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Gender, Faith, and Storytelling:

An Ethnography of the Charismatic Internet

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Statement of Original Work

I, Anna Stewart, affirm that the work contained herein is original and my own. I hereby declare that this thesis has been and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signed

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UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

ANNA ROSE STEWART, DOCTORAL THESIS

GENDER, FAITH, AND STORYTELLING: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE CHARISMATIC INTERNET

SUMMARY

Although early predictions that an emerging 'cyberspace' could exist in separation from offline life have been largely discarded, anthropological studies of the internet have continued to find notions of 'virtual reality' relevant as individuals use these technologies to fulfil the "pledges they have already made" (Boellstorff, 2008; Miller & Slater, 2001: 19) about their own selfhood and their place in the world. There are parallels between this concept of 'virtual reality' and the on-going spiritual labour of Charismatic Christians in the UK, who seek in the context of a secularising nation to maintain a sense of presence in the "coming Kingdom" of God. The everyday production of this expanded spiritual context depends to a large extend on verbal genres that are highly gendered. For women, declarations of faith are often tied to domestic settings, personal narratives, and the unspoken testimony of daily life (e.g. Lawless, 1988; Griffith, 1997). The technologies of the internet, whose emerging genres challenge boundaries between personal and social, public and private, can cast a greater illumination on this inward-focused labour. This doctoral thesis is based on ethnographic research in four Charismatic Evangelical congregations and examination of the online practices of churchgoers. I have found that the use of the internet by Charismatic Christian women fits with wider religious preoccupations and patterns of

ritual practice. Words posted through Facebook, blogs, Twitter, and other online

platforms come to resemble in their form as well as their content Christian narratives of

a life with meaning.

Acknowledgements

The past several years have been in no way stress-free, but I can at least say that they have been enjoyable. There are many people that I need to thank for this.

The Christian friends and acquaintances that I met through this work proved to be excellent company and always cared how I was doing on a level that was more fundamental than my fieldnotes. I am grateful to them for this, and for the extraordinary lengths gone to to ensure that I felt welcome whenever I arrived at any gathering and free to participate to any extent that I would feel comfortable. I would like to thank in particular the five women whose stories I focus on in the later chapters of this thesis. All of them took the time out of their lives to speak with me, in some cases at great length over several meetings, about the content of their blogs and their Christian lives. I realise that most of my informants would hope that any newcomer to their church would find the same welcome, help, and hospitality that I enjoyed. Still, one of the luxuries of writing this thesis is that I get to take this time to acknowledge acts of kindness that are no less remarkable for all that they are routine. Thank you.

Also notable for their routine kindnesses are my supervisors, Simon Coleman and Jon Mitchell. Both have read, thought about, and commented on many tens of thousands of words on my behalf. I don't know how any of this could even have been thought about

Contents

A Note on Translation

In this thesis I present an ethnographic account of internet use among Christians living in the UK. A peculiar task for the English-speaking ethnographer in this context is to translate words that the non-Christian would recognise from standard English into the shifted lexicons of Christianity. Christians themselves are acutely aware of the confusion and alienation that their unfamiliar dialect can cause for non-Christian and newly Christian listeners, and seek to minimise what is often termed "*Christianese*" in proselytising encounters and the public ritual of preaching. It should also be noted that the use of terms such as "worship" or "Grace" may shift depending on the context of the speech and particularly on the particular stream of Christianity in which it is used. Words may therefore not retain the same meanings from church to church, and will certainly shift depending on wider contextual factors. These terms are, however, widely used in general conversation among members of the churches I have visited and have relatively stable meanings. Throughout this thesis I have rendered these words in italics, and their 'native' meanings are elaborated in more detail in the glossary (pp. 186-193). Unless specified, all Biblical references are taken from the New International Version of the Bible, the translation that is most widely used by members of the churches in this study.

Also included in the glossary, for the sake of economy in the text, is a second section in which I elaborate the meanings of the common internet-related words that I have used throughout the thesis. While terms such as *blog* and *profile* are by now fairly widespread, it seems useful to include their meanings, alongside some less commonly used terms, in order to ensure clarity for the reader.

Introduction

In this ethnography, I discuss the possibilities of the making of the self online. Personal transformation is a trope in the study of the internet that was so ubiquitous in its early years as to seem almost outdated by now. Early studies considered the possibility that the advent of these new modes of self-expression would herald of entirely new ways of being (Wilson & Peterson, 2002: 450). The representation of the self in text or visual avatar, and the ability to interact with others in this form would, it was postulated bring greater potential for self-determination on the part of internet users than had previously existed (e.g. Turkle, 1995). Though it is generally acknowledged that the widespread use of the internet has not in fact become associated with an uncomplicated renegotiation of social categories of selfhood, the idea that the internet allows people to build a more satisfying or integrated selfhood persists, and can be related to perspectives in the anthropology of religion. In this thesis I will argue that the making of the self online can be related to capacities and processes found more widely in social life, focusing on a particular religious culture for whose members personal transformation is a constant, pressing, concern.

Although the internet has arguably become more structured into daily life since early predictions of its radical implications the most widely used services that make up its current form are still subject to continual revision. The location of the study in a particular time and place remains significant to understanding the trajectory of any research undertaken on these emerging technologies. By 2007, when I began to plan this

ethnography, the internet was a thoroughly everyday technology in much of the globalising world, certainly in the relatively middle-class cultures of British Christianity that I studied. YouTube was already ubiquitous as a video hosting and sharing site, Facebook had become established as the premier social networking platform (and all but defeated earlier networks such as MySpace and Friends Reunited), and Twitter was just starting to gather momentum among software developers and internet enthusiasts. In this thesis I will describe the growing entrenchment of individuals in these different modes of communication, and it is worth noting that throughout the period of my research these technologies were gaining a greater and greater foothold in social life in the setting in which I worked, and across the globe.

At the same time, a body of studies of the intersections of internet technologies and religion was beginning to emerge (see Campbell, 2007). For the most part, these dedicated studies of the framing of internet technologies through particular religious cultures were restricted in methodological and analytical focus to texts located online. In my research, I have taken a different approach. Following previous ethnographies of internet by Miller and Slater (2000) and Malaby (2009) I seek to approach the internet through the stories of its users. This is then an ethnography not of 'the internet' but of the Christian internet, specifically the internet as it appears in the stories of a Charismatic Christians in Brighton, UK. In this thesis a highly verbal culture has been studied in terms of one element of its communication, and a sprawling global technology has been examined from the perspective of members of one particular group of speakers. Examining the literature in more detail indicates several points of agreement between the study of Charismatic Christianities and those of the internet, particularly when we look to the manifestation and significance of gender.

Charismatic Christianity

Religious life can be found online in a massive array of manifestations. Virtual spaces created through chat rooms or visual simulated environments such as *Second Life* play host to a wide range of religious discussion and ritual practice from Pagan full-moon ritual to Catholic mass (Schroeder et al., 1998; O'Leary, 1996). Elsewhere, the internet is used as a tool for commentary on offline religious practice and community as Buddhist clergy attempt to provide relevant email support to adherents seeking enlightenment (Cheong et al., 2011), and Branch Davidians gather in online support groups after the events at Waco to consider what went wrong (MacWilliams, 2005). Specialist websites host translated copies of fatwas issued by prominent Muslim scholars for members of the faith living outside Islamic countries (Sisler, 2011) while those living within them engage in online debate concerning the suitability or otherwise of *blogging* as a mode of Islamic discourse (Doostdar, 2008). Even where the uses of the technology may not seem to be obviously 'religious', researchers have found a ready incorporation into existing religious commitments. For the Ultra-Orthodox Jews studied by Barzilai-Nahon & Barzilai (2005: 36) the internet provided a means through which women could engage in financial employment or education in the secular world, without having to physically enter the proscribed spaces associated with these activities.

Results from surveys conducted in the United States suggested that internet technologies might hold a particular attraction for the members of one cluster of believers. A 2004 study found that the most extensive uses of the internet are among Evangelical or 'born again' Christians. (Hoover et al., 2004). These findings are affirmed by accounts of internet use among several different religious groups in Ghana (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2007) and Trinidad (Miller & Slater, 2000), both of whom have

found the most extensive and enthusiastic use to be by those organisations not only deemed 'Evangelical' but more particularly 'Charismatic Evangelical'. These parallel findings suggest that there is some quality of these groups that renders internet technologies a particularly compelling prospect. In the existing anthropological literature on these groups we find a cluster of Christianities whose members are intimately concerned with the meaning of "being Christian", and the communication of this meaning to the world.

Intense self-reflection is of course not restricted to one branch or indeed one era of Christianity. A consistent finding of social scientists studying the sprawling, heterogeneous panoramas of global Christianity is the work of boundary maintenance that is an important category of practice in these religious cultures. Members of each movement pit the 'authentic' revelation of their own believers against the incorrect practices and beliefs of others. The paramount example of this kind of rhetorical categorisation is of course Protestantism, whose very name marks this movement as a critique of earlier European Catholicism. Even earlier than this, it seems, Christianity was a cluster of faiths defined through the continual revision and repudiation of previous and parallel forms of belief (see Ruel, 2005). This on-going negotiation has lent peculiar shades of meaning to the term 'belief'; to believe is not to merely hold a given statement as true, but to do so in a context in which this truth is contested (Pouillon, 1982). Seventh-Day Adventists hold themselves apart from other traditions in their social conservatism and apocalyptic beliefs, The Masowe WeChishanu Christians of Zimbabwe denounce the Bible as a barrier between believers and God, and Mormons enjoy a revelation that is considered by other Christians, and some academics, to represent an extreme outlier from the realm of the "really Christian" (Cannell, 2005; 2006; Engelke, 2004). These processes of classification and exclusion are a problem not

only for these variously defined Christians but also for those who study them. Writing on the anthropological engagement with these remarkably heterogeneous movements Cannell (2005: 349) asserts that "to the anthropologist, a 'real Christian' must mean anyone who seriously so describes him- or herself".

In the largely secular context of the United Kingdom, even this rather minimal definition requires qualification. The 2001 national census attracted interest from academic and religious observers alike when it reported that almost 72 percent of respondents chose to categorise themselves as "Christian". The figure seemed inconsistent with the widely recognised decline of the Christian church in the UK since the 1960s (Brierley, 2006). Statistical surveys of Sunday church attendance in England and Wales have observed steady losses year on year; in 2005 just over 6 percent of the population of these countries regularly attended a church service (Brierley, 2006). This gulf between the percentage of people who describe themselves as "Christian" and the percentage of those who attend church has been broadly understood to indicate an insecurity and desire for cultural homogeneity among many members of an increasingly ethnically and culturally diverse nation. It is going too far to claim that these self-categorisations do not indicate any form of cognitive or practical activity that we might designate 'religious' or indeed Christian. However, as has been recently shown in analysis of the supernatural beliefs of self-professed Christian youths in the UK, such ascriptions may refer to personal regimes of practice and privately-held beliefs that are strikingly divergent both from one another and from what we would recognise as any form of Christian orthodoxy (Day, 2009).

These ambiguous declarations stand in distinct contrast to the practices of Charismatic Evangelicals, a group who form the only branch of British Christianity that is growing according to the metric of Sunday service attendance (Brierley, 2006).

Anthropologists working in diverse geographical fields have found that for members of

Charismatic strands, the assertion of personal faith is an important ritual practice.

Believers, in declaring themselves to be so to other Christians and an unbelieving world,

constantly make and remake themselves in repeated acts of conversion (Coleman, 2003;

Lurhmann, 2004; Stromberg, 1993). The term "Charismatic" comes from the Greek for

divine gift or favour. Churches thus identified mirror the "Spirit-filled" practices

associated with the Holiness and Pentecostal revivals of the late 19th and early 20th

century, believing themselves to be endowed with certain spiritual gifts through their

relationship with God (Anderson, 2004). Members of these groups hold that the born-

again believer becomes filled with the Holy Spirit at the time of her conversion, and is

able to manifest this 'in-dwelling' presence through speaking in *tongues*, delivering

prophecy, and healing through prayer and the laying-on of hands. These regular

practices involve the believer in on-going affirmation of her own relationship with God,

through placing her in direct, sensory encounters with Him (Lurhmann, 2006). They

also form the basis for a new relationship with others. Like other Evangelicals,

Charismatic Christians seek to spread their faith through proselytising and social

activism, with the goal of stirring the spiritual regeneration of those around them.

These styles of faith have proved extremely adaptable to different social and

cultural contexts. Spirit-filled churches range from the traditions of asceticism and

Biblical fundamentalism seen in American Apostolic Pentecostalism (Scott, 1994) to the

'health and wealth' gospel of the global Faith movement (Coleman, 2000). The

contemporary forms of Charismatic Christianity in Britain stem from successive waves

of revival in separate movements both within the UK and from North America. The

Spirit-filled practices manifest in 18th and 19th century Holiness movements were

followed in the early 20th century by the evangelising missions of North American

Pentecostalism. From the 1950s, these styles of *worship* became more prominent

fixtures of British Christianity as the Restoration or 'house-church' movement spread

outward from a small gathering of 'brothers' in London through a national wave of

church-founding (Walker, 1998). Their efforts were bolstered by the spread of the

practices of the global 'Charismatic renewal' since the 1960's through the networks

built in televangelism and radio ministry, which transmitted direct appeals to Christians

to engage with the "expressive revolution" of Charismatic *worship* styles (Bebbington,

1993: 241). Practices of embodied engagement with the Holy Spirit have been leant

even greater prominence since the mid-90s, becoming incorporated into materials used

by the Alpha program, the most high-profile Evangelical ministry in the country (Hunt,

2003).

These large scale tendencies towards mobility and circulation are born out at the

level of the individual. Charismatic Christians seem deeply preoccupied, on a personal

level, with the communicability of their faith. Macchia (1999: 19) describes the beliefs

of the early Pentecostal movements, who understood the formless utterances of *tongues*

as a supernatural tool for "empowered global witness" across language barriers.

Coleman, in his 2000 ethnography of a large Charismatic ministry in Sweden, describes

a congregation who paint themselves on a similarly large stage. Members of the Word

of Life group in fixate on images of globes and maps (see also Shoaps, 2002: 38), and

direct spiritual power out into the world in corporate prayer. This assertion of dynamic

links with the wider world serves to create figurative networks of believers that project

from the past of the church into its future, and from the interior life of the individual

into the changing world.

This preoccupation with transmission generates a great enthusiasm for media

technologies. For members of less expressive forms of Protestantism, revival often

necessitates reform. Radio programmes, books, and audio and video recordings provide a way for members of small congregations in far-flung locations to become familiar with a globalised repertoire of ritual practice (DeWitte, 2003). Media products are also essential to the general Evangelical imperative that Christian faith must be spread to non-believers. In the UK, the largest 'televangelism' provider is the God Channel, who broadcast via satellite television repeats of prayer meetings and preaching from other (particularly North American) Evangelical stations with a distinctly Charismatic bent (Kay, 2009: 249). Recent years have seen the spread of these efforts to digital media.

It has been suggested that the global reach of Internet technologies make the web a particularly interesting medium for Charismatic Christians (Campbell, 2007). These groups have been found to gather around a vision of a world of interconnection, in which the Good News of the *Gospel* and the power of the Holy Spirit can be shared through instantaneous, global transmission, and the internet appears almost as a materialisation of such a network (Campbell, 2007: 1050; Coleman, 2000: 170). The ease with which individuals can produce their own communications in cyberspace has led to a profusion of Spirit-filled communication on the World Wide Web. As well as established church and denominational sites, individual members of these movements are represented in the online world in a wealth of interactive online spaces, individual websites and personal *blogs*. Members of these churches frequently use *forums* and mailing lists for public prayer and *prophecy* (e.g. Campbell, 2005a: 80) and find ways of replicating through textual communications the embodied experiences of Spirit-filled *worship* (Campbell, 2005a: 117; Schroeder et al., 1998). At the level of the individual as well as the group, the use of these technologies allows users to participate actively in the primary Charismatic narrative of perpetual mission.

These intense efforts towards personal and group evangelism are accompanied

by persistent concerns regarding its reception. Native and academic observers alike raise the same question; do evangelising appeals ever reach the eyes and ears of non-believers and bring about conversion (Kay, 2009: 250; Schultz & Woods, 2008)? This problem actually cuts to a basic concern of global Protestantism. Once the locus of personal salvation has been moved away from the ritual works of the believer to a personal, internally-held faith, the question of whether a given Christian has been truly 'saved' becomes less certain (Keane, 2002). A similar concern with personal orientation to public text is confronted in media studies by scholars who concern themselves with reception (Radway, 1988; Livingstone, 2004). Confronted with the products of media networks that spread across national and international contexts, the researcher can face difficulty in assessing their significance on a local level. While we can study the form of sermons, the presentation of televised prayer rallies or the text of the Bible, it is more challenging to assert with certainty how these messages are received across the remote locations of their transmission or the meaning that they hold for their consumers. For social researchers, understanding of a text can be enhanced through some broader understanding of the specific practices and concerns that it will meet upon its reception (see Couldry, 2004: Postill, 2010; also chapter 1: 26).

Followers of born-again Christianity, and particularly Charismatic Christianity, deal with the uncertainty of reception through a concentrated display of their personal affirmation of the Bible and Christian teaching. For these believers, recitations of declarations of faith are a central focus of personal and corporate ritual activity. There are echoes here of the general Protestant "norm of sincerity", which valorises personal transparency in language, as honest speakers work to ensure that their "speech adds and subtracts nothing in *words* that was not already there in *thought*" (Keane, 2002: 74). Many authors have come to view these declarations as not only revealing but actively

constituting the sanctification of the believer (see Stromberg, 1993). Csordas (1994), writing on Charismatic Catholics in North America, invites us to consider the analytical value of these elisions of communicative form and its experience. What we can learn from these active performances is that semiology and phenomenology are not so distinct. Texts can be assessed as fields of experience in themselves. When a believer receives a *prophetic* utterance and shares this with her congregation, for example, this act in itself serves to establish the presence of God in her daily life, and allows her to experience her own presence in a broader narrative of unstoppable global revival.

The primacy of these processes of self-creation may create tensions within the power structures of local congregations (DeWitte, 2003: 175). The same loose organisation and intense focus on sensory experience that has often been seen as the cause of the vast spread of these styles of Christianity across the globe creates conditions for theological and doctrinal splintering. Charismatic leaders generally echo broader Evangelical tendencies in minimising the authority of governing structures outside the local church. This lack of central authorising bodies can create the conditions for discord and dissent among different Charismatic streams. Walker (1998) has charted the history of the British Charismatic 'restoration' movement, and describes in detail how the founders of this movement became deeply and bitterly divided by disagreement over doctrine and theology, styles of ministry, and personality clashes. Authors have argued that the practices found in Spirit-filled churches undermine their ecclesiastical structures, forging as they do a direct and immediate line of communication between the individual believer and God (DeWitte, 2003: 175). Reviewing the anthropology of these global Christianities, Robbins (2004) predicts further ruptures as factions within denominations, movements, and churches break away to pursue their own God-given vision of authentic Christian living.

Such predictions mirror those made by social scientists considering the possible impact of internet technologies on religious institutions. Miller and Slater (2000) build a chapter of their ethnography around the use of internet technologies by various religious organisations. They end the chapter with some speculation on the possible erosion of authority that may be brought about by the internet, in terms that bear striking similarity to existing understandings about the possible structural instabilities of Charismatic Christianities. The authority of religious institutions often relies on processes of mediation, with those holding ecclesiastical power responsible for the transmission of a message whose ultimate authorship is Divine (Miller & Slater, 2000: 179). Internet technologies serve as a way in which users are able to construct fields of teaching and practice for themselves, and in so doing they lessen the power of local religious authority to mediate for believers the practices and beliefs of their faith. While these authors broke important ground in contextualising web use within particular cultures of religious practice, there are as of yet no ethnographies based in offline locations that show the expansion of a particular local setting and the specific dimensions along which these tensions becomes manifest. Within Spirit-filled movements, as in most religion in general, a central pillar of both officially authorised social truth and structural organisation is established in the meanings and roles attached to gender.

Speaking Women

Charismatic Christianity in the UK, as in much of the wider world, is associated with socially conservative attitudes and patriarchal structures (Robbins, 2004: 132). This fact has often been treated as perplexing given the typical demographics of these

congregations. It has been widely noted that the Christian church worldwide is made up of more women than men, and that this general distribution holds especially true in the case of Spirit-filled Christianity (Anderson, 2004: 273; Robbins, 2004: 132). In the period of rapid expansion that characterised the fledgling Pentecostalism of the early 20th century, female adherents were initially able to claim a relatively high degree of authority within the movement, with some prominent pastors and many missionaries being women (Anderson, 2004: 273; Powers, 1999: 312). This egalitarian tendency within Spirit-filled streams, however, began to diminish almost as soon as it had emerged. As these movements started to establish their own organisational and ecclesiastical structures, women were excluded from many formal positions of power (Barfoot & Sheppard, 1980). It is important to note, however, that this apparent adherence to patriarchal regimes of gender does not tell the whole story of the place of women in these churches. The sheer number of women in Charismatic movements, along with the emphasis on the relationship between the individual and God within them, complicates this vision of scripturally based gender hierarchy, and the values and statuses attached to women and men seem to represent an 'interpretive battleground' within many congregations (Cucchiari, 1990: 698).

Informants from studies of Spirit-filled congregations across the world seem united in their affirmation of the statement that "the man is the head of the household" (Aune, 2006; Brusco, 1997; Toulis, 1997). Walker (1998: 188) characterises the repetition of such statements among his house-church informants as "lip service", and recounts anecdotes from his own experience with these groups that indicate that these professions of gendered hierarchy are underpinned in practice by a more pragmatic domestic egalitarianism. More recent research within the same movement supports this claim. Aune (2006) found women and men in one Charismatic congregation affirming

the principles of male leadership, but expressing considerable uncertainty as to how these principles would be practically translated into day-to-day living, and unable to provide any examples of husbands making use of this God-given authority. In some cultural contexts, such divinely ordered patriarchy may even be preferable to existing gender regimes. In the strongly patriarchal Colombian contexts studied by Brusco (1997), Charismatic doctrine served to improve the position of women by encouraging familial responsibility and temperance in their husbands, and orienting both marriage partners to the overarching authority of God.

In the absence of more formal ecclesiastical structures, the members and leaders of Charismatic congregations typically liken their church to a 'family'. Although they tend to be restricted from the highest positions of power, women are frequently found to be extensively employed within a variety of positions in Charismatic churches, often carrying out duties that are seen as commensurate with their domestic roles of nurturing and care (Toulis, 1997: 221). The elisions of domestic and church contexts by members of these movements can allow women to draw on their role in the family as a means of amplifying their status in the church. Toulis (1997) describes in her ethnography of a Spirit-filled Jamaican church in the UK how motherhood is seen as a significant spiritual status in the congregation that she studied, to the extent that mothers themselves were able to admonish and advise other members of the congregation, including men. Such positioning is, of course, not open to everyone. In separate studies of UK Charismatic and Pentecostal congregations, Aune (2008) and Foster (1992) have found stirrings of dissent toward the traditional vision of gender relations, particularly among single, middle aged women for whom the relative status that is afforded through marriage and motherhood is not available.

In the practices of church life, differences between men and women are framed

in terms of speaking roles. The most widely cited restriction placed upon Charismatic women is the general prohibition against them acting as preachers. Spirit-filled practices can, however, provide a stage for creative subversions of this principle. Lawless (1983) describes a church service in which the sermon by the preacher is preceded by a session of song and prayer during which members of the church can give 'testimonies' of their experiences with God. Although women do not challenge the right of the male pastor to preach from the pulpit, they stand in the pews to deliver testimonies that run into lengthy meditations on the power of God in individual life that do in fact greatly resemble this proscribed genre. Lawless reports that the emphasis on the Holy Spirit that dominates these meetings allows the women themselves a degree of confidence in the spiritual propriety of their actions. As we see in *tongues* and *prophecy*, Charismatic Christians distinguish between the authors and animators of inspired speech. Native beliefs in the Spirit of God as a force that propels the vocalisations of the born-again speaker allowed these women to assert with confidence that they had acted in accordance with Divine will (Lawless, 1983). Members of the Jamaican church studied by Toulis express a similar surety in their own right to secure and share revelation from God. She tells us (1997: 141) that the authority of male spiritual leaders to teach the Bible is tempered somewhat by the fact that "every [believer], male or female, has the right to interpret scripture by the Holy Spirit".

Where women's voices do emerge from the literature in the form of spiritual teaching and writing, their words are often distinctly personal. Authors considering the speech of women in Spirit-filled churches have shown that their discussions of faith tend to centre on themes of intimacy and the narrative reflection of inner life and personal experience. God is described by Charismatic women as a nurturing father, a loving husband, or a friend to confide in (Griffith, 1997). Lawless (2003), speaking

from a long history of participant-observation in Christian churches, considers the significance of women's teaching in terms of the possibilities for engagement that these texts establish for their audience. The effect of this feminine-centred teaching, Lawless (2003: 62) argues, is to "shift the religious subject". Inside the text there is a new protagonist, and women are able to project themselves for the first time, as "mothers, sisters, and daughters" into the accounts of spiritual life shared from the pulpit (Lawless, 2003: 66). In so doing, they move themselves from rather marginal positions to the very centre of the Christian narrative.

It is certainly important to consider how it is that the speaker provides a particular understanding of the world and the self for her listeners, but we might return to the question that is highlighted by ethnographers writing on Evangelical conversion; what is the significance of these productions for those who speak (Stromberg, 1993; Coleman, 2003)? If a woman is able to bypass her usually marginal position to share spiritual insights in a church service or through a *blog* what impact does this have on her experience of spiritual selfhood and social position? Theories that place Charismatic practice at the centre of experience of selfhood mesh well with the perspective of Judith Butler (1990: 140), who maintains that gendered acts "effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal". Following Butler, I assume throughout this thesis that gender is not located in the heart of the individual but in practice. Critically, Butler contends that the repeated performance of selfhood can become a stage for change in understandings of gender. For the woman finally freed from restrictions on her own verbal production, the implication is not that she is expressing some essential womanhood that has been silenced, but rather that she is coming to new experiences of what 'being a woman' might mean.

Many researchers address the shifts in personhood that accompany internet use

through the concept of 'online identities'. The issue of women's use of the internet in religious contexts has received little attention (Campbell, 2006: 16), but existing research discusses the uses of the internet as a space in which women are able to either affirm or protest religious structures (Barzilai-Nahon & Barzilai, 2005; Bastani, 2001), or indeed to adopt religious identities that are unavailable offline (Lövheim & Linderman, 2005). Given the relative mobility of personal status across the key Charismatic contexts of home and church, we might ask how differences in speech practices online can lead to changes in the wider sense of selfhood experienced by speakers. 'Religion' itself is a category that has been so associated with specific forms of ritual that it has often been constructed in anthropological accounts as a sphere of practice that is separate from more mundane concerns (Coleman & Collins, 2000). Charismatic Christians challenge this separation explicitly, and push us towards more integrated understandings of the meaning of faith in daily life. To look at the use of the internet among Charismatic women seems to point a way of understanding parallel anthropological concerns regarding the everydayness of religion (Coleman & Collins, 2000) and the parochialism of the internet (Coleman, 2010).

Structure of the Thesis

In this thesis I utilise data gained from work in online and offline contexts to challenge three interrelated ideas. Firstly, that 'the internet' is experienced as a realm set apart from 'real life'; secondly, that this realm is primarily experienced as one lacking in embodiment; and thirdly, that 'online identities' can be understood in isolation, as more or less accurate renderings of essential selves that remain grounded in the offline world. In later chapters I address the formulation of these ideas and the manner in which they

are challenged in the practices of Christians who have a ambiguous relationship to notions of a life lived in separate spheres. The line of this thesis follows the progression of my own conceptualisation of 'the internet' as I sought to establish and maintain my grip on this rather slippery 'field', from extension of practices into new kinds of spaces, to the expansion of selfhood through new ways of performing it.

Some of the challenges of ethnographies of the internet are addressed in chapter 1, as introduce the various settings of this fieldwork and discuss its methodology. I include some discussion of the setting of the research, Brighton, as seen through the eyes of my Christian informants. This chapter concludes with a description of the churches themselves, the characteristics of their members, and the broader media landscapes into which they place themselves. My introduction to the 'field' of my research, then, is an introduction also to the processes through which such a field is made possible as a sphere for the activities of my informants.

These processes are investigated in earnest in chapter 2, in which I discuss the role of speech in the making of an inspirited world and the selves who inhabit it. This section brings to focus the ways in which words serve as orientational devices constructing locations into which the believer speaks and from which she receives. These emerging fields have implications for gender. As well as forming the subject of much Evangelical discussion, gender, as indicated above, is a property of selfhood that is performed in the manner in which people communicate and receive communication. In chapter 2 I consider the gendered nature of communication and particular communicative practices. Expanding on the established fact of prototypically masculine and feminine genres of speech within these streams of Christianity (see above) I argue that masculine and feminine styles of speech reflect broader understandings of gendered personhood, and serve to endow speakers with habitual orientations.

In order to better understand and illustrate the interaction between ways of being and ways of speaking I have focused particularly on the lives of a handful of women. In chapter 3 I begin my case with the stories of Katie and Leah. Each of these young women maintains a *blog* but their purposes and engagement with particular Christian genres place them in different kinds of social positions. While Katie's writing flows from her offline church life, Leah faces a more uncertain transition into online speech. Their experiences lend themselves well to the insights forwarded in the work of Bakhtin (1981) when we consider the practice that takes place through these texts and Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus when we look outside them. In this chapter I argue that there is an experience of self that can be rendered coherent, or alternatively whose coherence can be threatened, as speakers become writers online.

I move forward with the insight that writing can become a site for the development of habitus in chapter 4, as I consider the online text as a kind of embodied presence. Fran and Patricia are rather marginal figures in their offline congregations but have found their use of the internet to be a way of participating in Charismatic practices of prayer and *prophecy* that they particularly value. As well as enabling them to experience a more coherent self, their online writing allows them to amplify and extend their experience of presence within a landscape of inspirited language.

In chapter 5 I consider the practice of storytelling as a means of creating networks of emotional and discursive connection that stretch between online and offline contexts. I use the story of Gabby, a relatively new convert to Christianity whose personal narrative has become a source both of isolation and integration in her religious life. As Gabby shares her story she asserts a selfhood that is simultaneously an affective and spiritual position. Adapting language used by Miller and Slater (2000: 11), we might say that this is a point of "narrative realisation", as Gabby comes to a material

experience of her own inclusion within a redeeming narrative of divine grace.

Finally, I come to the question of the sense of *meaning* that is generated through this kind of narrative presence. Testimonies of conversion, and the sharing of these personal stories, are scattered throughout the case studies presented in chapters 3, 4, and 5, and as I will demonstrate play an important role in determining both the shape of the online texts I have studied and the paths through which they circulate in the world. Through online transmission, these stories, and their tellers, are experienced as coherent, present, and mobile in a more intimate world. I conclude with some consideration of the experience of *having meaning* for my informants, and the possibility of approaching the self as a sign.

Chapter 1: Maps and Methods

The Charismatic Field

Ethnography is a literary genre preoccupied with questions of location (Coleman &
Collins, 2006). Classic anthropological monographs open with maps and often lyrical
descriptions of the surroundings of the anthropologist during her time in 'the field'. This
work of creating distance in the text, between a 'here' that the author shares with her
reader and a 'there' whose social architectures she will uncover establishes the authority
of the ethnographer as guide. Along with other methods of establishing textual authority
the preoccupation with 'the field', became an object of reflection in itself in the
disciplinary critiques of the late 80s and early 90s. The work that has followed tends to
reflect more on the constructed nature of the research site. Identifying and entering a
field is a process that requires the work of the ethnographer as author and analyst as
much as traveller (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). This heightened reflexivity has become a
necessity for many authors, as the push and pull of global traffic and shifting
anthropological interests ensure that populations of interest may no longer be found in a
single geographical location. Despite these reformulations, the idea of place remains
important, even in those ethnographies termed "multi-sited", in which separate locations
are examined in terms of the ties that bind them to one another (Marcus, 1995).

The emerging, evolving technologies of the internet are frequently described in
spatial terms. The programmes that convert the code of the World Wide Web to the

more recognisable layouts and logos that most users see are named "explorers" and "navigators"; the work of conversion from plain text to interactive visual asset semantically positioned as a kind of emerging cartography. In 2000 Miller and Slater published an ethnography of internet use in Trinidad and foregrounded the issue of location in the opening section of their work. Their experience with these new technologies, however, lead them to caution against the tendency, common among many academics and commentators at the time, to approach 'the internet' as a discrete social space, or series of spaces. The internet, they had discovered, could not be approached as a monolithic 'there' into which users travel (Miller & Slater, 2000; see also Miller, 2000). They argue that forms of online sociality and their experience will differ depending on the settings in which they are encountered, and can in fact be best understood as expansions of these settings. The separation of online and offline is an aspect of these media that is constructed, and the notion of the internet as a space apart from 'real life' will be more salient in some contexts than others (see also Leander & McKim, 2003: 223).

Boellstorff's 2008 ethnography of the web-based 3-D environment *Second Life* is a clear example of an online setting in which virtuality is a central theme; a spatial simulation whose technologies and users are intensely concerned with the dynamics of place-making. This priority to make a place of code and pixels is embraced by the author himself in the introduction to his ethnography *Coming of Age in Second Life*. Boellstorff channels Margaret Mead in the title of his book and Bronislaw Malinowski in its opening sentences, inviting the reader to imagine themselves set down as a new arrival, alone on an unfamiliar digital shore. By invoking these famous fieldworkers Boellstorff makes a case for the salience of *Second Life* as an environment and therefore, for anthropologists, a field. He draws for his readers a vision of a simulated

landscape in which avatars, controlled by agents who are located off-stage of the ethnography itself, make friends, beautify themselves and their surroundings, trade, and explore. He settles on the appellation "virtual" in his description of this world, attracted to its vernacular interchangeability with the term "almost". Virtuality, for Boellstorff (2008: 19), "approaches the actual *without arriving there*". The inhabitants of Second Life are intensely aware of their own hand in the creation of their environment, and maintain for themselves a strong sense of separation from the 'offline world'.

These two very different ethnographies come to centre on the production of location. Although Miller and Slater's (2000) informants did not reside in a shared simulation of green hills, quiet beaches, and bustling town centres as did those found by Boellstorff, they too harnessed the internet to amplify and broadcast their experience of place. In this ethnography, however, the places concerned were not virtual terrains but the social spaces in which users were already enmeshed. Online chat-rooms were likened in the descriptions of users and their engagement with them to the street-corner gatherings of "limes"; personal websites greeted visitors with Trinidadian slang and images of national flags and celebrities, and web users recreated through intimate language the exchanges of Catholic confessionals. The inhabitants of Trinidad, Miller and Slater found, were using these technologies as tools through which they could work reflexively and creatively on the business of "being Trini". This creation of an online Trinidad serves to "expand individuals largely by expanding the fame of the entity they most fully identify with" (Miller, 2000: 7). It transpired that in this ethnography, as in all others, questions of where were intimately tied to questions of who.

Studying the Christian Internet

Before a field can be studied it must first be located. Working with a focus on the internet cuts down on the amount of physical travel undertaken by the ethnographer but may lend an extra dimension of uncertainty to her efforts to 'arrive' at the field. For those typing key-words into Google, the effect of the Evangelical enthusiasm for these emerging platforms is immediately apparent and overwhelming. When I began my research in 2007, there was a dizzying range of chat-rooms, online churches, Facebook groups, discussion *forums*, *blogs*, wikis and news outlets dedicated to Evangelical faith. Since the more reflective turn of the 80s and 90s anthropologists often start methodology chapters with discussion of concerns generated by their inability to achieve anything like omnipresence in even the most bounded of fields. For those studying the internet, this concern is brought into particularly sharp focus. For the researcher sitting at her desk in the private, solitary contexts of home or office, it can be difficult to generate a sense that she is achieving any kind of presence at all.

I had originally intended to base this study in comparisons between online and offline settings. I was drawn to *discussion forums* for the 'online' component of this research, assuming that they could provide a kind of analogy for 'community' that would allow for comparative analysis. These sites are a web-based evolution of earlier email discussion lists. Visitors can register to become members, and thereafter take part in shared discussions on particular themes. From the perspective of the visitor these sites therefore present relatively bounded communities of people, whose presence is organised around a shared interest. Like chat-rooms and mailing lists, these sites have been studied by previous ethnographers as locations in themselves; work going back to the mid-90s provides rich insight into the internal rules and social regulation of these

new kinds of social setting (e.g. Correll, 1995). While we can make strong arguments

for the salience of these communication platforms as sites in themselves, they present

difficulties for those who would wish to locate them, as I initially sought to do, within a

'multi-sited' (Marcus, 1995) project that includes offline locations.

As I planned my research I emailed the administrators of three online

Charismatic *forums* and asked for permission to work in their groups. Work in this

context consisted of *posting* an introduction to myself and the project on the *forum*,

reading *threads*, asking questions, and socialising with members via dedicated chat-

rooms. It was not long before it had become obvious that I was going to find it difficult

to conduct the comparative analysis that I had initially intended. For the most part, the

inhabitants of these online 'sites' did not share a church, a particular stream of

Charismatic Christianity, or even a single national context. Although it was certainly

true that there were differences in communication styles between online and offline

sites, it was difficult to ascertain the significance of these differences without a clear

sense of their connection. Moreover, it was very obvious that my own engagement with

these sites was quite different to that of regular users. Although spending hours in

concentrated reading and interaction provided an excellent introduction to the shared

media landscapes and widespread concerns of Anglo-American conservative

Protestantism, this kind of engagement was very different than that of the Christians

themselves, who consistently described their use of the internet as a relatively small part

of a broader religious life.

I quickly found that experience of "being there" was best secured by

approaching the internet through offline locations, and turned to consider the ways in

which I could use offline ethnography as a route in to the internet. This movement

required a shift in my perspective, from a primary focus on the analysis of the

interactions within the web browser to those outside of it. In recent years, scholars considering the anthropological approach to media have come to draw on Bourdieu, advocating practice-based approaches (e.g. Couldry, 2004; Postill, 2010). Within this research paradigm, the media analyst shifts her attention beyond the text itself, to the everyday meanings and engagements through which media products become animated in the lives of those who read, view, and listen to them (Postill, 2010). This approach bears the distinct advantage of ensuring some kind of anchoring of media texts in the wider social and historical contexts in which they are produced and received, and is followed throughout the thesis.

Over the period of January 2009 to the early summer of 2010 I regularly attended services and meetings at four Evangelical congregations in Brighton. Three of these churches were selected on the basis of their Charismatic leanings as advertised on their websites and a fourth, more mainline Evangelical congregation was recommended by a contact I had made through a Christian website. The pastors of each church were contacted by letter and all expressed an interest in the project and a willingness to take part. As a group, the churches studied vary in size from one very small assembly of around 12 regular attendees to another with a database of members that is almost 1000 strong. All of these congregations run a morning and an evening Sunday service, and I would alternate between these, generally visiting at least two services every Sunday. As well as Sunday services I attended *house-group* gatherings, joined and completed the Alpha course (see introduction: 8) at two different congregations, and attended other church-hosted events such as Christian music concerts and *apologetics* training. As I became more familiar with the four churches, and the members of their congregations became more familiar with me, I met several women who were particularly avid users of the internet. In total, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 25 women. The

majority of these (20) were conducted offline in coffee shops, church offices, and living rooms with women I had met at church events with the remainder drawn from email interviews. Interview participants ranged in age from 18 to early 70s, and occupied a range of positions in their local congregations.

The spoken interviews were transcribed and added to a database along with my field notes. I also circulated a survey featuring basic questions on web use among members of all of the churches. The results from this survey (n=77) provided a broader view of the web use of the Christians that I worked with, and the particular clusters of websites and resources that were popular among members of each of the congregations. This method allowed a better understanding of global networks of the Christian media landscape and shed further light on the clusters of international speakers, writers, and ministries that formed an important aspect of the discursive life of each church.

My own concerns regarding the extent to which it was possible to delineate, enter, and work within a 'field' in this project was shared by my informants. 'The field' in which anthropologists study has become configured in particular ways as a result of the theoretical interests of anthropologists and the methodologies of fieldwork (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997; Marcus, 1995). There is a loose parallel here with Evangelical Christians who in their desire to act as agents of salvation apply a specific kind of labour to the world that surrounds them, and in so doing define the contours of that world (see Coleman, 2000). The processes of constructing a meaningful field that had initially presented such a challenge were echoed in the speech and practice of my informants. As I will detail in chapter 2, these are faiths whose respondents frame themselves in terms of landscapes of spiritual influence and efficacy that transcend immediate physical locations**.** The city in which this research was conducted was conceptualised not only as the physical location of the workplaces, church halls, and

homes that my informants occupied but was endowed with a distinctive spiritual personality. In the speech and activities of its Evangelical inhabitants, Brighton is defined as a stage for an urgent process of mediation between the coming Kingdom of God and the secular culture of a fallen nation.

Strange Campaigns

The seaside town of Brighton and Hove lies on the south coast of England. The twinned authorities have since the 18th century been a popular resort for domestic tourism, a trend that intensified following the arrival of the railway in 1841 and the resulting easy proximity to London. Brighton remains a popular tourist destination to this day, attracting around eight million visitors each year to its pebbled beach and busy shopping districts. Alongside its status as a leisure resort the city is notable as a centre for visual and performing arts. Various festivals are held each year for comedy, art, theatre and music and the city is home to a wide range of creative and small media companies. The mixture of leisurely indulgence and creativity, a combination that has been associated with the city since its first flush of popularity under the patronage of the prince and later King George IV, has resulted in a popular conception of Brighton as markedly Bohemian in attitude and atmosphere. In 2010 the central district of the city became the first in the country to elect a parliamentary representative from the left-wing environmentalist Green Party, the BBC commentator reporting in the early hours of the 7th of May the not altogether surprising election success of Caroline Lucas in this "alternative city".

Alternative City, coincidentally, was the title given to a series of sermons that

had been delivered by the pastor of Jubilee, Brighton's largest church, almost a year

previously. During one of these services the speaker noted that, at almost a thousand

members, the church was sizeable by British standards. There might be a therefore be a

tendency for Christians to think "Brighton, that's a big church, that's done. But," he

went on, "Brighton doesn't even know we're here". Official figures seem to bear him

out. The results from a 2005 census conducted by the UK organisation Christian

Research found an average of 5.4 percent of the population of the city attending church

on Sunday, against a regional and national average of 6.5 percent and 6.3 percent

respectively (Brierley, 2006). The growing secularism of Brighton is echoed in findings

from the 2001 census in which 27 percent of the population reported their religious

affiliation as "no religion", marking the city as the second most irreligious authority in

England and Wales[1].

The decline of organised religion in the city has led to it being described by local

and national commentators as "the most Godless city in Britain"[2], a phrase that seemed

to be adopted with some cheer by the local population. When the local newspaper ran an

online poll to gauge whether or not people agreed with this assessment, 93 percent of

responses favoured a third option, indicating that they considered the term 'Godless' to

be a compliment. Members of Evangelical congregations assess the spiritual health of

the city with considerably less cheer. In line with the common practice of drawing

parallels between characters and events found in the Bible and those of the present day

Christians would frequently seek scriptural counterparts for the city. Brighton was

frequently compared, for example, to Corinth, whose inhabitants considered themselves

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[1]   Office of National Statistics, (2001) Census data available at:
      http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/profiles/commentaries/ethnicity.asp
      [Accessed 14th June 2008]

[2]   Petridis, A. (2010) "Is Brighton Britain's Hippest City?" *The Guardian*, 19th May,
      available online at http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2010/may/19/brighton-
      britains-coolest-city [Accessed 19th August 2011]

too sophisticated for religion, or Athens, a town with hundreds of Gods that needed to be shown that only one of them was true. Perhaps the most compelling image of Brighton is the city of Nineveh, the Biblical destination of the prophet Jonah who travelled, against his will inside the stomach of a whale, to spread word of God and save the populace from destruction. Like that reluctant prophet, many of my informants seemed to view themselves as evangelists to a city that despises their message.

A final comparison, though one that was made sparingly and rarely voiced from the pulpit, was between Brighton and the Biblical cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. My informants would regularly express concerns regarding the sexual mores of British culture in general, and these worries are endowed with specifically local flavour for Christians living in Brighton. The city is widely known as the "Gay capital" of the UK, a town in which 15 percent of the population openly identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual (Collis, 2010: 133). The annual gay pride march through the city centre attracts tens of thousands of visitors from all over the country, rainbow flags adorn various pubs, clubs and hotels in the city, and men's saunas and sex-shops aimed explicitly at gay and lesbian shoppers cluster in its central Kemp Town district. Although members of Evangelical churches seem keen to avoid alienating or condemning this particular section of Brighton's population, it is clear that the visibility and seeming acceptability of homosexuality in the city is widely seen as a cause for concern. Brief reference to sexual practices that are sinful and even "offensive to God" litter sermons on sexual morality, and feature also in prayers for the general salvation of the city, particularly around the time of the annual gay pride parade and carnival. In more private conversation Evangelicals from all of the churches I have attended identify homosexuality as a category of sinful behaviour rather than an enduring identity, a "lifestyle" that people become "mixed up in" as a result of personal alienation from

God, a kind of "confusion" rather than a manifestation of outright wickedness. The association of Brighton with homosexuality, then, is a very visible symptom of the estrangement of its inhabitants from God, and their urgent need for salvation.

Other signs of this general malaise lie in what is seen as a disordered and broken heterosexuality. The various strip clubs and the popularity of the city as a destination for stag and hen parties make for an atmosphere that I have heard described on more than one occasion as "licentious". Perhaps even more concerning than the promiscuity associated with the youth of the city is the lack of commitment among those who are older. In 2009 Brighton played host to a specially organised event which offered legal and emotional counselling, along with more light-hearted seminars and discussion groups, to those going through divorce. The organisers of the "Starting Over Show" cited in an interview with the local press the high divorce rates of Brighton and Hove (21 and 19 percent respectively, compared to a national average of 16 percent) as an important factor in their decision to bring their event to the city.[3] Although none of my informants attended the event this article generated a lot of attention. Several Christians mentioned the "Starting Over Show" during my fieldwork, with more than one member of Living Grace referring to it rather dramatically as a "festival of divorce". Figures from census data raise similar concerns; Brighton has the highest rate of cohabitation among unmarried couples in England and Wales, and the lowest percentage of marriage among couples in the South East region.[4] These statistics lend further weight to the general narrative of spiritual and moral dissolution that shapes Evangelical discussion of the city.

Against this trend of general decline, Brighton has emerged since the 1970s as an important site in the history of the British New Church movement due to its close

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[3] Elliot, E. (2008) 'Brighton to host divorce fair', *The Argus*, 4th June.
[4] Census data from Brighton and Hove City Council available at: http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/index.cfm?request=b1000175 [Accessed 12th May 2010]

association with Terry Virgo and his Newfrontiers church network. In 1968 Virgo, who had become a Christian "in [his] living room" following media coverage of Pentecostal minister Billy Graham's much publicised tour of the UK, came into leadership in a church in Seaford, East Sussex. Virgo had been dissatisfied by the rather staid churches that he had attended following his conversion and took much inspiration from the Charismatic renewal that was by the 1960s flourishing in North America and growing in the UK (Bebbington, 1993: 229). Members of his church were encouraged to practice the "Gifts of the Spirit" such as praying in *tongues* and *prophecy*, and church services featured the kind of ecstatic *worship* that typifies Charismatic styles of faith (Robbins, 2004: 120). In 1979 he moved along the coast, setting up a church in a former school premises in Hove. The congregation grew quickly and church meetings have since moved a former commercial warehouse near the centre of Brighton.

Throughout his career as a minister Virgo's influence has extended beyond the single congregation. Through a combination of church planting and the incorporation of existing congregations he became the central figure of a large network of Charismatic churches in the South of the country that has since spread to the rest of the nation and across the world (Walker, 1998). The Newfrontiers "family" of churches now includes over 600 congregations globally, and the Brighton congregation, although not the largest, is widely considered the flagship church of the movement. Each summer the church becomes a hive of intense activity as preparations are made for the twinned Newfrontiers leadership and youth conferences, which attract over 10,000 Christians from around the world to the city's seafront conference centre. Virgo, considered an "apostle" within the movement, currently spends much of his time visiting and offering guidance to global church plants with his wife Wendy, herself a prominent Christian speaker and writer.

Newfrontiers are not the first group to pursue religious revival in Brighton. In the late 1920s one of the founders of the Pentecostal Elim church held a series of prayer meetings in the city, eventually inviting the famous American preacher Aimee Semple McPherson to include Brighton in her tour of the UK. The coming of this flamboyant representative of what was considered already considered to be an overly dramatic, Americanised form of Christianity attracted much media speculation and expression of concern nationwide (Walker, 1998: 258). Noting the uproar the Sussex Daily News nonetheless expressed assurance that the inquisitive spirit of the local population would hold out. "She will have fair hearing in Brighton," its editorial concludes, "the town of many strange campaigns".[5] In a *house group* meeting some eighty years later a young man working as a secondary school teacher on a year-long placement from his native South Africa expresses a similar opinion. He enjoys speaking to local non-Christians about his faith, he says, because people in Brighton have so many different points of view about spirituality and tend to be open minded and interested when it comes to matters of religion. His views are not shared by other members of the group. While the group leader takes his point that people in Brighton seem interested in spirituality in general he presses the idea that when it comes to Christianity this interest turns to outright hostility, and that Christians in the city must learn to accept "*persecution*".

This is a view that is commonly held among my informants. Several times during my fieldwork I heard the census data on respondents claiming "no religion" reported as a specifically hostile act. Over a quarter of the British population, I was reminded, had "gone out of their way" to provide this response to a question that it was not mandatory to answer. The *house group* leader cited as further evidence of this local antipathy toward Christianity the refusal of a local coffee shop to allow the display of a poster advertising an upcoming church event, despite the fact that various other local

[5]   "Lightening Lady at Brighton", *Sussex Daily News,* 22 September 1928.

organisations had advertising displayed. When the South African teacher questioned whether this could really be thought of as *persecution* he was assured that the term was appropriate as this kind of obstruction "impedes the *Gospel*". This definition of *persecution* indicates an intertwining of agency and personal identity with the ability to engage with the world as a vehicle for spiritual truth. A similar conflation of personal and communicative marginalisation can be seen in the comments of a member of another church speaking about the hostility of local authorities to evangelism, "if I can't talk about this"; she remarked over coffee, "I can't talk about me".

Aspects of the character of Brighton that make it a particularly difficult mission field for those called to perpetual evangelism are balanced by other characteristics that justify continued hope for its place in the spiritual renewal of the nation. Brighton has a notably youthful demographic; the 2001 census found 45 percent of residents to be between the ages of 20-44, a marked difference from the average for England and Wales, which stood at 35 percent.[6] The relative youth of the population of the city makes it a strategically useful location for Evangelical outreach. In one *house group* meeting the leader asked all in attendance to consider the spiritual value of their own residence in a city like Brighton, describing the town as *"upstream"* of the culture of the UK. If you pollute upstream", he informed us, "you pollute the whole river". Such positive reference to the idea of pollution seems unusual in the context of the anthropology of religion. In this context, the term seems to connote the passive impact that the mere presence of Evangelical Christians can have upon the entire body of the city, and in turn upon the nation.

Media products are considered to be a particularly important tool in this project of civic and national conversion. In 2009 speakers from two congregations in London

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6   Census data from Brighton and Hove City Council available at: http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/index.cfm?request=b1000175 [Accessed 12th May 2010]

travelled to the Newfrontiers conference in Brighton to deliver a seminar for church leaders regarding the possibilities and pitfalls of media outreach. The session was entitled "Using the City to Reach the City". The title neatly expresses the concept of media common in these churches, in which technologies such as television, music, newspapers, and the internet are understood to be a foundational element of secular culture, and to offer therefore a route through which it can be contacted in its own language. The larger churches in my study sought to raise local awareness of their congregation through local radio and billboard advertisements and in one instance through the production of an album of *worship* music written and performed by church members. Even smaller churches concerned themselves with the production and dissemination of media texts, producing Evangelical tracts and leaflets and organising small groups of its members to distribute these to the letter boxes of nearby homes.

Given what is assumed to be the abject and unregenerate state of British culture, and the importance of media in the expression and reproduction of this culture, engagement with these technologies is widely understood to be a risky prospect. One woman in her mid-40s expressed concerns that primarily visual media such as television and posters allowed a much greater degree of personal interpretation than sermons or books, and represented therefore a potentially treacherous container for the singular revelation of God. Concern about the potentially destabilising effects of personal media engagement is particularly evident as Christians turn to consider the evolving technologies of the internet. In its secular use the internet is yet another spiritually bankrupt artefact of a fallen world. The ready availability of pornography, according to Christian teachers, challenges the resolve of men, particularly young men, to resist temptation and pursue righteous living. Social networking platforms invite an excessive kind of self-regard that shades over into preening as users make incremental changes in

an attempt to present themselves in a flattering light. Particularly concerning was the amount of "lies" and aberrant doctrine spread via the internet by pretenders to the Christian message (see introduction: 5) and atheists who sought to discredit this message altogether.

Despite the manifold hazards introduced by online media retreat is rarely entertained as an option. The widely-used concept of 'web presence' takes on an urgent spiritual dimension for believers who often referred to themselves as "ambassadors for Christ". Embassies must be established online as well as off. In 2009 one very influential American pastor urged his readers to "try to fill these media" with Christian discourse, so that the Gospel message would become unavoidable to the average web user.[7] As I planned my research in 2007 all of the churches discussed in this study hosted their own websites which were regularly updated with recordings of weekly sermons and information regarding the doctrine and leadership of the congregation. Beyond this, the vast majority of the Christians I met regularly used the internet in some capacity to research issues pertinent to their faith, to keep in contact with friends from current and previous churches, and to download inspirational messages and preaching from their favourite preachers.

As I grew more acquainted with the congregations of particular churches I became aware of patterned variation in these online engagements. My survey of internet use and broader media consumption indicated that the members of any given church would tend to congregate around a particular cluster of speakers, writers, and online resources. This variation can be described and explained through a practice-based approach to media (see Couldry, 2004; Postill, 2010). In his application of practice theory to the study of local media use Peterson (2010) utilises Bourdieu's (1984: 6)

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[7] Piper, J. (2009) 'Why and how I am tweeting', *Desiring God,* Available at: http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/taste-see-articles/why-and-how-i-am-tweeting [Accessed 31st April 2012]

notion of cultured taste as the individual embodiment of a field of distinction within which cultured actors position themselves. In their attempts to spread the Good News in the city and maintain spiritual relationships with God and with one another, the members of the four different churches in this study, all physically situated within walking distance of one another, are located in very different media environments.

Shoreline Church

In 2006 Scott, a leader from a large Pentecostal church in Toronto, Canada, moved to Brighton with his wife Bella and two young children following what he describes as a Call from God to found the first Assemblies of God congregation in the city. The church initially met in hotels and the back rooms of other church buildings, eventually settling in a hall adjoining an established Catholic church in the Kemp Town area of the city. During our first meeting Scott related his growing personal interest and concern for the area. Kemp Town provides a good example of the economic disparity that marks Brighton as a whole. The area ranks in the bottom 20 percent for economic deprivation nationwide, despite its situation a stone's throw from the upmarket shops and expensive property of the city centre.[8] The church hall where meetings are held is used by various social care initiatives during the week. Pin boards by the front doors displays adverts for those struggling with abuse, homelessness or alcohol dependency, the bathrooms display warnings that anyone found abusing drugs on the site will be immediately thrown out. Several times during my fieldwork Sunday services were interrupted by local youths or street drinkers coming in from the street outside.

In its own make up, the church is markedly less middle-class than other

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[8] Department of Health, (2008) *Health profile 2008: Brighton and Hove*

congregations I have visited. Many of the members work or have worked in service jobs in the city, including Scott and Bella themselves who continue to hold paid employment alongside their duties in running the church. The congregation itself remains small. At the time of the research there were ten members in what I would consider the core group, who would meet for midweek *house group* meetings and help with the general running of the church. This group is composed of all age groups from early 20s to retirement, and members are very much involved in one another's lives, regularly meeting for social events and helping one another with church duties and childcare. Outside this group Sunday attendance fluctuates but rarely reaches more than 20. Church members remain busy however running youth groups for local children and teenagers during weekday evenings and school holidays and a Sunday evening youth service during which they partner with a larger Evangelical church from the outskirts of the city.

The demands placed on the congregation by the fact that there are only a small number of regular members means that the organisation of services remains elastic and informal. The *worship* band consists of whoever is able to attend and play on the day and sermons, though usually delivered by Scott or Bella, often include a great deal of back and forth from members of the congregation. The church, in keeping with more Pentecostal tradition, often features a period at the end of services where members of the congregation are able to come to the front and share their experiences from the week or reflections on prayer, brief presentations which underline the status of the service as a shared event. After the service members come together in small groups for ad hoc prayer sessions in the kitchen or vestibule of the meeting hall, while other members make tea, help to tidy up equipment and round up the children. This time is also used to share Christian literature. A small table is set up at the back of the hall with on which

the collections of several of its members are pooled, with a blank record book to keep track of who has borrowed what. The most popular authors among members of the church tend to be prominent figures in the North American Charismatic media such as Joyce Meyer or Rick Joyner, and television and audio broadcasts from these streams of Christianity provide a source of teaching outside the church itself for many of its members.

Emmanuel Evangelical Church

Emmanuel Evangelical Church meets in an attractive Victorian building that is located on one of the main approaches to central Brighton. In 1894 the building was taken over from its original Methodist residents by the Brighton arm of the national Railway Mission, an organisation intended to service the spiritual needs of the many railway workers whose lives and labour had been rearranged with the growth of this technology. The church took its current name in 1984, and continues as an independent or "free" Evangelical congregation. Sunday morning services usually draw a respectable attendance of around 40 or 50 people, many of them foreign students invited to the church by one of the three church members who teach in local language schools. The Sunday evening service tends to attract a less fluid and rather smaller congregation, and it is at these events that a visitor would see the stable 25 or so people, most of them aged from about forty-five to seventy, who make up the core of the church membership.

The history of Emmanuel church in providing ministry for the specific needs of the local population persists in its contemporary emphasis on community involvement. The back room of the church holds a weekly toddlers group for local mothers, which is run by the wife of one of the two church Pastors. Hustings for local and parliamentary

elections are held in the main hall, which also plays host to the more regular community action groups dealing with issues of crime and redevelopment in the rather dilapidated neighbourhood of the church. Involvement in the community works not only inward, as local people and groups are invited into the church building, but also outward from the congregation to the town. The main hall is lined with bulletin boards displaying press cuttings which Gail, a full-time worker at the church, deems to be of Christian interest, and it is notable that one of these boards is devoted to pictures and information about the people and organisations involved in the governance of the city. These cuttings testify to a more supernatural engagement in local politics. Mid-week prayer meetings invariably include some mention of local councillors or politicians, and prayers either for specific needs or general requests for wisdom and guidance in governing the city.

The church is the only non-Charismatic congregation in the study. Although several of its members have backgrounds in Spirit-filled churches the pastor retains an attitude of cautious scepticism toward Charismatic phenomena, and Sunday services do not feature the *prophecy*, spiritual healing or ecstatic *worship* that we see at the other congregations. In keeping with this difference, the books that are read widely amongst members of the congregation are very different to those recommended at Shoreline Church, with the work of *Reformed* and conservative writers and missionaries being particularly popular. In general though, members tell me that the great value of the church for them is in its focus on the Bible. The Sunday evening service in particular is a time when members come together to study scripture, going through particular passages and taking part in a guided conversation on the meanings of these texts for their own lives.

Living Grace

The Vineyard is a global denomination of some 1,500 churches, most of them based in North America, that is heavily associated with the Charismatic "Power ministry" of Jon Wimber (Bebbington, 1993: 232). This network of churches combines a general Evangelical concern for proselytising and Biblical literalism with a focus on ministry through the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Brighton congregation was first founded as a *house group* in 1999. The assembly has seen stable growth since then, and at the time of my research attracted around 60 people to its Sunday morning meetings. The demographic of the church is considerably younger than we see at Emmanuel, with a fairly equal spread of all age groups up to around 60, and a large number of young families.

Since its early days as a *house group* the congregation has struggled to find a permanent home. Living Grace rents an office above a bank on Brighton's busy high-street but Sunday services are currently held in the large hall of a sixth form college on the outskirts of the city. Once a month the church holds an additional 'evening service', generally consisting of live music and short presentations on Christianity, which has itself moved around various music venues in the city centre, The members of the church often describe this multiplicity of bases as a temporary circumstance. The need for a church building from which Living Grace could run an expanded program of services and ministries has been an on-going concern of the congregation as a whole and its leadership in particular throughout the period of this research. The church has been engaged in a string of negotiations to try to secure a building closer to busier commercial and residential areas of the city, but has so far been unsuccessful in raising

the required funds.

The mobility of the assembly in terms of its location is echoed in the movement of its members. In keeping with the wider Vineyard movement, the church displays a marked focus on the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Members of the church are encouraged to "seek God" through experiencing and extending his supernatural power in their lives, through prayer for physical and emotional healing, the Gift of *prophecy* or the speaking and interpretation of glossolalia. This "seeking" of the Holy Spirit can involve pursuit over extensive distance. A *revival* that had taken place in Florida shortly before I began my research was the topic of much conversation at Living Grace throughout the period of study, and several members, including the Pastor, had spent considerable funds to fly out to experience the "outpouring of the Spirit" themselves. In general, the books and teaching accessed by members of the church overlaps with those favoured by the members of Shoreline Church. The work of travelling evangelist Reinhardt Bonnke is particularly popular, just prior to this research the church had held a series of meetings showing videos from his international ministry entitled "Catch the Fire", a name which in itself evokes the constant movement of *revival*. Unsurprisingly, the works of Jon Wimber are also cited by many members as an important influence. In 1989 the man himself visited the city at the invitation of Terry Virgo. Though there was not at the time a Vineyard church in Brighton many of those who now make up the congregation attended and fondly remember these meetings.

Jubilee Church[9]

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[9]   The names of the churches that I visited during my fieldwork have been replaced with pseudonyms.

Jubilee Church is a prominent feature of Brighton's Evangelical landscape. The slogan

of the church, projected on to the many television screens dotted around their extensive

meeting centre and reproduced on promotional material is "in Brighton, for Brighton".

Members and leaders alike frequently voice a desire to "reach out" to the city and the

church runs a variety of local ministries including a pregnancy crisis centre and a home

for the homeless. The presence of the church is further asserted in Billboard campaigns

and frequent advertising drives intended to attract local residents. These evangelising

efforts run right through the format and organisation of weekly services. During a bi-

annual meeting for those considering formal membership, attendants are introduced to

the various duties and considerations involved in the running of "Sunday in a missional

church". We are informed, for instance, that the church has conducted research into the

kind of music played in local venues and has tailored the Sunday *worship* music to

include more folk music instruments and playing styles in order fit with these tastes.

Even the fair trade coffee served at the small drinks bar and the recycling bins in which

empty coffee cups are deposited are intended to make an impression on the supposedly

green-minded inhabitants of Brighton that the church is an organisation that shares their

existing lifestyle and ethical commitments. Here we have an example of a kind of what

has been termed a growing "McDonaldization" of sectors of the Evangelical church, the

unsaved configured as target market (see Hunt, 2003: 80).

The *worship* at Jubilee, as at Living Grace, includes typical Charismatic

practices such as speaking in *tongues* and *prophecy.* As a congregation, Jubilee itself has

been the subject of various prophecies by its members, including one which predicted

that the church would grow to be a "mighty tree" in the city of Brighton, with a

congregation of 1400. A recording of the *prophecy* as it was delivered, referred to by

members as "Vision fourteen-hundred" was until relatively recently given as a cassette

recording to new members of the congregation. In keeping with its aspirations of growth and its presentation of itself as a media-savvy organisation (see also Meyer, 2006: 440) the church produces themed graphics to be projected on the television and projection screens that are dotted around its Brighton site, and adverts for billboards and postcards intended to reach the unconverted. The networked media technologies of the internet appear to be wildly appealing and much of the current media output of Jubilee is focused on its extensive web presence. A permanent staff member is employed to maintain the upkeep of its website and in 2010 Jubilee became the first congregation in the country to launch its own iPhone app, through which subscribers can access recordings of teaching from the church and catch up on its four *blogs*.

The development of the church's online presence has been a particularly important aspect of its strategy of growth over the last ten years, and appears to be heavily inspired by large ministries based in North America. When I first met an elder from the church to describe my research he noted that Jubilee strives to take a lead from American ministries in its use of the web, particularly that of Seattle-based Mark Driscoll and his Mars Hill congregation. Driscoll is frequently identified as a prominent figure in what has been termed "the *New Calvinism*"[10], a cluster of conservative Evangelical writers and theologians whose work is strongly endorsed by Jubilee leaders and enormously popular among church members. Despite their distance, this handful of mostly North American speakers and writers has emerged from the outset as highly visible characters in the field of Jubilee. The works of preachers and leaders such as Mark Driscoll, John Piper, and Wayne Grudem are widely available in the church bookshop, and referenced or explicitly promoted in church services and *house group* meetings.

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[10] Hansen, C. (2006) "Young, restless, reformed", *Christianity Today,* 22nd September, available online at: http://www.ctlibrary.com/ct/2006/september/42.32.html [accessed 14th September 2011]

Among the members of the assembly that I would consider to be heavily structured in to the church, either through work in a church ministry or marriage or family relation to someone in such a position, there was a remarkable conformity in the media resources studied. Outside this group, however, among the students and other migrants to the city who made up a large part of the congregation, I met Christians with a wide range of tastes, and even texts that I have heard referred to as "heretical" by those closer to the central structures of the church were cited as personal favourites. Although these more liberal and divergent sources are not advocated in sermons or reading lists they form an important part of the media influence of many members. Similar patterns of consumption could be seen throughout the congregations. In general, the less regularly a person attended a given church and the looser their social connections with the leadership, the more likely they were to actively consume material that diverged from the general cluster of authors and speakers recommended from the pulpit.

Circulation

Despite differences in personal consumption, there was in some respects a shared media landscape in the background of all of the churches studied. Big-name authors, preachers, and songwriters in Evangelical streams of Anglo-American Christianity were broadly known of by the majority of established Christians, even in context where their work was not approved of and not recommended. Liberal Christians would sigh and roll their eyes when I mentioned the names of famous conservatives, and conservative Christians would often be prepared with summaries of the personal and logical

arguments that could be brought against the work of liberal Christian thinkers. Beyond Christianity of course there was a wider media landscape that believers described in fairly consistent terms. A great many of the Christians with whom I came into contact expressed concern about the popularisation of atheist perspectives through the work of figures such as Richard Dawkins and felt that Christians in general were unfairly singled out for discrimination by many facets of British media, notably left-wing newspapers and television comedy.

It was not long before I was familiar with most of the online resources that featured in regular conversation. Prominent figures in Charismatic and Evangelical streams typically have a large web presence associated with their ministries. Speakers such as Joyce Meyer or Rob Bell would produce large quantities of writing and audio and visual recordings and when a prominent figure made a statement that was interpreted as particularly provocative or edifying I would often hear about it discussed in church that week. For many teachers and lay people that I spoke to, searchable databases of scripture like Biblegateway.com had replaced printed Bible concordances as a way of searching for Biblical mentions of specific issues. Equally as important was the social networking platform Facebook, which, though secular in its foundations, was so ubiquitous a feature of the social lives of many of my informants that it was often mentioned during casual conversation and preaching alike. Like email, Facebook was widely used among members of church leadership and laity to organise events and keep abreast of prayer requests.

The sprawling networks of online Christianity were organised through the regular engagements of Christians. As I noted above my informants frequently demonstrated a flexible command of various media sources and the ability to judge very quickly which fitted, or did not, with their own personal and doctrinal commitments.

Where the doctrinal provenance of a given text was uncertain, believers were advised to ask another member of their church community. One member of Jubilee informed me that those who are involved in mentoring recent converts always urge them to check the information they receive through online channels with other members of the church so that "it's not a situation where it's just me and Jesus and the Internet." Similar recommendations were voiced at all of the churches I studied, although this kind of communal engagement is understood to become less necessary as Christians become more 'mature' in their faith, and therefore better able to judge for themselves the provenance of a particular text. This growing expertise can be understood, in terms of practice theory, to indicate the growing cultivation of a spiritually-led media 'taste' (see Bourdieu, 1984). In selecting particular kinds of sources from the many available Christians "map themselves on to discourses of nation, family, and world" (Peterson, 2010: 133). These media, in turn, position their consumers in different worlds of engagement, from the embattled and embattling Christianity of conservative campaigning groups such as the Christian Institute to the more doubtful, blurred boundaries between saved and unsaved postulated by liberal Christians, a Kingdom of God that is deeply intertwined with the here and now.

The kinds of instabilities that differences in personal media consumption suggest are echoed in the actual movement of individuals across congregational boundaries. Brighton is not a large city and in the same way that the use of resources from foreign ministries and travelling evangelists confuse the distinction between local and remote in everyday church life, the boundaries between these congregations are notably permeable. It was not unusual to bump into Christians that I had met in one congregation attending Sunday service at another. Many church members would ask about the other sites of my research, and volunteer the names of a friend, acquaintance,

or family member in another church that I visited. Chains of acquaintance between members of different churches were often a result of previous membership in a different congregation. Jubilee church in particular was well known by most of the Christians I met; the size and prominence of the church meant that nearly every Christian I spoke to in the city had attended at least one service at Jubilee, and most had either regularly attended at one time or had considered doing so. Fluctuations in attendance at church on Sunday may be caused by personal illness or depression, an interest in witnessing the different *worship* or preaching styles of other congregations, or curiosity in new church ventures. It became apparent that for some people these temporary moves had stuck; a great many of my informants had been regular members of more than one church during their Christian lives.

Permanent movements from one congregation to another might be motivated by aesthetic preference or disagreements over doctrine, the attractions and strains of interpersonal friendships and rivalries, or mere convenience. Issues around gender and sexuality provided a significant set of motivations for changes in church membership. Several of the Christians that I spoke to told me that they had chosen to leave their previous congregation because of what they saw as the outdated or sexist attitudes of the church leaders when it came to gender roles. I met two openly gay church members during my research, both of whom maintained somewhat loose links to the congregations in which I had originally met them, and regularly attended services at more explicitly LGBT-friendly churches in the city. After finishing the research one of the women I had met at Alpha meetings came out as gay, and left the Church and indeed Christianity entirely. Even the practices associated with standard heterosexuality can motivate movement and instability at the edges of these congregations. A common joke is that unmarried Christians who seek a partner will often "do the circuit", moving

between different congregations looking for similarly-minded Christian singles. I have heard several second-hand accounts of young Christians switching congregations after tiring of the unwelcome attempts at match-making made by other church members.

If these 'fields' are characterised by movement, the best bet seems to be to draw on the suggestions provided by Marcus (1995) in his famous discussion of multi-sited ethnography, and seek to "follow" these flows. In their 2007 article, Leander & Lovvorn follow Kevin, an American teenager, as he moves through the different communicative contexts of lessons in High-School and the more compelling, for him, virtual environment of the Internet based Role Playing Game *Star Wars Galaxies*. Their approach chimes with Miller and Slater's (2000) ethnography of Trinidad. In each instance, the authors emphasise the different potentials for personal agency that are generated as internet users engage with particular kinds of networks of meaningful exchange online. The internet, in these accounts, is a field constituted in practice. In order to understand its creation and significance it is useful to look to the lives of its users and their own religious engagements. In this thesis, the interactions of particular women have been organised and presented, both by the women in question and myself, in the form of narrative.

Reception

For my analysis, I have concentrated particularly on the stories of five of the women that I met during fieldwork. All of them were particularly active users of the internet during the time that I knew them, and all were happy to spend time discussing the spiritual dimensions of their online engagements. Most importantly, all of the five

women maintained or had maintained their own *blogs*. Over the years of fieldwork, analysis, and writing up I have constructed case-study narratives from knowledge that I had gained during time spent with these women and their congregations, interview data and extracts of online speech. In the chapters that follow, I will discuss the customs of narrative creation and reception that particularly characterise women's participation in these churches. The stories that I present are co-productions between myself and the women in question (Plummer, 2001).

It quickly became apparent that this worked not only as a means of reviewing my data, but also as a way to organise it that harmonised with the existing practices of my informants. When I look back at my fieldnotes they seem to be filled with brief sketches of the stories told by others. Evangelical Christians, particularly women, constantly relate to one another stories of their own "journey" as a Christian, relating how they came to the shared "here" of Christian personhood and the equally shared trajectory that this personhood confers, from the present to the future of this life and the one beyond (Lawless, 2003; Griffith, 1997). Throughout my time in the field, people who did not know me would ask me upon meeting how it was that I became a Christian. This was a common question in the congregations I studied, and was often asked shortly after introduction with a new acquaintance (Harding, 2000: 40). Once I had recognised the ubiquity of this question I began to ask it myself. I would usually begin interviews by asking my informants to tell me how they came to faith. The commonplace nature of this question in conversation and more structured ritual events ensures that personal conversion narratives are typically highly rehearsed accounts, and so there was the added benefit of beginning the interview with a verbal performance in which my informants were already comfortable (see also Harding, 2000: 40). For myself as a non-Christian, however, the question remained a source of unease.

For Christians who see the Truth of the *Gospel* as fundamentally evident, accessible to all, and impervious to either logical or factual assault, the non-conversion of those who have both heard the *Gospel* and interacted with its carriers is a state of affairs that requires explanation. Over time I became familiar with the typical explanations that Christians offer for the lack of faith in those that they came into contact with. For Evangelicals, the default assumption is that the people simply haven't heard the message *correctly*. Among Charismatic Evangelicals this narrative gains further traction; the Church of England is widely considered to have become ossified through time and tradition into a staid, static kind of institution with none of the wild life of the Holy Spirit that is required to draw in unbelievers. Other explanations locate unbelief in individual pathology; secret hurts in the past of a person may cause her to become "hard hearted" and rejecting of God due to anger towards Him. A final, very commonly invoked explanation is that the non-believer recognises that conversion would mean letting go of personal pride and vanity and giving up a sinful lifestyle from which they derive physical and emotional pleasure and so reject the possibility.

This discourse of hard hearts, rigid tradition, turned faces and fleshly temptations among the *lost* fits with a general expectation that reception of God will be enacted in the body. During my time in Charismatic congregations I was aware that my body, as well as my words, would be regarded as a sign of my involvement in the spiritual life of the community, and was felt a need to perform a kind of embodied blankness during the sporadic occasions when others would offer to pray for me. Although I accepted these offers of prayer in the spirit of participant observation I avoided, to the fullest extent that I could, letting off any kind of spoken or physical sign that might be interpreted as a reception of God. In keeping with the general position of those receiving prayer I would remain with my head down, and my eyes closed while

others laid hands on my back, head, and arms but I did not "speak out" myself, sway as I stood, or indeed offer any kind of physical reaction at all until the ritual was finished, those praying had moved away, and my eyes were open again.

During one such prayer session I struggled to remain in control after a Christian friend called out as others were praying "can you feel the Spirit of God on you, Anna?" The direct question made evasion impossible, although I made a rather feeble attempt at it by pretending not to have heard, and when it was repeated I opened my eyes and shoot a beseeching look at one of the women praying for me. She seemed to take the cue and loudly said "No, no, it's okay," before taking charge of the prayer and winding it down. As the focus of the room passed on and the group around me returned to their seats I sat myself, blushing. Afterwards my friend came to apologise, clearly rather troubled on his own account by my lack of positive reaction to his question. He informed me that at the time he could "see" the Spirit of God on me and was certain that I would have felt it. This young man, like many of my informants, understood my academic interest in Christianity as a misguided attempt to become closer to God (see also Harding, 1987). It was implied throughout my fieldwork in my unconverted state I would be unable to grasp the core experience and meaning of Christian life. "If you don't get it," one Christian friend told me in conversation, "you won't *get it*." "Get it" in the first instance refers to reception of the Holy Spirit of God. In the second it refers to understanding. Failure to receive is simultaneously a failure of comprehension.

In discussions of conversion, the reverse is shown to be true also; accepting the Holy Spirit brings a new kind of understanding. Christians frequently report that following their conversion the Bible "came alive" for them in a way that it had not previously. What was before a dry and impenetrable text became a gripping account of God's own words to the believer that she was unable to put down. My informants would

describe their early Christian lives as a time in which they had a "hunger" for teaching, enormous appetites for *the Word* which often becomes demonstrated in buying a vast amount of books, listening to hours of Christian teaching, and incorporating Christian *worship* music into ITunes playlists and CD collections. In these stories Christian conversion is characterised as a time of radical change during which barriers inside the self and God are broken down and reception becomes a straightforward matter of ingestion rather than interpretation (see Coleman, 2000: 127-130). However, if being 'born again' is a persistent condition, as has by now been observed and discussed by anthropologists following these movements for many years (e.g. Coleman, 2003; Harding, 1987; Stromberg, 1993), then so is marginality. Accounts of everyday Christian life are replete with little conversions from confusion to clarity. Christians speak of scripture passages that suddenly become illuminated, songs that are sung and for the first time, really meant, prayers that bring new empathy and illumination to the motivations of frustrating acquaintances. My position on the outskirts of Christian community and understanding was at least intermittently shared by my informants, and this face perhaps lent some urgency to their desire to see this problem, as they viewed it, resolved.

But the occupation of the position of 'outsider' can, Christians believe, strengthen as well as limit understanding. A popular figure among Evangelical Christians in Brighton is the Victorian Evangelist Hudson Taylor, who left a Christian conference in Brighton to sit on the beach and contemplate the enormous burden of souls that remained *lost* while British Church leaders quibbled over doctrine. As he established his own ministry in China he insisted on bringing *the Word* to people in their own native language, a decision that was rewarded by huge numbers of conversions and became a standard of missionary societies worldwide. As I will discuss in the following

chapters, marginality as a position occupied by those who are redeemed through their acceptance of Jesus is widely held to be of great value in bringing timely critique that creates new routes through which salvation becomes possible. In the case studies of chapters 3 to 5 I discuss women who occupy, to vary degrees, positions of marginality in their own churches. In their uses of the internet we see negotiations of their own selfhood and their social position, and ways in which they are assert their own presence within much wider Christian narratives. I begin my analysis offline, in the handling of words and the creation of virtual realities.

Chapter 2: Speech, Orientation, and gender

Introduction

Lurhmann (2006), following work with Charismatic Christians in the United States, asks us to consider the processes of world-making through which the narratives of Biblical faith are rendered "inhabitable". Borrowing from the early theories of Levy-Bruhl's (1910) work on the cognitive attitudes of religion, she argues that these faiths come to take on everyday reality as boundaries between the inner and the outer are transgressed. Levy-Bruhl described the practices of "traditional" religions as engrossing their practitioners in "mystical participation" in the world. Lurhmann perceives similar modes of participation at work among her Charismatic informants. When prayers are answered or fellow church-members independently arrive at Spiritual insights that echo one another the inner world of the believer, her thoughts and feelings and intuitions, are experienced as manifest in the external world around her (Lurhmann, 2006). At the same time, the external presence of God, His own divine thought and intention, is understood to gradually take up residence within the mind. Through transmitting and receiving inspired speech the Charismatic believer constructs and experiences a verbal environment that incorporates speakers and listeners from across a range of media, times, and spiritual planes and it is in these emerging fields that we must try to meet her.

The composition of these verbal "scenes of encounter" between spiritually significant agents (Keane, 1997: 7) is intertwined with the construction of gender within

them. In this chapter I draw on the performative theories of gender proposed by Judith Butler and consider how it is that categories of 'man' and 'woman' imply a kind of orientation in the world. This perspective complicates the picture of the mediation of inner life and external reality described by Lurhmann through considering how it is that the categories of 'internal' and 'external' are created and experienced in the first instance as categories of linguistic, embodied, and cognitive practice. These processes fundamentally create for men and women a sense of location in the world that becomes significant as they approach the emerging architectures of the internet.

Practice and Field: An Evening at Alpha

On a Tuesday night in late October Jubilee Church in Brighton is hosting an Alpha evening. This evening is the first of a series of ten meetings during which attendees are introduced to the principles of Christianity and the message of the Gospel. Visitors to the refurbished commercial warehouse that houses the church are greeted three times at various doors and stairways as they make their way to the small, candlelit tables that fill the main hall of the church. Once there they remove their coats, write their names on sticky tags and become acquainted with one another over a meal. The small table is littered with postcards printed by the Alpha organisation and available to order for churches hosting the program. The postcards are plain on one side and on the other bear questions. "What am I doing here?" is the most common, others feature "Is there more to life than this?", "Is this IT?" and "The meaning of life is ___"

    After eating dinner we listen to a presentation about Christianity. The talk this

evening is delivered by Ken, an energetic man in his late 40s who paces the stage as he speaks, his voice amplified by a small flesh-coloured microphone that rests on his cheek. The title of this first presentation is *Christianity: boring, untrue, and irrelevant?* This title, along with much of the content of the presentation itself is inherited from the *Alpha* course outline, devised in 1990 by members of London's Holy Trinity Brompton congregation and now and used in churches all over the country and internationally (Hunt, 2003). Despite this seeming standardisation, Ken presents an argument that is personal, offering each and every person present an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.

> Jesus is making a huge claim. He's making a claim to bring direction to our lives, and a huge claim to say "I'm the only way to God." And that's a huge one we've got to discuss in a world which is so politically correct, where there are so many truths out there, and is truth really real or is it relative, what's the deal? Good one for debate. There's that second point Jesus makes, he says "I'm the way." He also claimed, according to eyewitness accounts, to be the truth. And you know there's something in our culture isn't there, that says, to us, "You can't believe in that Christianity thing can you? Surely there's no supernatural world beyond this world. That this world surely is all there is. And we're just a product of random selection. It's survival of the fittest. There is no difference between good and evil because those things surely are just relative. And when you die, you just rot." And at some point our culture is going to tell that to every one of us.

There is a moment of silence around the table as Ken finishes speaking and we come to

the part of the evening that is most heavily emphasised by Alpha leaders and commentators, the group discussion. Thea, a Christian woman in her late 20s who is leading our group opens a plastic wallet and retrieves from it a sheet of paper, on which are printed notes for the three discussion questions now projected on large screens to the left and right of the stage. She looks down at the sheet and then up again, smiling broadly at the other members of the still silent table. "Okay," she says, "where shall we start?"

Alpha, a course designed to take non-believers and carry them in to the sanctified community of the Saved, presents an excellent setting in which to Evangelical processes of world-creation at work. The key verbal practice through which the conversion of unsaved to saved will be achieved is the question. Alpha is often referred to, by those in attendance as well as course organisers, as "a context" for people to air and discuss these questions with others that would otherwise remain unspoken. The interplay of question and answer forms the basis for our engagement with the course. That the question has become almost totemic for the Alpha ministry is attested by the logo for the course, which depicts the cartoon figure of a man bent backwards, struggling under the weight of a giant red question mark which he holds in his hands. Like the first meeting described above, the title of each session takes interrogative form, from the "Boring, untrue, and irrelevant?" of the first session to the "What about the church?" of the last. The exchange of address and response that it is hoped will be embraced by visitors is an enduring feature of life for members of this church more generally, and so we might view our introduction to Christianity in the Alpha course as being a simultaneous introduction to a central aspect of Christian practice. Alongside historical arguments for the resurrection and description of the work and personhood of the Holy Spirit, visitors to the church this evening are being familiarised with a general

expectation that religious life involves expressing your inner life to others, and coming to experience yourself as addressed from without (Engelke, 2007: 172). In this chapter I discuss the communication processes through which the terrains of self and world, and the two combined, come to be defined and experienced. The creation of these inward and external landscapes is intertwined with the making of the Charismatic habitus.

Making the Inside

In its most widely-used formation, habitus refers to the "systems of durable, transposable dispositions" that generate fairly stable forms of embodied practice among members of a social group (Bourdieu, 1990: 53). All social acts, according to Bourdieu, derive meaning from their situation in a particular context, and serve both to generate and to reflect the wider social structure of the people concerned. The inclination to evangelise that is shared by many of my informants provides a simple example. Through these acts of outreach the definition of the world as composed of saved and unsaved is reaffirmed and becomes even more deeply ingrained. The very definition of the social environment therefore emerges in endless circularity with the practices found within it, through the "performative magic of the social" (Bourdieu, 1990: 57). In this way, individual practice is firmly tied to social structure, and discussions of habitus necessarily become discussions of social field (Hanks, 2005: 72).

The attendee listening to Ken's speech above may be struck by the number of speakers that are featured in his presentation, whose combined voices imply a field of engagement inside the speaker, and the speaker's presence in a highly verbal encounter. We might note, for example, the peculiar phrasing of "*culture*". *Culture* is here

presented as a speaker in its own right, speaking to "every one of us", mocking the Christian message in unmistakably atheist terms. The text of the Bible, too, has taken on verbal skin, with the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles referred to throughout this talk and those that follow not as inert text but as "eyewitness accounts". As we come to the small-group discussion, we are taking part in a contemporary, live engagement with these claims, and yet the key message of Alpha is that we are all already part of this on-going debate. Arguments about faith, morality, and meaning are not boring, untrue and irrelevant, but hold critical importance for our own lives. "These stories", Harding (1987: 172) notes in her discussion of Evangelical conversion rhetoric, "are about you".

The ideal personal engagement of the Alpha attendee with the spoken and written materials provided is reception. Those of us sitting around our tables are invited to relate to Ken as to a teacher. Plain postcards and ballpoint pens have been placed on the tables at which we sit and many of those in attendance take the prompt that seems to be offered by these props and take notes on the speech. Thea too has become part of this field of instruction. The plastic folder holds not only notes to lead the discussion but also to grant answers that might be sought. Printed on sheets of A4 are quotes from non-Christian historians whose words are seen as providing proof of the life and ministry of Jesus, and figures on the number of copies of the New Testament versus those of the Iliad or works of Aristotle, statistics that are intended to remove doubts concerning the historical reliability of the claims made. Challenges to the Christian claims presented are expected and even encouraged and yet the overall role of the listener is to ask her questions, and ultimately to receive the answers that are offered. Those course participants who take Ken and Thea up on the many invitations to attend church during the week will be presented with a familiar scene. There too we will be expected to absorb the teaching offered, taking notes if we wish, and later discuss what we have

learned in smaller more familiar groups during the week.

This constant input is presented as a necessity. The grasp of the subject over her inner self is understood to be somewhat tenuous; the territory of the inner self is under constant threat. Csordas, (1994: 165) informs us that we can tell much about a people "from the character of their demons". For the Charismatic Christians with whom I have worked, who expend so much time and energy on the circulation of redeeming Truth, the most important characteristic of the Devil is that he is a liar. The public, secular world of the UK, in to which the Christians hopes to "shine the light of Truth" is seeking also to speak back into her. The same openness to instruction and guidance that is so important in the reception of church teaching takes on a treacherous nature in the interactions of everyday life. The *culture* is constantly ready to accost the believer with a voice that is ultimately demonic. The deceptions of Satan are manifold, from relativistic understandings of faith and morality to the glossy magazines that convince the Christian, against the limitless and unconditional love of her Heavenly Father, that she will never be successful, talented or beautiful enough. Although the impact of this malign output is the exact opposite of that which is received through Christian teaching, the manner in which it is understood as generating an environment that can literally surround the believer is similar. "Just go to your high street", we are told by the leader of one church during a sermon on the ubiquity of spiritually significant communication, "just go to Tesco, just walk past a magazine rack. Preaching, preaching, preaching"

These totalising languages of truth and falsehood do not leave much in the way of middle ground. The verbal productions of human beings, when not subsumed within the broader projects of sanctification through Truth or corruption through lies are presented as languages of uncertainty. The progressive definition of speakers through their "colonisation" (Coleman, 1996) by inspired language suggests a kind of interior

blankness .Teachers giving advice to young Christians may urge them to pray for a "teachable spirit", an inclination to take on board the words of God so that they can come to "bear fruit" in their own character. The agrarian metaphor is extended in the parable of the sower, through which those engaged in evangelism are assured that, while some of their attempts to stimulate conversion will fail, others will fall on "good soil" and take root. This relationship of words to the inner self of listeners seems to contradict the total determination of God; those who hear the *Gospel* and reject it are considered to have made a genuine choice. The key agency of the individual, then, the aspect of communication that she has complete control over, is in allowing herself to be spoken into. Church members describe the maintenance of a sceptical attitude toward Christianity following exposure to the *Gospel* as evidence of "hard-heartedness", a purposeful refusal, often stemming from anger at God or a desire to maintain a sinful lifestyle, to allow Him entry (see chapter 1: 51). This attitude is echoed in the frequent repetition of the idea that the doors of Hell are locked "from the inside".

The meeting with Jesus Christ that will ultimately lead to salvation is performed in the speech reproduced above. Just as the words of the Bible the overriding ideologies of secular culture are transformed to flesh in Ken's speech, in the case of Jesus the flesh is made back into words. The Jesus introduced to us in the Alpha course is first and foremost a statement of his own divinity, He is "making a huge claim", the truth of which we must decide for ourselves. In later weeks Ken will suggest at the close of his speech that we speak along with him in our heads as he recites a version of the Sinners' Prayer. This prayer, when spoken with sincerity, is widely considered in Evangelical circles to be the first and only necessary step toward salvation through personal relationship with Jesus. In its relatively standard form, the prayer generally requires that the supplicant first address God, then make an admission of her own sinfulness and

inability to right herself without Him, then express a desire to follow Jesus and to allow Him into her heart (see Howard, 2005). This prayer stands therefore as a powerful illocutionary act (Austin, 1975). Through a verbal performance of a first meeting with Jesus, this meeting is actually achieved, and the Spirit of God comes to take up residence inside the self.

The confusion and drive for answers experienced by the inner self is given further life as the speaker reaches out to a contested world beyond. Through various mediating artefacts individuals come to an immediate and embodied experience of both the interpersonal framework of global Christian community, and beyond this a more geographical sense of frontier.

The External Voice

In a review of anthropological approaches to the relationship between the intimate field of "the local" and what is often understood to be the globalising force of "the media" Mazzarella (2004) raises a problem. The frequent separation of those forms of communication generally termed 'media' from the local setting with which they interact belies the fact that the simultaneous processes of "engagement and alienation" facilitated by media objects are already necessarily intrinsic to the shared understanding of what the local *is*. Like the relation between practices and social fields media technologies are inextricably related to the understanding and the experience of the localities from which they emerge and in which they circulate. This argument seems particularly pertinent in the Christian context. As various authors have noted, worldwide Christianities generally assert the primary importance of the relationship between

embodied humans and a transcendent God and rely therefore on mediating objects, exemplified of course in the personhood of Jesus Christ (Cannell, 2006: 18). Mazzarella (2004: 346) expands his own definition of media to include such "material frameworks" as ritual practice alongside the more standard forms such as television or the internet. In the following, I consider speech as part of this expanded concept of media, in order to show how interactions between the Charismatic individual and the "object-like" (Coleman, 1996: 122) communications that surround her work to define an expanding spiritual landscape.

Through their extensive consumption of books, audio and video recordings, and online media my informants, even within the secular settings of liberal Brighton, are able to locate themselves in a Christian world. The Christians in my study express great interest in the "moves of God" taking place elsewhere in the world, and revivals in foreign churches generate much excitement and conversation among believers. Although books are undoubtedly the pre-eminent media format for these Christians, when it comes to allowing a sense of connection to distant revival more immediate forms of media such as audio or visual recordings come into their own. In 2008 a series of prayer meetings and guest sermons delivered by a travelling Charismatic minister in Florida gained a large worldwide Christian audience and eventually came to be considered by many as a significant "outpouring" of the Holy Spirit. Several of my informants watched the meetings of what was eventually termed the "Lakeland *Revival*" live over the internet, with some even reporting instances of remote healings as they prayed along with the online stream.

At the time of my research, a young church leader who gave me a lift to a *house group* event was still listening to audio recordings from this "outpouring" in his car, a half hour section of a prayer meeting that he found particularly inspirational. This use of

inspired speech as an audio backdrop to travel or commuting was not uncommon, with many of my informants downloading sermons or prayer sessions by favourite speakers to their mp3 players or burning them on to CDs. It is generally considered that listening to teaching in this manner is not quite as good as being personally present at its original transmission, but these recordings can still form the basis for a significant spiritual encounter. The manner in which these events are "entextualised", rendered extractable from the immediate circumstances of their production (see Keane, 2004: 438; Shoaps, 2002), aids this. For example, a common vernacular term for sermon is *preach*; a term that is applied to both the present and past forms of the activity of preaching; "Ken gave the *preach* on Sunday" as opposed to "Ken preached". Such phrasing helps not only to make an object of the verbal transmission delivered from the Sunday pulpit, but also serves to remove it from the temporal trappings of its original emergence. *Preaches* thus identified become an on-going event. They can be recorded, shared in CD or mp3 format, and the listener who comes to it even several years later is still able to access a live encounter between themselves, the speaker, and God.

That scripture is conceived of as a fundamental framework in which contemporary action becomes contextualised is further indicated in the common description of the Bible as something to which one can orient oneself as if in space. One woman who leads study groups with teenagers at her church described to me her desire to help younger Christians to "live in the truth of" the Bible. In cases where a person is unsure if a particular piece of *prophecy* is genuinely from God its recipients are advised to "go to scripture", to check for inconsistencies or contradictions between the message received and scriptural revelation. The idea that scripture provides a kind of landscape that the individual can be *in* is reinforced by the short Bible quotes that can be found framed as one would a favourite picture and displayed prominently on walls, bookcases,

and windowsills. These icons of communication bring to mind the images of the Virgin Mary and other Saints that decorate the homes of Catholics, enabling the individual to experience her own presence within a "landscape of spiritual immanence" (Mitchell & Mitchell, 2008: 87).

The presence of the unsaved is key to the Charismatic sense of immanent renewal. Just as media objects make it possible for believers to experience their inclusion in a global network of Christians engaged in on-going communication with God they also allow the experience of the other key aspect of Evangelical identity, a perpetual interface with non-believers. *Witnessing* or presenting your own faith and the *Gospel* message to the unsaved is considered to be an incredibly important part of Evangelical life but is also widely acknowledged to be a difficult and socially awkward enterprise. Although a great many of my informants still attempt to bring the *Gospel* into conversation with non-Christians wherever it is possible, Evangelical tracts, books on *apologetics*, or recordings of personal *testimonies* are widely employed as a means of sharing *the Word* with friends, colleagues, and neighbours. The internet, whose simultaneous fostering of a sense of both remoteness and intimacy has been widely discussed (Campbell, 2005a: 185), and which is seemingly inextricably tied to concepts of space (Williams, 2002: 316) is particularly attractive in this respect. A popular Evangelical book about the internet, entitled *The New Media Frontier* urges Christians to use the internet as a tool to spread *the Word* of the *Gospel*. Several of my informants take up this challenge, circulating Bible passages and *links* to evangelising sermons via Facebook updates and email signatures.

Whether it is contained in media artefacts or embodied in the Evangelical address of an individual speaker, this sense of engagement with a wider world that attends Evangelical and Charismatic communication often outstrips the actual presence

of the unsaved. It has been noted that Evangelical television and radio broadcasts are rarely consumed by non-Christians (Schultz, 1996: 64), and I have certainly found that most recitations of the *Gospel* message are received by those who are already saved. This is the case even at the Alpha course. Despite the intense Christian and wider media focus on these courses as events that aim to bring about conversion in the *lost*, in the two courses that I have attended I have been one of only two or three non-Christians sitting at a table of at least eight participants (see also Hunt, 2003: 86). The same can be said of many sermons and prayers, which assure listeners of their need to come into a relationship with Jesus, even in contexts where no non-believers are present and such a relationship might therefore be assumed.

Like the social fields described by Bourdieu the interior plane of the Charismatic self is marked by a variety of actor positions, as she moves between the positions of listener to speaker (see Harding, 1987), and as other agents, both corporeal and spiritual, both address this field and find themselves addressed by it. Just as the unsaved must allow themselves to become spoken into, the Christian speaker is engaged in a constant push forward into the frontier of her own self. In this way Charismatic Christians become surrounded by a shifting social space, a stream of fields of reception and response extending endlessly into interior and exterior terrains. The idea of 'virtual reality' fits in two respects. Firstly in the sense of simulation that it implies; the terrains that are conjured in practice may not map on to the actual presence of unsaved listeners. But secondly and related to this, 'virtual', in the sense of the "almost" presented by Boellstorff (2008: 19), does not imply a falseness to these presentations but rather a nearness to the actual along the dimension of time. Unsaved listeners, like the spiritual regeneration of the constantly born-again self (Stromberg, 1993) are rendered immanent through practice.

Gendered Terrains

The simultaneous assertion of site and status that is the making of Charismatic Christianities is also the assertion of boundaries. For the individual believer, engaging in practices that mark the self as part of the sanctified community can make living in the *World* a discomforting experience. In conversation during *house groups*, shared meals, and Bible studies Christians relate to one another habitual experience of alienation in the form of colleagues who do not invite them to the pub, television programmes that criticise and ridicule Jesus and His followers, and the discomfort of acquaintance with attractive non-believers whom they know they can never date. In these group contexts, stories of alienation are repeated and become the basis for a shared positioning of outsiderness. A particularly acute source of mismatch is provided by differences from the *World* in the areas of sexuality and gender.

I noted in the previous chapter that, particularly for Christians living in Brighton, issues of gender and sexuality are a source of feelings of distance between the self and the world that is particularly marked. The Evangelical advocacy group The Christian Institute publishes through their website regular missives on social and political developments that are understood to indicate the declining sexual morality of British culture, articles that find their way on to the pin-boards in the main hall of Emmanuel Evangelical church and feature in conversations among informants across the congregations. Visitors to Jubilee are able to buy at the bookshop a range of books on the subjects of gender and sexuality, titles of which include; *Radical Womanhood: Feminine Faith in a Feminist World; Sex is not the Problem, Lust is: Sexual Purity in a*

Lust-Saturated World and *Every Young Man's Battle: Strategies for Victory in the Real World of Sexual Temptation.* The general formula of "X in a Y world" emphasises the experience of discord that Christians are generally assumed to feel between their own inner lives and the desires and practices of the *Culture*. "We are a city on a Hill," one visiting preacher told members of Jubilee, "and this means we do relationships differently, we do sexuality differently". This difference in 'doing' seems to apply particularly well to understandings and practices around gender.

Among the Christians I have worked with, gender is most frequently discussed as a *role.* The term is used explicitly in the literature of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. This US-based group distributes a large amount of doctrinal and exegetical literature which was particularly referenced at Jubilee and Emmanuel Evangelical. The concern of the Council, as is made clear by their activities and very title, is the investigation of what manhood and womanhood "should incline us to". The essence of men and women and the relationships between them, all of my informants agree, lie in the intention of the Creator and the pages of the Bible, and appropriate relations can therefore be modelled from the ideals established therein. Characters such as the unfailingly devoted Mary Magdalene or the flawed but faithful King David are read not just as examples of human relationships with God, but as examples of women and men that the Christian living in 21st century Brighton can learn to follow.

Such discussion brings to mind the idea of gender as performance, a metaphor that is well-established in gender literature in the social sciences, and has a broader applicability to Charismatic practice. The metaphor would no doubt be rejected by Christians themselves. The explicit connotations of the term performance suggest a kind of insincerity that, as I will discuss, is considered to be antithetical to born-again selfhood. When considered in the sense used particularly by Judith Butler (1990),

however, performance provides us with a particularly appropriate analogy. In gendered

practice, particularly in the social fields of church and kinship relations, Charismatic

men and women reach toward the appropriation of an outward text that becomes

progressively internalised. Like Evangelical conversion itself, coming to inhabit the

inclinations of manhood or womanhood is a process that is affirmed in constant

repetition but never fully completed, and that sets practices, relationships, and inner

selfhood on a very public stage.

One notable point of difference between the outside world and the sanctified

community, and one in which the quality of gender as something that is *done* can be

seen clearly, lies in the often overtly gendered hierarchies that persist within these

congregations. The supposed domination of men in conservative Christianities has

attracted much research attention, and the attitudes of a given congregation or

movement will often be summarised by researchers (e.g. Lawless, 1983: 436; Toulis,

1997: 236) with the same question asked by Christians themselves: Can women preach?

My informants are divided on this question. Materials provided to new members

of *Shoreline Church* and *Living Grace* assert that women are able to perform the same

ministry roles as men and both churches features female speakers with varying

regularity. In each one, a husband and wife team share the title 'Pastor', although in

each case the husband is widely regarded within the congregation as its de facto leader.

At Emmanuel Evangelical and Jubilee church these issues are approached very

differently. The church leaders and many members of the congregation argue that men

and women are "equal but different", and have been charged by God to fulfil different

purposes on earth. While men are called to lead under God's own authority, women are

expected to support this work in the role of "helper", affirming and submitting to the

leadership of their husbands at home and male leaders in the church. These two

perspectives are glossed by writers and speakers within the field of contemporary Evangelical Christianity as *Egalitarianism* and *Complementarianism* respectively (see Bryant, 2009; Scholz, 2005).

When we look to individuals rather than congregations we find that personal beliefs regarding these issues vary widely and it is possible to find at any one congregation a range of perspectives on the proper roles of women and men. Significantly, we also find that there are some points on which there is widespread agreement. Most of the Christians I worked with agreed that husbands should occupy a role as "head of the household" and that men and women are very different in their essential nature and the kinds of spiritual contributions that they are best able to bring to the world. Additionally, it is important to note that although some Christians argue forcefully for the ability of women to preach, most reported to me that they personally tend to find men's preaching more spiritually affecting. In contrast to masculine styles of preaching, women's speech in ritual and interpersonal contexts and their contributions to church life are typically characterised as more emotional and relational. As I will discuss below, and as has been noted by previous studies of conservative Christian cultures (e.g. Lawless, 2003; Griffith, 1997) women testify while men preach.

If, as argued above, ritual speech acts create their own kinds of locality, these gendered associations reflect the differing social positions of men and women. The association of preaching with masculinity reflects wider gender norms which locate men in spheres of public engagement and women in more intimate contexts. Harding (2000: 176) notes such an organisation of speech in her own study of the Fundamentalist preacher Jerry Falwell, whose speech would organise the assembly before them in the same manner as they would be physically organised in an orthodox church, as men were the primary subject of his address and women would, as it were, "overhear" his

remarks. This is in line with standard observations of gendered norms observed by anthropologists, in which women are associated with the private or domestic sphere while men dominate in public life (e.g. Ortner, 1974; Rosaldo, 1974). It is useful, however, to complicate the public/private division somewhat in recognition of the fact that, in Evangelical cultures as in others, the private seems to be instrumental in supporting and giving shape to the social structures of 'public' life (see also Dubisch, 1991). As is suggested by Evangelical interventions into marriage legislation and the emphasis placed upon bringing the disciplines and dispositions of church into private life, these Christians maintain that the public is supported and underscored by relationships in the private realm and pursue an ideal in which the most private engagements are inescapably public. The separation between a masculine public sphere and a feminine domestic realm is created in practices that often blur these lines.

Men of the World: Preaching

There is, June tells me, just something about male preachers. I interviewed June early on a Sunday morning, in a large, sunny classroom of the school that was rented by the church, before she began her responsibilities running the Sunday school at Living Grace. She informed me that while she felt strongly that women can preach, and that she had herself heard some wonderful preaching from women in her own church, there is some quality of preaching that makes it more powerful and effective when delivered by a man. "I think men are able to give a stronger message sometimes just because of, you know, the masculine thing".

June's comments echo earlier ideas of 'muscular Christianity' that we see in the

Victorian writings of Christian speakers whose own speech was understood to be part of a specifically masculine ethic of physical vigour and verbal boldness (see Hall, 1994). In her comments June asserts this connection between masculinity, strength, and preaching as one that requires little elaboration, as both the meaning of "the masculine thing" and my own knowledge of the connection of this to a strong message is assumed. The perceived naturalness of this connection of a particular way of speaking with a particular mode of gender invites a return to Butler. Preaching, in such formulations, is an act that is bound to, and indeed constitutive of, masculinity. This gendered form of verbal practice establishes the masculine in terms of confrontation with and expansion into a wider world.

The rooms in which preaching takes place tend to bear symbolic assertions of their connection to the surrounding landscape of the city. In the main meeting hall of Emmanuel Evangelical church moments of quiet during services are punctuated by the sounds of traffic and sirens from the busy junction that the church sits upon, and the walls are decorated with cuttings from the local and national press. At the converted warehouse premises of Jubilee, a church whose leaders believe that preaching is an act that can only be undertaken by men, the presence of the city is particularly striking. The audience in the auditorium on a Sunday faces large windows that occupy almost the entire height and length of one wall, and that during the day, have their blinds pulled back to reveal a commanding view of the opposite hill, and the thousands of houses, shops, flats and workplaces that occupy it. The *preach* forms the site at which this outside world and the corporate body of Christ will ideally come to meet, and the preacher therefore occupies a central position of mediation. The following extract is taken from one such occasion, a *preach* delivered at Jubilee on the subject of "alternative maturity".

This is really face the facts kind of material, isn't it? Paul writes a

letter saying "you're all just a bunch of babies, that is what you are."

That's the way he talks.

Now, I'm trying to come to terms with this because I want to preach

this faithfully, but also I don't want to get killed. So I'm going to try

and walk a tightrope here today, you watch. See if I fall off [muted

laughter].

The reason I'm so concerned about this, is because I feel that God

does want to say this to some of you. Today. I've been praying about

it all week. As elders we've been praying about it. God wants to say

this Sunday, to many people in this church, [slowly] grow up. You are

being a baby.

[…]

If no-one ever gets in your face and says "my friend, you're being a

baby. Grow up." Honestly, we may as well pack up and leave because

we will make no dent whatsoever in this city. We'll make no

transformation in our lives, let alone the lives of other people. What's

needed is genuine provocative words that bring maturity. This is why

Paul uses this kind of language. He's trying to shock them into

something, "guys, grow up. Please."

In the extract above the preacher likens himself to a tightrope walker. The rhetorical

move suggests the visibility that is imbued in the act of preaching. The same landscape

we see as we sit in the tiered seating of the church hall is understood to be looking in.

As described above (pp. 66-67), messages of salvation and the need for personal redemption are contained in every *preach* whether there is in fact an outside audience present or not. I have already considered the effect that this had on the shared understanding of the message delivered, but it is also important to consider the effect that kind of visible, mobile speech act has in the construction of the preacher as a particularly visible, mobile agent. Audience members sit with pencils and notepads ready, writing key phrases and summaries of the message given in their own hand. *House group* meetings and prayer events that take place during the week make frequent reference to the Sunday message, and its subject matter is often recycled into simplified lessons to be delivered in Sunday school, with the hope that families will be able to discuss the teachings as a group outside the church. The week after this sermon was preached I attended an Alpha course at the church. When I asked about their weeks so far a few of my friends in the congregation mentioned the message that had been delivered the previous Sunday, speaking in generally approving tones of how "challenging" it had been.

Although preaching is not an activity engaged in by all men it is, as June's comments suggest, understood to reflect wider qualities of masculinity. In the guiding of his people into the occupation of potentially dangerous territory, the preacher greatly resembles the husband and father. Indeed, the preaching that is delivered by men usually includes a great deal of reference to their own family lives. Preachers would often relate to the gathered congregation the insights that they had gained as they courted their wives or taught their children. The inclusion of these anecdotes not only illustrates the Spiritual lessons conveyed in preaching but also qualifies the preacher; men have an authority in the church that rests upon their authority in the home. Although a few of the Christians I met felt that single men are able to work as church leaders, others,

following Paul's first letter to Timothy in which a leader is described as "the husband of one wife" (1 Tim. 3:2) are adamant that such leadership is not Biblically sound. Marriage and the domestic realm hold enormous, public, significance for men (Dubisch, 1991: 45). The biographies of church leaders circulated at Christian conferences and *posted* to their websites always include, typically before any other information, the name of their wife and, if they have them, the number of children in their family.

The assonance between the roles of church leadership and fatherhood are based around an expectation that the husband assumes some kind of role of leadership for the family. As I describe above, the idea that men should occupy the role of the 'head of the household' is widely supported by my informants. The manner in which the leadership of men is actually manifest in the everyday interaction of the married couple, however, is a source of some uncertainty (see also Aune, 2006; Harding, 2000: 170). During one *house group* meeting on the subject of hierarchical authority in marriage a dissenting attendee, Fiona, asked repeatedly for "practical examples" of cases where the final say of the man would be invoked, but gained no such response. The clearest example she was aware of, and one that was frequently given in the discussions of marriage that I had observed, was the decision made by men to relocate themselves, their wives and families in order to pursue a calling to mission in remote, poverty-stricken, or otherwise unappealing locations. In these cases it is hoped that wives will trust in the judgement of her husband and the "vision" that he has received from God for their lives. Fiona asserted that she found this to be a rather "extreme example". She had a point. Although many Evangelicals place great emphasis on the notion of mission, and several of the young Christians that I have met express a desire to evangelise in foreign countries, the majority of married couples are unlikely to face this decision, under a condition of male leadership or otherwise. What this ubiquitous example does summon

neatly, however, is the general sense of mobility that is conveyed by this idea of leadership. Even the two more *Egalitarian* churches in this study, Shoreline and Living Grace Church, were founded by men who had moved to the city following a vision.

The authority endowed upon men is not owned by them. Christians constantly relate a belief that all gifts, all inspired words, and all authority are ultimately the property of God. The central statement of the extract above comes in the second to last line, as we are informed that the words transmitted are what "God wants to say". The overriding mobility of preaching and preachers, from the point of view of my informants, stems from its ultimately divine origin. During this Sunday *preach* reproduced above the speaker moves back and forth across the stage and frequently returns to the lectern that stands at its centre, hunching his tall frame over it and grasping the large Bible placed there from underneath as he speaks to the audience. This is a posture that he adopts particularly when he is reading from scripture but also when he is not, the stance reinforcing the closeness we are to perceive in the voice of the speaker and *the Word* of God. It is common to hear reports of preaching that asserts its relevance to the setting at hand in dramatic terms. My informants tell me of messages that came at precisely the right time, occasions when they have been certain that the preacher must have been speaking directly to them. Such events are described as being particularly significant, and often come up in testimonies of initial conversion, or during interviews when I ask Christians what drove them to join their current church. One young woman told me that though she might study a particular passage of the Bible herself in private, the thought would often strike her as she listened to preaching that "I would never have thought of it like that!" It is the possession of this external voice of God that makes men mobile in the world, and gives them authority. One informant, Lucy, a member of Jubilee church in her early 50s, explains:

It's to do more with- it's not just to do with teaching, it's to do with teaching the whole congregation on a Sunday- it's more to do with that corporate setting. Where there's a huge responsibility for what's being taught on that congregation. Where also there's people visiting and coming in um which kind of has a governmental feel to it as well. But that doesn't mean that women shouldn't teach, and women in our church do teach in different settings um, but I think that on a Sunday setting particularly, um where that teaching is kind of shaping the direction that the church is going in, the direction that the elders feel that God is speaking to them you know about, then yeah it feels very appropriate that that is done by um not just men but men that um, the elders feel have a very clear teaching gift in that way.

This is a mobility that is figured in physical as well as verbal movement. Male leaders in these congregations tend toward greater physical mobility within the church context. Even in *Egalitarian* churches, meetings with representatives from other Christian institutions are undertaken by men. Pastors are often absent from Sunday services because of visits to other churches, or mission trips further afield, and the churches that I have worked in have all, in turn, featured during their Sunday service male guest speakers from other congregations. This sense of men as going first, the pioneers of God's creation and His church, feeds into a narrative of advance that is rendered in more military terms. Evangelical literature often encourages Christians to adopt a "war-time mentality" and the semantic field of armed conflict is drawn on extensively by members of Brighton churches. Members of Jubilee talk about the city as territory that is occupied by *The Enemy* and describe the need to reclaim it in terms that

are overtly masculine. Men's events and weekends away are promoted with literature that makes reference to "fighting the good fight" and the assembled men as a "band of brothers". In the *preach* above, the speaker elides the congregation seated before him with that of the church of first-century Corinth, and his own voice with that of the apostle Paul. If those sitting in front of him wish to "make a dent" in the city of Brighton, it will be necessary to become accustomed to the "provocation" of the words he brings.

Ways of speaking therefore create not only a way to be, but a place to be also. Through the "stylised repetition" (Butler, 1990: 140) of particular speech acts, men and women come to an understanding of *Biblical* masculinity as a cluster of habits and dispositions that place the speaker in a perpetual clash with forces that would seek to restrain the message. In the extract above, the preacher rejects immaturity, social inhibition, and even politeness as barriers to the spread of "what God wants to say" and in so doing performs the key masculine traits of challenge and mobility in the form as well as the content of his *preach*. Although not all men will lead a church, there is an expectation that most men at least will one day lead a family, and practices such as leading prayers or Bible discussion around the table at dinner time and making the big decisions on behalf of the family group present a similar image. The kinds of speaking practice associated with Charismatic men simultaneously creates and defines territories that require active intervention, and equips them with the tools through which this can be carried out. If the speech associated with men locates its speakers in difficult, dangerous territories, the landscapes that women seek to tame are no less conflicted.

Words from the Heart: Women's Teaching

Every six months, Jubilee hosts a "joining the church family" day, during which members are informed of the doctrines and practices that the church as a corporate body upholds. During the day there is time allotted for questions from the 50 or so prospective members assembled. On the Saturday morning that I attend the representatives of the church are posed the same question that animates many studies of gender roles in Spirit-filled churches; Does Jubilee allow women to preach the main message on a Sunday? At this stage the young church member who had answered the previous questions yielded the floor as one of the elders, seemingly particularly animated by this question, came from the back of the room to answer. It "depends what you mean by preaching" he told us. He explained that there are churches, even a few in Brighton, that have women delivering the Sunday message, but this is more like sharing, this is more like "this is what I did with my week and here is some scripture", it's more like *testimony.* This caricature of women's preaching, though rather dismissive in context, captures well the personal nature of this genre. While women occupy the central Sunday role of preacher at *Egalitarian* churches, *Complementarians* also encourage women to engage in the spiritual instruction of others, in extended messages that are referred to as *teaching*. Whatever the title given, these engagements tend to locate their speakers in a world that is unlike that of male preaching, with relation to the experiences of domestic contexts and inner life.

This is particularly interesting in the context of the performative theories of gender presented in the work of Judith Butler. If repeated performances of gendered identity give rise to a growing fiction of masculine and feminine as *interior* essences, then Charismatic women, whose ministry and ritual speech is often bound closely to the

personal and everyday life, allow further insights into the practical constitution of 'inner life'. Preachers and teachers discussing the roles of women in the home and church express the value of a kind of visible silence. Women are urged by preachers and writers to develop a "quiet beauty" and a calmness that bespeaks a gentle spirit (1 Peter 2: 3-4). The contrast here between the cultivated silences of women and the 'natural' bold speech of men is interesting in the light of established anthropological symbolic grammars in which men are located in the realm of culture and women in nature (Ortner, 1970). The 'natural' state of women is cast in these discourses as a rebellion and insecurity that constantly flees from the intention of God. While young men are represented as a force that must be "channelled" and "guided" in the appropriate direction so that their natural brashness and vigour can come to shape the world in the image of God, women are urged to undertake an on-going refashioning of their own selves.

This task of remaking the self is not easy, and many women in more overtly hierarchical congregations speak of battling against their own "pride" and "vanity" as they seek to embody the principle of submission in their relationships with husbands, fathers, and church leaders. To this end, women are particularly cautioned against "nagging" or "belittling" men through confrontational speech. Instead, they are informed, the most effective challenge is brought indirectly. During a meeting in which gender roles were discussed, one member of the audience asked how a woman who is 'in submission' to her husband could confront his sinning. The young married woman at the front of the room described in response the value of providing for ones husband a model of obedience to God through her own piety and "joyful submission" to him, rather than through verbal confrontation. She went on to suggest that the primary recipient of this obedience was not in fact her husband at all. "Submission," she

explained succinctly "is part of my worship". Her example expresses an ideal of women's communication as largely *unspoken* in verbal terms, but effectively broadcast through its embodiment within the character, temperament and peaceful inner life of the woman that is ultimately a result of her relationship not with her husband but with God.

The following example of teaching was delivered to a room full of women by Jenny, the wife of a church leader and the mother of three young children. She smiles broadly as she presents, her tone enthusiastic and upbeat. Central to Jenny's message, like that of much female teaching, is the need for Christian women to "guard [their] hearts" against the voices of the *Culture* which would seek to destabilise their security in their relationship with God. In the following extract, she describes the insecurity that she experiences during a trip to the high-street.

Do you know, I went shopping recently, I don't like going shopping. There are two reasons why I don't like going shopping. The first is I get insecure about my body shape. Because I have a- not a particularly strange shaped body but I don't really fit most clothes in the shops that are designed. So I'm not really a 10, I'm not really a 12 and I'm not really a 14. I hate shopping because nothing seems to work on me. And I hate it as well because I go into a shop and I look at the clothes and I think "I don't even really like that. Maybe I should like that. Maybe I'm out of touch with what people should be wearing, in my generation. Maybe I'm one of those people that basically doesn't really fit with how you should wear clothes and I wouldn't buy most of the clothes in this shop and it makes me uncomfortable being in this shop because this shop makes me feel like I'm not conforming... Oh! Hang on! I think it might say something about that in the Bible!" [laughs]

It is significant that this extract, like a sizeable chunk of the message that Jenny delivered that Wednesday morning, refers to problems of dress. Discussion of feminine attire and insecurity in one's appearance is featured with striking regularity in the teaching delivered by women at the churches I have studied. Women talk about bad dye jobs, muse on the potentials of Botox injections, and describe sudden panics over not having a suitable outfit for church. In these stories the speaker presents herself as a comically uncertain figure, caught up in insecurity and vanity, and female audience members nod and laugh along with her. The overall message in most of the teaching on appearance is that the desire, for women, to look attractive to others must not be conflated with the true beauty that we should seek to cultivate in the eyes of our Creator. Physical beauty, and insecurity in one's own beauty, is consistently likened to insecurity in personal salvation and in one's relationship with God. Bella, one of the leaders of Shoreline Church, once invited us during a *preach* to consider the fashionable young women visiting the popular shopping districts of central Brighton, who look to the outside world to be so smart and "put together", but whose looks may mask inner feelings of worthlessness.

These commentaries of inner turmoil, in their uncertainty and need for reassurance, can be placed squarely in the language of the human (see p. 61 above). In their restriction to the language of inner life and personal selfhood, these speakers are necessarily tied in to the same grammars of uncertainty that accompany discussion of *the lost*. Salvation through Jesus Christ is the removal of all doubt, and the air of perpetually unregenerate selfhood that can be seen on the fringes of all Christian speech is particularly emphasised when that selfhood is configured as female. In conservative congregations, women are often encouraged to look to their husbands, fathers, and

pastors for spiritual guidance. One woman told me that women are indeed more "susceptible" to falsehood and spiritual misinformation than men, a view that although rarely voiced is referenced in much *Complementarian* teaching, and seems again to suggest that the salvation of female believers is less complete than that their male counterparts.

A key feature of both this speech and of women's speech in general is its autobiographical tone. In the extract above, Jenny tells her listeners how to deal with the problems of physical and spiritual insecurity by telling us how she deals with them, in a snapshot of her daily life. As audience members, women seem to find this kind of teaching particularly resonant. Many told me when I asked about the kind of Christian literature they read that they don't get on well with "deep theology," but that they love to read about the life stories of other Christian women. Female Bible figures are a particularly important inspiration for the women in my study. The Charismatic author Wendy Virgo has written several books in which the stories of women from the Bible are read for their relevance for Christian women today, case studies in the meaning and possibilities of *Biblical* Womanhood. When I asked her about the process of writing the book she smiled as she described her engagement with the story of Mary.

> "I was wondering, how did she cope with having a child that was so good?
> Because all of the other kids would have been much more normal. And
> how- what was family life like? And trying to ask these sort of questions.
> And Jesus was a man but he was also the son of God. But he was really her
> son. [...] I loved writing that, that was my favourite of all the books I've
> written, actually."

Wendy was careful to stress in her answer to me that the grounding of good theology is extremely important when we come to interpret the meaning of these women's lives. But what we do see clearly in her words is a desire to understand Mary as a woman whose life can be engaged with in terms of the same realm of motherhood and family life that she herself has come to grips with.

Commentaries regarding the relationship between the Bible text and personal experience play on a sense of interior relevance that patterns women's teaching at every level. At *Complementarian* churches there is a sense of the inside that is conveyed in the physical spaces from which women's teaching is delivered. Aside from the rare events aimed exclusively at women, female speakers rarely teach from the main stage, their engagement in this powerful practice bounded to spaces of seminar rooms, small gatherings of women, and the living rooms in which *house groups* are held. This internal sensibility is enforced as Jenny remarks that she "think[s]" there is some wisdom that would be relevant to her insecurity in the Bible. At a *house group* meeting with members of Living Grace, Bridget, a nurse in her early 30s, passed around slips of paper that she had printed off her computer, on which were printed *Words* of encouragement she had received from God. When I asked her about them she explained that she always prefaced these words of *prophecy* with either the statement "I think" or "I feel" that this was *the Word* of God. These kinds of qualifiers, in the Charismatic context, take on spiritual significance. Women, in asserting that they *think* the words they speak can be attributed to God's own authorship, are taking care to restrict the spiritual authority with which their words are endowed. Unlike the words attributed to God in preaching, listeners to the more informal lessons provided by women are given greater opportunity to disagree with the speaker, essentially denying the presence of the external voice of God in the text. Although Bridget felt that the words were indeed from

God, she allowed that they might have only been a product of her own mind.

The frame of reference for women's speech is further narrowed to the realm of the personal through a strong association with emotion. As Jenny looks in to the windows of the high-street fashion store and walks among its rails of undesirable and unflattering clothing she becomes insecure and uncomfortable, she "hates" the message of the stores and the way it makes her feel. When asked for the key differences between men and women Evangelicals will often respond with reference to women's more "emotional" nature, and in discussion on the subject of women's teaching, references to the sharing of emotional states are almost unfailingly invoked. Katarina, a young leader at Shoreline Church, laughed as she described Bella's preaching in comparison to Scott's; "Scott would preach very practical... Not very deep but practical. But Bella would go 'Ooh, do you know these emotions girls?'" This heightened tendency to feel and express strong emotion is imbued with particular religious meaning in the Charismatic context. While emotion can lead to a heightened empathy and understanding of the nature of God, it can also confound. Bella herself, though expressing a conviction that these emotional references were important as they form one part of the language of God to the individual, expressed some caution over this tendency. "Women are more prone to be emotional and to be- to be more touchy feely, I mean [...] I have seen some that really, kind of lose touch with reality almost".

According to these Charismatic women, the essential ground of womanhood, however its contents is understood, lies in the pages of scripture and must be reached toward through action. That so much of this action takes place in the interior terrain of the self, or in sites which are rendered in one way or another internal and intimate, emphasises the eternal incompleteness of conversion. Rather than reaching out to broad and anonymous audiences, women seek to either guide themselves, or women who are

like themselves, into an acceptance of God's voice that must be constantly re-staged. Women pass on *the Word* of God through personal stories of doubt, unhappiness, and constant redemption; through the rearing of children, through empathy with others like themselves, through the unspoken communications of their demeanour and attitude. The empathic, personal landscapes created through the words and embodied testimonies of women do grant their speakers a measure of agency and mobility. Empathy and emotion are important components of Charismatic practice regardless of the gender of those reaching out and receiving. The emotional response is a form of feedback from the territory of the self, demonstrating to the believer the extent to which they have been reached in to. Despite this, the risk of "los[ing] touch with reality", as Bella states above, is simultaneously the risk of losing touch with God. The internal orientation of women lessens their mobility in the expanding Kingdom.

Fields of Distinction

The Charismatic speaker is the locus of a series of emerging fields, as she speaks and interacts with the church, the unsaved, and God. Beyond this, she becomes a kind of field in herself. This holds true in both the interpersonal and the more geographical senses of 'field' that have been invoked. Before we have turned to a discussion of the internet proper, we can see in the practices of these Charismatic Christians the creation of a multiplicity of virtual spaces in which they are able to come into spiritual encounters. In ritual and more mundane practice alike Charismatic Christians act as vehicles for words that both create the world and are the means of its transformation. No less important than the exterior mission field is the interior field of the self, a site which,

like Ken's presentation at the Alpha course, teems with the voices of different speakers and becomes shaped through the various relationships between them.

We can read the orientations of men and women that are established and reinforced in speech and action in terms of habitus. In fulfilling gender roles, men and women seek to embody an authentic replication of the commands of an exterior voice. Both sexes are engaged in the creation and progressive occupation of territory in their desire to transform the world, but while men are generally considered to face outward in this work, women labour inside. As well as feminist literature on the distribution of labour in society, the patterns of orientation established in these practices brings to mind the work of Shirley and Edwin Ardener on the subject of "muted groups". Puzzling over the lack of female voices in the ethnographies of their time, the Ardeners suggested that the models of social life produced by male members of a given society were likely to be more holistic and inclusive, and as such hold more appeal for anthropologists. Women, on the other hand, may produce only narratives that include themselves, their children, and the natural realm (see Ardener, 1975). In the context of a faith whose adherents experience the range of their own spiritual efficacy as they speak (Coleman, 2000), such limited models have important implications. Just as these general tendencies meant that the words of women were less frequently included in the written documents of ethnography, it lessens the mobility of the words of Charismatic women and by extension their sense of themselves as an actor on a global spiritual stage.

The practical constructions of self and world described so far fit particularly well on an analytical level with the performative theories of gender proposed by Judith Butler. In her 1990 book *Gender Trouble*, Butler describes maleness and femaleness as social fabrications that we come to *approximate,* rather than inhabit, through a "stylised repetition of acts" (Butler, 1990: 140). In the same way as we might get dressed in the

morning into clothes marked as masculine or feminine, indeed *as* we get dressed in this way, we take on roles of masculinity and femininity in daily engagements with these categories. This relatively stable repetition confers upon the categories that we strive towards an air of interiority; the characteristics that are part of the performance of gender come to be regarded as *caused* by it (Butler, 1990: 33). In the example of Charismatic Christianity, men come to feel that verbal postures of guiding, leading, and alignment with the will of God in the world that marks the genres and roles of leading and preaching is an expression of their very condition. A kind of "sedimentation" (Butler, 1990: 140) of disposition and understanding builds up, and we come to gradually experience the social constructions of male and female as fundamental properties of being that exist within our own hearts.

The notion of "performance" brings to mind another key issue that I will come to later, the quality of being seen. The women I work with do not consider themselves to be excluded in any way from the visibility of the public realm. Specifically feminine spheres of activity such as marriage and motherhood, taking care of one's appearance, and the managing of emotion are commonly understood to be very public practices whose visibility is actively promoted within the contexts of church and daily life. What we do find, however, is that the stages upon which women perform these communications of Charismatic selfhood are ones that hamper the mobility of the message. The visible performances of *the Word* that are transmitted through the deeds of the faithful parishioner or the praying wife are limited in their impact to those people and environments with which the woman comes into direct, embodied, contact. Like the figures in Wendy Virgo's books, these women offer themselves as living illustrations, rather than mouthpieces, of the external voice of God. Crossings of physical form and verbal message can be observed in more detail in online practice, as

women seek to extend life and influence into a terrain in which personal presence is

embodied in the form of text.

Chapter 3: Writing Self Online

Introduction

There is a sense of on-going progress built into our interactions with computer technology. Current versions of operating systems such as Windows or popular software programs like the internet browser *Firefox* are numbered according to a history of iteration that often stretches back decades. Titles such as *Windows 7* or *Firefox 11.0* allow users to more easily navigate the web of previous versions and software updates that will bring their systems up to speed, and also imply a certain future. *Windows 8* will, at some time, follow *7; Firefox* will continue its incremental improvement. Investigations of the internet, in keeping with these general trajectories, often endow its subjects with a sense of on-going progress and change. Social scientific study in this emerging field seems driven by an assumption that online technologies hold the potential to wield broader impact on the religious lives of users (see Introduction: 2-3). This expectation leads us to the question of connection; if the internet has the capacity to express or bring about change then we must first identify lines along which this transformation may occur. What, scholars have begun to ask, is the relationship between online and offline religion (Campbell & Lövheim, 2011)?

The same expectation of change, framed in language that is by turns more optimistic and more alarmed, accompanies discussion of the internet in the churches I have studied. In chapter one I discussed the enthusiasm with which Evangelical

Christians approach the internet as a channel through which ever increasing numbers of people are able to come into contact with the *Gospel.* The impact that the use of the internet might have as it "speaks into" the Christian, however, is more troubling. At Jubilee, the largest church in the study and one whose online presence is similarly extensive, these emerging technologies are to be approached with caution. Several members of the church have discussed with me the problems faced by young men in battling the everyday temptation of internet pornography, or the casual narcissism that is encouraged by social networking platforms such as Facebook or MySpace. Christian teaching regarding the use of the internet makes frequent reference to the need for Christians to be self-aware and "intentional" in their online activity so as to ensure that it is are rooted first and foremost in a desire to glorify God.

At the heart of these discussions is a concern with personal authenticity that can be more widely observed in popular and academic discussion of the internet (O'Brien 1999) and that takes on particular urgency in the born-again context. Preachers and Christian leaders emphasise that the disparate and seemingly private engagements of online communication should not produce incoherent and hidden selves, governed and "fed" by different values than would be consciously adopted in obviously religious contexts. In this chapter I consider the case studies of two younger members of Jubilee. Katie and Leah, although not personally acquainted, are of a similar age and both write for *blogs* that are widely read among members of the congregation. Unlike findings from other studies, in which the internet served as a forum for active experimentation with concepts of self that are different than those embodied offline (Davies, 2006), both of these young women seem to experience their *blogs* as sites that exist in marked continuity with their congregational lives. This textual environment in what is a markedly textual religious culture creates a powerful site for the experience of a

coherent Charismatic self where the two work in continuity, and tensions where they do not.

Continuous Selves: Katie

In 2007 Katie went through a painful breakup. While she is not forthcoming on the personal details of this experience, either during her interview with me or on her own *blog*, the event served as the catalyst for extensive reflection on her relationship with and utter dependence on God, reflection that was incorporated into her online writing. During this period she charted her progress of becoming "healed and restored" through seeking God in prayer, listening to and applying insights gained through teaching, and reading the Bible. To this day, "scripture dealing with heartbreak" is one of the key search engine phrases that leads people to her *blog*[11], and she still receives emails from others telling her that her journaling of this experience has been a great inspiration to them in their own times of distress. Katie smiles as she tells me how "humbling" these communications have been. "To think that God could use that to help another person through their own situation. It's amazing, it really is."

Katie is in her mid-20s and has been born again since the age of five, having grown up in a Christian family that attended a conservative Evangelical church in Wimbledon. She moved to Brighton when she was 18 to attend the University of Sussex, initially her fourth choice for higher education that became her first after she felt a "pull" from God to come to Brighton and become part of the large congregation at

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[11]

      According to data taken from search engine analytics at www.alexa.com

Jubilee. Since graduation she has started to work in London but remains in the house that she shares with other young single members of Jubilee, located about two minutes' walk from the front door of the church. As well as working on the team overseeing student ministries, she has also run several programmes of "girls' discipleship" with younger women at her church. In these weekly sessions she would take a group of teenage girls through a self-authored series of teachings and discussions on "living in the truth" of the promises and guidance revealed in the Bible. She tells me that she has always loved teaching, helping others to take spiritual knowledge "from being just kind of a head thing to something that's actually deeply rooted in [our] hearts, that overflows into our lives."

In this quote we see echoes of a centrally important issue for Evangelical Christians; the belief in the value of a single religious self for whom faith in Jesus and Christian doctrine resides in the mind, in the heart, and in the practices of everyday life. These Christians, as previously discussed, are intimately concerned with the fit between knowledge about the social world and practice within it, a relationship that we can describe anthropologically in terms of habitus. In chapter 2 I discussed the habitus of Charismatic communication, through which practices of speaking and listening come to be experienced as urgent and powerful in their capacity to transform the world, and which define the linguistic work of women with particular relation to emotions and the inner terrain of the self. As I noted in the introduction, my informants would agree that the same attitudes that govern Christian life in general should pertain as Christians read and transmit information via the internet. During one interview I asked Gail, a key worker at Emmanuel Evangelical church what she used the internet for "in [her] Christian life" and received a response that was gently correcting; "well,, perhaps I should clarify that when we say "Christian life"- that is my life […] in any context".

One important reason for this continuity, from the Evangelical perspective, is the hope that through seeking to reflect God and your own miraculous renewal in every aspect of life, you are able to become a living *testimony* to the power of God. Gail, who is a particularly keen evangelist, has found a way to ensure such *testimony* accompanies her online transmissions. The same email account that she uses for church business, personal correspondence, and in her role in local government carries a passage from the first book of Romans in its signature line: "I am not ashamed of the *Gospel*, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes". A similar desire to cultivate and project a strong Christian selfhood in online communication can be seen in more extended form in the text of Katie's *blog*, *Blossoming Faith*.

For the most part, *Blossoming Faith* follows the prototypical *blog* form (see Reed, 2005; Myers 2010) of an online diary. As the reader scrolls down the chronology of *posts* we find that discussions of scripture and Christian teaching are tied to the everyday circumstance of Katie's life. A *post* on forgiveness and the *Calvinist* doctrine of grace, for example, is inspired by the confession and sorrow of a friend who had mistreated her, or a discussion of the remarkable nature of God's creation by a pleasant afternoon sitting outside in the sun. These small stories build to a broader narrative of Katie's life over the last four years. In his study of London-based *blog*gers Reed (2005) notes the repeated assertion of his informants that "my *blog* is me". The importance of *testimony* as a means through which Christians experience and activate their own religious selfhood makes this *blog* format particularly appropriate. In this online output we have the presentation of a self that is composed entirely of *testimony*, a patchwork of events and the lessons drawn from them as Katie builds, week by week to a regenerated self.

As noted in the previous chapter, testimonies are an extremely important part of

Charismatic, and more broadly Evangelical, communication practice. Following initial introductions Christians meeting in a church context will often ask one another how they came to faith as a way of becoming acquainted (see chapter 1: 50-51). During my research, I encountered personal testimonies presented during conversation, projected on to large screens prior to preaching, delivered from the stage during meetings, collected and printed into books that were shared, recommended, and read out during services. A repeated assertion of previous anthropological research has been that these often-repeated narratives have an important function in the Charismatic context. In religious cultures in which the most important possession of an individual is an internally regenerated self, opportunities for *testimony* provide a stage upon which that self can be performed and in this performance reasserted (Coleman, 2003; Lurhmann 2004; Stromberg, 1993). Christians are not merely describing a born-again self in *testimony*; they are repeatedly creating it in acts of successive renewal.

The intertwining of the experience of selfhood and the habitual practices through which people relate their own stories has been described by Ochs and Capps in a 1996 review of the anthropology of narrative. Their discussion has clear relevance for the practice of Charismatic *testimony* outlined above. In telling stories about themselves, speakers describe their lives in terms of progress along a particular trajectory (Ochs & Capps 1996: 22). Stories bind the speaker to a particular social collective and subsequently to a concept of selfhood that is meaningful in this context. We can see these processes at work as we turn to a discursive analysis of Katie's writing for *Blossoming Faith.* The personal renewal that Katie projects and experiences through her writing is not taking place in the backwaters of a disconnected online stage, but in texts that explicitly anchor her in the wider verbal context of her church life.

Blossoming Faith

The title of Katie's *blog*[12] gives us a snapshot of the most important elements of the on-going story that it communicates. The floral motif that is presented in the title and repeated visually in the image of a rose-bud that decorates the top of the page indicates the femininity of the speaking voice contained. Images of flowers are often used to illustrate books intended for Christian women, or the inspirational quotes and passages from scripture that decorate Christian homes. Katie cultivates even in this textual forum a distinct femininity. *Blossoming Faith* seems, in turn, to be a text intended for a female audience. Katie tells me that she has moved away from her initial sense that "this is a woman's *blog*", and yet, referring again to the continuity of the substance of Christian teaching and the lives of those who receive and transmit it, she notes that it is likely that much of her work, personal as it is, speaks particularly to the experiences of other young Christian women such as herself. We can see an example of this kind of female-oriented address in the following extract from a series of *posts* entitled *Why Dress Modestly?*

A third important motivation for dressing modestly is to honour and

submit to the headship God has placed us as women under - either

our father (or "office of father" - I'll come back to that) or our

husband. […] For more of this, see chapter nine of 'Women,

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[12]   In the interests of anonymity, the actual title of Katie's *blog,* like the other sites discussed in this thesis, has been replaced by a pseudonym judged to be equivalent in connotation.

Creation and the Fall' from the resources section of <u>The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood</u>.) Therefore, we ladies have been called by the Lord to honour and submit to the head of our family - be it our father or our husband - and this includes how we dress.

For those of us who are unmarried, God has placed us under the authority of our father. Throughout Scripture, we are admonished to respect and honour our parents:

'Each of you must respect his mother and father' (Leviticus 19:3)

'"Honour your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise—"that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." ' (Ephesians 6:3 [Deut. 5:16])

Now take an inventory of your wardrobe - does what you wear demonstrate an honouring of and submission to your father? Does it show you respect him? Or does it speak of a spirit that is rebellious and independent of his headship? Now, I am fully aware that not everyone has a loving or good father - if one at all. And not everyone still lives in the care of their father [...] How does this still apply? Well, I believe that in these cases, we are still under that headship of our father, but we are also under the headship of our spiritual "fathers" - those who are the pastors and elders of our church. As believers - both men and women, married and unmarried - we are called to submit to the men who are in the governing

authority of our church (Hebrews 13:17, Romans 13:1); and as we

are all part of a spiritual family - the church being similarly

modelled after the family - our pastors/elders can be seen as our

spiritual fathers, I believe.

In a later entry, Katie chastised herself for this series of *posts* on the topic of modesty,

which she felt emphasised the actual clothes worn over the attitude of the woman who

wears them. Even the most modest of clothes, she reminded herself and her readers, will

become immodest if the intention of the wearer is to demonstrate her own piety rather

than to honour God and the domestic and ecclesiastical authority that she is under. The

most important aspect of modesty, therefore, is the set of driving beliefs and personal

convictions that it follows. A more phenomenological approach would argue for a

lessened separation of the act and the concepts of self and community that are related to

it. As the young woman casts an appraising eye on the clothes that she is to wear for the

day, she is coming to an experience of Christian, specifically *complementarian*,

doctrine. Through the everyday discipline of modesty, the woman learns to define and

comport herself with primary reference to her Christianity and affirm the communal

form of that Christianity through an on-going, physical awareness of her status with

respect to male leadership (see Mitchell & Mitchell, 2008: 89-91). The work of this kind

of practice in affirming the shape of the social collective brings us back to the concept

of habitus and the practised orientations that it implies. In cases like *Blossoming Faith,*

where the text stands in for the self, these habitual inclinations can be worn at the level

of the communication.

Textual Orientation

Before moving to the analysis of Katie's work, it seems appropriate to provide some introduction to the general analytical framework that I will use to understand the place of online texts in the lives of my informants. I have already discussed the patterning of speech in these Charismatic churches in terms of habitus. Habitus, in bestowing a set of expectations about and ways of engaging with the shape of a given society patterns the "disposition" of the individual, her habitual *way* of engagement, but also her "orientations", the habitual *where* (Bourdieu 1990: 9). Bourdieu's understanding of the inscription of the social upon the self through habitus bears a strong resemblance to Butler's work on gender as discussed in chapter 2. Though Butler concentrates particularly on the quality of internality that these performances create, Bourdieu turns his focus on the stratified fields of their attainment and reception. The unending performances of social life are understood to be inescapably bound to a particular social position, and to be directed in turn towards specifically positioned witnesses. Habitus therefore creates a *place* for us in a symbolically ordered social field. This theory seems to hold promise for the ethnographer struggling to understand how online activity might be related to offline life. If actions patterned through the *habitus* make the social position claimed by the actor visible, then uses of the internet may situate themselves. Far from being disembodied and dislocated, texts found online occupy and perform their own social position.

In his works of literary criticism Bakhtin described written and spoken interaction as replete with reference to previous settings and speakers and, in turn "imbued with response" (Bakhtin 1986: 68). Within the parameters of this theory, acts of communication are deeply and necessarily embedded in the general social life of a

language community and it is through our engagement with these texts that we place ourselves in the social world. As she responds to texts which address her as a woman, as a mother, as a Christian, the individual comes to experience and in turn to articulate her own location as a speaker. There are significant, and fruitful, parallels here with the work of Judith Butler. Like the endless reaching toward the contents of the elusive categories of 'man' or 'woman' that Butler has described in her own work; the social and ideological siting of the self is a process that is never complete (Butler, 1990, 33). Just as the born again convert must seek constant spiritual growth and renewal through interaction with God in scripture and teaching, the Bakhtinian individual holds at her heart a sense of self that is 'becoming'; made and remade in the process of addressing and being addressed (Holloway & Kneale, 2000: 75). Through these social and literary theories we are able to gain a robust sense of the text as a site of practice, providing on-going orientation to the self in terms of discursive, rather than physical, space.

The landscape of speakers and locations that find their way into the entry above would no doubt be familiar to members of Katie's congregation. Katie's argument about the applicability of the head-covering to women today and the need to "distinguish [oneself] from the ways of our culture" is widely used within *complementarian* congregations. I have heard the same argument asserted in almost identical words by several church leaders during women's events and *preaches* on gender. In support of her argument Katie references the website of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW), a link established in speech that becomes a connection of a more physical nature as Katie codes it as a hyperlink that, once activated, will open a new browser window to the organisation's website. Further down the page she casts further into the established discursive landscape of her church through reference to the work of American author and Charismatic leader CJ Mahaney. Mahaney is an

influential figure in Anglo-American Charismatic Evangelical circles whose work is widely read and cited by many Jubilee members as an important influence. Bible references in this passage, like those in the rest of her *blog*, are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV) Bible, a text that is sold in the Jubilee shop and used in most of the preaching delivered at the church. This translation was spearheaded by members of the CBMW and intended to "restore" the gender-exclusivity seen in many earlier translations[11].

Further echoes of the conventions of speech found at Jubilee are evident in the manner in which the text identifies and addresses its reader. Although, as noted above, Katie does not see her work as intended for women specifically, there is no doubt that the advice and guidance that she offers in this series of *posts*, as is the case in the majority of her writing for *Blossoming Faith,* relates to a specifically female realm of experience. This serves to link her work thoroughly with the conventional form of women's teaching at Jubilee, in which women are enjoined to offer the lessons of their own lives to other women. Further ties are placed in the fact that Katie seems to identify herself alongside the audience for the *post* through her repeated use of the word "we" as she describes the recommendations made to young women. In the previous chapter I noted that female teachers frequently emphasise their own personal need for the message that they themselves deliver, a move that emphasises the authority of God as the ultimate source of knowledge and therefore lessens the authority that the speaker claims for herself. Finally, it seems likely that this post, like many others, has been literally recycled in part from lessons that she has planned for the young women's group that she leads at the church.

The various speakers referenced in Katie's work have been brought into the text through the activation of their teaching in own life. The phrase "I believe" is appended

on two occasions to assertions of doctrine. This phrase performs an important function in the space of this *post* on modesty, transforming doctrine into *testimony* in the space of a single sentence. In her writing Katie is not merely parroting teaching; she is expressing her own relationship to it. At the same time, the story is intended to achieve personal activation in the life of her readers. It is significant that she invites her readers to consider their clothing in the light of their specific relationship to the male authorities of their own lives, whether it be their fathers or church leaders. Katie herself identifies the teaching that she delivers in her *blog* as part of a stream of speaking and responding that she has herself benefited from. During her interview she relates a desire to "pass on knowledge that I've received and things that I've learned from other people just kind of passing like a chain almost. Keeping it flowing."

In her *blog*, Katie has managed to stick to a general rubric that the more public the communication a woman is engaged in, the more personal her voice should be. In her writing for Blossoming Faith she balances this equation from both sides. While her incorporation of the insights of other teachers provides deference to more senior speakers, she consistently emphasises the manner in which this teaching has struck home for her and become activated in her own life. Equally, although she projects her voice through a medium that presents a potentially infinite audience, she consistently narrows the scope of her teachings through an intimate and markedly feminine tone and by asking readers to, first and foremost, look to the immediate context of their own lives for their ultimate meaning. The fit between conceptual architecture and social practice that is inculcated through the habitus ensures that the necessary interaction of the actor and the world becomes socially meaningful and personally gratifying (Csordas, 1994: 10). The fulfilment that can be brought about through coherence in belief and practice seems to be affirmed by Katie, who repeats during her interview a sentiment that is

displayed in the side-bar of *Blossoming Faith*; "When I write I feel the pleasure of God."

Leah and Justify

Leah is the daughter of one of the elders at Jubilee and, like Katie, has been a Christian since her early childhood. Now in her mid-20s she works full time as an insurance clerk in Brighton having completed undergraduate studies in art and history in 2009. In her free time she is extensively engaged in various areas of ministry at her church. Leah is very studious and is particularly drawn to work that involves providing a rational defence of the Christian faith for sceptics and interested believers alike, a cluster of practices termed *apologetics*. Such practices have become important to her narrative of her own Christian life. In her interview, Leah contrasted the "very subjective" faith of her childhood and teenage years to her current understanding and daily experience of a God whose existence is not only felt but can be explained. 'When I got to university I needed to really... Justify [my faith] in my own mind. And so it was almost like a journey for myself to kind of find out all these questions, and I've always been someone that asks so many questions. And I did so and I just became really passionate about it".

Since leaving university, Leah has become active in contributing to this landscape of Christian discussion through her work for Jubilee's *Justify blog*. The *blog* is closely associated with the Alpha ministry at Jubilee, and provides another site for the dialectic of questioning and answering that I described in chapter one as central to these events. During each Alpha session attendees are invited to write questions about Christianity on postcards and place them in a box by the door as they leave. At the end

of the evening Nick, a member of the church in his late 20s, comes to the stage to answer one of the questions posed the previous week. These queries, along with others posted into the box that are not selected for Nick's presentation, are recycled as topics for the *Justify blog*, which is hosted on the main web-page of Jubilee. Nick passes on questions to one of a handful of authors, most of them also relatively young members of the church, who compose and return answers in the form of brief articles for publication on the *blog*. As the only woman regularly contributing to *Justify*, Leah frequently fields questions on gender and sexuality. Towards the end of 2010 she concluded a series of *posts* regarding the topic of women in Christianity. The following extract is taken from the first post in this series.

The Bible and Feminism

The stereotype that Christian women are thought of as second-class citizens in the church has emerged into common thought today. In many ways the source of these suspicions has been generated from outside the Bible. Some influencing factors are, firstly, the consideration that the Bible represents the values of an antiquated society that has now been proved suppressive and disregarded as obsolete. Secondly, the rise of a certain type of feminist theory has destabilised the distinctions between men and women. The assumption of this type of theory is that men and women are not only equal, but are the same. For example, feminist theorist Judith Butler has argued that gender should not be determined by sex, but rather by performance. Therefore, she denies that gender is predetermined by the physical. As such, she believes that equality of persons necessitates the removal of gender

distinctions, and thus gender roles are defined subjectively due to one's taste and preference. The Bible fully endorses one aspect of this feminism, insofar as it supports equality between the sexes. But in contrast, Christianity teaches femininity and masculinity to be different and complementary, and to be celebrated as such.

[...]

Ray Ortlund describes this well:

'*God exists as one Godhead in three persons, equal in glory, but unequal in role. Within the Holy Trinity the Father leads, the Son submits to him, and the Holy Spirit submits to both. But it is also true that the three persons are fully equal in divinity, power, and glory (the ontological Trinity). The Son submits but not because he is God Jr., an inferior deity; the ranking within the Godhead is part of the sublime beauty and logic of true deity. And if our Creator exists in this manner, should we be surprised and offended if his creaturely analogue on earth exists in paradoxical form?*'

This post, although atypical in dealing with an issue that is less commonly raised in *apologetics*, conforms to the general structure of the genre. In this extract, Leah describes a particular criticism that is levelled at Christianity, outlines the means through which this criticism can be addressed with reference to Biblical scholarship, and concludes with a statement that indicates a resolution of the original problem. Although Leah makes reference to the often-repeated claim that the Trinity is "in many ways... beyond the grasp of our mental capacities" its invocation in this *post* is intended to bring clarity to what is constantly described as a critically confused issue. Put simply,

the gender roles prescribed by *complementarian* teaching should be no more or less than reflections of the nature of God as His different aspects co-exist in the Trinity.

The kind of performative theories of gender described by Butler (1990), theories that I myself have drawn on in the previous chapter and throughout this thesis, are met with a scepticism that slides into moral consternation in the Evangelical context. Conservative Evangelical understandings of gender are founded in the very essentialism that Butler seeks to problematise. For Evangelical Christians, the idea of gender as performance, rather than the sincere expression of an internal truth, is anathema. To say that masculinity and femininity are performances, is, in line with Evangelical understandings of communication as either truth or falsehood, to present 'male' and 'female' as *lies*. The idea that Butler takes pains to present that there may not in fact *be* an 'inner self' that exists prior to its performance, appears to be unthinkable. If gender is a "performance", then the inner beings of men and women must be essentially "the same", and presentations of masculinity and femininity are therefore insincere. Against this portrayal of gender as a kind of social fiction, Leah presents the nature of masculinity and femininity as unchangeable. Male and female are written in the very nature of the creating divinity and intertwined with the creation of the world.

This message of clarity dovetails with the more general message of this post and of *apologetics* as a ministry, that Christianity provides an intellectually satisfying and clear system of belief and practice that is quite comprehensible even in human terms. It is this message that has been so important to Leah's narrative of her own faith, and it is reinforced in her extensive consumption of *apologetic* material. As listens to talks and debates featuring her favourite authors on her mp3 player on her journey to work or while she is dressing for a night out Leah is able to experience the ultimate coherence and rationality of Christian belief. Unlike the happy correspondence of content and

form that we saw in Katie's address, however, comments from Leah herself suggested that this belief in a rationally ordered God, the complementarian separation of roles which is a reflection of His nature, and her sense of social position brought about through her own practice were starting to slip out of coherence. As Leah and I discussed her *blogging* in the weeks following this series of *posts* she began to express that she was feeling a personal unease about her writing practice.

Shortly after finishing this series of *posts* on the roles of men and women in the church, Leah attended a women's day meeting at Jubilee. The day featured a guest talk from Wendy Virgo, speaking on the subject of women's authority. During her talk, Wendy presented to the audience of some 400 women an anecdote about a friend, Sarah. Sarah had an upstairs balcony leading off from her bedroom, overlooking the garden. There was no rail around the balcony, and she had complained that standing on it was, as a result, rather unnerving; she felt as if he had to press himself against back against the door to the bedroom in order to feel certain of not falling. After getting a railing installed, Sarah had happily reported to Wendy that the space was transformed, "you knew where the boundaries were and you could move about quite happily in the space". Wendy used this example to drive home a particular point about gender and authority. Christian women are called to take authority in the transformation of this fallen world, and yet they are in a way more free to utilise this authority when it is set within the structure of social boundaries and roles established in the Bible, and they are themselves under the clear leadership of husbands, fathers and male church leaders.

I met with Leah for lunch in the week after the women's day. She had enjoyed the meeting immensely but reported a nagging doubt that had crept in since this talk as she realised that she was unsure of how her *blogging* fitted within the speech practices of the church, and as a result, where her boundaries were as a speaker. Although there

had been no suggestion from any member of Jubilee that her work was inappropriate, Leah was keen to ensure that there was a logical coherence between the role that she occupied in writing her *blog* and the general understanding of men and women's respective positions as speakers that she had defended in her *posts*. "What is the difference," she asked me rhetorically, "between [a church leader] preaching in church and me writing a post for *Justify*? We can better demonstrate the possible sources of her discomfort by considering the meaning of *apologetics* as a religious activity, and the connections to other speakers and settings invoked in her writing.

Uncertain Positions

Apologetics has frequently come up in conversation and interviews with informants at the two *complementarian* churches I have studied, and has been the focus of several events organised by both congregations. The reason for this emphasis, not seen in the other churches, may be related to a more reflective relationship with Christian doctrine brought about by the emphasis on *Calvinist* teachings at these churches, as well as the generally more combative stance in the understanding of the relationship of Christians with the outside world. *Apologetics* itself is a field of practice that is dominated by male speakers and writers. When I have asked my informants about why this might be their answers generally refer to practical considerations. Those working in popular *apologetics* generally come through theology school, a route that is to a large extent dominated by men who intend to go into Christian ministry. Many already have long histories with Christian publishing houses and libraries full of books of theology and other *apologetic* volumes. The composition of *apologetic* arguments also requires that a

writer enjoys the luxury of considerable time to devote to the understanding of these resources, and of course understanding of the Bible itself, and this is again an attribute that is particularly associated with those in positions of church leadership who are, most often, male.

These pragmatics of speech can also be seen to extend into the habitual orientations of church members and the social position implied by *apologetic* teaching. *Apologetics* is a discipline that is turned to critical engagement with the arguments of sceptical speakers and writers. As a literary genre, the most obvious reference is to academic writing. Popular works such as those of William Lane Craig or Timothy Keller's *The Reason for God* not only resemble academic books in their extensive bibliographies and footnotes, they also feature in these citations reference to academic writers. Such works cite the work of hard scientists, philosophers, and even anthropologists[13] as they build arguments that, it is implied, are fully open to scrutiny from any angle and unassailable by anyone's standards. A similar reaching out can be seen in Leah's writing for the *Justify blog*. Like Katie she makes reference to speakers and arguments that are already commonly cited in the discursive landscape of her congregation, and yet these speakers are, in the space of this text, placed into interaction with very different kinds of voices. In the extract reproduced above, this meeting between the worlds of Christian faith and unbelief is staged in an encounter between Ray Ortlund, a writer affiliated with the ubiquitous Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, and Judith Butler.

This engagement with non-Christian voices stands as a repetition of the central trope of Evangelical outreach, in which speakers explicitly stage a meeting between

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[13] Keller's work includes a citation to anthropologist Carolyn Fleuhr-Lobban, whose 1995 discussion of cultural relativism is discussed at length as an example of what Evangelicals widely proclaim to be the failings and hypocrisies of a relativist stance.

God and the listener in their words. In chapter 2 I noted that the position of the preacher as a mediator between a given congregation and God is reinforced by the constant implication that the words delivered are divine in their ultimate origin. In sharp contrast to the practices of women's teaching, preachers often deny their own authorship of the words delivered. It is not uncommon for doctrinal statements that are not direct scriptural quotations to be preceded nevertheless with "the Bible says" or even "God says". The denial of personal authorship in the *Preach* nevertheless denotes a personal authority as the preacher is able to give voice to the very intention of God. In this context, the suppression of the personal voice that is so typical of the academic documents that Leah seeks to emulate connotes more than the simple objectivity that it is intended to convey. The academic tone and outside orientation established in her work for the *Justify blog* seems unremarkable according to the established standards of academic writing. When viewed as a religious speech act, however, the position offered in *apologetic* ministry is one that, for women, may prove uncertain and uncomfortable.

Since describing her initial discomfort Leah has endeavoured to formulate a rational understanding of the difference between *apologetics* and preaching. Her most recent *apologetic* project has been the organisation of a series of seminars at the church for women who are, like herself, interested in scholarly discussion of the Bible. Standing at the front of one of the church meeting rooms on a Saturday afternoon, Leah introduced the first session by relating to the audience a familiar question. As she had discussed her plans for this theology network, she informed us, several Christians at the church had asked her "what is the difference between this and a *Preach*?" In outlining her response to this question, Leah dealt with internal dispositions. Like modesty, preaching is a matter of intention. While there are similarities between the two practices, the key difference is that preaching aims to "admonish", meaning to convince

listeners of their sin and persuade them that a change in their attitude and behaviour is necessary. Her exegesis of the difference between teaching and preaching was confident, but it seems significant that, despite her careful classification of *apologetic* teaching as a very different type of practice to preaching, and therefore entirely acceptable for women, this explanation was delivered to a room in which no men were present. When Leah and I had discussed her plans for the "Women's theology network", she had informed me that this would be the case. In her first proposal to the church leaders asking permission to organise these theology sessions at the church Leah had made it clear that there would be no men present, so that no objection could be raised, "not that there probably would be anyway", that she was presuming to assert an inappropriate authority in her teaching.

Coherence

In offering *testimony* and *apologetics* to the unseen audiences of the internet, both Katie and Leah place themselves at a well-rehearsed boundary between the Kingdom of God and the fallen world, and press forward into that front. This interface of that which is regenerated and that which is to be transformed is the central site of Evangelical faith, and as we have seen is both rehearsed and conquered constantly in Evangelical practice. Although both of the women discussed in this chapter share this fundamental concern with bringing about change, the orientations to the fallen world expressed in their work are very different. While Katie has found that the words of teaching are able to flow from the lips of authoritative speakers to her typing fingers and out towards an audience that in many ways resembles herself "like a chain", Leah faces a more disruptive

transition into online communication. By concentrating her efforts not on the interior spaces of her own life and the lives of her readers but outward into a more unfamiliar realm of non-Christian speech and the conventions associated with this speech, Leah has found herself writing a position whose difference from those occupied by male speakers is less clear.

In this chapter, the connection between the acts of speech found online and those that circulate in the other discursive settings of religious life has been located within the self, a result of the extension of a habitus that is already so carefully geared toward communication. The textual habitus projected in these online documents is particularly visible when viewed through a lens of discursive analysis, in which texts stand as "voice", situated utterances which respond and reach out to socially significant speakers and contexts (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986). References to prominent speakers and writers assert continuity with the existing discursive landscape associated with offline church and we also see links to these established social fields through generic convention and styles of address. These have the effect of anchoring online communications, allowing the internet to be experienced as a forum that is not so random, nor so disconnected, as might have been thought. The social world is ordered through media (Couldry, 2004; Mazzarella 2004) and narrative (Ochs & Capps 1996) and in these practices, and the stories that they tell about them, both women seek to impose order not only on the seemingly endless chaos of the internet, but on the various voices and experiences of their offline lives.

A standard Evangelical complaint regarding the emerging technologies of the internet is that "anyone can say anything" online. The phrase implies both the possibility that untruths may be disseminated but also the equally troubling possibility this uncontrolled realm is one in which speakers may step out of place. Even where the

internet is being used to spread information that is considered to be, in terms of its content, doctrinally correct, the fact that "anyone" is able to do this may be enough to generate unease. The discord between Leah's explanations and her more instinctual sense of propriety in speaking roles indicates the inadequacies of the Christian (and broader Western) model of action as issuing from belief (see Mitchell & Mitchell, 2008). Despite the assurances of her teachers, assurances that she herself came to repeat, that it is only in the very specific instance of preaching that women at Jubilee are restricted in the roles available to them, there was something about writing for the *Justify blog* that didn't *feel* right. For all that Jubilee members emphasise the importance of the freedom granted by salvation there is also a strong feeling that members should, in the manner of Sarah and her upstairs balcony, seek awareness of the limits within which this freedom exists or risk a vertiginous and ultimately immobilising loss of surety in one's position with relation to the church community, and subsequently to God.

In this context, the internet offers a freedom for verbal positioning and outreach that is at least as troubling as it is appealing. As I noted in the introduction, the eager expectation of transformation is seen not only in Evangelical culture but in studies of religion and the internet. In this chapter, I have identified the experience of the self as the site at which such change might take place. An interesting question is what might happen in cases in which internet users are not as firmly structured in to their congregations as are Katie and Leah, and do not exhibit in their online communication the same kinds of stable anchors to particular offline settings. In these cases, what are the schemas of practice and linguistic habit drawn upon and how do these relate to emerging ideas of religious community and the selves that reside within it? In the next chapter I consider these questions with reference to two further women whose personal

religious histories show a more restless move between congregations, and who project

in their online speech a very different sense of religious environment.

Chapter 4: Moments of Presence

Introduction

In her 1998 ethnography of online chat rooms Annette Markham relays an encounter with a difficult informant. Sherie was a popular, extremely active member of one of the sites in which Markham was conducting her research and having secured an interview with her Markham was excited to find out what it was about the online medium that Sherie found particularly engaging. The interview, conducted via internet relay chat, quickly became strained. In the final ethnography we read that Sherie's replies to questions were brief and somewhat terse. On the subject of her enjoyment of online participation, she offered little elaboration other than the statement that "eloquence makes me beautiful online" (Markham, 1998: 202). Markham herself, having puzzled over Sherie's seeming discomfort during the interview and the responses that she offered eventually decided to take her at her word. The reason that Sherie found it so difficult to come to a reflexive description of her online experience is that the internet was, for her, not a forum for reflection and commentary on her offline life but a site of *being*. In her response Sherie articulates a direct correspondence between the experience that she has of her self and the experience she has of her words.

Sherie's straightforward insistence that she is able to be "beautiful online" invites us to consider embodiment. In the anthropology of Christianity, moves have been made to redress early tendencies to approach worldwide Christianities, and as a

side-effect, all religious movements (Asad, 1983) as primarily concerned with the transcendent. Within this early model, religious practice is determined by the transcendent beliefs held by adherents, and it is these beliefs that must therefore be investigated and elaborated by the anthropologist as the source of cultural practice (Mitchell & Mitchell, 2008). In a turn from these disembodied cosmologies, recent anthropologists of Christianity have described practices that are turned not to the reproduction of transcendent and ephemeral structures of belief but that root practitioners firmly in the material world, through cultivation of particular ideals of physical embodiment and architectural form (Coleman, 2000) or engagement with structures of work and kinship (Cannell, 2004) or the production of broadcast media and literature (Meyer, 2006). In such work the articles of Christian faith are rendered immanent in the world through the practices and somatic engagement of the body.

Social-scientific investigation of the internet has itself been troubled by questions of embodiment. The optimism of early scholars writing on these new spheres of human expression was based on an assumption that the move to online communication entailed a lessening of the relevance of embodiment. Divisions based on race, gender, and class would, it was assumed, be erased through a general divorce from human corporeality experienced by participants, and the internet would provide a site with truly democratic potential (e.g. Turkle, 1995). These early predictions have since been revised. Internet communications have been found to be marked by similar prejudices that beset earlier forms of media, and in the field of religion and the internet in particular, online expression has been gradually redefined as a "tool", turned toward practices that generally affirm the wider structures of a religious culture (Campbell, 2005b). The applicability of the concept of *habitus*, established in the previous chapter, is particularly suggestive of the possibility that continuity in practice across different

sites might be probed in terms of experiences relating to embodiment. In this chapter I look to the stories of two more women, whose personal narratives of exclusion and participation through online and more traditional religious contexts illustrate the extension of embodiment into the texts of the internet.

Fran

Sunday the 2nd of August is the final day of Brighton's 2009 gay pride weekend. That morning the streets are still littered with empty bottles and promotional fliers from the street parties that were held across the town the night before, and rainbow garlands hang from many of the commercial buildings and pubs and flutter in the morning sunlight. Down at the beach some of the members of Living Grace are holding a baptism. Two men stand in the water to either side of the pastor as he prays over first one and then the other, and then lowers them one at a time into the water, holding them firmly around the back and shoulders before helping them out. As the men emerge from the surf, smiling broadly and talking with the pastor, members of the church who have been standing on the beach cluster around them closely in two groups, laying hands on them and praying out loud. As is usual for weekends during the summertime, there are many people on the beach this morning; families sit with picnic sandwiches and drinks and clusters here and there of couples and people on their own reading books and magazines on beach towels. One other figure stands further back on the beach, ten yards or so away from the Living Grace group. She faces towards the people praying, her eyes closed, hand raised in the air and lips moving in prayer that is either silent or that I am too far away to hear. I know her from church, her name is Fran.

After the baptism we move to a restaurant on the beach front to share lunch.

Fran and I chat at the bar and order our food together. We are late to order and most other members of the church are already sitting on around tables when we come outside to find a place to sit. We decide on one of the empty tables, next to the door of the restaurant. After lunch I ask her if she has been out for any of the Pride events this weekend. Fran shakes her head no, she doesn't think so this year, she's getting too old. She says she'll show me something and begins to unbutton her jacket, motioning that I should move around behind her so that I can see something on her back that she presumably doesn't want to show to the people sitting eating on tables around us. Underneath her denim jacket Fran wears a white tee-shirt, emblazoned on the back of which is a three word slogan, the first letters of each word written in bold font to make a new word reading down her back: *God Adores You*. As I move to sit back down she refastens her jacket.

Before I met Fran she was mentioned to me by another member of the church, who described her as a "radical lesbian feminist" in a tone that was by no means unkind but that certainly communicated the rarity of such identifications in Evangelical circles. Fran herself is well aware of her rather unusual position. Although she states that her current church is much less homophobic than others she has attended, she continues to feel rather exposed as a member of a community that, for Evangelical Christians in Brighton, comprises a highly significant cultural Other (see chapter 1: 32-33). Comments from fellow Christians that the church in Brighton should "pray for" and seek to "love" the Gay community of the city are read by Fran as assertions that homosexuality stands apart from the possibilities of Evangelical selfhood, and that gay men and women, in turn, are exclusively imagined as a collective that stands outside the church community. "I'm thinking, should I go and stand outside so they can love me?" It is this sense of alienation, particularly acute at her previous church, which she sees as

the initial drive for her to seek out conversation online. In 2005 she was attending a large Evangelical congregation in the city, and describes the experience as one of isolation. "I was a sort of social pariah. It was like people who I actually felt like I had something in common with outside the church in terms of interests, people would shun *them* so they would shun *me.* That's how it felt. So it was a very lonely place to be. And I just felt that I needed to have social contact with Christians."

The search for Christian community led her to the internet, and eventually to the *discussion forum Gracechat. Gracechat* is a UK based Christian *forum* with just a handful of regular posters. Statistics at the bottom of the front page tell the visitor that the most users ever online at one time was 71 in June 2006. At the time of writing there are rarely more than one or two at a time. The site seems fairly unsophisticated compared to other discussion boards, and the page that greets the visitor is rather plain. The utterances of members show on the screen as black words on a pale blue background, and although users are able to include small profile pictures to accompany their contributions there is no functionality for *posting* images or video directly into ones writing, features that are heavily utilised in other forums. At the time of my research it seemed unlikely that these features would be added any time soon. The site had seemingly been abandoned by its creators and members no longer had a working contact email address for its administrators. New users were still sign up but are unable to post, the search functionality and even the ability to *post* at all had started to become glitchy and inconsistent. Fran was unsure how much longer the site will be usable at all, or even remain visible.

Since 2007 she has engaged in *Gracechat* primarily through her Lent *blog*, in which she journals the experiences and insights that she has in her church and personal spiritual life throughout the Lenten period. In the following extract, taken from her 2011

blog, she describes chance encounter with a friend in the street.

> walking along a street i feel a tug at my sleeve ... it's one of my course
>
> colleagues ... i am completely blown over.... this colleague had just
>
> announced they could not complete the course cos of a health issue
>
> […] so there i blustered about being a Christian and a Christian who
>
> believes and prays for Healing .... so i did right there in the street ....
>
> and actually had an inordinately long chat about my faith and the
>
> weird walk of an incipient Charismatic i gave the leaflet i felt i was
>
> being unbelievably and undeniably bold and then bloody hell i got
>
> boof a word and it was something like 'i want you to press in to me'
>
> and i didn't know who it was for and said as much and said it out
>
> loud...[...] it left me with so much to think about those words i want
>
> you to press into me and not knowing what that meant..

The extract gives us an insight into Fran's everyday religious practice. Fran does not

work and splits her time between helping with various church events, attending services

and meetings at her own church and occasionally others, and taking part in a variety of

workshops and courses. These various activities mean that she spends much of her time

walking from one location to another, and the meetings that she has with others during

these journeys across the city often form the basis of the anecdotes featured in her *blog*.

The sudden interruption of her conversation by the voice of God is not, for her, unusual.

Fran can come across in person as somewhat detached. She is keen to talk about her

faith and conversations about spiritual and mundane matters alike are punctuated by

long pauses as she searches the rather ragged copy of the Bible that she carries around

with her for appropriate quotes, or breaks into spontaneous prayer.

As was the case with Katie and Leah in the previous chapter, the same orientations and inclinations that mark Fran's Christian life as a whole ripple through to the form of the text itself. Fran's writing for the Lent *blog* and *Gracechat* in general, unlike the more composed pieces featured in chapter 3, reads as a distinctly unselfconscious. Paragraphs are seemingly accidentally repeated, sentences finish abruptly with no obvious end and no punctuation, and thoughts and comments often read in a disjointed manner, interjected with large chunks of scripture. Part of this may be due to the practicalities of Fran's writing process. She does not have a computer at home and has to log on from internet cafés, an expensive process and one that means that she often has to move to move from one café to another when her session expires. In some cases, however, the rather scatter-shot style of her writing is a reflection of the on-going engagement with God that breaks out elsewhere in conversation. She explains that she often feels suddenly compelled while typing to include certain words and phrases and that the same visions and promptings that colour her life offline come to her as she sits in internet cafés or the city library writing *blog* pieces.

While Fran's writing is clearly shaped, therefore, by an order of transmission from God's words to her own, it is more difficult to pin down a sense of audience in her writing. She tells me that she has "no idea" who might be reading her *blog*, and points out the idiosyncrasies of her style would probably make it very difficult for anyone who didn't know her personally to understand. "It is a form of engagement", she told me, "but above all it's about my brain having an outlet for some kind of action." Fran has found *blogging* to be a better outlet for her spiritual insights and thoughts than she has found offline. She is aware that everyday conversation with other Christians, for instance, can be hampered by her unfailing spiritual focus. "I can be very intense, and

there's only so much intensity that anyone can take" she laughed. I told her that it was interesting she had used that word. The day before I had met for an interview with another *blogger*, whose story seemed in some ways like Fran's and who had used the same word "intense" to describe herself. Fran seemed delighted that I had come across another woman who had been able to use the internet in this way. "Oh how wonderful!" She exclaimed, "What is she like? I'm really interested in her".

Patricia

Crosswalk.com is distinguished in the landscape of Christian social sites, particularly those that affirm more Charismatic Christian styles of religious practice, by the fact that the majority of its members are based in the UK. The site itself is a large, sprawling collection of chat rooms, *forums* and web pages developed by Graham, a Christian man in his late 50s who lives in Eastbourne. Although Graham tinkers continually with the look and structure of this network of sites they remain rather simple and somewhat antiquated. The *forums* are often very quiet. Sporadic bursts of conversation among its small group of regular members interrupt long periods, during which the only *posts* are Graham updating information on the board and introductions posted by new members. The chat room is host to significantly more activity as members meet with regularity for formal Sunday *worship* and prayer and more informal quizzes and chat sessions throughout the week. When I received permission to join the site and introduced myself to the members of the board the first person that replied was Patricia, who told me that she lives in Brighton and that she was very interested in the project. In a private email she explained that "evangelism is one of my gifting areas that I have used online" and

included a *link* to her MySpace page that she sees as a key site for this activity.

The opening line of the "about me" section on Patricia's MySpace *profile* reads "I'm Patricia and I'm mainly here to express my faith and love for Jesus." Her *profile* goes on to identify her as 45, single, a "proud parent", a fan of tennis and all sorts of music, a social care worker and above all a Christian. The rest of her page is decorated with images of wide landscapes and flying doves, as well as a large picture of Jesus surrounded by clouds and a computer-generated picture of his name under the "Who I would like to meet" section. MySpace allows users to host *blogs* on their pages and this is a feature that Patricia has made much use of. Her *posts* on the *blog*, like many of her contributions to the *Crosswalk forum*, are long reflections on the kind of themes that might be discussed in church, such as God's forgiveness or the need for personal humility. In keeping with her sense that her MySpace is a site for personal ministry, she also includes in her *blog* pieces that are obviously written with a non-Christian audience in mind. Her own conversion came while she was chopping vegetables at home after reading a pamphlet called *Journey into Life*, and she frequently includes links to an online version of this publication in her *blog posts*. Both her MySpace *profile* and her discussions at *Crosswalk* are punctuated by frequent assertions of her on-going desire to communicate her faith to others, and chief among the hobbies and interests that she lists on her *profile* is the statement that "I love to speak or write about the good news of the gospel most of all."

In contrast to the prominence of her voice in the online environment of *Crosswalk* and elsewhere on the internet, Patricia comes across in person as rather shy and quiet. The church that she attends, Emmanuel Evangelical, is a small congregation of around 30 regular members. As I became more acclimatised to the church and familiar with the rhythm of events and patterns of participation within it, it became

apparent that Patricia's own involvement in the life of the church was somewhat

marginal. Although she usually attends at least one of the services on a Sunday and any

other events that she can make it along to, work commitments usually mean that she is

absent from mid-week meetings and she is rarely able to commit time to street

evangelism and other church activities. Even at those occasions where she is present,

she is unlikely to speak up during group contexts such as the open discussions that

follow the Sunday evening service or shared occasions of prayer. In her online writing

and interview, however, Patricia relates a personal religious life in which she is in

constant communication with God. When I ask her if she sets time aside to pray, she

tells me that while she does do this; her correspondence with God pervades much of her

life, taking place at work, while she cleans her house, as she walks down the street.

For the past 15 years Patricia has converted aspects of this on-going interaction

to writing. Like many Charismatic Christians (see Lurhmann, 2006) she has learned to

perceive particular thoughts and images that run through her mind as she prays as

communications from God. She first began to commit these words to writing at the

behest of members of her *house group* at Jubilee, the first church that she attended

following her conversion. Although she reports that many members of her group found

the writing helpful, with one woman in particular saying that she "grew so much closer

to God as a result" of reading them, other members were less enthusiastic. She

elaborates on difficulties she faced during her time in this group in the space of her

personal *testimony,* a 20,000 word document posted to the *Crosswalk* forum.

> Generally speaking I couldn't get a word in edgeways at house groups. I did
>
> start to get more assertive and expressed myself. Then I was asked to repent,
>
> because they didn't believe that God could have revealed that to me. After all, I

was a young girl. They said the devil counterfeits and I could have been opening

myself up to him. I did repent and I wanted to be right with God. Only it

affected my relationship and they didn't let me contribute what God wanted to

say through me.

Since leaving the church in the mid-90s she has had little success in sharing her writings

in other contexts. Leaders and fellow parishioners at a Baptist church that she attended

immediately after leaving Jubilee were initially dismissive of her writing, with one

leader expressing the view that the output on which she spent so much time was nothing

more than "a load of letter-writing". Her writing was eventually cited as a problem

during the meeting at which her membership was withdrawn. Patricia is much happier

at Emmanuel Evangelical Church, where she feels that her thoughts on spiritual matters

are received with respect by the leaders and other members of the congregation. There

is an important difference between her current congregation and those that she has been

a member of in the past, however. Unlike Jubilee and the Baptist church, the leaders of

Emmanuel are cautious about the emphasis on spiritual gifts seen in Charismatic

congregations, and services and meetings at the church are devoid of the various

practices of *worship* and ministry that characterise this movement. Although Patricia

has struggled to find acceptance in Charismatic congregations, she maintains an affinity

with "Spirit-filled" styles of *worship*, and it is in the online replication of these practices

that she has come to an increased sense of her own spiritual agency.

In the extract above, Patricia tells us that she was prevented from contributing

"what God wanted to say through me". Her statement indicates that the words she was

attempting to bring to this *house group* belong to the genre of *the Prophetic*. As is the

case with much Evangelical practice, *the Prophetic* is a realm of ministry concerned

with the distribution of words. While "*the Word*" is usually used as a term for the Bible, or alternatively the person of Jesus Christ, to *give a word, bring a word,* or *share a word* is to carry dynamic messages of encouragement and prediction from God that are intended to edify and support individual believers or congregations. Those that speak *in the Prophetic* speak for God. It is a position with important implications, and it is significant that both women have experienced consistent rejection from Christian peers in their attempts to share in this way. Before we move to discuss the effect of the internet as an outlet of spiritual expression for Fran and Patricia, we might consider the position that is afforded by speakers in this genre, and the meaning for the women, of these repeated misfires in communication.

The Lonely Walk

Prophetic ministry is built in to the life of Charismatic churches, giving verbal form to the general sense held by charismatics that they are, in everyday and important endeavours alike, led by the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Certain individuals are understood to be "gifted" in *the Prophetic* and will regularly bring messages of prediction and encouragement to *house group* meetings, gatherings of friends, or even first-time encounters with new acquaintances. A more liberal distribution of these messages is expected to be granted during occasions of group prayer and *worship*. During such sessions it is common to see a senior member of the church standing at the front of the gathered worshippers with a microphone, and individual members of the congregation move one at a time to the front to share the words they have received.

The *Words* that impel worshippers to their feet and to the front of mass of the

church will, it is hoped, attain a greater mobility following their initial transmission. *Words* judged to be particularly edifying or appropriate, often those that make dramatic predictions of future upheavals and victories to be faced by individuals and congregations, will be repeated widely by those concerned. Some *Words*, however, never make it beyond the lips of their receiver. The designation of certain words as *prophetic* involves a negotiation that begins in the reflection of the individual who will speak the message and extends to the social context into which it is received. The following extract is taken from my field notes during a prayer meeting for women held on a spring afternoon in 2010. During a period of prayer, *testimony*, and *prophetic* ministry one member of the congregation comes to the front to share a word. In this extract, Laura and Jenny are the wives of church leaders.

> The room has become very warm by now, and the sound of the women's prayers seems to grow more plaintive and the sound of crying is more apparent. Many of the women are shaking where they stand, sometimes leaning for support on those standing around them. While the prayer is continuing, with Jenny standing facing the congregation, leading the prayer by speaking out from in front of the stage, a lady in a motorised wheelchair comes forward. She is probably in her early 60s, her chair is very heavily padded and the back cushion is covered with purple fabric, the same colour as her blouse. She goes up to where Laura stands holding a microphone, in front of the stage and off to one side from Jenny. Laura bows down so that the woman can speak into her ear. After listening for a minute she nods slowly, and then turns to speak to the woman. She looks

apologetic but I cannot hear what she is saying. The woman

eventually nods also, and then backs out via the front of the stage,

passing in front of where Jenny is still loudly praying. She moves

back to a position near the exit.

When I asked members of the church about the exchange described above they

explained the orchestration of these words of *prophecy* in terms of corporate voice. Jim,

a 68 year-old man and member of Jubilee for over 30 years told me that for Laura,

whose job in the example given above is to mediate access to the microphone, it is a

matter of spiritual discernment. Judgements about the divine nature of the words given

are based on "whether what this person wants to bring to the meeting ties in with what's

been going in the meeting so far. So there's a certain flavour, like a fruit salad and

suddenly someone comes up and says "How about a dollop of Marmite?" You know,

and it doesn't go really." As is demonstrated in understandings of the Bible and of the

interrelation of Christian worship and wider life, the distinguishing characteristic of

texts composed by God, according to my informants, is that they will be coherent (see

also Engelke, 2007: 173). The Charismatic Christians I have worked with are emphatic

in their assertion that the first and most important test of *prophecy* is whether it stands in

obvious contradiction with the words of scripture. The necessary coherence

encompasses the moment of bringing *prophecy* in ways that reach beyond the content of

the word itself, so it is possible that, as we see in the case of the story given in Patricia's

testimony, a word that seemed to be scripturally accurate but that was brought by the

wrong person or at the wrong time could not be authored by God.

Jim told me that the retreat from the front of the congregation back to ones seat

after having had a *Word* rejected is sometimes referred to as "the Lonely Walk". Jim

chuckled as he relayed this information; the phrase seems to be used in a rather light-hearted way but it points to the isolated condition of the would-be prophet. Not only are they to return to their seat not having shared their message with the congregation, but there is the further implication that the message was not in the first place shared with God. The words that will remain bounded to the individual were in their origins a product not of external interaction with God but of her own internal dialogue. I was further informed that for those who exercise discernment on messages during meetings, it is important to take some care to let the person down gently, a consideration that indicates something of the potential impact of such an experience. If the Charismatic experience of self is based on repeated moments of engagement with God building to a personhood that is rendered coherent through its continued connection to the Holy Spirit (see chapter 3) then failing to achieve this connection in the eyes of one's peers may threaten this coherence.

We can see an articulation of these concerns in Patricia's *testimony*, as she tells us how, following the suggestion that her words were not of divine origin "I did repent and I wanted to be right with God. Only it affected my relationship and they wouldn't let me contribute what God wanted to say though me." Taking a phenomenological view, we can say that it affected her ability to perceive her relationship with God, because the reception and sharing of words has always been for Patricia an important way in which this relationship comes to material immanence in her life. In this circumstance, the fact that much of Fran and Patricia's writing falls under the banner of *prophetic* speech is not surprising. Patricia tells me that since coming to the regular use of the internet she has enjoyed "wonderful spiritual growth", as she has shared *Words* and received and responded to the *prophetic* messages brought to her by others. Both women have found the internet to be a site in which their writing is accepted by others,

and their connection to God is affirmed.

The surety of this connection to God in the face of criticism and doubt from members of previous churches has led both women to critical appraisal of the social arrangements of these congregations, and of Christian community in general. Fran has told me that churches are often too bound to the conventions of class and the "manipulative hierarchies of sex and marriage" to be truly "led by God." She feels that the way that members of the church are assigned certain responsibilities often ties in with prejudices and conventions that should be absent from an authentic Christian community. As she describes it, "The Gospel is about turning people into powerhouses. It's not about following the ways of the World [it shouldn't be] 'You don't have an education? You can't read or write? You can put the chairs out.'". Patricia is similarly reflective about the practices that she has seen in her experience of offline church. She told me over email that there seemed to be a tendency for ministry roles to go to those who were "male and middle class", and that opportunities for those who, like her, are neither of these things seemed limited.

In their interviews each woman made reference to judgements on suitability for ministry that is based on *fleshly* categories of reference. It would be tempting on the basis of this ascription to approach the internet as a site of disembodied sociality in which flesh can be transcended, but to do so would be to miss an important part the concept. The opposition of "spiritual" and "fleshly" describes not a straightforward split between soul and what is Godly and the body and what is sinful, but rather points to a condition of mobility versus one of stasis. Those who are thinking in a *fleshly* or alternatively *worldly* manner are not "seeking God" as Patricia put it. They are bound to their own internal inclination and forced therefore to rely on their own rigid and unregenerate understandings and attitudes. The exhibition of pride or arrogance, for

example, can be considered to be fleshly just as can sexual immorality or gluttony. In order to transcend fleshly thinking a person must come into a living relationship with God and with the text of the Bible, a process that is staged with explicit and on-going reference to the body rather than denial of it. The very fact that Fran and Patricia feel that the internet is a site at which they have become connected to God suggests that the online environment is experienced as a site for the experience of something close to embodiment.

The Flesh Made Word

Addressing the issue of "textual embodiment", Jenny Sundén (2003) has considered the cues and practices of textual body-construction in the virtual environments of text-based role-playing games, in which descriptions of bodies are literally typed in by players and visible to other users upon request. She too has found a preoccupation among the inhabitants of these virtual realms with the language and imagery of corporeality, and a widespread reference among these internet users to aspects of their own embodiment. Continuing in this vein, I would argue that online texts can stand not only as sites for the representations of and reflections on embodiment, but, continuing with the phenomenological vein of the thesis, of *experiences* of it. Sundén draws on the work of Judith Butler in her assertion that for members of the online environments she has studied, online life occurs in a mediation between an intimately connected "embodied self and a textual I". The field site of this project offers a particularly fruitful territory for the investigation of the intertwining of textual representations of selfhood and the bodies with which these interact. Charismatic Christianity, whose adherents place so

much value on the possibility that the self can be read and transmitted in the world as a document, possesses an extensive repertoire of practice through which the "textual I" and the "embodied self" come to be experienced as integrated.

Coleman (2000: 127-130) has written at length of the incorporation of inspirited language by Charismatic bodies. Members of the Word of Life church, like Charismatic Christians in Brighton, speak of the *Word* of the *Gospel* as something that can be "eaten" or "breathed", or that one can have a "thirst" for. This incorporation through the digestive capabilities of the body, rather than the interpretative faculties of the mind, underlines the Charismatic experience of *the Word* as a stable, objective force that originates from outside the self and can be incorporated in uncorrupted form by the believer (Coleman, 2000: 128). The somatic response of the body to inspirited language is an important reference for Christians describing the evidentiary basis of their faith, and testimonies of personal encounters with God unfailingly mention the physical sensation that marked His presence. The Holy Spirit descends on individuals with a sensation like a cool breeze, or a flow of water over the body or a heavy warmth as if the receiver were under a blanket. As a non-Christian I would receive sporadic offers of prayer, accompanied by the laying on of hands. In each case I would be met afterwards with the same hopeful question from those praying; "Did you feel anything?"

This incorporation of words by the physical self can cause problems for believers. As was indicated by Fran's covered-up tee-shirt, there are words that it can be awkward to share co-presence with. A particularly interesting example of this problem can be seen in *testimony*. Patricia says that she would find it very difficult to share her *testimony* in church. I was not surprised when she told me this, knowing something of Patricia's shyness by this point and having witnessed myself the extreme prominence given to these narrative accounts of personal faith in the congregations I visited. Other

women who have shared their own stories in a congregational setting have remarked to me how "exposed" they felt afterwards as a result of what they experienced as a sudden and dramatic visibility, as other previously unknown members of the congregation would recognise them in church and strike up conversation on the basis of their stories. Ellie, a recent convert to Christianity, described to me her experience of sharing her own story at her church. "I sort of, didn't really want to become somebody that everyone knew. But that happened very quickly for me, you know [...] people go [pulls enthusiastic face] 'Oh, but your *testimony* is amazing!' and you just think [...] that is my life and I don't know why it is so amazing..."

Although Patricia's *testimony* was eventually read by many more than attend the rather modestly-sized congregation in which she worships on a Sunday, and was more detailed and personal than any that I had heard in church, through sharing online she was able to avoid this peculiar splitting between self and story, and the feeling of increased scrutiny that it brings. In the discussion *threads* featured on *Crosswalk*, the words themselves are the only presence that she has, and the visibility that she is able to achieve through her writing seemed to be a gratifying rather than intimidating prospect. When I brought up the subject of her *testimony* during her interview Patricia paused to offer me thanks for my participation in her *testimony thread*. "When you said that, that you'd read it- that meant so much to me." I thought at the time that this was an odd way of putting it. Like other members of the *forum*, I had posted on Patricia's *testimony thread* to thank her for the story, and to tell her that I found it beautifully written and moving. For Patricia, it seems that the most satisfying aspect of the feedback she had received was in finding not that it had been read and found to be well written or interesting, but that it had been read at all. Throughout the *testimony* Patricia made reference to the negative judgements of partners, family members, and other Christians;

that she was weak, that she was ignorant, that she was too intense and out of touch with God. In the story here she has been able to pull these experiences of outside judgement and rejection together into a single narrative of personal faith, perseverance, and redemption, and finally be seen in the way that she would wish.

Responses to the story from other posters indicated that readers, too, oriented to the text as a material extension of Patricia's own self. Two commenters on the *testimony thread* said that they were crying and that they wished they could reach out to her as they read it. Others attempted to carry out such an engagement textually by including in their responses the form "*(((Patricia)))*", a piece of textual shorthand frequently used by Christian web-users in which the brackets represent and virtually perform an embrace. Patricia herself has come to forge strong relationships with other members of the *forum* and friends on MySpace through reading their testimonies and *prophetic* words, and praying with and for them. This stream of activity between herself and other Christians has engendered in Patricia a strong sense of the salience of the internet as a spiritual location. In conversation with me she repeatedly referred to the cluster of online *forums* that she uses as an "Unseen church", explaining that spiritual gifts and agents that might be overlooked in offline congregations are able to find expression online. Her experience seems to be greatly influenced by, and is indeed continuous with, her engagement with the practices of *Spiritual Warfare*.

I mentioned Spiritual warfare and I've seen this to be more visible and pronounced on YouTube.

I've seen much zeal from Christians in their dedication to the Lord and in their ministry. I've even seen others attacking Christianity and

declaring the devil, and haven't seen this offline and even when they

are attacking the bible and Christianity.

I can see a clearer battle between good and evil on YouTube. I see

this as existing in the world, but online and particularly on YouTube

this spiritual battle seems to be more ahead and progressed in

comparison to offline. Maybe because of the collectiveness the

internet provides and the anonymity there. It suggests to me to be in

the forefront and showing what the world is expecting in the future,

with the internet being that bit ahead of the rest of the world.

Spiritual Warfare is a set of practices that involve claiming territory for God through the

application of words (see Shoaps, 2002: 38). One member of Living Grace told me that

he tell me that he had been moved to pray "over" his neighbourhood while looking out

of a bedroom window, and another that she had received a word from God that she

should pray while walking seven times around a particular area in which she lived. In

other cases the territory may be that of a Christian body (e.g. Csordas, 1994), but the

goal is the same, to drive out demonic forces that are in occupation by the assertion of

that which is already true, that the site upon which the battle is to be waged is the

property of God. It seems that spiritual warfare can also take place in the discursive of

online engagement. Here, the words themselves, and Patricia's own experience as she

reads, considers, and replies to them, constitute the ground of a "there" that the

humanity is progressing toward. It is significant that in these communications Patricia

experiences a "clearer" battle than she has witnessed in other contexts. The ubiquity of

YouTube as a video hosting service means that Christians using the site to transmit the

good news are likely to run into atheist net users, who have their own active networks on YouTube and feature as critical commenters on Christian videos as some Christians offer their own commentary on atheist broadcasts. The fact that she is able to directly "see" the blows of *The Enemy* in this forum, as well as take part in it herself, has led a more immediate experience of this eternal conflict than has been available to her in other settings.

This effect of online words in lending materiality and spiritual salience both to speakers and the contexts in which they speak can work back from the online to the offline. The conversion of personal experience to public text lends a public tangibility to offline experiences that would otherwise remain tied to the more restricted contexts of interpersonal *testimony* and conversation. Unlike predictions made by the early social science of the internet that speakers moving to online expression would step into an entirely new world, we see in the writing of these women, as we did with Leah and Katie in chapter two, the extensive conversion of offline experience to text. We can examine this process in more detail by returning to Fran, as she continues to write up daily experiences of spiritual encounter in her Lent *blog*.

Over the course of the four years that she has been *blogging*, Fran has come to consider the journey from her home to the internet café where she writes as a "Holy Walk". Her *posts* often recount stories of encounters with friends on the street, or instances when she has prayed for people that she sees who seem to be in trouble or distress. In the following extract, she recounts her thoughts during a 'healing on the streets' session, as she reflects on the upcoming European lottery draw, which had drawn some publicity due to its estimated jackpot of 115 million pounds.

there i stood looking at the chair i was about to sit in to have a

smoke.... 'my church'....remembering that: if i had 115 million i could

... buy a building and have a church that would be Spirit-filled Spirit

led the only (hopefully) unbigotted Power church in town... this was

my church my church began with one chair in the street... I sat down

and prayed for ... and sat and engaged best i could with GOD and

watched ...suddenly (and for the second time in two days i saw this) a

surge of people suddenly the street was twice as busy and folks were

in a hurry... and i was just praying.... and that's what i saw that sort of

church a church where people are touched and move with the Power

of GOD all welcome no doors... [...]

you see all this is about a talking to GOD my conversation and

hopefully what GOD can ...

GOD BLESS!

Peace and Love,

The passage indicates some ambivalence on Fran's part, common among Evangelicals,

toward the concept of 'church' as a material structure. The ideal she describes of a

collective of people with "no doors" speaks to the mobility that is a constant aim of

Charismatic spiritual practice. The church is commonly spoken of in terms that invoke

kinship and blood relation, as a 'family' or alternatively as the 'body of Christ', the

manner in which God comes into material embodiment in the world, a corporate

repetition of the figure of Jesus himself. In the extract above, the "church" that Fran

imagines comes into being through her physical presence as a vehicle of God. If

Charismatic Christianity demands of practitioners a self that is continually renewed and

capable of distinctive mobility as it seeks to bring this renewal to the immanent

transformation of the world, then the church described by Fran is in many ways ideal. The pavement itself, a site of continual movement and change, has become in this account a site of transformation and its potential as a result of Fran's physical presence and her on-going spiritual engagement.

We can explore this experience of presence further and consider the manner in which it becomes animated recursively in the text, as Fran and her readers come into contact with the Lent *blog* itself. The sentence at the end "you see this is all about a talking to GOD my engagement and hopefully what GOD can..." remains unfinished. It is difficult to tell if she is offering a commentary on her prayer on the street or the writing of the *blog* itself but I would argue that it is both. The faceless crowds that pass her on the street are defined, as she prays, as territory for spiritual intervention. The same appears to be true for those who come into contact with her writing in the *blog*. Although Fran finds it difficult to envisage the audience that she might be writing to, the idea that words will find an audience is heavily imprinted in Charismatic practice (see chapter 2: 67) and is repeated here. For Fran, these rehearsals of the day's events have allowed her to put personal and fleeting events into public circulation. In a later *post* she signs off with the phrase "love you dear reader whoever you are!" What would have been an silent, internal engagement with God has taken on concrete form, and the hope is that those who click on the *link* to her Lent *blog* and read the contents will be drawn into her on-going spiritual engagement, able to become "touched and move with the Power of GOD" themselves.

She makes explicit mention of this link between the online stage and its offline mirror when she describes the spiritual implications of maintaining the *blog* as an on-going narrative. Over the course of Lent Fran's *blog* will tend to converge on a particular theme, and she will continue to write past the end of the Easter if she does not

feel that she has been provided with a natural conclusion to the events on the writing period. The power of the narrative extends back from the text. Fran told me that she found updating the *blog* to be important to her spiritually as she realised that the sense that there was an audience out there was spurring her to tell a story that was coherent and satisfying in its progress. "If you've got an audience on a *blog* they kind of like want to know what happens next, so there's that motivation to make sure there's going to *be* a 'what happened next?' This commentary on the power of the audience to bring narrative clarity and coherence to her experience was expanded in line with Charismatic logic, to include the potential for the exercise of God's own hand in shaping the narrative. She explained to me that God also "hears" the words that she writes online, and through writing about the circumstances of her life they become a territory for progressive spiritual intervention. During the 2009 *blog*, this was brought to a head in dramatic fashion. That year's *blogs* had come to a theme of sexuality, a topic that was particularly troubling to Fran at the time. In her final entry to that year's *blog* she recounts the events of a prayer meeting from the night before.

> ...suddenly I had an image of an angel like on a cross of light it
> settled into a very clear image that remained... a close up a static
> image of an angel arms spread out wings visible looking straight
> ahead... I looked I looked again... nothing was happening I carried
> on staring at this GOD what was this about... then the word asexual
> came to me.... (like when something suddenly dawns you've worked
> something out)... I looked closer and thought then that the soul is
> asexual [...] GOD did not have a value judgement on gay
> relationships or straight ones.... not like we do..... but suddenly a

Peace came over me.... and that seemed to be that.... and I was

amazed and thankful and just said

thankyou thankyou thankyou...

After writing this post, Fran printed it out and handed it to her pastor, Lee, to consider. As has been the case with her spiritual input in the past, the message itself was seemingly rejected. The next week Lee preached a sermon on marriage and the family that touched again on the doctrinal convention that God has created sexuality for expression within the married heterosexual context, and that all other forms of sexual relationship and identity run counter to the intention of the creator. Fran was frustrated, as she is so often, by this disinclination on the part of her pastor to consider her insights, but did not find the rejection troubling to her own experience of God as the author of her experience. "At the end of the day," she remarked to me, "do I want Lee to agree with me? No. I want him to agree with God." For Fran, the sense that she herself was in agreement with God seems to have been enough. The recursive effect of her story repeating its own power back on to her life brought with it a more coherent religious experience. Fran provides her own commentary on the tangible spiritual encounter brought about by her writing and the vision that followed it during her interview; "It kind of changed my reality- or it certainly did at the time. And it was a healing because it gave me peace."

Embodiment

In chapter 3 I related the story of Leah, who has found it difficult to reconcile the position that she occupies in her *blogging* with her understanding of the speech roles of men and women. In this chapter I have considered a narrative that is more commonly found in literature relating to muted groups and cyberspace, that those who find themselves side-lined or marginalised in existing social structures will be able to take up positions of direct opposition to these structures online (e.g. Mitra & Watts, 2002). Fran and Patricia have both been able to use the internet to produce texts that critique the social structures of Charismatic Christianity while remaining firmly rooted in its central narratives. Discourses of anti-institutionalism run throughout Charismatic Christianity. As described in chapter one, born-again Christians are encouraged to view their own practices and speech as standing in opposition to the institutions of the *Culture* and this habit of critique extends to the engagement of the individual practitioner with the church itself. All of the stories of great Christians are stories, first and foremost, of outsiders. To face opposition and disdain from one's peers, even fellow Christians, is a powerful source of identity for Christians, and indicates that one's path is in alignment with that of Jesus himself. Through extending their private *worship* practice into material embodiment online, Fran and Patricia have been able to frame themselves and their experiences as part of this wider orthodoxy of rebellion. In carving out their own experience of Christian community through practices of engagement with the varied and often unseen audiences of the internet, both women have been able to come to an experience of Christian community as something more fluid and dynamic, and in turn more accepting of unconventional voices, than they have found offline.

This move that both women have made from internal dialogue to public speech and through it to external presence is significant in its implications for Charismatic gender norms. In chapter two I argued that women, much more than men, are associated

with a way of speaking that is not only turned toward the inner in its subject matter, but is also restricted in its outward mobility through the conventions and conditions of its transmission. The internet may not trigger a move away from the body but it may generate new possibilities for a person to experience their own presence in the world. We can return to Lurhmann's (2006) discussion of the material objects and practices of Charismatic life as creating the experience of God as an "external presence". In the on-going production and reception of "object-like" words (Coleman, 1996), God becomes something to which the believer can orient herself in her physical embodiment and is rendered *present* to immanent experience. In the Charismatic engagement with these inspirited forms of language we see a further hope that they will be able to act as a conduit for the replication of this power. Words of *prophecy* and *testimonies* circulate beyond the lips of those that speak them and come to effect change in the hearts of others and the progressive emancipation of the world. Fran and Patricia have suffered setbacks in their attempts to share such output, but in online speech they have been able, finally, to come to an experience of their own selves as an "external presence" in this expanding narrative.

If it is the case that speech acts such as conversion testimonies and *prophetic* ministry are a way of coming into experience of oneself as inspirited then acts of the body can work the same way (Mitchell & Mitchell, 2008: 84). As speakers move to become typists online we see a merging of the two. Speech acts, in a context in which presence is mediated entirely through communication, take on characteristics that suggest embodiment. As I finished this chapter I logged on to *Gracechat* to see if Fran had updated her *blog*. It transpired that in the few days I had been away from the *forum* it had been shut down and moved, and the previous four years of Fran's writing had been lost in the process. The same thing had happened to Patricia's *testimony*; as

Graham had given C*rosswalk* yet another overhaul, the section of the discussion board

to which Patricia had posted the document was deleted in its entirety. The only sites

where these documents exist now are among the data stored in my own computer, in

Patricia's email inbox and as extracts in this chapter.

The sudden disappearances remind us that the internet does not provide a

materiality that is stable and permanent but one that is changeable and fleeting in its

own way. Neither woman expressed, either to me or in their subsequent writing, any

distress over the loss of their work, or interest in revisiting their previous output once it

had gone. Although Patricia was pleased when I told her that I had saved her *testimony*

to my own computer and could send her a copy, she made no attempt to re-post it on the

Crosswalk forum or anywhere else. These texts are not valued as records of moments in

which the women have come to experience themselves as a salient spiritual presence in

the world. They are the moments themselves.

Chapter 5: Restoring the Self

Introduction

In line with the statements of other authors in the field, I have maintained throughout this thesis that 'the internet' is best conceptualised not as a pre-existing site but as a series of sites that become available to experience and interconnected with one another and the wider world through practice (Miller & Slater, 2000). In this chapter, I consider in more detail the possibility that the practical construction of 'the internet' of personal experience might intersect and harmonise with the construction of the self that uses it. If the experience of internet use is one of the expansion and materialisation of the capacities of the self (see chapters 3 and 4) then we might anticipate that these technologies hold particular potency in providing sites in which the perception of the self can be reconfigured.

The theme of personal representation looms large in social scientific literature relating to the internet, as evidenced in the centrality in internet studies of the concept of *identity*. This interest reflects an awareness that, rather than being completely untethered from social life, the words on the screen through which people construct and experience online sociality must be grounded in some way in order to be socially meaningful. Selves on the internet are usually understood to function as individuals: the desktop, keyboard, and mouse are rarely occupied by more than one person in any one sitting. Despite this, the intensely social nature of much internet use means that users rely on

established grammars of selfhood in attempts to secure mutual recognition. Researchers (e.g. Lövheim & Linderman, 2005; Marshall, 2007) have pointed therefore to standard categories such as "gender identity", "racial identity", and "religious identity" as aspects of the social self that are replicated as actors cast their presence online. This approach to identity, in which the term is cast in analysis as a stable, shared, aspect of selfhood, has been criticised in relation to the social scientific turn to practice (see Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). In this chapter, I follow these practice approaches and consider how it is that a sense of shared selfhood is actively *created* in the online activity of one of my informants.

Identity in Christ

In a famous article, Harding (1987) argues that the change in the self following conversion to "born again" Christianity is marked by a change in discursive position. Following conversion, those who previously received inspired language from others begin to produce it for the edification of non-believers. The fact that this discursive repositioning is understood in explicitly spatial terms can be seen in the habitual use of imagery of territorial expansion and conquest in Evangelical groups (see Coleman, 2000), and the habitual labelling of those who have not heard and accepted the Good News as "lost". That the transformed self is reoriented in the world seems to be understood at least implicitly by my informants, who rarely discuss "Christian identity" but refer more frequently to "identity in Christ".

This rather unusual prepositional phrasing of "identity *in* Christ" was elaborated upon during a meeting for prospective members of Jubilee held in the autumn of 2009.

Roger, a church elder in his late 60s, stood to discuss an issue that the founder of the church has frequently commented upon; the common classification by Christians of themselves as 'Sinners'. Roger borrowed an analogy from the founder, as he likened the Christian who says "I have been saved but *really* I am still a sinner" to a tourist in Spain who informs his companions "local time is six but *really* it's five o'clock." To continue to refer to oneself in this manner is to resist the change in one's circumstances, to ignore feedback from the outside world, and to provide misleading information to those one speaks to. For the Christians I work with, a person can be "in Christ" as surely and objectively as she can be "in Spain", and the responsibility of the Christian is to acknowledge and act out this fundamental shift in orientation.

Although a great number of my informants, most of whom do habitually describe themselves as sinners, would likely disagree with the content of this message, it demonstrates the markedly *practical* nature of this concept. The understanding of *identity* as a local category of practice (Brubaker & Cooper, 2004: 4) is of a public description of selfhood that is realised both in the way that one speaks to the world, and in the way that the world is allowed to speak back in to the self (see also chapter 2: 60-61). This understanding echoes earlier ideas of the status of 'individuality' as a condition of collectivity among persons rather than separation between them (see Stallybrass, 1992). In the Charismatic context, words proceed from the speaker as from a field of voices; the speaker who is fully redeemed speaks out of a unity with the God who has redeemed her. The enmeshment of the self in this network determines every aspect of speech. A person should experience identity *in* Christ as a stable, objective backdrop to their experience that is affirmed and expressed in habitual action, as one might check a watch. The inclusion of the watch into the analogy may have further significance. Identity, for Christians, is a quality of the self realised in time. The most

obvious division of past and current selves is provided by my informants in their

testimonies.

Gabby

Toward the end of 2009 Jubilee church extended its regular programme of Sunday

events from two to three services to run in the early morning, late morning, and

evening. The change had been the subject of much discussion in church services and

house group meetings during the previous months, and was broadly anticipated as a

point at which the favour of God toward this congregation would be manifest. In the

small *house group* that I attended during the week the leader acknowledged that there

was likely to be many more empty seats in the Sunday service to begin with, but that we

should look on these as spaces that God would fill with the as-yet unconverted of the

city.

The meeting hall of the congregation did seem less crowded than usual as I took

my seat during the second service on the Sunday of the launch, sliding in to a row that

was already occupied by other *house group* members. The conversation in the room

died down as a woman in her late 20s, the wife of one of the junior leaders in the

church, came to the front to read notices. She was followed by the lead Pastor of the

church, who offered a welcome to those of us in attendance, "Particularly if you're

joining us for the first time this Sunday". Before beginning to preach that morning he

introduced a video. The curtains that hung at the large glass windows had been shut

against the morning sunshine and the lights were dimmed as the video began to play.

We heard the voice before seeing its owner, projected through the speakers placed

around the meeting hall; "From the age of 13 really I was... aware there was something missing." Like the other members of our *house group* sitting around me, I let out a quiet "oh!" of recognition as the large screens located to the back, left, and right of the stage lit up to show a familiar face.

The speaker was a woman in her mid-40s, dressed casually but smartly in jeans, trainers, and a plain shirt. If you knew her personally you might think she seemed uncharacteristically hesitant as she began to share her story, although she smiled more broadly and paused less often as she settled in to her narrative. In the brief *testimony* video Gabby relayed a story that was in many ways extremely familiar. Like the subjects of most, if not all, conversion narratives, she described her pre-converted state as one of unhappiness brought about by a nagging sense that her life was missing an elusive "something" that she was unable to put her finger on. In Gabby's case, the lack of fulfilment and sense of personal unworthiness brought about by this ineffable absence was eventually manifest in many years of serious drug and alcohol abuse. The tone of the story changed when she described her first visit to church. She reported that she heard "preaching on the prodigal son that night and just instantly felt that love, that was the love of the Father welcoming him home". Gabby reported that since that time she has become "peaceful" and "content". The two minute video ended with Gabby smiling broadly, assuring us that since becoming a Christian she is "just a totally different person".

These stories are a mainstay of Evangelical life. Every "born-again" Christian has a conversion story, and these accounts of transformed selfhood make their way into literature, teaching, and more casual speech. Gabby's *testimony* was one of several that had been filmed by her church for the autumn preaching series. The visual and audio presentation of these stories was standardised across the videos. Initial descriptions by

the speaker of the unhappy circumstances of their non-Christian lives were accompanied by a soundtrack of slow, sad chords and black and white images. These gave way to full colour pictures of the congregation at Jubilee, and more up-tempo music as the stories enter the phase of personal encounter with God and the happiness and peace that follows. The uniformity in these videos makes a simple Christian statement. No matter their individual histories and personal circumstances, each speaker has arrived at a new kind of personhood that is readily available to all. If conversion takes the believer into a new territory, it is one that they share with all those who make the same journey. Stromberg (1993 alerts us to the fact that these stories are not a one-time event, the rebirth of those who are born-again is constantly affirmed and generated in acts of *testimony* and the wider practices of Christian life. It is in the area of repetition and personal participation that Gabby started to experience difficulties.

The week after that Sunday I saw Gabby again at the *house group* that she and I both attended. Several members of the group complimented her on her bravery in sharing her story. She told us that it was strange to see herself on the big screen at church, but that the next day she had received an email from a new member of the congregation who had herself struggled with drug addiction. She relayed the message from the woman that her story "spoke straight to her *heart*", and told us that although sharing her *testimony* in this context had been intimidating, this one message had made her realise that it was worth it. When I interviewed Gabby later on, she was more ambivalent. She noted again that she had gained great happiness from the knowledge that others had found her story valuable. She felt though, that she had possibly said too much and expressed the same concerns about her sudden visibility in the congregation that other women have related to me (see chapter 4: 133-134) following the public performance of their testimonies. Although Gabby was pleased that she was able to help

others who did identify with her story, she had a strong sense that the appeal of her *testimony* for most members of the congregation lay in the fact that they did not. "People love a background like mine," she told me, "I suppose it helps them to think 'oh, God can do anything.' […] it's sort of like the grittier your story is, [the more] that story will get used."

Gabby's suspicions that her story was not one with which other members of her church could relate were compounded by her own difficulties in identifying with and participating in the traffic of teaching at Jubilee. She was sceptical of the teachings on female submission expounded by church leaders, and found the division of ministry practice based on this doctrine to be personally alienating. I noted in chapter two that the genre of women's teaching tends to be restricted in focus to the discussion of the specifically gendered roles of wives and mothers. As the single mother of an adult daughter who had recently left home, Gabby felt little personal connection to the teaching offered by other women at the congregation, and was aware that it was unlikely that she would be able to participate in this teaching herself. In her *testimony* Gabby describes a move from marginality and alienation to a more integrated, peaceful existence, but she increasingly experienced herself on the fringes of her church community.

The style of the preaching at her church was a source of further alienation. Key to the *complementarian* argument that it is men alone who should preach on a Sunday is the particular understanding of the authority inherent in the act of preaching. The Sunday preach, members frequently tell me, is "steering the ship", it is an attempt to mould the audience into the better Christians that God wants them to be and is as such an expression of authority. That this approach is more aggressive to the individual believer is regarded by the church leadership as a positive feature. The leader of the

church insists that "preaching should either send men away angry or turn them in heartfelt repentance." At strategy meetings members of church leadership refer to this work of spiritually "discipling" members of the church as the "ground war", as opposed to the "air war" of seeking to impact the wider city of Brighton. When we spoke it seemed that this "ground war" was starting to take its toll on Gabby. Financial pressures had meant that she had had to drop out of the church's "Impact" scheme, a program in which church members donate a year to voluntary work with the church. She had also taken up smoking again, a habit that she had given up in the first flush of her Christian life. It was clear that Gabby regarded these events as personal and spiritual failures, and that she was at the time feeling rather delicate. The preaching that she heard on Sundays at Jubilee was not helping. She remarked on how "spiritually confrontational" the messages delivered were, saying that "if you're not really feeling high as a kite in your walk with God you can sometimes walk away feeling a bit like a worm".

It was around this time that her use of the internet began to change. In the period immediately following her conversion Gabby had subscribed to the various Twitter feeds and ministry sites recommended by friends and leaders at Jubilee, "just because everyone else did" but she came to find the constant exhortations to improve her spiritual life and practice that these conservative Christian writers offered up to be draining. At the time of our first interview, Gabby had started to search for writing by Christian women in particular, commenting to me that she needed "that identification" with others like herself. When I asked whether she thought the insights offered by women would be different to those of male authors she nodded, relating her comments on these platforms directly to her previous discussion of her experience of the teaching at Jubilee. "They're a bit more flowery, they're a bit more day to day, they're not as theological or challenging, you know it's a little bit more speaks to the *heart*."

The Heart

In his discussion of the social uses of emotional language, Beatty (2005) puzzles over the meaning of declarations by his Niasan informants that their hearts have become "long" or "blackened", or feel "like someone who has swallowed a ball of cat's fur". For Beatty (2005: 25-27), such descriptions indicate the position that the individual claims in social and political interaction, whether ashamed, insulted, saddened or rendered joyful through the actions of themselves and others. In Charismatic Christianity, we see a similar marking of social and narrative position through the language of *the heart*. When we review the lyrics of popular Charismatic *worship* songs we find references to hearts that are "written on" or "spoken to", that "cry out" and that "sing". These references indicate that the "discursive landscape" described in chapter 2 is also understood to be one of personal emotional connection. Connection of self to the world, configured in terms of communication, is represented as an empathic link of the inner self. A common English colloquialism may see speakers indicating that a particular issue is "close to my heart". In Charismatic Christianity even this distance is collapsed, as speakers assert that "my *heart* is to see the city restored" or urge listeners to "share God's *heart* for the poor".

Such language to describe one's continuity with God, the outside world, and the coming kingdom would be equally appropriate delivered by a man or a woman, but established symbolic vocabularies work to associate the *heart* with women in particular. The heart symbol (♥), most often rendered in pink, frequently decorates women's *blogs* and the books written by Christian women and intended for others. Young women doodle hearts on meeting notes and in the margins of their Bibles, and at a women's

meeting, held shortly after Valentine's Day, cupcakes were decorated with miniature hearts, and hearts were stamped on to the name cards that were handed out in the morning. During a *house group* meeting one woman told us that when the prayers that she writes in her diary are answered, she draws a heart next to that entry. Then when she is feeling unmotivated or unhappy and finding it difficult to pray she flicks back through the journal and sees "all these little hearts".

The sense of spatial proximity that this metaphor evokes is translated into social language as intimacy. The use of this symbol that is elsewhere associated with romance and familial affection indicates the emotional closeness that women in particular report as marking their relationship with Jesus (see also Griffith, 1997). In contrast to the objective claims of the kind of exegetical preaching that Gabby had found to be so challenging on a personal level, *the heart* is often a way of speaking about subjective desires and emotional experience. This distinction brings us back once again to the difference between male and female genres of speech (see chapter 2). During a presentation on the gendered division of speech roles in the church the pastor of Emmanuel Evangelical Church explicitly invoked a difference between "authoritative teaching" and the desire that a female speaker may have to "share what's on her heart". It is not surprising that Gabby saw this as a sphere of communication in which she had both the right and the capacity to participate.

Gabby's inability to personally engage with the practices of discursive positioning at her own church led her online. Although she shared the concerns of her fellow church members that she might encounter misleading spiritual information online, Gabby had found her own way of extending the general process of the recommendation of Christian teaching with which she was familiar (see chapter 1: 47) while at the same time widening the scope of these recommendations. Starting at the

Twitter page of her own pastor, she would choose one of the teachers that he was

following, then, after reading through some of his messages, would click on a teacher

that he was following, and so on until she would arrive at teachers and organisations

that were delivering a quite different message from the one promoted at Jubilee.

Eventually, this searching led her to the cluster of commentaries on established

Evangelical doctrine and liturgy described loosely within Western Christianities as the

Emerging Church.

The *Emerging Church* has been described as a "movement of cultural critique"

(Bielo, 2009: 219) attached to contemporary conservative Protestantism. Church leaders

and writers whose work is considered to fall under the *Emerging* or *Emergent* banner

tend to hail from personal backgrounds in conservative Evangelical churches, and

express dissatisfaction toward various elements of these styles of Christianity. Most

notably, *Emerging* authors tend to question the possibility of stable and objective

readings of the doctrinal implications of Scripture. Instead, these writers focus on what

they see as the non-verbal commands communicated through the practical ministry of

Jesus Christ related in the Gospels. These Christians understand the Kingdom of God as

immanent in the here and now, meaning that ministry efforts should emphasise social

outreach and material aid rather than proselytising. Gabby was drawn to this work, and

began to materialise her personal affirmation of their focus and sentiment by posting

links to articles or *posts* that she found particularly striking on Facebook. This activity

gained some comment from other members of the congregation. After *posting* a

comment on an article by Shane Claiborne, an author and speaker strongly associated

with social ministry to those in poverty, several members of her congregation expressed

concerns about the material she was accessing. One younger woman remarked to her in

conversation that her reading had placed her in danger of becoming "too liberal and too

works-based"

This comment requires contextualising within the *Calvinism* of the church in question. *Calvinist* Christianities place particular stress on the doctrinal conviction, found more broadly in Evangelical Christianity, that those saved by God have been justified in His sight as a result of their faith, rather than because of "good works". Keane (2007) describes the manner in which this emphasis on cognitive and emotional orientation over practice is in fact rendered habitable through practice, in the recitation of creeds or the on-going engagement of the believer with the Bible. This belief is cemented through the practices of Bible study and book recommendation, and can be seen in the centrality of the preaching event in the weekly calendar of the Reformed churches in the study. If the most important element of a believer's salvation is her acceptance of a particular proposition, then her understanding of this proposition becomes vitally important to the work of the church. We can see this attitude expressed clearly in comments from a 2006 booklet on the subject of pastoral authority: "a leader endeavours to teach people so that their consciences line up with God's word".[14] The pastoral elements of leading a church therefore extend not only to keeping watch over the conduct and attitude of church members, but also the kinds of media they access, and their reaction to it.

In this context, platforms such as Facebook, which invite users to detail the media products that they personally enjoy through *posts* to the public *wall* or as part of the evolving self-description of their *profile* page, provide spiritually significant information. Like the bookcases which stand in the living rooms of many Christian homes, Facebook's *profile* pages provide a point of materialisation through which other

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[14] Groves, J. (2006) "Spiritual authority in the church". Available online at http://www.newfrontierstogether.org/Groups/101198/Newfrontiers/Resources/Articles_and_Papers/Theological_Papers/Spiritual_Authority_in_the/Spiritual_Authority_in_the.aspx [Accessed 2nd Feb 2011]

Christians can literally see the media landscape in which those listed in its databases as 'friend' orient themselves. Gabby was surprised and unsettled by implication that her reading was considered to be a valid matter for public concern among other members of her church. "So it's just quite interesting isn't it," she suggested, "I suppose maybe from your own point of view, [that] things that I was exploring in *my own* personal faith... [that because of this] people were telling me that they were worried about me."

Among conservative Evangelicals, for whom the possibility and importance of objective readings of Scripture is a central concern, the more open exegeses of *Emerging* authors are widely considered to be heretical in form as well as content. In 2011 *Emerging Church* writer Rob Bell caused a storm of controversy among Evangelical Christians after publishing a book challenging the conservative Protestant formulation of hell.[15] This event elicited much comment and concern among many of my informants in Brighton. One informant told me that the affirmation of Bell's message that had been expressed by several members of his church could potentially "split the congregation". Such theological divergences are often framed in terms of distance. The American conservative writer and church leader Jon Piper elicited censure of his own from more liberal Christians when at the height of online debate on Bell's book, he posted to his Twitter the simple statement 'Farewell, Rob Bell'. The statement suggests a moving away from a centre that has in fact been incorporated by many emerging Christians into their own religious histories. Shortly after the comments on her potentially "works-based" inclinations, Gabby decided to leave Jubilee for a more theologically liberal congregation in the city. Since leaving she has put her desire to work with women and those going through personal hardship into practice. At the

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[15] Vernon, M. (2011) "Rob Bell's intervention in the often ugly world of American Evangelicalism". *The Guardian*, 21st March, available online at http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/mar/21/rob-bell-american-evangelism [Accessed 19th July 2011]

beginning of 2010 she travelled to South Africa to spend a month working in a programme to help women in the Johannesburg townships to start their own businesses, and she has quickly taken on responsibilities in various outreach ministries in her new congregation. Toward the end of the year she also began to write a *blog*.

Proximity and Distance

A peculiar thing about the Charismatic *heart*, given the fact that it is typically described as surrounded by communication, is that it is constantly presented as inarticulate. As indicated in the inchoate utterances of *tongues* (Csordas, 1990: 24), the *heart* is understood to be a seat of longing for God and meeting with Him that cannot be fully expressed in words. Women convey this awkwardness in their teaching, apologising for their words before beginning to speak, acknowledging that they may be unrefined, and offering by way of explanation the assurance that they just wish to share what's "on" their *hearts*. Gabby, for her own part, describes her writing for her *blog* as "clumsy" and "rambling", and opens an early *blog* post with a statement that the reader should not expect any "theological referencing" to her thoughts as she does not have any, "just a heart that's overflowing for a God I don't understand". This early statement and the tell-tale inclusion of the *heart* as a reference, reads almost as a mission statement for the *posts* that follow. Her writing is less about linguistic craft and theological objectivity, and more about proximity, intimacy, and personal experience. This was immediately apparent in her first post, in which she recounts the event that finally tipped her into starting a *blog*, a rather unfortunate date with a man Gabby refers to as "Mr Right... about everything".

When you asked what my church was like, I said I loved the

outreaching it does in my community, I love working with the

homeless, recovery programs and soup kitchens etc. really are my

thing..you said we shouldnt feed anyone until they've accepted

Christ..really..?

By now I'm seriously eyeing up your Sauvignon, but instead of

necking it am begging my wonderful God for some strength, I think I

muttered in a doubtful New Christian kinda way "well, i think Jesus

hung out with folk on the margins all the time and that's what I love

about him"

'Matthew, Mark, Luke and John' are irrelevant to the new testament

church" you say in a very factual kind of way.

'Oh,really?' Now im completely confused, am I even a Christian?

'Change the subject', my head was screaming 'we're not going to

agree on much here, move on, get out of here, make an excuse'.. 'how

old are your kids? tell me a bit about yourself", I say..

'My wife left me… for an UNBELIEVER' you reply

'really?' I say, 'funny that..'

The conversation here cuts in two directions. Though it seems from what Gabby has

told us about the date that she did not respond to the comments of her companion during

their meeting in the manner that she responds here, she is able in her *blog* to provide an expression not only of her outward conversation with the man in question but also the rather more internal dialogue taking place in her mind at the time. The common Evangelical formula through which believers define themselves as "X in a Y world" (see chapter 2: 69) is here turned on its head. For *Emerging* Christians, it is not the *Culture* of non-Christians that leaves them baffled and unhappy, but that of Evangelical Protestantism. Behind the rather conspiratorial exchange between Gabby and her reader are the broader critiques that *Emerging* Christians would direct toward conservative and particularly *Calvinist* discourses. In recounting this anecdote Gabby is expressing the broader sense of peripherality that she experienced in her previous church.

As is suggested in the metaphor of the *heart,* much of the linguistic affirmation of selfhood works through metaphors of interpersonal proximity and distance (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). This text seems on the surface to be altogether more concerned with the latter, as Gabby roundly disavows the conservative Christian teaching that has until recently formed the backdrop of her church life. The separation between Gabby and her date is thrown into relief, both for the reader and seemingly for Gabby herself, as each expresses a different appraisal of social ministry. Asked to describe her church, Gabby emphasises her involvement in "working with the homeless, recovery programmes and soup kitchens". Although few of my informants, conservative or otherwise, would agree with Mr Right that Christian ministry ought to be restricted to those who have themselves accepted Christ, there is a familiar undercurrent to his argument. The 'New *Calvinist'* insistence on correct doctrinal alignment builds on a more fundamental understanding of the basis of Christian ministry. According to these teachers, the most urgent and important work that Christians can engage in is evangelism. Her readers seem to recognise this likeness, one of whom jokingly suggests in the *comments* for this

post that her date had been taking "dating tips" from a widely known and controversial *Calvinist* teacher Mark Driscoll.

There are further parallels between Mr Right and *Calvinist* preachers when we look away from the content of their speech to its form. The difference in the orientations of the two diners to the practices of Christian ministry is reflected in their speech, as they fail to share even a common genre. If her dates' "very factual" tone is reminiscent of conservative Christian teaching, Gabby is presenting a markedly more personal voice. Her words demonstrate the kind of hedging common to women's teaching (chapter 2: 85) as she takes personal ownership over her statements with the qualifier "I think" and refers to the practices of social ministry as "my thing". This sense of interior reflection is reproduced in the form of the text itself, in which the reader is presented with an internal view of Gabby's internal monologue. Indeed, the very presentation of a vignette from her everyday experience, framed in such a way as to suggest that we can glimpse within it a more general spiritual truth, is the archetypical form of women's teaching.

Although Gabby failed to find speakers and voices with whom she could identify in her previous congregation, she creates in this text her own connections to others. Gabby has placed hyperlinks to established *Emerging Church* speakers in the side-bar of her *blog*, mostly American authors who have, like her, shared their own stories of movement from conservative Evangelical to more critical perspectives. These authors share with Gabby a general discursive position of speaking *back* to the creeds and practices of their past. Bielo (2009: 219) describes the proponents of *Emerging* Christianities as exhibiting a general "posture of de-conversion". The phrase suggests something of the intertwining of narrative position and discursive voice that we see throughout this extract, as Gabby positions herself as a perpetual outsider to the

Christianity offered by her date. Gabby describes herself in her writing as "confused" and "doubtful" in the face of the assertions made by her date, to the extent that she wonders if according to the landscape of orientation offered she is "even a Christian" at all. This reflection provides Gabby with a practical as well as rhetorical position. Through distancing themselves from the discourses of Evangelical Christianity, those Christians who align themselves with *emerging* doctrine are themselves reaching out to others who are themselves excluded and alienated. As we see repeated time and again in conversion narratives, isolation and exclusion are characteristics most frequently associated with the *lost*.

Unlike the rather vague, broad sense of audience expressed by the women in the previous chapters, Gabby asserted during her interview that she writes mainly for her "non-Christian mates". She hopes to "show a different side" to Christianity to those who might otherwise feel, as she has, that the message is not intended for them. Her use of Facebook is important in maintaining this cross-over between her offline social network and the encounters that she generates through her *blog*. Gabby announces new *blog posts* with updates to her Facebook *profile*. Facebook is well subscribed among my informants; the platform seems to embroil many users in networks created through a mixture of obligation, past association, social expediency, and conventional friendship. Members of large churches, particularly those who hold roles within the church that bring them into regular contact with other members, tend to have friendship lists running to hundreds of individuals. The text of Gabby's *blog* suggests a rather different network to the broader, more public, friends list of her Facebook *profile*, but it is one that is no less constituted through practice. Contributors to the *comments* section that follows her *posts* often mention that the events, thoughts, and feelings recounted echo their own experience, and Gabby habitually replies to this correspondence by

encouraging her commenters to consider starting *blogs* of their own. In her *blog* we see the formation of a network created through narrative identification.

Ochs and Capps (1996: 31) assert that "communion with others, ephemeral and fleeting as it may be, is the greatest potential of narrative". Gabby, who has found her Christian life to be marked by a persistent sense of isolation, has sought to express and generate empathy and understanding with others through her writing. Gabby related in her personal *testimony* the progress she has made from feelings of loneliness and emptiness to a surety in the love that she receives from God. These same concerns continue to shape her writing. Stromberg (1993) argues that the conversion narrative works as a ritual that attempts to ameliorate the habitual concerns and dilemmas of the believer. In their stories and the performance of them believers place their mundane experience into the shared, "canonical" narratives and ontologies of Christianity. Just as the narrative comes to immediate presence in the moment of sharing, the moment becomes "constituted" in the narrative. "Communion" between Gabby and her readers may well spring from the personal stories that she is able to share. At the same time, the meeting of her own voice and that of others is in itself the creation of a living story.

The Narrative and the Network

During the spring of 2011 Gabby was busy working with the wife of the pastor of All Saints, her new church, organising events for the homeless community in Brighton. The two had also been meeting regularly to pray that funding might become available for Gabby to work in the congregation in a more permanent role. In the first week of April her church opened up its cellar for use as a '24/7 prayer room', during which time

people could come into the church at any time to use the room for prayer and contemplation. The room itself was covered with cushions for comfort, and hanging drapes decorated the walls. When Gabby visited it, the pastor of her church had recently posted to Twitter a message about his upcoming sermon on Isaiah 58:12, the text of which is reproduced below. Gabby, sitting in the room in prayer, thought of the message and experienced a rare – for her- sense of her own presence within a broader Christian story. A few days later she recounted this experience via her *blog*.

Repairer of Broken Walls

Isaiah 58:12 Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.

[...]

A few days ago, I was with someone who was incredibly grateful for me spending a couple of hours with them. ME?! It was a humbling and slightly uncomfortable experience where someone seriously thought that I had more important things to be doing. It took me back to those feelings of unworthiness, the belief that another human being wouldn't really want to spend time with me. I can take for granted how those feelings are not there today. The changes in my life have been so gradual and subtle to the point that I fail to see them until others point them out. It's called restoration.

In <u>Narcotics Anonymous</u> they say 'the therapeutic value of one addict

helping another is without parallel'

This week I was able to clearly see God purposes for my life. I don't

mean that all of a sudden I heard an audible voice calling me to be a

missionary overseas or become a nun. I did see how all our past

experiences can be used to give hope to others, bring light to the dark,

rebuild and restore. God accepts us exactly as we are, we can do

nothing to please him. He sees our hearts, our wounds, our destructive

behaviours and he accepts and loves us. We are called by him to bring

that exact same patient, accepting and forgiving heart to others. God

uses us in ways we can't ever foresee or imagine.

Our past hurts and stories become gifts in his plan to repair all things broken.

When I asked Gabby about the experience that led to this post she described a sudden

realisation that "God sort of had me there for a reason. Not as a big 'I'm a Christian and

you need to be one!' but just as a sort of role model, and someone who has changed but

not in a really big verbal vocal kind of full on way." The description of herself as having

"changed", but not in a "verbal vocal" way reaffirms her distaste toward the prioritising

of verbal evangelism above other ministries and expresses beyond this a shifting

understanding of the value of her own presence to others. Equally significant is her

designation of herself as a "role model", a phrase that suggests shared experience and

narrative trajectory.

Blogs organise the output of their speakers along the dimension of time (Reed,

2005: 227; Myers, 2010). Posts appear to the reader in chronological order, arranged to

read down the page from the most recent to the least, creating a dimension of temporal proximity that runs down the text. In this post, the positioning of the speaker in time is emphasised by the presence of voices from the past. The passage from Isaiah, which Gabby uses to start the post, is an obvious example. The passage had been brought to her attention by her pastor, and had come alive for her as she prayed beneath the church building. Gabby's location during this particular encounter seems significant. All Saints church meets in a large, Gothic revival structure that is approaching its second centennial. Years of under-funding by a dwindling congregation had led to growing structural and cosmetic problems with the building that its new inhabitants are now seeking to remedy. Fresh coats of paint have been applied to the walls, doors, and notice-boards outside the church and scaffolding climbs the inside walls at the back of the nave. The trope of restoration also seems to have taken on a wider significance for the members of All Saints. The church building is located in an area noted by council planners and local area police teams as representing a serious problem with drug abuse and street drinking. The quote is therefore apt in a material and metaphorical sense, and also resonated strongly with Gabby on a more personal level. Gabby encounters people in this area who she has known from various recovery programs, and who she knew when she was still a user.

The clear delineation of the voice of Scripture in this post, placed in quotation marks at the top of the entry, before Gabby herself has begun to speak, is in contrast with the more uncertain boundary between Gabby and the "someone" with whom she shared a meeting. Although Gabby began to write after having become a Christian, previous versions of her self litter the *posts*. In other entries we learn that she was a friendly child, a rebellious teenager, an anxious young woman. In her first post, Gabby confronted a stand-in for her old Christianity. Here the presence of the other evokes the

previous form of Gabby's own self. In an text that echoes in many ways her conversion narrative, Gabby suggests to the reader of this *post* that the unhappiness and unworthiness of the self is met with constant understanding and loving acceptance by God. She follows this by telling us that "we are called to bring that exact same... heart to others", hinting once again at the recursive nature of the text. Gabby is not simply telling us about an encounter that she had with a woman who reminded her of herself, she is inviting us to take part in it. In line with the standard assumptions of Evangelical outreach, Gabby attributes to her readers also the unhappiness, the sense of hidden sadnesses that we would share if we could (see also Griffith, 1997: 110), and assures us that "our hearts, our wounds, our destructive behaviours" need not separate us from God.

Gabby's writing suggests to readers, in its form as well as content, that the transformation of these inner states and personal experiences is possible. "Past hurts and stories", brought before others, "become gifts in His plan to restore all things broken". An effect of this practice of converting experience to text has been a sense of her own continuity across time. Gabby is able to reach out from her present to her past in her writing, and in doing so to describe and provide form to the narrative path that she hopes others will take. The inclusion of a further voice from her past in the quote from Narcotics Anonymous demonstrates this clearly, and draws equivalence between the recovery of the drug user and the conversion of those who are born again. In each case the identification of the self invokes the past as a continual present, "addicts" remain addicts even after years of sobriety, and are therefore in a position to identify with and help those still in need (see Cain, 1992). It would be difficult to think of a statement more directly contradictory to the example given by Roger of how Christians should define themselves and their mission than "one addict helping another". It is in the

context of this narrative, however, that Gabby has experienced and continues to experience herself as connected to God.

In a later *post*, Gabby mentions the comment from the member of her previous church that she was "becoming too liberal and too works-based". Hindsight has led her to her own reflections on the matter, and she asserts that she "wasn't 'becoming' anything..that is me..that is who I am, always have been, and probably always will be." Of course, if we are to follow phenomenological thinking then we must allow that the sense of herself as "not *becoming* anything" is in itself a production. It seems significant in this respect that she continues to invoke her own story in her daily practice and outreach to others, both online and off. Some weeks after she posted this I interviewed Gabby for the final time, and found her in good spirits. A few days previously, she had received word from her church that funding had become available for her to join the staff at the congregation. In her new role at the church, she will be working with those who have attended soup kitchens and outreach programs but are not yet Christian, working one-on-one with those "on the margins", as she put it, of her congregation.

Narrative

The concept of 'identity' often refers, at least in its social scientific use, to the capability of the self to live in a shared social narrative. These personal ascriptions are viewed, for instance, as a rallying point for social protest or the result of a particular historical event (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000) For the Christians I work with, the narrative aspects of the term are foregrounded; the world is divided into believers and the *lost*, those "called" to

lead and to preach, those whose *heart* has brought them to particular ministries. *Emerging* critiques establish further narrative divides, as they question the right, based on incommensurable biographies, for the authoritative voices of Evangelical Christianity to speak for them. In previous chapters, I have argued that women position themselves as living illustrations of, rather than mouthpieces for, *the Word*. In her textual practice Gabby has written her history and current experience into circulation as a gift for others.

The themes of selfhood and transformation are tied to one another in studies of the internet almost as frequently as they are by Evangelicals. The prediction seems to be that, faced with environments in which the perceptible presence of inhabitants is their own active creation; many users will choose to be something other than what they already are. In this chapter I have discussed a woman who has come to affirm the continuity in her self. Miller and Slater (2000: 11) speak of identities that have achieved "expansive realisation". One of the chief findings of their early ethnography, and one that I have found echoed throughout this thesis, is that, rather than being experienced as an entirely new kind of context, the experience that users have of the internet is of a technology that closely mirrors "pledges they have made to themselves" about who they are (Miller & Slater, 2000: 11). When we focus in on particular users, and include in the frame their own personal stories, we find that this expansion also takes place along the dimension of time.

Gabby came to Christian faith following a sermon in which she heard and understood for the first time the story of the Prodigal Son. The story is a favourite among many of my informants, and is frequently recounted in contexts of Evangelical outreach. In the tale (Luke 15: 11-32) a man leaves the home of his wealthy father and squanders his inheritance in "wild living". Destitute, he makes for home with the

intention to repent and ask for employment in service to the family he rejected. As he approaches the his family home, however, he is seen "from a long way off" by his father, who, "filled with compassion" runs to meet him, embraces him, and assures him that he is loved. Gabby's insistence that she was not "*becoming*" anything can be read in the light of this story. The Prodigal Son is not the tale of a man who changes and is saved, but one who finds that, in spite of his faults and failings, he was loved all along. Her *blog* has become for Gabby a site for sharing, reflection on one's past, and healing and through these processes she continues to materialise this narrative, for herself and for others. For Gabby this work feels like a restoration. The experience she had of herself as isolated and marginalised, indeed the story of this alienation, has become the means of her own spiritual restitution.

Conclusion: Having Meaning

Introduction

The construction of "the internet" by the Christian web users in this ethnography has become incorporated into a broader project of creating the self. In the previous chapters, I have described the use of the internet as a technology of self-creation. The stories of Katie and Leah introduce the possibility that the move between online and offline contexts may aid or hinder the Christian as she seeks to build a more coherent experience of selfhood. As I argue in chapter 4, this continual forging of coherence ensures that this activity is given form that is meaningful according to existing expectations of the interaction of flesh and word. Finally, I examined in chapter 5 the implication of these activities for the portraits that women build of themselves. In this concluding chapter I consider these properties of coherence, embodiment, and narrative presence in further detail. Following semiotic perspectives, I discuss the manner in which these women and their fellow adherents generate a sense of their verbal practice as *meaningful* and their own selves as *signs* of divine presence.

It is not necessarily the case that all of the women will find the same narratives appealing. In chapter three, for instance, Leah reproduces the genres through which she first came to be secure in her adult faith. Fran, whose story is recounted in chapter four, attempts to generate a text that will strike its reader with the sudden power of God that they will find, as she did, impossible to deny. What the women share in their narrative

practice is a sense of movement from the outside in. All of the stories in this thesis can be read as stories of peripherality in one form or another, and, in line with wider norms of Charismatic speech, the women in the previous chapters circle in their online speech around the circumstances of their own conversion. The conventional form of the born-again conversion *testimony* emphasises a move from a disconnection perceived on social, spiritual, and emotional levels to a wholeness and integration that has come from a personal relationship with God. This is a movement that takes place across time as well as space, bringing women to a centre from which they can speak to the margins and a present from which to address the past.

These positions are only occupied temporarily. Gabby speaks both as someone who has come through the pain of recovery from addiction, and as someone who is an addict. Leah is both certain in her mediation of secular and Christian discourses, and unsure as to how the two can be reconciled. In either case, there is a spiritual value to this movement between categories. In her account of fundamentalist conversion, Harding (1987) describes the essential movement of the believer, from a position of doubt to one of belief. Feelings of marginality and isolation are brought to bear with massive weight on the would-be believer, who comes, through her own internalisation of the language of conversion, to a powerful, joyful, sense of reconciliation. As suggested by the discussion of previous authors and the findings of this thesis, however, the business of conversion is never fully completed (Coleman, 2003). The reinforcement of these positions of inside and outside requires their on-going performance.

Throughout the thesis I have drawn on ideas of embodiment and presence and coherence to describe the ways that selfhood is imagined and re-imagined according to the possibilities of the communicating self-in-the-world. The centrality of the

conversion narrative in providing an architecture of embodied experience and imagery to this movement between Spiritual categories processes hints at the possible outcome of this online activity. The key movement, in Harding's famous account of Fundamentalist rhetoric and conversion, is that between senselessness and certainty. In some ways, the work of defining gender is in itself the work of creating these categories. Harding (2000: 181) suggests that the strict hierarchical separation of men and women in the fundamentalist Christianity that she studied was modelled upon a "still more essential" distinction between those who interpret the will of God and those who receive these interpretations, between "teacher and taught". Women, in her study as in my own, are primarily positioned as taught. This is not however a passively embodied essence but a state of being that is actively created. From Fran's willingness to incorporate unexpected divine interjections (chapter 4: 122) into her blogging to Katie's desire to revisit and revise previous *posts* through an ever increasing understanding of God's commands (chapter 3: 99), these women are extensively engaged with the possibility of their own receptiveness. The use of the internet by these women contributes to the broader project of conversion, the creation and experience of a self that resists its own emptiness as it takes on meaning.

The Life of Meaning

Let us return to the *Alpha* evening that I described in chapter 1 of this thesis. Materials advertising and accompanying the course attribute an incompleteness to their readers. One particularly prominent slogan associated with the *Alpha* ministry reads: "The meaning of life is ____." This unfinished statement can be seen displayed on the posters

that grace advertising hoardings and the noticeboards outside churches participating in the programme, inviting readers to begin to begin to engage with the programme in their first encounter with its advertising, by mentally completing the phrase. The slogan also forms the basis for video advertisements that are designed to run in cinemas and be distributed through the internet. One such video is titled "Office dress for success".

Throughout the 47 seconds of the video most of the screen is filled with a mock-up of a search engine. The soundtrack plays noises of typing, distant conversations, and the ringing of telephones, suggesting an office environment. The sound of typing becomes louder as words start to fill the empty search bar. The invisible typist searches for "Power suits" and is taken to a page of results, before searching again for "shoulder-pads" and then "getting away with shoulder pads". Her activity comes to a halt when we hear the sound of a male voice: "Jane, when you're done, could I have a few minutes in my office please?" There is a pause before the typing resumes. "Did anyone see me search shoulder pads?" followed by "clearing my search history". Finally, this rather comical and familiar scene of workplace procrastination ends, as the protagonist enters a search for "meaning of life" and upon clicking the 'search' button, is presented with a *link* to the Alpha website. The screen fades to white, and the slogan "Fill in the blanks at Alpha.org" appears. When we look more closely at the ideas and practices that circulate as part of this ministry and the wider Evangelical culture from which it springs find a broader preoccupation with completion. Within Evangelical and particularly Charismatic Evangelical churches, speakers describe their own selves as becoming filled.

The linguistic conventions of the conversion narrative establish the character of the unsaved self as radically lacking. Those giving testimonies describe with striking regularity their former lives as "hollow" and "empty", their bodies as "shells", their

faces as "masks" and their engagement with others as "superficial". This inner emptiness is combined with an impermanence and restlessness in their engagement with the world. The unsaved may "slip through the cracks" of church life like water, or "wander astray" like sheep. They do not know who they are and attempt to project a veneer of happiness and security over an inner landscape of turmoil and hopelessness. Given the general Charismatic habit of projecting an audience of the *lost* in cases where no non-Christians are physically present (see chapter 2: 66-67), the ready endowment of this category of person with a sense of impermanence, uncertainty, and tenuousness is understandable. The feeling of emptiness experienced by the unsaved self is understood to be often accompanied by an attempt to fill this inner void with substance, whether this is drugs and alcohol, as cited in a great number of testimonies, or the accumulation of "things". Whether the substances abused in this manner are narcotic or status-driven, they are replaced by the same thing. The missing core at the centre of these vacant selves is signification itself; the new Christian finds the hole that was once at the centre of her being to have become flooded with *meaning*.

The personal transition charted in these narrative architectures, from "empty" self to the meaningful life of Christian belief, raises interesting questions in the light of our habitual understanding of meaning as attributed from the perceiving self to the exterior matter of the world. How can it be that the individual experiences her own self as first lacking, and then fundamentally endowed with meaning?

Meaning is a concept that is central to the anthropological lexicon and yet has been found, possibly as a result of this centrality, to be difficult to pin down to its own definition (Tomlinson & Engelke, 2006). For Christians in the UK the word *meaning* is most frequently used to denote an ideal of accuracy in representing the will of God as it is revealed through the Bible and the living texts of *prophecy* and prayer. Preachers and

teachers will expound at length, for instance, on the 'correct' meanings of words such as 'submission' or 'sin' or 'preach' or 'marriage'. The concept of meaning, in this context, bears relation to the idea of sincerity (see chapter 1: 10-11; Keane, 2002). Just as sincere speech reveals the inner *heart* of the speaker, meaningful speech reveals the presence and the heart of God. This idea spills out from discussions of translation until the very lives of Christians and the *lost* alike can be brought into the same frame of reference through a single question; does my life have meaning?

The God of Christianity, according to the followers I have worked with, is a master semiotician. He perceives clearly the hidden intentions that guide the actions of believers and sinners alike, and encodes all of His creation with the message of His own presence. A staple of the homes of Evangelical Christians and the decoration of websites and churches alike are photographs of soaring mountains and seascapes and forests that have quotes from scripture superimposed on top of them. These images imply that the beauty of the natural world is a message to be received. In practical terms meaning itself is elided with God, as processes in which the presence and intention of God is sought are themselves processes of interpretation. Deciphering *tongues* or understanding obscure Bible verses or judging the ways in which a prayer has been answered from events that take place in everyday life are acts in which God is directly present and experienced. Even where meaning is not currently recoverable there is an assurance that one day it will be. Christians often remark that there are three answers to prayer, "yes", "no", and "wait". The intention of God in all matters will eventually become plain (Harding, 1987).

At present, however, we see through a glass, darkly (1 Cor. 13:12). Where human beings attempt to construct their own meaning, the results are spiritually bankrupt and potentially catastrophic. As Christians construct meaning as a property

that must be constantly sought in life, they simultaneously establish the possibility of meaninglessness (see Robbins, 2006). As church structures fall into ruin and families become fragmented more fundamental architectures collapse. On several occasions Christian friends commented that words "nowadays" hold no stable meanings. Current Evangelical concerns regarding the possibility of gay marriage are framed in terms of the potentially deleterious effect of changing the 'definition' of marriage. In this context, Postmodernism has become identified not as a body of theory but as a unified ideology that seeks to overturn the very possibility of truth through shared meaning, and in so doing separates humans from one another. In a post for the *Justify* blog Leah argues that if postmodern understandings of meaning as relative are correct, "we cannot relate to one another on any deep level". If all human attempts to create meaning for themselves are destined to failure, signification is the extent to which we can act. This principle is demonstrated in the following extract, taken from a *Preach* delivered at Jubilee

God made us to be spiritual, not just cut off from God, not

merely human, not merely fleshly. But spiritual. Spiritual

doesn't mean that you're unnatural, means that you're more

natural. You're more able to- to live your- more able to do your

finances do your family do your job. Do your career, do

whatever in a way that is truly human. Cause you're able to

show God off. Nature is God's way of showing off. And I don't

just mean in a sunset or a waterfall, I mean in you and your

nine-to-five. In the daily rigmarole of your life you get to show

God off. That's being spiritual, truly spiritual, it's very down to

earth, and it's full of God.

Is that what you are?

You cannot *make* someone else become a Christian, I was frequently informed, you can

only 'point towards' God in Christian life. In the same way, you cannot *make* Godly

meaning. You can only embody it.

What *is* the meaning of life? Those who attend the Alpha course expecting a

straightforward answer are likely to be disappointed. No definitive response is

proposed, although its prominence in advertising materials suggests that course

architects feel that the question is a central concern of the course. At the end of the ten

or so weeks over which Alpha runs, those who have completed the programme are

invited to consider volunteering to help with hosting discussions for the next round. The

role of the host is not only to facilitate discussion but to serve as a living *witness* to

guests of God in life. Anthropologists have noted that different kinds of spiritually

significant objects may be handled according to a shared cultural logic. Among

Quakers, for instance, forms of speech may echo wider preferences for aesthetic

"plainness" that can be seen in the manner in which adherents spend their money and

decorate their homes (Coleman & Collins, 2000: 324). For Charismatic Christians, great

value is placed upon the circulation of spiritually significant artefacts in large-scale,

expanding networks (Coleman, 2000). Meaning, in this context, is only held so that it

can be shared. All of the women, when I asked them why they published their writing

online, made some reference to "showing" or "pointing towards" God through their

writing. As I noted in earlier discussion of the analysis of media (chapter 1: 10),

although it is difficult to judge the success of this project through speaking in turn to each person that has received these texts, we can look to the practical means through which the sense of the broadcasting self is achieved from the perspective of the broadcaster. Although it is difficult to assert the final "meaning of meaning" (Tomlinson & Engelke, 2006: 7), we can make claims on the manner in which this category of practice is experienced. The case studies described in the previous three chapters correspond to some important interrelated characteristics of the meaningful.

Coherence

Within the evangelising cultures of the Christians I worked with, Internet technologies are broadly seen as a tool for the transmission of messages that would otherwise remain restricted in their reach. This remarkable extension comes at a cost. Unlike the sharing of *Words* in church services and meetings (see chapter 4: 127-130), there is no authoritative filter on these transmissions to ensure that they fulfil criteria of accuracy or coherence. The primary danger of the internet, therefore, is confusion and misinformation. Just as the internet user connecting on her own may fall prey to attacks from viruses and fraud, there is the very real danger of coming into contact with messages that are damaging in their departure from the 'really Christian'.

In this context, teachers and leaders seem to be making increasing efforts to encourage a degree of conformity and stability in the engagement of Christian laity with the internet. For all that the internet is understood to take on massive scale in its social potential, there is a sense in which everyone "goes online" alone. In this solitary practice the believer may find an echo with the ritual habitus of Charismatic life.

Charismatic Christians sharing *worship* face forward in rows with their eyes closed or focused on the words on the screen, making out of the shared song parallel engagements with God. This parallel lends some broader ritual significance to the rather striking agreement around web practices that I found within congregations. Although there is indeed a quite dizzying variety of Christian sources that can be found online, most seemed to congregate around a shared core of websites that provided a familiar backdrop. Gabby (see chapter 5: 155-157) may have reported herself as indignant when her own online practice was marked as a site for intervention by fellow church-members, but when we consider the importance of media consumption as both an expression and an initiator of unity in the congregation it becomes understandable. Just as her unknown interlocutor had feared, Gabby's search for different kinds of material to engage with signalled a metaphorical, and soon literal, falling away from the church community.

Shared engagement enables the experience of shared understanding. In chapter one I described the practices of Katie and Leah, whose online practices circle around the issue of coherence. Within the cultures of contemporary Evangelical Christianity, coherence is a highly marked category of practice. Everyday rituals of prayer, reading the Bible, and speaking about faith performs connections; of disposition between church life and home life, of emotional experience between believers and those who remain unsaved, of mutual interpretability between the books of the Bible. Practices of engagement with scripture seem to provide a particularly compelling framework for online engagement. Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, a rather hefty volume that sits on the bookshelves of many of my more conservative informants, lends an insight into this interpretative tradition. Grudem (2000: 21) emphasises the importance of "application to life" in the introduction to his book, and communicates a confidence in

the suitability of this hermeneutic method, assuring readers that by collecting and summarising all Scriptural reference to a given issue "we know what to believe about [it]". The systematic style is demonstrated in *preaches* which take as their focus a particular topic such as 'Christianity in the Workplace' or 'Spiritual Authority', and present a synthesised voice of the Bible on the issue. The key message of these practices, beyond individual instances of spiritual prescription and proscription, is that Christianity is systematically comprehensible.

The majority of my informants seemed to take this lesson to heart, and bring it to bear on daily internet engagement. In their various church roles, occupations, and social relationships many use the internet as a resource through which to consider the correct, *Biblical,* perspective on issues such as alcohol consumption or workplace conflict. Biblegateway.com, an online database allowing the searching of scripture according to key words, was a particularly popular resource for this kind of ad hoc doctrinal consultation. Hypertext and search engines ensure that answers can be summoned as soon as questions are asked. Sites like Bible Gateway replace previous Bible concordances, and bring to the immediate experience of Christians the presence of God as a coherent source from which systematic knowledge proceeds.

Although the necessity of coherence was a powerful trope in the interviews and practices of many of the women and men that I spoke to, it was perhaps most clearly reflected for me in conversations with Leah (chapter 3). Leah had graduated from university shortly before I met her, and like many of her fellow adherents pursued a notably studious approach to her faith. This is perhaps a growing inclination in *New Calvinist* churches, whose members are encouraged to become extremely knowledgeable of doctrinal and *apologetic* readings of scripture, and who increasingly refer to church sites as "campuses". For Leah the internet is a site of learning and

debate. Her contributions to the *Justify blog* serve to place her in the same encounters that she confronts as she listens to debates between Christians and atheists or engages with unbelieving friends on Facebook. The use of the internet as a tool for education has been widely noted since its inception. In its Christian use, the on-going dialogue and debate that is hosted on *comments* lists and Wikipedia articles and YouTube videos fosters an experience within these Christian cultures of God as both knowable and becoming known.

The properties of coherence and knowability implied in these practices must extend also to the phenomenological experience of selfhood that they engender in their participants. Towards the end of chapter 3 (p. 108-109), I note that Leah finds echoes of her own self in the story of a woman who has lost her anchor. The subjects of the previous chapters seem to find the most comfort in taking the position of personal narrator, the speaking position that, in this Evangelical context as in many others (Lawless, 1983; 2003) is most open to women. All of the women use their *blogs* as sites to incorporate emotions and events from their own lives into wider systems of Biblical lessons and shared revelation. The lesson is strikingly conveyed in Katie's *testimony.* In the content of her *post* she places her daily selection of clothing in terms of fundamental messages about her relationship to God and the terrestrial carriers of His authority. But again, the manner of the engagement here suggests the same comprehensibility that we see with the searching of Leah, as she actively performs modesty in the deferred wisdom and humble voice of her own writing. If in the words of Markham's (1998: 202, see chapter 4: 116) informant, it is possible to be "beautiful" online, it is also possible to be vain.

The forging of coherence in practical action has been addressed through Bourdieu's embodied theories of habitus and the specifically located interlocutors of

Bakhtin's literary theory. Writing in such a way as to affirm and re-stage the religious commitments of everyday life is a pleasurable experience (chapter 3: 103-104). 'Online' and 'offline' are not experienced in separation, and indeed are brought into coherence through the demands of Evangelical continuity and the everyday performance of these demands in practice and reflection. Through this, the emerging realms of inner life and external world, projected in practice that describes the inner *heart* to a broader audience, are performed in a manner that emphasises their fundamental parity. This is less and less a site of chaotic and unstable meaning but rather a means through which the selfhood of its Christian users becomes actively experienced as fundamentally knowable as part of a wider system.

Embodiment

A second aspect of meaningful items that is particularly marked in Charismatic styles of faith is their embodiment. In chapter 4, I discussed these with reference to Fran and Patricia, whose stories raise interesting questions for commonplace understandings of the internet as a realm of disembodied action. With the exception of a few studies (e.g. Miller & Slater, 2000; Leander & Lovvorn, 2006; Malaby, 2009) the great bulk of previous social science of the internet has taken as its primary, if not sole, focus the events taking place within the web browser. There is a good reason for this. Burrell (2009), who has worked in internet cafés in Accra, describes the withdrawing from presence of the people whom she sat next to as she observed the life of these cafés. The offline presence of her informants became, she tells us, "muted and hollow" as they sat in their seats, engrossed by the screen (Burrell, 2008: 188). This is a compelling phrase

and certainly accurately represents the scene that many of us will be familiar with of strangers and friends and our own selves transfixed in front of backlit monitors to the exclusion of the events taking place in embodied vicinity. In this project, however, I have found that the transmission of messages via the internet can create a parallel embodiment.

The kind of 'online church' discussed in various studies of religious internet use (e.g. Campbell, 2005a; Schroeder et al., 1998) was accepted as a valid possibility by a handful of my informants, notably Patricia who described her own transmissions as contributions to an "unseen church" (chapter 4: 135), but was viewed with caution by most of those whom I spoke to. In their discussions of this assessment my informants usually took pains to define 'church' in terms of shared physical co-presence. In one preach a pastor at Emmanuel made this clear: "I can read about Christians in other parts of the world and know that we are part of the same body of Christ but unless I can *embrace* them and shake their *hand*, it's not really church." There is something about being, physically, in the same space that is of spiritual salience, such that a gathering of people in the form of physically dispersed and possibly asynchronous text, as we see online, cannot be considered to be valid. Despite this widespread understanding of the limits of 'cyberspace' as a spiritual setting, I did find that the internet was considered to have an important phenomenal dimension. Though it does not make the material viewable within the browser a separate setting, it does something to the presence of Christians in a wider world.

In chapter 1 I described the making of the Christian world through thematically linked practices of communication. Since their respective conversions both Fran and Patricia have somewhat paradoxically experienced their own presence in this Christian world in terms of a troubling lack of it. Patricia describes *house groups* in which she

"couldn't get a word in edgeways" and Fran remains haunted by the knowledge that there exists a "great pathos of women that's unseen unheard". The specific accounts of marginalisation provided by Fran and Patricia are particularly coloured by their experiences as unmarried, working-class women yet the broad outlines of their complaint of being stranded on the edges of communal life are much more commonly heard among British Christians. Evangelical preachers and writers often urge their audiences to take to their everyday experience the common born-again declaration that believers are to be "in, but not of, The World". Throughout this thesis I have described the sense of everyday alienation generated as my informants share encounters with the hostility and apathy of those around them. This is always discussed as a lack of presence. My informants describe Christianity as "squeezed out" of British culture, "side-lined" in national debate, and treated as an "irrelevance" by most people. One older man whom I interviewed remarked that it must be quite a culture shock to start researching Christianity from my own non-Christian background. "Because if you just read the news and look at the television you'd think this isn't a Christian country any more, but once you scratch the surface the Church is everywhere."

If we accept that the internet is not viewed in separation to the settings of everyday life but as a continuation of them, the appeal of these technologies for Evangelical Christians is clear. Through the daily use of the internet, Christians in secular societies are indeed able to come into contact with a world in which Christianity is the dominant force. Many of my informants seemed particularly captivated by the capacity of internet platforms to translate engagement into numbers and it was not uncommon to hear these figures repeated joyfully by those using the internet to engage in corporate or more personal ministries. The conversion of audience to numbers, both in publication figures or bodies in the Sunday morning service, is very common among

these churches, and significantly simplifies the proselytising field. The numbers of people present at *Alpha* or at a Sunday service, although they may all have been Christian, are seen as an indication of a transformative potential held by the words. In internet technology, in which audiences are largely faceless and unknown but can be quantified in terms of page-views or *hits*, this allows the experience of presence in terms of remarkable potential. In 2009 a *preach* delivered at a church in Brighton on the subject of prayer gained international attention after being *linked* to by conservative Evangelical writer John Piper through his Twitter feed. Over the next 24 hours more than a thousand people downloaded the sermon. The British *blogger* Adrian Warnock commented on this development with typical enthusiasm. "Imagine the impact of just some of them putting into practice what they learned and **pursuing God more vigorously** in prayer[16]"

This potential brings with it a tension, however. In cases where the audience member does make his or her presence felt, there is the possibility that the univocality and coherence of the Christian text will become disrupted. Miller and Slater, writing in 2000, reflect on the possibility that internet use will disrupt traditional lines of authority in religious movements. In a religious setting in which authority is intimately tied to the distribution of words, this is perhaps a particularly pressing concern. Several of the *blogs* that I read as part of my research, particularly those associated with the *New Calvinist* movement, did not allow *comments*. Writers who chose to restrict the standard functionality of *blogs* in this way usually explained their decision with reference to the large number of *comments* that they received, and the impracticality for them of

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[16]

     Warnock, A. (2009) 'How the influence of John Piper and the power of Twitter promoted prayer', *Adrian Warnock,* Available at: http://adrianwarnock.com/2009/07/how-influence-of-john-piper-and-power/ [accessed 19th April 2012] (bolding original).

policing the discussions they contained. The particular frequency of this practice among writers within this tradition of conservative Scriptural interpretation and constant striving for 'objective' readings of scripture, however, suggests that the desire to control the shape of the information presented may be a consideration.

In the massive discursive spaces created by globally ubiquitous internet platforms such as YouTube or Twitter, however, the seeming lack of centralised control over flows of comment and response may suggest the possibility of more supernatural intervention. I described in chapter 4 the manner in which Patricia, a frequent and enthusiastic consumer of spiritual guidance via YouTube, related to the platform as a suitable venue for the practice of *Spiritual Warfare.* In her comments to me Patricia expressed a sense of the internet as a landscape that, "ahead" of *The World,* gave an indication of what it could shortly expect. Other Christians whom I met during fieldwork would describe the hostile reaction to Christianity that they saw on the internet in similar terms. Online polls that showed local residents reacting with glee to proclamations of the city as Godless (see chapter 1: 29) or the antipathy towards Christianity voiced in *comments* lists beneath local news articles were frequently raised in discussions of the hostility of Brighton as a physical environment, and the hold of *the Enemy* over the town.

Continuity of embodied presence in the world with virtual texts is further indicated in the widespread incorporation of online practice into existing ritual technologies of self-sacrifice and denial. A great many of my informants impose personal bans on Facebook or Twitter over Lent, or enforce some form of digital Sabbath whereby all communications technologies are blocked for part of the week. Such practices indicate a personal investment and pleasure in the use of these platforms that is significant enough that their avoidance is an edifying form of self-denial. Fran

performs the link between religious discipline and internet use in a more positive manner, *blogging* for the past five years throughout the entire Lenten period. In either way, it is the connection of these texts to the wider life of their users that gives their spiritual significance. Fran narrates a scene that resembles in many ways the pavement in which she stands in prayer, and Patricia reaches out to a receptive, active, "unseen church" -- entries that with their shifting audiences and broad appeals to regeneration enact recursively the Charismatic prayer events that they describe. A rather different experience of continuity can be seen in Leah's story, in which we see that the position assumed in online speech may lead to discomfort where the speaker experiences a disharmony between the kind of positions and locations that the speaker inhabits in offline ritual genres and those assumed in online speech. In either case, the goal of continuity between online and offline is affirmed.

Towards the end of chapter 4 I noted that each of these accounts has since disappeared from the internet. In the Charismatic context, spiritual meaning is made not only through the stability of the signification, so the same person demonstrates Christ whether she is at church or in a supermarket, but also through the stability of its physical form. Words that are ultimately authored by God are understood to be enduring. Preaching is a simple example. At Emmanuel Evangelical church there is a cupboard filled with rows of neatly labelled cassette tapes, going back decades, of Sunday sermons. Similar archives are held at the other churches in this study and conversion of old cassette recordings to digital formats is an on-going project at many Christian congregations. Church leaders and laity alike feel it is important that these events are preserved in a form that remains accessible for future listeners.

This kind of monumentality (see Miller, 2005: 16) is rarely achieved by female speakers. *Words of prophecy* are not generally recorded, nor are the contributions that

church members make during weekly *house groups*. Although testimonies can gain

significant stature in a congregation, and remarkable ones will be widely shared and

discussed by its members, it is only the most exceptional that will be recorded for 'use'

(see chapter 5: 151) in proselytising efforts. Most of the women I spoke to seemed

comfortable with this state of affairs. While acts of preaching are understood to contain

the voice of God, women understand their speech as fallible (see chapter 2: 86), and

rooted in personal experience and perspective. In this respect, they are happy for their

speech to circulate in a form that remains somewhat tied to their own person, whether in

daily conversation and embodied example, or through postings to personal *blogs,*

Facebook *walls*, and *forums*. Unlike the large Church-owned websites in which

preaches and the musings of prominent teachers are held, women's online speech is

rarely archived in sites over which the women have ultimate control. Although the

internet offers the possibility of materialising meaning for a wider audience, the texts

that I have examined remain somewhat tenuously anchored in sites that are owned by

others.

Where permanence is achieved it will be through replication. Common concerns

about the disappearance of online texts are balanced against the knowledge that

statements *posted* in online discussion may prove treacherously enduring. The ease with

which words can be copied and pasted to another location means that it is difficult to

contain the spread of speech, and words born of a moment of indiscretion or anger may

come back to haunt their author. The author of *Sticky Jesus*, a website which aims to

advise Christians on appropriate means of "living out faith" online, advises caution on

the part of those *posting* content to the internet; "Once [you] post something online, it's

out of [your] hands.[17]" Gabby's statements on her own words as a 'gift', however,

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[17]   Birdsong, T. (2012) "What Christian parents need to know about Facebook", *Sticky
Jesus,*. Available at: *http://stickyjesus.com/2012/01/what-christian-parents-need-to-
know-about-facebook/* [Accessed 12th May 2012]

demonstrate a more positive interpretation of this kind of spread. The women I work with are accustomed to the expectation that the manner in which they will pass on meaning is through their own likeness (chapter 2: 80-86). Reflective commentaries on previous work such as those that we see in Katie's (chapter 3: 99) writing suggests that these words have been inhabited for a time, but now stand empty of the writing self, who has since moved on. Speech, in this case, streams out behind the speaker, lending a sense of forward momentum to her Christian *walk* and offering a path for others.

Narrative Circulation

Harding (1987) describes the shared characterisation by her informants of conversion as a moment at which the previously listening self becomes a speaker. Her first act of speech will be the conversion narrative. Materials provided by the *Alpha* course agree with this accepted sequence of communication. The first thing to do after praying *the Sinner's Prayer* Christian is to "tell someone", specifically, to tell someone who "will be pleased to hear the news", by which we can assume the author means a Christian. This act places the speaker in community with those who have their own narratives. That my informants would typically attempt to elicit testimonies of conversion from others upon meeting for the first time (see chapter 1: 49) indicates the social function of these highly rehearsed accounts. We cannot explain the centrality of the conversion narrative in these uses of the internet without some consideration of the nature of these verbal creations. Internet technologies have been described, particularly by those studying their religious uses, as a means through which the immediate- in terms of time, space and the self-becomes transcended (e.g. Miller & Slater: 2000; O'Leary, 1996). In this study, the

mechanics of this transcendence are lent both shape and sense through narrative. Placed into on-going streams of exchange, the conversion narrative indicates a third value of the meaningful self, its circulation.

The Christian self should ideally exist in constant motion; faith is described by my informants as a movement towards, a *Walk* with God that is also the achievement of a nearness to him. Stasis and restriction are associated most frequently with the unsaved and with ineffectual ministry (see chapter 4: 131). As we see in the conversion narrative, one of the most significant directions of travel is from the outskirts to the centre. Such trajectories of movement are often presented by my informants as inevitable. Like the straightforward models of media consumption that present the reception of scripture and preaching as a form of ingestion rather than interpretation, things move simply and smoothly to a given destination. The move of Living Grace church, for instance from a school on the fringes of the city centre to a more prominent location, was widely discussed in the congregation in tones that presented this as the unswerving destiny of the church, despite the improbable (to my view) combination of funding and good fortune that would be required to secure such a site. Similar understandings of inexorable progress colour descriptions of the narrative activities of believers and non-believers alike. Perhaps the most disconcerting narrative trajectory that I came into contact with was the expectation by many of my informants (chapter 1: 52; see also Harding, 1987) that my extended contact with Born Again Christianity was sure to result in my own conversion. This inevitability of these movements from unsaved to saved is continually implied in Charismatic discussion of Evangelical outreach. In one prayer meeting the women present were asked to consider the "thousands of lives" that they would transform through upholding a generally Godly countenance and speaking to others about their experiences of God.

A great deal of labour is denied in these narrative trajectories. In order to take up residence in more desirable central location Living Grace must look for suitable properties and raise a very ambitious sum of money. In order to speak to friends and colleagues about their faith in Jesus the speaker must overcome the personal inhibition and awkwardness that many Christians confess they struggle with each time they try to share their faith, and often fail to master. Despite these repeated experiences of stalling the narrative of inevitable movement remains prominent in these churches; God will provide the funds, the insecure speaker will find her voice, the protesting fieldworker will discover the deeper truth that was really sought all along. The air of inevitability communicated as people predict these transformations is generated in their narrative positioning. Movements through physical, spiritual, and emotional space are also clearly marked along the dimension of time.

Blogging, the genre of personal writing embraced by all of these women, is a medium in which the author's output is organised according to time. Gabby's story of repeated alienation and repeated communion is not separated off to be spoken only in highly ritual or intimate settings, but streams out behind her as she uploads stories of the past and present to her *blog*. A standard move made by *bloggers* who have been writing for an extended period of time (see Reed, 2005: 231) is to review and reflect upon previous *posts*. For Christians who base such importance on concepts of personal growth and progressive renewal, these chronologically ordered snapshots of life, arranged from present to past, lend form to the trope of progress. Robbins (2007: 11-12) in an article on the continuity thinking that dominates anthropology and can therefore obscure Christian ideas of conversion and change, describes the dominant Christian view of time as "the BC/AD model". The cultural, emotional, and social landscapes of the past have been left behind as time itself is fundamentally altered; continuity has

been replaced by transformation. Gabby, aware that this is the dominant model in her own church but struggling to present or experience herself as entirely transformed, negotiates this fundamental divide between what was passed and what is now by rendering her own story part of a continuous present.

It is on the basis of this story that she, like the other women in this study, finds connection to others. We can return to Ochs and Capps's (1996: 31) compelling statement that "communion with others, ephemeral and fleeting as it may be, is the greatest potential of narrative". Certainly the manner in which many of these narrative technologies are becoming incorporated into Christian networks suggests a broadened possibility of interpersonal joining. In recent months many prominent *Emerging Church blogs* have begun to devote *posts* to the stories of people who have been hurt by church movements, often those of specifically *Calvinist*, *complementarian* congregations. One prominent *blog*ger who has collected and published a range of these narratives provides the following commentary; "Each time I check my email there's one more, one more person raising their 'digital' hand and saying 'that's my story too.'". Stories of inner anguish and daily suffering become searchable through key words (see chapter 3: 93) and provide in themselves a bridge through which to connect with other stories, as people embed hypertext *links* to other similar narratives in the text of their *posts* and organised lists.

All of this work is achieved in a manner that is understood and experienced as remarkably artless. Like the Catholic effigies of Christ whose human construction is denied (see Mitchell, 1997: 82, 90), these stories are said to speak to the world in ways that go beyond far beyond the possibilities of authorial intent. At a *house group* meeting one woman told Gabby that the performance of her *testimony* was perhaps more valuable as a tool for reaching the *lost* than even the most persuasive preach "because

you're just telling your story, and people can't really argue with that." As I have noted, my informants devote considerable social, emotional, and financial resources to the active transmission of their faith to others. There is however a broader *testimony*, the "living *testimony*" that is most particularly expected of women, and the verbal productions of these *bloggers*, in converting their offline lives to text, seem to fit within this barely spoken tradition more than the carefully crafted arguments put forward by male preachers. The dominance of genres of *testimony* suggests that the words are carrying a message beyond lexical denotation as they stand in for selves in these emerging environments.

We can shed greater light on these processes of unspoken transmission when we consider parallels with established analytical frameworks provided in discussion of cultural semiotics.

This making of meaning in the world through practices that assert stability and coherence, create embodiment, and ensure a circulation that is in itself meaningful are characteristic of wider processes of signification. Throughout this thesis, I have referred to the work of previous authors who describe the practices of Evangelical Christianity as allowing believers to experience themselves in elision with texts (e.g. Coleman, 2000; Lurhmann, 2004). In particular this work draws on the perspectives of Thomas Csordas and his project of relating phenomenology to semiotics (1994: ix). The Charismatic self gains understanding of the limits of her *prophetic* insight in both embodied experience and shared grammars of meaning. It seems to me that we can extend this project to understand the individual narratives of believers and the potentials opened up by the internet when we approach the believer, in her embodied meaning, integrated in the world as a kind of *sign.*

I Mean

In chapter 1 (p. 52) I described a posture of blankness that I tried to embody, particularly during prayer and periods of *worship* as it became clear to me that my reactions to Spirit-filled practices were of interest to my Christian friends. In this I was consciously avoiding a particular signification. The bodies of Christians during *worship* are given over to the expression of God's own presence inside them. This expressive encounter is staged in the physical gestures that many Christians see as typifying Charismatic *worship*; head tilted back*,* eyes closed, arms raised (see Coleman, 2000: 135). This posture is often accompanied by distinctive facial expressions, usually smiling and joyful but sometimes seeming more anguished and it is not unusual to see Christians singing with tears running from their closed eyes. These are performances of a deep conviction; witnessing the believer in *worship*, there can be no doubt that she *means* it (see also Ruel, 2005: 253). There are further significations to the praying self. Photographs and video of the congregation engaged in *worship* are a common sight in Charismatic churches, and feature on Church home-pages and promotional materials. For those assessing a church this is a useful shorthand. Such images indicate to the Christian viewer that the church in question is Spirit-filled and most likely features modern styles of Christian music in its service. Beyond this, the popularity of these images may stem from their ability to represent God. The closed eyes and raised hands of the congregation in *worship* depict a meeting with a God that resides within, above, and around them.

This is a posture that requires some cultivation. It is necessary to know the words of a song before it can be sung without the visual aid of a printed songbook or Power Point slides. Typically these churches work with a relatively small selection of

worship songs, certainly enough for a person to become familiar with after a few months of attending weekly services. It is at this stage that these words of praise and supplication have been internalised to such an extent that they can be performed and experienced as an expression of the *heart*. Although worshippers share a common repertoire of gestures and emotional display these are embodied by different members of the congregation with little hint of synchronisation. Prompted by unseen inspiration some will suddenly move to sit while others stand and lean forward with their head in their hands, or begin to pray out loud or speak in *tongues* as their neighbours sing. These enactments not only demonstrate possession *by* the Holy Spirit of God but also possession *of* this Spirit within the body and the mind. As Christians, they are filled with the Holy Spirit; as signs, they are filled with meaning.

The five women whose stories I have related are engaged in a negotiation and performance of their own signification. Each has approached this task somewhat differently depending on the theological orientations of her own stream of Christianity and the regimes of personal semiotics it upholds. Although my informants would for the most part recognise the other churches in this study and their members as "really Christian" (Cannell, 2005: 339), we can see in the work of these women differences in the manner in which the presence of God in the text and its author has been represented and conveyed.

Katie and Leah grew up in *Calvinist* congregations in which it is generally agreed that the best demonstration of God is found in the life of the transformed believer. The cultivation and maintenance of this remarkably altered selfhood requires the constant guidance of more experienced Christians and particularly those recognised as gifted with authority in teaching. In the case studies presented in chapter 3 we see work that is filled, as these young women are filled themselves, with reference to

guidance from noted and influential predecessors and the leaders of their own

congregation. Fran and Patricia identify themselves more closely with charismatic

movements whose members place great emphasis on the "signs and wonders"

associated with the Holy Spirit (see Bebbington, 1993: 232), and this is reflected in the

preoccupation with *prophecy* and the answering of prayer that runs through their

writing. These women, I would argue, spend much time establishing the materiality of

their online engagements so as to establish the suitability of the webpage as a site of

spiritual encounter and the typist as a vessel of the Holy Spirit. Gabby, whose writing is

discussed in chapter 5, struggled to experience and present her own redemption in

accordance with the norms of her previous congregation. She has been drawn instead to

the storytelling of the *Emerging Church*. Christians within this movement present the

work of the salvation as an ongoing enterprise in which believers and nonbelievers are

united. For these Christians, God is most powerfully manifest in acceptance and

reconciliation, and Gabby reflects this in her text as she offers these divine gifts to her

readers and herself.

Media products in these settings can be understood as technologies of

incorporation, bringing the unsaved and unregenerate individual into a transformed

relationship with God and the world (see also Modern, 2008). We can see this in the

book sold in the church foyer that explains congregational doctrine, or the *worship* song

that brings the single voice into harmony with those of the wider assembly, or the prayer

that turns the lonely speaker into an encounter with God. Such products describe the

perimeter and participants in the sanctified encounter and provide a route into it. In this

examination of the internet I am not looking to the internet, or individual webpages, as

tools for incorporation in their own right, although in many cases they are certainly

intended to function in this way. Rather, I have discussed the manner in which using the

internet has allowed the Christian believer to experience *herself* as such a technology. There is a precedent for this in Jesus, a figure who is sometimes referred to as *The Word;* a figure whose own life is a statement to be given assent in thought and modelled in deed (Pouillon, 1982). The inward-focus of the texts discussed in the previous chapters is not understood to reflect a static self-absorption. Speaking to readers who are positioned, very often, as past versions of themselves, these women offer a way forward. They are filled with meaning as they produce it for others.

This approach to the Charismatic stress on signification sheds light on the intense preoccupation with personal and corporate visibility that we see in Charismatic and Evangelical circles. It is common for Christians to pray or to be encouraged to pray that non-believers will be able to "see God in" them or for congregations to be advised by the preacher that "the *World* is watching" the church. In chapters 4 and 5, we see that this emphasis on visibility can be a struggle for believers, who in giving testimonies offer themselves as highly conspicuous embodiments of tropes of transformation and renewal that may not always coincide with their experience of their own selfhood. The conversion narrative seems particularly significant in this context, as it is in the moment of conversion that the speaker first begins what will become a lifelong process of converting physical and emotional experience into textual form (Harding, 1987). Here we see Evangelical Christians approach for themselves the postulated "opposition" between phenomenology and semiotics that is viewed by Csordas (1994: 282) as so problematic and press their own selfhood into the breach.

Discussions of gender within the social sciences are already replete with reference to the embodied form of the individual as a mode of signification (see Butler, 1990: 8). Feminist perspectives in anthropology have long noted that symbolic value is intertwined with the constellations of physical and hormonal traits that categorise social

persons into male and female (e.g. Ortner, 1974). Abu-Lughod, in her famous

ethnography of Bedouin women, found that the veils worn by the Bedouin women she

worked with leant further shape and expression to both their spiritually polluted status

and their concomitant striving for piety (Abu-Lughod, 1986: 137-142). Furthermore,

she described linguistic practice that fitted within these existing symbolic grammars.

The women she worked with carried the habitual veiling of their everyday dress into the

texts themselves, creating accounts of personal feelings that were self-effacing and

partially anonymised. I have found similar translation of embodied disposition into text

in the accounts of the women in this study. Women's lack of mobility in the

communicating terrains of the Spiritual world becomes embodied in their careful

restriction of their speech to the terrain of the self, and this restriction reinforces their

somewhat static condition. The work of Judith Butler in particular allows us to consider

something of the experience and value of these conversions for their authors. Working

within established genres of femininity allows women to experience coherence between

different settings, and can generate an experience of pleasure for the writer.

Butler's analysis of gender as a quality that is approximated rather than ever

fully realised in the forms of men and women seems to fit particularly well with

understandings of the sign as constantly negotiated in the contingencies of social and

historical change (see Butler, 1990: 8). In his extensive discussions on the significance

of materiality to representational grammars of cultural and religious life Keane (1997,

2003, 2007) places emphasis on the embodiment of meaning in substance. Keane

follows Pierce's semiotics in his model, describing the embedding of the central

Protestant value of sincerity in language practices and personhood, such that Christian

people and Christian words can come to be considered signs of God's presence. The

resemblance between the object and the social value that is – or is not- understood to

inhere within it is established in broad symbolic grammars of meaning, but also, and perhaps more significantly, in the way objects circulate in the world. Keane (2003) draws our attention particularly to the importance of *indexicality* as a mode of signification governing the recognition and meaning of signs. The material form of the sign and its enmeshment and circulation in social life play a role in its signification. As smoke serves as sign for the fire that caused it, the secure, happy Christian is a sign of God. This emphasis has much to tell us about the importance of the container of meaning for the meaning itself. The testimonies presented in this thesis indicate that Christians experience pressures to maintain presence in the world, coherence as part of a wider system, and their own narrative positioning in their pursuit of a life of meaning. If internet use depends on native practices and preoccupations, then it seems particularly valuable in any context to consider the "semiotic ideologies" (see Keane, 2003) that govern local understandings of meaningful selfhood.

This focus on signification also provides a lens through which to view the social negotiations that create the marginality of certain words. If attendance at church is the creation of certainty, then its loss can be understood as related to an absence from significant contexts. A standard observation of global Charismatic Christianities is the remarkable openness and democracy implied in the doctrines of the Holy Spirit (Robbins, 2004: 125-126). Everyone, according to typical Charismatic theology, *can* be blessed with the spirit of God in order to receive *Words* and effect change in the world. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that certain voices are habitually endowed with greater significance than others, and some struggle to gain any audience beyond their own private exchanges with God. The spiritual productions associated with women are considered, like any others, to be *potentially* significant when staged in bedrooms, private thought, and conversation with friends, but these settings, unlike the pulpit or

book or well-subscribed Twitter feed, do not confer additional weight to the symbolic grammars of outreach and transformation to which this style of speech appeals.

And so there are related difficulties in the attempt to become a sign. Firstly, difficulties in circulation, as one's own signification may be denied from without and the transmission of personal insight and conviction halted. Among the many frustrations that Fran reported to me, chief was that it was a general, unspoken, assumption among the vast majority of her co-religionists that the category of 'Christian' was exclusive of the category 'gay'. This judgement, she felt, had conferred a marginality upon her own status in the congregations she had been a member of that was echoed in evaluations made of the words that she attempted to share. The vision that she had of the angel (chapter 4: 140-141) gained no traction in her own congregation because the meaning that she had interpreted included elements that immediately invalidated its status as a carrier of God's presence. There are speakers and are understood within the wider Christian community to be beyond the possibility of incorporation.

This leads us to the second problem in experiencing the self as sign; that the status of the sign as such is subject to a degree of negotiation (Keane, 2003). This is the case with written and verbal communications, and is even more pronounced when the carrier of presence is not *the Word* but the speaking subject herself. To experience oneself in pure, unambivalent terms as a vessel of God is not an easy matter. As Gabby found out, even the most committed of new Christians may find herself lured by cigarettes, hampered by material or financial restrictions, or succumb to feelings of inadequacy. The stress in sermons and the need to constantly uphold one's own sanctification and avoid backsliding, the reversion to thoughts and activities associated with unbelief, suggests the concern that is felt more widely. The popular understanding of becoming 'born again' among Evangelical Christians is of a radical transformation of

the self through the progressive "in-filling" of the Spirit and character of God (Austin-Broos, 1997: 140). The feelings of inadequacy and sinfulness that permeate *preaches* and discussions of personal faith suggests that maintaining this sense of uncomplicated purity of meaning is difficult, although this may be what spurs its continual pursuit.

Channelling verbal practice through online technologies allows these interrelated problems of speech and circulation to be ameliorated. The reach of a given piece of inspired language is still related directly to the words that it contains, but the expanded field of engagement ensures that a greater number of people will be able to seek out the message that is transmitted. We might return to Katie's comments at the satisfaction that she received from learning that God had "used" her painful personal history to help others, or Gabby's (chapter 5: 165) description of "past hurts and stories" as "gifts". Events that she describes as confusing and unsettling in the first instance take on a broader meaning that they simply did not have before through bringing edification to others who are going through similar emotional journeys. Women who are heartbroken find Katie's writing, or those who are alienated from church empathise with Gabby. The network of circulation is in itself an embodiment of the meaning carried.

One important aspect of the internet, in this study, is its production from home. One early observation that I made was that while male-authored *blogs* seemed to be linked to large ministries and written from the context of the office, women illustrated theirs with pictures of their children, images of bunches of flowers, and *links* to recipes and favourite clothes and jewellery retailers. There is a marked domesticity about these productions. If there is a significance to the big open spaces that preaching is produced and consumed for the meaning of these events (see chapter 2: 73) then there is also a significance to the home, or in Fran's case to the internet café, in which these texts were composed. Stories of internet success are often pitched as accounts of the very local and

intimate suddenly and unpredictably becoming remarkably global. People write *blogs* in their bedrooms which become read by millions, or create videos with their friends that gain a global audience.

In studies of gender we find that the posited separation of public and private is destabilised in practices through which the visible structures of public life are shaped in the less visible sphere of personal and domestic engagement (Dubisch, 1991). Christians from conservative churches frequently complain that liberal critics place too much importance upon the act of preaching and ignore the many ways in which women are central to the life of the congregation. When discussing men and women's roles, *complementarian* informants would frequently return to the point that the *testimony* of a life well lived may be as powerful, perhaps more powerful than an instance of or even a career's worth of preaching. Although all of the Christians I worked with agreed that women's labour should be accorded the same respect given to that of men, the metaphor of 'muting' (Ardener, 1975; see chapter 2: 88) captures the somewhat limited range of their communication. The opening of this unspoken spiritual labour to the unseen audiences of the internet is the creation of a private realm that is in some way amplified and becomes constituted as a wider, more intimate, world.

To the extent that these streams of texts and responses are experienced as a kind of landscape, a user becomes present through the words that she writes. For Christians who are trying to become signs, there are significant benefits to this kind of embodiment. Fran and Patricia relate that it is easier to share because others don't interrupt or because it is not so awkward and "intense" for the listener. Much has been written of the "anonymity" of the internet as a reason for the profusion of anti-social behaviours, confessional language, and sexual material found online. For my informants, although anonymity is rarely pursued as a particularly attractive status in

itself there are certainly positive implications of the partial separation of online texts

from offline religious settings. Words that are difficult to share offline, indeed whose

sharing may further exclusion and alienation, find audiences who can instead affirm and

empathise with them.

Evangelical believers hold that since the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ the presence

of God is immanent and accessible to all people, at all times. A story that is often told to

give Christians and prospective Christians a clearer view of what this means concerns

the ancient temple in Jerusalem. Deep within the temple behind a thick curtain lay the

Holy of Holies, the most sacred place, in which the presence of God physically dwelt.

This intensely Divine space could only be accessed by the highest Priest of the temple,

and only then at particular times of the ritual year. At the moment of Jesus' death upon

the cross, the story goes, the curtain was ripped from top to bottom. The presence of

God, once hidden behind physical and practical barriers of ritual mediation, was

suddenly, radically present; the whole world had become the temple and the Holy Spirit

made available to all human beings at any time. Subsequent revivals have re-staged this

story of lessening mediation, even as worldwide Christianities continue to be defined as

a religion that – through its central figure of Jesus Christ- continues to have mediation at

its centre (Cannell, 2006).

This story is repeated again in the experiences outlined in the previous chapters.

The previously obscured or altogether unseen stories of inner life and personal faith, and

the women who have produced them, have become part of the constitution of the world

they live in. Lurhmann (2006) argues that the posited relationship between the Christian

and God that is presented in Evangelical preaching and teaching becomes *real* to

believers as they experience the merging of inner and outer worlds in their own lives

(see chapter 4). In these stories, the women I have worked with define for themselves

what 'inner life' and 'external reality' consist of. In fusing the two, they are able to experience *themselves* as enjoying a presence in the world that they did not previously possess. Women can share a voice with their offline churches (chapter 3), present them as marginal figures in a wider story of personal ministry (chapter 4), or abandon them altogether (chapter 5). In either case, it is not only *the Word* that is becoming a more present and real in the world through the fusing of inner and outer life, but the women themselves.

Gender, Faith, and Storytelling

Prior to starting the research I imagined that I might find women using the internet to take on the kinds of roles that were proscribed in their offline lives. For the most part, I have not found this to be the case. Women's writing for the internet is able to exist for the most part in harmony with the conventions of their congregational lives. In any event, most women, like most men, do not desire the platform simply because it is not available to them, and patterns of authority and uncertainty and the feel of the private and public weave through various spoken and written texts in ways that are not neatly bounded within particular genres. Instead, I found a particular orientational emphasis towards the expression of inner life in the general verbal activity of women. Through their use of the internet, this expression of inner life have become constitutive in new ways of the external world, and the external world has been able to feature more in the traffic of the individual with her self.

Moving in this manner from offline life to its online expansions has allowed a much closer analysis of stories and the women who wield them. Miller and Slater's

analysis brings us into the cultures and ways of living that the internet springs from. In this work, I have attempted to move further into understanding of these technologies by considering individual lives. This perspective has drawn much from the work on the Charismatic self by Csordas (1994), in which frameworks of ritual practice and meaning combine to generate an experience of the self as a territory that is renewed and occupied. In this final chapter I have considered how these online practices can be considered to be part of a project of *having*, rather than solely communicating, meaning. *Having* meaning, in this respect, is like having gender or having faith. Performative theories of gender (e.g. Butler, 1990) and practice-based approaches to religious belief (e.g. Mitchell & Mitchell, 2008) are based around the understanding that repeated enactments of a culturally significant status become evidence, to actors and observers alike, of its interior possession. The tears of the believer demonstrate the belief that lies within, the peaceful demeanour of the Godly woman demonstrates an essential femininity.

Women in the congregations that I have studied are encouraged to view their own redeemed lives and the testimonies that they give as a means of surrounding themselves with a narrative aura through which they can be approached by others and wield personal spiritual power and impact upon the world. As Miller and Slater (2000: 11) would predict in their discussion of "expansive potential", the internet has leant experiential weight to these assumed spiritual trajectories. Looking to the stories of individual women allows a fuller understanding of the personal value of these movements from life to text. While securing an audience offline is an uncertain and difficult business, the *hits*, *comments*, and *links* that these stories gather, indeed, the simple fact of their own embodiment in public text, present them as part of the world. The critical audience, as in the street-corner evangelist (Coleman, 2003) or the praying

Christian (Shoaps, 2002), is the Christian self. For speakers already inclined to the cultures of storytelling associated with women, the internet has become configured as a technology for relating and embodying, in form, content, and potential, further narratives.

Through everyday uses of online media the vast, conflicting, and often incoherent landscapes of online discussion are experienced as personally familiar, a system in which the individual is intimately enmeshed. Tanya Lurhmann (2004: 527) discusses the everyday and ritual practices of Evangelical Christians, through which "the loneliest of conscious creatures comes to experience themselves as in a world awash with love". This "remarkable achievement", she feels, requires on-going explanation and she turns to a question addressed throughout the anthropology of religion; how is it that the worlds of religious belief come to be inhabitable by the religious? Evangelical Christians in the UK perceive the *Culture* in which they live as dominated, like the unsaved self, by hostility, conflict, and sadness. Being able to share one's story online with others allows some degree of certainty and communion to be woven from habitual experiences of alienation. Moreover, the stories extend a spiritual certainty into the future. Those who *post* personal stories project a growing security in the kinds of agents that will become involved in their accounts and the reasons that they will meet. The internet has become a place to express and experience both radical insecurity in the self and the mending of this state. Everyday, inconsequential, and more dramatic experiences of loneliness and alienation are woven together through networks of storytelling and through this become the route to an experience of on-going redemption.

Glossary

Christian terms

Note: It is worth noting that many words that would be classified as verbs in standard English (e.g. *preach*, *walk*, or *worship*) feature prominently as nouns in their Christian use. In each case, this indicates that the event described is not a one off, but a repeated occurrence that is in some sense connected with others of its kind. Although each person has a different Christian *walk*, for example, they are all recognised as being in some sense instances of one kind of thing.

Apologetics (n.) A genre of Evangelical speech and writing concerned with the provision of logical defences of the Christian faith. *Apologetic* arguments span topics from the historicity of the gospel accounts of Jesus' life and death to philosophical problems regarding the ontology of the Divine and the meaning of human existence. In the field discussed in this thesis, *apologetics* was a particularly popular genre among *Calvinist* Christians.

Biblical (adj.) as in "*Biblical* masculinity" or "*Biblical* relationships". Particularly significant for Christians who argue the inerrancy of the Bible, the use of this phrase demonstrates something of the cultural negotiation that attends 'literalist' approaches to Scripture (Coleman, 2006). The question "is it *Biblical*?" can be translated as "is it

correct?" Within Evangelical settings, a generally reverent attitude to the ultimate authority of the text of the Bible is assumed, and so disputes between groups such as *Complementarians* and *Egalitarians* or *Calvinists* and *Armenians* generally hinge on whose definition of terms like "leadership" or "salvation" is 'more' *Biblical.*

Calvinist (adj.) as in "*Calvinist* doctrine". A theological position that emphasises the total authority of God and the utter sinfulness and lack of agency of human beings (see extensive discussion in Keane, 2007). In recent years, *Calvinist* theology and doctrine has seen a surge of popularity in certain streams of Evangelical and Charismatic Christianity. Popular speakers and writers such as Terry Virgo, John Piper, and Mark Driscoll are seen as belonging to a movement sometimes termed *the New Calvinists*. In terms of doctrine, reading material, popular Scriptures and prominent teachers, there is a large overlap between *The New Calvinism* and *Complementarianism. Calvinist* theology is usually understood to oppose *Armenianism*, a more common perspective that holds that the salvation of individuals is a result of their own personal choice to accept God, rather than God's choice to accept them. Also *Reformed.*

Christianese (n.) The specific language used by Christians, particularly associated with church settings. As is evident throughout the thesis and in this glossary, *Christianese* bears an uncanny relationship to secular English, as some commonplace words such as *grace* or *witness* take on significant shades of meaning that would be apparent only to the Christian. Although the specific lexicon of Evangelical Christianity is commonly heard in these churches, it is generally considered to be jargon that should be avoided wherever possible when interacting with the *lost.*

Complementarian (adj.) as in "*complementarian* doctrine" or "*complementarian* preachers". The name given in the 80s and now widely in use in conservative Anglo-American Evangelical circles to describe a particular cluster of doctrines regarding gender. Although there are differences in this broad movement, *Complementarian* teachers universally assert that men are 'first before God' in hierarchies of spiritual authority, and therefore should hold the senior positions of authority in the church as leaders and in the home as husbands. In terms of doctrine, reading material, popular Scriptures and prominent teachers, there is a large overlap between *Complementarianism* and *the New Calvinism.*

Culture, the (n.) A commonly used term, used by turns to refer to Western society in general, British culture more specifically, or the local atmosphere of Brighton. A highly verbal entity, the *Culture* is generally presented as a speaking agent whose statements stand in direct opposition to the Christian message; for example "the *Culture* tells us we should sleep around as much as we want" or "the *Culture* says that you have to be mad to be Christian". Like the Christian agent herself (see chapter 2), *the Culture* is both a speaker and a ground that can be shaped through communication, as expressed in common phrases such as "speaking into *Culture*" or "impacting *Culture*". Also the *World.*

Egalitarian (adj.) as in "*egalitarian* doctrine" or "*egalitarian* preachers". A term used to describe Christians who believe in the equal distribution of all spiritual gifts and ecclesiastical roles, including leadership and preaching positions, to men and women.

Emerging Church, the (n.) A cluster of church leaders, writers, bloggers, and other

Christians who share a common critique of conservative and Evangelical styles of Christianity. The *Emerging* church in its current incarnation is particularly associated with Anglo-American Christianity. Also *Emerging* or *Emergent* (adj.), a label applied to specific teachers, doctrine, and ministries associated with this movement.

Enemy, the (n.) A widely used term for the devil, the primary antagonist of Christian faith and the source of all harm and evil that exists. The malign activity of *the Enemy* is particularly likely to be encountered by Christians who seek to bring about his defeat through spreading *the Word* of God. Also *Satan, Lucifer, the Prince of Lies* and *the Enemy of my Soul*.

Gospel, The (n.) The message of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection and the good news of the promise of eternal life and sanctification to all those who accept the historicity of these events.

Heart, the (n). Particularly associated with women. A complicated term, the *heart* generally refers to the inner soul of a person and is generally invoked to express empathic connection with particular causes, other people, or God.

House group (n.) Meetings of church members, away from the gatherings of the main congregation, held during the week. These are normally organised by the leaders of the church and will themselves have leaders guiding discussion on that week's sermon, prayer, general conversation, and the sharing of light refreshments. Also *small group, cell group, life group*.

Lost, the (n.) Collective term used to describe those who are not Christian, usually only used in predominantly Christian ritual environments such as preaching or training for proselytism. Also *the unsaved.*

Persecution (n.) to be maligned through speech and discriminated against in action. Evangelical Christians in the UK generally discuss *persecution* in terms of the verbal attacks and alienation that they suffer in their daily lives as Christians. The *Persecution* of British Christians is, according to my informants, widely evidenced in popular discourses on faith found in comedy, popular science, and liberal media outlets.

Preach (n.) a particular occasion of religious speaking as part of a church service, a sermon. *Preaches* are 'given' by religious authority figures, usually male, on a particular subject, with extensive reference to one or more Bible passages. It is widely understood that the best *preaches* will be shaped in both form and content by the supernatural promptings of the Holy Spirit. Also (v.) to deliver a *Preach*.

Revival (n.) a period of time during which the Holy Spirit comes to intense presence in a particular location, producing phenomena such as miraculous healings, *prophetic* insights, and the mass conversion of unbelievers. *Revival* may be attached to a particular preacher or ministry, and will generally excite much discussion and interest among Charismatic Christians.

Spiritual Warfare (n.). A name given to a collection of practices of prayer and *prophecy* particularly associated with Spirit-filled forms of Christianity. The practices of *Spiritual Warfare* bring Believers into direct conflict with the forces of *the Enemy* that occupy the

world. Practitioners may pray in *tongues* to drive out demons or receive and deliver *prophecy* that describes the form of present and future battles for Spiritual dominion over Earth and its inhabitants.

Testimony (n. verb, *to testify*). A narrative account of a person's conversion to Christianity. More generally, a story about a particular instance of encounter between the story-teller and God.

Tongues (n.) A genre of ritual speech. To *speak in tongues* is an expression of the presence of the Holy Spirit of God in the person, usually during prayer or group *worship*. *Tongues* as a genre of speech usually takes the form of a seemingly unintelligible stream of utterance that is spoken or sung by those engaging with the Holy Spirit and is understood to be authored by this Spirit rather than the speaker themselves. Also *Other Languages* and *Heavenly language. Glossolalia*, a term more commonly seen in academic texts, is rarely used by Christians themselves.

Walk (n.) As in "my *walk*" or "your *walk*". The Christian life with God, generally understood as a kind of progress towards Him, a growing personal improvement in one's spiritual life.

Witness (n.) To show the power of God in such a manner as to effect spiritual change in those around you. The Christians that I work with frequently express the desire to be "a good *witness'* to friends, family, and colleagues. It is worth noting that this term simultaneously combines the qualities of seeing and being seen; a witness possesses first-hand knowledge of a particular occurrence, and is engaged in the process of

relating this to others. Also *to witness* (v.), to give an account of faith to another, whether through the form of a spoken *testimony* or the example of Godly living. E.g. "she did not know it but I was *witnessing* to her."

Word, a (n.) Can be either a *Word of knowledge* or a W*ord of prophecy. Words of Knowledge* are given by God to Christians to be passed on to others. For instance a Christian may receive a *Word of Knowledge* from God that her non-Christian friend Sue is worried about her ability to conceive. Sharing this *Word* with Sue, it is understood, will both encourage her and serve as a powerful demonstration of the presence and reality of God. *Words of prophecy* are generally intended to be given to a group of Christians. These statements, often replete with Biblical quotation and imagery, describe the future destiny of the group, and serve to encourage and to remind listeners of the overarching providence and control of God over Christian efforts.

Word, the (n.) A term used to refer both to the text of the Bible and to Jesus, the living embodiment of this text. Usually *the Word* means the overall meaning and message of the Bible, rather than a reference to any specific part of scripture.

Worship (n.) The period or periods of a Christian meeting during which the gathered assembly join in singing songs of praise addressed to, and regarding, God. In Charismatic congregations, shared singing is often interspersed with time allocated to group and individual prayer, *tongues,* and the delivering of *prophecy* or *testimony.*

Internet terms

Blog (n.) Ideally, a regularly-updated web page in which entries, in the form of *posts*, are presented from the most recent to the least. *Blogs* are typically associated with individual authors and often resemble diaries in their commentaries on the on-going events of the author's life. In more recent years, the *blog* format has come to be a popular way of presenting less personal types of information and *blogs* focusing on a massive variety of specialist interests can now be found.

Comments (n.) A section of web-pages (particularly *blogs*) in which readers can *post* their own responses to each original entry by the author.

Forum (n.) A web-site that hosts discussions between registered members. *Forums* are less popular now than they were in the 90s and early 00s, although aspects of their functionality such as archived *posts* can be seen incorporated into *blogs* and social networking sites such as Facebook. Also *Message board, discussion forum, bulletin board.*

Hits (n.) The number of individual visits made to a particular website. Tallies of *hits,* named *hit-counts* provide one popular metric for assessing the influence and prominence of a particular online resource.

Link (n.) A code embedded in a word or image that, when clicked upon, will cause the

browser to load another page. When embedded in text, *links* are conventionally coloured blue. The 'World Wide Web' is named for the massive, complex webs of *links* that connects pages to one another.

Also (v.) To *link* or to *send a link* e.g. "could you *link* me to that article you were talking about?" To include a *link* in an online communication so that the recipient(s) can easily access a particular webpage.

Mailing list (n.) A precursor to more recent *forums*, a *mailing list* is a database of email addresses that will receive as a group messages sent by any of its members on a particular topic. Christian *mailing lists* span specific interests from global *Prophecy* to Biblical exegesis.

Post (n.) A particular instance of online speech, e.g. "A *post* about forgiveness" Also (v.) To compose and upload a particular instance of speech to the internet, to "post a *comment*".

Profile (n.) a potted description of a person associated with the online presence of a given individual. A mismatch between *profile* and offline self (for instance listing oneself online as female when one is gendered male offline) is in many online contexts considered to be a gross breach of social etiquette.

Thread (n.) a discussion composed of *posts*, usually by at least two users, on one particular issue. Posters following accepted conventions of internet etiquette will generally try to ensure that their own contributions remain largely focused on the issues or questions raised by the first *poster* in their *opening post*. Also *topic*.

Wall (n.), specific to Facebook, a wall is a part of the *profile* page of Facebook users which allows users to *post* publicly-viewable statements, images, *links* to other websites, or video to their own *profile*, or those of friends.

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