

## Chapter 2

# Music, Ritual and Media in Charismatic Religious Experience in Ghana

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### Introduction

In August and September 2013, I conducted a series of interviews with congregation members at Christ Victory Ministries, one of a myriad of charismatic churches in Ghana's capital, Accra. Christ Victory is a relatively small church in the Teshie-Nungua estates, a middle-class neighbourhood in the south-eastern part of the city, which attracts an average of 100–120 weekly worshippers. Founded in 1988 by its current head pastor, Bishop Joseph G. Bart-Plange, the congregation does not belong to any of Ghana's proliferating megachurches. Some of these attract thousands of worshippers every Sunday and broadcast their services nationwide on their own television networks.

One Sunday after service, I asked one of the worship leaders, Pastor Joshua, what he thought about the adoption of popular dance styles in church, as some congregants were fond of importing the latest dance fashions circulating in Ghana's mediascape into church services. After discussing the issue for a while, Joshua finally asked me: 'Are you on WhatsApp? Let me send you a video and you tell me what you think' (interview with author, 22 September 2013). He sent me a short video later in the day. Judging from the music and dress of the congregants, it was likely filmed during an Anglophone African church service, though not a Ghanaian one. The scene was obviously taken during offertory, as most people were modestly dancing their way towards a box put up in front of the altar into which they dropped money. But one man in particular was dancing in a most expressive way, almost like a crazy person, throwing his legs around and jumping into the other congregants' way. At one point, he stopped and stood still like a soldier. Then he slumped backwards, as if he would faint, just to absorb the fall with a backward roll, jumping up again, to continue his dance. The whole scene lasted about ninety seconds.

The instance described above made me think about the role of media in the ways people understand and negotiate religious practice and style, and how the sacred and the secular ultimately intersect in people's everyday lives. The video clip Joshua sent me served as a comment in the conversation we had about the style of congregational music-making. Increasingly, electronic media assumes a prominent role in cultural processes as well as in the making of religious subjectivities (for example, Hoover 2006; Meyer 2009; Meyer and Moors 2006). In Ghana today, having a phone that can store and play multimedia content and access the Internet is more or less taken for granted, particularly among young and educated people in urban areas (Sey 2011). There are, in fact, countless videos like the one Joshua sent me that are filmed during church services and then circulated on YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook and other social media platforms. Once posted, a particular media item can spread rapidly across social networks, shared over and over again. Witnesses document scenes of their congregational worship, and share stylistic performance experiments as a way of commenting on existing forms and formats, while also potentially inviting further debate, comments and performances.

Elaborating on this and other forms of mediation and media usage in this chapter, I want to further explore intersections of music, ritual and media in charismatic religious experience in Ghana. My discussion is based on my experiences with congregational life at Christ Victory Ministries as well as occasional visits to other churches in southern Ghana over the past eight years (see Carl 2012, 2014a and 2014b). I have been familiar with Christ Victory Ministries since 2006, attending church services and programmes regularly between 2006 and 2009 when I lived in Accra. During this time, I had the opportunity to conduct interviews with church officials and musicians as well as to engage in countless informal conversations with congregation members, a few of which became close friends. As with most ethnographic endeavours, my relationships within the church were both professional and personal; I met and married my wife at Christ Victory Ministries. Being a foreigner and someone who does not identify himself with charismatic Christianity, the relationship with my wife not only facilitated my initial access to congregational life, but subsequently also determined my role within the church and my relation to other congregants. In 2009, we relocated to Cape Coast and consequently visits to Christ Victory became more infrequent. In 2013, I began a series of interviews with congregants that focused specifically on questions of style in congregational worship and media usage.

Against this background, this chapter focuses on interrelations between mass-mediated and embodied congregational performance practices. I explore

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how the adoption of media and mass-mediated cultural forms change the way people construct identity and moral community and how, in turn, electronic media affect people's use of religion to make sense of their daily lives. I highlight the adoption of mass-mediated cultural styles in the context of congregational musicking (Small 1998), particularly the evocation of popular dance styles that, in their original contexts, are often explicitly non-religious, asking, how do such adoptions change the meaning of otherwise non-religious styles, and how is the meaning of ritual practice itself transformed through such performances? Finally, I address the ways in which people use media technology to re-enact congregational performance practices and create more intimate ritual spaces in the confines of their own homes. In such instances, music is used as what Tia DeNora has described as a 'technology of the self' (DeNora 1999, 2000), or what we might recast in a religious context, echoing Thomas Csordas (1994), as a 'technology of the sacred self', which blurs the boundaries not only between the sacred and the secular realm, but also between public and private spheres.

### **Media and the Pentecostal-Charismatic Public Sphere**

Researchers have stressed the critical role mass media has played in the proliferation of charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity in recent decades on the African continent and elsewhere (Meyer 2004; Robbins 2004). Authors focusing specifically on West Africa, particularly Ghana and Nigeria, have not only emphasized how the appropriation of mass media facilitated the enormous growth of the new African-initiated churches that have emerged since the late 1970s, but also how electronic media have become, at the same time, an integral part of these churches' identity (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005; De Witte 2003; Gifford 2004; Hackett 1998; Marshall-Fratani 1998). Many charismatic churches 'have been found to appropriate keenly new electronic media that have become easily accessible and, in a context of media deregulation, allow for an active part to play in identity politics' (Meyer 2004, 466). Music plays an important role in this context, as it is 'one of the most important ways in which charismatics construct their own identity and invade space' (Hackett 1998, 263). In a development that parallels the rise of charismatic churches, the gospel music industry in Ghana has thus become one of the most vital fields of commercial music production (see Atiemo 2006; Collins 2004, 2012). Commenting on the prominence of gospel music in Ghana's public sphere and its interrelation with charismatic churches, Paul Gifford noted that 'a whole cultural form – a whole industry –

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has been carried by these new churches and has increased their enormous appeal. Thus reasons for their growth are not exclusively religious' (2004, 35).

Many performers of commercial gospel music in Ghana are rooted in charismatic churches, and in some cases their music ministry has become part of the churches' image or 'brand' (Collins 2012; Usunier and Stolz 2014). For example, the music videos of gospel artist Florence Obinim, wife of Bishop Daniel Obinim (founder of the Kumasi-based megachurch God's Way International Ministry), fill much of the airtime of the church's television channel OB TV. Similarly, Christiana Love, winner of the Best Female Vocal Performance in the 2007 Ghana Music Awards, has helped build and popularize Life Power Miracle Church, a megachurch based in Accra, founded by her then-husband Pastor Love Hammond. In the latter case, however, a marital conflict that was noisily carried out in the media brought a sudden end to this previously fruitful collaboration. In any case, music has become an important part of many charismatic churches' marketing strategy. Through the new churches' market orientation, 'mass mediated forms of charismatic-Pentecostal expression and experience have become prominent in the new public sphere and available to a large audience beyond the churches' membership' (De Witte 2009, 187). Overall, one can observe a cyclical feedback loop between congregational and mass-mediated performance practices: commercial gospel artists emerge from churches and congregations, and churches in turn, re-integrate popular music and styles into the ritual context of their worship services.

While there seems to be a general agreement about the importance of mass media in the popularization of charismatic expressive forms as well as the impact of these forms on other cultural practices, the role of media in the making of religious subjectivities has been explored far less extensively, at least in the Ghanaian context (see De Witte 2003 and 2009). Perhaps less studied still is the interrelationship of religious and mediated musical experience in Ghana. In an attempt to fill this void, I argue for an approach that, following Birgit Meyer, understands 'religion as a practice of mediation that is centred around distinct "sensational forms"' (Meyer 2009, 2), and that takes music seriously as an integral part of religious experience (Ingalls, Landau and Wagner 2013). Such an approach requires us to reverse the focus on 'media' as 'objectifiable resources and influences on culture' to look instead at 'mediations' that 'enable individuals to locate themselves in social and cultural space and time' (Hoover 2006, 34). As Stewart Hoover further elaborates:

The idea of 'mediation' when applied to the mass media suggests a role for these devices and processes in social and cultural life and consciousness that is more

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integral to, less distinct from, that social and cultural life. They become a part of the fabric of social consciousness, not just an influence on that consciousness. (Hoover 2006, 34)

For my purposes here, I suggest a broad understanding of media beyond the conventional sense of mass media, to encompass 'a variety of objects and practices, from electronic forms of mass media to religious symbols, or musical styles, that index certain modes of sociality' (Brennan 2010, 355). From such a perspective, media are, as Debra Spitulnik noted, 'at once artefacts, experiences, practices, and processes' (1993, 293). Mediation, on the other hand, 'is a process that creates meaningful links between these various media, forms of social organization, and cultural meanings' (Brennan 2010, 355). At the same time, as Louise Meintjes wrote, mediation 'is both a conduit and a filter – it transfers but along the way it necessarily transforms. Mediation is a process that connects and translates disparate worlds, people, imaginations, values, and ideas, whether in its symbolic, social or technological form' (2003, 8).

Finally, in an attempt to deconstruct a substantialist understanding of culture and locality, William Mazzarella made a convincing case for the fact that cultural realities are always, in some form, mediated. Mediation can, as he writes, be seen as 'a dynamic principle at the root of all social life' (Mazzarella 2004, 360). Thus, he urges us to attend in our ethnographies to 'the places of mediation, the places at which we come to be who we are through the detour of something alien to ourselves' – what he calls 'nodes of mediation' (Mazzarella 2004, 356). One such node of mediation in the Christian context in Ghana is charismatic ritual, a highly overdetermined site at which a number of media and mediations – in its multiple sense as artefacts, experiences, practices, processes and experiences – come together.

### **Music, Dance and the Mediation of Religious Experience in Charismatic Ritual**

Although the body of literature on Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity has been rapidly growing over the past decades, in-depth analyses of charismatic ritual itself have been relatively scarce. As Joel Robbins noted in his review of the state of research a decade ago, 'from an anthropological perspective, it represents probably the greatest lacuna in the work done thus far' (Robbins 2004, 126). While scholars of religion have stressed the centrality of music and dance in charismatic Christianity, few have actually scrutinized congregational

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musicking as such. In the West African context, existing studies have argued for an understanding of charismatic expressive culture as conversion to modernity, as cathartic relief or in terms of the Africanization of Christianity, but often failed to closely examine actual performance practices as an integral part of charismatic ritual (see Collins 2004; Marshall-Fratani 1998; Meyer 1998). The most promising work in this regard comes from the field of ethnomusicology, where a number of ethnographies focusing on music-making in Pentecostal-Charismatic ritual in different geographical contexts have emerged (for example, Butler 2002 and 2008; Ingalls, Landau and Wagner 2013; Lange 2003; Rommen 2007; Yong and Ingalls 2015).

According to Robbins, one of the most distinctive features of charismatic Christianity is what he calls 'rituals of rupture', that is, rites that emphasize discontinuity and aim to transform believers. The most important of these, which is at the core of Pentecostal-Charismatic theology, is the so-called 'baptism of the Spirit', which is evidenced by speaking in tongues (glossolalia) and believed to revert the original sin in Genesis. In many Ghanaian charismatic churches, rituals of deliverance, by which demonic entities afflicting believers are exorcised, play a crucial role (Meyer 1998 and 1999), while for Haitian Pentecostals, ritualized practices of spiritual warfare take on a similar role (Butler 2008). While rituals of transformation might be present in all conversionist religions, Robbins believes that the Pentecostal-Charismatic approach is distinctive and can be seen as an important aspect of its global success. He writes that charismatic ritual transforms at the same time that it preserves 'indigenous spiritual ontologies', which allows for a 'continued spiritual engagement with the spirits that populate them' (Robbins 2004, 129).

Christ Victory Ministries offers a number of weekly programmes and services that each emphasizes different aspects of charismatic ritual practice. Generally, services are held in English, with occasional translations into local languages, either Twi or Ga. There are prayer meetings on Mondays, a teaching service on Wednesdays, and an all-night service from Friday evening to Saturday dawn during which rituals of deliverance are particularly prominent. While congregational music-making accompanies most rituals that are performed at Christ Victory, it is particularly in the context of Sunday services that music and dance become a ritual in their own right, featuring highly participatory performances that involve the whole congregation. The church's four-member popular band (drums, bass and two keyboards) and the gospel choir provide the musical backdrop during Sunday services. Services last from three to four hours and typically begin with a praise-and-worship section that lasts about an hour. The distinction between 'praises' and worship, as church officials as well

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as congregants explained to me, is principally the state of mind or consciousness of the worshipper. While praises are 'more committed to thanksgiving', in worship there is a direct communication between believers and God (interview with author, 21 September 2013). It is therefore particularly in worship that congregants are filled by the Holy Spirit, which may find its expression in speaking in tongues, prophesying or healing.

For the observer, however, the more obvious difference between praises and worship is the mood and general character of music-making. As Bishop Bart-Plange noted, 'most people think it's about speed' (interview with author, 22 September 2013). Thus, praises involve upbeat musical performances, typically gospel highlife music, as well as congregational dance. Worship, on the other hand, features more solemn musical performances, sometimes unmetered or in slow duple or triple meter. Instead of dance and clapping, congregants sway their bodies, raising their arms upwards in prayer or submit themselves to God, kneeling down or lying on the floor. Speaking in tongues and prophecy typically occur during worship, and tears often overcome congregants. The songs and choruses that happen during both praises and worship at Christ Victory are not rehearsed by the band and choir, but are spontaneously initiated by the worship leader. They include both local and international gospel music productions, songs made familiar through media that are in English as well as indigenous languages such as Twi and Ga. As one of the worship leaders explained, 'the songs we sing are songs that people have done and they play on the radio ... So, no matter what happens, people will have a clue as they have heard the songs somewhere' (interview with author, 30 August 2013).

A controversial aspect of congregational musicking is dance, which features prominently during praises. Congregational dance was actually one of the elements that distinguished charismatic and other African-initiated Christian churches from the orthodox mission churches, where the use of musical instruments, the clapping of hands and even modest forms of body movement were, for a long time, highly restricted (Agordoh 2004; Meyer 1999). By now, however, most of the older mission churches have also integrated dance and other charismatic expressive forms into their worship, so that there is, as Hackett observed, 'not a Christian church in Ghana or Nigeria that has not been affected by the revivalist trends of the last few decades' (1998, 265). But even in the charismatic ritual context, the moving body remains a site of contestation. It is in ritual dance that an 'ethics of style' manifests itself in a non-discursive form at the level of the individual body (Desmond 1994; Rommen 2007).

Media are an integral part of the negotiation of style in ritual dance and the production of moral community. In Ghana, some of the arguments centred on

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the adoption of mass-mediated dance styles in the context of church services, particularly popular styles that are perceived as ‘worldly’. Notable examples, which have caused debates at Christ Victory as well as in other churches, are azonto and alkayida, dance crazes that recently swept the country and which were circulated widely both via classical mass media as well as on social media platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp and Facebook.<sup>1</sup> Some congregants condemned the adoption of popular styles like azonto and alkayida during praises, holding that these were ‘not pleasing in the eyes of God’ and that ‘you should control yourself when you go to church ... that is not where you dance your azonto.’ The same congregation members even held that there were spiritual implications to popular cultural styles like these, explaining that ‘when songs and dances come like this, you know, it’s like they’re spirits.’ Said another: ‘from my perception of azonto, I think there is a spirit backing it’ (interviews with author, 24 August and 22 September 2013).

These two dances consist of a succession of separate movements and gestures that can be variously combined. They strongly encourage individual inventiveness and competition among dancers, and it is particularly on social media that individuals keep adding new moves and gestures that are then shared electronically with other members of the community.<sup>2</sup> During praises, some congregants adopt some of the movements and gestures of such dances – sometimes subtly suggesting them, sometimes more explicitly carrying them out – often performing in pairs or smaller groups where individuals mimic each other, thereby maintaining what Margaret Drewal characterized as ‘competitive interrelatedness’ (1992, 7). The signature move of azonto involves the right leg, which the dancer stretches forward a bit with only the tip of the toe touching the ground. At the same time, the dancer holds his or her fists in front of the chest like a boxer, then moves the right arm up and down in front of the body as if operating a pump. Based on this movement, dancers can invent and add their own variations. Additionally, there are also a number of other gestures associated with azonto, among them Michael Jackson’s signature move where the dancer’s one hand grasps the crotch while the other arm is stretched out upwards. Alkayida, on the other hand, features mostly side-by-side moves.

<sup>1</sup> For an excellent discussion of the transnational circulation of azonto, see Shipley (2013). For the original versions of these dances see [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rq1A8b6JPw&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rq1A8b6JPw&feature=youtube_gdata_player) and [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTUllOudlHI&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTUllOudlHI&feature=youtube_gdata_player).

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIEXVU5PV4c&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIEXVU5PV4c&feature=youtube_gdata_player) and [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gU4IfReFnk&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gU4IfReFnk&feature=youtube_gdata_player).



The signature gesture features the dancer alternately moving his right and left shoulder forward on the downbeat, both arms positioned at the side of his torso, pointing downwards. Other movements involve the pelvis and lower body, emphasizing legwork.

For Bishop Bart-Plange, the line between what is permissible and what is not in ritual dance was the perceived sexual explicitness of dance moves, and he admitted that some congregants in his eyes sometimes crossed that line. While it was okay to jump and shout during praises, 'you can't shake your waist and say you are praising God' (interview, 22 September 2013). This concerned particularly the movement of the pelvis and lower body as it features prominently in *alkayida* and some of the gestures of *azonto*. In theological terms, interview partners kept referring to the story in 2 Samuel 6, where David is told to have danced in front of his female slaves to praise God and in the course of dancing tore his dress. David's wife got angry over his supposedly inappropriate behaviour, for which God then punished her with infertility. Overall, the stance towards the adoption of popular styles in congregational worship at Christ Victory was ambivalent. However, instead of just condemning stylistic experiments, most congregants as well as church officials stressed the dialogical nature and fundamental sociability of congregational performance practices. As one of the junior pastors, Apostle Joseph Kwei, said, 'It's a surprise you throw at the church. So, when you see that you are not getting the response you wanted, next time you will follow what everybody else is doing' (interview with author, 21 September 2013).

Those congregants who were involved in the performance of popular dance styles at Christ Victory church, mostly young men, also stressed the sociability of ritual dance, explaining that for them dance performance is a question of identity: 'We make it as a group thing. We all bring what we have on board. Like, this guy has his dance, this guy has his dance ... we all bring it in like this. Other people might not like it, but that is what we are, that is what we can offer' (interview with author, 22 September 2013).

Identity construction in ritual performance is, then, dialogical and competitive at the same time. As congregants share their performances online, it becomes interactive. I remember an instance where a former congregation member of Christ Victory church, Fiifi Folson, now a popular radio host on the Christian station Sunny 88.7 FM in Accra and a public figure who has over 5,000 followers on Facebook and Twitter, posted a picture of himself dancing in church captioned, 'on some Christo Alkaeda moves lol'. The post fostered hundreds of comments, the vast majority positive and encouraging, such as: 'Uncle Phii dancing akayida ... me Lyk that you do your own thing', 'Hi big daddy i love your azonto God bless you' or 'EE ii Fii, will be dancing and singing with you.'

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Considering the role of social media in processes of identity construction and the mediation of style, it is clear that the moral community that is produced through ritual performance reaches beyond face-to-face social interaction within any given congregation, but constitutes an at least partly imagined community. The charismatic public sphere constitutes itself through performative acts, and the negotiation of ethics and style takes place both face-to-face as well as within electronic social networks (see also Warner 2005). For congregations on the ground, this means a shift in moral authority and a partial loss of control over the style of ritual performance, as the production of moral community is now also mediated through what Kate Crawford (2009) described as the multivalent nature of online attention and online interaction.

### **Media, Divine Intimacy and the Self**

Charismatic Christianity de-emphasizes fixed ritual structures and stresses the personal experience of the divine, which is part of the reason why stylistic idiosyncrasies in praise and worship, at least at Christ Victory Ministries, are tolerated and sometimes even encouraged. As one dance enthusiast at Christ Victory told me, 'You can even put your head on the ground and raise your legs to worship God' (interview with author, 22 September 2013). While both praise and worship are fundamentally dialogical, there is, however, a significant difference in the direction of communication that takes place. In praises, particularly those involving ritual dance, communication is mainly directed towards other congregation members and, by extension, to electronic social networks of presumably like-minded individuals, taking the form of mimesis, sometimes irony, and competition. Ritual dance can be described as a form of rhetorical play (Drewal 1992). Worship, on the other hand, differs in nature as believers enter into direct communication with God. The nature of dialogue that is mediated through worship might thus be characterized as a form of public intimacy, a space where the public and the private collapse, not unlike musical experience mediated by personal stereos and mobile music technologies (see Bull 2012).

Byron Dueck has pointed out that publicness and intimacy are not mutually exclusive, but that they often intersect in musical performances through which publics are constituted:

Public performances of intimacy present models, images, sounds, and concepts that are available for the public's appropriation, adaptation, or rejection. These

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intimacies should not be understood to fill a blank public space that already exists; rather, they play a central role in constituting the space in which they circulate. (Dueck 2007, 31)

The model on which charismatic worship in Ghana is built follows closely publicly circulated images of intimacy as they feature, for example, in the marketing of international Christian worship music, where, as Anna Nekola noted, listeners are promised to be taken 'from an everyday place or task into a personal experience of God's presence' (Nekola 2013, 129). Similar images of divine intimacy are reinforced in Ghanaian worship music that often adopts foreign models, modifying and localizing the existing imagery of the transnational charismatic public to varying degrees through the employment of local languages, local musical models, clothing styles and other means (see Carl 2014b).

While shaping congregational performance practices, commercial productions adopt, at the same time, corporate forms of worship that make it possible for worshippers to re-live the church experience in the confines of their homes. In such instances, media, in Nekola's words, 'assist us in transcending this physical world so that we may, on our own, journey to meet the divine' (2013, 133–4). In Ghana, it is common that artists release two different versions of the same song, one upbeat praise version and one solemn worship version, which are modelled on the modes of sociability and divine intimacy that characterize the praise-and-worship section in church. Common are also releases of live recordings of extended worship sessions that particularly lend themselves to more intimate religious experiences at home, private worship sessions that are often done alone as a form of devotional practice or self-care. In conversations, congregants at Christ Victory Ministries related such experiences: 'I just love music. Anytime I'm not happy, when I'm in my room, I'll just sing ... and after the singing I realize that I have become okay. I even do worship alone and by the time I realize, I'm okay. I love music' (interview with author, 30 August 2013).

And another friend at Christ Victory told me:

A: Sometimes I sing, when I'm exhausted, when I'm alone, or things are bothering me. I encourage myself with music – worship songs. Sometimes, I'll be singing alone and I end up crying, just here by myself.

Q: But does it feel the same as in church?

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A: Oh, yes, yes. Even sometimes in church, you'll be distracted. Sometimes, you are here, and you are in tune. It's like you're focusing on God, standing, and then somebody wants to pass in front of you, distracting you. Or somebody is falling, and then they distract you. (Interview with author, 24 August 2013)

Other congregants, too, in personal conversations kept emphasizing what music did for them rather than what it meant, thereby stressing the dynamic nature of musical experience and the usage of music as a means towards an end. A number of people, for example, told me that full participation in congregational music-making helped them to overcome shyness, recounting experiences of personal breakthrough when they finally found the courage to fully express themselves in dance during praises. With regard to worship, private musical experiences like the above are sometimes part of a form of self-discipline charismatic Christians exercise more systematically, as 'true worshipers ... even do more intense worship when they are alone than ... in the church' (Apostle Joseph Kwei, interview with author, 21 September 2013).

Upon closer examination it becomes clear, then, that musical experience for charismatic believers in Ghana constitutes what DeNora characterized as an aesthetic reflexive activity. Praise and worship music is used as a means of self-regulation and self-modulation that people engage in 'so as to produce themselves as types of actors imbued with specific feeling forms, attributes and identity characteristics, and as objects of knowledge to themselves and to others' (DeNora 1999, 53). It is in this sense that DeNora speaks of music as 'technology of the self'. In the charismatic context, we might add that music is used, at the same time, as a 'technology of the sacred self', since it is not merely themselves believers seek in musical experience, but ultimately an encounter with the divine. While the self can be conceptualized as 'an indeterminate capacity to engage or become oriented in the world, characterized by effort and reflexivity', the sacred, as 'an existential encounter with Otherness ... defines us by what we are not – by what is beyond our limits, or what touches us precisely at our limits' (Csordas 1994, 5).

As a 'node of mediation', charismatic ritual connects and translates, as we have seen, various forms of media – in the multiple sense of media as 'artefacts, experiences, practices, and processes' (Spitulnik 1993, 293). As believers embody mediated forms and experiences, these 'sensational forms' become part and parcel of the fabric of social consciousness that constitutes religious experience (Hoover 2006; Meyer 2009). Robbins (2004) noted that part of the success of charismatic Christianity is its ability to integrate and preserve indigenous spiritual ontologies, at the same time that charismatic ritual emphasizes rupture,

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discontinuity and the transformation of believers from mere sinners into ‘born-again’ Christians. The same integrative capacity applies to the mediation of popular cultural styles and media technology in charismatic ritual, mediating and reconciling everyday and sacred experience in the lives of believers. As Mazzarella (2004, 356) noted, mediation is, after all, a process through which ‘we come to be who we are through the detour of something alien to ourselves.’ As such, it is in charismatic ritual that believers come to be who they are through the experience of variously mediated forms and styles and, ultimately, through an existential encounter with the divine itself.

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