Vision of the Last Judgment," wherein he says that he does not see the rising sun as a mere disk of fire, but as "an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying Holy Holy Holy is the Lord God Almighty" (Erdman: 566; Frye: 21). Because Blake's visions intertwine different types of sense experience, these visions can be described as synaesthetic experiences—experiences that bring together (*syn-*) different types of perception (*aisthesis*). Insofar as trance experiences are characterized by the appearance of the sacred breaking through one's normal, profane, everyday boundaries, it follows that the aesthetics of trance experience would often involve synaesthesia.³⁶

Further evidence that Blake's visionary experience is analogous to what this present essay articulates in terms of trance experience can be seen in the frequent association of Blake and his poetry with madness. Many of Blake's contemporaries would contend that his visions are hallucinations or that his poems are the products of insanity (Youngquist: 3, 17-20). When Blake would speak about his visions to other people, as he often would, there was a tendency for people who did not know him to think he was mad, despite the fact that those who were close friends of Blake would emphatically defend his sanity (Gilchrist: 8, 341). Moreover, although claims that Blake was mad were often intended to disparage Blake's work or his mental health, sometimes they praised Blake for his madness. For instance, upon reading Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, the poet William Wordsworth said "There is no doubt this poor

³⁶ David Chidester (1992) goes further to argue that varieties of synaesthetic phenomena appear frequently throughout many of the world's religious traditions.

man is mad,” but he added further that “there is something in the madness of this man which interests me more than the Sanity of Lord Byron & Walter Scott” (Youngquist: 18).

While some scholars, such as Northrop Frye and Harold Bloom, argue that the question of madness is not relevant in studying Blake, Youngquist follows Nietzsche and Foucault in arguing that phenomena like madness, ecstasy, and inspiration are fundamentally important to the meaning of human expressions (Frye: 12; Youngquist: 19). Thus Youngquist argues that a study of Blake’s visionary poetry must inquire into the character of Blake’s visions (Youngquist: 170). In the hermeneutic terms of this present essay, Youngquist’s position can be reiterated as follows: an interpretation of Blake’s poetry must consider the structure of experience it expresses. The general consensus in contemporary scholarship holds that Blake was not psychotic or insane and that his visionary experiences were merely visual and auditory hallucinations (14-16). However, insofar as those within Blake’s historical context spoke of his expressions as signs of madness, it is evident that Blake’s works express something like an experience of trance—the displacement or dissolution of boundaries by the overwhelming power of the wholly other.

It is important here to bear in mind that my purpose in this essay is not to consider the empirical or metaphysical validity of Blake’s visions or of what Blake says of his visions, and my purpose is especially not to diagnose any psychological disturbances Blake might have had. In this essay, the question of Blake’s madness is situated in a phenomenological interpretation of how Blake came to understand his poetry as expressing a type of trance that he described in terms of visionary experience. Insofar as such visions are said to be instances of madness, it is a

madness that Blake understood as the fundamental faculty of all human experience, a faculty that lies fallow in most people because they fail to cultivate it (Frye: 30-32; Youngquist: 20).³⁷

For Blake, the visionary faculty of human beings is experienced at the limit where the infinite entrances everything finite, the limit where the boundaries of everything finite and temporal are infused with that which is infinite and eternal. In the words of Blake's "Auguries of Innocence," each human has the ability "To see a World in a Grain of Sand / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower / Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand / And Eternity in an hour" (Erdman: 490). According to Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, cultivating the faculty for visionary experience is analogous to cleansing the doors of perception: "If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is: infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern" (Erdman: 39).

Cleansing the doors of perception, one experiences the threshold (*limen* in Latin) where finite and infinite meet, the limit where opposites are married, whether heaven and hell, good and evil, innocence and experience, eternal and temporal, or human and divine. Indeed, throughout all of Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake interprets sacred matters of visionary experience as if they were things appearing amidst the everyday profane world, visible to all humans (Youngquist: 15). The interaction of these various opposites is fundamental in all human experience. As Blake says, "Without contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence" (Erdman: 34). In other words, the entrancing visions experienced by Blake are a function of the liminality

³⁷ This is similar to Foucault's argument that the unreason constitutive of madness is a fundamental part of rationality, even if, as in modernity, this unreason is suppressed and excluded from rational society. As Michel de Certeau expresses this matter, "For Foucault, unreason is no longer the outer limit of reason: it is its truth" (de Certeau: 173). Likewise for Blake, visionary experience is a fundamental part of all human functioning.

(or limit-crossing) that is necessary to all experience.³⁸ For Blake, all experience is entrancing, in transition between opposites. In terms of Victor Turner's concept of liminality, one could say that with Blake, "Transition has here become a permanent condition" (Turner 1969: 107).

Furthermore, Frye notes that Blake's rejection of the separation of the finite, corporeal, temporal world from that which is infinite, incorporeal, and eternal follows the philosophy of Bishop George Berkeley (1685-1753), which rejected the separation of the ideal and corporeal such as was articulated by modern scientists and philosophers like Bacon, Newton, and Locke (Frye: 14: 30). Berkeley describes beings as ideas that *are* insofar as they *are perceived* by some subjectivity (i.e., "*mind, spirit, soul*"), which is ultimately the infinite subjectivity of God (i.e., "Supreme Spirit). Berkeley's interpretation of being is summarized in his famous dictum, *esse est percipi* ("to be is to be perceived"), which suggests that finite perception and the infinite source of being (God) are liminally constituted—always in transition, transcending the boundaries between finite and infinite, humanity and divinity, perception and ideation, etc. (Berkeley: 151-53). What is perceived is not separate from that which really is (i.e., being), and the perceiving human spirit is at the threshold of the ideal Supreme spirit. Accordingly, Berkeley argues that "when the sense becomes infinitely acute the body shall seem infinite" (Berkeley: 169).

³⁸ I am borrowing the phrase "liminality" from two researchers who argue that all experience is liminal: the anthropologist Victor Turner and the phenomenologist Anthony Steinbock. Expanding on what Arnold van Gennep spoke of as the "liminal phase" of *rites de passage*, Turner speaks of all ritual experience in terms of the ambiguous liminality of transition, wherein one's experience is at a threshold or margin where the boundaries of normal structures are dissolved or intertwined (Turner 1969: 94f). "Liminality implies that the high could not be high unless the low existed, and he who is high must experience what it is like to be low" (97). All experience can appear liminal, insofar as people play many different roles in the drama of social existence, thus crossing the boundaries between different social structures (Turner 1982: 46). Starting from hints of a "generative phenomenology" in Husserl, Steinbock argues that all experiences of a normal world, which Husserl called a "homeworld" (*Heimwelt*), delimit and are delimited by that which is alien to the normal world, the "alienworld" (*Fremdwelt*) (Steinbock: 179). Experience is fundamentally liminal, as home and alien mutually delimit one another. "For this reason they are *co-relative* and *co-constitutive*" (ibid).

The infinite is not ideal or cognitive to the exclusion of the visibly apparent world, as Cartesian dualism might suggest; rather, when the senses are acute enough, the infinite can appear to human perception, the infinite can appear embodied. To put the matter in Blake's terms, when the doors of perception are cleansed, every finite thing appears infinite, eternity can be held in an hour. Thus, Blake's visionary experiences are situated within a modern context, wherein finitude and temporality are juxtaposed with infinity and eternity; however, Blake understands his visions to be contrary to the presuppositions characteristic of that context, particularly the presupposed exclusivity of opposites like finite and infinite, and temporal and eternal. Blake's experiences transgressed the established boundaries of his historical context, crossing the limits of mental health and sickness, human and divine, perception and ideation, seeing and hearing, heaven and hell, etc.

Having explicated the basic liminal structure of Blake's visionary experiences, it is now possible to interpret the structure of Blake's expression of this experience in poetry. I first show how Blake understood his poetry to relate to his visions, and then I proceed to show how the specific sounds of Blake's poem *The Tyger* express a visionary experience of the divine source of evil. However, before discussing Blake's visionary poetics, I need to say more about the way poetic expression in general relates to experience.

According to the definitions of expression and experience given in section I.1 of this essay, it is evident that insofar as it is a type of expression, poetic expression is an expression of lived experience (*Erlebnis*), an expression of the structural connections (or "types") revealed in immediate experience and concealed to the reflective gaze (Van der Leeuw 1963a: 671f; Dilthey: 223-27). Van der Leeuw notes that types can be expressed without them ever occurring or having occurred in history (Van der Leeuw 1963a: 673). Accordingly, Dilthey argues that poetic

works can express structures of lived experience in general, and they do not necessarily have to express or represent the “actual life” of the particular poet (Dilthey: 250). Poetic expression thus does not always indicate the structure of the poet’s own experience, but a structure of experience in general. This is similar to the argument in Aristotle’s discourse *On Poetics* (1451b) that poetry speaks of general things, of things that could be, whereas historical discourse speaks of particular things that have happened. Thus, Blake’s poetry is unique insofar as he contends that his poetry does indeed express that which is revealed in his visions.

Furthermore, the structure of experience expressed in a poem is expressed in the very structure of the poem and not in anything beyond, behind, or underlying this structure. In other words, a poem does not express experience through reference. Instead, a poem expresses what is revealed in experience by making transparent the experiential structure, which is concealed to reflection. Therefore, I do not interpret Blake’s poetic expressions of visions in terms of their reference to any psychological state of Blake, but rather in terms of what appears in the poetic expression itself. Whether considering the phonological patterns of a poem’s sounds, the structure of its words (morphology), the grammatical structure of its sentences, or the semantic associations of its tropes, the structures of poetic expressions are the unconcealed structures of the very experiences they express.

The poem does not express the experience by pointing beyond itself, but by manifesting the structure of the experience through verbal expression. Therefore, when trying to interpret an experience of poetic expression, the structure of the experience is not to be sought in something referred to beyond the expression, the structure of the experience is to be sought in the interconnections that appear in the expression. This notion that the experience of a poem appears in the very structure of the poem (and not in that to which the poem refers) is based on the

hermeneutic account of expression and experience developed by Dilthey and van der Leeuw, which is discussed in part I.1 of this essay. Another hermeneut, Paul Ricœur, also argues that the poetic function of language is not referential, which is a concept that Ricœur brought into hermeneutics from Jakobson's concept of the six functions of language, wherein the poetic function of language is distinct from the referential function (Ricœur 1981: 293; 1976: 15).

Jakobson says that the poetic function of language (i.e., "poeticity") "is present when the word is felt as a word [...], when words and their composition, their meaning, their external and inner form, acquire a weight and value of their own instead of referring indifferently to reality" (Jakobson 1987: 378). Jakobson also distinguishes the poetic function from other functions of language that involve an addresser, an addressee, and their mutual contact, which are the emotive, conative, and phatic functions respectively (43, 65-71).³⁹ It is worth noting here that Jakobson applies this non-referential sense of poetry to his interpretation of Blake's poem "Infant Sorrow," particularly by speaking of the tensions between the linguistic elements of the poem to describe the tension that appears throughout all of Blake's poems from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*—the tension between the goodness of youthful innocence and the evil suffered in human experience (479-89). Jakobson's account explicates linguistic structures and thus makes it possible to hear how those structures express "the tension between the nativity and the ensuing worldly experience" of the "Infant Sorrow" (486). Jakobson finds the tension between innocence and experience expressed in the tension between symmetry and asymmetry that appears in the structures of the poem's two quatrains.⁴⁰ This tension between symmetry and

³⁹ Jakobson also calls the emotive function the "expressive" function, but this emotional sense of expression is not to be confused with the hermeneutic sense of expression as structural connection (Jakobson 1987: 66).

⁴⁰ For instance, the nouns of the first quatrain of "Infant Sorrow" are predominantly subjects, while the nouns of the second quatrain are predominantly indirect objects (Jakobson 1987: 480, 486; Erdman: 28). Both quatrains are symmetrical insofar as they both have nouns, but they are asymmetrical insofar as the first stanza has mostly subjective nouns while the other has mostly objective nouns.

asymmetry also appears in other *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, such as in the “fearful symmetry” of “The Tyger.”

Jakobson’s concept of the non-referential poetic function of language is similar to Derrida’s argument that the meaning of a text is not outside the text (Østrem: 311). Derrida argues that the meaning of discourse is given in the interplay of differences between signs and not in any signified reference beyond the sign; in other words, the meaning is given in the dynamic appearance of the signs and not in anything transcending the signs (Derrida 1973: 139-146).⁴¹ Accordingly, the meaning of a poem lies in its own structure. The experiential structure the poem expresses is manifest in the structure of the poem.

Furthermore, this is similar to Blake’s own account of his visionary poetry in “A Vision of the Last Judgment,” wherein Blake rejects the Platonic concept that poetry is a mere memory or imitation (*mimesis*) of ideal reality (Erdman: 554_f). Blake argues instead that images of his visionary poetry represent and restore the images he has seen of the Eternal (ibid). Moreover, the image of the Eternal does not appear merely in the semantics of Blake’s visionary poetry, but also in the grammar of the poem, and even in the sounds of individual letters. In a

My mother groand! my father wept.
Into the dangerous world I leapt:
Helpless, naked, piping loud:
Like a fiend hid in a cloud.

Struggling in my fathers hands:
Striving against my swaddling bands:
Bound and weary I thought best
To sulk upon my mothers breast.

⁴¹ Derrida’s account of meaning as the interplay of differences between signs is based in part on his reading of the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, whose *Course in General Linguistics*—which was also an important influence for Jakobson—shows how linguistic signs appear according to the differences between them, and how these differences constitute the reciprocal relationship between the signifier and the signified (cf. Derrida 1973; Jakobson 1978; Saussure: *passim*). Merleau-Ponty summarizes Saussure’s position on this matter: “In a language, Saussure says, all is negative; there are only differences, and no positive terms. The side of the signified [*signifié*] amounts to conceptual differences, the side of the signifier [*signifiant*] to phonic differences” (Merleau-Ponty 1973: 96).

passage from “A Vision of the Last Judgment” cited in Jakobson’s essay on Blake’s “Infant Sorrow,” Blake comments on how every aspect of what appears in his artwork is significant, saying how all details are significant, “not a line is drawn without intention [...] as Poetry admits not a Letter that is Insignificant, so Painting admits not a Grain of Sand or a Blade of Grass Insignificant, much less an Insignificant Blur or Mark” (Erdman: 560; Jakobson 1987: 479). The image of the Eternal can be found in every mark appearing in Blake’s visionary art, in every phoneme heard in his poetry.

III.ii. The Tyger

To show how the very sounds of Blake’s poetry express his visionary experience, I interpret the sounds of “The Tyger.” In this interpretation, I follow the analysis of the poem articulated by Haj Ross, who follows Jakobson in opening his discussion with the same comment from “A Vision of the Last Judgment” about how “Poetry admits not a Letter that is Insignificant” (Ross: 99). Particularly important for the present essay, Ross’ account of “The Tyger” focuses on the very sounds of the poem, the “phonetic drama” of the poem (ibid). The structure of Blake’s poetry is dramatic insofar as it expresses visions with action and performance. In interpreting “The Tyger,” I show how the phonetic drama of this poem expresses an experience of the overwhelming power of the ultimate source of good and evil, particularly insofar as many of the poem’s structures (from stanzas to phonemes) are liminal, and thus appear co-relative and co-constitutive, mutually delimiting one another, co-evoking one another.⁴² An exhaustive account of the meaning of every sound in the poem is too large a task

⁴² Ross speaks of this relation of coevocation in terms of the Ancient Chinese word, *Tao*, literally meaning Way (Ross: 125). Things are said to be “taoing” if they relate to one another in the same way as the fundamental forces of the *Tao*: *yin* and *yang*. These two forces interpenetrate, complement, and balance one another, with *yin* being the feminine, dark, negative, passive force of the *Tao* and *yang* being the male, light, positive, active force (Smith: 214). Ross uses the yin/yang symbol—☯—to express the relationship of taoing (Ross: 125, 127ff).

to fit within the scope of this essay, thus the following interpretation is but sketch or outline of how “The Tyger” sounds sacred.

From Blake’s notebooks to his various printings of his *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, there are many versions of “The Tyger” that can be cited, none of which appears to be necessarily better or more authoritative than another.⁴³ From my own research, it appears that the only difference in these versions is punctuation, thus in the interest of interpreting the structure of “The Tyger” in general, I leave open the question of the significance of the punctuation appearing in the poem. I take the text of the following version of “The Tyger” from Erdman’s edition of *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (Erdman: 24f).⁴⁴

The Tyger

Stanza

- | | |
|---|--|
| A | Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry? |
| B | In what distant deeps or skies,
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare sieze the fire? |
| C | And what shoulder, & what art, |

⁴³ Whereas Ross notices a discrepancy between copies of “The Tyger” that do and do not have a question mark at the end of the fifth stanza, a look at other versions of “The Tyger” reveal other discrepancies (Ross: 145). In the edition of Blake’s works edited by Johnson and Grant, a question mark appears after “Dare its deadly terrors clasp?” and also after “Did he who made the Lamb make thee?” (Johnson and Grant: 50). A look at *The Notebook of William Blake* shows that his drafts of “The Tyger” used no punctuation whatsoever (Blake: N108, N109). Each of the punctuation schemes appearing in the different printing of this poem has its own significance, but the scope of the present paper precludes a thorough examination of them.

⁴⁴ The spelling of seize as “sieze” appears in all editions of “The Tyger” that I have seen.

Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

D What the hammer? what the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!

E When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

F Tyger Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

“The Tyger” is composed of six four-line stanzas (which I will call stanzas A-F), each with four lines. The poem expresses a series of questions. “There are no declarative sentences in the poem” (Ross: 101). The interrogative structure of “The Tyger” is evidence of its performative character—doing something instead of referring to something. As J.L. Austin showed in his lectures on *How to Do Things With Words*, all linguistic utterances can have the force of stating or referring to something (locutionary force), the force of doing or performing something (illocutionary force), and the force of yielding effects through saying something (perlocutionary force) (Austin: 133-47; Ricœur 1976: 14; Schiffrin: 50-54). Insofar as they request listeners to respond, questions are typically performative acts, having more illocutionary than locutionary force.

The questions in “The Tyger” ask the Tyger about its creation. The questions ask the Tyger of its ultimate (i.e., infinite, immortal) origins, asking in the first stanza “What immortal

hand or eye, / Could frame thy fearful symmetry?" The questions persist through the entire poem, ending with the last stanza giving a slightly altered repetition of the first stanza, asking not what could, but what "Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?" Many scholars have noted that the question asked regarding the Tyger's immortal source is analogous to the question asked in one of Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, "The Lamb," regarding the divine origin of the "Little Lamb": "Little Lamb who made thee / Dost thou know who made thee" (Marsh: 84f; Erdman: 8f). This parallel between the question of the Tyger's origin and the question of the Lamb's origin does not only appear in the juxtaposition of the two corresponding poems from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. It also appears within the structures of "The Tyger," particularly in the penultimate stanza, asking the Tyger about the relationship between the origin of the Tyger and the origin of the Lamb: "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?"⁴⁵

To understand this question, it is helpful to consider the basic differences between the Lamb and the Tyger. According to the text of "The Lamb," the Lamb was made by he who "calls himself a Lamb: / He is meek & he is mild, / He became a little child" (Erdman: 9). The Lamb is a symbol of Jesus Christ and is thus, like Blake's *Songs of Innocence* in general, a symbol of goodness, infinity, immortality, and unfallen innocence; whereas the Tyger, like all *Songs of Experience*, is a symbol of evil, finitude, mortality, and fallen experience (Frye: 42). In the *Songs of Innocence*, the Lamb is said to live "By the stream & o'er the mead," wearing "Softest clothing wooly bright;" whereas the *Songs of Experience* describe the Tyger as quite the opposite—residing not by a stream but "In the forests of the night," and not soft and bright with innocence but "burning bright" with fire. The text of "The Lamb" uses many pastoral images (e.g., stream, meadow, life, feed) to describe the Lamb, whereas "The Tyger" describes the

⁴⁵ Further evidence that the Tyger and the Lamb are juxtaposed against one another appears in the capitalization present in "The Tyger." Excluding capitalization that occurs at the beginning of each line, "Tyger" and "Lamb" are the only words that appear capitalized throughout the poem.

creation of the Tyger using an assortment of industrial images (e.g., hammer, chain, furnace, anvil) (Marsh: 86).

To ask if he who made the Lamb made the Tyger is to ask if innocence, goodness, and heaven have the same source as experience, evil, and hell. The interrogation of the Tyger thus questions the limits of evil, the limits of the world of experience, which are intertwined with the limits of innocence. These questions ask about the source of the Tyger's "fearful symmetry," culminating in "the climactic unveiling of a single question," asking if the divine source of the Tyger is also that of the Lamb (Ross: 101). The interrogation of the Tyger leads to a question that evokes the power of the Tyger's divine source, thus overwhelming the finite limits of the Tyger and the Lamb.

Insofar as trance is a dissolution of the normal limits of one's experience, the juxtaposition in Blake's "The Tyger" of the Tyger, the Lamb, and their divine source appears to be an expression of trance: the finite limits of experience (Tyger, evil, temporality) become entranced by the infinite power of he who made the Lamb and the Tyger. The expression of the liminal experience of good and evil can also be heard in other aspects of the poem's structure, specifically in the difference between the structure of the penultimate stanza, which mentions the Lamb, and the structure established in all the other stanzas, which focus on the Tyger.

Noticing that the penultimate stanza (E) stands out from the other stanzas, Ross says that "Blake has *sore-thumbed E*" (Ross: 109). Whereas all of the stanzas other than E ask questions about "what" made, could make, or dare make the Tyger (i.e., "wh-" questions, also called "constituent" questions), the questions asked in stanza E are yes/no questions (i.e., polar questions) that ask about a mythic time, "When the stars threw down their spears / And water'd heaven with their tears." Mention of the stars throwing down their spears also occurs in one of

Blake's prophetic works, *The Four Zoas* (V, 64: 27-28), wherein Urizen—the epitome of rationality—laments his fall and separation from God, when he hid himself in wrathful “black clouds” and refused to subordinate the light of his rational existence to the light of the Son: “The stars threw down their spears & fled naked away. / We fell” (Johnson and Grant: 50, 223).⁴⁶ Scholars have also pointed out that this theme of the stars throwing down their spears is an allusion to the war in heaven spoken of in Milton's *Paradise Lost* (VI, 838-9), wherein Milton speaks of the moment of Creation when the angels in heaven first cast into hell the rebel angels: “they, astonished, all resistance lost, / All courage; down their idle weapons dropt” (Marsh: 87-88; cf. Johnson and Grant: 223).

The questions in E ask if the experience and evil that accompanied the fall are delimited by the same divine source as goodness and unfallen innocence:

Did he smile his works to see?

Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

In this penultimate stanza, the questions about what created the Tyger reach their culmination in asking if the goodness that made the Lamb also made the evil of the Tyger, the evil of fallen experience. In other words, the question about what the limits of the Tyger are becomes a question asking if the ultimate limit of the Tyger is also that of the Lamb. With the juxtaposition of “what” questions about the Tyger with the polar questions about he who made the Tyger and the Lamb, it appears that “The Tyger” expresses an experience wherein the finite limits of experience become entranced by the divine power of the liminal creation of Tyger and Lamb.

The liminality of the Tyger expressed in the structure of E is also evident when listening to the transitive verbs in the poem. Ross points out that every stanza other than E has one

⁴⁶ It is worth noting the similarity between the beginning of the fall when Urizen hid himself in clouds and the beginning of sorrow in Blake's poem “Infant Sorrow,” when the infant is born into world: “Helpless, naked, piping loud; / Like a fiend hid in a cloud” (Erdman: 28).

transitive verb, each of which is preceded by a modal auxiliary verb, vacillating between “could” and the semi-modal “dare” (Ross: 105).⁴⁷ Preceded by “could” or “dare,” the corresponding transitive verbs have subjects that hypothetically act toward their objects, specifically in the context of questions about “what” body parts (e.g., hand, eye, shoulder) “could” create or “dare” create the Tyger. Although many of the verbs in stanzas other than E do not express the transitivity of a subject acting upon an object, in E there is “a flood of transitivity” (five transitive verbs) with no modals (106).

The increase in transitivity in E expresses an increase in liminality insofar as E expresses verbs that are indicative of subjects that are not interacting alone (e.g., the tyger burning, a heart beating), but are interacting with objects (e.g., stars throwing spears, tears watering heaven, the creator seeing his work, the creator making the Tyger and the Lamb). Moreover, this flood of transitivity only stands out because it appears with the intransitivity and hypothetical transitivity heard throughout the rest of the poem; in other words, the flood of transitivity appears meaningful insofar as it is part of a structure wherein intransitivity and transitivity complement and interpenetrate one another.

The last line of E has the most transitive verbs of any line in the poem: the two verbs “Did...make” and “made”. It is significant that the line with the most transitivity is the only line that speaks of the Lamb, and it is also the only line to ask a question about the Tyger directly (“thee”) rather than about the constituents of the Tyger (“thy fearful symmetry,” “thine eyes,” “thy heart,” “thy brain”). Questions asking about the creation of the Tyger have very little transitivity, very little contact between subject and object, and this lack of contact expresses the

⁴⁷ The intimate relationship between the modal “could” and semi-modal “dare” is indicated by the fact that Blake’s early drafts of *The Tyger* show the “Could” of the first stanza crossed out and the crossed out word “Dare” written next to it in the margin; and similarly, the “Dare” of the fourth stanza is written in the margin immediately to the left of a crossed out “Could” (Blake: N109).

separation and alienation characteristic of the fallen world of experience. In asking about the Lamb (“Did he who made the Lamb make thee?”), the transitive contact between the single subject of the verbs (i.e., the maker) and its objects (the Tyger and the Lamb) expresses an intertwining of creatures with their creator that is indicative of the entrancing power of the divine.

The series of questions that make up “The Tyger” express the liminality of Tyger and Lamb by interweaving stanzas that question that which could/dare create the Tyger with a stanza that questions the mutual creation of the Tyger and the Lamb by the same creator. It is when the question of the Tyger appears enmeshed in the question of the Lamb that the question arises whether the transitive relation of the creator toward goodness and innocence (Lamb) is simultaneously a transitive relation of the creator toward the world of experience (Tyger). The liminal experience of the divine source of good and evil is also expressed through other ways in which the penultimate stanza stands out from the others.

Ross notes that the types of words in E stand out from the types of words appearing in the other stanzas of the poem. In other words, the lexical structure of E stands out from that of the rest of the poem. “The only linguistic items that E repeats are when, the, he, and to—but lexically, it is totally new” (Ross: 119). Words like “Tyger,” “fire,” “what,” “could,” and “dare,” appear regularly throughout the poem, and none of them appears in the penultimate stanza. Just like the word “Lamb” appears only in E, so do most of the words in E appear only within that stanza (except for the words “when,” “the,” “and,” “he,” and “to”). Furthermore, some of the parts of speech that occur in E do not appear anywhere else in the poem. For instance, E is the only stanza with a plural subject, “Stars.” The only verb particle in the poem is “down,” which appears in the first line of E. Appearing in the second line of E is the only bisyllabic verb of the

poem—"water'd." Also, there are no adjectives in E, whereas each of the other stanzas contains at least one adjective, with the most adjectives appearing in the first and last stanzas (each of which has three adjectives: bright, immortal, fearful) (Ross: 106). Thus, the lexical structure of E transgresses the limits of the lexical structure appearing throughout the rest of the poem, which is further evidence that the poem expresses a trance experience wherein the question of the divine source of the Tyger and the Lamb overwhelms the normal limits of experience.

The final structure that I consider in interpreting the trance expressed in "The Tyger" is the structure of the poem's phonemes. The relationship between the Tyger and the Lamb is expressed in the patterns of phonemes heard in the poem. Ross notes that some of the phonemes that occur most frequently throughout the poem do not occur in the penultimate stanza (Ross: 109-112). More specifically, the line that introduces the Lamb does not contain the most salient phonemes of the poem, [t] and [r]. The first stanza of the poem introduces what appear to be its most salient phonemes, with [t] occurring eight times (in "Tyger Tyger," "bright," "forests," "night," "what," "immortal," and "symmetry") and [r] occurring ten times (in "Tyger Tyger, burning bright," "forests," "immortal," "or," "frame," "fearful," and "symmetry"). The line that mentions the Lamb is missing any occurrences of [t] or [r], which are not only two of the most salient consonants in the poem; they are also the consonants that respectively begin and end the word "Tyger."

These patterns of phonemes express the liminality of the Tyger and the Lamb, particularly by eliding the most salient consonants of the poem when asking if fallen experience has the same divine source as unfallen innocence. Furthermore, it is not only the case that the salient phonemes of "The Tyger" are complemented by the lack of such phonemes among the sounds that mention the Lamb; they are also complemented by the salience of phonemes in E

that are less salient in the rest of the poem. For instance, the occurrences of the liquid consonant [r] appear juxtaposed with occurrences of [l]—the other liquid consonant in the English language.

Each word of the first line has an [r] in it, with the [r] becoming more salient in the last word than the first: “Tyger Tyger, burning bright.” The first stanza has two occurrences of [l], which appear at the end of “immortal” and “fearful.” The lack of salience for [l] accompanies an increase in the salience of [r]. This relationship between [r] and [l] in the first (and last) stanza coevokes the relationship between [r] and [l] that appears in the penultimate stanza, where [l] increases in salience as the onset to the word “Lamb,” and [r] decreases in salience as it is elided from the line about the Lamb. Thus, the appearances of [r] in the line mentioning the Tyger coevoked the appearance of the Lamb in the penultimate stanza. As Ross expresses this point: “the increase in prominence of the four [r]’s of the Tyger line is a harbinger of the coming of the Lamb” (Ross: 133). The phonemes in the penultimate stanza evoke and are evoked by the phonemes in the rest of the poem. In other words, the phonemes used to ask questions about the Tyger and the phonemes used to ask about the Lamb are co-relative and co-constitutive. These phonemic patterns are further evidence that the very sounds of the poem express a liminal relationship between the Tyger and the Lamb.

In general, the linguistic structures of “The Tyger” can be described as liminal, particularly insofar as they are delimited by their opposites. Bear in mind, the liminal expressions found in this present investigation by no means exhausts the liminality expressed in this poem.⁴⁸ It is worth summarizing the liminal expressions in “The Tyger” that have been explicated in this present investigation: 1) the experience, evil, finitude, and darkness symbolized

⁴⁸ For a further discussion of many other ways in which the sounds of “The Tyger” coevoked one another, the reader is referred to the account given by Ross (125-43).

by the Tyger are mutually delimited by the innocence, goodness, infinity, and light symbolized by the Lamb; 2) patterns of transitive verbs in the penultimate stanza (E) appear juxtaposed with intransitive verbs; 3) instances of different lexical items and parts of speech are delimited by the alteration or absence of such lexical items and parts of speech in E; 4) yes/no questions in E are delimited by the questions asking “what” in every other stanza; and finally, 5) the phonemes that accompany the question about the Lamb (in stanza E) are coevoked by the salient phonemes heard in the rest of the poem.

Insofar as poetic structures express experiential structures, the liminality of “The Tyger” can be described as an expression of a liminal experience of the Tyger, an expression of a vision wherein the finite limits of fallen experience are overwhelmed by the transitive power of the creator—the infinite source of the limits separating Tyger and Lamb. In other words, “The Tyger” expresses an experience of a trance wherein the entrancing power of the sacred dissolves the boundaries of finite experience, questioning the limits between typical modern Western oppositions, which are expressed in terms of the opposition between Lamb and Tyger (e.g., good and evil, unfallen innocence and fallen experience, divine and human, eternal and temporal, infinite and finite, creator and creation).

Moreover, it is not particularly strange to find poetry using liminality (i.e., coevocation, parallelism, polarity) to express trance or other religious experiences. As Jakobson notes, “binary structures” of linguistic elements have been found in “prayers, exorcisms, magic songs, and other forms of oral verse” throughout numerous traditions (Jakobson 1987: 149). For Blake, the function of poetry lies precisely in its ability to express trance, to bring to vision the infinite power revealed in visionary experience. The world expressed in visionary poetry is the infinite

world of visionary experience, or in the words of “A Vision of the Last Judgment,” “This world of Imagination is the World of Eternity” (Erdman: 555).

The modern understanding that was typical of Blake’s historical situation generally suppressed trance, often calling it insane or unholy, and considering the terms of oppositions such as self/other, finite/infinite, temporal/eternal, human/divine, and body/mind to be mutually exclusive rather than interpenetrating, complementary, co-relative, or co-constitutive. However, Blake’s poems express an experience wherein the finite and the infinite appear intertwined in visions of the infinite—the sacred source of all delimitation and opposition. Through the articulation of liminal structures throughout his poems, Blake’s poetry expresses liminal experiences of the entrancing power of the sacred source of good and evil, innocence and experience, finitude and infinitude, and humanity and divinity.

With a phenomenological interpretation, it is possible to hear Blake’s expressions while withholding judgment regarding the truth of Blake’s visions. Whether his visions are real, logical, provable, sacred, demonic, or hallucinatory is not a question for the phenomenologist. The purpose of this present investigation is to show how Blake understood the phenomenon of trance through the structures of his visionary poetry, particularly the poem “The Tyger.” It is evident from what has been said that an interpretation of the liminal structures in Blake’s visionary poetry can show how Blake expressed his visions as liminal experiences of the sacred—visions of finite limits being entranced by the overwhelming power of the infinite, the wholly other. The entrancing power of the sacred is also expressed through liminality that can be heard in a context quite different than that of the modern separation of self and other, temporal and eternal—the context of the religions in the black Atlantic.

CHAPTER IV

RHYTHM AND TRANCE IN AFRO-ATLANTIC TRADITIONS

In religions such as Vodou in West Africa, Santería in Cuba, and Candomblé in Brazil, trance phenomena are a regularly occurring part of many rituals, and these trances are generally accompanied by musical expressions. In the present essay, I interpret the rhythmic structures of music in these rituals and show how such rhythms express an understanding of trance. To begin this interpretation, I first describe the hermeneutic context within which these rituals take place.⁴⁹ The context of these rituals is often described as Afro-Atlantic, insofar as it is situated along the coast of the Atlantic Ocean and its traditions have origins in Africa. Paul Gilroy describes this “intercultural and transnational formation” with a term that emphasizes its geographical character without marginalizing its racial and ethnic qualities—“the black Atlantic” (Gilroy: ix). After briefly elucidating the hermeneutic context of the black Atlantic, I proceed to interpret the trance phenomena typical in this context while showing how these phenomena are expressed in the rhythmic music with which they are accompanied.

IV.i. The Experience of Liminality in the Black Atlantic

Whereas modern Westerners have inherited an understanding for which the polarities and oppositions of the world are interpreted as mutually exclusive rather than mutually constitutive, this is not the case in the hermeneutic context of African and Afro-Atlantic traditions. To

⁴⁹ Although my approach to the phenomena spoken of in this essay is predominantly hermeneutic, this is not to the exclusion of ethnographic research. Indeed, as Vincent Crapanzano argues, the ethnographer is very much like the hermeneut insofar as they both take up the task of Hermes:

“a messenger who, given methodologies for uncovering the masked, the latent, the unconscious, may even obtain his message through stealth. He presents languages, cultures, and societies in all their opacity, their foreignness, their meaninglessness; then like the magician, the hermeneut, Hermes himself, he clarifies the opaque, renders the foreign familiar, and gives meaning to the meaningless. He decodes the message. He interprets” (Crapanzano 1986: 51_{ff.}; cf. 1992: *passim*).

Hermeneutics and ethnography are both practices of translating messages. “Like translation, ethnography is also a somewhat provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages—of cultures and societies” (Crapanzano 1986: 51).

elucidate this hermeneutic context, I show how the Afro-Atlantic traditions experience a liminal relationship between opposites like sacred/profane, divine/human, and self/other. In particular, I show how this liminal experience of oppositions is manifest in the African understanding of time, which appears in African traditional religions and in Afro-Atlantic religions.

Moreover, it is not an arbitrary decision to discuss the African understanding of time in distinguishing between the hermeneutic context of Western traditions and that of the Afro-Atlantic traditions. As Heidegger frequently mentions, the Western interpretations of being that speak in terms of various types of reified substance (e.g., Platonic idea, Cartesian *cogito*, Kantian noumenon) are different manifestations of the Western understanding of time as presence (Heidegger 1962; 1967; 1987: 205). Similarly, Derrida's works deconstruct the logocentric tendency of this "metaphysics of presence," showing how it suppresses and marginalizes the absence, difference, and mediation that accompany the delimitation of all presence, identity, and immediacy (Derrida 1997: 3, 22_f, 143, 309).

In contrast to this Western understanding of time as a presence that excludes the past and future, the African understanding tends to be oriented toward time as a passing, wherein phenomena in the present (and recent past and future) are experienced as returning to the sacred time whence they came. Scholars following the works of John S. Mbiti and Dominique Zahan interpret African experiences of the passing of time as time "moving backwards" (Mbiti: 17_{ff}; Zahan: 45; Olupona and Nyang: passim). Similarly, Eliade articulates understandings of time in traditional societies in terms of an eternal return of archetypal events that appeared in the sacred past, "*ab origine, in illo tempore*" (Eliade 1971: 27; 1987: 70). The everyday events of the present, past, and future continually pass toward their archetypal origins, moving back toward the sacred past.

In traditional African religions, the recent past, present, and future are not different ways of being present, but rather different ways of returning to the sacred past (and thus also from the sacred past). This understanding of time is thus also a liminal understanding of the relationship between the wholly other power of the sacred and the everyday presence of the profane world. As Jahn Janheinz argues, the “boundary between sacred and profane cannot be drawn as it is in Europe. Everything sacred has, as we have shown, a secular component, and everything secular a relevance to religion” (Janheinz: 83). Whereas Westerners understand the limits of that which is sacred, eternal, and infinite as excluding the limits of that which is profane, temporal, and finite, Africans experience the movement from everyday temporality to the sacred past as a continual passing of the same archetypal events, wherein opposites that Westerners consider mutually exclusive appear mutually constitutive. What is present to the self is always intertwined with the wholly other power of the sacred past. Accordingly, the African self is not a reified substance alienated from its natural environment; it is not a *cogito* separate from its body.

To further explicate the African understanding of time and the liminal experience of opposites, I discuss some of the temporal divisions articulated in various African calendars. Following this, I indicate the similarity between the African understanding of time and the Afro-Atlantic understanding of time, particularly by considering how the intercultural phenomenon of the Afro-Atlantic has maintained many of its African characteristics while emerging within oppressive modern contexts such as colonialism, the transatlantic slave trade, and globalization. After this, I interpret the musical expressions of trance that take place in the rituals of Vodou, Santería, and Candomblé.

A fundamental difference between the Western calendar and African calendars is expressed in Mbiti’s distinction between the “phenomenon calendars” of Africa and the

“numerical calendars” of the West (Mbiti: 17-19; Hollenweger: xi). The events demarcated in phenomenon calendars are determined by relationships that appear to be vitally important or significant to the people that live through those events; or as Mbiti says, “Time has to be experienced in order to make sense or to become real” (Mbiti: 17). On the other hand, the events demarcated in numerical calendars are determined by relationships that appear according to the abstract, homogeneous, and objective precision mathematics.

With numerical calendars, the wholly other power of temporality is thus reduced to the realm of that which is profane, familiar, typical, and normal. Eliade argues that this abstract and profane sense of time—spoken of in modern Western traditions in terms of historical progress—abhors any sense of time as an eternal return of a sacred past (Eliade 1971: 141). In contrast to this, phenomenon calendars are delimited by events experienced not as an abstract progression, but as a return to the sacred past. Africans do not understand the past and present as moving toward a future; rather, as N. S. Booth points out, “The future can be spoken of only in terms of past experiences which may be expected to recur in the future” (Booth: 91). Furthermore, insofar as phenomenal calendars do not abstract the returning rhythm of time from its phenomenological appearance, they do not abstract time from its appearance together with space. Mbiti notes that the intertwining of space and time is evident in the linguistic expressions of Africans. “Space and time are closely linked, and often the same word is used for both” (Mbiti: 26).

An example of an understanding of time as sacred return appears in the distinction made in the Swahili calendar between *Zamani*, the sacred past, and the everyday time characterizing the recent events of *Sasa*: “*Zamani* overlaps with *Sasa* and the two are not separable” (Mbiti: 21f). The everyday events of *Sasa* are not profane to the exclusion of the sacred; rather, the

everyday present, past, and future of *Sasa* are always already flowing into the sacred past of *Zamani*. *Zamani* is not some abstract mathematicized past, but a past that is always already coming to pass experientially, a past that always already has been, is, and will be happening. The recent events of *Sasa* pass into the sacred past of *Zamani*, and *Zamani* is present in the recent events of *Sasa*. The nearby past, present, and future have meaning according to the sacred past, which perpetually returns to the events of recent times.

Another example of a phenomenon calendar comes from the Ankore of Uganda, who orient their days around their relationship to their cattle (Mbiti: 19). The many times in the morning that Westerners speak of as between 6:00am and noon are referred to by the Ankore with one word, *akasheshe* (“milking time”). Noon is referred to as *bari omubirago*, which is the time when the people and the cattle rest. Roughly an hour later (1:00pm), the Ankore speak of *baaza ahamaziba* (“the time to draw water”). This time to draw water takes about an hour, at which point the time comes for letting the cattle drink, which is referred to as *amasyo niganywa*. The next hour (3:00pm) is referred to as *amasyo nigakuka*, which designates the time at which the cattle begin grazing again. The next time marked by the Ankore is roughly around 5:00pm, when the herdsmen begin driving the cattle home, which is referred to as *ente niitaha*. The cattle enter their sleeping places around an hour later (6:00pm), which is referred to *ente zaataha*. At around 7:00pm it is time for the cows to be milked again, “and this really closes the day” (20).

Time for milking cows does not appear in terms of some pre-established region of time; rather, the region of time called morning is expressed in terms of the region of time for milking the cows. Morning comes when the traditional activities of the morning return, specifically the vitally important traditional activities, such as tending to the cattle. The Ankore experience their

time as a return of the sacred past of tradition, a return of the events that encompass all of the phenomena experienced in the nearby past, present, and future.

Mbiti notes that along the equator, a vitally important event that delimits the calendars of many people is rain, which Africans along the equator experience as the cycle of two rainy seasons and two dry seasons (Mbiti: 21). A similar case can be found among the Baluba Shankadji, for whom the rainy season is called *diyo* and the dry season *busipo*, each of which lasts for a mathematical duration of about six months (Booth: 87). Furthermore, each passing of *diyo* into *busipo* or *busipo* into *diyo* marks the beginning of a whole new cycle, thus delimiting two years—one rainy, one dry—within the course of one Western year. Thus, if a person has lived through forty of these six-month seasons, the Baluba Shankadji would consider that person to be forty years old, whereas an American would consider the same person to have lived for only twenty years.

Another example of a phenomenal calendar is expressed according to another vitally important facet of African experience: the sun. Zahan notes that the Bantu-speakers of Kavirondo consider the East to be analogous to the “life, health, well-being, and prosperity” associated with the sun, whereas the West is identified with the “sickness, evil, bad luck, and death” that characterize the absence of the sun (Zahan: 67).⁵⁰ Morning is thus experienced as the rising sun brings back the light that nourishes life and health, continually making well-being and prosperity possible, while the setting of the sun repeatedly takes away light and life, thus bringing back death and bad luck every night. Furthermore, the return of the sun does not only mark the passing of days, but can also mark the passing of seasons. An example of this is found among the lagoon peoples of the Ivory Coast, for whom the height of the sun in the sky marks

⁵⁰ Furthermore, Zahan notes similar expressions of the east-west opposition among the Logoli, the Lamba of northern Rhodesia, the Abure, Aladian, Abidji, and others (Zahan: 67_f).

days and seasons according to its place along the East-West axis and North-South axis respectively (68).

The concept of time as sacred return is not as explicitly articulated in every calendar expressed in traditional African religions as it is with the aforementioned calendars. However, even calendars such as those of the Akan, which seem far more precise and homogeneous than the calendars mentioned thus far, are still found to express a concept of time as a return of the archetypal events of the past (Mbiti: 28). For the Akan, each year has nine months, and each month has forty-two days. Each forty-two day month is divided into six weeks with seven days each, although this is a fairly recent change from the division of the month into seven weeks with six days each. According to Mbiti, this fairly homogeneous calendar should still be considered as a phenomenon calendar rather than a numerical calendar. This is mainly for three reasons: 1) the Akan recognize the times of daily events according to the place of the sun, 2) months are organized according to agricultural cycles, and 3) each year is seen as a repetition of the same annual cycle, with no progression or other demarcation of year one and year two, three, four....

Thus, although we could not possibly describe the subtleties of every calendar expressed in traditional African religions, it is evident from the research of scholars like Mbiti and Zahan that the calendars of traditional African religions typically express time as a flow of events that has meaning based upon the events of the archetypal past. Time is thus a return of events that are experienced as prominent, authoritative, important, powerful, and in short, sacred. This understanding of sacred time is also evident in the experiences of human mortality and the passing of generations expressed in traditional African religions.

The traditional religions of Africa view the events of human life in the same way as other events—as a sacred return of that which is always already past, which in the case of human

beings is a sacred return of the dead. Human life is thus seen as a return of death and the dead, and death is seen as the sacred source of tradition and life. As Zahan expresses this point: “Life is born from death and death, in turn, is the prolongation of life” (Zahan: 45). This is particularly evident in the word designating “the ancestors” in the language of the Igbo, “*ndichie*,” which means “the returners,” i.e., those who return the past to the present (Booth: 89). Thus, the individual human being understands his or her present in terms of past people and generations, just as he or she understands everyday events according to past days, months, seasons, and years. Zahan states this point succinctly: “For the African, time is inconceivable without generations as its framework [...]. The human being goes backward in time: he is oriented toward the world of the ancestors” (Zahan: 45).⁵¹

Although this African experience of ancestors is often deemed “ancestor worship,” it is important to note Mbiti’s argument that the phrase “ancestor worship” is an inappropriate description both of African religions in general and of the relationship between the living and the dead in traditional African religions (Mbiti: 8f, 25). The phrase “ancestor worship” has often been used to designate the entirety of African religious traditions, but this phrase does not account for the many other diverse dimensions of these religions. Furthermore, the word “worship” is suggestive of a deification of the object of worship, whereas Africans have more of a sense of remembrance toward those who were once living human beings. Libations and other offerings made in remembrance of the dead are not symbols of worship, but symbols of hospitable respect and fellowship, of communion with the passing spirits of important people.

⁵¹ Zahan notes some important cases wherein the dead are not remembered by the living (Zahan: 49). This generally happens in cases when a person does not live according to the sacred order that marks the cycle of life. In particular, Zahan mentions the case of people who have died of “dishonorable” diseases, such as leprosy. Moreover, dying of such a disease is not just a case of deviating from the traditional life cycle, but also of deviating from the traditional burial practices (162). Other deviations from the traditional order that tend to keep one from being remembered after death include physical deformity, mental illness, and sudden or accidental death (49).

Depending upon their proximity to recent events, departed ancestors may be experienced as part of the archetypal time of sacred past or as part of the ordinary, everyday, profane time. Mbiti distinguishes between these two types of ancestors by discussing the difference between the “living-dead” and “spirits,” of which the former are ancestors that are recently departed but still remembered by name, and the latter are ancestors that are no longer remembered by name but are part of the “collective immortality” of the ancestors (Mbiti: 24-26, 74-83).⁵² In addition to these ancestral beings are spiritual beings that have never been human, but were created as spirits (74). A couple of examples further elucidate the understanding of time manifest in the experience of ancestors in traditional African religions.

Among the Baganda, the immortality of living-dead family members is distinguished from that of collective spirits, and also from that of national heroes (86-87). The living-dead are referred to as “*mizimu*,” a class of spirits that remains in the everyday presence of families and houses, benefiting those that remember them. Spirits that have lost these familial ties pass into a depersonalized class called “*misambwa*,” which designates spirits typically associated with the local people and with some of the natural things in the area (such as animals, trees, rivers, etc.). National heroes, leaders, and others who have been elevated to a high social and religious status are referred to as “*balubaale*.” These heroic spirits are something of a mixture of historical and mythological figures, considered divine to some extent while still having human stories or deeds attributed to them.

This tripartite division of immortal spirits is similar to that found in the Gikuyu tradition, wherein personal spirits, clan spirits, and national heroes are all distinguished from one another (88). Mbiti notes that the boundaries between these spirits are not clear and distinct, and they

⁵² Zahan speaks of the “glorious” and “illustrious” dead in much the same way as Mbiti does of the living dead; however, Zahan still refers to the glorious dead as ancestors (Zahan: 49-51).

vary depending upon the particular people that recognize these different classes. The overlapping of classes of ancestral beings expresses the overlapping of the everyday time of *Sasa* with the sacred past of *Zamani* (21-22). Each traditional African religion manifests this understanding of time in a unique way, depending upon what events are most vitally important for the tradition.

Although there is much variety within these different traditions, it is evident from what has been said that there is a tendency for African traditions to understand time as a return of a sacred past, wherein the events in the natural environment and in human beings are understood as manifestations of the perpetual return to the sacred. All temporal events are understood as repetitions of the original events (archetypes) of the sacred past. Sacred and profane are understood as the dynamic rhythm of return, and thus the oppositions between mortal and immortal, finite and infinite, self and other, human and divine are understood as mutually constitutive rather than mutually exclusive. Furthermore, insofar as African traditions tend to understand time according to the concrete experience of phenomena and not according to objective abstractions, the poles of oppositions like self/other, nature/culture and mind/body are not reified as they are in Western traditions; rather, such poles are understood liminally, with each term overlapping the limits of its opposite. To explicate this African sense of time as it is manifest in Afro-Atlantic traditions, I now turn to a discussion of how African traditions have maintained continuity while being transferred and translated into modern Western cultures.

The hermeneutic context of Afro-Atlantic traditions takes place precisely in the movement of African traditions toward other continents on the Atlantic Ocean, the main impetus for which was the transatlantic slave trade that accompanied the Western colonization of Africa. This transatlantic movement is often spoken of as a Diaspora—a concept that Gilroy thinks

“should be cherished for its ability to pose the relationship between ethnic sameness and differentiation: a *changing same*” (Gilroy: xi, 205-17).⁵³ Gilroy contrasts this understanding of transnational African culture as a changing same with the Cartesian sense of African culture that appears in some movements toward Afrocentrism or “Africentricity,” which reify the racial and ethnic heritage of Africa and focus on clearly distinguished boundaries of a “true self” that is closed off from the doubling or splitting of the self appearing in transnational and intercultural events (Gilroy: 53, 188, 246). Gilroy argues that what has remained the same in the changing identity of Afro-Atlantic culture is not one particular racial quality or one particular indigenous tradition; rather, what has remained the same is precisely the “desire to transcend” the political constraints and geographical boundaries of particular ethnicities and nationalities (Gilroy: 19).

Moreover, this desire to transcend limits is not merely a social or political desire. It is also a desire to transcend the limits that separate the sacred from the profane; it is a desire for the return of the sacred. As Judy Rosenthal found in her explorations of the Vodou practices in West Africa (specifically in Ghana, Togo, and Benin), experiences of spirit possession are understood in Vodou as instances of liminality or “border crossing,” with the sacred power of divinity overwhelming the entranced consciousness, dissolving the limits of life and death, mortality and divinity, masculine and feminine, and master and slave (Rosenthal: 75, 100f). It is important to note that these liminal experiences of boundaries also appear in types of Vodou situated in other Atlantic contexts, such as in Haitian Voudoun.⁵⁴

⁵³ Gilroy notes that the concept of Diaspora “was imported into Pan-African politics and black history from unacknowledged Jewish sources” (Gilroy: xi). In Jewish history, the term Diaspora originally signified the group of Jews exiled to Babylon sometime after 586 BCE, when the First Temple was destroyed; and presently, Jews understand the term Diaspora to refer to all communities of Jews residing somewhere other than Israel (Jacobs: 42).

⁵⁴ Maya Deren’s account of her experiences researching Haitian Voudoun gives many examples of how these Haitians experienced the boundaries between oppositions as being cooperative, co-relative, and co-constitutive. Deren observes that the figure of the cross-roads, which is represented in mirrors and in the center pole around which ritual dances take place, “is the most important of all ritual figures” (Deren: 35). Furthermore, Deren herself

Furthermore, Vodou practitioners do not understand the liminality of trance in terms that are separated from their understanding of political border crossing.⁵⁵ Political border crossing is part of the basic character of the relationship of people to the gods. Some Vodou practices were brought to West Africa from further north (around present day Nigeria) by Africans displaced by colonization, and thus Vodou practitioners associate otherness with the northern land (Rosenthal: 253; Friedson: 7_f). This intertwining of political and religious self/other relations also appears in spatial and geographical metaphors that Ewe-speakers use to express the phenomenon of spirit possession in terms of border crossing.⁵⁶

For example, when a person first goes into trance, an onlooker might say, “Eyi emogodo,” which means “She went to the other side of the street.” I have also heard “Eyi Dagati” or “Eyi Yendi,” indicating that the person in trance has suddenly been transported to northern towns (Rosenthal: 252_f).

Rosenthal also mentions that the Ewe word for border (*edin*) is used mainly to speak of “state-defined national borders,” and that this conceptual understanding of borders came into West Africa through the globalizing effects of colonialism (253). Rather than assimilating to the Western understanding of limits, Rosenthal found that Africans transformed the Western sense

became possessed on many occasions, describing her own consciousness during possession in terms of the liminality of light and darkness, which she expressed as the overwhelming force of a “white darkness”—both a glory and a terror—that pulses with the ritual drumming and singing, drowning her individual ego (247-62, 323_f).

⁵⁵ As Turner notes, an experience of liminality must always have social and political implications. “The attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* (“threshold people”) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (Turner 1969: 95).

⁵⁶ By “metaphors” I do not mean merely linguistic structures that bear a merely incidental or arbitrary relationship to the structures of experience. Rather, I am using the word “metaphors” in the sense articulated by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, who provide a cogent account of how metaphors express relationships that structure the way humans experience the various dimensions of their understanding, such as aesthetic, ritual, spatial, political, and ontological dimensions (Lakoff and Johnson: 3-15, 25_f, 229-37). Thus, metaphor carries meaning beyond (*meta*, “beyond”; *pherein*, “to carry”) one structure and into another, and this linguistic structure is the expression of an experiential structure (77, 228).

of borders from modern reification, stability, and identity to one of “(post)modern” border crossing and a “continual reworking of identity” (119).

This liminal sense of identity is also evident in the way African converts to Christianity have responded to the demonization and diabolicization of their indigenous tradition by colonialist missionary efforts to convert Africans to Christianity. Birgit Meyer shows how 19th century German pietism initiated missionary efforts that did not doubt or deny the power of the traditional African religions; rather, these missionaries interpreted these traditions as satanic, demonic, and diabolical, thus bringing converts to translate their traditional liminal understanding of identity into an understanding of the liminality of their satanic identity with their Christian identity (Meyer 1999; 2002). Rosalind Hackett states Meyer’s point succinctly, “The satanic Other has to be chased away from its hold over a person’s spirit and replaced by the divine Other, the Holy Spirit” (Hackett: 183). Thus, the converts still have to live with the ambiguous and contradictory limits of their changing identities.

A liminal sense of identity is also evident in the “double consciousness” that the African-American writer W. E. B. DuBois (1868-1963) describes as a fundamental characteristic of his identity as both an “American” and a “Negro.” Indeed, it is precisely DuBois’ concept of “double consciousness” that Gilroy appropriates in the very title of his work on the black Atlantic—*The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Gilroy: 58). DuBois describes how the American world does not bring to the African any substantial sense of self-consciousness,

but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a

world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two warring souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body (DuBois: 5).

Thus, in being translated into Western contexts such as modernization, colonialism, and the slave trade, the African sense of liminality was also translated into this context.

Rather than assimilating to the hegemony of homogeneity found in the modern West, African traditions maintained a sense of the irreconcilable tension between opposites, the irreducible intertwinement of identity and difference, presence and absence, self and other, sacred and profane. Furthermore, this liminal sense of Afro-Atlantic identity is not only evident in instances of Africans and African-Americans encountering the context of the modern West, it can also be seen in other Afro-Atlantic traditions, such as the Afro-Cuban tradition of Santería, and the Afro-Brazilian tradition of Candomblé. To further interpret the liminality experienced in the context of these Afro-Atlantic traditions, I show how practitioners of Vodou in West African, Santería in Cuba, and Candomblé in Brazil understand the phenomenon of spirit possession in terms of the mutually constitutive relationship between oppositions such as self/other, sacred/profane, human/divine, and animal/human. Following this, I show how the rhythms played by drums in Afro-Atlantic spirit possession rituals express an understanding of trance as a liminal phenomenon.

IV.ii. The Rhythm of Spirit Possession in the Afro-Atlantic

First, it is important to describe the basic characteristics of Vodou, Santería, and Candomblé, particularly with reference to how trance is experienced within these contexts. All of these religions have their origins in Africa, specifically West Africa. Vodou is a religion practiced by people in West Africa (e.g., Ghana, Togo, and Benin). This spelling of Vodou is based on the

use of the word among the Ewe-speaking people of West Africa. It is spelled and pronounced differently depending upon the language in which it is practiced and the orthography used to spell it. The Fōn speaking people of West Africa call this tradition Vodun, whereas the Vodou of the Americas is sometimes called Voudoun (Haiti) or Voodoo (United States). Janheinz notes that Vodou “comes from Dahomey in West Africa, where it means ‘genius, protective spirit’” (Janheinz: 29).

Rosenthal remarks that the word is often capitalized when denoting Vodou the religion and not capitalized when denoting a *vodu* in the sense of a “deity, spirit, or god-object” (Rosenthal: 1). In some regions of Ghana and Benin, a *vodu* is more specifically a *gorovodu*, which means kola nut god (kola nut is *goro* in Hausa, *bisi* in Ewe), which suggests the importance of this caffeinated nut for this religion (Friedson: 7; Rosenthal: 264_f). To speak of *vodu* in the plural, the Ewe add the suffix “-wo”, thus saying *voduwo* to speak of more than one *vodu*. These Dahomean deities are not unlike those found in other pantheons throughout the world’s religious traditions, with figures like those of a creator god (Mawu), spirits associated with the powers of nature (e.g., Ochún, spirit of rivers), a god of iron and war (Ogún), and a trickster (Legba) who delivers messages between gods and people (Hagedorn: 251; Herskovits: 139-50; Sublette: 213).⁵⁷

In Vodou, the phenomenon of spirit possession occurs when a *vodu* (also called a “*tro*”) entrances an initiate, who is called the *vodusi* (or *troisi*)—the bride of the *vodu*—with the suffix

⁵⁷ Mawu has been called the female principle of the Creator (Herskovitz: 124). However, Geurts argues that the full appellation of the Creator (Mawu-Segbo-Lisa) expresses a more complex identity of Mawu, where Mawu is sexless, Segbo is masculine, and Lisa is feminine. For our purposes here, the proper definition of these terms can remain ambiguous (Geurts: 172_f).

“-*si*” denoting the status of a bride (Rosenthal: 11_{ff}).⁵⁸ In Vodou and in similar Afro-Atlantic traditions, the gods are said to mount and ride their brides in the way people mount and ride horses (Friedson; Valéz: 14).⁵⁹ This ride appears in the form of a trance dance, wherein the performance of rhythms associated with a particular god call the god to mount the trancer, who is then dressed in the clothing associated with that god, dancing the movements of that god’s dance (Rosenthal: 6_f).

As Friedson notes, the trance dance of the *troisi* “entails a complete sacrifice of persona and a total concealing of ego in order to allow the unconcealing of the sanctified presence of the Other” (Friedson: 14). The trance dance of the *troisi* is not experienced or remembered by the *troisi*. After *transitioning* back to one’s personal identity after the trance, one has no recollection of any lapse of time; or in the pathologizing words of modern medicine, the trancer is amnesic. No longer conscious, the *troisi* resembles a horse, which has no experience of itself as being ridden, for it has no experience of any hermeneutic *as*-structure. At the same time, the *troisi* also appears to be a dancing *tro*, with such a command over its horse that there is no distinguishable characteristic between them. The trancer’s sense of self is thus part of a liminal conjoining of humanity with the sacred dance of horse (animality) and rider (divinity), as the limits of the trancer’s self are mounted and completely overwhelmed by the entrancing power of the god.

During the slave trade, practitioners of Vodou arrived in Cuba along with practitioners of other similar West African forms of religion. One of these West African religions was that of the Yoruba, which came from the Oyó civilization (in present day Nigeria) (Sublette: 171). The type

⁵⁸ A bride of a *vodu* need not be female. Rosenthal observes that limits of gender are transitory in the world of Vodou, they appear as “a movable festival of signs,” females and males can both be brides, and gods too can be male, female, hermaphroditic, or asexual (Rosenthal, p. 11_{ff}).

⁵⁹ The epigraph to Deren’s *Divine Horsemen* states this metaphor in a Haitian Proverb: “Great Gods cannot ride little horses” (cf. Deren: 78, 95). The image of the horse is particularly relevant because of the power that horses have symbolized in military encounters. For discussions of the types of horses in West Africa and the sociopolitical significance they have had there, see Law (1976) and Elbl (1991).

of deity the Yoruba people worship (i.e., the *orisha*) is very similar to that of the Vodou, particularly insofar as both of these traditions—in their African and Afro-Atlantic manifestations—have deities that appear in the phenomenon of trance dance (Janheinz: 62; Rouget: 27; Valéz: 62). In Cuba, the practice of Vodou came to be known by the Spanish name Arará, and the *orisha*-worship of Yoruba came to be known as the *orichas*-worship associated with the language of Lucumí, which comes from the Yoruba word *akumí*—“a name given to a native of Aku, a region of Nigeria where many Yorubas came from” (González-Wippler 1992: 2).

With Cuba colonized by the Spanish, their Catholic religion became a dominant part of Cuban culture. As the Cuban slave-holders suppressed the African traditions of their slaves, the religion of the Lucumí began to integrate (or “syncretize”) many elements of Catholicism with their own practices. Particularly important is that the names and symbols for Catholic saints (*santos* in Spanish) came to be used fairly interchangeably with the names and symbols for *orichas*. Santería—also called Regla de Ocha (the Law of the Oricha)—arose with this blending of Catholicism and Lucumí by Afro-Cubans (Hagedorn: 250-54). Catholicism has provided Africans with a way to practice Santería with a more diverse pantheon while still appearing to obey the authority of Catholic slave-holders (Sublette: 213). Thus, in Santería, one is not merely married to an *oricha*, but to an *oricha* that is simultaneously a *santo*. Being possessed by one’s *oricha* is thus spoken of as being in a state of *santo*.

Katherine Hagedorn notes that practitioners of Santería have to give up their consciousness to the *oricha* in order to become possessed, deconstructing the identity of the ego to allow the construction of the divine identity of the trance dancer (Hagedorn: 109, 215). This deconstruction of ego-consciousness is brought on by the sacred intent of all those participating

in the musical performance of the *toque de santo*—the performance of the rhythms (*toques*) that celebrate the *orichas/santos* (75, 100). This trance dance allows those present at the performance to engage in communication that intertwines the limits of everyday, normal, profane world with those of the sacred. As in Vodou, the movements of the entranced dance, the music being played, and the clothes and gestures of the possessed all signify the identity of the *oricha* possessing a person (44, 167_f). In the dance, music, and drama of the *toque de santo*, the sacred power of the *orichas* intertwines with the limits of the visible and the audible. This liminal experience of the sacred is also manifest in trances that take place in secular situations when the music is not intended to bring down the *orichas* (Hagedorn: 109_f; Sublette: 232).

The liminality of trance in Vodou and Santería is similar to instances of spirit possession that occur in the context of the Afro-Brazilian syncretization of African *orisha* worship with devotion to the Catholic saints (Rouget: 25). In Brazil, outsiders speak of Yoruba practitioners as Nagos, and just as the predominantly Catholic orientation of the colonialists and slave-holders in Cuba occasioned the syncretization of Catholicism and Yoruba, the Catholicism of the Portuguese colonialists and slave-holders in Brazil occasioned a similar syncretization of Catholicism with Yoruba practices (Canizares: 3). This Afro-Brazilian religion has many different incarnations, each with practices and beliefs that vary depending upon where in Brazil it is practiced (Wafer: 4_f). In Bahia, Brazil, the blending of *orisha* worship (*orixá* in Portuguese orthography) with the worship of Catholic saints (*santos*) goes by the name Candomblé. Moreover, Rachel Harding suggest that “more significant than any measure of African-Catholic ‘syncretism’ in Candomblé was pan-African syncretic formulation arising from the interactions of people of a variety of African ritual traditions” (Harding: 39). Afro-Brazilian religion in general can thus be understood as a blend of various “inter ethnic commonalities” shared by

traditions from the African Diaspora, and not merely as a syncretization of African and Catholic traditions (40).

A common factor uniting many of these Afro-Brazilian religions, and uniting Afro-Atlantic religion in general, is the presence of music, dance, and spirit possession during religious ceremonies (Browning: 23). Indeed, Harding argues that the possession ritual in particular is one of the most unifying characteristics of many African and Afro-American traditions insofar as “possession (and, by extension, initiation) expresses the fundamental nature of the relationship between human beings and deities. It is a relationship of exchange, of mutuality, of shared responsibility, and above all, of accompaniment” (Harding: 154).

To interpret how the phenomenon of possession becomes expressed in these Afro-Atlantic traditions through musical accompaniment, it is helpful to distinguish the type of trance called “spirit possession” from shamanic trance. After explicating this distinction, I show how the rhythms accompanying spirit possession in the Afro-Atlantic express a liminal experience of opposites. Rouget distinguishes between shamanic trance and possession trance, the latter of which is then divided into “identificatory,” “inspirational,” and “communal” trances (Rouget: 17-29). Moreover, these distinctions are not mutually exclusive; a trance can admit of some degree of each of these different types.

The phenomenological structure of trances occurring in spirit possession is the polar opposite of the structure of trance phenomena occurring in shamanic trances. In possession, “it is no longer the man who visits the inhabitants of the invisible world but, on the contrary, the latter who visit him” (Rouget: 19). In shamanism, the shaman travels through other worlds and brings back information from these worlds to perform healing, divination, and other rituals. In possession, the spirits come down into some body within the world, and they transmit their

information in person, rather than through the shaman. The different types of spirit possession vary according to the degree with which one becomes identified with one's possessor. In identificatory possession, one actually becomes one's possessor, one *is* the spirit; in inspirational possession, one becomes invested with the spirit and embodies it; and in communal possession, one encounters the spirit but does not embody it (26).

Rouget further differentiates between shamanism and possession by articulating a fundamental difference between musical performances that accompany shamanic trance and those that accompany spirit possession. The difference regards the state of the person playing the music. In possession, it is music played by other people that occasions the phenomenon of trance; it is never the trancer's own music (110). In shamanism the reverse is the case; the shaman plays the music that occasions his or her own trance. The music and trance of possession are thus correlated with one another. Because the spirit becomes embodied, the trancer cannot be busy playing the music; others have to play the music. In contrast, because the spirits do not take over the shaman's body, he or she is free to play the music rather than perform the duties of the spirits.

The trance dances of Vodou, Santería, and Candomblé belong primarily in the category of identificatory possession trance: "trance" because of the movement, music, and other *transitional* sensations involved in the phenomenon; "possession" because the deity becomes embodied in the bride of the deity (whereas the shaman makes a voyage toward the other worlds of the gods); "identificatory" because the bride of the deity is completely identified with whatever deity she is embodying in her performance, having no individual consciousness or memory of the trance.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ This sense of performance must not be taken in a mere objective or aesthetic sense but in a liminal sense, such as Richard Schechner articulated, wherein performers "focus their techniques not on making one person into another but on encouraging the performer to act in-between identities; in this sense, performing is a paradigm of liminality. And what is liminality but literally the 'threshold,' the space that both separates and joins spaces: the essence of in-

This identification of a divine horseman with his mount manifests the human body as the limit between divinity (horsemen) and animality (horses). In identificatory possession, the human body is both horse and divine horseman at once, both sacred and profane, both self and other. In the music of rituals in Vodou, Santería, and Candomblé, the liminal experience of trance becomes expressed through the liminal rhythms of the accompanying instrumental sounds. By elucidating the liminal structure of such rhythms, it is possible to show how these Afro-Atlantic traditions express trance through the sounds of musical performance.

To begin with, it is important to remember that the Afro-Atlantic experience of time and rhythm is not one that considers oppositions mutually exclusive, but rather mutually constitutive. This means that the aesthetic experience of rhythm is not alienated from the religious or social experiences of rhythm. Thus, Kofi Agawu (1995) points out that the Ewe-speaking peoples of West Africa experience rhythm in all dimensions of their existence, in music just as much as in the cycles of the calendar, the passing of generations, and the everyday rhythms of social existence. The African experience of music is intertwinement with all aspects of African existence. Stephan Coan (1978) speaks of this matter in his film *The Dancing Lion*: “For Africans, there is life and there is music – the two are never separate. Everything from birth to death, from drinking to dancing, is accompanied by music.” David Byrne (1989) notices a similar intertwinement of the many dimensions of experience in Candomblé, opening the liner notes to his film *Ilé Aiyé* (“the House of Life”) with the following remark: “Candomblé is art, religion, music, theater, gastronomy, dance, poetry and more all at once.” Thus, although this

betweenness?” (Schechner: 295). Schechner and his liminal understanding of theatrical performance are important influences on Turner’s research into the liminality of ritual performance (Turner 1982: 15_{ff.}, 105, 112). Furthermore, Janice Boddy argues that the performative aspect of spirit possession rituals is intertwined with its religious significance: “it is clear the aesthetic and performance dimensions of possession are inseparable from its spirituality, its capacity to reformulate identity or to heal” (Boddy: 424).

present investigation focuses on the expression of trance in the rhythmic sounds of music, this is but one of many ways in which the Afro-Atlantic experience of trance comes into expression.

An example of the musical expression of trance in Vodou is articulated by Steven Friedson, who describes a trance dance occurring at one of the Brekete shrines along the Guinea Coast of West Africa, wherein an old woman named Adzo was possessed by Ketesi (an epithet for the *gorovodu* named Bangle, the soldier).⁶¹ Brekete is a double-headed snare drum that came from the north with the foreign gods, and this drum is used “to call the gods to descend and dance” (Friedson: 7). Other trancers were also being ridden by Bangle, and Bangle was also present as a fetish, but as Friedson observes, “Bangle in Adzo is something slightly different than Bangle in someone else, which is different than Bangle as fetish” (12).⁶² When possessing a *troisi* (such as Adzo), the wholly other power of a *tro* (such as Bangle) dances into visible existence, and still has power to bring the invisibility of its sacred power into other visible phenomena, other fetishes, other *trosiwo*, and each embodiment manifests the same deity in changing appearances.

In this case, the possession occurred on the third and final day of a triennial cow sacrifice, a *fetatrotro*. During these three days, all day and night were spent celebrating. There was “almost constant music making, and three days of chewing kola nut and drinking *akpeteshie*, the locally distilled gin” (9). Kola nut and alcohol work simultaneously to stimulate and depress the activity of the nervous system, thus bringing the body to the opposing limits of stimulation and depression. Everybody at the celebration could thus be described as experiencing a

⁶¹ I am indebted to Friedson for his granting me the use of an unpublished manuscript about his own experiences researching the phenomenon of trance dancing as it appears among the Ewe-speaking people of the Guinea Coast.

⁶² In Vodou and in other Afro-Atlantic traditions, gods can become embodied in many manifestations at once. Janheinz discusses this type of phenomenon as it occurs in Haitian Voudoun, where a vodou is called a loa. “It is also possible, therefore, that several dancers may be ridden by the same loa if they react to the same specific beat” (Janheinz: 39).

psychopharmacological liminality, with the stimulation and depression of the nervous system simultaneously stimulating and depressing one another. However, the psychopharmacological experience of metabolizing caffeine and alcohol for three days is not sufficient to occasion the trance dance; music is needed to call the gods. When it was time for Bangle to ride his mount, he was called with drumming, which provided a liminal rhythm to invoke the occasion of an entranced dance.

The music for Bangle is “the slow groove of *agbadza*” (which literally means ‘gunbelt’ and signifies the “classic war drum of the Ewe”) is played at burials and at wake-keeping celebrations such as the *fetatrotro* (11). The rhythms of *agbadza* are polymetrical cross-rhythms, which manifest the limits of two different metrical patterns, a two-pulse and three-pulse beat. In other words, a succession of six pulses of *agbadza* is heard according to the co-occurrence of two three-pulse beat (123/456) and three two-pulse beats (12/34/56).⁶³ Western music theory—with its foundation in the mathematical theories of the Greeks—traditionally refers to such a co-occurrence of even and odd meters as a hemiola, wherein the odd/even ratio is typically expressed as “two *against* three” or “three *against* two,” thus reducing the co-relative co-occurrence of meters to a normal or regular meter being juxtaposed with an abnormal or irregular meter.

Hemiola is thus a form of syncopation, as it is typically understood as a “regular shifting of each beat in a measured pattern by the same amount ahead of or behind its normal position in that pattern” (Sadie: vol. 18, 469). In terms of hemiola or syncopation, the juxtaposition of two different meters is interpreted with one beat or meter being “normal” and another deviating from

⁶³ Janheinz provides a helpful description of the interpenetration of many meters that characterizes “the principle of *crossed rhythms*; that is, the main accents of the basic forms employed do not agree, but are overlaid in criss-cross fashion over one another, so that, in polymetry, for example, the particular basic metres begin not simultaneously but at different times” (Janheinz: 165).

that norm, but African traditions do not consider normal and abnormal rhythm to be mutually exclusive opposites that come together in the syn-thetic act of syn-copation (literally “striking together”: from the Greek *syn*, “together” and *koptein*, “striking”) (Watkins: 43). In other words, the traditions of Africa and the Afro-Atlantic do not interpret their music in terms of the Western concept of syncopation (Sublette: 81, 135). As Hagedorn argues, the polyrhythm characterizing the music of the Afro-Atlantic spirit possession rituals challenges the Western listener, particularly insofar as the plurality of polyrhythm deconstructs the “rhythmic equilibrium” of all listeners, an equilibrium that is considered self-evident truth by Western standards (Hagedorn: 46).

The terms “cross-rhythm” and “cross-accent”—both of which indicate a shifting (or “crossing”) between different accents or rhythms—seem more appropriate than “syncopation” for denoting the liminal interplay between the different meters of *agbadza*, but typical Western discourse still expresses this interplay in terms of a “normal” rhythm being accompanied by a consistent deviation from that rhythm (Sadie: vol. 5, 62-64). Sublette suggests that the music of African and Afro-Atlantic cultures is better described as “a nonhierarchical music consisting of an intricate polyrhythm” (Sublette: 49). The term “polyrhythm” (and also “polymetry”) indeed seems helpful in expressing the co-occurrence of a plurality of rhythms; but as Dufrenne notes, the distinction between “mono-” or “poly-” occurs only after reflecting on the unified whole of a rhythmic phenomenon. “Polyrhythm exists only upon analysis”; and accordingly, rhythm is never reducible to any “algorithm of a succession” (Dufrenne: 257).

The juxtaposition of odd and even meters in the music of the Afro-Atlantic expresses a co-relevant, co-constitutive structure, wherein the limits of opposites evoke one another. Accordingly, in the music of *agbadza*, hemiola (or polyrhythm, cross-rhythm, etc.) is not simply

a technical contrivance employed as an aesthetic decoration. The ambiguity of the cross-rhythms implies the constant possibility of crossing between two-pulse or three-pulse meters. Two-pulse patterns and three-pulse patterns can be interchanged and crossed because the metrical framework of the rhythm is itself liminal. It is not that there is a distinctly separate meter that is then synced to another meter; instead, either meter always already becomes understood with the delimitation of the other meter. Thus, the *agbadza* manifests the liminality of a polymetrical framework, which is audible in the cross-rhythms of two-pulse and three-pulse beats. The musical liminality of *agbadza* expresses the liminal structure that appears in the trance dance.

Furthermore, the liminality of *agbadza* is also manifest in the Afro-Atlantic understanding of rhythm as a return that intertwines past, present, and future. Whereas Western musicians count the passing of beats in an abstract order (e.g., 1-2-3, or 1-2-3-4), African cultures do not understand time in terms of an abstract succession that interprets the first beat and the last beat as mutually exclusive points in time. Africans understand time as more like a repeating hierophany—a repetition of the liminal experience of the sacred. Thus, Friedson notes that when you ask an Ewe drummer at what point the first beat of the repeating sequence occurs (i.e., “Where is one?”), the drummers simply tell you to listen to the bell (Friedson: 18). When listening to the bell, one can hear every beat repeating the co-occurrence of odd and even meters. There is no “one,” no first beat in the sequence, because there is no abstract sequence of homogeneous beats.

As Friedson says, the rhythm of the bell is part of a structure of “cross-rhythmic ambiguity, simultaneously open to multiple readings” (19). The bell plays a rhythm that intertwines different meters in each beat, thus intertwining the presence of one meter with the absence of the other, making every beat an audible expression of liminality. The liminal rhythm

of *agbadza* expresses the liminal structure of trance, wherein the intertwinement of deity and trancer manifests a liminality that Western discourse interprets in terms of the oppositions of presence/absence, self/other, conscious/unconscious, sacred/profane, divine/human/animal. Furthermore, the intertwinement of odd and even meters is similarly expressed in the music of Candomblé and Santería. In Candomblé, the polymetrical rhythms that call down the *orixás* are played on two instruments, an *agôgô* (two conjoined hollow iron cones beaten with iron pins) and *atabaques* (tall, wooden, single-headed drums) (Lewiston; Wafer: 136). In some cases only one of each of these instruments is present; but in all cases, these instruments play cross-rhythms to call the gods (Browning: 10-13).⁶⁴

In Santería, cross-rhythms can be heard in the music of the three *batá* drums used to call the *orichas*: 1) the *iyá* (the mother drum, the largest of the three), 2) *itótele* (or *omelé enkó*), and 3) *okónkolo* (or *omelet*, the smallest of the three drums) (Amira and Cornelius: 1, 15-18, 35; Hagedorn: 124-26).⁶⁵ Similar to the bell pattern in Vodou, the main rhythm of the *batá* drums can be heard in polymetrical structure of the clave (a Spanish word literally meaning “key” or “clef”) (Amira and Cornelius: 23f). In traditional Cuban terminology, clave signifies either an instrument (a pair of sticks) or the basic rhythm of a performance (which was often played on the instrument of the same name). Just as the bell pattern of *agbadza* established the cross-rhythms

⁶⁴ In her work on *Samba: Resistance in Motion*, Barbara Browning notices the intertwinement of the sacred and the profane in the way the music of Candomblé uses rhythms from samba. The “entrance of the profane into a sacred space” that is occasioned by the irruption of samba rhythms into the Candomblé ceremony serves to reaffirm the fact that the *orixás* are not deities restricted to some wholly other realm of transcendence; rather, the coinciding of profane and sacred music reinforces the cohesion of the *orixás*, as their power intertwines sacred and secular realms alike (Browning: 27).

⁶⁵ Examples of these polymetrical rhythms can be heard in any of the performances of Santería, such as those recorded on the CD accompanying Hagedorn’s work as well as on other compilations of recorded performances (Hagedorn: 256-258). Particularly noteworthy are recordings on the Smithsonian Folkways label such as *Sacred Rhythms of Cuban Santería (Ritmos Sagrados de la Santería Cubana)* (1995). Also, many recordings compile the music of Santería together with other forms of music occurring in the Black Atlantic. The three CDs of *Africa en America: Música de 19 países* (1992) is an excellent example of such a compilation because it contains pieces of music from 19 different Afro-Atlantic countries.

that call the gorovodu Bangle, the pattern of clave establishes the cross-rhythms with which *orichas* are called in Santería (25).

In intertwining duple and triple meters, the music of Afro-Atlantic spirit possession rituals expresses the liminal experience of opposites that characterizes the structure of trance manifest in spirit possession, wherein the sacred power of a *tro*, *vodu*, or *orisha* (*oricha*, *orixá*) becomes revealed at the limits of a human body, the limits where horses are mounted by divine horsemen. The liminality of cross-rhythms discloses the liminal structure of trance, which becomes understood in Afro-Atlantic rituals as the intersection and interpenetration of opposites like sacred and profane, horses and horsemen, self and other, identity and difference, and presence and absence.

In the trance dance, the limits of the trancer are overwhelmed by the sacred rhythm that makes possible the delimitation of self and other, sacred and profane, divinity and animality, presence and absence, conscious and unconscious, possessor and possessed. In other words, the trancer's experience is one wherein opposites become understood as co-relative, co-constitutive, and co-operative, intersecting and interpenetrating one another. The liminal structure of trance is expressed in the cross-rhythms that structure the music that calls the gods in the rituals of Vodou, Santería, Candomblé, and other religions of the black Atlantic.

Moreover, unlike the trance and ecstasy experienced by Westerners like William Blake or Friedrich Nietzsche, the hermeneutic context of the black Atlantic does not suppress the liminality of trance in favor of a rational, reified, abstract, substantive understanding of the world. This is not to say that the forces of colonialism and globalization do not suppress trance in the Afro-Atlantic. Rather, this is simply to say that the hermeneutic context of the Afro-Atlantic is more hospitable to trance than that of the West. This is particularly evident in the

difference between the Afro-Atlantic and Western interpretations of time. In the context of the Afro-Atlantic, the intertwining of opposites like presence/absence, self/other, and sacred/profane appear in every dimension of existence, including experiences of the cycles of sunrise and sunset, the passing of generations, the arrival of the rainy season, and the polymetrical rhythm of musical performance.

Thus, the intertwining of oppositions (e.g., male/female, sacred/profane, self/other, consciousness/amnesia, divinity/animality) that occurs when divine horsemen ride their mounts is not understood as some pathology that should never befall a healthy human being. The intertwining of opposites is understood as part of the liminality that accompanies all experience. For William Blake, the assertion that all experience is visionary experience—a liminal interplay of opposites—was quite antagonistic to the conventional modern interpretation of trance. Indeed, as Youngquist says of trance (madness, ego-loss) in Western society, “To pursue the truth of madness, the truth, that is, of ego-loss, is to gamble away a place in society” (60).

CONCLUSION

This present essay does not attempt to reach any conclusive position regarding musical and poetic expressions of trance. It is not my intention to make judgments about whether trance is real or illusory, true or false, divine or diabolical. My purpose in this essay is one of phenomenological hermeneutics; in other words, my purpose is to interpret experiences by speaking about phenomena as such, that is, as appearances of concealed structure that become unconcealed to the understanding, as revelations of the wholly other power of the sacred. In interpreting phenomena wherein the sacred becomes audible in the phenomenon of trance, this essay shows how trance phenomena become understood through poetic and musical expression.

This essay shows how the history of Western civilization has been a history of the suppression of trance. The Western understanding of trance is logocentric, rationalizing the ambiguous limits of ego-loss and suppressing the otherness that becomes manifest in trance. The modern West tends to interpret the boundary dissolution that occurs in trance as a symptom of madness, or in more contemporary clinical language, psychosis, disassociation, schizophrenia, and hallucination. In other cases, moderns consider trance to be a farce, a joke, a scam, or the work of the devil or other diabolic forces.

As a modern European, William Blake was born into a situation quite inhospitable to trance. However, Blake never interpreted his visionary experiences in the conventional terms of his society. Instead, Blake expressed his liminal experiences of innocence and experience, good and evil, infinite and finite, eternal and temporal, and divinity and humanity through visionary art. Just as his visionary experiences were characterized by the manifestation of liminal, co-constitutive, co-relative, interpenetrating oppositions, so also is his poetry characterized by the liminal juxtaposition of symmetries and asymmetries in every letter, phoneme, word, line,

stanza, and metaphor. This essay shows in particular how the patterns of sound appearing in Blake's poem "The Tyger" express the liminal structure of trance, wherein the wholly other power of the infinite overwhelms the limits separating the goodness and innocence of the Lamb from the evil and experience of the Tyger.

Being outside the hermeneutic context of modern Western civilization, the practitioners of Afro-Atlantic religions like Vodou, Santería, and Candomblé understand liminality to be part of all experience. In the black Atlantic, the liminal rhythm of opposites is manifest in all experiences of presence and absence, self and other, male and female, animality and divinity, and sacred and profane. Just as William Blake expressed his visionary experiences of liminality through the liminal structures of his poetry, the religions of the black Atlantic express the liminality of the trance dance through the cross-rhythms of their musical performances. Furthermore, the religions of the black Atlantic manifest trance as part of their normal rituals, and thus, unlike Blake, those who experience spirit possession in these religions are not alienated from their religious institutions because of their trances.

In Blake's poetry and in the rhythms of Afro-Atlantic music, experiences of being entranced by the sacred become audible expressions of the boundary dissolution, border crossing, and intertwining of opposites that occur in trance. For Blake and for practitioners of Afro-Atlantic religions, the liminality of trance is understood as a basic part of all existence, and thus the music and poetry that express the liminality of trance are not understood as merely aesthetic expressions, but also as expressions of the fundamental relationship between human beings and the wholly other power of the sacred.

My aim is to deconstruct the logocentric tendencies of the Western interpretation of trance, thus 1) making it possible to discuss trance as a sacred phenomenon without disparaging

any particular interpretation of trance or of the sacred, and 2) making it possible to discuss musical and poetic expressions of trance without interpreting them as deviations from a form of expression that is more ideal, immediate, or present. In other words, this essay is an exercise in restraint: holding back judgments and presuppositions until arriving at the frontier where musical and poetic trances are becoming revealed as such, becoming understood at the limits of my own hermeneutic context. In holding back the logocentric presuppositions of modern Western civilization, it is possible to hear poetry and music manifesting the entrancing power of the sacred; it is possible to hear others sounding sacred.

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