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**TechnoGnosis:
Media, Performance and Alterations of Consciousness in the
'Stage' of the Psychedelic Trance Culture**

RMA Thesis

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A Morning in the Stage

It is a hot summer day. It is near noon and the sun is high in the sky. A refreshing breeze cools down the atmosphere, while white clouds moving across the sky give sporadic shade. The person is a young woman who has just taken two sips from a bottle of water containing two drops of Lsd. She knows that the effects will not become apparent for at least half an hour. So she walks towards the stage to start by getting into the celebratory mood and feeling the 'vibe'.

Coming closer to the stage, she initially listens to the loud, rapid tinny beat, while in her visual field she sees a huge circular structure, a colorful human construct equipped with latest technology and different artistically appropriated materials. This structure is surrounded by nature, by trees and hills and by other smaller structures, from portable shops and bars to play-structures that move naturally without using electricity. While walking, people pass by, playing with toys, talking with friends, running and screaming. A baby wearing big headphones plays with a dog, whirling around her, laughing and having fun. A naked man, painted pink, rides by her on a unicycle, while two women holding beautifully decorated chinese parasols meet with a another woman in a top hat holding three ice-cold beers. She realizes that the top hat person is a guy understanding that the most of the men, with their long dreadlocked hair, colorful tattoos, jewelry and wearing culottes exhibit a feminized appearance. People around seem happy, and when she looks at them many immediately return her look straight in the eye and smile, or say "hey" or make an orientally inspired gesture of salutation or the indian gesture corresponding to 'namaste'.

Approaching closer to the stage, the music becomes louder and she starts differentiating between the electronic sounds as she enters an attentive mode of listening, a state of

mindfulness. She starts moving her head with the beat. Surrounding the stage colorful tents ornament the natural environment, temporarily set up by people intending to spend many hours at the stage. People sit, dance or walk; others are just chilling out, smoking a joint or sharing a chillum, sipping coffee or eating. Other people are juggling with props like contact balls, or gyrating with ribbons, hula hoops and other paraphernalia, adding color, texture and choreographed movement to the whole scene. Among them are figures practicing yoga or meditating, while others are painting each other's faces and bodies or playing with water; blowing bubbles or dousing their friends.

Now she enters the physical boundaries of the stage. She notices the brown earth, moist and muddy from the earlier rain, strewn with hay. People are dancing, close to each other with their bodies turned facing the DJ, who is positioned on an elevated structure between huge sound-monitors and decorative artefacts. That structure constitutes the 'formal', theatrical stage underlining the leading aspect of the performative situation: the performance of music. It is comprised by latest technology and looks like the cockpit of a spaceship, with the DJ piloting the machine. The whole stage incorporates a number of artistic elements and objects, whose effects are complemented and multiplied by the colorful playful toys and bizarre costumes of the participants. She stares at the center of the stage, at a huge column resembling a tree that becomes a flower and then a butterfly, decorated with spirals and fractal geometrical shapes. From it, colorful fabrics are draped and hung in shapes, many of them painted in depictions of strange, multidimensional 'alien' entities. Some of them evoke images of ancient gods, from India or Latin America; others look strange, like nothing she has ever encountered before. She thinks that the stage is an alien spaceship in the shape of a flower aided by the gods to travel into other dimensions. Casting her eyes around at the stage structure, she also notices some white surfaces, hidden wires, plugs, light mechanisms and

projection machines. They are well integrated in the environment and she concludes that all these are used at night, while the white surfaces serve as screens for projections when the sun has set.

She continues to walk between the people. She is able to navigate around, to move in between the moving bodies – some quickly and others slowly – but all in synch with the musical rhythm. She notices that some people dance with great intensity, with closed eyes or looking around and nowhere at the same time, being in a trance or ecstasy, immersed in altered consciousness states. They dance like no one is looking. Others dance slowly and gracefully, performing movements according to specific sounds of the musical track. Others again are standing motionless, just looking around; contemplating the situation and its specific elements, according to the free direction of individual attention accompanied again in their navigational journey by the course of music. While she walks, she jumps over someone who is lying, covered in mud, in the middle of the stage, among the naked grubby jumping feet; she notices that people are careful not to tread on him. A thin girl with dreadlocks, fairy wings and colorful face, resembling an elf comes closer and skips in a circle around her, inviting her to dance and to have fun by participating through dance in the congregation. She smiles back at her and continues her journey towards the DJ and the sound-monitors, this time walking to the beat, with a rhythmic step.

In front of the DJ, almost all people dance intensively. The energy is higher. She also notices the movements of the people are similar, all dancing in the same manner, jumping in and out of beat. She focuses her attention on the stage decoration. It is full of mandalas incorporating elements of world religious traditions, futuristic structures and natural elements. She sees a huge painted mushroom full of eyes, observing her as she moves. She stops and stares at the

eyes of the mushroom. "The mushroom is watching us," she thinks. Then she looks at the DJ. He is using extravagant movements, like an orchestra conductor, leading the movements of the whole performance through the rhythm of music. She stands for a while near the left sound monitor, in front of which a half naked guy, covered in perspiration, moves strangely back and forth, catching and freeing energies coming from different acoustical directions towards him. She feels the base as a vibration passing through her body. Opposite to her, she sees some other women, looking as if they have come from times past or times ahead, emblazoned with tribal tattoos, fluorescent dreadlocks, silvery clothes and partly covered in mud looking like amazons, priestesses, warriors or aliens.

She stands there, lights a cigarette, drinks some more water and delivers herself to the flow of music. The LSD has started to kick off. Everything around her starts to breath and move as though liquid. She looks up at the sky and is amazed by the beauty and the beautiful shapes the clouds are making. She closes her eyes and is carried away by the music. She starts seeing patterns and moves her body faster. She feels that it is a perfect day, she feels happy and she begins dancing with more intensity. After a while she realizes that she is jumping like an animal and she feels so light-hearted. She feels energized and she feels alive. Her body moves with the music without her directing the movements. She becomes aware of her body. She even feels she is unable to stop dancing. Her body gradually synchronizes with the bodies of others. She feels present. Colors become brighter; sounds become clearer. She is in the music. She is falling into a trance. She feels ecstatic.

0.Introduction

The trailer of the ethnographic documentary *Electronic Awakening* (2011), which investigates spirituality and mysticism in electronic dance music cultures (EDMCs), starts with the following phrase:

“In the twilight of human history a global culture will emerge and re-design civilization...”¹

The “twilight of human history” refers to –what many consider- the ‘threshold’ period of human evolution marked by the millenarian eschatology connected to the year 2012. More specifically, the 21st of December 2012 has been regarded and popularized by many as the date formally inaugurating a ‘New Age’ for humanity and the planet; a Golden Age, brought about by a transformation of individual and collective consciousness that will elevate living beings to a higher status of spirituality by freeing them from the prison of matter and body. This ‘alchemical transmutation’ of consciousness is considered to constitute the next evolutionary step in human civilization that will restore the lost Paradisical condition on earth and bring harmony and peace to all life.

The 2012 phenomenon has emerged from certain circles in alternative spirituality movements and has been also connected to the end of the Mayan ‘Long Count Calendar’. A central figure in the development of the New Age prophecy has been Terence McKenna who based his theory relating to the arrival of the Eschaton in 2012 on the construction of a speculative macrohistory derived from the Chinese I Ching and inspired by a psychedelic revelation

¹ *Electronic Awakening*, directed by A.C. Johner, produced by Federation of Earth/Keyframe, 2011, <http://electronicawakening.com/>

experienced with his brother in the Amazon forest around the middle 1970s². The 2012 expectation has been further nurtured by spiritual seekers involved in EDMCs and shaped ideas central to the ‘psychedelic trance’ culture. This is very much evident in the theme of one of the biggest and pioneering psychedelic trance festivals in Europe, namely the Boom Festival, that has taken place every two years in Portugal since 1997, and which during the August Full Moon of 2012 celebrated “The Alchemy of Spirit”; the transmutation of planetary consciousness³. The 2014 theme of Boom Festival is the celebration of the Feminine symbolizing the return of the archetype of the Goddess representing the Gaian Mind, argued to have been worshipped in Ancient times, at least in the Old Europe, in a time when people lived in peace with nature and with each other⁴.

In the poetic introductory phrase of the *Electronic Awakening* trailer, psychedelic trance is presented as that global culture that will re-design civilization. Psychedelic trance is an electronic dance music culture, and an alternative spirituality movement in its own right that uses art, performance, media technology and psychedelics as the means for contacting the transcendent through the facilitation of alterations of consciousness in order to induce individual and collective ‘gnostic’ and ‘mystical’ experiences for transforming and expanding consciousness. The initial intention for doing this, arises from the awareness of the contemporary state of human civilization and human history that exhibits the situation of an ‘Eternal War’, with its ensuing catastrophic consequences for the planet and living beings, pointing towards the ever coming closer to the self-destruction of earthly life and extinction of the human race. This condition, underlines the need for a fundamental change in human thinking and operating that is considered more crucial and necessary than ever. If psychedelic

²² Hanegraaff (W.J.) “‘End End History. And go to the Stars:’ Terence McKenna and 2012,” in Cusack (C.M.) & Hartney (C.) (eds.), *Religion and Retributive Logic: Essays in Honour of Professor Garry W. Trompf*, Brill: Leiden / Boston, 2010, 291-312

³ <http://www.boomfestival.org/boom2012/>

⁴ Gimbutas (M.) *The Language of the Goddess*, Thames and Hudson, 2001 (1989^{1st})

trance culture postulates it has the power and the method for achieving this, then an investigation into the ways this is supposed to happen, or is already happening, is necessary for understanding and further aiding the fulfillment of this process.

Actualization refers to the embodied action of an intention that, unless it is manifested in the material world, holds no value. Psychedelic trance culture actualizes itself in the collective presence and communal congregation in the ‘stage’ of its gatherings from which the awareness of responsibility towards self, life, nature and society are projected out to the world as the manifestation of the aesthetic and the ethical; as practiced spirituality, for bringing about a revolutionary transformation in planetary existence. Thus, at an initial level, this thesis is about an investigation of psychedelic trance culture - its methods, intentions and aims – focused on the performative situation in the ‘stage’ of psytrance, to find out through which means *-if it is possible -*to achieve a global change.

As an electronic dance music culture and a spiritual movement, also hosting a plurality of alternative spiritualities, the investigation of the psychedelic trance culture requires an interdisciplinary approach. For this reason I combine theories and research from media and performance studies with theories and research from religious studies and more specifically from the study of Western Esotericism. Both domains of study, which are very broad and can be considered, being interdisciplinary on their own, are inadequate for dealing with the psytrance phenomenon as a whole, unless considered in combination. This is because, on the one hand, the analytical tools and theories offered by each domain of study are able to cover specific fundamental aspects of the psytrance situation. On the other hand, psytrance as a new and unique contemporary phenomenon that has never occurred in known human history before requires new concepts and research methods for deepening the knowledge and

realizing the offered possibilities imbued and emerging within its core philosophy. This is so, because psytrance enables the convergence of art, technology, spirituality and performance in the facilitation of alterations of consciousness.

Thus, at a second level, this thesis is about showcasing the creative possibilities of combining media and performance studies with Western Esotericism and religious studies for investigating and theorizing the phenomenon of psytrance. I demonstrate this by presenting the concept of “technognosis”, which I further apply in the stage of the psychedelic trance culture as a characterization of the stage experience and as an analytical tool. Technognosis combines key aspects of media and performance, namely art and technology, with the notion of gnosis, referring to a specific kind of superior, salvational knowledge experienced directly by individuals. Gnosis can be further received while in altered states of consciousness, and for this reason I propose that the concept of technognosis is appropriate for analyzing the phenomenon occurring in the stage of psytrance.

Media and performance studies stress the epistemological value of ‘embodied knowledge’ through the intensity of direct and sensuous felt “experience”, triggering discussion around notions such as bodily presence/‘being there’, liveness and mediatization, corporeality and virtuality, spatiality and temporality. Performance studies emerged from the overlap between theatre and anthropology through an exchange of analytical concepts that got re-appropriated, enriched and applied in art and society accordingly. Thus, performance studies focuses on the research, analysis and conceptualization of events like staged theatrical dance or musical performances, rituals, demonstrations, carnivals, roles and identities performed in society etc, paying specific attention to the influences and effects of media communication technologies

on embodied felt experience and interaction. They also stress the transformative, transgressive or resistant potentials of performance.

The centrality of embodied experience in media and performance studies opened possibilities for the creative construction of new methods of research and analysis in academic disciplines that take into consideration the particularities of the subject matters and their participants/experiencers. This renders a conventional, arms length, and disembodied investigation of a given situation inadequate as a research method. Thus, performance studies offer a plurality of “performative-sensitive ways of knowing” that blur the boundaries between subject and object - body and mind, through the direct inter-subjective experience⁵. In addition, notions, such as practice as research, practiced based research and the concept of the practitioner researcher have emerged that are now broadly used in media and performance studies⁶.

Religious studies came into contact with performance initially through the study of rituals. The effects of post-modernity and the endeavors of feminist religious scholars further opened possibilities for the consideration of - among others - the centrality of body in religious or spiritual practice and experience, the role of empathy, and the roles of the erotic and the emotions in religious knowledge and mystical experiences⁷. They also stressed the sacred immanence and spiritual qualities in nature as well as the particularities of female experience and feminine ways of knowing⁸. Today, many religious scholars talk of a “participatory turn” in the study of religion, spirituality and mysticism incorporating postmodern and pragmatic

⁵ Conquergood (D.) 2002. “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research” in *TDR: The Drama Review*, 46:2, 145–56

⁶ O’Grady (A.)”Interrupting Flow: Researching Play, Performance and Immersion in Festival Scenes” in *Dancecult: Journal of Electronic Dance Music Culture*, 5:1, 18-38 p.22

⁷ Ferre (J.N.), Sherman (J.H.) *The Participatory turn: Spirituality, Mysticism, Religious Studies*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008, p.11

⁸ Ibid.

concerns with research in different ways of knowing – be it embodied, gendered, visionary, completative etc,- in arguing for an ‘enactive’ understanding of the sacred that serves in the approach to spiritual phenomena, experiences and insights as co-created events⁹ . These events also encompass gnostic and mystical experiences, including the encounter with entities.

‘Participatory knowing’ is conceptualized as being ‘performative’, creative and transformative; it admits and affirms the existence of spiritual realities experienced directly by individuals, which are viewed as emerging from a process of participatory co-creation between the whole range of human attributes or the multi-dimensional cognition of human beings and an undetermined spiritual power or generative force of life, or the spirit as a creative dynamism in life¹⁰. The participatory turn further takes into account the formative role of the ‘mediated’ human cultural variables in the visionary construction and interpretation of these experiences, as well as the contextual, the embodied and the intentional in subjective experience, stressing the *plurality of transpersonal experiences*. Finally, it argues for an *ethos* in research approaches and methodologies in religious studies that synthesizes empathic imagination and intuition, and thus the *symbolic*, with critical research and rational thinking¹¹. My approach in this thesis is participatory, too; a perspective I apply further in the study of media and performance.

My analysis of the stage of psytrance emerges from personal experience and embodied performative and social participation in some festivals and parties held in different European countries over the last five years. In these, I experienced affective qualities, sensations and transcendent states of consciousness through communal dance, music and experimenting with

⁹ Ibid. p.35

¹⁰Ibid. p.34-35

¹¹ Ibid. p.39

psychedelic substances. These experiences constitute my first hand material, further elaborated through a process of critical self-reflection combined with the study of psychedelic trance music, documentaries and theoretical texts, researching the fields of EDMCs, media, performance and religious studies. The experience of a multi-mediated, visceral and sensuous encounter with the environment of the stage of psytrance and with all its constituents, together with the plurality of alterations of consciousness occurring to individuals that may have spiritual effects, render the description and articulation in written form of the trance-dance experience impossible. The person experiencing, through the whole body, all the sensuous qualities of the stage is called “experiencer” because he is more than a member of an audience (ears), a spectator (eyes) or even a spect-actor (a physically engaged spectator that becomes an actor)¹². That person is also a “participant” in the sense of embodied action and of physical contribution to the event through the awareness of responsibility towards the situation. This participation is manifested in forms of performative and social participation, which I analyze in chapter II. But in the stage of psytrance, the experience of transcendent states of consciousness and the acknowledgment of the multi-dimensional cognition of humans, together with the ‘symbolic’ character of spiritual experiences and the performativity of art, also render the experiencer-participant a “co-creator” of the whole situation who actualizes the “shamanic model of the artist” primarily through human performance.

All these characteristics of the person ‘present’ in the trance-dance situation re-enforce the redundancy of a disembodied approach in the analysis of the stage experience. For this reason I focus on the inter-subjective and transpersonal aspects of the experience, which I further approach as an ‘artist researcher’, in finding creative ways, concepts and methods for the

¹² Nelson (R.) “Experiencer” in Bay-Cheng (S.), Kattenbelt (C.), Lavender (A.), Nelson (R.) (eds.), *Mapping Intermediality in Performance*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010, 45

analysis¹³. This is mostly evident in chapter III of this thesis, where I describe and analyze the performative situation in the stage of psytrance as technognosis.

The trance-dance situation in the stage of psytrance has been characterized as a techno-shamanic ritual. In this thesis I explain how this works on one level; but I find that the performative situation in the stage of psytrance goes beyond this. This is so because of the use of art and latest technology and of the facilitation of expressive artistic opportunities for the participants. Added to that, are its multi/transcultural character allowing for a greater plurality of meanings to occur, and, more importantly, the intentions of the organizers and experiencers. In addition, psychedelic trance culture involves a plurality of alternative spiritualities, (techno)shamanism being one among them and, thus the trance dance experience is “technognostic”.

In Chapter I, I analyze alterations of consciousness and the concept of gnosis, by highlighting the relationship between psychedelic substances and transcendent consciousness states. I attempt a historical analysis that is important for understanding how gnostic experiences have been conceptualized and achieved throughout western history while also presenting my own concept of technognosis.

In Chapter II, I describe the psychedelic trance culture as a movement that operates towards the expansion of a ‘participatory turn in society and culture’; something which constitutes the ends, and the means for achieving a planetary transformation. A turn towards participation has been gradually occurring in society since the 1960’s, something that becomes evident by

¹³ St John (G.) “Writing the Vibe: Arts of Representation in Electronic Dance Music Culture” in *Dancecult: Journal of Electronic Dance Music Culture*, 5:1, 2013, accessed online 01/07/2013 in <http://dj.dancecult.net/index.php/journal/article/view/164/188>

studying media and performance. The performative turn in the arts and culture was the first step towards participation, while art, media and psychedelics have played a crucial role in this change of direction. I further analyze aesthetic experience as a kind of gnosis, and also describe the shamanic model of the artist, its function and manifestation in different artistic forms and more specifically in theatrical performances.

In Chapter III, I analyze the stage of psytrance as technognosis, focusing on the transpersonal and inter-subjective aspects of the experience that is approached in terms of degrees of gnosis. These gnostic experiences are conceptualized as aesthetic, visionary and mystical experiences. Technognosis is about the communication and facilitation of collective gnostic experiences through art, performance and technology and the actualization on a big scale of the shamanic artistic function that manifests a new collective vision. This results at the expansion of a participatory mentality and the adoption of participation as the next paradigm in human civilization. Even if the 2012 prophecy does not correspond to actual reality, its *symbolic* character and its message in relation to the contemporary global condition offers an opportunity for changing the contemporary condition. The convergence of the experiencer, the participant and the shamanic model of the artist that unite themselves in the technognostic situation in the stage of psytrance, renders the actualization of this opportunity possible through the direct experience of a transpersonal gnosis, which is encapsulated in the statement that 'all are one'. Technognosis makes the experience of this unity possible as a mystical experience, the implications of which are unique and significant in facilitating a change in the planetary paradigm.

CHAPTER I

1.Alterations of Consciousness and Gnosis

In this chapter I analyze “alterations of consciousness” from antiquity to today in terms of their function, conception, meaning and interpretation in Western thought over the centuries of documented history. Initially, I present references to “divine madness” in ancient Greece and conceptualize them as “altered states of consciousness” (ASCs). Then, I investigate different consciousness conditions by highlighting the importance of “imagination” in them, together with examining different techniques and technologies used in inducing and maintaining alterations of consciousness, as well as the effects and interpretations of experiences of individuals during ASCs. These experiences are often viewed as being “mystical” or “spiritual”, impacting and transforming the persons undergoing them. A further examination of these mystical and spiritual experiences through currents and traditions belonging to the domain of study of “Western Esotericism” demonstrates their importance and presence in Western history, and their official repudiation by dominant forces and ideologies as having no ontological significance after the time of the Enlightenment. In the course of this examination, I introduce a notion, prominent in, and central to many Western esoteric traditions, that of “gnosis”, in order to develop my concept of “technognosis”, which is applied and analyzed on the “stage” of psychedelic trance gatherings in the last chapter of this thesis. Finally, I trace the role of “psychedelic” substances in alterations of consciousness and esotericism central to spiritual, gnostic and/or mystical experiences and to the psychedelic trance culture. My aim in doing this is to demonstrate the significance and creative possibilities of combining ‘western esotericism’ and ‘religious studies, with media and performance studies for investigating the performative phenomenon occurring in the ‘stage’ of the psychedelic trance gatherings in depth, in which ‘psychedelics’ and ‘alterations of consciousness’ through their spiritual and transformative qualities are central.

1. 1. Divine Madness

In his dialogue *Phaedrus* (370 BCE), Plato (aprx.428-347 BCE) informs us that most people of his time considered “madness” as something discreditable, but unlike his fellow citizens, he argued that not all kinds of madness are evil; rather that when granted to people as a divine gift, they benefit humankind¹⁴. As the classical scholar E.R. Dodds suggested, since the time of Homer (aprx.8 -7 BCE), and even long before that, the popular belief in ancient Greece was that any kind of mental disease was the result of supernatural intervention and the mentally afflicted person was often socially scorned by the majority¹⁵. However, the mad person also inspired respect and awe, as being in contact with the supernatural world, occasionally displaying powers denied to ordinary people. In Classical Antiquity some intellectuals limited the range of “divine madness” to some specific types, attributing the others to natural causes, a view that did not hold much sway in the general public’s opinion except in a few great cultural centres like Athens¹⁶; hence, the divide between insanity and god sent madness remained ill defined.

Plato, through Socrates, distinguished between four kinds of “divine madness” (*mania*). The first one is “prophetic madness”, whose patron God is Apollo and which he recognized as manifested in the predictions of the oracle of Delphi, the priestesses of Dodona and in Sibyl¹⁷. This kind of madness relied on “enthusiasm” (*εὐθουσιασμός*). The Oracle at Delphi, for example, would become ‘possessed’ by the god Apollo and, as a ‘medium’ for the god, would express in the first person knowledge of the future, or of the *hidden* present. In other words, she was becoming “ἔνθεος”, ‘filled’ or ‘inspired’ by some kind of divine entity, presence or

¹⁴ Plato *Phaedrus* 244a-244b

¹⁵ Dodds (E.R.) *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1951, p.65- 68

¹⁶ Dodds mentions Herodotus, Empedocles and the author of ‘*de morbo sacro*’ as examples of those who distinguished between divine madness and madness from natural causes e.g. bodily ailments. *ibid.*

¹⁷ Plato *Phaedrus* 244a-244c

force, in a state of ‘ecstatic trance’¹⁸; she was practicing ‘ecstatic prophesy’, and as the Greek word ‘mantis’ is thought to be derived from “μαίνομαι” (mainomai), prophecy and madness were once again inextricably entwined¹⁹. The ways these trance states were induced could be based on ritual acts, including liquor from a sacred tree, or the chewing of its leaves, but Dodds asserts that the Delphic prophetic madness, in particular, most probably stemmed from autosuggestion²⁰.

Plato’s second type of divine madness is the “teletic madness”, whose patron God is Dionysus, which he associated with prayers and worship of the Gods and with purification rituals for healing purposes²¹. In contrast to Apollo’s prophetic madness, which was considered to be a rare gift of the few, the Dionysian “teletic” or “ritualistic madness” could occur in anybody, from slaves to aristocrats²². The social function of teletic madness was essentially ‘cathartic’ (cleansing, purifying) in the psychological sense, providing a ritual context for relieving the “irrational” impulses to reject responsibility, and offering ecstatic/trance states for *transforming* the individual personality through the collective frenzy of an assembled congregation. Dionysus offered freedom, pleasure, liberation and healing from everyday life through the use of wine and orgiastic dance accompanied by orgiastic music, a process also indulged in other religious cults like the Corybantes²³. Both Aristotle and Plato regarded this ritualistic process as a useful organ for social hygiene, affecting the

¹⁸ Hanegraaff (W.J.) “Entheogenic Esotericism” in Asprem (E.), Granholm (K.) (eds.), *Contemporary Esotericism*, Equinox, 2013, 392-409 p.392

¹⁹ Plato *Phaedrus* 244c

²⁰ E. R. Dodds *The Greeks and the Irrational* p.71

²¹ Plato *Phaedrus* 244d-244e

²² E. R. Dodds *The Greeks and the Irrational* p.69,76

²³ Ibid. p.69,77-78. Music was thought to emotionally affect the person and facilitate healing. Especially in some mystery cults like the cult of Cybele, the mother of Gods, specific instruments and especially the tympanon were held to produce certain psychological effects and religious transformation by evoking participants to dance, shout and become enraptured by the Goddess. De Jong (A.), Teeuwen (M.) “Music I: Antiquity” in Hanegraaff (W.J.), Faivre (A.), Van de Broek (R.), Brach (J.P.) *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, Hanegraaff (W.J.) (ed.), Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2006, 808-810 p.808

participants in a positive way²⁴. Furthermore, studies have suggested that the wine of the ancients, Dionysus' gift to mankind, did not contain alcohol as its sole inebriant, but it was usually an infusion of different herbal toxins with water in a vinous liquid²⁵. The state of drunkenness signified a state of madness; in which, according to the wine, different physical effects would be produced, from insomnia to hallucinations. Thus, according to the classical philologist C.A.P. Ruck, the wine of Dionysus was the 'medium' that allowed the classical Greeks to continue to take part in the ecstatic rites of ancient vegetative, otherwise lost, forms of civilization²⁶.

The third kind of madness Plato recognizes is the "poetic madness", emanating from the Muses, which inspired a delicate soul to compose lyric and other kinds of poetry, often in a state of ecstasy²⁷. "Poetic madness" is connected with the epic tradition, but the notion of the "frenzied" poet is more akin to the Dionysian tradition, the dithyramb and the lyric poets that through the state of 'enthusiasm', and according to Nietzsche, reflected on "music's symbolic language the world's primordial melody"²⁸. In a creative exploration on the origins of ancient "Greek tragedy", Nietzsche proposed that it developed out of the Dionysian chorus who in 'ecstatic states' that transcend individuality and 'unveil the veil of Maya' - the illusion of culture and ordinary reality - saw in the *satyr* the primordial image of man²⁹. In the ritualistic congregation the relinquishing of the self allowed the participants to see themselves becoming transformed in front of their own eyes, acting as they had really entered another body and

²⁴ E. R. Dodds *The Greeks and the Irrational* p.79

²⁵ Ruck (C.A.P) "Solving the Eleusinian Mystery" in Wasson (R.G.), Hofmann (A.), Ruck (C.A.P.) *The Road to Eleusis: Unveiling the Secrets of the Mysteries*, Smith (H.) (pref.), Forte (R.) (ed.), Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978, 2-18 p.14-15

²⁶ Ibid. p.15

²⁷ Plato *Phaedrus* 245a, The fourth kind of Plato's madness is the "amatory" madness, which he regarded as the most beneficial of all, sent by the gods Eros and Aphrodite to help humans achieve the greatest happiness. It is discussed in Chapter II. Plato *Phaedrus* 249d-249e

²⁸ E. R. Dodds *The Greeks and the Irrational* p.82. Nietzsche (F.W.) *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music*, Johnston (I.) (trans.), Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada: Vancouver Island University, 2008, (1872^{1st}), p.15-16, 26

²⁹ Nietzsche (F.W.) *The Birth of Tragedy* p.12, 26, 29

another character. Through their transformation it became possible to look at their God in a new vision; and this vision of their transformed self as the reflection of God became then articulated through the symbolic language of dance, tone and word using myth as the vehicle of Dionysian wisdom³⁰. Satyr is a symbol of the primordial, animalistic and male expression of human race who is constantly in a playful, erotic mood. Nietzsche's poetic vision of the birth of tragedy is speculative, based on his strict contra posing of Apollonian rationality and Dionysian irrationality reconciled in the dramatic act. What is of interest, however, is the idea that in the enchanted atmosphere facilitated by ritual dance, music and wine, the dramatic art developed out of collective states of madness, or better "divine madness", *where each person became a musician, a poet, a dancer and a visionary at the same time* and co-created and further symbolized and articulated through art an image of the psyche of man; the reflection of Dionysus³¹.

Dionysian events also took place every February in Agrai, where the candidates for the initiation at the "Great Mystery in Eleusis", ritually re-enacted the death of Persephone, Demeter's maiden, who is a Goddess of harvest and fertility, in what is known as the "Lesser Mystery of Eleusis"³². Every September for approximately 1.500 years until the 4th century CE, in the complement to the Lesser Mystery the "Great Mystery in Eleusis", the return of Persephone from Hades, with her new-born son had been celebrated, symbolizing the eternal cycle of life – 'death and rebirth', offering redemption for the world and mankind³³. After entering the gates of the great hall of initiation in Eleusis, the "telestirion" (τελεστήριον), the participants/experiencers witnessed phasmata or phantasmata (φαντάσματα), which were ghostly apparitions or spirits, and more particularly the spirits of Persephone herself and her son. The archaeological remains of the site indicate that this spectacular vision could not have

³⁰ Ibid. p.29-39

³¹ Ibid. p.32

³² Ruck (C.A.P) "Solving the Eleusinian Mystery" (2-18) p.15

³³ Ibid. p.12, 15

been perceived merely as a theatrical performance, even if mechanical stage machinery was used for enhancing the magical experience³⁴. Studies have theorised that a psychoactive potion called “kykeon”, containing ergot of barley, mint and water was administered to the participants before the great mystery, inducing them to enter a state of ecstasy aided and abetted by the set and setting constructed by the hierophants with the help of dance, music, chanting, lights, incense etc³⁵. Thus, ritual techniques, later passed on to theatre, had been probably been used for enhancing the ‘visionary’ experience in the mysteries, conditioning the collective mood.

Although there is no evidence indicating that mechanical technology was used in Eleusis, as also Erik Davis in his book *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic and Mysticism in the Age of Information* points out in an endeavor to demonstrate the close relation between magic, technology and alchemy, in Egypt, and more particularly in Alexandria since the 4th century BCE the first automated ‘magic theatres’ had already been invented³⁶. Different kinds of mechanisms had been used for centuries in ancient Egyptian temples for creating the impression that the statues of the Gods really talked and moved, facilitating a ‘suspension of disbelief’ and thus inculcating the illusion of divine presence³⁷. In the 1st century CE, Heron (10-70 CE) the Machine Man (Mechanikos/Μεχανικός) invented new mechanical devices and automata, re-creating different ritual cults of his time, and others, like the Dionysian mysteries, in which “flames leapt, thunders crashed, and miniature female Bacchantes whirled madly around the wine God on a pulley-driven turntable”³⁸. In addition Heron advanced religious technology by creating divine signs like singing birds or invisible trumpet blasts, demonstrating that in their origins technology, magic, performing arts and religion were very closely connected or

³⁴ Ibid. p.12

³⁵ Ibid. p.17

³⁶ Davis (E) *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic and Mysticism in the Age of Information*, New York: Harmony Books, 1998, p.24

³⁷ Ibid. p.25

³⁸ Ibid.

intertwined.

In sum, “divine madness” in Ancient Greece was connected with *hidden knowledge* revealed as a divine gift in the form of visions, prophecies or artistic inspiration to individuals, while ecstatic/trance states of personality induced by psychoactive plants, ritualistic acts, and performative arts like music and dance were regarded as offering a kind of catharsis, renewal and healing in an enchanted ancient world. As we have seen, in Egypt, mechanical technology was additionally used for enhancing the magical atmosphere, recreating the divine presence by artifice. I argue that these ancient Egyptian and Hellenistic visions and circumstances/settings have been combined, de/re-constructed and revived since the mid 1980’s in our own era through the contemporary phenomenon of “Psychedelic Trance” gatherings, in a different context and under a secularized, rationalistic, technological, capitalistic and globalized paradigm, marking the beginning of a post-post-modern era that symbolizes the turn towards participation. Central to this “archaic revival” are alterations of consciousness evoked by ritual acts and performative techniques, technological media and psychoactive plants and substances, the latter having openly re-entered Western society during the 1950’s and 1960’s and then became legally proscribed near the end of the latter decade. “Psychedelics”, those that make the psyche manifest, started to be investigated in those years in secret military projects, scientific and academic research, stimulating discussion about alterations of consciousness that offered new explanations concerning the nature of mystical and visionary experiences reported since ancient times. It is to an examination of these different consciousness conditions that I now turn.

1.2. Alterations of Consciousness and Instrumental Causality

In his article “The Platonic Frenzies in Marsilio Ficino” Wouter J. Hanegraaff suggested conceiving of the four types of platonic madness (mania), regarded by Plato as divine – gifted states superior to rational sanity and which Marsilio Ficino (15th c CE) interpreted as means of ecstatic access to superior knowledge, as conditions corresponding in today’s terminology to ‘altered states of consciousness’ (ASCs)³⁹.

Altered states of consciousness have been studied since the 1960’s through different academic disciplines, and have been conceptualized as:

“any mental state induced by various physiological, psychological or pharmacological maneuvers or agents, which can be recognized subjectively by the individual himself (or any objective observer of the individual) as representing a sufficient deviation in subjective experience or psychological functioning from certain general norms for that individual during waking consciousness”⁴⁰.

In more general terms, they are conceived as patterns of physiological, cognitive and experiential events different from those of the ordinary waking state⁴¹. They include, among others, ‘sleep’, ‘trance’, ‘ecstasy’, ‘flow’, ‘peak’ and ‘mystical’ experiences as well as pathological states of ‘dissociation’ and ‘schizophrenia’. However, they do not always exist as distinct, stable and recognizable patterns of psychophysiological conditions, and because of the additional problem of defining some states of consciousness in contrast to a “standard”, “ordinary” state, the designation “alterations of consciousness” is more valid, underlying the

³⁹ Hanegraaff (W.J.) “The Platonic Frenzies in Ficino” in Dijkstra (J.), Kroesen (J.) and Kuiper (Y.) (eds.), *Myths, Martyrs and Modernity: Studies in the History of Religions in Honour of Jan N. Bremmer*, Leiden/ Boston: Brill, 2009, 553-567 p.553-555

⁴⁰ Ludwig (A.M.) “Altered States of Consciousness,” in: Charles T. Tart (ed.), *Altered States of Consciousness*, Anchor Books / Doubleday: New York 2nd ed. 1972^{2nd}, 11-24 p. 11

⁴¹ Baruss (I.) *Alterations of Consciousness: An Empirical Analysis for Social Scientists*, American Psychological Association, 2003, p.8

fluidity, plurality and degrees of intensity of different consciousness conditions⁴². Under this definition alterations in the flux of waking states, such as ‘strong emotions’, ‘daydreaming’ or ‘immersion’ may be considered as different from an ordinary waking state, the waking state in this view is better explained as a specific *state of mind* according to our orientation towards the world, usually experienced in Western societies while awake⁴³.

This state could be characterized as the expression of a spontaneous tendency of the human mind towards “instrumental causality” which refers to operations of rational thinking for explaining reality in terms of cause and effect⁴⁴. This way of knowing and understanding has been officially adopted in Western society as an ‘ideology’ since the time of the Enlightenment, when reason triumphed over imagination, logic over pre-logical thinking, science over magic, in a mechanistic and deterministic worldview that praised materialism based on external observation⁴⁵. This ideology had been supported by early positivists of the early 19th century like Auguste Comte (1798- 1857 CE), for example, in the emerging field of sociology in France, and culminated in what is known as the ‘logical positivism’ of the Vienna School in the 1920’s, influencing all academic fields and continuing to do so, although positivist models have since long being critiqued and dismissed⁴⁶. In other words, “instrumental causality” as an ideology corresponds to “the project of establishing a complete worldview based upon a theory (or a set of theories) claiming exclusive truth and sufficiency with respect to all dimensions of reality”⁴⁷. From this point of view, “instrumental causality”

⁴² Baruss (I.) *Alterations of Consciousness* p.8

⁴³ Baruss (I.) *Alterations of Consciousness* p.9

⁴⁴ Hanegraaff (W.J.) “How Magic Survived the Disenchantment of the World” in *Religion*, 33, Elsevier Ltd: 2003, 357-380p.373, 375. Hanegraaff reworks on Lévy-Bruhl’s conception of two stratum of human thought, one called “causality” and the other “participation”, participation conceived initially as a characteristic of primitive societies. The opposition between causality and participation was further developed by Tambiah and later elaborated by Hanegraaff, who made more explicit the “instrumental” aspect of causality in accordance with the official operational mentality-modality and ideology of modern western culture. On participation see Chapter II

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 375

⁴⁶ Van der Pijl (K.) *A Survey of Global Political Economy* (Version 2.1.), Center of Global Political Economy: University of Sussex, 2009, p. 61-62, 66, 73-75

⁴⁷ Hanegraaff (W.J.) “How Magic Survived” (357-380) p. 375-376

in the west, could be regarded as the expression of a specific orientation towards the world that is based on perception and reflection and which has become a specific state of consciousness/mind experienced during waking states, characterized on the one hand as a spontaneous tendency that functions for aiding humans deal with practical matters in everyday life, and on the other as the dominant ideology. In other non-western societies or indigenous people that operate through the spontaneous tendency of the mind towards “participation”, this condition could be regarded as being an *altered* state of consciousness, an idea that further reveals and underlines the biased presupposition for defining a state of consciousness as being ‘ordinary’.

At this moment I would like to point out a possible origin for the development and subsequent domination of “instrumental causality” in western thinking, illustrating how, from this point of view, it became inevitable. According to Walter Ong, who in this respect aligned himself with Marshall McLuhan, technology in general has the ability to fundamentally influence and change the operations of the human mind and thus transform ways of thinking, imagining, expressing and acting in society and the world at large⁴⁸. Ong’s research example focuses on the results of the deep ‘interiorization’ of a new technology by human consciousness involved in “writing”, and later in “printing”, which, as he explains, resulted in a radical transformation of the human mindset. He compares literary societies with oral cultures, arguing that in primary oral cultures, the sound of language is inextricably and exclusively bound up with thought processes based on an ‘internalization’ of the exterior world, as there is no visual relationship to objectified word-units⁴⁹. More particularly, in oral cultures, words are conceived as dynamic *sounds* produced by the internal power of living organisms and thus they are connected with the here and now, with the “event” and the given situation of their

⁴⁸Ong (W.J.) *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, Hawkes(T.) (ed.), NewYork: Routledge, 1988, (1982^{1st})

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p.70 -73

expression and perception⁵⁰. The ‘medium’ of sound permeates the body of every member of the society through their ears, positioning them at the centre of the ‘whole’ auditory world and connecting them with the exterior world lying beyond the limits of the body; through spoken words; “the phenomenology of sound enters deep into human beings’ feeling of existence” facilitating a harmonic inter-relationship between the ‘inner’ world of the individual and the outer/exterior world⁵¹. With the invention of writing, on the other hand, the “representation” of words in visual form as coded symbols with a concrete existence in ‘objective’ space became possible, separating the word from the living present, representing sound itself as a static thing⁵². Furthermore, the ability to store and transmit information in written form freed the human mind from the constraints of memory keeping and facilitated developments in ‘analytical thinking’ that gradually led to the emergence of scientific and academic disciplines, activating process in the ‘left-brain’ hemisphere⁵³. Gradually, writing separated the knower from the known and after the invention of print, which transformed knowledge into a commodity, the ‘interiorization’ of the book enabled it to be perceived as an ‘object containing ‘information and knowledge’, allowing the articulation of precise observation and verbalization of the physical reality⁵⁴. The study of the history or archaeology of technology illustrates many examples of the impact of technology on human consciousness, and Ong’s analysis partly justifies the empowerment of the tendency of the human mind towards “instrumental causality”, as writing enhanced the development of ‘analytical thinking’, leading gradually to the dominion of reason.

⁵⁰ Ibid. p.32

⁵¹ Ibid. p.72

⁵² Ibid. p. 81, 90

⁵³ Ibid. p.8-9, 78-82

⁵⁴ Ibid. p.116-117

1.3. Alterations of Consciousness and Imagination

‘Consciousness’ refers to the sense of existence of a subject, to the explicit knowledge of one’s own situation, to the subjective experiential stream of events and to the registration of information and action on it in a goal-directed manner⁵⁵. The ideology of instrumental causality asserted the existence of an objective world out there common to everybody, which can be rationally deconstructed by carefully following the rules of logic, which is occasionally interrupted by unfortunate lapses into irrationality. But the multidimensional subjective experience of this world is not congruent with that framework since emotions, contexts and intentions are an intrinsic part of everyday experience, often leading human actions to transcend logical barriers. By examining alterations of consciousness during waking life it becomes obvious how much imagination is involved in everyday processes. The advances in psychology over the last decade emphasize how imaginative processes are fundamental to everyday thought throughout life, and are inextricably linked to our understanding of reality⁵⁶. Furthermore, studies have shown that the increased engagement of the imagination, as well as changes in emotional expression, can result in intense alterations of consciousness, raising questions about the nature of reality itself⁵⁷.

In starting to trace different states of consciousness during waking life it is helpful to consider ways in which imaginative processes are involved. Since Aristotle (384-322 BCE) imagination (phantasia/φαντασία) has been usually been connected with visual mental imagery and perception, a link that has persisted until today, underlying the quasi - perceptual nature of imagination, accounted for by perceptual theories⁵⁸. In his “Peri Psyche” (De

⁵⁵ Baruss (I.) *Alterations of Consciousness* p.6

⁵⁶ Taylor (M.) “Imagination” in *Encyclopedia of Creativity*, Runco (A.M.), Pritzker (S.R.) (eds.), Elsevier Ind, 2011 ^{2nd}, 637 -643 p.637

⁵⁷ Baruss (I.) *Alterations of Consciousness* p.25, 36

⁵⁸ O’Connor (K.P.), Aarderma (F.) “The Imagination: Cognitive, Pre-cognitive and Meta-cognitive Aspects” in *Consciousness and Cognition*, 14:2, (June) 2005, 233-256 p.234

Anima), Aristotle separated the faculties of sense and thought/reason from imagination (φαντασία), although he explained the ways they function *in conjunction*⁵⁹. He defined imagination, on the one hand, as the result of sense impressions of an encountered object, which are true when the object of perception is there. But when the visual sense impressions continue in the perception when the object stimulating their appearance is no longer there, imagination can create fallacy and become unreal. On the other hand, he defined imagination as the ability to make inner/ mental images (phantasms, phantoms, φαντάσματα) appear by volition or involuntarily, as in dream states, independently of the realness of any sense impression⁶⁰. But the origin of this activation lies in the senses, and more particularly in the sense of seeing, and thus in external stimuli⁶¹. The Greek word Aristotle used for imagination (φαντασία) derives from the Greek word φάος, which means light⁶². The verb φαντάζειν means to make manifest in visual form. This is understandable, as without light it would be impossible to see the external objects and images necessary for the activation and function of the imagination; but this conception of the imagination does not account for the creative aspect of imagination and the possibilities it offers for originality, creating the need for a broader definition.

From a psychological point of view the term ‘imagination’ encompasses “the multi-faceted capacity to transcend our current time, place and circumstance to think about what might have been, plan and anticipate the future, create fictional worlds, become absorbed in the narratives

Aristotle *Peri Psyches*, Tatakis (B.) (trans.), Papanoutsos (E.), Athens: Daidalos, I.Zacharopoulos A.E., 1954, p.167. For Aristotle the human soul thinks in images and thus imagination forms the bridge between perception and intellect. Aristotle *Peri Psyches*. III 431a 16

⁶⁰ Ibid. III. 428a 11-15, 428b 27-30

⁶¹ Ibid. III 428a 1-5

⁶² Ibid. III. 429a 2-4

created by others, and consider remote and close alternatives to actual experiences.”⁶³

With this definition, imagination includes everyday thoughts as well as the creative insights leading to progress in art and science; and this definition also distinguishes imagination from imagery, with the latter being a tool of the imagination rather than being equated with it.

1.3.1. Daydreaming

A good example for understanding the role of imagination in everyday life is found in what is known as “daydreaming”, defined here as thoughts – images occurring spontaneously in mind, shifting the focus of thought away from an immediate task⁶⁴. This human capacity of “daydreaming” has been associated with the notion of “mind wandering”, in the sense that attention is shifted away from a primary task and redirected towards internal information, memories and plans related to actual experiences, or wish-fulfillment or fearful fantasies⁶⁵. In some cases, and especially when a person experiences failure, regret, hostility or aggression during “mind wandering”, the image-thoughts can be perceived with a near ‘hallucinatory vividness’, while in other cases the engagement becomes difficult to sustain, resulting in unpleasant emotions⁶⁶. In any case, the human capacity to deviate mentally from a present task has been argued as traceable back in the evolutionary development of hominoids some 50.000 years ago or so, when “mental time travel” in the sense of mental projection into the future, the past or into worlds of imagination, as well as “counterfactual thinking”, the integration of thoughts about what was happening in the present with thoughts about what could have happened, facilitated the survival of the species⁶⁷. “Mental time travel” and “counterfactual thinking” entail a degree of intentionality, in contrast to the spontaneous

⁶³ Taylor (M.) “Imagination” (637 -643) p.637

⁶⁴ Ibid. p.640

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Baruss (I.) *Alterations of Consciousness* p.38

⁶⁷ McConahie (B.) “An Evolutionary Perspective on Play, Performance and Ritual” in *TDR: The Drama Review*, 55:4, (winter) 2011, 33-50 p.39, Taylor (M.) “Imagination” (637 -643) p.641

“mind wandering” and may be grounded in what Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner have termed “double scope integration” or “complex conceptual blending”: the cognitive ability to project oneself in and out of imagined situations or roles and which may be the basis for the development of art, narratives and performance⁶⁸. In the case of “daydreaming”, there has also been found a particular neuronal pattern occurring, named the “default network”, which is usually activated during rest times, when the person is supposed to be doing nothing⁶⁹. What “daydreaming” processes suggest is that alterations of consciousness engaging imagination occur constantly, spontaneously or intentionally, during waking states signifying degrees of intensity that can culminate in a total absorption in alternative realities, which, according to their nature and to the individual, can affect the latter emotionally.

1.3.2. Volitional Imagination

Images can unfold in the mind involuntarily as in “daydreaming” or “dreaming” during ‘sleep’, while the person is unaware of them. But in some cases, as for example in “lucid dreaming”, awareness can be balanced with the total involvement in the dream. The person in “lucid dreaming” is even able to influence the course and content of the dream sequences by regulating her thoughts and expectations in balance with the free flow of the images⁷⁰. Something similar may happen during waking states when images appear by ‘volition’. Western psychology has used visualization techniques for therapeutic reasons since the beginnings of the 20th century, one of them being the ‘guided imagery’ technique developed in the method of ‘psychosynthesis’ by Roberto Assagoli during the 1910’s, a process for

⁶⁸ Fauconnier (G.) and Turner.(M.). *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind’s Hidden Complexities*, New York: Basic Books, 2002 p.179 as cited in McConahie (B.) “An Evolutionary Perspective on Play, Performance and Ritual” (33-50) p.39

⁶⁹ Taylor (M.) “Imagination” (637 -643) p.640

⁷⁰ O’Connor (K.P.), Aarderma (F.) “The Imagination: Cognitive, Pre-cognitive and Meta-cognitive Aspects”(233-256) p.247

actively directing images in a symbolically meaningful sequence⁷¹. Techniques for guiding the imagination are also used during “hypnosis” sessions, “hypnosis” being an ambiguous condition in some cases regarded as an altered state of consciousness in its own right, exhibiting similarities to states of ‘sleep’ or ‘trance’ and in other cases regarded as a technique that, according to the hypnotic susceptibility of the subject, allows for a phenomenal involuntary responsiveness towards given suggestions to occur⁷². Moreover, techniques for guiding the imagination are also used in alternative medicine, holistic practices and self-help-development programs. One broadly used technique is “guided meditation” applied for counteracting stress, for enhancing physical and psychological well-being or for facilitating memory regression. “Meditation” is conceptualized as a mental strategy for affecting transcendent (altered) states of consciousness, and its once more ambiguous nature enhanced by differentiations in individual experience has, since the 1960’s, inspired empirical research into measuring its physiological and cognitive aspects⁷³.

Furthermore, Carl Jung advanced a method of “active imagination” for the production of ‘spontaneous fantasies’ as the first hand material of the unconscious, which by their expression come into dialogue with consciousness for achieving a transformation of the psyche; this process is part of Jung’s “transcendent function”, the integration of consciousness with the unconscious for gaining a deeper understanding of the soul⁷⁴. In addition, unconscious material can also come to consciousness through performative techniques like ‘improvisation’ and exercises of ‘spontaneity’ and ‘creativity’ in a therapeutic context for

⁷¹ Baruss (I.) *Alterations of Consciousness* p.40

⁷² Ibid. p.108, 110,119

⁷³ Ibid. p.195-196

⁷⁴ Miller (J.C.) *The Transcendent Function: Jung’s Model of Psychological Growth Through Dialogue with the Unconscious*, Sunny Press, 2004, p.22-23,3-4

helping people gain a new awareness and insight into their problems⁷⁵. A method called “psychodrama” was developed in the beginnings of the 20th century by the psychiatrist and psychologist Jacob Levy Moreno as a unique form of psychotherapy based on theatrical concepts and techniques that allow the patients to “act out” their conflicts by assuming different roles⁷⁶. ‘Improvised performance’ offers engagement to imaginative possibilities, while in considering performance as a specific mode of acting – acting “as if” – I take into consideration Richard Schechner’s definition through his concept of ‘double consciousness’, indicating that to perform is to become someone who is both “not me” and “not not me” simultaneously⁷⁷. The performative consciousness is a consciousness that corresponds to a different experiential mode, which, when the performers are “immersed” in the performative act, brings them to a state of “flow”⁷⁸. In this regard, performance can be conceived as a different mode of experience that can induce alterations in consciousness through degrees of intensity in engaging with alternative, imaginative possibilities brought into existence through the body, according to the intention of the actor and the onlooker. In this respect, “performative consciousness” is an altered state of consciousness combined further with other consciousness conditions when compared with the ordinary consciousness of “instrumental causality”⁷⁹.

Another method for a volitional engagement with mental imagery was also developed by the anthropologist Michael Harner during the 1970s. This is based on shamanic techniques used by indigenous peoples for healing purposes, during which, under the influence of psychoactive plants, and under the guidance of a continuous drumbeat the shaman/healer

⁷⁵ Mcgovern (C.B.) *Psychodrama: Its theatrical origins*, Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1991, p.1-5

⁷⁶ Kellermann (P.F.) “The Place of Catharsis in Psychodrama” in *Therapeutic Aspects of Psychodrama*, Stockholm: University of Stockholm, 1986, 47-59, p.48

⁷⁷ Schechner (R.) *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985

⁷⁸ Flow is explained in 1.4.2.

⁷⁹ For the performative consciousness see 5.1.2.

leads the collective visions of the participants⁸⁰. Harner, who is the founder of ‘The Foundation of Shamanic Studies’, developed the method of “core shamanism” as a drugless healing technique adjusted to the Western “sober” setting, where vested interests and power games rendered the use of psychoactive plants illegal⁸¹. In addition, based on the same principles of indigenous/shamanic healing ceremonies, modern music therapies studies have also been developed since the 1950’s grounded on the idea that material suppressed in the unconscious could surface in the mind only through music, which can help patients come to terms with important psychological issues⁸². In the modern setting, music is assumed to evoke an alteration in consciousness in its own right that supports the creation of mental imagery, reflective of significant emotional issues, while additionally serving as the symbol of the healing power of the practitioner⁸³. Moreover, research on shamanic uses of music for healing purposes applied to modern music therapies has indicated that the set and setting of the healing process- the specific mindset of the subject and the (cultural) context and situation that conditions the experience itself - is enhanced by music, which means that its healing properties are inextricably bound to the intentions, expectations and belief systems of the participants⁸⁴. Thus it can be said that intention and belief system play an important role, not only in healing with music, but in every technique that engages imagination for therapeutic or other reasons.

⁸⁰ Harner (M.) *The Way of the Shaman*, New York: Harper and Row, 1980. Dobkin de Rios (M.) and Katz (F.) “Some Relationships between Music and Hallucinogenic Ritual: The “Jungle Gym” in Consciousness” in *Ethos*, 3:1, (Spring) 1975, 64-76 p. 68

⁸¹ <http://www.shamanism.org/fssinfo/harnerbio.html>. For a comprehensive view in the history of the psychoactive plants and substances in the 20th century see Martin (A.L), Shlain (B.) *Acid Dreams The Complete Social History of LSD: The CIA, The Sixties and Beyond*, Gove Press, 1985

⁸² Moreno (J.J.) “Ethnomusic Therapy: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Music and Healing” in *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 22:4, 1995, 329-228 p. 330

⁸³ *Ibid.* p.330

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* Dobkin de Rios (M.) and Katz (F.) “Hallucinogenic Music: An Analysis of the role of Whistling in Peruvian Ayahuasca Healing Sessions” in *Journal of American Folklore*, 84:333, (July-September) 1971, 320-327 p.325

1.3.3. Paranormal Phenomena

Until now we have seen that alterations of consciousness occur constantly during everyday life, whether by volition or not, and whether the person is aware of them or not. Imaginative processes play a fundamental role in facilitating different consciousness conditions, which may be differentiated in terms of degrees of absorption in imaginative activities and according to their emotional impact. Individual parameters are central to the experience of alterations of consciousness, set and setting determining the outcome and interpretation of phenomena occurring during them. In many cases, persons in altered states have reported experiencing anomalous phenomena regarded as “paranormal” which affect the material world and are interpreted by many as ‘spiritual’ or even ‘mystical’ experiences⁸⁵. “Paranormal” phenomena occur more spontaneously, often in persons that have gone through traumatic episodes, such as sexual abuse or near-death experiences, and in these cases they have been regarded as an expression of the capacity of the psyche for dissociation⁸⁶. Characteristic of these experiences is the psychological phenomenon termed “transliminality”, meaning openness to images, ideas and feelings that arise from within the mind, or from the world, or from both; “transliminality” is also characteristic of experiences taking place under the influence of ‘psychedelic substances’. The occurrence of anomalous experiences during alterations of consciousness can be increased in proportion to the prominence of mental imagery (visualization), changed levels of arousal and increased expectations of the actualization of these phenomena⁸⁷. They include, among others, encounters with spirits or alien species as in cases of alien abductions, and the poltergeist effect, which refers to the material displacement

⁸⁵ The term paranormal is problematic because is defined against the notion of something being normal; normal conceived from a point of view influenced by instrumental causality and corresponding to what is experienced as ordinary during the routine state of consciousness. Here it is important to note that according to the orientation towards the world, if for example people regard nature as being alive (animism), the mind as being open or if they believe that more exist in the world than what we perceive with the five senses, then paranormal phenomena could be considered to be absolutely normal.

⁸⁶ Baruss (I.) *Alterations of Consciousness* p.16

⁸⁷ Ibid.

of objects by a kind of invisible force.

1.4. Alterations of consciousness and Media

1.4.1. Immersion

Music as a medium can induce and facilitate alterations of consciousness, a capacity also shared by other media. A common state in this category is “immersion”, something that has been mostly studied in relation to different media but whose evocation is not limited to media alone. This refers, on the one hand, to a psychological and mental state of consciousness delineating the degree of personal involvement or total absorption in alternative worlds (e.g. thoughts, fantasies, book narratives, musical compositions etc)⁸⁸; on the other hand, and in relation to digital media environments such as virtual realities, video games, installation arts etc, it refers to “the sensory experience/perception of being submerged (being present) in an electronically mediated environment”⁸⁹. In this respect, “immersion” is a state in which someone has the ‘corporeal’ impression of being surrounded by a virtual world, as being a physical part of the experience per se; it is common consciousness condition of an experiencer. “Immersion” is characterized by a loss of sense of time and a loss of awareness of the physical self and the physical environment, through concentration and attention and a balanced relation between the offered opportunities for action and the person’s abilities and skills (the capacity to manipulate symbolic information) needed for the actualization of these opportunities⁹⁰. This latter relationship is inextricably linked to the concept of “flow”, while immersion in the case of flow acts as a prerequisite for it, as a person can be immersed in

⁸⁸ Ermi (L.) and Mäyrä (F.) “Fundamental Components of the Gameplay Experience: Analysing Immersion”, Proceedings of DiGRA, *Changing Views – Worlds in Play*, 2005, 1-14, p.3

⁸⁹ Vanhoutte & Wynants “Immersion” in *Mapping Intermediality in Performance*, Bay-Cheng (S.), Kattenbelt (C.), Lavender (A.), Nelson (R.) (eds.), Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010 p.47

⁹⁰ Ermi (L.) and Mäyrä (F.) “Fundamental Components of the Gameplay Experience: Analysing Immersion”, p.1

something while not being in the flow of it⁹¹

1.4.2. Flow

“Flow” is a common state of consciousness characterized as an ‘optimal experience’, explored in depth by Mihaly Csikszentmihaly⁹². He described it as a deep sense of enjoyment achieved when a person’s skills match the difficulties of a challenge in an activity; what occurs is a joyful and creative “total involvement in life” as the person becomes so engaged in the activity so that actions become generated automatically, while the awareness of the self as a separate being from the performed activity is lost⁹³. “Flow” experiences proceed spontaneously and are characterized by a distortion of time; they are conditions of consciousness in which concentration maintains a balance in the relation between challenge and skill that leads to feelings of inner enjoyment when the goals of the activity are clear⁹⁴. “Flow” occurs during engagement to imaginative activities like performing (dancing or playing a musical instrument), listening to music, playing a video game, watching a film or a theatrical play etc. In addition, the concept of “flow” can be broadened to also refer to states that occur during volitional imagination techniques when the intention/goal of the activity is clear and when feelings of deep enjoyment arise from it.

1.5. States of Transcendence

“States of transcendence” refer to consciousness conditions during which someone experiences a state of being that is in some sense superior to ordinary existence⁹⁵. They are accompanied by wonderful feelings of joy, of completion and of self-validation and are often interpreted as ‘spiritual’ or ‘mystical’. Sometimes they occur spontaneously when, for

⁹¹ Jennett (C.) et al. “Measuring and defining the experience of immersion in games”, *Int. J. Human-Computer Studies*, 66:9, 2008, 641-661 p.642-643

⁹² Csikszentmihaly (M.) *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, New York: Harper Perennial, 1990

⁹³ *Ibid.* p.xi

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* p.50-54

⁹⁵ Baruss (I.) *Alterations of Consciousness* p.187

example, during states of “flow” or “peak” experiences, as in the case of orgasm. “Paranormal” experiences with positive effects, as well as states of ‘trance’ and ‘ecstasy’ may also be included in this category, while alterations of consciousness under the influence of ‘psychedelics’ are often regarded by the subjects as being transcendental.

1.5.1. Trance and Ecstasy

“Trance” and “ecstasy” are states of consciousness both devoid of clear definition and in many cases identified as being identical. “Trance”, for example, subsumes a variety of different psychological phenomena; it refers to states of consciousness in which the appearance of awareness is present but characterized by involuntarily behavior and decreased environmental responsiveness, a definition that exhibits striking similarities to the “hypnotic” condition, while “trance” is characterized by a greater degree of absorption and intensity in aspects of alternative reality⁹⁶. Some persons may enter a “trance” spontaneously and some may be manipulated into it. In indigenous societies it is often associated with states of ‘possession’ or ‘enthusiasm’ and with states of “ecstasy”. “Ecstasy” derives from the Greek word ‘ekstasis’ (ἐκστασις), meaning ‘entrancement’, ‘astonishment’ or ‘displacement’. Gilbert Rouget defined “ecstasy” as a particular altered state attained in silence, immobility and solitude while “trance” as a state obtained by means of noise, agitation and in the presence of others; he used both terms in his research interchangeably⁹⁷. Both can occur spontaneously or be induced through different means, media and techniques including among others meditation, chanting, dancing, listening to (repetitive) music, visualizing, breathing, consuming psychoactive substances etc.

⁹⁶ Baruss (I.) *Alterations of Consciousness* p.110

⁹⁷ Rouget (G.) *Music and Trance: A Theory of the Relations between Music and Possession*, Biebuyck (B.) (trans.), Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985 p.7

1.5.2. Mystical Experiences

In the process of conducting research on experiences with psychedelics during the 1960's Walter Pahnke analyzed the literature concerning "mystical" experiences and identified nine core characteristics that appeared to be independent of cultural interpretations⁹⁸. They are: 1) unity (internal or external, in any case characterized by overcoming duality and sense of Oneness, Wholeness or Completeness), 2) noetic quality (direct insight into the nature of being, in the sense that mystical experiences reveal an otherwise *hidden or inaccessible knowledge*), 3) transcendence of space-time, 4) transiency (the experience lasts for a relatively brief period of time), 5) *ineffability* (inability to capture and articulate the experience in ordinary language), 6) sense of sacredness (intuitive response in the presence of inspiring qualities), 7) deeply felt positive mood, 8) paradoxicality, and 9) positive change in attitude and behavior (transformation)⁹⁹. Drawing on classic studies of William James, F.C. Happold and on personal experiences, Douglas W. Shrader identified and explored seven characteristics of mystical experiences, the five first of them been identical to Pahnke's findings¹⁰⁰. Shrader does not include sense of sacredness, positive mood, paradoxicality and positive change; instead he inserts 'passivity' in the sense that "mystical" experiences are felt as happening to somebody independently of human control and volitions; and the feeling that one has somehow encountered "the True Self" (revelation of the nature of the True, Cosmic Self)¹⁰¹. If someone feels that he has encountered "the True Self", then a sense of sacredness, deep feelings of positive mood and transformation can occur more easily, while the sense of paradoxicality may be overcome if someone abandons the ideology of instrumental causality and experiences life more intuitively, emotionally and multi-cognitively with an open mind.

⁹⁸ As summarized in Baruss (I.) *Alterations of Consciousness* p.189- 190

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Shrader (D.W.) "Seven Characteristics of Mystical Experiences" in *Proceedings of the 6th Annual Hawaii International Conference on Arts and Humanities*. Honolulu, HI, 2008 p.1-28

¹⁰¹ Ibid. p.1

2. Alterations of Consciousness and Gnosis

2.1. Reason, Faith, Gnosis

Wouter J. Hanegraaff in his article “Reason, Faith, Gnosis: Potentials and Problematics of a Typological construct” argued for the existence of three kinds of knowledge: one based on ‘faith’, the other based on ‘reason’, and the third based on ‘gnosis’¹⁰². Hanegraaff became inspired by the Dutch specialist on ancient Gnosticism Gilles Quispel who in the late 1980’s argued that in Western cultural tradition there exist three currents: one based on ‘faith’ emphasized by churches and theologies, the other based on ‘reason’ through the scientific and philosophical traditions and one based on ‘gnosis’, a superior spiritual wisdom, which has been suppressed and marginalized by the other two¹⁰³. Hanegraaff proposed that ‘reason’, ‘faith’ and ‘gnosis’ should be understood as three kinds of knowledge existing in Western tradition but which nevertheless should not be confused with specific historical currents and authors, as the three types of knowledge have co-existed and still co-exist simultaneously in different traditions, be they theological, scientific- philosophical or esoteric¹⁰⁴. More specifically the three kinds of knowledge can be differentiated by two basic questions: can these claims of knowledge be verified by others, and can they be communicated to others? The type of knowledge based on ‘reason’ provides affirmative answers to both questions. If someone says that there is someone in the next room, it is easy to go and check the validity of the claim; the claim is also communicated verbally in the first place. But in the case of knowledge claims based on ‘faith’, although they can be communicated in language, they cannot be verified; for example, nobody can actually check if Moses really received the Ten Commandments from God on Mount Sinai, although the Ten Commandments themselves are

¹⁰² Hanegraaff (W.J.) “Reason, Faith, Gnosis: Potentials and Problematics of a Typological Construct” in *Clashes of Knowledge: Orthodoxies and Heterodoxies in Science and Religion*, Meusburger (P.), Welker (M.), Wunder (E.) (eds.), Netherlands: Springer, 2008, 133-144 p.133

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p.138

communicated to humanity in written form and preached by the church father to be obeyed as being the True Law. Finally, the third kind of knowledge, the one based on ‘gnosis’, cannot be checked by others and its contents cannot be communicated to others either; but they are considered to be of the outmost importance by those who have received it¹⁰⁵.

To understand what “gnosis” is it is necessary to differentiate it from ‘Gnosticism’, a Christian dualistic religion of the Hellenistic culture in late antiquity, which was perceived and declared by polemics of the church fathers of the time as a “heresy”¹⁰⁶. “Gnosis” referred to the attainment of knowledge of salvation by which the human soul could be liberated from its material entanglement and become united once again with the divine Mind¹⁰⁷. The attainment of “gnosis” was central to Gnosticism but it was not limited to the Gnostics. It seems to have been the central pre-occupation of a kind of trans- confessional cultic milieu that flourished particularly in Egypt, and whose adherents during the Hellenistic period interpreted Platonism in a way that transformed it into a religious world-view with its own mythologies and ritual practices¹⁰⁸. It should be also noted that the seekers of “gnosis” at that time did not believe that Plato’s teachings were original, but they considered him an important link in the chain of transmission of an ancient and universal spiritual wisdom grounded in much more ancient religious traditions of people in the Orient, particularly Persians, Egyptians or Hebrews. This widespread understanding of Platonism is known as “Platonic Orientalism” and can be traced back in traditions like Gnosticism, Hermeticism and Theurgy¹⁰⁹. In the context of “Platonic Orientalism”, human beings were thought to have fallen - as the myth of the charioteer in Plato’s Phaedrus also suggests - from the spiritual Divine and the Plain of Truth to the earthly material world, from which they can ascend back

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. p.139

¹⁰⁶ Hanegraaff (W.J.) *Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed*, London: Bloomsbury Press, 2012, p.23

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. p.22

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid p.22-24

to the heavens and be reborn again as divine beings¹¹⁰. This is because humans possess some kind of a ‘divine spark’ in their souls, which it can be further enhanced and cultivated to gain unity with the Absolute divine *in this life*, through a practice known as “mysticism”¹¹¹. The revival of “Platonic Orientalism” in the West has been engendered since the 15th century after the import and subsequent translation from Byzantium to Italy of a corpus of ancient Greek manuscripts, including among others the ‘Corpus Hermeticum’, Plato’s and Aristotle’s texts and the theurgical ‘Chaldaean Oracles’¹¹². The willingness of Christian intellectuals of the time to learn and incorporate into their theological and philosophical frameworks elements from these ancient pagan sources and the newly discovered ‘Jewish Kabbalah’, enabled the compiling of the basic referential corpus of what is called “Western Esotericism”¹¹³.

The label “Western Esotericism” refers to a modern scholarly construct for studying a radically pluralistic field of currents, ideas, and practices in Western culture that display specific similarities and are historically related, extending from late antiquity to present day and which, after the time of Enlightenment, has been officially denigrated as ‘rejected knowledge’¹¹⁴. “Western Esotericism” involves the search for salvation and knowledge of divine realities through “gnostic” experiences, as well as the study of nature and its hidden or secret laws and dynamics¹¹⁵. Relevant domains of study are those of magic, astrology and alchemy, while the study of the modernist occult (a phenomenon of the 19th century that produced innovative mixtures between esotericism and modern rationalist and scientific ideas) and a number of contemporary ‘spiritualities’ like the “New Age movement”, “Neo-Paganism” or “the Psychedelic Trance culture” through the lenses of “entheogenic

¹¹⁰ Ibid. p.79. In this myth the soul is of a tripartite nature consisting of the charioteer, and two horses, the bad and the good. Before it became incarnated in the human body, the soul, with its wings, contemplated the true being in the plain of Truth, which lies beyond the heavens, where the Gods live. Plato *Phaedrus* 245c-250a

¹¹¹ Hanegraaff (W.J.) *Western Esotericism* p.80-81

¹¹² Ibid. p.29-30

¹¹³ Ibid. p.29

¹¹⁴ Ibid. p.16

¹¹⁵ Ibid. p.25

esotericism” that involves the consumption of ‘sacred plants’ or ‘psychoactive substances’, constitute further thematics of “Western Esotericism” and are of specific interest for this analysis¹¹⁶.

2.2. Mysticism and Esotericism

Before I continue to consider “gnosis” in relation to alterations of consciousness in the context of “Western Esotericism” for understanding its values and methods for its induction, it would be useful to differentiate between the terms ‘mysticism’ and ‘esotericism’ to the extent that this is possible, as both terms are very much related and confused with each other for a number of reasons. Etymologically ‘mysticism’ arises from “mu”, referring to a closed mouth, from which derives “mustes” meaning “mystes”, the initiated one, he who keeps his lips sealed; “musterion” refers to the initiation cult related to secrecy and to the hidden; in the context of Christianity it also refers to the manifestation of the divine plan of salvation in Jesus Christ comprehended by means superior to natural knowledge, revealed through mystical and allegorical interpretation of the texts (contemplative methods) comprising the discursive description of visions and events. It also refers to religious and liturgical elements, while during the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE the Christian Church fathers played an instrumental in shifting the meaning from the hidden to the ineffable¹¹⁷. After the 16th and 17th centuries

¹¹⁶ I need to clarify what is defined as **religion, a religion and a spirituality** in my general approach. According to Hanegraaff, “religion” is any *symbolic system* which influences human action by providing possibilities for ritually maintaining contact between the everyday world and a more general meta-empirical framework of meaning. “A religion” refers to religion, which has taken the form of a *social institution*. “A spirituality” refers to any human *practice* which maintains contact between the everyday world and a more general meta-empirical framework of meaning by way of the *individual* manipulation of symbolic systems. Hanegraaff (W.J.) “New Age Religion and Secularization” in *Numen*, 47, Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2000, 288-312, p.294-296

¹¹⁷ Rousse- Lacordaire (J.) “Mysticism” in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, 818-820 p.818. “Cult” can be defined as a religious movement with very loose organization, shaped by the individuals themselves, who decide what they will or will not believe. Cults do not claim unique access to truth and their spirituality is self-oriented, eclectic and epistemologically individualistic, although there is a significance influence of a cultic organization. Cult religiosity and mysticism as religions exhibit conceptual similarities but they are not the same. Partridge (C.) *The Re-Enchantment of the West: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture and Occulture*, vol. I, London / New York: T & T Clark, 2005, p.25-26, 62

the term ‘mysticism’ appeared designating a total “unitive experience of the intimate presence of God in Man” while the term “mystic” was used to characterize the person enjoying this experience¹¹⁸. In addition, and according to Ernst Troeltsch as explained in Partridge’s “The Re-enchantment of the West” ‘mysticism’ can also be defined as a kind of religion lacking an organized social structure and giving emphasis to direct interior and individualist experience of the divine¹¹⁹; it is religion based on epistemological individualism and it is experiential and relational¹²⁰. From this perspective it seems that mystics seek the experience of “gnosis”, and because the term “mystical” is problematic, having a history in theology and religion carrying established connotations for potential misinterpretation, in a general sense, and for my purposes, “mystical experiences” will be regarded as referring to the Absolute Union with the Divine¹²¹.

The term “esoteric” first appeared in the 2nd century CE in a satire by Lucian of Samosata, while it was Clement of Alexandria who associated it with secrecy¹²². The term was applied in the 3rd century CE to the pupils of Pythagoras referring to secret teachings reserved for a mystic elite, and this usage continued until the 18th century, denoting things obscure, hidden or uncommon, orally transmitted by the Ancients to an elite¹²³. During the 18th century the substantive “esotericism” appeared used initially as a scholarly label applied a posteriori to certain religious developments in the context of early Christianity, such as Gnosticism, and appropriated later by specific authors and currents as a self-designation defined according to individual preferences and agendas¹²⁴. From a typological point of view and in the context of religious studies, ‘esoteric’ and ‘esotericism’ can be understood in two ways: first, as

¹¹⁸ Rousse- Lacordaire (J.) “Mysticism” (818-820) p.818

¹¹⁹ Cited in Partridge (C.) *The Re- Enchantment of the West*, vol. I, p.20-21

¹²⁰ Ibid. p.21

¹²¹ Ibid. p.67, Rousse- Lacordaire (J.) “Mysticism” (818-820) p.819

¹²² Hanegraaff (W.J.) “Esotericism” in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, 336- 340, p.336

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid. p.337

referring to certain types of religious activity, characterized by specific structural features, related to the notion of secrecy and to the practice in various religious contexts for reserving certain kinds of salvific knowledge (“gnosis”) for a selected elite of initiated disciples; and second, as referring to a structural, inner dimension of religion as its “true core” opposed to its merely exoteric and superficial dimensions, such as its social institutions and the official dogmas¹²⁵. From a historical point of view, ‘esotericism’ is better referred to as “Western Esotericism”¹²⁶. Although emphasis on secrecy is found to exist in some of those currents, it does not exist in all of them and thus it cannot be regarded as a determining factor for designating them as ‘esoteric’¹²⁷.

“Mysticism” and “esotericism” exhibit similarities and in many cases they are used interchangeably. Their commonalities are found in: “the primacy of experience and inner transformation, the quest for unity, and the claim that the very heart of religion will be revealed only by going beyond rational discursivity”¹²⁸. What differentiates them are the degrees of experience of the divine realms - the degrees of contact with the worlds beyond-, consisting for the esotericists of ‘intermediary realities’ which they seek to access through different means and techniques including magic, alchemy, astrology etc, while the mystics seek for the “Ultimate Union with the Divine” after transcending those intermediary realms¹²⁹. In this respect, psychedelic trance culture is an esoteric movement that in a New Age context that considers humans as divine beings, the pursue of the ultimate sense/feeling of oneness places it in the context of mysticism, too.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Hanegraaff (W.J.) *Western Esotericism* p.16

¹²⁷ Hanegraaff(W.J.) “Esotericism”(336- 340) p.338

¹²⁸ Rousse- Lacordaire (J.) “Mysticism” (818-820) p.818-819

¹²⁹ Ibid.

2.2.1. Technognosis

At this point, I would like to explain why I prefer mostly the use of “gnostic” experiences instead of “mystical” experiences in respect to what occurs in the stage of the psychedelic trance culture. Psychedelic trance has been characterized as being a “techno-mystical” movement, for the reasons mentioned above and because the illegal use of psychedelic substances induces an attitude emerging mainly from fear towards the secrecy of its methods and beliefs¹³⁰. But on the other hand, the intention of psychedelic trance gatherings for achieving transgression on a collective/communal level - as explained in the next chapter - through the symbolic use of *media, art and performance*, further points to the pursue of gnosis. “Technognosis” involves several characteristics. First of all the term itself invokes connotations with what Erik Davis theorized as “techgnosis”, a concept based on the promise of information technology for ‘salvation from materiality’ and self-divination, in the context of a contemporary Gnostic (from Gnosticism) worldview. Cyberspace and the Internet have offered a vast space of incorporeal possibilities, invested and understood in terms of religious myth, mysticism and esotericism, driven by libertarian ideas appearing in extreme forms as ‘extropianism’ - an optimistic worldview that relies the future evolution of humanity towards immortality on the advancement of computational technology. From this perspective, information technology is thought to blend the limits between the spiritual and the material facilitating possibilities for “gnosis” through the use of the evolutionary potential of technology¹³¹.

¹³⁰ St John (G.) and Baldini (C.) “Dancing at the Crossroads of Consciousness: Techno-Mysticism, Visionary Arts and Portugal’s Boom Festival” in *Handbook of New Religions and Cultural Production*, Cusack (C.M.) and Norman (A.) (eds.), Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012, 521–552, p.552

¹³¹ Davis (E.) *Techgnosis: Myths, Martyrs and Mysticism in the Age of Information*

“Technognosis” entails Davis’ conception of “techgnosis” in the sense that information/media technology is regarded as offering possibilities of “gnosis” because technology – derived from the Greek word “τέχνη”- is conceived as a means for revealing *hidden* aspects of the world. “Τέχνη” (techni) in Greek also means “art”, art understood again as a means for revealing hidden aspects of reality. In this respect, the term ‘techno’ of “technognosis” refers to the capacity of technology and art to bring into surface/ consciousness hidden aspects of reality. Furthermore, information technology and art are characterized as being “media”; the term medium signifying a middle, an interval and an interspace through which information flows, denoting the communicative aspect of information technology and art¹³². In this respect, “technognosis” further includes the possibility for communicating gnosis. As explained in chapter II, media such as the book or music have been used and considered by different traditions as having the capacity to also induce gnostic experiences. As I will argue, “gnostic” experiences can range from aesthetic experiences and important moments of self-understanding in relation to the rest of life, to experiences that can be perceived as the ultimate union with the divine. In my view, there exist *levels/degrees/hierarchies* of “gnostic” experiences or gnosis, the contents of which, perceived as entailing spiritual truth, can be articulated, at least to some degree, through different artistic and technological media in symbolic forms for facilitating a “glimpse” of the inexpressible, as the Romantic Tradition had also suggested.

Furthermore, “technognosis” involves the notion of “τεχνογνωσία”, which in Greek signifies the sum or a part of notions, knowledge and experiences of indispensable elaborations or methods for the production of something. In other words, it signifies the ‘know-how’ for realizing a specific outcome through the manipulation of methods and techniques, which in

¹³² Elleström (L.) “The Modalities of Media: A Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations” in *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, Elleström (L.) (ed.), Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010, 11-48 p. 13

relation to “technognosis” refers to the manipulation of artistic and technological media for the facilitation of “gnostic” experiences. Central to this is the use of psychedelic substances as a kind of ‘sacred’ or ‘spiritual’ technologies, too. Thus, “technognosis” includes the revelation, articulation, evocation and facilitation through media (technological, artistic and spiritual) of different levels/degrees/hierarchies of “gnosis” and “gnostic” experiences.

As I will demonstrate in chapter III, in the stage of the psychedelic trance gatherings the participants are experiencing collective “gnostic” experiences, which involve different degrees of engagement, intensity and meaning according to the individual. The idea of “technognosis” in contrast to the term “techno-mystical” involves the articulation and facilitation of “gnostic” experiences through technology and art; it entails the *communication* of gnosis through different means and techniques experienced directly, while it seems to me that ‘mystical’ experiences are intentionally obscuring or avoiding articulating, or prohibiting the articulation of the experience itself. In addition, in psychedelic trance culture, apart from the influence of ideas from “Entheogenic esotericism” and Neoshamanism exemplified in Terence Mckenna’s theories, New Age, Neo/Techno-pagan, Technoshamanic and Romantic worldviews and practices are central; all these further fused in the context of “occulture”. New Age spiritualities have emerged from esoteric traditions and regard human beings and nature as expressions of the Divine Intelligence, seeking for experiential contact (gnosis) with the hidden realms of the world or the inner Higher Self through higher levels of awareness in an often ‘monistic’ context. In this respect, the divine and living matter are already united. Thus, an ultimate union with the divine is not the end goal as there exists no separation in the first place; the goal is to become aware of this reality. On the other hand and in my view, in mysticism the goal for ultimate union with God that ‘should be kept secret’ reveals an agenda that gives power to individuals for manipulating knowledge by assuming the roles of the gate-

keepers of the divine truths granted to them. There is a difference between keeping the contents of this knowledge hidden for your own agenda, and keeping them secret because the rest of society has discarded them as “rejected knowledge”, or because the dominant religious institution has declared the search for gnosis through esoteric practices as “heresy” or the use of psychedelics illegal. In every case, the difference is found in the intention of each individual for the attainment of gnosis and in how anyone intends to use the superior knowledge granted to them. And the gnostic experience of Oneness cannot but entail ethical implications that point to taking responsibility and contributing in the evolution of our species.

2.3. Gnosis and Alterations of Consciousness in the Study of Western Esotericism

Having said that, it is now possible to examine some practices and techniques used in different western esoteric traditions for the attainment of gnosis as the direct experience of the realms of light, culminating in gnostic experiences that involve characteristics of what have been described as mystical experiences¹³³. It should be noted that over the centuries gnosis has come to be understood differently in different traditions, and in different scholarly contexts and here it will be approached as a special kind of knowledge experienced directly and multi-cognitively in altered states of consciousness according to its contemporary conception. I do that in order to underline and support the choice of methods used by psychedelic trance culture by pointing to the long tradition of knowledge and usage of these methods.

¹³³ In the study of texts that come from these different traditions, the inadequacy of verbal language to grasp the mysteries of divinity is emphasized, and what is described instead of the contents of gnosis are narratives of how this superior knowledge can be attained. Hanegraaff (W.J.)“Altered States of Knowledge: The Attainment of Gnosis in the Hermetica” in *The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition*, 2, 2008 p.128-163 ??

2.3.1. Hermeticism

In the Hermetic Tradition, which is studied through the Corpus Hermeticum, a collection of texts and a product of Greek - Egyptian syncretism written in the 2nd century C.E. which was for centuries believed to have been written by the mythic figure of Hermes Trismegistus in the very ancient past, gnosis is the end goal and ultimate experience for the spiritual seeker¹³⁴. As Hanegraaff points out, in CH_IX it is argued that that reason and faith are necessary ‘*prolegomena*’ for the attainment of gnosis but the actual gnostic experience, which represents the culmination of the different successive levels of spiritual enlightenment, is regarded as being a gift from God and its contents can only be beheld directly by the individual by some faculty beyond the senses and reason¹³⁵. The pupil who wants to attain gnosis must quiet the mind and come to a trance-like state in order to see with the higher faculty of sight, the eyes of the heart, the divine light; and while in a state of mania (madness), which is a state of ecstasy, to experience his own mind as divine¹³⁶. In CH I this state of ecstasy or mania is regarded as a higher state of consciousness, as in Plato’s Phaedrus, compared with soberness and clarity in contrast to the normal waking state that is compared with drunkenness and sleep¹³⁷. Furthermore, the attainment of gnosis requires the suppression of all the bodily senses in absolute stillness, in other words a specific ‘altered state of consciousness’ accompanied by a temporal suppression of normal sensory activity, in order to perceive progressively more exalted dimensions of reality beyond what is accessible to the five senses¹³⁸. Through gnosis, the Hermetic devotee could transcend rational understanding and worldly attachments and find salvation (liberation) and ultimate release (transformation)

¹³⁴ Ibid. p.135

¹³⁵ CH_ IX as explained in Hanegraaff (W.J.) “Reason, Faith, Gnosis” (133-144) p.140

¹³⁶ Hanegraaff (W.J.) “Altered States of Knowledge” (128-163) p.138- 144

¹³⁷ Ibid. p.142

¹³⁸ Hanegraaff (W.J.) “Reason, Faith, Gnosis” (133-144) p.140 -141

through blissful unity with the supreme powers of divine light¹³⁹.

2.3.2 Ecstatic Kabbalah

In the methods developed in the 13th century by the Jewish mystic Abraham Abulafia, known as “ecstatic Kabbalah” for attaining superior knowledge, we find a combination of techniques for entering ecstatic states of consciousness. Gnosis comes in the form of *vision* through a recitation and combination of the Divine Names in accordance with specific breathing techniques, bodily movements like the shaking of one’s head, movements of the hands and inner persistent visualizations – imaginings of the Letters of the Divine Name¹⁴⁰. After specific preparations (ritual acts) that include finding a specific place, lightening candles, acts of purification and a process of adornment, the pupil must implore God to appear and concentrate all his efforts through the aforementioned techniques on achieving the total union between his intellect and the Supreme Being¹⁴¹. Ritualistic and performative acts, as well as the intention of the person are the main components for achieving ecstasy through intense concentration on a number of activities preventing the mind of thinking of anything else, a method that is different from meditative techniques for relaxing consciousness by means of concentration on a specific point or matter¹⁴². Intense concentration and the repetitive combination of bodily movements lead to altered state of consciousness.

2.3.3. Marsilio Ficino and Divine Madness

In his commentary on Plato’s dialogue *Ion* (dated between 1464 -1466 C.E) Marsilio Ficino, the Florentine Neoplatonist, priest, scholar, magus and musician of the 15th century, who translated the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the dialogues of Plato, in their entirety, into Latin, thus

¹³⁹ Hanegraaff (W.J.) *Western Esotericism* p. 23

¹⁴⁰ Idel (M.) *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988, p.14,24-37

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* p.13,38-39

¹⁴² *Ibid.* p.40

triggering the revival of Platonic Orientalism in the West, ranked the four types of Platonic madness in a hierarchical order in proposing a method for healing the human soul ¹⁴³. In Ficino's view, the invocation of the four types of madness correspond to four phases of the soul's therapy, culminating in the unity of the soul with its divine source; thus, the whole therapy could be conceived as an "ecstatic altered state of consciousness" on its own; achieved after invoking different alterations in consciousness. In later Renaissance thinkers, Hermetic religiosity and the Platonic frenzies were associated with one another to a point of virtual identity; although the term gnosis was never used, its signification as a kind of supra-rational ecstatic knowledge became an important theme, rendering the survival of gnosis incognito¹⁴⁴.

Ficino defines divine madness as that which can re-elevate the soul back to the heights and unite it with the divine source. At first, the soul's parts must be harmonized through the evocation of the poetic frenzy achieved by means of musical tones¹⁴⁵. Through listening to music, an alteration in consciousness will be achieved corresponding to the condition of poetic madness.

At the second step, the telestic frenzy is evoked for focusing the attention of all the parts of the soul on the mind that worships the divine¹⁴⁶. By means of rituals, acts of purification, ceremonies of worship and other kinds of sacred rites, the parts of the soul are directed to the divine¹⁴⁷. But a third frenzy is needed in addition, the prophetic one, through which the mind is led to the unity itself by means of the divinely gifted ability to see the future; but this unity,

¹⁴³ Hanegraaff (W.J.) *Western Esotericism* p.30-31. Allen (M.J.B.) "The Soul as Rhapsode: Marsilio Ficino's Interpretation of Plato's Ion" in *Plato's Third Eye: Studies in Marsilio Ficino's Metaphysics and its Sources*, Norfolk: Variorum Collected Studies Series, 1995, chapter XV, 125-148 p. 127

¹⁴⁴ Hanegraaff (W.J.) "Gnosis" forthcoming in *The Cambridge Companion to Western Mysticism and Esotericism*, Magee (G.A.) (ed.) Cambridge University Press 2013, p4-5

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. p.198-199

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. p.199

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

which as a potential exists in the soul's essence and has now been realized, must be converted into unity with the divine source. This is done through the amatory madness; that is through love, which is characterized by the desire for divine beauty and for the good¹⁴⁸. Like Plato, Ficino regards love as the condition that unites the soul with its true origin, a condition that can be achieved through the contemplation of earthly beauty and good that reflect and thus remind the soul of the true beauty and true good that exist in the plain of Truth¹⁴⁹. As we will see, in the stage of the psychedelic trance culture the evocation of the four kinds of the platonic frenzies result to a collective altered state of consciousness (the mystical experience), too, that between other, facilitates the healing of the soul.

2.3.4. Mesmerism

After the 18th century, esotericism as the “occult” began to emerge as a social phenomenon in its own right; it took the form of actual organizations and social networks that started to compete with the established churches of traditional Christianity and Enlightenment rationalism, by proposing a third way, “occultism”, which advanced in different forms¹⁵⁰. In this context the attainment of superior knowledge through different states of consciousness constituted the alternative to strict rationalism and blind faith. Origins of the occult are found in Frans Anton Mesmer's (1734-1815) theory of practice and healing called “mesmerism” or “animal magnetism”, influenced by the first tentative theories of electricity and magnetism, through which it was possible, as Marquis de Puysegur discovered, to induce trance-like or artificial sleep-like states, during which the ‘somnabulists’ claimed to experience spectacular

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ In ancient Greek the word «κάλος» signifies the beautiful and the good which are conceived as being united. So the encounter with beauty is an encounter with the good at the same time. In addition, Ficino approached Plato from the perspective of a *prisca theologia*, which allowed the syncretism of ancient Greek philosophy with Christian beliefs. Prins (J.W) *Echoes of an Invisible World: Marsilio Ficino and Francesco Patrizi on Cosmic Order and Music Theory*, Netherlands: Prins (J.W.), 2009 p. 16-17

¹⁵⁰ Examples include the Theosophical Society, the Anthroposophical Society, spiritualism and magical currents such as The hermetic order of the Golden Dawn, Aleister Crowley and George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff. Hanegraaff (W.J) *Western Esotericism* p.11,42,44-45

visions of invisible spiritual realms and their inhabitants¹⁵¹. This phenomenon was dubbed “artificial somnambulism” from which around the mid 19th century ‘hypnosis’ developed, as a practice inspired by magnetism, but with a more limited conception of its effects and operation¹⁵². In the context of German *Romantic* Mesmerism, these spiritual realms were conceived as belonging to the “Nightside of Nature”, because illumination could be found in the dark realm of sleep and dream, an idea that triggered the study and conceptualization of what is now known as the “unconscious”, developed through experimental psychological investigation¹⁵³. In addition, magnetism influenced the development of “spiritualism” in Europe and America, in which the induction of a somnambulant trance could bring the ‘medium’ in contact with the invisible world. From there, interest in “psychical research” developed, a domain of inquiry now known as parapsychology, dealing with paranormal phenomena¹⁵⁴.

2.3.5. Witchcraft - Paganism

The occult continued to spread after the 19th century comprising post-WWII spiritualities and worldviews, which have been said to constitute a ‘cultic milieu’ or an “occulture”. Occulture as a contemporary phenomenon, refers to the existence to individuals, groups and a number of contemporary spiritualities involved in occult, hidden, rejected and oppositional practices and beliefs concerned with arcane knowledge that contradict the accepted worldviews and rules of the dominant ideologies, giving an emphasis to immediate religious experience (gnosis) and

¹⁵¹Meheust (B) “Animal magnetism” in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, 76-82 p.76-77,

Hanegraaff (W.J.) “Gnosis” p.8

¹⁵² Meheust (B) “Animal magnetism” (76-82) p.79

¹⁵³ Carl Jung and his school developed out of this context; Romanticism re-formulated the esoteric tradition as it was influenced by esoteric ideas in first place, triggering a revival of esotericism but with a difference.

Hanegraaff (W.J.) *Western Esotericism: A Guide to the Perplexed* p. 42. McCalla (A.) “Romanticism” in

Hanegraaff (W.J.), Faivre (A.), Van de Broek (R.), Brach (J.P.) *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, 1000-1007 p.1007

¹⁵⁴ Meheust (B.) “Animal magnetism” (76-82) p.79, Hanegraaff (W.J.) *Western Esotericism: A Guide to the Perplexed* p.41-42

to particular monistic cosmologies, anthropologies and theologies¹⁵⁵. As the term designates, the occult is becoming popular so as to form an ‘occulture’, something evident in popular media contents that express and are also formative of this culture¹⁵⁶.

As a good example to aid understanding some occultural techniques for contacting the invisible realms and the performative aspect of them, I will now refer to the specific phenomenon of neo-paganism, as experienced and studied by Tanya M. Luhrmann in the English covens of Wicca, or the Old Religion of Witchcraft¹⁵⁷. During the 1960’s, Wicca spread in the US taking new forms and being interpreted by feminist activists as a Goddess Religion¹⁵⁸. In Wiccan rituals the participants claim to practice magic using different techniques for accessing different planes of reality and separate worlds. These include intense meditation and visualization techniques for engaging in “fictional” worlds based on vague ideas about the power of imagination and the physical plane of reality¹⁵⁹. They also include chanting (sound), incense, symbols and slow, rhythmic dancing which all combined together may have significant effects on the performers trying to enter an altered state of consciousness; especially when enhanced with theatrical-performative- ritualistic elements for suspending disbelief and experiencing a situation placed outside this world¹⁶⁰. The magician who performs the ritual acts out and describes an altered space-time, while all the performers of the ritual perform a separate identity from the one they use in everyday life; the separate space is theatrically re-created as a “magic circle”, while name changes. Costumes, speaking

¹⁵⁵ Partridge (C.) *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, vol. I, p.61,67,68. The term ‘cultic milieu’ was proposed by Colin Cambell and broadened by Partridge recently as “occulture”, to include not only cult and mystical religiosity but the combination of a number of subcultures who are influenced by media, esotericism, theosophy, mysticism, New Age, Paganism and psychedelics and connected after the 1960’s with the countercultural movement. Hanegraaff (W.J.) *Western Esotericism* p.30

¹⁵⁶ Partridge (C.) *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, vol. I p. 123 (I consider the relation of media and occulture in chapter II)

¹⁵⁷ Luhrmann (T.) *Persuasion’s of the Witch’s Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England*, Cambridge Mas: Harvard University Press, 1989

¹⁵⁸ Hanegraaff (W.J.) *Western Esotericism* p. 47

¹⁵⁹ Luhrmann (T.) *Persuasion’s of the Witch’s Craft* p.311-312,221

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p.221-222

in a different language, realistic narratives and a conscious theatricality contribute to a deeper imaginative involvement in the experience¹⁶¹. The goal of the ritual depends on intention, and is structured in such a way as to have certain effects on the participants who experience unusual emotional, spiritual and psychological feelings during the performance of the rites¹⁶². It employs a form of “technology of the sacred”, involving liminal practices for the transformation of identity and “serious play”, comprising intellect and involvement in a vivid imaginative experience in altered realities and consciousness states induced by acting out a complex set of imaginative phantasies¹⁶³. From a performative point of view, these rituals contain characteristics of play, carnival, theatre in an intentional context enhanced by techniques for evoking alterations of consciousness in a serious context, where the lack of belief is not a barrier to mental involvement judged at the level of its efficacy (Schechner)¹⁶⁴.

3. Alterations of Consciousness and Psychedelics

3.1. The Witches’ Sabbath

Adding to the analysis the use of psychedelic plants or entheogens in inducing alterations of consciousness and facilitating the potential for gnosis, I now turn from the witches of today to the witches of the transition between late medieval times and the Renaissance, who were put on trial, tortured, drawn and burnt by the Inquisition accused of flying through the air on broomsticks and engaging at orgies with demons during the Sabbaths. Investigations of the time, studies in alterations of consciousness since the 1960’s and the recent opening of the Inquisition archives have pointed out that women of the time accused of witchcraft, anointed their bodies with ointments made from hallucinogenic plants and brews, such as mandrake (Mandragora), Datura, henbane (Hyoscyamus) and belladonna or deadly nightshade (Atropa

¹⁶¹ Ibid. p.225-227,229

¹⁶² Ibid. p.221

¹⁶³ Ibid. p.230,327,336

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. p.208-213

Belladonna)¹⁶⁵. These plants contain different qualities of atropine, an alkaloid that can be absorbed through intact skin and produces hallucinogenic effects¹⁶⁶. The effects of these plants have been well documented in Giambattista della Porta's Eight Book of Natural Magic: Of Physical Experiments (*Magia Naturalis*) published in the second half of the 16th century, designating mandrake and belladonna as medicines that can induce sleep or send someone out his senses for a day to experience a "pleasant kind of madness" and see "delightful visions"¹⁶⁷. The witches' potions, filter's and magic ointments were prepared out of these plants, sending users on a journey, "a trip", to a rendezvous with spirits, demons and the other witches at the "Sabbath" after falling into deep sleep; in other words, they entered an altered state of consciousness similar to deep sleep, which lasted many hours, and during which they were mentally carried on – sometimes by the Devil as was thought- to a meeting place in which sexual sensations were freely and intensively experienced¹⁶⁸. The witches of the time, women and men, experienced the whole trip so vividly that after coming back to waking consciousness, they believed -and were prepared to confess - that they had actually participated in the Sabbaths. The broomstick probably served as an applicator for the ointment in sensitive areas, providing the suggestion of riding a steed, an illusion that symbolized the journey to the Sabbath and a symbol of the erotic-sexual nature of the whole experience¹⁶⁹. Researchers and scholars of the 20th century have re-created the witches' potions; they tried them and have reported experiencing dreams in which they were flying, dancing and participating in frenzied, medieval type orgies¹⁷⁰. Practices with hallucinogens have a long history in both the New and Old Worlds, while during medieval and early modern times they seem to have been widespread in a heterogeneous cultural milieu - in Mediterranean,

¹⁶⁵ Harner (J.M.) "The Role of Hallucinogenic Plants in European Witchcraft" in *Hallucinogens and Shamanism*, Harner (J.M) (ed.), Oxford: University Press, 1973, 125-150 p.128-129

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Della Porta (G.B.) *Magiae Naturalis libri viginti or The Eight Book of Natural Magic: Of Physical Experiments*, Volume VIII, p. 2-5

¹⁶⁸ Harner (J.M.) "The Role of Hallucinogenic Plants in European Witchcraft" p.129-132

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. p.129-131

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. p.139

Germanic, Slavic, Celtic and Baltic populations - corresponding to ecstatic experiences interpreted often as animal transformations and trips to the realms of the dead, as the widespread stories about werewolves further suggest¹⁷¹. Finally, other psychoactive substances re-entered the public sphere in the West after the Enlightenment, including hashish and opium which were utilized and explored by artists and intellectuals, being freely available¹⁷².

3.2. Ancient and Indigenous Psychedelics

As it was noted in the beginning of this chapter, wines imbued with psychoactive brews were used in the ancient Greek world in religious ceremonies and ritual cults. The use of psychedelic substances can be traced further back in the history of humanity, even in the prehistoric times and their use had been illustrated much later in written form such as in the Rig Veda (c.1200-900 BCE.), in the descriptions of a central sacred plant in Vedic spirituality, called Soma¹⁷³. The use of psychoactive plants is found through history in many cultures around the globe continuing in non-western societies in the form of “shamanism”, for achieving and maintaining well-being and healing, for the shamans themselves, the members of their community and nature¹⁷⁴. Shamanism can be defined as a practice in which a person deliberately, with the help (of mixtures) of ‘sacred’ plants, changes her state of consciousness

¹⁷¹ Ginzburg (C) *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, Penguin, 1991 p.153-159

¹⁷² Partridge (C.) *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, vol. II, London / New York: T & T Clark, 2005 p.85-86

¹⁷³ Ibid. p.82-85. Although there is no clear evidence about which plant soma was, Robert Gordon Wasson has argued that it was an agaric mushroom, a fungus with hallucinogenic properties, corresponding to Amanita Muscaria. Wasson (R.G.) *Soma: Divine Mushroom of Immortality*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972. Ruck further argued that the mushroom or mykes was central in religious rites in Minoan – Mycenaean civilizations, pointing out, among other arguments, that the etymology of Mykenai derived from Mykene, the bride or the mykes of mushroom. Ruck (C.A.P) “Solving the Eleusinian Mystery” (2-18) p.13. Finally, Terence Mckenna has also proposed a speculative theory of human evolution, known as the “Stoned Ape” theory, suggesting that the evolutionary leap from Homo erectus to Homo sapiens had to do with the addition of the mushroom Psilocybin cubensis to the diet of hominoids in approx. 100.000 B.C; a process that facilitated a consciousness expansion, promoted linguistic thinking and gave humans their first true religious experience. Mckenna (T.) *Food of the Gods: The Search for the Original Tree of Knowledge*, Batman, 1992

¹⁷⁴ Partridge (C.) *The Re-Enchantment of the West* vol. II p.85, Harner (J.M.) *The Way of the Shaman* p.xiii

for the purpose of interacting with the other/spirit world for beneficial purposes¹⁷⁵. It is usually experienced in one of two ways: first, there is the “soul journeying” in which the shaman enters through an opening in the earth a tunnel, leading to another plane of reality (the under-world or middle-world) where imaginary adventures and encounters with various spiritual entities take place¹⁷⁶. For many, this realm of reality is considered to be the “real” reality in which superior and hidden knowledge can be acquired. A person usually becomes a shaman after undergoing a process of *initiation* as a response to a ‘call’ marked by experiences of “death and rebirth”, a motif present as we have seen in many religious, spiritual and mystery rites, something understandable if considering the flow and circularity of life. The other experience of shamanism is usually understood in terms of “possession”, whereby a spirit works through the shaman’s body¹⁷⁷. Plants that are used in shamanic ceremonies include mushrooms, whose psychoactive ingredient is psilocybin, as the shamanic tribes of Siberia do. Other plants are the peyote cactus used, for example, in Latin America and the ayahuasca, ‘the soul vine’, used by the Conibo and Jivaro Indian of the Ecuadorian Andes¹⁷⁸.

3.3. Alterations of Consciousness in the Psychedelic Revolution

3.3.1. Phase One

The “sacralization” of psychoactive substances emerged in the West gradually after 1938 when Albert Hofmann produced the LSD-25 (lysergic acid diethylamide) in the Sandoz Pharmaceutical Laboratories in Switzerland and experienced the effects of it during his bicycle ride home, after accidentally splashing a drop of it on his hands. A (post) modern spiritual psychedelic revolution originated at that period, which according to Christopher Partridge can be divided historically in three phases: From 1938 to the end of the 1950’s, a

¹⁷⁵ Baruss (I.) *Alterations of Consciousness* p.136

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. 136-137

¹⁷⁸ Harner (J.M.) *The Way of the Shaman* p.1-2, Partridge (C.) *The Re-Enchantment of the West* vol. II p 85

period in which LSD was copiously, and illegally, secretly administered by the CIA and co-operators to unknowing human guinea pigs in the agency's search for new weapons of mass destruction. The subsequent activities and studies of specific scientists and psychiatrists such as Humphrey Osmond made it known to intellectuals and artists who captured the spiritual qualities of the psychedelic experience¹⁷⁹. Partridge recognizes Aldous Huxley as the central figure of the time and the main influence on the later psychedelic experimenters, who designated the psychedelic experience as a 'mystical experience' in the form of an "actual" mysticism. Huxley underlined not only the spiritual part of the psychedelics, but he also emphasized the "experience" *per se* as important, as the direct apprehension of an obscure knowledge that "All is in all" and that "all is actually each"¹⁸⁰. After experimenting with other psychedelic substances like mescaline, and following Henri Bergson in his conception of the mind working electively like the cinematic apparatus, Huxley conceived the brain and the central nervous system as a "reduction valve", a filter which allows only practical information necessary for the survival of the planet and the species to be accessed. Psychedelics, by facilitating alterations of consciousness, "open the doors of perception" by allowing access to the Mind at Large (Bergson's conception of Universal Consciousness) and inducing, according to the set and setting, and individual, an experience directly analogous to those reported by mystics¹⁸¹. This universal consciousness or the Over-mind is further referred to day as the Gaian Mind. Furthermore, Huxley's, and subsequent interpretations and conceptualizations of the psychedelic experience, were placed in an Eastern spiritual setting due to the process of an Easternization of the West, rooted in the Romantic Era and developed through the Theosophical society since the late 19th century and culminating in the 1960's

¹⁷⁹. Martin (A.L), Shlain (B.) *Acid Dreams The Complete Social History of LSD*, Partridge (C.) *The Re-Enchantment of the West* vol. II p.89

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. p.91-92

¹⁸¹ Ibid. p.89-91

with the migration of Indian gurus to the West¹⁸². At the time, the notion of gnosis was not widely known, and it is understandable why Huxley used mysticism for designating psychedelic experiences. As analyzed in the next section, Huxley differentiated between three kinds of psychedelic experiences, characterizing them in terms of consciousness, namely: the “aesthetic”, the “visionary” and the “mystical” consciousness. In this thesis, they will be regarded as different degrees/levels of ‘gnostic’ experience.

3.3.2. Phase Two

The second phase of the modern psychedelic revolution starts, according to Partridge, in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s and lasts until 1975¹⁸³. It is marked by the Beat Generation, the hippy movement and its central figure, personified in the person of Timothy Leary. Leary was the man who brought psychedelics to the public by underlining their spiritual impact and by stating that “drugs are the religion of the 21st century”¹⁸⁴. Tim Leary, Richard Alpert and Ralph Metzner published, among other work, *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead* for educating the public in conceptualizing and preparing themselves for the psychedelic journey, which corresponds to a process of the soul’s death and re-birth. Once again, the influence of Indian religion is obvious¹⁸⁵. Leary continued to promote the “politics of ecstasy” until his death, further supporting it through the artistic use of new-media technology; for example, he imagined the personal computer, especially after the advent of the Internet, as being able to activate a psychedelic experience of altered states of consciousness in its own right, facilitating the evolution of humanity through “transcendence” as proposed in his “cyber-delic” thesis¹⁸⁶. He was also a futurist and a

¹⁸² Partridge (C.) *The Re-Enchantment of the West* vol. I p.96-97

¹⁸³ Partridge (C.) *The Re-Enchantment of the West* vol. II, p.94, 105

¹⁸⁴ Cited in *Ibid.* p.96

¹⁸⁵ Leary (T.), Dass (R.), Alpert (R.) *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead*, New York: University Books, 1964

¹⁸⁶ Partridge (C.) *The Re-Enchantment of the West* vol. II, p.96

proponent of transhumanism, a cultural and intellectual movement that praises the use of technology for the enhancement of human intellectual, physical and psychological capacities, culminating in the transformation of human beings into technologically- aided superior “post-humans”. Finally, during the second phase of the psychedelic revolution, new media technology started to be used in psychedelic rock concerts through which a new psychedelic life-style started to spread in the Western World. The use of psychedelics influenced different musicians and music genres, extending from rock, punk, to afro-funk to the emergence of Goa trance.

3.3.3. Phase Three - Today

The third phase of the psychedelic revolution can be traced as starting from the mid 1980’s up to today, with the emergence of the psychedelic trance culture in the context of what is known as neo-shamanism, something which emerged during the 1960’s with the writings and shamanic experiences of authors such as Robert Wasson, Carlos Castaneda, William Burroughs, Michael Harner, Allen Ginsberg and Terence Mckenna¹⁸⁷. Neo-shamanism refers to a form of a modern entheogenic religion , which, after the 1970’s, branched off into two directions: one legal and safe, with a public profile using ritual techniques and psychotherapeutic practices e.g core shamanism, and another one, which is still illegal and underground, using psychoactive substances, and which after the mid 1980’s and the harnessing of the capabilities of new technology and the internet, spread around the globe via rave culture in general and psychedelic trance in particular¹⁸⁸.

The pivotal spokesman for ‘neo-shamanism’ or “psychedelic shamanism” as a form of New Age spirituality is Terence Mckenna (1946-2000), the visionary philosopher, intellectual, ethno-mycologist and major influence of the psychedelic trance culture. Mckenna foresaw the

¹⁸⁷ Hanegraaff (W.J.) “Entheogenic Esotericism” (392-409) p.400-402

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. p.402

emergence of an ‘archaic revival’, “the process of reawakening awareness of traditional attitudes toward nature, including plants and our relationship to them”, inaugurating a New Age of humanity and the planet¹⁸⁹. This archaic revival runs contrary to scientific materialism, sexual repression, alienation, traditional religions, military and neo-liberal ideals and ecological destruction through the imprudent use of technology, a paradigm that, according to Mckenna, was born from the animal organization of patriarchic, male, colonial, nomadic and dominational practices¹⁹⁰. Through the use of psychoactive substances, which is still prominent in indigenous societies, humanity will re-discover its roots and give birth to a new paradigm based on the “gnosis” of the Vegetative mind – the Gaian collectivity of organic life-, by coming closer to the Goddess archetype and thus to a partnership model of social organization; its characteristics include: a more maternal and intuitional style of operating, giving access to the boundless landscaped of imagination against the superficial (history-created) ego of Western thought, the feminizing of culture, the inward search for values, the detoxification of natural environments, connectedness and symbiosis, whole-system fine tuning, a global atmosphere-based energy economy, nanotechnology and the preservation of biological diversity¹⁹¹. These ideas are central to the psychedelic trance movement and, together with other elements of Mckenna’s visions, as we will see, become embodied – to the extent that this is possible – in the “stage” of psytrance, which corresponds from one perspective to a contemporary techno-shamanic ritual¹⁹².

3.3.3.1. Entheogenic Esotericism

Terence Mckenna’s ideas further correspond to what Hanegraaff suggests labeling as

¹⁸⁹ Mckenna (T.)” Plan/Plant/Planet” in *The Archaic Revival*, New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991 218-225 p.219

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. p.219-220

¹⁹¹ Ibid. p.219-225

¹⁹² Mckenna’s influence in psytrance culture is exemplified in numerous tracks-songs, in which his ideas are cited through his recorded voice. In addition, Goa Gil, the father of Goa trance, has, since the early 2,000’s presented his performances under the name: “Redefining the Ancient Tribal Ritual for the 21st century”

“entheogenic esotericism”, a specific phenomenon in contemporary religion that is based on “the religious use of psychoactive substances as means of access to spiritual insights about the true nature of reality¹⁹³. Mackenna’s ideas have been very much influenced by the “Eranos Religionism”, a 20th-century scholarly tradition characterized by the fact that it explores historical developments in terms of eternal and unchangeable truths¹⁹⁴. This project was developed out of the “Eranos” meetings that have been organized since 1933 in Ascona, Switzerland, initiated by Olga Froebe Kapteyn and including scholars such as Carl Jung – whose theories have had such a great impact on enhancing the valuation of myth and symbolism in the search for eternal truths- Mircea Eliade, Joseph Campbell, D.T. Suzuki, Heinrich Zimmer and others¹⁹⁵. Mckenna understood alchemy and Hermeticism through holistic Eranos approaches and interpretations, focusing on Renaissance magical traditions dominated by magic, personal religious experience and the powers of imagination. In conjunction with this, Mckenna promoted a direct and effective way towards the attainment of “gnosis”: none other than psychedelic substances¹⁹⁶. Knowing the influence of Mckenna in the psychedelic trance culture, it is possible to talk about a “techno-gnostic” movement that, from a religious point of view, comprises New Age, Neo/Techno Paganism, Neo/Techno Shamanism, Goddess religion, (Psytrance)/Music religion and Entheogenic Esotericism.

¹⁹³ Hanegraaff (W.J.) “Entheogenic Esotericism” (392-409) p.391,404

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. p.404

¹⁹⁵ Proff (I) “The Eranos Idea” in *Journal of Religion and Health*,5:4, (October) 1966, 307-313, p.307

¹⁹⁶ Hanegraaff (W.J.) “Entheogenic Esotericism” (392-409) p.404-406

CHAPTER II

4. Media, Performance and Participation

In this chapter I first describe the performative situation in the psychedelic trance gatherings for arguing that what is aimed and actualized in the stage of the psychedelic trance culture symbolizes a societal turn “towards” participation. I continue by describing participation as a mentality or spontaneous tendency of the mind in the other end of instrumental causality. My thesis is that during the 1950’s and 1960’s a first attempt towards participation had occurred realized in terms of performative and social participation. Towards this direction, political demonstrations, theatrical performances, technological media and alterations of consciousness played a crucial role and for this reason I analyze the ways they helped to facilitate participation. This was further aided by the constitution of the performance studies paradigm and its field of study of cultural performance that gave birth to the conceptualization of the performative turn in the arts and culture, which signifies a process towards participation. An analysis of this turn is further important for understanding how technognosis works in terms of technognosia (τεχνογνωσία), while the analysis of the performativity of the aesthetic experience showcases the ways the encounter with a work of art and the beautiful in general has the potentiality for facilitating gnosis. This analysis is focused on the reception of the artwork while in the next section I analyze the creative process of making an artwork for experiencing, communicating and facilitating gnosis, starting from the Romantic movement. I then present the function of the shamanic model of the artist and how it has/is actualized in different artistic forms. I end this chapter by focusing on theatrical performances and their relation to the shamanic function, which is pluralistically and fully actualized in the stage of psytrance.

4.1. A Brief Description of Psychedelic Trance

“Psychedelic trance” or “psytrance” is a musical genre and electronic dance music culture (EDMC) that encompasses a plurality of alternative spiritualities and has evolved into a multi-mediated psychedelic trance scene¹⁹⁷. It has its roots in Full Moon outdoor parties, held since the late 1960’s and early 1970’s in Goa, India, which gradually became the preserve of an international set of self-exiled middle-class Westerners fleeing the conservative restrictions of oppressive Western rationality and its ideology of “instrumental causality”¹⁹⁸. These people migrated to the East in a quest for the “experience” per se, and seeking a conceptual understanding of those experiences. The impact of World Wars and the ensuing shadow of nuclear annihilation, together with the prohibitions placed on psychedelic substances, led people from all over the world to search for a different way of living, free from the strait jacket of urban models of civilization, and more in harmony with nature.

Goa became an experimental area for alternative living and spirituality, characterized for decades by practices of mental discipline, ecstatic pleasure and visionary states of consciousness. These were induced through a variety of means and techniques, including meditation, yoga, tantra sex, listening and dancing to the sounds of acid rock, oriental instruments and medicine drums during protracted outdoor events and the consumption of chemical substances such as LSD and psychoactive plants¹⁹⁹. By promoting alterations in consciousness these westerners aspired to the possibility of encountering the Sacred, the Other, the One, the Force, the Spirit of Nature, the Cosmic Spirit etc. In their quest for access to *hidden* knowledge they further re-appropriated symbolic guideposts from the arts and

¹⁹⁷ St John (G.) “The 2012 Movement, Visionary Arts and Psytrance culture” in *2012: Decoding the Countercultural Apocalypse*, Gelfer (J.) (ed.), Sheffield, UK: Equinox, 2011, 123-143 p. 125

¹⁹⁸ St John (G.) and Baldini (C.) “Dancing at the Crossroads of Consciousness” (521-552) p. 522

¹⁹⁹ St John (G.) “Spiritual Technologies and Altering Consciousness in Contemporary Counterculture” in *Altering Consciousness: A Multidisciplinary Perspective*, Cardena (E.), Winkelman (M.) (eds.), Praeger Perspectives, 2011, 203-225 p.204,213

rituals of first Eastern and then, gradually, of different world religions and shamanic practices²⁰⁰. in other words, the spiritual seekers who migrated to Goa were looking for the experience of ‘gnosis’, which they understood within an Easternized context.

The cultural and spiritual ambience thus engendered facilitated a fusion of oriental teachings and worldviews with Western performative arts and technology. During the 1970’s and 1980’s these fusions became even more complex, and developed into new musical and performative situations with the introduction of new electronic sounds and sound production equipment from the West. This came about with Goa’s increasing popularity as a center of “trance tourism”; a place where music and dance resulting from and to altered states of consciousness were legitimized as tools of self exploration. They were as pathways to evoking feelings of pleasure, liberating and enhancing imagination, revealing the hidden, healing the soul, and reuniting culture with nature; synchronizing human consciousness with that of the cosmos so that sense of Oneness, love, respect, creativity and communality could be expanded.

Gradually, musicians such as Goa Gill, the precursors of today’s DJs, started to play pre-recorded music mixed with electronic samples and live oriental sounds. From the mid 1980’s this resulted in a distinct electronic music genre known as “Goa trance” which spread around the whole world during the 1990’s. Within “Goa trance”, “psytrance” became a transnational electronic dance music culture that has subsequently developed into independent music production technologies and psychedelic arts aesthetics; owing much to the medium of the Internet²⁰¹. Since the 1990’s big international outdoor festivals have been held in different parts of the world, lasting from a single night to a whole week, visited and used by an extremely culturally diverse community. At these events, electronic music in a 4/4 continuous

²⁰⁰ Ibid. p.204

²⁰¹ St John (G.) “Psytrance: An Introduction” in *The Local Scenes and Global Culture of Psytrance*, St John (G.) (ed.), London/New York: Routledge, 2010, 1-17 p. 6

drum beat ranging from 60bpm to 180bpm guides the dance in the “stage”, where people are able to ‘experience’ different alterations of consciousness and transcendent, states such as “trance”, “ecstasy” and “flow”. These states of consciousness have together been characterized as “ecstatic entrancements”, implying the ‘relinquishment’ of individual will and autonomy to an external power or higher energy, mediated through music, with the DJ acting as a “techno- shaman”, the harmonic helmsman in charge of the group mood/ mind²⁰². These festivals usually comprise a “main” stage, in conjunction with other smaller stages, like an “ambient” or “chill out” stage, playing different kinds of music from progressive trance, full on, dark spy to psybient or ambient, down-tempo, idm, chill-out etc. The ‘stages’ are structured as “sacred spaces”, usually embellished with ritual symbols, artistic objects like paintings, sculptures, structures and fabrics and state of the art technological equipment such as LCD screens, UV lights, lasers and different kinds of hypnagogic projections. All these are incorporated into the natural environment, giving the participants the opportunity to perform alternative experiential spiritual practices and identities, stemming from the rich reservoir of ‘occulture’²⁰³. Elements from circus, myths, fairytales, science fiction, sacred geometry, mystery cults, different world religions, ancient monuments, indigenous societies, psychedelic experiences, space, technology, nature and other occultural sources act as inspiration for costumes, symbolism and decoration in a ‘tribal’ context. This allows the expression of the intercultural dimension of the events in terms of authentic personal and communal creative expression, in a space where everyone participates as ‘performer; and ‘spectator’, as an experiencer and a participant and as the embodiment of the shamanic artistic function at the same time.

In addition to the dance stages, festivals like Boom in Portugal and Ozora in Hungary, offer a

²⁰² St John (G.) “Spiritual Technologies” (203-225) p. 211, Hutson (S.R.) “The Rave: Spiritual Healing in Modern Western Subcultures” in *Anthropological Quarterly*, 73:1, (January), 2008, 35–49, p. 39

²⁰³ In Boom Festival for example the main stage is constructed as the “Dance Temple”
<http://www.boomfestival.org/boom2012/>

number of other possibilities for relaxing and spending time by also providing alternative and holistic methods and techniques for spiritual healing. Workshops, art exhibitions, installations, land art and eco art, interactive and improvisational performances of different kinds, lectures, community/collective arts projects, markets, children's areas etc are all incorporated into these festivals as means of offering and communicating knowledge, quality time and psychological satisfaction, inviting the participants to actively engage with a number of activities. Accompanying these activities, recycling and sustainable technologies are incorporated into the events, signifying the actualization of the harmonic integration of technology within the natural environment, based on the "animistic" worldview that 'nature is alive and sacred', and we are part of it. As mentioned before, and exemplified in Boom festival, the overarching purpose is to conjure up a new vision for humanity and an alternative reality, following Terence Mckenna's ideas, through "actual participation" in a trans-cultural collectivity which embraces sharing ideas and making suggestions during and after the pre-production stage of the events, something now possible thanks to the Internet. The organizers employ the whole array of information, technology and creativity that humanity has acquired, to make the events into a collective, transformative experience, the fruits of which will be disseminated throughout the world by the participating individuals. This living experience demonstrates that a different way of existing and behaving is possible, one stemming from the spontaneous tendency of the mind towards "participation". This condition is not just possible in theory but in actuality; as the spread of this idea through the 'embodied experience' of the participants who, returning to their home countries would become active agents for making critical steps towards realizing that vision in the world as a whole, is central to the culture of psytrance.

But the most effective and affective part of the festival experience takes place in the 'stage', which operates as a "superliminal" space representing a "rite de passage"; a space of spiritual

and mental transition and transformation structured and planned for effecting transition²⁰⁴. Through the liminal techniques of the DJs, the supraliminal ecstatic entrancements and the multi-mediated visionary arts, effects and performances, what ideally occurs is ‘entrainment’, the synchronization of the physiological and psychological movements of the participants through the harmonization of the alpha/theta waves in the brain²⁰⁵. This synchronization occurs as a collective visionary, transpersonal or spiritual mode of experience²⁰⁶; as a transcendent unity of all the participants with the Cosmic Spirit that results in overwhelming feelings of happiness, love, oneness and respect for each other and for Gaia²⁰⁷. In the stage, art, technology and spirituality meet together in performance through the plurality of alterations of consciousness for facilitating collective gnostic experiences, a whole process that I will further analyze through the concept of “techno-gnosis”.

5. Participation

The ideology of “instrumental causality” that during the 19th century enabled the categorisation/differentiation of different academic disciplinary domains, including the typological construct of ‘religion’ as a concept and field of study, in the context of rapidly progressing modernization, led scholars like Max Weber(1864-1920 CE) to argue, at the beginning of the 20th century, for the “disenchantment of the world”. By this he meant a unilinear, progressive and irreversible process that enabled the marginalization or removal of religion as a dominant component of public discourse²⁰⁸. The “disenchantment of the world”

²⁰⁴ St John (G.) *Global Tribe: Technology, Spirituality and Psytrance*, Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2012, p.4

²⁰⁵ Siever (D.) “The Rediscovery of Audio-Visual Entrainment”, C.E.T. 1997, accessed online (13/01/2013) http://www.mindalive.com/2_0/ch5.pdf. entrainment: “When the brain is presented with a rhythmic stimulus, such as a drum beat for example, the rhythm is reproduced in the brain in the form of these electrical impulses. If the rhythm becomes fast and consistent enough, it can start to resemble the natural internal rhythms of the brain, called [brainwaves](#). When this happens, the brain responds by synchronizing its own electric cycles to the same rhythm.” In <http://www.transparentcorp.com/products/np/entrainment.php>

²⁰⁶ St John (G.) and Baldini (C.) “Dancing at the Crossroads of Consciousness” (521-552) p.523

²⁰⁸ Partridge (C.) *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, vol. I p.9, Kokkinen (N.) “Occulture as an Analytical tool in the Study of Art” in *Aries*, 13, 2013, 7-36 p.19

can be understood in terms of ‘secularization’ of society; ‘secularization’ regarded as the totality of historical developments that resulted in the displacement of Christianity from its central role in Western culture to become one among a plurality of institutions in a cultural context that is no more grounded on religious symbolic systems²⁰⁹. According to Weber, during the process of disenchantment art became disconnected from religion and spirituality, and constituted itself as an autonomous domain by competing with religion and claiming its own salvational function²¹⁰. However, the study of esotericism, the occult, and of a number of alternative spiritualities that gained momentum during the 1950’s and 1960’s shows that secularization, far from resulting in the disenchantment of the world, led to a profound “transformation” of religion which now operates in the context of occulture²¹¹. This situation is understandable if we consider that, apart from the tendency towards, and ideology of, “instrumental causality” still dominant in the Western mind, there also exists in every human another spontaneous tendency of the mind, or orientation towards life, which for years has been deliberately ‘repressed’; namely that of “participation”.

In Lévy-Bruhl’s initial conception, “participation” refers to a kind of mentality that characterizes so-called primitive peoples, describable in terms of an “affectional participation” based on pre-logical or irrational tendencies of the human mind. This is combined with a sense of a ‘mystical’ unity to and of the Whole Existence, in which the “connection between cause and effect is immediate”; while the universe and life are often understood and experienced in terms of correspondences, (hidden) patterns and analogies²¹². Lévy-Bruhl contrasted this mentality with modern man’s logical understanding of reality. However, in his later work he relaxed this contrast between primitive and modern people(s)

²⁰⁹Hanegraaff (W.J.) “How Magic Survived” (357-380) p.358-359

²¹⁰As explained in Kokkinen (N.) “Occulture as an Analytical tool in the Study of Art” (7-36) p.20

²¹¹Hanegraaff (W.J.) “How Magic Survived” (357-380) p.358

²¹²Ibid. p.373,386

and concluded that the “participatory” mentality is a mode of thinking and experiencing characteristic of every person; an immediate datum of human consciousness that cannot be reduced to prior reasoning but which nevertheless exists along it²¹³. According to Hanegraaff, “participation” is a way of experiencing and understanding life and reality that cannot be further explained through the intellect and rational thinking and for this reason it should be noted simply as a fact²¹⁴. It is based not on reason but on feeling, affection, imagination and intuition with an emphasis on the ‘immediate experience’.

“Participation” characterizes the mentalities of primary oral cultures as understood in terms of the orality of language, the immediate perception of sound and eventful thinking and knowledge that connects everything to the present situation. Oral cultural learning or knowing, for example, is empathetic and “participatory” in terms of achieving a communal ‘identification’ with the known, based on a sense of unity and interconnectedness²¹⁵. The “participatory” mentality is characteristic of indigenous societies living in harmony with the “spirits of nature”; and of the magical traditions of the Renaissance, the Romantics, and contemporary occultural and alternative spiritualities. It can be conceptualized as corresponding to operations of the “right-brain” hemisphere (e.g intuition, creativity, expression of emotions, music, color etc) and lies at the heart of spiritual and religious feelings and experiences. From the massive demonstrations of the 1960’s and the popularization of psychedelics the mentality of “participation” spontaneously and collectively re-emerged in the west, gradually achieving legitimacy as an orientation towards the world. This was assisted by developments in ideas on performance and performativity of the arts, the media and the world. According to Hanegraaff, the domination, since the 18th century of the ideology of “instrumental causality” fostered the emergence of a ‘romantic’ counter-ideology

²¹³Ibid. p.373

²¹⁴Ibid. p.374

²¹⁵ Ong (W.J.) *Orality and Literacy* p.45

based on “participation”, which now functions as a social narrative in different alternative spirituality contexts, and springs from a defensive reaction to the sterility of the dominant ideology²¹⁶. Starting in the 1960’s, the participatory mentality of Westerners has flourished and spread for a number of reasons – alterations of consciousness, art and media technology being central to this process- making it possible to argue for the possibility of changing the dominant ideology of instrumental causality by means of a “participatory turn” in society.

5.1. Performative and Social Participation

The mentality of participation must be realized at the corporeal level if we want to talk about a participatory turn in the society. As I argue, the mentality of participation can be manifested in performance and through performativity in tandem with (media) technology, and as we will see, performative and social participation as embodied experiences also have the capacity to induce the mentality of participation and aid in the realization of the participatory turn. The performative turn in the arts and culture has pioneered the first step towards participation as the conceptualization of the performativity of the arts during the 20th century has constituted the only legitimate participatory aspect of a secularized society in thrall to the ideology of instrumental causality and this underlines its importance as a domain for releasing and inducing the participatory mentality.

5.1.1. Play

In the earliest years of an individual’s development, the orientation towards life is “participatory”, as shown in children’s ‘play’. During play, new imaginative realities are created, separate from or blurred with consensus reality, where either no rules, or different rules are framed, and where ‘playing’ is an end in itself for getting in flow and experiencing

²¹⁶Hanegraaff (W.J.) “How Magic Survived” (357-380) footnote 36 p.376

feelings of pleasure²¹⁷. To play is to ‘play along’ something or someone. Play is “participatory” in its *nature*, it is interactive, and fundamental for cognitive and emotional development. Around their second year of life, children start to get involved in “pretend” play, an operation that requires the use of imagination for acting out scenarios, narratives and imaginative situations²¹⁸. During the second year of life, ‘pretend’ play starts to become directed towards other individuals, visible or invisible, and after a while, with the gradual incorporation of other people’s behavior into ‘pretend’ play, children start to attribute thoughts and feelings to imaginary others²¹⁹. Gradually they are able to create elaborate fantasies, while the study of children’s emotional investment in pretend activities has highlighted the contribution play makes to the processes of learning and management of emotion²²⁰. Evolutionary studies have argued that ‘playing’ helped proto-humans evolve by increasing their cognitive flexibility and especially their ability to recognize, repeat and refine “patterns”²²¹. In addition, the participatory nature of play and its emotional effects contribute to the development of social behavior and social bonds. “Play” is a form of performance, or mode of experience that facilitates alterations of consciousness like flow and immersion through engagement with imaginative realities. It is thus a form of ‘performative participation’, an embodied, intentional process usually enacted in the presence of others (visible or invisible, imaginative or physical) with a performative consciousness. More than this, it is a form of ‘social participation’ in the sense of engaging with physical others having similar intentions to achieving a common end. It should be becoming clear that children’s play is enacted with a ‘participatory mentality’ but which, at the same time, does not exclude the process of logical thinking; while, in contrast, playing with the mind-set of instrumental causality is, confined by boundaries, a “game” with certain ends and rules; a “game” is here

²¹⁷ Huizinga (J.) *Homo Ludens; a Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1955 p.23-28

²¹⁸ Taylor (M.) “Imagination” (637 -643) p.638

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid. p.638-639

²²¹ McConahie (B.) “An Evolutionary Perspective on Play, Performance and Ritual” (33-50) p.36

conceived as a form of performative and social participation, too, but with its creative possibilities of expression limited by the mentality of instrumental causality.

5.1.2. Ritual

To “participate” is to contribute to something that is other than oneself. This contribution can be thought of as manifested in the non-physical realm, on a magical plane, for example, which exists separately and connected to the world of every-day perceptions but on a different level of reality²²². This is a view that contemporary occult and magical traditions defend when asked to rationalize their practices. When a witch performs a ritual on her own, away from the physical presence of others in the corporeal world, she intentionally involves herself through her imagination in hidden realms of reality that through analogies and correspondences are connected to life as manifested at a physical level. The difference from children’s play is not in the participatory mentality, but in the “intention” and belief in the power of the ritual; ritual here defined as “serious play” evolved as ‘sacred play’ or as an act performed with a participatory mentality judged in terms of its ‘efficacy’²²³. This efficacy operates on a psychological level while ritual is here better understood as ‘ritual action’, as an act involving the possibility to be performed only once or that is characterized in general by a minimal element of repetition²²⁴. Like in pretend play, the performative consciousness of persons in ritual - the acting ‘as if’ - is not clearly delineated, because in ritual as in children’s play, to ‘act’ is to actually ‘do’ what is supposed to be acted out; and this is exactly an understanding of performance that corresponds to the participatory mentality of humans, which from the point of view of “instrumental causality” is conceived as an acting ‘as if’ and not as just ‘acting’ with a participatory mentality. Hence, like play, ritual is a form of performative participation which when performed in the physical presence of others becomes a social act in

²²² Hanegraaff (W.J.) “How Magic Survived” (357-380) p.370

²²³ Huizinga (J.) *Homo Ludens* p.173

²²⁴ Hanegraaff (W.J.) “New Age Religion and Secularization” (288-312) footnote 14 p.296

the sense that all the participants contribute to the transaction of the whole performative event according to their roles and responsibilities. Rituals enacted with the mentality of instrumental causality stop being rituals and become secularized ‘performances’, however much they continue to exhibit elements of performative and social participation.

5.1.3. Performance

‘Performance’ refers to an act of showing, and is traditionally connected with theatre and the presentation to audiences²²⁵. According to Marvin Carlson there are three types of performance: the first refers to the displaying of skills or to the intentional ‘pretending’ to be someone other than oneself in front of onlookers; it corresponds to the performative consciousness. The second type refers to “social” performance and more particularly to culturally and socially coded behaviors displayed as roles in the society; and third, to the success of an activity according to some standard of achievement, referring mainly to the effectiveness of technological machines²²⁶. From a broader perspective, performance refers also to ‘performance art’, which emerged from the happenings and performances of collectives like the “Living Theatre” during the 1950’s and 1960’s and developed historically and theoretically in the USA by giving emphasis to how the body, as the center of presentation, and the self are articulated through the act of performance²²⁷. It is used as an umbrella term for a number of activities including play, ritual and carnival.

A ‘performative’ situation refers to a framed occurrence where what is shown acts as an intentional sign in a perspective of possible worlds or situations; it is a situation of

²²⁵ Carlson (M.) *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, London: Routledge, 1996 p.2

²²⁶ Ibid. p. 4-5. There exists also the category of “organizational performance” referring to the management of performance in organizations. Mckenzie (J.) *Perform of Else: A Critical Introduction*, London: Routledge, 2001 p.4-6

²²⁷ Carlson (M.) *Performance* p.1, 6

showing²²⁸. In the performative situation of theatre, the physical presence of an object, a body, a gesture or a sound refers back to something absent, which is the category it belongs to, and for which it stands. This signifying process is called “ostention” and is the most basic instance of a performance, as it works symbolically through the de-realization of the performed objects, bodies, sounds and events by making them stand as signs for an entire class²²⁹. Ostention takes place in a ‘staged’ or ‘framed’ context where the performer constitutes herself in the presentation of her performance, while the spectator adopts a specific “performative orientation” towards what is being shown by taking up the position of being a member of the audience and in this way supporting the role of the performer²³⁰. The performative orientation is a specific orientation towards an event, where the communicating participants meet each other as ‘social actors’ who share and live in the same world²³¹. Thus, a performative situation signifies a form of performative and social participation where the participants, by assuming the roles of performers and spectators, contribute to the making of the event into a shared communicative process.

5.2. Illusory Participation

Performative events require social and performative participation in a shared communicative act, where someone performs, and someone performs the onlooker by adopting the stance of the reflexively committed observer. Since the 17th century and until the beginnings of the 20th, a separation between the fictional world of the stage and the audience was established in theatrical contexts that enabled the facilitation of a manipulative stance towards the acceptable reactions of the spectators during the experience of the performative acts²³².

²²⁸Kattenbelt (C.) “Intermediality in Performance and as a Mode of Performativity” in *Mapping Intermediality in Performance*, 2010, 29-37 p.31

²²⁹Eco (U.) “Semiotics of Theatrical Performance” in *Drama Review: TDR*, Vol.21 N.1, Theatre and Social Action Issue, (March) 1977, 107-117 p.110

²³⁰Kattenbelt (C.) “Intermediality in Performance and as a Mode of Performativity” (29-37) p. 30

²³¹ Habermas (J.) explained in *Ibid.* p.31

²³² Bennett (S.) *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*, London: Routledge, 1997 (2nd) p.3

Strategies like the eliciting of applause signaled by the curtain call, which have been further adopted and re-appropriated by television industries, were employed to give the audience the illusion of actively participating in the event²³³. With the emergence of ‘naturalism’, the audience’s role as a “passive” spectator was strengthened, while the degrees of performative and social participation were rendered unequal, as the audience’s participation was demoted to merely physical presence, financial contribution, regulated social behavior in the sense of e.g. performed applauses and mental/emotional involvement that could result in states of immersion, flow, catharsis and pleasure.

The concept of a “passive” spectator continued to be the dominant ideology in the West as nurtured by the ‘culture industry’, while the proliferation of centralized media like cinema and television further promoted this approach. The mental involvement of the audience through immersive states of consciousness, empathy, kinesthesia, laughter and emotional identification with the heroes gave the ‘illusion of participating’ in the event simply by the sense of removal from ordinary reality, while being part of something else in the presence of others, a situation also exploited by propagandistic tactics. In addition, strategies like television’s ‘liveness’ served to further sustain this illusion²³⁴. But as an answer to the expansion of mass media and the standardization of the “passive” observer, theatrical directors like Filippo Marinetti, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Erwin Piscator, Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Godowsky, Berthold Brecht and the early avant-garde found new ways to engage with these conditions through a playful experimentation involving technology, media, arts and theatrical space, that gradually changed the relationship between audience, performers and

²³³ Kennedy (D.) *The Spectator and the Spectacle: Audiences in Modernity and Postmodernity*, Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2009 p.17-18

²³⁴ Dixon (S.), Smith (B.) *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theatre, Dance, Performance Art and Installation*, Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2007 p.125

performance, pointing towards what became known as the ‘performative turn’ in the arts and culture²³⁵.

5.3. The Performativity of Media and Virtual Participation

Before I continue with an analysis of the performative turn in the arts, it is important to theorize the contribution of media technology in that development, because media re-enforced the performative qualities of the world, while contemporary media participation enhances the participatory aspects of society in general, regardless the initial interests and ends of media authorities.

In the domain of the arts, as Chris Salter in his book *Entangled: Technology and the transformation of performance*, indicates, technology and performance evolved in conjunction, influencing notions of performativity²³⁶. ‘Performativity’ refers to the general quality something might have by virtue of being a performance²³⁷. In contrast to the representationalist forms of knowledge that view external reality as something pre-given and static, performance suggests that the world is enacted and actively performed anew²³⁸. In this world, not only humans perform, but also the machines and the other materialities that constitute our environment, and this understanding of performativity is rooted in theatrical performances of the late 19th and early 20th century.

²³⁵ Gruber (K.) “Early Intermediality: Mapping Archaeological Glimpses” in *Mapping Intermediality in Performance*, 247-257 p. 247

²³⁶ Salter (C.) *Entangled: Technology and the Transformation of Performance*, MIT Press, 2010

²³⁷ Loxley (J.) *Performativity*, London: Routledge, 2006, p.140. After Judith Butler’s reworking of the notion of performativity through Austinean and Derridean ideas, the term broadened to signify also the performativity of identity and the performativity of gender in the sense that an identity does not correspond to the essence of a person but it is performed through clothes, gestures, styles etc. In this respect, the performativity of identity represents the constructed nature of subjectivity through norms and coded behaviors re-enforced by society and culture. Ibid. p.141

²³⁸ Salter (C.) *Entangled* p.xxvi

In modernity, since the end of 19th century and in the context of theatrical performances, different technical devices have been incorporated in the ‘stage’, often transforming the scenery into a whole machine. At times, the machines, and the effects they produced, became the spectacle themselves by overshadowing or even eliminating the performer’s presence, thus showcasing the performative qualities of technology. In other examples, performers and spectators became integrated within the staged environment for amplifying the intensity of the immersive experience through the spatial participation of the latter into the performative environment. These theatrical developments gradually changed the relationship between audience, performers and performance, culminating, at the beginning of the 20th century, and through the artistic endeavors of the early avant-garde, in the staging of different ‘media’ devices in theatrical contexts. This led to a radical break with all the previously established conventions in art, starting with what Gruber calls “semiotic fundamentalism”, the rejection of narrative and illusionist representations, through the exposition of the pure energy that flowed from the separate raw materials of every art-form in order for the artwork to be perceived as a pure perceptual event, a pure excitement and a direct experience²³⁹. This early attempt for a re-definition of art had two implications: on the one hand, the relationship between observer and artwork started to change as the former had to adopt a more reflective stance towards the latter, and on the other hand, the different art forms, together with, what were at the time, new mass media influencing the spectator’s attitude, could be staged and combined in a number of ways while still retaining their independence in rendering the observers’ reception of them even less automatic²⁴⁰. In other words, these processes aimed at a ‘defamiliarization’ with the staged signs and devices by highlighting their constructed nature. Thus, strategies, such as “interruption”, “navigation” and “exhibition”, started to develop aimed at provoking interactions with the observers and for producing a media self-

²³⁹ Gruber (K.) “Early Intermediality” (247-257) p.248-249

²⁴⁰ Ibid. p.250-251

reflexivity²⁴¹. In sum, this creative staging of media and arts underlined the aspects of performativity and self-criticism of the arts and media, while further helping in the development of interactive techniques for inviting the spectators to participate performatively and socially in the shared artistic events²⁴².

After the 1960's ideas on the performativity of media were further explored and used in architecture, music, dance and arts in general, where more interactive and participatory approaches in creative production were adopted. With the invention of the personal computer, new media devices gradually became generally accessible, such as video cameras, video games, walkmen etc, enabling a more personalized engagement with available technologies. With the advent of more recent media like mobile phones, tablets, computer games and others, an element of “playfulness” has been added to the way these devices are used, forming part of leisure time and entrainment, while serving as fashionable accessories and status symbols, too²⁴³.

These developments have enabled participation in two ways. First, there is the “explicit interactivity: or participation with designed choices and procedures” which can be conceptualized as a form of “cognitive interactivity” or “interpretive participation”²⁴⁴. Second, with the arrival of the internet and the facilitation of global connectivity through a worldwide network, the “beyond-the-object interactivity: or participation with the culture of the object” emerged, as exemplified in online fan cultures, online video game communities or

²⁴¹ Ibid. p.252, 254, 256

²⁴² Chapple (F.) and Kattenbelt (C.) “Key Issues in Intermediality in Theatre and Performance” in Chapple (F.), Kattenbelt (C.) (eds.), *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007, 11-24 p.11

²⁴³ Frissen (V), De Mul (J.) Raessens (J.) *Homo Ludens 0.2: Play, Media and Identity*, Frissen (V.), De Lange (M.), Raessens (J.) (eds.), Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012 p.8

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

online applications for co-shaping web-sites²⁴⁵. This kind of participation refers to the formation of online communities supported by multinational media industries in pursuit of new marketing strategies and models to cope with needs and operations in contemporary society. The actualization of the need to be social, present and visible and to live a trace behind has been exploited by the culture industry, a fact that stresses the role of media in shaping the performative qualities of culture in general. In addition, the possibility to “be online” or “be connected” serves further the interests of corporations and governments in terms of profit and as surveillance tactics, but at the same time, it also opens opportunities for getting more involved in cultural processes and getting in contact with like minded others. Analyzing these developments, Jenkins argued for a “convergence” culture, representing a paradigm shift towards a free flow of information through multiple media channels, the increased interdependence of communications systems, multiple ways of accessing media contents and a movement towards more complex relations between top-down corporate media and bottom-up participatory culture²⁴⁶. In general I believe that these advancements lead to a kind of ‘virtual participation’ as people are kept physically separate, marooned in cyberspace while standing in front a screen, a condition that produces different effects than embodied, physical and more performative forms of participation. But in any case, virtual participation is interactive and more mental, evoking a kind of a participatory mentality, too. For this reason, when the opportunities for connectivity are used creatively and with a concrete intention by individuals, then grass-root, embodied forms of participation can emerge, as is the case of the psychedelic trance culture.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Jenkins (H.) *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York: New York U.P., 2006 p.243

5.4. The Performative Turn in Arts and Culture

Media pursued the gradual appearance of the performativity of culture for facilitating illusory and virtual forms of participation. While artists, especially from circles of the early avant-garde evoked a critical reflection on the performativity of media themselves in the context of art by demonstrating their constructed nature and in this way deconstruct their power for affecting the emergence of performative and social participation. In this process, the performativity of traditional artistic objects was also highlighted. The youth generations of the 1950's and 1960's were the first to have grown up in a technologically mediated environment, becoming familiar with the performative possibilities of the world²⁴⁷. During those times, the distractive events of the first half of the 20th century enabled the spontaneous participatory mentality of westerners to burst and become radically expressed in performative forms of participation such as the massive demonstrations of the radical, political, artistic and counter-cultural movements. These events, allowed for new theatrical forms to emerge targeted at promoting the 'substantive participation' and actual spatiotemporal 'experience of the spectators in and of the live artistic events.

These processes took place during the first and second phases of the psychedelic revolution that enabled the facilitation of alterations of consciousness, which provided big-scale direct experiences of transcendence. Psychedelics played central role to the turn towards experience, known as the 'performative turn' in the arts and culture. Aldous Huxley, for example, emphasized the importance of psychedelic experiences for the artists in arguing for an experiential model of the imagination counter to representationalism; Huxley's conceptualization lies at the heart of understanding the performative condition of the world

and it's symbolic expression in art, as being in constant flux and interaction with embodied consciousness and experienced directly²⁴⁸. In other words, the performative turn in the arts stressed the radicalization of the performative aspects of art in the context of the ongoing constitution of the performativity of culture²⁴⁹.

In those decades, the performative art of theatre went out in the streets, taking place in non-traditional places such as abandoned warehouses, parks and other public spaces, while conventional staples of theatre such as narrative, character, setting and a boundary between playing space and audience were all abandoned, allowing for more spontaneous, improvisatory and intimate aspects of personality to be performed²⁵⁰. Performative events such as happenings, street performances, community arts projects etc, employed different interactive methods and techniques like navigation, shock and surprise, for making the participants aware of their perceptions and motivating them to respond during the performance to the continuous call for taking action²⁵¹. This call for taking responsibility heightened the attention and awareness of the spectators, inviting them to relinquish their passive stance and 'perform participation' in a safe context. Performative and social participation as the expression of a greater collectivity during these events aimed at intensifying the participants feeling of presence, so that they could reflect on the "experience" per se and carry it out into the everyday world for the purposes of achieving social liberation and transformation.

The performative aspects of society as a whole were further examined during the same decades by different scholars, researchers and artists within, or influenced by the counter-

²⁴⁸ Partridge (C.) *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, vol. II p.92

²⁴⁹ Kattenbelt (C.) "Intermediality in Performance and as a mode of Performativity" (29-37) p.33-34

²⁵⁰ Loxley (J.) *Performativity* p.147

²⁵¹ Brook (P.) *The Empty Space*, New York: Touchstone, 1996 (1968) p.66

culture, who enabled the constitution of the ‘performance studies’ paradigm in academia, with “cultural performance” as its field of study²⁵². Performance studies combined theatrical theories with ethnological, anthropological, sociological and linguistic research and findings to create models for studying how people and societies embody symbolic structures in their living behavior²⁵³. Performance studies theorized performance in terms of its “efficacy” conceptualized as the ‘pragmatic’ effect of the performativity of an embodied act, which signifies that modes of being and modes of experience are inextricably linked to each other²⁵⁴. Cultural performance was constructed as “ an engagement of social norms, as an ensemble of activities with the potential to uphold societal arrangements, or alternatively, to change people and societies”²⁵⁵ The focus was not so much on the recognized potential of performance to re-affirm existing structures but on its “transgressive” or “resistant” potential that was observed as realized in performative situations such as happenings, rock concerts and political demonstrations, effecting personal and collective transformation²⁵⁶.

Theatre provided performance studies scholars with a “formal” model for studying society while “rituals” conceptualized as ‘liminal rites de passage’ equipped cultural performance with a ‘functional’ model for theorizing the transformational potential of theatre and other performative genres²⁵⁷. “Liminal rites of passage” were initially conceptualized by Arnold van Gennep at the beginning of the 20th century for characterizing ‘initiation rituals’ as spaces for transition and transformation²⁵⁸. Victor Turner further developed the concept of “liminality” to refer to a state of transition or threshold state, corresponding to experiences in which an individual or group become detached from earlier fixed points in the social structure, from a

²⁵² Mckenzie (J.) *Perform or Else* p.29, Kattenbelt (C.) “Intermediality in Performance and as a Mode of Performativity” (29-37) p.33-34

²⁵³ Mckenzie (J.) *Perform or Else* p.35

²⁵⁴ Kattenbelt (C.) “Intermediality in Performance and as a Mode of Performativity” (29-37) p.34

²⁵⁵ Mckenzie (J.) *Perform or Else* p.30

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid. p.35-36

²⁵⁸ Vesperi (M.D.) “A Performance Studies Approach to Age and Secular Ritual” in *Journal of American Society on Aging*, 35:3, (Fall) 2011, 74-79 p.78

set of cultural conditions, or from both²⁵⁹. According to Turner, rituals rupture the structured modes of society allowing for the structureless social state to be experienced, which Turner dubbed *communitas*. In this context, *communitas* refers to the socially dynamic anti-structure that dissolves the conventional boundaries between individuals and allows for the experience of union with the congregation, the self and the cosmos, opening up possibilities for change. Performance studies applied the ritual model to a number of cultural activities, underlining the transgressive potential of performance and performativity. The conceptualization of liminal activities on this basis showcases the academic theorization of performative and social participation occurring during those years in the west, as liminality signifies a transitional (altered) state of consciousness that reinforces the participatory mentality. But in the ‘secularized’ context of the time, the notion of ritual as an activity performed *with* a participatory mentality does not apply to this conceptualization, as these liminal activities represent forms of social and performative participation targeted at ‘resulting’ in the adoption of the participatory orientation at the other end of the dominant mentality of the instrumental causality representing the consensus societal consciousness state. In sum, the use of ritual as the functional model for study demonstrates the first attempt towards engendering a turn towards participation in large societal contexts, exemplifying how performing arts and activities can evoke the participatory mentality. After the end of the 1970’s and in the midst of post-modernism ,the “functional” model of ritual was supplanted by the model of “performance art” for theorizing the mediated play of embodied practices and discursive statements²⁶⁰. Performance’s transgressive efficacy was transformed to be theorized as “resistant” efficacy through performance art which facilitated an understanding of the power and scope of performance as having the capacity “to challenge the solid world beyond its borders and bring the apparent obviousness of the ways in which those borders are

²⁵⁹ Turner (V.) *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1969 p.94

²⁶⁰ Mckenzie (J.) *Perform or Else* p.42

characterized into question²⁶¹.

5.5. The Performativity of Aesthetic Experience

At this point it is important to analyze how the experience of the encounter with a work of art as conceptualized after the performative turn resembles qualities of “gnostic” experiences because of its participatory nature, even if approached from a secularized perspective and in the context of modern art. What is central to this analysis is the experience of the reception of a work of art by the onlooker, rather than the experience of its creation by the artist, which will be analyzed in the next section. As we shall see, the actualization of the aesthetic experience requires a participatory mentality regarded here as an “aesthetic orientation”, a specific form of the performative orientation that concerns the presentation of ‘experience qualities’ in an act of affective perception and reflection on the encounter, the shared situation, oneself and the life-world²⁶². This “aesthetic orientation” can result in the “aesthetic experience” which, when successfully realized, reaffirms the sense of participation. The “aesthetic experience” is a ‘spiritual’ experience and can result in different degrees of “gnosis” according to the intensity and level of engagement with the work of art. To support this I will consider the theorization of the “aesthetic experience” mainly through the writings of Hans Georg Gadamer and, more specifically, his “Relevance of the Beautiful”.

Gadamer chooses modern art as an exemplary art-form for considering “the aesthetic experience” because it is non-conceptual and based on form, deconstruction and abstraction. He argues that modern works of art invite the onlooker to “participate” in their construction, meaning that the observer has to “read” the work and actively construct a meaning out of it,

²⁶¹ Loxley (J.) *Performativity* p.145, Mckenzie (J.) *Perform or Else* p.43-45

²⁶² Kattenbelt (C.) “Intermediality in Performance and as a Mode of Performativity” (29-37) p.31

while his active stance in finding a meaning constitutes the meaning itself.²⁶³. Thus the meaning is the actual participation in itself.

Every work of art leaves some space to be filled by the onlooker in an act of “recognition” and “understanding”²⁶⁴. This transforms the experience of perceiving the work of art to a performative event, taking place in the here and now, where the experiencers/participants intend a self-conscious reflection on themselves, the artist and the art form. The involvement of the participants in the process is a communicative activity in its own right, while the co-existence of the past, present and future in the activity forms the means for a “universal” communication, as the work of art addresses everyone ‘directly’²⁶⁵. And the variety of this experience, the different ways someone engages in the act of perception, constitutes the significant thing, which in any case comprises qualities of “play”, “festival” and “symbol”²⁶⁶.

First of all, like in “play”, which for its actualization needs someone to “play along”, the performativity of a work of art also needs someone to fulfill its end²⁶⁷; and this constitutes the experience as a kind of performative participation, which can result in states of flow and immersion. Furthermore, like in “festival”, which is an event characterized by an autonomous temporality, the work of art exhibits its own temporality, too²⁶⁸. It is there to be actualized in the moment of common participation in the event; that is in a celebratory act that unites humanity²⁶⁹. In a festival no one is excluded and everyone is welcome to celebrate. The person who excludes herself from the celebration, also excludes herself from the temporary unity of the participants during the event. The “intention” is what brings people together in

²⁶³ Gadamer (H.G.) *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, Walker (N.) (trans.), Bernasconi (R.) (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986 p.25-26

²⁶⁴ Ibid. p.26

²⁶⁵ Ibid. p.10

²⁶⁶ Ibid. p.32

²⁶⁷ Ibid. p.22

²⁶⁸ Ibid. p.41-42

²⁶⁹ Ibid. p.40

the perfect form of ‘community’, in which no separation exists, and this intention leads to the co-operative experience of participating in the construction of the artwork, rendering the experience an event of social participation²⁷⁰.

Moreover, art exhibits a “symbolic” character. According to Gadamer, the concept of the “symbol” is based on its classicist apprehension. In this conception the symbol is something that refers to itself, but as a fragment of being that “promises to complete and make whole whatever corresponds to it”²⁷¹. The encounter with the symbolic, which represents a meaning that is already present, can reveal a “wholeness” and a sense of “unity” to the onlooker because this is what fulfills him. Its meaning is not based on a pre-supposed convention with an agreed upon reference but in the spatiotemporal imbrication of the indeterminate reference of the symbolic and the direct addresser. The act of “recognition”, the accomplishment of the “intention” of the participant and the art-work, is an act in which the experiencer recognizes what she already knew, but now more authentically and in a more profound manner through direct experience, which can be understood as the ‘awareness of his own existence’ in relation to the whole²⁷². The task of the participants is to actualize the possibilities for the recognition in the symbolic through an imaginative engagement with the work of art²⁷³.

In addition, the “symbolic” exists in the “beautiful” and the “beautiful” can be considered as being “symbolic”. According to Gadamer, the experience of the beautiful is “the invocation of a partially whole and holy order of things, wherever it may be found meaning”²⁷⁴. The “contemplation” of a beautiful landscape for example, pleases the encounter in an act of communication with what is beyond human finitude, confronting humanity with its own

²⁷⁰ Ibid. p.44

²⁷¹ Ibid. p.32

²⁷² Ibid. p.47

²⁷³ Ibid. p.47

²⁷⁴ Ibid. p.32

existence and fulfilling it, when people accept the task to find meaning in the presence of here and now as part of a “whole and holy order of things”. In this way, the universe manifests its transcendental infinity in an act of symbolic communication with sensible, embodied conscious species pointing to the actualization of its ‘purposiveness’ in the intention of (self) reflection and understanding in the here and now. According to Kant, the encounter with the beautiful results in judgments of beauty that are based on a feeling of “pleasure”, which is inter-subjective and claims a universal validity in the sense that because the effects of the beautiful are so emotionally intense addressing the onlookers directly, everyone should experience the same feeling of pleasure²⁷⁵. The shared feeling of pleasure in the encounter with the beautiful is further enhanced through the “aesthetic orientation” - the intention in finding meaning in it -, and the meaning of “wholeness, unity and awareness of existence” found in the recognition of the symbolic and the beautiful constitutes the “aesthetic experience” itself, accompanied by feelings of pleasure. In addition, Plato designates ‘love’ as the fourth kind of “divine madness”, regarding it as the most beneficial of all, occurring when someone sees beauty and is “reminded” of the true Beauty in the plane of Truth, where the soul contemplated True Being, before descending into materiality²⁷⁶. Thus the contemplator of beauty is called lover, because they are the lover of beauty and the true philosopher, while the direct experience of love conceived as “divine madness” can be regarded as representing a kind of “gnostic” experience having the potential to bring into consciousness glimpses of the Absolute truth.

Through the engagement with the symbolic, the experience of the encounter with a work of art and the encounter with the beautiful in nature exhibits the same qualities. According to the “intention” and even going beyond “aesthetic orientation”, the encounter with the symbolic

²⁷⁵ Kant (I.) “The Analytic of the Beautiful” in *Kant’s Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*, Meredith (J.C.) (trans.), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911, 41-88 p.41- 45

²⁷⁶ Plato *Phaedrus* 245c-250a

through the engagement of the imagination can enable a specific kind of “reading” to occur, understood in terms of “contemplation”. During and after the performative turn, contemplative theatrical performances and contemplative films were produced, requiring the active stance of the spectators in engaging with the symbolic through the intensity of the moment. Contemplation can result in alterations in consciousness, which mystics usually experience in their quest for “gnosis” by contemplating a work in order to internalize it and enter into its images, until they permeate one’s own consciousness and become a ‘second nature’²⁷⁷. As Arthur Versluis explains,

“such a “second nature,” consisting in the imaginative landscape, allows one to see the actual landscape or “first nature” in a different way, not merely from the outside and as other, but inwardly and as mysteriously connected to oneself by way of imagination”²⁷⁸. And this experience signifies a sense of a mystical unity, constituted as “gnostic” experience.

The technology of writing and especially after the invention of print, enabled this kind of contemplative reading to occur, as the book, by separating the knower from the known, rendered possible the increasingly articulation of ‘introspection’, opening the psyche to the interior self against whom the external-objective world is set²⁷⁹. This is very evident in the fact that many mystical religions and traditions searched for gnosis in sacred texts.

Thus, the experience of the encounter with a work of art or with the beauty of nature, most of all in terms of the engagement with the symbolic that requires an active participation through the use of imagination, can be conceived as being a ‘transformative’ experience. The

²⁷⁷ Versluis (A.) *Restoring Paradise: Western Esotericism, Literature, Art, and Consciousness*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004 p. 60

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ong (W.J.) *Orality and Literacy* p.104

actualization of the “aesthetic experience” resulting in feelings of pleasure, a sense of recognition and a sense of unity of and with the whole through the construction of personal meaning resulting in a state of love can be further regarded as a kind of ‘gnostic experience’. This is lowly in terms of ‘gnostic hierarchies’, but which nevertheless re-affirms participation. Further contemplative engagement with the symbolic can result in more intense alterations of consciousness that can offer higher degrees of “gnosis”. The reception of this gnosis depends very much on the conscious intention of the participant and, in terms of man-made works, the intention of the creator to evoke or communicate the experience of gnosis to the onlooker, further plays a crucial role, which I will now consider through the Romantic tradition.

6. The (Neo) Romantic Imagination

I continue with the participatory mentality of the Romantic Movement, a historically diverse phenomenon, which I examine mainly through the German and British national traditions. I do that because the influence of Romanticism in art, the occult and in contemporary spiritualities and more specifically in the psychedelic trance culture is major and a brief analysis will help in understanding the aims and methods of technognosis.

The Romantics were influenced by esoteric worldviews and their conception of the power and nature of imagination owes much to the Paracelsian apprehension of the ‘creative imagination’. Paracelsus was influenced by Florentine Neo-Platonism and the occult philosophies related to it that regarded imagination as a cognitive faculty of the soul or a power that could ‘magically’ influence one’s own body and the external world²⁸⁰. However, Paracelsus further developed these conceptions of imagination within an organic, sexualized and visionary discourse, to refer to a fundamental Cosmic power of creation, connected with

²⁸⁰ Magia-Magic-Imagination are etymologically connected

will and desire²⁸¹. For Paracelsus imagination is a means or a ‘medium’ by which the soul, triggered by will and desire, creates images which are the ‘bodily’ incarnations of thought; it is not only a human faculty but a Divine power that initially gave birth to this world and continues to create the new. From this perspective, the macrocosmic heaven is mirrored (by analogy and correspondence) by the microcosmic earth, where human beings, through will and the physical body, build the divine heaven in the external world by means of the imagination²⁸². Paracelsus further differentiated between imagination and phantasia, the latter having the capacity to create fallacy.

The Paracelsian creative imagination was re-conceptualized by the visionary Jacob Bohme, who elevated it to the ‘theogonic’ and ‘cosmogonic’ power of creation itself; Bohme had a great influence on German Romantic ideas in which the Divine Imagination and its products are conceived as constituting the very essence of reality²⁸³. The Romantics viewed the evolution of the Universe as a progressive, Divine, Self-actualization in perpetual becoming²⁸⁴. The Absolute ontological truth of existence could be grasped directly through the “extra-rational” human faculty of ‘intuition’ or ‘imagination’, which in some cases was conceived as a kind of a ‘re-conceptualized reason’²⁸⁵. To grasp the Absolute reality, one must transcend the illusions of reason and dive into the depths of the soul and the Night-side of Nature, accessible through dreams and techniques of the occult; in other words, an individual has to immerse him/herself into the depths of the unconscious, and another way to do that is through creative inspiration²⁸⁶.

For the Romantics, ‘true knowledge’ is subjective, salvific and spiritual and can be

²⁸¹ Taylor (M.) “Imagination” (637 -643) p.612-613

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Mccalla (A.)”Romanticism” (1000-1007) p.1000

²⁸⁵ Ibid. p.1001

²⁸⁶ Taylor (M.) “Imagination” (637 -643) p.613

experienced directly through symbols and symbolic systems, correspondences, analogies and figures²⁸⁷. Thus, music, poetry and art in general are conceived as having the ability to offer a ‘glimpse’ of a fraction of Truth as symbols and figures are not only decorative but convey actual meaning in the sense that the artist who experiences ‘divine inspiration’ can translate, through different ‘artistic media,’ into materiality a portion of divinity²⁸⁸. For the Romantics physical reality is just an illusion and thus it is easily understandable why romantic art is not representational but more abstract and symbolic. The romantic artist acts as a “medium” who transforms through the medium of the imagination, the intention and the medium of the body, spiritual ‘gnosis’ into spiritual art. In this way, the artist “participates” in the divine-self actualization of the universe and the evolution and self-actualization of human-consciousness.

In addition, “initiation” as a theme is central to the Romantic tradition in the sense of signifying a kind of metamorphosis or purification of being, effected along with and by means of knowledge of and participation in the hidden mysteries of the Cosmos²⁸⁹. In many cases, initiation is also encompassing the discovery of truth that has social and political implications as exemplified in Ballanche’s *Essais de Palingenesie sociale* (1827-1831) in which “social evolution” operates by means of the progressive initiation of humanity into knowledge of the primitive revelation and full participation in religion and society²⁹⁰.

At this point, I would like to expand upon the romantic conception of the religious imagination as manifested in myths, which are considered “intuitions of Spirit” whose history in terms of religions manifests the degrees of the progressive self-actualization in human (un)consciousness of the divine nature²⁹¹. As the essential content of religions and myths is

²⁸⁷ McCalla (A.)”Romanticism” (1000-1007) p.1002

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Ibid. p.1003

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Ibid. p.1003

the same everywhere, conceived as the unfolding of Spirit, then differences between them are only superficial²⁹². This worldview is very close to Carl Jung's conception of the 'archetypes' that exist in the "collective unconscious" and result from the evolution of the structure of the human psyche²⁹³. They are part of human inheritance and "they encode the recurrent experiences of human beings over countless millennia and across all cultural boundaries"²⁹⁴. They are formless and invisible and they determine the form and the direction of instinctive behavior; but as the content of the collective unconscious, archetypes can only be manifested indirectly in symbolic forms determined by the cultural context, the "archetypal images"²⁹⁵. These images embrace universal motifs and themes like the Goddess, the Hero, the Self, the Unity of Opposites, the Godhead, the Anima/us etc. and they can be traced in dreams, myths and religious narratives. The actual engagement with the archetypes through the imagination is, according to Jung, the developmental and dynamic process which involves both the assimilation of archetypal content into consciousness and, as a consequence, the transformation of the archetypes themselves²⁹⁶. Thus, conscious and intentional participation in the 'imaginal realm' and further elaboration and manifestation of the archetypal images in the physical world can facilitate the evolution of the collective psyche in the process of Self-actualization.

Paracelsus used the "creative imagination" for medical reasons, while the Romantic artists and Jung used it for attaining "gnosis" and contributing to the collective evolution. As we have seen in Chapter I, alterations of consciousness are central in accessing the intermediary and higher spiritual realms through the imagination. "Divine/creative" inspiration alludes to

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Laughlin (C.D.) "Archetypes, Neurognosis and the Quantum Sea" in *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, Vol. 10 N.3, 1996, 375-400 p.377

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Blatner (A.) "Role Theory, Archetypes and Moreno's Philosophy illuminated by the Kabbalistic Tree of life" in *Journal of Group Psychotherapy, Psychodrama and Sociometry*, Spring 2005, 1-12, p.8

²⁹⁶ Laughlin (C.D.) "Archetypes, Neurognosis and the Quantum Sea" (375-400) p.378

‘poetic madness’, a state of intuitive creativity that communicates spiritual truth. The imaginal realm can come to consciousness through different methods, e.g. active imagination, music therapies, improvisation etc. Although Jung considered problematic the conception of the elaboration of the images of the unconscious as being an artistic act and the results of this process as being works of art, the romantics considered ‘art as a practice of living spirituality’.

6.1. Occultural Imagination

Contemporary mythologies are derived from the rich reservoir of “occulture”. Occulture is not in itself a worldview but a resource comprising diverse ideas, beliefs, practices and symbols from which people draw²⁹⁷. In it there exist, between other elements deriving from religious imagination infused with esoteric and occult material, narratives about communication with alien species and theories like the “ancient astronaut theory” supporting the idea that earth was visited by aliens in the ancient past. There are also stories about a hollow earth and different paranormal phenomena such as the Bermuda Triangle; or information about ritual magic and various conspiracy theories. Occulture is the cultural landscape, which the producers of popular culture exploit to compose media content and narratives expressing the occultural environment and contemporary religious and spiritual interests. In this respect, popular cultural products that explore and exhibit occultural concepts and cosmologies emerge from occulture. They contribute to the formation of worldviews, once considered unacceptable, by inviting people to regard the indefensible e.g. magic, the existence of super powers or the paranormal, as plausible while leading them to think about metaphysical and spiritual issues²⁹⁸. Thus, popular cultural products create familiarization and

²⁹⁷ Partridge (C.) *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, vol. I p. 84

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p.123-124

fascination with the imaginative and then evolve into the construction and development of diverse spiritualities, being formative of (oc)culture²⁹⁹.

During the 20th century and aided by Jung's works, the occult followed a general tendency towards the psychologization of the sacred in tandem with the sacralization of psychology³⁰⁰. This, in the context of occult and magical traditions together with different spiritualities, offered a number of techniques for approaching gnosis or accessing hidden realms, according to *personally meaningful choices and interpretations*. One such technique as mentioned earlier is engagement with symbols and symbolic systems. In the context of New Age spiritualities, for example, the stimulus provided by symbolic systems combined with various techniques as aids to individual spiritual growth is even more evident, captured in the doctrine of "create your own reality"³⁰¹. Is this practice not an artistic act embodied in living spirituality? Furthermore, the polysemic nature of cultural products in the context of occulture creates numerous possibilities for engaging with symbolic structures, inevitably leading to what Partridge refers to as being fiction-fact reversals; the idea that something, e.g. an artifact, intended as a fiction, within the occultural milieu, becomes decoded as being a fact³⁰².

This is more evident with science fiction stories, mostly first published in the form of book narratives or comic books before being remediated in cinema or tv-series. What makes science fiction interesting is the fact that, as Jeffrey J. Kripal in his book *Mutants and Mystics: Science Fiction, Superhero comics and the Paranormal* demonstrates, most of these stories are based on real life paranormal experiences of their creators that triggered their

²⁹⁹ Ibid. p.141

³⁰⁰ Hanegraaff (W.J.) *Western Esotericism* p.144

³⁰¹ Hanegraaff (W.J.) "New Age Religion and Secularization" p.229

³⁰² Partridge (C.) *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, p.126

conscious expression and articulation³⁰³. Here, the fiction-fact reversals become fact-fiction-fact reversals. Starting from the 19th century, Kripal attempts to prove a connection between paranormal experiences and the fantastic, by demonstrating that real-life paranormal experiences of authors and comic book artists have been *culturally transformed through their artistic expressions into the fantastic, becoming modern mythologies* that hold a central position in, in this case, American popular culture³⁰⁴. A culture which, according to Kripal, at its mythical level, participates in the ancient history and universal structures of human religious imagination; thereby transcending anything political or specifically American³⁰⁵.

Science fiction is all about the paranormal, the imaginative, the ancient and the futuristic, entailing gnostic implications as experienced during alterations of consciousness. According to Kripal, sci-fi and super-hero fantasies ‘reflect, refract, and exaggerate the real-world paranormal capacities’ and the possibilities for gnosis³⁰⁶. Popular media use science fiction in the context of occulture as resources that express the creative transformation of real-life experiences through the imagination arising from the depths of the unconscious into symbols. Thus, in some respect, occultural symbolisms represent images from the human psyche and the collective unconscious, articulated in the form of narratives. In addition, as popular media contents are formative of culture and spirituality, occultural symbolisms articulated through media further influence the forms of the co-creative visionary, spiritual or paranormal experiences of individuals. This is so because narratives and media have the ability to construct identities and thus being formative of the psyche.

³⁰³ Kripal (J.J.) *Mutants and Mystics: Science Fiction, Super Hero Comics and the Paranormal*, Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2011

³⁰⁴ Ibid. p.2

³⁰⁵ Ibid. p.5

³⁰⁶ Ibid. p.6

In relation to that, Kripal talks about two myth-themes found in science fiction stories, namely that of “realization” and “authorization”³⁰⁷. They are exactly concerned with the paranormal experiences of the authors and artists of science-fiction stories, who in some cases, literally wrote the future in the form of narratives, or experienced the future and the distant past in the present. What these authors ‘realized’ was the fact that the subjective paranormal experiences, that also affect the external physical world, constitute/resemble a story and that somehow, unconsciously, we as humans are involved in it. If humanity realizes that, in tandem with the powerful expression through art of the imagination, then it is possible to proceed to a conscious authorization, to the writing of better stories and experimentation with new narratives³⁰⁸. By pushing this process further, it is possible to take control of cultural, historical and political stories and transform ourselves; enabling our evolution as species towards what we really are. In a next step, after realization and authorization comes ‘embodiment’ and ‘actualization’, something happening as we will see at the stage of psytrance.

Finally, the function of science fiction artists and authors that base their work on their personal paranormal experiences corresponds to what will be now analyzed as the ‘shamanic function of the artist’, in the sense that the creative expression of knowledge received during alterations of consciousness is communicated through art to the public.

³⁰⁷ Ibid. p.219-290

³⁰⁸ It is important to consider contemporary film, television and video games mainstream thematology in terms of the evoked familiarization with death, guns, drugs, war and destruction in general. All those images enter the psyche influencing images and structures of the collective unconscious while their articulation and reproduction in the form of narratives may have a formative effect in humanity’s identity and future.

6.2. The Shamanic Model of the Artist

From a neo-romantic perspective, and in the context of contemporary psychedelia, Terence Mckenna proposed conceiving the role of the artist through the prototypic figure of the “shaman”.

“...The shaman is the figure at the beginning of human history that unites the doctor, the scientist and the artist into a single notion of care giving and creativity; and I think that... to whatever degree art over the past several centuries has wandered in the desert it is because this *shamanic function* has been either suppressed or forgotten... This notion of the artist as ‘mystical journeyer’, as one who goes into a world unseen by others and then returns to tell them of it, was pretty much lost... until beginning with the Romantics there is a new permission to explore the irrational. This really is the bridge back to the archaic shamanic function of the artist...”³⁰⁹ (my emphasis)

Mckenna also mentions the symbolists who, as modern art began to emerge, explored the irrational by accessing the unconscious³¹⁰. They were influenced by Spiritualism and the scientific studies of the supernatural and they turned to the occult as a vehicle for finding a route into the unconscious mind³¹¹. Also in a modernist context, in the period around the 1930’s, the Surrealist movement and its founder, Andre Breton, experimented with alternative states of the psyche or alterations of consciousness through the employment of occult techniques like the induction of somnambulism³¹². The Surrealists also derived collective inspiration from esoteric and occult world-views and systems of thought, which they re-

³⁰⁹ Mckenna (T.) “Open Doors for Artists”, talk: 56:14 min., 9:40min- 11:30min, accessed 03/06/2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VwqOagdFWHg>

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Keshavjee (S.) “Science and Visual Culture of Spiritualism: Camille Flammarion and the Symbolists in Fine –de – Siècle France” in *Aries*, 13, 2013, 37-69 p.40

³¹² Hanegraaff (W.J.) *Western Esotericism* p.155

appropriated, revisited and adapted for their artistic and social goals³¹³. Although modern art is usually thought to be secular, various exhibitions since the 1980's have demonstrated that modern art and the emergence of abstraction are very much indebted to spirituality and occultism³¹⁴. James Whistler was himself a spiritualist, Wassily Kandinsky argued for the Spiritual in Art, Piet Mondrian was personally involved in Theosophy, while similar and related occult and esoteric influences can be traced in music and literature³¹⁵. As Tessel M. Baudin points out, one of the essential themes of spiritual explorations in modern art is the figure of the artist as "the modern Prometheus"; leading once again to McKenna's shamanic model of the artist, which in his case is interrelated with the use of psychedelics³¹⁶.

Today, in the domain of visual arts, particularly in painting, the Romantic/shamanic model of the artist is actualized in a movement generally labelled as "Art of Imagination". As explained in the website of the society of Art of Imagination:

"Art of Imagination is two-fold. It is the "art" - the skill and techniques evolved over centuries - and the "imagination" by which we mean the vision of the artist which lifts the work of art above the ordinary, and gives it a life of its own."³¹⁷

This kind of art can go by many names such as Fantastic Realism, Surrealism, Magic Realism, Visionary Art, Cosmic Art and Inspirational Art, and its practitioners exhibit a great

³¹³ Ferentinou (V.) "Surrealism, Occulture and Gender: Women Artists, Power and Occultism" in *Aries*, 13, 2013, 103-130 p.105-106

³¹⁴ Bauduin (T.M.) "Introduction: Occulture and Modern Art" in *Aries*, 13, 2013, 1-5 p.2

³¹⁵ Hanegraaff (W.J.) *Western Esotericism* 155

³¹⁶ Bauduin uses the artwork *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths* (1967) by Bruce Nauman for making this case. Bauduin (T.M.) "Introduction: Occulture and Modern Art" .p.3

³¹⁷ <http://artofimagination.org/Pages/Hist.html>. Origins are traced in the visionary works of the early Flemish school (14th-15th c) and more specifically in paintings of Jan van Eyck (1385-1441) and Hieronymus Bosch (c1450-1516). In Italian Renaissance (15thc) and the works of Sandro Botticelli (c1444- 1510), Piero della Francesca (c1415 -1492) and Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519). In the works of Romantics during the 18th c like William Blake (1757- 1827). In the Pre-Raphaelite Brethren of 19th c England and the works of Sir John Everett Millais (1829-1896), William Holman Hunt (1827-1910) and Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1892). In the Symbolist (19th-20th) and Surrealist movement (20th c) and the Vienna School of Fantastic Realism formed after the 2nd World War. Ibid.

diversity in themes and style³¹⁸. Finally, in relation to psychedelic/visionary art, the most well known figure and major influence on the psychedelic trance movement, is Alex Grey, who designates himself as a “mystic artist” and embodies Mckenna’s shamanic model of the artist, translating his psychedelic visions into images.

6.3. Towards the Performativity of the Shamanic Model the Artist

In performative contexts, the roots of the shamanic model of the artist can be traced to ancient times, as presented at the beginning of chapter I, and more specifically to the ecstatic/trance performances of oracles or mediums such as the oracle of Delphi, as well as in collective rituals such as the Dionysian mysteries, from which Greek tragedy emerged. In its most original form, the performativity of the shamanic model of the artist is actualized in the ritual context of indigenous shamanic practices; for this reason, in the context of modernity, I will analyze *attempts* towards realizing and regaining this function in performative contexts, which is further fully actualized in the stage of psytrance.

The development of Western theatre after the 17th century, as we have seen, separated the roles of performers and spectators, and thus the shamanic model of the artist could only be manifested on the one side of the theatrical space, that is, “on” stage. This is evident if we consider the Spiritualist séances of the 19th century, when different “mediums”, mainly young women, entered a ‘trance’ state through a process of self-hypnotization to gain access to the otherworld³¹⁹. Recent studies have analyzed the ‘spectacular’ aspects of these séances,

³¹⁸ <http://artofimagination.org/Pages/About.html>

³¹⁹ Natale (S.) “The Medium on the Stage: Trance and Performance in nineteenth century spiritualism” in *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 9:3, (August) 2011, 239-255, p.250, Bennett (B.) “Sacred Theatres: Shakers, Spiritualists, Theatricality, and the Indian in the 1830s and 1840s” in *TDR: The Drama Review*, 49:3, (Autumn), 2005, 114-134 p.116

highlighting the close connections between Spiritualism and theatre³²⁰. For example, many professional mediums had trained as actresses and their trance-speaking performances were usually constructed as “staged” events in public halls and theatres³²¹. The effectiveness of the performances was dependent on technical devices and theatrical effects such as the use of phosphorescence, colored lighting and smoke machines, while sound effects such as rapping or knocking, as well as different props, were added to enhance the dramatic character of the events³²². At the same time, spiritualist séances were also promoted as scientific experiments for proving or debunking the authenticity of the medium; revealing the theatrical aspects of those performances assisted in exposing what was frequently a deliberate attempt at deception³²³. It may be that most of these mediums were acting “as if” they were in a trance and this is understandable when we consider that their oral pronouncements were often connected with political and spiritual issues, mainly concerning women’s’ rights, enabling a form of feminist political activism to occur³²⁴. The choice of using a “trance” as a vehicle is justified by the idea that “trance” or “spirit possession” signifying a disconnection from the ordinary world and the mediums’ own will, offered a validation of the authenticity of the delivered messages flowing automatically through the women’s bodies³²⁵. Although the performances of these mediums do not correspond to the shamanic model of the artist being discussed, the concept of a performer, on stage, contacting the otherworld to carry back messages to members of the audience clearly has its origins in the artistic shamanic function through the facilitation of alterations of consciousness.

³²⁰ Bennett (B.) “Sacred Theatres” (114-134) p.116

³²¹ Ibid. p.117

³²² Ibid. p.115 -117

³²³ Keshavjee (S.) “Science and Visual Culture of Spiritualism” (37-69) p.41

³²⁴ Bennett (B.) “Sacred Theatres” (114-134), p.116

³²⁵ Natale (S.) “The Medium on the Stage” (239-255) p.250

Spiritualism was a popular religious movement in the Occult Revival of the 19th century; but it was not the only form of spirituality using theatrical means for promoting specific beliefs and worldviews. In Theosophy, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky who was a co-founder and prominent teacher in the Theosophical Society re-worked in her *Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion and Philosophy* (1888) on the medieval belief about the connection between Plato and a “prisca theologia” – the idea that an ancient superior spiritual wisdom has been transmitted through a chain of divinely inspired sages from the very ancient past to modern times. Based on this doctrine, occultists like Edouard Schure and Katherine Tingley combined theatre with esoteric worldviews to construct and disseminate their new esoteric religions and spiritual systems³²⁶. In particular, the French Theosophist Edouard Schure asserted that Plato had been empowered with supersensible perception by a drama he attended as an initiate into the mystery religion of Eleusis, although no clear evidence exists for affirming this³²⁷. Schure produced two dramatic re-constructions; two performances, the Lesser and Great mysteries (*The Rape of Persephone* and *The Sacred Drama of Eleusis*), which he considered essential for the creation of a new form of “religious theatre” that would essentially transform human beings³²⁸. While in 1897 Katherine Tingley, who led the Universal Brotherhood and Theosophical Society (UBTS) from 1896 until her death in 1929 in California, opened the “School for the Revival of the Lost Mysteries in Antiquity”, incorporating the study of science, philosophy, religion and performing arts for the promotion of a “New Cycle of Universal Brotherhood” that would bring about peace on earth³²⁹. Tingley’s belief in the potential of theatre and drama for teaching these visions and principles of Theosophy was such that in 1901 she built the first, out-door, ancient Greek style theatre in North America for the creation and production of original plays, called “symposia”, usually

³²⁶ Ligan (E.M.) “Plato and the Theatre of the Occult Revival: Edouard Schuré, Katherine Tingley, and Rudolph Steiner” in *Religion and the Arts*, 14:4, (August) 2010, 257-385 p.367-370

³²⁷ Ibid. p.368

³²⁸ Ibid. p.374

³²⁹ Ibid. p.373-377

set in Ancient Greece and populated by ancient philosophers like Plato³³⁰. This was done to promote a contemporary revival of the hypothetical ancient Platonic religion by combining religion with art.

Finally, Rudolf Steiner, who left the Theosophical Society and founded the Anthroposophical Society in 1913, wrote four “*Mysteriendramen*” [*The Portal of Initiation* (1910), *The Soul’s Probation* (1911), *The Guardian of the Threshold* (1912) and *The Soul’s Awakening* (1913)] with the purpose of creating a “a new dramatic art for the future” able to bring soul and spirit forms into manifestation on stage by inviting the “readers” to develop their own spiritual faculties³³¹. These *Mysteriendramen*” included representations of spiritual entities, extra-physical realms of existence such as the spiritual, soul, etheric and astral planes, based on Steiner’s Platonically inspired understanding of the spiritual world and his self proclaimed clairvoyance. The spiritual beings presented in the dramas were thought to be perceived as real entities inhabiting the intermediary realms of existence, also regarded as representing actual places experienced directly by gifted human beings³³². If Steiner’s claims are true, then his *Mysteriendramen* represent the closest modern parallel to a shamanic/artistic performance.

Another kind of performance corresponding, from a non/psychedelic perspective, to the performativity of the shamanic model of the artist, can be traced back to the performative turn, particularly in the context of what is known “holy” or “sacred theatre”. According to Peter Brook, “holy” theatre is the theatre that renders the invisible visible³³³. It is based on the common need for contacting the extraordinary and the transcendent outside of the established

³³⁰ Ibid. p.378

³³¹ Ibid. p.380-381

³³² Ibid. p.381-382

³³³ Brook (P.) p.49

and accepted norms that rule our everyday lives and prevent us achieving transcendence³³⁴. This theatre also responds to the great common need that expresses itself in the urge to (re)create and thus communicate the most deeply hidden forms of reality lying inside every person. Its purpose is sacred because its actualization depends on the communal act of being physically, mentally and intellectually present in the here and now with other fellow – humans, while sharing, and ideally reflecting upon, the same experience. The effects of a “holy” theatre are cathartic resulting to collective and individual healing and thus, as a performative forms, it incorporates elements of “ritual” enacted with a participatory mentality, signifying performative and social participation.

I will consider Antonin Artaud, Peter Brook and Jerzy Grotowsky as important representatives of this kind of theatre; a brief examination of their works and influence will reveal how they contributed towards the actualization of the performativity of the shamanic model, which is fully actualizes in the stage of “psytrance”. Antonin Artaud, in his “theatre of cruelty”, actualized the potentials of a “holy” theatre by transforming a fragment of experience into communicable forms that derive from “imagination” and “intuition”, and which violently assault the participants, breaking down their defenses³³⁵. By using different “technological” means, Artaud created specific, intense spatiotemporal situations aimed at facilitating “trans-liminal consciousness states”, cutting off participants from the ordinary and confronting them, often in a shocking way, with their own common repressions and unfulfilled desires hidden in the psyche³³⁶. Central to Artaud’s work was the subject of ‘madness’ as his authority for violating social and cultural limitations and as a means of fracturing the constituted subject and opening the way to ideas of subjectivity as being a

³³⁴ Ibid. p.57

³³⁵ Ibid. p.61

³³⁶ Ibid. p.63, 64, 65

‘process’³³⁷. From the 1970’s on, several studies have suggested that Artaud’s vision, actualized in his works, is fundamentally “Gnostic”, seeking an escape and liberation from the prison of materiality; something that he pursued through the intensive effects produced by technology³³⁸. Although there is no clear evidence that Artaud was influenced by “Gnostic” literature, his vision was nevertheless influenced by esoteric and spiritual worldviews drawn from alchemy, the Tarot, Tibetan Buddhism, the Tao, Cabbalism, the Mystery Religions, Rosicrucianism, and Hinduism, while he himself claimed to have been more particularly inspired by the Zohar, the Bardo Thodol, the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the Mexican Popol Vuh, the Vedas and the Book of Revelations³³⁹. Artaud has become known as a ‘guru’ of the 1960’s counter-culture and he is also a major influence on recent developed ideas about performance and theatre.

For Peter Brook, “holy” theatre is sacred because, in its ‘collective’ constitution, profound meanings of “universality” are communicated through the shared act of ‘participating’ with a common consciousness and simultaneous concentration on the same thing³⁴⁰. For this reason, “holy” theatre does not lure the participants into an illusion because it occurs as the intensity of ‘being here. This collective experience of exploring the here and now in a distinct performative act was further stressed by Jerzy Grotowski who was also influenced by “Gnosticism”³⁴¹. Grotowski made theatre more participatory in terms of an equal involvement in the event, where the stage –auditorium distinction was eliminated. Through the collective experience of the exploration of the origins of the self; the inner processes and common forms, Grotowski searched for salvation by actualizing the inter-subjective deep essentials of human existence, which are rooted in the ancient rituals of *group identification*

³³⁷ Goodall (J.R.) *Artaud and the Gnostic Drama*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, p.2

³³⁸ *Ibid* p.3

³³⁹ *Ibid* p.6

³⁴⁰ *Ibid*. p.55, 57

³⁴¹ Atissani (A.), Poggelli (E.) “Acta Gnosis” in *TDR: The Drama Review*, 52:2, (Summer) 2008, 75-106, p.76

with the “myth”³⁴². What Grotowsky was trying to do was to explore the subjective expression of the (collective) unconscious in a mutual act of reflection upon it through the direct experience of communing with the participants. Thus, his theatre is closer to the performativity of the shamanic model of the artist, which, returning to the past in the form of a spiral feed-back loop, is almost fully actualized in the performative situation in the stage of the psychedelic trance culture, as analyzed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

7. Technognosis in the Stage of Psytrance

In this chapter I apply the concept of technognosis at the stage of psytrance, using theatre as my main analytical tool. This is done, because the stage, as a framed situation, re-enforces the process of ostention, where every constituent element and the whole operate as intentional signs, standing for the whole category they belong to. I analyze technognosis through the evocation and facilitation of aesthetic, visionary and mystical experiences affected by the intentional combination of media, arts, performance and psychedelic substances. The end result of this process is the affection and expression of the participatory mentality through direct experiences, that through the collective and pluralistic embodiment of the shamanic function gives form to the collective, symbolic vision of humanity’s imagination.

7.1. The ‘Stage’ as a Hypermedium

In his article “Theatre as the Art of the Performer and the Stage of Intermediality”, Chiel Kattenbelt proposed conceiving theatre as ‘the paradigm of the arts’ and a ‘hypermedium’, in

³⁴² Grotowsky (J.) “Towards a poor theatre” in *Odra*, no 9, Wrocław, 1965 p. 2

the sense that it is able to incorporate all other arts and media³⁴³. In addition, Kattenbelt defined theatre as the ‘art of presence’ and thus the art of the performer, where the shared responsibility of performers and spectators in realizing the event by adopting the performative orientation gives an aspect of ‘ethical’ meaning through the realization of performative and social participation to the congregation³⁴⁴. To further support his argument, Kattenbelt presented a philosophical debate held since the 18th century in the domain of the arts focused on the relations between different ‘primary’ arts and the question of which of them is the highest artform³⁴⁵. Immanuel Kant considered ‘poetry’ as the highest form of art, where thoughts and intuitions conduct the ‘free play of imagination’, while Hegel proposed ‘theatre’ as the highest art-form because it constitutes the completion of the dramatic text through the performative, direct ‘presence’ in action³⁴⁶. More specifically, Hegel recognized in theatre the power of the full expressivity of human body that mutually influences performers and spectators through their direct contact in a shared situation. In contrast to both Hegel and Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer, who had been influenced by the Romantic tradition, considered ‘music’ as the highest art of all³⁴⁷.

Since the time of Pythagoras, music has been developed as a ‘science’ based mainly on the Pythagorean and Platonic doctrine, which postulated that the creation and order of the cosmos correspond to numbers, and thus the numerical ratios that determine the musical intervals constitute the harmony of earthly music³⁴⁸. This conception was further developed into the “music of the spheres”, the ‘harmony or music of the cosmos’, based on the idea that

³⁴³ Kattenbelt (C.) “Theatre as the Art of the Performer and the Stage of Intermediality” in *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance* (29-40) p.31

³⁴⁴ Ibid. p.32-33

³⁴⁵ Ibid. p.29

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Ibid. p.30

³⁴⁸ De Jong (A), Teeuwen (M.) “Music I:Antiquity” (808-810) p.808-809

heavenly bodies resonate in a perfect harmony³⁴⁹. Gradually, musical imagery, theories and practices developed through different esoteric traditions of late Antiquity like Hermeticism, contributing to the systematic advance of ideas and belief systems on the relations between the different realms of being, based on the esoteric doctrine of “as above, so below”³⁵⁰. During medieval times, music was thought to reflect the ‘divine order of the cosmos’, which human beings had the capacity to approach for grasping the true meaning of Creation itself (gnosis) through the study of the musical principles³⁵¹. Additionally, during the Renaissance, music played an especially significant role in the formation of “occult” philosophies expressed in practical, magical experiments and artistic endeavors. Through its power to “mediate” between material and immaterial realms, it operates as the *threshold* between inner and outer worlds, as the “medium” connecting mind, body and spirit³⁵². After the Scientific Revolution and the period of the Enlightenment, concepts such as the ‘harmony of the spheres’ (musica mundana) or ‘musica humana’ referring to the psycho-physical effects of music were officially discarded as irrational, as the primary purpose of music became confined to offering aesthetic pleasure through the imitative representation of human emotions reflected in its expressive qualities³⁵³. However, at the same time, musical esotericism developed on the basis of Pythagorean ideas, continued to be practiced culminating in the elevation of music to the status of “religion” in the context of the Romantic tradition. During the 20th century, esoteric music based on Pythagorean world-views underwent a wider revival, while after the 1950’s esoteric ideas permeated further into everyday music in popular culture through the psychedelic revolution flourishing in avant-garde trends and different kinds of spiritual music healing songs, as in the case of New Age

³⁴⁹ Ibid. p.809

³⁵⁰ Ibid. p.809

³⁵¹ Teeuwen (M.) “Music II: Middle Ages” in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, 810-812,p.810

³⁵² Gouk (P.) “Music III: Renaissance” in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, 812-815, p.811

³⁵³ Godwin (J) “Music IV: 18th century to the Present” in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, 815-818, p.816

music³⁵⁴. The esoteric conception of music has also been a core feature of psychedelic trance culture as evidenced by the characterization of the trance dance experience as being a techno-shamanic ritual.

In a performative context, during the second half of 19th century, Richard Wagner attempted a re-unification and integration of the individual arts (music, poetry and dance) - and technology - into a *Gesamtkunstwerk* under the primacy of music as a synthesizing force and through dramatic ‘representation’³⁵⁵. What he was striving for was the construction of a perfect ‘illusion’ – the sense of existence of an autonomous world – in what he considered to be the ‘future of the arts’³⁵⁶.

Music also comprised the leading element in ‘modernist music theatre’, where the creators/artists invented and used new symbolic systems, which they further combined with a dramatic text and musical styles and structures for creating new forms of “ritual performance”³⁵⁷. The ‘ritualization’ of these theatrical performances centered around the use of music, rendered it as a sign of spirituality and serving as the vehicle for collective transformation³⁵⁸. This was achieved through the presentation of extended vocal techniques, stylized ornamentation, non-verbal sounds and the use of forms of notated speech and chant-like recitations characterized mostly by simplicity and repetition³⁵⁹. In addition, modern music theatre has incorporated elements from diverse genres such as cabaret, vaudeville, Japanese Noh, Kabuki theatre, commedia del’arte, oratorio and dramatic madrigal, European and East Asian traditions of puppet theatre, melodrama, medieval Christian theatre, film and ancient Greek tragedy,

³⁵⁴ Ibid. p.817

³⁵⁵ Kattenbelt (C.) “Theatre as the Art of the Performer and the Stage of Intermediality” (29-40) p.30

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Sheppard (W.A.) *Revealing Masks: Exotic Influences and Ritualized Performance in Modernist Music Theatre*, University of California Press, 2001 p.21

³⁵⁸ Ibid. p.21

³⁵⁹ Ibid. p.21

enabling connections between the exotic, the traditional and the modern models of theatrical performance³⁶⁰. The aim of the performances was the achievement of a connection between the actual performance and a higher state – whether of religious, political or a more generally spiritual and moral nature – something that could not happen without the actual engagement of the audience in the transaction of the event; the audience acts as part of a ritual congregation; totally a participant in the event³⁶¹. This is something different from Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which stands alone as a totality, being meaningful only as a representation of ‘action’ and a representation of the expressivity of ‘thinking’, independent of the spectator’s involvement. In the ritualistic modernist theatrical performance the end goal lies in the effects of the whole experience and the specific dynamics of the incorporated media to the participants and, more specifically, the medium of music that facilitated a “static” or a “meta-temporal” collective “higher state”³⁶².

Modern music theatre has been partly influenced by Wagner’s ideas and to a greater extent by Wassily Kandinsky who at the beginnings of 20th century developed the idea of a *Buhnenkomposition* as being the ‘monumental (abstract) art’, a new form of theatre. Here, all the individual art-forms would come together autonomously as “pure expressive forms” (as the intensity of the ‘vibrations of the soul’) through their equivalent elements of colors, sounds and movements³⁶³. Kandinsky argued against representationalism and illusionism and for the direct experience of the specificities and expressive qualities of every artistic medium through sensuous play with the physicality of signs and through their dynamic clash in the theatrical space. In Kandinsky’s conception the spectator became constituted as the experiencer.

³⁶⁰ Ibid. p.7-8

³⁶¹ Ibid. p.8- 18, 19

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Kattenbelt (C.) “Theatre as the Art of the Performer and the Stage of Intermediality” (29-40) p.30 -31

In contrast to Kandinsky, Jan Mukarovsky argued from a linguistic perspective that the components of a theatrical performance, when coming together in a performative context lose their autonomy and become a new art³⁶⁴. He defined the theatrical performance as a *Gestalt*, as that, which is more than the sum of its parts³⁶⁵. As Kattenbelt explains, in this respect, “all the elements of performance contain an aspect of the whole in them because they are determined primarily within the coherence of their mutual relationships”³⁶⁶. For Mukarovsky, theatre is not a ‘composition’ of individual elements but a ‘contexture’ – an interweaving of strands that together create a texture – while the ‘essence’ of theatre is found in the continuously changing dynamics and energies of the *immaterial* relationships, occurring between the spatial and temporal components in the ephemeral and transitory occurrence of performance³⁶⁷.

The technognostic ‘experience’ occurring in the stage of psytrance exhibits elements of all the above mentioned ideas in terms of the functions, roles and values related to the medium of music and the ‘hypermedium’ of theatre. But only from the viewpoint of instrumental causality could the trance-dance experience in the stage of psytrance be conceived as being an illusion. It is more than that, requiring a different conceptualization, an open mind and a participatory orientation in approaching it. It is first of all a *Gestalt* as it is a ritual; it is a carnival and a ‘luna park’, a performance, an art and life. In its highest form it is the practice of living spirituality as the intense, directly embodied experience of the deeper values and truths of existence. It is the sharedness of a profound synchronization of body and mind under a higher energy expressed through the medium of music based on rhythm, and the visual

³⁶⁴ Ibid p.31

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ Ibid. 31

expression of human and cosmic imagination. It is an altered reality embodying the participatory mentality of those experiencing it, actualizing the vision of the archaic and the futuristic in the present. It derives from love, it has an intention and it has an end; it is an ethical way and beautiful way of coming together with each other's conscious and unconscious creative expressions and for experiencing pleasurable emotions; for healing ourselves and celebrating with nature life and hope. As a Gestalt, every element, medium and energy participating in that experience contains a part of the whole, something, which is also valid for this analysis. And as theatre emerged from the collective performative participation in alterations of consciousness through the use of plants, music and dance, *where each person became a musician, a poet, a dancer and a visionary at the same time* and because 'there' once more returns as the vehicle for the collective actualization and embodiment of the shamanic model of the artist, I will use it as the basic analytical tool for analyzing technognosis.

7.2. The Elements Comprising the Stage of Psytrance

As a hypermedium, the stage of psytrance comprises the following elements, which I present in an order starting from the most physical/corporeal media and ending with the most immaterial aspects:

1. The natural landscape and the man-made architectural construction that incorporate the technological equipment needed for the conduct of the event, too.
2. The experiencers participating to different degrees in the performative situation that through the shamanic function operate as media themselves.
3. Visual media such as fabrics, paintings, sculptures, ritual objects, digital art, land art etc, as well as, light installations, visual and light projections and LCD screens that extend the

physical space by revealing hidden incorporeal dimensions manifested through the expression of human imagination in materiality.

4. The immaterial medium of music, comprising electronic sounds, natural sounds, instrumental sounds, vocals, speech and a number of media samples taken from the rich reservoir of occulture.

5. From a participatory perspective, hidden aspects of reality are further revealed to individuals through the facilitation of alterations of consciousness that constitute basic elements of the Gestalt as being “intermediary” worlds ephemerally actualized in performance through the human imagination and a ‘creative life-force’. The manifestation of these worlds (or entities) is aided by the consumption of psychedelic substances and the experience of alterations in consciousness, while their further harmonization is constituted by the medium of music in a techno-shamanic ritual.

8. Aesthetic Experience

It is now time to theorize about the first person experience introduced at the beginning of this thesis in relation to the first four categories of media constituting the ‘stage’ of psytrance and in terms of alterations of consciousness and the aesthetic experience (see p. 5). My description of the experience as an imaginative situation was confined on presenting the inter-subjective or transpersonal aspects of this experience, while my analysis is realized in three sections in which I position the visual media in the first category of media. Thus, the first section includes the encounter with the whole architectural structure of the stage integrated within the natural environment, incorporating media equipment and corporeal visual artistic materials. The second analyzes human performance and the third the medium of music.

8.1. Visual Media and Materialities

The stage facilitates the process of ostension and its symbolic character defines it as a work of art and an installation for spiritual practice. This structure actualizes the symbiotic model of existence in harmony with nature, in the sense that it is built as part of the natural environment, combined organically with what already exists there, something completely different from modernity's exploitation of nature according to human comfort.

As an artistic installation, the performative situation in the stage actualizes the characteristics of festival and play. In its festive qualities it demands performative participation, manifested first of all in the corporeal presence of humans. The playful qualities of the stage invite a more active involvement in the situation manifesting itself through the free, improvisatory and interactive engagement with the expressivities of the stage's material qualities experienced through the physical navigation in space. The expressivity of the materiality of the hyper-medium of the stage as a whole, especially through its symbolic character, further invites the adoption of an aesthetic orientation, something also supported by the encounter with the beauty in nature. Thus, initially, the contemplation of the stage structure as part of the natural environment during a sunny day can result in feelings of pleasure, and especially aesthetic pleasure.

In addition, as expressing the paranormal and the imaginative, the hidden in nature and in the unconscious and as used with an intention to contact the transcendent in a ritualistic context, the hypermedium of the stage and each individual element actualizes the shamanic function. Visionary arts and occultural symbolisms are widely used, while shamanic artistic methods are further implemented for communicating gnosis. This is evident in the use of e.g.

mandalas, which as Jung explained, are pictograms expressing the state of the self³⁶⁸; they are “Formation, Transformation, Eternal Mind’s Eternal Recreation” and they demand a deep imaginative engagement for communicating their hidden symbolic meaning³⁶⁹. Similarly, sacred geometry shapes are exhibited as further revealing the hidden patterns of the universe, something that is possible to be encountered directly through the visionary consciousness, as I will consider later.

8.2. Human Performance

In the stage, the condition of ostention exhibits also human beings as ‘intentional signs’, inviting for the further adoption of the aesthetic orientation towards the participants. People are presented in the congregation as embodied, living works of art, exhibiting a symbolic character and evoking aesthetic pleasure. This aesthetic pleasure depends very much on the feeling of collective pleasure. This fundamental aspect of collectivity gives an ethical meaning to the experience, which manifests itself in human performances, each in an individual ‘style’. To support that, I will consider Ludwig Wittgenstein and his famous assertion that “aesthetics and ethics are one” expressed in and through “style”.

Wittgenstein argues that the ethical and the aesthetic, as signifying values with no objective referent in the external world, cannot be expressed in propositional language by words. They signify the ‘inexpressible’. Their relationship is interdependent and tautological in the sense that they are both transcendent, beyond the capacity of significant language and theory, and they are one to the extent that the mode of being of the ethical is “showing” itself³⁷⁰. As

³⁶⁸ Jung (C.G.) *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* p.221

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Stengel (K.) “Ethics ad Style: Wittgenstein’s Aesthetic Ethics and Ethical Aesthetics” in *Poetics Today*, V.25, N.4, Winter 2004, pp. 609-625, p. 615

transcendent value statements, they offer a perspective on the world which can only be expressed *in and through* words in the formation of language that is in ‘style’, in ‘living practice’. Style expresses the ethical as a way of understanding life in the absolute value of the good in and through aesthetic form, while the aesthetic form, to wit style, expresses the ethical as an individual, yet universal, aspect of the aesthetic act³⁷¹. The uniqueness of the expression of individual style points to the inter-subjective aspect of existence, in the necessity for bringing into life the unique expression of the mind’s perspective of eternity, of infinity³⁷².

Although Wittgenstein is theorizing about the possibility of transcendent, inexpressible value statements being shown through the form of language, it is easy to transpose his hypothesis onto the human performance. Individual performance, including the performative utterances of speech, gestures, actions, forms and appearances, can be conceived as expressing the individual style. Through performance the unique, individual perspective on the world is “showing” itself as the corporeal expression of divine imagination in giving life to each human being, which through individual consciousness and will, further participates in its expression through individual style. The aesthetic and the ethical as transcendent, inexpressible values can be perceived as signifying degrees of gnosis, which is symbolically communicated through style. When someone participates in a performative situation with an aesthetic orientation it is possible to reflect on the individual and collective human style for finding a meaning in existence by considering the revealed human perspective on the world. In other words, the style in human performance discloses the ethical and aesthetic perspectives on existence and should be consciously performed.

³⁷¹ Ibid. p. 617

³⁷² Ibid. p. 617 -618 , In respect to Spinoza’s ethics

In the stage, pleasure can be also experienced through the consciousness of being watched by people who get pleasure in watching the individuals performing. As the collectivity of the event points to the sharedness of experience, the knowledge of being watched, the knowledge of watching and the initial intention to feel pleasure when participating in the event direct the individual style towards the beautiful, which is the ethical, in this case embodied in the joint experience. This aesthetic experience is further enhanced by the evocation of the aesthetic consciousness induced by psychedelic substances, this time directed towards humans as part of nature, which as Huxley conceptualized has the capacity to enable a person perceive the beauty in the world. This aesthetic experience signifies a kind of gnosis, as the encounter with the beautiful, which is also the good, can evoke a state of love. In addition, style expressed in clothes, movements, ornaments, images and behaviors in the stage of psytrance further actualizes the shamanic model of the artist as individuals operate in alterations of consciousness and thus in imaginative realities. Finally, after having the experience in the stage, which is a framed situation that invites for the adoption of the aesthetic/ ethical orientation towards humans, it is highly possible to adopt the same orientation in every-day life encounters; and this is one of the aims of technognosis.

8.3. The Medium of Music

In the stage of the psychedelic trance gatherings music plays the most significant role, working on diverse levels and influencing every individual differently. It is also the basic reason many trance goers participate in the stage of psytrance motivated by their love for music.

Music induces flow, while rhythmic music, as in the case of the incessant electronic drum

beat of psytrance, loaded with psychedelic sound embellishments, has a strengthened capacity to induce and enhance flow states, as it is intentionally structured to do exactly that. As mentioned before, the state of immersion is a preliminary and prerequisite for getting into flow and thus, in the stage, flow and immersion through music constitute common consciousness states. Music has the capacity to immerse the listener into a virtual world, while flow guides the imagination. As an optimal experience and a transcendent consciousness condition, flow evokes feelings of pleasure. This pleasure transcends the purely physical and incorporates the aesthetic pleasure too, which with the enhancement of the aesthetic consciousness through the use of psychedelics further reveals the beauty of musical harmony and the beauty of sounds in visuality.

9. Visionary Experience

I continue the analysis of the performative situation in the stage of psytrance by considering the visionary experience in relation to what Huxley termed as the visionary consciousness, which, induced by the use of psychedelic substances, reveals the world as a mystery full of new forms that emanate from thought, intuition and imagination (and a creative force) and offer new insights and meanings to the experiencers. The contents of the visionary consciousness constitute the most immaterial elements manifested in the stage of psytrance perceived individually. I will analyze how music and all the other visual media, including humans, contribute and co-shape this experience, which, in revealing hidden aspects of reality interpenetrating the elements of physical space, constitutes a kind of gnosis.

9.1. Visual Technologies

Before I proceed it is necessary to think about the stage as it may be at night. As natural light

does not exist the whole situation is lighted artificially. Light projections in different bright and fluorescent colors pervade the atmosphere which, in combination with the dust rising from the innumerable jumping steps of the participants, adds a textual, soft focus aspect to the visual field. Lights flash in time with the music, while at times the stromboli effect, or the combined illumination above the stage is used to maximum capacity. In addition, light projections scan the stage and participants, highlighting specific spatial qualities of the event, while psychedelic video projections and screens add more movement, color and vectors.

Visual media manifest intangible realities often resembling the psychedelic experiences of their creators, which they further combine with elements and intercultural symbolism from occulture and nature. These media technologies have the capacity to reveal other dimensions and imaginative or hidden aspects of reality that acquire actual forms in the physical world as the contents of these intangible media articulations. They are able to (re)create or simulate in the closest possible way the images of the mind, while, in themselves they comprise and represent other realities, too, entailing techgnostic implications and alluding to cyber-space. They can also communicate the (spiritual) visions of artists, while in the stage of psytrance they function as contemporary tools for actualizing the shamanic function.

In addition, flowing movements juxtaposed with sharp repetition, and effects resembling perceptions experienced in altered states of consciousness following the musical rhythm, further enhance the experiences of the participants. In this way, the possibilities for gnosis are enhanced, too.

9.2. Musical Visions

Music has the capacity to parallel qualities of space and motion, mediating meanings in a way that reaches beyond propositional language, as space and motion in music are closely tied to

psychosomatic experience³⁷³. Sound, in contrast to visual phenomena, penetrates through the ears into the body in a way that relates to the position of the listener; thus it can be perceived as having certain directionality. In the stage, because of the nature of the medium that produces the synthesized electronic sounds, recorded or amplified music allows greater control over how it is received than would be the case for acoustic instrumental music³⁷⁴. The stereophonic equipment enables the immediate reception of sound without intermediary interferences, and thus directionality and motion are generated in other ways. As music possesses spatial qualities, electronic music has the capacity to generate spaces beyond the realm of natural spaces and this is actualized by the use of different effects such as panning, reverberation and scalar value changes in volume, pitch and timbre, with the latter being a characteristic of psychedelic trance music that cannot be replicated in traditional acoustic, instrumental, music production³⁷⁵. Thus, the motions and spatial qualities of trance music are perceived as creating a reality, which transcends the boundaries of ordinary motion directionality and physical space. What is perceived is a multi-dimensional arena of vectors, motions, and spaces realized in time and mediated through electronic music³⁷⁶.

This inherent capacity of music to generate perceptions of motion and space can be further understood in terms of “synesthesia”, a neurological condition in which a stimulus received in one sensory modality elicits a sensory-perceptual experience in another. For example a musical tone can evoke the perception of specific colors or smells³⁷⁷. In the stage, this synesthetic experience is further enhanced through the consumption of psychedelic substances and through the other media technologies positioned around it which synchronize themselves

³⁷³ Pladott (U.) “Meaning, Motion and Gesture in Psychedelic Trance Music”, essay presented in the seminar *Music as Motion, Gesture and Action*, Department of Musicology: Tel Aviv University, 22 August 2002, 1-40. Accessed online 28/12/2012

http://www.udi.pladott.org/music/Motion_and_Gesture_in_Trance%20Music2005.pdf, p. 2

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 16-20 A good example demonstrating that is Vishudda’s “Marie Boine”

³⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 4

³⁷⁷ Harrison (J.) and Baron-Cohen (S.) “Synaesthesia: An Account of Coloured Hearing”, *Leonardo*, 27:4, 1994, 343-346

with the music. In this way, the physical external images and the visual media contents and projections become interweaved with individual visions and intangible realities contributing to the creation of an “extra-ordinary” time-space continuum which overpowers and immerses all the participants.

Furthermore, the Dj as a techno-shaman guides the visionary experience in the stage. The continuous drum beat constitutes also the vital link for bridging separate realities and dimensions by aiding in the passage from one consciousness state to the other³⁷⁸. As hallucinogens have the capacity to dissolve the boundaries of the ego, the inherent structure of music fills in the void in the consciousness of the individuals and provides new structures for the participants³⁷⁹. Thus, during entranced states music acts as a “jungle gym” for consciousness, as a structuring machine that provides consciousness with a specific pathway to follow.³⁸⁰ In the manifestation of the visionary images, music can also be regarded as acting like the creative life-force aiding in the co-creation of the intermediary worlds.

In addition, like in visual forms, auditory samples substitute for the common symbolic belief systems in the stage, functioning as common referents for the diverse participants. Music (re)mediates themes from popular media sources, such as science fiction films, TV, documentaries, radio etc. shaping the visionary experience of the participants.

First of all, the continuous drumbeat not only resembles the indigenous shamanic drum, but it also points back to the primitive and the primordial, a feeling that arises in consciousness through the intensity of the communal dance. Furthermore, as created by using computer technology, psychedelic trance music mediates electronic, disembodied and synthesized sounds that for many people outside psytrance are perceived as being ‘uncanny’ or unfamiliar.

³⁷⁸ Dobkin de Rios and Katz “Some Relationships between Music and Hallucinogenic Ritual” (64-76) p. 65

³⁷⁹ Dobkin de Rios and Katz “Some Relationships between Music and Hallucinogenic Ritual”1975 (64-76) p. 72

³⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 68

These sounds exhibit an alien quality - aliens connected in contemporary mythologies to futuristic technology - and thus these sounds point to the future of humanity, the exploration of space and the contact with other species; something only possible to be done with the aid of technology³⁸¹. Thus, space constitutes a prominent theme.

In relation to this, another common feature of psytrance music is the sampling of robotic, alien voices or voices of mystics that talk to the listeners and reveal secrets of the world, the universe, coming from other worlds or dimensions. At times these voices are strict, others just calm and others playful, according to the intentions of the artist. They communicate spiritual knowledge emanating from alternative spirituality contexts, often designating humans and aliens as being spiritual entities, cosmic brothers or as being 'one'. In any case, their aim lies at underlining the power of individual and collective will, freedom and imagination in creating reality in accordance with the New Age exhortation of 'create your own reality', as well as at highlighting the aspect of Oneness and interconnectedness.

In addition, vocals from different world cultures and religions are alluded to in many tracks, from Indian mantras to shamanic songs that enhance the spiritual qualities of music, while the intercultural mixture of non-western traditional sounds and contemporary electronic music further underlines the transcultural dimension of music and spirituality³⁸². Finally, organic sounds and different psychedelic sounds further resemble the qualities of nature, reconstructing artistically the sound-scapes of forests or the ocean floor³⁸³. The natural, organic, psychedelic and the artificial technological are all combined together as abstract

³⁸¹ Cosmosis "Contact" in *Jewel Case*, Transient Records, 2002, Helber Gun "First Contact" in *First Contact E.P.*, Iono Musi, Ele, 2011

³⁸² Hallucinogen "The Herb Garden" in *The Mystery of the Yeti part II*, Tip Word, 1999, Electric Universe "The Prayer" in *Cosmic Experience*, Electric Universe Records, 2009

³⁸³ Chilled Cquence and Tajmahal "The Power of Plants" in *Cosmic Chill VA*, Electric Dream, 2007

common signifiers, pointing back to the ancient, and forward towards the future experienced in the now in an altered time-space continuum.

9.3. Collective Vision

Individual style and conscious human performance, further express or embody aspects of different contemporary myths as expressions of the imagination. In this way, humans constitute occultural media. The dissolution of the ego and the freedom of expressivity allows human beings to perform with a participatory mentality the 'self' by re-appropriating occultural images and symbolisms. In the stage, people do not act 'as if' but they act 'as being', stripped out from the roles performed in everyday life and acting out their true self. The performance of the participants, thus, further conditions the individual and collective visions.

Similar to Nietzsche's analysis on the birth of tragedy, where drama evolved from collective alterations of consciousness when the Dionysian chorus saw in the satyr the reflection of their God and the primordial image of man, in the stage of psytrance something similar happens. This can be understandable in terms of the fully actualization of what Grotowsky was striving for in his holy theatre, namely the collective identification with the myth. The collective embodiment of the shamanic model of the artist that turns every person into a dancer, a poet, a musician and a visionary at the same time manifests the collective vision emerging from humanity's collective unconscious, desire and will, in forms comprising common symbolisms. The acting out of this image constitutes the embodiment and actualization of the human story that occurs as the next step in human action, after the 'realization' of our involvement in the paranormal and the decision to authorize our future. Psytrance has been born out of experiences that express the unconscious and because, through the internet and the

communal performance, its thematics were further structured through participation, in the stage what occurs is the vision of humanity, as the image of the primordial humans in a technologically mediated altered reality evolving towards the future. Closer to the archetype of the Goddess, this image alludes to the feminizing of culture, and it is manifested in the embodiment and expression of the plurality of individual visions transpersonally experienced.

10. Mystical Experience

The end goal of the trance-dance experience is the induction of a mystical experience or a mystical consciousness that can be manifested on a collective level through the sense of Oneness. From a New Age perspective, that regards humans as being divine/spiritual entities and one with the universe, the ultimate gnosis of union is actualized in the communal, embodied experience effected by and through technognosis. An analysis of the individual mystical experiences occurring in the stage of psytrance is impossible without ethnographic research, as qualitative differentiations in terms of spiritual growth influence the awareness and motivations of the participants. Thus the collective mystical experience can be approached through the 'ritual' end of the trance dance situation.

First of all, the adoption of the aesthetic orientation as a specific form of the performative orientation that results in an aesthetic experience signifying the experience of a kind of gnosis, is enabled by the symbolic character of the whole event as operating in the context of the theatrical hypermedium. The enhancement of the aesthetic consciousness, through the use of psychedelic substances, that then transforms itself into the visionary consciousness, together with the inherent capacities of music, visual media and dance in inducing, enhancing and maintaining alterations of consciousness and multiplying the possibilities for gnosis, facilitate the experience of collective transcendent altered states of consciousness, namely

trance and ecstasy. Trance and ecstasy in the supra-liminal situation of the stage of psytrance under the guidance of a higher force arising from music aim at the actualization of entrainment. This transcendent unity of all the participants with the higher force results in the collective sense of a mystical unity, manifested physically and emotionally; a unity with Universal consciousness, the planet and each other. The meaning and end goal of this unity is constituted in the state of love, which is the highest state of a mystical participation in society, nature and the universe.

The stage, thus, operates as a structural ritual in terms of Turner's conceptualization but performed by the facilitator with a participatory mentality, effecting transition and forming *communitas*; thus it demonstrates the transformative qualities of performative and social participation in a ritual context, re-enforcing the full adoption and expression of the participatory mentality. The operation of the stage as a trance-dance ritual is exemplified in Goa Gill's performances, who has become a Swami Mangalanand Saraswati and a sadhu, being a devotee of the Shiva Nataraji, god of bhang, and the Lord of the Dance³⁸⁴. Goa Gill performs "initiation" rituals in the stage of psytrance for fulfilling his divine "mission" by eliding religion and art to evoke alterations in consciousness and effect transition³⁸⁵. Through the use of dark, violent and rapidly repetitive music and the aid of ecstatic dance at night, Gill performs a 'rite de passage', a process of death and rebirth, through which the ego confronts the most hidden and repressed aspects of the unconscious, dissolves itself and is born again, with the first beams of the sun rise. Early in the morning, the music changes and becomes sweeter, synchronizing all the participants into the transcendent unity and elevating consciousness.

³⁸⁴ St. John (G.) *Global Tribes* p. 84

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p.86, 88

The initiation ritual taking place in the stage of psytrance embodies the romantic view of initiation, too, as effecting metamorphosis with and by means of knowledge of and participation in the hidden mysteries of the Cosmos³⁸⁶. This participation has also social and political implications. The full participation in religion, art and society in the stage of psytrance, through the embodiment of the self and the manifestation of the collective vision, emanating from the collective unconscious and a higher force, constitutes a political act in itself. Further participation in the trance-dance situation, accompanied with knowledge and research in different occult and esoteric themes can further transform and transfer the collective vision to the everyday world and the rest of the society, effecting a participatory turn. This is possible because after initiation and further involvement in occulture and psychedelics, what occurs in the participants is the process, Tanya Luhrmann dubbed, “interpretive drift”³⁸⁷. In analyzing contemporary paganism, Luhrmann proposed that people becoming involved with a particular activity slowly change their manner of interpreting events. The interpretive drift occurs spontaneously because of three loosely interlocked transformations which together propel change from one manner of understanding to another, namely interpretation, experience and rationalization³⁸⁸. In my view and in the context of psytrance, the interpretive drift is very probable to occur through the direct aesthetic, visionary and mystical experiences, signifying the transition from the dominion of instrumental causality to the expression of the participatory mentality. Something enabled by the process of technognosis.

³⁸⁶ Ibid. p.1003

³⁸⁷ Luhrmann (T.) *Persuasion's of the Witch's Craft* p.312

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have analyzed psychedelic trance culture by focusing on the performative situation as occurring at the 'stage'. To do this, I combined theories and research from media and performance studies with religious studies and more specifically with western esotericism. This combination is exemplified in the construction of the concept of 'technognosis', which serves as the main analytical tool for characterizing and examining in depth the methods and aims of the psychedelic trance movement.

At one level in my approach, the adoption of a participatory perspective in the study of media and performance has opened possibilities for the creative exploration of theories from religious studies in a performatively mediated context, while it further enabled the positioning of the aesthetic and the ethical at the level of the spiritual. This was supported by an examination of the aesthetic experience and of modern art that deconstructed the artificial theoretical divide between art and spirituality, argued to have been raised during modernity, opening also new avenues up for the creative investigation of the spiritual qualities of technological media.

A critical stance towards the examination of these matters was indispensable, as it is their first hand, embodied experience because only through a serious/sensuous engagement with the subject matters themselves is a more complete investigation of the world possible to be achieved. Furthermore, as a written text is insufficient in articulating the in depth analysis of the research matters, the adoption of the model of the researcher artist was further necessary, which affirms the subjectivity of the investigator pointing to a more sincere, ethically and aesthetically correct approach. Academic research ought to be political and the political is

spiritual, too; and as the spiritual meets in art and performance with the rest of the world the model of the artist researcher can be considered to be appropriate in serving as the theoretical vehicle for in depth, future, creative research and articulation of knowledge, especially in relation to situations like the psytrance experience.

At a second level, an examination of western esoteric traditions showcased that the search for gnosis has occupied numerous people since ancient times. History further demonstrates that there have been deliberate efforts for keeping humanity in ignorance in relation to gnosis, something that after the 1960's started very slowly to change with the (re)introduction to the west of psychedelic substances. Away from the western ideology of instrumental causality that rejects gnosis, Goa trance gradually developed, reviving the romantic spirit while incorporating all available knowledge and methods in its operations. Through psychedelic trance, the ancient marriage of gnosis with art and technology is once again actualized, involving the invocation and facilitation of degrees of gnosis by employing different means, techniques and technologies assisting in the induction and maintenance of alterations of consciousness. What technognosis in the stage of psytrance re-enforces or induces is the expression of the participatory mentality of people that lies at the other end of instrumental causality and may constitute the only way for avoiding self-annihilation. The direct experience of degrees of gnosis can effect change on a large scale, culminating in the recognition of Oneness with the whole and with each other. The intensity of this recognition results in the awareness of being alive, here, and now and in feelings of gratitude, happiness and love. These feelings involve a fundamental aesthetic/ethical dimension that can be expressed in terms of performative and social participation; and when the responsibility for performative and social participation is enacted with a participatory mentality in the everyday world, then a global change in society might be possible.

Discussion

The need for bringing the spiritual back to politics is crucial and necessary. Post-modernism and post-structuralism argued for a loss of subjectivity in the ongoing articulation of an endless citationality of statements and images through language and media that are elusive of actual meaning – elusive of truth. In this situation the self is regarded as a construction of external models and standards or even of language statements that do not correspond to an essence. From this perspective, the self is constituted as a ‘super ego’ constructed by false needs in a society that worships money and engenders hate instead of love by nurturing fear. Fear exists when thread stays put and knowledge and deep felt positive feelings of existence are missing. Media and education systems work towards infantilizing human beings in the sense of blocking evolution or even forcing it into regression. Political, financial and religious institutions combine in promoting fanaticism, which is what lies at the heart of societal dysfunction. The written history of humanity is a history of war, which is a history of pain; and the narratives of this history form the common cultural background that constitutes a common identity. Over the centuries our species has fought for survival, while our known past demonstrates that our most dangerous enemy is our own selves. Thus, the loss of subjectivity that signifies a loss of identity which is informed by a ‘written’ past in a collective level is interconnected with a loss of an end and a purpose in life.

Only when politics and spirituality merge in actuality, in everyday life, does a vision and a reason for being here evolve. The spread of alternative spiritualities in western world that postulate the search for individual gnosis, as well as the use of psychedelic substances that dissolve the ego and bring into consciousness what lies in personal and collective unconscious, offer opportunities for acquaintance or emergence of the essential self, which is

what lies under or beyond the ‘noise’ and history, which is what is deliberately mediated through culture for the construction or dissolution of subjectivities. The turn towards participation is also a turn towards symbolism in the sense of connecting, personally and meaningfully, with the whole by practicing free choice and by confronting both ourselves and the other. Psychedelic trance offers pleasure and feelings of deep joy; it opens up ways of expressing creativity, while transforming every person into an artist-shaman able to experience the hidden realms of reality and bring back knowledge for sharing with others. This process results in the construction and actualization of a collective vision that is embodied temporally in the psytrance gatherings and is further projected out to the world through the awareness of responsibility arising from the interpretive drift. This awareness of responsibility can result in forms of performative and social participation; but, without education and the mastering of important and useful knowledge, the means for effecting global transformation are limited.

As the Hermeticists underlined, knowledge of philosophy and science in the sense of education are prerequisites for receiving gnosis. Today, new media technologies and the internet offer opportunities for education. Technology has been developed to an extent that it can be used for cleaning and sustaining the planet. Western esotericism brings further hidden knowledge to the public, and big psychedelic trance festivals like Boom employ a number of means for educating through direct experience people. But the pursuit of knowledge is a personal responsibility that everyone should take, testifying to the authority of the self, which is preliminary for participation, while further enhancing individual capacities.

Thus, a further ethnographic investigation of the educational level, personal visions and intentions of the participants of psytrance gatherings may offer new insights towards

understanding and estimating the value of the psytrance experience. The same goes for an investigation of the artists participating in the psychedelic trance situation. Furthermore, research into forms of performative and social participation taken out in the world and arising from the psychedelic trance philosophy would also be necessary, something possible to be done through theories of media and performance. In addition, further interdisciplinary combination of media performance and religious studies can result to the constitution of new domains of study in the academy actualizing in this way participation in the academic level, too.

For closing this thesis I would like to add that from love emerges care, and love emerges from care. People like the organizers of big festivals like Boom seem to care. The universe that has manifested life and has rendered possible the emergence of human beings, who through feelings of love and pleasure, reproduce and contribute to the evolutionary process as intelligent beings also seems to care. But politicians, governments, banks, corporations and many many people do not care. Care constitutes again an individual responsibility, which manifests in participation for moving towards the expansion of the state of love; and the expansion of the state of love is the full actualization of participation.

Pictures



'Main Stage' in *Ozora* Festival 2009



Detail: *Ozora*'s 'Main Stage' 2009



Detail: *Ozora*'s 'Main Stage' 2009



'Market' *Ozora* Festival 2009



'Main Stage' in *Boom* Festival 2012
(Day)



'Main Stage' in *Boom* Festival 2012
(Night)



Ozora's 'Ambient Stage' 2012 (Day)



Ozora's 'Ambient Stage' 2012 (Night)



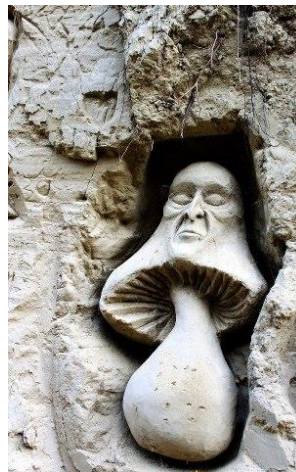
Light Projections in *Ozora's 'Ambient Stage' 2010*



Outside structure of *Ozora's 'Ambient Stage' 2009*



Market Objects Example



Land Art Example



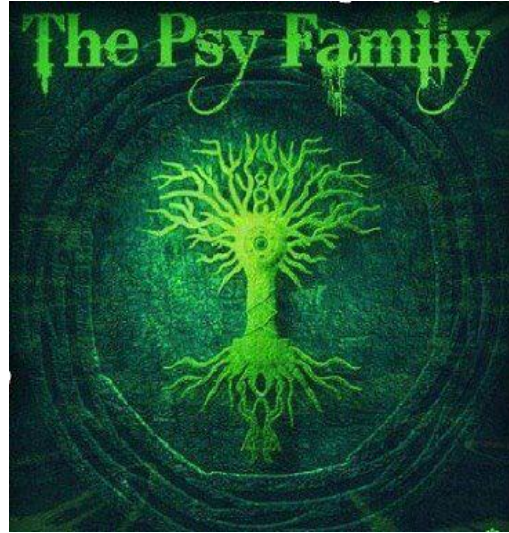
Life in the Festivals



Life in the Festivals



Life in the Festivals

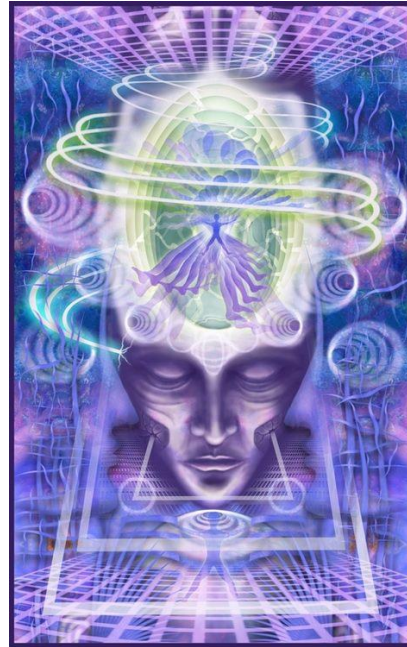
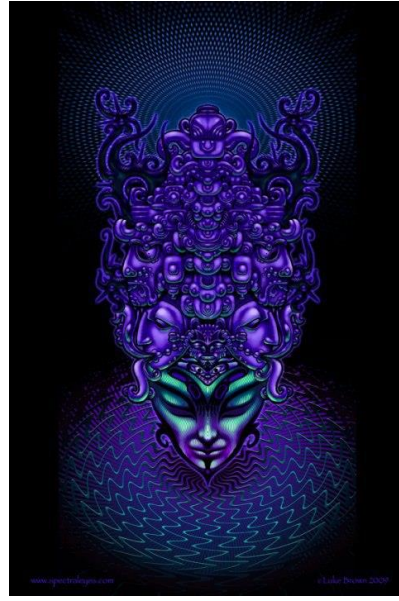


Psychedelic Trance Aesthetics

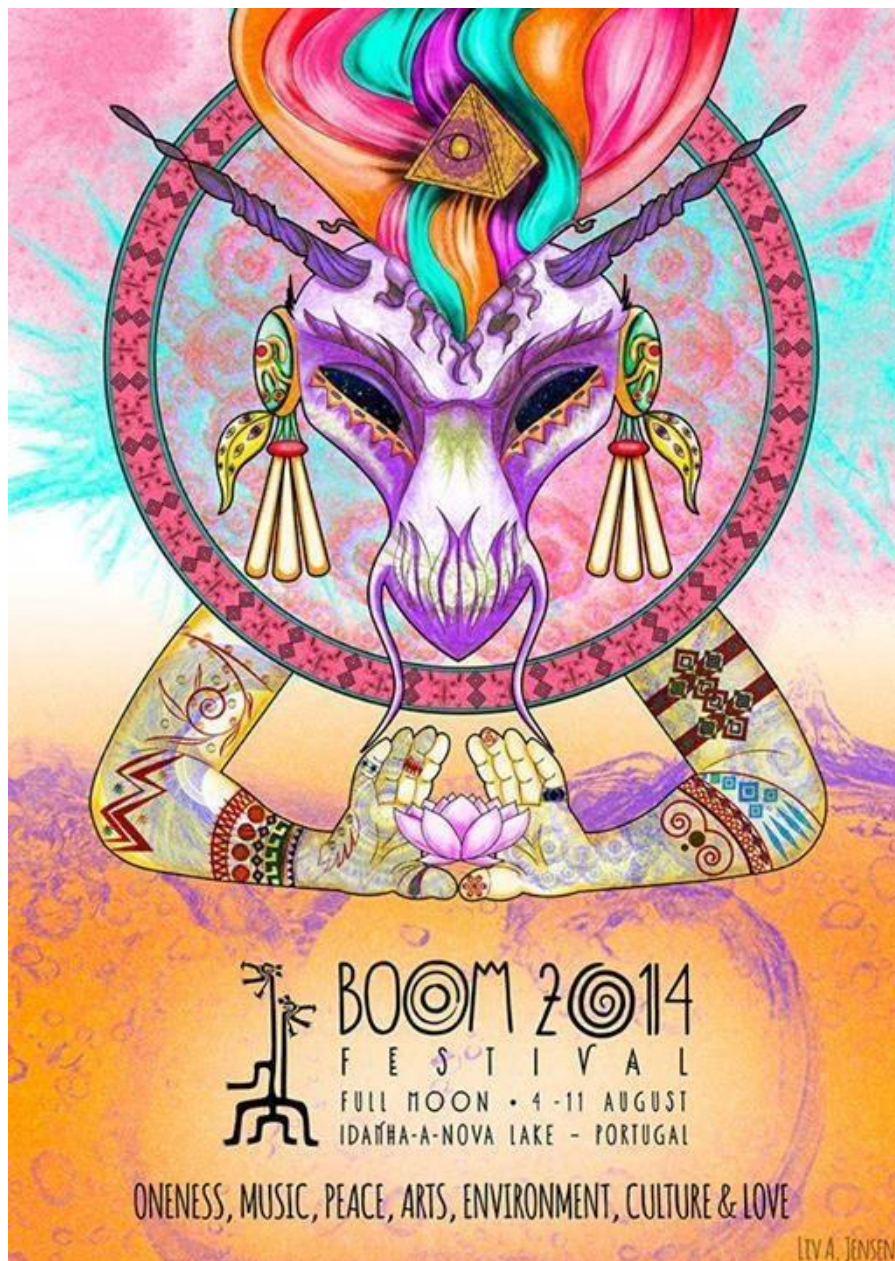


Life in the Festivals





Creative depictions of multidimensional/ alien/ spiritual/ otherworldly beings



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