

## HOLY GHOST

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*Prelude*

Summer 1996, Ust-Ordinsk, Siberia: Ken Hyder and I are on stage, everything's ready, we're ready to play. I raise my saxophone to my lips. Suddenly I hear a voice. Someone is speaking, not in a hushed way, but outwards, someone is addressing everyone in the room, someone is asking a question: the question is: "How did you begin in music?"

NOW? You want to know that NOW? Before even a note? "I started to hear certain music," I said, "as if it were a window opening into another world, a world that was more vivid than the one I lived in at home with my parents. And that intensity is something I've always gone after ever since. To lift people up out of where they are, to bring a sense of limitlessness, of possibility, a reminder that that also IS."

**Every human culture** on the planet proposes not only a way of life but also a unique metaphysical theater. In each case, imagined beings, invisible to the waking eye, pushed up and out of visible matter, but at the same time pulled back into dialogue.

And so sound. That which is not, rising out of that which is. Sound first it too pushing up out of the visible, telling always of the inside, voicing the shapes of enclosed air, unveiling the hidden; sound then captured and harnessed as voices of spirits, calls of communicants, summoning, purifying, rising up and out like prayer, chant, invocation, and the trance drums, sacred gongs and Chinese fireworks that change the gears of time.

Or is all this the wrong way round? Is the fundamental need to invent persons for imaginary conversations, and only then to invest them with voices and bodies?

Cambridge, 1968, I'm at college learning anthropology: LSD, Vietnam, rock music, academia: at school I'd had the Cuban missile crisis, Civil Defense handbooks, nightmares of World War III, still have my

NATO pamphlet with its cowering prisoners behind barbed wire in an unfree land and on the opposite page our guys look gratefully up at their atomic shield. The social set-up (the existing socio-discursive mind-set of any one society) insists on itself, imposes itself, as fixed, coherent, complete and self-sufficient. What happens to the knowledge that this is a bluff? Where is that knowledge placed? How and when is it spoken and how does it sound?

Read, study, synthesize. The rational mind pushing, it too, for a unified system. But suppose there is no unified system? Suppose human beings are not integrated wholes but dynamic fields in which different forces collide? Anthropology seemed to assume a basic continuity between nature and culture; societies were like organisms, bodies with every part having its “function.” But it seemed to me that exactly this transition from nature to culture that was being taken for granted was in fact the core variable, was in fact more than a variable, was a gap: the gap against which, and across which, the preaching insistence of culture is generated. For the culture of a society is in the first place a propaganda directed at its incoming members, its children, in the form of how they will be closed in to the world as that culture imagines it. Every culture generates to its own ends the *subjects* that inhabit it. In each individual psyche is installed the gap between the embodied intelligence of immediate sensation and the conceptual language-based representations that string together the obligatory narrative of a person—as conceived and constructed within that culture’s notion of personhood.

Detour into human cybernetics. Pain is an image, sound is an image, this page an image. I mean that they appear to us. These images are finely collated out of tiny informations rising in the afferent nervous system. They are transitory patternings of neuronal activity, momentary states of a plastic and holistic medium. Therefore, quite rightly, they seem to us alive, in a state of becoming, liable to change. This, if you like, is the quality of experience itself. Compare with language: an extrinsic system for combining and recombining an array of fixed, individuated, and mutually exclusive elements, according to rules for articulating to other persons descriptions, attitudes, and intentions. There can be no match between these two different kinds of information: our being is cybernetically divided. If language wants to tell of experience, it can only describe from the outside.

The great suspicion against language, rising in the apophysis of the old mystics, echoing in the Romantics and the tradition of idealist philosophy that holds music to be the purest expression of truth, hauling itself into modernism and into the Beats and settling into the aporias of Beckett and the rages of Jelinek.

My proposition is this: the projection of the sacred is the human response to the untranslatability between the two informational modes that above all other factors define the condition of that being’s being. Spiritual practice iterates a circular or rhythmic movement across the raw divide of this untranslatability. It is the shared but innermost secret of our species. The conversation with the gods is the conversation with ourselves we could never have.

You might guess that I am then going to argue that art goes on from this to attempt the translation itself, attempts to fire off a kind of utterance that does what language can’t, attempts to spill out what religion ultimately blurs and conceals. After all, as a musician I work with the intelligence of sound; music seems to plunge directly into the house of the spirit, eliciting complex inner motions that dart away from language. Is music then the expressive projection into sound of the images that are passing states or patternings of embodied intelligence itself—representations for which we can find no equivalents in language? The idea is tempting; after all, we have no direct access to our own embodied intelligence, but only to what that intelligence brings before us, namely the world as it livingly seems, as we hear, see, smell, taste and touch it—the image of the world as our senses sift and collate it from what comes forwards to them. This world is already talking to itself, and our attempts to join that talk, to talk that talk, can be thought of as attempts to cross the cybernetic divide that splits us. And a “word” in the language of the world would be something we could experience with our senses, like a song or a painting.

But I’m more cautious than that. What intervenes enormously into this “expressive projection” is that no act or process is primordial in this way, but is rather always realized in the mutual doings of actual human groups. In other words, what music is and what spirit is, is itself a cultural and historical variable. I realize that I am going to need to set out exactly what is distinctive about an aesthetic act or process, as against a spiritually-orientated or ritual act or process. And the distinction is going to have to work in cases where they seem to be almost one and the same thing, and in

other cases where they seem to be at each others' throats.

And there's a further reason also. I don't want to say that inside us all there's an authentic, or animal, or cosmic Self waiting to be expressed in art. A self is something much more complex and fluid and possibly multiple that is constantly being negotiated and produced within the conflictual informational field of the human.

Clifford Geertz wrote that people move "*very frequently between radically contrasting ways of looking at the world, ways which are not continuous with one another, but separated by cultural gaps.*" This passage between contexts allows the common-sense world to be "*now seen as the partial form of a wider reality which corrects and completes it.*" It seems that everywhere and often in the human world, cultural space is marked apart for those special activities that we identify as ritual or spiritual and that address the sacred domain, and that some of this marking out is also carried over into the setting apart of art from other things that are made. But it's precisely this carrying over from ritual to art that's the issue here. Music-making was, and still is in many places, thought of as a spiritual activity. But as a contemporary Westerner my grounding is to think of music as aesthetically organized rather than shaped by beliefs concerning transcendent beings. To think about music and spirit, to bring them into relation to one another, is also to worry at the edges and overlaps between ritual and aesthetic domains. In summer 2005 I found myself in the ideal place to do just that: the Republic of Tuva in southern Siberia, home of throat-singers, stone carvers and shamans.

### *Tuva*

Kyzyl, capital city of Tuva, exact center of Asia, amiable and violent, feels safer at night in the company of locals. We're walking down to the river, the Yenisei, to look at the moon and talk about music. Security on tonight's stroll is courtesy of Alash, an upcoming young Tuvan folk ensemble. "*The important thing here in Tuva,*" says Ayan, "*is that we think of ourselves as situated in the cosmos with the sky as our father and the earth as our mother. We're with the living creatures, the birds, the ants.*" So far he sounds much like a Tuvan government brochure. There's a mantra here repeated by everyone from the president on down to the effect that Tuva occupies a unique geographical space within which is communion between land and people. What's interesting is how the ideology embraces everyone from

conservatives to rebels. For musicians this means a natural conception of sound, as against the Western idea of sound purged of its natural elements before being allowed into the music room. "*Living in cities is bad,*" Ayan goes on, "*the philosophy is in the yurt, not in the building.*" And then he's interrupted by his mobile phone.

Like fish in the water of animist belief, shamans move amongst the people, intercede with the spirits so as to cure illnesses, bless journeys, purify persons and places of bad influences, find lost animals, and carry out funerary and other rituals. Each shaman must find his or her own unique destiny-fitted approach, part jived, part drawn out of a spoken tradition of techniques for tracking down the appropriate spirits and cajoling them into giving a result. Amongst these techniques are the use of spiritually empowered equipment and clothing, a preparation ritual that turns attention inwards to the spirit world, knowledge of how to lay and light certain kinds of fires and what to sacrifice on them, and a personal song that reminds the shaman of her origins and the source of her power. Just as their rituals mark apart the spirit world from unwanted contamination by the everyday world, shamans themselves are marked apart from other people and looked on as slightly dangerous and strange.

The economic-cultural type of South Siberian nomadism is identified with smaller units of economic production and consumption, but not with political, military and administrative structures. The basic reason for this is that for herders in this kind of terrain the amount of livestock mobility largely determines the degree of pasture degradation. You can only feed so many humans from so many cattle. Small scattered settlements are the practical ecological response, and there is no necessary one type of articulation of these mobile family-based units with higher order political units. Rulers and ruling systems, in other words, may come and go, but life in the pastures goes on. Or rather went on. Until recently each settlement would have had its own shaman. Now maybe half the population have decamped to Kyzyl, by far the largest city. But then as shaman Sergei Ondar said: "*I don't see any problem with shamanizing in cities, or indeed in extremely unshamanistic environments... All of my life has been a step by step development of shamanism: working in the city is part of that, and doesn't seem like a big break; I am in touch with my roots in nature and the cosmos.*"

I had visited Tuva on numerous occasions from 1992 onwards, but this time I decided to focus right on the boundary between aesthetic and

spiritual practice, as shown in the doings and sayings of musicians, carvers and shamans. I followed up my accumulated contacts and talked with as many people as I could. I found that Tuvan artists and musicians, like those elsewhere in Siberia, feel free to draw on a general shamanic culture. But Tuvan art is shamanic in a deeper way than simply referencing shamanism. Tuvan art is produced within the framework of a creative psychology that is often conceptualized and experienced as spiritual. An artist is free to ask permission from spirits, and to receive help from spirits, within the context of an aesthetic process. At the heart of Tuvan artistic imagination is an idea of nature as a totality, as a cosmos. It is towards this cosmos that an artist strives to open. Artistic skill is knowing how to work this opening towards the cosmos into the materials of sound or stone. It is as if each thing or event in the world is connected to everything else by networks of invisible forces, but that this connectivity is at first hidden, so that to reveal the connectivity is also to unveil the inner nature of things. This unveiling is often done in a spiritual state and it is tempting to think that for Tuvans a spirit is the personification of a node of connectivity to the cosmos:

Gendos Chamzyryn: “When I’m playing, a particular spirit comes to me, it’s above and comes down into my body and sometimes I’m playing and singing and it’s not me doing it, it’s someone else. It’s the spirit from where I’m born, a place that’s light and kind and beautiful.”

Alexei Kagai-Ool: “The carver has to feel the stone, be in dialogue with it. Before I start, I have to converse with the spirit of the stone, I do a ritual, I need to ask the spirit.”

However the claim to, or the acknowledgment of, contact with spirits is not for everyone:

Alexander-Sat Nemo: “When KK started to sing I listened with eyes closed and my eyes saw ancient Tuva, I felt it, no cars or electricity. He was like in a shaman’s trance, his eyes closed, giving out a big energy. I told him afterwards and he couldn’t understand what I was talking about. He didn’t want to know...”

In Tuva a person who listens to music or looks at art may receive *küsh*, the spiritual force residing in the work as a result of the artist’s inner moment of creativity and dialogue with the spirits. But what happens next is conditional on how this person perceives and receives this force. So art does not itself have a direct and objective power to change a person and the

circumstances surrounding them. The ritual actions of a shaman, on the other hand, are aimed at objective results and are felt to achieve them. A shaman is called when things build up to a head in real life, become risky or unpredictable. Shamanizing is case-orientated, and art is not. A piece of art is something that a person could encounter or not, respond to or not. True, a performed art, such as music, tries to be as case-orientated as it can, tuning itself to time and weather, place, and the feel of an audience. But this can’t match the detailed crafting of a shamanic ritual to fit a personal crisis, with the careful astrological reckoning, the “inner” and “outer” observation, the probing questions asked. Whilst art addresses persons, ritual objectively changes the world around and inside persons, dealing with all the circumstances, near and far, that bear on the case.

The power and cunning of artist and shaman diverge, the shaman primed to negotiate sacred worlds, the artist ready to hone a particular vocal technique or visualize the exact way a deer leaps. We can watch where the care goes, where the attention goes. Take the shaman Kunga Tash-Ool Boo, who is also a carver. When speaking of his carvings, he uses an unequivocally aesthetic tone: “Look at this, look at how beautiful it is, how the two goats are standing together, the composition.” As the only carver I know who works in horn rather than stone, he talks about horn being a finer and stronger material than stone, how this allows him to achieve greater delicacy in the figures. His work frequently shows a sense of exploiting variations in the color and texture of the material to achieve a more “living” quality in the figure. In this sense the carver Kunga is truly a maker, focused on taking physical stuff and crafting it into a physical thing. But as a shaman Kunga also makes ritual objects that have a ritual function, such as acting as vessels for spirits. Such objects may be the *ongon* figurines given to householders to keep in their homes, to be prayed to, or given small sacrifices of food. Here his approach is completely different. Although the *ongon* depicts three human figures, it does so in the most rudimentary way; the work is done quick, using felt, metal, or wood, whatever is to hand. The care is directed at ensuring that the *ongon* really is a recipient and holder of spiritual energy. Its form is merely adequate to this function.

This difference as to where care and attention are directed was made even plainer to me by a shaman who had previously attended music college in Kyzyl. Sergei Tumat said: “When I shamanize, I’m not here, not in the place where I’m playing the dungur drum, it’s just my material body

that's there: I'm away with the spirits, that's where my total attention is. If someone touches me, tries to get my attention there in the yurt, that's dangerous, it would be like falling a long way: so it's completely different from playing music to an audience, where you have to be there, to be attentive to what your material body is doing, to everything I learned in music school..."

Although much of art's work takes place in the imagination, the artistic imagination is always fundamentally orientated towards an image that requires to be made in the real (i.e. "this") world. The dialogue is between maker and materials, via the imagination. The convergence between the plane of imagination and the plane of material is effected by a physical process of making. (Taras Mongush, carver: "my favorite method is to choose a stone and wait until I can imagine what I can turn it into.") Ritual, on the other hand, establishes a special kind of meaning whereby concrete actions refer to, summon, and bring to life a collective imaginary space designated as the sacred. Here is a movement starting in the plane of concrete acts, but going away towards the plane of imagination. What happens in the yurt when a shaman shamanizes—drumming and singing, for example—is fundamentally orientated towards what happens in the domain of the sacred. So a shaman takes care of the material plane primarily to organize it in relation to the sacred, according to the special semantics distinguishing ritual acts and signs from everyday ones. In so far as what a shaman does is perceived as musical, it is said to be *music for the spirits*.

So this leads me to a first answer, a Tuvan answer, to my question about what is distinctive about an aesthetic act or process, as against a ritual act or process. Ritual action operates on an imagined sacred, which is believed in turn to cause directly a change in some person or thing in the everyday visible world. Against this, artistic action is towards the production of an image, concretized, and here it is exactly the connection or *PASSAGE* between imagination and real—taken as given in ritual—that is being constructed.

### *Xöömei*

*Xöömei* is a Tuvan word meaning both a particular style of throat singing and throat singing in general. A way of seeming to sing two notes at once, developing a melody of upper notes that are in fact harmonics of the lower note. The important and difficult thing for the singer is the suppression of the fundamental in favor of the harmonics. It's this stifling of the funda-

mental that distinguishes *xöömei* from European kinds of harmonic singing like those used by Stockhausen in *Stimmung*. How did this Central Asian musical culture come to exploit the harmonics of voices in the way it did?

Tuvan singers often alternate between singing words without *xöömei*, and *xöömei* without words, whilst playing a bowed stringed instrument throughout; is this a significant constellation? Had harmonic singing originated from an attention to the harmonics of instruments? There is evidence that the material culture of Central Asian music, in the form of instruments, has been stable for a long time. From the 10th century AD, instruments similar to the Tuvan *bizaanchi* appear right across Asia from China to Iraq. These are designed to be played by touching the side of the string rather than pushing it down to a fretboard. They are appropriate for sustained melodies and the accompaniment of epic recitations. Their Chinese name *hwuchyn* indicates a Central Asian origin. The *khomus* jaw harp is at least 2,000 years old in Southern Siberia. The *huur* is described from the 13th century onwards as a string instrument bowed underhand with horse-hair strings, inherited within the family, from father to youngest son. When it comes to throat singing, we have of course no material remains, but there is a hint of the age of the tradition in the following: Vainshtein suggests that the throat singing tradition of the Bashkir *uzliau*, which is not present in any neighboring culture, predates their emigration from Central Asia to present day Bashkiria. This move must have happened before they were described in 921–2 AD by the Arabic writer Ibn Fadlan. Vainshtein also speculates that "throat singing originally appeared in Sayan-Altai among ancient nomads of the mountainous steppe regions of the Upper Yenisei basin in the natural habitat where in the first millennium lived ancient Turkic tribes—the direct ancestors of Tuvan people." Nevertheless we have no actual descriptions of throat singing in the region prior to those of the late 19th century Russian ethnographer Jakovlev, followed by Anokhin in the early 20th century.

Despite our ignorance about the exact origins of throat singing, the existence of ancient instruments precisely designed for the production of harmonics is telling. In the case of the *khomus* jaw harp the note produced is constant in pitch, and the performer changes the shape of the mouth to cause different overtones and thus to create melodies. In the case of the stringed instruments these are played not by changing the length of the vibrating string, pushing the string down onto the fretboard, but by chang-

ing the mode of vibration of the string, touching it at the side. The idea is therefore not to produce a series of different fundamental frequencies, but a series of different harmonics of a single fundamental frequency. In *xöömei*, singing the melody is also done by passing skillfully between the different harmonics of a single fundamental. It seems plausible that once attention was given to the production of clear harmonics from the fundamental vibration of a string, the voice began to model itself on this. The metaphorical extension from instrument to voice is a case of the known being used to map the unknown: the voice, with its invisible mechanism, seems to issue from the lips as a direct output of the soul; now it is brought into relation with a humanly-made instrument that is under the hands, where the eye can see it and the hand can feel and find its measure.

But, unlike in the *organum* of medieval Europe, the external “machine” did not produce the result of thinking in terms of discrete notes, but rather of exploring the harmonics of one note. Thus although the voice was indeed conceptually instrumentalized in Tuva, instrumental sound itself was conceived as continuous, unified and transformative, rather than discontinuous and structural. Tuvan singers invariably refer to a close connection with nature and natural sound as the decisive factor shaping their musical culture; they invoke the presence and connectivity of the artist within visible and sounding nature conceived as the bright skin of a wider deeper higher cosmos. In day to day life it is of course attention to differences in timbre that allows us to recognize from far off the call of a particular animal, to tell its gender, age and condition, or to identify immediately the voice of a particular person and their mood, or even to tell the temperature of the air by changes in the sound of snow. In these instances it is change in timbre that carries the information. A musical alertness to timbre conditions the Tuvan approach to harmonics so that a movement between harmonics in *xöömei* is conceptualized as a change in something approximating to timbre, often described as “vowel sound” or as “sound quality”; if you get the “sound” right, your harmonic will be at the right pitch. The important point is that there is in Tuvan culture a perceptual and conceptual continuum between natural and musical sound, and that the continuous transformativity of natural sound is carried over into musical sound.

The great Tuvan musicologist Valentina Suzukey puts it like this: *the heart of the Tuvan sound concept is that the drone and the harmonics are regarded as inseparable*. Can I generalize one step further to the idea that a

sound and its transformations are inseparable? To the idea that the potential transformations of a sound are the “inside” of that sound? A specific cultural organization of interiority-exteriority put the accent on looking inside the sound. The impulse was to go inwards, to bring out the inner connectivity of a phenomenon, not to observe or manipulate its exterior. By filtering and amplifying the upper harmonics of a fundamental vibration we are unveiling its hidden life. Tuvan melody is the melody of a sound, the unfolding of the inner nature of a single sound that, in that moment, stands for all sound. I am reminded of a statement by the Romanian spectralist composer Iancu Dumitrescu when he spoke of his own musical project: “The attempt to release or unveil the god that is living in every piece of base matter.”

What this tells me is that the passage from imagination to realization in Tuvan art, and perhaps in any art, requires a coming to terms with the presence of physical matter so as to bring out what is already hidden in it.

### *Epic*

The Tuvan sound aesthetic is clearly embedded in a background shamanic metaphysics, but is it also historically shaped by the role of music in the performance of epics—long songs expounding the mythological stories that underpin the shamanic world view? Does Tuvan singing style originate as a solution to the problems posed by epic performance? Is there a connection between the relative absence of epic in Tuva today and the elaboration of throat singing there more than anywhere else in Central Asia?

We need to imagine first of all a stock or collection of stories held in collective memory, never written down, indeed expressly forbidden to be written down. The epic bard draws on these stories but there is no fixed text to be exactly reproduced; rather the bard must versify the story on the spot. So for the audience and for the performer the story is imagined in the light of the way in which it is told. In Buryat (South Siberian) epic singing, each phrase begins without words with a drone deep in the throat of the voice which then rises to a middle register in which the words are articulated. As the bard versifies the story, the rhythm comes out; the pitch melody remains very simple and very constant, playing little or no part in expressing changes of scene or of character. I have heard Sakha (North Siberian) epic sung in a very different way where different characters are done in clearly contrasted singing styles. Generally in all the Central Asian cultures in

which instrumental accompaniment is used, the role of the instrument is to give an anchoring drone, a point of departure that is always returned to between strophes, though there may also be some use of harmonics to suggest changes of mood or intensity. But it is easy to see how the instrumental drone voice and the drone played on a stringed instrument are interchangeable here. Carrying the drone into the voice would accentuate the special status of the ritual words then to be sung, separating them from other kinds of words.

Where would I place epic on my scale of variation between ritual and artistic practice? On the one hand, like a ritual, epic is directed at a specific effect in the real world. It should never be performed for no reason, or merely because it is beautiful and pleasing. It is done typically at the beginning of autumn in the period of preparation for hunting, but may be performed as a way of preparing for any big undertaking. The point is not that the story contains a model of action to be imitated, but that the process of bringing to life a sacred narrative impregnates whatever is done afterwards with the quality of normativity, a kind of putative “rightness.” On the other hand, as in a musical performance, the accent is on the versification and performance itself, and the skills of bards may be compared in a similar way to the techniques of artists.

We intuit that the desired effect is not primarily aesthetic, in our sense, but we need to know why. The answer lies I think in reception. The desired effect on the audience is that they vividly imagine and are gripped by the story being told, and that the story is imagined as happening within a sacred space-time. It is said that performance of epic involves going into trance; the singers act as if possessed and believe that they are receiving directly from the spirits the patterns, images and sounding strophes. (*I listened with eyes closed and my eyes saw ancient Tuva...*)

Essentially the epic is performed in order to evoke, generate, bring to life, the imagined sacred. But because here what is required is a prolonged act of imagination, this is not done in a perfunctory way via a semantics of ritual. The imaginary sacred must here itself be innerly performed by the audience. So although epic would appear to be an intimate fusion of ritual and art, the over-arching context and purpose is unambiguously ritual rather than aesthetic.

Where epics have been staged in the form of operas and plays—often as part of “national” cultural revivals—they no longer work in the

same way; they fail to bring the stories to life in the imagination of the audience, and are generally regarded as bad news. You still find today Siberians listening to music closing their eyes and going on a kind of cinematic flight or journey.

### *Monophony*

Why did the Central Asian outcome diverge so strongly from what happened in Europe in the ninth and tenth centuries when the voice was also brought into a considered relation to the instrument in the context of ritual performance? In Asia, the exploration of the harmonics of single notes; in Europe, a more accurate conceptualization of movements between discrete notes. The key points here concern divergent kinds of textuality in the two situations, and a specifically Christian construction of the spirit-body divide. But to understand this we have to explore nothing less than the thousand-year incubation of Western art-music within the Christian Church—a defining factor in the anthropology of this music. When John Baily—an expert in Afghan music—asked, as a question of ethnomusicological method, “Why privilege representation of musical patterns over representation of motor patterns?” he fingered a key factor in ethnomusicology: the conditioning of the Westerner by the hierarchies of his own systems of representation. These hierarchies were established for art-music during the period of that music’s incubation within the Church. It was the Church that provided the matrix within which grew up the idea of a consciously constructed music. It was the epistemology of that music that became musicology and fed into ethno-musicology where it colored and still colors the West’s take on other musical cultures.

In the Middle Eastern Judeo-Christian traditions, urban and hierarchical, ritual is generally performed in special custom-built institutions: the Temple, then the churches and monasteries. The very early Christian ritual had been essentially Jewish and the Jewish cantillation allowed improvisation on the base of traditional forms and cadences. The Jewish Temple had an orchestra with lyres, harps, trumpets, cymbals.

...when they lifted up their voices with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music and praised the Lord... then the house was filled with a cloud...so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God.

—II Chronicles

But certainly by 400 AD the use of accompanying instruments was thought by many Church Fathers to be a dangerous influence. The heterodox practices of the young Church are by now becoming stripped down, centralized, standardized. The monodic Chant, unaccompanied, now becomes the central musical expression of the Christian rite. The voice, privileged as the essential carrier for the ritual, is represented as internal, inaccessible, dissociated from the physical being; singing and listening become activities of the soul rather than of the flesh. In the same moment, the dematerialization of sound: as the body is expelled from music it takes with it bodily time and all that is implied by the presence of bodily time in pre-Christian performance traditions. Sound becomes pure, an exactly regular vibration, without physical shape. Equally the church building closes itself physically from the profane world and insulates itself from natural sound; the presence of the outdoors sound-world is replaced by the magnifying reverberation of the indoors within the hard tall walls of the edifice. In here, sound comes from everywhere and nowhere, an emanation rising towards the now vertically-situated god.

At this time everything is, on the face of it, dictated by the demands of the ritual. But notice how much of this is carried forward into secular composed music, even as the attention shifts gradually to the work of making the sound image itself. The gradual discovery of autonomous techniques for this making will eventually lead to the emergence of polyphony and beyond that to the Renaissance... beyond which composed music is no longer contained and contextualized by its liturgical function.

What is the importance of sound in Christian thought in this vast period? It is thought of as standing for the Word, the Word being language considered as illocutionary, language that *does* rather than language that *states*—ultimately, as the Word of God, bringing about the existence of matter itself. So to “sound,” or to cantillate, the sacred text is to express its illocutionary force, a force that, through utterance itself, directly changes the state of the singer and the listener, in the sense that to sing an Adoration is *to be with God wondering*, or that to sing a Thanksgiving is *to be with God gratefully*. And this force is **behind** the text, in the sense that the text itself can be translated and paraphrased without modifying the Word. (In Islam these two levels are much more intimately fused because the core of the Qu’uran is the Word of God as inscribed directly by the Prophet.)

So how the text is set is not in any way a musical revealing of the

meaning of the words, but rather a musical reinforcement of the linguistic shape and phrase of the text. So the *Jubilate* and *De Profundis* are sung with no musical indication of their radical difference in content, and every indication of their function within a single ritual structure. An introductory greeting may be sung on a single note; a fall of a third may show punctuation; a question mark may be suggested by a fall of a semitone followed by a rise; the end of the gospel by a melismatic treatment of the first syllable of the last phrase. This removal of expression, this abnegation by music of any paralinguistic expressive function, is part of the general “heightening” of the Chant, found also in the Roman *tonus lectionis* and the Jewish cantillation—a heightening that serves to distance the Chant clearly from normal everyday speech, to get and keep attention and enhance mnemonic resonance. Chanted words had physical charisma. Throughout the patristic and feudal periods, to read a text meant to perform it physically: to move the lips, to pronounce the words, and to listen to them, hearing the voices of the pages. Meditation and prayer were connected to the idea of spiritual digestion and ruminating. In praising a monk who prayed constantly, Peter the Venerable cried: “Without resting, his mouth ruminated the sacred words.” The little private booths, or carrels, in the libraries were designed to cope with the buzzing and muttering of readers and copyists. To make these motions of sound was to rehearse, to ingrain into the physical being, to physicalize the meaning, so that the words would always be there to reach for in any moment of weakness or confusion.

One of the crucial observations that helped define Christian attitudes to music is exactly that there is, within the psychology of music, a stimulation of both memory and forgetfulness. Clement of Alexandria drew a violent contrast between the devotion proper to worship and the immorality of secular song; he pictures the singers leaving the Church and forgetting at once where they have been. Instead of the praises of immortality they now sing “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” He comments grimly: “No, they will not die tomorrow, for they are already dead before God.”

The lifeline of the Christian self is the strong continuity between the self in prayer and the self in the world. Self-possession becomes intensely important. To abandon oneself, to forget oneself, is a horror. This does not mean what it means in later discourses; Christian self-possession is remembering oneself in God and before God. This remembrance is verbal

and the binding thread of the Christian self is the store of remembered words. So, meeting temptation, the Christian seizes on the words of a martyred saint; immediately he is no longer distracted from the destiny of his immortal soul; he weighs the matter of his own eternal death against the tug of fleeting pleasure. But his faith is not in words as words, in their capacity to mean what they say, but in the saying of them as an illocutionary ritual of remembrance; it is the music of the words as chanted that reinforces their mnemonic power and charisma, a music whose sound is a total sign, in the sense of a sign that suffuses all that is said with the power of God.

Ultimately, however, this sense of music as a total sign would be worn away. Some relation between parts and whole was latent in the practical work of music-making. Within the structure of the Chant, melodic elements and details had always been evaluated, substituted, recombined; it was simply that the *modus operandi* was articulated within a theological framework. Moreover the process had been both gradual and diffuse. The emergence of polyphony, which would telescope and superimpose this process on itself, is the point at which music begins to refuse its role as a total sign and to reject any way of mediating between detail and totality that might be imposed from outside.

### *Polyphony*

The Christian Church: a vast machine for creatively recombining sets of elements belonging to a sacred imaginary, in the interests of a hierarchy of ritual specialists maintaining a symbiosis of power with changing political élites. Christianity's peculiar multitextuality is central to its ability to adapt to successive political arrangements, from the Roman Imperium, through the Crusades and the Slave Trade to the treaty with Mussolini and the Cold War. In multitextuality is on the one hand the power of the authoritative written text—reinforced by a monopoly of reading and interpretation by persons with a vested interest in the structure—on the other hand the simultaneous presence and interplay of many different texts. It is as if the textual dimension of Christianity were similar to a body of epic stories in a Central Asian culture, only that all the stories and their possible variations had been written down, each carrying its own textual authority. Consider only that even the Bible as we know it is further surrounded by a vast cloud of other marginalized texts known as apocryphas and pseudepigrapha of which there are many thousands of pages.

In Europe music eventually levers itself away from the verbal text by acquiring its own textuality in the form of notation. A diagrammatic form arises which borrows the idea of discrete particles from written language but incorporates them into a mimesis of musical gesture in which spatial relationships reenact patterns occurring in the plastic and holistic medium of auditory sensation. The inspiration for such a spatial mimesis may lie in the ancient practice of chironomy in which the Jewish Cantor indicated by hand gestures the melody to be sung from the Hebrew text.

Around the same time as we begin to have written music (Hucbald's 9th century Europe) we have descriptions of the use of an instrument called the *monochord* to teach singers the Chant melodies. Here again is the idea of separate tones envisaged on a vertical plan, a feel for a striated vertical space in which each note is clearly separated from the one above and the one below it. This is achieved by placing the voice, so to speak, under the fingers, so as, literally, to digitalize it. The word *organum* means instrument, or tool; the *organum* in vocal music means, then, the instrumentalizing of the human voice, the realization of a fundamentally instrumental conception of sound in the medium of the human voice.

Also around this time the practice of troping begins to take on a new urgency. Troping could mean the addition of new text, the addition of new text combined with music, or the addition of new melismas without text. In its first form it consisted only of adding *sequences* or parts following on from sections of the Chant. Later, with the technique known as *farcining* (stuffing), new fragments of text were interpolated into the original. It was a proto-compositional technique whereby local composers could contribute to the body of liturgical music as representatives of particular monastic and church communities, often paying tribute to important local figures and saints.

At what point is the grip of ritual values loosened up when it comes to determining the actual shape and detail of the music within the ritual? The technical turning point is the discovery of a way of organizing the relationships between simultaneous, as opposed to successive, sounds. This invention—the invention of organized polyphony—challenged the authority of the sacred text, not of course as such but in terms of its operational pragmatics as the sole integrative field for musical organization. Instead of varying by substituting melodic formulae for others, you could now take the Chant or any part of it and build something new vertically on it; from

the moment the Chant became merely a starting point, the alert musician would gravitate towards such other integrative principles as might emerge from the actual work of building music on it. These new principles ultimately formed a matrix in which musical thought and experiment could interact directly without the mediation of a liturgical framework. The necessity of polyphony followed from the emptying out of musical space round the monodic Chant and the pregnancy of this space for the possibility of textual substitution. Once the impulses towards textual commentary, substitution, superimposition, glossing, in short *HYPertext*, become concretized in music, they begin to divide and link continua in ways that no longer simply mediate the divisions of experience reproduced in Christian discourse. The specific textual plurality that distinguishes Christianity from Islam, the notion of synchronous commentary, trope and textual and narrative diversity, is the major causal factor in the emergence of polyphony in the Paris cathedrals and not in the Baghdad mosques.

In short, a discourse centered on an unresolved cohabitation of transcendence and immanence (God, the Word made Flesh, the Son) produces its own negative and finds itself transcended (metaphorically speaking) by Art's immanent critique. In so far as Church legislators allowed themselves to be guided by an extreme distrust of music, they achieved exactly the opposite of what they had intended; they were forcing music to become a disciplined, self-conscious, technical skill: they had created the conditions for a learning process that would grasp more complex materials on the firm basis of what had been learnt with simpler materials. They had made it necessary for music to discover its own generative processes, to find an equivalent to the gradual and collective folk-process of elaboration and variation, but to find that equivalent in the sphere of conscious and organized practice. In this sense, the emergence of music as an art is already implied in the liturgical demand for a body of musical material that can expand and enrich itself without simply laying itself open to the uncensored influence of other musical traditions.

### *Pentecost*

The Spirit came upon the saints and upon me... Then I gave up for the Lord to have His way within me. So there came a wave of Glory into me and all of my being was filled with the Glory of the Lord.

So when He had gotten me straight on my feet, there came a light

which enveloped my entire being above the brightness of the sun. When I opened my mouth to say Glory, a flame touched my tongue which ran down me. My language changed and no word could I speak in my own tongue. Oh! I was filled with the Glory of the Lord. My soul was then satisfied. —Charles Harrison Mason, founder of Church of God in Christ, c. 1893.

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

—*Acts II*

Here we go to another thought, which is that the projection of the sacred is sourced (motivated, in the sense that motivations are the causes of social practices) in the actual vivid and shattering religious or mystical experiences of individuals. And that these experiences are the revolt of the psyche against the language-narrated self. So one definition of “spiritual music” is music that induces or draws on such experiences. The twist is how.

Mainstream Christian ideology deflects and defers any unmediated and overwhelming contact with God. In Catholicism, only after death is the Beatific Vision of God permitted. In life, such experiences are dangerous, extremely rare and confined to the deeply, and possibly only the professionally, religious. However, within Christianity is a partly suppressed and marginalized Pentecostal tradition. It emerges in our time around 1900 in Mississippi USA in the *Church of God in Christ* as an alternative to the white-ized post-slavery churches. This revived Pentecostal movement offers baptism by the Holy Spirit, and uses music to induce a state of being filled by the Holy Ghost and of speaking in tongues. It is said that *The Spirit moves in the music*.

Its forerunners were the Revivalist camp meetings of the early 19th century, at which people would often fall to the ground rendered unconscious by the sudden awareness of their sins, and sometimes further receive the gift of tongues and utter involuntary words glorifying God or Christ. And these movements in turn go back to the mystical “epidemics” that broke out spasmodically throughout the history of Christian Europe.

What generally keeps the lid on these outbreaks is the accommo-

dition of the mainstream churches with rising prosperity in *this* life. Thus Christianity has a key interest in secular institutions capable of filling the vacuum at the point where it fails to provide an existential experience of God. Social groups who are systematically materially disadvantaged tend to find this an unsatisfactory arrangement.

It may be that some aspects of West African religion passed into Pentecostal religion in the Southern States. Certainly a connection has been drawn going back the other way—between the “oral structures” of Pentecostalism and the indigenous religions of Africa—to explain the extraordinary success of Pentecostal churches in Africa since the 1970s. Amongst these oral structures Walter Hollenweger notes the inclusion of visions and dreams in worship, and understanding the relationship between body and mind revealed in healing by prayer and liturgical dance. Certainly everything that revolves around the term *Gospel* comes out of the rise of these churches in the Southern States from around 1900: the use of musical instruments, and the full range and expressive possibility of the voice both in the sermons and in the choral responses.

The spirit moves in the music. The Pentecostal tradition brought timbre back to life within Christian ritual. First because the sound comes out of persons sonically present as whole and bodied persons, second because the use of interference into the singing voice suggests the simultaneous presence of a material and a spirit source. The sense of something pushing up from within or behind. Modulation, distortion, interference, familiar from information theory, from the functioning of radios, from electronic music, fuzz boxes and the rattling metal sleeves on the tongues of *kalimba* thumb pianos. A signal interacting with another signal. Normal speech modulated by a shake in the voice telling of emotion. The voice broken as if animal vocalizations were coming up from below. The formalization of the signal on one level is partially disrupted by the presence of another signal on another level. And this disruption is displayed in the style. Consistent with this, musical instruments are vocalized. There are tonally undefined mordents (like the consonants of language), glissandi and blurred transitions, throaty and growling sounds by various kinds of overblowing and embouchure, prominent changes of vibrato, harmonics, and so on. Something else is trying to come through.

A parallel approach occurs in the more calculated context of contemporary art music. Jonathan Harvey, thinking about his own music, con-

ceptualizes two intersecting identities: on the one hand the (Western) instrument “as found” with its linear intervallic capacities; on the other its extensions, by means of electronics and timbral modifications, into a vertical timbre dimension. In his piece *Advaya*, the cello sounds at times corporeal, as if celebrating its own materiality, but at other times is made to produce a radically desubstantialized sound having no immediate link to any actual sounding object. Harvey thinks this as an unfolding in time of a dual identity, within the cello, of material and transcendent being. It is clear here that his way of showing out immanence is to show the points at which matter breaks out into spirit itself—which can then only be shown as transcendent. In Dumitrescu, this relationship becomes more dramatic: what is immanent can only be shown out by being caught in the act of bursting asunder its own material basis.

The point is that immanent spirit can only be summoned by a double perception, at once focused on the materiality of sound, AND directed to how that sound is being disrupted or transformed in some material way by what appears as an other force moving within it.

However it is Afro-American music that is the direct inheritor of the Gospel and Pentecostalist sound traditions. *Albert, we found out quickly, could play his ass off. He had a sound, alone, unlike anyone else's. It tore through you, broad, jagged like something out of nature. Some critics said his sound was primitive. Shit, it was before that! It was a big massive sound and wail. The crying, shouting moan of black spirituals and God music... Albert was mad. His playing was like some primordial frenzy that the world secretly used for energy.* Amiri Baraka on Albert Ayler in *The Autobiography of Leroi Jones*, pp. 194–5.

Coltrane's music, in comparison, is more weighted to the aesthetic. Listening to *First Meditations*, the music is not so much being pushed aside as modulated by Coltrane's intentions. There is the tension between the leader's search for the “beyond” and the foreground or “here” of predetermined melodic, rhythmic and modal patterns to be transcended and risen above. There is the choice of musicians, where each musician has a highly individual take on their own instrument, yet works with the others with extreme complementarity. At times it's as if each were playing a different music, and yet it's the same piece. Then there's an important narrative function, by which the soloist begins by voicing the theme and then passes through different levels or steps in a larger movement or journey, each step

clearly marked by changes in texture and rhythm by the whole group. In the paralinguistics of the tenor harmonics, in certain sections of prominent vibrato, and some relatively brief episodes of arpeggiated piano décor, the music can be said to illustrate or represent transcendence. But a far stronger accent is on the movement between here and somewhere else that is happening *inside* the music, a process that is being unwound, explored in the time that the music takes, by moving between a series of plateaus, each of which is itself multiply subdivided into phrases and periods. Finally the sequence of solos allows the same process to be re-explored in the different media of the different instruments and their players. Coltrane's music is uplifting because it invites a performance in the listener of an expansive aesthetic experience. The interpretation of this experience as a spiritual one by the listener is cued by track titles and by the relatively discrete "transcendence-signifiers" mentioned above. It may be that the message-bearing aspect is what motivated the artist to explore this kind of aesthetic set-up. But it doesn't follow that the work itself expresses the artist's intentions or message; the work is the outcome of a long series of aesthetic decisions that surely take on a life of their own.

I admit to having a bone to pick with message-bearing art. A habit picked up in the debates on Brecht, on Social Realism and political music. I've come to believe that signifiers in art, even in poems, have to circulate meanings, and not point hard outside the work; I see them rather as signposts inviting us in into the work and its dynamics, suggesting to us how we might start performing the work in ourselves. In art, aesthetic pull, centripetal, must be stronger than semantic pull, centrifugal; otherwise its power, its resistance against the world is dissipated. Only once the power of art is gathered can it then affect persons. Coltrane gathers the power of art, and that's what I meant by saying his music is *more weighted to the aesthetic*.

Does Albert, then, fall down on the question of message? Does his feeling of "having something to say" drive him merely to illustrate and signify the experience he wants us to have by imitating the trance-shake of the possessed?

Hell, it seems like we're still just scraping the surface of this thing. Suppose a spiritual experience is only ever defined, or even only ever *experienced*, via cultural signifiers? Doesn't an artist then who wishes to communicate, to inspire, to stimulate such an experience have no choice but to work with these signifiers?

Can we imagine a range of unusual experiences, including those of *seeing* or knowing more than should be possible by normal channels, time travel, dreams, hypnosis, out of body experiences, drug-fueled hallucination, the effects of various and particular drugs—*DXM is like living in a dream. Everything seems new and foreign. There is a childish euphoria. You feel disconnected from everything and everyone but communication is easy. Scenes are very choppy and you'll feel like you're in multiple places at once. PCP more knocks you out of reality. You'll feel slow and sometimes heavy. Your feet get stuck, feel as if they were melting into the ground . . . yet you're as light as a feather. There is less conscious command, and talking is difficult. You'll be in a street, but the street won't "click," and you'll feel nowhere, like not existing. Scenes are cut into long frames integrated slowly*—being seized by aliens and taken up into UFOs for experiments, possessed by spirits, inner flying, feeling yourself morphed into an animal, experiencing total unity and submersion in the cosmos, seeing the white light, or feeling the wave of the Holy Spirit coming down into you?

And then there's the "plain, everyday spiritual experiences" in the following passage from Norbert Baumert writing about Pentecostal Theology: *What in the 20th century was at first called "Spirit-baptism," is a clear-cut experience of the Spirit, which, on the one hand, is distinguished from clear-cut experience of the Spirit of another kind, such as occurs in mysticism or in the lives of many saints; on the other hand, it is distinguished from plain, everyday spiritual experiences. Its characteristics are: profound impact by the Holy Spirit; deepened living relationship with the three divine persons; intense, life-changing effects; love for prayer and Holy Scripture; an important bodily component with corresponding forms of expression; readiness for vocal and free prayer, also in community; special manifestations of the Spirit, usually prayer in tongues. The specificity lies in the combination of all the above . . . where it seems that, for this tradition at least, prayer or thanksgiving to God already count as spiritual experiences.*

This spectrum of unusual experiences, some perceived as spiritual, some less so, depending on your point of view, suggests a high degree of cultural modulation. What happens to people—often unexpectedly and intensely—is interpreted, and the interpretation may feed back into the experience so that it becomes largely culturally constructed. This interpreting, deciphering kind of knowledge has a more active counterpart in the form of the techniques used by ritual specialists to generate and modulate

special experiences. In shamanism, for example, what the shaman innerly sees has the form taken by the spirit; the shaman sees a bear and knows that this is not any old bear but the Bear Spirit. So you might say there's an act of interpretation here, in the sense that someone else might innerly see a bear and think it *was* just any old bear. But, more than this, the shaman *learns* to recognize spirits, that is, to construct the experience of spirits from varied kinds of visual images that may be more or less detailed. The shaman learns to feel towards the image, to empathize with it as though it were another person, to detect its intentions and mood.

We had begun with shamans. I spoke matter-of-factly about the shaman using preparation rituals and other techniques to enter a special state. "*When I shamanize, I'm not here, not in the place where I'm playing the dungur drum, it's just my material body that's there: I'm away with the spirits...*" I was concerned to establish the metaphysical and pragmatic structure of the shaman's doings. The shaman's use of sound—*That which is not, rising out of that which is. Pushing up out of the visible, telling always of the inside, voicing the shapes of enclosed air, unveiling the hidden*—is integral to the techniques of entering the special state. The shaman's drumming (active) takes her on a journey out of herself into the sacred world where the spirits may be met with.

Now consider a socially more elaborate situation such as the Bori rituals of the Nigerian Hausa. Rituals here are conducted for the same kinds of purposes as those of Siberian shamanism—to heal illness and resolve problems. However the role of shaman is now split between a group of musicians and one or more mediums. The music (active) triggers the medium (passive) to enter a dissociated state and be possessed by a particular spirit. Possession by a spirit is shown by talking and acting like the spirit, falling down, sweating and shaking, lapsing into comatose states, speaking in tongues, twitching and acrobatics, frothing at the mouth and nose. Such altered states have physiological and psychological components, but they are also learned: you learn what the cues are and how to respond to them; the learning takes place both in and out of normal waking consciousness. The music is the bearer of many of these cues. But it also triggers dissociation in the medium as a defense against the auditory overloading produced by a buildup of volume, speed and density of information. The mediums are trained to perform the music within themselves in such a way as to succumb to this kind of overloading.

Dissociation—a state of division or non-integration in the continuous production of identity—may be regarded as a strategy or a resource of the mind for dealing with certain types of difficulty, of which sensory overload is only one. It is possible that dissociation is a normal state and that the Western notion of an integrated identity is a myth; to paraphrase Castoriadis, the world as experienced by the subject is not an integrated whole, yet does not fall apart. But many religious and ritual practices offer institutional means of dissociation. Here the more traumatic aspects of dissociation for the subject are overcome by learning and habituation. Within these cults or practices dissociation becomes a skill that triggers the working of what anthropologists have called the *autonomous imagination*: a kind of imagining in which what takes place appears neither to be imagined by the subject nor to be happening in the physical world, but to be "imagined to" the subject by some other agency, and so happening in its own sacred space-time. So this is an experience of being taken over by an other force, projected as a more powerful, more authoritative force. *Then I gave up for the Lord to have His way within me.*

The jazz musician glances enviously at the cult member who has their dissociation technique all set up in advance. Against this, the jazz musician is constrained by a culture of the individual expressive identity to *put themselves totally into their playing* whilst dealing unaided with the indeterminacy of the artistic environment. Is this why some musicians in the extremely insecure and stressful jazz ambience reached out towards explicitly spiritual pathways? From an aesthetic point of view the potential problem is that, whereas in a CULT situation the cultural signifiers that tell you how to respond to the music are already given, in an ART situation, if you want to play *spirit music* you have to lay out the cultural cues in the music itself or in whatever other information is attached to it. Can you do this without aesthetic compromise?

### *Art*

I have so far dealt largely with aesthetics as a possibility incubating within ritual, as a potential that haunts the margins of other forms of practice and experience conceived in spiritual terms. It's high time to deal with it head-on. Because I approached artistic practice in Tuva as an anthropologist as well as a musician, I started thinking of art as an anthropological category rather than a historical one. It simply seemed to me that in Tuva, people

doing music and doing carving knew that they were doing a particular kind of thing that had a certain quite edgy relation to spiritual practices but that was also very distinct. The fact that a vocabulary of aesthetic judgement was shared between practitioners of both arts encouraged me in this direction.

In art, the accent is on the pragmatics of the movement from imaginary to real, a movement that is taken as given in ritual. The convergence between the plane of imagination and the plane of material is effected by a physical process of making. There is a physical dialogue between maker and materials, via the imagination. Materials are anything that is taken into the work-process that was already around, and so had some characteristics of its own. For example, an orchestra, a theme, a tone row, a sound, a way of making a sound, a bunch of chords, a recording of birdsong, Eric Dolphy (if you were Charlie Mingus). The characteristics of the material are an important input into the dialogue because they offer resistance. The idea does not simply impose itself on physical matter as if that matter were nothing other than an extension of the idea. The material offers resistance partly because it is material and partly because of the respect accorded to it, a particular kind of listening or looking that registers and explores its nature. In music composition, material may be chosen that is not physical matter, but, once it is chosen as material, it is attended to in a similar way. So a piece of art consists of some chosen material that has been worked on with a particular kind of respect, and it is because of that respect that the material bears the traces of being worked on in the way that it does.

Come back to the front end of *making* a flute solo or *making* a piece of sculpture. The formal aspects of the work arise exactly through the fact that it is *work*, the cumulative trace of intentional actions taken towards the material. These acts of shaping are conditioned by a series of acts of perception that are alive not only to the material but to each other. The looking or listening is at any stage towards a material already inscribed with the traces of previous lookings and listenings. Hence every perceived form is held in intimate relation to its possible or actually present transformations. In other words, because of this particular kind of perceptual care directed at and into the material, attention returns to what was excluded from each percept, and this residue is ready to be taken up in the next perceptual moment.

Notice that in this regard art is absolutely opposed to language, in which everything definite is cut out against everything else.

A general kind of isomorphism seems to be shared between ritual

and art. Ritual is isomorphic with itself, involving repetition, relations of formal similarity. These aspects constitute its formal semantics: they say *we are doing something special here*. Art takes the idea of ritual isomorphism as its model. Ritual says: the *ongon* represents the three spirits; the representation doesn't have to be good, *there only has to be the idea of representation*. But how, and at what point, does the vessel containing the spirit no longer do so by the force of iteration alone, but require to be formed in the *likeness* of the spirit—or in the *likeness* of the spirit's house or body? *If, for Kant, discursive knowledge was prohibited from access to the interior of things, then works of art are the objects whose truth can be conceived only as that of their interior. Imitation is the path that leads to this interior.* (Adorno.)

I want to deal first with the work's imitation of itself. I see likeness as based on grouping. (And perhaps this view of it is inspired by Stockhausen's essay on the *Klavierstück 1*.) The basic unit of aesthetic perception is a group of sensations, in which the connections between members of the group, and between members and the whole group, generate sets of related forms; each form is then grasped in relation to its possible transformations, because its constituent sensations remain active. All perception happens in time, not in one time but in a multilayered time in which syntheses of different kinds occur at different speeds, and this is true for the artist as for the viewer, for the musician as for the listener. The things that set off these sensations physically exist—even if they are sounds—and have been shaped to do just that. Their shapes embody the traces of actions and not directly the traces of ideas. These actions are conditioned by the possibilities of the material and by its resistance to being acted on. For example, a harmonic on a tenor saxophone, whether composed or improvised, is the encounter between an idea, dynamized into an intention, and the physical limits of the instrument. The harmonic becomes aesthetically valued in connection to other sounds, or for its own shape of which the parts are connected. Best is if you hear the shape of the sound, *and* you hear it in relation to the shapes of other sounds, *and* in several different dimensions at once, for example by comparing envelopes, or fundamental pitches, or by any mode of relationship and comparison that has been set up by the music. But that all this would be happening very fast and in an unobserved way, creating a feeling of transformations within a holistic and plastic medium of sound experience.

The neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese suggests that the models of the world by which we organize many of our thoughts and experiences are

dynamic and tactile because their neuronal correlates—*mirror neurons*—are those that simulate actions and movements. These structures are activated in the same way when we see the actions of others as when we move ourselves. They are, so to speak, the mental part of moving, but without the agency of the movement—us or them—being determinative. Hence we feel the movements of others around us as familiar long before we decode and interpret them. We might go on to speculate that we also feel the dynamics of things, and read the traces of movements in forms, in way that is tactile and intimate, as if through the lens of our sense of our own bodies. Or in other words that aesthetic experience involves the *mirroring* of suggestive movement and shape in art. But the important point that I want to borrow from Gallese is the idea of neuronal activity connected to movement but without being tied to images involving agency—us or them, you or me.

His way of breathing was a joy: it had economy and grace and power; his management of time was perfect. He had the time to hit whatever note it was that came next, then to extend the breath into the next phrase like a sudden almost-visible extension of the room, as if this phrase had yearned to be united with its predecessor, and now they were together. Then he'd cut the end of that phrase and wander off into the split chink of a twilight zone, momentarily. Normal business would resume some time, but in this instant he had gone down steps he'd never seen until then, that led down to a dark harbor where water clucked against the boats and rocks and a constellation could be seen reflected. —*Last Night's Fun*, Ciaran Carson.

The performing listener is here a writer creating a parallel text to the music. Giving a sense also of how a listener may interpret their own experience as inhabited by the intention and experience of the acoustic performer. This opens up the idea of the active creative performance of the receiver/listener/viewer in response to the work. It's a fundamentally democratic idea. The inner performance is not a passive effect of the work. Its agency is open. Listening to music we do not care if it is us that is actively making the experience or not. Or, rather, the *who* of the activity is not an essential part of its quality.

Again this places art in decisive opposition to language, which is almost nothing other than a grammar of agency, a schema for negotiating the differences between your position and mine.

Music stimulates both forgetting and remembering. Christians were horrified that the *wrong music* might cause a person to forget them-

selves before God, but believed that the *right music* would bring a person to recollect themselves before God. In Tuva *xöömei* is said to make the listener forget their normal self to participate more deeply in the cosmos. According to Michel Ratté, music can be a proto-symbolization of the inner what-we-are that is lost when we use the means of communication and representation offered by society. Music is peculiarly suited to this because sound constantly disappears, as if it were a constantly collapsing representation of the listening self. Listening to music brings us into a state where memory no longer has representation, and simply confronts itself as awareness of forgetting. Art is driven by the energy of a self that finds itself on the one hand brought into relation to itself by the possibility of communication, and on the other constantly misrepresented by the inherently intersubjective character of that communication. The young Georg Lukacs also considered all human socio-cultural communicative acts to be a tragic failure in terms of the primal need for the subject to express the singular immediacy of their own experience. The individual is incarcerated in an incommunicable subjectivity, the isolation of the subject produced precisely within the solidarity of all the speakers of a language. Art expresses what we are as such within the failure of communication.

Jonathan Harvey on Xenakis and Ferneyhough: *Both composers possess a "hot" energy that appeals to some temperaments. There is in this a notion of assault on the self-identity of the subject. Piranesi, Beckett, Matta, Bacon, etc., all exemplify this. The self (body and mind) is torn to fragments to reveal the nothing.*

But there's another almost opposite way in which a listener's sense of agency might be put on hold. I'm thinking of the ideas of John Cage: Cage's ideas about music as the production of a quiet mind, and as something that can help to quieten the minds of others; silence as the totality of the unintended, not a literal absence of sound and movement but the totality of all the sound and movement that is happening anyway when the intention is quietened. In Cage's dualistic view, intention can only produce a catastrophically rigid mind-set such as that employed in the workings of traditional tonal harmony. A person who makes music in such a structuring way is laying down a dominant continuity that imposes a line of hearing and prevents the listener's perceptual capacities from opening to any other possibilities. Against Cage, this leaves out the recursive nature of aesthetic perception as an activity, the constant sending back of the attention to adjust

the filters and discover something new. It leaves out the listener's contribution to the emergence of a new and unique continuity with each listen.

If Cage's proposition represents a radical, perhaps deliberate, misunderstanding of traditional music, his actual practice can be thought of as simply moving the zone of the listener's activity nearer to the early stages of incoming perceptual information. This perhaps relaxes the higher level (more abstract) processing activities involved in recognizing, sorting and drawing connections between perceptual entities.

*Taken together, the ideas I have been discussing suggest a vast range of possible types and intensities of musical aesthetic experience all of which place the experiencing subject's sense of agency in some way into parenthesis. Finally, at the core of every truly engaged listening experience, something is retained from the transcendental religious experience: not the giving up of the self for the journey into the sacred imaginary, but a special condition in which "I," the listener, am inhabited, and temporarily imagined, by the subjectivity of the music. Finally, by embodying the traces of the listenings of its maker, or makers, music, in the moments that it sounds, is listening to itself, and I listen to it by becoming it.*

There is a further implication here that bears on the musician's own state of mind and how that indirectly contributes to the work's reception: namely that the musician's own sense of agency may also be placed in parenthesis. We've already seen how, in the Tuvan psychology of artistic creation, a creative process may involve a dialogue with spirits, or a sense that *it's not me doing it, it's someone else*.

In Western culture also, certain modes of performance seem to require an abandonment of the self. But what is being abandoned here is the self in the limited sense of that part of the mind that has previously acquired and that now consciously holds and deploys the necessary technical skills for the realization of the work. Furthermore this operative self is not being inhibited—in fact its contribution to the output is being strengthened. The notion of *giving up the self* here refers to a restructuring of the attention so as to get a performance that has a sense of immediacy, a sense of the work being discovered in real time in front of and with the audience, and so a sense of risk, of going beyond what is simply known and adequately covered by technical competence. For the performance of a piece of music is always an attempt to open the deepest and most comprehensive dialogue possible between the work as it exists in abstract or recorded form and the

empirical and social moment within which it is being realized. So what is demanded is not the reproduction of an ideal performance, such as might be arrived at through competence alone, but the realization of a unique iteration that listens to its here and now.

In jazz this quality is sometimes referred to as *spirit* or *energy* or *vibes*. Some musicians adopt a devotional metaphor as a technique for getting themselves into the right frame of mind. A shared vocabulary develops between players and listeners: *he taps into a higher animating spirit, playing like a man possessed, visibly transported...*

The academic literature on the psychology of performance looks mostly at questions of motivation and control of anxiety, as if these were the crucial factors. Furthermore, the various therapies available to performers suffering from stage fear are explicitly acknowledged to be of dubious value; they bear little or no relation to the personal preparation methods used by some musicians in order to let go of the anxious mind before going on stage. From yoga to double whiskies to private rituals of disorientation, musicians will try anything that works for them.

Glenn Gould famously overcame a block in some tricky passage by practicing with a radio AND a TV on full blast. My guess is that a certain kind of dissociation is functional for optimal performance and that many different techniques, whether spiritual or secular, can create such dissociation and partially re-organize a person's normal sense of agency.

### *Coda*

Finally this question of agency/non-agency draws me back to the social doings of human groups and the distribution of power within those groups. An anthropology of power will look at how control systems—previously biochemical and instinctual—are, in human beings, transferred to extrinsic cultural systems. This enables and fires off the singular human project of the variable, developing and undetermined adaptations of societies and cultures within different ecologies. The lynchpin of these effective possibilities is cooperative action, which requires the binding of the individual into the social group and the affirmation of the general power of a society over its members. My thinking here starts out from the work of Pierre Clastres on pre-political societies; societies in which the role of individual leadership and hierarchy is less important than the submission of every member of society equally to the rule of tradition; small-scale societies in which the

nearest thing to a leader is a person who solves disputes, gives away worldly possessions and acts as the group orator. This account breaks with the tradition of explaining (and legitimating) power differences in present-day societies by reference to hominid, and therefore instinctual, pecking orders. It asserts cooperation within small groups as a fundamental step in human acculturation, one that precedes the later emergence of political difference and inequality within single societies. My point here is that first we have to reckon with the general power of society over its members, and only then can we consider the case in which social power is unevenly distributed.

My power over another person could be defined as my capacity to get them to do what I want regardless of their own wishes and without the actual deployment of force. The communicative acts involved in the expression of power are very often ritual in character. Ritual may be more abstract than any actual violence, but just as physical, because addressing the body through the mimetic movement and complicity of bodies and the binding of the body to exaggerated and repetitive gestures within the ritual procedure itself. In so far as the model for all rituals of power is the particular category of actions by which we address the domain of the sacred, “spirit,” the content of that domain, is revealed as purified social power, or pure coercion. In the initiation ceremonies of quasi-leaderless societies, all members of society submit equally to the tradition of the group by submitting equally to the ritual knife. It is as if control, once displaced outside the biological system, has to cut its way back into the human body. Why does this movement of control from biological systems to cultural systems have to take such a traumatic form?

This year, 2009, is Darwin’s anniversary. Evolution is an improvisation. No animal is a perfect and integrated system (despite our longing projection of grace upon them) because every animal is an improvisation on the basis of temporary solutions to earlier problems. Human language and culture do not suddenly of themselves lift us out of that process. I began this essay with a proposition concerning the untranslatability between the two cybernetically defined informational modes—natural and cultural—that constitute the human being’s being, and this remains the core of my answer. We look for, we expect, smoothness, in the sense of a functional or analytic continuity. But clearly this expectation is conditioned by the social organization of our own project of understanding, the same conditioning that led generations of scholars to gravitate towards a sociological reduction of reli-

gion. But the invention of the sacred, the peopling of a sacred dimension with imaginary beings, has first to be grasped within the total field of the human, the entire field of being as a simultaneously natural and cultural being. Only on this level can its true lack of sense be articulated.

The extrinsic cultural system is largely vehicled by language, a grammar of agency, of the constantly shifting positionality of the individual in relation to other individuals within the space-time of the group. So not only does culture confront the pre-cultural in terms of how it arrays, processes and stores information, it also, by introducing a grammar of agency in the form of language, reconfigures human intentionality in relation to how information is activated. *Who is doing it* becomes an integral part of *what is being done*. From the perspective of the intending subject, agency and positionality sink back as constants into the functional context of action. However, behind and underpinning the grammar of agency, lies the general and unagented power of culture itself. This is now articulated through a secondary imaginary network of positionality.

The way in which this secondary network is marked apart from actual relationality within the group draws on a pre-existing category of communicative action: I mean those forms of animal ritual that place certain behaviors in parenthesis in order to reduce inter-individual conflict for the benefit of the group as a whole. The dog will lie down in front of the larger dog in order not to get attacked. The action is marked out as communicative, and the logic is that of avoiding the unnecessary death of an individual which would be counter-productive for the pack. Animal behaviors are ritualized by the application of exaggeration, stereotyping and repetition to what would otherwise be normal functional behavior; all these formal aspects reappear in human ritual.

Like a constant sound we only notice when it’s turned off, the general power of a culture can only be sensed and culturally articulated by its members at points of malfunction, recurrent difficulty or complexity; points at which cultural knowledge is palpably not self-sufficient, at which the world-image breaks down, at which a fragile walkway must be rebuilt after every storm. Through the development of a sacred domain as an imaginary network of positionality, human persons get to have a positional attitude, as if towards other real persons, towards those issues, frictions and negations generated by the culture of which they are members, as it lays claim to operational mastery within the total nature-culture system.

Whatever is dangerous, or is simply unplaceable within a culture's categories, becomes material for that culture's construction of the sacred. Clastres' *Chronicles of the Guayaki Indians* opens with one of the greatest *coups de theatre* in ethnographical literature when he is woken in the middle of the night to assist at the rare and precious event that is the birth of a new baby into the tribe. He describes the four or five Guayaki forming a protective circle around the mother, staying silent, unsmiling and careful because they know that the slightest sound or a single word would be enough to attract a mortally dangerous night spirit.

Ritual articulates nature as a complex of spiritual forces that enter into social relations with persons. At the same time it makes the power of society seem natural by locating it in the body and its gestures and in the physical resonances of gesture, of relations in physical space, and of the voice. Power is in the first place a dimension of social relationships in general. The unagented, or collective, force of society itself underlies the later internal distribution of power that comes with the growth of political difference within society. At this point political power ceases to be one and the same thing as the general power of a culture over its members and culture takes on the new task of legitimating political inequality within the group. With political difference the collective and relational aspect of power gets concealed in rituals of authority where power appears as belonging to an individual, an office-holder. But even here to begin with power is directly spiritually conferred, or conferred by one whose power is spiritual. The rewards of power, the privileged access to social goods, the identification of the power-bearing individual as variously destined or chosen, as responsible, as privileged, as mandated, or as representative, all this agenting of social power is built up on the basis of social power itself.

But if ritual is effectively the exercise (or even the manufacture) of social power directly through the body, art seems to commandeer this body-inscribed process and instigate itself as its own power, or a separate field in which power is no longer hierarchical, applicable or applied, the worked material in art perhaps even standing in as a substitute for the cut body in ritual. The democratic possibility in art is that the receiving subject's sense of agency is left open, the receiving subject is not possessed by a spirit.

Art democratizes ritual? Art as an immanent critique of power? But supposing that the association of power with the body most authentically belongs to the kinds of society in which economic relations are still

posed in terms of relations between individuals expressed through an ontological ritual of bodies? Supposing that the development of the autonomy of art as a field coincides with the over-riding of all such relations by the more abstract relations of money? Suppose then that art has become nothing but a privileged zone in which survives a substitute ritual for the bourgeoisie? Isn't what Bourdieu argues in *Les Règles de l'Art* that the final push to define art (here, literature) as a separate field of activity with its own rewards and sanctions comes as a reaction to the flooding in of money, new money, into cultural life in the Paris of Flaubert and Baudelaire? I blow the dust from my copy of the *Communist Manifesto*; it hasn't been out much recently:

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors," and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment." It has drowned the heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. . . . In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.

Marx did not foresee the society of the spectacle as the material form taken by monopoly capital and the need to absorb surplus production. The exploitation that in his time was becoming nakedly visible quickly concealed itself within a new universe of images.

But it was Rudolph Bahro's remark that Marx wasn't materialist enough, that the human of dialectical materialism had been flattened out into too few dimensions, that first got me thinking about the material presence of the human being and the embodied intelligence of that being. Music can't be reduced to a social text, or a social process with an integrative and relational social function. Music is not beholden to society but to the whole being that is part inside and part outside society. An anthropology that isn't mere sociology will have to respect that. My patience, my pragmatic respect for beliefs of others in spirits and for the interpretation of certain experiences as spiritual ones, survives my intense suspicion of organized religion because these are sure-fire indicators of that human complexity.

—London February 2009

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Holy Ghost! is an American synthpop duo from Brooklyn, New York City, consisting of Nick Millhiser and Alex Frankel. Millhiser and Frankel both grew up on the Upper West Side of New York City and attended Trevor Day School together. They were later part of a hip hop group called Automato. Automato's debut album was produced by James Murphy and Tim Goldsworthy of DFA. After the release of the album, Automato "kind of fell apart". However, Millhiser and Frankel kept working on music. Initially it was...