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When Church and Cinema Combine: Blurring Boundaries through Media-Savvy Evangelicalism

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Abstract

The use of social media presents new religious groups with opportunities to assert themselves in contrast to established religious institutions. Intersections of church and cinema form a central part of this phenomenon. On one hand, many churches embrace digital media, from Hollywood clips in sermons to sermons delivered entirely via video feed. Similarly and overlapping with this use of media, churches in cinemas have emerged around the world as a new form of Sunday morning worship.

This paper investigates intersections of church and cinema through case studies of two representative congregations. CityChurch, in Würzburg, Germany, is a free evangelical faith community that meets in a downtown Cineplex for Sunday worship. LCBC (Lives Changed by Christ) is one of the largest multi-sited megachurches on the American East Coast. While LCBC's main campus offers live preaching, sermons are digitally streamed to the rest. Both CityChurch and LCBC exemplify growing numbers of faith communities that rely on popular musical and social media to 1) redefine local and global religious relationships and 2) claim identity as both culturally alternative and spiritually authentic.

By engaging with international flows of worship music, films, and viral internet sensations, new media-centered faith communities like CityChurch and LCBC reconfigure established sacred soundscapes. CityChurch's use of music and media strategically differentiates the congregation from neighboring traditional forms of German Christianity while strengthening connections to the imagined global evangelical community. LCBC creates what cultural geographer Justin Wilford dubs a "postsuburban sacrality" that carves out meaning from the banality of strip-mall-studded suburban existence. Analyzing the dynamics of music and media in these new worship spaces assumes growing importance as transnational music and media choices play an increasingly a central role in locally differentiating emergent worship communities from historically hegemonic religious neighbors.

About the Author

Deborah Justice started at Syracuse University in Fall 2013 as the Schragis Postdoctoral Fellow in Popular Music in the Department of Art and Music Histories. With a focus on North America, Deborah's work broadly explores perceived tensions between the new and the old, between pluralism and authenticity. Her research interests center on sacred musics (with a dissertation on sonic cosmopolitanism within mainline Protestantism), traditional musics in the modern world, and phenomenology in both musical experience and fieldwork. A practitioner as well as a scholar, Deborah has been playing hammered dulcimer for over twenty years in a variety of folk traditions from Irish to klezmer.

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Introduction: Sunday Morning

Sunday Morning, Ephrata, Pennsylvania, USA

“Welcome to LCBC! Would you like some popcorn?” A smiling usher stands in front of huge posters advertising Hollywood films and offers me a buttery-smelling red-and-white striped paper bag. Having never been in this space before, the scents and visuals lure my senses toward registering “movie theater.” I do a mental double-check to confirm that I really am at a branch campus of one of America’s largest megachurches as I walk past the usher, through the doors, and into the darkened room. Inside, an amplified band is playing on the stage in front and large screens project the lyrics. I can vaguely make out rows of people standing, since the contrast between the bright sunlight outside and the darkness in the room makes it difficult to see.

“Can I help you find a place?” I still feel like I am in a movie theater when another usher, prepared with a small flashlight leads me down a few rows. Once my eyes adjust to the low light, I can see people’s lips moving as they sing. However, the volume of the guitar, (electric and acoustic), bass, drum set, keyboard, and vocals largely overwhelm the congregational sound. After a few songs (a mix of internationally popular contemporary Christian praise and worship hits and in-house compositions) the multicolored stage lights shift away from the band to spotlight the lead guitar player as he prays to end the time of praise.

The house lights come up as, microphone in hand, the campus’ pastor says a few words of welcome and introduces the sermon. The message forms a part of Lives Changed By Christ (LCBC)’s “At the Movies” series. The pastor walks off stage as a large video screen descends in between the two smaller side screens. The lights go down again and video footage begins to roll. Images flash across the screen and the sounds of the movies enter the space: the bombastic Twentieth Century Fox theme, the whimsical boy fishing from the moon of the Dreamworks brand, and more. In short, we are seeing all of the opening production markers of a Hollywood movie. People crunch on their popcorn. The film then cuts to footage of LCBC’s senior pastor, David Ashcroft, sitting at a table with a movie theater bag of popcorn, Coke cup with a straw, and a Bible. He begins to preach, interspersing his commentary with lengthy film clips from Spielberg’s recently-released movie, *Lincoln*. Some twenty minutes later, he closes with a prayer. The video screen goes blank and the lights come back on in the room. Around me, worshipers stand up, chatter erupts as people greet each other, and we file out into the sunshine.

Sunday Morning, Würzburg, Bavaria, Germany

Although no films are showing until the afternoon, a small, but steady, stream of people enters the downtown Cineplex at eleven o'clock in the morning. We walk past the lobby, which smells like last night's popcorn, and ascend stairs up to the second floor. Kids are running around, while teens and grown-ups are chatting. At the hospitality center, many people are topping off their coffee mugs to bring along into the worship space. Inside the theater room itself, the lights go down just after eleven. A countdown begins on the screen with footage of different church members each saying a number, "Zehn, Neun, Acht, Sieben, Sechs, Fünf, Vier, Drei, Zwei, Eins." The video shifts to a clip that has gone viral on the internet recently. Today, it is the band Walk Off the Earth's cover of the band Gotye's song, "Somebody That I Used to Know." The five members of WOtE play a single guitar. They form a YouTube tableau, with each musician performing specific tasks with the performance. Between strumming, singing, harmonics, percussion and more, the performative whole is far greater than the sum of the parts. People react audibly with sounds of recognition. The song has no overt religious meaning. Instead, it appeals to the connecting value of popular culture. Many of those sitting around me make comments that indicate that they have seen the clip and likely have watched it multiple times via social media.

One of the church leaders comes on stage and welcomes everyone to CityChurch. The speaking in the service happens in German; only singing features English prominently. After a few announcements, the band takes its place stage left. The group changes from week to week, but generally features guitars (electric and/or acoustic), bass, keyboard, drum set, and vocals. They always play a mix of German-and English-language praise and worship songs. For some pieces, the lyrics are projected onto the screen in English with a German translation provided.

Other originally English language worship songs are simply sung in translation, with no comment on their origin. Other songs are German compositions sung in German. People sing along with equal enthusiasm to both international praise and worship hits and German songs. This morning, we are singing “God of Wonders” and “Meet with You” as well as German songs “Vater des Lebens,” (Father of Life) and “Herr, Ich Komme zu Dir” (Lord, I Come to You).

The lead singer prays to end the time of worship and lead pastor Christoph Schmitter takes the stage. His sermon interweaves Powerpoint slides with video clips, often from Hollywood movies. This week, he draws on Brad Pitt’s new release *Tree of Life*. Schmitter contextualizes the clip before it rolls, letting the audience know why he is showing it. After the movie excerpt plays in English, Schmitter carries on preaching in German. He encourages congregants to text or email questions that come up for them during the sermon to his assistant.

The church’s congregation has a young vibe. Rhetoric of ministering to “our generation” (read: twenty-somethings) pervades the congregation. The feeling created is one of contemporary hipness. University students make up a substantial contingent, but young people and students are by no means the only participants. Families with young children and older adults have created a wide age-span among the congregation. Yet, while the congregation is multi-generational, the “our generation” sense pervades and other age groups conform to (what they perceive to be) those cultural norms.

The service is coming to a close. After the sermon, the lights go up and Schmitter pulls a barstool to the center of the stage. He sits, microphone in hand, and takes five minutes to answer select questions that worshipers have sent in during the sermon. The band leads people in one more song. As the song ends, the lights go up, a track of recorded music comes on (sometimes

specifically religious, sometimes not), and people spill out into the lobby which has become busy with cinema employees preparing for an afternoon and evening of movie-goers.

Reinserting Religion

Despite being halfway around the world from each other, the two churches described above share a reliance on films, other media, and theatrical settings. These two congregations represent many other church groups that have adopted similar popular culture and media-reliant worship. While streaming sermons and cinema churches present novel configurations for Western Christian worship, the relationship between media and religion has developed throughout history and across culture. Whether embracing media, banning it or something in between, religious communities of every sort have always negotiated their relationships with mass culture. Religious traditions have long inspired popular media with both broad themes and specific subject matter. Today's technology-permeated societies, however, have managed to intensify the conversation. This article argues that churches like LCBC and CityChurch have adopted a media-centered worship style that positions popular media as an outlet for divine power, a tool God is using to reach out to humanity.

Many new religious communities are selectively embracing media to assert their contrast to established religious institutions. Within Western Christianity increasing numbers of congregations have come to rely on media with global reach—i.e. popular music styles, social media, and cinema—to claim unique local identity. For these Christians, highly mediatized worship asserts both the culturally alternative and the spiritually authentic.

But why are so many religious groups telling their stories through “secular” media? What is causing churches to turn to Hollywood plot lines and simulcast sermons instead of relying on

Biblical narratives alone? Why has guitar-driven indie rock pop largely displaced organs and choirs?

When churches draw on media, they are doing so selectively. Most often, faith communities are looking beyond themselves for familiar stories of faith. Media scholar Lynn Schofield Clark addresses this interaction between media and morality. She describes the phenomenon as entertainment media providing religious narratives twice removed (2007). According to Schofield Clark, religious groups often remove stories from their original contexts and adapt them for their own use. For example, tales of a massive earth-destroying flood were common in early Mesopotamia, but Judaism (and then Christianity) appropriate the flood narrative within their own framework and retell the story with details that support their faith system. In a second level of removal, the stories are then taken from their religious contexts to be used in popular media. Imagine, for example, a science fiction disaster film in which a small group of humans escapes earth's destruction in a space vessel and knows that their small band is now charged with carrying on the human race. The specifics of the tales change, but the core elements remain.

Schofield Clark's reading resonates with Hollywood's adoption of American mythologist Joseph Campbell's theory of the "monomyth." Drawing from decades of research and work by ethnographers Franz Boas and James Frazer, psychologists Sigmund Freud, Arnold Van Gennep, and Carl Jung, Campbell suggests that one archetypal hero narrative—in his terms, a monomyth—anchors most of the world's religions and epic tales (1949; 2003). Alongside heroes from sagas and mythology, Campbell distills the narratives of major religious figures such as the Buddha, Moses, and Christ into this pattern. After the first edition of his *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) many screen writers and authors either used the work as a model or

became aware that they were already taking similar approaches. George Lucas' deliberate reliance on monomyth theory in the *Star Wars* movies has been well documented in print and a video-recorded discussion ("The Hero's Adventure" 1988). Internal memos at Disney advocating Campbell's monomyth as a narrative blueprint developed into the instructional book, now in its third edition, *The Writer's Journey, Mythic Structure for Writers* (Vogler 2007). This trend of popular media reaching back through modern religious stories to access their archetypal power became pervasive enough to prompt analytical books of case studies on specific films, such as *Myth & the Movies: Discovering the Myth Structure of 50 Unforgettable Films* (Voytilla 1999). While few movies advancing a particular faith system break it big at the box office, nearly all films operate within the warp and weft of a moral fabric.

Given that religions grapple with these moral structures alongside the most substantial concerns of the human condition, it is little wonder that religious themes form a backbone for "secular" entertainment media from music to the movies – media not intentionally designed to serve religious purposes. A growing body of interdisciplinary scholarship, such as that evidenced in religious studies scholar Michael Gilmour's edited volumes (2009; 2005) demonstrates the pervasive presence of spiritual themes, imagery, and language in popular music. Some films intended for mass popular consumption—like *The Ten Commandments* featuring Charlton Heston, Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, and similar titles—deal directly with religion.¹ More generally, most Hollywood plots draw on moral narratives of right and wrong. People give their lives in sacrifice for their loved ones. Good guys fight bad guys. Characters may act against their consciences, but the pervasive backdrop assumes a sense of right and wrong. Concrete religious histories may not be present in every movie, music video or song; indeed,

¹ In the West, the religion most often under discussion is Christianity. A more nuanced discussion of religious narratives across world cinema lies beyond the scope of this article.

decontextualized spirituality often outweighs dogmatic religious presence. Yet, the broad outlines of religious tales and their morals linger.

I argue that churches “reinsert religion” into the twice removed morality tales of popular media as part of a dual strategy of connecting to strength and authenticity. Their mediatized worship connects to both the time-enduring divine and other Christians’ experiences of it. Today’s Christians emphasize that the core morals of the ages remain pervasive in entertainment that appeals to the general population today (even outside of the religious realm). For many Christians, this longevity and popular appeal evidences divine power, a God that pervades human interactions whether people acknowledge this presence or not. In other words, it feels natural to movie-goers to be happy when the good guys win. As such, when a cinematic story – that you many have seen on Saturday night is referenced on a Sunday morning, good triumphing over evil becomes clearly connected with Christ triumphing over evil and death. One German CityChurch band singer—herself a transplant from southern California to Germany—pointed out how powerful it was when “Jesus could use movies and music” for Christian purposes. Informal interviews and conversations with people at CityChurch, LCBC and beyond confirm this trend of seeing the divine at work in everyday media.

In other words, layers of transformation happen to religious tales. If a tale of a flood comes around, then religions may co-opt that story. Entertainment may then riff off of that connection. Finally, churches may incorporate that cinematic stream into their sermons. Thus, even though the ancient moral tales of religious texts may seem centuries removed from the relevance of twenty-first century realities, as churches reclaim moral stories from popular media without removing the popular media, they put moral stories back in conversation with religious contexts. The fact that these tales have resonated with thousands of media consumers outside of a

specifically religious sphere reinforces the narrative power, as well as the corollary that powerful stories tend to carry authentic truths.

The evangelical interplay between ancient and modern is important here. By using the power of popular media, churches are crafting phenomenological strategies to combat the cognitive dissonances created by today's highly mediatized life. Mediatization has become a key concept aiding popular culture and media studies scholars in explaining the power of communications technology. Jean Baudrillard (2003), Fredric Jameson (1991), and Philip Auslander (1999) have described mediatization as a process that involves media, message, and meaning. Not only is live performance transformed into the product of media, this transformation influences both the message and the sociopolitical context producing it. For example, you know that your actions are going to be recorded, posted on Facebook, and then discussed, archived, re-discussed, and so forth. What started as a live event now becomes a multifaceted event with multiple levels of media intervening. The result is a performative media product and environment that is greater than the sum of its parts: in other words, mediatization.

Yet, we can shape how we interact with mediatization. Theorizing well before the internet, phenomenologists Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann describe a "life-world" as a reality that reciprocally modifies our actions as we modify it (1973, p. 6). What Schutz and Luckmann find key is *how* people's life-worlds are constituted: what structure they have, and what this significance is for social action (1973, p. 4). In other words, they describe a cycle that resonates with mediatization. We create a life-world which then influences our creations, and this in turn influences the creations of others, which comes back to influence us, and so on. In this paper, I suggest that churches are using the subjective transformations of media-centered worship to create evangelical life-worlds that position popular media as an outlet for divine

power. When worshippers make a choice to respond positively to popular media in church, they position the media, message, and social context within a divinely-ruled realm. They understand today's popular media as a potentially pervasive tool for God to reach out to humanity; but more than that, the transformative social power of mediatization helps them understand their familiarity with the popular media as an intimate connection to an omniscient, omnipresent deity.

Unique Cultural Geography: Creating a Sense of Contrast to Neighboring Churches

Comparing the similar ways in which congregations a world apart integrate media helps us to explore the broad, global implications of religion reinserted. This article uses two contrasting ethnographic congregational case studies to analyze religion reinserted as a global phenomenon. Roughly 4000 miles separate CityChurch in Würzburg, Germany and Lives Changed by Christ (LCBC) in Pennsylvania in the United States. Yet, in terms of reinserting religion, these congregations are quite close in how they illustrate complementary approaches to embracing film and media in worship.

My methods for studying religion reinserted began with selecting these representative congregations, both of which stand out as media leaders in their own local sacred-scapes as well as in broader religious geographies. I analyzed their globally-reaching virtual and social media presence and also conducted complementary local ethnographic fieldwork to understand the immediate human interactions with the congregations. Over the course of a few months of Sundays between 2011 and 2013, I visited worship for participant-observation in these congregations. My time at CityChurch Würzburg was spread across 2011 and 2012. Fieldwork at LCBC happened later, in 2013. While church leadership was aware of my presence as a researcher at both institutions, my methodology did not rely heavily on intensive interviews or

surveys with congregants. After identifying myself as an ethnomusicologist interested in media and religion, I spoke informally at length with numerous congregants and leaders at these churches. I was able to gain a feel for congregational aesthetics and expectations. For this set of fieldwork, my participant-observation in these communities gave me insight into their internal dynamics and core values. More intensely interactive work with congregants and leadership (including feedback interviews, focus groups, and surveys) could provide a future avenue of research to augment the analysis in this article.

It is important to understand the degree to which LCBC, CityChurch, and similar media-embracing churches base their identities on creating contrast to neighboring faith communities. Many such churches that base their ministry on media and music are relatively new. Yet, rather than being church-plants or mission projects started in non-Christian or under-served areas, they tend to emerge in areas that already have relatively high church presence. As such, these congregations need to work to carve out unique spaces in the local religious ecology.

In addition to reinserting religion through media, two strong themes—renewal and “our generation”—run through the representative narratives that CityChurch and LCBC tell about their foundations. First, these origin stories emphasize the need for renewal amidst ossified and stagnant existing organizations. Jesus Christ’s biblical calling to be nonjudgmental and open often plays a central role, “Do not judge, or you too will be judged...Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye” (Matthew 7:1,3 NIV) and “If you [only] love those who love you, what credit is that to you?” (Luke 6:32, NIV). That new faith communities emphasize these features so strongly implies a parallel lack of focus on these qualities within existing congregations.

Second, media-embracing churches like CityChurch and LCBC reach out to a target demographic that includes everyone, but focuses particularly on “our generation” (read: young adults). Even though the demographic of “our generation” changes over time naturally as people age, the ideal remains pervasive. Although LCBC was founded over 25 years ago, the church continues its rhetoric of “our generation” and supports a parallel openness to media-and-technology-permeated lifestyles and spirituality of Millennials, Generation Y, and Generation X. This tech-friendly attitude also plays with blurred boundaries between sacred and secular, marking media-savvy faith communities as iconoclastic new-comers within their more conservative surrounding spiritual geographies. Both CityChurch and LCBC exemplify these broader trends of new media-friendly congregations starting up as religious alternatives.

CityChurch, Würzburg

The city of Würzburg sits on a picturesque bend of the River Main in the wine country of Franconia. The city boasts a large university and a thriving downtown area. Pedestrians crossing the old stone bridge stroll by statues of three Irish monks who converted area residents to Christianity over 1300 years go. Today, numerous churches mark city quarters and dot the skyline. With just over 130,000 residents, the metropolitan area is served by roughly sixty churches, forty-five of which are Roman Catholic and fifteen of which are Protestant (“Bistum Wuerzburg” 2013).

Most churches in Würzburg are traditional centuries-old buildings intentionally designed for religious use. Their monumental steeples and stained glass architecturally proclaim their primary functions as houses of worship. During Sunday services, the stone surfaces and wooden pews of most of Würzburg’s churches (both Protestant and Catholic) resound with organ music

and hymns. While there are exceptions to these trends, overall, Christianity in Würzburg has strong historical overtones.

Recently, however, purposeful contrasts to this continuity have begun to take hold in Würzburg's worship. While most churches in the city belong to either the official state Roman Catholic or Lutheran denominations, increasing non-denominational and "free evangelical" churches have been emerging. By 2013, international parachurch and post-denominational worship organizations Campus Crusade for Christ and the Vineyard Movement had opened ministries in Würzburg. Non-traditional faith groups like these have few if any administrative and financial ties to the German state and thus enjoy greater autonomy than Germany's state Protestant and Catholic churches. CityChurch began in 2002 as a project of one free evangelical church from a Würzburg suburb, the Free Evangelical Community of Heidingsfeld, Germany.

From their beginnings, CityChurch leaders have been aware of how their identity works to stand out against established forms of Christianity in Würzburg. The faith community focuses on cultivating setting, music, and media to provide a religious alternative within this sacred landscape. The church website recounts their history as beginning from, "the dream of founding a church in the center of Würzburg: a church that would reach people in 'our' generation who normally wouldn't darken the door of a church" ("City Church" 2013, translation author). In keeping with this philosophy, CityChurch did not build a church building. Instead, they chose to rent space in a popular downtown location. CityChurch has continually rented space from Cinemaxx, a multiplex on the edge of Würzburg's city center. Roughly two hundred members and visitors fill one of the cinema's theater rooms for Sunday services. Many members attend films there during the week, perhaps even seeing a Hollywood hit on a Saturday night from the exact same seat that they choose for Sunday worship.

If CityChurch emphasizes intense mediatization of worship through loud popular musical styles, cinema space, and digital media, they also encourage congregants to relate to each other and God in more intense ways than their religious neighbors do. Providing media-driven modern worship propels CityChurch, but the first point in their online values statement asserts that “Relationships are more important to us than productions. It is not attractive events that make the church relevant, but rather reliable and honest relationships between people that are called “church” (“City Church” 2013). The evangelical fervor that CityChurch brings to renewing Würzburg’s sacred landscape, however, has left some locals asking if the organization is a cult. One interactive crowd-sourced message-board website featured an exchange between citizens under the (translated) title “Are you familiar with CityChurch? Is it a cult?” One concerned man writes, “That’s the experience that I’ve had. I don’t find this church to be so great. The people there mix themselves up too much in the private lives of others and want to dictate what a person should be doing with their life. No thanks!” Another poster to the site agrees, “You just always have to be there for God and Jesus, 24 hours a day. God should be more important than your partner. They just talk about sins and such” (“Gutefrage.net” 2014). The level of intensity at CityChurch, in terms of media and beyond, sets it apart from other local Christian options.

LCBC, Lancaster County

LCBC tells a story of postsuburban expansion typical of multi-sited megachurches around the United States. Settled largely by German immigrants, Lancaster County has historically been renowned for rolling farms, some fine local colleges, and a deep sense of history. Religiously, Anabaptist groups feature strongly, ranging from buggy-driving Old Order Amish to progressive Mennonites. Small churches with traditional Pennsylvania Dutch names like Erb Mennonite Church or Longenecker’s Reformed Mennonite Church abound.

Additionally to the Anabaptist contingent, most often, Lancaster County's mainline Protestant congregations proudly trace their roots back to revolutionary times. For example, Donegal Presbyterian Church commemorates the large oak that stood in its yard, the Witness Tree, around which colonists swore to fight the British crown. Many of Lancaster's traditional congregations are still active, but they often strongly emphasize their historical roots.

However, the local character of Pennsylvania Dutch Lancaster County has been changing. Demographic expansion has altered the area's population and diversity. Housing developments and strip malls have cropped up and interrupted the rolling pastoral landscape. Highways have widened, schools have expanded, and suburbia has spread. More recently around the turn-of-the-millennium, the formerly downtrodden center of Lancaster City shook itself off and gentrified into hipster-attracting urban renewal.

As these changes were taking place:

25 years ago, a small group of people gathered in a garage...to dream about a new kind of church—asking questions like ‘What if there were a church that focused on others? What if it were a place where people far from God felt comfortable coming and asking questions? What if everyone who walked through the doors felt accepted, not judged?’

(“LCBCCChurch.com” 2013).

Similar sentiments drive the vision statements of many churches, in Lancaster County and around the globe. Nevertheless, newly-founded Lancaster County Bible Church perceived these qualities as lacking in the existing religious landscape of Lancaster County. They felt that the burning religious fervor that had driven the area's earliest settlers was smoldering or extinguished. Despite the continued presence of local Old-Order Amish communities, various

varieties of Mennonites, and a host of other local churches, from LCBC's perspective, changes over time had seen true religious vitality recede from the area.

Many people seemed to agree. The church was soon growing by leaps and bounds and adding campuses outside of Lancaster County as well as an international outreach program. By summer 2013, the church had grown to a membership of just over 10,000 (“Hartford Seminary Megachurch Database” 2013) with one auditorium-style main campus and five satellite campuses (which receive the sermon via video). As this expansion was occurring, however, the church’s name, with nominal ties to a specific locality, proved less attractive. Keeping their LCBC acronym, the congregation rebranded themselves from “Lancaster County Bible Church” to “Lives Changed By Christ.” Since most people connected with the church simply refer to it as LCBC, the name did not functionally change. Yet, the projection of a keen tie to Lancaster was replaced with general evangelical emphasis on transformative personal interaction with Jesus. The local was shifted and rebranded for larger-scale evangelical expansion beyond the farm fields of Lancaster County.

Yet, despite its rapid growth, LCBC still navigates within its religious landscape. The church’s website recounts concerns over potentially tenuous relationships with older neighboring churches in Lancaster County. In one example, plans for the anticipated traffic the church would draw required widening the road and cutting down some mature trees on the edge of the property of neighboring Bergstrasse Evangelical Lutheran Church. LCBC campus pastor Matt Graybill’s description of the discussion highlights the role of music and media in differentiating LCBC from this historical congregation:

This church has been there for over 200 years and frankly, we (LCBC) were not sure what type of reaction we would get....As we approached the Bergstrasse

leadership about this road decision, we found out that their whole congregation would need to vote on the changes.... Two weeks later, the chairman of the Bergstrasse Church board stood up and told the congregation about LCBC and how LCBC is reaching people that they are not. The members took the vote and later we received a stunning phone call. The result of the vote was a unanimous “yes” to the turning lane!

There are some at Bergstrasse that have been teaching Sunday School longer than most of us at LCBC have been alive, and for them change might not come easy. This church does not play loud music, or have flashing lights, but this church has the same mindset that others matter and that more lives can be changed by Christ.

(“LCBC Blog” 2012)

Graybill’s comments position LCBC in contrast to Bergstrasse. LCBC understands itself as comparatively young, loud, and flashy. The Bergstrasse chairman affirms LCBC’s self-perception from an outside point of view. LCBC’s strategy of cultivating a media-driven identity has indeed allowed the church to reach a contingent of worshipers that historical area churches have not been attracting.

Setting the Stage for Media-Centered Worship

What do churches like CityChurch and LCBC do to make the “loud music” and “flashing lights” of media spiritually effective? When, why and how are they incorporating popular music, social media, and cinematic clips? How do such churches re-insert an overtly Christian message into ambiguously cosmopolitan popular spirituality and morality? How do issues of mediatization and liveness come into play when religion is “reinserted” through popular media?

The following sections move through a discussion of these aspects of reinsterting religion through media. First, I consider the role that space plays in setting a neutral stage. The majority of churches that rely on media aim for settings that emulate cinemas or other “secular” spaces, so much so that they often reject traditional religious architecture and symbolism. Then, the article

turns to the media itself, focusing on video and music. These aspects of heavily mediated worship combine to create religious experiences that church leaders brand as authentic and powerful.

While traditional church spaces resonate with the functional ideals of theaters' audience-presenter set-up, historically, most congregations have created architecturally-marked spaces. In the West, steeples, crosses, and stained glass have been some of the ways of identifying church buildings. "They will know we are Christians by our love, but the sign out front and the steeple up top don't hurt!" quipped a Presbyterian regional leader. Many church forms developed historically, in part at least, due to acoustic advantages. However, amplified sound has decreased this necessity. According to architectural historians Loveland and Wheeler (2003), increasing numbers of churches that incorporate modern worship media have been choosing to hold services in architecturally neutral spaces. Now, especially for groups like LCBC, CityChurch and others that aim to offer an alternative to existing religious establishments, the form of the traditional "church" building itself takes on a negative aspect. Instead of stained glass, crosses, and vestments, these media-savvy churches prefer spaces suited to the performance aesthetics of popular music venues. New literature written by Christians and for Christians has emerged to help alternative churches articulate the spiritual drive behind reaching out to "our generation" by fearlessly embracing a "secularized" vision of space. For example, Tim Cool's *Why Church Buildings Matter: The Story of Your Space* (2014) encourages congregations to experience building design as socially and spiritually meaningful. Kim Miller's *REdesigning Churches: Creating Spaces for Connection and Community* asserts that emphasis on space for "our generation" to worship in a new way "is an incarnation of Jesus' call for new wineskins and is emerging as a key means to create community and the opportunity for transformation for a

creative generation” (2013 cover). Some churches redesign their facilities, whereas other groups eschew single-purpose religious buildings altogether. Overall, blurring the architectural lines that once divided sacred-secular venues has become a driving spiritual aesthetic.

LCBC: Secular Style for Single-Purpose Space

LCBC has chosen to set the stage for media-inclusive worship by creating single-purpose religious facilities with a “secular” appearance. The spaces are only used for church-related activities, but physically, LCBC’s facilities do not project a religious image. The buildings all have a sleek modern design that blends into suburban Lancaster’s newly built, recently landscaped vibe. The main campus looks like it might be a large high school, while branch campuses resemble the retail franchises that used to occupy the spaces.

Rather than physical markers of Christianity such as steeples and crosses, as soon as visitors park and get out of their cars, media and music demarcate the space. Speakers project music throughout the parking lot. The music is not a live feed from inside the church, but rather a playlist of popular worship music. Set to a light and quiet level where you almost have to strain to hear specific details, the electric guitar, drum set, bass, vocals and the like of contemporary Christian music bring the parking lot into the church’s soundscape. This sonic spatial marking happens at all of the branch campuses. Like most megachurches, LCBC relies heavily on digital media and music to spread their message and to bridge the physical distance between their campuses.

The building exteriors exert stylistic cohesion as well. They all bear the LCBC logo (white letters LCBC on a blue oval), but no overtly Christian symbols. The story behind the LCBC logo tells a tale of moving away from the locally-specific in favor of broader appeal. The crisp stylized lines of “LCBC” are far removed from the original “Lancaster County Bible

Church.” This transformation from title to logo is important because iconic media plays a key role in how many alternative churches like LCBC achieve success at reaching such large memberships. In addition, the logo embodies tensions between the local and the broader scope that many multi-sited megachurches around the United States face. When “Lancaster County Bible Church” changed to “Lives Changed by Christ,” they moved away from the geographically-specific. This move allowed them to sound relevant beyond their original location. While many of the largest, fastest-growing churches retain names that tie them to particular locations, slightly more churches eschew such specificity in favor of titles that express evangelical values. Twenty of the thirty-five largest megachurches listed on the Hartford Seminary index have ideological names like “Gateway Church,” “Fellowship Church,” or “Crossroads,” whereas fifteen out have names reflecting their location

LCBC normally does not write out the name, but rather uses an icon made of its acronym. By cultivating a name, a logo, and a look anchors the institution within social media, LCBC uses a design theme to create a brand for itself. Ethnomusicologist Tom Wagner applies studies of branding specifically to churches (2013; 2012). Just like Coke, Apple, and similar well-known products, churches create iconic brands that participants both recognize and identify with. Across LCBC’s geographic dispersion, branding unites the main campus and the five branch locations. Well-produced promotional material, repetitious marketing, and pervasive rhetoric brand the “LCBC experience” to communicate the over-arching “One church, multiple locations” identity to both members and potential new-comers.

For the uninitiated, the physical presence of LCBC does not spread an overt message of church, Christianity, or religion in general. The facilities’ corporate style resembles office

buildings or movie theaters. Yet, even seen from the freeway or parking lot, the iconic symbol communicates LCBC's expanding presence in Central Pennsylvania.

CityChurch: Creating Sacred Space in the Secular Sphere

Twenty-first century digital and social media technologies allow evangelicals to intensify historical patterns of using popular media to spread the messages of Christianity. LCBC, CityChurch, and similar alternative media-centered churches build upon a performative heritage with roots extending back to medieval processions, paraliturgical passion plays, and more. Many evangelically-oriented churches have long relied upon theatrical media and music to establish their balance between divine and human experience. This openness to media and media spaces reflects evangelical theology that emphasizes the immanence of Christ, the consistent presence of God throughout spheres of human life, and thus the artificiality of binaries separating sacred and secular spheres. Although the human mind likes clean boundaries, on this premise, if God is omnipresent, then there is very little difference between Saturday night and Sunday morning. Objects, spaces, music, and media themselves are not holy; rather, sanctification comes through conscious, purposeful use. From the "invisible church" of enslaved African Americans, to tent meetings to churches meeting in shopping malls, a congregation can understand its intentions as sanctifying.

Evangelicals have long been open to configurations of modern media and music in worship as a result of this sanctifying belief system (Turner 2008). During the nineteenth century, implications of media and space intensified when churches began change their presentation style in response to newly-booming popularity of meeting in auditorium-style spaces (Loveland and Wheeler 2003; Kilde 2005). During this time, churches were constructing sanctuaries that reflected the then-modern presentational style of theaters. Twenty-first century

interaction of churches and cinemas can be seen as logically following the history of churches in theaters.

Parallel to their embrace of media space, many churches are comfortable blurring ideas of sanctuary and cinema. The same media technology associated with secular entertainment has been reappropriated for sacred use. Evangelical megachurch pioneer Robert Schuller led the way with his use of a drive-in movie theater at the beginning of his ministry in 1955. Worshipers would drive to the space, receive bulletins, tune their car stereos to the correct frequency, and hear the service from the privacy of their automobiles in the same way that they would have heard a movie sound track at the drive-in during a film. Beginning with these early days, media scholar Erica Robles Anderson demonstrates Schuller's evolving relationship to media and space as he built his evangelistic empire (2009). Schuller's now-iconic relationship with media in worship has come to represent broader twentieth-century evangelical negotiations of music, media, and space in worship.

Following Schuller's legacy, in the twenty-first century, instances of evangelical churches meeting in cinema spaces have been rising (Garber 2012; Yi 2009). Continued expansion of media outside of churches has led to the role of media, both digital and otherwise, growing within churches as well. This increase has been most pronounced in conjunction with the explosion of "contemporary" praise and worship services since the 1990s. In the United States, for example, whereas only three churches registered to rent space with movie theater conglomerate National CineMedia in 2003, by 2009 nearly 200 churches had rental contracts (Moon 2009). A Google search of "church movie theater" scores over 50,000,000 hits (August 30, 2013). In the main, these searches directly return results of congregations meeting in movie

theaters: individual church websites, articles about the phenomenon, and guides on the pros and cons of such configurations.

Churches meeting in movie theaters have not only become increasingly common in the United States. A church like Victory! Church in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania could have been chosen for a direct comparison with LCBC, but the phenomena of mediatized religion and churches meeting in cinemas have been expanding around the world. In Germany, the idea of *Kirche im Kino* (trans. church at the cinema) has been growing in popularity and influence. Although these religious groups stand in sharp contrast to centuries of institutional Christianity in German-speaking Europe, *Kirche im Kino*, or *KiK*, has become a solid concept on the emerging evangelical fringe of German Christianity.

Today's worship configurations see unprecedentedly blurred boundaries between media space and religious space. In many congregations like CityChurch the worship really *is* taking place in movie theaters. There, ushers regularly use empty cardboard popcorn buckets to collect the offering. Other churches like LCBC replicate a sense of media space, for example by handing out popcorn as an extra prop for their "At the Movies" sermon series. A firm sense of setting blurs when the sermon's cinematic clip may be playing in a church building, or church may really be meeting in a cinema.

Reinserting Religion: Cinematic Media and Popular Music in Worship

Media-friendly churches use two primary types of popular media to reach out to their congregants: film and music. Both forms reference "secular" spheres outside of worship during the church service. Yet, they also provide a bridge between church services proper and the rest of daily life. Churches intentionally blur lines between sacred and secular (indeed, sometimes re-

inscribing those lines just to blur them). The result creates a sense of a media-friendly church “for this generation.”

Churches that meet in movie theaters (like CityChurch Würzburg) and churches that affect a cinematic environment relate to their spaces in similar, yet subtly different ways. Both incorporate large projection screens in the services to reinforce the experience of going to the movies. Yet, projection screens have in fact become ubiquitous in countless more traditional houses of worship that have chosen to hold Contemporary worship services (in which a praise band leads the congregation and the congregation sings projected lyrics from a screen).² Small rural churches throughout the United States often rely on a range of technology from old slide-projector screens to flat-screen monitors to assist worship. However, this technology often seems out of place in church architecture with alters, naves, and chancels; spaces that were clearly designed during a pre-digital era.

Churches began experimenting with multimedia presentations that incorporated film in worship services during the mid-20th century. As technology evolved, showing media clips in church services became easier and easier. By the late 1990s, churches had also come to rely on cinematic clips in highly mediated presentations during worship. In a parallel development, churches have also come to rely on cinematic clips in highly mediated presentations during worship. Books like *Hearing a Film, Seeing a Sermon: Preaching and Popular Movies* (Cargal 2007) or *Movie-Based Illustrations for Teaching and Preaching* (Larson and Zahn 2003) provide concrete suggestions for pairing film clips with thematic points. Need to illustrate Christ's death as a substitute for humanity's sins? Larson and Zahn pairs appropriate Biblical texts with a clip from Disney's *The Lion King*. For backsliding? A scene from *The Matrix*. To discuss the notion

² For more on Contemporary services, see (Ingalls 2008; Justice 2013; Nekola 2009).

of calling? *Dead Poet's Society*. While pastors have long told stories involving books or films to illustrate their points, they increasingly bring the media itself into worship and often let the films speak for themselves with minimal theological interpretation.

This use of multimedia contributes to the service's cohesion. Branding has already established local identity, and reliance on Hollywood films and international memes references broader global contexts. Digital media provides the primary form of communication for churches like LCBC. The website acts as a central hub for accessing everything from announcements and registration for upcoming events to online archives of sermons and worship music downloads. Social media via Facebook, Twitter, and video site Vimeo connect users interactively. Options abound for when and how people engage with LCBC.

Accessing sermon archives online bears strong resemblance to many LCBC worshipers' actual Sunday morning experience of the sermon. The church's website helps prospective worshipers envision what they will find on any given Sunday morning. "Each weekend you will experience a welcoming environment, engaging worship and a thought-provoking message from the Manheim Campus. Through the use of videos, dramas and music we desire to see lives changed by Christ" ("LCBCChurch.com" 2013). Like many multi-sited churches, LCBC has only one live sermon each Sunday. While each campus has its own assistant minister, senior pastor David Ashcroft delivers the sermon at the main Mount Joy campus. This message is recorded and streamed or played back at multiple services in the church's five other locations.

The video recorded sermons often become digitally layered products. Far from one simple home video camera turned to the pastor, multiple cameras shoot from various angles and zooms. The sermons are clustered into series, each branded with their own title and theme.

LCBC's sermon on *Lincoln*, for example, formed part of the "At the Movies" series. Visual marketing, a brief music video, and theme song use digital media to tie each of the sermons in this series together. Congregants at a branch campus are not only watching the pre-recorded sermon, they are watching the embedded video clips, too. For most worshippers at LCBC, the sermon is not a live event, but rather a layered, carefully-edited video production.

With only one location, CityChurch Würzburg does not have to worry about video feed sermons. Nevertheless, film clips and video play a strong role in CityChurch branding itself. Media makes the church stand out from its neighbors as both culturally alternative and spiritually authentic.

Each week, a viral video clip (often from the Internet, sometimes a TV or film clip) opens CityChurch's service. No verbal introduction or later explanation contextualizes the film; the media speaks for itself. These clips generally have no overt religious symbolism, and are usually viral internet sensations known to most of the congregation. People laugh in recognition when the clips play and say things like, "Ach, ich kenn das schon" or "ich habe das Gestern gesehen!" ("oh yeah, I know that" or "I saw that yesterday!") and are instantly connected by their shared familiarity with the media. Since these videos draw upon shared experience outside of worship, using them to open the service extends this shared experience to a sense of community within the congregation.

At CityChurch, film clips are used weekly in the sermon, most often in English from Hollywood blockbusters (from *Field of Dreams* to *Ice Age*). Pastor Schmitter gives a brief contextualization of the clips to show how he means them to intensify his point, but the language that he uses to do so conveys a degree of expectation that the congregation is largely already

familiar with the film in question. Just as with their reaction to the opening viral video clips and well-travelled praise-and-worship songs, the congregation's murmured verbal response confirms Schmitter's expectations.

Like the media dynamics at LCBC and similar American churches, generally, sermon series lasting three to four weeks guide CityChurch's themes. Rather than directly Biblical or informative, detailed descriptions, these series have catchy, attention-grabbing titles that work like advertising slogans, or in other words, catch phrases: "Die Welt ist nicht genug" (The World Is Not Enough), "Steuerwert" (Tax-Worthy), "Urgewalt" (Force of Nature), and sometimes in English, "Homestories." These sermon series are announced on colorful postcard size fliers given out on Sunday mornings during church at the InfoPoint in the cinema lobby in front of the theater where CityChurch meets. Each series has a professional quality graphic design. Many series draw upon popular iconic imagery, such as the Urgewalt series which uses the work of an internationally-recognized graffiti artist Banksy. Pastor Schmitter often extends these links further in his sermon, as he did by opening "The world is not enough" series with a clip from a James Bond film.

CityChurch draws upon media to create experiences that resonate with what Schutz and Luckmann would describe as life-worlds. In this case, mediatization reinforces the spiritual life-worlds that individual congregants have built. The shared experience of understanding commonalities between individual life worlds, even in something as simple as appreciating viewing the same familiar video clip, contributes to the social and spiritual fabric of the congregation.

Media-centered churches brand themselves as unique within their religious landscapes through music and media. The music becomes a form of media, since the music that churches like CityChurch Würzburg, LCBC, and others use draws upon a transnational body of popular contemporary Christian music that circulates through digital and social media. Not all of the music comes from these mediated musical flows. Both congregations profiled here are typical in that they do incorporate a few original songs in their worship from time to time. Yet, these locally-generated pieces form a very small percentage of the repertoire. Most of their music does not originate in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania or Würzburg, Germany. Yet it forms a central part of how these worshipers experience their music as locally-unique and spiritually authentic.

The sound of amplified popular music sets media-centered churches apart from many of their neighbors. Media-centered churches display similar musical choices to most churches that use contemporary music as an identity marker (Ingalls 2008; Justice 2010, 2013; Nekola 2009). LCBC uses its volume as an identifying characteristic, in contrast to longer-standing neighboring congregations (“LCBC Blog” 2012). The sound of worship pulsates with bass guitar, electric guitar, and drum set. CityChurch utilizes a *lob-preis* team (praise and worship team) to lead the congregation in worship. Instead of the pipe organ typical in neighboring Würzburg churches, the instrumentation usually includes a singer or two, guitars (acoustic and/or electric), a bass, a drum set or cajon, and a keyboard. As a result, the sound of these churches’ music resonates more with popular music than with local expectations of traditional “church” music.

The case of CityChurch Würzburg’s music provides an example of how mediatization impacts personal actions and beliefs. Global flows of music and Christianity come together in CityChurch’s *lob-preis* band. Unlike surrounding churches which rely on hymnals for hymns and either paper handouts or mobile projection screens for contemporary songs, CityChurch uses the

theater's screen. The song lyrics are projected onto the movie theater screen behind the band so that the congregation can sing along. Many congregants do sing, and a few also raise their hands in the air. The postures that they affect, with palms raised in an offering in front of the body or one or both hands extending open to heaven, strongly resemble motions typical in American evangelicalism. Yet, these motions are not at all typical of surrounding Würzburg churches, where movement during worship is limited to congregants crossing themselves, sitting, and standing at prescribed times.

The fact that CityChurch congregants move the way that they do points to the pervasive role of visual media in how the church members access foreign repertoire. Most German churchgoers do not emphasize physicality in worship. This expressive reserve pervades the state-affiliated Catholic and Lutheran churches, as well as most of the free Evangelical congregations. During the three years that I lived and researched in Franconia, the extent of movement that I observed in usual Sunday Services ranged from standing at appointed times to occasionally clapping on the downbeat of newer praise and worship songs.

It is significant that the most movement comes along with newer repertoire based on popular music styles, which tends to originate outside of German tradition. CityChurch draws heavily on transnational worship hits that have been generated by worship leaders from the United States, Great Britain, and Australia's Hillsong Church (now turned into a multi-continental organization comprising labels and a media empire, as well as being a worship center). This results in roughly half of the songs on a Sunday morning being sung in German, while the rest are sung in English. Some of the German-language songs are, however, actually translations of internationally-popular praise-and-worship hits. When the songs are sung in English, a German translation of the lyrics is provided. The congregation sings along with equal

gusto in English and in German, and emotional demonstratives (such as hand-raising, standing, and swaying during singing) seem to be language-independent.

The movements that have come into German churches have flowed along with the new repertoire of evangelical music sweeping around the globe. After the congregation sang along enthusiastically to an English song the *lob-preis* band had not played at CityChurch before, pastor Schmitter joked “Well, I shouldn’t be surprised. You all have the latest Hillsong album on your MP3 player or iPod or whatever.” Schmitter knows that his congregation is plugged into both live musical experiences as well as digital and social media. The band often learns songs off of YouTube, and sometimes uses musical tutorials on the Hillsong website. Congregants learn the songs in church, at conferences, and concerts, but also via YouTube, other internet sites, and through MP3s. As CityChurch musicians and worshipers watch and listen, they absorb evangelical theology and emotive physical performance practices at the same time.

The advent of digital media, increasing travel, and the imagined community of global evangelicals has come together to create strong cohesion in sonic and performance practices. This movement of music has more complex dynamics just than divorcing a musical sound from its point of origin. Ethnomusicologist Steven Feld theorized this type of disjuncture with his work on *schizophonia* and *schismogenesis* in the mid-1990s (Feld 1994). Similar dynamics are at play in globalized mediatized worship, but the musical sound is not the only performative media that is travelling away from its point of origin. In this case, the evangelical musical worship cultures that created much of CityChurch’s repertoire perform certain body movements (like hand raising or swaying) along with the music. Song leaders and congregants have a shared repertoire of movements—raising their hands in the air, closing their eyes, lifting up their palms—that ebb and flow along with the music activity.

Media-centered churches that rely on popular musical styles like CityChurch, LCBC, and others feel the power of enacting motions that have become the embodiment of musical devotion across the global community. These churches are using popular forms to reinsert religious power via mass experience into worship. As worshipers access the music through YouTube and other digital sites and through live events featuring international worship guest artists, they indirectly learn to pair these motions with the music. At the same time, due to the popularity of the artists, number of YouTube video views, and download statistics, they learn that thousands of other Christians are worshipping in the same way. By participating in the evangelical community through media consumption, people enact worship as they see it modeled. Yet, their adoption and reiteration of this model gives it strength. Many participants are aware of this homogenizing interaction, but they often explain it as evidence of the global reach of God's power. They experience strength and spiritual authenticity through the shared expressive practices. This power of popular music to create a sense of power and authenticity in numbers plays a key role in religion reinserted.

Conclusion

Media-savvy churches that are comfortable reinserting religion through popular media rely on theologies that embrace worshipers' familiarity with popular media. When the popular media contributes to worship, the mass appeal of the media outside of church becomes relevant within the religious setting. Yet, the idea behind such a reinsertion of religion is also to highlight the relevance of the religious beyond the worship service alone.

An exchange between a worshipper and the pastor at CityChurch Würzburg illustrates these dynamics. As quite often happens at CityChurch, the sermon opened with a video clip. This Sunday, it was a scene from the James Bond movie *The World Is Not Enough*. Bond was tied to

a chair and a scantily-clad woman tried to seduce him away from his mission. The sermon then went on to illustrate how Christianity calls believers to stay true despite worldly distractions. During the “text the pastor a question” segment following the sermon, one parishioner questioned the appropriateness of showing such a steamy video in worship. CityChurch minister Christian Schmitter’s reply was quick. “But you know it already, don’t you? You have probably seen the film or ones like it. If you, and I, watch these things outside of church, how can we not deal with them in church? God sees what we are doing,” (trans. author). Schmitter’s explanation conveys a theology that positions God as omniscient and omnipresent. This God is so present in daily life that divisions between “sacred” space and “secular” space do not really exist.

Schmitter’s comments resonate with studies of everyday evangelicalism by anthropologist Tanya Luhrman. Luhrman’s study of California evangelicals reveals how many Christians believe in an immanent God who is active in the world (2012). This evangelical God watches movies with you and surfs online with you. He can steer you towards understanding through media, even if it was not specifically created with an overtly Christian message. On this logic, God is so all-encompassing that the peak states you might hit rocking out to “secular” music may, in fact, have elements of the divine in them.

In terms of cinema, the dynamics reflect a similar engagement with “secular” media as potentially sacred. At Churches like LCBC or CityChurch, most attendees watch movies frequently. Many do so in the movie theater. They accept this as normal behavior. They also believe that God is participating in these activities with them. Many evangelical parents encourage their teens (and themselves) to judge films and other media on the basis of God’s omniscient presence: “Would you watch that movie if Jesus was sitting beside you? Because he is!” This type of framing demonstrates the prevalence of evangelical belief in an immanent God

who is present and active in everyday life, including the movie theater, popular music, and digital realm.

Understanding the sacred potential in everyday events becomes a key mission of media friendly churches that minister to “our generation.” While cultural geographer Justin Wilford focuses on multisite megachurches like LCBC, his analysis of “postsuburban sacrality” (2012, 166) can be extended to media-friendly churches that rely on religion reinserted. Postsuburban sacrality describes strategies to combat conditions of (post)suburban alienation, commodification, and decontextualization. If “our generation” lives in increasingly homogenous retail-chain driven landscapes pervaded by pop music and culture, how do people experience meaning? Wilford explains postsuburban sacrality as a strategic decision to find meaning in the mundane (resonating with Luhrman’s California evangelicals who “Fake it ‘til they make it” in terms of belief [2012]). Ethnomusicologist Anna Nekola describes a similar phenomenon within the Christian music marketing of the mid-1990s, in which companies advertised the possibility of their Christian music to “transform your commute into communion” (2013). If Christian music can transform your commute to work into a sacred experience, then the idea of an active God and intentional believers sanctifying “secular” music in a worship space seems like a reasonable move.

As media-savvy evangelicals embrace both the technology and substance of life outside of church, digital media, cinema, and popular music have come to form an important part of Sunday morning worship. The relationship forms a feedback loop, as “secular” media in worship are transformed into potentially “sacred” media outside of worship. In a theology of immanent divine omnipresence, the mundane media of the everyday take on sacred significance. What was religion twice removed now becomes religion reinserted.

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