Until the Stones Cry Out: Materialities of Faith and Technologies of the Holy Ghost in Southern Appalachia

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2011
ABSTRACT

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*Until the Stones Cry Out: Materialities of Faith and Technologies of the Holy Ghost in Southern Appalachia* is an ethnography of the often unrecognized infrastructures that have sustained Charismatic practices of healing and performances of faith since the mid-twentieth century. My research demonstrates that the broadcasting of healing prayer over the radio, the circulation of curative faith cloths through the postal system, and the architecture of massive canvas revival tents are not merely passive instrumentalities for the transmission of a discretely self-contained religious content, but affect, most fundamentally, the way ritual practices such as intercessory prayer and faith healing are experienced and understood by Charismatic communities within the United States. Moving comparatively between ethnographic and archival evidence, this work explores the objects and technologies that provide the material underpinnings for Pentecostal performances of faith, prayer and the miraculous. On the rhetorical side of these charismatic phenomena, this ethnology examines inspired preaching styles and performances of religious testimony in order to track the appearance and circulation of so-called Holy Ghost power within spaces of ecstatic and enthusiastic worship.
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Belief never subsists on its own, but always emerges through a community of the expectant faithful. This work, as well, was only written through the guidance and support of many individuals and institutions. I am grateful to Kevin “Bossman” Grogg and his family for allowing me to live on their beautiful farm in the mountains of southern West Virginia. The many months spent there have facilitated both my research and my imagination. Many thanks as well to Bill McAllister and the Mellon Interdisciplinary Fellows Program at the Institute for Social and Economic Research and Policy at Columbia University for funding several site visits in conjunction with my Materiality of Religious Presence research project. Likewise, the commentary of Brian Larkin and Allen Shelton during presentations of several early chapter drafts proved invaluable as I continued the process of writing. The teaching of Marilyn Ivy and Michael Taussig, two of my dissertation committee members in the Department of Anthropology, has provided a constant source of inspiration to explore the precarious boundaries of perception and subjectivity. My attempts to hear the sound of the sacred have been most influenced by my advisor, John Pemberton, and his guidance resonates throughout Until the Stones Cry Out. Without the consummate advice and encouragement of my brothers Ben, Ward, and Tommy, this whole project as a graduate student would have been impossible. Alas, I do not have enough breath to voice all the thanks due to my mother and father, who always had faith in me.
Until the Stones Cry Out is dedicated to Sister Dorothy and Brother Aldie Allen, Sister Sally, and all the congregation members of the Jackson Memorial Hour Broadcast. You gave me the inspiration to write
“Hittin’ the prayer bones” is a phrase invoked in charismatic Christian worship spaces throughout southern Appalachia. Evoking a long history of Christian penitential exercises, this phrase viscerally describes the importunate act of falling down upon one’s knees in the performance of prayer. Hittin’ the prayer bones is thus a percussive genuflection that literally sounds an embodied technique of divine communication. Even before the mouth begins to give voice to a prayer, the body itself, in a sudden coincidence with an external object, opens a communicative space between the sacred and the everyday. In this moment of collision between the penitential bone and the wooden floorboard, the curative efficacy and miraculous power of the Holy Ghost is materialized within the charismatic milieu.

In this way, the miraculous appearance of the Holy Ghost, a seemingly intangible and ethereal entity, can never be fully abstracted from this striking sound unleashed between the subject and the object in the performance of divine communication. The percussive noise released through this technique of the body-in-prayer also resonates with the rapid, disjointed hand claps that pierce the entangled voices in the performance of communal prayer, and the bony knuckles of an elder Brother or Sister as they rap the wooden podium to mimic “God knockin’ on that heart’s door” during the altar call of the worship service.
The sound of the bone is not only used as a crucial embodied metaphor of prayer within spaces inundated with “Holy Ghost’n’par” [power], but the rattling sound of those dry bleached bones in the valley becomes a sermonic touchstone to describe the enlivening potentiality of the Spirit in a world where the living waters of charisma have dried up. While scanning the airwaves of southern Appalachia on any given weekend, one is sure to tune in to a disembodied radio voice speaking of those dry bones and the quickening power to come:

Ever-body that can, stand up an’ help us,
Sister Jackson wants “These Bones.”
These bones are definitely gonna rise again.
You know, I thank so much about Elisha.
An’ they went out thar an’ buried him.
An’ then how they come by ta bury a man [chuckles under his breath]
Happened ta lay’em down right on Elisha’s bones.
When they saw a troop of men comin’ along. [audience response: Amen!]
Kindly scared’em, they dropped’em on Elisha’s bones,
An’ at man sat straight up! [Hallelujah! Clapping of hands]
“There’s somethin’ alive in here!” [visceral, vehement voice, energetic,] [Whoo!]
Ya know one day after awhile,
The Lord’s gonna step out on tha clouds a’glory.
They gonna be allotta dead bones gonna raise up.
Ah’ praise God, I tell ya what [congregation member cries out, Whoop-Glory!]
They’s somethin’ alive gonna come outta there!
I don’t know what its gonna be,
But somethin’s commin’ outta tha grave,
The grave is not gonna hold.  [That’s right. Yes!]

[Immediately after the Brother’s final words, a song begins, sung with the accompaniment of guitar, tambourine, piano and rhythmic clapping]

These Bones
Well my God decided to make’em a man
These bones gonna rise again
With a little bit of mud and a little bit of sand
Yea these bones gonna rise again
My God decided to make a woman too
_Yea these bones gonna rise again_
Well my God knows just what to do
_Said these bones gonna rise again_
And well I know it, indeed I know it
I know it, these bones gonna rise again

The resonance of the bone extends to another recurrent motif within the charismatic space of worship, the performative description and evocation of suffering and corporeal break-down in a world of sin. Here visceral accounts of gnarled arthritic joints, perpetual invocations of hip and knee replacements, broken bones, bones held together with steel frames and metallic screws, and the cancerous gnawing of the marrow fill the worship space with stories of pain and suffering in a world of bodies “got down.”¹ The preeminent performance in these charismatic communities is thus a communal hittin’ of the prayer bones that instantiates the miraculous healing power of the Holy Ghost into the participants’ ailing bodies and everyday experiences.

Exploring the intertwined practices of prayer, faith and healing, my dissertation attends to that particular sound of the sacred produced through “hittin’ the prayer bones” and other material and technological conduits of the Holy Ghost. My ethnography is an attempt to hear the sound of the Holy Ghost in that abrupt space of coincidence between subject and object, spirit and matter. Taking cue from the charismatic phrase itself, my research moves outward from techniques of the body to investigate the materialities of prayer within the space of charismatic

worship. In this way, the prayer bones also include other material underpinnings of divine communication such as prayer cloths and radios. Throughout the project, I describe the way prayer, even within a historically iconoclastic Pentecostal tradition that overtly postulates no mediated grace and the immaterial nature of divine communication, subsists on a material underbelly that actively organizes and inflects the way divine communication is experienced and understood by the charismatic faithful. As Marcel Mauss presciently states in his unfinished doctoral dissertation, *On Prayer* (1908), “Prayer in a religion that has renounced all fetishism itself becomes a fetish.”

Exploring the materialities of divine communication, my research responds to a recent body of scholarship on the question of religious experience and its specific relationship to technological mediation. Though this body of scholarship has made important contributions to a critical engagement with the unanticipated resurgence of forces of religion in our time, these accounts of religion and its relation to technological mediation often neglect the question of the

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2 In what was to be his “great work,” Marcel Mauss defines prayer as “a religious rite which is oral and bears directly on the sacred” (57). Much of my theoretical insight into the history and nature of prayer is taken from Mauss’ unfinished dissertation. However, my work departs from Mauss’ in considering the way that the oral performance of divine communication can never be fully abstracted from the materialities of the worship space. Mauss, M. (2003) [1908]. *On Prayer*. New York, Durkheim Press/Berghan Books.

bone, or materiality of the religious phenomenon. To be sure, many within the religion and media debates describe the intimate interfacing between experiences of transcendence and tele-technology, or the miracle and the special effect; yet these accounts of so-called religious mediations and the sensations produced therein often fail to describe the material force or agency of the objects and technologies themselves in the organization of specific modes of religious experience.\(^4\) In opposition to a subtle instrumentality that pervades the emergent debate on the relationship between religion and technological mediation, my research emphasizes the question of the material actuality of the bone in the emergence of sacred presence.

In addition to the more contemporary reflections on the intimacies between the miracle

\(^4\) In terms related to the “interfacing” of the miracle and the special effect, I am referring to the recent work of Hent de Vries: Vries, H. d. and S. Weber (2001). *Religion and Media.* Stanford, Calif., Stanford University Press. The relation between religious sensations and the media has also been explicitly outlined by Brigit Meyer: Meyer, B. and A. Moors (2006). *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere.* Bloomington, Indiana University Press.; Meyer, B. (2009). *Aesthetic Formations: Media, Religion, and the Senses.* New York, Palgrave Macmillan. Though Meyer and her students are producing some of the most interesting scholarship in the burgeoning religion and media debate, the resonances of the bone, or materiality of the medium, are generally absent in this body of work. Meyer is right to identify the importance of the senses in religious experience, but we are left wondering as to the specific ways that technological media grant experiential access to specific “sensations of transcendence” in this particular body of scholarship.

The recent work of Charles Hirschkind, which has received much attention as of late, is a clear example of the lack of material thinking in an emergent body of scholarship where it is precisely the force of the medium itself that seems to be the crucial issue. There is no moment in his work where the modes of Islamic piety themselves are inflected or organized in any way by the very medium of the cassette tape which allows the sermons and devotional instruction to circulate. In this way, an underlying instrumentality governs much of this body of scholarship in so-called religion and media. Hirschkind, C. (2006). *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics.* New York, Columbia University Press.
and the special effect, my research on faith healing has been inspired and challenged by a classic body of ethnological scholarship exploring the relation between artifice and healing efficacy. In these ethnological descriptions, it is precisely through a performance of sleight of hand or other form of trickery, what Mauss and Hubert call “the moment of prestidigitation,” that an experience of curative force is released between the patient and the healer against the broader background of communal belief. Yet as these ethnographic accounts describe, it is often the case that both the audience and patient demonstrate a critical awareness of the legerdemains performed by the healer. A translation between the discontinuous experiential frames of the patient-healer dyad, and the concomitant release of healing efficacy, however, seems to take

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5 “Obviously there are two subjective states of experience involved in these facts. And between the the dreams of one and the desires of the other there is a discordant factor. Apart from the sleight of hand [tour de passe-passe] at the end, the magician makes no effort to make his ideas coincide with the ideas and needs of his client. These two very intense individual states coincide only at the moment of the conjuring trick [a la moment de la prestidigitation]. At this unique moment a genuine psychological experience takes place... Mauss, M. (1975). A General Theory of Magic. New York, Norton, p. 152. Given that the crucial moment of curative efficacy was forged through the legerdemains of a specific type of technique, it comes as no small surprise that Mauss and Hubert conclude their general theory with a rumination on modern industrial techniques. By struggling with the relation between the experience of magical techniques and the automatic efficacy of specifically industrial techniques, these authors prefigure the contemporary debates on the ‘interfacing’ of transcendence and tele-technology in crucial ways. For another analysis on this key moment, see: Crapanzano, Vincent. “The Moment of Prestidigitation: Magic, Illusion and Mana in the Thought of Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss” in: Barkan, E. and R. Bush (1995). Prehistories of the Future: The Primitivist Project and the Culture of Modernism. Stanford, Calif., Stanford University Press, p. 102.
place despite this communal suspicion of potential artifice at the heart of the curative technique.\textsuperscript{6}

Inspired by this early ethnological problematic that outlines an intimate relationship between the artifice of the healer and the instantiation of curative efficacy, my dissertation describes the phenomenon of contemporary practices of healing prayer mediated through the radio and other devotional objects with these older ethnological resonances in mind. Articulating the way that contemporary practices and embodiments of faith healing subsist and make their appearance through technologies and objectile media exterior to the ‘believing’ subject, my research departs from the majority of scholarly approaches on the practice of faith healing that have either sought to debunk the curative practice by revealing the technological artifice associated with the healing performance, or relegated the curative force of the faith cure to some interiorized black box mechanism such as the placebo effect or so-called psychological suggestion.\textsuperscript{7} By focusing on the exteriorities inherent in the performance of faith, my research


\textsuperscript{7} I am thinking here especially of James Randi, whose work The Faith Healers (1987) gained wide public recognition and rekindled the debate on the place of faith healing in American popular culture. Following a long line of Enlightenment performances that demystified or disenchanted earlier forms of magic and credulity with new technologies and methods of science, Randi used a radio scanner to reveal that the famous faith healer Peter Popoff was receiving his divine “words of knowledge” through a hidden earpiece that received secret radio messages from his wife hidden backstage. Randi’s account belies a deeper question as to the
returns to early anthropological questions of the moment of prestidigitation, applying these early insights to the contemporary phenomenon of faith healing.  

Related to these materialities of divine communication, my research on the prayer bone also contributes new ethnographic descriptions to a burgeoning body of scholarship interested in the objectile dimension of devotional practices. Works such as historian Colleen McDannell’s experiential efficacy of the performance of faith precisely in the face of the tricks of technological artifice. Given the forces of attraction between faith healing and the technologically mediated voice that I trace in this dissertation, it is no surprise that Popoff chose a wireless earpiece to help facilitate his own healing performance. Signaling a departure from accounts such as these, my research sees the forces of doubt, suspicion and technological artifice as crucial components to a phenomenology of faith in an age of mechanical reproduction. Incidentally, even after James Randi’s technical revelations, the faith healer Peter Popoff continues to bring in millions of dollars a year for his healing ministry. Randi, J. (1987). The Faith Healers. Buffalo, N.Y., Prometheus Books.

Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America, articulate the importance of material devotions in the process of religious subjectivization and the perpetuation of religious communities. By focusing upon the sensation of tactility and the Christian healing techniques of manual imposition, my research articulates the way objects such as radios and prayer cloths play a crucial role in the reproduction of charismatic communities and the production of sensations of Holy Ghost presence. Tracking the circulation of material devotional objects within charismatic communities, my ethnography also extends a body of classic ethnological theory on the religious force of compulsion that is generated through the exchange and movement of objects.

My ethnography is based upon two years of fieldwork with charismatic radio preachers and their in-studio congregations, as well as dispersed members of the listening audience out in that nondescript space of what is referred to by the broadcasters as “radioland.” I began my project in the summer of 2007, conducting site visits to radio stations, churches and scanning the airwaves throughout southern West Virginia, southwestern Virginia and eastern Kentucky. It was during this summer pilot research that I located radio station 105.5 WGTH “The Sheep” in

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Richlands, Virginia, and first met Brother and Sister Allen. Their hour-long live charismatic broadcast “The Jackson Memorial Hour” was to become the centerpiece of my research into the materialities of divine communication. A small Christian radio station, WGTH is located in the heart of southern Appalachia, and its broadcast signal is capable of reaching into portions of western North Carolina, eastern Tennessee, southern West Virginia and Eastern Kentucky (see coverage map).

In terms of participant observation within the immediate space of the live studio of the radio station, I spent 135 hours at the station conducting research. While in the space of the live studio, I paid close attention to techniques of prayer and performances of worship, especially as they related to technologies within the studio such as the microphone. An overarching question within this technological environment was in what ways, if at all, did the microphone and associated technologies of radio broadcasting actively organize the charismatic worship environment and concomitant practices of devotion?

One of the numerous facets of my research made possible through the openness and generosity of Brother and Sister Allen are the 85 cassette tape recordings of their worship broadcasts that they have sent to me through the mail over the past four years. Not only have these tapes enabled me to keep abreast of the developments among the congregation members I came to know during fieldwork, but some of my richest ethnographic material in relation to ritual organization around the radio apparatus has been gleaned from these recordings. Moreover, the Allens have given me access to their collection of over 30 years of recorded charismatic worship
broadcasts from the time period when Sister Dorothy’s father, Brother George Jackson, preached over the radio. This charismatic radio archive has proved invaluable, allowing me to hear both the development of Brother Aldie’s sermonic style over a period of 20 years, as well as to hear the continuities in performance styles and techniques of healing prayer. In this way, it is not so much my capacities in ethnographic observation, but the remarkable generosity of the Allen family that has enabled this project.

Figure 1: The Circulation of Ethnographic Material
My interest in the practices of charismatic healing prayer often led outside the spaces explicitly oriented around the radio apparatus as I followed preachers who I had met within the context of the radio station to other spaces such as church services, tent revivals, prayer meetings and baptisms. It was in spaces such as these that I realized early in my fieldwork that my research frame on the materialities of prayer needed to be expanded to encompass the pervasive use of prayer cloths as a physical conduit for the power of the Holy Ghost. Another unanticipated opportunity emerged from what has been a constant source of curiosity and interest in the course of my fieldwork, the phenomenon of radio tactility. In this ritual of divine communication, the sick patient out in “radioland” makes manual contact with the radio apparatus as a conduit for efficacious healing power. The more I attempted to think about the specificities of this technologically mediated practice of prayer and healing in many charismatic communities in southern Appalachia, the more I realized that this key moment of the radio broadcast was intimately linked to broader practices of healing prayer that were disseminated on a national scale in the heyday of what has been called the Charismatic Renewal.10 In this way, some of the crucial healing performances within the so-called folk religious practices of southern Appalachia suggested an intimate link of oral-folk transmission with larger mass mediated religious movements of the 20th century. In order to explore all the implications of healing

radio tactility within the radio stations in southern Appalachia, it was therefore necessary to broaden my research to include an analysis of specific practices of prayer broadcast on a national scale during the healing revivals of popular charismatic figures such as Oral Roberts. My interest in radio tactility within the worship contexts of southern Appalachia therefore demanded that I expand the scope of my project to include not only instances of this practice on a wider national scale, but challenged me to begin thinking about the broader histories of faith healing and efficacious techniques of prayer in an age of mechanical reproduction. Far from taking my research into the isolated and preserved recesses of uncorrupted practices of so-called ‘old time religion’ in Appalachia, the preeminent ritual practice among these small Gospel radio stations demanded a sustained engagement with a history of prayer in the modern world that is intimately extended and organized by forces of technological mediation. Thus, just as my ethnography moves between spaces of transmission (radio station) and reception (private home) in an attempt to hear the sacred sound of the Holy Ghost, my narration of the materialites of prayer constantly oscillates between the specificities of curative practices in southern Appalachia on the one hand, and broader Evangelical practices on the other.

Exploring the forces of attraction between performances of healing prayer and the radio apparatus, chapter one, “Radio Prayers in Appalachia: The Prosthesis of the Holy Ghost and the Drive to Tactility,” tracks the miraculous power of the Holy Ghost and its particular mediations through the radio loudspeaker. Through this exploration of prayer translated through the radio apparatus, this chapter also introduces key performances of charismatic worship and techniques
of prayer that recur throughout the dissertation. Articulating the phenomenon of “radio tactility” as an efficacious point of contact for the communication of healing virtue, this section moves comparatively between theurgical practices in southern Appalachia and broader Pentecostal practices of the twentieth century. While grounded in the contemporary practice of curative radio prayer among charismatic communities in southern Appalachia, this chapter also recalls formative practices of faith during the Charismatic Revival of the early 1950’s when over three million listeners simultaneously tuned in to Oral Roberts *Healing Waters* radio broadcast and were instructed to put their hands on the radio during the performance of healing prayer.

Chapter two, “Haptic Faith: Prayer Cloths and the Circulation of the Miraculous Testimony,” describes the remarkable metamorphosis of a mere rag into a sacred cloth receptacle for the efficacious power of the Holy Ghost. Tracking the circulation of anointed fragments of cloth for the purposes of healing and divine protection, this section articulates the relation between the movement of materialized prayers and the compelling narrative force of testimony. Through ethnographic descriptions of the process of manufacture and use of these sacred cloth remnants, this chapter describes the “texture of faith” as a particular desire to instantiate the fleeting voice of prayer. Tracing the movement of these sacred rags, I demonstrate the unanticipated emergence and force of faith in and through the exterior object. Suggesting the resonances of profanation at the heart of Holy Ghost power, this chapter describes the patching-in of materialized prayers into the threadbare fabric of everyday life.

In the third chapter, “Preaching: The Anointed Poetics of Breath,” the ethnographic ear is
prosthetically extended into a sacred soundscape that is punctuated by a particular technique of respiration practiced in southern Appalachia and beyond. In this sermonic performance, the faculties of articulation are inspired by the breath of the Holy Ghost. This possession, in turn, unleashes a divine poetic fluency that is characterized by a guttural and percussive gasp for breath at the end of the sermonic line. Through the explosive force of this non-representational noise that erupts from the anointed bodily techniques of the preacher, the power-filled presence of the Holy Ghost announces itself within the charismatic milieu. With gestures to other similar forms of breath opening a space of comparative leverage, I propose that the mouth of the radio loudspeaker—a crucial technological force in the oral transmission of this performative style—announces the anointed poetics of breath in particularly compelling ways.

Performances of healing prayer in southern Appalachia often require a physical body to literally “stand in the gap” between the sacred and the everyday. Revisiting classic ethnological theories on the contagious transmission of force, chapter four, “Standin’ In the Gap: The Material Conduits of Divine Communication,” explores the place of material objects in the performance of divine communication and the practice of faith. Tracking between the devotional specificities of the practice of “standin’ in” within the context of southern Appalachia and the broader mass mediated performances of healing prayer during the Charismatic Renewal, this section also articulates Oral Roberts’ famous notion of “the point of contact” as a physical conduit for the transmission of healing power.

Recalling those rattling resonances of the very dry bones, the prophet Ezekiel reminds us
that the bone itself has a capacity to register the sound of the sacred word and the divine breath in specific ways:

> And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord (Ezekiel 37:3-4, King James Bible, *my italics*).

Yet the bone not only has the sensitive capacity to register the presence of the sacred in particular ways, but also to announce or signal this divine presence through the production of sound:

> So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone (v. 7).

Interpreting this passage that resounds in charismatic sermons and songs throughout southern Appalachia quite literally, my project attends to the production of numinous noise in and through the technological and objectile media of charismatic worship. Like the sound of the bone that announces the presence of the spirit, a basic premise of my ethnography is that manifestations of the Holy Ghost, sonic or otherwise, can never be abstracted from the material objects, bodily techniques and media technologies that are used to both disseminate the gospel and access communicative relays between the sacred and the everyday. One of the challenges of this ethnography, therefore, is to hear the specific resonances of the object itself in the organization and enframement of religious experiences of divine presence.11

11 This attempt to hear the sound of the sacred builds upon an ever-growing body of scholarship on the historical specificities of listening and the sonic environment, or soundscape.
The attempt to hear the sound of the sacred is also beholden in particular ways to the resonance of the bone.\textsuperscript{12} More specifically, the capacity of human audition is made possible through the translations of three tiny bones (the hammer, the anvil and the stirrup) as they resonate at the interface between the exterior environment and the sensitive structures of the inner ear. That the process of hearing is contingent upon a bone suggests the ways that the capacities of the human sensorium are always imprinted, cauterized, extended and organized by technological environments that are seemingly exterior to the ‘natural’ perceptual faculties of the subject. The experience and perception of prayer, therefore, an act intimately associated with

\textsuperscript{12} “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Matthew 11:15 King James Bible).
capacities of human and divine audition, is transformed in different technological environments and historical epochs. Taking another oft-invoked phrase within the charismatic worship milieu, “His ears are not too heavy to hear the cries of his people” (Isaiah 59:1), my dissertation explores the specific ways efficacious prayer and other practices of divine communication are experienced and understood when the sound of prayer is ‘heard’ by the artificial ear of the microphone, amplified by the mechanical mouth of the loudspeaker and communicated across vast expanses through “wireless” apparati. Through the artificial ear of the microphone, a kind of prosthetic extension of a human sensory capacity, my project attends to the contemporary technological resonances of that ubiquitous passage from the book of Romans (10:17) “faith cometh by hearing.”
Chapter 1

Appalachian Radio Prayers: The Prosthesis of the Holy Ghost and the Drive to Tactility

Emerging from the black-veiled surface of the radio, the tremblings of her voice filled the room with an intimate presence, like the warmth of words whispered directly in the ear. These tremulous sounds—winding, careening and twisting like the snake-path roads precipitously following the mountainsides and hollers of southern Appalachia—were punctuated every few seconds with a guttural gasp of breath. So clearly audible, the sound of these gasps made seem as if the fleshy organs of vocalization themselves were incarnated by the mechanical lungs of the loudspeaker. Combined with the undulating flow of her voice, these guttural punctuations began to form a rhythmic and songlike cadence, so that to the ear of the attentive listener, the sound of the loudspeaker oscillated between the palpable cadence of rhythm and the emergent meaning of articulated words.

Sister Violet: The dead in Christ is gonna rise up-agh
Amen.
These old bones-agh
There gonna rise again one day after-while-agh
Amen.
When this is all over, and that Gabriel blows that trumpet-agh.
Ooohh, get ready while ya can-agh
God is a’tellin’ ya, “Come On!”
Come.
When he calls-agh
Don’t turn him away.
Scanning the airwaves of southern Appalachia on any given Sunday, the radio loudspeaker is certain to voice the importunate communal prayers, energetic singing, and “anointed” preaching styles that characterize the ecstatic performances of so-called folk religion in Appalachia. Unlike the highly-produced, syndicated Evangelical programs that also retain a daily place within the Appalachian ether, these charismatic broadcasts are recognizable by their spontaneous and improvisatory style. The guiding principle of these live broadcasts, repeated time and again during each worship service, is “Just obey the Lord.” Implicit in this phrase is a profound sense of expectation and anticipation that the miraculous power of the Holy Ghost will instantiate itself within the ritual milieu, taking possession of the faculties of speech and bodily control for the purposes of healing physical ailments and blessing the listening faithful.

These charismatic radio broadcasts maintain a vague liturgical structure, yet this form is often deferred, interrupted or completely derailed according to the precarious contingencies introduced into the worship context by the miraculous power of the Holy Ghost. When the “power falls”, it often “anoints” the preacher with a particular poetic style characterized by a rhythmic delivery of sentences punctuated by guttural grunts and gasps for breath, while at other
times the spirit is “quenched” and withholds the *charismata* of rhetorical inspiration.\(^{13}\) When the Holy Ghost power reaches ecstatic intensity, the anointing becomes so excessive as to completely enrapture the body of the speaker, initiating a “fallin’ out in the spirit” that renders speechless the mouth of the preacher. This evocative phrase describes the sudden and precipitous collapse of the body into an inanimate mass whose only sign of life is the gentle, silent undulation of respiration. To those not present, but listening on the radio, the abrupt silencing of an anointed voice usually signals that an in-studio congregate has fallen out, as if their consciousness were suspended in that nebulous space between transmission and reception. The power of the spirit can take on myriad manifestations and self-effacing intensities, and the structure of the broadcast must be flexible enough to accommodate these precarious potentials of the Holy Ghost.

Centrally located within the southern Appalachians, radio station 105.5 FM WGTH, “The Sheep” provides a good example of the small independent radio stations located throughout this region. Transmitting from southwestern Virginia, the signal of this station is capable of reaching the listening faithful throughout portions of southern West Virginia, eastern Kentucky, western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee. As if to mimic the improvised spontaneity of the charismatic worship services that take place within the live studio of this station, this

\(^{13}\) The Greek term *charismata* is usually rendered in English as “spiritual gifts.” Elaborated in the New Testament, these divine gifts included, among other things, the miraculous ability to heal the sick, prophesize and the ecstatic practice of speaking in unknown tongues (glossolalia) (cf. Hastings 1919).
structure was originally constructed as a domestic residence, but has been converted with minimal alteration into a radio station. The space of the “live” studio clearly suggests its earlier domestic organization with its brick fireplace, now usurped by a wooden podium that functions as both a support for the single studio microphone and an altar for the participants of the worship service. A large window in this room reveals a dilapidated storage shed and an outmoded satellite dish resting wirily in the backyard, its rusted face still gazing expectantly toward the heavens. Abutting from the wall opposite the window, a bare incandescent bulb mounted in a porcelain housing looks strangely out of place. The sudden muted glow of this bulb signals to the live studio congregation that the sounds within this converted space are now being broadcast to the listening audience out in what is referred to as “radioland”, a nondescript space where the totality of the dispersed listening audience is imagined as a single community. Two reclaimed church pews, well-worn and stained from years of use, and fifteen mismatched chairs provide seating for the members of the live studio congregation. Though sometimes young children are present in the studio, the congregation is primarily made up of white working class individuals (truck drivers, cafeteria cooks, miners, waitresses, mechanics, etc.) generally ranging in age from 45 to 70. Women have a slight majority in terms of attendance and participation within the live studio. Underneath the naked bulb sits a piano that often gives instrumental accompaniment to the lively singing of hymns.

During the week, live charismatic worship services are interspersed with local news, obituaries, church announcements and syndicated Evangelical programming such as the “Back to
the Bible Broadcast.” In addition, local businesses such as funeral homes, banks, restaurants, and farming supply stores advertise on this station. On the weekend, however, the programming features a higher concentration of charismatic worship services and preaching. On Saturday and Sunday the radio station is bustling with energy as preachers, instrument-toting musicians and faithful congregants pass in and out of the studio in slots of airtime ranging from 30 minutes to an hour. One of the most popular weekend broadcasts is the “Jackson Memorial Hour,” airing during the prime Sunday listening time from 11am until noon. The main organizers of this worship service, Brother Alide Allen and Sister Dorothy Allen, have been preaching on the radio for over 43 years. The Allens took over the program from Dorothy’s Father, Brother George Jackson, who began broadcasting in the mid 1950’s on a radio program called “The Little Mountain Preacher.” Brother Aldie, the main preacher during this broadcast, had his conversion experience while listening to the voice of Brother George issuing from the radio loudspeaker.

As these brief historical details suggest, many of the self-proclaimed “old-time Gospel” worship practices in Appalachia are significantly related to the technology of radio. A significant amount of the charismatic faithful in this region grew up listening to worship services mediated over this apparatus. The prominent practice of radio listening, in combination with the aurally-saturated metaphors of early Christianity (“Faith cometh by hearing,” etc.), significantly influence the way many of the charismatic faithful, both broadcasters and radio auditors alike, experience and understand practices such as intercessory prayer, faith healing and
glossolalia.

Like many of the charismatic broadcasts in this region, the Jackson Memorial Hour is oriented around the healing of physical illness. The key ritual performance and climax of emotional intensity in such radio programs is organized around the practice of faith healing. In order to create an efficacious milieu for miraculous cures, the force of the Holy Ghost must be instantiated into the worship context. Various theurgical apparati are set in motion in a precarious attempt to “get a prayer through” to the divine ear. As noted by Max Muller in his series of Oxford lectures “On Ancient Prayers,” the word prayer has an important etymological similarity with the word precarious (1901). This analysis is helpful within the context of this study because it suggests the emergence of faith as a kind of burden or threat to the automatic efficacy of the magical incantation. An elementary contingency and potential breakdown, therefore, resides within the performance of prayer. Moreover, this supposed burden of faith gets to the core of significant debates within the emergent disciplines of comparative religion and ethnomology. These debates described how the automatic efficacy of the magical and materialized incantation undergoes a gradual process of “abstraction,” “spiritualization” and “interiorization” through an ever-increasing technological control of the contingencies of the natural environment. Through this process of abstraction, the materialized and automatic efficacy of incantation becomes the precarious practice of prayer directed toward autonomous spiritual agents. Despite these earlier forecasts, however, material conduits always seem to insinuate themselves into the contemporary worship context in a tactile attempt to mitigate the precariousness of
prayer. Thus, a panoply of charismatic techniques of the body, material objects and media-technologies are simultaneously engaged to make manifest the presence of the Holy Ghost. Such material and ideational entanglements summon a physicality shared by both the spirit and the radio voice, a commonality that is necessary for successful faith healing.

Several times during the course of the Jackson Memorial Hour, the members of the studio congregation, referred to as “prayer warriors,” are called to circle around the microphone and pray for the sick listeners out in “radioland.” The altar mentioned during such healing prayers refers to the microphone and microphone stand as well as the wooden table they rest on. Congregants of the radio church occasionally kneel down in front of the microphone during moments of conversion and supplication. As the prayer warriors approach and place their hands upon the wooden platform, the sensitive microphone crisply perceives brisk pops, cracks, creaks and thuds as hands are placed near the microphone, and as the microphone is adjusted. This call for participation in the healing prayer also includes the listening audience. Both the isolated sick in need of a cure and the distant worshipper who wishes to contribute to the theurgical efficacy are importuned to “lay your hand on the radio as a point of contact and pray with us.” As if to mimic the early radio sets that had the capacity to both transmit and receive, the radio loudspeaker becomes a two-way conduit for divine communication.¹⁴ For listeners

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out in radioland, it is as if the radio loudspeaker can simultaneously amplify or extend prayers from the everyday to that sacred space somewhere else and receive the miraculous transmission of healing force from the sacred to the everyday.

While these preparations for healing prayer are taking place, Brother Aldie further organizes the prayer by assigning “stand-ins” and arranging the most efficacious manual positioning for the communication of Holy Ghost power. Once again, the level of spontaneity and creative improvisation that characterize these ritual preparations are worth noting. While observing these preparations, one is reminded of the creative informality of rural farmers who use whatever improvised materials at hand (garden hoses, tin cans, bailing twine, rusted washing machine parts, etc.) to get a tractor up and running again before the rain falls upon the hay. “Standin’-in” the gap between the everyday and the sacred, poetic techniques of prayer and material conduits of the spirit are mobilized through a consecrated performance of what Stewart calls, in describing a local cultural poetics, “foolin’ with thangs.”

Among charismatic practices in Appalachia, one member of the congregation who is present in the studio becomes the bodily substitute for a patient who is to be prayed for, yet is not physically present. Blood relations usually provide the most efficacious “stand-ins” or conduits for the prayer, though some members of the congregation are believed to possess particular elective affinities for certain categories of illness and patients, and may be employed as stand-ins in these cases. For example, one older sister was believed to have a special gift as an embodied

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conduit for sick children; therefore, when the congregation prayed for a distant child who had no
kinship bond in the studio, she was often called upon to stand-in and thus become a physical
medium for healing power on behalf of the ailing child.

Radiating outward like spokes around the hub of the microphone-altar, the outstretched
arms and downward-facing palms of the studio worshippers demarcate a sacred circle for the
communication of Holy Ghost power. As if to amplify the efficacious connectivity of the spirit
through tactile contact, the body in communication with divine powers and the material
mediations of the radio apparatus mimic one another almost without distinction. In this way,
the haptic and proprioceptive sensations of the outstretched or uplifted “holy hand” seem to
amplify the technical capacities of the microphone. Speaking forcefully toward the center of
this sacred wheel, Brother Aldie begins the prayer: “Father God we call…” Like the sudden
illumination of the exposed electric bulb protruding from a wall in the makeshift studio, his short
invocation signals all the prayer warriors to commence praying their own specific prayer out
loud.

What follows is a technique of prayer that is practiced in charismatic worship services
throughout Appalachia. Because of the striking entanglement of articulated words created in
this communal performance of divine communication, I have termed this practice *skein prayer*.
Borrowed from the terminology of weaving and textiles, the word *skein* denotes both a bundle of
yarn, and the act of tangling or coiling thread. Thus, the phrase “skein prayer” suggests that

Princeton, Princeton University Press, p. 44.
there are elements of manual technique and haptic sensation intertwined with the oral performance of prayer. As the prayer progresses, this atmosphere of language grows dense like the haze of coal dust: the bituminous unction of industrial modernity. As these atmospheres thicken, so does the explosive potential. In this entanglement, the possibility of articulation is immersed in a seething skein of noise.

As if this vociferous entanglement of dismembered words were not enough to secure the attention of the divine ear, the noise of the skein prayer is augmented by vocal exercises such as wailing, crying, and the most prominent and practiced form of these vocalizations, the undulating “Whooo.” As if to further thematize the dis-articulation of language and immersion into the buzz of noise, the mouth cedes its function of articulous and simply cries out, voicing a basic capacity of the vocal organs.

Skein prayer, according to many charismatic practitioners in Appalachia, is one of the most efficacious theurgical techniques to “get a prayer through” to the divine ear. Suddenly, this pulsating flow of skein prayer is cut-through with the only clearly discernable sound, the percussive POP of hands rapidly clapped together.

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16 Once again the abundance of metaphors of divine hearing capacities within the worship context is worth noting. (Isaiah 59:1, “His ears are not too heavy to hear the cries of his people.”) These auditory motifs within the orally saturated culture of early Christianity leads to the question of how the contemporary faithful experience and conceive divine capacities to hear prayer in an age immersed in technological extensions of sound and hearing.

17 In his unfinished doctoral dissertation, Marcel Mauss explores the relationship between prayer and the non-representational force of sounds produced by the vocal organs (2003 [1908]). Likewise, Mauss’ famous articulation of “techniques of the body” concludes with a rumination upon the “psychological momentum” gained through the breathing techniques of
disjointed bursts of 5-15 beats. If only for an instant, these percussive cracks pierce through the entangled thickness of noise. There is an important structural similarity between the overall aural effect of the communal skein prayer and the practice of speaking in tongues, or glossolalia. In both cases, the most efficacious forms of prayer are those which can be registered by the human ear, but whose plentitude of meaning remains unavailable. To observe this performance of skein prayer in the space of the live studio, one is moved, perhaps even threatened, by the emotionally charged, ecstatic space that is produced. However, the translation of this performance through the radio apparatus produces a significantly different experience. An experience, moreover, that seems particularly apt for the ecstatic moment of skein prayer.

The performance of skein prayer in the live studio differs subtly from the way that this efficacious prayer is ‘traditionally’ practiced. Whereas the ritual of skein prayer within the space of the church or revival tent is usually performed by each congregation member either where he or she is already positioned within the space (in the rows of chairs or pews, for instance), or perhaps concentrated around the body of the sick patient, the performance of this type of entangled prayer within the space of the live studio is specifically organized and oriented around the artificial ear of the microphone. As if to utilize the artificial amplifications of the electro-mechanical ear/mouth to enhance the efficacy of this theurgical technique, the prayer warriors gather around the microphone/altar.

The skein prayer oriented around the microphone suggests yet another entanglement: an
intertwining between the technological infrastructure of the apparatus and the precarious hearing capacities of the Divine Ear. Early Christian anxieties around the potential for the divine ear to become “heavy” “dull” or “deaf” and thus unable to register “the cries of the people” suggests the historically and technologically contingent modes for understanding and experiencing divine hearing capacities, angelic messengers, divinatory speech, sacred postal economies, disruptive demons, oracular noise, and so on.\(^{18}\) Charismatic practitioners self-consciously utilize the radio apparatus to amplify “the cries of the people.” Yet this amplification reacts back upon the pious subject with unanticipated consequences and attunes particular modes of religious sensation. Within this particular charismatic context, the radio apparatus is an important component in what Birgit Meyer has recently termed the “sensational form.”\(^{19}\) Senses of transcendence are inflected, attuned and augmented in particular ways by the religious mediations within the worship context. Embodied techniques and pious training combine with material mediations of the divine to produce the ecstatic sensation of what Hent de Vries, emphasizing the intimate relation between instrumental artifice and the miraculous, calls the


“special effect.”20

The theurgical orientation around the microphone simultaneously facilitates a benediction upon the ears of the listening faithful out in radioland and an amplification of the importunate intercessory cry toward Heaven. The prayer warriors in the radio station anticipate the simultaneous voicing of their prayer somewhere else in the nebulous and nondescript space of radioland. The very organization of the prayer, even before the tongues have tangled and the percussive pops cut through the skein, thus prefigures a peculiar experience of simultaneity or doubling somewhere else. This basic detail concerning the different orientation and conception of the charismatic skein prayer reveals how the radio apparatus inflects or augments experiences and performances of divine communication. Skein Prayer voiced into the artificial ear of the microphone is not merely the replication of ‘normal’ charismatic worship practices “over” the radio, but a profound alteration, re-conceptualization, and re-embodiment, through the transforming process of technological mediation.

As the skein prayer is translated from the space of the live studio to the mouth of the loudspeaker at home, the listener, whose capacity for hearing is extended by the artificial ear of the microphone, experiences this moment in a condition of “blindness.”21 The technical capacities of the radio do not convey any visual information about the prayer. There is no


visual grounding to help orient and locate the voice issuing forth from the loudspeaker.

Alternatively, when this type of prayer is experienced within the space of the studio or church, for example, the participant is able to differentiate and organize this otherwise cacophonous tangle of noise by visually identifying the positions of other congregants’ bodies. Likewise, if the congregate has her eyes closed and hands raised in a posture of prayer, she is able to differentiate and locate these voices by differing proximity and intensity of sound, reverberations created by architecture or surroundings, physical contact with other church members, etc.

Rather than detracting from the somatic and emotional power of prayer in the presence of a church space, this distinction may be useful to emphasize the different sensory registers and sense ratios that are invoked, attuned and trained in what may seem to be the same practice. In comparison to the architectural space of the church, worship through the radio invokes, attunes and trains significantly different sensory registers and sense ratios.

Issuing from nowhere, this compelling force of sacred noise gains a new quality and intensity of disorientation through the radio. This vertiginous ‘special effect’ of the radio apparatus foregrounds and attunes the sense of hearing at the expense of other perceptual capacities. This is not to say that the body of the listener loses all perceptual and embodied orientations in the private domestic space. Listeners are still experiencing this “canny” environment through the embodied orientation of the senses (seeing the table upon which the radio sits, feeling the fabric of the couch, the smell of food cooking, etc.). This feeling of embodied familiarity, we might add, could nevertheless further contribute to the strange
sensation of aural disjuncture between the noise issuing from that peculiar elsewhere of the apparatus and the privacy of the everyday domestic space. The sacred noise of skein prayer rends the mundane and habituated “radio texture” that is usually associated with practices of radio listening within the domestic space. Uncanny in the strict sense of the term, the ecstatic noise of skein prayer demarcates a numinous space within the intimate interior of the home.

One could add to the disorienting force of the “disembodied” skein prayer the technical failure of the microphone that is voiced by the loudspeaker. At moments the noise of the prayer reaches such sonic intensities that the sensitivities of the microphone are unable to clearly register the sound. This inability to ‘hear’ creates strange distorted sounds increases the efficacious noise mouthed by the loudspeaker. Like the stones in the book of Luke, the technical capacities of the apparatus themselves cry out, adding to the efficacy and sensorial impact of the prayer. This technological failure is voiced by the loudspeaker as a violent hiss of wind, static, and a bending or distortion of the skein voices.

Just as there are moments during the performance of prayer when the technological media fail to ‘faithfully’ register the boisterous noise within the studio, there are many instances following the gradual lull and decrescendo of the skein prayer when the pastor declares “That

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24 “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out!” Luke 19:14.
prayer ain’t gone through yet. Keep prayin’!” When a member of the congregation senses that the prayer has not “gone through,” the prayer warriors resume the prayer until everyone is satisfied that the theurgical transmission has reached the divine ear. Communication breakdown between the divine and the everyday is often attributed to the obstructing influences of the devil and his “dark principalities,” as well as the burden of unbelief among the radio congregation and the listening audience. Likewise, the negative force of unbelief is said to “quench” the Holy Ghost, preventing the anointing power from entering the space of worship. Though many times the skein prayer is performed with no tangible manifestations of the spirit within the studio, there are occasional moments of ecstatic irruption when the numbing buzz of prayer unleashes the miraculous power of the Holy Ghost.

**Part II**

Many faithful listeners in radioland claim to have been miraculously healed as a result of hearing the skein prayer mediated through the radio apparatus. Sister Violet, a faithful listener to charismatic broadcasts and occasional participant in the space of the live studio, gave a testimony to the miraculous cure of her severely infected index finger while listening to the radio:

When my fanger was in bad shape,  
you know, Sister Dorothy was a-prayin’.  
She was a-prayin’ one Sunday mornin’ on there [the radio] for me.  
And I felta-sucha par a-shakin’ my radio.  
And I just lifted my hands up, and then I realized that I had my fanger on the radio,  
and my fanger began ta straighten out.  
And, you know, somebody’s gotta pray the prayer of faith for ye.  
And I felt her, and then I realized my fanger was straight…
You know, we need to tell, and stand up and tell what god does for us. And may god bless ya—I don’t wanna take up no more time.\textsuperscript{25}

As Sister Violet testifies into the microphone for an unseen audience her performance completes a circuitry of efficacious prayer. It is as if the healed body of the patient tracks back to the mechanical origin of the prayer. Recounting the miraculous event and thus tracing the infrastructure of the radio broadcast, the healed patient returns to the material source of transmission. Her “live” in-studio appearance in the technological space of transmission is voiced into the self-same microphone that once registered a prayer on her behalf. The anointed body of Sister Violet embodies a forgotten technical potentiality of the radio apparatus; the magnetic interface of the radio’s transducer is not only capable of reception, but transmission as well.\textsuperscript{26}

Sister Violet’s experience of “presence” entails sensations that are in excess of the merely instrumental capacities of the medium. Thus, the haptic and kinesthetic descriptions given by the Sister point to a specific effect of radio listening that transcends the informational content of the broadcast. Not only are the sounds of sister Dorothy’s

\textsuperscript{25} October 12, 2008. WGTH 105.5 FM. Tape recording of live Jackson Memorial Hour broadcast) Because this excerpt from the testimony of Sister Violet is part of an anointed rhetorical style characterized by specific pronunciations of words such as power (par) and a rhythmic cadence that is heard by the listening faithful as a “sign” of Holy Ghost anointing, I have attempted to translate the sound of her voice issuing from the loudspeaker as faithfully as possible.

praying voice translated by the apparatus; Sister Violet *feels* the physical proximity of Sister Dorothy, and this specifically in relation to the somatic awareness of bodily disfigurement and proprioceptive sensations of elevated extremities.

Likewise, faithful listeners out in radioland also respond to radio’s production of presence by actively participating with the broadcast. During interviews, listeners often described how they interact with the worship service by clapping their hands and singing along with the studio congregation. Several listeners claimed to actively encourage the radio preacher with exhortations such as, “Preach it Brother!” and “Come On!” This type of participation with the radio broadcast is accompanied by ecstatic manifestations such as the listener who called into the broadcast to testify that she received the anointing while doing house chores and suddenly began “just a-jumpin’ and a-shoutin’ all over the kitchen.” The sound issuing from the radio loudspeaker produces an experience of calling or demand upon the listener that is in excess of the informational content of the broadcast.

As Adorno notes, a basic characteristic of the radio apparatus is that during the experience of listening, the instrumental/material aspects of the radio apparatus (studio microphones, transmitters, receivers, electrical grids, etc.) are forgotten or repressed.²⁷ Through habitual use and a longing for the unmediated, the machinations and material details of

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the instrument fade into the background. This inability to actively conceptualize the infrastructure of broadcasting, therefore, creates a sensation of actuality—that an unmediated voice is present in the space of listening directly addressing the listener in her singularity. As I have suggested, this sensation is also described as the experience of the isolated radio listener suddenly singled out by a speaker who seems to be actually present in the space of listening.

And yet, it is not merely this capacity to forget that produces the most profound sensations of presence, but a kind of doubled awareness that simultaneously recognizes the instrumental machinations of the apparatus and a vague sensation of something else at work behind the apparatus. This rupture, or special effect, that is produced when sensory capacities are augmented and extended by media such as radio, brings us closer to understanding the moment when Sister Violet’s radio trembled with divine power.

To be sure, the charismatic faith healing tradition is saturated with metaphors and practices of touch. Throughout many charismatic radio broadcasts, the phrases “he needs a touch from the Lord,” or “touch her Lord” are employed as metaphors of divine healing and

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28 Recall for example the history of furniture in the bourgeois household: phonograph, radio and railway all became upholstered and cushioned so that the apparatus could become a piece of household furniture. Once proudly displayed, the wires, tubes and diaphragms moved behind the black veil. Schivelbusch, W. (1988). *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century*. Berkeley, University of California Press.

29 Utilizing archival material such as letters, historian Tona Hangen has demonstrated that the mediated voice of twentieth century evangelical preaching made it seem as if the preacher were actually present inside the privacy of the home. Hangen, Tona J. (2002) *Redeeming the Dial: Radio, Religion, and Popular Culture in America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina
miraculous intervention. Accounts within the New Testament of “laying on of hands” and various instances of efficacious communication of divine healing virtue through tactile contact are interpreted literally and translate into a plethora of tactile practices within worship. The performance of healing prayer is intimately and crucially linked to a frenetic drive to tactility.

In this way, the contagious potentiality of the Holy Spirit could become communicated through tactile contact with the radio loudspeaker. The specificities of charismatic radio tactility, however, cannot be merely collapsed into a more general charismatic drive to healing touch. The act of touching the radio receiver in order to facilitate both the efficacious reception and transmission of Holy Ghost power is generally referred to as a “point of contact.” Though this crucial theologico-technical term has spread out—a propensity of all sacred force—to encompass a significant inventory within the charismatic reliquary (anointing oil, photographs, letters, television sets, prayer stamps, prayer cloths, etc.) the key concept of “point of contact” itself was, in fact, formulated within the context of healing prayer mediated over the radio apparatus. Oral Roberts, arguably the most significant proponent of both the charismatic healing revival and Pentecostal faith healing movements during the twentieth century, coined this preeminent phrase as a theologico-technical term that helped to mitigate the distance from both the ear of the faithful radio listener and the efficacious healing virtue of the Holy Ghost. The term “theologico-technical” suggests that the point of contact is both a specific theurgical technique that augments or amplifies the efficacy of the prayer, as well as a theological claim
upon the nature of divine communication and faith. According to Roberts, God institutes certain “instrumentalities” into the world to provide efficacious material conduits for divine force, allowing the patient to “turn faith loose” through an act of tactile contact.\textsuperscript{30}

Though most of the faithful must employ material and technological instrumentalities to unleash their faith and thus instantiate healing virtue, Roberts himself claimed to have been given as one of his charismata a specific “sense of discernment” in his right hand that allowed him to “detect” the presence of illness-causing demons. This presence was discerned through tactile sensations of pressure that were exerted upon his healing hand by the malignant force of the illness-demon (1950: IV, 35). For the isolated listener, tactile contact with the radio loudspeaker became a prosthetic extension of Roberts’ gift of discernment and detection. Thus, as Roberts laid his hand upon the microphone or a physical stand-in within the studio during the “prayer-time” of his famous Healing Waters Broadcast, the ailing patient placed hands on the radio loudspeaker to achieve access to Roberts’ manual sense of detection. This tactile/objectile exercise of faith, in turn, “loosed their faith” and created a physical conduit for the communication of healing virtue.

In his famous treatise If You Need Healing, Do These Things, Roberts emphasizes the radio as an important point of contact.\textsuperscript{31} Of course, Roberts use of radio contact as a technique


\textsuperscript{31} Another material of mass mediated healing, the prayer cloth is the other most prominent object within the charismatic reliquary of faith prosthetics. Though more archival research is need at this point, is seems that the circulation of prayer cloths by mail was expanded through
of immediacy, “liveness”, and audience participation was not new. Early Pentecostal radio pioneers of the late 1920’s such as Sister Aimee McPherson also encouraged listeners to make tactile contact with the loudspeaker during the prayer.\(^{32}\) Roberts, however, made radio tactility a centerpiece of his *Healing Waters Broadcast* and explicitly formulated the theologico-technical phrase “radio as a point of contact.” Moreover, this how-to manual of faith healing features a visual illustration explaining how the point of contact works. At the top of the image sits Roberts himself in front of a large microphone exclaiming, “Rise, the Lord maketh the whole.” A bedfast and sickly-looking man is located in the bottom corner of the illustration, his feeble hand outstretched and touching the radio, while a gigantic divine hand reaches down from heaven to touch his head and thus communicate “healing virtue.” Providing a striking example of the disavowal of the material conduit in the moment of healing cure or efficacious divine communication, the radio loudspeaker, placed prominently in front of the prone patient, voices the ironic words, “ONLY BELIEVE.”\(^{33}\)

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\(^{33}\) ibid, p. 33.
Figure 3: Illustration of the “Point of Contact” from famous healing treatise
Likewise, a prefiguration or anticipation of the “radio as a point of contact” can be seen in the pictures and descriptions taken from Roberts’ massive tent revival campaigns of the 1940’s. Inside what was then the largest tent in the world, sick patients would form a “prayer line” or “healing line” in the front of the sanctuary to be prayed over, one at a time, by Roberts’ palpating hand. This massive tent auditorium depended on a large public announcement system to broadcast the voice of the healer throughout the throngs of faithful and expectant audience members. Roberts’ praying voice and his right hand of discernment were therefore already mediated by a technological system of voice amplification that was literally inserted between the body of the healer and the patient. The microphone, or technological extension and amplification of the voice, was already mediating the patient-healer complex; Roberts would often hold the microphone in his left hand, its large steel housing held close to his mouth, while the right hand reached out to both “discern” the illness of the patient and communicate healing virtue. The technology of radio broadcasting allowed Roberts to propose a strange mimicking of the healing technique within the amplified space of the revival tent. Roberts asked listeners to put their hands upon the apparatus in order to gain access to divine healing power. The materialities of the radio, combined with a need to produce a sensation of “liveness” and immediacy for the distant listening audience, initiated a curious reversal or inversion of the tactile healing technique.
Figure 4: Iconic Images of the Famous Faith Healer
In this way, the faithful listeners experienced an artificial or prosthetic embodiment of Roberts’ spiritual gift of haptic detection; they experienced the tactile sensations of heat and pressure from the vibrating electric diaphragm of the radio loudspeaker. In terms specifically related to the radio apparatus and the challenges of communication at a distance, the point of contact can be seen as a theatrical production of immediacy or “liveness” through a strategic thematization of an unanticipated or unregistered potential of the radio apparatus. Hearing the prayer issuing from the loudspeaker in an experiential condition of “blindness,” the listener-participant laid on hands to “fill-in” the disembodied and distanced voice. Deploying two sensory modes—the auditory and the haptic—during the performance of healing prayer created a powerful sense of immediacy with the praying voice. More than this, however, the discontinuity or disjuncture between sounds registered by ear and vibrations felt by hand was likely experienced by many tactile listeners as the miraculous healing power of the Holy Ghost.

To experience sound through the hand, as a deaf person palpating the throat of someone speaking in order to “hear,” creates a sense of disjuncture between the body’s capacity to register and process sound, and the sheer materiality of sound experienced through the hand. This sensation of vibration not only corresponds or co-registers with certain sound-meanings of the radio voice, but the sensitive capacities of the skin are able to register heat, pressure and vibration that are “unheard” by the ear. Radio tactility thus allows the listener to experience the prayer in a profoundly different sensory mode than is possible in other worship contexts and media environments. Sensations of Holy Ghost power surging through the radio loudspeaker
reside in this productive space of the experiential gap between the haptic and the audile. This sensation of excess during the practice of radio tactility informs the healing testimony of Sister Violet and her reliance upon tactile and kinesthetic metaphors to describe the miraculous moment when she feels her radio trembling with divine power. Sister Violet’s testimony is a tactile sensation of skein prayer experienced through the hand. Indeed, the tangled excess of noise, percussive-pops, and wailing produced through the performance of skein prayer is manually registered through the loudspeaker as a series of warm, trembling vibrations.\(^\text{34}\) This particular practice of radio audition seems to emphasize the tactile sensibilities at the expense of aural experience.

Crucial theurgical techniques within the context of charismatic faith healing, such as the tactile “point of contact,” were thus developed specifically in relation to the radio apparatus and actively incorporated into the worship styles of the Appalachian faithful. Modes of listening and understandings of faith healing insinuated themselves into the “normal” church context through the mass-mediations of the radio apparatus, at least since the early 1930’s. Emphasizing the intertwining of charismatic practice and media technologies such as the radio, also attests to the thorough modernity of “old time gospel” and prevents the typical narration of

\(^{34}\) While conducting fieldwork with charismatic listening communities in Appalachia, I had the opportunity several times to participate in radio tactility while listening to live broadcasts in the space of listeners’ homes. My description of the sensations of vibration were registered through my ethnographic hand, a *gauche* one at best. For the “holy hand” of the charismatic, imprinted and cauterized through manual theurgical techniques, tactile metaphors of divine touch, and haptic “senses of detection” the experience produced through radio tactility is no mere vibration, but the trembling power of the Holy Ghost.
religion in Appalachia as “isolated” or “timeless.” Charismatic practices such as skein prayer and radio tactility can be seen as performative negotiations of a specific technologically mediated environment, just as much as attempts to influence and instantiate supernatural power. There are crucial moments within the ritual context where the two seemingly discreet phenomena—the performance of prayer and the technical apparatus—become indistinguishable.

Within the charismatic tradition, the phenomenon of radio tactility points to a “prosthesis of prayer” and an “apparatus of faith” supplementing the spiritualized rhetoric of faith healing. Many of the faithful within the charismatic community and beyond emphasize that prayer is unmediated and free from material conduits, claiming “there is no distance in prayer.” In academic analysis, many so-called belief-centered theories of ritual efficacy relegate the force of charismatic healing techniques to internal psychological mechanisms and cognitive processes. Both everyday and scholarly understandings of “faith healing” thus take for granted the internal, spiritual, and belief-centered characteristics of this curative technique. Yet the prevalence of material “points of contact” such as the radio apparatus suggest otherwise. Perhaps a reconceptualization of the term “faith” in the ubiquitous phrase “faith healing” would be useful.

The exercise of faith—and its visceral, embodied connotations—seems to be activated in material objects and technological apparati exterior to the religious subject. It is as if faith does not reside in the interior structures of cognition and belief, but remains hidden within the external object ready to be “let loose” “unleashed” or “released” through the explosive tactile performance of the “point of contact.” Through the machinations of the radio apparatus, the
religious subject is able to “reach out and touch faith.” Faith therefore seems to make its appearance felt in and through specific processes of objectile and technological mediation.

Yet to conclude by suggesting that faith resides in media radically exterior to the religious subject would be merely to reify what seems to be a peculiar oscillation at work within the term “faith” itself. The precariousness inherent in prayer demands some kind of performance or practice of faith. This performance of faith is not only a spiritual form of volition or belief that would propitiate the precarious contingencies of divine communication. Rather, it is simultaneously a performative revelation and concealment of the material conduits of divine communication. Its power, depends on a disavowal of the tangible media of prayer in favor of some spiritualized form of belief. The word “faith,” then, encapsulates both the material conduit of prayer and its simultaneous denial. In an instant of self-effacement, the radio loudspeaker voices “ONLY BELIEVE” at the very moment when the ailing patient must make tactile contact with the apparatus in order to receive healing power.

Just as haptic and kinesthetic sensations were restored to the necrosed and benumbed finger of Sister Violet through tactile contact with the radio apparatus, the miraculous presence of the Holy Ghost makes its appearance to the particular sensory registers of the religious subject as a specific effect of technological mediation. The apparatus, as a kind of prosthetic sixth sense, attunes the perceptual faculties to specific somatic experiences of the ‘transcendent.’ The material and technological prostheses of prayer extend the perceptual capacities of the subject somewhere else, yet this religious experience of  

ecstasis (literally, talking outside the
self) can never be abstracted from the material devotional practices that “stand-in” between the everyday and the sacred. The Holy Ghost moves in that ecstatic space between body and apparatus, and thus Sister Violet feels her radio “shakin” with divine power. To rephrase the ubiquitous passage from the book of Romans (10:17), perhaps it would be more appropriate to conclude that “faith cometh by touching.”

**Part III: Ritual Resonances of the Radio Voice**

The phenomenon of healing radio tactility is perhaps the preeminent example of an interfacing of techniques of divine communication and the technology of the radio apparatus. However, many other examples evoked and performed within the charismatic worship space of the live studio suggest the intimate relations between experiences and understandings of prayer and the radio apparatus. This section describes several recurrent motifs within the context of the charismatic radio broadcast to reinforce the phenomenal impact of the radio voice on experiences of divine presence, prayer, and healing efficacy.

*A Ritual Procession Around the Microphone*

**Aldie:** I may just have ta preach here in a minute, seems like tha sangin’ ain’t goin’ no where. Before I do, I’m gonna go ahead and preach here in just a minute, if it be tha Lord’s will. *[In an informal yet imperative voice]* Francis come’ere. ‘Fore I do I don’t know why, I don’t know why *[Arranging the most efficacious ritual positions]* No give me your other hand… I don’t know why. I don’t know why. But before I preach, I need ya ta just walk around this mic here a-time’er-two.
[Intense, visceral voice] I need ta walk her around this mic here a-time’er-two!
I don’t know why.
Ah’ but God does-agh [Poetics of breath beginning to emerge]
Ah’ God knows what’s goin’ on-agh
He knows our problems-agh
An’ tha troubles that we all have-agh
But I’ll tell ya today that we got a God today,
Ah’ Francis, that’ll reach down-agh
An’l maketh a way when there seemeth to be no way-agh
Ah’ praise God
As far as the prayer warriors-agh
It seems like God’s takin’em out one at a time-agh
But I got news for Mr. Satan-agh
Honey I got news for’em-agh
Ah’ tha same God-agh
That was here with Joe Shelton-agh
The same God here with George Jackson-agh
The same one here with all the others-agh
He’s still here today-agh
He’s still blessin’ today-agh
If you’ll believe in tha name of tha Lord.
There’s a healin’ commin’ fer somebody,
I thought it was Gordon, it ain’t Gordon—
[Loud, boisterous voice] It’s YOU gonna get that healin’ this mornin’!
It’s you!
Thank God, thank God, thank God.
God’s gonna heal ya, and ever-thang’s gonna be alright.
I don’t know what she needs.
I don’t know what she needs.
She’s gettin’ a blessing, or she’s gonna get a healin’.
[Brother Aldie’s voice becomes indiscernible amidst the claps, singing, vocalizations and
glossolalia inundating the space of the live studio.]
[Speaking once again in close proximity to the microphone, with a voice clearly
registered]
Gordon may get a healin’, no doubt in my mind that he is.
But right there’s the one tha Lord told me gonna get a healin’ this mornin’.
But didn’t tell me ‘til right now.
Francis needs a healin’ [Glossolalia clearly audible and forceful in the background]
I told ya I’m gonna preach here in a minute.
Arizona make yerself at home, help pray [Arizona enters the live studio]
Come help pray, make yerself at home. *A brief ‘silence’ in which only tongues are heard filling the studio and resonating from the louspeaker*

Help pray for her.

The Lord’s gonna give’er a healin’ this mornin’.

The doctors are givin’ bad reports,

But we got a God today that don’t give no bad reports.

We got a doctor today, an’ his name is Jesus. *Multiple ‘tongues’ speaking, clearly audible*

[October 25, 2009]

…3 weeks later [November 15, 2009]

**Aldie:** I feel bad a’doin’ this, but I gotta obey tha Lord.

That was that same service, I believe,

That the Lord had me ta walk Francis around this podium three times *The podium holds the microphone*

Francis I’m not pickin’ on you, but we gotta do it again today.

And I don’t know what it’s for.

But I know One that’s got a reason for it.

*Several praise reports and testimonies are given, as well as the announcement of prayer requests*

Ever-body come on over here, we’re gonna pray.

We’re gonna pray an’ after we pray I’m gonna walk Francis around;

Or no, we’re gonna do one song first.

And then we’re gonna walk Francis around this podium.

An’ ask ever-body in radioland an’ here in tha studio ta help us pray.

Don’t know why, but God does.

Help us as you will.

*prayer beings, followed by a song*

You know Jesus said I’ll use the foolish thangs ta confound tha wise.

An’ allotta times I do things like this,

An’ people, I don’t know, they don’t understand.

An’ seems like if you cain’t give’em a name or tell’em what it is about,

Then they get real quiet to see what’s gonna happen.

But if you’re here to serve tha Lord, let God have his way.

Don’t you worry about what God’s gonna do,

Let him do his job, ‘cause he knows what it’s about.
I’m gonna take Francis around this altar three times,  
An’ I want you people ta pray.  
Somebody…Is gonna get a miracle.  
Whether it’s right here in this building,  
Or whether it’s in radioland,  
Somebody is needin’ a miracle this mornin’.  
An’ God is gonna give you that miracle.  
It may be me, I don’t know.  
I had back surgery February this year, ever-thang in there is loose; [pins, rods and cage in spine]  
Doctor says its loose-as-a-goose.  
And they gotta do it all over again Tuesday. [Intense congregation response begins  
building and continues until prayer cycle commences]  
Landis has gotta have two hips replaced.  
It may be him, I don’t know.  
It may be Brother Henry’s eyes, I don’t know.  
It may be Sister Dixie’s feet, I don’t know.  
It may be one a’ya’ll, I don’t know.  
It may be somebody in radioland, I don’t know.  
But thars one thang I do know.  
When God says ta do somethin’,  
If we’ll do what he says ta do,  
Ever-thang’ll be alright.  
Pray for us.

[As the communal prayer commences, Aldie can still be overheard for several lines until his individual articulations are inundated by the charismatic vocalizations, prayers, percussive claps and the song, “Put Jesus On The Mainline” performed simultaneously by members of the congregation.]  
Father God in tha name a’Jesus,  
Lord as we obey you, God.  
Ah’ Lord you told me ta walk’er around three times,  
An’ you didn’t say why.  
You said walk’er three times.  
As we walk’er around God…

The commencement of this ritual of divine healing is marked by a sudden compulsion to walk around the in-studio microphone. In this performance of ritualized circumambulation, the
body’s of the participants are drawn by some ineluctable force of gravitation to circulate around the microphone. This ritual demarcation of a scared circle produces through bodily techniques and prayer a sacred space encircling the most consecrated point where healing power will be communicated from the sacred to the everyday: the microphone.\(^{35}\)

The automaticity driving this ritual procession demonstrates a particular force of attraction to the microphone. As an artificial organ of hearing that is always listening, always registering even the sounds that are unheard and unattended by the ‘natural’ ears of the in-studio congregation, the artificial sensitivities of the microphone become a divinatory apparatus that will soon reveal the locus where the healing efficacy will be instantiated. As the most forceful point of consecration at the center of the sacred circle, the microphone is a divine ear that not only registers the presence of earthly sounds, but ‘hears’ the physical procession of bodies around its electro-mechanical organs. The microphone’s capacity to ‘hear,’ in turn, reveals both the source of illness and announces the manifestation of healing power to come.

The act of physically demarcating a space around the microphone thematizes the particular sensitivities of this technology of hearing. Performatively revealing the presence of the microphone within the space of worship, as Aldie grasps the hand of Francis and escorts her around the microphone, an audible effect of distance is created for the listener as the voice varies

\(^{35}\)In this ritual of divine communication, the microphone stand recalls the stake that holds the sacrificial animal as described by Mauss and Hubert. The stake thus marks the point or interface between the sacred and the everyday, and is the object wherein the consecrated force is focused. Hubert, H. and M. Mauss (1964). *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*. [Chicago], University of Chicago Press.
in intensity, clarity and audibility during his ritual procession. The ritual thus performatively reveals the organizational capacity of the microphone within the broader infrastructural complex of the radio apparatus (transmitters, receivers, loudspeakers, electricity, etc.). Through the mouth of the loudspeaker, the sensitivities of the artificial ear (microphone) convey this experience of ritual movement in a particularly compelling way. Thus, it is precisely through its emancipation from an everyday perceptual grounding in the visual that the translation of a ritual procession through the radio apparatus produces a compelling aural effect. Through the ear, both artificial and ‘natural’, the listener gets a sense of the spatial proximity of bodies in the performance of a ritual ambulation around the in-studio microphone. In this way, divine awareness and the artificial hearing capacities of the microphone collapse into indistinction: “Ah’ God knows whats goin’ on-agh.”

_Hearing Tongues Through the Loudspeaker_

_Aldie_: You know it made me feel good there yesterday. Ya know we all-time tellin’ people, tryin’ encourage’em ta obey tha Lord. An’ it was real good ta see Claude there Friday night. Hear his witness; an’ he’s tellin’ us about listening to tha [radio] program, An’ how he heard Violet on the program here talkin’ in tongues. An’ he heard it an’ interpreted it, _an’ its fer him_. I never did hear her interpret it, I guess maybe she did. But he said he did, _an’ its fer him_. [December 2008, WGTH, _my italics_.]

_Name Called Over the Radio_

_Aldie_: Ya know, alotta times God lets us hear thangs that we don’t do. Just for the Glory of tha Lord, One morning I’s up here an’ I was preachin’ so hard. An’ that afternoon we went ta church where we’s pasterin’ over here.
An’ this young lady come out there and told me,
Said, “Aldie,” said, “I want ya’ll to pray for me.”
Said, “You called my name on tha radio program.”
Said, “An’ I began to shout.”
Said, “I’s warshin’ dishes.”
I don’t remember now which dishes she had in’er hand,
They went flyin’ across tha kitchen.
She said, “An’ I’s a’throwin’ water ever-whar, shoutin’ ever-whar.”

An’ said, “You called my name and told me to come out here, that I was gonna be healed.”
Church I didn’t say it.
She heard my voice but it wasn’t me.
I didn’t say it—I know I didn’t.
They gonna take’er breasts off.
[Speaking to a member of the studio congregation] You remember Sister Faye?
She come up an’ we prayed for’er…

This non-representational force of the radio voice issuing from the loudspeaker actively calls out the listener, as in the account of the woman who tried to turn her radio apparatus off, is exemplified through Brother Claude hearing “tongues” through the radio loudspeaker. Once again, the listener is singled out by the radio voice, “an’ it’s fer him,” and this in the face of a sound emerging from the loudspeaker that transcends or exceeds the meaningful articulation of everyday language. In this way, glossolalia sounding from the mouth of the radio apparatus becomes doubly compelling in that the loudspeaker itself compounds a process of possessed ‘speakers’ that are animated by forces from elsewhere. Glossolalia through the mouth of the radio loudspeaker thus reveals the compelling structure of the radio voice that is, under normal circumstances, the sublimated or habituated experience of a sonic presence that is sensed as immediate, as if coming from within the home, yet communicated from some uncertain
Divine Radio Vision

Let me tell ya somethin’, I don’t know what none a’you need.
I only know what I need.
But God’s got an all seein’ eye.
Had one woman tell me a few years back,
Said, “Can you see through that radio?”
Said she’s gonna turn’er off, I’s preachin’ on’er.
Said, “The Lord turned the radio on, and I turnt it off.”
An’ I think ya’lls with us when she made that statement [Addressed to members of the studio congregation]
Gonna turn the t.v. off an’ turn the radio on.
She said, “I wanna hear what they gotta say.”
Lord made’er turn the t.v. off an’ turn’er radio on.
An’ said, “You’s preachin’ on me,” and’ turned it back off.
The Lord made’er turn it back on.
We went by to visit that day, but wasn’t goin’ to visit her,
We was goin’ ta visit her mother-in-law.
An’ the mother-in-law happened ta be at her house.
An’ she said, “Can you see through that radio?”
An’ I said, “No, but I know one that can.”
I know one that can.
She said, “I had ta call a preacher, an’ I repented and made thangs right.”
Listen, God knows what he’s doin’ church,
He knows what you’ve done [vehement, growling tone of voice].

In yet another case of a listener being compellingly called out by the voice issuing from the mouth of the radio loudspeaker, this auditor is so shocked by the experience of being singled-out by the radio voice that she attempts turn off the speaking apparatus. Even this attempt at silencing the direct address, however, is preempted by the compelling force of the
Divine moving her hand to reach toward the radio once again. In an unanticipated twist that I have heard invoked several times during my research, this anxiety-provoking experience of interpellation is also accompanied by a sensation that the radio apparatus facilitates a preternatural capacity of vision. Miraculously extending God’s “all seein’ eye,” the infrastructure of the radio apparatus becomes a prosthetic augmentation of divine perceptual capacities. Thus, the field of vision of the divine eye is opened through the mechanical mouth of the radio loudspeaker.

Translated into an anxiety in relation to the preternatural sensory capacities of the divine, this account suggests the particular unease experienced by the listener at being addressed by a public voice through a technological infrastructure that extends into the private interiors of the domestic space.  

It is not merely the explicit content of the religious broadcast that places a specific demand upon the listener in his or her singularity, but the very structure of the listening environment organized through the radio apparatus itself.

To this contemporary inventory of anxieties in relation to technologies of divine surveillance, we could add early Christian accounts of the inscriptive capacity of writing angels, angelic postal messengers, and the “listening birds” that convey every idle word into the divine ear.

Speaking of the psychological impact of the radio voice upon the isolated listener, Adorno says, “The deeper this voice is involved within his own privacy, the more it appears to pour out of the cells of his most intimate life; the more he gets the impression that his own cupboard, his own phonograph, his own bedroom speaks to him in a personal way, devoid of the intermediary stages of the printed word; the more perfectly he is ready to accept wholesale whatever he hears. It is just this privacy which fosters the authority of the radio voice and helps to hide it by making it *no longer appear to come from outside*” (p.114, *my italics*).
After an attempt to silence this calling from the mouth of the loudspeaker proves futile, the member of the audience is compelled not only to keep listening, but to reach out for yet another ‘disembodied’ voice to confess and repent to this infrastructure of voices emancipated from bodies. The disembodied voices of the confessional box have been liberated from the wooden frames and arabesque screens within the space of the church and now reside in the electro-acoustical housings of the wired and wireless mouthpiece: the microphone and its radio.

There is a wonderfully suggestive term used in the textile industry to describe our basic experiential relation to fabric:

**HAND, HANDLE**: The reaction of the sense of touch, when fabrics are held in the hand. There are many factors which give “character and individuality” to a material observed through handling. A correct judgment may thus be made concerning its capabilities in content, working properties, drapability, feel, elasticity, fineness and softness, launderability, etc.

The term was originally applied to silk filaments, but the importance of a good handle to textiles has caused the term to take on more importance in other phases of this far-reaching industry.

*The Modern Textile Dictionary, 1954*

With the textile definition of “fabric hand” in mind, this chapter describes the “character and individuality” of a category of devotional objects variously known as prayer cloths, anointed handkerchiefs; and faith cloths. These materialized prayers are circulated throughout charismatic communities in southern Appalachia and beyond for the purposes of miraculous healing and divine protection. This chapter explores the elementary haptic qualities of this important devotional object: the consecrated cloth. This chapter asks, in short: “What is the *hand* of the Holy Ghost?”
The narrow road wound its way up the side of what the locals called “Schoolhouse Hill.” As my truck engine began to grumble in a low laborious tone, I geared down as the grade steepened. At the crest of the small mountain, the road opened to an entrance paved in gravel and marked by a particle board sign crumbling at the corners from years of exposure to the harsh Appalachian winters in the mountains of southwestern Virginia. The barely discernable lettering that formed the words “Pentecostal” and “Holiness” were faded so much by the elements that they recalled the dry bones in the desert so often described in small church settings such as the one announced by the sign. The weathered condition of the church sign, however, did not reflect the condition of the Holiness church itself, which wore a bright new coat of white paint, and whose entrance was adorned with a large ceramic pot of well-tended flowers. The verdant grass on the well-kempt lawn surrounding the church accentuated the white exterior of the worship space. Automobiles pulled into the parking lot in anticipation of the service. The tiny pebbles that paved the lot made a particularly crisp crunching sound as the wheels crushed upon the gravel. One side of the church lot opened to an expansive view of a valley immediately below and a chain of mountains farther off in the distance.

The beautiful vista and homely flowers seen from the church parking lot, however, were tempered by a chain-link fence that separated the well-tended church grounds from the sagging trailer located on the other side. From the debris strewn about the front yard, a bulldog chained to a small tree cast a menacing stare in my direction, as if to reinforce the slight anxiety I always
experience upon entering into an intimate worship context as an unannounced stranger. The section of the yard where the dog was chained had been worn down to a perfectly barren circle. To step from the grass onto the dirt in a transgression of that boundary demarcated between the dog and his chain would surely mean danger.

My interest in this church came through what was at that time the sole focus of my ethnographic fieldwork: radio preachers and their audiences in southern Appalachia. Brother Clarence Brown, who has a thirty minute program every weekday on the local Christian radio station (105.5 F.M., WGTH, Richlands, Virginia) had made an announcement during his broadcast, “The Voice of Healing and Deliverance,” that there was going to be an “old time foot washing” (pronounced waur-shun) at his church on Schoolhouse Hill. Because I had read about the ritual of foot washing in several accounts of religion in Appalachia, I was enthusiastic about the possibilities of observing this traditional ablution in person.38

To my disappointment, however, shortly after the commencement of the Wednesday night prayer service, an announcement was made that the elder of the church who usually lead the foot washing had fallen ill and was unable to attend the service. In deference to this elder,

38 I am thinking here especially of Dorgon’s account of a ritual foot washing within the space of an Old Regular Baptist church in Appalachia: Dorgan, H. (1989). *The Old Regular Baptists of Central Appalachia: Brothers and Sisters in Hope*. Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press. The specific passage that is interpreted as a call for the ritual ablution of the feet is John 13: If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.
the congregation was unable to perform the foot washing in his absence. Frustrated, I sat there alone in a pew at the back of the small church, contemplating if I should quietly extricate myself from the service and go visit the local Christian radio station instead. Not wanting to seem rude in the eyes of the congregation, however, I resolved to sit through the service instead of frantically flying off the Schoolhouse Hill to what I had naively perceived to be another more promising ethnographic space.

After several brief introductory announcements and reminders about upcoming church services and gatherings, several members of the congregation came to the podium to sing hymns, either solo or duet. After several songs, the entire congregation joined in the singing of four hymns, each requested by different congregation members who shouted out the page number of the song in the hymnal that they wanted to sing. As is characteristic of many Holiness-Pentecostal services in this region, after the conclusion of the singing, Sister Bonnie, who was directing the services, opened a rhetorical space of testimony by asking the church, “Has anybody got somethin’ to say for the Lord?”

After a brief period of silence, a middle aged woman seated on a pew to my right on the other side of the isle stood up and said that she had a “praise report” to share to the congregation. In what followed, the sister recounted, in minute detail, the accidental coincidence of two automobiles careening down the curvaceous “four-lane” at fifty-five miles per hour. Through the narrative windings of her testimony, the minutiae of the accident began to accumulate: descriptive images of her unbelieving husband and two young sons, the shape and configuration
of the vehicles as one “T-boned” the other in the moment of impact, etc. Juxtaposed with the
sounds and images evoked by her description of the twisted and contorted pieces of automobile
entangled in the moment of shocking coincidence on a dark and winding highway, her story
articulated how all three of the family members emerged from the wreckage with “not hardly a
bruise.”

In the performative practice of “testifyin’” within the charismatic space of worship, the
recounting of the intricate and at times mundane details of the story is a key element within the
overall narrative structure of this poetic mode. These minutia, and the time it takes to articulate
them, “sets up” the congregation of listeners for a particular experience of faith and the
miraculous. Thus, it is not until the end of the testimony, when the narrative structure has
developed a tangled descriptive inventory of effects, that the hidden lines of force organizing
these seemingly random or merely coincidental events is forcefully revealed. The testifying
Sister reveals that well before the accident, she had placed three prayer cloths—anointed in that
very church by the same congregation hearing the story—in the glove compartment of her
husband’s small automobile. In that moment, several of the congregation members exclaimed
“Yes Lord!” and “Praise God!” along with other sounds of surprised affirmation.

By this point in her testimony, the sister began to cry as she professed her thanks to God
for saving her family. In its basic structure, the narrative testimony is a retelling or repetition of
a past event. Yet the narrative performed through the testimonial form suggests that this poetic
genre of storytelling is not merely a recounting or repetition of past events, but a mode of
narrativity that elicits certain effects or appearances of faith. In other words, the narrative structure of the testimony facilitates a particular experience of faith for the listening audience. A performance of faith and the compulsion to recount miraculous events thus draw close to one another. In this way, the material movement of the prayer cloth shadows the force of language as the testimony accrues “faith” through progressive retellings. Both the appearance of faith and the prayer cloth make their most forceful appearance after a temporal deferral. Faith in the possibility of the miraculous emerges through the circulation of stories and objects, and thus must be located in a space outside the subject. Through its performative capacity to narrate a particular structure of temporal deferral, the poetic technique of testifying conjures an experience of faith for the participants in the audience. The testimony often concludes its temporal accumulation of narrative details by revealing, in the end, that a compelling force was operating underneath these seemingly discrete or discontinuous events from the very beginning.

Given the particular narrative structure of the testimony, it comes as no surprise that the Sister concludes by requesting that the congregation “make” more prayer cloths for herself and the members of the congregation. In this moment, the circulation of faith and the force of testimony come full circle. Like the hau of the gift described by Marcel Mass, the cloth returns with newfound efficacy to its point of origin, albeit in the form of a testimony. And as if to demonstrate that their efficacy was not expended in the coincidental moment of the automobile accident, there is a call to further replicate the efficacious prayer cloth. Reassuring their automatic efficacy, the cloths continue to replicate themselves.
Through the promptings of this testimony, sister Bonnie calls upon the “prayer warriors” in the congregation to come up and help “anoint” some prayer cloths. This process of anointing is also referred to as “praying the cloths”; this suggestive phrase evokes the intertwined relation between the material object and the voice in the performance of prayer. Indeed, the prayer itself appears to bring or materialize the cloth into existence. As individual prayer warriors arise and approach the pulpit at the front of the church, an elderly woman in the front pew pulls a small bag from her pocketbook filled with cloth fragments that will be “prayed” by the congregation. As is the case within many small churches and charismatic communities, one member is usually in charge of cutting the cloth fragments from larger pieces of fabric. Perhaps mimicking the millions of prayer cloths circulated through the postal system during the late 1940’s and early 1950’s by large Pentecostal organizations, the sister in this church also uses pinking shears to give the border of the fabric ridged teeth or scallops [Figure 8]. The elderly Sister removes a small stack of cloth fragments from her bag and hands them to Sister Bonnie, who then pours oil on her fingers from a glass bottle kept at the foot of the podium and

39 As elaborated in my chapter on radio tactility, the ubiquitous phrase “prayer warrior” within the charismatic community was coined by Charles Fuller on his popular radio program. This is one of many examples within the worship context that suggests the way mass mediated practices such as radio prayer were actively incorporated into the space of the church.

40 Once again, this small detail seems to suggest the mutual interpenetration between so-called traditional Pentecostal practices and mass mediated healing revivals of the mid twentieth century. “Old Time Religion” is thus anachronistically infused and enabled through the modern apparatus of radio broadcasting and the automatic sorting machines of the postal system.
smears the textile remnants with the unction of her fingers. By the time of the actual physical unction with oil, I had approached the pulpit to participate in the “praying” of the textiles.

Hiding the soon-to-be-transformed fabric remnants from the gaze of the congregants, immediately upon anointing theses objects, sister Bonnie concealed the cloths in the tight grip of a fist. As her fingers closed around the fabric, the wrinkled folds of her skin became tightly drawn around the bony protrusions of her arthritic knuckles. Like the skin stretched tightly around the wooden frame of a tambourine, the integument drawn around her fist became translucent, revealing the colored veins, sinews and bones underneath. Extending her tightly clenched fist outward, Brother Clarence, the actual sibling of Sister Bonnie and the principal preacher of this church, superimposes his hand upon her right fist, further veiling the fabric in layers of skin. At this point in the ritual preparation for anointing prayer, eight members of the congregation surround sister Bonnie: half the prayer warriors extending their hands to touch the fist of hidden fragments or the Brother’s superimposed hand with their fingertips, while the others raise their arms upward with palms oriented in a downward direction so that the surface of the palm faces the hidden fabric. These specific comportments are sacred techniques of the body that help to instantiate the efficacious healing power of the Holy Ghost into the textile remnants. The oral performance of prayer, therefore, is inextricably linked with these sacred gestures and manual techniques. As a technique of sacred manufacture, the anointing of the prayer cloth marks an inversion in the relation between the hand and the fabric. In this case of ritual substitution, it is not the cloth that veils the hand, as in classic sleight of hand magic and
older forms of the Eucharist where the hand is veiled in the moment of transubstantiation, but the hand itself that ‘kerchiefs’ or veils the cloth.

Each time this sacred cloth remnant is rubbed between the fingers or upon the surface of the ailing body part, it recalls the intertwined sum of tangled tactile experience when layers upon layers of haptic sensation were combined in a performance of prayer. Thus the handle, or texture of the fabric allows the sick patient to haptically experience the ritual of anointing once again. In this way, the prayer cloth is a kind of supplemental skin or prosthetic dermal layer that grants access to sacred sensations. Because this tactile experience can never be abstracted from the aural aspects of the prayer cloth, the experience of texture upon the skin or between the fingers also recalls, or plays back, the tangled voices and sonic force of the communal prayer. The prayer cloth translates an experience of the voice, its grain so to speak, into a tactile register that facilitates miraculous healing and apotropaic efficacy.

The outstretched arms of the prayer warriors and hands that touch the fist of fabric create a kind of sacred wheel: the arms like spokes connected to the point of tactile unity at the fist-become-hub. This wheel of body techniques demarcates a sacred circle where the diffuse potentiality of the Holy Ghost becomes focused or rarefied in the hidden recesses of the fist. Surrounding the sacred wheel and creating a field of concentric circles, the other prayer warriors, myself included, who were not directly implicated within the sacred wheel stood around this inner circle with hands raised upward, palms oriented downward toward the hub, as if to further focus the efficacious force of the Holy Ghost into the center of the circle. With all the prayer
warriors in place, the assembled congregation began the practice of communal prayer, wherein each congregant simultaneously prays his or her individual prayer in a loud importunate voice. This communal prayer performance creates an entangled force of sound that inundates everyday articulations of the voice and the capacity to register or discern meaningful sounds. At certain times during the performance, however, word-fragments or phrases are discernable above the numinous din of the skein prayer, such as the several instances when Brother Brown shouted in a loud importunate voice, “Anointing go into this cloth!”

Again, this manual technique and spatial demarcation cannot be abstracted from the vocalization of prayer that accompanies it. The performance of skein prayer provides an oral counterpoint to the entangled haptic sensation of the warriors’ intertwined manual experience within the sacred wheel. The ear is able to experience what is sensed on a tactile register and vice versa. The tactile sensation of the cloth provides a kind of haptic mnemonic device for the ‘playback’ of the skein prayer. As described earlier, skein prayer refers to a traditional theurgical technique wherein all the members of the congregation begin praying their own prayer out-loud and simultaneously. This tangle of voices, in addition to the hand clapping, ejaculations (Yes Lord!; Amen!; Jesus!) and other vocalizations accompanying this enthusiastic communal prayer, creates an auditory effect of a dense nonrepresentational noise. This numinous noise is a pivotal moment in the “anointing” of the prayer cloth. When this tangle of language becomes dense and ecstatic, it signals to the congregation that the power of the Holy Ghost has been successfully “prayed down.”
As a crucial theological term within the charismatic worship milieu, the “anointing” slips between the actual physical application of oil and the moment through prayer when Holy Ghost power is instantiated into the fabric. In fact, perhaps it would be more appropriate to say that the two moments are often totally indistinguishable, each having not merely a metaphorical significance, but a fundamentally tangible or palpable presence. In this way, the anointing can never be abstracted from its original connotations with the massaging of animal fats into the skin to facilitate consecration. Moreover, this intimate association between the anointing and the rubbing of oil upon the surface of the body helps to explain the importance of the material qualities of the prayer cloth. The supple “drape” quality of fabric and its accompanying ability to fall upon the contours of the physical form, or ‘flow’ upon the body’s surface, put cloth in a similar category of tactility with that of unguents and oils. This physical presence residing at the heart of the anointing also sheds light upon the prevalent phrase to “pray-it” in reference to the performance of skein prayer. As the phrase so forcefully suggests, to “pray-it” literally entails a physical manifestation or instantiation of the vocal efficacy of prayer into a physical object.

As the intensity of the skein prayer gradually decreases, finally ending in a short yet profound silence, the sacred wheel breaks apart as the prayer warriors disperse. After the anointing is complete, Sister Bonnie unclenches her fist to reveal the transformed cloth: from

41 For more detailed analysis of the history of the massaging of fats and oils into the skin for the purposes of consecration and healing, see “unction” and “anointing” in: Hastings, James. Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1908, [1922].
mere detritus or remnant to the sacred receptacle of prayer and the concomitant power of the Holy Ghost. Revealed anew, the prayer cloths are distributed to any congregation member who may desire one. While at the front of the church, I obtained one of the newly metamorphosed cloths which was a 3” by 3” square of solid white cotton sheeting cut with pinking shears (Figure 8).

This initial exchange of hands—though the very “praying” of the cloth entails crucial supplementations of the tongue and the hand—often commences a series of hand-to-hand exchanges as the sacred cloths are circulated throughout the community through friends, co-workers, neighbors and relatives. Thus, the “exchange of hands” is a crucial element in the appearance of belief, not only because it inaugurates a physical circulation of objects that begins to accrue a compelling force, but this “exchange of hands” also connotes the communication and recollection of mutual experiences of tactility or haptic encounters that gives the sensory effect of the presence of the sacred. Through the palpation of the cloth’s texture, its base material properties signal both a tactile immediacy for the handler and a simultaneous awareness that other hands have also experienced this textured surface of prayer. The moment the handle of the fabric is experienced as a tactile sensation, this feeling of presence becomes even more forceful and compelling, precisely through its doubled structure. That is, the texture of the cloth is intensely present and yet somehow communicating or extending to another sensory register somewhere else. This sensation of mutual tactility at a distance, then, is also implicated in the physical circulation of the anointed cloths through an “exchange of hands.”
What I did not realize as I sat there in the back pew of that Pentecostal-Holiness church, naively rueing the fact that no foot-washing would take place during that Wednesday night prayer service on the top of Schoolhouse Hill, was that the force of substitution was already operating within my project. After this service, I was convinced that the phenomenon of the prayer cloth and its concomitant exchange of hands was a crucial materiality of faith that had to be explored in my dissertation research. Thus, in an exchange of a hand for a foot, the force of substitution was already circulating within my research. And through the time it has taken to articulate this anointed process of bodily augmentations and substitutions through the texture of a rag metamorphosed into a sacred cloth, my ethnography has been caught within the force of narrativity and been compelled to repeat, once again, the miraculous testimony of the prayer cloth.

Devotional Density and the Rosary Bead

How could we begin to describe and theorize the devotional specificities of the prayer cloth? In other words, what is the significance of the fabric itself and what could be called the specific textures of faith within the charismatic tradition of healing prayer? In order to open a space of comparative leverage to explore the hand or phenomenological texture of the prayer cloth, my analysis will briefly touch upon the density, surface and shape of another popular
material object in the history of Christian material devotionals, the Catholic Rosary bead.\textsuperscript{42}

In his controversial analysis of the underlying forces compelling the widespread popularity of praying the rosary, sociologist Michael Carroll focuses upon “the most immediate and concrete aspects of the devotion.”\textsuperscript{43} For Carroll, the devotional technique of “fingering the beads”—running the hard beads (traditionally ceramic, wood, glass or metallic filigree) between the thumb and fingers while reciting repetitive prayers, was a kind of tactile simulation of the

\textsuperscript{42} Several of the most influential histories of prayer, for example Friedrich Heiler’s \textit{Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion} (1920) take up decisive apologetic and polemical positions in their articulations of prayer. Heiler, for instance, is constantly describing the ossified performances of Catholic prayer in comparison to the spontaneous and authentic outpourings of Protestant prayer techniques. In his unfinished doctoral dissertation, \textit{On Prayer}, Marcel Mauss laments the fact that so much polemic energy was invested in these histories of prayer that their scholarship became weak and unreliable. My intention here is to explore the theme of tactile experience in religious devotion, using the density and technical instrumentalities of the bead as a foil or springboard to begin thinking about the material qualities and sensations offered through the textile of the prayer cloth. It is not my interest or intention here to make statements upon the legitimacy of the devotional object, but to attempt to grasp the phenomenological texture or hand of the sacred thing. In the end, moreover, it should be kept in mind that the earliest manifestations of what we recognize today as Rosary beads were fashioned out of knotted rope and other long strips of cloth, thus the two seemingly different objects are much more closely related than they initially appear.

sensation of defecation. Although I will not recount all the movements of this analysis of a devotional compromise between unconscious desires and conscious prohibitions, what has been particularly useful in this analysis is the author’s attempt to explain the popularity and mass diffusion of a devotional technique through an inquiry into the basic haptic sensations and manual techniques that characterize this material prayer-aid. Working from Ferenczi’s essay on the transformation of anal-erotic desires, Carroll traces a substitutive history of erotic tactility moving from the softness of feces to the density of coinage. The specific tactile sensations of the density, shape and textured surface of the Rosary bead as it is squeezed between haptic surfaces of the thumb and index finger replicates on the level of manual gesture both a sensation of defecation and the prohibited desire to play with feces.

Of course, the devotional technique of fingering the hard beads was not only an inextricable aspect of the recitation of the prayer—a classic aide memoire—but functioned within the medieval monastic order as a kind of sacred abacus for the counting of repetitive and

44 Carrol’s argument draws heavily from Freud’s essay on the relation between obsessive acts and religious rites. For the summation of Carroll’s argument see: “Of Beads and Feces,” p. 491.

45 That the old English word for prayer was bead sheds crucial insights on the constant oscillation in the history of divine communicative techniques between the oral vocalization of prayer and the drive to instantiate the voice into the material object. See Thurston, Herbert. “Genuflexions and Aves: A Study in Rosary Origins, Part 1”. The Month, vol. 127 (Jan-June), 1916, p.441-452.
incredibly arduous penitential exercises (genuflections). As was characteristic of so many aspects of monastic life (clock, timing, regimentation), the prayer beads, like the clock, were an object that facilitated a rigorous regime of discipline in the name of sanctification and consecration. The hard, cold feel of the beads seems related to the history of a devotional practice characterized by rigid discipline and the repetition of arduous penitential exercises; a rigidity and density that ironically, according to Carroll, substitutes a desire to play with a soft material. On the level of technique, and intimately related to the machinations of the clock, the rosary could be considered a prayer counting machine designed for single-handed manipulation. More specifically, the spatial alignment of the beads along the string, along with the smooth texture of the beads themselves, allows for the rounded elements to pass easily between the thumb and index finger. 

46 The monastic penitential technique of the body known as the genuflection (literally bending or hitting of the knees) relates to the phrase in Appalachia used to refer to the performance of importunate prayer: “hittin’ the prayer bones” connotes the falling upon ones knees in order to assume a traditional comportment of prayer.


48 There is a rich early ethnological tradition interested in issues of string and its relation to efficacious vocalizations such as prayer, song and rhyme. These investigations into the relationship between efficacious prayer and techniques of weaving, basketry and string games have also provided useful insights into the intertwined relation between voice, manual gesture
together. Moreover, this abacus-like manipulation is indissociable from the function of this object within the field of mnemotechnics. The rosary is a kind of silent recording of voice that can be played in a continuous, unbroken chain by the hand: a manual “stand-in” for the voice and the exteriorized mnemonic surface. As a specific mnemotechnical device, the oral performance of praying the rosary is indissociably linked to manual gestures and tactile sensations. When played silently, the force of recollection and the movement of thought are located in the progression of the bead through the haptic surfaces of the hand.

As a combination of beads arranged spatially along a string, the rosary can be seen as a kind of automatic prayer machine for the repetitive recitation of prayer: an abacus-like apparatus for the counting of extensive penitential exercises. In the case of the rosary the theme of automaticity or mechanicity entails a kind of habituated or unconscious repetition of the prayer, and as is often the case, the devotional performance is totally abstracted from the oral rite or vocalization to become a manual-objectile technique of silent playback. As a repetitive act of compulsive manipulation, the pleasurable sensations aroused from these manual gestures and haptic sensations prefigured similar psychological impacts with the operation of modern electrical and ballistic apparati. Thus the compulsive fingering of the sacred prayer machine foreshadows the religious significance of flicking the switch in an age of mechanical reproduction.

and spiritual power.
Cutting of the Prayer Cloth

What is the significance of the cutting-up of the cloth to create a remnant or remainder? This image of the cloth fragment recalls the translucent plastic bag stored behind the podium at the Independent Bible Church of God at Red Ash. Bags such as these are often kept in the small Pentecostal, Holiness and Independent churches of southern Appalachia. As I have mentioned earlier, these bags are usually kept by one member of the congregation who also cuts the fabric into small squares in preparation for the performance of anointing prayer. These bags bear a striking resemblance to what is referred to as a “remnant bag” within the weaving and patchwork community. As the name suggests, remnant bags are filled with scraps, rags and fragments from cloth that was once “whole” in some other context and use, but whose integrity and coherence has become worn, tattered, ripped or threadbare from everyday use. Through creative reuse, the remnant of textile detritus is reincorporated or reformed into another textile surface, thus creating a new unity which is a conglomeration of discrete textile elements: quilts, appliqué motif, clothing repair or patching.


50 The creative recombinative possibilities evoked by the remnant bag resonate with Levi-Strauss’ notion of bricolage, as well as Stewart’s elaboration of “foolin’ with thangs.” As in the act of prayer, the manual technique of sewing, stitching, weaving, etc. cannot be abstracted from the poetics of “just talkin’ on thangs.” A communal bond and sociality is solidified/sutured in and through the process of stitching together fragments—words literally inscribed in the stitch through a simultaneous movement of the hand, needle and tongue.
In the early days of Oral Roberts’ healing ministry, before the manufacture of hundreds of thousands of “anointed prayer cloths” was subcontracted to independent factories that produced these sacred fragments on a mass scale, Roberts’ wife Evelyn, along with a small army of secretaries, stenographers, and volunteers from the “Ladies Missionary Society” would patiently “cut squares of cloth 2 ½ inches by 5 inches” from used bed sheets. Evelyn instructed the ladies to “use old sheets, and be careful to cut them only with pinking shears to prevent raveling, also be sure to keep them in uniform size.” In the incipient years of what was to become one of the most influential Christian organizations of the twentieth century (late 1940’s), these fragments of cloth were imprinted with a message:

I prayed over this cloth for God to deliver you—use as a point of contact (Acts 19: 11—12). Oral Roberts, Tulsa 2, Oklahoma. It is not necessary to wear the cloth unless you feel you should. It can be used more than once or for more than one person. If you wish to request more, I will be glad to send them to you. The important thing is to use the cloth as a point of contact for the release of your faith in God, so that when you pray and put the cloth on your body, you will believe the Lord will heal you at that moment. I have prayed over this cloth in the name of Jesus of Nazareth and asked Him to heal you when you apply it to your body.

As if to mimic the automatic efficacy of this fragment of Holy Ghost power materialized in the cloth, the instructions seem to anticipate the future replication and circulation of these objects within the postal network. Thus, the postal service information is imprinted upon the


52 Quoted from Healing Waters in Harrell
cloth in addition to the ritualized healing instructions. Evelyn’s insistence on the uniformity of the cloths—the consistency in sacred manufacture—foreshadowed the mass production of these “faith cloths” by machines totally abstracted from the manual process of cutting and printing. This idea of uniformity, moreover, highlights the place of postal relays and economies of exchange as important infrastructures or materialities of the Holy Ghost and divine healing. Thus, the faithful who requested prayer cloths through the mail were instructed not to send their own cloths or handkerchiefs, because the ones manufactured by the healing ministry “are uniform in size and fit nicely into a letter.” In this way, the material exigencies of the postal system begin to organize the size and shape of the devotional object. The specificities of the tactile surface of the fabric and the sacred haptic sensations evoked through devotional manipulation are thus intimately related to the mechanized system of the postal network.

Of course, in some circumstances an entire piece of cloth in its undivided unity is

53 I have yet to find the answers as to how the Roberts’ evangelistic organization dealt with the mounting logistical conundrum of how to properly anoint and thus “pray over” hundreds of thousands of prayer requests. The sheer logistics of this burgeoning postal economy of the Holy Ghost necessitated that the early techniques of hand ‘manufacture’ be abstracted from the process. Did the mass circulation of prayer cloths through the postal system necessitate a kind of mass anointing where the pastor prayed over huge piles of cloth fragments at once? Or perhaps he prayed over the cutting and sorting machines themselves? More archival work is needed to explore these questions of the mass circulation of the Holy Ghost through postal relays.

54 ibid, p.119.

anointed. For example, during a prayer meeting at the home of an elderly sister, one of the participants was inspired to anoint an entire handkerchief he had in his pocket. However, in this specific case, the cloth was anointed for a patient suffering from severe gastrointestinal disorders so that the “praying” of the entire cloth was necessary so that it could be laid across the surface of the stomach of the patient to effect the cure. Thus, while there are certainly exceptions, in general it seems that the manufacture of the prayer cloth is intimately related to the practice of cutting and thus creating a remnant or fragment from a greater whole. It is perhaps not merely financial exigency, therefore, that the colored bandanas at the Independent Bible Church of God at Red Ash were cut into fragments and stored in the remnant bag.

Even with the reproduction of the prayer cloth on a mass, mechanized scale, there is still an attempt to replicate the semblance of the cloth fragment. Take for example the massive contemporary postal circulation of prayer cloths by the Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association, whose anointing machines produce hundreds of thousands of faith cloths with saw-toothed edges, as if they were still hand-cut with pinking shears by Evelyn and her Ladies Missionary Society volunteers. Although Evelyn seems to articulate a merely functional reason for employing a specific type of scissors in the process of anointed cloth manufacture “to prevent raveling,” there are perhaps other ways to consider the significance of the ridges that create the boarder of the prayer cloth. Not only do these boarder ridges created by the cut of the pinking

56 Over the last 30 years, massive Pentecostal and Evangelical organizations have circulated many different textile variations on the prayer cloth such as fragments of wool, fleece, burlap crosses, prayer rugs (both paper and cloth), prayer shawls, fabric “prayer clouds,” etc.
shears—what is termed the “saw-tooth” pattern in the textile industry—maintain the integrity and coherence of the weave, these ridged teeth of the prayer cloth also create a pronounced tactile effect upon the skin. The name of the tool itself used to cut these ridges, pinking shears, suggests the accompanying tactile sensations of the jagged ridges of a flower and is described in the textile dictionaries using tactile metaphors such as the scalloped ridges of a shell, the jagged and sharp points of saw-teeth, and the raised points of a leaf. As the cloth is rubbed against the skin, held to the ailment, gripped in the palm of the hand or rubbed between the fingers, these teeth further accentuate the sensations of the ‘hand’ of the fabric: density of weave, type of thread fiber, nap, stiffness, drape. Additionally, the teeth of the sacred cloth seem to thematize the process and instrument of cutting itself—both on a visual and haptic register, signaling once again, albeit on a base perceptual level, the fragmented nature of the object.57

Although at first glance the phenomenon of cutting the cloth may seem a mere trivial detail, the cut of the prayer cloth reveals significant aspects of Pentecostal theology on the nature and manifestation of the Holy Ghost. The cuts of these teeth open up a charismatic pneumatology. In most circumstances the prayer cloth is a fragment or remnant that has been cut, or abstracted, from a larger totality such as a bed sheet or handkerchief. Emancipated from its original unity or utility by the cut, the textile shard becomes a free-floating piece with a newfound potentiality to be “patched-in” to other unanticipated circumstances and surfaces. A

57 Other mass healing campaigns such as that organized by evangelist and A. A. Allen also featured anointed cloths of similar size and ridged boarders.
patch or rag becomes a kind of floating signifier within the material exigencies of everyday life: literally “standing-in” to patch a hole in a miner’s coveralls, to soak up bodily fluids, to patch a rip in the screen door, or to become part of a quilt. This textile patch provides a very concrete metaphor for the way in which the power and healing efficacy of the Holy Ghost—itself a kind of diffuse potentiality—is made manifest within the circumstances of everyday life. The percussive pop of hands, acrobatic vocalizations and the noise of skein prayer act as a kind of theurgical shear: thus, the tongue in prayer carves out a piece of the Holy Ghost like a double-edged sword, cutting a fragment of this potence from the diffuse totality and instantiating it into the object. Once instantiated from this totality, the materialized efficacy takes on a life of its own, animated apart from the abstract totality from which it appeared. Thus “prayed-down” from the sacred, the transformed rag is once again free to circulate and “stand-in” for the needs of everyday life: pain, illness, suffering, danger, evil influences, and financial problems.58

*The Infrastructure of Healing or: The Architecture of Cloth*

Next to the technical amplification of the voice and the illumination of the electric bulb, the other key infrastructural element in the charismatic healing revivals of the mid-twentieth

century was the canvas tent. In everyday parlance, the words “tent” and “revival” seem almost synonymous in that phrase “tent revival.” Almost all of the accounts of the rise of major charismatic evangelists of this period feature stories of their desire, indeed the importunate necessity, to obtain huge tents that would accommodate the masses of expectant faithful. By 1952 for instance, Oral Roberts, the most influential charismatic healer of the twentieth century, invested over $200,000 in a “Tent Cathedral” that sheltered over 12,500 folding chairs underneath its fireproof canvas roof. “This fine gospel equipment” boasted an article in his popular magazine *Healing Waters*, “was the largest every constructed for the gospel ministry.”

In significant ways, the rapid spread of the charismatic renewal and the emerging popularity and everyday understanding of faith healing cannot be abstracted from the specific atmosphere or environment created in and through the cloth architecture of the massive tent. The movement and miraculous manifestations of Holy Ghost power cannot be detached from the specific environment created and demarcated within the canvas tent: the heavy, stultified air heated by the bright electric bulbs, the smell of sweat mingling with grass and sawdust, and the particular resonance of amplified sound. Within this inherently transient space demarcated by the cloth architecture, some of the most important mass crowd phenomena of the twentieth century took place.

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59 Harrell, p.91

60 Several participants in the early Oral Roberts healing campaigns commented upon the specific soundscape of the revival tent: “The tent provided a remarkably fine acoustic setting” Harrell, p. 95. The insertion of “high speed” film cameras within the space of the revival tent
The Tent Cathedral, that basic infrastructural component to the charismatic healing renewal, bears an infra-structural similarity to the prayer cloth. On a basic level, both objects thematize the notion of portability and itinerancy. This infrastructure of transience so intimately associated with the Tent Cathedral, for example, required a fleet of eight semi-trailers to haul the thousands of yards of fireproof cotton canvas as well as a circus-type stake driver from the Lewis Diesel Equipment Company (the same machine, incidentally, used by the Ringling Bros. Circus). 61  The hand-held prayer cloth, so crucial an element in the formation and solidification of mass charismatic publics in the middle of the twentieth century, mimics the movement of the canvas healing tent through the infrastructure of the postal system. As if the massive tent were cut into thousands of pieces and circulated through the postal network, the appearance and circulation of faith in the practice of “faith healing” is sustained through hidden infrastructures of stenographers, sorting machines, diesel trucks, envelopes, storage and relay facilities.

Likewise, both the tent canvas and the prayer cloth have an inherent pliability or

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allowed the space of the tent to enter into the domesticity of the living room, and without the oppressive heat of special technical lighting that was necessitated by the older type of film cameras. Not only did TV cameras in the healing tent signal the death knell for the Golden Days of radio, it also altered the form and speed of the healing line itself. Ironically, the high speed film slowed the healing line because Roberts wanted to give the TV viewing audience a sense of the intimacy of the healing experience. Likewise, it is important to note that Roberts could reproduce the presence for the TV viewing audience in the “live” tent revival, but failed to convey this presence when he tried to reproduce the radio format in the television studio.

61 Harrell, p. 95.
flexibility in regard to the necessities of everyday life. Thus, one of the many reasons that Roberts claimed such allegiance to his revival tent was its ability to be pitched in a farmer’s field or a vacant space on the outskirts of town when conservative churches or town organizations tried to prevent his healing revival from entering their territory.

This force of attraction between these two textiles presses even closer through the sacred architecture of what was referred to by the Roberts healing campaign as the “prayer tent.” This auxiliary tent provided a space of prayer and counseling for members of the Tent Cathedral who had just professed their faith to the audience. Compared to the generally orderly and subdued crowds within the main tent, the prayer tent was a liminal space characterized by ecstatic pandemonium and collective effervescence. The cloth architecture of the prayer tent demarcated a sacred circle, thus opening a communicative space for glossolalia, ecstatic prayer, “fallin’ out in the Spirit,” jerks, and other somatic manifestations of the spirit.

The homology between these two healing textiles was made quite apparent when A. A. Allen, another important figure in the charismatic revival, realized the anointed significance of his old revival tent: “Don’t you know that this tent is saturated and impregnated with My Power? I want you to cut these strips of canvas into little prayer rugs and send them to your friends who are partners in this ministry.”

For those members of the faithful who were unable to pledge the $100 for the “Power Packed Prayer Rug,” they could settle for a “Prosperity Blessing Cloth”

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at a much smaller price.63

The Flow of Fabric and the Contagiousness of the Sacred

A song that often resonates within the space of small Pentecostal, Holiness, and Independent churches and radio broadcasts throughout southern Appalachia suggests the transgressive underbelly of the prayer cloth:

But for the blood, shed on Calvary’s tree  
but for the blood, there’d be no hope for you and me  
for all my righteousness was filthy rags  
and that’s all I’d ever be  
but for the blood that cleansed and set me free.

Recalling a passage from the Old Testament, the phrase “for all my righteousness was filthy rags” evokes images of the profane antithesis of Christ’s cleansing blood, perhaps one of the most ritually dangerous substances in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the *pannus menses* or menses rag. Evoking visceral sensations, both preachers and congregants often invoke these heavily cathected objects with the phrase “and our righteousness is unto filthy rages that raises up a stench in the nostrils of God.” This image of the menses rag recalls not only the Levitical proscriptions regarding ritual cleanliness in regards to the menstruant woman, but a long

63 This specific employment of the prayer cloth took place in 1963. By then, not only had the charismatic tactics for raising funds become more sophisticated and aggressive, but the prayer cloth had become more and more closely associated with the augmentation of “financial blessings” both upon the sender and the receiver. I discuss this shift in greater detail at the conclusion of this chapter.
established ethnological inventory of the magical potential of menstrual blood. 64

The symbolic horror of the “filthy rag” presses close to the sacred efficacy of the prayer cloth through another biblical reference that provides one of the theological cornerstones for the charismatic practice of faith healing. Thus Mark 5: 25-34 recounts the miraculous cure of a woman with an “issue of blood” that had lasted for twelve years, causing her financial ruin and a kind of social death within her community. Current biblical scholarship disagrees on the precise nature and connotation of the transfer of healing virtue in this passage; if it indeed was a kind of ritual transgression or profanation inflicted upon Jesus through the tactile communication with the sick woman according to Levitical proscriptions. These accounts focus on several small details, such as the way the author of the book of Mark describes the “issue of blood.” Whatever may be the case, it is hard to ignore the expression of surprise or shock exclaimed by Jesus upon registering the tactile contact from the woman. The particularities of this contact seem suggestive of a kind of transgressive communication, specific to a gesture of profane tactility.

After pushing her way through the noisy throng, the ailing woman reaches out to “but touch the hem of his garment,” and is instantly healed in the moment of tactile communication and the transfer of healing virtue. This healing account from the book of Mark, along with numerous references to the filthy rags, suggests that there is a dangerous element of profanation profanation

64 Perhaps the most influential early ethnological reference would be the numerous references to blood and ritual purity in William Robertson Smith’s Lectures on the Religion of the Semites. (1889) First series. The Fundamental Institutions. New York, Appleton.
and transgression inherent in the textile of healing. At very least, it suggests an intimacy between the communication of healing power, bodily fluids and the anointed cloth. Of course, this force of attraction is clearly evident in the other crucial passages for the Pentecostal justification of prayer cloths, such as the account from Acts 19 when “handkerchiefs or aprons” are taken from the body of Apostle Paul and used to heal the sick. The Greek connotation of this word rendered in English had specific connotations in the ancient world with a piece of fabric used to wipe sweat and other fluids from the face (sudarium).

Contemporary practices of healing through this materialized prayer perform this intimacy between cloth and bodily fluid in very literal ways. Thus the manufacture of the prayer cloth often includes an “anointing” with oil. In this way, the other prevalent term, anointed handkerchief, is very appropriate because it suggests the place of bodily fluids and a literal flow of force in the practice of faith healing. When I participated in the anointing of prayer cloths in southern Appalachia, I was always struck by the way ordinary vegetable oil was often generously applied to the white fragments of cloth. The yellow oil would leave a prominent stain upon the white surface of the fabric, mimicking the sullying of the fabric with bodily fluid (spit, mucus, tears, sweat and so on).

Once again, the healing ritual of the prayer cloth emphasizes the material characteristics of the sacred object. The absorbent properties of woven plant fiber enable the cloth to become a medium for the communication of sacred fluid. And this notion of fluidity, in turn, so crucial to this healing practice and an ‘elementary’ quality of the sacred itself, seems to be an inherent
physical property of the cloth. Cloth envelopes the form that it touches, and in this way
comes an intimate metaphor for skin and tactility. Likewise, cloth blows in the wind, drapes
around forms, flows like water and “fits” the body in an extension of skin and therefore has
strong connotations with fluidity. Rendering these basic material properties and phenomenal
sensibilities of fabric in a sacred mode, the prayer cloth reveals the force of an object that would
otherwise remain too proximate, intimate, and habituated to be remarked.

_Hanky-panky of the Voice_

The charismatic healing revivals of the twentieth century utilized early Christian accounts
of efficacious healing power transmitted through tactile contact as a touchstone for their modern
curative performances. Accounts of the healing force released through touching the hem of
Jesus’ garment or the sweat-soaked “aprons” of the Apostle Paul, for example, were constantly
invoked to support contemporary charismatic healing techniques. These healing practices of
manual contact, however, were not merely part of an unbroken lineage of tactile healing
techniques uninterrupted from early Christianity and ancient Greek sources; but the very sense of
touch itself, as well as experiences of “communication,” took on specifically modern orientations
and organizations in an age of electronic modes of communication such as the radio and
mechanized networks such as the postal system. Through new modes of technological reproduction and transmission, the Christian hand of healing and discernment employed a thoroughly modern haptic gift extended and attuned by prosthetic extensions of the body.

Though the origins of the prayer cloth, also known as the anointed handkerchief, were traced by the practitioners of charismatic healing back to early Christian sources, the pervasive popularity of the prayer handkerchief as a devotional object in the 20th century had much to do with its symbolic textures and resonances within a specifically modern context. Thus, when the prayer handkerchief emerged as one of the most influential devotional objects in the history of Pentecostalism, the handkerchief, as a ubiquitous utilitarian object, already carried within its woven texture a specific social history and meaning. Tracing some of the specifically modern resonances in the weave of the handkerchief, this section suggests that there were significant forces of attraction between the practice of Charismatic faith healing and the modern piece of pocket fabric known as the handkerchief.

The etymology of the word “handkerchief” will help to uncover some of the significant

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modern resonances residing within this everyday utilitarian object. Even from the outset, the word carries within itself a curious displacement. Thus the Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language elaborates on the curiously disjointed or out of place character of this word:

Handkerchief: n.—Compounded of hand and kerchief. Etymologically the word contains a contradiction, since kerchief denotes a covering for the head, fr. OF. couvrechef, couvrechief, lit. ‘cover-head’.

As if to usurp the sovereignty of the head, this displaced hand seems already to be hiding itself under a veil of secrecy—a tricky hand indeed!

This sleight of hand at the heart of the word signals important modern associations with the handkerchief as a standard implement within the magician’s bag of tricks. Behind the veil of the handkerchief, objects disappear and adroit hands move undetected by the distracted senses of the audience. Though it is difficult to give the precise time period of the widespread use of the handkerchief as a indispensable prop in the magic show, by the time Pentecostal healers were anointing them for the purposes of miraculous cures early in the twentieth century, these objects would have had a strong association, albeit at times implicitly, with shows of magical entertainment. 67

By the 1920’s, the contradiction inherent in the word handkerchief announced itself in

67 Indeed, the handkerchiefs absorbent properties and use to soak up bodily fluids make it an especially apt object for profane and secret magical purposes. Of course, this aspect of the handkerchief opens the field of analysis to a much more pervasive and dangerous form of “magic” than that connoted by a domesticated form of modern magical “entertainment.”
another way through the popular phrase “hanky-panky.” At that time, this phrase took on its contemporary connotation as a secret sexual liaison or erotic encounter. By then, the thoroughly utilitarian object known as the handkerchief had been shortened to “hanky.” This playful truncating of the term attests to its pervasive and ubiquitous presence in everyday life.

Before the “hanky” took on the libidinal resonance we understand today, it was saturated with the residues of older magical meanings:

_Hanky-panky._ A synonym for trickery, hanky-panky may have been coined, with the help of reduplication, from the magician’s handkerchief, or _hanky_, under which so many things have mysteriously appeared and disappeared through clever sleight of hand. Probably related to _hocus pocus_, it is first recorded in _Punch_ (1841).

Hanky-panky, adroit substitution, palming, sleight-of-hand in legerdemain. (A Dictionary of Slang, Jargon and Cant, vol. 1, 1889)

Hanky-panky goes back more than a hundred years and originated in the jargon of fairs and carnivals. It’s a variation on the much older “hocus-pocus”—a term used by shysters and magicians while performing tricks. Since there was always something underhanded about such activities, hanky-panky has come to mean double-dealing or devious trickery. (Morris Dictionary of Word and Phrase Origins, 1962)

hanky-panky (trickery, deception)

The attractive phrase might suggest a sort of conjuring trick done with the aid of a handkerchief (‘hanky’), as magicians often do. It is probably, however, an alteration of ‘hocus-pocus’. (Dictionary of True Etymologies, 1986)

_hocus-pocus._ Sham L. of quack. The fact that _hocuspokusfiliokus_ is still used in Norw. & Sw. suggests that there
may be something in the old theory of a blasphemous perversion of
the sacramental blessing, *hoc est corpus (filii)*. Hence *hocus*, to
hoax (q.v.); later, to drug one’s liquor for swindling purposes. (A
Concise Etymological Dictionary of Modern English, 1952)

HOCUS-POCUS

The word “hocus-pocus” is now a common designation (at least in the English language)
for “a cheat or impostor” and refers originally to the conjurer who by legerdemain deceives the
people and pretends to work miracles. In German the word is used mainly in the sense of
“sleight-of-hand,” designating not the performer, but the deception by which a trick is done, and
this seems to be the more original meaning of the term.

The word is probably a corruption of the Latin words *Hoc est corpus meum*, which is the
formula spoken by the priest over the sacramental bread and wine, which thereby is claimed to
be transformed into the body and blood of Christ.

In its modern sense the word can be traced back to the seventeenth century, but the use of
the formula *hoc est corpus meum* in the sense of jugglery is mentioned as early as 1579 in
Fischart’s *Beehive*.

Johann Fischart, the famous satirist and reformer who lived in the middle of the sixteenth
century and died about 1590, speaks of the sacramental transubstantiation as “bread jugglery”
(brolvergaukelung), and compares the power of the five words to the magic word which Satan
uttered when creating monks…

Tillotson (1630—1694) in one of his sermons (XXVI) accepts the etymology of the
word, saying:

“In all probability those common juggling words of hocus pocus are nothing else but a
corruption of hoc est corpus, by way of ridiculous imitation of the priests of the Church of Rome
in their trick of Transubstantiation.”

We need not assume with Tillotson that jugglers actually intended to ridicule the
sacrament. When pretending to transform anything, they simply imitated the process of
transformation and naturally used the same words as the priests did, merely because the people
believed them to be potent charms, and since the audience did not consist of Latin scholars, they
naturally corrupted the words into a formula that was easier pronounced.

The verb “to hocus-pocus” thus acquires the meaning, “to transform, to metamorphose,”
or “to disguise a change.” (“Natural Magic and Prestidigitation,” 1903).

As if the tricky hand hidden in the word ‘handkerchief’ was once again reasserting its *sui
generus* or automatic efficacy, our tracing of the etymological associations with this word have
taken us back to the miraculous transformations and communications of early Christianity.
That the modern handkerchief still maintained residual traces of past Eucharistic rites of transubstantiation is once again suggested by the word itself. Thus the *kerchiefing* of the hand bares a striking similarity to the Eucharistic rites of the middle ages that veiled the right hand holding the soon to be transformed bread with a sacred liturgical vestment known as the maniple. Once again, standard magical practices can be seen as a kind of profanation of ritual performances within the church.

Through its employment as a prop in the performance of prestidigitation, the handkerchief is the middle term or medium between the aural distraction of the voice and the skillful movements of the hand. In this way, the technique of magical substitution thematizes the voice and concomitant power of words—*hocus pocus!*—precisely to usurp the place of the ear/voice though quick manual gestures that, so to speak, move behind the back of the sense of hearing. The moment of prestidigitation is precisely that moment of *distraction* when the sound of the voice draws attention away from the movements of the hand.

With these connections and historical linkages of the handkerchief taking us back to the Eucharistic elements and its magical profanations, we are pointed to an overarching problematic of the prayer cloth. Through its historical and etymological vicissitudes, the prayer cloth seems to evoke a particular anxiety around the *representational* status of the devotional object. Like the always already exteriorized resonance of the voice outside the speaking subject, the prayer handkerchief, as a materialized instantiation of the voice, marks a particular anxiety around the exteriorities of faith and the force of automaticity.
Not uncoincidently, therefore, even a cursory reading of the proposed origins of the term hanky-panky in the etymological dictionaries performs this oscillation and anxiety in compelling ways. Thus there are vehement debates between the etymological dictionaries themselves as to whether or not the term “hanky panky” is really a profane derivation or slippage of the sacred Latin phrase *hoc est corpus meum*. Thus the possible origins of the phrase not only signal a profanation, but suggest the potential of language, as a particular force of exteriority, to take on an unanticipated force outside the subject through a series of reduplications, mispronunciations and mumblings.

This brief description of some of the historical residues woven into the handkerchief help to shed light on the compelling nature of the Pentecostal prayer cloth as a specific modern devotional object associated with experiences of miraculous healing and divine presence. Thus, the earlier resonances of the handkerchief with performances of distraction and sensory disjuncture between sight and sound in the moment of prestidigitation suggest that way that the “prayer handkerchief,” as a miraculous coupling of *voice and object* marks a curious antinomy. On the one hand, this devotional object is explicitly described in terms of faith and the aural vocalizations of prayer. While on the other (perhaps left) hand, the prayer cloth embodies an

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68 The etymological accounts of the phrase “hanky panky,” like the history of prayer and divine communication that it supposedly mimics, ends up replicating many of the apologetic and polemical debates between Protestants and Catholics that gets subtly played-out in the discourses on magic and the history of prayer. What I want to emphasize in this section is the way these seemingly innocuous etymologies reveal the underlying tension that also resides at the heart of the Pentecostal prayer handkerchief.
experience of tactile immediacy that seems to operate with a force of automaticity that goes
behind the back of ‘faith.’ Just like earlier practices of magical sleight of hand, the prayer cloth
is an *adroit* substitution of a manual experience in place of the voice.

*Silent Voice: Pantomime*

One particular performance of trickery associated with the phrase ‘hanky-panky’ in the
nineteenth century was the art of pantomime. The popular treatise on parlor magic, *The Art of
Amusing: Being a Collection of Graceful Arts, Merry Games, Odd Tricks, Curious Puzzles and
New Charades* (1866), for instance, dedicates a short chapter to the tricky phrase in question:

“HANKY-PANKY is the name of a certain art practiced by pantomimists
of the clown and harlequin school, and is the subject of no little study and
practice. We do not think it within our power to define hanky-panky,
composed as it is of fictitious whackings and kickings and smackings,
unless, indeed, that be a definition. We can, however, give a couple of
illustrations of the art as it may be practiced in the family circle. We may
look further into the matter at some future day, and possibly a volume of
Parlor hanky-panky, beautifully illustrated by the author.69

The author goes on to describe several performances of pantomimic hanky-panky
wherein through rapid movements of the hands and fingers, the audience is tricked into
perceiving that some portion of the body (knuckles, head, ears, etc.) has been pummeled

69 Bellew, Frank. *The Art of Amusing: Being a Collection of Graceful Arts, Merry Games, Odd
Tricks, Curious Puzzles, and New Charades. Together with Suggestions for Private Theatricals,
violently against some dense object such as a wooden door. The present author cannot resist including one of these pantomimic instructions in its entirety:

The first example we shall now give is how to knock your knuckles on the edge of a marble mantel-piece or other hard substance without hurting them. It is done thus: You raise your clenched fist high in the air, hold it poised there some seconds for all the audience to see, and then bring it swiftly down; but just before your hand reaches the object, open your fingers quickly, so they will strike the object with a sharp slap, then close them quickly; if this is neatly done, it will appear as if you had struck your knuckles a violent blow. This will make the ladies scream, and every one else thrill of horror (135).

In order to produce this special effect or “thrill of horror,” each pantomime technique outlined in this chapter thematizes a disjuncture between bodily gestures and the production of sound. In this way, the absence of the speaking voice sets up the viewing audience to focus attention upon the silent gestures, so that the unanticipated irruption of sound, somewhere else, exterior to the mouth of the speaking subject, produces a kind of perceptual surprise-effect or moment of sensory disjuncture. In the moment of hanky-panky the hands usurp the function of the mouth and announce themselves through a percussive noise. This pantomime thematizes or performs the displacement of traditional orientations or locations of sound and bodily movement to produce shocking effects. In this way, the hanky-panky art of pantomime bares important similarities to another tricky art of voice displacement and mouths usurped by hidden hands: ventriloquism. Displaced sound generated outside ‘normal’ regions of vocalization, “sets-up” yet another significant instance of sensory displacement in the technique of the trick.
Figure 5: Hanky-Panky, 1886
Ectoplasmic Textile Tongues or: The Spiritualist Prayer Cloth

Coinciding with the communicative link-up between Washington and Baltimore through the electrical wires of Samuel Morse’s recent invention, the Fox sisters from the “burned-over-district” of New York State began interpreting the rap-tap-tappings of spirit communiqués from a spectral beyond (1848). Known as “modern spiritualism,” this telegraphic necromancy spread rapidly throughout the United States and Europe during the middle of the nineteenth century. During the séance or sitting the medium was able to bridge the chasm between the living and the dead, facilitating the appearance of spectral forms, ghostly voices, and other hollow sounds from the afterlife.70

Towards the late nineteenth century, skillful mediums began channeling not only the traditional immaterial voices and spectral images from the realm of the shades, but actual physical substances. Usually extruded through the mouth of the medium, this phenomenon of materialization was termed “ectoplasmic substance.”71 One of the most renowned investigators into the phenomenon of spiritualist materialization, Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, described this

70 Of course, the telegraph was not the only modern apparatus that seemed particularly attracted to the spiritual communiqués and appearances of the spiritualist movement. The new optical technologies of photographic lenses and gelatin plates also had an uncanny ability to register spectral presences otherwise imperceptible to the naked eye. See for instance: Gunning, Tom, "Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theater, Trick Films, and Photography's Uncanny," Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video, edited by Patrice Petro, Indian University Press, 1995; Chéroux, C. (2005). The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult. New Haven, Conn.; London, Yale University Press.

71 The Perfect Medium, p. 179
substance as a “membranous veil, like a cobweb” composed of “compact organic fabrics.”

Also referred to as “ideoplasty,” or “teleplastics,” von Schrenck-Notzing proposed that spectral fabrics were not actually communications from the realm of the dead, but materializations exuding from the memory surface of the medium’s “subliminal consciousness.” Many incredulous opponents of the spiritualist movement were able to scrutinize high quality photographs of these so-called ectoplasmic materializations, and were surprised that these oral extrusions “closely resembled everyday materials such as wool, cotton, fur and paper.”

Both mediums and séance participants, on the other hand, believed these ectoplasmic emanations to be a kind of fleshly incarnation from the spirit world; a grotesque parody of the Eucharistic metamorphosis of spirit made flesh.

Even upon cursory inspection, the photographs of manifestations of teleplastic phenomena from the mouth do indeed have a striking resemblance to fabrics woven of delicate thread, or in other circumstances, fluffy or downy material such as cotton. Yet despite the fact that the spiritual manifestation seems clearly identifiable through the photographic lens as some type of textile, the image of this material exuding from the mouth of the medium still strikes the viewer with a particularly unnerving force. Arousing sensations of horror and disgust, it is as

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73 Ibid.

74 Reactions such as this also characterized the reception of these images at the exhibition of spiritualist photographs entitled “The Perfect Medium,” see exhibition catalog.
if the tongue of the medium has elongated to monstrous proportions, oozing out of the moist darkness of the oral cavity.

The uncanny effects produced by these specific types of spirit manifestations could be related precisely to the fact that the ectoplasmic substance bares a strange resemblance to cloth. As one of the most ubiquitous and utilitarian objects in everyday life, cloth plays a constitutive role in the unacknowledged demarcation of the boundaries of the subject. Cloth is a kind of extension or boundary between the subject and the exterior world. The ectoplasmic manifestation inverts this everyday demarcation so that the exterior surface ends up oozing excessively form the interior of the body: a regurgitated externality from the dark recesses of the interior.

Despite its disconcerting force, there is something quite apposite about this specific ectoplasmic extension of the tongue within the modern spiritualist tradition. After all, the power in the medium, that spiritual telegraphist, resides precisely in the ability to “get out of the way” and allow the spirits to animate the faculties of vocalization like an instrument. The mouth of the medium was made to speak in both foreign and unknown tongues through the animating force of the spirit. The spiritual manifestation of the ectoplasmic cloth tongue thematizes a basic spiritualist practice on a visual and tactile register.

In an age of communication extended by the electrical telegraph wires, forces from the realm of the dead were able to animate and extend the tongue to horrifying and grotesque proportions. As if to embody the anxieties articulated by Ferdinand de Saussure in his lectures
directly coincident with these spiritualist manifestations, the teratological tongue of the medium signaled the exteriority of language by grotesquely rendering its forgotten materialities: tongues, teeth, electrical wires, and inscriptive surfaces.

Not only did these spiritualist manifestations provide a kind of implicit commentary on the changing nature of human subjectivity and the possibility of articulation in an age of technological mediation, their tongues portended the emergence of glossolalia on a scale never before heard through the Pentecostal revivals of the early twentieth century.

The ectoplasmic tongue of the medium foreshadows the Pentecostal emphasis on glossolalia, a wonderfully descriptive term that emphasizes the movement of the tongue muscle in and of itself, as the preeminent sign of a baptism of the Holy Ghost and sanctification. More than this, however, can we not see in the grotesque textile tongue of the medium an auger to the pervasive circulation of the prayer cloth beginning in the second half of the twentieth century? And does not the Pentecostal prayer cloth bear a curious resemblance to an exteriorized or severed tongue, flapping in the pneumatic wind of the Holy Ghost and surrounded by a border of teeth cut by the pinking shear? Indeed, one could debate whether the size of the prayer cloth was to fit economically within the space of a small envelope or to suggest the glossolalic tongue animated through the ecstatic performance of healing prayer. Thus, the ectoplasmic tongue in an age of the spiritual telegraph foretold of the postal circulation of the

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75 Indeed, the importance of speaking in foreign and unknown tongues within the American spiritualist tradition prefigured the irruption of Pentecostal tongues in 1906 in significant ways. Leigh Schmidt makes this point in his work: *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American*
severed tongues of the prayer cloth in the ventriloquistic age of the ‘wireless’ loudspeaker.

Figure 6: Ecotoplasmic Materialization from Baron von Schrenck Notzing’s *Phenomena of Materialization*

The Prayer Cloth Testimony of Sister Francis (WGTH Dec. 2010)

I wanted to tell everybody about the little girls that we’ve been talkin’ about for the past three weeks.
Well I wasn’t here last week.
But the past three weeks, this little girl in North Car-lina, she had anorexia real bad.
And she was really, really in bad shape.
She was eleven years old and her friend also had it.
I don’t know what her age was but she…
Her mother asked my sister if we would send some prayer cloths.
And we sent a couple of handkerchiefs—anointed handkerchiefs.
And last week we heard, well, I’m gettin’ ahead of myself.
The little girl she wrote her friend a letter that she was in the hospital.
She was so bad they put her in the hospital and they thought they were gonna have to put this little girl in the hospital too.
But thank God they didn’t.
She was just so bad and she wrote her a letter and if you could just read that letter, you would never believe that it come from a eleven year old girl.
I mean that letter was just, just wonderful.
You’d thank it come from somebody that was in college, the way that she wrote that little girl a letter.
And she started tellin’ her about God.
And what God could do for her.
And how God could bring both of ‘em out of that.
And thank God, the little girl’s home.
She came home last week.
And from what I can understand, she’s doin’ better.
And the little girl that wrote her the letter, she’s eating better and she’s doin’ better.
They’re not outta the woods they still need prayer.
But I just thank God for what he has did for these little girls.
And ya know, the mother she told my sister the other day, she said “will you please ask your sister and her husband if they would send me another prayer cloth?”
She says, “They work.”
She says, “Those prayer cloths work!” [at this point in narrative, more robust affirmation from the congregation]
And you know, and I thought well how wonderful.
It’s the faith, you know.
And I’s tellin’ my sister, I said, she had the faith that everything was gonna be ok with her little girl.
And it just thrilled me when she said that they work.
And we did send another one, but it was for another woman that had cancer and she needs prayer also.
I think that she had surgery, but I don’t know how that surgery came out but I’m praying that everything will work out o.k. for’er.

The testimony of Sister Francis highlights several significant features of the narrative form and the prayer cloth. Like the physical circulation of objects through a system of postal exchange, the opening remarks of her testimony calls attention to the temporal dimension of the narrative. Through progressive updates and retellings of the young anorexic girls, the testimony builds and accumulates compelling force. The phrase “we’ve been talkin” instantiates a narrative history of talk and prayer, and announces that the potential energy of faith is already in circulation. This particular testimony marks an immediacy within a temporal framework of storying on ‘thangs’ of the spirit. This gesture to the continuous compulsion to narrate the movement of the miraculous performatively instantiates the listener into the continuing circulation and temporal progression of faith.

As a crucial aspect both with the structure of the narrative testimony and the generation or appearance of faith, the temporal themes of displacement and deferral emerge thorough a brief retelling of the etiology of the devotional object:

Her mother asked my sister if we would send some prayer cloths.
And we sent a couple of handkerchiefs—anointed handkerchiefs

Even from its inception, the origin, or at least initial glimmer of faith appears in and through an originary displacement. Through the intermediary of the sister, the mother of the sick girl asks Sister Francis to anoint a cloth. Even at its inception, faith begins to gain force,
like the deadly power of the *hau* in the gift exchange process described by Mauss, through progressive displacements and deferrals. The force of faith emerges through its unplaceability or the perpetual deferral of its permanent and fixed location. And just as the anointed handkerchief is a materialized instantiation of the fleeting vocalization of prayer, the actual physical movement of the sacred cloth remnant between hands and through invisible postal infrastructures give tangible, tactile presence to this perpetual deferral of faith as that which is always about to arrive or make its appearance *somewhere else*. In this way as well, the circulation of talk about the potential efficacy of the devotional object between mother, intermediary and Francis coincides on a material dimension through the movement of the cloth through a system of exchange. The circulation of the materialized prayer through the postal system is thus the shadowy material underbelly of the compulsive spirit of talk. As the textile tongue moves, so the tongue itself wags. In this way a crucial sustaining element of faith, the deferral and displacement, is intimately linked to hidden networks of scanning, sorting and transport machines. Thus the postal service is a crucial material infrastructure of payer an apparatus of faith.

In the next movement of the narrative, Sister Francis performs what could be called a “testimonial parapraxis:” “And last week we heard, well, I’m gettin’ ahead of myself.” This momentary slip in the narrative flow is rife with meaning, not only for what it reveals about the particular structure of narrativity organizing the poetic effect of the story, but its evocation of a *rupture* between the speaking subject and the movement of the story. “Getting’ ahead of
oneself,” especially in this context, heralds the appearance of divinely inspired poetic styles such as anointed preaching and the ecstatic sounds of glossolalia. In a similar way, Sister Francis’ testimonial parapraxis, “I’m gettin’ ahead of myself,” challenges us to begin to think of the ways in which the performance of faith is always somehow ahead of or slightly off-kilter from the ‘believer.’ Conceived in this way, faith is perpetually moving just beyond full perceptual grasp of the subject through postal networks, narrative circulations and the compelling force of talk. Thus it is precisely in this deferred or disjointed space of getting ahead of the self that faith lives and moves and has its being.

This slip within the testimonial form also suggests useful insights into the particular narrative structure of this mode of faith-talk. Thus, on a basic structural level, to reveal the wonderful news of the testimony too early in the narrative form would be to short-circuit the poetic effect that is garnered and released through the performative enactment of the story. Once again, the poetic force of the testimonial form in southern Appalachia is unleashed through a particular structure of narrativity, not merely a recounting of the “informational” content of a miraculous occurrence. The particular structure of the retelling brings the ears of the listener within its sphere of poetic operation, calling the audience to participate in the instantiation or performance of faith. The revelatory movement of the testimonial releases its full poetic force only after the enactment of the story has passed the time and embraced the listener into its operations of expectancy and suspense. And what does the listener get in lieu of this immediate divulging of the stark informational content of the illness, but a performative calling for us to
imagine the penning and circulation of a wonderful letter from one frail hand to another.

After moving through the details of the narrative, we arrive at the miraculous coincidence that releases the full force of faith in the very moment that it signals its further displacement. Just before the moment of revelation, the deferral of faith is narrated once again:

And ya know, the mother she told my sister the other day, she said “will you please ask your sister and her husband if they would send me another prayercloth?”
She says, “They work.”
She says, “Those prayer cloths work!”

Replicating the initial occasion for the sacred anointing of the prayer cloth, the conversation mediated by a middle term (Francis’ sister) generates yet another call for an anointed object. The mother, therefore, could be commenting upon both the miraculous healing efficacy inherent in the cloth and this object’s capacity to generate the compelling appearance of faith. In almost every instance of testifying upon the miraculous power of the prayer cloth, a repetition of the story has signaled the further replication of the cloth. Once again, the force of word of mouth, talk, and the circulation of the devotional object go hand in hand. In this way, the return to the origin always occasions further replication and deferral.

The next narrative turn is not only characteristic of this specific form of poetic speech, but talk on miraculous healing more generally. As if to wrest the efficacy from the autonomous and automatic circulation of the object from the space of exteriority and thus recuperate faith to the bounded interiors of the subject, Sister Francis emphasizes or attempts to locate “faith” in a definite source:
It’s the faith, you know.
And I’s tellin’ my sister, I said, she had the faith that everything was gonna be ok with her little girl.

This subtle disavow or distancing from the automatic exteriorities of faith is a recurrent theme in the narration of faith healing in the twentieth century. However, even this attempt to locate the source of faith in the caring mother marks yet another displacement of belief. After all, was it not the mother who initially looked to Sister Francis and her husband as the supposed bearers of faith?

And finally, where is faith to be located when its supposed bearer or guarantor displays a great sense of surprise when talk of the efficacy of the sacred cloth returns to its apparent point of origin: “And you know, it just thrilled me when she said that they work.” This revelatory thrill points to the appearance and accumulation of the force of faith through material infrastructures of circulation and the exchange of hands. Faith was not present at the origin, but gained compelling force through its progressive displacements and temporal articulations in exterior networks of exchange. In anticipation of an even greater thrill, and even greater accumulation of efficacy, the very moment when wandering faith seems to have found its resting place, yet another space of storying, anticipation and circulation is opened within the space of the narrative. Where then, can faith be located at the end of this miraculous testimony? It’s in the mail.

*And we did send another one*, but it was for another woman that had cancer and she needs prayer also.
I think that she had surgery, but I don’t know how that surgery came out but I’m praying that everything will work out o.k. for’er.
An Apotropaic Device

Another unanticipated appearance of the prayer cloth occurred while I was interviewing an elderly sister about her practice of listening to live charismatic radio broadcasts. This conversation took place within the Spartan confines of her apartment in a public housing complex for low-income senior citizens. In a high-pitched voice that labored for breath and trembled like her hands, the stream of spiritual storyin’ meandered around the theme of the miraculous until it came across this devilish encounter:

**Sister Dixie:** You know that lady come helps me, her little grandson, he’s five years old. *Hits* mommy and daddy is separated, and he’s got *angry* in ’em. And she said she had whipped him and whipped ’em. I said, “get ’em in prayer line!” And I told Ruth, I said, “Ya’ll better be gettin’ little Mike in prayer line.” “Ahh, he’ll be alright.” I said, “well see.” Cause see, I could see. And Annes was settin’ in the floor one day a’playin’; he just walked over hit that little thang and said, “Sissy I hate you!” I said, “No you don’t Mike, no you don’t.” And I got him up on my lap and I laid my hands on ’em. And I said, “Devil, now you’s well go on away from this baby, ‘cause he ain’t gonna be raised up to work for you!” –and he got out-of’em. And Ruth, she got a prayer cloth and pinned on ’em. And now there ain’t no better young’in.

After casting out the devil through a technique of manual contact and verbal command, a prayer cloth is immediately employed to ward-off any further influences of the devil and his dark principalities upon the helpless child. Utilized in this way, the prayer cloth embodies yet

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76 My use of the phrase “spiritual storyin’” resonates with Stewart’s notion of “talkin’ on thangs.” As this phrase suggests, the figure of materiality always seems to persist in the heat of these otherwise strictly oral performances. In this way, talkin’ on spiritual thangs always suggests the particular objectile dimensions and their moments of surfacing or desublimation within the narrative poetics of the testimony. For another devilish encounter and its spiritual implications, see: Stewart, K. (1996). *A Space On the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an*
another function as an apotropaic device.

Typical of these narrative testimonies upon the power of the materialized Holy Ghost, Sister Dixie concludes her story, after a brief period of conversation, with a standard qualifying phrase: “If you don’t b’lieve there ain’t no use ax-kin’.” In almost every testimony or spiritual storyin’ on thangs I have witnessed in southern Appalachia, there is a kind of formalized disclaimer or subtle renunciation of the automatic force of the objectile as an afterward to the miraculous narrative. This disclaimer or qualification points to an underlying tension within the circulation of the prayer cloth. Just as the devotional object shifts between hands through the process of exchange, it perpetually oscillates in that gap between the material and the spiritual, between the fleeting sound of the prayer and the material textures of the cloth.

This fleeting nature of faith, and the inability to fully “pin it down” for more than an instant, is shown through the details of Sister Dixie’s narrative. Within the relationships between the angry toddler and his caregivers, for example, where is this all-important practice of belief to be located? Does little Mike believe in the efficacious force of the prayer cloth? Or perhaps the belief of Sister Dixie becomes a kind of supplementary stand-in for a child who is too young to understand the dynamics and meaning of belief itself. The helper Ruth, in turn, could be the locus of belief, as she was the figure in possession of the anointed cloth and actually pinned it upon the suffering child. Moreover, is it possible that the prayer cloth mechanically performs its apotropaic function outside this apparent field of belief, and through this autonomous and

automatic efficacy becomes a magical object as defined by classic ethnological sources such as Mauss and Hubert’s *A General Theory of Magic*?\(^77\)

In order to help map the locus of belief, perhaps it will be useful to track the circulation of the cloth itself as it “exchanges hands,” so to speak. As indicated further in the conversation on prayer cloths, Sister Dixie had requested that Brother and Sister Allen, who were also present during the interview, manufacture some of the anointed cloth fragments.

**Andy:** “And she [Ruth] had prayed on that, or the church had prayed on it?  
**Sister Dixie:** Well I had some anointed Brother Allen’n’Dorothy, and I gave her one.

After the cloth is anointed through the verbal prayers and manual techniques of an initial community of believers, it enters an economy of circulation that moves into the hands of Sister Dixie, who then gives the anointed fabric to Ruth. Based on the testimony of Sister Dixie, we might add, that Ruth’s lack of faith (“Ahh, he’ll be alright”) may have been a concern for Dixie, thus the need for the gifting of the cloth in the first place. And finally, within this initial cycle of circulation (one foresees, for example, many other potential exchanges of the cloth after it serves its purpose for the child) belief once again makes its appearance through the affixing of the cloth to the young child as an apotropaic device to repeal the evil animations of the devil.

The other crucial element in this system of exchange, perhaps the most motivating and contagious force of all, is that of the narrative testimony upon the miraculous movements of the

object. In and through the performance of the testimony, the cloth comes full circle by returning to its initial owner. Albeit in the guise of an account of the efficacy of the anointed cloth, the object returns to the original ‘manufactures’ (Brother and Sister Allen) who were also present during the interview. In this way, the narrative testimony further reinforces and solidifies the power of belief.

One overarching question, therefore, is in what way does this system of anointing, exchange, and narrative circulation temporalize and thus constitute belief through moments of deferral and delay. In and through this kind of temporalization, belief emerges and seems to gain momentum, or perhaps we should say, becomes more compelling, as it marks ever-increasing exchanges of hands. Belief itself, like the *hau* of the gift described by Mauss, gains momentum and force of compulsion in and through this economy of circulation. As the object literally moves between hands, the force of belief, and thus the powerful efficacy of the Holy Ghost, builds to such intensity that this tiny rag, this mere fragment or piece of textile detritus, is able to repel the devil himself! Belief, therefore, emerges or makes its appearance not in one single person or practice but in this manifold network and deferred “exchange of hands.” In this way, what is at first inspection the strongest seat of belief, that of the initial anointing by the Allens, seem to be eclipsed by the process of circulation itself. This circulation, in turn, seems to generate another, more powerful gravitation of belief—what could be called a spirit of compulsion. As emphasized by de Certeau, belief subsists in and through a temporal articulation that moves through a series of deferrals, substitutions, and temporal lags.
Thus, there is always someone else, another potential story, some alterity elsewhere, that drives the appearance of faith in and through the promise of its return.  

_The Sound of the Mechanism: Materialized Prayer_

Further asserting the force of repetition compelled through the prayer cloth, Sister Dixie’s testimony of diabolical influence and the power of the sacred object precipitated yet another miraculous chain of narrativity. After Sister Dixie responded to my questions as to the process of anointing the efficacious cloth, Brother Aldie announced another story with a question directed to me: “You do believe in prayer cloths, don’t ya?”

**Aldie:** Did we tell you ‘bout the man that had artificial hips-n-knees? He came out church, well in fact I mentioned it last week on the radio. He was Presbyterian and he wasn’t used to Pentecostal ways. They brought his mother-n-law down there. I know we told you about her comin’ outta the wheel chair, runnin’ the aisles and so-forth. But anyway, _par_ got on him, and he come out and ran up and down the isles. And went back and told’em that they better b’lieve in it because it was real. “The power of God is real.” But anyway, the Lord had spoke to me one day out thar prayin’, and told me to have Dorothy go to Dollar Store’n buy a white sheet. Lay it down in the floor at church, get everybody, you know, anoint it and prayer over it. And then fold the sheet in half and cut it: make two sheets instead of one. Then take one section of that sheet, and fold it and cut it again, so it be a’total of three pieces.

**Andy:** You just prayed over it once?

**Aldie:** Yea. Everybody got down, prayed over the whole sheet. And then we

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cut it, and sent it to Christiansburg [Virginia] to that couple. I coulda sworn that 
he told me that she had a bad back and he too. They called us, they were so 
happy. But then, I found out later, like I said I coulda swore they told me she 
had a bad back. But they called, she said she wrapped that half-a-sheet around 
er, and he wrapped the two little ones around his legs; and they shouted and 
praised the Lord all evenin’. Even slept in’em. Next day, she went ta get her a 
shower. When she came out he had his hand behind his back. And 
she didn’t know what he had—he’s a big man, used to be a biker. And she kept 
askin’ him what he had. They was gettin’ ready to replace his knees and hips 
again—he didn’t wanna go through it—said he’d rather be dead as to do it. He 
was a real jealous man, and said he had somethin’ behind his back. And she 
kept askin’em what it was, he wouldn’t tell her. Finally she run, started to get by 
him. When she did he pulled out a gun, and as she run she wrapped the towel 
around her and took off runnin’ to go out the side door to her son’s house. And 
he snapped the gun, but it didn’t go off. He turnt it on hisself and killed hisself. 
And she said she knew, last time we saw her, she still says she knew, that God 
sent that prayer cloth to protect her back. ‘Cause that’s where he tried to shoot 
her was in the back, and said there was nothin’ wrong with her back. She had a 
perfect back. I’d misunderstood someway-er-another; said whatin’ nothin’ 
wrong with her back. But said she know God used that prayer cloth to protect 
her back. He’d put the prayer cloths around his legs, but he shot hisself in his 
head. God can do it. See, he was gonna kill’em both, but God used a prayer 
cloth to save her life. She’s still alive today.

**Andy:** So the cloth carries the…

**Aldie:** Anointin’ of God. Uh-huh. Sure does. Like Dixie said when she had 
that cloth there, it had the anointin’ of God on it, and God honors that! If you 
pray from the heart, he honors it! Sure does.

Announcing the theme of mechanicity yet again, Brother Aldie’s story of the prayer cloth 
opens with a strikingly visceral image “’bout the man that had artificial hips-n-knees.” As if to 
prefigure the process of the manufacture of the anointed cloth, the theme of substitution and 
bodily extension is present at the inception of the narrative. The material “stand-in” or patch 
that supplements the broken-down contingencies of the everyday is announced as an overarching
testimonial motif within the story. Early in the story the power of the Holy Ghost and the mechanical prosthesis display striking similarities in their mutual ability to assert the force of mechanicity in the practice of bodily movement. The possessing power of the Holy Ghost enables the lame to “run the aisles,” while the biomedical replacement of atrophied and defective bone sockets allows the crippled to walk once again. In both instances, therefore, the prosthetic supplement enables the movement of lame bodies.

Another remarkable feature of this story is its descriptions of the transformation of a quotidian object into a sacred receptacle of power. Brother Aldie is divinely inspired to “buy white sheet” from the place that seems to be the embodiment of ‘cheap’ everyday commodities, The Dollar Store.79 Through a process of prayer, techniques of the body and ritualized rending

79 Anointing the sheet from The Dollar Store invokes the intimate relations between the prayer cloth and magical notions of accumulation and circulation associated with the prayer cloth. As a commodity, the sheet already has a specific spectral quality and metaphysical subtlety operating within it. In this way, perhaps we could think of the necessary process of cutting or rending the fabric in the process of sacred manufacture as a release of spiritual force already accumulated in the fabric commodity. This releasing of pre-existent spiritual presence then opens a space for the creative reconfiguration of the fabric remnant into new contexts and categories. In many ways the dollar bill itself resembles the prayer cloth. The devotional gesture of rubbing the prayer cloth between the thumb and fingers, for instance, is also a manual gesture for money—thus both objects convey a particular haptic sensation that is associated with magical accumulation and the force of objects that seem to move on their own. In the history of evangelical and charismatic organizations, the prayer cloth became increasingly associated with precisely the accumulation of dollar bills. Now “green prosperity handkerchiefs” are circulated by the thousands to facilitate the miraculous accumulation of wealth made possible by the power of the Holy Ghost. Thus, if Marx were to write his essay on the commodity within our contemporary setting he would update his equation: 1 revival tent = 5,000 coats = 1,000,000 prayer cloths. I would like to thank Allen Shelton for suggesting this relation between Marx’s famous equation and the prayer cloth. For an exploration of the circulation
of the fabric, the cheap utilitarian object from The Dollar Store will be metamorphosed into a sacred cloth.

The practice of folding and cutting the sheet, which is described in careful detail by the narrator, seems to evoke the classic ethnological descriptions of the part that is equivalent to the whole. Thus, despite the process of dividing the cloth, it still maintains the efficacy which was instantiated into the entirety of the sheet through the initial prayer of anointing. Yet because Brother Aldie invokes this process of folding and cutting with such performative care, and because this theme of the cutting of the prayer cloth is a recurrent practice in the overall phenomenon of this devotional object, it seems likely that the “cut” is not merely a secondary process to allow for a greater distribution of the initially anointed object, but like the incision made by the sacrificial knife, the cut of circumcision or the fleshly inscriptions of scarification, the act of cutting itself instantiates efficacious force into the object.\(^\text{80}\) Just as the percussive pops of hand clapping and loud vocalizations in the performance of skein prayer opens a space of divine communication, the cutting or ripping of the fabric is a destructive gesture that completes the materialization of Holy Ghost power.

\(^\text{80}\) Indeed, several sources on the history of prayer suggest that the word prayer originally referenced a cutting of the flesh in the act of divine communication. The Semitic phylactery, for example, can be seen as a symbolic representation of an earlier form of cutting and scarification associated with techniques for contacting the divine. See “prayer” and “phylactery” in: Hastings, James. *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, New York: Charles
Additionally, the physical process of cutting the fabric to divide its surface mimics, on a basic material level, the process of narrativity. It is this performance of storying, in turn, that generates the compulsion to repeat stories of the miraculous efficacy of the prayer cloth. The force of belief makes its appearance and accrues force in and through these narrative replications. The actual cutting of the fabric is also a symbolic “cuttin’ loose” of storying tongues that will recount, repeatedly, the miraculous movements of the sacred object. The prayer cloth is a textile tongue, cut loose and set free to flap in the winds of narrativity.

This technique of prayer and concomitant rending of the fabric also makes an implicit commentary on the nature and movement of the Holy Ghost within the space of worship and everyday life of the charismatic faithful. Just as a scrap or remnant of fabric can be cut from its original totality to be patched-in to another textile surface or context, the cutting of the cloth mirrors on a material level the capacity of prayer to cut-out, wrest or excise power from the diffuse totality of Holy Ghost potentiality and materialize it into an object. In turn, this materialized trace of Holy Ghost power begins to circulate autonomously and can be patched-in, like a floating signifier, into the exigencies, gaps and threadbare surfaces of everyday life.

Another recurrent theme that is reinforced through Aldie’s story is the efficacious transfer of force through tactile communication. Thus parts of the body are literally “wrapped” in the anointed cloth. This devotional technique of tightly wrapping the cloth around the body or afflicted body part creates a kind of sacred supplemental skin that channels efficacious power.

Scribner’s and Sons, 1908.
into the body. Indeed, when Aldie invokes the phrase “they shouted and praised the Lord all evenin’,” it is in the context of divine inspiration through possession by the Holy Ghost. An analogous phrase would be being “shouted in the Lord.” Within this narrative, therefore, tactile contact with the devotional object initiates a physical transfer of power and thus initiates an ecstatic form of possession in the spirit. In addition, notice that the situation seems to be going well for the couple until the wife sheds this sacred skin in order to perform her daily ablutions: “Next day, she went ta get her a shower. When she came out, he had his hand behind his back.” Thus, the body unclothed in this materialized prayer becomes vulnerable to the forces of evil.

Helping to precipitate the moment of violent crisis, the theme of the prosthetic reappears at the crux of the narrative: “They was getting’ ready to replace his knees and hips again—he didn’t wanna go through it—said he’d rather be dead as to do it. He was a real jealous man, and said he had somethin’ behind his back.” It is precisely within this space of mechanicity that the miraculous moment of coincidence unleashes all its narrative force. The snapping sound of mechanicity as the hammer of the revolver automatically collides with the firing pin in response to the pull of the trigger thus marks the moment of coincidence between a naked body, jealous rage, and a materialized prayer. Several seemingly random or unrelated elements are collapsed into a shocking moment of the miraculous through the snapping sound of the machine. In this miraculous collision, however, the force of divine automaticity inherent in the sacred cloth inserts itself between the machinations of the firing pin and the explosive charge of the shell. Reaffirming the force of automaticity, the materialized efficacy of the prayer cloth derails the
machine, causing a ‘misfire.’ Ironicaly, however, the failure of the mechanism only acts to reassert or reaffirm the force of automaticity with newfound intensity. In this way, ideas of luck, quintessence, and chance that are made to appear through the mechanical operations of the revolver are translated or organized by the materialized efficacy of prayer and Holy Ghost power.81

Like the clicking of the revolver’s hammer, the movement of the narrative, the very narrative structure formed through the miraculous testimony, unleashes the force of belief through a temporal deferral or delay. It is not until the end of the narrative progression, when the story has built tension and accumulated an inventory of at times seemingly random details, that the story tracks back to the beginning to reveal that the forces of divine organization were already working upon events within the narrative. A misunderstanding or confusion at the beginning of the narrative thus turns out to be divinely guided: “I’d misunderstood someway-er-another; said whatin’ nothin’ wrong with her back. She had a perfect back.” A disjointed experience of temporal lag is effected through the narrative progression, and just as the listener is drawn into the performative movement of the story, the force of belief has already

81 "The invention of the match around the middle of the nineteenth century brought forth a number of innovations which have one thing in common: one abrupt movement of the hand triggers a process of many steps. This development is taking place in many areas. Once case in point is the telephone, where the lifting of a receiver has taken the place of the steady movement that used to be required to crank the older models. Of the countless movements of switching, inserting, pressing, and the like, the “snapping” of the photographer has had the greatest consequences. A touch of the finger now sufficed to fix an even for an unlimited period of time. The camera gave the moment a posthumous shock, as it were" (174-75).
made its surreptitious appearance.

Yet in the very moment that belief makes its tricky appearance through the temporal progression of narrativity and the circulation of material objects, a gesture is made to mitigate the autonomous externalities of faith that seem to have moved on their own through the story. True to the narrative form of testimony, Brother Aldie does not leave the automatic efficacy of the prayer cloth in free circulation, but attempts to recover it within the stable interior of the ‘believing’ subject. Thus, in the final words of his story, we are left with the sound of prayer resonating within the bounded interiors of the heart instead of emerging through the snapping of the trigger or the rip of fabric.

*Mentioning the Prayer Cloth*

Both detailed testimonies and brief references are made during worship services in regard to the prayer cloth. These recurrent appearances within the performative dialogue of the charismatic milieu attest to the prevalent use and circulation of the materialized prayer within the community. A brief mention of an anointed cloth by Brother Aldie provides a representative example:

*Aldie: An’ I’d like ta tell Brother Kenny, I thank ye for tha prayer cloth. I wanna thank Kenny and Darleen, they sent me a prayer cloth th’other night, and its been on me, still is. [Aldie laughs] I’ve been wearin’ it religiously, so, we thank you for it.*

Brief descriptions of prayer cloths such as this are often given over the radio, both within the context of the Jackson Memorial Hour broadcast and many other live charismatic radio programs. Brother Allen’s specific descriptions of this practice of devotion demonstrates that the blessed cloths are often worn for prolonged amounts of time: “it’s been on me, still is. I’ve been wearin’ it religiously.” Recall as well the instructions given by Brother Arnold to put the materialized prayer in one’s wallet or shirt pocket and “carry it around with ye.” Thus, an important aspect of the prayer cloth is its habitual or prolonged use.

Accounts such as these contradict one of the only published descriptions of the use and manufacture of prayer cloths within the Pentecostal tradition. In an interview that has been published online, historian of religion R. Marie Griffith claims “Since they’re [prayer cloths] used in times of crisis, the prayer power that they had may not be active six months later if something else comes up. They are immediate objects.”

82 Griffith, R. “Material Devotion—Pentecostal Prayer Cloths” (Material History of American Religion Project, Princeton University): [http://www.materialreligion.org/journal/handkerchief.html](http://www.materialreligion.org/journal/handkerchief.html) p.4. This idea of the immediacy of the prayer cloth is a recurrent theme in the few published accounts in the field of religious studies. These accounts rely on the printed accounts of Pentecostal publications such as magazines and pamphlets, which all tend to repeat this theme of immediate efficacy for purpose of publication space and to quickly convince the audience of their curative force. Scholars in the fields of American history and religious studies should take this into consideration when making pronouncements about practices of devotion based on the published accounts in the official Pentecostal literature. My ethnography demonstrates that the force of “immediacy” that is claimed by scholars such as Griffith appears with most compelling force in and through particular structures of deferral, habituation and the temporal
As we have seen in other accounts of the materialized prayer, however, it is precisely through habituation and perpetual use of the prayer cloth that this object makes its (re)appearance with the most compelling force of faith. As in the miraculous incident of the mother who placed three anointed handkerchiefs in the glove compartment of her husband’s automobile, the compelling gravitation of the devotional object achieves its most powerful effects through a structure of deferral, habituation, and forgetting. Moreover, Griffith’s insistence on the immediacy of the prayer cloth belies its crucial importance as an apotropaic device against the devil and his dark principalities such as in the case of Sister Dixie and the pinning-on of a prayer cloth to an afflicted child. To be sure, the efficacy of the prayer cloth takes on a force of immediacy, yet this temporal instantiation of force in the here and now emerges through a process of temporal articulation characterized by deferral. This temporal lag is articulated through the progression of the narrative testimony on the efficacy of the cloth and through the actual physical circulation of the devotional object.83

Sacred Automaticity: Prayer Cloths, Machines, Accidents

The slightly uneven and disproportionate black lettering on the hand-painted sign reads, The Independent Bible Church of God at Red Ash. As if to mimic the images evoked by that articulations of exchange.

singular name “Red Ash,” piles of brick lay strewn about the ground on one side of the grey and dilapidated church: red bone remainders of prosperities past. When the coal still poured from the tipple of the Red Ash mining company, this structure was once a filling station and the bricks, now detritus, formed a mechanics’ automotive garage. The name Red Ash was taken from the streaks of iron that occur in the various coal seams located in this region of southern Appalachia; when this type of high-grade anthracite is burned, it leaves behind ash tinted with a reddish hue.84 This eponym, moreover, seems both to suggest a traumatic history of industrial mining accidents and a disquieting portent of disastrous coincidences to come.85 Indeed, haunted like the rusted skeletal remains of the iron tipple scaffolding that once conveyed the coal from the dark bowls of the mine into the connected machinery of the railway, the name recalls that catastrophic explosion in the year 1900 that snuffed the lives of 46 miners employed by the Red Ash Coal Company.86

86 In the early 1900’s, extraction technologies such as the electric locomotive and the automatic drill greatly increased the productive capacities of the mining operation. These
As is characteristic of the spatial layout of a mining company town, the church is perched precariously close to a road that winds through the narrow holler, to convey more efficiently convey the human labor power to the dark subterranean face of the coal seam. The gears and belts of the industrial extraction system move out into daily life, impinging upon the domestic space. Across the road lay railway tracks that still service the transportation of coal from a functioning mine at the mouth of the holler. A steep embankment behind the church leads to the recently expanded route 460, connecting Richlands and Grundy, Virginia, with its sharp curves and tiny guardrails that thinly separate the asphalt from precipitous descents into ravines and hollers below.

Advancements in mechanization, however, also produced new potential for explosive accidents within the mine in the form of fine coal dust and the rapid release of methane gas—both of which were highly volatile when released or stirred up within the dark subterranean atmosphere of the mine. For an account of the catastrophic explosion in the Red Ash mine, as well as a history of government regulated safety practices in the bituminous coal extraction industries of West Virginia, see: Rakes, P. H. (2002). Acceptable Casualties: Power, Culture, and History in the West Virginia Coalfields, 1900-1945. Doctoral Dissertation. Dept. of History. Morgantown, West Virginia. My return from the field and commencement of dissertation write-up coincided with yet another explosive coincidence within the mines of West Virginia: 29 miners were instantly killed when a faulty ventilation system in the allowed sufficient methane gas to accumulate and explode. The company that owned the mine, Massey Energy, has a long history of repeated federal safety violations. The politicians of West Virginia continue to turn a blind eye to egregious safety conditions and severe environmental degradation in favor of financial gain for both themselves and the coffers of the state.

The work of Lewis Mumford elaborates on the intimate relations between the artificial environments of the coal mine and everyday modern life “above ground.” Mumford, L. (1934). Technics and Civilization. New York, Harcourt. For another useful account of the psychological impacts created in situations of everyday life oriented and organized around the coal extraction industry, see for instance: Gaventa, J. (1980). Power and Powerlessness:
Inside the church, brightly colored tapestries of The Last Supper, images of Holy Spirit Doves and massive praying hands adorn the walls. The hum of engines that once must have resounded in this space have now been replaced with the fatigued crackling of an air conditioner and the slightly dissonant and static filled whurr of a vintage electric organ.

![Figure 7: Advertisement for the Red Ash Coal Company, circa 1900](image)

What follows is an account of the manufacture of anointed prayer cloths that occurred during one of my several visits to the *Independent Bible Church of God at Red Ash*. This

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*Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley.* Urbana, University of Illinois Press.
particular Monday evening church service was the occasion of a funeral eulogy for the elder
brother of the pastor. Somewhere in his seventies, Pastor Arnold is tall and lanky in stature.
There is a high-pitched hollowness to the timbre of his voice, as if his vocal chords have been
worn thin and his jaw made stiff from so many years of anointed preaching. In this moment of
anointed rhetorical style, the power of the Holy Ghost takes command of the organs of
vocalization and plays them like an instrument. The particular grain of the brother’s voice,
however, does not detract from the poetic force of his preaching, but inflects his rhythmic
delivery with an added intensity.

I’ve got some prayer cloths here,
were gonna pray for here just in a little while.
I think a brother wants one right there, don’t he, Glory to God.
Amen, these prayer cloths,
amen, is bible.
Ah if you want one, ah, to put in your shirt pocket, put in yer wallet’n carry with ye.
Amen, ‘cause we’re gonna anoint’em with oil,
amen, and pray the prayer of faith over’em, amen.
And let that prayer cloth be with ye, amen.
‘Pos-tle Paul, amen, he said, amen, Glory to God,
He cut up his apron strangs, can ya say amen?
He was a tent maker, so he wore an apron.
He cut it up after wearin’ that apron, amen, preachin’.
He sweated on it, the anointin’ got on it, can ya say amen.
And the cloths went out from his body:
And the lame were healed,
The deaf were healed.
The blind were healed, glory to God.
So the prayer cloth, amen, is very important to you,
amen, for safety
Can ya say amen, glory to God,
Up on the highways.
And the Lord knows everybody needs God out thar,
Can ya say amen,
On the highways.

Several minutes after this initial announcement that the congregation was going to “pray for” and “anoint” the prayer cloths, the Pastor’s wife, Sister Eva, reached behind the podium and brought out a translucent plastic bag full of small squares of cloth (roughly three inches by three inches). These squares were cut from mass produced bandanas, bright yellow and orange in color; the jagged cuts that formed the squares left tiny pieces of thread hanging from the side, so that the textile fragment resembled more of a rag or piece of detritus than the soon-to-be receptacle of the Holy Ghost. Several of these cloth fragments were removed from the bag and then “anointed” with an ordinary bottle of vegetable oil that is kept in a wicker basket in front of the podium.

After the *unction* of the scraps, Brother Arnold gripped them tightly in a fist and called the elders of the church to come up and pray. Eight congregation members (six older gentlemen and two older ladies) gathered around Brother Arnold, reaching out their hands to touch the top of Brother Arnold’s fist. As if to focus the diffuse power and potentiality of the Holy Ghost that will be instantiated during the prayer, the congregants’ arms formed a kind of sacred wheel whose spokes met in the hub of the fist gripping the cloths. The techniques of bodily comportment and manual gesture that are associated with the intercessory prayer demarcate a sacred space for the instantiation and focusing of sacred force. These anointed techniques of the body open a space of entry and exit for the healing efficacy of the Holy
The anointing of the scraps can be thought of as a ritual process of *manufacture*: taking quite literally the etymology of the word *manufacture* as the combination of *manus* (hand) and *facere* (to make). Between this sacred technique of manufacture and the force of an object that seems to automatically or mechanically move on its own is a suggestive group of terms mingling manual dexterity with magical secrecy. One thinks, for example, of the wonderfully revealing words *legerdemain* (leger=light, main=hand), *slight-of-hand*, *hanky-panky*, *underhanded*, and *prestidigitation* (presto=quick, digitus=finger). The theme of magical substitution is thus related to the technical notion of a manual “knack,” *habilite*, and adroitness. The prayer cloth itself, also referred to as the prayer handkerchief, or an anointed handkerchief, suggests a logic of hand-kerchiefing: the crafty gestures of the hand and fingers are veiled by a pocket-sized piece of fabric. In the ritual anointing of the prayer cloth, however, the techniques of substitution are ironically inverted: the hand itself veils the cloth in skin during its metamorphosis from rag to sacred devotional cloth. The popular term “anointed handkerchief” thus suggests an element of secrecy and substitution residing within the sacred object.

In this manifold experience of tactility, hands layered upon hands, techniques of manufacture are to be inextricably linked to the oral performance of prayer. Brother Arnold

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The center of this sacred hub of manual gesture as that place where the diffuse potentiality of the Holy Ghost is focused seems reminiscent of the post or stake to which the sacrificial animal is tethered. For an analysis of the demarcation of sacred space and its relation of rites of entry and exit, see: Hubert, H. and M. Mauss (1964). *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*. [Chicago], University of Chicago Press.
begins praying out loud in a forceful voice, and the other *haptically enmeshed* members quickly follow, each praying his or her individual exhortation out loud, at the same time. This cacophonous tangle of voices, this skein prayer, sonically mirrors the tactile experience of the sacred hub of hands. The importunate voice of Brother Arnold at times emerged clearly from this dense atmosphere of noise, as he described several situations “out on the highways” and commanded the prayer cloths to be efficacious apotropaic devices in these circumstances. After the prayer reaches a climax of sonic force, this numinous noise dense with the tangle of language begins to lessen in intensity until all the congregants have ceased praying. In the strikingly quiet moment after the prayer is finished, the Brother opens his hand to reveal the objects that have undergone a miraculous metamorphosis from mere rag to sacred cloth. Through this haptic ritual, prayer itself and the concomitant power of the Holy Ghost that has been invoked through this performance has been instantiated into the physical object—a materialization of the Holy Ghost.

What is particularly revealing in this process of sacred manufacture is that moment during the initial description of the prayer cloth in which Brother Arnold makes a seamless transition from the theme of miraculous healing to that of *safety*. Let us recall the words of Brother Arnold:

> And the cloths went out from his body:
> And the lame were healed.
> The deaf were healed.
> The blind were healed, glory to God.
> So the prayer cloths, amen, is very important to you,
> Amen, for safety,
Can ya say amen, glory to God,  
Up on the highways.

Healing and safety thus occupy similar positions within Brother Arnold’s classification of the types of efficacy inherent in the prayer cloth. Once again, that curious name “Red Ash” seems to resonate with this theme of safety in a particularly compelling way. After all, the word “safety” in this context recalls early mining accident prevention campaigns circa 1900 that were initiated to stem the explosive tide of mining disasters precipitated by increased automation and mechanization in the coal extraction process. During these early (and largely ineffective) campaigns, slogans such as “Safety First!” and “Be Careful!” became the watchwords of the time. Even today, many residents of this region in southern Appalachia still employ the early mining phrase “Be Careful!” as an ominous farewell. Sedimented into this invocation of safety at the Independent Bible Church of God at Red Ash, therefore, is a long history of mechanized coal extraction and the catastrophic dangers associated with this industrial process.

Announcing the themes of automaticity and mechanicity, the equation of safety with the highway, and thus automobility, further solidifies this genealogy. The theme of the automatic acts as a kind of middle term, bringing these two seemingly uncoincidental objects, the prayer cloth, and the automobile, together under one field of gravitation. That the automobile is related to some notion of automaticity seems self-apparent; yet how is the prayer cloth, an object so intimately associated with faith, related to the perhaps more magical associations of the automatic?

Recall the moment during the rite of healing prayer when Brother Arnold can be
overheard commanding the prayer cloths to be efficacious safety devices “out on the highways.” Though early in the service the Brother describes how the congregation will “pray the prayer of faith over’em,” it is as if during the heightened emotional intensity of the prayer, Brother Arnold is speaking incantations into the cloth. In this way, crucial aspects of the process of anointed manufacture of the prayer cloth seem to circulate outside a logic that would otherwise be beholden to the precarious contingencies of the Holy Ghost for the communication of efficacious force. In this moment, the precarious nature of faith and the sacred communicative relay between the sacred and the everyday seems to be short-circuited or circumvented by the *sui generis* force of the Brothers words, *in and of themselves*. It is as if at the very heart of the ritual of anointing resides the spectre of a renegade or traitor who renounces the contract of belief in favor of some more immediate form of power, thus yielding to the compelling force of the automatic.89

Moreover, after the cloth’s metamorphosis from mere rag to sacred object, the curative and evil-repelling efficacy of the fabric circulates freely, unencumbered by any precarious dependence upon the abstracted and autonomous Holy Ghost. Indeed, in what seems to be a classic moment of magical profanation, the autonomous and diffuse power of the Holy Ghost seems to have become instrumentalized into an object that begins to circulate freely in the everyday world. The prayer cloth does not need a communicative link to the sacred, or even

faith for that matter; it carries within its weave a sui generous efficacy un-beholden to the typical or self-apparent demand of faith. Thus the brother’s instructions to “put it in your shirt pocket, put in yer wallet’n carry with ye.” Through the process of prayer and manual gesture, what was once the autonomous force of the sacred, has, quite literally, become portable.

What is important to note is the way this materialization of the spirit carries with it an antinomy or double bind. At one moment, faith seems to reside within a religious subject dependent upon the precarious whims of the divine; while at other moments, it is as if belief itself has been exteriorized, taking on a life of its own within the object. In that moment of anointed objectification, stable notions of human subjectivity become troubled by a constant oscillation between interiority and exteriority, subjectivity and objectivity, magic and religion.

Likewise, this force of attraction manifests itself in the narrative form of testimonies that seem particularly compelled to repeat stories of the miraculous coincidence between the prayer cloth, the body and the machine in the shocking moment of accident. For example, my first encounter with the prayer cloth during fieldwork was through the testimony of a mother whose two young sons and husband emerged miraculously unscathed from the twisted wreckage of a violent automobile accident. After recounting the wreck itself in painstaking detail and marveling at the fact that no injuries were sustained by the members of her family, she revealed that she had placed three prayer cloths in the glove compartment of their automobile.

Like sacrifice, faith in this case finds its most powerful manifestation in a moment of violent coincidence. In this shocking moment, the faith object that had been forgotten,
unremarked or neglected—merely stowed away in the glove compartment—reemerges with unanticipated force and intensity. This is both a moment of revelation and consternation: on the one hand, a newfound faith in the forgotten object: “My God, prayer cloths really work!” on the other, a sense of the efficacious operation of the object totally exterior to any subjective exercise of faith. Thus, that which was used as an apotropaic device to temporarily ward-off the dangerous specter of automaticity ends up reinstating it in unanticipated ways. True, the deadly repercussions of the accidental coincidence seem to have been averted, if only for a moment; yet the force of the automatic not only persists, but seems to manifest a newfound intensity in the compulsion to repeat the shocking events. Like the circulation of a prayer cloth, narrative testimonies take on a life of their own: completed to repeat, almost automatically, the story of the accidental encounter.

With the explosive resonances of Red Ash still ringing in our ears, perhaps it would be appropriate to conclude this exploration with a word of caution. That is, before we safely demarcate these metaphysical subtleties of the materialized Holy Ghost to some otherwise arcane and isolated practice down in southern Appalachia, perhaps it would be useful to recall that over 56% of our nation’s electrical infrastructure is powered by the combustion of coal extracted from regions surrounding the Independent Bible Church of God at Red Ash. Thus, it is quite likely that the very electric bulbs in the room where you are currently reading this page are directly connected to the mine through a massive machine ensemble of belts, tracks and wires. In this way, the illuminated environment that is allowing you to read the words printed on this page is
intimately related to the subterranean darkness of the mine. Perhaps the oft-forgotten or repressed infrastructural organization of everyday life helps to explain that strange and foreboding sense of unease that is aroused the moment the lights flicker. In the contemporary genres of the uncanny, for instance, the unexpected flicker of the electric bulb signals or portents the irruptive presence of the horrible thing into the intimate and homely space of the domestic interior. This classic contemporary moment of the uncanny recalls the spectral logics and explosive coincidences that lie hidden underneath the homely environments of everyday life.

The flicker of the bulb, the sudden twitch in the unnoticed functioning of the electrical infrastructure desublimates, if only for an instant, an awareness of the massive chain of electrical infrastructure that connects the interior of the home directly to the railway tracks inside the mine. In this way, the flicker of the light on that dreary and foreboding night is that vague awareness that yet another explosion has occurred within the mine; and that the miner, transformed into a strange acephalous creature by the percussive force of the explosion, still retains his grip upon the machine. I leave you then, with that compelling Appalachian ‘farewell’ that simultaneously recalls the industrial shocks of the past and portends of disastrous coincidences to come: Be Careful!

Prayer cloth from the Independent Bible Church of God at Red Ash

Materialized Prayer from the Pentecostal-Holiness Church at Schoolhouse Hill

Figure 8: Prayer Cloths
A Faith Cloth anointed by Brother and Sister Allen at the Radio Station

Figure 8b: Prayer Cloths

Excursus

Holy Ghost Bumps

There is a phrase often invoked within the charismatic worship spaces of southern Appalachia that strikes at the heart of the basic experiential character of so-called old time religion: “I want somethin’ I can feel!” And yet, this emphasis on embodied experiences of tactility and kinesthesia is ironically in relation to a presence that cannot be experienced or
enframed through everyday faculties of perception or awareness. This nondescript “somethin’” is the spectral presence of the Holy Ghost that manifests itself in and through the charismatic practitioner’s quickened flesh and augmented perceptual faculties. Perhaps there is no better example of this particular embodiment and registration of the presence of the Holy Ghost than the mark made by the spirit upon the surface of the skin:

**Dorothy:** They ain’t no feelin’ no better’n tha Holy Ghost chills, are they?

**Violet:** Linda said, “Eeew, I feel somethin’!” [Laughter from both women] She knew, when them tongues started rollin’ she started feelin’ it, you know. She knew, said, “Eeew, I feel it.” See, when that genuine tongues comes out, and I tell you what, you feel it too! You can feel it. [Violet Interview, 3/8/09]

Although the Holy Ghost chills are often precipitated through the representational force of images and memory traces evoked during ritual performance, there are certain aspects to the experience of Holy Ghost chills that not only fall outside the enframents of narrative and ritual structure, but seem to register precisely that which persists outside or beyond the particular enframents of perceptual awareness. In this way, the epidermal layer itself seems to be registering a presence that remains inaccessible to conscious layers of sensory awareness. The most forceful experiences of the Holy chill described are those that literally erupt from the

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91 In his famous work, *The Idea of the Holy*, Rudolf Otto describes the uncanny numinous experience of the “creeping flesh.” In the strict sense of the term, Freud’s notion of the uncanny describes an experience of un-placeability that persists in situations of modernity that have ‘surmounted’ older symbolic forms in which the irruption of the sacred could be schematized within discernable classificatory systems and categories of awareness. In the end, therefore, Holy Ghost bumps are not uncanny. Note the ecstatic pleasure in the descriptions—this is not the unplaceable anxiety of the uncanny.
dermal boundaries of the subject outside of contexts of worship such as church, prayer meetings, or gospel broadcasts. Within the profane spaces of the everyday, the chills announce an irruptive presence that moves behind the back of everyday perceptual faculties and structures of awareness. In this moment of sacred chills, the very integument of the subject becomes doubled, at once ‘detecting’ a presence which is intimately proximate and yet somehow outside or exterior to the subject’s normal frames of orientation in the world.92 It is this involuntary or automatic aspect that adds compelling force to the experience of Holy Ghost chills.

**Aldie:** But you asked also ‘bout what inspired Dorothy. She’s told me, an’ her daddy has too, he told me he had watched her, without her knowin’. But she’s told it in the past, how that as a little girl she’d set in the car, an’ watch his arms when he’s drivin’. Watch the chillbumps—ya know how ya get anointin’ sometimes ya get chill bumps on ya—an’ he’d be meditating on what he’s gonna preach or whatever, an’ the chill bumps come on his arms, an’ how she’d set an’ watch. And she told me tha same thang over-tha past, that she used-ta watch’em get tha chill bumps; watch tha par a’God get’ or’em. And ya know, she wanted that feelin’ as just a little small child.

**Dorothy:** [interjecting] That’s what we’re tryin’ ta stress to that people now. Unless you been there an’ know it an’ feel it, you cain’t ‘splain it [explain it], you know, ta people. They’ve got ta get it on their own. But I mean it’s real. It’s real as nowadays as it was in tha bible days.

**Andy:** Ya’ll talkin’ about the anointin’?

**Dorothy:** Yea, the anointing. But people are just so dried up now. I mean, its like they’re too lazy ta move an’ they don’t want ta throw they hands up and praise tha Lord. An’ *he inhabits our praises; he wants our praise.* An’ he don’t want us to be ashamed of it. [Interview, February 10, 2009 Berwind, WV, *my italics*]

92 This ‘somatic awareness’ seems very different from those that provide the recurrent themes in the work of Thomas Csordas.
The anointing, that ritual technique of consecration intimately associated with the rubbing or massaging of oil or other unguents upon the surface of the body, finds its most powerful manifestation upon the dermal surface that itself *secrets* the presence of the sacred.\(^9^3\)

An “altar call” importunately voiced into the studio microphone at the end of a Sunday broadcast from the WGTH radio station also describes this particular flesh of the spirit:

**Burt:** If ya don’t have it fixed up, by all means get ya sins under tha blood.
An’ Brother Mike, we don’t do this just ta miss Hell;
Look at the blessin’s we got outta this.
Ya know I was standin’ over thar awhile ago,
An’ the preacher was sangin’ that song ‘bout “bow down.”
I could feel the Holy Ghost bumps goin’ up-an’-down my spine,
Up-an’-down my arms.
One blessin’ that you get from servin’ the Lord. [July 1, 2007 WGTH]

The Holy Ghost bump is thus a crucial haptic sensation in what I have elsewhere called the “texture of faith.” In fact, the somatic “bumps” of the Holy Ghost seem to be woven into the same experiential surface as the prayer cloth. Recalling the particular sensations of fabric ‘hand’ (associated with the type of thread, density of weave, drape, pliability, etc.) and the scalloped ridges often bordering the anointed fabric, the Holy Ghost bumps are literal embodiments of an otherwise tactile experience of prayer as the hand rubs the fabric between the

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\(^9^3\) In this way, the bumps of the Holy Ghost could be seen as sacred magnifications of the sweat glands themselves. Indeed, on several occasions sister violent has described one of the most forceful anointings as a literal secretion of oil from the palms of the hands. This motif of secretion of holy unction from the body has a long tradition in Catholic veneration of both icons and living saints.
fingers and upon the skin. Rubbing the faith cloth, moreover, not only recalls the feelings associated with the ‘tongues a’rollin” as described by sister Violet, but helps to precipitate, once again, the manifestation of sacred bumps upon the skin. In this ecstatic sensation of Holy Ghost bumps, the very integument of the subject becomes like a prayer cloth, and the dermal surface that once demarcated the boundaries of the subject become the manifestation of a holy texture which persists in spaces radically exterior to the supposed boundaries of the subject. Once again, we have a complex interplay between the texture of the prayer cloth and the movements of the tongue in performances of intercessory prayer and glossolalia.94

In terms of the specific relations between the surface of sacralized fabric and the raised dermal surface of the Holy Ghost chills, the eruption of the presence of the Holy Ghost from the epidermal layer sheds light upon the importance of manifold tactile experiences during the process of anointing and sacred manufacture of the prayer cloth. Recall that the process of consecration of the fabric consists of a tight grip around the cloth remnant which is covered by multiple hands wrapped around, touching or superimposed upon the fist gripping the cloths. This surplus of tactile stimulation in the moment of sacralization mimics the supra-sensory manifestations and haptic capacities of the Holy Ghost bumps.

Like a blind man reading the bumps of language though his fingertips, the Holy Ghost

94 The flapping of the tongue inside the viscous cavity of the mouth is an incredibly tactile experience and cannot be abstracted from the tactile sensations of articulation, especially in contexts of the anointed mouth and tongues that flap under the poer of divine winds. For more on orality and sensations of tactility, see: Steven Connor’s “Edison’s Teeth” in; Erlmann, V. and ebrary Inc. (2004). Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening, and Modernity. Oxford;
makes itself manifest in ridges on the skin for those who do not have eyes to see the presence of the spirit. Yet, the meaning of these somatic bumps is not through a symbolic or representational mode, but in the opening up or breaking of the surface or texture of skin itself. In this way, the Holy Ghost bumps rising from the epidermis are like ellipses upon the surface of the printed page or the somatic equivalent of the percussive clapping made during the performance of ecstatic healing prayer. The sacred bump announces a beak or dissolution of the everyday boundaries of subjectivity and meaning.

As the somatic clap upon the surface of the skin, the Holy Ghost bump signals the point of indistinction between spirit and flesh. Reiterating the force of tactility within charismatic experience, the Holy Ghost enlivens the papillary ridges of the dermis, becoming a supernatural organ or prosthesis of the subject’s ‘natural’ cutaneous sense. Yet this divine sensation of tactility is never fully ‘linked’ or organized with the everyday perceptual capacities, but persists, somehow outside the conscious structures of awareness, while nonetheless announcing a compelling presence of something that lies just beyond the frames or capacities of everyday awareness. In the moment of Holy Ghost bumps, the subject is no longer in their own skin, so to speak, but clothed in the sacred fabric of the spirit.

New York, Berg.
Dorothy: And ya know I got a little great nephew. 
You know that ever-body’s, been on ever prayer board ever-whar, ever-church. 
An’ ya know, last week they was another thang comin’ on his throat that they 
woulda hada took him ta Col-a-rod-a. 
Ta have removed again after havin’ 40 surge-ries.

They called a pastor down North Care-lina. 
An’ he prayed fer J.J. 
An’ he said, “That first prayer didn’t go through; put that baby back on the phone again!” 
An’ he told’em, he said, “Open his mouth.” 
Said, “Look an’ see if it’s gone.” 
An’ they watched it, Francis, rith before their eyes [loud percussive claps] 
They watched that thang—it went away—it went away. 
Whoo-Glory!
Oh we praise-ya mighty God! 
Ya know tha daddy was cryin’. 
An’ my sister had chill bumps all over’er. 
She said it wutin’ but a few minutes-ahh [audible secondary inhalation] 
An’ ya know I’m not makin’ fun in no way, no shape or form, 
I’m just tellin’ you what J.J. did. 
An’ it watin’ but a few minutes, 

Aldie: [interjecting] He’s only six years old.
Dorothy: He’s only six.
An’ said he come through the house an’ he goes, “Whooo-agh, Whooo-agh” 
An’ said his whole body was a’shakin’ and a’tremblin’.
Linda said, “Can you get tha Holy Ghost at that age, an’ that young?” 
I said, you sure can. 

John the Baptist-ah [audible inhalation] 
Before he was ever brought inta this world 
He leaped in his mother’s womb, 
An’ at was with the Holy Ghost-ah. 
An’ ya know tha Lord, there’s nothin’ impossible with God. 
An’ Linda said his whole count ance [countenance] changed-ah. 
As he was goin’ backwards-ah 
Said his daddy grabbed’em, ya know, as he was goin’ out in tha spirit as sure as 
I’m a’standin’ here today. 
An’ I told Linda, I said, “How much more; how much more, 
Is the Lord gonna show ya’ll,
Ta get you involved in tha church an’ tha house of God?!
Ya know that little fella’s workin’ overtime
Tryin’ ta let ya’ll know, there’s a God out thar that loves ya!
That your household needs to be saved today [rapid percussive clapping]
An’ she’s in tha bathtub tryin’ to warsh the chill bumps off.
You cain’t warsh tha par a’God off!
You can not-ah
I don’t care how long-ah
You stay in a tub a’water!
How long you may run or where you may go ta hide,
You cain’t hide from God,
He knows whar you’re at-ahh
An’ he’s gonna know where you’re at on Judgment Day.
An’ you’ll wish you had not-a-run.
You’ll wish you had-a-stayed.
You’ll wish you had-a-prayed.
And ya know, Oh God, I love’em today
An’ I told Francis said, You gonna try ta come to tha program tomorrow?
She said, yes, I’ve got allotta people ta pray about.
She said, we got allotta good thangs to tell about too, don’t we [laughter in the studio]
An’ ya know, it’s good ta be able ta tell about good thangs that God has done
An’ ya know I’m just grateful from tha bottom of my heart
An’ Aldie’s gonna have to say a few words
An’ let me get my breath…
Chapter 3

*Preaching: The Anointed Poetics of Breath*

*The absence of visible persons makes the “radio voice” appear more objective and infallible than a live voice; and the mystery of a machine which can speak may be felt in the atavistic layers of our psychical life.*

Theodor Adorno

*In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.*

Romans 8:27

After the introductory remarks and a series of songs, testimonies and healing prayers, Brother Aldie approaches the microphone stand in the live studio of radio station WGTH to begin his sermon. Before his poetic sermonic style has even commenced, however, a curious sonic phenomenon is registered and translated through the radio apparatus. In preparation for the delivery of the word to the faithful listeners out in radioland, the brother must open his leather-bound bible that is clenched in the teeth of a metal zipper. As his hands slowly and methodically unzip the stained leather covers of the Holy Scriptures in preparation for preaching, the radio microphone clearly registers each unclasping of the metallic teeth as the mechanical slider is slowly pulled down the clenched zipper chain. Registered through the sensitivities of the ear of the studio microphone and voiced through the mouth of the radio loudspeaker, this normally inaudible and unremarked noise is sounded through the apparatus as if it were some
massive machine giving access to a disproportionately large object. The apparatus of radio extends the unaided perceptual faculties, granting aural access to an acoustic unconscious that renders hidden resonances disconcertingly and shockingly present in ways hitherto unheard in the space of worship. Like the magnification of the pores in the skin of a human face seen through the lens of the camera, the microphone/loudspeaker complex renders the metallic teeth of the zipper monstrous, enlarged and amplified to a strikingly disproportionate degree. Before the sacred word is channeled through the voice of the preacher, the apparatus itself seems to voice the word—the material sound of the good book itself. It is as if the mouth of the preacher will begin to repeat what is already moving through the mouth of the radio loudspeaker or public announcement system. With the sacred work open before him, Brother Aldie begins the sermon:

In tha book Ezekiel in tha thirty-seventh chapter, I preached on this allot. But not what tha Lord gave me this mornin’ an’ if he anoints me I’ll preach. If he don’t, I’ll sit down like I always say. Because we realize today that tha word a’God is anointed, this bible right here, the words that’s on the inside, those words are anointed. But if the individual gettin’em out is not anointed we can’t help nobody. Without tha anointing a’God we can not bring these words out; we can hurt people but we can’t help’em. So yall pray that God will anoint me this mornin’ an’ it be his will, that I bring forth anything from these words today…

The “anointing” is a crucial theological motif in the Pentecostal-Holiness sermonic traditions of southern Appalachia. As suggested by the words of Brother Aldie, the anointing connotes a divinely inspired form of speech that is characterized by prosodic elements such as the rapid chanting and sung intonation of words, as well as percussive respirations that punctuate the end of the preached sermonic line. When the anointing “falls” upon the preacher, his or her mouth is literally filled with the power of the Holy Ghost. This power, in turn, grants the orator a
linguistic fluency and bodily comportment that transcends the stylistic boundaries of everyday speech. This chapter explores some of the inspired poetic styles that characterize this region of Appalachia, paying close attention to the relationship between the anointed mouth of the preacher and the mechanical voice of the radio loudspeaker.

Just before Brother Aldie approached the studio microphone to preach, his wife, Sister Dorothy, prayed a special prayer in preparation for his sermonic delivery:

“Jesus God touch Aldie today God. Lord give’em the breath, God, ta bring your word forth today God. Lord help us all Jesus! Oh Yes! Hallelujah, Hallelujah! Praise God [percussive clapping ] Whooo, Glory!...

Sister Dorothy’s prayer is revealing because it suggests the importance of breath within the practice of anointed preaching. Her prayer for anointing could be taken quite literally as a desire for the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. The anointed style of preaching has a specific relation to breath and the practice of breathing. Midway through the sermon, Brother Aldie gives further description of the “anointing”:

I just open my mouth-agh
And usually I’m ‘bout fifteen or twenty words behind what tha Holy Ghost gives me-agh
Ah-praise God.

Characterized by an abrupt exhalation of air at the end of the sermonic line, the practice of anointed breathing is a key poetic element in the performance of preaching. Like the dry bones in the book of Ezekiel, this particular type of respiration forms the skeletal structure upon which the rest of the poetic form is enlivened. Generated through the undulation of the entire upper body, a percussive respiration is evoked through a particular bodily gesture, or what could be
considered a technique of dance that visibly rocks the torso back and forth.\textsuperscript{95} The first moment of respiration is characterized by the convulsive and abrupt tightening of the abdominal muscles. Through a total evacuation of air from the lungs, this abrupt tightening of the diaphragm generates a percussive “grunt.” Although the first time I heard the term “grunt” used to describe this particular charismatic preaching style in Appalachia was while putting up hay with Baptist ministers who inflected the word with a slightly pejorative timbre, I have since heard practitioners of the percussive breath themselves refer to this key prosodic element as a “grunt.” Moreover, there is a special expression associated with his anointed breath as being “grunted in the spirit.” This word evokes the visceral, abrupt and urgent nature of this sound, and is invoked by the anointed practitioners of this sermonic style; therefore I employ the term “grunt” throughout the chapter.\textsuperscript{96}

This sudden constriction of the abdominal muscles draws the chest and head forward, as the shoulders shrug upwards. After this total expenditure of breath through the percussive grunt, the chest is immediately plunged out and upwards. The shoulders as well are shot back

\textsuperscript{95} Of course, I am drawing heavily from Mauss’ famous essay on “Techniques of the Body.” The theme of dance and breath seem crucial to his argument, especially in relation to issues of the sacred. “I had to go back to ancient notions, to the Platonic position on technique, for Plato spoke of a technique of music and in particular a technique of dance, and extend these notions.” Mauss, M. and N. Schlanger (2006). \textit{Techniques, Technology and Civilization}. New York, Durkheim Press/Berghahn Books. p.82

\textsuperscript{96} One aim of this chapter is to compel the reader’s ears to hear the particularly sacred resonances of this guttural grunt.
as the lungs are rapidly filled with air through the second movement or inhalation of this breathing technique. Concomitantly, the head moves upward with the rapid rising of the chest. Upon the secondary inhalation, this respiratory dance of the upper body is also accompanied by visible flexing of the neck muscles.

Demonstrating what Marcel Jousse, founder of orality/literacy studies and student of Marcel Mauss, calls the “laryngo-buccal gesticulation,” the vocalization of the percussive grunt cannot be detached from the techniques of dance that help to generate, and in turn, are generated by it.97 This anointed poetics of breath, therefore, presses close to what many Holiness and Pentecostal preachers in this region refer to as “being danced in the spirit.”98 This technique of danced breath places extreme physical demands upon the body of the inspired orator, and is evinced by the beads of sweat that appear upon the brow of the preacher; here these sacred beads conglomerate, rolling down his face to soak a ring around the collar. By the end of this breath performance, the fatigue generated is evident as the respiratory capacities of the body are stretched to the limit, pushing the lungs of the brink of hyperventilation. After the anointed

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poetics of breath leaves the body, the orator seems literally “out of wind,” as if he or she has just run a footrace or completed an extreme feat of manual labor. With flushed-red face and sweat-bedraggled brow, the exhausted preacher laboriously pants, trying to “catch one’s breath” after the inspiration of the Holy Ghost has departed.

This first forward movement that generates the percussive exhalation can be thought of as the setting of a respiratory “spring.” This convulsive tightening of the abdomen and total evacuation of breath through the grunt builds momentum for the following deep inhalation, which fills the lungs with a standing reserve of wind for the next sung or chanted poetic line. Linguists employ the term “breath-unit” to connote this standing reserve of wind that will be expended in the process of articulation. This grunt not only punctuates the poetic line, sounding out a kind of vocalic marker or aural period, but creates an overall rhythmic structure to the performance. It also can be seen as a strategic technique of breath that enables the deepest inhalation in preparation for the next sung line. Like a bucket thumping the bottom of the well, the momentum of the grunt reaches to the depths of the respiratory organs, allowing the mouth to draw from a deep source of inspiration. The grunt is both a key rhythmic device and a respiratory spring that sets the diaphragm for the following inhalation.

This poetics of breath seems to dramatize the very act of breathing itself. An action, moreover, that usually remains beneath the surface of awareness as one of the body’s autonomic regulatory processes. In this dance of sacred breath, the act of respiration is itself doubled. Like bellows manipulated by hands unseen, the chest cavity heaves with convulsive undulations.
The sound of the breath and its accompanying movements signal to the congregation that the anointing has “fallen” upon the preacher, filling his faculties of vocalization with a rushing mighty wind from some divine elsewhere.99 Gradually moving upward from the belly to announce a tongue that moves on its own, we hear the noise of the diaphragm, lungs, larynx and velum rustling in winds blown from some sacred beyond.

Closely related to the particular grain of voice that is evoked through the percussive grunt, the chanted and rhythmic lines that fill the space between breaths are often characterized by a particularly abrasive or raspy timbre. For many preachers in southern Appalachia, the texture of the anointed voice takes on a rough, almost growling quality. Translating the voice into a tactile mode, the rough timbre of the inspired voice invokes the chips of pocked and rusted iron flaking form the skeletal remains of abandoned mining tipples, the rusted indentations of a machinists’ file and the abrasive surface of tar paper that covers the naked space between pine boards on the small company homes of coal mining towns. There is an intense aggressivity to this grain of voice, as if the anointing force of the Holy Ghost has pushed the musculature and

99 The intertwined relation of sound, breath and possessed tongue is firmly established in the preeminent passage from the second chapter of the book of Acts: And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (King James Version)
viscera of the throat almost to the point of breakdown.\textsuperscript{100}

At strategic points in the sermonic line, this visceral grain of voice is suddenly rendered smooth and flowing through the transition from chant to song.\textsuperscript{101} A particularly striking poetic effect is created when the raspy rhythmic sound of the sermon suddenly soars into intoned sung lines. In these poetic moments, the sermonic words are melded together in an undulating melodic line. For many of the preachers I heard in the space of the radio station and over the airways, the transition from the raspy chanted mode into sung lines announced a new level of affective intensity for both the orator and the congregation. In terms of the overall structure of the delivery, the abrupt and visceral grunt of the percussive breath always continues to mark the end of the sung line, even when the sermon has taken on a particularly melodic and mellifluous character.

As an intermediate form between the growling truculence and sung importunacy of the voice, the chanted words of the sermon find a monotone tonal center that closely resembles the rapid articulations of the southern tobacco or livestock auctioneer. The persistence of this warm monotone of the voice also sets up the listener for a particularly striking effect when a

\textsuperscript{100} My ethnographic exploration of the specific textures of the possessed voice has also been inspired and challenged by another account of the voice of possession that remains within the modulations of everyday speech, see Marilyn Ivy’s “Recalling the Dead On Mount Osore” in: Ivy, M. (1995). \textit{Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan}. Chicago, University of Chicago Press

sung line, elongated “Whoop,” or other sound is suddenly woven into the prosodic line.\textsuperscript{102}

When young or inexperienced preachers from this region mimic the more established poetic techniques of seasoned preachers, the difficulty in acquiring the embodied knack or \textit{habitus} of this poetics of breath is revealed. Some young preachers, for instance, foist shallow grunts at the end of their sentences. Because this superficial grunt does not open a space of breath that prepares for the next chanted line, it clashes with the overall sermonic architecture and actually impedes the rapid rhythmic delivery characteristic of the anointing. When this anointed technique becomes a total poetics of breath, thus establishing the basic architecture of the sermonic form, the percussive force of the grunt becomes off-kilter in the strictest sense of the term. When this deep poetics of breath inspires the preacher, a sense of doubling or displacement emerges between the rhythmic and intoned words of the sermon and the very vocalic-clap that makes way for the next sermonic line. To put this another way, there seems to be a rupture between the force of articulation and the visceral organs of the body which are voicing these words. The percussive grunt, therefore, can be defined as the sound that is produced when the gap between the sacred and the everyday is suddenly closed through a pneumatic gesture.

\textsuperscript{102} See for example the sermon of Brother Pearl further in the chapter, and included in its
The Sacred Belly Laugh

During an interview early in my fieldwork at the Allen’s home in Berwind, West Virginia, Sister Dorothy was showing me pictures taken at the Wilderness Chapel where they once ministered. We flipped through an album of Polaroid photos covered by translucent cellophane sheets as it rested atop a small cigarette-scarred table holding cups of coffee and an ashtray for the consumed remnants of the generic menthols which they so frequently enjoyed. As Sister Dorothy casually turned the pages, narrating the photos of worship and fellowship at the Wilderness, my attention was suddenly arrested by an image of several congregants lying upon the floor. Gathered around these prone worshippers were other church members who radiated an ecstatic visage of joy. They seemed to almost rock from the page in paroxysms of belly laughter. The caption at the bottom of the Polaroid, now slightly sallowed from age, read: “the day the church got the laughing spirit.” After inquiring about the meaning of these ecstatic faces and postures, Sister Dorothy explained that during this singular church meeting, the power of the Holy Ghost fell upon the entire congregation in the form of the “laughing spirit.” This divine power brought with it an uncontrollable self-effacing laughter that also initiated a “fallin’ out in the spirit” wherein several members of the congregation collapsed violently to the floor and lay prone from anywhere to several minutes to several hours.

The inundation of the worship space by the force of the laughing spirit is an extreme example of the importance of laughter within the charismatic worship milieu. Far from being a entirety in the sermonic appendix.
somber and cautious environment, the space of efficacious contact between the sacred and the
everyday is permeated with a playful levity.  This joviality, moreover, seems to complement the
spontaneous, improvisatory nature of charismatic worship styles and theurgical performances.
Throughout the service, the participants are making subtle jokes, telling humorous stories and
kidding with one another.  In fact, there are key moments within this worship context when the
force of laughter and the sacred sounds of ecstatic prayer and other anointed performances
become indistinguishable.

The phenomenon of belly laughter also bares important similarities to other poetic
techniques and performative exclamations within the enthusiastic environment.  For example,
the percussive breath that punctuates the chanted sermon could be seen as an intermediate form
of anointing, or “baptism in the spirit,” *en route* to what some would call a more enraptured form
of divine speech.  As the mighty hand of the Holy Ghost penetrates deeper and deeper into the
organs of vocalization, it reaches the pit of the stomach and begins to pound the diaphragm like a
drum.

In terms of the basic technique of breath, both the percussive grunt and deep laughter
emerge from the recesses of the stomach.  Similarly, in both techniques there is a force of
automaticity at play animating the faculties of respiration through convulsive movements of the
abdominal muscles.  The visual rocking and heaving of the torso of the preacher’s chest during
inspired performance closely resembles that of a belly-laughing congregant.  When the power
reaches ecstatic intensity, the sermon abandons many of its everyday representational vehicles,
yet maintains the percussive skeleton of the poetic form. This percussive architecture includes not only the engastrimythic “agh” or the disjointed punctuations of sacred laughter, but also the anointed flappings of the tongue.

Other enthusiastic techniques of the body are intimately related to the percussive beats of laughter as well. The rapid yet disjointed clapping that accompanies skein prayer and other emotional moments can be seen as a manual technique of sacred communication corresponding to the convulsive flexing of the muscles of the diaphragm—both percussive techniques at once invoke and announce the powerful efficacy of the Holy Ghost. Both the grunt of the preacher and the staccato rhythm of laughter signal that the participant is animated by forces from elsewhere. On the material-visceral level of language itself, these ecstatic beats ‘sound’ the muscles of the lower abdomen, the lining of the throat, the warmth of saliva and the density of the teeth in and of themselves, in a non-representational noise that finds its force outside the everyday structures of symbolic articulation. The tell-tale twitch that signals the classic moment of spirit possession is thus expressed or ‘sounded’ in and through the organs of vocalization.

The testimony of Sister Z who had been recently released from prison precipitated brother Aldie’s telling of this humorous story. As Sister Z testified into the microphone of the live studio, she described her conversion experience, “god dealin’ with’er heart,” while listening to the Jackson Memorial Hour worship service over the radio.104 At the time of her conversion, this sister was incarcerated in a Virginia penitentiary and listened to the charismatic radio broadcast on a small receiver located in a communal recreation area. After her conversion narrative, Sister Dorothy announced that Sister Z, along with several others, would be baptized at Sandy Bottom and invited the radio audience to come and participate. Sandy Bottom is the local name for a popular swimming hole and traditional space for baptizing that is located near a pull-out from a gravel road outside the city limits of Richlands, Virginia. The water in this baptizing hole is about waist deep and shaded by massive oak and walnut trees. The depth of the water allows the presiding preacher and participating elders freedom to forcefully immerse

104 After reviewing the tape of this broadcast several times, I was struck at the eloquence and conversational fluency of Sister Z’s testimony, especially since she claimed to be such a young convert in the Lord. Part of her poetic fluency in this testimonial performance must have been gained from listening to other testimonials over the radio during her years in prison. Besides the force of oral transmission over the radio apparatus, however, Sister Z’s testimonial prowess seems to point to a overarching form of narrative poetics and talk that is practiced in southern Appalachia and elsewhere. The poetic force of the testimonial in southern Appalachia, therefore, could be thought of as sacred “talkin’ on [spiritual] thangs.” Stewart, K. (1996). A Space On the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an "Other" America. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
new converts into the chilly water. After the invitation to the listeners out in radioland, Sister Dorothy said a few more words that seemed to open the space of narrativity around the themes of sacred transformation and the power of the Holy Ghost:

Dorothy: Were prayin’ that God’ll warsh them afflictions right down the river. We’ve seen so many people go in’at water ain’t we. And we seen ‘em come out healed and refreshed and renewed today. When she goes in’er, we know God can.

“Floppin’ Fish”

Aldie: [softly chuckling in his deep voice] Just real fast ‘fore we pray, I thank this is so cute. She’s talkin’ ‘bout goin’ in tha water, n’Dorothy sayin’ we seen so many thangs at tha water. But we saw somethin’ one time at tha water, and I think it is….hilarious myself. But her nephew by marriage came over’n, you know, Zanda’s family I thank’s gonna video of film or take pictures or somethin’ over thar today. But it just so happened her niece-n-nephew come over to see us one Sunday to the radio program, n’his truck broke down’n some of tha guys from tha radio program’n myself went out thar to help’em fix it. Didn’t have the

Because many of the elders of the radio congregation associated with the Jackson Memorial Hour suffer from severe back and hip problems, I was deputized to help with the baptizing. This capacity to participate, however, was only made possible after Aldie and the elder brothers first immersed me in the brisk waters of the river. I vividly recall the shock of the cold water, and the green luminescence of afternoon sunbeams as they passed through the leaves of the giant walnut tree that grew from the riverbank. The shock of immersion into chilly water itself is enough to initiate a radical change in breathing technique. After helping the brothers dunk several initiates, I was struck by the force required to fully immerse the initiates’ body into the flowing water. Within this worship context, it is absolutely necessary that the body be fully immersed in this ritual of symbolic death. Two attempts at immersion, for instance, had to be done over when the initial attempt at dunking did not immerse the body totally under the water. Several of those baptized were also put under multiple times acting as physical “stand-ins” for other congregation members who were absent or too weak/disabled to enter into the river. After the immersion of one middle-aged sister, I heard Brother Aldie exclaim, “Look at the Holy Ghost on her face!” in reference to the raised chill bumps upon the surface of her wet skin. The “Holy Ghost chillbumps” or “bumps” are often referred to when testifying of the visceral and somatic experience of the spirit.
parts, had to get tha parts’n by then, we had to go to church. And we asked’em could he wait ‘til afterwards, n’he said yes. Dorothy said, “there’s somebody ta run tha video; we’ll get this on camera.” [laughing under his breath] So we went out there ta tha riverbank an’ God bless his heart, we love’em dearly. He’s still not saved, but he’d never been in church. He’d never seen, or been around, anybody go out under the par a’God. They was forty-nine, that we put forty-nine times, that we dunked people under’tha water ‘at day—an’at was a perty good little job! [chuckling] But I tell ya what, he got out thar and he started videoin’, an laid that camera down’n got in tha car. An we asked’em afterwards, why? And he told his mother-in-law, my wife’s sister, he said, “they have no compassion fer nobody.” [at this point in the narrative, Aldie’s pace and intensity of delivery quickens, with the sound of the congregation members laughing throughout this second portion of the account] Said, “they was people started goin’ out in’at water,” an said, “started floatin’ down tha water,” said, “Aldie’d run grab’em, and somebody’d hep’em over’n they’d lay’em up on tha bank,” said “they’s flippin’em up’er like ‘ol flippin-fish!” Said, “they didn’t offer no CPR, they didn’t call no 911.” He said, “I got in tha car and closed tha windas’n set there in tha sun.” He said, “now they art’ta have more love about them than that if they gonna be Christians.” But he’d never been around the par of God. I thought that was so cute [laughing]. But ya know today, God still loves’em, and now he has been around the par of God. God’s dealin’ with’em, and I b’lieve one day he will be saved…[at this point the prayer begins].

Within this space of worship, laughter emerges from within the most holy of circumstances: the rite of baptism and the transforming power of the Holy Ghost. Stories such as these not only signal the sacred element inherent in the phenomenon of laughter, but also suggest the immanence of so-called Holy Ghost power to circulate in the everyday lives of the charismatic faithful. More specifically, the loss of agency and the precarious blurring of subjective boundaries that is often the focal point of humorous stories such as the Floppin’ Fish are not characterized by the extreme horror or unease of an un-placeable presence such as the

106 Transcription of live WGTH broadcast, October 12, 2008
epileptic fit described by Freud. These humorous narratives of the spirit point to the playfulness and ease in which these congregations interact with forces of possession, singularity and the miraculous. Once again, this mode of levity and playfulness is the very antithesis of nonchalance or frivolity; it suggests the particular character of practices of divine communication and the efficacious circulation of sacred force within the spaces of the everyday.

Even ritual preparations for healing prayer are interspersed with moments of jocular banter and humorous play:

Aldie: I couldn’t help but laugh a few minutes ago. [chucking] I love my little woman. And we pick at each other. She’s settin’ over there a minute ago on tha piana, n’ she said: “Just a minute now we’re gonna turn little ‘ole Aldie loose.” An I thought, “I’m not tied up I don’t reckon!” [robust congregation laughter] I thought if I looked around see’d if I was chained up’er in tha corner or somethin’. But anyhow we like to pick at each other, and we thank God for this opportunity to be here.

[WGTH, December, 2010]

“A runnin’ in the Spirit”

Aldie: And I’ve never forgot, when we lived, like I said, over’n the valley. I’d stand behind Dorothy—I’ll try to make this short—a bunch of singers, you know, would get around tha piana, and I’s behind’em with my bass. Had a new bass that Dorothy had bought me, collector’s edition: they whatin’ but five of ’em made to begin with. Made by Fender. Loved at guitar. An I’d stand back’er a’playin’ it, n’ tha par-a-God get on me, and I wouldn’t lay my guitar down. I’s afraid it’d get broke or whatever, ya’know. He [George Jackson] told me me, he said, “If-a

107 Brother Aldie’s play on words here recalls another colloquial expression in southern Appalachia in reference to the phenomenon of speaking in tongues. No other phrase seems to render the phenomenon of glossolalia more ‘faithfully’ than the phrase “cuttin’ loose the tongue” or the power of the Holy Ghost “cuttin’ the tongue loose.”
God cain’t take care of that guitar, you don’t need it; throw it down and do what God’d have ya do!” Well tha par’s common’ on me to actually run; I mean my feet be makin’ ninety, an I wouldn’t go no where. I’d brace my feet, ya know; I wouldn’t run. So he told me, he said, “The Lord will chastise you Aldie if you don’t.” So one night I made my mind up, I’m gonna obey tha Lord. That’s why I’m a’goin’ to church to obey tha Lord, not people. And they were all gathered up around Dorothy at one side, right in fronta me, a’ singin’ an old song that you mighta heard before: says “I shall not be moved.” I thank that’s tha name of it. Now they up’er singin’ that, and tha par-a-God hit me and I slung’at collectors edition down and away I went. An so help me, Andy, they parted like tha Red Sea—all ‘cept fer one old lady. She musta been seventy year old: looked like she played for the Pittsburg Steelers. I mean she was real wide-n-narra down, but she was old, you know. An she’s standin’ there with her hands in tha air, a’ singin’ “I shall not be moved.” Well ‘bout time she said “I shall not be moved,” I couldn’t stop, and I knocked her down, jumped’er, went to tha door, her friend grabber’er. She couldn’t move’er. An I hit that door an I come back, an it was like some-un’ had a’holt-a-me, I couldn’t quit runnin’. I come flyin’ back an they drug her up in tha seat—an I felt like dyin’. Really to God I felt like this couldn’t a’ been tha Lord—I done kilt this Lady. But she went out in tha Spirit there, during that period of time, an I didn’t know that then. I’s still young in tha Lord.

So anyhow, they drug’er up in a seat and Brother Jackson began to preach, an he preached a long time. I’s sittin’ thar thankin’, “What am I gonna do!?” She had a lady went to church with’er, and drove’er, or rode with’er rather. Ah, she’s kindly mental I guess, or something, and she had trouble with her speech. An she kep lookin’ at me like, you know, you come toward my friend I’m gonna hurt’ye! But she couldn’t talk plain. And I was bothered so badly, an she finally woke up and her friend helped’er to tha back row, back to tha back seat ‘stead of tha front. An Brother George got through preachin’, he asked her, “Is there any thang you’d like to say for tha Lord?” She said, “Yes” said “Whoo-Honey” she said “Whar I been I cain’t tell ye.” Said “I b’lieve I been by the river Ezekial.” She said, “I don’t know what hit me,” she said, “But I never had such a great feelin’ in all my life.” And for years she started commin’ to tha radio program and our church, a’ beggin’ me to do that again, and I said I couldn’t, I’d hurt you. She’s always beggin’ me ta do it again. I told’er, said I’d hurt you if I did—I didn’t know what I was doin’! But George told me, he said, “Your guitars fine.” It didn’t even knock it outta tune and I slung it down in tha floor. Didn’t even knock it outta tune, didn’t scratch it, nothin’, you know. God knows what he’s doin’. But then, you know, we all got a big laugh—I still laugh when I thank about it.
[Interview 2/10/09]

As evinced by the particular prosodic style of the delivery of this narrative, this next story made its appearance during the course of one of Brother Aldie’s anointed sermons in live studio of radio station 105.5 FM (WGTH), in Richlands, Virginia.

“Heavy Set Woman”

Ah’ praise God but listen ta me [words are drawn out in a visceral growl]
I want ya to know-ahh
I knew a woman one time-ah
It was several years back-ah
Ah’down near Bradshaw-uh
An’I won’t call her name or anything.
She’s dead-n-gone now-uh
Ah’but she was a heavy set woman-ah
Ah’she was huge I guess ya could say
Weight-wise for’er size-ah.
She was real short’n heavy-uh
And she went down ta tha PTL Club-uh [Praise The Lord: The Evangelical empire of Jim Baker]
An’ she went down thar she’d had cancer [drawn out last word]
An’ the doctor said-uh
That she only had a few days left-uh.
An’ she went to church-uh
She was a Christian
An’ she went down to tha PTL Club-ah
Ah’ praise God
An’ she went down’n they prayed fer her-huh
An’ she come back-ah
An’ she went back to tha docter-ah
An’ he searched her-ah
I mean he done ever test-ah
That could be done-ah [Intensity and viscerality of voice beginning to build]
Ah’known to man-ah
An’ he said “Your cancer is gone”-huh
“What happened ta You!?”  [loud clapping and vocal affirmations from congregation]
An’ she said I went down-ah [very visceral growl, importunate timbre of voice]

Ah’ta tha PTL Club-ah
An’ said, “They prayed for me”-ah
An’ I was made whole-ah
An’ he got angry-ah
An’ he said “go back”-uh
An’ hav’em pray ‘bout 300 pound off of ya-ah!

[WGTH April 19, 2009]

Toward the end of this story, a tension builds between the audience’s desire to respond to the humorous features of the narrative on the one hand, and the supreme disapproval at the attitude of the medical professional on the other. This tension seems to add to the compelling force of laughter circulating through the story. Because Pastor Allen was under the power of the anointing while recounting the story, its implications seemed to fall upon the more sedate and disapproving aspects of the acerbic unbelief and caustic consternation of the doctor. However, in several other circumstances, Brother Aldie has told this story with an emphasis upon the humorous side, and with a particularly laugh-inducing effect. Within this particular context, perhaps the force of laughter emerges not at the expense of yet another “heavy set woman,” but the baffled consternation of western biomedical frameworks of understanding in the face of the irruption of the miraculous.

A humorous space of storying on the spirit is opened through Brother Allen’s phrase, “If you ain’t got’em, you can’t feel’em—you’ve left’em!” during a moment of heightened emotional intensity in the broadcast studio. The following account is instructive not only upon the place
of ironic humor within the sacred milieu, but the crucial role visceral, somatic sensations play in the charismatic religious experience. This story accentuates the palpable pneumatic force of the Holy Ghost with a humorous air:

Holy Ghost Lingerin’

Aldie: I’ve never forgot, one night we stopped to pick Walter’n’Dixie up ta take’em to church. An’ I asked’er, could I got to tha bathroom. An’ I went in thar and tha chillbumps come, n’tha par-a-God eat me up. [with guttural gusto] An’ I said, “Somebody been in this bathroom a’prayin’!” [Congregation laughter] They went ta laughin’. Dixie told me later said, “It was my prayer room Aldie, it’s my prayer room.” [energetic voice] Well she just left that prayer room, ‘cause she shore left the Lord, an’ tha presence right behind. But ya know the presence a’God is with us no matter whar we at. You may leave the church today, but tha presence a’God will not leave instantly. He’ll hang around… [opens space for another story] [Nov 15, 2009]

An indissociable technique of breath and emotional state, laughter circulates within the space of worship in ways similar to the quickening power of the Holy Ghost through the anointed poetics of preaching, ecstatic vocalizations and glossolalia. The force of narrativity and the concomitant compulsion to re-tell opened through the associative chain of meaning moves through the congregation like the contagious force of the sacred. Just as poetics of anointed breath facilitate the accumulation of emotional intensity among the congregation members, the humorous narrative opens the space for the contagious breath of laughter. When the rocking breath of laughter irrupts within the space of charismatic worship, the force of
automaticity has already begun to make its appearance.\textsuperscript{108}

\textit{The Story of the Smile}

And then Brother Henry got a good doctor’s report.  
He says somebody got a prayer through fer him. 
So let’s give tha lord a great big hand, Hallelujah [sound of hand clapping]  
The lord surely is a’movin’.  
He surely is a’workin’.
You know ‘fore I finish givin’-in the prayer requests,  
I seen this lady on T.V., an’ it was called extraordinary healin’s.  
She was settin’ on tha couch an’ she was readin’.  
I don’t know if she was readin’ her bible or what she was readin’.
But this big dog was there, an’ it was a friendly lookin’ dog.  
And he didn’t mean to, but he jumped up on tha couch an when he did, he took out part-a-her lip.  
‘Cause his tooth came down on it, ya know.
An’ they said that they was gonna have ta do nineteen surgeries on her.
An’ she said, “No.”  
She said, “I’ll have one.”  
An’ he said, “I wanna show you.”
Said, “They’s gonna glue her lip, what they did put back on, to her gum.”  
An’ she’d never open her mouth, you know, and then she would never smile again.
She’d never smile again.
An’ she said, her smile, “She loved her smile because she was a preacher.”
An’ she said, “Lord I just cain’t do this.”
She said, “I’m a preacher.”
An’ she said, “I don’t want your nineteen surgeries.”
And he said, “Well, just look at my book.”
An’ she said, “No.”
She said, “I’ve got my book that I look at.”
She said, “I look at tha bible.”
She said, “I look at tha bible.”
She said, “I trust in tha bible.”

She said, “I trust in thar lord.”
She said, “I went home an’ I put ever pitcher I could find that I had a smile on my face.”
She said, “I put it up on thar wall.”
An’ ever time I walked by those pitchers I said, “Lord I’m gonna smile again.”
[audible breath]
“You gonna fix me an’ I’m not gonna have ta have all those surge-ries—ahh”
An’ she went ta her church at’night an [audible breath]
Oh you could tell those people was believin’ with ever-thang they had in’em.
An’ they was prayin’ [audible inhalation]
An’ she turned her back, she said, “You go ahead an’ look at me.”
She said, “’Cause this is fer my first surge-rie—an’ it’ll be my last.”
An’ she said, “An’ it don’t look good.”
She said, “But God’s gonna touch me.”
An’ after they prayed an’ she turned her back ta tha people like this an [audible breath]
She raised her hands and she kept ast-in’ God ta heal’er.
An’ when she turned back around,
That bruise was gone.
That bloody look was gone.
She was back.
An’ she had a smile.
I mean she smiled like you Betty!*  [Visceral Laughter]
She was smilin’ like crazy!
An’ you know, God can do any-thang if we allow him to…

*[Betty is a member of the studio congregation. At this moment, Sister Dorothy lets out a burst of laughter so intense that it inundates the sensitive capacities of the microphone and is translated through the loudspeaker as a fuzz or grain outlining the percussive force of her laughter]

This story not only provides further evidence as to the centrality and compelling force of laughter within the charismatic space of worship, it performatively reveals important elements of narrative structure within the testimony. The particularities of this form, in turn, helps to invoke laughter and other emotional experiences. The affective force that is unleashed through the poetics of testimony is, of course, not made possible through the mere recounting of the “informational” aspects of a T.V. show. The force generated through the particular structure of
narrativity characteristic of the testimony is in this poetic form’s ability to perform the event itself, or bring the listener into the gravitation of storied events.  The story of the miraculous smile does not merely recount the narrative form of the television program; the elements of the story are creatively recombined and performed to enable a specific experience or effect.  In this way, the poetic force of the testimony and its very narrative structure is not so much about re-presentation, as it is about performatively instantiating a specific emotional experience of faith and the miraculous.

Often the appearance of the testimonial seems to be characterized by a sudden irruption into the worship context.  Associative chains sometimes trigger the retelling of a faith-story.  While in other instances, the storyteller seems abruptly moved by divine inspiration to testify.  This divinely-inspired process of narration seems to be suggested just before the opening of the story on the miraculous smile:

        The lord surely is a’movin’.
        He surely is a’workin’.
        You know ‘fore I finish givin’-in the prayer requests…

A compulsion to enact the narrative seems to interrupt the normal course of events, placing a kind of call or demand on both the storyteller and the audience.  The gravitational pull of narrativity is already organizing the worship milieu through the particular force of language.

        Typical of this narrative poetics, the testimony describes in vivid detail the visceral elements of the story.  Through a specific technique of storying, the imagination
of the listener is focused upon a lip dangling from the mouth, and a slow-motion shot of a massive canine tooth sinking into the ruddy surface of the lower lip. In a surrealist montage the listener hears of glue and gums and the benumbed sagging gape of a dumb mouth. This narrative close-up on the visceral details of a body “got down” creates a sense of empathy for the sick and opens a space of vulnerability in the listener by cultivating a heightened awareness of the fragility and precarious boundaries of the fleshly body.109

After generating this sense of urgent empathy with the listener, the testimonial often stages a dialogue between the ‘patient’ or protagonist of the story and a representative of the western biomedical tradition. Heavy with power dynamics, the miraculous potentiality of the Holy Ghost opens a space of “back talk” to bureaucratic conceptual frameworks and biomedical conceptions of health and disease. As we also heard in the story of the “heavy set woman,” the doctor makes implicit commentary upon the faith of the protagonist with a tone of condescension that is literally performed through the vocalizations of the storyteller. In these testimonials of faith, the figure of the doctor becomes the caricature of educated unbelief and rigid bureaucracy. This gesture of unbelief on the part of the medial bureaucrat, however, is always met with an obstinately defiant call of faith and openness to the irruptive potential of the miraculous.

At this point in the testimony, the force of narrativity has built so much momentum that a subtle poetics of breath begins to emerge. The tone of Sister Dorothy’s voice has now gained an importunate quality, and she begins to make clearly audible inhalations at the end of select testimonial lines. There is often an arbitrary line of demarcation between the performance of the testimony and the anointed poetics of preaching. This intensity of tone and breath coincides with a mounting sense of tension and expectancy within the listening audience. The narrative technique of testifyin’ instantiates the experience of the listener into the movements of the story. Or to put this another way, the poetic structure forges an experiential link between the characters in the testimony and the listening audience. Through this performative intertwining of audience and story, the listener no longer hears the account as a distanced or abstracted observer, but is actually brought into the storied events:

An’ she went to her church at’night an [audible breath]
Oh you could tell those people was believin’ with ever-thang they had in’em.
An’ hey was prayin’ [audible inhalation]

As this moment in the progression of the faith narrative, it is not some abstracted church that has mobilized “ever-thang they [got] in’em” to help instantiate the miraculous power, but the listening audience itself that experiences a kind of self-referential account of their own experience within the experiential force of the story. The story becomes a mirror image through which the audience is able to recognize faith on a basic experiential level. Through this performance, a palpable expectancy is released, and is thus a performative enactment of faith in

Press.
and through the temporal articulation of the narrative. Through the storied performance of a healing prayer, the tense expectancy of the audience is released through the image of a smile that unleashes the visceral laughter of the storyteller. And through the temporal articulations of the narrative we are able, if only for a moment, to fill that silent space of the gaping mouth, with laughter.

*The Anointed Laughter of Sister Julie*

On the level of the techniques of breath, there is a similarity between the percussive exhalations that mark the end of the sermonic line and the belly laugh. The sermonic style of Sister Julie, one of the most performatively gifted preachers I have heard in southern Appalachia, demonstrates this structural homology. One of the hallmarks of Sister Julie’s sermonic style is a chanted, rhythmic form that periodically breaks into rising intonations of sung and elongated words. Juxtaposed with the chanted monotony of her voice which occasionally reaches such a low and extremely guttural timbre as to totally shed any feminine vocal marker, the smooth weaving-together of intoned sung words creates a particularly striking poetic effect within the overall sermonic structure. As the emotional intensity of her sermon increases, the chanted monotone and accompanying hyperventilated grunt punctuating the line yields to a deeper form of breath that opens the performance onto sung phrases that rise and fall in intonation. Sister Julie’s audience is well-aware that the emergence of sung lines from the
monotonous chant signals a deeper anointing; as she breaks into song the studio audience acknowledges this performative power with vociferous affirmations: “Yes Lord!” “Amen.” “Whoooo!”.

During sequences of heightened charisma, the visceral punctuations of the percussive grunt give way to what I can only describe as brief moments of low, guttural laughter. In this moment of sacred respiration, the percussive grunt and the guttural laugh seem at times only distinguishable by the break or silent pause that briefly separates them. Laughter is a kind of repeated grunt followed by a deep and more pronounced inhalation in preparation for the delivery of the next sermonic line. Indeed, this laughter seems to throw the loose rhythmic structure of the poetic form off kilter—if only for an instant. There is a brief slippage or interruption, like the skipping of a phonograph, between the immediate coincidence of the mouth of the preacher and the anointing power of the Holy Ghost:

Oh Glory to the Lamb of God
Lord is callin’ you today
Ah’ get back in
Ah’it’s not too late yet-ahh
Ah’ get back in,
I’m callin’ my children today back in
Well Glory ta tha lamb of God
He’s callin-ah
Oh-ah
Heed to his call today

Heed to his call
Well-Glory-ah
Hallelujah
I know it mighta been a-long time [rough, guttural monotone]
Ago-ah
An’ that you-huh
Ah’ been outta church-ah
Well now is tha time-ah
Oh its ready-ah
Time is ready fer ye ta go back-ahh [visceral, guttural]
Hallelujah do yer first works over
Well Glory to tha lamb of God-ah   [forceful intensity in following lines]
Hal-le-lu-jah
An’ because-ah
An’ God is biddin’ today-ah
Oh God is biddin’ today-ah
Well glory-ha-ha [brief interruption of laughter followed by clearly audible and forceful
inhalation]
Well glory to tha Lamb a’God-ah
An’blessed be tha name of tha Lord-ah [like chat of an auctioneer]
Ah’ let me tell you God will not fail you-ha-ha
     [sung line, followed by pronounced inhalation]
Hallelujah to tha Lamb-ah
He’s a faithful God-ha-ha
He’ll stand by in his word before’em his word-hah
Oh you don’t have to worry ‘bout God-ha-ha
Because he’ll be here on time-ah
Hallelujah ……?-ah
When we face some thangs-ah
An’ we think he might be too late but let me tell ya
He’ll come through on time for ya [brief pause before commencing next cycle]
Hallelujah to tha lamb-ah
Oh glory-ah
I know God’s speakin’ today-ah [allusion to anointed speech]
Hallelujah to tha Lamb
I had no idea I’s gonna say these thangs-ah
But oh glory-ah
…

An’they’re good preacher’s everywhar-ah
A’misterin’ tha word-ah
If people will only heed-ah
An’ get in that word and study tha word-ah
So you’ll not be deceived-ah
Oh glory ta tha Lamb a’God-ah
Hallelujah
Why I say unto you-ah
That none of these men which were bidden shall taste of my supper-ah
Well it already-ah
Time-ah
Had given tha last opportunity-ah
An’glory to them back then that praise tha Lord-ha-ha-ha [massive breath]
Well glory tha door was open-ha-he
Through Jesus when he died-ah
Well Glory ta tha Lamb a’God
An’ it’s fer ever’body
It’s for the Jews-ah
It’s fer the Gentile
It’s fer all tha prophets-ah
Oh its fer ever’body today-ah
Heed to his word today-ah
An’ come forth-ah
An’ in him-ah
An’ glory to tha Lamb110

Sister June’s Bulldog Preachin’

With her long grey hair pulled tightly back in a ponytail, Sister June Sweeny’s outward appearance seems to mirror the timbre and grain of her voice: austere, strict and slightly foreboding. Like Sister Julie, Sister June is among the most poetically gifted preachers who have weekly programs on radio station WGTH in Richlands, Virginia. Unlike many of the other worship broadcasts, however, Sister June rarely has a studio audience, other than the

110 See appendix for this particular sermon transcript in its entirety.
grandchildren whom she often watches during her 30 minutes of preaching on Saturday afternoon: “I got my grandson with me, he’s almost two years old, an’ I’m kindly keepin’ an eye on him. So praise the Lord, you pray for me today.”¹¹¹ The presence of Sister June’s grandchildren in the live studio is often registered by the microphone as their little voices mimic her singing and talk amongst each other. Once again, the presence of young children, along with the periodic disruption and vocal intrusions into the sermon that they cause, attest to the informal environment of many of the live preaching broadcasts. During the sermon that is included in this section, for instance, Sister June’s two year old grandson can be overheard making an abrupt “thumping” noise in the background, followed by piercing cries of distress. The child presumably fell and hit his head, and thus cries loudly for several minutes. Though this incident took place during a crucial emotional section of the sermonic form, Sister June’s poetic performance barely misses a beat, despite the fact that she does stray from the microphone for a moment to presumably make sure that no serious harm has befallen the child.

Despite the subtle harshness and stringency in the grain of Sister June’s voice, there is an attraction to the character of her speech; her voice is like the hard oak handle of a tool polished smooth by years of contact with the grip and sweat of the hand whose burnished surface beckons hands to touch its surface one again. During her anointed preaching, this stark sincerity becomes more pronounced and at times breaks into the harsh raspy timbre that is characteristic

¹¹¹ The citations from Sister June’s sermons are all taken from various recordings of her live, in-studio preaching at radio station WGTH. Though I have actually been present in person within the radio station studio to hear Sister June’s preaching, these particular recordings were
of other sermonic styles in this area. And although Sister June’s sermonic line is often punctuated by the poetics of the anointed grunt, what seems to differentiate her style from the others is her seamless fusion of passages from the King James Bible with stories, colloquialisms and words that characterize everyday modes of talk in southern Appalachia.

A poetic force is released through Sister June’s particular linguistic capacity to fuse the mellifluous style of the King James Bible with motifs and turns of phrase from everyday life in southern Appalachia. There are times within her sermonic delivery when it is difficult to recognize the biblical passages and phrases, so seamlessly are they woven into the fabric of the sermonic form. This poetic charismata to weave together different forms also points to a prodigious mnemonic capacity that is opened through the anointed sermonic technique of gesture, breath and story. Her capacity to recall countless biblical passages with such fluidity and ease, as well as to seamlessly patch them into the overall sermonic structure is so strong that the listener often does not even realize in the immediacy of the anointed performance that they have just heard a biblical verse.

Enlivening the sermon to make concepts such as sin, gossip, and hatred resonate with palpable force, her anointed poetics melds the flowering prose of the King James version with striking everyday images that grab hold of the listener:

So if you in Jesus,
You’re in a safe haven today.
If you in Jesus,
You in tha arc of safety.

taped on a cassette player from the radio.
If you’re in Jesus you got a hedge built up around you [intense vocalization]
I read over’n the Old Bible whar he said,
He’d take down the hedge an’ let tha devil in.
Let me tell you honey,
You keep prayin’ and standin’ fer Jesus,
An’ he’ll keep’at hedge built up around’ye.
Glory to God.
You take a big pond a’water,
Glory ta God,
If its got a little bitty crack in it,
Or a little small needle-hole in it,
At water’ll go ta seepin’ through thar.
   An’ after-awhile it keep drippin’-drippin’-drippin’,
After-awhile it’ll have a little spew about it.
[vocal intensity quickly building] After-awhile it’ll gush open and be a’runnin’
   ever-whars—ahh
That’s tha same way, praise God,
You let sin get in your life a little bit,
After-awhile—ahh [audible inhalation]
It’ll take aholt!
Glory ta God—ahh
It’ll be worser than a bulldog aholt on ya!
And won’t turn-a-lose of ya!
Glory ta God.
[in a voice of markedly gentler and softer tone] It’ll clamp down that sin will.\(^{112}\)

The heart of tha wise teaches his mouth-huh
And addeth learning to his lips, praise God-huh
Honey we gotta learn ta keep our tongue under control-huh
An say God-huh
Ah you put me on, I’ve often said this—
Put me on that potters wheel-huh
An turn it an turn it-huh
An make me ta what you’d hav-me-ta-be-huh
Ah glory to God, praise tha Lord-huh
He said pleasant words are as a honeycomb-huh

\(^{112}\) This sermon was recorded off the radio, March 21\(^{st}\), 2009 from the 2:00pm broadcast
originating from radio station 105.5 FM, WGTH, Richlands, Virginia.
Ah’ sweet ta tha soul-hah
An’ health to tha bones [hand clap]
Praise God-huh

... An ungodly man digeth up evil-huh
An’ his lips thar is as a burnin’ far, praise tha Lord-huh
Honey that old tongue is a deadly thang-huh
Ah glory ta God, praise tha Lord-huh
An you get out here-huh [commotion in background, child falls and begins screaming loudly]
In tha summertime you get a rattlesnake or a copperhead bites you
Ah’ praise tha Lord-huh
An’ glory ta God, ah’praise God
If you don’t go to tha doctor an’ get help-huh
Ah’ praise God-huh
Ah’ you’ll die-hah
An that’s the same way with that old lyin’ tongue-huh
Hit ‘s-as-poison-as-a-rattlesnake-bite-huh
Ah glory ta God it’s out thar a’tryin’ ta stir up strife-huh
An’ hurtfulness’n’trouble-huh
Ah’ glory ta God, praise tha Lord-huh
Hits all-time tryin’ ta do somethin’ mean-hah
A’tattlin’ on people tellin’ lies-hah
A’talkin’ ‘bout somebody-huh
A’praise God-huh

These arresting images of the everyday seem constantly on the verge of suffusion with a recurrent theme in Sister June’s preaching, what she sometimes refers to as the “Holy Ghost’n’far” [far=fire]. More often, however, this force is referred to through a unique pronunciation of the everyday term power: par. This par circulates in the world like some diffuse potentiality or efficacious potential, ready to be instantiated into the operations of the everyday. This theme of par, even when not explicitly mentioned, metaphorically and physically saturates the worship milieu:
Because Jesus has more par than the devil has.
That ole devil’s got allot a’par, don’t get me wrong.
They’s sa-many people lettin’em have it.
Ah’ glory ta God.
People that used to walk upright before God and live good fer tha Lord—huh
They’ve turned thar par right over to him—ahh
Ah glory ta God,
They right back out in sin doin’ tha thangs of tha devil-ahh
Ah praise God, an that give him more par—hah
Ah praise tha Lord—ahh [Begins buildin in forceful intensity]
Ah but I’m servin’ one, glory ta God [Full visceral force, begins beating podium in rhythm]
I don’t care if you backslide today on Jesus—ahh
He still retains his par—ahh
He never loses no par—ahh
He’s still got the same par, praise God
[soft, intimate voice] But that ole devil just has what par you give’em.
An I’m glad today, that we don’t have to depend on a God, that his par is limited.
Because all par is given unta Jesus in heaven and in earth.
And he give his par unta us—ahh
Ah glory ta God, if we’ll serve him and walk in tha way that he has fer us ta go.

Prayer and its accompanying techniques of manual gesture help to instantiate this diffuse heterogeneous potentiality of Holy Ghost par:

Almighty God reach down and send forth your divine healin’ par—ahh
We know God, they’s nothin’ too big that you cain’t take care of it—ahh
Ah’ today dear God—ahh
Ah Lord we ast ya ta move an’ touch each and ever-one Lord—ahh
That’s in need of prayer out thar in radioland, maybe got their hand—ahh
Upon the radio by a point-a-contact—ahh
Ah’ touch’em today Jesus, and heal their bodies today—ahh
Anoint us today ta speak what you’d have us ta speak—ahh
An we’ll not fail ta give you the praise for it all—ahh
In Jesus wonderful name we do pray,
An amen, an amen.
This percussive technique of anointed breath resonates with a tradition of work songs and chants used primarily by black labor crews in railroad related industries such as timber extraction and coal mining. These section crews, eponymously known as “Gandy dancers” from the Gandy Manufacturing Company that fabricated the mauls, pry bars, rail-dogs and other tools necessary for railroad track maintenance, were responsible for re-aligning sections of railway track after it was displaced by the massive weight of the passing coal trains. This task, known as lining track, required the coordinated movement of many laborers in order to move the entire track ensemble, which consisted of wooden cross ties, gravel and steel rails, back into alignment. Failure to synchronize the laborers’ movements would not only result in the inability to move the massive weighty rail ensemble, but could result in severe injury such as the crushing of limbs under the weight of massive wooden crossties and long sections of steel railing.

Each maintenance crew had a “strawboss” who would sing or chant calls that were crafted to facilitate the rhythmic demands of the specific task of railway work at hand. The special track lining calls, for example, synchronized each crewmember’s exertion of force upon the twenty-pound steel pry bars used to move the tracks. With all the pry bars pulling in unison, enough force was mustered to move the entire track ensemble back into alignment. The task of track lining required a special technique of the body in which the feet and arms were moved in rhythmic coordination with the steel bar to facilitate the heaving of the track back into place. This manifold of bodies and objects, in turn, was organized and actuated in and through the force of song. This concomitant movement of body, tool and track was often actuated through the percussive “hah” or other abrupt exhalations at the end of the rhythmic song phrase. This “dance,” or technique of the body was inextricably linked to the tool-rail complex.

“Coordination and timing of each man’s exertion was critical. One member of the gang, the caller, synchronized the group’s physical movements with his voice, ensuring safety and pacing, while *spiritually uplifting* the men at their work.”\(^{114}\)

The following is an excerpt from a Gandy dancing song that was “called” by the strawboss:

[Singing] I don’t know but I believe I will,
Make my home in Jacksonville.
Oh boys, throw it over—henh!
Oh boys, throw it over-henh! (p.5)

Another example of the coordination of physical labor through chant and percussive breath can be heard in the well-known recordings made by Alan and John A. Lomax in the penitentiary work farms of Tennessee. The song “Katy Left Memphis,” for instance, is a collection of stanzas taken from several work songs that coordinated the swinging of axes or the moving of heavy railway hardware during forced labor operations in southern penitential systems.115 Once again, the end of the poetic line is punctuated with a percussive exhalation of air that closely resembles that sonic emanation from the anointed mouth of many preachers in southern Appalachia. This breath, moreover, is simultaneously inflected with the chopping sound of the axe “bit” as it bites into the truck of the tree. In this moment of coordinated movement, it is as if the deep exhalation of air at the end of the line “sounds” the swinging of the tool—as if to sing the tools movement—‘hah,’ as it cuts through the air. As one retired section crewman describes it, the song enlivens the movement of the tool:

So Gandy dancing goes in with the music. That’s the way it’s been since way back. In the beginning of the railroad, you had to line it up. That’s where the gandy dances come in. And you even Gandy dance behing a maul. Even spiking, you make the spike maul talk; you sing to it. Like when you’re driving a spike down” (Holtzberg, p. 4).

Here again, what I want to emphasize is the way that the percussive end-line demarcation of

breath seems to orchestrate or enliven a coincidence of bodily technique, tool movement and percussive chop. In this moment, breath and tool are inextricably linked, as if the sound of air is produced by the tool itself. Take for instance, the singing of “Katy Left Memphis” by the Parchman Farm inmate nicknamed “Crosseye”:

Arkansas city did not—\textit{hah}
A’have but ten \textit{hah}
A’have but ten boys \textit{hah} [the percussive “hah” of this line also coincides with the sound of a wood-chip flying from the tree trunk and striking Lomax’s microphone]
I have but ten (whoo) \textit{hah}

Arkansas city did not—\textit{hah}
Have but ten \textit{hah}

A’little Joy said fourty—\textit{hah}
Well tha Katy was made \textit{hah}
A’little Joy said fourty—\textit{hah}
Well tha Katy was made \textit{hah}

Arkansas city gonna—\textit{hah}
A’be her train \textit{hah}
Arkansas city gonna—\textit{hah}
A’be her train \textit{hah}.

Oh Rosie—\textit{hah}
Oh Gal (whoo) \textit{hah}
Oh Rosie—\textit{hah}
An’ a ho-Lord Gal \textit{hah}

The boats in the bayou turnin’—\textit{hah}
Well-a ‘round’n’round
The boats in tha bayou turnin’—\textit{hah}
Well a’round’n’round \textit{hah}

The drive wheel knockin’ Ala-\textit{hah}
Well’a-bama bound (whoo) \textit{hah}
The drive wheel knockin’Ala-\textit{hah}
Well’a’bama bound hah

You go-ta Memphis don’t you--hah
Well ya act no whore hah
A’you go ta Memphis don’t you--hah
Well ya act no whore hah

A’buy you a-ticket n’catch tha—hah
Well tha yellow dog (whoo) hah
I buy you a ticket n’catch the hah
Well’a yella dog hah

Oh---Rosie hah
An’a oh girl (whoo) hah
Oh Rosie hah
An’a oh-Lord girl hah

The organizing force of song under labor conditions of extreme duress recalls Marcel
Mauss’ 1934 lecture to the French Psychology Society on “Techniques of the Body.” At a

crucial point in his talk, Mauss describes the “remarkable feats of hunting endurance” displayed
through an Aboriginal hunter’s ability to outrun kangaroos, emus, and wild dogs (82).

Continuing his description, Mauss says:

One of these running rituals, observed a hundred years ago, is that of the hunt for
the dingo or wild dog among the tribes near Adelaide. The hunter constantly
shouts the following formula:

volume 2. The last portion of the liner notes to this particular selection read: “The train
reference may indicate a late-nineteenth century origin for this song, as countless black
convicts were leased by the state to perform dangerous railroad work at that time.” To listen
to this track go to: http://amso.alexanderstreet.com/View/377666, track #14.
Strike (him, i.e. the dingo) with the tuft of the eagle feathers (used in initiation, etc.)
Strike (him) with the girdle
Strike (him) with the string round the head
Strike (him) with the blood of circumcision
Strike (him) with the blood of the arm
Strike (him) with menstrual blood
Strike him to sleep, etc.¹¹⁷

Through this example, Mauss proposes that ritual breathing techniques open a particular
space of “confidence” and “psychological momentum” (84). Ritual techniques of respiration
emerging from the performance of song seem to propel the human body into extraordinary feats
of endurance, granting access to prodigious reserves of power.¹¹⁸ Moreover, Mauss concludes
his lecture with yet another gesture to the relation between ritual efficacy and techniques of
breath. Citing Marcel Granet’s work on China and the respiratory rhythms associated with
Taoism, he elaborates on the interrelations between “breath technique” and “mystical states”


¹¹⁸ Interesting both in its invocation of the prodigious psycho-physical capacities instantiated through song and its political implications in the United States, Mauss also includes in this section a wonderful description of Native American endurance: “Running. Position of the feet, position of the arms, breathing, running magic, endurance. In Washington I saw the chief of the Fire Fraternity of the Hopi Indians who had arrived with four of his men to protest against the prohibition of the use of certain alcoholic liquors in their ceremonies. He was certainly the best runner in the world. He had run 250 miles without stopping. Henri Hubert, who had seen them, compared them physically with Japanese athletes. The same Indian was an incomparable dancer” (p. 89).
Proceeding with his call for continued psycho-technical exploration of these ritual forms of breath he evocatively states: “I think there are necessarily biological means for entering into ‘communication with God’.

Although in the end breath technique, etc., is only the basic aspect in India and China, I believe this technique is much more widespread” (93).

The phenomenon of Gandy dancing provides fruitful terrain to give further consideration to Mauss’ interest in the ‘confusion’ between techniques of the body, ritual forms of breath and exterior objects. Because Gandy dancing seem to perpetually tack between sacred calls invoking religious motifs and other calls heavy with sexual innuendo, as if to constantly hop between both sides of the track—it seems always on the boundary of ritual efficacy, not only because of its close association with automaticity, but because of its sustenance and relation to older forms of work calls and spirituals.

In fact, the calls of the Gandy dancers not only


120  If another excursus were to be added to Wolfgang Schivelbuschs’ work, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century*, perhaps it would explore the phenomenon of Gandy dancing. The vast “machine ensemble” of the railroad is literally kept on track, aligned, by a song that coordinates movements of bodies and implements. The boiler-breath of steam as it blew from the whistle and percussively huffed from the pressure valves just as the drive-wheels began to pull the machine out of the station was made possible through the rhythmic breath of the black sections crews who aligned portions of track through the organizing force of the *hah* at the end of the sung line. Small wonder, therefore, that the
invoke biblical motifs and phrases from spirituals, but the practice of calling itself has been
generally described as a form of preaching. For example, in a description of the mental and
physical fatigue associated with track lining, one retired railroad crewman states:

Yea, they done give out already! When you sing, that make them uplifted. So the fella’ asked me, “how do you feel when you’re singing?” I say, “I feel alright and they feels alright. And that make the job go easy.” That’s the way that was. You got to have somebody to preach to ‘em. That old man told me to talk my Latin. (Holtzberg, p. 4, my italics)

Other firsthand accounts from the Gandy dancers themselves attest to the relation between the form of the railway chant and religious performance. Speaking of the singing prowess of a long-time railway strawboss he knows, Cal Taylor, a retired railway man from Mississippi, says:

And he got a voice too. And he’s the man that trained mighty near all the men that’s on these bridge gangs and trained em how to keep from getting caught with a piece of timber. He can preach to a piece of timber. Just like the sermons you hear, he can

history of American folk music seems not only saturated with metaphors of this mechanized transportation, but resonates on a deep level with the sound of the whistle and rhythm of locomotion as it is mimed through the harmonica, pounded on the guitar-box and channeled through the voice. In addition, does not the rhythmic technique of the Gandy dancer seem to run parallel to the concepts of traumatic shock, repression and other forces of automaticity cauterized upon the modern perceptual faculties? The synchronized and coordinated rhythm generated through the work song is a forceful work technique not only to muster the tremendous force necessary to move the entire track assemblage, but to accomplish this feat in a state of distraction or displacement from the immediacies of the harsh reality of forced labor. When an adaptation of spiritual song and preaching style is sung in order “to get the worker’s mind off work,” are we not already en route to notions of ritual automaticity pressing upon the religious or the magical? And like the scalded hand of the engineer who holds fast to the throttle of the machine even in death, the deep form of distraction generated through the rhythmic form of breath that characterizes the work chant demonstrates yet another manifestation of the forces of attraction between repetition in the field of ritual and the mechanical movements of the train’s drive wheel.
preach to ‘em.\(^{121}\)

In addition to the structural similarities between the rhythmic breath techniques of the Gandy dancer and the anointed respirations of the preaching style that characterizes the anointed poetics of southern Appalachia, the labor history of the southern railroad and its associated industries of timber production and bituminous coal extraction suggest significant points of communication between poor whites in southern Appalachia and black laborers from the flatlands and coastal regions North Carolina, Virginia, Georgia, Tennessee, South Carolina and Alabama. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, large numbers of black workers were recruited by the railway and mining industries—often employing recruiting practices that were not only dishonest but often violent.\(^{122}\) Poor whites in Appalachia would have had close interaction with southern black laborers in the mines, timber operations and railway infrastructures that were heavily exploiting the region of southern Appalachia for its natural resources. Although more historical work is needed at this point, it is plausible that the technology of the railroad is intimately linked to the spread of certain sermonic styles among


predominately white religious communities within the mountains of southern Appalachia.  

Brother Pearl’s Preaching

Although Brother Raymond Pearl’s preaching style stands out as particularly gifted, even among the numerous ministers who preach to the microphone in the live studios of radio station WGTH in Richlands, Virginia, the introductory remarks of his sermons seem somehow impeded. More specifically, this imposition is characterized by shallow, clipped breaths and a quivering tone of voice that falters somewhat, as if the Brother were suffering from the subtle tremors of weakness or disease. Once again, the sensitivities of the artificial ear (microphone) reveal acoustic intimacies unregistered by our natural capacities of audition. This slight tremble in his voice and the sound of superficial respirations seems to suggest that this is the voice of an elderly Brother. This shallowness and fragility in the character of Brother Pearl’s voice, however, quickly gives way to robust and forceful articulations sustained by the deep inhalations of the anointed technique of breath.  

\[123\] Of course, the fervent and enthusiastic revivals of the early nineteenth century in this region of Appalachia must have also played a significant role in the oral transmission of the chanted sermonic form. My emphasis on the importance of the railway helps to account for the regional specificity and resilience of this performative practice in southern Appalachia, as well as to suggest new ways to theorize the poetic and affective import of the percussive breath. At this point, more historical research is needed. This historical aspect of this sacred breathing technique is part of an ongoing project into the origins and spread of the anointed grunt.
Several stylistic elements come together in the poetic form of Brother Pearl’s anointed performance. Once his sermon has gained momentum, for example, the intonation of his voice finds a “tonal center” and remains in this intense monotone while he rhythmically chants out the words given to him by the spirit. As the poetic inspiration falls upon him, the colorful intonations of each word cede their place to the demands of metricality and rapid pronunciation. The droning effect created by this chanted monotone is reinforced by the repetitive use of words such as “Amen” to introduce the next chanted line. This type of chanted monotone, which is a recurrent prosodic element in sermonic styles throughout southern Appalachia and beyond, bears a striking sonic resemblance to the chanted performances heard in tobacco and livestock auction houses throughout the American South. Indeed, several scholars have proposed that the specific prosodic styles of southern auctioneers—a unique combination of monotone chant and occasional intoned words—emerged out of a southern tobacco tradition of auction that placed the ‘spirituals’ of southern slaves in close proximity to the English tradition of chanted bids.124

As is characteristic of many of the preaching styles in southern Appalachia, the end of the sermonic line is punctuated by the percussive grunt. Brother Pearl’s technique of breath at the end of the chanted line is particularly interesting, however, because the second movement of this technique, the rapid inhalation of air, is not only clearly audible, but it often creates a rasping or wheezing noise. At certain times during the delivery, this secondary sound of inhalation is equally as percussive and pronounced as the initial exhaled grunt described at the beginning of

this chapter. In this case, each movement of the anointed breath-dance—the forward thrusting inhalation and the backward pushing inhalation—corresponds to clearly audible and percussive breaths. This raspy secondary inhalation only becomes audible and particularly pronounced once Brother Pearl’s sermon has reached its zenith of emotional intensity; in these moments his breath technique achieves its deepest and most regulated respirations.

When he has fallen into the breath-groove, the radio listener becomes intimately attuned and aware of his respiratory cycles. And though there is a loose rhythmic form to his percussive breaths, there is something always eerily mechanical, jerky or somehow off-kilter about the sound of his breath through the loudspeaker. Once again, the technical capacities of the radio apparatus seem to amplify the presence of the spirit, enabling the listener to literally hear the force of the Holy Ghost as it kneads the lungs of the orator like a bellows. To the ears of the listener, the microphone reveals an auditory close-up of the sacred pneumatic gesture, as if the ear of the listening faithful has entered inside the anointed mouth of the preacher.

Through this repetitive structure of multiple “Amens,” the ear of the listener is lulled by the monotonous warmth of the chanted sermonic line. Yet this rhythmic warmth of the chanted line is periodically interrupted by another distinctive mark of Pearl’s poetic style, the sudden explosive intonation of “Whoop(!)Hal-le-lu-yer-ahh”:

Amen because the bible said to let ever-man-ahh
Amen work out his own soul’s salvation-ahh
Amen with fear and with trem-ble-ahh
Amen they’s commin’ a day friend-ahh

141-149.
Amen your gonna stand up before’em-ahh
Amen praise the Lord and the books are gonna be opened-ahh
*Whoop-Hal-le-lu-yr-ahh!*

Requiring one breath unit, or a total expenditure of air in the lungs to voice the line, this phrase reveals how a single word is stretched, cut and reformed in the process of anointed poetics to both accommodate the demands of rhythmic cadence and announce the presence of the Holy Ghost. A recurrent poetic motif in the chanted sermons of this region, this coupling of warmed chanted sections with the sudden appearance of intoned sounds or words, adds particular poetic intensity and affect to the sermonic performance. Like the marked pronunciation of the word power (*par*) when referring to the force of the Holy Ghost, Brother Pearl pronounces the prayer formula “hallelujah” within a particular emphasis upon the end of the word (yer). This particular pronunciation of the “jah” seems to prepare the way for the corresponding end-line percussive exhalation of air (yer-ahh). To put this another way, an everyday pronunciation of the “jah” would create a slight impediment to the explosive force of the percussive “agh.” At the end of Brother Pearl’s sermon, when the poetic inspiration has flown and he has once again taken up his everyday conversational style, he gives a standard pronunciation to this word of praise: “May God bless you ‘till the next time, honey. Stay in church friend. Pray. Seek the face of God. Hallelujah.”

At other points in the sermon, the chanted line is interspersed with a kind of routinized tongue, or glossolalia, that seems to announce a deeper level of poetic inspiration. I employ the

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125 See appendix for complete transcript of Brother Perl’s sermon.
term “routilized” because this appearance of tongues does not derail the sermonic progression or throw it off kilter. Moreover, this phrase of tongue speech often has a set pronunciation that is occasionally repeated during the sermon.

Amen but when the books are open-ahh
I’ve had people to tell me well-ahh
I’m gonna stand there and I’m gonna argee-ahh
Amen with God, this is just how silly-ahh
Amen some people is-ahh
Amen praise the Lord whoop-hal-le-lu-ler-ahh
Amen but I believe today friend-ahh
Amen when the book of life is opened-ahh
Amen when ya stand before the Lord of Lords-ahh
Hak-cod-da-ee-oh-sai-ahh

After many months listening to the voice of Brother Pearl over the radio and through tape recordings of his radio sermons, I was repeatedly impressed by his forceful anointed poetics and deep techniques of breath. Yet it was not until I visited his home church outside of Raven,

126 In his seminal work on the chanted folk sermon, Bruce Rosenberg terms phrases such as Brother Pearl’s “Whoop-hal-le-lu-ler-ahh” as “stall formulas” that function as a sonic space holders. These stall formulas supposedly occupy the audience while giving space to the preacher to compose the next sermonic line. Yet if we take the numerous personal accounts of the preachers themselves describing the experience of anointed preaching seriously, its seems that Rosenberg’s (and the entire Perry-Lord tradition of formulaic composition to which his work responds) analysis of the stall formula is too cognitive and instrumental. Taking into account the particular temporal lag described by preachers such as Brother Aldie between the articulations of the anointed mouth and the conscious awareness of meaning “in the mind,” could we not begin to propose a theory of formulaic composition that sees the techniques of pneumatic gesture inherent in recurrent phrases such as the “Whoop-hal-le-lu-ler-ahh” as memnotechnics that themselves grant access to surfaces of memory and poetic force not located within the space of conscious linguistic modes of articulation?  Rosenberg, B. A. (1970). The Art of the American Folk Preacher. New York, Oxford University Press.
Virginia, that I understood the implications of those faltering, shallow breaths that were clearly audible during the early moments of his sermon. Can you imagine my amazement and newfound appreciation for the force of the inspired poetics of breath when I realized that the elderly man, at least in his early 80’s, hunched over on the front pew of the church visibly struggling for air, was Brother Pearl. His mouth, whose space had been filled many times with remarkable force and poetic capacity, was now covered by the translucent plastic cup of an oxygen mask attached to a large metal cylinder mounted on a small hand truck. In that moment of visual recognition, I was unable to reconcile the compelling force of Brother Pearl’s anointed voice with the fragile old man laboring for breath in the front pew.

Like the prodigious force generated through the chanted songs of the Gandy dancers, Brother Pearl’s preaching testifies to the tremendous psycho-physiological momentum released through the percussive technique of breath. Through this pneumatic gesture, the intertwining of bodily movement, song, and breath grants access to mnemonic surfaces and linguistic-formulaic capacities inaccessible to the everyday faculties of awareness and embodiment. Deep down in the pit of the stomach, an elementary form of religious life announces itself with a guttural, percussive clap whose noise signals that the gap between the sacred and the everyday has been unbroken. In this dance of pneumatic gesture, the force of the sacred presses close upon the domain of psychotechnics. And thus, we are left once again with

127 Upon editing this section on Brother Pearl’s anointed poetics of breath, I realized that my account had replicated the narrative testimonial form often performed in southern Appalachia to recount appearances of the miraculous.
the sounds of Marcel Mauss’ concluding remarks during his lecture on techniques of the body lingering like an auditory after-image: “I think that there are necessarily biological means of entering into communication with God” (93).

A particular force of attraction resonates between the history of Pentecostal worship practices and the radio apparatus. The emergence of Pentecostalism in the early twentieth century was saturated in metaphors and practices organized around enraptured tongues and possessed mouths quickened by the divine power of the Holy Ghost. In fact, the manifestation of tongues is, according to the majority of commentators on the history of this movement, the preeminent practice and theological doctrine. Just as the rap-tap-tappings of the American Spiritualist movement embodied a particular affinity to the communicative technology of the mid nineteenth century, the anointed mouths of Pentecostalism seemed to find a particularly compelling voice through the mouth of the radio loudspeaker. Through a kind of mechanical translation, the mouth of the radio loudspeaker mimicked the anointed organs of vocalization so


129 Of course, the early history of Pentecostalism does not display a direct technological coincidence, as with Spiritualism and the telegraph; however, the general Pentecostal spirit emerging in 1906 seemed to speak prophetic words upon the coming of radio, and all its explosive religious potential, in the near future to come. For a description of some of the early charismatic figures of radio, see: Hangen, Tona J. 2002. *Redeeming the Dial: Radio, Religion, and Popular Culture in America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
characteristic of Pentecostalism. 130

At the same time, the figure of the radio loudspeaker, animated by forces from elsewhere, not only provided a means to think about possessions of the Holy Ghost, but the mechanical apparatus itself enlivened the anointed Pentecostal mouth producing amplifications and other special effects specific to its radiophony. The apparatus of radio, translating experience through the loudspeaker (receiver) in what Arnheim describes as experiential “blindness,” provided the listener an intimate aural close-up with the anointed mouth. 131 Through the sensitivities of the radio microphone, the listener heard the anointed articulations of the preacher in striking new ways. The radio apparatus translated the experience of a congregation member sitting in the front pew of an enthusiastic sermon, feeling the fine droplets of saliva shot from the mouth of the anointed orator. Through the sensitivities of the microphone-loudspeaker complex, it was as if the distanced radio auditor were inside the aural cavity of the preacher, inundated by the minute sounds of vocalization: the clicks, smacks and pops of the lips, the moist flapping in


131 In a section of his book on radio entitled “In Praise of Blindness: Emancipation from the Body,” Arnheim describes useful aspects of radio “relay”: “It is true that it [everyday radio relays of current events] hardly makes an entirely satisfactory impression, but at least it conveys distant happenings to the listener by the most direct method conceivable to-day, that is to say, it artificially cuts out slices of reality, by this isolation making them the object of special attention, sharpening acoustic powers of observation and drawing the listener’s attention to the expression and content of much that he ordinarily passes by with deaf ears”
the tongue, the visceral wheeze of inhalation, and the gush of saliva.\textsuperscript{132} The apparatus of radio focuses in upon the “acoustic grain” of the anointed voice, translating its inspired force in particularly moving ways.

Returning to Brother Aldie’s sermon on the story of the dry bones in the desert, which were enlivened through the force of divine wind and prophetic words, it seems as if the preaching has ended prematurely. The Brother claims that the power of poetic inspiration has been quenched and that the performative force of divine breath has been withheld:

\textbf{Aldie}: An’ I told ya if anointin’ come I’d preach, an if it didn’t I wont. Well guess what, the anointin’ ain’t come, an I ain’t gonna preach.” [in a very low, soft voice, almost a whisper, disconsolate] I’m not gonna bust myself open. God knows all thangs.\textsuperscript{133} [Aldie begins closing bible]

Once again, through the mouth of the radio loudspeaker the listener hears the slow methodical sound of the metallic teeth of Aldie’s leather bound bible gnashing together as the sacred word is closed. And though Brother Aldie claims that the power of the Holy Ghost did not fall upon his faculties of vocalization this particular Sunday afternoon, one does wonder if the sensitive capacities of the radio apparatus were able to register and amplify a presence that

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Arnheim, Rudolf, 1972 (1936) \textit{Radio: An Art of Sound}. New York: Da Cappo Press. P.140-141.\textsuperscript{132} Indeed, I experienced this insufflation of anointed spittle several times while sitting in the front pews of church revivals in southern Appalachia.

\textsuperscript{133} Recorded from live studio broadcast WGTH, Richlands, Virginia; February, 8th, 2009. Pastors in southern Appalachia often employ visceral pulmonary metaphors to describe the act of preaching. Take for instance another phrase of Brother Aldie: “They’re preachers out there today bustin’ their lungs open-ahh/Preachin’ tha true word a’God... (WGTH, January, 2011)
was running through the mouth of the preacher, yet was unable to be heard in the space of the studio.
Both branches of magic, the homeopathic and the contagious, may conveniently be comprehended under the general name of Sympathetic Magic, since both assume that things act on each other at a distance through a secret sympathy, the impulse being transmitted from one to the other by means of what we may conceive as a kind of invisible ether, not unlike that which is postulated by modern science for a precisely similar purpose, namely, to explain how things can physically affect each other through a space which appears to be empty.

(Sir James Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 1890)

Man has, as it were, become a kind of *prosthetic* God. When he puts on all his auxiliary organs he is truly magnificent, but those organs have not grown on to him and they still give him much trouble at times.

(Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 1930)

In the last chapter, we saw how the open mouth of the preacher, that hollow cavity of linguistic potentiality is filled with the inspired words of the Holy Ghost. “Open wide your mouth and I will fill it,” says the popular passage from the book of Psalms (81:10). At the same time, however, there is always the precarious potential that this gaping mouth will remain empty, the tongue held fast in the clutches of silence. As we heard in the closing words of Brother Aldie, there are times when the anointing power of the spirit will not make itself manifest in the organs of vocalization. Prayer, yet another instance of efficacious words, is also beholden to the precarious contingencies of the gap between the sacred and the everyday.\(^{134}\)

\(^{134}\) Once again, Max Muller’s etymological analysis of the word *prayer* and its intimate link with the term *precarious* suggests the gap, or potential for communicative breakdown, at the
many practitioners of intercessory healing prayer in southern Appalachia, the force of divine communication is often encumbered by demonic blockages, the inertia of unbelief, and the precarious hearing capacities of the divine ear.

During the rite of healing prayer, a preeminent performance among many Holiness-Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Independent-Baptist churches in southern Appalachia, one theurgical technique is repeatedly invoked to help mitigate the precarious contingencies inherent in this gap. Literally a physical substitution of one body for another, the practice of “standin’-in” during the performance of healing prayer connotes the utilization of the body of a congregation member who is present, to act as a kind of proxy representative for the sick patient who is not physically present in the immediacy of the worship space. When the actual imposition of hands upon the sick patient is not physically possible within the space of worship, the stand-in supplements this absence and the healing rite of laying on of hands proceeds with another physical conduit. The term “stand-in” is a shortened version of the phrase “to stand in the gap.” Within the space of the live studio, for example, this process of embodied substitution is often invoked:

Dorothy: [Speaking the prayer requests into the studio microphone]
We wanna remember Brother Henry today, he’s not feelin’ well. And he’s been a real trooper, you know, he’s been a real soldier for the Lord. An’ the Devil’s tryin’ ta knock’em down’n keep’em down.

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I’ve had so many people tell us, that when Brother Henry laid his hands up-on ‘em,
You know, he got a prayer through on their behalf.
He had the faith, you know.
He stood there in the gap, you know.
An’ we miss’em this mornin’.

The stand-in, therefore, has a doubled function: it provides a physical supplement or substitute for an absent body, while simultaneously providing a material conduit for the communication of divine healing power to the sick patient. The stand-in prefigures a doubled distance between the sick patient and the healing efficacy of the Holy Ghost. In this way, the stand-in acts as a kind of miraculous transmitter, translating healing virtue from the sacred elsewhere to ameliorate the bodily suffering in the spaces of the everyday.135

A recent recording from a live in-studio worship service at radio station WGTH in Richlands, Virginia, offers an example of the practice of “standin’-in.” This particular instance of physical substitution occurred early in the broadcast during preparations for the ritual of healing prayer.

**Brother Aldie:** I’m gonna ask Landis if he’d stand-in for my cousin, Ursul Blankenchip. He had five bypasses less than a year ago. He had a hip replacement, and they put the ball in—they put it in one end too small. And now they gotta do the complete hip. And they can’t do that ‘till March because they said it had to be a year after the bypass before they would ‘tempt it. But I’m goin’ tell ya somethin’ ‘bout this man real fast; not tryin’ to give him no honor’n’glory—it all goes to the Lord.

He was actually on T.V. a few years back.
He had a blood clot in a’arteries, and the arteries was too small.
Said they never seen arteries that small on a man.
They didn’t have a stint small enough to go in it.
And on T.V. some preachers come in prayed for him and God moved.
They said, “you’ll have to be back in two years an’ we’ll have to do open heart surgery.”
He said, “Well they was wrong, it’s thirteen years later. I did have to go back, but its
thirteen years later.”
And they did five bypasses but they had to take his heart outta his body and lay it up on
his chest ta get to the one they had to fix.
So now he’s in bad shape with his hip.
He’s still movin’ around goin’, goin’ to church.
Went to church last night and I thank he’s gonna be listenin’ this mornin’ on the way to
church if he’s able to go.
But anyhow, I told’em we’d pray for’em.
He said, “Aldie I’d ‘preciate that.”
He said, “If them people just call my name before the Lord I’d appreciate it.”
He’s got the faith, and that’s what the bible said.
He said if you got the faith, by your faith you shall be made whole.
By your faith, not by mine, not by yours.
But he also said if two or three would touch and agree askin’ the father anything in my
name it shall be done.
That’s what the Lord said.
Eh I’ll tell ya, if he b’lieves it, if we b’lieve it, God said it, then why cain’t it happen!
It can if we will believe.
So we’re gonna lay hands on Brother Landis, ‘cause Brother Landis has had hip surgery
here two weeks ago, I guess it was.
Two weeks tomorrow.
And he’s with us today, and disappointed ‘cause he couldn’t be here last Sunday,
but he was in church with us Thursday night.
But He’s gonna stand-in for my cousin.
I wonna ask you’s people out in radioland to help us out.
If ya don’t b’lieve, don’t pray.
You’re wastin’ your time and ours too.
But if ya do b’lieve then lift your hands and pray with us and be parta this program.  

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136  Tape Recording of “The Jackson Memorial Hour” radio broadcast, 105.5 WGTH, Richlands, Virginia (Sunday, December 12, 2010).
With the ritual stand-in in place, the congregation commences with the practice of enthusiastic communal prayer, which I have elsewhere termed skein prayer because of the entangled nature of the sound. The vivacious practice of all the congregants praying individual prayers out loud is also accompanied by rapid disjointed clapping, cries and other vocalizations, as well as singing. Produced is a cacophony of noise believed by the congregants to be one of the most efficacious theurgical techniques to span the gap and “get a prayer through” to the divine ear. Just before the skein prayer gathers enough sonic momentum to render all meaningful articulations indiscernable to human ears, Brother Aldie is overheard giving final instructions to Ursul, who is about to hear the sacred force of communal prayer though the loudspeakers of his automobile radio:

**Aldie:** Ursul if you’re listenin’ lay ya hands on the radio, b’lievin’ for your miracle.

At this point, skein prayer commences in earnest: its sacred noise resonating through the radio loudspeaker for several minutes until it gradually loses momentum and abruptly ends. The stand-in, however, whose sensitivities to the efficacy of the prayer seem to be amplified in this intermediary position between the patient and the divine, senses a communicative breakdown in the healing prayer. As the communal prayer begins to decreases in intensity, the stand-in suddenly claims that the prayer has not “gone through”:

**Landis:** Let’s do that again.
Let’s do that again.
Dorothy, Dorothy, let’s do that again.
Let’s do that again, they was a big block somewhere.
We gotta get that block outta here.
[Beginning the healing prayer once more] Oh Jesus, Lord.
Jesus in your name, Lord, Jesus we come to ya Lord.
Lord in your holy sweet name…[force of skein prayer inundates the words of Brother Landis]

Not to be deterred by the perceived failure of the first cycle of prayer, the congregation commences a second attempt at healing prayer, this time with even greater sonic force, intensity and boisterous noise.

As suggested by this instance of healing prayer, the practice of standin’-in substitutes another body to literally stand in the space of an absent and distanced recipient of healing power. This theurgial practice of substitution, however, does not proceed at random, placing merely any person within this space of the gap. The specific decision to use Brother Landis as the stand-in for this intercessory healing suggests the potential to enliven through prayer certain sympathetic resonances between distant bodies. Through a mimetic or imitative association, Brother Landis is the most propitious stand-in because he has recently undergone a total hip replacement surgery. In an ironic way, therefore, the visceral process of hip replacement seems to thematize the substitutionary practice of standin’-in as an efficacious technique of healing prayer.

The theme of the prosthetic, moreover, announces several overarching experiences of displacement at work in this technique of divine communication. On the level of human sensory capacities, for example, this cycle of healing prayer anticipates the simultaneous extension and voicing of the prayer somewhere else, so that the distanced patient could possibly experience the prayer on his behalf in and through the technological extensions of the radio apparatus. To further mitigate the precariousness of prayer, not only is Brother Landis used as
a stand-in, but the absent Ursul is instructed to make tactile contact with the automobile radio to facilitate the miraculous transmission of healing force. The technical capacities of the radio apparatus, just like a prosthetic organ, enable a particular sensory experience of divine communication. Ursul can literally feel the distant prayer through his hands. Though the studio congregation is unable to lay hands upon Ursul’s dis-jointed artificial hip-socket, the technical prosthetic of the loudspeaker allows Ursul to make tactile contact with the distant voices of the prayer warriors. In yet another bodily and sensory substitution, the artificial organ of the voice (radio apparatus) translates and extends a manual experience of tactility across a distance. Recalling the fact that the mouth itself is a massive organ of touch, the crucial charismatic practice of laying on of hands is extended through the mouth of the radio loudspeaker.137 Like the organ of circulation taken outside the natural boundaries of the body, the naked capacities of the ear are ‘armed’ and extended with the sensitivities of the microphone and the amplifications of the loudspeaker.

Just as surgical replacement of bodily organs opens to the possibility of a disjointed fit or slippage—in this case a maladjusted ball socket necessitates a total hip replacement—the manifold substitutionary layers during the performance of healing prayer at times fail to successfully span the gap between the Holy-Ghostin’Par and the exigencies of the everyday. Brother Landis, whose sympathetic resonance with Ursul seems to grant the charismatic capacity to detect or

discern the communicative success of the prayer, senses a “big block somewhere” that has prevented the prayer from reaching both its divine destination and the ailing body of the patient. Sometimes during the end of a prayer cycle, when the inundating noise of skein prayer decrescendos to a brief though forceful silence, one of the practitioners within the skein prayer will exclaim, “That prayer didn’t go through!” and the congregation will perform the communal prayer once again with more importunate intensity.

This precarious potential for communication breakdown in the performance of healing prayer demands material conduits and embodied techniques to help buttress the unsteady contingencies of divine communication. Yet it is precisely in this performative moment when faith, like a clogged artery, seems to be bypassed by practices of material substitution and supplementation, that an overt insistence upon the necessity and primary force of faith is invoked. Despite the panoply of embodied techniques and physical conduits that “stand-in” the precarious contingencies that beset messages voiced to the divine ear, the overt narration of healing prayer quickly reasserts the primacy of faith in the performance of divine communication. At certain moments, therefore, it seems as if the practice of faith alone grants access to healing efficacy:

He’s got the faith, and that’s what the bible said.  
He said if you got the faith, by your faith you shall be made whole.  
By your faith, not by mine, not by yours.  
…  
Eh I’ll tell ya, if he b’lieves it, if we b’lieve it, God said it, then why cain’t it happen!  
It can if we will believe.
I wanna ask you’s people out in radioland to help us out.
If ya don’t b’lieve, don’t pray.
You’re wastin’ your time and ours too.
But if ya do b’lieve then lift your hands and pray with us and be parta this program.

This performance of healing prayer marks the constant oscillation between visceral detail and material substitutes on the one hand, and explicit calls for the performance of an internalized, spiritual, and intellectualized faith or belief on the other. At the crucial moment during the healing prayer, however, when Ursul is instructed to perform the rite of manual imposition upon the radio, the two seemingly discrete and mutually exclusive moments almost collapse into one another:

**Aldie:** Ursul if you’re listenin’ lay ya hands on the radio, b’lievin’ for your miracle.

At the point where the efficacious healing power of the Holy Ghost is unleashed, manual gestures of tactility and the intellectualized performance of belief become almost indistinguishable.

The song “A Meeting In the Air” is often sung during the communal practice of healing prayer:

Well there is going to be a meeting in the air
In the sweet, sweet by and by
Oh I am going to meet you, meet you over there
In that home beyond the sky
Such singing you will hear, never heard by mortal ear
Twill be glorious I do declare
And God’s own Son will be the Leading one
At that meeting in the air
You have heard of little Moses in that bulrush
You have heard of fearless David and his sling
You have heard the story told of dreaming Joseph
And of Jonah and the whale you often sing
There are many, many others in the Bible
I should like to meet them all I do declare
By an by the Lord will surely let us meet them
At that meeting in the air

[Repeat first verse]

Many things will be there be missing in that meeting
For the mourners bench will have no place at all
There will never be a sermon preached to sinners
For the sinner has refused to heed the call
There will be no mourning over wayward loved ones
There will be no lonely nights of pleading prayer
All our burdens and our anguish will be lifted
At that meeting in the air [At this point in the performance, a wave of ecstatic emotion almost completely derails the song]

[Repeat first verse]

Aldie: Gonna be a meeting in the air, you gonna be there? [loud congregational exhortations fill the background]
Jesus make it possible we could all be there.
He said it wasn’t his will, that any should perish.
But that we all come to repentance.
An’ I’ll tell ya today its allot better felt than told
Its allot better felt than told today
He’s a good God, he’s here today.  [at this point, Aldie’s voice is almost inundated by the enthusiastic sounds in the background: Glory! Whoo! Yes Lord!]
We thank God for all of yens.
All of yens got us tuned-in.
An’ I hope you’re feelin’ what were feelin’.
Sister Donna said lift your hands, praise the Lord.
[vehement and guttural voice] Let’em have his way with ya!

Dorothy:  Ya’ll come on up and lay hands on Landis for that man who just fell. Hallelujah, Glory.
This is fer Donna’s husband. [As Dorothy leaves the mic, she is overheard organizing the upcoming prayer. Donna preaches in the live studio during the airtime slot just before the Jackson Memorial Broadcast of Brother Aldie and Sister Dorothy]

**Aldie:** Ever-body in radioland lay ya hands on tha radio real fast.
We’re gonna lay hands on Landis in behalf of Donna’s husband,
He fell here a minute ago in tha studio,
Ah, that he’ll be alright.
Lay hands on’em [*in a voice of clear and emphatic command*]
[Skeiń prayer begins….]

These examples of the practice of standin’-in suggest a basic characteristic of the healing prayer performance. The ‘spirit’ of the prayer is its improvisatory form, a kind of off-the-cuff spontaneity and resourcefulness in regard to the exigencies of the situation at hand. In this way, whatever elements or resources at hand are utilized to help instantiate the healing power of the Holy Ghost. Like a remnant of cloth taken from one context and used to patch the hole worn in a miner’s coverall’s, the practice of standin’-in recalls Stewart’s description of “foolin’ with thangs”: a creative process whereby disparate or unanticipated elements are combined to form an ensemble that meets the needs of everyday necessity.¹³⁸

Thus, a healing prayer is precipitated by an accidental occurrence within the space of the radio station. Shortly after the accident, the prayer warriors are organized around the sympathetic substitute (Brother Landis) whose associative chain of homologous elements (hip surgery, use of walker, older male, unsteady on feet, prone to falls, etc.) identifies him as the

most efficacious stand-in within the immediately assembled congregation. In this way the prayer is orchestrated to meet the sudden exigencies of the situation at hand. The hasty, improvised organization of the prayer, its orchestration “on the fly” so to speak, is embodied in the casual yet forthright tone of Sister Dorothy’s voice as the microphone registers her informal instructions for specific congregation members to come up and lay hands upon the stand-in.

Further evincing the improvised spontaneity at the root of this theurgical practice, Brother Aldie voices a call for the participation of the distanced members of the listening audience: “Ever-body in radioland lay ya hands on the radio real fast.” The end of this instruction, “real fast,” is the kind of expression that would be employed in a phrase such as “come and help me fix this gutter real fast,” or, “let me use your hammer real fast.” This expression is used in everyday situations of mending, improvised patching, brief borrowing and quick fixes that are called for in order to keep everyday actions moving. Combining the sacred power of the Holy Ghost with the creative resourcefulness of the bricoleur, the stand-in patches, if only temporarily, the gap between efficacious healing virtue and the painful actualities of everyday life.

These practices of radio prayer in Appalachia bear important resemblances to the techniques of faith healing espoused by Oral Roberts and others during the Charismatic Revival of the late 1940’s. The practices of standin’-in and manual imposition upon the radio

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apparatus are often explicitly referred to by radio preachers in southern Appalachia as “a point of contact.” This term was disseminated on a mass scale through Oral Roberts’ popular radio broadcast, Healing Waters, which by 1954 was reaching an estimated listening audience of over 100 million. In what is perhaps the most influential treatise on the techniques of charismatic faith healing, If You Need Healing Do These Things, Oral Roberts articulates “the point of contact,” emphasizing that it is “the master key to healing.” Because the point of contact is such a crucial instance within the broader history of technologically mediated prayer and practices of faith healing, Roberts’ description is worth quoting at length:

3. USE A POINT OF CONTACT FOR THE RELEASE OF YOUR FAITH

God is the only healer. Doctors perform a good work but they only assist nature while God can actually bring deliverance. The authority of Satan’s


Harrell (1985), p. 120.

Roberts, O. (1950). If You Need Healing Do These Things. Tulsa, Healing Waters, Inc., p. 32. I am quoting here from the revised second edition of 1950. There first edition of the healing treatise placed even more emphasis on the place of demons in the etiology of illness and did not include the cartoon illustration of radio tactility which I explore later in this chapter.
oppression over human life is in God and in His children. But God is a spirit and sometimes we are confused because he is not directly before us in human body. He does not come into your room as your family physician with medical potions and instruments, you cannot see Him with the human eye, nor can you take a trip to heaven and present your case as you would go to your doctor’s office. How then can we reach Him? By establishing a point of contact. Faith is the meeting ground between your limited self and your limitless God. A point of contact is given as a means of steadying and helping you to release your faith (p.32).

Note how the question of faith is immediately enframed in terms of the sensory capacities of the “limited self” to register the presence of the divine spirit. This inability to perceive the presence of the spirit with our natural sensory faculties creates a “confusion” within the subject. This disorientation, moreover, seems especially related to the perceptual capacity of vision and its inability to sense the spirit: “you cannot seem Him with the human eye.” In this confusing situation of perceptual blindness to the spirit, the “self” must establish a point of contact as a means of “steadying” a subject literally thrown off balance by a lack of visual grounding. The point of contact, therefore, seems to suggest a new way for the limited sensory capacities of the self to register the unseen omnipresence of the spirit. Indeed, Roberts’ description of the limited capacities of the “human eye” announces the theme of augmented and extended sensory capacities that will be accessed through the point of contact. Whatever the case may be, this key passage frames the question of faith and divine healing in terms of limited sensory capacities and the possibility of transcending these perceptual inadequacies.

After this initial description of the point of contact, the reader turned the page to see a cartoon illustration of this master key to healing. In this representation of a miraculous cure the
point of contact is the radio apparatus (Figure 3). The bottom half of the drawing features a sick bedfast patient who reaches out a hand to make contact with the radio receiver. At the top of the panel is Oral Roberts himself, whose discerning right hand of healing power seems drawn toward the artificial sensitivities of the “radio station” microphone. Mediating between these two distanced actions is the divine hand of Christ, outstretched to communicate “healing virtue” into the sick patient. On both sections of the illustration, the artist has attempted to convey the simultaneous voicing of the crucial phrase “only believe” in both the space of the Healing Waters live studio and the private sphere of the afflicted patient.

In this technological infrastructure of transmission and reception, the cartoon’s depiction of the healing hand of Christ embodies the unseen presence of the electromagnetic waves circulating between the microphone and the loudspeaker. After a description of this image of radio healing, the previous passage describing the point of contact now resonates with new interpretive possibilities. This crucial passage is not simply a rumination upon the challenges of perceiving God’s spiritual presence, but in fact a veiled commentary on the “confusing” sensory experience of registering the presence of the disembodied voice that has “come into your room” (30). These themes of disembodiment, sensory blindness or lack of visual grounding, and the question of the communicative relation between the limited self and the limitless or unplaceable divinity, seem strikingly similar to the basic elements of radio experience described by early theorists of the apparatus such as Arnheim and Adorno. Small wonder, therefore, that Roberts would directly relate the question of faith and the point of contact to the radio apparatus,
as the two seemingly discrete instances seem upon further inspection to be mutually constitutive.
Even under the auspices of a theological description of the challenges of faith, the point of
contact can be seen as a particular appearance of the demand of faith in an age of the
technological emancipation of the voice from its ‘body.’

Continuing this exploration into the point of contact and its relation to the sensorial
capacities to experience faith and the presence of the sacred, the figure of the hand, or manual
experience, seems to emerge within the heart of a phenomenon saturated by the disembodied
voice. Recall the place of the divine hand in the mediation between patient and healer, as well
as the specific forces of attraction between tactile experiences of power (note the artistic
representation of force radiating from the right hand of Roberts and at the interface between the
patient’s left hand and the radio set) and the technological infrastructure of the radio broadcast
(microphone/receiver). Other technological infrastructures as well informed Roberts’
thelogico-technical elaboration of the point of contact. Take for example his description of
this tactile healing technique from the Evangelical film, Miracles Yesterday, Today and Forever
(1994):

142 Here I am working from Arnheim’s chapter “In Praise of Blindness: Emancipation from the

143 On this longing for a return of the corporal presence of the body in the experience of
radio listening, see: Peters, J. D. (1999). Speaking Into the Air: A History of the Idea of
consideration of tactile experience in and through the radio apparatus, see my description in
chapter one as well as the section on “the laying on of hands” in the present chapter.
The point of contact was given to me in a rather extraordinary experience. When I went to the little church I was pastoring and in the small office fell down and was seeking God as he was leading me into the healing ministry, because I didn’t know what to do. I felt the call; but feeling the call and knowing what to do with it are different things. And ah, as I lay there I sought God, and ah, I forgot about time. I have no idea how long I lay there, but pretty soon everything faded away and was just God and me. And finally I heard the Lord’s voice say from this hour, you’ll feel my presence in your right hand. And my presence will enable you to detect if there’s a demon present. The presence of God through your hand, will be a point of contact—and there I was wonderin’ what a point of contact was. What was he saying?

So when I got home, I was led to notice that when I wanted the light on I flipped the switch. The power was not in the switch, the switch led to the power plant. But the switch was the connection to the power plant. It was the point of contact. It was where you made contact with the power of electricity in the power plant, that turned on the bulbs, the electric lights. Or if I took the key in my automobile and turned it the motor would turn over; it was the point of contact with the power of the motor. So He said my presence coming into your hand will be a point of contact for you, so you’ll feel a connection with me, strong enough for whatever comes against you: for whatever you come against in sin and sickness and disease and demons and fear and the torments of the people. Secondly, he told me it would be a point of contact for the people. When I touched them, I would say, let all the faith you have come out of your heart and go to God, because He’s the power. I am a point of contact to you, and usually it works through my right hand into their bodies. They would just loose their faith because they become aware they were connected now to a greater power than Oral Roberts. They were connected to God himself and their faith, then, did the job. It brought the healing power, the supernatural miracle, into their lives.144

Through the charismata of a divine sensory capacity, the tactile sensitivities of Oral Roberts’ right hand were miraculously attuned to become the first “point of contact.” Even at its origin, therefore, the point of contact revolves around the theme of divinely augmented sensory capacities that grant tactile access to spiritual presence, both divine and daemonic.

Through this divine prosthesis, Roberts’ right hand is able to “detect” the presence of the illness-causing demons within the sick patient.\(^\text{145}\) As if he had yet to fully emerge from the trance state in which he heard the oneiric voice instructing him in his new sacred sensibilities, when Roberts returned home he was “led to notice” that when he wanted the light on he flipped the switch.\(^\text{146}\) Through an automatic gesture directed by the spirit, Roberts is given a divine revelation, or desublimation, of an everyday gesture that enlivens a massive hidden and unremarked infrastructure. Through a kind of somnambulistic movement, the hand that operates the apparatus (switching the machine on, regulating the dials or knobs, etc.) is drawn to the light switch under the gravitation of some ineluctable force of attraction. In what could be seen as a critical parody or inversion, the instrumental gesture of “flipping the switch” reveals not only the repressed infrastructures underneath, but suggests the way in which technological infrastructures are always organizing the perceptual and interactive capacities of the so-called user. This everyday instrumental gesture, now divinely guided like the jerky movements of a healing puppet, desublimates a vast machine ensemble of a hidden electrical infrastructure:

> The power was not in the switch, the switch lead to the power plant. But the switch was the connection to the power plant. It was the point of contact. It was where you made contact with the power of electricity in the power plant, that turned on the bulbs, the electric lights (ibid).

\(^\text{145}\) This recurrent concept of spectral *detection*, moreover, cannot be abstracted from the popular technical terminology of radio reception, crystal detectors, valve-detectors, etc.

This divine revelation through the everyday manual gesture of flipping the switch also recalls a history of the organization of the modern bourgeois interior with forces and machine ensembles exterior to it. The sudden illumination of the electric bulb recalls the anxieties of the emergence of industrial gas light and its accompanying infrastructures of pipelines and gas preparation plants in the nineteenth century. \(^{147}\)

This experience of doubling or manifold process collapsed into one small gesture of the hand, the flick of the switch, the strike of the match, the push of the button, the pull of the trigger, also suggests an anxiety not only with regard to the traumatic shock of immediacy, but the force of automaticity at work behind everyday life. \(^{148}\) Once again, Roberts’s account of the history of the emergence of the point of contact clearly suggests that modern technological infrastructures have had an important role in informing and organizing this crucial theologico-technical practice.

This metaphor of the electric current is also evoked by Roberts to emphasize the way in


\(^{148}\) Says Benjamin, “Comfort isolates; on the other hand, it brings those enjoying it closer to mechanization. The invention of the match around the middle of the nineteenth century brought forth a number of innovations which have one thing in common: the abrupt movement of the hand triggers a process of many steps. This development is taking place in many areas. One case in point is the telephone, where the lifting of a receiver has taken the place of the steady movement that used to be required to crank the older models. Of the countless movements of switching, inserting, pressing, and the like, the “snapping” of the photographer has had the greatest consequences. A touch of the finger now sufficed to fix and event for an unlimited period of time. The camera gave the moment a posthumous shock, as it were.”
which the tactile point of contact is an actual *physical conduit* for the transmission of efficacious healing power. As a specific technique of divine communication, the point of contact not only signals the kinesthetic “turning loose,” “unleashing” and “releasing” of faith, but a concomitant surge of healing virtue or power into the body of the sick patient. This surge of divine force is often compared to electrical phenomena, as in the popular description of the woman with the “issue of blood” in the book of Mark (5:25-34):

The crowd moved back for her and she plunged on through and then…there He was. She had made it through to Him. She bent low, reached out a trembling hand and touched the hem of His garment. *It was like touching a live wire,* the mighty healing virtue of Christ surged out of Him into her. It went all though her, into every fibre of her being and spent its force against her affliction (Roberts p.106, *my italics*).

Continuing with the electrical metaphor several pages later, Roberts elaborates:

**6. SHE MADE CONTACT WITH HEALING POWER**

“She felt in her body that she was healed of that plague.” Contact was made between her faith and the healing virtue resident in Jesus Christ. *Like plugging in an electrical connection,* making contact with the distant powerhouse, faith that is released—put into action—makes contact with God’s power and releases the healing power. This power healed the woman of a literal disease.150

This visceral experience of an actual flow of energy through the body is thus an

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149 In this way, the preeminent ritual gesture of charismatic faith healing thematizes on the level of sacred efficacy what Canetti describes as the most basic of human manual techniques: grasping and letting go. Canetti, E. (1962). *Crowds and Power.* New York,, Viking Press.

important aspect of the point of contact: “You tap the source of healing power causing it to flow into your body where it will destroy disease and affliction” (p.79, *my italics*). With its emphasis on the physical, palpable transmission of force through actual tactile contact, the point of contact provides a classic instance of the efficacious transmission of force, communication at a distance and the contagiousness of the sacred that occupied an important place in the early ethnological literature. And here, E. B. Tylor’s interest in the spiritualist telegraph and Oral Robert’s utilization of the numinous potential of the radio press close.\(^\text{151}\) Although this force of attraction between ethnographic description and theorization of the contagiousness of the sacred and modern technology would perhaps take us too far afield from the immediate study, it is important to note the undercurrent circulating between the two seemingly discrete phenomena.

At a basic level, therefore, the point of contact is a visceral, tactile experience that emerges between, or at the interface of, the sensory capacities of the subject and an exterior object. And though “embodied” on an elementary level, this sensation gains a particular force of experiential intensity precisely because it cannot be located squarely within the perceptual boundaries of the subject, but seems to emerge at this strange interface *between* the subject and object, the sacred and the everyday.

This efficacious unleashing of faith through the point of contact also invokes a crucial temporal dimension in the practice of divine healing. In his elaborations of this tactile practice

of faith, Roberts often refers to the way that “the point of contact sets the time” for healing (p. 32, his italics). Another passage from this curative instruction manual, *If You Need Healing Do These Things*, will help elaborate the key temporal dimension of the practice.

4. TURN YOUR FAITH LOOSE—NOW!

So many times I have seen the need of saying, “Believe now and you may have deliverance.” On the other hand, many captives, when asked when they expect to get healed, will reply, “Oh, when God gets ready, I am.” God has been ready all the time; it’s your move next. Others reply, “I’m expecting God to heal me anytime.” On the face of that statement is a certain amount of reasonable value, but I remind you that it is not scriptural. *There is a definite time when faith works and unless you set a time, it is doubtful if you will ever be delivered….God will respond and work in our behalf when we believe and set the time* (p. 38-39 my italics).

In and through a particular experience of tactile sensation, the point of contact performs a temporal actualization of faith, ritually instantiating faith in the embodied ‘here and now.’ A ritualized gesture of tactility and a particular attention to time or temporal awareness are thus intimately related.

This actualization of faith through a self-conscious action or human volition has a long history within American practices of “faith curing.” In her work on the history of faith healing, historian Heather Curtis demonstrates that the curative rhetoric of “acting faith,” or the performative realization of human agency within practices of divine healing, emerged in the 1870’s and coincided with changing conceptions of human suffering and the force of the miraculous.152

Although the point of contact certainly draws from earlier historical precedents and practices of “acting faith,” the specific temporal and tactile registers thematized by this healing technique, as we have seen, suggest specific relations with modern technology. Another specific instance of the point of contact will help flesh out this threefold relation between tactility, temporality and technology. Recall once again the preeminent point of contact through which millions of Americans experienced the tactile sensation of faith:

Many lay their hands on their radio as a point of contact during our Healing Waters broadcast. Through this means they release their faith and through faith they are healed during the “prayer-time” of the broadcast.\(^{153}\)

How are we to understand this particular temporal awareness that is actualized through tactile contact with the radio apparatus during the most important “prayer-time” of the Healing Waters radio program? Likewise, how does this sacred experience of temporality relate to the actual physical gesture of tactile “steadying” that Roberts first uses as a term to describe the point of contact? This need for the gesture of tactility within both the experience of radio audition specifically, and the challenge of faith more generally, emerged from a spectral presence that could not be discerned by the natural perceptual capacities. The technique of the

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point of contact “steadied” a bodily awareness disoriented and thrown off kilter by a disembodied voice. Seen in terms of the specificities of the disembodied radio voice, the point of contact steadied the listener who was perceptually separated from the physical immediacy and visual presence of the body of the speaker. And yet, it is precisely in this moment when the ‘confused’ or disoriented self attempts to buttress or supplement the sensory disjuncture by steadying the body, which has technically realized the ideal sacred bodily attitude of prayer—with eyes closed—that the subject experiences the crucial tactile-temporal awareness of the “setting” of the faith-time. Ironically, however, this experience of ‘steadying’ produces the most compelling sensations of immediacy and temporal actuality precisely in the moment when tactile sensation registers a rupture or doubling between the resonating immediacy of the radio loudspeaker and an awareness of forces that remain hidden being the immediate phenomena of the radio voice. Thus, the crucial moment of ritual temporality performs this rupture between perceptual immediacy and a vague awareness that there are forces at work outside the experiential frames of audile-tactile sensation through the radio apparatus.

By focusing in upon the performance of divine communication during the crucial prayer time of the radio broadcast, and allowing the patient to experience the prayer in a different sensory register—a hand for an ear—the legerdemain of radio tactility marks the curious ritual coincidence of a distanced patient and absent healer. In this way, the point of contact is a wonderful example of what Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert called “the moment of
prestidigitation.”¹⁵⁴ In a moment of technological artifice and a manual gesture, the distance between the patient and healer is collapsed in a release of healing efficacy.

The prayer-time of the Healing Waters broadcast and the particular techniques of radio tactility involved can be seen as yet another instance of the performative manipulation of the disembodied voice for the purposes of healing. Like the shamanic throwing of the voice or the curative efficacy unleashed through the ventriloquism of the healing puppet, the mouth of the radio loudspeaker allows the sick patient to experience the prayer in an unanticipated way. Just as ritual performance often conjures grotesquely enlarged images and narrative techniques of “slow motion,” opening a space of anti-temporality that seems to characterize many ritual forms, the radio loudspeaker amplifies the visceral sound of the mouth at prayer to monstrous and disconcerting proportions.¹⁵⁵ Likewise, the sensitive capacities of the studio microphone grant access to new forms of perceptual awareness and experience by sounding the unheard resonances of the acoustic unconscious. Even more than this, the ritual technique of radio tactility allows the patient to experience the sonic resonance of prayer through the hand, and thus miraculously substitutes a hand for an ear.¹⁵⁶ The point of contact, therefore, is the moment of divine


¹⁵⁶ My analysis of certain experiences of disjointed radio temporality departs from many of
communication when through a manual gesture and a technological artifice, the experiential gap between the “limited self” and the “limitless God” is filled with a resonance outside the frames of everyday temporal awareness.

Although the divine gift of the point of contact was given to Oral Roberts to help dispel the “confusion” surrounding the practice of healing and the exercise of faith, a close reading of his famous treatise on the faith cure, *If You Need Healing Do These Things*, suggests an unanticipated or unacknowledged locus of faith itself. To be sure, everyday understandings and the kinesthetic terms such as “turn loose,” and “unleash” and “release” locate the standing reserve or potentially active faith within the interior of the subject. This religious subject, in turn, is able to exteriorize this standing reserve of faith through embodied techniques of prayer and performances of belief.

Yet the very heading that introduces this key theologico-technical performance suggests an unplaceability at the heart of this practice: “USE A POINT OF CONTACT FOR THE

RELEASE OF YOUR FAITH.”157 This unanticipated locus of faith is also suggested further in that key section: “How then can we reach him?  By establishing a point of contact.  Faith is the meeting ground between your limited self and your limitless God” (p. 30, my italics).  This passage, along with the examples invoked to explain and elaborate the point of contact, ironically point to the radical exteriority of faith itself.  The potential standing reserve is not located within the interior of the religious subject, but circulates outside the ‘believer’ who through proper bodily attitude and techniques of manual gesture must properly orient him or herself to this exterior potentiality.  Faith therefore makes its appearance in this precarious space of alterity between the “limited self” and the “limitless God.”  Faith emerges and circulates at this indeterminate ‘point’ or interface between the subject and the divine.  In this way, Roberts’ highly influential phrase “point of contact” not only resonates with classic ethnological descriptions of the emergence of the compelling force of belief in and through the exchange of physical objects, but seems to press close to the phenomenological considerations of touch described by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean Luc Nancy.158

Although crucial moments in the articulation of the point of contact suggest the exteriorities of faith, the practice of belief is quickly recuperated to the interior of the religious subject through the rhetoric of self-conscious action and individual agency to “declare you


healing,” “write your ticket with God,” “set the time,” etc. Thus, the point of contact, that space between the sacred and the everyday, marks the oscillation at the heart of charismatic practices of faith healing between the agency of an autonomous subject and the precarious forces of automaticity and exteriority.

Though the point of contact demonstrates a particular force of attraction to the radio apparatus, Roberts claimed, as we have seen, that the originary point of contact was located in his right hand. The efficacious transmission of healing power through the practice of laying on of hands, of course, has been an important technique throughout the history of Christian healing practices. On the surface of things, therefore, it would seem that Roberts was merely continuing a long standing tradition of curing through manual contact. Roberts’ manual technique of the point of contact, however, thematized and described the older practice of manual imposition with new, specifically modern, resonances. More than fifty years before several academic disciplines would identify the theme of “religious sensations” as a particularly fruitful ground for a thinking of religious experience and subjectivity, Oral Roberts was describing in vivid, visceral detail the particular tactile senses of “discernment” that enabled him to “detect” the presence of sickness and spectral presence:

God has not left Himself without human instrumentalities to deliver this generation. I have heard His voice: first that I was to be healed, next, that I was to bring healing to the sick and demon-possessed, and that His healing power would be felt in my right hand for all who would believe. It is happening just as the Lord said. I seldom feel anything in my left hand, but through my right hand I feel the healing virtue of the Son of God. Thousands have witnessed this
power as it surged through every fiber of their being. God uses this human agency as a point of contact. The time is set when I lay my right hand upon the captive and adjure the afflictions to come out of him in the name of the Master, Jesus Christ of Nazareth. I feel the pressure of the disease rising to meet my right hand, but then as God’s healing virtue surges into the person, this pressure is relieved and deliverance is wrought.  

Not only the site for the efficacious transmission of healing virtue, Roberts’ healing hand thematizes the place of sensory capacities and perceptual experience in the performance of healing. Through a preternatural sensory capacity, the great healer is able to “detect the presence” of that which is normally unregistered by the naked or unarmed perceptual faculties (preface, vi). The preeminent point of contact is a sacred sensory augmentation or extension, a kind of divine prosthesis appended to the body of the healer, that allows him to register through the tactile surface the presence of that which resides outside the enframement of the natural sensory capacities: “With a keen sense of discernment the Spirit enables him to detect the presence of demons, to ascertain their number and names. It is amazing to see people set free from demon spirits” (ibid).

The point of contact marks a new technologically organized and imprinted interpretation of the influential passage from the book of 1st Corinthians:

It was Paul who describes the nine gifts of the spirit in 1 Corinthians 12, including the gift of healing, the gift of miracles and the gift of discerning of spirits. These three gifts are given to certain believers, principally ministers, for the direct purpose of healing the sick and casing out demons. These gifts are additional stimulants to faith and will bring deliverance when other means fail (78).  

160 Here is the specific passage to which Roberts gives reference: 1 Corinthians 12: 4-10:
The charism, or divine gift of “discerning of spirits” is articulated by Roberts on the level of sensory perceptions, inflecting the older curative practice of the laying on of hands with notions of preternatural sensory extensions and amplified tactile capacities. Once again, however, the discerning right hand of the healer seems drawn, as if by some unseen force, to the radio apparatus. Thus, both the hand of demonic discernment and the radio receiver “detect” spectral presences which remain imperceptible to the everyday sensory faculties. The radio extends the ‘natural’ capacities of the ear, while the Holy Ghost augments the tactile sensitivities of the hand.

The Prosthesis of Prayer, or: The Apparatus of Faith

As the preeminent point of contact in the explosive early years of the Charismatic Revival, the radio became a central apparatus of faith. Just as Oral Roberts required a divine tactile enhancement to sense the presence of the spirit, the particular sensory experience generated through the radio apparatus helped to produce an appearance of faith which was

“Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; 1 To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues” (King James Version, my italics).
registered by the listener. The special effect of faith generated through the radio apparatus gave the listener a particular sensory experience of doubled immediacy, both in terms of a praying voice that was immediate yet distant, and the sensory disjuncture between the sound of the radio voice and the warm vibrations registered through the hand. By enframing the experience of the disembodied voice and tactile sensation in particular ways, the special effect of radio produced a compelling sensation of immediacy, precisely in the moment that it suggested a force just behind or beyond perceptual access which the listener was not quite able to fully perceive, yet which was somehow registered or communicated by the radio apparatus itself. As an apparatus of faith, the radio produces on the level of sensory disjuncture between the senses of touch and hearing what older modes of belief enlivened though the physical exchange and circulation of objects. Belief in an age of the faith apparatus is no longer articulated within the field of temporalization, but through the thematization of sensory disjuncture and the concomitant special effect. Belief operates autonomously of the religious subject, and thus the very possibility of sensory access and recognition of ‘faith’ is given in and through the extended sensory prosthesis of the radio apparatus.¹⁶¹

This theme of sensory extension and the disconcerting awareness of a presence that

persists just outside the perceptual frame recalls Freud’s account of the emergence of faith in the essay, “Animism, Magic and the Omnipotence of Thought.” In this description of the shift from magic to religion, Freud articulates how the automatic self-enclosed system of magical thinking became plagued or threatened by a disjuncture between our immediate perceptual experience alongside a recognition of latent memory surfaces capable of recalling the dead after immediate perception of them had ceased. The radio apparatus, as well, produces this rupture between perceptual immediacy and external storage and transmission capacities and it is for this reason that early radio theorists such as Adorno are constantly invoking themes of spectrality, ‘spooks,’ atavistic residues and divinatory arts to think about the phenomenological experience of the radio voice.

Oral Roberts, therefore, should be taken quite literally when he claims that making tactile contact with the radio apparatus during healing prayer “unleashes” faith. Faith emerges not from within an interiority of a religious subject, but at the interface between the bodies’ perceptual limit and its sensory prostheses. Once again Freud makes the prescient association when writing in 1929 that there is an intimate force of attraction between an experience of the divine and mankind’s prosthetic extensions. Though it is not so much that we have become prosthetic Gods, but that the performative embodiment of belief has been exteriorized into the


operations of machines. In this way, the increasing technological reproduction of the voice and the ever-expanding surface of exteriorized memory processors will only continue to set-up the subject for new calls of faith and the threatening presence of that which persists just beyond the frame of perception, mechanical or otherwise.

_The “Laying On of Hands” in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction_

This section traces the crucial shift in charismatic prayer and associated healing-line techniques through Walter Benjamin’s classic essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” Through a description of this transformation in curative performance, I explore the relation between the manual charismatic healing technique of the “laying on of hands” and what Benjamin terms “tactile appropriation” in an age of mechanical reproduction.

Tracing the history of pictorial reproduction techniques early in the essay, Benjamin announces that the hand, through a gradual process of technical abstraction, had finally become “freed” of the most important artistic functions in the process of pictorial reproduction by the lens of the camera. In this way, the sheer representational speed of the machine seemed to sever the hand from the body, taking its once autonomous technique into its own sphere of repetitive machinations. Yet in a way that resonates deeply with Freud’s description of the logic of the uncanny, the hand, this severed, abstracted and surmounted body part, seems to

Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main.
reemerge at the conclusion of Benjamin’s essay with an unanticipated new force. Like the famous accounts of the hand that obstinately and automatically maintains its grip on the throttle of the machine even in death, it is as if the abstracted hand of the machine reasserts its force once again, albeit in a strange and unanticipated new form.

In order to flesh-out this history of manual abstraction, a history of technique whose intimate other is the collapse of traditional spaces of consecration, insolating the dangerous contagion of the sacred force, Benjamin evokes the difference in therapeutic technique between the magician and the surgeon. In a descriptive move that signals a fascinating moment of coincidence between the preeminent charismatic healing technique and the curative hand of the

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165 Indeed, as Benjamin aptly points out, this notion of aura and manual abstraction gets to a crucial problematic within the classic ethnological theories of magic: the interrelation between the abstraction of the hand, techniques and magical efficacy. It is thus no coincidence that Mauss and Hubert’s well known account in *A General Theory of Magic* concludes with a rumination on the emergence of industrial techniques. In fact, at crucial moments in their text, they find it increasingly difficult to differentiate modern notion of automaticity and mechanicity with the in and of itself efficacy of the magical incantation or object. Here this historical convergence is crucial. Moreover, this moment points to another overarching problematic in this body of literature approaching the phenomenon of healing, belief, efficacious technique, etc. The moment of prestidigitation as a technical artifice, a manual technique, sleight of hand, that facilitates healing is also a compelling undercurrent circulating throughout this literature.
magician, Benjamin twice invokes “the laying on of hands.” Here again, the tension between a literal and symbolic distancing and a compulsion to draw close constitute the difference in theurapeutic technique. The touch of the magician maintains and reasserts symbolic hierarchies and power precisely in the moment of tactile contact, while the hand of the surgeon transgresses this traditional distance, penetrating beyond the dermal surface of the body. What is crucial here, however, is not so much a literal penetration of the hand from the surface into the interior of the body, but the way the very notion of the ‘operations’ of the surgeon no longer approach the patient face to face, “man to man.” In this penetrating moment of operation, the hand of the surgeon literally touches the body through an optical apparatus such as the “laryngoscope.”

In and through the optical device, the hand of the surgeon takes on a new magical resonance,


167 In the particularly revealing footnote # 14, Benjamin quotes Luc Durtain: “I refer to the acrobatic tricks of larynx surgery which have to be performed following the reversed picture in the laryngoscope. I might also speak of ear surgery which suggests the precision work of watchmakers” (p.248-49).
performing “technical sleights of hand” and other adroit “acrobatic tricks.”

Through this new kind of “operational” therapy, the traditional attentive structure of eyes focused on hands synchronized and working in unison, is broken, abstracted by the mechanical eye of the throat scope. The hand, therefore, in a kind of somnambulism seems to be moving on its own, habitually, while the attention of the surgeon is oriented toward the optical image on the screen. In a very literal way, he thus makes contact with his hands through the aid of a prosthetic eye that is looking into the body for him. Through the use of a very literal and concrete detail—the image of the surgeon looking upon a screen as his hands perform a

168 Ibid.

169 We also see other parallels in the history of technology on the level of voice and hand, think for instance of stenographic sound hand that prefigured the technological speed up of the stylus in the phonograph. Early in the essay, with his rumination on sound film and the surpassing of the human hand by the speed of the machine, all these notions are invoked by Benjamin. This freeing of the hand through technical speed-up creates an uncanny sensation in the viewer of these new abstracted operations. Perhaps there is an attraction to knitting on the subway train, still something dissonant or disconcerting about hands moving through this extremely delicate, complicated and automatic weaving operation while gazing lazily at their reflection in the opaque subway window. Children learn this talk of manual dissociation at an early age through the incessant harping of the typing teacher “don’t look at the keys!” Even to this day, the image of someone typing at a computer terminal while looking away from the screen still strikes some as strange or somehow disquieting—this residue of older attentive forms, however, is quickly disappearing. A new mode of distraction has become the normal sensory orientation; this can be readily seen as the screen of the cellular phone radically alters techniques of walking and structures of awareness on the street. Direct eye contact is now more easily achieved by the metropolitan through a constant gaze upon the screen of the cellular phone or other handheld device. Thus, the narcissistic interiority of the folding compact makeup mirror has become a perpetual self reflection through the screen of a cellular phone.
seemingly disjointed operation—Benjamin begins to articulate a new mode of haptic attention that signals the specifically modern rupture between the immediate coordination of hand and eye.

Just as new orientations and possibilities of sensory awareness were opened through the mechanical eye of the optical device, mechanical devices of transmission and reception also wrought transformations in the ritual of healing prayer. In several significant ways, these pervasive shifts in the performance of prayer were portended within the technical environments of the charismatic healing revival tent. Part of the gospel infrastructure of Oral Roberts’ “Tent Cathedral,” which seated over 9,000 and at the time (1949) was the largest gospel tent in the world, included a public address system with loudspeakers mounted on support beams throughout the tent. This system of voice amplification allowed the charismatic sermons and healing prayer of the reviver to resound throughout the tent and beyond. Many eye witnesses to the healing revivals, moreover, commented on Oral’s prowess and intimacy with the microphone, which he “clutched as if it were a broom sweeping sin from the tent.”

The key performative moment underneath these amplified revival tents was the miraculous healing of the sick through techniques of prayer and ritual gesture. One by one, each patient approached the elevated dais to receive the “laying on” of Roberts’s hands and the concomitant prayer. As Roberts prayed out loud into the large steel microphone that stood

170 Harrell, D. E. (1985). Oral Roberts: An American Life. Bloomington, Indiana University Press., p.97. Indeed, almost all of the iconic photographs of Roberts seem to draw attention to his intimacies with the microphone, both within the grip of his hand and within close proximity to his mouth. In the iconography of the Charismatic Revival, the two—Roberts and the microphone—are almost inseparable.
between him and the patient, he often gripped the microphone stand with his left hand while pressing the palm of his right hand of spiritual discernment forcefully upon the forehead of the patient. In this moment of tactile contact between patient and healer, the sensitive capacities of the microphone clearly registered the performative modulations of the healers voice: “Oh God! Oh, it’s coming out now. Father, I ask for this miracle, I ask that…the Lord…HEAL!” The phrase, “Oh, it’s coming out now,” was spoken in a soft, almost matter-of-fact conversational tone. While the following line was broken up and spoken as if to reflect the laborious effort expended by the healer in the moment of casing out the demon of infirmity. Finally, the efficacious word “HEAL!” was forcefully enunciated into the microphone. In this way, Roberts actively utilized the capacities of the public announcement system to help ‘effect’ the force of the miraculous.

In what could be considered an intermediate theurgical form within the amplified space of the revival tent, the healing prayer had already undergone a kind of doubling or displacement, not only in terms of a message that was believed to resonate in the space of a divine elsewhere, but the displaced voice of the healer simultaneously resonated from individual loudspeakers located throughout the massive cloth architecture of the revival tent. In this way, the moment of enunciation of the healer signaled a doubled displacement, both within the immediate space of the tent and the sacred beyond of a divine elsewhere. Through the system of voice

amplification, moreover, the mouth of the evangelist was miraculously supplemented, resonating powerfully from above as if it were the voice of a God.\textsuperscript{172}

In this way, \textit{both} the prayer and the crucial moment of laying on of hands were significantly augmented by the technology of voice amplification. The insinuation of the microphone/loudspeaker system into the traditional patient/healer relationship seemed to announce or foreshadow the curious reversal of this performative healing technique in an age of radio.\textsuperscript{173} Yet, even in this intermediary or transitional form in the mediated environment of the tent, traditional forces of symbolic distance are maintained and reproduced through the healing technique. Recall how the patient is \textit{standing below} Roberts, who is \textit{seated above} upon the stage. On a basic level, therefore, the physical orientation between the patient healer dyad reinforces symbolic hierarchies of high/low, sitting/standing, speaking/silent, etc. Additionally, it is Roberts who touches the patient; he controls the healing agency and therapeutic force in this

\textsuperscript{172} Of course, the very moment of enunciation itself always performs a displacement from the source of utterance. The public announcement system in the healing tent is thus a technological realization of older forms and techniques of curing that utilized and thematized the force of the abstracted or displaced voice in the service of curative efficacy. Take for instance the shamanic techniques of ‘throwing the voice,’ etc. As this history suggests, therapeutic efficacy cannot be abstracted from these technologies of voice and the moment of artifice or prestidigitation.

\textsuperscript{173} Here it is important to note that the \textit{Healing Waters} Broadcast and the mass tent crusades were not separate, but were both developing and gaining mass momentum on parallel tracks. Roberts’ intimacy with the microphone in the revival tent and his awareness of the force and presence created by the public announcement system must have helped inform his almost preternatural ability to reproduce “presence” through the unforeseen or unacknowledged potentialities of the radio apparatus.
curative encounter. The further abstraction of the voice and hand from this ritual form would thus initiate a reversal that could be considered a profanation upon the more orthodox curative gestures.

Recalling Benjamin’s well-known phrase “mechanical reproduction emancipated the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual,” we could slightly reformulate this quote to describe the ritual technique of healing prayer mediated through the radio apparatus. This translation would read: “Ritual presence maintains a parasitical dependence upon mechanical reproduction.” In so doing, the charismatic healing technique of “laying on of hands” in an age of mechanical reproduction presses close to the hand of the surgeon as described by Benjamin. Just as the operation technique of the surgeon’s hand is mediated through the optical device, the prosthetic hand of the healer is only able to discern the body of the patient through the operations of the radio apparatus. In both cases, the ‘normal’ sensory coordination and habilite of the hand has been supplemented by a sensory prosthesis or extension. The collapse of symbolic distance from what Benjamin calls the “face to face” relationship between surgeon and patient also characterizes the healing technique of tactile contact with the radio receiver during the performance of healing prayer. More specifically, it is no longer the healer who reaches out to touch the patient and thus reassert his symbolic force, but the sick patient who reaches out to make tactile contact with the resonating mechanical mouth supplementing the voice of the healer. More than this, however, the new orientations structured by the radio apparatus between patient and healer could be considered a transgressive reversal or inversion of earlier
modes of efficacious healing gestures.

Thus, in an age where the skin of the healer, and its concomitant haptic gifts of spiritual discernment, are extended by the prosthesis of radio, it is not the healer who touches the patient, but the patient who touches the healer. The tactile experience of the patient contaminates the traditional symbolic boundaries that once characterized the ritual milieu and associated curative techniques. Collapsing distance through a new grasp, the patient is also able to sense the healing resonances of divine communication in an unanticipated way. Through this profanation of mediated immediacy organized by the radio apparatus, a new sensation of devotional awareness is unleashed by the sensitivities of the microphone and the amplifications of the loudspeaker: the acoustic unconscious.

The force of attraction between the laying on of hands, tactile sensations and the radio apparatus suggests the revelatory power of an “acoustic unconscious” operating at the heart of the phenomenon of radio healing. Though Benjamin’s famous essay makes no explicit formulation of the notion of acoustic unconscious, sonic themes resound throughout his text: multiple ruminations on sound film, descriptions of religious sounds resounding in the parlor, disembodied ears, prayer, etc. Moreover, at that crucial moment in the text when Benjamin introduces the theme of tactility and distraction, he directly invokes the percussive shocks of Dadaist sound poems:

From an alluring appearance or persuasive structure of sound the work of art of the Dadaists became an instrument of ballistics. It hit the spectator like a bullet, it happened to him, thus acquiring a tactile quality (p. 238).
It is fascinating that he does not explicitly formulate a concept of the acoustic unconscious, especially given that at pivotal moments in his analysis it seems to be on this tip of this tongue.\textsuperscript{174}

Just as the lens of the camera is able to isolate and access elements of visual phenomena inaccessible or imperceptible to the naked eye, the microphone and loudspeaker, technologies for the reproduction and amplification of sound, reveal aspects of sonic worlds that resound and echo underneath the ‘natural’ sensory capacities of the unarmed ear. Thus early commentators on the microphone were fascinated by the account of the fly that landed upon the microphone’s surface: through the system of electrical amplification, a sound which had never before been registered by human ears suddenly resounded as if it were the feet of an elephant.\textsuperscript{175} Just as the photographic lens opened a world of vision upon new structural formations otherwise hidden in the “optical unconscious,” the microphone made it literally possible to hear the “slip of the tongue”

\textsuperscript{174} See for example Benjamin’s ruminations on sound and synchronization in early film at the beginning of the essay. Ironically, many of these sonic motifs in this pivotal text have fallen upon commentators and theorists with no ears to hear these acoustic resonances of modernity. Neglecting this sonic aspect of the text, in turn, has lead many scholars of media and the senses to write about the perceptual/phenomenological impact of the cinematic in Benjamin’s work as if it were still silent.

\textsuperscript{175} Numerous publications from the late 1870’s recounted various instances of the sound of the fly: “But its extreme sensitiveness to minute sounds is perhaps best shown by enclosing a fly in an empty matchbox, when, upon listening at the attached telephone, every movement of the fly is heard as a loud noise.” Barrett, W. F., “The Microphone” \textit{Good Words}; Jan. 1878; 19, p. 711.
described by Freud in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901). While technologies of voice recording enabled analysis on the symbolic level, the microphone extended the ear to perceptions of the visceral, corporeal and elemental materialities of vocalization and language. Just as the camera lens isolated bodily movements so that even the most subtle muscular contraction could be isolated and analyzed, the microphone gave perceptual access to the saliva-soaked clacks, smacks and watery undulations of the tongue itself as it slid and “slipped” among the teeth and moist oral cavity.

If the microphone reveals new structural formations resonating underneath the soundscapes of everyday life, what are the implications of this new prosthetic mode of hearing for the theurgical technique of prayer? Or to pose this question another way, do the ‘faithful’ experience the ritual of divine communication differently in an age of mechanical reproduction? Prayer and techniques of the body such as pious postures and sacred manual gestures seem always to be indissociably related. In this way, a material history of Christian devotional practices suggests a panoply of techniques for the material instantiation of the fleeing voice of prayer. In turn, these materializations of prayer always recall the disembodied voice through haptic sensations registered through the hand. Prayer beads, cloths and leather phylacteries, for example, can be seen as translations of the aural performance of prayer into haptic devotional sensations.176

176 This notion of the intertwining of prayer and manual technique recalls a large body
Materialized prayers thus render the fleeting voice palpable and ‘record’ its efficacy upon the surface of the body through the haptic sensations of rubbing, wrapping, pressure, fingering, etc.

In terms of the relation between haptic sensation and the devotional object, mechanical reproduction initiates a new era in the material history of prayer. Through the amplified artificial mouth of the radio loudspeaker, the prayer is translated or decomposed into warm vibrations that can be haptically experienced through the hand as it touches the apparatus in a moment of divine communication. In this moment of healing prayer, as the radio trembles with power, the sick patient, through the operation of the radio apparatus, touches the healer-in-prayer like a deaf person feeling sound while touching the throat of the speaker. In this curious reversal, the patient makes transgressive contact with the prosthetically extended vocal organs through the operation of the radio apparatus. Just as the surgeon touches the patient through the mediation of an optical device, healing prayer in an age of mechanical reproduction is characterized by a new tactile relation between patient and healer. Accessing new haptic modes of devotional attention, radio prayer initiated a profound shift in the meaning and

of work within the ethnological tradition on the relation between manual techniques and efficacious words. The work on string games (cats cradle) by Evans-Pritchard and many others as a survival of older manifestations of manual skill where the weaving of basketry for hunting activities was accompanied by prayer and song—both to facilitate the manufacture and render the snare, net, trap, etc. efficacious. See also Malinowski’s Coral Gardens and their Magic for other examples of the indissociable link between manual techniques and incantation.
performance of faith and divine communication within the Christian tradition. The practice of healing radio tactility resonates with my reformulation of Benjamin’s famous phrase: ritual presence maintains a parasitical dependence upon mechanical reproduction.

In conclusion to this chapter, let us return to the specificities of the practice of standin’-in within the context of charismatic communities in southern Appalachia. The sympathetic resonances between distant bodies that facilitate the communication of healing efficacy during the performance of intercessory prayer in Appalachia are organized and informed in intimate ways by the structure of the radio apparatus itself. More specifically, the practice of stand-in cannot be abstracted from the specific experiences of technological communication at a distance and the longing to materialize the disembodied voice. This ritual technique of substitution mimics the materiality of transmission by inserting a physical body to help ‘receive’ and ‘transmit’ healing power. Just as the artificial sensitivities of the microphone are a crucial technical component in the material infrastructure of the radio broadcast, the sympathetic resonances embodied in the stand-in facilitate the communication of healing virtue from that sacred elsewhere to the abstracted body of the sick patient. The stand-in thus embodies a forgotten potentiality of the radio set: to both receive and transmit.177

The practice of standin’-in outside the space of the live studio thus marks the moment when the technological organization of prayer and techniques of divine communication insinuate themselves into other circumstances and environments of charismatic worship. Just like a voice transmitted over the airways, the practice of standin’-in leaves the confines of the live studio of the radio station and begins to resonate elsewhere, informing worship practices seemingly outside the specific media environments of radio transmission and reception.

During the practice of baptism in a river near the radio station in Richlands, Virginia, for example, I have seen participants being immersed in the chilly waters as stand-ins for other members of the congregation who were either physically absent or too sick or immobile to actually enter into the river. Within the space of actual churches and during prayer meetings in private homes as well, stand-ins are often employed to help “get a prayer through” on behalf of an absent family member, friend or congregation member. Even within these worship spaces seemingly unorganized by forces of technological mediation, therefore, the experience and understanding of the practice of standin’-in can never be fully abstracted from the structure of the radio apparatus. As the radio broadcast comes to a close and the “altar call” is importunately voiced into the live studio microphone, the phrase “The Lord is a’comin’ soon, just as sure as I’m a’standin’ here” is often invoked to reinforce the urgent immediacy of the need for repentance and salvation. Yet as this phrase is translated through the mouth of the radio
loudspeaker, the theme of bodily presence and immediacy takes on new displaced and
doubled resonances. Just like the prosthetic replacement of a bodily organ, the
theurgical practice of standin’-in marks that moment when bodily capacities of sensation
and awareness are extended beyond the ‘natural’ boundaries. It is in and through this
extended embodiment that the efficacious power of the Holy Ghost makes its appearance.
Altar Call

*(If You Ain’t Blas-ah-phemed the Holy Ghost)*

Each Sunday before the close of the Jackson Memorial Hour broadcast, a member of the congregation approaches the microphone to deliver the “altar call” to the abstracted listeners out in radioland. Both in the studio and out in that non-descript space of audition, “time is a’windin’ up,” and thus commences an importunate call for the “sinnners, backsliders and the lost and undone” to repent and ask the Lord for forgiveness. This urgent plea to “get your sins under the blood,” “get it fixed up,” and “get ready ta go Home,” is voiced into the studio microphone. Just as the clarion blast of Gabriel’s trumpet is invoked to describe the commencement of the Second Coming that is “nigh at the door,” the congregant giving the altar call casts an occasional furtive glance at the naked light bulb protruding from the wall that signals that the call for salvation is being communicated into the air. Time, after all, in both the everyday and the eschatological sense, is a’windin’ up.

During the altar call, the all-encompassing potential for Christ’s forgiveness, “no matter how far down in tha pit of sin you’ve gone,” is thus broadcast to all the lost out in radioland. Yet this importunate plea for repentance and salvation “before its ever-lastin’ too late” is always tempered or qualified by an ominous exclusionary clause: “The Lord will forgive you no matter what ya done; as long as you ain’t blas-ah-phemed the Holy Ghost.” Although always invoked in passing during the altar call, this qualifying phrase is never elaborated or expounded upon, and
thus remains a vaguely ominous potential for breakdown even within Christ’s seemingly all-encompassing power of redemption. Although I have never heard an exegesis of Holy Ghost blasphemy articulated during the altar call in which this exclusionary clause is inevitably invoked, this passage from the book of Matthew seems to connote the act of attributing the miraculous workings of the Apostles to forces other than the Holy Ghost. In other words, to blaspheme the Holy Ghost, like the Pharisees who attributed the power to cast out demons and heal the sick to Beelzebub, would be to attribute the efficacious force of the miraculous to something outside or exterior to the operation of the Holy Ghost.

Upon hearing this clause of exclusion during the altar call, I was always struck by the way this exceptional transgression posed specific challenges to the practice of ethnographic interpretation. Indeed, it is precisely an ethnographic interpretation that merely relegates the presence of the Holy Ghost to the warm vibrations of a radio loudspeaker or the stark materiality of the devotional object that could be considered vulgar or blasphemous. Like the percussive sound of the bone as it suddenly collides with another object, the resonances of the Holy Ghost can never be located within a stable relation between the subject and the object, but in that sudden unleashing of a powerful excessive presence when the subject is intertwined or interfaced with the object. The question of the presence and efficacious healing power of the Holy Ghost, therefore, is precisely a question of subjectivity and the prosthetic extensions that allow it to sense a world. Like a mended bone that has the capacity to prefigure climactic events and accidental phenomena or sense the presence of the unseen, the Holy Ghost appears in that
strange space where human perceptual faculties are organized and extended by artificial organs of sensation, mnemonic devices and materialized devotions. Thus, until that day when the stones themselves cry out, the unremarked extensions and augmentation of the subject will continue to voice the calling of an excessive presence. The Holy Ghost resounds in that point of indistinction between subject and object, and it is through a performative evocation of this point that the healing *par* is unleashed into the spaces of the everyday.
Appendix of Sermons

Sermon I

Sister Julie’s Preachin’

Praise you Lord, Hallelujah, Glory to tha Lamb of God [as she approaches mic, these phrases become clearer and more audible]

It’s good to be here today, an I need your prayers. So you pray that I’ll just min-ster exactly what the Holy Spirit-ah, a’bids me ta min-ster. ‘Cause I’m not here for myself, but I’m here that I might be a blessing, that I may be of help-ah

Ah’ ta someone, Glory to that Lamb of God.

Maybe someone thanks that they’s no hope-ah

But I want you ta know that hope is in Jesus-ah

Glory to tha Lamb a’God, allota times-ah

Ah’ we go to people for help, we go to people

Ah’ ta have ta tell’em our heart needs help an’ things-ah

But you know the only thing, the only advice we can give-uh

Is in Jesus Christ-ah

Ah’ the only way-ah

Ah’ glory to God when we’re goin’ through things-ah

In our lives is ta trust tha Lord God almighty Hallelujah

An’ I want ya to know he’ll never let us down-ah

He was always thar with his hands outstretched-ah

Ah’waitin’ for his people ta come ta him-ah

Ah’ that he can lif’em up, Glory to tha lamb a’God-ah

An’ he will you today-ah

An’ if you’ll just give-ah

Ah’ give it over ta him-ah

An’ trust him-ah

Ah’ we’ve gotta get our minds off-ah

Ah’ the situations that were goin’ through-ah

Ah’ you know the devil want us-ah

Our minds ta wander on ever-thang-ah

An’ get it off-a Jesus-ah

Ah’ Glory-ah

An’ when we start gettin’ it off-a Jesus-ah

Ah’ we stop-ah

Ah’ winnin’ our battles-ah

Ah’ but tha minute we come back and realize-ah

Its gonna take Jesus-ah

Ah’ then he come on tha scene Glory-ah
Unto tha Lamb a’God-ah
An’ I wanted to minister today-ah
Ah’ over in tha fourteenth chapter-ah
Ah’ you know allotta time when tha
Ah’ Jesus, this is when Jesus-ah
Ah’ before he went to the cross-ah
Ah’ when he’s goin’ through fixin’-ah
Ah’ to go-ah
Ah’ on a mission Glory-ah
His work was almost finished here on this earth at this time-ah
Ah’ but had to get it finished before-ah
Ah’ he ascended back ta his father-ah
Ah ‘fore he went went to tha cross for you and I-ah
Ah’ but when he was teachin’ here-ah
Un-ta Israel
Ah’ glory to tha lamb of God-ah
Ah’ lotta times he used parables-ah
Ah’ because-ah
Ah’ they could easily-ah
Understand tha parables-ah
Ah’ glory to tha lamb-ah
An’ sometimes tha parables-ah
Ah’ when you interpret they’re spiritually interpreted-ah
Ah’ glory to tha lamb a’God-ah
Ah’ but I wanted you-ah
Ah’ to go over’n at sixteenth-ah
Ah’ chapter of that great supper-ah
Well glory to tha lamb a’God-ah
Ah’the lord has that supper prepared today hallelujah-ah
Ah’ biddin’ his people ta come in-ah
Ah’ biddin’em ever-whar glory-ah
Ah’ ta come in to that supper of tha lamb of God-ah
It said then, said he unto them-ah
Ah’ a certain man made a great supper-ah
An’ he bade many-ah
An’ sent his servant at suppertime-ah
Well glory-ah
Ah’ ta say ta them that were bidden come-ah
For all thangs are now ready
Well glory to tha lamb of God
I believe today all things are now ready-ah
Ah’ fer tha commin’ of tha Lord-ha
Ah’ because time is short-ah
Its time we get serious about that work God’s called us ta do-ah
Its time glory to tha lamb of God to quit playin’ around-ah
Ah’ they’s no time fer playin’ around no longer-ah
Ah’ glory to tha lamb of God-ah
Its time for us ta get serious-ah
About our souls salvation-ah
Ah’ta go before the Lord-ah
An’ ask him-ah
If there anything in our lives-ah
Ah’ glory to God that he’s not pleased with-ah
An’ cleanse us-ah
Ah’ totally from ever-thang-ah
Ah’ that would hinder us-ah
Ah’ from enterin’ in to tha kingdom of heaven-ah
Ah’ because he’s commin’ after those-ah
Ah’ without spot-ah
An’ without wrinkle-ah
A’glory be to tha lamb of God-ah
An’ we gotta be that way-ah
If we expect ta see tha kingdom of God
Our heart has got ta be perfect with’em-ah
Hallelujah ta tha lamb a’God-ah
I know we make allotta excuses-ah
Ah’ but let me tell ya our hearts gotta be perfect with God
Hallelujah
Hallelujah
Ah’ glory to tha lamb-ah
An’ we cain’t blame others-ah
Ah’ glory-ah
*Hallelujah I’m just gonna go of the way of the leadin’ of tha Holy Spirit-ah*
Ah’ you know when Adam’n’Eve-ah
Ah’ when they sinned in tha garden-ah
Ah’ what was the first thang when
God came to’em-ah
Ah’ they were makin’ all kinds of excuses-ah
Ah’ Eve was blamin’ tha serpent-ah
Adam was blamin’ his wife-ah
Ah’ glory ta God-ah
Its so easy ta blame our neighbor-ah
Its so easy ta blame-ah
Ah’ those that goes ta church with us-ah
An’ were gonna stand alone-ah
Ah’ were not gonna be able ta say Lord-ah
Ah’ because of that one-ah
Are because of this’un-ah
Ah’ but God is gonna look at your heart-ah
An’ he knows-ah
Your record is gonna be fore’em-ah
We cain’t make any excuses.
Hallelujah.
Glory to tha lamb and they all
Listen at this-huh
Huh-they were begged ta come ta that supper-ah
An’ they all with one consent-ah
They all agreed and they begin to make excuses-ah
Ah’ the first verse said unto them-ah
I have bought a piece of ground-ah
An’ I must needs go and see it-ah
Well glory-ah
An’ I pray thee have me excused-ah
An’ another said I have bought five oxen
Yoke of oxen-ah
An’ I go ta prove them-ah
An’ I pray-ah
Have me excused-ah
Ah tha firstin’-ah
Ah’ was a self-interest-ah
Ah’ the second was tha self-will-ah
Well glory an’ another said I have married a wife-ah
An’ therefore I cannot come-ah
All these excuses-ah
Ah’ glory ta God-ah
An’ you know all them-ah
Is not sin-ah
Ah’ but it was because-ah
Ah’ they were be puttin’em-ah
Ah’ before tha Lord Jesus Christ-ah
Ah’ this here-ah
Ah’ this parable
I know it says a certain man that certain man is God-ah
An’ that servant is Jesus Christ
Ah’ that tha Lord sent-ah
An’ he’s prepared a place in tha Kingdom a’God
A’ fer his children
A’ Jesus said I go away
An’ I prepare a place for you
An’ I’m a’cummin’ again
An’ receive you unto myself-ah
An’ that where I am you may be also
This is Jesus speakin’
Ah’ glory to tha Lamb of God
Ah’ but excuses are bein’ made
Ah’ tha Lord didn’t come, Jesus didn’t come
Ha’ ta say what-ah
Ah’ can he-ah
Ah’ do for tha world-ah
Ah’what can that world do for him
Ah’ but he came ta see
Ah’ what he could do fer tha world-ah
Well Glory
An’ that was the love-ah
Ah’ that he had in his heart-ah
Hallelujah
What could Jesus do, well glory
An’ he come-ah
An’ they paid that price at cal-vry.
Ah’ fer you and I
That’s what he did
That was love that took’em to tha cross-ah
Hallelujah ta tha lamb of God
It was the love glory-ah
Hallelujah
An’ he was reachin’ out-ha
Ah’ fer his people n’ I know-ah
This parable was for
Ah’ tha Israelites at that time, I know that-ah
I know-ah
Ah’ but its fer tha church today-ah
Hallelujah to tha lamb
Ah’ because were makin’ too many excuses-ah
Ah’ Sunday mornin’-ah
Ah’ we get up-ah
Oh this is tha church world
Hallelujah
So many decide
Huh they wanna spend time with their family
Ah’ the only day of the week-ah
Ah’ glory
They are puttin’ their family before god
So many-ah
Is makin’ excuses ‘cause-ah
Ah’ they’re watchin’ others’ lives-ah
An’ those lives are not linin’ up with tha word-ah
An’ so they think if they can get by they will too
Ah’ well let me tell ya they are not gonna get by
Hallelujah because when they stand before tha lord
They will also-ah
Glory ta god-ah
Ah’ see where they made their mistake at
They’re people deceived today-ah
Ah’ they’ve watched others-ah
An’ the others got by with thangs-ah
An’ they thank they got by
But nobody
Is gonna get by with sin-ah
Ever-body-ah
When you onced accept Jesus as your savior-ah
Ah’ you’re held responsible
Ah’ fer tha sins you commit from then on out
Ah’ you’ll have ta come
Ah’ glory ta God before tha throne a’God
Hallelujah when you sin
And we all make mistakes-ah
An’ we’ll sin
Ah’ but glory ta God we have a advocate-ah
Ah’ with tha father
An’ he welcomes us in.
Hallelujah
Ah’ but ya know tha church-ah
Ah’ world today-ah
Is so sad-ah
Ah’ that they-ah
God is makin’ tha call
An’ he’s callin’ fer those that have back-slid up-on’em
Ah’ those-ah
That got hurt-ah
An’ have gone away from tha house a’tha Lord-ah
Oh let me tell ye church-ah
*It’s not tha church that’s done you that way-ah*
*It’s not tha church mabey somebody-ah*
Has hurt you-ah
A’glory but it’s not tha church-ah
Well glory we hold things ‘again tha church-ah
Ah’ when one person-ah
Ah’ will hurt us or somethin’-ah
Ah’ but let me tell you today-ah
Ah’ God wants you-ah
Ah’ ta-be whar he wants you ta-be-ah
Ah glory to tha lamb a’God-ah
He wants you to go to tha church-ah
Ah’ whar he wants to place you-ah
Ah’ he has a work fer each one of his children-ah
Ah’ they’ve gotta be-ah
A’whar he wants’em ta-be-ah
Well glory to tha lamb a’God-ah
Ah’ God-ah
Hallelujah
His word doesn’t change-ah
His word will not change fer you-ah
An’ it will not change fer me-ah
Hallelujah
An’ tha price Jesus paid-ah
Ah’ was settled long ago-ah
An’ tha word was written-ah
A’ glory to God-ah
A’ long ago fer us-ah
An’ it will not change-ah
An’ we gotta line up with’at word-ah
Ah’ we got ta let tha love of tha Lord shine out of us-ah
Ah’ we got ta let tha light’a tha Lord shine-ah
Oh glory ta God they is no excuse-ah
I remember that song they used ta sing-ah
Ah’ there’s no excuse today glory ta God-ah
An’ God’l not take no excuse from you-ah
An’ he’ll not take it from me-ah
Hallelujah we’re-ah
A’stayin’ home-ah
A’ because we wonna stay ‘ome-ah
Glory ta god we’ll answer to tha Lord-ah
If we’re not servin’ tha Lord-ah
An’ walkin’ in-at-ah
Call of God-ah
If we’re not walkin’ in at call-a-God
We’ll answer to God-ah
Hallelujah ta tha lamb a’God-ah
Ah’ you can make all kinda excuses-ah
Ah’ but when you stand that call-ah
Hallelujah it’s without repentance-ah
Ah’ you will stand before tha Lord-ah
Ah’ glory ta God-ah
An’ you gonna-ah
Ah’ be ashamed-ah
Ah’ because you didn’t-ah
Ah’ go ahead with the work of tha Lord-ah
Ah’ that God called you into-ah
Oh glory to tha Lamb
Lord is callin’ you today
Ah’ get back in
Ah’it’s not too late yet-ahh
Ah’ get back in,
I’m callin’ my children today back in
Well Glory ta tha Lamb of God
He’s Callin’-ah
Oh-ah
Heed to his call today
Heed to his call
Well-Glory-ah
Hallelujah
I know it mighta been a-long time [rough, guttural monotone]
Ago-ah
An’ that you-huh
Ah’ been outta church-ah
Well now is tha time-ah
Oh its ready-ah
Time is ready fer ye ta go back-ahh [visceral, guttural]
Hallelujah do yer first works over
Well Glory to tha Lamb of God-ah [forceful intensity in following lines]
Hal-le-lu-jah
An’ because-ah
An’ God is biddin’ today-ah
Oh God is biddin’ today-ah
Well glory-**ha-ha** [brief interruption of laughter followed by clearly audible and forceful inhalation]
Well glory to tha Lamb a’God-ah
An’blessed be tha name of tha Lord-ah [like chat of an auctioneer]
Ah’ let me tell you God will not fail you-**ha-ha** [sung line, followed by pronounced inhalation]
Hallelujah to tha Lamb-ah
He’s a faithful God-**ha-ha**
He’ll stand by in his word before’em his word-hah
Oh you don’t have to worry ‘bout God-**ha-ha**
Because he’ll be here on time-ah
Hallelujah ……?-ah
When we face some thangs-ah
An’ we think he might be too late but let me tell ya
He’ll come through on time for ya [brief pause before commencing next cycle]
Hallelujah to tha Lamb-ah
Oh Glory-ah
I know God’s speakin’ today-ah [allusion to anointed speech]
Hallelujah to tha Lamb
*I had no idea I’s gonna say these thangs-ah*
But oh glory-ah
Ah’ theres so many stayin’ outta the houses of the Lord
Ah’ tha houses of tha Lord are getting empty-ah
Oh glory to tha Lamb-ah
An’ let’em use you for his glory
Hallelujah
Ah’ you’ll not regret it-ah
Ah’ glory he’ll bless you goin’ an commin’
An’ it says here-ah
An’ so that servant-ah
Who was Jesus came-ah
An’ showed tha Lord these thangs-ah
An’ then tha master of tha house bein’ angry had said to his servant
Ah’ go out quickly into tha streets-ah
   An’ tha lanes of tha city-ah
   An’ bring in hither the poor and the maimed-ah
And the  ?  and the blind ha-ha
An’ the servant said Lord it is done-ah
Thou has commanded yet there is room-ah
Children there is still room-ha
Hallelujah it’s not too late-ah
Ah’ glory to tha lamb a’God-ah
Ah’ just come before’em with um-ble heart-ah
An’a contrite-ah spirit-ah
An’ here he was sayin’-ah
How tha master was angry
You know why he was angry
‘cause his chosen people Israel
Had rejected him
Ah his people Israel-ah
Ah’ rejected him-ah
An’ at tha time there hope was gone
But now it’s opened-ah
It’s opened up ta ever-body
It’s opened up ta ever-body today-ah
Whosoever will glory to tha lamb at’s why Jesus died-ah
Ah’ that whosoever will-ah
Ah’ glory ta God-ah
An’ live by that word-ah
‘ey can have a home in glory
An’ you know what we might face allota thangs-ah
Ah’ but it’ll be worth whatever you-ah
Hafta go thru in this life ta make it ta heaven-ah
Oh glory it’ll be worth it sometime-ah
You might hafta go all alone-ah
Sometime yer mate don’t want ta go to tha house of tha Lord
Ah’ but you can go-on anyway hallelujah
Ah’ because it’s a person relationship with tha father
An’ God’ll bless you commin’n’goin’-ah
Ah’ glory ta tha Lamb a’God
Hallelujah
An’ when tha servant said Lord it is done-ah
As thou has commanded yet there is room
Hallelujah ta tha Lamb
There is room for you today-ah
Hallelujah
An’ the Lord said unto the servant-ah
Ah’ go out in tha highways an tha hedges-ah
An’ compel them ta come in that my house-ah
Well may be filled-ha-ha
Well he’s tellin’ you go out in tha highways
He wants tha word ta go out there-ah
In tha highways n’tha by-ways-ah
An compel’em ta come in-ah
Ah’glory to tha Lamb-ah
He wants it ta go out ta ever corner of tha earth-ah
Hallelujah
He wants tha word ta touch ever heart-ah
Ah’ that ever-body’ll
Ah’ be able ta hear tha word-ah
An’ they have ta make tha decision on their own-ah
Oh glory ta tha Lamb a’God
Ah’ we’ve gotta get busy-ah
An’ get this word-ah
Out-ah
Ah’ glory ta tha Lamb a’God
An’they’re good preacher’s everywhar-ah
A’ministerin’ tha word-ah
If people will only heed-ah
An’ get in that word and study tha word-ah
So you’ll not be deceived-ah
Oh glory ta tha Lamb a’God-ah
Hallelujah
Why I said unto you-ah
That none of these men which were bidden shall taste of my supper-ah
Well it already-ah
Time-ah
Had given tha last opportunity-ah
An’ glory to them back then that praise tha Lord-\textbf{ha-ha-ha} [massive breath]
Well glory tha door was open-\textbf{ha-he}
Through Jesus when he died-ah
Well Glory ta tha Lamb a’God
An’ it’s fer ever’body
It’s for the Jews-ah
It’s fer the Gentile
It’s fer all tha prophets-ah
Oh its fer ever’body today-ah
Heed to his word today-ah
An’ come forth-ah
An’ in him-ah
An’ glory to tha Lamb
He said-ah
An’ there were great multitudes with him and he turned and said unto them, listen-ah
What he was tellin’em-ah
He said if any man come ta me-ah
An’ hate not his father’n’mother’n’wife’n’children’n’bretheren’n’sisters yea n’ his own
life-ah
Also he cannot be my disciple-ah
He wasn’t meanin’ the word hate as we see it-ah
He mean-ah
Ah’ you should prefer him above ever-thang-ah
Ah’ you gotta put…
Well Glory-\textbf{ha-ha}
Ah’ when we do that I’m gon’ tell ya
Ah’ glory ta God, God’l bless ya
Ha
Glory to tha Lamb, he just wants ta be first
In yer life-ah
Ah’ he wont take second place-ah
Ah’ but you put’em first an’ in your family
You’ll even have more love for your family
Well glory-ah
Ah’ when ya put Jesus first-ah
Well glory ta tha Lamb
‘cause at love-ah
Ah’ that you get from the Lord-ah
Ah’ will love them that children-ah
Ah’ glory ta tha Lamb an that family
Hallelujah
An’ whosoever does not bare his cross-ah
An’ come after me-ah
He cannot be-ah
Ah’ my disciple-ah
Ah’ what its sayin’-ah
Over in the Mark-ah
Tha eighth chapter tha thirty-fourth verse, he said-ah
An’ when he had called tha people unto him with his disciples all there he said unto them-ah
Whosoever will come after me-ah
Let him deny himself-ah
An’ take up his cross an follow me-ah
Fer whosoever save his life-ah
Hallelujah
Ah’ shall loose it but whosoever shall loose his life for my sake and the Gospels tha same shall save it-ah
Fer what shall it profit a man-ah
If he shall gain tha whole world an lose his soul-ah
Or what shall a man give-ha
Ah’ in exchange for his soul
Oh children today-ah
Ah’ this means when we-ah
Ah’ glory ta God-ah
When we deny ourselves, when we take up tha cross-ah
Ah if were puttin’ our will-ah
Our ambitions an ever-thang we have-ah
Its Gods will-ah
Oh glory ta tha Lamb-ah
Ah’ God has plans fer ya whole family-ah
He don’t leave your family out when you’re dedicated ta him-ah
Oh glory ta tha Lamb of God-ah
He’s there-ah
A’biddin’ you Lord ta stay-ah
Ah’ but ya got ta put’em first and foremost-ah
Ah’ glory ta tha Lamb a’God-ah
Ah’ it’s a straight-ah
An’ it’s a narra way, glory ta tha Lamb a’God-ah
Ah’ in Mathew seven
Ah’ thirteen he said-ah
Enter you in at this straight gate-ah
Ah’ fer wide is tha gate-ah
An’ broad is the way that leadeth to destruction-ah
An’ many there be which go thereat-ah
Ah’ because straight is tha gate-ah
An’ narra is tha way which leadeth unto life-ah
An’ few be that find it-ah
A’listen at that gate-ah
Ah’ that door is Jesus Christ hallelujah
Ah’ that straight gate is through Jesus tha door
Hallelujah ta tha Lamb of God-ah
An’ that gate is a’narra-ha-ha
An’that’s because you can’t partake a tha world an partake of Jesus to-ah
Hallelujah ta tha Lamb-ah
Ah’ you gotta be separated from the world-ah
Ah’ we’re in this world but we don’t partake a’tha world hallelujah
Ha’ glory ta God that way ta heaven is narra today children
Ha’ but that other way-ah
That leadeth ta destruction its broad-ah
Ah’ why is it broad-ha
Because so many are on it-ah
An’ it’s a broad road-ah
Headin’ fer destruction
Ah’ but if you’ll heed to tha day-ah
Ah’ glory ta tha Lamb of God-ah
Ah’ you won’t have ta worry-ah
Hallelujah
Ah’ you can lay down at night-ah-ha-ha
Well glory ta tha Lamb an not worry-ah
Ah’ glory-hallelujah
Ah’ whar you’ll be-ah
Ah’ whar you’ll be at in eternity-ah
Ah’ you’ll not have ta worry when you accept Jesus Christ-ah
As your savior-ah
He’ll watch over you
He’ll meet your needs glory ta tha Lamb a’God-ah
He said-ah
For which of you intended ta be a power send us not down first-ah
An’ count tha cost-ah
Ah’ whether it be sufficient ta finish it-ah
Left happy after he had laid-ah
Ah’ tha foundation-ah
An’ is not able ta finish it that behold he began ta mock him sayin’ this man began ta build
An’ was not able ta finish it, children
Tha price was paid at Calvary, Sister Cathy’s commin’ at this time
But you know that price was paid at Calvary
Uh’ fer you and I-ah
Ah’ but they’s a price of self-denial that we have ta pay ourselves-ah
It don’t cost us no money
Hallelujah it’s free
Ah’ but we’ve got to
Ah’ live by tha word of God that’s our requirement today as Cathy-ah
Ah’ come forth today, glory may God bless ye
Hallelujah ta tha Lamb
[As Cathy gest on studio microphne to sing a song and close the program, Sister Julie is still overheard in the background voicing praises: hallelujah, Praise ye Jesus, Praise you Lord, etc]
Sermon II
Sister June's Bulldog Preaching

We gonna be a’readin’ in Proverbs today, and you be much in prayer for us.
In the 16th chapter of Proverbs, praise tha Lord and glory to God,
We just wanna read a little bit-cheer, a’praise God.
Speak as God would help us, praise God today.
Glory to God, he said the preparation of the heart in man and the answer of the tongue is from the Lord.
All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes, but the Lord weightith the spirit.
Commit thy ways unto the Lord and thy thoughts shall be established, praise God.
You get your mind upon the Lord,
and you walk for him and talk for him,
An’ ever-thang else’ll fall in place.
I b’lieve I read over, glory ta God.
Over in the new testament whar it said seek first the kingdom of God,
And all these other thangs a’be added unto ya, praise tha Lord.
He said in the 4th verse, it said, in the third verse it said,
Commit thy works unto the Lord and thy thoughts shall be established-ahh.
And the Lord hath made all thangs fer himself.
Yea-ahh
Even the wicked for the day of evil.
Everyone that is proud in his heart is an abomination unto the Lord-huh
Though hands join in hand he shall not be unpunished-ahh
A’glory ta God, praise the Lord today-ahh
By mercy and truth inequity is purged-ahh
And by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil, praise God-ahh
A glory ta God when you get down and pray and get your [audible breath]
A’sins under tha blood, ask the Lord to forgive ya of ever-thang-hah [audible breath]
A’glory ta God today-huh
And Jesus comes inta your life, glory ta God-huh
You wanna depart from all them evil thangs that men does-ahh
A’glory to God-huh
He said that when a man’s ways please the Lord-huh
He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him-huh
He said better is a little right-us-nuss than great revenge-ahh
Without right-ahh
Ah glory ta God-ahh
I’d ‘trather be a little bit right with God as a whole lot right with tha devil, praise God-ahh
A’glory to God, he said a man’s heart devises his ways-huh
But the Lord directith his steps, praise God-ahh
A divine sentin is in the lips of the king
A’but his transgressions-ahh
Not in judgment, praise God-ahh
He said a just wayeth-ahh
A just way and a balance are the Lord’s-ahh
And all the weights of the bag are his work-ahh
Ah’ glory ta God, and it is abomination ta kings-ahh
Ah ta commit wickedness-ahh
For the throne is established by right-u-nuss-huh
Ah righteous lips are the light of kings-ahh
Ah glory ta God are the delight of kings-ahh
And they love him that speaketh right, praise God-ahh
Ah glory to God, God wants you ta speak tha truth-huh
Ah glory ta God it don’t make no difference who it hurts-ahh
Ah people’ll say well-huh
I told just a little white lie to keep from hurtin’ somebody’s feelin’s-huh
Ah’honey let me tell you somethin’-huh
I’d ruther hurt somebody’s feelin’s as see them lost-n-die lost-n-go down to a devil’s hell-uh
Ah praise the Lord
Glory ta God, he said the wrath of a king is a messenger of death-huh
But a wise man will pacify it, praise the Lord-huh
In the light of the king’s countenance is life-huh
And his favor is as a cloud of the latter rain-huh
How much better is it ta get-huh
Ah wisdom than gold-huh
An a great understandin’ rather to be chose than silver, praise the lamb of God-huh
Ah glory ta God I’d ruther be a poor paw-per-ehh
As rich in this world-huh
And be lost without God-huh
And die’n’go-down to a devil’s hell-huh
Ah glory ta God whar I cain’t take a penny with me. [pause]
A highway of the upright is to depart from evil-huh
Ah glory ta God, he that keepeth his ways-huh
Preserveth his soul, glory ta God-huh
Tha highway of the upright-ahh
Is to depart from evil-ahh
And he that keepeth his ways preserveth his soul-uhh
Ah glory ta God, you got some work [2 hand claps] ta do ya-self-huh
Its not all in God’s hands-huh
Ah glory ta God,
Once he saves you honey, you gotta work yerself-ahh
[pause, silence]
He said pride goeth before destruction-huh
And a haughty spirit before a fall-huh
Ah better is it to be of a humble spirit-huh
With tha lowly-huh
Ah than ta divide the souls’ spoils with the proud-huh
Ah glory ta God-huh
Ah hallelujah, he that handleth-ahh
A’matter wisely shall find good-huh
Ah glory ta God, praise the Lord-huh [June’s voice beginning to develop gritty rasping
voice and aggressive, intense timbre]
Ah hallelujah today-huh
An’ who-so-ever-huh
A’trusteth in the Lord happy is he-huh
If we keep our mind on God-huh
An ever-thang we in need of-huh
We ask God ta move’n’bless it-huh
And God-huh
If you want me ta have it you give it ta me-huh
An if it’s not your will Lord-huh
Ah don’t let me get it, praise God-huh
Ah glory ta God let God have control of all’a’tat-huh
Ah praise tha Lord-huh
And we’ll be a-happy people praise God-huh [pause]
He said he that handleth a matter is wisely-huh
A’shall find good-huh
And whosoever trusteth in tha Lord happy is he-huh
Tha wise-huh
The wise in heart shall be called prudent-huh
An’ tha sweet-nuss-huh
Of the lips increase learning-huh
Understanding-huh
Is a wellspring of life-huh
Untha him that hath it-huh
But tha instructions of fools is folly-huh
Ah glory ta God today-huh
Ah hallelujah to Jesus-hah
The heart of a wise teacher-huh
Ah’ glory ta God-huh
Ah’ praise God-hah
The heart of tha wise teaches his mouth-huh
And addeth learning to his lips, praise God-huh
Honey we gotta learn ta keep our tongue under control-huh
An say God-huh
Ah you put me on, I’ve often said this—
Put me on that potters wheel-huh
An turn it an turn it-huh
An make me ta what you’d hav-me-ta-be-huh
Ah gory to God, praise tha Lord-huh
He said pleasant words are as a honeycomb-huh
Ah’ sweet ta tha soul-hah
An’ health to tha bones [hand clap]*
Praise God-huh
Ah’ tha words of God are sweet-huh
Ah’ glory ta God today-huh
Ah’ they’re like a honeycomb-huh
He said thar is a way that seemeth right unto man-huh
But the end thereof are the ways of death-huh
Now they’s allota people said, well-huh
I’m-a’walkin’ fer God-huh
I’m a’livin’ fer tha Lord, praise God-huh
Ah glory ta God-huh
Ah praise tha Lamb-a-God, I’ve been livin’ fer’em fer 30 or 40 year-huh
An’ still you don’t have-huh
Ah’ glory ta God no more right-e-nuss than what ya started out with-huh
You’ve not growd a lick in tha Lord-huh
Ah’ glory ta God, praise tha Lord-huh
He said-huh
Thar is a way that seemeth right unto man-huh
But the end thereof are the ways of death-huh
He that-huh
Ah’ laboreth labor fer himself-huh
For his mouth craveith it of him-huh
An ungodly man digeth up evil-huh
An’ his lips thar is as a burnin’ far, praise tha Lord-huh
Honey that old tongue is a deadly thang-huh
Ah glory ta God, praise tha Lord-huh
An you get out here-huh [commotion in background, child falls and begins screaming loudly]
In tha summertime you get a rattlesnake or a copperhead bites you
Ah’ praise tha Lord-huh
An’ glory ta God, ah’ praise God
If you don’t go to tha doctor an’ get help-huh
Ah’ praise God-huh
Ah’ you’ll die-hah
An that’s the same way with that old lyin’ tongue-huh
Hit’s-as-poison-as-a-rattlesnake-bite-huh
Ah glory ta God it’s out thar a’ tryin’ ta stir up strife-huh
An’ hurtfulness’n’trouble-huh
Ah’ glory ta God, praise tha Lord-huh
Hits all-time tryin’ ta do somethin’ mean-hah
A’tattlin’ on people tellin’ lies-hah
A’talkin’ ‘bout somebody-huh
A’ praise God-huh
Ah’ but let me tell you-huh
He said an ungodly man digeth tha people an’ his lips there is as a burnin’ far-huh
He said a forward man’s soul strives, an’ a whisper separates ye friends-hah
A violent man entices his neighbor-huh
An leadeth him unto the way that is not good-huh
Ah glory ta God-huh
He shutteh his eyes-huh
Ah’ ta devise forward thangs-hah
A’movin’ his lips-hah
He bringeth evil ta pass-huh
A’ glory ta God-hah
Ah’ praise tha Lord-hah
We better watch out-huh
Of tha thangs we do-huh
Ah’ hallelujah ta God-huh
Ah’ keep ourself under correction-huh
He said a horny head-huh
Is a crown-huh
Is a crown a’ glory!-hah
And it is to be found in the way of the righteous-hah
A glory ta God-huh
He said he that is slow ta anger-huh
Is better than the mighty-huh
And he that ruleth his spirit-huh
Ah’ than he that taketh tha city-huh
A glory ta God-huh
I’d ruther have a good spirit wit God-huh
Than own all the world-huh
Ah’ hallelujah ta God-huh
He said the light is cast inta tha lap-huh
Of the hole disposed thereof-huh
Is of the Lord’s-huh
A’glory ta God honey-huh
We might thank well-huh
We’re doin’ alright-huh
A glory ta God, but today-huh
We better open up our eyes an’ know-huh
Ah’ who were servin-huh
A glory ta God-huh
He said an ungodly digeths up evil-huh
An’ his lips-huh
Ah’ thar is a’burnin’ far-huh
Oh my God-huh
My God is able ta keep us-huh
He’s able ta keep us, praise God-huh
An’ let us live fer him-huh
An’ walk in his love-huh
An’ talk in his love-hah
Ah’ praise God today-huh
Ah’ what a mighty God were servin today-huh
A’glory ta God, tha old highway-huh
A’highway of tha upright-huh
Is ta depart from evil-huh
An’ he that keepeth his-ahh
Ah’way preserveth his soul [pause]
Honey if we live fer God, hell hep us. [voice noticeably raw, grating and gruff here]
He’ll hep us.
God will hep us when we thank we got nobody-hah
Oh praise the Lord
He said I’ll be thar and I’ll stick closer than a brother-hah
A’praise tha Lord today-huh
I’m glad we got somebody we can depend on-ahh
I’m glad we got somebody we can take hold-a that big nail-scarred hand.  
A’glory ta God-huh  
He said when a man’s ways please the Lord-huh  
He maketh his enemies-hah  
Ah’ta be at peace with him-huh  
Ah’honey you serve God-huh  
A’glory ta God praise tha Lord-huh  
An’ God’ll make a way fer you-huh  
He’ll make your enemies be at peace with you-huh  
A’glory ta God-huh  
A’praise tha Lamb of peace with you-huh  
A’God is a merciful God-huh  
An’ he’s able to keep us-huh  
He’s able to heal us, he’s able ta  
Ah’ glory ta god, to feed us, put food on our table-huh  
Ah’give us an automobile ta ride-huh [intense]  
A home ta live in-huh  
A healthy kids-huh  
Ah’ God is able ta do anything today.  
[quietly: a gentle calmness in the next six lines] What a mighty God we serve.  
He said pleasant words are as a honeycomb,  
Sweet to tha soul and health to tha bones, praise tha Lord-huh  
Oh glory ta God-huh  
A’God can hep you-huh  
A’praise tha Lord-huh  
I’ve talked ta people before-huh  
A’glory ta God and they seem like they in tha-awfulest shape at ever was-huh  
So down’n’out, n’don’t know where ta turn to-huh  
A’glory to God, set down’n’talk with’em fer maybe 30 or 40 minutes, ‘er har-hah [or an hour]  
A’glory ta God n’they’ll say “I’m shore glad you come by my way-huh”  
I’m shore glad-huh  
I found somebody ta talk to-huh  
I said well honey you can talk ta the Lord anytime-huh  
Ah’just find you a place some-whar-huh  
An’ cry out ta him-huh  
An he’ll be thar, he said I’ll-huh  
Ah’be closer than a brother to ye.  
He’ll hep you.  
Oh he’ll comfort your heart, he’ll be thar for ye.
Glory ta God, I’m glad today-huh
That we got somebody-huh
We got somebody that can comfort us and keep us-uh
In tha time-ah-need and in tha midnight are-huh [hour]
When you thank, we’ll I don’t have a friend in tha world-huh
You ken have somebody in Jesus praise God.
He said I’ll be thar.
And I’ll stick closer than a brother.
He said I’ll go all the way with ye.
Ain’t nobody else can go all tha way with ye.
Nobody.
Eh your brothers’n’ sisters, your mommie’n’ daddy, your children, your husband, your wife;
They can just go so far.
And then they’ll stop right thar.
At’s far as they can go.
Ah’ glory ta God, I’m glad, praise God,
When it comes down fer me ta die-huh
My family might go to tha graveside-huh
A’ glory ta God.
An’ at’s as fer as they can go-huh
Ay’ can look down in at hole on me—
they cain’t go no further-hah
Ah’ but I got a man at can go right down in’ere with me-huh
An’ when resurrection day come he can rise outta thar with me.
A’ glory ta God
They ain’t nothin’ too big ‘at my God cain’t handle it.
Glory ta God.
He’ll be right thar.
Now he’s not no little ‘ol bitty thang-huh
A’ glory ta God
But I am glad he is so little he can get in my heart-huh
A’ glory ta God
Get right down in’ere n’make me clean’n’ wholed-huh
And pure, praise tha Lord
People say oh you cain’t live holy.
[emphatically] Oh yes you can live holy-huh
And you’d better live holy-huh
If you don’t live holy you’re never gettin’-in were he’s at-huh
He said to be ye holy, for I am holy
A’glory ta God-huh
And people’ll tell ya they cain’t live holy-ahh
I cain’t live pure-huh
I cain’t live clean-huh
A’glory ta God he said holiness without-huh
Ah’no man’s gonna see tha Lord-huh
Ah’ so honey if you’re not holy-huh
You’re not gonna see him today,
When you leave ‘his world
I see our times come’n’gone.
We trust today we’ve said some’in ta hep you. We want ya ta know that we love ya, an’
Jesus love ya. He gave his life that you could have life, and have it more abundant.
An’ we be back next week if its tha Lord’s will, preachin’ you the good news of the
gospel. An’ we love ya in the Lord. An’ we turn it back to the radio announcer at this
time…
Sermon III

The Breath of Brother Pearl: “Are You Ready?”

You pray for us today. In Revelations 20 and chapter 12, and it said: I saw the dead small and great standing before God and the book was opened and another book was opened which was the book of life. And the dead were judged out of those thangs which were written in the book according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it and the dead in hell delivered up the dead which was in them and they were judged every man according to his works. And the dead in hell were casted into the lake of fire, this is the second death. And whosoever was not fount written in the book of life is casted into the lake of fire.

Amen, praise the Lord.
I’d like to preach just a little bit today, amen.
Are you ready, praise the Lord.
I thought about it this mornin’, praise the lord, and last night amen.
I was prayin’ and seekin’ the Lord
Seemed like he lead me to this scripture-ahh
Amen and I’ve prayed and I’ve cried
Amen praise the Lord
But are we ready to face it, amen.
When that book is opened friend its gonna mean somethin’-ahh
Amen when ya stand before God, amen-ahh
I’ve had people tell me, well-ahh
If so-and-so can make it to heaven-ahh
I haven’t got anything to worry about amen-ahh
Honey but I’ll tell ya somethin’ today, we better be worryin’-ahh
Whoop-Hal-le-lu-yer-ahh
Amen about our own soul-ahh
Amen because the bible said to let ever-man-ahh
Amen work out his own soul’s salvation-ahh
Amen with fear and with trem-ble-ahh
Amen they’s commin’ a day friend-ahh
Amen your gonna stand up before’em-ahh
Amen praise the Lord, and the books are gonna be opened-ahh
Whoop-Hal-le-lu-yer-ahh
Amen were its for you-ahh
Are where its against you-ahh
Amen your gonna stand there speechless-ahh
Amen praise the Lord-ahh
I’ve had people say well, God-ahh
Won’t send me to hell, no-ahh
Amen ya send yourself-ahh
Amen ya don’t obey-ahh
Amen what says the word of God-ahh
Hal-le-lu-yer-ahh
Amen but when the books are open-ahh
I’ve had people to tell me well-ahh
I’m gonna stand there and I’m gonna argee-ahh
Amen with God, this is just how silly-ahh
Amen some people is-ahh
Amen praise the Lord whoop-Hal-le-lu-yer-ahh
Amen but I believe today friend-ahh
Amen when the book of life is opened-ahh
Amen when ya stand before the Lord of Lords-ahh
Hak-cod-da-ee-oh-sai-ahh
And the King of Kings-ahh
Amen your gonna stand there speechless-ahh
Whoo-Hal-le-lu-yer-ahh
I feel somethin’ in here this mornin’-ahh
Whoa glory to God-ahh
I want my record to be clear-ahh
Amen praise the Lord-ahh
I wanna do everything friend-ahh
That I can do-ahh
Amen to uphold the standards-ahh’
Amen of God because-ahh
Amen one day after-awhile-ahh
Amen were gonna stand-ahh
Amen before him-ahh
Whoop-Hal-le-lu-yer-ahh
_And were gonna give an account of it._
Amen

We can live like the devil if ya want to
Whoop-Hal-le-lu-yer
Amen you can live any kind of life
Amen you wanna live-ahh
Amen die and go to hell lost without God-ahh
Whoop-hal-le-lu-yer-ahh
Amen but I’m here to tell you today friend-ahh
Amen if you wanna go to heaven-ahh
Amen you better come separated-ahh
Amen from the things-ahh
   Whoop-Hal-le-lu-yeer-ahh
Amen and get your mind-ahh
Amen set on heavenly thangs-ahh
Whoo-Hal-le-lu-yeer-ahh
And forget about-ahh
Amen the things of this world-ahh
Amen my God-ahh
I ain’t got the world’s riches-ahh
And I don’t need’em friend-ahh
Hal-le-lu-yeer-ahh
Oh glory to God-ahh
Its enough down here-ahh
Amen to get by with-ahh
Whoop-Hal-le-lu-yeer-ahh
Amen because-ahh
I b’lieve I got a mansion-ahh
A'waitin' on me.
Hal-le-lu-oh-se-de-oh-saii
Hal-le-lu-yeer
Friend its gonna be somethin’-huh
Whoop-Hal-le-lu-yeer-ahh
Amen ta stand before’em-ahh
Amen’n give an account-ahh
Amen of ever idle word-ahh
Amen man’ll be judged by the deeds-ahh
Amen that he done by the life-ahh
Amen that we’ve lived-ahh
Amen we’re gonna give an account of it-ahh
Oh yea you’ll get a righteous judge-ahh
Amen you’ll get everything-honey-ahh
At’s commin’ to you-ah
Amen you will not be left out-ahh
Amen praise the Lord-ahh
Where its good-ahh
Are where it’s bad-ahh
Amen praise the Lord-ahh
Amen God will give the righteous judge-ahh
Whoop-hal-le-lu-yeer
Amen because-ahh
He is the Lord of Lords-ahh
And he is the King of Kings-ahh
Amen my God-ahh
He’s gonna have the last say-ahh
Amen in mine’n’your life friend-ahh
Amen were we make it-ahh
Amen or were we don’t
Oh glory to God-ahh
He done too much for me friends-ahh
He brought me too far-ahh
Whoop-Hal-le-lu-yer-ahh
Amen he’s been too good ta me-ahh
Amen ta turn away from ‘em-ahh
Amen all I want-ahh
And everything I can get a’holt of-ahh
Amen from the word of God-ahh
I don’t need the world’s goods-ahh
Amen praise the Lord-ahh
Amen because one day after awhile-ahh
I’m gonna leave here-ahh
I’m gonna leave it all behind-ahh
*And its not-ta-gonna do me no good.*

Hal-le-lu-yer
Whoo-Glory!
Hal-le-lu-yer
I b’lieve the bible tell us-ahh
Amen ta lay up our treasures in heaven-ahh
Amen were the moths’n’t he rust-ahh
And the thieves cain’t get it-ahh
Amen ya lay it up down here-ahh
And you worry about it-ahh
Whoop-Hal-le-lu-yer-ahh
I wanna lay it up there-ahh
Oh thank God-ahh
Amen when I part this life-ahh
Hal-de-oh-saii-ahh
I can go home friends-ahh
Amen and enjoy-ahh
Amen the blessings of God-ahh
Hal-le-lu-yer-ahh
I’d live in a shack-ahh
Amen just ta make it to heaven-ahh
Amen praise the lord-ahh
But I don’t b’lieve they’s gonna be any there-ahh
Whoop-Hal-le-lu-yer-ahh
Amen but Jesus said in my father’s house-ahh
Are many mansions-ahh
If it were not so-ahh
I would have told you-ahh
Whoop-Hal-le-lu-yer-ahh
Amen praise the lord-ahh
We can have a mansion-ahh
A’waitin’ on us-ahh
Amen praise the Lord-ahh
If we’ll straighten up-ahh
Amen and live ‘cordin’-ahh
Amen to the word of God-ahh
Hal-le-lu-yer-ahh
I ain’t got no high school-ahh
Amen edge-jur-cation-ahh
But I’ll tell ya somethin’ today friend-ahh
I’m servin’ the world’s greatest teacher-ahh
Whoop-Hal-le-lu-yer-ahh
Amen he said ask-ahh
And I shall receive it-ahh
He said to seek and that shall find-ahh
Oh my God today-ahh
All we gotta do’s ask for it-ahh
Who-o-n’ask in faith believen’-ahh
Amen praise the Lord-ahh
Amen without faith-ahh
Its impossible-ahh
Amen to please the Lord-ahh
Amen but friend-ahh
It’s time to get ready-ahh
Amen we’re leavin’ here-ahh
I believe time is right up on us-ahh
Amen praise the Lord-ahh
I don’t b’lieve we got the time left-ahh
That we think we have-ahh
Praise the lord. This is Brother Pearl-huh. Sayin’ we love you. May God bless you
Brother Brown….

As Brother Brown arrives at the microphone and begins to announce prayer requests, Brother Pearl is heard once again in the background breathing out one final vivacious “Whoo!”; as if the breath of the Holy Ghost had not fully left his lungs.
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