the world of music 42 (2) - 2000: 25-50

Listening Selves and Spirit Possession

Judith Becker

Abstract

This essay explores the idea that certain senses of personhood or styles of subjectivity preclude the experience of spirit possession, while certain others may encourage it. Notably, the Cartesian 'self', the rational, self-controlled, disengaged self tends to hold in contempt those who practice spirit possession, with its surrender of control and lack of ironic distance. Conversely, those who tend to have strong emotional reactions to musical stimuli and those who do not maintain "aesthetic distance" or an ironic stance toward experience are more likely to be involved in spirit possession ceremonies. The listening subject in a spirit possession ceremony is ever alert to musical signals that indicate the presence of divine beings and the possibility of personal transformation. Drawing upon materials from evangelicals in colonial Virginia and contemporary U.S. Pentecostals, the author contrasts the non-ironic, engaged selves who may be involved with experiences of transcendent unity with holy beings and the Cartesian selves whose sense of an appropriate style of selfhood centers more on self-control and 'rationality'. These two American styles of self are then compared with trancers and those who do not trance among the Bugis peoples in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The Bugis believe that one's vital spirit, sumange', may diminish if one's bodily integrity is penetrated. Spirit possession is feIt to be a kind of invasion of the body by outside forces. One group of transvestite priests, called bissu. *are able to transcend this cultural injunction and allow the penetration of spirit possession and to f1irt with a second penetration, i.e. self-stabbing. The special powers of the bissu that permit transgression of cultural norms of sensible behavior also allow them to be the intermediaries between the world of humankind and the spirits of the upper realm. The author concludes that more than one style of selfhood may be available even within societies with a preferred, hegemonic style of self, and that only the listening self susceptible to the transport of musically-driven holy narratives will accept spirit possession.*

Who are we when we listen to music? What is the drama into which we cast ourselves? How many different selves are appropriate for how many different genres of music?

1. Introduction

In this essay, drawing upon materials from evangelicals in colonial Virginia, contemporary Pentecostals, and transvestite priests in Sulawesi, Indonesia, I intend to explore the idea that only certain kinds of selves, only certain constructions of selfhood are possible for one to participate in spirit possession. I suspect that certain other constructions of selfhood not only obstruct the possibility of spirit possession, but lead one to look down upon, even despise the practice itself. I suspect that these different selves may affect one's openness to the emotional response elicited by the musical stimulation that nearly always accompanies spirit possession. Extreme emotions are the correlatives of spirit possession—emotions often attributed to the accompanying music. Like the obligatory roles of the spirit possession narrative, aroused emotions must also be acceptable components of one's sense of self.

To speak of subjectivity or one's sense of self, and to assume as I do that our sense of selfhood is not self-made but is culturally constrained, is, for one who has never thought of it, a profoundly anti-intuitive act. Our inner selves are felt to be so completely natural, so unique, so independent of the society around us that we may feel affronted by any suggestion that what we feel to be our sense of inner being is not our unique creation, and that selves can vary predictably across cultural boundaries. The term 'subjectivity' is often used among linguists and anthropologists to designate the area of study concerning one's sense of self, or personhood.

> The "subjectivity" we are discussing here is the capacity of the speaker to posit himself as "subject." It is defined not by the feeling which everyone experiences of being himself (this feeling, to the degree that it can be taken note of, is only a reflection) but as the psychic unity that transcends the totality of the actual experiences it assembles and that makes the permanence of the consciousness. (Benveniste 1971: 224)

Benveniste has argued that the sense of person is a product of languaging[1], as have many others, including Buddhist philosophers. While the sense of personhood seems inextricably tied to the development of language, one's sense of bodily boundaries, our sense of what (somatically) belongs to us and where our bodies end, seems to escape the linguistic formation of person and takes shape in areas of the brain not directly involved with languaging (Melzack 1992; Damasio 1999: 108). Since the 1970's, an influential group of anthropologists has compiled a series of articles and monographs that describe senses of personhood around the globe that sometimes seem far removed from Western understandings (Geertz 1973; Myers 1979; Rosaldo 1980; Errington 1983, 1989; Shweder and Bourne 1984; Lutz 1988; Abu-Lughod 1986; Becker A.L. 1999). Notions of personhood do not reside in the mind as abstract entities, as disembodied, contextless images. They are imagined as situated within certain cultural narratives. We project ourselves imaginatively within a situation, acting in a particular way, responding verbally and gesturally to specific events and particular people. These imaginary narratives are, in broad outline, already given in the society into which we are born. Our subjectivities, our subject positions, our sense of personhood necessarily develop within cultural narratives that are pre-existent.

The listening subject of a spirit possession ceremony, the self who may become entranced, enters into a special kind of narrative, not of his or her invention. The roles in these dramas are more specified, more particularly detailed, than the roles of either quotidian existence, or of the dramas into which we enter while listening to music as an activity in itself. The potential entrancee must be prepared to "receive the Holy Spirit", or to be willing to assume the role of a lower being in order to curb the power of a great witch (*bebuten* trance in Bali, Indonesia), or to become host to the "numinous energy of foreign peoples and wild animals" (a patient in a Tumbuka healing ceremony in Malawi), or to accept becoming a vehicle through which the spirits of the sky realm communicate with mankind (*bissu* priests in Sulawesi). Encounters with holy beings are, it seems, never easy, especially if one is expected to surrender (temporarily) a part of one's self as well. To participate in a ceremony of spirit possession is to enter into a narrative not constructed by oneself, but a community narrative that gives moral purpose to the event. The narrative is both particular, what happens for the duration of the ceremony, what might be called the 'script', as well as broadly cosmological, the ultimate truths about humankind and the holy that are being enacted. Entering a spirit possession narrative means situating oneself as a certain kind of person—many ritual narratives may be precluded for us because we cannot imagine ourselves participating in that particular story. The story, the role, the emotional affect and the moral purpose must be compatible with who we think we are.

Among my humanistic, academic peers, a discussion of the relationship between spirit possession and music will often, at some point, evoke a certain resistance. The reasons for our distrust of trance possession and of our distaste for it are multiple, involving, among many other historical developments, the history of the relationship of the Catholic church and spirit possession throughout the Middle Ages. Although we have put aside many ancient fears and misunderstandings, there still remains a residue of misinformation and anxiety concerning trancing. We still do not easily accept the idea that someone who trances at a Pentecostal church on Sunday can function in a rational, controlled manner in a responsible job all week long. Yet as ethnomusicologists and anthropologists our own experiences with people for whom trancing is an accepted, expected result of particular ceremonies, people who themselves may be skilled trancers and are simultaneously responsible, moral, orderly, even ordinary citizens sets up an incongruity between what we know of trancing and trancers and the unexamined beliefs of our academic, humanistic peers.

The gentlemanly, well-educated director of the government Institute for Arts in Den Pasar, Bali, tells me, sitting in his modern, air-conditioned office:

> "When I come up to that tower, when the curtain opens like that, as soon as I step up to approach Rangda [the witch], I see a strong fire coming from her eyes. I just—"Oh! [slaps his hands together] I do this! I just jump! I feel myself just floating—because of the excitement, the aroma . . . whenever they pick up the music [sings *janga janga janga*], whenever you sing that song [sings a bit of a gamelan piece associated with trance] people just go crazy. I want to attack her!" (I Wayan Dibia, interview, 1996)

There is, for him, no problem, no syncope, no epistemic gap between his trancing and his high-status, governmental administrative job. Why is there for us? Are we committed to the idea of a single model of personhood, i.e. "the real me"? Do we hesitate to accept the notion that more than one style of self may be available to us?

2. The Development of a Western 'Self'

The hypothesis I am proposing is that one style of Western self, the notion of a bounded, unique, inviolate self may hinder the trance experience of the surrender of self and consequently the ability to imagine trance as a reasonable, natural phenotypic kind of consciousness. And that culturally defined and historically determined subjectivities may also influence one's openness to some ritual narratives and their supporting musical expressions.

A classic definition of Western identity is that formulated by Clifford Geertz.

> The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background, is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures. (Geertz 1983: 59)

It may be that one ingredient of the Western history of hostility to spirit possession, and of the reluctance of many to grant legitimacy to any kind of religious trancing in the United States concerns what are considered to be appropriate kinds of selves. Charles Taylor has written compellingly of the philosophical development of the Western self from its intellectual origins in Plato, through the decisive delineations of Descartes and Locke that led, through the Protestant Reformation and Romanticism, to our modern notions of self (Taylor 1988/1989). Two of the parameters concerning the modern self that Taylor has explored seem particularly relevant to the issue of spirit possession. One is the idea of personal will and control, while the other is the idea of the rational, disengaged self.

> Self-control is a basic theme of our whole moral tradition. Plato (*Republic*) speaks of the good man as being "master of himself." He remarks himself how paradoxical this can sound. Mastery is a two-place relation. So mastery of oneself must mean that something higher in one controls the lower, in fact, that reason controls the desire. From Plato through the Stoics, into the Renaissance, and right to the modern day, this mastery of reason remains a recognizable ideal—even though it is contested in modern civilization in a way it doesn't seem to have been among the ancients. (Taylor 1988: 303)

The rational mind, operating independently of body, an instrument of control, 'disengaged' from the rest of the body was forcefully argued by Descartes (1596-1650). The trope of being 'one's own master,' of being in control of one's own bodily appetites, thoughts, passions and desires sets up a sense of the disengaged self. We

identify our 'self' not with the body but with the governor of body, mind and passion. Our 'self', this governor, seems in modern times to reside in the brain[2], especially the frontal lobes associated with decision-making and problem solving, with rationality.[3] The detached, disengaged mind ideally rules the unruly, insistent body.

Rationality itself, for Descartes, assumes a new meaning with repercussions in both humanistic and scientific disciplines. Whereas for Plato and the Stoics, 'reason' was attaining a clear vision of Goodness and Truth, Descartes abandons the Order of Ideas in the Cosmos and substitutes a procedural definition of rationality. Descartes' aim was to promote a methodology that would lead to certainty, i.e., a scientific methodology. The mental procedures that were equated with reason are the staple formula for rational thinking from Descartes' time to our own. Rationality is defined as the procedure in which one organizes thoughts, breaks a problem into its component parts, proceeds from simple to complex, and thereby reaches a true resolution, not influenced by the disturbance of messy emotions, desires or fantasies (Taylor 1989: 305-306). To illustrates the different approaches to reality assumed by Cartesian thinkers or by fanciful Druidic thinkers, the phenomenologist Don Ihde has imagined the following drama.

> Imagine two seers, a "cartesian" seer and a "druidic" seer. Both are assigned the task of observing a series of tree-appearances under a set of varying conditions and reporting what the tree "really" is like. The cartesian seer returns with a very accurate description of the tree's color, the shape of its leaves, the texture of its bark and its characteristic overall shape. However, upon questioning him, we find that out of the conditions under which the tree appearances occurred, the cartesian seer chose as *normative* only appearances in the bright sun on a clear day. His clear and distinct tree, characterized as essentially an extended, shaped, colored configuration, is a cartesian tree, which appears best in the light of day, all other conditions being dismissed as less than ideal for observation.
>
> The druidic seer returns with a quite different description. His tree emerges from an overwhelming nearness of presence and is eery, bespeaking its druid or spirit within. It waves and beckons, moans and groans, advances and retreats. Upon interrogation, it turns out that his *normative* conditions were misty nights and windy mornings in the half-light of dawn, when the tree appeared as a vague shape emerging from the fog or a writhing form in the wind. His tree is a druidic tree; a quiet sunny day fails to reveal the inner tree-reality. (Ihde 1977: 37)

The Druidic seer is more likely than the Cartesian seer to be a trancer.

The ideal enlightenment person is the broad-daylight, calm, dispassionate thinker-through of problems and philosophical issues. Mastery, self-control and disengagement lead not only to success in strictly scientific endeavors, but in daily affairs as well. The world, the body and the cosmos loose their enchantment and become objectified, objects of rational, scientific study. Descartes' self is the philosophically perfect correlative of the scientific revolution.

All cultures may have a reflexive pronoun to refer to the speaker, but not all have the nominalized, disengaged, objectified 'self' commonplace in Western thought.

Taylor links this objectified self to the Western emphasis on individuality and what he calls the 'radical reflexivity' of modern Western conceptions of self.

> Radical reflexivity is central to this stance, because we have to focus on first-person experience in order so to transpose it. The point of the whole operation is to gain a kind of control. Instead of being swept along to error by the ordinary bent of our experience, we stand back from it, withdraw from it, reconstrue it objectively, and then learn to draw defensible conclusions from it. To wrest control from "our appetites and our preceptors" [*Discours de la methode*], we have to practice a kind of radical reflexivity. We fix experience in order to deprive it of its power, a source of bewitchment and error. (Taylor 1989: 163)[4]

In the discussion above, I have tried to outline some of the parameters of a modern Western sense of self and its historical antecedents in order to make the notion of personhood 'visible' and available for inspection. In exploring the possibility of a correlation between the willingness and the ability to accept spirit possession and certain ideas concerning selfhood, we need to be able to imagine both what our ideas of selfhood are and what some other ideas might be. I believe that the notion of self outlined above has, throughout the history of the colonization of North America, worked to exclude the acceptability of spirit possession and trancing. The question immediately comes to mind—but how many Europeans and Americans read Descartes and Locke, much less Plato? Certainly most did not. Just as certainly, the social and spiritual elites did. But more than this, Descartes and Locke were also imbued with general cultural narratives of their times as well. Their doctrines were not totally original, nor without precedents. The idea of the controlled, disengaged self fell upon fertile soil in eighteenth-century America, with a readership ready to accept these formulations of the world and one's proper relationship to it. Nonetheless, Cartesian views never gained anything near total hegemony. They were, and remain today, more internalized among certain groups, and within certain individuals than others.

Trancers, it seems to me, must necessarily not experience their selves as disengaged. To feel oneself totally at one with the music and the religious narrative enacted there must be no distance at all between event and personhood: no aesthetic distance, no outside perspective, no objectivity, no irony. Later perhaps, the trancer may reflect upon his or her experience, but to do so at the moment is to introduce the very disengaged subject that will break the enchantment. Likewise, a person whose integrity is severely challenged if he or she feels out of control cannot surrender his or her being to spirit possession.

In spite of the powerful influence of Cartesian thought on North American and North European notions of self, the disengaged self never completely subsumed other models. The conflict between different concepts of the self, and between trancers and non-trancers is an old one in the United States.

3. Possession Trance in Colonial Virginia

From a journal entry written in Tidewater Virginia on May 10, 1771 comes the following entry:

> "Brother Waller informed us . . . [that] about two weeks ago on the Sabbath Day down in Caroline County he introduced the worship of God by singing. While he was singing the Parson of the Parish [who had ridden up with his clerk, the sheriff, and some others] would keep running the end of his horsewhip in his mouth, laying his whip across the hymn book, etc. When done singing he 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 gentleman [the sheriff] gave him something not much less than twenty lashes with his horsewhip. . . . Then Bro Waller was released, went back to singing praise to God, mounted the stage and preached with a great deal of liberty. He was asked by one of us if his nature did not interfere in the time of violent persecution, when whipped, etc. 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, rejoicing with Paul that he was worthy to suffer for his dear Lord and Master" (Isaac 1974: 347; Little 1938: 230-31)

The attackers in this episode were Church of England folk who were gentry or near-gentry and who represented governmental authority and established social values (Isaac 1974). The attacked were Separate Baptists, an evangelical group without a church, only a stage, a mixed-race (Thomas 1774), lower-class congregation who continued singing while their pastor was beaten and whipped. The revivalist movement called "the Great Awakening" swept over the colonies in the 1740's, but the most bitter conflicts between the evangelists and those of the Established Church in Virginia occurred after 1765 (Isaac 1974).

The Baptists provoked those of the Established Church on many levels. They were a clear challenge to the hierarchical order of the Established Church; any male could become a Baptist preacher if he felt the call. Their doctrine encouraged a direct, personal relationship with their God, emotional, intense and without any sacramental mediation. Evangelist preachers were believed to be leading their followers into false doctrine that would lead to the breakdown of civilized society. Underlying these causes was a clash of social classes and the affront to the aesthetics of the Church of England followers posed by the Baptists. The Baptists were mostly poor, uneducated and given to noisy expressions of their piety (Gewehr 1930: 128-133).[5] Included among their religious practices, little understood and maligned by their opponents, was spirit possession (Lovejoy 1969: 58; Weisberger 1958: 34).

> Personal testimonies of the experience of simple folk have not come down to us . . . but the central importance of . . . the common experience of ecstatic conversion is powerfully evoked by such recurrent phrases in the church books as "and a dore (sic) was opened to experience." (Isaac 1974: 354)[6]

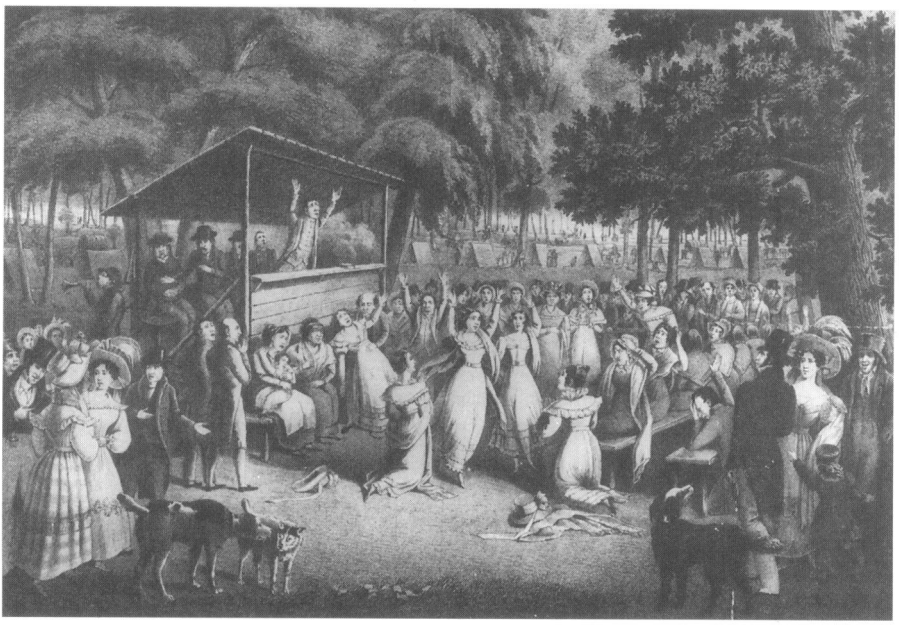

Fig. 1: An impression of an evangelist meeting. The tents and formal clothes suggest that this drawing came much later than the 18th century Virginia Separate Baptists, but the emotional fervor is evident (from Weisberger 1958:115).

One writer tells of a meeting of "multitudes, some roaring on the ground, some wringing their hands, some in extacies, some praying, some weeping ... I saw strange things today" (Gewehr 1930:110, ff.23). Strong emotions forcefully presented in very public contexts, enthusiastic singing of hymns and spirit possession were not only unseemly to the gentry, but ungodly as well. Physical violence against the Separate Baptists was fairly common.

One model of personhood among educated males in colonial Virginia was an enlightenment 'rational' man who was also a person with an impressive bearing. Beneath a formality of manners, self-assertion, competitiveness and proud self-presentation were admired. Horseracing, cockfighting, dancing and card games offered venues for the display of this style of self (Isaac, 1974: 348). The gentry set the tone that was emulated all the way down the social ladder.

The Baptists set themselves against the pastimes of the gentry, called each other Brother and Sister, and proclaimed a democracy of religion as well as of society.

Baptists were trancers, Church of England worshippers were not. The ideal of personhood, of self, of the Baptists allowed for the kind of surrender that all spirit possession involves. A trancer must be willing to accept a certain amount of insult to his or her bodily frame and to his or her external decorum. Trancers nearly always, at some point, end up on the ground. And they often utter strange cries or make guttural

noises. All this demands a surrender of impressive bearing and strong self-presentation. The price of ecstasy may be a loss of "dignity." Little wonder that for the gentry of Virginia religious ecstasy was not an ideal; they ridiculed, despised and feared the trancing Baptists.

Early in their history, the Separate Baptist preachers established the practice of spontaneity. They used no written texts but preferred to rely upon the "gift of the spirit" (Downey 1968: 93). Unlike other evangelist groups, they produced few songbooks and those that did appear were from the urban north, not Virginia (Downey 1968: 93-95). Separate Baptists took current popular songs and ballads and changed the words to reflect their spiritual beliefs. The notation below, published in 1805, illustrates the use of a popular Irish song as the basis for an evangelical tune. The text suggests the narrative drama invoked by the evangelical Baptists. Hell awaits those who are not yet free from sin. The Baptists were on a lifelong journey that would culminate in their death and unification with Christ.

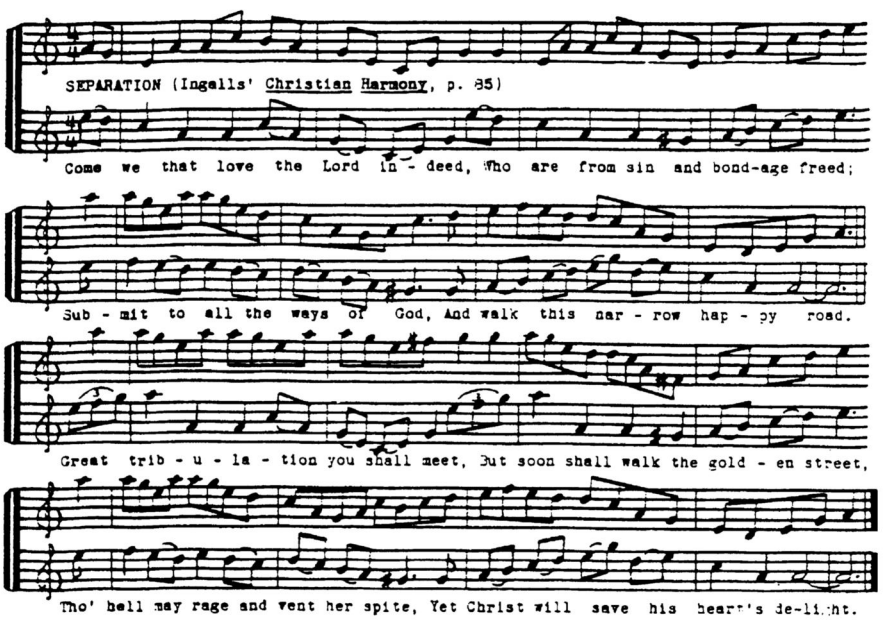

Fig. 2: Johnny from Gandsey (Joyce, Old Irish Music and Songs, *No. 21)—(cf. Jackson 1975:72).*

A Baptist tune that possibly dates to the beginning of the eighteenth century and could have been sung at Brother Waller's meeting outlines the same eschatological Christian narrative. (Needless to say, the evangelicals would not have been concerned with either key signature or mode.) The simple melody would have been sung strongly, with no harmony.

When I was sinking down, sinking down, sinking down;
When I was sinking down, sinking down;
When I was sinking down beneath God's righteous frown,
Christ laid aside his crown for my soul, for my soul;
Christ laid aside his crown for my soul.

To God and to the Lamb I will sing, I will sing;
To God and to the Lamb I will sing;
To God and to the Lamb who is the great I AM,
While millions join the theme, I will sing, I will sing;
While millions join the theme I will sing.

And when from death I'm free I'll sing on, I'll sing on;
And when from death I'm free I'll sing on.
And when from death I'm free I'll sing and joyful be,
And through eternity I'll sing on, I'll sing on,
And through eternity I'll sing on.

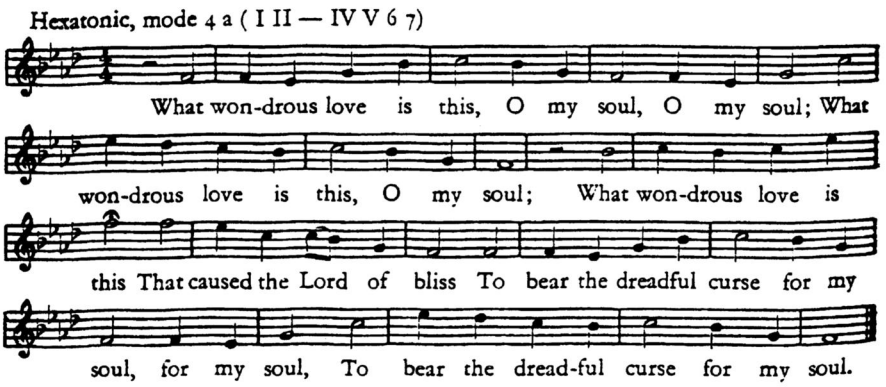

Fig. 3: Wondrous Love. No. 88 (OSH 159)—(cf. Jackson 1964:114-15).

Some evangelical songs, like that below, hint at the practice of trance and possession with new, sometimes mildly heretical, messages.

"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,
And that without Controul."
(Heimert and Miller 1967: 202)

The Separate Baptists were proclaiming a new relationship between themselves and their God, and a democratic church of equals. New music, new texts were iconic of their new mission and new faith. By taking old songs and placing them into the context of an emotional, fervent, passionate religious practice, the old songs took on a new urgency and were fitting catalysts for the dancing and trancing of the congregants. Over and over again the texts reiterated the evangelical Christian narrative, the drama into which the entranced congregants entered. These songs were most likely sung unaccompanied with straight-on, untutored voices (possibly like the tone quality of Sacred Harp singers) with only the pastor as the lead singer. Evangelical hymns were catalysts for the powerful emotions of Baptist trancing.

The deep difference in the sense of personhood between the Separate Baptists and their better educated adversaries (Isaac, 1974: 348) was an idea that neither may have formulated. At least in the extant literature, their arguments were on theological grounds (Heimert and Miller 1967). Institutionalized emotionalism, reflected in and undoubtedly inspired by the singing of newly-composed hymns "opened a door to experience", an ecstatic experience of possession trance. Cartesian rationalism, disengagement and self control give way to acceptance and surrender. A disengaged, rational self would seem unlikely to cry out "*abba* Father", nor imagine the blessed Dove to enter her breast.

4. Possession Trance Among Contemporary Pentecostals

Pentecostal religions, one of the modern-day descendents of eighteenth-century evangelism, were formally constituted at the beginning of the twentieth century. Contemporary pentecostals seek a direct, unmediated, personal and deeply emotional experience of the divine. They also are tolerant of trancing and dancing within religious services. Pentecostalism constitutes a faith that is dependent upon music to structure its religious services and to validate its system of beliefs by provoking intense emotional reactions within its most devote practitioners, leading them to 'testify.' To dance in The Spirit, to be possessed by the Holy Ghost, is demonstration that one is accepted into the congregation of those blessed beings who will experience the final act of history, the re-appearance of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. Music is the driving force for this emotional apotheosis. From softly played passages underlining a sermon or a prayer, to swinging, driving choruses sustaining a wave of religious emotionalism, music is rarely absent from the hours-long services. Pentecostal musical offerings shape a musical/emotional/religious arc that carries the congregation along with it. A service will begin with quiet, slow, soothing music: "Music gets people in the attitude of worship. It helps

them to forget outside influences and to focus on the Lord." (Jerry Trent, Church of God, Willow Run, Michigan, 1996).

Pentecostal churches may use a wide variety of musical instruments often including piano, electric organ, synthesizer, guitars and drumset to back up their driving, repetitive gospel hymns. Just as eclectic as their instruments is their selection of musical repertoire. Old evangelical hymns are mixed with current popular gospel styles in a musical *melange* that draws from diverse sources. As with the eighteenth-century evangelists, hymnbooks are seldom used. Lowering one's head and reading from a written text would be gestures of alienation and separation from the communal immediacy of a pentecostal service. Songs are learned by rote and all participate. Sometimes words will be projected on a screen, a concession to non-regulars and visitors while maintaining the attentive focus of the congregation on their leader and on each other. The following hymn appears in a book published in 1894, but which is still heard in Pentecostal services. Harmony is now standard, as are the presence of trained musicians in the bands. But the emphasis remains on total participation, total commitment and loud, strongly emotional delivery. (see Fig. 4)

As the music becomes louder, more rhythmic, more repetitive, its driving quality supports, propels, and sustains the hand-waving, hand-clapping, foot-stomping choruses of 'Amen!' High on the trajectory of the musical, emotional arc, worshippers may come forward to the altar to pray, and some may dance or trance. The musical support will continue at a high intensity until all worshippers have worked through their transport. Religious ecstasy is a confirmation of the salvation of the worshippers. He or she has become a part of the historical narrative of millenarial Christianity and will join fellow believers at the right hand of Jesus at the last day. The music never flags as some members are moved to tears, to dance, to quiver and jerk in the uncoordinated gestures of some religious trances. As religious passions subside, so does the music, until every last ecstatic has become quiet—exhausted and joyful.

> 'And it was terrific,' exclaimed one worshipper at a service marked by intense, sustained, high-energy music, dancing and trancing: 'and we really got down here. I mean we really had church'. (Cox 1995: 268)

Eighteenth-century Separatist Baptists and contemporary Pentecostals demonstrate resistance to the internalization of the enlightenment ideal of the detached, objectified self with superior mastery over the emotions, and a procedural rational methodology for attaining knowledge. Pentecostal immediacy and union replace objectivity and distance. A Cartesian method for attaining knowledge is challenged by direct gnosis. Pentecostal certainty in emotional revelation replaces careful, rational procedures. William James describes this "noetic" quality of what he refers to as mystic experiences and contrasts this type of knowledge with schooled knowledge.

> Although so similar to states of feeling, mystical states seem to those who experience them to be also states of knowledge. They are states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain; and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for after-time. (James 1902/1982: 380)

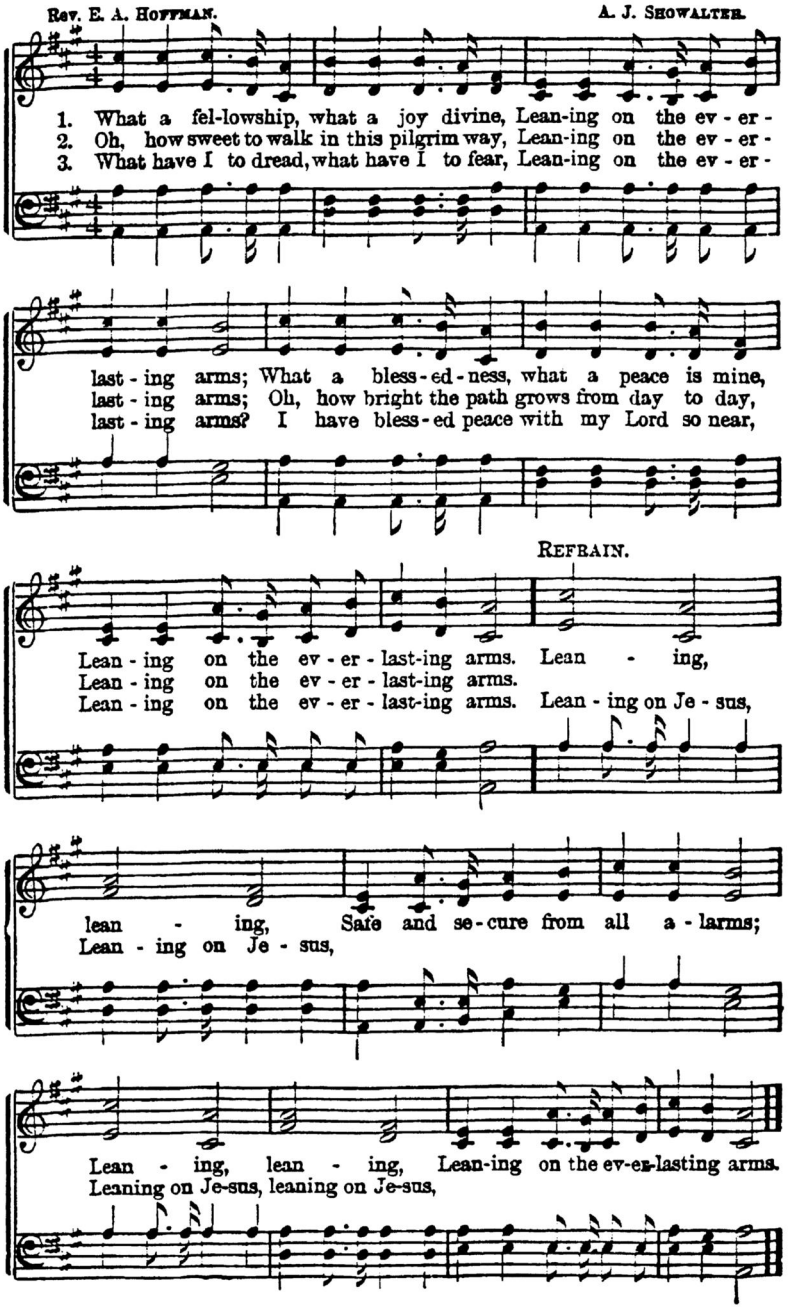

Fig. 4: Leaning on the Everlasting Arms (Date 1894:40).

Evangelicals in eighteenth-century Virginia and contemporary Pentecostals live in an enchanted universe in which music provides a milieu for the drama of millenarianism and sustains the transport into that drama of the moment.

5. Possession trance in Sulawesi, Indonesia

In Eastern Indonesia on the southwestern peninsula of the island of Sulawesi live the Bugis, a people famous for their navigational skills and trading prowess. Beginning in the seventeenth century the Bugis were gradually converted to Islam and are now among the most devout of Indonesia's many ethnic groups who follow Islam (Pelras 1996: 83-85). The mythic stories of the origins of the Bugis people and Bugis society, predating Islam, underline the importance of maintaining ties with their spiritual progenitors. From the sacred text *I La Galigo* comes the story of the founding of one of the main Buginese dynasties, the kingdom of Luwu, and the peopling of the province. The oldest son of the principal deity of the sky, or upper realm, descends to earth (the middle realm) encased in a sheath of bamboo, sliding from sky to earth along the length of the arc of a rainbow (Hamonic 1975: 129). This spiritual son of the sky, named Batara Guru, then marries the daughter of the lower realm (the sea or sometimes beneath the earth) and brings order to the chaotic middle realm (the realm on the surface of the earth, the realm of humankind). The term *Batara Guru* when used in Southeast Asia generally refers to Shiva and implies some Shaivite influence,

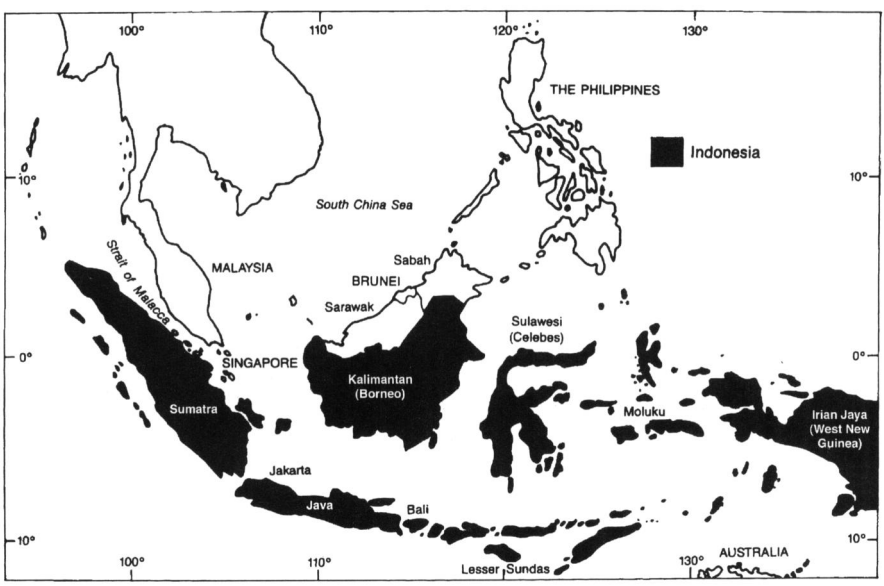

Fig. 5: Map of Indonesia (Errington 1989:xv).

but does not seem to be the case here. While Buginese contact with centers of medieval Shaivite beliefs such as Java and Sumatra were continual, the Buginese origin myth only peripherally touches upon Shaivism.

Sky realm and sea realm, with their myriad of spiritual beings, are thus the progenitors of the Buginese nobility and the protectors of the land and its people. Over the centuries, a process of assimilation and adjustment has gradually taken place as the old beliefs of the Bugis concerning sky realm, earth realm and sea realm have been absorbed into Islamic doctrines or exist uncomfortably beside them (Pelras 1996: 196; Hamonic 1975: 122; Sutton 1995:685).

The Bugis language, as do all languages, has a full set of first-person, reflexive pronouns that relate what is being said to an "I" (Tupa 1997), but the lexicon does not include the noun 'self' (Errington 1989:132). While not having a nominalized 'self' in their language as does English, the Bugis hold clear ideas about how people are constituted—emotionally, physically and spiritually—and of the location of the sources of human effectiveness. The nearest Bugis equivalent of the English-language 'self' seems to be the body itself. Various parts of the body are believed to control functions we ascribe to the brain. Memory and thinking are located in the chest. Emotions are associated with areas of the abdomen, especially the liver (Errington 1989: 78-79). A central metaphor within a complex of beliefs about the nature of human beings is the term *sumange'*, a kind of life-force which is attached at the navel. The head is the location of the senses, and thus the means by which we communicate with the world and the world communicates with us. The importance of the head lies in the fact that it is the highest part of the body (vertical relations are meaningful in all spheres) and is also the location of many openings of the body to the outside world (Errington 1989: 76-78). The world can 'enter' us through our eyes, our ears, our noses, our mouths. The whole body or at least the whole trunk and head share the seats of intellect, emotion, and spirituality.

Sumange' describes a kind of spirit-energy that animates the material universe. *Sumange'* is a linguistic cognate and overlaps semantically with similar terms widely found in island Southeast Asia such as *semangat* (Malay and Indonesian) meaning 'vital spirit', 'consciousness', or sometimes 'enthusiasm'. *Sumange'* is a morally neutral force in the universe and in human beings supports health, consciousness and effective action. All persons contain *sumange'* but not to the same degree. Persons of noble ancestry inherit more *sumange'* than do commoners. One can loose *sumange'* through uncontrolled actions or gain *sumange'* through meditation. *Sumange'* cannot be perceived, it is invisible and intangible but can be recognized through its results. A person with much *sumange'* will be calm, under control, effective in their actions and exhibit total awareness of the situations in which they find themselves. People with a fullness of *sumange'* are able to protect others with less *sumange'* from ill-health, accident or destructive forces (Errington 1983).

Sumange' is embodied, collected around the energy center of the body, i.e. the navel. In South Sulawesi, as in Indonesia as a whole, the navel becomes, metaphorically, the term for a center of power or potency. The capital of the country, Jakarta, is

the 'navel' of the country. A center of cultural or religious activity is called the 'navel' of that activity. Likewise, the center of spirit energy, of consciousness and effectiveness is not the head of a person, but the navel. *Sumange'* may fluctuate in intensity through different periods of one's life, may be loosely or tightly attached, and must at all times be closely guarded. One of the ways in which one may loose *sumange'* is through the openings in the body. *Sumange'* may escape if one carelessly lets the mouth hang open. One keeps or increases *sumange'* by concentration, awareness, carefulness and by control of one's emotions and actions. Anger causes one to loose *sumange'* as controlled action may increase it. Health is also tied to one's state of embodied *sumange'*. A sick person needs great attention from others to help coax back his or her *sumange'*.

Fear of the penetration of the body is an abiding concern for the Buginese. To be penetrated by a spirit or by a dagger not only diminishes one's *sumange'* but is evidence of a certain lack of *sumange'* in the first place. Persons of aristocratic heritage or persons in high office must, to be effective, have an abundance of *sumange'* and must also guard against it's loss. The ordinary person also, if he or she wishes to have control over his or her destiny and avoid misfortune must take care not to allow a thoughtless dispersion of *sumange'* (Errington 1989: 51-57). One would expect that persons in high positions or persons from aristocratic families do not become possessed in South Sulawesi. Indeed that is the case (Errington, personal communication). Since belief in the spirit energy of the world and the ways in which a person may tap into it or loose it are shared across the social hierarchies of the Bugis peoples (Errington 1983: 568), one might further expect there to be no institutionalized trancing, especially among an intensely Muslim population where spirit beliefs are strongly discouraged.

An extraordinary exception remains, if only marginally. These are the *bissu*, a group of transvestite 'priests' who may still officiate at rural weddings and funerals, are healers, and who, in religious ceremonies enter into trance possession, flaunting all the injunctions against penetration. *Bissu* may or may not be homosexuals, but they are always transvestites and exhibit feminine traits in gestures and movements. In order to become a *bissu*, a young man has to be 'called' by a supernatural being who then becomes the spirit spouse of the *bissu* (Pelras 1996: 83). Indications of a call may be some trauma such as an illness or sudden mutism, episodes that are followed by apprenticeship to a *bissu* master into the metaphysics of the *bissu* world view and the procedures of the *bissu* rituals (Lathief 1983: 23-24).

The *bissu* live within a hierarchy of their own led by an elder called the *pua matoa*. When the *pua matoa* goes into trance, he speaks the language of the deities (Hamonic 1975: 126), a kind of Buginese 'speaking in tongues' incomprehensible to ordinary Bugis. The *bissu* are intermediaries between the spirits/deities (*dewata*) of the upper world and the human world.

All *bissu* rituals contain two sequences, the first directed toward the lower realm and involving water, such as a procession toward the sea where the *bissu* will make offerings. The second sequence is directed toward the upper realm, involving bam-

Fig. 6: A Bissu Priest, the pua matoa from South Sulawesi in ritual dress (Harmonic 1987; frontspiece).

boo, such as a bamboo tree trunk erected before the house of a sick person (Hamonic 1975:128). The dress of the *bissu* during rituals also includes paraphenalia associated with the lower and upper realms such as a dagger (*kris)* made of elements of the earth, and the rattle (*lalosu*) which they carry while dancing made of a bamboo and shaped to resemble a hornbill, the bird particularly linked to the sky realm. The name of the rattle, *lalosu*, has two etymologies. One claims that *lalosu* comes from the root *lao-lisu*, meaning 'to go back and forth', indicating the right/left motions of the *lalosu* in the hands of the dancing *bissu*. The other etymology relates the term to *alusu*, a word meaning intangible, that which cannot be seen, touched, heard, smelled or tasted (Errington 1983: 555). *Alusu* is an adjective tied to spiritual things such as Allah as well as the deities of the other realms, and also can be a description of *sumange'*.

The songs of the *bissu*, long 'recitatives' or 'psalmodies' according to Hamonic (1975: 128) along with the dances of the *bissu* bring to the middle world the spirits from the upper world and drive out the possibly malevolent spirits of the lower world. A section from part of the liturgy chanted by the *bissu* imploring the deities to descend, to possess their 'disciples', illustrates the close relationship between *bissu* and the spirits of the upper world.

Children of the deities, travel to here!
Children unrivalled in the sky, travel to here!
Appear here, as a quickening revelation,
Envelop the disciple,
To be perfect, like you.
And the offering cloth ornamented with the Moon-Dragon

Fig. 7: Bissu *Priests holding* lalosu *rattles (Kaudern 1927:466).*

That makes the clouds rise in tiers,
That shakes the edges of the sea.
Coconut-palm, agitated, from the beginning,
Sparks that increase
Like spurting flashes of lightening,
Claps of thunder
Expand boldly!
Celestial beings without equal, come here!
You who quicken the possessed. (Hamonic 1989:56)[7]

During rituals, *bissu* wear special clothing, carry sacred objects and perform a slow, undulating dance to the accompaniment of drums (*gendang*), gong, metal plates (*suji kama*), sometimes an oboe (*pui-pui*), bamboo spring-clappers (*lae-lae)* and a small hand cymbal (*kancing*) (Lathief 1983: 25; Pelras 1976). The music that accompanies the *bissu* dance is a variant of the drum/gong ensemble music found throughout island Southeast Asia, a cyclic structure marked at the end/beginning by a stroke on a gong. These musical forms have been/are used for contacting spirit beings from time immemorial (Becker, J. 1979: 202). The more popular genres of Buginese music today such as *dangdut* or brass band music (Sutton 1996: 673) would be inappropriate to invoke the deities of the upper world, or to accompany the dancing of transvestite priests. The largely tone-less, cyclic pattern of the gong/drum ensemble becomes iconic for the power of other worlds, other beings, and unseen forces. Gongs, iron plates, and cymbals forged from the earth express chthonic powers (Becker, J. 1988).

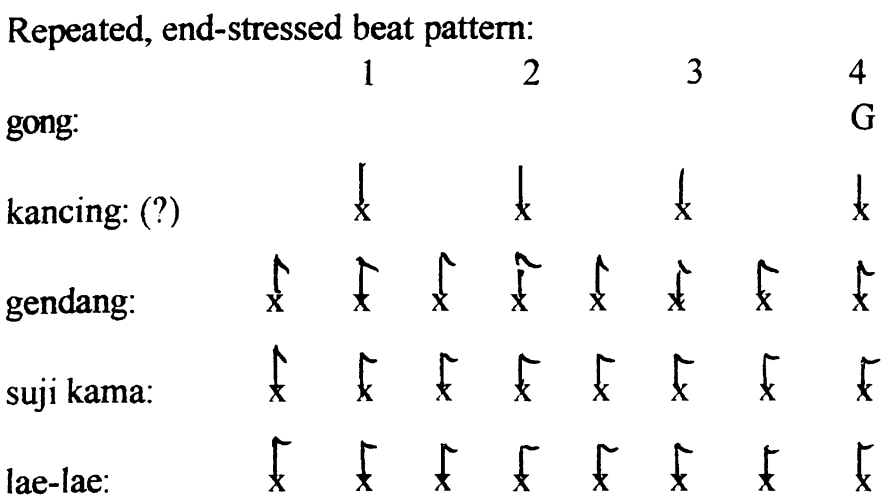

Fig. 8: Diagram of musical accompaniment for bissu dances.

The pattern above repeats several times, alternating with a drum and rattle roll punctuated at the end by a stroke on the gong ("Les Musique de Celebes Indonesia", Side B, #2).

At the climax of the ceremony, the entranced *bissu* draw their daggers from scabbards attached at their waist and commence self-stabbing (Hamonic 1975: 121). The initial penetration of possession is reiterated in the act of self-stabbing. Like the famous self-stabbing trancers of the Barong/Rangda ritual in Bali, *bissu* aim their daggers at vulnerable parts of the body such as the neck or the temple. And like the Balinese self-stabbers, they emerge unharmed.[8]

This is an extravagant display of *sumange'*. Only someone 'full' of *sumange'* could risk and survive the double penetration of spirit and sword and not die, nor fall ill, nor go mad. In their asexual, androgynous selves, the *bissu* are believed to represent a unity before the disunity and bifurcation of human sexuality. Closer to heavenly beings, the *bissu* are more *alusu* than ordinary mortals. The implication seems to be that their *sumange'* so far exceeds that of ordinary persons that they are able to transgress recklessly the usual precautions against *sumange'* loss, and that these special powers are a part of their sacrality and their ability to communicate directly with spirit beings.

The narrative into which the *bissu* propel themselves and their listeners is the origin myth of the Bugis, a time before time when the deities of the upper realm were the guardians and ancestors of the Bugis. The musical accompaniment enhances the presence and immediacy of the narrative of spirit beings descending from the sky and 'speaking' to their earthly children. To become possessed by the deities, there must be no ironic distance between *bissu* selves and the origin myth they enact. Music, story, *bissu* and deities become one.

6. Conclusion

Trancing evangelicals and trancing *bissu* share certain characteristics that differentiate them from many of their contemporaries, such as senses of self that are not entirely orthodox within their respective societies. Eighteenth-century Virginia evangelicals and contemporary Pentecostals show an openness to experience, a willingness to give up control and to surrender their selves to a more abiding, more powerful "Holy Spirit." They willingly accept being swept away by strong emotional reactions to the gospel hymns and the millenarial narratives that are overwhelmingly present in their services.

Bissu present a different picture. They too transgress cultural norms of protecting and striving to increase *sumange'* by avoiding emotional excess and bodily penetration. But in so doing, they assert their own special potency and nearness to the divine. *Bissu* must believe in their special selves as intermediaries between ordinary humans and deities to perform their rituals. Only if other Bugis also believe both in the mythic narratives and in the *bissu*'s special selves can the *bissu* maintain their traditions

and their music. *Bissu* and Pentecostals inhabit a world narrative that may seem full of error to their more orthodox Muslim and Christian contemporaries.[9]

For the purposes of this article, I have emphasized certain dominant ideas of self among Western academics and Indonesian Bugis in order to delineate the ways in which trancing individuals transgress or transcend culturally hegemonic notions of self. The examples chosen, however, illustrate another thesis; all of us have more than one model of selfhood pregiven in our cultures and languages, and more than one option when present in a musical, mythologized, non-Cartesian religious service. We, too, may surrender control, 'rationality' and distance and become Druids when the music begins.

Notions of self are not immutable, but may in special circumstances become permeable, changeable in surprising ways. Situations of extreme stress, illness or drug use may alter one's sense of personhood. Living among people who hold very different senses of self may also precipitate a change in one's own subjectivity. Steven Friedson, anthropologist and ethnomusicologist, describes movingly his own experience of spirit possession among the Tumbuka of Malawi and the changing sense of self that he experienced. He speaks of the experience of spirit possession as a new way of being-in-the-world (Friedson 1996: 14) and as a transformation of his usual, Cartesian self. After he had been "dancing a spirit" for a considerable time, was so exhausted he could no longer stand, and his accustomed self was regaining ascendancy, he began to reflect upon what had just happened to him.

> It seems that my physical body had experienced *vimbuza* [spirit possession] as much as my thinking self had, if not more. But this is a way of interpreting experience which assumes that the mind and body are somehow separate entities, and implicit in this assumption is the priority of the mind over the body. . . . Nevertheless, for those of us inculcated in the metaphysics of a split between mind and body, it is hard *not* to interpret experience in these terms. I often—though not always—experience myself as a thinking subject. On the night I danced *vimbuza*, however, I experienced not so much the absence of this phenomenon but its transformation. (Friedson 1996: 19-20)

The listening self at a spirit possession ceremony is a self who waits and listens for clear signs of intervening holy spirits, signs that he/she is about to become a different self. The ears become the valorized sense, music the vehicle for transformation. Just as the spirit powers are invisible and intangible, the music that summons them invokes a realm of unseen power and limitless extension. Music makes real, somatically, the narrative of millenarial Christianity or the Buginese story of Batara Guru's sliding descent on the arc of a rainbow. What seems impossible becomes a felt certainty as the Pentecostal worshipper or the *Bissu* comes to know an indwelling spirit. The listening self in these ceremonies may be the same body, but may not be the same self as that inhabited in more commonplace life activities. Music, for many listeners, opens pathways of being not ordinarily experienced in everyday life. How much more intensely is this the case for the receptive, alert, and expectant self who is literally entranced by the music at a spirit possession ceremony?

Footnotes

1 The gerund 'languaging' is a form favored by scholars who wish to differentiate language activity from the structure of language (Maturana and Varela 1987: 234; Smith and Ferstman 1996: 52; Becker, A.L. 1995: 9).

2 For Descartes, the governing mechanism resided in the pineal gland (Dennett 1991: 104-5)

3 In a highly acclaimed book Descartes' Error, the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio demonstrates through his study of patients with various kinds of mental lesions that the reasoning/decision making parts of the brain and the emotion/feeling parts of the brain comprise the same collection of systems, i.e. the ventromedial prefrontal cortices, the amygdala and the somatosensory cortices. As Damasio states, reason and emotion "intersect" in these areas of the brain. (See Damasio 1994: 70).

4 The 'radical reflexivity' of Taylor is different from the 'reflexivity' of much contemporary anthropology and ethnomusicology. In the later disciplines, reflexivity is the intent to make clear the role, perspective and situation of the writerly author in relation to that she writes about. To the degree that this technique, consciously or unconsciously, is used to enhance the authority of the writer, or to undermine the authority of a different writer, it may become yet another tool of mastery.

5 Not surprisingly, colonial evangelical congregations came to be dominated by women for whom "ecstatic expressivity" was more acceptable than for men (Isaac, personal communication)– an aspect of gendered selfhood that extends into our own time..

6 The church records mentioned in this quote came from the Chestnut Grove Baptist Church, 1773-79 and the Albemarle-Buck Mountain Baptist Church 1792-1811 (Isaac 1974: 354).

7 Translated by the author from the French translation by Hamonic. The original Buginese is as follows:

Ana' tollao-lao ko mai
Ana' batara tungke' ko mai
Musulo' lanyu-lanyu
Mallarung maujangka
Balibonga sengngeng
Ri torowatu Ula'Naga
Ya.La.Ti.Nge. meggae
Pawewang simpuru' tasi
Aju taddelle' mulajaji
Wero' mawekke
Kua ile' tattere
Alumpang oddang
Musolo' mappesaga-saga
Batara tungke' ko mai
Nalanyu-lanyu anurungeng (Hamonic 1989:56)

8 In his description of this part of the ceremony, Lathief (1983: 25) writes that the *bissu* attain *fana al fana*, 'the passing away of passing away', the Sufi term for religious ecstasy in which one knows one's own nothingness and absolute dependence upon Allah (Al-Ghazali 1990:xvi). Sufis were among the earliest Islamic missionaries in all Indonesia, so it is not surprising that Sufi terms and Sufi concepts have become a part of the way Bugis think about trance possession.

9 With the steady movement of all Indonesian Muslims toward a stronger orthodoxy, the pressures upon the *bissu* increase. According to one source, many *bissu* have been killed and *bissu* rituals destroyed (Lathief 1983: 17). This may have happened during the turbulent upheavals in Indonesia during the 1960's when thousands were killed throughout the archipelago because of suspicions of non-orthodoxy of one sort or another, especially Communism (or Lathief may be referring to more recent events). In any case, the narrative of the *bissu* rituals is one that becomes increasingly difficult to maintain in the present day.

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