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To see in a mirror dimly: An ecology of ritual transmission

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TO SEE IN A MIRROR DIMLY: AN ECOLOGY OF RITUAL TRANSMISSION

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Dedicated to two former-teachers-turned-friends,

both of whom instilled in me the ability to find joy in difficult endeavors:

Cindy Greider, who taught me to be a musician and a teacher

and

Stephen Clough, who first encouraged me to combine faith and scholarship, and to be

unafraid to think (and write) outside the box

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ABSTRACT

Sims, Rebekah E. M.A., Purdue University, August 2016. To See in a Mirror Dimly: An Ecology of Ritual Transmission. Major Professor: Thomas Rickert.

I examine ritual transmission through three practices: Sacred Harp hymnody, Montessori Sunday School, and Celtic thin place, all practices meant to provide the participant with a tangible sense of transcendence. Ritual transmission in not a linear exchange, but is instead a complex system involving pedagogy, praxis, and persuasion: an ecology. Ritual ecology provides a way to think about rituals as both preserving practices and as consistently evolving. The composition of a ritual – that which makes it possible to transmit – requires the development of technical praxis. Ritual praxis is a blend of procedural and exegetical knowledge; it is the link between the actions/words of the ritual and its theory: the significance and symbolic meaning behind the actions and words. To teach a ritual to a new participant, and ultimately to fold that new participant into the community that practices the ritual, requires negotiation with an environment that contains signs and symbols. The individual must read and incorporate these signs and symbols into his or her exegetical knowledge. Transmission is not exclusively the province of live community, but happens also through web technology. Technology is taken up into this ritual ecology, shifting and expanding the mechanisms of transmission

and fundamentally changing how participants imagine and construct the "face of God"-

type moments.

PROLOGUE

As a child I imagined God without feet. God wore a white alb and a liturgically-colored

stole that changed with the church seasons, like the pastors I knew. God's head was

alternately a smiling, brown-haired young female or a balding 50-something male,

depending on whether Pastor Melinda or Pastor Larry preached that Sunday. When I was

a child, I reasoned like a child: I knew that God was holy, and I figured that since pastors

spent so much time studying God, they must also be holy, and therefore God would

probably look like my pastors. However, I also knew that, unlike my pastors, God was

eternal and never ending. And so, I imagined that God quite literally never ended: God

(in both the male and female imaginings) had no feet. The long, floor-length alb floated

sideways into the mist in my imagining.

Eventually, this fairly concrete picture of God gave way to Confirmation class, time spent

studying the characteristics of God and the theological concepts that provided

information *about* God. Bible reading was the primary intermediary between human and

God. God's voice was "heard" through scripture, and as I am a person who likes the

concrete and the readable, scripture became my primary source for God. I no longer

pictured God at all, nor did I feel a sense of divine presence.

Who, exactly, is the person of God, and what it means to see the face of God, has been for me a life-long, burning question. As a graduate student, I have rephrased this question within my own discipline, rhetoric and composition. What is the rhetorical method by which individuals construct and maintain a relationship with the deity (or deities) in whom they believe? How is it that some people of faith feel a haptic and tangible sense of God's immediate presence, and others (like me) do not? What is it that transmits and strengthens ritual practices that facilitate such moments where the divine is tangible?

It first occurred to me that other people might have this same question when, in the Classical Rhetoric seminar, I read Plato's *Phaedrus*. In the section of the *Phaedrus* on souls and chariots (246a-254e), the gods are near. Plato writes that the soul enjoys seeing reality for a "space of time" (247d). There are other souls who long to see the true reality, but whose horses are unruly, preventing them from gazing beyond the barrier even momentarily (248b). Souls that have perceived divine things may not fully realize it, lacking "sufficient clarity" (*Phaedrus* 250a-b). These souls lack an awareness of sacred time, as they are distracted by other things. In *Phaedrus*, is the action of the divine that makes a time sacred; it is the job of humans to realize this and make themselves ready.

In *Phaedrus*, Plato's Socrates explains that those souls who are closest to the gods "stand on the ridge of the heavens" and see a little more than the rest (247b-c). These souls are in the right place (the ridge of the heaven), but are not there permanently, only momentarily. These souls are the ones who desire to know the activity of the gods and are also worthy of such knowledge. To get to this point, the individual must be nourished

by the divine wisdom, beauty, and goodness, for it is these characteristics that cause the soul to grow closer to the divine (246e). The souls who successfully pursue the divine experience true knowledge. Mortals cannot enter heaven, but can glimpse it from the outside: the barrier is momentarily lifted and they see the activity of the gods. Reading this section of the *Phaedrus* set me on a search for rituals that challenge that barrier – and the result of that search is this thesis.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

"For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known." – 1 Corinthians 13:12

1.1 Ritual Ecology

What, exactly, does it mean to transmit a ritual? In *Transmitting Culture,* Regis Debray writes, "In sum, the art of transmission, or making culture, consists of adding a strategy of logistics, a praxis or a techne, or establishing an institutional home and engineering a lexicon of signs and symbols. What persists over time is the art of composition; the proportion of elements varies (13). The composition of a ritual -- that which makes it possible to transmit -- requires the development of technical praxis. *Praxis,* in its rhetorical sense, involves the linking of theory and practice, which here means the link between the actions/words of the ritual and its "theory" or the significance and symbolic meaning behind the actions and words. I am curious about why ritual practices continue and about how they evolve. What practices are compelling, and why? How do communities present ritual so that practice is transmitted? Rituals -- even those practiced by the participant alone -- are transmitted because they do not happen in isolation, but in a constant interaction with community. Therefore, transmission in not a one-to-one, traceable line, but is instead a complex system involving pedagogy, praxis, and persuasion.

I have chosen the word "ecology" to characterize the means of transmission of ritual because it embodies a sense of the interactive and the cyclical. Considering ritual transmission as an equation was too linear; the sheer number of variables challenged the clarity I hoped to gain by using a visual representation of transmission's concepts. I needed something that, instead, offered a more holistic sense of ritual and its environment. The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers this definition of "ecology:" "the interrelationship between any system and its environment; the product of this." To teach a ritual to a new participant -- and ultimately, to fold that new participant into the community that practices the ritual -- requires negotiation with a sign and symbol system and with an environment. That the sign and symbol system appears significant requires that it be practiced in a particular environment; the specific meaning of that environment depends on the presence of the sign and symbol system.

I propose to build a theoretical model, an ecology, to explain ritual transmission as a persuasive, rhetorical act. I read ritual practices as rhetorical arguments for transmission, communal identity, and personal transcendence. Specifically, I will examine Sacred Harp hymn singing, Montessori Sunday School programs (Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and Godly Play), and Celtic thin places. These three practices offer facility in a discourse of communal ritual, which then allows the participant to construct either a relationship with God or a sense of transcendence. This relationship does not depend on assent to uniform doctrine, though doctrine is always present and individuals engage and negotiate with it. This praxis requires an "institutional home," or an environment in which to carry out the ritual. This may not *literally* be a physical institution (although it can be). Within

this environment exists a lexicon of specific signs and symbols. It is these things, which

persist over time, that compose the ritual. I take from Harvey Whitehouse's *Modes of*

Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission a second, related question:

what representational forms of ritual are likely to recur, given "specified patterns of prior

learning, transmissive frequency, and arousal"? (23). Ritual does not exist static and

unchanged, but in its recurrence adapts to new audiences, participants, and situations.

To analyze and understand the rhetorical processes through which people construct a

sense of transcendence and community, I focus on those practices that intentionally avoid

the direct teaching of doctrine and that do not require participants to affirm any one belief

before participation. Instead, through participation, individuals construct exegetical

knowledge through rhetorical interactions. To understand the relationship between the

actual ritual and the significance individuals and communities assign to ritual, I consider

both sources which demonstrate or describe the ritual and reflections on the significance

of the rituals written by participants. Many of the writings that constitute my primary

sources are web writings, which offer both a window into ritual significance not available

through observation, and a method to trace the persistence and persuasiveness of

particular rituals across communities.

Studying what individuals characterize as religious "experiences" requires a precise and

technical language to avoid overgeneralization. Robert Sharf writes in "Rhetoric of

Experience and the Study of Religion" that he objects to current non-definitions of

"religious experience," arguing that "experience" has no consistent, or even explicitly

defined, referential signification, rendering it nebulous to the point of methodological

meaninglessness (286). He writes that for the past few decades, scholars (and religious

individuals) have valued "experiential" religion without really defining it well. In fact, I

would argue that this nebulously defined "rhetoric of experience" -- valuing personal

experience as authoritative, considering the mystical, and challenging the teaching of

explicit doctrine -- is in fact partially responsible for the rise and continuation of

Montessori Sunday School, Sacred Harp and thin place, as each of these practices is

termed "experiential" by proponents and participants who seek a more tangible

relationship with something transcendent. Rhetoric of experience, for Sharf, escapes the

objective and places emphasis on valuing cultural pluralism (i.e., stating that no one

religion is more or less correct than any other) while affirming the depth of meaning that

individuals find in religious practice: it is the lack of explicit definition that makes

rhetoric of experience such a persuasive and pervasive concept. "Meaning" of

experiences is another slippery and imprecise term; however, Zaliznjak, Ivanov, and

Toporov, writing on semiotic systems of religion, note that excluding meaning from the

study of religious systems limits the modeling capacity of the resultant interpretive frame

(53). To understand a ritual which purports to facilitate transcendence, we must

investigate how individuals make meaning from that experience.

To clarify what I mean by religious "experience" and "meaning," I will primarily use the

terms ritual, "procedural knowledge" and "exegetical knowledge." I draw the latter two

terms from Whitehouse's *Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious*

Transmission. Procedural knowledge is how-knowledge: participants learn the words,

acts, symbols, and signs involved in performing the ritual. Exegetical knowledge is why-knowledge: participants construct an understanding of the significance of the ritual beyond its literal actions or words (87). For me, "how-type" knowledge reflects a serial nature of collective participation. Individuals learn to negotiate the symbol system to participate in the ritual, but do not yet have to engage with exegetical, or "why-type" knowledge. With enough repetition, procedural knowledge becomes implicit; that is, participants no longer have to intentionally recall a set of steps to follow. Physical participation becomes automatic.

Defining the two types of ritual knowledge separately is key because I will argue that each plays a role in persuasive transmission -- and, that procedural knowledge is the primary force behind both persuasiveness and transmission. I will also consider how religious practices that do not require doctrinal agreement as a predecessor to participation offer ways of understanding how-type procedural knowledge to be as persuasive as exegetical (why-type) knowledge. How-type knowledge can be persuasive and argumentative even if it is primarily directive, because it is a site that enables individuals to participate in persuasion bodily and thus construct why-type knowledge. Wright and Rawls note in "The Dialectics of Belief and Practice: Religious Process as Praxis" that beliefs are retrospectively assigned to religious practice as explanations for social action; they do not actually sustain practice. Instead, it is carefully orchestrated religious process that creates and sustains belief (187).

As ritual practices both enable and perpetuate systems of signs and symbols, I draw on Eduardo Kohn's reading of Charles Pierce in *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human.* Pierce defines signs as representations that have meaning in relation to other things. Kohn takes up this concept and conceives of signs as living: part of an ongoing relational process. Signs can be interrupted by other signs, forming a semiotic chain (33). Humans are both the producers and interpreters of signs, and so are part of semiosis, the process of chaining living signs (34). For Pierce, signs fall into three categories: icons, which reproduce likenesses through imitation, indices, which demonstrate some physical connection, and symbols, the meaning of which depends on habit, use, and basic consensus among users. Symbols are the most complex, requiring a level of interpretation on the part of the user, whereas icons and indices require only basic association or recognition of common characteristics (23, 31).

I define "ritual transcendence" as a moment of the manifestation of exegetical knowledge: a moment where an individual identifies that through some kind of ritual action, he or she has had contact with transcendence, which is something beyond typical human interaction. I use "transcendence" specifically instead of "God" because the two of the three practices I examine (thin place and Sacred Harp) do not necessarily exist only for Christians or even for those of monotheistic faiths generally, but attract a wide range of individuals who do not always style themselves as religious or Christian. Additionally, I hope to build an interpretive frame that has possible applications beyond these three specific practices.

1.2   Religion as a Rhetorical Problem

Understanding religion and ritual requires considering the environment in which the practice exists. Whitehouse notes, "If we want to assess the chances of any particular religious concepts becoming widespread in a particular population, then we must begin by asking about the relevant conditions of prior learning and the ongoing transmission of expert knowledge (22-23). In other words: do a rhetorical analysis. In *Sucking at the Breast of God: Women and the Rhetoric of Faith* (1995), Kathleen Horton writes that faith is an interesting rhetorical problem because it involves persuasion and argument about the fundamentally unobservable: "the starting point of faith– the invisible, the unknown– defies rationality and can only be brought into presence by argument. The many different kinds of arguments that bring God into material presence comprise the text of faith" (45). Faith does not necessarily depend only on logic or reasoned arguments; the *logos* of faith goes beyond reason and includes desire, emotion, and senses. The arguments for faith -- and the texts which demonstrate these arguments -- are what makes faith itself able to be examined and interpreted. Arguments that make up the text of faith must be read, by both the believer and by those who strive to understand the broader workings of faith.

I am defining "faith" as the general intellectual understanding that there is a transcendent presence, or the possibility of a transcendent presence. Religious rituals are one form of rhetorical argument for either building or continuing faith. I call these "arguments" because participation in a religious ritual does not always result in faith: the practitioner must be convinced and moved towards faith by the ritual for the argument to be effective.

However, these rituals are also arguments for transmission. If the participants continue to practice the ritual (with or without faith) the argument for transmission has been successful.

I have chosen three practices to analyze: Sacred Harp (shape-note) hymn singing, Montessori Sunday School programs, and thin place, a revival of a supposedly Celtic practice. Each of the three practices I have selected consists of a complex web of intertexts. As Horton writes, "people come to faith by giving adherence to textual, material, and abstract cultural artifacts that present arguments about God" (iv) and "many different kinds of arguments that bring God into material presence comprise the text of faith" (45). The material presence of the ritual elements and procedures both provides for the participant the traces to be woven into exegetical knowledge, and also provides for the interpreter or scholar the persuasive appeals that constitute the ritual. Like written texts, these are sourced from social contexts (Porter 36) and their significance to the individual practitioner involves both the interpretation of the various verbal and nonverbal arguments present in the practice's environment and the method by which these arguments activate an individual's prior knowledge. While all of these practices are supposedly appealing to a universal sense of transcendence (for example, the Montessori Catechesis of the Good Shepherd states that all children have a natural need for spiritual connection) these intertexts arise less from universal experiences and more from the fact that texts and textual fragments teach individuals to read, construct, and communicate experiences in particular ways (Fischer 29). Because all of these practices also have in common that they are supposed to give individuals a haptic experience of transcendence

or a momentary closeness with the divine, reading them as intertexts may mean that the religious trope of momentary closeness to God arises more from a cultural expectation that such moments are important and that people of faith experience them and less from any sort of universal human desire to know and experience the divine. People create and reproduce ritual text to engage in a communicative relationship with God and/or to identify moments of transcendence.

To complete this analysis, I will draw primarily on work of Jean-Paul Sartre (*Critique of Dialectical Reason*), Emile Durkheim (*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*), Ann Rawls (*Epistemology and Practice: Durkheim's The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*), Regis Debray (*Transmitting Culture*), Eduardo Kohn (*How Forests Think: Toward and Anthropology Beyond the Human*), *Soviet Semiotics: An Anthology,* and Harvey Whitehouse (*Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission*).

<center>1.3   Ritual Transmission as a Persuasive Text</center>

In *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology* (1961), Kenneth Burke writes that religion is concerned with the persuasive, motivating people to act in certain ways (v). I argue that ritual specifically is also concerned with the persuasive, and the teaching of ritual is an attempt to persuade others to repeat the ritual, thus ensuring its continued transmission. In "Problems in the Typology of Texts," Lotman describes the transmission and interpretation of texts: "The reader chooses or evaluates specific plot types and sequences of episodes on the basis of the model's fixed probability, provided that the knowledge of the language precedes perception of the text and that the transmission

conforms precisely to highly stable rule; the choice is always made from some set of

possibilities" (121). If I replace "reader" with "ritual participant" and "plot" with "ritual

procedure," Lotman's explanation of transmission explains that facility in the vocabulary

of the ritual practice (i.e., knowing the words "Celtic" and "thin place," or being able to

name the elements of the Eucharist) is a necessity for constructing the exegetical

knowledge. However, the knowledge of the vocabulary need not precede the ritual

participation itself; exegetical significance may be assigned retroactively. Additionally,

Lotman points out that the creator of a text may interpret it differently from the perceiver

or the one who receives the transmission (120) -- which accounts, I think, for the

evolution of ritual and the individualized nature of exegetical knowledge specifically.

Developing individualized exegetical knowledge requires inquiry into the significance of

ritual. In *Reading Religion in Text and Context* (2006), Elisabeth Arweck and Peter

Collins write that we are often driven to inquire about the meaning of a religious ritual or

artifact. They posit that to derive meaning from an aspect of religious practice, we should

read it as a text; "Just as one might read a book for meaning, one may take any channel or

sign system and treat it as a text with an internal structure which can be interpreted" (4).

Paul Ricouer, too, states that religious faith can be identified through its language:

"whatever may be the nature of the so-called religious experience, it comes to language,

it is articulated in a language, and the most appropriate place to interpret it on its own

terms is to inquire into its linguistic expression" (35). Language (and other sorts of not-

literally-linguistic texts) give face to the divine and reveal how people construct

knowledge of what the divine is.

However, what is it that makes a ritual religious or transcendent, rather than secular? The problem of how to define religion is not a new one. In 1912, Emile Durkheim expressed concern that scholars of religion have obscured the true nature of religion by casting it as individual experience or as merely a complex belief system (Rawls 34); instead, Durkheim looks at religion as a collective social phenomenon. Durkheim is right in his insistence that to examine the power and effects of religion, one does not need to measure the authenticity of the divine encounter. He then defines religion as "a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden -- beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them" (Durkheim 46). This is helpful inasmuch as it notes that religion deals with things that are sacred and things that contribute to community, but the practices I examine do not have an entirely consistent set of beliefs or a uniform "church". It is here that Durkheim's definition of religion becomes exclusionary. The beliefs created by the practices I examine may have some common central tenants, and do initiate and reify community, which may be immediate (Sacred Harp), working toward initiation (Montessori Sunday School), or imagined and time-spanning (thin place).

Rudolf Otto's 1917 *The Idea of the Holy* defines religion, or religious encounters, as those involving the following characteristics: a feeling of terror before the sacred or the awe-inspiring mystery and the majesty that "emanates from an overwhelming superiority of power" (Eliade 9). He calls such experiences "numinous," "induced by the revelation of an aspect of divine power." The numinous presents itself as wholly other, "confronted with it, man senses his profound nothingness" (10). In other words, someone who has a

sense of being dust and ashes in the face of something eternal is probably having a religious experience. This definition is compelling because it captures something of the profound nature many participants cite in religious experiences, but it does not include any sense of community or any indication of how that religious moment came to be. It does not account for the role of prior knowledge and context in the acquisition and transmission of ritual.

Instead, I turn to the definition of religion found in *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Mircea Eliade argues that it is human religious practices including myth and liturgy that create the perception of closeness with the divine. A religious experience "enables man to live periodically in the presence of the gods" (Eliade 105). Not permanently, but momentary: the kairotic moment of communion with the divine arises out of the everyday, chronological time. Eliade also says that religion is constituted by a large number of "manifestations of the sacred" or "hierophanies." A religious or transcendent experience is one that reifies the delineation between the sacred and the profane, and marks the participant as a part of some kind of community that at least at a basic level shares the delineation between sacred and profane. This definition works because it offers a way to set apart the religious from the everyday, but it does not suggest that all participants have a completely unified doctrine, or necessarily require that participants affirm a set of beliefs before participation. Communities that require such would still fit into this definition, but the definition does not rule out communities where individuals have a more agential role in constructing the meaning/belief. This is the definition of religion I propose to use.

Therefore, I define religious ritual as a practice, action, or set of actions that contribute to

the continual determining of times, places, objects, and sets of actions as sacred and set

apart from the profane. Durkheim points out that religious rites are not necessarily always

about interaction with a deity (34). Ritual is both constitutive and reflective: that is, ritual

can be read as acts that reflects the practices or traditions of a community, but ritual is

also forward-looking, and can build community membership and belief.
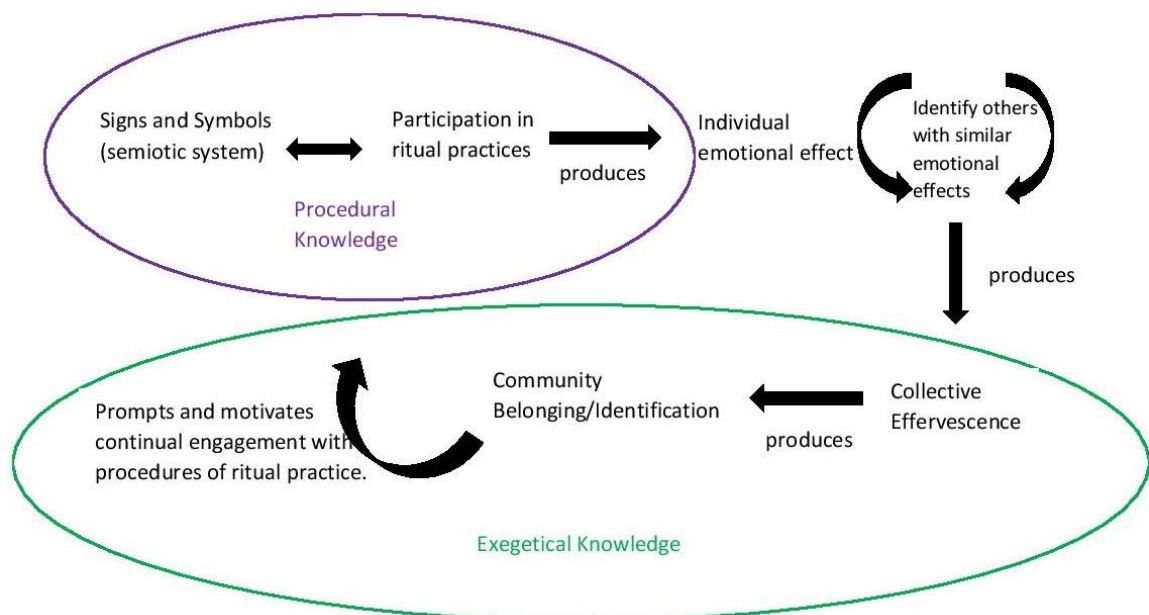
Figure 1: Ritual Ecology Diagram

Religion, Whitehouse writes, "like any cultural domain, is a distributed phenomenon.

That is to say, it inheres not merely in the thoughts and feelings of an individual devotee

but also in the recognizably similar or complementary thoughts and feelings of a

population of adherents" (16). This means that collective effervescence is not just a force

produced and experienced by the performance of ritual. If fact, it is a rhetorical argument that moves individuals to consider themselves differently in relation to others around them, causes shifts in identity, and sustains community between moments in which it can be produced.

This project, in part, reveals the agency than individuals have in building meaning for perceived transcendent experiences. It also considers how implicit doctrine mediates the agency, and shows how participatory ritual shapes and interacts with community. Specifically, I consider how these rituals organize, shape, and prompt faith and belief, and how they initiate individuals into a variety of communities. Community membership in these cases needs to be experienced to be claimed: there's no application, and no approval. It is determined by the participating individual if and how they want to be a part of this community.

CHAPTER 2. NOW SHALL MY INWARD JOY ARISE[1]: PERFORMATIVE RITUAL
COMMUNITY IN SACRED HARP SINGING

2.1   Introduction

Attending a Sacred Harp singing can be hard on the ears – especially for those

individuals who are accustomed to classical music. Sacred Harp singers are intentionally

loud and eschew dynamic contrast. The singing is rather harsh and the leaders provide no

instruction on word pronunciation or tone quality. The singers sit in a square facing a

leader who calls the song number, sets the pitch reference, and beats time. Leaders have

no special training; rather, participants rotate in and out of the leader spot every one or

two songs. Participants sing for hours on end. Often, a weekend singing will include eight

hours of singing on Saturday and another four to six on Sunday, with short breaks for

coffee and a midday meal. At a singing, there is no audience to view the ritual. The

emphasis is on participation rather than exhibition.

Sacred Harp is a ritual practice that has persisted since the late 1700s. Throughout its

continual practice since its invention, the actual music and methods of singing have been

relatively unchanged. Yet, there exists no official set of exegetical theological beliefs

about Sacred Harp: its contemporary practice is entirely divorced from shared, communal

---

[1] This is the opening phrase from "Africa," Sacred Harp hymn #178, text by Isaac Watts (1709) and tune by
William Billings (1770).

religious beliefs among its singers. Examples of ritual that are both highly repetitive and lack a systematically available exegesis are rare (Whitehouse 94), but they are incredibly valuable for examining why exegetical knowledge and justification for participation generally follow procedural knowledge, rather than the other way around. Belief or agreement is often seen as argumentative: first, an individual intellectually assents to a persuasive argument presented verbally, and then commences participation in some sort of group routine. Sacred Harp demonstrates the exact opposite.

In *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity,* Roy Rappaport writes that ritual performance differs from other performance in that the actor and receiver (or performer and audience) are one in the same: the participant. The transmitter-receiver is in essence fused with or embodies the message (119). This is Sacred Harp: the participant embodies the practice for the purposes of participation and discovers the message of Sacred Harp (which is often not reflected by the actual words that are sung) through practice -- and this participation has lasting material consequences. In *I Belong to this Band, Hallelujah! Community, Spirituality, and Tradition among Sacred Harp Singers*, Laura Clawson writes, "People who come to singing as adults often find their preconceptions [of musical meaning] reshaped as they engage with the music, community, and tradition" (85). The sets of beliefs about religion and about music that individuals bring to Sacred Harp singing are renegotiated, and sometimes challenged, through the experience of group singing.

In *A Sacred Feast: Reflections on Sacred Harp Singing and Dinner on the Ground,*
Kathryn Eastburn writes:

> Singing Sacred Harp, I feel as if I'm plugged into a 220-volt socket and the lights
> have come on blazing. My experience of it is distinctly religious, but free from the
> constraints of doctrine, judgement, and dogma. It is wholehearted and unabashed,
> filled with joy and despair, humbling and exalting... It is a fiercely egalitarian
> tradition that welcomes everyone into its ranks, all voices great and small into its
> melodic mix (xx).

Eastburn's description of her Sacred Harp participation highlights several key threads
that run through both academic studies and personal reflections on Sacred Harp singing:
participants cite profound physical sensations, a sense of joy, and delight in the
participatory singing. The time singing is, for many, transcendent, and engenders long-
term loyalty to the practice and to others who practice it. However, this quotation also
notes the tension between "religion" and "doctrinal." For Eastburn, something about the
ritual stays within the realm of religion, but is also divorced from pressure to conform to
a specific set of theological principles or beliefs.

Shape-note singing is a text-driven practice that also keeps alive a musical tradition, but
its primary purpose is through participation to enact and perform community.
Considering the mechanisms of Sacred Harp performance offers a way to think about
participatory ritual practices as collective realizations of community among those who do
not share theological conformity. It is through action, rather than through assent to a set
of beliefs or rules, that this community comes to be. Additionally, Sacred Harp

demonstrates how learning to use a sign/symbol system (procedural knowledge) alongside others engaged with the same system eventually produces both collective effervescence and exegetical knowledge. Significantly, the uniform procedural knowledge does *not* end in uniform exegetical knowledge but in individualized exegetical knowledge that generally echoes some common themes.

Several scholars have examined how Sacred Harp unites diverse participants (Clawson; Bealle) and others have connected singing in the square to Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence (Heider and Warner). As Ann Heider and R. Stephen Warner write in "Bodies in Sync: Interaction Ritual Theory Applied to Sacred Harp Singing," doctrinal agreement is not necessary to produce meaningful ritual: ritual can produce solidarity in the absence of theological consensus (87-88). Participation produces collective effervescence in the immediate moment of singing, but then also sustains a long-term, geographically dispersed community, and causes lasting change in the lives of participants. Participation and action, rather than belief and discussion, are what form the community. Because shape-note hymn singing is participant-centered and designed to be accessible to the general public, it is an example of how new participants gain procedural knowledge of how to complete the ritual very quickly in the absence of any information about why to complete the ritual. Participants may be taught (or just pick up) the basics of reading music, but even the musical notation system is designed specifically with the non-musically-inclined, or those without access to formal musical training, in mind.

2.2   Shape Notes Symbols and Procedural Knowledge

How-type, or procedural, knowledge of Sacred Harp is relatively easy to learn because of how the symbol system works. Shape-note music is written on a traditional five-line staff, but notes are not all round. Rather, shape-note music employs notes written in a variety of shapes, each shape signifying a particular solfege pitch. Some systems, such as Appalachian shape-note, have a different shape for all seven steps of the major scale, whereas Sacred Harp uses only four shapes (so, la, fa, mi) and repeats these shapes within the major scale. The primary purpose behind shaping the notes different ways is to facilitate ease in sight-reading and ease in "hearing" the different intervals between notes. "So" is oval, "la" is rectangular, "mi" is diamond-shaped, and "fa" is triangular. So, la, and fa are repeated twice within a major scale, and mi is seventh scale degree, before the return to the tonic pitch. Sacred Harp pitch is relative, not absolute. The leader sets the pitch for each song.
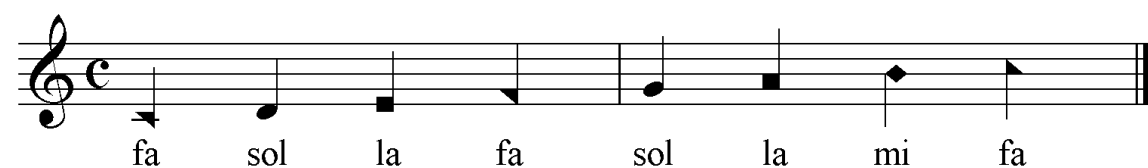
Figure 2: Sacred Harp Shape Note Scale

Shape-note systems facilitate efficient musical learning, especially in the absence of accompanying instruments. Creating a visual system where participants can, for example, see the difference between a fourth or a fifth because of different shaped pitches aids the singer in remembering the distance between various intervals. As Sacred Harp singing is entirely void of phrasing, dynamic changes, and other non-pitch-related musical skills, once an individual can read the various pitches and reproduce them with approximate

accuracy, he or she can fully participate in all communal activities. As someone who came to Sacred Harp with previous musical experience, it took me about fifteen minutes of singing to learn the Sacred Harp system. People who come to Sacred Harp with limited or no musical experience typically feel comfortable and coversant within a couple of hours. Even if someone sings off-key or uses the wrong solfege pitches, other members of the group will not correct the individual. This low threshold for participation, and the unusually high frequency of ritual repetition, frees individuals to move from procedural knowledge to exegetical knowledge very quickly.

Shape-note music departs from other kinds of choral music in that the primary melody is always in the tenor part, which is sung by both men and women. All four parts in a shape-note hymn are written to be interesting to sing and somewhat independent of one another. In many ways, shape-note singing draws on Renaissance and early Baroque expectations for the four parts. Fugues and semi-independence among the various voices are common features of shape-note hymns. Such independence and a new symbol system demand all of new participants' attention, leaving little cognitive space to think about anything else. Coupled with the physical movements and sheer noise of the singing, Sacred Harp demands that participants remain in the here-and-now, which perhaps allows a special experience of community because the participant is hyper-aware of the haptic collective.

A certain level of repetition is necessary for ensuring group identity and transmission of a routine, which can then be replicated. Debray writes, "the transmissive relay will see to it that a certain *level of redundance* is sustained for the sake of proper hearing. Because an

excess of originality affects reception adversely, one must know how to use signs that are dispensable -- or already familiar to the ambient milieu -- to be understood" (13). Similarly, Whitehouse writes that highly routinized ritual is effective for communicating complex doctrine, but does not facilitate spontaneous exegetical reflection (95). Sacred Harp is incredibly routinized, both on the level of individuals songs (each of which is selected and sung according to the same procedure) but also on the level of group meetings. A singing in Berkeley, CA will operate with the same routines as a singing in rural Indiana. Any individuals with a basic level of familiarity with Sacred Harp singing can immediately participate in any gathering of singers, anywhere. However, Sacred Harp does not exist to communicate complex doctrine, and has no "official" set of beliefs. Even the doctrine of the historical hymns themselves does not represent the doctrine of the group, which is essentially that singing is enjoyable and that everyone should have the chance to participate. Yet Sacred Harp singers follow this tradition with zeal, and, as evidenced in the following analysis, have clear and cogent exegetical reflections. I differ from Whitehouse in that I do not see exegetical reflection as ever spontaneous; it is rhetorically induced.

2.3 Ritual Theory and Interpreting Sacred Harp

It is tempting to see ritual as historical and (mostly) unchanging or stable. Part of the attraction of liturgical churches and ritualized expressions of faith, for example, is the sense of timelessness and participation with an imagined past community. In *Ritual Communication: From Everyday Conversation to Mediated Ceremony,* Eric Rothenbuhler notes that early anthropologists understood ritual as "conceived as

symbolic expression of social order, and presumed to be stable, as is social order" (46).

This notion of ritual as a stable reflection of social order did not hold up particularly well

as colonial empires dissolved and as postcolonial theory challenged the stability

hypothesis. Ritual and tradition are as much invention in response to changes in social,

political, and economic factors as they are a passing down of knowledge and a

reproduction of past ritual (Bharucha 72); thus in addition to thinking about ritual as

structural and symbolic, we also need to consider ritual not as a "safe deposit box" for

ideas and practices, but as "dynamic performative systems generating new materials and

recombining traditional actions in new ways:" through practice, ritual evolves (Schechner

228). This evolution happens, I argue, within an ecological system.

To analyze the persuasive nature of Sacred Harp ritual transmission, I use internet texts

from the Cork (Ireland) Sacred Harp Convention to examine the material and rhetorical

effects of ritual and consider the constitutive result of ritual -- that is, a forward-looking

analysis of what it is that ritual builds. I also draw on Jean-Paul Sartre's concept of a

serial collective, articulated in *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, to show how Sacred Harp

participants, first united around a symbol system (a series) eventually become a group

because of collective emotion and collective effervescence, concepts I take from Emile

Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. It is *not* the presence of a coherent,

assented, unified goal that make the series become a group in this case. Rather, it is the

material effects of realizing the symbol system: I argue that groups and series can exist

simultaneously within the same practice. That is, participants in a ritual can be part of a

series -- oriented primarily around practico-inert objects, symbol systems, or physical

actions -- or, after sufficient participation to experience the collective emotion and effervescence of a ritual, can become part of the group. A group formed by collective emotion and effervescence does not require conscious assent on the part of participants to a set of beliefs or common project.

Furthermore, moving between series and group parallels moving between procedural and exegetical knowledge. Individuals, as they learn the procedural knowledge, are generally (though not exclusively) participating in the collective as serial participants. It is only when they reach a level of exegetical knowledge that acknowledges the importance of the community to the ritual that they achieve membership in a group. That is, rather than being along for the ride with others, doing the same thing as those around them, they understand their participation as constitutive of group identity and purpose. In Sacred Harp, it is very easy to trace this movement, as the ritual can be learned efficiently, is very uniform, and does not require in participants a high level of skill or an acceptance of complex doctrine. Instead, all that is required for an individual to become part of the group is to sing for long enough that they experience collective effervescence and determine that this procedure has both personal and collective significance enough to bear repetition.

Studying how religious rituals are realized in performance is difficult, because what the practices mean to participants and how the practices changes their thinking or ways of life are not always clear -- especially when the results are not uniform across the group. Since practitioners of Sacred Harp often report bodily effects, a sense of community, and

identity with a surprisingly pluralistic community, scholars need to find other ways to examine the mechanisms of Sacred Harp and to understand how and why participants replicate this ritual with such an unusual level of frequency. The reflections on Sacred Harp written after singing are key to understanding both the exegetical knowledges produced through singing and the long-term effects of participation. However, video recording a ritual adds a non-authentic and often unknown audience, a viewer who is not part of the community and whose presence is a function of political or social power. What I examine here as my "texts" reflect these embodied practices even though they cannot contain or fully communicate them. In "Performance and Intangible Cultural Heritage," Donna Taylor articulates some of the quandaries involved in analyzing how ritual is practiced by humans: "Embodied practice always exceeds the limits of written knowledge because it cannot be contained and stored in documents or archives. Practitioners reaffirm their cultural identity and transmit a sense of community by engaging in these cultural practices" (101). Thus, reading the text of the Sacred Harp hymn book or learning about the history of shape-note systems, for example, does not allow much insight into what happens when people actually sing these songs.

It is specifically the collective practice that embodies the emotion produced by Sacred Harp. Singing alone -- or even with a recording -- does not produce the same material effects as does singing for a period of hours with a group of people. Thus, examining the singing itself, rather than the hymnbook text, will reveal more about the material effects of Sacred Harp participation. Durkheim writes that "It is by shouting the same cry, saying the same words, and performing the same action in regard to the same object that they arrive at an experience agreement" (qtd. in Rawls 179). Using a symbol system is

complete synchronicity with others is the first step towards collective emotion and collective identity.

2.4   Sacred Harp Ireland and the Replication of Ritual

Sacred Harp in Ireland is a relatively new iteration of the shape-note tradition (the first convention was in 2011), and is especially interesting because it represents a particularly active international community in a place where Sacred Harp has no historical precedent and is thus completely inventive. While the Sacred Harp Ireland groups sing from the same book and use the same ritual pattern as do American groups, but the cultural environment is quite different. Horton writes,

> The text of faith is an act of conflation of argumentative sites
> differentiated according to personal experience and disposition. The text
> of faith, then, is both in response to what is past (having read a scripture
> passage, having heard a sermon, having learned the catechism, having
> been baptized, having received communion, having confessed, etc.) and an
> evolving future text being constructed in the present through new
> experiences and understandings, through new and ongoing acts of reading
> (45).

Sacred Harp Ireland, as I will demonstrate, conflates strict practice of ritual singing with passing on of Sacred Harp through Irish pub culture. Through (for example) public transit systems it continues to spread quickly throughout Europe. Sacred Harp Ireland is a constant reading of what is past within the present ritual practice and of what is the hoped-for future, fostering continued transmission of what becomes an Irish cultural text.

I have selected both written and visual web-based sources published by the practitioners of Sacred Harp - Ireland, including videos, blogs posts, news articles, and discussion board posts. I have chosen this variety of primary texts for several reasons: first, videos demonstrate the mechanics of performing community and highlight the material realization of Sacred Harp practices; second, blog posts, articles, and discussion posts bring forward evidence about the motivations of participants, the emotional consequences of singing, and the pervasive nature of community in this practice; third, considering these things together allows us to see how Sacred Harp continues to evolve as a tradition while it is continually reinvented and reshaped through interaction with technology and the postmodern world. These sources, taken together, offer a window into both the actual act of performance and the inner thoughts, motivations, and experiences of the participants. Offered for viewing by the general public, the participants are aware of the (technological) watcher or the reader.

All of the materials I am examining, performative and otherwise, are technologically and physically preserved by the individuals creating these lived texts. This makes it possible to analyze both the practice and its "natural" or community methods of continual practice and preservation (and the evolution of that preservation). That Sacred Harp is still a lively practice by a diverse and world-wide group suggests that its mechanisms produce meaning for a remarkably different, multilingual, multicultural group of diverse ages and religious persuasions. This does not mean that Sacred Harp holds the key to some sort of universal human connection. Instead, it means that something about how Sacred Harp

functions allows practitioners to experience the joy of group inclusion without pressure to conform to certain beliefs or ways of life.

2.5   Hymnbook Text and Realized Text

Most religious groups who participate in collective ritual expect some level of conformity to shared doctrine (although the level to which this is expected can vary enormously) before individuals can participate in said ritual(s). Often, expectations for participants are made explicit, as in Roman Catholic celebrations of the Eucharist. Unlike this ritual, Sacred Harp participants are not required to affirm any belief, or even to be Christian. Although some singings do include short prayers before the meal, participation is optional, and no formal set of theological principles for Sacred Harp exists as it is not affiliated with one denomination. In fact, the structure of a Sacred Harp singing rules out any lengthy discussion of religious belief. Participants are diverse and many do not see themselves as active participants in any religion, and so Sacred Harp can be thought of as a sort of embodiment of American pluralism (Steel and Hulan 3). However, this ideological diversity and lack of discussion about belief does not prevent Sacred Harp singers from active participation in a dynamic community.

Whether or not participants are themselves religious, each will have to engage with religious language to participate in Sacred Harp. Clawson writes that while *everyone* has to engage with religion when the experience Sacred Harp, how they do so varies (86). The theological principles reflected in hymn texts represent non-liturgical Protestant theology of the 18th and 19th century, often emphasizing sin, hell, and damnation.

Individuals who identify primarily as non-religious or less-religious Sacred Harp singers

must cooperate with individuals who identify primarily as Christians who sing Sacred

Harp (Clawson 88). New participant and blogger Christina Kennedy writes, "The lyrics

are deeply Puritan in style and outlook (we definitely covered 'vile sinners' in more than

one song) yet they were the only religious element of the evening. On the whole, the

singers seemed to be united by a shared joy of singing rather than by religious fervor."

Modern singers must engage with these texts, and decide whether they can participate

even if their own theology does not reflect that of the text. The text's language is not

changed. Rather, these individuals adjust their own expectations, generally accepting the

text of Sacred Harp hymns as part of a historical moment, and choosing to emphasize

instead the communal quality of Sacred Harp.

So how is it that a hymn-book whose literal text upholds nineteenth-century Protestant

theology sustains a pluralistic singing community? Perhaps the answer comes in

reconsidering the role of the text in community: the text's content and the text's function

may indeed be two different things. Lotman and Pjatigorskij, in "Text and Function,"

write that "The function of text is defined as its social role, its ability to meet certain

needs of the collective that creates the text. Thus function is a mutual interaction between

the system, its realization, and the text's addressee-addresser" (125). The symbol system

for shape note singing is easy to learn and highly repetitive: ease of participation is key to

the collective. The literal "truth" of the phrases individuals sing is not important (for most

people); rather, the procedure the text facilitates is the important thing. The text's

appearance as a historical document is important for some singers; a sense of connection

to the past and reminders of the continuity of the ritual is key exegetical meaning for other participants. The interaction between the system of symbols (shape-notes) and its realization (audible music), however, is the point from which that individual emotional experience arises. When many people realize the system together, they are able to identify others with similar experiences – Whitehouse's similar or complementary thoughts and feelings (16).

In Sacred Harp, why-type knowledge and reflection on the significance of singing happens at an individual pace. Unlike rituals such as first communion that generally come with instruction in the authorized meaning of the ritual, Sacred Harp participants encounter no such pedagogy. Rather, Sacred Harp teaching is limited to how-type knowledge. Why-type, or exegetical knowledge is not strictly necessary for participation in a ritual, but most people who repeat rituals over and over do eventually engage with exegetical reflection, building a why-type knowledge (Whitehouse 94). For shape-note singing, it appears that what moves individuals from how-type knowledge (or what I think of as serial participation -- the participant engages primarily with the symbol system) to why-type knowledge (group participation) is the collective experience of emotion and community. When the participant is fluent enough in the symbol system, he or she starts to feel the collective effervescence, and becomes motivated to participate in the ritual long-term.

The unification of participants through ritual procedure of singing, which is transcendent, is valued above seamless theology. Clawson notes that some individuals must find ways

around the lyrics to justify participation as not just (or not at all) religious (86). Unitarian Universalist participant and blogger Dan Harper, who describes himself as a "postmodern heretic," writes, "Even though I don't agree with the theology of most of the songs we sang, nevertheless I got more religion out of singing Sacred Harp than I generally get in a Unitarian Universalist worship service" ("What I Did with My Weekend"). He credits this to the "do-it-yourself" nature of Sacred Harp that encourages easy participation and the "ecstatic" experience that results. (He quips: "Ecstatic and transcendental experiences tend to make Unitarian Universalists very uncomfortable.") Singing produces a sense of joy and community in the non-religious or non-Christian participants like Harper, despite explicitly Christian lyrics. The exegetical knowledge that these individuals cite is not necessarily based in logic or acceptance of shared intellectual principles. Rather, it is based in shared communal practice.

2.6   Creating Community: Performative Invention

Historically and presently, Sacred Harp's invention reflects innovation and re-creation, rather than static preservation. Sacred Harp's original development was a response to social and economic forces. As literacy rates rose, practices of "lining" psalms for singing in church was less and less interesting to congregants. Puritan clergy, disturbed by the lack of musical ability and participation from the parishioners, promoted a "Regular Singing" movement. Citing verses from First Corinthians and Jeremiah, clergy built a Biblical charge, arguing that singing with understanding was something God demanded of the faithful (Bealle 7). Cotton Mather, specifically, preached several fiery

sermons on the denigration of congregational singing, presenting some form of shape-note singing as the remedy.

With Westward expansion, shape-note systems traveled with itinerant singing teachers, attractive because it was easy to learn and did not require instruments or long-term presence of trained musicians. Bealle notes that shape-note singing, though immediately popular and nearly universal shortly after its origin, eventually fell into widespread disuse (especially on or near the East Coast) as cultural pressures towards "ordinary" solemnization pushed American music towards European musical trends seen as more sophisticated. Shape-note singing held fast in the Appalachian region and in the American South as an embodiment of the rural, oral, informal, and communal (4). Shape-note singing, although missing from the mainstream, was practiced continually throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s, passed down through singing families in the rural South: a passing down of knowledge and a reproduction of past ritual; yet, it became invented as "traditional American" folk singing only upon its "discovery" by Northern urban academics. In the 1920s, "folklorists" writing for publications like the *Yale Review* brought Sacred Harp into the discourse of urbane America, "introducing the forgotten movement in discourses of discovery, often to the very Americans who had become institutionally separated from it" (85). These writings rhetorically re-invented shape-note singing as an American folk practice rather than as a specifically religious or innovative singing tradition, thus adding an argument for preservation to its general practice.

Sacred Harp's recent uptake on the international stage exemplifies the relationship

between physical practice of its symbol system and the material results of production of

collective emotion because its entire (very short) history, as documented in web videos

and texts, comes not out of family tradition or long-standing singing groups, but out of

interest in Sacred Harp itself and in what happens when people practice this together:

writers indicate an overwhelming emotional experience that persuades them both to

continue the ritual (as it is enjoyable) and to assign exegetical significance to the ritual.

Expanding upon Durkheim's concept of collective representation, Rawls writes that

collective representations "have their origins in symbols used by the group" and are

"ideas that have their counterpart in collective emotions" (178). An innovative form of

musical notation, shape-note (and later specifically Sacred Harp) created a serial

collective around a symbol system. Those who participated in using the symbol system

then created collective emotion, resulting in sustained collective representations of the

practice.

In "Ireland's First Sacred Harp Convention: To Meet and Part No More," published in

Southern Spaces (an online magazine about global connections to the Southern United

States) Jesse P. Karlsburg writes that about half of the participants at the first Ireland

Sacred Harp conference were first-time singers; the other half were regular participants in

the local group. It "was an exceptionally emotional experience for visiting and Irish

singers alike. The visiting singers felt the power of their role in introducing the music

they loved so much to this enthusiastic and eager group; this enabled the visitors to

rediscover their own love of the style." Some newcomers found themselves

uncomfortable or surprised by the religious nature of the music (felt "alien" for instance), but eventually, these qualms were overcome by the inclusive nature of the community and the power of the music. A sense of collective praxis occurs: that is practice with others also engaging with the symbol system transcends the individual agent (Sartre 318).

Durkheim writes that for ritual to be realized as a collective representation, participants must engage with "tangible intermediaries" that both reveal the associated mental state and also create it (175). The first step for the Ireland participants, like other new singers, is engaging with the same text -- the hymns. Only once they negotiate the tangible intermediary that is the shape-note notation system can they realize that they are experiencing a community with others. Heider and Warner argue that "Sacred Harp is so structured that participants are not only doing the same thing (i.e., singing the same song), they are aware that they are doing the same thing" (89). And, the physical movements that accompany the text help solidify the communal realization: "Individuals minds can meet and commune only on the condition that they come out of themselves; but they can only do this through movements. It is the homogeneity of these movements that makes the group aware of itself and so brings it into being" (Rawls 175-176). In the video "282 I'm Going Home," almost all participants shown are keeping beat with the leader. The right arms of these participants move up and down at the same time. The leader, a young woman with a side mullet grins as she leads, rotating slowly so that she faces each side of the square. Sacred Harp is an inherently physical activity, but these Ireland participants (leader and singers in the square) are moving about more than usual. Songs lead by especially physically active leaders engender more physical

movements on the part of singers in the square. Interestingly, Sacred Harp seems to be exempt from what Whitehouse calls the "tedium effect" of doing physical rituals too much -- so much so that the loose their meaning and attraction (99). Singers repeat the ritual over and over for many hours on end, and the community holds onto its members long-term.

Reflections on the first Ireland Convention demonstrate the coalescing and invention of community, as well as how and when why-type knowledge is produced by Sacred Harp. Whitehouse writes that "in the case of routinized rituals, spontaneous exegetical reflection (SER) is not automatic" and does not always directly follow implicit procedural knowledge (94). For Sacred Harp, implicit procedural how-type knowledge provides the opportunity for why-type knowledge to occur by creating an environment in which collective effervescence occurs. Blogger Alice Maggio, in "Shout On!" (2011), reflects on her participation in the first Ireland Convention. Several weeks after the singing, she writes, "my head is still ringing and my heart is still singing... I can't yet think or write about anything else." For her, exegetical reflection (resulting in an eventual blog post) took several weeks and was a continuous process after the singing convention ended. Her eventual SER connected the powerful emotions produced by Sacred Harp to a sense of friendship and kinship with other singers.

She also writes that most of those from the Cork singing hadn't been to a large singing before, and so they were discovering *en masse* the power of Sacred Harp singing: through engaging the symbol system, they experienced the collective emotion created when that

symbol system is realized through performance. "Of course, the pleasant surprise of finding ourselves in the middle of such a "revelatory experience" only heightened the effect for everybody." In effect, the sheer number of new people first experiencing the collective effervescence, and feeling part of the group (moving from a serial position to group membership) reified the group identities of the long-time Sacred Harp singers. Those who initially tried Sacred Harp singing at the Ireland Convention encountered each other first around a symbol system. Like Sartre's example of a bus stop (256) the pluralistic singers at the opening of the convention are occupied with negotiating the objects around which the praxis is centered (Sacred Harp hymnals and shape-note notation systems). New singers, especially those who come out of curiosity about the symbol system rather than those who come looking for a group to join, are serial participants who become part of the group only when they experience the collective effervescence. Whereas Sartre sees the difference between group and series as one where the group has an explicit, agreed-upon, common goal, and a series as people passively unified around objects or ideas, Sacred Harp demonstrates how individuals can experience the ritual as either part of a group or of a series. To move from the experience of a series to part of the group requires not conscious intellectual assent to a common goal, but instead becoming part of the group by sharing in collective emotions produced by physical realization of a symbol system.

This collective emotion, produced by engaging with the symbol system, creates social energy. Drawing on Durkheim, Heider and Warner write that belief is *not* the best source of social energy. Ritual is a much more powerful source of energy because it is based in

emotion aroused through collective action (77). Clearly, the social energy Maggio writes

about -- which lasted long after the actual singing -- was related to the common

experience around the symbol system which then led to a collective experience. One of

the material results of the Cork singing were different from most of those in the U.S.

Maggio notes that a large group of the singers all went to the same bar following the

singing, and she attributes this to "collective consciousness," as a result of the shared

experience. At the bar, "We heard English drinking songs, ballads sung in Irish,

trad[itional] music (bodhrán, guitar, accordion, banjo), a New England ballad, sea

shanties, Sacred Harp songs, and I backed Rob up on a Irish rebel song. This doesn't

usually happen at socials in the U.S.A., at least not the ones I've been to." Invention of

community in Cork did not simply motivate singers to participate in further singings;

rather, the participants immediately started socializing and sharing other kinds of music.

Thus, physical ritual is not always an expression of social solidarity. Instead, physical

rituals create social solidarity (Heider and Warner 76). The bar visit itself was an

expression of social solidarity in reaction to the physical ritual of Sacred Harp singing

that created the initial sense of social solidarity.

<div align="center">2.7   Ritual Innovation: How Sacred Harp Spreads</div>

Sacred Harp's continued spread happens because its form is easily learned, requires

minimal formal teaching and thus has a low barrier for participation, and has been

specifically distanced from formal religion. While the actual practice of singing in the

square has not changed dramatically over the past two centuries, how people find Sacred

Harp and who is welcome to sing it has definitely changed. Taylor writes:

About the worst attitude to tradition is to incarcerate it with an immutable

form that ostensibly never changes. If tradition lives today, it is because it

has always changed in the course of history. How it changes within its

own performative and cultural context is frequently undocumented and

even forgotten, because the change occurs slowly, organically, and in

deference to the larger needs of its community (76).

Because many in the Sacred Harp community actively participation in online discussions

and blogs, it is possible to observe, through the community's own documentation, how

the practice continues and shifts with new participants and in new cultural contexts.

Sacred Harp's spread in the twenty-first century is reflected in and solidified by

technology and so it is an example of how technology is a determining factor in the

invention of tradition.

The creation of national (and international) shape-note groups is both a material effect of

Sacred Harp and a site of community invention. As Clawson writes, national community

is "something more transient, occurring when singers from local communities come into

contact with each other, whether in person at a large singing or in online discussions; all

such meetings require the production of a shared practice and culture out of local distinct

ones" (116). Thus, the national and international community is constantly coalescing and

dissolving -- invented and reinvented. In June 2010, a Fasola discussion group member

posted the first online recordings of the small group of Sacred Harp singers in Ireland: "I

thought some of you might be interested in hearing what we sound like. (Hopefully this

will inspire some of you to come out to come sing with us in Ireland's first Sacred Harp

convention, which will be in the early spring of 2011)" ("Online Recordings of Sacred

Harp Singers in Ireland"). Ireland held its first large Sacred Harp singing, now known as

the Ireland Convention, in Cork in 2011. The Convention attracts a diverse crowd of

singers, with more young adults and non-religious individuals than most singings in the

U.S. The tone of the singing sounds different, partially from the rounded vowels

characteristic of British and Irish choral singers. It is loud, but without the intentionally

harsh tone created by flat vowels of the Alabama singers and other rural U.S. groups.

This shift in sound is an example of ritual evolution within a specific cultural context:

British singing habits seep into the physical rituals of Sacred Harp.

Use of online media facilitated interest in Ireland Sacred Harp, through demonstration of

shared practice, and then through discussion board members in Cork requesting advice on

how to organize a large convention. A Fasola discussion board member notes that Sacred

Harp spread in Cork in part because local singers brought shape-note hymn singing to

pubs, taking advantage of pub culture and the tradition of bringing local music to pubs.

Documentary filmmaker Ciarán Ryan notes that Sacred Harp spread to Limerick from

Cork via pub singings when the Cork group visited Limerick ("Documenting Cork's

Sacred Harp Community"). This is not a way that Sacred Harp is spread throughout the

US, and so this technique represents a blending of shared practice and distinct local

culture.

Eventually, those who organized the Cork Sacred Harp group were called upon to advise

others interested in starting groups in the UK. Asked what the essential practices were, a

member who organized the Ireland Convention replied, "Based on my own experience of introducing Sacred Harp singing to Cork, Ireland, I would say that the crucial element for starting a new local singing community from scratch is enthusiasm and passion for the tradition...I have a deep love for it and throw lots of energy and passion and enthusiasm into sharing it, and I think that's contagious" (Hill). Enthusiasm, joy, and energy entice those who try Sacred Harp to become members of the group.

Sacred Harp has been preserved in the southern states due mostly to multi-generational "singing" families who have continues to make music in this fashion and have creating local or regional organizations that facilitate the practice. Sacred Harp took hold in the late 1970s in New England through academic institutions (notably Wesleyan University) when a few people who had encountered Sacred Harp found ethnomusicology university programs with strong interest in early American choral music. Similarly, Sacred Harp spread to Ireland through a former student of the Wesleyan University ethnomusicology program (Karslburg) although its uptake and lively community is sustained by local Irish citizens. Sacred Harp is the site of academic inquiry, and in the Northeast United States, its preservation and practice is closely linked to ethnomusicology departments and university department interest in preserving American folk music. However, many people who conduct academic research on Sacred Harp, such as John Bealle and Heider and Warner came to Sacred Harp originally as participants, and an interested in research grew out of personal practice wherein they found the practice meaningful. Other "outsiders" who seek to study Sacred Harp, including Irish documentary filmmaker Ciarán Ryan, discover a place in the community as a participant: "I subsequently discovered that

there's no such thing as an "outsider" in the Sacred Harp international community, such
is the inclusiveness central to its ethos" ("Documenting Cork's Sacred Harp
Community"). Ryan's interest in documenting Sacred Harp practices in Ireland was
solidified during the 2014 Ireland Convention: "I was blown away that weekend, by the
musicality to an extent, but more so by the positive energy that was bouncing around the
room" ("Documenting Cork's Sacred Harp Community"). The collective effervescence
Sacred Harp produces motivated its spread through mainstream media (Ryan eventually
produced a radio documentary then posted online). Such examples as documentaries are
material effects of ritual, demonstrating how rituals are "dynamic performative systems"
that produce new materials when traditional actions are combined with, for example, new
media (Schechner 228).

When Sacred Harp also makes its way into popular culture, something about the
collective emotion and effervescence of Sacred Harp remains, even in very different
iterations of the tradition. Blogger Christina Kenney was led to seek out Sacred Harp
after seeing Cold Mountain and found it through the network of Sacred Harp Ireland. She
outlines the some of the benefits of Sacred Harp: the use of relative pitch rather than
absolute pitch means no need for an instrument (or iPhone) to provide correct pitch.
"This may sound confusing, but trust me, it makes sense. It removes the need to fiddle
about with key signatures and iPhones, but most importantly, it opens musical
participation up to everyone, regardless of training. MUSIC FOR ALL YAY WHOOP
WHOOP!" ("An Introduction to Sacred Harp"). Like others who reflect on this practice
Kenney reiterates, "It was astonishing: a group of singers of mixed experience who had

never seen the music before were able to rehearse twice and perform a song in four-part

harmony in the space of 95 seconds. I've done the odd paid gig where that hasn't been

possible. If that doesn't show the power of shapenote, I'm not sure what does" ("An

Introduction to Sacred Harp"). Here, again, the symbol system enables near-universal

participation and results in collective joy.

The actions of Sacred Harp are rhetorical, not so much in terms of the text or words used

to describe them, but in terms of how the experience of participation enacts an argument

for living together in a pluralistic community, united by a shared experience rather than a

set of shared values. Sacred Harp teaches us that searching for similar – or similar enough

– values is not necessary for building a functional community. Rather, collective

experiences (preferably ones that produce delight and joy) form a strong and dedicated

community. In Rawls' *Epistemology and Practice: Durkheim's Elementary Forms of*

Religious Life, she explains that, in terms of the material effects of ritual, it matters very

little what people think or believe, but it matters greatly what they do (170). Sacred Harp

attests to this: the value of singing has very little to do with whether the participants

affirm the words of the music or what the participants' religious beliefs are (or aren't).

Rather, the value of singing comes from the collective emotions and the community

enacted by the experience of singing. Clawson writes, "singer's expressions -- their joy

and their grief -- as they sing show the power this music and the experience of

participating in it has over them. Through singing, they become a community" (166).

Participating in Sacred Harp is "a choice that brings [participants] into sustained

interaction with people very unlike themselves" as they "share a profound experience"

(167). Individuals are persuaded to join and sustain this community because of what they experience in terms of collective emotion, not what they think or believe. Experiencing collective emotion is a persuasive argument for community identity and participation.

2.8   Sustaining Community: Transferring Effervescence from Sacred to Profane

The time spent singing in the square is the sacred time -- that which occurs when the ritual is performed. Time between the singings is "profane" or ordinary time. Signs used by the groups facilitate communication, which Durkheim defines as collective representation, and these signs help participants designate between sacred and profane time. "It is not enough for a society to periodically produce collective feelings. Those feelings must carry the group through profane phases, and must also become a basis for communication, if a society is to survive" (Rawls 178-179). For singers, the sacred time is that which is spent in the hollow square; the feelings created carry those members through until the next singing -- and such feelings are constantly articulated through the group's discourse, demonstrating the long-term material effects of singing Sacred Harp. Sacred Harp singers have a lively online community: Kathryn Eastburn notes the active fasola.org listserv (xxi) that provides prayers and news among the geographically dispersed singers. Additionally, myriad blog posts and an open Facebook group attest to the constant presence of online shape-note conversations. Google Groups hosts a lively Fasola discussions group, administered by John Bealle, which connects singers internationally.

A March 3, 2015 post on the Fasola Google Discussion Group, "A Ferocious Singing Machine' – 5th Ireland SH Convention, Cork, Feb 2015" characterizes that year's convention as especially enthusiastic, with loud, fast singing. A reply to this post notes, "It goes from strength to strength each year, long may it continue." Such an energetic convention sustains the energy and strength in the participants between the sacred times. Blogger and 2011 Ireland Convention participant Alice Maggio writes, "Coming back to reality after four days spent in such ecstasy has been hard. For the past week I have been slowly recovering the bits of my mind that insisted on staying a little longer in Cork. The main symptom of this absence of mind was the constant stream of songs flowing through my head and often out of my mouth all week long" ("Shout On!). Long after the singing ends, the memory of the joy and community remains in the forefront of singer's minds. This collective effervescence is what carries the group identity through those profane times, between the actual practice of the ritual.

2.9   Persuasion, Text, and Participation: Sacred Harp's Effective Arguments

Given Sacred Harp's persistence and continued growth nationally and internationally, and the proliferation of active online Sacred Harp communities, it is clear that the arguments Sacred Harp presents for both transmission and significance are persuasive and effective. The unified ritual and the open, self-directed exegesis appear to be effective: Sacred Harp offers the best parts of group identity without the conflict-inducing pressure for doctrinal orthodoxy. Each person engages with the text and may enjoy singing because of the message of the text or in spite of the message of the text. What is key to the helpfulness of this framework is the lack of teaching a specific doctrine.

Participants are agents who actively choose what meaning to make, within certain parameters.

Sacred Harp is pedagogical in that participation requires basic facility in a musical system. However, it does not purport to teach larger ways of life or specific beliefs. The exegetical knowledge individuals build is largely unchecked, though appreciated. For this ritual, why-type knowledge precedes how-type knowledge: the why-type knowledge is the persuasive and argumentative, how-type knowledge follows through and affirms the persuasive success of the why-type knowledge. Ritual offers a frame for considering how procedural knowledge can be persuasive and argumentative even if it is primarily directive, because it can be a site enabling participants to experience persuasion bodily and thus construct exegetical knowledge (as happens in Sacred Harp). Privileging why-type knowledge can disguise the ways in which serial and group collectives exist simultaneously. Thinking about how-type knowledge as experientially persuasive demonstrates the porous nature of groups and series, and offers a window into how collective effervescence persuades individuals to become dedicate members of pluralistic groups grounded in collective experiences. In a sense, collective effervescence is an embodied, word-less argument that persuades someone (with or without explicit why-type knowledge or conscious assent to the moment of joining the group) to move from serial participation to group participation.

CHAPTER 3. THEY SPEAK WITHOUT WORDS: ARGUMENTS FOR THE
PRESENCE OF GOD IN MONTESSORI RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

3.1 Introduction

While Sacred Harp is pedagogical on a small scale, towards basic facility in a symbol

system, Montessori Religious Education programs such as Catechesis of the Good

Shepherd (used mostly in Catholic and Episcopal churches) and Godly Play (mainline

Protestant) are pedagogical on a much larger scale: the eventual goal of these programs is

facility not in one ritual, but in many. While these programs, like Sacred Harp, place a

value on the individual participant's opportunity to build individual exegetical knowledge

through participation in ritual procedures, they do purport to fold participants into a

community with a much more explicit and central doctrine. Like shape-note singing,

these curricula aim to give students fluency in the language of a community -- a language

that relies on a specific symbol system beyond words and letters. Liturgical church

rituals, many of which had their genesis before literacy was widespread, depend on

participant's ability to interpret signs and symbols, and to associate these signs and

symbols with Biblical texts and with elements of the life of Christ. Ritual significance

requires an ability to think beyond the literal.

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and Godly Play both engage students immediately in

how-type knowledge, and intend for students to *create* exegetical "why-type" knowledge

independently and at their own paces. My argument about Montessori Sunday School is two-fold. First, these curricula exemplify the methods by which how-type knowledge, independent of formal doctrinal training, prompts children to construct exegetical knowledge through participation; second, that this construction of exegetical knowledge is a rhetorical process, made up of arguments and persuasive appeals (in which doctrine is implicitly present). These arguments and persuasive appeals are not solely or even primarily oral or written. In fact, they use signs, symbols, and actions in addition to phonetic language (part of what we might term visual rhetoric): all of these are elements of a religious text, as they can be read and interpreted. Because practicing a faith involves interacting with all of these elements, and using them to build a sense of personal and communal meaning, I read faith as an ecological intertext. It is a persuasive text woven together out of these communally-created pieces, and this text is created by and then functions within the ritual ecology. Montessori religious education is a way of training children to read the signs of faith, and it sets up an environment in which children encounter and manipulate the signs of faith, hoping that eventually the student will experience their transcendent meaning. I define "argument" broadly so that it can encompass appeals beyond the verbal.

To examine Montessori religious education, I draw primarily on three texts: Jerome Berryman's *The Complete Guide to Godly Play,* Sofia Cavaletti's *The Religious Potential of the Child*, and Gianna Gobbi's *Listening to God with Children: The Montessori Method Applied to the Catechesis of Children.* I have chosen these three texts because they are foundational texts for these programs, but also because they offer pedagogical

theory, ritual instruction, and reflection on the author's experiences implementing the curricula. *The Religious Potential of the Child* also offers pictures, children's drawings, and written records of children's spoken reflections on God.

A session of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd looks something like this: in the Atrium (classroom), after greeting the children, the teacher gathers the class and reads aloud a Bible story, therefore proclaiming the Word. Yet the teacher is not really the speaker of the Word: "In regard to religious education, the first moment necessarily involves proclaiming the Word. Then the catechist must know how to step aside and allow the Word, itself, to do its work in the child. It is the Holy Spirit, present in God's Word, who engages the child in a personal dialogue and is, thus, the true Teacher" (Gobbi 15-16). The teacher offers no explanation or exegesis. The students are offered the opportunity to engage with the story manipulatives, though they may also choose to engage with other objects in the Atrium instead. Any explanation is offered by the child, when he or she is ready, and the assumption is that this explanation happens after some inner dialogue or engagement with God. Inside the Atrium, there is a central area for the class to gather, and

Figure 3: Child-Sized Baptism Set

around the room there are child-sized versions of the elements of Mass (altar, paraments, baptismal font, communion elements) and small version of Bible stories (Noah's Ark, the

parables, creation) for children to use. Some classrooms also include art supplies, although this is more common in Godly Play classrooms.

Godly Play also includes its own liturgical cycle, repeated weekly: first, the teacher greets the children, who sit in a circle. Then, the teacher tells the story of the day (with no interpretation or explanation), and asks a set of "I wonder" questions that prompt the students to reflect on what they feel is most important or most interesting (these questions are punctuated by silence, and the teacher expresses no preference for certain answers, and considers no responses "wrong"). The student are then given a time to "respond," although they decide if and how to respond. They might play with the miniature figures from the lesson, or choose to paint or draw. Then, the students and teacher gather for "the feast," which is usually crackers and juice, with a time of individual prayer (which may be shared out loud, or be inner, silent prayer). The teacher says goodbye to each individual student. Godly Play imitates the entire routine of a liturgical church service in each session, whereas Catechesis of the Good Shepherd does not, instead enticing students to imitate parts of the liturgy and church year at the pace of the student's choosing.

Because texts of faith deal with written and spoken language, material artifacts, symbols, and signs that present arguments, and because participants must experience some form of persuasion to entice them to practice faith, coming to faith is a rhetorical process. This rhetorical process is often started by the parents, who choose to expose children to the religious community, and who control the access that a child has to that community.

However, within the classroom environment, children participate in Montessori Sunday School in response to various modes of persuasion: appeals to interest and imitation especially. As scholars, we need to understand the rhetorical workings of these religious education programs, in part because they forward a different understanding of argument and persuasion -- that argument can take implicit forms and nonverbal forms -- but also because a rhetorical analysis of these practices provide insight into how individuals come to have faith and how communities effectively (or ineffectively) transmit faith. Examining Montessori Sunday School programs allows an exploration of specifically the non-verbal, symbol- and action-based persuasive appeals, to explain how persuasive transmission concerns the holistic environment of ritual.

Here, the atrium or classroom echoes the signs and symbols children encounter during the worship services and community rituals, but at the child's physical and developmental level. The ritual elements and Bible stories are presented to the child in the form of manipulatives, simple retellings, and child-sized versions of the elements of communion, for example. Children play with the symbols, constructing the ritual as they remember it and becoming more comfortable with the elements that create the community's ritual procedure: their actions create a semiotic chain. These child-sized objects combine two of Peirce's levels of signs: the iconic or referential and the symbol. A baptismal font in the sanctuary has symbolic meaning. A miniature baptismal font is an icon of the larger one. The child must first recognize the two as similar, and then through play determine the symbolic significance, and then transfer that symbolic significance out of the classroom and into the community's ritual.
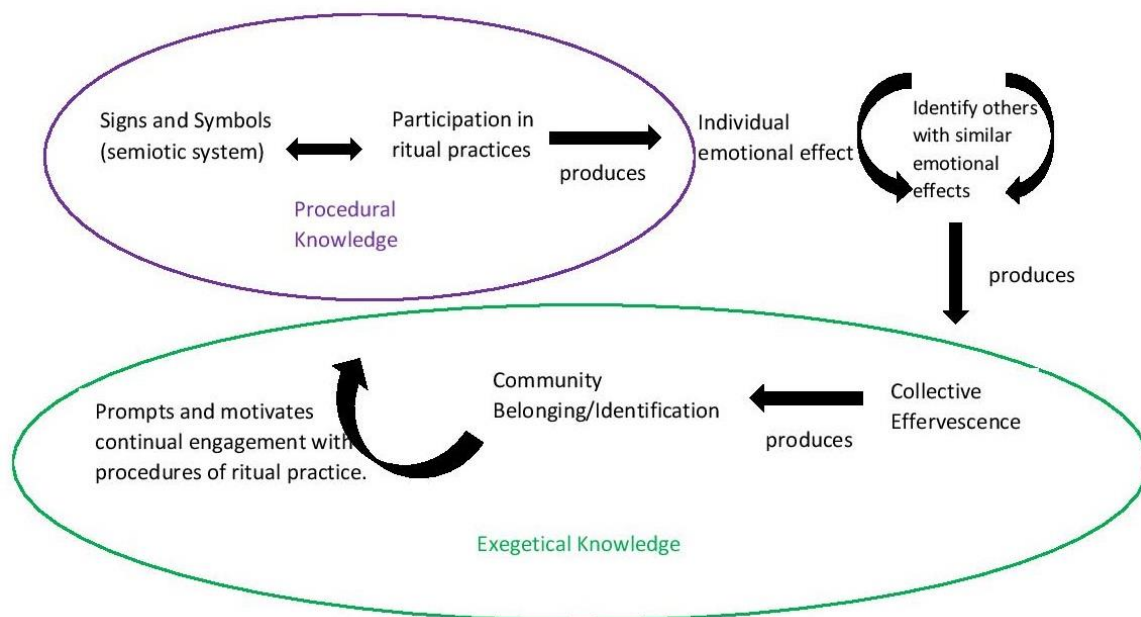
Figure 4: Ritual Ecology

It is important to note that in the ritual ecology, it is not necessary to begin at the top left of the purple oval: someone who comes to church with family regularly may begin to encounter ritual as part of a community identity, with a sense that ritual reinforces that identity, and then later learns the procedure of signs and symbols. Similarly, I think it is possible to experience the ecology counterclockwise: a sense of collective effervescence could be something a participant notices first, prompting that participant to figure out the procedure of the ritual. On the ritual ecology diagram, I have not included a space for explicit presentation of doctrine. While this could be added – either with the sign/symbol system, with the community section, or between the two, depending on the method of presentation – strictly speaking, uniform doctrine it is not necessary for the general transmission of ritual in the way that procedural knowledge, personal exegetical knowledge, and collective effervescence are.

3.2   Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, Godly Play, and Methods of Religious

Transmission

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and Godly Play find specific ways to facilitate religious

transmission without presenting theological or doctrinal principles directly or

dogmatically. Instead, religion "speaks" or is transmitted through objects, stories, images,

and action. In *The Religious Potential of the Child,* Sofia Cavaletti states, "It has been

observed that when theology ceases to speak through images, it loses its hold on people

and becomes a science of the specialists" (158). For the Montessori religious educators,

theology is best learned through physical practice, specifically through facilitating

children's connection to God. These programs emphasize that not everything about faith,

prayer, and ritual can be put into words or explained logically: religious transcendence,

especially, and personal connections with God are often constructed with non-written

arguments such as images and manipulatives. According to Cavaletti, these arguments

are essential to ensuring that people find faith persuasive and that it retains transcendent

elements instead of becoming a "science."

In a Montessori classroom, the procedural knowledge is built when children are

enticed/persuaded to "play" with or manipulate the signs and symbols of religion.

Through this play, children learn the procedural knowledge and "discover" (rather,

construct) exegetical knowledge as they put the pieces together (e.g. "Jesus is the Good

Shepherd" after heading the parable several times over). In Zaliznjak's terms, this

reduction of the parable to a phrase "Jesus is the Good Shepherd" makes the parable a

"ritualized sign and a standardized citation" transformed into the "religious code," (52)

reducing its information but changing it from non-ritualized story to part of the ritual language of the church. As the parable plays a key role in both curricula, children learn to connect the parables with church ritual, slowly building facility in the non-literal language of the church, where almost everything stands for something else. "Parables are examples of how signs of a religious system are derived from the nonritualized language of events after passing through a number of intermediate stages such as ritualization or being joined to myth. The appearance in a religious text of the language of events that forms part of the parable is usually unexpected and in this sense conveys a great deal of information" (Zaliznjak et. al 52). And this is what these programs do: symbols in church convey key information about faith and God efficiently and repeatedly. So, Montessori Sunday School is likely effective because it comes to the student in the context of weekly church services: "religious people are capable of acquiring certain kinds of doctrinal and exegetical knowledge within their own tradition more easily than are people who lack any

Figure 5: Good Shepherd Parable Set

substantial experience in that religious tradition" (Whitehouse 22). Things in the Atrium aren't brand-new; they are child-sized versions of the ones participants encounter in the regular services. Therefore, part of their persuasive appeal is that they activate prior knowledge in that they are similar to things the children have encountered elsewhere.

Rituals can transmit doctrine through repetitive practice (Whitehouse 87), engaging

participants in the how-to, later followed by exegesis. First, the procedure is instilled and

significance is either acquired along the way or taught at a later time. This is what

Montessori religious education purports to do: children should have repeated tangible

experiences with religious ritual and religious stories to facilitate connection to God,

personal faith, and communal belonging. Significance or exegetical knowledge is

acquired by children as a result of incorporating what they hear from parents, worship

services, and other sources with personal reflection. Exegetical knowledge and doctrine

are somewhat standardized when children participate in confirmation classes as young

teenagers.

Confirmation classes serve the purpose of instilling church history, theology, and

doctrine in those who will soon be considered adults in the church, generally through a

non-Montessori, traditional pedagogical approach. Cavaletti is disturbed by what she sees

as the "formula-ism" of theology (158-159): codifying principles, and transmitting

primarily those principles, is not persuasive for anyone but the intellectual "elect few."

She doesn't see the formula (in her case, the Roman Catholic faith) as wrong; rather, the

pedagogical preoccupation with transmitting religion through formula is the problem

(159). She instead builds a method based on Montessori instruction, which emphasizes

respecting the interests and developmental pace of the individual child, and believes

learning happens best through hands-on experience rather than being led by a didactic

teacher. Her assertion that the principles being transmitted are valid, but that they should

be transmitted without direct teaching requires a close look at ritual ecology to discern

the ways in which doctrine is present in the environment, and presented to children through other sources.

Cavaletti and those who practice the method also believe that formulaic doctrinal teaching gives no choice to the learner: they make it seem as though religion is done and decided. This suggests three things. First, it suggests that Montessori pedagogy values individual agency. Rather than moving the class from concept to concept together, Montessori programs in general respect the choice of the child -- even though this is guided choice -- as to the child's current interest and speed of comprehension. Second, the Montessori-based pedagogical systems forwarded by Cavaletti, Gobbi, and Berryman are not doctrine-free; rather, the doctrine is presented implicitly and is enacted by the child. Third, it demonstrates that Cavaletti and others have noticed that explicit, formulary doctrinal arguments are not effective, persuasive, rhetorical appeals for children to become members of -- and stay members of -- a religious community. Other ways of argument are necessary, and the individual's faith is formed through a balance (or perhaps a negotiation) between individual agency and communal arguments. These curricula reshape religious transmission to emphasize rhetorical engagement with God.

3.3   Reading the Signs and Conversing with God: Rhetorical Engagement

Religious transmission is inherently a rhetorical endeavor. To ensure that the religion lasts, individual participants must communicate procedural and exegetical knowledge in a way that is persuasive to others, ensuring continuity of belief and practice. To grow up in a faith community is to grow up among a set of texts and symbols presented to the

faithful again and again: most liturgical mainline churches, for example, use the Revised

Common Lectionary, a three-year cycle of scripture readings. Paraments are changed

seasonally, and the colors of the hangings symbolize both parts of the church year and

aspects of the life of Christ. Communion comes with physical elements imbued with

multiple levels of meaning, confirming membership in a community and for some literal

consumption of Jesus or a common assent to the presence of Jesus in the elements. Each

of these things reminds the believer of the principles and practices of faith, and the acts of

faith – listening, praying, partaking in ritual – affirm and reaffirm participation and belief.

Horton writes,

> Faith is never a given, never a naturalized, universalized state of being.
> Faith is always an act in response to different kinds of arguments. It is
> always an act of reading – a reception *and* a production of an artifact, a
> cause *and* an effect: as a cause it is a cultural text produced in the past
> leading to an act of reception in the present; as an effect it is the object of
> ongoing making, a revisionary product (50).

In Debray's terms, "a transmission arranges the effective force of the actual with the

referential or the virtual" (7). Both Horton and Debray point out that the actions that

make up transmission involve linking the physical or the present with the non-literally or

visually present. To "read" in Horton's terms is to effect force in Debray's. Catechesis of

the Good Shepherd and Godly Play both present these texts and symbols of faith to

children as parts of a holistic cultural text (of Christian faith), linking the actual with the

referential. Children receive and then reproduce these texts, often "playing" with them.

The presentation of the texts and the text's reproduction happen over and over again throughout the process of religious education.

This reproduction requires continued engagement with religious symbols. Kohn writes that symbols achieve referential power because of the systemic relations they have to other symbols (55). Religious symbols are particularly powerful because they do not come to the interpreter isolated from a material context of other symbols. Kohn also writes that symbols achieve stability over time (unlike icons and indices) because they have meaning even in the absence of the direct object to which they refer: they can be about a "what-if" as well as about the here-and-now (55). This stability also offers insight into how ritual remains recognizable even as it evolves. The actual pattern of action or procedure may slowly change, but the system of symbols stays referential and readable even among changing action.

Both Godly Play and Catechesis of the Good Shepherd suggest that there is something about faith, and about the experience of closeness with God, that evades verbal portrayal entirely; hence, the emphasis on activity, play, manipulatives, and signs. In Godly Play, play itself is a rhetorical endeavor, is understood by proponents to bring together the verbal (symbolic) system of communication with the nonverbal system. The nonverbal system is understood by Godly Play teachers to be stronger in children than is the verbal system; therefore, knowing God and knowing *about* God require information to be experienced nonverbally (Berryman 37-38). In fact, the nature of play evades our ability to portray it accurately and with depth verbally. Using Catherine Garvey's conception for

play, which describes the act and does not set a singular definition for the word.

Berryman instead believes that play "sets the bounds for the experience that must be

shown to fully understand it nonverbally" (39). Godly Play's definition of play also rests

on theological concepts, exploring "the theme of Jesus' dictatum that if we hope to be

mature we need to become like children," which, Berryman notes, has very little to do

with speech, or getting the words correct (40). It is therefore a part of educating people to

become mature Christians. Play does not have to imitate the ritual precisely to reinforce

or reinscribe the signs and symbols as readable in the context of communal faith.

In *Listening to God with Children: The Montessori Method Applied to the Catechesis of

Children,* Gianna Gobbi writes that, "Christianity is a religion which requires a

proclamation, and announcement of the Good News" (12). However, Catechesis of the

Good Shepherd and Godly Play explicitly forbid teachers from making statements about

what one should believe about God, or even from evaluating children's assertions about

who they think God is and what they believe. (Teacher may, unconsciously, use

nonverbal signals of approval such as smiling or nodding.) Yet, these programs also raise

up young people who become members of mainstream liturgical churches, and are quite

effective in initiating young people as members of the community. Instead of oral

arguments that present doctrine and belief verbally, and connecting these statements to

required behaviors, in Montessori religious education, the teacher presents argument for

engaging in acts of faith through enticing the child to use the environment, called the

Atrium. Gobbi writes that "the environment and materials are meant to be indirect

instruments of education. They speak to the child without words," and help the adult to,

as much as possible, refrain from intervening in the work of the child (11). Godly Play

involves "both a spoken and unspoken lesson" (Berryman 75). Verbal proclamation

involves only making audible scriptural text. The unspoken lesson is conveyed by the

arguments presented through objects, room arrangements, and pedagogical routines.

These environmental signs and symbols, in both Godly Play and Catechesis of the Good

Shepherd, function not only as a conduit to God, but also an education in participation in

the liturgical church: they teach children the "language of God" (Cavaletti) and the

"language of God's people" (Berryman). Facility with the language of God is something

children come to be able to do through practice, play, and gentle, child-paced initiation

into the community of the church. Berryman takes "language of God" to mean ritual,

liturgy, scripture, as well as the actions, symbols, speech, and objects that go with these

things -- language is not just spoken, but is an entire way of life within the community. A

shared reading of the symbols has been achieved.

Instead of the teacher or theologian as the primary speaker, and the children as the

audience, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd places the Scriptural text, and God, in the

place of speaker. The teacher and the students are both listeners (Cavaletti 159).

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, "does not give the impression that everything has

already been researched and resolved and that nothing remains for the individual to do"

(159). There is much for the individual to do in terms of making meaning out of these

texts through play/work and meditation -- and this can only be done at a developmentally

appropriate pace. This Montessori-based method, says Cavaletti, is not new to the church;

in fact, it has always been present in the Liturgy, which is constructed of signs and symbols of God, repeated regularly (and often presented without accompanying interpretation or why-type information).

> The transcendent is manifested in the sign through a language that is primarily visual, and as such it is immediate, involving the whole person in one's totality… the sign connects us to the sensible while it urges us to reach toward the Invisible… signs in some way make visible to us the great invisible reality of the gift of God (160).

Signs, especially, propose objects of meditation and here described by Cavaletti sound quite persuasive: the sign motivates the participant/listener to "reach" towards the invisible God. At the same time, there is an element of the sign presentation that also helps the child move towards potential community member.

> The child should be initiated into the language of signs. The child is faced with something that signifies more than itself (*"significante"*), for instance, a person he loves, a mustard seed; but for the child to be able to read this in its profundity, it is necessary to help him know the other pole, without which the sign would not exist. Without such help, the thing that signifies can remain mute and opaque, precisely because the sign - [the signifier and signified] inseparably united - is not formed, and thus there is no possibility of reading it (Cavaletti 163-164).

Until the child finds the point at which the sign (parable, liturgical practice, image) is meaningful to him or her, the sign cannot "become animate," "speak," or "acquire depth." As in Sacred Harp, there is a system of signs and symbols that the child must

learn to read and use, and these signs and symbols are understood by the religious

educators to be conduits, through prayer and meditation, to experience and understand

both the divine and the community. Zaliznjak notes that the chief difficulty in semantic

analysis is "the researcher's imposition of a meaning on the signs of a system that was

not characteristic of them within the system but only appeared in the system of

description, while repudiating the exact semantic testimony of the member of a collective

who uses or has used the sign system" (53). This is the exact issue for Montessori Sunday

School: the children literally play with the sign and symbol system within a mini-

environment (the classroom) where the teacher cannot verbally give them the description

of the sign or symbol used by the larger community. The students must import the proper

meaning of the sign into the classroom from outside their church collective. Whereas the

teachers see this as "discovery" I see it as transfer and reinterpretation.

As catechesis teaches children to read the signs of faith, the parable plays a central role in

both curricula, not as a "text" to be read, or as a set of words, but as a cohesive sign to be

seen/heard, and interpreted. A parable offers an element for meditation, whose meaning

cannot be interpreted once-and-for-all by the teacher or theologian. Instead, a parable is a

prime space for children to consider what it means to *them* (Cavaletti 161). The

allegorical nature of the parable, and the Catechesis prohibition on teacher explication,

allows for an individual search for meaning, and "is the revelation of a hidden reality"

(161). Catechesis "reads" the parable as a cohesive image rather than as a set of

sentences, or a set of claims, because the parables are multi-level and share the nature of

poetry: "the images of which they are composed cannot be changed" or even translated or

explained (162). The must be encountered as a whole. Parables are made up of two parts:

the departure point (e.g. the mustard seed) and the arrival point (e.g. the kingdom of

God). The child, through experiencing the parable and meditating on its meaning,

connects the two. Specifically, the child eventually "reads" the actions of his/her teachers

and family as divine love, a reference to the Good Shepherd: "The child reads in a

Christological key the ethical sign of the love he experiences" (163).

In teaching children the "language of God," children are given what *seems like* complete

free range in choosing how to speak to and about God. Cavaletti writes specifically that

the adult must *not* impose his or her own standards or methods of prayer on the child:

"We risk leading them along a path that is not theirs" (120). This strategy is supposed to

separate prayer from the idea of a formal set of words, said to God. Cavaletti asserts that

children should be free to live prayer bodily, and to pray in silence: the child determines

the method of prayer. Otherwise, the adult might suppress the child's seemingly

spontaneous relationship with God. I do not argue that this relationship is spontaneous.

Nor, Whitehouse would say, does it derive directly from procedural knowledge:

"Spontaneous exegetical reflection is not automatic" (49). While in the Atrium, whatever

method of prayer the child uses is accepted, this does not mean it is actually spontaneous.

It is intertextual: woven together *by the child* as a rhetorical response to the atrium,

stories, manipulatives, and corporate worship experiences. Although the children are not

taught long or formal prayers, the weave together what they see as acceptable responses

based on other religious texts or experiences. Or, in Horton's terms, the create a prayer in

response to arguments presented by religious artifacts.

Godly Play, a second Montessori-based Sunday School program, has a slightly different focus. While both programs emphasize experiential learning, and choice on the part of the child, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd calls the experience "the work of the child," (a direct application of the Montessori term) whereas Godly Play focuses on the "invitation to play" (Berryman 11). Both methods value a lack of compulsion on the part of the child, but Godly Play's concern with invitation is especially rhetorically meaningful: "So there really has to be an invitation to play, not a directive based on power or an argument from authority" (11); however, that invitation to play is not for general play, "but for play with the language of God and God's people: our sacred stories parables, liturgical actions, and silences" (12). The child can refuse the invitation, although it is unlikely. Through engaging with this powerful language, and wondering about it, and through experiencing play with a community, "we hear the deepest invitation of all: an invitation to come play with God" (12). Catechesis of the Good Shepherd has more of an emphasis on prayer and dialogue with God, whereas Godly Play focuses on using play to learn the language of God. Catechesis of the Good Shepherd has more of an emphasis on developing the exegetical, and assumes children are predisposed towards exegetical reflection.

While both programs socialize children into the practice of liturgical churches, the rhetorical nature of these programs has important differences. Godly Play aims to "resacralize the everyday things of this world [and] reteaches a sacramental worldview" (Berryman 18). That is, it redefines what is sacred and what is profane. (Catechesis delinates sacred and profane, but does not attempt to do so outside of its own classroom).

Godly Play also aims to integrate the two ways children know: the verbal system (language) and the nonverbal system (play), and thus encourage children to internalize learning through discovery: "The children have the opportunity to enter the story, wonder about it, and *then* create meaning for their own lives" (19). Importantly, Godly Play "helps children know God and the Bible instead of simply knowing *about* God or *about* the Bible" (19). It also "teaches that there is *kairos* time (significant time) as well as *chronos* (chronological or clock time" (19). According to Berryman, Godly Play creates *kairos* time, which prompts participants to see that God is the center of daily life and to reflect on what time is for. No one must hurry the children: they should know when they enter the room that they are in *kairos*; while there is order in the room, there is no timeline except the child's internal one (51). Catechesis focuses primarily on the child's communication with God, whereas Godly Play centers more on the child's relationship with the church community.

Each of these curricula suggest that engaging with God, and living in a faith community, is a rhetorical task that involves reading, interpreting, and creating symbolic texts. Using these texts to build faith requires persuasive and argumentative techniques: people engage with them as they are enticed or persuaded to do so, they build meaning based on continued engagement. Each texts presents an argument about who God is, or who the community is (or both); these are arguments negotiated by the participants. When a child, after hearing the parable of the Good Shepherd and playing with the shepherd manipulatives, says "Jesus is the Good Shepherd and he loves me," the rhetorical argument of the parable and the manipulatives together has been successful: the child has

determined that the parable is meaningful for her, and she has also articulated a general, shared community exegetical knowledge.

3.4   Joining the Community: Exegetical through Procedural Knowledge

In "Ritual Meaning in the Doctrinal Mode," Whitehouse writes that examples of ritual that are both highly repetitive and lack a systematically available exegesis are rare (94). Like Sacred Harp, these Sunday School programs are highly repetitive, and while a systematically available exegesis exists, it is not available to the initiates (the children). Whitehouse also writes that spontaneous exegetical reflection on ritual is not automatic once people learn the mechanics of a particular ritual (94). That is, how-to competence does not automatically mean that participants will be moved to figure out the religious beliefs undergirding the practice. Yet, Montessori religious education purports this very thing: children, given the chance to experience and explore ritual and sacred story, will eventually spontaneously determine what it means to them. In fact, Whitehouse states that highly routinized and repetitive rituals are often very unconnected with exegetical reflection (97): except, Montessori Sunday School, thin place, and Sacred Harp seem to all be exceptions to this rule. This is where I see rhetoric and argument come in: all of these practice prompt exegetical reflections on the part of the participants by presenting effective, persuasive arguments through sign, text, symbol, and ritual action. I agree with Whitehouse that the exegetical reflection is not spontaneous; instead, I see it as rhetorically constructed.

Belief or agreement is often seen as traditionally argumentative: first, an individual intellectually assents to a persuasive argument presented verbally, and then commences participation in some sort of group routine. Why-type knowledge precedes how-type knowledge: the why-type knowledge is the persuasive and argumentative, how-type knowledge follows through and affirms the persuasive success of the why-type knowledge. In the Atrium, sensory materials and the way they are arranged and presented to the child can be read as a text and therefore as persuasive: these arrangements are "not meant to lead to the formulation of concepts, but to a vital encounter with a real Person" (Gobbi 20). The materials have a distinctly rhetorical purpose: not just to aid in learning, but to aid in religious life and religious encounters. The materials make visible and real for the child the proclamation of the gospel. "The material can offer an opportunity for an interior dialogue between the child at the Teacher." (Here, the Teacher is the Holy Spirit.) Materials, in fact, are believed to prompt discussion between the child and God. According to Cavaletti, it is "the child himself who tells us if he does or does not want to be helped to discover God and the transcendent reality. It must be the child who tells us if the religious experience is or is not constitutive of his personality" (31). The child's interpretive relationship with God is allowed to be and remain something of a mystery to the adult. Cavaletti also argues that a child has a deep, natural need for God and an innate belief in God, apart from religious instruction (33-34). So, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd claims to help children discover and make sense of that natural inclination, but this happens through rhetorical engagement.

Whether the sense of God and the experience of the divine – the effervescence – that

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and Godly Play propose to foster is *collective* is

questionable: Montessori religious education emphasizes that each person will experience

this when he or she is developmentally ready, and will under no circumstance hurry or

press a child to express religious feeling. However, the general purpose of this education

is to initiate the child into finding the collective rituals of the church transcendent, and

building a sense of relationship to both God and the church community, so there is still a

sense that eventually one should experience collective effervescence. However, the

purpose of these is very much to build in students a sense of collective identity: the

Sacred Story (scripture) plays a central role in Godly Play, "providing raw materials for

the development of a coherent, mature sense of Christian identity." Through these stories,

"God calls people into a relationship, who then respond by trying to connect with what

they experience as an Elusive Presence" (25). It is through play that the child catches

"glimpses" of God, and communicates with the divine (25). Liturgical actions help

children integrate their identity as Christians into that of the church; additionally,

liturgical play/lessons are a "language lesson" that invites children to participate in the

liturgical experience of the whole church (26). For this curriculum, story is the central

element: Berryman says that stories provide a means for creation of collective identity

and prompt participants to integrate life experiences into "acts of recognition" and to

make meaning of the world (28). This collective identity eventually moves children from

serial players to group ritual participants. Here, Sartre's idea of serial and group

membership does not fit as well, so I adapt it to consider serial participation and group

participation. Children in liturgical churches are generally baptized as infants and therefore they are theologically understood to be full members of the community.

To participate in Montessori Sunday School, children do not have to ascribe to any belief system (indeed, for those who start these programs at an age of 3 or 4, they probably can't), and are not expected to conform to community beliefs. Rather, they are supposed to engage with child-sized or miniature versions of ritual objects, such as communion sets, dollhouse-sized Mass elements, and other liturgical objects. They participate in these activities without being full members of the religious group. Though baptized, they are not held accountable for doctrine or behavior. I argue that at this point, children are serial participants in the collectivity, because "how-type" knowledge reflects a serial nature of collective participation. Individuals learn to negotiate the symbol system to participate in the ritual, but do not yet have to engage with exegetical, or "why-type" knowledge. With enough repetition, procedural knowledge becomes implicit; that is, participants no longer have to intentionally recall a set of steps to follow. Eventually, these children will not have to actively remember what to do in Mass, or how to receive communion. Physical participation becomes automatic. However, in this case, the practicing of ritual is not just for ritual competence. Instead, students are expected to start building why-type knowledge as a consequence of how-type participation.

> Through repeated actions and responses that offer invitation, respect and
> empowerment, the children come to experience the ethics of God's People
> lived out in every interaction. The message we give them is, 'You are

> capable...You are a responsible, beloved member of the community
>
> (Berryman 52).

The idea here is that, supposedly, repeated ritual (both verbal and nonverbal), done at the child's chosen speed, helps the child to *experience,* in a bodily fashion, that they are part of this community. And, they experience the operations of that community. This initiation is largely free of the child having to consent to teachings or doctrine, but instead presents the teachings (sans interpretation) through ritualized action, and allows the child to take up those in whatever way seems meaningful.

I suggest that ritual offers a frame for considering how how-type knowledge can be persuasive and argumentative because it can be a site enabling participants to experience persuasion bodily and thus construct why-type knowledge. Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is persuasive because the physical participation in and rhetorical engagement with the curriculum (sign, symbol, text, action, ritual) is supposed to persuade and encourage children to build a relationship with God, and therefore persuade them that God exists, and that participation in the church is an important and meaningful way to express and confirm this belief. While this method intentionally avoids explicit, didactic teaching, that does not mean it is without argument and persuasion. Through examining Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, we can come to a destabilization of what argument is and recognize that argument need not be written, or even directly offer propositions and statements.

A second reason for examining how-type knowledge as argument is that privileging why-type knowledge can disguise the ways in which serial and group collectives exist simultaneously. Thinking about how-type knowledge as experientially persuasive demonstrates the porous nature of groups and series, and offers a window into how collective effervescence persuades individuals to become dedicate members of pluralistic groups grounded in collective experiences. In a sense, collective effervescence is an embodied, word-less argument that persuades someone (with or without explicit why-type knowledge or conscious assent to the moment of joining the group) to move from serial participation to group participation.

CHAPTER 4. THE TEARING OF THE VEIL: DIACHRONIC COLLECTIVES AND

SEMIOTIC CHAINS IN THIN PLACE RITUAL

4.1   Introduction

Montessori Sunday School emphasizes the child's own developmental pace when

building a sense of transcendence, and Sacred Harp's ritual-intense community seems to

predispose individuals to identify transcendence. These practices both rely on an

immediately present community of practitioners who engage in ritual actions together

and around each other, over and over. A major point of each practice is to initiate new

members into an existing community – although the speed at which new members are

initiated varies greatly. Thin place, however, challenges the notion of "collective" as this

is not typically a ritual practiced with others nearby, nor does it tend to be a practice

repeated many times in a short span of time. Indeed, thin place rituals are significant to

practitioners in part because they are rare: they stand out as special moments and places

unlike the mundane, the everyday, and the chronological. This is the opposite of the first

two ritual practices, whose highly repetitive practices both challenge Whitehouse's

tedium effect (99) suggesting that familiarization and repetition play a role in reifying

community identity. However, thin place rituals are significant and perpetuated despite

very little physical repetition.

A "thin place" is a moment when an individual believes that the barrier between human and divine is momentarily very close: in a sense, the veil has been thinned or lifted temporarily. It is a haptic moment when the divine is *almost* tangible, and a profound moment for the participant. While the religious trope of human near-contact with the divine is not new, nor is it unique to Christianity, the specific label of "thin place" is a twentieth- and twenty-first-century iteration, popularly credited to the Celts. Even in its modern iteration, thin place is not exclusively Christian. *New York Times* travel writer Eric Weiner describes these places: "I'm drawn to places that beguile and inspire, sedate and stir, places where, for a few blissful moments I loosen my death grip on life, and can breathe again. It turns out these destinations have a name: thin places… They are locales where the distance between heaven and earth collapses and we're able to catch glimpses of the divine, or the transcendent or, as I like to think of it, the Infinite Whatever" ("Where Heaven and Earth Come Closer"). Thin place experiences are a unique blend of production and artifact, past and present. They are formed by a perceived cultural history and identification of these experiences as "Celtic." The belief that this practice was established by an ancient and spiritual human group offers practitioners a group they can imagine and with whom they can identify. Ritual participants find this practice legitimate and interesting in part because of the contemporary fascination with ancient religion (especially as it is often constructed in direct opposition to characteristics of present-day religions). Additionally, the basic elements of thin place are easily applied to other religious texts and practices, suggesting to participants that it is transcultural and therefore has the potential to be a universal human experience. To be able to connect to a specific past group, but to also see the practice as open to everyone, is the "sweet spot" of

modern ritual: the practice has a unique history but that history does not prevent those outside that historical group from participation in the ritual.

Examining thin places adds depth to an ecology of ritual that Montessori Sunday School and Sacred Harp do not quite capture, because individual practitioners identify themselves as, through this specific practice, participating in non-time-bound communities, imagining themselves in community with the ancient Celts (who, conveniently, both provide an ethos and authority to the practice but cannot deny the current participant membership). While the actual ritual practice of thin place does not require such a label, the ethereal sense of community requires a uniform name: one cannot identify with others who have (or who supposedly have) practiced thin place unless one knows and understands the label. "Membership" in this group or community is entirely self-determined: individuals choose this label in advance of, during, or after the thin place, because it provides an exigent analytical frame, describing the significance of a moment of transcendence. Individuals essentially invent the community that they imagine practiced this ritual.

Multiple cultures and religions chronicle instances where the human and the divine are for a moment very close. For example, several Babylonian sanctuaries were designated as a "link between heaven and earth" (Eliade 41) as was the Newgrange Passage Tomb, in County Meath, Ireland. Plato's description in the *Phaedrus* of the souls on chariots who glimpse the gods momentarily can also be understood this way, as can Martin Buber's moment of I-Thou. The moments are places of persuasion: the human identifies a

nearness to the divine in response to persuasive appeals -- language, environments, artifacts, signs, and symbols that constitute the moment and that, woven together by the participant towards an exegetical meaning, present a text that can be read as a time and place of nearness to a transcendent presence.

4.2   "Celtic" Christianity and the Genesis of Thin Place

Thin place is popularly attributes to Celtic Christianity, a historically troubled term. Much of what is currently termed "Celtic Christianity" can be sourced in Eastern orthodox ritual (R. Power) and nineteenth-century publications of dubious accuracy (Meek). Power and Meek both point out that the early Celts were not a unified Christian body, but a conglomerate of various Christian and pagan religious practices. Early Celtic Christian churches have no direct modern equivalent; these historical groups were absorbed into the Roman Catholic tradition at the Synod of Whitby in 664 (R. Power 35). What is commonly practiced as Celtic Christianity in the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries is almost entirely unrelated to the actual Christian practices of Celtic-speaking groups in early Britain (R. Power 9-10; Hall 18; Harrington 8; Meek 13). In a modern sense, because the idea of Celtic Christianity has no current denominational body, it is rhetorically compelling when presented as an authentic and especially spiritual form of ancient Christian practice. For those in conservative, non-liturgical churches, thin place and other Celtic practices are forward-thinking and progressive without requiring those who practice them, for example, to abandon literalist Biblical interpretation or embrace a more haptic understanding of communion such as transubstantiation. For those in

mainline, liberal denominations, thin place and Celtic practices offer a sense of historical roots and an orthodox ethos without more traditional or conservative theology attached.

The term thin place occurs nowhere in early church documents or faith writings from the pre-664 Celtic churches, but its modern practice is key to contemporary Celtic Christianity. In "A Place of Community: 'Celtic' Iona and Institutional Religion," Rosemary Power traces this century's revival of Celtic spiritual practices to George McLeod, Church of Scotland minister and founder of the Christian intentional living community on the isle of Iona. Fascinated by eastern Orthodox Christianity, and looking for a way to construct a sense of historical legitimacy for his newly-founded intentional living community, McLeod imported Eastern orthodox ritual practices and labeled them "Celtic." Because his concurrent religious scholars had limited access to Celtic texts and religious artifacts, the authenticity of his claims was not challenged until the 1980s and 1990s, well after the public interest in and general acceptance of these practices as truly Celtic had taken hold (41-43).

The first allusion to "thin place" comes from the George McLeod's 1956 *The Abbey Services of Iona Community* (43), and the first definite use of the term is found in McLeod's *The Future of the Traditional Churches: Pentecostalism and Peace* (1972) (45). However, Power also notes that Christian writer George MacDonald may have used a similar term as early as the 1930s. She traces the ultimate root of thin place to verses in Hebrews and 2 Corinthians that describe the veil of the Temple, as well as to allusions to "thin place" in Greek and Russian Orthodox practices (45). Despite the near-complete

absence of thin place from scholarly work on Celtic Christianity[2], this idea has captured

the minds of modern Christians and non-Christians across denominational boundaries[3].

After its initial use in the Iona community of the 1940s and 1950s, the term achieved

something of a renaissance in circulation on the internet and in Christian publications in

the late 1990s. In 2003, *Christian Century* editor John Buchanan defined thin place as a

place "where the boundary between earth and heaven is porous" ("Spiritual Things").

Writing for the National Catholic Reporter in 2006, Robert Royal, then-president of the

Faith & Reason Institute in Washington, defined thin place as one "where the boundaries

between this world and the next almost disappear" ("Reflections from the Thin Place").

Blog posts and other informal publications chronicling individual thin place experiences

abound, suggesting that something about thin place is persistently persuasive for modern

Christians.

Whereas in Montessori Sunday School and in Sacred Harp singing, the relationship

between the discourse of practice, procedural knowledge, and exegetical knowledge tends

to be straightforward (the first two precede the latter), this relationship is more complex

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[2] "A Thin Place: Narratives of Space and Place, Celtic Spirituality and Meaning" by Laura Beres, published in the *Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work* (2012) is one of the few scholarly articles on thin place. Beres reflects on her visit to Iona, which she experienced as a thin place. She argues for an integration of spiritual narratives into social work practice. However, this article does not offer any evidence that the concept of a thin place is legitimately Celtic.

[3] Ian Bradley, author of *Celtic Christianity*, and an academic who studies its modern revival, takes issue with much of the published work on Celtic Christianity. He questions the authenticity of materials published as "Celtic," especially the many explicitly religious publications that do not rely on research, instead taking their material from church tradition and from each other. Tracing the growing interest in Celtic Christianity to Ireland immediately post-Vatican II, Bradley identifies a "growing mood of national self-confidence" and a desire to incorporate more historical Irish culture into the Roman Catholic tradition (194-195). Some scholars have pointed to the perceived ecumenism of the Celtic church and note its possibility for offering some sense of shared heritage between Irish Catholics and Northern Ireland's Protestants (195).

in thin place. Here, prior learning is especially important because there is no synchronic collective that intentionally teaches participants the procedural knowledge. Because individuals can seek a thin place moment, spontaneously find themselves in one, or retroactively identify the moment as thin, exegetical knowledge may precede or be concurrently developed alongside procedural knowledge. Procedural knowledge is also less unified in this practice: how the practice of thin place happens, in a concrete way, is very much up to the participant. Suffice to say that the individual must encounter the *idea* of a thin place through some sort of discourse, and must have a "specified pattern of prior learning" (Whitehouse 16) in which there is some belief in God or transcendence, and then has to determine based on the set of qualifications they develop that a place is thin and that thin place has some relevance to their religious or spiritual life.

Despite its supposed historical connections, I read thin place as a new religious movement (NRM). In *Religion as a Chain of Memory,* Hervieu-Leger notes that NRMs allow individuals to construct their own religious meaning based on what they find important (or, I would argue, what they find persuades them to learn the ritual and construct exegetical knowledge): "The constitution and expansion of the modern sacred is a consequence of the direct access individuals have to the stock of cultural symbols available" (33). Contemporary ritual – and the modern sacred – does not necessarily require an established, institutionalized group. For example, high literacy rates and the proliferation of technology give individuals access to texts and cultural symbols which may be removed or used apart from the religious institutions that created them. For thin place, "direct access" can come in the form of popular publications, internet access, and

travel to historical British or Irish sites. As Hervieu-Leger points out, participants combine cultural symbols. This combination of cultural symbols and iterations of textual fragments creates a sort of language of thin place, which can then be written into thin place moments.

The opportunity to define thin place for oneself offers participants a certain ritual agency: beyond the requirement that it be a moment when the practitioner feels closer to God/transcendence than usual and the general trend that such moments happen in the natural world, the practitioner is free to define thin place for him or herself almost entirely. The procedural knowledge and the text of the ritual is determined by the participant. As there exists no authorized source for the ritual, an individual takes the general trends mentioned above and applies them to a place and moment that seems to fit, and upon reflection assigns some exegetical knowledge to the ritual procedure. The frame of the ritual procedure may even be applied long after the actual moment has passed, if an individual does not have the vocabulary necessary to label a moment and place as "thin" at the actual time of experience. Exegetical and procedural knowledge are not developed separately or even one after the other, but simultaneously. A bit of exegetical knowledge – a hint that thin place might be personally significant – is required for individuals to pursue enough procedural knowledge to confirm that they can fit a particular personal moment into the ritual frame, or that they can manipulate a ritual frame to fit the personal moment.

In the absence of established uniform ritual, thin places demonstrate a high rate of what

Porter calls "iterability" or the repetition of fragments such as themes, signs, symbols,

and other texts (35). That most people who identify a moment/place as thin find such in

nature, and often in either the American Southwest or in the UK and Ireland, for example,

is evidence to this practice as intertext. Individuals apply either proactively or

retroactively a characteristic of other's experiences to their own. Certain quotes attributed

to Celtic individuals pop up again and again in blog posts or articles. Whether the quote

is accurate is neither justified nor important; its seamless applicability to the situation at

hand justifies its use and reuse. These fragments "mark" a person's experience as a thin

place, rather than imposing a particular procedure or interpretation upon it. This marking

causes individuals interested in thin place to be able to locate the web narrative or article

that result, here creating a loosely networked digital community of people who have all

identified this practice as significant.

Thin place persists because it seems both historically grounded and innovative in the

context of the modern world. "In general, the stronger the innovatory force of a given

symbolic message (i.e., the greater its nonconformity with the norms of its milieu), the

sturdier must be its transmission's organizational armature, because it will become all the

more arduous to clear ways through hostile surroundings" (Debray 13). Thin place both

resonates with and challenges the norms of the modern religious world: as I will

demonstrate in forthcoming sections, thin place is constructed as a valid practice with

exegetical significance because participants identify similar ideas in Biblical texts or

liturgical practices; yet, no denomination or church structure claims or regularly institutes

thin place in any official sense. So, transmission of this practice requires a strong organizational formal structure. For thin place, this means that the essential structure of this practice is highly persuasive and activates relevant prior knowledge, as the organizational formal structure is not part of any one tradition's doctrine and persists almost entirely outside of spiritual or religious organizations.

This relationship between procedural and exegetical knowledge fits in with the broader Celtic Christian movement: it is both inter-denominational and extra-denominational. Participants are free to integrate it into an existing, denominationally-based faith practice (most common) or to abandon formal denominational faith practices entirely and opt into Celtic Christianity (less common). Compared, for example, to other haptic experiences of God, such as partaking in the Eucharist or being baptized, thin places do not come with a well-defined and complex set of theological principles contested by multiple denominations over centuries. These moments are particularly persuasive in part because the procedural knowledge (ritual) and exegetical knowledge (significance) can be highly personalized and also connected to an imagined past community. Because this movement is linked not to denominations or institutions but instead to circulation of persuasive discursive objects and ideas, it does not follow Hervieu-Leger's general

Figure 6: Iona Abbey, a common thin place

pattern for the normativity of collective religious memory, wherein individual, ordinary

believers (i.e. church members) must be connected with and participate in rituals

authorized by the established producers of the collective memory (i.e. bishops or

prophets). Instead, ordinary participants in thin places and other Celtic Christian faith

practices then become themselves the "authorized producers of collective memory"

(126), feeding the energy behind these experiences and offering personal testimony as

persuasive evidence of the realness of these experiences. The practice is normalized by its

intertextuality, technological circulation, and imagined connection to the ancient Celts.

4.3   Take Off Your Shoes, God is Here: Doctrinal Justification for Inventive Ritual

Modern Christians are attracted to Celtic Christianity because it presents itself part of an

ancient narrative, a reformulation of ancient practices supposedly lost. As Hervieu-Leger

notes in *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, "modernity's imaginative projection of

continuity presents itself as an interlacing of shattered memories, memories that have

been worked upon and invented and constantly reshaped in response to the demands of a

the present" (Hervieu-Leger 143). The continuity practitioners seek is intertextual and

inventive. This is different than religious nostalgia, or the sort of fond memory of what

has past; this is the result of a fascination with and longing for a sense of ancient

community woven into contemporary ritual practice that intersects with technology.

Celtic Christianity and thin places reflect the demands of those who find them persuasive

arguments for continued faith. As Whitehouse writes, "a number of variables come into

play that regulate the rate and volume of independent reflection of religious

mysteries...popular religious thinking will err in the direction of simpler, more "naturalized" concepts" (17). Thin place, and Celtic practices more generally, demonstrate this tendency towards simpler or "naturalized" concepts in that they fulfill a need for haptic connection with God and a sense of ancient ritual that is not being met within participant's church communities. The principle of thin place is not very complicated, particularly when compared with doctrinal concept such as the trinity or the Eucharist. Part of thin place's popularity is its ease of adaptation and its lack of intercessors and intermediaries. Debray writes, "The more speculative a doctrine, the less preoccupied it will be with its administrators and intermediaries" (33). The very nature of thin places and other moments of closeness to transcendence eliminates the need for intercessors as well as administrators. For the most part, this in an individual ritual that can only be interpreted and authorized by the participant in conjunction with discursive traces. Debray also writes that in religion, intercessors are generally introduced at moments of "ecclesiastical rigidification" (33), when it is time to rein in and standardize a particular ritual. Thin place persists as a concept entirely outside of church structure and for some people outside of Christianity itself, and is certainly a speculative practice; therefore, there is a resistance to any need for intermediaries, who would make such a practice less significant and less haptic. The standardization that is present happens only because the practice and its discourse present themselves as sufficiently persuasive, and so practitioners take up and reuse the traces, ensuring the survival of a recognizably similar ritual.

For individuals who identify strongly with Christian traditions, thin place becomes

persuasive when it is traced through scriptural texts. The procedural ritual of a thin place

is a complex text of faith: an individual is persuaded by arguments for the near-material

presence of God at a particular place and at a particular time. The idea of thin place and

the texts produced by these experiences offer a unique vantage point for examining how

individuals construct and perform the modern sacred because they represent experiences

that individuals feel are simultaneously highly personalized and an elective connection to

an ancient community, yet (although this is not necessarily realized by the participant)

they also demonstrate how a participant's relationship with God is rhetorically and

communally constructed from pre-existing iterations of signs, symbols, and text

fragments.

Before a thin place moment can be constructed and read, it must be justified, rhetorically

and theologically, as a legitimate faith experience. Thin place has achieved an acceptable

status within theologically orthodox, conservative Christian groups because individuals

have identified Biblical stories that meet the conceptual qualifications of a thin place. A

text (of faith) is acceptable in a given community only to the extent that it reflects a

community's episteme (Porter 39). Thus, citing and analyzing Biblical stories within

personal narratives about thin place experiences is a rhetorical argument for the

legitimacy of this experience as part of the text of faith, especially within more

conservative Christian denominations that privilege Biblical inerrancy and theologically

orthodox doctrine. However, these narratives that connect Bible stories and thin place

experiences also allow a window into what certain writers believe about the role of God in the thin place compared to the role of the human.

On the multi-authored spiritual blog *Patheos,* Rev. Mark D. Roberts, as part of an analysis of the Garden of Eden as a thin place, defines thin place as "a place where human beings experience God more directly" and as an especially intimate encounter with God ("Thin Place: A Biblical Investigation"). This definition is the most haptic and tangential of the bloggers considered in this chapter; the more general definition of closeness to the divine is replaced with the almost direct experience of the being of God. For Roberts, however, to keep the place thin, the human agent creates a certain tension. The thin place is one of active negotiation between the human and God, a space of ongoing conversation.

To justify thin place as suitably theologically orthodox, Roberts also explores the story of Moses and the burning bush as a Biblical example of a thin place. While the closeness is necessary for the construction of the thin place, so is the separation. In this narrative, the closeness is the work of God and the separation is the work of Moses, who hides his face. This tension between permeable barrier and slight separation keeps the place thin. In the book of Exodus, Moses leads his father-in-law's sheep up to Horeb, the mountain of God. An angel of God appears and sets a bush on fire. Then, "Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.' When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' Then he said, 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet,

for the place on which you are standing is holy ground" (Exodus 3:4-5, NRSV). Moses

hides his face: he is afraid to look at God. The human and the sacred come close; the

barrier is permeable; the place is thin. The mountain was already known as a place of

God. Yet, it does not become a holy or sacred place until God shows up at a specific

moment in a specific place. God and Moses are close, definitely closer than normal, but

there is still a separation. Mountains and other separated or difficult-to-reach geographic

places are, Biblically and otherwise, often thought of as places closer to divinities:

consider Mount Ida in Greek mythology, the Garden of Gethsemane, and Mecca.

What is interesting about interpretations that read Moses on the mountain as a thin place

is the extent to which these attribute all of the agency and action in narrative to God –

even though human action is clearly important in maintaining the place as thin. Christian

writer Mark Batterson (*Wild Goose Chase*, 2008), who like Roberts reads the Moses

story as thin place, states, "This was one of those moments [a thin place] and one of those

places for Moses. God showed up. And an ordinary place, a bush on the backside of the

desert, became holy ground" (46). The idea of the ordinary becoming holy because of the

perceived presence of the divine is also a common fragment cited in thin place.

Batterson's interpretation of Moses on the mountain reads the physical location of a thin

place as completely un-sacred until the appointed time of God's arrival. The agency of

Moses is nebulous. In these author's readings, other than bringing the sheep to a place

known as the mountain of God, Moses does nothing to create the thin place. This writer

does not see Moses' action of turning his face from God as important. Rather, it is the

actions of God alone that create the thin place. Because he reads this place as both thin

and constructed by God alone, this reading justifies applying the principles observed in this place text to other places to make them holy and thin. Batterson shapes the modern thin place experience as entirely the work of God. God has a stronger ethos than the human; therefore, legitimate faith experiences are thought to be the work of God. Citing the actions of God, as Roberts does in "Mount Sinai as a Thin Place" ("[Mount Horeb] itself had no particular thinness, apart from God's decision to make his presence known there in a particular way") is a common thread running through thin place reflections, as the idea that there is something outside of human control during a thin moment is key to creating sense of divine closeness.

Reading Robert's and Batterson's readings of the Moses text demonstrates specifically how faith plays out in thin place as a communal and social construction. Faith is not simply the text a believer creates when negotiating a relationship with God because writing one's relationship with God does not happen from scratch. Individuals borrow traces from religious texts as a part of building a discursive relationship with God. Porter writes that by emphasizing the intertextual nature of discourse, "we shift our attention away from the writer as an individual and focus more on the sources and social contexts from which the writer's discourse arises." An intertextual reading assumes that social context matters more than authorial intention (34-35). This statement applies to analyzing faith: the believer is not merely an individual constructing a relationship with God. Instead, the believer's discourse arises from social contexts of a faith tradition, even if that individual removes him/herself from organized religion. Batterson and Roberts

accept the model of thin place as a legitimate faith experience because they can place it within the social context of Biblical narratives.

4.4   Thin Place and the Diachronic Collective

Sacred spaces in particular offer a sense of connection to a larger, diachronic narrative of faith and a link to past individuals of similar faith. David Power writes that religious rituals, including ones that derive from popular perceptions, "offer a sense of historical continuity even when the world in which they belong is changing. For those who participate in them, they are an important part of the means of generating a sense of mystical participation in a greater reality" (307). A thin place is not typically a group experience in the sense that others are immediately present and participating simultaneously. Yet, individuals who identify thin places do cite an identification with *past* or *imagined* groups as a key characteristic of a thin place. The individual may seek a religious ritual that causes them to feel a connection with ancient Celts, for example. The connection between the practitioners is not synchronic but diachronic.

Sartre's serial collective -- individuals oriented around a particular practice, but who do not share a common identity or purpose -- may describe the connections between modern practitioners of thin place. Thinking of modern thin place participants as a serial collective also highlights the persuasive appeal of this practice. People do not generally identify with others who concurrently find thin places, but instead identify with the practice, its material effect, and its (supposed) ancient practitioners. Any possibility of group collectives with thin place is imagined diachronically and neither synchronous nor

literal. The contemporary diachronic community can be traced through examining web narratives wherein individuals record thin place experiences for public reading, suggesting a loosely organized technological spiritual network. The imagined (and more intentional) diachronic collective that individuals opt into by using thin place ritual happens as participants *feel* and *identify* a sense of trans-historical practice.

Travel writer and thin-place-seeker Mindie Burgoyne writes, "They are often marked by human spirits that have gone before, felt the thinness and been changed by it. Thin places not only transcend the senses, but transcend the boundaries of time and space" ("Walking Through Thin Places"). According to Burgoyne, the community of thin place works across time: it is diachronic, formed by multiple individuals who identify a similar procedure at a particular place. As there are no clear, gathered records of who felt what place was thin, these "histories" are largely either imagined or formed by encountering web texts claiming a place as "historically" thin. The persuasive appeal has nothing to do with logic or empirical evidence; rather, is a persuasion of pathos. Reading web texts prompts individuals to redefine moments as possibly thin, introducing them to this idea. The thin place can happen either retroactively or sometime in the future; the importance of definition comes in being able to understand what the phrase "thin place" signifies. And, it is an imprecise signification that is quite malleable for the individual participant.

These rituals make it possible for the participant to see himself of herself as part of a large narrative of faith. By practicing these rituals, individuals write themselves into texts of faith that span centuries. Participation in these religious rituals solidify cultural and

community ties in an ever-changing world because "For the religious man, this spatial

non-homogeneity finds expression in the experience of an opposition between space that

is sacred – the only *real* or *real-ly* existing space and all other space, the formless

expanse surrounding it" (Eliade 20). A true sacred experience (in contrast to the profane

everyday life) requires a special, qualitatively different space.

While community for thin place is typically diachronic, I have found one example of

intentional, immediately present synchronicity. Since 1991, travel writer and tour guide

Mindie Burgoyne has led yearly "Thin Place Mystical Tours of Ireland," which are

> mystical, spiritual tours will help transport you into a higher existence
>
> when you sense the healing energy in Ireland's thin places. Our tours are
>
> crafted as spiritual tours (though not religious), and are ideal for people
>
> interested in earth energies, the healing arts, nature, Reiki masters, artists,
>
> those who desire connection with ancestors, those interested in Celtic
>
> history and archaeology, shamanic journeyers, and people looking for
>
> spiritual growth ("Tour Ireland and Thin Paces with Mindie Burgoyne").

This tour departs from other writings about thin place in that it specifically designates

certain places as thin pre-tour, and brings a collective to these places simultaneously,

prompting the participants to think of the place as thin and construct the signs and

symbols they encounter as characteristics of a thin place – which perhaps prompts

participants to apply thin place ritual even after the tour, in other parts of their lives.

These tours, also, are billed as ways to avoid getting lost in Ireland, and to help tourists

get the most for their money ("About Thin Place Mystical Tours"), both characteristics

that depart from other writings on thin place, some of which include the importance of

feeling lost to identifying a particular moment and locale as a thin place. On these tours,

"we do it all for you," Burgoyne writes, so that participants do not have to worry about

any logistics. This both resonates with and departs from Batterson's and Roberts'

definitions of thin place. First, the travel coordinator marks the place as thin, picking up

traces from historical and cultural sources, and then presenting those to the participants

wholesale. The travel coordinator "writes" the intertext and essentially takes the agency

and logistics Batterson and Roberts ascribe to God. So, the agency of the ritual

participant is recognition and helping the place remain thin. However, Burgoyne departs

from Batterson and Robert in that the justification for thin place has far less to do with

theology and showing this ritual as fitting in to a Christian tradition and more to do with

making it fit into a sort of mystical history accessible to anyone regardless of religious

identity.

Through this enactment of claiming a part of a collective, trans-temporal identity (Celtic

Christianity), thin place becomes a persuasive category for haptic experiences of God that

occur outside traditional church structure and ritual. Celtic Christianity in general, and

thin places specifically, build from traces familiar to a religious audience. An intertext

assume certain audience attitudes and "exerts its influence partly in the form of audience

expectations" (Porter 38). Thin places presents a compelling intertext to modern

Christians, specifically those with an attitude of seeking a tangible sense of God,

composed of familiar traces re-worked into new, outside-of-formal-church package.

Elements of a thin place such as prayer, the beauty of the natural world, and a sense of

the nearness of God are all easily found in other Christian texts and rituals. Audiences

expect these elements in religious rituals. Thin place presents the familiar and

comfortable in a new way – one that offers the experiencer a more direct and powerful

religious agency. Thus, the audience is responsible for the production of text as is the

writer (38). In reading thin places as intertextual, we are able to examine the text

produced and the text producer simultaneously.

4.5   Traces of Thin Place: Semiotic Systems

Thin places, and Celtic Christian practices more generally, exemplify the modern sacred,

which its participants perceive to be an individualized sacred (consider the phenomenon

of "spiritual but not religious"). The modern sacred is voluntary: modern-day elective

fraternities (religious or nonreligious) are founded on the *experience* of brotherhood

rather than a shared ancestry (Hervieu-Leger 150). The vast majority of those who

identify with Celtic Christianity do so because they find it significant, not because they

necessarily have any ethnic or linguistic link to Welsh, Irish, or Scottish groups (Meek

232). Christian individuals in the West are typically raised in or around established

churches, and so participation in Celtic Christianity, usually a turn that comes later in life,

is also voluntary in a way that the individual's "home" denomination or tradition is not.

The modern sacred is constructed by people who are motivated to depart from

established, officially sanctioned religious ritual; however, most elements of the modern

sacred can be traced back to various communities' religious practices and are collectively

constructed—and so, the modern sacred is also fundamentally intertextual as individuals can pull bits and pieces from various sign and symbol systems to write a text of thin place. Sharf writes that "scholars disagree over the extent to which mystical experiences are shaped by prior culturally mediated expectations and presuppositions," and whether it is possible to separate a person's description of a religious experience from his/her interpretation of that experience (276). It seems to me that a rhetorical understanding of religious experiences and of faith strikes a balance between individual agency and the construction cued by outside forces.

The "traces" that form ritual intertext can also be understood as the signs and symbols that make up a semiotic system of thin place. Writing about the structure and typology of semiotic modeling systems, Zalinznajak, Ivanov, and Toporov note that, "Semiotic systems are never furnished directly to the researcher, but instead are constructed as the result of interaction between the observer and the facts observed… religious and mythological systems can be constructed on the basis of directly observed facts that we can call a text in the broad sense of the word" (49). This text is distinguished from what surrounds it "according to the signifying aspect of the signs from which the texts are constructed" (49). In a thin place, the "facts" observed might be the environmental characteristics (trees, wind, water, ancient stone circles, canyons, etc.) that a participant then assigns a symbolic meaning based on his or her interaction with nature, interpreted in part by activated prior knowledge. (Whitehouse 23). Eduardo Kohn, in *How Forests Think: Towards an Anthropology Beyond the Human,* discusses these as living signs, which are in an "ongoing relational process," not located in a static being or location and

able to "be interpreted by a subsequent sign in a semiotic chain that extends into the possible future" (33). Thin place is part of an ongoing semiotic chain wherein the participant interacts with prior knowledge (perhaps religious traces or internet encounters) which enables interpretation of natural characteristics and connects those to some expectation of the presence of the divine, cued by the relational process between the world around the individual and what their prior knowledge teaches them about the divine. This process is semiosis, which enables the chain of memory, connecting current participants to past Celts and ensures the continued propagation of thin place.

Writing for HuffPost Religion in 2013, Karyn L. Weisman, a homiletics professor at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, reflects on the nature of thin places, which she defines as "a moment of connection to the Divine that is close and profoundly intimate" ("Thin Places of Faith"). Weisman's definition of thin space is unique in that she grounds her understanding in relationship, rather than distance (although she does also reference distance). Weisman reflects on a high school trip to the Rocky Mountains, where she was lost and away from the group at night, and so her reflection is an example of retroactive procedural and exegetical knowledge. At the time of the experience, she did not know about this particular interpretive frame and so the significance was assigned post-moment. In her process of semiosis, the chain of signs by which she constructs a past experience of thin place, "similarity and difference become interpretive positions (with potential future effects)" (Kohn 87). Weisman assigns the state of being lost alone in the Rocky Mountains and realizing that the stars were especially bright -- and felt unusually close – was a moment of similarity to other's narratives of thin place although

she did not agree with the literal assertion about Celts belief that heaven and earth are three feet apart. After taking time to get used to the darkness, she had a profound sense of God's intimate closeness and a moment of communication that kept her in a relationship with God. Acts of faith continue to place a believer in communication with God, "a persuasive relationship that instills conviction and moves the faithful to performance, to acts carried out in the context of a material existence" (Horton 44). In this case, the material existence, or the living sign, is both the mountain and the later written internet reflection: both are necessary to interpret and experience the moment as thin, and are therefore part of the semiotic chain, or what Hervieu-Leger would term the chain of religious memory. These moments of communication re-convince the believer of God's presence and reinforce the line of communication between the human and God. She notes at the end of the post, "I am trying to be open to the "thin places" every day. Some days I am better than others — but I pray to be open enough to experience them" ("Thin Places of Faith"). Here, the potential future effects of these interpretive positions become clear: assigning the ritual frame of thin place predisposes the participant to experiencing this again.

For the ritual frame to succeed, the individual needs an awareness or openness to the possible presence of God, divinity, or transcendence. The barrier that determines when a thin place occurs is created by the individual, who has significant control over how directly or indirectly he/she experiences God. The reiterated cultural idea that such moments happen across cultures and times, combines with this personal sense of possible contact with the diving, together make thin place possible. This is evident through

Weisman's exploration of "thick place," or a sense of distance from God. In these
moments, though,

> I know it was not God who moved away. The Divine was still very close -
> - maybe I did not feel it as close as I felt it on that mountaintop, but God
> was close nonetheless...What's the difference? Sometimes I'm just not
> sure. Was it me being open and needy on the mountaintop that led me to
> feel that connection? Or was it simply the circumstances? I can't say I
> really have an answer (Reflection on a Thin Place").

Weisman constructs thin place as most definitely dependent on human action: God is not
the only agent, independently determining thin or thick places. When a person is closed
off or distracted, he/she makes the barrier between human and God thicker and less open
to communication. The communicative relationship Weisman pursues understands God
as always there: the opportunities for thin places are many. Whether they will occur
depends in great part as to whether the human agent is actively seeking them. David
Williams, General Superintendent of the Evangelical Friends Church-Mid America, has a
similar understanding: "any ordinary space can be transformed into a thin place when we
are attentive to the presence and power of God's Spirit in our midst" ("Thin Places").
Both Williams' and Weisman's understanding of thin place bring this concept into
harmony with the typical mainline Christian theological understanding of God as
omnipresent.

Kairos time is helpful to understand both the individual and collective temporal aspects
of thin place. Weisman's and Williams' thin places are kairotic in a Platonic sense: an

awareness of the possibility of a thin place is key in experiencing a thin place. The rhetor must be aware of and open to kairos in order to experience it and to use it (Smith 52-53)[4]. Human action can intentionally distance one from a thin place, just as the Platonic rhetor, if not well-trained, may fail to recognize and take advantage of a kairotic moment. Platonic kairos here explains the process of procedural and exegetical knowledge: to take a set of signs as a semiotic chain of thin place requires recognition of not just the procedure but the procedures significance, and both of these must be realized close to simultaneously. This is possible because the basic set of procedures for thin place can be encapsulated in very few steps and these steps are felt more than physically performed. Its procedure is both practical and metaphysical.

The metaphysical aspects of thin place ritual, especially Weisman's experience, also show elements of Gorgian kairos. For the Sophist Gorgias, kairos is mystical and almost completely outside of human control, anticipation, or at-the-time recognition. It is unteachable, understandable only in retrospect. The decision of what constitutes a kairotic moment is not made by the rhetor, but by the force of kairos itself. Gorgian kairos is not founded in the rational (Miller 170). Weisman questions whether her openness is more or less important than the right time and place; Williams emphasizes that any place may be made thin if the human is attentive to God. The subject experiencing the thin place cannot be taken out of the physical space. Miller notes that

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[4] Smith argues that kairos, as presented in Plato's *Phaedrus,* is more practical than metaphysical, emphasizing human action and skill. Plato also explores kairos in the *Seventh Letter* and the fourth books of *Laws* (52-53). For Plato, kairos rests in the knowing of *when* to use (or refrain from using) speech and rhetorical appeals. Bernard Miller also casts Plato's kairos as practical: it is an awareness of the right time to make a certain argument, a sort of seize-the-moment opportunity recognizable to the well-educated speaker (169).

"to isolate the subject from the situation would seem to violate the integrity of Gorgian kairos. There must be a meditative correspondence between the two, a dialogue that tends to fuse them...a slamming shut of the distance between the two" (177). Like Horton's assertion that faith positions a believer in a communicative relationship with the divine, Miller here notes that for a moment to be kairotic, there is also a closeness between the subject and the situation who are fundamentally tied up together. This analysis of kairos offers insight into the tension between human agency and divine agency in the construction of a thin place.

The proliferation of thin place at both a personal and a cultural level depends on semiotic chains – on the ability of the participants to read living signs in ways that construct personal significance but also that create basic conformity to cultural traces which mark these rituals as carrying on a chain of (largely fictional) memory, a link to Celtic practice. This ritual is culturally persistent despite relatively low rate of ritual repetition because of the strength of the semiotic chains. These semiotic chains show how procedural and exegetical knowledge are developed simultaneously and apart from a physical collective, instead retroactively adding the participant to a loosely networked diachronic ritual collective.

CHAPTER 5. CONCULSION: TRANMISSION THROUGH PRAXIS

5.1   "Spiritual but Not Religious"

Through the ecology of ritual practice that I have developed, I find it evident that the

claim that a certain practice can be "spiritual but not religious" is not entirely possible.

For example, thin place is a ritual that may be practiced by those outside of any form of

organized religion; indeed, this is quite common. However, the construction of this ritual

requires reuse of textual fragments which can be traced back to various Christian and

Biblical sources. This means that although an individual participant may identify as non-

religious but ethereally spiritual, the actual ritual can never be entirely divorced from the

structures of established religion, nor can spirituality be divorced from ritual. By tracing

the reuse of religious concepts and texts, we can observe the extent to which religious

memory remains a part of a more secularized twenty-first-century world that is perhaps

less divorced from institutional religion than we often imagine. While the modern sacred

may happen outside of historical religious institutions, it repurposes their rhetorical

appeals in ways that are effectively persuasive for a contemporary audience.

5.2   The Sweet Spot of Ritual Praxis

Ritual transmission requires a sort of "sweet spot" of praxis, wherein theory (exegetical knowledge) and practice (procedural knowledge) reach an optimal level of individual competency and communal repetition. Communal repetition must include ritual pedagogy, a mechanism for integrating new participants into the procedural knowledge. Through praxis, the ritual ecology is transmitted, and slowly evolves as it incorporates new elements: its recurrence happens among new audiences, participants, and situations – especially with the twentieth- and twenty-first-century proliferation of web technology. Pedagogies of ritual (Montessori Sunday School and Sacred Harp) gain wider access through web technology. Videos and web forums (Sacred Harp and Montessori Sunday School), and web narratives (Sacred Harp and thin place) are all methods of transmission specifically enabled by the internet: person-to-person live transmission occurs, but often as a result of first encountering the practice digitally.

On the spectrum of procedural knowledge, Sacred Harp has a completely uniform transmission of procedural knowledge. Every singing is run the exact same way. A singing in Berkeley, CA will have the same procedures and rituals as one in Kokomo, IN. The transmission of exegetical knowledge is less uniform (though most singers would probably note that a "why" they sing includes powerful feelings of community membership). Montessori Sunday School transmits procedural knowledge at the speed of the individual child -- and does not correct children who deviate from the precise ritual actions -- but the eventual idea is that the child becomes comfortable with the established ritual procedures and performs them as expected by the adult community. This

pedagogical method aims to prompt children to come to individual understanding of relationship with God, but eventually these children go through confirmation where they will be presented with doctrinal, exegetical knowledge that will supplant their individually-developed knowledge to match the ritual they continue to practice. Thin place has, at a basic level, more uniform exegetical knowledge (encountering the divine closely is important) but exactly *how* that happens procedurally is pretty much up to the participant. One can observe general trends (i.e., nature), but the ritualization isn't necessarily uniform beyond the basic principle. Ritual praxis (the ideal blend between procedural and exegetical knowledge) creates effective transmission.

Ritual ecology lets us see how rituals are both alive and in transmission shift to be rhetorically persuasive for different audiences, but also how rituals retain enough of their characteristics (symbols, for example) to be continually recognized as a specific ritual. Stability and evolution are both present in the ecology of ritual. Ritual is not something that human use, and then teach. Instead, rituals are themselves agential, acting upon humans as much as humans act upon ritual.

5.3   God Versus the Silicon Chip

Transmission of ritual praxis in the twenty-first century cannot happen apart from technological structures. Debray writes that the cultural and the technological – and those who study each – are often at odds with one another, as two different fields with few translators between them (45). It is the job of the mediologist to negotiate between the "technological cruse" and the "underground mantle of cultures" (46). Writing about these

fault lines, he questions, "Can one not discover a premonition, in the battle between ethnic memory and the tendencies of a new technology, of what will be at stake in the next century? Put graphically, this is the question of God versus the silicon chip, and the struggle's outcome could well come down to a paradoxical reactivation of orthodoxy by computers" (46). Archives and records, kept through technology means, provide a repository for doctrine and ritual practice but do more than simply record: "the rapidity of our evolutionary rhythm of assimilating knowledge is thrown off by the relative inertia of… our sense of membership in, or obedience to, different associations, doctrines, or affiliations (46). As ritual spreads more quickly and reaches new audiences via web technology, this same technology can effectively standardize ritual, slowing its 'natural' evolution. For rituals to be taken up by audiences, then, the tension between standardization and doctrine is key: the ritual procedure itself may be relatively standardized though technology, but the doctrine must be flexible enough to incorporate rather than exclude new participants. That is, for ritual survival, procedural knowledge can be uniform, but exegetical knowledge must remain flexible, a sort of doctrine-optional situation.

Such technological ritual transmission must also survive the diverse environments through which it travels: separation of ritual from denominational institution has both rhetorical advantages and disadvantages in terms of its ethos: "Equally jarring, the more uniformly weightless our objects and networks become, the more enmeshed we seem to be in long-standing mythologies and attachments" (Debray 46). If we conceive of internet transmission as "weightless" in that it's difficult to hold, and the networks, though

observable, are still not quite solid, it is interesting to consider how that might cause – or at least correlate with – the construction of such ritual as part of a long-standing mythology, as in the construction of thin place as ancient Celtic. Sacred Harp, too, while ritual pedagogy is largely still transmitted in person, has spread more quickly and powerfully as a result of networked communities facilitated by the internet. Practitioners (especially newer and younger ones) cite attachments to transcendent singing that are echoed in online spaces.

In such a world as this, Debray writes, where participants then crave a sense of place, the one who studies transmission lands in both camps: the cultural and the technological. According to Debray, each side sees itself as the final arbiter: either the human is at the service of technology, or inherent humanness transcends technology (47). This tension is reinforced by the historiographies of each side: an empirical study of technology is a progress narrative (if one removes considering the ethics or the culture of technology), because newer tools typically outperform older tools, while in the study of culture, situation and relativism matter, as no one culture is truly better than any other, or more universally applicable (53). The very narratives of each frame are incompatible with these common methods. An ecology of transmission (while certainly placing the scholar in the uncomfortable position of mediologist) demonstrates that neither is quite true: technology is taken up into the ritual ecology, shifting and expanding the mechanisms of transmission, and fundamentally changing how participants imagine and construct the "face of God"-type moments. Technology does not control, but neither does the human transcend it. I also do not think that the study of technology cannot ever be completely

separated from the tools' cultural and situational development. Each technology is taken up differently by various cultures and universal, uniform use doesn't exist. This means that although technology's archive of ritual transmission can standardize the practice, humans who take up these rituals in different contexts are still able to adapt the exegetical knowledge to culturally specific situations.

This ritual praxis and transmission matters now because religion is never separate from the other elements of culture: there will always be interaction and tension between the "religious" world and the "secular" world. Understanding transmission as a rhetorical ecology enables insight into both the strength of religious memory and the changing way religion operates as a result of expanding web technology. Religion in the United States and Europe has not shrunk or become less powerful because of a decline in participation in established denominations and religious institutions; rather, its influence on other aspects of culture has remained profound but in different ways. Tracing transmission makes explicit the methods by which transcendence remains rhetorically persuasive, and shows why individuals continue to seek these transcendent experiences.

AFTERWORD

AFTERWORD

"O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his

judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord?"

– Romans 11:33-34a, NRSV

My 4th grade Sunday School teacher told me, "Never look for God too high up or too far

away." In a sense, he was encouraging me to see the veil between human and divine as

continually thin, to be on a constant watch for the immediate and tangible presence of

God: the sacred among the profane. Shifting to kairos was a constant possibility.

Walter Ong writes that oral communication, grounded in the actual, immediate existence

of the other being, facilitates the removal of some, but never all, masks. With time,

wisdom, and grace, he writes, we can succeed in stripping some masks; however, "When

the last mask comes off, sainthood is achieved, and the vision of God. But this can only

be with death" (20). Communication with God both challenges and upholds the "mask."

The participant in ritual and prayer, the one who seeks the divine, must accept the

existential actuality of God's immediate presence for successful communication whether

this communication is oral or written, spontaneous or an enactment of established ritual.

In thin places, for example, contact with God is *almost* but not quite direct. The veil of

the temple, the separation or the mask, is present. Prayer -- even written prayer -- is

grounded in the existential actuality of God who is at that same moment engaged with the believer in a communicative relationship. Ong writes that "It is hard to bare your soul in any literary genre" (21), yet this is what religious people try to do in the various genres of ritual: to thin the veil, to make transparent the mask in order to bare the soul and access the transcendent or the divine. I am not very good at this because it is hard to keep this sense of the existential actuality of God's immediate presence. As a very logical person (a little bit of a Spock), the idea that the transcendent is accessible is a difficult concept. Yet, I keep going to church. Every week I participate in communion. I pray every day, and shape the rhythms of my life around the liturgical calendar. Ritual is an ingrained part of my being even when I don't quite see the divine or experience transcendence. I am pulled in by the community and kept there even when God seems distant: it is the community identity that sustains ritual transmission in the absence of the tangible divine.

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      B.S. Special Education, with highest honors   December 2012

Pedagogy:

Purdue University Department of English   August 2014 – May 2016
      Teaching Assistant, Introductory Composition at Purdue (ICaP)
      Teaching Assistant, ICaP for International Students

Guest Lecture Series, Introduction to LGBT Studies   April 2016
      "Judith Butler, Gender Performativity, and Children's Literature"

Purdue Language and Cultural Exchange   January 2016-May 2016
      Writing Fellow, History 104: Introduction to the Modern World

North Side High School – Fort Wayne Community Schools   January 2013- June 2014
      English and Special Education Teacher

Indiana University Writing Tutorial Services   January 2010 – December 2012
      Peer Tutor and Undergraduate Manager

Publications and Presentations:

Conference on College Composition and Communication   April 2016
      "She is Worth Far More than Rubies: Creating a Self through Online Narrative
      Writing."

Feminisms and Rhetorics: Women's Ways of Making   October 2015
      "The Fruit of the Womb is Her Reward: Examining Digital Rhetoric in Quiverfull
      Weblog Narratives."

"Discursive Agency and Collective Action among Lubavitch Hasidic Women,"
     Published in *Young Scholars in Writing*   January 2013

Indiana University Hutton Honors College Research Symposium   April 2012
     "Agency and Collectives among Lubavitch Hasidic Women"

East Central Writing Centers Association Conference   March 2012
     "No Walls, No Door: Meeting Student Needs in an Open-Concept Writing Center"

St. Francis Undergraduate English Language and Literature Conference   March 2012
     "Agency and Collectives among Lubavitch Hasidic Women"

Service:

Editorial Assistant, *Peitho Journal*   September 2015-May 2016

Undergraduate Studies Committee, Purdue University Dept. of English   2015-2016

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Research Interests:

Intersections between secular and religious discourse
Discourse and writings of cloistered religious communities
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Professional Organization Memberships:

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