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TRANSFORMATIONS: MATERIAL TERMS FOR WRITING ON RELIGION IN
COMPOSITION CLASSROOMS

By

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B.A., Wheaton College, 2002
M.A., Appalachian State University, 2007

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2013

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A Dissertation Approved on

April 10, 2013

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family—but especially to my parents, Teri and Al Williams; my brothers and sisters, Drew Williams, Jana Gunther, Tony Gunther, and Allison Williams; my aunt and uncle, Tammy and Bill Pence; and my grandparents, Jim and Jane Reynolds—in recognition of your generosity, patience, and support through this process. My immense respect for the intelligence, depth, sincerity, and abiding value of your Christian faiths has driven me, over and over, to qualify and improve my ideas here.

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Thanks to Dr. Min Zhan Lu, who took on two projects—me and this dissertation—and guided both with care, rigor, and bracing honesty. Thanks to Dr. Karen Kopelson: along with Dr. Lu and Professor Brian Leung, she has taught me how deeply caring, generous, and demanding a mentor I will need to be if I'm to live up to the mentorship I've received. Thanks to Professor Paul Griner, for his steady and incisive contributions to this project and to my creative writing at all stages; thanks to Dr. Debra Journet for the patient guidance she's given me since my first semester at Louisville, and for never letting me off the hook; and thanks also to Dr. Shari Stenberg for the energy, expertise, and vast contributions she brought to the late stages of the project. I also want to recognize those who have formed my support network through graduate school, making substantive contributions to me as a person and to the material and aims of this dissertation: Dr. Jeffrey Davis, Dr. Kirstin Hotelling Zona, Dr. William Atkinson, Steve Watkins, Brice Nordquist, Ryan Trauman, Adam Robinson, Derek Hostetter, and Emily and Josh McGee. Finally, thanks to my first college mentor, Dr. Em Griffin. Em told me when I was 20 years old, speaking of both religion and society, that we could either bless the mess, or we could set about fixing it. This is me, trying to fix it.

ABSTRACT

TRANSFORMATIONS: MATERIAL TERMS FOR WRITING ON RELIGION IN COMPOSITION CLASSROOMS

Mark Alan Williams

April 10, 2013

This dissertation argues for closer attention to the material conditions of student writing on religion. Writing scholars in recent years have called for the inclusion of students' religiously inflected perspectives, values, experiences, genres, and texts in the classroom, but I argue insufficient attention has been paid to the broader social contexts in which composition students must write about religion.

In the first chapter, I outline the basic principles of my theoretical approach and attempt to articulate the generalized exigency of this work in terms of our current political and religious climate. I contend that a clearer understanding of how changing conditions create and transform religions can better prepare educators to intervene in and alter potentially counterproductive understandings and assumptions held by students and instructors alike. In the second chapter, I illustrate this, demonstrating how approaches to religious students previously forwarded by rhetoric and composition scholars fail to adequately address the material conditions of the writing classroom and larger American religious culture in which students and teachers interact.

The third and fourth chapters draw on scholars outside rhetoric and composition to offer a materialist case-study of American evangelicalism, exploring how its

representations are distributed through various channels including institutional policies, celebrity representatives, research definitions, classroom interactions, and political platforms; and how these representations come to shape a society's religious ideas, commitments and identities. I also examine the discourse of alternative forms of evangelicalism to demonstrate how religious formations are contested and change in response to changing social contexts, such as recent shifts in American attitudes towards homosexuality and women's rights.

In chapter five, I draw on translingual pedagogies emphasizing the critical use of students' personal resources in the classroom to point out several ways students could employ their diverse religious resources in writing so as to interrogate and intervene in these changing religious contexts. Vital to these pedagogical recommendations is a focus on the role of disciplinary relationships, bodily practices, and material objects in religion, areas of study that have increasing value as rhetoric and composition looks to acknowledge these critical dimensions of learning and writing.

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CHAPTER I
THE WEAK MIDDLE

Charles Taylor characterizes the current “Secular Age” as one in which most individuals can no longer naively adhere to traditions but must always *choose*, forced to recognize that their tradition is one among a range of options. Anthony Giddens similarly suggests that globalization has placed new demands on people: “in a cosmopolitan world, more people than ever before are regularly in contact with others who think differently from them. They are required to justify their beliefs, at least implicitly, both to themselves and to others.” Giddens’ description, like Taylor’s, suggests what we already likely know: globalization brings contact, and contact often denaturalizes habituated beliefs—as well as habituated assumptions, feelings and behaviors. College writing courses are sites where these challenges to students and their ways of being occur; not only because the university classroom is a site for the sort of contact that Giddens gestures at, but also because the rationale behind many contemporary writing courses emphasizes diversity, complexity, cultural critique, reflection, and choice. Our classrooms are inherently and intentionally sites where such encounters across difference will take place. Recognizing this pressure, scholars in rhetoric and composition have spent more than a quarter century asking how we can better facilitate (both initiate and address) these processes of critique, self-reflection, representation, and choice with all students.

Religious discourses are increasingly recognized by writing instructors as one of these sources of difference (Daniell; Goodburn; Perkins; Gere; Rand; Carter; Thomson; DePalma). But religious discourses—a term by which writers often designate religious ways of being that include religiously-inflected perspectives, values, feelings, behaviors, texts, genres, as well as the communities in which they circulate (Thomson 7)—are not always comparable to other differences that instructors work to incorporate in the classroom. Religious students and their religious discourses—statistics suggest somewhere between 70 and 80 percent of American students claim a religious affiliation—present a different challenge for instructors because religions have been and continue to be implicated in many forms of oppression and intolerance. Elizabeth Rand’s statement ten years ago still holds true, although it now might apply to more religious groups than she references: “We may feel suspicious toward religion—particularly Christianity—as a cultural and social force that has been used too often to oppress and dominate people” (351). In the United States, for example, we can cite the religious institutions, coalitions, and discourses currently fueling legislative and cultural efforts against gay marriage and contraceptive rights. Given this suspicion, it can seem that incorporating religious discourse as a legitimate difference in the classroom will mean “either working toward effecting [political] change in students, some of whom appear to oppose it, or reinforcing through [our] teaching practices what [we] perceive to be ethically noxious social relations” (Lu and Horner, “Problematic” 265).

In this fairly common construction of the situation, we are faced with an ostensible choice between *promoting* tolerance by challenging a dominant religious discourse, or *practicing* tolerance by abstaining from forcing our critical discourse onto

religious students. The first to thoroughly articulate this concern was Amy Goodburn. Fifteen years ago, she reversed the common-sense framing of religious students as possessors of the dominant discourse, and instead worried that some religious students were actually struggling against a dominant *critical* discourse. As she noted, “some fundamentalist students’ experiences often are that of constantly defending their beliefs from dominant discourse, even those that invoke liberatory goals” (350). In this struggle she saw between critical academic discourses and Christian fundamentalist discourses, students were forced to “engage in counter-hegemonic practices daily in classrooms where the discourses through which they read the world are delegitimized or challenged” (350). To remedy this, Goodburn hoped to re-present fundamentalist discourse to writing instructors in a way that might alter what she called “oppressive classroom relations” (351). Following subsequent, similar critiques from Priscilla Perkins and then Rand, critical strategies that challenged religious discourses largely ceded the ground to inclusive strategies that construed religious and academic discourses as complementary and worked to avoid hegemonic relations between students and academic discourse.¹ I understand this as a major shift away from trying to “fix” or “change” religious students and their religious discourse (promoting tolerance) and towards what Bruce Horner and Min Zhan Lu describe as “a commitment to honor the experiences, needs, and desires of students or informants” (“Problematic” 258)—what I call practicing tolerance.

In these inclusive strategies, students’ religious commitments have come to be viewed increasingly as discourses or identities to be respected and incorporated as classroom *resources* that help students acquire academic discourse, while the critical idea

¹ Elizabeth Vander Lei and Lauren Fitzgerald, Shannon Carter, Heather E. Thomson, and Michael John DePalma have each noted this inclusive trend as well.

of working to *change* religious discourses or helping students work to change religious discourses has become less and less visible. This inclusive trend seems to be on the rise despite our persisting, if largely unvoiced, concerns that religious discourses can still prove hegemonic, ethically and politically suspect. I find this a less-than-satisfactory result. I applaud the sentiment behind this shift, but I'm concerned that in the process we've left behind the important critical aim of promoting tolerance, specifically the aim of helping our religious students use their writing to participate in improving their lived conditions. Improving those lived conditions, of course, should include helping them to change their religious discourse and religious discourse community. Unless we do, we cannot successfully answer Shari Stenberg's call that writing be used to help religious students obtain new ways of examining their religion that might be "politically transformative" (284).

In this dissertation, I work to locate a strategy for accomplishing inclusive goals while still pursuing a politically transformative agenda. I believe this begins by acknowledging that religious students and writing instructors are always "trying to talk to each other under the weight of global political, cultural, and economic forces we [can] only understand incompletely," as Bronwyn Williams has written (116). Our strategies have not yet achieved a balance between promoting and practicing tolerance because we haven't given sufficient attention to these structuring forces, what Williams also calls the "constraints of the structures of power" (116). My dissertation responds to this gap by drawing on scholarship in anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, and rhetoric and composition to posit a new contextual framework for writing on religion in light of those forces. Specifically, my project investigates and explicates materialist approaches to

religious culture, and to religious students' writing, that can help us achieve Stenberg and Perkins' politically transformative goals.

The Trans-formational Approach

In this first chapter, I outline the basic principles of my theoretical approach to religion, and attempt to articulate the generalized exigency of this work in terms of our current political and religious climate. In order to do so, we must begin from the work of sociologist Talal Asad, whose writings on religious studies initiated my particular line of approach almost thirty years ago. The crucial founding assumption in Asad's "formational" approach is that religions are always in process; like genders, identities, and languages, religions do not have an essence or a stable core. They instead depend for their existence upon the forms of life that maintain and transmit them—languages, material objects, relationships, practices—and the social apparatuses that organize and authorize those forms so that particular religious practices, relations, and loyalties are enabled, while others are disabled. So what a religion *is* can only be determined provisionally by the practices and institutions shaping it into a temporary historical formation at a given moment (on this, see also Keane; Engelke; Mahmood; Robbins; and Chidester). Religions are always *becoming*.

Asad originally asserted this perspective in a critique of anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who had forwarded an essential, universalizable definition of "religion" that he could apply to various groups and behaviors. But such universalizing definitions, Asad argues, "aim at identifying essences when we should be trying to explore concrete sets of historical relations and processes" ("Reflections" 252). Failing to explore religion in

terms of these concrete sets, Asad suggests, obscures the “processes of formation and effects of power, hovering above social reality” (251). Put another way, Asad argues that religious meanings and symbols simply “cannot be understood independently of . . . their articulation of social life in which work and power are always crucial” (250; 251). So Asad argues we must “begin by asking what are the historical conditions (movements, classes, institutions, ideologies) necessary for the existence of particular religious practices and discourses. In other words, let us ask: how does power create religion?” (252). This sets out the two related lines of religious investigation that inform Asad’s work as well as this dissertation—the ongoing creation of religion through *processes of formation* and through *relations of power*.

Processes of Formation

As indicated by the phrase “processes of formation,” Asad’s term formation here is not only a noun referring to a religion, but always also a verb referring to the active, historic process that constantly inscribes particular religious sensibilities, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors into individual and corporate bodies, producing *religion*. I prefer Asad’s term formation over terms like “discourse” because the crucial emphasis upon the contingency of particular instantiations of religion is constantly highlighted in the dual reference to *processes* of formation and *products* of formation. Other terms with a similar utility include “collective” (Latour) and “assembly” (DeLanda). Though there are differences, all three terms encourage users to present social groups as instable and constantly in process—as Bruno Latour writes, when looking at a network, we must

focus more on the “work” than the “net.” To put it differently, we must focus on the how and the why, not the what, when examining religion from a formational perspective.

From the formational perspective, religions’ relative stability paradoxically results from the nearly imperceptible process of change that theorists including Pierre Bourdieu, Judith Butler and Alastair Pennycook have called “sedimentation.” Sedimentation occurs as particular practices, words, objects, and sensibilities are practiced—repeated—over time and in various contexts, coming to be both socially recognized and described as markers of particular religious formations, and so create apparently natural boundaries around religions through their relatively stable reproduction. Together, these apparent coherences and boundaries result in the sets of practices that we identify as “religions.” But sedimentation is an ongoing process, because material conditions continually change, and because all new iterations of religious actions and practices must break (however slightly) with the previous context in which they were performed in order to be re-contextualized in their new context. Thus the next “stable” iteration of a religion will necessarily be different from the previous “stable” iteration, so that repetition simultaneously produces religious stability—as in duration—and assures its essential instability—as in change (Pennycook 34-51).

In addition to simultaneously offering an account of the durability and instability of religion, the practical sedimentation process assigns religious participants an active role in forming and re-forming religion—after all, practitioners are the ones who bring religious words, forms, and behaviors into new contexts, maintaining and transforming religion through iterating its forms across space and time. Practitioners, then, create religion. Throughout the dissertation I will draw out different facets and consequences of

this assumption, contrasting it with the implicit assumptions in our own work. Asad's formational perspective begins from the assumption that religious users do not simply experience or believe in a static religion—they actively perpetuate, and change, the forms of religion that they receive and the inflected forms of religion that they subsequently transmit. I will offer multiple examples of this below.

Relations of Power

But focusing on sedimentation in formational processes also introduces the question of power into religion, because sedimentation indicates that uses of religious forms are not free, but instead are constrained by the social conditions and previous histories of use that make them socially meaningful. As Judith Butler writes, “[T]he subject is neither a sovereign agent with a purely instrumental relation to language, nor a mere effect whose agency is pure complicity with prior operations of power. The vulnerability to the Other . . . is never overcome in the assumption of agency (one reason that ‘agency’ is not the same as ‘mastery’)” (Butler 26, qtd. in Lu and Horner, “Translingual Literacy” 11). This sort of tension is perhaps most visible when religious practitioners re-deploy religious conventions for their own purposes—like the Egyptian Muslim women in Sherif’s “Gender Contradictions in Families,” who don the *hijab* in order to take well-paying jobs outside the home (see discussion in chapter four). Those women are neither sovereign nor passive, to borrow Butler’s descriptors, but *negotiating*—deploying one religious tradition in order to transform another to their advantage (the Egyptian social and religious systems that encourage middle- and upper-class married women to remain in the home).

As it regards religious formations, Asad addresses this “vulnerability to the Other” that Butler describes at least partially in terms of *processes of authorization*. Rather than asserting that there are quintessentially religious dispositions or meanings that we can locate in various cultural behaviors, Asad argues that for something to be “religious,” there must be an authorizing process, and implicitly agents, that declare it so:

The connection between religious theory and practice is fundamentally a matter of power—of disciplines *creating* religion, interpreting true meanings, forbidding certain utterances and practices and authorizing others. Hence the questions that Geertz does not ask: how does religious discourse actually define religion? What are the historical conditions in which it can act effectively as a demand for the imitation, or the prohibition, or the authentication of truthful utterances and practices? How does power create religion? (246)

That last phrase is the provocative refrain throughout Asad’s article, and the question he ultimately condemns Geertz for failing to address. So Asad’s formational perspective encourages us to focus on the creative work of power relations on several different levels—on one level, there are the *intraformational* power asymmetries between religious practitioners within a tradition that shape the way a religion will be practiced and talked about; second, there are the *interformational* relations and power asymmetries among religious (and irreligious) groups in society that shape religions by introducing new possibilities or restrictions into religious practices; and on a third level, there are *interformational* asymmetrical power relations between researchers and religious subjects, which often seem to enact the former asymmetries.

Work and Power: Transformations

In a complex move, Asad locates all of these creative and asymmetrical relations within Geertz’s definitional work. For Geertz, Asad argues, the heart of religion rests in

“religious symbols [that] formulate conceptions of a general order of existence” (qtd. in Asad 247); those religious conceptions are affirmed and expressed in (not shaped by) religious practices. On this conception of religion, Asad argues, “to achieve what is truly religion, ‘received practices and conventional sentiments’ must be joined to discourses which *affirm* something, which give these practices some cosmological meaning” (245). The essence of religion for Geertz, then, lies in a meaning behind the practices, which the anthropological researcher attempts to discern: “always, there must be something that exists *beyond* the observed practices, the heard utterances, the written words” (246). But Asad argues that this definition of religion, which still seems to hold sway in many rhetoric and composition texts², gives inordinate primacy to religious thought and religious meanings “without regard to the processes by which meanings are constructed” (245). Geertz’s focus on religious meaning, Asad writes, misses “the occurrence of events (utterances, practices, dispositions), and the authorizing processes which give those events religious meaning” (245).

For Asad, religious symbols and actions are not merely *expressive* of religious conceptual truth, but rather are *constitutive* of religious truth and both constrain and enable its experience. Asad points out that even for St. Augustine,

[I]t is not mere religious symbols that implant true dispositions, but power—ranging all the way from laws (imperial and ecclesiastical) and other sanctions (hellfire, death, salvation, good repute, peace, etc.), to the disciplinary activities of social institutions (family, school, city, church, etc.) and of human bodies (fasting, prayer, obedience, penance, etc.). Augustine was quite clear that power, the effect of an entire network of motivated practices . . . imposed the conditions for experiencing [religious] truth. (242-43)

² See discussion in chapters two, three, and five

Rather than existing out there somewhere apart from its practical realizations, for Asad here religious truth is immanent: *implanted* in bodies in the form of a “true disposition,” and conditionally *experienced* as a result of the social disciplines that produce that disposition.

Asad argues that Geertz’s definition, by removing the essence of religion from this processual immanence, is heavily biased towards modernist, idealist, Western, and specifically Protestant constructions of religion. When Geertz universalizes his definition of religion as cosmological meaning and applies that largely Christian definition to the behaviors of non-Western and non-Christian religious groups, he obscures and perpetuates the intra- and inter-formational power relations mentioned above. First, in accepting the more modernist Christian construction of religion—rather than, say, Augustine’s—Geertz ignores the historical processes and power struggles within religions that shape and re-shape their practices and beliefs. He mistakes the religion he sees in one point in time for something transcendent. But he also mistakes the religion he sees in one location for something universal. In doing so, he ignores the power asymmetries at work between the Western researcher and his non-Western subjects, wherein the researcher’s discourse itself does the work of deciding what events and practices have true religious meaning. This research process echoes broader *interformational* power relations between Western religions like Christianity and the religions of the non-Western populations Geertz studies.

To draw out these various relations, Asad has most recently focused on the practices and institutions of modern “secularism” that form contemporary religions. He sets out the following guiding questions for his study, *Formations of the Secular*:

How do attitudes to the human body (to pain, physical damage, decay, and death, to physical integrity, bodily growth, and sexual enjoyment) differ in various forms of life? What structures of the senses—hearing, seeing, touching—do these attitudes depend on? In what ways does the law define and regulate practices and doctrines on the ground that they are ‘truly human’? What discursive spaces does this work of definition and regulation open up for grammars of ‘the secular’ and ‘the religious’? How do all these sensibilities, attitudes, assumptions and behaviors come together to support or undermine the doctrine of secularism? (17)

He examines, as one example of these interformational relations of work and power, a situation in Greece where individuals were not allowed to keep their religious affiliation on “identity” cards despite their protests—thus enforcing a definition of religion and of identity. Asad explains that the Greek government refused by citing the need to protect their human rights; but clearly, what it means to be “human” is different for the protesters and the government. As Asad argues, what the protesters “regard as vital to their religious being,” the government judges not to “affect their freedom of religious belief”—so here we see different views of 1) what human rights include and 2) the nature of religion and religious belonging (*Formations* 139-140).

In order to declare that keeping the religious affiliation would amount to the violation of those desirous individuals’ civil rights and removing it would not, the government declared religion (and identity) an individual, private matter that therefore cannot be violated by lack of access to particular forms of identification, including communal identity. Only on the assumption that human rights are “individual” and even that they relate to *anonymity* can a government refuse a minority group the right to identify as a group on the basis of human rights. And only on the assumption that religion is about internal “religious belief” can such a ruling be upheld. But these are not universally-agreed upon definitions of the human and of religion, but rather Western

ones: Asad argues that in contrast, being Muslim “is being able to live as autonomous individuals in a collective life that extends beyond national borders” (180). Those Muslims’ *religious* being, in other words, was violated for the sake of ostensibly protecting their rights as a *human* being. So we might fairly say that a significant social conflict plays out here in the production of a small material object: practical definitions of religion and of humanity are contested and made significant through practical enforcement, motivated by a question of legal practice, and decided through a structure of legal channels, ultimately shaping how it is possible to practice religion and to be human and/or religious in Greece.

Asad’s work is often focused in this way on the complex and mutually constitutive relations *between* formations (like Western academics and non-Western informants). He imagines contemporary life as “complex space” in which a variety of forms of life operate and relate simultaneously. In defining this complex space, he cites John Milbank’s argument that “there is no such thing as absolute non-interference; no action can be perfectly self-contained, but always impinges upon other people, so that spaces will always in some degree ‘complexly’ overlap, jurisdictions always in some measure be competing, loyalties remain (perhaps benignly) divided” (*Formations* 178). Complex space speaks to the complexity of individual’s “internal” space as well: we should imagine society as “a multiplicity of overlapping bonds and identities. [In medieval Christendom and Islam] People were not always expected to subject themselves to one sovereign authority, nor were they themselves sovereign moral subjects” (179). In complex space, everyone participates in multiple formations—“the sovereign state cannot (never could) contain all the practices, relations, and loyalties of its citizens” (179).

Simply put, from a formational perspective religions do not operate in a vacuum, but interfere, are interfered with, and really *depend upon* external discourses—public discourses on sexuality, gender, race, politics, education, even religion—and the shared forms of social life—media, political systems, educational systems, economies, and the like—wherein those discourses can circulate. So rather than looking for a single hegemonic discourse or single religious powerful institution in society, Asad encourages the recognition of various mutually-interfering formations that operate at a variety of practical levels to support, change, or undermine one another.

In order to even more firmly indicate the mobility and instability of religious formation in complex space, in my dissertation I will term Asad's construction of religion *transformational*. There's obviously some redundancy in the term, but transformation highlights for me the *cross*-formational action that accounts for much of the change and relations of power we want to represent. Trans-formational action takes several forms: First, there are the *internal* trans-formational relations between groups within a religious formation (not all Muslims would agree with Asad's characterization of "being Muslim," for instance); second, there are also *external* trans-formational relations wherein outside formations participate in and reciprocally shape a religious formation, as in the Greek government's restriction on religious practice; third, and just as importantly, there are trans-formational relations that translate between levels, in and across formations: from bodily practice to religious belief, from manufacturer's invention to religious disposition, from legal doctrine to religious identity. In various chapters of the dissertation I will focus on all three of these trans-formational relations.

It is my working assumption in this dissertation that education is one of the forms of life in which religions circulate, and that liberal academe specifically is one of the “competing” formations engaged in mutually interfering relations with religion—especially, in American classrooms, with forms of Christianity like evangelicalism in which many of our students participate. In addition to Asad’s work on religion and Western thought, writers like Charles Taylor and Mark C. Taylor have traced a few intricate engagements between Christianity and Western academic thought far beyond what needs to be established to initiate this investigation (*Sources of the Self; After God*). The academy, however, is an incredibly varied institution with largely undeterminable relations to both religion and traditions in Western thought. It seems necessary for me, at least, to narrow my scope.³ I believe writing scholars’ texts on religious students offer us descriptions of local instances where religion and the writing classroom interfere with one another, and in somewhat regularized ways. That being the case, this dissertation attempts to answer Asad’s provocative question—How does power make religion?—with regards to my discipline, rhetoric and composition. In what ways, I ask throughout, do writing scholars, instructors, and students participate in the making of religion through these overlaps and interferences? What sorts of religions are we making? How might we participate differently in shaping the various practices of religion in America?

³ The same logic, in part, drives my decision to focus on evangelicalism. I certainly want to recognize that students affiliated to other forms of religion—not only other forms of Christianity but other forms of religion and irreligion—are also present in the composition classroom. I assume here that they too may participate in and experience interfering relations between academic and religious formations. But given the incredibly diverse nature of religion it often proves necessary here to narrow my scope to just one set of interfering relations, drawing in other forms of life and religion wherever possible. I elaborate on my selection of evangelicalism, specifically, in chapter three (see pp. 86-7).

Material Consequences

So why are the answers to those questions important to rhetoric and composition, specifically? I will argue throughout this dissertation that the consequences of current constructions of religion in America, perpetuated in part by interactions in the writing classroom, are politically and socially damaging—not only to the civic agenda of a liberal arts education, but also to our students whose ways of being religious or irreligious are constrained by these constructions. In a recent online interview, sociologist Philip Gorski puts the contemporary religio-political situation well:

Our current politics is in many ways defined by the people on the edges, by radical secularists on the Left and religious nationalists on the Right. Not to say that this is all that's going on in American politics, but if you take this religious slice of it, I think that's a lot of it, with the culture wars and so on. The two feed off one another to a certain degree. The radical secularists become a stand-in for anybody who's on the Left and anybody who's not the religious nationalists, and the radical religious nationalists become a stand-in for everybody who's religious. When people look at religious people from the Left, you get this kind of undifferentiated and polarizing picture, so there is this rather unfortunate synergy between the two positions.

I argue in this dissertation that even our most generous approaches to religious students in the writing classroom unintentionally perpetuate this hegemonic and polarizing situation.

This polarizing binary choice (conservative religion or liberal secularism) that Gorski describes has concerned many of our writers, including Michael John DePalma, Shannon Carter, and Elizabeth Vander Lei. We often explicitly worry that students will be forced to choose between the two poles (see chapter two for more on this disciplinary discussion). But contemporary research shows convincingly that the binary generally produces three categories. Sociologists Robert Putnam and David Campbell describe

their finding on this: “people (especially young people) have increasingly sorted themselves out religiously according to their moral and political views, leaving both the liberal, secular pole and the conservative, evangelical pole strengthened and the moderate religious middle seriously weakened” (*American Grace* 132). Some students are channeled towards religious conservatism, some towards secular liberalism, but the vast majority move towards what Putnam and Campbell have rightly described as the *weak* moderate religious middle. It’s this third option I find most significant and troubling, because it represents a missed opportunity for writing instructors to participate in religion in the politically transformative ways Stenberg imagines. I hope to show throughout this dissertation how our current practices risk contributing not only to religious and political polarization, but worse, to the expansion and weakening of the religio-political middle. Here, I briefly articulate those three positions.

Religious Conservatism

Students’ first potential response to current constructions of religion could be termed “incorporation,” in which they come to embody and identify with the representational norms. The primary reasons for incorporation will be discussed in depth below; but troublingly, research indicates that secular education can actually contribute to, or accelerate, this response. As Perkins notes, “conservative Christian students who attend public institutions tend to become more fundamentalist . . . by the time they graduate, whereas those who attend religious colleges emerge considerably less so” (594). Perkins’ brief explanation is that “students at church-related colleges are enabled by some combination of peer support and culturally sensitive teaching to become more

questioning than their relatively embattled and isolated counterparts at secular schools do” (595). But rhetorical theory affords us a more satisfying, if still partial, explanation of such responses. Within individual interactions, Elizabeth Ervin calls the reactionary phenomenon Perkins describes “discursive entrenchment,” the rhetorical digging-in-of-the-heels that results from perceived risk, disrespect, or hostility in a rhetorical encounter. This reaction—described so well by Carolyn Sherif, Muzafer Sherif, and Carl Hovland’s Social Judgment Theory—is the motive force often attributed to larger religious movements as well.

Philosopher of religion Mark C. Taylor, for example, argues that all fundamentalisms emerge as situated responses to perceived threats (to tradition, identity, values, beliefs, and so on) (13). In his *Reith Lectures*, Giddens similarly argues that fundamentalism is simply “beleaguered tradition,” and in *American Grace* Putnam and Campbell suggest that the emergence of contemporary evangelicalism in the 1970s—a broader cultural movement than fundamentalism, *per se*—could be read as a reaction against the liberal challenges of the sixties that continues to resonate for many. Their research of 2006 bears this out: “more than two thirds of evangelical Protestants in our Faith Matters survey said that they felt their values were ‘seriously’ or ‘moderately threatened in America today’” (114). All of these writers seem to suggest that the academic environment Heather E. Thomson describes in her dissertation on religious students and writing instructors, where both perceived and real antipathy seem the norm, may actually be *triggering* fundamentalism in conservative religious students while simultaneously silencing the majority of moderate and progressive religious students

whose fears of being mischaracterized—and mischaracterizing themselves—keep them from speaking up (Thomson 72, 96, 206).

Liberal Secularism

Christian students' second response to the dominant religious representation is related. I call this the oppositional stance, visible in the exodus of American religious students and American young people more generally from religion. Researcher David Kinnaman concisely describes the shift:

1. Teenagers are some of the most religiously active Americans.
2. American twentysomethings are the least religiously active. (*You Lost Me* 22)

Putnam and Campbell also point out that the incidence of two sets of “nones”—those who claim to identify with no religious group and those who did not attend church in the last year—has risen from about 7% of college freshmen in 1965 to about 24% in 2009. In fact, despite common perceptions to the contrary, there are significantly more Americans aged 18-29 claiming “no religious preference” than “Evangelical Protestant” (the most populous religious category). Putnam and Campbell explicitly attribute this desertion of religion to popular shifts in both popular disposition and the representation of religion:

This group of young people came of age when ‘religion’ was identified publicly with the Religious Right, and exactly at the time when the leaders of that movement put homosexuality and gay marriage at the top of their agenda. And yet this is the generation in which the new tolerance of homosexuality has grown most rapidly. In short, just as the youngest cohort of Americans was zigging in one direction, many highly visible religious leaders zagged in the other.

. . . Many devout religious people would have preferred to (and did) sit out the culture wars, and some liberal Protestant groups have tried hard to keep up with the evolving views of young people on issues of sexual (and homosexual) morality. It is very hard, however, for a religious “brand” forged in the fires of the Reformation four centuries ago to

“rebrand” itself overnight. Moreover, this youthful generation seems unwilling or unable to distinguish the stance of the most visible, most political, and most conservative religious leaders from organized religion in general. (130-1)

Putnam and Campbell are very clear about this: it is the articulation of Christianity with conservative politico-social agendas that drives many young people away from religion. Kinnaman also observes that most of those who leave organized Christianity “are more defined by and committed to their distance from Christianity than they are to their current spiritual perspectives” (*You Lost Me* 66). While “Many still have positive things to say about specific people (such as their parents), . . . the overall tenor of their perceptions is negative” (68). The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, too, notes the motivating force of these negative perceptions. They observe that nones tend to “think of religious people as hypocritical, judgmental or insincere” (qtd. in Putnam and Campbell 131). And so the polarizing cycle continues—negative representations of religion lead to more secular liberals, more religious conservatives, and a lot of religious moderates who lack the cohesion or representation necessary for political or even institutional mobilization.

While we may all agree that increased alienation and fundamentalism are troublesome outcomes for the writing class, some of us may be tempted to feel that growing dissatisfaction with religion is a fine development, an even better one as it may be leading to the generalized decline of religion in America (I’m thinking here of prominent writers such as Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins). Writing scholars have generally argued, however, that such a shift constitutes a loss of identity (see discussion of Carter; Rand; Vander Lei; and DePalma in chapter two). But I would offer a different, perhaps more pragmatic reason for concern: Research finds that religious participation actually makes participants significantly better citizens and better neighbors

(one of the chief and oft-cited goals of our liberal educational environment) than those who do not participate regularly. Drawing on their own survey data as well as previous research, Putnam and Campbell report that “greater religiosity tends to produce increased giving, volunteering, and civic engagement” (462), as well as greater levels of empathy, altruism (464), and trust (470). This is true even when controlling simultaneously for “gender, education, income, race, region, homeownership, length of residence, marital and parental status, ideology, and age” (452). Putnam and Campbell compare this improvement directly to the civic benefits of education—“the civic difference between Americans who attend church nearly every week and those who rarely do so is roughly equivalent to two full years of education” (454). Education that draws students away from religious participation thus may be undermining some of its own civic goals, and should not be entered upon lightly.

It’s very important to note that these benefits do not accrue as a result of beliefs or personal spirituality—quite oppositely, in every major national survey they reviewed Putnam and Campbell found that what they call “good neighborliness” is correlated to participation in a religious social network and shows no significant correlation with individual religious beliefs (476). They are clear on this:

Once we know how observant a person is in terms of church attendance, nothing that we can discover about the content of her religious faith adds anything to our understanding or prediction of her good neighborliness—nothing about her views of the Bible or life after death or evolution or eschatology, or her personal experience of God, or the kind of God she believes in, or the importance of religion in her life or in her personal or political decisions, or her views about morality or salvation or evolution or Judgment Day or the Rapture, or her habits of saying grace or reading scripture. (467)

Underlining this point, they note that an atheist who get deeply involved in a religious social network “is much more likely to volunteer in a soup kitchen than the most fervent believer who prays alone” (473). Separating belief from belonging is not entirely possible, of course, as it may well be religious belief that spurs the push to begin belonging in the first place. But to the extent that belief is implicated, it is noteworthy that the effect of religion on citizenship is stronger for moderate and progressive religious participants than for conservatives. Putnam and Campbell find, “for many measures of civic engagement, such as club membership, organizational leadership, and . . . local reform activities, religiosity matters more for self-described liberals than for self-described conservatives” (456). Thus, these benefits aren’t likely to go away if religious participants shift into more liberal and tolerant modes of religious belief or religious practice—but if the religious participation creating the benefits drops off, these benefits assuredly drop off as well, Putnam and Campbell find within just one year’s time.

The Weak Middle

The third, most pervasive and troubling, response to the dominant construction of religion in America is the relative silencing and political passivity of moderate and progressive religious students. When conservative representations of religion dominate people’s perceptions of what religion looks like, and when instructor-representatives of liberal academe echo and act upon these dominant representations of religion as reactionary, they stifle (or at least *slow*) the ability of young religious moderates to practice, represent and publicize their alternative or emergent religious practices as legitimate religious practices. This felt lack of agency, so often leading to moderates’

silence, is cogently expressed by students in Thomson's study. One of her informants writes, "As long as Christians stay, you know, as long as they don't let their religion seep out and try to change other people, I think most people are fine with that" (106). Christian students report "avoiding topics with which their instructors may disagree; choosing not to disclose their religious beliefs; striving to be 'neutral' in their work" (206). They silence themselves on the assumption "that to identify as Christian is to invite doubts or preconceived notions about their intellectual abilities, their political views, and their openness to people of other faiths and worldviews" (124).

Thomson's religious informants, like writing instructors and writing scholars, seem to struggle against this dominant negative representation of religion. But they fear they are not capable of representing their very different religious practice adequately in the face of these more dominant representations. As one student explains,

I feel a lot of times that I'm not equipped enough . . . I just have a hard time getting out what I mean, so when I talk to people that's one of my big concerns, that I'll say something I don't mean, that it comes off the wrong way, or that I'm presenting my faith in a poor way. I just get really insecure about that . . . I definitely do get scared, because I don't think I'm the wisest person alive. (105)

Another student, Quinn, describes feeling embarrassed and angry after seeing the way a preacher represents Christianity on the quad. He wants to differentiate himself from "that guy"—but he's not sure he can. Thomson writes that Quinn feels "he has little control over how others might forge connections between him and that which he rejects" (96). These pervasive negative representations leave students feeling "a lack of control over how the label 'Christian' (or even just 'religious') will be interpreted by their peers and instructors" (105). Thomson describes the effects of this loss of control: "The lack of power they have (or feel they have) over people's perceptions of them contributes to a

feeling that being Christian at UM involves a certain amount of risk and requires a willingness to explain oneself” (97). Many students feel fearful and defensive in such settings. As a result, “All but two student interviewees mention fear as part of their experience as a Christian student”; particularly, Thomson suggests, fear at “the prospect of dredging up other people’s negative associations with Christianity” (104). These students are frustrated by popular constructions of Christianity, but experience feelings of inarticulacy when they wish to challenge them. In the end, they don’t feel they have a chance to fairly represent themselves and their religion in the face of such challenges. So a lack of control over their representation leads to silence, and this silence in turn increases the misperception of religion that leads to instructor hostility, silences moderate religious students, and places conservative religious students even more strongly in the spotlight and on the defensive. It’s a self-perpetuating cycle.

These students, however, do not only feel this lack of agency in the academy: they feel silenced and out of control in churches as well. While Kinnaman argues that at least half of Christian young people are disaffected and feel at odds with the dominant religious representation and its norms, only about ten percent are actually explicitly engaged in trying to create change within Christianity. Some stay passively; others leave entirely; others wander for a few years; and that leaves only a meager *ten percent* who consistently “are trying on new ways of Christ-following that make sense to their communities and careers. Their rejection of some mindsets and methods common to the North American church stem from this desire” (*You Lost Me* 77). As Kinnaman explains this passivity, “The details differ, but the theme of disengagement pops up again and again, often accompanied by a sense that the decision to disconnect was *out of their*

hands” (10, emphasis mine). He goes on to quote two online comments from an article on Catholicism that underline this lack of agency: “I wonder what percentage of . . . ‘Lost’ Catholics feel like I do, that we did not leave the Church, but rather, the Church left us.” “I hung in for a while, thinking that fighting from within was the way to go, but I ultimately realized that it was damaging my relationship with God and my relationship with myself and I felt no choice but to leave” (10).

Christian Smith, observing many of the same attitudes and behaviors in college-aged Americans, classifies them as generally disengaged from religion—he says they just don’t care (288-89). Others have similarly noted some decline in religiosity among younger Americans, though they don’t draw the same strong conclusion. In fact on a number of scales, religious practice is *up* among young Americans. But it seems to me that Kinnaman and Thomson’s in-depth research on young Americans’ religious experiences demonstrates how negative engagement and blasé disengagement may be two sides of the same coin. Both might be interpreted as symptoms of a shared history of commitment and estrangement from religion, and both appear to draw upon a similarly liminal sensibility, or posture towards it—neither for nor against, neither in nor out. In either case—a generalized muting of religious feeling or a shared exilic posture—we can say with some certainty that there is an emergent religious formation in which many young Americans participate, and while it is decidedly not aligned with dominant constructions of religion, it is also not yet aligned with any other easily articulable, definite position. It is, then, mostly *potential*.

The most prescient takeaway from these findings for writing teachers is not merely that so many young Americans who grow up as Christians are unhappy with

Christianity, or different from the dominant representation of religion—although whether they stay, hang around on the fringes, or leave entirely, this appears to be true. The most prescient takeaway is that most young Americans don't believe they can change Christianity, or practice Christianity in the moderate or progressive ways they'd like to within institutional Christianity, or represent their Christianity in ways that differ from popular perceptions; worse, only a small percentage of them are even really trying. All three responses—incorporation, opposition, silence—seem practically to assume that religion is what it is—that the current manifestations of religion and secularism in America are real, essential, universal. When combined with the currently prominent forms of religion, this assumption, so counter to Asad's vision of religion, is successfully muting the political, social, and even theological potential of young Americans. By investigating the transformational processes responsible for creating this version of religion and pointing out how we participate in those processes, I hope to identify strategies for creating religion differently through our classroom practices.

Chapter Summaries

In Chapter Two, I argue that approaches to religious students previously forwarded by rhetoric and composition scholars fail to adequately address the material conditions of the writing classroom and larger American religious culture in which students and teachers interact. I ground this argument in published accounts of instructor interactions with religious students, finding that while scholars often recommend encouraging students to bring religiously-inflected resources into their academic writing, their approaches and representations of such interactions tend to homogenize religions

and their practitioners, treat such acts of representation as transparent, overlook ongoing asymmetrical power relations, and construct religious experience as self-evident. I argue that students are denied the opportunity to deliberate and act on their religious resources when instead of investigating the heterogeneity within their religious communities and exploring its sources and consequences, they are encouraged to represent those practices or attitudes in generalizing terms. I explore how failing to help a student highlight the losses, contradictions, and transformations created by translating her religious resources into new language falsely separates writing from thinking and living. I suggest that an opportunity for re-negotiating the asymmetrical power relations between academic and religious discourses is lost when instead of deliberating on, manipulating, or challenging the conventions of academic discourse, a student is simply encouraged to revise his religiously-inflected text to be more audience-effective. I point out that when a student's religious experiences are reported on as self-evident rather than interrogated as sites of cultural shaping, that student is denied the opportunity to intervene in the cultural forces shaping those experiences.

In Chapters Three and Four, I use American evangelicalism as a test case for the relevance of my “transformational” approach to religion. These chapters are aimed, first, at accounting more fully for the material conditions that affect our classroom interactions with religious students; second, at constructing religions as sites of heterogeneity and conflict continually shaped by the ways individuals represent religious organizations, experiences, and identities in writing and speaking. To accomplish these aims, I analyze representations of American evangelicalism in a wide array of genres and media produced by lay practitioners and leading voices, including institutional policy

handbooks, denominational belief statements, organizational websites, blog entries, open letters, media networks, pop culture celebrities, sociological survey data, and previously published student and instructor interviews. These texts highlight the power struggles and transformations enacted through intra- and inter-formational debates as American evangelical practitioners work to shape evangelicalism's membership, public discourse on Christianity, and religion more generally. The transformational approach aligns with the work of Raymond Williams and Judith Butler to argue that all such hegemonic formations are also continually transformed by a multitude of external forces. I demonstrate this by analyzing evangelical texts and movements inflected by progressive strains of religion, generational differences, feminism, and gay rights discourses; but I also point out how the discourse of such alternative and emergent formations remains largely tethered to the hegemonic account as they continually define themselves with and against its stereotypes, terms and logics.

In Chapter Five, I explore the relevance of a transformational approach to religion for our everyday classroom practices. More specifically, I explore its alignment with translingual approaches which aim to use writing to not only respect and include students' multiple personal discursive resources traditionally undervalued in the classroom, but to recognize and develop students' capacities for actively shaping and reshaping the very languages, identities, and social relations playing a key role in their writing and learning. To accomplish this, translingual scholars suggest helping students deliberate on the traffic between those different resources and draw on them to participate in matters of concern extending beyond the writing classroom. I turn to student writing featured in previous scholarship in rhetoric and composition to examine how instead of

merely allowing students to bring religiously-inflected resources into the writing classroom, a transformational approach might help students attend to how and why they are interested in employing such resources, and how and why they might best go about re-creating and transforming their religious experiences, identities, and communities in the process of writing about them. Instead of encouraging a student to provide or defend a single definition of religion, a transformational approach would help the student to deliberate on the sources of her definition, the context of asymmetrical power relations in which her definition participates, and alternative definitions she might choose to forward. Instead of encouraging another student to find genres for expressing his frustration when a romantic break-up interferes in his relationship with God, asking that student to explore the socially-orchestrated nature of supernatural experiences might allow him to interrogate his experiential struggle, deliberate on its external sources, and make plans for intervention.

The increasingly rapid global flows of people, objects, signs, monies, ideas, and emotions across borders, which our discipline recognizes as a positive development in so many ways, also transmits religious conflicts—not to mention religious militancies—around the globe. That is my starting point in this dissertation: there is necessarily religion and religious conflict flowing into our classroom spaces (whether we recognize it, or not). Religion flows across the thresholds of our classrooms through the bodies of our students, through objects we or they bring to class, through texts we read or they carry in their e-readers, through ideas churned up in class discussion or the arguments of a paper, through the emotional responses that arise in our classes. Last year one of my students, Ambreen Paracha, composed a wrenchingly beautiful essay for my class

describing the murder of her family members at a mosque in Karachi during a religious holiday. Her creative non-fiction piece, which was supposed to be contained to eight to ten pages, sprawled to almost twenty—there was no stopping the flow of story and details once begun. The sectarian violence of Pakistan had materially entered Ambreen’s life, and through her, our classroom. In such ways, religion continually flows through our classrooms, and we must not shirk the responsibility this brings. Classroom strategies for approaching religion in respectful, yet transformative ways are all the more necessary in such a world. A transformational approach to matters of religion, informed by a translingual approach to writing and teaching, can better address the needs and interests of students across races, ethnicities, classes, and genders by assisting them in making critical use of their own religious practices and alignments when writing and learning. That is what this dissertation attempts to accomplish.

CHAPTER II

CAUGHT IN BETWEEN

This second chapter takes a transformational approach to religion in the writing classroom. Believing that intersections between religion and the writing classroom represent one particular site of transformational action by which religion is continually re-formed, I attempt to identify some specific formational processes and relations of power by which writing scholars have constructed the forms of religion visible in our classrooms and scholarship over the past twenty years. I begin by sketching an image of our current classroom situation as it is described in writing scholarship. Following this, I briefly trace the development of the assumptions and logics framing our current approach to religious students, which I term “inclusive.” I then spend the majority of the chapter identifying and re-evaluating four moves characteristic of this inclusive approach—representing religion, teaching translation, downplaying conflict, and resourcing religious experience.

I argue that our representations of religion and religious students, constructed as they are through these four pedagogical strategies, are more likely to draw out stability and homogeneity in religion than they are to construct religions as the fluid, participatory, contested formations that Asad has suggested. Because of this, students are unlikely to see any more clearly their own active role in maintaining and potentially transforming their religions. I conclude that such constructions of religion, for all the good that they

may do, offer our students—most of whom fall within that “weak middle” I describe in chapter one—little or no new means of agential intervention in the polarizing religio-political climate of our time, and thus either fail to address, or actually run counter to, our stated desire for politically transformative pedagogies. While I largely examine extant strategies here in chapter two, I do offer the beginnings of alternative approaches at several points. I devote considerable time to developing those new transformational strategies in my final, fifth chapter.

The Current Context

Thomson’s 2009 dissertation, *When God’s Word Isn’t Good Enough*, presents the best snapshot to date of the relationships between Christian students, their instructors, and issues of religious representation in college writing classrooms. Thomson finds that writing instructors tend to see Christian students as “cling[ing] to the idea of universal truth” (74) and “unable or unwilling to think critically” (80). While instructors try to “make distinctions between Christian students whom they see as radical, evangelical, conservative, and judgmental and those who appear to blend more seamlessly into the academic environment” (68), the radical, evangelical, conservative, judgmental Christian student seems to drive generalized instructor perceptions of “Christians.” Moreover, Thomson’s findings indicate there is a markedly high degree of similarity between writing instructors’ perceptions of Christians and writing scholars’ published representations of religious students. These published representations have come under strong critique from Thomson, DePalma, and Rand. Rand notes that Christian discourses in the writing classroom are associated in our texts with a number of negative terms:

“quaint naïveté,” “dualistic thought,” “lack of reasoning ability,” “immature thought” (357), “simplicity,” “superficiality,” “foolishness,” and lack of awareness (358). Further, the representatives themselves are rendered as “dogmatic” (357), “narrow,” rigid, “obedient,” and lacking “independent and critical thought” (362). She rightly worries that these negative and inaccurate representations can produce damaging interactions with religious students in the classroom.

In many rhetoric and composition articles, religious representatives are depicted in this anti-intellectual way, embodying the twin academic heresies of unquestionable truth and unquestioning obedience. But crucially, the religious representative also usually displays some form of political, social, and theological conservatism. Religious students are often seen in the literature opining *politically* and *socially* conservative positions on topics like evolution, abortion, women’s rights, and homosexuality (for instances of students writing on these topics, see Goodburn; Shafer; Dively; and Downs).

Theologically conservative religious students are also usually selected as religious representatives in our articles, indicated either by labels or by reported practices. Chris Anderson describes the “‘sweet,’ ‘foolish’ discourse” of a “born-again paper” (Rand 358; Anderson 12); Janet Neuleib describes disgusted instructor responses to a written “testimonial about the saving power of Jesus Christ” (Rand 357); Goodburn focuses on a Christian fundamentalist who dominated her classroom, and connects his conservative religious beliefs with the political action of the Religious Right (333, 335); Ervin connects the rhetoric of Christian fundamentalists with the rhetoric of Creationists (454); Perkins’ students are described as fundamentalist evangelicals whose religious beliefs cause their economic subjugation (588); Carter’s students and their “inappropriate” and

“unacceptable” academic behavior are explained in terms of “evangelicalism” (578, 581); Douglas Downs’s “true believer” student, who predicts that gay adoption will lead to mass pedophilia and increased teen suicide, espouses “orthodox LDS doctrine, assumptions, and language” (40); Williams’s student, though Muslim rather than Christian, espouses conservative Muslim ideological positions and protests Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* without having read it (109); Juanita M. Smart describes the discourse of a student who compares Frankenstein’s monster to Jesus Christ as “evangelical discourse” (20) and connects it with politically charged issues such as abortion and gay rights; and Gregory Shafer’s student, whose arguments for traditional family values and gender roles are mocked as anti-intellectual by her classmates, is identified as a Christian fundamentalist.

The combined result is a collective literature on religious students focused largely on representatives whom Mark C. Taylor would call either *contemporary foundationalists*—those who stubbornly privilege “simplicity, security, and certainty over complexity, insecurity, and uncertainty” (4), *religious reactionaries*—religious and political conservatives characterized by tendencies to “absolutize faith in unquestionable foundational principles” and exercise “total obedience to authoritative figures” (23), or (usually) both. In contrast, studies highlighting students’ subscription to moderate or progressive theological, political, or social viewpoints have only appeared in Thomson’s unpublished dissertation and to some extent Rebecca Schoenike-Nowacek’s essay. This disparity in representation exists despite the demographic reality that most American religious students hold religiously, politically, and socially moderate to liberal views (Pew; Kinnaman; Putnam and Campbell). Those religious students simply don’t get a

chance to “represent themselves” in the literature. To look at our articles on religious students, it would appear that we teach a lot of religious reactionaries whose religious, intellectual, social, and political habits are deeply and negatively implicated in one another. This perception leads to what Laura May, in one of the only comprehensive histories of writing on religious students within rhetoric and composition, calls the “original or core problem: the problem of ideological and pedagogical friction between more liberal secular teachers and more conservative religious students” (9).

In articles that advocate a critical pedagogical approach to religious students, these tensions rise immediately to the surface. Vander Lei and Lauren Fitzgerald sum up the common sentiment driving such critical approaches: “Given our allegiance to critical thought, most of us can identify with the frustration that results from students (and instructors) who hobble scholarly inquiry with unexamined belief” (188). That vividly described stock character—the deluded, trapped, hobbling, unreflective student—represents the antithesis of critical ideals. Where we perceive these students in our classrooms, it is understandable that our instinctive response has, as DePalma notes, often been an attempt to change their relationship to their religious discourse. We do this by either directly “challenging students’ religious viewpoints or teaching the language and posture of critique” (223), the latter often intended as an indirect way of mounting the same challenge. Anderson, whose three page “The Description of an Embarrassment: When Students Write about Religion” initiated this line of scholarship, exemplifies this critical mindset. He suggests the following tack in working with “born-again” religious students: “if we change the *way* students write, change their language, we also change *what* they think, what it is possible for them to think” (362). Rand explains the mentality

she sees underlying this attempt at change: “For composition studies, evil results from a lack of critical consciousness”; so “we want students to get saved and to resist subject positions that discourage critical awareness” (360, 364). This emphasis on the responsibility to create “change” is central to the critical approach, and features strongly in articles by Ronda Leathers Dively, Perkins, Downs, and Shafer.

It is important to note, though, that while writing instructors and scholars may have these tendencies to perceive and describe religion negatively, they are also often visibly struggling *against* these tendencies, not attempting to perpetuate them. Instructors, for instance, are quick to indicate that they’re aware and concerned about the effects of this negative account. As Thomson wrote, instructors try to “make distinctions between Christian students whom they see as radical, evangelical, conservative, and judgmental and those who appear to blend more seamlessly into the academic environment” (68). The instructor responses Thomson highlights in her study demonstrate this struggle with the negative stereotype as they simultaneously forward it and counter it. When asked, “What characteristics come to mind when you think of a Christian student?” one instructor writes, “I feel like I should say either ‘conscientious and kind’ or ‘radical and evangelical’ but Christian students, like others, seem to be individuals” (65). Another writes, “There are radical Christian students and normative Christian students” (67). A third actually responds, “I see this trap and will try to avoid it” (66).

This “trap” is evidently felt by our published writers as well: most of the same writers who depict conservative representatives actually provide caveats or try to mount challenges to this hegemonic account of religion, consistently affirming that they are as

concerned to *respect* religious students as they are to *change* them. Every prominent critical approach to religious students (beginning with Anderson, and moving through Goodburn, Perkins, Downs, on down through Shafer) offers self-reflexive critiques of its own critical approach, worrying that these produce a hegemonic situation in which academic discourses threaten and disrespect religious students' identities and discourses. While she doesn't cite them, Rand similarly positions evangelical students' experiences of the academy as a matter of resistance to a dominant culture. Specifically referencing Anderson's seminal article on Christian students, Rand critiques popular disciplinary representations of Christians as "condescending" (358), challenges the assumption that we can and should improve students' faith as "lacking in respect" (362), and criticizes attempts to change resistant religious students and their discourse "into a respectable academic form" (362). Rand argues that students' religious discourses and experiences should be respectfully included in the writing classroom, rather than challenged.

The central trope justifying such calls to respect is identity. Rand writes, "spiritual identity may be the primary kind of selfhood more than a few of [our students] draw upon in making meaning of their lives and the world around them" (350). (She seems to use spiritual and religious interchangeably.) This means for Rand, "religion should be considered a difference along with identity markers such as race and sexual orientation" (350). She notes, crucially, that it is religious *discourse* that forms this religious subjectivity—as she writes, instructors need to recognize how "faith is 'enacted' in discourse and sustained through particular kinds of textual and interpretive practice" (350). This, in turn, leads to her argument against attempts like Anderson's to alter students' religious discursive practices. She describes these as "lacking in respect for the

deeply intimate and profoundly personal ways that human beings come to make meaning of what is sacred” (362).

In the ten years since its publication, Rand’s focus on identity as discursive subjectivity has become the touchstone quotation for scholarship on Christian students, directly cited multiple times within the texts of Carter, Nowacek, and DePalma. DePalma notes that if we accept Rand’s identity claim a critical or challenging “posture toward students’ religious discourses becomes pedagogically ineffective and ethically questionable” (223), again linking religious identities with religious discourses and making both relatively un-challengeable. Vander Lei and Fitzgerald observe how “much of the scholarship on religious belief in composition studies extends research on cultural and social identity, an extension that can make talking about religion seem like trespassing” (190). Through its continual citation, Rand’s identity claim establishes and re-establishes an intimate connection between religious identity and religious discourse as well as the tension between *respect* and *change* that drive our efforts at *respecting* religious discourse in the classroom.⁴

These same claims about discursive subjectivity also undergird the push for the *inclusion* of religious discourses in the writing classroom. Vander Lei, for example, argues that asking students to keep religion out of the composition classroom “suggests to students that to succeed in our composition courses they must deny who they are” (4). In classrooms where it goes undiscussed, Vander Lei argues, religious faith is comparable to a missing gun in an empty holster—the absence of the gun is still recognizable and

⁴ I find that writers evince little need to explicate why these descriptors demand respect—apparently, writers feel they can rely on generalized assent that discourses and identities should be respected.

significant. DePalma, too, worries that students will feel that they must compartmentalize or relinquish their religious identities if their religious discourses are not included and treated with respect in the classroom. To help students avoid this self-alienation, scholars often recommend that instructors “embrace the ideals of pluralism and inclusiveness” by accommodating students’ religious discourse (perspectives, valued texts, experiences) in the classroom (Carter 572-73; DePalma 220). Carter’s logic is paradigmatic; students for whom the Bible constitutes a “primary sense of selfhood” must not be made to feel that discourse centered on the Bible is inadequate or that it must be replaced (586), so she sets about utilizing religious discourse to help students see the plurality of discourses and help students acquire academic discourse as one more discourse. She hopes this will allow students to become better academic writers without losing their highly valued religious discourse.

These attempts at achieving respect and inclusion for religious discourses and identities generally rely on four overlapping moves that I believe are at once useful, and yet ultimately undermine these goals—producing new representations, teaching academic discourse, downplaying conflict, and privileging personal experience. Because religious discourse is generally approached as a source of *difference* in the writing classroom, both analogues and critiques of these strategies can be located in other areas of writing scholarship, like basic and second-language writing. This particular correspondence might best be explained by the ascription of “irrationality” to students of all three categories (see Stenberg 276-77; Thomson 28). One could compare the litany of negative representations of religious students, above, to similar litanies describing basic writers in Lu’s “Conflict and Struggle” (891) and Glynda Hull, Mike Rose, Kay Losey Fraser, and

Marisa Castellano's "Remediation" (311-312); the level of vitriol is certainly quite different, but the attitude and implications are quite similar.

Move One: Homogenize Religion and Its Practitioners

The first move we make in trying to improve relations between instructors and religious students is to re-present religious students and their discourse in more favorable ways. This is done to increase instructor respect, or at least understanding, of religious students and their religious discourses. Rand, for instance, wonders, "Perhaps if we tried to collapse the binary between 'rebelliousness' and 'religiosity' (even evangelical religiosity), we would find new ways of talking about faith. This vocabulary might in turn be useful in our classrooms as we respond to students whose views diverge from our own" (356). So she collapses the "binary" by offering an alternative representation of Christianity drawn from alternative Christian representatives like Paulo Freire and Stephen Carter. Perkins, too, makes this attempt, drawing upon liberal theologians like Leslie Newbigin and relative progressives like Arthur Holmes to locate religious alternatives that are not only unobjectionable, but might actually inform instructors' rhetorical practice.

Carter, following a similar logic, points out several parallels between religious communities of practice and academic communities of practice in order to establish that religious communities of practice are not (any more) anti-intellectual (than academic ones): she directly points to the academic merits of "faith" (585) and "orthodoxy" (586), two of the most seemingly anti-intellectual components of religion. DePalma too focuses on faith parallels, and adds experience—he argues that these dimensions of knowing, so

crucial to religious discourses, are highly valued within pragmatist accounts of knowledge and crucial to academic knowing as well. DePalma seems to hope this might lead to a re-valuation of religious knowing. Rand makes a similar argument in describing the conversion focus of critical pedagogues—as she writes, “Composition studies itself preaches a kind of born-again faith; we want students to get saved and to resist subject positions that discourage critical awareness” (364). Given this emphasis on conversion, she doubts the “dichotomous relationship we maintain between the ‘evangelical’ and the work we ourselves do in composition studies” (356). The implication of this set of arguments is, if admittedly only in part, a fascinating sort of backhanded compliment: “Perhaps we aren’t really any better than them, since our discourses and theirs do many of the same things: for this reason, we should re-consider our dismissive stances towards them.”

Though he is making a slightly different point than I am here, I believe DePalma presciently diagnoses the problematic tendency towards homogenization underlying all these efforts at more positive representations. DePalma argues that in constructing their representations of religious students, writers in our field have tended to over-emphasize official, homogeneous accounts of religion while under-emphasizing individual religious practice:

Narratives of this kind tend to start with a description of how religious students think about language and texts, based on definitions generated in religious studies or elsewhere, and move on to an illustration of student texts that fit those definitions. Such research, in my view, is limited, because it works from generalizations that do not account for the complex notions about texts and language that many religious students have. (239)

DePalma largely limits his critique to the way we represent religious “notions about texts and language,” but I think it could be argued that we often do this more broadly by

providing definitions of religions that highlight official or at least dominant descriptions and perspectives, and the practices that neatly enact these doctrines. Specific religions and religious groups are defined in our literature essentially, homogeneously, and often ideologically; then these definitions are taken to directly inform individual student practices. While the homogeneous representations we offer *are* pressed into the service of creating greater respect or understanding for religious students, Raymond Williams points out the significant cost attached to such generalizations: “The relatively mixed, confused, incomplete, or inarticulate consciousness of actual men in that period and society is thus overridden in the name of this decisive generalized system” (109). In other words, our habit of moving directly from dominant accounts to exemplary practices leaves too little room for the *heterogeneity, change, conflict, and creativity* in students’ lived religious practice.

Goodburn’s article offers one version of this tendency to explain individual behavior through a dominant account of religious ideology:

In defining Christian fundamentalist discourse within this essay, then, I am not referring to a description of practices or institutional affiliations, but rather to a set of guiding assumptions . . . “a tendency, a habit of mind, rather than a discrete movement or phenomenon, . . . a body of *discourse arising from belief* in the sole authority of an inerrant Bible.” (Kintz 10, qtd. in Goodburn 336, emphasis mine)

The textual behaviors of the student Goodburn writes about, Luke, are then explained through this universal description of fundamentalists (which corresponds directly to the dominant representation and its norms discussed in chapter two). But Goodburn’s explanations depend upon her own characterization of Luke and other students as fundamentalists, not on their own profession of fundamentalism or of any specific religious doctrine (336). She writes, for instance, “Luke’s resistance to a revisionist

reading of this biblical story is understandable given how he views the authority of biblical text as the literal and unmediated word of God” (339). Just a paragraph later, Goodburn writes, “Given Luke’s perspective on the authority of meaning within biblical texts it’s not surprising that he does not mention the other two articles that were assigned...” (339). She explains, “for him, the Bible is the sole source of authority for interpreting *all* other texts” (339). This explanation again derives from a homogenizing and unilinear causal relation Goodburn appears to be assuming between official doctrine and individual practice: “fundamentalists do not view texts as offering multiple readings” (339). This representation implies that Luke is entirely defined by the official religious discourse—and while this isn’t a denial of “agency” because Luke is still acting with his discourse and maintaining his discourse through performing it, it certainly is a representation that fails to highlight all of the potential differences between official religious discourse and Luke’s performance of it.

A second manifestation of this move encourages our students to act as official representatives, often when we imagine that they and we are involved in cross-cultural negotiations. I see this particularly in Carter’s text where students are asked to explain evangelicalism to her, and in Bronwyn Williams’s negotiations with Mohammed. In Williams’s text, Mohammed is positioned (or positions himself) as a sort of spokesperson for Muslims, and Williams positions himself as a spokesperson for liberal, Western values. As spokespersons, the two engage in a negotiation process intended to create better understanding across “cross-cultural conflict,” here represented by a discussion of divergent Western and Muslim reactions to Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* (117). Given both Williams’ and Mohammed’s background and stated positions on issues, this

seems fairly reasonable, all the more so in that each individual appears comfortable speaking as such within the conversations. But in the process, both Williams and Mohammed also frequently display a tendency to present a singular, unified conception of the positions they represent that stems in part from this spokesperson status and in part from the Western form of argument they enact.

In order to talk cross-culturally in this manner, both reduce their traditions selectively without much acknowledgement of these selections. Here, for example, is Mohammed: “The entire Islamic system consists of the so-called ‘Hodud’ or limits beyond which one should simply not venture. Islam does not recognize unlimited freedom of expression. Call them taboos, if you like, but Islam considers a wide variety of topics as permanently closed” (109). Interestingly here, Mohammed confidently attributes positions and assumptions to “Islam,” but seems to recognize practical variation in the very next line, writing, “Most Muslims are prepared to be broad-minded about most things” (109). In the same way, when Williams describes his position he does so in fairly singular terms: “Quakers search for truth in contemplation and consensus” (107); “As a Quaker I had been raised” (110); “Quakerism also privileges human discussion and consensus” (111). While I am certainly not in a position to deny the general accuracy of any of these statements, I think it is notable that in such phrasings particular positions are reified and homogenized—rendered official. At one point Williams insightfully acknowledges the differential role of class in Muslim’s experience of religion; at another Mohammed points to the role of education and poverty in Muslim responses to the West. But these sources of intradiscursive difference don’t receive the attention that interdiscursive differences do, and I wonder whether that is a result of the construction of

the rhetorical situation as a “cross-cultural negotiation” between representatives. When we construct ourselves and students as representatives in this way, we may actually perpetuate hegemonic *logics* of homogeneity and generalization, even if in the short term we do not perpetuate specific hegemonic *relations*.

Third, I think that this tendency to privilege the official and under-emphasize intradiscursive difference is further exacerbated by emphasizing religious “identity” as a rationale for respecting religious discourses. This, too, can easily lead to downplaying the critical differences between students with religious identities. If we say an “evangelical subjectivity” is many of our students’ “primary kind of selfhood,” as Rand would have it (350), this can easily become a way of understanding our evangelical students primarily in terms of official ideology or dominant representations, as well as a way of homogenizing heterogeneous experiences of evangelical discourse. Goodburn and Perkins both note this complication in their footnotes, though they elect not to discuss it within the text of their articles. Goodburn explains, “I realize that reading a student’s responses or actions as shaped by one overriding discourse is problematic because such a reading seems to decontextualize this discourse from its relationship to others, like race and class,” yet she chooses to do so because “naming the discourses that shape student response helps *teachers* examine how their own discourses shape their practices” (352). Perkins similarly notes, “Though the majority of evangelical Christian students aspire to a seamless reading of Scripture, their interpretations are overdetermined by aspects of their identities—senses of their own whiteness or blackness, cultural ideologies of family or political power—that most of them cannot change (not that they would)” (609). Unfortunately, Perkins like Goodburn relegates this important caveat to a footnote.

Undeniably, these writers make understandable choices given their own purposes; however if our goal is to counter a dominant representation that seems to effect religious students by negating their differences from the dominant representation, I think relegating such qualifications about students' multiply-constituted discursive identities to a footnote is a mistake. Perkins's and Goodburn's choice to de-emphasize students' multiple identities in favor of their religious identity has seemingly contributed to later scholars' elision of these complexities. Carter and DePalma, writing after Perkins and Goodburn, don't even provide a footnote explicitly noting how other traditional sources of difference impact religious identity. Religious students and even a church service Carter attends, for example, are described using a number of racial markers that might suggest the church and some of the students are black, yet Carter never explicitly acknowledges that both her race and that of the congregants are inflecting the way evangelicalism is being enacted and experienced in the service or in the classroom. (If it is even evangelicalism—most sociologists do not classify African American churches as evangelical, despite quite a few similarities.)

This erasure of other components of student identity, like all the others, keeps us from seeing differences in students' religious experiences; for example, an evangelical woman may sharply feel the differences in evangelical identity between herself and evangelical men; men can take on a much larger range of leadership roles in most conservative evangelical churches, yet surprisingly *women* are more active in both leadership and recruiting in these churches (Woodberry and Smith). Evangelical men may not even be aware of the difference between these evangelical subjectivities. Pointing to another source of such difference, a student named Lauren Lewis in one of

my classes once wrote an autoethnographic essay on the historical relationship between black women and Christian churches in America. She used sociological research to develop several lines of thought reflecting on the church's relation to the legacy of slavery as well as shifting gender roles. But she also used interviews with family members and video footage of her deceased grandmother, a pastor, leading worship. Together, these resources allowed her to deliberate on not just religious experience or black women's religious experience, but on the religious experience of black women in her family across three generations. She reminded me that in Christ, as Galatians 3:28 says, there may be "neither Jew nor Greek, . . . neither slave nor free, . . . no male and female"—but in the church and at school, all of these categories still exist, and so do many more.

So if we say that students participate in some form of evangelical discourse that constructs their sense of self, we must not fail to note that students participate in that particular evangelical discourse in different ways relating to other discourses and subject positions they embody: one individual might participate in evangelicalism as an evangelical man, as a (rare) black evangelical, as a homosexual evangelical, as an (increasingly common) upper-class evangelical, as an (also increasingly-common) college-educated evangelical, as a gamer who is evangelical, as a Southern evangelical, as a scientist evangelical, as a liberal evangelical, and as a young evangelical. This conception of a plural evangelical identity introduces sources of difference—first, a dissonance experienced by the individual who moves within these various discourses and communities; second, dissonances experienced between individuals' experiences of evangelicalism. Both create the deliberative space in which change, re-organizations of

the relations among discourses and individuals, can occur. Representations that elide such heterogeneity are (or can quickly become) tools of the dominant order—no matter their intended use. So in such attempts to represent religion respectfully and protect students from academic hegemony, we merely substitute one essential definition for another, and thus contribute to a homogenizing and essentialist construction of students' religion.

Move Two: Translate Religious Discourse Transparently

The second move we've made in response to conflicted relations between academia and religion is to encourage students to transparently "translate" their religious discourse into academic discourse for us. Because our goal is often improved relations between religious and academic discourses and improved relations between religious students and their academic instructors, we tend to help religious students take up specifically academic ways of representing their religious discourse that might make religious discourse more palatable and even respectable to instructors whom we assume are generally suspicious of religion and religious students. In this model, *respect* is directed towards the religious discourse while change is directed instead largely towards the ways that students practice discourse in the classroom.

Rand's argument sets this up, too: in her conclusion, she quotes Thomas Newkirk: "It is one thing to demonstrate an alternative—to extend a repertoire; it is another to try to eradicate a 'lower' form of consciousness" (102, qtd. in Rand 364). As Vander Lei re-frames the essential conflict of the writing classroom, the question is really, "How do we respect the writer's rhetorical commitments (both cultural and religious) while simultaneously preparing her to meet the expectations of an academic audience?" (103)

Downs offers our paradigmatic answer: translation. “As with any other home Discourse, we would not necessarily wish students to leave Affirmation behind. If our project is teaching Discourses of inquiry, then, our task is to help *translate*” (50, emphasis mine).

Downs elaborates on this process of translation:

A “translator” response from me would have been to explain to Keith more about the audience he faced and what sorts of support for his case they would value. I could have shown him how “real scholars” probably wouldn’t accept a “the Bible tells me so” argument on its face but might accept similar arguments framed in cultural terms, or how to reframe his question more usefully for them, or how “real scholars” who are unable to accept a “true believer’s” received knowledge of spiritual experience might be more sympathetic to “felt sense” (Perl and Egendorf 1986). (50)

Teaching students to *translate* their religious discourse—a term that seems variously to refer to religiously inflected perspectives, experiences, values, feelings, behaviors, texts, genres, as well as the communities in which they circulate (Thomson 7)—into academic discourse (again, defined variously) will *respect* students’ religious discourses and identities while *changing* their academic discursive habits.

This logic of translation informs even casual approaches to religious students. In a recent article, Nancy Sommers and Laura Saltz discuss religious students in the context of a larger project, and so discuss such students’ writing without subjecting their discussion of religion to careful reflection and elaboration. This provides us with a better view of the disciplinary *doxa* on religious students than do articles focused on them. Discussing Jeremy, a “deeply religious” student at Harvard, Sommers and Saltz negatively evaluate what they call Jeremy’s early proclivity for “personal writing”: “If students are only writing to understand their personal experiences, if their expertise comes only from their personal connection with the material, or if they see the personal and academic as opposites, their writing remains a form of self-expression” (146). But

Jeremy eventually arrives at “argument,” where he “learns to locate his questions within a wider circle of readers, seeing himself as part of an ongoing critical discussion about what compels people to accept or reject their faiths, a discussion that is legitimate in itself, not just a topic that tells him more about himself” (145). The implicit goal of college writing courses, for Sommers and Saltz, is to see students move “from personal writing to argument” (145)—so the “personal” must be translated (here, we can think of translation in the religious sense of being raised to a higher state) into academic discourse, that which is *legitimate in itself*, they say, because it is suitable for this particular public’s consumption and is potentially of interest to that readership. Academic discourse on religious topics in this sense means progressively creating distance from personal experience, choosing proper methods, evidence, and authors for citation, and employing explanatory (analytic) modes of thinking and writing. Other explicit examples of pedagogy-as-translation, all of which also offer us an implicit definition of academic discourse, appear in attempts to arrive at mutual understanding through rational discourse (Williams; Goodburn; Smart) attempts to help students achieve critical consciousness (Perkins), to help them make persuasive arguments defending religious viewpoints (Downs; Shafer), and to effectively convey religious experiences for academic audiences (DePalma).

Frequently, the claim that such translations will not damage students’ religious commitments seems to rely upon the assumption that religion can be separated from the ways in which it is discussed. This in turn often depends on constructing religion as, essentially, beliefs. We see these dual assumptions repeatedly: Mark Montesano and Duane Roen argue that the challenge for the writing teacher is to “provide opportunities

for students to actively engage their belief systems in writing classrooms . . . without diluting one's own beliefs" (85). Perkins explains that a student named Clifford's religious faithfulness has been salvaged though he acquired some level of critical consciousness because he learned to read and write academically "Without . . . abandoning the beliefs that shaped his personal relationships and that gave meaning to his existence" (605). And we see this definition early on in Goodburn, who argues that instead of attempting to change core religious beliefs and assumptions in students who are satisfied with them—this would be "a bit arrogant"—students should be encouraged to articulate these fundamentalist assumptions and their consequences for the purpose of better mutual understanding (350-351). Elizabeth Vander Lei sets her goals for religious students similarly: "not that they alter what they believe"—that is, the apparent essentials of their religion—but their expressions and their thinking: she hopes to see them "bring their religious faith to their writing," "respond effectively to the religious faith they encounter in the public square," and "use tension between faith . . . and academic inquiry as a way of learning more and learning better" (8).⁵

Outside rhetoric and composition, Giddens best articulates the divide between belief and discourse—between religious *content* and religious *language*—that this view constructs. Giddens argues that a fundamentalist is not a fundamentalist because of her tradition, but because of the way she justifies her tradition. So there is religion on the one

⁵ This representation of religion as primarily a matter of belief is also strongly if subtly reinforced by our generalized use of "believer" to designate religious adherents. This construction is specious at best, depending upon a definition of religion as centrally or at least essentially a matter of beliefs, similar to Geertz's definition. Since Asad's article almost thirty years ago, such views have largely fallen out of favor in scholarship on religion. See chapters one, three, and five on this point.

hand, and then there are the ways people talk about religion in public on the other.

Fundamentalism, according to Giddens,

is tradition defended in the traditional way—by reference to ritual truth—in a globalizing world that asks for reasons. Fundamentalism, therefore, has nothing to do with the context of beliefs, religious or otherwise. What matters is how the truth of beliefs is defended or asserted. Fundamentalism isn't about what people believe but, like tradition more generally, about why they believe it and how they justify it.

We in rhetoric and composition seem to agree with Giddens. So long as students are willing to fully adhere to conventional forms of academic discourse when speaking and writing in academic spaces, our rhetoric runs, students may believe (and often argue for) whatever they want.

Carter offers us perhaps the most overt and fully elaborated version of this logic and pedagogy for religious students. She explains here her basic understanding of the classroom context:

I argue that inasmuch as these believers “live in a world always already biblically written” (Kintz) and large segments of the academy are likely to remain hostile to faith-based ways of knowing, we would do better to help students speak to and across difference by employing what I have called a pedagogy of rhetorical dexterity, an approach that trains writers to effectively read, understand, manipulate, and negotiate the cultural and linguistic codes of a new community of practice (Lave and Wenger) based on a relatively accurate assessment of another, more familiar one. (574)

We might paraphrase Carter to be saying that the tensions between conservative religious students (and religious discourses) and academics (and academic discourses) are not changing. By implication, neither are the discourses—conflict is inevitable. Because of this conflict, becoming a part of the academic discourse community risks loosening students' bonds to their religious discourse community. So religious students need to protect themselves from that by getting better at learning new discourses. Specifically,

they need to acquire the discourses of power—as she puts it, “those the academy expects them to exhibit” (574). This will allow them to keep their religious identities intact, Carter says.

But writing scholars have begun intimating a growing concern that religious identities aren’t being protected as much as we think in such acts of “translation,” because language can’t really be separated from thinking and living. bonnie lenore kyburz explains:

We struggle to attend to context [elsewhere she calls it an oversimplified audience concept] in ways that we imagine as helpful, and we believe that we are making various “transitions” easier for students to experience (I dare say that we imagine the transitions as unproblematically necessary, which should be alarming). Rarely do we consider our work on/in audience as harmful; more often we think of it in terms of “rites of passage” (139)

This concern finds fuller elaboration in Smart’s essay, which quite typically begins by arguing that “Faith embarrasses our attempts to articulate it because it is otherworldly and thus other-word-ly: Faith asks us to explain the unexplainable” (14). Early on, she seems sure that when instructors recognize this difficulty and “help faith-oriented students move from ‘embarrassment’ to engagement by asking students to examine their religious assumptions and the language they use to articulate those assumptions” (14)—helping them get better at meeting audience expectations for explanation and articulation, in other words (20)—they can help to “legitimize the faith-centered voices of our students” (14). She enacts this herself by asking a religious student writer to revise his paper and “consider his rhetorical situation and the need to address his purpose and audience appropriately by composing a paper for a literature class, not a sermon for church” (20). Smart intends for these strategies to help her student think critically about his faith while

they also “recommend him to, rather than alienating him from, an eclectic audience of academic mentors and peers” (20). So the student responds to Smart’s request by scrubbing out the overtly religious forms of evidence and re-writing the paper with an academic audience’s rhetorical conventions in mind (20-21). This seems to be a perfect example of the translation Downs calls for. Smart recognizes, however, that her student’s success may have come at a cost—she ends up asking the crucial question: “what costs do such acts of re-vision exact on the privately-intuited, epistemological registries of the student?” (21)

I think we can best answer Smart’s question—what are the actual costs of translation?—by borrowing a critique from scholarship on language difference. Pedagogies that encourage students to translate their religious discourse into academic discourse might be said to take something of an *accommodationist* approach to religious difference. Such approaches are purportedly more progressive than earlier pedagogies in that they don’t want to eradicate differences—instead, they acknowledge them, codify them, and grant individuals a right to them. They do this by teaching students contextual appropriateness—learning to use the right discourse in the right “specific, discrete, assigned social sphere” (Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur 306). In “Conflict and Struggle,” Lu argues, however, that these accommodationist approaches are troubled from the start because they problematically depend upon Giddens’ separation between content and form to justify their audience-focused strategies. Speaking of a similar separation in Mina Shaughnessy’s approach to basic writers, she notes it is only “because of her essentialist assumption that words can express but will not change the essence of one’s thoughts, [that] her pedagogy promises to help students master academic discourse

without forcing them to reposition themselves—i.e., to re-form their relation—towards conflicting cultural beliefs” (906).

In other words, it is only when languages are separated from thinking and living—from other aspects of culture—that they can be reduced to codifiable sets, and distinguished from the forms of life and thought they merely “describe.” In this accommodationist conception of language’s relation to thinking and living, language does not shape thinking and living, but is simply asked to represent them accurately, the way that a French translation is separate from (has no impact on) the English book it translates. The concerns for a translator, in that case, are basically limited to accuracy to the original on the one hand, and audience-effectiveness on the other. We risk enacting both accommodationist assumptions in transparent translation approaches to religious students: On the one hand, if we act as though students’ religion can be spoken about in new, academically appropriate ways without altering its essential qualities or their essential religious commitment, we risk forgetting the intricate relation between thinking, living and language. Forgetting this allows us to believe students who translate their religious discourse into academic discourse must only concern themselves with an *accurate* and/or *appropriate* representation of their religion. On the other hand, if we acknowledge that religious discourse is, in fact, a discourse connecting speaking, writing, thinking and living, then religion cannot be *thought* about in just any way, any more than it can be *spoken* of in just any way, without producing alterations and new relations to the discourse. The specific ways of thinking about religion are themselves a part of the religion, so introducing new ways of thinking about religion can alter an “essential” aspect of students’ religion, too.

If language is understood as wrapped up in thinking and living, then switching the language you use to describe something is more than just exchanging one word for another. The same is true of approaching religion from a new perspective—these exchanges will actually *change* meanings, as well as users' relations to their original discourses; transformations become inevitable in the process of opaque translation. As Mary Soliday explains in “Translating Self and Difference through Literacy Narratives,” parts of the original self, discourse, community, or experience may be left behind, or contradicted, by translation into a new discourse: “the translation of self, cultural categories, and felt experience can be incomplete” (515). This incomplete or contradictory translation is literally *felt* by those who learn new discourses. Lu discusses this throughout “Conflict and Struggle” and exemplifies it in “From Silence to Words,” as she recounts both the contradiction and compartmentalization she experienced in shifting between different languages. She attributes these experiences of loss and contradiction to the ways of thinking and living that attach themselves to ways of speaking—Standard Chinese at school and English at home were not simply linguistic codes, but entire conflicting *cultural* ways of being that immersed Lu in dramatic *internal* conflict (443). From this perspective, we can see that translation is neither solely a question of accuracy—no discourse, identity, experience, or community can be fully transferred into another—nor of audience-effectiveness—speaking or writing in new ways affects not only the audience but also rebounds upon the speaker or writer and upon the discourses, identities, experiences, and communities spoken. A whole system of meanings and ways of seeing and feelings are attached to words, and these new meanings and ways of being may well contradict with other ways of being. New sets of relations

are established. Thus translation is always a process of creating losses, contradictions, and choices.

We can see something of the actual opacity of translation between religious and academic communities in Carter's interactions with Keneshia. In keeping with an accommodationist perspective, the codification of discrete communities' features prominently in Carter's pedagogy and Keneshia's translation. Carter poses her questions for students more generally this way:

What are the "territorial *imperatives*" within this community of practice? That is, what are the "*rules*" that govern what one should or should not say, think, or feel in this context, as well as how one *must* behave, dress, and carry oneself in order to be considered a "churchly child" rather than merely "a child that goes to church"? How is membership in this context expressed? What strategies *must* one use to be "heard, understood, taken seriously" within this community of practice? In other words, what strategies or ways of being mark some children as "churchly" and others as children who just "go to church"? . . . What kinds of things did you *have to do* before you could consider yourself Christian-literate? . . . What might you have to learn, recognize, and embody in the academy before you may be able to feel literate as a writer and reader in various school-based contexts, too? (587, emphasis mine)

Students like Keneshia are said to have succeeded in Carter's class if they have "developed ways . . . to make sense of her own Christian literacies in terms legible and accessible to those much less literate in Christianity" (591). But as we can see, in order to accomplish this legibility and accessibility, Carter encourages students to speak in *rules* and *imperatives* and *universals*—a representational strategy that produces both homogeneous and static representations. Nor is there any space for discursive change in Carter's text: note that her questions are largely synchronic. Thus, a heterogeneous and changing discourse, translated into an academic assignment, can become static and homogeneous.

Carter also encourages Keneshia to translate her religious discourse into the textually-driven form of evangelicalism that Carter—and Goodburn, Perkins, Rand, and many others—have deployed in their texts (noted above). This representation can be traced to Goodburn and Dively’s early disciplinary articles on conservative Christian students. Here’s Dively, quoted in Rand:

Many [Christians] who have been fed [a] narrow view of subjectivity may perceive themselves as rigidly defined by belief in the tenets of holy scripture and of faith in the existence and saving power of Jesus Christ. A 'literal' interpretation of scripture becomes their rule book for living a 'pure' and productive life, and God becomes the center of their universe, the ideal against which all thoughts, behaviors and actions should be judged. (94, qtd. in Rand 362)

In keeping with this cited and sedimented disciplinary conception of conservative Christianity as text-centered, Carter—not Keneshia—initially constructs evangelical Christianity as a text-centered community of practice at the beginning of her article. Like Goodburn, Carter quotes Linda Kintz: “all ‘legitimate participants . . . live . . . inside a world of textual quotations and references to biblical passages, interpretations, and reinterpretations” (578). She draws from this the inference that “many of my students ‘live inside the Book’” (578) and that for evangelical Christian students “the Bible represents their ‘primary sense of selfhood’” (581). This last is a significantly appended version of Rand’s words: “spiritual identity may be the primary kind of selfhood more than a few of [our students] draw upon in making meaning of their lives and the world around them” (350). The upshot is that Carter draws a direct line from Bible to religious discourse, from religious discourse to spiritual identity, and from spiritual identity to primary selfhood.

So working from within this academic understanding of evangelical discourse as text-centered and codifiable, Carter wants Keneshia to better articulate and codify the connections between the Bible and her church's community of practice. She writes to Keneshia, "In revision, I'd like . . . [for you to] show us how these 'rules' as outlined in Exodus might play themselves out in your church" (590, ellipses original). Keneshia, who had apparently originally cited a passage from Exodus with only oblique connections to the practices she was describing in her church, responds by quoting a new scripture, this time from Psalms, and explaining line by line how her church's worship service fulfills the lines of the Psalm (591). Carter writes that in Keneshia's revision "we can begin to understand how the shape and function of the church might be informed by, among other things, this passage from the Book that makes up the core guidance in this community of practice" (591). Carter also suggests this representation is evidence that Keneshia is "developing a deeper awareness of the various ways in which the Bible itself informs Christian literacy" (592). This certainly may be true—a Psalm describing worship practices does seem likely to more directly inform Keneshia's worship practices than the Ten Commandments, which are focused ostensibly on moral strictures. But Keneshia's revised account also seems simply more in line with writing scholarship's academic discourse about evangelical Christianity. First, it presents a stable and homogeneous *codification* of her religious community by sketching a direct, linear relationship between an official document and everyday practices; second, it places the Bible at the rule-giving center of religious practices. Keneshia's religious discourse has to some extent been assumed by academic discourse through her own assumption of academic discourse.

It is, admittedly, impossible for me to tell what effect this emphasis on codification and textuality *actually* had on Keneshia’s relationship to Christianity and the Bible, or to predict what effect similar codifying strategies could have on other students. Acknowledging this limitation in my work, I nevertheless want to highlight the potential risks and affordances of this encounter that scholars have generally failed to acknowledge or work to address in their recommendations.⁶ In my view, this translation may cause Keneshia to re-construct and re-conceptualize her religion to fit academic conceptualizations—making it potentially not “true” to the original religious discourse community she’s describing—and it may also change the way that Keneshia relates to her religious discourse (and confirm for us our existing relation to it). For example, contrast the potential effects of encouraging Keneshia to connect her contemporary religious practices to a three thousand year-old poem (and turning the poem into a set of explicit instructions) against encouraging Keneshia to connect her contemporary religious practices with ever-shifting historical, cultural, racial, geographic, or class trends. Or, alternatively, contrast Carter’s codifying strategy against encouraging Keneshia to identify variations and changes in how religious practitioners enact these instructions from the Psalms, either over the years or within her congregation, and to contemplate the role of culture and context in creating those shifts. I believe the former strategy seems more likely to encourage Keneshia to understand these everyday practices as ageless or static, while the latter strategies seem more likely to encourage Keneshia to think through what causes her community’s religious practices to *change*, and what might cause them to change again. In highlighting the relations between the Bible and Keneshia’s religious

⁶ I face similar limitations in my re-readings of published accounts throughout the rest of this chapter, and in chapter five.

practices rather than the relations between, say, social trends, the Bible, and Keneshia's religious practices,⁷ an opportunity for promoting more flexible, politically efficacious representations of religious discourses is missed. Keneshia is not encouraged to see her own agency in producing her religious discourse, nor how the *situation* is actually involved in shaping her community's *situated practice*, nor her potential role in changing that situation. (Nor is she encouraged to consider how her *academic* situation is impacting her discursive practice.) Though again this cannot be said with any degree of certainty, it seems that translation into this particular form of academic discourse might actually keep Keneshia from seeing the agency, change, and heterogeneity in her religious discourse, and so prove not only ineffective but counterproductive.

An instructor's responsibility here is not to eradicate such risks in translation—that would be impossible—but to acknowledge the possibilities so that students can be vigilant and actively making decisions on whether and how they want to change. This is why in translingual pedagogies the act of translation itself comes under investigation even as a translation is produced. When students are asked to translate from one discourse or language into another, they are confronted with the opacity of words and the constraints of any one discourse's representation of "reality" and "experience." As they translate, they are forced to select new words from among a set of partially adequate choices, leaving some meanings and subtle nuances out of the new translation while drawing in new ones. Further, these translations must be made to highlight the unequal power relations between discourses in that particular setting: these selections are made because someone has asked for the translation; because some privilege or reward or

⁷ For example, Perkins would encourage consideration of the relations between social trends and possible interpretations of that text, that in turn affect religious practices.

punishment will be attached to its performance or failure. And while a pragmatist or accommodationist approach might emphasize the utility and benefits of producing the finished translation, a truly translingual approach will ask students to contemplate the remainders, we might say—the losses, inefficiencies, and injustices also produced by the process. Ideally, by focusing student attention on the process and its by-products (and not only the document that results) students see how each of these discourses or languages bring limitations and new meaning potentials not available in the other, but also how power works through such processes. Translation is never a matter of neat, algebraic substitution, and language use is never simply a matter of information transfer.

Move Three: Resource Religion as Compl(i)mentary

Our third move, resourcing religious discourse, retains some of the assumptions of transparent translation while explicitly attempting to move beyond accommodationist pedagogies. Like other inclusive methodologies, this move emphasizes respect for religious students and their discourses by looking to locate ways in which academic discourse can accommodate religious discourse. But resourcing explicitly goes beyond accommodation because it looks for ways “students’ religious discourses might contribute to discourses of the academy,” as DePalma puts it (224). He emphasizes this shift: “religious students’ discourses are seen not as barriers to critical inquiry but as *resources* that have the potential to contribute to the enterprise of knowledge making” (225). DePalma’s approach would appear, at first glance, to be in keeping with Horner et al.’s translingual approach to language difference, which “insists on viewing language differences and fluidities as resources to be preserved, developed, and utilized. Rather

than respond to language differences only in terms of rights, it sees them as resources” (304). But I will attempt to demonstrate that there remains a crucial difference between translingual resourcing and religious resourcing. Because DePalma’s application of resourcing fails to help students *deliberately attend* to the power relations involved in this merger between religious and academic discourses, it remains largely accommodationist in spite of itself.

Like many others have, notably Goodburn, Nowacek, Perkins, Rand, Smart, Stenberg, Vander Lei, DePalma emphasizes the complementarity of religious and academic discourses as a response to assumptions of mutual exclusivity by scholars who, like Carter and Downs, imply at times that the gap between religious and academic discourses may be irreconcilable (574). He rightly points out that highlighting incommensurability mistakenly shores up the porous boundaries between discourses, reifying differences and power relations. Rehearsing the by-now familiar disciplinary religion-academe conflict narrative, DePalma notes that it forces an undesirable binary choice upon instructors and students (223). He wants to avoid this compartmentalization and its binary choice, so his goal is to help students find ways to “merge” religious and academic discourses by allowing students to utilize both. In DePalma’s presentation of an evangelical student named Thomas’s writing, merging manifests as analyzing religious vocabulary and key words (237-38), incorporating religious texts like the Bible (229), reporting on religious experiences like feeling the presence of the Holy Spirit (231), and utilizing religious discursive forms like an epistolary generic form that Thomas borrows from C.S. Lewis (234). In these ways, religious discourse can merge with academic discourse in one text, rather than having to be translated first.

To justify this inclusion DePalma, like many others, emphasizes how academic and religious discourses are actually “overlapping or complimentary [*sic*]” (223). He offers a rather strong version of the anti-foundationalist position that recognizes all discourses and discursive subjectivities as situated, and all truths as partial. DePalma argues that since all discourses are provisional and transitory attempts “to convey the ever-shifting stream of human experiences” (224), any discourse that helps make meaning out of experience can have value. From such a position, users of academic discourses must try not to invalidate other discourses and instead respect and include diverse perspectives, acknowledging that no discourse can claim transcendent knowledge and all discourses could have something to teach us. Religious discourses, too, might help to convey or work through experiences. “From this vantage point,” DePalma writes, “we are no longer forced to choose between discourses. Instead, it becomes possible to see how students’ religious discourses might contribute to discourses of the academy” (224). But in the process of creating *epistemological* equality between the discourses, he seems to lose sight of the still-extant *structural* inequities between discourses that his epistemological stance wants to rectify.

We can literally watch this erasure of conflict occur in DePalma’s text. He specifically locates his argument for complementarity in the context of translingualism and resource-based approaches to discursive difference drawn from Horner, Lu, A.

Suresh Canagarajah, and Joseph Harris. Here, he cites Horner and Lu:

By treating these [academic and religious] discourses as “fixed varieties into and out of which writers can ‘translate’ their ideas without altering what is imagined to be the discrete nature of each,” rather than as overlapping or complimentary [*sic*], students are given the impression that they must become different ‘selves’ in each context they enter (9, qtd. in DePalma 223).

Through the quotation, DePalma concisely brings out the risks of translation that arise when we consider relations between discourses: first, the mistake of treating various discourses as fixed and discrete; second, the mistake of assuming that discourses can be translated transparently into one another without altering the discourses themselves; third, the mistake of compartmentalizing students' mixed and plural discursive identities. But when looked at more closely, DePalma's gloss on Horner and Lu's words actually appears to shift away from the originating text's concerns about translation and relations between discourses. In fact, DePalma's rosy characterization of those relations, "overlapping or complimentary," proves to itself be a silent translation of Joseph Harris's characterization of discourses as "overlapping and *contradictory*," a phrase DePalma quotes later in the article. This elision of conflict becomes especially clear in DePalma's revision suggestions for Thomas—evident in both what he doesn't ask Thomas for (any discussion of the conflicts or struggles between discourses, communities, or identities) and what he does (academic forms of discourse).

On a fully translingual model of translation or "merging," accomplishing a merger between discourses as powerful as Christianity and academic discourse should result in losses, contradictions, transformations, and remainders; and students should be encouraged to *focus* on those ruptures. But this is not the case in DePalma's model, because transdiscursive conflict is de-emphasized in favor of complementarity. At times, we do see the struggles of merging in DePalma's interactions with Thomas. He certainly has a number of revision suggestions for Thomas's next draft. These revision suggestions might be interpreted as symptoms of just such a struggle between discourses (232-33, 236-38), particularly because DePalma focuses so strongly on critiques he thinks

“academic readers” might offer when reading Thomas’s writing (232). DePalma worries at that point that “some readers” will be concerned by Thomas’s use of biblical and religious terminology without providing definitions or qualifications; his appropriation of religious clichés to express personal sentiments; and the balance of metaphor and concrete description in his narration of religious experience (232-33). DePalma notes that these criticisms might miss the positive work of self-exploration, reflection, and invention that Thomas is doing, but he studiously avoids rejecting the criticisms themselves (which he himself constructed). And when he later posits his own suggestions for revision—analytical exploration of religious key words, greater concreteness of description, imitation of academic models of religious discourse (237-38)—these suggestions also press Thomas towards academic modes of discourse. The religio-academic merger is beginning to look more like a take-over. For me, they index the *competition* involved in such a complex web of “competing belief systems” (perhaps he means different discourses?) and lived experiences.

But for DePalma, these simply index the struggle for adequate *expression* and *understanding*—finding words adequate to Thomas’s experience (a crucial objective), and finding words adequate for Thomas’s audience. We can see how DePalma conceptualizes both expression and audience in the following phrases: he wants to help Thomas

- 1) “*relate* these experiences to readers *more effectively*”
- 2) “[*communicate*] the magnificence of these experiences to his *audience*”
- 3) “*convey* the shift in his interior condition to his *audience*”

- 4) “more *vividly represent* the fluctuation among the various forms of belief he is attempting to articulate in his essay” (all on 236)
- 5) “*ground* his experiences in a way that is *accessible to readers*” (237)
- 6) “more *effectively articulate* [his] beliefs, commitments, and experiences” (237)
- 7) “gain a *serious hearing* with diverse *audiences*” (237)
- 8) “explore [his] deeply held values and beliefs in light of his experiences *in an effort to make them available to others*” (238)
- 9) “mine [his] ‘God-terms’ and reflect on *defining* events in [his life] *in order to communicate them to an audience in writing . . . in a way that is meaningful to diverse audiences*” (238, all emphases mine)

DePalma seems unaware of the uneven power relations he is perpetuating by continually casting modes of academic discourse (indicated by his specific revision suggestions above) as ways for students to write effectively for a broad, “some readers” type of audience (indicated by the phrasing of these goals for Thomas’s writing). So academic discourse retains its hierarchical place; first, because Thomas’s religious discourse remains ultimately answerable to academic norms; second, because those academic norms themselves become transparent and naturalized into general requirements for successful communication.

As DePalma seems to construct the issue, now that religious discourses and experiences have been deemed academically appropriate and complementary (through his theoretical framework), the struggle of writing comes down to a struggle for audience-appropriate self-expression (transparent translation). Or, as Carter put it using a similar line of reasoning, the struggles between religious and academic discourses in the

academy can be “understood as a dispute over appropriateness, rather than as a question of whether [students] suffer from ‘false consciousness’ or, as I’m (unfortunately and often) quick to see it, outright ‘ignorance’” (580). This does not acknowledge that a dispute over appropriateness is indeed a *dispute* in which various parties exercise power over others (who decides what is appropriate?). The political agenda behind critical calls for merging discourses and incorporating experience—challenging hegemonic positions, politicizing experience together (see, for instance, Anzaldua; Pratt; Soliday)—dissipates in the face of these emphases on appropriateness or successful communication, as do the structural pressures and constructed borders between academic and religious discourses. There is no longer a conflict to acknowledge between powerful and competing discourses, because they are epistemological equals working together in a bigger struggle to make language *align with* and *communicate* experience. Because of this, like Carter and the accommodationists before him, DePalma can’t seem to see that he, too, is asking for a particular type of discourse that will only be effective for certain audiences. These approaches promise to reduce conflict, and do—by simply requiring students to surrender for their own good.

Mary Soliday asserts that writing classes should help students actively *participate and deliberate* on conflicts—not avoid them. In contrast to pedagogies that treat the collision of discourses as a problem to be resolved through adequate expression and audience awareness, and the classroom as a space where harmonious and complementary mergers are privileged, Soliday’s vision is of texts and classrooms as contact zones: “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in the contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (Pratt 34, qtd. in Soliday 512). It is

only through *deliberately* writing in these contact zones and through *deliberating* on those forms of contact that students will be enabled to more critically participate in and shape the cultural forces shaping them. Within the discipline of that time, Soliday saw “considerable debate . . . on whether writing teachers and their students should assimilate, critique, or reject dominant discourses,” but she notes that instructors seemed to be arrogating students’ rights to make their own decisions. Soliday suggests that students have significant contributions to make in those debates and decisions; ironically, she argues that they might think through cultural conflicts by focusing precisely on the sorts of processes of translation and merging that DePalma and Carter recommend as a means of *avoiding* conflict.

Soliday imagines a pedagogy that might help students “to ponder the conflicts attendant upon crossing language worlds and to reflect upon the choices that speakers of minority dialects and languages must make” (512). By deliberating on translations, students may be enabled to contend

with complicated affective and social issues of translation that the scholarship boy could not resolve without losing a sense of self: how to be independent from teachers, yet also how to accept direction from them; how to switch codes according to context without being an opportunistic rhetor; how to enter one discourse world without losing the words and values of another. How, in short, to translate self and difference between language worlds without becoming “a stranger to yourself.” (519)

In other words, Soliday argues it is only through *deliberating* on acts of merging and translation that students can truly contend with questions of social power and cultural conflict that arise in the multicultural classroom—not merely by performing the mergers and producing the translations. I will return to this argument for deliberation below.

Move Four: Report Religious Experience as Self-Evident

A fourth move we have made in our efforts to counter hegemonic classroom relations is the incorporation of religious experience in academic writing. We are now encouraging students to write richer, closer reports of their own lived religious practice (Rand; Carter; DePalma) just as we work on developing our own richer, closer examinations of religious practices (Moss; Crowley; Thomson). This critical autoethnographic approach to religious experience can be traced back to Daniell's 1994 essay, "Composing (As) Power." Daniell asks informants to report on their religious discourse—and often personal experience—in order to help us reflect on our work. Rand similarly proposes that instructors ask students to represent their religious experience to us in order to complicate our misconceptions of religious students and their religious discourses. She recommends instructors ask the following questions:

We should ask students to explain how their resistance to mainstream values and culture has shaped their lives and how those outside their immediate faith communities respond to them. (Have they faced rejection from family members, friends, coworkers, classmates, etc.? How do those in the secular world react to their religious identity?) Christians are admonished to be "in" the world but not "of" it (John 17:15-16): how is this detachment from the secular world lived out on a daily basis, and do the effects of sin make this kind of separation a struggle? (363)

We should note that Rand's questions here are focused on the conflicts students experience between religious and academic ways of being. She suggests that representing personal experience in these ways—in terms of inter-discursive conflict and for instructor viewing—might help instructors overcome crippling misconceptions of religious students while also engaging "students in further conversation about the complex negotiations of selfhood they undergo" (363). In other words, representing personal religious experience is seen as a strategy for countering popular, hegemonic accounts of religion and for

coming to greater understanding; this is certainly in keeping with Soliday's vision of autoethnographic writing.

Such uses of personal religious experience present a significant positive development in our approaches to religious students. But as with other moves we've made, the turn to the personal retains a troubling tendency to elide the conflicting and contingent social forces structuring both religious experience and its representation. I argue in what follows that including religiously-inflected experience in student writing is not inherently critical work; to be fully critical—a goal espoused by nearly all of the writing scholars who write on religious students—experience must be written on in ways that interrogate and respond to the complex cultural forces and conflicts that shape that experience.⁸ Lu and Horner offer three questions for instructors and students to consider when incorporating personal experience in their academic writing: “how to represent the experience *of* an other,” “how to represent experience *to* an other,” and “how to politicize experience with the aid of others” (“Problematic” 262). I argue that we have neglected to fully answer the third question. In order to write on experience in a way that would politicize it, experience would have to become a medium for deliberation on and intervention in power relations, rather than simply a resource for learning a new discourse or reporting on a history, as in our heretofore approaches to religious experience. I designate this here as the critical difference between *interrogating* experience and merely

⁸ Stenberg has rightly noted that this, too, is a sort of required translation, and I agree: my position is that any writing we ask students to do on their religious experience *will* be a translation—the question is what sort. I justify this particular form of translation on the basis of the logic outlined in my first chapter: research suggests religious students would like to practice religion differently, but feel “out of control” and unable to change religion—so I take up a critical approach to help students achieve a sense of the instability of religion and their own ability to effect desired change within religion. This, to me, constitutes a politically transformative pedagogy.

reporting on experience. For example, we might note in the above text that Rand begins from a particular understanding of Christianity (“Christians are admonished to be ‘in’ the world but not ‘of’ it”), then asks students to illustrate that understanding by reporting on their own experiences (“how is this detachment lived out?”). This is, so far, a reportorial use of experience. But as she goes on to ask if living that out is a “struggle,” we move to what is potentially an interrogative treatment of experience, particularly depending on how sin gets defined. If students are to write on religiously inflected experiences in politically transformative ways, I argue here that our use of this interrogative mode must be expanded.

In the most recent iteration of this move to incorporate religious experience, DePalma emphasizes experience and encourages students to report on those experiences in academic writing. He argues that instructors must “account for the intersections between and constant change within every ‘discourse community’” (223). DePalma explains the source of this constant change: “discourse that seeks to convey the ever-shifting stream of human experience is never going to be static or stable but will always be in process, because its value is measured by its ability to adapt to the un-reproducible experiences of language-users” (224). Language, for DePalma, not only “conveys” and “adapts to” experience (224) and “describes” experiences (233); he also sees Thomas using writing for “negotiating the contradictions, complexities, and mysteries of his experiences” and “grappling with his experiences through the language of [Biblical] texts” in a “cycle of action, reflection, and invention” (234). In keeping with this conception of language, DePalma’s students are encouraged to “identify a moment of significance in their lives and compose an essay that conveyed the importance of that

experience to readers” (229). Writing this essay will allow students like Thomas, DePalma suggests, to make connections between texts and experience and better understand their identity in relation to their discourses and experiences (235). As DePalma notes, this focus on experience affords students the opportunity to discursively re-construct those experiences and shape their senses of self, using the discursive resources we can add to their repertoire “to better understand [their] own identity in relation to [their] faith tradition” (235) and to develop “rhetorical resources that might allow them to shape themselves as they desire” (238). So DePalma importantly evokes the dynamic nature of discourses and the intersections between identity, discourse, and experience. DePalma’s purposes are clearly and admirably political: as with Rand, his focus on religious experience is intended as a counter to hegemonic accounts that inaccurately depict religion and religious students and as a means of helping students negotiate an identity at the intersection of academic and religious discourses.

But because DePalma is concerned with the discipline’s homogenizing tendency described in Move One, he tends to focus his discussion on the religious experience of the *individual*. In several different ways throughout the article, DePalma privileges the individuality of religious beliefs over against the “‘official’ beliefs of religious institutions” (239), and suggests ways for highlighting individual religiosity in scholarly writing practices, instructor reading practices, and student writing assignments. First, of our representations of religious students, DePalma complains, “much of what has been written in this area of inquiry has relied on preconceived ideas about how ‘fundamentalist Christians’ view the Bible, truth, and so on. This literature has not, however, seriously investigated individual students’ perceptions on these matters” (239). Second, he

proposes a new method of reading religious students' texts, so that "we might seek to understand how they as individuals conceive of their relationship to the sacred" (239). And third, he recommends writing assignments for students to help them acquire "rhetorical resources that might allow them to construct themselves as they desire" (238). So DePalma counters hegemonic accounts of religion and dominant discourses with individuality and individual experience, suggesting that this will give students the tools to construct themselves autonomously. By thus challenging the effects of the dominant account of religion on multiple levels, DePalma's focus on heterogeneity and experience appears to be a promising strategy for helping instructors and religious students improve classroom relations.

When we arrive at DePalma's hypothetical revision questions for Thomas, however, we see that this individual conception of experience also places significant limitations on the critical or interrogative potential of writing about religious experience. He wants Thomas to elaborate on a particular religious experience by answering the following questions:

What senses were activated in the Spirit's presence? What did you see, hear, smell, taste, or feel? What happens to your body in moments like those described here? Have you experienced similar sensations in other contexts? What are the experiences you describe here analogous to? How do you discriminate the Spirit's presence? Have you had other experiences of this kind? If so, what were they like? How have such experiences impacted your beliefs in the past? What allows you to know when the Spirit is present? How do these experiences compare with or differ from the religious experiences of others you have talked with or read about? (236)

On many levels, these questions are excellent. They emphasize embodiment; they emphasize change; they emphasize heterogeneity; and they likely will produce the vivid descriptions that allow readers to imagine the experience. And these are, after all, goals

DePalma espouses (see Move Three, above). But there are things these questions don't do. Namely, they fail to address the deeply *social—that is, structured and contingent*—components of Thomas's religious experience. I can demonstrate how crucial these failings are for a critical agenda through a pair of brief examples.

On the one hand, we can see the dangers of constructing religious experience as stable and given by looking back at Rand. Despite her emphasis on cultural conflict, Rand, like DePalma, fails to emphasize the contingency and change inherent in religious experience. Ironically, this is in part because she constructs the experience of cultural conflict as an *essential* component of religion, declaring, "Religion, rightly understood, is a subversive force" (361). Here, she is reifying both religion and cultural conflict, and dehistoricizing both. In saying "rightly understood," Rand is asserting that there is an ideal, true, originary religion that makes cultural conflict inevitable, rather than dependent upon the cultures in any specific conflict. We see this dehistoricization and its consequences even more strongly when she writes, "Christian spirituality (aside from the way human beings have often corrupted it) seeks to take attention off of one's own self in order to exalt the name of Jesus" (363). This static definition of Christianity allows Rand to argue that "a declaration of faith in Jesus is far from being pious cliché or a sign of dull conformity" because true Christian discourse already represents a critical challenge to secular discourse (363). On the basis of this construction of religion, Rand can recommend that instructors ask students to report on their community's (and their own) ongoing critical relation to secular discourse, rather than demanding that students critically interrogate their religious discourse. Rand's choice here is characteristic of the inclusive turn: writing scholars have focused nearly all of our attention on interdiscursive

conflict between religion and academe while neglecting entirely to attend to the intradiscursive conflict and change *within* religion that produces change and variation in religio-academic relations. The result is the implicit stabilization of the religious status quo.

In a sense, Rand calls for students to provide their personal experience in writing classes as *proof* of this religious constant, which will challenge secular and uncharitable constructions of religion and religious discourse. Carter similarly uses student reports on religious experience to assert/confirm stable truths about evangelical literacy that point out conflicts between religious and academic discourses related to *faith* and the Bible's centrality (576). By working from this definition of religion and describing religious experience in the terms Rand's questions suggest (see above), students certainly should become more aware of religious experiences of cultural conflict, as should instructors. Self-understanding and outside sympathy may increase. But if religion exists "aside from the way human beings have often corrupted it" then this ultimately renders all changes and differences in people's religious experiences ephemeral rather than material. People's behaviors are merely corruptions and superstructural variations—religion itself is not changed by people's performances of religion. This may explain why Rand's recommended questions for helping students investigate their own religious subculture ultimately emphasize commonalities rather than differences—despite a recommendation that students gather individual stories, she focuses on helping students create generalizing descriptions that highlight neither change nor heterogeneity—and why her questions about differences in religious practice frame those differences in terms of sin and the human condition, rather than as matters of social context or contingency (363-4).

Whatever the intended goal, this has the effect of insulating religion, particularly Christianity, from historical change and human participation. Un-qualified by an ongoing, changing history and independent of practical manifestations, religion must continue to exist in the same set of relations. Such representations of religious experience and conflict will ironically only reify religious experience into an essentially homogeneous, stable entity. Worse, for the purposes of educators and religious reformers alike, such reports will make students' religions into homogeneous, stable entities *immune to human intervention*. Like Carter's interaction with Keneshia, Rand's stabilizing questions could potentially reduce students' ability to see themselves as agents of change in their religious communities. Representing experience is reduced to reporting on experience, not changing it.

On the other hand, we should also beware the danger of constructing religious experience as completely individual and spontaneously achieved. Looking back at DePalma's questions for Thomas (above), supernatural experience appears to spontaneously happen. The experience's socially- and individually-orchestrated aspects are not discussed. This is first because DePalma's questions evoke no exploration of the ways that Thomas's encounters with the Holy Spirit involve Thomas as an active agent. He asks, what *happens* to your body? rather than, what do you *do* with—and to—your body? What role did you play in producing this experience? How could we readers have an experience like this? Nor, second, does DePalma ask Thomas about the social aspects of the experience, outside of the Spirit and one comparative question that seems more likely to encourage closer description than to highlight the role of culture in producing the experience. Asking how Thomas's experience compares or contrasts with other

accounts of supernatural experiences does not suggest social influence—whereas asking how other accounts of supernatural experiences might have shaped Thomas’s experience, or at least his ability to recognize the supernatural character of his experience, would have. Moreover, as I will discuss in detail in chapter five, Thomas’s account of the supernatural experience appears as the climax of a long, detailed narrative of Thomas’s spiritual journey, one kicked off by a break-up with his girlfriend and ending by the lake of a religious camp where Thomas interacts with the Spirit. Happily for Thomas, his spiritual crisis ends just days before he is set to attend a secular college. This is notable because the camp as described appears to be a sort of boot camp for getting Christian students ready for the spiritual challenges of the college year. It is disappointing that these contextual factors—relationships, chronologies, and spatial locations—are treated as unrelated to Thomas’s spiritual experience.

In contrast, anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann has found that achieving the supernatural sensational experiences that Thomas describes, and the personal relationship with God they index, are difficult for most religious adherents to achieve, and require significant social production. As she explains, writing with Howard Nusbaum and Ronald Thisted,

it takes effort to accept that a particular interpretation of the supernatural is correct, and it takes effort to live in accordance with that interpretation—to live as if they really do believe that their understanding is accurate. It requires learning, and the learning can be a slow process, like learning to speak a foreign language in an unfamiliar country, with new and different social cues. That learning is often stumbling and gradual for those who convert, take on new roles, or go through an initiation process. People must come to see differently, to think differently, and above all to feel differently, because to believe in a particular form of the supernatural as if the supernatural is truly present is, for most believers, to experience the world differently than if that form of the supernatural were not real. (67)

Maintaining this experiential relationship through seeing, thinking, and feeling differently is difficult, contingent on a process, and must be acquired and worked at by religious practitioners. The relationship and the sensations are thus the products of a continual learning process. Elsewhere, Luhrmann argues there are three different types of learning involved in contemporary U.S. evangelical Christian practice: cognitive/linguistic, metakinetetic, and relational. “Together,” she writes, “they enable new believers to do something quite remarkable—to construct, out of everyday psychological experience, the profound sense that they have a really real relationship with a being that cannot be seen, heard, or touched” (“Metakinesis” 519).

This social learning process lends religious experience a sense of situated contingency and agency that can be contrasted with the spontaneous and a-social construction of religious experience assumed by Rand’s reifying questions and DePalma’s individualizing questions. Within such constructions of religious experience, students may be aided in sharing their experiences, reflecting upon them, and retro-actively shaping their meaning for themselves or others—seemingly DePalma’s and Rand’s chief goals—but not in accounting for, transmitting, or intervening in the cultural forces shaping those experiences. Religious experiences as reported in both cases, then, are not *practiced and formed*, but *undergone and then re-formed afterwards*. But as previous sections have made clear, a politically challenging use of personal experience must do more than that. Writing on personal experience must be an opportunity for students to actively deliberate on the cultural forces shaping their experience and an opportunity for them to use accounts of those experiences to *respond* to those cultural forces—both of which forms of agential action are denied or partially denied to students

when some of those cultural forces are treated as static or spontaneous. But there is another requirement for a critical use of personal experience: it must present students with an opportunity to intervene and re-think the way cultural forces will shape their future experiences. While the first two requirements have been dealt with extensively above, the final, future orientation is at once the most critical and the least discussed. I will elaborate briefly here, but will offer a far more thorough articulation of how this use of experience might be accomplished in chapter five.

Lu and Horner suggest in “The Problematic of Experience” that we must recognize discourse as always “an act of shaping—giving form to—experiences” (262), rather than expressing or transparently reporting them. This phrase has a sort of double meaning that is easy to miss: if discourse “gives form to experiences,” this doesn’t necessarily mean the forming occurs only after-the-fact. Lu and Horner are suggesting that discourse does not merely re-shape *past* experiences, ordering them or making sense of experience in some cognitive sense, as DePalma tends to imply; nor is discourse merely shaped (determined) by the past. Acts of representation and experiencing shape the way we will perceive and relate to *ongoing* and *still-to-come* phenomena, engaging in and altering reality and future experience. They go before us, in a sense, even as they are themselves already structured by lived conditions. When we acknowledge that discourse and experience are mutually informing in this way, then students must be encouraged to pay far more attention to the choices they make in reporting on their experiences for us—they can no longer simply focus on conveying those experiences *effectively*, because their instructor’s understanding is not the only thing being affected by what they write. Their

future reality and their future experiences, too, are shaping and being shaped through acts of representation.

This is why representing experience is potentially an effective political act: Resources and experiences, critical ethnographic approaches would emphasize, are not static but instead formed by the ways in which we use and represent them: “the relation between experience and discourse is not polar and hierarchical but dialectical” (Lu and Horner, “Problematic” 259). If we acknowledge this, that discourse on experience is always already culturally informed, “an act of re-forming experience” in culturally structured directions, this gives discourse significant sway, though not full determination. Because discourse and experience are inextricably related but not identical, reporting on an experience in a new way is potentially a means for challenging the dominant discourses on that experience; but discoursing differently is also a potential means to changing our experiences (262). So a truly critical use of personal experience will focus more attention on how writing about religion is a *political* and *constructive* act—on the ways in which religious students don’t merely report on their faith experiences, critique their faith experiences, reveal what lies beneath their faith experiences, but instead how religious students *form* and *re-form* their religious experiences through the representations they create when they write in our classroom. This sort of writing extends beyond the constructing or expressing of the self (DePalma’s chief concerns) to participate in *cultural* definition and *cultural* representation through the de-naturalization of experiences and in turn cultural forces. Discourse only truly becomes the means for critical self-shaping that DePalma imagines if students deliberate on the *choices* they are

making in discoursing on their experience, and on the cultural consequences of those choices.

Conclusion

Schoenike Nowacek's ethnographic work corroborates the perspective I've been suggesting here: she finds that when religious students write they are often negotiating with religion and academia in far more complex ways than we may realize. In their papers as well as interviews, it becomes clear that her student informants' religious discourses reciprocally exert their own force on (and through) academic discourse, on (and through) the body and experience of the students, and on (and through) the writing they do. Each of the students in Nowacek's study experiences writing assignments differently depending upon the relationship they have with organized religion—one sees himself as a strong Catholic, and so feels comfortable questioning aspects of his faith in writing assignments at his Catholic university, whereas another, a Quaker, sees herself as “an uncertain outsider” at that same university and so experiences the same writing assignments as narrowly-designed and coercive. The third student enters college already questioning the reality of religious claims, and in her papers Nowacek perceives evidence of two different struggles: “Underneath the surface of this paper, . . . are Tigra's religious experiences and concerns as well as her efforts to write about them in ways that would be satisfactory in an academic context” (164). The relations move in multiple directions—at times, religious and academic forces work together harmoniously, as in the first student's case; at times, as for the Quaker student, they seem to directly conflict; and at other times, students know they are negotiating and struggling with both simultaneously.

All of this occurs, Nowacek writes, within “a subtle and shifting nexus of individual beliefs, classroom contexts, and institutional culture” (162) in which students’ religious identities “are not separable from institutional religious culture” (155). While Nowacek intends the religious culture of the university institution where the classroom experience takes place—and so remains focused on academic institutional forms of hegemony—I believe we need to recognize, actually, that religious students always operate in relation to a larger academic culture *and* a larger religious culture; that both discourses structure students’ experience of writing in the academy, in concert with their many other social locations; and that all those discourses enter into conflict through the bodies and texts of students. Religious students’ relations to religion are not uniform; neither, then, are religious students’ relations to academia. Conflicts traverse *all* of these relations. Our pedagogies must begin from this acknowledgement: that religious and academic discourses, identities, experiences, and communities are neither entirely at odds, nor entirely complementary, but instead reciprocally shaping one another at all points through conflictual, complementary, and mostly uncategorizable relations.

So it is true, as Goodburn writes, that academic discourses and religious discourses “are engaged in constant struggle” (351). But in the course of this struggle, the lines around “religious” and “academic” are constantly changed. Moreover, we (students and instructors) constantly participate in these struggles as representatives and makers of those discourses. In our calls for respectful “merging,” dexterous switching, better articulation, and greater understanding, the critical focus on multi-directional change (that is, the reciprocal relations between “realities,” discourses, translations, and representations), so central to a truly critical approach, has disappeared. This causes us to

pay only lackluster attention to the relations between discourses that occur at the border formed by our translations. In light of these constant movements and struggles, our approaches to religious formations have to be flexible enough to incorporate the heterogeneity of personal religious experience while also keeping track of the power relations and multiple cultural discourses that inform those experiences in shared ways. In the next three chapters, I will examine means by which we might retrieve a fuller sense of these relations, and help our students to deliberate on and participate in them.

CHAPTER III

ACCOUNTING FOR RELIGIOUS POWER

In chapter two, I describe the disciplinary turn towards incorporating religious discourse in the writing classroom. We have used such writing to accomplish important goals: chiefly, to help students combat a dominant negative representation of religious students held by outsiders and to help students succeed in college writing contexts. But I argue there that we haven't achieved our dual goals of practicing and promoting tolerance with religious students for four chief reasons: a homogenization of religion, a transparent conception of translation, an incomplete acknowledgement of the conflictual and mutually shaping relations between discourses, and a spontaneous and individual conception of religious experience. Put otherwise, we haven't placed sufficient emphasis upon the inter- and intra-formational sources of change, contradiction, and conflict in religious discourses. If we are to include religiously-inflected perspectives, values, terms, texts, genres, and experiences in the writing classroom, chapters one and two suggest that we must better attend to the heterogeneity, change, and conflict of living those out—and how the writing classroom participates in producing those differences, changes, and conflicts. This chapter sets out to produce one such account of religion, in the process suggesting terms and concepts to help us produce more such accounts.

As I discuss in the opening, Asad argues that we should investigate the mutually shaping relations between forms of religion, social disciplines, and material conditions

that cause religions to take particular forms, and then cause those same religions to take new forms. So in these next three chapters I attempt to apply Asad's perspective on religion to American evangelical Christianity, producing a new account of it that emphasizes its forces, heterogeneity, changes, contradictions, and conflicts. I demonstrate in this chapter that evangelicalism depends for its existence on a number of social forces and institutions that in effect *create* and maintain evangelicalism by disseminating a hegemonic *account* of it. I call this account, its proponents, and its institutions "official evangelicalism." Official evangelicalism maintains itself by setting pressures and limits on the religious experiences, practices, and representations of religious practitioners, to the point that I believe most religious Americans must experience, practice, and represent their religion in *relation* to that official account. I connect this account of official evangelicalism back to the writing classroom throughout the second half of this chapter, arguing that writing scholars, instructors, and students are actually complicit in the reproduction of official evangelicalism.

As I argued in chapter one and two and continue to demonstrate here in chapter three, scholars, instructors and students alike continue to struggle against a homogenizing and reifying account of contemporary American Christianity that is often explicitly connected to evangelicalism. This account obscures the ability of both parties to view the actual practices of religious adherents, and it obscures the actual hegemonic relations between religious adherents and official evangelicalism. In the face of the hegemonic account presented to them in the larger culture and at school, neither students nor instructors possess the language and concepts necessary to articulate the varieties of actual religious practice in America, nor to envision the means for changing existing

relations among students, religion, and academia. I choose to focus on evangelicalism, in other words, not only because it is a powerful force in American religion, but even more so because evangelicalism affects the rest of us, too.

But this power of official evangelicalism is not total or without interruption, precisely because it depends upon so many institutions and participants for its continuing power. So I will argue in chapter four that in contrast to the homogeneity of this hegemonic account, official evangelicalism's definitions are heavily contested and its norms practically contradicted. In contrast to the hegemonic account's stable and given constructions of evangelicalism, I will demonstrate that evangelicalism, like all religions, is constantly forming and transforming, and describe several more of the unstable mechanisms that religions like evangelicalism depend upon for their transmission. Chapter five will discuss ways in which these mechanisms could be highlighted through our students' writing. If we want to respect the place of religion in students' lives and with them re-negotiate its place in our classrooms and our shared spaces, we must first locate its actual place(s) in their lives and our classrooms, as well as the forces that render those places various and contingent.

I. Defining Evangelicalism

After surveying a set of popular tropes for conceptualizing the essence of religion—baseball (ritual institution), Coca-Cola (fetish), rock 'n' roll (potlatch)—David Chidester concludes that each is both useful and limited in its ability to convey religion's essence. Through people's use of such tropes, he writes, "religion is revealed, once again, not only as a cluster concept or a fuzzy set but also as a figure of speech that is subject to

journalistic license, rhetorical excess, and intellectual sleight of hand” (758). Such definitional possibilities and difficulties, Chidester suggests, “signify both the problem of defining religion and the complex presence of religion in American popular culture” (761). I want to argue that the same might be said of the term *evangelicalism*—the word designates a cluster concept, a fuzzy set, a figure of speech. In writing scholarship, we know this. Running up against the need to define *evangelicalism* for her readers, Carter provides the following *caveat* first: “Even the most influential leaders of this movement are unable to reach a consensus about what it means to be an evangelical Christian” (581). The reason for Carter’s difficulty—and these influential leaders’ difficulties—is that the evangelical “movement,” as Carter calls it, does not strictly exist. Whereas the Catholic Church might, from one perspective, be said to exist in an ordinary sense—there is a monolithic institutional hierarchy with the broadly recognized (if challenged) power to include and exclude others from the Catholic formation—this cannot be said of *evangelicalism*. *Evangelicalism* is only a cluster concept; a fuzzy set; a figure of speech. As such, the definitions of “evangelical” and “evangelicalism” are also sites of conflict.

The Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals, an organization associated with institutionally-evangelical Wheaton College, explains the difficulty of defining *evangelicalism* on its website: “The term ‘Evangelicalism’ is a wide-reaching definitional ‘canopy’ that covers a diverse number of Protestant traditions, denominations, organizations, and churches” (Eskridge, “Defining Evangelicalism”). There are evangelical churches, denominations, schools, seminaries, associations, and political organizations, each with some degree of coercive power over their individual members, or at least member churches or groups—but there is no one Evangelical (capital E)

institution with coercive power over all these smaller evangelical assemblages. And yet despite this lack of a coherent coercive apparatus for regulating membership equivalent to that of the Catholic or Mormon church, and despite the apparent diversity among members, Luhrmann notes “About 40 percent of Americans describe themselves as born again or evangelical” (*When God Talks Back* 13). Actually, Gallup indicates that as recently as 2005 a stunning 47% of surveyed Americans answered yes when asked if they would describe themselves in this way (“Another Look”). Such an astounding number suggests that evangelicalism has some sort of significant presence in American society—but it doesn’t yet tell us what that presence is.

In trying to define and explain this evangelical presence (and the power of this term as an identity-marker and widely-used descriptor) in the absence of Evangelicalism, scholars (and others) define the terms “evangelical” and “evangelicalism” in a variety of ways, and to a variety of ends. The Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals offers three of the most common referents for the term (all text comes directly from their webpage):

The first is to view as “evangelical” all Christians who affirm a few key doctrines and practical emphases. British historian David Bebbington approaches evangelicalism from this direction and notes four specific hallmarks of evangelical religion: conversionism, the belief that lives need to be changed; activism, the expression of the gospel in effort; biblicism, a particular regard for the Bible; and “crucicentrism,” a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Bebbington’s definition has become a standard baseline for most scholars. . . .

A second sense of the term is to look at evangelicalism as an organic group of movements and religious tradition. Within this context “evangelical” denotes a style as much as a set of beliefs, and an attitude which insiders “know” and “feel” when they encounter it. As a result, groups as disparate as black Baptists and Dutch Reformed Churches, Mennonites and Pentecostals, Catholic charismatics and Southern Baptists can all come under the evangelical umbrella—demonstrating just how diverse the movement really is. . . .

A third sense of the term is as the self-ascribed label for a largely Midwest-based coalition that arose during the Second World War. Importantly, its core personalities (like Carl F.H. Henry, Harold John Ockenga and Billy Graham), institutions (for instance, Moody Bible Institute, Wheaton College, and Fuller Theological Seminary), and organizations (such as the National Association of Evangelicals and Youth for Christ) have played a pivotal role in giving the wider movement a sense of cohesion that extends beyond these “card-carrying” evangelicals. (Eskridge, “Defining the Term”)

We might say that the Institute identifies an evangelical *ideology* consisting of articulable ideas; an evangelical *style* marked by less-articulable but still-recognizable behaviors, knowledges, and feelings; and an evangelical *institution* of leaders, coalitions, and organizations connected by a shared label and a shared history. All three are critical to any account of evangelicalism, but alone none of these definitions can fully account for its cultural force. The point Larry Eskridge and the Institute make so well here is that one cannot pin down a single, coherent “Evangelicalism,” but there are plenty of things that are “evangelical.”

Such a motley definition is unwieldy at best when academics try to speak authoritatively and definitively about evangelicals. So most writing scholars, and many scholars outside writing studies, have tried to positively define evangelicalism and identify evangelicals by privileging one definition or another. Sociologist Sarah Diamond, for example, describes evangelicals in terms that are quite typical of definitions offered across academia (including in writing scholarship):

In general, evangelicals are Christians, Catholic as well as Protestant, who have had a born-again experience [“a conversion experience in which they made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ”]. They believe the Bible is the accurate, inspired word of God, and they also believe that the only way to salvation is through belief in Christ’s divinity and resurrection. Evangelicals believe they are required to share their faith with nonbelievers in an effort to win new converts to Christ. (9)

This is a largely ideological definition—note the five explicit references to belief.

Putnam and Campbell, in contrast to such ideological definitions, define evangelicalism as a loose category for grouping together a wide band of largely unaffiliated, independent Christian churches. “Evangelicals” are then those individuals who identify themselves with one of those denominations or churches—a somewhat “institutional” definition, although not an institutional definition that necessarily refers back to the midwestern coalition the Institute describes (14, 602). Both of these definitions work to include and exclude different people—Putnam and Campbell’s definition would exclude those who affirm evangelical ideology but don’t identify with an evangelical church; Diamond’s definition would exclude those who attend an evangelical institution but don’t affirm evangelical ideology; and neither gives much weight to actual behavior or evangelical style.

The point, then, is not to find the right definition: the point is to find a definition that might highlight the conflictual uses and definitions of its own term. For my purposes, I follow Chidester and Asad’s transformational approach. First, I take “evangelical” to be an adjective, applied and defined variously, which nevertheless generally designates very real “evangelicalisms”: sets of ideas, ways of being, populations, and organizations. Second, it follows that these definitions and applications of the adjective are situated and partial; all uses of “evangelical” are necessarily selective, carrying along sources, motivations, and consequences. Third, I understand these definitions to participate in social conflict and power relations. Various groups and individuals within and outside of evangelicalism attempt to gain some measure of *social power* through gaining control over the term—by asserting the right to define its essential doctrines, or its behavioral

norms, or its membership criteria, or its institutional hierarchies; and in turn using these to shape ideas, behaviors, people, and organizations. Academics in writing scholarship, for example, utilize definitions of evangelicals that allow us to explain, understand, sympathize, resource, and improve religious students and their relations within our classroom—though those students’ actual relations to our idea of evangelicalism are not entirely certain or even entirely positive. So all uses of this evangelical label, and any –isms those uses collect and define, should be understood as contested, the locus of power relations. Below, I attempt to elaborate on how what I call official evangelicalism is “winning” the struggle to define and control “evangelicalisms.” Following that, I will highlight the heterogeneities and fluidities obscured by official evangelicalism’s hegemonic account.

II. Terms for Analysis

In order to describe this struggle over evangelicalism and explain the social processes that produce evangelicalism’s profound cultural force, I utilize organizing concepts and vocabulary drawn from critical theory: namely, Louis Althusser’s concept of the ideological apparatus and Bourdieu’s concept of the *habitus*. While Bourdieu and Althusser’s approaches to culture focused on accounting for the production and reproduction of asymmetrical economic and class structures, their concepts have been successfully applied by subsequent scholars to account for certain other aspects of culture—we are likely most familiar with Butler’s performative approach to gender and, more recently, with Pennycook’s practical re-conception of language (*Gender Trouble*;

Language as a Local Practice). Asad's work suggests that the same conceptual approach can be applied to understanding religion.

In attempting to account for the operation of hegemony in "Ideology and State Ideological Apparatuses," Althusser points the finger at cultural institutions, acknowledging that the coercive power of the state cannot by itself explain the effectiveness of "ideology"—that is, why people actually seem to enjoy their subjection and to believe in the metanarratives that maintain existing power relations, for instance, when they can't be *made* to believe them. He distinguishes between these cultural institutions, which he calls Ideological State Apparatuses, and Repressive State Apparatuses like the police. The difference for Althusser is in the proportions of coercion and ideology used by the apparatus to achieve conformity: whereas Althusser imagined that repressive apparatuses rely heavily on violence and coercion, "the Ideological State Apparatuses function massively and predominantly *by ideology*," although he concedes, "they also function secondarily by repression, even if ultimately, but only ultimately, this is very attenuated and concealed, even symbolic. (There is no such thing as a purely ideological apparatus.)" (145). Althusser identifies several of these apparatuses: the religious ISA, the educational ISA, the family ISA, the legal ISA, the political ISA, the trade union ISA, the communications ISA, and the culture ISA.

Importantly, these ideological apparatuses simultaneously achieve two functions. First, as Raymond Williams notes, they have a practical effect: they "teach, confirm, and in most cases finally enforce selected meanings, values, and activities" by "exerting powerful and immediate pressures on the conditions of living and of making a living" (118). On the other hand, they also offer an *account* of those practices that makes them

seem not only normal, but *right* and *natural*. Althusser divides these operations into “know-how” and “ideology.” Take school, for instance: Althusser says the education system

takes children from every class at infant-school age, and then for years, the years in which the child is most ‘vulnerable’, squeezed between the Family State Apparatus and the Educational State Apparatus, it drums into them, whether it uses new or old methods, a certain amount of ‘know-how’ wrapped in the ruling ideology (French, arithmetic, natural history, the sciences, literature) or simply the ruling ideology in its pure state (ethics, civic instruction, philosophy). (155)

He goes on to explain the economic function both serve: education reproduces the necessary relations of production (the “*know-how*” that will enable jobs to be performed successfully) even as it inculcates the *ideology* that makes people want those jobs, feel good about that work, and believe that getting the job and the pension is the only way to be a responsible, respectable citizen.

This ideology, at least for Althusser, is obfuscatory: it obscures the asymmetrical power relations those know-hows will serve and maintain (the “real” purposes and mechanisms of the school) by making them seem natural. “The mechanisms which produce this vital result for the capitalist regime are naturally covered up and concealed by a universally reigning ideology of the School, universally reigning because it is one of the essential forms of the ruling bourgeois ideology: an ideology which represents the School as a neutral environment purged of ideology” (Althusser 157). Althusser cogently points out that the maintenance of the *status quo*, hegemony, depends upon making contingent social structures seem natural and given and making culturally-specific logics feel like “common sense.” Elsewhere, Althusser describes this ideological function as instilling a sense of “obviousness” in social constructs:

It is indeed a peculiarity of ideology that it imposes (without appearing to do so, since these are “obviousnesses”) obviousnesses as obviousnesses, which we cannot *fail to recognize* and before which we have the inevitable and natural reaction of crying out (aloud or in the “still, small voice of conscience”): “That’s obvious! That’s right! That’s true!” (Althusser 172)

So for Althusser, an ideological apparatus functions *practically* by reproducing the social bodies necessary to the maintenance of existing power relations, and *ideologically* by reproducing a hegemonic account of that formation that naturalizes the power relations and social conditions it maintains, making them feel obvious, right, and true.

Scholars have since worked to move beyond Althusser’s treatment of ideology, however, by more intricately connecting practical “know-how” with “ideology.” Religion, gender, as well as economic and class structures all depend on ideas, of course—definitions, discursive spaces, and assumptions (which themselves operate in the material world). But scholarship throughout the disciplines has increasingly granted a more central place for the practical in ideology, producing a subtle reversal of Althusser’s logic. As Terry Eagleton remarks, “It is no good reminding myself that I am opposed to racism as I sit down on a park bench marked ‘Whites Only’; by the [act] of sitting on it, I have supported and perpetuated racist ideology. The ideology, so to speak, is in the bench, not in my head” (40, qtd in Rickert 117). Latour would point out, as Eagleton’s own phrasing implies, that the ideology is not simply *in the bench*, but actualized in the active relation between Eagleton and the bench: ideology is materialized by Eagleton’s sitting. This, of course, is a different meaning of ideology than that being used in Althusser’s quotes, above. Eagleton’s broader understanding of ideology here might best be distinguished, as Bonnie Brennen suggests, by using a different term like “hegemony”

(8). Hegemony, Raymond Williams explains, incorporates both know-how and ideology; it

is a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meanings and values—constitutive and constituting—which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society, a sense of absolute because experienced reality beyond which it is very difficult for most members of the society to move, in most areas of their lives. (110)

Articulating this intertwining of ideology and know-how within rhetoric and composition, Thomas Rickert quotes Slavoj Zizek to underline practices' roles in hegemony: "belief, 'far from being an 'intimate', purely mental state, is always *materialized* in our effective social activity'" (117).

Bourdieu advanced his notion of the *habitus* to account for this hegemonic relation between practice and ideology, specifically focusing on the transmission of culture and social structures through the body. As Bourdieu saw it, "Practical belief is not a 'state of mind', still less a kind of arbitrary adherence to a set of instituted dogmas and doctrines (beliefs), but rather a state of the body" (68, qtd in Lee 159). The *habitus* refers simultaneously to a social context—as in the ideological apparatuses I mention above—and to individuals' *incorporation and participation in* those apparatuses through those bodily states that he references. According to Bourdieu, this incorporation is achieved through the enculturation Althusser aptly describes above as "drumming in": the life-long experiential process of prolonged exposure to meanings, values, norms, practices, and ideological accounts of those that causes those ways of being to become a part of our living. Bourdieu speaks of this incorporation process in terms of "internalized, embodied schemes" (*Distinction* 467), and "social necessity made second nature, turned into

muscular patterns and bodily automatisms” (474) through constant repetition and discipline. Experiences in our social and physical milieus actually change the structures of our body, and thus the way we will experience and interact with (perceive, respond, and thus change and be changed by) all future environments. This sort of incorporation in Bourdieu’s descriptions may seem like a metaphor describing a social process—but it has an analogue in a material, neurological reality. Philosopher Evan Thompson sums up the considerable body of neuroscience supporting Bourdieu’s finding: “one’s lived body is a developmental being thick with its own history and sedimented ways of feeling, perceiving, acting and imagining” (33). So we might say that our experiences within ideological apparatuses really do shape the bodily structures and practices of perception, feeling, action, expression and imagination that structure our responses to new surroundings, literally *naturalizing* culture. Bourdieu’s concept of bodily incorporation helps us to better understand some of the ways in which Althusser’s ideological apparatuses work to create the obvious, right, and true, but Bourdieu’s concept allows us to do so without resorting to false consciousness and a separation between know-how and ideology.

Marcel Mauss spoke of this enculturation process almost a century ago, introducing the concept of the *habitus* in relatively innocuous terms by pointing out how very different ways of swimming, sleeping, and even having sex can seem like the natural way to various populations. But writers like Bourdieu, Williams, and Butler charged Mauss’s idea with its full political weight by applying it to the notion of hegemony and power relations. Prolonged exposure (and systems of attached rewards and punishments) created by practices themselves—quite apart from any explicit or implicit ideology—can

cause cultural practices to seem right and good. As perceptions and feelings are brought into alignment with culture and behavior, people come to expect to see what they generally see, and to act in accordance with their expectations (thus often bringing those expectations about). Together, these actions and perceptions act as a sort of mirror-structure, as Althusser himself says. The resonances between what we are taught to perceive in the world and what we therefore experience (and cause to be) in the world are mutually confirming, constituting and affirming the reality of cultural stories about the world—and maintaining existing social conditions.

This is, roughly, how Butler accounts for the cultural production of gender. She uses Althusser's mirror-structure and Williams' "reciprocally confirming" practices and perceptions to explain how gender operates as a credible cultural fiction:

Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions—and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction that "compels" our belief in its necessity and naturalness. (*Gender Trouble* 140)

If our society is part of our bodily structure, shaping the way we relate to the world, the way that we feel in response to it, what appeals as common sense or natural to us, and the choices that we see there, we cannot ever just "get outside" and reject the social structure entirely. One's gender, like Bourdieu's classed subject and Althusser's interpellated subject, feels and therefore is entirely too real. Given these intertwinings between society, our bodies, and the way that we experience reality, Butler argues in *Gender Trouble* that "power can be neither withdrawn nor refused, but only redeployed" (124). These crucial redeployments will be the focus of chapter four and five.

These concepts of the ideological apparatus and the *habitus*, with a concomitant focus on linking institutions, accounts, practices, and dispositions, drive my transformational analysis of evangelicalism. I argue that we should understand the religion that appears in our rhetoric and composition classrooms and texts in hegemonic and transformational, rather than essential, terms: particular individuals and institutions work with and through ideological apparatuses to persistently disseminate, confirm, and enforce selected doctrines, meanings, values, and activities of religion, namely evangelicalism, as religious. Those evangelical forms of religiosity are rendered natural and normal through their repetition, which sediments them into the (habitual) practices and perceptions of individuals, as well as through hegemonic accounts of those religious practices and representatives as natural and normal (what Althusser would call ideology). Through their continual presence, these representations and norms come to be construed as *really* religious; thus creating a hegemonic religion to which individuals are forced to act in response. So here I examine some of the ideological apparatuses that do this work of realizing a particular, hegemonic brand of religion that I call “official evangelicalism”—namely the media, the political system, arts and entertainment, and education (including rhetoric and composition).

III. Evangelicalism and Ideological Apparatuses

The deployment of ideological apparatuses to promote evangelicalism has been a calculated choice made by the evangelical establishment. We might look, for an early indicator of this calculation, to Carl Henry’s *The Uneasy Conscience of Fundamentalism*.

This book, written in 1947 by the first editor of *Christianity Today*, represents one early and consequential manifestation of the Christian Right's institutional logic. Henry writes,

. . . the church's prime task is to challenge men and women individually in such numbers that the manifesto is global. As the world felt Hitler's threats at the borders of Czechoslovakia and Poland and England, and Mussolini's at the border of Greece, so too must it feel the promise of deliverance by Jesus at the fringe of our civilization, calling men to spiritual decision. The Christian life must be lived out, among the regenerate, in every area of activity, until even the unregenerate are moved by Christian standards, acknowledging their force. (71)

Elsewhere in the text, Henry calls this imperialistic practice—comparing Christians to Nazis only two years after the atrocities of World War II—“salting.” The reference to Hitler and Mussolini is at best remarkably tone-deaf, and at worst quite frightening. But clearly, Henry doesn't intend that this Christian “force” will be literally coercive. Instead, he believes that Christian force must be exerted ideologically as Christianity is lived out in public. He argues that to attain such a global force Christians must first build up ideological apparatuses that instill an evangelical disposition in their own population. From there, Christianity can then be practically represented in public—“lived out, among the regenerate, in every area of activity.” Henry's plan at once indicates the importance of explicitly evangelical ideological apparatuses in raising up representatives, and at the same time indicates Henry's intention to subsequently place those representatives within secular ideological apparatuses: Henry's representative not only is shaped by Christian social institutions, but in turn exerts normative pressure on people through his practical activities in non-Christian social institutions—*challenging* them, making them *feel*, *calling* them to decide, *moving* them by his standards or living out.

Evangelicalism and Education

The first ideological apparatus I want to examine is the religious educational apparatus. Not only does this accord with Carl Henry's manifesto, but describing the religious educational apparatus also allows me to set out some of the basic and most readily recognizable characteristics of official evangelicalism—beliefs and behaviors, specifically—to which I can attach less obviously evangelical beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, representatives, and groups in my descriptions of subsequent ideological apparatuses. Evangelicalisms, we must remember, constitute fuzzy sets: loose conglomerations of individuals, ideas, and organizations associated (or not) in various ways—by shared beliefs, shared representatives, shared commitments, shared dispositions, etc. The religious educational apparatus and the representation of official evangelicalism I draw from it, then, simply represent nodes in that network on which I can proceed to articulate a series of connected apparatuses and representations.

Because representatives must be raised up before they can act as evangelical representatives in public, Henry calls for an evangelical education system that can effect his incarnated evangelical “manifesto”: he writes,

Perhaps the answer is the building of evangelical educational plants, with attractive auditoriums that will serve for worship purposes, providing a week-round program that out-educates the secular educators. . . . Beyond doubt the time is here for an all-out evangelical education movement, and alert churches will think through the wise investment of their funds. The maintenance of evangelical grade and high schools, and of evangelical colleges and universities, with the highest academic standards, promises most quickly to concentrate the thinking of youth upon the Christian world-life view as the only adequate spiritual ground for a surviving culture. (71)

Lest we fail to take seriously how Henry's vision of evangelical education as a social force may have influenced the Christian Right, consider that evangelical educational institutions have exploded in the decades following Henry's call: according to the

National Center for Education Statistics, over four million children in America today attend private religious schools (United States, “Private School Universe Survey”). Moreover, 9 out of 10 conservative Christian religious schools (the second largest category of private school) began *after* 1960 (United States, “Other Religious Conservative Christian Schools”). The reasons for this are manifold—desegregation might explain some of the rise in private schools, for instance—but the desire to inculcate a Christian disposition through children’s education must not be discounted. We can examine two specific ways in which evangelicals utilize educational apparatuses to enforce a particular brand of evangelicalism within their own populations, an evangelicalism then reproduced in culture at large through secular ideological apparatuses. Because of the structure of education, this is one of the more *coercive* forms of reproduction available to evangelical leaders while all others that I describe make more use of ideological pressure. This distinction comes in part of necessity: whereas students can be coerced into conformity, they are intended to become *witnesses* to those “unregenerative” who cannot generally be forced to conform to evangelical norms of belief or practice unless through governmental policy.

At times, evangelical education can focus on shaping evangelical students’ external behaviors. At Appalachian Bible College in West Virginia, a highly conservative evangelical college, the rules of conduct for students are published in the *Servant’s Staff*. Rules range from dress code for specific occasions—men’s hairstyles, class apparel, Sunday apparel, casual apparel, and recreational apparel require almost three full pages (11-13)—to hosting—“Single student commuters who are not living with parents must notify the Student Deans before hosting mixed groups or any members of the opposite

sex in their home” (10)—to sexual behavior—“fornication, adultery, incest, sexual abuse of a minor, homosexuality, indecent exposure, sexual harassment, and other such activities are forbidden” (8)—to hygiene—“Personal cleanliness and neatness are vital to one’s personal testimony. Clothing and shoes should be clean and neat at all times” (21)—to quotidian religious observance—“Everyone is expected to have a personal time of prayer and Bible study” (31). Religious doctrine, too, is dictated at colleges like Appalachian Bible College, and conformity to these and other norms are self-evaluated, measured, recorded by institutional agents, used to assess eligibility for continued enrollment, and even evaluated one last time to determine a student’s right to graduate (37-38). I think ABC’s *Servant’s Staff* outlines a form of evangelicalism most often associated with fundamentalism—a reactionary religious stereotype extensively represented/lampooned in media representations of religion from *Footloose* to *Saved*. It’s certainly not the norm, and I don’t present it as such: instead, I want it to stand in for one extreme of institutional evangelicalism. Its rules represent here a highly invasive attempt at enforcing a particular version of Christianity, as homogeneously as possible. Lest we forget the purpose of such standards, note the reason those shoes must stay clean, because “Personal cleanliness and neatness are vital to one’s personal testimony” (21). The goal is to inculcate an evangelical disposition, and in turn the reproduction of a proper evangelical representative, who can exert force on his neighbors by living out his evangelicalism well, in public.

In addition to shaping students’ dispositions, however, the evangelical educational apparatus exerts considerable coercive force in an attempt at managing evangelicals’ *beliefs*. These evangelical beliefs, like the behaviors described above, should be familiar

to most American readers. In order to secure and maintain employment at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, for instance, all professors must sign and believe (see discussion below) both the “Abstract of Principles” (Manly) and “The Baptist Faith and Message.” These documents, available online, together seem to represent one explicit account of what I will here call “*official evangelicalism*.” What I mean by this should become clearer below, but I generally mean to indicate a simultaneously *powerful* and *popular* account of evangelicalism that most Americans will recognize in some way, regardless of how they feel about it.

Official evangelicalism, at least in this particular Baptist instantiation, is designated by orthodox stances on a number of beliefs and practices including the following: *the Bible* (“It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter”); *gender* (“the gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God’s creation,” so “the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture”); *salvation* (exclusive to Christians, through faith, from a literal Hell); *witnessing* (“seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle”); *society* (“seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society” by speaking against “racism . . . greed, selfishness, and vice . . . adultery, homosexuality, pornography . . . speak on behalf of the unborn . . . ”); *government* (“The church should not resort to the civil power to carry on its work. The gospel of Christ contemplates spiritual means alone for the pursuit of its ends.”⁹); and *family* (“God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society . . .

⁹ Many who follow contemporary politics may be surprised by this position, but it is actually a traditional Baptist stance. How it is interpreted and enacted, clearly, is a matter for debate.

Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime . . . A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ”) (“The Baptist Faith and Message”). Each of these positions in the “Faith and Message” is followed in the document by citation strings similar to those found in academic texts—the only difference is that these citations reference particular Bible verses. We can see that these beliefs are tied not only to theology, but also to practices and attitudes on cultural hot button issues. Staff at SBTS are required to adhere to particular definitions of the family, gender, religion, sexuality, and government, among others. These definitions translate into conservative political and social stances to which staff and faculty must adhere—signing, believing, and we must assume practicing in other senses as well.

I say sign and believe because as Southern’s president Albert Mohler writes, professors at SBTS must sign these documents “without hesitation or mental reservation” (“Southern Baptist Theological Seminary’s Response”). In demanding that the staff’s signature be written in an ideal complete sincerity, Mohler and his evangelical institution exert both *ideological* and *coercive* force on those individuals. This is somewhat ironic, in that the Faith and Message’s Preamble affirms the following:

Confessions are only guides in interpretation, having no authority over the conscience . . . they are statements of religious convictions, drawn from the Scriptures, and are not to be used to hamper freedom of thought or investigation in other realms of life . . . Baptists . . . deny the right of any secular or religious authority to impose a confession of faith upon a church or body of churches.

Regardless of such claims, the signature requirement directly impacts the consciences of hundreds of Southern Baptist Seminary employees who are required to subscribe to and espouse this ideology; it both directly and indirectly impacts the Seminary’s *thousands* of

students who are educated into it, not including the families they bring to campus who also participate in the Seminary's culture; and through those thousands of seminary students and their families this particular religious educational apparatus indirectly impacts *millions* of Southern Baptist congregants and missionary targets. Southern Baptist Seminary utilizes coercive institutional contexts to deploy an "official" evangelical ideology through a whole chain of organized sponsors. Without such systems, SBTS's definitions are no more significant than anyone else's. And conversely, those who wish to differently represent evangelicalism must make use of their own mediated networks—or perhaps the same networks—to make their representations similarly influential. Such efforts are described below.

But the larger reality is that it is more than possible, in spite of these examples, to participate in many evangelical organizations for years without ever becoming subject to such disciplinary procedures or codified doctrinal demands. Most evangelicals, however defined, would refuse to subscribe to the code of conduct put forward by Appalachian Bible College (sociological data cited below strongly supports this supposition) and would likely quibble with one or several of the doctrinal points asserted by "The Baptist Faith and Message." In point of fact, most evangelicals report that they *behave* and *believe* generally like the rest of the American population—as has been pointed out by the Pew Forum, the Barna Group, Kinnaman, Smith, and Putnam and Campbell, among others—and most evangelicals do not ever belong to institutions with this sort of significant coercive power to shape their behavior. And yet "evangelicalism," and usually at least some aspects of ABC and SBTS's versions of evangelicalism, have significant influence on popular identifications, perceptions and representations of evangelicalism.

As Henry predicted, evangelicalism's power derives not from pervasive coercion, but from its pervasive, hegemonic presence in American culture—highly visible on the one hand, deeply sedimented in people's minds and bodies on the other. So we should instead consider the effectiveness of Henry's plan as he detailed it—by examining the sorts of public representatives that evangelicalism produces, how they maintain their presence in culture, and the types of pressures and constraints (forces) the prominence of these representations actually place on individuals.

Evangelicalism and the Media

The representatives of official evangelicalism, and particularly the loose coalition of conservative politico-religious organizations often (self-) labeled evangelical, participate in a vast media network that has been described in detail by Diamond. These religious organizations often publicize their own religious stances, but also rely on non-religious media hubs to more widely distribute those. Both religious and secular media benefit in page views, ads, ratings, and sales from this arrangement. This is not necessarily a partisan issue: the *New York Times* and *Daily Beast* stand to benefit just as much from running stories on religious conservatives as do *Fox News* and *Breitbart*, even if viewer interest may stem from different motivations. Because of the tendency towards sensationalism in news, these portrayals often select highly visible official “personalities” like Billy Graham, or highly quotable and inflammatory personalities like Pat Robertson, to act as representatives. Most of us will likely remember, to name two widely-reported instances, Robertson's suggestions that 9/11 was a punishment for American homosexuality, and that Haiti's earthquake was the result of a long-ago deal with the

Devil. To take an even more extreme example of religion's presence in the media, as I write this there are reports in the American media that over 160 schoolgirls and their teachers in northern Afghanistan have been poisoned because a sectarian group finds the idea of educated women intolerable—likely reinforcing secular suspicions (and resulting from sectarian suspicions) that education and conservative religion are incommensurable.

Such strongly negative representations notwithstanding, the media does enable evangelical leaders to disseminate a visible and broadly recognizable evangelicalism to groups well beyond their own followers. To offer one quick example, we can look again to Mohler. He is not merely the President of Southern Baptist Seminary: he is also on the board of Focus on the Family and The Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, both heavily politicized and publicized conservative religious organizations. Most importantly, Mohler is the *de facto* voice of the Southern Baptist Convention—which has a membership of over 16 million members and sponsors “more than 5,000 missionaries in 153 nations” (“About Us”). Through religious media networks (which include his blog, podcasts, radio show, and books) Mohler disseminates official constructions of Christianity; multiplying the effect, a Google search immediately turns up at least twenty re-postings, re-publications, and twitter links to the full text of most of his articles or blog entries. But secular media plays a significant role in amplifying Mohler's representations: he has appeared on NPR's *Fresh Air* and *Larry King Live*, blogged for the *Washington Post*'s On Faith religion column, and serves as a representative voice for evangelicalism in multiple national publications. As Molly Worthen notes in a cover story on Mohler in *Christianity Today*, “*Time* magazine has turned to Mohler for the conservative evangelical perspective on issues ranging from evolution to Christian missions in Iraq,

calling him the ‘reigning intellectual of the evangelical movement in the U.S.’.”

Together, these mediated platforms, including Worthen’s article—described by conservative evangelicals as a condescending hack job—continually cement Mohler’s station as a highly visible representative of evangelicalism (for an example, see Justin Taylor’s blog *Between Two Worlds*). Mohler’s official representation of evangelicalism, deriving from a centralized location in evangelical networks, is disseminated through a large number of local, traceable channels, creating something of a “global” effect.

Through these media apparatuses, leaders like Mohler not only implicitly represent, but also explicitly define, evangelicalism. In a pamphlet on Southern Baptist Seminary’s website, for instance, Mohler sets out the doctrines that are “fundamental and essential to the Christian faith.” He asserts, “Where such doctrines are compromised, the Christian faith falls” (“The Pastor as Theologian” 8). Mohler accordingly excludes those who don’t believe the essential doctrines from the religious formation—and heaven—as “unbelievers” (8), and argues that any church that doesn’t hold to these central doctrines is similarly outside the religious formation. This is enacted in a piece Mohler wrote about Dutch heretics, where he makes clear there that any Christianity, church, or individual failing to subscribe to his essential doctrines “is not a new form of Christianity. It is a new religion meeting in historic Christian church structures” (“A Laboratory for Christianity’s Destruction”). Those heretics, for Mohler, are not explicitly excluded from Christianity by any evangelical institution, although he thinks they should be—but nevertheless they are *definitionally* outside of Christianity, and Mohler is merely reporting this reality. This definition, disseminated through contemporary media forms, directly impacts thousands of Mohler’s blog readers; it indirectly impacts many

thousands more who read bloggers sponsoring Mohler's ideology and distributing it through links and postings as well as indirect citations.

The book publishing industry contributes to disseminating official evangelicalism as well, of course: Diamond and Sharon Crowley have both noted (and in doing so illustrated) the massive publishing success and cultural force of the apocalyptic Christian fiction series, *Left Behind*. In that sixteen book series, co-authors Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins fictionalize a particularly violent, literalist, Manichean interpretation of the Bible's last chapter, Revelation. A more recent example might be *Heaven is for Real*, advertised on its website as "the true story of a four-year old son of a small town Nebraska pastor who experienced heaven during emergency surgery." The book, released in November 2010, had sold over 6 million copies by February of 2012, managing to hold the top spot on the *New York Times* Paperback Nonfiction list for 53 weeks (www.christianretailing.com). *Heaven is for Real* has what might be recognized as a characteristically evangelical message; like Mohler's discussion above, it blends a certain religious optimism about the reality of God and an afterlife with something far less so, something closer to *Left Behind*, actually: as the book's online press declares, "the disarmingly simple message is that heaven is a real place, Jesus really loves children, and to be ready . . . there is a coming last battle."

But Mohler's exclusionary focus upon right belief, to offer an example somewhat closer to home, also gets regularly disseminated through representations of evangelicalism in academic texts. I previously described this phenomenon in reference to rhetoric and composition's published representations in chapter two, but we can also see an example of this by looking again at the work of Kinnaman, head of the well-respected

religious research firm Barna Group. In a pair of extensive book-length studies on the attitudes of young Americans towards religion, Kinnaman attempts to differentiate between the attitudes of various religious groups, including evangelicals. For Kinnaman and co-author Gabe Lyons, “Being classified as an evangelical is not dependent on church attendance or the denominational affiliation of the church attended” (249-50). Instead, Kinnaman and Lyons—themselves evangelicals—define an evangelical largely in terms of belief. To be defined as an evangelical for Kinnaman and Lyons, respondents must be “Born-again Christians”: “people who said they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today, and who also indicated they believe when they die they will go to heaven because they have confessed their sins and have accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior” (249). Respondents must also meet seven other conditions: “1) saying their faith is very important in their life today; 2) believing they have a personal responsibility to share their religious beliefs about Christ with non-Christians; 3) believing that Satan exists; 4) believing that eternal salvation is possible only through grace, not works; 5) believing that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth; 6) asserting that the Bible is accurate in all that it teaches; 7) describing God as the all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect deity who created the universe and still rules it today” (249). So in a book not ostensibly intended to define evangelicalism, Kinnaman and Lyons’s definition nevertheless serves to perpetuate belief-centered definitions of evangelical formations that are also being perpetuated by the official evangelical establishment.

Moreover, their narrow definition reciprocally shapes their demographic information on “evangelicals.” The exclusionary work here is that other sorts of

evangelicals (say, those who don't believe in Hell) will be excluded from statements such as, "evangelicals tend to..." throughout the book. In this way, evangelicalism becomes incrementally more homogeneous (evangelicals believe all of the same things, and perhaps evangelicals act in more of the same ways). Thus, when Kinnaman and Lyons reject behavioral or institutional definitions of evangelicalism in favor of cognitive definitions, they are not merely setting research parameters: they are broadcasting ostensibly "official" definitions of evangelicalism that are forcefully and explicitly exclusionary. That representation got picked up, notably, by other media outlets who reported on Kinnaman and Lyons's findings: articles from *Time*, *USA Today*, *Publisher's Weekly*, and *The Atlantic* are all linked on *UnChristian's* website. In this way, Kinnaman and Lyons's scientific definition perpetuates the hegemonic strategies that work to present a particular version of evangelicalism as *the* evangelical formation, and their influence is amplified by their representation's dissemination throughout the secular media apparatus.

Evangelicalism and Political Systems

As is probably apparent to the reader, however, the evangelicals who attain the heaviest publicity and public influence are often not pastors but politicians or those explicitly connected to politics. The political system is perhaps the ideological apparatus where we see most clearly the power of official evangelicalism. Goodburn rightly connects evangelicalism's highly visible presence in American culture to the *political* and *cultural* relevance of the Christian Right, a political group with strong, redundant ties to some elements of evangelical Christianity (the Christian Right as a whole has been

characterized by Diamond as “a political movement rooted in a rich evangelical subculture” [1]). While the names and organizations change, the Christian Right has been front and center in American political and religious consciousness for at least thirty years, embodied most recently in George W. Bush’s proclaimed evangelical Christianity, Sarah Palin’s vice presidential nomination, and Rick Santorum’s primary campaign for the 2012 Republican presidential nomination. Evangelicals like Santorum, Palin, and Bush may well *represent* religion for this generation the way that Falwell and Robertson did for other generations—after all, Thomson’s student informant Quinn does complain, “they think that we’re all like George Bush” (Thomson 90).

Leading historians of evangelicalism including George Marsden, Randall Balmer, and Mark Noll offer a narrative that traces the articulation of American evangelicalism with conservative social and political policy all the way back to the Puritans (Noll 40). Following these sources in a recent dissertation on evangelical rhetoric, Amy King traces the increasing prominence of evangelicalism in the religious and political imagination through American history—through the Puritans, the Great Awakening, the Second Great Awakening, abolition, the Social Gospel, Prohibition, the Scopes trial, communism, *Roe v. Wade*, the Moral Majority, the Christian Coalition, the Carter, Reagan, and Bush presidencies. Such events and movements served to not only tie together religion and politics, but also “solidified the position of evangelicalism at the center of American religious life” (Prothero 221, qtd. in King 38). That is, media attention and politics together solidified evangelicalism’s central place within American religion. So long before we arrive at the Moral Majority of the 1980s and the Tea Party of the 2000s, King’s sweeping narrative of America, politics, and evangelicalism draws together many

familiar names: George Whitehead, Jonathan Edwards (35); Charles Finney (39); Dwight L. Moody (42); William Jennings Bryan (45); and Graham (49). By the time we arrive at Billy Graham's representation of evangelicalism in the second half of the 20th century, evangelicalism has firmly established itself as the chief representative of American Protestant Christianity. As King notes, quoting Prothero, eventually "'Evangelical' became the usual term to refer not only to the more moderate heirs to the broader fundamentalist coalition, but also to conversionist Protestants of any heritage" (234, qtd. in King 50). This evangelical prominence within hegemonic accounts of American Christianity was only cemented and extended in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Evangelicalism's more recent political power is just as familiar a narrative: in the 70s, 80s, and 90s, evangelical leaders fronted the famed Christian Right that drew together conservative politics and evangelical religion through organizations and media outlets like the Moral Majority, the Christian Coalition, Focus on the Family, and the 700 Club. Much has been written about the media and organizational strategies of leaders like Jerry Falwell, Robertson, Oral Roberts, Charles Colson, James Dobson and the rest. During their decades in the spotlight, each of those men carried on dual agendas as both spiritual and political leaders. Diamond paints a vivid picture of a politico-religious media conglomerate that used all available forms of media to motivate religious individuals to political action: "the evangelical subculture . . . thrives through an array of institutions that may not, on the surface, seem political. These include Christian broadcasting, literature and music, Promise Keepers rallies, and the practice of homeschooling" (11). These evangelical leaders both *represented* and *shaped* the evangelical populations they reached through their media organizations. With the

influence these leaders acquired by ostensibly *representing* millions of evangelical voters, well-placed Christian Right leaders of the 90s were even more importantly, perhaps, able to shape Republican Party platforms, pressing what should still be a familiar set of social issues. The platform remained conservative on issues of “abortion, gay rights, and sex education in the public schools,” Diamond explains, “because these [were] the concerns raised by the religious milieu of evangelicalism” (11).

While in 2009 King hopefully hypothesized that the influence of the evangelical-conservative coalition was in decline after the Obama election, in hindsight we can see that this was not entirely the case (196-214). We must now add the Tea Party to the list of political movements with strong ties to evangelicalism. As Putnam and Campbell found, the Tea Party draws much of its constituency from conservative religious sources.

Next to being a Republican, the strongest predictor of being a Tea Party supporter today was a desire, back in 2006, to see religion play a prominent role in politics. And Tea Partiers continue to hold these views: they seek “deeply religious” elected officials, approve of religious leaders’ engaging in politics and want religion brought into political debates. The Tea Party’s generals may say their overriding concern is a smaller government, but not their rank and file, who are more concerned about putting God in government.

This inclination among the Tea Party faithful to mix religion and politics explains their support for Representative Michele Bachmann of Minnesota and Gov. Rick Perry of Texas. Their appeal to Tea Partiers lies less in what they say about the budget or taxes, and more in their overt use of religious language and imagery, including Mrs. Bachmann’s lengthy prayers at campaign stops and Mr. Perry’s prayer rally in Houston. (“Crashing the Tea Party”)

All of this is increasingly relevant to us as I write this chapter and the second straight Republican Vice Presidential candidate is a vocally conservative Christian and staunch political conservative—this time, Catholic budget hawk Paul Ryan.

This articulation of political, social, and religious conservatism in the public imagination is compounded by published agendas from Christian Right organizations like the Christian Coalition. Their 2013 agenda includes the following items: “Defunding and Rolling Back Obamacare”; “Stand with Israel”; “Reducing Government Spending and Debt”; “Defending Our Second Amendment Rights”; “Stop Public Funding of Abortion—And End Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research”; “Defending Traditional Marriage”; “Energy Independence and Reform”; “Ending Religious Discrimination against Christians in the Military”; “Opposing Liberal Judicial Nominees”; and “Opposing any Re-introduction of the ‘Fairness Doctrine’.” Incredibly, the Christian Coalition manages to embody almost all of Americans’ preconceptions about religion in one brief agenda. They espouse a politically conservative ideology—that somehow extends to a religious stance on fiscal policy and guns—while arguing against scientific research, abortion, homosexuality, social welfare, and liberal ideals of critical thought and conversation (the Fairness doctrine). Perhaps most remarkably, they perform hypocrisy and intolerance by evincing concern over religious discrimination in the military while at the same time eliding the more pressing issue of pervasive discrimination against homosexuals in the military, *and* looking to defend “traditional marriage”.

The Christian Coalition, Dobson, Michelle Bachman, Palin, and the rest concisely demonstrate why the pervasive perception of religion held by most Americans (religion is hypocritical, politically reactionary, uncritical, antihomosexual, antiscience, judgmental—see below) seems to mirror this politicized evangelical Christianity: not only because they make such neat representatives, but because these official evangelicals

successfully disseminate (and translate into public discourse and policy) their version of evangelicalism broadly through public channels—“secular” political systems, “secular” media, and (as I’ll demonstrate below) and the “secular” entertainment industry. As Asad has suggested, this historic inter-relation between religion and so many key public apparatuses should cause us to question entirely the notion of a truly “secular” public space that can be separated from the religious sphere. In fact, our American public sphere is deeply imbued with religion and particularly with evangelicalism. Below, I note several other intersections between religion and secular ideological apparatuses that only make that conclusion more compelling.

Evangelicalism and Entertainment

This power to raise up high-visibility evangelical representatives that shape American religion is not only present in political, theological, and academic circles, however: the connections between media and official evangelicalism extend into entertainment industries as well. To offer just one indication of the power of this mediatized evangelical network and the way it creates its own representatives, the album of Christian rapper LeCrae debuted at #3 on the Billboard 200 last month. While the music has received fairly positive critical reviews, LeCrae’s success might also be linked to his appearances at Christian youth conferences like *Passion*, an annual Christian teaching and worship conference aimed at 18-25 year olds, and the vocal support and media publicity lent him by the leaders of the white evangelical establishment. On this connection between a young black rapper and white evangelical leaders, we might point to evangelical pastor, editor, and blogger Tim Challies’ oft-cited “The Middle-Aged

White Guy’s Guide to Christian Rap.” Challies attempts to do as he indicates—introduce Christian rap to groups who have likely never listened to (or approved of) rap. He is clearly aware of the strangeness of this partnership at the levels of cultural history, race, and age: his guide is jokingly subtitled, “all about represent’n, front’n...and a bunch of other stuff you don’t understand.” By way of introduction Challies admits, “It has to be one of the most unexpected phenomena in the church today—that white middle-aged pastors are talking about rap music and, even more strangely, actually listening to it and recommending it.”

Challies documents the connections between Christian rap and conservative evangelical leader John Piper, whose name, sermons and books are cited in rap titles, lyrics, and even sampled by Christian rappers (“John Piper’s Unexpected Career in Hip-Hop”). The sixty-six year old Piper, importantly, prominently represents the official evangelical positions I’ve been describing above. He edited 1992’s *Christianity Today* book of the year, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*. We might also find notable his published assertion that a tornado in Minneapolis was “a gentle but firm warning” from God to an association of Evangelical Lutheran churches who had gathered to consider a policy change allowing practicing homosexuals to pastor churches (“The Tornado”). Piper interviewed LeCrae at Passion 2011; in the interview, LeCrae describes himself as “an indigenous minister in an urban culture” providing “solid biblical truths” that “are Christ-centered and God-centered” and articulating “the revealed will of God” (Piper, “LeCrae”). This is not an obscure interview: the link provided has, as of the date of this writing, 2835 comments. Its YouTube video companion currently has 117,317 views and 769 “likes” (compared to

only 10 “dislikes”). We can imagine that this has a reciprocal effect—producing a wider net for both Piper and LeCrae. While LeCrae’s citations of Piper certainly send publicity Piper’s way—he has a song entitled “Don’t Waste Your Life,” which is also the title of a popular Piper book—LeCrae almost certainly has gained visibility in certain circles through his networked connection to the pastor and author.

But Billboard successes like LeCrae’s should also be understood as indicating a particular cultural network of evangelical celebrities, too—visible in the vocal support LeCrae has received from Christian celebrity-athletes including Tim Tebow, Jeremy Lin, and Bubba Watson. NBA player Lin’s own wave of popularity (dubbed Linsanity) was spurred not only by his Asian heritage and his (rare for a professional athlete) affiliation with Harvard, but also by his outspoken evangelical religious affiliation, detailed in a *USA Today* post by Cathy Grossman. Jim Lee, another evangelical blogger, makes this context for Lin’s popularity explicit: “Jeremy Lin intrigues me in more ways than one. First, he is a Christian. Secondly, he is an Asian American of Chinese descent. Thirdly, his Christian faith spells out in real life by doing all things in excellence unto the Lord including in academics, evident by the fact that he is a Harvard Economics Graduate.” Lee’s blog post offers a single picture of Lin with one finger pointed as if to heaven, wearing a Harvard jersey—though by then Lin was actually playing for the NBA’s New York Knicks. The blogger provides links to an interview with Lin from the *Evangelical Channel*, and Lin himself has a “Faith” tab on his personal website that provides links to multiple Lin interviews on the subject. So while any thorough explanation of Lin’s popularity would have to account for his multiple subject positions and personal attributes, including his stunning initial success as a rookie NBA point

guard in the bright lights of New York City, and his underdog story (going undrafted, then sleeping on his brother's couch while playing for the Knicks), the point I'm trying to make is that Lin's evangelical identification, coupled with access to evangelical media networks, amplifies (again that word) Lin's overall visibility.

Lin also, as we've seen in other ways, reciprocally amplifies the visibility of official evangelicalism. Notably, one of those links on Lin's "Faith" page takes readers to the website of InterVarsity, a Christian organization that works on college campuses. High profile evangelical representatives are often redundantly tied into evangelical institutions through overt connections like this. This is the case with Passion in LeCrae's case, and Focus on the Family in Tebow's. (Tebow, an outspoken evangelical and son of a missionary, appeared as a sort of celebrity endorser for Focus on the Family in a pro-life commercial that aired during the Super Bowl in 2012.) The results of such arrangements are complex: Lin's interview with InterVarsity may at one time have increased *his* public visibility; now the link from Lin's website returns the favor by increasing traffic on InterVarsity's website; institutional evangelicalism directly and indirectly gains by its connection with a high-profile celebrity representative; and the hegemonic account of "evangelicalism" gains a new contribution—a modest, intelligent, attractive young Chinese-American who credits God for orchestrating specific events in basketball games (Grossman). So even the entertainment industry continually creates new evangelical *representatives* for official evangelicalism that legitimate the authority of other evangelical representatives and organizations to speak as evangelicalism. Through such connections to specific organizations, official evangelicalism's representational

network and cultural presence grows more expansive, or perhaps dense, and certainly harder to fully escape.

While his study doesn't focus on athletes, Tebow, Lin and LeCrae nevertheless corroborate D. Michael Lindsay's basic finding in a sociological study of evangelical elites and their social networks: "the incorporation of powerful leaders into social and professional networks that overlap with evangelicals has been fundamental to achieving greater visibility for the movement" (78). Lindsay points for illustration to non-evangelical George H. W. Bush's participation in the National Prayer Breakfast. Similarly, even if Lin, Tebow, and LeCrae turn out to be outspoken Christians but not strictly evangelicals, their participation as celebrities in organizations that overlap with evangelicalism like InterVarsity, Passion, and Focus on the Family still will have resulted in greater evangelical visibility. Tebow, Lin, and LeCrae are *official* representatives of *official* evangelicalism because they are connected to both institutional evangelicalism and the hegemonic account of evangelicalism through organizational and mediatized ties, even if they are not themselves ideologically evangelical. Their visible support strengthens the hegemonic account of official evangelicalism and helps to disseminate its norms to a wider audience. Taken together, the effect of all of these ideological apparatuses suggests one partial answer to Asad's question—how does power make religion?—through publicity. As Henry charged, official evangelicalism's version of Christianity is being "lived out, among the regenerate, in every area of activity," so that "even the unregenerative are moved by Christian standards, acknowledging their force" (71).

IV. Recognition: The Evangelicalism Under Our Skin

Everything I've described might seem to describe a circle of elites affirming and recognizing one another in a sort of mediated echo chamber; how this prominent account of evangelicalism actually impacts "normal people," including instructors and students, may remain somewhat unclear. Research and theory have together argued for decades that the effects of the media on individuals are neither totally determining nor linear. Why does Tim Tebow make my experience of evangelicalism any different? To answer this, we return to the concepts of recognition and misrecognition by which individuals respond to ideological apparatuses. Bourdieu's notion of the *habitus* reminds us that our prolonged exposure to official evangelicalism's norms and accounts of itself, disseminated through such a wide variety of "secular" apparatuses, probably means that evangelicalism will have become sedimented beneath our skin, so to speak, even if we don't subscribe to an explicit evangelical ideology. We—whether religious ourselves or not—are likely shaped by and *recognize* evangelicalism.

And in fact, there's plenty of evidence suggesting that these official evangelical representatives have gotten under our skin and will be recognized. In chapter two I discuss Thomson's findings about instructor perceptions of religious students—to present that text again briefly, Thomson finds writing instructors tend to see Christian students as "cling[ing] to the idea of universal truth" (74) and "unable or unwilling to think critically" (80). While instructors try to "make distinctions between Christian students whom they see as radical, evangelical, conservative, and judgmental and those who appear to blend more seamlessly into the academic environment" (68), the radical/ evangelical/ conservative/ judgmental Christian student seems to drive generalized

instructor perceptions of “Christians.” Such descriptions and perceptions of religion are not unique to writing instructors, nor localized to conservative Christians. Putnam and Campbell report widespread negative perceptions of Christianity; of religion more broadly; and of the Christian Right, Muslims, and atheists most specifically (*American Grace* 120-33; “Crashing the Tea Party”). They suggest in *American Grace* that a much-discussed across-the-board decline in American religiosity may be a result of what I’ve called official evangelicalism: “religion itself and conservatism (theological, social, moral, and political) became increasingly symbiotic and identified, especially in the public eye, with the Religious Right” (120).

To support this claim about American perceptions of religion, Putnam and Campbell cite studies from the Pew Forum, a number of academic studies including their own, and the work of Lyons and Kinnaman, whose research I discussed above. In their 2006 book *UnChristian*, Kinnaman and Lyons report on an expansive study they conducted of young “outsiders” to Christianity, a group they define as “atheists and agnostics; those affiliated with a faith other than Christianity (such as Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Mormonism, and so on), and other unchurched adults who are not born again Christians” (249). Among these “outsiders” aged 16-29, Kinnaman and Lyons find that 91% describe present-day Christianity as antihomosexual; 87% describe it as judgmental; 85% describe it as hypocritical; 75% describe it as too involved in politics; and 70% describe it as insensitive to others (34). Kinnaman qualifies that “too involved in politics” means outsiders think “Christians . . . promote and represent politically conservative interests and issues” (30).

So instructor perceptions seem to correspond closely to at least young Americans' conceptions of "Christianity"—hyper-conservative, judgmental, hypocritical, and narrow-minded—and to the behaviors and representations forwarded by official evangelicalism through the cultural apparatuses described above. As Putnam and Campbell interpret this and their own similar findings among the general population, "this youthful generation seems unwilling or unable to distinguish the stance of the most visible, most political, and most conservative religious leaders from organized religion in general" (*American Grace* 131).

But strangely, Kinnaman and Lyons find that younger *Christians* seem to agree. In the same study from 2006, Kinnaman and Lyons find that among young churchgoers, 80% would describe present-day Christianity as antihomosexual; 52% would describe it as judgmental; 47% would describe it as hypocritical; and 50% would describe it as too involved in politics (34). And in a more recent study, Kinnaman identifies six issues raised by disaffected Christians aged 18-29. These disaffected, according to Kinnaman, make up approximately 60% of all young Americans with Christian backgrounds. They feel Christianity is, first, *over-protective*—"The church is . . . a creativity killer where risk taking and being involved in culture are anathema." It's also *shallow*—"Easy platitudes, proof texting, and formulaic slogans." Third, it's *anti-science*—"Many young Christians have come to the conclusion that faith and science are incompatible . . . What's more, science seems accessible in a way that the church does not; science appears to welcome questions and skepticism, while matters of faith seem impenetrable." Fourth, it's *repressive*—"Religious rules—particularly sexual mores—feel stifling to the individualist mindset of young adults." Fifth, it's *exclusive*: "[Young Americans] have

been shaped by a culture that esteems open-mindedness, tolerance, and acceptance. Thus Christianity's claims to exclusivity are a hard sell." Finally, it's *doubtless*—"Young Christians (and former Christians too) say the church is not a place that allows them to express doubts. . . . Many feel that the church's response to doubt is trivial and fact focused, as if people can be talked out of doubting" (92-93).

Kinnaman observes that young Christians' complaints about Christianity are weirdly similar to one another—he writes, "It feels as if they are reading from a script" (9). This phenomenon is clearly occurring across American culture more generally, too: the same script is being employed in our rhetoric and composition descriptions, general societal descriptions, and descriptions from religious practitioners themselves. Altogether, these descriptions of Christianity, and of religion at large, do begin to feel "scripted"—and having observed how official evangelicalism promotes itself through our ideological apparatuses, this should be less than surprising.

To begin to consider the consequences of that recognizability, we can look again to examples of religion in politics and entertainment. The success of evangelical parodies indicates the extent to which evangelicalism is generally recognizable. A recent episode of NBC's *Parks and Rec* on abstinence education provides an example: in that episode, "Sex Education," a married Christian couple crusades against teaching comprehensive sex education to senior citizens (there's been an outbreak of Chlamydia in the nursing homes), saying that this will lead to "babies in thongs." The kicker, of course, is that the wife is portrayed as sharp-faced and unhappy while the husband is flamboyantly gay—but doesn't know it. He refers to the "urges" he keeps down, and mentions that he and his wife waited till well *after* marriage to have sex. To be clear, the word evangelical never

gets used. But the specific references to God, sin, and abstinence do enough to connect the couple's discourse directly to the official evangelical rhetoric on sex, homosexuality, and marriage I describe above.

This sounds like a result that evangelicals would not want—people's perceptions of evangelicals seem generally negative. But scholars of presidential rhetoric have pointed out how recent presidents—though particularly George W. Bush—have utilized this general recognizability of evangelicalism to their rhetorical advantage by pairing “God talk” with ideals of freedom, and with prophetic, hortatory modes of discourse that display the *certainty* characteristic of such religious discourses (Coe and Domke, Hart and Childers, Brown). As Kevin Coe and David Domke put this, “Reagan and Bush are distinct [from other presidents since Roosevelt] in at least three crucial ways: their greater amount of God talk, their greater propensity to claim that a divine being has a special connection with freedom and liberty, and their much greater likelihood to speak declaratively about God's wishes for these principles” (323). Coe and Domke connect these rhetorical patterns with “the ascendancy of religious conservatives in the political sphere and the desire of presidents—particularly those in the Republican Party—to connect with this voting block” (320), noting Bush's ascription to the belief that “political leaders should ‘signal early, signal often’ their religious views” (312), and pointing out that “in the 2000 election Bush received 79% of White evangelicals' votes” (313). But plenty of non-evangelicals voted for Bush—the more interesting question might be to what extent the general incorporation of evangelical logics causes non-evangelicals to similarly *recognize* Bush's evangelical discourse.

Wendy Brown is less circumspect. She argues that the blurring of religious and political discourse “facilitates the reception of the de-democratizing forces of neoconservatism and neoliberalism” (706) by utilizing religious discourses’ dependence on a “declarative modality of truth” combined with an “inner conviction or certainty” that makes “interrogation, deliberation, and facts” irrelevant (707). Brown believes that this religious discourse activates a sort of authoritarian mindset in which those possessing the requisite evangelical disposition will simply submit to leaders who perform evangelical discourse. But Althusser’s conception of ideology suggests that no such blindly coercive relation need be imagined—Bush’s discourse might be more successful with evangelicals precisely because it doesn’t *require* their submission (a coercive logic): it instead *merits* trust in those who recognize its evangelical logics. Because of this recognition, Brown is right to note that when evangelicalism’s logic “seeps from religious to political rationality” it “transforms the conditions of legitimacy for political power” so that “executive power obtains a prerogative and legitimacy not routinely available to liberal democratic states” (708). Put simply, Bush’s evangelical God talk may grant him legitimacy and authority with populations in whom such discourse positively resonates. They trust him, vote for him, and thus literally *authorize* him to press his religious logic forward into government policy.

In a less incendiary instantiation of the same basic argument, Ann Powers of *NPR* argues that the appeal of a number of immensely popular contemporary bands similarly derives from their resonances with Christian sensibilities. She describes

a new generation of fans emerging not only for Mumford but for acoustic-leaning American bands garnering ever-larger and more fervent audiences on the club and theater touring circuit. A lot of this stuff has unmistakably churchy overtones: The Head and the Heart shares a name with Garry

Wills' popular history of American Christianity; The Avett Brothers sing of carpenters and (indirectly) “Corinthians”; the rousing choruses of bands like The Lumineers musically connect to both old hymns and contemporary praise and worship music. It may not be cool on the secular scene to play up these Jesus people leanings, but they're a huge part of what attracts fans to these artists. Many pop fans are or have been churchgoers, and the comfortable feeling of singing along, nurtured in many during childhoods spent in the pews, allows for a form of release that's edifying without proving too scary.

The most incisive distinction Powers makes here (though it can be easily over-looked for its seeming obviousness) is between the explicit and the implicit: music evocative of religious sensibilities attracts American listeners; music that is explicitly religious might repel them.

Powers goes on in this vein, describing the levels at which the experience of these bands resonates with people's religious sensibilities—reminding them of church without being specifically or directly religious:

I know the feeling that radiates from a room full of Avetts or Mumford fans singing along with every overly sincere, earnest word; I've been there myself. At sixteen, I was a confused Catholic kid struggling to figure out how I could be my parents' daughter and still want to make out with boys, dye my hair funny colors and dance all night to ridiculously loud music. U2's music didn't present an alternative to the church life that had made me, in part, who I was then; it showed me how to struggle within that life, and get to the point where I could either walk on within it or walk away. I'm not a practicing Catholic now, but when I hear Mumford & Sons or the Avett Brothers, I recognize the same internal fights, the same desire to grapple with impossibly big terms like "sincerity" and "belief," that U2's music helped me through twenty years ago.

Powers is not the only one who *recognizes* these feelings and fights: globally, Mumford & Sons' 2010 *Sigh No More* sold over 2.5 million copies, while its new album *Babel* (a notably religious reference) had the biggest debut week of any album in 2012—moving 600,000 copies—and won the Grammy for Best Album of 2012. That sales number, by the way, almost doubled the debut sales of the year's next highest album, Justin Bieber's

Believe (G. Smith). The point I'm making through these examples is that Christian discourse (often, specifically evangelical discourse) pervades not only institutional apparatuses, but through these apparatuses also injects itself into the sensibilities and even the tastes of ordinary people. They, in turn, recognize and sediment that discourse through a number of consumer practices—buying albums, attending concerts, wearing band gear, sharing songs, quoting lyrics, creating Pandora streams, and many more—that ensure its continuation.¹⁰

V. Misrecognition: The Evangelicalism in our Writing Classrooms

But hegemonic enculturation leads not only to the *recognition* of evangelicalism, but also to the *misrecognition* of official evangelicalism. To reiterate, the chief hegemonic work of ideological apparatuses is to cause individuals to accept as *natural* the selective version of the world they are offered by those apparatuses: misrecognizing culturally contingent relations for natural ones; misrecognizing their own participatory role in the maintenance of those relations; and missing their potential for transforming those relations.¹¹ Individuals' incorporation of cultural norms as behaviors, expectations,

¹⁰ All of these citational examples speak, of course, to evangelicalism's discursive power, but not necessarily its effects or potential uses: given that the bands, satirists and politicians speaking in evangelical terms are not necessarily evangelicals or working from evangelical motives, we can see how the power of evangelical discourse can be harnessed for alternative purposes and articulated with non-evangelical perspectives. Rhetors often draw on religion's power for non-religious purposes: to intensify listeners' sympathetic experience of romantic sentiment, to elevate citizens' sense of togetherness or human responsibility, or even to add the "recognition" necessary to much contemporary comedy while critiquing the behavior of the religious community being recognized.

¹¹ Within rhetoric and composition, this has been discussed thoroughly in Richard Miller's "The Nervous System" (in Bourdieusian terms) and even more thoroughly in Rickert's *Acts of Enjoyment* (in Lacanian terms).

and perceptions—the enculturation of the *habitus*—effects such misrecognitions. I deal with several more key forms of misrecognition, and the stories that produce them, in chapter five: religious boundaries as stable, religious communication as transparent, religious experience as spontaneous. But here in chapter three I want to briefly point out another key form of misrecognition: religious representatives as really representative. Writing classrooms offer an instructive example of this particular misrecognition, so I turn my focus there to identify the individual, often non-conscious levels at which this misrecognition of official evangelicalism occurs.

We might say that instructors and students encounter (perceive, recognize, respond to) three levels of sponsors promoting official evangelicalism. First, as discussed above, there are the official spokespersons of a minority religious population—that is, fundamentalist adherents, many of whom participate in institutions loosely tied together by the term evangelicalism—who have come to dominance in both American religious representations and American religious norms by successfully “representing” far larger and more heterogeneous religious populations (including the broader population of “evangelicals”). By claiming to speak for “Christianity,” and by being perceived as doing so, this 13% of the American population claims authority to speak for almost 68% of the American population (to put the numbers roughly—see discussion in chapter four). The relative accuracy of this representation will vary from issue to issue—for example, Putnam and Campbell find that most religious adherents do remain against abortion, but that doesn’t mean they also favor the death penalty and oppose gay marriage (they don’t, in fact). The official spokespersons are perhaps the easiest to recognize because they may maintain official positions, or will self-identify as evangelical or born-again, or may be

associated explicitly with evangelical institutions. On this primary level, hegemony depends upon explicit representations.

But second, there are the performative, temporary representatives: anyone who acts in the name of this representation, or even anyone whose behavior is perceived to align with this representation. When this happens, they at least temporarily slip into the role of representative—for the length of the encounter, they become *the* evangelical that secular instructors write about. This is the case with Powers' chosen representatives for Christianity more generally, Mumford and Sons. The band's lyrics are generally religiously thematic rather than religiously dogmatic, and yet for Powers, Mumford and Sons' music remains recognizably Christian ("churchy") and affects people through activating that recognition. So we must acknowledge these sponsors' representational role while we continue to resist the temptation to believe every representation actually *refers* to a concrete reality—instead, the representation itself *is* a reality that activates further realities, connecting discrete behaviors and groups, motivating collective and individual actions, realizing itself even in spite of the intentions of the actors like Marcus Mumford. These temporary instantiations of evangelicalism are only a situated acting-out, making-real, of the hegemonic account of evangelicalism. This is actually how I read our tendency to write about evangelical students, described at the beginning of chapter two—I believe that often students act as what I'm calling secondary sponsors of official evangelicalism.

There is no reason to suggest that our disciplinary portrayal of religious students is an intentional misrepresentation of the religious population: none of our scholars seem to be attempting to portray "religion" as conservative, and so choosing conservative

students as representatives. And none of our writers suggest or even imply that all religious students are political, social, and theological conservatives. After all, in almost every case the writers are clear that they are talking about evangelicals (not all Christians or religious practitioners). There is no reason, even, to suggest that our representations are inaccurate—the individual students we describe as conservative religious adherents probably are just that. Frankly, conservative religious practitioners are likely the ones we write articles about for the right reason: because we’re struggling to find good ways to teach them. They seemingly choose themselves. They announce themselves to us, or we have difficulty teaching them, or they struggle in our class, and so we write about them in an effort to help. But through our reporting on these apparently discrete encounters, one set of representatives seemingly dominates our literature, and those representatives correspond to generalized perceptions of Christian practitioners that are prevalent among Christians and non-Christians alike. To me, the relative similarity of religious representatives in our articles, arising without conscious intention, as a result of a series of apparently discrete encounters between individual teachers and their religious students over a period of twenty years, and yet displaying significant coherence, should be interpreted as a symptom of the hegemonic power of official evangelicalism to *shape what rises to our attention*. So at this level, official evangelicalism is dependent upon markable *behaviors* and remarking *perceptions* of those behaviors.

This act of recognition, then, implicates two parties—the recognized and the recognizer. So I want to suggest here that the third group of sponsors of official evangelicalism consists of everyone who perceives these temporary representatives, gives credence to the official representatives, and then cites evangelicalism to explain their

experience. That's where academics often come in: we are *tertiary* sponsors of official evangelicalism, maintaining its norms and forwarding its account in spite of ourselves. Perpetuation of official evangelicalism occurs, I would argue, every time instructors really do have bad experiences with a hypocritical, judgmental, absolutist, repressive, or conservative religious adherent. When we quite naturally interpret and occasionally represent this adherent as an expression or actualization of the official "Christian" or "religious" representation, we make them a representative of official evangelicalism. The stereotype gains reality through its confirmation: as Williams puts it, hegemony "is a lived system of meanings and values—constitutive and constituting—which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming" (110). Every time we give credence to that evangelicalism's apparent "expression" in our interactions with religious adherents, we strengthen the authority (and possibly power) of official evangelicalism (the account and its institutionally-powerful backers) while eliding the practical challenge posed to official evangelicalism by our interlocutor's religious life or the challenge that might be presented by identifying different sorts of representatives.

This reality effect, in which individuals internalize, activate, and thus realize and misrecognize the hegemonic account, can also be seen at work in Thomson's student informants. Official evangelicalism shapes these students' expectations, their perceptions, their emotions, and their behaviors in the writing classroom, specifically because they operate as both secondary and tertiary sponsors. First, we can see how official evangelicalism has shaped religious students' *expectations*. Heather E. Thomson's research indicates that Christian students *expect* to be negatively perceived by instructors—thus, there are instructors expecting to see official evangelicals, and there

are students expecting instructors to see official evangelicals—and the result is political paralysis. As Thomson notes, “nearly all interviewed students raised the issue of stereotyping without being prompted” (97); they believe that instructors stereotype Christians as politically conservative (94), judgmental (96), ignorant, backward (104), “naïve, ill-informed, biased, ignorant” (110). Consistently, the religious students Thomson interviews are frustrated by popular representations of Christians put forward by non-Christian individuals and groups on campus (not only instructors but student newspapers, student groups on Facebook, and the like). One complains of his campus’s student newspaper staff, “they think that we’re all like George Bush, like Nazis, like we’re all conservatives” (90); and another observes of instructors, “I think they understand the concepts of, you know, the religious right and religious left, but not that most people aren’t either” (95). We can see that the students’ expectations have been shaped by official evangelicalism: they expect to be perceived as *that* kind of Christian.

Thomson describes the *emotional* and *relational* effects of this loss of control (that is, the effects of official evangelicalism’s overwhelming presence): “The lack of power they have (or feel they have) over people’s perceptions of them contributes to a feeling that being Christian at UM involves a certain amount of risk and requires a willingness to explain oneself” (97). Many students feel fearful and defensive in such settings. As a result, “All but two student interviewees mention fear as part of their experience as a Christian student”; particularly, Thomson suggests, fear at “the prospect of dredging up other people’s negative associations with Christianity” (104). Another student, Quinn, describes feeling embarrassed and angry after seeing the way a preacher represents Christianity on the quad. He wants to differentiate himself from “that guy”—

but he's not sure he can. Thomson writes that Quinn feels "he has little control over how others might forge connections between him and that which he rejects" (96). These pervasive negative representations leave students feeling "a lack of control over how the label 'Christian' (or even just 'religious') will be interpreted by their peers and instructors" (105).

Not only are their feelings and expectations being shaped by official evangelicalism's cultural presence; religious students also feel unable to represent religion differently, given the constraints under which they must attempt those representations, and so they *write differently*. As one student explains,

I feel a lot of times that I'm not equipped enough . . . I just have a hard time getting out what I mean, so when I talk to people that's one of my big concerns, that I'll say something I don't mean, that it comes off the wrong way, or that I'm presenting my faith in a poor way. I just get really insecure about that . . . I definitely do get scared, because I don't think I'm the wisest person alive. (105)

Or as another of Thomson's informants writes, "As long as Christians stay, you know, as long as they don't let their religion seep out and try to change other people, I think most people are fine with that" (106). As a result these Christian students report, "avoiding topics with which their instructors may disagree; choosing not to disclose their religious beliefs; striving to be 'neutral' in their work" (206). They silence themselves on the assumption "that to identify as Christian is to invite doubts or preconceived notions about their intellectual abilities, their political views, and their openness to people of other faiths and worldviews" (124). This mutual expectation (ours, theirs) and attendant feelings stifle (or at least *slow*) the ability of young religious moderates to actually practice, represent and publicize their alternative or emergent religious practices as legitimate religious practices.

These students, however, do not only feel this lack of agency in the academy: they feel silenced and out of control in church as well, and part of this can again be understood in terms of misrecognition. One student, Theresa, activates official evangelicalism in her own description of other religious adherents. She

remembers feeling afraid at times to “voice [her] more liberal opinions” to the Christian student group because they are sometimes looked down upon. She also wonders if “maybe it’s easier if you agree with the stereotypical Christian [than] to voice your opinion in that sense because it’s not like you’re going outside the lines that have already been set for you.” (95-96)

Remarking on this quote, Thomson ties Theresa to the population of religious students who have “endeavored to both differentiate their religious selves from stereotypical representations of evangelical Christianity and perform or behave in ways that consistently reflect that identity” (Bryant 2, qtd. in Thomson 96).

But here I think we see another relation to official evangelicalism for religious students, too: Theresa is not only struggling against the stereotype in the classroom, where she fears being constructed as a secondary sponsor of official evangelicalism—she’s now using and perpetuating official evangelicalism as a tertiary sponsor. Feeling fearful around other Christians and anticipating negative responses, whether in fact there’s any actual social risk, constructs the participatory hegemony Raymond Williams describes—that “whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world” (110). Further, through telling her story to Thomson, Theresa is transforming the stereotype into a real conversant, or perhaps turning her peers into the stereotype. We might say that conservative members of the Christian student group are actively *perceived* and *constructed* by Theresa as *embodying* the stereotypical Christian; thus both

the liberal and the conservative members of the group together participate in perpetuating the dominant representation and reinforcing the authority of its norms. So instructors and students alike act as tertiary sponsors, or “recognizers.” When we activate the representation through a reference or partial reference, or when like Theresa and Quinn we read behaviors in terms of the stereotype, even those who oppose official evangelicalism become its spokespersons. The representation is, in other words, hegemonic; dislocated, distributed, partial, and participatory, not merely coming “down from above.” And we are all its spokespersons through our recognitions and misrecognitions.

Conclusion

We can conclude from this that official evangelicalism has not only attained direct influence (power) within religion and within American culture through visible positions within official institutions, but its leaders have also gained indirect influence (authority) by sedimenting their status as religious representatives in the bodies and minds of Americans. They may have institutional power apart from the hegemonic account; but official evangelical spokespersons derive much of their *authority* from ideological apparatuses like education and the media that move official evangelicalism beneath our skin, and from the recognition students and we learn to give to its representatives. Official evangelical credibility and legitimacy is at the very least reinforced every time what primary and secondary sponsors say and do in the name of their religion aligns with people’s perception of Christianity and religion more generally. This means that for the majority of Americans, the more homophobic or anti-science or anti-abortion a religious

spokesperson is, the more authoritatively he or she represents religion. Simultaneously, a highly visible creationist confirms for those who perceive religion as anti-science that religion is, after all, anti-science. And conversely, a spokesperson for religion can quickly lose credibility as such if his arguments or actions are shown to fall outside the range of the hegemonic account. To the extent that writing scholars should attend to celebrity spokespersons like Dobson or Jim Wallis, it should be an attention to what makes them *recognizable* and *credible* to us as religious authorities, and in what ways we, as secondary and tertiary sponsors, take up, misrecognize, and thus *realize* their accounts of evangelicalism (and Christianity, and religion).

I think this pattern of misrecognition is crucial to understanding the power relations within which religious students write on religion in the classroom. We've heard from Thomson's informants the lack of agency religious students feel over their perception at college and at church, and the self-muzzling that can result. They don't feel they have the authority to claim their own position in either case, because official evangelicalism's pervasive presence in people's expectations (including their own) is successfully constraining their political, social, and academic options. Recognizing this difficulty presented by official evangelicalism, we can also recognize that giving religious students the opportunity to bring in religiously-inflected perspectives, values, genres, experiences, and texts may not seem as good an opportunity for them as it seems to us. They may see it as a risk, or they may not feel they have the tools to represent their religion adequately.

CHAPTER IV

HETEROGENEITY AND CONTESTATION

Given the deep resonances between the dominant representation and the visible “representatives” of the Christian Right, researchers may be tempted to believe in, or at least look for, a homogeneous religious population that corresponds to these representations and their representatives—a powerful, official evangelicalism that people practice. As the previous section demonstrates, this temptation to give credence to the dominant representation and authority to the official representative is just as strong for individuals who encounter it in their everyday life. Michel de Certeau calls this the ultimate power of citation, and Butler calls it a reality effect—we believe the ideal or norm *because* of its ostensible representational or citational qualities. We tend to assume that there must be something that it accurately refers to, or someone else would have contradicted it, and we’d have heard that contradiction—citation always refers to a reality (we think). Because of this much of our scholarly focus tends to turn on these highly visible representatives and representations of religion. For example, throughout her recent dissertation on contemporary American religious rhetoric—discussed above—King constructs a rhetorical and ideological struggle between two strains of evangelicalism, one conservative and one progressive. She focuses heavily on official representations and representatives from each strain—namely, Dobson and Wallis—to establish the existence

and growing prominence of these two evangelical formations and their rhetorical struggle for the evangelical soul.

Practical v. Official

But as Thomson's student informants above indicate, it is always dangerous to believe that such official positions—even the ones we find sympathetic—represent, in a strict sense, the “real” positions held by the population. Butler points out that actual practices will always exceed or run counter to the constraining forms offered by the dominant representation. Speaking of gender, she explains,

That disciplinary production of gender effects a false stabilization of gender in the interests of the heterosexual construction and regulation of sexuality within the reproductive domain. The construction of coherence conceals the gender discontinuities that run rampant within heterosexual, bisexual, and gay and lesbian contexts in which gender does not necessarily follow from sex, and desire, or sexuality generally, does not seem to follow from gender. (*Gender Trouble* 135-36)

Like gender, the official account of religion covers over the discontinuities of religious practice rampant in actual congregations and on actual campuses in America. Just as “heterosexuality offers normative sexual positions that are intrinsically impossible to embody, and the persistent failure to identify fully and without incoherence with these positions reveals heterosexuality itself not only as a compulsory law, but as an inevitable comedy,” so too do dominant religious institutions offer normative religious positions that are intrinsically impossible to embody and inevitably produce tensions experienced

to varying extents by all religious adherents (*Gender Trouble* 122). This difference is described by Raymond Williams as the difference between the *practical* (here, religion as it is experienced in everyday life) and the *official* (ideal constructions of religion as it is disseminated) (109).

Evidence of such discontinuities within evangelicalism and within American Christianity more broadly abounds in religious research. First, we can see differences between practical realities and official evangelicalism even by observing the disparities in institutional religious affiliation. The Pew Forum's "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey" finds that 83% of young Americans between 18 and 29 are in some sense "religious"; 22% of all young Americans report evangelical affiliation; 43% are affiliated with all Protestant Christian denominations; and 68% are affiliated with Christianity. Another 6% of all young Americans fall into the category of "Other Religions," and 25% report no religious affiliation—though 9% of those who are unaffiliated still describe themselves as religious. Of the religious 83%, then, evangelical spokespersons only officially represent a little more than one fourth, and Catholic leadership officially represents the same share. Even if we restrict our comparisons to evangelicalism's place among young Christians, only around one third of those call themselves evangelicals. This point is especially important because with the partial exception of Black Protestant churches (8% of young Americans), Putnam and Campbell's as well as Pew Forum's results suggest that other Christian populations are vastly and consistently more liberal religiously, socially, and politically than evangelical Christian populations. For example, the Pew Forum finds that mainline Protestants and Catholics are almost three times as likely as white evangelicals

to feel that homosexuality should be accepted in society (though even among evangelicals, they find that 19% report that attitude).

Putnam and Campbell also indicate discontinuities between the clergy (institutional representatives) and their congregants. Whereas religious Americans' beliefs and practices are heterogeneous, clergy members can prove far more homogeneous—98% of Missouri Synod Lutheran clergy, for instance, claim that salvation comes only through Jesus, while only 14% of their Lutheran congregants agree (540). This gap between the institutional representatives and lay membership holds true on other counts as well: for instance, Jeremy Uecker and Glenn Lucke note that politically lay Americans “are divided, [but] the divisions are close, with millions of average Americans in the middle, sharing some views from one side of the cleavage and some views from the other side” (693)—but both political and religious elites are increasingly polarized (693, 705). While congregations are largely politically moderate, in other words, the clergy are likely to be more strongly liberal or more strongly conservative. It is a significant mistake, such findings suggest, to conflate official representatives' attitudes and norms with those of congregants (although this is not to deny that the clergy's views are influential, as Uecker and Lucke also note).

A closer look at American belief, attitude, and behavior confirms that these differences between practical religion and official evangelicalism are present throughout American culture. Sociological data suggests that most Americans are clearly practicing religion in ways that differ from the dominant religious representation and its norms. In terms of belief, attitude, and behavior, religious Americans demonstrate that their practical relation to the dominant representation and its representatives is diffracted at

best, and most likely conflictual. In terms of belief, for example, Putnam and Campbell find that only 13% of the entire American population consists of “true believers”—what we often call fundamentalists (542-3). (Looked at slightly differently, the Pew Forum finds this sentiment among a still small one quarter of religiously affiliated Americans.) Putnam and Campbell find only that small population believes that “One religion is true and others are not”; in comparison, when asked the same question a remarkable 80% of surveyed Americans respond, “There are basic truths in many religions” (*American Grace* 543).

Putnam and Campbell find that even among evangelicals, whose members make up 52% of the true believing population in America (note that 48% of true believers come from other religious traditions), 75% are not true believers (547). And even *within* that true believing fraction of the American population, there is significant diversity in attitudes. For instance, in addition to the one third who would approve certain forms of abortion, only 60% of true believers oppose gay marriage and civil unions. That is, within the *most religiously conservative* 13% of our population, abortion and gay rights are viewed *favorably* by at least a third of those believers (*American Grace* 544). And Kinnaman and Lyons lament that in terms of moral behavior there is simply no significant difference between evangelicals and others, Christian or not (54). So whether the differences stem from institutional or practical sources, the data makes clear that the hegemonic evangelical account does not even “represent” evangelicals in any complete sense—let alone the rest of the Christian or religious population.

Performativity

To be clear, while these statistics indicate considerable gaps in official evangelicalism's power to reproduce itself and make religion over in its own image, they cannot deny its power altogether. Unable to erase the hegemonic account either from the ideological apparatuses or from their own minds and bodies, what we find is that religious practitioners act, as Butler predicts, to deflect and re-deploy both the hegemonic account and its apparatuses. In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler concisely summarizes the realities of subversive action from within the hegemonic:

Performativity describes this relation of being implicated in that which one opposes, this turning of power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power, to establish a kind of political contestation that is not a "pure" opposition, a "transcendence" of contemporary relations of power, but a difficult labor of forging a future from resources inevitably impure . . . For one is, as it were, in power even as one opposes it, formed by it as one reworks it, and it is this simultaneity that is at once the condition of our partiality, the measure of our political unknowingness, and also the condition of action itself. (241)

If I were to translate this notion of performativity into the language of my text, I would say that if official evangelicalism is truly as hegemonic as I suggest in the previous chapter, then the challenges and contradictions that people's actual lives present to official evangelicalism should merely produce new subject relations to it, not its eradication—namely, alternative and emergent evangelical formations that continually appear to stand in various relations to the official. Representing these alternative and emergent formations within evangelicalism, and the modes of religious struggle, heterogeneity, and change that they evidence, is the focus of this chapter.

First, however, I want to offer an extended example from outside of Christianity and American culture that brilliantly highlights these related notions of the practical and the performative within religious formations. Bahira Sherif's research on middle and

upper class Muslim professional women in Egypt investigates the specific ways in which those women are never entirely within or outside of official ideology; instead, they are in power even as they oppose it, and formed by hegemony even as their own actions rework it. Sherif argues that within traditional ideologies being disseminated by fundamentalist Muslim leaders in Egypt, “The ideal woman is a wife and a mother . . . wears the veil, guards her modesty, obeys her husband, and expresses her views only through her husband” (9). But this official representation of the ideal Muslim woman belies economic and social realities: “there is no room for the economic constraints that force women to work outside the home, to interact with unrelated men, or to negotiate new distributions of duties within the home in order to deal with the pressures of marriage, work and children” (9). These economic constraints are really matters of class; societal expectations demand that middle and upper-class women should expect a certain level of material wealth in their marriage that have become generally impossible to achieve on a single income. So traditional ideas of class status, gender roles, and religion collide here with current economic realities. As Sherif notes,

While the ideologies of the centre identify women with the household and children, and subsume this domain to that of men, many upper-middle class Egyptian women are in the process of creating mechanisms that enable them to accumulate wealth for their families by negotiating central and peripheral domains. They are thereby reworking the definitions of what it means to be either male or female. (13)

Sherif finds, in other words, that the Egyptian women she studies negotiate these transformational conflicts by balancing their religious observation across multiple formational levels.

Sherif describes a number of practices taken up by Egyptian women in order to negotiate these conflicting commitments and expectations. Most interestingly, Sherif

points out that Egyptian women have taken to wearing the veil—a very traditional religious practice—as one of their negotiating tactics.

The *hijab*, the wearing of a head veil and loose fitting clothing, has come to signify the sum total of traditional institutions governing women's role in Islamic society . . . This accounts, in part, for the willingness of many professional women to adopt these new forms of Islamic dress, thereby literally cloaking themselves in orthodoxy and modernity. (12)

When Sherif's informants elect to wear the veil but go to work, they are practicing an alternative way of being Muslim that responds to a variety of societal pressures without mounting an open challenge to official ideologies of gender roles. They observe Islamic norms on the level of appearance so as to be allowed to press its boundaries on other levels; and they make these trade-offs so as to satisfactorily address class, family, and gender pressures that matter to them. Sherif concludes, “the gender ‘rules’ that are often invoked for Egyptian society only represent ‘reality’ as it exists within the limited framework of a particular ideological system: one that relegates women to a subordinate female sphere. Nonetheless, we find that ‘reality’ is changing as women negotiate with the tensions brought on through divergent dominant ideologies” (9). It should not be lost on us that women in Egypt take up these negotiations to safeguard their own economic, social, and even physical well-being. Nor should it be lost on us how this might apply outside of Egypt: perhaps the *hijab* or *birka* that we read as a mark of repression or even danger (as suggested by France's laws) is *also* (not instead) a mark of subversion—paradoxically, these women may have to choose to wear the hijab in order to more freely pursue their classed and gendered desires.

While negotiations may occur at less dangerous or less obvious levels, religious practitioners elsewhere are similarly operating in relation to multiple, competing

formations. Performativity will help us understand below, for example, how and why alumni of evangelical flagship Wheaton College choose to maintain identities as Wheaton alumni even as they openly challenge Wheaton's official evangelical stance on homosexuality—as a group strategically entitled OneWheaton. Those alumni are explicitly asserting a multiple and partial, variously contradictory identity as Christians, Wheaton grads, and homosexuals or allies; but they do so in the name of creating a single, ideal evangelical community that never entirely separates them from official evangelicalism. And these notions of practice and performativity, the condition of negotiating relations of power within a complex space, will help us understand how external discourses on women's rights exerted enough pressure on evangelicalism to bring about the creation of feminist evangelical organizations in the 1970s, and then how those organizations drew counter-organizations like Piper's Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood in the late 1980s (all discussed below). In each case, while practitioners enact their multiple commitments, I will demonstrate how they engage and redeploy the hegemonic account of official evangelicalism. This discursive engagement with official evangelicalism proves both a constraint and a vehicle for these groups' agential actions and alternative representations.

Alternative Evangelicalisms

One example of the struggle for control over evangelicalism—not only its popular representation, but also its ideological and cultural manifestations—can be seen in the “Evangelical Manifesto.” The Manifesto was published and signed by prominent evangelicals (including numerous Christian university presidents, magazine editors,

C.E.O.s of international relief organizations, the publisher of *Forbes* Magazine, and even the C.E.O. of Dollar General). Generally, the original signatories who published this document could be described as having ideological or cultural influence, rather than coercive influence, within evangelicalism. Released to significant press attention in 2008, the Manifesto outlines exactly what its writers think evangelicalism really *is*. Evangelical Christianity is characterized in the Manifesto by seven beliefs and seven defining features, which these evangelicals claim are in keeping with true Christian tradition: “Evangelicals are therefore followers of Jesus Christ, plain ordinary Christians in the classic and historic sense over the last two thousand years” (5). Later in the document, they go so far as to aver, “In sum, to be Evangelical is earlier and more enduring than to be Protestant” (10).

But though they make these positive statements, the writers of the Manifesto clearly recognize that such claims to Christian tradition and Evangelical definition are contested. In fact, the document’s stated purpose is not merely to define Evangelicalism, but to counter the dominant public perception of Evangelicalism. The writers of the Manifesto are explicitly representing their evangelicalism and outlining its norms *against* the hegemonic account.

The two-fold purpose of this declaration is first to address the confusions and corruptions that attend the term *Evangelical* in the United States and much of the Western world today, and second to clarify where we stand on issues that have caused consternation over Evangelicals in public life.

. . . we are troubled by the fact that the confusions and corruptions surrounding the term *Evangelical* have grown so deep that the character of what it means has been obscured and its importance lost. Many people outside the movement now doubt that *Evangelical* is ever positive, and many inside now wonder whether the term any longer serves a useful purpose. (2-3)

The writers indicate that the Manifesto is working to define Evangelicalism *against* the hegemonic account of Evangelicalism, not just to clean up a vague misperception.

Furthermore: their efforts are not just directed against a hegemonic account, but against the norms for evangelicalism propagated by official evangelicalism. The authors refuse to directly indicate the sources of this dominant perception in the document or in subsequent interviews, but it requires little effort to recognize official evangelicalism and its representatives in their descriptions. To connect the two strains of contention: the writers are writing the Manifesto in response to the related hegemonic forces of, first, official evangelicalism's explicitly ideological account of itself as truly evangelical and truly Christian; and second, official evangelicalism's forceful presence as *habitus*, which shapes American religious and cultural norms for belief, behavior, and practice.

So to oppose these, the Manifesto's authors set out to articulate and publicize a set of alternative evangelical norms (dispositions, behaviors, assumptions and beliefs) and an alternative account of evangelicalism. These norms are represented—and countered—as in some sense normative for all Christians. Groups compete to claim, *We* stand as representatives of *the* Christian tradition; *Ours* are the norms for being “plain ordinary Christians” (*Manifesto* 5). In other words, they're saying, make us the stereotype, not them. In their account, partially reproduced below, we see these writers engaged in a struggle to assert an authoritative definition of evangelicalism (indicated not least by their capitalization of the E in Evangelicalism, below)—but they can't seem to extricate themselves from the sedimented forms of popular perception and official evangelicalism long enough to do so in strictly positive terms. The phrasing of their own positive defining features of evangelicalism makes this struggle—at once a constraint and a

springboard for their progressive action—all the more clear. Note below the continual uses of phrases like “not,” “but,” “also,” “rather than,” “always more than,” “not only...but,” “as much in...as in,” “not limited to,” “not contained by,” “not reduced to,” “not confused with,” “should be distinguished from,” “distinctive for,” and others (7-10). Even for these evangelical elites—heads of universities, academics, popular authors, CEOs—positive definitions of evangelicalism cannot get fully outside of official evangelicalism, and in fact gain much of their specificity and motivation agonistically, if not antagonistically.

I provide here the key phrases for each of the Manifesto’s seven “defining features” of Evangelicalism, plus any clarifying language the writers offer that better indicate their agonistic relation to both the hegemonic account and to official evangelicalism. It would be a mistake to take this Manifesto’s Evangelicalism, any more than any other, to be the real or true form of evangelicalism. That’s not why I present this alternative account of evangelicalism in depth here. Instead, what this hopefully does is indicate two related struggles for control. First, one *within evangelicalism*, over what will be the official evangelicalism. Second, one both *within and outside of evangelicalism*, over what will be the hegemonic account. All of the following text is directly from the Manifesto:

First, to be Evangelical is to hold a belief that is also a devotion. Evangelicals adhere fully to the Christian faith expressed in the historic creeds of the great ecumenical councils of the church, and in the great affirmations of the Protestant Reformation, and seek to be loyal to this faith passed down from generation to generation. But at its core, being Evangelical is always more than a creedal statement, an institutional affiliation, or a matter of membership in a movement . . . whole-hearted devotion, trust, and obedience are our proper response. . . .

Second, Evangelical belief and devotion is expressed as much in our worship and deeds as in our creeds. . . . What we are about is captured not

only in books or declarations, but in our care for the poor, the homeless, and the orphaned; our outreach to those in prison; our compassion for the hungry and the victims of disaster; and our fight for justice for those oppressed by such evils as slavery and human trafficking. . . .

Third, Evangelicals are followers of Jesus in a way that is not limited to certain churches or contained by a definable movement. Evangelicalism has always been diverse, flexible, adaptable, non-hierarchical, and taken many forms. This is true today more than ever, as witnessed by the variety and vibrancy of Evangelicals around the world. For to be Evangelical is first and foremost a way of being devoted to Jesus Christ, seeking to live in different ages and different cultures as he calls his followers to live. . . .

Fourth, as stressed above, Evangelicalism must be defined theologically and not politically; confessionally and not culturally. Above all else, it is a commitment and devotion to the person and work of Jesus Christ, his teaching and way of life, and an enduring dedication to his lordship above all other earthly powers, allegiances and loyalties. As such, it should not be limited to tribal or national boundaries, or be confused with, or reduced to political categories such as “conservative” and “liberal,” or to psychological categories such as “reactionary” or “progressive.” . . .

Fifth, the Evangelical message, “good news” by definition, is overwhelmingly positive, and always positive before it is negative. . . . Just as Jesus did, Evangelicals sometimes have to make strong judgments about what is false, unjust, and evil. But first and foremost we Evangelicals are *for* Someone and *for* something rather than against anyone or anything. . . .

Sixth, Evangelicalism should be distinguished from two opposite tendencies to which Protestantism has been prone: liberal revisionism and conservative fundamentalism. Called by Jesus to be “in the world, but not of it,” Christians, especially in modern society, have been pulled toward two extremes. . . . The liberal revisionist tendency was first seen in the eighteenth century and has become more pronounced today, reaching a climax in versions of the Christian faith that are characterized by such weaknesses as an exaggerated estimate of human capacities, a shallow view of evil, an inadequate view of truth, and a deficient view of God. In the end, they are sometimes no longer recognizably Christian. . . . As a reaction to the modern world, [fundamentalism] tends to romanticize the past, some now-lost moment in time, and to radicalize the present, with styles of reaction that are personally and publicly militant to the point where they are sub-Christian. . . .

Seventh, Evangelicalism is distinctive for the way it looks equally to both the past and the future. . . . To be Evangelical is therefore not only to be deeply personal in faith, strongly committed to ethical holiness in life, and marked by robust voluntarism in action, but to live out a faith whose dynamism is shaped unashamedly by truth and history. . . . We therefore regard reason and faith as allies rather than enemies, and find no

contradiction between head and heart, between being fully faithful on the one hand, and fully intellectually critical and contemporary on the other. (7-10)

Later, the Manifesto's writers also complain against individualistic constructions of religion that they say have been confused with true Evangelicalism: "One error has been to privatize faith, interpreting and applying it to the personal and spiritual realm only. Such dualism falsely divorces the spiritual from the secular, and causes faith to lose its *integrity* and become "privately engaging and publicly irrelevant," and another form of "hot tub spirituality" (15).

We can see the definitional boundaries that the Manifesto's writers have chosen in these "defining features" as they set themselves against official evangelical norms along seven basic areas. It would appear from this that the hegemonic account of evangelicalism emphasizes religious beliefs over religious feelings, commitments, behaviors; right ideas over right actions; defined boundaries, institutional stability, and eternal dicta over heterogeneity, diachronic change and context-dependent ways of being; political and cultural identifications and viewpoints over religious identifications and viewpoints (or directly articulates them); negatives over positives (exclusion over inclusion, sin over righteousness, evil over good); anti-intellectualism and "tradition" over intellectualism, critique, and openness to new knowledge and changing understandings of religion; and individualism over community. Naturally, the Manifesto's writers would recommend a different emphasis in each case, though they do not often engage in actual binary logics that would reduce the choice to one or the other. But as descriptions, these statements resonate with the descriptions of Christians offered by writing scholars, instructors, students, and public survey respondents; they also echo

many of the publicized characteristics of official evangelicalism (presented at length in chapter three). In other words, the Evangelical Manifesto accurately and continually *cites* the hegemonic account of official evangelicalism in its attempt to authoritatively re-define the term along more flexible lines.

The same performative struggle for re-definition is evident in other sorts of alternative evangelicalisms—many researchers have noted, for example, Jim Wallis’ efforts to establish and publicize a progressive evangelicalism through *Sojourners*. But importantly, sometimes the alternative formations actually appear to be driven by religious practitioner’s relationships with *other identities and discourses*. The Evangelical and Ecumenical Women’s Caucus, to cite just one of these issue-specific alternative alignments, hosts an extensive website and publishes *Christian Feminism Today*. The EEWC-CFT is clear about its counter-cultural agenda and history:

. . . in 1974 the women’s caucus was one of six task forces or caucuses formed by ESA [Evangelicals for Social Action] participants to study such concerns as racism, sexism, peace, and simpler lifestyles. Thus our group was born as the Evangelical Women’s Caucus (EWC). The EWC group presented proposals to Evangelicals for Social Action on a variety of topics including endorsement of the Equal Rights Amendment, support for inclusive language in Bible translation and Christian publications, affirmation of the ordination of women, and criticism of discriminatory hiring policies in Christian institutions. (“About EEWC”)

While support of the ERA was clearly an intervention into the “secular” sphere, the last three endorsements were in clear opposition to stances taken by the official evangelical establishment I’ve described—in fact, they remain in opposition to stances *still* taken by evangelical leaders and institutions like Albert Mohler and the Southern Baptist Seminary, which houses the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. The Council affirms the “equality” of men and women, but also affirms that God has

established roles as part of the “created order”—citing the Bible, they call husbands to “loving, humble headship” (not domination or passivity) and wives to “intelligent, willing submission (but not usurpation or servility). The same paradigm of equal-but-distinct roles applies, they feel, to church settings where “some governing and teaching roles . . . are restricted to men” (“Core Beliefs”).

In an attempt to combat this, the EEWC-CFT argues for an alternative—but importantly still evangelical—approach to gender. On their website, the EEWC-CFT indicates both explicitly (in name) and implicitly—through various ideological affirmations—that it is an evangelical organization. It emphasizes its institutional evangelical history and its advocacy of several of the ideological hallmarks of evangelicalism discussed earlier (briefly: “conversionism, the belief that lives need to be changed; activism, the expression of the gospel in effort; biblicism, a particular regard for the Bible; and crucicentrism, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross” [Eskridge, “Defining the Term”]). So the EEWC-CFT affirms that sin separates people from God; “that the gospel is good news for all people”; that “the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, . . . is a central guide and authority for Christian faith and life”; and emphasizes the simultaneous humanity and divinity of Jesus, along with the importance of his death and resurrection. Having established these evangelical credentials, they then argue (in direct contradiction to the Council) that their alternative stance on women’s equality derives from their evangelical ideology, namely the Bible’s authority: “EEWC affirms that the Bible supports the equality of the sexes”; “We proclaim God’s redemptive word on mutuality and active discipleship.”

Other alternative articulations have arisen to challenge evangelical institutions from within on the question of sexuality—OneWheaton, for example, is a local organization of Wheaton College alumni who came out to vocally support gay Christian students in 2010. Illustrating again the importance of the media, the group released and publicized its letters of support through a media campaign that included offering press copy on their website and providing links to the articles in the *New York Times*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Newsweek*, *Christianity Today*, and other major media outlets that reported on their campaign. A central location in the evangelical institution actually contributes to OneWheaton’s success, too; Wheaton’s evangelical reputation, discussed above, contributes to the visibility of OneWheaton’s campaign, something like the way the defection of high ranking Syrian officers is currently gaining more media attention than the far more regular defection of its common soldiers.

Again, OneWheaton finds itself responding to official evangelicalism: forced to frame its agenda, first and foremost, *oppositionally*; but again this proves not merely a constraint, but in fact enables evangelicalism’s strategic redeployment. The first open letter begins, “Dear Wheaton Students, The recent chapel message on Sexuality and Wholeness and surrounding conversations may have left some of you feeling alienated, ashamed, and afraid . . . as a group of LGBTQ Wheaton alumni and allies, we’ve seen the devastating effects these words have had on ourselves and our loved ones” (“Dear Wheaton Students”). Here OneWheaton frames its agenda in the context of the devastating effects of official evangelicalism, represented here by Wheaton’s chapel message. Going further, the writers assert their own evangelical credibility by referencing their personal histories at Wheaton College. But they are leveraging, or redeploying, that

credibility as they assert their simultaneous LGBTQ identities or at least their commitment to supporting LGBTQ students. Citing their own negotiated position as an example of its possibility for other students, they write, “In our post-Wheaton lives, we have traversed the contradictions we once thought irreconcilable. Our sexuality has become an integral part of our broader pursuit of justice, compassion and love.” From this authoritative, negotiated position, OneWheaton affirms in part, “*You are not tragic*. Your desire for companionship, intimacy and love is not shameful. It is to be affirmed and celebrated just as you are to be affirmed and celebrated” (emphasis original).

Seen over and over again, such framing indicates the extent to which the conservative evangelical account and the conservative evangelical institution are truly hegemonic, but also the ways in which official evangelicalism is being redeployed by those who want to transform religion. Official evangelicalism exerts normative pressure on all Christians within its range, but clearly alternative accounts can exert counter-pressures and work to lend legitimacy to individuals who wish to practice their Christianity differently. Religious norms and accounts must be treated by writing scholars not as given, but as sites of struggle and potential tools for transformational action within the broader American religious community (and perhaps for those outside of it, who nevertheless are defined in relation to its norms).

Emergent Evangelicalisms

In addition to alternative formations, which compete with the hegemonic official evangelicalism for control over evangelical institutions and the evangelical public image (the hegemonic account), we can identify *emergent* evangelical formations that do not

necessarily display the coherence, articulacy, and organization of the Manifesto. These emergent formations, Raymond Williams explains, tend to appear at the level of the practical, and may or may not in the future rise to the level of alternative or official formations (125-7). This seems to have been the level that writers were pointing at when they wished to talk of religious students' individual experience. But emergent formations, even if they are not entirely articulable, are nevertheless social. Practical consciousness must not be reduced to the individual, Williams writes: "It is this seizure that has especially to be resisted. For there is always, though in varying degrees, practical consciousness in specific relationships, specific skills, specific perceptions, that is unquestionably social and that a specifically dominant social order neglects, excludes, represses, or simply fails to recognize" (125). Not only are those practical relationships, skills, and perceptions social, but as such they are likely *shared*. While practical consciousness does refer to the ways that people's individual relations to the official are inflected by their lived realities and complex relations to multiple formations, looking at emergent formations can help us highlight the shared components of that process. Williams points to the arts as a means of highlighting such emergent formations. I focus here on sociological studies describing an emergent evangelical formation, constituted in part by generational discursive differences, that seems evident among those under 30 (and in our rhetoric and composition students, as indicated throughout Thomson's study). It is certainly lacking the cohesiveness of an alternative formation, but nevertheless indicates a new source of growing practical resistance to the hegemonic account of evangelicalism and to official evangelicalism. It is, definitionally, emergent.

While their official affiliations are not all that different from older generations, by almost all practical measures—belief, attitude, behavior—research finds that young Americans are consistently different from (and usually more liberal than) their elders. The Pew Forum’s *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey* finds, for example, that compared to 35% of people over 65, 63% of young Americans feel that “Homosexuality should be accepted by society.” They also report that 55% of young Americans think “Evolution is the best explanation for human life” compared to 48% of the rest of the population and 67% “prefer bigger government, more services” compared to 46% of the population at large. On religious issues, 74% of young Americans believe there is “more than one true way to interpret the teachings of my religion”—a number that fairly steadily decreases across age groups, falling to 59% in those over 65.

Evangelicalism, despite all its ostensible conservatism, is no exception to these trends, either. Again according to the Pew Forum, 64% of young evangelicals believe there is “more than one true way to interpret the teachings of my own religion,” compared to 51% of those over 30; 39% of young evangelicals feel “Homosexuality should be accepted in society” compared to 24% of evangelicals over 30; and 65% of young evangelicals “prefer bigger government, more services,” compared to 36% of evangelicals over 30. Young Americans of all religious traditions are not only in conflict with insider/outsider representations of religion, but most are also in conflict with religion’s entrenched representatives and norms—represented here by elders who are more likely than the young to be politically, socially, and theologically conservative, to possess institutional authority, and to be construed as religious spokespersons. Together, they suggest an emergent formation.

In *You Lost Me*, Kinnaman describes this emergent formation by focusing on those of Christian background. Kinnaman finds, as I noted earlier, that “more than four out of five Americans under the age of eighteen will spend at least a part of their childhood, tween, or teenage years attending a [Protestant or Catholic] Christian congregation or parish” (22). But by the time that population is between 18-29, 59% will have “dropped out of attending church, after going regularly” (23), for an average of three years. Even if they do not leave religion for good, most young religious adherents seem to find themselves at the edges of organized religion. A full 50% of all Americans aged 18-29 with a Christian background agree that they have “been significantly frustrated about [their] faith,” and 32% “went through a period when [they] felt like rejecting [their] parents’ faith” (24). Kinnaman says that almost half of all young Americans from a Christian background (again, four fifths of the total 18-29 population, and a group not limited to evangelicals) exemplify at least some characteristics of what he calls an “exilic posture” towards Christianity. Exiles “are skeptical of [Christian] institutions but are not wholly disengaged from them” (77). They “want to participate in ministry outside of conventional forms of Christian community” (78), and are “Rejecting ‘cultural Christianity’ to seek deeper faith in Christ” (83). Exiles feel “stuck between the security of the Christian subculture and the realities of life in today’s society” (83). Exiles are “Struggling to see how their faith connects to their calling or professional interests” (83). They are “Seeing the best in culture and desiring to redeem and renew it—sometimes experiencing the worst in the church” (83). Exiles feel “fellow Christians—particularly older believers—frequently have a hard time relating to their choices and concerns. . . . In fact, many times these young exiles end up staying under the radar, as

both fellow Christians and nonbelievers often misunderstand their faith and their calling” (78). Exiles “feel tremendous tension between their work, usually in mainstream arenas of society (the arts, media, science, fashion, law, and so on), and their faith” (80). Given all of this, it is unsurprising Kinnaman finds 33% of young Christians agree that “God is more at work outside the church than inside, and I want to be a part of that” (79), and 29% agree that “I want to help the church change its priorities to be what Jesus intended it to be.” (79). The exilic subject position, at least as Kinnaman discursively constructs it, offers evidence of incredible *tensions between*: young religious practitioners experience significant conflict between various aspects of their lives and official manifestations of Christianity. This between-ness, really this performativity, marks both an “individual” subject position and a shared emergent formation that stands in a liminal relation to official evangelicalism. It is oppositional but participatory, simultaneously engaged and disengaged.

We can see some references to Christian ideology in Kinnaman’s phrasing—some “doubt God,” some feel tension between their work and their “faith”—but seemingly more references to Christian culture—the church’s priorities, the Christian subculture, cultural Christianity—and to institutional Christianity—distinctions between inside and outside the church, difficulties with older church members, and references to institutional Christianity. Kinnaman explains that exilic Christians are, in fact, more concerned with the latter two: they are “deeply at odds with expressions of modern-day Christianity, which many would categorize as distortions or abuses of Christ’s teachings. In other words, some young adults doubt God—but for others, ‘doubt’ might best be described as a deep, visceral sense that the church today is not what it could or ought to be” (190).

As a result of these tensions, these exiles from church “feel isolated and alienated from the Christian community—caught between the church as it is and what they believe it is called to be” (77). Such constructions of “church” make room for exceptions—even the most disaffected young Americans tend to cite a different Christianity evidenced by someone like their parents. But the negative behaviors, experiences, and representations can be gathered discursively and organized as expressions of that nebulous Christianity (official evangelicalism) that cannot be said to exist coherently, but nevertheless must be acknowledged to fluidly and authoritatively exist in the imaginations and experiences of Americans in the form of Christian institutions and culture.

This struggle to articulate a position against official evangelicalism, which we also saw in Thomson’s informants in the first chapter, seems to be echoed in part by James Bielo’s ethnographic work on the Emergent evangelical movement. Official evangelicalism operates as a forceful presence in Emergent evangelicalism in several forms. First, Bielo notes the Emergent movement explicitly rejects institutionalization: “there is no interest in establishing a denominational heritage, or extinguishing all ties to existing denominational structures. There is an active resistance to official statements of faith. There is an explicit resistance to viewing Emerging as a ‘movement’” (“The Emerging Church” 220). Second, Emergent evangelicals actually tend to construct their religious identities negatively: whereas conservative evangelicals are often characterized as purveyors of conversion narratives,¹² Emergent evangelicals characteristically offer “deconversion” narratives, according to Bielo. As Bielo explains,

Emerging Christians have an abiding dissatisfaction with how Christianity is imagined, lived, and discussed in 21st-century America. The result is an

¹² As simultaneously described and enacted by Rand (354-6).

abundance of talk about what and who they are turning away from, what forms of thought and practice they reject, and what they would just as soon see disappear from American Christian culture. The what and who of this deconversionist bent is primarily the conservative Evangelical establishment. Emerging Christians seem intent on not being mistaken as the latest incarnation of Bill Hybels or Rick Warren, not to mention more militant figures like Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, or James Dobson. (227)

As I have been arguing, Bielo points out these deconversion narratives indicate that even this most powerful form of Emergent evangelicalism “relies heavily on the existing discourses of Evangelicalism” for its self-definition (228).

Even beyond the Emergent church’s internal reliance on hegemonic discourse for self-definition, outside pressures on Emergents to conform to official evangelicalism are everywhere. This pressure becomes visible at several points. Some ideologically and culturally conservative evangelical churches take on the outward forms of the emergent church while retaining their conservative evangelicals; other evangelical churches and leaders have excluded the emergent church by questioning the Christian *bona fides* of its leaders and their doctrines (229-30). And of course, the official evangelical dispositions, ideologies, and social networks inculcated from childhood incline even those within alternative and emergent evangelicals back towards the hegemonic formation. These hegemonic pressures might partially account for the liminality and inarticulacy of the emergent formation I described above, and even for their fear of taking on a truly institutional character—they don’t trust themselves to institutionalize without losing the exilic posture to official evangelicalism that drives them. This suggests that it is perhaps too difficult for Emergents to disentangle “church” and “religion” from official evangelicalism. But Bielo also rightly notes that official evangelicalism’s antagonistic response indicates a destabilizing power structure: the dialogue surrounding it “indexes

the fact that Evangelical and Christian identity, and the terms that religious dialogue function on, are up for grabs in America and any analysis must grapple with this” (230).

Most young Americans are not associated with this Emergent movement. But the Emergent church Bielo describes nevertheless seems to resonate with the swelling exilic formation described by Kinnaman and other researchers, and suggested at times by Thomson’s student informants. We certainly must not assume that religious students align perfectly with official evangelicalism or any other authorized position (including the Emergent church) with which they might be identified. But we *should* assume that religious students, like the writers of the Manifesto and Bielo’s Emergent Christians, are always acting in practical *relation* with the official evangelicalism disseminated by the popular media, other religious adherents, and academics. Official evangelicalism infuses their lives and their religious practice, even if only negatively. We would do well to remember how Thomson’s evangelical informants shape their behavior towards it and against it, they anticipate interactions on its basis, they feel fear and shame because of it. We must anticipate that their practices will never perfectly align with the official any more than anyone else’s will, and that in fact alternative and emergent formations will continue to constantly arise to resist the official institutions and the hegemonic account of any religion. Between these students’ lived experience of religion—beliefs, sensibilities, assumptions, behaviors—and popular representations of those forms of religion, there is a crucial and variable gap, a felt tension. This is the representational gap in which instructors must begin to work with their religious students—not only with Christians, but with all religious students who may feel unrepresented by the representations and representatives of religion generally available to them.

Conclusion

The above should demonstrate that, contrary to our representational tendencies, religious formations like evangelicalism are heterogeneous and instable; continually beset by power struggles. Evangelicalism is not monolithic, but consists of numerous dominant, alternative, and emergent formations that fracture it into various partial evangelicalisms. As Bielo writes, even the privileged discourses and identities of “Evangelicalism” and “Christianity” are “up for grabs” (230), and we and students participate in the various ongoing power grabs, even if we don’t always recognize that or know how to articulate our positions. There are several factors confounding our ability to see this fluidity and these power struggles (and so, confounding our ability to develop the truly politically transformative pedagogies for which Stenberg has called). First, the groups—dominant or otherwise—that successfully articulate their positions tend to do so by positing homogeneous, stable, and essential accounts of Christianity or evangelicalism that of necessity attempt to elide the contingency and situatedness of their accounts. Second, the sedimentation of official evangelicalism within secular and religious ideological apparatuses, and within the bodies of religious insiders and outsiders, causes the powerful accounts to seem natural and given. Third, alternative and emergent evangelicals perpetuate the authority of homogenizing and stable official accounts by citing them to articulate their own positions—in a sense, the success of alternative articulations ironically depends on the continued stability, recognizability, and “citability” of that which they oppose. In sum, official evangelicalism successfully operates within a number of unstable ideological apparatuses to sediment a “stable”

position for itself in American society. But none of that makes it immune to change—in fact, hegemony’s dependence upon continued social participation makes religious formations like evangelicalism wildly susceptible to change.

Given the critical role of power relations and material conditions in constituting evangelicalism and other religions, anthropologists studying religion in recent years have worked to develop theoretical frameworks that can highlight the actual mechanisms of transmission and transformation at work in ideological apparatuses. So in chapter five, I forward several terms offered by anthropologists who study religion. Each describes a particular structuring force that simultaneously *maintains* and *disrupts* the hegemony of official religions, thus helping to produce the alternative and emergent religious formations I’ve described. The terms I’ve selected are definition, mediation, and sensation. These frames promise not only to be academically, but also *politically* useful: if we can identify the contingent processes by which religions are continually formed and transformed, then we can also see how such normative pressures and hegemonic accounts might be de-stabilized, and how actions might be taken to deliberately challenge both the account and those relations. I will discuss how students and instructors can effectively activate these terms to create new autoethnographic accounts that do just that.

CHAPTER V

MATERIAL TERMS FOR WRITING ON RELIGION

I established in chapters three and four that the vast majority of American religious students experience—and recognize—significant dissonance between their lived religious practices and the hegemonic account of religion that is connected with evangelicalism. That hegemonic account constructs religious practitioners as religious reactionaries and contemporary foundationalists. In contrast, studies suggest that in terms of belief, attitude, and behavior, religious practitioners are vastly more tolerant and more moderate—socially, religiously, and politically—than official evangelicalism and the hegemonic account would suggest. These pervasive disaffections and struggles over representation offer writing instructors our major opportunity for political intervention in today’s religious climate. They indicate that many Christians are motivated to practice and represent Christianity differently—in fact, to practice Christianity in myriad ways that often partially align with our critical ideals—and are struggling to find ways to do so. If we desire to efficiently promote and practice tolerance among religious adherents, we must focus on helping this massive population that is struggling for the same goals (in addition to challenging the thirteen percent of our students who probably are fully opposed to them). A few things have held us back from accomplishing this.

One obstacle holding us back has been the issue of respect—I discuss in chapter two how writing scholars have often worried about balancing change with respect

through our pedagogies for religious students (Carter; Perkins; DePalma; Vander Lei; Downs). But Soliday has rightly argued that we presume too much by assuming responsibility for students' decisions over "hybridizing and assimilating" (518). An instructor's responsibility is not to decide how students should relate to any of the dominant discourses in their lives—it is to give students the opportunity to examine these choices for themselves. Soliday recommends an approach that allows "those 'others' of the academic landscape hitherto largely represented by teachers speaking on their behalf—themselves to enter into and influence the contemporary debates surrounding multicultural education" (513). Students have a right to offer an account of, belong to, become transformed by, and in turn transform those other discourses to which they are engaged in conflicted and committed relations (522). So rather than making decisions for students, writing classes should help students "wrestle with the kind of relationship to dominant discourses a writer wants to imagine for herself" (520) as they themselves "[contend] with complicated affective and social issues of translation" (519). To my mind, finding ways of reading and responding to students' acts of religious discourse that will help them to do this sort of wrestling offers one compelling answer to Howard Tinberg's questions in the 2013 CCCC Call for Program Proposals: "In what sense is writing public work?" and "How might our research be put to public use?"

Our tendency to treat religious and academic discourses "as discrete, stable, internally uniform and linked indelibly to what is held to be each writer's likewise stable and uniform location and social identity" (Lu and Horner, "Translingual Literacy" forthcoming) has proven a second obstacle to effective pedagogy. We must better acknowledge that no one discourse holds monolithic sway over public spaces like the

writing classroom—or the church sanctuary. As Soliday explains, speaking of the classroom, “outsider” discourses always push back against “insider” academic ones. “[T]he outsider’s own language overlaps, conflicts with, shapes, and is shaped by insider’s language; movements between worlds take on a liminal rather than dichotomous character . . . students and teachers begin to see their languages as mutually shaping” (522). Recognizing these intersections between students and discourses in the classroom space, Soliday hopes students come to see themselves as “rooted in other cultures yet also belonging to, becoming transformed by, and in turn transforming school cultures” (522). Religious discourse is already in the classroom and shaping academic discourse—we don’t have to bring them together, and we can’t keep them separate.

Correspondingly, no one discourse can be assumed to hold monolithic sway over students; Soliday points out that students are “writers with multiple and sometimes conflicting commitments, aspirations, and choices” (522). Allowing students to contend and wrestle for themselves with their relationships to dominant discourses becomes not only desirable, but necessary, when we acknowledge this complexity of relations between and within students, religious discourses, and academic discourses; it becomes even more necessary when we acknowledge the complexity introduced into the classroom space by the “outside” formations we, our students, and our texts carry into the classroom. We are always operating within the mutually interfering webs of Asad’s “complex space” (*Formations* 178-79). So a third obstacle, as I suggest throughout the dissertation, has been our failure to fully attend to the potential *internal* conflicts between students and religious discourses—many of which are created by student’s conflicted and multiple discursive identities.

Most Americans, I argue in the above chapters, today must operate in relation to official evangelicalism and its norms, lending it credence and perpetuating its authority by re-activating it in their perceptions, their conversations, and even in their own alternative or excluded social, political or ir/religious practices. Because of this hegemonic situation, even the majority of students and instructors who do or would practice religion differently tend to share many of the same negative conceptions and experiences of American religion described by those who do not practice religion. They are always, if not self-consciously, responding to their sense of the positions of the authoritative spokespersons as those positions have been circulated through mass media and other ideological institutions such as family, the local church, college classrooms, and the entertainment industry. Such representational difficulties are only compounded for students by our blindness to the pressures our own academic discourses bring to bear.

If we are going to encourage students to bring their religiously inflected perspectives and experiences into the classroom, we need to recognize these constraints on students' abilities to write about them. Neither preservationist nor assimilative logics of inclusion can fully address the complexities of actual relations within and between students, religious discourses, and academic discourses. A key challenge for instructors, as I see it, is locating new ways of reading and responding to acts of religious discourse, particularly ways of reading and responding that are neither 1) immediately and necessarily counter to students' current positions nor 2) caught up in the hegemonic accounts and logics of religion forwarded by official evangelicalism (and at times by our own scholarship). I cite Soliday throughout the dissertation because in her discussions of autoethnography and translation, she seems to be forwarding a critical strategy for

accomplishing the approach for which I'm looking: creating strangeness. By reading and responding to even the most seemingly conventional religious discourses in the relatively *strange* or *estranging* terms I will suggest below, both students and instructors may have the opportunity to move into new and potentially transformative relations with religion, and to deliberate on how they want to proceed with these new possibilities. Rather than re-entering familiar scenes from familiar angles where the battle lines are already drawn, this gives students and instructors the opportunity to approach sites of religious and academic conflict, and religious texts and discourses more generally, from new productive angles. This strategy for working with religious students is not new: it has already been forwarded, to some degree, by Perkins, Carter, and Stenberg. But I see two ways in which my project differs from earlier attempts.

First, I understand this chapter as an extension of their work that more fully addresses official evangelicalism's hegemonic force in structuring students' and instructors' relations to religion. So I draw on contemporary scholarship in anthropology and sociology to offer several new strange terms—definition, mediation, and sensation—that can help us read and respond to students' religious discourse in ways that address, deflect, and transform official evangelicalism's force. I take significant time throughout the chapter to demonstrate how this might work: after introducing each term, I outline the official evangelical ideological account of each term, discussing the misreadings these official accounts encourage and the power relations such misreadings maintain. I then spend the bulk of each section re-reading previously published texts from religious students in our composition classrooms to demonstrate how reading and responding to students' texts with these new religious terms might open up spaces for deliberation and

transformation in those students' texts and in their relations to official evangelicalism (whatever those relations might be).

The second difference I see between my transformational approach and those forwarded by previous scholars is my application of translingualism to the topic. Translingual scholars pay close attention to the negotiations that occur between various competing and conflicting discourses and languages—what I would describe as transformational events—and call student and instructor attention to both the *risks* and *affordances* of such transformational action—many of which inform my critique of extant disciplinary approaches to religion in chapter two. As Horner and Lu explain in “Translingual Literacy,” translingual approaches aim to use writing to not only respect and include students' multiple personal discursive resources traditionally undervalued in the classroom, but to develop students' capacities for actively shaping and reshaping the very languages, identities, and social relations playing a key role in their writing and learning. So instead of merely asking students to bring religiously-inflected resources into the writing classroom, translingual approaches to religion will challenge students to explore how and why they are interested in employing such resources, and to consider how they might best go about re-creating and transforming their religious experiences, identities, and communities in the process of writing about them. By bringing anthropological lenses together with translingual lenses as a way to re-examine our students' texts and propose transformational strategies for responding to their acts of religious discourse, I hope to demonstrate how we might respond in ways that can prove truly “politically transformative” for our students.

One pragmatic note should be offered about these strategies and how I imagine their actual employment in the classroom. Without ever explicitly asking students to write a significant essay on religion, over the past decade I have received numerous essays from students that nevertheless either referenced religious discourse or offered a full-blown account of a particular religion. I have been explicitly witnessed to by students analyzing sources of major transformation in their lives; I have received traditional “argumentative” essays challenging and supporting abortion, birth control, and even homosexuality (just homosexuality, not gay marriage) largely on the basis of religious evidence; I have received research essays attempting to make a case for atheism or counter Islamophobia; and as mentioned in chapters one and two, I have received an autoethnographic piece exploring the role of religion in the lives of African-American women, while another recounted a student’s personal experience of religious violence in Pakistan.

My working assumption, then, is that while my strategies could be useful to those who wish to design a religiously-themed course or assignment sequence—I provide a number of texts and substantive themes that could facilitate those projects—a greater number of instructors are likely to come across religious discourse in irregular and unpredictable ways, for which they are less likely to be prepared. Those instructors who encounter religion in their classroom unexpectedly need a variety of strategies for reading and responding to religious students and texts, and my discussions below are largely geared towards such situations. The previous two chapters should illustrate how and why many of our conventional ways of reading and responding to religion (described in chapter two) are actually disciplined by official evangelicalism, as are many of our

students' conventional ways of representing religion. We need new ways of reading and responding because otherwise such encounters with religious discourse will draw out our habitual responses and habitual readings, reinforcing the polarizing situation described in my first chapter. So in each section of this chapter I present a new way of reading and responding to students' acts of religious discourse, hoping such re-readings might in turn help students discover new ways of representing and enacting religious discourse.

I. Translingualism and Transformationalism

Translingualism, as it has been recently defined in writing scholarship, represents a re-conceptualization of language similar to Asad's formational re-conceptualization of religion. Asad points out that recognizing religion's inessentiality causes us to ask how historical conditions *make* religion, thus exposing the power relations structuring religion that would otherwise remain hidden beneath a veneer of a-historical permanence. The same principle is at work in translingualism: languages are viewed as "always emergent, in process (a state of becoming), and their relations as mutually constitutive" (Lu and Horner, "Translingual"). This recognition of the inherent instability of social things like languages or cultures depends, as we've already seen in the cases of religion and gender, upon performative definitions of those things.¹³ As Lu and Horner explain, a

¹³ This correspondence between Asad's treatment of religion and translingualism is not merely analogous: in fact, discursive differences such as those between academic and religious discourses can represent the sorts of differences *within* a "single language" that Pennycook and other proponents of translingualism have marked for attention under the term "semiodiversity" (as opposed to "glossodiversity," which refers to differences *between* languages) (Pennycook 97). Thus, we might imagine that the principles of translingual writing pedagogy are not only relevant, but in fact directly applicable, to issues of religious difference (although that is not to say that they won't require some degree of translation).

“translingual approach shifts attention to matters of agency—the ways in which individual language users fashion and re-fashion standardized conventions, subjectivity, the world, and their relations to others and the world” (“Translingual”).

Pennycook explains these central aspects of translingualism cogently in *Language as Local Practice*, drawing a parallel between Butler’s notion of performative identity and gender and his own conception of language (46-8). Butler articulates this performative logic, also discussed in chapters one and four, most clearly in the following quotation.

Because there is neither an “essence” that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions—and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction that “compels” our belief in its necessity and naturalness. (*Gender Trouble* 140)

Like Butler’s conception of gender and Asad’s conception of religion, translingualism sees languages and discourses as only existing through their repeated performance—that is, they depend upon new iterations, or uses, for their continuing existence. Language is *practiced* and *social*: performed over and over and passed from individual to individual in a process of “sedimentation” (*Gender Trouble* 163). From this perspective, to briefly rehearse an argument I’ve already made, ideal and stable constructions of a language or discourse—“English,” “evangelicalism”—paradoxically depend upon human action for their stability. This is the active, social process Pennycook calls “practice” by which actions become habituated, repeated in a variety of settings by a variety of users, and can

come to be both recognized (and therefore socially valuable) but also misrecognized as natural, stable, essential (46-8).

On this view of language, there is no ideal or essential core—the real English—existing somewhere, but only ever a set of practical realizations that “real-ize” English. Pennycook argues that even more progressive notions of overlapping languages or changing languages, by maintaining somewhere the concept of discrete languages, participate in hegemonic logics by falsely positing cores and peripheries as well as norms and variations that do not in fact exist (49-50, 132; see also Lu and Horner, “Translingual”). Languages themselves must be understood as linguistic constructs dependent upon their own repetition for credibility and authority. That words have fixed meanings is a naturalizing perception produced by the constant connection of a word with a meaning; that languages have discrete boundaries is a naturalizing perception produced by ATMs that offer discrete language choices and academic courses of work in “Mandarin” and “Spanish.”

Attempts to remedy this through ever-greater specificity, like isolating Standard Edited American English or English, will not find a fixed or homogeneous language there either, because these varieties are not any more stable than their broader counterparts. More accurately, researchers may *find* a fixed language variety, but only because they themselves have produced it in their research by highlighting the partial homogeneities and partial fixities that they found. Thus, there are not “languages,” which would suggest a count-noun and thus a countable, finite set of individual languages—instead, there is

only “language,” something more like “water”, which is not a count-noun,¹⁴ or better we could say there is only “linguaging,” the act of using language that is constitutive of the language process and its sedimentation. There are always and *only* the ways that people practice language—writing it down, exchanging it vocally, thinking with it. This renders language entirely dependent upon users for its continued stability and thus subject to change through errors, copies, break-downs, alienation, lying, fiction, invention for new purposes, etc.

Such performative conceptions of language assign users two forms of agency. First, there is a practical, if not conscious, agency in that language users here are active agents who create, change, and perpetuate the languages they use with every use. This is best expressed in the concept of *iteration*—the perpetual rupturing of language introduced by its repeated performance over time in an always-new context. Every performance of language (across space and time) necessarily introduces its forms into a new set of relations: perhaps into conflicting discourses which use that language form differently; into alternative “genres” which may authorize, revise, or reject a particular use; into social categories involving race, gender, class, or even religion where its meaning may become split or diffuse for different users; into new activities where it may take on an entirely new relevance or use. Even if I say the same words to the same interlocutor in the same location twice, still, time has introduced change—neither I, nor my interlocutor, nor our location, is exactly the same (not to mention that the previous iteration, remembered, will also impact the words’ meanings in subsequent iterations). All of these mean that the everyday practice of language inherently re-contextualizes and

¹⁴ That analogy could be taken further, but doing so brings added and unnecessary complications.

transforms language as new meanings and uses accrete and old meanings and uses change or drop out, quite outside of any specific intention to create such change. Languages change, in other words, because they are practical and always in process—lived out within the flow of everyday practices that are never ideal. As Pennycook notes and Lu and Horner re-iterate, one cannot step into the same river twice, and you can't say the same thing twice (50; "Translingual"). Within such flows of time and space, constancy and stability are impossible.

Second, performative representations of discourse raise the possibility that language users can *strategically* participate in changing their languages. This possibility that individuals could want to change the discourse arises through the conflicts and instabilities described above—from the differences between discourses, the dissonance created by our multiple commitments and multiply-constituted identities, the differences between lived experiences using a discourse and the official norms of a discourse endorsed by those in power, between experiences, between experiences and desires, desires and discourses. Such conflicts present the impetus for language's negotiation and re-negotiation in each interaction, and language's dependence on practice makes those re-negotiations possible. We can see this chain of logic in "Language Difference in Writing: Toward a Translingual Approach" where Horner, Lu, Royster and Trimbur write,

learning language is necessarily continuous precisely because language is subject to variation and change. Further, we recognize that language learners are also language users and creators. Thus, mastery must be redefined to include the ability of users to revise the language that they must also continuously be learning—to work with and on, not just within, what seems its conventions and confines. (307)

Representing social entities as unstable because dependent upon practice for existence, then, doubly makes room for agency and change in our understanding of language.¹⁵

But this recognition of change and agency does not negate the operations of power detailed at length in chapters three and four: while instability is central to translingual approaches because it enables a re-conceptualization of possibilities for agency, power still flows through this practical sedimentation process, constraining those possibilities. First, this occurs through the situated repetitions by which some forms and uses come to be repeated, valued, and normalized. Norms and conventions are continually and actively produced, disseminated, and reproduced by those who act in relation to that language or discourse, whether from the inside or outside. The privileged forms and practices move through the ideological apparatuses I describe in chapter three—through popular media, education, and politics, but also through quotidian social relations in ways that transform individuals into agents of the hegemonic (regardless of intention).¹⁶

And again, there's the probability of *misrecognition*: as the ubiquity of those particular practices increases, their specific historical and authoritative roots come to be obscured by generalized practice and the new rationales assigned to them by those who take up the practice. I illustrate in chapter three that this misrecognition is often effected through hegemonic accounts that explicitly naturalize, homogenize, and idealize certain

¹⁵ The same is true when a practical account of religion or culture is used, as we learned through Sherif's account at the beginning of chapter four. The Muslim women Sherif studies creatively respond to economic- and class-related pressures by re-negotiating gender roles—even finding ways to do so within the bounds of their religious formation—and thus work with, on, and within the confines and conventions of their specific context to achieve their desires.

¹⁶ Sometimes, even as individuals or communities explicitly look to work *against* the hegemonic.

privileged practices—this is how Pennycook views the notion of “languages,” as I explain above. Together, hegemonic practices and accounts lead to misrecognizing a temporary social structure as permanent and transcendent—and thus slow down actual change. So translingual pedagogies attempt to recognize again what the hegemonic account covers up—the heterogeneity, conflict, and change necessitated by practical processes of cultural reproduction; those processes of reproduction; and the accounts that naturalize those processes.

Translingual Strategies

To be clear, the translingual approach to writing not only looks to *acknowledge* linguistic instability, but also focuses on making *political use* of that instability. For translingual scholars, “the ideal user of English is . . . attentive to the capacities, rights and necessity of change in all living things: people, their life, society, culture, the world, and the language itself” (Lu and Horner, “Resisting” 151). But the ideal user is not only attentive to instability, but active in creating and using it: the ideal translingual writer will “map and order, remap and reorder conditions and relations surrounding their practices, as they address the potential discrepancies between the official and practical” (Lu and Horner, “Translingual”). We can see two examples of this de-stabilizing approach in familiar critical works from outside of translingualism.

Raymond Williams speaks of de-stabilizing “tradition,” which he calls “the most evident expression of the dominant and hegemonic pressures and limits” (115). To Williams, tradition is always “*selective tradition*: an intentionally selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process

of social and cultural definition and identification” (115). Getting a particular form of language, gender construction, or religious tradition passed off as the “ideal,” or “the tradition’, ‘*the significant past*’” is one of hegemony’s “decisive processes,” Williams says, by which a contemporary order gains “historical and cultural ratification” (115-16). So Williams suggests historical research on alternative traditions—“the recovery of discarded areas, or the redress of selective and reductive interpretations” (116). This strategy will come up again below.

Butler, alternatively, suggests tactically subversive performance and the strategic highlighting of such de-stabilizing performances:

The abiding gendered self will then be shown to be structured by repeated acts that seek to approximate the ideal of a substantial ground of identity, but which, in their occasional discontinuity, reveal the temporal and contingent groundlessness of this “ground.” The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found precisely in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction. (*Gender Trouble* 164)

In both cases the key to effecting strategic change is believed to lie in de-stabilizing and de-naturalizing official representations of social givens that must be shown to be “historical, variable, and negotiable” (Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur 311).

As I note above, to accomplish this destabilization in matters of language difference translingual scholars like Lu and Horner suggest helping students learn to map existing conditions, recognize their practical instability, and take advantage of the instability to re-order those conditions—often by focusing on *processes of translation*. For instance, as I explain in chapter two, when students are asked to translate from one language or discourse into another, they are confronted with the opacity of words and the constraints of any one discourse’s representation of “reality” and “experience.” As

students translate, they are forced to select new words from among a set of partially adequate choices, leaving some meanings and subtle nuances out of the new translation while drawing in new ones. Further, these translations are made in the context of the unequal power relations between discourses that are particular to that setting: these selections are made because someone has asked for the translation; because some privilege or reward or punishment will be attached to its performance or failure; because peers will respond (or are expected to respond) in particular ways to certain discourses, languages, or experiences. And while a pragmatist or accommodationist approach might emphasize the utility and benefits of producing the finished translation, a truly translingual approach will ask students to contemplate the remainders, we might say—the losses, inefficiencies, and injustices also produced by the process. Ideally, by focusing student attention on the process and its by-products (and not only the document that results) students see how each of these discourses or languages bring limitations and new meaning potentials not available in the other, but also how power works through such processes. They will see, we might say, the tensions between the official account of academic writing as a clear, rational, beneficial, and appropriate choice; and the practical, lived realities of academic writing as a forced, contradictory, obscuring behavior.

In “The Place of World Englishes in Composition,” Canagarajah describes a second sort of translingual strategy, code-meshing, in which students work to incorporate multiple languages into a single document rather than “translating” one into another (598). As I see it, the value here lies in the way students negotiate that incorporation with readers who also must bring some labor to the negotiation (609-10). The way such incorporations are invested in relations of power, and the responsibilities of readers and

writers in such negotiations, becomes apparent when writers and readers discuss whether or not a foreign word must be defined for readers, for instance. Ideally, at least, responsibility for the labor and success of a translinguistic encounter lies with all the participants—not just the “foreigner.” Students should be asked to deliberate upon the process itself, to discuss its challenges and interrogate (that is, map and re-map) their own socially-specific assumptions about etiquettes, or responsibilities, or what makes a linguistic transaction successful, for instance. If this happens, then asking students to perform “translingually” in these ways helps them to not only see, but also to enter into negotiating, the *work* and *power* of language use.

A third type of translation returns us to autoethnographic pedagogies, discussed in chapter one. These strategically incorporate (translate) personal experience into academic conversations in order to challenge hegemonic accounts and discourses. Throughout “Translating Self and Difference,” Soliday argues that writing on experience can help students act within their lived conditions by highlighting, deliberating on, and intervening in the contingent and culturally-situated forces that shape those experiences. Similarly, Lu and Horner set two goals for classroom uses of students’ experience in “The Problematic of Experience”: first, “to make productive use of, rather than dismiss, the challenges students’ lived experience poses for the teachers’ discursive understanding of that experience” *but also* “to involve the student as well as the teacher in politicizing the students’ experience” (267). We use experience autoethnographically, in other words, for the dual purposes of identifying and transforming hegemonic *accounts* of discourses, and for identifying and transforming our *lived relations* to those discourses. This sort of use of personal experience extends beyond the constructing or expressing of the self to

participate in *cultural* definition and *cultural* representation through the de-naturalization of experiences and in turn cultural forces.

This, of course, requires reading and writing strategies for de-naturalizing (making strange) experience. That is, for locating the contingent and culturally specific aspects of experiences. Soliday explains what this achieves: “By foregrounding their acquisition and use of language as a strange and not natural process, authors of literacy narratives have the opportunity to explore the profound cultural force language exerts in their everyday lives” (511). She uses, for example, a story of an Irish man’s violent acquisition of literacy to point out how “his story achieves maximum tellability in rendering strange one of the most seemingly mundane events of our lives” (514). This happens, first, when “like an ethnographer, the narrator assumes that something as seemingly natural as learning to write in school is not a neutral event but is itself a meaningful social drama” (514). Another means of doing so Soliday suggests is through shifts in time: “If writers construct their interpretation of past events from the vantage point of a particular present, then the life story becomes a dialogical account of one’s experience rather than a chronological report of verifiable events” (514). Soliday explains that deliberation on the discursive shaping of experience is another key to this politicization of experience: “successful narrators acknowledge that their life stories can be composed or deliberately constructed renderings of experience” (514)—in other words, the choices involved in telling about experience create the meaning and offer opportunities for experience to be politicized in the telling (514)—to reinterpret ostensibly neutral experience “from the vantage point of a critical present” (515). The introduction of these deliberations on experience can lead to the de-naturalization of

supposed cultural givens like experience's expressive relation to representation and autonomous relation to culture.

Summarizing the principles of the translingual approach enacted in all of these particular strategies, Lu and Horner offer three generalizable pedagogical tacks for accomplishing translingual work:

- 1) foregrounding the sedimented nature of social and discursive practices;
- 2) examining the processes of recontextualization involved in iterations of conventional ways of doing language;
- 3) considering the possible short and long term consequences, often unintended and not always immediately observable, that individual instances of recontextualization might bring to conventions iterated, the contexts of iteration, and the subjectivity and the life of the person using them. ("Translingual")

While I don't articulate a comprehensive pedagogy below, the reading strategies I forward attempt to follow these basic principles of translingual pedagogy. I begin from the acknowledgement that all student uses of religiously inflected values, experiences, commitments, texts, or genres in the classroom are *trans-formational acts* whereby multiple formations and power relations collide, and change and creativity result. I also assume it is our responsibility to help students deliberate on the forces, processes, and consequences of those acts of transformation in which we ask them to engage. Put into the transformational terms of this dissertation, those reading strategies might be rendered in this way:

1. Map: Ask students to locate and deliberate on cultural forces that shape their religious experience, and to map out how they participate in those;
2. De-stabilize: Challenge students to locate the conflict, change, and heterogeneity within religion and religious experience by drawing students' practical experience

of enacting their religion into comparison with official accounts of that religion for the purposes of interrogating both;

3. Re-map: Emphasize sites for student choice, intervention, and creativity in their religious and academic contexts (specifically, through acts of representation), and encourage deliberation on the process and consequences of those choices.

Transformational Strategies for Reading and Responding to Religious Discourse

In the rest of this chapter, I propose three new terms instructors can employ in reading and responding to acts of religious discourse. I believe each term—whether brought to bear individually or in concert—offers instructors and students alternative means of mapping, destabilizing, and re-mapping religious formations through writing and reading. Drawn and conceptualized largely in terms of anthropological and sociological research, my terms are purposely chosen for their ability to counter specific aspects of our hegemonic accounts of religion—largely connected to official evangelicalism—that make religion’s practical instability difficult for scholars, instructors, and students to see. For example, official evangelicalism and its account of religion often focus attention on consciousness: beliefs, language, and the behaviors that properly express these beliefs. So my terms are intended to help students and instructors attend to how religious discourses work to shape and adhere to individuals on other levels: informing not just conscious belief but also sensibilities, attitudes, assumptions, and behaviors. And because official evangelicalism centers its attention on the Bible as God’s word, the terms I’ve selected help students and instructors identify how religious formations depend on material forms other than language—including bodies and

objects—to produce, maintain, and transmit religious practice over time. This avoids a direct confrontation over a valued belief while shifting attention to aspects of religious practice that are immanent and more obviously subject to constant change. By focusing on “inessential” religious practices rather than “essential” ideas, students and instructors may be able to more comfortably identify and analyze variations and changes in religious formations—how individuals change, how discourses change—thus countering reifying tendencies towards static, unchanging depictions.

These potential shifts in instructors’ readings and students’ representations of religion, however, are not important simply because they might de-stabilize received Western notions of religion by talking about bodies, objects, and processes. They are important because they can help instructors highlight specific avenues of student action and creativity. The responses I imagine here encourage students to create representations of religious discourses as entirely dependent upon ongoing relationships between individuals, things, and language that will perpetuate, challenge, conform to, re-appropriate, and ultimately alter the religious discourses themselves. Moreover, the responses I suggest encourage students to contemplate specific, concrete changes they might introduce into their religious practices and religious communities. Attending to and highlighting students’ religious agency should be a crucial concern for us, given the perceived lack of agency expressed by the religious students I described in chapters one, three, and four; it should be even more of a concern as we read the representations of religious experience and communities offered by religious students later in this chapter. Students need multiple new ways into expressing and altering their own religious discourse; instructors need multiple new ways to respectfully address and even challenge

aspects of students' religiously inflected perspectives, experiences, and communities about which they may be skeptical.

II. The Transformational Work of Definition in Representational Formations

If privileged religious terms like Christianity, Islam and evangelicalism are taken to refer to historical formations whose stable boundaries and essential cores are actually constantly contested, then one of the first channels by which power operates in these formations is boundary work—that is, acts of *definition*. While boundary work occurs on all levels—as evidenced by Sherif's informants donning of the *hijab*, which is useful for the women precisely because wearing the *hijab* is seen as a *definitively* Muslim behavior—language must be considered as a formational component of religion because implicit and explicit definitions do not merely describe religious formations but actually participate in shaping them. As foregoing chapters should demonstrate, even ostensibly meta-discursive definitions (like religion as a historical formation) *form* religious formations. Often, an “essence” of a religion is declared in order to determine the exclusionary boundaries of the social group, whether in ideological or coercive senses (as seen above in Southern Baptist Seminary's employment requirements).

Such acts of definition take place in legal arenas, too: those definitions can actually disable certain practices of religion while enabling others. In chapter one I mentioned one example of this from Greece, where individuals were not allowed to keep their religious affiliation on “identity” cards despite their protests—thus enforcing a definition of religion and of identity as individual. In order to declare that keeping religious affiliation on an identity card would amount to the violation of those desirous

individuals' civil rights, but removing it would not, the government declared religion (and identity) an individual, private matter, that therefore cannot be violated by lack of access to particular forms of separation, including communal identity. So an official and “secular” definition of religion, motivated by a question of legal practice, decided through a structure of legal channels, and made significant through state apparatuses that enabled its coercive enforcement—all of this recorded and disseminated through the medium of language—shaped the individual and collective practice of religion in Greece (Asad, *Formations* 139-40).

Anthropologist Webb Keane uses the notion of *representational economy* to describe these transformational connections between practices, ideas, and language. It is not only the definition of *religion* that causes changes in religious practice: accepted definitions of any aspect of the religious formation can change related practices. He writes, “ideas and the practices they involve have not only logical but also causal effects on one another across a potentially wide range of apparently distinct social fields. They are parts of what we would call a *representational economy*” (*Christian Moderns* 18).

In “God is Nothing but Talk,” Joel Robbins depicts one such representational economy by exploring the prayer practices of the Urapmin (905-7). Prior to mass conversions to Christianity, the Urapmin generally believed others' thoughts were entirely undiscoverable. Language by definition could not represent thought (906). But the introduction of a form of Christianity reminiscent of evangelicalism that puts a premium on sincerity in language provoked the Urapmin to alter their practices to accommodate this new value (905). They negotiated a solution in which God was an invisible auditor to Christian prayer, and could assure the sincerity of the person praying.

Thus, in a situation where two Urapmin men were feuding, a public prayer of apology, performed in church, was accepted as sincere and ended the feud: an apology offered in any other discursive mode would have been considered suspect (907-8). New attitudes towards sincerity introduced by representatives of a different formation shifted the representational economy of the Urapmin's religious formation and necessitated new practices of reconciliation; new assumptions about and practical relations with God enabled this new conciliatory strategy to be successful, even as the Urapmin's conception of the relationship between language and thought transformed the Western religious practices they took up.

To offer just one more example, Saba Mahmood's argument in "Religious Reason and Secular Affect" uses the Danish cartoon controversy of a few years ago to point out how definitional assumptions about signs can enter trans-formational interactions in ways that can limit agency and delegitimize religious experience. Mahmood convincingly argues that Westerners' bafflement at Muslim pain and anger over cartoon representations of Muhammed "presuppose a semiotic ideology in which signifiers are arbitrarily linked to concepts, their meaning open to people's reading in accord with a particular code they share between them" (841). It is only because they detach material causality from semiotic forms, Mahmood argues, that modern Western semiotic ideologies can suggest "Muslims agitated by the cartoons exhibit an improper reading practice" (844). That Western response and its assumptions are most obviously at evidence in the arguments "it's just a damn cartoon," and its more recent instantiation "it's just a movie," spoken in response to the fatal backlash against the "Innocence of Muslims" video. Mahmood points out that this "impoverished understanding of images,

icons, and signs . . . fails to attend to the affective and embodied practices through which a subject comes to relate to a particular sign—a relation founded not only on representation but also on what I will call attachment and cohabitation” (841-42).

She describes the relationship of attachment or cohabitation between devout Muslims and Muhammed as “predicated not so much upon a communicative or representational model as an assimilative one” (847) in which practitioners attempt to embody Muhammed’s dispositions and practices. The sense of violation in the cartoon, then, “emanates not from the judgment that the law has been transgressed but that one’s being, grounded as it is in a relationship of dependency with the Prophet, has been shaken” (848-849). Western semiotic ideologies, with their assumed definitions of signs, religion, existences, and possible relationships, are incapable of recognizing that sense of violation and thus dismiss the experience as “irrational.” Obviously, we can see the power of definition here—if semiotic forms are limited to words and interpretation, then religion becomes a matter of language, and religious agency becomes choice—a social and cognitive phenomenon subject to the rules of rationality. Muslims’ agitated response to the cartoon is prohibited, out-of-bounds, irrational, because their semiotic ideology does not fit within the Western representational economy.

Definition Misrecognized: The Hegemonic Work of Official Religious Definitions

One chief goal of all hegemonic ideological accounts is to essentialize their own definitions and ideas: this allows them to stabilize religious boundaries while covering over the situated source of those definitions and the particular relations of power those definitions promote. Mohler demonstrates well how official definitions can actively work

to promote this misrecognition of religious formations. In a blog entry arguing that Christians should not practice yoga, Mohler writes,

Yoga begins and ends with an understanding of the body that is, to say the very least, at odds with the Christian understanding. Christians are not called to empty the mind or to see the human body as a means of connecting to and coming to know the divine. Believers are called to meditate upon the Word of God — an external Word that comes to us by divine revelation — not to meditate by means of incomprehensible syllables. . . .

When Christians practice yoga, they must either deny the reality of what yoga represents or fail to see the contradictions between their Christian commitments and their embrace of yoga. The contradictions are not few, nor are they peripheral. The bare fact is that yoga is a spiritual discipline by which the adherent is trained to use the body as a vehicle for achieving consciousness of the divine. Christians are called to look to Christ for all that we need and to obey Christ through obeying his Word. We are not called to escape the consciousness of this world by achieving an elevated state of consciousness, but to follow Christ in the way of faithfulness. (“The Subtle Body”)

This short text illustrates two key components of hegemonic definitions.

First, a-historical, *essential* definitions of religion play a critical role in drawing boundaries and establishing relations of power. Mohler’s whole argument depends for its effect upon a number of definitional arguments that erase the fluidity of religious practice—Christianity is by definition a conscious and pure practice of knowing the divine; yoga is by definition an embodied and sexualized practice for knowing the divine; therefore, Christians should not practice yoga. In fact, Mohler actually defines yoga in universal and essential ways that deny the importance of lived practices. He does so by ascribing assumptions and understandings of yoga to contemporary practitioners that Mohler actually acknowledges they may not hold—and yet the “bare fact” is, what “Yoga begins and ends with,” “the reality of what yoga represents,” is that it is “heathen” (Mohler’s word). It is heathen because of its supposed point of origination: “yoga cannot

be fully extricated from its spiritual roots in Hinduism and Buddhism.” In the same way, Mohler confidently asserts essential definitions of Christianity that do not depend upon the recognition of practitioners: he writes that “Christians are called,” “believers are called,” and “Christians are called,” whether they know it or not, to practice religion in the ways Mohler asserts.

Second, hegemonic acts of self-definition often depend upon constructing an excluded *other* (which must also be defined on essential terms). Ironically, Mohler makes these ahistorical, essentializing assertions about yoga despite drawing his information from a source, Stefanie Syman, who appears to place careful emphasis upon historicity and cultural construction. She writes of contemporary yoga,

We had turned a technique for God realization that had, at various points in time, enjoined its adherents to reduce their diet to rice, milk, and a few vegetables, fix their minds on a set of, to us, incomprehensible syllables, and self-administer daily enemas (without the benefit of equipment), to name just a few of its prerequisites, into an activity suitable for children. Though yoga has no coherent tradition in India, being preserved instead by thousands of gurus and hundreds of lineages, each of which makes a unique claim to authenticity, we had managed to turn it into a singular thing: a way to stay healthy and relaxed. (Syman, qtd. in Mohler)

In this quotation at least, Syman represents yoga as precisely the sort of constructed, inessential formation that I’ve attempted to argue official evangelicalism also represents. Moreover, she ironically notes the American cultural construction of yoga by which an incoherent set of practices and “traditions” becomes “a singular thing: a way to stay healthy and relaxed.” And yet, using Syman’s very quotation as evidence, Mohler brazenly does what Syman mocks: he establishes that there is something “authentic” and “coherent” about yoga’s tradition that can be identified and used to define and exclude yoga from Christianity’s boundaries.

We can see two more components of hegemonic definitions in prominent evangelicals' response to the "Evangelical Manifesto" discussed in chapter two. We see that hegemonic definitions are *selective*. Many prominent conservative Evangelicals like (again) Mohler, Dobson, and Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council predictably and publicly refused to sign the Evangelical Manifesto, often on the explicit grounds that the document's definitional criteria were too inclusive or too exclusive. Their rebuttals to the Manifesto represent the dominant norms of evangelicalism they wish to defend, and clarify how well they understand the power of definitions to shape entire formations. Mohler actually admits that the document's description of evangelicalism might be accurate, but argues that the account nevertheless remains inadequately selective:

Another complication on this score comes from the fact that Evangelicals are identified as "one of the great traditions that have developed within the Christian Church over the centuries." There is a sense in which this is true, of course, but relegating the Evangelical understanding of the Gospel to just one among many Christian traditions undercuts our witness and sows seeds of confusion. ("An Evangelical Response")

In that complaint, we see that Mohler finds the Manifesto's construction of the Christian tradition not sufficiently *selective*. Even as he admits that the Manifesto's rendering of tradition might be historically accurate, he worries that it will not be satisfactorily persuasive. Accuracy, Mohler is saying, is not as important as effect.

Finally, hegemonic definitions are *exclusive*. Mohler complains, for instance, that the Evangelical Manifesto's definition of salvation "leaves out the question of the exclusivity of salvation to those who have come to Christ by faith. The use of the phrase 'for us' in strategic sentences," Mohler writes, "makes one wonder if room is left for some manner of inclusivism or universalism? The door is certainly not sufficiently closed." In a fitting last complaint, Mohler then worries that he himself has been

excluded from the Manifesto's definition of evangelicalism. The document, as we saw in chapter four, criticizes official evangelicals for its anti-intellectualism and its low view of science. He asks regarding these criticisms, "Who are these believers who represent 'caricatures of the false hostility between science and faith'?" The context would seem to implicate those who believe in a young earth cosmology. This represents millions of Evangelicals — perhaps by many surveys the vast majority. Are they (we) to be written out of Evangelicalism?" ("An Evangelical Response"). "Written out of Evangelicalism" is the right phrase—Mohler is rightly underlining the most important hegemonic function of definition: a linguistic exclusion can effect a social exclusion. And if that linguistic construct can be rendered *neutral* and natural (the function of ideology), then that social exclusion will also seem neutral and natural.

Recognizing Definition in Student Accounts of Religion

To provide the simplest of illustrations of how employing a transformational perspective in student writing might combat such hegemonic definitions—and accounts of those definitions—we can consider the best definition of evangelicalism heretofore offered by a student in our scholarship. Here's how a graduate student named Mona explains evangelicalism in Carter's article:

A myriad of beliefs and, subsequently, subgroups abound within the vaguely defined borders of Evangelical Christianity, however the expected beliefs are those espoused by the largest protestant denomination in America. These views are touted by Christian programs, held as mainstays by the political activist Christian groups, and echoed by grassroots Christians in the workplace. It is these views to which you must hold or at least not contradict if you are to be considered a "literate" member of the mainstream Evangelical movement." (586)

As I discussed above, the chief idea in translingual approaches is to help students recognize that language is always practical—working—rather than transcendent, transparent, or stable. Mona’s definition suggests that she is very cognizant of some of this work. First, we note her references to practical heterogeneity: “a myriad of beliefs,” “subgroups,” and “vaguely defined borders.” Further, she is successfully identifying several formational forces at work in the “mainstream Evangelical movement”—“touted by Christian programs,” “held...by political activist Christian groups,” “echoed by grassroots Christians.” Finally, she recognizes the definitional and exclusionary power exercised by particular institutions by using phrases like “borders,” “expected beliefs,” and “must hold or at least not contradict if you are to be considered a literate member.”

Mona apparently offered this information directly to Carter, rather than for an assignment: but Carter’s response, as she applies it to her undergraduate writing classrooms, is a concern to help students recognize their various communities’ orthodoxies “so that they don’t commit heretical acts” within them (586). As noted in chapter one, Carter wants to help students see the differences between academic and religious communities of practice so they can more effectively and safely shift back and forth between them, rather than having to abandon a valued community. She calls this giving students “some control over [their] environment” (586), but it sounds to me more like helping students fit into environments they cannot control. Our challenge, however, is to respond in a way that might also help Mona locate and activate the sources of transformation in evangelicalism.

I say this because even though Mona’s account seems to acknowledge the social power defining evangelicalism and sources of variation, there is no sign here that Mona

recognizes how and why evangelicalism *has changed, is changing, and will change*. Her definition right now presents us with a stable account of official evangelicalism and its definitions that does not fully acknowledge the processes of formation behind it. As such, in the end she offers up a static picture of evangelicalism that can be immediately appropriated and reified by Carter for politically accommodationist purposes. Mona's definition acknowledges heterogeneity, but not transformation—which, given the generalized dissatisfaction and sense of impotence felt by young Americans towards contemporary religion, is unsurprising. As I argue in chapters one and four, this apparent misrecognition indicates a pedagogical opportunity for writing instructors to help students like Mona wrestle with the dominant religious discourses in their lives.

A first option for de-stabilizing a hegemonic account of religion like this is to encourage students to compare multiple *official* definitions of a religion and highlight both the content and the social purposes of such accounts—focusing, then, on the intraformational conflict produced by definitions. A student like Mona might be encouraged, for example, to examine official definitions of evangelicalism like those offered by Mohler and compare those with the Evangelical Manifesto and definitions offered by Bielo's emergent evangelical informants. Or she might be encouraged to reflect on how various alternative definitions are offered by insider groups that form around competing discourses—for example, how evangelical feminist groups have selectively appropriated parts of evangelicalism's discourse in constructing their alternative accounts of evangelicalism, and the reasons for those choices. Students like Mona would then have the opportunity to note the competing claims on “true” and “essential” Christianity, deliberate on conflicts within religious formations, contemplate

the roles played by multiply-constituted identities and external cultural discourses in those conflicts, and situate themselves positively in relation to the account that they preferred.

Instructors can also approach official definitions as Raymond Williams suggests, by asking students to historicize those definitions and doctrines. Historicizing specific beliefs should be appealing to many instructors, given our own tendency to privilege doctrines and beliefs in definitions of conservative religion (discussed in earlier chapters), and even more so given the conservative religious establishment's heavily doctrine-centered self-representations. The hegemonic works—through us—by naturalizing and essentializing these definitions, so historicizing these definitions could acknowledge this habitual emphasis on doctrine while essentially using its momentum against itself. This would require noting how religious formations have developed through history as not only a set of ideas but as shifting sets of beliefs, behaviors, and consequences containing or attached to those shifting ideas. Moreover, it would require examining *why those shifts occurred*—that is, the transformative pressures exerted on religious formations.

How, for example, did the presence of Muslims shift how European Christianity defined religion, or how did the introduction of the printing press and concurrent shifts in cultural notions of textuality participate in changing definitions of the Bible? Students could examine how definitions have been used to include and exclude populations—to examine who would have counted as a Christian in Reformation England, who would today, and the sometimes-lethal consequences of being included or excluded. Balmer's accounts of American Christianity work to describe such historical shifts: in *Thy Kingdom Come*, for example, he describes how dominant religious positions on

evolution, education, political activism and even abortion underwent major shifts during the twentieth century in response to events including the Scopes trial and Ronald Reagan's presidential campaign. In Balmer's account, the ideas, beliefs and behaviors of American Christianities are represented as formational practices: produced to do specific work for the religious formation, in response to particular contextual forces. Such shifts were not simply in response to events like the Scopes trial or Ronald Reagan, Balmer argues throughout the book, but in response to shifts in public discourse—on science and education in one case, and in response to shifts in public policy regarding the taxing of religious institutions in the other, and so on. Our accounts should look to activate the same historical perspective on definitions if instructors and scholars intend to continue to focus on religious doctrines in published representations and classroom interactions.

Some idea of giving greater attention to students' *personal* definitions of religion has already been suggested by DePalma's recommendation that Thomas work out his "key words" through narrating personal experiences (237-8). To be more specific about what that means, however, from a transformational perspective I would want to do three things when I encountered students' key words or definitions. We can take the definition offered by Alex in Carter's article as an example: Alex writes, "I understand that academics look at facts and evidence. However, religion is mostly about *feeling*. If God wanted to, He could easily give us evidence that He exists. If He did, though, believing in him and trusting Him wouldn't be the same" (577, emphasis in original). I would want to help Alex connect this definition both to her experience and to a specific cultural context—to draw out the personal-social contexts connected to this definition.

So first, I would ask Alex to examine the *past* transformations that produced that definition for her. I might ask her, for example, how she arrived at this definition—Where has she seen that definition before? Was there a time when she believed that religion was a matter of facts and evidence? What changed her mind? Second, I could ask her about the work the definition *presently* does: What benefit does she derive from this definition? Does she know people who would disagree with her? Are they Christians or non-Christians? If she agreed with those others that religion *was* a matter of facts and evidence, or was *not* a matter of feeling, would she still be able to be a practicing Christian? Third, a transformational approach would ask Alex about the potential work she could do *on* the definition. Moving from a retrospective account of definitional transformations to a forward-looking transformational account, I might also ask Alex to pursue one alternative definition of religion and imagine its short-term or long-term consequences on her life (past, present or future), then to reflect afterwards upon her reasons for accepting or rejecting that new definition in light of its transformative potential.

Another transformational response would be to encourage a student like Alex to examine how academic and religious formations define *shared* cultural terms, exploring how the formations work on one another through these definitions. Mahmood's discussion of the Mohammed cartoon controversy (above) might help us to initiate this sort of investigation. If she were encouraged to read Mahmood's explanation of the religious conflicts created by differing definitions of seemingly non-religious terms like representation, instructors could then ask Alex, to deliberate on the definitions of other key terms in her above description: facts, evidence, feeling, believing, trusting. These

words clearly do not have stable, singular meanings, and the words are continually transported from context to context. Alex's definition indicates some of those cross-formational movements between religion and academia that we could deliberate on. For example, some might argue that the evidence for God *is* the feeling that Alex describes. Pointing this out highlights the way Alex's definition of evidence and facts depends upon modernist scientific epistemologies, and highlights the way that modernist epistemology causes her to place religious knowledge in a different category from academic knowledge (for good or for ill). Instructors might also discuss how Alex's definitions of Christian believing and trusting as actions taken in the absence of facts and evidence—definitions glossed by Carter as “faith” (578)—contribute to precisely the dismissal of faith as “anti-intellectual” that Carter complains about (578). If Alex were to re-define facts and evidence in less Cartesian ways, or if she and Carter were to re-define faith as an action taken in the *presence* of evidence (emphasizing faith as the relational concept of “trust” over the more cognitive concept of “belief”), how would this change the relationship between the academy and religion Alex has conceptualized? What risk would this present to Alex or her religious commitments, or what challenges might this present to the intellectual divide that ghetto-izes religion, in Carter's mind? Carter herself sets about doing this work, attempting to re-present the relationship between academic and religious knowing to instructors. She does not assist Alex in re-considering her definition. But doesn't Alex, a Christian graduate student, need this opportunity to re-present the relations between academic and religious definitions just as much as secular instructors do?

III. The Transformational Work of Mediation in Religious Formations

Another key term for thinking through the forces producing religious transformation is *mediation*. Keane points out that even if religion is *just* language and ideas as some Western conceptions might suggest, those ideas still must take material form in order to be shared between people: “like everything else, [they only] circulate insofar as they have some medium” (*Christian Moderns* 42). In the “Evidence of the Senses,” Keane argues that even religious beliefs rely on material practices for their transmission—as he writes, “With the possible exception of divine revelation unmediated by any prior practices, institutions, or discourses (but even then, it must take a semiotic form if it is to go further), belief ontogenically follows on practice” (S116-17). Mediation actually enables religion’s transmission and reproduction across space and time, entailing both the potential conservation and transformation of the religious discourse—“even the most spiritualized of scriptural religions teach doctrines through concrete activities, such as catechisms, sermons, scripture-reading, exegesis” (S117). New assumptions do not simply appear in the consciousness of the Urapmin Robbins studies—they arrive in material form and are taken up, practiced, and circulated in and by other material forms.

In keeping with this assertion, Birgit Meyer and the other sociologists in her edited collection *Aesthetic Formations* have demonstrated across a wide range of religious groups—including groups practicing Bahian Candomble, Brazilian Pentecostalism, Islam in Bangladesh, Tamil mythology (mixtures of Hinduism), Canção Nova (Catholicism), Ghanaian Pentecostalism, the Raelian movement (UFO religion), and Venezuelan Pentecostalism—the ways that religious formations depend upon, re-appropriate, and are shaped by material objects. Meyer and her contributors emphasize,

for example, the role of traditionally understood “media” as sensational forms that mediate religious experience—they describe how sermon cassettes, videos, cards, worship music, and the like are all used by religious adherents to relate to the supernatural as well as to strengthen the bonds within their religious community. In his book-length ethnography, *Emerging Evangelicals*, Bielo has made similar observations about American evangelicals (74-75).

Taking the term media more broadly, I propose here that a mediated lens for understanding a religious discourse such as evangelicalism could help us focus on the literally *material* aspects of religion: 1) bodies and bodily practices 2) other material objects, such as buildings, clothing, relics, and photographs 3) traditional “media” including podcasts, books, songs, YouTube videos, and blogs. Focusing on these circulating material forms (bodies, objects, media) as mediators can help writers represent the transmission, provocation, regularization, and disruption of shared religious sensibilities and practices that shape historical formations. In order to successfully recognize and represent religious mediators in this way, there are a few transformational keys: first, recognizing their *necessity* for the religious formation; second, recognizing how their very materiality renders mediators instable, *unpredictable* transmitters of religion (introducing change and variation into the religious formation); third, recognizing how various religious formations relate to mediators in different ways through their *practices*, which introduces a further source of instability and difference; fourth, recognizing how various religious formations *manage* mediators’ instability in different ways, again introducing a further source of instability and difference into religious formations; and fifth, recognizing how all of these unstable aspects of religious

mediators render religious practitioners and formations always susceptible to *creativity* and *change*. We can see these five keys by analyzing a pair of anecdotes from anthropologists studying religion.

Matthew Engelke's *A Problem of Presence* is an anthropological study of religious mediation in an African Christian movement, the Friday Church Masowe, in Zimbabwe. The Friday Church Masowe explicitly reject the use of the Bible in their religious practice because they strive for a direct and unmediated relationship with God (2-3). The Masowe, as radical immaterialists, try to shun material objects that they perceive to inflect their relationship to God: those which cannot be trusted, which may produce unpredictable results and by doing so produce evidence that their channel is not entirely clear for the pure transmission of God's presence, are rejected for use in religious practice (3). In this way, the Masowe actually take to its logical conclusion Western definitions of signs and religion I discussed above. But the Masowe cannot eschew the use of all material vehicles, no matter how hard they try. As Engelke rightly demonstrates throughout the text, "The repudiation of the material is a selective process" (224). So throughout his text Engelke investigates the material vehicles that the Masowe *will* incorporate into their services—the spoken word, songs, healings, rituals, holy water, pebbles, holy honey, white robes, and prophets, along with their *mumiriri wemweya*—and the ways that these material vehicles exert their own force on the religious practitioners, in spite of all attempts at relegating them to neutral intermediaries.

The Masowe are in a difficult position because within their struggles to locate objects that simply transmit (without bending, integrating, or inflecting) religion, they keep running against the materiality and sociality of those objects. For example, the

Masowe perform healings using jars of holy honey, supposed to draw all of their medically healing properties from the church's ritualistic infusion of the Holy Spirit's power in prayer (226-8). The honey, in and of itself, is a neutral vessel, an intermediary through which the Holy Spirit does all the healing. But then one day a church member asks Engelke to loan him some holy honey blessed specifically to treat Engelke's illness. But the church member is only looking to get through a long day at work (227). Even church members know the honey really is not an intermediary, despite all the official discourse—members know practically that the honey can have effects apart from the Spirit's power, and no amount of official discourse to the contrary can regulate the practical use of honey. The Spirit may act upon honey eaters, but so does the honey. It is a mediator, which by its variable action and variable relations with practitioners constantly troubles the official account that would obscure the practical work that the honey does in declaring it a transparent intermediary.

Bielo provides an excellent discussion highlighting how American evangelicals deal variably with the problem of mediation. In *Emerging Evangelicals*, he describes how particular groups of American evangelicals use bodies, objects, and texts differently—detailing, for instance, how and why emergent evangelicals make heavy and deliberate use of quotidian found objects and multi-sensory experiences in their worship (see especially pp. 70-97). He describes uses of “lint brushes, globes, sand, bricks, bags, sugar, stones, and sponges . . . Lint brushes roll off sin, prayers are placed onto their destinations, bricks are lifted and removed, and sponges soak while stones sink” (95). Despite their positive and deliberate incorporation of mediators into their worship, Bielo finds his evangelical informants are aware—and wary—of this risky relationship. So they

attempt to change out the found objects they utilize in worship regularly so as to not sediment too much power in those objects or risk changing the relationship people have with them (96). The informants know—though Bielo seems to pass over this—that they are not simply using the objects to relate to God (the primary goal [96]) but entering into relationship with the objects themselves in ways that are not entirely predictable. So as a protection against losing control of that relationship—in order to maintain the items in a place where “they are not dismissed, they are not special”—“none are retained for very long or treated with any reverence” (96). Given that religious informants (from the Masowe who distrust media to the emerging evangelicals who privilege them) are clearly concerned with what objects will do to people and their faith, we must not fail to take objects equally seriously in our studies of how religion changes.

Mediation Misrecognized: Obscuring Mediation in Official Accounts of Religion

Naturally, another effect of hegemonic ideology is rendering a formation’s transmission processes—that is, its mediators—transparent. In Western religions like Christianity and particularly in official evangelical strains, this often occurs through the de-emphasis of religion’s materiality. In his thoughtful account of Christianity’s arrival in Papua-New Guinea, Keane traces the historical development of a broadly Western view of religion “which identified it ‘as a set of propositions to which believers gave assent’ . . . a matter not of material disciplines or of ritual practices, for example, but of subjective beliefs” (*Christian Moderns* 67). Keane argues that this construction of *religion* also defines *language* in certain ways: in such religious formations, he writes, “language functions primarily (and properly) to refer to or denote objects in a world that lies apart

from it, in order to communicate ideas that lie within one person to another listener or reader” (67). And from within this hegemonic account of religion, religious beliefs too are understood primarily in referential terms—they affirm something about the world (“Reflections” 245). Explaining what this account of religion achieves, Keane writes that Christian leaders since John Calvin have been trying to “play down the materiality of semiotic form in order to arrive at a disembodied spirit, a pure idea, or an unsullied faith” (79).

This attempted purification, as Asad constructs it, is an attempt at obscuring the social contingencies that threaten hegemonic religious authority. Such accounts erase the historicity and transformativity of religion in order to arrive at something essential, universal, and unchanging. To be clear, focusing on belief is not all bad—the problem is failing to recognize that beliefs (and orthodox beliefs) are dependent upon social conditions for their constitution and thus intrinsically changing. The reality, Asad argues, is that social conditions continually transform religion, religious beliefs, and even the definitions of belief that religions operate with:

Changes in the object of belief change that belief, and as the world changes so do the objects of belief, and the specific forms of bafflement and moral paradox, which are a part of the world. What the Christian believes today about God, life after death, the universe, is not what he believed 800 years ago—nor is the way he responds to ignorance, pain, and injustice the same now as it was then. (“Reflections” 247)

He explains, then, that the proper focus for a religious scholar is on material conditions and social processes, because social “disciplines are *preconditions* for specific forms of thought and action, but they must be taught and learnt, and are therefore themselves dependent on a range of social institutions and material conditions” (251, emphasis

mine). Power relations and social conditions cannot be separated from beliefs—and thus any definition that asserts otherwise serves hegemonic ends by concealing those relations.

On hegemonic belief-centered accounts, religion *transcends* human action and historical change; the religion has an enduring essence referenced by ideas that can correspond perfectly to an eternal reality; humans' perceived ability to change the religion is constrained (only the humans can change, because God and his perfect earthly representation needn't); the possibility of a true and accurate knowledge arises as an ideal, and is echoed in the possibility of a single, common-sense meaning for all Biblical language; arguments over definition, belief, and correctness become possible and then central to the religious formation. This account of religion and language lends force to whatever is the official doctrine at a given moment, which can claim to transcend its historical formation and instead declare itself true in reference to an eternal ideal. Those in power can then demand belief from adherents. This belief can only be signified by verbal assent, so that words must now do two things faithfully in order for those in authority to feel assured of their control: words must *faithfully express interiority*, and words must *faithfully refer to reality*.

We can see how this conjunction between pure beliefs and pure language produces hegemonic effects by returning to official evangelicalism and Mohler's argument against yoga. Mohler's privileged form of religion, "Christianity," is defined as conscious and linguistically centered while in contrast yoga is embodied and privileges other forms of knowing. As he writes, setting up the boundary between Christianity and yoga, "Christians are not called to empty the mind or to see the human body as a means of connecting to and coming to know the divine. Believers are called to meditate upon the

Word of God — an external Word that comes to us by divine revelation” (“The Subtle Body”). Mohler explains this transparent process elsewhere in the short pamphlet entitled “The Pastor as Theologian,” which I reference in chapter three. For Mohler, the transparent transportation of meaning through language is guaranteed by the work of the Holy Spirit. He writes,

Through the preaching of the Word of God, the congregation is fed substantial theological doctrine *directly* from the biblical text. . . . The divine agent of this *transfer* is the Holy Spirit, who opens hearts, eyes and ears to hear, understand and receive the Word of God. The preacher’s responsibility is to be clear, specific, systematic and comprehensive in setting out the biblical convictions that are drawn from God’s Word . . . (“The Pastor as Theologian” 9-10, emphasis mine)

In his book on emergent evangelicals, Bielo cites another prominent conservative evangelical theologian, pastor, seminary president, and popularizing author—John MacArthur—who also articulates this view of biblical language. In a radio interview, MacArthur says,

. . . we’re talking about how do you interpret the meaning of the Bible? It’s really not that hard. It’s not brain surgery. You use the normal sense of the language. You just see what the language says like you do, how do you interpret a conversation? Or, how do you interpret an old document? We’re talking simply about how we discern what it means by what it says. (*Emerging Evangelicals* 58)

To the extent that religious language transparently refers to a religion that is perceived to exist separately from the language but can be represented accurately in “that normal sense of the language,” this account enables several of the hegemonic practices evident in official evangelical discourse. The *direct (pure) transfer* of religious knowledge by way of *clear (pure) language*, enabled by the Holy Spirit, allows for the progressive *purification* of religion as beliefs are corrected and as heretics are excluded. And it does so while making human religious *authority* transparent (pure): if Mohler and

MacArthur are successful in arguing that their interpretation is natural and common-sense, then in declaring Biblical truth and establishing Biblical mandates they are purely speaking for God, not from crass material motives or a desire for power. Moreover, alternative understandings must be corruptions, not of God, and can be rejected out of hand. Hegemony thus draws power from obscuring mediation and positing stability: both the physical materiality of communication, the material conditions shaping those communications, and the agendas of the communicators must be removed from consideration if official evangelical leaders like MacArthur and Mohler are to continue speaking for God and authoritatively excluding and including beliefs, people and practices from religion.

While arguments directly challenging this privileged status of language (and in turn, destabilizing particular beliefs) can be appealing and by 2012 have become increasingly easy for writing instructors to make,¹⁷ I'm not convinced they represent our best option when we encounter religious discourse that enacts this logic. Pointing out interpretive variability without first combating the idealist removal of religion from materiality mostly seems to produce a logic of corruption or variation (as seen in Rand's argument in chapter one), not genuine instability. It leaves the hegemonic logic of religion as an immaterial idea largely intact—and it's that logic, not just an approach to language *per se*, that maintains power relations by masking religion's transformational capacities. Appeals to divine revelation, further, produce a loophole for those in power that arguments over hermeneutics simply can't overcome. Making matters worse, given the direct accounts of language-as-common-sense offered by official evangelical leaders

¹⁷ See Perkins

and formative documents, adopting a strategy that emphasizes language's instability is likely to be seen as a direct attack on religion. This is why in the rest of this chapter I want to focus instead on how instructors might attend to the elements of religious literacy acquisition that dominant representatives like Mohler wish to leave out—the body, things, and other people, for instance—and on highlighting how they are involved in the process of acquiring the right religious knowledges, feelings, and experiences (literacy). I believe these approaches provide students and instructors with alternative, somewhat indirect means of challenging the hegemonic status of pure religious language and knowledge within evangelicalism. They also provide students and instructors with new, positive terms for representing religious practices, getting them outside of largely oppositional and unending arguments over doctrine and hermeneutics.

Recognizing Mediation in Student Accounts of Religion—Objects

If instructors want to help students challenge or at least de-naturalize hegemonic accounts that divorce religion from change and power relations by making its social transmission appear transparent, our responses to them need to highlight the unstable material (physical and social) processes involved in religious literacy and learning. One potentially useful strategy for doing this is to ask religious students who incorporate religious texts to deliberate on their own relations with those texts, as objects, in light of Latour's distinction between mediators and intermediaries (*Reassembling* 39). Making any sort of strong distinction between the two—stating, for instance, that the Bible is an intermediary rather than a mediator, as some evangelicals might, requires a significant amount of definitional work—establishing criteria, compiling evidence, etcetera. Instead

of asking students to make a fast distinction, or arguing with students about which their sacred text is, I think it might be more useful to ask students to define both terms and then attempt to find ways in which it might enact both roles. For example, Alex tells Carter how she and her cousins carried their Bibles to school every day in high school in hopes that “when the time came, we could use it to help others become saved” (576). Alex also tells of quoting the Bible throughout an academic paper and failing, then removing those quotes and succeeding—“I did nothing but remove the quotes and my paper received an A” (577). While not everything falls neatly into the category of intermediary and mediator or remains within either category—in fact, Latour argues that things move back and forth in accordance with the relationship actors have with them—using those theoretical categories might help Alex to deliberate on her experience so as to highlight how the Bible’s effects change as it relates to individuals in various contexts.

In the high school anecdote, Alex constructs the Bible as simply a tool for use “when the time came.” In that sense, Alex constructs the Bible as an intermediary she could deploy for specific purposes at moments she chose. But we could ask if the Bible doing other work during the school day, apart from Alex’s intentions? Was it acting as a mediator? Were other students, for example, attributing a religious identity to Alex because of that Bible? Was it creating a community for her? Or was the Bible actually acting as a mediator that helped irreligious high school students know to *avoid* being evangelized by Alex, who kept waiting for a time to come that the Bible itself kept from occurring? She might be encouraged to consider alternative actions and effects the Bible was having while she carried it as a tool—as if the shovel she was carrying to dig a hole might have knocked over a few passers-by on the way. And did she carry the same Bible

all those years? What relationship did she have to that *particular* Bible? I remember when a pocket Gideon Bible I owned in high school (I carried mine everywhere too) went through the wash. I was so distraught over the destruction of a *free* book that I cooked it in the oven to try and dry it out. The Bible in this case took on properties beyond an intermediary for delivering informational content—my relationship was also with the object itself.

In responding to Alex's experience of removing biblical quotations from her college paper, we could also examine the transformational relations between academic and religious discourses the account indicates. Alex's purported attempt to use the Bible as an intermediary (simply useful as evidence for her arguments) was foiled because the instructor's relationship with the Bible was beyond her control. The Bible again worked differently than Alex had hoped—making it a mediator—or perhaps not. Perhaps, as Goodburn and others are suggesting, Alex was aware of the likely effect of the Bible on her professor and was challenging or even *testing* her professor. So instructors could challenge Alex to consider how the Bible, as a cultural object with variable meaning, mediated the relations between Alex and her professor. But then, Alex might also be encouraged to consider what it means that she was able to make her argument successfully for an academic audience without doing *anything*, she said, but removing the Bible quotations. For the professor, removing the Bible positively transformed Alex's argument. And given that Alex changed nothing else in the essay, it would appear that the essay was ostensibly coherent and persuasive without her Biblical quotations. Alex's argument after the citations were removed became simultaneously biblical (no arguments were scrubbed out when the quotations were erased) and academic (it's academic logic

received an A). This forces a reconsideration of the relationship between academic and religious discourses—perhaps in this one case at least it was the Bible, not the logic, that created conflict. But it also allows Alex to go back and look at the document—what, specifically, was lost to the document, or to Alex, when the Bible was erased from the text. Why is she still angry about it?

Instructors might also ask Alex about the transformational agency (specifically, salvific agency) she attributed to the Bible. Alex says she and her cousins carried the Bible “so we could use it to help others become saved.” This is a fascinating syntactical construction that establishes four sets of unstable relations Alex could probe by thinking through a specific witnessing experience she might have had. In that experience, what were the relations she imagined between herself and the Bible—how specifically did *she use it, and why* in those ways? What were the relations between Alex and the other person—how specifically did she *help that person* become saved? What were the relations between the Bible and the other person—how specifically did it help? And finally, what were the salvific relations between Alex, the Bible, God, and the other person?—after all, she does not say they save themselves, nor does she say that they get saved, but she *uses the Bible to help* them *become* saved, a curious distribution of agency.

Having thought through these assignments of agency, instructors might ask Alex to examine the transformational properties of this encounter in the past, present, future mode I described earlier. First, what was the cultural or experiential source of these understandings and the evangelistic practices that stemmed from them? Who taught those attitudes to her, and if no one did, where did she acquire them? Second, instructors could ask her to consider the consequences of those attitudes and practices towards the Bible in

concrete encounters. Third, since Alex is reporting on a past behavior towards the Bible as object, instructors could ask her to construct a narrative of her relationship with the Bible, or to simply compare that high school relationship to other relationships from other points in her life (including using it as a source of evidence in a college paper). She could borrow from a variety of genres and sources to craft these representations, but the question would remain generally the same: in what ways, and for what reasons, have her relations with the Bible changed—and how have those related to other changes in her life?

Recognizing Mediation in Student Accounts of Religion—Sponsors

In attempting to highlight the mediated nature of religious literacy acquisition, instructors' responses can also focus students' attentions on the social disciplinary relationships their writings describe. Though the language is different, the mediators that Engelke, Keane, Meyer and Bielo depict aren't too far from Deborah Brandt's conception of sponsors—at least not as regards the role that they play in transforming religious formations and religious individuals. For her project on literacy, Brandt defines sponsors as “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy—and gain an advantage by it” (17). As she explains, “Sponsors are delivery systems for the economies of literacy, the means by which these forces present themselves to—and through—individual learners” (17). It will prove helpful below to also think of mediation in terms of sponsorship to help us draw out the *power relations* imbricated in the transmission and distribution of religious practices from sponsors to individual practitioners.

Here's James, another student from Carter's class, explaining the discipline he underwent at church:

Before I was [just] a child that went to church. I believed the Bible was something you read if you weren't sure that you were going to heaven [. . .] so I never read it. But one day I started to mature from a child that went to church to a churchly child. I started to understand the older Christians and the purpose of being a Christian and the role that the Bible played in a Christian's life. All because one day . . . I felt it was my job to be the clown. . . . When my mother . . . saw me acting like a fool she came slapped me in the back of the head in front of all my friends and maid me go to the front of the church to sit with the senior saints. . . . I couldn't even fall asleep because the old ladies wouldn't let me because they would either pinch to wake me or be making too much noise praising the Lord so I had to listen to the message. . . . I mean don't get me wrong I always heard the Message but I actually listened that time. . . . That's how the front pue saved my life. (575, all ellipses original)

James explains further in an interview in Carter's office: "It's like this. A *child who just goes to church* is an illiterate Christian because he can't *feel* it. He may feel something somewhere else, like in school with his friends or at work, but that feeling ain't the Lord because he's not in his House. A *churchly child*, though, he [is] literate because he can *feel* it. Like I felt it" (576).

James's literacy narrative, ostensibly an essay describing the Bible, was written for an assignment "to describe an object that best represented literacy for [him]" (575). But instead of talking about his relation to the Bible as a representation or even a sponsor of literacy, James's story is really consumed with *other* mediators, and with tactile, affective, and aural discipline. He describes being hit on the back of the head, being embarrassed, being placed in the front pew, being pinched by old women, and being kept awake by their noise. All of these acts of discipline—physical, emotional, spatial, aural—are acts of sponsorship (really, authoritative discipline) that enable James to acquire religious knowing and religious ways of being. The experience, knowledge, and

relationship with God that James acquires—together, his personal transformation into a religious literate—are not directly transported into his mind through the intermediary Bible, the mediational Holy Spirit, or even the clear instruction of the pastor: instead, a broad set of indirect mediators enables James' religious literacy. Recognizing this directly challenges the exclusionary power claimed by those who would render religious literacy immediate and self-evident.

What's more, these mediations are performed mostly by the women of James's community, and thus women's leadership is strongly indicated as a cause for James's achievement of religious "feeling" and religious literacy. As he says, those sponsors caused him to "really listen," rather than goofing off or falling asleep (which he calls merely hearing the Message), and thereby "the front pue saved my life" (575). Further, James spends a lot of time elaborating on the importance of place—the feeling must occur in the Lord's House, or it's not the feeling. In this way, even the church building (and even specifically the front pew) becomes a mediator necessary for James's acquisition of religious discourse. Emphasizing all these mediators might encourage James to challenge official accounts of Christianity through his representation of religious transformations. In a revision he might, for example, be encouraged to represent his experience in a way that highlights the practical role of women and material forms in the church; deliberate on how these sponsorships do or don't align with official religious discourse on gender relations, say, or the practical importance of a Christian's material surroundings through locating primary documents distributed by religious institutions; and even potentially draw in traditional academic research on the changing historical relationships between African-Americans, women, and Christian churches. Tracing

mediators, then, might help students represent a different set of practical relationships and hierarchies within a church than the official discourse offers.

Another revision suggestion might focus on alternative routes to religious literacy, which could help James develop the contingency and choice that are implicated in acquiring religious discourse in these mediated ways. For instance, he could be encouraged to construct alternative narratives exploring what would have happened if the pews had been more comfortable, or if there had been children's services at church, or if he had been at a church where demonstrative forms of worship were not acceptable. We could challenge him to do either first or second-hand ethnographic research on how other sorts of Christians acquire religious literacy absent those factors, and deliberate by comparing his experience to theirs on the differences between not only the processes, but the products. In what ways are the properly religious dispositions of a member of a largely white, Midwestern Reformed congregation different from those in James' community? To what mediating factors does James assign responsibility for these differences? Do they matter?

A third avenue of response could challenge James to think about the power relationships and advantages gained through his religious sponsorship. What motivation does he think the senior section had for pinching him and helping him to acquire religious discourse? What does the church gain from his membership? What does he gain through membership—perhaps, I would specify, what besides salvation? Finally, any writer hoping to represent James's acquisition of religious discourse as transformative must identify not only his wide variety of sponsors, but also the specific work that *he* did in these interactions with sponsors to help him acquire the religious discourse. One could

ask James, for instance, how he altered his practices from that day forward in order to maintain the feeling he describes and the ways of seeing that determine his relation to the Bible. This might entail asking him to construct a new narrative that focuses not on a single transformative event, but on religious transformation as a continual process—describing how his attitudes, practices, feelings and beliefs have changed over the years since that day that he became a churchly child. To be properly transformational, James would need to identify not only how they've changed, but *why*—what new discourses, events, and sponsors does he think caused those changes? Who's done the work? And finally, looking forward to the work he can do *on* his religious experience and discourse, one could ask James to consider how this new understanding of religious sponsorship does or should affect the way *he* sponsors other people—in what ways might he use this knowledge to become a better religious sponsor for others, or in what ways has this new knowledge changed or damaged his relations with his religious community? And in what ways does this new, academic construction of religious literacy acquisition fail to hold up when interrogated in light of his religious experience?

IV. Recognizing the Transformational Work of Sensation in Religious Formations

A third type of media that I mention above, but do not discuss in detail, is the body: so here in this final section I focus on the role of the body and bodily practices in religious formations. I believe instructors must focus on how religious formations help adherents to acquire the “right” feelings, or sensations (that is, making strange the processes by which religious practitioners themselves must be transformed). Looking back at James's account, we can see how his experience challenges writing scholars and

instructors to focus more closely on this issue. Carter notes that James’s representation of Christian literacy hinges on a “feeling that only other literate Christians can experience or understand” (576), which points to the crucial articulation of feeling with information in religious literacy. Again, we can begin from the work of Meyer. In her work on mediation, she explicitly focuses on the sensational level of formation, and usefully focuses on Evangelical Christians, a group that we might not normally associate with a religion of the senses (regarding sensation, see also Mauss; Bourdieu; Jackson; Luhmann). In fact, as Mohler demonstrates, official evangelical discourse works to dissociate Christianity from sensational practices: “Christians are not called to empty the mind or to see the human body as a means of connecting to and coming to know the divine” (“The Subtle Body”). Meyer demonstrates convincingly, however, that sensation is not only included, but is actually at the *center* of many evangelicals’ religious practice. Moreover, she notes that for many evangelical Christians, the ability to experience certain sensations arises through “authorized and socially shared practices and techniques” rather than immediately. In “Aesthetics of Persuasion” Meyer describes these practices,

through which born again Christians are enabled to sense the presence of the Holy Spirit *with* and *in* their bodies wherever they are and to act upon this sensation . . . sensations of the divine do not happen out of the blue but require the existence of a particular shared religious aesthetic through which the Holy Spirit becomes accessible and ‘sense-able’.
 (“Indispensability”)

These acquired sensibilities enable participants to physically experience—that is, sense—new aspects of reality with their bodies.

One of the closest studies of these Evangelical sensibilities and their acquisition comes from Luhmann, who studied an Evangelical Christian congregation in California. Luhmann argues that while we in the academy have largely focused our attention on the

beliefs of Christians (particularly about the truth status of the Bible), “it is at least as important that the new U.S. religious practices put intense spiritual experience—above all, trance—at the heart of the relationship with God” (“Metakinesis” 518). She also notes, “The most interesting anthropological phenomenon in U.S. evangelical Christianity is precisely that it is *not* words *alone* that convert: Instead, congregants—even in ordinary middle-class suburbs—learn to have out-of-the-ordinary experiences and to use them to develop a remarkably, intimate, personal God” (518).

So in contrast to official evangelicalism’s heavy emphasis upon doctrine, for many Evangelical adherents “relationship,” not doctrine, seems to be the focus of their practical religious discourse. And it’s this relational construction of religious practice that explains for Luhrmann why sensational practices are so important to the Evangelical Christians she studies: “the goal of worship is to develop a relationship with God. Developing that relationship is explicitly presented as the process of getting to know a person who is distinct, external, and opaque, and whom you need to get to know in the ordinary way” (525). Luhrmann compares falling in love with Jesus to “the intense love of early adolescence” (523). Religious adherents in Luhrmann’s study consistently described the process as “falling in love with Jesus,” and achieving “peace,” both of which Luhrmann specifically identifies as bodily dispositions (523, 524). This emphasis on learning to have experiences, crucially, denaturalizes religious experiences and the relationships with God that depend upon them—creating space for the inherent change and participatory agency we want to inject into representations.

These dispositions emerge through and perpetuate practitioners’ ongoing love relationship with God, but don’t emerge spontaneously. Writing with Nusbaum and

Thisted, Luhmann argues they actually depend upon a set of social disciplines and individual labor within those disciplines.

it takes effort to accept that a particular interpretation of the supernatural is correct, and it takes effort to live in accordance with that interpretation—to live as if they really do believe that their understanding is accurate. It requires learning, and the learning can be a slow process, like learning to speak a foreign language in an unfamiliar country, with new and different social cues. That learning is often stumbling and gradual for those who convert, take on new roles, or go through an initiation process. People must come to see differently, to think differently, and above all to feel differently, because to believe in a particular form of the supernatural as if the supernatural is truly present is, for most believers, to experience the world differently than if that form of the supernatural were not real. (Luhmann, Nusbaum, Thisted 67)

Maintaining this relationship through seeing, thinking, and feeling differently is difficult, and must be acquired and worked at by religious practitioners. The relationship and the sensations are thus the products of a continual learning process. Luhmann's findings suggest there are three different types of learning involved in contemporary U.S. evangelical Christian practice: cognitive/linguistic, metakinetic, and relational.

“Together, they enable new believers to do something quite remarkable—to construct, out of everyday psychological experience, the profound sense that they have a really real relationship with a being that cannot be seen, heard, or touched” (“Metakinesis” 519).

In terms of language, Luhmann discusses lexical, syntactic, and narrative knowledges that religious adherents utilize to represent, construct, and disseminate their personal relationship with God. She notes two lexical elements particularly: one, “walk with God,” describes the ongoing relationship Christians have with God; the other, “Word of God,” “refers overtly to the written Bible, but it connotes the loving, personal, and unique relationship congregants believe God has with each individual Christian.” One man, for instance, describes the Bible as “a love story [. . .] written to me” (521).

The man turns a generally available text into a personal communication of sorts—and importantly, does so through particular interpretive texts. Luhrmann also notes that evangelical Christian congregants train to acquire and maintain these relational practices in part through official forms of discourse. Luhrmann’s “syntax” is closer to logic, or themes. These broad themes include, for instance, the assumption that being a Christian, praying, and the like are difficult: “These Christians expect that prayer does not come easily and naturally. It is a skill that must be learned, as a relationship to God must also be learned” (522). Finally, there are the narratives, and again Luhrmann cites one chief narrative: “I was lost, so deeply lost, so lost that no one could love me—and then God did, and I was found” (522).

Language also participates in transmitting metakinetic, or sensational, practices. Descriptions are used, she finds, to transmit and codify sensational practices and experiences, which are often “identified, labeled, and discussed” in books, seminars, small groups, and sermons. At least within this congregation, the practical is articulated (identified, labeled, discussed) so that it can be shared—whether it ever reaches the level of official discourse or not. Although Luhrmann notes that individuals seem to develop their own heterogeneous versions of the authorized practices, codifying articulation can inform and disseminate these sensational experiences that “mark God’s spiritual reality in their lives” (525). Luhrmann calls the bodily awareness that results from these practices “metakinetic.” Reversing direction, metakinetic skills are also dynamically involved in making linguistic practices relationally significant. For example, Luhrmann’s research into sensation points out the ways the Bible is also a love story written *by* that man referenced above—that is, she attributes his and other practitioners’ ability to have this

experience and understanding of the Bible to their embodied skills. If the Bible is to be a personal love story, practitioners must first acquire the “ability to identify their own bodily reactions as indicating God’s responsiveness as they read the Bible, and as they pray” (525). This use of sensation to develop a relationship with God, through language, was widespread in the large congregation that Luhrmann studied: she notes, “all congregants spontaneously associated the process of ‘getting to know Jesus’—which one does through prayer and reading the Bible—with occasional experiences that involved heightened emotions and unusual sensory and perceptual experiences and that they identified, labeled, and discussed” (523).

In learning metakinetic skills, adherents “seem to be engaging in a variety of bodily processes that are integrated in new ways and synthesized into a new understanding of their bodies and the world”—processes that can alter attentional focus, sensory perceptions, and changes in mood (522). The most prevalent metakinetic skill, according to Luhrmann, is learning to “build a personal relationship to God through prayer” (522). This prayer is “the conduit of anomalous psychological experiences” (523) achieved through attendance and trance. Luhrmann writes that adherents “attend to the stream of their own consciousness like eager fishermen, scanning for the bubbles and whorls that suggest a lurking catch” (523). Adherents “become intensely absorbed in inner sensory stimuli and lose some peripheral awareness” (523). In addition, Luhrmann discusses the experience of sensory hallucinations—hearing voices, feeling pushes, and the like. Nearly half of Luhrmann’s interviewees cited such experiences (524). In whatever form, metakinetic learning allows congregants “to learn to pay attention to the fragmentary chaos of conscious awareness in a new way” and “learn to identify and

highlight these moments of discontinuity and . . . come to understand these moments as signs of God's presence in their lives" (524). As Luhrmann notes, these emotional and bodily experiences "mark God's spiritual reality in their lives" (525). She explains,

Metakinetic states—when God gives you peace, speaks to you outside your head, when you feel that He carries you down to the altar—give a kind of real reality to God because they create the experience of social exchange between opaque individuals, between individuals who cannot read each other's minds and must exchange goods or words in order to become real to each other, in order to know each other's intentions. (525)

In this way, through the media of their own socially-disciplined bodies, even run-of-the-mill American evangelical Christians achieve new religious sensations, modes of consciousness, and dispositions that help them "create a personal relationship that feels to them authentic, intimate, and mutually reciprocal with an intentional being who does not exhibit any of the normal signs of existence" (520).

Sensation Misrecognized: Mysticizing Sensation in Official Accounts of Religion

But, as I discussed with regards to DePalma in chapter one, hegemonic accounts of religion and experience in America tend to misrecognize these embodied experiences and feelings as natural and spontaneous. While the connection may not at first be obvious, I'd like to connect this misrecognition to Alex's distinction, discussed earlier, between "my faith-based religious views" and "my fact-based academic view of the world" (Carter 576). Although Alex understands herself as practicing both stances, she nevertheless posits a divide between the two formations, in that "academics look at facts and evidence" while "religion is mostly about *feeling*"—it literally can't be a matter of knowledge because God's material presence would change the nature of belief and trust (576). Writing studies has focused much attention on this division, and to the concept of

religious feeling in general, but I don't think we've yet adequately theorized religious feeling, or figured out how to deploy it fruitfully. In fact, I use our own writings as an example of the hegemonic account, because we remain wrapped up in a logic of religious experience and feeling that renders it spontaneous, or individual, or in-articulate, and almost always *non-agential*.

The logic first appeared in Anderson's "Description of an Embarrassment." Citing negative theologian Karl Barth, Anderson argues, "Faith is a matter of intuiting the inexplicable and of making a leap that cannot be justified to anyone who hasn't made that leap" (22). Since Anderson, this negative theological definition of religion has developed into a common trope in our writings: Bronwyn Williams, citing Anderson, defines religion as "belief in what cannot be proved or seen or explained in words" and a "relationship to the unspeakable, undefinable, and unprovable" (107), while Smart approvingly cites Anderson, affirming that "Faith embarrasses our attempts to articulate it because it is otherworldly and thus other-word-ly: Faith asks us to explain the unexplainable" (14). Carter's gloss on Alex's statement is interesting for the way it draws in Anderson, Williams and Smart: "as so many of my students have said, true faith is a 'feeling' that cannot be explained, so articulating the reasoning behind one's faith in terms the secular world can understand may seem impossible" (574). I think it's worth rehearsing the set of terms attached to faith in these quotations: Faith is feeling (not facts and evidence); intuiting; inexplicable; a leap; unjustifiable; belief in what cannot be proved, seen, explained in words; a relationship to the unspeakable, undefinable, unprovable; inarticulate; otherworldly; other-word-ly; asking us to explain the unexplainable.

As I read these terms that instructors attach to “faith,” I find these descriptors compelling. Really, they would appear to correspond to the position I’m taking here—they acknowledge the forms of practical knowing and being that are undoubtedly involved in religious formations and really all formations, as Raymond Williams makes clear. Experience cannot be exhaustively represented in language. Moreover, they point out the internalization of behaviors, beliefs, assumptions, and sensibilities within formations that I describe in chapter three. I want to further this line of inquiry, but I first want to point out the hegemonic misrecognition process at work here. It might be best expressed by Asad’s complaint regarding Geertz: He says, quite simply, “Geertz never examines whether, and if so to what extent and in what ways, religious ‘experience’ relates to something in the social world believers live in” (249).

To understand what’s going on here, I believe the connections between this construction of religion and negative theology must be elaborated. Put very roughly, a strong negative theology asserts that by definition, nothing said by humans about God can be true. This draws a firm and total line between a God of the Outside, and human language (see Hagglund; Tillich). This epistemic agnosticism is academically and philosophically useful, because it appears to insulate religious belief from many basic rational arguments against it while simultaneously posing a challenge to the certain knowledge claimed by religious adherents. In a very weak form, negative theology is prevalent among evangelicals. According to the surveys done by Smith, Putnam and Campbell, and Kinnaman, as well as ethnographies of evangelicals written by Susan Harding and Bielo (to name only a few), many evangelicals do seem to acknowledge that there’s much that they cannot *know* in a cognitive sense about an infinite being beyond

their comprehension. This is so even in light of claims for the clear and immediate knowledge of Biblical truths. This would seem to justify activating negative theology when discussing students' faiths.

So as the writing scholars above rightly indicate, many evangelicals instead report conducting lives infused with religious affect, religious ways of thinking, and even supernatural experiences. In other words, they report on religious ways of being and like us often pose those religious ways of being (feeling) against knowledge or fact as a seeming defense against logical critiques of religion. This is where Alex's quote comes in: "I understand that academics look at facts and evidence. However, religion is mostly about *feeling*. If God wanted to, He could easily give us evidence that He exists. If He did, though, believing in him and trusting Him wouldn't be the same" (Carter 577, emphasis in original). Here, we see that Alex replaces facts and knowledge with feeling, though she denies that these feelings represent a form of knowing or evidence. Given academe's increasing interest in embodiment and alternative forms of knowing, writing scholars seem naturally drawn to these descriptions of religious faith (on the relations between embodiment and rhetoric and composition pedagogy, for instance, see Cooper; Fleckenstein; Hawhee; Hawk; Johnson; Miller; Rickert). Our pedagogical response, as I demonstrate in chapter one, is to help religious students find ways to *express* those aspects of their faith in ways that will be congenial to an academic audience, rather than attempting to defend what is "rationally" in-defensible. Negative theology, then, seems a generous and intelligent way of getting around the difficulty of defending religious beliefs that we may see as logically indefensible (Latour outlines and dismisses this approach in the final chapter of *Factish Gods*).

But I see two problems here. First, we don't seem to acknowledge that pervasive evangelical claims about relational knowing mean that a strong negative theology is decidedly *not* how most evangelicals seem to understand their relationship to God. Even beyond claims that the Bible consists of God's actual words, the evangelical God participates in the world—was even incarnated and lived a historical life as a man. He is not fully Outside; in fact, as Luhmann makes so clear, many evangelicals report conducting an ongoing, deeply intimate relationship with a very personal God. If evangelicals can talk about their lover or their friend, they can talk about their God—strongly evidenced, too, by the enormous market for Christian music. The lyrics of those songs are, as many have noted, often strangely reminiscent of popular love songs. God may be mysterious, inarticulable, and somehow Other, but evangelicals' *relationships* with God are decidedly not. They are conducted, talked about, written about, improved and fall apart, *worked* on and deliberately *managed*. Thus, while it needn't be rejected out of hand, we might need to reconsider our attempts to use negative theology as an *explanans* for our students' struggles to articulate their religious experiences and as a rationale for helping students better express their faith. Their experience of a relationship with God is not as mysterious and inarticulable for them as we would have it. As DePalma, Rand, and Carter seem to suggest, perhaps the trouble is not knowledge or general inarticulacy, but a question of genre or a matter of the sorts of knowledge we count as legitimate.

Second, and even more crucially, we need to recognize that the difficulty of adequately articulating religious feelings has little impact on whether or not the mediated *acquisition* and *maintenance* of those feelings can be articulated and deliberated upon—

and that seems to be a more important political project than determining ways to express them. I can't always articulate a feeling of love to my own satisfaction in any one form, but I can nevertheless use any number of lenses or generic forms to explore and articulate parts of that love, as well as particular sources contributing to that love's acquisition. I can manage it, recognize it, represent it, re-conceive it, make plans to get rid of it, help others act so as to achieve it. Asserting there is a *role* for dispositions and emotions in religious formations, then naming them (simply valuing and incorporating sensation in descriptions of religious practice), is not enough. If instructors and scholars point to religion's practical qualities but fail to expose the deliberate processes of construction underlying them, we allow ourselves and our religious students to treat these intuitions, feelings, relationships, and beliefs as spontaneous or static rather than acquired and changing. We again fall victim to "misrecognition"—forgetting the processes by which a feeling or belief was acquired, and acting instead as if it is natural, a given. Doing so maintains power relations by covering over sponsorships and hiding responsibility behind spontaneity and "mystery." This assumption, as Asad would point out, disables certain options for religious students—they may more readily accept the idea that they can't express their religious commitment, but worse, they may also more readily accept the idea that they can't *change* the way that they feel.

Recognizing Sensation in Student Accounts of Religion

Acknowledging the importance of "feeling" and "experience" in religious practice is the easy part—students claim them, instructors constantly highlight them—drawing out the multiple mediators and individual acts of participation that form these experiences

and feelings is seemingly more difficult. But it is worth the trouble: emphasizing “sensation” simultaneously removes religious feelings, experiences, and faith from the passive mystical, and moves them a little further into the politically and rhetorically useful realm of choice, change, and individual agency. It is critical, therefore, that instructor responses to, and student representations of, religious formations not only gesture at these components of religious commitment and aid in their *expression*, but also help students deliberate on and articulate the social processes by which such intuitions, feelings, relationships, and beliefs are achieved. If students like Alex and James had access to a strategy for representing the construction of religion’s internalized and practical qualities, they might gain some agency in both expressing and intervening in the supposedly inarticulable or spontaneous (passive) aspects of religious experience. Those practices and events become explicable, describable, transmissible, and even alterable. That doesn’t make religious commitment “logical,” and it doesn’t resolve it down to assumptions, facts, or value statements; but it does make religious commitment accessible to more forms of expression and more forms of intervention.¹⁸

¹⁸ The same might be said of our persistent definition of religion as identity. While emphasizing the relations between religious discourse and students’ sense of self has done powerful political work in legitimizing religions’ inclusion in the writing classroom, it also risks reifying particular relations. Within all of our repeated attestations to religion’s role in identity, very little has been said about the way that identity was achieved and the way that it is likely to change in the future. The problem with this is very similar to what Horner and Lu argued in “The Problematic of Experience” about desire. In that article, Horner and Lu argue that students may want certain things when they enter our classroom, and those desires should be taken into account. But the desires students have at nineteen often change: over-privileging the desires of a certain moment in their life, as some instructors have suggested we do, risks ignoring that these desires have been shaped into this particular form and will continue to re-form in the future. It would be irresponsible to reify the desires of the student at one moment and only work to meet those desires, ignoring all of the other forms that student and her desires may take.

This, I believe, is an implicit concern in DePalma's article. He focuses significant attention on the dynamic relationship between religious beliefs and experience. Religious belief, DePalma argues, is a "working out of experience," and so he encourages students to reflect back on faith-defining events (223-4; 232). I've described DePalma's strategy in depth in chapter one: working specifically with an apparently evangelical student named Thomas, DePalma responds to Thomas's accounts of encounters with the Holy Spirit by suggesting ways that Thomas might better communicate and construct these religious experiences. DePalma indicates that Thomas could better describe the sensory experiences (235-6), wants him to complicate and explicate phrases like "the presence of the Holy Spirit," "God's will" and "surrender to Him" as well as terms like "calling," "grace," and "ministry" (232), and thinks Thomas should more carefully mine some of his key terms by explaining the personal meaning they've acquired through his religious experiences (terms like identity, will, and surrender) (237). These are certainly promising avenues of approach that are likely to achieve DePalma's goals: they should encourage Thomas to reflect in academic ways on both his religious experience and his religious discourse, and could realistically improve Thomas's ability to communicate those experiences and that discourse to academic outsiders. Additionally focusing on religious sensation as social, acquired, and relational, however, would provide Thomas and DePalma with a transformative way to re-construct this spiritual experience; one which could help Thomas to see further opportunities for actively participating and even intervening in his religious experiences and relationship with God.

When we reify a momentary identity or quarantine a religious feeling, we risk doing the same thing. Our options for creating change become extremely limited.

While at times Thomas reports upon successfully achieving religious sensations and relationships, oftentimes Thomas is reporting on difficulties he has with his feelings and the strained relationship with God that those struggles index. He seems to feel very little agency with regards to those religious sensations and that relationship with God, and this lack of agency is a source of significant angst in the narrative. Thomas speaks at one point as if God and his feelings towards God have together deserted him, for instance. He writes,

Ever since I broke up with Jen, I feel like God is nowhere to be found. Just when I needed him most, he has up and left. I read my bible every day, but I just don't feel drawn the way I used to. What's happening with me? Why can't I get a hold of myself? God, I am trying to fix this, but I just don't know how. I just have never felt so alone, and I don't think anyone gets it. (230)

Here Thomas is clearly flustered by his inability to master his feelings, but also by a sense of loneliness stemming from a double social loss—not only is his relationship with God seemingly gone (“he has up and left”), but Thomas also feels that others can't understand his situation. Thomas also admits the difficulty of communicating other religious feelings, implying a pattern: “For a long time, I felt a calling to ministry. It's hard to describe, but I just had a feeling inside of me that it was right for me” (231). As I noted at the beginning of this section, other students in our literature have similarly confessed to difficulties articulating religious feelings, a complaint that instructors have frequently highlighted.

So instead of trying to better express his frustration or the sense of absence he feels when his relationship with God is on the fritz, Thomas might be better served if encouraged to deliberate on the mediators and processes involved in producing that relationship and those sensations at that moment. Clearly, attempting to describe feelings

is difficult for anyone—and poetic genres for expressing them will not always meet students' needs (especially not if they're trying to gain more control or understanding of them). Focusing on religious sensation as acquired and social could, however, by helping them to write about the mediative role they and others have played in both enabling and disabling their feelings and experiences. In Thomas's case this type of focus could afford a position of greater agency to Thomas but also to others like his girlfriend Jen, while also giving him specific language for representing and interrogating the forces and causes of his feelings.

Reading his account with the social and sensational aspects of religious experience in mind, I see Thomas's relationship with God as heavily shaped by his social conditions. First, there are the commonalities between Thomas's account and other evangelical accounts: like Luhrmann's informants, Thomas uses the word "peace" twice in one short entry describing a positive religious interaction with the Holy Spirit (231), suggesting that his sensation (or at least its representational aspect) circulate. Second, in keeping with Luhrmann's informant-accounts Thomas depicts a strong connection between his cognitive relationship to the Bible and his emotional relationship to the Bible and to God—perhaps just as interestingly, he depicts how that connection is also affected by his emotional relationship with Jen, his ex-girlfriend. For example, when Jen quotes Scripture to him shortly after their break-up—"Wait for the Lord. Be strong and take heart, and wait for the Lord"—Thomas's journaled retort is, "You know what, no thank you. I hate that verse. What does it even mean?" (230). Thomas is "unable" to comprehend the transparent meaning of the Word because his relationship with Jen, and God, have become troubled. Here, sensation again points to the social and mediated

nature of religious literacy. This could be the germ of a revision suggestion in which Thomas would be asked to highlight the mutually transformative social relations he experienced between he and Jen, and he and God. If I pushed out our boundaries to consider the cultural forces at work here, I might ask Thomas to consider what discourses on love, sex, and relationships (religious or not) were speaking into his relationship with Jen, and so through that relationship into his relationship with God and the Bible.

Many other mediators, too, played significant roles in helping Thomas recover his ability to hear God speaking. Here, for example, is Thomas's report of the moment when he does finally sense God's presence again:

August 26, 2008: Dear Diary . . . Morning prayer started off sitting in a small, slightly crowded room joined together in body and spirit with 20 other people. The profound feeling of the presence of the Holy Spirit is a weight and a heat that surrounds you and fills your lungs with every breath, as if the air were somehow thicker. Yet it is comforting, like the warm embrace of a parent; it removes all distractions, and I am at peace . . . Then, after worship, we transitioned into the retreat of silence. Two and a half hours by myself in total silence. At first, I was very intimidated by this, two hours alone with my thoughts with all the confusion in my life at this point. But as I picked a comfortable spot under a tree and looked out over the lake, peace crept back in. During the silence, I spent a long time reflecting on my life and praying for God to reveal whatever he has been trying to show me. This time I was willing to wait, willing to take heart, and eagerly I anticipated an answer. In the quiet, God slowly revealed to me a lot more than I bargained for. (231, ellipses original)

I think we see here the real advantage of DePalma's emphasis upon thick description—thick description draws out the mediators in an account. Moving towards revision or further assignments, a transformational perspective will ask Thomas to think about the work being done in this scene by a variety of things, people, and regulated practices.

There are the four hours or so of religious programming—the morning group prayer, transitioning into group “worship” (likely music), transitioning into contemplative

silence. There is the programmed experiential progression from individual to corporate body, then back again into individual isolation. There is the small size of the room, important, as studies have found that being crowded increases excitement and suasion. There is the relational orientation of the programming: the direct invocation and address of God through prayer, and the proclamations of relationship that generally infuse Christian worship music—which Thomas suggests successfully provoke the presence of the Holy Spirit—followed by the long period of silence and prayer in which Thomas specifically supplicated God for his personal communication. This period of silence, of course, is enhanced by the cultural symbolism that attaches contemplative ambience to the lake scene. Further, I think there are indications that Thomas may be practicing the metakinetic forms of attention described by Luhrmann’s informants—he is willing to wait, willing to take heart, eagerly anticipating an answer—and so, after an hour or so of preparatory practices that moved Thomas into a heightened emotional and spiritual state and then two hours of prayer and internal attendance, he gets it. God speaks to him. That’s a lot of work, a lot of mediation, a lot of agency. These not only offer opportunities for reporting, but for deliberation; Thomas could be asked to examine the cultural sources that shape, disseminate, and thus enable these practices as effective religious practices.

If we encouraged him to look backward in his life, Thomas might examine how he learned to utilize such sensational practices—and to expect and interpret such sensational experiences—in the first place. In terms of practical experience, instructors could ask Thomas, When do you remember first having such sensations of God’s presence, revealing something to you? What were the circumstances that time, and which

of those circumstances were also present in this occasion? Are there specific types of prayers that you pray, or ways that you've learned to attain the "quiet" and "waiting" that you describe? Who taught you to do that, or what other experiences helped you locate those skills? Are there books on this, or other publicly-disseminated models of religious behavior that resemble your practice? In terms of recognizing those sensations as specifically religious, instructors might ask Thomas to elaborate again on its sources: How have you acquired the ability to recognize the Spirit's presence? What other individuals taught you how to recognize this? What did that training entail? Where have you ever read, viewed, or otherwise heard about these experiences and sensations? How might these past second-hand experiences have informed your experience?

Then, as I suggested with James, instructors could produce a sense of cultural specificity by asking Thomas to compare reports of religious experience offered by practitioners of other religions or other churches to his own report. How do they differ, and why does he think that is? What might Thomas consider including from those practices into his own—and if he's unwilling to include any of these alternative means of relating to God, he might go back to the definitions of religion he's operating with. Instructors' comments could, too, turn attention to the future by asking Thomas to consider what he can do with this new conception of religious sensation as acquired. How can he intervene in his own religious practices or those of others with this new knowledge? What work could be accomplished by representing religious experience in this way? Conversely, Thomas could discuss any losses or contradictions this new, fairly academic representation creates for him. Does thinking of religious sensation through this academic lens change Thomas's relationship with God, or the way he now remembers

that experience on retreat? Does the excitement of experiencing God's presence go away if it seems orchestrated or manufactured? Does it create a sense of contradiction for him at church, or in any way cause him to feel differently about things he hears or sees in church?

Conclusion

In a well-known Bible story King Solomon is confronted by two mothers and one baby. Each woman claims that the infant is her child. Those of Judeo-Christian heritage know, of course, the punch line—Solomon demonstrates his divine wisdom by drawing the truth out of the women themselves. He orders the baby cut in half. It was not his intent, of course, but by today's light there is something scientific and analytical in Solomon's recommendation: let us cut the baby open, releasing the child from its infantile muteness, and let the body itself tell us the truth. One woman—the *ESV* calls her "the woman whose son was alive"—exclaims, basically, "In that case, she can keep the child. Don't kill it." The other, stone-faced, urges the king to get on with it. Solomon declares the first woman the boy's mother on the basis of those reactions, saying, "Give the child to the first woman, and by no means put him to death; she is his mother" (I Kings 3:16-27). Solomon, you sly devil, we say. Tricking the women into telling you the truth.

But lately I am more compelled by an alternate reading. As a modern reader it has always troubled me that the women in the story are not named, and as such the distinctions between the two women are never better than hazy. They are described as "two prostitutes," "the one," "the other," "the first woman," etc. The reader is never told

whether the plaintiff or the defendant is speaking after the opening explanation of the circumstances, so that the reader is never granted the “truth” we often demand from such a story. We don’t know which woman was stone-faced, and which was loving—only that the loving woman received the child. It’s like ending a detective novel with the murderer’s execution, but never showing readers the face under the hood. Here, we only know that the story is adequately resolved in the sense that the mother has her child. That should be enough, right?

But this raises, for me, a critical implication: if we do not need to know who was telling the truth—plaintiff or defendant—perhaps it’s because Solomon didn’t need to know either. The real story for me isn’t about the honesty of the women or the facts of the child’s birth—the narrative (and by turn Solomon) proves to be concerned with the baby and with its mother. A relationship. Solomon’s real wisdom may have been in eschewing information (facts, knowledge of the past) for present effects. So is it possible, I’d like to ask, that the birth mother did not end up with the baby, but the mother did? Why not? What if the reason we aren’t given any way to differentiate between the women’s histories (their characters, their “selves”) is because they don’t matter? Then, Solomon’s wisdom is not in “knowing the truth,” nor in “revealing the truth,” nor in otherwise pretending to find what is inaccessible but instead in *recognizing*, in *making*, a *mother*. Motherhood is “yearning,” being “moved,” effects that the *ESV* says Solomon’s word triggered in one woman and not the other (3:26). From there on, motherhood becomes really a matter of legal positioning—Solomon’s performative utterance declares “She is his mother” in the same breath as it gives the child to her, so that this particular type of motherhood is born in discourse.

Solomon's story points out, certainly, other approaches to an investigation. We can proceed assuming that cutting open the baby will reveal a factual mother. We can proceed assuming that careful questioning may eventually coax or cajole a hidden truth or partial truth from the women (that's how the story is generally read). We can give up on both and declare that whatever we decide it won't ever get to the truth; we may believe what we determine, but we can forget about ever being certain of it. In this case, which sounds (but is not) close to my reading, the true mother may not end up with the child. But that's not what I'm saying: I'm saying the mother inevitably ends up with her child in this story because Solomon is re-defining a mother as something one can become or cease to be, rather than something one simply is. One woman became a mother through her responses and through Solomon's actions—the other woman became the mother of the other, dead child through her responses and through Solomon's actions.

This reading of Solomon's story compels the dissertation I've written. My founding assumption is that religions, like mothers, are being made continually. The important questions have never been what religion, or Christianity, or evangelicalism, really are: the important questions have always been what forces have shaped those formations into their current form, what relationships and practices maintain that current form, and in what ways can our actions intervene and alter future formations of religion, and Christianity, and evangelicalism? And, specific to our discipline, what habitual ways of thinking, seeing, reading, and writing about religion operate in our relations to religious discourses and religious students? If instead of answering these questions we wish to continue arguing over what religion *is*, or what evangelicalism or Islam or Judaism truly *are*, the result for ourselves and our auditors will be something like

Solomon's response to the two women's endless debate: "'The one says, 'This is my son that is alive, and your son is dead'; and the other says, 'No; but your son is dead, and my son is the living one'.'" And the king said, 'Bring me a sword'" (3:23-24). There is no end to such an argument, but there will assuredly always be two polarized sides, a weak middle, and a scramble for a sword.

The binary logic on religion is pervasive, and politically consequential. Mohler said weeks before our recent presidential election, speaking from just such a binary perspective on the difference between Democrats and Republicans, "We are not looking at minor matters of political difference. We are staring into the abyss of comprehensive moral conflict. Christian voters," he continued, cannot escape "the fact that our most basic convictions will be revealed in the voting booth come November" ("The Great American Worldview Test"). Barack Obama and the Democratic Party were applauded in some corners for eventually taking an equally antagonistic rhetorical stance, dramatically apparent to me as I watched the Democratic National Convention. In the end, such irresolvable arguments must resolve down to force: who yells loudest, who steals the baby last, who gets the most votes, who grabs the government's sword.

Thinking back to Thomson's student-informants and the ways they struggle to represent themselves within the hegemonic influence of official evangelical discourses like Mohler's, and thinking back to instructors' and scholars' corresponding difficulties with reading and representing religious students and religious texts, it is clear that we all need strategies for re-mapping the polarized, two party, heaven and hell religio-political world of Mohler and official evangelicalism. As I have argued in this fifth chapter, this

re-mapping is a matter of recognizing (that is, not only *reading* but *legitimizing* and *realizing*) both difference, and change.

To better recognize difference, students and instructors need new ways of recognizing and locating official evangelicalism's representations, representatives, and accounts on a different, less polarized, more pluralized map, even if it's just a map of evangelicalism itself. If we can produce that map, it will offer us a richer variety of ways to position ourselves and relate to one another on religious and political questions. This might allow students to more creatively align their position in relation with their experience of religion, or their desires for religion, or the political reality that they desire, or to the various and competing commitments shaping their political and religious lives. To better recognize change, students need help focusing on religious processes rather than contents or products, so that they will have a better chance at seeing religion, the academy, and the contexts in which it plays out as sets of moving parts involving relations of agency and power. If they do, then they may also understand themselves as one of those moving parts, part of the answer to how and why; they may see themselves having the capacity to intentionally and non-intentionally change, as well as be changed by, their religious experiences and discourses and the contexts in which such experiences and discourses take place.

Accordingly, the reading strategies I've recommended to instructors throughout this dissertation are intended to help students explore new ways of representing, locating, and creating religion. At the very least, I hope they help instructors practice forms of reading and writing that acknowledge, and help students address, the challenges of representation—the need for and possibility of responding to official discourse using

one's own practical experience in religions and academic cultures. But in addition, these reading strategies should help students see how they can exercise their agency in transforming cultures and identities through reading and writing. If these strategies are successful, we may be able to simultaneously practice and promote tolerance by helping religious students “engage the fluidity of [religion] in pursuit of new knowledge, new ways of knowing, and more peaceful relations” (Lu, Horner, Royster, and Trimbur 307). And, really, in pursuit of new religions.

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Vander Lei, Elizabeth, and Lauren Fitzgerald. "What in God's Name? Administering the Conflicts of Religious Belief in Writing Programs" *WPA* 31.1/2 (Fall/Winter 2007): 185-195. Web.

Williams, Bronwyn T. "The Book and the Truth: Faith, Rhetoric, and Cross-Cultural Communication." *Negotiating Religious Faith in the Composition Classroom*. Eds. Elizabeth Vander Lei and Bonnie Lenore Kyburz. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 2005. 105-120. Print.

Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford [Eng.: Oxford University Press, 1977. Print.

Worthen, Molly. "The Reformer." *Christianity Today*. Christianity Today. 1 Oct. 2010. Web. 7 Oct. 2010.

CURRICULUM VITAE

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Education

Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Composition, University of Louisville, KY (Expected May 2013)
Dissertation: "Transformations: Material Terms for Writing on Religion in
Composition Classrooms"

Committee: Min-Zhan Lu (Chair); Karen Kopelson; Debra Journet; Paul Griner

M.A. in English, Education, Appalachian State University, NC (May 2008)

Concentrations: Community College Teaching, Rhetoric and Composition

Thesis: "Butterflies, Lifeboats, Suicides and the Un-Dead: Reading *Lord Jim* as
Gothic Social Drama"

Committee: William Atkinson (Chair); Elaine O'Quinn; William Brewer

Capstone Project: "A Rhetoric of Emotion."

Capstone Director: Elizabeth Carroll

B.A. in Communications, Wheaton College, IL (December 2002)

Minor: Biblical and Theological Studies

Awards and Honors

University Fellow, University of Louisville, 2009-2013

Chancellor's Fellow, Appalachian State University, 2006-2008

Creative Writing Scholarship, University of Louisville 2010, 2011

Sarah Jean Powell Award Winner in Creative Writing, University of Louisville, 2010

Honorable Mention, Sarah Jean Powell Award in Creative Writing, University of
Louisville, 2012

Half-scholarship: NY Summer Writer's Institute, Poetry, 2010 (unable to attend)

Faculty Favorites, University of Louisville, 2011-2012

First place, Graduate Poetry Division, Kentuckiana Metroversity Competition 2012

Graduate Student Spotlight, University of Louisville, April 2012

Publications

“All So Morbid: The Gothic in Conrad’s *Lord Jim*.” *Conradiana* 43.1 (2013): 1-24.

“Heaven.” *Mikrokosmos*. Spring 2013 (Forthcoming).

“Hodology.” *Human Voices: Kentuckiana Metroversity Anthology 2012* (Forthcoming).

“Fete.” *Stirring: A Literary Collection* (Forthcoming).

“Liturgy.” *Stirring: A Literary Collection*. January 2012.

“Robeson County, North Carolina.” *Stirring: A Literary Collection*. November 2011.

“Sleep.” *The Tulane Review*. Spring 2011: 32-33.

“One or Two.” *The Honeyland Review*. Spring 2011.

Conference Papers

“Representational Economies, Scriptural Instruments, and Mediation in Religious Practice.” Thomas R. Watson Conference in Rhetoric and Composition: “Economies of Writing.” Louisville, KY, 18 October 2012.

“Toward a More Civil Discourse.” Conference on College Composition and Communication. St. Louis, MO, 23 March 2012.

“Why I Am Not a Zombie—and Why That Matters to the Humanities.” *Kentucky Philological Association Conference*. Frankfort, KY, March 2011.

“A Pedagogy of Habit.” Research Network Forum at CCCC. Atlanta, GA, 6 April 2011.

“Excessive Language: Writing Complexity.” Thomas R. Watson Conference in Rhetoric and Composition: “Working English in Rhetoric and Composition.” Louisville, KY, 14 October 2010.

“Moral Orienteering: Shifting Landscape in Rob Bell’s *Sex God*.” *Kentucky Philological Association Conference*. Richmond, KY, March 2010.

Academic Positions Held

- 2012-2013 Writer in Residence, Writers in the Schools, Houston, TX
- 2011-2012 Writing Center Consultant, Writing Center, University of Louisville
(Virtual Technologies Consultant)
- 2010-2012 Graduate Teaching Assistant, Composition Program, Department of
English, University of Louisville
- 2010-2011 Graduate Teaching Assistant, Creative Writing Program, Department of
English, University of Louisville
- 2009-2013 University Fellow, University of Louisville
- 2008-2009 Full-time Lecturer, Modern Languages Department, University of North
Carolina Pembroke
- 2007-2008 Distance Technologies Consultant, Writing Center, Appalachian State
University
- 2007-2008 Associate Editor, *Cold Mountain Review*, Appalachian State University
- 2006-2007 Graduate Research Assistant, Dr. Elaine O'Quinn, Department of English,
Appalachian State University
- 2006-2008 Chancellor's Fellow, Appalachian State University
- 2003-2006 Full-time High School Instructor, English, Cornerstone Academy,
Bloomington, IL

Teaching Experience

University of Louisville

ENGL 101: Introduction to College Writing

ENGL 102: Intermediate College Writing

ENGL 202: Introduction to Creative Writing

University of North Carolina, Pembroke

ENGL 0104: Written Communication Skills (developmental)

ENGL 1050: Composition I

ENGL 1060: Composition II

Writers in the Schools (Young Women's College Preparatory Academy)

9th Grade English (Guest Creative Writing Instruction)

10th Grade English (Guest Creative Writing Instruction)

Cornerstone Academy

6th through 11th Grade English

Selected Graduate Coursework

Rhetoric, Composition, and Pedagogy

- Composition Theory and Practice (Min-Zhan Lu)
- Re-vision: Theory and Practice (Min-Zhan Lu)
- Teaching College Composition (Joanna Wolfe)
- Research Methods in Composition (Debra Journet)
- Biology, Technology, and Composition (Marilyn Cooper)
- Narrative Theory and Composition (Debra Journet)
- Sociolinguistics (Elizabeth Patton)
- Studies in Rhetoric and Composition: Feminist Theory (Elizabeth Carroll)
- Emotion in Composition Pedagogy (Examined Area of Study, Elizabeth Carroll)
- Issues in Teaching English (Elaine O'Quinn)
- The Adult Learner (Barbara Bonham)

Literature and Literary Theory

- Contemporary Theory and Interpretation (Karen Kopelson)
- Literary and Critical Theory: Sexuality and Aesthetics (Matthew Biberman)
- Studies in Genre: Film (Bronwyn Williams)
- Studies in Genre: Visual Studies and the Graphic Narrative (Nathalie op de Beeck)
- Advanced Seminar in Major Authors: Conrad and Eliot (William Atkinson)
- American Modernist Poetry (Kirstin Zona)
- American Travel Narratives Post-1950 (Examined Area of Study, Leon Lewis)
- Gothic Fiction up to 1900 (Examined Area of Study, William Brewer)
- Contemporary Narrative and Literary Fashioning (Examined Area of Study, Aaron Jaffe)

Creative Writing

- Creative Writing Workshop I (Brian Leung)
- Creative Writing Workshop I (Paul Griner)
- Creative Writing Workshop II (Jeffrey Skinner)
- Creative Writing Workshop II (Brian Leung)
- Creative Writing Workshop II (Jeffrey Skinner)

Workshops

“Master Workshop.” Srikanth Reddy and Suzanne Buffam at University of Louisville.
Invited by Creative Writing Committee, Louisville, KY, 10 November 2011.
(Unable to attend.)

“Master Workshop.” Brian Teare at University of Louisville. Invited by Creative Writing Committee, Louisville, KY, 5 November 2010.

“Master Workshop.” Jeffrey Bean at University of Louisville. Invited by Creative Writing Committee, Louisville, KY, 29 January 2010.

“Master Workshop.” Terrance Hayes at University of Louisville. Invited by Creative Writing Committee, Louisville, KY, 13 November 2009.