TECHNOLOGIES OF SPIRIT: THE DIGITAL WORLDS OF CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIANITY

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2012

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

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This dissertation investigates the interrelation of religion, particularly American evangelical Christianity, and digital technologies. In showing both the religious use of technology and the religiosity of technological practice, it aims to contribute to recent discussions on modernity and secularism that have taken place in sociology as well as philosophy and anthropology. Specifically, it troubles the assumed link between secularization and modernization, which, in effect, views technology as largely a proxy of science, and therefore an instrument of "disenchantment." Contrary to this, my research suggests that the relation of new media and religion bears a more complicated picture than secularization theories would allow. Drawing from a variety of methods, including content and discourse analysis, ethnography and media studies, I examine the technological mode of worship and ministry increasingly favored by today's Christian churches, including the highly technologized contemporary worship spaces, which feature multiple projection screens and theater-grade audio and lighting systems, and online churches (i.e., churches that meet strictly online through web sites and social media such as Facebook). Additionally, I offer an analysis of the ways in which new media technologies have produced a certain religious, God-like mode of subjectivity especially evidenced in popular mapping software such as Google Maps. In this way, contemporary religion, specifically Christianity, and digital technologies, I suggest, hold an *intrinsic* and *interimplicated* relationship.

Acknowledgements

It is increasingly rare that a student planning on pursuing doctoral studies knows exactly with whom he wishes to study, and actually is able to do so. Fortunately, for me, I was among the few. I came to the Graduate Center in pursuit of three professors, Patricia Clough, Stanley Aronowitz and Jerry Watts, all who eventually came to make up my dissertation committee. Therefore, I must acknowledge each of them first and foremost. To Patricia Clough, my chair, I have to extend thanks for so many things over the years but especially the freedom and confidence to let me pursue whatever it was that piqued my interest. To Jerry Watts, I cannot thank enough for the hours and hours of conversation—about important intellectual matters such as Major League Baseball, James Brown and Bill Evans—and all of the books. And though he may not know this, it is he who encouraged me very early on to pursue graduate studies in that happenstance meeting years ago in the bookstore of Wesleyan University. To Stanley Aronowitz, I must extend my gratitude for the many tokens of advice but more importantly for always taking me seriously as an intellectual. The fact that I read Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* with him in a Talmudic, line-by-line fashion, I wear like a badge of honor.

There are others at the Graduate Center, who have been sources of encouragement, that I must mention. On the faculty, Bryan Turner and Talal Asad deserve mention, and, among my fellow students, John Boy, Rachel Schiff, Craig Willse, Simone White, Kristin Moriah, Anna Gjika, Demond Mullins, Fiona Lee and Allan Takeall.

This dissertation was written with the support of an Instructional Technology Fellowship at the Macaulay Honors College. There, I must thank Joe Ugoretz, as well as Gary Schwartz, Richard Blot, Sondra Perl and Florence Aliberti.

Closer to home, I must mention Charles Lemert, who is an abiding influence and friend, Anthony Elliott, whose support has been constant, my brother Paul and, of course, my girlfriend Khalia Frazier. Without her, none of this is imaginable.

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Technologies affect our perception and experience of the world…Most specifically, they alter senses of time and place. In turn, these alterations and others more subtle affect the kinds of people we see ourselves to be; for they shape our dreaming and aspiration—that is, what we hope for and what we appreciate as possible. The belief in the operation of angels, demons, and the appearance of ghosts was a medieval commonplace, the object of enlightenment ridicule and is again finding support in certain contemporary sections of western society. The cultural a priori that makes any belief believable are constantly changing…What requires much further analysis is exactly what these new a priori are, and then what social consequences they might have. Because we see the world as, we never just see the world, changes in the modes of believing will alter the structure of sensibilities—that is, the acceptable range and interrelated network of emotional responses to the world. Both these changes will further impact upon the way we behave—that is, our moral, political and aesthetic activities (and their legitimation).

Graham Ward, *The Future of Religion*, p. 185

Introduction

An odd thing happened on 24 January 2011. On the occasion of World Communications Day, the Pope sent a message to Catholics giving advice on using social networks. While acknowledging the merits and novelty of new communications technologies, the Pope urged Catholics “to be authentic and faithful, and not give in to the illusion of constructing an artificial public profile for oneself.” He wrote:

> Entering cyberspace can be a sign of an authentic search for personal encounters with others, provided that attention is paid to avoiding dangers such as enclosing oneself in a sort of parallel existence, or excessive exposure to the virtual world. In the search for sharing, for "friends", there is the challenge to be authentic and faithful, and not give in to the illusion of constructing an artificial public profile for oneself.(Benedictus XVI 2011)

Rather impressive for someone whom most people (including Catholics) assume does not have a working knowledge of the newest change in Facebook’s default privacy settings or the promise of cloud computing. But if you think this was the Pope’s first broach into social media since installation as Pope you are mistaken.

In fact, just a year prior, in 2010, he released another statement for World Communications Day, challenging clergy “to proclaim the Gospel by employing the latest generation of audiovisual resources (images, videos, animated features, blogs, websites) which, alongside traditional means, can open up broad new vistas for dialogue, evangelization and catechesis.”

> Using new communication technologies, priests can introduce people to the life of the Church and help our contemporaries to discover the face of Christ. They will best achieve this aim if they learn, from the time of their formation, how to use these technologies in a competent and appropriate way, shaped by sound theological insights and reflecting a strong priestly spirituality grounded in constant dialogue with the Lord. Yet priests present in the world of digital communications should be less notable for their media savvy than for their priestly heart, their closeness to Christ. This will not only enliven their pastoral outreach, but also will give a "soul" to the fabric of communications that makes up the "Web."(Benedictus XVI 2010)

The Vatican's interest in new media is not limited to once-a-year speeches but has been followed through by actions. As the popular technology blog *Mashable* reports, the 265th Pope launched a YouTube channel and developed both Facebook and iPhone apps called "Pope2You"(Parr 2010).

This is not your grandparents' Pontiff.

Or maybe it is. The respective histories of religion, media and technology have always been entangled. There is, of course, the printing press, which changed the course of Western Christian history, as Marshall McLuhan well noted(McLuhan 1969). But, sticking to the example of the Catholic Church, we see that the Vatican began to use radio addresses "to carry the gospel to all peoples" as early as 1923 (New York Times 1923).

At the end of the decade known as "the Aughts" (2000-2010), there has been no shortage of press coverage of this nexus of religion, media and technology. News stories with titles such as "Our Father, Lead Us to Tweet, and Forgive the Trespassers" have littered the pages of the *New York Times*(Vitello 2009). Detailing the various attempts by Jewish, Christian and Muslim congregations to incorporate Twitter, the article does a fairly good job of

highlighting some of the issues raised when religion and media technologies converge, especially with regard to the ways new media technologies affect different religions. For instance, there are particularly sensitive concerns among Muslims who use Facebook. Many imams discourage members from discussing politics and mentioning Pakistan or Afghanistan. One particularly tech-savvy Rabbi from the borough of Queens in New York, while toting his iPhone and laptop, acknowledged that one could not tweet a minyan (Jewish prayer service). For Roman Catholics, all of whom, throughout the world, use the same liturgy on any given Mass, the issue is message control. Speaking about Facebook, a spokesman for the Archdiocese of New York commented, "When people can post comments on your site, things can degenerate unless you are constantly monitoring." And indeed, his concern is not unfounded as one Protestant church in Michigan found out one Sunday. While experimenting with projecting the live stream of tweets from the congregation behind the pulpit during the worship service, there were some stray comments such as "Nice shirt, pastor!" and "Jesus is a joke." In spite of this, the article points out that faith leaders rather err on the side of new media. They view "mischief," as one Episcopalian reverend put it, as engagement. "If someone chooses to interact with us mischievously, that's fine. The opposite of engagement is not mischief, but apathy," she is quoted as stating.

In fact, scholarship on the culture, and specifically, cultural objects, of evangelical Christianity has emphasized this point. In *Shaking the World for Jesus*, Heather Hendershot details the complex of evangelical Christian media. Much of it, she suggests, is "ambiguous," allowing for a cultural rapprochement with secular, mainstream culture. "To produce their own countermedia," she writes,

> …evangelicals have repeatedly drawn on previously existing forms, often turning them completely on their ear, as in antimarijuana reggae songs or rock tunes advocating

> submission to parents. On the other hand, evangelicals would prefer not to poach on mass culture; their preference would be to transform mass culture, making it entirely evangelical. In other words, if evangelical media producers and consumers constitute a "subculture," it is one that aspires to lose its "sub" status. (Hendershot 2004:13)

As Hendershot shows through various case studies, reports of incommensurability between *secular* culture and *religious* media are wildly exaggerated. This is due to the fact that Christian media in particular attempts to "somehow provide pleasure (since kids won't consume media they find dull)" while maintaining its Christian aspect(Hendershot 2004:37). Hence, there is no "resistance" to mass culture on the part of evangelical Christian media.

While this kind of scholarly attention is encouraging, it is rather odd that these reports are largely rooted in a one-sided understanding of the relationship of religion and new media technologies, that is, as the religious *use* of media and/or technology. This is in line with much of the widespread thinking about technology as mere tools for human use. This translates to an ideology of technology that strips away its power, its ontology, its status as actor, or *actant*, in the parlance of actor-network theory. What I'm *not* suggesting is a form of technological determinism. Not in the least. But, in the words of the late German media scholar Friedrich Kittler, "media determine our situation." This much is true, whatever that situation may be. As a matter of fact, ordained Jesuit priest and communications scholar Walter Ong, in his landmark study *The Presence of the Word*, echoes Kittler's argument:

> The relationship of man to man, of man to society, of man to his entire life-world, which includes his religious state, can be seen in new and refreshing detail if we attend to the history of the word itself, that is, to the history of communications. Only we must be clear that by communications we understand here not simply new gimmicks, enabling

> man to "contact" his fellows but, more completely, the person's means of entering into the life and consciousness of others and thereby into his own life. Communications in this sense obviously relates to man's sense of his own presence to himself and to other men and his sense of God's presence. (Ong 1967:15)

What is missing from these accounts of the nexus of religion, media and technology is the acknowledgement that, when “used” by religious organizations, media and technology also exert their force, their power. It is a two-way street.

Historical perspectives on the relationship of religion and technology bear this out. As the historian Lynn White writes:

> The cultural patterns which are emerging today are largely a result of the impact of technology and science upon the traditional Hellenic and Christian assumptions of the West. Since both our scientific and our technological movements are in great part products of these same Greek and Semitic legacies as they fused and took shape in medieval Europe, we are involved in a feedback process of great historical intricacy.(White 1968:vii)

While the casual reader may view this statement as formulated in a dichotomous fashion, that is, as a reading of the history of the West as one of a convergence of two, distinct and separate, forces—on the one hand, technology and science, and, on the other, Hellenic and Christian ideas, it is clear that White means something rather different. For him, science and technology are *products* of the Greek and Semitic cultural legacies, and thus what we have, instead of a “convergence” or “opposition” or some other signifiers of “clash” (which, thanks to

Huntington has become such an easy description of global trends), something more like feedback loop. “The West” is simply the wave emitted through the circuit through which Semitic, Christian and technoscientific energy runs.

This, White argues, can be seen in no era better than in the Middle Ages, or the “Age of Faith” as he calls it, which exhibited, on the one hand, “the highest expression of the cult of the Virgin Mary,” and, on the other, also managed to “[envisage] the concept of labor-saving power technology which has played so large a part in the formation of the modern world”(White 1968:71). The scratch plow along with a new type of counterweight artillery that had allowed for the exploitation of gravity, for instance, were formed during this time and, according to White, shifted the relationship of the human to nature. “Formerly man had been part of nature,” White writes, “now he was the exploiter of nature.” Furthermore, it is during this time that monks began to reorient intellectual life as it had been practiced up until that point. As White argues, the monk bridged knowledge with practice. (Indeed it was a monk by the name of Francis Bacon that first coined the term “ars mechanicae.” More on this in following chapters.) The monk, he writes,

> …did not immediately launch into scientific investigation, but in his very person he destroyed the old artificial barrier between the empirical and the speculative, the manual and the liberal arts, and thus helped create a social atmosphere favorable to scientific and technological development.(White 1968:65)

Thus, according to White, the *innate* relation of science and technology and religion is evidenced in the transformation of the role of the human “from passive recipients of spiritual messages through natural phenomena to active seekers for an understanding of the divine nature as it is reflected in the pattern of creation”(White 1968:101).

White reminds us of this very important historical moment, when natural theology, science and technology fundamentally reoriented the world, in epistemological and ontological terms. While he, along with many scholars of technology and science, including Lewis Mumford, point to the Middle Ages (in particular the figure of Francis Bacon) as a transitional moment in the orientation of the West, Leo Marx, the Americanist, makes a more updated argument in *The Machine in the Garden*. In this much-read book, Marx studies the "cultural images" of machinery and machines in the public imagination. In one particular essay, he argues that the machine as social figure, or what Durkheim would call "collective representation," became impetus for a shift in the way Americans thought about nature but also the lofty ideas of Progress, which today, in retrospect, are so embedded into the American collective psyche(Marx 1964:30).

Machines, or so Marx argues, became a vital component in the idea of America in the period of mass industrialization in the United States, roughly early- to mid-19th century. They took on a status as "conquerors of nature," of dominating space. This, of course, has largely to do with the "completion" of the trans-continental railroad in 1869, and the subsequent presence of the railroad as a trope in the literature of Hawthorne, Emerson, Thoureau and Whiteman among others. These writers, according to Marx, largely represented the railroad and industry more generally as the primary cause, as "responsible agent, or *separator*," of the sense of detachment from nature. Thus, he concludes that the themes of "unrelatedness" in 19th century American literature are a "characteristic legacy of agrarian experience" and are "expressions of our native tradition of pastoral, with its glorification of the Garden and its consequent identification of science and technology with evil"(Marx 1964:40). Though Marx's notion of the pastoral is largely, as he suggests, a literary by-product of industrial technology, it is nevertheless significant for this study as it pertains to the "ontological settlement" wherein

technology becomes a kind of middle-term, the mediating party that has kept apart the human from its original habitat—nature.

From White and Marx, we see that religion and technologies have always been involved in an intricate dance, with the choreography largely determining the conception of both what is human and what is nature. As philosopher of technology Don Ihde writes, "technology supplies the dominant basis for an understanding both of the world and our ourselves"(Ihde 1983:10). Thus, human self-conception must be understood not as contained but as within "a context, a field, a world"(Ihde 1983:14).

It seems that a similar position must be staked out for religion, since it has, for one reason or another, been classically understood in primarily epistemological (as opposed to ontological) terms. In contemporary religious studies, the single article with the most reach and influence in this regard has been Clifford Geertz's "Religion as a Cultural System." Here, Geertz famously argues for a functionalist, meaning-oriented understanding of religion. Religion, for him, keeps the chaos of life at bay. Religion is a way of *explaining* paradox, mystery and death. As Geertz famously writes:

> …Religion is: (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. (Geertz 2004:4)

Geertz, it is clear, relies heavily upon symbols as that primary dynamic that creates the "sacred canopy," to use Berger's term.

Indeed Geertz's main focus is on the ability of religion to construct a world with *meaning*. He describes this process, not coincidentally in my view, in technological terms (e.g.,

"sources of information," "model")(Geertz 2004:7). The goal of religion, he suggests, is to formulate:

> by means of symbols, [an] image of such a genuine order of the world which will account for, and even celebrate, the perceived ambiguities, puzzles and paradoxes in human experience. The effort is not to deny the undeniable—that there are unexplained events, that life hurts or that rain falls upon the just—but to deny that there are inexplicable events, that life is unendurable and that justice is a mirage...What is important, to a religious man at least, is that this elusiveness be accounted for, that it be not the result of the fact that there are no such principles, explanations or forms, that life is a surd and the attempt to make moral, intellectual or emotional sense out of experience is bootless.(Geertz 2004:23)

As Talal Asad has argued in his critique of this essay, Geertz assumes that "because all human beings have a profound need for a general order of existence that religious symbols function to fulfill that need. It follows that human beings have a deep dread of disorder"(Asad 1993:45). Thus, Asad concludes, Geertz's conception of religion resembles that of Marx's thesis of religion as ideology—"that is, as a model of consciousness which is other than consciousness of reality, external to the relations of production, producing no knowledge, but expressing at once the anguish of the oppressed and a spurious consolation"(Asad 1993:46). While Geertz's article provides vast theoretical resources, some of which this study draws from, such as the phenomenological concept of "world," I believe, with Asad, that his influence on religious studies underplays ontology and overplays the idea that human beings have an innate drive for not only meaning but coherence and order. Most crucially, for the present

purposes, this emphasis on meaning and order assumes the human to be an extant entity apart from the phenomenological world. Thus, religion becomes "world-maker" purely in the sense that it becomes a categorizer, a fundamental tenet of phenomenology, going back to, at least, Kant.

Taking Asad's point, which could easily serve as not simply a critique of Geertz but of the Kantian/phenomenological bent in the social science of religion more broadly, what if we were to think about world-making as less a Kantian synthesis, which would assume the clean break between and stability of the subject (human consciousness) and object (the world), but as *onto-cosmological*?

The idea that religion is an environmental response to the condition of humans is not in any way something new. While it is undoubtedly the case that, along with philosophy, theology and science, religion is, as Geertz too suggests, an attempt to understand the world, I am suggesting, after the work of Eliade and others in the tradition of the history of religions, to view it as ontological and even cosmological. Religion is an attempt to build cosmoi, worlds and universes. It creates networks of objects and relations,[1] which for the pious, are real, not simply meaningful. They contain, pardon the theo-philosophical language, substance. As philologist Remi Brague reminds, "cosmologies" are "the fruit of a sort of act of faith"(Brague 2004:23).

The present study attempts to take seriously the world-making dynamic of technologies and religion, in particular American Christianity, in order to study their contemporary interrelation. This interrelation goes both ways. Even in the wonderful work of Hendershot and others, there is a sense that this relationship is wholly instrumental, construed in scholarly and

[1] I use "object" here deliberately to allude to the recent developments in object-oriented philosophy, otherwise known as the "speculative turn" that includes a variety of figures. An exhaustive, though not

popular discourse as religion *using* media or media *coverage* of religion. Therefore, the present study proposes the following thesis: the interfacing of religion and new media technologies occurs on an *intrinsic* and *interimplicated* level wherein the primary shared dynamic of religion and new (digital) media technologies is world-making, or *onto-cosmogonic*. I suggest that religion and media technologies, digital ones in particular, are principally connective and binding, therefore creating networks of connectivity, which I dub *milieu*.

I analyze the interrelation of religion and digital technologies in three milieux: (1) the highly technologized contemporary worship space that features multiple projection screens and theater-grade audio and lighting systems, (2) the World Wide Web, in particular online worship, and (3) the visual world of popular GISs (geographic information systems) such as Google Maps and Google Earth. In showing the "theology of technology" that emerges as a result of the religious engagement with technology and the latent "religiosity" of everyday technological practice, I aim to enter into these broad areas of scholarly discourse: (1) the debates on secularism and secularization, (2) the tension of religion, science and technology within these discussions, (3) recent contributions in the sociology of religion, (4) studies in religion and media. In order to situate what will, throughout the course of this study be fleshed out, it may be of best interest to briefly touch on some of these areas of research.

1. Modernity: secular = postmodernity: post-secular?

The overarching intellectual project of Jurgen Habermas can be described as the attempt to find the best in the principles of the Enlightenment. This was at least the reputation he received during the high noon of the modernity debates in philosophy and social theory in the 1970s-1980s. As an astute philosopher, Habermas is fully aware of the anti-clericalism of the intellectual tradition of which he is the primary flag-waver. However, more recently, undoubtedly because of the so-called crisis of multiculturalism and secularism across Europe,

he has called for a consideration of a "post-secular" society(Habermas 2008), which, in Western Europe given its rightward, anti-immigrant turn, is courageous in some ways.

Behind the idea of the post-secular is the acknowledgement that the anthropocentric worldview that emerged as an effect of "disenchantment" was largely exceptional, not the norm, and relegated to a very small segment of the world's population. (This is not to mention that this kind of "Occidental rationalism" was in many ways a product of Christianity, not simply religion *qua* religion.) As Habermas notes, this model was supposed to serve as an example for the rest of the world. Just look at the way in which democracy was seen as the *natural* outcome of the modernization process in development theory. This was arrogance, he acknowledges. Europe, the West, was "treading a deviant path"(Habermas 2008:18) in its rather rash triumphalism of the secularization thesis.

Habermas, however, as many know, is no radical. While acknowledging the overreach of the secularization thesis, he still argues "the data collected globally still provide surprisingly robust support for the defenders of the secularization thesis"(Habermas 2008:19). Nevertheless, he cedes the point that religious communities must necessarily "claim a seat" in societies that are secularized. This is the basis of what Habermas calls "post-secular." While liberal (implicitly secular) societies view religion as a problem and thus incommensurable with democratic principles, post-secular societies, on the other hand, have to adjust itself to the continued existence of religious communities. "Post-secular" is not so much an actually existing reality but an aspiration towards a change in consciousness(Habermas 2008:20).

Unsurprisingly, Habermas attributes the dominance of Occidental rationalism that has produced secular society on "science and technology," as they produce an "anthropocentric understanding" of the world. This places Habermas well within the Weberian idea that science and technology, as agents of rationalization, "demystify" the world, thus making the survival of religion less likely in the modern world.

But what if, as philosopher John Caputo has argued, there is an “amazing symbiosis of religion and technoscience in the post-secular world”(Caputo 2001:71). He writes:

> We live and hope and pray and weep in a world of high-tech advanced telecommunication systems, a dizzying, digitalized world that is changing everything. Yet far from falling prey to the prophets of the death of God, far from dying a digitalized death, the divinity simply takes on new digitalized high-tech life. Religion shows every sign of adapting with Darwinian dexterity (to use an analogy that would give the fundamentalists no comfort), of flourishing in a new high-tech form, and of entering into an amazing symbiosis with the "virtual culture."(Caputo 2001:67–68)

Caputo attributes the failure of the rapid rise and growth of technology to accomplish the death of God to the philosophical contradictions embedded in modernity’s core principles. Let us take, for instance, “materialism.” Bruno Latour describes it as “a foolproof appeal to a type of agency and a set of entities and forces that allowed analysts to explain, dismiss, or see through other types of agencies,” that is, a universally applicable—and thus superior—philosophical stance. It was supposed to supersede all others, “an ideal way to shatter the pretensions of those who tried to hide their brutal interests behind notions like morality, culture, religion, politics, or art”(Latour 2007:138). Materialism, in other words, was the great disenchanter. But, as Caputo argues, “advanced communication technologies actually undermined the old-fashioned materialism” (and thus a core intellectual effect of modernity), thus depriving it “of its rigid fixity and dense and heavy substantiality.” “The impossible,” he writes,

> …has its techno-scientific analog in the utter transformability and permeability of physical things in a world that is mastering the genetic map and is digitalizing everything.(Caputo 2001:77).

While Caputo's media theory is not the most robust or complex, his point is well taken. Digitization challenges the old-fashioned "idealistic materialism," as Latour would no doubt call it, which (rather unscientifically by the way) equated matter and substance.

The major point of significance, for Caputo, is the possibility of "a religion without religion," an idea that he associates with the later work of Jacques Derrida(Caputo 1997). Caputo's formulation of "religion without religion" is rested upon a rethinking the "location," or perhaps "forms," that transcendence takes. He describes this as the "[wresting] of religious phenomena…from religions," resulting in a religion "outside the classic oppositions of religion and science, body and soul, this world and the next"(Caputo 2001:89).

It can be argued that Caputo is identifying a period *after* modernity wherein digital technologies exhibit "religious" qualities, though he refrains from overemphasizing this point as the "logic" of today's technologies. This is because Caputo, astutely though perhaps implicitly, knows that technologies have always in some ways exhibited a religious quality, if we are to think of religion as essentially an environmental response. It is clear then that Caputo is providing a critique of a certain reading of the correlation of modernity and secularization, which views technologies, in particular, to be, disenchanting.

2. Science or technology?

Even Caputo, while offering a very important corrective in the way that technologies are viewed in relation to the secularization thesis, nevertheless lumps together science and technology. Though there is no doubt that they are inextricably linked, as the many scholars who have used

the term “technoscience,” have suggested, there is, according to Ihde, who has quite often used the term, nevertheless a need to rethink their connection, especially in the face of, I contend, the privileging of science over technology in the discussions regarding secularization in social scientific discussions of religion. This has even been acknowledged by sociologists of religion such as John and Michael Evans, who can be hardly called “radical” but have yet called for going beyond, what they call, the “epistemological conflict narrative” between religion and science. But even in their welcomed call for going beyond the modernist stranglehold wherein religion and science are seen as competing social forces vying for hegemony over capital-T Truth, the assumed equivalence of religion and science is largely reinscribed. This implicitly suggests that it is the dynamic between religion and science that bears most analytic weight even in today’s world. In my view, they do not go far enough as they simply suggest that religion and science are not only interconnected in their historical development (a point which has been made over and over by the history and philosophy of science as well as theology) but that they are not as *oppositional* as one would think.

It seems that the tendency, at least in discussions regarding science, technology, religion and modernity, is to discount technology one way or another. This, I believe, is wholly unjustified and baffling. A mere glance at the headlines or the news ticker on any major cable news network would reveal the importance of digital technologies for business, culture and social formations but in discussions of religion and modernity, technology nary makes a mention.

This may have to do with modern culture’s, and its academic disciplines’, inability to recognize, as Ihde calls it, the ”historical-ontological priority of technology over science”(Ihde 1983:25). To make this case, he makes the point that technology is almost like “first philosophy” for humans.

> If technologies in the broadest and most concrete sense involve humans and their uses of tools and artifacts, then at the least one can say that technology in this sense is both universal and probably used at the time of the arising of the human species. There are no instances of societies, cultures or human groups which do not use tools and artifacts in their relations with the natural environment.(Ihde 1983:25)

Striking an evolutionary tone similar to perspectives taken on most recently by Bernard Stiegler, Ihde argues that humans have always used technologies. Although the prevailing idea, at least in terms of Western intellectual history, is that technology emerged as "applied science"(an idea that comes from Roger Bacon), if one takes technology to be a generalized behavioral response to the natural environment, as Ihde does, then it could be interpreted as existing under the heading of "praxis."

It is out of this originary encounter with its environment, in which the human feels the need to develop a systematic mode of knowledge that will inform its praxis, hence science. This is essentially an argument made by Malinowksi with regard to the existence of "science" in "primitive" societies(Malinowski 1954). Countering earlier, anthropological arguments that unfairly portrayed "primitive" peoples as being without rationality—as Levy-Bruhl did most explicitly(Lévy-Bruhl 1966), Malinowski writes in "Magic, Science and Religion":

> There are no peoples however primitive without religion and magic. Nor are there, it must be added at once, any savage races lacking either in the scientific attitude or in science, though this lack has been frequently attributed to them. (Malinowski 1954:17)

At the root of his argument is that every so-called "primitive community is in possession of a considerable store of knowledge, based on experience and fashioned by reason"(Malinowski

1954:26). These communities use this knowledge in a manner that may be called scientific in spite of it looking like magic to Westerners. There is, he assures, a "line of division" between work and ritual, with "science" being deployed in the former and "magic" used for the latter.

Which—science or magic—is used is determined by the nature of the situation. He illustrates this point using the example of sailing.

> If the modern seaman, entrenched in science and reason, provided with all sorts of safety *appliances*, sailing on *steel-built steamers*, if even he has a singular tendency to superstition—which does not rob him of his knowledge or reason, nor make him altogether prelogical—can we wonder that his savage colleague, under much more precarious conditions, holds fast to the safety and comfort of magic?(Malinowski 1954:30. Emphasis added.)

Notice the mention of technologies in this brief exegesis by Malinowski, which he also does when commenting on the way in which the "primitive" deals with uncertain environmental conditions.

> He [the primitive] never relies on magic alone, while, on the contrary, he sometimes dispenses with it completely, as in *fire-making* and in a number of *crafts* and pursuits. But he clings to it, whenever has to recognize the importance of his knowledge and of his rational *technique*. (Malinowski 1954:32. Emphasis added.)

Malinowski, in these places, is pointing to the commonality of technology, or "technique" as he calls it, in both the so-called "primitive" societies and modern ones. The point, ultimately, is that "science is never consciously made" but is arrived at through an active, rational encounter

with the world. It is a matter of semantics, according to Malinowski, if one wishes to call this "science"(Malinowski 1954:35).

Following Ihde and Malinowski, this study views technology as primary, over science, especially in relation to large onto-cosmological questions of the human and the "world" (a point largely amenable with Heidegger's argument in "The Age of the World Picture," as Ihde notes). It is, he writes, how humans mediate "basic perceptual experience." It is, while he does not put it this way, more immediate. Science, meanwhile, is the "coming to self-consciousness" of technological practice (Ihde 1983:45).

3. Sociology of religion

This study also attempts to make contributions to the sociology of religion by critically engaging certain analytic tendencies that the field has inherited from its recent past, including not only the rational choice theories of religion espoused by Finke and Stark(Stark and Finke 2000) but also parallel developments, such as the "spiritual seeker" thesis of Wuthnow and Roof(Wuthnow 2003; Roof 2001), the community-analytic of Ammerman(Ammerman 1997), as well as the previous sociology of knowledge and social-theoretical bent of Berger, Luckmann and Bellah(R. Bellah 1991; Luckmann 1967; Berger 1967). It does so not to partake in any of the usual academic saber rattling but to use the intermingling of religion and technologies that is particular to our times as an occasion to reconsider and scrutinize some of the key categories and assumptions in the sociology of religion, especially religious experience, community, space, and sacred/profane. I argue that many of these tendencies are effected by the historical development of sociology as a modern discipline and the place of religion in the fashioning of sociology's self-identity. This point is made quite clear in discussion that occurred in the 1990s on both sides of the Atlantic regarding the commensurability of postmodernism and postmodern theory with the sociology of religion.

Quite naturally, one set of issues that emerged revolved around that of metanarrative-incredulity and its effect on capital-T Truth. If indeed religion, like science, was a source for both ontological and epistemological certainty, then the *secular* competitors for certainty like rationalism and progress were also subject to the Lyotardian smell-test. As British social theorist of religion Grace Davie summarizes it:

> No longer is it assumed that a secular discourse will gradually overcome a recognizable and unified religious alternative. Instead, both secular and religious thinking will evolve, as multiple groups of people find their own ways forward and creeds (both secular and religious) to live by in the early years of the 21st century. (Davie 2004:78)

But this, according to David Lyon, was precisely the problem; religion was treated parochially.

> The result was threefold: religion came to be studied as a contracting phenomenon; or as a channel that could easily be marginalized from the mainstream; or it was assumed that one should not take "religious" accounts of religion, seriously.(Lyon 1999:15)

Lyon here, as he acknowledges, is riffing off of points made by James Beckford, who also offers a threefold typology of the kind of social theoretical responses to religion that were prevalent: (1) Functionalist (i.e., religion as socially integrative), (2) Marxian (i.e., religious institutions as impediment to full human development), (3) "German"[Weber, Troeltsch, and Simmel) (i.e., religion as means of making sense of world and resource for meaning) (Lyon 1999:17).

The prospect of postmodernity shakes up the state of affairs. Thus, the categories and analytics of sociology, and the sociology of religion, as disciplines that have been framed by modernity and theories of modernization, are thrown for a loop. As Lyon writes:

> Without a doubt, sociologies of religion have been framed by theories of modernization. But what if modernity itself is failing or undergoing transformation? Is secularization theory merely a modern idea and itself ripe for reappraisal in the light of both social-cultural change and of theories about such change? (Lyon 1999:19)

There have been many ways in which sociologists have attempted to approach these questions. One, already mentioned, is to view religion, as metanarrative that has been brought back down to earth. It is simply a "cultural resource." Another has been the consumption model. Influenced by the supply-side, market model of Finke and Stark, among others, religion is viewed to have been not only become a cultural resource but a cultural commodity. In advanced capitalism, religion no longer retains the power of obligation but is a matter of "personal choice," as Davie puts it(Davie 2004:79).[2] Thus, religion becomes one of the many sources from which one can construct a patchwork, *bricolage*, identity, which is, as some have argued, a condition, not just an option, in postmodern consumer culture.

While the sociology of religion's engagement of postmodernity has resulted in these welcomed developments, including the call for a rethinking of the "place" of religion in the story of modernity, it seems to stop short of calling for a robust rethinking of certain *categories* within the study of religion. But, as these scholars have alluded to, if the emergence of

[2] Many have interpreted this as the privatization of religion, thus the waning of religious institutions but not necessarily of religion itself. While many have argued along these lines, two very clear, sociological, statements of this thesis have come from Daniel Bell and Thomas Luckmann. See Luckmann, Thomas. 1967. *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society*. Macmillan; Bell, Daniel. 1978. "The Return of the Sacred: The Argument about the Future of Religion." *Zygon* 13:187–208.

sociology is intricately tied to the story of modernity, then, it is my contention at least, that a rethinking of some of the categories of sociology of religion may also be in order.

4. Religion and media

Along similar lines, media scholar Stewart Hoover insists upon the importance of looking at religion or technology not as institutions but as practices incorporated into the construction of identity (Hoover 2006:3). The prevailing view that understands "religion" and "media" as institutions more so than practices, Hoover suggests, is guilty of a dualism that presents religion and media technologies as "coherent, transhistorical, unchanging forms…potentially acting independently upon one another"(Hoover 2006:8). Hoover's argument ultimately is that religion and media categorically "bleed" into one another. As he puts it:

> …[M]edia and religion have come together in fundamental ways. They occupy the same spaces, serve many of the same purposes, and invigorate the same practices in late modernity. Today, it is probably better to think of them as related to think of them as related than to think of them as separate.(Hoover 2006:9)

For Hoover, media "condition the way knowledge is produced and shared, the way symbols, ideas and values are encountered" (Hoover 2006:12). In other words, culture (symbols, ideas and values in this instance) is mediated by media (what it has arguably always done) but also, thanks to evolution of digital, communications media, is *produced* by media. Hoover labels this "media culture," by which he means that media "today constitute the *inventory* of symbols, values and ideas out of which sense is made locally and globally" (Hoover 2006:13).

Yet, upon closer inspection, media, in this formulation, is a repository and circulator of cultural material, not a producer. In fact, he says as much.

> That material is not something that is idiosyncratically produced by the media (as some would want to claim) but is very much derived from the cultures in which the various media are situated…The fact that those things become mediated means that they are changed in fundamental ways, certainly, but the integration of the media in and through culture cannot be ignored. (Hoover 2006:13)

It is through arguing that media is a distributor of culture that Hoover then proceeds to make the link with religion. Whereas religion was once the primary distributor of culture (i.e. symbols, values and ideals), media has now replaced it in that capacity (Hoover 2006:15). This, he argues, is an effect chiefly of social modernization. In this new social formation, "factors of difference such as language, culture, religion, etc., that had traditionally provided the foundations of identity and worldview for individuals would become less and less effective" (Hoover 2006:30). In Hoover's estimation, modern mass media filled this void, offering people new resources of finding their new social location. In this sense then, religion and media both function in society as "mediations." Each makes up, or has made up historically, "tools" (in the general sense) for the construction of social identity, more specifically, as narrative-builders, Hoover suggests. In sum, religion and media each helps individuals' "efforts at making meaningful, coherent narratives of themselves as active participants in their social and cultural surrounds" (Hoover 2006:20).

Identity, understood as the individual's efforts of constructing a meaningful narrative for one's life, is therefore where much of what Hoover believes "lived religion" can be found, especially in the ethos of self-perfection embodied in what religion scholars Wuthnow and Roof

refer to as “quest culture” (Roof 2001; Wuthnow 1998). Lived religion is the analytic alternative to institutional religion, which has been on the decline in the US, according to these authors. It is the model used by Roof and Wuthnow to describe contemporary religious experience in everyday life, that is, religion as practice, not a set of “symbols that imaginatively explain what the world and life are about.” Lived religion, thus, becomes an analytical tool that allows for the idea of religion or “religious life” to encompass “the official, the popular, and the therapeutic modes of religious identity”(as quoted in Hoover 2006:55). Indeed, this falls right in line with Hoover’s stated goal of his study. “The question, rather than being ‘*what* is the significance of the media age for religion?’ is instead ‘*where* is that significance to be found?’”(Hoover 2006:14). Identity is where.

Hoover’s formulation of the interrelation between religion and media technologies as a cultural resource for narrative-building and identity-construction does however bear a few weak spots especially as it pertains to the analysis of media. While he maintains a dynamic theory of religion as “achieved” not as simply extant, Hoover, however, has a far less nuanced view of media technologies. In my estimation, he understands media as a *fait accompli*. For him, the dynamic of media and identity is oversimplified. Media is what individuals draw from to construct identity. It is a pipeline to “culture.” The relationship, while not passive, is unidirectional, as evidenced by Hoover’s theoretical reliance upon Giddens’ “reflexivity” which obviously has a strong theory of agency albeit within the framework of the “double-hermeneutic”(Giddens 1993). It overlooks the interactivity of current regime of media technologies.

This is an error in two parts. On the one hand, Hoover does not look at what recent media critics have referred to as Web 2.0, where collaborative content creation is the norm. Additionally, the success of Wikipedia and the ever-growing blogosphere is testament to the kind of bi-directionality character of new media. Hoover does not entertain the possibility that

media users, individually and as communities, can *produce* culture (i.e. content) through media, not simply draw from it and use it. On the other hand, Hoover narrowly focuses on media technologies' *symbolic* function in their relation to religion, thus situating the entire study in terms of the construction of religious identity. But, as the rest of this present study will demonstrate, this approach precludes the possibility to study the religious use of media technologies, which Hoover does hint at but never fully explains. By wholly adopting Wuthnow and Roof's analytic of "lived religion," Hoover finds no room methodologically to make room for the increased religious use of new media technologies such as the announcement by Pope Benedict XVI to Catholic priests to engage the Web and to blog, mentioned earlier(David 2010). Unfortunately, this would not fall anywhere within Hoover's analytic framework.

Overview

This project is divided into two sections. Part I serves two functions. On the one hand, it aims to clear the theoretical space that the overall project seeks to situate itself; on the other, it will lay down the overlying scaffolding which will frame the more empirical parts of the project. Part II is where claims, trends and arguments posed in the previous section are pursued and demonstrated in a detailed manner.

Chapter 1, "Upending the 'Modernist Settlement': The Lacunae of Religion and Technology in the Myths of Modernity," aims to situate religion and technology in the debates around modernity and post-modernity and the secular. In doing so, it brings light to the fact that so much of the discourses on modernity and secularity have reproduced the orthodox Weberian reading of "disenchantment," fixing religion and technology in a conceptual deadlock. This leads to, among other things, definitions of "religion" and "technology" stripped of dynamism and historical specificity, leading to awkward moments like the Christianity of Cotton Mather being discussed in the same breath as that the Christianity of today's Nigerian

Pentecostalism. The same goes for technology. In its traditionally subservient role to science, technology was too often underconceptualized and given short shrift, especially in its relation to modernization and secularization.

Chapter 2, then, entitled, "From Cosmos to Networks: The 'Worlding' of Religion and Technology" traces the concept of "world," and its equivalents like "cosmos" as they have been construed in influential theoretical studies of religion and technology. I do so in order to pose the thesis that the recent convergence of religion-technology today is due to their cosmogonic, or "world-building," and ontologically *creative* qualities. This requires a new way of thinking about the concept of "world." I contend that a "cosmology" and "ontology" that describes the relation of religion and new media technologies must be viewed as unbounded and networked, and necessarily challenges the restrictiveness of ancient and traditional cosmology, which focuses on totality, causality and order.

Then we move on to Part II, where specific instances of religio-technolical "worlding" are examined empirically.

Chapters 3 and 4 hone in on LifeChurch.tv, one of the largest evangelical churches in the United States, which is widely known within and beyond Christian circles for its high-use of digital technologies across their physical worship spaces, called "campuses," as well as on their Internet campus, called "Church Online." Chapter 3 focuses on the world of techno-physical worship spaces of a particular LifeChurch campus. It consists mainly of an auto-ethnographic analysis of the worship experience (and the digital technologies that facilitate it), focusing on how the technologies impart a sense of connection and bonding with the pastor and other worshipers who are in distant locations through a formation of a "world." I propose that the digital environment of the technologized worship space hints towards a larger shift in ideas around Christian worship, which I call "liturgical aesthetics," which emphasizes embodiment and affectivity that are specifically actualized by digital technologies.

Chapter 4 addresses LifeChurch.tv's "digital milieu," which features the coexistence of religious participation and sociality, whereby the lobby, where the fellowship occurs, and the sanctuary, where worship occurs, are both "remediated," to use the term of media theorists Bolter and Grusin(Bolter and Grusin 2000). I do so by presenting a sustained discussion of the online churches, wherein I provide a phenomenological (*pace* participant-observation) analysis of LifeChurch.tv's digital milieu, specifically its Church Online (Internet campus), Facebook page, and its microsites (e.g., its blogs). Thus, I suggest that online churches' digital *milieu* has effectively redefined extant ideas of religious community and religious experience by injecting sociality in nearly all forms of worshiping.

If chapters 3 and 4 can be thought of as a study of the religious use of technology, the final chapter, chapter 5, is an exploration of the technological use of religion. It explores is the "theoscopics" of Google Maps and Google Earth, software that is used with frequency in everyday technological practice, which has *proliferated* and *normalized* an omniscient view of the world. This has, in turn, wrought a new regime of vision, where the user can virtually see *as* God. This is due to the cosmogonic—world-making—capacity intrinsic to these visual technologies. I argue that this new "God-vision" reshuffles the onto-cosmological positionality of the human, in relation to the world and God. In turn, I ask a theological question: If indeed conceptions of the world and the human have shifted, what is the shift to the notion of God?

Part I

Chapter 1

Upending the "Modernist Settlement": The Lacunae of Religion and Technology and the Myths of Modernity

Introduction

In the confines of contemporary academic discourse, but also in the greater landscape of public debate, a peculiar sense of wonderment is often produced when the basic tenets and assumptions of modernity (one could go so far as calling these the "metaphysics of modernity," as Heidegger does) are challenged. It is a bizarre dance, an exercise in self-deception to a certain extent. What I mean is that many people, not just scholars, understand "modernity," that troubling word which we have inherited from the classical social theorists Marx, Weber and Durkheim, to be something to the tune of what Anthony Giddens has called "living in a post-traditional world"(Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994). But when remnants of traditional life attain visibility, putting the modern into sharp relief, there is a feigning of curiosity that takes on a distinctly ethnographic flavor. It is as if after the onset of modernity (whenever this may be—16th century and beyond according to many accounts), "the traditional," yet an ever more elusive term, was wiped away. (God knows the Europeans did try to do this literally.) This bewilderment is nowhere better exemplified when specifically the technological aspects of modern life are juxtaposed with leftover phenomena of our traditional past, in particular religion.

In an image made popular in the *New York Times* taken by photographer Rina Castelnuovo, there stands an orthodox Jewish man pressing a mobile phone against the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem so that, we are led to believe at least, the person on the other end of the line could also pray, albeit remotely. The "success" of the photo, that is, its mass distribution and its critical acclaim (helped along by its inclusion in a book by Thomas

Friedman) can be explained by the semiotic contradiction that the photograph appears to present. The man holding the mobile is not just a Jew, but orthodox. He is clad in the traditional clothing of a particular strand of ultra-Orthodox Judaism, black hat and coat; he is donned with thick, curled sideburns, called payots, and a beard. All of these details do the work of conveying to the audience that this man is not simply a man of faith but devout. He is at one of the holiest sites of the Abrahamic religions praying with the most unholy of objects, a cellular phone. The phone here is an ungrounded signifier in this particular a system of religious signs. It is this juxtaposition of the ancient (even Biblical) and the modern, which has given this particular photograph such poignancy. This type of response represents, what Jurgen Habermas has called, though in an altogether different context, a "false norm," which in this instance is really a false dichotomy between "religion" and "technology," the latter serving as a proxy for "modernity." The popularity of this photograph demonstrates a widespread acceptance of the incongruity of religion and modernity (and even post-modernity).

This is true in not only public discourse but also in relatively recent sociology of religion. In "Religion and Science: Beyond the Epistemological Conflict Narrative," sociologists John Evans and Michael Evans argue that it is the influence of Max Weber's notion of "disenchantment" in the sociology of religion has resulted in a zero-sum "epistemological narrative" that sees religion and science as "always conflict[ing] and that they conflict over competing truth about the world" (Evans and Evans 2008: 88). According to this view, the thrust of rationalization, the main dynamic of modernity, does not leave science and religion untouched, resulting in the dominance of science and the waning of religion. This, they suggest, needs rethinking. By pointing to the recent work of Christian Smith as well as the rational choice sociologists of religion Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, Evans and Evans praise the emergence of what they call "non-epistemological" views of the religion-science relation, in which

> …religion and science are not thought to be struggling over truth, but [focus] on religion as an institution with multiple tasks and interests, struggling with other institutions. The focus here is on power and agency of individuals within institution. (Evans and Evans 2008: 98-99)

However, an underlying assumption in Evans and Evans' argument is the all-too-easily equated "epistemology" with "conflict." While going through such pains to describe how it is that the conflict narrative between religion and science emerged, even going so far as to suggest that it is inscribed in the very founding of sociology (an argument to which I have great sympathy), it seems that Evans and Evans simply adopt the intellectual basis upon which this narrative is founded and perpetuate it without much interrogation. While critiquing the way in which epistemological analyses of the relationship of religion and science have created a deadlock, wherein which religion is equated with the irrational and science with the rational, they gloss over the studies of religion that take an epistemological approach without being limited to this conflict narrative (e.g., the entirety of the religion and science literature). For Evans and Evans, the only way out of this is by completely jettisoning the question of knowledge. By relegating the question of knowledge as not only insufficient but nearly unnecessary, Evans and Evans' argument can be seen as symptomatic of the reigning doxa of contemporary sociology of religion.

Evans and Evans go on to argue in favor of "social-institutional" analyses of science and religion as a much needed corrective to the dominance of "symbolic" analyses. In other words, they claim that there is too much consideration of religion and science as ideologies, in the most neutral sense of that term, as sets of ideas or beliefs, at the cost of viewing them as institutions with "competing interests," which they claim Smith, Finke and Stark to be

exemplars.[3] There is almost no doubt, then, that Evans and Evans are positioned well within the objectivist tendency in contemporary sociological writings on religion, embodied by the rise of rational-choice theory, which is nothing short of a reaction against the dominant framework in social studies of religion in 1960s and 1970s, which was the sociology of knowledge or phenomenology. [4]

Putting aside their proclivity for a particular approach to religion, their point regarding Weberian disenchantment rings true all too loudly. One does not have to look very closely to see the undoubtedly Weberian substrate in so many studies of religion. This is the case even in the studies that were part of the "turn to religion" wave of the 1990s in continental philosophy(de Vries 1999). With little exception, it is not religion qua religion that was at the heart of these studies; in fact, it is largely secularism, and its confrontation with religion, that plays a larger analytic role. As Charles Taylor points out in his *A Secular Age* (2007), scholars in the recent debates on secularism have focused on the relationship between religion and modernity, resulting in a rather narrow set of possibilities for envisioning the rather complex relationship that exists between the two. According to him, the dominant tendencies in the

[3] For an alternative, see Sloterdijk, Peter. 2009*. God's zeal: the battle of the three monotheisms*. Cambridge ; Malden, MA: Polity., a study of the origins of monotheism from a perspective that takes seriously the idea of "competition" among the monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—that displays both theological and "social-institutional" rigor without utilizing the language of rational choice.

[4] Works in this vein would include, among others, Peter Berger's *The Sacred Canopy* (Berger 1967), Thomas Luckmann's *Invisible Religion* (Luckmann 1967), Robert Bellah's "Civil Religion in America" (Bellah 1967) and Clifford Geertz's "Religion as Cultural System" (Geertz 1965). As a matter of fact, Luckmann's now classic book was a critique of the institutionalist tendency of post-WWII sociology of religion to be mere demographic studies of congregations, i.e., "membership trends, attendance patterns, geographic and class differences" (Lemert 1979:448). It has been suggested that the generation of sociology of religion that comprises of Luckmann, Berger and Bellah substituted a social-functionalism for the structural-functionalism of earlier sociological studies of religion, for instance, Lenski's *The Religious Factor* (Lenski 1961). "In effect," Lemert states, "religion was defined as a functional feature of man's social nature, not of social institutional arrangements" (Lemert 1979: 450). Thus, we see that the generation of scholars that emerged in the 1960s presented religion as an ontological problematic to counteract what they believed to be an overly institutionalized framework of analysis that sought to study. It was, in sum, a speculative response to the demographic (or institutional) tendency of post-war sociology of religion. I believe Evans and Evans' article to be representative of an anti-speculative reaction in the sociology of religion.

study on secularism can be viewed in the following typology: (1) the retreat of religion in public life (2) the decline in belief and practice (3) the change in the conditions of belief. Indeed, some of the most lauded works on secularism in the sociology of religion in recent years have centered on grappling with progressive narrative of secularization, encompassed in (1) and (2) of Taylor's typology (Casanova 1994; Martin 2005; Smith 2003). What is striking, in these works, is that there has been close to no attention paid to what was once seen as the chief forces of secularization—science and technology—at least in Max Weber's original formulation of "disenchantment," which many of these studies take as their implicit, or sometimes even explicit, context.

This is the case, for instance, in Jose Casanova's *Public Religions in the Modern World*, one of the most influential works in recent sociological studies of religion (Casanova 1994). There, he argues that "religions" had "gone public" in the 1980s, by which he means religion has become increasingly visible. Pointing to numerous cases from across the globe, including Brazil and the United States, Casanova argues that the increased visibility and public nature of Christian religious movements, especially in the realm of politics, in these varied national contexts, challenges the "disenchantment" narrative. On this point, his work is immensely valuable. Yet, he makes no attempt to ask what "going public" may mean beyond the participation of religious groups in politics. He does not scrutinize the means, or through which media, that religions have "gone public." In the grand thesis of the "deprivatization of religion" that he offers, Casanova fails to even mention the word "media," an omission that Hent de Vries has noted(de Vries 2002:17). The "politicization of religion," Chiara Bottici suggests, goes "hand in hand with its mediatization"(Bottici 2009).

What accounts for such an analytic blind spot in an otherwise shrewd piece of scholarship? One could speculate that a place to look for an answer would be in the discourse on modernity, of which secularism and technology are an integral part. It may be that the

correlation of modernity with technology (Thompson 1995) has all but put to rest the question of media and technology's secularizing function, though with some notable exceptions especially from the religion and science literature(Barbour 1966; Merton 1970). In this view, media and technology are unquestionably secular forces. Casanova's work, then, is, in this regard, not exceptional but rather symptomatic of the sociology of religion, and perhaps the scholarly discourse of modernity more broadly.[5]

Jeremy Stolow, the scholar of religion and media, identifies this as "the myth of social modernization."

> This is the myth which credits modern media[and we could add technology more broadly here - SH]—beginning with the printing press—with a key role in the world-historical disembedding of religion from public life, and its relocation within the private walls of bourgeois domesticity, or deeper still, the interior silent universe of individual readers and their infinitely replicable activities of decoding texts. For some, this is a tale about loss of meaning and moral crisis that comes with the dematerialization of palpable structures of religious authority. For others, it is a heroic story about the empowerment of social groups to challenge the repressive apparatuses of Church and Court. (Stolow 2005:122)

[5] To be fair, Casanova has more recently taken more interest in media and their relation to religious "deprivatization." In recent reappraisal of *Public Religions*, Casanova writes: "What constitutes the truly novel aspect of the present global condition is precisely the fact that all world religions can be reconstituted for the first time truly as de-territorialized global imagined communities, detached from the civilizational settings in which they have been traditionally embedded. Paraphrasing Arjun Appadurai's image of 'modernity at large,' one could say that the world religions, through the linking of electronic mass media and mass migration, are being reconstituted as de-territorialized global religions 'at large' or as global ummas"(Casanova 2008:116; also Casanova 2001).

However, as Stolow rightly notes, this "common metanarrative" of disenchantment assumes "that the mere expansion of modern communication technologies is somehow commensurate with a dissolution of religious authority and a fragmentation of its markers of affiliations and identity"(Stolow 2005:122).

In this chapter, I aim to explore the Weberian disenchantment thesis in order to tease out its implications for the study of religion and new media technologies. I go about this in a slightly roundabout, though hopefully not too odd, manner. Instead of dealing with "disenchantment" from the get go, I first show how various modern scholarly discourses, including existentialist social philosophy (especially the work of Karl Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel), the philosophy of technology (Jacques Ellul and Albert Borgmann) and critical theory (Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin), take the Weberian "myth of social modernization" as their unstated "ground," and how much of this recapitulates the modernity-technology conflation. I propose three motifs through which the "myth of social modernization" emerges in these theoretical discourses—massification, disindividualization and atomization. While seemingly random, I select these discourses because they are, for the most part, included in what may generally be called "theory,"[6] and fairly represent some of the perspectives on the question of "modernity," especially as it relates to technology. Then, drawing from the political scientist Gilbert Germain, I forge an alternative—less epistemological and more ontological—reading of Weber's "disenchantment" to suggest that there is an opening to a consideration of the possibility of a technological "reenchantment of the world," as Morris Berman once put it(Berman 1981). In turn, if there is such a possibility, then it must, I contend, stand as the

[6] On the question of "theory" as an identifiable academic field of study see, the work of Fredric Jameson, especially his contribution to Foster, Hal. 1983. *The Anti-aesthetic: essays on postmodern culture*. Bay Press; and Jameson, Fredric. 1988. *The Ideologies of Theory: The syntax of history*. University of Minnesota Press. I could not refute the charge that the approach I take to Max Weber in this chapter is largely influenced by chapter 1 of the latter, "The Vanishing Mediator; or, Max Weber as Storyteller."

backdrop of any serious inquiry into the relationship of religion and new media technologies. I end with comments on how such a backdrop will influence this study in particular.

Modernity as massification

In *The Revolt of the Masses*, Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset had begun to hint at the crises brought on to Western "civilization" (his word) by modernity. The impending doom, he thought, was made clear by the appearance of what he called "mass-man." The mass-man is he who is at ease or even content with being part of the crowd, a member of the masses; in short, the mass-man values conformity. "Mass society," Ortega y Gasset contends, is the "greatest crisis that can afflict peoples, nations and civilization"(Ortega y Gasset 1950:11). This is rooted in his belief that the effects of industrial capitalism, especially the rise of a middle-class (and the associated shrinkage of class difference in liberal democracies of the West), have severely hurt the special status of elites. "Mass society" has allowed for the sacred functions of civilizational progress to be accessible by too many and not just the "select minorities," as he calls them (Ortega y Gasset 1950:11). The elitism that hitherto had preserved the Holy Grail of Western civilization would be forced into the democratized masses. With the social power of qualified elites being distributed and made available to the masses by technologies, Western culture itself, he thought, was on the decline.

For Ortega y Gasset, this perceived decline had a clear anti-technological flavor about it. After all, advances in industrial machinery, specifically the assembly line, had come to embody an ethos of consistency, uniformity and efficiency. Further, with the emergence of automation, as one Catholic writer put it, technology was beginning to at once make machines more human-like, and humans more machine-like:

> Technology has created electronic brains which seem to make machines more like men. From another aspect, has it not also been busy making men more like machines, making man as automatic? Is the reaction of the bus-driver who stops at the red lights so different from that of the pick-up arm which, when the record is finished, lifts itself and returns to the rest position?(Queffelec 1964:32)

This anti-technologism in mass society discourse is reflected sharply in a particular strain of existential philosophy, especially in the writings of Karl Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel. What distinguish Jaspers and Marcel are not only their theological interests, but the shared displeasure at what they view to be a major social psychological effect of, as Jaspers says, "the modern age"—the mechanization of personality.

For Jaspers, the major concern of the modern age was what he refers to in *Man in the Modern Age*(Jaspers 1957) as the "uprooting of man." Whereas traditional times allowed for "man"[sic] to have a stable knowledge of himself in relation to the world, modernity has ripped the rug from underneath him, throwing him into a seemingly never-ending Heraclitean flux of movement, a consequence of which is what Jaspers refers to as "despiritualization." This, he argues, is caused by "advanced technique" or technology. "The despiritualization of the world," he writes:

> is not the outcome of the unfaith of individuals, but is one of the possible consequences of a mental development which here has actually led to Nothingness…[I]t has actually occurred, having been promoted by the overwhelming success of science in the technical and practical fields. What, in all the milleniums of human history and pre-history, no god had been able to do for man, man has done for himself. It is natural enough that in these achievements of his he should discern the true

> inwardness of being—until he shrinks back in alarm from the void he has made for himself. (Jaspers 1957: 21)

The world of technique, according to Jaspers, is the key difference in separating the modern from the traditional. Modern technology can effectively control nature and do what nature could not have done, whereas premodern technology was only attempting to harness what was already within the realm of nature's power.

For Jaspers, this inevitably leads to "massification," whereby the dominant model of social formation is no longer tribe, ethnicity, race, religion or city-state but mass, "an aggregate of persons who are articulated in some apparatus of the life-order in such a manner that the will and the peculiarities of the majority among them are decisive" as opposed to reflective(Jaspers 1957:37), which would be characteristic of alienated, "despiritualized" society.

> But when at length the time arrived when nothing in the individual's immediate and real environing world was any longer made, shaped, or fashioned by that individual for his own purposes; when everything that came, came merely as the gratification of momentary need, to be used up and cast aside; when the very dwelling-place was machine-made, when the environment had become despiritualized, when the day's work grew sufficient to itself and ceased to be built up into a constituent of the worker's life—then man was, as it were, bereft of his world. Cast adrift in this way, lacking all sense of historical continuity with past or future, man cannot remain man. The universalization of the life-order threatens to reduce the life of the real man in a real world to mere functioning. (Jaspers 1957:42)

All of this leads to a "danger to man's selfhood." The individual is no longer a self but rather becomes "function." The massification of life is, in sum, a forceful challenge to the metaphysics of human Being. In mass-life, "Being is objectified," loses its "individual consciousness" and becomes "absorbed into the social"(Jaspers 1957:47).

Gabriel Marcel echoes Jaspers' concerns regarding "mass-life." Marcel, like Jaspers, is considered by many to be a proto-existentialist, and thus his concern with "mass society" and "technique" is largely articulated through anxiety about "man in his death-throes" as a result of the potential self-destruction at the hands of the atomic bomb among other "techniques of human degradation"(Marcel 1962:13-14). Marcel, along with many post-war intellectuals in the United States and Europe like Albert Camus, were concerned with the devastation of the Second World War, and what it meant for the future of humanity.[7] As for Hannah Arendt, the "human" or was under threat, of not some kind of external threat but an internal one. In *Man against Mass Society*, he writes:

> To say that man is in his death-throes is only to say that man to-day finds himself facing, not some external event such as the annihilation of our planet, for instance, which might be the consequence of some catastrophe in the heavens, but rather possibilities of complete self-destruction inherent in himself…I am thinking here both of the atomic bomb and of techniques of human degradation, as these have been put into effect in all totalitarian states without exception. Between the physical destruction wrought by the atomic bomb and the spiritual destruction wrought by techniques of human degradation there exists, quite certainly, a secret bond…(Marcel 1962:14)

[7] In fact, one can argue that the category of "humanity" and "human rights" took prominence in the wake of intellectual engagements with the events of World War II, the Holocaust and the use of the atomic bomb.

According to Marcel, this has a particular effect on the human's individuality. In terms that prefigure the Frankfurt School, especially Adorno and Marcuse, he argues that "man becomes dependent on gadgets whose smooth functioning assures him a tolerable life at the material level, the more estranged he becomes from an awareness of his inner reality"(Marcel 1962:55). He calls this "new" man, or "technical man"(Marcel 1962:75).

The "spiritual" effect, if one can call it that, of the emergence of technical man is what Marcel dubs "autolatry," the self-worship of humanity vis-à-vis technologies.

> It is, in fact, from this extremely general and even metaphysical point of view that the problem of relationships between technical progress and sin should be envisaged. Broadly, we might say that man's increasing mastery over nature has been accompanied, for reasons which I have already partially indicated, by a more and more complete capitulation of man before his own fears and desires, or even before the ungovernable element in his nature. Man's mastery of nature, then, is a mastery which has less and less control over itself. (Marcel 1962:99)

This leaves the human completely atomized, with no hope for "inter-subjectivity" and "no kind of spirituality"(Marcel 1962:267).

In sum, what we have in Marcel is a two-pointed critique of technology and mass society. On the one hand, Marcel posits a metaphysical critique; modern techniques of degradation, and the correlative massification, leave the individual in a situation wherein "he loses touch with himself"(Marcel 1962:18). On the other, he suggests that humans end up guilty of a technical apotheosis, wherein the technology takes over the "transcendental" position that God once held. Or perhaps, even worse, a recourse to the transcendental, to a "a

level of being, an order of the spirit, which is also the level and order of grace, of mercy, of charity," no longer is an option(Marcel 1962:22).

For Jacques Ellul, "technique" is the social force that defines modern life, one that infuses into everyday life the twin logics of rationality and efficiency.

> Technique integrates everything. It avoids shock and sensational events. Man is not adapted to a world of steel; technique adapts him to it. It changes the arrangement of this blind world so that man can be part of it without colliding with its rough edges, without the anguish of being delivered up to the inhuman. Technique thus provides a model; it specifies attitudes that are valid once and for all. The anxiety aroused in man by the turbulence of the machine is soothed by the consoling hum of a unified society. (Ellul 1964:6)

It is the perceived unstoppable, amoeba-like integrative-function of technique that leads Ellul to come to the same conclusion as Jaspers and Marcel: "technique attacks man, impairs the sources of his vitality, and takes away his *mystery*"(Ellul 1964:413. Emphasis added.).

The idea that the complex of modern techniques, characterized by its impersonal bureaucratic nature, has chipped away at the metaphysics of human Being is also reflected in Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"(Benjamin 1969). There, he famously writes:

> That which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. The technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own

> particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced…These two processes lead to a tremendous shattering of tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind. Both processes are intimately connected with the contemporary mass movements. (Benjamin 1969:221)

Benjamin articulates similar concerns around "mass movements" as Jaspers, Marcel and Ellul, though with a specific orientation towards this concept of "aura." In his formulation, the aura of the work of art is rooted within the knowledge that an artist, a human being, has a hand in producing that particular object. But, with the possibility of technological reproducibility of a painting, in the form of a postcard, for instance, we have what he calls "detachment" from the work of art's "unique existence." It is banalized and obscures the human element.

It would no doubt be reductive to suggest that the authors mentioned—Jaspers, Marcel, Ellul and Benjamin—are all stating the same position. Yet, it is nevertheless the case that they all are concerned with the prospect of a metaphysical, spiritual or transcendental aspect of human Being getting annihilated—albeit without offering exactly what about technology and its internal workings would do this. With the exception of Benjamin, who emphasizes mechanical reproduction, the overriding view of technology in these philosophers is as follows: Technology's cold and calculating character undermines the enchanted mystery of humanity's Being, his *individuality*.

Modernization as challenge to human rationality

But what exactly is "individuality" here?

For Theodor Adorno, it is the individual's ability to *critically* reason, against the mass, that captures the essential Being of humanity. Despiritualizing technologies, which consist of not only massive industrial factory machines but also consumer technologies such as radio,

were then dis-individualizing. In his under-read book on the "psychological technique" of Christian talk radio host Martin Luther Thomas, Adorno argues that these radio addresses "belong to the realm of indirect, semi-hidden, fascist…propaganda"(Adorno 2000:30). The brunt of Adorno's argument regarding the incitement of fascism rests upon the foregoing of the individual's capacity to think outside of the grips of the conformist masses. Fascism, for Adorno, is massification taken to its logical extreme.

One of the ways in which Martin Luther Thomas' radio addresses exhibits this tendency towards disindividualization is through what Adorno calls the "fait accompli" technique.

> The "fait accompli" technique thus touches upon one of the central mechanisms of the mass psychology of fascism: the transformation of the feeling of one's own impotence into a feeling of strength. The feeling of impotence is represented by the idea that the issue already has been decided without one's having had any say in it; but acknowledgment of this very fact, by "going over" to the established victor, mysteriously and irrationally changes the feeling of impotence into one of power.(Adorno 2000:44)

Evoking Wilhelm Reich's "mass psychology of fascism," Adorno makes the claim that the psychological effect is reliant upon tapping into an extant feeling internal to the audience and manipulating it. The chief means of manipulation is through the presentation of "facts." With the use of phrases such as "It is widely known…" or "Everyone can see that…" Thomas embodies "the spirit of positivism" by constantly treating outlandish statements about Jews and Communists (his favorite targets) and others as facts. What this means is that, in Thomas' radio addresses, "religion largely and unconsciously has been replaced by a very abstract yet tremendously powerful cult of the existent"(Adorno 2000:45).

It is clear that Adorno offers a theory of technology, while the other writers do not. This specific media technology is a propagator of, what he rather confusingly calls, “the quality of existence.”

> By investing anything that is propagated or desired with the quality of existence, this device tends to make it an object of adoration in a sense similar to that in which half-grown boys adore motor cars or airplanes.(Adorno 2000:45)

By the phrase, he means that radio, in particular, turns an extant object into an “object of adoration,” in other words, fetish, in the true sense of the term, that is, a cultic object.

The process of propagating the quality of existence is explained through a theory of “emotional release.”

> Under the cloak of Christian ecstasy, there is the encouragement to paganism, to the orgiastic release of one’s emotional drives, to regression towards inarticulate nature, which worked so successfully in Nazi propaganda. The ultimate aim of the “emotional release” device is the encouragement and endorsement of excess and violence.(Adorno 2000:7)

In language that is strikingly close to Marcuse’s descriptions of “repressive desublimation,” Adorno offers, what in my estimation, is an energic, quasi-psychoanalytic explanation of the method of Thomas’ emotionalism. Within advanced capitalism, where there is such great emotional (and sexual, for Marcuse) repression, the identification of Thomas’ ideology with empirical reality becomes a release; jouissance. Adorno again:

> The irrational gratifications which fascism offers are themselves planned and handled in an utterly rational way. Such manipulation results in a kind of psycho-technics, borrowed from the modern factory and applied to the population as a whole. It is an extremely pragmatic irrationality, and it is highly characteristic that this irrationality is expressly advertised by Thomas as well as by the German agitators as if it were a kind of a pill which makes life more agreeable. (Adorno 2000:8)

The sum effect of the "psycho-technics" of talk radio on the listener is fixation, fed by variations on the same vehement anti-Semitism and anti-communism of Martin Luther Thomas. The fixation takes on the status of universal epistemological framework. The individual, "as a rational being," in the words of Marcuse, is taken up into the whirlwind of the "radical coordination" innate to "integral function" of the "technological apparatus." "Under the impact of this apparatus," Marcuse writes, "individualistic rationality has been transformed into technological rationality"(Marcuse 2004:64.). Adorno, in offering a more robust description and analysis of technology and its effects, sets up, as does Marcuse, a battle between technological rationality and critical (anti-fascist, democratic, and individual) rationality.

Modernity as atomization

A nearly opposite tact comes from Albert Borgmann. Whereas Adorno views the technology of radio to be all consuming, and thus *overly* communal, for Borgmann, technology does not provide enough communality, leaving the individual atomized in an anomic state. For him, the information technologies of today are the exemplars of what have been the worst tendencies of technology since the end of World War II. They have intensified the "drift away from public and civic engagement" thanks to an overdevelopment of technological convenience so as to create

an attitude where “all the world is at one’s call and beckon, and hence to venture out into the world begins to feel like a waste and a pain”(Borgmann 2003:77). Invoking the name of Robert Putnam, the author of *Bowling Alone*, Borgmann argues the technologies of today, by which we are to assume “new media,” have exacerbated the fragmentation and atomization of society. This is most clear, he argues, in the rewriting of the public/private distinctions in advanced industrial societies. The public sphere, in his words, “has become both hypertrophied and atrophied,” while the private sphere has become utterly closed off. “As public space has been taken over by instrumentality (i.e., production and administration),” he writes, “finality (i.e., consumption) has passed into the private realm. The latter must remain inconspicuous because of the nature of privacy”(Borgmann 2003:40).

What we have then is a culture wherein legitimate forms of “communal celebration” are extremely rare. Borgmann bemoans the televising of public sporting events such as the Olympics because he believes that the mediation of such creates social distance and commodifies the collective experience one would get if he or she were to be there in person. Technology, in this case television, “makes genuine public celebration impossible because the public realm is production, not celebration, and through the private realm is for leisure, leisure is now commodious consumption, not festive engagement”(Borgmann 2003:46). Thus, technology has left us with a “semblance of the public” rooted in “indifference and disengagement”(Borgmann 2003:50).

Borgmann orients this quasi-Habermasian line of critique of technology towards religion by eliding religious ritual and communal celebrations, thus viewing the degradation of the public, and public celebrations particularly, as discouraging for religion.

> The reflective power of religious celebration has astonishing appeal. No political or cultural institution draws people so regularly and in such great numbers out of their

> homes and into a community. Whatever charges one might bring against the national culture, it certainly does not pressure or seduce people into attending religious worship. The faithful today come from an authentic need. (Borgmann 2003:53)

Technology, in this case broadcast technology, has dulled the importance of religious celebration, effectively preventing the formation of "true" community. Instead, people remain at home and celebrate through the screen. Technology has erected a wall dividing the world into "public production" and "private consumption"(Borgmann 2003:61).

Yet, the worry exceeds that of the diminishing of the sacred in technological culture, which Benjamin also expressed in his concern over the end of aura. For Borgman, what is troubling

> …is the fuzzy and uncertain force of technology and hence the challenge Christianity is facing. What kind of liberation is it that technology as promised? What sort of riches has technology produced? Do we in fact feel free? Are we truly prospering? These questions go largely unasked in our national conversation. We seem to be stricken with a subclinical malady of doubt and sometimes despair. But in this second sort of trouble there lies hope as well. Perhaps underneath the surface of technological liberty and prosperity there is a sense of captivity and deprivation, and we may hope that once we understand technology more incisively and clearly, there will be good news once again. (Borgmann 2003:7)

Thus, in Borgmann, we see a zero-sum game of an existential sort, not the epistemological kind mentioned earlier in some interpretations of the Weberian disenchantment thesis. What is

missing, in Borgmann's view, is what he calls "focal," or community producing, practices and things. He gives some examples.

> For example, a guitar is a focal thing—it commands from me a certain kind of engagement of my body and mind. As I learn to play it(a focal practice), it engages me with the larger tradition of music and the community of musicians. The meal is a focal thing and its preparation is a focal practice. The wilderness is a focal thing and hiking a focal practice. The stream, or the trout, is a focal thing—fly fishing the focal practice. In the life of the Christian community, the bread and the cup are focal things and the Eucharist the focal practice. *Focal things and our engagement with them orient us and center us in time and space in ways that technological devices do not.* A focal thing is not at the mercy of how you feel at the moment, whether the time is convenient or whatever; you commit yourself to it come hell or high water. It helps, of course, if it's a shared commitment, because when one person weakens, the other person can make up for that weakness. Two weak persons, each expecting the other to be strong, will be strong together.(Wood 2003. Emphasis added.)

Clearly, focal practices and things are euphemizations for sacraments. Thus, "focality," in Borgmann's thought, is some kind of religious substrate, a religiosity we might say, in the culture, which he views as altogether wiped away by technology's cultural effect of individualized "freedom." Judging from the flurry of questions from Borgmann, technology is not only producing a culture of hyper-individualism, but is doing so in a "seductive" way, that is, by providing a false means of freedom.[8] As he describes it, technology has begun to

[8] Jean Baudrillard has offered a rather provocative theory of seduction as a means of liberation. See Baudrillard, Jean. 1991. *Seduction*. Palgrave Macmillan.

compete for the hearts and minds of people alongside religion. Or better yet, technology has overcome religion in the existential marketplace of metaphysical "sources of the self" to use Charles Taylor's phrase(Taylor 1992).

Religion and technology in the motifs of social modernization

In the various authors and thinkers discussed above, we can see that "the myth of social modernization" takes on various shapes and tropes; it is perhaps better to slightly revise it as "the myth*s* of social modernization." In each of the "mythic" fields of discourse, there was a particular way in which notions of "the religious" and "technology" was couched. In the discourse of modernity as massification, technology became a disindividualizing force, effectively "mechanizing" humans. The language used by these authors suggests that technology is not only a modernizing force but also one that reduces or takes away some vague human spiritual essence. Thus, for Jaspers the descriptor of technique is "despiritualizing." Ellul saw it as reducing the "mystery" of humanity. Most dramatically, Marcel saw the effect of technology on humanity as "degradation." While there are no overt theological themes addressed among these authors, it is clear that there is an extant metaphysics of the human. The human takes on a privileged status to the point where the object of the disenchanting force of technological forces is *not* God but the human. The greatest source of alarm is not that God is in the "death-throes" but that the human is due to technology. What we have, in effect, is apotheosis.

In the discourse of modernity as challenge to human rationality, we see an extension of some of the arguments of the modernity as massification. This discourse shares two characteristics with the discourse of modernity as massification—sacralization of the human and the alarm of technology-induced conformity. What sets apart this discourse from the previous one is, with respect to the first aspect—the sacralizing of the human, Adorno hones in

on particular feature of humanness to sanctify, if you will, which is critical rationality. For him, like Ellul, an overarching, and decidedly brutal logic of "technique," which takes on a psychological effect, characterizes modernity. Hence, the juxtaposition Adorno sets up is between technological and human rationality. Among other things, technological rationality corrodes the individual's ability to reason outside of the mass to which he or she is interpellated via radio, in the example used here. As a result, technology has a dulling effect on the psyche of the human being. It seduces the individual to put his or her guard down, allowing dangerous forces such as fascism and anti-Semitism to creep in, or worse yet, become pleasurable.

We have nearly the opposite view of technology's effect on the human in the discourse of modernity as atomization. The view of technology in the discourse of modernity as atomization is quite simply that technologies would be fragmentary, allowing for individuals to be sprawled out, distant from one another and would not have opportunities to forge communal bonds, which occur mostly through collective ritual. The worry for Borgmann is not that individuals would be overrun by technological conformity, but that they would become isolated. Modernity, in this instance, is mythologized as progressively atomized and fragmented.

From the genealogy of the "myth of social modernization" provided above, it is clear that Evans and Evans' argument holds true. But, in addition to the Weberian substrate that exists as motifs in the several discourses overviewed above, there is something else about them that Evans and Evans do not broach—that of the lacunal position of religion and technology within the idea of disenchantment. Indeed, the very foundations of the disenchantment thesis has to do with the waning of religion and the rise of technoscience, or so says the all-too-common reading of what is rather reductively called "the Weberian thesis" across scholarly literatures. It may be that, while Evans and Evans have a point about the

influence of Weber in the propagation of the hegemony of the religion-science conflict narrative in sociological studies, they do not take care to explore disenchantment themselves.

So the question still remains: what is it that Weber wrote?

Modernity as Weberian disenchantment

In “Science as a Vocation”(1918), which contains the most sustained discussion of the concept of disenchantment, Weber aims to present a methodological argument, largely derived from Kant, about what he calls the “cultural sciences.” Although it is not a stated focus, the issues of religion, science, modernity and rationalization—themes that are present in the entirety Weber’s oeuvre—can be found, and serve as the argumentative “background,” providing a context for Weber’s insistence on the importance of viewing science as the calling of modern humanity. And it might be that because Weber’s most prolonged engagement with “disenchantment” comes in an essay about method, that many who cite “Science as a Vocation” do so and simply reproduce the commonplace interpretation of *Entzauberung* as epistemological modernization.

If we look closer, however, for Weber, “disenchantment” is derived from the greater metaprocesses of modernity, which for him are rationalization and intellectualization. But by rationalization and intellectualization, he is quick to note that he does not necessarily mean that all moderns are scientists. He illustrates this point through an example involving a streetcar.

> Unless he is a physicist, one who rides on the streetcar has no idea how the car happened to get into motion. And he does not need to know. He is satisfied that he may "count" on the behavior of the streetcar, and he orients his conduct according to this expectation; but he knows nothing about what it takes to produce such a car so that it can move…The increasing intellectualization and rationalization do not, therefore,

> indicate an increased and general knowledge of the conditions under which one lives. (Weber 1958:116-117)

According to Weber, this is beside the point. Rationalization and intellectualization do not guarantee the dispersal of scientific knowledge throughout all strata of society. “It means something else,” he writes,

> …namely, the knowledge or belief that if one but wished one could learn it at any time. Hence, it means that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. Technical means and calculations perform the service. This above all is what intellectualization means. (Weber 1958:117)

In other words, the world is “disenchanted” because there is no longer anything therein that is not available for inquiry. We are no longer in the same situation as “the savage,” as he puts it rather crudely. If one wished to look into the mechanics of streetcars, one, conceivably, could.

Honing in on this specific part of Weber’s argument, political theorist Gilbert Germain suggests that “demagification” is a more apt translation of Entzauberung than “disenchantment.” “Magic” shifts the issue of science, religion and modernity towards ontological and cosmological considerations. For Weber, the world is disenchanted not only when all is available for inquiry but also up for possible human control. A magical world, as Malinowski noted famously, is considered by traditional societies as at the mercy of “powerful and incalculable” forces, in spite of the application of systematic knowledge. A magical attitude

is not, as he shows, oppositional to a rational attitude (an important retort to Levy-Bruhl's less than tactful notion of "the savage mind") towards nature but rather one which allows for uncertainty(Malinowski 1954:30). I mention Malinowksi here because he too uses the language of control in discussing magic's importance as the conceptual link between humans and nature. This is in keeping with Germain's reading of Weber's "disenchantment of the world," which can, he suggests, be understood as "the increasing technological controllability of the world."

> In an enchanted world so-called "magical means" were employed to effect a measure of influence over the natural realm. Weber does not explicitly state what these means are, but given their objective—to "master or implore the spirits" it can be inferred he had in mind various rites of appeasement, such as sacrifices, ceremonial dances, and so on. Although acts of this sort manifest the same practical impulse that propels modern science and technology, the fact that they are performed within what might loosely be called a religious or metaphysical setting is of considerable importance. In an enchanted age, unlike our own, the means of control is conditioned by the belief that the natural environment is governed by spiritual forces residing in or beyond the immanent order of nature itself. This means that the business of controlling nature is, at bottom, a matter of establishing a measure of influence over the supernatural forces that inform it. "Magic," then is simply the name given to the art that has as its purpose the extension of power over a spiritualized natural realm. (Germain 1993:29)

Magic and technology are similar in their onto-cosmological positions; they are both attempts "to effect real control over natural processes"(Germain 1993:29).

Additionally, Germain points out that this reading of disenchantment also illustrates something very important about enchantment, the natural world and technology. “We see that in an enchanted age,” he writes:

> …nature is incalculable because its mind or soul shares with the human mind the capacity to function in unpredictable and unconditioned ways. It follows, then, that the disenchanting of nature signifies in part divesting the natural world of its uncertainty. Disenchantment qua demagification, on the other hand, informs us that the same process, when viewed in terms of the transhistorical impulse to control nature, is characterized by a corresponding change in the means of control”(Germain 1993:30).

Nature, in a magical/enchanted mode, has a “mind,” according to Germain, in that it is thought to contain a level of uncertainty and complexity. But when it is disenchanted, that is, “devoid of mind,” it exists “as mere res extensa”(Germain 1993:30).

Furthermore, Weber suggests in his essay that “technical means and calculations” are the key forces in the process of disenchanting. It is this, which allows for the world to be “opened up” for scientific knowledge, a process that Edmund Husserl suggests began with the mathematization of nature by Galileo(Husserl 1970). As Germain writes, “a disenchanted world, then, is one in which all domains within society are restructured in accordance with the demands of technical rationality”(Germain 1993:37). Therefore, we can gather that Weber, when he places the process of “disenchantment” under the larger umbrella heading of “rationalization,” did not mean science as purely theoretical knowledge, delinked from its applied use upon nature (to frame it in Heideggerian terms); what he meant was science as it is translated onto the level of praxis. Thus, he pronounces “today the routines of everyday life challenge religion”(Weber 1958:127).

This presents us with an alternative to the easy conclusion that relies upon the false dichotomy that characterizes the relationship of religion and science as an epistemological end game, as do Evans and Evans.

Following Germain, I argue that for Weber, disenchantment is not merely just another term for rationalization and intellectualization but a descriptor for a revolution in the modern "onto-cosmology." Unlike its religious, thus traditional, antecedent, the modern world viewed "the human" as its fulcrum. Its operative key words included Progress and history.[9] Within the modern Verstehen, the world, and history itself, was measured in human terms. On this count, as Germain notes, religion could be seen *as* a disenchanting force. They both "rationalize" and "intellectualize" the magical-mythical world achieved by "religion's demand for a more coherent and meaningful justification of human suffering"(Germain 1993:35). Rationalization and intellectualization, therefore, contribute to the retreat of "the ultimate and sublime values…from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations," opening up a more prominent ontological space for the human. Or, as Marcel Gauchet puts it, "human actors now [gained] access to the mastery of their collective destiny through the realization of the divine infinite"(Gauchet 1999:59). Instead of a magical-mythical world, we have perhaps a human-technological world, with magic being replaced by technoscience and myth replaced by humanism.

In this laying out of the precondition for humanism, which Weberian disenchantment seems to be, is there not also, what Germain describes as, a "counterforce" that "infuses disparate value spheres [resulting from rationalization] and restructures them according to a

[9] While the "universal" is by no means introduced by a modern, rationalized and intellectualized worldview (as Karl Lowith suggests in *Meaning in History*, it can be traced to Christian sources actually), there is no doubt that modernity had intensified such a view especially in its orientation to humanity and nature. See Lowith, Karl. 1957. *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History*. University Of Chicago Press.

single unifying principle"(Germain 1993:39)—technical rationality? In other words, the complexity of the "technological milieu" has taken on "magical qualities" themselves, perhaps leading to "the conclusion that our disenchanted world is in danger of becoming re-enchanted"(Germain 1993:42) but this time the gods are immanent in technology itself as opposed to being supernatural.

Germain's argument regarding the possibility of technological re-enchantment is reinforced theologically by historian David Noble in his study *The Religion of Technology*(Noble 1997). There, Noble suggests, "the present enchantment with things technological—the very measure of modern enlightenment—is rooted religious myths and ancient imaginings" (Noble 1997:3).

Reading medieval theological texts on technology, Noble suggests that the useful arts or "technics" was associated with the Christian idea of redemption and transcendence, ideas that were of special interest among medieval theologians. Prior to that, for instance in Augustine, transcendence and redemption was only to be garnered through Grace, a formulation reflecting the impact of Paul. Yet, sometime in the Middle Ages, writes Noble, technology came to be was largely viewed within the framework of the Adamic fall, as a means by which to rectify and compensate for it.

> …Technology came to be identified more closely with both lost perfection and the possibility of renewed perfection, and the advance of the arts took on new significance, not only as evidence of grace but as a means of preparation for, and a sure sign of, imminent salvation. (Noble 1997:12)

Though humans could not return to the Garden of Eden, they could attempt to create it in this world through the directing of science towards application. Rightly, Noble suggests that

this attempt to recreate Eden is a particularly Christian endeavor for two theological reasons. Judaism was far more strictly monotheistic, and could not theologically entertain a God-human hybrid found in the figure of Christ, since it, theologically at least, adhered to an ontological dualism that radically separated God and humans. Medieval Christianity's interpretation of the notion of imago Dei, that humans had a divine likeness, or, as is probably better known in the culture in a paraphrase of Genesis 1:26-27, that Man[sic] was created in the image of God, was based on the ethic of living as Christ. Thus, technology quite easily fit into the double-edged pursuit of divinity:(1) to recover Adamic perfection—articulated as piety (2) to imitate the life of Jesus—articulated as asceticism (Noble 1997:11).

By the 12th century, the "spiritualized" view of the useful arts became the norm. This theology of technology extended into the late-Middle Ages through many threads, one of which was Christian eschatology. Unlike Augustine's separation of City of God and City of Man, the millenarian concept of redemption awarded human beings the ability to construct the City of God. The useful arts could be utilized in preparation for the Second Coming of Christ. This of course meant that there needed to be a new way of thinking about Adam, as not just the fallen Father of Sin but as the archetypal artisan, and the Lord of Nature given the power to work the land and name the beasts by God (Genesis 2:20). British Millenarians, like John Napier, the author of *Natural Theology*, which introduced the concept of "Divine Clockmaker," encouraged this new view of a lordly attitude toward nature, anticipating the restitution of Eden.

We can see that Noble's attempt to link religion and technology via eschatology is based on a notion of transcendence, of which his image of choice is redemption and salvation, both of which he sees as other-worldly pursuits. As he puts it, following Weber, Christianity especially was able to redirect the "worldly means of survival" into "other-worldly" salvation. By acting as the means by which humans were able to more easily participate in this task,

technology, within this theological formulation, ultimately levels out the chasm between God and humans, a process that Noble, in quoting Irenaeus, “enabled men to become gods” (Noble 1997:9).

If taken seriously, the significance of the bridged chasm between God and humans, developed out of a certain, onto-cosmological reading of Weber’s disenchantment, occasions a rethinking of what Bruno Latour calls “the modernist settlement.” By this, Latour is referring to what in his view was a vision of the world, a cosmology, that came out of traditional times, and has remained, albeit with some modification, until today. It is characterized by an attribution of the potential for action to a select group of objects while others are deemed passive. “In the modernist settlement,” he claims, “objects were housed within nature and subjects within society”(Latour 1999:193). It is this separation, or “ontological dualism” of subjects and objects that Latour deems to be in crisis in today’s technological milieu.

He states that that there is a new situation partly brought on by science and technology studies, which has granted ontology (and action) back to nonhuman entities, including technologies and God. "Whereas objects could only face out at the subjects—and vice versa,” he argues, “nonhumans may be folded into humans through the key processes of translation, articulation, delegation, shifting out and down”(Latour 1999:193). It is this intermingling of ex-subjects and ex-objects that Manuel Castells calls “real virtuality.”

> It is a system in which reality itself (that is, people's material/symbolic existence) is entirely captured, fully immersed in a virtual image setting, in the world of make believe, in which appearances are not just on the screen through which experience is communicated, but they become the experience. All messages of all kinds become enclosed in the medium, because the medium has become so

> comprehensive, so diversified, so malleable, that it absorbs in the same multimedia text the whole of human experience, past, present and future, as in that unique point of the Universe that Jorge Luis Borges called "Aleph."(as quoted in de Vries 2001:12)

It may be that the ultimate import of Weber's disenchantment thesis is not as explicatory, sociological grand narrative of modernity and secularization but as a prompt to reconsider the onto-cosmological "givenness" of the humanist "modernist settlement," providing insight into the constitutive place of "religion" and "technology" in the formation of modernity's metaphysics.

Chapter 2

From Cosmos to Network: The "Worlding" of Religion and Technology

Introduction

Overall, this project works to argue that religion and technologies maintain an infra-level, that is, intrinsic (or even structural) relationship. More specifically, I argue that the nature of this relationship is a shared onto-cosmogonic, or "world-forming," logic. Furthermore, I suggest that this common logic has intensified and resulted in the convergence of the religion and media technologies in recent decades, especially in light of what some scholars have identified as "the information age"(Castells 1997). Indeed, it is not mere coincidence that the rise in discussions around "the global" occurred roughly at the same time as that of "the digital," evidenced not only by Castells' three-volume tome *The Information Age*(Castells 1996) but also the *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman's *The World is Flat* (Friedman 2005) and ethicist Peter Singer's *One World* (Singer 2004). Though these writers disagree on many aspects of globalization, there is nonetheless agreement that technologies, in particular digital technologies, have contributed greatly to the globalizing of the world. The idea that the world had become ever more connected, shared by these three rather divergent analysts of globalization and many others, was buttressed by the information (digital) technology revolution of the 1990s.

The concept of "world," with varying degrees, strikes at the heart of many, if not all, religions. To explain the creation, or origins, of the world is somewhat requisite for what most people would consider being a chief function of religion and also science. In Western thought, the concept of "world" has had a rather interesting history, receiving much of its importance from a time when the intellectual lines between "religion" and "science" were blurry at best. Beginning with Galileo and later Newton, "the world" held a distinctly mechanical flavor, what

religion and science scholar Ian Barbour calls the “world-as-machine,” which meant to view it as “an intricate machine following immutable laws, with every detail precisely predictable” (Barbour 1966:36). This idea became prevalent in early modern times, a key moment in the intellectual history of the West, in which theology and philosophy were giving way in hegemony to science. As Barbour tells it, the world (in this stage still thought of as the universe) becomes more and more closely aligned with the divine and humans become less and less central to the created order. As a consequence, the Creator’s transcendence (and separation from his creation, the world) is intensified. “Newton himself,” Barbour writes, “believed that the world-machine was designed by an intelligent creator and expressed his purpose; to later interpreters, impersonal and blind forces appeared to be entirely self-contained, and all sense of meaning and purpose was lost” (Barbour 1966:36). Thus to find truth in Nature, which for instance was the chief aim of the emergent form of knowledge known as science, as the prior contributions of Galileo had facilitated, was to look for a *mechanism*, something *within* the world that would explain its complexity yet retain some sense of the divine.

Later, Galilean and Newtonian perspectives were successfully combined in the figure of the “Divine Clockmaker” or what is alternatively called the “Watchmaker analogy” in William Paley’s *Natural Theology*(Paley 1963).

> It was the clock analogy that provided the basic interpretive image of the world as a perfect machine, autonomous and self-sufficient, with natural causes acting in independence of God. "Divine preservation" started as active sustenance, became passive acquiescence, and was then forgotten. Frequent reference was made to God's dominion and governance, but the interpretation given to these terms made them applicable only to the original act of creation. (Barbour 1966: 42)

A theological consequence of this analogy was that God began to be thought of in terms of Aristotelian First Cause, not a constantly active force in the world. By the beginning of the 18th century, Nature, a self-contained machine, is expunged of God altogether, its creator now dwelling, critically, *outside* of the domain of humans. The image of the clockmaker, who, once after he creates his product no longer actively intervenes in it, is suggestive of a strategy widely used among early modern philosophers that Barbour calls "God of the gaps." In other words, when early modern philosophy and science begin to take shape and develop their respective fields of knowledge, outside the confines of theology, "God" is utilized to fill in the yet-to-be-explained portions. The analogy of Nature as machine (a clock) and God as Divine Clockmaker, then, reflects not a "deus ex machina" but a "machina ex dei" in early modern philosophy and science. Just as the "deus ex machina" is the means by which ancient Greek drama resolved itself (through the sudden appearance of a god dropped down onto the stage by use of a crane), the "machina ex dei" is the condition of possibility for the Galilean-Newtonian worldview of the 17th-18th centuries.

Unlike this "world" of early modern science, philosophy and theology, the notion of "world" presented here draws from an important mention of the origins of the Latin *religio* in Jacques Derrida's essay "Faith and Knowledge" (Derrida 2002). There, he reminds us of the dual genealogy of the term. On the one hand, *religio* is traced to *relegare*, "to bind back"; on the other, as Cicero does, it is traced to *legere*, "to gather or assemble." The conceptual framework of "worlding" presented here incorporates both genealogical routes. Worlds, as formulated here, are *not* the bounded territories, which "globe" tends to signify, a result of the influence of the order and structure in Aristotelian cosmology. (More on globes below in the discussion of the work of philosophers Jean-Luc Nancy and Peter Sloterdijk.) Worlds, in our digital age, are no longer neat entities but are modular *milieux*, *dispositifs*, and assemblages. These new worlds are able to "bind" worlds to other worlds, creating new worlds. They are

able to create new "schemata" or "networks" whereby elements from traditionally "separate" ontologies are able to resonate. They are able to de-differentiate, or in a Deleuzian mode, de-territorialize and re-territorialize. They are, in short, recombinant.

The concept of "world," and its cognates like "cosmos," has held a prominent place in theoretical studies of religion and technology respectively in the 20th century. In terms of studies of religion, one could argue that the defining work in the sociology of religion, Emile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), was the first to do so by suggesting that religion imparted sacred value upon various objects in the environment of human beings. The dual functions of sanctification and collectivization were evidence for Durkheim that God, or religion more generally, was the apotheosis of the social. Though there is much to be said about some of the other implications of this argument (not a minor one being that Durkheim is clearly outlining a kind of Rousseauian "civil religion" thesis), there is indeed an indication that he is forging a theory of "world," which for him, is rooted in a bonded reverence for the social itself. Durkheim's "world" is a moral world not a physical world such as a globe but nevertheless it is a world because it entails an ontology and, most evidently, an order.

I wish to develop the thesis that the recent convergence of religion and technology today is due their cosmogonic, or "world-building," and ontologically *creative* qualities.[10] However, I contend that a "cosmology" and "ontology" that describes the relation of religion and new media technologies must be viewed as unbounded and networked, and necessarily challenges the restrictiveness of ancient and traditional cosmology, of mostly the Aristotelian variety, that focuses on totality, causality and order, which influenced so much of what is today considered cosmology. This I will suggest is occasioned by the dynamic of the current regime

[10] Not only do cosmology and ontology reveal their closeness as branches of metaphysics in the philosophical tradition of the West, they, in fact, appear as the two of the three types of "proof of God" taken on by Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason*(Kant 1999). Actually, he refutes the cosmological argument for the existence of God by suggesting that it *rested upon* the ontological argument.

of *digital* media technologies, which is defined by emergence, convergence, creativity and non-linearity.

This requires a new way of thinking about the concept of "world." In order to attempt a new "world" theory, this chapter will begin with a critical assessment of theories of religion as world-building, focusing particularly on the works of Peter Berger and Mircea Eliade. It will then move onto theories of technology as world-forming, focusing on Martin Heidegger, who is arguably the originator of this argument, and philosopher Don Ihde, a contemporary articulator of a Heideggerian approach to the study of technology. Then, I will move on to a consideration of the work of Jean-Luc Nancy and Peter Sloterdijk. Their recent work, while influenced by Heidegger, moves past his framework of "world" in similar ways, which will be important to the way that "worlds" are conceptualized in the wake of digitization, which will be taken up in the concluding section with the help of the recent work of Mark C. Taylor and William Connolly.

The worlds of religion

In his renowned work, *The Sacred Canopy*, a veritable classic in the sociology of religion, Peter Berger argues that "human religion" is an instance of "human world-building" (Berger 1967:3). World-building or world-construction is, according to Berger, a basic, perhaps ontological, aspect of human beings. This is because human beings cannot live with ontological insecurity, and therefore must locate themselves within a milieu, a world. "Man," he writes, "must *make* a world for himself. The world-building activity of man, therefore, is not a biologically extraneous phenomenon, but the direct consequence of a man's biological constitution"(Berger 1967:5).

For Berger, the process of locating oneself via world-constrution is essentially dialectical, its three steps being externalization, objectivation and internalization. Externalization is the "outpouring" of human physical and mental activity. Objectivation is when the products of this activity taken on the status of "facticity," that is, as actually existing

outside of the human consciousness. Internalization, finally, is the process of "re-appropriating" that objective reality and "transforming it…from structures of the objective world into structures of the subjective" (Berger 1997:4). As Berger argues, this is where the human being constructs a world, though not simply for the sake of merely being a creator of one but to also locate herself within it. Thus, the human produces *herself in a world*. The facticity, or object-ness, of the world is helped along by its collective character. Berger suggests that the human collective must not only produce this world but also recognize it. This duality is essential for the eventual internalization of the reality that is objectivated.

> Man's world-building activity is always a collective enterprise. Man's internal appropriation of a world must also take place in a collectivity. It has by now become a social-scientific platitude to say that it is impossible to be human, in any empirically recognizable form that goes beyond biological observations, except in society. This becomes less of a platitude if one adds that the internalization of a world is dependent on society in the same way, because one is thereby saying that man is incapable of conceiving of his own experience in a comprehensively meaningful way unless such a conception is transmitted to him by means of social processes. (Berger 1997:16)

Especially of interest here, Berger makes an argument for world-construction as *nomos*, "a meaningful order…imposed upon the discrete experiences and meanings of individuals" (Berger 1967:19). The process of world-building, then, is necessarily one that aims to achieve a holistic, systematic explanation of individual experience. There is a tinge of drive theory in Berger. Humans, he states, are "congenitally compelled" to seek order.

A consequence of this will-to-order, as he explains, is that social institutions begin to be endowed with an *ontological* status to the point "where to deny them is to deny being itself—

being of the universal order of things, one's own being in this order" (Berger 1967: 24). This ontologization of social institutions he calls "cosmization." As he goes on to explain, when *nomoi* (more than one *nomos*) are objectivated, there "occurs a merging of its meanings with what are considered to be the fundamental meanings inherent in the universe" (Berger 1997:25). In "traditional" or pre-modern societies, nomos and cosmos maintain this co-extensive relationship in the form of macrocosm/microcosm, whereby society is a reflection of the natural laws of the Universe on a smaller-scale, so to speak. This, he concludes, demonstrates the tendency of humanly constructed *nomoi* to be projected into the universe, the supreme instance of cosmization, producing a cosmology or anthropology, or better yet, an ontology.

Religion, then, is an instance of this kind of cosmization but in a sacred mode. "Sacred" here is seen as bearing "mysterious and awesome power, other than man and yet related to him"(Berger 1967:34). The cosmos necessarily includes but also transcends the human. While it confronts her as a reality outside of her, the cosmos is crucial in its function as a GPS device of sorts, helping to locate herself through the construction of a meaningful order.

This "locating function" is crucial in the process of world-maintenance. These socially constructed worlds that achieve ontological status—*cosmos*—are maintained through processes of legitimation. In order to maintain a cosmos, Berger argues that its constructed nature must be hidden as much as possible. People must

> believe that, in acting out the institutional programs that have been imposed on them, they are but realizing the deepest aspirations of their own being and putting themselves in harmony with the fundamental order of the universe. (Berger 1967:33)

Religion fulfills this "task" of world-maintenance quite successfully as it places upon social institutions, and all human phenomena, the validity of ontology, thereby placing constructed institutions within a sacred and cosmic framework. "Cosmization," Berger notes, "implies the identification of this humanly meaningful world with the world as such, the former now being grounded in the latter, reflecting it or being derived from it in its fundamental structures" (Berger 1967:27).

The sacralization of human *nomoi* has historically had disastrous consequences. One example is the cosmization that was explicitly used to justify the doctrine known as the Divine Right of Kings. A more contemporary example, as given by Berger, is modern science, which provides the supreme ontological and cosmological ground today. But even in arguing the ontological aspect of world-construction and –maintenance, Berger privileges the epistemological. For instance, he formulates the concept of "plausibility structure," which he describes as the "social base" for the continuing subjective and objective reality of a world (Berger 1967:45). When articulating the importance of social interaction for the continued recognition and participation in a socially constructed world, Berger argues that this occurs in a shared epistemological, not ontological, plane. Thus, we come to a tension in Berger's theory of "cosmization." Whereas he insists on the ontological disposition of world-construction and world-maintenance, he, in the last analysis, views epistemology as the ultimate ground of cosmos. So when he argues that cosmization is the process by which *nomoi*, the socially constructed institutions of human societies, attain cosmic status, it is merely at the level of ideology.

As he himself acknowledges, Berger's theory of cosmization comes directly from Mircea Eliade, especially *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History* (Eliade 1954*)* and *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (Eliade 1959). It is in these works that Eliade outlines his basic definition of religion. All religions involve cosmogony, the act of

creating a world, which serves the purpose of differentiating inhabitable space (cosmos) from uninhabitable, indeterminable space (chaos). Cosmos is the space with meaning, whereby objects within are all explained. The relationship between the cosmos and chaos is the spatial expression of the general, theoretical relationship between the sacred and the profane. The profane is not a proper "world." It is a shattered universe of fragments, an amorphous mass.

> The former is the world (more precisely, our world), the cosmos; everything outside it is no longer a cosmos but a sort of "other world," a foreign, chaotic space, peopled by ghosts, demons, foreigners (who are assimilated to demons and the souls of the dead). (Eliade 1954:29)

A feature of cosmogony in many archaic societies is the sacred pole, which is erected in a space *before* inhabitation. The pole acts as an *axis mundi*. It is an ontological establishment of the universe "in a particular place, organizing it, inhabiting it" (Eliade 1954:34). The pole or the axis is crucial to establishing the sacred space because of its centrality in both symbolic and material terms. As pointed out earlier, Eliade equates sacred space to "world" (more specifically, *our* world) and especially one that contains an absolute center. That center is the axis or the sacred pole as found in a range of groups such as the Kwakiutl, pre-Christian Celts and Germans a well as the Nad'a of Indonesia (Eliade 1954:35).

A key attribute of sacred space is its capacity to orient the universe and give it form. Consequently, the establishment of the *axis mundi*, and "our world," results in the centering of "our world." The centering is key not only for its representation of spiritual significance (the space and its inhibitors see it as most holy) but also its status at mediator between other cosmic planes. The founding of the *axis mundi* translates to such world becoming the basis for an *imago mundi*. As Eliade explains using the example of Palestine:

> Whatever the extent of the territory involved, the cosmos that it represents is always perfect. An entire country (e.g., Palestine), a city (Jerusalem), a sanctuary (the Temple in Jerusalem), all equally well present an *imago mundi* . . . It is clear, then, that both the *imago mundi* and the Center are repeated in the inhabited world. Palestine, Jerusalem, and the Temple severally and concurrently represent the image of the universe and the Center of the World. This multiplicity of centers and this reiteration of the image of the world on smaller and smaller scales constitute one of the specific characteristics of traditional societies. (Eliade 1954:42-43)

The reasoning behind the concentric circles of the *imago mundi* for "religious man" was to imagine oneself as living as close to the Center as possible. His home, temple, city and country all become the Centers. All of the various spaces that he occupied could only be sacred; he could "only live in a space opening upward, where the break in plane was symbolically assured and hence communication with the *other world*, the transcendental world, was ritually possible"(Eliade 1954:44).

As Eliade points out, the development of spatial consecration and inhabitation can not only be found in "traditional societies," by which he clearly meant "primitive," tribal groups, but also in ancient Rome. Though the cross-cultural nature of his argument is questionable as it is clearly Eurocentric, he does provide the insightful example of the Roman *mundus*—"a circular trench divided into four parts; it was at once the image of the cosmos and the paradigmatic model for the human habitation"(Eliade 1954:44). This quadratic schema of the mundus, Eliade argues, extends from Bali to pre-Christian Germans, the point being that any settling into a territory is a consecration of space. That is to say, any form of inhabitation of space for

religious persons is always of a sacred one, which contains the cosmogonic moment—the founding of a world.

> [T]he experience of sacred space makes possible the "founding of the world": where the sacred manifests itself in space, *the real unveils itself*, the world comes into existence…Hence the manifestation of the sacred in space has a cosmological valence; every spatial hierophany or consecration of a space is equivalent to a cosmogony. (Eliade 1954: 63-64)

In other words, the world inhabited by religious people *must* be sacred because their participation in being-itself is tied directly to the sanctity of the cosmos. Religious people, thus, display an "ontological thirst," in the attempt to align individual and collective existence with the universe. As Eliade calls it, this is "the anthropo-cosmic" nature of religious life, where "being" and the sacred are the same. "[T]he most elementary religion is," Eliade writes, "above all, an ontology" (Eliade 1954:210).

Although Eliade insists upon the "there-ness" and facticity of the sacred for the religious person, unlike Berger, even going so far as to suggest that "the manifestation of the sacred ontologically founds the world" (Eliade 1954:21), he nevertheless maintains a Platonic dualism between the realm of ideas and the realm of the real in his articulation of religion as ontology. Just as in Plato, the cosmos remains at a level beyond the human, for her to draw from and imitate and repeat. In the case of cosmogony, the world-construction ritual of sanctifying inhabitable space can be explained as repetition of the originary Creation of the World. For Eliade, cosmogony is at once hierophany, the revelation of not only a world but also an "absolute reality." Yet, he maintains that this process is *mediated* by the constitution of an absolute center, the *axis mundi*, which takes form in the holy sites, such as a temple, basilica

or cathedral. The *axis mundi* is, Eliade argues, a means of communication, an opening, a break from one cosmic region to another. The "world" or cosmos then is made real by its adherence to a mythical "archetype" that in turn opens up the connection between it and the cosmos. So while he does not relegate the religious to the realm of ideas, Eliade nonetheless retains a privileging of the archetype (an idea or perhaps memory) over the sacred cosmos.

Berger and Eliade share two fundamental characteristics in their formulations of religious worlding. First, "cosmos" is an ideological construct that does not have material consequence. And, secondly, ontology or Being is strictly an effect of knowledge. These conclusions coincide with some recent criticisms of Berger leveled by British theologian John Milbank. In one of his early works *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Milbank 1990), Milbank charges the American tradition sociology of religion, which includes Parsons, Berger, Luckmann and Bellah, of "policing the sublime," effectively relegating religion to the epiphenomenal. Milbank turns the tables on sociology by arguing that the category of the "social" emerges out of a secularist project whereby "religion" becomes an object of sociological knowledge to "cope" with it, and thus subjecting it to disciplinary (in both senses) analysis. (This, of course, is a clever upturning of Durkheim's argument that God is the apotheosis of the social.) Thus, he goes on to argue, religion becomes equated to the Kantian sublime, "a realm of ineffable majesty beyond the bounds of the possibility of theoretical knowledge a domain which cannot be imaginatively represented." By relegating religion to the sublime, sociology effectively confines it, claiming that it is carrying forward a critique of metaphysics by explaining the sublime as a product of the conditions given by the social, as either "factual *a priori* or as *a priori* norm" (Milbank 1990:104).

Berger, Milbank argues, is guilty of this as he represents "the sacred canopy" as a kind of ideological defense mechanism used by societies to explain the prevailing social norms and institutions. As the Greeks used Prometheus and Persephone to intellectually account for the

presence of fire and the seasonal change, the sacred canopy—religion—is functionally mythology, a set of ideas and stories that take on the status of social knowledge. As Milbank calls it, Berger's theory of religion is a theory of "general occlusion" (Milbank 1990:137).

Certainly, then, Millbank confirms what was earlier proposed about Berger's conceptualization of "worlds." They are not much more than worlds of ideas. Berger here reveals his functionalism and mentalism. Religion is "useful for imagining and representing this invisible 'whole' and also for temporarily 'storing up' energies in an 'ideal' realm, which can later be put to 'real social use'"(Milbank 1990:109). Milbank's critique against Berger is, in sum, that "religion," as he and sociology generally defines it, lacks any kind of ontological substance. This can be extended, though to a lesser degree, to Eliade as well. Although he makes a stronger case for the ontological grounds of "worlding" in that he does not treat religion as epiphenomenal, he nevertheless privileges the realm of ideas. "World," for either of them, if not wholly, is largely ideational.

The worlds of technologies

In two well-known essays, "The Age of the World Picture"(1950) and "The Question Concerning Technology"(1954), Martin Heidegger outlines one of the most influential philosophical approaches to technology in the 20th century, which Don Ihde a contemporary philosopher of technology influenced by him, calls the "nonnetural" view (Ihde 1983:60). Ihde describes it in this way because Heidegger explicitly rejects what is still perhaps the commonsense ("instrumental" or "anthropological") view of technology—as mere utensil, which views it as simply a passive means to a human end. Marxist philosopher of technology Andrew Feenberg calls this the "substantive" theory of technology, suggesting that it sees technology as an autonomous cultural force that reconstitutes the relationship of the human to the world, overriding prior value-systems and other areas of social life. But however it is called,

technology, in this view, is an actor. As Feenberg describes it, “technology is not simply a means but has become an environment and a way of life”(Feenberg 2002:8).

Within Heidegger’s philosophy of technology is an implicit periodization. For him, modern, that is to say, mechanical technologies, do something quite particular, which, in turn, requires, a modern philosophy of technology. They, modern technologies, facilitate *poiesis* and *aletheia*. In the Greek, *poiesis* stands for “to make” or “to create” and *aletheia* “to reveal or make evident,” which together form the Heideggerian concept of “presencing.” This, he argues, is one of the chief tasks of technology. For him, *poiesis* does not simply signify creation but something particular—“bringing-forth” (Heidegger 1982:10). As an example, Heidegger offers up another Greek term *physis*, which usually refers to the machinations of nature—arguably an ancient precursor to what in the Middle Ages and later was referred to as “natural law.” Heidegger suggests that *physis* is *poiesis* in the highest sense. “For what presences by means of *physis* has the bursting open belonging to bringing-forth, e.g., the bursting of a blossom into bloom, in itself”(Heidegger 1982:10). While *poiesis* is equated to “bringing-forth,” *aletheia* is equated to what Heidegger calls “unconcealment.” As he notes, *techne*, or “craft,” has been linked etymologically with *episteme*. They both refer to knowledge, in the most general sense. Unconcealment, then, is a kind of *presencing* that “reveals whatever does not bring itself forth and does not yet lie here before us, whatever can look and turn out now one way and now another” (Heidegger 1982:13). In fact, one could think of the *aletheia* aspect of modern technologies as *poiesis* but working in a sui generis fashion.

But the revealing of presencing is not simply a bringing-forth of something that already exists. Something is being *produced*. Unconcealment, then, has a particular character, which Heidegger calls “challenging.” Modern technologies “challenge” nature by demanding of it energy to be extracted and stored. Nature, therefore, is brought-forth and revealed as a

"standing-reserve" of energy. Modern technologies "enframe" nature within a particular mode of ordering or systematicity.[11]

> Enframing is the gathering together that belongs to that setting-upon which sets upon man and puts him in position to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve…Enframing, as a challenging-forth into ordering, sends into a way of revealing. Enframing is an ordaining of destining, as is every way of revealing. Bringing-forth, *poiesis*, is also a destining in this sense. (Heidegger 1982:24)

It is Enframing that is demonstrative of world-forming. The view of nature, as standing-reserve, is not *a priori*; it is a product of the process of Enframing of technology. Technologies provide a dominant picture of the world, or "world picture" [*Weltbild*].

In modern times, Heidegger suggests, science and technology have "pictured" the world in a particular way.

> One of the essential phenomena of the modern age is its science. A phenomenon of no less importance is machine technology. We must not, however, misinterpret that technology as the mere application of modern mathematical physical science to praxis. Machine technology is itself an autonomous transformation of praxis, a type of transformation wherein praxis first demands the employment of mathematical physical science. Machine technology remains up to now the most visible outgrowth of the essence of modern technology, which is identical with the essence of modern metaphysics. (Heidegger 1977:116)

[11] As we shall see in a subsequent chapter that will focus on the religious nature of Google Maps and Google Earth, a related essay of Heidegger's "The Age of the World Picture," in which he explicates in greater detail the "systematic" nature of the world as constructed by technologies.

For Heidegger, the world picture is always "the ground." By this he means that "world" is not simply a denotation of a certain "scenic" space, a usage which the social sciences more generally are guilty of—i.e., the social world, the psychic world, etc. But for Heidegger, to call something a "world" is to identify a process of binding and cohesion; it is normative, prescriptive even. "Picture" refers to its systematicity, like when we say, "we get the picture." We mean that we get the entire picture. So, "world" here refers to something "in its entirety" (Heidegger 1977:129) and "set in place"[*gestelt*] (Heidegger 1977:127), like the terms "cosmos," "history" and "nature." As Heidegger explains:

> We mean by it [world picture] itself, the world as such, what is, in its entirety, just as it is normative and binding for us. "Picture" here does not mean some imitation, but rather what sounds forth in the colloquial expression, "We get the picture" [literally, we are in the picture] concerning something. This means the matter stands before us exactly as it stands with it for us…Where the world becomes picture, what is, in its entirety, is juxtaposed as that for which man is prepared and which, correspondingly, he therefore intends to bring before himself and have before himself, and consequently intends in a decisive sense to set in place before himself. Hence world picture, when understood essentially, does not mean a picture of the world but the world conceived and grasped as picture. (Heidegger 1977:129)

It is the signifier of systematicity, a kind of logic that Heidegger suggests is the driving force behind science and technology.

This "entirety," that is, the world picture, is illustrative of "setting in place" or a modality of representation, signifying the way in which Being is always actualized through

representedness, a specific type of representation that privileges presence in the modern age.

> To represent [*vor-stellen*] means to bring what is present at hand [*das Vorhandene*] before oneself as something standing over against, to relate it to oneself, to the one representing it, and to force it back into this relationship to oneself as the normative realm. (Heidegger 1977:131)

Therefore, we can summarize Heidegger with the point that the modern world picture is an image "structured" and ordered by technologies. Moreover, technologies affect how humans view themselves in relation to the world. Heidegger gives two modern examples, which evidence the structuring of the world image—the airplane ("the annihilation of great distances") and radio(Heidegger 1977: 135). Planes and radio are two modes of a *dispositif* of technologies that influence everyday understandings of space (distance) and time (simultaneity) that have receded into the ontological "background" of many people today. They are deeply embedded in the "plausibility structure," to use Berger's terminology, of the contemporary world.

Whereas Heidegger uses "world," Ihde uses the more phenomenologically orthodox "lifeworld."[12] Lifeworld, according to Ihde, is the multidimensional structure of experience(Ihde 1990). It is the environment or the milieu in which humans situate themselves. Hence, to say that technologies construct lifeworlds is to suggest that they "[supply] the dominant basis for an understanding both of the world and ourselves" (Ihde 1983:10). This is so because technologies are inextricably linked to the humanness of humans, as Bernard Stiegler, and Andre Leroi-Gourhan before him, has argued(Stiegler 1998). Certainly, as Ihde suggests,

[12] "Lifeworld" is rumored to have been a response made by Husserl to Heidegger's "Dasein." See Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1977. *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. University of California Press.

technologies are perhaps the first expression of *praxis*, which is "what grounds the relationship between humans and their world. Now when this thesis is applied to technology, not only can technology be seen to be important, and in a few cases even central, but it is related to the fundamental dimensions of human life itself"(Ihde 1983:10).

As a phenomenologist, Ihde views the self as "neither self-contained nor separated from a context, a field, a world," mirroring Heidegger's concept of "throwness" [*Geworfenheit*] (Ihde 1983:14). Ihde carries on the capsizing of the subject-object separation that Heidegger initiated by suggesting that the lifeworld of technology uncovers the "relativistic ontology of human experience"(Ihde 1990:23). Taking seriously the ontological implications of Heidegger's questioning of the worldhood of the world, Ihde suggests that a relativistic ontology is one that takes the self and the world as located and constituted through a relation. They are not treated as pre-existing entities.

> The relationality of human-world relationships is claimed by phenomenologists to be an ontological feature of all knowledge, all experience. Negatively, it would be claimed that there is no way to "get out of" this relativistic situation, and any claim to the contrary can be shown to be either naïve or misguided. (Ihde 1990:26)

Ihde's conceptualization of the technology and the lifeworld focuses on a particular definition of experience—perception, of which he offers two types, macro (which he describes as "cultural, or hermeneutic") and micro ("actual seeing, hearing"). These two, he is quick to note, are "closely linked and intertwined"(Ihde 1990:29). But more importantly, Ihde's argument suggests that technology affects the very vision or perception of the phenomenological subject, echoing the Heideggerian rejection of the anthropocentric view of technology as instrument. There is no such thing as "innocent" or unmediated perception; all perception is

“technologically embodied”(Ihde 1983:44), just as there is no “innocent” or value-free world, but always a “pictured” one.

Hence, according to Ihde, when technologies are used to “enhance” perception, such as the case for optical technologies, the perceptual sense, vision in this case, is transformed, as the technological object no longer takes the “position of mediation” but rather withdraws into the seer.

> The very first time I put on my glasses, I see the now-corrected world. The adjustments I have to make are not usually focal irritations but fringe ones (such as the adjustment of backglare and the slight changes in spatial motility). But once learned, the embodiment relation can be more precisely described as one in which the technology becomes maximally “transparent.” It is, as it were, taken into my own perceptual-bodily self experience thus:
>
> (I-glasses)-world
>
> My glasses become part of the way I ordinarily experience my surroundings; they “withdraw” and are barely noticed, if at all. I have then actively embodied the technics of vision. Technics is the symbiosis of artifact and user within a human action. (Ihde 2004:138)

This long, experiential description of the relationship of the phenomenological subject, eyeglasses and the world demonstrates the principle of embodiment that is characteristic of the relationship between the “user” and technology. The glasses do not impose greatly on the seer. It “withdraws,” as Ihde says, represented by the parenthesized relation of I and glasses. The seer in that instance embodies the technics, which in turn, constitutes a technological lifeworld. Another illustrative example he provides is that of driving a car.

> One experiences the road and surroundings *through* driving the car, and motion is the focal activity…One embodies the car, too, in such activities as parallel parking: when well embodied, one feels rather than sees the distance between car and curb—one's bodily sense is "extended" to the parameters of the driver-car "body." And although these embodiment relations entail larger, more complex artifacts and entail a somewhat longer, more complex learning process, the bodily tacit knowledge that is acquired is perceptual-bodily. (Ihde 2004:139)

But the significance of technological embodiment is not limited to level of the bodily-perceptual. As Ihde notes, technologies affect the "entire gestalt." Using the example of the telescope, he writes, "[w]hen the apparent size of the moon changes, along with it the apparent position of the observer changes" (Ihde 2004:141). This is, of course, an illustration of what Ihde means by relativistic ontology vis-à-vis technologies. Technologies create new relations, and relations of relations, which, in turn, produce new worlds.

Beyond phenomenology

The works of Berger, Eliade, Heidegger and Ihde, provide a good basis upon which to develop some notes towards a theory of the interrelation of religion and *digital* technologies as "worlding." From Berger and Eliade, we can look at religion as an instance of cosmization or world-construction that is an ontological activity of all human beings. From Heidegger and Ihde, we can take seriously the kind of world-production function of technologies and the existential effect they have. These discussions, however, still leave unanswered, some pressing questions about the nature of "worlds" that have plagued phenomenology. Specifically, they leave themselves open to the charge of totalization. The discussion of Heidegger above makes

this much clear. The "world-picture" is an "object world," one rooted in the strict ordering of nature in a calculated manner. Some scholars have associated the "setting in place" that Heidegger refers to as the primary representational means of "picturing" the world with universality, totality and order.[13] Berger and Eliade have also had their fair share of critics charging them with holding onto a universalist understanding of "cosmos."[14] Undoubtedly, the foregoing discussions have not done much to aid our understanding of the distinctiveness of digital technologies and contemporary religion's "world-construction" or "cosmization," which I earlier hinted at—the "open" and modular nature of these worlds that are produced. It is my contention that this is due, to a phenomenological bias in how "world" is formulated.

The thinkers just discussed—Berger, Eliade, Heidegger and Ihde—all share a common language of "worlds" due in large part to their intellectual debt to Husserlian phenomenology. Husserl's definition of "lifeworld" leaves the door open for the possibility of it being merely ideological (again to mirror Milbank's critique of Berger). This could result in a couple of problems. First, religion and/or technologies can be viewed as mostly symbolically effective vis-à-vis the human being, producing an intellectualized understanding of both. Thus, the study of a religion as lifeworld can remain at the level of the symbolic pertinence of religion. Likewise, the study of technology as lifeworld would remain at the level of its effect on the consciousness of the human subject. Religion and technologies, when viewed as "world-constructors," are seen as being so in a totalistic fashion. The worlds of religion and the worlds of technologies are complete, whole, and neat, mirroring the "closed system" of thermodynamics. Cosmology and ontology, for the most part, are conceived as closed

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[13] One example, among many, of this kind of criticism can be found in Sawicki, Jana. 1987. "Heidegger and Foucault: escaping technological nihilism." *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 13:155-173. A far more nuanced and favorable reading of Heidegger's essay can be found in Weber, Samuel, and Alan Cholodenko. 1996. *Mass mediauras*. Stanford University Press.

[14] See Lemert, Charles. 1980. *Sociology and the Twilight of Man: Homocentrism and Discourse in Sociological Theory*. Southern Illinois University Press; Flood, Gavin D. 1999. *Beyond phenomenology: rethinking the study of religion*. Continuum.

systems.[15] The human being or subject within this structured, ordered and unified world would have very little interpretive recourse except the development of *Weltanschauung* or worldview that would correlate with the *Weltbild*.

In principle, there is nothing misguided or wrong about this approach. However, it does tend to slide into, what Derrida, in another context, called, "structurality."[16] One of the features of this structurality is the tendency for ahistoricism and dogmatism. Worlds, whether they be Ihdian bodily-perceptual lifeworlds, Heideggerian "object spheres," Eliadian sacred cosmos, or the Bergerian *nomoi* become worlds in and of themselves. This then excludes the possibility of "religion" or "technologies"—depending on which is given analytical privilege as world-constructor—interacting with other forces of social life. Religion and technology become identitarian, stable entities. But lest we forget, as Stewart Hoover reminds us, religion must not be seen as "given" but rather as achieved(Hoover 2006). This must therefore also extend to both religion and technology as "world." The world must be achieved. What is referred to as "technology" is constantly in flux, especially in light of the increasing rate of change that is exhibited today's technological landscape. Thus, in order to take into consider technology and religion and their respective "worlds" seriously, what kind of "world" must we be talking about?

To approach this question, it will be useful to look at the work of two contemporary theorists of worlds—Jean-Luc Nancy and Peter Sloterdijk. Both authors offer a unique set of concepts that help us to place "world" and "cosmos" in a historical light, thus allowing us to

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[15] The entirety of Emmanuel Levinas' philosophical corpus can be seen as a critique of "ontology," though what he refers to as such is open to debate. See, among many places, Lévinas, Emmanuel. 1996. "Is Ontology Fundamental?." in *Emmanuel Lévinas: basic philosophical writings*, edited by Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi. Indiana University Press.

[16] The phrase "structurality of structure" comes from, of course, Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play in the Human Sciences," widely noted as the text which gave "birth" to post-structuralism, where he lays a devastating critique of Levi-Strauss' structural anthropology. See Derrida, Jacques. 1978. *Writing and difference*. University of Chicago Press.

steer a different course from the theories of world-construction laid out in the authors discussed above.

Nancy traces the view of the world as ordered and structured from the Roman "*Urbi et orbi*" ("from the Rome to the world"), a phrase that today embodies the very notion of "political theology." Once the opening statement for official decrees in ancient Rome, it is today used to refer to a papal address. As another Rome-related phrase, "All roads lead to Rome," would also indicate, this view of the world is centered on a *singular, privileged origin*. Though the dissolution of the Byzantine Empire in the 15th century had all but eliminated any shell of the Roman Empire in its political form, the remnants of the Imperium lived on in European colonialism. As Nancy points out, the figure of "the West" was the new Rome that functioned under the logic of *Urbi et orbi* until the decolonization movements of the 1950s-1970s initiated by India's liberation from the British in the late 1940s(Nancy 2007:34). What decolonization challenged in particular were the twin values that undergirded this model of the World—the universal and reason, ideals promised to much of the colonized periphery in the gift wrap of Progress and modernity, but not delivered to the extent pledged. When this was rejected, the world of *Urbi et orbi* was as well.

On the other hand, Sloterdijk goes further back than Nancy, pointing to the Greeks as responsible for introducing the idea of "sphere." The "sphere," which he interestingly uses interchangeably with "cosmos," is the earliest instance of the idea of globalization in the West, the contemporary "vectors" of which, he suggests, are "rapid transportation as well as ultra-high-speed telecommunication." Greek philosophical cosmology, by which Sloterdijk is quite clearly referring to the Aristotelian variety, theorized the cosmos as a response, so he claims, to the fact that human beings could no longer live in a real cosmos, that is, a "closed and comforting world," which "was the totality of being imagined under the form of a great, perfectly symmetrical bubble"(Sloterdijk 2005:223). As our discussion of Eliade already made

clear, cosmization is the equation of house and universe in order to make a space inhabitable in Western and non-Western cultures. Sloterdijk describes this as "the great simplifying maneuver" in that it set in motion a view of "world" and thus "globalization" as rooted in ordering (as Berger's *nomos* does).

> If the house is the cosmos, and if the cosmos is the house of man, then the notion of habitat is extended to all the forces of chaos that subverted the ancient order of things. The pre-philosophical universe was much more threatened by chaotic forces than the well-arranged cosmos of the post-Platonists. After the age of Plato and Aristotle, the world became a cultivated garden surrounding the villa of an aristocrat jovially observing the totality of things from his terrace. (Sloterdijk 2005:239)

The ancient cosmology of concentric circles, which had a major influence on Ptolemy, creates a "symbolic immune system" whereby the foundations of social knowledge are based on the whole and closed nature of the world.[17] He and Nancy, both, can be seen as moving away from the concepts of ancient (Greco-Roman) cosmology to asses the contemporary situation, which for purposes of this project, will have special attention paid to religion and new media technologies.

Hence, "world," for Nancy specifically, signifies a

> totality of meaning…to which certain meaningful content or a certain value system properly belongs in order of knowledge or thought as well as in that of affectivity and participation. Belonging to such a totality consists in sharing this content and this

[17] See Koyre, Alexandre. 1968. *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*. Johns Hopkins University Press; for the most well known history of the concept of world in the 16th-17th centuries.

> totality in the sense of "being familiar with it," as one says; that is to say, of apprehending its codes and texts, precisely when their reference points, signs, codes, and texts are neither explicit nor exposed as such. (Nancy 2007:42)

While at first glance it seems that Nancy is giving a phenomenological definition of world (which I had just promised he would be used in critiquing), there is a particular aspect of "world" that he points out, which separates his definition from the others outlined above: the mention of "affectivity and participation." The aspect of "familiarity," as he calls it, stakes out an important difference between his "world," and the phenomenological "world" of Peter Berger. Whereas Berger's world may be reliant upon human consciousness, Nancy's, to the contrary, is rooted in a *bodily* familiarity much in the way of Ihde's "lifeworld." This familiarity does not necessarily reflect upon a symbolic system but something that is not-quite-conscious. This would lead to a portrait of "world" as given and ready-made for consciousness to perceive. However, as we can see from Nancy's more detailed formulation of world and world-forming, it betrays a certain *non*-objectivity.

> [A] world is not a unity of the objective or external order: a world is never in front of me, or else it is my world. As soon as a world appears to me as world, I already share something of it: I share a part of its inner resonances. Perhaps this term *resonance* is capable of suggesting the issue at hand: a world is a space in which a certain tonality resonates. But that tonality is nothing other than the totality of resonances that the elements, the moments, and the places of this world echo, modulate, and modalize. (Nancy 2007:42)

Therefore, a world is a world only for those who “inhabit” it, as he says. It is a place that allows events to take place. In this sense, it is the condition of possibility for all happenings. The non-objectivabilty of the world means that the world is not assigned a particular principle of telos. It rejects the Enframing of the *Weltbild*.

The world, in this framework, also has theological consequences. A representable world is a world with God as “subject of its representation (and thus of its fabrication, of its maintenance and destination)” as the earlier discussion of the Clockmaker analogy makes clear(Nancy 2007:44). To represent the workings of nature was to reflect God. This correlation is traceable to the beginnings of Western metaphysics in the ancient Greek *Logos*, *ultima ratio* and *causa prima* which Thomas Aquinas most successfully made into doctrine. However, a world that cannot be represented is one that rejects not only this correlation but also a certain specific vision of God, that is, a God of metaphysics or onto-theology.

Furthermore, world-forming, in Nancian parlance called “creation,” is a flat-out rejection of the given.

> The idea of creation, such as has been elaborated by the most diverse and at the same time most convergent thoughts, including the mystics of the three monotheisms but also the complex systems of all great metaphysics, is above all the idea of *ex nihilo* (and I do not exempt Marx from this, to the contrary: while his understanding of Christian creation is only instrumental, for him value is precisely created...). The world is created from nothing: this does not mean fabricated with nothing by a particularly ingenious producer, and not even coming out of nothing (like a miraculous apparition), but in a quite strict manner and more challenging for thought: the nothing itself, if one can speak in this way, or rather *nothing* growing [croissant] as *something* (I say "growing" for it is the sense of *cresco*—to be born, to grow—from which comes *creo:* to make

> something merge and cultivate a growth). In creation, a growth grows from nothing and this nothing takes care of itself, cultivates its growth.(Nancy 2007:51)

This out-of-nothing quality of the idea of creation serves as a rejoinder to the metaphysics of "givenness" based on a notion of the origin. The politics of originary thinking are evident in the conceptualization of capital-N Nature by certain environmentalists, who suggest that we must "return to Nature," positing a relationship with Nature, whether God-given or not, that was at one point harmonious, though eventually threatened by modern, ever-polluting technologies.[18] By insisting that "creation" is a radical making out of nothing, Nancy is not only engaging in a denaturation of Nature, and, thus, "world" but arguing for its multiplicity. In this way, Nancy concludes:

> The unity of the world is not one…A world is a multiplicity of worlds, the world is a multiplicity of worlds, and is unity is the sharing out and the mutual exposure in this world of all its worlds…The sharing out of the world is the law of the world. The world does not have any other law, it is not submitted any authority, it does not have any sovereign."(Nancy 2007:109)

While Nancy's theory of world and worlding is an attack of originary thinking, Sloterdijk's "spherology" wages a critique of the aforementioned phenomenology-influenced

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[18] Herbert Marcuse basically argues from this position when he writes:

> Nature, scientifically comprehended and mastered, reappears in the technical apparatus of production and destruction which sustains and improves the life of the individuals while subordinating them to the masters of the apparatus. (Marcuse 1991:166)

Marcuse's description of the "catastrophe of liberation" of man from nature by scientific-technical rationality sums up the kind of "originary" thinking that Nancy is refuting in his definition of "creation."

views of world-construction through a reconsideration of the figure of the globe or sphere in relation to totality. According to him, the story of modernity can be told through the analytic of "globalization." The "globe," as opposed to the "sphere," is introduced through Greek cosmology as a means by which to measure the immeasurable, and thus to place human beings within a totality. It is this meeting of ontology and geometry that lays the ground for the Western "metaphysics of roundness," which Sloterdijk describes as "the fundamental event of European thought"(Sloterdijk 2009a:30).

> It can be said definitively that originary philosophy was the radical change to monospherical thought—the demand that entities in general be interpreted through the formal idea of the sphere. With this formalizing gesture, thinking individuals were bound to a strong relationship with the center of their existence and sworn to the unity, totality, and roundness of existence.(Sloterdijk 2009a:31)

The metaphysics of roundness represents a fundamental misconception in Western thought where the "the unevenness of life and the fissures of the world must be measured" within "an encompassing zone," which is no longer a house but a "logical and cosmological construction form of timeless validity"(Sloterdijk 2009a:31).

Interestingly enough, Sloterdijk associates monospherism with monotheism. As many traditional understandings of monotheism suggest, the force of the singular God necessitates a central moral authority—God's Law. But, according to Sloterdijk, religion must also "englobe"—that is, create a world.

> A strong monotheism relies not only on moral authority but on the authority of its physical world, and wants to englobe both the natural and the spiritual. It requires a

> God strong enough to be omnipresent, and omnipresent in both nature and in consciences. This powerful God would necessarily be constructed like an englobing sphere whose center claims a right of universal ingestion. (Sloterdijk 2005:233)

But the metaphysics of roundness purported by the ancient cosmology of monotheism is challenged by "electronic and telematic globalization"(Sloterdijk 2005). This is prompted by the "rapid images in the networks." This is today's "virtual space of cybernetic media"(Sloterdijk 2011:66). The chief characteristic of this new *virtuality* is a generalized decentering. "When everything has become the center," Sloterdijk writes striking a Derridean chord, "there is no longer any valid center; when everything is transmitting, the allegedly central transmitter is lost in the tangle of messages"(Sloterdijk 2011:71).

A whole range of media developments, from modern transportation (which McLuhan even considered to be "media") to modern telecommunications, can be said to have annihilated space, effectively "synchronizing consciences distributed in space"(Sloterdijk 2005:226).

> With the accomplishment of the modern world, this form of life becomes a temptation for more or less everyone, and this for the good reason that the great megasphere of monothesim that provided everybody with an ideal pretext to devote themselves to a big Other has disappeared. (Sloterdijk 2005:235)

The name that Sloterdijk gives this form of life is "foam," or "bubble." The foam bubble is "an architectural foam, a multi-chambered system made up of relatively stabilized personal worlds"(Sloterdijk 2009b). The metaphor of foam reflects the fact that worlds have always had plural and insular structures.

> I, by contrast, go for the concept of the foam bubble or the world cell in order to show that even the individual element already contains intrinsic expansion…"Cell" express the fact that the individual place has the shape of a world…By contrast, the foam metaphor emphasizes the microcosmic, intrinsic spatiality of each individual cell.(Sloterdijk 2009b)

Elsewhere, he describes the "guiding morphological principle of the polyspheric world" as not being a *singular* world but *multiple* worlds. In doing so, he evokes the language of "networks" and "media."

> The structural implication of the current earth-encompassing network—with all its eversions into the virtual realm—is thus not so much a globalization as a foaming. In foam worlds, the individual bubbles are not absorbed into a single, integrative hyper-orb, as in the metaphysical conception of the world, but rather drawn together to form irregular hills. (Sloterdijk 2011:71)

I present Nancy and Sloterdijk's post-Heideggerian theory of worlds to suggest that it offers a more suitable framework for this study in light of two realities. They both offer a stronger theory of world and world-forming (or, "creation" as Nancy calls it; and "spherology" as Sloterdijk calls it) and gives us a more appropriate framework to analyze the relation of contemporary religion and media technologies. On the one hand, the notion of religion can no longer be simply thought of as ideological or symbolic, as the producer of meaning and context for the human mind. This kind of conception of world too easily falls into an immaterial theory of religion, akin to the overtly anti-religious approaches to the study of religion exhibited

in Freud and Feuerbach before him. On the other hand, the study of technologies as world-forming thus far outlined do not take into full consideration the distinct break that digitization has initiated in the history of media technologies. The kinds of world occasioned by digital (or new), postmodern media technologies are indeed different than those Enframed by modern technologies.

Assemblages and networks as worlds

To delve into what exactly is so "new" about new media technologies, we may look at Lev Manovich's *The Language of New Media*, the most comprehensive work on the subject, where he provides an apt description of the what it is about the "digital revolution" that is so unique in the history of media.

> This new revolution is arguably more profound than the previous ones and we are just beginning to sense its initial effects. Indeed, the introduction of printing press affected only one stage of cultural communication—the distribution of media. In the case of photography, its introduction affected only one type of cultural communication—still images. In contrast, computer media revolution affects all stages of communication, including acquisition, manipulating, storage and distribution; it also affects all types of media—text, still images moving images, sound and spatial constructions. (Manovich 2001:19)[19]

[19] According to Manovich, there are five principles of new media: (1) Numerical representation (2) Modularity (3) Automation (4) Variability (5) Transcoding (Manovich 2001:27). (1)Numerical representation describes the programmability of media. Once digitized, a new media object can be described formally, that is, mathematically and thus open to algorithmic manipulation. (2)Modularity refers to the discontinuity of information that is inherent to the process of digitization. Data, originally, is not broken into units. There is no quantum. Digitization discretizes data into information by sampling and then reconstructs them into large-scale objects by quantizing. A good example of this process is the digital image, which exists in small units called pixels. (3)Automation is self-explanatory. It is the processing

One of the key arguments of Manovich with regard to digitization is that it has created what Deleuze calls a "plane of immanence" in which nearly all-prior media became interoperable and virtually interactive by becoming digitized. Describing this as a "pseudo-religious" effect of digital media, Pierre Levy calls this "universalization."

A point that Levy makes repeatedly is that his theory of universalization is distinct from totalization. The universality of new media, for instance, the World Wide Web, "lacks any center or guidelines. It is empty without any particular content. Or rather, it accepts all content, since it can connect any point with any other, regardless of the semantic load of the entities so related" (Lévy 2001:91). The condition of possibility for such a de-centered media technology is digitization. New media has achieved this by breaking from prior technologies' reliance upon the communication systems "fathered" by writing. In the example given by Levy, many of the "universal," or in the famed words of Jaspers, "axial" religions are based on text. This is indeed the case with the monotheistic religions as well as Hinduism and Buddhism. Their textual bases allows for a "centered" universalism. Thus one can convert to Islam, for instance, without having to make the *hajj* to Mecca (though it is customary to do so at least once in a life time *after* conversion) but by reading, studying and obeying holy texts including the Quran. Though, "writing doesn't automatically determine the universal; it conditions it (there is no universality without writing)" (Lévy 2001:95). This can be said of many cultural forms, not simply the "axial religions." As Levy rightly points out, this is also true for philosophy and

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ability of computers that requires minimal human involvement. (4)Variability illustrates the ethos of new media technologies. As Manovich states, "Instead of identical copies of a new media object typically gives rise to many different versions. And rather being created completely by a human author, these versions are often in part automatically assembled by a computer"(Manovich 2001:40). Contemporary remix or "mash-up" culture is a good example of this(Lessig 2008). Lastly, (5)transcoding is the feature of new media technologies that allows it to reformat a media object from one format to another. An example of this is the increased role that video streaming sites such as YouTube and Hulu are playing in watching television programming.

science, though with different “attractors.” The universality of religion relies on meaning, philosophy on reason, and science on reproducibility. In all of these cases, this type of totalizing universalism “operates on the identity of signification,” or the complete correlation between signifier and signified, a “semantic closure.”

New media technologies like the World Wide Web, on the other hand, Levy states, dissolve

> the pragmatics of communication, which, since the invention of writing, has conjoined the universal and totality. It brings us back to a preliterate situation—but on another level and in another orbit—to the extent that *the real-time interconnection and dynamism of on-line memory once again, create a shared context, the same immense living hypertext for the participants in a communication*. Regardless of the message, it is connected to other messages, comments, and constantly evolving glosses, to other interested persons, to forums where it can be debated here and now.(Lévy 2001:98. Emphasis added.)

In a clear critique of Habermas (which the phrase “pragmatics of communication” alludes to), Levy suggests that the disjuncture between the universal and totality occurs to through a “world-forming” process, which he describes as the creation of a “shared context,” facilitated by digital technologies. The identity of meaning is no longer the essence of this new universal, but by immersion, or in a Heideggerian mode, a thrownness into the same world. As Levy describes it, “We are all in the same bath, the same communicational deluge” (Lévy 2001:100). This makes the stability and singularity of meaning in identity difficult to maintain its relevance. The Web is a prime example of what the ability to universalize without totalizing, a feature which has deep resonance with Nancy’s *mondialisation* and “creation.” They both feature an

openness and non-teleological quality that is present in a great deal of the literature of worlds in religious studies and philosophy of technology.

It is a theory of "worlding" informed by the universalizing yet non-totalizing nature of digitization that I believe is found in philosopher Mark C. Taylor's *After God*. What distinguishes Taylor's approach from others is that he shies away what many studies of religion aim for—a definition of religion. Instead, pointing to the "pressing conflicts resulting from uncertainties and instabilities created by globalization," Taylor states that there must be a renewed direction in religious studies that moves away from modern categories of classification and interpretation (Taylor 2007:10). Not only do they fail to aid us interrogate the ways in which they are cast for political ends but also fail to consider the changing nature of what we call "religion," not to mention its interrelation with other areas of life. What is necessary is a new way of thinking not only religion but also systems of all kinds—biological, social, political, cultural and technological—and how they are resonate in different ways. He writes:

> Living systems…are always *embedded* in complex social, cultural and technological milieux that comprise multiple networks. All of these networks as well as their interrelations are, in different ways, information-processing systems, which, when fully deployed, are global: everything—absolutely everything—is *entwined*, *enmeshed*, *interrelated*, *interconnected*. Within these coevolving networks, different systems codetermine each other. Cultural systems, for example, condition natural systems as much as natural systems influence cultural systems. Religious attitudes shape values, which issue in political and economic policies that literally transform the fabric of life…Far from a simple biological force, life is a complex global network of natural, social, economic, political and cultural relations. To sustain life it is necessary to cultivate all of these relations. As connections proliferate and relations multiply, the

> network of life becomes increasingly complex. This complexity produces instabilities that are the condition of the infinite restlessness of life itself. (Taylor 2007:343. Emphasis added)

Hence, for Taylor, the task of studying religion today must include these two aspects: religion must be seen as enmeshed and implicated in "milieux" of other systems, as he calls it, and it must be considered as coevolving, that is, it is not a static entity or system but adaptive and dynamic. Thus, Taylor's "definition" of religion is reflective of these concerns.

> Religion is an emergent, complex, adaptive network of symbols, myths, and rituals that, on the one hand, figure schemata of feeling, thinking, and acting in ways that lend life meaning and purpose and, on the other, disrupt, dislocate, and disfigure every stabilizing structure. (Taylor 2007:12)[20]

Taylor elaborates on this definition through two rather surprising parallels: ancient cosmogony and modern information theory. Though there seems to be very few similarities between the Demiurge myth of Plato's *Republic* and the famed Bell Labs memo on cryptography, for Taylor, both cosmogony and information theory are founded upon what may be called non-linear complexity. In the theory of complexity found in the work of, for instance, Ilya Prigogine, self-organizing systems function well in states that are far from equilibrium.[21]

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[20] It is no coincidence that the key terms he uses, "schemata" and "network," are borrowed from physics. The former he borrows from the physicist Murray Gell-Mann. Schemata act as stabilizers for cognitive activity. They are somewhat like "models" for human thinking, feeling and acting. The latter, which he borrows from Danish physicist Per Bak, is his attempt to offer a more limber definition of structure and systems, without, as he says, having a "monolithic view" (as in the case in the functionalism which views systems as essentially having parallel attributes).

[21] Taylor is not by any means the first to utilize complexity theory in non-scientific contexts. Prigogine himself has partnered with philosopher Isabelle Stengers to write two books that elaborate the

This translates to one of the fundamental lessons of thermodynamics for thinking about non-physical systems, such as social ones: From Durkheim's *organic solidarity* to Weber's *rationality*, order has been viewed as the condition which systems—physical, biological, economic and social—function optimally. But, as Taylor argues, drawing from Gell-Mann, this may be based more on the maintenance of power structures and hegemonic ideology than facts. Chaos or complexity many in fact be the condition of prime operation in systems.

The nature of worlding in the Platonic cosmogony myth reflects this complexity:

> [A] Demiurge brings together eternal forms with formless matter, which is always in flux, to create the world as we know it. The world therefore, is *matter in form, or in-formed matter*. Every variation of this narrative presupposes one or another set of binary oppositions that/somehow must be mediated or negotiated. (Taylor 2007:14. Emphasis added)

Taylor contends that the information theory of Shannon and Weaver also produces an order out of chaos like the cosmos in Plato's cosmogony. As he explains:

> According to Shannon and Weaver, information, in the strict sense of the term, is inversely proportional to probability: the more probable something is, the less information it conveys...Information must be sufficiently different to convey something new but not so different that it is completely unrecognizable or undetectable. The

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philosophical implications of his research. Further, sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein has also written on the significance of complexity theory especially in regard to social science epistemology. See Prigogine, I. and Isabelle Stengers. 1984. *Order out of chaos : man's new dialogue with nature*. Boulder, CO: Random House, —. 1997. *The end of certainty : time, chaos, and the new laws of nature*. New York: Free Press, Wallerstein, Immanuel Maurice. 2004. *The uncertainties of knowledge*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

> domain of information, then, lies between too little and too much difference. On the one hand, information is a difference and, therefore, in the absence of difference there is no information. Not all differences make a difference: if they are redundant, they are inconsequential…Information and noise are not merely opposites but coemerge and remain codependent: *information is noise in formation*…Inasmuch as the process of destabilization provides the occasion for the emergence of new informative patterns, it is not merely negative. (Taylor 2007:15-16)

Therefore, to conceptualize religion-as-network is not to study a set or a system of beliefs, symbols and rituals, at least not stable ones but to study a network of beliefs, symbols and rituals that are most likely in flux. The phenomenon of "religion" can be thought as the way in which "theology, anthropology and cosmology mutually condition each other." It is for this reason that Taylor analyzes religion as a particular kind of symbolic network, one that has existential or ontological consequences. It is a network that not only puts in to play various symbols and rituals but also the key ontological relations of the self, world and God. He gives an example of this dynamic of what he calls the "religious network."

> [T]raditionally there have been two alternatives within the parameters of this vision: either God's will follows God's reason, in which case the world is ultimately comprehensible, or God's will is antecedent to reason, in which case the world is radically contingent and irreducibly mysterious…When religion is understood as a complex adaptive network, it becomes clear that these contrasting theological alternatives are coimplicated in such a way that neither can be itself apart from the other and reach becomes itself in and through the other. (Taylor 2007:22)

Similarly, technology, Taylor argues, also reflects the emergent character of complex networks. Like religion, technology is not simply a set of objects or ideologies but it "grow[s] out of and act back upon natural, social, and cultural systems."

> Within the human domain, the shift from mechanical to electronic forms of production and reproduction marks a tipping point that profoundly transforms the relation of technology to nature, society and culture. If natural, social, cultural processes are, in effect, distributed information processes, then the digital revolution is creating technologies whose structure and function not only reflect but more importantly amplify and transform what is already occurring in the world. When information machines are connected in webs that have the same structure as national, social and cultural systems, coevolution becomes inevitable even if its direction is impossible to predict. This development leads to a further obscuring of the line between nature and culture or natural and artificial systems. (Taylor 2007:30)

Like his analysis of religion as network, Taylor again points to the coimplication and coevolution more specifically of technology with social and cultural developments. We can see that Taylor's theory of religion and technology is rooted in a concept of relationality, whereby traditional categorical differences and oppositions of nature and culture, for example, are jettisoned. Religion and technology are both relational networks, and have the ability to produce new situations, new contexts by putting into play different systems and networks. An example of which political theorist William Connolly provides in his work on the dynamics of American evangelicalism and the right-wing media.

In "The Evangelical-Capitalist Machine"(Connolly 2005), he argues that the alliance forged between American-styled capitalism, what he calls "cowboy capitalism," and

evangelical Christianity cannot be "understood through the terms of efficient causality, in which you first separate factors and then show how one is the basic cause, or how they cause each other or how they together reflect a more basic cause"(Connolly 2005:869). He suggests that their respective "spiritual dispositions" for "ruthlessness, ideological extremism, and readiness to defend a market ideology" are made explicit, or "actualized" by media.

> The complex becomes a powerful machine as evangelical and corporate sensibilities resonate together, drawing each into a larger movement that dampens the importance of doctrinal differences between them. At first, the parties sense preliminary affinities of sensibility; eventually they provoke each other to transduct those affinities into a massive political machine. And the machine then foments new intensities of solidarity between these constituencies. (Connolly 2005:871)

Thus, the "resonance" between American capitalism and evangelical Christianity cannot be easily understood within the framework of the Aristotelian *causa efficiens*, as there exists, in this particular relation, an unstable third entity—a *dispostif* of 24-hour cable news television, right-wing blogosphere and the vast circulation of funds. I refer to this third entity as unstable because it does not resemble the traditional "thirds" in the history of philosophy. For instance, in Hegelian dialectics, the third is a stable entity, one that is a product of two prior stable entities. The third, in the case of the evangelical-capitalist resonance machine, is neither singular nor bound; it is, on the contrary, a modular network of different media technologies, with "diverse elements [that] *infiltrate* into the others, metabolizing into a moving complex"(Connolly 2005:870).

In a clear nod to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "assemblage," Connolly's point here with "resonance" is to clear the path for rethinking not only causal explanation but also

ontologies. Ontology and causality are two key ingredients in how we understand relations of all kinds, between objects and also regimes of objects. Ontologically speaking, "self-containment" is, as far as Connolly is concerned, an outmoded and ultimately unhelpful way of approaching objects and their relationships. One way that he describes this shift is in the distinction between *affinities* and *doctrines*. Affinities are always virtual, that is, they are *potential* connections that in the proper conditions and settings could attach to one another. Connolly rightly describes them as "sensibilities"(Connolly 2005:873). Doctrines, on the contrary, are codified systems of belief, which more difficult to reconcile, as they necessitate almost strict adherence.

To understand why he argues this, we must return to his emphasis on *machine* to look at his theory of media, which is the kernel of his notion of resonance. According to him, media (by which he only means TV and film, oddly) that present "much of their work below the level of explicit attention and encourage the intense coding of those experiences as they do so," leaving the viewer mostly "immobilized before a moving image and sound track, while the everyday perceiver is either mobile or one step removed from mobility"(Connolly 2005:880). Thus, it is the ability for media technologies to "activate" the affective capacities of its viewers/users vis-à-vis perceptual experience that is at the core of Connolly's "resonance."

In sum, the resonant network avoids both the pitfalls of "correspondences, analogies and homologies," and determinism. By discussing Taylor and Connolly, I'm suggesting that the worlding of religion and technology do not resemble the stable worlds of the sociology and anthropology of religion or the phenomenological worlds in the philosophy of technology. They are creative, and thus chaotic, as the Internet is architecturally "amorphous, polyvalent, transformational, holistic, and fragmented, all at the same time" (Apolito 2005:161).

Conclusion

Let us conclude with reminding ourselves again of the stakes for the present study. Why exert the effort to reconceptualize worlding, and with it ontology and cosmology in relation to religion and technology? It is the theory of worlds, as "relational network" and "resonance machine," informed by digitization, which I believe to be operating in the theological conceptualization and practical use of digital technologies in contemporary American Protestantism, especially among multi-site churches. As I will show in the remainder of this study, the worlding of contemporary American Christianity takes on a distinctly different flavor than the totalizing models of "cosmos" that mid-century sociology and history of religion largely purported. It is in the *digital* "worlds" of today's multi-site churches, including the technologized media environment of worship spaces and the extensive use of online social media—the subject of the following two chapters—where I believe we can see most clearly the distinctly digital convergence of religion and new media technologies.

Part II

Chapter 3

The Religio-Technological Environment of Multi-Site Christian Worship: Architecture, Liturgy and Aesthetics

Introduction

My parents currently live in a suburb of New York City in the neighboring state of New Jersey. Their church, of which my father is an elder, is typical of the successful Korean congregations in the New York metropolitan area.[22] In 2005, after experiencing rapid growth in terms of membership (and in turn funds), the church, like many others of its kind, undertook a construction project to redesign the building, which was previously an office. It expanded and improved.

Having been away for college when my parents had moved across the Hudson from New York and subsequently began attending a new church, I was never compelled to feel that "their" church was "my" church. But one Sunday during a spring break (must have been Easter), when I was back at their house (again, not "mine" for some reason), I noticed that the church was no longer an office building with a cross in front of it—which it had been—but a full-fledged megachurch. While the term is usually reserved for churches with congregations upwards of 2000 weekly worshipers (which my parents' church is quite close to having) and usually associated with evangelicalism (their church is Presbyterian in affiliation), I use it not so much referring to the sheer number of congregants nor theological leanings but the

[22] For discussions specifically about Korean churches in the United States, please see Kim, Kwang Chung. 2001. *Korean Americans and Their Religions: Pilgrims and Missionaries from a Different Shore*. Pennsylvania State University Press; and Min, Pyong Gap, and Jung Ha Kim. 2002. *Religions in Asian America: building faith communities*. AltaMira Press.

architectural and technological elements of the building as well as their effects on the worship experience.

Though it retained much of the office-building feel on the exterior, the interior is what made it seem, in my estimation, a megachurch. The worship hall or chapel was enormous, probably able to hold close to a thousand people at a time. But this was not all that noteworthy. The outside was big; of course the inside would be too. But being the tech-geek that I am, I was most impressed the lighting, audio and video system that had been newly installed. Having worked as a chief sound engineer during college as part of my work-study, as well as someone who had spent much time in his youth in churches, technical rigs at many houses of worship and even professional music venues, for that matter, did not easily impress me. Yet this one did. There were floating speakers, a theater-grade lighting setup, on-stage audio monitors, and *two*, projection screens—one behind the altar, in view of the worshipping audience, and one on the back wall, allowing the those on stage to see a different video feed than the congregants. (I found this to be particularly clever.)

At the start of the service, I heard the band play some contemporary Christian praise song that sounded mildly familiar. The band, to my surprise, sounded good. By this I am not referring to the skill or talent of the musicians but the *mix* sounded good. The vocalists and the instruments were equalized (EQ'd) properly, with each element clearly audible and not drowned out by one another. I had witnessed so many praise bands play in my life with such poor setups that made them sound horrible. To hear this one sound so good and so clear, and not muddled by the poor acoustics of a church, was indeed a great shock.

This shock is something that is not widely shared for many young Christians in the United States. For those who attend what are euphemistically called "contemporary" worship services, this level of technological sophistication and investment is not at all remarkable. Many churches, like my parents', now have two or more services with differing styles. Usually, the

earlier service is more traditional, sticking closer to a traditional liturgy and using hymns. Older members of the church usually attend this service. The later service does not follow a traditional liturgy. There is emphasis on "praise," a time where a band, alternatively called praise team, leads the congregation in contemporary worship songs. These are not subject to the power structure of a denomination, like hymnals are. The projection screen is crucial for this style of worship. The lyrics of the songs are projected onto the screen using computer software similar to Microsoft PowerPoint, like EasyWorship, which is specifically designed for this very purpose, as well as Mediashout and ProPresenter.

Shane Hipps, a Christian writer on issues of technology and teaching pastor at Mars Hills Church in Seattle, Washington, a church known for its technological ministry, has described contemporary Christian worship as increasingly "graphical, with a growing preference for the "experiential and intuitive." Thus, churches are more than ever looking to design "worship services that engage all five senses" (Hipps 2006:76). Worship, in other words, has become sensory.

The Barna Research Group, which produces studies primarily "pertaining to spiritual development, and facilitates the healthy spiritual growth of leaders, children, families and Christian ministries"(Barna Group 2008), stated in a recent report that two-thirds of Protestant churches currently have a large screen projection system that they use for services and other events. This is a huge jump from 2000, when just 39% of Protestant churches stated that they had such a system. Many of the churches within that percentage of Protestants, according to a National Public Radio report in 2005, were using technology to branch out and attempt to become "multi-site."

Quite simply, churches that are becoming so large that they are creating smaller "satellite" campuses can be placed under the heading of "multi-site"(Ludden 2005). What is distinct about these churches, as the Barna Group and NPR note, is their use of technology to

maintain forms of continuity between the various locations. This is done through mostly "simulcasting" aspects of worship services through large projection screens and heavy online ministry (which will be explored in the following chapter in greater detail), including online church, podcasts, email, and social networking site presence among other things.

Multi-site churches have become a bit of a fault line in some Christian circles, not only because of the capitalist franchising model that it seems to mirror, but also because of its intense incorporation of technology in all aspects of ministry. There are numerous articles and books that have appeared in recent times taking stock of "the multi-site *movement*"(Surratt 2009). Some of the criticisms, predictably, raise questions about pastoring: "How can a preacher pastor his flock when he cannot possibly know or meet every member of his church?" one article asks(Barnhart 2008). Further, many Christian leaders and pastors raise similar concerns about multi-site as they do with megachurches—the potential for the development of a cult of celebrity preacher. The same article quotes a pastor who says, "When the video service decision is made, there is a conscious decision made by the leadership that the personality (or teaching) of one man is more important than meaningful connection with the audience."

For churches that are large and wealthy enough, the most immediate matter of course is, as the Barna report states, the installation of an audiovisual (A/V) system in the main worship space. Having a high-tech worship space is, for these churches, crucial to providing a contemporary worship experience, which usually centers on a four-piece rock band, projection system, and a professional sound system. This is considered crucial to church growth, and is seen as one of the ways in which a church can attract newer (and younger) members.[23] Across

[23] "Church growth" is also the name of a movement organized around, what was formerly called, the American Society for Church Growth, which has recently changed its named to The Great Commission Research Network. The organization describes itself as "an affiliation of leaders who share research, examine case studies, hear from thought leaders, and network with fellow church leaders who are

the board, the idea of "growth" usually is couched in terms of creating a technologically-infused worship space, and with it, an engaging (read: young, more contemporary) worship experience. For them, space matters in a fundamental way because it transmits specific ideas about the "culture" of the church. As one professor of theology writes, "What values does your ministry facility communicate? Are they values you intend to communicate? What's your theology of space?"(Metzger 2009).

The alignment of church growth, architecture, technology and experience is clearly evident in Christian-oriented technology trade magazines and blogs. *Worship Facilities Magazine* and its parent magazine *Church Production Magazine* are by far the most prominent and most influential of these.[24] Within this order of discourse, we can see that there are certain trends and predominant ideas, the chief among them being that technologies and architecture have the ability to create worlds that affect a certain kind of religious experience. In nearly all of the articles and editorials that appear in *WFM* that deal with how church leaders can effectively create the ideal worship environment, the emphasis is quite often on "experience." One editorial reads:

> Houses of worship are finding that A/V installations offer a dynamic and often cost-effective means of expanding reach and growing membership. Whether the systems installed are intended to *enhance the experience* within a single worship area or

committed to helping expand the kingdom through effective disciple-making"(Great Commission Research Network n.d.).

[24] Both are published by Production Media, Inc., which also organizes a very large trade show and conference called WFX, geared towards pastors and church technology directors. *Church Production*, which has a circulation of 30,000, began publishing in 1999. In 2004, *Church Production* (from here on, *CPM*) partnered with another company, EH Publishing, to launch *Worship Facilities Magazine* (from here on, *WFM*). *WFM* differs from *CPM* as it targets "senior-level leaders in houses of worship including: pastors, executive pastors, business administrators, operation and facilities managers covering facilities design, construction, finance/fund-raising, operations and maintenance." A year later came the WFX, "an educational conference and tradeshow designed to bring together teams of decision makers from churches around the world"(Blackmore n.d.).

> designed to deliver the worship message to a broader group at multiple sites, to web users, or to television audiences, the planning and execution of each of these projects is key to its immediate and long-term success.(Thompson 2009. Emphasis added.)

It continues to describe the thought-process behind a church thinking about investing in a new A/V system. After making sure to list the usual questions about the goals of the church meeting the budget of the project, it adds:

> Because worship is a very personal experience, the key considerations in planning an A/V installation within a house of worship extend beyond the technical. Though well-established congregations holding services in historic buildings may be most inclined to be protective of their facilities when looking at new A/V installs, all varieties of houses of worship must focus on maintaining the preeminence of the message while minimizing the presence of the technology that delivers the message. (Thompson 2009)

In most of this discourse, we see this back and forth between encouraging church leaders to invest in digital technologies but to also "ensure the message." The relationship between the perceived message and digital technologies is even considered by clearly pro-technology Christian writers as a negotiation. It would not be a stretch then, to read this as the genuine concern of Christians about the danger of imposing the secular or profane into the sacred. However, judging by the numerous articles and editorials found in these Christian-oriented technology blogs and magazines, this is not the case. In fact, the "secular" stands as a positive signifier. To bring in elements of the secular into the worship environment is, at least in this literature, a good thing. An editorial detailing best practices for church leaders to incorporate video systems reads:

> Many churches want to present congregation members with an entertainment and education experience of the same quality they would get in a secular environment. Churches—and anyone else using video in a public venue today—have an advantage they've never before had in history: the possibilities are limited only by the staff's imaginations—and, of course, the project's budget.(Allcot 2009)

It is clear that there is not an invitation of the profane into the sacred but rather a separating out of the *quality* of entertainment and education in secular environments. Though this requires adopting some of the technologies of these environments, it seems that this style of argumentative parsing works to justify the use of digital technologies in worship in the minds of church leaders and others. But after these technologies are theologically justified, the most important "end" of digital technologies is the worship experience. Here, the recurring theme is providing an experience of transcendence. Worship spaces ideally "create a space and a base to transform lives—sometimes quite subtly—and harness youthful energy, pointing it in a positive, even transcendent, direction"(Webb 2009). What we have then in the techno-physical environment of the contemporary worship space is a conceptual alignment of a "secular" technological aesthetic and the religious experience of "transcendence."

The most immediate means by which churches attempt to create space conducive to a "transcendent experience" is through the use of video projection systems. Throughout the trade magazine literature, there is a detectable insistence on the mood-setting ability of projected images on large screens. This is done through a careful selection of images, and could range from a depiction of the Crucifix (for a Good Friday service for instance) or a picture of a lily. No matter what the image is, it is the sheer size of the image contributes most in the setting of the mood. Screens cannot only reach sizes usually associated with sports-arena

JumboTrons, but the recent trend in large churches has been multiple screens. The screen's presence is perhaps the most imposing when one enters into one of these environments.

In addition to the selection of images there is what is called IMAG—image magnification. Churches usually use this technique to provide live shots of the congregation on the projection screen throughout the service. Obviously, this requires the placement of cameras positioned in various places around the worship space. This has a particular effect on the worship experience. As one article in *Worship Facilities Magazine* states:

> …IMAG has it roots in the entertainment industry for large-scale events and concerts, with the idea being that it was difficult if not impossible for the people with seating far away from the stage to see anything going on, on the stage. The application of IMAG became popular in megachurches with the intent to *provide a sense of intimacy to the service (bringing the pastor closer to the congregation)*, where having the pastor "connect" with the congregation is very important. Initially, IMAG was rarely used in churches smaller than 1,500 seats or so. However, the technique has become more popular and its use is more widespread and effective in churches where there might be obstructed view seating (regardless of size). One might also see IMAG techniques applied in video venues or satellite churches where there is a local praise and worship band and other pastoral staff, while the senior or teaching pastor appears at the multiple locations via video. (Johnson 2010. Emphasis added.)

As the article notes, IMAG is used not simply for practical reasons (i.e. in order to allow the members in the space see what is happening at the altar) but also for its mood-creating effects. The way that the author describes it is through the framework of intimacy. It does not isolate the individual worshiper-spectator but rather nudges him or her towards an affective

experience of, what Max Scheler called, “fellow-feeling”(Scheler 1983). This especially apparent when images of other worshipers appear on the screens. It provides a feeling of association, of “being-with”(*Mit-sein*). IMAG then is not so much a means of experiencing “transcendence,” though it is largely described in such a way, but the opposite; it induces a feeling of closeness and involvement, what Sloterdijk would place under the banner of “intimate relationship space” of “spheres,” which he describes as “structures of constitutive being-in-each-other and being-with-each-other”(Sloterdijk 2011:544).

In this chapter, I will analyze the digital, sensory world of contemporary religious, specifically Protestant multi-site, worship spaces by viewing them as religio-technological “spheres,” which constitute “environments of feeling” through the aesthetic and imagistic deployment of these technologies. First, I situate these religio-technological worlds of contemporary Christian worship spaces in the history of religious architecture, in order to take stock of their liturgical and experiential effects since the practice of religious architecture has always operated with the fundamental assumption that the environment itself could affect religious experience. I then ground this thesis in an examination of LifeChurch.tv, one of the largest multi-site churches in the United States today, whose use of technology has been widely commented upon within and outside of Christian circles. I provide an auto-ethnographic analysis of the worship experience (and the digital technologies that facilitate it) of one of its thirteen campus, focusing on how the technologies impart a sense of connection and bonding with the pastor and other worshipers who are in distant locations through a formation of a “world.” I argue that the resulting digital environment of the technologized worship space points towards a larger shift in ideas around Christian worship, which I call “liturgical aesthetics,” which emphasizes embodiment and affectivity that are specifically actualized by digital, especially visual, environments.

Space and liturgy in religious architecture

It is clear from the discussion of Christian technology magazines and blogs that worship spaces of today are no longer the solemn sanctuaries of yesteryear but have become, with the onset of digital technologies, modular, multipurpose places that resemble concert venues and theaters as much as they do Riverside Church in New York City, the bastion of the Gothic revival in the history of American church architecture. In order to delve deeper into the digital world of contemporary Christian worship spaces and their liturgical, experiential effects as well as their implications for religio-technological "worlding," it is necessary, first, to examine, albeit briefly, Christian architectural history, since the practice of religious architecture has always operated with the fundamental assumption that the environment itself could affect religious experience.

In *From Temple to Meetinghouse*, Harold W. Turner provides two typological terms to view the history of Christian religious architecture—*domus dei* and *domus ecclesiae*. *Domus dei* refers to the earliest of sacred places such as the temple, which comes of the Greek verb "temno," meaning, "to cut" or "mark out (as sacred)." To be sure, the sacred, as consistent with the perspectives of Durkheim and Eliade, is always an area that is in relation (usually oppositional) to a given space. The temple, as Turner suggests, is "a special area…where divine actions occur, omens are given, and sacrifices offered in a sacred precinct"(H. Turner 1979:16). Indeed, the earliest temples were, in the main, shrines not necessarily religious buildings. They were not built for the assembly of a crowd of worshipers. To the contrary,

> [o]nly the shrine itself, protecting the sacred object of the god from careless intrusion by the outside world, could be regarded as a sacred building and then only in a derivative fashion; its later elaboration into a temple, a richly decorated or impressive palace-like

> structure fit for the residence of a god, must not be allowed to obscure this point.(H. Turner 1979:16)

The *domus dei* or the temple-type, according to Turner, is the dominant form of architecture throughout the Old Testament. The Holiest of Holies or Tabernacle had been thought to be the dwelling place of God. It was mobile and in tent-form becoming stationary only later.[25] For Turner, the history of Christian architecture beginning with the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus is one of eventual *de-sanctification of place*. The temple, he contends, is transplanted onto the community of believers and no longer to a physical place. Thus, there is a transition "from place to person" in the New Testament. Turner writes:

> The absolute and final nature of Jesus' replacement of the physical and spatial form of the sanctuary is dramatically expressed in the synoptic gospels' accounts of the rending of the temple veil on the day of Jesus' death…[T]he way to God's presence is now open for all, or else the whole temple, starting with its outer curtain, is to be destroyed.(H. Turner 1979:149)

Here, Turner is attempting to tell the history of Christianity and the development of Christology in phenomenologico-architectural terms, by suggesting that the death of Christ brought forth not only a new form of radical Judaism (Christianity) but had also consequences for how sacred space was understood. "The Church" was no longer the dwelling-place of divine presence but displaced onto the community of believers. The setting of worship was now "in the place of everyday life"(H. Turner 1979:150).

[25] In the Old Testament, the Tabernacle was mobile up until the entrance and conquering of Canaan. It was not "set in stone," so to speak, until the establishment of the First Temple under Solomon.

The synagogue, which had existed concurrently with the temple, was a non-consecrated place of prayer and learning. Any Jew was able to build a synagogue if he wished and had the means. This was the model upon which the early Christian (1st-2nd centuries CE) house-church was built. This resulted in, according to Turner,

> …a new phenomenological form we propose to call the meeting room, or in its larger manifestations, the meeting house, and within the Christian tradition use the term *domus ecclesiae* in contrast to the *domus dei* represented by the temple. It is of the essence of this new form that the room itself has no special sanctity. It is quite different from those other forms of household religion focused on a domestic shrine; in early Roman and ancient Vedic religion this was the only or most important sanctuary, and even where temples have multiplied the domestic altar or images have often retained their place.(H. Turner 1979:153)

This new form is, for Turner, the genesis of what we today understand to be a house of worship; it is the conjunction of the sacred place and place of assembly.

The *domus ecclesiae* functioned far more flexibly than *domus dei*. Turner describes it as such:

> With the growth and organization of the community man of these house-churches assumed a wide range of functions and acquired further rooms in the domestic complex, especially in the larger houses of wealthier members or the many-storied multi-roomed tenement buildings of a city like Rome. Rooms were required not only for worship, with perhaps special accommodation for the Eucharist and for baptisms, but also for catechetical and charitable purposes, for the residence of ministers, for

> administration, meetings, social gatherings, as a library and as a reliquary, as a school, and as a hospice for the sick or the indigent, or for traveling Christians. Such a church had become what would in our times be called a *Christian community center*, and had ceased to be a mere annex within a private house.(Turner 1979:159. Emphasis added.)

Though political and other forces (mostly the Christianization of Rome) would play out so that the *domus dei* would reign as the dominant Christian model of the house of worship up to the 16th century when the Reformation would bring back the *domus ecclesiae* in full force, it is this rather unusual moment in the history of Christian architecture that is so revealing for this study.

The relatively short interregnum between the temple and the Christian *domus dei* forms has perhaps the most similarities with the churches that I'm describing here. Though it may seem that my presentation of Turner's historical analysis relies upon a strong break between the two types, there are, as he argues, four chief functions of all worship spaces, whether temple or meeting-house—(1) center, (2) meeting-point, (3) microcosm, and (4) transcendent-immanent presence. This typology of the elements of sacred place, inspired greatly by Eliade, are indeed what provides historical, phenomenological and architectural continuity between all of these various forms. Nevertheless, the modularity of the early churches bears special importance, as it shares many of the characteristics of the technological environments of contemporary worship spaces.

Today, what we normally call a "church" in the United States is usually in the Gothic or neo-Gothic style. This is an effect of the Gothic revival initiated the 19th century. The original Gothic movement in church building during the late-medieval period represented a certain movement towards "the numinous." The famous definition of the numinous as "Mysterium tremendum et fascinans"(Otto 1958 Chapter 5) by Rudolf Otto is key here as it undergirded by the dominance of the *domus dei* form in Western Christian churches. The sanctity of the

worship space, in the Gothic, and later, Renaissance architectural schema, is rooted in the attempt to induce feeling of the church, mirroring the experience of meeting God. The worship space, which was intended to be "awe-inspiring" and "ethereal," was thus thought of as a meeting-point, a communicative zone, if you will, between the worshiper and God. As Turner rightly notes, this was very much a response to the Eastern Orthodox liturgy, which had greater emphasis on *experiencing* God through an emphasis on sacraments and visual aids—a far cry from the austerity of usually text-oriented Protestantism.

The American Gothic revival in the 19th-20th centuries shared some of these features. American neo-Gothic churches, like their medieval counterparts, were constructed to produce a "devotional" or "worshipful" atmosphere(H. Turner 1979:248). While for the classically Gothic churches, the "sense of worshipping amid a great community of the sanctified" was attached to "its hierarchical orders"(H. Turner 1979:190), this did not translate to the neo-Gothic movement among American Protestants in the 20th century. As Turner writes:

> Among Protestants…the trend has been to cleanse worship from the excessively individualistic, subjective and rationalistic elements that have crept into it...and to restore the corporate aspect, to liberate laymen from clergy-dominated services by providing more meaningful opportunities for lay participation, and to urge the more frequent celebration of the Eucharist in the manner of the early Christians. (H. Turner 1979:312)

For the neo-Gothic, the recovery of the bodily (corporate) aspect of worship was no longer linked with the respect for hierarchy. This is of course a result of the theological particularities of Protestantism but also representative of a change in the thinking behind what constituted a worship space.

> The church building in this view was no longer the house of the people of God for their common worship, but the House of God which they were allowed to enter with due reverence; they must remain in the nave and refrain from entering the chancel which was for the choir, or the sanctuary reserved for the priesthood.(H. Turner 1979:244)

For Turner, the Gothic revivalist churches in the America represent the high point of "confusion" in the history of religious architecture. By this, he means not so much that Christians were confused about what they were building but were overturning the traditional symbolic, liturgical and theological definitions of specific architectural styles. The neo-Gothic churches in America, for instance, combine the highly Protestantized auditorium and the Eastern Orthodox sanctuary. Turner argues that this is a symptom of a general trend in the 19th-20th centuries in church building—"the rejection of the temple for what may be called the tent-house"(H. Turner 1979:313). In turn, this trend in church building mirrors a more general trend in modern architecture—"a reaction from the elaborate and pretentious to the simple and direct, from concern with façade to stress on the functional"(H. Turner 1979:313).[26]

While acknowledging the vicissitudes of architectural styles in expressed in churches, we can hesitantly state that the contemporary multi-site church in America, then, trends towards being a "machine for worship." The worship space becomes a modular entity, a "mixed form." Instead of it holding a singular, consecrated object, such as the Ark in the case of the Tabernacle, the mixed form of contemporary Protestant churches is *domus dei et ecclesiae*. It is both a "field of action" and "shrine"(H. Turner 1979:339). We can thusly

[26] There is no doubt that the influence of Bauhaus and other modernist architectural movements on Turner's periodization. He even riffs on Le Corbusier writing, "the church then becomes merely a *machine* for performing the liturgy parallel to the house conceived as a machine for living"(H. Turner 1979:325).

summarize the significance of Turner's work with two points: First, he provides an important historical arc for looking at the development of worship spaces in general. Indeed, his thesis "from temple to meetinghouse" is very consistent with how contemporary Christian worship spaces and churches generally are thought of—as not necessarily sacred places in the first place. Second, he insists that the study of worship spaces bears especially on liturgy. Though this may seem like an obvious point—that worship spaces affect worship practices—it is nevertheless the case that Turner's point of view places the changing nature of liturgy as well as the reform movements around liturgy at the center of the development of different architectural styles in religious architecture.

The interaction of architecture and technologies

These two points—*the "denuminization" of worship space* and *the liturgical impact of architecture*—that comprise the bulk of Turner's contribution are especially important when taking stock of the ways in which digital technologies have, in recent times, become integral to a church's digital architecture. This is clear when looking at an actual church environment that displays a high level of technological incorporation, such as LifeChurch.tv.

LifeChurch.tv (the ".tv" is actually part of its official name) was started in 1996 in Oklahoma City, OK. Today, it is, according to some sources, the second largest Protestant church in America, with thirteen campuses across the US, not to mention the various "network" churches[27] and others who use LifeChurch resources(Grossman 2009). It exemplifies the ethos of multi-site *par excellence*. Denominationally, it is affiliated with the very

[27] LifeChurch has two channels for resource sharing. Churches that are part of the LifeChurch.tv network use various resources including video teaching for more than one experience a week. They maintain full autonomy and are not beholden to LifeChurch in any financial or other way, except to include "a part of the LifeChurch.tv Network" when using LifeChurch materials. There is also LifeChurch.tv Open, which allows for picking and choosing relevant materials and resources without any claim of association with LifeChurch.tv(Lifechurch.tv 2008, 2007).

small Evangelical Covenant Church, which has its roots in Swedish Lutheranism, though Craig Groeschel, founder and senior pastor of LifeChurch, was trained and served as a Methodist pastor, before breaking off to launch LifeChurch.tv. While many megachurches are indeed evangelical, multi-site churches, as mentioned above, are characterized less so by their evangelicalism but for their "style" or culture. Multi-site churches tend to be younger, with much of its congregants ranging from ages 30-40. They also tend to be overwhelmingly white and middle-class.[28]

Besides its remarkable growth in numbers, it has garnered much press attention in the past decade due to its heavy use of new media technologies in both its physical worship spaces as well as the launch of its Internet Campus, which meets strictly online. While many use technologies in order to serve their growth model, LifeChurch.tv has, in many ways, built its entire *raison d'être* around technology. This is largely attributable to its multi-site character.

Being multi-site poses similar technological challenges for all churches, not just LifeChurch. They tend to revolve around the issue of liturgy. How will the message (sermon) be transmitted—satellite? pre-recorded video files? How much of worship will rely on satellite feed and how much will be in-person? How will the music be played? In addition to liturgical challenges, there are other challenges, in particular to what Christians call "fellowship." How does a church with several different campuses create a feeling of *one* Church? How does it create a sense of "community"? As Christian theologians remind us, these two sets of questions are not in anyway mutually exclusive. Not only do many liturgies include the reinforcement of "community," for instance, in the communal reading of *The Apostles' Creed*, a staple of many Western Christian traditions, but are by their very being, a means of connecting

[28] This is most definitely the case in LifeChurch—Albany, which is, according to Joe Dingwall, the worship and development pastor, 85% white.

the individual church to the Universal church. Thus, the study of technology in worship spaces necessarily includes the dual focus on liturgy and ecclesiology.

Let us look at how this unfolds in a particular religious setting, LifeChurch.tv's Albany campus. The Albany campus, in addition to being one of LifeChurch's newer campuses, is also among its smallest. Of the roughly 26,000 who attend one of the thirteen campuses of LifeChurch every week, the Albany campus only makes up 2%(Dingwall 2010). Its pastoral staff consists of just two pastors—the campus pastor and worship pastor. The campus pastor's duties are what we would traditionally associate with the senior pastor of a given congregation. The worship pastor is responsible for all of the technical ins and outs of the church. At LifeChurch—Albany, this turns out to be quite a bit, as much of the worship service, which LifeChurch across the board calls "experience," is wholly reliant upon the smooth functioning of various technologies.[29]

Allow me to narrate a typical worship experience with an eye on the technologies and aspects of worlding. LifeChurch—Albany's worship space, while small, seating only 200 congregants at a time, is nevertheless a digital, media environment. One of the first things that worshipers, who come to one of the two experiences on a given Sunday, see to their right is the large tech booth, where the audio/visual/lighting equipment are all stored (Figure 1).

[29] As of this writing, the pastoral staff has been reduced to one.

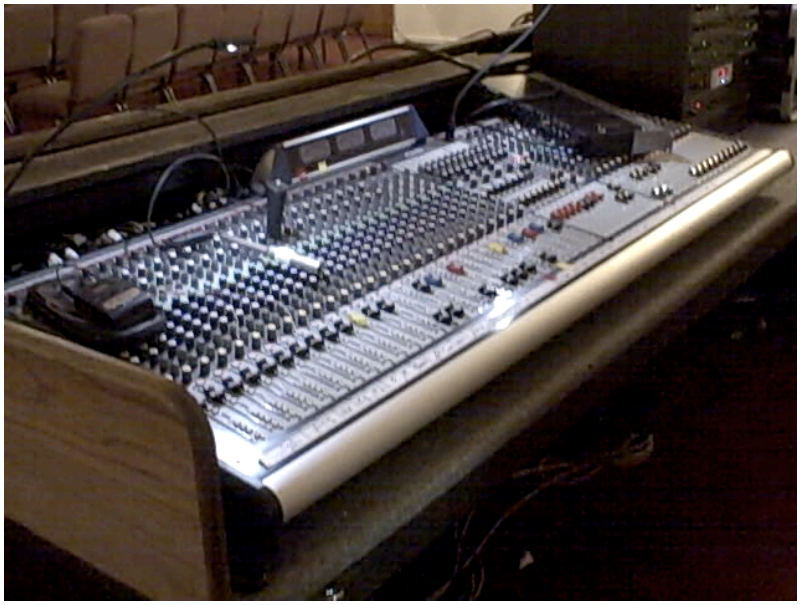

Figure 1: Audio Mixing Board

Towards the front, where the stage is, are three screens—one dropdown projection screen and two 32" television monitors flanking it on either side (Figure 2). When you look up, there are flying speakers (in audio technology parlance, this means hanging from the ceiling) and spotlights as well as numerous acoustic panels hanging from the ceiling to counteract some of the sonic inconsistencies of the dome-shaped ceiling.[30] On the side of the stage are two "intelligent"[31] or moving lights that, like their name suggests, are able to swivel and move. A lighting board or software that is behind the tech booth controls their movement.

[30] Dingwall on numerous occasions has expressed the challenges of the dome. The building of Albany campus of LifeChurch, because it was a result of a merger of a church that had already occupied that building, was not new construction. The acoustics of the dome is primed for a purely acoustic liturgy.

[31] Intelligent lighting usually refers to automated or user-based lighting typically found in many performance spaces such as concert venues and auditoriums.

Figure 2: Projection Screen and Two TV Monitors

On the stage itself are microphones, instruments and amplifiers for the band, which consists of two guitars (one for rhythm, one for lead), a drum set behind an isolation screen, and a bass. Before the experience actually begins, background music plays over the speakers. It is not Christian music. As Dingwall explained to me, the pre- and post-experience music is always "secular music" as he put it. This, he says, is unique to LifeChurch. "Because we have the person who isn't familiar with church in mind," he tells me(Dingwall 2010). At 9:30 or 11:00, the two experience start times, Dingwall and his band take the stage. He then asks everyone to stand. Usually, their first song is a secular "cover," a recognizable song—sometimes a top 40 hit, sometimes a song like the theme to the *Ghostbusters* movie.

After this, a video clip plays an all three screens simultaneously, which announces, "The LifeChurch Experience begins now." It is akin to the opening graphics of a cartoon—a short animated "film" so to speak. It's flashy, the graphics hitting you from all angles. Center, left and right. Even your peripheral vision cannot wrest free of the grip of the graphics. It is at this exact moment that the media environment truly turns on. It is the cosmogonic moment. It is the

creation of the techno-religious world. All of the technical elements are set into motion. The house lights are dimmed, and the lighting system goes into full effect.

It is no wonder that LifeChurch adamantly calls their worship services “experiences.” As Bobby Gruenewald, LifeChurch’s Innovation Leader, relayed to me, “It is intentional. It’s not service. We’re trying to help you experience God”(Gruenewald 2010).

During the eighteen minutes or so that the praise time happens, Dingwall’s wife, who controls all of the video aspects, uses a software called ProPresenter in order to project the lyrics of the praise songs as well as background images that resemble stock desktop wallpaper images on computers(Figure 3). ProPresenter, made by a company called Renewed Vision, is a “professional worship presentation” tool. It allows “an operator to control a presentation on one screen, while dynamically affecting the visuals and lyrics experienced by an audience on one or more screens,” as it states on its web site. The operator, at LifeChurch—Albany, uses ProPresenter to not only control the visualizations but also to display the lyrics of the songs that are being sung by Dingwall and the band. She is able to time the display of the lyrics much in the way that karaoke lyrics are displayed but in this case manually (though ProPresenter does have an automation function). The background images seem to be pre-selected based on the lyrics and “feel”(i.e., tempo) of the song. For up-tempo, energetic songs, the images behind the lyrics tend to move at a faster pace and during slower songs, they tend to be more static (Figure 4).

Figure 3: ProPresenter Software User View

Figure 4: ProPresenter Audience View (LifeChurch—Fort Worth)

During all of this, another staff member (*not* volunteers as all of the tech and band members are paid) is controlling the lighting system using a design system called Vista, made

by a company called Jands. There are several packages that are on the market, some which include both hardware (a physical console), but LifeChurch—Albany uses the software package, and the lighting designer sits behind a computer to control the lights through a user interface that has all of the lighting components visually represented on a graphical replica of the space on the screen. From there, the user is able to adjust the spreads, cross lights and cross fades throughout the experience. For example, while the praise team at the Albany campus plays a particular song that includes the phrase, “In the darkness, God’s light shines through,” two intelligent lights on either side of the stage shoot beams of light directly towards the ceiling.

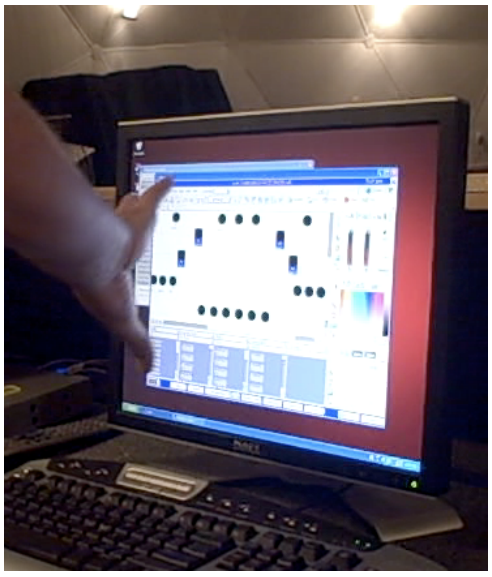

Figure 5: Jands Vista User View

Meanwhile, the audio engineer, who Dingwall informs me has gone on tour with many professional acts, sits behind the mixer board and computer. He is controlling the levels of the various instruments and vocalists but also supervising the backing track that is running through ProTools, which is a digital audio workstation that is used for both recording and performance

settings. It is *the* industry standard and is used in all LifeChurch campuses. At LifeChurch—Albany, they run audio and video clips through ProTools. Prior to each weekend, Dingwall, having already selected which songs the band will "perform"(in many Christian circles, the worship band is seen *not* as performing but as "leading" worship). Because his band is, in his estimation, "bare bones," meaning there are not as many musical elements as he would like, he records many musical parts and plays alongside them in his "live" performances on Sundays. It makes the band "sound fuller," Dingwall says. This is facilitated by the use of in-ear monitors, with which the band members can all hear each other but also all of the instruments that are on the backing track, which is coming through ProTools. Of top priority, in any live musical performance with a backing track, is what is called "the click." The "click" is shorthand for click-track, which is a metronome that can be heard by all the performers with in-ear monitors but not to the worshipping audience. This is important so that the recorded parts and played parts are all properly synced. If not, there would be a very noticeable sound clash.

Figure 6: Master Clock and Satellite Feed User View

And, of utmost importance, however, the click makes sure that the band keeps their worship set to exactly eighteen minutes. The experiences at LifeChurch—Albany, and indeed in all of its campuses, are simultaneous, which is quite a feat since there are thirteen campuses as well as Church Online. This simultaneity is produced through a master clock, which is synced up to Global Operations Center of LifeChurch in Oklahoma. There the master clock is set and synced up to all of the other clocks at the many campuses around the country(Figure 6). In order to ensure that the "teaching" (sermon), which comes in live through satellite, starts at the right time, there are specific time markers to which the worship staff has to adhere. The first is at the 18-minute mark, at which the praise portion must stop. At this point, a spot light hits the campus pastor Eric Hodgins, who addresses the audience with a few welcoming words and asks the people who are there for the first time to fill out a "communication card." He *must* stop at the 21-minute mark because that is when the tech staff goes to the live satellite feed from Oklahoma.

Then, the spotlight fades away and a short film begins to play on all three screens. The picture quality is crisp; it is in HD (high definition). It is no longer than five minutes, and doubles as a transition into the message or "teaching" delivered by Craig Groeschel, senior pastor of LifeChurch.tv, and an introduction. For this particular sermon, about how to deal with negative thoughts, the film depicts a group of people (some old, some young, some white, some black) walking into a white-walled room with permanent markers, who then proceed to write what are supposed to be disparaging things about themselves, such as "You are not skinny enough." After doing so, they walk out of the room.

After the short clip, which runs about five minutes, the teaching begins. The opening tableau is of Groeschel, equipped with a headset microphone, seated on a high stool, dressed in jeans and a polo shirt, with his sermon notes and Bible on a table besides him on the very

large stage of the Edmond Campus of LifeChurch.tv. Behind him is a staged set, consisting of yellow container bins that say “toxic” on them, going along with the theme of the sermon series. He begins his sermon. While he delivers his message, camera angles are constantly changing. There is a moving camera along the base of the stage pointed upwards at him and there is a wide view as well as a single, probably mounted camera to which he occasionally looks at directly, when he reaches a particularly important or emotional part of his sermon. This is facilitated through a technology called IMAG (image magnification), mentioned earlier (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Groeschel looking directly at the camera

Figure 8: Angle 1

Figure 9: Angle 2

Groeschel is clearly a seasoned veteran when it comes to preaching not only to his immediate audience, the Edmond campus, but also to the cameras, without looking like he is cognizant of them. He is able to tarry this fine line of being media-trained and also seeming like a real person by using a variety of techniques to interact with the audience. For instance, he frequently takes straw polls, asking people in the attendance to raise their hands if, to use an example from the same sermon about negative thoughts, "they've ever felt debilitating doubt before." Quite surprisingly, the audience *in the Albany campus* raised their hands even though a pastor fed in through a satellite feed was posing this question. A similar dynamic is at play when Groeschel makes jokes, many of which are self-deprecating. In fact, like good preachers, his examples are autobiographical. He also makes it a point to make light of the fact that he is on-screen. At one point during a bit of a divergence in his sermon, he says that many people, when they meet him for the first time, say, "You're a lot smaller than I thought you'd be." He noted, "Just for the record. It's never good to hear that…in any context," tipping his toe in sexual innuendo. This joke was especially a hit at the Albany campus. Thus, there is a sense of comfort in the worship space as he preaches. I even saw couples with arms around each other

and other worshipers furiously thumbing their mobile phones, tweeting or updating their Facebook status about the message.

During the teaching, the worshipers are seated and rapt in attention. It is quite hard to get bored while Groeschel preaches. This speaks not really to the level of theological sophistication of his teaching but rather to the size and layout of the screens, as well as what they display. Throughout the teaching, visual aids appear whenever Groeschel makes any reference to the Bible. The Bible verse to which he alludes appears below on a graphic strip, almost mimicking the running headlines on the bottom of the screen when one turns to CNN. Like CNN, there is a snazzy graphic that appears, which, in the case of this particular sermon, which was the first of a series called "Toxic," was a yellow biohazard triangle (Figure 10). It is assumed that worshipers do not need a Bible during worship. Groeschel always says, "*if* you have your Bible, turn to…" Groeschel is clearly a familiar presence to the worshipers of its Albany campus. The largeness and multiplicity of the images, projected on the central screen and the two television monitors, *envelopes* the worshiper.

Figure 10: Bible verses appear throughout the teaching as Groeschel makes reference to them

This, however, does not last throughout the duration of the experience. After the message, there is a transition into what is called, in evangelical churches, a "time of decision," alternatively known as "an altar call." During this time, soft, red lights hit the stage and soothing, droning electronic ambient music plays. (In fact, I peered over the audio engineer and the name of the song file is "invitation music.") From behind the projection screen emerges Hodgins, the campus pastor, who speaks to the worshipers, asking if anyone is "wanting someone to pray," clearly a "euphemization," as political anthropologist James Scott would put it(Scott 1989), to publicly display one's commitment to God and Jesus Christ "as his or her personal savior." This is the only "confrontational" part of the experience. If no one "comes to God," the campus pastor does a general prayer and goes onto a time of "giving," and ushers pass around several collection plates. These portions of the experience are presided upon by Hodgins. Then the house lights dim and another clip shows, showing the same white room with scrawled negative thoughts all across the walls. A man in a yellow HAZMAT suit walks in with a paint roller and tub of white paint. He proceeds to paint over the negative thoughts from earlier in the experience and walks out. The group that had originally written those things on the wall proceeds to write self-affirming statements on the walls. The house lights come up in the worship space and the experience ends just as it started, with an animated clip.

Though I've only described a single worship experience at Albany, there is good reason to believe that it is typical of all LifeChurch campuses. This is because not only are the teachings standardized but also nearly all of the technological aspects that facilitate the worship experience are. This allows for easy troubleshooting, of which there is plenty of occasions, especially since LifeChurch.tv relies so heavily on technology. When there is an issue with the satellite feed or a syncing issue with audio, Dingwall, the worship pastor, calls a helpline and is guided through the problem remotely. This can only happen because the

worship tech staff in LifeChurch headquarters in Oklahoma is familiar with all of the equipment.[32]

The continuity of experiences across the campuses is also ensured by its Global Operations Center (Figure 11). According to project manager at LifeChurch.tv Sunny Thomas, who works at the GOC:

> At the GOC, our leaders gather and watch the experiences at many of our campuses. This is accomplished by using a device at each campus call[sic] a Slingbox. We connect a camera, like a Sony HandyCam to the Slingbox and then connect the Slingbox to our network. With this setup, we are able to watch what is going live at our campuses in New York, Tennessee, Texas, Oklahoma, and Arizona.(Thomas 2008b)

Today, in the updated GOC, LifeChurch.tv leaders can watch up to ten experiences at the same time, while previously (at the time of the statement above), it could only support the watching of four or five. In addition, at the GOC, one is able to monitor the Internet Campus (now called Church Online) but also the Attendance Management System, which shows "real-time attendance data from all the campuses"(Thomas 2008a). It looks like the White House Situation Room, containing four television monitors, two on either side of a large projection screen, reminiscent of the layout of screens in the worship space of the campuses. The projection screen contains a 4x3 grid, with each box displaying the worship space of each campus. At the very bottom, is the official clock that all of the campuses must organize their live components around. In fact, on the wall behind the tech booth in the Albany campus is a

[32] In fact, the continuity extends to even the children's and youth ministries. For instance, all of the curricular content for Bible study on all levels are sent to all of the LifeChurch campuses in a box for every age group at certain intervals.

digital clock with red letters, which is synced up to this clock. The central clock in software and other technologies that require syncing is called, appropriately enough, a "global clock."

Figure 11: LifeChurch.tv Global Operations Center, Edmond, OK. Photo: Sunny Thomas

The GOC is used, according to the project manager, to provide feedback and support after each experience. To be sure, however, there is undoubtedly, a "disciplinary" tinge to this as well. Dingwall states that the camera placed in the back of the worship space, which feeds a live stream to the Global Operations Center, is "lovingly" called "the Big Brother camera" by the worship staff at LifeChurch—Albany(Dingwall 2010). And to be sure, while this is fodder that feeds a Foucaultian nightmare,[33] it is, at least for the particular interests of this chapter, evidence of the *digital* and *imagistic* method of LifeChurch.tv's world-forming.

Liturgical aesthetics and sensational forms

[33] See Poster, Mark. 1990. "Foucault and Databases: Participatory Surveillance." in *The mode of information: poststructuralism and social context*. University of Chicago Press, for a Foucaultian analysis of contemporary digital technologies.

As is the case for the Albany campus, the building of a physical religo-technological world-as-network is reliant upon the ability for media technologies to "activate" certain affective capacities of its viewers/users vis-à-vis perceptual experience(Clough 2009). In my observations, LifeChurch, in its use of digital media in worship spaces, and especially its reliance upon digital imagery, creates a decidedly aesthetic response in its worship experience. As Ben Simpson of *Collide Magazine*, a magazine on new media technologies geared towards Christians, writes:

> …[D]igital artwork can inspire and invoke the imagination, tapping the affective dimension of our humanity. Good art produces awe, opening up new realities heretofore unknown, including the reality of God.
>
> Awe is a sense of wonderment, an overwhelming recognition of deep and profound beauty, wherein the soul is not only moved to contemplation, but is *drawn in* by that which is beholden. When the Church gathers, we make God visible and thus create space for the faithful—and our companions with reservations about Christianity—to have an encounter with God. This encounter can bring about not only a cognitive response, but an affective response that captures the heart. Media that points to God can lead us not only into newfound understanding, but to fall in love. (Simpson 2010)

Simpson's discussion of the affective dimension of the digital image, which he calls "digital artwork," only makes sense when there are no technical glitches. The technical smoothness of this sphere, from the music, lights and visuals of praise time to the very end of the post-teaching video clip, must be unbroken or else the wonderment that the worshiper feels will be shattered. It is not simply about relaying a message but creating an orientation of

the worshiper's affect to *receive* God. This can only occur through technical perfection. Indeed, Dingwall informs me that a mantra among all of the worship pastors of all the LifeChurch campuses is, "Excellence honors God and inspires others." The excellence referred to by Dingwall is the same "excellence" referenced by another Christian technology writer Matt Capps:

> In fact I would argue that all aesthetical endeavors within the context of a worship service should function to supplement God's word in focusing people toward the one true God. Therefore, striving for excellence in our employment of visual artistry is not only an aesthetic endeavor but a theological endeavor. As media enthusiast Mike Apple once told me, "Excellence is when media becomes a transparent aspect of the service and not the focal point." Just as the teacher should seek to get out of the way so that God can speak through him, media should be a vehicle through which God can be seen as beautiful…Humanity's apprehension of aesthetics, and even its ability to create, are distinct ways God has chosen to reveal himself…Ultimately, our motivation for excellence in artistic expression supersedes philosophy, is grounded in theology, and is expressed as worship. (Capps 2008)

Thus, technological excellence and beauty, or awe, of God come together, in Christian technological discourse, under the heading of liturgical aesthetics. What is striking is that both Simpson and Capps choose to point to the visual rather than the auditory in describing the various ways in which the worshiper's affect is affected. The image is, for both of them, crucial.

To help us interpret the links between the digital image and affect proposed by Simpson and Capps, we may turn to the work of French sociologist Michel Maffesoli, whose concept of "the imaginal world" will help us better understand the affective dimension of

images, and anthropologist Birgit Meyer, whose concept of “sensational forms” will help aid us in taking stock of some of the broader consequences to religiosity that “liturgical aesthetics” may be pointing towards, especially in the context of worlding in worship spaces.

While we live in a world inundated with images, the key to understanding what images do, Maffesoli notes, is to start from the *a priori* that there is no innate “content” of an image, that it is fundamentally a medium, a transmitter. As such, “it does not pretend to exactitude or verisimilitude” but acts rather as a vector of communion, “a support, for other things.” He explains:

> [T]he image is relative, in the sense that it does not pretend to the absolute and that it puts things into relation. It is this very relativism that renders it suspect, since it does not allow the certainty, the security engendered by dogma, or even the good abstract reasoning that does not embarrass itself with factual, sensory, or emotional contingencies or other "frivolous" situations with which daily existence is filled.(Maffesoli 1996a:72–73)

In Maffesoli’s formulation, the image “matters less for the message that it is supposed to carry than for the emotion it conveys” (Maffesoli 1996a:74), a twist on the McLuhanian dictum of the medium being the message. For Maffesoli then, “communication” must be understood outside the cognitive/linguistic realm of signs and symbols but rather in terms of feeling. Thus, in this sense, he concludes that the image is *orgiastic* (“orge” pertaining to passion) and *aesthetic* (“aisthesis” in the Greek pertaining to the senses).

Anticipating what he calls the “moralist critique of the spectacle,” Maffesoli argues insistently that the image does not operate within the ream of a “purely rational real”(Maffesoli 1996a:75). Therefore, to relegate the image to the rational is inadequate, as it commits the sin

of conceiving the image in purely content-centric terms. This, however, comes with an epistemological price of uncertainty:

> …what allows the being-in-the-world of each individual, or of any whole social ensemble, what grounds the being-togetherness of any political or social organization—in short, the images, the sight, the being seen—everything is suspect and potentially fiendish. (Maffesoli 1996a:79)

The image can then be said to create a feeling of "being-with" without an appeal to cognitive or linguistic categories. Yet he is quick to note that this is not an "abdication of mind" or anti-rationalism for its own sake. To the contrary, he is offering a new wrinkle in the theory of worlding, based on an alternative view of knowledge, one that comes close to what Pierre Bourdieu often calls "practical knowledge" or "knowledge without concepts"(Bourdieu 1984).

Thus, it can be said that the image, in its ability to create both aesthetic and orgiastic regimes of "feeling with," partakes in a cosmogony of sorts, constructing "a matrix in which all the elements of earthly data interact, resonate in concert, or correspond to each other in multiple ways and in a constant reversibility"(Maffesoli 1996a:76). The image facilitates a

> global conception of the world that, beyond, the different separations of distinguishing thought, stresses the organicity of the whole and the complementarity of the different elements of this whole. The image is a kind of "mesocosm," a middle world between the macro- and the micro-cosm between the universal and the concrete, between the species and the individual, between the general and the particular, whence comes its own efficacy and the stakes that it represents.(Maffesoli 1996a:83)

Is this not a description of the image's spherological, or foaming, potentialities?

The image-as-mesocosm allows us to think about it as the link "established around images we share with others." Maffesoli suggests that the "bonding" function of the image indicates the contamination of religiosity into all of social life (Maffesoli 1996a:88). Sporting events, musical concerts and opportunities for collective consumption such as the one in the US called "Black Friday" are all Durkheimian "collective effervescences," in which the basis of the shared sentiments and emotions are largely mediated through images.

In the case of the latter, the four-letter word "SALE" (always in caps) no longer offers up the calculus of a cost-benefit analysis to the throng of shoppers on that Friday after the ritualized Romanesque gorging of American stomachs known as "Thanksgiving" of all things. (We Americans tend to appreciate this kind of irony.) SALE elicits not only a psychological response a bodily one, calling up desire off the bench, where it is usually the sixth man, ready to get into the game, and join everyone else who is experiencing "retail therapy" as Carrie, the lead character in the famed television series *Sex and the City* so well put it. It is, as Maffesoli describes particularly well, like a "trance" transmitted through "affective contagion"(Maffesoli 1996a:94).

> I feel myself other, and with the other I participate in a joint emotion that may be explosive or gentle, brief or dragged out at length, but that in every instance is intense, translating a very strong tribal organicity and best expressing the pregnant import of an image, or of an ensemble of images, in a given social body. (Maffesoli 1996a:94)

SALE, in this instance, does not have much semiotic value. It embodies the linkage "that mysterious cement—nonlogical, nonrational" needed for the religious outpouring of energy that is the consumer culture experience in the United States.

No longer is this effervescence usually reserved for "proper" religious activities such as festivals, liturgies and rituals, but it is, as Maffesoli argues, spread into the quotidian. We can thus speak of a "rebirth of homo religiosus" in everyday life. As Maffesoli rightly notes, since this neo-*homo religiosus* is rooted in the image, we can look at it as a variant of *homo aestheticus*, since

> the renaissance of a social individual and a society resting not on distinction from the other, nor any longer on a rational contract linking to the other, but rather on *an empathy that makes me, with the other, a participant in a larger ensemble, contaminated all the way through by collective ideas, shared emotions, and images of all kinds.* (Maffesoli 1996a:91. Emphasis added.)

Here, "aesthetic" means something very specific. As opposed to its cloudy definition as something to do with how something looks, it is "that which makes [the viewer] feel the sentiments, sensations and emotions of others"(Maffesoli 1996a:111).

With the figure of the image, Maffesoli therefore brings together the theoretical issues of worlding and bonding or "linking."

> The efflorescence of images is at once cause and effect of this organicity: they are diverse and multiple, but, entering into correspondence or into resonance one with another, they create a unicity, a cohesion that envelops life and the representations of each and every one. (Maffesoli 1996a:94)

This unicity or "cosmos" or "world" that is created through the bombardment of images, he goes on to assert, creates a community or what he calls more specifically "the communitarian

(tribal, ethnic, identitarian)" dynamic (Maffesoli 1996a:114). What is specific about "the communitarian," as opposed to "community," is its mode of subjectivization. It is not through a voluntary *act* or rite of membership but through nonactivity, as exemplified in the experience of watching television or looking at the digital image of the projection screen in contemporary churches. Though many critics of spectacle like Debord write disparagingly about the "passivity" of the viewer, Maffesoli argues that nonactivity is not necessarily passive. Watching-with gives the experience of feeling-with. Maffesoli describes it as "immanent transcendence" whereby this nonactive, impassioned participation leads to "that which transcends individuals [the sacred or its equivalent] 'is made immanent' in the group, and is going, in the strongest sense of the word, to constitute a tribe, with the dependence upon others that this never fails to involve" (Maffesoli 1996a:112).

This kind of participation, Maffesoli concludes, is representative of a "new style of Eucharist"(Maffesoli 1996a:112), a transfiguration in the Catholic sense if you will, of the body or spirit by the image. This has major epistemological and ontological ramifications for understanding the traditional separation between matter and spirit in Western metaphysics (and Christianity). It dissolves the material/immaterial divide that is assumed to exist between words and things and social and individual facts, and also between things(Maffesoli 1996a:99). The image "[remakes] the unity between 'corpus' (the body, industrialized product, commercialized product, local community) and 'spirit' (qualitativity, sense of beauty, disinterested caring, pleasure in the sensual, stress on the nearby and neighboring)"(Maffesoli 1996a:120). It enables the body to be transfigured, to take another dimension. Transfiguration brings the person into an invisible community to go "vibrate in unison" to assure the "function of 'copresence'"(Maffesoli 1996a:113).

> [The image] is a structure composed of a multiplicity of elements that it combines with each other. All the elements, even the most anodyne and the most microscopic, enter into interaction with each other and compose by this very interaction the texture in question. To return to an expression I often use regarding what I call "formism": form is forming, or else form becomes vital force.(Maffesoli 1996a:103)

The image is not only a form, in the traditional Aristotelian understanding, but it also in-*forms*; it produces and creates new sets of relations, new networks, new environments, new worlds.

In the case of the Albany campus of LifeChurch.tv, the visual elements of its worship experience —the accompanying images during praise time; the short films that introduce the teaching (sermon); and slick editing of Groeschel's preaching—make up what anthropologist Birgit Meyer calls the "sensational forms" that "aestheticize" the worship experience.

Meyer, like Maffesoli, is interested in bringing back "form" as a concept in the study of religion, in particular liturgy. She roots this in a very specific understanding of "aesthetic," which she identifies as not only the "capacity to perceive the world with their five senses and to interpret it through these perceptions" but also as the Kantian *sensus communis aestheticus*. And it is the dual foci—on the one hand, the importance of sensory perception in Pentecostal/charismatic liturgy and, on the other, the *social* nature of aesthetics—of Meyer's formulation of sensational forms that leads to the introduction of what she calls "the aesthetics of persuasion," that is "intrinsic to sensational forms" and "responsible for the 'truth effects' of religion"(Meyer 2010:756).

For her, sensational forms do not operate at an interpersonal level, an assumption that runs counter to much scholarship on Pentecostalism, which focuses on *pastors*, who are deemed to be the "charismatic leader" of the Weberian variety. "The stress on the existence of

primary, individual, authentic, and in this sense, unmediated religious feelings is misleading because it neglects the role of religious organizations and institutions in providing forms through which such feelings can occur repeatedly"(Meyer 2010:750). On this point, she is right when looking at the example of LifeChurch—Albany. The sensational forms of worship are a result of a complex of technological, institutional *and* spiritual forces. They are not the Jamesian ecstatic moment of oneness with divine but, rather, "authorized modes for invoking and organizing access to the transcendental"(Meyer 2010:751). She writes:

> Involving religious practitioners in particular practices of worship and patterns of feeling, these forms play a central role in modulating practitioners as religious subjects. Thus, sensational forms are part of a specific religious aesthetics, which governs a sensory engagement of humans with the divine and each other and generates particular sensibilities. Religions operate through historically generated sensational forms that are distinctive and induce repeatable patterns of feeling and action. Sensational forms emerge over time and are often subject to contestation and even abandonment (as in the shift from image to text in Reformation).(Meyer 2010:751)

Thus, sensational forms shape religious content *through* the body by "subjecting" (that is, making them into subjects) it to certain ritual practices and feelings. These then "modulate," in the words of Meyer, the practitioners as worshipers.

Much in the way that Maffesoli argues about the affect of the image, sensational forms are largely responsible for the holist feeling of the immanence of God in a structured cosmology, constructed through the "distribution of the sensible," a phrase Meyer draws from Jacques Ranciere, who describes it as, "the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that

define the respective parts and positions within it"(Meyer 2010:754). This, in turn, creates a "community of sense" wherein "a particular experience of the world that involves horizontal links between people on the level of community, as well as vertical links to some higher force"(Meyer 2010:755) becomes the cosmological ground upon which worship and worshipers come to be.

From the preceding discussion of Maffesoli's approach to affect and image and Meyer's sensational forms, we see that LifeChurch.tv, in many ways, serves as a primary example of an aesthetic orientation towards liturgy though with the added element of worlding, facilitated by networking nature of digital technologies. Is not the Global Operations Center, an example of the world-"forming," in Maffesoli's sense, at LifeChurch.tv, as it attempts to produce an experience of connection with all the other campuses around the country?

The Global Operations Center's main objective, it seems, is to create a sense of unicity of a world, in which worshipers on all campuses feel that they are part of a single church. As Groeschel, the senior pastor of LifeChurch.tv, often says when introducing LifeChurch.tv, "We are one church in many different locations." This is done not only through the constant reiteration of this fact but through the digital, imagistic production of a sphere of affect—the feeling of being-with, that is, the "copresence" (Maffesoli) and "community of sense" (Meyer). This is undoubtedly the case at LifeChurch where worshipers meet to form a collective in order to be part of the aesthetic experience of worship.

Conclusion

In the context of today's highly technologized and affective (or sensational) worship spaces, the relationship between worship space and religious experience can perhaps be seen through what media theorist Mark Hansen in *Bodies in Code* calls "mixed reality"(Hansen 2006). It is a clear critique of the term "virtual reality," which is couched in notions of disembodied

transcendence. In this conceptual schema, a body, for instance, in virtual reality is a *representational* body; it exists in another, non-physical world. For Hansen, this engages more in science fiction than scientific reality. In the world of digital art (a privileged area for Hansen), works are trending towards explorations of the "the fluid interpenetration of realms"(Hansen 2006:2). Quoting from German media theorist Olivier Grau, he writes: "No longer a wholly distinct, if largely amorphous realm with rules all its own, the virtual now denotes a 'space full of information' that can be 'activated, revealed, reorganized and recombined, added to and transformed as the user navigates…real space'"(Hansen 2006:2). Within this new situation, the body and embodiment emerge as the *interface* between the virtual and the physical.

> With the convergence of physical and virtual spaces informing today's corporate and entertainment environments, researchers and artists have come to recognize that motor activity—not representationalist verisimilitude—holds the key to fluid and functional crossings between virtual and physical realms. (Hansen 2006:2)

Of the many defining principles of the mixed reality paradigm that Hansen proposes, there is one that is most germane: the virtual is "not a fully immersive, self-contained fantasy world" but simply one more realm among others that can be accessed through embodied perception. This point is especially key as it gets to the heart of Hansen's theory of mixed reality: "Bluntly put, the new mixed reality paradigm *foregrounds the constitutive or ontological role of the body in giving birth to the world*"(Hansen 2006:5). This (mixed) world, for Hansen, is characterized by the "so seamless, so unnoticeable, so believable" passage of the "body-in-code" from one realm of media to another(Hansen 2006:8). Hansen argues that this "opens up a domain of 'transcendental sensibility' (Deleuze) or of the 'sensible-transcendental' (Irigaray). This transcendental domain, paradoxically, is entirely *within* the empirical world, though

invisible to traditional philosophical modes of capture, and deploys technics as its nonsupplementary core"(Hansen 2006:8). In the case of LifeChurch.tv, the "transcendental domain," of which Hansen speaks, is the image of the singular church that multi-site churches like LifeChurch.tv attempt to produce using digital technologies in their liturgy.

With Meyer and Hansen in mind, the digital aesthetics of LifeChurch-style worship could be seen as signaling a turn towards the mystical and experiential, which Shane Hipps attributes to a period he calls "the Graphic Revolution," which includes the advent of television and computing. He deems these "positive changes [that] reconnect us to the aspects of the faith that have long been suppressed under the left-brain tyranny of the print age, which had obsolesced communal faith and nurtured individualized spiritual practice, facilitating a privileging of fact over feeling in the ordering of faith"(Hipps 2006:56). For Hipps then, there is something specific about the graphic age, and visual technologies, that signal revaluation of "feeling" and "fact" in the ordering of faith.

While seemingly unaware of some of the developments of the increasingly digital media environments of worship spaces, theologian James K.A. Smith has recently called for a shift in Christian thinking that privileges liturgy over doctrine and "worship over worldview." In doing so, he proposes a new ontology of the human, rooted in a new definition of worship that affirms the materiality of the world and the embodiment of the worshiper(J. K. A. Smith 2009:133). This ontology he calls "*homo liturgicus*," trying to distinguish this view of the human from *homo rationale*, *homo faber* and especially *homo religiosis*. For Smith, a main concern is to critique the rationalist/cognitivist/intellectualist ontology of particularly Protestant liturgy that focuses on the Message, and therefore, "ideas and abstract values"(J. K. A. Smith 2009:42). (Note the resonance with LifeChurch's concerted decision to call the sermon a "teaching," *not* a message.)

He outlines an ontology of desire, wherein the primary dynamic of worship shifts from the cognitive (i.e., ideas, beliefs) to the affective (i.e., cares, concerns, motivations, desires) (J. K. A. Smith 2009:64).

> Humans are those animals that are religious animals not because we are primarily believe animals but because we are liturgical animals—embodied, practicing creatures whose love/desire is aimed at something ultimate"(J. K. A. Smith 2009:40).

The attack on Christian liturgy, or rather the call for its reform, is largely a subplot for the assault on his greater theoretical foe: "worldview-talk." By this he is referring to theories of religion that, while rejecting the "thinking-thing-ism" of the rationalism, nevertheless restricts human ontology to belief, faith or worldview. According to this view, "before we are thinkers, we are believers; before we can offer our rational explanations of the world, we have already assumed a whole constellation of beliefs—a *worldview*—that governs and conditions our perception of the world"(J. K. A. Smith 2009:43). Smith states that this is expressed especially in recent social scientific approaches to religion, namely that of the sociologist of religion Christian Smith(C. Smith 2003). While the worldview-talk undoubtedly does much to move away from the strict rationalism of Descartes for instance, it still, according to James Smith, "retains a picture of the human person that situates the center of gravity of human identity in cognitive regions of the mind rather than the affective regions of the gut/heart/body"(J. K. A. Smith 2009:63). Beliefs are just ideas-lite.

As opposed to "worldviews," Smith is more interested in looking at "social imaginaries," a term he borrows from Charles Taylor, which broadens the idea of a deep background knowledge (or *Verstehen*) from "worldview" which connotes a strict set of clearly articulated ideas. Instead, for Smith, "social imaginaries" hint "at a more embodied sense of how we are

oriented in the world," it provides a "noncognitive *understanding*" as opposed to a "cognitive knowledge or set of beliefs"(J. K. A. Smith 2009:65).

Smith then proposes that worship should reflect a distinctly Christian social imaginary as opposed to a worldview. "The rhythms and rituals of Christian worship," he writes, "are not the 'expression of' a Christian world view, but are themselves an 'understanding' implicit in practice—an understanding that cannot be had *apart from* the practices"(J. K. A. Smith 2009:69). In more concrete terms, Christian liturgy, in Smith's view, should be sensitive to the fact that "we are embodied, affective creatures who are shaped and primed by material practices or liturgies that aim our hearts to certain ends, which in turn draw us to them in a way that transforms our actions by inscribing in us habits or dispositions to act in certain ways"(J. K. A. Smith 2009:133). In Smith, we see a liturgical articulation of what is already extant in the many religio-technological worlds of contemporary Christian worship spaces like LifeChurch. The incorporation of the digital into worship spaces and liturgy implies a turn towards the aesthetic.

In this chapter, I explored the digital, sensory world of contemporary religious worship spaces by viewing them as religio-technological "spheres," which constitute "environments of feeling" through the aesthetic and imagistic deployment of these technologies. I empirically examined this thesis in an analysis of the worship experience at a campus of LifeChurch.tv, focusing on how the technologies impart a sense of connection and bonding with the pastor and other worshipers who are in distant locations through a formation of a "world." I concluded that the resulting environment of the technologized worship space points towards a larger shift in ideas around Christian worship, which I call "liturgical aesthetics," which emphasizes embodiment and affectivity that are specifically actualized by digital, especially visual, environments.

In the following chapter, I pursue the study of another religio-technological world, the digital milieu of online Christianity, using the example of LifeChurch.tv once again.

Chapter 4

The Digital Milieu of Online Christianity: Experience and Sociality in Church Online

Introduction

In 2004, the Pew Research Center released a new report from its Internet and American Life Project entitled "Faith Online." The takeaway, or "data point," in the parlance of the Pew, was that: "64% of wired Americans have used the Internet for spiritual or religious purposes"(Hoover, Clark, and Rainie 2004).

But what is meant by "spiritual and religious purposes"?

Upon reading the report closely, it is clear that one of the main engines driving it is the "spiritual seeker" analytic, a perspective that is found in the works of sociologists of religion Wade Clark Roof and Robert Wuthnow, which points to the emergence of a new religious sensibility characterized by people browsing in hopes of a loosely constructed spirituality drawing from many different sources as opposed to a stable religious identity rooted in a singular religious tradition(Wuthnow 1998; Roof 2001). A key finding in this regard is that "the online faithful"—those whom the report designates as people who use the Internet for "religious and spiritual purposes"—do so for "*personal* spiritual matters more than for traditional religious functions or work related to their churches. But their faith activity online seems to augment their *already-strong commitments to their congregations*"(Hoover et al. 2004:iv. Emphasis added).

However, it is clear from the activities measured in the report betray a preconceived idea of what religious use of technologies looks like. The report's conception of "using the Internet" for religious purposes consists of the following categories, listed here in in descending order of response size: (1) *personal* spiritual concerns, which includes prayer requests, downloading or listening to music, sending faith-related greeting cards, and using

email for spiritual matters [55%] (2) *traditional institutional religion*, which includes getting ideas for celebration of holidays, looking for places where respondents can attend services, making donations to religious organizations or charities and using email to plan church meetings [36%] (3) online religious news seeking [32%] (Hoover et al. 2004:8).

Needless to say, these categories of religio-technological activities are restrictive. They are especially so because they do not take into consideration the entirety of what media scholars and analysts have referred to as "Web 2.0" or "social media."[34] In looking at practices such as the forwarding of religious-themed emails, the report finds itself speaking back to a regime of online practices that are dated. Moreover, the categorical distinctions made by the report assume that they do not bleed into one another. For instance, on Facebook, which I discuss in greater detail and context below, one's personal spiritual concerns could be pursued alongside one's institutional, religious activities. A user could be sharing experiences that resonated with the past week's sermon on her church's Facebook page while also be being updated on matters of women and Islam as a result of her having clicked "Like" on the page of Sisters in Islam, an organization that promotes women's rights in Malaysia. These are not mutually exclusive in the context of social networks, a sentiment which the report somewhat acknowledges. This is not so much a fault of the analytic leanings of Stewart Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark, the authors of the report, but mostly because of the pace at which changes occur online. The entire mode of sociality on the Web, not just for religious purposes but in general, has changed.

Hence, the Pew report does not consider the liturgical possibilities of religious Internet-use. This is especially unusual since much of the first wave of the religion and Internet studies were focused on this very issue—everything from neopagan séances in chat rooms to Muslim

[34] I provide an overview of the crucial issues and discussions surrounding Web 2.0 in Han, Sam. 2011. *Web 2.0*. Routledge.

online recitation programs(Bunt 2004). LifeChurch.tv is among many churches that have, what are called, “Internet campuses”(Andron 2007). This phenomenon, it seems, would be outside the purview of the typology of the spiritual or religious use of the Internet laid out in Hoover and Clark’s report.

The Pew Report, with its delimited conception of the religious use of the Internet, shows itself to adhere to what Christopher Helland, one of the first to study the nexus of the Internet and religion, calls “religion online,” as opposed to “online religion”(Helland 2000). While religion online conceives of the Web as simply another platform for religion to take place (untouched and unchanged by technology), online religion hints at the possibility of a new form of religiosity that facilitated by the Web(Dawson and Cowan 2004:7).Though indeed the Web and religion may have initially had a merely instrumental relationship at first, it is clear that today, with the emergence of cyberchurches in virtual environments, such as Second Life, and the advent of online worship, something else is going on. Helland’s distinction, an apt one for the time, framed much of the subsequent scholarly and even not-so-scholarly investigation into religion and the Internet. But in light of the current media-technological regime, the categorical binary offered by Helland seems to be no longer tenable when looking at contemporary religious practices on the Web.

As Glenn Young has noted more recently, there is clearly continuity between religion online and online religion(Young 2004). Young reads Helland’s dichotomous typology as hinging upon a deeper axis—*information provision* and *religious participation*. Religion online, as Helland sees it, is merely a means by which religion gives information about itself. There is no aspect of religious participation (with some exception for prayer requests made via email). Online religion, however, primarily references its own environment, such as a virtual 3D environment, as the context of religious practice. This separation sits on a rather thin line, however, as Young notes, due to the architecture of participation of the Web, where linking is

the hegemonic ethos; there is a "reciprocal flow of information." Many instances of religion online, like the website of the United Methodist Church, link to instances of online religion, such as Daily Devotional, a site that facilitates visitors' engagement in the ritual of prayer and reading Scripture. Therefore, sites, such as the UMC's, offering a list of local churches, "further [emphasizes] the connection the online world maintains with offline religious institutions and communities"(Young 2004:103).

In this chapter, I suggest that Christian churches that utilize the Internet have combined the logics of "online religion" and "religion online," forming a religio-technological world, a "digital milieu," which features the coexistence of religious participation and sociality. This is facilitated, I argue, through the facilitation of the new forms of sociality and intimacy rooted in the "social proprioception" that characterizes the current regime of new media technologies. Hence, I suggest that online churches' digital *milieux* have effectively redefined extant ideas of religious community and religious experience. Drawing again on Maffesoli, I contend that the major consequence of the ever-growing intimacy of Christianity and the World Wide Web is that religious experience and religious community have folded into each other, with the experience of the online milieu of religion is becoming sociality itself. Put differently, I suggest that the church lobby, traditionally where the fellowship occurs, and the church sanctuary, traditionally where worship occurs, are both "remediated," that is, paid homage to, rivaled, and refashioned in new media, in contemporary online churches (Bolter and Grusin 2000).

I do so by first presenting a sustained discussion of online churches, using LifeChurch.tv, including its Church Online as well as its Facebook page, as privileged example. Describing in detail what a typical worship experience is like, I make certain analytical claims about the effects of digital technologies on liturgy but also sociality associated with brick-and-mortar houses of worship. Of these effects, in the main, the largest is what I call the "emancipation of worship" from enclosed worship spaces to the networked spaces of popular

social network sites such as Facebook. I suggest that the intermeshed *milieu* of the online worship space and Facebook, in effect, provides a challenge to traditional forms of religious experience and religious community.

LifeChurch.tv's Church Online

What distinguishes LifeChurch's Church Online from prior attempts at conducting online worship services is the GUI (Graphical User Interface), a somewhat technical term used to describe the design and layout of web sites and software.[35] The GUI of LifeChurch's Church Online has specific structural components that largely determined its use. At the heart of it is the video player that functions as a broadcaster (Figure 12). Though it looks like the Flash-based video frames found in YouTube and other video hosting sites such as Vimeo, what is missing is the play button. The video plays automatically during experience times.[36] In this sense, it is much like a televised feed of a sermon; the user cannot turn it off without closing the page entirely. Directly beneath that is a "Live Prayer" button that when clicked on, opens up a pop-up dialog box that allows the users either to live chat with a member of the Prayer Staff or leave a message to be responded via email. Underneath that is a box that provides informational text based on what is playing in the video player. This "modular information box"

[35] The most notable prior attempt of conducting online worship services is Church of Fools/St. Pixel's, which launched in 2004. St. Pixel's, originally named Church of Fools, is widely considered to be one of the first and most important online worship spaces and, for us, will serve as an apt entry point. St. Pixels began as a magazine started by a group of theology graduates in the 1970s called "Ship of Fools." In 1998, the magazine moved online and was renamed *Ship of Fools*. By the time Church of Fools launched in 2004, it was not the first to run religious services online in a 3D environment. In fact, there was a Catholic Mass that took place on Second Life, a popular 3D virtual environment, a few months before the Church of Fools' launch. What separated Church of Fools from prior attempts at online religious service was that it created its own environment, using Shockwave, a multimedia player program that allowed programs to run over the Web as long as users had the Shockwave plug-in installed on their computers. (A more contemporary analogue would be Flash made by software company Adobe.)

[36] Experiences occur at specific times throughout the day. When one navigates to the Church Online site while an experience is far off, a clock with "Next Experience In" counts down the hours until the next one. There are forty-three in a week.

is crucial as its contents are constantly changing throughout the experience, and contribute to the "liveness" of the Church Online experience, which I will discuss more below. Beneath that is a clickable icon that reads "Do you want to tell someone about Church Online?" When clicking it, it transforms into a sharing dashboard much like those found on the side of news articles found on the Web with several shortcut links to link sharing and social networking sites such as Facebook and StumpleUpon (Figure 13).

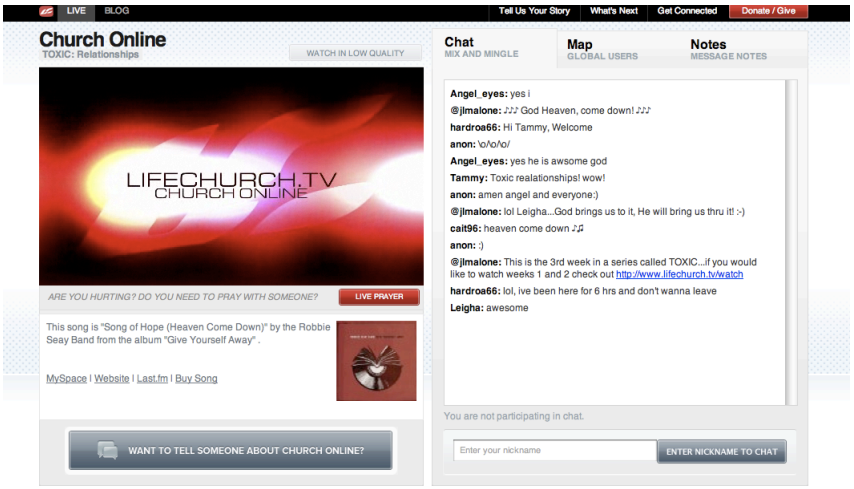

Figure 12: LifeChurch.tv's Church Online's Graphical User Interface

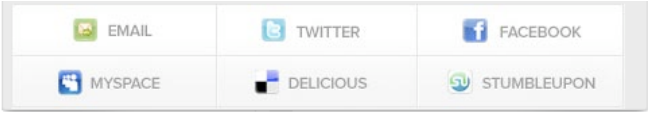

Figure 13: Sharing dashboard

In addition to the video player, which takes up the left half of the page, there is a box on the right side with three tabs that allow the user to toggle back and forth between "Chat," "Map" and "Notes." Chat, as its subtitle says, allows users to "mix and mingle" with one another. This allows for worshipers to interact with one another using aliases or real names.

Interestingly, the chat contains an "experience captain," who "moderates" the chat and is designated in the chat section with "(captain)" after their handles. The "Map" tab displays a map of the world with red dots representing from where currently users are logged in with a list of "countries currently online." Next to that is "Notes" where the user can find a modified version of the speaking notes that the pastor is working from (Figure 12).

When an experience starts, the chat, which is the default "home" tab, begins to fill up with participants. It is difficult to say how many attend each experience session but Bobby Gruenewald, the Innovation Leader of LifeChurch.tv and chief mind behind Church Online,[37] tells me that there are 70,000-80,000 unique IP addresses that log into the forty-three experiences in a week, though some may only be logged in for a very short amount of time. Beneath the chat window is a box where the user may enter her "nickname" to participate in the chat. If she chooses not to do so, then it will remain there. A praise band, usually the one from LifeChurch.tv's main campus in Edmond, OK campus, plays various worship songs.[38]

After fifteen to twenty minutes of praise time, there are a few announcements that are usually playing on the video player, with related links and information displayed in the box below (Figure 14). This usually includes an introductory clip acting as a FAQ about how to navigate the various functions of the Church Online page. How the various tabs work are explained here. Following this appears a person who in traditional liturgy would be considered the "presider." It is actually Brandon Donaldson, LifeChurch's Online Pastor. This person serves as the guide for the experience. He makes some announcements, usually about what series the "teaching" (or sermon) is falling under. It is also at this time is where he makes the

[37] As "innovation leader," Gruenewald oversees nearly all of the technical operations of LifeChurch's, including Church Online. He is also credited with coming up with the idea for LifeChurch's Internet Campus, later to be called Church Online.

[38] These songs are distinct from hymns, which come from a hymnal organized by a governing body of a denomination. They are far more musically contemporary, usually rock-oriented, and distributed through a wide array of Christian music databases on the Web.

announcement for donations to LifeChurch. Usually, in the modular information box under the video player is where various links that correspond to projects that LifeChurch is currently funding appear. Functionally, this is close to the "time of offering" in many Christian churches, where congregants place their alms into baskets or plates. Here, it is done through electronic transfer on one's debit or credit card, and the presider encourages the audience to click on the "Donate/Give" on the upper-right corner of the page. After this, there is a brief prayer giving thanks for the offering (also mirroring "offline" liturgy).

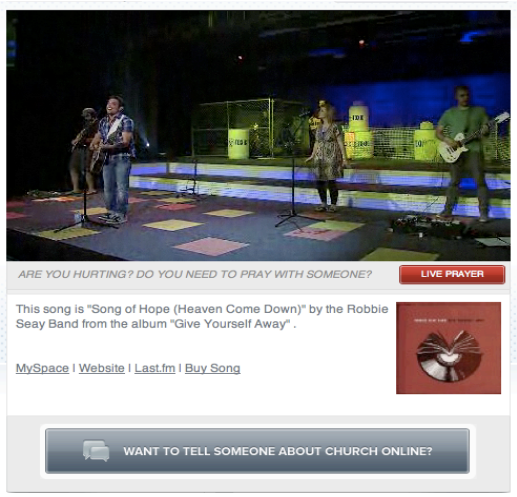

Figure 14: Praise time

Then, the sermon or "teaching" as LifeChurch.tv calls it, begins. During the sermon, the user is able to stay in chat mode. As mentioned above, the chat usually contains an experience captain, whose task is to moderate the chat. However, this does not influence the conversation much. His or her task is usually to minimize the presence of "trolls," which is an Internet slang term used to reference "someone who intentionally disrupts online communities"(Schwartz 2008). In fact, there is very little "moderating" the discussion in that sense. The experience captain, at least in the many times that I have attended experiences at LifeChurch's Church

Online, has not been the main contributors to the chat. Quite frankly, it is difficult to really discuss "topics" in any chat room, not just this one in particular. Chat rooms are rather chaotic spaces where multiple conversations are happening at the same time and users can jump into any of them without necessarily feeling like he or she is "butting in." Conversations between two or more people can be discerned by the torrent of "@," the Twitter-style indicator of directing a message at certain persons that is used in a variety of spaces on the Web, not just chats but also in comment sections of blogs.

As for what the conversations are about, many of them revolve around how certain people "came to Christ," a phrase which has taken on the status of meme in evangelical churches, signifying someone's "conversion" experience. I hesitantly use the term "conversion" because, as many scholars who have studied American evangelicalism have noted, "coming to Christ" or "giving your life to Christ" are synonymous with being "born again"(C. Smith and Emerson 1998). As expected, there is a lot of asking about where people are located. (Undoubtedly, this curiosity about geography is encouraged by the "Maps" mode, which visually represents where different people in the chat are from in close to real-time.)

Sometimes, the chats resemble what Nadia Miczek calls "written chat singing"(Miczek 2008). Many users type out the lyrics of the praise songs, as if they were singing along, something that they perhaps would have done, or at least encouraged to do, had they been at worship experiences offline. At other times, specialized ASC-II art, of which emoticons such as :) are a subset, and "net lingo" is used. A popular one is "\o/"—a pictogram of a person holding their hands up. Worshipers also type "PG," which is shorthand for "Praise God," at various points in the experience. During the teaching, some users re-type what Groeschel has just said for emphasis, which sometimes extends to an "AMEN!" Chat participants also use various portions of the teaching to initiate conversations in the chat. During one particular teaching on courage, for instance, when Groeschel is describing a rather harrowing experience in which he

had to ask God for strength, a participant stated: “This is so true. I remember when I was going through something like this.” However, the chats are not always so on point. In fact, much of the time, there is not really a singular topical thread. The chats are like in many other chat rooms, which consist of micro-chats and side-conversations. But before dismissing the chat component of Church Online as trivial, let us consider what the purpose and effect of the chat is.

When compared to offline worship, the chat *is* out of place. What I mean is that the chat component be interpreted as a means by which LifeChurch is trying to compensate for the absence of the traditional (offline) community-building during “fellowship hour,” a time after the worship when worshipers gather to have coffee and mingle. This is usually the time and place where relationships are formed, where the pastor or ushers have an opportunity to approach new faces. In fact, LifeChurch.tv’s Church Online has recently just launched “Talk it Over,” which is a chat room where worshipers of Church Online can go to mingle after the experience(Byers 2010).

Though some may view this as evidence that community-building is much more difficult on the Web (though I would disagree), LifeChurch’s Church Online is not so much trying to make up for the inherent unsocial nature of online communication but rather trying to intensify and capitalize on the already-social nature of the current regime of the World Wide Web. Instead of setting aside the social component of worship, Church Online places it at the very heart of it. It may be the case that rather than the content of the chat, it is its very existence, its form, that gives it its importance. In this sense, the chat-function is what Miczek calls “invention,” that is, a ritual that is unremediated from the prior “physical” liturgy. It is *specific* to online worship.

In effect, we can say that the chat component of LifeChurch’s Church Online is akin to what the Internet theorist Clay Shirky calls a “two-channel experience”—a live conversation

with a simultaneous and "overlapping real-time text conversation"(Shirky 2002). As he argues, this kind of interaction, which is also called "backchannel," operates on a very different idea of what chat and other social software are used for. Usually, chat or instant messaging is seen as a "replacement" for face-to-face meetings. However, when using it among people who are in the same physical location or, in the case of LifeChurch's Church Online, "web space" (i.e. logged into LifeChurch.tv's Church Online), chat becomes something of a new experience. After experimenting with "in-room chat," he made one particularly notable observation that bears on our discussion of the chat component of LifeChurch's Church Online.

Shirky states that the introduction of backchannel "chatter," in the form of live chat, changes the "interrupt logic." Usually, group conversations are breeding grounds for interruptions of one kind or another; hence, it is difficult to maintain a single line of thought for an extended period of time. But, if there were no interruptions at all, there would be a good number of valuable insights since often the most noteworthy things are said during tangents. The chat allowed for participants "to add to the conversation without interrupting, and the group could pursue tangential material in the chat room while listening in the real room"(Shirky 2002).

Tech-savvy churches have experimented with a modified version of "in-room chat" via Twitter using what are called hashtags that allow for a tweet to be marked along certain thematic lines. One can then search on Twitter based on hashtags to see who is involved in that particular conversation. Conferences, academic or otherwise, and other large events such as music and technology festivals have made good use of this technology by dictating an official hashtag for the event. One particular all-day music concert I attended had the hashtag of #rootspicnic. Thus, every time I tweeted something I would append it with #rootspicnic. As a *New York Times* article in 2009 reports, houses of worship have different means of integrating in-room chat(Vitello 2009). Some, like Westwinds Community Church in Jackson, Michigan

have a display of the Twitter comments on monitors behind the pulpit during services. Others leave it up to the congregants to access Twitter on their smart phones and do not project them on screens.

In any case, we can view both of instances of integrating Twitter into the liturgy in much the same way that chat functions in LifeChurch's Church Online. It is there to serve, according to Shirky, as an outlet to the congregants' inclination of humans to be chatty and interrupt. Church Online's chat component, in large part, functions as "in-room chat," a back- (or side-) channel space for "unofficial" conversation.

Moving along, throughout the teaching, under the video player is a red "Live Prayer" button and the modular information box. The information box constantly changes, adjusting its contents to the different parts of the worship. For instance, during the "praise" portion of the experience, there is the name of the song, by whom it is composed, as well as what album it was recently on, alongside the album art (Figure 14). Additionally, while announcements are being made, the box turns into a hyperlink, which, when clicked on, redirects the worshiper to the appropriate "microsite," such as the LifeChurch.tv blog, or its Facebook page (Figure 15). When it is time for offering (or "giving" in the parlance of LifeChurch.tv), the box turns into a link for the online portal to make credit card donations (Figure 16).

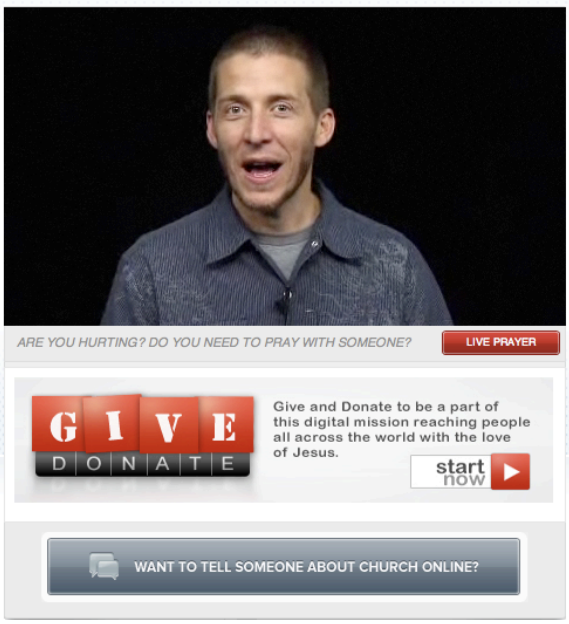

Figure 15: Modular information box during call to give

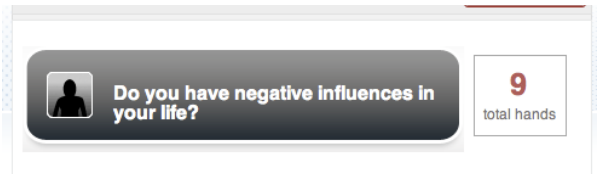

Figure 16: Modular information box during straw poll

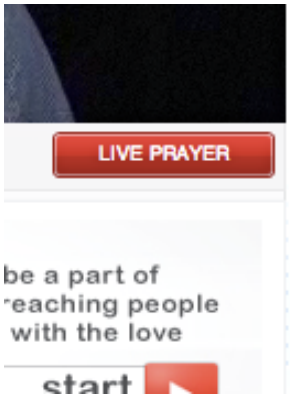

Figure 17: Close-up of "Live Prayer" button

Perhaps the most significant use of the modular information box is during the "teaching." One of Groeschel's preaching techniques is the straw poll. Frequently throughout the teaching, he asks for people to raise their hands if they, for instance, have negative influences in their life. This is a means by which to connect to the audience, and to make the message applicable to people's lives. The box then turns into a clickable icon with the straw poll question, with a number beside it displaying how many others who are logged into Church Online at the moment have clicked on the icon, effectively "raising their hands"(Figure 16).

Right above the information box is a strip that reads, "Are you hurting? Do you need to pray with someone?" and alongside it a red clickable icon with "Live Prayer" on it (Figure 17). It is there for those who wish to have a one-on-one interaction as opposed to the default public nature of the Church Online experience. When clicked on, a pop-up window appears, which looks very much like the Live Help windows in many commercial web sites. The layout of Live Prayer and Live Help is a basic instant message layout. On the "other side" is a volunteer or staffer, who, according to Gruenewald, functions, like "the wise person." Live Prayer sessions are not really like group prayers. For the most part, they are private side conversations. Their "appeal" is that they are not public, that is, in full view of the chat. For Gruenewald, this is the locus of the most "meaningful interactions" in Church Online. As he describes it, it is Church Online's "big win."

LifeChurch.tv on Facebook

Thus far, I have remained at the level of online worship, bracketing it from the experience of navigating the entire *complex* of LifeChurch's digital milieu, which includes Facebook and

microsites, such as blogs.[39] Each of LifeChurch.tv's thirteen different physical campuses has a separate Facebook page, including Church Online. Its Facebook page has several tabs—Wall, Info, Events, Helpful Links, Other Pages, Video, and other collapsed tabs, including Discussion, which the user needs to hover her mouse over in order see.[40] Much of where the action happens is on the Wall, which is the case with most Facebook interactions. Technically, anyone with a Facebook account can join the social milieu or network of LifeChurch. All one needs to do is to click on the "Like" button that is on every Facebook page, which, as of this writing, over 28,800 people had done in the case of Church Online's Facebook page. Clicking "Like" gives one the ability to comment on the Wall and engage in discussions, though one can easily read and access the various resources on the "Helpful Links" and "Info" tabs without joining the LifeChurch.tv's Facebook "group." This means that for those people who have elected to click "Like," whenever LifeChurch.tv posts a message, a video or just a short status update on Facebook, it appears on the user's News Feed (usually the default page when one logs into Facebook), which shows posts, status updates, and shared media from all of the user's friends and "Liked" pages in reverse chronological. Further, any comment made on LifeChurch.tv's Facebook page by someone else also appears in the "News Feed."

There are various kinds of interactions on LifeChurch.tv's Church Online's Facebook wall. Tony Steward, the Online Community Pastor at LifeChurch.tv,[41] initiates many of them. They range from reposts from the LifeChurch.tv's blog to discussion prompts that relate to the

[39] The blog functions as a key diachronic, non-live component of Church Online. Its non-live character does not however reduce its importance in the entire landscape of LifeChurch's digital milieu. It is here that sustained engagement with the material of the teaching, for instance, takes place much in the way of what in American Protestantism (and other traditions) are called "small groups." Like small groups, the blog posts that take up much of the front page are sort of "recaps" of the week's teaching. In addition, he also provides links to books mentioned in this week's teaching(Russell 2010). They also provide more information on the various causes that LifeChurch is contributing to financially, which are usually Christian-oriented relief funds.

[40] Facebook has since changed its layout.

[41] In his capacity as Online Community Pastor, Tony Steward oversees much of social media strategies of LifeChurch.tv, including its Facebook page.

week's teaching. For instance, "All through out the Bible God has been for our neighbors. How can you show the love of God to the people who live on your street this weekend?"(LifeChurch.TV 2010). These tend to get thirty or so Likes, which in Facebook means that the user who clicked on "Like" has this post automatically show up on *her* wall, and, in turn, all of her Facebook friends' News Feeds. This particular post elicited many different kinds of responses. Many of them are cursory, sticking very closely to the question asked.

> Last year we gave a jar of m&ms to our neighbor that said Jesus loves you. Months later he told us we saved his life because he is diabetic and was unable to find anything with sugar in it to boost his blood sugar. He stumbled upon the m&m's bearing the Jesus loves you message ate them and recovered. You never know what a great impact a simple gesture done with faith will have.
>
> I've shoveled snow off the sidewalks for the elderly, brought their trash bins in for them, made them cookies, sent them encouraging cards, etc whenever prompted by God.
>
> Any suggestions? It's really hard to love my neighbors at this very moment! They have a late night house party that has been disrupting the noise level & parking in our quiet street...it's 2:45am and I can't believe it's still going on. Pray for me! (LifeChurch.TV 2010)

We can then say that LifeChurch.tv's Facebook page relies upon what media theorist Zizi Papacharissi calls "the virtual geographies of social networks." As she notes, social networks build connections through structural (architectural) features, that is, their "composite

result of structure, design, and organization"(Papacharissi 2009:205). One of the most important aspects of this virtual geography, according to Papachrissi, is the blending of public and private spheres. Several theorists of the World Wide Web have made this point. But for her, this has less to do with "access to content" than with what kind of world is created as a result. "Imagine a world where all separating rooms, houses, and offices were removed, thus combining several distinct situations"(Papacharissi 2009:206). As she rightly notes, Facebook, in comparison to other social networks, provides "loose" social settings. It is a "glasshouse, with a publicly open structure which may be manipulated (relatively, at this point) from within or create more or less private spaces"(Papacharissi 2009:215).

Community as social proprioception

It is no surprise then, many proponents of online church define "community" through relationships. In an interview with *Collide* magazine, Steward, Online Community Pastor at LifeChurch.tv, uses Twitter as an illustration of the ideal "online community":

> It's a network of interpersonal relationships…What's cool about the Church is that when you talk about biblical community, it's then focused on the things the Bible tells us to do when we're getting together as the Church—the edification of believers, evangelism, fellowship, and discipleship. That can all happen as you communicate, as you gather, as you have presence, as you feed into each other. The Web is very relational now, and you can know people and be known through those media.
>
> The whole point of Twitter is having a presence in someone's life in the everyday. Twitter and some of those micro-media formats give you the ability to be present in someone's life because you can see what is happening in the parts of their day that you wouldn't know unless you were actually present. So what we'd like to see

> when we build community, what we'd like to see come out of that, is belonging—where people feel like they belong to something that brings value to their life and they can bring value to a community that feeds into each other with those relationships and those values is now possible online.(McClellan 2009)

Later in the interview, Steward points to two "measures" of success in the creation of community on Church Online—engagement and influence.

> Are we helping to have a positive influence on how people are living out their faith online? Also, how engaged are the people we're connecting to? The pageview metric isn't a community metric—it's how many people are responding and how much feedback we're getting. (McClellan 2009)

From Steward, we can extract some tenets of the understanding of "community" that dominate in the discourse of the proponents of online church. As he repeatedly notes, community is *relational*. By relation, he means something close to "presence." Twitter obviously becomes a very important example. Twitter, and "status updates"[42] more generally, as technology writer Clive Thompson has noted, reflects a new mode of social media that produces what he calls a "sixth sense." Since Twitter, and other status-update-oriented social networking platforms, encourages frequent messages throughout the day, one develops a sense of his or her social network's schedule and overall personality. This occurs even on a

[42] Updating your status in a social media context is about letting members of your social network know what you are doing. This is the case for not only for Twitter, which asks, "What's happening" atop its text box, but also for Facebook, MySpace and also instant message applications like AOL Instant Messenger and Google Talk (more commonly referred to as GChat).

very detailed level. “The power,” writes Thompson, “is in the surprising effects that come from receiving thousands of pings from your posse.”

> When I see that my friend Misha is "waiting at Genius Bar to send my MacBook to the shop," that's not much information. But when I get such granular updates every day for a month, I know a lot more about her. And when my four closest friends and *worldmates* send me dozens of updates a week for five months, I begin to develop an almost telepathic awareness of the people most important to me.
>
> It's like proprioception, your body's ability to know where your limbs are. That subliminal sense of orientation is crucial for coordination: It keeps you from accidentally bumping into objects, and it makes possible amazing feats of balance and dexterity.
>
> Twitter and other constant-contact media create *social* proprioception. They give a group of people a sense of itself, making possible weird, fascinating feats of coordination…It's practically collectivist—you're creating a shared understanding larger than yourself.(Thompson 2007. Emphasis added.)

Thompson’s description of the experience of contemporary sociality as proprioception illuminates why Steward cites Twitter as a type of “community” he wishes to strive for with the online endeavors of LifeChurch.tv.

Yet, there are those, like Heidi Campbell, one of the leading scholars of religion and the Internet, who argue that the primary challenge of what she calls CMC (computer-mediated communications) to religion is to “religious community”(Campbell 2004). According to her, the nature of sociality on CMC—social networking—is antithetical to the community of religion. She writes:

> Speaking of religious community as a social network can be problematic, as it appears to challenge theological and structural ideas of community. Social network analysis, which has been utilized to explain relationships and community structures online, describes communities in terms of networked, free-form relationships that are constantly changing and resist being tied down. Religious communities, however, typically characterized themselves as having a firm grounding in faith, in which community serves as a reflection of the character and likeness of the Divine.(Campbell 2004:82)

Whereas Campbell dichotomizes networked and traditional notions of community, it seems that the Christians who use the technology see it differently. In other words, people like Gruenewald, Donaldson and Steward are not suggesting that their Church Online mirrors the community of coffee hours and Bingo nights—the more traditional techniques of community building by religious institutions in the United States. "Community," in the case of LifeChurch.tv, is not based on the logic of membership.

The tension between community-as-*membership* and community-as-*network* is rooted in an overinvestment on faith (or belief) as the primary indicator of religious identity. Numerous scholars of religion have warned against this, most notably Talal Asad. "The assumption that belief is a distinctive mental state characteristic of all religions"(Asad 1993:48) is a "modern, privatized Christian one because and to the extent that it emphasizes the priority of belief as a state of mind rather than as constituting activity in the world"(Asad 1993:47). While Campbell, like in this article, may have been addressing Christian religious communities in particular, it still holds that "Christian" is historically fluid.

> What the Christian believes today about God, life after death, the universe, is not what he believed a millennium ago. The medieval valorization of pain as the mode of participating in Christ's suffering contrasts sharply with the modern Catholic perception of pain as an evil to be fought against and overcome as Christ the Healer did. That difference is clearly related to the post-Enlightenment secularization of Western society and to the moral language which that society now authorizes. (Asad 1993:46-47)

But in addition to the historical shifts in the contents of belief, there are also the changing contours of communality on the Internet. As Paolo Apolito writes:

> ...the Web surfer never gives up his freedom of choice in a definitive community commitment to reciprocal recognition, whether it is to a group, a movement, or an association. Every time that he goes online, he confirms the community, in other words, each time, he has an option not to confirm the commitment that he has entered into. And so it can be hypothesized as a devotional double world: the world of choices that in some sense bind and constrain, though never in a definitive manner, offline, and the choices whereby capriciously and pleasantly it is possible to vary, repeatedly, even during the course of a single browse and even simultaneously, opening up numerous sites and interacting with numerous virtual realities. (Apolito 2005:241)

The fluidity of the content of belief that Asad highlights, along with the liquid forms of communality that Apolito emphasizes, beckons the question: What does religious "community" look like when in fact the standards by which "community" was interpreted have changed quite drastically?

Sacramental communality of proxemics

To approach this question, it seems appropriate to go back to Durkheim, whose work on religious life is where most religion scholars in the social sciences start. What Durkheim offers is not so much a better or "truer" definition of religious community but an altogether different concept. In his theory of religion as with his social theory in general, Durkheim's chief conceptual tool, "conscience collective," which has the dual meaning in French of collective *consciousness* and collective *conscience*, sought to view religion as the grounds for social (or moral) action, not merely metaphysical speculation about the origin and place of the Universe or a system of belief. The way that he believed religion (and society) to construct such a duality of the collective was through a regime of representations via the constitution of an objective, collective reality that is confirmed and reinforced through ritual. The relationship of ritual and representation is of special significance for Durkheim. "Religious representations are collective representations that express collective realities," he writes, and "rituals are ways of acting that are generated only within assembled groups and are meant to stimulate and sustain or recreate certain mental states in these groups"(Durkheim 2001:11).

The technological milieu of today's online churches attempts to bring rituals, or sacraments—"miniature, personal signs of God and God's grace in the world . . . visible signs of God's invisible presence"(Beaudoin 2000:74)—back in. Instead of it being based on morality (collective conscience) or perception (collective consciousness), the digital "collective" that is formed by the milieu of LifeChurch.tv, both its Church Online and its work on Facebook, contributes to the formation of social bonds rooted in a non-absolutist coefficient of belonging, to use the terminology of Maffesoli. As he says, "anyone can participate a multitude of groups, while investing a not inconsiderable part of him or herself in each"(Maffesoli 1996b:144).

These types of social configurations, which Maffesoli argues is characteristic of postmodernity, are no longer rooted in tidy, contractual agreements (whether expressly so

such as actual contracts or implicitly so such as familial obligation) or even whole-hearted identification, as the sociological terms such as “conformity” and “reference group” would have it(See Merton, 1940; Turner, 1956). Rather, they are based on a “sense of fellow-feeling” or “communal ambience.”

In suggesting that social formations now crystallize through what in earlier times would be considered “mundane” moments of interaction such as those in cafes or at the bus stop, Maffesoli argues that this ambient form of solidarity is largely rooted in a collective experience of intimacy or closeness through emotion, affect and feelings. This he calls “proxemics.”

> Proxemics refers primarily to the foundation of a succession of “we's” which constitutes the very essence of all sociality…[The] constitution of micro-groups, of the tribes which intersperse spatiality, arises as a result of a feeling of *belonging*, as a function of a specific *ethic* and within the framework of a communications *network*. (Maffesoli 1996b:139)

Maffesoli is quite sensitive to the ways in which media technologies present images, and especially what kind of emotional response they produce. In this case, he is less interested in a specific emotion nor a specific type of media (i.e., visual as opposed to audio media) but how “sociality” itself is in large part both “communicational,” that is, largely influenced by contemporary media technologies, and “religious,” in the sense that it produces a certain kind of “collective emotion,” or “effervescence” as Durkheim would have it.

Interestingly, he relates the experience of this emotional collectivism, which he labels, “puissance” to the Heideggerian *Mitsein* (“being-with”)(Heidegger 2008) and places it in a genealogy of “mystical sensibilities”(Maffesoli 1996b:24), which begins with Meister Eckhart, arguably the most iconic of Christian mystics, who stressed an experience of “union” with

God(Kieckhefer 1978). Maffesoli evokes this tradition of mysticism when detailing the rituals of proxemics, going so far as to use the very word "religion" to describe this kind of collective feeling (though he stipulates that "it is less a content, which is the realm of faith, than a container, that is, a common matrix" (Maffesoli 1996b:38)).

For Maffesoli, proxemics also approximates the Christian concept of the "Communion of Saints," which he rightly points out "is primarily based on the idea of *participation*, correspondence and analogy, notions which seem perfectly appropriate for analyzing social movements that cannot be reduced to their rationalist and functional dimensions"(Maffesoli 1996:40. Emphasis added.).[43] The affective-sacramental virtual geographies of participation found on Facebook, and social media more broadly, are precisely what churches with an Internet campus such as LifeChurch.tv aim to take advantage of. It is no wonder that Maffesoli spends much time on the kind of organizational mode of which he speaks, taking pains to give a plethora of synonyms—"networks," "sect'"(Troeltsch), "polycentric nebulae," "communicational matrix"—all of which evoke a religio-technological register.

Mapping Maffesoli onto LifeChurch.tv's digital milieu, we can say that the "virtual geographies of social networks" found in its Church Online and Facebook page are indicative of a religio-technological proxemics based on shared connections of feeling(Maffesoli 1996b:75), which are temporary, casual, "ephemeral and localized" while still being meaningful. It is the formation of a community rooted in the ritual of the everyday sociality, such as "sitting in the café [or] eating a meal." These mundane rituals are "[confirmations], expressed countless times, of the link between the divine, the social whole and proximity"(Maffesoli 1996b:25).

[43] The Communion of Saints, as a theological concept, is founded upon the Pentecost, when the third entity of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, revealed itself to the disciples, giving them the capacity to bear such spiritual fruit as speaking in tongues. It serves, in many ways, as a precursor to the Pauline expression of the Universal as it allows for a loose network of believers to exist as a 'community' by mere participation.

In true Durkheimian fashion, the "deity," in Maffesoli's analysis of contemporary social formations, is "the social," but for members of LifeChurch.tv's Church Online and the users of its Facebook page, the deity is very much still God. But beyond this difference, which admittedly is not by any means minor, there is a collapse, or folding, into one another of the religious and the social. The experience of the religio-technological sphere exhibited in LifeChurch.tv's Church Online is very much that of sociality itself. By logging onto Facebook, as one would do normally, and seeing status updates of old high school, college and work friends that read something like, "Finally, the baby and husband both asleep," or even candid photos of the weddings of nieces and nephews, alongside posts and updates from LifeChurch.tv's Facebook page, with its lively discussions of the week's teaching or a separate thread on a certain short video clip posted about a recent disaster zone that LifeChurch is donating to, or even the frank meditations on a certain crisis of faith by someone, religious experience becomes woven into one of the many already existing technological sacraments of the World Wide Web.

Conclusion

Over the course of this chapter, I have suggested that Christian churches that utilize the Internet form a religio-technological world, a "digital milieu," which features the coexistence of religious participation and sociality. This occurs, I argue, through the facilitation of the new forms of sociality and intimacy rooted in the "social proprioception" that characterizes the current regime of new media technologies.

These trends in online Christianity recall Swiss Catholic theologian Hans Kung's comment in his magisterial *The Church*, in which he makes the case, in the wake of Vatican II, that the Church is the "people of God" not an institution of ecclesiological hierarchy or abstract papal infallibility. And thus, *ekklesia* "means both the actual *process of congregating* and the

congregating community itself"(Küng 1976:120). Brandon Donaldson, the Online Pastor of LifeChurch.tv, echoes this outlook when he states:

> When we first started [Church Online] the reason we first jumped into that instead of TV was [because] this tool provides this pretty cool opportunity to be interactive and now four years later, this is a no-brainer. People that go online expect to be heard. They're not consumers anymore. That's old school. That's sort of TV. The power is now [in] Facebook, YouTube. People are out there and they are producers...It doesn't matter how good they are. They're out there to produce. They're building their own page. They have their own site. They have their own blogs…As a church, that sounds really good. As a pastor, it's what we're trying to do in our buildings. How can we help these people? *[They're] the church!* This building has nothing to do with the church. It's just where we meet. We're inspired to go out there, introduce people to Christ, and then *we go be the church*. And so, this tool has that sort of built-in, and it's just not just the tool, it's actually the context… (Donaldson 2010. Emphasis added.)

Donaldson's comments here, that technology has become the context whereby the socialization of religious experience occurs, can be viewed in the context of Robert Wuthnow's work on the small-group movement of American Protestantism (Wuthnow 1993).

> …[T]he kind of community small groups create is quite different from the communities in which people have lived in the past. They are more *fluid* and more concerned with the individual's *emotional* state. The vast majority of small-group members also say their sense of the sacred has been profoundly influenced by their participation. But small groups are not simply drawing people back to the God of their fathers and

> mothers. They are dramatically changing the way God is understood. *God is now less of an external authority and more of an internal presence.* The sacred becomes more personal, but in the process also more manageable, more serviceable in meeting individual needs, and more a feature of *group processes themselves*. Support groups are thus effecting changes that have both salutary and worrisome consequences. They supply community and revitalize the sacred. (Wuthnow 1993. Emphasis added.)

For him, the proliferation of small groups, whether in the form of Alcoholics Anonymous or a Bible study group, calls forth a changed understanding of "community" and a redefinition of "the sacred."

In many ways, the consequences of the digital proxemics of multi-site Christianity on the concept of community mirrors what Wuthnow suggests with the small-group movement. That is to say, if the concept of the sacred must be rethought, rites, or ritual, which were thought of as moments of transcendence not as immanent and temporary instants of socio-technological exchange, must also be reconsidered. With this "socialization of ritual," we are witnessing, in the formation of the digital milieu of online religion, the collapse of the sacred *into* the social.

Chapter 5

The Sacred Cosmos: "World Picture," Theoscopy, and Politics in Everyday Technological Practice

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we saw how church online (or Internet campuses, as LifeChurch.tv calls them) represented a Protestant sacramentalism, a type of religiosity that shirks the separation of the sacred and the profane as well as that of public and private. The digital milieu of LifeChurch.tv, as we see with the extensive use of Facebook, takes advantage of the collapse of the public and private spheres engendered by new media technologies (Poster 2001; Calhoun 2003). "Religiosity" is thus socialized and publicized, and, most importantly, woven into everyday technological practice of "keeping-in-touch" largely done on the Web and other technologies. The casual act of checking Facebook also becomes the sanctified act of checking on congregant members, sharing Bible verses and keeping in touch with the pastor. This convergence of religion and technologies reveals something about the trajectory of not only contemporary religious practice, as explored in previous chapters, but also technological practice.

The vanishing distinguishability of religiosity and everyday technological practice demarcates not only the ways in which digitization affects the fundamentals of Protestant Christianity but also in how technological practice reasserts, what the sociologist of religion Thomas Luckmann once deemed, "minimal transcendences"(Luckmann 1990:129). In "Shrinking Transcendence, Expanding Religion?," he argues that religion may in fact be expanding while transcendence, capital-T Transcendence, long held as the universal basis of "religious experience," was on the decline.

> [T]he socially constructed cultural models that shape the prevailing subjective orientations in the modern Western world—and, perhaps, in all modern societies—may be called religious without overly expanding the meaning of that term. I will suggest that modern consciousness, too, not only archaic or traditional consciousness, is concerned with certain kinds of transcendence. (Luckmann 1990:127)

This *modern* kind of transcendence he describes as "minimal," speaking of "sounds, pleasures, pains that are overwhelming in their actuality"(Luckmann 1990:129).

In pursuing this expansion of the term "religious," he argues that the decline of religious institutions, a fact often cited by proponents of the secularization thesis, does not in the least mean the end of religion itself. Luckmann calls for a reconsideration of not only religious experience but the categorical usefulness of the term "religion," preferring "sacred" or "sacred cosmos" in its stead. Luckmann points to the proliferation of religiosity or, perhaps more suited to his terminology, the diffusion of transcendences in the use of "the sacred." This of course has implications for how "the cosmos" is conceived. Luckmann again:

> The "sacred cosmos" of modern industrial societies no longer has one obligatory hierarchy, and it is no longer articulated as a consistent thematic whole. It consists of assortments of social reconstructions of transcendence. The term "assortment" points out a significant distinction between the modern sacred cosmos and the sacred cosmos of a traditional society. The latter contains well-articulated themes that form a universe of "ultimate" significance that is reasonably consistent in terms of its own logic…[Today] these themes, however, do not form a coherent universe. The assortment of religious representations—a sacred cosmos in a loose sense of the term only—is not internalized by potential consumers as a whole…Individual religiosity is thus no longer a replica or

approximation of an "official" model.(Luckmann 1990:134)

Perhaps in the twenty years since Luckmann's article, written in the not insignificant year of 1990, on the cusp of the IT-revolution that would give rise to what Paul Virilio refers to as "the information bomb"(Virilio 2000b), we must make Luckmann's statement bear on contemporary, postmodern, realities. If indeed his attempt at periodizing the "sacred cosmos" bears a sociohistorical shift from traditional to "modern industrial" times, we must also extend this argument to post-industrial ones as well. In doing so, however, we acknowledge the importance of Luckmann's point regarding the "sacred cosmos" and the eventual withering of its coherence.

In fact, philosopher and historian of science Alexandre Koyre in his renowned study *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* makes the case for an analysis of cosmos as integral to the unfolding of modernity and secularization.

> …[I]n my opinion they [Montaigne, Bacon, Descartes] are concomitants and expressions of a deeper and more fundamental process as the result of which man—as it is sometimes said—lost his place in the world, or, more correctly perhaps, lost the very world in which he was living and about which he was thinking, and had to transform and replace not only his fundamental concepts and attributes, but even the very framework of his thought…[T]hey are interdependent and closely linked together—can be described roughly as bringing forth the destruction of the Cosmos, that is, the disappearance, from philosophically and scientifically valid concepts, of the conception of the world as a finite, closed, and hierarchically ordered whole (a whole in which the hierarchically of value determined the hierarchy and structure of being, rising from the dark, heavy and imperfect earth to the higher and higher perfection of the stars and

> heavenly spheres), and its replacement by an indefinite and even infinite universe which is bound together by the identity of its fundamental components and laws, and in which all these components are placed on the same level of being. (Koyre 1968:2)

We see here that Koyre and Luckmann agree on the waning definition of the cosmos as a bounded, unified and transcendent entity to which all are beholden. But as Koyre's study details, the world as a closed entity gives way as early as the 15th and 16th centuries with the work of Nicholas of Cusa and Giordano Bruno. For Koyre, and less so for Luckmann, the story of modernity is not one of institutional secularization (that is, the retreat of religion) but rather a change in worldly orientation, in the (re)arrangement of the "sacred cosmos." In other words, modernity can be seen as a shift in how religious thought and the emergent scientific thought come to influence the way in which humans view themselves in relation to the world and God. It is a shift in onto-cosmology. For Koyre, the story of the closed world to the infinite universe is a theological story where the "mighty, energetic God…who actually 'ran' the universe according to His free will and decision became, in quick succession, a conservative power, an *intelligentsia supra-mundana*, a 'Dieu fainéant'"(Koyre 1968:276).

It is my contention that this process of deterritorialization of the sacred that Luckmann and Koyre identify has intensified with the proliferation of certain visual technologies, including satellite imagery and mapping software, which quite literally breaks up the visual unity of the world in its new regime of vision. While the two previous chapters have focused on the instances of worlding, which exhibit the "religious use of technology," this current chapter will focus on instances where there is evidence of a religious influence on technology. The realm of technological practices whose structural and visual characteristics have an affinity with religiosity extends from social networking sites, as the previous chapter details, but also to GISs that are commonly used such as Google Maps and Google Earth, which provide the

feeling of seeing *as* God. One writer describes the experience of using these technologies as such:

> [T]he satellite vision made popular by GPS systems and Google Earth, they show how much we enjoy having an omniscient, commanding view of the world. What the Greeks regarded as the sin of hubris is commonplace for us, almost mundane, as is another divine prerogative man has granted himself: that of taking on different forms and using these to operate in different worlds. Like in the past, this projection of the divine ego is known as an avatar, but unlike in the past, it is now a possibility open to any acne-ridden adolescent. For today's teenagers, "virtual life" is a fact of life, but often it is also…a collective cult, a religion…Technology also violates our privacy like only God used to be able to; thus while we are increasingly unwilling to attend confession, we find it easier and easier to lay our souls bare on social networks.(Quaranta 2008)

It is my assertion that the expansion of "minimal transcendences" that Luckmann identifies has intensified with the proliferation of these visual technologies, in effect *normalizing* the omniscient view of the world, as Quaranta says. In other words, the normalization of the omniscient view of the world, or "God-vision," is a "minimal transcendence" *par excellence*. (It is the other side of the religio-technological coin, wherein the convergence of religion and new media technologies not only affects the former but also the latter.) To support these claims, I investigate changes in models of the world engendered by visual media, in particular everyday GISs(Geographic Information Systems) such as Google Maps and Google Earth.

Theoscopy and the horizontal attitude

The foundation of the claims of this chapter is that the unity and stability of the various

historical articulations of “cosmos” have in large part been influenced by technologies that have, in turn, created what I would call, after Jonathan Crary and other art historians, “regimes of vision.” New technologies affect new cosmologies. And for every new cosmology, there is a new way in which human and Godly vision is constituted.

This is an argument that historian Stefanos Geroulanos has made with regard to what he calls “theoscopy.” In line with Foucault’s alignment of architecture and regimes of vision with certain modes of power, an argument most famously explicated in *Discipline and Punish*, Geroulanos suggests that technologies, serving as the architectural infrastructure of vision, formalize an “omnipotent gaze” of an “all-seeing God, at once present and absent, and reinscribes him as a Great Observer”(Geroulanos: 2006:642). Theoscopy, therefore, “involves the establishment of a site of perfect vision in the political, a site endowed with transcendental, theological power, which then turns into the sovereign structuring principle of the theologico-political,” rooted in “an ethics and a social ideal of transparency before this gaze”(Geroulanos 2006:633). In this way, it is “Christian” or “Christomimetic,” reminiscent of what Foucault later calls the “pastoral” power of the all-seeing eye of God. Thus, “a theologically inflected concept of vision returns to organize modern everyday life, how theoscopy is reconstructed in a society devoid of God”(Geroulanos 2006:634–635), such as in contemporary network societies.

It is this question of the “positionality” of God and the human that is pursued in theological terms in theologian Paul Tillich’s response to the advent of space travel and space photography. For him, the changing nature of the human’s view of himself tells the story of modernity’s unfolding, in part theological and in part scientific-technological, from the Greek and medieval ideals of contemplation and self-transcendence to the modern ideal of “world-control” and “world-shaping.” The “technical sciences,” or “technoscience," the complex of technology and scientific research that has made space travel possible, contribute to what he calls the “discovery of the horizontal.”

While classical Greece and the Middle Ages featured the "striving of life toward what transcends the cosmos," thus producing a "vertical attitude," "the Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment" aimed to control and transform the cosmos in the service of God and/or humans, thus producing a "horizontal attitude." The major "shocks" of the "removal of man and his earth from the cosmic center" were to the onto-cosmological *status quo*.

> Since the biblical literature as well as its interpretation in fifteen hundred years of church history was based on a world view in which the earth was in the center of the universe and human history the ultimate aim of the creation of the earth, and the Christ the center of human history, an urgent question arose: What about the position of man in the providential acting of God; what about the cosmic significance of the Christ in the universe as a whole? Does not the moving of the earth out of the center undercut both the central significance of man and the cosmic significance of the Christ? Is not the whole "drama of salvation" reduced to a series of events, happening on a small planet at a particular time without universal significance?(Tillich 2002:187–188)

Here, Tillich identifies the crisis of the figure of the human, upon which Christian doctrine was silently upheld since the beginnings of modernity. When the positionality of the human shifts in response to technological change, the notions of God and the world also necessarily incurred an alteration.[44]

The horizontal attitude is an important concept that Tillich introduces when considering the shift between the onto-cosmological complex of God-human-world that was initiated by

[44] Arguably, however, the technical accomplishment of what Tillich here is arguing, and the subsequent "horizontal" attitude, was not accomplished in any significant way as it did not yet reach a level of mass diffusion, until the televisualization of the Moon landing by Apollo 11 in 1969 and the availability of photographs of the Earth from subsequent space travel, in particular the Earthrise photos, which of course occurred six years after the writing of Tillich's response.

the visualization of the Earth *in toto*, made possible by space travel and space photography. Its instrumentality in provoking such a shift is especially indebted to its status as symbol. A picture of the whole Earth had not only "emotional power" but also "important sociological effects." As these symbols became "decisive for the formation of a new ideal of human existence, the image of the man who looks down at the earth, not from heaven, but from *a cosmic sphere* above the earth became an object of identification and psychological elevation for innumerable people"(Tillich 2002:188). The new "ideal of human existence" is one, which fulfills, according to Tillich, the Icarian desire of humans to "transcend the realm of earthbound experiences, at least in imagination"(Tillich 2002:188). But, as he is quick to note, this transcendence is not at all through something "qualitatively other" but "through a strange section of something qualitatively the same—the natural universe," effectively immersing the Earth into a larger entity. Therefore, the "transcendence" of the Earth is at once an immersion into the universe as well as a move away from Earth.

Along with this transcendence comes an objectification of Earth for the human viewer. It deprives the Earth "of 'her' motherly character, her power of giving birth, of nourishing, of embracing, of keeping for herself, of calling back to herself. She becomes a large, material body to be looked at and considered as totally calculable"(Tillich 2002:190). In this way, Tillich argues, science challenged the vertical attitude, which at times he calls a "cosmic frame," as well as the figure of Man, which had a privileged place within it.

> Today's astronomy considers the possibility of other religiously meaningful histories in other parts of the universe, with other beings in whom God could have become fully manifest, through with another beginning and another end. If space exploration is seen in this context, as the preliminary last step in a long development, one can say that it has changed tremendously the cosmic frame of man's religious self-evaluation.(Tillich

2002:192)

Geroulanos and Tillich foreground themes that will be at the root of the arguments laid out over the course of this chapter. First, they both identify a tri-partite onto-cosmological network that consists of God, the world, and humans. This "arrangement," which Luckmann, as earlier noted, calls "the sacred cosmos," their arguments suggest, is constituted by the theoscopic nature of visual, "worlding" technologies. These, in turn, have consequences on the said arrangement of the sacred cosmos, shifting not only the power relations therein but also how the constituent elements relate to one another, and thus are defined.

The new technics of Apollonian vision

In terms borrowed from Heidegger, geographer Tim Ingold suggests that, thanks to scientific and technological innovations such as space travel and space photography, humans have become alienated from the world. "The world *imaged* as a globe," he states, "far from coming into being in and through a life process, figures as an entity that is, as it were, presented to or confronted by life. The global environment is not a lifeworld, it is a world apart from life"(Ingold 2000: 210. Emphasis added.).

We see from this that the basis for his "separation" argument is the phenomenological category of "lifeworld." Following Sloterdijk, Ingold argues that the sphere, as opposed to globe, is the preferred "model" of the relationship between the human and the world. The globe is "centripetal," by which he means that it draws the world into the human. The world, from the global view, revolves around the human. This is literally what the pre-Copernican view of the universe largely purported. It was not so much an issue of Earth-centrism but rather an expression of a proto-humanist anthropocentrism. To the contrary, spheres are "centrifugal," that is, they draw the human outward, allowing greater engagement with the other possible

objects of knowledge.

For Ingold, the major mistake of globalism, the ideology of the globe, is its divorce "from life, that is yet complete in itself." It draws the "world" in which we live "even further from the matrix of our lived experience," giving off the illusion that "the world as it really exists can only be witnessed by leaving it"(Ingold 2000:211). Globalism thus suggests that the world, in order to be fully understood, could only be through a distanciation. Furthermore, it portends a framework of complete spatial unification, which compels the perceiving subject to already have in mind an image of the globe reaching an understanding of the global. Though he does not put it this way, Ingold, in effect, is arguing that the figure of the globe, and globalism, is totalist.

Echoing Heidegger, he points to *technology* as responsible for the dominance of the global perspective.

> ...it might be argued that the dominance of the global perspective marks the triumph of technology over cosmology. Traditional cosmology places the person at the center of an ordered universe of meaningful relations…and enjoins an understanding of these relations as a foundation for proper conduct towards the environment. Modern technology, by contrast, places human society and its interests outside what is residually construed as the "physical world," and furnishes the means for the former's control over the latter. (Ingold 2000:216)

For Ingold, technology provides a different orientation to the world. It allows for the human to become *master* over it not an object within it. This is a symptom of the modern, technoscientific *Weltbild*, and harkens back to Heidegger's argument about the "object sphere" of the modern world-picture.

> Cosmology provides the guiding principles for human action *within* the world, technology provides the principles for human action upon it. Thus, as cosmology gives way to technology, the relation between people and the world is turned inside out, so that what was a cosmos or lifeworld becomes a world—a solid globe—externally presented to life. In short, the movement from spherical to global imagery corresponds to the undermining of cosmological certainties and the growing belief in, and indeed dependence upon, the technological fix. It is a movement from revelation to control, and from partial knowledge to the calculated risk. (Ingold 2000:216)

Hence, it is no surprise that the cultural geographer Denis Cosgrove argues that the representation of the whole Earth has brought forth a particular type of vision, which he describes as "Apollonian," after not only the Greek-Roman deity but also the name of the space program initiated by NASA during the Kennedy administration.

> The Apollonian gaze, which pulls diverse life on earth into a vision of unity, is individualized, a divine and mastering view from a single perspective. That view is at once empowering and visionary, implying ascent from the terrestrial sphere into the zones of planets and stars. The theme of ascent connects the earth to cosmographic spheres, so that rising above the earth in flight is an enduring element of global thought and imagination…In the narrative of Christ as God-man, refracted through the heritage of Greece and Rome, these two strands have been braided together into a universalizing teleology of Western Christianity. The imperial imperative has been figured through the image of the globe and centered on its surface at axes of temporal and spiritual power. For two millennia, Rome, city of the caesars [sic] and the popes,

has figured in the Western imagination as the paradigmatic global city.(Cosgrove 2003:xi)

Therefore, for Cosgrove, the regime of vision native to the visual technologies of the Apollo program and satellite photography was a "global vision," which was able to reach the masses thanks to the proliferation of two photographs—"Earthrise," a photograph taken in 1968 on Apollo 8 by astronaut William Anders, and 22727, alternatively called "The Blue Marble," taken in 1972 on Apollo 17 through its wide proliferation and circulation. Non-astronauts could now experience the vision of the astronaut, albeit in modified form(Cosgrove 1994:286).[45]

As a geographer, Cosgrove contextualizes the Apollonian vision brought on by Earthrise and 22727 in the history of cartography and along with it the history of cosmography and geography. Doing so, he suggests, reveals the fact that the "meanings of the photographed earth were anticipated long before the photographs themselves were taken," expressing "the distinctive Western mentality that lies behind the universalist claims of contemporary globalism"(Cosgrove 2003:ix–x). In *Apollo's Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the Earth in the Western Imagination*, he traces a genealogy of globes (the physical objects), from the classical globe of the ancients to the Christian globe of the Middle Ages to the modern and virtual globe. The thematic threads that weave this genealogy together are visual unity, transcendence and universalism.

The medieval Christian globe, for instance, articulated a "theological geography," with "the idea of a celestially located, 'almighty,' patriarchal divinity" that "encompasses elemental and celestial spheres, his head reaching beyond even the enclosing frame of the universe"(Cosgrove 2003:56).

[45] Paolo Apolito calls a similar subject-effect "the Magic eye," while providing an alternative genealogy that points to the photographs of the Hubble Space Telescope as the achievement of "celestial subjectivity" (Apolito 2005:116).

> Christ's physical encompassing of the terrestrial globe speaks to his corporeal presence on earth, while the cosmographic image places Godhead in the incorruptible realm. The risen Christ's physical ascension brings the whole world within his Apollonian embrace. Christ's wilderness temptation, narrated in Matthew, emphasizes the implications of this perspective. Given sight of "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them" from "an exceeding high mountain," Christ is offered global dominion in return for an acknowledgment of a distinct authority over the elemental sphere. (Cosgrove 2003:58)

The Apollonian perspective effectively brought together two discourses to produce the global attitude of which Cosgrove writes—celestial and geographic exploration alongside the budding ideology of the sovereign individual, effectively resetting "the place of humans within nature"(Cosgrove 2003:114). But the Apollonian perspective was, importantly, not a mapping of the universe but rather a view of Earth from the stars. The Ptolemaic view of the world was influential in the development of linear perspective, though Erwin Panofsky may argue otherwise(Panofsky 1991).

Up to this point in Cosgrove's genealogy of the Apollonian perspective, we have only remained at the level of a singular view of the Earth, with its "universal" or "transcendent" quality deriving from the *distance* more so than omnipresence. The godliness of Cosgrove's Apollonian vision, as thus far explained, relies upon an ideological alignment of the heavens with God(s). But, as Cosgrove shows, map galleries and, later, world landscape paintings, such as those by Jochaim Patinir, "[appeared] to illustrate a substantial segment of the globe's surface, a vast panorama with multiple viewpoints"(Cosgrove 2003:128). It is not until, what he calls, the "virtual globe," itself an extension of aerial photography that took hold in World War I

that emerges out of Earthrise and 22727, where Cosgrove argues full Apollonian vision is achieved.

This achievement, for Cosgrove, however, is not necessarily one to celebrate. In fact, he is quite ambivalent on the issue. While in some places, he writes with a sense of accomplishment, in others, he bemoans its Master positionality(Cosgrove 2008). Seeing the entirety of the earth, one could argue, gives the human the illusion he or she could not only see as God but *was* God. Donna Haraway identifies this as "the god-trick," describing it as "the conquering gaze from nowhere"(Haraway 2002:677). This god-trick of all-encompassing, even god-like vision, has been aided by the development of visual technologies in particular, a point that goes rather unacknowledged by Cosgrove. She writes:

> The visualizing technologies are without apparent limit; the eye of any ordinary primate like us can be endlessly enhanced by sonography systems, scanning electron microscopes, computer-aided tomography scanners, colour-enhancement techniques, satellite surveillance systems, home and office VDTs, cameras for every purpose from filming the mucous membrane lining the gut cavity of a marine worm living in the vent gases on a fault between continental plates to mapping a planetary hemisphere elsewhere in the solar system.(Haraway 2002:677)

Unlike the visual technologies that facilitated the Earthrise photos, which allow for the user to view the world from a "zoomed out" distance, the visual technologies that Haraway mentions offer a "zoomed in" intimacy. These are infra-technologies. This type of supposed "infinite" vision, she insists, is an illusion, a trick. She goes so far as to call it "unregulated gluttony" stemming from gorging in a "technological feast."

In this theoscopic regime of visual technics, the embodied nature of vision is

undermined and forgotten. As her main problematic is the “Western cultural narratives about objectivity,” which she rightly argues are “allegories of the ideologies of relations of what we call mind and body, of distance and responsibility,” Haraway discusses vision mainly in terms of power.

> Vision is *always* a question of the power to see—and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices. With whose blood were my eyes crafted? These points also apply to testimony from the position of "oneself." We are not immediately present to ourselves. Self-knowledge is a bad visual system. Fusion is a bad strategy of positioning…There is no way to "be" simultaneously in all, or wholly in any, of the privileged (subjugated) positions structured by gender, race, nation, and class. And that is a short list of critical positions…The only position from which objectivity could not possibly be practiced and honored is the standpoint of the master, the Man, the One God, whose eye produces, appropriates, and orders all difference. No one ever accused the God of monotheism of objectivity, only of indifference. The god-trick is self-identical, and we have mistaken that for creativity and knowledge. Omniscience even.(Haraway 2002:681)

Haraway thus concludes that the normalization and proliferation of the omniscient view of the world offers a view from nowhere that elides issues of subjugated positionality, in particular the coefficient of power that is written into the use of particular visual technologies. Hence, for her, the political implications are worrisome.

The worry expressed by Haraway, Cosgrove and Ingold for the human taking up of the God position is also found in discussions that are only tangentially related to geography and visual technologies though *very* much in line with discussions about representations of “the

world." In his interventions within epistemological debates around relativism, philosopher Hilary Putnam too professes a discomfort with what he calls "God's Eye" point of view. The God's Eye point of view is an externalist perspective of truth, predicated on a "correspondence" theory. "The world," in the God's Eye point of view, he writes:

> …consists of some fixed totality of mind-independent objects. There is exactly one true and complete description of "the way the world is." Truth involves some sort of correspondence relation between words or thought-signs and external things and sets of things.(Putnam 1981:49)

It is for this reason that Putnam alternatively calls this "externalist." The privileged position is from the outside.

The Omnivoyant technics of Google Maps and Google Earth

Are the everyday technologies of Google Maps and Google Earth guilty of the god-trick? Is the vision of Google Maps and Google Earth indeed guilty of externalism, that is, a maintenance of a metaphysical "outside" from which all can be seen clearly in the light of Truth? Are the technologies such as Google Maps and Google Earth wholly theoscopic? Are the users of these technologies inextricably bound to take up the position of God, along with the trimmings of (*pace* Foucault) pastoral and disciplinary power?

There have been many commentators (especially on the World Wide Web), who have pointed out the Godly nature (meant derogatorily) of Google Maps. For instance, a post on the prominent New York City art blog *Art Fag City* observes, "We are bombarded by fragmentary impressions and overwhelmed with data, but we often see too much and register nothing. In the past, religion and ideologies often provided a framework to order our experience; now,

Google has laid an imperial claim to organize information for us"(Rafman 2009). Pointing to the ways in which Google Maps' Street View in particular has taken pictures of homes and people without permission or consent, the post points to some feats of protest among those who, having caught wind of what Google was doing, wished to voice their displeasure—the most forthright being an image captured on Berwick Rd. in Belfast of four young men, three of whom are giving the camera the middle finger. But while mentioning the sense of surveillance that many residents feel across the Americas, Europe and Australia, where Google has acquired most of its Street View images, the author of the post ultimately suggests that "Google Street Views present a universe observed by the detached gaze of an indifferent being. Its cameras witness but do not act in history. For all Google cares, the world could be absent of moral dimension"(Rafman 2009).

Others, however, write more positively. For instance, media theorist Jason Farman suggests that Google Earth points to an emergent global awareness. While acknowledging the links between visualization tools, voyeurism, and the "pretense of objective empiricism" and their implications for imperial and colonial mapmaking, Farman shows that "Google Earth uniquely engages its users, not as disembodied voyeurs, but as participants in global dialog, represented spatially on the digital map." In Google Maps and Google Earth, Farman argues, there is the potential for "recontextualization and subversion from the 'master representations' of maps can be achieved *within* the authorial structure of the digital map rather than re-authoring the existing software"(Farman 2010:870).

> What is new is the advancements made by emerging GIS programs such as Google Earth that allow for spatial debate of maps within maps, new levels of interactivity and user agency with maps, and the ability for non-professionals to engage in these activities. These opinions have instigated a massive step forward for how users interact

with maps.(Farman 2010:872)

Take, for instance, Google Earth Community, one of the prime spaces on the web that links the work of Google Earth users with one another. It is a discussion board/forum where "overlays"—user-made place marks that can be exported, and thus saved, as a file to be imported by other users of Google Earth—are widely shared.

> Overlays functions as a way for users to augment the map by offering a different visual representation of a specific area and can range from the simple—such as a user replacing the low resolution imager of Bora Bora in French Polynesia with a higher resolution aerial photograph—to the complex—such as an animated overlay that shows the shrinking Arctic icecaps. (Farman 2010:879)

Though the user opens up Google Earth and begins in the Apollonian perspective of Earth from afar, she quickly "flies to" wherever region she so chooses. (The flying is simulated through animation but Google has quite happily adopted it as its official term.) At this point, there is no "fixed" perspective with regard to either scale or anything else. The map, "instead of being an objective visualization of a territory," is rather an "unstable signifier, heavily imbued with the cultural perspectives of the society that created them"(Farman 2010:874).

For Farman, this is enough evidence to suggest that in Google Earth, and especially its capacity to create and share overlays, "there is not a 'central' map of authority that will dominate user interactions." To the contrary, the users are able to affect and customize the map. Hitting a Saussurian note, Farman writes, "The user-generated content of the Google Earth community brings this symbol, which has enjoyed the status of being a grounded sign, into a relationship with the users that allows them to engage in free play"(Farman 2010:880).

Consequently, “the technological gaze of aerial and satellite imagery—the essence of the interactive maps presented in Google Earth” is not, in Farman’s view, “remaining within the static authorial control of its authors/programmers and system requirements”(Farman 2010:880, 882). Therefore, for Farman, Google Earth is not an entity that is “always already” there. To the contrary, it is a resonant complex that includes both user and software. This avoids “fetishizing interactivity” but also locking the user into the limitations of the program. Ultimately, he argues that “interactivity…within the very structure…[enacts] agency”(Farman 2010:882).

This can also be said of Google Maps, which has perhaps a larger user-base, and has the ability for users to use it on the move, on their mobile devices. In the first place, Google Maps in its Desktop view (that is, on the computer) uses as its main interface a map, which resembles a road map. It is horizontal, uses a color palette of no more than 4-5 colors and has the ability to zoom in and out. In terms of layout, this is nothing different than a road map, which can be purchased at any rest stop on the numerous highways of the United States or from a GPS device found in many cars sold in the US today. What changes is when the user types in a search key “pizza,” for example, with certain parameters such as address or zip code. This then results in an adjustment, a magical zoom-in, followed by an information bubble which lists the names, addresses and phone numbers of the pizza places that fit the locational and informational rubrics of the given search. Though these are quite convenient, there is yet another more important feature that is more pertinent—the different view functions.

There are six in total including the “default” map view: street, traffic, satellite, terrain and the very recently implemented, more. Each view setting has a different “imaging” of movement, a simulation of movement that is not embedded in the vocabulary of human visual or kinesthetic movement. I would argue that it is here where signs of the new regime of Apollonian vision can be found. It allows for multiple perspectives, which in effect may be a

non-perspective. (More on this issue of perspective later.) If, for example, I switch from “street view” which shows the avenue of the address that I searched, to the “satellite view,” I see the dissolution of perspective altogether since it is in fact impossible for the Heideggerian or any other phenomenological subject to occupy. It is not “bird’s eye” but God’s eye. It is Apollonian, but modular. Unlike Cosgrove’s Apollo, which remains far off, viewing the Earthly object *in toto*, Google’s God can switch back and forth not just between two perspectives, but *multiple* perspectives. The viewing subject is at once embedded (as in during street view) and disembedded (as in during map or satellite view). And as for the most recently added “More” tab, which drops down with option boxes—Wikipedia and Photos. If I check the Wikipedia and/or the Photos box, places near my search destination with Wikipedia entries and photos that have been geo-tagged appear.[46]

Thus what we see is the disunification of the Godly logic of vision into a plurality of perspectives, a phenomenon that media theorist Paul Virilio calls “omnivoyance.” There is, it seems, a clear difference between the omniscience of the Haraway’s “God-trick,” or Putnam’s “God’s eye point of view,” and Virilio’s omnivoyance. Most noticeably, Virilio’s suggestion is an argument about the structural or architectural aspects of visual technologies, what he calls “visionics.” Hence, it is less so a claim about epistemology or vision broadly but one that is specific to the current media-technological age, which, as he rightly notes, fuses the “eye and the camera lens.”

> After all, aren't they talking about producing a "vision machine" in the near future, a machine that would be capable not only of recognizing the counters of shapes, but also of completely interpreting the visual field, of staging a complex environment close-up or

[46] Geotagging is a relatively recent development in informational metadata that accompanies many media files, in this case digital photos. For example, if one is taking a photo with their Blackberry, which are now equipped with GPS, the geospatial data of the photo is coded into file.

> at a distance? Aren't they also talking about the new technology of "visionics": the possibility of achieving *sightless vision* whereby the video camera would be controlled by a computer? The computer would be responsible for the machine's—rather than the televiewer's—capacity to analyze the ambient environment and automatically interpret the meaning of events. (Virilio 1994:59)

Sightless vision is of course *synthetic* vision, as it is a "[product] of info-graphic software" and "computer-aided design"(Virilio 1994:62). For Virilio, this amounts to a "splitting" of "viewpoint," by which he means something akin to the disintegration of linear perspective, which is perhaps the most important aspect of the visual technics of Google Maps and Google Earth. Whereas Haraway (and Cosgrove) express concern about the unification of vision vis-à-vis digital technologies, for Virilio (like Farman), while there is concern, it is directed at something else entirely—the dispersal of unified perspective. Part and parcel of this dispersion is the "the unity of optics and kinematics," which "requires that the vector of physical movement (the means of transport over distance) should no longer be separated from its specific vision"(Virilio 2000a:26). This new regime of synthetic vision is a "kinematic," or "active," optics(Virilio 2000a).

He believes this kind of optics has been fueled in large part by the advent of "cine-videography," referring to the proliferation and ubiquity of instant-relay video cameras, allowing the user to observe all that which is exposed to "the inquisitive gaze"(Virilio 2000a:7) of increasingly improving televisual definition. It allows for the user to be "tele-present"(Virilio 2000a:6), thus able to view the environment as electrically transparent. Though this could only occur in confined spaces such as the casinos, which in many famous Hollywood portrayals contain a control room that allows for a simultaneous view of multiple camera areas, this today, arguably, happens on a global scale in the case of Google's pair of GISs, facilitated by satellite

imaging and the widespread use of computers and mobile devices, resulting in the “instant interaction” that characterizes the “media non-separability” of contemporary reality(Virilio 2000a:30). The “*tele-reality* of synthetic vision, he writes, “[supplants] the reality of the real-space presence of objects and places”(Virilio 2000a:6–7). This, he writes, is the “death” of “rational visibility.”

> This "death," or at least this *relativist disappearance*, is linked to the discrediting of passive (direct)optics to the benefit of active or even "activist" (indirect) optics. *Eye death* of the scientific researcher here represents for physicists the same crisis of conscience that Nietzsche's death (or relative disappearance) of God provoked in metaphysicians, relativist renunciation of faith in perception corresponding to objectivist renunciation of faith in perception corresponding to objectivist renunciation of religious faith.(Virilio 2000a:50)

This relativist disappearance, or eye death, is also, in turn, “trans-appearance,” the turn of phrase of course describing the phenomenological experience of viewing the world in direct or active optics. Thus, the “passive optics” of the “telescope, microscope or camera lens” is today obsolesced by the “active optics” of “optical electronics and radio electronical vision,”(Virilio 2000a:56) resulting in a shift towards “omnivoyant” user experience, which adds the divine attribute of omnipresence dressed up in “a kind of electro-magnetic telekinesis”(Virilio 2000a:66).

Being omnivoyant, for Virilio, is the technological accomplishment of tele-presence. It is the capacity for “instant orbital perception”(Virilio 2000a:27). It is, to put it in terms of this study, Godly *omnipresence*.

> In fact, the faster information circulates, the more the control of all exchange increases and tends to become absolute. *Omnipresence is meant to make such control the substitute for man's environment, his earth, his only milieu*.
>
> Everything that was acted out in dividing the territory is now acted out not only, as before, in organizing the social body, but in controlling the animal body of this human being, less "in the world" than *within himself*. Hence the fragility of human "self-consciousness," which has been more invaded by technologies than invested with new responsibilities.(Virilio 2000a:78)

What Virilio is describing is a new positionality that has come from the visual technics of kinematic optics. He speaks of this in terms of "belief," perception and the death of God. The "absolute look" of God and the "relative look" of the human, as Virilio notes, have collapsed into each other.

> No longer to believe your eyes has become an inevitability, so that loss of faith in perception develops *ad infinitum* the loss of religious faith begun in the Age of Enlightenment. If God is dead, as Nietzsche claimed, it is because the omnipotence of the look *(theos)* has been extinguished forever. The absolute look of the divine (creator) and the *relative* look of the human (observer): both have been dragged into the fall of definitive blindness.(Virilio 2000a:79)

Though unacknowledged by Virilio, his use of the terms "absolute" and "relative" is evocative of the visual theology of Nicholas of Cusa, the 15th century polymath and cardinal.[47] Inspired

[47] The thought of Cusanus (his Latinate name) is a starting point for a wide variety of works in the philosophy of science. For Ernst Cassirer and Alexander Koyre, and later Michel de Certeau, Cusanus is

by Augustine, Cusanus attempts in his *On the Vision of God* to lay out not simply a theological tract but also an impressionistic and experiential rendering of how God's presence operates. Indeed, as Augustine's *Confessions* had done almost a millennium prior to it, Cusa gives not an intellectualist, theological account in the form of Aquinas' more systematic "proof" of God, but an affective-phenomenological one. Cusanus grounds his theory of God's vision in equating the omnivoyant Gaze (of God) with what he calls Absolute Sight. The "gaze" is his term to describe how God sees. This is quite different than the perspectival subject-object oriented vision, which emerges contemporaneously with Cusanus, in, according to many art historians, including Jonathan Crary, Alberti's *Della pittura*(1436)(Crary 1992).

Cusanus' mode of argument is quite curious as it deviates from rigid and rigorous philosophical logic. It is rooted in a central *image*. That image, at the very beginning of *On the Vision of God*, is that of the Icon:

> There are in existence many of these excellently depicted faces—e.g., the one of the archer in the forum of Nuremberg, the one of the preeminent painter Roger in his priceless painting in the city hall at Brussels, the one of the veronica [i.e., of the image of Christ] in my chapel Coblenz, the one, in the castle at Brixen, of the angel holding the emblems of the church, and many others here and there. Nevertheless, so that you not be lacking in practical experience, which requires such a sensible figure, I am sending to Your Love a painting that I was able to acquire. It contains the figure of an *omnivoyant* [individual]; and I call it the "Icon of God."(Cusanus 1985:680)

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the first "modern" thinker, in that his Renaissance-era theological writings, while mystically oriented and, at root, neo-Platonist, is greatly influenced by the not-quite-yet-emergent science of astronomy and also mathematics. So what we get with Nicholas of Cusa is a proto-modern scientific mysticism, one that has surprisingly great bearing on the "sacred cosmos" of the 21st century in spite of its writing during what is now called the Renaissance. Cassirer, in particular, finds in Cusanus, the beginnings of a modern "cosmic" thinking, wherein the medieval ideas of the whole and hierarchy are met with scientific (and mathematical) ideas of infinity.

The Icon of God is a representation—a symbolic "stand-in" that refers to the "real" thing.[48] Yet, Cusanus does not treat it as such. He treats this Icon with literal seriousness, going so far as to never bringing attention to the deployment of metaphor in his writing. Throughout *On the Vision* what he from the outset calls a "depiction" does not hold a lesser degree of privilege. This can be partially explained by his mysticism.

Mysticism, at best, is a term that is too broad to describe anything with any hope of precision. However, the Christian mystical tradition is generally centered on the experience of God through *other-than-intellectual* means. Whereas mainstream Western Christian theology is focused on experience as a product of belief (a product of the influence of Thomas Aquinas' Plato-Aristotelianism), Cusanus' mysticism focuses on what William James calls "religious experience," or what Mircea Eliade refers to as "ecstasy." Here is Cusanus, describing the experience of looking at the Icon after hanging it on a wall:

> For the imagination of the brother [meaning: a fellow monk] who is standing in the east does not at all apprehend the icon's gaze that is being directed toward a different region, viz., toward the west or the south. Next, let the brother who was in the east situate himself in the west, and he will experience the [icon's] gaze as fixed on him in the west, just as it is previously was in the past. But since he knows that the icon is stationary and unchanged, he will marvel at the changing of the *unchangeable* gaze . . . Moreover, if while fixing his sight upon the icon he walks from west to east, he will find that icon's gaze proceeds continually with him; and if he returns from east to west, the gaze will likewise not desert him. He will marvel at how the icon's gaze is moved

[48] For a full philosophical and theological discussion of "the Icon," see chapter 1 of Marion, Jean-Luc. 1995. *God without being: hors-texte*. University of Chicago Press.

> immovably. And his imagination will be unable to apprehend that the gaze is also moved in accompaniment with someone else who is coming toward him from the opposite direction.(Cusanus 1985:680–681)

Cusanus' fascination with the Icon is grounded in an *il-logic* of vision. He highlights the paradoxical nature of the unchanging, yet mobile gaze of the Icon. This description of the gaze, he suggests, is a mystical one since the normal, intellectualist and reasoned "imagination will be unable to apprehend" how it is that the gaze can be utterly constant, yet mobile. This is what he refers to as Absolute Sight.

> For indeed, God, who is the summit of all perfection and who is greater than can be thought, is called "theos" by virtue of the fact that He observes all things. Therefore, if in the image the depicted gaze can *appear to be beholding each and every thing at once*, then since this [capacity] belongs to sight's perfection, it cannot truly befit the Truth less than it apparently befits the icon, or appearance.(Cusanus 1985:682. Emphasis added.)

Cusanus' words could very well characterize the experience of kinematic optics in Google Maps and Google Earth. The Absolute in the above case is the capacity to cast a gaze on everything simultaneously; in other words, it is spatial and temporal ubiquity, which prefigures the multi-perspective modularity that I have been outlining with respect to Google Maps' "visionless visualization." The primary feature of Google Maps—the various "view" functions—can be explained through this concept of Absolute Sight.

However, there is some ambiguity in what Absolute, in his sense, means. There is very little clarity as to whether or not, for instance, it is synonymous to Aristotelian Form (and hence

of another plane, beyond that of the human). Cusanus writes: “For the specific form derives from the Form which exists through itself and prior to which there is no other form. Therefore, that Form which gives specific being is Absolute Form; and You are this Form, O God—You, who are Former of heaven and earth and all things”(Cusanus 1985:696). If one were so inclined, he or she could do an Aristotelian reading. However, one must be careful in understanding the theological assumptions within Cusanus’ thought. The Aristotelian reading posits that Cusanus’ God as existing in another plane. God, in Cusanus’ writing, is the Icon that functions as the illustrative, “this-worldly,” grounds for the meditations of the entire work. Trinitarian theology understands the division of realms (e.g., this-world vs. other-world) in a rather different way than the Platonic-Aristotelian model. The triangle of the Father (God), the Son (Christ) and the Holy Spirit (the post-Pentecostal “trace”) tarries with the divide between matter and spirit.

And thus, Contracted Sight is precisely the opposite of the vision of God because of its very humanness. “For our sight,” he writes, “is conditioned by the affections of the organ [i.e., of the eye] and of the mind. Hence, a given individual looks [upon a given thing] now lovingly and gladly, later sadly and angrily, now as does a child, later as does an adult, and, still later, gravely and as does someone elderly”(Cusanus 1985:683). What Cusanus does in this rather strict typologization of Sight is to offer a theory of the vision of God that is not based on human physiological constraints. What differentiates God’s vision is its superhuman nature—its Apollonian, kinematic and theoscopic status. What Cusanus is precisely arguing against is a theological reduction of God’s vision, and thus God, to the level of the human. In fact, what seems to be most useful about Cusanus’ description of God’s vision is its purposeful inattention to the human as epistemological/hermeneutic standard for theology. For instance:

Since You behold at once each and every one [of us]—even as befigured by this

> painted image I look upon—I am amazed, O Lord, at how in Your visual power the universal coincide with the singular. But I take note of the following: that because seek [to understand] Your vision in terms of my own visual power, my imagination does not grasp how this [coincidence] can occur; since Your vision is not contracted to a sensible organ, as is mine, I am deceived in my judgment.(Cusanus 1985:695)

It seems that the descriptions of the vision of God illustrated by Cusanus above bear a resemblance to the experience of the active theoscopics of Google Maps and Earth. The visual technics of these everyday GISs have allowed for those with Internet access to take on the positionality of God, the Tillichian "horizontal attitude."

Today, "God-vision" is the "subject-effect" of visual technics, as represented by Google Maps and more generally the *dispositif* of satellite-imaging and GPS; or, God-vision facilitates an il-logic of vision (Absolute Sight) that detaches the concept of vision from the organic (read: physiological) body, linking it ontologically to new media technologies such as GISs. It seems that it is so because of the ways in which the visual technics of Google Maps does not even *attempt* to replicate physiological vision nor the stable subject-object relation that historians of vision, such as Crary, detail nor the systematicity of the "object sphere" in the words of Heidegger.

Theological considerations of God vision

To return to the onto-cosmological arrangement mentioned at the very beginning of this chapter, this development, in effect, closes the gap between "God" and "human." But it does so by not only repositioning these elements, leaving them unchanged, but rather recasts them in meaningful ways. In particular, the idea of "God" becomes increasingly unclear, as we take into consideration some of the technical aspects Google Maps and Google Earth. Is the "God"

of the "God vision" facilitated in these GIS technologies the same "God" as that of Haraway's "god-trick"?

Both, Cosgrove's "Apollonian vision" and Haraway's "god-trick," are concepts that are rooted in a line of social analysis that begins, at least in the 20th century, with Durkheim, and also Freud, especially in the latter's *Civilization and its Discontents*. Cosgrove and Haraway's positions are characterized by danger, specifically, of the vision of God. This danger, for them, is rooted in the possibility of taking-up of the position of God, that is to say, the potential donning of the subjective positionality of omnipresence and omnivoyance that has certain affinities with totalistic or fascist ideologies. In sum, the caution is directed toward the becoming-God of human subjectivity.

Within this fear, there is, undoubtedly, an assumed theology, a theology of transcendence, which lies beneath not only the arguments of Haraway and Cosgrove but also Putnam, Ingold and others. God, in their formulation, remains at a distance, and sees from above. Yet, GISs such as Google Maps and Google Earth maintain their God-like omnivoyance and omnipresence not through transcendence but through immanence. If we juxtapose these facts with a recent theological discourse around *kenosis*, or "emptying out of God," we may be able to consider a different outlook with regard to "God vision" than those who object to it.

In Christianity, the idea of *kenosis* is traced usually to Paul's letters to the Philippians:

> Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. (Philippians 2:5-7)

For many interpreters of Paul, *kenosis*, along with universality, is one of the Apostle's great

contributions to Christian theology. For them, Paul's notion most aptly explains the Incarnation and the co-substantiality of Trinitarian theology. It answers the mystery of why Christ most necessarily had to be both Man and God, and of course the most mysterious being of them all—Spirit.

Among the philosophers of religion, Jean-Luc Nancy has been one of the most consistent thinkers of *kenosis*, convinced of its import in understanding "deconstruction." Of interest to him has been the idea of the "self-deconstruction" of Christianity, whose operative logic he finds in the concept of *kenosis*. Influenced most keenly by Jacques Derrida's "auto-immunization" and Marcel Gauchet, Nancy suggests that there exists a kernel, immanent to Christianity (both in the history of theology and Biblically), of its own unraveling, that is, its own deconstruction.[49] For Nancy, this beckons the possibility of *kenosis* to the death of (a transcendent) God.

Kenosis, as Gianni Vattimo puts it, is the "death of (a transcendent) God," making God an immanent, this-worldly entity. It is the "atheistic" moment of Christianity, if we understand atheism to be "the negation of the divine principle, that is, of the principle represented in the configuration of an entity that is distinct from the entire world of entities, and for which it would hold the first cause and the final end"(Nancy 2008:16). God is thus flattened and ontologically deprivileged. As Nancy writes:

> With the figure of Christ comes the renunciation of divine power and presence, such that this renunciation becomes the proper act of God, which makes this act into God's becoming-man. In this sense, the god withdrawn, the god "emptied out," in Paul's

[49] Though unacknowledged, this argument has broad connections with those of Harvey Cox and Ernst Bloch. See Bloch, Ernst. 1972. *Atheism in Christianity: The religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom*. Herder and Herder; Cox, Harvey Gallagher. 1965. *The secular city: secularization and urbanization in theological perspective*. Macmillan.

> words, is not a hidden god at the depths of the withdrawal or the void (a *deus absconditus*): the site to which he has withdrawn has neither depths nor hiding places. He is a god whose absence in itself creates divinity, or a god whose void-of-divinity is the truth, properly speaking. (Nancy 2008:36)

The kenotic God is no longer an *absent* God. Nancy goes even further in suggesting that through the Incarnation, God "alienates" and "atheizes" himself. Thus, in Christianity, we have not so much a theology but an *atheology*. Nancy again:

> Atheology as a conceptualization of the body is the thought that "god" made himself "body" in emptying himself of himself (another Christian motif, that of Pauline kenosis: the emptying-out of God, or his "emptying-himself-out-of-himself"). The "body" becomes the name of the *a-theos* in the sense of "not-of-god." But "not-of-god" means not the immediate self-sufficiency of man or the world, but this: no founding presence. (In a more general sense, "monotheism" is not reduction to "one" of the number of gods in "polytheism": its essence is the disappearance of presence, of that presence that the gods of the mythologies *are.*) The "body" of the "incarnation" is therefore the place, or rather the taking place, the event, of that disappearance. (Nancy 2008:83)

For Nancy kenosis is a welcomed development as it resists the politics of transcendence that at times reinforces authoritarian structures of Christianity. God then is not "wholly other" but rather something much more familiar—human flesh. God, in Nancy's reading, is no longer God but rather a *body*.

But for a theologian, such as Jurgen Moltmann, who very much maintains a theism, the emptying-out of God into Man, the moment of Incarnation, is tantamount in Christianity as it

brings together the ontological issues of substance and being, most aptly. For him, unlike Nancy, *kenosis* raises not only the possibility of atheology but of a *pneumatology*. While atheology remains at the level of the figure of Christ, Moltmann's pneumatology hones in on the third entity of the Trinity—Spirit. "If the Spirit is God's immanent presence in the world," he writes, "do we not then also have to talk about a *kenosis* of the Spirit?"

> If God commits himself to his limited creation, and if he himself dwells in it as "the giver of life," this presupposes a self-limitation, a self-humiliation and a self-surrender of the Spirit. The history of suffering creation, which is the subject of transience, then brings with it a history of suffering by the Spirit who dwells in creation.(Moltmann 1993:102)

To configure this image of the Spirit that is implicated in the day-to-day operations of creation, Moltmann draws from two sources—the doctrine of the Trinity and the Kabalistic doctrine of Shekinah. Both, he argues, hold the key to understanding ways in which God "indwells" in creation. "Indwelling" is the famed doctrine of *perichoresis*, which in Christian theological circles, Moltmann is known for bringing back in vogue. Though there is no clean translation of the term, the one that Moltmann uses is "interpenetration," which he describes as:

> God *in* the world and the world *in* God; heaven and earth *in* the kingdom of God, pervaded by his glory; soul and body united *in* the life-giving Spirit to a human whole; woman and man *in* the kingdom of unconditional and unconditioned love, freed to be true and complete human beings. There is no such thing as a solitary life…In actual fact it consist only of windows. All living things—each in its own specific way—live in another and with one another, form one another and for one another. (Moltmann

1993:17)

This image of God is of course a throwback to an "earlier theological idea of the Creator Spirit who interpenetrates, quickens and animates the world, [which] was pushed out by modern mechanistic world-picture"(Moltmann 1993:98). It is God as *ruach*, which is of course the very first instance of God that we see in the Old Testament.[50]

The view of God as primarily Spirit has definite onto-cosmological ramifications. And thus to describe the sphere of the Cosmic spirit, Moltmann draws from systems and information theory to explain the behavior of "matter life and in the natural environment," which, according to these discourses, is fundamentally "indeterminate" and "complex." In this view, matter is not mere "object" but a "recipient and the sender of information"(Moltmann 1993:50).

By this, Moltmann is approximating a scientific theology taken on by another religious thinker, Teilhard De Chardin(Chardin 2001, 2008), who argues that all matter has "interiority," a level of evolutionary complexity evidencing the proof of the operation of Godly spirit on all level of creations.

> We are logically forced to assume the existence in rudimentary form (in a microscopic, i.e. an infinitely diffuse, state) of some sort of psyche in every corpuscle, even in those (the mega-molecules and below) whose complexity is of such a low or modest order as to render it (the psyche) imperceptible—just as the physicist assumes and can calculate

[50] According to Moltmann, "The biblical creation narrative begins by elucidating the initial statement about God's creation of heaven and earth, explaining that "The Spirit of God hovered (i.e., brooded) over the waters" (Gen. 1.2). The explanation was seldom heeded in theological interpretation. But it is intended to point out that the divine Spirit (*ruach*) is the creative power and the presence of God in his creation. The whole creation is a fabric woven by the Spirit, and is therefore a reality to which the Spirit gives form"(Moltmann 1993:99).

> those changes of mass (utterly imperceptible to direct observation) occasioned by slow movement. (Chardin 2008:301)

The larger, evolutionary process of the "complexification of all things" is what he calls "psychogenesis," or the development of the "within of things." As matter on all levels begins to forge an interiority of "psyche," a "thinking layer" in turn forms across nature, which he dubs "the noosphere." This term, originally used by Vladimir Vernadsky to refer to the sphere of distinctly human thought, as Teilhard uses it, refers to the thinking layer in general, which for him, also includes quantum, which itself, exhibits characteristics of "thinking" as information theory tells us.[51]

As we can see, the noopshere is akin to a guiding "spiritual energy," or "Cosmic spirit" in Moltmann's terms. Unlike the Watchmaker analogy, it refuses both the onesidedness of the transcendence of the God of Deism, on the one hand, and the nothingness upon which Spinoza's pantheism verges, on the other. What we have, however, according to Moltmann, is *panentheism*. "In the panentheistic view," he writes, "God, having created the world, also dwells in it, and conversely the world which he has created exist in him"(Moltmann 1993:98).

> Whereas simple pantheism makes everything a matter of indifference, *panentheism* is capable of differentiation. Whereas simple pantheism sees merely eternal, divine presence, *panentheism* is able to discern future transcendence, evolution and intentionality…This doctrine views creation as a dynamic web of interconnected processes. The Spirit differentiates and binds together. The Spirit preserves and leads indwelling Creator Spirit is fundamental for the community of creation…If the cosmic

[51] A notable study on the intersections of information theory and quantum physics is Barad, Karen. 2007. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Duke University Press Books.

> spirit is the Spirit to God, the universe cannot be viewed as closed system. (Moltmann 1993:103)

What we have with Moltmann's distinction of pantheism and panentheism is not only a working definition of an immanent God but also a corresponding open, multi-perspectival world like that of Google Maps and Google Earth. Thus, the God of this Cosmic, perichoretic vision is quite a different from that of the Apollonian vision. Could we call this *a*theoscopics?

Conclusion

What has been discussed throughout this chapter is the vanishing line between religious and technological practice, a phenomenon which can best be described using Graham Ward's notion of "techno-mysticism"

> The virtual reality that sits on so many people's desks or laps is one aspect of a new techno-mysticism most spectacularly presented to us in the use of special effects in blockbuster films. This is ironic given that Weber saw the rise of instrumentalism in science as fundamental to the disenchantment of the world. Science [and technology–S.H.] is now at the forefront of a multimillion dollar business of enchanting the world. (Ward 2006:182)

Ward's notion, which acknowledges the blurred distinction between religious and technological practice, gestures towards the possibility of what Gabriel Vahanian in *The Death of God* refers to as the triumph of religiosity (e.g. religious experience) *over* Christianity (e.g. religious doctrine)(Vahanian 1961b:198). Though many theologians and social scientists in particular have taken this position to task (though I believe misguidedly), the point that Vahanian

attempts to make is one that is close in spirit to Nancy and (Mark) Taylor. For him, we live in a post-Christian era, whereby "Christianity has lost its original value," meaning, its "symbolic and sacramental worth of the original Christian understanding of creation"(Vahanian 1961b:199), which was a victim to the epistemological end game between religion and science, of which religion ultimately lost.[52] Yet, there is retention of a "religious sentiment" or "religiosity." As he explains:

> This phenomenon shows that the secularization of Christianity has not been accompanied by an obliteration of the religious sentiment. In its lowest forms this sentiment has multiplied into a teeming "religionitis."(Vahanian 1961b:195)

For Vahanian, this "secularization" process of Christianity, from its hegemonic epistemology to "religionitis," has produced a "nascent religiosity of this post-Christian era," which he writes, "provides evidences of a technological orientation which are beyond dispute"(Vahanian 1961b:197).

This chapter has argued that this "technological orientation" can be found in the theoscopic structure of spectatorship in everyday GISs. But, if indeed one takes seriously the idea of *kenosis* and the theological work of Moltmann, then the "God" of "God-vision" is not the traditional Christian God but one which reflects a religion experiencing a "crisis of containment." Thus, in same movement where the shared logic of "worlding" blurs the line between religious and technological practice, providing the position of God to the human user, the very idea of God effectively changes as well.

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[52] Vahanian's "secular" perspective, if one can call it that, draws undoubtedly from the "demythification" project of Rudolf Bultmann. See especially Bultmann, Rudolf. 1976. *History of the Synoptic Tradition*. Harper; Bultmann, Rudolf. 1980. *Jesus and the Word*. Scribner; Bultmann, Rudolf. 1961. *Kerygma and myth: a theological debate*. Harper.

This is because today, God may be said exist in the “structure of technology” as “special effect,” to use the language of Ward. No longer the Primary Cause, “God is swallowed up by the power of technological systems that attest his sign; he has become a test result; he exists because he himself, or perhaps we should say, his envoys and his miracles, have been photographed, filmed, recorded, documented and stored” digitally(Apolito 2005:130). Is this, then, a god that can no longer be thought of as God?

Conclusion, or Thought Prompts

If it can be argued that the interface of religion and technologies can be found in, among other places, a shared logic of "worlding" as evidenced in the techno-physical environments of worship spaces, the digital milieu of online religiosity and the sacred cosmos of the globalized world-picture, then this shared logic must indeed have ramifications of the fundamental arrangement, or onto-cosmology, upon which many of the sociological, anthropological and even theological categories of the study of religion has been rooted, among them the various themes of this study, including "disenchantment," "sacred space," "community," and "religious experience." Yet, unfortunately, there are some matters that could not be addressed with the attention deserved. And thus, to conclude, it may be prodigious to touch briefly on themes that need to be mentioned by returning to the key contextual areas that were laid out in the Introduction: (1) the debates on secularism and secularization, (2) the tension of religion, science and technology within these discussions, (3) recent contributions in the sociology of religion, (4) studies in religion and media. The issues and themes tackled under these headings should not be thought of as summary "takeaways" but something more like prompts for future thought and repeated consideration.

1. Secularism and secularization

While there may be barometers for judging whether squabbles in academic books and journals have "hit the masses," so to speak, other than *The New Yorker*, when the esteemed literary critic James Wood wrote of "secularism and its discontents" in an article that appeared in the magazine's pages in August of 2011, there would be no doubt that the "secularism" debates had been put on the map—again. There is, of course, a precedent to mainstream news attention of secularism and its place in academic circles. After all, *Time* had run a cover story

called “Is God dead?” in the 1960s, after the onslaught of “death of God” theology. Nevertheless, Wood’s essay, largely a review of an edited volume by George Levine, was proof that questions pertaining to the religious and the secular were once again okay to ask.

As mentioned, the book anchors Wood’s discussion of the mixed blessing of contemporary secularism, which is both “achievement” and “predicament.” As he describes it:

> …modern Godless man, deprived of the old spirits and demons, and thrown into a world in which there is no one to appeal to outside his own mind, finds it hard to experience the spiritual “fullness” that his ancestors experienced.(Wood 2011)

This, of course, Wood himself admits, is a highly stylized, over-exaggerated and Christo-centric. But nevertheless, the point stands that secularism is really an occasion to think about the current place of the human in the world.

Hence, it is no surprise that many of the contributions in Levine’s edited collection hover over the lands of disenchantment. This is especially true for the chapter by Charles Taylor entitled “Disenchantment—Reenchantment” (C. Taylor 2011). While Taylor sticks to much of the same positions contained within *A Secular Age*, he does, however, make a very important point regarding the difference between the enchanted and disenchanted worlds.

In the enchanted world, “the line between personal agency and impersonal force was not at all clearly drawn.” Taylor uses relics as an example. Relics were thought of as curing those who handled them, or cursing those who abused them. They were “loci of power.” In other words, “the enchanted world, in contrast to our universe of buffered selves and ‘minds,’ shows a perplexing absence of certain boundaries that seem to us essential.” Among these is the modern, Western split between the subject and object, between mind and thing. But in the premodern world, “meanings do not inhere only in minds, but can reside in things, or in various

kinds of extrahuman but intracosmic subjects" (C. Taylor 2011:60). The fact that non-humans could be "charged," and that relationships between such objects were independent of human consciousness is the benchmark for "post-Galilean, mind-centered disenchantment"(C. Taylor 2011:62).

The question of reenchantment, then, obviously rears its head because there are some non-human objects that seem to be "charged." Different social theorists have posited a variety of different examples as to what these "objects" are. Some, like Jane Bennett, most forcefully, have suggested that nature through a certain philosophical—vitalist-materialist (via Spinoza and Thoreau)—lens can be seen as "enchanted"(Bennett 2001). Others, like John Caputo have honed in on technologies. Moreover, these new technologies are part of a "de-secularization process," whereby "new technologies have "created the opportunity for a new religious imagination" and produced the possibility of, as he calls it, "religion without religion," wherein "the sense of religious transcendence has begun to assume new and other forms." This, for Caputo, is the ultimate significance of the relationship of religion and technology in today's postmodern world:

> The traditional faiths contain something that they cannot contain, and there is an unmistakable tendency today to wrest religious phenomena free from the religions, to reproduce the structure of religion outside the traditional faiths and outside the classic oppositions of religion and science, body and soul, this world and the next. (Caputo 2006:89)

The present project has aimed to enter into this scholarly discourse by suggesting that if there is, indeed, a reenchantment in today's world, there must be a consideration of not only the role of technologies, in particular digital technologies, but also whether technological enchantment

necessarily falls within the narrative of secularization or counters it.

2. Religion, science and technology

Another concern of this study has been the rethinking of "the religious" or "religiosity" in the wake of the convergence of religion and technology. Part and parcel to this, I argue, is the onto-cosmological reshuffling of "God" in relation to "the human" and "the world." Here, it may be useful to think about that reshuffling in terms that have, since Durkheim, been the way in which social scientific approaches to religion have handled this very question, in terms of the generalized category of "the sacred."

By viewing "the sacred" as a primary heirustic through which the evolution of the relationship between technology and Christianity could be regarded, sociologist Bronislaw Szerszynski argues that "modern science and technology thus reinterpreted the salvation history of the Bible," producing a particular view of the sacred(Szerszynski 2005:54). For instance, the Reformation, with its own correlative media technology, print, signaled the arrival of the *Protestant* sacred, one that "strips away the institutional and supernatural hierarchies that both constituted and spanned the gulf between the transcendent divine and the world"(Szerszynski 2005:19). This is the sacred that is in the background of the "ethical orientation" of "this-worldly asceticism" that Weber famously describes(M. Weber 2001). It is viewing action in the world as holding some *sacred* or religious value. "Instead of Being and order being seen as deriving from a supernatural source external to empirical reality," Szerszynski writes, "they are increasingly seen as p*roperties of that reality itself*"(Szerszynski 2005:20).

With the "virtualization of reality" and the "realization of the virtual," we can say that we have reached the postmodern sacred, wherein "the idea of the rational but absent God is slowly abandoned in favor of the idea of an immanent rationality to nature itself—evidenced not

just in an increasingly secular science, but also in wider cultural ideas." The postmodern sacred is made up of a "multiplex reality, one filled with and constituted by different cosmologies and world-views grounded in subjective experience"(Szerszynski 2005:22).

These developments lead Szerszynski to suggest the emergence of a "technological sublime" that "[exalts] the power to dominate nature, provided a new, non-denominational civil religion to unite a pluralistic nation through awestruck moments of Durkheimian collective effervescence in front of public technological projects such as bridges and skyscrapers, and later atom bombs and rocket launches" (Szerszynski 2005:61).

In light of globalizing, visual technologies, specifically GISs mentioned above, we can say that this technological sublime has reached a summit, a point wherein the sacrality of the earth achieved its ultimate expression—the image of the globe itself, that is, the cosmic *Weltbild* of satellite images. In his periodization of the sacred, Szerszynski finds the "abandonment of the empirical for the sublime" in the postmodern sacred of today. God no longer functions as a singular being but as the diffused, multiplicitous logics of the universe. For him, this means that the "religious effect" of global sacred is representative of all other forms of what he dubs "religion in the postmodern age," which exhibit a "fragmentation and subjectivization that allows the signs to mean what people want them to mean"(Szerszynski 2005:167).

This leaves us with an opening up of a set of questions that many recent debates regarding secularism and disenchantment-enchantment-reenchantment have left unexplored: could the upsurge of religious feeling in the era of new media technologies mean the further decline of the monotheistic God in favor of a more generalized sacred?

3. Sociology of religion

The prospect of digital, liturgical aesthetics of American Christianity raises important questions that cut across various approaches to the study of religion, including sociology. Firstly, there is the matter of what, after theologian Catherine Pickstock, I refer to as "post-Protestantism," which in no way means to make a generalized statement about the "end of Protestantism," nor is it referring specifically to the declining significance of mainline Protestantism, especially in the United States but not strictly so. While sociologists of religion have already confirmed the abysmal attendance numbers, there is, I would suggest in light of the research presented here, deeper consequences that the liturgical shift puts into relief with regard to "post-Protestantism."

According to the famed Weberian distinction between the "magical religiosity" of pre-modern societies and the rational "salvational religions" of modern times, magical religiosity "attributes power to acts, substances, and rituals," while salvational religions "aim for pure, immediate experience"(Meyer 2010:744). This creates an image of "rational religiosity" as uninterested in "matters of the world, particularly the aesthetic, erotic and political spheres"(Meyer 2010:745). Though this may have been the case at one time, that is, with mainline Protestantism exemplifying "rational religiosity," today even some of these very churches are considering forays into digital aesthetics in liturgy, thus "reverting," if sticking to Weber's strict developmentalism, to an earlier mode of religiosity. For Birgit Meyer, Weber's dichotomy "forms an indispensable starting point for a reconceptualization of aesthetics as intrinsic to modern religion, including not only Pentecostalism but also Protestantism," involving both "Weber's narrow understanding of and dismissive attitude toward aesthetics, and the privileging of content and meaning above form"(Meyer 2010:746).

The two points that Meyer makes with regard to Weber's overarching definitional framework of religion is important as the digitization and aestheticization of liturgy in the media environments of contemporary Christian worships spaces points to, according to Pickstock, an "embrace [of] the entirety of Christian, both prior to and after the Reformation," in particular the

Eastern Orthodox emphasis on matter and its focus on the human body(Pickstock 2010:723). While unfortunately she does not address the relationship of this post-Protestant turn to digital aesthetics directly, she does suggest that liturgy in this mode operates under a very different understanding of ritual and the body. For her, liturgical ritual is rooted in mystery and art. She writes:

> Liturgy is not simply an outward and symbolic honoring of a God whom we know already through internal experience or conceptual reflection. Rather, it is the most important initial way in which we come to know God and the path to which we must constantly return—in excess of the relative poverty of our private emotional experiences and the equal poverty of abstract speculative theology. (Pickstock 2010:721)

"Coming to God," as Pickstock suggests, is a sensory or bodily induction. The senses play, according to her, a mediating role between individual ("inner attentiveness"), God ("responsiveness to the divine"), and the collective. "In liturgy," she writes,

> …the participants undergo sensory experiences, but they collectively produce this sensory experience, along with the natural materials they deploy. In liturgy the spectators are also the actors or the other way around, while the roles of acting and speculating keeps alternating.(Pickstock 2010:725)

The senses become the material place through which all of these meet and assemble. The body becomes like the "body without organs"[53] of Deleuze and Guattari—a flow within a greater flow of the collective sensory experience.

> And so God must communicate to us through our bodies and senses as a tilting of his sublime thought toward our particular mode of understanding. But this does not denote condescension and economic adaptation. Human beings, unlike angels, have a privileged access to the mute language of physical reality. (Pickstock 2010:721)

The worshiper, in this formulation, thus becomes a "mixed creature" (cf. Mark Hansen's "mixed reality"), wherein she takes on a bodily worshipful orientation. The mind, for instance, is not necessarily most important but the senses are. This sensory orientation, which we may alternatively call a "state of ontological mixedness," that is, of being both human and divine, collective and individual.

> The relationship between the inner soul and the collective body as mediated by the individual body is crucial to a deepened grasp of the liturgical action that dramatizes the relationship between Christ and his bride [the church-S.H.]…In the liturgy, all these loving relationships are at stake. Yet the individual, sensing physical body is their pivot. Just how are we to understand its mediating role? One can start with the earlier

[53] Theologian John D. Caputo has also recently developed the theme of "body without organs" in view of religious "form," in the formulation of what he calls "immaterial matter," which is "kind of prime matter that when given form issues not in a material substance but an immaterial one, which is a lighter, thinner, more light-suffused, airy, aerial, ethereal stuff, capable of a kind of absolute velocity and of passing through solid substances (passability)"(Caputo 2007:79). He writes, "If Deleuze could speak of the body of schizophrenic as a body without organs, we might offer a parallel hypothesis of the risen body as a body without flesh, a body without the physics of density and volume, without the biochemistry of organic functions, and without the deep structure of vulnerability and mortality. This is a body that is all function, all action, without flesh, vulnerability, wound, passivity"(Caputo 2007:81).

> observation that while Christianity diversifies the soul, it also grants organic unity to the human collectivity. Instead of the polis being compared with the hierarchy of the soul, as for Plato, Paul compares the church polity to the cooperation of the various functions of the human body. (Pickstock 2010:732–733)

The turn to aesthetics and body seems to signal a recuperative moment in the history of the body in Protestant Christianity.

4. Studies of religion and media

As much of the academic discussion around the nexus of Christianity and new technologies continues to revolve around the figure of the megachurch, it seems, in light of this study, that the analytic and explanatory value of "the megachurch," at least when attempting to explore the technologies themselves, fail to do much good. To be sure, both analysts of religion and Christian leaders alike have mistakenly viewed technology as merely instrumental, that is, as utensils. Even staff members of LifeChurch occasionally echo this sentiment. In the context of the digital environment of contemporary Christian worship, this too is the case. The presence of digital technologies has reconfigured not only architecture, that is, where worship happens, but also, as I suggest, the entire nature of worship itself.

The implications of this are twofold. On the one hand, it challenges the dominant approaches of social scientific studies of religion, especially of megachurches. While mentioning the presence of technology in worship spaces, they, for the most part, have not studied what they are and how they work, favoring explanations rooted in the "religious

economy" approach.[55] For instance, Scott Thumma and Dave Travis' *Beyond megachurch myths*, a sourcebook of sorts for the study of megachurches, devotes an entire chapter to the liturgical incorporation of technologies, but in a framework that equates technology with pop culture. In this formulation, the more technology a church uses the greater the chance of attracting worshipers to then ultimately become a megachurch(Thumma and Travis 2007). Thumma and Travis, while not at all proponents of the religious economy approach, nevertheless assume that technology is a proxy for "culture." In this view, these technologies become vehicles for content. This ignores, as earlier discussed, the "formism"(Maffesoli) of the visual technologies, that is, their ability to create ontological networks, that is, worlds.

On the other hand, it calls into question whether megachurches should even receive the technological kudos that they currently do. While the technological sophistication of megachurches is widely reported and mentioned, the way that they use technology, as this study shows, pales in comparison to the multi-site churches. Though perhaps before the millennium, megachurches could have been looked at as technologically ahead-of-the-curve, even the smallest of mainline Protestant churches are starting to use digital technologies—if not in their "main" services, most definitely in their youth or "contemporary" services (Ellingson 2007).

Relatedly, the onset of *online* worship also brings forth the issue of what Bryan Turner calls "post-institutional" religion. According to him, the major issue that emerges from the convergence of religion and new media such as the World Wide Web is that of religious authority. As he notes, religions usually require "a stratum of intermediaries (such as theologians and other intellectuals) to interpret" the ineffable symbols and ways into the

[55] The scholars most readily associated with this approach are Roger Finke and Rodney Stark. See Finke, Roger, and Rodney Stark. 2005. *The churching of America, 1776-2005: winners and losers in our religious economy*. Rutgers University Press.

sacred(Turner 2008:220). Literacy, in this way, became a contributing factor in determining who had religious authority. Moreover, the Abrahamic religions, sometimes called the "Religions of the Book," form their identities around "revelation," a certain kind of theologico-hermeneutic stance with respect to sacred knowledge.[56] Mere empiricism does not exist in a religious context. Religion, quite simply, is founded upon the "hierocracy"(Weber) of "the ineffable."

But today, aided by new media technologies:

> The basic images of Christian soteriology—harvests, shepherds, the lamb and the dove—have lost their metaphorical force in a post-industrial system, because the shared experience of an ineffably mystery has disappeared. (Turner 2008:221)

In addition, new media technologies have created a new situation that is more democratic, more global and more individualist, resulting in a kind of "low-intensity" religiosity. New media technologies, in particular, foster a more "democratic environment," whereby "the very idea that some truths are ineffable contradicts the ethos of modern society in which everybody assumes a right to understand or at least to have the relevant information"(Turner 2008:221).

New media technologies have also aided, he argues, in the globalization of religion. They have aided in the "global revivalism" of various popular and traditional (fundamentalist) religious institutions but also new spiritualties that exist largely outside of formal institutional settings(Turner 2008:231). They have also facilitated a new individualism predicated on the normative status of the cultural "prosumer," who produces and consumes culture in one fell swoop (or couple clicks of the mouse or touchpad).

[56] There is a rich tradition in Christian theology of a grappling with the knowledge of God known as the ontological argument. This reaches as far back as Anselm but is most pointed in Thomas Aquinas.

> The main change that has taken place with the growth of new information systems in the age of ubiquitous media is that the power relationship between popular and virtuoso religion has been reversed. The struggle between popular and elite religion in the field of symbolic capital has given an important if unintended advantage to popular religious communication, which can now bypass the hierarchal organization of orthodox information. The principal thesis is therefore that the new media have brought about a democratization of the systems of religious communication in terms of both codes and contents. (Turner 2008:227)

Given this situation, religion has become, as Turner describes it, less virtuoso (as in the case of the religion of the ineffable with its hierocracy) but more popular. This can be seen in its seepage into pop culture. Turner gives the examples of two films, *Passion of the Christ* and *The Da Vinci Code*, whose successes show not only that religion is an important social force but also are representations of religion *outside* of any official religious authority. They are, as he rightly notes, religious commodities.

> Popular culture constantly appropriates religious symbols and themes, and these commercial developments are paradoxical because they both contribute to the circulation of religious phenomena, but at the same time they challenge traditional, hierarchical forms of religious authority and interpretation. (Turner 2008:228)

The chief means through which this paradox is expressed is the hybridized and individualized religiosity that seems to exist in today's consumer culture, which de-emphasizes meaning and deep knowledge (such as doctrine and liturgy) and encourages *feeling*.

> In the new individualism, people invent their own religious ideas, giving rise to the new spirituality. The result has been a social revolution flowing from both consumerism and individualism. Religious lifestyles are modeled on consumerism, in which individuals can try out religions rather like they try out new fashions as in leisure activity. (Turner 2008:230)

With globalization, this market-approach to religiosity is extended to religions outside of the Western tradition. Today, it is ever more clear that capital, which was famously described as "knowing no bounds," was preceded, to a certain extent, by religion.

According to Turner, this is evidence of the emergence of "low-intensity" and "post-institutional" religion. This is because the religiosity required does not appeal to an individual's need for (existential) meaning but rather for some form of affective comfort(Turner 2008:232). In other words, the age of revelation has given way to the age of information.

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