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**ECSTATIC ANTHEMS: MUSIC AND THE PERSISTENCE OF  
ENCHANTMENT IN MODERN AMERICA**

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And approved by

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## **ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION**

Ecstatic Anthems: Music and the Persistence of Enchantment in Modern America

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This dissertation investigates the different ways that musical Americans interpreted self-transcendent experiences—that is to say, experiences that involved a merger between subjective identity and forces, agents, or spaces that transcended the individual. Conventional histories of secularization suggest that the elevation of rational thought in modern Western culture inexorably invalidated beliefs in self-transcendent phenomena—or what the English-speaking world variously described as “ecstasy,” “trance,” “rapture,” and “spirit possession,” among other terms. While this dissertation does not completely deny this process of devaluation, it suggests that, during the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the process was neither linear nor absolute.

Indeed, “Ecstatic Anthems” argues that, during this period, Americans continued to adapt their beliefs in authentic self-transcendence to a variety of secular settings, particularly when they engaged with the highly emotional activities associated with music-making. Certainly, orthodox religion, which in America was primarily associated with Protestant Christianity and African-American syncretic religion, provided one set of cultural contexts for understanding this phenomenon. However, the romantic traditions associated with sentimentality, the sublime, and animal magnetism provided yet another

framework; these mystical traditions cast musical rapture as an attunement with spiritual entities that were more natural and earthly than their religious counterparts. Yet another cultural tradition—derived from Carnival festivities and other cognate activities—framed songful self-transcendence in vaguer terms, as an escape from normal subjectivity without a merger with some clearly-defined external object.

While the religious, romantic, and Carnival-derived frameworks could be distinguished from each other, they also were not entirely isolated from each other. Not only did they share historical roots, but, during the nineteenth century, they also became partly coopted by bourgeois values, which encouraged the physical restraint of musical ecstasy in communal settings. This process provided opportunities to reinforce social hierarchies based on class, race, and gender, regardless of how one interpreted the specific objects of musical self-transcendence.

By the last decades of the nineteenth century, some Americans initiated a more vigorous effort to confine and control musical trance. Equipped with scientific theories that reduced musical rapture to the workings of an individual mind and body, the neurologists, psychologists, and other professionals who supported this movement came close to rejecting conventional notions of transcendent experience altogether. Yet, the possibility of authentic self-loss was never entirely eradicated from American culture. Within the burgeoning commercial music industry of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Americans simultaneously validated experiences of authentic and illusory self-transcendence. This equivocation between belief and disbelief, authenticity and illusion, and transcendence and immanence engendered a play impulse that came to dominate cultural interpretations of musical ecstasy starting in the 1920s. In this manner,

musical Americans never abolished the possibility of ecstasy, but instead they continuously adapted it to a variety of different secular settings.

## **Acknowledgements**

If the arguments and ideas expressed in this dissertation are most obviously attributable to the name on the title page, it is also clear that the act of authoring is always a dialogical process. My words have been informed and inspired by others, and therefore my work partly belongs to them too. Of course, it would be impossible to provide a comprehensive list of everyone who influenced the writing of this document; and consequently these acknowledgements are partial at best. They do, however, recognize a select few who have played a particularly important role in the creation of this dissertation.

First, I would like to thank all the faculty and graduate students who have helped foster a rich and welcoming academic environment in the Rutgers history department. Over the last several years, I have come to feel part of a unique community of peers and professionals who have supported me in so many ways. It has been a privilege to share my academic journey with them.

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I am also deeply indebted to the members of my dissertation committee: Ann Fabian, Ginny Yans, and David Suisman. They have assiduously read various drafts and outlines of the project and provided me with shrewd advice that has shaped and focused

every chapter. In doing so, they have provided me with excellent models of what it means to think and write like an historian. I have no doubt that their perceptive comments will continue to influence my work for years to come.

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## Introduction

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This dissertation investigates the different ways that musical Americans interpreted self-transcendent experiences—that is to say, phenomena that involved a merger between subjective identity and forces, agents, or spaces that transcended the self.<sup>1</sup> Conventional histories of secularization suggest that the elevation of rational thought in modern Western culture inexorably invalidated beliefs in self-transcendent experience. While this dissertation does not completely deny this trend of devaluation, it suggests that, during the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the process was never linear and far from absolute. Indeed, “Ecstatic Anthems” argues that, during this period, Americans continued to adapt their beliefs in authentic self-transcendence to a variety of secular settings, particularly when they engaged with the highly emotional activities associated with music-making.

In contemporary times, self-loss experiences are regularly associated with pre-modernity. Indeed, the ancient Greeks used several words for the experience of self-loss, and although they were distinguishable from each other in specific terms they all expressed a fusion with some supernatural elements of the cosmos. *Katochos*, *theolêptos*, and *enthousiasmos*, for instance, all signified some kind of possession by a god, such as Dionysus, the god of intoxication and madness. Initiates of mystery cults as well as oracles and prophetic priests also pursued these forms of consciousness.<sup>2</sup> *Mania*, another spiritual experience, was associated with a madness and frenzy. And *entheos* referred to

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<sup>1</sup> In this dissertation, subjectivity or “selfhood” can be defined broadly as an intimate locus of awareness, or consciousness, that is regularly juxtaposed, either vaguely or precisely, against exterior others.

<sup>2</sup> Yulia Ustinova, “Consciousness Alteration Practices in the West from Prehistory to Late Antiquity,” in *Altering Consciousness: Volume I: History, Culture, and the Humanities*, ed. Etzel Cardeña and Michael Winkelman (Santa Barbara, CA: Prager: 2011), 56.

the indwelling of a spirit.<sup>3</sup> Because they involved a mutable sense of self, all of these phenomena could be associated with *ekstasis*—which referred to the somewhat paradoxical condition of existing or moving outside of oneself.<sup>4</sup> Although Classical Romans were by and large more suspicious of the phenomenon, many of them also pursued what they called *ex stasis*. This included the devotees of the popular mystery cult that worshiped the Egyptian goddess Isis.<sup>5</sup> It also may have included those who participated in the Roman festivals of Bacchanalia and Saturnalia.<sup>6</sup> For centuries, the Semitic peoples of the Near East also celebrated their own transcendent experiences. Indeed, a Jewish “prophet,” or *nabi*, was originally revered for his ability to act as a psychic interlocutor between the spirit and human worlds.<sup>7</sup>

*Ex stasis* persisted, even flourished, in Christian Europe during late antiquity and the Middle Ages, although Christians who discussed it would have been loath to acknowledge any similarities with ancient pagan rites. With the spread of mystical

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<sup>3</sup> Angelika Malinar and Helene Basu, “Ecstasy,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, ed. John Corrigan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 241-258; Ustinova, “Consciousness Alteration Practices in the West,” 45-72.

<sup>4</sup> Angelika Malinar and Helene Basu suggest that the original Greek definition of *ekstasis* referred to the experience of being “placed outside or beside” oneself or “being dislocated.” Malinar and Basu, “Ecstasy,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, 241-258. The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides a similar definition, relating to the status of “being ‘beside oneself,’” and it suggests that ancient Greeks might have understood *ekstasis* specifically as the “withdrawal of the soul from the body.” See: “Ecstasy, n.” *OED Online*, September 2016. Oxford University Press, <http://www.oed.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/view/Entry/59423> (accessed October 25, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Ustinova, “Consciousness Alteration Practices in the West,” 45-72.

<sup>6</sup> In 186 CE, Roman authorities officially outlawed the Bacchanalia festivals and killed approximately 7000 Bacchic practitioners. The state elites found the festival so threatening because of its emphasis on personal mysticism and “madness” that seemed to challenge the political state. D.J. Moores, *The Ecstatic Poetic Tradition: A Critical Study from the Ancients through Rumi, Wordsworth, Whitman, Dickinson and Tagore* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Only later did the Hebrew word for “prophet” become associated with the relatively non-ecstatic connotations of religious instruction. See: Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, [c1907] 1996), 610, 612; Lester L. Grabbe, *Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages: A Socio-Historical Study of Religious Specialists in Ancient Israel* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), 82-84, 108-112; H. B. Huffmon, “Company of Prophets: Mari, Assyria, Israel,” in *Prophecy in its Ancient Near Eastern Context* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 47-70; Stacey Campbell and Wesley Campbell, *Ecstatic Prophecy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2008), 52-55.

interpretations of Christianity, ecclesiastics regularly pursued unitive experiences with the divine, which they called *raptus* (root of the English word rapture) or *unio mystica*.<sup>8</sup> These experiences were often associated with the Latin term *inspiratio* (root of the English word “inspiration”), which, beyond a general connotation of animating or influencing something, also entailed the act of being instilled by a spirit.<sup>9</sup> (Other forms of soul or body possession were not considered to have a divine provenance but were instead thought to emanate from supernatural demonic forces.<sup>10</sup>) In medieval Christianity, a number of religious activities were thought to instigate divine mystical possession, including the church sacraments, and, among monks, acts of contemplation and meditation. These latter two methods involved the complete focus of one’s mind on God so as to elicit a union with the divine and to reveal spiritual insights.<sup>11</sup> Medieval laypeople also probably pursued something like *ex stasis* during the rites of Carnival, the joyous season preceding Lent (and associated with other holidays throughout the year).<sup>12</sup> Although using the term “altered experiences” may be somewhat anachronistic when discussing fluid experiences of self in premodernity, in general terms it still loosely applies here.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Moshe Sluhovsky, “Spirit Possession and Other Alterations of Consciousness in the Christian Western Tradition,” in *Altering Consciousness*, ed. Etzel Cardeña and Michael Winkelman, vol. 1, *History, Culture, and the Humanities* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger: 2011), 1:77.

<sup>9</sup> *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v. “inspiration,” <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=inspiration> accessed October 24, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Sluhovsky, “Spirit Possession and Other Alterations of Consciousness in the Christian Western Tradition,” 1: 73-88.

<sup>11</sup> Augustin Poulain, “Contemplation,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Charles George Herbermann, vol. 4 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908), 4:324-329.

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter 3 for elaboration.

<sup>13</sup> One of the things that may make the term “altered experience” anachronistic when discussing the premodern era is its connotations of alterity, and the implication that ecstasy was somehow inextricably abnormal or atypical. In premodernity, regular experience of self may have been fluid enough to preclude a strict normal/altered dichotomy in the modern sense. According to the historian Morris Berman, the premodern West—particularly in the clerical and vernacular cultures of medieval Europe—was characterized by a “participating consciousness” that signified an openness to subjective identification

It is easy enough to find instances of self-loss in premodern times, but what about the modern period? When focusing on the cultures of Western civilization, luminary thinkers from across the disciplines regularly suggest experiences of self-transcendence have been in historical decline. This includes the historian Glenn W. Olsen, who describes the history of the West during the modern era as largely defined by “the loss of transcendence.”<sup>14</sup> This line of reasoning has been supported by much of the twentieth-century scholarship on secularization, which often identifies a growing cultural discomfort with the idea of entities and essences whose power and influence exceeded that of the self. Among the first and most prominent theorists of secularization was the sociologist Max Weber. He explained the tendency as the product of a rationalization impulse that sought to atomize the world into its component parts in order to make them calculable, predictable, and manipulable (often with the goal of maximum output and achievement).<sup>15</sup> Weber argued that as Westerners continued to embrace rational thought, they developed more reasons to delegitimize conventional ideas of transcendence. Increasingly, this meant rejecting the foundational beliefs of orthodox Christianity as unfounded and irrationally reliant on notions of magic, mystery, and mysticism. The famous phrase Weber used to encapsulate this demystification process was the

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with the objects of the world. This expansive and porous notion of selfhood is compatible with Owen Barfield’s contention that medieval men and women understood the world around them more as a garment they wore (suggesting an intimate extension of self) rather than a discrete set of objects disconnected from them entirely. It implies a persistent openness to ecstasy. Morris Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 2, 61; Owen Barfield, *Saving the Appearances* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 94.

<sup>14</sup> Glenn W. Olsen, *The Turn to Transcendence: The Role of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), x.

<sup>15</sup> The philosopher and psychologist William James described much the same impulse when he wrote the following: “[T]o understand life by concepts is to arrest its movement, cutting it up into bits as if with scissors, and immobilizing these in our logical herbarium where, comparing them as dried specimens, we can ascertain which of them statically includes or excludes which other.” William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 109.

“disenchantment of the world.”<sup>16</sup> It represented a steady and cumulative challenge to the agency of supernatural spirits and indeed, ultimately, all transcendent objects that were once thought to hold some power and influence over human subjects.

Assumptions about the decline of transcendence in the modern era are reinforced by a related set of scholarship that addresses the rise of a profoundly immanent model of selfhood based around a relatively autonomous and inviolable personal body, mind, and/or soul. Scholars have recently located antecedents to this confined form of selfhood in premodernity.<sup>17</sup> Most academicians, however, consider the paradigm of an

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<sup>16</sup> The term “disenchantment,” as it is attributed to Weber, was first published the English translation of a 1917 lecture titled “Science as Vocation.” One of the earliest English-language publications of this lecture was: Max Weber, *From Max Weber*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946). Weber wrote in German and it is unclear whether the sociologist himself had any influence on the decision to use the English term “disenchantment” when translating his texts. The original German word he used was *Entzauberung*, which has no direct equivalent in English and no common etymological link to “enchantment.” Therefore, the translation would have required some creative interpretation. Interestingly, the first time *Entzauberung* was translated into English, “disenchantment” was not chosen. This occurred when American sociologist Talcott Parson first translated Weber’s *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* into *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* in 1930. It was not until Hans H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills published *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, a 1946 compendium of Weber’s work, that “disenchantment” became the English equivalent to Weber’s *Entzauberung*. However, this would have been about 26 years after the German sociologist’s death. See: Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons Max (New York: Routledge, [1930] 2005); Max Weber, *From Max Weber*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946).

<sup>17</sup> Although a case can be made for the fluid nature of normal self-experience in premodernity, there is also evidence to suggest that certain types of consciousness were *more* normal than others. Put another way, certain kinds of self-awareness probably occurred more frequently, or to more people, than others. Indeed, a degree of alterity is implied within the ancient definition of *ekstasis* itself, which was historically associated with the paradoxical condition of moving or existing “outside” of oneself. The insinuation that one could exist *outside* of oneself implies an exterior/interior dichotomy that could have been twinned with an altered/normative one. Additionally, the historical record demonstrates that, in different times and contexts, many premodern communities prioritized normative models of self-experience that were considered more static and ordered, and in this way were contrastable with the ecstatic impulse. For instance, classical Greek philosophers celebrated the activities of an “alert ego.” This included Plato, who embraced it as central to a single, unified, and separate psyche ruled by the will of reason. According to Plato’s *Republic*, a good man exercised these precepts and in doing so became “master of himself.” In Rome, there existed the *persona*, a term that eventually came to represent an atomized subject, member of society, or citizen with legal rights. In Medieval Europe too, intellectual elites and others, at least by the twelfth century, began to elaborate definitions that characterized selves as “atomized” units within the social structure.

On individuality in the ancient world, see: Yulia Ustinova, *Caves and the Ancient Greek Mind: Descending Underground in the Search for Ultimate Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 9, 11, 16; Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press,

autonomous and inviolable self to have coalesced in the early-modern West, namely during the Italian Renaissance.<sup>18</sup> It was at this time, according to the cultural critic Raymond Williams, that the concept of selfhood became commonly understood as a subjective entity that was indivisible, or “individual”—a term that came to engender the modern notion of selfhood.<sup>19</sup> This emphasis on indivisibility subjected the very notion of selfhood to the atomizing process of rationalization as articulated by Weber. This formulation was inscribed in the philosophy of Rene Descartes, who promoted a strong, discerning mind capable of exercising rational control, or “will,” over bodily passions,<sup>20</sup> and who believed that only the weakest and most irrational souls could be “carried away by present passions.”<sup>21</sup> The notion of individuality also found acceptance among thinkers such as Galileo, Hobbes, and Locke, whose new scientific methodologies assumed the

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1989), 115; Aaron J. Gurevich, “The ‘Persona’ in Search of the Individual,” in *The Origins of European Individualism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 89-99; Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World*; Marcel Mauss, “A Category of the Human Mind: The Notion of Person; The Notion of Self,” in *The Category of the Person*, trans. W.D. Halls, ed. M. Carrithers, S. Collins and S. Lukes (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1938); Aubrey Johnson, *The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel, Second Edition* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, [c1964] 2006).

On individuality in medieval Europe, see: Aaron Gurevich, *The Origins of European Individualism*, trans. Katharine Judelson (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1995); Caroline Walker Bynum, “Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?” in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 82-109. See also: R.W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), esp. 219-57; Walter Ullman, *The Individual and Society in the Middle Ages* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966); Peter Dronke, *Poetic Individuality in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970); Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050-1200* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987). Moreover, as Larry Seidentop and Brian Stock, among others, carefully demonstrate, these ideas had likely been percolating in Western civilization for centuries, going as far back as St Augustine and the earliest era of Christianity. Larry Seidentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2014); Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader: Meditation, Self-Knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1997).

<sup>18</sup> The nineteenth-century Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt was among the first to locate the roots of this modern conception of selfhood in the Italian Renaissance. It was in this context, he argued, that the common medieval assumption that all identity was essentially shared with others “melted into air” revealing personal subjects to be separate and unique entities. See: Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2012), 81.

<sup>19</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Revised edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983 [c1976]), 161-165.

<sup>20</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 115-116.

<sup>21</sup> Rene Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, trans. Stephen H. Voss (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1989), 46 (Article 48).



existence of sovereign personal subjectivities that were disengaged from their material and social worlds enough to study them objectively.<sup>22</sup> The model was also promoted by religious movements, including the Protestant Reformation, which elevated the role of the individual in determining one's understanding and relationship to God.<sup>23</sup>

Religious and scientific advocacy for the primacy of the individual were only reinforced by social and economic factors. From an early stage, these included what the historian Norbert Elias describes as class anxieties of European aristocrats who developed a culture of self-discipline and genteel manners in order to distinguish themselves from the masses during the early modern era.<sup>24</sup> And according to the historian R.H. Tawney, the personal greed and ambition fostered by capitalism only reinforced the emphasis on individual self-interest.<sup>25</sup> Division of labor—integral to the growth of industrialization and bureaucratic organizations—also entrenched notions of individuality, according to the sociologist Emile Durkheim. As companies and societies

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<sup>22</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*.

<sup>23</sup> Accompanying the rise of the individual was also a growing sense of individual self-awareness. This perspective increasingly treated the individual not only as a subject of experience (i.e. a self that experiences others), but also an *object* of experience—something that could itself be reflexively studied by a subject. This much is evidenced by the popularization of the term “consciousness” during the seventeenth century. At this time, the word took on its modern meaning, which is associated not only with awareness, but also with *self*-awareness more specifically. From at least the seventeenth century onwards, therefore, to be conscious was to experience both one's environment and the scope of one's own place inside it. See: Peter Abbs, “The Development of Autobiography in Western Culture: From Augustine to Rousseau” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Sussex, 1986), 131-132; Roy F. Baumeister, *Identity: Cultural Change and the Struggle for Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 39.

<sup>24</sup> According to Elias, during the early modern era the status of nobility across Europe largely shifted from that of warrior to courtier, and with this transition arose a newfound concern among the aristocracy to distinguish themselves from the masses. Previously, their comportment had had little bearing on defining their status, but now, stripped of their responsibilities as leaders of combat, they began to develop “refined” manners to set themselves apart from others. In the Middle Ages, nobles had willingly participated with their social underlings, engaging in the passionate spectacles of Carnival and other exuberant celebrations. With the waning of their medieval roles, however, they turned to alternate methods of expressing their genteel status—now it was through the ostentatious display of dispassion and self-restraint that they hoped to demonstrate their inherent moral supremacy. It would not be long before these ideals spread to artisans, peasants, and laborers who aspired to higher-class standing. Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process, Volume 1: The History of Manners*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982); Barbara Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007), 137, and chapter 5.

<sup>25</sup> R.H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1926).

grew larger and more complex, it became necessary to create specialized occupations and loosen the mutual bonds of reliance that existed between people in order to facilitate free movement of individuals.<sup>26</sup> As the historian Joyce Appleby has accurately demonstrated, the rights of the individual became enshrined in the political philosophy of liberalism, which gained wide currency in revolutionary America and the early republic.<sup>27</sup> With such a wide array of intersecting cultural, legal, political, and economic developments promoting the individual, the notion became cemented as the primary model of selfhood in Western society by the nineteenth century and supported by numerous scientific, political, and commercial elites and authorities. It was at this time that the words “individual” and “self” became effectively synonymous. A great deal of excellent scholarship has been written on the historical development of the individual in Western culture.<sup>28</sup> This includes scholarship by the philosopher Charles Taylor on what he succinctly describes as the rise of the “buffered self.”<sup>29</sup> Contemporary scholarship’s observations about the decline of conventional transcendence and the preeminence of an

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<sup>26</sup> Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, trans. W.D. Halls (New York: Free Press, 2014).

<sup>27</sup> Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>28</sup> Some of the main texts addressing histories of selfhood include: Shaun Gallagher, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the Self* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011); Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, *A Brief History of the Soul* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2011); Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007); Raymond Martin and John Barresi, *The Rise and Fall of Soul and Self: An Intellectual History of Personal Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Richard Sorabji, *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life, and Death* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Jerrold Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe Since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Nikolas Rose, “Assembling the Modern Self,” in *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present*, ed. Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1997), 224-248; Norbert Wily, “History of the Self: From Primates to Present,” *Sociological Perspectives* 37, no. 4 (Winter, 1994): 527-545; Taylor, *Sources of the Self*.

<sup>29</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 27. In the 1980s, the anthropologist Clifford Geertz famously defined individual selfhood in a similar way, describing it as: “a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgement, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background.” See: Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*, 3rd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 57.

inviolable, individual model of selfhood make it easy to assume that experiences of self-loss have slowly but assuredly fallen by the wayside in modern culture.

### Argument

This dissertation takes a different stance. It argues that self-loss experiences never disappeared in the modern era but instead adapted and mutated to accommodate the growing influence of rationalization. In general terms, modern individuals found ways to accommodate their understandings of self-transcendent experience to cultural environments that frequently challenged and diminished conventional notions of transcendence. In the modern era, self-loss phenomena were labelled using a variety of terms including perhaps most frequently “ecstasy” and “trance.” To a lesser degree they also included: rapture, abandon, spirit possession, enthusiasm, sublime, hypnosis, hysteria, altered consciousness, transpersonal awareness, and ego-death, as well as more descriptive phrases relating to feelings of being “beside oneself,” “carried away,” or “caught up.” While scholars and laypeople alike have often distinguished between these terms, what they all share in common is the some profoundly altered conscious experience of self.

To demonstrate how cultural interpretations of ecstasy changed and adapted over time, this study focuses specifically on what (English-speaking) moderns call “music”—that is to say, the human-generated melodic, harmonic, and/or rhythmic arrangement of sounds and words that varies over time.<sup>30</sup> It takes this focus for a number of reasons. First, music satisfies the need to focus down an ambitious topic that could easily become overburdened. During the late-twentieth century, historians often chose to deal with a

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<sup>30</sup> Although some modern definitions of music focus specifically on instrumental varieties, this dissertation also expands the definition to include songs with lyrics.

potentially unwieldy research topic by “asking large questions in small places,”<sup>31</sup> as Charles Joyner described the practice of microhistory. For most microhistorians, this meant concentrating on a small community, individual, event, or time period, so as to enhance the granularity of their analysis and demonstrate the complexity of human relationships. But historians who wish to maintain a focus on nuance and complexity while also making connections across larger communities or time periods must look to other ways of focusing down their unit of analysis. Instead of concentrating the historical lens onto small social, geographic, or temporal units, this dissertation instead focuses on a specific category of human experience—moments of self-loss or altered consciousness that were initiated, precipitated, reinforced, or represented by music. Of course, intentionally circumscribing the scope of the study in this manner has its limitations; namely, it prevents the possibility of making conclusive statements about all types of ecstatic experience. However, it also permits a degree of the microhistorian’s concern for detailed analysis and attention to “normal exceptions”—historical sources, individuals, and events that seem to defy norms and averages.

The second, and most important, reason for focusing on music relates to the integral role it has played in achieving, expressing, or describing trance experiences throughout history. The ethnomusicologists Marcia Herndon and Norma McLeod find “shifting personal awareness” to be a universal attribute of musical experience as it functions in culture.<sup>32</sup> While this dissertation does not make any claims about the

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<sup>31</sup> Charles Joyner, *Shared Traditions: Southern History and Folk Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 1.

<sup>32</sup> Marcia Herndon and Norma McLeod, *Music as Culture* (Darby, PA: Norwood Editions, 1982), 134. Recognizing emotional capacity as a defining feature of music has a long tradition among scholars and theorists of music, including Leonard Meyer and Deryck Cooke. See: Leonard Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956); Deryck Cooke, *The Language of Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990 [1959]).

universality of musical experience, it does observe that music has regularly served as a catalyst, conduit, or consequence of altered, expansive, or fluid self-awareness throughout the history of Western civilization(s).<sup>33</sup> As early as the Mycenaean period (1600-1100 BCE) the peoples of ancient Greece employed music instruments during religious ceremonies, including those related to the *enthusiasmos* of Dionysus. Classical Greek philosophers also suggested the possibility of something like *ekstasis* with their Music of the Spheres theory, which perceived metaphysical harmonies existing between instrumental sounds, the human soul and body, and the cosmos at large. In ancient Rome, music continued to be tied to enthusiasm and ecstasy. The Latin term *incantare*—root of the English word “enchantment”—referred to the singing of a magical spell that is meant “to enrapture, to overpower with delight, so as to *stun* the faculties of the mind, and deprive them of their power of action.”<sup>34</sup> The Romans also used the term *carmen*, root of the English word “charm,” which originally meant a song or “sung spell.”<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, the prophets of ancient Israel incorporated music into their ecstatic rites.<sup>36</sup> All of these influences ensured that music remained an important feature of Christian ecstasies during late antiquity and the medieval eras.<sup>37</sup>

As this dissertation demonstrates, music was no less important to self-loss experiences during the modern era. This was particularly true of America—which in this

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<sup>33</sup> This is not to say that other expressional forms—visual art or oratory for instance—could not also tell a persuasive history of the phenomenon.

<sup>34</sup> La Roy Sunderland, *Book of Psychology* (New York: Stearns & Co., 1853), 28-29; Editors of the American Heritage Dictionaries, *Word Histories and Mysteries: From Abracadabra to Zeus* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), 45-46.

<sup>35</sup> Editors of the American Heritage Dictionaries, *Word Histories and Mysteries*, 45-46.

<sup>36</sup> The Torah, for instance, makes several references to prophets playing music while entranced or as a means of conveying their prophecies to others. 1 Samuel 10:5; 2 Samuel 6:14-21; 2 Kings 3:15-16; Ex. 15:1-21; Deut. 31:19-32:44; Judges 5:1-12; Psalms 1-150; Hab. 3; 1 Chronicles 25.

<sup>37</sup> Some of the great medieval mystics, including Hildegard of Bingen and Richard Rolle, entered musically-inflected trances. And during the Italian Renaissance, Marsilio Ficino revived the Music of the Spheres philosophy and encouraged its connection to ecstasy.

context may be taken to represent the culture loosely associated with the United States, its historical precursors, and its cultural affiliates throughout the Atlantic World. The focus on America is not, of course, intended to imply that this region had a unique history of ecstasy. In general terms, much of what occurred here also occurred in other parts of the modern western world, and therefore this dissertation takes transnational connections seriously. However, a case can also be made that America's diverse combination of ethnic and cultural influences—each with their own musical styles and traditions—provided an atypically rich environment for subjects to explore the intricacies of self-loss and to elaborate this understanding more deeply, broadly, or quickly than elsewhere.

### Chapter Outline

The chapters that follow demonstrate a variety of ways in which musical Americans adapted their interpretations of ecstasy to the pressures of rationalization, especially its challenges to conventional notions of transcendence. To be sure, the process was complex, multifaceted, and rarely linear or uniform in its progression. The members of different traditions accommodated rational impulses in different ways. They often diverged from each other based on how they interpreted the object of their ecstasy (i.e. the external entity or environment a subject experienced), the manner in which they expressed their experiences, the moral valence they assigned to them, and the degree of sincerity they felt towards them. Vast differences in attitude and interpretation always made broad consensus difficult. Moreover, traditions and movements were imbricated, often developing out of or in coordination with one another. For this reason, it is often necessary to have chapters and sections circle back over one another, focusing on different aspects of the same era.

Chapter 1 addresses orthodox religious interpretations of ecstasy as they were upheld and debated by Anglo-Protestant elites and enslaved African communities during America's colonial era and early republic. Although this chapter culminates in the evangelical revivals of the early nineteenth century, it also briefly covers the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to help contextualize this period. It was in this entire era that ecstatic experience was explained primarily as a mystical experience with the Holy Spirit or some other supernatural force.

Chapter 2 investigates the soft secularizing impulse that encouraged some Americans to pivot away from orthodox religious explanations of ecstatic rapture. This impulse became associated with the rise of the romantic movement and its closely aligned sentimental and spiritualist traditions. All of these traditions, to varying degrees, diminished supernatural interpretations and reframed ecstasy as primarily a unitive experience with thoroughly natural spirits, forces, and other mystical entities that bound together nature and humanity.

Chapter 3 explores the history of a less-overtly mystical tradition of self-loss, derived from the early modern Carnival tradition, fostered by market capitalism, and associated mostly (except in New Orleans) with marginalized classes and social identities, which grew in influence, if not always in prestige, throughout the nineteenth century. While participants of this interpretation did not necessarily reject the philosophies discussed in the previous chapters, they endorsed a less formal and altogether more ambiguous form of ecstatic experience.

Chapter 4 does not focus on any one identifiable tradition of ecstasy, but instead it investigates a widespread cultural movement that cut across different traditions. Led by

bourgeois educators, clerics, and other elites and achieving prominence during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, this movement sought to categorize higher and lower cultural forms of ecstatic expression mainly along class, race, and gender lines.

Chapter 5 describes how the growth of scientific reductionism, particularly during the last decades of the nineteenth century, provided bourgeois Americans with an increasing number of opportunities to downplay the notion of transcendent phenomena altogether, favoring instead thoroughly immanent explanations that confined trance solely to the workings of the individual mind and body.

Chapter 6 focuses specifically on how entrepreneurs and audiences in the burgeoning music entertainment industry responded to the advent of reductive theories of experience while still accommodating latent cultural yearnings for genuine self-loss. This involved reattaching (supposedly) archaic qualities of sincerity and authenticity back on to self-loss experiences even as they simultaneously imbued such phenomena with trivial and artificial qualities.

### **The Modes of Musical Consciousness and the Dynamism of Self-Loss**

The idea of a “mode”—itself a musical term—provides a useful way of considering each tradition addressed in the chapters of this dissertation. Just as the lines in a contrapuntal melody may, despite moments of dissonance, still remain part of a common key or “mode,” so too may the discrepancies, fractures, and tensions that existed within and between both individuals and social groups still share a common set of basic beliefs and assumptions. Although interest and identity groups often generated important distinctions and disagreements (e.g. based on class, race, gender, profession, expertise, taste, etc.), they also formed alliances founded upon a basic set of cultural assumptions



regarding musical self-loss. For instance, chapter 1 of this dissertation demonstrates how—although Americans had starkly varied approaches to ecstasy based on their religious denomination, sect, or racial background, etc., they all maintained a basic belief that ecstasy should be treated as a transcendent experience with some supernatural spirit. In this regard, Puritans, Methodists, and African-American ring shouters might all be said to have participated in a common “mode” of musical consciousness, even if they disagreed over more precise aspects of their religion.<sup>38</sup> As such, the concept of “mode” acknowledges and elucidates the complex of attitudes, opinions, and impulses that coexisted within human subjects and the communities to which they belonged, while at the same time identifying the connective tissue that tied together people and communities into still larger units of belonging.

Sometimes, the overlapping attitudes, values, and beliefs about consciousness coalesced into formal doctrines or ideologies. Other times, the cultural formations were more diffuse. These latter formations in particular might be understood as “structures of self-loss.” An adaptation of Raymond Williams’s idea of a “structure of feeling,” this term might encompass a less-articulated or less-developed set of attitudes and values regarding ecstatic phenomena that were upheld by a significant segment of society.<sup>39</sup> Regardless of their particular formation, though, the modes of musical self-loss could be construed as sharing some basic elements even as they were constituted by internal tensions and divisions. By addressing commonalities and differences at each level, the

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<sup>38</sup> Cultural “modes” of consciousness might be thought of as emerging from what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls “fractional interests”—shared understandings and motivations that can cut across class, ethnic, race, gender lines, as well as other social categories such as age, vocation, and musical taste. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

<sup>39</sup> Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 128-135; Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961).

chapters in this dissertation endeavor to tell an expansive history of ecstasy during the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries without intentionally abandoning any considerations of nuance.<sup>40</sup>

In tracing the rise of different modes of musical consciousness in America, this dissertation demonstrates that self-loss has a history. Therefore, to call ecstasy a “state” of consciousness—a commonplace in much contemporary writing as well as in some of the historical literature addressed in this dissertation—is somewhat misleading because it emphasizes only the fixed (or static) qualities of transcendent conscious. Indeed, there is perhaps only one basic element of ecstatic experience that may be described as constant—a general feeling of self-loss or some other significant alteration of normal self-experience. Beyond this element, almost everything else in the ecstatic experience is potentially mutable. The etymology of words like “ecstasy” as well as its counterpart “trance” suggest this kind of mutability. The root of ecstasy, *ekstasis*, itself suggests something that is *outside* of *stasis*. Therefore, to be ecstatic is always in some way to be astatic, to be in constant motion. An astatic element can also be found in the root of the term “trance,” which connotes a kind of (psychic) *transition*. Instead of interpreting them as “states” of experience, therefore, a more fruitful option would be to call them “dynamics” of experience.<sup>41</sup> A dynamic quality certainly applies to the shifting cultural interpretations of self-loss experiences over decades and centuries covered by the present

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<sup>40</sup> One inspirational model for this integrative approach comes from Marianna Torgovnick. Although her focus on the relationship between primitivism and ecstasy is in some ways more specific than that of this dissertation, Torgovnick takes a capacious approach to the topic by studying the different, gendered approaches to the trance practices of “primitive” races during the twentieth century. In doing so, she is able to study common Western notions of primitive trance while still capturing different social attitudes towards it. See: Marianna Torgovnick *Primitive Passions: Men, Women, and the Quest for Ecstasy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

<sup>41</sup> Instead of using the term “dynamic,” Judith Becker indicates the evolving, processual nature of self-experiences in a different manner. She replaces the term “trance” with its gerund, “trancing.” See: Judith Becker, *Deep Listeners: Music, Emotion, and Trancing* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 8.

study.<sup>42</sup> For this reason, this dissertation treats both “ecstasy” and “trance”—contrary to some scholarly tendencies—as equivalent etic terms that refer to any and all forms of self-transcendent experience.<sup>43</sup>

Defining ecstasy as an astatic experience makes it relatable to the broader category of emotion. Despite different philosophical ways of explaining the phenomenon, emotion, like ecstasy, is generally recognized to include consciously felt experiences.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, some scholars have convincingly argued that experiences of self—or what this dissertation also calls “consciousness”—are frequently (or necessarily) an aspect of emotional experience.<sup>45</sup> Some eminent scholars, including the psychologist William James and the ethnomusicologist Gilbert Rouget, have even drawn direct connections

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<sup>42</sup> Dynamism also applies to the vacillating personal approaches to (culturally-prescribed) ecstasy from one moment to the next, for instance the fluctuations in awareness that occur as one passes through various phases of the experience. According to Judith Becker, “one is either entering, continuing, or coming out of trance.” Becker, *Deep Listeners*, 8.

<sup>43</sup> This expansive definition of ecstasy and trance counters the definitions of previous scholars on the topic, who often associate each term with a specific *kind* of self-loss. These include the anthropologist Judith Becker, who finds ecstasy to be a limited term because of, among other things, its specific association with “joyful experience” (8). Likewise, she distinguishes both ecstasy and trance from “meditation,” a practice that often leads to self-transcendent experiences but, unlike trance in particular, occurs in “solitude, stillness, and silence” (1). Becker, *Deep Listeners*, 1, 8. To make matters more confusing, the ethnomusicologist Gilbert Rouget links ecstasy to “silence, immobility, and solitude” and connects trance to self-loss “by means of noise, agitation, and in the presence of others.” Gilbert Rouget, *Music and Trance: A Theory of the Relations Between Music and Possession* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 7. This dissertation, by contrast, uses both “ecstasy” and “trance” interchangeably to connote a more generic form of self-loss experience, regardless of its more specific emotional characteristics.

<sup>44</sup> Some theories define emotion primarily as felt experience, while others root it in physiological changes in the body, or in the physical behavior of individuals and groups. However, almost every theory has recognized that emotion—however defined—includes some consciously felt experience. Philosophers as distant as Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza, Hume, Darwin, James, Freud, Dewey, and beyond, have acknowledged as much. Even those who have placed behavior or physiological change as the primary feature of emotion still recognize its perception and interpretation through the senses as important to the emotional process. See: Cheshire Calhoun and Robert C. Solomon, eds., *What is an Emotion: Classical Readings in Philosophical Psychology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

<sup>45</sup> The social psychologist Stephanie A. Shields claims that, “Despite disagreement on other fundamental issues, most contemporary theories of emotion suggest that one consequence of emotional experience is some profound, if temporary, change in the way in which the self is experienced in the emotion-evoking situation.” Stephanie A. Shields, “The Concept of Self in Emotion Theory” (paper presentation, Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Anaheim, CA, August 26-30, 1983); Rouget, *Music and Trance*, 326.

between emotion and self-loss in particular.<sup>46</sup> And as with ecstasy, the category of emotion is also regularly (if perhaps wrongly) construed as a set of unchanging “states.”<sup>47</sup> A better theory of emotion would define it as a dynamic category that results from an affective interaction with one’s physical and cultural environment, and which fluctuates over time, as well as in intensity, valence, complexity, etc.<sup>48</sup> In short, a better definition would describe emotion as an experience in *motion*.<sup>49</sup> Thankfully, new scholarship in the humanities as well as in the social and physical sciences is beginning to acknowledge this point.<sup>50</sup> Considering the two terms’ overlapping characteristics, it might be fair to say that ecstasy/trance constitutes one version of a subject’s emotional experiences of herself.

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<sup>46</sup> While studying mystical “religious experiences” in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the pioneering psychologist William James recorded the thoughts of many subjects who spoke of the “deep emotion” that accompanied their mystical encounters. During the 1980s, the ethnomusicologist Gilbert Rouget made a similar point: “[I]f we must seek for an explanation of [trance], it might be found in the overriding power of a certain conjunction of emotion and imagination. This is the source from which trance springs.” See: William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co. 1902), 397, 399; Rouget, *Music and Trance*, 326.

<sup>47</sup> Often, theories of emotion break up the phenomenon into a typology of subcategories, e.g. sorrow, anger, joy, etc., each with static characteristics. See: Graham Richards, “Emotions into Words—or Words into Emotions” in *Representing Emotions: New Connections in the Histories of Art, Music and Medicine*, ed. Helen Hills and Penelope Gouk (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 49-65.

<sup>48</sup> Batja Mesquita, “Emoting: A Contextualized Process,” in *The Mind in Context*, ed. Matja Mesquita, Lisa Feldman Barrett, Eliot R. Smith (New York: The Guildford Press, 2010), 83-104.

<sup>49</sup> It is no coincidence that connotations of physical, social, and psychic movement have been embedded in definitions of emotion for as long as the word has been used. “Emotion.” OED Online. September 2013. Oxford University Press.

<sup>50</sup> See: Richards, “Emotions into Words—or Words into Emotions” in *Representing Emotions*, 49-65; Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions, 600-1700* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction*, trans. Keith Tribe (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015); Susan J. Matt and Peter N. Stearns, eds., *Doing Emotions History* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2013); Monique Scheer, “Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion,” *History and Theory* 51, no. 2 (May 2012): 193-220; Ute Frevert, *Emotions in History: Lost and Found* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011); Keith Oatley, *Emotions: A Brief History* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004); William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Carol Zisowitz Stearns and Peter N. Stearns, *Anger: The Struggle for Emotional Control in America’s History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

## The Historiography Selfhood

The chapters in this dissertation relate to several bodies of scholarship. One of them includes the work of those who provide alternatives to the dominant model of autonomous individuality in the modern Western tradition. The authors of several eminent works published over the last half-century or so—including Gordon Rattray Taylor, Daniel Bell, Daniel Miller, T.J. Jackson Lears, and Colin Campbell—have recognized the existence of not one, but (at least) two competing categories or impulses of selfhood.<sup>51</sup> The first three of these scholars—Taylor, Bell, and Miller—distinguish between a “Puritan” model and a “Romantic” one. They associate the former with the dominant model of individuality—characterizing it as inhibited, authoritarian, having a strong work ethic, and inclined towards structure. And they associate the latter term with an alternate selfhood—which they describe as uninhibited, democratic, indulgent, and inclined towards the more amorphous relations of culture.

Certainly, these labels help capture important features that were emphasized within the “Puritan” and “Romantic” movements, but they also risk overlooking the complexities of lived experience. Those who called themselves “Puritans” (or were called this by others) did not resolutely pursue an inhibited, authoritarian, and structured lifestyle, just as “Romantics” did not stick doggedly to uninhibited, indulgent, and inchoate notions of selfhood. Even if individuals explicitly championed one or the other set of values, their embrace was rarely all-encompassing. Therefore, to use culturally and

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<sup>51</sup> Gordon Rattray Taylor, *The Angel-Makers: A Study in the Psychological Origins of Historical Change, 1750-1850* (London: Heinemann, 1958); Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1978); Daniel Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987); T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Jackson Lears, *Something for Nothing: Luck in America* (New York: Penguin, 2003); Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).

historically specific labels such as “Puritan” or “Romantic” in this way is to misleadingly apply a relatively uniform set of ideals to a multifarious community of subjects. In short, it is a vast overgeneralization.

Both Lears and Campbell avoid this confusion by using labels that transcend any specific historical movement or social grouping. Lears makes a distinction between “modern” and “antimodern” (the former embracing the principle of rationalization and the latter rejecting it), or “control” and “chance.” Campbell likewise distinguishes between the “repressive” and the “passionate.” Lears and Campbell also frame these countervailing principles not as distinguishable social *models* of selfhood, but as impulses that simultaneously threaded through multiple points of experience or units of belonging, from the most confined personal level (i.e. the individual) to the largest cultural formations. They demonstrate that these countervailing impulses were equivalent to musical “counterpoint,” which involves multiple layered voices or rhythms evolving alongside each other in a given piece of music. In counterpoint, one voice or rhythm can dominate the rest at a given moment in time. Sometimes it might harmonize consonantly with other (melodic or rhythmic) lines, and at other times it might create dissonance with them. But rarely is any one voice completely absent. In a similar manner, the most useful scholarship on selfhood demonstrates that different notions of self may exist alongside each other within a given subject.

This dissertation is based on the premise that that the best way to study the complex counterpoint of impulses regarding selfhood is to focus on (musical) *experiences* at least as much as the ideas envisioned by their philosophies. Therefore, this dissertation may be categorized as a phenomenology in the broadest sense—as a study of

the character of subjective, lived experience.<sup>52</sup> Although some historians of selfhood do address lived experience in detail,<sup>53</sup> it is still understudied in the historical scholarship of selfhood.

Most modern histories that rely on lived experience have taken the individual as their primary unit of analysis. As such, they have perpetuated commonplace assumptions that the boundaries of personal consciousness were relatively inviolable and always revolved around a static model of selfhood centered on the individual mind, body, and/or soul. Very few of them attempt to investigate alternate notions or experiences of selfhood that, even if accessed temporarily, nevertheless could play a transformative role in the lives of historical subjects. To be fair, many historians' inattention to this topic might not be due to some underlying antagonism towards notions of ecstasy. Instead, the scant scholarship might be partly explained by a paucity of relevant sources. Throughout the modern era, there has been widespread agreement that ecstatic phenomena were unusual and irrational enough to defy explanation altogether. The ineffability of self-loss has been articulated by many Americans throughout the period covered by this study. Ralph Waldo Emerson, for example, claimed that the ecstatic act of spiritually merging with the universe was beyond words when he claimed "ineffable is the union of man and God in every act of the soul." For him, "The soul answers never by words, but by the thing itself that is inquired after."<sup>54</sup> Psychologist and pragmatist William James understood mystical

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<sup>52</sup> See, for example: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. David Landes (New York: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>53</sup> Lears explores how antimodernists pursued "intense experience," which itself could include drastically altered consciousness, such as that associated with religious salvation or the emotional lives of pre-modern and exotic others. For examples, see: Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 6, 161.

<sup>54</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Oversoul," in *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays, First Series*, vol. 2 (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1903), 2:282.

experiences to possess the same ineffable characteristics.<sup>55</sup> If even those who studied it believed it to be intrinsically difficult or impossible to describe accurately, then it might be understandable why others refrained from trying in the first place.

Thankfully, not all historical subjects were entirely reluctant to describe their altered experiences. While many may have found it difficult to discuss their experiences using conventional methods of communication, such as language, they nevertheless did not become deterred from the task. With enough searching, contemporary historians can access historical records describing so-called “ineffable” experiences that shattered the boundaries of individuality. Some historians—including William G. McLoughlin, Ann Braude, Barbara Goldsmith, and Albert J. Raboteau, to name only a few—have focused more specifically on these altered forms of consciousness in America.<sup>56</sup> Their histories provide much needed, and in many cases excellent, contributions to a woefully small body of literature on trance. Most of them study altered experiences within localized communities or identity groups, such as Protestant evangelicals (McLoughlin), African-

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<sup>55</sup> James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 380-381.

<sup>56</sup> William G. McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1959); William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals Awakenings and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). See also: Elaine A. Heath, “Ecstasy: Mysticism and Mission in the Wesleyan Tradition” (paper presentation, The Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies, July 2007); Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Free Press, 1989); Barbara Goldsmith, *Other Powers: The Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism, and the Scandalous Victoria Woodhull* (New York: Harper, 1999); Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Timothy E. Fulop and Albert J. Raboteau, *African-American Religion: Interpretive Essays in History and Culture* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013); Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Albert J. Raboteau, *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Stephen D. Glazier, *Encyclopedia of African and African-American Religions* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Kenneth Thomas, *The Religious Dancing of American Slaves, 1820-1865: Spiritual Ecstasy at Baptisms, Funerals, and Sunday Meetings*, (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008); C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990); Noel Leo Erskine, *Plantation Church: How African American Religion was Born in Caribbean Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Mechal Sobel, *Trabelin’ On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).



American religionists (Raboteau), or spiritualist women (Braude and Goldsmith). Many of these works explain how the pursuit of altered consciousness empowered marginalized communities in their fight for rights and recognition during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In doing so, they provide crucial groundwork for the more “modal” study pursued by this dissertation.

### The Historiography of Secularization

The chapters of this dissertation also contribute to a large body of historical literature that traces the process of secularization—that is to say, the process by which supernatural, mystical, as well as other transcendent entities and activities grew less central in the modern era. In his magnum opus, *A Secular Age*, the philosopher Charles Taylor defines secularization as a process by which faith in transcendent dimensions of human culture has been gradually overshadowed (although not entirely replaced) by a more “immanent frame,” centered around human ideas, individual action, and naturalistic materialism.<sup>57</sup> This process has involved a fundamental shift away from a vertical orientation (directed at a higher transcendent power) towards a horizontal orientation (directed at social and humanist dimensions). While Taylor presents magnificently cogent insights about the nature of the immanent frame, his focus remains mainly on the secular ideas of intellectual elites. According to the historian Jon Butler, Taylor’s work woefully neglects both “experience and ordinary people.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, chapter 15.

<sup>58</sup> Jon Butler, “Disquieted History in A Secular Age,” in *The Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, ed. Michael Warner, Jonathan Vanantwerpen, and Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 198. It is worth noting that, while Charles Taylor does not base his theories and ideas in the recorded accounts of subjective experience, he certainly does discuss the nature of experience in philosophical terms.

This dissertation follows up Butler's criticism by studying both ordinary people and elites in order to determine how they *experienced* secularity. What it reveals tends to both elaborate and historicize many of the facets of secularization outlined by Taylor. For instance, chapter 1 studies the viewpoints of influential religious leaders such as Cotton Mather or Jonathan Edwards alongside those of nineteenth-century popular religionists. Likewise, while chapter 2 focuses on the philosophies and phenomena of bourgeois romantics such as Ralph Waldo Emerson or Walt Whitman, chapter 3 investigates the notions of musical ecstasy suggested by working-class street revelers and concert audiences who engaged with popular culture. More than just corroborating Taylor's arguments, the chapters in this dissertation help elaborate and historicize them within the American context.

In addition to expanding Taylor's discussion of the historical development of the immanent frame, this dissertation also upholds recent scholarly claims that reject the anachronistic assumption that secularity and spirituality have always been at odds with each other. In the words of the literary scholar Colin Jager, "The idea that the opposition between the secular and the religious is self-evident has come under increasing scrutiny in recent years."<sup>59</sup> Instead of finding a dichotomy, contemporary historians have begun to elucidate claims that secular and spiritual views stem from a common history, and that a secular impulse actually germinated *within* Christian religious traditions. In America, as with much of Europe, Christianity itself created and acknowledged a secular space, partly to salvage the divinity of a supernatural God and partly to augment the religion's own claims to earthly authority. According to John Lardas Modern, James Turner, David

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<sup>59</sup> Colin Jager, "After the Secular: The Subject of Romanticism," *Public Culture* 18, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 301-323.

Nord, Candy Gunther Brown, Michael Warner, and others, it was religionists—and in America, this meant predominantly Protestant Christians—who actually encouraged secular ideas.<sup>60</sup> Only later did the groundwork they laid actually blossom into a self-sustaining movement that fostered a more radically atheistic worldview.

For this present study, perhaps the most valuable contribution to the existing body of literature is Ann Taves' 1999 book, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience Wesley to James*.<sup>61</sup> This history, a capacious overview of the varied and complex ways Americans experienced religion and explained these experiences from about 1740 to 1910, covers the intellectual movements and debates that developed in and between evangelical sects and denominations over religious trance. In another respect, Taves bridges the spiritual and secular contexts, covering the multivariate approaches to what she calls “special” experiences as explained by not only spiritualist theories of popular psychology—such as those associated with animal magnetism and mesmerism—but also the nascent field of professional psychology. Her book, whose broad range makes it a crucial foundation for this study, reveals that the rational assault on supernaturalism was not deployed entirely from outside of supernatural or otherwise transcendent traditions.

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<sup>60</sup> John Lardas Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Taylor, *A Secular Age*; James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); David Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Candy Gunther Brown, *The Word in the World: Evangelical Writing, Publishing, and Reading in America, 1789-1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Michael Warner, “Rethinking Secularism: Was Antebellum America Secular?” *The Immanent Frame: Secularism, Religion, and the Public Sphere* (blog), Social Science Research Council, October 2, 2012 <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2012/10/02/was-antebellum-america-secular/>.

<sup>61</sup> Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

The observation that spiritual traditions could be complicit in the secularizing process suggests that ecstatic modes were never entirely fixed, but instead underwent periods of change themselves. Just as music written in one key or mode can morph into a new key or mode—a process called “modulation,” in musical terms—a comparable process occurred within the cultural modes of consciousness. Appreciating and articulating the ways in which cultures of ecstasy underwent modulation embraces the dynamic quality of trance and avoids the misleading connotations of stasis and uniformity that are sometimes associated with nouns like “culture,” and “structure” (or “mode” for that matter).<sup>62</sup> Of course, acknowledging that new traditions can modulate out of older ones does not always mean older traditions were automatically abandoned. Modulation—in music and culture—always includes elements of both transformation and retention.<sup>63</sup> According to Charles Taylor, the construction of an immanent frame (partly out of a transcendent mold) did not extinguish preexisting religious cultures; it only marginalized them. In this sense, secularity became only one of many worldviews simultaneously available to moderns.

By exploring the different modes of self-transcendent experience in American history, this dissertation also rejects any scholarly proclivities to view secularization as a sequential and linear progression. The sociologist Steve Bruce has urged scholars to assess the process of secularization “not [as] an Enlightenment journey from A to B but a

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<sup>62</sup> In a general sense, the concept of cultural modulation might be compared to Anthony Giddens’ theory of structuration. See: Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1984).

<sup>63</sup> This combination of change and continuity is inscribed in the musical concept of modulation as well: changing keys in the middle of song usually involves maintaining the relative scale (just as changing scales usually involves staying in the same key).

broadening-out from a common past.”<sup>64</sup> The present study follows this plan, detailing how the decline of orthodox religious authority gave rise to a series of different secularities, each with their own distinct methods of questioning the power of conventional transcendent entities or embracing newfound models of immanence. The different romantic models discussed in chapter 2, for example, could not only be distinguished from each other; they also diverged from the carnivalesque conscious or psychologically reductive modes explored in chapters 3 and 5. These modes all shared a secular disposition in comparison to the supernatural beliefs of orthodox Christianity, but they were also *differently* secular relative to each other. Acknowledging these differences requires considering the coexistence of several secular frameworks within the same (multifaceted) immanent frame. And it conceives of secularization not as a two-dimensional progression but as a three-dimensional process involving homologous branches of secularity, each evolving in parallel.

### **The Historiography of Reenchantment**

In challenging teleological assumptions, this current project also joins a body of scholarship that reveals how notions of transcendence have continued to infiltrate secular traditions. The sociologist Christian Smith and others suggest that researchers of secularity in various disciplines have, until recently, too readily portrayed the declining authority of religion in inexorable terms: “Sociologists, historians, and other social observers have long considered the secularization of American public life...to be an

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<sup>64</sup> Steve Bruce, *Secularization: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 62.

inevitable and natural outcome of modernization.”<sup>65</sup> Much of this perspective probably originated in Max Weber’s theories, which described the rationalization impulse as descending like an iron cage over Western culture. This metaphor depicts disenchantment as a rigid and indomitable force that progressively clears away considerations of transcendence from modern culture. At bottom, this is a zero-sum perspective that assumes the growth of immanent ontologies grew in inverse proportion to the decline of transcendent ones. However, the steady march of disenchantment throughout the modern West may not have been as absolute as many of Weber’s interpreters have suggested.

Some of the most intricate challenges to the teleological view of secularization scholarship come from the growing scholarship on “re-enchantment”—which locates a persistent cultural openness to the possibilities of transcendence even in thoroughly secular settings. According to the authors Joshua Landy and Michael Saler, the project of re-enchantment strives to demonstrate the existence of “forms of enchantment entirely compatible with, and indeed at times *dependent* upon, those features of modernity usually seen as disenchanting the world.”<sup>66</sup> In other words, it attempts to articulate the enduring overlaps between otherwise dichotomous impulses—one that perpetuated a belief in magic, mystery, and mysticism outside the control of the individual, and another that rejected it. It considers secularization not as a death knell to transcendence, but rather a reconfiguration of how culture assesses its possibility. In short, scholars of re-enchantment

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<sup>65</sup> Christian Smith, ed. *The Secular Revolution: Power, Interests, and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>66</sup> Joshua Landy and Michael Saler, eds., *The Re-Enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 7.

do not consider the relationship between disenchantment and enchantment, or transcendence and immanence, in zero-sum terms.<sup>67</sup>

There is a long and venerated lineage of scholars who have contributed in some way to the historical literature on reenchantment. This includes Jason A. Josephson-Storm, Joseph Bottum, Gordon Graham, Joshua Landy, Michael Saler, T.J. Jackson Lears, Charles Taylor, Kristina Karin Shull, Richard Jenkins, Morris Berman, as well as George Steiner, Robert Bellah, and Philip Rieff, to name only some of the authors who are relevant to the present study.<sup>68</sup> These scholars might be said to replace the iron cage metaphor with that of a nylon net, such that the spread of rationalization was, in practice, flexible enough to incorporate *certain* salvageable features of conventional enchantment, even as it condemned others as ineffectual, vestigial, and moribund. The reenchantment scholarship is yet another way of demonstrating Jager's assertion about the reconciliation of secular and religious worldviews.

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<sup>67</sup> Weber actually suggested the prospect of reconciling features of archaic enchantment with the impulse disenchantment, but his scholarly disciples have only recently begun to elaborate this more dynamic interpretation of his work. See: Sung Ho Kim, "Max Weber," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2012 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2012/entries/weber/>.

<sup>68</sup> Jason A. Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Joseph Bottum, *An Anxious Age: The Post-Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of America* (New York: Image Books, 2014); Gordon Graham, *The Re-Enchantment of the Word: Art versus Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Joshua Landy and Michael Saler, eds., *The Re-Enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age*, (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009); Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 161. Also see: T. J. Jackson Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880-1930," in *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980*, ed. Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears (New York: Patheon Books, 1983); Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009); Taylor, *A Secular Age*; Kristina Karin Shull, "Is the Magic Gone? Weber's 'Disenchantment of the World' and its Implications for Art in Today's World," *Anamesa* (Fall 2005): 61-73; Richard Jenkins, "Disenchantment, Enchantment and Re-Enchantment: Max Weber at the Millennium," *Max Weber Studies* 1, no. 1 (November 2000): 11-32; Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World*; George Steiner, *Nostalgia for the Absolute* (Toronto: CBC Publications, 1974); Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 96, no. 1 (Winter 1967): 1-21; Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

By demonstrating how secularizing modes of ecstasy shared important characteristics with orthodox religious traditions, this dissertation lends an experiential focus to the scholarship on reenchancement, much of which focuses on the evolution of ideas and theories more than the study of consciousness.<sup>69</sup> In studying how human experience became reenchanted, this dissertation finds that some of the main elements salvaged from archaic enchantment included not only a yearning for self-transcendence, but also a sincere consideration of the power of experience to attune subjects with mysterious and deeply meaningful elements of the cosmos. Chapter 2, for example, demonstrates how, despite rejecting a dogmatic faith in a supernatural deity, the romantic mode(s) of ecstasy sought to earnestly engage with the mysterious fundament of the natural world in much the same way that orthodox Christians experienced their God. Despite obvious differences, therefore, both cultures ascertained that the mysterious, meaningful objects they revered were *sacred*—that is to say, they transcended the most immanent (individual) concerns by pervading, spirit-like, the cosmos.<sup>70</sup>

As Chapter 6 reveals, some reenchanted modes of musical ecstasy did not hold fast to as many features of conventional enchantment as the romantic modes had done—but they nevertheless remained available to the possibility of self-transcendence in general terms. By the twentieth century, popular understandings of ecstasy had incorporated an obvious element of make-believe, which questioned the authenticity of self-loss experiences. And yet, the popular explanations of ecstasy also framed self-loss

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<sup>69</sup> Charles Taylor briefly addresses the reenchancement of experience in a way that is relevant to this study when he claims that moderns tend to look back nostalgically to what they consider to be a more “porous” model of selfhood found in premodernity, and they aim to recover some measure of this archaic feeling, for instance, by watching movies about the uncanny in order to experience a “frisson.” Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 37.

<sup>70</sup> The French sociologist Emile Durkheim, whose theories were seminal to the topic, defined the sacred in somewhat secular terms, not as an acknowledgement of the supernatural, but as anything that united a society or community together.



as a genuine engagement with the transcendent aspects of existence. In this way, secular traditions in America that avoided strictly supernatural explanations could still surreptitiously integrate aspects of mysticism within an atmosphere of demystification.<sup>71</sup>

By studying music's involvement in this delicate relationship between individually immanent and self-transcendent experiences, the work of this dissertation resonates with the anthropologist Judith Becker's theoretical concept of "deep listening." It is a term Becker associates with "secular trancing, divorced from religious practice but often carrying religious sentiments such as feelings of transcendence or a sense of communion with a power beyond oneself."<sup>72</sup> The concept—which Becker identifies not just with the active interpretation of organized sound, but with a number of embodied practices—is abundantly useful in the context of the present study because it can be distinguished from conventional religion on one hand, but it can encompass a wide array of reenchanting experiences on the other hand. It is this kind of nuance that is required to explore the varieties of ecstatic experience that were employed in different secular settings.

By focusing on the musical character of reenchanting experience, this dissertation also reestablishes a largely forgotten connotation of the term "enchantment." The word

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<sup>71</sup> Of course, it would be hyperbolic to claim that reenchantment constituted simply another form of archaic enchantment. Unfortunately, some historical studies of popular music and entertainment either insinuate or declare as much. These studies—which focus almost entirely on the second half of the twentieth century—provide valuable insights into the commonalities between religion and popular entertainment. However, by employing nebulous and overly expansive definitions of religion, they also tend to overstate the shared elements and downplay the differences between conventional religion and secular entertainment—sometimes to the point of conflation. See: Robin Sylvan, *Traces of the Spirit: The Religious Dimensions of Popular Music* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); David Chidester, *Authentic Fakes: Religion and American Popular Culture* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005); Rupert Till, *Pop Cult: Religion and Popular Music* (New York: Continuum International Publish, 2010); Vaughan S. Roberts and Clive Marsh, *Personal Jesus: How Popular Music Shapes our Souls* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012). See also: Robin Sylvan, *Trance Formation: The Spiritual and Religious Dimensions of Global Rave Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>72</sup> Becker, *Deep Listeners*, 2.

itself was rooted in the original Latin word *incantare*, which referred to the singing of a magical spell. Despite its original musical quality, however, it is unlikely that Weber or his translators were thinking specifically of this connotation when they adapted the word to the English translation of his work.<sup>73</sup> (Weber was of course not unfamiliar with the musical tradition, having written quite extensively on the topic himself.<sup>74</sup>)

### Sources and Methodology

That being said, studying musical self-loss also comes with its share of difficulties. This is because, like ecstatic experiences in particular, musical experiences in general have historically been interpreted as communicating meaning beyond the capacity of words.<sup>75</sup> Such views have existed in the western tradition for centuries.<sup>76</sup> In the nineteenth century, the German composer Robert Schumann alluded to this capacity when, upon being asked by an audience member to explain the meaning behind a challenging *étude*, his response was simply to sit down and play it a second time without verbal explanation.<sup>77</sup> Decades later, the English composer Frederick Delius similarly proclaimed that music “only begins to be significant where words and actions reach their

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<sup>73</sup> This neglect of the musical connotations of the word “enchantment” is understandable. Although the related word “chant” has held onto some of its musical connotations, popular definitions of “enchantment” during and following Weber’s time have typically associated the word with more general conceptions, such as the application of magic, charm, sorcery, bewitchment, and rapture. See, for instance: Noah Webster, Robert Arrowsmith, and Harry Thurston Peck, *Webster’s New Modern English Dictionary* (Chicago: Consolidated Book Publishers, 1922) <https://archive.org/stream/webstersnewmoder00web>.

<sup>74</sup> See: Max Weber, *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music*, trans. D. Martindale, J. Riedel, and G. Neuwirth (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1958).

<sup>75</sup> Siglind Bruhn, ed., *Voicing the Ineffable: Musical Representations of Religious Experience* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2002); Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*, trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); David Allen Erickson, “Language, Ineffability and Paradox in Music Philosophy,” (M.A. Thesis Simon Fraser University, 2005).

<sup>76</sup> As early as the fourth century, St Augustine wrote of the singing quality of what he called “jubilation,” a profound state of communion with God, when words fall short to express one’s feelings, and yet one still feels compelled to communicate one’s joy. When one is urged to express the ineffable, Augustine explained, “what is left but to sing in jubilation, so that...your unbounded joy may not be confined by the limits of syllables.” Quoted in: Simon Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 84.

<sup>77</sup> George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 20.

uttermost limit of expression.”<sup>78</sup> During the early twentieth century, William James tied the ineffability of music directly to mystical experiences, which he found to be frequently inflected with transpersonal qualities. The quality and worth of a symphony, he claimed, was a function of a listeners’ “state of feeling” more than their intellect, and like any mystical experience, “no adequate report of its contents can be given in words.”<sup>79</sup> The connection between ineffable musical experiences and ecstasy was further elaborated by Rudolf Otto, the German theologian and scholar of comparative religion. In the 1910s and 1920s he wrote and published about a mental state that is “wholly other” and “outside the self”—which he labeled as “numinous”—and compared it directly to musical experience, whose content he claimed was “in no way merely a second language, alongside the usual one.”<sup>80</sup> This propensity to describe musical experiences as both ineffable and conducive to trance has continued up until the present day.<sup>81</sup> Their ineffable quality has made historical descriptions of musical and ecstatic experiences sparse or lacking in detail, characteristics that help explain why there are relatively few primary

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<sup>78</sup> Quoted in: Carol Kimball, *Song: A Guide to Art Song Style and Literature* (New York: Hal Leonard, 2006), 361.

<sup>79</sup> James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 380. During his long engagement with the ideas of the American pragmatist, philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein placed James in a thought experiment, in which he had James listening to a piece of music and, though acknowledging that it was glorious, not being quite able to say why, concluding “Our vocabulary is inadequate.” Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 610.

<sup>80</sup> Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1936), 50. Also see 191-198.

<sup>81</sup> In 1922, the musician and inventor Thomas Wilfred supported the idea that music provided a mode of communication that was untranslatable into language. He declared that “music has the power to express in sound what we find inexpressible in words.” A few years later, a music critic reviewed a performance of the ballad singer Libby Holman, describing how her performance reminded the audience of “its ineffable nostalgias and its oh-so-burning desires.” In more recent years, anthropologist Judith Becker has theorized similarly about music’s ineffability and its proclivity towards trance. On Thomas Wilfred, see: “A New Art—‘Silent Music,’” *The Musical Leader*, vol. 43 (1922): 515. On Libby Holman, see: Francis Fergusson, “What is the Revue?” *The Bookman: A Literary Journal* 72 (1930), 411. For Judith Becker, see: See: Becker, *Deep Listeners*, 43.

and secondary sources that address the topic.<sup>82</sup> While the persistent belief in the indescribability of musical experience provides another yet reason to study it in conjunction with ecstasy, it also serves as an impediment to finding extensive relevant written sources on the topic.

The difficulty of finding extensive and elaborate written sources on the topic of ecstatic musical experiences is not only a function of their ineffability. Sometimes, it also results from their mainstream devaluation and trivialization. This tendency, which is outlined in this dissertation, likely made historical actors disinclined to discuss ecstatic experiences, much less record their ideas for posterity. The devaluation of ecstasy also had the effect that the words used to describe the sensation of self-loss became more convoluted or oblique. By the twentieth century, conventional one-word terms—including rapture, trance, spirit possession, etc.—increasingly became replaced with vaguer multi-word descriptions. These included phrases such as being “carried away” or “beside myself,” as well as a number of longer descriptions that subtly suggested an experience of dismantled selfhood without recourse to the stock terminology. This practice makes the process of identifying historical descriptions of self-loss more difficult and time-consuming and also helps explain the scarcity of historical sources.

Despite the obstacles limiting the historical production of written accounts, it is nevertheless possible to write an expansive history of altered dynamics of musical ecstasy. One way of doing this is by scouring archives, secondary source publications, and historical texts in order to track down the few existing descriptions of musical

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<sup>82</sup> When music is considered capable of being fruitfully described using language, it is nevertheless usually thought to possess a “notorious ‘abstractness’” that, although not fully ineffable, nevertheless still deters many would-be scholars from studying it. See: Christopher Ballantine, *Music and Its Social Meanings* (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1984), xvi; Jeffrey H. Jackson and Stanley C. Pelkey, *Music and History: Bridging the Disciplines* (Jackson, Miss: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), vii.

ecstasies. While descriptions certainly exist, they have often been recorded for posterity despite prevailing assumptions about the ineffability, irrelevance, or invalidity of such phenomena. While first-person written accounts remain the most valuable sources for this study, third-person descriptions are also extremely useful. Although they may not always accurately identify or describe another person's subjective experience, they do help reveal the writer's particular attitudes towards these kinds of experiences. Similarly, non-written sources—including pictorial and musical ones (e.g. notated music, song lyrics, or sound recordings)—help corroborate written accounts if they are analyzed with enough contextual knowledge.

So too are any sources, written or otherwise, that describe “extra-musical” ecstatic experiences, phenomena that were not exactly musical themselves but can be historically linked to music in practice.<sup>83</sup> Depending on the context, this may have included prayer and other sacramental activities, the drinking of alcohol, the writing or reading of lyrical poetry, and, very frequently, dancing.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, in certain cultural and historical contexts, the rhythms of music were linked with either the cadence of poetry or the physical gestures of the body so inextricably that they could not be discussed separately.<sup>85</sup> In more technologically mediated settings, usually theatrical and cinematic, music was also

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<sup>83</sup> Useful in this regard is Christopher Small's efforts to reconceptualize music not merely as a cultural product but as a social practice—“musicizing.” (While this gerund does not feature prominently in this dissertation, more conventional “music” words should be understood to imply its basic meaning.) Understanding music as a verb, Small argues, enables us to take into account every act that facilitates the performance of music, from rehearsing to performing to listening, dancing, etc. This dissertation takes Small's concept to its logical conclusion, by encompassing all activities related to music, including performing, listening to, thinking, speaking, and writing about music, or acting on assumptions about it. See: Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998), 8-9.

<sup>84</sup> Malinar and Basu, “Ecstasy,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, 241-258.

<sup>85</sup> Ancient Greeks, among many other cultures, did not consider music—or what they called *mousike*—to be solely a sonic form of expression. Instead, they treated it as a “mixed art,” combining dance, poetry, song, and tones, and therefore closely linked to drama. Frank Burch Brown, “Music,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, ed. John Corrigan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 204.

twinned with visual stimuli in such a way as to make a single multimedia format.

Approached this way, music is best studied as overlapping with a multitude of other forms of expression.

A capacious history of musical ecstasy is possible if one remains keenly aware of the different terms used to address or suggest self-loss. Although this dissertation uses “ecstasy” as an etic term for all altered dynamics of self-awareness, many words have connoted ecstasy over the years. These include terms such as enthusiasm, rapture, trance, spirit possession, mystical experience, somnambulism, shamanism, delirium, hysteria, mania, transpersonal awareness, self-transcendence, and transport, to name only a few. Ultimately, this dissertation is premised on the assumption that, in the face of scant available sources, the best chance of writing a history of musical ecstasies is to take this integrative approach by analyzing a variety of sources and activities that somehow signified or suggested self-loss.

## Chapter 1 Spiritualization: Evangelicalism, Enthusiasm, and Polyrhythmic Consciousness

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In 1834, Andrew Reed and James Matheson, both esteemed ministers in the Congregational Union of England and Wales, embarked from London on a journey to America to observe and build ties with churches there. Of particular interest to the two ecclesiastics were the thought and practices associated with religious revivalism. This is what drew them to camp meetings—outdoor gatherings hosted by itinerant American preachers in regions too remote or sparsely populated to support permanent resident ministers. Located mainly in the frontier territories and remote rural regions of the states, they required attendees to travel long distances and camp out over the course of several days to worship. Devotional exercises often included praying, listening to sermons, and exhortations. With tremendous frequency they also involved the singing of spiritual songs associated with divine salvation.

One day, while tramping through some pine barrens in the Northern Neck region of Virginia, Reed happened upon a camp meeting erected in a clearing of trees. Arriving just as morning worship was commencing, Reed was welcomed by the worshippers and immediately joined them in a hymn of praise. Having never previously engaged in this kind of worship,<sup>1</sup> he was confounded as to what had compelled him to join in. “I could scarcely tell what sensations possessed me,” he later declared.<sup>2</sup> Yet, it was impossible to deny that he was “filled for the moment with...[sensations] of wonder.” Upon looking

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<sup>1</sup> Camp meetings and their associated devotional activities had not been a part of Reed’s early education as a Congregationalist in Britain. See: Andrew Reed, George Collision, and Robert Winter, *The Ordination Service of the Reverend Andrew Reed* (London: T. Rutt, 1812).

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Reed and James Matheson, *A Narrative of the Visit to the American Churches, Vol. 1* (London: Jackson and Walford, 1835), 272.

around the scene that morning, he felt that everything was “so novel, so striking, and so interesting, as to appear like the work of enchantment, and to require time full to realize.” The singing was soon followed by prayer and a sermon and spiritual exhortations from the preacher, after which the singing resumed. The afternoon service followed a similar pattern.

Outside the scheduled morning and afternoon services, other engagements ran throughout the day and Reed found these “always fulfilling.”<sup>3</sup> These included the smaller devotional gatherings located in nearby tents throughout the camp grounds, where ministers led participants through exhortations, prayers, and songs. They also comprised the informal gatherings in the altar, that area surrounding the main preaching stage of the camp (the pulpit), which, when the primary services were not being held, was always open to those who wished to sing. This area was consistently frequented by worshipers; if some singers grew tired, others would usually come up and replace them. “The singing was without ceasing,” in Reed’s estimation.<sup>4</sup> Sometimes, he would stroll away into the forest to contemplate what he had experienced, and even here the singing followed him and helped him orient himself to the camp. While this at first frustrated him, he soon found it “a pleasing accompaniment to [his] solitary walk.”<sup>5</sup>

The nighttime events, according to Reed, were most impressive. At this time, hundreds of worshippers would flock to the main stand. Behind the pulpit, “stems of trees laid down as seats for the negroes” were occupied by some 300 enslaved people.<sup>6</sup> In front of the pulpit assembled a “full-sized congregation,” presumably white. Although racial

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<sup>3</sup> Reed and Matheson, *A Narrative of the Visit to the American Churches*, 1: 274.

<sup>4</sup> Reed and Matheson, *A Narrative of the Visit to the American Churches*, 1: 274.

<sup>5</sup> Reed and Matheson, *A Narrative of the Visit to the American Churches*, 1: 275.

<sup>6</sup> Reed and Matheson, *A Narrative of the Visit to the American Churches*, 1: 271, 275.



divisions obviously remained stark in this setting, all the attendees shared a passion for religious expression. During this particular gathering the singing, which had persisted all day, took on a fuller power. Many in attendance, especially the women, collapsed with exhilaration. As Reed observed, “Two or three young women were fainting under the exhaustion and excitement; and one, who was reported to...[be] a Methodist, was in hysterical ecstasy, raising her hands, rolling her eyes, and smiling and muttering.”<sup>7</sup>

During the several days he stayed at the camp meeting, Andrew Reed remained determined to keep an open attitude towards the worship practices of those in attendance. Only sparingly did he register any judgement or hesitation towards the activities. After uniting in a hymn of praise for the first time and feeling overwhelmed with sensations and wonder, he briefly worried whether his experience was immoral: “I hope I was not void of those [sensations] which are devotional.”<sup>8</sup> He also opined that morning and afternoon services were sometimes ineffective or uninteresting, and therefore he was happy to “stroll away into the forest” to contemplate in silence the uproarious activities he had recently witnessed.<sup>9</sup> A more subdued atmosphere seemed to suit Reed well, for when he was eventually asked to preach to the camp, he decided to refrain from “any thing [sic] noisy and exclamatory.”<sup>10</sup> This method, he observed, made those in attendance more quiet themselves. Throughout his discourse, “there was a growing attention and stillness over the people.... Many rose from their seats; and many, stirred with grief, sank down....but all was perfectly still. Silently the tear fell; and silently the sinner

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<sup>7</sup> Reed and Matheson, *A Narrative of the Visit to the American Churches*, 1: 277.

<sup>8</sup> Reed and Matheson, *A Narrative of the Visit to the American Churches*, 1: 272.

<sup>9</sup> Reed and Matheson, *A Narrative of the Visit to the American Churches*, 1: 274.

<sup>10</sup> Reed and Matheson, *A Narrative of the Visit to the American Churches*, 1: 283.

shuddered.”<sup>11</sup> Even after he stopped preaching, nobody moved—“the silence, the stillness, became more solemn and overpowering.”<sup>12</sup> Only later did the stillness erupt into a “universal wail” from the people and ministers alike, as they all sank down to their knees in solemn recognition of the “divine truth.”<sup>13</sup>

In broad terms, the episodes recounted by Andrew Reed’s encounter in Virginia represented a cultural interpretation of ecstasy that had become pervasive in the United States at the time. It framed profound self-loss as a mystical merger with the Christian Holy Spirit, and it employed music to help elicit such experiences. Such beliefs had been underscored in Christianity from its earliest days. The sacrament of Communion, for instance, which dated back to biblical times, required churchgoers to ingest the holy body and blood of Jesus in order to join into a life of “common union” with the Holy Spirit. The practice of speaking in tongues, or glossolalia, also dated back at least this far and was believed to signal the loss of ordinary sensations of self or possession by the Holy Spirit.

Music frequently factored into Christian experiences of transcendence. The book of *Colossians* urged: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”<sup>14</sup> *Ephesians* encouraged a similar process: “be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”<sup>15</sup> Music, it seems, helped elicit a divine

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<sup>11</sup> Reed and Matheson, *A Narrative of the Visit to the American Churches*, 1: 283.

<sup>12</sup> Reed and Matheson, *A Narrative of the Visit to the American Churches*, 1: 283.

<sup>13</sup> Reed and Matheson, *A Narrative of the Visit to the American Churches*, 1: 284-285.

<sup>14</sup> Colossians 3:16.

<sup>15</sup> Ephesians 5:18-19.

possession.<sup>16</sup> This penchant for musical ecstasy persisted in medieval Christianity too, pursued as it was in the rites of Carnival as well as in other singing and dancing celebrations that took place inside the church.<sup>17</sup>

This chapter investigates how Christians developed and altered their attitudes towards musical ecstasy in America from the earliest days of colonialism up until the 1830s. By tracing this history, this chapter also aims to address the debates and divisions that emerged over transcendent experiences within the broad and multifaceted tradition(s) associated with American Christianity. Members of different denominations—including Puritans, Quakers, Anglicans, Baptists, and Methodists—both paralleled each other and diverged in their attitudes toward musical rapture. Furthermore, sectarian tensions

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<sup>16</sup> Music did not always facilitate Christian ecstasies, nor did other expressive forms based on sensory stimulation. According to St Augustine, although a unitive experience with the divine could be achieved spiritually—through the senses and imagination—it could also be attained intellectually, in the absence of sensory experience. Medieval monks and other devotees regularly pursued the more intellectual variety through acts of contemplation and meditation, both of which required the singular focus of one’s mind on God. Under exceptional circumstances, contemplation could lead to deeply profound ecstasies, such as those described and discussed by Catholic mystics like Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas, the Carmelites, St. John of the Cross, and St. Teresa of Avila, although eventually they were made available to the laity through the publication of treatises written in the vernacular language. See: Sluhovsky, “Spirit Possession and Other Alterations of Consciousness in the Christian Western Tradition,” 76, 78; John Hardon, *Modern Catholic Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1980); Poulain, “Contemplation,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*.

<sup>17</sup> Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets*, 88, 92-93; Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (New York: Routledge, 2009); Michael D. Bristol, *Carnival and Theatre: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance Britain* (New York: Routledge, 1985). The music of Carnival was typically absent from the monasteries and abbeys of medieval Europe, but musical enchantment could also be experienced there. Catholic mystics who inhabited many of these institutions sometimes experienced musical ecstasies, even as they engaged in the ostensibly silent practice of contemplative devotion. For instance, in 1141, Hildegard of Bingen, a female mystic and abbess of the German monastery Disibodenberg, received what she believed to be an instruction from God, to “write down that which you see and hear.” Later she would write *Ordo Virtutum*, a morality play including monophonic melodies for the human soul, as well as *Symphonia armoniae celestium revelationum*, a compilation of liturgical songs. In another vision, she also claimed to hear “in a marvelous way many kinds of musicians praising the joys of the heavenly citizens.... And their sound was like the voice of a multitude, making music in harmony.” This was the final vision of Hildegard of Bingen, as recorded in *Scivias*, 1143-50. From: Joscelyn Godwin, *Harmonies of Heaven and Earth* (Rochester, NY: Inner Traditions 1978), 71. Another mystical experience of supernal music came to the fourteenth-century English hermit Richard Rolle, who upon saying his prayers one day heard a “sweet ghostly song” more beautiful than any church music he had ever heard. And Henry Suso, a German contemporary of Rolle, “not only heard and saw angels playing rebecs, fiddles, and harps, just as they are shown in fourteenth-century paintings; he joined with them in round-dances, such as Dante had recently described in his *Paradiso*.” Godwin, *Harmonies of Heaven and Earth*, 63.

sometimes developed *within* certain denominations, such as the cleavage that erupted between Old Lights and New Lights during the Great Awakening. Probably the largest division, however, occurred not between denominations or sects, but along racial lines—particularly in relation to the syncretic religious traditions crafted by enslaved African Americans as they adapted their Old World cosmologies to Euro-American Christianity. In all of these instances, religious Americans regularly approached musical self-loss in decidedly different ways, but, just as importantly, they also shared a common set of basic beliefs in the spiritual nature of musical ecstasy. From the psalmody and “regular singing” of Puritans to the ring shout of enslaved communities and the revival songs of evangelical camp meetings, such as those encountered by Andrew Reed—Americans of all backgrounds employed both sung and instrumental music to instigate, represent, and comment on the supernatural character of self-transcendent experience in their religious lives.

### **Music and Self-Discipline in Early Protestant America**

The radical Protestants who colonized British territory from New England to Pennsylvania during the seventeenth century were not known as ardent ecstasies. Rather, they gained reputations as vehement supporters of emotional regulation and the integrity of the individual.<sup>18</sup> Their advocacy for a stable and autonomous selfhood may be traced back to the rise of nominalism in European Christianity during the High Middle Ages. Christian nominalism at this time rejected the theory of “universalism,” which suggested any foundational entity, including God, could be present in all things. By extracting universal essences from the world, nominalism was intended to salvage the ascendancy

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<sup>18</sup> In taking this stance, radical Protestants also drew on a long-held impulse within Christianity illustrated by Paul’s biblical aphorism, “Let all things be done decently and in order.” 1 Corinthians 14:40.

and autonomy of the Divine.<sup>19</sup> What it also did was disentangle human action from divine intervention. Thus, an autonomous God also yielded an autonomous subject. Such a formulation proved exceedingly influential to the leaders of the Reformation. Martin Luther and his counterparts, for example, endorsed a nominalist view of individual autonomy by calling for members of the laity to circumvent the hierarchy of the church and focus on their individual relationship with the divine. Calvinists became especially interested in how personal practice might relate to the will of God. Their doctrine rejected the idea of divine intervention, but it conceded that one's closeness to God could possibly be ascertained upon carefully looking for God's divine attributes in one's own life. Systematic self-control, rational planning of one's entire life, and other manifestations of self-sufficient individuality were all deemed Godly characteristics.<sup>20</sup> For those Protestants who drew inspiration from Lutheran or Calvinist thought, these characteristics became integral features of a pious life.

This proclivity towards self-control helps contextualize the actions and attitudes of William Bradford, the Separatist governor of Plymouth Colony from the 1620 to the 1650s. During this period, Bradford wrote disparagingly in his diary of another early colonist, Thomas Morton, who, after settling in Massachusetts as a senior partner of a

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<sup>19</sup> *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "William of Ockham," by Paul Vincent Spade and Claude Panaccio, accessed October 17, 201, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ockham/>. Like the nominalists, universalists also purported that no higher entity could exist beyond, and considered the divine presence in worldly things to be evidence of God's supreme power. The nominalists, though, led originally by people like William of Ockham, argued that omnipresence did not directly translate into omnipotence. They purported that a belief in universalism logically worked to challenge God's ascendancy because it could not deny the presence of other universals, for example "truth," "beauty," "goodness," or even "beingness" in all things. Because it was impossible to claim God's ascendancy over other universal essences, the nominalists concluded that any sense of universalism was actually an abstraction of the mind. God, they claimed, could only remain completely sovereign over the world if He was separate from it, abiding by no external natural laws.

<sup>20</sup> These attributes did not signal a divine presence in individuals—an assumption contrary to nominalism—but they were meant to exhibit an earthly reflection of God. The method of assessing these attributes was imperfect, but it was thought to be the only available means of evaluating whether one was predestined for election into heaven.

trading venture led by Captain Wollaston, took advantage of the captain's absence one day by arranging a feast for the local indentured servants—explaining to them that they would be sold into slavery in Virginia unless they rose up against their master.<sup>21</sup>

Promising them freedom from servitude and equal partnership in a new colony, Morton convinced many and managed to usurp Captain Wollaston's leadership and start a new colony based on his own utopic vision. It was at this time, Bradford claims, that Morton and his consociates “fell to great licentiousness and led a dissolute life, pouring out themselves into all profaneness.” They set up a maypole, “drinking and dancing about it many days together” and composed “sundry rhymes and verses, some tending to lasciviousness, and others to detraction and scandal.” For Bradford, a strict moralist, “pouring out” oneself through dance, verse, and other illicit practices was a deplorable act of exuberance and would have constituted nothing less than an insult to God.

Puritan leaders were no less disgusted with profane revelries or enthusiastic revelations than their Separatist counterparts. This much became clear during the 1630s, when the leading officials of the Massachusetts Bay Colony condemned as “antinomian”—incompatible with religious law—the views of clergyman John Cotton and his supporter Anne Hutchinson, who claimed that true spiritual knowledge was gained only through sudden raptures brought on by the mystical “inspiration” of God's grace. The era of mysticism and miracles was over, the officials concurred. True revelations of grace would not come freely and suddenly, as an illumination of an “inner light.” Rather, they would come gradually and rationally, through empirical observation

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<sup>21</sup> William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation, 1620-1647* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), 227.

of external events, clerical preaching, or other means determined by God.<sup>22</sup> In other words, intense experiences of transcendence did not transport one along a scale of spiritual piety; indeed, misguided self-loss could actually stall spiritual uplift and lead one to wallow in a soup of ignoble emotion.

With this disinclination towards ecstasy, New England's orthodox Puritans were not known to use music for purposes of self-loss. Indeed, some Puritans set forth with calculated conviction to discredit the reputations of so-called "singing Quakers," a Protestant sect that upheld the antinomian notion that divinity penetrated all human beings and employed singing, vocalizing, and dancing to facilitate such spiritual possession. Of particular notoriety were the "three mad Quakers," also known as "Thomas Case's Crew," consisting of a man from Plymouth, a married woman who was following him against her husband's consent, and the leader, Mary Ross from Boston.<sup>23</sup> Sometime in 1681, the troupe teamed up with others of like mind and set to work converting the soul of Thomas Harris, a young Boston merchant on business in Long Island. Harris's experience was recorded by the famous Puritan minister, Increase Mather: "They all got about him, and fell a Dancing and Singing, according to their Diabolical manner. After some time, the said Harris began to act like them, and to Dance, and sing, and to speak of extraordinary raptures of joy."<sup>24</sup> Mather spared no scorn in describing this "diabolical" deed as morally corrupt, intending to record it "so that others may fear and do no more so wickedly."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Emery John Batis, *Saints and Sectaries: Anne Hutchinson and the Antinomian Controversy in the Massachusetts Bay Colony* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 27.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Rath, *How Early American Sounded* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 129.

<sup>24</sup> Rath, *How Early American Sounded*, 129.

<sup>25</sup> Increase Mather, *Remarkable Providences: Illustrative of the Earlier Days of American Colonisation* (London: Reeves and Turner, 1890), 241-242.

Conservative defenders of the Religious Society of Friends answered the Puritan strictures not by defending the singing Quakers but by expelling them from the fold of Quaker orthodoxy. The Scottish missionary George Keith, for instance, advocated for passion-control in Quaker worship and rebuffed the assumption that Thomas Case's Crew should be labeled Quaker at all.<sup>26</sup> Instead, he believed the culprits should be ostracized as Ranters, another antinomian sect. Although some of Keith's views would become extreme enough to eventually marginalize his influence within the Society of Friends and lead to his transition back to Anglicanism, William Penn and many moderate Quakers shared Keith's disdain for exuberant musical outbursts under the false guise of religious worship. They believed the universalist "inner light" that permeated true Quakers actually led to "Sobriety and Gravity in all things, but into none of these mad Gestures, and ungodly Singings and Dancings, under the pretense of Raptures of Heavenly Joy."<sup>27</sup> By the eighteenth century, sober, orderly behavior became enshrined in the Quaker philosophy of Quietism, which endorsed inward contemplation over unruly outbursts of emotion.

Back in England, Protestant moralists of various stripes issued direct rhetorical attacks on the concept of transcendent spiritual experience. In 1632, for instance, George Sandys, an English poet and early colonist to Virginia challenged the veracity of musical entrancement by rejecting as presumptuous the belief that "the Soule,...consisting of harmony, & rapt with the sphearicall musick before it descended from Heaven to inhabit the body, affects it with the like desire."<sup>28</sup> Similar condemnations can be found in a 1698

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<sup>26</sup> Rath, *How Early American Sounded*, 133-134.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in: Rath, *How Early American Sounded*, 136.

<sup>28</sup> Christopher Marsh, *Music and Society in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 48.



inquiry commissioned by Britain's Royal Society to study "The strange effects reported of musick in former times."<sup>29</sup> The inquiry's chief investigator, John Wallis, concluded that traditional claims about the entrancing effects of song were "highly Hyperbolic and next door to Fabulous."<sup>30</sup> As the historian Gretchen L. Finney attests, other rhetorical tactics were more subtle and involved reducing the concept of musical ecstasy to mere metaphor. This, Finney argues, was probably the case with John Milton's reference in *Paradise Lost* to the "raptures" evoked by a "charming symphonie."<sup>31</sup> According to John Hollander, English poets similarly reduced the Harmony of the Spheres theory, a mainstay of Western philosophy for over two millennia, to a mere figure of speech.<sup>32</sup> These efforts, while not pervasive in their influence, would have almost certainly helped diminish the veracity of transcendent experience.

The early British inhabitants of colonial Virginia shared what, during the seventeenth century at least, was apparently a shared English reticence towards self-loss. This stance was perhaps assisted by the fact that settlers in Virginia, who were officially required to register as Anglican, also absorbed a significant Puritan influence.<sup>33</sup> In matters of religion colonial Anglicans in Virginia exhibited an enduring "liturgical piety

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<sup>29</sup> John Wallis, "XIII. A Letter of Dr. John Wallis, to Mr. Andrew Fletcher; Concerning the Strange Effects Reported of Musick in Former Times, Beyond What is to be Found in Later Ages," in *Philosophical Transaction: Giving some Account of the Present Undertakings, Studies and Labours of the Ingenious, in Considerable Parts of the World*, vol. XX (London: Royal Society, 1698), 298; also cited in: Marsh, *Music and Society in Early Modern England*, 34.

<sup>30</sup> Wallis, "XIII. A Letter of Dr. John Wallis," 298; also cited in: Marsh, *Music and Society in Early Modern England*, 34.

<sup>31</sup> Gretchen L. Finney, "Ecstasy and Music in Seventeenth Century England," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 8, no. 2 (April, 1947): 185.

<sup>32</sup> John Hollander, *The Untuning of the Sky* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961).

<sup>33</sup> April Lee Hatfield, *Atlantic Virginia: Intercolonial Relations in the Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 115, 119; Carla Gardina Pestana, *The English Atlantic in the Age of Revolution, 1640–1661* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 21.

[that] was staid and habitual.”<sup>34</sup> According to the historian Edward L. Bond, theirs was a “low-key piety...given to order rather than passion or ecstasy.”<sup>35</sup> They did not value any earth-shattering rapture, but instead pursued a “well-ordered journey to God.” One was meant to express devotion through a well-ordered life consisting of prayer, the reading of devotional literature, and a practical obedience to God’s laws. Expression through intense displays of emotion was never appropriate. According to John Page, a Virginian merchant and colonial council member, all forms of emotional excess—particularly those associated with presumption and despair—had the power to act as “destructive rocks, upon...which, if the ship of the soul dash, it is split in pieces.”<sup>36</sup> Put another way, Page determined that any feelings that shattered the soul were not only distasteful, but sinful, leading one “head-long into hell.” Sermons were accordingly constructed ideally to resemble “balanced, ordered, dispassionate, and polished” essays.<sup>37</sup> Virginia parishes, therefore, were not known to be particularly musical. Although they had no formal restrictions on worship music (as there occasionally was in New England), some Southern churches were even known to do away with psalmody altogether. Instrumental music was even less popular: only three churches had organs and organists prior to 1750.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Lauren F. Winner, *A Cheerful and Comfortable Faith: Anglican Religious Practice in the Elite Households of Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 190 (note 7).

<sup>35</sup> Edward L. Bond, *Damned Souls in a Tobacco Colony: Religion in Seventeenth-Century Virginia* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 245.

<sup>36</sup> John Page, *A Deed of Gift: To My Dear Son, Captain Matt* (Philadelphia: Henry B. Ashmead, 1856 [1687]), 94.

<sup>37</sup> John K. Nelson, *A Cheerful and Comfortable Faith: Parishes, Parsons, and Parishioners in Anglican Virginia, 1690-1776* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 207.

<sup>38</sup> John Ogasapian, *Music of the Colonial and Revolutionary Era* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 60.

## Music as Purveyor of the Rational Will

While both religious and scientific champions of autonomous selfhood condemned or devalued musical rapture as either excessive or overstated, others took a different tack. Some intellectuals and medical practitioners accentuated music's capacity to exorcise insidious forces that seized control of the body and soul. In 1676, for example, the English musician and theorist Thomas Mace reminded his readers of the biblical story of "how the *Evil Spirit* departed from *Saul*, when *David* played upon his *Harp*."<sup>39</sup> His fellow countryman, Robert Burton, reported that physicians in France harnessed the power of music to treat patients "troubled with St. Vitus bedlam dance" or "the phrensy."<sup>40</sup> As a "sovereign remedy against despair and melancholy," music, he wrote, was enough to "drive away the devil himself."<sup>41</sup> From Calabria on the Italian Peninsula came the most dramatic stories. It was here that musicians performed "solemn Songs and Tunes" to counteract the frenzy-inducing venom of local tarantulas after they bit unsuspecting victims.<sup>42</sup>

The English physician Richard Brocklesby similarly endeavored to reinforce the paradigm of autonomous selfhood with his publication of *Reflections on Ancient and Modern Musick, with the Application to the Cure of Diseases*, which detailed how music was used in the treatment of madness, grief, and other afflictions of the body, mind, and soul. In his own practice, Brocklesby was able to "appease the disorderly roving of

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<sup>39</sup> Thomas Mace, *Musick's Monument; or, a Remembrancer of the Best Practical Musick*, quoted in: Gretchen L. Finney, "'Organical Musick' and Ecstasy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 8, no. 3 (June, 1947): 283.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in: Marsh, *Music and Society*, 66.

<sup>41</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Arthur Richard Shilleto, Arthur Henry Bullen, vol. 2 (London: George Bell and Sons, 1896), 2: 134.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in: Marsh, *Music and Society*, 66.

fancy, and as it were to reestablish the former union of the body and mind by the powers of musick.”<sup>43</sup>

In New England, leaders of the Puritan orthodoxy also recognized song’s capacity to reinforce one’s rational will. While they loathed the animated outpourings of raucous Ranters, they still supported songs that they believed helped elevate proper feelings of devotion to God.<sup>44</sup> In this manner, they followed Calvin’s decree that music both inside and outside the church should “serve to edify rather than to amuse.”<sup>45</sup> Calvin had indicated that this goal of edification was best served through the appropriate selection and performance of music. One of his stipulations was that only divinely inspired songs should make up the repertory of the devout. Biblical psalms proved to be the most suitable in this regard, and therefore it is not surprising that they constituted the majority in the well-known and widely distributed *Bay Psalm Book*. Furthermore, singing was to be done in unison and unaccompanied by instrumentation, so as to prevent distraction by less-sacred sounds (e.g. instrumental music) and unnecessary embellishment.<sup>46</sup> Without diversion, one could maintain a focused attention on the highest matters of piety. In a sermon from 1721, Cotton Mather, New England’s renowned Puritan minister, and grandson of John Cotton, expressed his approval of psalm singing for its capacity to “compose and unite the Thoughts, to engage and fix the Attention,...to brighten the Mind, and warm the Heart,...to calm and silence our evil noisy Passions, to actuate and

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<sup>43</sup> From 1749, quoted in: Marsh, *Music and Society*, 67.

<sup>44</sup> Increase Mather was reluctant to attribute all therapeutic power to the agency of song itself, claiming: “there is no reason to conclude...that musick is so hateful to the devil, as that he is necessitated to depart when the pleasant sound is made.” If this seemed possible, it was only because music had some effect in mitigating the “melancholly passions” upon which the devil thrives. Ultimately, then, the task of dispossessing the soul of evil spirits could only be achieved by God. See: Increase Mather, *Remarkable Providence* (1684), quoted in Finney, “The Organical Musick,” 285-286.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in: Bruce C. Daniels, *Puritans at Play: Leisure and Recreation in Colonial New England* (New York: Palgrave, 1995), 52.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in: Daniels, *Puritans at Play*, 53.

invigorate pious and devotional Affections.”<sup>47</sup> Cast in this way, musical affections were at their best if they served to edify aspects of the rational self: a focused attention, a sharp mind, and a heart not prone to overheating. Likewise, they were meant to subdue any “evil” passions that might challenge the integrity of the individual.

While Puritans agreed that singing could restore normative notions of selfhood, they came to debate the best methods to achieve this goal. Conventionally, the singing of psalms was treated solely as an aural/oral exercise that reflected the Congregationalist aversion to leadership. It employed the technique of “lining out,” whereby a cantor or deacon called out the phrases of a psalm before the congregation sang them, but while providing no direction on tunes, notes, or cadence. Although this technique may have opened the possibility for individual congregants to infuse their own individual creativity into the performance, participants were expected to possess a self-imposed discipline that would enable the blending of individual voices with the community.<sup>48</sup>

Particularly in urban settings, however, this method was increasingly understood to lead to a general cacophony that actually contradicted the original goal of enhancing focused attention. Therefore, during the early eighteenth century, reformers began to call for firmer guidance on congregational singing. They mounted a “regular singing” movement that sought to eradicate “lining out” and replace it with the reading of notated melodies published in printed songbooks (up until this time, few songbooks had included anything more than song lyrics). During the eighteenth century, these reforms would be gradually integrated into most Puritan services. But while “regular singing” sought to

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<sup>47</sup> David P. McKay, “Cotton Mather’s Unpublished Singing Sermon,” in *The New England Quarterly* 48, no.3 (September, 1975): 417.

<sup>48</sup> Glenda Goodman, “‘The Tears I Shed at the Songs of Thy Church’: Seventeenth-Century Musical Piety in the English Atlantic World,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 65, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 700-701.

mitigate social distraction and “lining out” sought to mitigate social hierarchy, both movements shared a common desire to uphold the individual’s sense of autonomy within the context of the congregation. Regardless of how one sang, it was expected that the individual be serious and disciplined. In the words of Cotton Mather, “let your outward carriage be grave and composed...let sincere view to the Honor of God animate and regulate your endeavors.”<sup>49</sup> This serious disposition would remain a model of moral behavior for all facets of Puritan life throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

### **Overtones of Ecstasy in Early America**

While there is no question that Puritans elevated a “grave and composed” demeanor as a model sensibility, it would be wrong to interpret a serious and austere comportment as representative of a larger rejection of affect altogether. Yet, this appears to be precisely what Max Weber and many of his scholarly disciples have done. According to Colin Campbell, “the picture one forms from Weber’s discussion of the typical Calvinist is of an intensely serious, sober and rational individual who manifests no emotion.”<sup>50</sup> Affections, such as those devotional feelings associated with psalm-singing were, of course, widely endorsed by Protestant Americans of all types. Less acceptable though were the kinds of intense emotions that were strong enough to disrupt sensations of self-control and autonomy. A “grave and composed” demeanor, therefore, was not meant to signal outright emotionlessness, but rather one’s ability to control the kind and intensity of emotional impulses so as to prevent the loss of an autonomous will. Even in these cases, however, there were notable exceptions.

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<sup>49</sup> Quoted in: Daniels, *Puritans at Play*, 56.

<sup>50</sup> Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Capitalism*, 123.

While passion-control constituted an ideal of devotional life, there is also evidence to suggest that Anglo-Calvinists found intense emotional experiences permissible under certain circumstances. Some of these, according to Campbell, ironically resulted from the psychological torments associated with a radically rational consciousness: the melancholy and loneliness that comes from the isolation of a severely disengaged identity, as well as the “immense agonies of self-doubt” over one’s own predestination, or the fear of damnation.<sup>51</sup> Speaking from his own experience, Mather explained that he was frequently “overwhelmed... with melancholy Apprehensions of my Unfitness for the weighty Work now before mee, and of the Likelihood that the supporting Presence of God may bee denied unto mee.”<sup>52</sup> These were the kinds of enormously powerful emotions that Puritans played upon regularly in order to attract and maintain dedicated supporters.<sup>53</sup>

Puritans frequently, if subtly, tied these intense emotions to a corresponding acknowledgement of self-loss. For all their endorsements of rational self-control, Campbell claims, it was not uncommon for Calvinists to erupt into “outbursts of ‘enthusiasm’ or intense emotional release.”<sup>54</sup> Paradoxically, the integrity of one’s disengaged selfhood could be threatened by the melancholy, fear, and anxiety that regularly accompanied it. The English Puritan Richard Baxter acknowledged this condition by noting the many devout believers afflicted with melancholy who “are oft apt

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<sup>51</sup> Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Capitalism*, 123; Ursula Brumm, “Passions and Depressions in Early American Puritanism,” *La passion dans le monde anglo-américain aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* 7, no. 1 (1978): 85-96.

<sup>52</sup> Cotton Mather, *Diary of Cotton Mather, 1681-1724* (Boston: The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1911), 98.

<sup>53</sup> Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Capitalism*, 123-124.

<sup>54</sup> Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Capitalism*, 124.

to be confident that they are possessed by the devil, or at least bewitched.”<sup>55</sup> Cotton Mather recapitulated this same point using the medical discourse associated with bodily humors that was popular during his day. Melancholic people, he argued, had “vitiating humours...whereinto Satan does insinuate himself, till he has gained a sort of possession in them, or at least, an opportunity to shoot into the mind, as many fiery darts, as may cause a sad life unto them.”<sup>56</sup> It was in this way that Mather’s identity could feel “overwhelmed...with melancholy Apprehensions.”<sup>57</sup> Although the body was ideally meant to be contained by the rational will, therefore, humoral imbalances within the body could leave the individual soul melancholic and vulnerable to the dispossessing threat of the devil.

More positive transcendent experiences may have also accompanied the Puritan conversion process—the spiritual transformation of true believers, which was typically accompanied by repentance for past sins and a sincere commitment to lead a pious life in accordance with God’s grace and the teachings of Jesus. A mystical element inhered in this belief system, for it was through conversion that one was made aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit. However, in the Puritan context the process typically involved a pedantic series of stages, much anxiety and uncertainty, and ongoing reading of the bible.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, although Puritan conversion might have resulted in an intellectual appreciation of one’s spiritual elevation, it might not have been experienced as outright ecstasy.

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<sup>55</sup> Richard Baxter, “The Cure of Melancholy and Overmuch Sorrow, by Faith,” in: Richard Baxter, *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*, vol. IV (London: George Virtue, 1838), 923.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in: Brumm, “Passions and Depressions in Early American Puritanism,” 85-96.

<sup>57</sup> Mather, *Diary of Cotton Mather*, 98.

<sup>58</sup> McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, 95-98.



Nevertheless, it seems that some Puritans, under some circumstances, experienced their conversion in self-transcendent terms. According to Perry Miller, “ecstasy and vision” came legitimately to the Puritan in the moment of his or her vocation (the particular occupation or task to which God determined a person was best suited).<sup>59</sup> Engagement in such an activity was thought to reveal one’s election and therefore may have provided a profound and extraordinary release from one’s ordinary, anxiety-ridden consciousness.

Several Puritans also seemed to appreciate music for its ecstatic potential. The English Calvinist poet and satirist George Wither wrote of the power of song not only to “dispossesse us of evill affections, and such like” but also to induce “divine raptures, that allure and dispose the soule unto heavenly meditations, and to the high supernaturall apprehension of spiritual things.”<sup>60</sup> Some forms of music, he averred, could in actuality “raise the spirits to that excessive height, as the soule is almost ravished, and in an extasie.” Cotton Mather—having ostensibly absorbed the antinomian inclinations of his grandfather John Cotton—similarly advised fellow worshipers to seek out something like this “extasie” contemplating the lyrics of spiritual songs:

Let us be Inquisitive after those *Motions of Piety*, which are discernible in the Verse now before us.... Let us with a Soul flying away to God try whether we cannot fly *with* them...till we feel our selves come into an Holy *Symphony* with the Saints who had their *Hearts burning* within them, when they *sang* these things unto the Lord.<sup>61</sup>

That his counsel to let the soul fly was published in *The Accomplished Singer*, Mather’s 1721 manual on “regular singing” suggests that even as he and other Puritan music

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<sup>59</sup> Perry Miller, “From Edwards to Emerson” in *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1956), 198.

<sup>60</sup> George Wither, *A Preparation to The Psalter* (1619), quoted in: Finney, “Organical Musick,” 280.

<sup>61</sup> Cotton Mather, *The Accomplished Singer* (Boston: B. Green for S.Gerrish, 1721), 13. Also quoted in: Karen L. Shadle, “Singing with Spirit and Understanding: Psalmody as Holistic Practice in Late Eighteenth-Century New England” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2010).

reformers moved to improve the focus and emotional control with which singing congregants performed, they did not outright condemn the lofty goals of self-abandonment that overcame worshipers as they harmonized in symphonic rapture with the heavenly saints.<sup>62</sup> On the contrary, Mather and other like-minded Puritan ministers believed that the serious and standardized approach to psalmody prompted by regular singing actually provided the better path to true transcendent awareness of God.

Puritans were not the only Protestants in the American colonies who understood the ecstatic power of song over the individual soul. Despite their disdain for Ranters and their proclivity towards Quietism, orthodox Quakers had always been open to the possibility of rapturous experience and music's role in facilitating it.<sup>63</sup> Their faith centered around a belief in an Inner Light, a divine essence that permeated the souls of all true followers of God. This divine force transcended the individual soul even as it illuminated it, and therefore any experience of the Inner Light could lead to ecstasy. Although music performance was highly regulated by Quaker doctrine, one of the few times it was permissible was during those moments when the individual was spontaneously inspired by the profundity of the Inner Light.

On these occasions, it was deemed perfectly acceptable to have individuals "sing in the spirit,"—a term Quakers used to label the spontaneous singing that ushered from

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<sup>62</sup> Although not musically-inflected, an example from Cotton Mather's diary describes the cathartic and ecstatic release from anxiety that descended upon him one day while he was in prayer: "Being prostrate, in the Dust on my Study-floor, after many Fears of a sad, heavy, woful [sic] Heart, that the Holy Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, grieved by my Miscarriages, would forsake mee utterly, that Spirit of the Lord made an inexpressible Descent upon mee. A Stream of Tears gushed out of my Eyes, upon my Floor, while I had my Soul inexpressibly irradiated with Assurances, of especially two or three Things, bore in upon mee." Mather's ecstasy occurred regularly and sometimes lasted for days at a time. See: Mather, *Diary of Cotton Mather*, 187.

<sup>63</sup> Kenneth L. Carroll, "Singing in the Spirit in Early Quakerism," *Quaker History* 73, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 1-13.

the mouths of individuals who were truly motivated by the “Divine Influence.”<sup>64</sup> All other forms of music-making were prohibited, including any perfunctory performance of psalms or other formal religious songs that was dictated by church convention or clerical decree rather than genuinely spiritual feelings. Equally condemned was the performance of any profane song that was motivated by areligious feelings. Such music, which was often associated with fiddling and dancing and linked to the sinful antics of the “singing Quakers” was considered a form of devilish debauchery.

Admittedly, truly spiritual music, absent of both profanity and formality, was relatively rare among Quakers, but it remained a highly desirable phenomenon from the earliest days of the movement. George Fox, the founder of the Quakers, wrote fondly of such an experience in his journal. During a stint of imprisonment, a cruel jailer, knowing of Fox’s aversion to secular melodies sent a fiddler to his cell. Instead of being vexed by this insult, however, Fox quite suddenly found himself “moved in the everlasting power of the Lord God to sing” and thereby overwhelm his adversary with the power of a truly sacred song.<sup>65</sup> His voice “drowned the noise of the fiddle, and made the fiddler sigh and give over fiddling and pass away with shame.” In Quaker terms, the deep sensation that “moved” Fox to sing would have been motivated by the sudden awareness of the transcendent Inner Light within him. Despite the profundity of this event, which Fox seemed to experience as self-loss, it did not appear to encourage widespread musical practice among Quakers. The scarcity of accounts, however, probably speaks more to the specific moral requirements of musical expression rather than to an outright aversion to musical ecstasy per se. And in this regard, Quakers and Puritans shared a reluctance to

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<sup>64</sup> Carroll, “Singing in the Spirit in Early Quakerism,” 5.

<sup>65</sup> Marsh, *Music and Society*, 64.

endorse the widespread and regular pursuit of musical ecstasy, even if they recognized the value of such experiences under very specific circumstances.

### **Musical Rapture and the Great Awakening**

Starting around the 1730s, the Puritan congregations' latent acceptance of ecstatic experience would blossom with newfound credibility in Anglo-Protestantism, as many theologians and laypeople on both sides of the Atlantic grew frustrated with what they believed to be misguided conventions within contemporary Protestantism. Their concerns were multiple (and sometimes at odds with each other): a stagnation of conviction in worship; the dilution of congregational membership through the enactment of a the "Half-Way Covenant" in 1662, which granted non-converts partial membership in the Puritan church; a growing tendency, formally permitted within the theology of Arminianism, which deemphasized the doctrine of predestination and preached in favor of individual free will as the determining factor of salvation; a related tendency to interpret the accumulation of material wealth and earthly accomplishments as sufficient for ultimate salvation; and a growing belief in the general moral decay of religious communities as demonstrated by increased drunkenness, swearing, and the like.<sup>66</sup> It was in appealing to these concerns that various theologians and preachers sought to reinvigorate a new era of piety within both the northern and southern American colonies—an impulse that developed into a widespread movement of religious revivalism later known as the Great Awakening.

Despite their diverse opinions, what the various Awakening revivalists shared in common was a newfound emphasis on acts of emotional devotion. Jonathan Edwards,

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<sup>66</sup> Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

one of the earliest American revivalists, extemporaneously delivered sermons loaded with passion that warned his congregants of their utter corruption and the suffering that awaited them as “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.”<sup>67</sup> From England came George Whitefield, a minister from Oxford who was heavily invested in the reform of the Anglican Church. He was also an indefatigable preacher, “fervent in spirit,” who travelled endlessly throughout the American colonies and the British Isles converting tens of thousands along the way.<sup>68</sup> Collectively, the supporters of Edwards, Whitefield, and many of their Congregationalist and Baptist counterparts, became known as the “New Lights” for their shared rejection of an emotionally desiccated, radically disengaged ideal of selfhood. By touring throughout the northern and southern colonies of America, they would come to gain a fervent following of supporters throughout the continent.

Central to the New Lights’ faith was the evangelical belief that true spiritual salvation could be ascertained through an ecstatic experience of religious conversion. Unlike the somewhat plodding process of conversion inherited from the Calvinists, evangelical conversion almost always involved sudden and deeply felt experiences that occurred or reoccurred over a matter of days, hours, or minutes. So striking and transformative was the experience that the subject felt “born again.” Unlike Puritan conversion, the process almost always involved intense emotions and self-loss, typically beginning with an acknowledgment of one’s abject sinfulness followed by an immeasurable joy that ensues after the revelation of God’s grace at the moment of salvation. Even if the long-term consequences of conversion were sometimes a calm

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<sup>67</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* (Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1741).

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Foxcroft, *Some Seasonable Thoughts on Evangelic Preaching, Its Nature, Usefulness, and Obligation* (Boston: G. Rogers and D. Fowke, 1740), 43.

demeanor—often the result of a newly expanded faith—moments of rapture were often anything but tranquil.

Music frequently accompanied these moments of ecstatic epiphany. Sometimes singing was prescribed for such purposes, as by the influential devotionalist William Law, whose 1728 tract, *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, encouraged devotees to imagine the music of angels singing the glories of God and to “think upon this till your imagination has carried you above the clouds, till it has plac’d you amongst those heavenly beings, and made you long to bear a part in their eternal musick.”<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, before and during the performance of psalms and songs of praise, one should imagine this music and “your self amongst those heavenly companions, that your voice is added to theirs” or to the voice of “our blessed Saviour.” Moreover, “think how your heart would have been *inflamed*, what *ecstasies* of joy you would have then felt, when *singing* with the Son of God.” Spiritual singing, for Law, was nothing if not the mystical union with the Divine.

Although many of Jonathan Edwards’ conversion experiences did not start with Law’s contemplation of a heavenly chorus, a number of his evangelical experiences nonetheless expressed themselves in the form of song. This included one of Edwards’ very earliest conversion experiences, which occurred upon reading a passage from the bible:

The first instance that I remember of that sort of inward, sweet delight in God and divine things that I have lived much in since, was on reading those words, I Tim. 1:17. *Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever, Amen.* As I read the words, there came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the Divine Being; a new sense, quite different from any thing I ever experienced before. Never any words of scripture seemed to me as these words did. I thought with myself, how excellent a Being that was, and how happy I

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<sup>69</sup> William Law, *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, Second Edition, (London: William Innys, 1732), 286-287.

should be, if I might enjoy that God, and be rapt up to him in heaven, and be as it were swallowed up in him for ever! I kept saying, and as it were singing over these words of scripture to myself.<sup>70</sup>

Edwards did not neglect the relationship between feeling “rapt up” and “swallowed up” in God and his song-like recitation of scripture. From then on, “it always seemed natural to me to sing, or chant for my meditations; or, to speak my thoughts in soliloquies with a singing voice.”<sup>71</sup>

The impetus for rapture was only reinforced by musical revivalists from across the Atlantic, especially the contributions of a few prolific hymn writers who purposefully sought to exceed conventional Calvinism’s strictures on public musical worship. One of the earliest leaders of this movement was Isaac Watts, an English dissenter who wrote and published hundreds of hymns during the first five decades of the eighteenth century. In his tract titled, “Thoughts on Poetry and Musick,” passages of which were reproduced in many American-published songbooks, Watts contended that if songs of devotion were properly approached they could transport the participant to divine realms: “If the Memory be well stored with devout Songs... We may... feel our Souls borne up, as on the Wings of Angels, far about this dusky Globe of Earth.”<sup>72</sup>

As the historian Karen L. Shadle demonstrates, New Lights frequently reinforced the links between transcendent experience and devotional music over the course of the eighteenth century. From the 1770s to the 1790s, New England Congregationalists and Presbyterians frequently published treatises endorsing this connection. One minister, for

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<sup>70</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Edward Hickman, vol. 1 (London: William Ball, 1819), 1: lv.

<sup>71</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 1: xii.

<sup>72</sup> Isaac Watts, “Thoughts on Poetry and Musick,” in *The Grounds and Rules of Musick Explained: or, An Introduction to the Art of Singing by Note*, ed. Thomas (Walter Boston: Benjamin Mecom, 1760).

instance, used the language of rapture in describing the effects of introducing “regular singing” to a worship community in Connecticut:

Our souls are wafted on the wings of sublime devotion; and with extatic [sic] rapture carried even to the third heavens, where nothing else but the exactest harmony, and most melodious, heavenly songs fill the place.<sup>73</sup>

This was only one of numerous statements sermonized or published throughout the northeastern colonies and states that spoke to the same enchanting effect. As Shadle argues, some of the more adept writers of religious songs reflected music’s capacity for transcendent experience within the form and structure of the song itself. The words to Isaac Watts’ Psalm 126, for example, reflected the sudden transition from a “mournful state” to “rapture” that accompanied the revivalist experience of conversion.

My God reveal’d his gracious name,  
And chang’d our mournful state,  
My rapture seem’d a pleasing dream,  
The grace appear’d so great.

And composer Daniel Read’s musical setting to these lyrics, written in 1785, attempted to reflect this soul transition by using highly contrasting musical styles to accompany the lyrics. The first “mournful state” is characterized by “slow-moving notes, mostly step-wise motion, and a homophonic texture in a triple meter.” The rapture, by comparison, changes starkly to “a sprightlier duple meter, a frolicking imitative texture, and an abundance of leaping thirds and fourths.”<sup>74</sup> The change in musical styles seemed to mimic the onset of ecstasy.

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<sup>73</sup> Joseph Strong, “The Duty of Singing, Considered as a Necessary and Useful Part of Christian Worship” (New Haven: Thomas and Samuel Green, 1773), 20, quoted in: Shadle, “Singing with Spirit and Understanding,” 89.

<sup>74</sup> Shadle, “Singing with Spirit and Understanding,” 94-95.



## The Old Light Attack on Enthusiasm

Accompanying this growing emphasis on soul transport was also an intensifying debate over where to place the boundaries of (acceptable) religious experience. For a substantial set of “Old Light” Congregationalists and Baptists who remained strictly dedicated to principles of autonomous individuality, all bodily manifestations of ecstatic experience were intolerable. And bodily sounds, including many of those linked to music, were considered among the most repellant of all. Chief among the condemners was the Boston clergyman Charles Chauncy, who lambasted exuberant congregations not only for the “*Screamings and Shriekings of the People, but their talking, and praying, and exhorting, and singing, and laughing.*”<sup>75</sup> As the historian Ann Taves demonstrates, Chauncy described this kind of behavior not in revivalist terms—as the highest form of conversion experience—but rather using the language of Enlightenment science, as a flaw in the body and mind of the subject.<sup>76</sup> As such, it could be the result of “an overheated imagination,” a “bad temperament of the blood,” or a melancholic constitution.<sup>77</sup> Put simply, it was the result of an excessively excited body unrestrained by the rational will.

For Old Lights like Chauncy, the New Lights’ passionate experiences and concurrent bodily expressions were not the result of divine grace but of “the natural Influence of awful Words and frightful Gestures” or “a mechanical Impression on animal Nature” that worked to enhance the production of animal spirits.<sup>78</sup> In short, it was

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<sup>75</sup> Charles Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New-England* (Boston: Rogers and Fowle, 1743), 239.

<sup>76</sup> Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, chapter 1.

<sup>77</sup> Charles Chauncy, *Enthusiasm Described and Caution'd Against* (Boston, J. Draper, for S. Eliot and J. Blanchard, 1742), 3-5.

<sup>78</sup> Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts*, 109, 80.

heretical experience. Although the assertion of a strong rational will could ideally contain these affections, an overabundance of these profane impulses was capable of putting “weaker Minds out of Possession of themselves.”<sup>79</sup> The self-loss that resulted was not a divine ecstasy. Instead, it was a debased indulgence in “enthusiasm,” a pejorative term of the day that was associated with non-devotional trance and emotion pursued for its own sake. During the eighteenth century, enthusiasm was regularly defined as an egregious miscalculation: “To equal the *imaginings of men* to the *holy scripture of God*, and think them as much the *inspiration of God*, as what was dictated as such, to the *holy prophets* and apostles, is strictly and properly *Enthusiasm*.”<sup>80</sup> At their most benign, Chauncy suggested, these dynamics were mere flights of fancy propelled by an overactive personal imagination, but at their worst they could be linked more to “the *Suggestions of Satan*” than to an indwelling of the Holy Spirit.<sup>81</sup> According to strict Old Lights, enthusiasm was most easily associated with frequent, physical, and passionate experiences—particularly ecstasy—that was characteristically atheistic in its orientation.

New Lights, of course, took a softer—although not entirely unconditional—approach to religious experiences that abounded with rapturous physicality. “[W]hen...the affections are so strong, and the whole soul so engaged and ravished and swallowed up,” Edwards claimed, it was no wonder that “all other parts of the body are so affected as to be deprived of their strength, and the whole frame ready to dissolve.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts*, 94.

<sup>80</sup> M[artin] M[adan], *A Full and Compleat Answer to the Capital Errors, Contained in the Writings of the Late Rev. William Law* (1763), quoted in: Susie I. Tucker, *Enthusiasm: A Study in Semantic Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 27. About a century earlier, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke had defined the word in similar terms. Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>81</sup> Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts*, 182.

<sup>82</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of President Edwards, in Four Volumes*, vol. 1 (New York: Leavitt, Trow and Company, 1844), 1:531.

But this did not mean Edwards was indiscriminate in his endorsements of self-loss and bodily emotion. The false ecstasy of enthusiasm was also still possible for him, even when people practiced in the name of spiritual devotion:

[T]here are many exercises of the affections that are very flashy, and little to be depended on; and oftentimes there is a great deal that appertains to them, or rather that is the effect of them, that has its seat in animal nature, and is very much owing to the constitution and frame of the body.<sup>83</sup>

The difficulty was in determining which forms of self-loss were inspired through God's grace and which were fabricated by indulging in unholy affections. On this count, Edwards was reluctant to provide a steadfast heuristic for distinguishing between earthly and divine transcendent experiences, concluding only that the task must be left to "the skill of the observer."<sup>84</sup>

George Whitefield, for his part, applied a similar distinction between sacred and profane forms of musical affections. While on a preaching tour throughout the American southern colonies, he was known to condemn adamantly the profane music associated with public revelries. This occurred on New Year's Day in 1740 at a tavern in South Carolina, when he chastised a dancing woman and her accompanying fiddler for indulging in a sinful entertainment that "well pleased the Devil."<sup>85</sup> Despite his aversion to secular music, Whitefield was nonetheless a strong supporter of religious singing and engaged in it frequently. On occasion his singing even helped elicit ecstatic feelings of unity, such as those that occurred in Newborn Town, Georgia, about a week before his encounter in the South Carolinian tavern. It was here, on Christmas Eve of 1739, that Whitefield had a "sweet Communion in Spirit" while singing hymns and spiritual songs

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<sup>83</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Thoughts on Revival of Religion in New England, 1742* (New York: Dunning and Spalding, 1832), 122.

<sup>84</sup> Quoted in: Taves, *Fits, Trances & Visions*, 37.

<sup>85</sup> George Whitefield, *A Continuation of the Reverend Mr. Whitefield's Journal* (London: James Hutton, 1740), 77.

to usher in the festival of nativity.<sup>86</sup> As with Edwards, Whitefield’s method of distinguishing the Devil-pleasing effects of profane music from the “sweet Communion” of sacred songs was based mainly on his own discerning ear rather than some immutable characteristics.

### The Wesley Brothers

Into this religious tumult waded John and Charles Wesley, brothers and Anglican theologians from Oxford, and far and away the most musical of the Great Awakening revivalists. Steeped in the ideology of dispassionate selfhood that permeated most Protestant denominations during the eighteenth century, the Wesleys were raised to be studious and disciplined—an ethic that served them well during their years as students at Oxford in the 1720s. Never lacking commitment in their pursuit of piety, the brothers began a Holy Club at the university that required members to fast two times a week, preach to others, and meet daily for three hours of prayer, psalms, and biblical reading.<sup>87</sup>

Although they endorsed in broad terms the Calvinist emphasis on self-control and self-denial as inextricable from personal salvation, the Wesleys also diverged from Puritan teachings in several important ways. They rejected the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, believing instead in the Arminian principle that individual will can augment one’s inner holiness. They also willingly conceded that something like a deep emotional impulse drove all devotional acts, including those of rigid self-regulation. As early as 1726, John wrote of the importance of an “inward...religion of the heart” composed of “simplicity of intention and purity of affection...one desire ruling all our

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<sup>86</sup> Whitefield, *A Continuation...Journal*, 5:71-72.

<sup>87</sup> Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 2013).

temper.”<sup>88</sup> And when he spoke of the necessity of giving “all my heart, to [God],”<sup>89</sup> he implied that this emotional brand of devotion involved aspects of self-loss. In validating this tacit acceptance of transcendent experience, Wesley may also have been compelled by his readings of the Church Fathers while he was at Oxford, particularly those of John Chrysostom on *theosis*, a concept that purported that the mind and body could achieve a likeness or union with God through cathartic acts of purification.<sup>90</sup> Wesley’s leanings towards devout transport were duly noted by some of his more conservative colleagues at Oxford, who condemned as “enthusiasm” the practice of his Holy Club.

Dogged by this label on a consistent basis, the Wesleys overtly strove to avoid outright enthusiasm, which prioritized experience over devotion, without succumbing to the pitfalls of “formalism,” which elevated religious practice over experience. As the historian W. Stephen Gunter observes, John Wesley was always trying to find a balance between “cold rationalism” and “overheated enthusiasm.”<sup>91</sup> In this capacity he was reluctant to concede that his devotional work could culminate in the full relinquishment of his soul. Nevertheless, he remained fascinated with finding the balance between passionless worship on one hand and ecstatic, areligious indulgence on the other.

For John Wesley, the performance of religious music provided an important opportunity for pursuing this middle path. One particularly poignant event in 1736 occurred on a ship bound for Georgia, where both Wesley brothers were hired to work as spiritual advisors to the founder of the colony, James Oglethorpe. Several months into

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<sup>88</sup> Henry Moore, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, A. M.*, vol. I (London: Printed for John Kershaw, 1824), I: 95.

<sup>89</sup> Moore, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley*, I: 95.

<sup>90</sup> Steve McCormick, “Theosis in Chrysostom and Wesley: An Eastern Paradigm on Faith and Love,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 26 (1991): 50.

<sup>91</sup> Wesley, too, would strive to make distinctions between what he called “proper enthusiasm” and “reasonable [or improper] enthusiasm.” W. Stephen Gunter, *The Limits of “Love Divine”: John Wesley’s Response to Antinomianism and Enthusiasm* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1989), 127, 134-137.

their transatlantic journey a fierce storm rose up and broke the mast of the ship. The English travelers on board panicked, but a group of Moravians who were also there remained calm as they sung psalms, never resorting to the crying, screaming, and trembling of their neighbors.<sup>92</sup> Their music, in Wesley's estimation, had somehow enabled them to channel their fear into an affectionate praise of God that in turn imbued them with equanimity and courage. Essentially, it proved that emotional devotion could be attained without abandoning the integrity of the individual. The group's behavior left a lasting impression on John, who described it at length in his diary. Soon after reaching the American colony, he obtained a Moravian hymnal and spent three to five hours a day translating and adapting it into English.<sup>93</sup> It would not be long before the Wesley brothers together published their own collection of psalms and hymns.

As both Wesley brothers' interest in music grew, however, their valuation of the principle of self-control constantly came up against their desire to augment their own spiritual experience. Ultimately, they conceded that intense passions were necessary for true conversion, even if they entailed something approaching a sense of self-abandon. Here again, music was integral. Probably the closest John Wesley ever got to a transcendent experience occurred on May 24, 1738 at a meeting room in Aldersgate, London. On the evening of that day, he attended a reading of Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. At about a quarter to nine, as the reader was describing how faith in Christ enables God to work in the heart, Wesley was inundated with a religious experience like none he had ever had: "I felt my heart strangely warmed," he later

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<sup>92</sup> John Wesley, *The Works of Reverend John Wesley* (London: John Jones, 1809), 186-187 (February 1736).

<sup>93</sup> J. Steven O'Malley, "Pietistic Influence on John Wesley: Wesley and Gerhard Tersteegen," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 31, no. 2 (Fall 1996): 66.

recounted. “I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”<sup>94</sup> The sensation stayed with Wesley into the following day, when going over Psalm 89, he slipped into a synesthetic state whereby he could “taste the good word of God.” The psalm he was reading seemed to itself echo Wesley’s own sentiment. It began: “My song shall be always of the loving-kindness of the Lord: with my mouth will I ever be showing forth thy truth from one generation to another.”<sup>95</sup>

During that same week that his brother’s heart was “warmed” at Aldersgate, Charles Wesley also had a mystical experience that he later found best expressed through song. While recovering from an illness in the home of some Moravians in England, he suddenly felt his soul undergo a profound transformation. “By degrees the Spirit of God chased away the darkness of my unbelief,” he wrote in his diary.<sup>96</sup> “I found myself convinced. . . I saw that by faith I stood.” Soon after, Charles felt compelled to commemorate this event by writing a hymn. Although he never specified which one of his many compositions it was, scholars agree that a likely possibility is “And Can it Be that I Should Gain,” whose final verse runs as follows:

No condemnation now I dread,  
 Jesus, and all in Him, is mine:  
 Alive in Him, my living Head,  
 And clothed in righteousness Divine,  
 Bold I approach th’ eternal throne,  
 And claim the crown, through Christ, my own.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> John Wesley, *The Journal of John Wesley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 66.

<sup>95</sup> Wesley, *The Journal of John Wesley*, 67.

<sup>96</sup> Charles Wesley, *The Early Journal of Charles Wesley* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1909), 147.

<sup>97</sup> Roger J. Green, “1738 John & Charles Wesley Experience Conversions,” *Christian History Home* 28 (1990) <[www.christianitytoday.com/ch/1990/issue28/2844.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/1990/issue28/2844.html)> [Accessed on July 22, 2014].

Such a description of his “Head” living in Jesus and “all in Him” being “mine” would suggest something like an ecstatic interpenetration of Charles’ self with that of the Divine.

The Wesley brothers and their followers would remember these moments as their belated religious conversions and the first time they experienced confirmation of their salvation. In many ways these events marked the brothers’ transition into a newly devout period in their lives, setting them on the path to developing, with the help of George Whitefield, the distinct religious movement within Anglo-American Protestantism eventually known as Methodism. From these moments onward, the Wesleys and their Methodist followers became more amenable to considering self-transcendence as an acceptable part of religious experience.

Certainly, their fear of being snared by enthusiasm required that they proceed with caution, and for this they rarely endorsed flamboyant self-abandon. For example, in describing his most profound conversion experience, John Wesley was sure to articulate his encounter with God as a “strange” sensation that occurred within him rather than an act of outright spiritual communion. Likewise, he suggested that true spiritual development always involved “meekness, patience, gentleness, and long-suffering,” characteristics which may have involved a degree of self-control uncondusive to self-loss. Nevertheless, the Wesleys’ approach, more than that of any other Great Awakening revivalist, celebrated something like ecstatic experience as an essential feature of religious life.

No man can be a *true Christian* without such an inspiration of the Holy Ghost as fills his heart with peace and joy and love; which he who perceives not, has it not.... And this I take to be the very foundation of Christianity.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Quoted in: Taves, *Fits, Trances & Visions*, 51.



This emphasis in religious emotion helps explain the brothers' subsequent turn to impassioned sermons, their belief in conversion experiences as essential for salvation, and their faith in the sustained action of the Holy Spirit upon the believer's soul.

Not coincidentally, Methodists placed the singing of hymns as central to their worship practices. In the words of the historian Leslie Griffiths, "Singing was the medium by which Methodists learned and gave wing to their theology."<sup>99</sup> Charles Wesley alone wrote several thousand hymns during his lifetime, most of them after his conversion experience. John, while less musically prolific, was equally supportive of song as a method of faithful experience and expression. Hymnody proved integral to the spread of Methodism throughout the English-speaking Atlantic world during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and in this capacity it complemented a Methodist commitment to extensive missionizing. After the events of 1738, for example, John Wesley would follow in George Whitefield's mold by embarking on extensive and open-air preaching tours of Britain and the colonies, attracting crowds that numbered in the tens of thousands, and encouraging participants to develop their own intensely emotional relationship with God. The singing of hymns frequently factored into his meetings and, along with the popularity of other evangelical hymnodists like Isaac Watts, helped break down the narrow but monolithic tradition of psalmody associated with Calvinism.

### **Baptists and Anglican Resistance in Virginia**

Methodists were not the only leaders of religious revivalism in America. Others included members of the Baptist church, a denomination founded in the Netherlands by

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<sup>99</sup> Leslie Griffiths, "Traditions and Spiritual Guidance: Spirituality and the Hymns of Charles Wesley," *The Way* 31 (1991): 333.

an Englishman named John Smyth. From its inception, the denomination, had been present on the American continent since the mid-seventeenth century, asserted that only professing, adult believers in Christianity (as opposed to infants) should be eligible for baptism, because such a rite should constitute an outward expression of an individual's internal conversion experience. As such, the Baptist tradition remained relatively open to the possibility of religion ecstasy from its outset.<sup>100</sup> Because it was an antinomian denomination that promoted an unadulterated, personal connection between an individual and God, many preachers tended to forego any prepared, written sermons in favor of spontaneous performances that relied on "the gift of the spirit."<sup>101</sup> Congregants followed suit. Some Baptists encouraged these practices more than others, with the result that, by the mid-eighteenth century, a new, emotionally-oriented sect cleaved off from the original movement and, with the help of evangelical missionaries, spread quickly throughout the American colonies, especially the South. Members of this new sect—called Separate Baptists—could be counted as part of the New Light movement.

As with other evangelicals, Baptists paired their belief in profound religious experiences with a hearty endorsement of musical praise.<sup>102</sup> The lyrics to some of their songs specifically suggested the possibility of self-loss under the relentless power of the Holy Spirit:

Down from above the blessed Dove  
 Is Come into my Breast,  
 To witness God's eternal Love;  
 This is my heavenly Feast.  
 This makes me *Abba Father* cry,  
 With Confidence of Soul;  
 It makes me cry, My Lord, my God,

<sup>100</sup> Jack Stephen Kroll-Smith, "In Search of Status Power: The Baptist Revival in Colonial Virginia, 1760-1776" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1982), 163.

<sup>101</sup> James Downey, "The Music of American Revivalism" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Tulane University, 1968), 93.

<sup>102</sup> Downey, "The Music of American Revivalism," 93-95.

And that without Controul [sic].<sup>103</sup>

This kind of song was sung by preachers and congregations alike, including during a baptismal service in Fauquier County, Virginia, in 1771. On this occasion, the preacher, Daniel Fristoe, wrote about a service attended by approximately two thousand people. Spectators crawled up trees, filling them sometimes to the point of breaking, in order to see dozens of people being immersed in holy water for the first time. Afterwards, those in attendance moved to a field where the preacher laid hands on the newly baptized. The scene overflowed with emotion and self-loss:

The multitude stood round weeping, but when we sang *Come we that love the lord* & they were so affected that they lifted up their hands and faces towards heaven and discovered such chearful [sic] countenances in the midst of flowing tears as I had never seen before. In going away I looked back and saw multitudes, some roaring on the ground, some wringing their hands, some in extacies [sic]...and other so outrageous cursing & swearing that it was thought they were really possessed of the devil.<sup>104</sup>

The vehemence of the Baptists was palpable. While some rejoiced in spiritual delight that they had come to God and were finally “born again,” others despaired at their sinfulness and inadequacy in comparison to the Divine and therefore took to swearing.

In Virginia, such behavior galled the more reserved and conservative Anglicans, who also tended to be the wealthier landowners in the region. (Separate Baptists, by contrast, typically included middling property owners and the poor.)<sup>105</sup> The obvious differences in class, religion, and emotional style were bound to come to a head, and they did so on many occasions. One occasion occurred during the same year as Fristoe’s

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<sup>103</sup> Quoted in: Alan Heimer and Perry Miller, eds., *The Great Awakening: Documents Illustrating the Crisis and Its Consequences* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1967), 202-203.

<sup>104</sup> Daniel Fristoe’s journal 1771, in: Lewis Peyton Little, *Imprisoned Preachers and Religious Liberty in Virginia: A Narrative Drawn Largely from the Official Records of Virginia Counties, Unpublished Manuscripts, Letters, and Other Original Sources* (Lynchburg, VA: J.P. Bell Co., 1938), 243.

<sup>105</sup> Clifton Ellis, “Dissenting Faith and Domestic Landscape in Eighteenth-Century Virginia,” in *Everyday Landscapes: Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, VII*, ed. Annmarie Adams and Sally McMurry (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 32.

laying on of hands ceremony, when another Baptist preacher, John Waller, had a violent run-in with Anglican elites in the Tidewater region of Virginia. One Sabbath day, as Waller began to sing to his fellow worshippers, the Anglican “Parson of the Parish” stormed into the congregation with his clerk, the sheriff, and other supporters:

[The parson began] running the end of his horsewhip in his [Waller’s] mouth, laying his whip across the hymn book, etc. When done singing he [Waller] proceeded to prayer. In it he was violently jerked off the stage; they caught him by the back part of his neck, beat his head against the ground, sometimes up, sometimes down, they carried him through a gate that stood some considerable distance, where a gentlemen gave him something not much less than twenty lashes with his horse whip.<sup>106</sup>

Baptist faith, it would seem, went against so much of what Anglicanism stood for that, in the opinion of its most ardent defenders, it deserved aggressive, violent retaliation.

Indeed, the faith of Separate Baptists did seem to mount a direct challenge to the status quo. Its openness to radical religious experiences only echoed other radical impulses, including egalitarian ones that rejected the hierarchal structure of the Church of England just as it derided the higher echelons of the colonial gentry. To make matters more difficult for the Anglican elite, Baptist faith and practice proved exceedingly hard to discourage. Despite Waller’s protracted abuse and derision, immediately after being released he “went back singing praise to God, mounted the stage and preached with a great deal of liberty.”<sup>107</sup> When asked if he did not feel stifled by the parson’s violent persecution, he answered that “The Lord stood by him of a truth and poured his love into his soul without measure, and the brethren and sisters about him singing praises to Jehovah, so that he could scarcely feel the stripes for the love of God.”<sup>108</sup> Evangelicalism, it would appear, was not so easy to beat down. The ecstasy that came from having God’s

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<sup>106</sup> Quoted in: Little, *Imprisoned Preachers*, 230.

<sup>107</sup> Quoted in: Little, *Imprisoned Preachers*, 231.

<sup>108</sup> Quoted in: Little, *Imprisoned Preachers*, 231.

love “poured” into their souls fulfilled Baptists’ spiritual needs so thoroughly that they could endure direct insult and physical injury.

### **Camp Meetings and Spirituals during the Second Great Awakening**

The importance of intense, ecstatic, and musical worship practices cannot be underestimated in explaining the explosion in religious fervor that spread throughout the United States in the early decades of the nineteenth century during what eventually became known as the Second Great Awakening. Experience-based faith, particularly that endorsed by Methodism, proved remarkably attractive to Americans of various backgrounds during this time. Whereas the founders of Methodism and other evangelical denominations exercised the utmost caution in embracing emotional and self-transcendent inclinations that fell short of “enthusiasm,” the proponents of the Second Great Awakening were bolder. They elaborated and exploited the careful work of the Wesley brothers and sought to transplant physical and frequent ecstatic experiences firmly into the fold of acceptable religion.

The movement’s elevation of passionate devotion made sense to many Americans. For some, it provided a way of coalescing people around religion during a period when many Americans were fearful about the spread of secularization, liberalization, and other political and economic transformations in American society.<sup>109</sup> Its premium on intense boundary-dissolving experiences and its largely Arminian-based emphasis on self-determination could also be reconciled with the anti-authoritarian, anti-

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<sup>109</sup> Works that support this viewpoint, include: John Bodo, *The Protestant Clergy and Public Issues, 1812-1848* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954); Charles C. Cole, Jr., *The Social Ideas of the Northern Evangelists, 1820-1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954); Charles Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790-1837* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960); Perry Miller, *Nature’s Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 115; Donald Mathews, “The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830: An Hypothesis,” *American Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (Spring 1969): 23-43.

orthodox ethos that had fueled the American Revolution and permeated the democratic principles of Protestant theology for generations.<sup>110</sup> As it turned out, appealing to the hearts of the people rather than the intellects of elites proved enormously successful. Starting around 1800, evangelical revivalism began to spread like wildfire through the Southern states and American frontier lands, ultimately igniting a religious fervor throughout the country.

Music factored regularly into the Southern and Western revivalism of the Second Great Awakening, even more than in its eighteenth-century forerunner. Exuberant singing featured prominently in the camp meetings organized by evangelicals throughout the South and West of America.<sup>111</sup> Very often, music was used as an integral tool in eliciting religious self-loss, or what evangelicals increasingly called being “slain in the Spirit.” And more than ever before, this musical ecstasy was meant to be a non-hierarchal communal event, in which any number of individuals in attendance could experience spiritual transcendence in the company of other devotees. At one of the earliest camp meetings, organized in Logan Country, Kentucky in June of 1800, John McGee, a Methodist preacher in attendance, came to the pulpit singing the following words:

Come Holy Spirit, heavenly dove,  
With all thy quick'ning powers,  
Kindle a flame of sacred love,  
In these cold hearts of ours.<sup>112</sup>

At this, it was reported, the heavenly spirit descended upon the people, causing some to fall to the ground, others to cry out for mercy, pray, or praise God in resounding voices—

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<sup>110</sup> Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989); John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>111</sup> By 1811 the Methodist bishop Francis Asbury reported in his journal that over 400 camp meetings were held annually along the frontier from Georgia to Michigan. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. “Camp Meeting,” accessed February 18, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/topic/camp-meeting>.

<sup>112</sup> Kenneth O. Brown, *Holy Ground: A Study of the American Camp Meeting* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), 18.

much to the shock of some Presbyterian ministers in attendance. John McGee, himself nearly crumbled under the power of the Holy Spirit. Later, he recounted, “I...was near falling; the power of God was strong upon me. I turned again, and, losing sight of the fear of man, I went through the house shouting and exhorting with all possible ecstasy and energy, and the floor was soon covered with the slain.”<sup>10</sup> Several Presbyterian ministers in attendance—unfamiliar with the sudden and expressive conversion practices of the Methodists—became confused and wondered if they should intervene.<sup>113</sup>

According to the historian Dickson Bruce, music infused camp meetings from start to finish.<sup>114</sup> The opening service of a meeting, which usually began on a Thursday night, typically started with a preacher singing a spiritual song and the congregation joining in. This was followed not by a sermon, but by exhortations and more singing, a pattern which was repeated in subsequent night services. The alternation between exhortation and singing proceeded every night until mourners, called by the Holy Spirit, began to enter the pen (the altar area in front of the congregation). In due course, the power of God came down, causing sinners to fall to the ground, slain by the Holy Spirit. Sometime before midnight, after these exercises had continued for some time, the crowd generally dispersed into smaller tents to continue worship. Often singing and shouting continued until dawn, when a trumpet called congregants to prayer. After breakfast, another trumpet signaled the beginning of morning service, at which point a few of the participants moved into the seats and started singing hymns until the preacher moved to the stand and began a sermon. Following testimonials, another sermon was presented by

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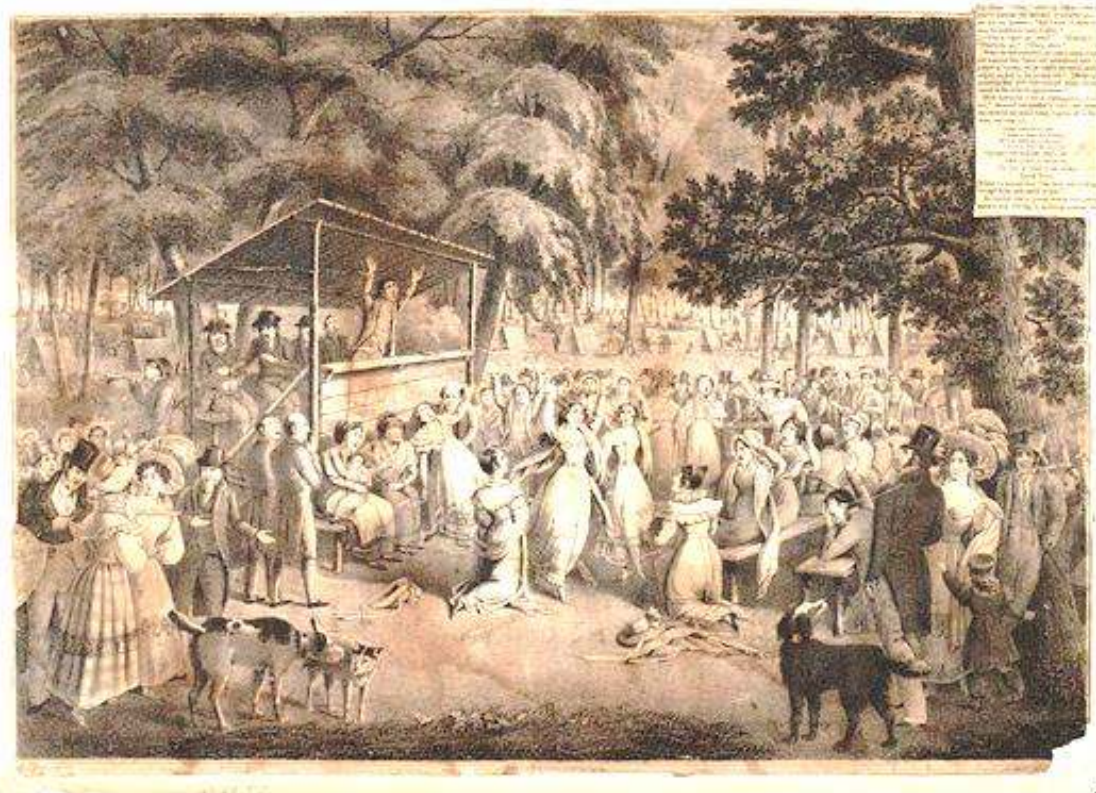
<sup>113</sup> The concerned Presbyterian ministers in attendance were named John Rankin, William Hodge, and James McGready. See: John McGee to Thomas L. Douglas, June 23, 1820, *Methodist Magazine* 4 (1821): 191, quoted in John B. Boles, *The Great Revival: Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1972), 54.

<sup>114</sup> Dickson D. Bruce, *And They All Sang Hallelujah: Plain-Folk Camp-Meeting Religion, 1800-1845* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1973), 80-82.

a senior preacher, which was closed with more congregational singing. After lunch, there was more singing, along with sermons and testimonials. During the break after afternoon services, clergy invited lay people to private tents to continue singing, praying, and exhorting. After dinner, the evening services began anew.

Particularly during evening exercises, camp participants almost certainly experienced prolonged moments of musical rapture. The episode recounted by Andrew Reed at the beginning of this chapter provides one example. So too does the event depicted by Alexander Rider in a lithograph picture dating from about 1830. It portrays one preacher leading attendees in some exuberant devotional exercise, while a series of other ministers wait their turn on the pulpit stage. One entranced woman is ushered onto a bench beneath the pulpit, while others dance intensely around the camp, apparently enthused with the Holy Spirit. Almost everyone's mouth is open—probably singing or shouting at the behest of the fervid preacher. At the back of the pulpit, someone sounds a signalling horn to draw in newcomers. Observing the scene from the sidelines are several patrician spectators, perhaps local community members averse to participating in the trance exercise but interested or concerned (or both) all the same.





**Illustration 1**

Alexander Rider and Hugh Bridgeport, "Camp Meeting," lithograph, ca. 1832 (The Harry T. Peters Collection: 19th Century American Lithographs, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution)  
<http://amhistory.si.edu/petersprints/>

Of particular note in Rider's lithograph is his depiction of the highly gendered nature of religious self-transcendence. The picture focuses on several women dancing and vocalizing in front of the preacher, presumably in the throes of spiritual rapture. In his written description, Andrew Reed provided a similar characterization in describing the several young women who fainted or lapsed into "hysterical ecstasy" while attending the camp meeting he observed in Virginia in 1834. In fact, women's susceptibility to intense emotion and self-transcendence was frequently documented and highlighted within the historical literature of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.

This focus on female trance had long been entrenched within the gendered rhetoric of American Protestantism. During the seventeenth century, Puritan ministers Thomas Shepard and Solomon Stoddard celebrated women's emotionality as something

that made them spiritual (if not social) equals of “rational” men. By the 1740s, Jonathan Edwards came to a similar conclusion. In making his case for the morality of impassioned conversion experiences, he argued that women’s proclivity for emotionalism made them willing recipients of religion, and he often singled out female worshipers as models of Christian piety.<sup>115</sup> Detractors of revivalist self-loss also framed women as emotionally vulnerable, touting their emotionalism as a sign of weakness rather than of spiritual fitness. Charles Chauncy, for instance, urged that it is in “*young People and Women*, whose Passions are soft and tender, and more easily [than men] thrown into a Commotion, that these Things [proclivities] *chiefly* prevail.”<sup>116</sup> Appealing to the physiological theories of science Chauncy explained that the reason for this female vulnerability was likely due to the “Weakness of...[women’s] Nerves, and from hence their greater Liableness to be surpris’d, and overcome with Fear.” While the rhetoric of gender liability never completely receded from evangelical discourse during the Second Great Awakening, white women may have exploited their special relationship to ecstasy as a means of augmenting their religious authority in settings where their power had traditionally been curtailed.

### **The Ring Shout and African-American Enchantment**

The embrace of ecstasy, music, and missionizing during both Great Awakenings proved attractive to groups in the American colonies and United States who had traditionally been excluded from organized religion. Perhaps primarily among these groups were the scores of African-descended people who populated large swaths of the

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<sup>115</sup> Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 148.

<sup>116</sup> Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts*, 105.

American South. As Andrew Reed observed in Virginia, enslaved African Americans were frequently in attendance at the Southern camp meetings led by white preachers. Their participation, however, was automatically subordinated to the back of the pulpit or farther reaches of the grounds, and often African Americans carried out their own distinct services in segregated quarters or in separate camp meetings altogether. John Fanning Watson, an amateur historian from Philadelphia, attended one such session at a black camp meeting in the 1810s and reported the following:

In the blacks' quarter, the colored people get together, and sing for hours together, short scraps of disjointed affirmations, pledges, or prayers, lengthened out with long repetition choruses.... With every work so sung, they have a sinking of one or other leg of the body alternately; producing an audible sound of the feet at every step.... If some in the meantime sit, they strike the sounds alternately on each thigh.<sup>117</sup>

While the exercises bore many similarities to those of white worshipers in attendance, certain practices, such as the rhythmic, almost dance-like stepping and body-slapping described above, diverged starkly. The reason for this was that slaves' cultural understanding of music and self-loss was only partly indebted to Euro-American culture and Protestantism. The other inheritance derived from Africa and its tribal religions.

Based on ethnographic studies, contemporary scholars believe that the Akan speakers, Igbo speakers, and the West-central African groups from which most American slaves were extracted were both very musical and widely engaged with the kinds of spiritual dynamics that contemporary Western scholars would call ecstasy or trance. In Yoruba culture, for instance, possession by a deity has traditionally been a formal goal of religious practices, imbuing the possessed subject with predictive powers.<sup>118</sup> During these liminal experiences, the possessed becomes known as "the one mounted by the god," and

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<sup>117</sup> John F. Watson, *Methodist Error, or Friendly Christian Advice to Those Methodists Who Indulge in Extravagant Religious Emotions and Bodily Exercises* (Trenton, NJ: D. and E. Fenton, 1819), 16.

<sup>118</sup> Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 9.

as such becomes its mouthpiece.<sup>119</sup> Historically, ceremonial possession in Western Africa would involve handclapping, call-and-response (antiphonal) singing, and complex percussive rhythms, usually involving dancing.<sup>120</sup> African possession, claims the music scholar Samuel Floyd, Jr., was strongly linked to “rhythmic stimulation,” including drumming, chanting, and singing, which would have all mutually reinforced each other as participants tended towards trance.<sup>121</sup>

Despite the horrors of the Middle Passage, enslaved people managed to smuggle in elements of their spirituality and music even as they were forced to adapt them to their new worlds. Many of these originated in the religions associated with various tribal groups from West and Central Africa, which required initiates to temporarily give up aspects of their own self-identity as they became possessed by the spirits of deities that guided their community (or deceased ancestors).<sup>122</sup> Song and dance—both of which were closely tied to religious rites—fared perhaps better than most cultural practices in surviving the transatlantic crossing.<sup>123</sup> And following convention, they could be taught to others using little more than oral and mimetic methods.

Bonded men and women likely adapted African rhythms—along with perhaps some of the melodic styles of their homelands—to new expressive forms. In many

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<sup>119</sup> Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 10.

<sup>120</sup> John M. Chernoff, “The Rhythmic Medium in African Music” *New Literary History* 22, no. 4, Papers from the Commonwealth Center for Literary and Cultural Change (Autumn, 1991): 1093; Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 65.

<sup>121</sup> Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 20, 26. Also see: Sheila S. Walker, *Ceremonial Spirit Possession in African and Afro-America: Forms, Meanings, and Functional Significance for Individual and Social Groups* (Leiden: Brill, 1972).

<sup>122</sup> The African influence on African-American culture is thought to have originated in the cultures of both West and Central Africa. Joseph E. Holloway “The Origins of African-American Culture,” in *Africanisms in American Culture*, 2nd edition, ed. Joseph E. Holloway (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), 1-18.

<sup>123</sup> Katrina Hazzard-Gordon, “Dancing Under the Lash: Sociocultural Disruption, Continuity, and Synthesis,” in *African Dance: An Artistic, Historical, and Philosophical Inquiry*, ed. Kariamu Welsh Asante (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1996), 105.

instances, these coalesced into “ring shouts.”<sup>124</sup> These were communal rituals, such as the one John Fanning Watson attended, in which participants stood and shuffled around in a circle, accompanied by the beating of a rhythm with a stick, as well as antiphonal singing and vocalizations, hand-clapping that fell on what European-Americans would have considered the non-dominant beats of the rhythm, and repetitive chants—all features that have been attributed, if controversially, to an African provenance.<sup>125</sup> What is also perhaps attributable to Africa is the spiritual significance that pre-Christianized enslaved people gave to the ring shout. One theory speculates that the roots of the circle dances actually originated in the African BaKongo practice of tracing cosmograms on the ground and dancing over them to invoke spirits.<sup>126</sup> Here again, a compelling theory remains constrained by the sheer lack of empirical evidence. Nevertheless, regardless of which attributes of the ring shout can be traced back to Africa, it seems likely that some did. And therefore enslaved people who participated in the shout would have succeeded not only in maintaining some semblance of connection to their ancestral past but also in forging communal links with others who shared something of a mutual cultural inheritance.

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<sup>124</sup> Earliest references to the ring shout as an African retention go back to at least the 1840s. See: Dena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 232. For one of the earliest scholarly works in the twentieth century that claims the ring shout as an African cultural retention, see: Harold Courlander, *Negro Folk Music, U.S.A.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963).

<sup>125</sup> Mark Knowles, *Tap Roots: The Early History of Tap Dancing* (Jefferson, NC: Mcfarland & Co, 2002), 59-60; Samuel A. Floyd, “Ring Shout! Literary Studies, Historical Studies, and Black Music Inquiry,” *Black Music Research Journal* 22 (2002): 50; Robert Winslow Gordon, “Negro ‘Shouts’ from Georgia,” in *Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel: Readings in the Interpretation of Afro-American Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (New York: Garland, 1981); John Storm Roberts, *Black Music of Two Worlds*, 2nd edition (New York: Schirmer, 1998), 19-68.

<sup>126</sup> Peoples Gabriel, “A Circular Lineage: The BaKongo Cosmogram and the Ring Shout of the Enslaved Africans and their Descendants on the Georgian and South Carolinian Sea Islands” (Masters Thesis, Cornell University, 2008).

Irrespective of issues of provenance, it is clear that African-American ring shouts presented regular opportunities for the enslaved to become entranced, which they sometimes called “falling out.”<sup>127</sup> While trance was not a necessary outcome, it was a frequent one. It was typically achieved by progressing through a series of stages that, despite a premium on spontaneity, tended to follow a familiar arc. Starting first slowly, the shout would gradually quicken to a frenzied pace, often ending with participants screaming, falling to the ground, or dropping out of the circle.<sup>128</sup>

In 1886, the journalist and novelist George Washington Cable wrote an article describing earlier dance gatherings in New Orleans during the first half of the century.<sup>129</sup> His account described a bamboula dance, which was in some ways distinct from the ring shout. What it does provide, however, is a generally accurate outline of the basic stages of African-American dance and music practices related the ring shout during the several centuries it was practiced on American soil. Writing in the present tense, Cable described how, on Sunday afternoons, “slaves” congregate in “Place Congo,” later known as Congo Square, the central gathering place of the enslaved community in New Orleans. The dance usually begins with some “slow and measured” musical movements, accompanied by a “slow and quiet strain” that is also “dull and repetitious.” From the first note, many singers join in, finishing the end of the first line with uplifted voices, and growing in spirit the second time around. A chief singer then “rolls out the song from a mouth and throat like a cavern,” exhibiting a “play of restrained enthusiasm” that spreads from one bystander to another. They “swing and bow to right and left in slow time to the piercing

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<sup>127</sup> Knowles, *Tap Roots*, 59.

<sup>128</sup> Knowles, *Tap Roots*, 60.

<sup>129</sup> George Washington Cable, “The Dance in Place Congo,” *Century Magazine*, vol. XXXI (February 1886): 517-532.

treble of the Congo women. Some are responsive; others are competitive.” The slap of bare feet can be heard, and the musicians “warm up” at the sound. The women’s voices “rise to a tremulous intensity,” some of them improvising. “Now the chorus is more piercing than ever.” The women clap their hands in time. A fellow has taken “one short, nervy step into the ring, chanting with rising energy. Now he takes another, and stands and sings and looks here and there, rising upon his broad toes and sinking and rising again.” Now “the music has got into his feet.” He moves to the ring’s edge, still singing, and leads a girl into the ring.

Wait! A sudden frenzy seizes the musicians. The measure quickens, the swaying, attitudinizing crowd starts into extra activity, the female voices grow sharp and staccato, and suddenly the dance is the furious Bamboula. Now for the frantic leaps! Now for frenzy! Another pair are in the ring!...And still another couple enter the circle. What wild—what terrible delight! The ecstasy rises to madness; one—two—three of the dancers fall—*bloucoutoum! boum!*—with foam on their lips and are dragged out by arms and legs from under the tumultuous feet of crowding newcomers. The musicians know no fatigue; still the dance rages on.<sup>130</sup>

While Cable’s description of the bamboula is not without its biases, including a willingness to describe the phenomenon as “madness,” it also accurately indicates some basic characteristics of the ring shout and other African-American dances. The circle dancing, the initially slow and repetitive tempo rising in intensity, the hand clapping, the sudden climax—this pattern remained typical of ring shout gatherings from the eighteenth century to the twentieth century, when the dance itself mostly faded out of African-American culture.<sup>131</sup> What Cable does not describe here are the slaves’ internal experiences, the spirit possession of which he may have had little reliable knowledge. However, he does vaguely imply a kind of self-transcendent experience in describing the “ecstasy” and the “madness” as the music reaches a fevered pitch.

<sup>130</sup> Cable, “The Dance in Place Congo,” 523.

<sup>131</sup> According to Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., Cable’s observation that “some are responsive; others are competitive” suggests the presence of call-and-response figures and polyphony that was likely inherited from Africa. Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*, 37.

Whether or not enslaved African Americans reconjured African deities and African communities on American soil, their music provided its participants with one of their most powerful instruments of resistance. It created the psychic and spiritual channels necessary to transport them, if even temporarily and incompletely, out of bondage. Certainly, they could not easily escape the physical bonds of forced servitude. In Saidiya Hartman's view, chattel slavery served to make the captive body "an abstract and empty vessel, vulnerable to the projections of others' feelings, ideas, desires, and values."<sup>132</sup> In this sense, Hartman suggests that the logic of slavery leaned toward an enforced dispossession of African selfhood—by making the enslaved person a receptacle for the consciousness of the master. In this view, bondage, by its very definition, insisted on a degree of self-loss. But if enslaved individuals had been entirely dispossessed of their bodies, perhaps they believed that their souls could not so easily succumb to their white masters. And spirit possession, manifested through the ritualized rhythms of African music, would have served to barricade white ownership from the most essential aspects of their identity, if even for a few hours every week. In this sense, the ring shout ensured that the enforced entrancement of African selves by white traders and owners was always partial.

Traders and planters throughout the Americas recognized only too well how ring shouts and other African-inspired forms of musical spirit possession challenged their authority over enslaved peoples. Consequently, many white Americans worked hard to mitigate the more potent expressions of African-American ecstasy. From the beginning they had attempted to simply curtail the frequency with which the enslaved engaged in

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<sup>132</sup> Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 21.



their own musical rituals, by keeping them working and limiting their free time to one day or several hours a week. Indeed, the advent of Congo Square as a meeting place for African Americans on Sunday afternoons was the result of city ordinance to confine (the perceived threat of) music and religion of enslaved people to a highly localized place and time.<sup>133</sup> By the mid-eighteenth century, however, legislators of the slaveocracy resorted to even stricter measures. In many places, they banned enslaved people from using drums and other loud instruments that could be used to communicate with each other over relatively long distances using a rhythmic language unknown to whites. “[I]t is absolutely necessary to the safety of this Province,” read South Carolina’s Negro Act of 1740, “that all due care be taken to restrain the...using or keeping of drums, horns, or other loud instruments, which may call together or give sign or notice to one another of their wicked designs and purposes.”<sup>134</sup>

Drumming had been so integral to African religious practice that its prohibition substantially curtailed the enslaved people’s ability to forge communal bonds based on old world cosmologies. If African-American religion was to survive the censorious purview of white lawmakers, its initiates needed to recast their musical-spiritual rituals into a form that their masters would find acceptable. This drumming prohibition elucidates why practitioners of the “ring shout” replaced drum accompaniment with hand-clapping, foot-tapping, and other softer rhythmic expressions, which could take over the percussive roles originally carried out by the drums.<sup>135</sup> But enslaved people

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<sup>133</sup> Carolyn Morrow Long, “Perceptions of New Orleans Voodoo: Sin, Fraud, Entertainment, and Religion,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 6, no. 1 (October 2002): 86-101.

<sup>134</sup> 1740 South Carolina Slave Code, Acts of the South Carolina General Assembly, 1740 # 670, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, South Carolina. Reproduced in: U. S. Department of Education, *Teaching American History in South Carolina Program*, <http://www.teachingushistory.org/trove/1740slavecode.htm>.

<sup>135</sup> Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 64-65.

would need to do more than this if they were to maintain the ecstatic aspects of their own musical culture.

The arrival of evangelical preachers in the South, starting in the 1730s, provided a fortuitous opportunity for adapting African musical experiences. Not only did the preachers encourage the enslaved to convert to Christianity (something that slavemasters had been reluctant to do up until that point), they were also open to methods of exuberant bodily devotion and spiritual ecstasies that would have seemed considerably more compatible with African rituals than the staid worship of the Old Lights. Consequently, enslaved people entered into evangelical churches, where they heartily took advantage of preachers' endorsements of effusive praise. Reverend Samuel Davies, one of the more musical of the American-born evangelists of the eighteenth century, preached throughout Virginia from the 1740s to the 1770s and observed that "The Negroes, above all the human species that ever I knew, have an ear for music and a kind of extatic [sic] delight in psalmody."<sup>136</sup> During Sabbath services, he took great pleasure listening to the enslaved in their segregated gallery "breaking out in a torrent of sacred harmony, enough to bear away the whole congregation to heaven."<sup>137</sup> Instead of being mounted by African gods, they were now being filled with the Holy Spirit. But all the same, they still shouted, sung, danced, and tranced to achieve their spiritual goals.<sup>138</sup>

This is not to say that enslaved people gave up all their African rituals in their transition to evangelicalism. What they created, in many instances, was a syncretic religion combining elements of both. By the Second Great Awakening, this syncretism was best represented by African-American "spirituals," self-stylized folk hymns

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<sup>136</sup> Quoted in: Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 21.

<sup>137</sup> Quoted in: Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 21.

<sup>138</sup> Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 64.

developed by enslaved people that synthesized Christian doctrine, in the form of lyrics, with African-derived musical devices that would have been more familiar to the enslaved.<sup>139</sup> The compilers of *Slave Songs of the United States*, the first collection of African American music, also observed this syncretism in South Carolinian congregants' creative blending of Anglo-style worship with the traditional ring shout format.

Following regular church services, they reported:

The benches are pushed back to the wall when the form meeting is over, and old and young, men and women, sprucely-dressed young men, grotesquely half-clad field-hands[,],...boys with tattered shirts and men's trousers, young girls barefooted, all stand up in the middle of the floor, and when the 'sperichil' is struck up, begin first walking and by-and-by shuffling round, one after the other, in a ring.<sup>140</sup>

Sometimes they danced in silence, sometimes they performed a spiritual as they sung, and most often "a band, composed of some of the best singers and of tired shouters, [stood] at the side of the room to 'base' the others, singing the body of the song and clapping their hands together or on the knees." Both the song and the dance were "extremely energetic," and sometimes the "monotonous thud, thud of the feet" could be heard lasting well into the night.<sup>141</sup>

If critics of the ring shout condemned African Americans' bodily effusiveness as an egregious loss of individuality during the ring shout, then they may have been misconstruing the nature of shouters' awareness during these rituals. If contemporary ethnographic studies of dance, music, and consciousness in West Africa provide any indication of those historic African cultures from which American diasporic communities

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<sup>139</sup> Floyd, "Ring Shout!" 50; Knowles, *Tap Roots*, 59.

<sup>140</sup> William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, Lucy McKim Garrison, *Slave Songs of the United States* (New York: Peter Smith, 1951 [c1867]), xiii-xiv.

<sup>141</sup> Allen, Ware, and Garrison, *Slave Songs of the United States*, xiv.

were extracted, then it might be possible to conjecture<sup>142</sup> that enslaved Africans were also concerned with regulating their sense of selfhood during spiritual ceremonies.

Ethnomusicologist John Miller Chernoff argues that the rhythms, which are so central to many forms of African music, encapsulate apparently contradictory impulses: one towards individualism and the other toward collective values. In much African music, drummers superimpose rhythms on top of other rhythms, often each one with markedly different meters. According to Chernoff, the polyrhythmic environment they create requires each drummer to simultaneously protect the integrity of his own rhythm without abandoning the coherence of the overall pattern. They must remain detached from the collective even as they participate in it. If each participant provides the appropriate balance of distance and collaboration, what emerges is a super-rhythm (or “phantom” rhythm)—the true music of the performance, which is somehow larger than the sum of the component parts.<sup>143</sup>

Part of a West African sensibility, therefore, is—and perhaps was—a “polyrhythmic consciousness” that rejected a stark distinction between self and other, and likewise individuality and self-loss. Just as ceremonial musicians in West Africa do not hierarchize one rhythm over another in a polyrhythmic performance, so too do they reject the dichotomies between normal and altered consciousness. What they affirm, in the researcher Sam Mickey’s words, is “the ongoing alternation or liminal interplay of what

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<sup>142</sup> Using contemporary studies to draw conclusions about historical interpretations of African selfhood is riddled with potential pitfalls, and therefore the reader should approach the remainder of this section as purely speculative.

<sup>143</sup> John Miller Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). Chernoff’s study is based on Ghana and not necessarily representative of all of African music, or even West African music for that matter, as Chernoff himself acknowledges.

are hastily called opposites.”<sup>144</sup> And in this, they approach Morris Berman’s notion of a “participatory consciousness,” a sense of self that, although somewhat contained, extends out and merges with one’s surroundings.<sup>145</sup> The stableness that African ceremonial initiates find in ambiguity means that, in musical trance, they control and protect their selfhood even as they let a god “ride” or “come up” to them. This balance is valued to such a degree that, as Chernoff observes, a religious figure is frequently present who specializes in “cooling down ‘hot’ people.”<sup>146</sup>

The art historian Robert Farris Thompson elaborates this notion of controlled selfhood, or what he calls “the aesthetic of the cool,” and finds it to be an integral element of African expressive culture. (The concept of “cool” itself features prevalently in African languages and cultures.) It is this sensibility that compels trance initiates to value individual composure and social stability, expressed through the ability to be nonchalant or stoic in exciting, passionate, or stressful situations. This cool mind-state, exhibited at the right moment, is considered to be very attractive.<sup>147</sup> Was this polyrhythmic balance of self-possession and deity-possession present in the expressive culture of black diasporic communities in America? Thompson and others think so.<sup>148</sup> Although the banning of drumming by enslaved people, along with other cultural curtailments, would have challenged this African sensibility, some scholars claim that the polyrhythmic consciousness nevertheless adapted to the American setting, manifesting in

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<sup>144</sup> Sam Mickey, “The Rhythm of Spirit Possession: An Entrancing Legacy,” *Nomos Journal* (May 14, 2014), <http://nomosjournal.org/columns/sounding-sacred/the-rhythm-of-spirit-possession/> (accessed February 18, 2016).

<sup>145</sup> Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World*, 2.

<sup>146</sup> Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility*, 169.

<sup>147</sup> Robert Farris Thompson, “An Aesthetic of the Cool,” *African Arts*, vol. 7, no. 1 (Autumn, 1973): 41.

<sup>148</sup> Thompson, “An Aesthetic of the Cool”; Timothy Brennan, *Secular Devotion: Afro-Latin Music and Imperial Jazz* (New York: Verso Books, 2008).

the call-and-response musical patterns present in black ring shouts, preaching, spirituals, and other forms.<sup>149</sup>

Whatever the precise form of these cultural developments, white Westerners were loathe to recognize that enslaved people were capable of possessing themselves. They were more likely to compare African-American ceremonies to enthusiastic soul possession than to the calm, reserved contemplation of the Old Lights. Partly, this attitude developed through willful ignorance. White Americans were by and large uneducated about and unwilling to understand the subtleties associated with African-American polyrhythms and ring shouts. There were no equivalents to these features in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Euro-American music, which was typically mono-rhythmic—deviating only occasionally from this norm during temporary moments of rhythmic otherness, which musicians called “syncopation.” All white Americans heard in African-American music was the threat and the thrill of black bodies and black minds, coordinated in perpetual syncopation and capable of disrupting the racial and rhythmic hierarchy of America. The ecstasy of black music, therefore, was just as much a white construction as it was a black experience.

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Many twentieth-century historians of religion speak of two contrasting eras in American history. The first period spanned from the seventeenth century into the eighteenth and was dominated by a stern, stoic, and rational temperament associated with the Puritan brand of English Calvinism. The second period, they claim, began sometime in the eighteenth century and flourished during the nineteenth with the growth of

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<sup>149</sup> Brennan, *Secular Devotion*.

evangelical denominations like the Methodists and Baptists, which replaced rational intellectualism with exuberant spiritual experience. In broad terms, this basic narrative captures many of the important changes that occurred in Anglo-American religion during this era. It is true that the leading lights of Puritan piety, their Quaker counterparts, and a growing number of intellectuals who followed the Cartesian model of rational selfhood all elevated the integrity of the individual and emotional restraint as a moral form of conduct for much of the colonial period. Likewise, evangelicalism did much to turn the Puritan model on its head as it gained the support of a huge swath of Americans during the late-colonial and early-republican era.

However, even if one impulse tended to dominate at any given time, this narrative obscures the countervailing impulses that continuously coexisted in American religion. During the starchy era of Puritan ascendancy, overtones of antinomian ecstasy still remained perceptible and sometimes even acceptable. And during the mid-eighteenth century, when leaders and followers of the Great Awakening came to encourage more effusive and social forms of ecstasy, John Wesley and other New Lights continued to worry about how far they could acceptably transgress the boundaries of selfhood prescribed by the Old Lights. As evangelicalism evolved into the nineteenth century, the growing embrace of ecstatic exuberance proved more compatible, if not always sympathetic, to the African-derived rituals of enslaved Americans. Yet, contrary to popular belief at the time, enslaved people may not have simply encouraged a wholesale acceptance of emotional abandon. Instead they too perhaps drew on African cultural antecedents to reconcile competing proclivities towards self-loss and self-control. By emphasizing this counterpoint of experience, this chapter aims to complicate some

existing historical scholarship that risks overgeneralizing differences of religious experience based on time period, denomination, or race.

If it is difficult to map the proclivities towards spirit-possession and self-possession perfectly on to different time periods or religious and ethnic groups, perhaps it would be more useful to differentiate between those who sought to conserve social and communication hierarchies and those who did not—regardless of race, denomination, or time period. Religious Americans who typically respected the authority of clergy members to lead congregations in song often tilted towards a more stable sense of selfhood. The same could be said for those who both elevated and relied on written texts, including notated music as sources for their musical expression. Certainly, mainstream proponents of Puritanism endorsed both practices just as they often remained skeptical about the benefits of self-loss. What this overlap suggests is that the rationalizing impulse that encouraged the social status quo as well as linear (or static) text also informed a suspicion of the *ex stasis* experience. Inversely, those Americans who—either through cultural inheritance or practical necessity—leaned away from hierarchy and written text also happened to be typically more open to ecstasy. At least this seems to have been the case for those Americans who populated the less-socially stratified and less-literate areas of the country, such as the remote frontier and rural regions. Not only did the Americans who lived in these areas adopt evangelicalism more rapidly than the developed areas of the country, they also remained amenable to the more passionate religious experiences associated with camp meetings and extemporaneous expression. Enslaved people held similar attitudes. Regardless of where they lived in the country, they seemed to draw on a West-African polyrhythmic sensibility and turned to evangelical religion as they adapted



to their new position at the bottom of the American social and educational hierarchies. Of course, while social status and literacy are perhaps more helpful categories than race, denomination, or time period for understanding the competing impulses of self-experience, they still do not overlap perfectly. One notable example of this condition comes from Cotton Mather, who, while encouraging Puritans to transition to “regular singing” (which relied on notated, standardized music), nevertheless continued to laud the benefits of ecstatic experience. Consequently, it is fruitful to understand the counterpoint of religious consciousness during this period as its own distinct formation that could never be completely conflated with other forms of expression.

Beyond exploring the diverse ways that Americans interpreted their experiences of self, it is also important to recognize what they shared in common during this era. Indeed, despite their differences, all of the Americans addressed in this chapter approached their ecstatic experiences as encounters with supernatural phenomena. Like that of their European and African forebears, black and white Americans typically interpreted their most important experiences of musical transcendence as involving a fusion of themselves with the Holy Spirit or some other supernatural cognate. And all of them believed these events to reveal or maintain some deep truth about the cosmos and their place in it. This paradigm of sincere spirituality remained relatively unchallenged during the eighteenth century. During this era, most Europeans remained committed to the teachings of the first and second testament and believed firmly in the Christian God and Holy Spirit. Between 1700 and 1740, an estimated seventy-five to eighty percent of American colonialists attended churches, which were being built at a rapid rate.<sup>150</sup> All of

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<sup>150</sup> “II. Religion in Eighteenth-Century America,” *Religion and the Founding of the American Republic*. Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel02.html> (accessed August 18, 2017).

them found ways to authenticate some form of religious ecstasy, and many recognized music as an important feature of such an experience. The coming of the Great Awakenings, along with the growing numbers of Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians throughout the colonies and early states, made the United States a thoroughly religious nation. By the nineteenth century, evangelicalism had gained the support of some ten million people, or roughly forty percent of the United States' population, constituting what Richard Carwardine calls "the largest, and most formidable subculture in American society" at the time.<sup>151</sup> Certainly, some Americans considered themselves Christian in name more than in faith, and scholars still debate just how religious Americans were before the nineteenth century.<sup>152</sup> But it is difficult to deny that, from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, ministers, priests, preachers, and other religious leaders enjoyed a level of cultural influence that was rarely matched. Very frequently they also held the moral authority over two aspects of American culture relevant to this study. One was musical taste; until well into the nineteenth century, the most musical place in America remained the church.<sup>153</sup> The other involved interpretation of mysterious occurrences, including unusual alterations of selfhood.

Starting towards the end of the eighteenth century, however, some musical Americans followed their European counterparts in radically revamping how they understood self-transcendence. This process did not challenge the ritualized and mystical nature of musical experience outright, but it did alter other features that had remained pervasive throughout the American colonies and the United States for centuries.

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<sup>151</sup> Richard J. Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 44.

<sup>152</sup> Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>153</sup> Daniel Cavicchi, *Listening and Longing: Music Lovers in the Age of Barnum* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 59.

Beginning around the turn of the nineteenth century, orthodox religion would no longer represent the only framework for understanding self-loss in American culture.

**Chapter 2**  
**Naturalization:**  
 Sentimentality, Sublimity, and Animal Magnetism

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On the night of February 5, 1853 John S. Dwight entered the Boston Music Hall for a momentous occasion. The Germania Musical Society, in partnership with the Handel and Haydn Society, the United States' oldest classical music group, was performing Beethoven's Ninth Symphony for the first time in America. Earlier in the day, Dwight's *Journal of Music*—the country's highly acclaimed musical weekly—had predicted that: “the glorious intention of the music will not be lost upon the audience.”<sup>1</sup> That intention, Dwight would later explain, was to “utter the unutterable, by [producing] music ‘so monstrous long and difficult’” that it would create a “sublime whole.”<sup>2</sup> Each member of the Germania Musical Society, Dwight contended, “appear[ed] to be united by a sentiment of genuine fraternity and enthusiasm for Art.”<sup>3</sup> For them, “music is religion.... Their success is a moral triumph,” explainable only by “the cordial unanimity, spirit of devotion, the merging of the individual in the common interest.”<sup>4</sup> Of the performance, Dwight's journal declared “*not* to be enthusiastic is not to have heard.”<sup>5</sup>

During a later performance of the same symphony, Dwight's journal described the audience reaction as the “most earnest, attentive and appreciating ever seen in Boston.”<sup>6</sup> During this concert, one of the middle movements, a Scherzo, provided pure joy: “Not the [kind] that satisfies, but that in which the deeply unsatisfied soul seeks oblivion of its

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<sup>1</sup> *Dwight's Journal of Music*, February 5, 1853: 141.

<sup>2</sup> “Concerts of the Past Week,” *Dwight's Journal of Music*, February 12, 1853: 150.

<sup>3</sup> *Dwight's Journal of Music*, April 9, 1853: 6.

<sup>4</sup> *Dwight's Journal of Music*, April 9, 1853: 6.

<sup>5</sup> “Concerts of the Past Week,” *Dwight's Journal of Music*, February 12, 1853: 151.

<sup>6</sup> *Dwight's Journal of Music*, April 9, 1853: 5.

torturing aspiration in the most desperate abandonment to the philosophy which makes the livelong day and life itself a feast.”<sup>7</sup> The melody in this movement provided the “inspiring rhythm of nature, in which you feel always something rich and new...and that you never exhaust its charm.”<sup>8</sup> Another movement, the Adagio, was the product of a “communion...sweet and pure.” The final movement the audience recognized as “unspeakably sublime,” akin to a religious form of “ecstasy.”<sup>9</sup> The energy of the orchestra was enough to let it “[rise] above itself [and] seize the actual form and outline of the human utterance to which all is tending.”<sup>10</sup> For Dwight, experiencing the symphony provided opportunities for profound self-loss.

Dwight’s assessment of musical power can be both compared and contrasted to those of Jonathan Edwards, the Wesley brothers, or Andrew Reed. On one hand, all of these men recognized musical self-loss as a potent and sometimes overwhelming force that exceeded ordinary sense perception and revealed some deep truth about the cosmos. More than this, they also believed in the possibility of self-effacement in some kind of spiritual transcendent entity. In short, they all subscribed to a kind mysticism.<sup>11</sup> The commonality was apparent in Dwight’s word choice, including not only “ecstasy,” but also “religion,” “spirit,” “devotion,” “soul,” and “communion”—all of which borrowed directly from the Christian tradition.

However, Dwight also differed from the evangelicals in his precise interpretation of the object of musical ecstatic. Absent in his account were Christian appeals to an

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<sup>7</sup> *Dwight’s Journal of Music*, April 9, 1853: 5.

<sup>8</sup> *Dwight’s Journal of Music*, April 9, 1853: 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Dwight’s Journal of Music*, April 9, 1853: 5.

<sup>10</sup> *Dwight’s Journal of Music*, April 9, 1853: 6.

<sup>11</sup> According to Max Weber, mysticism is based on the belief that the self can surrender to some larger spiritual entity. Therefore, it consists of a “subjective condition which may be enjoyed as the possession of, or...union with, the divine.” Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Talcott Parson (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993 [c.1922]), 169.

omniscient God who remained separate and distant from the natural world. Although Dwight sometimes referred to “God” in his writings, for him the term was only one of many used to describe the vague, elemental force of the universe that operates through all things. Approached in this way, terms other than “God” could equally, if not more potently, describe such a metaphysical essence. According to the Transcendentalist philosophies to which Dwight subscribed, “Nature” was an immanently useful concept, for it actively referred to that raw, relentless impulse that animated the workings of the physical world. For Dwight, however, “Art” was perhaps the most useful term of all, for it reflected both the process and product of manifesting the elemental principles of the cosmos through the faculty of the human imagination.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Dwight believed music to be the highest form of Art, and although he compared its creation to “religion,” his was not a faith that was amenable to that of most mainline Protestants. Dwight believed that accurately evoking the artistic impulse was not to be achieved through religious conversion, but rather through the attentive reception of European classical music. And instead of making one aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit, Dwight’s experience was of an ineffable and elemental essence that created what he called a “sublime whole.”

Dwight’s understanding of “Nature” and “Art” echoed aspects of the classical Harmony of the Spheres philosophy. It presumed that the sounds of instruments somehow captured a deeper principle that resonated through every facet of the world. This interpretation found sacred qualities in the natural world, and therefore it could have been considered heretical “enthusiasm” by evangelicals. Perhaps for this reason, it is no coincidence that, when describing audiences’ reception to what he considered superlative

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<sup>12</sup> For an overview of the Transcendentalist idea of art, see: Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Art” in *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Society and Solitude*, vol. 7 (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1903-1904), 7: 37-57.

art music, Dwight's writings regularly and affirmatively referred to the term "enthusiastic." According to the historian Jon Mee, non-evangelicals imbued the term not only with negative connotations but also with positive ones, giving it less pejorative punch than it had received during previous centuries.<sup>13</sup> And in this respect, Dwight seems to have been reorienting the object of ecstasy away from that supported (and debated) by orthodox Protestants.

Ostensibly, some Americans' interpretation of musical self-loss had undergone an important transformation. The transition might be best described as a process of naturalization, a term that signifies a secularizing tendency whereby the objects of ecstatic experience shifted away from a supernatural source and towards more natural phenomena. In effect, this process involved a reduction of the horizon of transcendence. It was a refocus that gave less attention to the tenets of orthodox religion, but it was rarely intended to deny the existence of supernatural entities altogether. Indeed, like Dwight, the main proponents of naturalized ecstasy considered their philosophies to be compatible with the existence of a deity or other ethereal agents. Yet, their focus remained more on the mysterious, mystical, and magical forces that existed *inside* the secular, natural realm. These forces were still considered transcendent to the extent that they exceeded the agency of the individual and seemed to bind together separate components of the natural, living, and human worlds, as well as smaller social communities such as a nation or family. For this reason, they were thought to deserve a

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<sup>13</sup> Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*. Although the term "enthusiasm" was more consistently used as a pejorative in Protestantism, John Wesley too distinguished between what he called "proper enthusiasm" and "reasonable [or improper] enthusiasm." Gunter, *The Limits of "Love Divine,"* 127, 134-137.

sincere respect much like the supernatural spirit associated with conventional religion.<sup>14</sup> Despite these commonalities, however, the natural provenance of these sacred “spirits” made them qualitatively different from their orthodox religious precursors.

This chapter traces the emergence of naturalized interpretations of ecstasy as they originated among Deists, liberal Protestants, mesmerists, spiritualists and members of unorthodox faiths and non-religious philosophies that formalized in America during the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It specifically focuses on three musically-inflected traditions of naturalized self-loss, which were associated with sentimentality, the sublime, and animal magnetism. Each of these traditions was comparable yet distinct from each other. Sentimentality (or sensibility) involved the elicitation of tender feelings such as sympathy and benevolence towards others that tied together a society. Sublime experience provided an antinomian encounter, not with a distant God, but with the universal, mystical currents that flowed through Art and Nature. Animal magnetism involved the merger of self with an ethereal fluid that could both balance one’s body and soul or communicate with spirits. Broadly speaking all of these interpretations might be loosely associated with the term “romanticism.”<sup>15</sup>

By addressing musical phenomena, this chapter helps expand the focus of much existing scholarship on romanticism in America. Most of this links the popularity of naturalized ecstasy to the world of literary publications that were bought and shared far and wide throughout the United States. These included thousands of sentimental novels,

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<sup>14</sup> For an elaboration on the supernatural qualities of romanticism, see: M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1971).

<sup>15</sup> Using “romanticism” as an umbrella term to encompass all the traditions discussed in this chapter is slightly problematic, because the term was often associated with notions of the sublime. Historically, however, the term was also used more loosely to identify the amalgam of traditions that encouraged a sincere emotional engagement with earthly entities. This chapter employs the more versatile usage of the word.



short stories, and non-fictional or journalistic publications written by the likes of Catharine Sedgwick, Maria Susanna Cummins, and Harriet Beecher Stowe.<sup>16</sup> These also included the poems, essays, journals, sermons, and other published writing of romantic authors such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Walt Whitman, to name a few. Not discounting the vast influence these works and writers had on the development of romanticism in America, it is wrong to assume the romantic ethos in America was based only on writing and reading. Doing so neglects the profusion of sentimental songs and romantic music that swept through America and the English-speaking world during the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most of which were experienced through listening and performing. It also neglects the deep appreciation of music held by mesmerists and spiritualists. As this chapter demonstrates, music in the romantic tradition(s) provided Americans of various stripes and backgrounds with abundant opportunities for emotional self-abandon and compassionate connections to secular entities and activities that were not tethered to conventional Christian doctrines or clerical control.

### **Sentimentality and Sensibility**

The growth of a naturalized mode of musical ecstasy in America occurred over several centuries. It was tied up in a larger pivot towards secular thought that evolved out of contradictions found within Protestant theology itself, particularly those associated with the tenet of nominalism. Although Christian nominalism originally dissected the Divine from the profane in order to maintain God's moral authority, the historian Glenn

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<sup>16</sup> See: Shirley Samuels, ed., *Culture of Sentiment* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1992).

Olsen contends that this theological position somewhat ironically accelerated a cultural pivot away from God altogether.<sup>17</sup> Ultimately, Olsen argues, disentangling the Christian Deity from the profane world effectively made God less knowable, less accessible, and less involved in human affairs. This distance provided the earthly subject with a newfound claim to personal autonomy over the mundane world. Accordingly, it rendered the profane sphere, which was originally imbued with vulgarity, both more interesting and more valuable.<sup>18</sup> Nominalism's separation of the supernatural from the natural was not originally intended to challenge the ultimate ascendancy of the Divine. But it did tighten the nexus of nature and experience. During the seventeenth and especially eighteenth centuries in Europe and America, the theological position called Deism came to capture this new secular attention. Those who supported the position, including many revolutionaries and Founding Fathers, believed that humans did not experience God through supernatural revelation or divine intervention but more obliquely, through observations of the earth and its activities.<sup>19</sup> Such a secular orientation was only augmented by the philosophy of liberalism, which enshrined secular authority in the idea of a civil state that was autonomous and unfettered by ecclesiastical doctrine.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Olsen, *The Turn to Transcendence*, 210.

<sup>18</sup> Olsen, *The Turn to Transcendence*, 211.

<sup>19</sup> Matthew Stewart, *Nature's God: The Heretical Origins of the American Republic* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014).

<sup>20</sup> The liberal view accepted, even celebrated, religious beliefs but only as long as they did not enable the ascendancy of one religious belief system over another in the public sphere. In this sense, it installed toleration and moderation as core principles of society. These were supra-religious in the sense that they were intended to override immoderate tendencies within any individual faith, denomination, or sect and prevented the devotees of one religious tradition from claiming the final authority over public life. Ultimately, the supremacy of a secular, civic institution ensured that Puritans, Quakers, Baptists, and other religious groups could co-exist without resorting to a permanent state of internecine conflict. This scenario also helped create a united national identity, and it encouraged economic growth by allowing people from diverse regions and backgrounds to immigrate and join a rapidly growing labor force. This view is cogently summarized by: Stanley Fish, "Liberalism and Secularism: One and the Same," *New York Times*, September 2, 2007. Admittedly, historians have debated the importance of secularity (i.e. non-religious values) in early philosophies of liberalism in America. For instance, Mark D. McGarvie argues that the

The Deists' strict focus on earthly activities distinguished them from their evangelical counterparts, but what some doyens of Deism shared with Protestant revivalists was an emphasis on sincere feelings and emotional experience in leading a moral life.<sup>21</sup> By the seventeenth century, this attention to emotion prospered among the members of an informal alliance of English Puritan theologians, known as the Cambridge Platonists. Drawing on classical philosophies, they develop a theology based on feelings of benevolence, compassion, and pity—attributes that they believed devout Christians shared with the Divine.<sup>22</sup> This valuation of the mundane world and tender sentiment persisted and blossomed within various philosophical and cultural movements of the eighteenth century.<sup>23</sup>

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separation of church and state was implicit in the constitution and prevailed even during the early years of the United States, whereas Philip Hamburger suggests that the secular orientation evolved more gradually. See: Mark D. McGarvie, *One Nation Under Law: America's Early National Struggles to Separate Church and State* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004); Philip Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> According to the philosopher Colin Campbell, this moral belief stemmed from an enduring orientation he calls the "Other Protestant Ethic," going back to the earliest days of the Reformation. Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic*, 99-137.

<sup>22</sup> Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic*, 120, 141. Some of Cambridge University's Platonists happened to take an interest in music. Thomas Mace, a well-known musician, composer, and theorist taught singing to the Cambridge Platonist John Worthington, for instance, and he was also known to Henry More. See: Penelope Gouk, *Music, Science and Natural Magic* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 44. Mace, incidentally, appears to have shared his Cambridge associates' penchant for emotional experience. Years after his time in Cambridge, Mace became a musical editor at the York Minster in England, where he described the rapture he experienced when singing psalms together with organ accompaniment: "[W]hen that vast concurring unity of the whole congregational chorus came, as I may say, thundering in, even so as it made the very ground shake under us; oh! The unutterable, ravishing, soul's delight! In the which I was so transported, and wrapt up in high contemplations, that there was no room left in my whole man, viz., body, soul and spirit, for anything below divine and heavenly raptures, nor could there possibly be anything to which that singing might be truly compared, expect the right apprehension or conceiving of that glorious and miraculous quire [choir], recorded in the Scriptures, at the dedication of the Temple." Quoted in: Reuben T. Robinson "Congregational Singing" (1868), originally published in *The Congregational Review* VIII, no. XLI (1868), reproduced in: Jonathan L. Friedmann, ed. *Music, Theology and Worship: Selected Writings, 1841-1896* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2011).

<sup>23</sup> According to Campbell, this turn towards tender sentiments would have been reinforced not only by the positive emotionalism that accompanied benevolence. It also would have resulted indirectly from the residue of "negative emotionalism" inherited from Calvinism—specifically, the melancholy, self-doubt, and morbidity that Puritans accepted (if not admired) as appropriate dispositions for pious individuals aware of their inherent depravity but ignorant of their election. While not exactly tender, these sentiments nevertheless represented a tacit tradition of emotionalism that had long been rooted in Calvinism and that

In the transatlantic Anglophone world of the eighteenth century, members of an emerging middle class appealed to this “profound emotional sensibility”<sup>24</sup> as they began competing for cultural hegemony with the traditional aristocracy. They framed tender feelings—or sentimentality—as a sign of the intrinsic virtue and the moral authority of their class culture.<sup>25</sup> The theories of the Moral Sense philosophers only reinforced this disposition, for they too imbued subjective feelings of compassion and benevolence with the utmost moral integrity. In the English-speaking world, this turn towards tender feeling and beauty became encoded in what was eventually known in the English-speaking world as the “cult of sensibility,”<sup>26</sup> which for the first time elevated human feelings—based around sensations of pity, sympathy, benevolence, and melancholy—over religious doctrine. As such, the middle classes partially turned their attention away from considerations of the Divine and more towards feelings for each other—particularly the sentiments that enabled individuals to feel and understand the suffering of others. By the time the cult of sensibility emerged during the second half of the eighteenth century, it had evolved a long way from orthodox Protestantism. Except for a few notable exceptions,<sup>27</sup> it rarely employed the language of “religion or revelation.”<sup>28</sup> Instead, the

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lingered on even as the orthodox strains of that tradition began to wane. Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic*, 131.

<sup>24</sup> Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic*, 131.

<sup>25</sup> It was during this period that “sentimentality” lost its general affiliation with all types of affect and gained its more specific, modern connotation with benevolent feelings, empathy, and high emotional responsiveness. Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic*, 139.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Ferber, *Romanticism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 15.

<sup>27</sup> Only occasionally, and early on in the movement, did sentimentalists connect the feelings of sensibility to a Christian God. This included the Anglo-Irish novelist and clergyman Laurence Sterne, who declared that a degree of pity, sympathy, and benevolence constituted “God’s contact with mankind.” It was an act of grace that worked through the human nervous system, such that a display of tears incited a Man (or Woman) of Feeling to make proclamations like “I am positive I have a soul.” Likewise, the English novelist Samuel Richardson contended that his own sentimental writing conveyed “the great doctrines of Christianity.” Sterne quoted in: Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic*, 141. Richardson quoted in: Lori Branch,

cult of sensibility echoed the general character of conventional Christianity by imbuing sentimentality with an abstract sacred quality that could be elevated and set apart from more mundane sensations. Indeed, any advocate of sentimentality—or what Henry Mackenzie called a *Man of Feeling*—was expected to praise tender sentiments as possessing a hidden and omniscient power that revealed some universal moral truth about the nature of humanity.<sup>29</sup> In this manner, sentimentality was imbued with such spiritual qualities that several modern scholars have described the cult of sensibility as “almost sacred,”<sup>30</sup> “semireligious,”<sup>31</sup> echoing with “religious valences,” “a science of the soul,” and “implicitly religious.”<sup>32</sup>

Another semireligious feature of sentimentality was what one scholar has called its “mystic” quality.<sup>33</sup> This was the belief that tender feelings were not just shared among individuals, but rather permeated the social world as emotional currents in much the same way that the Holy Spirit could in a conventionally Christian context. While this belief did not exactly revive medieval universalism, it did suggest something akin to a secular “spirit” of humanity. In recent years, scholars have demonstrated how sentimentalists interpreted this mystical quality as the power to bind communities of individuals

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*Rituals of Spontaneity: Sentiment and Secularism from Free Prayer to Wordsworth* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), 136.

<sup>28</sup> As Allison Coudert observes, moral sense philosophers like Adam Smith made “no mention whatsoever of religion or revelation” in their discussion of sentimentality and sensibility. Allison Coudert, *Religion, Magic, and Science in Early Modern Europe and America* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2011), 117.

<sup>29</sup> One example of the sacred quality of sentimentality comes from the English writer Hannah More’s poem *Sensibility*, from 1782, which described a “sweet” and “secret” power that ineffably “eludes the chains of definition” and is imparted only to a select few at birth. Such a description was comparable to the Calvinist notion of grace as described in its doctrine of predestination. Hannah More, *The Works of Hannah More*, vol. 1 (Boston: S. G. Goodrich, 1827), 35.

<sup>30</sup> J.M.S. Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800*, quoted in: Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic*, 139.

<sup>31</sup> R.F. Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 20.

<sup>32</sup> Branch, *Rituals of Spontaneity*, 136.

<sup>33</sup> Walter Francis Wright, *Sensibility in English Prose Fiction, 1760-1814: A Reinterpretation* (Folcroft, PA.: Folcroft Press, 1970 [1937]), 24.

together. According to the philosopher Martha Nussbaum, tender feelings effectively valued “others (even distant others)...[as] an important part of one’s own scheme of goals and projects, important as ends in their own right.”<sup>34</sup> Historians have also demonstrated how this principle was institutionalized in American society. For instance, the historian Sarah Knott demonstrates how sensibility offered revolutionary-era subjects and early republic citizens a means of kindling social cohesion in a country that lacked traditional societal bonds (e.g. monarch, state religion).<sup>35</sup> According to Jose Torre, sentimentality also presented opportunities to bind American society together economically.<sup>36</sup> These and other historians demonstrate that sentimental feelings became crucial to the sharing of identities and the formation of communities both large and small.

What the existing historical literature rarely demonstrates, however, is how the “spirit” of sentimentality also provided opportunities for profound self-loss. Certainly, early supporters of the cult of sensibility—such as the philosophers Denis Diderot and Adam Smith—contended that sentimental feelings could grow strong enough to overflow into an ecstatic union between sentimental people.<sup>37</sup> Yet, this formulation remains less

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<sup>34</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge, UK: University of Cambridge Press, 2001), 319.

<sup>35</sup> Knott also demonstrates how, beyond fostering social cohesion within a new nation, American displays of sensibility enabled sentimentalists to showcase a level of identification with the genteel, sentimental classes of Europe, who many American elites counted as equals. Sarah Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

<sup>36</sup> Torre argues that the growing market economy in America encouraged a reassessment of the concept of “value.” In the early republic, many Americans found themselves deeply in debt and interested in increasing their capital quickly. Therefore, they began to reject older notions of value as something intrinsic and objective in favor of a new conception, promoted by David Hume and other Moral Sense philosophers, which approached value as something constructed, malleable, and based on subjective feeling. This shift was meant to promote paper credit and the lending capacity of banks while simultaneously sparking a new era of sociability and interdependence in the commercial sphere. Jose Torre, *The Political Economy of Sentiment: Paper Credit and the Scottish Enlightenment in Early Republic Boston, 1780-1820* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007).

<sup>37</sup> Denis Diderot described the overwhelming sensations he experienced, as a Man of Feeling, when he contemplated anyone else who led a virtuous life: “...then it seems as if my heart were distended even beyond my body, as if it were swimming; a delicious and sudden sensation of I know not what passes over my whole body; I can hardly breathe; it quickens over the whole surface of my body like a shudder.”

studied, particularly in the scholarship on sentimentality in America. Investigating musical performance and experience reveals that Americans continued to interpret the currents of tender feelings as not only tying communities of individuals together but also eliciting expansive and unusual experiences of self-loss.

One of the earliest accounts of sentimental, musical ecstasy in America comes from 1771. It was in this year that the future president, John Adams, then a lawyer and public figure, recalled hearing a choir in Connecticut. Despite being known as a curmudgeon, Adams rhapsodized passionately about the experience:

The finest singing that I ever heard in my life; the front and side galleries were crowded with rows of lads and lasses, who performed all their parts in utmost perfection. I thought I was rapt up; a row of women all standing up and playing their parts with perfect skill and judgment, added a sweetness and sprightliness to the whole which absolutely charmed me.<sup>38</sup>

Adams, who sympathized with the principles of Deism and the cult of sensibility,<sup>39</sup> did not employ conventional religious terminology in describing the choral music. Instead, his reception of the performance seemed to echo the tender, virtuous feelings that grounded a properly functioning society. His experience of being “rapt up” in the music suggested a particularly deep level of identification with the choir, a feeling that was

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Here, the author’s empathy transformed into outright identification with the objects of his feelings. But his was not a religious experience in the conventional sense. It was neither instigated by nor directed at a supernatural source, but instead seemed to stem from the transcendent power of emotion itself. Quoted in: Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic*, 140. Adam Smith also discussed a similar phenomenon when he wrote of a profound sympathetic tendency (paramount to modern notions of “empathy”) among individuals that recruited the power of one’s imagination to almost “carry us beyond our own person.” In this capacity, he contended that “we place ourselves in [another’s] situation...we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him.” The power of the imagination was not capable of completely recreating one’s experience within another individual, making the sensations of the latter “weaker in degree.” However, the similarity of the sentiments was close enough in Smith’s estimation to elicit a kind of social, secular ecstasy. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), Part I, Section 1, paragraph 2, pp. 11-12.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in: David Warren Steel, “Sacred Music in Early Winchester,” *Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin* 45 (1980), 36.

<sup>39</sup> G. J. Barker-Benfield, *Abigail and John Adams: The Americanization of Sensibility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

condoned if not celebrated by moral philosophy. Absorption into a larger group remained a key tenet of the nation and state that Adams himself helped found. This much was suggested by the de facto motto of the United States starting during the revolution: *e pluribus unum*—out of many, one.

In contrast to Adams, however, many American sentimentalists helped popularize the trance of tender feelings even as they condemned it. Liberal principles of autonomy and self-determination, enshrined as ideals of the revolution, informed notions of selfhood in America both during and following the Revolutionary War.<sup>40</sup> The consequence was that many Americans discouraged extreme forms of sentimentality for fear that they would lead to rampant loss of self-control. One of the leaders of this reactionary movement was the American author William Hill Brown, who, in 1789, published *The Power of Sympathy*, widely considered the first novel published by an American. In the book, Brown included stories of the egregious behavior that resulted from an indulgence in tender feelings, particularly sympathy. This sentiment, Brown suggested, was capable of eradicating an individual's claims to free will, leading to tragic outcomes such as licentious thoughts, seductive tendencies, incest, disease, and suicide. At a crucial point in *The Power of Sympathy*, the character Harriot cried mournfully about the hazards of emotional abandonment: "why do I rave, and why do I again abandon myself to despair!"<sup>41</sup> Fidelity, another character, also learned how the self-loss of sentimentality could yield traumatic consequences. She was "a poor distracted girl [who]

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<sup>40</sup> According to the historian Joyce Appleby, the first generation of the early republic fashioned an image of the ideal citizen as an autonomous individual who voluntarily participated in civil society (e.g. temperance societies, foreign missions, antislavery movement), free enterprise, the political process, and other trappings of a liberal society. Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>41</sup> William Hill Brown and Hannah Webster Foster, *The Power of Sympathy and The Coquette* (New York: Penguin, 1996), 87.



was carried off by a ruffian a few days before her intended marriage,” which caused her betrothed to drown himself in the river after discovering what happened. When realizing the tragedy she had set in motion, Fidelia continued to indulge her impressionable sensibility by wandering through the countryside singing sad songs about lost love.<sup>42</sup> Although the story was ostensibly intended to warn against the dangers of sentimentality and provide a guide for good behavior, scholars of the text and its reception have suggested that the book’s lascivious stories actually interested readers more than its moral lessons.<sup>43</sup> Regardless of whether one supported Adams’ affirmative judgement or Brown’s negative one, all sentimentalists agreed that the pursuit of tender feelings often resulted in self-loss. In this respect, the naturalization of ecstasy relied little on the moral valences assigned to it.

Some songs gestured towards sentimental self-loss, avoiding any explicit acknowledgement of trance but suggesting its possibility through word choice. This included “I Leave My Heart With Thee,” a lachrymose love song composed by James Hook in 1804 wherein the narrator felt that he left his emotional center with his lover even though he was forced to stray.<sup>44</sup> Thomas Moore and John Stevenson’s tune “Oft in the Stilly Night” from 1818 similarly approached the possibility of self-transcendence in a nostalgic yearning for days when sentimental delight could be found not only in “the smiles, the tears, of childhood’s years” but also in “the friends, so link’d together.”<sup>45</sup> Although they may have always been intended to be interpreted poetically rather than

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<sup>42</sup> Brown and Foster, *The Power of Sympathy and The Coquette*, 48-49.

<sup>43</sup> Richard Walser, “Boston’s Reception of the First American Novel,” *Early American Literature* 17, no. 1: 72.

<sup>44</sup> James Hook, “I Leave My Heart With Thee” (New York: I & M Paff, 1804), located in: Johns Hopkins University, Levy Sheet Music Collection, Box 110, Item 010 <http://jhir.library.jhu.edu/handle/1774.2/29374>.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Moore and John Stevenson, *A Selection of Popular National Airs* (New York: V. Thurston, 1818), 51-53.

literally, the lyrical references to leaving one's heart with a loved one or linking together friends suggests that musical Americans might have found the power of sentimentality to be equivalent to ecstasy.<sup>46</sup>

While inferences of sweet self-loss regularly described the love between two individuals, perhaps even more popular were those that acknowledged emotional unity that could exist between members of larger circles of belonging, such as the home and family. This was especially true following the enormous success of John Howard Payne's 1823 song "Home, Sweet Home," which was set to music by Henry Rowley Bishop. While the original lyrics referred wistfully to the sanctity of the home, additional verses added in 1830 celebrated a properly functioning family as consisting of "a fond Father's smile" and "the cares of a Mother to soothe and beguile."<sup>47</sup> As the piece grew to become the single most popular song of the English-speaking world during the nineteenth century,<sup>48</sup> dozens of other songwriters wrote similar tunes embracing the household and its denizens. The lyrics of all of these pieces were specifically intended to pull at the heartstrings of listeners. That they resonated so strongly in American culture likely speaks to the massive amount of migration—both into the country and out towards its less populated regions—that remained commonplace for much of the nineteenth century. This factor cannot be understated when accounting for the rise of sentimentality and its affiliated ecstasies during this era.

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<sup>46</sup> One more example comes from H.S. Wheaton's 1847 tune "Come Love and Sit Awhile by Me." The lyrics were written from the perspective of a man who is about to depart from his lover, never to return. His loving words declared: "My soul may give itself to thee/ And all its grief and sadness tell." See: Nicolas E. Tawa, *Sweet Songs for Gentle Americans: The Parlor Song in America, 1790-1860* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1980), 131.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas R. Lounsbury, ed., *Yale Book of American Verse* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1912), 11.

<sup>48</sup> Charles Hamm, *Music in the New World* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1983), 176.

Certain songs were more effective than others at suggesting the possibility of sentimental rapture afforded by home and family. Some lyrics took the idea to almost absurd levels, such as the words Eliza Cook wrote for the 1840 song “The Old Arm Chair.” These described something close to an ecstatic communion with a chair—ostensibly meant to symbolize, in this case, the sanctified institutions of home and motherhood:

I love it, I love it; and who shall dare  
To chide me for loving that old arm chair.  
I’ve treasured it long as a holy prize,  
I’ve bedew’d it with tears, and embalmed it with sighs;  
‘Tis bound by a thousand bands to my heart;  
Not a tie will break, not a link will start,  
Would ye learn the spell a mother sat there,  
And a sacred thing is that old arm chair.<sup>49</sup>

Firmly “bound” to the narrator’s heart through unbreakable ties, the piece of domestic furniture became a “sacred” reminder of the morality of the family unit.

Sometimes, sentimental self-loss was not so much described as it was insinuated. The traveling vocal groups that became popular around the 1840s excelled at insinuating the possibility of sentimental ecstasy.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps not coincidentally, these groups often consisted of members of the same family. Chief among them was the Hutchinson Family, a troupe of several brothers and one sister who sang in tight four-part harmonies, and toured around the country singing sentimental songs. Many of their lyrics advanced an agenda of social activism that supported abolition, worker’s rights, women’s rights, and temperance. Their lyrics also asked listeners to join in sympathetic union with those less fortunate than themselves. As such, many of their most popular ballads honored the family, their region or nation, as well as the social plights of various marginalized

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<sup>49</sup> Quoted in: Tawa, *Sweet Songs for Gentle Americans*, 139.

<sup>50</sup> Some professional music families included the Cheney Family, the Rogers Family, the Baker Family, the Wright Family.

subjectivities, including those of enslaved people, workers, and women. “The Old Granite State,”<sup>51</sup> one of the Family’s earliest and most well-known tunes, expressed many of these themes simultaneously. In it the singers proudly identified themselves as “a band of brothers” and “a band of music,” “all real Yankees,” and New Hampshireites who “despise oppression” and are “friends of emancipation.” In just a few verses, the Hutchinsons employed sentimental lyrics and melodies to connect themselves with a series of overlapping communities: their nuclear family, a musical consortium, an American state, the abolitionist movement, and the free North.

Perhaps more than the lyrics, the Hutchinsons also alluded to unitive experiences by blending their voices together in harmony. Indeed, the group was so well-trained and well-practiced that they could combine their voices together to create one seamless, sonorous outpouring of mellifluous sentiment. They did this so precisely that, according to one description, “an audience found it impossible to distinguish between the four voices.”<sup>52</sup> An anonymous daguerreotype of the Hutchinson Singers taken in 1845 seemed to visibly portray the unifying force evoked by their vocal performances. It shows ten brothers in the group sitting in close proximity to each other, most of them clasping hands or leaning affectionately on each other’s shoulders. The image evokes an undeniable intimacy that, in conjunction with the band’s song lyrics and vocal work, became a microcosm of the *e pluribus unum* principle.

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<sup>51</sup> The Hutchinson Family, “The Old Granite State” (Boston: Oliver Ditson, 1843).

<sup>52</sup> Tawa, *Sweet Songs for Gentle Americans*, 82.



**Illustration 2**

*Hutchinson Family Singers*, 1845, daguerreotype, 14.4 x 19.7 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gilman Collection (Accession Number: 2005.100.77), New York , <<http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/283176>>

Although no evidence exists to confirm whether the sympathetic accord of the Hutchinson Family was matched by equally unifying experiences of self, it certainly seems possible. Most of the siblings in the family are reported to have become “fully convinced of the truthfulness and genuineness” of the possibility of clairvoyants to extend their consciousness into the spirit world through the power of entrancement, and more than one member of the group reported having profound trances in which they felt surrounded by the spirits of deceased loved ones.<sup>53</sup> These feelings of transport suggests that, if the Hutchinsons did not always experience a sense of sentimental self-loss, then they accepted its possibility and were sometimes capable of it themselves.

Moreover, the Hutchinsons’ ecstasy was not necessarily framed in conventional religious terms. Although the family was affiliated with the Baptist Church,<sup>54</sup> their songs mostly avoided the language of orthodox Christianity, opting instead for a rhetoric that

<sup>53</sup> Jesse Hutchinson, Jr. and E.W. Hazard, “The Case of Judson Hutchinson” (Letters to the Editor), *Spiritual Philosopher* 1, no. 15 (November 9, 1850): 113-114.

<sup>54</sup> Scott Gac, *Singing for Freedom: The Hutchinson Family Singers and the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 102.

espoused the socially progressive causes of their generation, as “The Granite State” did. Indeed, some Hutchinson songs encouraged sentimental feelings of benevolence and sympathy quite explicitly at the expense of religious institutions.<sup>55</sup> This was certainly the case with the Hutchinson Family’s perennially popular abolition song from 1844, titled “Get off the Track.”<sup>56</sup> Set to the melody of another favorite tune of the day, the Hutchinson’s lyrics suggested slave freedom was not rooted primarily in religious sentiment or religious action.

Let the ministers and churches  
 Leave behind sectarian lurches;  
 Jump on board the car of Freedom,  
 Ere it be too late to need them.  
 Sound the alarm! Pulpits thunder!  
 Ere too late you see your blunder!

With this, the songwriters seemed to suggest that the liberal principle of “Freedom” transcended any particular faith or denomination, and religious pundits often needed to relinquish their sectarian ties in order to embrace “Liberty...thro’ the nation” in such a way that it extended to African Americans. The Hutchinson Family repertoire constitutes only a few of the countless sentimental songs produced during the nineteenth century that endorsed secular communities of belonging such as the family or nation. Such tunes could be heard in concert halls, recitals, and middle-class parlors throughout America.

For all their popularity, the Hutchinsons were only one of many music performance acts capable of eliciting sentimental self-loss by invoking the secular sanctity of the home. During the 1870s, some accounts suggested that these sensations were mainstays of the concert stage, particularly when executed by accomplished female

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<sup>55</sup> In advocating for moral causes sometimes in defiance of orthodox Christian doctrine, the Hutchinsons might be said to be part of a larger liberal religious order during the antebellum era that rejected conventional Christianity’s sanctification of pain and suffering as an undue justification for slavery. See: Elizabeth B. Clark, “‘The Sacred Rights of the Weak’: Pain, Sympathy, and the Culture of Individual Rights in Antebellum America” *The Journal of American History* 82, no. 2 (September 1995): 463-493.

<sup>56</sup> Jesse Hutchinson, “Get off the Track!” (Boston: Jesse Hutchinson, 1844).

singers. This included the British-born Clara Fisher, who immigrated to the United States as a young woman and regaled American audiences for decades. On one occasion in 1873, she took to the stage in New York and transformed what could have easily been “a ludicrous appeal for sympathy” into a masterful performance that had “a majority of the audience...overcome with tears.”<sup>57</sup> A few years later, another well-known songstress, Charlotte Cushman, was reported to have sung her sentimental tunes with such “dramatic genius,...pathos, sweetness, and vigor” that she “riveted” the “audience’s attention.”<sup>58</sup> These “overcome” and “riveted” emotions certainly bare some comparison to the kinds of feelings described about a century earlier by the likes of John Adams and William Hill Brown. It would seem then, that to listen to and love sentimental tunes during the nineteenth century was to believe in the possibility of ecstasy.

### **The Musical Sublime**

Sentimentality was by no means the only tool used to empty Christian doctrine from musical ecstasy. Starting in the late-eighteenth century, intellectuals from continental Europe began to formulate a parallel ethos of secular musical self-loss that adapted aspects of sentimental and Christian self-loss. This tradition switched out references to heaven, God, or the spiritual currents of social sympathy with other kinds of secular “spirits,” a position that would eventually have a tremendous influence on American culture. Among the trailblazers in this regard was the German philosopher Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder. In a well-known essay, titled “The Marvels of the Musical Art,” Wackenroder contended that music had the capacity to transport one to a

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<sup>57</sup> Henry Dickinson Stone, *Personal Recollections of the Drama or Theatrical Reminiscences* (Albany, NY: Charles van Benthuysen & Sons. 1873), 10.

<sup>58</sup> Emma Stebbins, ed., *Charlotte Cushman: Her Letters and Memories of Her Life* (Boston: Houghton, 1879), 87.

metaphysical realm free of pain: “O, then I close my eyes to all the strife of the world—and withdraw quietly into the land of music, as into the land of belief, where all our doubts and our sufferings are lost in a resounding sea.”<sup>59</sup> While this realm resembled the Christian heaven in some respects, as “the land of music,” it also appeared to be of a decidedly different character. The German pastor and romantic poet Ludwig Theobald Kosegarten shared Wackenroder’s belief in the bewitching, if not exactly religious, power of music. In a poem he wrote titled *Die Harmonie der Sphaeren* (1797), he revived the imagery and philosophy of the Harmony of the Spheres and venerated the capacity for the self to “dissolve” as it resonated sympathetically with the essential ratios “intoning the hymn of the cosmos.”<sup>60</sup> The lyric would later be set to music by the German composer and violinist Andreas Romberg.<sup>61</sup> Without yet knowing it, Wackenroder and Kosegarten would represent some of the earliest contributors to the long tradition of European romanticism.

Popularized by philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, much of the romantic ethos countered pure rationality by calling for a new emphasis on intuition, feeling, and passion towards the secular world. For romantic philosophers on the Continent and their counterparts in Britain, this emotional engagement was most fruitfully directed at larger units of belonging. These could include social communities, such as the nation, but very often they were directed at what were believed to be the deep

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<sup>59</sup> Wilhem Heinrich Wackenroder, *Confessions and Fantasies*, trans., Mary Hurst Schubert (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971), 179. In another essay, Wackenroder wrote a fictional story about a composer during the mid-eighteenth century who struggled to distance himself from the mundane duties of a utilitarian life by listening to music and embracing the passionate trance it induced in him. Wackenroder, *Confessions and Fantasies*, 155.

<sup>60</sup> Ludwig Theobald Kosegarten, *Die Harmonie der Sphaeren* (1797), reproduced in: Joscelyn Godwin, *Music, Mysticism, and Magic: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), 190.

<sup>61</sup> Kosegarten, *Die Harmonie der Sphaeren* (1797), reproduced in: Godwin, *Music, Mysticism, and Magic*, 189.



vital currents that ran through the entirety of the natural world and the inner life of every individual—what were respectively referred to as “Nature” and “Genius.” Like sentimentality, these deep essences were also considered sacred in a secular way.<sup>62</sup> They were not supernatural spirits originating from a distant, divine realm. Instead, they constituted a more immanent spirit that permeated the secular, material world. For philosophers such as Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant, the perception of these mysterious secular forces did not constitute religious experience but rather *aesthetic* experience.<sup>63</sup> According to the religious scholar Christopher Partridge, the concept of the aesthetic resulted from a growing effort among the philosophical and artistic elites of Europe to “know the truth about the nature of reality without recourse to divinely revealed propositions or to religious authorities.”<sup>64</sup>

European romantics tended to embrace the ecstatic potential of naturalized experience. Indeed, for Kant and other philosophers of his day, rapture resided in perceptions of the sublime—that highest and most vital quality of Nature that, when perceived, elicited subjective responses of both pleasure and unease.<sup>65</sup> It was a “negative pleasure,” involving competing impulses of horror and awe that demanded feelings of

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<sup>62</sup> The German philosopher Friedrich Schelling affirmed the spiritual assessment of nature when he proclaimed that “nature shall be visible spirit, and spirit invisible nature.” Friedrich Schelling, “Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature as Introduction to the Study of this Science,” [1797] trans. Albert Hofstadter, in *Philosophy of German Idealism: Fichte, Jacobi, and Schelling*, ed. Ernst Behler (New York: Continuum, 2003), 202.

<sup>63</sup> Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1757] 1990); Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, trans. John T. Goldthwait (Berkeley: University of California Press, [1764] 1960); Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, [1790] 1964).

<sup>64</sup> Christopher Partridge, *The Lyre of Orpheus: Popular Music, The Sacred, and The Profane* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 122.

<sup>65</sup> In romantic philosophy, the sublime could be contrasted with the concept of beauty, which was said to elucidate a somewhat lower form of aesthetic experience because it only produced feelings of pure pleasure.

respect and admiration in the face of Nature.<sup>66</sup> This complex array of deep and intense impulses, Kant claimed, evoked ineffable experiences that were so powerful that they defied rational understanding.<sup>67</sup> They also overwhelmed rational subjective experiences, leading to the surrender of stable notions of self. (Kant claimed that this propensity for drastically altered awareness was what made the sublime the highest form of aesthetic experience.)<sup>68</sup>

Imaginative individuals who were able to achieve such a deep union with the sublime currents of the universe were thought to be more capable of creating cultural works that elicited this knowledge in others. Their creations were almost invariably related to the concept of “art.” It was through art, many agreed, that the self could be sublimely transcended, fused with the deep forces present in the elemental and organic matter of the world, or transported to obscure locations both outside and inside the self. Thus, art and aesthetic experience became twinned.

Before long German romantics and intellectual descendants of Burke and Kant would come to hold music in a special place among the arts due to what they believed to be its superlative ability to affect aesthetic experiences of ecstasy. Although Wackenroder and Kosegarten may be counted among the earliest advocates of music as a superlative aesthetic tool, it would be the German critic E.T.A. Hoffmann who crystalized the nexus

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<sup>66</sup> Jeanette Bicknell, *Why Music Moves Us* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 34.

<sup>67</sup> Bicknell, *Why Music Moves Us*, 36.

<sup>68</sup> David Hume’s philosophies, which argued that selfhood was essentially malleable, seemed to validate this inclination towards secular entrancement. Hume theorized that the true self could not narrowly be attributed to any natural state, for instance as the agent of rational will. Although he acknowledged the concept of a singular, unified “self” was a useful category for dealing with matters of personal accountability and jurisprudence, he claimed that the true self was always divisible and mutable. As such, the illusion of normal selfhood arose only from the habitual associations one’s mind makes between similar experiences. See: Becker, *Deep Listeners*, 91; Mary Douglas, “The Person in an Enterprise Culture,” in *Understanding the Enterprise Culture: Themes in the Work of Mary Douglas*, ed. Shaun Hargreaves Heap and Angus Ross (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 44.

of music, aesthetic experience, and self-loss. In what is still one of the most famous music reviews of the nineteenth century, Hoffmann wrote capaciously of aesthetic experience as it related to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony—a work whose sublime power he believed made it one of the highest aesthetic achievements of all time. Hoffman's review basically equated Beethoven's symphony with sublimity, replete as it was with references to the infinite, the ineffable, awe and horror, and transcendent experience.

...Beethoven's instrumental music...opens up to us the realm of the monstrous and the immeasurable. Burning flashes of light shoot through the deep night of this realm, and we become aware of giant shadows that surge back and forth, driving us into narrower and narrower confines until they destroy *us*—but not the pain of that endless longing in which each joy that has climbed aloft in jubilant song sinks back and is swallowed up.... [It] is only in this pain, which consumes love, hope, and happiness but does not destroy them, which seeks to burst our breasts with a many-voiced consonance of all the passions, that we live on, enchanted beholders of the supernatural! ... Beethoven's music sets in motion the lever of fear, of awe, of horror, of suffering, and wakens just that infinite longing which is the essence of romanticism.... [His symphony in C minor], in a climax that climbs on and on, leads the listener imperiously forward into the spirit world of the infinite!... [T]he soul of each thoughtful listener is assuredly stirred, deeply and intimately, by a feeling that is none other than that unutterable portentous longing, and until the final chord...he will be powerless to step out of that wondrous spirit realm where grief and joy embrace him in the form of sound.<sup>69</sup>

With these words, Hoffmann elevated music's dignified status within the romantic art movement.

Soon after Hoffmann's review was published in 1810, the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer would entrench music's elevated status with his assertion that it, more than any of the other arts, was most effective in expressing the Will. For Schopenhauer, the last term referred not to the rational will of Descartes, but rather to the deepest metaphysical impulses that motivate all desires and actions in the universe, including "every blind force of nature" and "the preconsidered action of man."<sup>70</sup> Unlike sculpture or painting, which required one to engage in intellectual thought and the formation of

<sup>69</sup> E. T. A. Hoffmann, "Beethoven's Instrumental Music (1813)," in *Strunk's Source Readings in Music History (Revised Edition)*, ed. Oliver Strunk (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998), 1194-1196.

<sup>70</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, "Music as the Cosmic Will Revealed," in *The World as Will and Idea*, trans. R.B. Haldane and J. Kemp (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1907), 1:143.

mental images before discovering the hidden intentions of nature, music expressed the Will of nature directly and intuitively. Indeed, for Schopenhauer there was no ostensible difference between the two entities: “we might, therefore, just as well call the world embodied music as embodied will.”<sup>71</sup>

Although romanticism’s early advocates were mostly European, and particularly German, Americans of different backgrounds also adapted aspects of the movement’s aesthetic, most notably Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Transcendentalists. Steeped in the theology of Unitarianism (itself an outgrowth of eighteenth-century Deism),<sup>72</sup> as well as the counter- and post-Enlightenment philosophies of British and German origin, the Transcendentalists privileged imagination, venerated nature, celebrated the individual, and linked all of these attributes to emotional experiences of self-transcendence.<sup>73</sup> The name “Transcendentalism” itself was adapted from Kant by Emerson to signify a philosophical orientation that rejected simple material empiricism in favor of an idealist knowledge that intuitively “transcended” the senses.<sup>74</sup> This process was said to elicit ecstasy in the sense that it exceeded the soul’s ordinary state. However, the object of transcendentalist ecstasy did not reside entirely beyond the natural world, as conventional Protestantism had insisted. Instead, it was thought to constitute an elemental force or feature of nature itself.

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<sup>71</sup> Schopenhauer, “Music as the Cosmic Will Revealed,” 1: 340.

<sup>72</sup> Many of the founding members of Transcendentalism pursued extensive religious education at Harvard Divinity School or trained as Unitarian ministers. Ian Frederick Finseth, “‘Liquid Fire Within Me’: Language, Self and Society in Transcendentalism and Early Evangelicalism, 1820-1860” (M.A. Thesis, University of Virginia, 1995).

<sup>73</sup> In venerating emotional experiences, Emerson and his colleagues tended to reject a prevailing impulse among many Unitarians to favor calm, cool reason. Andrea Greenwood and Mark W. Harris, *An Introduction to the Unitarian and Universalist Traditions* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>74</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Transcendentalist: A Lecture Read at the Mason Temple, Boston, January 1842,” in *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nature: Addresses and Lectures*, vol. 1 (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1903-1904), 1: 329-359.

Transcendent knowledge, likewise, could be ascertained only by engaging the imagination and the emotions, and therefore it was readily suited to the sublime. In a well-known passage from his wide-circulated essay *Nature*, Emerson described one of his experiences of nature as a sublime admixture of horror and pleasure, or as he described it, gladness and fear: “Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky... I have enjoyed a perfect exhilaration. I am glad to the brink of fear.”<sup>75</sup> He elucidated the mystical element of this sublime experience by describing how his sense of selfhood was absorbed into (and through) nature, becoming both its component and conduit: “I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me.”<sup>76</sup> Any understanding of the higher plane of reality, he contended, required some transcendence of the self: “From within or from behind, a light shines through us upon things, and makes us aware that we are nothing, but the light is all.”<sup>77</sup> Exposure to the spiritual foundation of the natural world, therefore, also led one to an awareness of one’s internal divinity. Under this logic, the external world was just as natural as the internal one, and both were metaphysically intertwined.

Emerson’s reference to an ecstatic eyeball accurately captures Transcendentalism’s general emphasis on visuality, an attribute that distinguished it from German romanticism’s emphasis on the aural qualities of aesthetic experience. Indeed, the romantic movement in America was predominantly focused on what the eye could see rather than what the ear could hear, and accordingly it tended to focus on literature and visual art. All the preeminent Transcendentalists were prolific writers—Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Amos Bronson Alcott, for example. Others who were directly

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<sup>75</sup> Emerson, *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 1: 9.

<sup>76</sup> Emerson, *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 1: 10.

<sup>77</sup> Emerson, *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 2: 270.

influenced by Transcendentalist philosophy used painting as their medium, including Thomas Cole and the Hudson River School of American artists who adapted European styles to depict the natural sublimity of landscapes in upstate New York and across America.

Despite the ocularcentrism of the Transcendentalists, though, they were also interested in music and often addressed it obliquely through their writing. In this regard, they followed more closely the literary tradition started by early British romantics such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge,<sup>78</sup> who both conflated poetry with music<sup>79</sup> and regularly wrote of music's uncanny power to facilitate an emotional engagement with the natural world. In an 1806 poem, for instance, Wordsworth wrote of the "Power of Music" to make listeners "happy as Souls in a dream,"<sup>80</sup> while Coleridge provided a now-famous description of an opium-induced dream in which the narrator traveled to Xanadu and envisioned "A damsel with a dulcimer."<sup>81</sup>

The Transcendentalists' adaptation of the aesthetic ideals of European romanticism resembled more the British variety than the German one. Emerson, like Wordsworth and Coleridge, also equated poetry with song,<sup>82</sup> and he was similarly less inclined to write music than to write *about* it. In his journal from 1838, he proclaimed that "Music takes us out of the actual and whispers to us dim secrets that startle our

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<sup>78</sup> Emerson, himself, had traveled to Britain and talked in person with these poets as well as Thomas Carlyle. Emerson, *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 1: xxiii.

<sup>79</sup> The two poets' co-publication in 1798 of the seminal compendium of Romantic literature, *Lyrical Ballads, with a Few Other Poems*, suggest they, like the ancient Greeks, conflated ballads and poems.

<sup>80</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Miscellaneous Poems of William Wordsworth*, vol. 2 (London : Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1820), 2: 157.

<sup>81</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Kubla Kahn" in *The Oxford Book of English Verse: 1250-1900*, ed. Arthur Quiller-Couch (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1904 [c1901]), 650-651.

<sup>82</sup> Emerson's conflation of song and poetry is exemplified by his 1836 poem titled commemorating a battle fought in Massachusetts at the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, which he musically titles, "Concord Hymn." Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 9: 158-159.

wonder as to who we are, and for what, whence, and whereto.”<sup>83</sup> Some Transcendentalists, not only recognized music as an agent capable of causing ecstasy, but also one that results from it. This included Amos Bronson Alcott, who, while staying at his farm, Fruitlands, during the winter of 1844, regularly found musical ecstasy in his daily ablutions:

On raising my head from the flood, there was heard a melody in the ear, as of a sound of many waters.... It was not easy to write prose while thus exalted and transfigured.... The brain was haunted with the rhythm of many voiced melodies. I enjoyed this state for a couple of months or more....<sup>84</sup>

Emerson and Alcott were not alone in their promotion of music as a vehicle for self-transcendent experience. Periodicals published by Transcendentalists between about 1835 and 1850 regularly included articles on music.<sup>85</sup>

Romantics who were not explicitly affiliated with the transcendentalist movement also wrote passionately about the ecstatic qualities of European concert music. This included a music critic for *The Corsair*, a self-proclaimed gazette of art and literature, who wrote in 1839 about the sublimity of a Beethoven’s opera *Fidelio*:

Oh! may you give your spirit up to him fearlessly! He will transport you to other worlds, and infuse a thousand strange and thrilling sensations—will cradle you in his arms until, in admiration of his strength, you forget how powerful you are, and when he has poured those notes into your ear, and you are filled with tremblings, as of golden wires half conscious of their own thrilling—he leaves you petrified, enchanted—in a silent dream where even the echoes have subsided.<sup>86</sup>

These words, perhaps penned by Nathaniel Parker Willis, a well-known writer and the editor of *The Corsair*, described an incontrovertible power of captivation that resided in Beethoven’s music, which was capable of enthralling listeners into passive petrification.

<sup>83</sup> Quoted in: Irving Lowens, “Writings about Music in the Periodicals of American Transcendentalism (1835-50),” *Journal of American Musicological Society* 10, no. 2 (Summer 1957): 79.

<sup>84</sup> Amos Bronson Alcott, *The Journals of Bronson Alcott*, ed. Odell Shepard (Boston: Little, Brown, 1938), 240-241, entry for February 9, 1951.

<sup>85</sup> Quoted in: Lowens, “Writings about Music in the Periodicals of American Transcendentalism,” 71.

<sup>86</sup> “The First Night of ‘Fidelio’ in America,” *The Corsair*, September 14, 1839: 423. (Originally printed in: *The American*, September 10, 1839.)

Some of the most avid appraisals of the musical sublime were written by John Sullivan Dwight, a Boston native who after graduating from the Harvard Divinity School, drifted away from Unitarianism and spent a short stint at the Transcendentalist commune at Brook Farm in 1841.<sup>87</sup> A lifelong lover of music, early in his career Dwight wrote resolutely that music provided the language of feeling required to communicate life's deepest mysteries: "Love, striving to amalgamate with all,—devotion, reaching forward to eternity—all that...which binds us to one another, to the beauty of the world, to God and to an hereafter."<sup>88</sup> Indeed, Dwight was undeniably the most active advocate of the transcendental power of music. For him, music stimulated:

...native impulses of the soul, or what are variously called the passions, affections, propensities, desires...[all of which are inclined towards] union, harmony...binding ties of fitness and conjunction with all spheres. Through these (how else?) are the hearts of the human race to be knit into one mutually conscious, undivided whole, one living temple not too narrow, nor too fragmentary for the reception of the Spirit of God.<sup>89</sup>

Dwight's statement employed the language of religion (e.g. "God") to highlight music's role in eliciting an areligious mutual consciousness that transcended any personal perception of the world to create a unity of experience between all humans. In interpreting "the passions, affections, propensities, desires" as inextricable from this process, he worked to counteract earlier Enlightenment-era efforts to subordinate emotions to the rational will and sever them from transcendent (and transgressive) experience.

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<sup>87</sup> Nicholas E. Tawa, *From Psalm to Symphony: A History of Music in New England* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001), 107.

<sup>88</sup> "On Music," an unpublished essay in the Boston Public Library, as cited in: Lowens, "Writings about Music in the Periodicals of American Transcendentalism," 75. Many of the ideas set out in this essay were reiterated and elucidated in Dwight's later article for the Elizabeth P. Peabody's publication *Aesthetic Papers*.

<sup>89</sup> John Sullivan Dwight, "Music," in *Aesthetic Papers*, ed. Elizabeth P. Peabody (New York: AMS Press, [1849] 1967), 30.



Dwight's idealized notions of the musical sublime would have certainly been shared by some of the scores of German and Austrian romantics who immigrated to the United States, particularly after Europe's calamitous crop failures and revolutions of the 1840s. Among the newcomers were dozens of professional musicians who, upon arrival in the United States, sought work as performers, orchestral and choral directors, music educators, and publishers.<sup>90</sup> The speed with which they found work in the music sector was partly a product of their own excellent education in Germany and partly a result of a scarcity of classically-trained local musicians in the United States. Although bourgeois Americans had long desired to foster homegrown art music and musicians, its relative lack of elite and aristocratic traditions made the process more difficult. Therefore, it was not long before the German immigrants permeated the musical professions. Their presence was so apparent that Louis Moreau Gottschalk, a well-known American composer and pianist of the day, would later write with equal parts exasperation and hyperbole that "all the musicians in the United States are Germans."<sup>91</sup> Among the most notable German musicians were those who joined the Germania Musical Society, a classical music group formed in New England by several ex-patriots, which toured the country and gained considerable renown during the 1840s and 1850s,<sup>92</sup> not least due to the frequent recommendations they received from *Dwight's Journal of Music*.

Dwight and the members of the Germania Society may not have been the only ones in agreement over the ecstatic power of romantic music. Dwight's assessment of the ineffable sublimity of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony probably paralleled to a certain extent the intention of the composer himself, for the language of ecstasy was also

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<sup>90</sup> Tawa, *From Psalm to Symphony*, 126.

<sup>91</sup> Louis Moreau Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 127.

<sup>92</sup> H. Earle Johnson, "The Germania Musical Society," *Musical Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (Jan. 1953): 75-93.

inscribed in the lyrics of the symphony's final movement. It is here, in the "Ode to Joy," where the chorus sings of the bliss that comes with the "universal love and embrace of all Mankind," and the transmutation of this love into that of "the Creator, the All-Father."<sup>93</sup> The coordinated effort of the symphonic orchestra, which required anywhere from a dozen to over 100 members to work together to create one vast sound, might have itself symbolized the ecstatic proclamation of brotherhood. Indeed, when the symphony debuted in Boston, Dwight's journal reported that, as the night's performance rose to a climax, the singers themselves seemed to encapsulate that "pitch of enthusiasm and inspiration which are the sentiment and the key to the last [movement]."<sup>94</sup> This particular performance, therefore, blended together the language of sentimentality, sublimity, and orthodox religion. The sentiment of the music itself seemed to permeate each performer, who in turn sang with an inspiration that surrendered their "souls" to the "rhythm of nature" and to "the Creator."

Dwight's assessment of the music's powerful entrancement was paralleled by account of other genteel audience members who attended the premier. Upon hearing the Beethoven piece, they too experienced feelings of being transported out of their normal self. One veteran musician in attendance, who had largely felt indifferent to European art music up until that point, suddenly changed his mind. Upon hearing Beethoven's music that night, he suddenly felt himself sublimely possessed and rejuvenated by the sounds emanating from stage: "From the first bars, the music took the deepest hold upon me. I was agreeably disappointed, delighted beyond measure; forty years were gone from me

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<sup>93</sup> "Concerts of the Past Week," *Dwight's Journal of Music*, February 12, 1853: 151.

<sup>94</sup> "Concerts of the Past Week," *Dwight's Journal of Music*, February 12, 1853: 151.

and I was a young man again.”<sup>95</sup> Ostensibly then, the psyches of many in attendance at the music hall that night resounded with the sensation and appreciation of something like Schopenhauer’s Will or Emerson’s “Over-Soul.”

If there was another American who matched Dwight in his articulation of the romantic experience of musical transcendence in America, it was surely Walt Whitman. Though born later and lacking the formal education of the Transcendentalists, as a young man Whitman became infatuated with the writings of Emerson. The poet touted him as vital to his development as a writer and published in *Leaves of Grass*, his famous compendium of poetry, a glowing letter Emerson wrote to him in praise of his work.<sup>96</sup>

Probably just as influential as Transcendentalist philosophy to Whitman were the Italian operas and opera singers he heard in New York during the 1840s and 50s. “But for opera,” the poet once proclaimed, “I could never have written *Leaves of Grass*.”<sup>97</sup> And indeed, Whitman’s passion for music was honed through years of dedicated attendance at operas performed at the Castle Garden, the Park and Broadway theatres, the Astor Place Opera House, and other concert halls in and around New York City. It was here where he fell in love with the works of famous Italian composers such as Giacchino Rossini, Vincenzo Bellini, and Giuseppe Verdi,<sup>98</sup> and the singers who popularized their music in the United States during this time. All of these composers had mastered the *belcanto* style, wherein the singer oscillated between simple, flowing melodies and elaborate vocal

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<sup>95</sup> “Concerts of the Past Week,” *Dwight’s Journal of Music*, February 12, 1853: 149-151, p.150.

<sup>96</sup> Walt Whitman, *The Complete Writings of Walt Whitman*, ed. Richard M. Bucke, Thomas B. Harned, and Horace L. Traubel, vol. 7 (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1902), 7: 106.

<sup>97</sup> John Townsend Trowbridge, “Reminiscences of Walt Whitman,” *Atlantic Monthly* 89, no. 2 (February 1902), 166.

<sup>98</sup> Donald Barlow Stauffer, “Opera and Opera Singers,” in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Walt Whitman*, ed. J.R. LeMaster and Donald D. Kummings (New York: Routledge, 1998), 484-486.

work in order to create an unpredictable and intensely emotional performance. The result was what Whitman believed to be the highest form of art.

In a letter he published in New York's *Evening Post* in 1851, the poet posed a rhetorical question to his readers regarding the experience of the ecstatic power of music:

Have you not... while listening to the well-played music of some band... felt an overwhelming desire for measureless sound—a sublime orchestra of a myriad orchestras—a colossal volume of harmony, in which the thunder might roll in its proper place; and above it, the vast, pure Tenor,—identity of the Creative Power itself—rising through the universe, until the boundless and unspeakable capacities of that mystery, the human soul, should be filled to the uttermost, and the problem of human cravingness be satisfied and destroyed?<sup>99</sup>

Whitman's fascination with the "boundless" feelings elicited by the singing human voice in this passage, likely refers to Alessandro Bettini, a singer whose voice was known to bring Whitman to tears.<sup>100</sup>

With such an intense passion for Italian opera, it is not surprising that so many of Whitman's poems make reference to the voice, singing, carols, chants, hymns, choruses, and musical instruments.<sup>101</sup> Some are also written in a style that mimics the recitative or aria styles of opera. "Song of Myself," published first in 1855 and one of Whitman's most well-loved poems, also alludes to a romantic musical ecstasy by celebrating the special knowledge that arises in the narrator as he listens to an opera and finds his soul merging with entities beyond himself or travelling out beyond his body.

I hear the chorus, it is a grand opera,  
Ah this indeed is music—this suits me.  
A tenor large and fresh as the creation fills me,  
The orbic flex of his mouth is pouring and filling me full.  
I hear the train'd soprano (what work with hers is this?)  
The orchestra whirls me wider than Uranus flies...<sup>102</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Walt Whitman, "Letters from Paumanok," *New York Evening Post*, August 14, 1851: [1].

<sup>100</sup> Stauffer, "Opera and Opera Singers," in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Walt Whitman*, 484-486.

<sup>101</sup> See for example: "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," "Proud Music of the Storm," "Chants Democratic," "Italian Music in Dakota," "Proud music of the Storm," "I Hear America Singing," "Vocalism." Stauffer, "Opera and Opera Singers," in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Walt Whitman*, 484-486.

<sup>102</sup> Whitman, *The Complete Writings of Walt Whitman*, 1: 67.

The tenor's voice permeates the narrator like an act of soul possession, and the soprano works to transport him out into the cosmos. Ten years later, in his poem "The Singer in Prison," Whitman similarly described the power of a convict's song to make "the hearer's pulses stop for ecstasy and awe."<sup>103</sup>

Despite his decades-long devotion to opera, perhaps Walt Whitman's most sublime experience of music occurred on the night of February 11, 1880, while attending a chamber music concert in the foyer of the opera house in Philadelphia. "Never did music more sink into and soothe and fill me," Whitman later recalled. Upon hearing a small chamber group perform one of Beethoven's septets, Whitman felt profoundly "carried away, seeing, absorbing many wonders. Dainty abandon, sometimes as if Nature laughing on a hillside in the sunshine; serious and firm monotonies, as of winds. . . . I allow'd myself, as I sometimes do, to wander out of myself."<sup>104</sup> In recognizing his own capacity to "allow" himself to "wander out of" himself, Whitman evoked something of an Arminian stance, which embraced individuals' capacity to initiate their own conversion rather than waiting for a higher power to dole out grace. Beyond this basic approach, however, Whitman's experience was a secular but transcendent one devoid of Christian metaphor and replete with the sublime language of romanticism.

While Whitman found ecstasy in the opera of Italy, it was German opera that was more widely associated with sublime rapture in America. No other composer engendered this phenomenon more readily than Richard Wagner, whose operas proliferated on American concert stages starting in the 1880s. Although not even born at the time Hoffmann published his review, as a young composer Wagner nevertheless became

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<sup>103</sup> Whitman, *The Complete Writings of Walt Whitman*, 2: 150.

<sup>104</sup> Whitman, *The Complete Writings of Walt Whitman*, 4: 288.

greatly influenced by the critic's writings as well as those of Schopenhauer as he strove to emulate Beethoven in his aesthetic pursuit of pure feeling, sublime self-loss, and exposure to the infinite. As an established composer Wagner would echo some of the early romantic writers in averring that sympathetic listening to great music would plunge listeners into a:

dreamlike...state...wherein there dawns on us that other world, that world from whence the musician speaks to us – we recognize at once from an experience at the door of every man: namely that our eyesight is paralysed to such a degree by the effect of music upon us, that with eyes wide open we no longer intensively see. We experience this in every concert-room while listening to any tone-piece that really touches us.<sup>105</sup>

This was a “spellbound...state essentially akin to that of hypnotic clairvoyance,” and an “ecstasy wherewith no other can compare.”<sup>106</sup> And its power came from its capacity to make one consciousness of the infinitude of the Will:

I am convinced that there are universal currents of Divine Thought vibrating the ether everywhere and that anyone who can feel those vibrations is inspired.... I believe, first of all, that it is this universal vibrating energy that binds the soul of man to the Almighty Central Power from which emanates the life principle to which we all owe our existence. This energy links us to the Supreme Force of the universe, of which we are all a part...in that trance-like condition, which is the prerequisite of all true creative effort, I feel that I am one with this vibrating Force, that it is omniscient, and that I can draw upon it to an extent that is limited only by my own capacity to do so.<sup>107</sup>

Throughout his long career, Wagner referenced trance regularly, often by exploiting musical conventions and attitudes that had been present but less-prominent in previous centuries. One way Wagner achieved this goal was by having the characters in his operas undergo self-transcendence themselves. Episodes from *Tannhäuser* suggested this possibility, including Bacchanalian dancing and singing in honor of the ancient god of wine and intoxication. Likewise, *Tristan und Isolde* portrayed characters entranced by love, whose desire for ecstatic union was consistently stifled by Isolde's betrothal to

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<sup>105</sup> Richard Wagner, *Wagner on Music and Drama: A Compendium of Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, ed. Albert Goldman and Evert Sprinchorn, trans. H. Ashton Ellis (New York: Da Capo, 1964), 186.

<sup>106</sup> Wagner, *Wagner on Music and Drama*, 186, 184.

<sup>107</sup> As reported by Engelbert Humperdinck in: Arthur M. Abell, *Talks with Great Composers* (New York: Citadel, 1998), 137-138.

another man. Union is only achieved in the final act, through the death of Tristan and Isolde's physical bodies and the extinguishing of their rational consciousness. It is during the last scene of the opera, when Isolde lies dying, that an ethereal music, apparently from her dead lover, seems to envelop and transfigure her:

Is it I alone am hearing, strains so tender and endearing? Passion swelling, all things telling, gently bounding from him sounding in me pushes upward rushes trumpet tone that round me gushes. Brighter growing, o'er me flowing, are these breezes airy pillows?... Shall I breathe them? Shall I listen? Shall I sip them, dive within them...? In the breezes around, in the harmony sound, in the world's driving whirlwind be drown'd, and, sinking, be drinking—in a kiss, highest bliss!<sup>108</sup>

It is with Isolde's death and transfiguration, that the souls of the two star-crossed lovers are apparently reunited—if not exactly in a Christian heaven, then certainly in some transcendent realm of absolutes.

The form of Wagner's music, though difficult to connect definitively to any given psychic experience, also seems to have alluded to aspects of trance experience. Wagner's intentional use of altered harmonic forms in particular can be connected to transcendent self-awareness, creating both a sonic and psychic liminality throughout the opera. The most well-known of these is, without question, the opening chord of *Tristan und Isolde*—the so-called “Tristan chord”—which defied compositional conventions of the day by partly resolving and partly augmenting the harmonic tension of the piece, thereby encompassing both a sense of consonance and dissonance within the implied key.<sup>109</sup> The opera scholar Burton D. Fisher interprets this harmonic tension as encapsulating Tristan's own inner psychic tension, which develops as he yearns for ecstatic union with his lover but is thwarted by the limits of his own physical body and rational consciousness, not to

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<sup>108</sup> Richard Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde (Tristan and Isolda): Opera in Three Acts* (New York: Fred Rullman, 1865), 55. This English translation of the libretto was provided to patrons during the early decades of the opera's performance at New York's Metropolitan Opera House.

<sup>109</sup> Burton D. Fisher, ed., *Wagner's Tristan and Isolde*, Opera Journeys Mini Guides Series, ([No location]: Opera Journeys Publishing, 2002), 18-19.

mention the adverse social circumstances tearing them apart. The harmonic and psychic tensions are carried throughout the opera, both resolving only during the final act of the performance, when Tristan dies and is at last able to break down the boundaries that have prevented the synthesis of his own subjectivity and the object of its desire.<sup>110</sup>

Wagner's yearning for sublime ecstasy was not lost on his American audiences. When his operas were performed in urban centers the eastern seaboard, those in attendance also found themselves swept up into the sublime. Among them was M. Carey Thomas, a female doctoral student in linguistics (who would later become the president of Bryn Mawr College), who described a decidedly spiritual encounter with the sublime will of Nature upon attending a Wagner performance. Writing to Mary Garrett, her intimate confidant, Thomas revealed how the opera *Tristan und Isolde* evoked "memories of the splendid things of seas & stars and plains and marble & pictures & poetry until all together are blended into one in the rapture & fire of the music."<sup>111</sup> Ecstatic imagery of the natural cosmos blended here with more conventionally spiritual language when she described the experience of soaring "heavenly high, winging thro. the Emprean." In a later correspondence Thomas reiterated the destabilizing effect the experience had on her sense of self, revealing how she was "carried away" and "utterly lost to everything else."<sup>112</sup> Even more lyrical descriptions could be found in the poetry of Ella Wheeler Wilcox, who described her encounter with Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde*. After the concert, she wrote to *Munsey's* magazine of a deep personal transfiguration using the imagery of a natural universe:

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<sup>110</sup> Fisher, *Wagner's Tristan and Isolde*, 18-30.

<sup>111</sup> M. Carey Thomas Papers, *M. Carey Thomas to Mary Garrett, March 3, 1891* (Letter), From Bryn Mawr College Library, Special Collections, Reel 148.

<sup>112</sup> M. Carey Thomas Papers, *M. Carey Thomas to Mary Garrett, August 23, 1891*, Reel 148.



...in the flood of music swelling clear  
 And high and strong, all things save love were drowned.  
 A clamorous sea of chords swept o'er my soul,  
 Submerging reason. Mutinous desire  
 Stood at the helm; the stars were in eclipse:  
 I heard wild billows beat, and thunders roll;  
 And as the universe flamed into fire,  
 I swooned upon the reef of coral lips.<sup>113</sup>

A more lavish ode to sacred sublimity could hardly have been penned by Walt Whitman, who had died two years earlier.

### **Music and Animal Magnetism: Mesmerism and Spiritualism**

For some Americans, the “spirit” of Nature was not an abstract and amorphous spiritual force but rather a physical substance that could be identified by someone properly attuned to its presence. In the 1770s, the German doctor Franz Anton Mesmer postulated that this mysterious natural substance was an electrically-charged fluid called *gravitas universalis* or “animal magnetism” that permeated the universe and created a psychic bridge between living creatures. Mesmer contended that learning to locate and manipulate this substance could have therapeutic applications. The method he developed to treat illnesses or imbalances in the human mind and body became known as mesmerism. It evolved into a distinct outgrowth of the romantic movement and garnered widespread appeal among scientific-minded professionals and laypeople alike.

In order to harness the therapeutic power of animal magnetism, Mesmer and other practitioners often encouraged fits or “crises,” which required an individual to relinquish control over many of his or her bodily functions and intellectual faculties in order to harmonize with the magnetic fluid. Mesmerists who became particularly adept at accessing the power of animal magnetism appeared to be able to induce both

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<sup>113</sup> Ella Wheeler Wilcox, “The Prelude to ‘Tristan und Isolde,’” *Munsey’s*, December 1894: 288.

somnambulism, a “waking sleep” that allowed one to speak without remembering, and clairvoyance, which gave one sight into an ethereal world even with closed eyes.<sup>114</sup> In its basic form, mesmerism’s faith in the omnipresent, mystical force of animal magnetism bore some general resemblance to Transcendentalism’s notion of the “Over-soul” or Schopenhauer’s notion of the Will: these were all holistic theories that blended naturalism with mysticism and sought to explain the elemental nature of existence, life, and the universe without a conventional Christian theology. This complementarity helps explain why mesmerism gained such popularity in America starting in 1836, when the French animal magnetist Charles Poyen St. Sauveur toured throughout New England giving lectures and stage demonstrations and using audience volunteers.

Some of the most popular novelists of the era became fascinated with mesmerism and helped spread its cultural appeal throughout America and the English-speaking world. Edgar Allan Poe wrote extensively about the theory in four of his stories, including “A Tale of the Ragged Mountains” and “Mesmeric Revelation,” both published in 1844.<sup>115</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne also likened writers to mesmerists for their power to create and manipulate fictional characters, reveal hidden aspects of their inner lives, and also to weave enthralling stories that captivated readers.<sup>116</sup> Literary critic Samuel Coale points to Hawthorne’s frequent narrative references to fixated gazes, shadowy scenes and otherworldly settings, and profound moral insights into one’s inner character as all tenets of mesmerism. He likewise interprets Hawthorne’s use of protracted sentences, riddled

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<sup>114</sup> Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, 127.

<sup>115</sup> John Anthony Andola, “Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Use of Mesmerism in Four Major Works” (Doctoral dissertation, Bell State University, 1977).

<sup>116</sup> Samuel Coale, “The Romance of Mesmerism: Hawthorne’s Medium of Romance,” in *Nathaniel Hawthorne, Updated Edition*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2009), 88. Also see: Maria M. Tatar, *Spellbound: Studies on Mesmerism and Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 229.

with clauses and repetition of names and details, as intentionally composed to mesmerize readers.<sup>117</sup> Indeed, Hawthorne's goal in much of his writing was to create a new and unusual psychic space for readers, or as he described it in *The Scarlet Letter*, a "neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other."<sup>118</sup> Herman Melville, who befriended Hawthorne in 1850, also employed mesmerism as a theme in his writing. *Moby-Dick* (1851) contains several allusions to animal magnetism, as the literary critic David S. Reynolds points out. Most of them refer to Ahab's power of compulsion over his crew, such as when "Ahab kept his magnet at Starbuck's brain," and "a certain magnetism shot into [the harpooners'] congenial hearts from inflexible Ahab's."<sup>119</sup> Ahab's powers of psychic influence, it would seem, originated from his own mesmerized obsession with the white whale, which he acknowledges as he cries out "He's all a magnet!"<sup>120</sup>

Music was a recurring feature of mesmeric activities. Mesmer, an amateur musician and friend to Mozart as well as other famous European composers, regularly employed musical instruments to facilitate the trance experiences of his patients. This included Benjamin Franklin's glass harmonica, an "incomparably sweet" sounding

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<sup>117</sup> Samuel Chase Coale, *Mesmerism and Hawthorne: Mediums of American Romance* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998).

<sup>118</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (London: David Bogue, 1851), 47. This natural mysticism was ubiquitous in Hawthorne's stories. In *The House of The Seven Gables* (1851), for instance, the old Pyncheon house becomes an otherworldly realm planted in the rational world, which correspondingly causes those who enter it to have mysterious, surreal experiences resulting just as much from the power of their imagination as from their sensory perceptions. Coale, "The Romance of Mesmerism," 88.

<sup>119</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 212, 518, quoted in: David S. Reynolds, "'Its Wood Could Only Be American!': Moby-Dick and Antebellum Popular Culture," in *Herman Melville's Moby-Dick*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase, 2007), 113.

<sup>120</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 441, quoted in: David S. Reynolds, "'Its Wood Could Only Be American!'" 113.

instrument that remained one of Mesmer's preferred instruments.<sup>121</sup> Observers noted that the piano and other keyboard instruments were also used to magnetize patients. A 1784 investigation of mesmerism led by Benjamin Franklin, commissioned by King Louis XVI of France, revealed that "the changing of the key and the time, in the airs played upon the piano fort  has an effect upon the patients; so that the quicker motion agitates them more, and renews the vivacity of their convulsions."<sup>122</sup> Musical practices appear to have been abandoned by the Frenchman Charles Poyen St. Sauveur and his American followers.<sup>123</sup> However, the mesmeric power of music was inferred by Herman Melville, who touched briefly on it in his novel *Pierre*. In one scene, Isabel, the protagonist's love interest and half-sister, entranced him by playing guitar to communicate to him those aspects of her life "for not in words can it be spoken." Before long "a strange wild heat burned upon his brow" and as the music stopped, he enthused to Isabel, "thou hast filled me with such wonderings; I am so distraught with thee," then left her company feeling "bewitched" and "enchanted," as if the world was "steeped a million fathoms in...mysteriousness."<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> H. W. Brands, *The First American: The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 325; David A. Gallo and Stanley Finger, "The Power of a Musical Instrument: Franklin, the Mozarts, Mesmer, and the Glass Armonica," *History of Psychology* 3, no. 4 (Nov 2000): 326-343; Peregrine Horden, "Commentary on Part V, with Notes on Nineteenth-Century America and on Mesmerism and Theosophy," in *Music as Medicine: The History of Music Therapy since Antiquity*, ed. Peregrine Horden (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 2000), 326; James Kennaway, "Musical Hypnosis: Sound and Selfhood from Mesmerism to Brainwashing," in *Social History of Medicine* 25, no. 2 (May 2012): 273.

<sup>122</sup> From: *Report of Dr. Benjamin Franklin, and other Commissioners, charged by the King of France, with the Examination of the Animal Magnetism, as Now Practiced at Paris* (London: Johnson, 1785), 25-27.

<sup>123</sup> In a report on animal magnetism in 1836, St Sauveur stated: "Now...magnetizers...help themselves neither with the influence of music nor the power of imitation." Henri Marie Husson and Charles Poyen St Sauveur, *Report on the Magnetical Experiments: Made by the Commission of the Royal Academy of Medicine, of Paris, Read in the Meetings of June 21 and 28, 1831* (Boston: D.K. Kitchcock, 1836), xii.

<sup>124</sup> Herman Melville, *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1852), 172-173.



**Illustration 3**

Claude-Louis Desrais, *Mesmeric Therapy: A Group of Mesmerised French Patients*. 1778/1784, Oil on canvas, 60.5 x 76.2 cm, Wellcome Library, Iconographic Collections 44754i, ICV No. 17651, Photo number: V0017306, London, UK. Available from: <https://wellcomeimages.org/indexplus/image/V0017306.html>

The concept of animal magnetism would prove remarkably influential, not only in popularizing mesmerism but also in inspiring other musical movements that circumvented orthodox Christian theology. This included adherents of the spiritualist movement, many of whom were musical, who categorized the somnambulism and clairvoyance of mesmeric experiences under the label “trance.” They also believed that adepts could access an ethereal force, but in a departure from mesmerism they framed this force not as a magnetic fluid but as a more abstract psychic realm. Entranced spiritualist, or “mediums,” used their voices and bodies as conduits to the spirit world in order to facilitate communication with the ghosts of the dead and other individual souls.<sup>125</sup> Unlike transcendentalism and other romantic philosophies of the sublime, which circulated predominantly among the more educated and intellectual strata of society, spiritualists democratized access to the spirit world. In this manner, they drew inspiration

<sup>125</sup> Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, 178.

from the activities of evangelicals, by denouncing the authority of churches and established ministers.<sup>126</sup>

The spiritualist overlap with evangelicalism also had its limits. Certainly, spiritualist beliefs in the existence of ghosts grounded the movement in supernaturalism, but supporters of the tradition diverged from their revivalist counterparts by remaining relatively focused on natural phenomena. Believing that spirits remained separated from the material world by the thinnest of veils, spiritualists tended to agree that that any otherworldly spirit could, and should, be ascertained through the natural senses.

According to the historian R. Laurence Moore, spiritualism “appealed not to the inward illumination of mystical experience, but to the observable and verifiable objects of empirical science.”<sup>127</sup> And according to the historian Ann Taves, the movement represented perhaps the first instance of “religious naturalism,” a philosophy that endeavored to reconcile anything supernatural with verifiable scientific knowledge derived from the study of nature.<sup>128</sup> Indeed, spiritualists tended to be more rigorously empirical than their mesmerist predecessors.<sup>129</sup> They carefully noted which types of behavior were more or less conducive to authentic mediumship. For example, Andrew

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<sup>126</sup> Rebecca Moore, “Angels Among Us in Four San Diego Spiritualist Churches,” in *The Spiritualist Movement: Speaking with the Dead in America and around the World*, ed. Christopher M. Moreman (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2013), 1: 169.

<sup>127</sup> R. Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 7.

<sup>128</sup> Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, 175.

<sup>129</sup> Not all mesmerists avoided empirical study. For instance, the French naturalist Joseph Philippe François Deleuze justified the existence of animal magnetism by pointing to the observable soothing of patients’ nervous system—the main therapeutic outcome of a mesmerist session—as well as the physical warming of a practitioner’s hands and the feeling of having a “correspondence” between separate hands when placed on either side of a patient. Furthermore, he encouraged physicians, physiologists, and metaphysicians to unite in studying and clarifying the scientific foundations of animal magnetism. Ultimately, he believed that the existence of a mystical magnetic fluid could be confirmed by the frequency with which practitioners induced individual “crises” and achieved therapeutic results among patients. J.P.F. Deleuze, *Practical Instruction in Animal Magnetism*, trans. Thomas C. Hartshorn (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1843), 194, 195, 205.

Jackson Davis, a famous magnetist turned spiritualist from Poughkeepsie, NY, recorded a detailed empirical description of the physical and behavioral changes undergone by an individual as he became entranced. The account, recorded as a series of lectures entitled *The Principles of Nature, her Divine Revelations, and a Voice of Mankind*, described how the medium's body

becomes cold, rigid, motionless, and insensible to all external things. The pulsations [of the arteries] become feeble, the breathing is apparently almost suspended, and all the senses are closed entirely to the external world. This condition...corresponds almost precisely to that of *physical death*.<sup>130</sup>

It was through these most unusual alterations in the physical body, Davis proposed, that one could confirm the onset of trance and access the “spirits and angels of the ‘Second Sphere.’” If the experience of spiritualists was oriented towards the supernatural realm, then the proof of its authenticity was achieved through the “scientific” knowledge of the natural world. As a movement that distanced itself from conventional Christianity and maintained a belief in the blending of naturalism and supernaturalism, the spiritualist movement evaded easy placement within a religious tradition.

Spiritualists in America and Britain found music to be a particularly useful tool for achieving their goals.<sup>131</sup> In the 1850s, several songbooks were published that were suited to Spiritualist entrancement sessions, or séances. These included *The Spirit Minstrel; a Collection of Hymns and Music, for the Use of Spiritualists, in Their Circles and Public Meetings*, and *The Spiritual Harp; a Collection of Vocal Music for the Choir, Congregation, and Social Circle*, to name but a few.<sup>132</sup> According to one

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<sup>130</sup> Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Principles of Nature, her Divine Revelations, and a Voice of Mankind* (New York: S.S. Lyon and Wm. Fishbough, 1847), xvii.

<sup>131</sup> A crucial resource base for this section is the online archives of The International Association for the Preservation of Spiritualist and Occult Periodicals. See specifically: [spirithistory.iapsop.com/singing\\_with\\_the\\_muse.html](http://spirithistory.iapsop.com/singing_with_the_muse.html).

<sup>132</sup> J. B. Packard, *The Spirit Minstrel; A Collection of Hymns and Music, for the Use of Spiritualists, in Their Circles and Public Meetings* (Boston: Bela Marsh, 1853); James Martin Peebles, *The Spiritual*

contemporaneous observation, “the singing of hymns or songs is of no less consequence to spiritual gatherings than to Methodist or Baptist meetings.”<sup>133</sup>

Although spiritualists did not seek to adulate or placate God through their hymns, as the evangelicals did, they did share with their revivalist counterparts a belief that both music and singing were useful tools for accessing “disembodied spirits.” For Emma Hardinge Britten, one of the most famous American mediums, music seemed to facilitate her first trance experience. As Britten herself described it:

my last clear remembrance was of listening to a lovely quartette, beautifully sung by the ‘Troy Harmonists’ and then I had a dim perception that I was standing outside of myself, by the side of my dear father—dead—when I was only a little child but whose noble form I could plainly see close by me, gesticulating to, and addressing somehow, my second self, which was imitating him, and repeating all the thrilling words he was saying.<sup>134</sup>

The spiritualists’ valuation of music led many of them to both begin and punctuate their services and séances with hymns and songs. Often, these songs were simply Christian hymns with lyrics adapted or already suited to a spiritualist perspective. For the more staunch opponents of orthodox theology, this proximity to Christian doctrine became a source of irritation.<sup>135</sup> Others who accepted the songs without complaint may have felt that the power of song overrode any inconsistency in the lyrics.

Music proved valuable not only for its ability facilitate séances and initiate trances, but also for its apparent capacity to prove a medium’s loss of normative self-possession. Maggie, Kate, and Leah Fox, three sisters from New Jersey who are credited

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*Harp; a Collection of Vocal Music for the Choir, Congregation, and Social Circle* (Boston: W. White, 1868). Also see: Esther C. Henck, *Spirit Voices: Odes, Dictated by Spirits of the Second Sphere, for the Use of Harmonial Circles* (Philadelphia: G. D. Henck, 1854); Emma Hardinge Britten [and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow], *The Footsteps of Angels; Recitative & Air* (New York: H. Waters, 1856); John Stowell Adams, *The Psalms of Life; a Compilation of Psalms, Hymns, Chants, Anthems, &c., Embodying the Spiritual, Progressive and Reformatory Sentiment of the Present Age* (Boston: O. Ditson, 1857).

<sup>133</sup> W. G. Haskell, “The Hymnology of Spiritualism,” *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, July 28, 1888:2.

<sup>134</sup> Emma Hardinge Britten, *Autobiography of Emma Hardinge Britten*, ed. Margaret Wilkinson (London: John Heywood, 1900), 50.

<sup>135</sup> Haskell, “The Hymnology of Spiritualism,” 2.



with initiating the spiritualist movement during the late 1840s, themselves attested to the possibility of musical possession. Leah, oldest of the three and last to convert to spiritualism, recounted an anecdote from the early days of the movement, when, while reading the memoirs of the Wesley family one day, she became entranced and had a series of letters dictated to her by some spiritual source. First she believed the sequence, which ran “GAGCBAGAGEFEFAGFEFGFEDAGGCEDGGCBA GCCDBC,” to be a scrambled message from the ghost of “Johnny Story,” a simple boy who was never taught to read. But eventually she received a message that the letters should not be deciphered into words but instead applied as notes to the piano. When she did so, Leah recognized them as “a sweet and tender melody,” which she was then told to set to an existing poem called “Haunted Ground.”<sup>136</sup> As early as 1849, the Fox sisters introduced song into their séances, including one occasion when they invited the Universalist minister Charles Hammond to sing several pieces of sacred music.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Ann Leah (Fox Fish) Underhill, *The Missing Link in Modern Spiritualism* (New York: Thomas R. Knox & Co., 1885), 415-420.

<sup>137</sup> Bret E. Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 138.

**THE HAUNTED GROUND.**

Arr. by J. JAY WATSON.

1. Yes, it is haunted, this  
2. Have I not, under these

*Moderato.*

**PIANO.** *Retardando.*

qui - et scene, Fair as it looks, and all soft - ly green;  
whisp'ring leaves, Wo - ven such dreams as the young heart weaves?

Yet fear thou not, for the spell is thrown, And the might of the shadow's on  
Shadows yet un - to which life seem'd bound, And is it not - is it not

me a lone,  
haunted ground?

*Retardando.* *Retardando.*

**Illustration 4**

The organ arrangement for "Haunted Ground." Leah Fox claimed the melody was dictated to her from the spirit-world. From: Ann Leah (Fox Fish) Underhill, *The Missing Link in Modern Spiritualism* (New York: Thomas R. Knox & Co., 1885), 417.

On other occasions, trances instigated not only the writing of songs, but also their performance. An article in the *Spiritual Telegraph*, the movement's primary publication during the 1850s, relayed the story of Catherine Mettler, a young clairvoyant and medium. Having previously taken only a few lessons on the piano and holding only a rudimentary knowledge of music, the girl found one day that her

arms were apparently seized by an unknown power; which at once compelled her to commence the most astonishing improvisation, evidencing an extraordinary mastery over the instrument and a thorough knowledge of the science of harmony. The medium's

hands for some time mechanically obeyed the irresistible impulse of this unseen performer without any volition or mental impression of her own.<sup>138</sup>

The possessed girl's mother heard the improvisation from another part of the house and concluded that some highly skilled pianist had visited her daughter. She was amazed to find Catherine alone in the parlor, "fixed and spell-bound." From that day on, the girl was reported to become regularly possessed by musical spirits, including the ghosts of famous composers such as Mozart and Beethoven.

On still other occasions, musical ghosts would visit members of a séance and perform for them directly. These included events where singing from invisible sources permeated a room or instruments levitated and were played as if on their own accord.<sup>139</sup> Some of the most notable cases occurred to the Hutchinson Family Singers in 1850. During that year, Jesse Hutchinson, one of the founding members of the singing family visited one of the Fox sisters in Rochester, NY, who, upon entering a trance, began to communicate across the veil of reality, as it were, to the ghosts of deceased individuals, including members of Jesse's own family. For him, the series of rappings and other communications from the spirit world was "something so mellow and pure, and intelligent...like the sweet voice or sound of music."<sup>140</sup> And upon hearing about the presence of his deceased children, he became "much overcome." He recalled later that it was as if the "dear little children seemed to be upon my knees, and on my shoulders." At one point, the medium declared "Oh! they [the children] are singing, ALL IS WELL," whereupon she burst forth with a melody, singing along with the "spiritual choir" of

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<sup>138</sup> Samuel Byron Brittan, in the *Spiritual Telegraph*, as quoted by: Emma Hardinge, *Modern American Spiritualism: A Twenty Years' Record of the Communion between Earth and the World of the Spirits* (New York: Emma Hardinge, 1870), 202-203.

<sup>139</sup> Hardinge, *Modern American Spiritualism*, 104, 155, 201, 202, 288, 314, 317, 463, 464; Daniel Dunglas Home, *Incidents in My Life* (New York: Carlton, 1863), 85; Aura Satz, "Music of Its Own Accord," *Leonardo Music Journal* 20 (2010): 73-78.

<sup>140</sup> Hutchinson, "The Hutchinson Family," 81-82.

youths. With this revelation, Hutchinson declared “O! I never knew such joy before. My soul was filled with ecstatic pleasure,” as he too joined the sweet song.

One week later, with Jesse’s encouragement, his brothers and sister also met with a medium and partook in an interview of the spirits, at which time they too became believers in the power of spiritual trance.<sup>141</sup> As the *Spiritual Philosopher* reported later, the family met with the spirit of their deceased brother Benjamin, who answered their questions and sang “an old and familiar tune” that was immediately recognized by all the attending Hutchinsons, who joined in heartily. After someone asked Benjamin’s spirit to perform the song he sung on his own deathbed, the spirit did so, and according to Jesse, it “thrilled our every souls.” One brother in particular, Judson, was “overwhelmed with ecstasy almost too much to bear.” As the clairvoyant became entranced, Judson too began to lapse into a “deep trance.” One observer reported, “I saw his hand go to the top of his head in a manner, apparent to me, that he did not place it there himself,” at which point he became “overwhelmed with a burst of affectionate feeling, and sobbed aloud.” Upon exiting the trance he exclaimed “Oh, Benjamin, it is you! I saw you! I felt you!” Only after some strong persuasion, he was finally “induced” to come back and dwell in his own body. But he had been so severely affected by the experience that, for a time, he endured severe psychic attacks and hallucinations. These episodes, however, were also matched by some of the most “glorious and happyfying [sic]” experiences, many of them musical.

Only a few years later, after Jesse Hutchinson himself had passed away, he too apocryphally appeared during a séance hosted by Leah Fox. It occurred at Barnum’s hotel in New York, and several notable politicians were in attendance, including the prominent

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<sup>141</sup> Hutchinson and Hazard, “The Case of Judson Hutchinson,” 113-114.

abolitionist and social reformer William Lloyd Garrison. Upon request, the spirit of Hutchinson “beat a march—it seemed to us Washington’s march—in admirable time, and in the most spirited manner: no drummer could have done it more skillfully.”<sup>142</sup> He then beat time as the company joined in singing several tunes, including the perennial favorite “The Old Granite State.” Garrison, still wanting additional confirmation, asked Hutchinson’s spirit to grasp his right hand, which he proceeded to fasten between his legs so as to prevent anyone else from touching it. Nevertheless, he felt the touch of another’s hand “with no warmth in it” even as he saw every living person’s hands on the table.



Illustration 5

“‘Spirits’ and their Manifestations—An Evening’s Séance,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, April 2, 1887.

For some spiritualist leaders, music itself had a similar character to magnetic fluid in that it constituted a mystical substance that surrounded everything in a joyous aura. According to an early exponent of the movement, Thomas Lake Harris, “The universe

<sup>142</sup> William Lloyd Garrison, “Modern Phenomena,” *The Liberator* 24, no. 9 (March 3, 1854): 34.

moves in music... Every heart in Heaven beats in music.”<sup>143</sup> Another prominent proponent, James Peebles, elaborated these sentiments:

Music envelops every surrounding object with Aeolian vibrations. The angels, charmed when sweet melodies rise like ocean ripples from joyous souls cannot help approaching us. As our music quiveringly touches and trembles the finer chords of their souls, we hear an echo far sweeter, and in turn we pause and listen, the auditors now of heavenly choirs. Thus the songs we produce, however, humble, set all the universe ablaze with melodious light, and, ringing through the arches of heaven, bless all hearts with new joy.<sup>144</sup>

Just as Schopenhauer concluded that “we might...just as well call the world embodied music as embodied will,”<sup>145</sup> Harris and Peebles seemed to suggest that we might just as well substitute animal magnetism with “music.”

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Over the course of the nineteenth century, the cultural frameworks Americans used to explain musical ecstasy underwent enormous changes. Orthodox Christian doctrines that explained the phenomenon as a supernatural communion or transport were challenged by naturalized philosophies that reframed musical ecstasy as a unitive experience with the vital feelings or forces that tied together individuals, societies, and the natural world. Although sentimentalists did not always recommend self-loss as avidly as the other romantic traditions, they nevertheless joined the sublime romanticists, and animal magnetists (including mesmerists and spiritualists) in pivoting ecstasy and emotional absorption towards the secular sphere. This process did not completely deny orthodox Christian notions of spirit, but it did serve to flatten out the hierarchy between supernatural and natural transcendent experiences.

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<sup>143</sup> Quoted in: Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 237.

<sup>144</sup> Peebles, *The Spiritual Harp*, 3.

<sup>145</sup> Schopenhauer, “Music as the Cosmic Will Revealed,” 1: 340.

The term naturalization is appropriate in describing the work of these groups for more than one reason. It does not only describe the shift away from supernatural phenomena. It also represents the degree to which unreligious interpretations of self-loss were popularized and validated as an acceptable (if not always normal) phenomenon in American culture. With the work of people like John S. Dwight, the Hutchinson Family, Walt Whitman, and the Fox sisters, self-loss became commonly viewed as a (somewhat secular) mainstay of American society by the mid-nineteenth century. The millions of Americans that supported or admired the cultures of sentiment, sublimity, and animal magnetism populated every corner of American society. Their traditions of musical mysticism did not entirely displace religious ones, especially during the Second Great Awakening. But they did come to parallel and challenge them in influence. To this effect, (semi-)naturalized sacred experiences came to constitute a vital mode of musical self-loss in America.

Of course, the shift away from supernaturalism was not entirely comprehensive. Some romantics, mesmerists, and spiritualists, did not always make clear distinctions between the supernatural and the natural. Emerson, Dwight, and others would occasionally describe natural phenomena using the language of orthodox Christianity—for instance as indebted to God, the Holy Spirit, or some other kind of supernatural force. Likewise, Wagner infused some of his operas (e.g. *Parsifal*) with Christian symbols and themes. In many cases, the secular orientation of romanticism was meant to nest comfortably beside an orthodox religious one.

Moreover, when romantics avoided the language of religion, they nevertheless treated the objects of their ecstasy much like the divine forces associated with

conventional Christianity. Although natural, however, these objects can still be considered sacred; they worked in decidedly mysterious or magical ways, they were approached earnestly and respectfully, and they represented some higher (or deeper) power within the natural world that transcended the mundane and immanent concerns of the individual. For these reasons, romantics believed they deserved an earnest reverence. Whether it was the romantic “spirit” that united a loving couple, a family, a nation, or more abstract formations such as the sentimental bond between all humans or the vital force of nature—the ecstatic mergence with these transcendent objects all demanded an sincere appreciation. More specific comparisons to orthodox religion could also be made. For instance, as the historian Ian Fredrick Finseth demonstrates, certain streams of the romantic tradition shared evangelicalism’s philosophical embrace of antinomianism, which affirmed an individual’s capacity to have an unmediated, intimate relationship with a transcendent entity, often through intense revelatory experiences.<sup>146</sup> Both traditions, too, were inspired by an increasingly popular Arminian stance, which rejected orthodox Calvinism’s doctrines of predestination and innate depravity in favor of an optimistic belief in individual free will as the path to personal growth.<sup>147</sup>

Despite their shared characteristics and predominance during the nineteenth century, the traditions of Christianity and romanticism did not in fact generate every

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<sup>146</sup> For both romanticism and evangelicalism, “the central event of human existence” was the spiritual transformation that accompanied ecstatic conversion experiences. For Transcendentalists, conversion entailed a profound awareness and appreciation for the munificence and interconnectedness of the cosmos. For evangelicals, conversion involved a deep awareness or preemptive experience of one’s ultimate reunion with God. Either scenario was said to entail a “complete effacement or abnegation of self...an absolute suspension of ego.” For evangelicals, it was the external agency of the Holy Spirit that sparked this dissolution of self; for Transcendentalists, it was an intellectual and visceral epiphany upon realizing the interpenetration of self with the overarching patterns of nature or what Emerson called a foundational “Oversoul.” Finseth, ““Liquid Fire Within Me.””

<sup>147</sup> An Arminian outlook informed John Wesley’s Methodism as well as Thomas Paine’s Unitarianism, and it became enshrined in the Revolution’s call for self-determination. Consequently, an Arminian hue came to infuse all mainstream religious and secular sensibilities in the United States by the early decades of the republic.



mode of musical ecstasy available to Americans during this era. A notable segment of the population—which included Americans who overtly supported the principles of religion, transcendentalism, or magnetism—did not always employ conventional notions of spirituality or mysticism to interpret their musical self-loss. While these people believed in the possibility of self-transcendence, they also avoided or chafed at the prospect of tying ecstasy to an identifiable transcendent object such as the Holy Spirit, the spirit of Nature, or animal magnetism. For them, trance comprised a more aimless experience.

**Chapter 3**  
**Carnivalization:**  
 Rough Music, Mardi Gras, and Minstrelsy

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On July 22, 1865, an advertisement appeared in the *New York Clipper*, the city's "sporting and theatrical journal," announcing that a young impresario named Tony Pastor was opening a new variety theatre in New York City's Bowery district.<sup>1</sup> The Tony Pastor Combination, a wildly popular ensemble of different entertainers managed by Pastor himself would perform on opening day. The advertisement for the show's opening day also promised that some in attendance would fall into "extasies [sic]."<sup>2</sup> This was not Pastor's only reference to altered experiences among audience members. Descriptions elsewhere similarly proclaimed that "Tony's company...has a galaxy of talent which enraptures the Bowery girls and boys."<sup>3</sup> A lack of first-person accounts makes it difficult to verify whether audience members actually felt "enraptured" or ecstatic, but it appears that the promise of unusual subjective experiences was expected by theatregoers when they attended Pastor's shows.

Although Pastor's Combination offered a variety of different performances including dances and comic skits,<sup>4</sup> music performance remained integral to the audience's experience at the show. Indeed, the advertisement from 1865 pledged that Pastor himself would grace the stage with "all his NEWEST AND BEST COMPOSITIONS," including "New Comic Songs, Humorous Ballads and Admirable

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<sup>1</sup> "Tony Pastor's Opera House," *New York Clipper*, July 22, 1865, 120.

<sup>2</sup> "Tony Pastor's Opera House," *New York Clipper*, July 22, 1865: 120.

<sup>3</sup> "Tony's Opera House," *New York Herald*, October 6, 1865: 4.

<sup>4</sup> Parker Zellers, *Tony Pastor: Dean of the Vaudeville Stage* (Ypsilanti, MI: Eastern Michigan University Press, 1971), 27-28.

Adaptations.”<sup>5</sup> Pastor was familiar with how responsive audiences could be to a well-chosen song or apt instrumental accompaniment. Earlier in his career, he had found success as a songwriter and singer and published numerous songbooks for use in stage performances.<sup>6</sup> So, it was not surprising that tunes and lyrics were nearly ubiquitous during the opening show of the impresario’s theatre.

The musical ecstasies advertised for Pastor’s show resembled very little of the mystical experiences idealized by Americans evangelicals or romantics. Decades earlier, the famous revivalist Charles Finney warned that “raptures, or ecstasies, or high flights of feeling...can exist in full power where there is no religion,”<sup>7</sup> and Pastor’s ad indicated that his theatre was just such a setting. Upon admission to the event, patrons were not expected or encouraged to encounter a supernatural god, a naturalized numen, or any other conventionally mystical entities. No one was required to believe in some hallowed sacred doctrines or follow some religious liturgy. Indeed, Pastor’s descriptions of musical “extasies” and “enrapture” were utterly lacking in formal spiritual philosophy. In this guise, self-loss became framed vaguely, as the transcendence of one’s normal subjectivity without a simultaneous experience of merging with some external object or realm.

This chapter argues that Pastor’s “extasies” represented a larger, nebulous mode of musical self-loss in America that paralleled the more spiritual traditions associated with religion and romanticism. Adherents to this alternative mode rarely presented direct challenges to the more identifiable transcendent objects associated with religion,

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<sup>5</sup> Zellers, *Tony Pastor*, 27-28.

<sup>6</sup> These songbooks included: *Tony Pastor’s Comic and Eccentric Songster* (1862), *Tony Pastor’s Great Sensation Songster* (1864), and *Tony Pastor’s 201 Bowery Songster* (1867). See: Norman Cazden, Herbert Haufrecht, Norman Studer, eds. *Notes and Sources for Folk Songs of the Catskills, Supplement*, vol. 2 (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1982), 182-183.

<sup>7</sup> Charles G. Finney and Joshua Leavitt, *Lectures on Revival of Religion* (Boston: John P. Jewett & Co., 1858), 381.

romanticism, and other formal mystical traditions. However, by avoiding the conventional language and philosophies associated with these traditions, they also opened up a rhetorical space for imagining self-loss as an escape into a decidedly vague metaphysical space. Unattached to the more demanding philosophies of Christianity and romanticism, this alternative mode permitted aimless psychic transport for its own sake—that is to say, for fun. This mode was pursued most readily by the participants in American outgrowths of Carnival, including rough music, blackface minstrelsy, and Mardi Gras. However, it also came to infiltrate the more formally mystical traditions—especially romanticism—through the dissociative logic of the market and the Darwinian challenges to religious belief.

At its core, this aimless mode of musical self-loss matched boundary-dissolving experiences of self with a more diffuse tendency—also present in sonic, social, and cultural realms—that upended expectations, broke or bent rules, tore down hierarchies, and contested conventions. As such, the nebulous mode of musical ecstasy became loosely linked to noise, gender and racial role reversals, working-class culture, and secular thought. Pastor’s performances regularly leaned towards such alternative cultural tendencies. For instance, his shows included “blackface” performances, which involved white performers impersonating what they touted as African-American behavior.<sup>8</sup> Anti-hierarchical social blending could also be observed among the audiences. Indeed, Pastor’s advertisement lauded his shows’ abilities to entrance both “girls and boys,” including not only people of bourgeois backgrounds but also those who lived in the “Bowery,” one of New York’s working-class districts.<sup>9</sup> This ethos made Pastor’s shows

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<sup>8</sup> Armond Fields, *Tony Pastor, Father of Vaudeville* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2007), 125.

<sup>9</sup> “Tony’s Opera House,” *New York Herald*, 06 October 1865: 4.

successful not least because it recruited the topsy-turvy sensibility long present in the folk customs and commercial theatricals associated with Carnival.

### The Deritualization of Ecstasy

Although the nebulous mode of self-loss may be construed as secular, it actually evolved out of tensions within religion. Indeed, the musical experiences associated with Pastor's show were deeply rooted in the premodern Carnival, a popular event throughout Europe that was originally attached, at least nominally, to Christian doctrine and officially labeled as a religious "ritual."<sup>10</sup> Throughout the Middle Ages and into the early modern period, European Carnival centered mainly around the Christian calendar—particularly the celebratory period that preceded Lent. This period, as well as related saints days throughout the year, were periods of bodily excess involving music-making and dancing as well as eating, drinking, sexual activity, and hedonistic abandon.<sup>11</sup> Practiced mainly, although certainly not exclusively, by the lower sorts, these grotesque displays also involved intentional mockery of authority through ribald humor or role reversals—for instance, by designating a man of low-standing a "lord of misrule" or "king of the fools," or by dressing men as women.<sup>12</sup> All of these practices shared a common goal of upending normative notions of order, hierarchy, and stability. According to the Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, a "carnavalesque" sensibility not only characterized certain holidays, but it also informed much of the expressive culture of the medieval and early modern eras in general.

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<sup>10</sup> Carnival is apocryphally assumed to be a Christianized adaptation of ancient festivals associated with *enthousiasmos*. Even if this connection is overstated, however, both rituals appear to have shared an inclination towards self-loss.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986).

<sup>12</sup> Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets*, 88; Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*; Bristol, *Carnival and Theatre*.

A paucity of historical evidence makes it difficult to determine how participants experienced their own sense of self during carnival rites, but the dissolution of social boundaries that characterized the holiday were likely paralleled by a similar breakdown of the psychic boundaries that normally confined notions of selfhood. This much is suggested by the account provided by a traveler to Wales in the twelfth century, who described a scene of emotional and physical abandon:

You can see young men and maidens, some in the church itself, some in the churchyard and others in the dance which wends its way round the graves. They sing traditional songs, all of a sudden they collapse on the ground, and then those who, until now, have followed their leader peacefully as if in a trance, leap up in the air as if seized by a frenzy.<sup>13</sup>

The “trance” and “frenzy” of the Welsh participants corresponded with what Bakhtin describes as the “‘carnivalization’ of human consciousness”—a process that, in creating “the possibility of a complete exit from the present order of this life,” ultimately erased “limits between man and the world.”<sup>14</sup> According to the literary critic, this process of dismantling the boundaries of the self through music, dance, and reveling was also “closely combined” with excessive eating and drinking.<sup>15</sup> Such acts of carnal consumption, Bakhtin argued, effectively enabled the body to transgress “its own limits,” by swallowing, devouring, and rending apart the external, material world.<sup>16</sup> By assimilating the “cosmic elements: earth, water, air, and fire; he [Man] covered them and became vividly conscious of them in his own body. He became aware of the cosmos within himself.”<sup>17</sup> Carnival, then, not only provided the ecstatic opportunity to blur self and other. It also, in Bakhtin’s view, empowered participants to initiate this process,

<sup>13</sup> Giraldus Cambrensis, *The Journey Through Wales and the Description of Wales* (London: Penguin Classics, 1978), 92.

<sup>14</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helen Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 273, 275, 281.

<sup>15</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 223-224.

<sup>16</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 281.

<sup>17</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 336.

configuring the carnival “trance” as a liberatory opportunity for self-expansion rather than a circumscribed act of self-surrender to some greater force.<sup>18</sup>



**Illustration 6**

Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Fight Between Carnival and Lent*. 1559, Oil on wood panel, 118 x 164 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Available from: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/1/1a/Pieter\\_Bruegel\\_d.\\_%C3%84.\\_066.jpg/800px-Pieter\\_Bruegel\\_d.\\_%C3%84.\\_066.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/1/1a/Pieter_Bruegel_d._%C3%84._066.jpg/800px-Pieter_Bruegel_d._%C3%84._066.jpg)

Ultimately, the topsy-turvy impulse that motivated Carnival’s psychic, social, and cultural disruption placed it at odds with the church hierarchy and formal religion altogether. Medieval powerbrokers had originally accepted Carnival as an official church “ritual” in order to regulate its liberatory impulses and ensure that it remained a temporary, symbolic (and therefore relatively permissible) challenge to social and

<sup>18</sup> Bakhtin’s original assessment of Carnival’s ecstatic potential has been reiterated by many of his scholarly successors. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, for instance, affirm that the inversion of “everyday hierarchies, structures, rules and customs” resulted in “the immixing of the subject, to the heterodox, messy, excessive and unfinished informalities of the body and social life.” In this way, they agree that Carnival embodied what Bakhtin called the “unfinished nature of being” and the “flux of becoming.” Applying these “messy,” “unfinished,” and perpetually unstable attributes to notions of selfhood would indeed have made for highly altered personal experiences. Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 183; Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 52, 53.

ecclesiastical hierarchies.<sup>19</sup> By the early-modern era, however, elite fears had grown and Carnival was now viewed as a serious existential threat to the social status quo and the very principles that undergirded Christian faith. In short, Carnival was deemed a profane counter-culture masquerading as a holy rite. The fears of church elites were somewhat founded. As Bakhtin describes it, there was an aspect of the carnivalesque consciousness that laughed in the face of religious doctrines and practices, abiding only by “the laws of its own freedom.”<sup>20</sup> And these laws made it easy to reject “God, authority and social law.”<sup>21</sup> Wary of such antiauthoritarian tendencies, church leaders decided to demote Carnival from a religious “ritual” to a profane “festivity.”<sup>22</sup> This official “deritualization” was, in effect, a way for ecclesiastical elites to disassociate Carnival from religion altogether, leaving it to float alone as a secular phenomenon with few ties to Christian doctrine, or, for that matter, any other sacred entity or ideal.

Despite the demotion, though, popular support continued for Carnival and its unholy festivities proliferated among common people within the secular sphere even amidst official efforts to condemn, prohibit, and regulate them out of existence. What resulted was a diverse array of vernacular traditions of song, dance, and sensory overload, social inversion and role reversals, humor, sport, and sacrifice, masking, and costuming.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Scholars such as Julia Kristeva and Michel Foucault have tended to emphasize Carnival’s liberatory impulses. Others, such as Terry Eagleton, have focused on the ways that it was licensed by religious, social, and political authorities. The best assessments of Carnival, however, come from Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, who suggest that the history of Carnival resulted from the continuously evolving interplay of liberatory and licensed impulses. See: Julia Kristeva, “Word, Dialogue and Novel,” in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Julia Kristeva, *La Révolution Du Langage Poétique: L’avant-Garde À La Fin Du Xixe Siècle, Lautréamont Et Mallarmé [Revolution in Poetic Language]* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974); Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin: or, Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London: New Left Books, 1981), 148; Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*.

<sup>20</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 7, chapter 1.

<sup>21</sup> Kristeva, “Word, Dialogue and Novel,” 49.

<sup>22</sup> Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets*, 94.

<sup>23</sup> Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets*, 88.



While these practices were no longer always tied together through association with a single set of holidays or rituals, the varied traditions that developed nevertheless shared common “carnavalesque” attributes. In this way, Carnival—along with its self-transcendent possibilities—progressed away from a specific calendrical event towards what Peter Stallybrass and Allon White call “a mobile set of symbolic practices, images and discourses which were employed throughout social revolts and conflicts,” not to mention celebrations.<sup>24</sup> Across early modern Europe and the British Isles, the carnivalesque sensibility proliferated in a myriad of folk customs, including “charivari” and “skimmington.”<sup>25</sup> Dancing manias also broke out across Europe at this time, which religious commentators condemned as a kind of madness that was probably sent as a curse from St. John or St. Vitus.<sup>26</sup>

Many folk customs involved a strong reliance on sound, including most notably “rough music.” Sometimes treated interchangeably with terms such as skimmington, charivari, callithumpian, or ran-tan, rough music involved the performance of raucous sounds that created psychic upheaval with the goal of maintaining community cohesion or affecting social transformation. Often it was performed by a procession of concerned neighbors in order to authorize and/or reprimand selected community members for certain kinds of behavior. This included sanctioning unusual marriage pairings (e.g.

<sup>24</sup> Stallybrass and White, *Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 15.

<sup>25</sup> According to the historian Natalie Zemon Davis, this festivity sometimes challenged traditional gender hierarchies by placing “women on top” and ritually humiliating men. “Skimmington” became associated with rites of economic protest, involving male youths in female dress and painted faces defending their forests against the encroachment of capitalist enterprise. Natalie Zemon Davis, “Women on Top: Symbolic Sexual Inversion and Political Disorder in Early Modern Europe,” in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1975).

<sup>26</sup> Peasants, mechanics, and house-wives were known to leave their normal duties to join in wild scenes of what must have seemed like senseless abandon. They formed circles hand in hand and danced for hours together, often accompanied by elaborate visions of spirits and holy figures. Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets*, 85; J.F.C. Hecker, *The Dancing Mania of the Middle Ages*, trans. B.G. Babington (New York: Franklin, 1970), 8; John Waller, *The Dancing Plague: The Strange, True Story of and Extraordinary Illness* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2009).

second or third marriages) or confronting more deplorable activities, such as adultery and spousal abuse. If mellifluous music was meant to represent a social and moral status quo, then rough music symbolized its opposite. It was characterized by cacophonous playing (noisy enough to be hardly considered music at all) using not only conventional instruments such as drums and horns, but also pots, pans, basins, spades, bells, and tongs, as well as much whooping and hollering by the participants. The resulting din, which could often be heard for up to a mile away, was intended to cause a psychic disturbance; for instance, “charivari,” a term associated with rough music, is thought to derive from the Latin word *caribaria*, which meant “headache.”<sup>27</sup> Ultimately, it acted as a form of local, community-enforced justice.<sup>28</sup> As such, it was a secular exercise that tacitly acknowledged a vague moral order, but it did not strictly recognize any allegiance to a supernatural or spiritual entity.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Michael Jarrett, *Drifting on a Read: Jazz as a Model for Writing* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 159.

<sup>28</sup> Marsh, *Music and Society in Early Modern England*, 45-47. Also see: David Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 106-11; D. A. Johnson, “‘Johnson is beaten!’ A Case of ‘Rough Music’ at West Bromwich in 1611,” *Transactions, Lichfield and South Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society* 25 (1983/1984), 31-34; Martin Ingram, “Ridings, Rough Music and Mocking Rhymes in Early Modern England,” in *Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. Barry Reay (London: Routledge, 1988), 166-97; E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York: New Press, 1993), chapter 8.

<sup>29</sup> Rough music’s ostensible secularity meant that it continued to bear the scorn of cautionary voices fearful of its apparent disregard for religion. For some, rough music was only the most egregious form of a larger category of sonic expression that spellbound subjects in a completely un-Christian manner. For example, one sixteenth-century Protestant reformer from England warned that most music was dangerous, not least: “bycause it carieth awaye the eare, with the sweetnesse of the melodie, and bewitcheth the minde with a *Syrenes* sounde, pulling it from that delite, wherein of duetie it ought to dwell, unto harmonically fantasies.” According to the author of this quotation, the bewitching quality of the melody could be likened to the trance-inducing and thoroughly pagan songs sung by mythical Greek sirens. Quoted in: Marsh, *Music and Society in Early Modern England*, 50-51.



Illustration 7

The image, by a renowned English satirist, depicts an unruly procession gathering outside the home of a shrewish wife and hen-pecked husband are mocked by their neighbors. The “rough music” is played by members of the procession as they bang on pans and pots, blow a horn, and squeeze a bagpipe. William Hogarth, “Hudibras Encounters the Skimmington” 1726. Print, 26.8 x 50.4 cm. The British Museum, London, Museum no: 1847,0508.19. Available from: [http://www.britishmuseum.org/collectionimages/AN00336/AN00336768\\_001\\_1.jpg](http://www.britishmuseum.org/collectionimages/AN00336/AN00336768_001_1.jpg)

From time to time, certain folk customs’ metaphorical assaults on authority were known to erupt into outright physical aggression. (The masking and costuming typical of these customs helped create disguises that were ideally suited for anonymous, subversive activity.) Indeed, accounts describing how revels transformed into rebellions go back at least to the sixteenth century.<sup>30</sup> It was during these kinds of tensions that the term “emotion” came into colloquial usage among English speakers.<sup>31</sup> Initially associated with any disruption or movement, either physical or social, the term soon became associated with public agitations and civil unrest, precisely the kind of popular revolt and political

<sup>30</sup> One example dates from 1580, in the French town of Romans, where a group of insurgents rose up against local elites by dancing threateningly with swords, brooms, and flails used for threshing wheat, announcing publicly their desire to kill. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Carnival in Romans*, trans. Mary Feeney (New York: Braziller, 1979).

<sup>31</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “emotion,” accessed July 2, 2016, <http://www.oed.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/view/Entry/61249>.

action that, as Stallybrass and White claim, were nearly inextricable from connotations of carnival for centuries to come.<sup>32</sup>

### **Carnival in America: Rough Music, Mardi Gras, and Minstrelsy**

When Europeans migrated to America they brought rough music and other carnivalesque customs with them. This was true of even the earliest colonists, including Thomas Morton, who attracted such scorn from Plymouth Colony governor William Bradford in colonial Massachusetts. Although he probably did not instantiate the carnivalesque sensibility as much as his most vehement cynics claimed,<sup>33</sup> Morton certainly appeared to engage in secular festivities of self-loss. This much was evident when Bradford wrote in his diary of the unholy debauchery that ensued after Morton mobilized a group of indentured servants to free themselves from their master. It was then, Bradford recounted, that the gang of ne'er-do-wells “fell to great licentiousness and led a dissolute life, pouring out themselves into all profaneness.”<sup>34</sup> Morton, as he described, “became lord of misrule and maintained (as it were) a school of atheism.”<sup>35</sup> Thereupon, he and his brood set up of a maypole and began “drinking and dancing about it many days together” as well as composing “sundry rhymes and verses, some tending to lasciviousness, and others to detraction and scandal.”<sup>36</sup> The activities Bradford described and the language he used were all derived from the carnivalesque tradition of European folk celebrations. They were full of music and dance, they were “profane” and “dissolute,” and, by using phrases like “pouring out themselves” they hinted at an

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<sup>32</sup> Stallybrass and White, *Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 96.

<sup>33</sup> Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 226.

<sup>34</sup> Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 227.

<sup>35</sup> Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 227.

<sup>36</sup> Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 227.

aimless, secular self-loss. Morton, for his part, defended these activities as “harmless mirth” and undeserving of such strong condemnations.<sup>37</sup> Regardless, his activities and experiences remained firmly aligned with the carnivalesque sensibility inherited from Europe.<sup>38</sup>

The Morton episode was not an anomaly. It is fair to say that, even amidst condemnation from local religious elites, carnivalesque elements were regularly transplanted to Britain’s American colonies and evolved there over the centuries. Dozens of examples come up in the historical record, including a rough music incident on January 21, 1757, when a group of yeomen farmers rioted in front of the house of another yeoman, Joseph Smith at Cortlandt Manor, New York. The rioters approached Smith’s house at about two o’clock in the morning armed with “Clubs, and Staves Fiddles French Hornes & making hideous and umber [dark or earthy] noises,” whereupon they proceeded to terrify Smith for several hours.<sup>39</sup> During times of civil unrest and political

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas Morton, *New English Canaan*, ed. Jack Dempsey (Scituate, MA: Digital Scanning, 2000), 139.

<sup>38</sup> It is relevant that Morton was born in Devon, England, a culturally conservative region outside the Puritan and Separatist sway. Indeed, the area was categorically deemed the “dark corner of the land” by many Protestant reformers because of its attachment to the near-Catholicism of High Church Anglicanism as well as old heathen folk beliefs. The region’s own “blend of English countryside paganism and Gentleman’s Christianity” became known as “cavalier” culture, a term feted by its proponents and ridiculed by its detractors. Cavalier culture by no means denied the growing paradigm of autonomous selfhood—itsself subscribing to what Colin Campbell calls an “ethic of restraint.” However, in the socially and geographically peripheral regions of Britain, the neo-stoicism of the aristocracy did not initially preclude any penchant for carnivalesque folk practices. Here, the topsy-turvy ethic of rough music seemed to strike a fragile balance with “God, authority and social law.” Although cavalier culture was present in New England, as demonstrated by Morton, it actually became more closely associated with Virginia and the southern colonies. Here the trappings of Puritanism were weaker and English settlers often claimed direct bloodlines to the British aristocracy and modeled themselves after its culture. (Despite widespread belief in these connections, the hereditary ties were probably more tenuous than claimed, and so too were the resilience and pervasiveness of the cavalier culture in that region.) See: Morton, *New English Canaan*, 26; Leslie A. Fiedler and Arthur Zeiger, eds., *O Brave New World: American Literature from 1600 to 1840* (New York: Dell, 1968), 380; Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic*, 162; James Horn, “Cavalier Culture? The Social Development of Colonial Virginia,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (Apr., 1991): 238-245.

<sup>39</sup> Deposition of Joseph Smith and Philip Scheffer, n.d., Kempe Papers, quoted in: Steven J. Stewart, “Skimmington in the Middle and New England Colonies,” in *Riot and Revelry in Early America*, ed. William Pencak, Matthew Dennis, and Simon P. Newman (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 50.

discontent, including the Revolutionary years, dissenting groups often recruited rough music for political goals. On July 4, 1778, for instance, a ran-tan crowd marched through the streets of Philadelphia and eventually stopped at a tavern where genteel men and women presumed to be Loyalist leaning were attending a private ball.<sup>40</sup> Instead of the usual array of pots and pans and other makeshift noisemakers, a soldier beat out a rowdy march on his drum, perhaps the “Whore’s March” or the “Rogue’s March,” tunes that customarily played as “idle” women were being expelled from military encampments during the eighteenth century.<sup>41</sup> At the center of the rowdy crowd marched a woman, whose hair had been coiffed high above her head in mockery of the elite female hairstyles of the day. Practices of social and sonic inversion were obviously on full display, and perhaps, so too were experiences of psychic transport.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, a wide range of carnivalesque folk customs continued to flourish along the east coast of the United States, invigorated by the arrival of millions of laboring immigrants from Ireland and Germany.<sup>42</sup> Philadelphia became known as a hotbed for carnivalesque festivities. These included the German “belsnickle,” a Christmas Eve celebration that involved a noisy party centered around a Saint Nicholas figure who dressed in furs and perambulated around town shaking bells (often cowbells), holding a club or whip to frighten children, and sometimes delivering small gifts. Belsnickle was followed by a Mummers Parade on New Year’s Day, which involved masked and costumed revelers ringing bells and banging pots and pans as they marched throughout the city. In Philadelphia, as well as in New York and Boston,

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<sup>40</sup> Susan E. Klepp, “Rough Music on Independence Day: Philadelphia, 1778,” in *Riot and Revelry in Early America*, ed. William Pencak, Matthew Dennis, and Simon P. Newman (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 158.

<sup>41</sup> Klepp, “Rough Music on Independence Day: Philadelphia, 1778,” 161.

<sup>42</sup> Elliot Robert Barkan, ed. *Immigrants in American History: Arrival, Adaptation, and Integration*, vol. 1 (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2013).

callithumpians also became widespread. Appearing around the same time of year as mummers parades and sharing their proclivity for noisy celebration, callithumpian bands also dressed in outrageous costumes and mocked, intimidated, and jostled with both the higher and lower social strata—wailing on drums, whistles, horns, pots, pans, and kettles as they went.<sup>43</sup> As the Philadelphia *Public Ledger* reported, “Some [callithumpian troupes],...extravagant in the expression of their pleasure, were tricked out in burlesque garb and whimsical costume, and excited much amusement in the crowd, while musical instruments, from the trumpet to the penny whistle, enlivened the air with sound.”<sup>44</sup> Since all of these customs were rooted in Carnival and shared a common emphasis on music and noise-making, the term “rough music” might fairly be said to stand in as an appropriate synecdoche for the entire category of activities.

The North was not the only area with a rich carnivalesque heritage. Carnival traditions were also present in southern communities along the Gulf Coast, particularly New Orleans and Mobile. Originally colonized by the French and oriented more to the Caribbean, however, these places originally celebrated Carnival in a manner that was markedly different from that in the North. One defining feature of the Southern tradition was the importance it placed on masked balls. Such events had been popular among members of the European aristocracy since the Renaissance and were transplanted to Louisiana by colonial elites and plantation owners during the eighteenth century.<sup>45</sup> By the mid-eighteenth century, society balls, banquets, masquerades—all of which mixed poetic verse, music, and dancing—were held regularly during the days and weeks leading up to

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<sup>43</sup> Dale Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and Their World*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 32.

<sup>44</sup> “Christmas Eve,” *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia), December 25, 1844: 2.

<sup>45</sup> R. Randall Couch “The Public Masked Balls of Antebellum New Orleans: A Custom of Masque Outside the Mardi Gras Tradition,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 35, no. 4 (Autumn, 1994): 405.

Mardi Gras, the day before Lent.<sup>46</sup> Many of these were also relatively cosmopolitan affairs, open to different classes, including the local-born Creole elite and occasionally free or enslaved people of color.<sup>47</sup>

New Orleans's status as a mature colonial enclave within the French colonial and culture sphere of influence made its Mardi Gras customs relatively distinct from those practiced elsewhere in North America.<sup>48</sup> However, there was also some notable overlap with folk customs popular in areas of the continent that were more influenced by the British Isles and Northern Europe. For instance, the informal and street-oriented practices associated with the rough music of New York or Philadelphia were not unknown in New Orleans. In that city in 1804, an immense charivari confronted Madame Louise de la Ronde de Almonaster in order to protest her marriage to her unpopular new husband. Her house was "mobbed by thousands of the people of the town, vociferating and shouting with loud acclaim...many in disguises and masks; and all with some kind of discordant and loud music, such as old kettles, shovels and tongs and clanging metals.... All civil authority and rule seems laid aside."<sup>49</sup> These kinds of raucous events regularly took place in the communities of the North around this time.

The United States' purchase of Louisiana in 1803 provided an opportunity for blending the North and Southern carnivalesque cultures. While this process likely did not account for the scene at Madame Almonaster's house, it was certainly apparent by 1831.

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<sup>46</sup> Henry A. Kmen, *Music in New Orleans: The Formative Years 1791-1841* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966); Robert Tallant, *Mardi Gras...As It Was* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Co., 1994).

<sup>47</sup> Couch "The Public Masked Balls of Antebellum New Orleans," 403-431.

<sup>48</sup> Jerah Johnson, "Colonial New Orleans: A Fragment of the Eighteenth-Century French Ethos," in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, ed. Arnold R. Hirsh and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 44-45.

<sup>49</sup> John F. Watson, "Notitia of Incidents at New Orleans in 1804, 1805," *American Pioneer* 2 (May 1843): 229.



On Christmas Eve of that year, Michael Krafft, a cotton broker from Pennsylvania living in Mobile at the time, strung together several cowbells and attached them to a rake. Described by a contemporary as “a fellow of infinite jest and . . . fond of fun,” Krafft clattered around town with his noisy contraption and eventually gathered a crowd. His boisterous antics that night were not simply the brainchild of a waggish and intoxicated mind. It is likely that they also drew on the German rough music tradition associated with “belsnickle.” This much seems likely when considering that Krafft was originally from the Philadelphia area, where belsnickle was already popular, and that his name also suggests German ancestry. Regardless of its source, however, Krafft’s activities that night had a resounding influence on the carnivalesque culture of America’s Gulf Coast. A local group in Mobile created the “Cowbellion de Rakin” Society, a carnival club inspired by Krafft’s raucous displays. And when business growth occurred in New Orleans starting in the 1830s, many members of the society moved to the city and brought with them the Cowbellion culture, thereby initiating a new blossoming of Mardi Gras culture.<sup>50</sup> In 1835, an observer recorded boisterous scenes of commingling races, genders, and classes:

Men and boys, women and girls, bond and free, white and black, yellow and brown, exert themselves to invent and appear in grotesque, quizzical, diabolical, horrible, humorous, strange masks and disguises.... [They] march on foot, on horseback, in wagons, carts, coaches, cars, & c. in rich confusion up and down the street wildly shouting, singing, laughing, drumming, fiddling, fifing, and all throwing flour broadcast as they went their reckless way.<sup>51</sup>

Mardi Gras’ noisy confusion seemed to evoke the breakdown of boundaries between conventional social identities, if even for a short time. Perhaps, too, it perpetuated the carnivalesque embrace of self-loss for its own sake.

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<sup>50</sup> See: Jessica Atkins, “Setting the Stage: Dance and Gender in Old-Line New Orleans Carnival Balls, 1870-1920,” (Doctoral dissertation, Florida States University, 2008), 51.

<sup>51</sup> James R. Creecy, *Scenes in the South and Other Miscellaneous Pieces* (Washington: Thomas McGill, 1860), 43.

Although certain carnivalesque folk customs persisted relatively intact in the United States throughout the nineteenth century, in many cases they also underwent profound transformations in response to the demands of industrialization and immigration. This was particularly apparent in America's largest urban centers, such as New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, where traditional carnivalesque customs were regularly adapted to commercial purposes. America and Western Europe's growing capitalist economy encouraged the creation of strict barriers between laborers' work and leisure. This division profoundly affected notions of time and space. Certain hours of the day and certain days of the week were reserved exclusively for labor, as were certain spaces like the factory. Sometimes these delineations proved incompatible with the more spontaneous revels associated with preindustrial rough music. So, America's laboring classes increasingly endeavored to extract the carnivalesque sensibility out of its traditional customs and adapt it to more strictly defined periods and spaces.<sup>52</sup> Now, secular working-class "leisure activities" became centered in saloons, popular theatre, and social or vocational clubs, all of which catered to the after-work period.

According to the musicologist Dale Cockrell and the social historian Eric Lott, the folk theatricals associated with traditional rough music created a cultural setting in which a new commercial festivity could flourish in America: blackface minstrelsy.<sup>53</sup> Adapted into a new form of leisure by the emerging working class in the industrializing cities of

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<sup>52</sup> Peter Bailey, *Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure* (Milton Keynes, UK: Open University Press, 1986); Hugh Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution, c1780-c1880* (London: Croom Helm, 1980); Hugh Cunningham, "Leisure," in *The Working Class England, 1875-1914*, ed. J. Benson (London: Croom Helm, 1985); John Storey, ed., *Culture Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (New York: Routledge, 2008); John Lowerson and John Myerscough, *Time to Spare in Victorian England* (Hassocks, UK: Harvester Press, 1977); Keith Robbinson, *Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); John K. Walton, *The English Seaside Resort* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1983).

<sup>53</sup> Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder*; Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

the North, many features of minstrelsy were actually rooted in the carnivalesque tradition. These included an emphasis on spontaneous civil participation (often taking place at night), a strong support-base among the laboring classes, and connotations of rebellion. As before, minstrelsy was also occasionally used as a means of challenging (if only symbolically) the political and economic structures that suppressed the lower ranks of society. Another element that minstrelsy drew from the carnivalesque customs was an emphasis on masking. The minstrel practice of “blacking up,” for example, whereby white performers applied black paste, made from burnt cork, to their faces, ostensibly drew on carnival customs common in Northern Europe, which involved dark face painting.<sup>54</sup> The color inversion represented a larger inclination towards role reversals that also involved men dressing up as women or performers imitating elites in front of working-class crowds.<sup>55</sup>

Lastly, and most importantly for the purposes of this study, American minstrelsy inherited a carnivalesque reliance on music. Although the stage performances of minstrelsy involved a series of comic skits and variety acts, some of its biggest attractions comprised dances and songs, including the massively popular tunes “Jump Jim Crow,” “Zip Coon,” “Oh, Susannah,” “Dixie.” Moreover, most of the famous minstrel personalities became renowned for their music—including prominent stage personalities

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<sup>54</sup> It also seems likely that minstrelsy borrowed a proclivity for self-loss from the earlier carnivalesque traditions. George Washington Dixon, perhaps the famous minstrel performer of the 1830s, probably pursued, or at least referenced, altered forms of consciousness during his performances. By the 1840s, he also began to dabble in other ecstatic traditions such as animal magnetism and spiritualism (specializing in clairvoyance). Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder*, 137.

<sup>55</sup> Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); Lott, *Love and Theft*; Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder*.

like Thomas D. Rice, Dan Emmett, and E.P. Christy, and a slew of songwriters.

According to one estimation, minstrelsy was approximately two-thirds musical.<sup>56</sup>

Of course, minstrelsy also added many new features to the old-style carnivalesque customs. Perhaps chief among them was an elaborate commentary on African-American culture. Although blackface had been prevalent in some European carnival festivities, in the United States it gained a newfound importance because it enabled white performers to dress up and act in ways they imagined (or wanted their audiences to imagine) African-American culture to exist. Originally, depictions were not entirely negative, but increasingly blackface performance portrayed black characters with uneducated dialect, a taste for “possum and coon,” and other stereotypes of African-American degeneracy.<sup>57</sup> Over time, performances were repeated with such frequency that character tropes quickly emerged, including: the “dandy darcy,” an egocentric free black urban swell with a large sexual appetite who appropriated upper-class fashion; the “Old Darcy,” an elderly, practically asexual, enslaved Southern male who upheld a vision of a sentimental plantation life free from concerns; and the “Mammy,” a beloved motherly plantation woman and counterpart to “Old Darcy.”<sup>58</sup> In the minstrel theatre, therefore, the liberatory attitude of carnival helped blur the boundaries between black and white, but it rarely succeeded in dismantling the boundary between races. Indeed, minstrelsy’s maintenance of racial divisions reveals how the theatrical stage could help rationalize, regulate, and control the carnivalesque sensibility in ways that mitigated its subversive potential.

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<sup>56</sup> LeRoy Ashby, *With Amusement for All: A History of American Popular Culture Since 1830* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 52.

<sup>57</sup> Toll, *Blacking Up*, 67.

<sup>58</sup> Toll, *Blacking Up*, chapter 3.

If they continued to uphold aspects of America's racial hierarchy, minstrel performers remained more committed to maintaining rough music's residue of class chaos. Even during the decades of class mixing, the minstrel theatre was most widely associated with working-class, white men—including journeyman craftsmen and semiskilled or unskilled workers such as teamsters, boatmen, barbers, etc. as well as other vocations with more ambiguous class affiliation (e.g. small shopkeepers, artisans, and clerks).<sup>59</sup> This lower stratum of the populist crowd was regularly cast as vulgar and repulsive and more inclined towards passionate, body-based, and noisy exuberance. In addition, many successful blackface minstrels, including Thomas D. Rice—the songwriter of “Jump Jim Crow”—were known to have fraternized with convicted criminals,<sup>60</sup> which could have easily tinged performances with a hint of violence or impropriety.

Moreover, it soon became apparent that blackface performances could upend normative notions of psychic demeanor at least as easily as the folk customs of the street. This was certainly true of a performance by Richard Pelham, a founding member of the popular Virginia Minstrels. During one show early on in his career, Pelham seemed to become “animated by a savage energy; and the [handling of his instrument]...nearly wrung him off his seat. His white eyes rolled in a curious frenzy...and his hiccupping chuckles were unsurpassable.”<sup>61</sup> The effusive gestures and the apparent “frenzy” that appeared to seize his mind signified, if not necessarily enacted, the experience of aimless ecstasy.

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<sup>59</sup> Lott, *Love and Theft*, 67-68. Also see: Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

<sup>60</sup> Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder*, 69.

<sup>61</sup> An 1846 review in England, printed in a pamphlet on the Ethiopian Serenaders, quoted in: Hans Nathan, *Dan Emmet and the Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), 125.

Such minstrel performances seemed to match self-loss with a propensity for physical upheaval. They were often described as being replete with “riot and commotion, contortion and pungency,”<sup>62</sup> and “sheer bodily display.”<sup>63</sup> Likewise, such performances were presented by minstrels who “rolled onto the stage in a thundercloud of energy, which hardly ever dissipated.”<sup>64</sup> The final part of most minstrel shows, the “afterpiece,” seemed particularly susceptible to these “thundercloud” activities. It was this segment that usually featured a Plantation skit and often involved a song and dance routine that exhibited a “freedom from restraint,...[and a] lack of all formality.”<sup>65</sup>

The transition from a professional performance of “frenzy” to crowd chaos may have seemed frighteningly easy to moralizing observers unfamiliar with the minstrel tradition. After all, minstrel audiences sometimes revealed themselves to be less restrained than their separation from the stage might have implied. Far from passive spectators, audience members were known to sometimes lapse into “raving [and] catcalling” during the shows.<sup>66</sup> The fragility of crowd control in the minstrel theatre was made all the more palpable by the fact that audiences themselves created porous boundaries between the commercial blackface performance and the more menacing practice of rough music. Just as the animated antics of the folk theatricals found their way into the theatre settings, the popular features of the commercial stage influenced the style of street performers. This included the carnivalesque costumes that belsnickle celebrants

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<sup>62</sup> Lott, *Love and Theft*, 140.

<sup>63</sup> Annemarie Bean, James V. Hatch, Brooks McNamara, *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy* (Hanover, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 13.

<sup>64</sup> Lee Davis, *Scandals and Follies: The Rise and Fall of the Great Broadway Revue* (New York: Limelight Editions, 2000), 31.

<sup>65</sup> Dailey Paskman, “Gentleman, Be Seated!” *A Parade of the American Minstrels* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1976), 88.

<sup>66</sup> Scott Malcomson, *One Drop of Blood: The American Misadventure of Race* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2000), 327.

and mummers wore during Christmas festivities, which imitated the satirical characters popularized on the minstrel stage, like Jim Crow or Aunt Sally.<sup>67</sup> All of these antics helped make minstrelsy perhaps the most popular form of American amusement during the nineteenth century.

On the streets, the songs and activities of the minstrel theatre were sometimes recruited for the more rowdy and physical antics associated with rough music protest. The series of anti-abolitionist riots that swept through New York in 1834 exemplified this phenomenon. On July 9 of this year, a mob descended on the New York house of the abolitionist Lewis Tappan—shattering doors, windows, and furniture as they went. Elsewhere, several thousand whites collected at the Chatham Street Chapel, the headquarters of the revivalist and abolitionist Charles Grandison Finney, where an anti-slavery meeting was planned for that evening. Finding the meeting place empty (the abolitionists had already fled), the crowd might have normally resorted to the noisy drumming, blowing of horns, and the banging of pans that were the mainstay of rough music. This time, though, they drew on the minstrel stage tradition to convene their own mock “emancipation meeting.” The performance included satirical renditions of the kind of abolitionist rhetoric that might have occurred there that night, an ersatz sermon from the pulpit presented in a “mock Negro style,” and finally the performance of “Jump Jim Crow,” minstrelsy’s signature song of that era.<sup>68</sup> Not far away, several thousand rioters also broke into the Bowery Theatre after discovering the owner, an abolitionist by the name of George Farren, had earlier made an anti-American remark, complaining “Damn

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<sup>67</sup> Florence Lyons-Fontenot, *Beyond Boundaries: Political Dictates Found in Minstrelsy* (Doctoral dissertation, Louisiana State University, 2003), 41.

<sup>68</sup> John Jentz, “Artisans, Evangelicals, and the City: A Social History of Abolition and Labor Reform in Jacksonian New York” (Doctoral dissertation, City University of New York, 1977), 249.

the Yankees; they are a damn set of jackasses and fit to be gulled.”<sup>69</sup> Disrupting a play that was in progress, the theatre erupted into rowdy demands for Farren’s apology.<sup>70</sup> The tension grew until the manager unfurled an American flag and George Washington Dixon quelled the crowd with the songs “Yankee Doodle” and “Zip Coon.”<sup>71</sup>

Did the New York rioters experience self-loss during those summer nights in 1834? Concerned observers certainly seemed to think they did. *Niles’ National Register*, one of the most influential newspapers in the United States at the time, described New York’s rioters who destroyed abolitionist churches as hundreds of “infuriated devils” who tore out the windows and doors and nearby houses with “fiend-like” rage.<sup>72</sup> Another observer declared that New York was drowning in “an ocean of madness.”<sup>73</sup> Such phrases echoed similar accounts of rough music in Philadelphia from the year prior, which described how “Gangs of boys and young men howled and shouted as if possessed by the demon of disorder.”<sup>74</sup> Those events fell on Christmas Eve and were intended as celebratory folk customs. However, an article in the city’s *Daily Chronicle* complained that they too brimmed with a “riot, noise, and uproar [that] prevailed, uncontrolled and uninterrupted in many of our central and most orderly streets.”<sup>75</sup>

The connotations of unmitigated and ungodly self-loss in these statements would have likely been apparent to contemporaneous readers. Phrases like “possessed by the

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<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Don B. Wilmet and Christopher Bigsby, eds., *The Cambridge History of American Theatre, vol. 1: Beginnings to 1870* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1: 361.

<sup>70</sup> Philip Hone, *The Diary of Philip Hone*, July 10, 1834.

<sup>71</sup> From the *Enquirer*, quoted in: Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 265.

<sup>72</sup> “Mobs in New York,” *Niles’ Register*, July 19, 1834: 359.

<sup>73</sup> Quoted in: Joanne Reitano, *The Restless City: A Short History of New York from Colonial Times to the Present*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (New York: Routledge, 2010), 45.

<sup>74</sup> *Philadelphia Daily Chronicle*, December 26, 1833, quoted in: Alfred Lewis Shoemaker, *Christmas in Pennsylvania: A Folk-Cultural Study* (Mechanicburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1999), 91.

<sup>75</sup> *Philadelphia Daily Chronicle*, December 26, 1833. Quoted in: Shoemaker, *Christmas in Pennsylvania*, 91-92.



demon of disorder” made such connotations explicit, but the other terms also insinuated the possibility of egregious entrancement. If the term “infuriate” had lost its ancient association with spirit possession by Greek Furies,<sup>76</sup> the related term “furious” had not. The 1828 edition of *Webster’s Dictionary* defined the word as “raging; violent; transported with passion.”<sup>77</sup> Connotations of self-transport also imbued definitions of “madness,” which *Webster’s* connected to “a state of disordered reason...in which the patient raves or is furious.”<sup>78</sup> Indeed, the dictionary provided the “madness of a mob” as a potent example of this definition. The word “riot,” too, had similar connotations of passionate abandon, linked as it was to “act[ing] or mov[ing] without control or restraint.”<sup>79</sup> Therefore, the language used by journalists to describe the activities in New York in 1834 strongly suggested the possibility that the musical mob’s unruly behavior was directly tied to the vague ecstatic experience of its participants.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> In colonial New England, William Bradford had described Thomas Morton and his cronies as acting like “furies” when they danced and frisked together during Carnival festivities. See: Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 227.

<sup>77</sup> *Webster’s Dictionary 1828*, s.v. “furious,” accessed July 2, 2016, <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/furious>.

<sup>78</sup> *Webster’s Dictionary 1828*, s.v. “madness,” accessed July 2, 2016, <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/madness>. To “rave,” one of the characteristics of madness, was “to wander in mind or intellect; to be delirious; to talk irrationally; to be wild. [W]hen men thus rave we may conclude their brains are turned.” *Webster’s Dictionary 1828*, s.v. “rave,” accessed July 2, 2016, <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/rave>.

<sup>79</sup> *Webster’s Dictionary 1828*, s.v. “riot,” accessed July 2, 2016, <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/riot>.

<sup>80</sup> Abolitionists readily jumped on the connotative linkages between riots and madness. Some years later, John Jay, an ardent abolitionist and grandson of the famous American revolutionary by the same name described how the newspaper publishers covering the riot exhibited an abandonment of self-restraint in similar fashion to the New York rioters themselves: “Seven prominent newspapers were so carried away by the madness of the hour, that, in compliance with the demands of the slaveholders, they invoked the aid of the legislatures, and recommended a law of pains and penalties against the utterance of anti-slavery opinions.” John Jay, *The Rise and Fall of the Pro-Slavery Democracy, and the Rise and Duties of the Republican Party: An Address to the Citizens of Westchester County, New York..., November 5, 1860* (New York: R. Lockwood & co., 1861), 25.

## The Spread of Carnavalesque Consciousness

Vague versions of self-loss did not only appear in minstrelsy, rough music and other direct outgrowths of the Carnival tradition. They could also be found in settings that, curiously enough, were more overtly tied to conventionally spiritual modes of transcendence—especially romanticism. Take for instance the phenomena described by Lucy Emerson Lowell, a young woman from Massachusetts who attended a Richard Wagner opera festival at Boston’s Mechanics Hall on April 15, 1884. That evening, *Götterdämmerung*, the last installment of the composer’s four-part Ring cycle, was being performed. The daughter of a district court judge from an illustrious Massachusetts family,<sup>81</sup> twenty-four-year-old Lucy had enjoyed both the means and opportunities to hear Wagner’s music before. This was, in fact, her second night in a row attending the festival. Yet, Lowell’s familiarity with the music did not mean that her experience that night would be ordinary. Transcribing her impressions in a personal diary, Lowell would later recount the exquisite sensation that overcame her upon hearing one tenor, Walter Winkelmann, perform his prized song. “[N]ever in my life was I so perfectly carried away, excited, overcome,” she enthused. And part of this musical captivation seemed to have been shared by the performer himself. Lowell wrote: “[It] was perfectly superb.... Winkelmann sits all the time perfectly unmoved & as tho’ in a dream (almost).”<sup>82</sup> A great number of others in attendance at Mechanics Hall must have shared something of Lowell’s feelings, as she noted that one of the final performances became “a scene of wild enthusiasm [such as] I’ve never seen.” After the performance, the singers were

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<sup>81</sup> Richard Herndon and Edwin Bacon, *Men of Progress: One Thousand Biographical Sketches and Portraits of Leaders in Business and Professional Life in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* (Boston: New England Magazine, 1896), 69-70.

<sup>82</sup> Lucy Lowell Diary, 14 April 1884, quoted in: Cavicchi, *Listening and Longing*, 107-108.

called back on stage repeatedly, where they were met each time with a standing ovation bursting with exuberance. The audience “shouted & cheered, stamped, waved handkerchiefs & were actually beside themselves. Cousin Lewis & I rushed forward so that we were close to them as they went up & down fr. The stage & they [the singers] were tremendously excited & pleased.”<sup>83</sup>

Lucy Lowell’s description was replete with ecstatic terminology. Her feeling of being “carried away” or “overcome” in extraordinary ways suggested a vast reframing of her boundaries of selfhood. Likewise, her account of the audience being “beside themselves” brimmed with connotations of self-loss. (The simultaneous splitting of self into two adjacent parts surely constituted a form of personal transcendence.) What being “carried away” or “beside oneself” shared in common with religious or romantic forms of mystical rapture was the subjective phenomenon of moving through physical or metaphysical space and/or time.

Yet, could these ecstasies be categorized as truly sublime? Certainly, Lowell would have been familiar with the philosophies of nature associated with romanticism. She was the daughter of an illustrious district court judge and her family was recognized by others to be “renowned in all its branches for learning and integrity.” She was also the granddaughter of the famous educator George Barrell Emerson and a distant cousin of Ralph Waldo Emerson.<sup>84</sup> If this family connection was not enough to guarantee her familiarity with romantic philosophies of the sublime, then her bourgeois upbringing probably was.

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<sup>83</sup> Lucy Lowell Diary, 17 April 1884, quoted in: Cavicchi, *Listening and Longing*, 109.

<sup>84</sup> Harvard College, *Records of the Class, 1883-1908* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard College, 1908), 89; Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Eleanor M. Tilton, vol. 10, *1870-1881* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 10: 108.

By the 1880s, the patrician elites on both sides of the Atlantic had become current with Wagner's theories. Yet, despite her likely knowledge of romantic philosophies, Lowell's descriptions never referred to Emerson's attunement with "the currents of the Universal Being"<sup>85</sup> or Wagner's ecstatic encounters with the "universal currents of Divine Thought."<sup>86</sup> Indeed, Lowell's account avoided conventionally spiritual or religious language altogether. Instead, it replaced older religiously-informed words like "ecstasy" and "rapture" with new, vague references, such as being "carried away" or "beside" oneself. There was actually nothing to suggest that Lowell interpreted her (or anyone else's) concert experiences that night as encounters with any definable entity outside of the individual. Instead, Lowell's ecstasy seemed to occur for its own sake. This was not to suggest that she thought lightly of the experience. To the contrary, she seemed to approach it earnestly, as evidenced by her highly detailed descriptions, evocative vocabulary, and the confession that the events were unlike anything she had ever seen or felt. But nowhere did she speak of the concert experience as some unitive experience with the will of Nature, God, or some other mystical essence. In this way, Lowell's experiences seemed to align with other carnivalesque ecstasies by engaging with a nameless, inchoate space that transcended one's subjectivity.

How could the objectless self-loss of Carnival migrate into settings that were more closely associated with formal modes of musical ecstasy? The reasons for this transition are sundry and relate mainly to large economic and cultural changes that were occurring throughout American society that proved somewhat compatible with the carnivalesque ethos. One major factor stemmed from the rise of a capitalist, market-

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<sup>85</sup> Emerson, *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 1: 10.

<sup>86</sup> As reported by Engelbert Humperdinck in: Abell, *Talks with Great Composers*, 137-138.

driven economy. With the pursuit of profit as its primary goal, capitalist enterprise often encouraged an indifference towards conventional worldviews and belief-systems that elevated spiritual over economic values. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx summarized this destructive power. “All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned,” he declared in reference to the consequences of capitalism. Indeed, the accumulation of capital thrived on the principle of commodification—a process that involved extracting activities and goods from their original frameworks of meaning and making them amenable to new contexts where they could be sold and bought in a market, preferably by the greatest number of highest-paying customers. The underlying goal of profitability was best served if commodities required little other than payment from their potential consumers. Therefore, whether someone understood a commodity as part of a rich tradition of sacred meaning was ultimately less important than his or her willingness to pay for it.

Market culture’s congruence with the carnivalesque sensibility was no coincidence. From its beginnings, carnivalesque culture had been staged in marketplace settings and linked with market activities that also fostered the dislocation of cultural practices and products from dominant spiritual and social traditions.<sup>87</sup> This certainly helps explain why the outgrowths of Carnival, including minstrel theatre, became easily commercialized throughout North America and especially in the industrialized areas of the Northeast. The sheer strength of the market economy in America, however, also meant that it indirectly applied something of the carnivalesque ethos to any tradition it touched. Importantly, this included the classical and religious music traditions. During prior centuries in Europe, the music of these traditions was not heavily commercialized.

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<sup>87</sup> Lears, *Fables of Abundance*, 24.

At that time, small groups of aristocrats and religious elites constituted the principle patrons of the music, and they often commissioned musical works in order to support their own spiritual, aesthetic, and social interests.<sup>88</sup> But by the nineteenth century, especially in America, the “public” had replaced the old patrons.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, those who constituted the public grew in number, as the rise of economies of scale encouraged the mass production of sheet music and its distribution to diverse regions of the country. Consequently, if it was to be sustainable, music’s composition and performance—regardless of its provenance—had to accommodate the demands of an increasingly expansive community of paying individuals. To confuse matters more, music’s new patrons—many of them recent immigrants—often hailed from a variety of cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds, and, as such, they were not necessarily trained in the subtleties of religious or romantic musical appreciation.<sup>90</sup>

Accordingly, music in general became increasingly framed as a cultural commodity that could be simultaneously open to a diverse array of different meanings. Opening music to a multiplicity of interpretations could be achieved in a number of ways. One involved simply advertising and selling songs from different genres or traditions. For instance, in sheet music catalogs and at shops, entrepreneurs could take songs associated with sacred traditions and sell them, quite literally, alongside decidedly profane minstrel tunes, creating a sense of equivalency.<sup>91</sup> Another way involved the pervasive use of

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<sup>88</sup> The German composer J.S. Bach, for instance, was employed for much of his life by a variety of Protestant churches (although he also composed secular music for royal courts). Peter Williams, *J.S. Bach: A Life in Music* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>89</sup> Jamie James, *The Music of the Spheres: Music, Science, and the Natural Order of the Universe* (New York: Copernicus, 1993), 14.

<sup>90</sup> H. Wiley Hitchcock, *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1988), 17, 61-62.

<sup>91</sup> For instance, in music catalogs it was possible to find songbooks titled *Church Music* or *Hart’s Christmas Carols* next to other titles like *We Will Dance Like Elves and Fairies*, *The Complete Nigger*

“musical borrowing,” a technique that typically involved taking an existing melody and setting it to new lyrics (although it could also include applying a recognizable melody or music style to an original tune and lyrics).

In the hands of the abolitionist and escaped slave Frederick Douglass, the dissociative effect of musical-borrowing could work to disparage conventionally sacred notions of self-loss. In 1845, he rewrote the lyrics of a familiar hymn titled “Heavenly Union” to call out the hypocrisy of those who appealed to divine doctrines in order to justify their brutal treatment of enslaved people. In doing so, he also satirized religious notions of ecstasy. The original lyrics (left) and Douglass’s rewritten ones (right) are included here side-by-side for comparison:

Come, saints and sinners, hear me tell  
The wonders of Emmanuel,  
Who saved me from a burning hell,  
And brought my soul with Christ to dwell,  
And gave me heav’nly union.<sup>92</sup>

Come, saints and sinners, hear me tell  
How pious priests whip Jack and Nell,  
And women buy and children sell,  
And preach all sinners down to hell,  
And sing of heavenly union.<sup>93</sup>

A religious believer himself, Douglass did not condemn the basic principles of Christianity, but his new lyrics transformed a sincere belief in “heavenly union” into the mere rhetoric of so-called Christians intent on using religious ecstasy as an excuse for racial violence. (His scathing critique went on to describe those who seized African Americans “by their throats” and robbed them of “human rights, and bread and ham.”)

In addition to the dissociative influence of the commercial music market, another attack on the spiritual modes of musical ecstasy came as a result of the demystifying

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*Entertainment*, the latter containing “Stomp Oventions, Burlesque Lectures, Negro Songs..., Comic Conversation, Darkey Witticisms,... and Patent Sermons.” All books, regardless of their cultural valence, could be sold for approximately the same price, a condition that only augmented a sense of exchangeability between sacred and secular interpretations of musical experience. See: *The Musical Times*, November 1, 1880: 581.

<sup>92</sup> “Come, Saints and Sinners,” in *The Primitive Hymns: Spiritual Songs and Sacred Poems*, ed. Benjamin Lloyd (Greenville, AL: Published for the Proprietor, 1858 [c1841]), 133-134.

<sup>93</sup> Frederick Douglass, *A Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (Boston: The Antislavery Office, 1845), 105-107.

influence of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. As the British naturalist's ideas grew in popularity among American scientists during the 1870s and 1880s, many observers interpreted them to preclude the presence of an omnipotent God in the development of the natural world. Although Darwin never articulated such a position in his writing (preferring to remain agnostic about the issue),<sup>94</sup> he did become one of the champions of thoroughly secular scientific method based on empirical observation, objective verification, and rational analysis of natural phenomena. Such a stance was enshrined in the principles of positivism, a term coined by the French philosopher August Comte, and it proved devastating for conventionally transcendent interpretations of experience. Perhaps the biggest blow came when Darwin argued that the combination of chance variation and competition generated a process of natural selection that applied as much to the evolution of emotions as it did to biology and physiology. That is to say, emotions of all varieties arose primarily as animals (including humans) adapted to environmental and biological demands in the interest of species survival. In this sense, Darwin suggested that emotions revealed a great deal about natural evolution and nothing at all about the presence of some spiritual force.

Music too, Darwin argued, was an evolutionary development. In this sense, it gave scientists insight into how early humans experienced and expressed themselves, divulging a great deal about their mental and physical conditions, but nothing about the presence of a spirit world or sublime will. In *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, originally published in 1872, Darwin contended that the sophisticated melodies

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<sup>94</sup> Darwin contended that an individual "can be an ardent Theist and an evolutionist" and wrote about his own beliefs in the following way: "I have never been an atheist in the sense of denying the existence of a God.— I think that generally (& more and more so as I grow older) but not always, that an agnostic would be the most correct description of my state of mind." Charles Darwin to John Fordyce, May 7, 1879, Letter no. 12041 in *Darwin Correspondence Project*, accessed on 10 July 2017, <http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/DCP-LETT-12041>.



and harmonies of contemporary music could be traced back to the very simple vocalizations produced by pre-humans during their primitive courtship practices. Investigating the sounds produced by apes, young children, and other animals, he inferred that a kind of proto-music actually predated and precipitated the development of systematized language in the human species. “The progenitors of man,” he declared, “probably uttered musical tones before they had acquired the power of articulate speech.”<sup>95</sup> Darwin’s counterpart, Herbert Spencer, disagreed with him regarding the order in which music and language developed in human history,<sup>96</sup> but Spencer’s theories of evolution were no less secular. Despite their differences, Darwin, Spencer, and other natural scientists all agreed on one fundamental principle: human practices and emotions were the result of adaptations to environmental and biological demands in the interest of species survival, not the result of some supernatural or otherwise mystical force. By establishing this basic premise, the proponents of natural science helped collapse several preexisting metaphysical and religious doctrines and entrench a religious, positivistic positions as what the historian James Turner calls a “model of new truthfulness” in American society.<sup>97</sup>

The kind of dismantling influence Darwin’s theory had on the supremacy of religion—and notions of mystical transcendence more generally—helped initiate a vast reassessment of self-loss in the West. During the last decades of the nineteenth century, perhaps no one was more interested in this topic than Friedrich Nietzsche. Throughout his

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<sup>95</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (London: John Murray, 1873), 87. See also Darwin’s discussion of birdsong in: Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: John Murray, 1871).

<sup>96</sup> In an 1857 article, Herbert Spencer argued that animal vocalizations were not enough to constitute the origins of music, and what moderns called music would have more likely have evolved *after* the development of vocal language. Herbert Spencer, “The Origin and Function of Music,” *Fraser’s Magazine* 56 (October, 1857): 396-408.

<sup>97</sup> Turner, *Without God, Without Creed*, 213.

career, the German philosopher remained fascinated with the growing modern tendency to find less and less meaning, purpose, or essential value in the conventionally dominant traditions of Western society. In his early work, Nietzsche discussed this inclination as a growing cultural rejection of teleological principles or purposes—whether religious, metaphysical, moral, or otherwise. Later, he would use the term “nihilism”—the will to nothing—as a label for the ultimate embrace of the deconstructive process. Regardless of the terminology though, Nietzsche located the source of this dismantling worldview in a compulsive adherence to rationality and truth-seeking, which ironically tended to find nothing lasting or stable in pre-established forms, truths, and values. Such a perspective, Nietzsche believed, could be traced through Western civilization all the way back to the ideas of Socrates, and it remained central to the reason-centered ethos of the entire Judeo-Christian intellectual tradition. In this respect, the atheistic implication of Darwinism was only a major milestone in the longer development of the nihilistic impulse.

For Nietzsche, participating in this repudiation of value and meaning had become one of the central activities of modernity. Addressing it could lead to different possible outcomes. On one hand, one could sink into passive despair or disorientation at the realization that life has no value and therefore no meaningful goals.<sup>98</sup> On the other hand, one could also actively confront the rubble of meaninglessness and overcome it by ascribing new interpretations to moribund forms of morality and value. For the German philosopher, this second option was undoubtedly the better alternative.

In his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy* (published in German in 1872), Nietzsche advocated for reviving the ancient, pre-Socratic principles associated with the Greek gods

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<sup>98</sup> Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche On Overcoming Nihilism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

Apollo and Dionysus as a way of reevaluating life and overcoming the deconstructive will. While he had little use for conventional notions of religiosity, he did find that the principles represented by these ancient gods were abundantly useful, not least because they predated Socrates and the compulsive rationality-cum-nihilism that succeeded him. (Some scholars have also looked to this period as the apocryphal origin of the carnivalesque sensibility.)<sup>99</sup> When properly combined, Nietzsche submitted, Dionysian and Apollonian principles did not suppress natural human instincts and drives, but rather encouraged them. The Apollonian element impelled order, restraint, discipline, and form. The Dionysian element impelled disorder, abandon, dissolution, and formlessness; it encompassed the foundational mysteries and paradoxes of existence, and it conveyed realities that exceeded both words and logic. In this manner, it was essentially nameless. These contrasting Apollonian and Dionysian elements had repercussions for human experience. The former reinforced distinct boundaries, and therefore a sense of duality and individuality, whereas the latter smashed individuality and united it with “primordial existence.”<sup>100</sup> This was nothing less than a merger with the heart of creation,<sup>101</sup> and, in this sense, accessing the Dionysian element epitomized the ecstatic impulse.

The Dionysian tendency towards formlessness was of particular interest to Nietzsche. Of course, he recognized that a modicum of the Apollonian was also vital, but only for its ability to mold the Dionysian—through words, logic, and the like—into something intelligible, and to prevent it from self-destructing as a result of an excessively centrifugal emphasis on disorder and fluidity. Applying only a small amount of the

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<sup>99</sup> Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets*.

<sup>100</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Clifton P. Fadiman (New York: Dover Publications, 1995), 27.

<sup>101</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 19.

Apollonian element, therefore, set up a delicate balance that could sustain a direct engagement with the chaotic, borderless arena of Dionysus. In the German philosopher's estimation, pre-classical Greek tragedy, associated with the likes of Sophocles, effectively balanced these opposites. The Dionysian element within the performance was represented by the chorus of singers and dancers, and the Apollonian element was represented by the individual hero, who temporarily stood apart from the chorus as "*principium individuationis*." Heroes were tragic, in this context, because they died and were absorbed into the chorus, but according to Nietzsche this tragedy was ultimately a positive and affirming act because it captured the full human condition, including individual subjective existence and the loss of individuality into a larger whole. Consequently, the tragic transition—itsself a kind of self-loss—exposed the heroes to all realities and manifestations of the human condition.

In much of his writing, Nietzsche highlighted music—especially wordless music—as the purest expression of the non-symbolic Dionysian element that existed “beyond and before all phenomena.”<sup>102</sup> Just as the ancient practitioners of Dionysian rites employed melody, rhythm, and harmony to instigate the “annihilation of the ordinary bounds and limits of existence,”<sup>103</sup> so too, believed Nietzsche, did the best concert music of his day. Unlike other expressive forms, music enabled listeners to achieve a manner of consciousness that exceeded rational understanding and evaded the expressive capacity of language to describe it. In the early editions of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche looked specifically to the music of Richard Wagner as a contemporary model for achieving the Dionysian ecstasy he associated with Greek tragedy. The “Foreword” of his book was

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<sup>102</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 19.

<sup>103</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 23.

addressed to the German composer, who Nietzsche had befriended several years earlier. Moreover, chapter 21 directly linked Wagner's opera with this boundary-dissolving power. When discussing the third act of *Tristan und Isolde* for instance, Nietzsche asked:

A man who has..., so to speak, put his ear to the heart-chamber of the world-will, who feels the furious desire for existence issuing from it as thundering stream or gently dispersed brook... would he not collapse all at once? Could he endure, in the wretched fragile... human individual, to hear the re-echo of countless cries of joy and sorrow from the 'vast void of cosmic night,' without flying irresistibly towards his primitive home at the sound of this pastoral dance-song of metaphysics?<sup>104</sup>

This ode to the power of Wagner's "dance-song of metaphysics" to expose "man" to the "vast void of cosmic night" and instigate his own "collapse" certainly suggested a profound experience of self-loss.

While Nietzsche was unquestionably a supporter of musical ecstasy, his writing also revealed a tension over how to identify the kind of transcendent experiences he had in mind. The complication seemed to arise out of the problem of naming a phenomenon that he insisted was inherently nameless. For Nietzsche the Dionysian element was essentially ineffable, yet he somehow had to identify it using written language—a communication method that was, at bottom, Apollonian. The tension this created often meant that Nietzsche employed terminology associated with the romantic sublime in order to approximate the metaphysical arena he was after. This is why he described Wagner's music as exposing listeners to "the heart-chamber of the world-will" or "spirit of music," which evoked the primal, metaphysical qualities associated with the sublime. He also used phrases that were very familiar to romantics, such as when he described a mystical experience with the "highest... expression of *Nature*."<sup>105</sup> That Nietzsche would

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<sup>104</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 78.

<sup>105</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 19, 27. If Nietzsche invoked primitive ideas when he wrote of Dionysian encounters with "primordial being," his theories diverged starkly from the primitive theories proffered by neurologist and psychologists of the day, which tended to equate primitive consciousness with trivial and illusory experiences.

adopt the language of Schopenhauer, Emerson, or Wagner was no surprise. All of these thinkers had greatly influenced Nietzsche during his early years.<sup>106</sup> Indeed, like Schopenhauer's romantic sublime, the German philosopher also saw a "terrible awe" (as well as "blissful ecstasy") in any deep experience of "Nature."<sup>107</sup> Accordingly, it would not be inaccurate to describe Nietzsche as what one scholar has called a "masked Romantic."<sup>108</sup>

Yet, it is also important to recognize that Nietzsche ultimately understood the Dionysian experience as existing beyond words and therefore somewhat more diffuse and objectless than conventional romantic notions. Some of his phrases, such as "Primal Unity" or "primordial being," were perhaps better at gesturing towards the nameless and frameless metaphysical arena he had in mind. Inevitably, though, any effort he made at labelling the ineffable would fall short. All that he could do was use more precise terminology to gesture towards an inherently amorphous and unidentifiable experience. It was in this way that Nietzsche would become his era's most elaborate (musical) interpreter of a nebulous self-loss.

Nietzsche's writings accurately captured some major transitions at work in American and European thought during the late-nineteenth century. Admittedly, during the early decades of his career, his intellectual influence was not directly felt in North America. Few English-speakers west of the Atlantic were particularly amenable to the

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<sup>106</sup> Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, *American Nietzsche: A History of an Icon and His Ideas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Russell Goodman, "Ralph Waldo Emerson," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014 Edition), last accessed March 30, 2017, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/emerson/>.

<sup>107</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 3.

<sup>108</sup> Caroline Joan S. Picart, "Nietzsche as Masked Romantic," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55, no. 3 (Summer, 1997): 273-291. Bruce Ellis Benson finds Nietzsche's advocacy for Dionysian self-loss to be a kind of spiritual faith itself. See: Bruce Ellis Benson, *Pious Nietzsche: Decadence and Dionysian Faith* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007).

German's philosophies during the 1870s and 1880s; and his *Birth of Tragedy* would not be translated from German until 1909.<sup>109</sup> However, already by that time, the philosopher's observations about the cultural yearning for ecstatic experiences unburdened by dilapidated frameworks of transcendence had been circulating in the United States for decades. One variation had arisen in the aimless ecstasies associated with rough music and minstrelsy. Another one had influenced the vague rapture described by Lucy Lowell.

Such challenges to established modes of musical ecstasy help explain why romanticism never became, in the words of C. Hugh Holman and William Harmon, a "clearly conceived system."<sup>110</sup> Following the dissociative demands of commerce and the despiritualizing influence of Darwinism, some Romantics, like Lowell, may have swerved away from the naturalized numens associated with formal romantic philosophies. Instead of revering the spiritual side of Nature, Sentiment, and magnetic fluid, they could have instead pursued musical self-loss unencumbered by conventional notions of transcendence. To the degree that the label "romantic" continued to be used in reference to these ecstatic experiences, it is worth distinguishing between at least two types of romanticism: a mystical form that revolved around some formally identifiable naturalized spirits; and a desacralized metaphysical form that constituted, at most, a variety of undefined self-loss. The term "sublime," closely affiliated with romanticism, also can be said to have taken on a split meaning. This divide is what permitted Lucy

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<sup>109</sup> Around this same time, two well-known American writers—James Huneker and H.L. Mencken—both published detailed studies of Nietzsche and his philosophy, and in 1913, Oscar Levy published an eighteen-volume English translation of the German philosopher's works. Michael Oriard, *Sporting with the Gods: The Rhetoric of Play and Game in American Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 407; Ratner-Rosenhagen, *American Nietzsche*.

<sup>110</sup> Clarence Hugh Holman and William Harmon, *A Handbook to Literature*, 6th ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 415.

Lowell and other middle- and upper-class opera lovers, concert-goers, musicians, conductors, and critics—most of them admirers of “romantic” music writ large—to pursue experiences of dissolution and encounters with formlessness that had only faint correspondences to the more explicitly spiritual notions admired by the likes of Emerson, Dwight, and Whitman.

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Over the course of the nineteenth century, an alternative mode of musical ecstasy evolved alongside religious traditions and partly inside romantic ones. Associated with rough music, minstrelsy, Mardi Gras and other cognates, this mode can be linked to what Bakhtin called the “‘carnivalization’ of human consciousness,” consisting of experiences that broke down psychic and spiritual norms. Carnivalized consciousness challenged conventional notions of stable selfhood at the same time that it avoided (or, in Nietzsche’s case, overlapped with) orthodox beliefs in transcendent, sacred, or mystical entities. And in the absence of elaborate, pre-established frameworks of meaning, it transformed ecstasy from a deeply transcendent experience into a vague loss of subjectivity without clearly defined objects of experience. What emerged was an objectless ecstasy that involved the subjective experience of moving or expanding through metaphysical space and/or time, but no identifiable union with other identifiable entities exterior to the individual. This self-loss was unmoored from its mystical foundations and available to be employed simply for its own sake.

The rise of this alternative mode of self-loss in America was related to a number of factors. One can be simply attributed to the growing number of immigrants who openly pursued vague ecstasies during the nineteenth century. Lower-class laborers from



Europe, whose affiliation to carnivalesque musical practices went back centuries, inflated the population of the United States during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Another factor involved the market process of commodification, which disconnected sacred songs from their conventional frameworks of meaning and made them interchangeable with profane ones. Of course, the influence of Darwin's theories of natural evolution also played a crucial role in diminishing the role of spirit and religion in the lives of bourgeois Americans. While these factors did not present an outright rejection of transcendent forces and spirits, they severely reduced Americans' belief in them, and in doing so they obscured the objects of ecstasy. This development encouraged some romantics to move away from the formal philosophies upon which their movement was grounded.

The rise of this alternate mode of ecstasy had radical implications. Not only did it challenge the primacy of religious and spiritual experiences, it also insinuated the possibility of class upheaval. New York's rough music riot of 1834 exemplified this tendency. Rife with populist violence and noise, it seemed to threaten the very fabric of social order in New York at the time. This riotous energy also permeated the carnivalesque theatricals associated with commercial minstrelsy, including the "savage energy" and "curious frenzy" that seized Richard Pelham and other professional minstrel performers, not to mention the "raving [and] catcalling" of their audiences.<sup>111</sup> Even after the Civil War, commercial carnivalesque establishments continued to both imply and incite the possibility of violent social disorder. This was particularly true of certain concert saloons—music halls that served alcohol. For instance, one popular establishment

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<sup>111</sup> The quotation is taken from an 1846 review of the Ethiopian Serenaders, printed in a pamphlet in England. Quoted in: Nathan, *Dan Emmet and the Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy*, 125; Malcomson, *One Drop of Blood*, 327.

in New Orleans called the St Nicholas attracted patrons who had “a special reputation for getting into fights.”<sup>112</sup> The proprietors of the hall made an exerted effort to instill “law and order,” and they were often successful in this regard, but this did not prevent patrons from creating noise and disorder, occasionally resulting in individuals being beaten over the head with a bat or charged with inciting a riot.

Raucous conduct was by no means the exclusive province of the folk customs and commercial theatricals that grew directly out of Carnival. Rowdiness also permeated musical events that were formally dedicated to art and religious music. As John Kasson demonstrates, audiences in any number of theatres and concert halls in America during this period exhibited a “freedom and informality [that] extended to the action onstage.” They joined performers in singing familiar songs, or responded to a great performance with audible cries, feet stamping, and demands for an encore; and if performances were not to their liking, they were also known to chase the offending parties offstage.<sup>113</sup>

Although this kind of disorderly comportment may have been more prevalent during the antebellum period, Lucy Lowell’s descriptions of the Wagner concert in 1884 proved that raucous behavior persisted in romantic musical settings until the end of the nineteenth century. While the behavior at Mechanic’s Hall was probably less likely to devolve into outright violence, Lowell’s account did describe “a scene of wild enthusiasm” as the audience “shouted & cheered, stamped, [and] waved handkerchiefs.”<sup>114</sup> These kinds of activities certainly echoed the kinds of rough music behavior that might occur in minstrel theatres or street festivities. Incidentally, such

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<sup>112</sup> “Concert Saloons in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1869,” *New Orleans Republican* (December 26, 1869): 1.

<sup>113</sup> John Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Civility and Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), 221.

<sup>114</sup> Lucy Lowell Diary, 17 April 1884, quoted in: Cavicchi, *Listening and Longing*, 109.

conduct also found parallels in the effusive practices associated with evangelicalism, such as the fainting, flailing of hands, rolling of eyes, and shouting that Andrew Reed discovered during his time at the camp meeting in Virginia.<sup>115</sup>

While individuals in each of these settings may have understood their musical ecstasies in drastically different ways, they also seemed to share a common proclivity towards animated corporeal expression that served to link them together across different modes of musical consciousness. That this culture of physical expressivity rang with overtones of violent social upheaval did not go unnoticed by the those religious, intellectual, and economic elites who benefited the most from maintaining class hierarchies and the social status quo. It should not be surprising then that, starting early on in the nineteenth century, these different elites would mount a cross-modal coalition to encourage individual self-discipline and root out what they believed to be the most corporeal forms of musical ecstasy.

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<sup>115</sup> Reed and Matheson, *A Narrative of the Visit to the American Churches*, 1: 277.

**Chapter 4**  
**Classification:**  
Refinement, Identity, and the Body

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In December of 1890, General Nelson Miles and a contingent of American cavalry officers surrounded a group of Sioux at their camp in Wounded Knee Creek, South Dakota. As the cavalry became visible to the Indians, a medicine man started up the Ghost Dance, a sacred ecstatic ritual that he and many in his tribe had performed for decades. According to a witness, Lieutenant James D. Mann, many of the soldiers in attendance had no idea what to make of the dancers' movements, songs, and sounds. Were they intended to be physically aggressive? Amid much confusion on both sides, a few gunshots were fired from an unknown source, which in turn triggered a volley of machine-gun fire from the U.S. Cavalry. Within a short time, thirty-one soldiers and at least 128 Sioux were dead, including men, women, and children.<sup>1</sup>

In many ways the tragedy of that day in 1890 resulted from two vastly different cultural interpretations of the role that the human body played in relation to ecstatic experience. For the many indigenous peoples who participated in it, the Ghost Dance was ultimately oriented towards peace. Arising decades earlier, the ritual was originally based on the ecstatic revelations of its Piante founder, Wovoka (Jack Wilson), who reported that he travelled to heaven, "saw the Great Spirit and all the people who had died a long time ago."<sup>2</sup> It was then that God gave Wovoka a dance and told him to go back and inform his people that "they must be good and love one another, and not fight, or steal, or

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<sup>1</sup> James Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, 14th Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, Part 2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1896), 871.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in: Michael Hittman and Don Lynch, eds. *Wovoka and the Ghost Dance* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 326. Also see: Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion*, 780-781.

lie.”<sup>3</sup> The Indian believed the dance needed to be performed regularly if the Indians wished to bring back the plentiful days when the buffalo roamed freely.

At bottom, the myth of the Ghost Dance provided its Indian practitioners with a drastic method for salvaging their traditional way of life and coping with the destruction of their ancestral homelands as a result of white settlement. The dance, which always included movement and song, provided its supporters with a symbolic portrayal of the end of the world and its regeneration, both physical and spiritual. The dance’s profound importance attracted Indians throughout the American West. Starting with the Piaute, it spread to the Cheyenne, Shoshone, Sioux, and beyond, until, by 1890, it had transformed into a pan-Indian, quasi-Christian movement that upheld Wovoka as its messiah.

For white onlookers, though, the most pertinent characteristic of the Ghost Dance was its sheer physicality. The dance had participants form into a large circle, dancing and chanting as they expanded and contracted it.<sup>4</sup> According to the anthropologist Vittorio Lanternari, individual dancers, including both men and women, painted their bodies and held each other’s shoulders such that “the vibrant rhythm of the dance sway[ed] the worshippers as if they were a single body.”<sup>5</sup> The coordinated bodily movements were always accompanied by songs—often serving as invocations to the dead.<sup>6</sup> These were followed by “loud cries, ejaculations, and mimicry” and finally “a paroxysm of exaltation,” stamping of feet, and bodily contortions.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted in: Hittman and Lynch, *Wovoka and the Ghost Dance*, 326. Also see: Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion*, 780-781.

<sup>4</sup> Hittman and Lynch, *Wovoka and the Ghost Dance*, 91-92.

<sup>5</sup> Vittorio Lanternari, *The Religions of the Oppressed: A Study of Modern Messianic Cults*, trans. Lisa Sergio (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1963), 129.

<sup>6</sup> Lanternari, *The Religions of the Oppressed*, 130.

<sup>7</sup> Lanternari, *The Religions of the Oppressed*, 130.

Members of the American government, intent on westward expansion and increasingly concerned about Native Americans' capacity for obstructing this goal, chose not to interpret Indians' cries, paroxysms, stamping, and contortions as a defensive movement or a desperate measure for coping with immense upheaval.<sup>8</sup> Instead, they construed the Ghost Dance as confrontational, aggressive, even verging on violent. The connotations of violence were only enhanced when Sitting Bull, the Lakota chief who helped defeat the U.S. Army in the Battle of the Little Bighorn, began to endorse the Ghost Dance. Concerned about a Sioux uprising, the U.S. Army generals decided that the best course of action was to contain, control, and eventually disperse the Ghost Dancers by sending them back to their reservations. This decision is what sparked the events of 1890 at Wounded Knee Creek.

For many in the federal government and army, the Ghost Dancers' defeat only affirmed the savagery of their superstitious rituals. Henry M. Teller, a Colorado senator and Secretary of the Interior, described the Indian's tribal customs as simply "hindrances to civilization."<sup>9</sup> His view was shared by the Bureau of Indian Affairs Commissioner, W.A. Jones, who petitioned the government to discontinue certain uncivilized traditions, including Indian dancing, which he considered "degrading" and "immoral."<sup>10</sup> Such entreaties obviously had some effect, because it was not long before government agents received instructions to prohibit Indian dances on the reservations.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Part of the white ignorance of the Ghost Dance may have also resulted from its practitioners reluctance to explain its meaning to white foreigners. Wovoka himself had urged his fellow Ghost Dancers, "Do not tell the white people about this." Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance Religion*, 781.

<sup>9</sup> United States Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1903), 14.

<sup>10</sup> United States Office of Indian Affairs, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 15.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in: Maureen Needham, ed., *I See America Dancing: Selected Readings 1685-2000* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 36-38.



THE GHOST DANCE BY THE OGLALA SIOUX AT PINE RIDGE AGENCY, DAKOTA.—(DRAWN BY FREDERIC REMINGTON FROM SKETCHES TAKEN ON THE SPOT.—[SEE PAGE 262.]

**Illustration 8**

Frederic Remington, "Ghost Dance of the Oglala Sioux," *Harper's Weekly*, December 1890.

The hard crackdown on the Ghost Dance in 1890 represented a much larger movement to restrict and suppress any frequent, physical displays of musical ecstasy. For much of the nineteenth century, Protestant clerics, romantic intellectuals, civic leaders, and other elites worked towards eradicating intense corporeality from all forms of ecstasy. The target here was not so much the specific mode of ecstatic experience—religious, romantic, or carnivalesque. Instead, it was the general manner in which trance experiences were outwardly expressed. The efforts of this cross-modal coalition were pervasive and involved prohibiting excessive bodily movements and spontaneous outbursts or regulating the circumstances under which they occurred. Particularly in public settings, forceful and frequent displays of self-loss were thought to spread quickly to others. The fear appeared to be grounded in the assumption that personal experiences of self-dissolution, when communicated to others by public and bodily displays of passion, could also dissolve the institutions and hierarchies that made up a functioning,

ordered society. Ideal forms of ecstasy, by contrast, were thought to be relatively subdued affairs, even if they masked profound personal experiences.

This chapter examines how elites within the evangelical, romantic, and carnivalesque traditions sought to institute strict standards regarding the physical expression of musical ecstasy, or musical emotion more generally (which may be assumed to have encompassed the more specific category of musical ecstasy in many cases).<sup>12</sup> With only a few exceptions, the evangelical, romantic, and carnivalesque leaders rarely worked in concert with each other.<sup>13</sup> Despite the lack of collaboration, though, each camp's aims, methods, and achievements harmonized with each other. What they sought was a "cultivated" consciousness, characterized by physically-restrained expressions of ecstasy. And if such outbursts occurred, they endeavored to regulate strictly how (privately) and when (infrequently) such expressions could occur. The term "cultivation" had attendant connotations of care and refinement, but it also had class connotations. In America, the term was associated with the high moral standing and respectability of the middle and upper classes. However, not everyone who endorsed and exhibited cultivated emotion was considered equally qualified for membership among the privileged echelons of society. White men were regularly assumed to be easily amenable

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<sup>12</sup> Due to a scarcity of available sources in some instances, certain parts of this chapter (and dissertation) assume a correlation between general prescriptions for musical emotion and specific recommendations for musical ecstasy in particular.

<sup>13</sup> Many transcendentalists recognized their movement's debt to liberal Protestantism and continued to use some of its terminology, as John S. Dwight did in chapter 2, for instance. On the Christian side, the Congregational clergyman and theologian Horace Bushnell paralleled romantics in finding some profound spiritual presence in the natural world. Although he probably would never have called himself a romantic, after visiting Niagara Falls in 1852, he nevertheless wrote that the scene gave him a sense of "the greatness of God." Lowell Mason, too, was inspired by the language of romanticism. He described the singing of church congregations as "sublime in nature," and comparable to "the mountains, which owe their majesty, not to their fertile soil, nor to any architectural skill, but to the Power which commanded the light to shine out of darkness." Quoted in: Ralph H. Gabriel, "Evangelical Religion and Popular Romanticism in Early Nineteenth-Century America," *Church History* 19, no. 1 (March, 1950): 42, 44.



to refinement, while women and African Americans, regardless of their specific experiences or practices, were more readily linked to the evils of effusive self-loss.

The effort to simultaneously cultivate and subordinate different expressive styles might be best described using words such as “containment” or “sanction.” Both of these terms, depending on context, can be used to imply acts of acceptance and rejection—of being “a part” and being “apart.” Thus, the containment efforts of middle-class Americans involved both an embrace of tranquility and the rejection of physical effusiveness. It also required sanctioning infrequent and private ecstasy while applying sanctions to the frequent and collective pursuit of self-loss.

The musical culture of ecstatic refinement became broad and systematic in its implementation. By the 1830s or 1840s, its adherents had already become fully committed to enforcing the tenets of cultivation that encouraged physical restraint. Even Protestant evangelicals, many of whom had wholeheartedly accepted demonstrative self-loss early on during the Second Great Awakening, began to pivot towards emotional and corporeal regulation. The result was that, for most of the nineteenth century, the principle of self-control—long entrenched within Protestantism and the homologous traditions associated with romanticism—became strongly linked with notions of physical containment in middle-class American culture.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Although they do not focus specifically on ecstatic experiences, John F. Kasson, Lawrence Levine, and other historians have identified the growth of an ethos of controlled conduct in American concerts during the nineteenth century. Admittedly, critics have called out these authors for overstating both the periodization and the effectiveness of this regulatory movement. Acknowledging these limitations, though, the general thrust of their observations remains valid to the topic of this chapter. See: Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 239-245. See also: David Scobey, “Anatomy of the Promenade: The Politics of Bourgeois Sociability in Nineteenth-Century New York,” *Social History* 17, no. 2 (May, 1992): 203-227; Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*; James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996); William Weber, “Did People Listen in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century?” *Early Music* 25, no. 4 (Nov 1997): 6781-691.

The reasons why members of the bourgeois class championed the principles of individual integrity and self-control are multiple, and some of them have been discussed before. As many esteemed scholars have demonstrated, the impulse resonated strongly with economic changes associated with the growth of industrialization, expanding labor demands, and the opening of new markets during the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> This chapter contributes to the existing scholarship by demonstrating how considerations of music and consciousness factored deeply into the movement to maintain middle-class ascendancy and satisfy the demands of capitalist enterprise.

### Refining Revivalist Rapture

Among evangelicals, the physical regulation of religious ecstasy started in the Northern industrialized regions of the country and was led almost entirely by a series of white, male bourgeois elites who believed strongly in adapting the revivalist interest in emotional devotion to the more tempered tenets of emotional control. One of the earliest nineteenth-century proponents of this movement was John Fanning Watson, the Methodist minister from Philadelphia.<sup>16</sup> In his 1819 treatise titled *Methodist Error; or, Friendly Christian Advice to Those Methodists Who Indulge in Extravagant Emotions and Bodily Exercises*, Watson accepted the precept of religious ecstasy, but condemned

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<sup>15</sup> Historians and social theorists including Max Weber, E.P. Thompson, Christopher Hill, Paul E. Johnson, Steven Mintz, and Karen Halttunen have argued that the rise of capitalism impelled its would-be beneficiaries to endorse the creation of: i) a disciplined, consistent labor force that was conducive to the smooth functioning of industry; and ii) moral entrepreneurs, protected from the temptations of unfettered capitalism. See: Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 2005; Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*; Thompson, *Customs in Common*; Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997); Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004); Steven Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

<sup>16</sup> In many regards, this goal perpetuated and elaborated the Wesley brothers' efforts to reconcile "cold rationalism" with "overheated enthusiasm" during the eighteenth century. For reference to "cold rationalism" etc. see: Gunter, *The Limits of "Love Divine,"* 127, 134-137.

its fulsome expression in public settings, such as camp meeting “shouts.” Effusive bodily behavior, he explained, was noisy and chaotic in these contexts. Therefore, it best occurred in closeted settings where it would avoid the possibility of offending others.<sup>17</sup>

Efforts to regulate religious ecstasy flowered under the guidance of Charles Finney, during his long tenure as the preeminent revivalist leader in the North. Finney’s decision to pursue an ecclesiastical vocation occurred after a musical conversion experience in 1821. On this occasion, he had been singing and playing his bass viol alone at his law office one night. When he started to play he was overwhelmed by a spiritual sensation unlike any other he had ever felt:

It seemed as if my heart was all liquid, and my feelings were in such a state that I could not hear my own voice in singing without causing my sensibility to overflow. I wondered at this and tried to suppress my tears, but could not.... I wondered what ailed me that I felt such a disposition to weep.<sup>18</sup>

Unable to control his crying, Finney stopped singing and put away his instrument. Soon thereafter, all his inward feelings began to “rise and flow out,” and he felt his heart utter the words “I want to pour my whole soul out to God.”<sup>19</sup> In this moment, Finney recalled, the divine spirit “descended upon me in a manner that seemed to go through me, body and soul. I could feel the impression...going through and through me.... I can recollect distinctly that it seemed to fan me like immense wings; and it seemed to me, as these waves passed over me, that they literally moved my hair like a passing breeze.”<sup>20</sup> Finney’s conversion experience—which he described as a “mighty baptism of the Holy Ghost”<sup>21</sup>—gave him a deep appreciation for the power of emotional experiences to reveal

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<sup>17</sup> See: [James Fanning Watson], *Methodist Error* ([n.p.], 1814); Watson, *Methodist Error*, 27. Both sources are cited in: Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, 76, fn 3.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Grandison Finney, *Memoirs of Rev. Charles G. Finney* (Bedford, MA: Applewood Press, 2009 [c1876]), 19.

<sup>19</sup> Finney, *Memoirs of Rev. Charles G. Finney*, 19-20.

<sup>20</sup> Finney, *Memoirs of Rev. Charles G. Finney*, 20.

<sup>21</sup> Finney, *Memoirs of Rev. Charles G. Finney*, 20.

the true nature of God's grace. Intense emotion soon became central to his devotional style, which often employed grand gestures of sentiment to instill spiritual understanding in his followers.<sup>22</sup>

However, the famous revivalist was no advocate of excessively effusive physical acts of devotion. Unrestrained bodies and demonstrative emotions did not, in this opinion, epitomize the pinnacle of worship practices, as some earlier revivalists had supposed. Certainly, he admitted, religious ecstasy could involve a degree of physicality. "In every age of the church," Finney acknowledged, "cases have occurred in which persons have had such clear manifestations of divine truth as to prostrate their physical strength entirely."<sup>23</sup> If such responses were authentically religious, however, Finney believed that they were, by and large, relatively tranquil affairs. Indeed, as he described them, such experiences often had an almost paralyzing effect on the subject's mind and body:

The mind seems not to be conscious of any unusual excitement of its own sensibility; but on the contrary, seems to itself to be calm and its state seems peculiar only because truth is seen with unusual clearness. Manifestly there is no such effervescence of the sensibility as produces tears, or any of the usual manifestations of an excited imagination or deeply moved feelings. There is not that gush of feeling which distracts the thoughts, but the mind sees truth unveiled, and in such relations as really to take away all bodily strength, while the mind looks in upon the unveiled glories of the Godhead.<sup>24</sup>

That Finney would favor subdued physical trances, such as the one described here, was not exactly surprising. His ethos of corporeal self-control tended to echo that of his intended audiences, who were typically urban and middle-class—a status that was often

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<sup>22</sup> In his *Lectures on Revival of Religion*, Finney claimed that "God has found it necessary to take advantage of the excitability there is in mankind to produce powerful excitements among them before he can lead them to obey." In another tract, *How to Experience Revival*, Finney similarly stated that "Pray[ing] with a lack of feeling" prevented the effectiveness of worship. Finney and Leavitt, *Lectures on Revival of Religion*, 9, 194-197; Charles Finney, *How to Experience Revival* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2010), 29.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Finney, "Letters on Revivals: No. 8," *Oberlin Evangelist* 7 (1845): 75.

<sup>24</sup> Charles Finney, "Letters on Revivals: No. 8," *Oberlin Evangelist* 7 (1845): 75.

attended by refined sensibilities regarding physical comportment.<sup>25</sup> This approach obviously differed markedly from the Methodist revivals that had been popular (especially in the South and West of the country) during the earliest years of nineteenth-century revivalism, and which Finney continued to condemn as “recklessness,” “fanaticism,” and “rash zeal.”<sup>26</sup>

Although Finney lectured and wrote little about music, he obviously believed it to be an integral feature of his evangelical revivals as well as conducive to the more specific goal of cultivated emotional uplift. The role music played in his earliest conversion experience certainly evinced this attitude. So too did his later encouragement of choir and congregational singing at his revival meetings. Indeed, in 1832, after settling in New York City as minister of the Chatham Street Chapel, Finney quickly hired Thomas Hastings as his music director in order to facilitate the spread of his particular brand of revivalism among the urban congregations. The two men already knew each other well. Hastings had been a choir director in upstate New York when revivals burned through the region where Finney was making a name for himself. Hastings also continued to serve as editor to *The Western Recorder*, an important evangelical newspaper at the time. When he joined Finney, Hastings had already made several influential contributions to the growing repertory of evangelical music, including the hymn “Hail to the Brightness of Zion’s Glad Morning,” and the melody for “Rock of Ages.” With the eminent revivalist’s support, Hastings would teach and continue to write music, direct choirs, and compile songbooks.

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<sup>25</sup> Sean McCloud, *Divine Hierarchies: Class in American Religion and Religious Studies* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2009), 165, 132-133; Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 199.

<sup>26</sup> Finney and Leavitt, *Lectures on Revival of Religion*, 66, 250.

While Finney spoke generally about the necessity to regulate religious experience, Hastings focused this attitude on musical experience in particular. Many of his views were presented in his *Dissertation on Musical Taste*, the first full-length musical treatise by an American. Here, he averred that true devotional song should “school [the] affections” of worshipers and accord with “the tranquil nature of religious feeling.”<sup>27</sup> The performance of a religious song was to be “mild, tender, and subdued,” distinct and impressive enough to attract attention and evoke sentiment among audiences but never “frantic.”<sup>28</sup> A truly moral model for devotional music, Hastings believed, involved singing with “disciplined hearts and voices” a hymn that subdued listeners to tenderness, “not as by dramatic effort or musical enchantment, but by the force of religious considerations, presented distinctly and solemnly by individuals.”<sup>29</sup> The performance should be such, Hastings maintained, that the congregation “retired in silence,” encouraged towards a “more earnest contemplation of the truths...so solemnly presented” by the hymns.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, like Watson, he believed that these musical experiences were best practiced in private whenever possible. “The inspired Psalmist [of early Christianity] appears often to have been singing alone,” Hastings contended, and he believed this model should serve to guide the devotional practices of his contemporaries.<sup>31</sup> While Hastings wrote little on the precise topic of self-loss experiences, his general comments about emotional control seem to have been abundantly applicable to such phenomena.

So too did the writings of Hastings’ former teacher, Lowell Mason. Far and away the most influential educator and publisher of American church music during the

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas Hastings, *Dissertation on Musical Taste* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1853), 249, 250.

<sup>28</sup> Hastings, *Dissertation on Musical Taste*, 267, 250.

<sup>29</sup> Hastings, *Dissertation on Musical Taste*, 271.

<sup>30</sup> Hastings, *Dissertation on Musical Taste*, 171.

<sup>31</sup> Hastings, *Dissertation on Musical Taste*, 278.

nineteenth century,<sup>32</sup> Mason also frowned upon unmitigated exuberance. Although he advocated for the centrality of music to religious life, his popular songbooks highlighted music's ability to calm the mind, cultivate "habits of order and union," and teach singers to "control...the modulations of the voice."<sup>33</sup> The principle of union, in this context, seems to have alluded more to a conformity of practice rather than a merger of identities. As N. Lee Orr observes, the music director "eschewed the emotional, spontaneous ecstasy of the revival song for a more rational hymnody, mildly evangelical in doctrine, and sentimental in tone."<sup>34</sup>

This ethos was apparent in Mason's instruction books, which became exceedingly popular among students of all ages and stages of training. One of his most influential publications was *The Manual of the Boston Academy of Music* (1836), which provided detailed instruction and exercises for use in singing schools and other educational institutions. Bodily discipline, even immobility, featured prominently among the manual's instructions. One chapter expressed this principle in explicit terms, directing that when singing out the vowel sounds in a word: "The [body] organs should be immovably fixed from the beginning to the end of the sound; not the least change should be allowed in the position of the lips, teeth, tongue or throat; nor indeed of the head or body."<sup>35</sup> Students had ample opportunities to practice this vocal technique, for within a

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<sup>32</sup> Over the course of his career, Mason composed or arranged approximately 1600 tunes and compiled more than eighty songbooks. His most influential role, however, was as a music educator. After founding the Boston Academy of Music with William Channing Woodbridge in 1833, Mason ran free juvenile classes at Boston's Bowdoin Street Church, and also taught at two private schools in the area. He also headed up an initiative that introduced music classes to all public schools in Boston and eventually other cities across America. James A. Keene, *A History of Music Education in the United States* (Centennial, CO: Glenbridge Publishing, 2010), 102-135.

<sup>33</sup> Lowell Mason, *Juvenile Lyre, or Hymns and Songs, Religious, Moral, and Cheerful, Set to Appropriate Music* (Boston: Richardson, Lord & Holbrook, 1831), iii-iv.

<sup>34</sup> N. Lee Orr, *Music of the Gilded Age* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 88.

<sup>35</sup> Lowell Mason, *Manual of the Boston Academy of Music: For Instruction on the Elements of Vocal Music*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (Boston: J. H. Wilkins & R. B. Carter, 1839), 235.

few years Mason had published two popular songbooks, *Carmina Sacra* (1841) and *The New Carmina Sacra* (1850).<sup>36</sup> The books sold more than 800,000 copies combined, a huge number considering mass production and distribution of printed music did not completely appear until the Civil War and the postbellum period.<sup>37</sup>

Part of Mason's project to improve the musical performance in America included his role as the leader of the "better music" movement. Motivated by a similar impulse as the eighteenth century's regular singing movement, "better music" aimed to articulate more clearly the intent or lyrical message of printed songs through the introduction of more precise composition techniques and performance instructions. With this goal, the movement came to focus on eradicating the shape-note tradition that had grown popular earlier in the century among camp meeting revivalists and other evangelicals. Relying primarily on a rudimentary notation system, including distinct symbols assigned to each note on the staff, shape notes were intended to facilitate easy reading by the mass of relatively untrained evangelical singers. Shape note songs were to be sung simply, loudly, and emphatically so as to invoke a spiritual presence. Yet, to the edified ears of Mason and his counterparts, the performance of these songs probably seemed "rude and bold in expression, rugged in meter, and imperfect in rhyme."<sup>38</sup> Thus, "better music" provided an opportunity to instill "habits of order and union" into the vocal performance styles of singing schools, choirs, and other musical gatherings of evangelicals.

With the guidance and encouragement of Watson, Finney, Hastings, Mason, and other musical leaders of the Second Great Awakening, the principles of physical

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<sup>36</sup> Lowell Mason, *Carmina Sacra* (Boston: J.H. Wilkins & R.B. Carter, 1841); Lowell Mason, *The New Carmina Sacra* (Boston: Wilkins, Carter, & Co., 1850).

<sup>37</sup> Robert James Branham and Stephen J. Hartnett, *Sweet Freedom's Song: "My Country 'Tis of Thee" and Democracy in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 52.

<sup>38</sup> "The Early Camp-Meeting Song Writers," (n.a.) *Methodist Quarterly Review* (July 1859): 407.



propriety and restraint grew increasingly pronounced in American evangelicalism. In fact, they were integral features of the so-called “businessmen’s revival” of 1857-1858,<sup>39</sup> which flavored the subsequent period of revivalism spanning to the early 1900s—which some scholars have called the “Third Great Awakening.”<sup>40</sup> It was in this tradition of cultivated sentiment that the preacher-musician duo of Dwight Moody and Ira Sankey embarked on a musical mission of popular outreach during the 1870s. Although they represented a younger generation of evangelists, they upheld the earlier valuation of refined and restrained emotional expression. Like Finney, the team’s spiritual journey was occasionally punctuated with personal and profound mystical experiences. Weeks before setting off on his first tour with Sankey, for instance, Dwight Moody found himself “roll[ing] on the floor in the midst of many tears and groans and [crying] to God to be baptized with the Holy Ghost and fire.”<sup>41</sup> Later, he described the event as “almost too sacred an experience to name.... I can only say that God revealed himself to me, and I had such an experience of His love that I had to ask Him to stay His hand.”<sup>42</sup> Yet, like Finney, too, Moody and Sankey believed these demonstrative experiences should occur rarely and in private.

Even so, Moody and Sankey’s followers were not completely unfamiliar with ecstatic, musical outbursts. According to one account of the duo’s performance in Chicago during the mid-1870s, the audience became “wrapt in ecstatic peace by the

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<sup>39</sup> Kathryn Teresa Long, *The Revival of 1857-1858: Interpreting an American Religious Awakening* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Elaine A. Heath, “Ecstasy: Mysticism and Mission in the Wesleyan Tradition,” July 2007.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example: McLoughlin, *Revivals Awakenings and Reform*.

<sup>41</sup> Vinita Hampton and C.J. Wheeler, “The Gallery,” *Christian History Magazine* 9, no. 25, (1990): 13.

<sup>42</sup> William R. Moody, *The Life of Dwight L. Moody* (Albany, OR.: Book for the Ages, Ages Software, 1997), 127.

music of Mr. Sankey's melodious voice."<sup>43</sup> Sankey also observed music's overwhelming effect on full display at other events. This included one event when, after hearing the hymn "The Ninety and Nine," a woman who was "so hardened a moment before burst into tears and falling on her knees began to pray to the Good Shepherd to receive her."<sup>44</sup> The words of the tune also profoundly influenced a young man who had left his family "to rid himself of all home restraint." After hearing the lyrics, the man fell on his knees, and returned home.<sup>45</sup>

Notwithstanding these moments of profound physical release, however, Moody and Sankey preferred their musical performances, and the spiritual experiences that often accompanied them, to be tempered affairs. As Tamara J. Van Dyken, David W. Stowe, and other scholars have claimed, the duo's revivals were typically "well-ordered masses" that evoked tender emotions, usually related to pathos, the music being primarily intended to attract would-be converts and channel their attention to the sermon.<sup>46</sup> Regulated devotion was integral here; physically passionate ecstasy was not. This model helped make Moody and Sankey enormously popular in the United States (and abroad) during the 1870s, where they toured extensively, and frequently attracted sold out venues. Such appearances included P.T. Barnum's Hippodrome in New York City (one of the largest arenas in the city at the time), the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, and dozens of cities and towns across the United States. By the time Moody died in 1899, he had

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<sup>43</sup> Edgar Johnson Goodspeed, *A Full History of the Wonderful Career of Moody and Sankey in Great Britain and America* (London, ON: John O. Robinson, 1876), 566.

<sup>44</sup> Ira Sankey, *Sankey's Story of the Gospel Hymns and of Sacred Songs and Solos* (Philadelphia: The Sunday School Times Company, 1906), 224-225.

<sup>45</sup> Sankey, *Sankey's Story of the Gospel Hymns and of Sacred Songs and Solos*, 224-225.

<sup>46</sup> Tamara J. Van Dyken, "Singing the Gospel: Evangelical Hymnody, Popular Religion, and American Culture; 1870-1940" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, December 2008), 39-40, 93; David W. Stowe, *How Sweet the Sound: Music in the Spiritual Lives of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 105.

established Christian colleges and schools and was estimated to have preached to over 100 million people around the world, with Sankey usually accompanying him.<sup>47</sup> Their work culminated a decades-long evangelical effort to refine religious experience, and ecstasy in particular.

### Sanctioning Sublime Self-Loss

The impulse for physically-subdued rapture was no less present in the leading Protestant denominations than in the romantic traditions associated with naturalized musical self-loss. From as early as the Revolutionary era onwards, sentimentalists who counted themselves as part of America's political and social elite became interested in pursuing tender emotions without entirely disposing of their own individual autonomy. As the historian Nicole Eustace describes, inhabitants of the thirteen colonies and early republic were abundantly aware of both the necessity to embrace sentiment and the dangers of taking it too far. They rejected the dispassion exhibited by European civility, but they also tried to sidestep the demonstrative over-emotionality they attributed with "savage" Indians. What they developed was a careful balance of sense and sensibility that many Americans interpreted to be a unique feature of their nation.<sup>48</sup> When it came to ecstatic experiences, achieving this equilibrium was an ongoing process, but in general terms it constituted a manner of relating to the world that permitted one to compassionately connect or merge with other entities while simultaneously maintaining integral aspects of the "singular, self-conscious individual."<sup>49</sup> What resulted was always

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<sup>47</sup> Lyle W. Dorsett, *A Passion for Souls: The Life of D. L. Moody* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003).

<sup>48</sup> Nicole Eustace, *Passion is the Gale: Emotion, Power, and the Coming of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

<sup>49</sup> In reference to reading literature during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the literary scholar Lisa Spiro uses the term "detached intimacy" to label this simultaneous effort to maintain individuality while remaining open to certain kinds of self-expansion. She defines it as a practice by which "the reader,

of a qualified capitulation of one's personal identity that permitted psychic self-loss but rarely the loss of bodily control.

Starting in the 1830s, Transcendentalists would begin to flesh out specific ways to achieve and identify corporeal control as it pertained to musical self-loss. Unlike the followers of Hastings, Finney, and Mason, who encouraged private ecstasies but communal gatherings, Transcendentalists more uniformly embraced solitary experiences away from others.<sup>50</sup> Thoreau's private retreat to Walden Pond typified this proclivity. Emerson, for his part, refrained from encouraging communal experiences of the sublime among his followers, and despite the popularity of his teachings, he was also reluctant to encourage his followers to pursue passionately aesthetic encounters with the natural world (at least such recommendations are remarkably scarce in his writings.)<sup>51</sup> Whitman's musical ecstasies also appear to have been comparatively solitary. Even in describing public events, at concert halls for instance, the poet seldom suggested his experiences were shared by others. And when he wrote, "I allow'd myself, as I sometimes do, to wander out of myself," the statement seemed to suggest a degree of personal agency, as Whitman carefully decided when and under what circumstances he would relinquish normal notions of his own subjectivity. Self-loss, as Whitman conceived it, may have always involved some degree of intentional self-regulation.

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though swept over by feeling, still keeps fantasy at arm's length," or similarly as the process by which a reader develops "an imagined intimacy with [the book's] central characters and narrator, while remaining a singular, self-conscious individual." Lisa Spiro, "Reading with a Tender Rapture: Reveries of a Bachelor and the Rhetoric of Detached Intimacy," *Book History* 6 (2003): 61.

<sup>50</sup> On the few occasions that Transcendentalists endeavored to start close-knit communities—such as George Ripley's utopian community at Brook Farm, or Charles Lane and Amos Bronson Alcott's Fruitlands commune—membership of these groups remained low and the communities themselves typically disbanded within a few months or years. Richard Francis, *Transcendental Utopias: Individual and Community at Brook Farms, Fruitland, and Walden* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

<sup>51</sup> Ann Woodlief, "Emerson and Thoreau as American Prophets of Eco-Wisdom" (paper presentation, Virginia Humanities Conference, Fairfax, VA, March 30/31, 1990), <http://transcendentalism-legacy.tamu.edu/criticism/ecotran.html>.

Further outside the Transcendentalist fold, other American romantics also grew concerned about the hazards of demonstrative ecstatic expression, even if they could be justified as authentic encounters with the sublime. Indeed, the romantic movement's basic veneration of "Genius"—the label typically given to those whose talent and insight made them specially attuned with the sublime—provided opportunities for confining the circumstances under which expressive self-loss could take place. The romantic assumption that the best artistic creators and performers were geniuses constructed stark boundaries between these artists on one hand and audiences on the other. In the musical world, either the individual composers or the "virtuoso" musicians (and conductors) hired to perform the piece were considered closest to the aesthetic experience of the artwork.<sup>52</sup> Therefore only a select few people—including such luminaries as Beethoven, Wagner, and the like—were regularly labeled as "genius."<sup>53</sup> As such, their bodies became primary sites for enacting the gestures, vocalizations, and other physical expressions that went into the music-making process. Audiences were far from passive outsiders, of course, but neither were they provided the same opportunities to participate in the music-making process. (This contrasted with both religious settings and earlier traditions of secular music, when the lines between spectators and performers were often blurred.)<sup>54</sup> The physical construction of higher and larger theatre stages came to symbolize this process of disentanglement. The result was that performers took on something of a surrogate role,

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<sup>52</sup> According to the musicologist Christopher Small, nineteenth-century composers typically held the highest spot on the hierarchy, while performers remained slightly subordinate. This hierarchy, he claims, can be contrasted to even a century before, when improvised performances suggested a more equalitarian relationship between the two roles. See: Christopher Small, *Music of the Common Tongue: Survival and Celebration in Afro-American Music* (New York: Riverrun Press, 1987), 285.

<sup>53</sup> Tia DeNora, *Beethoven and the Construction of Genius: Musical Politics in Vienna, 1792-1803* (Berkeley, CA: University California Press, 1997); "Gottschalk's Concerts," *Dwight's Journal of Music* 22, no. 3 (October 18, 1862): 231.

<sup>54</sup> Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

embodying the kinds of aesthetic experiences and physical expressions that were considered less appropriate when enacted by larger audiences. In this way, as the historian Jon Mee writes, “To transform enthusiasm into art was to make it relatively safe.”<sup>55</sup>

The widespread endorsement of corporeal quietude should not be mistaken for dispassion or lack of engagement in the performance. Just the opposite, audience silence may have masked a rich landscape of personal experience shrouded by the etiquette of bodily control.<sup>56</sup> Even musical luminaries such as John S. Dwight acknowledged that stoic comportment could obscure a deep silent self-loss. Describing the American premier of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony in 1853, Dwight’s journal implored its readers to consider the relationship between sublimity and silence: “Think of it!...if a certain virtue went not out from the music into the souls of the audience, so long and elaborate a work could not possibly, by any preparations and secondary appliances, have kept the crowd so quiet in their seats.”<sup>57</sup> In this manner, audience members may have poured their souls out as they listened to the music, but their bodies never betrayed it.

Believing it possible to achieve ecstasy in stillness and silence, Dwight regularly lauded performers’ and audiences’ ability to restrain their expressive behavior when necessary. His journal attributed the success of the Germania Society to such proper comportment. The society, it contended, “won the esteem of the community, by modest self-respect, correct deportment and gentlemanly manners. They number among them some highly cultivated and intelligent men.”<sup>58</sup> Beyond the superlative effect of the music

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<sup>55</sup> Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 5.

<sup>56</sup> Daniel Cavicchi has also made this point in: Cavicchi, *Listening and Longing*, 173.

<sup>57</sup> “Concerts of the Past Week,” *Dwight’s Journal of Music*, February 12, 1853: 151.

<sup>58</sup> *Dwight’s Journal of Music*, April 9, 1853: 6.

itself, it was these “cultivated” characteristics, Dwight indicated, that also helped explain why the musical group was invited to perform hundreds of concerts through the United States and Canada, including nearly eighty public performances during one season in the Boston area alone, where the average audience sized numbered in the thousands.<sup>59</sup>

Among the most outspoken supporters of still and silent musical ecstasy in concert settings was George Templeton Strong. The lawyer, music aficionado, and dedicated diarist was also no stranger to musical raptures. Indeed, one entry in his diary recounted an anecdote about the transcendent power a Mozart piece: “After church I rushed down to St. Peter’s [Church], and I reached it just as a Mozart’s ‘Number Twelve’ was in full blast.... I was just in a fit state to go into ecstasies at each individual note.”<sup>60</sup> Strong’s obsessive emotional sensitivity to concert music, which he called his “musical mania,” was also elicited at concert held at the Broadway Tabernacle Church. It was at this location, that Strong heard Beethoven’s oratorio, *Christ on the Mount of Olives*.<sup>61</sup> The lyrics were strictly Christian in their focus, but although Strong was a regular church-goer, he followed many romantics in describing the music’s effect using the language of the sublime. He noted “such strange, wild, terrible passages,...such startling changes from the darkness and most savage discords to passages of sweetness and beauty.” Of the “Hallalujah Chorus,” which ended the second part, he said “no words are strong enough” to describe it. The end of this ineffable passage in particular seemed to him “the grandest, the most simply sublime piece of music conceivable.” Although he did not explicitly link this ineffable experience to self-transcendence, his description was

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<sup>59</sup> Dwight’s *Journal of Music*, April 9, 1853: 6.

<sup>60</sup> George Templeton Strong’s diary entry from April 16, 1843, quoted in: Vera Brodsky Lawrence, *Strong on Music*, vol. 1: *Resonances, 1836–1849* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 1:182.

<sup>61</sup> George Templeton Strong’s diary entry from November 2, 1841, quoted in: Lawrence, *Strong on Music*, 1:115.

saturated with overtones of self-loss. So too was another ineffable experience elicited by hearing Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. During the performance of this piece, Strong was reportedly awestruck and unable to muster any words: "It's hardly worthwhile to write any grandiloquencies on the subject...So, to save trouble, I simply write a '!' and anybody who'll have the goodness to dilute the same over six closely written pages will possess my views and sentiments about Beethoven's Symphony in C minor."<sup>62</sup>

Despite his openness to sublime transport though, Strong firmly rejected effusive physical expressions of ecstatic psychic impressions. His attitude was especially evident on November 9, 1859, when he attended a concert by the New York Philharmonic orchestra. The performance, which mainly included pieces by Beethoven and Wagner, commemorated the birth of the romantic poet Friedrich Schiller. Arriving home that night, Strong wrote approvingly in his diary of an "admirable orchestra" that presented a "program of the first order."<sup>63</sup> Just as impressive, in Strong's estimation, was the "order" of the audience that evening. "A great, silent, appreciative crowd of Teutons,"<sup>64</sup> he recalled, ostensibly referring to the German ancestry of many attendees. Strong adored audiences that were silent, or at least tranquil; and opprobrium spewed from his pen whenever he witnessed loud and exuberant displays of intense emotionality. He deplored the "frowzy"<sup>65</sup> patrons of concert music who appeared all too willing to mark their approval with raucous applause and "vociferous bellowings."<sup>66</sup> Similarly, he deplored "crowded and enthusiastic" concert halls, when the performers "screamed" and the

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<sup>62</sup> George Templeton Strong's diary entry from January 18, 1846, quoted in: Lawrence, *Strong on Music*, 1:359.

<sup>63</sup> George Templeton Strong, *The Diary of George Templeton Strong: The Turbulent Fifties, 1850-1859*, ed. Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1952), 2: 467.

<sup>64</sup> Strong, *The Diary of George Templeton Strong*, 2: 467.

<sup>65</sup> Strong, *The Diary of George Templeton Strong*, 2: 445 (April 8, 1859).

<sup>66</sup> Strong, *The Diary of George Templeton Strong*, 2: 373 (November 30, 1857).



audience responded “uproariously” and clamorously.<sup>67</sup> The enjoyment of music was always vexed, the diarist maintained, when one was confronted by “excessive, ill-bred, obstreperous gabblings.”<sup>68</sup> When Strong eventually became president of the New York Philharmonic in the early 1870s, he embarked on a campaign to clean up the boisterous and bodily expressions that he found so repulsive.<sup>69</sup>

Strong’s goal of tranquilizing audience behavior was shared by Theodore Thomas, the German-born conductor who rose to prominence from the 1860s to the 1880s and was already a leading light within the world of classical concert music when he took up leadership of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in the 1890s. As a conductor, Thomas quickly made a reputation for himself as a musical martinet, holding his orchestras to a very high standard of “conduct, appearance and propriety.” His string sections were expected to practice uniform bowing, which both polished the phrasing and coordinated the visual presentation of the orchestra. Instrumentalists were expected to tune before they entered the stage, and when they did make an appearance in front of the audience they were prohibited from talking or moving their chairs. Thomas held his audiences almost to the same high standard, and he regularly reminded his audiences about his expectations.<sup>70</sup> The conductor himself strove to be a model for his orchestra and audiences, always arriving at these shows highly prepared and restraining his own onstage movements in the pursuit of an orderly appearance.<sup>71</sup>

It was this kind of tempered comportment that the American journalist George Gladden venerated in the expression of musical ecstasies. His opinion on this matter

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<sup>67</sup> Strong, *The Diary of George Templeton Strong*, 2: 63 (Sept 1, 1851).

<sup>68</sup> Strong, *The Diary of George Templeton Strong*, 2: 371 (November 21, 1857).

<sup>69</sup> John Erskine, *The Philharmonic-Symphony Society of New York: Its First Hundred Years* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1943).

<sup>70</sup> Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 234-238.

<sup>71</sup> Quoted in: Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 134.

became evident after he attended a Wagner opera at Bayreuth, the German festival town dedicated solely to the romantic composer's music. Gladden approvingly declared of the audience's tranquility in the presence of trance:

And so you sit there for perhaps two hours in silence which is never broken except by the voices from the stage and the hidden orchestra. No matter what your emotions are, you must not betray them by any demonstration whatever. When the curtain has gone down at the end of the act, you arise and walk out into the open air. Has there been a wild storm of hand-clapping when some singer has poured his whole soul into the darkness and silence on the other side of the foot lights? Not a sound. Was there a frantic outburst of cheers and shouts when the curtain descended? Not a whisper. That is Bayreuth; the Ultima Thule of the opera; the Mecca of the musical world.<sup>72</sup>

If the singers themselves seemed to undergo self-transcendent experiences, as they “poured” their souls out into the auditorium, the audiences never stirred, never whispered. When audiences did turn raucous, however, Gladden hastened to decry them as “diabolical claquers” or compare them to savages “clad in the skins of wild beasts” as they “clash[ed] together...spears and shields and battle axes.”<sup>73</sup> It was in this way that cultivated musical elites—performers, critics, moralists, and audience members alike—upheld both quiet and quietude as virtuous attributes of sublime self-loss in the concert hall.

### Cultivating Carnavalesque Consciousness

Bourgeois elites also initiated a campaign to mitigate overly corporeal forms of ecstatic expression in rough music, minstrelsy, Mardi Gras, and other carnivalesque customs. Some of this effort was imposed from outside the traditions, for instance, by moralizing civic legislators, while much of it originated from influential participants within the carnivalesque traditions. As in the religious and romantic traditions, this movement was not intended to prohibit ecstatic or emotionally intense experiences

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<sup>72</sup> George Gladden, “Is Applause Necessary?” *Music: A Monthly Magazine* 8 (May 1895 to October 1895): 435.

<sup>73</sup> Gladden, “Is Applause Necessary?” 433, 431.

outright, but rather to barricade carnivalesque consciousness from the possibility of physical and social disorder. In the industrializing North, the process of regulation probably started during the 1830s, around the time that riots swept through New York and other cities across the region. It was during this period that censorious bourgeois Americans began to use newspapers to cast rough music and its cognates as noisy and demonstrative affairs that destroyed the peace and quiet of good neighborhoods. It was under these circumstances that the Philadelphia *Daily Chronicle* complained of the unruly din and disruption of revelers who crowded the city public spaces:

Throughout almost the whole of Tuesday night—Christmas Eve—riot, noise, and uproar prevailed, uncontrolled and uninterrupted in many of our central and most orderly streets. Gangs of boys and young men howled and shouted. . . . Some of the watchmen occasionally sounded their rattles; but seemed only to add another ingredient to the horrible discord that murdered sleep. It is undoubtedly in the power of our city police to prevent slumbering citizens from being disturbed by the mad roars of such revelers.<sup>74</sup>

While such comments (as with others discussed in this chapter) discussed the bodily expression of musical emotion writ large, it is possible to extrapolate such appeals to corporeal (and sonic) regulation as applicable to musical ecstasy in particular.

In comparison to rough music and other street-based carnivalesque customs, the minstrel show format may have actually provided more opportunities for reducing corporeal excess. Indeed, although minstrel songs could be performed anywhere, organized minstrel *shows* were usually confined indoors, within theatres, and away from the city streets. Here widespread spontaneous participation was less-easily achieved. Moreover, like all stage performances, the minstrel show distinguished more clearly between audiences and performers, separated by way of a stage, and in doing so it served to divert some of the raucous energy of rough music away from the crowd and into the

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<sup>74</sup> Philadelphia *Daily Chronicle*, December 26, 1833, quoted in: Shoemaker, *Christmas in Pennsylvania*, 91.

bodies of a select few professionals who provided the central action in the theatre. For these reasons, mainstream tastes may have considered minstrelsy a more palatable alternative to publicly-performed rough music.

The minstrel theatre's potential for focusing down physicality helps explain why, originally, some members of the growing middle classes were occasionally willing to patronize minstrel theatres, as were women of various classes. Indeed, at least one upscale magazine described such an early minstrel venue as "vibrant and vigorous, if rather coarse and unrefined," thereby casting it as an almost acceptable middle-class destination.<sup>75</sup> Some performers, in search of bourgeois acceptability, endeavored to exploit this potential for cultivated comportment. This included the Virginia Minstrels. In 1843, they took out an advertisement in the *New York Herald* promoting themselves as "an *exclusively musical entertainment*...entirely exempt from the vulgarities and other objectionable features, which have hitherto characterized negro [blackface] extravaganzas."<sup>76</sup> A critic who attended their performance seemed to agree, for one review described the troupe as "Chaste, Pleasing, and Elegant!" "This species of amusement," it maintained, "cannot fail of making it acceptable to the most refined and sensitive audience."<sup>77</sup>

Minstrel music's cultivation process was also aided by the fact it was easily adapted to sheet music, which represented a more benign format of musical consumption than public performances. Improvements in printing technology during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries permitted minstrel songs to be converted into sheet music and

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<sup>75</sup> Robert M. Lewis, *From Traveling Show to Vaudeville: Theatrical Spectacle in America, 1830-1910* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 69.

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in: Ashby, *With Amusement for All*, 53.

<sup>77</sup> Quoted in: Ashby, *With Amusement for All*, 53.

songbook compilations intended for sale to middle-class amateur musicians, including singers and pianists, to be performed in the confines of their own homes. In short, printed sheet music precluded the necessity for public performance and therefore provided an additional impediment to the potential for civic unrest that came with street festivities or theatre gatherings. Therefore, if the music elicited intense physical responses, at least these were relatively confined in the personal home or other more intimate settings.

Perhaps no other person did more to uplift the reputation of printed minstrel song than Stephen Foster. Avoiding the stage and choosing to make his living primarily as a songwriter, Foster would pen dozens of famous minstrel tunes. One of them, “Oh! Susanna,” sold 100,000 copies of sheet music in an era when selling 5000 was considered successful. By circumventing the minstrel stage, Foster helped diffuse the minstrel tradition. In a literal sense, this involved separating and distancing emotional bodies that would have otherwise been required to congregated in public settings in order to appreciate the music together.

Theatre managers also partook in the curtailment of corporeal experience. This included the proprietors of Charley White’s Melodeon in New York, who, in 1850, advertised shows that were “chaste, moral and free from vulgarity” and kindly requested audience members “not to beat time with their feet.”<sup>78</sup> Other minstrel theatre playbills similarly entreated the audience to calm down. Some issued proclamations such as, “it is not necessary for boys to whistle or stamp with their feet, which will not be allowed,” or, “The *unmusical* portion of the audience will please avoid loud talking or moving about during the rendition of any song, as it annoys the performers, and all who have a desire to

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<sup>78</sup> Harvard Theatre Collection, minstrel box on White’s bill, quoted in: Richard Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television, 1750-1990* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 90.

hear.”<sup>79</sup> Hearing, in this view, became achievable only in the absence of vocalizations or body movements.

When Tony Pastor open his own theatre in the 1860s, he was eager to emulate this refinement effort. Although he advertised his troupe as capable of drawing large audiences,<sup>80</sup> he also placed more than a modicum of emphasis on notions of proper etiquette for those who entered his theatre after 1865. His advertisement in the *New York Clipper*, for instance, promised that the opening day show at his theatre would reach the kind of “high moral excellence” that attracted those “ladies” and “gentlemen” who made up the “ELITE AND FASHION OF THE CITY.” It is for this reason that, instead of holding his opening show in the evening when roughhousing, laboring men were more likely to be the primary attendees, Pastor purposefully scheduled the first performance to be a matinee, held at 2:30 p.m. on a Saturday afternoon (which would become a regular time slot for his shows).<sup>81</sup> He also guaranteed that his shows would provide “fun without vulgarity” and entertainment that was “unalloyed by any indelicate act or expression.”<sup>82</sup> Such indelicate expressions, he indicated, were often spurred on by alcohol, and therefore as Pastor’s business expanded he also decided to prohibit spirituous beverages from his theatres as a way of distancing them from the rowdy working-class saloon. Likewise, he forbade the performance of bawdy songs and skits and frequently expelled boisterous

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<sup>79</sup> Quoted in: Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 240.

<sup>80</sup> “Tony Pastor’s Opera House,” *New York Clipper* (July 22, 1865): 120.

<sup>81</sup> *New York Herald*, October 2, 1865: 7.

<sup>82</sup> Trav S. D. *No Applause—Just Throw Money: The Book that Made Vaudeville Famous* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2005), 65.

patrons from the premises.<sup>83</sup> By adhering to this careful code of conduct, he hoped to attract audiences from a variety of social and economic backgrounds.<sup>84</sup>

The street-based carnivalesque festivities associated with rough music in the Northeast differed from their commercial equivalents, such as minstrelsy and variety theatre, because they lacked a leadership who wished to move their tradition towards a more cultivated ethos. For this reason, rough music was deemed menacing enough to warrant considerably harsher forms of external enforcement. Starting in the 1860s in Philadelphia, for instance, the raucous Christmastime Carnival of Horns and other rough music street activities were gradually legislated out of existence. By 1868, the municipal authorities of the city had effectively banned this rough music tradition, and the city's *North American* newspaper registered its approval: "Everybody on Saturday blessed the order that rendered illegal on the previous night the customary din of horns and horse-fiddles. Such a Christmas night was never before known in Philadelphia."<sup>85</sup> When revelers tried to reprise their festivities in subsequent years they were met with arrests.<sup>86</sup> By 1872, "Not a horn was blown on Eighth street [sic]."<sup>87</sup> Although the Carnival of Horns would later revive for another few years, it was again outlawed in 1881 by the city's new mayor.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Robert W. Snyder, *The Voice of the City: Vaudeville and Popular Culture in New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3-25.

<sup>84</sup> Pastor's etiquette requirements in turn became a model for dozens of other variety theatres around the country. This included the Eleventh Street Opera House in Philadelphia, which in 1867 banned loud talking, moving about the theatre during a performance, standing in the aisles, whistling or stamping the feet. Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences*, 100.

<sup>85</sup> Philadelphia *North American*, December 28, 1868, quoted in: Shoemaker, *Christmas in Pennsylvania*, 91.

<sup>86</sup> Philadelphia *North American*, December 27, 1869, quoted in: Shoemaker, *Christmas in Pennsylvania*, 91.

<sup>87</sup> Philadelphia *North American*, December 25, 1872, quoted in: Shoemaker, *Christmas in Pennsylvania*, 91.

<sup>88</sup> Shoemaker, *Christmas in Pennsylvania*, 125-126.

Enforcement, however, was only one of many options available to Americans interested in creating order in the streets. The citizens of New Orleans took an altogether different approach. Like the commercial tradition in the North, carnivalesque the folk customs in the South moved towards corporeal control under the guidance of participant leaders. Much of the impetus came from a fairly small group of white elites in the city who recast Mardi Gras in Louisiana in accordance with the tenets of genteel self-restraint. The movement began during the 1850s, after public denunciation erupted over the increasingly intense and spontaneous nature of public celebrations that arose following an influx of immigrants from Ireland and elsewhere, and a corresponding increase of racial and ethnic mixing.<sup>89</sup> It was during this period of contention that a new, regulated style of Mardi Gras celebration was popularized by organized groups of Carnival revelers called “krewes.” Originally established and managed by local elite businessmen, the krewes endeavored to polish up the coarser aspects of the Cowbellion tradition into something that resembled the genteel celebrations of France’s aristocracy more than the disorderly outbursts of rough music. Starting in the 1850s with the Mistick Krewe of Comus and followed soon thereafter by similar societies, the krewes began to organize elaborate parades, tableaux, and balls that provided ostentatious displays of the meticulous “education, splendor and wealth of the upper class.”<sup>90</sup>

In their pursuit of grandiose performances, the Mardi Gras krewes also found ways to regulate and mitigate the more spontaneous and effusive displays of bodily emotion that had typified earlier eras of Mardi Gras celebration. Such attitudes were

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<sup>89</sup> As the historian Jessica Atkins reports, “The *Daily Orleanian* decried the racial mixing in the streets during Carnival; the *Daily Crescent* spread rumors of Carnival’s reported... disintegration; and the *Bee* excitedly condemned Carnival back to the ‘barbarous age’ whence it came.” Atkins, “Setting the Stage,” 50.

<sup>90</sup> Atkins, “Setting the Stage,” 55.



exhibited in the krewes balls, which included flamboyant promenading and conspicuous consumption of high fashion and courtly costumes and reprised the kinds of celebrations produced by Creole aristocrats during New Orleans colonial era all served the class interests of privileged white Southerners.<sup>91</sup> Of course no ball was complete without much refined dancing, including quadrilles and other stately dances the required carefully executed gestures in order to execute properly. The music that accompanied such dances was often “most charming.”<sup>92</sup> The most famous song of the krewe dances was certainly “If Ever I Cease to Love,” which was first performed in Mardi Gras in 1872, at a mock coronation of the “King and Queen of Carnival” by the Rex Krewe.<sup>93</sup> The music accompanied a mock procession of “the royal court.”<sup>94</sup> Other than their common origins in Carnival and the fact that they both took place in city theatres, the krewe balls could not have been more different from the rough music festivities of the North. Instead of displays of intense physicality and noise, there were graceful dances and mellifluous love songs.

Perhaps the krewes’ most focused effort to still the body during musical experience occurred with the tableaux vivant, another prominent component of the Mardi Gras celebrations. These “living pictures” involved costumed groups or individuals statically posing for several seconds or minutes in elaborately decorated scenes that illustrated popular mythologies, famous paintings, historic events, or the like. The very form of the tableaux literally celebrated, even fetishized, the body in suspended animation. Here, even sound and music could be reduced to a form of still-life. This is

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<sup>91</sup> Atkins, “Setting the Stage.”

<sup>92</sup> *Hand Book of the Carnival* (New Orleans: Kain & Co., 1874), 68.

<sup>93</sup> An authentic royal figure, the Grand Duke Alexei Alexandrovich of Russia, was in attendance at the time.

<sup>94</sup> *Hand Book of the Carnival*, 131.

precisely what occurred in 1868 in the tableaux presented by the Krewe of Comus, which portrayed the five senses. To represent “Hearing” the krewe included several depictions. On a platform was the god Orpheus with lyre in his hand, and near him crouched a lion that appeared to have been subdued to Orpheus’s will by the plaintive strains of his entrancing music.<sup>95</sup> There was also King David, whose mythology is rife with episodes of musical ecstasy, including his uninhibited dancing, whirling, shouting, and trumpeting as the ark of the covenant was brought into Jerusalem, and his assignment of prophetic singers to minister in the Temple.<sup>96</sup> Other parts of the stage included a cricket, the “symbol of the music of domestic affection” and various musical instruments, including a drum, fife, horn, and clarinet, as well as some cowbells, bagpipes. Chinese bells, a Spanish guitar, a monkey with a hand organ, and a giant church bell.<sup>97</sup> Safely confined on the genteel stage, the tableau perfectly eradicated all the potentially alarming and physically threatening aspects of Carnival. It subdued the violence threatened by effusive bodies in motion, it silenced the noise of rough music, and it rendered static the ecstatic.

Whereas tableaux vivant easily facilitated the process of stopping expressive, musical bodies in motion, the same could not be said for the krewes’ city parades. These took place in highly public spaces, in city streets and squares, and they were freely open to people of all backgrounds. As such, the potential for rough music and riot was more augmented. One way the krewes avoided social chaos was by employing spectacle as a pacifying agent. Indeed, in their pursuit of ostentatious display, the krewes quickly gained a reputation for creating unusually flamboyant visual and sonic displays that were quick to catch the eye or ear of a passerby. Much more than any folk custom, the krewes’

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<sup>95</sup> “Mardi-Gras,” *Debow’s Review* 6, no. 3 (March 1869): 227-228.

<sup>96</sup> 2 Samuel 6:14-21; and I Chronicles 25.

<sup>97</sup> “Mardi-Gras,” *Debow’s Review* 6, no. 3 (March 1869): 228.

provided polished processions of elaborately costumed performers and extravagantly decorated vehicles, some of them large and grandiose in stature. For instance, the Mistick Krewe of Comus's fourth annual parade in 1860 included "fifteen cars or wagons...drawn by horses draped in white, and each containing a group of living statues, representing persons distinguished in the history of our country."<sup>98</sup> Another krewe, the Twelfth Night Revelers, put on an even more spectacular pageant in 1873. It consisted of seventeen "immense" cars or floats, fifteen of which bore at least five to ten figures "brilliantly illuminated" with lanterns, transparencies, and calcium lights. The parade created "one of the most magnificent and imposing displays ever known in the history of our Carnivals."<sup>99</sup>

These "magnificent and imposing" performances contrasted starkly with the more mundane accoutrements of city life. And in doing so, they made it difficult for anyone other than the krewe members and their invited guests to partake fully in the parade proceedings. Spontaneous opportunities for participation, common with the less elaborate folk customs, were mitigated. The consequence of this divide was that Carnival celebrants were often converted from corporeal carousers into subdued spectators. The historical record certainly supports this view. The *Hand Book of the Carnival*, for example, almost always described the non-krewe parade attendees as "spectators" rather than participants or contributors.<sup>100</sup> And by and large, these roles meant parade attendees were "orderly and quiet."<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> *Hand Book of the Carnival*, 12.

<sup>99</sup> *Hand Book of the Carnival*, 60, 62.

<sup>100</sup> For example, see: *Hand Book of the Carnival*, 8.

<sup>101</sup> *Hand Book of the Carnival*, 101.

In many respects, the spectacle of the krewe parades acted in an equivalent manner as a theatre stage. It created a stark distinction between the performer and audience. Instead of a wooden scaffold, it was the large vehicles and floats (and sometimes animals), as well as the sheer elaborateness of the performance, that distinguished those being entertained from those doing the entertaining. Yet, unlike the minstrel theatre, which sometimes brought the coarser elements of street carnival into the theatre, the krewe parades deftly brought elements of the genteel theatre (and ballroom) out into the streets. As a consequence, those who came to watch and listen to the krewe parades remained relatively equable. In 1868, for instance, swarms of people assembled with great anticipation to watch the Krewe of Comus parade. If at first the eruption of an unruly hub-bub seemed unavoidable, the possibility soon abated. Canal Street did not erupt into raucous bouts of effusive charivari. Instead, as the Krewe passed by, the thousands in attendance issued only the “warmest applause.”<sup>102</sup> With their parades, therefore, the krewes effectively achieved their intended goals. They limited the participation in demonstrative displays to a select few and effectively helped convert would-be carousers into more subdued spectators.

### **The Double-Bind of Female Ecstasy**

Regardless of the specific tradition, it was middle-class white, male elites who headed up the movement to cultivate musical experience, and ecstasy in particular, during the nineteenth century. Historians have demonstrated how people like Charles Finney and Lowell Mason benefited from disproportionate access to intellectual, material, and social

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<sup>102</sup> *Hand Book of the Carnival*, 18.

resources, as well as alliances with successful Northern capitalists.<sup>103</sup> Much the same could be said for those who molded musical experience in the classical music and romantic traditions.<sup>104</sup> George Templeton Strong, for instance, was a successful lawyer and played an influential role in many clubs and organizations in New York City; and Theodore Thomas is reported to have been “a legend in his own time.”<sup>105</sup> Among the carnivalesque traditions in the North, the civic leaders who instituted prohibitions on rough music certainly found membership among the local political elite. While the performers and managers who refined musical experience in the minstrel and variety show settings may not have always come from respectable backgrounds, they always aspired such status and largely achieved it through their commercial successes. And in New Orleans, the Mardi Gras krewe members largely comprised businessmen and entrepreneurs who had flocked to New Orleans from Southern (and some Northern) parts of the country.<sup>106</sup> Considering the higher social status of these religious, economic, and political males, it is not surprising that the rhetoric of refinement was fashioned to disadvantage anyone who was not male or white, even if they came from a respectable background or aspired to one.

Women were consistently considered ill-equipped to maintain their physical autonomy as they ecstatically connected with others. The explosion of sentimental culture

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<sup>103</sup> Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*; Michael Broyles, “Bourgeois Appropriation of Music,” in *The American Bourgeoisie: Distinction and Identity in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. J. Rosenbaum and S. Beckert (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 235; Stowe, *How Sweet the Sound*.

<sup>104</sup> Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 239-245; Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*.

<sup>105</sup> Judith Tick, “Theodore Thomas and His Musical Manifest Destiny,” in *Music in the USA: A Documentary Companion*, ed. Judith Tick and Paul Beaudoin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 270.

<sup>106</sup> The founding members of the Mystik Krewe of Comus, for instance, included S.M. Todd, L.D. Addison, J.H. Pope, F. Shaw, Jr., Joseph Ellison, and William P. Ellison, most of whom worked as cotton merchants and brokers. Joseph Ellison was also a former member of the Cowbellion de Rakin Society in Mobile, Alabama and became a captain of the Confederate Army. Reid Mitchell, *All on a Mardi Gras Day* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 211-212; Rosary O’Neill, *New Orleans Carnival Krewes: The History, Spirit and Secrets of Mardi Gras* (Charleston: SC: The History Press, 2014).

in America during the nineteenth century reinforced this notion. In America, as in Britain and Continental Europe, women at the time were believed to be more vulnerable to the excesses of compassion, which, according to the historian Ute Frevert, were often thought to translate into indiscretions such as “frenzied feeling” and “abnormal agitation of the senses.”<sup>107</sup> This absence of reason was thought to risk causing even genteel white women to resort to unseemly physical displays of emotion. American songs of the early republic that reinforced this stereotype included “Oh! Why Should the Girl of My Soul Be in Tears.” A popular piece in the United States starting in 1809, the song portrayed the narrator’s female love interest as a lachrymose girl with a “languishing smile” who succumbed easily to a “meeting of rapture” or a “moment of blissful delight.”<sup>108</sup> The result was that she became prone to weeping “again and again.” Male thinkers of the day interpreted this kind of propensity to tears as illustrative of an innate predilection among women towards fragility and passivity. Such attributes could be contrasted to the emotional disposition of men, who were thought to possess a degree of rationality that encouraged more physical control of their bodies.<sup>109</sup>

Although ecstasy sometimes risked making women too sensitive and overly-expressive, sentimentalists did not always consider it a morally decrepit. Indeed, many sentimentalists believed that the proper kind of ecstasy could actually enhance a woman’s success at courtship, marriage, and family life—all crucial achievements for respectable young ladies. And music, as one of the most sentimental art forms, was certainly believed

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<sup>107</sup> Frevert, *Emotions in History*, 109-110.

<sup>108</sup> Thomas Moore, “Oh! Why Should the Girl of My Soul Be in Tears” (Philadelphia: Carr & Schetky, 1809).

<sup>109</sup> Frevert, *Emotions in History*.

to play a valuable role here.<sup>110</sup> This much was suggested by a short-story published in 1835 in *Godey's Lady's Book*, the preeminent women's monthly magazine during the antebellum period that frequently lauded the virtues of sentimental song.<sup>111</sup> Written by Mary E. Macmichael and titled "The School-Fellows," it described a scene of mutual musical entrancement between a woman, Mary, and her male admirer, Eugene. In applying the language of sentimental self-loss to a romantic liaison between a young couple, the story seemed to blur the lines between ecstasy and seduction.

[Mary] seated herself unhesitatingly upon the piano-stool, and after a slight accompaniment, sung with exquisite pathos, a plaintive air. There was a natural beauty in her voice—a profound melancholy in its intense sweetness that could dissolve the soul of the listener. Eugene was entranced; all that was dear to him in the memory of the past; the joys of home and childhood; the tenderness and truth of his first friendship...all that he had loved and lost upon earth—his gentle mother, seemed again to live and again to fade, as he listened to the strains.<sup>112</sup>

While Mary was able to musically "entrance" and "dissolve the soul" of Eugene, she too felt ecstatic feelings rise up in her: "The same spell was felt in the heart of the maiden, veiling the world, and lifting her spirit into vast and immeasurable regions of unexplored delight. One moment their eyes met and glanced upon each other the look of exalted, of eternal love.... Rapture swelled their breasts, and swelled their full hearts."<sup>113</sup> The "spell" that lifted her spirit into vast and immeasurable regions created a visceral feeling of "rapture." But if Mary's breast and heart swelled with love, her sentimental ecstasy elicited few other visible, physical manifestations. As the story described, Mary and Eugene's ecstatic musical moment was simultaneously "mute, blessed, and

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<sup>110</sup> Indeed, a proper musical education was thought to lead to the kind of emotional insights that turned a woman into a "gentlewoman;" and for this reason many men considered a cultivated music education to be a prerequisite for marriage. Tawa, *Sweet Songs for Gentle Americans*, 34-35.

<sup>111</sup> *Godey's* magazine regularly referenced music in articles and published short-stories published songs every week. Julia Eklund Koza, "Music and the Feminine Sphere: Images of Women as Musicians in 'Godey's Lady's Book' 1830-1877," *The Musical Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (Summer, 1991): 103.

<sup>112</sup> Miss Mary E. Macmichael, "The School-Fellows," *Godey's Lady's Book* 13, no. 2 (August 1836): 68-69.

<sup>113</sup> Macmichael, "The School-Fellows," 68-69.

inexpressible.”<sup>114</sup> It was also “a rapture felt but not seen; for, motionless, and in deep silence, as if every outward faculty were absorbed in reverence, they continued, each inwardly knowing, hearing, seeing nothing but the divine influence and attraction of the other.”<sup>115</sup> This balance of sentimental sensitivity and physical self-mastery helped prove Mary’s “purity and integrity of nature.” Mary, of course, was a fictional character that was intended to encapsulate *Godey’s* model of the “ideal woman.” Her attributes were perfect because the author wished them to be. Real women, of course, were recognized to be not nearly so successful at embodying this ideal.

The bellwethers of middle-class propriety regularly worried about mothers’, wives’, daughters’, and sisters’ susceptibility to lapse from emotional sensitivity into rapturous over-expressivity. This included the British Reverend Andrew Reed, who disparaged a woman at one of the camp meetings he attended in Virginia for the physicality with which she progressed through phases of self-loss, transitioning from singing to raising of hands, rolling of eyes, smiling, and muttering. Despite his relative openness to the camp meeting’s radical evangelicalism, he compared the woman’s actions disparagingly to that of a hedonistic drunkard, sneering that, “It appeared that she courted this sort of excitement as many do a dram, and was frequent at meetings of this character, for the sake of enjoying it.”<sup>116</sup>

This tradition of stern judgment towards ecstatic female corporeality also helps explain George Templeton Strong’s complaints that overemotionality was a “feminine shortcoming”—that is to say, an essential, if not always exclusive, attribute of the

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<sup>114</sup> Macmichael, “The School-Fellows,” 68-69.

<sup>115</sup> Macmichael, “The School-Fellows,” 68-69.

<sup>116</sup> Reed and Matheson, *A Narrative of the Visit to the American Churches*, 1: 277.



gender.<sup>117</sup> The outrageous expressions of female performers were doubly dangerous, according to the diarist, because they risked reinforcing audience unruliness. For example, after an 1851 performance of Bellini's opera *Norma* at Castle Garden in New York, Strong described how the overexcited antics of the female singer onstage incited similar behavior among the patrons: "the louder this lady screamed, the more uproariously they applauded, and her solitary windpipe was a fair match for the vociferous bravos of her 5,000 admirers."<sup>118</sup> In this account, the audience's commotion took on decidedly feminine connotations. Inez Fabbri, the singer who Strong described in 1861 as "ever amiable, complaisant and self-possessed," garnered a somewhat better critical reception, but Strong's description stands out as somewhat anomalous in comparison to other musical assessments of feminine emotionality. These included the advertisements for Tony Pastor's Opera House, which also commented on female audience members' tendencies towards emotional abandon. One entry in the *New York Clipper* suggested that the performance would produce "ladies in extasies [sic] and...gentlemen highly delighted."<sup>119</sup> While this gendered distinction did not comment directly on the physicality of female emotion, it gestured towards it by suggesting that the emotional responses of "ladies" exceeded those of their male counterparts.

Prescriptions for musical comportment continued into the 1870s. It was at this time that *The Ladies' Book of Etiquette and Manual Politeness* advised women to play instruments in a modest and demure manner. Respectable musical women, it declared, should "avoid movement at the piano. Swinging the body to and fro, moving the head,

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<sup>117</sup> George Templeton Strong, *The Diary of George Templeton Strong: Post-War Years, 1865-1875*, ed. Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1952), 4:116 (December 15, 1866).

<sup>118</sup> Strong, *The Diary of George Templeton Strong*, 2: 467 (September 1, 1851).

<sup>119</sup> "Tony Pastor's Opera House," *New York Clipper*, July 22, 1865: 120.

rolling the eyes, raising the hands too much, are all bad tricks, and should be carefully abstained from.”<sup>120</sup> Such suggestions appeared almost as direct responses to Andrew Reed’s complaints about female ecstasy some forty years earlier. In New Orleans, Mardi Gras events organized by krewes were also infused with elements of bodily control. According to the scholar Jessica Atkins, women participants in krewe balls were expected to display a “perfect...curtsey” and “drill-like” discipline during courtly marches, and the Queen of Carnival was thought to be most endearing when she sat in “immobile poses” on thrones.<sup>121</sup> All of these requirements enabled krewemen to “proclaim lofty status and propagandize power” and offer up their respective organization’s “adherence to hierarchy and stability.”<sup>122</sup>

Some women seemed to find no feasible way to satisfy the elusive expectations of physical discipline while also pursuing ecstatic experiences. It was this tactic that the members of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) took as they leveraged the issue of alcohol consumption to gain social and political influence for women as moral protectors of the home.<sup>123</sup> WCTU advocates were certainly believers in the transcendent power of music. Frances Willard, the first president of the American WCTU, declared that appropriately chosen spiritual songs had the power to “bear the soul upward in its reaching forth toward [God].”<sup>124</sup> Letitia Youmans, another leader, likewise

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<sup>120</sup> Florence Hartley, *The Ladies’ Book of Etiquette and Manual Politeness* (New York: Lee, Shepard, and Dillingham, 1875), 189.

<sup>121</sup> Atkins, “Setting the Stage,” 152-153. For a detailed history of ballroom dance as an expression of aristocratic power in Europe, see: Carol Lee, *Ballet in Western Culture: A History of its Origins and Evolution* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>122</sup> Atkins, “Setting the Stage,” 169.

<sup>123</sup> For a seminal work on the history of women’s domestic role as defenders of the home in an uncertain world beset by rapidly changing economic, demographic, ethnic, and class relations, see: Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>124</sup> Frances E. Willard, *Glimpses of Fifty Years* (New York: Woman’s Temperance Publication Association, 1889), 340.

spoke of music's capacity to carry or bind individuals to the divine realm. She believed that music "brings us nearer the heavenly world than any exercise in which we engage, and sometimes it seems to me that invisible intelligences hover around us, catch up the strains and echo them through the heavenly mansions."<sup>125</sup>

Despite these affirmations of tuneful transport, though, the WCTU rarely attempted to elicit transcendent experiences among their members or potential converts. Music held a prominent place in the organization's strategy of moral suasion, but the leadership of the movement ensured that it did not encourage unfettered trance. Consequently, WCTU members usually sang at the beginning and end of their meetings, or at selected times throughout, in order to facilitate group cohesion and dedication to the cause. They did not, however, sing to elicit a heavenly union or lose themselves in the collective. WCTU songs, of which there were thousands, also reinforced the ideal of controlled female physicality. Many WCTU lyrics co-opted militaristic language for these purposes, drawing on connotations of lockstep physical coordination which had previously been associated with male citizens during the Civil War. Some lines strongly evoked such features:

Tramp, tramp, tramp, hear the onward march  
Of the valiant, the good and the true,  
Who in the name of the Lord of Hosts  
Have a work they unite to do

Come to the help of the just and right  
Keep steady on till we win the fight,  
Lift up the banner and wave it high,  
For the victory now is nigh.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Letitia Youmans, *Campaign Echoes: The Autobiography of Letitia Youmans* (Toronto: W. Briggs, 1893), 87-88.

<sup>126</sup> Mary T. Lathrop and William J. Kirkpatrick, "Dead March of the Saloon," in *Temperance Music*, vinyl disc, performed by Neely Bruce and The American Music Group (Champaign, Ill: American Music Group Publishing Co., 1982), issue LP S260-02.

Another song declared “Then move along! March along! Make no delay!...Our hearts are warm, our hands are strong.”<sup>127</sup> These lyrics created images of female temperance crusaders organizing for victory with “strong” bodies and “steady” marches. Such military metaphors worked well for reconciling the WCTU’s pro-woman and anti-alcohol movement with mainstream ideals of respectable comportment. It was a way of demonstrating how sentimentality, as well as openness to ecstasy, did not necessarily lead to excessive physicality.

The WCTU’s methods, which included reinforcing their claims to emotional (and alcoholic) temperance, were not the only tactics women used to empower themselves during the nineteenth century. Female spiritualists pursued the same goal as WCTU advocates with the opposite tactic—by indulging in frequent and often physical experiences of self-loss, squarely in the face of mainstream denunciation. From its inception, the majority of supporters and practitioners of spiritualism consisted of females. The movement itself is usually said to have originated with the highly publicized ghost encounter reported by Maggie and Kate Fox, two sisters from Hydesville, New York who in 1848 demonstrated an apparent ability to communicate with the spirit world, not just through the subjective experiences of trance, but through objectively verifiable “rapping” sounds that were audible to anyone who partook in their séances. After the Fox sisters became a national sensation and embarked on successful careers as mediums, dozens of other women (along with more than a few men) followed suit and the spiritualist movement flourished.

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<sup>127</sup> Alfred Taylor, “Move Along! March Along!” in *Trumpet Notes for the Temperance Battle-Field*, ed. J.N. Stearns and H.P. Main (Hamilton, Ont.: Royal Templar Book and Pub. House, 1890), 92.

The peculiar nature of mediumship provided an unusual opportunity for empowering women and other marginalized social groups. During trance, spirits were said to possess the bodies of mediums, and therefore the individual normally associated with the body could not be held responsible for what she said. This abrogation of personal responsibility, as the historian Rhodri Hayward describes it, enabled women mediums (or at least their bodies) to dictate commands, flirt, or even make physical contact with men and other women under circumstances in which they would normally never be permitted to do so.<sup>128</sup> As the historian Ann Braude demonstrates, women mediums sometimes framed their sensitivity to trance not as a sign of weakness but as a sign of an innate spiritual proclivity that justified claims to moral authority and permitted them to become advocates for social justice programs such as female rights and enfranchisement, antislavery, and marriage reform.<sup>129</sup>

One of the most influential women within the spiritualist movement was without question Victoria Woodhull. A women's rights activist, labor reformer, free-love advocate, vegetarian, and the first female candidate to run for president, Woodhull was also a keen music lover. Her reputation as a trance medium was known and even adored by some of her activist colleagues, including the eminent suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton. On one occasion in 1871, Stanton wrote a droll request to her spiritualist collaborator, asking her to channel the spirits of strong, ethical, and musical women from ages past: "Ask the spirits of Rachel, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Malibran and Hemans to send down some fine woman's suffrage songs. I know they are all interested in our struggle and see as clearly as I do that we must sing as well as argue ourselves into the

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<sup>128</sup> Rhodri Hayward, *Resisting History: Religious Transcendence and the Invention of the Unconscious* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2007), 39.

<sup>129</sup> Braude, *Radical Spirits*.

political kingdom.”<sup>130</sup> Both music and mediumship, it would seem, were acceptable additions to the women’s rights movement. So too was a degree of corporeal passion. As Stanton further explained in her letter, “I would rather make a few blunders from a superabundance of life, than to have all the proprieties of a well embalmed mummy.”<sup>131</sup> Thus, it appears that among some quarters of the women’s rights campaign both music and effusive physicality bound together the passive self-loss of trance with the “self-ownership” of political activism.<sup>132</sup>

### White Interpretations of Black Ecstasy

Even more than respectable white women, musical African Americans of both genders were burdened with elusive cultural expectations of corporeal control. Both before and after the Civil War, bourgeois whites, including many women, typically interpreted black ecstasy—that is to say, the self-loss attributed to (but not always experienced by) African Americans—as egregiously physical. These proscriptions regularly linked enslaved bodies to noise, savagery, and excess. During a visit to New Orleans in 1819, the British architect Benjamin Latrobe happened to hear a “most extraordinary noise, which [he] supposed to proceed from some horse mill, the horses trampling on a wooden floor.” The source of the sound, as it turned out, was a great

<sup>130</sup> Quoted in: Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 310.

<sup>131</sup> Quoted in: Goldsmith, *Other Powers*, 310.

<sup>132</sup> In the final account, however, spiritualism’s use of physical trance for female empowerment was as fragile as it was fascinating. By the end of the nineteenth century, the movement’s legitimacy had been largely discredited as a result of sensational reporting and well-publicized scandals about some of its female leaders. Perhaps the most notorious of these involved the downfall of the Fox sisters, who, in 1888, confessed that their séances had been a hoax. In a public demonstration at the New York Academic of Music, Maggie Fox explained how the rappings that had made their encounters with spirits seem so legitimate were in fact the sounds of the sisters cracking the joints of their toes and fingers. Spiritualism, according to the Fox sisters, was “an absolute falsehood from beginning to end.” While this denunciation did not signal the deathblow to trance mediumship as a whole, it did spell the end of its efficacy as a tool for advancing the cause of women’s rights and social activism. Harry Houdini, *A Magician Among the Spirits* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011 [1924]), 1-17. Quote from: R.B. Davenport, *The Deathblow to Spiritualism* (New York: G.W. Dillingham Co., 1897), 76.

meeting of enslaved dancers and drummers in Congo Square. Their music Latrobe described as “abominably loud,” “uncouth,” and “detestable,” “brutally savage, and at the same time dull and stupid.”<sup>133</sup> On the plantations, the shouts, yells, and moans that African Americans inserted into their music sometimes disturbed slavemasters so much that these practices were categorically banned on the plantation grounds, and if heard could result in corporal punishment such as a burning or whipping.<sup>134</sup> If enslaved people decided to surreptitiously shirk their masters’ injunctions, they needed to do so in remote or isolated locations.<sup>135</sup> For the white writer George Washington Cable, the musical exploits of enslaved people in Congo Square were appalling less for their noise and more because they represented “a frightful triumph of body over mind, even in those early days when the slave was still a genuine pagan.” Accordingly, Cable believed the bamboula dance to be “gross” and “a forbidden fruit monopolized by those of reprobate will.” Only through a “moral education” could an enslaved person begin to understand the depth of his or her depravity.<sup>136</sup>

Even after African Americans converted to Protestantism, white Anglo-Americans often refused to accept their expressions of ecstasy as authentically Christian. Instead, they picked out the idiosyncratic physical elements of black worship and cast them as foreign, unintelligible, and excessive. Even white abolitionists were not immune to this proclivity. This included Harriet Ware, a Northerner who volunteered to teach free

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<sup>133</sup> Edward Carter II, John C. Van Horne, and Lee W. Formwalt, eds., *Journals of Benjamin Henry Latrobe, 1799-1820: From Philadelphia to New Orleans*, vol. 3 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 3: 203-204.

<sup>134</sup> See: Shane White and Graham White, *The Sounds of Slavery: Discovering African American History Through Songs, Sermons, and Speech* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), 109.

<sup>135</sup> See: White and White, *The Sounds of Slavery*, 108-109.

<sup>136</sup> Cable, writing during the 1880s, was referring to the activities of the enslaved during the first half of the nineteenth century. George Washington Cable, “The Dance in Place Congo,” 525.

people of color and help manage a Southern plantation in South Carolina at the end of the Civil War. Her account of a ring shout demonstrated a palpable condescension towards black ritual and black experience:

“I let the children sing some of their own songs in a genuine, shouting style, a sight too funny in the little things, but sad and disagreeable to me in the grown people, who make it a religious act. It is impossible to describe it—the children move round in a circle, backwards, or sideways, with their feet and arms keeping energetic time, and their whole bodies undergoing most extraordinary contortions, while they sing at the top of their voices the refrain to some song sung by an outsider. We laughed till we almost cried over the little bits of ones, but when the grown people wanted to “shout,” I would not let them..... [If] you could have looked in, you would have thought it Bedlam let loose!”<sup>137</sup>

For Ware, the “energetic” movements were silly and puerile, amusing enough when performed by children but deplorable when committed by adults. And the “extraordinary contortions” of bodies were hardly to be considered “a religious act.”

Ware was not alone in her opinions. When Elizabeth Kilham, a white school teacher, visited a black church in the Sea Islands in 1865, she was also repelled by what she believed to be a harsh, discordant mixture of shouts, screams, and stamps that were injected into hymn singing or interjected between different songs. For Kilham, it was a scene that left “an impression like the memory of some horrid nightmare—so wild [was] the torrent of excitement, that, sweeping away reason and sense, [it tossed] men and women upon its waves.”<sup>138</sup> The stamping, which gradually intensified during the singing of hymns eventually, proceeded until “the noise was deafening,” and the whooping and screaming that sometimes occurred resembled a “savage war-cry.”<sup>139</sup> In the minds of so many white elites, intense corporeality and thunderous cacophony were integral yet disgraceful characteristics of the slave soundscape.

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<sup>137</sup> Elizabeth Ware Pearson, ed. *Letters from Port Royal: Sung at the Time of the Civil War* (Boston: W.B. Clarke Co., 1906), 292-293.

<sup>138</sup> Elizabeth Kilham, “Sketches in Color: Fourth,” *Putnam’s Magazine of Literature, Science, Art, and National Interests* 5, no. 27 (March 1870): 305.

<sup>139</sup> Kilham, “Sketches in Color,” 306.



Of course, not all white observers thought African expressive culture was quite so repulsive. Louis Gottschalk, one of the best known American composers and pianists of the mid-nineteenth century, found it inspirational. While delirious from a bout of typhoid fever in France from 1844 to 1845, Gottschalk wrote his second opus, *Bamboula: Danse des nègres*, inspired by the ecstatic slave drumming and dances of his native New Orleans. It was a strongly rhythmic piece, with some parts reminiscent of a drum beat that, in comparison to other romantic music of the day, certainly lent the piece an exotic flair. It seems likely that, in the ring dances of Congo Square, Gottschalk sensed an emotional force that was compatible with what he believed to be the ecstatic impulse that undergirded all great music. It was an impulse that he also identified in the “phantasmagoria of [Carl Maria von Weber’s] *Der Freischütz*,” the “mystical inspirations” of Renaissance composer Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, or the Masses of Mozart,<sup>140</sup> which like all great art “makes us burst the bonds of material space, through the ideal, and transports us to the celestial spheres.”<sup>141</sup> That he would find a kindred element in both European and African musics might be at least partly explained by his own hybrid identity. Born to an Anglo-German-Jewish father and a French-Haitian creole mother, Gottschalk was able to identify both with the European romantic culture and the popular folk traditions of Louisiana and the Caribbean.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, 108.

<sup>141</sup> Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, 200.

<sup>142</sup> If Gottschalk’s work can be interpreted as reflecting an element of aloofness from the music of enslaved people in Congo Square, this sentiment can be found more in the context than the content of his music. Gottschalk’s entire professional career revolved around performing for European and bourgeois American audiences who possessed a penchant for romantic music and the hierarchy of taste that often accompanied that sensibility. In these settings, Gottschalk’s creative work was not intended to appreciate the folk traditions of Congo Square on their own merit, but to transmute them into “high art.” By no means equal to the scathing censures of Latrobe or Kilham, this was nevertheless a subtle form of othering and it served to reduce most African-American music to primitive art or proto-art that, however comparable, could never achieve equivalency with the achievements of great romantic composers.

Despite his best efforts, Gottschalk's more appreciative views were regularly overshadowed by more hostile indictments of ecstatic black physicality. This negative impulse is what had already helped motivate white planter societies to outlaw drumming by enslaved people. It is also what and compelled white performers and spectators, especially starting in the 1840s, to frame African-American culture as rife with threats of physical violence.<sup>143</sup> Claiming to be "authentic delineators of Negroes,"<sup>144</sup> blackface minstrels often depicted entranced African Americans as uncontrollably corporeal. This included Richard Pelham, a founding member of the Virginia Minstrels during the 1840s. One review of a musical performance by Pelham described how the minstrel seemed to become "animated by a savage energy; and the [handling of his instrument]...nearly wrung him off his seat. His white eyes rolled in a curious frenzy...and his hiccupping chuckles were unsurpassable."<sup>145</sup> This description resembled an observation from 1857, which mentioned how the enslaved would also "let themselves go" in "dervish-like fury...all night long, in ceaseless violent exertions of frenetic dancing."<sup>146</sup>

Such portrayals of violent and frenetic ecstasy fell in line with a larger trend within blackface minstrelsy that cast black culture as essentially and excessively physical. This included portrayals of African Americans with gaping mouths, long dangling lower lips, gigantic feet, and bulging eyeballs—all aberrant physical features that reinforced

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<sup>143</sup> During the earlier era of blackface minstrelsy in America, specifically around the 1820s and 1830s, blackface minstrelsy was often used by working-class participants in order to critique bourgeois elites. By the 1840s, though, the critique turned more racial in orientation—directed not towards white authority figures, but towards dark-skinned others. The reason for this shift can be attributed to a number of factors. These included the influx of working-class European immigrants during the 1840s who needed to compete for jobs with others who occupied the lower strata of society, and the corresponding threat of white supremacy in the North posed by the growing abolition movement. See: Toll, *Blackening Up*; David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991).

<sup>144</sup> Toll, *Blackening Up*, 42.

<sup>145</sup> The quotation is taken from an 1846 review of the Ethiopian Serenaders, printed in a pamphlet in England. Quoted in: Nathan, *Dan Emmet and the Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy*, 125.

<sup>146</sup> Quoted in: Nathan, *Dan Emmet and the Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy*, vii-viii.

assumptions about black ecstasy.<sup>147</sup> Over time, performances were repeated with such frequency that character tropes quickly emerged, many of which exhibited inclinations towards degenerate corporeality. These included the “dandy darky,” an egocentric free black and urban swell with a large sexual appetite who dressed in upper-class fashion.<sup>148</sup> The “dandy darky” caricature became only one representation of a growing tendency to depict black Americans as uglier, dumber, drunker, more violent, and more sexually depraved.<sup>149</sup>

Other carnivalesque outgrowths perpetuated comparable portrayals of black degeneracy. According to the historian Susan Kattwinkel, Tony Pastor’s variety theatre format continued to offer up a “derogatory attitude” towards African Americans, who were rarely present at Pastor’s venues.<sup>150</sup> And among the krewe festivities of New Orleans, black culture was all but absent. While their silence on the topic did not necessarily imply condemnation, it seems likely that many krewemen shared the opinion of Emil Deckert, a German traveler who toured New Orleans in the 1880s, and censured certain neighborhoods of the city where Mardi Gras celebrations were carried out by “colored people acting very unruly and wild.”<sup>151</sup> Indeed, the krewe’s veneration of self-proprietty may have been motivated by growing status anxiety among the white, male bourgeoisie. According to the historians Karen Trahan Leathem and Rosary Hartel O’Brien, the formation of the krewes occurred not only amid the region’s influx of

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<sup>147</sup> Blackface minstrelsy’s depictions of African Americans also included other unseemly attributes such as an uneducated dialect and a taste for “possum and coon.” Toll, *Blackening Up*, 67

<sup>148</sup> Other character tropes include the “Old Darky,” an elderly, practically asexual, enslaved Southern male who upheld a vision of a sentimental plantation life free from concerns; and the “Mammy,” a beloved motherly plantation woman and counterpart to “Old Darky.” Toll, *Blackening Up*, chapter 3.

<sup>149</sup> Ashby, *With Amusement for All*, 53.

<sup>150</sup> Susan Kattwinkel, *Tony Pastor Presents: Afterpieces from the Vaudeville Stage* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 1998), 6.

<sup>151</sup> Frederick Trautman, “New Orleans, the Mississippi, and the Delta through a German’s Eyes: The Travels of Emil Deckert, 1885-1886,” *Louisiana History* 25 (1994): 88.

working-class immigrants (from Ireland and continental Europe), but also, following the Civil War, the rise of newly enfranchised black men as well as women who took a more active role in civic life.<sup>152</sup> As white entrepreneurs, the krewemen had much to benefit from embracing self-discipline throughout their entire society. Not only did it reinforce labor efficiency in an expanding capitalist economy. It also helped consolidate their status as virtuous upholders of civic, corporeal, and musical order.

As denigrations of black musical ecstasy became entrenched in white American culture, some post-bellum African Americans endeavored to embody the principles of autonomous self-restraint. Daniel A. Payne, a prominent clergyman of mixed racial ancestry who served as a bishop of the (predominantly black) American Methodist Episcopal Church, certainly stands out as an exemplar of this approach. He deplored the extemporaneous enthusiasm that often accompanied the singing of spirituals, and he condemned rural congregants as “fist and heel worshipers” who engaged in a “voodoo dance” that would “render them as easy prey to Satan” and “drive out all the intelligence, refinement, and practical Christians” from the church.<sup>153</sup> Although they did not always take as harsh a stance as Payne, some educated and urban African-American musicians also set out to purge their expressive culture of the more vulgar displays of corporeal passion.

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<sup>152</sup> Karen Trahan Leathem, “A Carnival According to Their Own Desires: Gender and Mardi Gras in New Orleans, 1870-1941” (Doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1994); Rosary Hartel O’Brien, “New Orleans Carnival Organizations: Theatre of Prestige” (Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1973).

<sup>153</sup> Daniel A. Payne and Charles S. Smith, *Recollections of Seventy Years* (Nashville, TN: Publishing House of the A.M.E. Sunday School Union, 1888), 254-256.

This was the approach taken by the Fisk Jubilee Singers.<sup>154</sup> Founded in 1871 at Fisk University in Tennessee, this all-black *a cappella* choral ensemble toured extensively (the first of its kind to do so) and gained widespread popularity both at home and abroad.<sup>155</sup> Some of their music was inspired by the slave spirituals, camp meeting hymns, and secular songs that had become popular among African Americans before that point. In other ways, however, the Singers' music departed significantly from their enslaved roots.

In an attempt to appeal to Euro-American respectable tastes, George White, the white musical director of the choir, was interested in "smoothing down" the singers' voices through careful, controlled practice. He and Theodore Seward, who arranged the groups' songs, revealed their adherence to European performance standards in their efforts to eradicate the members' "grotesque bodily motions or the drawling intonations that often characterize the great congregations of the colored people in their excited religious meetings."<sup>156</sup> The more extemporaneous singing of black spirituals was polished up in order to conform to standardized time signatures and tempos, and their choral pieces were arranged to fit with the customs of SATB (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) harmonies.<sup>157</sup> When processed in this way, what might have been considered rough and erratic spirituals were transformed into elegant "jubilee songs."<sup>158</sup> The group's

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<sup>154</sup> While they were among the most well-known African-American groups who sought middle-class respectability through their music, the Jubilee Singers were far from alone in this endeavor. See: John Anthony Aveni, "Such Music as Befits the New Order of Things: African American Professional Musicians and the Cultural Identity of a Race, 1880-1920" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Rutgers University, 2004).

<sup>155</sup> For an assessment of how the troupe achieved this global fame and its racial implications, see: James W. Cook, "Finding Otira: On the Geopolitics of Black Celebrity," *Raritan* 34, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 84-111.

<sup>156</sup> Theodore P. Seward, *Jubilee Songs: As Sung by the Jubilee Singers* (New York: Bigelow & Main, 1872), 29.

<sup>157</sup> Bob Darden, *People Get Ready!: A New History of Black Gospel Music* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 117.

<sup>158</sup> According to the music historian Bob Darden, the Fisk "jubilee songs" were considered more musically "correct" and polished than their other pieces. Darden, *People Get Ready*, 152.

repertoire also expanded in cultivated directions, with the incorporation of a number of religious and profane tunes—including temperance songs, operatic arias, and parlor tunes. Such refinement was not lost on Seward, who complimented the group members for their ability to “[adopt] improvements from the cultivated music that they have heard.”<sup>159</sup>

White audiences throughout the English-speaking Atlantic acknowledged and appreciated the Jubilee Singers’ ability to uplift the more savage tradition of African-American music to the standards of the educated elite. For instance, in Trinidad the *Port-of-Spain Gazette* commented on the pleasing and exhilarating effect one felt upon witnessing the “quaint, vigorous, original African feeling controlled, harmonized and refined under the powerful influence of civilized musical science.”<sup>160</sup> Of particular interest, according to the author of the article, was the “civilized edition of the more demonstrative and coarse gesticulation of old negro camp-meetings, in their ecstatic fervor.”<sup>161</sup> Under the careful control of the female singers, these bodily movements became “a lively and graceful combination of what might otherwise be a jerk or a sway, and the effect is one of quite taking surprise.” Here at last, the ecstatic black body seemed to submit to the rational will. Or did it?

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<sup>159</sup> Seward, *Jubilee Songs*, 3.

<sup>160</sup> *Port-of-Spain Gazette*, December 5, 1888, quoted in: Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff, *Out of Sight: The Rise of African American Popular Music, 1889-1895* (Jackson, MI: University of Mississippi, 2002), 30.

<sup>161</sup> *Port-of-Spain Gazette*, December 5, 1888, quoted in: Abbott and Seroff, *Out of Sight*, 30.



Illustration 9

“Fisk Jubilee Singers, ca. 1870s.” Prints & Photographs Department, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center (MSRC), Howard University.

Despite the Fisk Jubilee Singers’ best efforts, one major caveat usually rendered their attainment of respectability perpetually out of reach. While white audiences appreciated the group’s displays of self-discipline, they were also subtly attracted to the more expressive physicality of black music. Therefore, regardless of the troupe’s efforts, white audiences understood the Singers’ songs, and especially their adapted spirituals, to be born of exotic feelings and experiences that would always evade white standards of refinement. In his 1880 *Story of the Jubilee Singers; with Their Songs*, the author J.B.T. Marsh stated that the group’s songs “come from no musical cultivation whatever, but are the simple, ecstatic utterances of wholly untutored minds.”<sup>162</sup> Put another way, any airs of civility one might have ascertained in the group were simply genteel “overtone” to the

<sup>162</sup> J.B.T. Marsh, *The Story of the Jubilee Singers; With their Songs*, Revised edition (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1880), 121.

passionate, physical strains of black trance that remained fundamental to the Singers' songs.<sup>163</sup>

That the Fisk Jubilee Singers may have been more interested in emulating white genteel sensibilities than flouting them was irrelevant (or worse, contradictory) to the audience's desired interpretation of their performances. J.B.T Marsh's comments demonstrated that white audiences likely wanted to see and hear only a modicum of cultivation in the Singers—just enough to demonstrate, or at least symbolize, their elevation from slavery. This was, therefore, a contingent celebration of the group's respectability that specifically refrained from challenging what was felt to be the choir's essential proclivities towards undisciplined emotion. It ultimately ensured that African-American music performers (and their music) continued to be embrangled in the process of racial subordination.

White audiences' fixation on the physicality of the Jubilee Singers' songs and (perceived) ecstasies constituted subtle efforts to essentialize black emotion and maintain racial hierarchies in an era of emancipation.<sup>164</sup> At the same time, by insisting that displays of black musical experience were couched in a veneer of respectable restraint, white onlookers seemed to encourage African Americans' progress out of the suffering of slavery, but only a short distance. Acknowledging this progression could have served to

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<sup>163</sup> White observers became disappointed when they only registered a cultivated sensibility in the Jubilee Singers. For instance, an unknown reporter who attended a Jubilee Singers show in 1881 disappointedly wrote that "They have lost the wild rhythms, the barbaric melody, the passion.... [T]hey smack of the North." See: "The Fisk Jubilee Singers," *Peoria Journal*, May 29, 1881, quoted in: Doug Seroff, *Gospel Arts Day Nashville: A Special Commemoration: Fisk Memorial Chapel*, June 18, 1989, 3.

<sup>164</sup> It is possible to read white attitudes towards the Fisk Jubilee Singers as based on what Renato Rosaldo calls "imperialist nostalgia"—a longing for contact with those whose own cultures were transformed or destroyed by imperialist, colonial, and racist structures of domination. A crucial feature of imperial nostalgia is its portrayal as an innocent yearning for connection without the desire for domination—an act that manages to obscure a colonizing culture's complicity in the structures of power that led to domination in the first place. Renato Rosaldo, "Imperialist Nostalgia," *Representations* 26 (Spring, 1989): 107-122. An argument for the presence of imperialist nostalgia can also be found in: Stowe, *How Sweet the Sound*, 97.



absolve white audiences of collusion in the structures of dominance that had originally been inflicted on enslaved blacks. This assessment of both the essential alterity of black ecstasy and the Singers' (limited) potential for cultivation provided a perfect opportunity for white audiences to acknowledge commonality but not equality with African Americans. In short, it permitted white audiences a degree of identification with African Americans while resolutely creating distance between the races as well.<sup>165</sup>

Some audiences seemed to cleave more closely to either the impulse of detachment or that of intimate identification. Those who saw the troupe perform at a Presbyterian church in Brooklyn in 1871 seemed to derive most of their pleasure from recognizing the exotic nature of the Jubilee songs. Theodore Cuyler, an attendee of the show, wrote to the *New York Tribune* after the performance, proclaiming: "I never saw a cultivated Brooklyn assemblage so moved and melted under the magnetism of music before. The wild melodies of these emancipated slaves touched the fount of tears, and gray-haired men wept like little children."<sup>166</sup> Other times, it was not so much the wild corporeality of the performance as the restrained refinement of the singers that moved the audience. After a performance in Boston, for instance, one critic for *The Boston Journal* commented on the troupe's "natural grace and simplicity of expression" and wrote warmly of the "few selections of more artistic composition" that demonstrated "the

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<sup>165</sup> Eric Lott and Dale Cockrell explore a similar mixture of white fascination and detachment in blackface minstrelsy. Lott perhaps overstates the degree of white identification with African-American culture, calling the process a form of "ecstatic surrender." Cockrell provides a more balanced assessment. He acknowledges that whites distanced themselves from and derided African Americans, by creating blackface and minstrel products that exhibited "virulent racism" and an inclination towards white supremacy. However, he also suggests that American blackface, at least in its earliest incarnations (during the decades before the 1840s), also became an "especially powerful form of acknowledging, or even engaging, Otherness." See: Lott, *Love and Theft*, 147; Dale Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder*, 60, 53.

<sup>166</sup> Marsh, *The Story of the Jubilee Singers*.

students have been educated to an appreciation of the higher grades of vocalization.”<sup>167</sup> It was these songs, the writer suggested, that ushered forth “an enthusiasm seldom witnessed at a concert in this city. From the initial to the finale of the programme the singers were applauded and encored, and now and then the enthusiasm broke forth in the interludes.”<sup>168</sup> Audiences seemed almost incapable of resisting the urge to lapse into great outpourings of sentiment when they heard the Jubilee Singers’ plaintive melodies. As these last examples indicate, their “magnetism” and “enthusiasm” may have verged on feelings of ecstasy.

Ironically, white yearnings for contact with authentically black forms of cultural expression required black performers to strive for corporeal control but it could sometimes stir white audiences so deeply that they themselves broke with the conventions of cultivated physical restraint. One acute example came from Britain, when the troupe’s rendering of “John Brown’s Body,” the popular Civil War song, “took a decorous, aristocratic English audience by surprise and threw them into a volcanic eruption of applause before they knew what they were about.”<sup>169</sup> At yet another performance, as the song’s refrain rang out “the dense audience could suppress their feelings no longer; they rose from their seats, and their applause was deafening, hats and handkerchiefs, were waved, and the excitement continued until ‘God save the Queen’ was sung.”<sup>170</sup> For British audiences, and perhaps too for Americans, witnessing the Jubilee Singers perform provided opportunities to explore the outer limits of their own

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<sup>167</sup> Quoted in: James M. Trotter, *Music and Some Highly Musical People* (Boston: Lee and Shepard Publishers, 1881), 263-264.

<sup>168</sup> Quoted in: Trotter, *Music and Some Highly Musical People*, 263-264.

<sup>169</sup> Mark Twain, *Mark Twain’s Letters, 1872-1873: Volume 5* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 317.

<sup>170</sup> Gustavus Pike, *The Singing Campaign for Ten Thousand Pounds; or, the Jubilee Singers in Great Britain* (New York: American Missionary Society, 1875), 53-54.

claims to bodily control. Indeed, it presented perhaps one of the rare occasions upon which one was justified in exceeding the normative boundaries of staid self-discipline. The absolution of guilt and sin that white spectators might have felt in compassionately identifying with dark Others could have easily evoked a strong emotional release, even approximating something like a transcendent experience.

The nostalgia experienced by white audiences may be distinguished from the kind of sentiments African-American spectators felt upon witnessing the performances of the Jubilee Singers. They did not typically consider the troupe's "wild" songs to represent their own innate racial savagery. If savagery could be found in the music of their collective past, it was not inbred, but rather an imposed and brutal consequence of bondage. This was certainly the opinion of the black writer and critic James Trotter, who agreed that "notwithstanding their [the Singers'] great beauty of melody, and occasional words of elevated religious character," the choir's words and music often harkened one back to "a former life of enforced degradation."<sup>171</sup> Like their white counterparts, Trotter claimed, black audience members also "often listened spell-bound" to the Jubilee performances.<sup>172</sup> However, where they differed was in abandoning any assumptions that their physical expressivity was an inexorable symbol of their social inferiority. If they became audibly excited at Jubilee shows, it was "the inspiring voice of hope [that] was heard bidding them to turn from a view of the dark and receding past to that of a rapidly-dawning day, whose coming should bring for these singers, and all others of their race, increase of opportunities, and therefore increase of culture."<sup>173</sup> In contradistinction to the nostalgia of white audiences, then, some black spectators optimistically saw the

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<sup>171</sup> Trotter, *Music and Some Highly Musical People*, 268.

<sup>172</sup> Trotter, *Music and Some Highly Musical People*, 268.

<sup>173</sup> Trotter, *Music and Some Highly Musical People*, 268.

physicality of the Jubilee Singers and their audiences as engendering the ideals of self-making, liberation, and racial uplift.<sup>174</sup>

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Although members of religious, romantic, and carnivalesque traditions diverged in their specific interpretation of the objects of musical ecstasy, the elite members of these all these groups tried to link moral, musical self-loss to the principles of corporeal control and related features such as quietude, privacy, and infrequency. By contrast, elites also reined in physically animated, frequent, communal, and often loud expressions of musical experience by deeming them morally corrupt and associating them with subordinate identities, namely women and racial minorities. In constructing this hierarchy, the advocates of cultivation invited musical ecstasy within the conversation of culture even as they sought to marginalize its more physical forms. The result was a newfound emphasis on *impression*—which required an immaterial, psychic seat of awareness that was capable of acknowledging or ecstatically connecting with sacred objects without relying too heavily on *expression*—which inevitably involved the physical movement of the body. The former tilted more towards private (although not always solitary) experience, while the latter was inevitably public, at least to the extent that it was always done potentially in open view of other people. Under the guidance of influential clerics, moralists, legislators, entrepreneurs, and performers, the perils of overexpression were so strongly affixed to women and African Americans that even

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<sup>174</sup> The historian Gabriel Milner further explores how the Fisk Singers' spirituals took on bifurcated meanings. White bourgeois Northerners framed them as symbols of "primitive Christianity" or the biblical trope of redemption through suffering, while African Americans interpreted them as crucial to self-making, communal solidarity, and liberation. See: Gabriel Milner, "The Tenor of Belonging: The Fisk Jubilee Singers and the Popular Cultures of Postbellum Citizenship," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 15, no. 3 (June 2016): 1-19. Also see: Ronald Radano, "Denoting Difference: The Writing of the Slave Spirituals," *Critical Inquiry* 22, no. 3 (Spring 1996): 506-544.

advocates of corporeal control, such as the members of the WCTU or the Fisk Jubilee Singers, were prevented from being full beneficiaries of refinement.

That rough music, minstrelsy, and Mardi Gras also became stratified in this manner as well demonstrated that the “liberatory” impulse that motivated the carnivalesque traditions was always used selectively, usually to encourage sonic and psychic disorder while permitting only partial and temporary challenges to class, gender, and race hierarchies (even despite the carnivalesque emphasis on role reversals). In doing so, it supports the position of Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, who suggest that the carnivalesque sensibility resulted from the continuously evolving interplay of liberatory and licensed impulses.<sup>175</sup> If the minstrel theatre occasionally helped blur the boundaries between black and white, for instance, it rarely succeeded in dismantling the boundary between races. By continuing to target those already at the bottom of the social scale, minstrelsy’s threat to the social hierarchy became substantially attenuated.

This emphasis on corporeal cultivation perhaps helps explain why private reading achieved such popularity during the nineteenth century. The act of reading literature, of course, provided ample opportunities for self-loss. As the popular English author Robert Louis Stevenson maintained, “anything fit to be called...reading...should be absorbing and voluptuous; we should gloat over a book, be rapt clean out of ourselves.”<sup>176</sup> But the reading of popular literature also provided limited opportunities for unrestrained physical expression in public arenas—at least in comparison to musical performance. As an expressive form, literature was easily confined within a small book for private use within the home. The act of reading was also a relatively tranquil practice. To acknowledge this,

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<sup>175</sup> Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*.

<sup>176</sup> “A Gossip on Romance,” in: Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson: Memories and Portraits* 13 (New York: Scriber’s, 1896), 327-343.

of course, is not to suggest that the practice was entirely silent, still, or solitary. Not only did readers move their lips or mumble under their breath; they also frequently read clearly and loudly for the enjoyment of other listeners in their vicinity.<sup>177</sup> Moreover, reading could be employed to upset the gender hierarchies and the social status quo.<sup>178</sup> In short, historical reading practices—especially in the nineteenth century—could be both public and radical in their consequences.

However, an argument might still be made that entranced readers were more restrained in their gestures and vocalizations than the kinds of ecstasies associated with participatory, public musical performances—such as those held in Congo Square or revivalist camp meetings. Musical ecstasy did not require a single performer, it did not follow a text-based script, nor did it need to occur within close proximity to a written page. Instead, it could involve multiple performers who could move relatively freely and extemporaneously within a loose set of cultural practices, which often involved grandiose physical gestures, erratic actions, and, of course, dancing. With this kind of potential for physical expression, the production and consumption of written material may have been considered a more palatable alternative for those in search of cultivated self-loss. As such, these practices would have epitomized much of the same ethos prescribed by the likes of Charles Finney, George Templeton Strong, and the Mardi Gras krewes.

Lawrence Levine, Paul DiMaggio, and others have used the word “sacralization” to describe the practice of elevating the moral value of certain products, spaces, and behaviors—including a controlled and subdued expressive culture—within American

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<sup>177</sup> According to Lisa Spiro, nineteenth-century reading may have been more of a communal activity than contemporaries might assume. See: Spiro, “Reading with a Tender Rapture,” 57-93.

<sup>178</sup> Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*, Expanded Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

secular culture.<sup>179</sup> The term is useful in this context, but it can also be somewhat misleading. On one hand, it accurately suggests that—under the guidance of people like Lowell Mason or George Templeton Strong—the principles of genteel physical restraint became venerated in American society to such a degree that they surpassed individual interests, similar to the way that the transcendent spirits of orthodox religion and mystical romanticism did. On the other hand, however, the term “sacralization” also risks conflating a belief in the ideals of social etiquette with the faith in supernatural and natural spirits.

If some influential clerics and romantic intellectuals contended that cultivated comportment was inextricably linked to spiritual uplift, there were also many Americans who believed that it did not bring one closer to God or any other spiritual object. This may have been true of the bourgeois elites, such as Tony Pastor or the members of Mardi Gras krewes, who venerated principles of refinement in the carnivalesque traditions without directly appealing to conventional notions of religiosity, spirituality, and mysticism. And it certainly was true of those communities of disenfranchised Americans, such as the spiritualists, and African-American admirers of the Jubilee Singers, who overtly rejected the cultivated ethos as they pursued transcendent experiences. To varying degrees, these Americans chose to embrace rather than recoil from frequent, corporeal, communal, and noisy ecstatic practices. In doing so, they felt not so much burdened as blessed with attributes that elites would have described as irreverent and vulgar.

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<sup>179</sup> Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*; Ralph P. Locke, “Music Lovers, Patrons, and the ‘Sacralization’ of Culture in America,” *19<sup>th</sup>-Century Music* 17, no. 2 (Autumn 1993): 149-173; Paul J. DiMaggio, “Cultural Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth-Century Boston: The Creation of an Organizational Base for High Culture in America,” *Media, Culture and Society*, 4 (1982):33-50, 303-322; Paul DiMaggio, “Cultural Boundaries and Structural Change: The Extension of the High Culture Model to Theater, Opera, and the Dance, 1900-1940” in *Cultural Boundaries and Structural Change: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality*, ed. Michèle Lamont and Marcel Fournier (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992): 21-57.

Perhaps a case can be made that, even within conventionally spiritual contexts, the promotion of a cultivated ethos actually contributed to the secularization of self-transcendent experience in America. Indeed, by severely restricting how Americans could physically express their ecstatic experiences, even religious leaders like Charles Finney may have reinforced a cultural pivot towards more immanent, social concerns and away from more conventionally transcendent ones. Of course, this pivot would have never been intended to usurp supernatural, mystical, or spiritual beliefs. Yet, perhaps it worked to counterweight such beliefs with considerations of class, gender, and race, as well as other social issues and values. This turn could have easily refocused ecstatic phenomena within a more immanent frame. For example, when romantics like George Templeton Strong descried the “excessive, ill-bred, obstreperous gabblings” of concert audiences,<sup>180</sup> they may have been more interested in the social nature of experience as much as they were in the experience of natural spirit.

If it is difficult to confirm whether the movement towards cultivation actually helped secularize musical trance during the nineteenth century, other influences were altogether more obvious. Perhaps the strongest secularizing impulse arose out of the theoretical and experimental conclusions of psychologists and their counterparts in the other social scientists. Starting around the 1880s, their efforts would provide the first widespread and persuasive challenge to foundational beliefs in, and experiences of, self-transcendence.

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<sup>180</sup> Strong, *The Diary of George Templeton Strong*, 2: 371 (November 21, 1857).



**Chapter 5**  
**Internalization:**  
Psychology and Scientific Reductionism

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In his 1898 book, *The Psychology of Suggestion*, Boris Sidis recounted the story of a theatre actress who underwent a religious conversion during a revival some decades before. Walking through town one day, the actress found herself strangely attracted by the songs of a revival meeting. Opening a door, she heard the congregation sing the words “Depth of mercy! can there be, / Mercy still reserved for me?”<sup>1</sup> She could not shake the influence of the hymn, which she felt had surrounded her with its full force. A short time later, the actress walked on stage prepared to perform a song for the opening act of a play. The curtain rose and the orchestra began the accompaniment for her song. Instead of singing, the actress stood “as if lost in thought (she seemed to have fallen into a trance), and as one forgetting all around her and her own situation.”<sup>2</sup> So the orchestra started up the music from the beginning, but as her cue to sing came up again, she still did not move her lips. After a third attempt, the actress clasped her hands and, with tearful eyes, she finally started up singing—but not the song from the play. Instead, she began singing the words of the hymn from the revival meeting: “Depth of mercy! can there be, / Mercy still reserved for me?”

The story, published first by the Baptist pastor Henry Clay Fish of Newark, New Jersey, had originally been interpreted as a powerful example of religious conversion and

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<sup>1</sup> Boris Sidis, *The Psychology of Suggestion: A Research into the Subconscious Nature of Man and Society* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1898), 306.

<sup>2</sup> Sidis, *The Psychology of Suggestion*, 307.

the piety of Christians who “sang with the Spirit” of their God.<sup>3</sup> However, in Sidis’s book, the actress’s musical performance was hardly an example of divine spirit possession. Rather, it was an excellent illustration of the power of “suggestion.” By using the term “suggestion,” Sidis promoted a theory of trance that downplayed the role played by any external “spiritual” entities and located the source of self-loss in the personal mind, specifically its ability to lapse into an automatic condition that rendered the rational will relatively passive. Ecstasy, in this view, originated *inside* the individual. Any external influences on such experiences were not directly imposed by a spirit. At most, they were encouraged by a more inchoate set of cues or “suggestions” provided by the people or things that existed in an individual’s environment.

This theory was a purely secular and scientific one based on some of the most recent psychological findings emanating from Europe. That Sidis would gravitate away from a spiritual explanation for “transcendent” experience is perhaps understandable. A Jewish émigré from Kiev, he had not been brought up in the evangelical tradition so prevalent among native-born Christian Americans during the nineteenth century. Instead, from a young age he gained a reputation as a radical thinker who opposed his family’s religious tendencies almost as much as he condemned the political authority of the Romanov dynasty. After fleeing the Russian empire for the United States, Sidis attended Harvard University and studied with the preeminent psychologist William James, under whose guidance he became familiar with the most up-to-date scientific theories of the mind.

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<sup>3</sup> Henry Clay Fish, *The Handbook of Revivals: For the Use of Winners of Souls* (Boston: James H. Earle, 1874), 313.

With his background and education, Sidis was well-positioned to think of subjective experience—or “consciousness,” as it was increasingly called—in thoroughly immanent terms. Instead of an experience of something that transcended the self, his idea of ecstasy was simply of an experience that transitioned between two different *types* of self. Indeed, the psychologist maintained that the individual was not so indivisible after all. Rather, it contained both a “waking self” and a secondary “subwaking self” that lurked in the shadows of an individual’s psyche. The latter could be normally controlled with an effective mental “cleft” that ensured the primacy of the rational waking consciousness, but if the subwaking self became too “disaggregated” from the waking form, it could take over control of the individual and lead to abnormal experiences and actions. If Sidis believed in transcendent experiences, therefore, these were highly mitigated forms that involved the transcendence of the normal, rational waking self (into one dominated by the irrational subwaking self). Sidis was far from alone in his ideas. Indeed, he was only one contributor to a long line of American and European professionals who confined consciousness within the bounds of the individual. He was also part of an even larger scientific trend in America that emptied meaning and value from conventional objects of transcendent experience.

As this chapter demonstrates, Sidis represented a new mode of (musical) ecstasy that emerged in the nineteenth century and grew more acute starting in the 1880s. This mode defined altered consciousness not only as a thoroughly secular phenomenon that was detached from sacred objects of experience, but also as a thoroughly immanent phenomenon enclosed entirely within the mind and body of the individual.<sup>4</sup> This mode

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<sup>4</sup> The primary constitution of the individual, whether physical or mental (or otherwise), was a topic of debate during this period, and, of course, it had been for centuries. However, in public discourse and

was not the result of a soft secularizing impulse, as sentimentalism, romanticism, and spiritualism had been earlier in the nineteenth century when these movements naturalized supernatural principles but still retained much of their sacred status. Instead, it was a more reductive form of secularization that strongly devalued the great bulwarks of religion and spirit and abrogated any sense of transcendence from the objects of experience.<sup>5</sup> This stringent form of secularization was exemplified and exacerbated by a number of developments, including perhaps most effectively, the gradual rise of scientific reductionism as a central feature of professional psychology, which reframed self-loss as an immanent experience and denied the authenticity of transcendence in its conventional sense. Under the guidance of a cadre of social scientists, intellectuals, and physicians from both America and Europe, this reductive mode of ecstasy would come to challenge the cultural authority of religious and romantic cultures directly by the end of the nineteenth century.

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common usage, many tacitly agreed that, even if one entity constituted the epicenter of selfhood, all of these entities blended into each other in the making of a bounded and inviolable self. Even Descartes' dualism, which starkly distinguished the mind from the body also recognized that the two were so closely intertwined as to form a union—the body being ideally contained within the mind-dominated self even as it was formally an extension of it. As this chapter demonstrates, the debate between mind-based and body-based theories of individuality continued into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but so too did implicit assumptions that both aspects were tightly entangled and could be somehow nested together within the individual. See: John Barresi and Raymond Martin, "History as Prologue: Western Theories of the Self," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Self*, ed. Shaun Gallagher (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011); Quassim Cassam, "The Embodied Self," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Self*, ed. Shaun Gallagher (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> The proponents of this reductive theory did not, at this time, completely deny the existence of a numinous spirit. However, they nevertheless agreed (following a Deistic line of reasoning) that any spiritual force had little or no discernible effect on human life and experience. According to Edward S. Reed, "psychology succeeded in becoming a science in large part because of its defense of a theological conception of human nature typically associated with liberal Protestant theology." If the defense was nominal, it was not atheistic—an important distinction which lent more credibility to the social scientists. Edward S. Reed, *From Soul to Mind: The Emergence of Psychology from Erasmus Darwin to William James* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 7.

## The Rise of Neurology and Psychology

Before the late-nineteenth century, some scientific theorists recognized that musical emotions and transcendent experiences were grounded in the individual body, but they also refrained to take a reductionist stance on the topic. For instance, the seventeenth-century English scholar Robert Burton suggested that musical emotions occurred through the workings of “animal spirits”—natural impulses produced within the blood that transmitted stimuli between the organs, brain, and heart.<sup>6</sup> Contained as they were within the body, animal spirits were therefore as biological as the nervous system. However, Burton also adapted his theory to a larger Christian cosmology by suggesting that these immanent impulses complemented and interacted with the self-transcendent dimension through one’s “sensible soul.” In this manner, the Devil could manipulate the animal spirits to interfere with the workings of the body and mind, for instance, by making a person not only “subject to diabolical temptations” but also to “demoniacal [sic]...obsession or possession of devils, which *Platerus* & others would have to be preternatural.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, the internal impulses of the human body were hardly barricaded from the influence of supernatural intervention.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For Robert Burton, music affected the ears instantly and the other primary faculties of the body as well: “the very arteries, the vital & animal spirits; it erects the mind, and makes it nimble.” In this manner, it became a superlative method of remedying both the body and mind of those who suffered from melancholy. Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 2: 133.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Arthur Richard Shilleto, Arthur Henry Bullen, vol. 1 (London: George Bell and Sons, 1896), 1: 229, 164.

<sup>8</sup> In the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, some romantics took a similar position with regard to the internal workings of the individual. They contended that experiences confined entirely within the individual mind and facilitated by the imagination could—in some cases—engage with a transcendent reality (although the nature of this reality differed somewhat from that purported by orthodox religionists). As the literary scholar Kiene Brillenberg Wurth notes, this viewpoint was summarized in the third part of Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, which contended that sublime transcendence could be achieved by disengaging from sensory experience and turning inward. Such a reorientation, however, was not meant to discount the sublime experiences that were possible when engaging one’s senses and exploring the will of Nature. Instead, it was intended to complement it. This dual focus provides a useful representation of what the literary scholar Colin Jager calls romanticism’s “competing tendencies.” As the

From an early era, too, some scientific-minded theorists averred that certain experiences resembling self-transcendence were instead simply illusions created by the individual mind and its capacity for imagination. Burton acknowledged as much when he claimed that the phenomenon of self-loss could result from the delusional power of “*phantasy, or imagination.*”<sup>9</sup> In the eighteenth century, the notion of “enthusiasm” came to represent a similar kind of misguided musing. Many thinkers framed this form of false ecstasy as the philosopher David Hume eventually did—as the process that occurs when the subject’s “imagination swells with great but confused conceptions” that makes him into a “fanatic madman” blindly prone “to the supposed illapses [absorption] of the spirit.” Another author similarly maintained that, if enthusiasm entailed experiences of raptures and transports, these were actually the product of a profound confusion between “the *imaginations of men*” and “the *inspiration of God.*”<sup>10</sup> The eminent educator, philosopher, and clergyman Samuel Johnson used the phrase “invisible riot of the mind” to denote the same kind of phenomenon, which arose, he suggested, when one willingly “abandons himself to his own fancy.”<sup>11</sup> All of these references to “imagination” and “fancy” suggested the presence of a human “mind” (rather than soul) that was separated

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scholar Roger Lundin demonstrates, it was a perspective that continued to grow in transcendentalism and other forms of American romanticism. See: Kiene Brillenburg Wurth, *Musically Sublime: Indeterminacy, Infinity, Irresolvability* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 3-4; Jager, “After the Secular: The Subject of Romanticism,” 301; Roger Lundin, *From Nature to Experience: The American Search for Cultural Authority* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 1: 229, 159.

<sup>10</sup> M[artin] M[adan], *A Full and Compleat Answer to the Capital Errors* (1763), quoted in: Tucker, *Enthusiasm*, 27. About a century earlier, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke had defined the word in similar terms. Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel Johnson, “No. 89 Tuesday, January 22, 1751,” in *The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL.D., in Nine Volumes, Volume the Second The Rambler, Volume I* (Oxford: Talboys and Wheeler, 1825), 418. Writing in 1853, the Finneyite music director Thomas Hastings proclaimed that the “trivial character” of parlor music—the sheet music marketed to middle-class amateur musicians and bourgeois tastes—made its effect on listeners tantamount to an “invisible riot of the mind.” Hasting, *Dissertation on Musical Taste*, 169.

off from any transcendent reality.<sup>12</sup> This possibility not only concerned orthodox Christians but also early romantics, who began to question whether their elevated sublime experiences were actually nothing more than self-indulgent enthusiasm.<sup>13</sup>

Scientific thinkers who were fully committed to enlightenment principles of rationalization took easily to this notion of the self-contained “mind” and used it to tacitly move away from religious theories of self-loss. Benjamin Franklin’s early inquiries into the phenomenon of animal magnetism helped initiate this shift. Although his 1784 French Royal commission on mesmerism revealed that music could help induce magnetic trance, he also concluded that there was no credible evidence to suggest the existence of magnetic fluid, and that any individual’s sensation of being magnetized was actually a result of the power of imagination and “mechanical imitation.”<sup>14</sup> Franklin’s ability to explain (away) mesmeric trances without reference to the mystical workings of a numinous force would have far-reaching effects, influencing even Abbé Faria, one of Franz Anton Mesmer’s erstwhile disciples, who helped popularize an early theory of “suggestion.”<sup>15</sup>

In the 1840s, the Scottish surgeon James Braid worked from these ideas and advanced a new theory of “rational mesmerism,” which labeled mesmeric conditions

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<sup>12</sup> Reed, *From Soul to Mind*.

<sup>13</sup> The historian Jon Mee makes this case for British romantics. See: Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> From: *Report of Dr. Benjamin Franklin*, 25-27. Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, 125-126.

<sup>15</sup> During the 1810s, Faria conducted mesmeric experiments in Paris in order to disprove the existence of magnetic fluid and to demonstrate how the alterations in consciousness that followed mesmeric crises were entirely generated within the individual subject. In his view, trance was basically an unusual form of sleep; if some external source had any bearing on the induction of this mental dynamic, it only occurred indirectly, through the power of “suggestion.” Unlike the elaborate set of rituals developed by Mesmer, Faria’s methods of suggestion were relatively simple. At their most basic, they entailed a “mesmerist” requesting a subject to close his or her eyes and relax. After Faria’s early death in 1819, his theories were taken up and expanded by a French physician and former mesmerist named Alexandre Jacques François Bertrand. See: Abbé Faria, *Of the Cause of Lucid Sleep or Study of the Nature of Man [De La Cause du Sommeil Lucide Ou Étude de la Nature de l’Homme]*, trans. Manoharrai Sardessai (Goa, India: CinnamonTeal Publishing, 2014).

“hypnotism.” Lacking the “higher phenomena” usually reported by animal magnetists, Braid asserted that hypnotism was instead “a peculiar condition of the nervous system, into which it may be thrown by artificial contrivance.”<sup>16</sup> This “nervous sleep” was a “habit of abstraction or mental concentration,” in which the “powers of the mind are so much engrossed with a single idea or train of thought, as...to render the individual unconscious of, or indifferently conscious to, all other ideas, impressions, or trains of thought.”<sup>17</sup> Eventually, Braid would elaborate the different kinds of “suggestion” that could be used to encourage hypnotic conditions in his subjects. These included indirect verbal insinuations, figures of speech, changes in vocal intonation, and the like.<sup>18</sup>

Music too, Braid believed, possessed a hypnotically suggestive power. He identified how certain subjects were known to develop a “taste for dancing...on hearing lively music during hypnotism.”<sup>19</sup> In demonstrating this point, he recounted an experiment performed on one “Mrs. C,” wherein music excited her “to ecstasy...[and] graceful dancing.”<sup>20</sup> In another case, he described how a different woman “cut a very good figure at waltzing” while melodically induced into a hypnotic sleep.<sup>21</sup> In Braid’s estimation, “every variety of passion and emotion can be excited in the mind by music,” and this certainly included the susceptibility towards the “nervous sleep” of hypnosis.<sup>22</sup>

Soon, influential professionals on both sides of the Atlantic recruited similar reductive theories to specifically target the notion of animal magnetism. In the United

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<sup>16</sup> James Braid, *Observations on Trance or Human Hibernation* (London: John Churchill, 1850), vi.

<sup>17</sup> James Braid, *Magic, Witchcraft, Animal Magnetism, Hypnotism, and Electro-Biology* (London: John Churchill, 1852), 53-54.

<sup>18</sup> This was a theory taken up and expanded by the French physician Hippolyte Bernheim. See: Hippolyte Bernheim, *Hypnosis and Suggestion in Hypnotherapy* (New York: Aronson, 1884), 179.

<sup>19</sup> James Braid, *Neuroptology; or, The Rationale of Nervous Sleep, Considered in Relation with Animal Magnetism* (London: John Churchill, 1843), 56.

<sup>20</sup> Braid, *Neuroptology*, 132.

<sup>21</sup> Braid, *Neuroptology*, 138.

<sup>22</sup> Braid, *Neuroptology*, 95.



States, Nathaniel Hawthorne began to explain mesmeric experiences to be purely grounded in one's physical faculties.<sup>23</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson also acknowledged animal magnetism, along with other new sciences, as produced solely by a nervous condition.<sup>24</sup> These viewpoints did not necessarily diminish the public's (or the authors') fascination with mesmeric phenomena, but they increasingly put supporters of animal magnetism in a defensive position, requiring them to either ignore or address the physiological interpretations of mesmeric consciousness.

As it turned out, spiritualists—who had adopted many ideas from the theory of animal magnetism—proved more open than traditional mesmerists to accommodating this skepticism. Some of them engaged in empirical studies to distinguish between true spiritual ecstasy and illusions of the imagination, and they admitted that misapprehension, voluntary deception, and imitation could all create false impressions of spiritual contact.<sup>25</sup> Although most spiritualists continued to believe in the possibility of genuine interaction with a spiritual realm, some of them also began to take an agnostic view on the topic. This included Dr. John Gray, who admitted that “it is impossible for us to know whether [the pronouncements and experiences of mediums]...are simply spiritual or simply natural in their authorship, or a mixture from both sources.”<sup>26</sup> In other words, he acknowledged that there was not yet any conclusive way of disqualifying the possibility that a spiritual communication was, in fact, a trick of the imagination.

By the 1860s, all forms of self-loss—not just those associated with animal magnetism—became subjected to the full brunt of scientific reductionism. Much of the

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<sup>23</sup> Coale, “The Romance of Mesmerism,” 85-103; Coale, *Mesmerism and Hawthorne*.

<sup>24</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 5, ed. Linda Allardt (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1965), 5: 388.

<sup>25</sup> Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, 200.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in: Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, 201.

impetus in this direction stemmed from the work of La Roy Sunderland, a former Methodist minister, mesmerist, and spiritualist who turned into a religious skeptic later in life. He described the mystical experiences of both evangelicals and spiritualists as products of “nervous phenomena” that excited the mind.<sup>27</sup> He also contended that the particular activities and sensations associated with any given religious tradition were encouraged by “sympathetic imitation” of others and learned mental “habits” of association.<sup>28</sup> The raptures that had previously been accredited with supernatural or spiritual qualities, now fell under Sunderland’s category of “the Trance”: “a state of the nervous system, in which the mind is said to pass beyond the use of the external senses; a condition in which the mind is more or less active, without the normal consciousness of the external world.”<sup>29</sup> In this form, trance was a diversion of attention away from the outside world, but it did not constitute a fusion with or transcendence of that world. Instead, it was more simply a movement of the mind and nervous system into new and unusual states. Like Braid’s theory of hypnotism, Sunderland’s formulation of “Trance” rebaptized profound numinous experiences as physiologically-grounded mental ones.

The work of Sunderland was both complemented and extended by the professionalization of fields such as neurology and physiology on both sides of the Atlantic. Initially, these new disciplines reduced subjective experience primarily to the workings of the physical body. One of the most influential leaders of this trend was the French neurologist Jean Martin Charcot, who worked at the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris. Charcot interpreted trance as indicative of an underlying disease of the nervous system

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<sup>27</sup> La Roy Sunderland, letter to the editor, *The Banner of Light*, November 13, 1858.

<sup>28</sup> La Roy Sunderland, *The Trance and Correlative Phenomena* (Chicago: James Walker, 1868), 49, 71, 75-76, 100-104.

<sup>29</sup> Sunderland, *The Trance and Correlative Phenomena*, 109-110.

involving abnormal activity in certain parts of the brain.<sup>30</sup> Individuals, he averred, did not experience spirit possessions or psychic attunements with a magnetic fluid. These were instead examples of “hysteria,” a medical condition previously associated with sexual imbalances in the female body (and attributed to a malfunction of the uterus or other female organs) that Charcot now linked specifically with hypnotism and lesions on the brain. While this formulation altered earlier theories, it also perpetuated an enduring cultural tendency that cast women as susceptible to the excesses and automatism of ecstatic madness.

Some of Charcot’s research and experimentation involved initiating trances among women he had identified as hysterics using sound and music-based hypnotic techniques. These included the use of gongs, tuning forks, and songs as well as other methods developed originally by mesmerists but now streamlined and divested of their spiritual framework. After inducing cataleptic fits and loss of self-control, Charcot and his colleagues at the Salpêtrière concluded that hysterical women were predisposed towards automatism and trance delusions.<sup>31</sup> In doing so, he knotted together insanity,

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<sup>30</sup> In many ways, Charcot’s theories elaborated the earlier work of the American neurologist George Miller Beard. Scarred by a strict Congregationalist childhood, as an adult Beard developed a deep-seated scorn for what he believed were the delusions of religious experience. Addressing what he considered to be the false apparitions of “trance experiences” in particular, he claimed that it was imperative to overcome misguided assumptions that the senses were always “worthy of trust.” In the case of trances, he contended such impressions of self-loss were best explained by the neurological knowledge of experts, who knew them to represent “a functional disease of the nervous system, in which the cerebral activity is concentrated in some limited region of the brain, with suspension of the activity of the rest of the brain, and consequent loss of volition.” Although usually less elaborate in their writings, other American and British scientists and physicians echoed and anticipated many of Beard’s conclusions. These included the physiologist W.B. Carpenter, the neurologist William A. Hammond, and the alienist (psychologist) Henry Maudsley. See: George M. Beard, “Psychology of Spiritism,” *North American Review* 129 (1879): 67; George M. Beard, *The Scientific Basis of Delusions: A New Theory of Trance and Its Bearings on Human Testimony* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1877), 5; Hayward, *Resisting History*, 41-43; S.E.D. Shortt, “Physicians and Psychics: The Anglo-American Medical Response to Spiritualism, 1870-1890,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 39 (1984): 344.

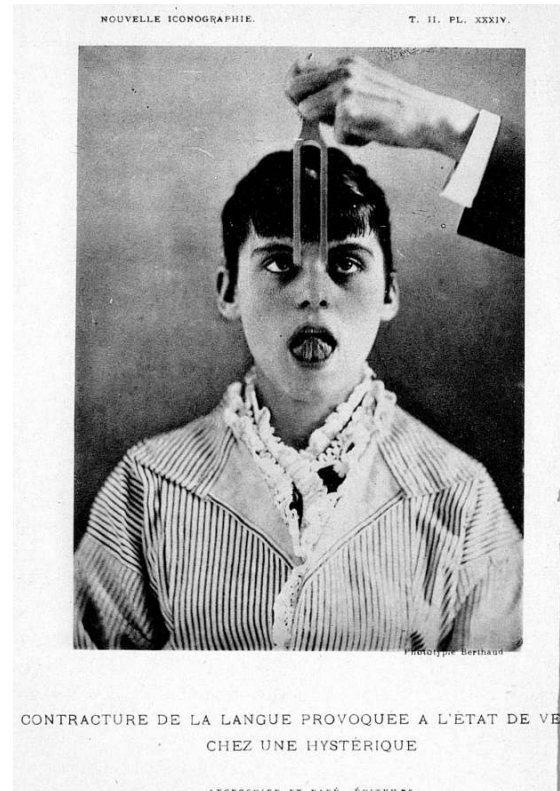
<sup>31</sup> Jean-Martin Charcot, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Bureau de Progres Medical, 1886–93), referenced in: Kennaway, “Musical Hypnosis,” 5.

femininity, and sound, while simultaneously reinforcing the bonds between sanity, masculinity, and silence.<sup>32</sup>



**Illustration 10**

A depiction of the automatic response ostensibly provoked in a female patient by the suggestive power of music. Source: Paul Regnard, *Les Maladies épidémiques de l'esprit: Sorcellerie, magnétisme, morphinisme, délire des grandeurs* [*Epidemic Maladies of the Spirit: Sorcery, Magnetism, Morphine Addiction, Delusions of Grandeur*] (Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit, et cie., 1887), 271.



**Illustration 11**

A female hysteric at the Salpêtrière exhibiting what is described as an automatic response to the sound of a tuning fork held by physician. Source: Charles Laufeneur, "Des contractures spontanées et provoquées de la langue chez les hystéro-épileptiques," *Nouvelles Iconographie de la Salpêtrière* 2 (1889): 203-207, plate 34 (located between pages 204-205).

While a great many researchers supported Charcot's explanation of trance as a physical phenomenon, a growing body of scientists countered that the unusual alterations of consciousness could be explicated in purely psychological terms.<sup>33</sup> For instance, Hippolyte Bernheim, a French professor of medicine at Nancy, rejected Charcot's claim that trance experiences were solely rooted in the abnormal physiology of certain diseased

<sup>32</sup> Kennaway, "Musical Hypnosis," 5.

<sup>33</sup> This orientation towards psychology was partly reinforced by ongoing criticisms of Charcot's own work. Some of the French neurologist's peers, including Joseph Delboeuf, claimed that the French neurologist's theories on mania and hysteria were tainted by his recurring use of the same few patients both in experiments and in public demonstrations. According to Charcot's critics, these circumstances opened up the possibility that the patients could have consciously partaken in something like a simulation of automatic response. See: Kennaway, "Musical Hypnosis," 5.

individuals, namely hysterical women. Instead, Bernheim called unusual forms of consciousness “psychogenic” because he thought that they could be triggered by unusual mental activity associated with environmental stimuli rather than a disorder in the physical body. This meant that otherwise healthy and sane people could also become entranced like so-called “hysterics” did.<sup>34</sup> Bernheim’s ideas grew influential enough that, later in his career, Charcot (along with his disciplinary supporters) would start to consider the viability of this explanation.<sup>35</sup>

Some professionals, such as Gustave Le Bon, were happy to combine physiological and psychological explanations of trance with the addition of socially suggestive factors. In *The Crowd*, Le Bon’s widely-read publication from 1896, the author worried that, when participating in an emotional crowd of peers, individuals could begin to act automatically based upon ideas and emotions presented to them by other people in their environment. Even people who were normally of sound mind could more easily succumb to the alluring power of “suggestibility” during these particularly heated moments. In doing so, they lost their rational will and became entranced in much the same way that a hypnotized subject became susceptible to the suggestions of the hypnotizer. What emerged, according to Le Bon, was a crowd “unconsciousness” or “group mind” that possessed its own opinions, values, and beliefs, often in contrast to those of the individual. Under these conditions, the individual’s “conscious personality has entirely vanished; will and discernment are lost.”<sup>36</sup> In upholding many of the gender

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<sup>34</sup> Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions*, 247.

<sup>35</sup> According to Pierre Janet, a former mentee of Charcot, the existence of abnormal experiences suggested not so much an abnormal neurology as a *désagregation* of consciousness. By this, Janet referred to a section in the mind that was split off or dissociated from normal waking experience. This disaggregated consciousness was thought to comprise its own “chain of memory” that was inaccessible except through hypnosis or other mind-altering techniques.

<sup>36</sup> Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1896), 11.

biases of his predecessors, he contended that women were particularly sensitive to this crowd psychology because they tended towards emotional “extremes.”<sup>37</sup>

Although it would have been possible to consider the “group mind” as existing external to the individual, Le Bon did not frame it as such. Unlike a mystical spirit whose power was conventionally thought to be tied to some transcendent realm, the “group mind” was assumed to be entirely a product of the faculties contained within the individual mind. After all, submitting to the crowd unconsciousness rendered one “the slave of all the unconscious activities of his spinal cord.”<sup>38</sup> It did not entail fusing one’s internal identity with an entirely separate, external one. Instead, it involved submitting to the alternate identities and impulse that existed within a subject’s own mind in ways that mirrored the subconscious thoughts and actions of others. In short, “group mind” was an emergent byproduct of self-hypnotizing individual minds that, upon entering highly “suggestible” states, forewent rational impulses of individual control in favor the emotional impulses that group members held in common.

Irrespective of whether professionals explained trance as primarily psychological or physiological, or a blend of the two, most researchers and theorists of consciousness during the late-nineteenth century joined in the effort to challenge religious and conventionally metaphysical explanations of experience. While most Americans would not consider science to be entirely at odds with religion until the twentieth century,<sup>39</sup> it is clear that over the course of the nineteenth century many scientific thinkers had begun to retreat from belief systems that relied on the primacy of a spirit world, deity, naturalized

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<sup>37</sup> Le Bon, *The Crowd*, 35.

<sup>38</sup> Le Bon, *The Crowd*, 11.

<sup>39</sup> According to Drew Gilpin Faust, “most Americans continued to regard science and religion as in alliance rather than in conflict well into the late nineteenth century.” Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), 173.

numen or any claims to higher powers or deep universal truths that challenged a materialist or mechanistic view of the world. If these thinkers were not entirely anti-theological or anti-metaphysical,<sup>40</sup> they nevertheless effectively erased any element of spiritual doctrine from the new science of emotional experience. In its place, they posited that, while the experience of unusual or mysterious phenomena may give the illusion of a truly transcendent reality, these were actually the result of psychic or bodily changes.

### **The Reassertion of Transcendence**

Not all musical Americans were willing to reduce self-loss and transcendent spirits to the illusions of an individual's overactive imagination. For these people, psychology's reductive theories only exacerbated the pivot towards self-control and individual integrity that had already been initiated by the bourgeois-led movement for silent and still emotional lives. In this sense, the scientific internationalization of trance was only a more trenchant extension of the starchy sensibility embraced by the genteel classes. Thus, during the last decades of the nineteenth century, at precisely the same time that Darwin, Charcot, Bernheim, and others were gaining wider currency in American culture, there also emerged a movement to reinvigorate transcendent musical experiences in accordance with older prescripts. This new crusade embraced almost everything that scientific reductionism and bourgeois refinement did not. It doubled down on authentic self-loss and effusive corporeal expression, and it uplifted the status of women, African Americans, and other social groups conventionally relegated to positions

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<sup>40</sup> According to the historian Edward Reed, most psychologists—into the twentieth century—continued to accommodate the possibility of a human soul and a superior deity even as they pursued more secular-oriented models of self and experience. S. Reed, *From Soul to Mind*.

of little authority. Much of its impetus originated in the different denominations and sects that constituted the Holiness Movement.

Born of a growing desire among American Methodists to achieve more enduring conversion experiences and a purer, sanctified Christian life, members of the Holiness Movement were initially divided over the role of ecstatic experience. Some members sanctified only those spiritual experiences that conformed to the more controlled conduct of the middle class. Others, however, found value in more unrestrained experiences. The tension came to a head at a Midwestern camp meeting in 1881, when a debate erupted over the musical ecstasies of one of the attendees:

One day right in the midst of a great sermon, a woman from Carrol County, a Holiness professor, sprawled out at full length in the aisle. This was in itself not much to be thought of, for to tumble over now and then was expected. But the unexpected happened in this case. It kept some of the sisters busy to keep her with a measurably decent appearance. Directly she began to compose a jargon of words in rhyme and sing them in a weird tune. She persisted until the service was spoiled and the camp was thrown into a hubbub. Strange to say, the camp was divided thereby. Some said it was a wonderful manifestation of divine power, some said it was a repetition of a speaking in unknown tongues as at Pentecost. But every preacher on the grounds without exception declared it to be of the devil. But the camp was so divided in opinion that it had to be handled with the greatest of care.<sup>41</sup>

Some of the more radical members of the Holiness Movement, particularly in the South and Midwest, came out adamantly in favor of this demonstrative musical ecstasy. This included most notably Maria Woodworth-Etter. An evangelist from Ohio, Woodworth-Etter preached and led revival meetings in towns and cities across the country from the 1880s to the 1920s, converting tens of thousands along the way. Her meetings were well-known for their intense emotional and physical vigor, including prostrations, speaking and singing in tongues, trances and visions, and miracles of healing.

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<sup>41</sup> A.M. Kiergan, *Historical Sketches of the Revival of True Holiness and Church Polity from 1865-1916*, quoted in: Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury, 1987), 177-178.



For Woodworth-Etter, singing and hearing music while in ecstatic or trance states was an important feature of the conversion process. Indeed, one of her own earliest conversion experiences involved singing the hymn “God Be With You Till We Meet Again” and feeling the spiritual power of singers who “broke down crying, one after another, until nearly everyone in the station was weeping. Strong men wept aloud, and the power came upon us. I came near being overpowered.”<sup>42</sup> When she herself became a preacher, Woodworth-Etter frequently marveled at the power of the Holy Spirit to draw “heavenly music” out of those who felt the power of its presence. In her writings, she described one of these occurrences in detail:

Suddenly there fell upon my ear... a song of the most wonderful description. It did not at all appear like human voices, but seemed much more like the tones of some wonderful instrument of music, such as human ears never before heard. It began on the right side of the audience, and rolled from there over the entire company of baptised saints in a volume of sounds resembling in its rising and falling, its rolling and sinking, its swelling and receding character, the rolling waves of the ocean when being acted upon by the wonderful force which produces the tide.... Such blending of tones, such perfect harmony of sounds, such musical strains, my ears never before heard.... It filled me with such holy awe, worship and praise to the Lord, that before I was able to realise the fact fully, the Holy Ghost led me to join in that heavenly song of praise with the rest.<sup>43</sup>

Woodworth-Etter’s ministry style, particularly its focus on direct and physical experience of God through the baptism by the Holy Spirit, presented a substantial challenge to the bourgeois emotional restraints placed on women throughout the nineteenth century. By both embracing extreme affect and taking responsibility for deciding when and where emotional behavior was acceptable, Woodworth-Etter contradicted expectations that women should be both more emotionally sensitive and more emotionally controlled than men. In doing so, she, along with other radical female evangelicals who aspired to leadership roles in the Holiness Movement, helped revivify

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<sup>42</sup> Maria Woodworth-Etter, *Signs and Wonders* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1997), 85.

<sup>43</sup> Woodworth-Etter, *Signs and Wonders*, 248-250.

transcendent experience and make it accessible and acceptable to more participants than most evangelical movements ever had before.

Woodworth-Etter’s ministry style—particularly its focus on direct personal experience of God through the baptism by the Holy Spirit—serves as a model for the Pentecostalism that grew out of the Holiness Movement during the very early years of the twentieth century.<sup>44</sup> So too did the importance she placed on music. This love of song was also shared by Charles Fox Parham, who would become the leading light of the Pentecostal movement. Like Woodworth-Etter, one of Parham’s earliest conversion experiences was linked to music. As a young boy, probably not much older than ten, the young Parham was on his way home from a religious meeting in his hometown of Cheney, Kansas, when he suddenly felt wrought with a “deep and pungent conviction” as he thought of the sinfulness of man and the grace of God.<sup>45</sup> Unable to pray under such weighty circumstances, young Charles turned instead to singing. He began quietly at first, humming the familiar hymn “I am Coming to the Cross,” but by the third verse he turned his face heavenward and belted out the lyrics:

Here, I give my all to Thee,  
Friends, and time and earthly store,  
Soul and body Thine to be;  
Wholly Thine forever more.

As he repeated the word “wholly,” suddenly he felt a flash from Heaven that was as brilliant as the sun. As Parham later recalled, “like a stroke of lightning it penetrated, thrilling every tissue and fiber of my being.”<sup>46</sup> In this moment of ecstasy, Parham knew he had been saved and could live his life as a true Christian. By the age of fifteen, Parham

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<sup>44</sup> On the roots and early history of Pentecostalism, see: Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997); Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism*.

<sup>45</sup> Charles Parham, *A Voice Crying in the Wilderness* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform), 11.

<sup>46</sup> Parham, *A Voice Crying in the Wilderness*, 11.

was a preacher and within another ten years he had rejected religious denominations and established an evangelical ministry based on the ideas of the Holiness Movement.

Black evangelicals responded positively to both Parham and Woodworth-Etter, whose emotionally and musically charged style of worship resonated strongly with their own religious practices. Certainly, the more polished performances of the Jubilee Singers garnered widespread acclaim among more than a few black intellectuals, but many African Americans still preferred the raw emotionalism found in their informal community celebrations and local churches.<sup>47</sup> It also helped that the new revivalists happily appealed to people of all races. Woodworth-Etter felt strongly about this issue. Claiming that her only interest was in the “harvest of souls,” she held camp meetings in African-American communities and associated with the successful black Christian leader and songwriter Thoro Harris.<sup>48</sup> Parham had much the same attitude. In 1906, he began a ministry in Houston and preached extensively to African Americans.<sup>49</sup> Many were deeply affected by Parham’s ministry style, including the black Holiness preacher William J. Seymour, who would become another early leader of the Pentecostal movement.<sup>50</sup>

Interracial mixing featured prominently during one of the first Pentecostal revivals, the Azusa Street Revival, which started in Los Angeles in 1906. Under the

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<sup>47</sup> This penchant for emotional worship practices was corroborated by the Massachusetts journalist Edward King, who toured the American South during the 1870s. In his published memoirs, King recounted occasions where former enslaved people would sing the “simplest hymns...with almost extravagant intensity.” As before, “they arose out of the ecstasy occasioned by the rude and violent dances on the plantation;...they bubbled up from the springs of religious excitement.” Edward King, *The Great South: A Record of Journeys in Louisiana, Texas, the Indian Territory, Missouri, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, and Maryland* (Hartford: American Publish Co., 1875), 609.

<sup>48</sup> Wayne Warner, *Maria Woodworth-Etter: For Such a Time as This* (Gainesville, FL: Bridge-Logos, 2004), 281.

<sup>49</sup> Randall Herbert Balmer, “Charles Fox Parham,” in *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism, Revised and Expanded Edition*, (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2004), 523-524.

<sup>50</sup> Edith L. Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith: The Assemblies of God, Pentecostalism, and American Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 55-56.

leadership of Seymour, who drew on worship practices encouraged by Parham and often already present in black evangelicalism, the revival was characterized by effusive spiritual ecstasies and speaking in tongues. Music featured prominently in these activities according to Jennie Moore, an African-American woman who attended the revival: “I sang under the power of the Spirit in many languages, the interpretation both words and music which I had never before heard, and in the home where the meeting was held, the Spirit led me to the piano, where I played and sang under inspiration, although I had not learned to play.”<sup>51</sup> Another participant, A.C. Valdez, provided a comparable eye witness account, describing how:

Many were slain in the Spirit..., buckling to the floor, unconscious, in a beautiful Holy Spirit cloud, and the Lord gave them visions. How I enjoyed shouting and praising God. During the tarrying, we used to break out in songs about Jesus and the Holy Spirit, “Fill Me Now,” “Joy Unspeakable,” and “Love Lifted Me.” Praise about the cleansing and precious blood of Jesus would just spring from our mouths. In between choruses, heavenly music would fill the hall, and we would break into tears. Suddenly the crowd seemed to forget how to sing in English. Out of their mouths would come new languages and lovely harmony that no human beings could have learned.<sup>52</sup>

Amidst spiritual possession, loss of bodily control, and visions, the participants found that everyday speech fell short of expressing what must have been an array of ineffable experiences. Therefore, they resorted to the emotional power of songs and speaking in tongues.

This enduring propensity for songful self-transcendence was commonly condemned by those who prescribed to more refined and scientific cultures of experience. One journalist onlooker, for instance, described the revivalist activities at Azusa in the following way:

...they cry and make howling noises all day and into the night. They run, jump, shake all over, shout to the top of their voice, spin around in circles, fall out on the sawdust

<sup>51</sup> Jennie Moore, “Music from Heaven,” *The Apostolic Faith* (Los Angeles) 1, no. 8 (May 1907).

<sup>52</sup> Adolfo C. Valdez, “Fire on the Street,” quoted in: Gastón Espinosa, “Tongues and Healing at the Azusa Street Revival,” in *Religions of the United States in Practice*, ed. Colleen McDannell, vol.2, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 2: 222.

blanketed floor jerking, kicking and rolling all over it. Some of them pass out and do not move for hours as though they were dead. These people appear to be mad, mentally deranged or under a spell. They claim to be filled with the spirit....They repeatedly sing the same song, 'The Comforter Has Come.'<sup>53</sup>

Beyond providing insight into the activities of the Azusa Street Revival, this description also demonstrated the degree to which Pentecostalism challenged both mainstream social (and scientific) sensibilities during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Its intense corporeality rejected the refined middle-class comportment of both religious and secular elites, and its apparently indiscriminate openness to people of different social backgrounds similarly depreciated the race, class, and gender hierarchies that also benefited bourgeois culture. Moreover, its unrelenting faith in a transcendent deity flew in the face of more empirically-grounded theories that explained spirituality in purely immanent terms. When the journalist described the revivalists as “mad, mentally deranged or under a spell,” he effectively summed up the range of possible explanations offered by those groups who felt most threatened by their practices. For many African Americans and women of all races, this would have simply been the most recent assault in a long history of campaigns aimed to denigrate any penchant they might have had for affective release.

### **William James and the Radical Empiricism of Science & Spirit**

Although the reductive tendencies of modern science contradicted the model of ecstasy presented by Pentecostalism, a few social and psychological scholars strove to find compatibility rather than contrast between the two modes. Chief among them was certainly William James, who for a time would become the most influential psychologist in America. The investigation of trance experiences, variously construed, was a longtime

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<sup>53</sup> “Weird Fanaticism Fools Young Girl,” *Los Angeles Daily Times* (12 July 1906), quoted in: Larry Martin, *The Life and Ministry of William J. Seymour: and a History of the Azusa Street Revival* (Shreveport, LA: Christian Life Books, 1999), 249.

interest of James. In 1882, already fascinated with altered consciousness, he breathed nitrous oxide, whereupon he experienced an “immense emotional sense of reconciliation” in which “the centre and periphery of things seem to come together. The ego and its objects, the meum and the tuum, are one.”<sup>54</sup> The merging of subject and object incited in James an “intense metaphysical illumination,” from which he concluded that “Hegelism was true after all.” He had become intimately aware of the synthesis of opposites, and the possibility of fusing self with other. Later he would claim,

Our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the flimsiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in their completeness, definite types of mentality which probably somewhere have their field of application and adaptation.<sup>55</sup>

By the fall of 1884, James had helped found the American Society for Psychical Research (SPR), a sister organization to the SPR in England two years earlier, which established committees to investigate supernatural phenomena, particularly those associated with trance mediums. By the 1890s, James was writing and lecturing on automatism (spontaneous verbal or motor behavior), hypnotism, hysteria, multiple personalities, demoniacal possession, and genius. By the early years of the twentieth century, he expounded his ideas in a lecture series at the University of Edinburgh, the publication of his pioneering study *The Varieties of Religious Experience* soon thereafter, and his ongoing courses and publications while at Harvard University.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> William James, “Subjective Effects of Nitrous Oxide,” *Mind* 7 (1882): n.p. [Retrieved from [http://www.erowid.org/chemicals/nitrous/nitrous\\_article1.shtml](http://www.erowid.org/chemicals/nitrous/nitrous_article1.shtml)]

<sup>55</sup> James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 388.

<sup>56</sup> Eugene Taylor, “William James and Transpersonal Psychiatry,” in *Textbook of Transpersonal Psychiatry and Psychology*, ed. Bruce W. Scotton, Allan B. Chinen, and John R. Battista (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 21-27.

To a certain extent, James accepted materialist explanations of experience. He was also among the earliest scholars in America to adopt Darwin's naturalist theories.<sup>57</sup> And after earning an M.D. from Harvard Medical School at the age of twenty-seven, where he specialized in anatomy and physiology, he worked for a time as a brain researcher, regularly accumulating empirical data and developing scientific conclusions based on surgical dissection. Some of his best-known theories were grounded in biological materialism. This included his postulation that emotional experience is the result of the mind perceiving physiological responses to an internal or external stimulus. Only the perception of changes in the body created identifiable feelings; for instance, the production of tears actually preceded the feelings of sadness.

Despite his grounding in materialism, though, James accepted that the mind also influenced one's experience, and in this regard he was convinced that parallel sets, or what he eventually called "streams," of consciousness existed within the mind of an individual. The theory itself had been broadly outlined earlier by Frederic W.H. Myers, a member of the English Society for Psychical Research, who had postulated the existence of additional sets of "subliminal consciousness" in the peripheral regions beyond normal awareness.<sup>58</sup> The notion of a multiplex of consciousnesses would become endorsed by an array of psychologists around the turn of the century, including Boris Sidis who

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<sup>57</sup> Taylor, "William James and Transpersonal Psychiatry," in *Textbook of Transpersonal Psychiatry and Psychology* 22.

<sup>58</sup> E. Gurney, F.W.H. Myers, and F. Podmore, *Phantasms of the Living*, 2 vols. (London: Society for Psychical Research and Trubner and Co., 1886), xlvi. Myers contended that the existence of "subliminal" regions beyond normal awareness was evinced in those people with double or multiple personalities, who were a growing topic of interest for the scientific community during the late-nineteenth century. In support of his multiplex theory of consciousness, Myers stated: "I hold that...it is perfectly possible that other thoughts, feelings, and memories, either isolated or in continuous connection, may now be actively conscious, as we say, 'within me,'—in some kind of co-ordination with my organism, and forming some part of my total individuality." Frederick W. Myers, "The Subliminal Consciousness," *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 7 (1891-1892): 305.

distinguished between waking and subwaking selves. (Eventually, “subconscious” and “unconscious” would become the primary terms used to identify the different basic types of multiplex consciousness). As an ardent supporter and popularizer of the notion, James was happy to explain subjective consciousness as integrally linked to the individual mind and body.

Yet, notwithstanding his interest in the more immanent sources of experience, James was most decidedly not a reductionist. Indeed, he was also somewhat open to more conventionally transcendent explanations of experience—that is to say those that relied on entities that were grounded in objects that existed outside of the individual. When he was a child, his own father had associated with many mystically-minded thinkers of the day, including the Swedish theologian Emanuel Swedenborg and Ralph Waldo Emerson, who became the young William’s godfather. This background distinguished James from most of his scientific contemporaries and made him more willing to synthesize physiological and psychological explanations of experience with more spiritual ones. His effort to resolve these different considerations came not by rejecting the principles of science, but rather by pushing them to their limit. Whereas positivistic empiricism involved objectively verifiable observations of physical bodies, James encouraged a “radical empiricism” that also gave equal attention to those phenomena subjectively experienced by the mind. This theory expanded the definition of empiricism to include sensory perceptions and feelings of unnatural phenomena. James considered these as part of what he called science’s “unclassified residuum,” and he believed they should be given credence despite the impossibility of having an outside party objectively verify them.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> William James, *The Works of William James: Essays in Radical Empiricism*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt and Fredson Bowers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1976).



Contrary to his reductionist colleagues, he averred that science provided no convincing reasons why empiricism should only be applied to the material world. Pure positivism, therefore, was logically unsound.

Wary of relying too heavily on what he believed to be fallible yet institutionalized opinions, James averred that the truth and value of any explanatory theory of experience should be determined only by the efficacy of its results. (This approach would eventually be enshrined in his philosophy of pragmatism, which he developed towards the end of his career.) Under this logic, if the experience of engaging with a divine or metaphysical force substantially improved the moral and aesthetic quality of one's daily life or the interactions between people, he contended that no one should claim it was any less valid than a neurological explanation of the same experience. Similarly, if an experience of self-expansion or self-loss facilitated some aspect of one's personal or community life, it should also be accepted as valuable and a kind of truth in its own right. This point held even if what James called "medical materialism" deemed these experiences nothing more than the "perverted action of various glands."<sup>60</sup> The "rationalistic" claims of modern science, James believed, were "relatively superficial," but they only benefited from the medical discipline's "*prestige*" and "loquacity."<sup>61</sup>

James's radical empiricism and his pragmatic stance not only served to reconcile religious experience with scientific materialism, his theories also embraced apparently authentic experiences of self-loss as potentially valuable phenomena.<sup>62</sup> Eventually, he

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<sup>60</sup> James, *Varieties*, 13.

<sup>61</sup> James, *Varieties*, 73.

<sup>62</sup> Frederic W.H. Myers also remained open to the possibility of authentic self-transcendence. He asserted that what he called the "subliminal self" was often superior to everyday consciousness because it extended well beyond the limits of the body and could conceivably persist after death. See: Frederic W.H. Myers, *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*, 2 vols. (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1903).

would come up with a morally neutral term, “transpersonal,”<sup>63</sup> that served as an etic label for any kind of intensely emotional experience in which an individual’s ordinary understanding of self is felt to be temporarily lost, expanded, or transcended. As with previous labels for ecstasy, the term “transpersonal” also involved a powerful experience that could potentially transform the interior life of those who experienced them by revealing a sense of knowledge unknown by the normal intellect.<sup>64</sup> James did not attend any of the Holiness or Pentecostal revivals around the turn of the century, but if he did he would have almost certainly labelled the participants’ experiences of spirit possession as transpersonal.

Unfortunately, William James also wrote little about the relationship between music and transpersonal experience, which was on full display at Pentecostal meetings. Indeed, there is a chance the psychologist was “tone deaf.” Although he had entertained the idea of a career in visual arts as a young man, he was known to be unresponsive and indifferent to music at the best of times and rarely felt compelled to write about it, much less attend a concert.<sup>65</sup> What little he did write, however, suggested that he believed melody, harmony, rhythm, and lyrics all had an important role to play in the experience of self-loss. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, for example, he wrote of a subject who used a musical metaphor to describe his ecstasy, acknowledging it had “the effect of some great orchestra, when all the separate notes have melted away into the swelling harmony that leaves the listener conscious of nothing save that his soul is being wafted

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<sup>63</sup> The term “transpersonal” is said to have first appeared on the syllabus of one of James’s Harvard courses in 1905. See: Taylor, “William James and Transpersonal Psychiatry,” 21-27.

<sup>64</sup> James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 380-381.

<sup>65</sup> Oliver Sacks, *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain, Revised and Expanded Edition* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), xiii. Nevertheless, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James acknowledges that musical sounds, along with “words, effects of light on land and sea, odors . . . , all bring [mystical experience] when the mind is tuned aright.” James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 383.

upward, and almost bursting with its own emotions.”<sup>66</sup> With these few phrases, James provided a brief but adamant endorsement of music’s power to induce a sense of soulful transport. It is a statement that he would have likely elaborated if he had more opportunities (and inclination) to attend Pentecostal revivals, sublime concerts, or other deeply moving musical performances.

### **The Entrenchment of Reductionism**

Despite William James’s prestige within the scholarly community, his radical empiricism never gained wide currency among his peers, colleagues, and students—most of whom chose instead to rely on more reductive interpretations of consciousness.<sup>67</sup> These included people like James L. Corning, a prominent American neurologist, who developed a keen interest in the therapeutic potential of musical trance. Starting in the 1890s, he began to treat people with emotional and behavioral conditions by playing music for them as they entered into hypnotic states or progressed through various phases of sleep and pre-sleep. Hypnosis and slumber were eminently comparable, Corning believed. They both occurred as regular waking cognitive processes became dormant and involved the loss of much of a subject’s autonomy and self-control. Likewise, they both opened up access to the subconscious, which Corning ascertained to be the psychic location in the mind where morbid thoughts were situated, and from which they could be

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<sup>66</sup> James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 66.

<sup>67</sup> As the scholars Joel Pfister, Nancy Schnog, and others demonstrate, such views also resonated strongly with a cultural interest in psychic (and physical) interiority that had begun in the nineteenth century, as exemplified by the literature of Louisa May Alcott, the art of Thomas Eakins, the rise of popular psychology, and the proliferation of psychology textbooks in college. See: Joel Pfister and Nancy Schnog, eds., *Inventing the Psychological: Toward a Cultural History of Emotional Life in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997).

eliminated.<sup>68</sup> At the level of subconscious awareness, Corning suggested that a subject was “open to the full suggestive power of impressions, . . . [and] the absence of that inhibition which is the penalty, so to speak, of full consciousness.”<sup>69</sup> The choice of music was crucial to the therapeutic efficacy of hypnosis. Corning himself thought the music of Wagner and others in the romantic style served the purpose best, at least for patients of a more sophisticated background.<sup>70</sup> (For the uneducated clientele, he suggested simple melodies rather than the complex harmonies of Wagner.)<sup>71</sup> His ultimate goal was to produce pleasant feelings within the drowsy or somnolent person, possibly even affecting his or her dreams, all of which was thought to improve the subject’s disposition during his or her waking hours.

These “musical vibrations” were administered to patients through an elaborate arrangement of apparatuses and techniques developed by Corning himself, often with positive outcomes. A leather and canvas hood covered much of the head of the patient, while metal cups were placed over the ears, serving as rudimentary headphones. Each cup had a small hole that was attached to a piece of rubber tubing that connected back to an Edison cylinder phonograph—the source of the music.<sup>72</sup> The function of this apparatus was to enhance the desired signal while reducing other environmental sounds that might disrupt the focused listening experience. On some occasions the musical treatment was accompanied by soothing and pleasant visual displays, thereby creating a “dual appeal to

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<sup>68</sup> During this period, Freud also theorized that the stages of sleep provided clues as to the workings of the unconsciousness, and therefore he would discuss patients’ dreams with them at length. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1913).

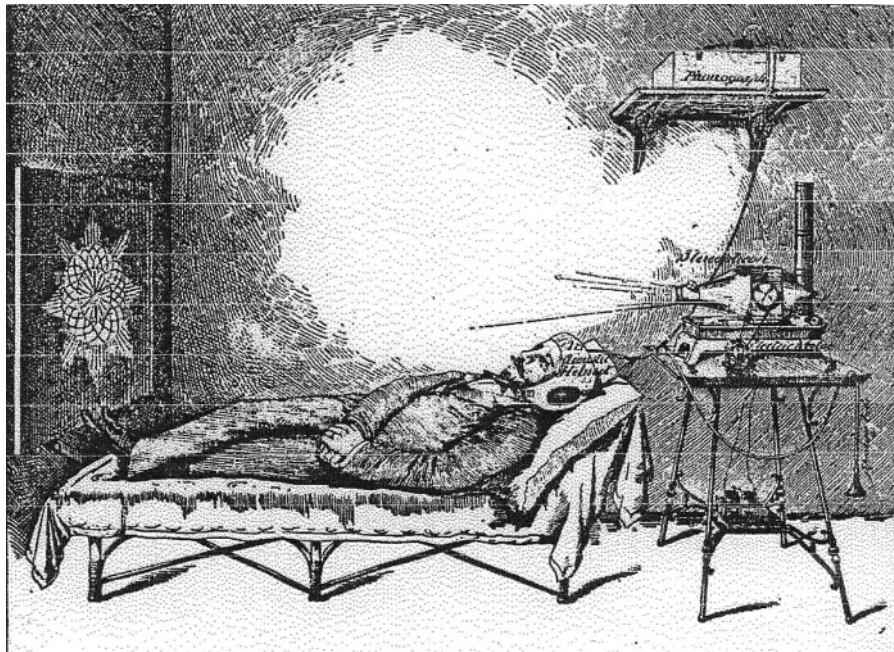
<sup>69</sup> James Leonard Corning, “The Use of Musical Vibration Before and During Sleep—Supplementary Employment of Chromatoscopic Figures—A Contribution to the Therapeutics of the Emotions,” *The Medical Record: A Weekly Journal of Medicine and Surgery* 14, (1899): 80.

<sup>70</sup> Corning, “The Use of Musical Vibration Before and During Sleep,” 84.

<sup>71</sup> “Music for Insanity,” *New York Daily Tribune*, April 8, 1900, 4; Corning, “The Use of Musical Vibration Before and During Sleep,” 84.

<sup>72</sup> Corning, “The Use of Musical Vibration Before and During Sleep,” 84.

the vast affective life” of the individual.<sup>73</sup> Some of Corning’s hypnotic treatments required that the patient be merely drowsy, or presomnolent, while others took place during deep sleep. In an article he wrote in 1899 for the well-known journal *The Medical Record*, Corning reported that his musical therapy sessions had proven successful. Patients, particularly those who had suffered from depression, demonstrated notable improvements in their waking lives—becoming more active, vigorous, and less melancholy.<sup>74</sup> Musical self-loss, Corning concluded, could be fruitfully leveraged to produce healthier individuals, at least when directed by knowledgeable medical experts such as himself.



**Illustration 12**

A depiction of one of Corning’s patients being administered “musical vibrations” with the assistance of a phonograph, an acoustic helmet, and slide projections from a stereopticon. From: James Leonard Corning, “The Use of Musical Vibration Before and During Sleep—Supplementary Employment of Chromatoscopic Figures—A Contribution to the Therapeutics of the Emotions,” *The Medical Record: A Weekly Journal of Medicine and Surgery* 14, (1899): 84

A theory of multiple simultaneous consciousnesses, which underwrote Corning’s experiments and therapies, also influenced the African-American intellectual W.E.B. Du

<sup>73</sup> Corning, “The Use of Musical Vibration Before and During Sleep,” 83.

<sup>74</sup> Corning, “The Use of Musical Vibration Before and During Sleep,” 82-84.

Bois, who molded it to suit his particular interests in racial equality and black empowerment. In his seminal 1903 book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois wrote of a “double consciousness” that resided specifically within African Americans. He described this condition as requiring African Americans to perceive the world in two different ways: one based on their own values, beliefs, and life experiences, and another way that involved the “peculiar sensation...of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others,” namely white Americans.<sup>75</sup> Du Bois’ did not consider this capacity for second sight an authentic psychic merger with the white perspective. Indeed, although he had been raised as a religious believer, he soon developed what he described as “strong questions” about the nature of faith, many of which were encouraged after he matriculated at Harvard.<sup>76</sup> After travelling to Germany for graduate work, he became a free thinker. As a result, *The Souls of Black Folk* articulated no belief in a divine or transcendent entity.<sup>77</sup>

Far from metaphysical, Du Bois’ notion of double consciousness was probably at least partly inspired by the more reductive theories of consciousness emanating from Europe and America.<sup>78</sup> The term “double consciousness” had itself been used since the eighteenth century as a diagnosis category that eventually included “multiple personality” disorders and schizophrenia.<sup>79</sup> Mid-nineteenth century psychologists including La Roy Sunderland and George Miller Beard wrote about double consciousness as a vacillation

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<sup>75</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1903), 3.

<sup>76</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing* (New York: International Publishers, 1968), 227-288.

<sup>77</sup> Edward J. Blum, *W.E.B. Du Bois: American Prophet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

<sup>78</sup> Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., “W.E.B. Du Bois and the Idea of Double Consciousness,” *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 64, no. 2 (1992): 299–309.

<sup>79</sup> Becker, *Deep Listeners*, 39.

between what Sunderland described as “two distinct Individualities, so distinct, that when in one state they have no recollection of the other.”<sup>80</sup> William James did not employ the exact term, but he used an equivalent form when he discussed cases of individuals who alternated between “primary and secondary consciousnesses” in the *Principles of Psychology*.<sup>81</sup> A French variation, “*double conscience*,” also appeared in Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud’s first chapter of *Studies on Hysteria*, published in 1895.<sup>82</sup> In formulating his own notion of “double consciousness,” Du Bois seemed to borrow the basic contours of these earlier theories if not always their specific details.

If Du Bois refrained from casting double consciousness as a genuine psychic possession, he also acknowledged its power to have very real repercussions for the plight of African Americans. Indeed, “seeing” through the eyes of others, even if through the power of imagination rather than genuine clairvoyance, meant looking back on oneself from the perspective of those people who made America a racist white society. The dual consciousness was unrelenting in Du Bois’ view. “One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body.”<sup>83</sup>

Du Bois viewed this conflict of consciousness less as a metaphysical problem and more as a psychological pathology. In his estimation, the divided awareness of “double consciousness” alienated African Americans from other aspects of their own identity. Indeed, attempting to live simultaneously as “a Negro and as an American” could give

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<sup>80</sup> Sunderland, *Book of Psychology*, 13.

<sup>81</sup> William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1890). See especially, 1: 379-393.

<sup>82</sup> Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*, trans. Nicola Luckhurst (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), viii, xviii, 14.

<sup>83</sup> Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 3.

rise to “a painful self-consciousness, an almost morbid sense of personality, and a moral hesitancy which is fatal to self-confidence,” as well as “doubt and bewilderment” and a temptation towards “pretence or to revolt, to hypocrisy or to radicalism.”<sup>84</sup> Such characteristics mirrored many of the symptoms described by Charcot or Freud when diagnosing hysteria or other hypnoid afflictions. In this sense, Du Bois might have easily described “double consciousness” as inherently pathological.

Ultimately, Du Bois called for a way to reconcile these two divergent impulses. “The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,” he contended.<sup>85</sup> It involved a “longing...to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world.”<sup>86</sup> How then to achieve this reconciliation? While Du Bois did not provide specifics, he implied that it entailed avoiding any force, either external or internal, that favored one consciousness over the other. This meant rejecting the anti-black sentiment that permeated mainstream American culture without rejecting other aspects of that same culture. It also meant rejoicing in one’s African inheritances without shame or remorse.

Music had a role to play in this process of reconciliation. Du Bois dedicated the final chapter in *The Souls of Black Folk* to the old “Sorrow Songs” of the enslaved, which made up the bulk of “Negro folk-songs” in America. For him, these “weird old songs” achieved something of an amalgamation of old and new, black and white, African and European. Written by enslaved people who were “weary of heart,” they became “not

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<sup>84</sup> Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 202.

<sup>85</sup> Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 4.

<sup>86</sup> Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 4.



simply...the sole American music, but...[also] the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side the seas.”<sup>87</sup> Thus, originating in Africa (“where its counterpart can still be heard”), and adapted to an American context, these songs transcended both to become entirely “human.”<sup>88</sup> In Du Bois’ view, such tunes provided a crucial element of “hope” that “America shall rend the Veil [that separates black consciousness from white] and the prisoned shall go free.”<sup>89</sup> He found this hope for reconciliation encapsulated in any number of different songs, including the one whose lyrics he placed at the beginning of his chapter. They spoke of the meeting of different souls after some kind of figurative or literal death:

I walk through the churchyard  
To lay this body down;  
I know moon-rise, I know star-rise;  
I walk in the moonlight, I walk in the starlight;  
I’ll lie in the grave and stretch out my arms,  
I’ll go to judgment in the evening of the day,  
And my soul and thy soul shall meet that day,  
When I lay this body down.”<sup>90</sup>

Simultaneously sorrowful and hopeful, the words suggested the possibility of joining together two alienated “souls,” and in doing so gestured towards a resolution to the paradox of a double consciousness. Considering his distrust of Christianity, Du Bois probably interpreted the song’s lyrical allusions to a meeting of the souls as metaphorical rather than spiritual. As such, what the song seemed to represent more than anything was a deeply integrated African-American identity that did not suffer from the feelings of disunity evoked by trying to satisfy two contradictory conscious impulses.

Corning and Du Bois were not the only musically-inclined contemporaries of James who leaned towards reductive interpretations of musical ecstasy. Some of the

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<sup>87</sup> Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 251.

<sup>88</sup> Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 191.

<sup>89</sup> Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 263.

<sup>90</sup> Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 250.

strongest assaults on transcendent phenomenon came from evolutionary theorists after Darwin's rise to prominence in American scientific circles during the late-nineteenth century. According to these professionals, a belief in authentic self-loss was a central feature of primitive human cultures. For many evolutionists, this characteristic alone made it easy to categorize the belief as misguided and illusory. The famous British theorist Herbert Spencer took this stance, describing ecstasy as a form of "insensibility" marked mainly by a "high degree of mental excitement," the stiffening of the body, and the suspension of "voluntary motion."<sup>91</sup> These were mental and physical disturbances, not metaphysical ones. For Spencer, only primitive tribal cultures—such as the Zulu of Africa, the Dyak of Borneo, and the Khonds of India—believed that such phenomena also involved going "astray out of the body" or traveling to supernatural realms.<sup>92</sup> These beliefs, according to Spencer, indicated the "lower states" of such cultures within a hierarchy of social development.<sup>93</sup> From the perspective of modern, scientific-minded Westerners such as himself, though, such ecstasies experiences took on a "pretend" quality, were associated with "figurative expressions," and no longer held their "original implication." For the British evolutionist, then, belief in authentic self-loss helped distinguished slow developing humans from highly-developed, civilized ones.<sup>94</sup> During

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<sup>91</sup> Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology*, vol. 1 (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1883), 1: 160, 161.

<sup>92</sup> Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology*, 1: 163-164.

<sup>93</sup> Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology*, 1: 164.

<sup>94</sup> This hierarchical view of human development came to dominate popular theories of evolution, though Darwin himself did not share it. Instead, he took a "branch" approach to evolution, contending that the differences between cultures could be explained based on the unique environments and circumstances they encountered over time. His was a three-dimensional theory that prevented perfect comparisons between cultures and therefore made it difficult for naturalists to judge the degree to which any culture or group was more or less "civilized." Spencer, by contrast, took a scalar view of evolution, by portraying human development as existing along a two-dimensional "ladder" of evolution. At the lower rungs resided primitive peoples, such as the Zulu or Dyak, and at the highest rungs existed the more civilized races, including the white, English-speaking world, particularly Anglo Saxons. Twentieth-century detractors would later call this approach "Social Darwinism" (although a better label might have been "Social

the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth this hierarchical view of human development remained strongly entrenched in the mainstream of American culture. It often framed primitive beliefs as akin to the immature illusions of children, and it required that white Anglo-Americans emphasize their distance from such forms of consciousness.<sup>95</sup>

Many evolutionists believed that musical rhythm represented a crucial feature not only of the early phases of human evolution, but also to their related trance experiences. In 1889, the psychologist J. Donovan suggested that rhythm played a strong role in eliciting powerful emotions and “feelings of self-expansion” in both the phylogenetic and ontogenetic past of humans.<sup>96</sup> For the psychologist Carrie Ransom Squire, rhythm also played a central role in the trance experiences of childhood. In her dissertation, published just after the turn of the century, she stated that:

the greater pleasure which children find in rhythm is due to the efficacy of rhythm to set up vibrations in other organs of the body, and the consequent harmonious activity of the several bodily organs. The affective tone increases in proportion as the summation of excitation increases, till a state bordering on ecstasy may be reached. Ecstasy, when it follows upon rhythmical stimulation, is due to a spreading of the excitations to a greater and greater number of centers, till the body and the whole consciousness are set in co-vibration. At such times the rhythm has become automatic, and the attention is directed solely upon the sensations accompanying the diffused bodily movements.<sup>97</sup>

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Spencerism”). David Hoogland Noon, “The Evolution of Beasts and Babies: Recapitulation, Instinct, and the Early Discourse on Child Development,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 41, no. 4 (Fall 2005), 384.

<sup>95</sup> The conflation of primitive cultural beliefs, including trance, with child consciousness was encapsulated in the recapitulation theory, originally developed by the German naturalist Ernst Haeckel. In the United States, G. Stanley Hall, a Harvard graduate who was the first American to earn a Ph.D. in psychology, became the most vocal supporter of Haeckel’s theory. He found strong parallels between the unusual hypnotic experiences of adolescents and those of “savages,” including shared propensities towards “manias, trance, lycanthropy, demonology, and especially in revivals and other great religious movements,” as well as “enthusiasm, and fanaticism, . . . frenzies, and calentures.” All of these activities, according to Hall, were simply exaggerated “tendencies and characteristics normal to this age” and stage. In this sense, they could be compared to play, which Hall also considered a normal part of the development of both the human individual and the human species. G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education*, Volume 1 (New York: D. Appleton, 1904), 265-266.

<sup>96</sup> J. Donovan, *Music and Action, or, The Elective Affinity Between Rhythm and Pitch* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, & Co, 1889), 132, 137.

<sup>97</sup> Carrie Ransom Squire, *A Genetic Study of Rhythm* (Worcester, MA: O.B. Wood, 1901), 98.

Squire fell short of fully authenticating children's sense of self-transcendence, being careful to qualify that the sensations were grounded in bodily changes and only "bordered" on ecstatic self-loss. However, the psychologist nevertheless affirmed that something like a rhythm-induced trance was an integral feature of childhood experience. The German philosopher Karl Groos similarly wrote of the power of rhythm and repetition to elicit "trance-like or ecstatic state[s]" during the play activities of early humans.<sup>98</sup> James H. Tufts, a philosopher at the University of Chicago, did not address self-loss experiences in particular. However, he came close when he argued that tribal primitives who engaged in play behavior often used "common rhythmic action" to both stimulate and reinforce "sympathy and social accord."<sup>99</sup> These feelings of sympathy and accordance suggested, even if they did not completely describe, the same kind of self-loss discussed by Donovan, Squire, and Groos. Altogether these academicians stitched together evolutionary theories with trance experiences to reframe self-transcendence as the illusory views held by those occupying the early stages of human development.

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Following William James's sudden death in 1910, the discipline of psychology in America (and abroad) began to engender the principles of reductionism at a more rapid rate. At this time, those who became members in the American Psychological Association and published in the *American Journal of Psychology* or the *Psychological Review* rarely wavered from theories that assumed emotion and consciousness were

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<sup>98</sup> Karl Groos, *The Play of Man*, trans. Elizabeth L. Baldwin (New York: Appleton, 1901), 405. Also see: 367-369.

<sup>99</sup> James H. Tufts, "On the Genesis of the Aesthetic Categories," *The Philosophical Review* 7, no. 1 (January 1903): 12.

entirely internal to the individual.<sup>100</sup> This trend towards interiority was only augmented by the influential theories of Sigmund Freud. The Austrian neurologist had studied with the leading French theorists of the mind, including Jean-Martin Charcot and Hippolyte Bernheim, and he inherited from these mentors a steadfast belief in a reductive theory of consciousness. Early in his career he collaborated with his colleague and mentor Josef Breuer to write *Studies on Hysteria* with, a book about both the therapeutic and pathological potentials of hypnotic states.<sup>101</sup> Before long, however, Freud lost interest in hypnotherapy altogether, finding that his theories never garnered widespread acclaim and that his therapies achieved inconsistent results. Ultimately, he would come to disparage hypnosis as “a fanciful, and so to speak, mystical, aid.”<sup>102</sup> At the same time, Freud also began to theorize that most of the hidden layers of the mind—what he usually called the “unconscious”—were actually cut off from everyday waking consciousness and were best accessed not through hypnosis but through “psychoanalysis,” which required a professional to analyze the words and gestures of a waking subject. A series of advocates and authors helped glamorize this method to such an extent that by the 1920s it became fashionable to be neurotic.<sup>103</sup>

Mainstream views of psychoanalysis, or “the talking cure” as it was colloquially called, did not only perpetuate the reductive view of consciousness as entirely enclosed

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<sup>100</sup> D. B. Baker, *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Psychology: Global Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Michael Wertheimer, *A Brief History of Psychology* (New York: Psychology Press, 2011); Margaret P. Munger, ed. *The History of Psychology: Fundamental Questions* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003); G. Mandler, *A History of Modern Experimental Psychology: From James and Wundt to Cognitive Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

<sup>101</sup> Breuer and Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*.

<sup>102</sup> Sigmund Freud, “The Origin and Development of Psychoanalysis” *The American Journal of Psychology* 21, no. 2 (April 1910): 191.

<sup>103</sup> Joel Pfister, “Glamorizing the Psychological: The Politics of the Performances of Modern Psychological Identities,” in *Inventing the Psychological: Toward a Cultural History of Emotional Life in America*, ed. Joel Pfister and Nancy Schnog (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 167-216.

within an individual's psyche. While Freud's theories were somewhat more flexible than his popularizers supposed, most of his own writing either denied or avoided the premise that an individual's consciousness could merge with the outside world. By 1927, he had written a book called *The Future of an Illusion*, which deplored religious ideas and experiences as delusions of the mind.<sup>104</sup> A few years later, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, he reiterated the premise—by then commonplace—that human consciousness was separated from its external environment: “Towards the outside, the ego seems to maintain clear and sharp lines of demarcation.”<sup>105</sup>

Reducing the phenomena of ecstasy to an internal, individual reality rather than external one extended what the French intellectual Georges Bataille called “inner experience.” While Bataille defined inner experience as a personal, mystical experience that is entirely secular,<sup>106</sup> the scientific reductionist form of inner experience might be said to embrace this characterization but also confine it to the immanent realm of the individual mind and body.<sup>107</sup> This inward orientation might also be compared to the lesser known term *enstasis*, popularized by the philosopher Mircea Eliade, which refers to a profound absorption or contemplation within one's own self.<sup>108</sup> Such a process enables one to expand one's subjectivity into the mysterious realms of one's interior universe in much the same way that *ekstasis* expands subjectivity into the exterior

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<sup>104</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1927).

<sup>105</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. J. Strachey, vol. 21 (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), 21: 66.

<sup>106</sup> Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, trans. Leslie Anne Boldt (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988).

<sup>107</sup> Inner experience, understood in this way, did not necessarily encourage a forced physical internalization of experience, such as the kind promoted by the principles of cultivation. Instead, it reduced the phenomena of ecstasy to an internal, individual reality rather than an external one (which many promoters of cultivated behavior could have still accepted).

<sup>108</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 76; Herman Dooyeweerd, *De Crisis der Humanistische Staatsleer* (Amsterdam: W. Ten Have, 1931).

universe. The reductionist stance of science might be said to have legitimized *enstasis* at the expense of *ekstasis*. It rested on the logic that immanence deflated transcendence instead of mirroring it or linking back to it in some other manner, as James hypothesized.

Unsurprisingly, the growing cultural influence of this view had consequences for the ideas of James. While he would continue to be a leading figure in the evolution of modern psychology, his transpersonal theories gained far less currency than his other more mainstream theories. In this regard, it is telling that his textbook, *Principles of Psychology*, which provided a capacious and insightful overview of psychologists' primary theories, problems, and questions, became central to the field, while *Varieties of Religious Experience* (along with his other works that proposed more radical explanations of emotion and consciousness) did not.

With the rise of modern psychology, unitive experiences with a transcendent entity or metaphysical space were now squarely framed as at best a benign illusion and at worst a pathological delusion that required attentive care in order to treat. From this point on, all competing modes of musical ecstasy would need to address this scientific effort to derealize authentic ecstasy in favor of psychological and physiological reductionism. For those who refused to bend entirely to its empirical arguments, rigorous study, or elite theories, there were few options. One was to become more tenacious, zealous, and resolute in transcendent philosophies, just as members of the Holiness Movement and Pentecostalism did. This choice meant growing increasingly distant from the scientific mode of musical ecstasy. Another option entailed employing various rhetorical strategies that blended reductive and transcendent interpretations in ways that appealed to (and profited from) Americans' competing impulses validate and demystify the possibility of

authentic self-loss. This was the tactic employed to by musical entrepreneurs as they developed the music-making business into a fully-fledged commercial industry.



**Chapter 6**  
**Equivocation:**  
 Commercial Music and Authentic Illusion

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In 1903, the German writer Gustav Kuhl underwent a profound experience upon attending a musical masquerade ball on Jekyll Island, off the coast of Georgia. The event, he recalled, took place amidst a group of “hilarious” dancers who moved noisily to the “peculiarly jerky and clapping sounds” of two African-American men playing a piano and a double bass in a “rag-time” style. Kuhl recounted how, upon entering the room, his senses were “captivated against my will by the music, which seemed to be produced by a little army of devils to my left.”<sup>1</sup> Astounded that anyone could move in time to such a cacophonous rhythm, he also admired the dexterity of the musicians. Before long, Kuhl found that the music once again became irresistible:

Suddenly I discovered that my legs were in a condition of great excitement. They twitched as though charged with electricity and betrayed a considerable and rather dangerous desire to jerk me from my seat. The rhythm of the music, which had seemed so unnatural at first, was beginning to exert its influence over me. It wasn't that feeling of ease in the joints of the feet and toes, which might be caused by a Strauss waltz, no, much more energetic, material, independent as though one encountered a balking horse, which it is absolutely impossible to master.<sup>2</sup>

Only with the assistance of two other people was he able to wrest control of his own feet. The victory would be short-lived, however. Every time the music started up his body started jittering by “rhythmic compulsion” even before his ears registered what was happening.

In one way, Kuhl's experience could be interpreted as a conventional ecstatic experience. The source of the ecstasy was not entirely clear, but much of his description suggested that it originated in the “music” itself, particularly the rhythm, which Kuhl

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<sup>1</sup> Gustav Kuhl, “The Musical Possibilities of Ragtime,” trans. Gustav Saenger, *Metronome* 19 (March 1903): 11.

<sup>2</sup> Kuhl, “The Musical Possibilities of Ragtime,” 11.

described as overriding his own sense of self-control. At other times, the German author indicated that the special power to possess his bodily functions may have stemmed from the power of the musicians themselves. As he described it, the music was produced by “a little army of devils”—a term that could have referred to some supernatural beings, but more likely acted as a metaphorical representation of the people playing the music. In this sense, Kuhl’s ecstasy constituted something of a social trance involving a psychic attunement between him and the musicians. Racial dynamics, of course, would have inflected this rapture. After all, Kuhl was of entirely European descent, while the musicians (not to mention the other dancers) were African-American. Their heavily rhythmic, syncopated style—what was sometimes called a “ragged” rhythm—was a common feature of music produced by black Americans from St. Louis, New Orleans, and elsewhere. The origins of such styles were indubitably diverse;<sup>3</sup> but they were at least partly rooted in the ring shouts, Congo Square dances, and other music traditions of the African diaspora in the Americas.<sup>4</sup> (Certainly, ragtime’s syncopated style, which one practitioner described as “playing two different times at once,” approximated the effect of African polyrhythm.)<sup>5</sup> As such, Kuhl’s emotional merger with the sounds and psyches of the musicians might have also constituted some kind of racial ecstasy, whereby the German’s white identity absorbed aspects of the performers’ “black” consciousness.

<sup>3</sup> One source of ragtime was certainly American marching band music, which had remained a fixture of American culture since at least the Civil War, and which was also heavily rhythmic and beat-oriented. Marching band music, however, had never been as overtly syncopated as this music.

<sup>4</sup> Brennan, *Secular Devotion*; Ned Sublette, *The World that Made New Orleans: From Spanish Silver to Congo Square* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2009); Ned Sublette, *Cuba and Its Music: From the First Drums to the Mambo* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2007); John Storm Roberts, *The Latin Tinge: The Impact of Latin American Music on the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); John Storm Roberts, *Black Music of Two Worlds*.

<sup>5</sup> Rudi Blesh and Harriet Janis, *They All Played Ragtime: The True Story of an American Music* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950), 227. The ragtime style had the melody anticipate or follow the main beat of a song, a technique that simultaneously avoided and accentuated the beat of the song. Rudi Blesh, introduction to *Scott Joplin Complete Piano Works*, by Scott Joplin, ed. Vera Brodsky Lawrence (New York: New York Public Library, 1981), xv.

Despite their differences, all of these variations fit within the metaphysical traditions of spiritual, social, and carnivalesque self-transcendence.

Other aspects of Kuhl's description, however, reveal that his experiences may not have been quite so metaphysical after all. Although they recruited the language of transcendence, they also accommodated a reductionist scientific view that grounded all human experience within the immanent mind of the individual. This much was indicated when Kuhl acknowledged that "there is no magic connected with" ragtime. The disenchanting view was also suggested by his efforts to explain the human nervous system's role in heightening the experience of music. Specifically, he described how the body "involuntarily...strive[d] to oppose and balance the weakly accented principal beats of the bar" in syncopated music. Musical experience, from this perspective, arose as a result of one's own involuntary (perhaps subconscious) effort to compensate for the production of irregular rhythms in one's aural environment. It was not the direct product of the external sounds themselves. In Kuhl's particular case, the efforts of his mind and body to interpret the ragtime rhythms compelled him to dance. Understood in this way, did Kuhl's experience actually constitute an authentic form of self-loss? Kuhl seemed to provide two disparate answers to this question. One explained his actions as something like a spiritual enthrallment to the power of music; the other explained them by looking at the internal workings of his mind and body.

This chapter argues that Kuhl was not alone in simultaneously employing the languages of transcendence and immanence to explain (the semblance of) musical ecstasy. His views were part of an ambivalent mode of musical ecstasy, which had roots in the carnivalesque sensibility but coalesced mostly between the 1880s and 1920s. This

mode drew attention to the contradictions between reductionist frameworks of experience and metaphysical ones, without necessarily trying to synthesize them. As such, this new mode was characterized primarily by ambiguity. On one hand, it gave a certain amount of credence to a sacred sensibility that endorsed the feeling of genuine psychic or spiritual emergence with the external world. This amounted to an authentication of experiences that focused beyond the immanent realm of the individual. On the other hand, it also embraced the immanent explanations that demolished self-transcendent experiences as illusory byproducts of the individual mind and body. Ecstasy now became simultaneously metaphysical and metaphorical.

The rapidly expanding commercial music and entertainment industry, long rooted in the carnivalesque sensibility, became an excellent vehicle for exploiting this ambiguity. As amply demonstrated by historians such as David Suisman, Timothy Taylor, Karl Hagstrom Miller, Russell Sanjek, entrepreneurs and corporations in search of popular appeal developed techniques, technologies, and ideas that augmented the cultural influence of mass entertainment during the decades surrounding 1900.<sup>6</sup> This process involved, among other things, the industrialization of sheet music production, the refinement of song advertisement techniques, the commercialization of automated music players, and the expansion of copyright laws.<sup>7</sup> Under the careful guidance of profit-minded entrepreneurs, these new commercial technologies and techniques also became

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<sup>6</sup> Timothy D. Taylor, *The Sounds of Capitalism: Advertising, Music, and the Conquest of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2010); David Suisman, *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Russell Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business: The First Four Hundred Years Volume III: From 1909 to 1989* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, USA, 1988). See also: David Sanjek, "They Work Hard for Their Money: The Business of Popular Music," in *American Popular Music: New Approaches to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Rachel Rubin and Jeffrey Paul Melnick (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Suisman, *Selling Sounds*.

engineered to elucidate what might be called a dialectic of belief and disbelief towards musical trance.

Of course, even in commercial settings, not everyone pursued this mixture of authenticity and artifice in the same way. Some embraced new media technologies in order to blur the boundary between real and fake musical ecstasy, while others relied primarily on the older format of live stage performance. Some questioned and gestured to the possibility of aimless self-loss without defining the object of one's transcendence. Other approaches debated the possibility of more identifiable forms of self-loss, such as those that involved some kind of spiritual or social merger. As with Kuhl, these discussions sometimes took on specifically racial overtones, particularly when they involved white Americans pursuing ecstatic experience *vis-à-vis* the music most closely associated with (if not always performed by) African-American communities. This included ragtime and its stylistic successor, jazz.<sup>8</sup> In all of these settings, Americans of varying backgrounds—including professionals and amateurs, white Americans and people of color and men and women—all participated in the discourse of ambiguity surrounding transcendent experiences. In doing so, they partially reattached supposedly archaic qualities of sincerity and authenticity back on to ecstatic experience even as they explicitly worked to trivialize the paradigm by stressing its artificiality.

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<sup>8</sup> Jazz was a predominantly African-American stylistic tradition that emerged following the First World War. As a musical form, it drew deeply from the ragtime styles that typified the pre-war era, and for several years the terms were interchangeable in some contexts. However, by the 1920s, the term jazz began to represent a variety of distinct musical features. Stylistically, it became associated with a greater emphasis on ensemble performances and improvisation than conventional ragtime tunes. Thomas Brothers, *Louis Armstrong's New Orleans* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006), 133; Nat Hentoff and Albert J. McCarthy, eds., *Jazz: New Perspectives On The History Of Jazz By Twelve Of The World's Foremost Jazz Critics And Scholars* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1975).

## The Carnavalesque Roots of Ambivalent Ecstasy

To a limited extent, equivocal endorsements of authentic self-loss had existed in American culture throughout the nineteenth century, partly embedded within the carnivalesque tradition. During this period, those who disaffiliated their ecstasies from conventional spiritual traditions seemed to find it easier to question the authenticity of such experiences.<sup>9</sup> It was as if Americans determined that Carnival's liberatory attitude—which had long been used to challenge the dominant structures associated with social hierarchy, sonic normalcy, and individual integrity—could be directed back on the established conventions of *self-transcendence* as well. This approach appeared to motivate all depictions of ecstasy that simultaneously questioned the boundaries of individual selfhood and challenged the belief that the individual could be transcended.

The purveyors and practitioners of rough music were among the first Americans to register this equivocal attitude towards genuine self-loss. One example came from an 1830s description of carnivalesque carousers that took to the streets of Philadelphia. The *Daily Chronicle* complained that “Gangs of boys and young men howled and shouted as if possessed by the demon of disorder.”<sup>10</sup> For some observers, including devout evangelicals, these noisy social and psychic affairs might have been easily explained as some kind of soul “possession” by a demon. For others, the statement could have taken on more figurative qualities. This possibility seemed to be permitted by the author's use of the words “as if,” a subtle but important qualifier that indicated the experiences of

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<sup>9</sup> Secular performance practices had long been imbued with characteristics of pretense and artifice. This was especially true of the carnivalesque theatricals, exemplified best by their frequent use of masking, costuming, and satire. On theories of pretense in theater, see: Gregory Currie, *The Nature of Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> Philadelphia *Daily Chronicle*, December 26, 1833, quoted in: Shoemaker, *Christmas in Pennsylvania*, 91.

rough music revelers may have resembled the process of soul possession without actually engendering it. In this sense, the notion of ecstasy acted not as a literal description but rather as a simile in order to make the author's statement more emphatic or vivid.

The commercial performance settings that proliferated in urban centers during the mid-nineteenth century also encouraged audiences to question the truth of transcendent experience.<sup>11</sup> Certainly, these venues could foster conventionally mystical interpretations, such as when John S. Dwight's journal described the Germania Musical Society's 1853 American debut of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony as a "sublime whole."<sup>12</sup> This reading, however, did not represent the experiences of all in attendance. Dwight himself admitted as much, confessing that although the performance was eminently successful, it was impossible to deny that there were "all shades of opinions and feelings about it, from utter indifference to unqualified enthusiasm."<sup>13</sup> Another review of that performance, this time by a local businessman and avid patron of art music named Henry Higginson, was more cynical: "Dwight, I believe says...[the performance] was very fine, beautiful, etc., but no doubt most of the audience thought it terribly dull."<sup>14</sup> Ecstatic encounters with the "sublime whole," it would appear, were not accessible to everyone who patronized the show that night.

The equivocation of ecstasy was not only present in the cultivated concerts familiar to Dwight, but also in more plebian settings such as Tony Pastor's variety

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<sup>11</sup> Urbanization had a direct influence on the growth of a concerts industry, for it was in the largest population centers that business based around live performance became viable. Between 1820 and 1850, the nation's largest cities grew quickly, and the rate of growth only increased during the second half of the century. Cavicchi, *Listening and Longing*, 24; Howard P. Chudacoff and Judith E. Smith, *The Evolution of American Urban Society*, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994), 77-110.

<sup>12</sup> "Concerts of the Past Week," *Dwight's Journal of Music*, February 12, 1853: 150.

<sup>13</sup> "Concerts of the Past Week," *Dwight's Journal of Music*, February 12, 1853: 150.

<sup>14</sup> Bliss Perry, *Life and Letters of Henry Lee Higginson*, I (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1921), 78.

theatre. When opening his “Opera House” in New York’s Bowery district in 1865, his promise to submit his audiences to “extasies [sic]”<sup>15</sup> or hire “a galaxy of talent which enraptures the Bowery girls and boys”<sup>16</sup> may have been more rhetorical than real. Of course, the terminology itself borrowed from religion.<sup>17</sup> So, perhaps it was something like experiences of spiritual transcendence that attracted what one advertisement described as fifty consecutive nights of “HOUSES CROWDED TO EXCESS.”<sup>18</sup> However, Pastor’s lack of elaboration with regard to his “extasies” left open a multiplicity of meanings. The words seemed to serve simultaneously as hyperbole and genuine representation.

In concert saloons—music halls that served alcohol and catered mainly to patrons from working-class neighborhoods—gender often played a role in confusing the authenticity of carnivalesque consciousness.<sup>19</sup> For the mostly-male patrons of the concert saloons, “waiter-girls”—workers who served men their beer, rum, and whisky—maintained an appealing and at times entrancing presence. This was especially true of the more musical women who regaled concert saloon customers with songs throughout the night. According to one description, men were more than willing to pay to “come in close quarters with the siren who has enchanted them with the music of her voice or the witchery of her eye, while singing her song on the stage.”<sup>20</sup> While the statement vividly described the alluring influence of the female voice over male listeners, it invoked the

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<sup>15</sup> “Tony Pastor’s Opera House,” *New York Clipper*, July 22, 1865: 120.

<sup>16</sup> “Tony’s Opera House,” *New York Herald*, October, 6 1865: 4.

<sup>17</sup> Similar religious language was used to describe the nature of his performance venues as well. Pastor’s Opera House, for instance, was frequently described as a “temple of amusement,” which made it comparable if not exactly equivalent to a place of worship. “Tony Pastor’s Opera House,” *New York Clipper*, October 7, 1865: 208.

<sup>18</sup> “Tony Pastor’s Opera House,” *New York Clipper*, July 22, 1865: 120.

<sup>19</sup> Other venues that attracted a similar clientele included minstrel theatres, dime museums, and freak shows.

<sup>20</sup> “Concert Saloons in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1869,” *New Orleans Republican* (December 26, 1869): 1.



imagery of magical, mythical bewitchment in order to amplify what may have been an altogether more mundane form of charm.



**Illustration 13**

“Inside Harry Hill’s Dance-House” in: Matthew Hale Smith, *Sunshine and Shadow in New York* (Hartford: J.B. Burr & Co., 1869). In: New York Public Library -- Art and Picture Collection. Shelf location: PC NEW YC-Lif-18 Catalog ID: b17539114 <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e0-d782-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

Sometimes in carnivalesque settings, the interpretations of spectators and performers could become disconnected. This became apparent in the interactions between men and women at the dance saloons that often dotted urban centers and attracted a similar clientele as the concert saloons. Here, workingmen and working women of various backgrounds came into much more intimate (and public) physical contact, mostly through dance. In these establishments, musical women entranced men just as they did in the concert hall, but in these settings the women, too, appeared to be susceptible to the ecstatic power of music; or, at least this was the claim of the popular men’s lifestyle

magazine, *The National Police Gazette*. One *Gazette* article from the 1870s described a New York City dance hall, called the Cremourne, which supposedly included dancing girls who succumbed easily to the absorbing power of melodic sound. “How gracefully they dance,” it declared, “how thoroughly they melt into the music!... It is not strange that it should be so. To dance well—to captivate their partners—is part of the business which began with flirtation two blocks away [at a similar establishment].”<sup>21</sup> Were the dancing women really so thoroughly overwhelmed by the music? Or were they willing to feign enthusiasm in order to more thoroughly “captivate” the men?

It is impossible to determine the women’s intentions or experiences, but it is plausible that their ecstasy would have been more contrived than real. This much becomes clear when considering the likely motivations of women’s interactions with men, which often centered on monetary compensation. This was certainly true of the “waiter-girls” who worked at concert saloons. By their own accounts, these women had fallen on hard times. Abandoned by their husbands or married to unemployed men, they often sought employment at concert saloons when they had no other hireable skills and needed to support their families.<sup>22</sup> Their wages often relied entirely on commission from the drinks they sold or tips from customers, and so they resorted to any means necessary to get men to stay and pay. This involved chatting and flirting with them, dressing provocatively, and promising or insinuating the possibility for more intimate sexual encounters, if not necessarily following through.<sup>23</sup> The women at dance halls could have

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted in: Edward Van Every, *Sins of New York as “Exposed” by the Police Gazette* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1930), 191.

<sup>22</sup> James Dabney McCabe, *New York By Sunlight and Gaslight* (Philadelphia: Douglass Brothers, 1882), 477.

<sup>23</sup> “Concert Saloons in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1869,” *New Orleans Republican* (December 26, 1869): 1; Brooks McNamara, *The New York Concert Saloon: The Devil’s Own Nights* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 81-88.

easily been motivated by similar factors, and if they were, their ecstasy would likely have been fabricated more than felt.

Questions of authenticity also applied to those ecstasies associated with romantic art music, some of which had already become distanced from conventionally spiritual understandings of experience. The famous American virtuoso, Louis Moreau Gottschalk, who performed and composed music in the romantic style, contributed to this process. Writing down his thoughts in 1862, the pianist described his frenzied experiences while playing show after show during a relentless touring schedule across America:

I have become stupid with it. I have the appearance of an automaton under the influence of a voltaic pile. My fingers move on the keyboard with feverish heat. . . . The sight of a piano sets my hair on end. . . . Whilst my fingers are thus moving, my thought is elsewhere. Happier than my poor machine, it traverses the field, and sees again those dear Antilles, where I gave tranquilly a little concert every two or three months comfortably, without fatiguing myself, where I slept for weeks the sleep of the spirit, so delicious, so poetical, in the midst of the voluptuous and enervating atmosphere of those happy lands.<sup>24</sup>

The description avoided any mention of a transcendent spirit, but did it reject the possibility of self-transcendent experience altogether? On one hand, Gottschalk felt his bodily movements take on an automatic quality, and he also felt transported through time and space—back to a peaceful time to the Antilles that had occurred earlier in his life. On the other hand, Gottschalk’s movements only had the “appearance” of being automatic, and his transports might have occurred within his “thought” rather than as a result of some literal escape from his body. In this regard, it may have involved an engagement with the outer reaches of his personal consciousness more than a genuine experience of self-transcendence. Although Gottschalk’s experience was undeniably powerful, it may

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<sup>24</sup> Gottschalk, *Notes of a Pianist*, 102-103.

have resembled Samuel Johnson's "invisible riot of the mind" more than a true religious conversion.<sup>25</sup>

An "as if" quality may have also subtly informed Lucy Lowell's ecstasies at the Wagner concert in Boston in 1884. She recounted her experiences as instigating feelings of being "carried away" or "overcome" were shared by her fellow audience members who were similarly "beside themselves" as they watched and listened to *Götterdämmerung*. While these descriptions could easily have indicated a potent experience of undefined self-loss, Lowell also subtly questioned the possibility of transcendent experience in general. This was most obvious in her description of Walter Winkelmann's performance that night, who she described as sitting on the stage "as tho' in a dream (almost)."<sup>26</sup> The words "as tho'" and "almost" suggest that the great tenor's dream-state was not necessarily literal in the strictest sense. And yet, despite these qualifications Lowell's descriptive language also did much to imbue her experiences with authenticity. This much was suggested by her use of the words "perfectly" or "actually" when describing her and the audience members' experiences of being "carried away" or "beside themselves." Lowell's account, therefore, remained expressly open to the possibility of real self-transcendence even as some of her language invalidated such sensations.

Lilli Lehmann, the famous German soprano who performed regularly at the New York Metropolitan Opera during the late-nineteenth century, also found a similar double

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<sup>25</sup> Devoted defenders of the transcendent sublime perhaps also concluded this much, for some of them were quick to condemn Gottschalk. The influential music critic John S. Dwight, for instance, connected Gottschalk's flamboyant musical style with thoroughly secular, commercial ambitions. The virtuoso's music, he judged, were aimed to "dazzle or to appeal to [a base] sentimentality" more than to elicit a lofty reverence for a numinous entity. Quoted in: Tawa, *From Psalm to Symphony*, 112.

<sup>26</sup> Lucy Lowell Diary, April 14, 1884, quoted in: Cavicchi, *Listening and Longing*, 107-108.

quality in the character of musical transports. For her, operatic music, especially that of Wagner, elicited deeply moving experiences:

In the whole world there was nothing that could free greater emotions in me than [my *Tristan und Isolde*] performances in New York, where the audiences sat still for minutes, silent and motionless in their places, as though drunk or in a transport, without being conscious that the opera was over.<sup>27</sup>

Like Lowell, Lehmann referred to the profound power of musical transport but also qualified it with the words “as though” and compared it to drunkenness, suggesting that audience ecstasies may not have been truly psychic or soulful journeys out of the body, but merely intoxicated delusions that resembled such experiences.

Even Friedrich Nietzsche was well aware of the possibility of counterfeit ecstasy when listening to Wagner’s music. Although the two Germans had been one-time friends, their relationship eventually turned sour. Indeed, by the 1880s, several of the Nietzsche’s publications chastised the composer for adhering to beliefs that prevented a full embrace of the Dionysian principles. In two treatises, *The Case of Wagner* and *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, Nietzsche railed against Wagner for his German nationalism, anti-Semitism, and affinity for Christianity. As for his operas, Nietzsche also performed a drastic about-face, condemning them now for being far too theatrical:

... Wagner makes one ill—What do I care about the theatre? What do I care about the spasms of its moral ecstasies in which the mob...rejoices? What do I care about the whole pantomimic hocus-pocus of the actor? ...[Wagner] was essentially a man of the stage, an actor, the most enthusiastic mimomaniac that has perhaps existed on earth, even as a musician.<sup>28</sup>

What repulsed Nietzsche about the theatricality of Wagnerian operas was, among other things, their ability to infuse an artificial “pantomimic” quality into the “moral ecstasies” of the audiences—amplifying their emotion without directing their focus. The most egregious results, Nietzsche further explained, were achieved when Wagner’s music

<sup>27</sup> Lilli Lehmann, *My Path Through Life* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1914), 366.

<sup>28</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case Of Wagner, Nietzsche Contra Wagner, and Selected Aphorisms*, 3rd Edition, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici (London: T.N. Foulis, 1911), 59-60.

cleaved “ever more closely to naturalistic play-acting and pantomime, which governed by no laws of form, aim at effect and nothing more.”<sup>29</sup> In this assessment, Wagner had not overcome the nihilistic impulse, but only directed it at the belief in authentic ecstasy as well.

In Nietzsche’s view, Wagner’s potential for undirected emotionalism was signified most potently by his “unending melody.” This musical device created a floating feeling in the listener, dissolving a sense of time and rhythm. The effect was one of entering the sea: “Gradually one loses one’s footing and one ultimately abandons oneself to the mercy or fury of the elements: one has to swim.”<sup>30</sup> If this gave the impression of self-loss, though, Nietzsche assured his readers it was not. Wagner was a “master of hypnotic trickery” and his music was incapable of eliciting true Dionysian trance.<sup>31</sup> Rather than overcoming nihilism, then, the German composer only “flatter[ed] every nihilistic...instinct and tog[ged] it out in music.”<sup>32</sup> In this manner, nihilistic tendencies worked even to deconstruct notions of self-loss. Regardless of Wagner’s aspirations towards the sublime, then, Nietzsche ultimately found his music to fall short of attaining the “spirit of music” associated with the purest, nameless form of Nature, Art, and Will.

Taken together, Nietzsche’s earlier spiritualized celebrations and later condemnations of Wagner’s music demonstrated that “hypnotic trickery” and “pantomimic hocus-pocus” could be easily confused with truly transcendent experiences of the sublime “heart-chamber of the world-will.” Put simply, profound and authentic self-loss resided uncomfortably close to its superficial and false counterpart.

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<sup>29</sup> Nietzsche, *The Case Of Wagner, Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, 62.

<sup>30</sup> Nietzsche, *The Case Of Wagner, Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, 61.

<sup>31</sup> Nietzsche, *The Case Of Wagner, Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, 14.

<sup>32</sup> Nietzsche, *The Case Of Wagner, Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, 39.

Although the practice of skirting the boundary between belief and unbelief in musical ecstasy had inchoate roots in the earlier parts of the nineteenth century, in the United States it only began to emerge as a mature cultural dynamic during the period spanning from about the 1880s to the 1920s. On one hand, it was at this time that reductionist scientific theories provided convincing reasons for treating self-loss as artificial. On the other hand, it was also at this time that bourgeois Americans began to increasingly yearn for authentic experiences. According to the historians T.J. Jackson Lears and John Higham, many upper- and middle-class Americans viewed the spread of industrialization, secular science, and technology as inducing nagging feelings of unnaturally soft decadence—or overcivilization.<sup>33</sup> Certainly, many agreed that the comfort and stability afforded by such programs was worthy of veneration. Yet, many of the elites who benefited most from such luxuries often believed they had the potential to exacerbate a sense of artificiality thereby sapping one’s will and perverting one’s decisiveness—much like the medical anesthetics that became prevalent during this era.<sup>34</sup> During the Gilded Age, fears of this modern languor—often associated with the illness “neurasthenia”—motivated many to look beyond the comfort and stability, towards more intense sensations that seemed altogether more real.<sup>35</sup> In this context, premodern activities, such as historic arts and crafts techniques, seemed satisfying precisely because they were strenuous enough to counterbalance the synthetic softness of modern life.

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<sup>33</sup> This state had been brought on by modernity’s “ethic of self-control and autonomous achievement, its cult of science and technical rationality, [and] its worship of material progress.” Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 4. See also: John Higham, “Reorientation of American Culture in the 1890s,” in *Origins of Modern Consciousness*, ed. John Weiss (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1966).

<sup>34</sup> On the rise of anesthetics see: Joseph M. Gabriel, “Anesthetics and the Chemical Sublime” *Raritan: A Quarterly Review* 30, no. 1 (2010): 69-74.

<sup>35</sup> Lears, *No Place of Grace*; Lears, “From Salvation to Self-Realization,” in *The Culture of Consumption*; Higham, “Reorientation of American Culture in the 1890s.”

For many bourgeois Americans, notions of self-loss became a focal point for this tension between authentic and artificial experience. This was certainly the case for William James. On one hand, James embodied much of the overcivilized dissatisfaction typical of his generation. Born into a wealthy family in 1842, he had a privileged childhood and access to all the comforts of modern living, yet he developed neurasthenia as a young man and began yearning for an invigoration of his will. Initially, he found antidotes to his depression by seeking out travel and adventure, such as when he took a year out of his studies at Harvard to explore the Amazon River with the naturalist Louis Agassiz.<sup>36</sup> As he matured, though, James also came to recognize that mental transports could be just as invigorating as geographical travel. This consideration prompted his experiments with nitrous oxide and his investigations as a member of the American Society for Psychical Research. But even as he became fascinated with the possibility of genuine transcendence, he remained dedicated to reconciling these interests with the more reductive theories that proliferated among the professionals in his own field. His theory of radical empiricism and his notion of transpersonality might be understood as part of an attempt to synthesize modern science with his personal yearning for authentic self-loss. James was, of course, only one of the more well-known American elites who became fascinated with authentic experience amidst a perceived pandemic of artificiality. Literary romantics, philosophical vitalists, avant-garde artists, all participated in this *fin-de-siècle* movement.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Maria Helena P. T. Machado, *Brazil Through the Eyes of William James: Letters, Diaries, and Drawings, 1865-1866* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>37</sup> Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 4-5.



## Spiritual Rapture

While the bourgeois elite helped formalize the ethos of equivocation, it was the producers and consumers who participated in the burgeoning commercial music industry who helped institutionalize it within American mainstream culture during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. These professionals helped attach the dialectic of authentic ecstasy not only to the vague metaphysical language of carnivalesque self-loss, but also to other more identifiable forms of transcendence. Sometimes this involved employing the conventional language of religion and spirituality when describing the object ecstatic experience. Although the Holy Spirit of conventional Christianity was only occasionally referenced, romanticism's spirit of Art—or more precisely music—did present a viable option for some Americans (just as it had done on occasion for Nietzsche). Unlike in earlier ritualized settings, however, the commercial entertainment context required that transcendent experiences of a numinous, musical essence were also couched within a context of make-believe. This necessity presented an obvious challenge to any assessment that solely treated trance as an authentic union of subjective identity with an external entity. Nevertheless, the presence of this paradox of authenticity once again demonstrated how the entertainment setting legitimized transcendent experience even as it challenged it.

Classical concert musicians sometimes instantiated this paradox. In 1905, for example, George Copeland, a well-known classical pianist from Massachusetts, found himself possibly entranced by the music of the French impressionist composer Claude Debussy. After receiving an anonymous package in the mail one morning, Copeland opened it to find some unfamiliar sheet music. As he played through it, his attention

changed from an “idle curiosity” to an intense excitement, and he grew conscious of a “strange awareness” coming over him. The melodies and harmonies, which he only later discovered were composed by Debussy, seemed to take on an (almost) ethereal quality, like “something I had known long ago in a dream.” For days, Copeland obsessed about the music, which he believed had introduced him to “a complete new world of sound.”<sup>38</sup> The formal characteristics of Debussy’s music itself seemed to embody the free, fluid, and transparent sensation one might experience upon listening to it. Just as the melodies achieved a “crystal-clear, but floating, tone,”<sup>39</sup> so too might have Copeland floated into this “new world” of experience. This effect was perhaps intended by Debussy himself. According to Copeland, the French composer held that any successful performance of his music required the player to avoid imposing himself on the piece: “It is necessary to abandon yourself completely, and let the music do as it will with you – to be a vessel through which it passes.”<sup>40</sup> This directive garnered no resistance from Copeland who would become responsible for popularizing Debussy in America through numerous performances. Like Kuhl’s, Copeland’s treatment of ecstasy lauded the uncanny power of the music itself to overcome one’s individual subjectivity. In other words, possession by some transcendent force was somehow possible.

Even so, if Copeland believed in the possessive power of music, he also knew that self-loss could also be imitated without true transcendence. He displayed this attitude in his unpublished autobiography, where he wrote avidly about the emotional power of Spanish music, such as flamenco. Commending the music’s ability to shift suddenly from languor to “fiery black passion,” Copeland also reminded his would-be readers not to be

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<sup>38</sup> George Copeland, “Debussy, the Man I Knew,” *The Atlantic Monthly* (January 1955): 34.

<sup>39</sup> Copeland, “Debussy, the Man I Knew,” 38.

<sup>40</sup> Copeland, “Debussy, the Man I Knew,” 38.

misled by such intensity: “Spaniards can give the impression of utter and complete abandon, but they never are.”<sup>41</sup> While their sound and gesture might be vulgar, he contended, their straight backs and “enormous dignity” reveal that they have never completely lost control. Copeland himself may have learned to feign self-loss through impassioned musical performance during his early career playing in popular dance halls and on the vaudeville stage. During this phase of his life, the young pianist shared a stage act with a ventriloquist and learned quickly that one must “catch your public” immediately upon entering the stage.<sup>42</sup> Even for a dedicated romantic like Copeland, therefore, the space between authentic and fake ecstasy might never have been very far.

For some aficionados of opera, however, the space appeared to be somewhat larger. Long associated with the romantic sublime, operatic music demonstrated a more enduring attachment to authentic interpretations of spiritual transcendence. During the early twentieth century, this tendency regularly became apparent in appraisals of performances by Enrico Caruso—not only the best-known tenor of his day, but probably the most famous performer of the era. Born in Naples, Caruso began touring and recording throughout America and Europe starting in 1902, and much of his international renown was achieved after he took a multi-year contract to sing for the Metropolitan Opera in New York City starting a year later. According to one article in *The New York World* from this era, “a motley but spellbound audience” would gather in the lobby outside the door of Caruso’s rehearsal parlor as he prepared for opening night of the

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<sup>41</sup> George Copeland, Unpublished Biography (pp. 136-137), JPB 91-135, Box 2, Folder 17, George Copeland Papers, Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

<sup>42</sup> George Copeland *Music My Life*, printed by Monica McCall, p. 31. (This is a condensed version of the unpublished autobiography cited above). Found in: JPB 91-135, Box 2, Folder 19, George Copeland Papers, Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

opera *Rigoletto*.<sup>43</sup> At times, the admirers could be seen “gushing rapturously” and humming along. What was the source of their spellbound rapture? A clearer answer came two years later, following a London performance of *Madame Butterfly*, when Thomas Burke wrote rhapsodically about the “captivating” power of Caruso’s voice. The singer’s mellifluous tones, wrote Burke, recaptured Caruso’s “first fine careless rapture” and sprung forth with a “lyric of ecstasy,” an “incomparable magnificence...[and an] intangible quality that smites you with its own mood.”<sup>44</sup> Although Burke’s encomium never went so far as to affirm a spiritual encounter with Nature, his words described something close to a sublime spirit of music.

A *New York Telegraph* article from 1910 went a step further, invoking conventional religious terminology to describe the ecstatic power of Enrico Caruso’s operatic voice. Written as a first-person account, the author of the article described Caruso’s performance as “not only good, great, overwhelming,” but also “divine.”<sup>45</sup> Even before the concert began, these feelings of overwhelming divinity seemed to be at work, as the spectator felt an “irresistible impulse” driving him from the street into the concert hall. That impulse did originate within him, but from the music itself. After witnessing the great tenor perform, the author’s “soul was transfixed” by the “magnificent, enthralling” performance. These sensations of soul possession appeared to be shared not only by the spectator, but also by the performer himself. While onstage, Caruso could be seen “singing, and pouring forth the music with such abandon, with such devotion” that he appeared to become a “vessel” for the music and for “God’s voice.” As powerful as it

<sup>43</sup> The article was originally published in *The New York World*, probably in November 1903 (sometime before Nov 23, 1903, which was the opening night of Caruso’s *Rigoletto* performance). See: “Enrico Caruso in Rigoletto, November 23, 1903,” *The Metropolitan Opera Archives*, accessed July 19, 2008, <http://archives.metoperafamily.org/Images/RigolettoEssay.htm>

<sup>44</sup> Pierre V. R. Key and Bruno Zirato, *Enrico Caruso: A Biography* (Boston: Little Brown, 1922), 215.

<sup>45</sup> “Where Caruso Sings,” *New York Telegraph* (March 6., 1910).

was, this overt affirmation of authentic (and indeed religious) ecstasy was not actually typical of most descriptions of musical performances during the early twentieth century.

In many instances, descriptions of musical experience—even those affiliated with Caruso or opera more generally—were written in ways that remained open to both sides of the debate regarding the “possessive” spiritual power of music. This included the 1914 *New York Herald* headline that proclaimed “Caruso Carried Away by His Song.”<sup>46</sup> Did the music’s capacity to “carry away” Enrico Caruso actually involve some unitive experience with an external musical force? If the word “song” here referred to the external realm associated with the audible melodies of the opera, then this was certainly the case. However, the article also included statements that seemed to contradict such a viewpoint. It described Caruso as “carried away” not only by music, but also by “his own emotion” and “on the waves of . . . emotional intensity.” These latter descriptions seemed to suggest that his experience was not rooted in the external world but in the internal workings of the emotional centers of his mind and body. Such contradictory assumptions remained unresolved in the article. Indeed, the fact that both points were left unelaborated suggests that the author seemed happy enough leave the debate open.

Neither Caruso nor his preferred genre of music held a monopoly on the rhetoric of spiritual entrancement. Some observers followed Gustave Kuhl in locating such a power in ragtime and other popular Tin Pan Alley music of the 1910s. These included the famous songwriter Irving Berlin, who avowed that his success as a songwriter was partly due his ability to write a tune that “grips each member of the audience.”<sup>47</sup> Similarly, the accomplished British pianist and composer Francesco Berger, in writing about his

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<sup>46</sup> “Caruso Carried Away by His Song,” *New York Herald*, January 15, 1914.

<sup>47</sup> “£16,000 A Year from Song Writing” [unknown newspaper and date, c. 1911], Scrapbook 1, Box 511, Irving Berlin Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress.

introduction to American jazz music in 1919, described how “the music...thrilled and overpowered” the listener.<sup>48</sup> And yet, while both Berlin’s and Berger’s comments suggested the possibility of self-loss experiences, they never fully confirmed a genuine achievement of transcendence. The best jazz ensembles, Berger declared, were:

a blend of uncongenial elements, bewildering, exasperating, and yet appealing.... Your familiar codes and laws are defied and upset. Your *terra ferma* [sic] is withdrawn. You are adrift on an unexplored ocean. The anchor of your traditions, by which you held so reliantly, has failed you. Whether you will ever reach sunlit meadows and shady groves, whether you will ever again safely tread the highroads which your forefathers trod before you, is a question which only Time, the inscrutable, can solve.<sup>49</sup>

Was Berger’s use of metaphor—including references to losing touch with solid ground and being set adrift upon an ocean—a necessary tactic for gesturing towards a sublime experience that would always exceed the capacity of normal language to describe it? Or was it a convenient tool for imagining what was actually impossible: an authentic experience of individual self-loss? Both possibilities remained open, and highlighting the paradox may have been precisely what Berger had intended.

For some musicians during the 1920s, the sensations felt while listening to jazz easily suggested the possibility of more authentic spiritual experience. Such an interpretation is certainly what the banjoist and guitarist Eddie Condon described as a young man in 1924 when he heard the King Oliver band play live during a show in his hometown of Chicago. As soon as Oliver lifted his horn to play, Condon reported, “the first blast of *Canal Street Blues* hit me.”<sup>50</sup> It was also at this time that Condon, along with his friends Bud Freeman and Jimmy McPartland, felt themselves each losing control of their own individual wills:

[Musical] notes I had never heard were peeling off the edges and dropping through the middle; there was a tone from the trumpets like warm rain on a cold day. Freeman and

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<sup>48</sup> Francesco Berger, “A Jazz Band Concert,” *Monthly Musical Record*, August 1, 1919.

<sup>49</sup> Berger, “A Jazz Band Concert.”

<sup>50</sup> Eddie Condon, *We Called it Music: A Generation of Jazz* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1992), 107.

McPartland and I were immobilized; the music poured into us like daylight running down a dark hole.<sup>51</sup>

Transfixed by the improvised melodies of Oliver and his bandmate Louis Armstrong, Condon and his friends experienced the music penetrate them much like an evangelical would have encountered a baptism by the Holy Spirit. Indeed, Condon admitted that the group of young aficionados—all of whom would later become well-known jazz musicians in their own right—would often talk about jazz “as if it were a new religion just come from Jerusalem.”<sup>52</sup> Such feelings of entrancement did not only occur in the presence of their idols. Indeed, Condon described one of his friends, a musician named Dave Tough, as “possessed” nearly anytime he played the drums.<sup>53</sup>

Yet, for all of his endorsement of authentic trance, Condon also provided subtle cues to suggest that these feelings of entrancement did not need to be always or entirely approached with sincerity. Indeed, when he described his first live experience of the King Oliver band that night in Chicago as “hypnosis at first hearing,” Condon may have acknowledged the more reductive, scientific premise: that his experience of musical absorption was a consequence of an excited subconscious mind more than some authentic possession by an outside force. Even if Condon remained a true believer in the transcendent power of jazz, however, he nevertheless refrained from treating jazz trance as a sincere and profound experience. For him, music was one of the “two things in the world which obviously were fun” (the other being girls).<sup>54</sup> This playful attitude even informed his choice of songs. As a young musician, some of the tunes he loved to play included titles such as “Ain’t We Got Fun” and “Make Believe.”<sup>55</sup> These titles may have

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<sup>51</sup> Condon, *We Called it Music*, 107.

<sup>52</sup> Condon, *We Called it Music*, 107.

<sup>53</sup> Condon, *We Called it Music*, 109.

<sup>54</sup> Condon, *We Called it Music*, 61.

<sup>55</sup> Condon, *We Called it Music*, 73.

symbolized a mindset in Condon that managed to reconcile his belief in the affectation of musical trance with a deeper nearly-spiritual belief in its transcendent power.

### Social Trance

While many musical Americans explored the fluidity of beliefs in conventionally “spiritual” unitive experiences, many also gestured towards other “objects” of ecstasy from the 1890s to the 1920s. This included explorations of the possibility of *social* trance—the absorption of one’s psyche or will into those of other individuals or communities such that the consciousness of the individual is subsumed into that of the collectivity. In many ways, this impulse was an updated adaptation of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophy of sentimentalism, which had encouraged tender feelings such as empathy and benevolence to bond together societies of people. Now, in the entertainment context, feelings of self-loss always needed to be infused with skepticism, even as they were framed as somehow authentic.

By the 1890s, Americans had even found a place for social trance in traditions that strongly promoted self-control, such as John Philip Sousa’s marching band music. As scholars like Neil Harris, Patrick Warfield, and others have demonstrated, Sousa gained a reputation as a paragon of masculine self-control and discipline.<sup>56</sup> These were, unquestionably, the kinds of characteristics that helped popularize Sousa’s music and earn him his moniker—“The March King.” But, these authors focus less on how the bandleader and his supporters indicated that such ideals should also be abrogated in

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<sup>56</sup> Neil Harris, “John Philip Sousa and the Culture of Reassurance,” in *Perspectives on John Philip Sousa*, ed. Jon Newsom (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1983); Patrick Warfield, *Making the March King: John Philip Sousa’s Washington Years, 1854–1893* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press; 2013); Patrick Warfield, “The Sousa March: From Publication to Performance” in *Six Marches*, by John Philip Sousa (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, Inc., 2010); Paul E. Bierley, *John Philip Sousa: American Phenomenon*, revised edition (Miami, FL: Warner Brothers Publications, 2001).



certain individuals in the name of specific goals, such as the production of strong, bold, coordinated music. To this effect, Sousa was known to be a demanding bandleader, requiring his orchestra to become highly attuned to his every direction. One Michigan newspaper reported that such training enabled Sousa to hold his men “as under a spell,” as they responded to his “quiet and unassuming” conducting.<sup>57</sup> In this quotation, as before, the word “as” inflected the statement with a figurative quality that challenged belief in conventional magic; however, it also suggested that each band member’s individual integrity was seriously mitigated while performing Sousa’s songs.

As it turned out, Sousa was fully aware and supportive of this kind of social self-loss during his performances. In his memoirs, the March King admitted:

this is what I am constantly trying to do all the time—to make my musicians and myself a one-man band! Only, instead of having actual metallic wires to work the instruments I strike after magnetic forces. I have to work so that I feel every one of my eighty-four musicians is linked up with me by a cable of magnetism. Every man must be as intent upon and as sensitive to every movement of my baton as I am myself.<sup>58</sup>

Sousa’s reference to animal magnetism may have been used hyperbolically for effect, for by the turn of the theory had been discredited in mainstream society. But such language also suggested that the March King believed his own consciousness should coordinate with his band members to the point of fusion.<sup>59</sup> In a press package for the band from 1895, the distinguished actor Otis Skinner extended this capacity for psychic possession from the music, through Sousa, and not just on to his band, but also to his audiences more generally: “Watch him...in his abandon to the character of the music..., and his magnetic

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<sup>57</sup> Saginaw *Globe*, quoted in: Harris, “John Philip Sousa and the Culture of Reassurance.”

<sup>58</sup> John Philip Sousa, *Marching Along: Recollections of Men, Women and Music* (Boston: Hale, Cushman & Flint, 1928), 340.

<sup>59</sup> Sousa’s argument for the unity of conductor and orchestra echoed Richard Wagner sentiments on the bond between a composer and the musical performer. Wagner once wrote that, in performing a composer’s work the musician should “add nothing to it nor take anything away; he is to be *your second self*.” Quoted in: Clive Brown: *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice, 1750-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5.

capture of his audience.”<sup>60</sup> Some observers were immensely pleased by his display of authoritarian control over others in pursuit of musical perfection. One review from 1899 purported that, “To be able to command men is a gift possessed by comparatively few, and the great general is no more difficult to discover than the great conductor.... Not the least enjoyable thing about a Sousa band concert is the masterly control of the leader over the human instrumentality before him.”<sup>61</sup> It would seem, therefore, that Sousa’s aural and visual projection of individual strength, discipline, and refinement was accompanied by loud echoes of psychic merger with orchestras and audiences alike.

Such an arrangement would not have been lost on Irving Berlin who, despite his reputation as a Tin Pan Alley tunesmith, adored brass band music written in the Sousa style. An article he published in 1913 in the entertainment magazine, *The Billboard*, marveled at how audiences could have profound, even trance-like, experiences when listening to such performances.<sup>62</sup> This included the huge crowds of people who flocked to amusement parks, like Coney Island, during hot summer nights and made “a bee-line” for resident brass bands that usually performed in a corner theater. It was in witnessing these performances, Berlin described, that audiences “go into fits of ecstasy.” Such responses were not exactly the submission of will to the authority of a commanding conductor, as Sousa himself had described it. Instead, for Berlin, the ecstatic feeling had a more mystical quality. A well-prepared band, he claimed, possessed a “sympathetic soul...that feels as we feel and speaks in our own heart-to-heart language.” Its loud and bold voice became a “mammoth aggregation of soul-felt thought reflectors, shouting forth the

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<sup>60</sup> Otis Skinner in a Sousa Band press package, c. 1897 in the Paul Bierley Papers, Sousa Archives Center for American Music, quoted in: Warfield, “The Sousa March: From Publication to Performance,” lii.

<sup>61</sup> “Sousa’s Band Plays Twice Sunday,” clipping labeled *Tribune* Detroit, April 6, 1899, in: HJ8: 243, Sousa Band Press Books, United States Marine Band Library.

<sup>62</sup> Irving Berlin, “Why We Love Band Music” *The Billboard* (June 21, 1913), in: Box 511 [Scrapbooks], Irving Berlin Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress.

fundamental sentiment of its listeners, with all the fervor an individual soul feels, and in actual, sincere, naturally-harmonized tones!" This fundamental element of all souls amounted to, in Berlin's words, "the spirit of the music," and, as such, it was only expressible through music. It had the capacity to bind together people over space and time, for instance, by capturing "the voices of the living and the dead ringing together in a vital, clear sound." This power is what caused people to weep or sing joyfully during a patriotic air. For some older men and women, Berlin recognized, it was almost as if they were "receiving a blessing from the creator." In this manner, brass band performances could be compared to a revival meeting or the work of an "oracle of old," because they captured something of the "universal soul" that passed through the music, the performers, and the audiences alike. It is perhaps not surprising to find that Berlin proudly proclaimed that "no one loves band music more sincerely than I do."

Despite the sincerity of Berlin's tone, though, his assessment of the transcendent power of music may also have been somewhat hyperbolic or metaphorical in its construction. This possibility becomes apparent when considering that Berlin himself subscribed to no formal spiritual philosophy. Born into a Jewish community in Russia in 1888, Berlin—whose original name was Israel Isidore Baline—only gained a deep exposure to religion during the first few years of his life. In his hometown, religious observance was seamlessly integrated into social life.<sup>63</sup> At this time, his father worked as a *shochet* (a ritual slaughterer of animals according to kosher religious laws) and a cantor in the local synagogue. However, when the Balines immigrated to Manhattan's Lower

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<sup>63</sup> Nathan Hurwitz, *A History of the American Musical Theatre: No Business Like It* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 76.

East Side in the 1890s, they underwent a rapid process of secularization.<sup>64</sup> When young Israel's father suddenly died, the family's assimilation accelerated, as the children were forced to leave school in order to seek out any kind of employment that would help support the family. Similar kinds of pressures had, in fact, led many Jews to start abandoning their religious rituals during this period, even if they never completely stopped thinking of themselves as ethnically or culturally distinct from the rest of American society. After growing up and becoming a famous songwriter, Irving Berlin exhibited very little, if any, affinity for the doctrines of his ancestors. His daughter, Marry Ellin, would later claim that her father was "not a religious person."<sup>65</sup> Berlin's own reading of the power of music to speak the language of a "universal soul," therefore, should be read in the context his own incomplete experience of secularization.

An ambivalent attitude towards spirituality and self-loss also informed one of Berlin's early songs, titled "That Mesmerizing Mendelssohn Tune."<sup>66</sup> Set to a cheerful melody, the lyrics celebrated a "tantalizin', hypnotizin', mesmerizin'" and "dreamy tune" that made it difficult for one to "keep from swayin'." At first hearing, the lighthearted references to hypnosis may have suggested that anything resembling a musical trance should be explained as nothing more than the immanent, if unusual, workings of the hypnotized human mind. Yet, in the context of Berlin's own spiritualized description of brass band music, the meaning became somewhat more obscured. The presence of the word "mesmerizing" also served to confuse matters, for although it was generally used as

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<sup>64</sup> Alexander Woollcott, *The Story of Irving Berlin* (New York: Da Capo, 1925), 13.

<sup>65</sup> Young Israel's father could not find work as a synagogue cantor, and therefore he took up sporadic employment at a local kosher meat market. Mary Ellin Barrett, *Irving Berlin: A Daughter's Memoir* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1996), 32.

<sup>66</sup> Irving Berlin, "That Mesmerizing Mendelssohn Tune" (New York: Ted Snyder Co., 1909).

a synonym for “hypnotizing” by the early twentieth century, it also harkened back to the more numinous magnetic fluid associated with Franz Mesmer.

Berlin was far from alone in his ambivalence towards self-loss. Many popular Tin Pan Alley songwriters also wrote tunes about hypnosis that similarly contributed to the discourse of authenticity surrounding transcendent musical experiences. “It Must Have Been Svengali,” written by Vincent Bryan and Harry Von Tilzer in 1902, maintained that the power of “Hypnotism” had instigated a variety of tragic outcomes, from Adam and Eve’s migration out of Eden to a doctor’s fall down a well.<sup>67</sup> In the chorus, each of these occurrences was explained to be “Svengali in disguise,” a reference to the name of a fictional “hypnotist” character in the popular novel *Trilby*, by George du Maurier. In referencing hypnosis, the song seemed to accept scientific theories of consciousness that framed trance as a result of mental hyper-suggestibility more than an older spiritual notion of soulful fusion or psychic possession. Other songs seemed to take a similar approach. These included “Hypnotizing Man,” written by Lew Brown and Albert von Tilzer (Harry’s brother) and later recorded by Billy Murray and the American Quartet,<sup>68</sup> as well as “Hip Hip Hypnotize Me” by Will Dillon and Harry Von Tilzer.<sup>69</sup> All of these songs’ allusions to “hypnosis” reinforced psychological theories that cast the individual mind as the source of altered experience.

The formal features of these songs similarly encouraged artificial interpretations towards self-loss. The effect was usually achieved through the art of exaggeration. “Hip Hip Hypnotize Me,” for instance, was written in a flagrantly joyful style and its title

<sup>67</sup> Harry Von Tilzer and Vincent P. Bryan, “It Must Have Been Svengali in Disguise” (New York: Harry Von Tilzer Publishing Co., 1902).

<sup>68</sup> Lew Brown (lyrics) and Albert Von Tilzer (composer), “That Hypnotizing Man” (New York: York Music Co., 1911).

<sup>69</sup> Will Dillon and Harry Von Tilzer, “Hip Hip Hypnotize Me” (New York: Harry Von Tilzer Music Publishing Co., 1910).

seemed to play on the common celebratory cheer “hip hip hooray.” Meanwhile, “Hypnotizing Man” was composed in a minor key and characterized by an exaggerated eerie style. Despite the contrasting moods, however, the effect of both songs was much the same: their exaggerated character lent a hyperbolic quality to the lyrics and seemed to act as invitations to listeners and performers alike to refrain from taking the songs too seriously.

Underneath this veneer of frivolity, however, echoes of authentic transcendence remained. These may have been most evident in the Bryan and Von Tilzer song. This is because the original story about Svengali imbued the hypnotist character with supernatural qualities, compelling the literary scholar Edmund Wilson to describe Svengali as “a spirit from an alien world who carries with it an uncanny prestige, who may speak in a divine tongue.”<sup>70</sup> Published in 1895, the story played upon a persistent cultural interest in what was at the time regularly called the “occult”—an umbrella term meant to encompass mystical and magical phenomena from a variety of backgrounds, including spiritualism, religion, divination, clairvoyance, alchemy, and astrology. Popularized by the likes of Helena Blavatsky, Rudolf Steiner, and Alice Bailey, occult topics garnered considerable interest and often appeared in popular literature of the day. The song lyrics for “It Must Have Been Svengali” also hinted at this occult quality when they described Svengali not only as a manipulative hypnotist, but in more abstract terms as “the force by which the world is ruled.”

The hand-drawn cover art of the songs’ sheet music also supported the possibility of authentic ecstasy. These images provided colorful caricatures of men’s hands

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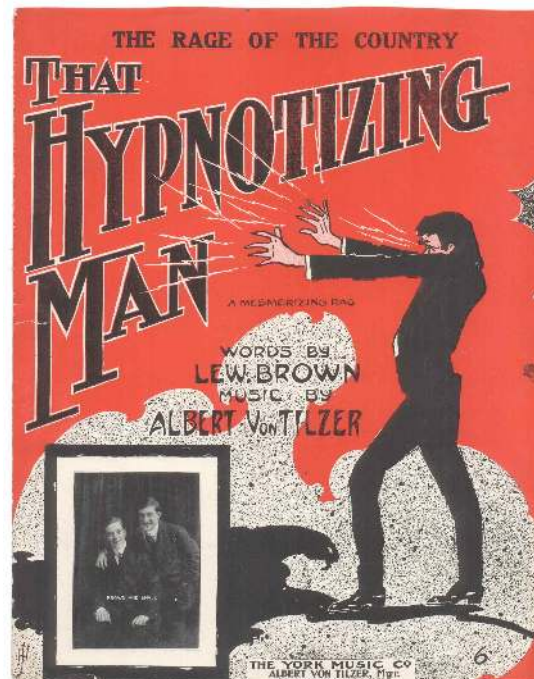
<sup>70</sup> Edmund Wilson, *Piece of My Mind: Reflections at Sixty* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1956), 105.

projecting forth what might be described as magnetic rays, which—in one picture—appear to have cast a spell on an entranced woman. While such imagery might be construed as contributing to the process of trivialization through exaggeration, it once again gestured towards the archaic theories of Franz Mesmer—which did not support modern scientific understandings of hypnosis and suggestibility. Taken one way, therefore, the depiction of magnetic rays could be interpreted as validating assumptions of animal magnetism. Taken in the context of some of the more inane features of the songs, however, such depictions also seemed to lend an extravagant tenor to the tunes that prevented anything from being taken too seriously. Thus, the songs straddled the boundaries between sincerity and frivolity, remaining equivocal towards both authentic and inauthentic interpretations of self-loss.



**Illustration 14**

Will Dillon and Harry Von Tilzer, “Hip Hip Hypnotize Me” (New York: Harry Von Tilzer Music Publishing, 1910).



**Illustration 15**

Lew Brown and Albert Von Tilzer, “That Hypnotizing Man” (New York: York Music Co., 1911)

While such descriptions never resolved the question of true transcendence, the Tin Pan Alley songs indicated that altered consciousness should nevertheless be taken seriously in at least some respects. Most often, they created a sense of urgency by appealing to race- and gender-based fears regarding the capacity of trance, however formulated, to overcome completely the will of others. Racial connotations were abundantly present in “It Must Have Been Svengali.” The character of Svengali was originally cast as a pejorative stereotype of a Jewish man who seduced, controlled, and exploited a young English girl and made her into a famous singer. In the years since the book’s publication, the name became a trope for any evil mastermind who sought to manipulate unsuspecting innocents through mysterious powers of influence. The prevalence of this image derived from racial fears and anti-Semitic sentiments that pervaded urban America during the turn of the twentieth century. For Christian Americans already concerned about rapidly growing influx of Jewish immigrants to United States,<sup>71</sup> it may have been easy enough to assume that the Jewish infiltration of cities could be matched by Jewish mind-control of Christians, particularly Christian women.<sup>72</sup> In this regard, the differences between hypnotic suggestion and spiritual entrancement were deemed less important than their capacity to permit malicious-minded foreigners to destroy the will of native, white women.

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<sup>71</sup> Jessica Cooperman, “The Great Migration: 1881-1924,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell History of Jews and Judaism*, ed. Alan T. Levenson (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2012).

<sup>72</sup> Harry Von Tilzer (born “Aaron Gumbinsky”) was of Jewish descent, but his identity did not seem to dissuade him from permitting his melody and harmonies to be matched with the subtly anti-Semitic lyrics of Bryan. Like Irving Berlin, his decisions accommodate such opinions may have been based on an apathy towards religious observance, a wish to assimilate into mainstream society, and an eagerness to advance his career as a Tin Pan Alley musician. See: Box 1, folder 1, Von Tilzer / Gumm Collection, 1878-1959, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.



Other Tin Pan Alley songs focused more on gender than race or ethnicity, but they too reinforced concerns about the power of self-loss. The lyrics for “Hypnotizing Man,” for instance, were written from the perspective of a woman and ran as follows:

Oh! that hypnotizing man:  
When he makes those motions at you  
Ev'rything he bids you must do.  
...  
Oh those wonderful eyes,  
How they seem to tantalize.  
When that feeling o'er you does creep,  
Your eyes are open but you're fast asleep.

Here again, the lyrics proposed that entrancement, however explained, could effectively submit one's psychic and bodily control to the will of another. The female-focus of the song was not coincidental; it perpetuated the longstanding tradition of associating women with a weakened will and susceptibility to self-loss. “Hip Hip Hypnotize Me” continued the gender stereotype and even indicated that fully-conscious women lacked a sufficient degree of self-control, for they could be willing participants in their own entrancement. The song told the story of how “A Hypnotist once in a Vaudeville Show was admired by a maid in the very front row... she said, ‘if you hypnotize me, then I won't know...I don't care what you do; I'll take my chances with you, if I'm hip, hip hypnotized, hypnotized.’”<sup>73</sup> The woman in this song seemed to be not just willing but happy to succumb to the trance of the performer. Taken together then, the Tin Pan Alley songs framed women as highly susceptible to the beguiling methods of males and racial others. In this formulation, it did not matter whether “hypnosis” was an immanent mind-based phenomenon or a transcendent and numinous one. Whatever it was, its power was relentless and all-consuming of the psychic agency of women.

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<sup>73</sup> Dillon and Tilzer, “Hip Hip Hypnotize Me.”

Despite this enduring legacy, America's popular music industry was not entirely predisposed towards downplaying the ecstatic agency of females. This much becomes apparent when investigating the career of Nora Bayes, who made a name for herself in vaudeville and shot to fame on the Broadway stage during the early 1900s. Having gained a reputation for "awaken[ing] the enthusiasm of...large audience[s],"<sup>74</sup> during her time at the popular theatrical revue *The Ziegfeld Follies*, Bayes' career only continued to grow. One review from 1912 described her as having a "bewitching," "ethereal," and "entrancing" stage presence.<sup>75</sup> By 1917, as she was gaining international attention with the song "Over There," her smash First World War anthem, Bayes continued to receive an array of accolades. Many reviews from this period described how she "captivated her hearers," "capture[d] the hearts of a Brooklyn audience," or exhibited "the power to conjure audiences."<sup>76</sup> For Bayes' supporters, therefore, ecstasy might have amounted to something approximating an authentic collective consciousness between the performer and her audience.

Nora Bayes herself also seemed to be fully aware and supportive of the self-loss potential of her effect on audiences. She acknowledged as much in a 1917 article she published in *Theatre Magazine*, titled "Holding My Audience."<sup>77</sup> In it, she provided a ringing endorsement of the power of creative expression to bind together performers and audiences (of any gender) into a unified whole, filled with "unbridled self-abandon" and

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<sup>74</sup> "Nora Bayes Score as One of Follies," *New York Telegraph* (30 August 1907).

<sup>75</sup> "Bewitching Miss Bayes," *Chicago News* (January 31, 1912); "Great Bill at Majestic," *Chicago News* (31 January 1912).

<sup>76</sup> "B.F. Keith's" *Washington Post* (8 November 1916); "Nora Bayes Hit of Orpheum Bill," *Brooklyn Eagle* (23 October, 1917); "People of the Stage," *Cincinnati Commercial* (10 September 1911). See also: "Nora Bayes a Hit at New Brighton," *Brooklyn Eagle* (17 July, 1917). All of these sources can be found in: reel 4, Robinson Locke Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

<sup>77</sup> Nora Bayes, "Holding My Audience," *Theatre Magazine* (September 1917): 128.

an “exchange of feeling with other human beings who understand you.” Achieving this ever-so desirable effect, Bayes argued, was something akin to an act of “magic.”<sup>78</sup> A similar attitude was also presented in another article she wrote for *American Magazine* in 1918, where she contended that “If you can make anybody cry, you make them forget themselves. The minute you make them forget themselves they are being entertained. If you can set them to thinking about your blues instead of their own, they are taken completely out of themselves.”<sup>79</sup> In short, Bayes reasoned that true entertainment involved a “complete” transcendence of self.

And yet, despite this apparent embrace of genuine transcendence, some of Bayes words also indicated the presence of an illusory element in the experiences of musical ecstasy. For instance, in the previous quotation Bayes interpreted audiences “thinking about” someone’s troubles as tantamount to being “taken completely out of themselves,” a conflation that either elevated the former or diminished the latter—and opened up the possibility for reducing self-loss to the inner workings of the imagination. This possibility seemed all the more likely considering that, as a vaudeville star, Bayes belonged to a long line of entertainers who rarely elaborated their allusions to ecstatic references. Whereas someone like Charles Grandison Finney described in great detail the nature of his baptism in the Holy Spirit, twentieth-century references to trance in popular culture did little more than mention the word.<sup>80</sup> Descriptions that lacked expatiation could more easily imbue the language of self-transcendence with an elusive quality, implying a

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<sup>78</sup> Nora Bayes, “Holding My Audience,” 128.

<sup>79</sup> Nora Bayes, “Why People Enjoy Crying in a Theater,” *The American Magazine*, April 1918: 33.

<sup>80</sup> This lack of elaboration can also be found in an early review of George M. Cohan’s musical theatre production *Forty-Five Minutes from Broadway*, which flippantly described the show as opening to an “expectant and feverish audience” that became “captivated” and “spellbound” by the performance of the lead actor, Victor Moore. “Music and Drama,” *The Record-Herald* (October 2, 1905).

heightened sense of adoration among the audience rather than representing genuine experiences of self-loss.

While this always remained a possibility for Bayes, there were also times when she determined that effective performances could actually transform ecstatic artificiality into something authentic. Such an effect could only be achieved, Bayes recognized, when an entertainer was truly honest and sincere towards her or his audience. In these settings, she argued, one must exhibit “absolute sincerity” and have “heart, mind, faith, and love for one’s audience,” much like the way one treats a true friend.<sup>81</sup> Recalling one particularly moving show she attended as a spectator, Bayes described how a performer “turned and faced his pursuers with the moment of tremendous earnestness that brought us out of our seats.” It is difficult to determine whether Bayes interpreted these actions as a literal loss of individuality. The option remained a possibility, though, insofar as Bayes determined that by focusing on sincerity “the artist...makes the unreal situation on the stage an incident that is true.” For Bayes, therefore, such a process transformed the somewhat artificial space of the theatre into something authentic and likewise the fictional quality of performance into an honest emotional connection between herself and her audience. While her discussion perhaps never entirely resolved the question of “true” transcendent experience, Bayes’ comments demonstrated that women were just as capable as men as questioning the validity of entrancement in the early twentieth century.

Those men and women who loved and played ragtime and jazz music also engaged in the ambiguation of social trance. For instance, when Paul Whiteman—the famous jazz bandleader from Denver—performed with his ensemble at the London Hippodrome in 1923, the American magazine *The Vaudeville News* reported back to its

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<sup>81</sup> Nora Bayes, “Holding My Audience,” *Theatre Magazine* (September 1917): 128.

readership that “the audience seemed hypnotized and utterly carried away by the sheer perfection of it all, but on the final electrical flare of harmony for the last piece, they stood as one man and cut loose with a roar of applause, so genuine in its feeling that it would make the man who invented the ‘claque’ do a triple somersault in his grave.”<sup>82</sup> The sensation of being “carried away” or acting as “one man” certainly suggested a profound loss of normative selfhood among audience members. Furthermore, that this process could be achieved “utterly” effectively seemed to affirm the possibility of genuine self-loss. However, the description also linked these sensations with the act of being “hypnotized”—which, by scientific definition, delegitimized any transcendent feelings as illusions of the subconscious.

The musical press gave a similar treatment to the work of the popular and classical composer George Gershwin. After the 1924 Broadway premiere of his musical *Scandals* (which he wrote in collaboration with George White), one review described an audience who became “literally spellbound” as the sound and scenes unfolded before them, including a “bevy of girls with bewildering charm and entrancing curves unconcealed.”<sup>83</sup> The enchantment, though, was probably not considered completely authentic; each scene was described as being “contrived” even if it was executed in a “masterly fashion.” A similar ambivalence may have greeted Gershwin in 1927, when he performed his jazz-classical masterpiece *Rhapsody in Blue* in front of a crowd of what one reviewer described as “16,000 rapt listeners.”<sup>84</sup> Very often, it would seem, an

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<sup>82</sup> Frank O’Connell, “Our London Letter,” *The Vaudeville News*, June 15, 1923: 7

<sup>83</sup> “New Scandals is Striking Success,” *Gazette Review*, 1924 [unknown month and day, probably July 1], in Box 72 [Scrapbooks], George and Ira Gershwin Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>84</sup> Charles H. Noble, “Gershwin Jazz Numbers Given at the Stadium,” *New York Herald Tribune*, July 26, 1927, in Box 76 [Scrapbooks], George and Ira Gershwin Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress.

embrace of musical ecstasy remained uncertain enough to be read both metaphorically and metaphysically.

### **Black Ecstasy**

Perhaps more than any other issue, race relations served to heighten and complicate the dialectic of authentic musical ecstasy in the commercial sphere. White Americans had long been aware of the distinct traditions of self-loss practiced by African Americans. And for just as long they had endeavored to distance themselves from such practices. This impulse towards detachment generated a movement to demote African-American ecstasy as inferior on account of its corporeality, but it did not stop there. It also involved efforts to recast black ecstasy as artificial. Even when such efforts were successful, though, the deauthentication effort always ran up against contrary longings for actual self-loss. Thus, the white perspective occasionally or tangentially attached black ecstasy to sincere beliefs in social, spiritual, or otherwise metaphysical self-loss. White observers (and listeners) became particularly fascinated with authentic iterations of black self-loss on account of their association with highly physical expressions and other characteristics long denied to the cultivated trances associated with white, middle-class (and male) Americans. Both white and black professionals in the commercial music industry responded to this heightened interest by drawing out and highlighting the dynamic tension between artificiality and authenticity that informed conceptions of black self-loss.

Interpretations of some of the earliest minstrel performances alluded to this dynamic and set the tone for future discussions. These included a musical act by Richard Pelham, a founding member of the popular Virginia Minstrels during the 1840s. In one

review of Pelham's performance, the author described how, the minstrel seemed to become "animated by a savage energy; and the [handling of his instrument]...nearly wrung him off his seat. His white eyes rolled in a curious frenzy...and his hiccupping chuckles were unsurpassable."<sup>85</sup> If it did not explicitly acknowledge the presence of self-loss here, the description certainly suggested that playing the instrument triggered a special power that overcame Pelham's will.

Did the minstrel performer and his audience interpret displays of ecstasy as genuine self-transcendence? The cultural historian Eric Lott, borrowing terminology from Frederic Jameson, has called this kind of display an "ecstatic surrender" to the "Other," namely a psychic submission by white performers to African-American consciousness.<sup>86</sup> This reading certainly leaves open the possibility of some genuine measure of black embodiment. However, such a possibility could equally be contradicted because, despite Pelham's apparent loss of bodily control, no part of the historical account suggested that he—or the author who described his performance—actually interpreted the display as a loss of individuality. Indeed, because the performance was carried out by a professional entertainer who was paid to portray characters (rather than become them), the display of ecstasy might have just as easily been recognized as pretense. By "acting out" black ecstasy, Pelham—and the audiences who adored him—did not necessarily condone a submission to black selfhood; they may have also demonstrated an ability to resist such action. In short, play-acting ecstasy on the stage may have provided opportunities for white audiences and performers alike to prove their self-mastery. Minstrelsy, in these terms, was not so much a submission to black experience as a satire of it. Such a public

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<sup>85</sup> From a 1846 review of the Ethiopian Serenaders, printed on a pamphlet in England, quoted in: Nathan, *Dan Emmet and the Rise of Early Negro Minstrelsy*, 125.

<sup>86</sup> Lott, *Love and Theft*, 147.

demonstration of self-control probably seemed an attractive possibility for whites from all classes who, at the time, aspired to the codes of self-propiety that attended claims to respectability during this period. Moreover, for white observers, constructing caricatures of altered consciousness did not preclude the possibility that African-Americans still treated such displays as genuine forms of self-transcendent experience. Blackface minstrels, after all, were originally thought to represent genuine African-American culture.<sup>87</sup> With such divergent possibilities, the “ecstatic surrender” of blackface minstrelsy could be simultaneously interpreted as either an impersonation or an authentic incorporation of dark-skinned others. Furthermore, if minstrelsy created some form of magnetism between white and black “consciousness,” the force between them could have just as easily been repulsive as attractive.

Similarly diverse meanings could be gleaned from the suggestions of self-loss that peppered descriptions of ragtime during the early 1900s. One example came from Carl Van Vechten, a white writer and photographer (and later popularizer of the Harlem Renaissance), who attended *In Dahomey*, a musical comedy produced in 1902 by George Walker and Bert Williams, with music and lyrics written by Will Marion Cook and Paul Laurence Dunbar—all black musicians and entrepreneurs. The plot followed the fantastical tale of two African-American men who travelled to Africa and became the leaders of a colony of emigrants from the state of Georgia. Van Vechten found that the dancers at the show exhibited an amazing physicality and transpersonal sensibility. He exclaimed about “the line, the grace, the assured ecstasy of these dancers, who bent over backward until their heads almost touched the floor, a feat demanding an incredible

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<sup>87</sup> Toll, *Blackening Up*, 42



amount of strength, their enthusiastic prancing, almost in slow motion.”<sup>88</sup> If Van Vechten confirmed that the ecstasy was “assured,” he was less forthcoming as to whether it was truly transcendent.

A similarly ambivalent attitude also marked the lyrics of “coon songs,” which combined elements of ragtime rhythm with parodic displays of stereotypical African-American culture. Written by white and black songwriters alike, the songs simultaneously reinforced and rejected beliefs in genuine self-loss. Harry A. Fischler’s 1910 piece, “Chili Sauce,” included lines such as “You coons is in a trance, Dis is no place to dance...But I am willin’, Chilun’ to take a chance, On dat entrancin’ melody,” and “Don’t try to stop yo’ twitchin’, keep on, dat tune’s bewitchin’.”<sup>89</sup> On one hand, the lyrics recognized the bewitching power of music, but just as quickly they provided reasons to dismiss genuine self-transcendence. Replete with stylized “darky dialect,” the lyrics portrayed the “entranced” African-American characters as obviously uneducated, a status that—at least to white onlookers—might have enabled them to misinterpret the true nature of their experience. Moreover, the words described the characters as “crazy for sure” and “insane,” suggesting the possibility that their trances were akin to the delusions of hysterics rather than some metaphysical experience of self-loss. White listeners of the song, therefore, had more than one reason to question the authenticity of any lyrical references to “trance” and downplay them as the imaginary creations of uneducated “coons.”

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<sup>88</sup> Carl Van Vechten, *The Dance Writings of Carl Van Vechten*, ed. Paul Padgette (New York: Dance Horizons, 1974), 5.

<sup>89</sup> H.A. Fischler, “Chili Sauce: That Tantalizing Rag Time Song” (Rhode Island: Vandersloot Music Publishing Co., 1910).

A similar complex of interpretations could be applied to another ditty, “That Coon Town Rag,” written by Herm Siewert and Gilbert Perry in 1913, which also told of the rapture experienced by a group of African Americans listening to a ragtime tune:

Down across the border lives a rag-time coon,  
Who plays upon a banjo such a rag-time tune  
We slides and sways when he sings and plays  
Such a syncopated trance,  
And I’m gone, that’s all, when that man does call  
“Come on hon’ an’ do dat dance.”<sup>90</sup>

The “syncopated trance” mentioned in this song painted the ragtime player as inextricably prone towards the production of ecstasy. But what did it mean to admit “I’m gone” upon hearing the tune? For the German psychologist Dr. Ludwig Gruener, and many of his American counterparts, such a statement could have been interpreted as a euphemism for a form of mental illness. In a newspaper article from around the same period, Gruener wrote that ragtime was akin to a “germ” that makes anyone “dippy” if they become too fond of syncopated melodies. His theory was supposedly derived from studies of the criminally insane, which Gruener took to indicate that ragtime created “mental disease” and “acute mania” associated with hysteria and “idiocy.”<sup>91</sup> These conclusions seem to have been based on a logical fallacy: Greuner assumed that if “90 per cent” of inmates at American asylums were “abnormally fond of ragtime,” then the musical term itself form must be a cause of the disease. Despite the obvious error, though, the opinion was published and served to corroborate a more general attitude among American psychologists, which considered self-loss experiences to be pathological delusions.

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<sup>90</sup> Herm Siewert and Glibert Perry, “That Coon Town Rag” (Kalamazoo, MI: C. A. Ross Publishing Company, 1913).

<sup>91</sup> “Calls Ragtime Insanity” [newspaper clipping], October 19, Box 511, Scrapbook 1, Irving Berlin Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress.

Not all immanent gestures towards self-loss framed the experience in negative terms. In an article for *Current Opinion*, a “Broadway ethnologist” named Walter Kingsley described the effect of jazz rhythms as creating a syncopated pleasure that could be traced back to “jungle ‘parties’” of the Congo, when the “tom-toms throbbed” and “witch doctors and medicine men” were in attendance.<sup>92</sup> In the United States, Kingsley wrote that these antecedents gave way to the “underworld resorts of New Orleans.” In this city, where jazz was thought to have originated, were located “wonderful refuges of basic folklore and primeval passion [where] wild men and wild women...danced...for gladsome generations.” From this “levee underworld,” Kingsley purported, jazz eventually crept up the Mississippi river until it landed in Chicago and points beyond.<sup>93</sup> By framing jazz as an outgrowth of African “jungle” rituals, the description quietly recruited the language of evolutionary science, which, following the logic of Herbert Spencer and others, often linked “primitive” consciousness with misguided illusion. Kingsley’s portrayal, however well-intentioned, opened up the possibility of this interpretation.

Alongside the tendency to psychologize trance and project it onto the so-called primitive minds of (Africans and) African Americans, ragtime and jazz also revealed a tacit yearning for some sense of genuine self-transcendence into a collective, transracial whole. This impulse informed white Americans’ interest in the music and dance of both African Americans and Native Americans. Such an impulse is perhaps what drew crowds of white tourists across the desert to view the Hopi Snake Dance, a common ceremonial practice in Arizona and other parts of the Southwest. As the anthropologist Charles

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<sup>92</sup> “Why Jazz Sends Us Back to the Jungle,” *Current Opinion* 65 (Sept. 1918): 165.

<sup>93</sup> “Why Jazz Sends Us Back to the Jungle,” 165.

Francis Saunders later explained, the Snake Dance became nothing more than an “‘entertainment’...to the average white onlooker,” even if it remained to the Indian “a solemn and religious rite...[in pursuit of] divine favor.”<sup>94</sup> Yet, Saunders also described the ceremony as the “most entrancing...half-hour entertainment that America has to offer,” suggesting that white tourists may have recognized the potential for their own authentic entrancement even as they trivialized Indian ecstatic experience as mere “entertainment.”<sup>95</sup>



**Illustration 16**

A lithograph postcard from 1915 depicts a Snake Dance in Arizona. One dancer faces the camera with a snake in his mouth while a crowd of spectators looks on. Source: R. M Bruchman, *Hopi Ceremonial Snake Dance, Near Winslow, Arizona*, lithograph postcard, (Winslow, Navajo County, AZ: R.M. Bruchman, Indian Trader, 1915). Available from: <https://www.terapeak.com/worth/3-near-winslow-arizona-hopi-indian-snake-dance-view-1-c1915-az-litho-postcard/291925805072/>.

The possibility of genuine self-release might also have motivated white Americans’ fascination with the jazz idiom. According to James Weldon Johnson—the famous African-American author, civil rights leader, and sometimes songwriter—white patrons of black dance music in the 1920s were “striving to yield to the feel and

<sup>94</sup> Charles Francis Saunders, *The Indians of the Terraced Houses* (New York: Putnam, 1912), 203. Writing several years later, D.H. Lawrence described this attitude as converting “the Indian with his ‘religion [into]...a sort of public pet.” D. H. Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico* (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2009), 139.

<sup>95</sup> Saunders, *The Indians of the Terraced Houses*, 203.

experience of abandon; seeking to recapture a state of primitive joy in life and living; trying to work their way back into that jungle which was the original Garden of Eden; in a word, doing their best to pass for colored.”<sup>96</sup> In this statement, Johnson effectively suggested that white Americans participated in jazz culture partly as a way to blend white and black races, civilized and primitive consciousness, and individual and collective experiences.

Many popular jazz and dance tunes of the 1920s specifically fed this white longing to blend with black consciousness. Recognizing the widespread appeal of this possibility, songwriters of different racial backgrounds participated in the process. This was immediately apparent in Perry Bradford’s lyrics to the song “Black Bottom,” which ran as follows:

Now learn this dance somehow  
Started in Georgia and it went to France  
It’s got everybody in a trance,  
It’s a wing, that Old Black Bottom Dance.<sup>97</sup>

Like all references to ecstasy in the popular music environment of the 1920s, the reference to “trance” here could have easily been interpreted as a vicarious experience of the feelings and actions of others through the power of the individual imagination. However, the circumstances of its popularization suggest it may have also signified something more. Written by a composer of color, the song was usually matched with a dance that originated in the African-American community of Florida and was subsequently developed by the black choreographer Billy Pierce. (The name “Black Bottom” itself referred to an historically African-American neighborhood in Detroit.) Despite such strong roots in the African-American community, the song and dance grew

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<sup>96</sup> James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way* (New York: Viking Press 1968 [c1933]), 328.

<sup>97</sup> Marshall Stearns, *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1968), 111.

into a national craze and became famous among white jazz-lovers. For these Americans, the Black Bottom “trance” might have been considered not only an opportunity for genuine self-transcendence but also for a kind of ecstasy that bridged the racial divide—effectively blending white identity with features of black consciousness.

A similar longing for transracial self-loss may have also motivated the allusions to ecstasy in the white songwriter Cole Porter’s 1929 song “You Do Something to Me.”

You do something to me,  
something that simply mystifies me.  
Tell me, why should it be  
you have the power to hypnotize me?  
Let me live ‘neath your spell,  
Do do that voodoo  
that you do so well.<sup>98</sup>

Even as the word “hypnotize” alluded to immanent explanations of ecstasy, the suggestion of living “‘neath your spell” suggested a more magical form of mystification. And while the object of the singer’s desire might be assumed to be a woman, it could just as easily be interpreted as the entire African-American community. In fact, the reference to “voodoo”—a perennially potent a symbol of African mysticism (especially in the white imagination)—made this alternative seem entirely possible. In this scenario, the word “you” would be treated as second-person plural, and the effect would consist of embodying black experience through the power of song and dance. Such a process constituted a more metaphysical impulse of what the author Normal Mailer would later call the “white Negro”—a name he gave to those white hipsters who shrugged off the tendency towards totalitarian conformity and “absorbed the existentialist synapses of the Negro.”<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Cole Porter, Alan Strachan, Benny Green, *The Mermaid Theatre’s Cole: An Entertainment Based on the Words and Music of Cole Porter* (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1981), 54.

<sup>99</sup> Normal Mailer, “The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster,” in *The Portable Beat Reader: Three Commentators on the Beat Generations*, ed. Ann Charters (New York: Viking, 1998), 587.

While some white Americans yearned for transracial ecstasy, others simply desired to appropriate the language of authentic self-loss associated with jazz in order to serve *intra*-racial bonding. This impulse explains one article published in 1924 in the magazine *Sunset*, which identified jazz as a music that “binds the family together through its shared pleasures.”<sup>100</sup> Considering *Sunset* was a general interest magazine that catered to a broad middle-class readership, the jazzy family unit in this case was most likely not assumed to be black. This point was reinforced by the fact that every jazz musician who was described in the article as playing “good music” for family bonding was white, including Paul Whiteman, Art Hickman, Zez Confrey, and Frank McKee. Such a reluctance to break out of racial boundaries almost certainly reflects the underlying racial divisions that permeated American culture during the 1910s and 1920s, which were deep enough to prevent most white Americans from outwardly acknowledging that they shared consciousness with their fellow black citizens.

For several reasons, then, white jazz lovers’ notions of racially-inflected self-loss differed dramatically from W.E.B. Du Bois’ theory of double-consciousness. Perhaps primarily, the white pursuit of transracial ecstasy was always a voluntary act. Even if it was motivated by a desire to break free of stifling middle-class conformity, the desire to transcend white experience was always a relatively free choice. By contrast, Du Bois’s notion of double consciousness was much more of a requirement imposed on black Americans who participated in mainstream society. As such, white transracial ecstasy was mostly liberating while the black variety was often constraining. Another distinction between the two forms pertained, of course, to the possibility of authentic self-loss. Whereas Du Bois remained mostly attached to immanent explanations of consciousness,

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<sup>100</sup> Pauline Partridge, “The Home Set to Music” *Sunset* (November 1924): 68, 75-76.

which confined experience to the working of the human mind, the ecstasy of the “white Negro” remained open to—if not entirely convinced by—the possibility of a true fusion of consciousness between members of different racial groups.

### Technological Transport

Although the debate over authentic ecstasy never disappeared, it might be accurate to state that, starting in the final decades of the nineteenth century, the advent of new media technologies and commercial techniques reinforced cultural interest in artificial interpretations of self-loss. Thomas Edison’s invention of the phonograph in 1877 became a crucial, early component in the process of “artificializing” aural experience more generally.<sup>101</sup> Edison’s promotion of the device as a “talking machine” provided an effective way of describing its hybrid features. On one hand, it possessed something close to human characteristics. It could reproduce the sounds made by humans with uncanny accuracy. On the other hand, it was obviously mechanical, and not human at all. Indeed, it recreated human aural experiences in superhuman ways, retaining them across large distances of time and space; and its method of reproduction actually signified the very mechanical nature of the process itself. The hissing and popping and scratching that typified the earliest recordings, including those put on a wax cylinder and later on a celluloid or vinyl disc, could never be made by humans.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, the phonograph’s design was entirely inorganic, replete with metal, wax, and wires. In this manner, if the device was “talking” like a person, it also had all the characteristics of a “machine.” As

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<sup>101</sup> On the phonograph, see especially: Andre Millard, *America on Record: A History of Recorded Sound* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Emily Thompson, “Machines, Music, and the Quest for Fidelity: Marketing the Edison Phonograph in America, 1877-1925,” *Musical Quarterly* 79 (Spring 1995): 131-171; Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 193-235; William Howland Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life: The Phonograph and Popular Memory* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>102</sup> Thompson, “Machines, Music, and the Quest for Fidelity.”



such, it became easy enough (although not inevitable)<sup>103</sup> to treat phonographic experience as somehow less authentic than face-to-face human interaction.

The relative fakeness of mechanical recording experiences was recognized early on. An article from the popular magazine *Scientific American* exclaimed that it was impossible for a man to listen to the recording “without his experiencing the idea that his senses are deceiving him.”<sup>104</sup> The article reinforced the connotations of deception by describing recordings as a “little contrivance” (on par with stereoscopic photographs) and by marveling at their power to create “the illusion of real presence.” Notably, the term “real presence” had theological connotations, serving as a synonym for a transcendent entity.<sup>105</sup> But, in these terms, as impressive as the phonographic experience was, it only ever mimicked a spiritual one.

The counterfeit quality that typified the phonograph was less obvious but still on display in the player piano, the more profitable and arguably more important music reproduction technology of the early twentieth century.<sup>106</sup> The contrivance of this instrument lay in the rolls of perforated paper—originally recorded by a human player—that, when processed through a mechanism inside the piano, caused the hammers to strike different strings at different times, thereby creating melodies, harmonies, and rhythms just as a human player would. While many features of the reproduced music here were quite similar to the original, the technology also revealed its mechanical nature to the listener relatively quickly. As the piano roll was processed, keys played in time, but the musical dynamics (the relative loudness or softness) as well as the tempo of the original

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<sup>103</sup> Schmidt, *Hearing Things*.

<sup>104</sup> “The Talking Phonograph,” *Scientific American* 22 (December 1877): 385.

<sup>105</sup> See: Steiner, *Real Presences*.

<sup>106</sup> Brian Dolan, *Inventing Entertainment: The Player Piano and the Origins of an American Musical Industry* (Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009).

performance could not be retained. With these limitations, it was not uncommon for music critics and journalists to describe the instrument as “ingenious artifice” or “a curious artificial device.”<sup>107</sup>

More than even the phonograph and player piano, the greatest opportunity for technological artifice came with the advent of moving picture devices. These included Edison’s Kinetoscope, which was intended for viewing by one person, and the Vitascope, which could support multiple simultaneous viewers. Although the primary function of such devices was to project images on a lens or screen, even from an early era their visual phenomena were rarely presented without an added auditory component. Indeed, nearly from the beginning of the commercial cinema industry, “watching” moving pictures almost always relied on multiple forms of media and therefore multiple sensory experiences. In this regard, the tendency to label the early decades of the twentieth century as the “silent era” of film is a gross misrepresentation.<sup>108</sup>

Producers of early cinema suffused movies with reminders of their artificiality. Some of these were unintentional, such as the mechanical limitations of film recording which tended to create grainy reproductions that could be distinguished from phenomena that was mediated only through the human eye. Other times, the effect was entirely

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<sup>107</sup>J. Hopkins, “A Player-Piano for Natural Musicians,” *The American Monthly Review of Reviews* 34 (December 1906): 85; J. Alfred Johnstone, “Some Essentials in Fine Piano-Playing: Illustrated by Features in the Art of Mme. Carreno [sic],” *Musical Standard*, September 3, 1910: 146.

<sup>108</sup> As early as 1895, the Kinetoscope gave way to the Kinetophone, which was outfitted with a phonograph and listening tubes. The recordings included pre-selected recordings from the Edison catalogue, including dance tunes and marches. Opportunities for pairing moving pictures with music only expanded with the development of nickelodeons—small indoor cinema spaces that cost five cents for admission and featured a series of short movies. The equal role played by both visual and audible components was evidenced by the rampant popularity of “illustrated songs.” These were shows that involved the performance of music in conjunction with the projection of still images on glass slides. Often the slides were intended to enhance the musical experience, for instance by including song lyrics that allowed audience members to sing along. The immense popularity of illustrated songs from the 1890s to the 1910s helps signify how important sound and music was in early cinematic spaces. Kathryn Kalinak, *Film Music: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 33-36.

deliberate, for instance when characters broke with onscreen action to smirk and wink knowingly at the audience or bowed to the spectators after performing some remarkable feat.<sup>109</sup> In this regard, screen actors mimicked performers on the vaudeville stage, which was still the most popular commercial entertainment at the time. (Vaudeville actors themselves drew on a long-practiced convention of “breaking the fourth wall” that was rooted in Shakespearean theatrical “asides.”) Similarly, the artificiality of films was sometimes put on display in order to demonstrate the novel capabilities of the recording technology itself, as with close-up shots or reproductions of otherwise inaccessible locations, like the front of a fast-moving train. According to film historians such as Tom Gunning and Charles Musser, an emphasis on novelty and an ability to draw attention to its own artifice characterized the early style of filmmaking, which has been labelled the “cinema of attractions.”<sup>110</sup>

Nevertheless, the focus on artifice did not make new communication technologies entirely ill-suited to imbuing altered experiences of consciousness with feelings of authenticity. According to the media theorist Marshall McLuhan, all technologies act as an extension of the human body by expanding the power of the embodied mind beyond its natural physical means.<sup>111</sup> Put another way, the primary role of technologies is to augment what the human mind, body, and senses can already do, by strengthening their actions or extending them across time or space. Long before McLuhan popularized it, many Americans implicitly accepted this theory when they expressed an earnest belief in

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<sup>109</sup> Tom Gunning, “The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde,” *Wide Angle* 8, nos. 3 and 4 (Fall 1986): 64-65.

<sup>110</sup> See: Gunning, “The Cinema of Attractions;” Charles Musser, “American Vitagraph 1897-1901,” *Cinema Journal* 22, no. 3 (Spring 1983): 4-46; Charles Musser and Carol Nelson, *High-Class Moving Pictures: Lyman H. Howe and the Forgotten Era of Traveling Exhibition, 1880-1920* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

<sup>111</sup> Marshal McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

the power of the phonograph, the player piano, and especially the multimedia technologies of the cinema to extend themselves literally out into the cosmos.

Film creators attempts to alter the consciousness and self-awareness of audience members was amply demonstrated by films within the cinema of attractions tradition that included sequences taken from unusual or inaccessible perspectives—including from trains, rollercoasters, or other moving vehicles. For the movies about locomotives, the intent could be ascertained even before the movie started. Some theatres were decorated and arranged as a train car, including a conductor who took tickets and a recording of clacking wheels and hissing brakes.<sup>112</sup> Such details probably encouraged what the film scholar Miriam Hansen refers to as the “derealization” of the theatre space.<sup>113</sup> In some instances, the effect was only augmented when the film began. This occurred during screenings of *The Black Diamond Express*, which projected an image taken not from the front of the train, but from the tracks as a locomotive approached. As the train barreled towards the audience “with a roar and rumble, the noise being simultaneously produced by the phonograph,”<sup>114</sup> more than one audience member “involuntarily...scramble[d] to get out of the way” as it seemed to reach the front of the stage.<sup>115</sup> With such stimulation of their auditory and visual senses, audience members may have experienced what Marry Ann Doane calls the “progressive despatialization and disembodiment of the spectatorial position.”<sup>116</sup> This involved shifting spectators’ awareness away from their known environment or normal sense of self towards other versions far removed in time or place.

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<sup>112</sup> Tom Gunning, “The Cinema of Attractions,” 64-65.

<sup>113</sup> Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship and American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 83.

<sup>114</sup> Quoted in: Musser and Nelson, *High-Class Moving Pictures*, 66.

<sup>115</sup> Quoted in: Musser and Nelson, *High-Class Moving Pictures*, 66.

<sup>116</sup> Mary Ann Doane, “Technology’s Body: Cinematic Vision in Modernity,” *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 5, no. 2 (1993): 15.

Contemporary film scholars, including Kathryn Kalinak, have written about this effect, describing the cinematic experience as having “an ability to make us forget where we are or who we are when we are engrossed in watching it.”<sup>117</sup>

Yet, considering that cultural assumptions had long tied mechanical reproduction technologies to illusion, how strong or convincing were these apparent transports? By most accounts, the cinema of attractions did not excel at authenticating ecstasy. The film scholar Lauren Rabinovitz, for example, acknowledges that cinematic experiences always involve some blending between the phantasmagoric space of the screen and the theatre itself. But she counters Doane’s arguments by contending that early film-viewing experiences typically maintained spectators’ normative sense of embodiment.<sup>118</sup> Similarly, according to the film historian Leon Gurevitch, reports about transported audiences in *The Black Diamond Express* were “most likely exaggerated precisely because they served a promotional function that benefited all involved.”<sup>119</sup> Other scholars have made similar observations about the so-called transports of early cinema audiences.<sup>120</sup> It would seem, then, that—even with the accompaniment of realistic sound effects—the majority of audiences were not wholly convinced that a physical locomotive emerged from the screen. In a similar manner, most audiences probably did not frame their own feelings of cinematic self-loss in purely authentic terms.

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<sup>117</sup> Kalinak, *Film Music*, 28.

<sup>118</sup> Lauren Rabinovitz, “More than the Movies: A History of the Somatic Visual Culture through Hale’s Tours, Imax, and Motion Simulation Rides,” in *Memory Bytes: History, Technology, and Digital Culture*, ed. Lauren Rabinovitz and Abraham Geil (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Lauren Rabinovitz, *For the Love of Pleasure: Women, Movies, and Culture in Turn-of-the-Century* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

<sup>119</sup> Leon Gurevitch, “The Cinemas of Transactions: The Exchangeable Currency of the Digital Attraction,” *Television & New Media* 11, no. 5 (2010): 370.

<sup>120</sup> Stephen Bottomore, “The Panicking Audience? Early Cinema and the ‘Train Effect’,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 19, no. 2 (1999): 177-216; Ian Christie, *The Last Machine: Early Cinema and the Birth of the Modern World* (London: BBC-BFI, 1994); David B. Clarke and Marcus A. Doel, “Engineering Space and Time: Moving Pictures and Motionless Trips,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 31, no. 1 (2005): 41-60.

Contemporaneous psychologists' theories of film experience only reinforced audience members' disbelief in sensations of self-transport. This included the writings of the German-American psychologist Hugo Münsterberg, who compared movie-watching to hypnosis. In his publications from the 1900s and 1910s, Münsterberg claimed that the mind states of hypnotized subjects and film spectators were comparable in that both groups suffered from an "over-attention" that "narrow[ed] the contents of consciousness," resulting in "a heightened state of suggestibility."<sup>121</sup> As a result, this form of consciousness stood in "complete isolation from the practical world."<sup>122</sup> In short, Münsterberg's theories of cinematic experience framed cinematic self-loss as fictional, powered by "suggestion," and generated through constraints on an individual consciousness.<sup>123</sup>

Nonetheless, while artificiality would always remain a clear feature of cinematic experience, filmmaking techniques popularized during the late 1900s and 1910s also helped focus attention away from this element. Much of the impetus in this direction came as a result of filmmakers rapid transition away from the cinema of attractions and towards more narrative-based movies, wherein characters developed and action unfolded through plot. The primary focus of this format was not to showcase the novel and spectacular capabilities of the technology itself, which often drew attention to its manmade quality. Instead, the emergent cinema focused on the creation of what theorists call diegesis—the imagined, narrative world of the film. These consisted of the projected sights and sounds that are intended to give a spectator/listener what the film scholar

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<sup>121</sup> Hugo Münsterberg, *Psychotherapy* (Boston: Moffat, Yard, & Co., 1909), 117; Hugo Münsterberg, *The Photoplay* (New York: Routledge, 2002 [1916]), 85, 97.

<sup>122</sup> Münsterberg, *The Photoplay*, 82.

<sup>123</sup> Such a characterization corresponds to what the film scholar Miriam Hansen describes as cinema's own unique "fictional space-time." Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, 83.

Annabel J. Cohen describes as the “emotional information he or she needs to make a coherent story.”<sup>124</sup> A mark of success for this narrative style of filmmaking included the creation of a convincing or compelling diegetic world. (As such, technology needed to serve the story instead of reminding spectators of its contrivance.) Towards these ends, narrative filmmaking always elevated techniques that were more likely to make audiences feel immersed or absorbed in the story.

The multimedia nature of the cinematic environment became especially effective at achieving this sense of immersion. The combination of visual and aural technologies often worked better to downplay the illusoriness of audience experience than either technology on its own. The early convention of including human musicians in the cinematic space, performing in close proximity to audience members, may have contributed a sense of authenticity to the sonic environment of the theatre even after musicians were replaced by machines. Moreover, even when recorded music became normative, it also served to distract audience attention away from the more obvious artificial aspects of the visual component. For instance, a mellifluous melody was able to drown out rattling projectors or give the appearance of continuity in an otherwise choppy sequence of shots and scenes.<sup>125</sup> According to the cultural critic Theodore Adorno and the film composer Hanns Eisler, one of the vital functions of music in the cinematic experience was its ability to act as “a cement, which holds together elements that otherwise would oppose each other unrelated—the mechanical product and the spectators.”<sup>126</sup> By distracting spectators from the film’s mechanical foundation, therefore,

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<sup>124</sup> Annabel J. Cohen, “Music as a Source of Emotion in Film,” in *Handbook of Music and Emotion: Theory, Research, and Applications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 886.

<sup>125</sup> Kalinak, *Film Music*, 23.

<sup>126</sup> Hanns Eisler and Theodor W. Adorno, *Composing for the Films* (New York: Continuum, 2005 [c1947]).

music was able to reduce considerations of artifice, and, in the words of Kalinak, “suspend our disbelief in the two-dimensional, larger-than-life images posing as reality.”<sup>127</sup> The desired result was, as Cohen points out, a heightened level of “absorption” in the film context.<sup>128</sup>

Filmmakers recognized this audiovisual synergy early on. Although the earliest nickelodeons were not always accompanied by sound, by the 1910s most movie theatres did incorporate music in some format or another. At first, most film music was created by live musicians, who would play “incidental music” within the theater space itself. Producing the desired emotional response among audiences became of crucial importance, and, towards this goal, studios, trade publications, and theater managers began to develop “cue sheets”—documents that specified musical pieces (or at least styles) that should be played at precise moments throughout the film.<sup>129</sup> The songs chosen for the cue sheets took any number of different forms. They included popular tunes from vaudeville, classical music, folk melodies, and other compositions written by musicians specifically to accompany specific emotions or actions portrayed onscreen. These pieces were often published in encyclopedic catalogues of songs which producers, managers, and musicians could select from when customizing a cue list.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Kalinak, *Film Music*, 26-27. See also: Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987). Caryl Flinn elaborates the point, contending that music provides a “fullness of experience” and augments the film’s “impression of perfection and integrity.” Caryl Flinn, *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia, and Hollywood Film Music* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 9.

<sup>128</sup> Annabel J. Cohen, “The Functions of Music in Multimedia: A Cognitive Approach,” in *Music, Mind, and Science*, ed. S.W. Yi, (Seoul, Korea: Seoul National University Press, 1999).

<sup>129</sup> Kalinak, *Film Music*, 41.

<sup>130</sup> These publications included “Incidental Music for Edison Pictures” *Edison Kinetograms* 1, no. 4 (September 15, 1909); Giuseppe Becce’s *Kontheek* series published in Berlin (1919-29); J.S. Zamecnik’s *Sam Fox Moving Picture Music* series (1913-1914); Malvin M. Franklin’s *Favorite Moving Picture Music Folio*; and Enro Rapee’s *Motion Picture Moods for Pianists and Organists* (1924) and *Encyclopedia of Music for Pictures* (1925). Although those who ran and patronized the film world agreed that music was crucial to the cinematic experience, during the early era of film many also complained about the careless



Some catalogs, such as Malvin M. Franklin's *Favorite Moving Picture Music Folio*, explicitly described film music as having an authenticating influence on cinematic transport. An advertisement for the songbook in a monthly magazine from 1915, made abundant references to self-transport as it endeavored to encourage musically adept amateur players to purchase the publication for use at home:

Begin at the very beginning. A few bars of the opening "Grand March" and the fun is on. You are literally carried away as your mind's eye pictures you part of some splendid court scene. The theme changes. "Hurry Up" music stirs you to imaginative participation in some stern and exciting struggle or pursuit. That done, the first few notes of 'Mysterious Burglar Music' halt your galloping brain. You feel it backing instinctively into a conveniently dark corner, where it watches some stealthy night prowler—on evil bent—flicker across the screen of the imagination. Then the warm strains of seductive "Oriental Music" chase the goose-flesh from your back. You loll languidly in unaccustomed splendor 'neath Asiatic skies. A bugle call! Gone is the breath of the lotus. Your mind marks time to the beat of "War Music"—or whoops madly with hard-riding cowboys to the tune of a wild "Gallop." And so on through 20 pages of the *Favorite Moving Picture Music Folio* takes you through the entire gamut of human sensations. Not a dull bar in it. Never be without it. It's a whole evening's pleasure at home.<sup>131</sup>

By playing the film music at home, the ad suggested, the player could "literally" float out of his or her mundane life and magically visit any number of exotic destinations, from a royal court to the Orient or the Wild West. This act of being "carried away," as the ad described it, certainly seemed to constitute a form of ecstasy. Indeed, the physical presence of one's body seemed to have no bearing on the flexible potential of one's consciousness.

Yet, beyond these references to transcendence, there was also a simulated quality to the experiences it described. The ecstasy it marketed, after all, was a transport of the

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choice of compositions or accompanying styles that actually distracted from the storyline. In response to these concerns, many in the film industry set out to improve the coordination between film music and audience reception. According to the film historian Rick Altman, this effort involved a series of decisions and techniques that "concentrated audience attention on identification with the image." This was achieved in a variety of methods, including a transition away from lyric-based popular songs and towards instrumental music, and ultimately the commissioning of customized scores for specific movies. Rick Altman, *Silent Film Sound* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 283, 251-258.

<sup>131</sup> "At-the-Movies Fun in Your Own Parlor with the *Favorite Moving Picture Music Folio*," *The Music and Theatre Gossip: A Popular Monthly Magazine of Song, Dance, Concert and Stage* (February 1915), 5. Also see: Irving Berlin Collection Scrapbooks, Library of Congress, Box 511, p. 99 of scrapbook.

“imagination” that could be achieved “at home.” It was not based on the testimonies of people who had performed music from the book. Instead, it gave the appearance of a daydream. Like the films from which they were derived, the experiences supposedly elicited by the songbook always had some element of artificiality. These were projections or facsimiles of reality conjured up within the “mind’s eye,” not reality as such. In this regard, even the advertisement’s use of the word “literally,” which it employed to describe the act of being “carried away,” could have taken on an ambiguous meaning. Its obvious connotations of being factual or unexaggerated may have been twinned with a more colloquial usage, which at the time was used to add hyperbolic emphasis more than to delineate reality.<sup>132</sup>

Not only advertisers, but also film creators and spectators believed that musical motion pictures facilitated self-altering experiences of the rich, diegetic world in ways that simultaneously validated and challenged its authenticity. One article published in a leading film trade publication, *Moving Picture World*, made explicit this duality when describing the musical accompaniment for the film *The Old Fiddler*, which was produced in the 1910s. The movie told the story of an elderly fiddle-playing man, shunned from his house following complaints from his daughter-in-law, and his son who went out in search for him, finally finding him and bringing him home to a remorseful daughter-in-law.

It will be a hard-hearted person indeed who can look upon this picture without shedding a tear, and if it is presented with the strains of a violin following the movements of the old fiddler, and, at the end of the search, if a gradual crescendo is effected to denote the approach to the fiddler, the illusion will be complete and will captivate any audience.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> In this usage, the word “literally” comes closer to the definition of “virtually.” See: “literal, adj. and n.” in *OED Online*, <http://www.oed.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/view/Entry/109055?redirectedFrom=literal> (accessed September 26, 2016).

<sup>133</sup> “Feature Films for Feature Music,” *Moving Picture World*, April 16, 1910: 591.

This passage revealed a great deal about the relationship between music and cinematic self-transcendence. The violin music—appropriately chosen to symbolize the fiddle-playing father at a crucial moment in the story—“completed” the “illusion.” But it also worked to “captivate any audience,” implying a degree of spectator absorption that could be likened to (if not exactly equated with) true transport.<sup>134</sup>

According to an article in the magazine *Strad*, music was a vital factor for the cinematic transport of audiences who attended any high-caliber movie:

Anyone who has sat through the performance of a complete film to which there has not been a single bar of musical accompaniment, will readily admit how absolutely dead the whole play seems. Even the most ‘furious’ parts seem unable to make one oblivious of one’s surroundings. Add music of any description, and there is a distinct improvement, though often one is conscious of an emotional pull in one direction by the music and a distinctly opposing pull by the action on the screen. Cause the music to fit the emotion and something of rhythm, and one can become quite absorbed in the play, but add to the perfect fitting *suitable* music and one becomes steeped in the whole atmosphere of the play, seems almost to live in the scenes portrayed, and take away a vivid impression of the whole play that is never quite forgotten. And add even more feature, and that is a theme (or two) which accompanies a principal character or the meeting of the two principals, and the audience can take away something tangible.<sup>135</sup>

In this account, music’s “distinct” role in making one “oblivious” to one’s surroundings amounted to psychically extracting one from the non-diegetic realm and, if well executed, permitting audiences to become “absorbed”—or even “steeped”—in the diegetic world. At its most advanced, these musical experiences became something “tangible,” a term that seemed to imply that the audiovisual experience of the cinema could somehow evolve into a tactile one as well.

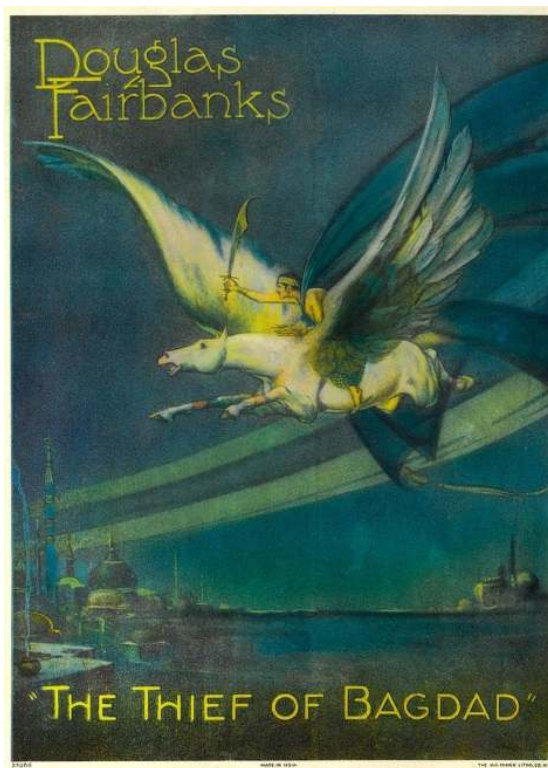
According to the article, such an effect was best achieved by a number of movies produced in 1924. One of these was *Monsieur Beaucaire*, a film about court life and

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<sup>134</sup> Some authors avoided allusions to artifice altogether, choosing instead to frame cinematic transport in decidedly real terms. This included the reviewer of D.W. Griffith’s 1920 film *Way Down East*, who pointed to the rich musical score, composed by Louis Silvers and William Frederick Peters, as conducive to the effect. The author described the film music as having “touched the heart” in an unforgettable manner, unfolding in a spectacle of pathos and comedy that created a “rapture of transport to pastoral scenes of New England community.” “Local Brevities,” *The Advertiser* 11, no. 3, March 19, 1921: 5.

<sup>135</sup> “A Cinema Musician, ‘Atmosphere’” *Strad*, March 1926: 17.

society before the French Revolution, which achieved an appropriate air of grace and ceremony through use of minuets, gavottes, and “stately rhythms.”<sup>136</sup> Another movie, *The Thief of Bagdad* required a “most extravagant” music to accompany its portrayals of mythical winged horses, flying carpets, deep-sea monsters, and magic crystals. These images were accompanied by some commissioned works of “modern music” and “oriental music” composed by Mortimer Wilson. Meanwhile, the film *Peter Pan* achieved its success through the orchestra’s ability to make audience members feel as though they could fly. Through the proper use of music, all of these films were able to create “vivid” enough impressions that audiences felt “absorbed” into a cinematic world.



**Illustration 6.5**

United Artists, *The Thief of Bagdad*, Movie poster, 1924,  
Available from: IMP Awards, [http://www.impawards.com/1924/thief\\_of\\_bagdad\\_ver3\\_xlg.html](http://www.impawards.com/1924/thief_of_bagdad_ver3_xlg.html)

<sup>136</sup> “A Cinema Musician, ‘Atmosphere’,” *Strad*, March 1926: 17.

Although the language of absorption retained aspects of authenticity, the article also imbued such experiences with figurative qualities. Indeed, even as the movies made spectators feel “steeped in the whole atmosphere of the play,” the author implied some element of diegetic illusion when using the phrase “seems almost” to describe the sensation of living in the scenes. In doing so, but he or she also perhaps unwittingly betrayed an acknowledgement that, as realistic as the sensation of transport may “seem,” it was always “almost” real. An article in the music magazine *Metronome* made a similar point when it contended that the combination of appropriate music, sound effects, and the visual content of the screen worked together to “carry the illusion” and mystify the audiences.<sup>137</sup> Thus, film music presented a clear departure from everyday reality, but when well executed it served to authenticate the diegetic world somewhat.

It was not only journalists in the film industry who made such claims about the ambiguous transcendent effect of film music. Social scientists corroborated these points too. This much was determined after the University of Chicago sociologist Herbert Blumer was commissioned by the Payne Fund, a private foundation, to carry out a survey of filmgoers’ subjective experiences of movies. Focusing specifically on children, but with the implication that adults also shared many of the younger generation’s impulses, Blumer concluded that filmgoers were prone to what he called “emotional possession”—a loss of self-awareness and control whereby “the individual identifies himself so thoroughly with the plot or loses himself so much in the picture that he is carried away from the usual trend of conduct...[and] impulses usually latent or kept under restraint

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<sup>137</sup> Joseph N. Weber (interview), “Will Machine-Made Music Displace Real Music in our Theaters?” *Metronome*, September 1928: 50, 102. For another reference to cinematic illusion, see: Warren Nolan, “Talking Pictures and the Public,” *Transactions of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers* 13, no. 37 (1929): 131-134.

gain expression.”<sup>138</sup> Blumer’s professional grounding in reductive science meant that he almost certainly did not intend these references to self-transport to be interpreted in literal terms. And yet, by referring to individuals “losing” themselves and being “carried away,” Blumer indulged in the language of genuine cinematic entrancement. In this sense, his remarks could be easily compared to the ambiguous description provided by Lucy Lowell after her experience at the 1884 Wagner concert in Boston.

The introduction of synchronized recorded sound into films during the last half of the 1920s sparked new debates regarding music’s efficacy in promoting transport. After the release of the 1926 film *Don Juan*, which included a fully-recorded musical soundtrack by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, followed the next year by *The Jazz Singer*, which included synchronized recorded talking as well as music, some Americans resolved that the filmgoing experience had moved one step closer to verisimilitude. For one studio publicist, though, the construction of realistic movie experiences was always simply a process of perfecting what was fundamentally an “illusion.”<sup>139</sup> For others, the increased mechanization was more than enough to deauthenticate all kinds of music experience. Not surprisingly, the American Federation of Musicians—the national labor union representing professional musicians—became one of the most outspoken opponents of recording technology of all kinds. For professional “live” musicians, of course, the increasing ubiquity of recorded music posed an existential threat, and therefore the union had more than one reason to denigrate sound recording in the cinema. A large advertisement published by the organization in the *Pittsburgh Press* (and elsewhere) in 1929 decried the vapidness of what it called “canned music.” Recorded

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<sup>138</sup> Herbert Blumer, *Movies and Conduct* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1933), 74.

<sup>139</sup> Nolan, “Talking Pictures and the Public,” 131-134.

sound was guilty of “corruption of musical appreciation and discouragement of musical education,” the ad accused.<sup>140</sup> Even more seriously, mechanical performance required that “the soul of the Art is lost” and the “emotional rapture is lost.” With this last statement, the Federation effectively proposed that one of the central goals of any musical experience—its capacity to promote emotional self-loss—was no longer available. For some musical Americans, it would seem, recorded sound actually disrupted the delicate balance between illusion and authenticity that was required for a truly pleasurable artistic and entertainment experience.

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By the 1920s, a rapidly expanding mass entertainment industry had promulgated a mode of musical ecstasy in America that was at least partly compatible with the reductionist view of experience proffered by science. From this perspective, self-loss was not only secular but also illusory because it was internally rooted in the psychology and physiology of each individual. Yet, the sheer success of commercial entertainment was never entirely sustained on connotations of make-believe. Even the most enthusiastic celebrants of entertainment continued to scan their “ecstatic” experiences for some measure of truth. If individual consciousness was capable of producing trivial illusions of self-loss, should such phenomena be considered fake or inconsequential in all cases? Could some semblance of legitimacy be salvaged from the now archaic interpretations of transcendence? Americans began to pose these kinds of questions starting in the last decades of the nineteenth century, at precisely the same that artificiality became so

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<sup>140</sup> American Federation of Musicians, “Canned Music on Trial,” *Pittsburgh Press*, 1929, Duke University Digital Repository, (R0206) <<https://idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/r4rr1q397>>.

pervasive. Consequently, notions of immanence never fully eclipsed a transcendent sensibility when it came to questions of musical self-loss.

In describing audiences' reception of popular music in America during the first decades of the twentieth century, words like "ecstasy," "entrancement," being "carried away," "beside oneself," "overwhelmed," and the like, continued to be referenced—perhaps more frequently than ever. Yet, now they played a dual role. In one way, they were affirmations of genuine self-loss. In other ways, they also opened up a rhetorical space for diminishing the truth of these same experiences and transforming them into mere metaphors. Through a lack of elaboration these descriptions remained perpetually available to multiple interpretations.

For individuals who cared little to appeal to popular modes of thought, the ambiguation of self-loss could come down more heavily on the side of transcendence than immanence. Take for instance the 1927 writings of D.H. Lawrence, the British author who—following a lengthy journey through North America and many years studying American culture<sup>141</sup>—wrote earnestly about the transcendent experiences of popular entertainment. It is in this setting, he claimed, that "we want to be taken out of ourselves."<sup>142</sup>

We lean down from the plush seats [of the theatre] like little gods in a democratic heaven, and see ourselves away below there, on the world of the stage, in a brilliant artificial sunlight.... The secret of it all, is that we detach ourselves from the painful and always sordid trammels of actual existence, and become creatures of memory and of spirit-like consciousness. We are the gods and there's the machine, down below us. Down below, on the stage, our mechanical or earth-bound self stutters or raves, Pa Potter or King Lear.... The audience in the theatre is a little democracy of the ideal consciousness.... Which is very soothing and satisfying so long as you...instinctively feel that there is some supreme, universal Ideal Consciousness swaying all destiny.... A few people, the so-called advanced, have grown uneasy in their bones about the Universal Mind. But the mass are absolutely convinced. And every member of the mass is absolutely convinced

<sup>141</sup> While living in the U.S, Lawrence published a book titled *Studies in Classic American Literature* which became one of the preeminent books on the topic.

<sup>142</sup> Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 97.



that he is part and parcel of this Universal Mind. Hence his joy at the theatre. His even greater joy at the cinematograph. In the moving pictures he has detached himself even further from the solid stuff of earth.... That is our idea of entertainment.<sup>143</sup>

In this lengthy quotation, Lawrence captured much of what it meant to lose oneself in the age of mass amusement. His first equivocal statement about desiring self-transcendence in the theatre was quickly revealed to be a modern desire to turn spirit-like. Not only did Lawrence interpret this process as the transfiguration of human spectators into gods, he also perceived it to be a fusion of consciousness with others in order to populate the “Ideal Consciousness” or “Universal Mind.” Self-loss, in this frame, was perceived as both spiritual and social, and if divorced from “actual experience” then still somehow authentic in its own right. Such ecstasy was also mediated through technology—not only through the human “machines” on the theatrical stage, but also through the mechanisms of the cinematograph and other moving picture devices, which—despite a degree of contrivance—still augmented one’s feelings of transcendence.

Although Lawrence did not discuss music’s integral role in this process, his passage succinctly summarized the views of many producers and participants in the commercial industry. It demonstrated how Americans were able to extract ecstasy from its supernatural settings, brush it off, and repurpose aspects of it for an ostensibly artificial context without completely rejecting an original sense of authentic magic or mysticism. Therefore, even as trance was primarily interpreted as a benign illusion whereby one pursued the sensation of escaping from their ordinary subjectivity simply for fun, it was also—usually more quietly—inferred to be closer to its enchanted past than first imagined. The modern, secular world of entertainment was not so disenchanting

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<sup>143</sup> Lawrence, *Mornings in Mexico*, 97.

after all. It validated genuine transcendent experiences even as it acknowledged them to be false and trivial.

## **Conclusion:** Playing with Experience

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Two key terms define this project. The first is “immanence,” and it applies to the simultaneous and successive cultural frameworks that interpreted the objects of self-loss as somehow less transcendent than Christianity’s supernatural sources. One set of immanent traditions—which can be categorized under the general rubric of romantic thought—recast experiences of God as altogether more secular encounters, for instance with the sublime spirit of Nature, social sentiment, or animal magnetism. Although more secular than orthodox Christianity, these objects were also thought to share many characteristics in common with the ghostly presences described by conventional religion. For instance, they supposedly possessed mysterious, mystical, and ineffable powers that exceeded the confines of individuals and permeated the secular world. Another tradition of immanent ecstasy was less-obviously mystical in its orientation. It was represented by the vague experiences of self-loss associated with carnivalesque consciousness and its counterparts. Supporters of this perspective validated the possibility of ecstasy while reserving judgment on the precise character of the objects of self-loss experience. A more precise definition of immanence, developed mainly within the field of social science, firmly rejected conventional notions of transcendence and definitively reduced ecstasy to the internal functions of the individual mind and body. By the turn of the twentieth century, religious, romantic, carnivalesque, and scientific frameworks of explanation had all matured into relatively distinct—if sometimes overlapping—traditions. As such, conventional religious explanations of self-loss were paralleled and often surpassed by

different secular explanations, all of which employed the language of immanence to some degree.

## Play

Another key term in this project relates to the notion of “play.” Perhaps most immediately, this term connotes a sense of frivolity that informed certain frameworks of ecstasy. According to the Dutch cultural theorist and historian Johan Huizinga, this characteristic was indeed integral to the play phenomenon. In his seminal work *Homo Ludens*, Huizinga described playful activities as fundamentally “pretend” and “not serious.”<sup>1</sup> In his terms, the concept of play did not demand a great deal of sincere commitment because it was best attributed to voluntary activities pursued for their own sake “outside the sphere of necessity or material utility.”<sup>2</sup> Such a characterization was further elaborated by the French sociologist Roger Caillois, who also framed play as correspondingly artificial and trivial when he described it as “make-believe by nature” and pursued “for its own sake.”<sup>3</sup> More recently, the anthropologist Peter G. Stromberg has continued to embrace a definition of play that includes elements of frivolity and make-believe.<sup>4</sup>

Such features, of course, could also be found in the ecstasies experienced by many Americans within musical entertainment settings—particularly those commercial and

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<sup>1</sup> Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), 8, 13.

<sup>2</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*. Also see Diana Ackerman, *Deep Play* (New York: Vintage, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Caillois contended that these particular features informed all of the different categories of play, which he defined as the following: *agon* (competition), *alea* (chance), *mimicry* (role playing), and *ilinx* (vertigo). While playful activities sometimes combined these categories, Caillois believed that it was also useful to distinguish them from each other. Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001 [c.1958]), 4, 10, 29.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Stromberg, *Caught in Play: How Entertainment Works on You* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009).

carnavalesque entertainments that grew in popularity during the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Indeed, it seems likely that Huizinga (and his disciplinary successors) would have also labelled the trance experiences described in chapter 6 of this dissertation as forms play, not only because they exhibited an element of frivolity, but also because they involved a sense of self-loss. For Huizinga, the essence of play also involved “rapture and enthusiasm,” and it often entailed “absorbing the player intensely and utterly.”<sup>5</sup> Treated this way, experiences of self-loss could take on a trivial quality that made it easy to accommodate the reductionist theories of science.

Yet, should triviality be considered the central feature of the play impulse? It should not if one is willing to treat most of the activities of the popular entertainment industry as playful. As this dissertation has shown, most entertainment was rarely trivial in absolute terms, but instead it remained ambivalent about the importance, profundity, and meaning of different cultural phenomena. Accommodating this ambivalence means reconceptualizing play in a more expansive, and ultimately more useful way—one that leans towards multiplicity and fluidity. Interpreted in this manner, playful experiences may be framed as simultaneously trivial and meaningful, sincere and frivolous, authentic and artificial, or any other combination of opposites.

Although Huizinga did not explicitly elaborate this particular notion of play, he gestured towards it in his writings.<sup>6</sup> This much can be ascertained by his statement in

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<sup>5</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 132, 13. In a similar manner, Caillois might have made a similar judgement. His conception of *ilinx* (vertigo) as a category of play also suggested the possibility of profoundly altered consciousness. Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Huizinga was notoriously elusive on considerations of seriousness and frivolity, among other issues. See: Hector Rodriguez, “The Playful and the Serious: An Approximation to Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*” *Game Studies* 6, no. 1 (December 2006), <http://gamestudies.org/0601/articles/rodriques>, last accessed August 23, 2017.

*Homo Ludens* that “the consciousness of play being ‘only a pretend’ does not by any means prevent it from proceeding with the utmost seriousness.”<sup>7</sup> Likewise, “In play as we conceive it the distinction between belief and make-believe breaks down.”<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, play could move between what he described as the poles of “frivolity” and “holiness.”<sup>9</sup> All of these quotations suggested the possibility of breaking down strict binaries.

Huizinga and his scholarly supporters also remained open to a labile interpretation of ecstasy. For instance, he suggested that when a child was engaged in a game of pretend, he was “quite literally ‘beside himself’ with delight, transported beyond himself to such an extent that he almost believes he actually is such and such a thing, without, however, wholly losing consciousness of ‘ordinary reality.’”<sup>10</sup> The child’s “almost” conviction in “literal” self-loss exemplifies Huizinga’s view that play blended both “belief and make-believe.”<sup>11</sup> Other theorists have similarly supported this dynamic notion of play even as they continue to uphold the more trivial connotations of the term. For instance, Stromberg recognizes that a player is always patently aware of the artificial quality of play but voluntarily participates in its contrivances all the same. He submits that a player can paradoxically know his experience to be false but feel it to be true.<sup>12</sup> The cultural theorist Brian Sutton-Smith also affirms this kind of dynamic quality too, when he argues that most theorists of play have either implicitly or explicitly leaned towards ambivalence and lability to define the term.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 8.

<sup>8</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 25.

<sup>9</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 21, 25.

<sup>10</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 14.

<sup>11</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 132.

<sup>12</sup> Stromberg, *Caught in Play*, 13.

<sup>13</sup> Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

This dissertation relies on the expansive, dynamic notion of play. In emphasizing the elemental quality of equivocation, however, it does not suggest that play is entirely without rules or organization. Indeed, one useful way of defining play is as “free movement within a more rigid structure.”<sup>14</sup> Considered this way, play is constituted by the fluid movement within a specific (and sometimes paradoxical) set of parameters. According to the theorists Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, it is what occurs when one “takes advantage of the space of possibility created from...[a] system’s structure.”<sup>15</sup> Musical performance happens to provide an excellent example of such a principle in action. As Huizinga himself acknowledged, all musical activity “begins and ends within strict limits of time and place,...consists essentially in order...[and] rhythm.”<sup>16</sup> In short, it requires adherence to some set of rules. However, music also requires motion within the limits of its rules and structures, and it is this vacillation that entails play. In music, as elsewhere, sometimes this free movement can actually overwhelm and transform the structure within which it occurs. In this more extreme scenario, play acts not only as a function of the structure but also helps reshape the structure itself.

By using such a capacious definition, it is possible to find play at work in all the traditions of musical trance addressed by this dissertation. Indeed, at least two basic kinds of play can be identified in the chapters: one kind, which might be called “agonistic,” involved taking a side within a larger process of dynamic interaction; the other, which can be called “holistic,” embraced the dynamism more fully by pursuing divergent views or impulses simultaneously. Chapter 1 illustrates the agonistic type in its description of

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<sup>14</sup> Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004), 304.

<sup>15</sup> Salen and Zimmerman, *Rules of Play*, 304.

<sup>16</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 42. In his reticence to embrace a more capacious definition of play, Huizinga also fell short of identifying all musical activity as play.

the interplay of diverse and competing and corresponding viewpoints regarding the value of self-loss, as expressed by Puritans, Quakers, Methodists, Baptists, etc. The chapter also examines a more holistic type of play in its discussion of “polyrhythmic consciousness,” which enabled African-American individuals and groups to pursue principles of self-loss and self-control concurrently.

The agonistic and holistic approaches can also be identified throughout the remainder of the dissertation. As chapter 2 demonstrates, the naturalized mysticism of romantic thought evolved partly as a result of the interplay of contradictory ideas within Christianity regarding the nature of transcendence, which engendered the nominalist movement and made possible the rise of a naturalized notion of spirituality. Some romantics were capable of holistically recognizing the playful overlap of their philosophies with orthodox Christianity, as J.S. Dwight did when he frequently employed references to a supernatural “God” when describing the sublime “Nature” of art music. Other romantics, though, were happier to take sides, preferring to stick exclusively to their favorite philosophies, including those based on the sublime, sentimentality, or animal magnetism.

Different forms of play also informed the rise of the carnivalesque mode of musical ecstasy discussed in chapter 3. Like romanticism, this tradition developed out of the dynamic interaction of contradictions within conventional Christianity—namely the competing desires for popular appeal and religious hierarchy, which eventually caused Carnival activities to be demoted from sacred rituals to public festivities. Also similar to romanticism, supporters of carnivalesque consciousness participated in discrete musical



traditions, such as those associated with rough music, Mardi Gras, minstrelsy, and other commercially-oriented and secularly-informed performances.

Chapter 4 also addresses play by focusing on the multi-modal movement associated with the refined trance of the bourgeois classes. Although those Americans who supported this ethos firmly rejected the free play between classes, genders, and races, their emphasis on corporeally-cultivated ecstasy also worked to place religious, romantic, and carnivalesque traditions on a relatively even plane—especially for white, middle-class males. In this sense, cultivated self-loss permitted correspondence and conjunction between different modes of self-loss that were otherwise kept separate from each other. While the religious, romantic, and carnivalesque elites rarely acknowledged the possibility for holistic interplay between different bourgeois traditions, they nevertheless tacitly encouraged a common set of values that spanned across discrete traditions of transcendence.

Even the reductionist mode of musical ecstasy discussed in chapter 5—which ultimately rejected the preexisting modes—evolved out of a dynamic tension that began within religion itself. This tension arose over the ongoing interplay of contrasting ideas regarding the internal (individual) or external (transcendent) grounding of musical ecstasy, which had evolved within religious settings before splitting from them around the late-nineteenth century. Within this reductionist tradition too, different professionals also engaged in agonistic play, some preferring a physiological interpretation of experience while others favored a psychological one, even as both sides relied on the primacy of the individual. The growing influence of these scientific views created an even deeper (ant)agonistic tension with conventional modes of musical ecstasy, leading

to the rise of a more resolute form of religious mysticism as embodied by the Pentecostal movement. Not all scientific thinkers, however, were willing to participate in this more competitive form of cultural interplay. These included William James, who attempted to reconcile the divergent approaches to transcendent experience through his more holistic theory of radical empiricism.

Chapter 6 provides probably the most explicit and expansive demonstration of play at work. This was the play between belief and unbelief in transcendent experiences that was associated with the commercial entertainment industry during the early twentieth century. It was rooted in the carnivalesque mode of self-loss, which often employed ambiguous enough language to accommodate mystical, metaphysical, and reductionist interpretations of musical ecstasy all at once. The musical entertainment entrepreneurs from about the 1880s to the 1920s helped coalesce this ambiguity into a more formal, and commercially-viable, mode in its own right—specifically by providing equivocal statements about the authenticity of spiritual, social, transracial, and technological self-loss.

### **Playful Contradictions and the Culture of Consumption**

The type of play addressed by chapter 6 is undoubtedly holistic because it simultaneously pursued divergent interpretations of musical ecstasy; but to claim this is not to suggest that it eradicated agonistic impulses altogether. Indeed, the playful approach of popular musical entertainment did little to help Americans fully reconcile or balance the dual poles of artificial and genuine experience. Instead, it was more likely to reiterate (rather than resolve) their binary opposition. As a result, twentieth-century Americans were placed in a contradictory situation whereby they were encouraged to

yearn for authentic self-loss at the same time they were reminded of the impossibility of attaining it.

By focusing on how the contradictions of belief and authenticity played out in musical experiences, chapter 6 of this dissertation contributes to existing cultural histories of reenchantment in the arena of popular entertainment.<sup>17</sup> These include Simon During's *Modern Enchantments: The Cultural Power of Secular Magic*, and James Cook's *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum*, which explore the ambiguity of authenticity, respectively, in the rise of secular magic in the modern West<sup>18</sup> and in the mid-nineteenth-century spectacles of P.T. Barnum in America.<sup>19</sup> This dissertation elaborates and updates these works, specifically by focusing on how the dialectic of authentic experience became institutionalized in the early twentieth century within the commercial music entertainment industry.

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<sup>17</sup> Karen Haltunnen's book *Confidence Men and Painted Women* focuses on questions of authenticity in the marketplace during the second half of the nineteenth century. She demonstrates that the movement for genteel sincerity and cultivation increasingly had to contend with an emerging "cult of confidence" that encouraged playacting and insincerity. This was exhibited in the widespread embrace of gaudy fashions, face-painting and cosmetics for women, and the superficial charm idealized by characters in Horatio Alger novels. The cult of confidence was so strong that even displays of earnestness were questioned, with the result that insincere sincerity became acknowledged as a potential possibility. Haltunnen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*.

<sup>18</sup> During portrays secular magic, with its sleight-of-hand and staged conjurings, as an intentionally illusory tradition. Its entertainment quality, he argues, became crucial in assimilating a "residual irrationality" into an exceedingly rational modern world. In this sense, secular magic was not a surrogate for supernaturalism, but a mutation of it to accommodate disenchanted goals. Simon During, *Modern Enchantments: The Cultural Power of Secular Magic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> P.T. Barnum's stage acts, Cook claims, titillated audiences by questioning the boundaries between authenticity and imitation. They played on audience's fears and fascination of deception by keeping them guessing whether, for instance, someone was an animal or a human or whether an automaton could play chess. With these examples, Cook effectively demonstrates how entertainment could sometimes question the boundaries of make-believe fun. Cook rightly claims that, by the early twentieth century, such explicit interrogations of illusion were replaced by a more predictable emphasis on realism. However, as this dissertation demonstrates, popular music entertainment continued to play on the ambiguity of authentic ecstatic experience by surreptitiously gesturing towards sacred phenomena and sincere feeling even under the guise of make-believe fun. James Cook, *The Arts of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

This dissertation also demonstrates that, whether or not they explicitly acknowledged it, the conductors of commercial entertainment had much to gain from perpetuating this paradox. Indeed, by using musical entertainment to promise a true ecstatic escape and simultaneously indicating that such a transport was never truly attainable, American musical entrepreneurs effectively established an irreconcilable contradiction that was tempting enough to pay for but never fully satiating. This combination of temptation and dissatisfaction could have easily reinforced each other, causing Americans to consume music in order to seek the resolution of an irresolvable paradox. Put another way, such a condition could have highlighted the chronic consumption of popular musical culture as a desirable method of managing the contrapuntal dynamics that existed between belief and disbelief, authenticity and inauthenticity, and self-control and self-loss.

The goal of this dissertation is not to corroborate the relationship between this contradictory logic and the rise of a culture of consumption in America; yet, the work of other scholars suggests it was a possibility. The historian T.J. Jackson Lears, for instance, explains the rise of the advertising industry in America as the result of its ability to play with the dynamic tension between unreconciled yearnings for authentic experience amidst a growing sense of unreality.<sup>20</sup> The sociologist Colin Campbell also writes of consumer culture's reliance on unfulfilled promises of authenticity. In *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, he describes the romantic movement's moral elevation of the imagination as a key driver of consumer culture due to its ability to

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<sup>20</sup> Lears demonstrates how advertisers framed consumer goods as capable of fulfilling this longing for authenticity. Ultimately, however, consumers' experiences fell short of their expectations, which set in motion a cycle of consumption. See: Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization;" Lears, *Fables of Abundance*.

create pleasurable and convincing fantasies that risked “outperforming” the actual experience of activities and products—a tension that ultimately encouraged people to continue consuming in order to feel (never fully) gratified.<sup>21</sup> Other scholars have also observed the same kind of dynamic motivating non-Western consumption practices. Jean-Marc Philibert, for instance, describes consumption in the Third World as based on a kind of “bait-and-switch” mechanism whereby “individuals purchase objects in order to attain what their image suggests, but there is never enough behind the image. Their desire is forever renewed but never satisfied.”<sup>22</sup> If musical ecstasy generated a similar dynamic tension between authenticity and artificiality, it could have also encouraged Americans to consume more musical entertainment in the form of vaudeville, opera, ragtime and jazz, film scores, and any number of other recorded and live performances.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic*. The anthropologist Peter Stromberg uses the label “Romantic Realism” to encompass the aesthetic works—the images, and stories, and other expressional forms—that encourage consumption by creating this larger-than-life imaginal realm. Stromberg, *Caught in Play*.

<sup>22</sup> This dilemma, Philibert contends, results in more consumption of Western goods and therefore more acculturation. See: Jean-Marc Philibert, “Consuming Culture: A Study of Simple Commodity Consumption,” in *The Social Economy of Consumption*, ed. Benjamin, Orlove and Henry Rutz (Lanham: University Press of America, 1989), 63.

<sup>23</sup> This theory about the generation of consumer culture relies on an assumption that Americans yearned to reconcile contradictory impulses (even if they were not always successful at it). The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss seems to have upheld this point when he argued that the human mind is naturally drawn to reconcile opposites presented to it through contradictory cultural symbols, such as the binaries addressed in the myths of so-called “primitive” societies or the more technologically mediated stories of modern, western society. Another anthropologist, Victor Turner, found the play of creative tension not so much in the contradictions between different cultural symbols but rather within single cultural symbols. This led him to become interested in the idea of the “liminal,” a condition “betwixt and between” multiple meanings, which individuals leaned towards as they underwent ceremonial rituals. During these moments, social structure breaks down and individual identity tends to be conflated with that of the community, producing what Turner calls *communitas*. Turner also found something approximating (if not exactly replicating) liminal experiences in the music concerts, art exhibitions, theatre plays, and other cultural performances of complex societies. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978); Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969); Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974); Edith Turner, *Communitas: The Anthropology of Collective Joy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Victor Turner, “Liminal to Liminoid in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An essay in Comparative Symbolology” *Rice University Studies* 60, no. 3 (1974): 53-92.

## The Growth of Play

Regardless of its effect on American consumption habits, the music industry's ambiguous attitudes towards trance help demonstrate one of the central conclusions of this dissertation: over the course of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, musical Americans grew more playful in their attitudes towards transcendent experience. Again, to claim this is not simply to argue that Americans increasingly treated such experiences as trivial (although this impulse was certainly present). Instead, it is to argue that musical Americans increasingly engaged with more diverse and multifaceted *types* of play. For some, this remained the play that had long existed within conventional modes of musical self-loss, for instance the debate between Christian denominations and sects over the precise nature and value of ecstasy. For others, though, it involved newer forms of play that encouraged the free movement between different traditions of authentic musical ecstasy or that questioned the authenticity of self-loss altogether. By the 1920s, musical Americans could play with self-loss in more ways than had ever been available. Skirting the boundaries of belief in self-transcendence was only the newest and most dramatic of the varieties of play available to them.

The commercial context of much of this musical entertainment provided an excellent setting for this playful activity. With its market emphasis on fungibility or exchangeability, participants in commercial activities and experiences were less encumbered by the demands of convention or custom. As such, they often created and engaged with cultural products that, by design, highlighted the interstitial spaces that existed between different modes of musical ecstasy. If play comes from “free movement within a more rigid structure,” then an augmentation of play must involve either freer

movement or a less rigid structure. The market of musical experience fostered both of these conditions, especially from the 1890s onwards. This dissertation claims that, by encouraging a dynamic interplay between different frameworks of interpretation, the popular cultural notions of musical self-loss became more overtly playful in the twentieth century.

Of course, if play became an increasingly notable feature of the discourse of musical ecstasy in American culture throughout the period covered by this dissertation, it is also true that not everyone was as equally inclined towards its potential. Many Americans remained reluctant to engage in the newer forms of play. For example, those millions of Americans who continued to rely on Christian doctrine to explain ecstatic experiences, including the supporters of Pentecostalism, often found it challenging if not impossible to validate other non-religious modes of interpretation. Likewise, by cleaving more towards structure than free movement, devoutly religious Americans either did not think or thought it unthinkable to question the authenticity of transcendent experience. In this regard, they remained less open to the diverse interpretations of self-loss.

Beginning in the late-nineteenth century, a less playful ethic also informed the reductionist tendencies that permeated the social sciences, especially psychology. As the decades progressed, the discipline only became more intransigent. This proclivity is what encouraged Freud and his followers' to abandon hypnosis starting in the early 1900s, and it is also what prompted the disciplinary turn to behaviorism following the First World War. Behaviorism was founded on the theory that psychological conclusions should only be based on that which was observable to the naked eye.<sup>24</sup> Its overriding goal was to

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<sup>24</sup> John McCrone, *The Myth of Irrationality: The Science of the Mind from Plato to Star Trek* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1993), 46.

identify a more reliable and consistent unit of analysis—namely the behavior patterns of humans—that could be easily isolated, studied, and explained. For behaviorists, notions of consciousness, experience, and feeling—which had been the purview of most psychologists, including Freud, up until that point—were too amorphous and ethereal to be effectively studied. In short, behaviorists believed that interpreting consciousness involved too much play to be scientifically useful. This attitude obviously had devastating consequences for the scholarly study of trance. (Ironically, though, mainstream psychologists’ growing inflexibility and inattention towards the topic of self-loss may have inadvertently bolstered the more playful attitude towards altered consciousness proliferated by commercial professionals’ in the entertainment industry.)

If psychologists and other social scientists were responsible for limiting play in their respective disciplines, it is also possible to overstate this proclivity. Indeed, after William James, not all social scientists were as reductive and dismissive of trance as one might suppose. Some scientific-minded scholars who worked outside, or on the periphery, of mainstream psychology endeavored to accommodate immanent, mind-based theories of consciousness while continuing to play with the possibility of genuine transcendent experience. Chief among these scholars was the French sociologist Emile Durkheim, who was already well known among American social scientists by the 1910s. For Durkheim, the will of a social group was a common and necessary feature of all human cultures. His groundbreaking book from 1912, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, claimed that “Homo duplex” was an appropriate label for humans because all people were capable of at least two basic levels of awareness. One level focused on an individual’s self-serving desires, instincts, and goals. The other level of awareness



subsumed individual concerns in favor of common values, beliefs, and practices that served the interests of a group. This was a form of shared awareness or common understanding that constituted a larger “collective consciousness.” (It was no coincidence that the word “consciousness” translates into the French word “*conscience*,” a term that was also associated with socially-determined morals.)

Religion, Durkheim claimed, had provided a central construct for aligning individual awareness with that of the collectivity because it provided symbols that were powerful enough to attract the interest of multiple subjectivities. As he understood it, any practice or idea that united multiple subjectivities into a single moral community could be considered “sacred,”<sup>25</sup> a label that Durkheim applied to anything from a religious creed to a nation, tribe, movement, or team. The term “ritual,” too, lost its traditional religious connotation under Durkheim’s direction; it could now represent any repeated social activity that made individuals intensely aware of their common unity—or community.

Certain activities appeared to be more conducive than others in facilitating such strong experiences of the collective consciousness. Durkheim observed that “cries, songs, music,...[and] dance” were regularly employed towards these sacred ends. They created what he called a state of “collective effervescence,”<sup>26</sup> which enabled participants to be “carried outside [themselves]...and diverted from [their] ordinary occupation and preoccupations.”<sup>27</sup> At bottom, these were ritual activities that made participants forget their self-serving identities and become more emotionally attached to the collective

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<sup>25</sup> Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1915).

<sup>26</sup> Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 211.

<sup>27</sup> Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 382.

consciousness. This transfer of awareness is what created sensations of ecstasy in Durkeim's view.

What is remarkable about the French sociologist's work is that, in an era when scientific theories strictly confined all forms of consciousness within the mind of the individual, Durkheim never definitively prioritized this theory over others. Certainly, he recognized that collective consciousness was an amalgamation of several individual "states of consciousness." When these states were "identical," they began reinforcing and "intermingling with one another" to create "a new idea that absorbs the former ones."<sup>28</sup> However, was the collective consciousness, with its "new idea," an external entity that transcended individuals and had a mind of its own, so to speak? Or was it simply shorthand for what was essentially the work of many atomized individuals, abstracted to the level of the social? Durkheim never provided a clear case for either viewpoint. By remaining reticent about the issue, though, he left open the possibility of both explanations. Therefore, instead of being strictly a "utilitarian atomist" or a "metaphysical organicist," he suggested that the individual and the social levels of consciousness were simultaneously distinct from as well as contingent upon each other.<sup>29</sup> In this manner, the collective consciousness emerged from the actions and ideas of individuals, but it also, in turn, exerted its own agency back on individuals. Thus, Durkheim left open the possibility that the "sacred" could simultaneously be explained in both immanent and transcendent terms.

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<sup>28</sup> Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, 76.

<sup>29</sup> This interpretation of Durkheim's theories has been discussed by the contemporary psychologist R. Keith Sawyer, who concludes that the French sociologist approached collective consciousness as an "emergent" phenomenon. R. Keith Sawyer, "Durkheim's Dilemma: Toward a Sociology of Emergence," *Sociological Theory* 20, no. 2 (July 2002): 227-247.

Psychologists also sometimes explored the play of transcendent experience. Sigmund Freud himself continued to demonstrate a subtle inclination in this direction even as his work encouraged a countervailing, individualizing tendency throughout his discipline. Indeed, even after he abandoned hypnotherapy in favor of psychoanalysis, Freud appears to have conceded some modicum of value to the possibility of transcendent consciousness. According to Mark D. Epstein, this accommodation can be discerned by investigating Freud's calls for therapists to engage in what he called an "evenly suspended attention" in the face of all that one hears.<sup>30</sup> According to Freud, the goal here was for a therapist to "give himself over completely" to his unconscious activity and become "like a receptive organ toward the transmitting unconscious of the patient," just as a telephone receiver is adjusted to the signal from the transmitting microphone.<sup>31</sup> Freud's use of language, here, suggested the possibility of a genuine "collective consciousness" even as he explicitly subscribed to a reductionist philosophy that precluded such a possibility.

For all of Freud's influence, his emphasis on "evenly suspended attention" never actually accrued much traction among most psychoanalysts during of the early-twentieth century.<sup>32</sup> The method was either dismissed as unprofessional because it required "hardly

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<sup>30</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Recommendations to Physicians Practicing Psychoanalysis," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, vol. 12 (London: Hogarth Press, 1955 [c1912]), 12: 111-112; Mark D. Epstein, "On the Neglect of Evenly Suspended Attention," *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 16, no. 2 (1984): 193-205.

<sup>31</sup> In Freud's words: "Just as the receiver converts back into sound waves the electrical oscillations in the telephone line which were set up by sound waves, so the doctor's unconscious is able, from the derivatives of the unconscious which are communicated to him, to reconstruct that unconscious, which has determined the patient's free associations." Sigmund Freud, *Recommendations to Physicians Practicing Psychoanalysis* (London: Hogarth Press, 1955 [c1912]), 12: 111-112, 115. Also see: Sigmund Freud, *Two Encyclopedia Articles*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, vol. 18 (London: Hogarth Press, 1955 [c1923]), 18: 239.

<sup>32</sup> According to the psychiatrist and author Mark D. Epstein, "no specific training in the cultivation or maintenance of...[Freud's] attentional attitude ever developed." Epstein, "On the Neglect of Evenly Suspended Attention," 198.

any work at all” on the part of the analyst,<sup>33</sup> or it was watered down into a set of vague guidelines to make analysts aware of their own subtle biases or preconceptions when interacting with a patient.<sup>34</sup> Most psychologists, it would seem, were reluctant to reconcile what appeared to be an intuitive, meditative approach to psychotherapy with the competing (and ostensibly more important) demands of making psychology into a professional field. The latter pursuit appeared to rely on creating a body of expert techniques that clearly articulated the special authority of the analyst. Consequently, trance experiences did not feature prominently in mainstream psychologists’ arsenal of therapies.

However, ecstasy continued to fascinate and perplex Freud. His playful attitude towards the possibility of self-loss appeared again in his published work towards the end of the 1920s. It was at this time that Freud endeavored to explain the phenomena associated with “oceanic” feelings, which involved sensations of “‘eternity’, a feeling of something limitless, unbounded.”<sup>35</sup> On one hand, Freud readily explained away such sensations as a vestige of illusory, infantile experiences that occurred in the early development of a human being before a strong sense of rational individuality developed. In this way, he maintained that oceanic feelings falsely projected an engagement with the depths of one’s own “infinite” unconscious onto an external reality. Although Freud deemed this logic erroneous, he also found it fascinating because it seemed to be what

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<sup>33</sup> Otto Fenichel, quoted in: Mark D. Epstein, “Freud’s Influence on Transpersonal Psychology,” in *Textbook of Transpersonal Psychiatry and Psychology*, ed. Bruce W. Scotton, Allan B. Chinen, and John R. Battista (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, the technique of “evenly suspended attention” remained “one of the least discussed, [and] certainly one of the least well conceptualized aspects of psychoanalysis.” Paul Gray, *The Ego and Analysis of Defense* (New York: Jason Aronson, 2005), 5.

<sup>35</sup> Freud borrowed the term “oceanic feeling” from his friend and colleague Romain Rolland. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. J. Strachey, vol. 21 (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), 21: 64.

generated the “religious energy” that motivated the world’s religions, not to mention the sensation of losing oneself while in love.

On the other hand, even as he devalued oceanic experiences as false projections, Freud also suggested the near impossibility of untangling human perceptions of internal and external realities. These thoughts again permitted Freud to employ language that alluded to the possibility of genuine self-transcendence. At infancy, the neurologist admitted, the subjective consciousness of humans “includes everything,” both outside and inside the psyche.<sup>36</sup> Only later, the ego—the seat of subjective consciousness—“separates off an external world from itself.” The ego of a mature adult, in this view, represented “only a shrunken residue of a much more inclusive—indeed, an all-embracing feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world around it.” While Freud may have described this self-loss phenomenon as objectively illusory, he also seemed to validate the experience by calling it a “subjective fact.” In this subtle manner, therefore, Freud too played with the possibility of genuine self-transcendence.<sup>37</sup> Although this particular approach to consciousness never accrued much traction among the leading psychologists of the early-twentieth century, a few psychologists and psychiatrists interested in the field of hypnosis—including Clark Hull, Milton Erickson,

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<sup>36</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 21: 68.

<sup>37</sup> In one of his lectures, Freud also exhibited a subtle openness to non-reductive interpretations of mystical experience when he acknowledged that it was “erroneous and detrimental” to reject any theory immediately or out of hand. Furthermore, he admitted that the negative condemnation he received from the medical community when first developing his theory of the “unconscious” was analogous to the condemnation directed at mystics throughout the ages. At the end of his lecture, Freud even questioned his own skepticism towards mysticism, stating: “If one regards oneself as a skeptic, it is a good plan to have occasional doubts about one’s skepticism too. It may be that I too have a secret inclination towards the miraculous which thus goes halfway to meet the creation of occult facts.” Freud’s skepticism of his own skepticism involved a self-reflexive logic that suggested he may have been more open to transcendent experience than many of his publications and popularizers have indicated. See: Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, trans. J. Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1965), 53; William B. Parsons, *The Enigma of the Oceanic Feeling: Revisioning the Psychoanalytic Theory of Mysticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

and Ernest Hilgard—pursued similar paths and explored altered consciousness at the peripheries of their disciplines.<sup>38</sup> If even social scientists formally committed to the principles of reductionism were able to subtly endorse genuine self-loss, play had indeed become a central feature of modern American culture.

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<sup>38</sup> See: Ian E. Wickramasekera II, “Hypnosis and Transpersonal Psychology: Answering the Call Within,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Transpersonal Psychology*, ed. Harris L. Friedman and Glenn Hartelius (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2013).

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