"Creating an Environment so Someone Can Come to Christ": "Relevant" Environments, Audio/Video Technology, and Ritual Practice

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Abstract

The expansion in the U.S. of a House of Worship (HoW) market has seen the increase in professional audio and video devices use by evangelical denominations and corporate practices of designing, manufacturing and marketing specific devices for this niche consumer. This paper explores how HoW personnel are taught to conceptualize the use of professional audio and video devices to create culturally "relevant" worship environments. Amidst vectors of control, mastery, and militarized and nationalist discourses, personnel learn particular dispositions towards device use, and niche products are marketed to HoW users. The tensile nexus of these discourses and their attendant practices converge in performative aspects of ritual.

Sonic "feedback is the evidence of sin." That screeching sonic loop that rampages through an audio system inciting listeners to cover their ears is the product, in houses of worship, of the technical director's failure to create an acoustically appropriate environment and further demonstrates their trespass against God and God's physical laws.

This paper explores how house of worship (HoW)[1] personnel are

1 The term "house of worship" (HoW) is used here to broadly describe religious institutions of varied faiths or denominations even though this discussion centres on evangelical Christians. The concept of HoW as an alternative to the more restrictive term "church" emerges as an inclusive alternative from within the technology- manufacturing and trade-publication sector that serves these organizations. Additionally, many evangelical congregations distance themselves

taught to conceptualize a "relevant" worship environment amidst a milieu of U.S. militarization and nationalism. This "relevant" environment is, in part, composed of audio, video and lighting devices that are designed to address the technical challenges of worship-space design. Learning takes place, not just through hands-on use, but at technology exhibitions throughout the U.S. The intra-action of user and device, and the discursive materializations that enact boundaries which configure the meanings of this intra-action, are local and contingently iterate what can constitute a "relevant" worship environment.

To situate my analysis of the milieu of the relevant worship environment, I engage Borneman's reading of Judith Butler in his study of marriage practices as a way to work towards the recognition of localized materializations of ritual practice. His work is particularly interesting for his discussion of how marriage has been traditionally understood as a "definitive ritual and universally translatable regulative ideal."[2] Instead, he explores how the complexities of cultural meanings that compose the performativity of marriage rituals have been eschewed in favour of universal concepts. Marriage was once thought to carry the same meanings no matter the locality. Religious rituals it is now understood, like marriage practices, are composed in varied, locally meaningful ways and are based on the performance of specific modes of practice. I thus start from this understanding, that creating a relevant worship environment amidst the discursive and practical materializations of militarization and nationalism is a locally contingent enactment.

In this context, conceptualizing a "relevant" worship environment, following Borneman via Butler, "operates through exclusionary means, such that the human is produced not merely against the inhuman, but through a set of foreclosures, radical erasures, that are, strictly speaking, refused the possibility of cultural articulation."[3] I argue, therefore, that the discursive materializations that contour what constitutes a "relevant" worship environment are both formative

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from the term church and its relationship to traditional denominations, marking themselves as Other to longer-standing, what some consider static and out-of-touch, forms of worship practice.

2 John Borneman. "Until Death Do Us Part: Marriage/Death in Anthropological Discourse." *American Ethnologist* 23, 2 (1996): 215.

3 Quoted in John Borneman. "Until Death Do Us Part," 215-238.

and marginalizing—they consign to the periphery of importance those houses of worship that do not cultivate a practical logic of relevance performed through device use that "arms" users for battle with the unsaved as potential prey. But how do these logics come into being? To explore these logics I offer a situated reading from Karen Barad, whose rearticulation of Judith Butler's performativity in which "performativity is not understood as iterative citationality … but rather iterative intra-activity," emphasizes meanings in the making. [4]

I have drawn two examples from my ongoing research to explore how militarization and nationalism frame the intra-activity and discursive materializations that inform the dispositions of embodied practice for the use of audio, video and lighting devices in houses of worship.[5] By embodied dispositions I am referring to the ways that device users learn to engineer a "relevant" worship environment through developing particular ways of using devices (to avoid sin), understanding the relationship between themselves and the device and, generally, between the device and the body. To do this, I am interested in the conditions within which what counts as meaningful is marked and discursively materialized through learning.

The discursive modes that inflect and frame the experiences of HoW personnel, I suggest, are composed within evangelical cultural logics that enable these discourses to seem plausible and sensible.[6] I take as a guide the assertion by N. Katherine Hayles that during periods of technological transformation, "changing experiences of embodiment bubble up into language, affecting the metaphoric networks at play within the culture."[7] Moreover, "discursive constructions affect how

4 Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, 3 (2003): 828.

5 When speaking of dispositions I mean the durable practices and habits that result from circumscribed ways of learning and doing. For the rereading of Pierre Bourdieu's understanding of the dispositions that compose a habitus see N. Katherine Hayles, "Chapter 8: The Materiality of Informatics," in *How we Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

6 For a more extensive exploration of authoritative discourses, see Talal Asad, "The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category." In *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993 (1982).

7 Ibid., 207.

bodies move through space and time, influence what technologies are developed, and help structure the interfaces between bodies and technologies."[8] Thus, "formed by technology at the same time that it creates technology, embodiment mediates between technology and discourse by creating new experiential frameworks that serve as boundary markers for the creation of corresponding discursive systems."[9] Of particular note here are the modes by which embodiment mediates discourse and technology. What Hayles is suggesting is that ways of being and doing, the materializations of discourse and its relationship between new forms of technology, are worked out through practice. While on the one hand Hayles appears to be working out the formation of new subjectivities, her emphasis on grounding the materialization of technology in the human subject, in embodiment itself, closes off the dynamic configurations between bodies and machines that are constituted through their mutual articulation. Karen Barad takes up this challenge by arguing for an "agential realist account," where, discursive practices are not human-based activities but rather specific material (re)confingurings of the world through which local determinations of boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted. And matter is not a fixed essence; rather, matter is substance in its intra-active becoming–not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency. And performativity is not understood as iterative citationality (Butler) but rather iterative intra-activity.[10]

Intra-activity, the configurations within iterations of performativity, is an openness to the modes and means by which the ways of knowing are part of ways of being.[11] The refusal to lock down configurations of boundaries and meanings in their becoming to static absolutes resonates with Butler's focus on the ways that exclusion occurs in the making of gender roles, in their performativity, or in ritual practices. How specific forms of worship practice come to matter (for their "relevance") and the ways that these practices are contoured and

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., 205.

10 Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward and Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, 3 (2003): 828

11 Ibid., 829.

materialized within militarized and nationalist U.S. discursivities form the following sections.

Mastery and Control: Conditions for Gendering Ritual Performativity

Contoured by metaphors of mastery, control, power and obligation, much of the contemporary evangelical worship in the United States is informed by a desire to reveal, communicate and perform the glory of God through a commitment to "excellence" in mediated ritual performance. This occurs within houses of worship as technical directors are tasked with cultivating a mastery and operative control of audio and video devices; part of this process often includes attending educational events where connections between users, devices and ritual practice are materialized. Establishing what can constitute excellence or relevance for contemporary worship marks out boundaries that contour ways to think about and enact ritual practices. Within the U.S. these contingent and shifting boundaries are situated amidst militarized and nationalist discursive practices and materializations. They have the effect of excluding or marginalizing those houses of worship and their technical directors for which these discourses fail to resonate and for those that do not endeavor to include sophisticated technologies into ritual practice. Moreover, the ways in which these militarized and nationalist discourses frame the relationship between users and devices is problematically, though not unexpectedly, patriarchal. Amidst metaphors of control, mastery, and dominance and the meshwork of gendered religious doctrine, the technical directors that attend educational events are overwhelmingly men. Device manufacturers also most often fronted and operated by men, help to define the technology industry generally as a men-only sector. Women, at least in the U.S. technology manufacturing sector are most often found in public relations positions or marketing and rarely in executive positions. What this indicates is that for houses of worship and device manufacturers, the technical aspects of worship performance and device design and sale are heavily dominated by male involvement. It is not surprising then that the patriarchal and militarized discourses, materialized in the curricula at technology trade events, are designed to resonate with and simultaneously form gendering (in an intra-active sense) modalities within which technical

directors perform their relationship with devices and use them for ritual practice.

But, why use these devices at all? Audio, video and lighting device use for ritual practice has its antecedents in historical modes of communicating religious tenets to a broad audience. Stained glass windows provide one such example with their pictorial representations of important events and moral lessons. In contemporary ritual practice mediating communication with device use has been built upon through the efforts of device manufacturers to contour products to what they perceive is a niche market of users with their own unique challenges and discursive ways of understanding those challenges. These efforts respond to the ways that houses of worship have begun to market their cultural relevance through "branding" their church image and mission.[12] The purpose of "branding" a HoW identity by creating a media-rich worship environment, as one Pastor put it, is for the purpose of "creating an environment so someone can come to Christ." How are these environments materialized within broader nationalist and militarized politics that serve to reinforce particular ways of conceptualizing the mandates of worship practice? And, as these modes of becoming establish ways to think about device use, what understandings and ways of being are excluded or rendered marginal?[13]

"What has God Led You to Do?": Creating Relevant Environments

How is a "relevant" worship environment created? What logics inform its composition? How and in what ways do HoW personnel learn the techniques and methods for producing a worship service using professional audio and video devices, considering many personnel

12 See also Phil Cooke, *Branding Faith: Why Some Churches and Nonprofi Impact Culture and Others Don't* (California: Regal, 2008), and Shayne Lee and Phillip Luke Sinitiere, *Holy Mavericks: Evangelical Innovators and the Spiritual Marketplace* (New York: NYU Press, 2009).

13 See Brian Massumi, *Parable for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke U. Press, 2002), and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minnesota: University of Minesota Press, 1987). Modes of becoming refer to a topology where outcomes (of practice or discourse) are not or cannot be concretized, fixed with certainty or rendered static. This analytical disposition is meant to encourage attention to the processual and contingent elements of practice and its embodied affects.

are volunteers? One method is for HoW personnel to attend technology training events held often within major trade exhibitions mainly throughout the United States but more recently across Europe and Asia. Trade publications like *Technologies for Worship Magazine* (TFWM) facilitate event programming and attempt to attract their readership to these training conferences. Technology training occurs within the floor space of the TFWM pavilion in designated training areas that flank a mobile stage. Classes are taught by technology industry and HoW market experts with long histories working both in the church and with technology. Through my affiliation with TFWM I have been attending these training events since 2006, and in what follows I will recount one experience that serves to address the questions above as well as speak to the broad goals of this paper; that is, to explore the conditions and logics within which HoW personnell learn to configure a "relevant" worship environment using audio and video devices.

These self-professed experts are overwhelmingly male U.S. citizens, as are the HoW personnel that attend. The experts tend to be older than the attendees, who are often in their mid-twenties. Indicative of the professional audio and video industry generally, the attendance of HoW personnel also reflects a trend towards the disproportionate representation of men in the purchase and use of audio and video technology. The HoW attendees often travel from across the United States and Canada to attend events like the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) exhibition; TFWM often offers incentives for registrants from houses of worship to attend a largely secular event, like a complimentary exhibit floor pass which would otherwise carry a substantial cost. Many of these attendees are volunteers although some are paid technical directors or worship pastors. Training classes run during the day and vary from lecture-style to hands-on audio or video device tutorials but one aspect of these training seminars remains consistent. The conditions of possibility are framed by educators within a singular logic: they endeavor to enable houses of worship to use technology to communicate in culturally relevant ways that demonstrate a commitment to "excellence" in production quality to effectively share and perform, as the man I describe subsequently suggests, "messages that change people's lives."

In the TFWM pavilion I attended a class taught by a man in his early forties who owns and operates a U.S.-based design and building

firm. He's tall and well spoken and his southern charm more than once elicits chuckles from the attendees. His friendly manner makes him seem accessible and open; as such he elicits scores of questions from eager attendees after the seminar. He phrases his authority to speak on the necessity of technology as one of divine mandate, stating explicitly, "I *am* holiness!" Firms like his both design and build worship facilities from the ground up and retrofit existing structures with new technology. His business, he claims, builds or retrofits a HoW in the U.S. every two days. He stood at the head of our mostly male class, polling the attendees for their positions and HoW sizes, and then introduced the title for the session: "Creating Relevant Environments."He began by explaining that in a worship context, "It's not what you say, but what people hear you say. Relevance is a moving target." The reason why churches are dying, he suggested, is that congregants are moving from venues that do not use technology for worship to those that do.[14] Yet, using these audio, video and lighting devices is not enough in itself. Houses of worship must learn to cultivate their vision for an ideal worship environment, he suggested, asking, "What has God led you to do?" Framed in such a way, attendees begin to learn that technology use is its own separate ministry within the HoW; and, most importantly, that the spiritual lives of new congregants are at stake.

The "mission" of the contemporary HoW, from the speaker's perspective is to determine their strategy for creating and enacting a "relevant" environment. He implicitly sets up a dichotomy where to fail to consider the goals of device use, or worse, to abstain from device use altogether is to fall to the margins of irrelevance. Those houses of worship who fail, as Lee and Sinitiere suggest, to "reconnect religion with emerging cultural tastes"[15] create gaps where the savvy religious innovators, like media-driven houses of worship, can "capitalize on untapped niches and new popular trends, utilizing a broad range of cultural tools at their disposal to offer appealing ministries and messages to their contemporaries."[16]

Communicating the messages that have the capacity to change

14 For a discussion of religious competition see Shayne Lee and Phillip Luke Sinitiere, *Holy Mavericks: Evangelical Innovators and the Spiritual Marketplace* (New York: NYU Press, 2009): 152.
15 Lee and Sinitiere, *Holy Mavericks*, 18.
16 Ibid., 19.

lives is bundled with the idea that there is a profound responsibility and power attached to using technological devices for worship and for creating "relevant" worship environments with a commitment to "excellence". This responsibility, to use devices excellently to share "the message," speaks to this educator's attempt to enact boundaries within which attendees cannot but recognize and value the use of devices for worship and acknowledge the power this use confers. These boundaries also create a model of device use for users where imagery, sound and lights are thought to collide with the potential unsaved body in order to "impact" them. As such, the speaker suggested, "By using sound, lights, we can have an impact." Within a relevant environment, one that uses technology well, the "impact" of sound, lights, and the visual in their collision with congregant bodies is not only addressing the senses with messages that "save lives" but more generally, using technological artifacts and modulations as "affective projectiles."[17]

The Militarized (Worship) Environment

"Without a target, you're just shootin." Creating a relevant environment requires a plan. Having a target, a goal, says the speaker, is integral for success. A HoW without a target, which does not establish a strategy to discern what is culturally relevant, will be cast to the margins of cultural relevance–thus potentially rendered irrelevant. The speaker's allusion to targeting and gunfire, albeit casual, also frames conditions within which technological use is likened to militarized battle in the mastery of the machine and the fight for souls. This logic of militarization uses familiar hegemonic metaphors that gesture to the tense discursive practices of militarization.[18] Catherine Lutz, for example, suggests that militarization identifies "a society's emphasis on martial values … [and suggests] warlike values have an independent ability to drive social change."[19] In this instance, the "faith in technology"[20] that Lutz accords to the high ratio of military

17 Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and Ecology of Fear* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2010: 112).
18 Catherine Lutz, "Making War at Home in the United States: Militarization and the Current Crisis," *American Anthropologist* 104, 3 (2002): 725.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.

arms to soldiers speaks to the proliferation of advertising campaigns extolling the virtues of a better life (or in this case, more relevant worship practice) through the use of technology. The contemporary U.S. house of worship is subject to this topology of shifting virtues informed by wartime and a nation of war.[21] Lutz has argued that, with the U.S., a "nation made by war...", "the capillaries of militarization have fed and moulded social institutions seemingly little connected to battle."[22] Houses of worship are not exempt from these capillaries; they may create soldiers without creating soldiers. The aptness of the hymn "Onward, Christian Soldiers," played notably at Eisenhower's funeral in 1969[23] to demonstrate this collusion of religion and militarization, is a subtle reminder that "the process of militarization has been not simply a matter of weaponry wielded and bodies buried."[24] And, the soldier envisioned in the march onwards is male and heterosexual and falls in line with the contouring of masculinity and sexuality of a militarized nation like the U.S.[25] Lutz suggests that this process of gendering results is "further marginalizing anyone but the male heterosexual."[26] If we assume that the technology industry is not exempt from broader patterns of structuration, then it is no surprise that, considering technology use is framed by metaphors of mastery and control, the majority of technology manufacturers are men as are the HoW users. This gendered exclusion is materialized through the discursive practices referenced here, but also through the patriarchal organization of many contemporary houses of worship.[27]

This configuration using warlike values of targeting and shooting

21 This is not to suggest a uniform or pan-evangelical response to these virtues. Lee and Sinitiere (2009) rightly emphasize the range and diversity of evangelical practice.

22 Lutz, "Making War at Home in the United States," 724.

23 http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/all_about_ike/Final%20Years/Final%20Years.html.

24 Lutz, "Making War at Home in the United States," 724.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 For example, at a recent conference a pastor I mention earlier easily, and with an air of self-congratulation, recounted three examples where he had verbally abused women in his personal and ministry life. He lamented his actions but was confident that with prayer he would be forgiven. The recounting of his misogynist attacks on women further demonstrates the patriarchal configurations of some evangelical houses of worship.

which materialize the boundaries for creating a relevant environment within a HoW, indicate the conditions within which the speaker understands what denotes relevance: it must be devised, identified, aimed and targeted to be effective. This planned and situated strategy sets up the terms for establishing relevance; the dispositions that attendees learn to performatively enact would, within these terms, dispose them to use technology as an effective and culturally relevant means of intra-acting in a worship environment. But more than this, they learn to intra-act with the device as passive object, which they, as operator control, target and master. A hierarchy of dominance over the machine is erected which in turn marks the human, male and heterosexual, as steward of sonic command. And while women are not expressly banned from taking these positions, they do so within these configurations.

The desire to save souls and rescue the unsaved, within a battle and business of salvation casts device operators as virtuous combatants using the tools of technology to wage a war. To those houses of worship apprehensive about the cost of audio/video and lighting technology, the speaker suggested measuring technology budgets by "dollars per soul saved." While this accounting may seem crude, it emphasizes the importance in this context of configuring worship practice with technology.

The stakes are high when considering the way the relationship between device use and worship is framed. Not only are souls a matter of investment and militarization but there are God's laws to consider. Later in his seminar the speaker suggested that there are four levels of design regarding the acoustics of a worship service that must be considered for creating a relevant environment. There are certain laws that must be followed when designing this environment. He called these God's physical laws, or physics. Among these laws is the assertion that the (generic) chest cavity physically resonates at 80 Hz, thus audio environments should be designed with this law in mind and the sounds of ritual and worship, (its sonic affects), should be consonant with the message being communicated. Akin to the "impact" of lights, sound more than affects the body; it vibrates and moves it. This physical intervention across the thresholds of the body's limits is not a generic breach but a "targeted" attempt to inhere "the word" or the message within the resonant body. And within this affective space "resonation can be seen as converting

distance, or extension, into intensity… with the body, the 'walls' as sensory surfaces."[28] However, when these laws of sound are broken, the speaker suggests, such things as aberrant feedback and distracting noise emanates from the speaker system disrupting the transmission or the haptic reach of sound. "Feedback," he indicated, "is the evidence of sin in your physical life." Thus, failure to abide by the laws of the device and sound, through a failure to adequately control and master the device, is not just distracting but represents a breach of faith and failure to abide by the laws of God's physics. At stake here is both the successful communication of the message without feedback and the performative demonstration of belief and faith by device operators. Posed as a rhetorical question, the speaker framed the gravity and conditions for the relationship between HoW personnel and the devices by asking, "How can you worship God while breaking his psychical laws?"

The Challenges of Divine Acoustics: The Feedback Ferret©

The breach of God's physical laws posed as a contravention of worship practice frames contemporary mediated worship and contours the dispositions of device users and intra-actions between those users, devices and congregants within the HoW. The worship environment the speaker I describe alludes to is one composed of the crossing of thresholds: both actual and figurative. The body of the congregant becomes the site within which sound is used to reach into the chest cavity, to reach and touch the heart by way of the direct transmission of the message along the waves of sound. These waves are also the figurative means through which appropriate device use is framed. Users are taught to work within certain acoustical laws to avoid the evidence of sin, a failure of the targeting capacities of properly executed sound reinforcement. To parse these laws of sound and the militarized context within which they are enacted with nationalist discourses, let me now turn to considering a particular audio device designed and manufactured in the U.S. specifically for the HoW market and specifically to address the problem of feedback.

The Sanctuary Series by Peavey Corporation is a line of products

28 Brian Massumi, *Parable for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke U. Press, 2002), 14.

designed to be both aesthetically appealing and sensitive to volunteer users with a HoW. With its ivory case embossed with an outline of a dove in flight, Peavey's line of audio mixing consoles are designed, to quote Peavey's promotional material, as a "line of all new, innovative audio products dedicated to making pro audio easy and cost-effective for houses of worship. Since many worship centers are unable to staff an experienced sound technician, Peavey developed several unique, user-friendly mixing features to simplify operation so any church leader or choir director can speak and perform with confidence."[29] One specific aspect of this line of mixers that I would like to draw attention to is the Feedback Ferret©. The Feedback Ferret© is, as Peavey describes it, an automatic digital feedback elimination system… [that] uses exclusive Peavey technology to eliminate feedback without sacrificing tonal quality."[30] This acoustical control feature ensures that inexperienced users avoid sending waves of screeching feedback through the worship sanctuary speakers, disrupting the service, the message and, at least in potential, revealing the evidence of their technological naivety and crossing a threshold into sin.

Peavey's attempt to create a user-specific product, that responds to the needs of HoW personnel, also speaks to their attempts to configure a HoW user through affiliating an object like an audio console with a specific application. This targeted design and marketing campaign is bolstered by U.S. nationalist discourses that abrogate fears of the export of design and manufacture of products to sources outside of the U.S. Domestic production and targeted design, with this particular product, are hooked into the metaphors of mastery and control, and the gendered dynamics of worship production. Through video commentaries on the Sanctuary Series, two men, one a HoW market consultant, the other the console engineering manager, situate the sound console within these discourses. The two men reinforce their collective sentiments that aim to market this line of consoles to houses of worship specifically within the U.S., which may lack dedicated, professional audio engineers, and would find their appeals to localized design and production a viable selling feature. This begs the question: why market the audio console this way? Why use these

29 Peavey Corporation. Peavey.com (2009) http://www.sanctuary-series.com/mixers/ (accessed November 2009).
30 Ibid.

discourses, metaphors and themes in particular? Their dialogue, taped within a house of worship, runs as follows:

Consultant: "I know that Tom here, this is your home church, you mix here every Sunday. You've got a lot of experience from that booth tied into this console, and I believe your guys as well, your team ..."

Engineer: "That's right, my engineers are all involved with church sound and worship and they bring their experiences as well to the design of these products."

Consultant: "So, over a century of church-mixing experience [is] built for the people who are going to be using this on a Sunday/Sunday basis. So we've got church people designing systems for church people."

Engineer: "That's right, it's designed by church people here in the United States and manufactured here as well..."

Consultant: "So the product line is made here, it is designed here; it's focused on a particular market. So instead of a general purpose application, you've got a market specific application and we solve the problem."

Engineer: "It's not just about aesthetics; it's about solving problems and making church sound better and easier."

Consultant: "Sanctuary Series..."

Engineer: "That's right."[31]

As this promotional dialogue demonstrates, the predominant themes reinforced through repetition by these acoustic experts situate the Sanctuary Series line of products within a U.S. market of HoW consumers that, it is assumed, will be inclined to endorse and use a product that originates from the experience of HoW sound operators located within the United States. The situatedness of this console gestures to internalized nationalist discourses that reinforce the notion that a product designed outside of the borders of empire would fail to be tailored to the needs and desires of the U.S. HoW. The unique needs of the local HoW, such as the desire to abrogate the evidence of sin, are materialized in the design of this console. Promoted by two expert men who subtly draw on xenophobic fears of the invasion of products from the foreign other and the outsourcing of contemporary capitalisms, the console is thus directed towards a

31 Ibid.

U.S. market of purchasers for whom these discourses and keywords[32] of nationalism are tied to fears about the breach of borders by foreign products.

Sanctuary Series consoles materialize the tensions of cultural logics of evangelical device use. Consoles are not merely sound mediators but become indexes of U.S. nationalist discourses, which compose the gendered, patriarchal, militarist dispositions of some conservative evangelicals. Audio consoles are affiliative objects. Lucy Suchman frames such affiliative objects by suggesting attention to "the ways in which objects are not innocent but fraught with significance for the relations that they materialize."33 The console is a gatekeeper between users and the evidence of sin; it materializes the tense relationship between technology and worship such that when it becomes visible, as through feedback, its presence marks worship practice as performance and disrupts the transmission of "the word." Moreover, in the sense that a user's failure to control and master the device and sound in a worship space is a lost attempt to reproduce the intimacies of a worship environment, console use materializes the tense conditions necessary for creating "relevant" environments. When sound goes awry, this tension is acutely felt.

Indexes of militarized and nationalist discourses, audio consoles, in intra-action with their human collaborators, create sonic ecologies and engineered sonic spaces where their logics of operation work over and through the bodies of congregants with waves of audio potential. The very act of sound production and modulation thus entails a modulation of modulation and an act of violence and interference. They act as markers denoting the ways that boundaries are provisionally territorialized around what can constitute relevant worship and who can engage in its production. Audio consoles, understood this way, are neither neutral tools nor merely inert collections of functional components but in and through their intra-activities and affiliations, materialize discursivities of evangelical worship practice.

Within ritual practice, the conditions of possibility for operating a console or any type of mediating device are a matrix of potentials.

32 Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, Revised Edition* (New York: Oxford, [1976] 1983).
33 Lucy Suchman, "Affiliative Objects," *Organization* 12 (3): 379.

During a worship service, an operator must be open to crossing a threshold through cultivating bodily dispositions to hear and experience sound through the device. While the device and user are removed in space, located away from the congregation, their co-constituted affects are haptic as they reach out and touch the congregant through sound and through mediating the sacred word. The creation of a relevant environment, conceptualized by the educator mentioned beforehand, as a device-rich environment where a commitment to production excellence is upheld, endorsed, planned for and targeted, travels through this bodily engagement, intra-action, between device and user; through the pleasures of a successful service and the frustrations of technical failure. Brian Massumi notes that images and I would suggest sound also, perform as "conveyors of forces of emergence, as vehicles for existential potentialization and transfer."[34] The tactility of the image he describes can be used to think sound as tactile, or resonant. So, for example, when these volunteer engineers are tasked with mediating the affect of the sermon, with controlling the possibilities of sound in the sanctuary, for creating a relevant environment, when the pastor wants the congregants to feel it, they are drawn, like the devices also, into an assemblage where "the transmission of a force of potential...cannot but be felt."[35] The acoustical challenges of worship thus become a site where ideas and discourses about cultural relevance (and its antithesis) are formed, worked out and worked over.

It must not, however, be forgotten that Peavey Corporation is one among many manufacturers that vie for HoW market share and their innovative approach to designing pro-audio products for the novice user is but one attempt to successfully sell products to a niche market. In this context, manufacturers, and the aforementioned speaker, play on the desire shared by many houses of worship to increasingly draw in new congregants through the production of "excellent" worship services that communicate their spiritual message. Audio and video technology is framed, during technology training sessions, as the most contemporary and culturally relevant way to achieve this.

34 Brian Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," *Cultural Critique* 31 (1995): 104.
35 Ibid.

Endings; Beginnings

Fostering a relevant worship environment occurs amidst the purchase of audio, video and lighting technology, its integration and use, and the harmonization of technical innovation with the ritual message. In the instances analyzed in this paper, learning about, how to use, and the purpose of technology draws from broader militarized metaphors and nationalist allusions that situate device use within particular ways of understanding the role of technology for ritual worship practice. Through an attention to the social lives of people and devices,36 I have attempted to show how contested terrains and margins are formed through education and marketing of mediated worship practice. Those who use technology for worship to battle sin, manifested as sonic feedback, stand in contrast to those who either reject technology for worship practice altogether or use it while inadvertently creating sonic feedback which distorts and distracts from the message. Failing to performatively enact the relevant worship environment is thus itself evidence of sin. "Relevance" and "excellence" become keywords marking discourses that draw attention to the ways that some possibilities are opened while others are foreclosed or marginalized regarding the creation of worship environments using of audiovisual devices. Device use, with a commitment to upholding professional standards of production, is propounded as seemingly the only means through which to engage contemporary congregants. Via the often slippery and elusiveness of totalizing ideologies, these discourses are static reflections of a unified reality outside of social change. When they fail to gain traction with personnel from houses of worship, do not resonate through practice with the spiritual needs of congregants, or do not fit the public manufacturers envision they bring attention the sheer variety of ritual practices that implicitly vet "relevance" as a complex becoming that defies a universal or unitary definition. The movement of discourse, like sound, is subject to contingent social and cultural logics that inflect, influence, reject and re-imagine its contours based on potential conditions of possibility that infer meaning to words, practice, objects and their users. It is within these logics that, "a movement of the body becomes a movement of thought

36 See also Arjun Appadurai, "The Thing Itself," *Public Culture* 18, 1 (2006): 15-21, and *Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value*, ed. Arjuan Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

becomes a movement of the body"[37].

The militarist discourses that inflect the composition of a relevant worship environment, and ideas about the receptiveness of bodies within it to the interventions of sound reinforcement, also materialize militarization through enacting the control of the sonic as a war against sin. Performative aspects of these dispositions towards sonic control and mastery are played out through technical directors seeking education to hone and cultivate skills of control. Control is both something that is sought and is reinforced through the curricula. It should not be forgotten however, that the materialization of "relevant" worship environments are also set within a political landscape. In this social history the influential conservative Moral Majority and New Christian Right attempt to influence political decision making and social life since the late 1970s. Influential proponents such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson and Jimmy Swaggart, initiated the nation into the dynamics of televangelism—there has been a strong affiliation between the uses of new media by evangelicals.[38] That there is a connection between conservative evangelicals in particular and new media use is not to suggest that all their politics lean right.

In the end (and beginning), articulations between users and devices within houses of worship are cast within this performative frame of enacting the battle against sin through the technological mastery and control of sound, light, vision and ultimately, worship environment. Rather than see this control as totalizing, it seems more apt to situate it within the evangelical cultural logics that make it make sense.

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37 Goodman, *Sonic Warfare,* 72.

38 On Jerry Falwell, see also, Susan F. Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000); for further commentary on Televangelism see Michael Corbett and Julia Mitchell Corbett, *Politics and Religion in the United State*s (New York: Garland Pub., 1999).

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