DRAFT

The Common Vernacular of Power Relations in Heavy Metal and Christian Fundamentalist Performances

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Abstract

Wittgenstein's comment that what can be shown cannot be said has a special resonance with visual representations of power in both Heavy Metal and Fundamentalist Christian communities. Performances at metal shows, and performances of "religious theatre", share an emphasis on violence and destruction. For example, groups like GWAR (God What an Awful Racket) and Cannibal Corpse feature violent scenes in stage shows and album covers, scenes that depict gory results of unrestrained sexuality that are strikingly like Halloween "Hell House" show presented by neo-Conservative, Fundamentalist Christian churches in the southeastern United States' "Bible Belt". One group may claim to celebrate violence, the other sees violence as a tool to both encourage "moral" behavior, and to show that the Christian church is able to "speak the language" of young people who are fans of metal, gore, and horror.

Explicit violence, in each case, signifies power relationships that are in transformation: Historically, medieval morality plays and morality cycles had been used as a pedagogical tool, a welcoming, inclusive, interactive, embodied sharing of religion and ideology. (McCarthy, 1998; Gottschall 2004; Baldwin 2006) In the modern-day context of fundamentalist religious education, these Hell House performances seek to exclude outsiders and solidify teen membership in the Christian community (Collins-Hughes 2006). Hell House performances are marketed to the young church members, and are seen as a way to reinvigorate conservative Fundamentalist Christianity. Women and girls routinely take part in, and often organize Hell House events. Teenage girls involved in the pro-life movement often look forward to playing a girl suffering the aftereffects of an abortion, complete with fake blood and screams worthy of metal gore shows.

In the context of heavy metal, violent performances do not seek to exclude, but provide an outlet for a variety of socially unacceptable or unpopular feelings. Psychologists have argued for the therapeutic value of emotional musical performance for adolescent males experiencing social isolation (Lachmann 2006). For example, US high school shooters, such as Kip Kinkel, would benefit from expression through music providing outlets

for anger, such as Mahler; an important counter-argument to the common media assumption that the violent music may cause violent acts. The primary examples in the literature tend to be young men, but the notion of violent performance having potential benefits can also be applied to women. "Hard and Heavy-Gender and Power in a Heavy Metal Music Subculture" by Leigh Krenske and Jim McKay (2002), an ethnographic and autobiographical analysis of a heavy metal club and its denizens, illustrates how female heavy metal fans negotiate power relationships and define themselves, asserting themselves into an atmosphere of (controlled) male aggression, and symbolic oppression of females. The most challenging situations involve women as performers, and the quest to be taken seriously as a performer.

In each context there is an apparent, if not actual, empowering of women who are willing to play particular kinds of roles. The use of violence and gore has a value beyond merely shocking the audience, it is arguably a way that some women find their voice, both for fundamentalist Christians and fundamentalist gore metal fans.

Key Words: Aesthetics, politics, conservative Christianity, power relations, psychoanalysis, violence, social theory

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1. Religion and Theatre

Wittgenstein's adage that what can be shown cannot be said has a special relationship to performance, especially performance intended to invoke images and ideologies. I will illustrate how religious performance, religious theatre, and heavy metal performance share common references to violence. In both contexts, the use of explicit imagery is intended to cement community connections and attract young, new members to the group.[1]

The use of theatre as a pedagogical tool for religion and religious studies is a growth industry. For centuries, mystery cycles and medieval morality plays have been utilized as a pedagogical tool in religious contexts. (McCarthy, 1998) Interactive, performance-based approaches are also used in a variety of university courses, such as World Religions and Introduction to Religious Studies. (Gottschall 2004, Baldwin 2006) In the past five years there have been a growing number of articles in religious studies journals arguing that empathy and somatic experience through religious theatre will heighten our pluralistic cultural understanding. However, there is a double edge: in the case of inter-religious dialogue and religious pluralism, these performances take one shape; in the case of religious education in one particular theology or liturgy they take a very different, less inclusive shape. (Collins-Hughes 2006) In the United States, controversies about

"evolutionary theory" being taught in schools have involved performances to illustrate intelligent design and creation science perspectives. I advocate for a modified Aristotlean view: theatre should both entertain and teach, but one must guard against crossing the line from teaching to indoctrinating. The pedagogical value of theatre is strongest when it can teach us how to think rather than what to think.[1] Academic journals, such as Teaching Theology and Religion and Academic Exchange Quarterly, regularly feature articles explaining teaching techniques that include ritual practices, verbal performance and physical activities associated with specific spiritual beliefs. What are the limits of teaching ideology? Can one teach ideology as well as critical reasoning skills about ideology? Should the teaching and learning of religion involve active attempts at the practices of a religion? For example, in an introductory level World Religions class, to what extent is prayer or singing of hymns a legitimate part of teaching about a religion? Should learning involve activity or passivity, and can performance be a better, more active alternative that enables better learning…of religion? of ideology? of ethics?

2. Pedagogy: Passive Learning vs. The Pedagogy of Performativity

To some extent, the answers to these questions depend on the audience involved. Understanding the religious background of the students in a World Religions course helps to inform the pedagogical practices, and helps the instructor to see which practices will be most effective. In 2006, a Gallup poll covered a variety of religious beliefs among US citizens:

Gallup Poll 2006

- 53% believe that God created man, exactly as the Bible described it
- 31% believe that man did evolve, but God guided the process
- 13% believe God had no part.
- Belief in literal interpretation of the book of Genesis increases for certain populations, including those who are above the age of 50 and those who report voting Republican.

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[1] The author would like to thank the organizers and participants of the Transformations and the Dynamics of Radical Change: Insights from Political Theory and Philosophy conference at Queen's University, Belfast, Ireland, UK, November 2008.

An audience with a set of entrenched religious beliefs may be more or less receptive to a passive or active teaching model; for example, students who are highly invested in Christianity may be offended when asked to participate in saying a prayer associated with another faith. So, they may be more comfortable with a more passive learning style in which they merely read about another faith, rather than attempt to mimic a practitioner of the other faith. There is a subtle irony in the passive learning model; on occasion the surface appearance of being a good exemplar of a faith might overtake the substance of that faith. One example comes from the Creation Museum founded by Ken Ham in Kentucky. Soon after the museum opened in 2007, it was revealed that at least one of the actors portraying Biblical figures had begun their career in the pornography industry: the actor who plays Adam in one of the museum's educational videos is an owner and performer on a porn site called BedroomAcrobat.[2]

While the example of the Creation Museum is humorous, many professors and instructors in religious studies and comparative religion find the notion of active learning, or active embodied experience, to be a promising way for their students to develop a deeper understanding and empathy for other religions. In her article "Introducing Islam Through Qur'anic Recitation" from 2004, Marilyn Gottschall describes having students memorize a sura of the Qu'ran phonetically, using the help of a CD, and then sing it to the class. The activity is intended to bring students to a deeper, embodied empathy with the members of a faith other than their own. This embodied practice, in theory, opens the door to deeper theological concepts. Diving into a particularity of sounds, Gottschall writes, draws students into "theological and devotional intricacies of orthodox Islam." (Gottschall 2004) Arguably, this works like being drawn into music theory by listening to performance and trying to recreate it. However, one can legitimately ask, do people learn to really play the bass by listening to and fingering through the introduction to Smoke on the Water? Do I feel a deeper empathy with the members of Deep Purple when I do this?[3] What advocates of the active, embodied approach claim, is that learning about religion can be achieved via a Berlitz-style methodology (sample the language and the daily actions and phrases uttered by the average Spanish person, and you will understand their lived experience better.)

The emphasis on embodied, lived experience reflects the intersection of religious studies scholarship with postmodernism. The life narratives of the individual practitioner, and their lived orthopraxy, become a pedagogical tool through which students understand the religion on a deeper and more visceral level.[4] In the 2006 article "From Sole Learning to Soul Learning" in the journal Teaching Theology and Religion, Gayle Baldwin argues that teachers of World Religions courses have an obligation to find a

learning method that brings about a process of *personal transformation*. She holds that the proper goal of a religious studies course is to "transmit the experience of learning as an embodied process that engages personal narrative within a community context." (Baldwin 2006, 166) The active, embodied pedagogy is contrasted with the passive recipient of information model, in which students are "mere voyeurs" who risk examining religion "through the head or the heart only." The threefold goal combines an embodied active pedagogy, a respect for personal narratives, and a sense of community. To achieve this goal, Baldwin recommends that a World Religions course should jolt students "out of their safe universe", bidding them to embark on a "sacred quest" in which they constantly dialogue with the truth. (Baldwin 2006, 168) The beginning of this sacred quest must struggle against a certain amount of intellectual inertia because "students enter the first year of college with a commitment to mindlessness about religion," Baldwin writes. To counteract the mindlessness, Baldwin advocates recreating the classroom as a community of accountability and mutual change. The classroom becomes a "community of trust" where individuals who are willing to learn to think differently are held together by the one common denominator that Merizow's transformative learning theory called 'human connectedness, the desire to understand, and spiritual completeness'. (Baldwin 2006, 180)

While the notion of a community of trust is a positive idea, there are certain potential drawbacks to Baldwin's approach. A community of trust can easily lapse into relativism, with little discernment and little attention to the role of religion (or religious rhetoric) in political contexts. Another potential disadvantage to the active learning approach is that the emphasis on performance and embodied living may take the place of other aspects of the religious studies curriculum – facts, dates, history, the social and political context of the religion and its development, as well as the possibility of corruption and critique of religious leaders.

One can also review student evaluation comments to analyze the effectiveness of this pedagogical approach. A student mentioned by Baldwin wrote, "I have started to think about why I have pushed my religion on other people, why is that? Just asking the question is a good start."[5] But, one might ask, is just asking the question enough?

Current religious studies pedagogy often involves active performance of prayer and song, and an emphasis on the lived embodied experience of religious practitioners. This is rooted in the idea that physical performance will raise students' consciousness and broaden their appreciation of other religions and other cultures. Historically, dramatic performance has also been used to teach practitioners about their own religion and reinforce their membership in closed religious communities.

Medieval morality plays, for example, were meant to welcome non-believers into the teachings of the Christian faith, whether or not they were able to read. Such plays often involved a character standing as the "everyman", struggling with his relationship to God. Other plays involved a retelling of Biblical narratives, featuring actors portraying Cain, Abel, Noah, Abraham, and a variety of other prophetic figures in dialogue with God. This everyman figure provides a way for an audience member to identify with the characters in the play, and in turn to identify with the presented religious ideology.

3. Playing for the Everyman, or Localized Interests

The everyman in mystery cycles and medieval morality plays has continued to be a recurring theme when the plays are restaged and adapted to modern theatre. For example, the Court Theatre group adapted and performed the 1958 edition of the York Cycles mystery plays in 1992. Their staging and costuming included current references, with God dressed as a construction foreman, raised above the crowd on a forklift. All other characters were dressed specifically to provide familiar physical contextualization of the story of mankind's relationship to God, to welcome the average person into the story, showing the average person's world on stage:

> We performed in Rockefeller Memorial Chapel, a cathedral-like structure at the University of Chicago. Although we did not enjoy the convenience of a theater, we could exploit the chapel's height and architecture. The space was decorated with construction lights. The audience sat in bleachers or on the floor. We used two forklifts. God was raised up, dressed in overalls and a hard hat. Lucifer's forklift was garishly decorated with silver wings and Christmas lights which could flash on when needed. Lucifer "fell" into the toxic-waste cauldron which was fitted with a red revolving light in its base. When God created the world we used a long piece of blue cloth to create waves. This later turned into a "whale" which blew water through a fire extinguisher. (Sahlins and Rudall 1992, 5)

Staging the mystery cycle with God and Lucifer as construction workers in Chicago was intended to reach out to the audience, a means of connecting the audience with the story. The staging also sent the message

that the events could just as easily happen to a person from modern times as it could happen to someone from the current 90's atmosphere of Chicago.

Similar staging was used in morality plays during the Spanish Civil War, as discussed by James McCarthy in his article "Drama, Religion and Republicanism" from Contemporary Theatre Review.[6] In this context, the everyman stood as an exemplar for young men to follow as they joined the war effort. The performances sent the message that everyone was welcome to join the fight, that everyone would be welcomed into the same brotherhood.

In terms of the question of audience, both the medieval morality plays and their modern day reproductions are meant to welcome both members and non-members of the Christian church. The stories can be understood metaphorically (as the serpent representing evil, the apple representing temptation) or as an open invitation to the everyman – providing examples of human beings engaged in day to day life communicating with God.

The emphasis on the everyman brings about a certain tension in the political motivations of theatre used to teach ideologies and religion. Depending on the specific outcomes of the morality play, the everyman may be welcomed to salvation, usually after an experiential reminder of the unavoidable depravity of human nature, or the dependence on grace for righteousness and redemption.[7] It would seem that a distinction can be made between Catholic and Protestant teaching and their relationship to religious performance. As James Parente notes in his *Religious Drama in the Humanist Tradition* (1987), the Protestant emphasis on salvation through grace, not repentance, meant that "everyman" theatre could not have been used in Protestant circles to inculcate good morality. The Catholic tradition, in contrast, used theatre and performance for a variety of ends, from inculcating good morality to learning the catechism and developing a basic understanding of Biblical narratives among practitioners with varied levels of education.

Arguably, the everyman was a necessary device for illustrating mankind's moral education – an Aristotelian exemplar of virtuous character development, the individual battling with drives and desires that could drag one down into depravity. The tri-partite soul of the ancient Greek philosophers still instantiates in the everyman figures of religious performance. The rational soul seeks to control the emotional, appetitive soul; and in the process the everyman seeks redemption and salvation. This process involving the soul of the everyman on the path to redemption is reflected in the notion of the Trinity. One example of the everyman and the trinity in current Christian writing is the book The Shack, which will soon be made into a film.

> In "The Shack," a man named Mack, grieving over the murder of his daughter, is called by God to the scene of the crime. There he meets—there is no delicate way of putting this—the Trinity. The Father is an African-American woman named Papa who likes to cook. Jesus is a Jewish man wearing a carpenter's belt. The Holy Spirit is an elusive Asian woman named Sarayu. Together, over a long weekend, these characters force Mack to face his anger and his emptiness. Mack eats delicious feasts; with Jesus, he takes a walk on the water. Finally, God convinces Mack of his deep and everlasting love. "I don't create institutions," says Jesus in "The Shack." "Never have, never will."
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> Some orthodox Christians are calling "The Shack" heresy. On his radio program in April, Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, said it was "subversive" and "incoherent." Concerned that "The Shack" might adversely influence readers, LifeWay Christian Stores, the Southern Baptist Convention's bookstore chain, in June pulled "The Shack" off shelves to review its theology. Two weeks later the books were for sale again, this time with a warning label that says READ WITH DISCRETION. A LifeWay spokeswoman says she expects "The Shack" to be high on its best-seller list for August. (Miller 2008, 15)

The negative reception of The Shack in conservative Christian communities reflects a split between two preferred types of religious performance. In the southeastern United States, the struggle for morality plays out with an extra emphasis on neoconservative political agendas. Instead of medieval morality plays, there are “Hell House” performances, most notably in the area south of the Mason-Dixon line known as the Bible Belt. Hell House performances tell the stories of individuals who have fallen from grace, using direct terms and explicit visual effects, with no metaphor and no attempt to portray a time and place other than the “here and now.” The fallen individuals have all made choices that relate to political issues that are central to neoconservative politics. A Hell House performance might feature a teenage girl in an abortion clinic, covered with blood; or a car accident caused by teenagers who drank and drove. Since the Columbine High School shootings, many Hell House performances feature loner high school students engaged in violence in their high schools. Those playing the shooter will usually be costumed in clothing that references media coverage

of high school shootings, for example long black trenchcoats. An innocent victim character might be asked if she believes in God before she is shot.

Central to each performance is the realistic portrayal of blood and violence, and lots of it. The staging looks like it would work for an album cover of a thrash metal gore band, or a scene from a horror movie. Hell houses are traditionally understood to have a limited audience because they are usually advertised to the young, teenage members of the particular church congregation that arranged the event. The purpose is not to bring new Christians into the fold, but to control the behavior of the young who are already at least nominally members of the congregation.[8]

The hell house performances are also specifically offered as an entertainment, with a two-fold purpose: the hell house is meant to show that the church can entertain in a way that is as current and pop-culture savvy as the film and music industries, ie., that the church is keeping up to date with Hollywood, and to show that the church can compete with other available entertainments, ie. "if we can get them out of the theatre we can strengthen their Christian resolve."

As such, the hell house is claimed to have a special role in moral education of the young members of a church, providing a visceral experience that allegedly helps teenagers to moderate their behavior from the beginning, a visual representation of vices. It is also central to the hell house performance that the participants cannot be saved or achieve grace after they give in to vice – the girl having an abortion, or the drunk driver are lost to the fires of hell by the end of the performance and never find their way back. Thus the hell house emphasizes that one should not do these things in the first place, that moderating one's drives and desires from the beginning can ensure that one does not fall from grace at all.[9]

In the article "Modern Morality Plays," Karen Roebuck holds that the current hell house performances involve indoctrinating prejudice and simplistic theology/ideology. The Christian church is bifurcated into communities that can be described as welcoming and liberal; or insular,

closed off, and conservative. These two types of communities inform which aspects of Christianity are put forward to the audience. The Old Testament notion of a judgmental and vengeful God fits well with the modern hell house, in which an eye for an eye becomes a damned soul for an abortion. In contrast, the everyman of the medieval morality plays experiences the welcoming messages of the New Testament and Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The medieval morality play emphasizes the possibility of spiritual uplift and escape from depravity; not hell, damnation and punishment. The essential moment of this "welcoming Christianity" would include the figure of the thief on the cross next to Christ asking if he would be allowed in to the Kingdom of Heaven also. The response Jesus gives ("…today you will be with me in paradise…") is one of inclusion, even for the fallen. These moments of redemption are not included in hell house performances. The hell house emphasis on damnation and punishment of the wicked would trump any message of possible salvation and redemption.[10]

It seems that conservative Christians are consciously choosing the shift from welcoming inclusive performances of mystery plays to the less welcoming and more violent hell house performances. They make the counterargument that it is a mistake to discuss and emphasize medieval morality plays such as the York cycle mysteries and their modern day re-adaptations. The community building, they argue, has simply taken a different form of fellowship activity, and that there is no less community building among Christians, it is simply packaged differently. However, this counterargument does not hold for all Christian communities in the United States. There, the community of the faithful may have changed and bifurcated with an increasingly vocal neo-conservative side that wants to see judgment, damnation, and a renewal of what they perceive as Christian values. This conservativism seems to have divested itself from the portrayal of the Church as a welcoming family, and prefers to retain Calvinist conceptions of predestination into the "elect," rather than the possibility of moral education through positive exemplars. It appears to be a classic case of all-or-nothing: either one learns not to have an abortion by seeing a vivid and gory hell house depiction of an abortion, or, one learns not to have an abortion through "abstinence-based sex education" and little discussion of abortion and birth control at all.[11]

What is the political purpose of these performances, on a national and international political level? How does this shift in performances and intended audience relate to the way in which modern neo-conservative Christians see themselves? The rise of hell house performance as ideological tool has happened concurrently with neo-conservative fundamentalists self-definition as victims. This particular notion that Christians are victimized in the current US political context rests on the assumption that the "founding fathers" were Christians who shared their political and ethical views, and that

today's Christians have been ignored by the United States emphasis on religious freedom, and that the current Christian must struggle to re-place God as the center of United States politics. The hell house not only teaches specific fundamentalist Christian beliefs, it also teaches a specific neo-conservative political ideology.

4. Edification and Education vs. Judgment and Warning

The neo-conservative Christian notion of victimization and its ideological hell house performances can be analyzed through the framework of Bahktin's concept of "carnival." Bahktin describes carnival as a context in which individual voices, as well as group ideologies, are heard and interact with each other. But more importantly, carnival implies that the power relationships between voices and ideologies are fluid. This fluidity creates moments of power reversal. A classic example of a power reversal in the carnival setting is Mardi Gras in New Orleans, Lousiana. Residents of the city who are typically categorized as members of lower economic status dress as kings and queens for the Mardi Gras celebrations. In philosophy, these reversals of power can be compared to Hegel's inverted world, and the relationship of master and servant, reversing as the master realizes that he or she is profoundly dependent upon the servant. In the case of Bahktin's carnival, the servant is also highly aware of the dependence of the master, and celebrates or revels in the knowledge that the master would be helpless without the servant.

A situation similar to the carnival is now apparent among neo-conservative Christians, as they engage in specific types of religious performances. In the postmodern context, Christians often cast themselves as displaced victims – witness rhetoric in the media about the "founding fathers" of the United States allegedly upholding Judeo-Christian values. The claim is made that America must return to its original Christian values. The neo-conservative Christian thus inscribes their group as the subverting leaders in a Bahktinian carnival, celebrating victory over pluralist religious culture. As a result, they embrace the idea that postmodern drama in the church need not be done for building community, it can be done simply as entertainment for a small group who already think alike. In the case of hell houses, the intention might be to limit specific behaviors of young people while at the same time providing them with entertainment that is commensurate with horror films. The message is that the local community of believers, those who are already saved, are the audience, the performance begins from an assumed agreement (reflecting the postmodern shift from global to local) rather than an assumed difference of opinion. In the article "Drama In the Church: A Match for Postmodernity" by Wanda Vassallo, the

importance of theatre in reinforcing an already set community is discussed. Published in The Clergy Journal, the article celebrates that the postmodern political context has made fundamentalist Christians eager to prove their unity and eager to bring their adolescent children into the fold by reaching them “where they live”. (Vassallo 2005, 15) It is also noteworthy that most conservative Christian dramatic performances reflect a “distrust of metaphor”, preferring instead to deliver messages directly without need for interpretation or analysis. (Collins-Hughes 2006) Thus, the focus on local issues, especially specific stories of people who have fallen out of favor with God, and the enhanced depiction of blood and violence to accentuate what will supposedly happen if one leaves the group (of fellow churchgoers).[12]

5. Metaphorical Stories vs. Direct, Cautionary Tales

The emphasis on specific tales of the fallen, rather than welcoming mystery plays, and the shift from a global/pluralistic intended audience to a highly local audience of those who “already believe” are telling marks of the state of Conservative Christianity. There seem to be at least two different kinds of “Christian Theatre” currently available: some performances personify God as a benevolent friend (the modern day mystery cycles with God as the construction crew foreman), some represent God as the locus of judgment, fire, and brimstone (the hell house performances in which God is not seen, but the fallen person’s separation from God is clear). Another distinction between these types of performances is discussed by Laura Collins Hughes in her article from the September 2006 issue of American Theatre.[13] She describes gritty, yet ‘open’ Christian works dealing with modern day urban life that represent an opening to Christianity, welcoming new audiences and people who normally wouldn’t see a “Christian” work to become interested in Christian theatre. However, she notes that there are still many more conservative Christian audiences that refuse to see plays that involve swearing, let alone a positive appearance by a gay or un-saved character. (Collins-Hughes, September 2006)

The unwelcoming attitude of some Christian theatre performances also hints at a deeper issue, the divisions among fundamentalist Christians in terms of racism. There are many conservative Christians who self-define as white, and many who self-define as black. This is especially noticeable in the southeastern United States, where many African Americans feel a strong historical tie to Christian churches (a relationship that was encouraged during slavery and reconstruction, with wealthy white landowners explicitly hoping that their newly freed slaves would be placated by the Christian church), and where many African Americans identify with the military power structure (as a source of jobs, education and social status that are largely unavailable to African Americans in the non-military arena.) Among white southerners, there is a latent racism that is expressed by an assumption that they cannot

identify with themes of "city life" or poverty in morality tales and performances – among white southerners, urban is often a code term for black.

The race issues inherent in conservative Christian American theatre are especially complicated, because there are white Christian audiences that refuse to support urban themes in plays. Ironically, black Christian audiences tend to vote more conservatively and identify strongly with fundamentalist Christian political agendas. Perhaps this can be explained by a radical aspirationalism and Calvinism among southerners, white and black. The African American theatre circuit in the southern United States usually performs plays that involve direct and open claims of right and wrong, specific stories with character development along clear lines of good and bad, right and wrong. Thus the black and white fundamentalist Christian theatre(s) share a great deal in common.

Collins-Hughes also emphasizes the conservative Christian theatre tendency to use direct moral claims as opposed to metaphor. She argues that conservatives still feel a distrust of metaphor, while the more 'open' liberal Christian theatre uses metaphor and allegory (akin to the parables of Jesus and the sermon on the mount) rather than specific labeling of individual characters' morality. This narrative of "straight talk" and "plain talk" parallels phrases used by conservative political candidates during election season. The concern seems to be that metaphor is a device of the elitists and that "real" people say what they mean and mean what they say. Rather than be burdened by interpretation and metaphor, it seems that the average person would rather be engaged with explicit stories of bad behavior, complete with bloody portrayals of evil acts.

6. The Commonality with Heavy Metal Performance

Performances at metal shows, and performances of "religious theatre", share an emphasis on violence and destruction. For example, groups like GWAR (God What an Awful Racket) and Cannibal Corpse feature violent scenes in stage shows and album covers, scenes that depict gory results of unrestrained sexuality that are strikingly like Halloween "Hell House" show presented by neo-Conservative, Fundamentalist Christian churches in the southeastern United States' "Bible Belt". One group may claim to celebrate violence, the other sees violence as a tool to both encourage "moral" behavior, and to show that the Christian church is able to "speak the language" of young people who are fans of metal, gore, and horror.

Explicit violence, in each case, signifies power relationships that are in transformation: Historically, medieval morality plays and morality cycles had been used as a pedagogical tool, a welcoming, inclusive, interactive, embodied sharing of religion and ideology. (McCarthy, 1998; Gottschall 2004; Baldwin 2006) In the modern-day context of fundamentalist religious education, these Hell House performances seek to exclude outsiders and solidify teen membership in the Christian community (Collins-Hughes 2006). Hell House performances are marketed to the young church members, and are seen as a way to reinvigorate conservative Fundamentalist Christianity. Women and girls routinely take part in, and often organize Hell House events. Teenage girls involved in the pro-life movement often look forward to playing a girl suffering the after effects of an abortion, complete with fake blood and screams worthy of metal gore shows.

In the context of heavy metal, violent performances do not seek to exclude, but provide an outlet for a variety of socially unacceptable or unpopular feelings. There is a clear emphasis on marketing that which will be popular with teenage and young adult fans – to a certain extent, gore and blood *sells*, explicit violence *sells*. Bands using violence also emphasize the idea that these are rituals that fans are a part of, something special that only those who buy tickets to the show can experience. The irony is that the same ritualized horror experience is also used in conservative Christian circles to cement membership in a religious community during Hell House performances.

Perhaps to some extent young adults fulfil a psychological need for an outlet or a carthasis during these performances. Psychologists have expressed a variety of opinions on the issue, with many psychologists since the high school shootings at Columbine making an inference that violent music and violent behaviour are connected, especially among teenage males. The theme of music and violence was developed in a play that debuted this autumn at the Lyric Hammersmith Theatre in London, entitled “Punk

Rock."[14] On the other side of the debate, psychologists have argued for the therapeutic value of emotional musical performance for adolescent males experiencing social isolation (Lachmann 2006). This perspective upholds the benefits of catharsis in response to "safe violence" as part of a scripted performance, such as the live stage shows of gore metal bands like GWAR.

For example, some would argue that US high school shooters, such as Kip Kinkel, would benefit from expression through music providing outlets for anger, such as Mahler; an important counter-argument to the common media assumption that the violent music may cause violent acts.

The primary examples in the literature tend to be young men, but the notion of violent performance having potential benefits can also be applied to women. "Hard and Heavy-Gender and Power in a Heavy Metal Music Subculture" by Leigh Krenske and Jim McKay (2002), an ethnographic and autobiographical analysis of a heavy metal club and its denizens, illustrates how female heavy metal fans negotiate power relationships and define themselves, asserting themselves into an atmosphere of (controlled) male aggression, and symbolic oppression of females. The most challenging situations involve women as performers, and the quest to be taken seriously as a performer. But this may not be specific to the metal context, it may be a part of the ethos of musicianship present among many professional musicians (having the right skill level, "the chops".)

In each context there is an apparent, if not actual, empowering of women who are willing to play particular kinds of roles. The use of violence and gore has a value beyond merely shocking the audience, it is arguably a

way that some women find their voice, both for fundamentalist Christians and fundamentalist gore metal fans.

7. Summary and Conclusion

In sum, a number of forces have transformed the teaching of religion and religious studies in the United States over the past 10 years. Pedagogy in Religious Studies classrooms shifted from an emphasis on passive learning to an emphasis on performative, embodied experience. Christian theatre performance, taken broadly, negotiated the difference between “everyman” theatre (meant to welcome newcomers) and localized performances meant to reinforce specific religious communities. The reaction of the Christian communities in the United States became bifurcated along political lines, with some communities emphasizing a theory of conservative Christian political issues, and other Christian communities opening to a wider and more diverse population base. The conservative Christian performances emphasized direct, even explicitly violent stories, and cautionary tales. The welcoming Christian communities instead reinvigorated the use of metaphor and allegory, dating back to the New Testament and medieval morality plays.[15] Given the shift in the neo-conservative political atmosphere of modern day Christianity, perhaps it should come as no surprise that the popular vernacular of violent films, video games, and heavy metal/gore metal performance has taken on a new significance in the recruitment strategies of conservative Christian communities. For them, the gore featured in heavy metal performance is used to illustrate what can happen if one strays from the fold and engages in immoral behaviour, while simultaneously welcoming young members to the Christian community. For metal audiences, the violence featured during a performance is also a form of welcoming and uniting fans of the music, while at the same time, mocking conservatives who would be afraid of the performance. The politics of membership in each case are rich with irony.

Notes

[1] In using performances to address specific issues of religion, pedagogy and the transmission of ideologies, I take inspiration from the work of Hannah Arendt on irony and comedy and its relation to violence. For example, see H. Arendt, *On Violence*, Harvest Books, 1970.

[2] The Associated Press article dated Friday, June 8, 2007, notes that "In Ken Ham's Garden of Eden, the lion lays down with the lamb (and the dinosaur), but his Adam, Eric Linden, it seems, lays down with everything in sight. According to the Associated Press, Linden owns a pornographic web site called BedroomAcrobat.
Linden appears as Adam in one of 55 videos featured on visitor tours at Ham's newly opened Kentucky Creation Museum. Maybe it's the video where they take to heart God's injunction to be fruitful and multiply."

[3] M Gottschall, 'Introducing Islam Through Qur'anic Recitation'. *Academic Exchange Quarterly,* Summer 2004, vol. 8, issue 2. "Interactive, performance based approaches are also used in courses on other religions:
One teacher of World Religions courses has students memorize a sura of the qu'ran phonetically, using the help of a CD, and then sing it to the class." The theory is that diving into particularity of sounds to draw students into "theological and devotional intricacies of orthodox Islam." Arguably, this works like being drawn into music theory by listening to performance and trying to recreate it; do people learn to really play the bass by listening to and fingering through the introduction to Smoke on the Water?

[4] I am especially interested in this idea of pedagogy taking in the lived experience of individuals, especially relating that lived experience to the lives of students themselves. In this area I take inspiration from the work of Paulo Freire. P Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Continuum Publishers, 30 Anv Sub edition, September 2000.

[5] Teachers of World Religions courses have an obligation to find a learning method that brings about a process of personal transformation, specifically, to "transmit the experience of learning as an embodied process that engages personal narrative within a community context"; ensuring a student "cannot be a mere voyeur, examining religion through the head or the heart only", to "jolt them out of their safe universe";
to engage students in a "sacred quest" and "dialoguing with the truth". Important in this process is creating a "community of trust" in the classroom community – individuals who are willing to learn to think differently held together by the one common denominator that Merizow called 'human connectedness, the desire to understand, and spiritual completeness'. At the same time, it can be noted that students enter first year of college with either a commitment to mindlessness about religion, or a hard and fast commitment to a specific religion; and so the experience of a community of accountability and mutual change is new for them. Teaching in a way that merely introduces new religions without facts, history, social and political context, can be a way of avoiding issues of corruption, human leaders failings, results in relativism. Student comment on evals: "I have started to think about why I have pushed my religion on other people, why is that? Just asking the question is a good start." But is just asking the question enough?" from G Baldwin, "From Sole Learning to Soul Learning" *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 2006, vol 9 no. 3, pp 165-174.

[6] Spanish Civil War morality plays also discussed in J McCarthy, "Drama, Religion and Republicanism, Theatrical Propaganda in the Spanish Civil War" *Contemporary Theatre Review* 1998 vol 7 part 2 pp 47-59.

[7] A distinction frequently addressed in terms of Calvinism and Arminianism, which hold very different conceptions of salvation, and its relation to grace and depravity.

[8] Pastor Keenan Roberts, co-founder of The New Destiny Christian Center in Colorado notes "Hell House" visitors are escorted through a series of graphic scenes which illustrate the agonizing results of such sinful behavior as gay marriage, abortion, and dancing at raves. The intent, according to Pastor Keenan's website, is "to shake your city with the most in-your-face, high-flyin', no denyin', death-defyin', Satan-be-cryin', keep-ya-from-fryin', theatrical stylin', no holds barred, cutting-edge evangelism tool of the new millennium!" http://gothamist.com/2006/10/02/hell_house_1.php accessed June 2009.

[9] Emphasis on the everyman, or on the unavoidable depravity of human nature and the dependence on grace for righteousness and redemption is a major distinction in Catholic and Protestant teachings, that meant that the theatre could not have been used in Protestant circles to inculcate good morality. (This may explain why Hell Houses might have a limited audience, those who are already members of the church, or specifically directed at young members of the church as an entertainment that shows the church is up-to-date with pop-culture horror films.) Alternatively, the everyman figure may still have been needed, perhaps to illustrate man's education out of total depravity. Also see Charles Nauert, Jr's review of James Parente Jr's *Religious Drama in the Humanist Tradition: Christian Theatre in Germany and in the Netherlands, 1500-1680, 1987 E. J. Brill.*

[10] Modern liberal critique of current morality plays (hell houses, judgment houses): involve indoctrinating prejudice and simplistic theology/ideology; how to decide which aspects of Christianity to put forward, Everyman of Medieval morality plays and mysteries emphasized uplift and escape from depravity, modern day version veers toward hell, damnation and punishment rather than edification/education (hell houses – to entertain those who already believe and to make the church seem hip to younger members, cool in the way horror films are cool) K Roebuck, "Modern Morality Plays" US News and World Report, 11/02/98, v 125, n 17, p55, 1998.

[11] Counterargument from the conservative Christians: it is a mistake to discuss the medieval morality plays, the York cycle, then go into their modern day re-adaptations; this may cause us to miss the emphasis on community building among the faithful.
However, in the US the community of the faithful may have changed and bifurcated with a vocal majority that want judgment, damnation, hell houses.
See also Ilana Brownstein's review of Sarah Beckwith's *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays*, U of Chicago Press, 2003.

[12] American Protestants embrace the idea that postmodern drama in the church need not be done for building community, it can be done just as entertainment for a small group who already think alike, begins from an assumed agreement (reflecting what she calls the postmodern shift from global to local.) It reinforces a set community. Bahktin for Christians who believe their values are ignored in modern American society. (Reversal of power structure – hell houses feature the ultimate punishment of the guilty, reversals of fortune where the Christians who had been persecuted are finally vindicated)
Vassallo, Wanda, 2005 Drama In the Church: A Match for Postmodernity, The Clergy Journal, November/December 2005 pp 14-16

[13] L Collins-Hughes, "Articles of Faith: Can Conservative Christianity Find Expression on the Stage?" Sept. 2006, *American Theatre*. Interesting question to ask after morality plays, hell houses are so common
Notes that there is no such thing as "The" Christian Theatre, because of the distinctions between who is doing welcoming stories with God personified as a benevolent friend, and who is doing the judgment, fire and brimstone works. Gritty, yet 'open' Christian works dealing with modern day urban life are often a opening, welcoming new audiences and people who normally wouldn't see a "Christian" work to become interested in Christian theatre. However, there are still many more conservative Christian audiences that refuse to see plays that involve swearing, let alone a positive appearance by a gay or un-saved character. Also notes that most conservative Christian dramatic performances reflect a "distrust of metaphor", preferring instead to deliver messages directly.
[14] K Fricker, "Punk Rock" Review, Daily Variety, Friday, September 11, 2009, pp. 6, 34.
[15] Overall themes in sum:

- Pedagogy of performativity vs. passive learning
- Everyman vs. localized interest
- Edification and Education vs. Judgment and Warning
- Opening audiences to non-Christians vs. keeping conservative Christian audiences comfortable
- Metaphorical stories (of the kind Jesus would have shared at the sermon on the mount, workmen/foreman, consider the…) vs. Direct stories and cautionary tales (classic example of alcoholic mother forbidden to live with daughter's family unless she stops drinking and accepts Jesus as her lord and saviour.)

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