APPLE ICONOGRAPHY: MARKETING THE METAPHYSICS OF MEDIA

by

BRETT THOMAS ROBINSON

(Under the Direction of Anandam Kavoori)

ABSTRACT

Since the advent of the electronic age, new media technologies have frequently been described in religious terms. New media technologies have been imagined as both liberating tools with utopian promise and revolutionary forces with eschatological implications. The religious rhetoric used to describe these technologies is part of a "technological mythology" - a narrative form in which technology is assigned a spiritual significance. Technological mythologies are evident in science fiction literature, film, academic scholarship and the rhetoric of inventors and entrepreneurs. However, very little attention has been paid to the representation of technological mythology in American advertising. This dissertation considers the intersection of technology and the American religious imagination in the advertising of the Apple computer company. Through evocative visual metaphor Apple advertisements combine technology promotion with metaphysical themes – making Apple ads icons of the information age.

INDEX WORDS: Apple, advertising, media, religion, technology

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DEDICATION

For my family

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I was told early on that a dissertation is an exercise in endurance, not brilliance. A marathon analogy might seem fitting here but considering the fact that the first marathoner died delivering his message to Athens, I am wary of the parallel. Fortunately, Athens, Georgia has been a lot kinder to me than Athens, Greece was to Pheidippides.

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INTRODUCTION

Apple products are emblematic of digital culture. In the same way that Kleenex has become synonymous with facial tissue, 'iPod' has become synonymous with 'mp3 player' and iPhone with 'smartphone.' This is a powerful position for a brand as it suggests a standard that all other devices are measured by. But the relevance of the iPod and iPhone is more than market share and naming rights. Apple is a media giant, meaning the company produces much of the hardware, software and content of the multimedia age. As such, Apple is partly responsible for shaping the culture of the age. From the design of the products to the advertising messages to the particular practices of individual users, Apple exerts tremendous influence over the social rituals that make up cultural life in the information age. The use of cell phones, desktops, laptops, mp3 players has skyrocketed over the last decade and the trends show no signs of slowing down. As of September 2010:

- 96% of 18-29 year olds own a cell phone
- 76% of Americans own a computer
- 47% of Americans own an mp3 player "such as an iPod" (Smith, 2010)

Americans spend between eight and nine hours a day in front of screens (television, computer, cell phone). While the television still accounts for the bulk of screen time among Americans, the computer and mobile device are quickly encroaching. Among 18-44 year olds, the combined

time spent with computers and mobile devices is nearly equal to television screen time (*Video Consumer Mapping Study - Key Findings Report*, 2009).

Given the amount of time we devote to these objects, a study of our technological practices would aid in better understanding modern culture. The purpose of this study is not a better understanding of a particular artifact, but a better understanding of ourselves in relation to our technological artifacts. As Sherry Turkle (1984) says in *The Second Self*, computers change not only what we do, but how we think. In *Understanding Media*, Marshall McLuhan makes the point that such a relationship is analogous with idolatry:

> It is this continuous embrace of our own technology in daily use that puts us in the Narcissus role of subliminal awareness and numbness in relation to these images of ourselves. By continuously embracing technologies, we relate ourselves to them as servomechanisms. That is why we must, to use them at all, serve these objects, these extensions of ourselves, as gods or minor religions. (McLuhan, 1994, p. 46)

In the "Narcissus role" we remain unconscious of the fact that our media objects are sensory tools that have been amputated from our own human sensorium and amplified using electricity. The telephone is an electronic extension of the ear and voice, but we do not necessarily think about this when we use the telephone. Media forms are extensions of ourselves that we do not consciously recognize as ourselves. This has a profound impact on the development of human consciousness. If human consciousness is formed by sensory input then electronic man possesses different structures of thought than pre-electronic man. Notions of time and space are altered and accelerated in electronic conditions where all communication is instantaneous. The

shift in consciousness is barely perceptible as man adapts to each new tool for reaching beyond himself.

Media technology puts us in touch with a form of transcendence, the ability to traverse time and space to communicate and commune with the other. The ability of media forms to make the distant or transcendent present suggests a metaphysical significance. In the Catholic Church, there is a Latin phrase, *lex orandi lex credendi*. It means "the law of prayer is the law of belief." It is generally interpreted to mean that the form prayer takes is indicative of what one believes. To put it in a secular sense, if we substitute mediation for prayer (as prayer is a form of mediation) then we might say *the law of mediation is the law of belief*. In other words, the dominant form of mediation in a particular age tends to shape the way beliefs and attitudes get articulated. Media forms provide metaphors for grappling with the big questions whose answers lie beyond the immanent realm of experience. What does this imply about religious consciousness in electronic culture?

Such a broad and provocative question would require many volumes to answer. In lieu of such a ponderous study, I have chosen an instrumental case study of the Apple computer in an attempt to interpret some general knowledge from a particular case. The Apple computer company embraces religious speech as a form of promotion. This phenomenon is most evident in the "Apple evangelists" – a group formed by former Apple marketing officer Guy Kawasaki to elicit more fervent devotion to the Apple brand. The result is what has become known as the Apple "brand cult." In this dissertation, I am interested in developing a better understanding of media technology's religious resonance as it is expressed in Apple's popular advertising.

A Lack of Critical Distance

In the film *Synecdoche, New York* (Kaufman, 2008), a struggling theater director played by Philip Seymour Hoffman produces his opus by recruiting hundreds of actors to inhabit a life-sized city in an abandoned New York warehouse. He attempts to work out his existential struggles by interacting with the actors in his own play for several years before his own death. There is no audience, just the actors. The film is a dizzying trip through the mind of a man obsessed with his environment and his work, and the two become impossible to separate. The term synecdoche comes from a Greek root that means "simultaneous understanding." Hoffman's character tries to understand his life in the process of trying to direct a play about his life. The film is disorienting and presents more questions than answers about Hoffman's troubling existential situation.

And so it goes with writing dissertations about media technology. I live in an environment saturated with media technology. My history is intricately bound to the technological environment in which I live. Like Hoffman's actors, I exist in an artificial environment. I live and work in spaces defined by their technological natures. From climate control to telephony, I am never cut off from convenience and rapid communication. From communicating to cooking dinner, I am surrounded by machines that are used to accomplish the most basic tasks more efficiently, minimizing the hazard of unpredictability. I live in an age consumed with developing techniques for being more efficient, even if they are not technological per se. From 12-step recovery programs to human resources management, our infatuation with increasing efficiency reflects a mechanistic approach to human experience.

This emphasis on efficiency has led to a generalized acceleration that is disorienting. Information technology in particular has contributed to what Paul Virilio calls the "theatericalization of the real world" (Genosko, 2005, p. 139). By virtue of high-speed

multimedia communications we are able to put everything on display. This condition has existential effects.

> With acceleration there is no more here and there, only the mental confusion of near and far, present and future, real and unreal – a mix of history, stories, and the hallucinatory utopia of communication technologies. (Virilio, 1995, p. 35)

The theatrical collapse of space and time in *Synedoche, New York* creates a similar situation in which the environment becomes a theater of the absurd. The stage becomes a godless universe where human existence has no meaning or purpose and communication simply breaks down. In like manner, life in the modern electronic fun house is marked by a dissolute confusion mixed with a hallucinatory utopia. Our existential struggle is being played out in an electronic environment of hypermediation and public display.

I say this after years of depending on computers for information, entertainment and my livelihood. I am a media educator, I have produced web sites for large companies, I depend on the internet for news and information. I jog with an iPod, I marvel at the iPhone, I am typing this dissertation on a MacBook. These machines and others like them are lead actors in my social relationships, work and leisure. My relationship to these machines is inseparable from whatever I end up saying about them. These machines are also environmental – they comprise a new nature. We cannot speak of media technology as if it were an element of society that can be isolated for analysis. It is not a part but a defining feature of our society.

An obsessive reliance on electronic media forms leaves a troubling void in the area of personal engagement. Robert Putnam found that community, political and religious participation in America has been declining precipitously since the 1950s, which happens to be the same time television was introduced in the home. In *No Sense of Place*, Joshua Meyrowitz (1985) argues

that television culture alters social relationships between men and women, children and adults, and politicians and citizens by virtue of both its content and its physical presence in the home. There are no more secrets in the electronic environment as individual narratives collapse into one another in a dizzying display of information overload. The internet has only accelerated this trend and hastened the prevailing confusion..

I am dependent on computers and yet I am highly skeptical of them. As a father of three children, I am increasingly aware of the influence technology exerts on a child's understanding of the world; not just by the content they provide, but by their mere presence. A recent study suggests that the number of books in a home correlates with a child's academic success (M. D. Evans, Kelley, Sikora, & Treiman, 2010). Even more than demographic factors like having highly-educated, white-collar parents, the quantity of books in a home had the strongest correlation with academic success. The children did not even have to read the books, it was just the presence of the books that mattered, suggesting that media provide more than content – they shape consciousness by being a part of the environment.

Religion and Media Technology

The information glut of our modern media environment has also induced a spiritual malaise. Religion is considered one pursuit among many that gives meaning to our lives. It is optional and malleable. Historically, communication technologies from oral speech to print to electronic media have played a formative role in religious belief and practice. Paul Ricoeur's work on the phenomenology of the sacred shows the way in which the technological environment supplants nature and makes the sacred archaic:

> Modern persons no longer have a sacred space, a center, a *templum*, a holy mountain, or an *axis mundi*. Their existence is decentered, eccentric, a-centered. They lack festivals,

> their time is homogenous like their space. This is why we only speak of the sacred world today as something archaic. The sacred is the archaic. Furthermore, the beginning of the end of this archaism may be dated easily. Essentially, it was in adopting science and technology, not just as a form of knowledge, but as a means of dominating nature, that we left behind the logic of correspondences. (Ricoeur & Wallace, 1995, p. 61)

The "logic of correspondences" Ricouer refers to comes from a phenomenology of the sacred where, "the proximity of the gods is…attested to in the fertility of the soil, vegetative exuberance, the prosperity of the flocks, and the fecundity of the maternal womb" (1995, p. 52). Where are the gods then when the soil is artificially fertilized, plants genetically manipulated, animals cloned, and the womb made a site of pharmaceutical control? What happens to the phenomenology of the sacred when technological mediation is substituted for natural condition?

One might fairly deduce that extreme technological mediation does not annihilate the sacred but instead becomes arbiter of a substitute sacred. Paul Virilio (1995) warns of the'technocult' ushered in by a desacralized nature governed by technological rationality:

> Faced with the demands of an increasingly artificial terrestrial environment and the disastrous consequences of a criminal level of pollution…will we see a new type of FUNDAMENTALISM emerge, one no longer associated with the trust in God and traditional beliefs, but with the worship, the 'technocult,' of a perverted science…It will attack what is alive, "natural" vitality finally being eliminated by the quasi-messianic coming of wholly *hyper-activated* man. (1995, p. 120)

Elsewhere, Virilio claims that "a caste of technology-monks is coming up in our times," and "there exist monasteries (of sorts whose goal it is to pave the way for a (kind of) 'civilization' that has nothing to do with civilization as we remember it." These monks are avatars of a

"technological fundamentalism" and "information monotheism," a world-view that replaces previous humanist and religious worldviews, displacing man and god in favor of technology" (Virilio & Armitage, 2001, p. 116).

At this point, you are no doubt wondering how all of this relates to a study of Apple advertising. To paraphrase Raymond Williams, who called advertising the official art of capitalism, Apple advertising may be the official art of the technocult. The advertising of electronic media devices like computers, iPods and iPhones is an exercise in promoting the means by which vast amounts of human thought, feeling and action are transmitted, received and ritualized. This cultural dependence on the forms that perpetuate the conditions of electronic communication and consumption is essential to sustaining the 'information economy.' They are in fact, fundamental. It is taken for granted that these modes of communication will be readily available to satisfy our rapacious appetite for information and entertainment consumption. This is not to say that an absence of advertising would alter the current technological condition, but advertising does serve as a frequent reminder and promoter of a technological way of life. It is through the ritual of technology advertising production and consumption that the values and conditions that characterize life in the information age are articulated and affirmed.

Devoid of a grand narrative or a dominant religious authority, we have endowed our means of communication with a religious status. Mediation mimics the metaphysical. The ancient heresy of gnosticism has found fertile purchase in the field of electronic media technologies. Gnostic rhetoric about escaping physical existence, performing magical and miraculous deeds and the quest for higher knowledge can be found in both gnostic scripture and the breathless rhetoric of technology prophets and promoters.

One such technology prophet is communications theorist, Marshall McLuhan, who informs much of the theoretical work in this dissertation. McLuhan waxed poetically about man's angelic experience in the age of discarnate electronic speech. McLuhan was also a Roman Catholic and his theological views filled his work. As a structuralist and a Catholic, McLuhan offers a useful critical perspective for analyzing the poststructural and gnostic structures of modern technology discourse. In *The Medium and the Light* (McLuhan, McLuhan, & Szlarek, 1999), a collection of McLuhan's thoughts on religion and media, it is clear that McLuhan is not optimistic about the electronic age as most critics tend to paint his work. Instead, McLuhan is deeply concerned with the radical shift in man's nature that takes place in the process of adapting to an electronic media environment. It is in this concern that my philosophical interest in the confluence of religion, technology and advertising is most succinctly expressed.

I currently teach advertising courses at Saint Vincent College, a college founded by Benedictine monks in the mid-19th century. The Benedictine monastery here is the largest in the country and the black-robed monks still walk the halls, some of them as teachers and administrators. The college embraces the Catholic intellectual tradition and its approach to knowledge: everything is studied in the light of faith and reason. This places additional pressure on faculty who must engage a secular academic culture that is bound and gagged by anti-essentialist ontologies. The myth of free-thinking in academia is hemmed in by such approaches that provide an illusory sense of intellectual exploration. In postmodern thought, one can swim through the murky depths of post-structuralism to search for hidden meanings and ideologies without acknowledging that the water in which s/he is immersed is itself ideological. As such, there is no research that is ideology-free, and this dissertation is no exception. I hope the preceding pages have given you a fair idea of the history and biases I bring to this project.

It is at this point that we must jump into the murky depths of media scholarship where the media that present the world to us (television, magazines, computers) become the objects of study. Unlike the fish, which is blissfully unaware of the water that surrounds it, I hope to better understand our mediated environment by reading its most venerated iconography, advertisements.

Why Study Apple Advertising?

Advertisements play a dubious role in American cultural life. Ads are both emblems of crass consumerism and icons of materialist desire. They imagine for us a world of material goods enchanted with possibility while celebrating superficial want. Advertisements are a nuisance, interrupting our leisure time with intrusive messages about soft drinks and automobiles. At the same time, they are the subject of ritual gatherings (like Super Bowl parties) and popular discussion. In their effort to garner precious attention they are obnoxious and vulgar at one turn and uplifting at another. Their presence clutters the media environment and their short shelf life makes them highly disposable; meanwhile, they provide many of the slogans and symbols that contribute to our common discourse. Ads are America's trash and treasure; infused with layers of meaning rendered in the lush iconography of consumption art, these throwaway images demand our attention.

The advertisements for the Apple computer company are icons depicting life in a technological culture. Personal computers, music players and cell phones are compulsory accessories in the information age and Apple has imagined them in compelling ways. Their success is perhaps most evident in the development of an Apple brand cult, a group of consumers that exhibits a fervent devotion to the Apple brand. The Apple brand cult has attracted the

attention of academics and journalists who have described the brand cult as a place where consumers creatively combine religious and technological narratives.

This dissertation looks at the advertising of the Apple computer company, not merely as a series of consumerist images, but as a metaphorical text for understanding the various intersections of media technology and religious meaning. For Judith Williamson (1978), advertising has superseded religion and art as arbiter of value and meaning in society. What did Williamson mean by this? Religion and art still exert an influence on public discourse, but, as systems of meaning, religion and art now exist *within* a symbolic environment oriented toward consumption rather than God or beauty. Religion and art, once mediators of the metaphysical, have been demoted from transcendent forces to immanent sign systems to be negotiated and exchanged on the free market. Not surprisingly, churches and museums have adopted modern advertising conventions, the meta-language of consumer culture, in order to compete in the ideological marketplace.

This dissertation follows the work of Vincent Miller (2004) who explores how consumer culture and media change our relationship to religious beliefs, narratives and symbols. Miller argues that the 'commodification of culture' hastens the fragmentation of religious traditions into

> discrete, free-floating signifiers abstracted from their interconnections with other doctrines, symbols, and practices. The abstraction of elements from their traditions weakens their ability to impact the concrete practice of everyday life. (2004, p. 3)

Miller's concern is that an overwhelming number of superficial consumer narratives and media forms breed habits of interpretation and appropriation that threaten deeper, contextual readings of religious beliefs, traditions and practices. Religion is thus viewed as something to be

consumed that should be useful, valuable or pleasurable, lest individuals seek deeper meaning in other activities that are more useful, valuable or pleasurable, like music or movies.

The parody of religious themes throughout the Apple mythology, from the half-eaten forbidden fruit logo to the messianic portrayals of CEO Steve Jobs, does not blaspheme the sacred as much as trivialize it. More importantly, it is not the content of media that have ushered in this symbolic imbalance (although a pretty strong case could be made for the evisceration of the sacred in contemporary media discourse); it is the forms of our dominant communication technologies that have supplied new metaphors for religious understanding.

In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss the historical relationship between media technology and religious rhetoric. By citing examples as diverse as the telegraph and the computer, I show how persistently media technologies are imagined using religious figures of speech. I also include historical context necessary for understanding the Apple case by providing a biographical sketch of Apple founder and CEO Steve Jobs. In addition, I discuss the marketing literature that has already addressed the Apple 'brand cult' phenomenon.

Religion-Technology Rhetoric

Substituting computers for religion may seem like an odd analogy until one considers the deep historical correspondence between technology and conceptions of universal order. For the Greeks, the world was an expression of manual technology. Plato's heavens revolve around the "spindle of necessity" (Bolter, 1984, p. 22). In the *Timaeus*, the creator of the cosmos was "an ideal craftsman who formed the sphere of the fixed stars by turning it as a carpenter does wood on his lathe and mixing metaphysical elements as a potter mixes the clay (1984, p. 22). The pivotal invention of the Middle Ages was the weight-driven clock. Lewis Mumford described the significance of the weight-driven clock as nothing short of prophetic,

> The clock…is the key-machine of the modern industrial age. For every phase of its development the clock is both outstanding fact and the typical symbol of the machine: even today no other machine is so ubiquitous. Here, at the very beginning of modern technics, appeared prophetically the accurate automatic machine which, only after centuries of further effort, was also to prove the final consummation of this technics in every department of industrial activity. (Mumford, 1963, p. 14)

These examples illustrate the ways in which metaphysics can be imagined through a culture's crowning technical achievements. The clock's power is its universal presence and power to organize nearly every activity in modern life – a distinction once reserved for religious culture. Ironically enough, the clock was developed in part to mark the hours of prayer in the medieval monastery. Instead of remaining a universal call to prayer, the clock became an efficient maximizer of commerce and wealth. The clock also became a metaphor for philosophical and scientific reflection on the cosmos. The clock suggested a "precise and ordered cosmos" that allowed men to "abstract and quantify their experience of time" (Bolter, 1984, p. 27). The discoveries of Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo and Newton would have been unthinkable in a culture without clocks.

What clocks were to the Middle Ages, communication technologies are to the modern era. Networked digital media technologies are the crowning technical achievement of the age and as such they provide a new set of metaphysical metaphors for coming to grips with our existential circumstance. On May 24, 1844 the Baltimore to Washington line of the telegraph was christened by inventor Samuel F. B. Morse with the words, "What hath God wrought?" Morse's proclamation via dots and dashes marked the first successful electronic transmission of

information across the Eastern seaboard, but it also represented an important historical-cultural transmission. Morse's religious phrase became emblematic of the way in which communication innovation tends to evoke rhetoric of the technological sublime (Carey, 1989b).

For communications theorist James Carey, the American rhetoric of the technological sublime emerged from the early Protestant movement in America that associated developments in transportation and media technologies with the progressive movement of God in history (Q. J. Schultze, 2003). If, as David Nye suggests, humans derive unity from the common feeling of awe inspired by technological prowess, then one begins to see one of the ways in which the mythos surrounding media technology mimics the sacred (Nye, 1994). The commingling of religious imagination and technological change is evident in the remarks of a 19th-century telegraph enthusiast:

> The most remarkable effect, if I may judge from my own narrow thought, will be the approach to a practical unity of the human race; of which we have never yet had a foreshadowing, except in the Gospel of Christ. (Sconce, 2000, p. 22)

In addition to the distinctly Protestant layer of understanding media in America is a connection with late 19th-century occult practices that developed alongside the introduction of the telegraph. The notion of disembodied communication at a distance was of particular interest to participants in the occult. Morse's telegraph coincided with the tremendously popular "Modern Spiritualism" movement in the late 1800s. Spiritualists believed that communication with the dead was possible by way of "spiritual telegraph." Periodicals such as *The Spiritual Messenger* invoked popular knowledge of Morse's electromagnetic telegraph to explain their model of spiritual contact (2000). By constructing a "spiritual science" from the doctrines of

mesmerism, electrophysiology, and reformist Christianity (among other sources), Modern Spiritualism foreshadowed the cultural move toward a postmodern religiosity that informs both media imagination and spirituality.

We can also locate mystical imagery in the language of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson paired steam and electromagnetism with transcendentalism: "Our civilization and these ideas are reducing the earth to a brain. See how by telegraph and steam the Earth is anthropologized" (Carey, 1989c, p. 120). Emerson's language about a global brain and the way in which media act as extensions of the self is reiterated among the religiously-inclined media theorists of the mid-20th century, Teillard de Chardin and Marshall McLuhan. Theologian Teillard de Chardin imagined a web of electronic information that would eventually envelope the globe in a thinking membrane, marking a new stage in man's development and bringing him closer to the mind of God. Chardin refers to this membrane as the "noosphere," a neologism that is often associated with technological prophet Marshall McLuhan's "global village" (Wolfe, 2000, pp. 68-69).[1]

The link between the American religious imagination and communication technology persisted as telegraph evolved into radio, television and internet. Peter Horsfield argues that television has become the functional equivalent of religion by providing a common body of beliefs (Horsfield, Hess, & Medrano, 2004). Gregor Goethals (1981) suggests that we recreate symbols of transcendence in popular media that parallel Catholic sacramental models. And Jesus Martin-Barbero writes:

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[1] Although there are competing claims as to how much Chardin influenced McLuhan, it can be argued that McLuhan possessed a more skeptical view of the inevitable networking of humanity. McLuhan, a convert to Roman Catholicism, suggests that a global electronic mind risks coming off as a diabolical perversion of the *corpus mysticum*, or the mystical body the Church (McLuhan, et al., 1999).

> Despite all the promise of modernity to make religion disappear, what has really happened is that religion has modernized itself. … What we are witnessing is not the conflict of religion and modernity, but the transformation of modernity into enchantment by linking new communication technologies to the logic of popular religiosity. (Horsfield, et al., 2004, p. xx)

Tom Wolfe captured the zeitgeist of the Internet boom in the late 1990s by highlighting the language of computer scientist Danny Hillis:

> Telephony, computers, and CD-ROMs are all specialized mechanisms we've built to bind us together. … We are not evolution's ultimate product. There's something coming after us, and I imagine it is something wonderful. But we may never be able to comprehend it, any more than a caterpillar can comprehend turning into a butterfly. (Wolfe, 2000, p. 74)

Although similar in their hyperbolic zeal, a notable difference between the language used by Hillis and that of the unnamed telegraph enthusiast is the distinctly evolutionary mythology employed by Hillis. Both individuals wax poetic about a paradigmatic change in the human condition, but one grounds it in the "Gospel of Christ," whereas Hillis invokes the language of evolution. What is most salient here is that in both cases bear traces of religious speech. Hillis' "mechanisms" that "bind us together" echo the etymology of religion itself, *re-ligare*, to "bind back to a source."

The preceding examples exhibit what William Stahl (1999) refers to as a "technological mysticism." According to Stahl, technological mysticism is belief in the universal efficacy of technology and can be found in the utopian predictions of futurologists as well as the way in

which media report on computers and technology (1999). In *Being Digital* (Negroponte, 1995), MIT Media Lab founder Nicholas Negroponte contributed to the rhetoric that fueled the dot.com bubble of the 1990s by stating, "Computing is not about computers, it's about life; being digital is not just being a geek or Internet surfer or mathematically savvy child, it's actually a way of living and is going to impact absolutely everything" (1995, p. 33). Negroponte's organizing metaphor in *Being Digital* is the idea that humans are being liberated by the move from atoms: the physical and material, to bits: the virtual and immaterial – an idea that reflects the gnostic disregard for the physical body in favor of the immaterial *gnosis* or divine knowledge necessary for enlightenment.

Tech Visionary and Mystic

It is here that we move from the general to the particular. Having established a historical link between religious rhetoric and technology, I will now provide some specific context for the Apple advertising rhetoric to be analyzed in this study. One of the distinguishing features of the Apple brand is the way in which the narrative remains so consistent from advertising to promotion to press release to product design. This necessarily entails a singular vision, one that is derived in large part from the company's founder and CEO, Steve Jobs. From his hippie days at Reed College to his experimentation with LSD and Zen Buddhism, Jobs provides a fascinating study in technological artistry and radical mysticism.

In the following section, I present a series of biographical details about Steve Jobs and founding partner Steve Wozniak to highlight the early evidence of religious proclivities among the century's most compelling technological showmen. The stories come primarily from secondhand historical sources that rely on press accounts and personal interviews. The lack of

primary source material in this section is a methodological weakness that must be admitted, although the corroboration across sources does provide some degree of verification. In short, the Apple computer company is a case study in the way in which the self-directed spiritualities that sprung from the countercultural pathos of the 1970s found purchase in a computer company. The confluence of technological innovation and countercultural values provides a provocative point of analysis for understanding the ways in which technology and spiritual belief continue to be intersect.

All good cults have larger-than-life leaders and Apple is no exception. Steve Jobs has personified the Apple ethos since the company began in the late 1970s. The Apple enterprise is the serendipitous confluence of a dreamer and a technician, Steve Jobs and close friend Steve Wozniak. Together they would revolutionize the budding personal computer industry in the early 1980s.

Sunnyvale and Cupertino California in the 1970s was a hotbed of high-tech talent. As teenagers, Jobs and Wozniak belonged to a group of hobbyists known as 'wireheads.' Tinkering with electronics at that time was considered a 'cool' hobby and was more sophisticated than just being a marijuana-smoking 'pothead.' Wozniak was obsessed with electronics and it was a hobby that kept him out of trouble in the turbulent drug-fueled 70s,

> I was lucky. Keys to happiness came to me that would keep me happy for the whole of my life. It was just accidental. I don't know how many people get it. It's like a religion or something that just popped into my head, walking home from school. (Malone, 1999, p. 15)

As a thirteen-year old, Wozniak received his eureka moment while studying an adder-subtractor circuit in a trade magazine, "he understood not only how the circuit worked but its underlying

metaphysics" (1999, p. 15). It was at this point that Wozniak realized electronics could "create the world itself; becoming thought and memory. It could inhabit a universe of its own devising" (1999, p. 15).

Wozniak's sheltered teenage years were in stark contrast to the free-wheeling experimentation of future business partner, Steve Jobs. The availability of LSD and marijuana in northern California meant that electronics and drugs became intertwined hobbies for some wireheads. Hobbyists and engineers alike realized they were able to better design the minds of machines by tinkering with their own minds. Jobs dropped his first LSD in a wheat field,

> It was great. I had been listening to a lot of Bach. All of a sudden the wheat field was playing Bach. It was the most wonderful experience of my life up to that point. I felt like the conductor of this symphony with Bach coming through the wheat field. (Niermann & Sack, 2008, p. 57)

The partnership of Jobs and Wozniak was a perfect symbiosis, Jobs was consumed with engineering enlightenment while Wozniak honed his craft of enlightened engineering.

In the 1970s, after dropping out of Reed College and working for Atari at night, Jobs wanted to explore his devotion to Eastern philosophy by traveling to India with his friend, Dan Kottke. While Wozniak continued to tinker, Jobs became more interested in the 'electric atmosphere of love' reported by his friend Robert Friedland while studying the teachings of Indian guru, Neem Karolie Baba. In India, Jobs took on the role of a mendicant, a spiritual beggar who depends on the kindness of strangers. He traveled from Delhi to the Himalayas where he shaved his head and participated in various Hindu rituals (Young & Simon, 2005).

Jobs became somewhat disillusioned as he met different gurus who tried to impart ideas about the essence of existence, but it did not dampen his search for enlightenment. It was not

until the end of the journey when he and Kottke were trying to find shelter from a driving thunderstorm that anything close to a religious experience took place. The two men, digging in the sand of a dry creek bed to escape the lightning and rain called out to God, promising to be good people if they survived. After reflecting on his intense and disturbing pilgrimage, Jobs recalled, "It was one of the first times that I started to realize that maybe Thomas Edison did a lot more to improve the world than Karl Marx and Neem Kairolie Baba put together" (2005, p. 25)

In 1975, Jobs search for truth was still not satisfied. He was back at Atari and began exploring Zen Buddhism more deeply. He ate only fruit, fasted and attended meditation retreats at the nearby Los Altos Zen Center. Jobs liked the fact that Zen had no 'religious structure' and was instead a self-directed spirituality that emphasized "experience, intuition, and self-fulfillment through inner consciousness" (2005, p. 31). It was at this time that Jobs met Japanese Zen master Kobin Chino. Jobs' friend Kottke recalls a particular exchange at the Zen master's house where the three men were sitting, talking and drinking tea, "All of a sudden, Steve says to Kobin, 'What do you think of speed? You know, doing things fast?' He was really serious about it and was really into this idea that the quicker you could do something, the better a person you were" (2005, p. 32).

It is here we begin to see how 'technique' finds its way into the formative stage of Jobs' early career. Philosopher Jacques Ellul (1964) describes 'la technique' as a social process infatuated with speed and efficiency - not just speed for its own sake, but speed as a marker of something that is good or morally desirable. The computer discourse has always been one that is defined by speed, particularly processor speed. As Ellul makes clear, it is not particular technologies that make up 'la technique' but a way of doing things, a guiding ethic. It is now a foregone conclusion that a computer must be fast in order to be useful. A machine's virtues are

defined in some way or another by download speed, upload speed, video rendering speed, startup speed, and so on.

Despite Apple's full-fledged membership in the technological society of Ellul's description, the company managed to achieve cult status by *avoiding* marketing messages that placed a premium on speed and efficiency while continuing to produce fast products. The rise of the so-called Apple cult is due in part to a messaging strategy that minimizes technical specifications in favor of more aesthetic or mythological appeals. During the run-up to the 1984 Macintosh computer launch, Jobs had the following exchange with Marketing Director Mike Murray,

> 'We don't stand a chance of advertising with features and benefits and with RAMs and with charts and comparisons,' Jobs said. 'The only chance we have of communicating is with a feeling.'
>
> 'It's got to be like a Sony Walkman or a Cuisinart. It's got to be a cult product,' Murray said.
>
> 'Yeah, we say, it's a cult, and then we say, hey, drink this Kool-Aid.' He strolled to the door and said, 'We want to create an image people will never forget. We've got to build it, and we've got to build it early.' (Cruikshank, 2006, p. 91)

The result was the infamous '1984' ad in which the 'IBM society' (depicted as Orwellian) is demolished by the rebellious Macintosh movement. By correlating the 'business machine' computer culture with all that is depersonalizing and soulless in society, Apple managed to create an image and a feeling about computers that was liberating rather than confining. The feeling generated by the ad was contagious.

The Apple movement is not a cult maintained by high priests and secret oaths, it is a self-directed body (true to the Zen spirituality of the company's founder) that inspires Mac fanatics to sell to the community of consumers. Apple's strategy is merely to keep them around, keep them happy, and allow them to do the evangelizing. In the how-to management book *The Apple Way*, author Cruikshank advises that "you don't have to get everybody to join the cult. You just have to get the smartest, most connected, and most committed people to sign up. (Think Opus Dei.) They'll do the rest" (2006, p. 99).

The Zen Buddhism of Steve Jobs is self-directed, self-important, and skeptical of rational analysis. Zen is all about intuition and spontaneity. Such a list of qualities reads like a crib sheet for the values statement of the Apple computer company. Apple devices allow the user to 'self-direct' their experience, whether it is through personalized playlists on the iPod or customized interfaces on the iMac. The Apple machines eschew clunky interfaces for elegant, one-button designs with touchscreens that appeal to intuition. Apple has become the machine that uninitiated computer users gravitate to for their ease of use and intuitive design. During the development of the Apple II, Jobs decided the computer should have no fan because it needed to be *quiet*. Jobs believed that customers would appreciate a computer that did not make lots of machine noise. His conviction arose from his study of Zen meditation where noise was something that impeded mental and spiritual growth (Young & Simon, 2005). The ad campaign for the first iPhone was about spontaneity. The ads featured a device that could show a feature film, get directions to a seafood restaurant and then place a call to the restaurant in less than thirty seconds. Intuition, speed and spontaneity are hallmarks of the Apple experience and stem in part from the founder's formative experiences in Eastern mysticism that continue to inform Apple's corporate and consumer culture.

Computer companies founded by technicians, engineers and corporate types derive their strength and sustainability from quality products and good marketing. Companies like Apple possess the rare ability to create quality products, market them well, and peddle a philosophy that transcends the business. Steve Jobs has helped create a company that uses its tools as metaphors for professing what is *good* about digital culture. Jobs is a guru of the information age. At a time when our 'device lifestyle' threatens culture with internet addiction, hollow relationships, short attention spans and the like, Jobs offers romantic notions of self-fulfillment in the form of elegant machines.

The entire digital ecosystem benefits from this philosophical coup. If technology can be imagined in the spirit of mind expansion, creative discovery and greater self-awareness then it becomes a social good. It escapes the prejudice that fettered early computers characterized by esoteric programming languages and dubious military projects. The impersonal military machine eventually became the impersonal business machine that focused on raw computation and data storage but bore no traces of the human spirit and imagination that were required to create it.

Like Walt Disney, Steve Jobs would seize the narrative of imagination and market it with great success from the 1980s onward. The spirit and imagination of Steven Jobs is a potent mix of countercultural values and a sincere desire to ponder the big questions. Adopted at an early age, a rootless Jobs sought spiritual and emotional answers about his own beginning. He was captivated by what is hidden or beyond the realm of the everyday. The company's early rallying cries like, "Let's Make a Dent in the Universe!" "The Journey is the Reward!" and "Let's Be Pirates!" reflect this combination of alienation and seeking, not to mention a healthy dose of ego.

The Brand Cult

The brand cult that has formed around the Apple brand is a product of a number of factors, not the least of which is Jobs' cult of personality. In this section, I will shift the focus from Jobs to the academics, journalists and consumers who are responsible for the maintaining the brand cult through actively participating in it or describing it. I will begin by introducing the concept of the brand cult as it is conceived in the marketing literature before moving to the Apple case.

Brands that have achieved cult status according to marketing experts include Harley Davidson, JetBlue, Apple and Volkswagen Beetle (Atkin, 2004; Einstein, 2008). It is no coincidence that transportation and media brands tend to dominate such lists. They originate from the same cultural patronage – human communication. Transportation and communication products move persons and/or messages through space and time. Forms of communication also exist at the heart of religious belief systems that add meaning and purpose to communities of like-minded individuals. The common root of the terms community and communication make communication brands more amenable to the cult concept. They foster togetherness and meaningfulness in a society being pulled apart at the seams by anomie and meaninglessness.

The product, for most cult brands, is often secondary to the social experience of using and displaying the brand. Starbucks chairman, Howard D. Schultz said that the company is not about various iterations of coffee, but is about the experience of being part of a hip, laid-back social scene. The buzz of the Harley brand comes from the thousands of riders who organize "rides, training courses, social events and charity fund-raisers." It is in this network of genuine social exchange that stories about the brand move beyond official PR and become part of the lives of real product devotees.

In a study of Macintosh fans, Belk and Tumbat (2005) argue that the Apple cult is sustained by more than just a sense of belonging. It is a product of the corporate narrative that has given the brand a mythological significance. The authors suggest that certain archetypal Judeo-Christian stories give life to the consumer cult narrative; Jobs as messiah, Microsoft as the devil and so on. In this dissertation, I take this idea one step further. What has been overlooked in the current research on Apple's religiosity is the fact that Apple sits at the creative fore of a social upheaval that is reshaping our environment. Computers and mobile devices have become a dominant mode by which social relationships are organized and enacted.

It is one thing to create communities or stories or symbols that inspire devotion within a particular cultural context, but it is quite another to also create the means by which those communities, stories and symbols are manufactured and maintained. In other words, Apple's innovative leadership in personal computing places the brand in the unique position of being both medium and message. Apple provides the means by which the sacred rituals of community and self-discovery are enacted, thereby granting the devices a sacred significance. While this might be argued for any computer or mobile device manufacturer, Apple has successfully capitalized on the metaphorical significance of this position in their highly iconographic advertising. It is this metaphorical significance that I intend to analyze in detail in this dissertation project.

In Chapter 2, I provide a theoretical and methodological grounding for the interpretive process of reading the Apple advertising texts in Chapters 4-6. This dissertation follows an instrumental case study approach, allowing me to pursue an external interest, the relationship between religion, technology and advertising, through a specific case, the Apple computer company. This is different from an intrinsic case study approach that seeks insight from an

individual case for the sake of learning more about that specific case. Both are valid methods of study, but each come with certain caveats and limitations that are addressed in the methodology discussion.

Hermeneutics depends on a systematic and structured reading of a text. My particular approach is derived from semiotics – a linguistic mode of analysis that reads communication as a system of signs that is capable of both literal and mythical forms of speech. In Chapter 2, I discuss Thomas Lessl's (1993) framework for identifying religious communication in secular contexts as a useful conceptual framework for approaching the Apple texts. The theory that informs the research comes from the media ecology tradition; a "theory group" that emphasizes the role of communication forms in social and cultural change. I will provide a substantive summary of media ecology in Chapter 2 as well.

Chapter 3 looks at the iMac personal computer – a descendent of the Apple Macintosh. The dominant theme in the iMac advertisements is the anthropomorphizing of the computer, an attempt to make computers seem more human. The most popular example is the "Get a Mac" campaign featuring comedians John Hodgman and Justin Long playing the parts of the Windows and Apple operating systems. The ads set up a dualist morality play in which the Windows figure is repeatedly defeated by the technological virtue of the more enlightened Macintosh figure. Apple's penchant for setting up good versus evil binaries extends into other iMac product ads in which the machine is portrayed as an aesthetically beautiful device in the midst of a darkened post-industrial world.

Chapter 4 is a textual analysis of advertising for the Apple iPod. I situate the iPod in a long line of personal media technology devices, from the Sony Walkman, a portable cassette player, to the Audiac, an experimental acoustic device used as a pain killer in dental offices in

the 1960s. The chapter describes the way in which the minimalist iPod ads imagine the device as both entertainment medium and means of escape. The ads rely on visual metaphors that highlight the ecstasy and liberation derived from immersion in music.

Chapter 5 is a textual analysis of several iPhone product advertisements. I look at the print ad that launched the iPhone in 2006 called "Touching is Believing" and two television ads that exemplify the iPhone advertising motif. All of the ads are product focused, rarely showing the faces of users, instead focusing on their hands as they manipulate the iPhone's innovative touchscreen. Several religious themes emerge in the iPhone advertising rhetoric, including the gnostic theme of man as magician – connoted by the sleight of hand required to operate the elegant touchscreen interface.

In Chapter 6, I conclude the dissertation by considering the Apple story in light of my work as a media instructor at a Catholic, Benedictine liberal arts college. Steve Jobs' rhetoric during the most recent product launch for the Apple iPad tablet computer, exemplifies the rhetoric of Apple's marketing; Jobs described the new device as "truly magical" and "a dream" (Sutter & Gross, 2010). As Karl Marx famously argued, the enchantment surrendered by religion has re-emerged in the form of mass marketed commodities. If the technological environment promoted by advertising is indeed a haven for false consciousness and quasi-religious ideologies, then where does one find articulations of an authentically human consciousness? I explore this point by integrating media ecology theory with the 1400-year old "Rule of St. Benedict" - a guide for monasteries written by the founder of Western monasticism, St. Benedict of Nursia. Through such a radical juxtaposition, I argue that a return to the precepts of the monastic oral culture is a necessary antidote for virtuous navigation through the world of electronic media.

CHAPTER 2

THEORY, METHOD AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The first chapter of this dissertation provided some valuable context for analyzing Apple's advertising. In this chapter, I will review the research that has been done on the religion-technology relationship and describe the constellation of theoretical approaches that inform this study. I will also provide a demonstration of the semiotic methodology used to read the advertising texts.

I begin the chapter by considering a framework for defining 'religious communication.' I rely heavily on Thomas Lessl's (1993) approach that seeks three criteria in defining particular rhetorical acts as forms of religious communication: 1) the use of metaphor 2) the presence of symbols that cannot be reduced to nonfigurative forms of expression and 3) an allusion to metaphysical concepts. Lessl makes it clear that religious communication does not have to be dogmatic, scriptural or come from a religious authority – it merely needs to exhibit speech that is both metaphorical and metaphysical. This approach aids in understanding they way in which a cultural practice like advertising that comes from the secular discourse of consumerism can model religious forms of speech. I elucidate Lessl's framework by providing an expanded definition of metaphor and by conducting a sample analysis of consumer technology ads from AT&T, Verizon, Sony and Apple that illustrates the way in which the religious grammar of technology discourse is not unique to Apple but is an integral part of the media technology ecosystem.

My overarching theoretical orientation is guided by media ecology theory, a framework that concerns itself with the effects of media technology on human perception, understanding,

feeling and value. It concerns itself with media forms rather than the content of media. Insofar as this is a study of advertised media forms, I find media ecology to be an illuminating interpretive lens. However, the explanatory power of media ecology only takes us so far. This dissertation is reading our relationship to media forms through the iconography of advertising. This requires a content-based approach as well, which is why I have chosen semiotics – a study of the signification process in communication. Semiotics interprets how signs and symbols mean. How can they be interpreted – literally and figuratively? By considering media ecology and semiotics together, I read the signs of Apple advertising as a system of signs that are symptomatic of our relationship to media technology forms.

This type of analysis fits within a paradigm of research known as cultural studies, a broad grouping of approaches that looks at culture from an engaged perspective rather than a detached position. In Chapter 1, I describe the way in which I am immersed in the environment of technology and advertising while I attempt to study it. In this chapter, I take up the cultural studies banner in my outline of method – a hermeneutic approach to reading culture that considers various moments in the cultural meaning making process. Culture is an amorphous entity. To study culture, one must seek constellations (like the one I have suggested between religion, media technology and consumerism) to ground an analysis. One must also consider the articulation of meaning making 'moments' that makes up any cultural practice or process.

Cultural studies offers a schematic for such analysis in the 'circuit of culture' – a series of moments that encompass the various facets of human practice. Aside from production and consumption activities, there are moments of identity formation, regulation (legal or social) and representation. My focus is on the moment of *representation*. What do the Apple advertising signs and images say about our relationship to technology products in the modern age? This

requires a semiotic approach – a means by which the signs of a text can be read in conjunction with one another and situated within the various cultural narratives and mythologies that inform the ad's production and consumption. Studying representation does not exclude the other moments of cultural meaning making, but it does shine a brighter spotlight on the practice of representation.

In this chapter, I also provide a treatment of 'commodification' that comes from Marxian theory. Cultural studies began as a project that grew out of literary criticism and left-wing sociology in 1960s Birmingham, England. The Marxian approach permeates cultural studies work, but the focus is typically on the oppression of certain groups by an unjust cultural authority or system. My concern with Marx is more metaphysical.

Marx was fond of religious analogy in his criticism of capitalism and commodity culture. He believed that workers were spiritually *alienated* from the goods they produced because of the system of capitalist system of exchange. Marx saw the process of assigning value to products divorced from individual human labor as an exercise in *fetishism* – where value is mystically assigned to goods rather than being determined by the human labor and raw materials required to produce it. The customary use of Marx is to critique the capitalist process of value determination, but my interest is somewhat different.

Where I part with Marx is in his use of spiritual terms to demythologize *both* religion and capitalism. Marx famously claims that religion is the 'opiate of the masses.' My aim is to demythologize consumer culture while taking the religious rhetoric seriously. If our views of technology and culture are haunted by religion, albeit veiled by metaphor, it should be the work of hermeneutics and critical analysis to interpret the telos of our techno-spiritual pursuits. In other words, what does it mean to subscribe to a Gnostic or psychedelic or new age view of

technology? These ideas are not merely fables or superstitions, they are highly influential structures of thought that impact the ethical and moral choices we make with technology. The only myth in this scenario is that technology is neutral or value-free. On the contrary, technology practice is informed by the moral and ethical positions, religious or otherwise, practiced by the producers and consumers of technology products.

A New Underground Religious War

This dissertation is an interpretive account of Apple's technology advertising. In qualitative studies such as this, this is typically the point where the researcher reveals any biases that may inform the work. While I took care of most of that in Chapter 1, there is one question I left unanswered: do I prefer Mac or PC?[1] This question is loaded with something more than product preference. Some would argue there is a particular worldview embedded in the operating systems of personal computers.

According to Umberto Eco (1995), there is "a new underground religious war which is modifying the modern world." Eco is not referring to fundamentalism but to computers. Eco's tongue-in-cheek metaphor goes like this: the Apple Macintosh computer is Catholic and Microsoft Windows/DOS is Protestant.[2] Macintosh is Catholic because it is

> counter-reformist and has been influenced by the *ratio studiorum* of the Jesuits. It is cheerful, friendly, conciliatory; it tells the faithful how they must proceed step by step to reach -- if not the kingdom of Heaven -- the moment in which their document is printed. It is catechistic: The essence of revelation is dealt with via simple formulae and sumptuous icons. Everyone has a right to salvation. (1995, p. 33)

[1] Apple and Windows (Mac and PC) are the two most popular operating systems for personal computers.

[2] At the time of Eco's article on the subject (1994) non-Macintosh personal computers were still referred to as DOS machines. Today, they are more commonly referred to as PCs or Windows machines.

The Windows/DOS machine is Protestant, “even Calvinistic,”

> It allows free interpretation of scripture, demands difficult personal decisions, imposes a subtle hermeneutics upon the user, and takes for granted the idea that not all can achieve salvation. To make the system work you need to interpret the program yourself: Far away from the baroque community of revelers, the user is closed within the loneliness of his own inner torment. (1995, p. 33)

Accounting for the move to the Windows operating system in the mid-1990s, a system partially derived from the Macintosh interface, Eco qualifies his analysis of DOS by noting that

> Windows represents an Anglican-style schism, big ceremonies in the cathedral, but there is always the possibility of a return to DOS to change things in accordance with bizarre decisions: When it comes down to it, you can decide to ordain women and gays if you want to. (1995, p. 33)

Eco’s creative analysis of competing computer brands is the work of a semiotician – someone who reads the meaning of signs in a culture. For Eco, “a sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else” (Eco, 1976, p. 7). For Eco, computers serve as an evocative metaphor in the information society. The dominant technologies of an age often serve this purpose, giving individuals a metaphorical frame for understanding and interpreting their existential situation. Eco’s whimsical interpretation captures this dissertation’s theoretical and methodological approach succinctly. It is a semiotic study that supports the media ecology view that forms of media shape human consciousness – including religious consciousness.

Media Ecology Theory

The notion that dominant technologies shape cultures and consciousness is the core tenet of media ecology theory. In this section, I will lay out the core arguments of the media ecology position. This will set up a discussion of cultural studies and the rhetorical methodology used in this dissertation. The basic assumption in the media ecology school is that as human practices of mediation change, cultures change. Neil Postman, one of the founding fathers of the discipline likens it to the biological term 'ecology' by suggesting that media are environmental. In other words, when a significant change is introduced to the system, just as in a natural ecology, the system is changed.

The introduction of the printing press in the Middle Ages not only had an effect on literacy, but it changed legal, scientific and religious ideas and practices as well. It is not a stretch to assert that the print revolution gave birth to the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment. Without a system of mass-production like the printing press, it would have been too difficult for these movements to take hold and change culture in the ways that they did. Each change introduces a new set of relations and a different conception of 'symbolic' balance. Electronic media has had a profound environmental effect and has ushered in what is commonly known as the information age. In much the same way that the printing press allowed for the proliferation of new social and cultural patterns and symbols, telecommunications technologies have instituted a newly-configured symbolic universe.

The Greeks were keenly aware of communication forms and their impact on communication beginning with written texts. In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates complains that writing "diminishes memory, lacks interaction, disseminates at random, and disembodies speakers and hearers" (Peters, 1999, p. 36). These conditions are the rules or grammar by which the technology of writing operates. We do not often question these conditions because we are

too often caught up parsing the information in the text. Socrates felt that oral discourse was the only way in which a person's words could retain their life and bring forth fruit in the soul of another through dialectic exchange. Writing divorced the speaker from his ideas and forced his thoughts to exhibit a "solemn silence" in the face of questions and challenges. Socrates' concerns have found new purchase in the anxieties of the new media age where digital devotees remain attached to computers and cell phones and disconnected from their immediate surroundings.

When one is addressing technology, we have already noted the way in which our machines serve as extensions of the self. Thus, the relationship between humans and technology has a particularly personal and physical connection that can be interpreted in advertising. Those who speak of man becoming cyborg, part human/part machine, in the age of new media fail to remember that man has been trying on external media prosthetics for some time. The camera and television extend the eye, the telephone and radio the ear. All media extend human communication through time and/or space. Storage devices, from marks on clay to computer hard drives, extend memory. Computers, and all of the devices derived from computer technology, translate our cognitive capacities into machine form.

The symptoms of our perceptual shift from human-centered communication to electronically mediated communication can be read in our social interactions (or lack thereof) and our cognitive capacities (or lack thereof). Nicholas Carr (Carr) asks whether or not the bias of new media is to form a consciousness that skims the surface of things. Has the hyperlink and the search engine remapped and short-circuited neural pathways so that the idea of engaging in a deep read of a lengthy text has become an overwhelmingly foreign task? Has the cell phone and iPod cut us off from embodied social encounters that might otherwise occur if not for the ubiquity of personal communication devices? If any of this is remotely true, then we are altering

what Walter Ong (1982) calls *noetic economies* or ways of knowing. As Apple famously announced at the dawn of the internet age, we are beginning to "Think Different."

Ads for media technology products are recursive in the sense that they promote the means by which media (like advertising) is ultimately consumed. If advertising is "capitalism's way of saying 'I love you' to itself" (Schudson, 1999, p. 195) then media technology advertising is technology's way of saying "I love you" to itself. It is in technology ads that we are, for a moment, made explicitly aware of the means of communication by which all of the advertising and media content travels.

Marshall McLuhan's famous phrase "the medium is the message" provides a literal interpretation of ads that promote media technology products. The message of a cell phone ad is an affirmation of the social necessity of the medium. The *content* of the cell phone ad message is secondary to the implied assertion that the presence of the cell phone medium in contemporary society is to be taken for granted and embraced as a compulsory accessory for modern life. The necessity of computers and cell phones are the message of media technology ads, but McLuhan was interested in much more.

McLuhan recognized that the formative power of media was not in the content of media but in the media themselves. The printing press changed the culture of the 1500s in a dramatic way – not because of what was printed but because mass literacy provided a completely new way to share ideas and apprehend the world. Elizabeth Eisenstein (1979) took note of the force, effect and consequences of Gutenberg's invention by calling it the "unacknowledged revolution" (1979, p. 3). Print literacy revolutionized awareness of the world by changing the sensory experience of information sharing. Literacy was replacing orality as the primary means of knowledge acquisition.

Communications theorist and American cultural studies icon James Carey is considered a media ecologist for a number of reasons, not the least of which is his connection to Harold Innis (who also influenced Marshall McLuhan). From Innis's work on the time and space biases of certain forms of communication, Carey (1989a) developed a distinction between ritual and transmission models of communication. A good example of the transmission model is the spread of Christianity in the new world by virtue of the printing press. Carey argues that cultures are formed *in* communication rather than *by* communication and that American culture is constantly communicating because it is constantly trying to define itself. It is in communication that culture is made and re-made. In academic work, Carey adds, not enough attention has been paid to ritual models of communication. Communicative rituals are overlooked in favor of transmission views, where sender and receiver and content/effect of messages is the dominant focus.

The Apple subculture provides a prototypical example of how a subculture of traditions, values and beliefs are maintained in ritual fashion. Annual MacWorld conferences draw thousands from around the world and the everyday use of Apple technologies like the iPod and iPhone has become highly ritualized. A commuter might listen to his iPod every morning on the train providing a soundtrack to an otherwise bland experience. It is in the repeated, ritual use of these devices that they become artifacts that shape human communication, social relationships and the surrounding culture.

Carey's observations are related to the work of another noted media ecologist, Walter Ong (1982), who analyzed the differences between oral and literate cultures. In oral cultures, Ong contends, there is an emphasis on repetition, memory, tradition and physical presence. These attributes are noetic in that they structure and pattern human perception, understanding, feeling and value. The move to literate culture invites an altogether different noetic economy

where the emphasis is on abstract thinking, sequential thought and logical argument. Ong argues that electronic media have ushered in an age of secondary orality where features of tribal culture like acoustic space and 'presence' have been recalled in mediated form.

Ong's link between tribal cultures and electronic media recalls Marshall McLuhan's 'global village' (1964b). Ong and McLuhan worked together at St. Louis University and there is a fair amount of overlap in their thinking. McLuhan's more famous aphorism, "the medium is the message" is something of a slogan for the media ecology movement. The medium is the message is derived from McLuhan's formalist roots in literary criticism where literary form said as much or more than the actual content.

It is somewhat ironic then that McLuhan's career began with a book about *content*. The release of *The Mechanical Bride: The Folklore of Industrial Man* (1951) inaugurated McLuhan's media/culture legacy with a series of acerbic and witty reflections on 1950s magazine advertisements, comic strips and other assorted pop culture paraphenalia. McLuhan argued that industrial man could be 'read' through the ads that portrayed him as the specialist-savant Sherlock Holmes or the bumbling corporate cog, Dagwood Bumstead. Industiral woman was mass produced in assembly line fashion by ads that focused on refining body parts as if one were working on an automobile. Babies were baptized into industrial culture by ingesting mass-produced baby formula and were later educated by institutions that prepared individuals for participation in a machine-like corporate culture. McLuhan's treatment of advertising as a reflection of a 'technological' ideology is highly instructive for the study of Apple advertising that I am proposing. In addition, his later work on form over content informs the way in which a productive analysis of media devices can be undertaken.

In order to fully probe the relationship between technology, religion and representation, I have found the work of media ecologist Jacques Ellul to be enlightening as well. Like McLuhan, Ellul was concerned with the ways that technology as a worldview or ideology shaped society and culture. His expanded treatment of 'technique' in *The Technological Society* laments the tyranny of efficiency that guides modern technological pursuits. For Ellul, efficiency as an ideology is devoid of a moral or ethical center and therefore dangerous.

As a media ecologist, Ellul was also concerned with communication modalities, most specifically, the tension between word and image. Like Guy Debord, Ellul sees the spectacle as something nefarious and ideological. More importantly for Ellul, the obsession with images undermines the centrality of the Word in religious thinking. The word is 'humiliated' by images and as a result religious belief suffers. As an iconoclast, Ellul was wedded to the Old Testament prohibition of graven images in Mosaic law. As Postman points out, if God was so concerned about the way religion was mediated as to make it a commandment, then God was also a media ecologist in the sense that he realized how forms of mediation shape cultures.

Identifying Religious Communication in Technological Discourse

The hostile tenor of the Enlightenment in the seventeenth century featured rhetoric that condemned religious institutions for their bloody history and superstitious practices. The philosopher Voltaire's rallying cry against the Church was *Ecrasez l'inflame* – 'crush the infamous one' (Byrne, 1997, p. 2). Despite a militant rationalism, the leading figures of the Enlightenment could not resist plundering the sacred shibboleths of religious rhetoric in an attempt to assert a secular-scientific order. From early on it was clear that the process of attacking religious structures of thought also involved borrowing some metaphors. There was a commingling of scientific and religious modes in movements like 'natural religion':

> Bacon argued that the same hermeneutic ethic which had recently revitalized Christianity, namely the Protestant's singular devotion to the "book of God's word," also demanded singular attention to the "book of God's works," which was the work of science. (Thomas M. Lessl, 2007, pp. 127-128)

The rise of Enlightenment scientism has been linked to a discourse that retains many of the marks of a religious discourse. The terms and metaphors are not quite as explicit as they once were but a careful textual analysis of scientific communication still yields apparent links. In a case study of the *Cosmos* television series written and narrated by renowned astronomer Carl Sagan, Lessl (1993) observes that the commingling of scientific and cultural symbols "produces a rhetoric often more characteristic of religious than scientific discourse." He calls it a hybrid form in which instructional elements are set within a larger mythical framework to convey meaning about an otherwise complex topic.

Science seeks to overcome its own "rhetorical dilemma" of conveying complex ideas by granting access to the uninitiated layman through common symbols. The way to do this most effectively in an ideological sense is to construct narratives that are simple to understand and that resonate with deeper human concerns. Sagan does this in the *Cosmos* series by insinuating that science and nature are in perfect harmony, allowing for what he calls a "cosmic perspective" or natural way to knowledge. Lessl points out that Sagan's mythology is primarily an "evolutionary mythology" in which all the realities of the universe can be tied back to the root metaphor of evolution, a fact of nature in Sagan's cosmic perspective. Evolution is thus granted a mysterious and sacred status; becoming a trope by which humans come to understand themselves and the universe around them.

Both science and technology must overcome the "rhetorical dilemma" that occurs when trying to present complex ideas to the uninitiated layman. Here we can draw some parallels to the discourse of technology companies. Prior to the development of the graphical-user interface for computers, programmers had to rely on an esoteric and complex set of codes and commands to complete even basic tasks. Programming languages like COBOL and FORTRAN made computer mastery difficult to attain. With the advent of icons, popularized by the early Apple Macintosh operating systems, computer users were given a way of interfacing the machine in a much more visual and intuitive way. The underlying machine code remained impenetrable by the uninitiated user, but the dilemma was masked by the user friendly icons that invisibly directed the underlying code. Apple found a way to popularize the personal computer by imagining computing metaphorically rather than through difficult codes and jargon. Apple's use of metaphor extended beyond the interface and became part of the broader corporate narrative as well. In the following section, I will discuss a theory of metaphor that will inform a textual analysis of the technology ads at the end of this chapter.

A Theory of Metaphor

Before we pursue the rhetorical links between technology and religion in the context of technology advertising, it will be helpful to consider a more thorough definition of metaphor. The central tension in theorizing metaphor as a symbol system has been between its stylistic and epistemic qualities. Is metaphor merely linguistic decoration or does it contribute to meaning? This debate can be traced back to the Greeks, from whom modern definitions of metaphor are derived. For Plato, rhetoric was to be condemned as illusion and deception. Metaphor, as a supplement to persuasion, was to be included in this despicable class. Aristotle chose a more

positive evaluation by suggesting that metaphor is the ingenious perception of likeness. He defined metaphor as 'giving something a name that belongs to something else.' The transference of meaning could be from 'genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or on the grounds of analogy.' Aristotle's elaboration allows us to include metonymy, hyperbole, synechdoche, catachresis, and a host of other figures of speech in the category of metaphor. In this sense, metaphor is known as the 'figure of figures' (Ricœur, 1977).

The classical definitions of metaphor tend to focus attention on the word and the displacement of words. It is concerned with the process of naming rather than the semantic effect of a grouping of words. Max Black (1966) develops a theory of metaphor that deals with the stylistic/epistemic split by working through the mechanics of metaphor as a semantic exercise rather than a grammatical one. Black investigates the uses of metaphor and establishes a taxonomy for recognizing types of metaphor. In one example, Black shows how 'Richard is a lion' substitutes lion for bravery so that the phrase can be re-worked as 'Richard is brave,' a truncated simile. This is what Black would call a *substitution* metaphor. Another view of metaphor is that of *comparison* where simile re-emerges in elliptical form, Richard is like a lion (in being brave). In both cases, Black asserts, the reader detects the ground of an intended analogy or simile and retraces the author's path to the original literary meaning.

The problem with the preceding views is that they presuppose a likeness before the metaphor has a chance to act on the reader. In the substitution and comparison views, the metaphor is an ornament of style that relies on the objective similarity of two hermetically sealed terms. Black's interaction view overcomes this by suggesting that the metaphor does not merely reflect similarity but *creates similarity.* In Black's interaction view, there are two distinct subjects: the principal and subsidiary. The principal and subsidiary subjects are best regarded as

systems of things rather than just things. This is why Janet Soskice (1985) calls metaphor a community of relations.

In the interaction view, the principal subject obtains a new meaning, not quite literal, not quite the meaning of the literal substitute. In this case, the reader is forced to connect two ideas and attend to the old and new meanings together. The elements of the interaction are the system of "associated commonplaces," or those terms and ideas that are freely evoked by the subsidiary subject (Black, 1966). In this way, the metaphor filters and transforms as the principal subject is *seen through* metaphorical expression. Black uses the analogy of viewing the stars through clouded glass that has been etched, allowing the sky to come into view through the lines that have scratched through the fog of the glass. The filter brings forward aspects that might not be seen through another medium and transforms the principal subject. It selects, emphasizes and organizes the principal subject (1966).

The process of selection, emphasis and organization is especially useful in the context of religious communication. Because religion concerns itself with the infinite, the invisible and the ineffable, humans have to rely on approximations of the numinous in order to apprehend religious truth. The Creation account, the Psalms, and the Incarnation are but a few of the filters through which spiritual reality is represented. In *Laws of Media*, Marshall McLuhan, who is indebted to Northrop Frye's view of language as metaphor, claims that in the broadest sense, all words are metaphors except the word, 'word' (McLuhan & McLuhan, 1988). This illumines the opening passage of John's Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God and the Word was God." The 'Word' is an irreducible term that points to a metaphysical reality. The role of communication metaphors in apprehending reality and formulating truth claims makes

them especially fertile ground for a religious-rhetorical analysis of communication forms like media technology.

In the next section, I will discuss the religious metaphors that occupy the realm of advertising and consumerism. At the end of the chapter, I will bring the three elements of this theoretical constellation (advertising, technology and religious metaphor) into alignment by reading a series of media technology ads that invoke religious metaphor.

Advertising and Commodity Fetishism

Forms of communication contribute to a metaphysical sensibility surrounding communication technology. This includes physical forms like radios, televisions, computers and cell phones, but it also includes literary forms. One such literary form is advertising – a popular art that combines several artistic and literary genres to sell product. A discussion of the cultural history of advertising as it relates to religious imagination involves a number of key studies. Tricia Sheffield (2006) provides a broad survey of the topic that draws heavily from the sociology of religion developed by Durkheim (1915). Sheffield argues that

> advertising, in the guise of divine mediator and consumer sacrament, helps mediate ultimate concern, which communicates to the individual the objects of value in the culture of consumer capitalism… advertising is best understood through a totemic lens, in that totems mark a group of people as a specific consumer community. (Sheffield, 2006, p. xii).

Fox and Lears (1983) historicize the religious dimension of advertising by considering it in the formative context of the early twentieth century. Their analysis argues convincingly that advertising must be understood within a network of institutional, religious, and psychological changes – an allusion to the Foucauldian notion of discursive formation. His take on the religious and psychological changes starts with Weber's analysis regarding the "Protestant ethic" behind American capitalism and goes on to develop the idea that the Protestant ethos of salvation through self-denial shifted toward a therapeutic ethos stressing self-realization in this world ; a concept that figures prominently in a critical analysis of modern technology.

Sut Jhally (1989) develops the advertising/religion analogy through a Marxian lens. He describes the way in which the advent of mass production dissolved the social relations between producer and consumer, creating a void of meaning that was in need of being filled. Jhally describes traditional pre-industrial society as an agricultural economy where family life, work and leisure were intimately bound together. As such, extended family, social relations and religion were a large part of everyday life. The meaning of goods in this culture came from this community structure and was defined by the personal relationship between producers, consumers and manufactured goods.

Capitalist industrial society hastened the dissolution of these bonds and opened up a void between producer and consumer. Industrialization and urbanization provided the conditions for a more anonymous form of exchange where producer and consumer were detached social entities that only interacted for the purposes of exchange. The production and consumption of goods was divorced from the traditional and ethnic cultural forms like religious observance and community ritual.

The change in social order that resulted from the rise of consumer culture was hardly perceived as the metamorphosis took place. However, like any fundamental shift, the process was gradual and the effects not realized until many years later. At the turn of the 20th century, the work being done in the sociology of religion by Max Weber (1958) was indicative of this shift wherein capitalism inherited a religious significance, and religious institutions began to cede cultural authority to more powerful secular institutions.

Max Weber believed religious ideas were historic forces that helped shape society. His seminal work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitliasm*, saw Protestantism as a fusion of inwardness and rigorous ascetic discipline that led to societies based on acquisition and bureaucratic subjugation. Weber theorized that the Protestant Reformation was not aimed at removing Church control from everyday life but substituting "a new form of control for the previous one" (1958, p. 36). Here he is referring to the strictures of Calvinism and Puritanism that came to characterize much of Protestant society. Weber points out the fact that the rise of Puritanical control was more tyrannical than the authority it sought to replace, the authoritarian Catholic Church. However, the emergence of a "Protestant ethic" in economic enterprise was particularly fruitful from a monetary perspective and thus, the mingling of faith and fecundity contributed to the rise of capitalism in Western Europe and the burgeoning American colonies.

Weber derives a number of important insights from political economist Karl Marx in his theorizing. Most notably is the concept of *disenchantment* – the idea that for the first time in history, a collective sense of religious enchantment has vanished. No longer governed by gods, society seeks meaning in material pursuits. One of these pursuits is the production and consumption of goods. In Marxian analysis, commodities take on a metaphysical status as they are transferred from the form of raw materials through the social process of human labor and into

the realm of exchange. Marx's metaphysical analogy is used to make a distinction between the use value, or utility of an object, and the exchange value, or the appearance of value that objects acquire in the process of exchange. These two terms, use value and exchange value, are at the heart of Marx's critique of capitalism (1973).

Objects have a use value because they have some utility, i.e. a computer can assist in the completion of certain tasks. Objects also have an exchange value that is derived from a series of relative equivalencies, beginning with the value of raw material and ending with the money value assigned to the finished commodity. Along the way, the metal, plastic and glass used to manufacture the computer are invested with the human labor required to transform them into computer components. Marx's critique claims that the raw material value and the labor value are detached from the money value of the commodity. In capitalist systems, the exchange value is based on a set of ephemeral characteristics, e.g. esteem, elegance, beauty, that have no substantive equivalency with the material and labor required to produce the product.

What concerns Marx is that the value of human labor, which is an essential part of the commodity's existence as a social object, is subject to the laws of exchange and money value. In a capitalist system, the value of commodities is largely based on the appearance of value rather than a one-to-one relationship with the raw material and human labor required to produce them. An Apple computer sells for hundreds of dollars more than a comparably equipped Dell computer. Both computers provide similar if not identical utility, but the Apple computer possesses a higher exchange value. If one were to trace the process of production from sourcing the raw metals and plastics through the process of assembly line labor to the determination of price, one would be hard pressed to make a case for the dramatic exchange value difference

between the two offerings. Thus, the commodity, the human labor, and the physical properties of the object lose their material relationship and begin to take on something transcendent,

> In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. This I call Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities. (Marx & Engels, 1996, p. 53)

The term fetishism comes from the history of religion and is understood as "the habitual attribution of life to…material objects…[Objects are] conceived as possessed of a consciousness and affections similar to those of the human being whose lot it modifies or whose sentiments it engages" (Ingram, 1900, p. 35). In this sense, the objects of capitalist exchange are seen exclusively as fetish objects for the consumer – magical enticements that promise control, beauty, prestige, power. The relationship of the laborer to the same object is quite different – it is a relationship of necessity and want. It is a means to an end, namely a paycheck and a decent living.

Figure 1: Alienation and Fetishism

iPad assembly line worker[3]

iPad consumer[4]

The typical application of Marx's critique is one that assails the capitalist system for creating a fantasy world of objects that have no discernible relation to the human labor that produces them. Marx calls this state, *alienation*, in which the value of an object is divorced from a material relation to the labor power invested in it and inherits the imaginary desires of the consuming populous. The photo of the iPad assembly worker in Figure 1 depicts this alienation while the consumer photo depicts an object full of life, one in which the consumer literally sees himself. Recognizing that these photos have a history that should not be erased for the sake of a theoretical illustration, they still provide a helpful visual depiction of the figurative terms Marx employs, *alienation* and *fetishism.*

Karl Marx was fond of religious analogy in his analysis and critique of capitalism. Although he dismisses religion as the "opiate of the masses," his analogical approach is one worth considering. He uses an iconoclastic critique, one derived from religious criticism, to

[3] Photo credit: http://www.newsbiscuit.com/2010/06/22/the-itop-is-killer-application-for-chinese-ipad-assembly-line-workers/, retrieved December 9, 2010

[4] Photo credit: http://www.theinfochief.com/3531/netbooks-vs-tablet-pcs/, retrieved December 9, 2010

excoriate the capitalist economic system. Echoing Eco (I've always wanted to write that), Marx uses the Catholic/Protestant binary to contrast money and credit,

> The monetary system is essentially Catholic, the credit system essentially Protestant. "The Scotch hate gold." As paper, the monetary existence of commodities has a purely social existence. It is faith that brings salvation. Faith in money value as the immanent spirit of commodities, faith in the mode of production and its predestined disposition, faith in the individual agents of production as mere personifications of self-valorizing capital. But the credit system is no more emancipated from the monetary system as its basis than Protesntantism is from the foundations of Catholicism. (Hawkes, 2001, pp. 50-51)

'Credit' comes from the Latin *credere,* to believe. This is consistent with the Protestant doctrine that it is only faith alone that is required for salvation. The Catholic view is that faith and works are necessary for salvation. The conception of faith and works marries the transcendent aspects of belief with the immanent reality of material deeds. The utilty of the Catholic/Protestant analogy for Marx is in this tension between immanence and transcendence.

In theological terms, immanence is used to denote the presence of indwelling of God in the world. The oppositie of immanence is transcendence, the belief that God is wholly apart from the world. Catholic/Protestant debates often hinge on these two terms as the Protestant view favors a more transcendent view of God, and the Catholic a more immanent one. In Marx's analogy, Adam Smith's political economy critique is a 'Protestant' attack on the 'Catholic' view of money having immanent value. Smith criticizes his predecessors for believing that gold and money have an incarnate value, just as Protestant critiques would take issue with a world infused

with God's presence. Marx takes this a step further by pointing out that Smith is not iconoclastic enough because he contends that money has an objective, "real" existence. For Marx, money is an empty sign whose value is socially constructed. Marx tries to reform the political economy discourse by avoiding the transposition of sign and referent, money and value.

Marx's analogical critique of political economy can also be applied to the information economy. At the heart of Marx's analysis is the tension between form and content. The form of money, for Marx, has no content besides what is assigned to it in the social process of exchange. It is simply paper or, in the case of credit cards, a piece of plastic. We accept on faith that the paper and plastic possess some value that is worthy of exchange. This places money in the role of mediator, and this is a very powerful position.

> It is clear that this *mediator* thus becomes a *real God*, for the mediator is the *real power* over what it mediates to me. Its cult becomes an end in itself. Objects separated from this mediator have lost their value. Hence the objects only have value insofar as they *represent* the mediator, whereas originally it seemed that the mediator only had value insofar as it represented *them*. (Hawkes, 2001, p. 50)

The transposition of object and mediator is also evident in the realm of electronic communication. McLuhan's aphorism that media are extensions of the self reminds us that *we are the object of exchange* in the communication process. We serve our mediated extensions as "gods or minor religions." We relate to our mediators (computers, iPods, televisions, radios) as images of ourselves that we do not quite recognize. We are fooled into placing an objective value on the objects of exchange (emails, photographs, songs, shows, etc.) as if they possessed an inherent value. Instead, their value is derived from our involvement with them. Therefore,

the means or medium by which they are exchanged takes on a profound, even sacred, significance. The power these objects possess is rooted in their role as mediator – empty vessels into which the self can be poured and partially contained – making them sacred.

Walter Benjamin, whose affinity for Jewish theology and mysticism made him somewhat of a pariah among critical Marxian thinkers serves as a helpful model for envisioning a theological view of media forms. The avowed Marxist was the closest to a secular Saint Augustine that the twentieth century has produced. Benjamin's ambling through the streets of modern Paris brought him to the threshold of theological enchantment (McCarraher, 2005). Benjamin's (W. Benjamin, 2001) work on media technology, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, analyzes the shift in the way art and religion are understood in the wake of technological change. Benjamin does this in part by theorizing the concept of *aura*:

> An ancient statue of Venus … stood in a different traditional context with the Greeks, who made it an object of veneration, than with the clerics of the Middle Ages, who viewed it as an ominous idol. Both of them, however, were equally confronted with its uniqueness, that is, its aura. (2001, p. 52)

Although Benjamin's Marxism precluded him from developing thoroughly religious conclusions, his work remains remarkably consistent with what Paul Ricoeur calls a hermeneutic of suspicion. Ricoeur cites the ability of Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx, who all reject religion, to smash the idols of economic, philosophical, and psychoanalytic distortions in religion, allowing the authentic symbols to speak. Thus, Benjamin channels Marx's iconoclasm for the purpose of smashing the idols of capitalist culture. The "aura" of religious symbols in the Paris cathedrals, having been drained of significance by the Enlightenment, allow Benjamin to focus on

destroying the temples consecrated to capitalism. His aim was to re-enchant material culture in such a way that the false visions of the capitalist dream-state would give way to the sacred essence buried deep within material objects. For a Jewish Marxist mystic, Benjamin's approach is highly sacramental.

In the next section, I will move from the abstract realm of theory to the more particular work that has been done on the Apple brand and technology as sites of religious meaning making.

Religious Narrative in the Apple Brand Community

Literature that has addressed Apple's techno-religiosity has attempted to understand the phenomenon through the narratives constructed by individual consumers (RW Belk & G Tumbat, 2005; Jensen Schau & Muniz, 2006; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Muniz Jr & Schau, 2005). These studies emphasize the role of narrative in the construction of meaning for Apple products. In the case of the Apple Newton, a device discontinued by Apple in 1998, Muniz (2005) identified a series of supernatural, religious and magical motifs among the consumer narratives of the Newton user community. The narratives focus on the miraculous performance and survival of the brand despite Apple's lack of support for the product and the messianic return of the brand creator (Apple founder Steve Jobs). The authors of the study conclude that the religious nature of these narratives is rooted in a universal need for community and religious affiliation.

Belk & Tumbat (2005) detected several religious myths at work among Apple followers: a creation myth (the company starting in a garage), a messianic myth (visionary founder Steve

Jobs), a satanic myth (Apple's competition with IBM/Windows) and a resurrection myth (the return of Steve Jobs). These narratives are said to play a significant role in the construction of the Apple cult's identity. While this approach is illustrative of one of the ways in which technology can be understood as mythos, it is ahistorical. The authors interpret the responses of a diverse group of Apple brand community members as Judeo-Christian clichés rather than addressing the question of what it is about media technology that makes it a suitable artifact for religious allusion. The answer to such a question is tied to the fact that media technology objectifies a human social practice, communication, by which culture and belief are ultimately created and understood.

Lam's (2001) study of Apple devotion as "implicit religion" comes closer to the mark of explaining Apple's religiosity by considering the broader relationship between technology and culture. Lam argues that the Apple narrative is tied to utopian visions where humans and technology work in harmony. Lam concludes that the Apple devotional discourse is best described as a "techno-theology:"

> Techno-theology is the mirror image of scientific creationism. Technologies have become – for some people – the new way of expressing myth…Computers are seen either as monsters or as the omnipotent and all-loving giants and gods which will help us to create a better life. (2001, p. 56)

In *The Religion of Technology*, David Noble (1997) employs a similar approach by suggesting that Western technological pursuits are the product of a disturbed Protestant theology. Noble argues that the Protestant belief in humankind's "fallen nature" has inspired the development of tools and technologies that will restore humankind's divinity. In the end, Noble sees this trend as

troublesome, citing technologies like the atomic bomb and genetic engineering that suggest "the thousand-year convergence of technology and transcendence has ... outlived whatever historical usefulness it might once have had." Noble's account is rich with historical examples but lacks an organizing theory that explains the religion-technology relationship outside a narrow understanding of Christian theology.

Alexander (1990) shares Noble's concern that the placement of technological narratives in the realm of salvation and apocalypse is a dangerous move. We lose control over technology in its material form and allow irrational fears and motives to take over when it is viewed as a transcendent force. We must instead, argue Noble and Alexander, resituate the discourse of technology in the realm of practical concern and human progress. Apple's marketing strategy has in part been an attempt to satirize this academic hand-wringing. Apple playfully embraces the brand cult as a harmless, secular version of religious fervor that does not come with all of the baggage of ultimate concern and supernatural deities.

The literature shows there have been frequent attempts to understand modern technology as expressions of religious metaphor. Academics and consumers alike pick and choose readily available narratives to add meaning to their brand and technology experiences. In this dissertation, I argue that the discourse about technology does not belong to one spiritual tradition or another. Instead, by virtue of its metaphysical connection to the act of human communication, media technology discourse metaphorically expresses a syncretism of many belief systems.

Protestant, Catholic, Buddhist, Gnostic, New Age, and psychedelic motifs can all be detected in discourse that presents technology in imaginative ways, especially advertising. This is not due to some essential link between any of these particular traditions and technology;

rather, it is a product of the way in which communication form, be it language, image, text or screen, represents man's attempt to mediate reality. Despite the doctrinal and theological differences that exist between faith traditions, all of them share an essential feature, the mediation of reality. Even an atheist must admit that his or her world is interpreted through this lens – that the denial of a Creator and divinity – plays a mediating role in his or her interpretation and appropriation of the world. Kenneth Burke calls this the *terministic screen* – a perceptual filter through which an individual receives and interprets external events.

In the next section, I discuss the methodology used to read the Apple advertising discourse. By considering Apple advertising within a 'circuit of culture' the ads can be read both semiotically and contextually – thereby avoiding the narrow appropriation of religious cliché present in the existing literature.

Doing Cultural Studies

In order to study the Apple subculture it is necessary to understand what constitutes a subculture and how meaning is made in that culture. Traditional definitions of culture that posit a high/low distinction, a set of values or a way of life do not account for the complexity of meaning construction. Dick Hebdige's (1993) work on Rastafarian subculture in Britain illustrates the way in which subcultures engage in a process of representation and resistance that grants them identities, including religious ones. Culture is to be understood as a process or set of practices. One cannot fully appreciate the fervor of the Apple community, for instance, without understanding their vitriolic disgust for IBM and Windows. The same catalyst that Hebdige identifies among Rastafarians, resistance to the status quo, is also part of the meaning making process in the Apple subculture.

This research employs a model developed by cultural studies scholars in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham, England. In *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman*, CCCS scholar Paul du Gay (1997) seeks to demonstrate the way in which culture can be studied as a series of intertwined moments in the life of cultural objects. In du Gay's study, the Walkman is selected because it is *typical* of 1990s culture. By studying the "story" of a typical cultural artifact, "one can learn a great deal about the ways in which culture works in late-modern societies such as our own" (1997, p. 2). Something that is *typical* is symbolic of the culture and corresponds to a type. The Walkman is characteristic of private electronic media consumption the late 20th century. It is also characteristic of a culture that relies heavily on electronic media as a form of entertainment, information and communication. It is a *type* of mediation that allows the user to experience public space while simultaneously experiencing a private inner space of electronic media stimulation.

Apple products like the iPod and iPhone are of the same type as the Sony Walkman. They are personal, portable, electronic media devices that provide entertainment and distraction. The form factor is very similar – a pocket-sized media playback device is attached to a pair of earphones. The compact design allows the wearer to participate in physical activities with little or no restriction. The primary difference between the two is that the iPod and iPhone store sound digitally and in larger quantities. The Sony Walkman was born in the cassette era, so users could only carry 15-20 songs at a time on cassette tapes. With the iPod and iPhone, one can carry thousands of songs on a device less than half the size of the Walkman. The iPhone is also a communication and web device. Sony recently sold its last Walkman in Japan and only plans to sell in emerging markets in the future. This shift in the balance of power in the portable media market marks a good time for revisiting du Gay's approach.

Known as the ‘circuit of culture,’ du Gay’s model presents a series of ‘articulations’ in which the meaning of a cultural object is developed. The moments included in the circuit of culture are: *Representation, Identity, Production, Consumption and Regulation.* In order to fully examine an artifact using the circuit one should “explore how it is represented, what social identities are associated with it, how it is produced and consumed, and what mechanisms regulate its distribution and use” (Du Gay, 1997, p. 3). It is through the articulation of these moments, “connecting disparate elements together to form a temporary unity” that “the beginnings of an explanation can be found” (1997, p. 3).

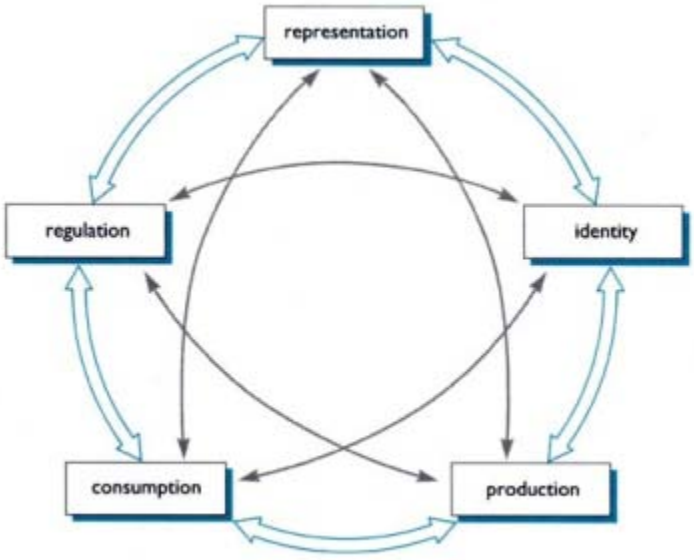
The term ‘articulation’ is used to highlight a break with conventional logic that assumes the cultural meaning of an object is present at the moment of production. The Walkman is a portable audio playback device that became very popular in the 1980s. Rather than assume that the producer, Sony, has a monopoly on determining what the Walkman means to the culture, du Gay argues that it is the coming together or articulation of moments in the circuit of culture that more fully informs the explanation of the artifact. To do so, he proposes the five moments to explain the ongoing process of meaning making.

While it is difficult to consider all five moments in the circuit of culture in one research project, it is even more difficult to write about one moment in isolation. For this reason, I will make reference to all five at various points in the discussion even though I focus primarily on the representation moment. The decision to analyze the representation moment is due to the ready availability of Apple advertising examples and a fair amount of secondary research on the topic. There is no order or priority to the moments in the circuit because they do not necessarily interact in a linear or sequential fashion. One could reasonably start with production because it

is the moment in which the object first takes shape and begins its movement through society, but each moment relies on the others in the process of meaning making.

In the case of Apple, one cannot talk about the production of Apple's devices without mentioning Steve Jobs (see Chapter 1). Very few companies in recent memory have a public image as distinct and characteristic as Apple and its founder Steve Jobs. One gets the sense, by the way the company is represented in the press and among Apple users, that the company's technological devices spring directly from the mind of Steve Jobs. In order to be introduced to the other individuals, practices and processes that make up the Apple production process, one has to conduct research within the company. Even at that, the secrecy with which Apple guards its technology and practices makes it difficult to form a cohesive assessment of the production process.

Figure 2: Circuit of Culture



from Paul Du Gay, Production of Culture/Cultures of Production (London: The Open University), 1997

The moments in the circuit are in no way isolated. As Figure 2 shows, each moment flows into the other, forming a matrix rather than a strict linear process. It is suggested that the boundaries of the cultural moments are permeable in the sense that the study of representation can inform consumption and vice versa. The number of permutations is extensive with the overall theoretical point being the undetermined nature of cultural artifacts as meaning remains in a state of flux. The nature of meaning in cultural studies is fluid in the sense that changes in one moment can impact other moments in often unexpected ways. A good example of this interaction of moments is the regulation imposed in France on the Apple iPod. Like the Walkman, the iPod is a personal, portable playback device that provides private audio entertainment to users. In France, concerns over hearing loss led the government to mandate that the decibel level on the iPod be restricted to 100dB. This regulation impacts production and the process of understanding the object is necessarily shifted, adding health hazard to its already defined role of audio playback device.

Regulation also includes all of the social norms and implicit rules that go along with producing and consuming an artifact. The use of cell phones and the iPhone in particular in public is one of those areas of regulation that is still being negotiated; it is in process. Is it OK to use the phone in a quiet restaurant? How about texting during church? Identity speaks to the way in which subjects are constituted by the artifact or text and its associated discourse. It could be argued for instance that the enigmatic iPod ads featuring blacked-out, silhouetted dancers plugged into white iPods gyrating on psychedelic backdrops identifies the consumer by using a soundtrack that is popular with certain demographic groups.

Consumption comprises the ways in which we use cultural objects as well as the stories we tell about them. The practice among devoted Mac users of keeping a 'museum' of all of the computers they have owned is an example of a consumption practice. Production includes not just the material process of production but the narratives of production that become part of what the object means. In the case of Apple, a memo from Jobs to the design team to make the iPod something that champions individuality is as much a part of the product's meaning as the ideas that get assigned by consumers and the media. Finally, representation comprises all of the images, texts, symbols, figures and music that display or 'represent' the object in question. Apple advertising and product design, where I will focus my study, are examples of the representation moment. However, it is crucial to remember that these moments are not hermetically sealed categories – they are also sites of overlap and slippage. Stuart Hall notes that since the cultural turn in the human and social sciences, meaning is thought to be produced rather than simply 'found',

> In what has come to be called the 'social constructionist approach', representation is conceived as entering into the very constitution of things; and thus culture is conceptualized as a primary or 'constitutive' process, as important as the economic or material 'base' in shaping social subjects and historical events – not merely a reflection of the world after the event. (Hall, 1997, p. 5)

The strength of the circuit is in its ability to articulate key moments in the cultural process. It would be foolish to assume that one can understand a cultural object based solely on its production or its visual representation. It is more richly and comprehensively understood in light of all of the processes that inform its existence and social reality. The ontology of the cultural studies paradigm is that things do not have inherent meaning. Meaning is constructed

and therefore incompatible with essentialist claims. In the circuit, meaning flows between moments and is never locked in one or the other. This may also be perceived as a weakness as the categories tend to dissolve under heavy scrutiny. Where does consumption end and identity begin? There is no easy answer to this and the process is necessarily a messy one.

The Case Study Approach

This study will employ a textual analysis case study methodology to explore the question of representation and religious imagination in the Apple discourse. The case study will focus on a series of texts collected from the Apple advertising archives. The advertising texts are grouped according to product class. The Apple products I will focus on are the Macintosh/iMac, iPod and iPhone. My approach included screening all of the iPod and iPhone television ads since their inception.[5] (Appendix _ provides a brief summary of each ad). I also included an iPhone print ad that ran prior to the introduction of the first iPhone in 2006 because it was quite different than the television ads that would follow. The iPod print ads on the other hand were almost identical in visual composition and message as the television ads.

I did not include a semiotic analysis of every Apple ad I found because I wanted to limit this project to a reasonable scope. Rather than analyze every ad, I chose ads that were representative of the particular campaigns in which they were run. For example, the majority of the iPod ads included in the sample were minimalist displays that portrayed dancers in silhouette wearing iPods and dancing against a monochrome background. When there was a slight variation, like an ad featuring the band Coldplay where their faces were *not* in silhouette, I included those as well. Another iPod ad featured dancers holding iPods that left trails of light

[5] Sample was collected in December 2008

behind them as they moved. This would be a another case where I would include the ad because it exhibited a unique visual element that was missing from the other series of ads.

In like manner, I chose iMac ads that contained many of the same attributes as other ads in the product series. For the 'Get a Mac' campaign, the setup was always the same. Two actors stood on a white background debating the merits of the Macintosh and Windows operating system. There was no need to analyze all of the ads in the campaign to develop conclusions about the technological mythology being presented throughout. I also selected ads from the iMac launch period (1998) that were the first to feature the candy-colored computer hardware (monitors and keyboards). I spend a fair amount of time analyzing an ad for the iMac called "Window" in which a man strolling down a city street is captivated by an iMac in a store window. The themes that emerge from the other ads, the dualism between light/darkness and the anthropomorphizing of the machine are particularly evident in the "Window" ad, making it a fruitful one for extended analysis. Each of the iMac ads selected exhibit a distinct visual motif that sets them apart from other iMac campaigns and also makes them indicative of other ads in the same campaign.

The iPhone ads include the aforementioned print ad called "Touching is believing" as well as two television ads that are indicative of other ads in their respective campaigns. The first television ad focuses on the ability of the iPhone to satisfy impulses related to leisure, from watching a movie, to finding a restaurant to making a phone call. This ad called "Calimari" was in heavy rotation immediately following the first iPhone launch in June 2006. The other television ad features the iPhone's apps – software for the device that includes everything from games to maps to videos. The 'app' platform allows users to download specific programs for specific tasks. For instance, the app in the commercial being analyzed can be used to name any

song that comes on the radio, simply by holding the iPhone up to 'hear' the song. When I assembled my iPhone sample back in 2008, there were not many ads to choose from. Now, there are dozens.

According to Robert Stake (1995), the case study is a "study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (p. xi). If we translate this into the terms of the cultural studies model we might say that the advertising artifacts constitute the "single case" and the discursive formations or context of which they are a part make up the "important circumstances." In addition, it is understood that the visual representations of Apple and its products constitute a cultural practice rather than a series of fixed objects. In other words, the campaigns, designs and products cannot be studied in isolation but must be considered as part of an ongoing cultural activity that is informed by social, political, economic and technological practice.

This contextual approach suggests that an "instrumental" case study is more appropriate than an "intrinsic" case study. The intrinsic case study remains focused on a particular case and does not seek generalizations that would inform an external interest. It is undertaken because of a particular interest in a specific case rather than an interest in an "abstract construct or generic phenomenon" (p. 445). Instrumental case studies, on the other hand, "provide insight into an issue…and [facilitate] our understanding of something else" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 445). The case is "looked at in depth, its contexts scrutinized and its ordinary activities detailed, but all because this helps us pursue the external interest" (p. 445). The abstract construct I am interested in is the *idolatry of objects*, particularly the objects of electronic communication. In order to pursue this interest, I have selected advertisements that promote Apple products that have become the centerpieces of the Apple "brand cult."

While the Apple discourse relies on a number of Gnostic metaphors, the religious significance of Apple technology is not limited to one system of belief. Catholic metaphors, new age metaphors and psychedelic metaphors all find their way into the following analysis. Apple thus represents a technologically informed syncretism – a blending of traditional beliefs with one another and the technological milieu.

> The new technologies bring into effect the three traditional characteristics of the Divine: ubiquity, instantaneity and immediacy. Without some cultural familiarity with these themes, mediated by Christianity, Protestantism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, etc., they remain incomprehensible. One cannot come to grips with the phenomenon of cyberspace without some inkling of, or some respect for, metaphysical intelligence! That does not mean that you have to be converted. I believe that the new technologies demand from those who are interested in them that they have a substantial measure of religious culture and not merely some religious opinion.(Armitage, 1999, p. 44)

In the next section, I will outline the theory and practice of semiotics, a method for reading cultural texts and representation.

Reading Representation

The following discussion outlines the major tenets of semiotics and considers its utility in studying representations of Apple technology. The study of advertisements is a study of signs. Images and text coalesce in the advertising text to produce meanings that are the product of the relationship between signs in the text and between those signs and the historical-cultural context in which they are situated. For instance, an ad featuring a famous athlete requires that we know the significance of the particular athlete at that time in history. Typically, the athletes are

individuals who excel at their particular sport and have a certain cultural cachet. Lebron James in basketball, Sydney Crosby in hockey are two good examples from professional sports. Armed with this knowledge, the consumer is asked to make some associations between the athlete and the object of the ad's promotional appeal. The marketer may want the viewer to associate the excellence embodied by the athlete with the product or service being sold. The end result is an example of communication that asks the viewer to connect the athlete as sign to his or her broader historical/cultural significance and to transfer that association to the object being advertised.

This process of reading an advertisement takes place in an instant for most readers and submerges a number of ideological assumptions at work in this unique form of mass communication. The most prominent feature of advertising that tends to remain obscured in popular analysis is the way in which advertisements provide structures of meanings for society. Judith Williamson (Williamson, 1978) argues that ads fulfill a function similar to the one traditionally provided by art or religion. Ads are not simply attempts to sell us things, they are persuasive forms that seek to impart meaning on things by referencing the hopes, dreams, aspirations and values of human beings.

Ferdinand Saussure, founder of modern linguistics, was also responsible for instituting the general science of signs, known as *semiology*. The science of semiology "studies the role of signs as part of social life" (Saussure, 1974, p. 15). Saussure recognized that we communicate through a system of signs that have a history and a structural relation to one another. Such a perspective invites a mode of analysis that is not limited to human language but encompasses "rites, customs, etc., as signs" (1974, p. 17). At the heart of Saussure's science of signs is the question of the relationship between words and things. Saussure took issue with the assumption

that words simply referred to things in the world. This ignores the linguistic process at work in ongoing process of meaning making that exists in the word/thing relationship. In order to provide a more nuanced understanding of relationship between sign and thing, Saussure made a distinction between the 'mark' of a thing, either written or spoken, and the concept or 'thought' that the mark evokes in the listener/viewer. The mark was called a 'signifier' and the concept a 'signified.' Together, signifier and signified make up the 'sign.' Thus, the mark 'book' printed here is a series of ink lines that signify a mental concept, a printed bound volume of ink marks.

In order to further explore this relationship, Saussure proposes a distinction between the language system, *langue*, and the individual utterance, *parole*. Semiology divides the individual occurrences of language in poems or speeches or cultural practices from the rules that govern their arrangement. This invites the critic to consider the overarching structure that allows us to make sense of individual utterances. Semiology, as it relates to the study of communication, is a form of meta-analysis.

A basic example is that of the traffic light where the signifying colors red and green are understood by members of an automotive society as meaning stop and go respectively. This understanding does not stem from anything inherent in the essence of red and green but from a socially agreed upon convention whereupon red means stop and green means go. The two signs are also understood in relation to one another so that a red and green light in a traffic intersection mean stop and go. Red and green lights in a Christmas display mean something entirely different because of the context in which they are situated. It is the difference between red and green in the traffic context that contributes to their meaning. Traffic rules provide the grammar or *langue* and traffic lights the utterance or *parole*.

Clifford Geertz describes culture as a "web of signification" (Geertz & Banton, 1966). One process for analyzing the web of signification is known as semiotics, "the theory and analysis of signs, codes and signifying practices" (Chandler, 2007, p. 259). Semiotics (originally spelled *semeiotics*) comes from the founder of Western medical science, Hippocrates (460-377 BC). In *Persuasive Signs*, Beasley and Danesi (Beasley & Danesi, 2002) point out that "medical science is, in effect, basic semiotic science, since it is grounded on the principle that the symptom [a physical mark or sign] is a trace of an inner state, condition, etc." (2002, p. 21). The inner meaning in cultural representation is referred to as a myth or ideology due to its ability to hide behind the so-called literal meaning of signs.

Roland Barthes' (1988) conception of myth is a critical concept from semiotics that will inform the analysis of Apple's visual language. For Barthes, myth is a type of speech that designates a third-level of language that coalesces above the denotative and connotative levels of meaning. In this sense, myth is a "second-order semiological system," one that takes the sign (signifier/signified) of a first order semiological system and makes it a signifier of a new signified. Insofar as the second-order meaning remains somewhat hidden from view, it can also be considered ideological. In this study, I seek to examine the mythos at work in official representations of Apple. For Barthes, myth is form rather than content, "myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message" (1988, p. 109).

Judith Williamson's (1978) work in *Decoding Advertisements* provides an example of the way in which semiotics can be applied to popular advertisements. In the book, Williamson works through the denotative and connotative meanings of numerous ads to arrive at their ideological core, the interchangeability of people and products, "Advertisements are selling us something else besides consumer goods: in providing us with a structure in which we, and those goods, are

interchangeable, they are selling us ourselves" (1978, p. 19). In the context of Williamson's Marxian critique, her advertising analysis reveals the fundamental differences in modern society as class differences. Manufactured goods are just another means by which groups and classes are created. Is it possible then that there are other ideologies at work in the advertising discourse that escape sustained attention? Williamson defines ideology as "the meaning *made necessary* by the conditions of society while helping to *perpetuate* those conditions" (1978, p. 13). In the technological society, owning or participating in electronic media is a precondition for entering into the realm of mass communication in the first place. Without electronic media delivery and electronic modes of mass production, there is no advertising discourse to speak of. This grants electronic media a fundamental status in the cultural logic as well.

In the next section I begin the process of reading technology advertisements in light of the theory and method discussed above. These readings are not as systematic as the ones that will take place in the following chapters, but they do provide a series of specific illustrations that demonstrate the various ways in which technological and religious ideas can intersect.

Verizon 'Rule the Air'

Verizon proclaims, "Rule the Air," in a recent cell phone campaign. While a Biblical sense of reality has been all but vanquished in the modern age, it is worth noting that Satan is referred to as "prince and power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2). This resemblance bears a rhetorical correspondence to religious language. In one of the television ads, a thunderstorm awakens a young man who jumps out of bed, grabs his laptop and heads into the street where a tree stands cleaved by a violent lightning strike. The visual tone is dark and foreboding as he approaches the tree and finds a Verizon 4G access card (a device used for wireless internet access) lodged in the tree's severed trunk. The ad implies that the manifestation of the access card was a result of

the lightning strike. The scene connects the access card as signifier with the signifier lightning. The connotation is that the access card is as fast and powerful as lightning. Keeping in mind the brand tagline, “Rule the Air,” the scene can also be read as a commingling of Biblical metaphors, including lightning, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18) and the forbidden tree of knowledge in the book of Genesis.

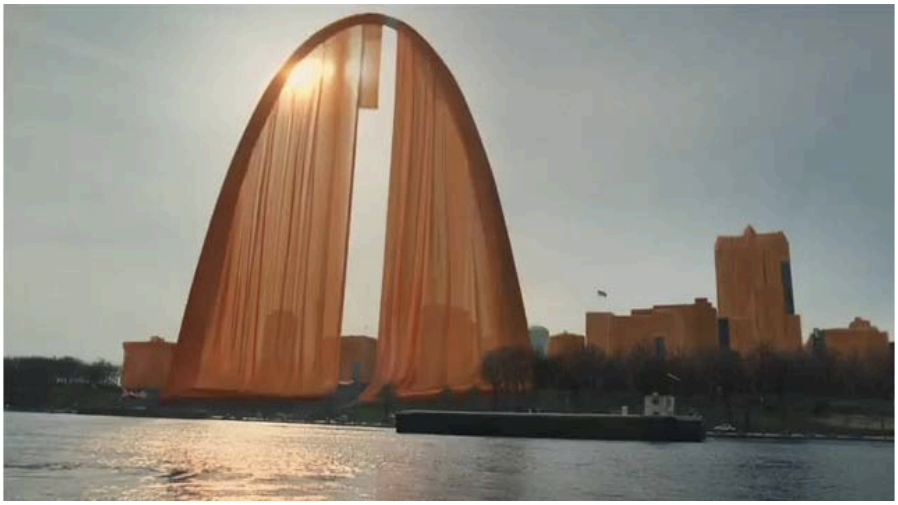
The man partakes of the tree by pulling the access card from the burnt trunk and plugging it into his laptop. At this point, we see his computer downloading music at high speeds. His face is illuminated by the screen and bears an expression of awe at his new discovery, giving him godlike access, omniscient and omnipresent, to the universe of online information. The ad ends with Verizon’s unintentionally diabolical tagline, “Rule the Air.” This reading is a good example of using Judeo-Christian metaphors and clichés to read the technological discourse. This approach was common in the literature discussing the Apple brand community. The next ad reading shows the way in which technology can be represented mythically and religiously without alluding to specific religious terminology.

Figure 3: Verizon “Rule the Air”

AT&T 'Rethink Possible'

An AT&T ad asks the viewer to "Rethink Possible." The dramatic images in the AT&T ad show enormous gauzy drapes falling on major cities and landmarks captivating bystanders who stand mouths agape at the grandiose spectacle. The message is focused on coverage, as in radio signal coverage for cell phones. The ability to transmit from anywhere, from the top of the Great Arch in St. Louis to the bottom of the Hoover dam, is promoted as an inherent good.

Figure 4: AT&T "Rethink Possible"

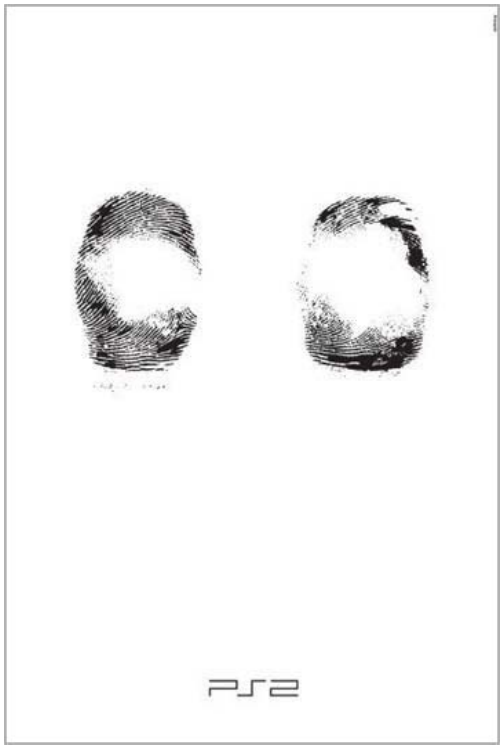


The ad suggests that AT&T or communication technology has become the new "technological sublime." In an earlier era of American ingenuity, one might have stood in awe at the manmade magnificence of the Hoover Dam or the Great Arch in St. Louis. However, in the age of speed-of-light communication, these monumental artifacts seem pedestrian and sedentary. The engineering prowess required to build them is superseded by the technological prowess required to harness the air (or the electromagnetic spectrum to be more precise) above and around them. This control is symbolized by orange blankets that envelope the landscape and cover the sacred monuments to American progress. The enveloping nature of modern technology is visually connected to earth's primordial nature in the closing scene. At the end of the

commercial, dozens of jubilant people carry the orange gauzy blanket to the edge of the sea, a tableau that connotes AT&T's presence as oceanic, vast and deep. The aesthetic quality of the ad and the contemplative soundtrack sanctifies the process of digital coverage as if the areas being draped are somehow sanctified by AT&T's digital presence, its omnipresence.

Sony 'PS2'

Figure 5: Sony "PS2"



Apple and Sony are heavyweights in the consumer electronics market. The two companies have produced many of the defining products of the multimedia age. In Chapter 3 I discuss the Apple iPod as being a direct descendant of the Sony Walkman. In this section, I will provide a semiotic read of a Sony advertisement to show the way in which the technological religiosity that presents itself in the Apple narrative is also present in parts of the Sony narrative. This is not intended to be a formal survey or study of non-Apple companies. To conduct such a study, a much larger sample would have to be collected. However, in conjunction with the

AT&T and Verizon ads presented in this chapter, this example is used to show the pervasiveness of metaphysical themes in technology advertising.

An ad for the Sony Playstation 2 (PS2) video game system depicts two thumbprints with the product insignia at the bottom of the frame. The thumbprints are visually incomplete, inviting the viewer to solve the puzzle by filling in the blanks, a common practice in image advertising that relies on metaphor. The cognitive reward the viewer receives from solving the visual puzzle is part of the advertisement's allure. In the case of the Playstation video game system, the thumbs are used extensively to control the on-screen action via handheld controllers. The message in the ad seems to be that the system requires such intense gameplay that the player's thumbs will be disfigured by the experience.

The signification process in the PS2 can be read semiotically. The sign of the thumbprints is composed of a signifier, the image of the two thumbprints, and a signified, the mental concept of thumbprints. The prints are themselves signifiers of another referent, a physical pair of thumbs. This is how the literal meaning of the image is decoded. But a puzzle remains because some visual information is missing. It is therefore what is missing that conveys the primary significance of the ad's message.

In Barthes' semiotic model this sign can also work at the level of a 'second order signification' – a metaphorical level. The work of interpretation involves solving the visual puzzle to understand the metaphorical meaning. From a messaging strategy perspective this is an ideal exercise for gamers who are accustomed to unlocking game levels by successfully accomplishing tasks. In this respect, the ad is pitch perfect for the target audience.

At the metaphorical or second order level of signification, the sign of the incomplete thumbprints becomes a signifier for yet another signified. In this case, the second order signified

refers to the unseen but intense Playstation user. Thus, a new sign emerges, disfigured thumbprints as the identifying mark of a serious Playstation user. This meaning can only be derived based on the linguistic signifier at the bottom of the ad, the 'PS2' insignia. Absent the system's logo the ad would become detached from any meaning associated with the product. We only understand this new sign, the identifying mark of a serious gamer, because it is anchored in an image *about* PS2.

If we were to subject this ad to Lessl's criteria for religious communication, we have already noted the metaphorical work of the visual imagery. However, as previously discussed, many ads contain metaphor but only a small fraction of metaphorical speech can be considered religious in nature. Lessl's second criteria is that the communication cannot be reduced to a literal form of expression. The visual metaphor of the thumbprints is irreducible in the sense that the prints signify a mythical figure, the overzealous player, who remains hidden. The individual is anonymous and represented only indirectly by his or her thumbprints.

Here, we must consider the other connotation of the thumbprints – that of identification. Prior to breakthroughs in DNA research, the fingerprint was the defining mark of personal identity. Fingerprints contain outward physical information that is entirely unique to that person. There is a criminal connotation here, on that reminds the viewer of fingerprints being used to solve crimes and identify criminals. This fits the Playstation ethos because many of the games on the system contain subversive narratives where violence and crime are defining features.

The other connotation at work is the notion of a fractured or missing identity. Using the PS2 involves a sensation of losing the physical self to take on a virtual self for the purpose of gameplay. The physical self becomes secondary as the player immerses himself/herself ever deeper in the virtual environment. It is here that we can draw an analogy between mediation and

metaphysical experience, the third of Lessl's criteria. The gamer who is physically marked by immersion in the immaterial space of on-screen action partakes in a metaphysical ritual. Thus marked, the gamer is made part of a cult of users who treat gaming experiences with the utmost concern and dedication. Not surprisingly, the theme of abandoning the physical self in pursuit of an incorporeal reality is a hallmark of Gnostic mythology, among other spiritual traditions. All three rhetorical conditions satisfied, we might say that this ad points indirectly to a cult of technology that resembles the Apple brand cult. The religiosity of technology use is thus not limited to Apple.

Apple '1984'

Figure 6: Apple "1984"

In addition to popularizing the personal computer by making it easier to use, Apple advertising avoids esoteric language about bits and processors and instead focuses on constructing a mythical framework for imagining personal computing. Apple produced their famous'1984' ad to launch the first Macintosh personal computer during the 1984 Super Bowl. There are no Macintosh computers in the ad and the Apple logo does not appear until the very end. Instead, the ad depicts a dreary, dystopian police state where a group of drab, lethargic

individuals are staring at a large screen. On the screen is an ominous male figure ranting about ideology and control:

> Today we celebrate the first glorious anniversary of the Information Purification Directives. We have created for the first time in all history a garden of pure ideology, where each worker may bloom, secure from the pests of any contradictory true thoughts. Our Unification of Thoughts is more powerful a weapon than any fleet or army on earth. We are one people, with one will, one resolve, one cause. Our enemies shall talk themselves to death and we will bury them with their own confusion. We shall prevail!

The figure on the screen can be read to represent Apple's competitor IBM. The portrayal is meant to evoke the figure of Big Brother from Orwell's *1984* novel, a not so subtle play on IBM's nickname, Big Blue. The climax of the ad occurs when a woman, who is being pursued by armed guards, runs into the assembly space and hurls a sledgehammer at the giant screen. The resulting explosion releases a burst of light that washes over the indoctrinated masses while a voiceover reads a text crawl, "On January 24th Apple Computer will introduce Macintosh. And you'll see why 1984 won't be like '1984.'"

Stein (Stein, 2002) argues that

> Utlimately, the message of the Macintosh ad is an old one echoing cultural faith in the machine and in technology-engendered progress. Technology per se does not yield the Big Brother figure and its control over brainwashed and roboticized masses. It is the *wrong* technology that creates such a state. The right technology – in this case the Macintosh – will provide salvation. (2002, p. 189)

Stein identifies a number of mythical frameworks in the ad that have a religious resonance. First is the Biblical David and Goliath story in which the young, undersized Israelite David fells the giant Philistine Goliath by hurling a stone from a slingshot. The image of the woman's flying hammer evokes the Biblical story but also suggests an ironic nod to the symbol of Communist oppression. The hammer is now being thrown back into the face of the Stalin-esque regime. The multivalence of such symbols allows for varying interpretation but ultimately hinges on a narrative of slavery and liberation.

Based on the symbolism in the ad, liberation is an individual exercise, one accomplished by a woman in the "garden of pure ideology." The allusion to the Genesis account of Adam and Eve is hard to overlook especially when the Apple logo is a piece of fruit with a bite removed, "The Macintosh computer in the ad is the sign of "the fruit of an Edenic tree, with its links to notions of clean technology, free from polluting and robbing the planet's resources, while making the Tree of Knowledge within everyone's grasp" (2002, p. 188).

The most striking visual symbol in the ad that has not been commented on at length by Stein or others is the preternatural release of light as the woman's sledgehammer destroys the ominous screen. The screen does not explode in typical Hollywood fashion with orange balls of fire and black smoke. Instead, the catastrophic event releases a dazzling torrent of white light that illuminates the darkened grayness of the hall and transfixes the individuals in attendance. Seemingly awakened from their somnambulism, the men in the hall are placed in an ecstatic trance. In the following section, I focus on light/darkness signifier as a way to open the discussion of Apple-specific metaphors that will be analyzed in the following chapters.

Apple's Gnosticism

The metaphorical relationship between light and darkness is featured throughout the Apple advertising discourse and it conveys a distinct spiritual tone. Apple's repeated reliance on light and darkness in its advertising evokes gnostic sensibilities. The following passage from gnostic scripture aligns well with the 'awakening' scene in the '1984' ad:

> They bestowed upon the guardians a sublime call, to shake up and make to rise those that slumber. They were to awaken the souls that had stumbled away from the place of light. They were to awaken them and shake them up, that they might lift their faces to the place of light. (G 308) (Jonas, 2001, p. 80)

The female Macintosh revolutionary in the spot acts as a gnostic guardian calling the slumbering masses to awake from their darkened state. She is the magus or sacred figure that is sent from beyond to dispel the clouds of ignorance and darkness and reveal the divine light (of Macintosh salvation from oppressive technologies).

The Gnostic belief system leaves room for this sense of the magical as a route to escaping the confines of physical existence, "The greatest magic of the Gnostics…has always been liberation from the confinement in the regions of matter and mind" (Hoeller, 2002, p. 106). Apple's allegorical attack on thought control speaks to the Gnostic impulse to transcend social, cultural and material circumstance and access pure knowledge or *gnosis.* Such knowledge does not come from institutions but from individuals in touch with the divine – spirituality is a self-directed exercise. The metaphors by which this spiritual-technological allegory continued to take shape include the coincidental introduction of the term 'cyberspace' into the popular lexicon around the same time.

In 1984, William Gibson released his landmark cyberpunk novel, *Neuromancer*, in which the idea of a metaphysical realm of information known as 'cyberspace' was popularized. The term cyberspace was later adopted by early internet enthusiasts to differentiate between the real and the virtual. The convergence of cultural expression that sought to define the role of the personal computer in the technological society and the burgeoning idea of 'cyberspace' provided a potent mix of ideas, planting seeds that would not be fully comprehended until a decade later with the birth of the commercial internet.

The impulse to create regions of knowledge and experience that exist outside or beyond physical reality bears a strong resemblance to Gnostic structures of thought. For Gnostics, the material world is fallen, filthy and unredeemable. It is only through gnosis, knowledge of the divine, that one ascends to the spiritual realm, free of bodily and material corruption. In his book, *The Age of Spiritual Machines*, Ray Kurzweil (1999) combines both the evolutionary metaphor and the Gnostic metaphor to describe a future in which computer intelligence outpaces human intelligence; an age in which humans will download their minds to machines to free themselves from their decaying biological containers.

The spiritualized dreams and aspirations of futurists, cyberpunks and computer enthusiasts are all evident, albeit in condensed form, in the evocative discourse of the Apple computer company. The most recent ads for the company, featuring the tablet computer iPad device rely on the tagline, "Magical." Apple promotes the computer as a metaphor for escaping the confinement of matter and mind and accessing illumination and magic, both literally and figuratively. The light of Apple is clear and undefiled, while for IBM and Apple's other competitors it only shines "through a glass darkly."

The dualism of light and darkness is central to gnostic belief systems as is the notion of man as magician. They also provide handy metaphors for computer makers like Apple who recognize the aesthetic allure of brightly lit screens and the virtual empowerment that comes with accessing and controlling a universe of information at one's fingertips. The ecstatic reaction of the producers and consumers of computer technology is one that carries a note of warning from philosopher Jacques Ellul:

> We must conclude that it is far from accidental that ecstatic phenomena have developed to the greatest degree in the most technicized societies. And it is to be expected that these phenomena will continue to increase. This indicates nothing less than the subjection of mankind's new religious life to technique…Ecstasy is subject to the world of technique and its servant. (Davis, 2004, p. 205)

The inherent irony here is that Ellul recognizes the "embrace of [computers] was not a spiritual resistance to the dominant society, but a complete capitulation to it" (2004, p. 205). Apple's attempt to resuscitate a Gnostic spiritual narrative in a society of fading religious institutions goes largely unnoticed beneath the hype and hysterics associated with the company's "brand cult." The brand cult phenomenon has remained the purview of sociologists and marketing scholars. It is now time to read Apple's religiosity hermeneutically by reading the official iconography of the Apple brand.

CHAPTER 3

IMAC

The year is 1984. Steve Jobs is illuminated by a single spotlight. He wears a blazer and bow tie. He tells the audience cryptically, “All the images you are about to see on the large screen will be generated by what’s in that bag”("Steve Jobs demos Apple Macintosh," 1984). Jobs the magician moves across the dark stage and lifts the machine out of a bag “giving birth” to what would become the future of personal computing. In another gesture reminiscent of a stage magician, Jobs reveals a small diskette from his jacket pocket to cheers from the audience. After he inserts the disk, the song “Chariots of Fire” begins playing over the loudspeakers. The word “MACINTOSH” scrolls slowly, in giant letters, across the screen to cheers from the audience.

At this time in personal computing, graphics were seen as a novelty as most interfaces consisted of nothing more than a basic command prompt. To reinforce the graphical capabilities of the machine, the next sequence shows the word Macintosh against a starry background as the words “insanely great!” appear as if handwritten in an animated script font. Again, the notion of different text fonts was also something of a surprise and stems from Jobs’s conviction that computing was more than crunching code, it could be an aesthetic and artistic experience as well. The crowd cheers with delight as the words write themselves across the screen. The next series of images show a graphic editing program, another sampling of Macintosh fonts, a spreadsheet program, architectural drawings, a photo of Steve Jobs being edited in the graphics program and a three-dimensional chess game, which also draws applause and cheers.

The photo of Steve Jobs in the editing program is a particularly telling icon. It is perhaps the most significant sign in the romantic introduction of the first Macintosh. At the surface level, it is merely a humorous (and narcissistic) way of demonstrating the computer's graphic capabilities. At another level it is indicative of the relationship that has become so commonplace in the computer culture - the computer as a mirror and tool for self-transformation. The Apple mythology is one that imagines the computer as a virtual extension of the emotional and cognitive self. The computer is designed to think as we do, in patterns, using visual and linguistic signifiers to mirror our own cognitive process. The computer mediates the mind and to the extent that it replicates our own sensibilities it becomes an extension of the self.

Insofar as the self is sacred, the computer itself is deemed a sacred object in the technological culture. In this chapter, I conduct a textual analysis case study of several iMac computer advertisements. Following the theoretical framework I established in the previous chapters, I will identify the ways in which the Apple advertising discourse exhibits traits of religious communication by enchanting the world of technology products.

Window

The iMac "Window" ad opens on a dark city street. A black male walks on a sidewalk towards the camera. To the left of the opening frame, a smokestack belches white smoke into the evening air. Other pedestrians walk by in pairs. Two streetlamps are visible, but the scene remains very dark. The ad cuts to a point of view shot from a shop window. A white iMac computer sits in the window and the monitor of the computer turns to follow the man as he passes the window. The computer is the iMac G4, released in 2001, featuring a swivel arm that connects a half-dome base to a flat-screen monitor. The new design for 2001 reflects Apple's design effort to consolidate all of the computer's components (monitor, CPU, disk drives) to

make it more aesthetically pleasing. The man notices the computer moving on its own and stops to look around. The man's facial expression suggests that he is suspicious of the moving computer. The ad cuts back to the street showing the man alone in front of the window as other passers-by fail to notice machine's antics.

Figure 7: iMac "Window"

The computer sits alone in the display window and is bathed in white light. The window and the computer stand in stark contrast to the dark, gritty and crowded city street. The man stops to engage with the computer. The computer mimics the man's movement exactly by rotating the flat screen monitor mounted on the swivel arm in a counterclockwise direction. The man turns to the side with his chest facing the left side of the frame while continuing to look at the computer skeptically. The computer mimics the action by turning its monitor so that the screen faces the left side of the frame. The ad cuts back to the man's point of view looking into the window. The man's reflection is visible in the window and as he turns to face the other direction, the computer does the same. The man performs a small hop from side to side. The computer does the same by bobbing the flexible monitor from side to side.

The next shot uses the window as the center line placing the man on the left surrounded by a sea of black and the computer on the right in a sea of white. The man leans in to peer more closely and the computer imitates him by extending the monitor face forward. The next shot shows the man in close-up pulling his cheeks apart with his index fingers and sticking out his tongue. The iMac ejects its CD/DVD disk drive that protrudes from the half dome base, resembling a mechanical tongue. The man steps away from the window, amused by the exchange. An older white woman stands behind him with a look of consternation. He smiles broadly at her and then frowns as he looks back at the computer as if to wonder if this was really happening. The computer straightens up and returns to its original position. The voiceover intones, "Wait till you meet the new iMac" as a white Apple logo appears on the iMac's screen. As with any cultural text, the meanings that can be derived from this ad are polysemous.

In this description, it is helpful to situate the play of signifiers within the historical context of personal computer marketing, particularly the narrative that Apple has constructed over the last few decades. The iMac ad succeeds in personalizing the personal computer by making it accessible to the uninitiated. This is accomplished by anthropomorphizing the machine, giving it the qualities of a person. The iMac "Window" ad is a whimsical approach to introducing a new product. The pantomimed interplay between man and computer is Chaplin-esque in its simplicity and charm. The music in the ad is just as playful. The song is "Music to Think By" by Benny Golson and consists of a saxophone, snare drum, whistling and an occasional note from the xylophone.

The music in the ad works as a nostalgic signifier. The choice of a retro jazz song highlights Apple's tendency to repurpose cultural symbols and texts and re-articulate them in ads that are promoting the newest of the new technology products. This strategy is effective because

it implicitly acknowledges two important facets of consumer technology culture. First, the use of familiar cultural symbols is comforting. Technology products are often perceived as being complicated and hard to use or figure out. Apple has maintained a strategy of making computer use intuitive, making it feel like something familiar that is just being recalled. This is a deft move for marketers like Apple who work to sell the future while trying not to evoke its associated anxieties. The scene recalls an "idyllic past of unified tradition" where people are "reintegrated within all-embracing, meaningful structures and social, physical and metaphysical solidarity" (Morley, 2000, p. 246).

The computer itself facilitates a kind of virtual window shopping. In this way, the setup of the "Window" ad is synonymous with the function of the product. Computers provide a virtual "window shopping" experience as consumers sample the multitude of online offerings as if strolling through a city. The personal computer offers a gateway to virtual spectacles and phantasmagoria that render the physical city and the store window archaic. Walter Benjamin's treatment of the Paris arcades at the turn of the century is resurrected here in the form of the *flaneur*. The Paris arcades were early iterations of the shopping mall, elegantly adorned shops displaying baubles and enticements that eventually fell into ruin. Benjamin was infatuated with the ruins of material culture because, from his theological-political view, ruins were the stuff of allegory. The arcades were "the original temple of commodity capitalism" and "they beamed out into the Paris of the second Empire like fairy grottoes" (Jenks, 2004, p. 258). The fairy grotto of the iMac window, with its glimmering white light and spritely computer, surprises the passer-by who is enchanted by the otherworldliness of the exchange.

Another term from Benjamin that is equally helpful here is that of *aura*. The iMac is approached by the man as one might approach a piece of prized art. No matter how close he gets

to the window, the object seems a world away. Aura has to do with authenticity and the unique presence of something original. In the age of mechanical reproduction, where images can be reproduced physically or digitally with relative ease, the original image or work loses its uniqueness. The ability to manufacture thousands of Van Gogh prints detracts from the specialness of the original painting. The *aura* of a work of art is thus diminished or dispersed by its reproduction. This is one way in which the cultural narrative about disenchantment can be understood, that those things, religious or not, that can be captured, distributed, reproduced and reused are no longer sacred. They no longer stand apart because the perceived imaginary distance has been dissolved.

The iMac "Window" ad uses the signifiers of the window and the white light to recover the idea of aura. The iMac is a singular artifact, the ad seems to say. The ad works to suggest that the iMac is not a unit of mass production, but that each machine is unique and magical. It cannot be touched, only viewed. In fact, the interface tools like keyboard and mouse that would invite contact and conventional human-computer interaction are conspicuously absent. The lack of keyboard and mouse is denoted by the sparse shop window that only houses the base and monitor assembly of the computer. The connotation of this lack is that the computer is so intuitive that a keyboard and mouse would only get in the way. This connotation is completed by the ritual "dance" between man and machine that shows just how capable the computer is of "reading" the man's physicality and emotion. The window and light signifiers are important for creating this sense of distance and portraying the computer as enchanted object. An even deeper read of the ad reveals that the sacred status of the personal computer is not derived solely from these representational signs, but from the way in which personal technology works mythologically.

The mythical interpretation of such an ad is that of computer as mirror. Here, we have the Narcissus myth replayed in the guise of the gawking consumer. The man sees the computer as a separate entity, as distant from him as the black city night is from the inside of the sanitized white display window. And yet the computer responds to his every move as if he were looking in a mirror. The computer is, as McLuhan would put it, an extension of the self. It is an extension of our own communication, memory, visualization and cognitive capacities. During the introduction of the iMac, Steve Jobs prefaced the unveiling of the new computer with a list of its technical specifications. 100 MB ethernet, 32MB of RAM, , 15" display, and SRS surround may sound like nonhuman attributes, but they are simply the human faculties of communication, memory, sight and sound rearticulated in machine terms. The figurative dance between man and machine in the ad is a metaphorical exposition of this link between the sensory and thinking capacities of man and the computer's ability to ape and augment them.

In the Narcissus myth, Narcissus does not recognize his own reflection as himself but he is still captivated by it and nothing can break him of the spell. This is the somnambulism McLuhan refers to where we are narcotized by these seemingly "other" forms. Just as the motorcar paralyzes the action of the legs by effortlessly transporting the human body from one place to another, the computer refashions our sensory environment. This disciplining of sound and sight by modern media reconfigures our sensory apprehension of the world. The computer is an intimate device because it mimics human capacities in so many different ways. The artistry of the iMac ad is its ability to capture this relationship in the metaphor of the mimetic dance between man and machine. The most telling frame is about halfway through the ad when the man jumps to face the opposite direction, and as the computer does the same. In this frame, we

see the man's reflection in the window, superimposed over the machine. He is looking at himself just as much as he is looking at the impish machine.

A related connotation that is evoked here is the father looking in on a newborn child in the whitewashed hospital nursery. The familiar scene of the father peering in to a nursery window to ogle his new offspring is playfully recreated in the iMac ad as the man smiles adoringly through the sanitized window at the steel, plastic and glass extension of himself. The iMac can be read here as progeny. It is more than an instrument for increasing productivity; it is an articulate, emotional, artistic being. At the introduction of the first Macintosh in 1984, Steve Jobs allowed the computer to "speak" using groundbreaking text to speech software. The fledgling Macintosh introduced Jobs, "it is with considerable pride that I introduce a man who has been like a father to me, Steve Jobs" ("Steve Jobs demos Apple Macintosh," 1984). The father and child motif extends into the iMac "Window" ad as the shop window bathed in white light is connotative of the hospital nursery window. The man peers into the window and ogles the machine in much the same way a new father looks at a new child through the nursery glass. He looks on in amazement at the object that is already able to mimic him as a child would. The computer evokes a quasi-paternal instinct as a machine with a simple intelligence that obeys commands but still has the ability to surprise. The propensity for some consumers to call their machines their "baby" is indicative of this relationship.

The iMac "Window" ad is laden with evocative signifiers that mythologize the personal computer. The use of a nostalgic jazz tune coupled with the enchantment of the shop window reminds the viewer of a simpler time. Rather than being flooded with choices and images, the iMac flaneur is arrested by the singular and supernatural aura of the solitary iMac. He is able to contemplate the device and interact with it in an intimate way that reveals the spirit of the

machine. The dualism of black and white, darkness and light, give the advertising communication a metaphysical quality, and the lighthearted dance between man and machine personalizes the computer in a way that gives it a life of its own.

> The birth or coming to life of the machine is not simply the product of a rational, scientific design; it is not simply a matter of construction, of putting parts together, of engineering. Rather such a machine is necessarily infused with a living spirit, with a soul; it is a "dead" technological object reanimated, given the status of an autonomous subject. This bringing to life of technology must obviously, then, take place as much through magical or spiritual means as through science. (Rutsky, 1999, p. 24)

The iMac ad continues an Apple tradition of breathing life into technological objects by imagining the machine as possessing human characteristics. In the following series of "Get a Mac" ads the anthropomorphizing of the machine is the central metaphorical device used throughout the campaign.

Get a Mac

In May 2006, Apple launched the "Get a Mac" campaign. The ads ran on television until October of 2009. There were 66 ads in the "Get a Mac" series. All of the "Get a Mac" ads were directed by Phil Morrison of Epoch Films for TBWA Media Arts Lab ("Apple and TBWA's "Get a Mac": The Complete Campaign," 2010). The setup of each ad is nearly identical. Actors John Hodgman and Justin Long stand side by side against a white background. Hodgman is typically dressed in a business suit, he wears glasses and his hair is neatly combed to one side. Long is dressed casually, his shirt untucked and hair tousled. Long begins each ad by saying, "Hello, I'm

a Mac" and Hodgman replies, "And I'm a PC." After introducing themselves to the television audience, the two engage in a humorous spoken word exchange in which Hodgman as PC suffers from his own ineptitude. Long as Mac remains somewhat aloof as he tries to convey sympathy to Hodgman while also extolling the benefits of the Mac hardware and operating system. Hodgman is reminded of his shortcomings while Long communicates the ways in which Mac computers transcend those shortcomings.

The ads were in heavy rotation for 3+ years and like the iPod silhouette ads before them, they were highly iconic. Ad critic Barbara Lippert wrote, "[The ads are] so simple, that the genius of them. They are so pre-tech and low-tech that they seem like they've been icons forever, they seem like they are already in the landscape" (Honan, 2010). Other critics were impressed with the way in which the ads conveyed complex concepts about computer operating systems with such simple visual representations. Still others sympathized with the hapless PC while bristling at the arrogance of the Mac (2010).

The "Get a Mac" ads rely on a metaphor that equates the human actors with the hardware and software of their respective computer systems. The metaphor results in an anthropomorphizing of the computer. In other words, the PC and Mac are given human characteristics. In a January 2007 ad, PC appears dressed in a surgical gown. Mac asks if PC is going in for a checkup and PC explains that he is going in for an upgrade to Visa, "which is great, but I get a little nervous when they mess around with my insides." PC laments that they have to update his graphics card, memory, and processors, "it's major surgery." PC is visibly nervous and ends the commercial by saying, "Listen, Mac, if I don't come back, I want you to have my peripherals."

In an August 2006 spot, PC is shown sitting in a wheelchair with a cast on his leg and casts on both arms. PC explains that someone tripped over his power cord and pulled him to the ground. PC grimaces as he re-enacts the painful fall. Mac tells PC that Macintosh computers come with a magnetic power cord that just pops out if the cord is pulled, "everything is just kind of thought out…" PC is still focused on the accident and interrupts Mac, "my life is flashing before my eyes. I see a sunset in a field of beautiful wheat…" Mac retorts, "Isn't that your screensaver?"

It is easy to slip into the assumption that the two actors in the "Get a Mac" campaign are portraying PC and Mac *users*, but the intent is clearly to grant the machines a human personality. The way in which the actors are dressed, their body language and their physical appearance are all signifiers to be transferred to the computer. The PC is dressed in a business suit. The shirt, tie, jacket and matching pants denote a typical Western business style of dress. The business suit connotes professionalism but also suggests someone is a member of the "establishment." Given the countercultural ethos from which the Apple brand originates, it would seem the latter connotation is more salient.

The Mac dresses more casually, often wearing t-shirts, jeans, sweatshirts and the occasional untucked button-down shirt. Mac's hair is longer and his upper lip and chin are sometimes unshaved. The Mac actor connotes being young and laid back, eschewing the uptight world of the business person/machine. In an August 2006 spot called "Self Pity," Mac is dressed in a suit and PC abruptly asks, "What's with the big boy clothes?" Mac replies that he was at a meeting and that he can run the same office software as PC. Here the Mac asserts his superiority by suggesting that he can do all the things PC can do when called upon. The PC is discouraged

by this and curls up on the floor in a fetal position while moaning, “I’ll just lie here and depreciate.”

In addition to transferring the connotation of various physical traits to the computer, the campaign also toys with the idea that computers have an emotional life as well. Two ads in the “Get a Mac” campaign feature a psychotherapist who tries to help PC overcome his deficiencies. In “Counselor” from October 2006, the PC says he feels inadequate because he gets viruses and they can’t do as much. Mac tries to reassure him and the therapist asks Mac to say something positive about PC, “OK, easy. PC you are a wizard with numbers and you dress like a gentleman.” PC responds by saying that he guesses Mac is better with “creative stuff” even though it is “juvenile and a waste of time.” The therapist then delivers the punchline, “Maybe you should come in twice a week.” In the “Breakthrough” ad from April 2008, the therapist assures PC that his issues are not his fault. She reasons that the PC’s components come from all over while the Mac all comes from the same place, so how could PC possibly work well. PC’s realization that it’s not his fault seems to be a breatkthrough until he utters the punchline, “It’s not my fault…it’s Mac’s fault” to which they all sit down again to continue the session.

The female therapist is a reminder that the maleness of the computers is also an important signifier in the ad. Females appear very infrequently throughout the campaign. The therapist appears in two ads and her femaleness seems to connote the idea that females are better working with emotional issues. In an April 2008, a female yoga instructor works with PC to help him forget the many problems of his Vista operating system. As she recites the things he should be putting out of his mind, she reminds herself that her yoga studio billing was “screwed up” by Vista and storms off the set. To which the PC quips, “Maybe I should try Pilates.” Here the

female represents another empathic figure, but in this case cannot control her own emotions, reinforcing another stereotype that women are prone to hysterical outbursts.

Several other ads feature females who are seeking a new computer. The male-female dynamic of the Mac/PC and the interested female consumer sets up a "courtship" scenario where the two machines vie for the woman's affection/purchase by showcasing their relative merits. In the August 2009, "Top of the Line" ad, PC introduces a young woman to a top of the line PC played by an actor dressed in a dark suit who conveys a comic smugness. The woman says that she wants a big screen and a fast processor. The top of the line PC says "look no further" and "some say I'm too fast." The subtle sexual innuendo is apparent here and the dating metaphor seems an apt one for the consumer-product relationship, especially when it comes to the personal computer. The computer is a personal medium that stores much the user's most intimate information, financial data, personal photographs, passwords, journal entries, and so on.

The "Get a Mac" ads are playful and humorous and tend to resist a "deeper read." Their visual simplicity is inviting and helps reinforce one of Apple's key themes, that personal computing should not be intimidating. The PC character played by John Hodgman has been compared to a chubby Bill Gates and the comic strip character Dilbert, a hapless corporate employee. Justin Long who plays Mac has been featured in a number of popular Hollywood films and television shows, making him popular with the young Macintosh demographic. Granting the machine personhood makes it something sacred. There is no religious ideology or gnostic belief that must be invoked to understand the ways in which Apple's humanization of the computer makes it sacred. The computer is designed to enhance human consciousness and as such it becomes an extension of the self. Adherents to the Singularity movement popularized by

futurist Ray Kurzweil believe that man will transcend all of his biological limitations with the help of machines.

In the Mac narrative, differences in operating systems represent differences in cognition styles. Associating with a particular brand then is not just an affiliation with a name or corporate philosophy but with a way of thinking. The operating system is a metaphor for the mind. A March 1999 print ad titled "I THINK THEREFORE IMAC" (Figure 13) reiterates this view that the computer is synonymous with the human cogito.

Figure 8: iMac "I think, therefore iMac"

The ad and the computer reflect the way we process information. To the extent that we prefer one interface over another reveals our cognitive predisposition. An insult hurled at a PC user is not just about the type of computer they use, but an attack on a structure of thinking. When political or religious commitments are involved this would be called an ideological debate. But in the world of computers, the computer stands outside and above such discourse, making it a tool of metacommunication.

It is not a great leap then to consider the ways in which metacommunication operates in the realm of metaphysics. We are thinking, feeling, acting human beings who use ephemeral modes of communication to foster familial bonds, build social relationships and erect democratic

systems. In this way, communication can be imagined as a sacred act, one that connects human beings and evokes the root of the term 'communo' – communion. The personal computer has become the most thorough symbol of human thought, feeling and action because of its central function in the information age.

In "Better Results" Mac and PC compare home movies made on their respective machines. Mac's home movie is represented by supermodel Gisele Bundchen. When Mac asks to see PC's home movie, PC is hesitant. Both Mac and his movie, Bundchen, plead with PC to view PC's movie. A male actor enters the screen in a wig and the same dress the supermodel is wearing and says, "What's up? PC home movie." PC is embarrassed by this and says, "Work in progress." Again we see the humanizing of, in this case, the output of a computer software product. The movie made with iMovie software is made human in the form of a supermodel. The qualities associated with the supermodel signifier are meant to apply to the Mac-made movie. The connotation is that the Mac movie is more aesthetically pleasing than the PC version. From a technical perspective, this may refer to the various compression algorithms and image controls that Mac and its native software have pioneered. One is given the sense that the same movie made on both Mac and PC would just look better on Mac.

The creativity of Mac and PC's lack thereof is a theme that repeats itself throughout the campaign and points to a central tension regarding the role of creativity in the world of personal computing. Prior to the Mac, Apple would have us believe, computers were dull, lifeless, esoteric machines that required a secret knowledge to operate. To borrow a metaphor made famous by Umberto Eco, the computers of the DOS era were based on understanding machine language, a "kabbalistic code." With the Mac, the "word was made flesh." Now users could *see* what they were doing via bubbly icons and friendly software interfaces that placed more

emphasis on the role of images in computing. The Macintosh signaled the arrival of computing for "the rest of us" a slogan the company used frequently in the mid-1980s. The intuitive interface and icons helped initiate a new kind of computer user, one who needed no knowledge of difficult lines of code to operate the machine. In the Apple mythos, creativity is man's higher calling, one that transcends the world of mundane work implicated by the PC and Microsoft.

The "Get a Mac" ads raise the question of the personal computer's reason for existence. The tension that the ads present, and that Apple has nurtured over the past 30 years, is that Windows/PC computers represent the world of work and the depersonalization wrought by technology while Apple computers are part of a creative and romanticized movement to liberate human creativity. This motif is evident in the '1984' ad that ushered in the personal computer age and it persists in humorous form in the "Get a Mac" campaign. Medieval morality play portrayed man's existence as a fall from innocence followed by redemption. In the "Get a Mac" ads PC represents the "fall" of personal technology and the Mac is the redemption or resolution.

The ads accomplish this by creating a dualism between the worlds of work and leisure. From a philosophical perspective, work and creativity are bound up with the ways in which culture is understood. According to Josef Pieper, "culture depends for its very existence on leisure, and leisure, in its turn, is not possible unless it has a durable and consequently living link with the *cultus*, with divine worship" (Pieper, 2009, p. 15). Leisure, for Pieper, is the ultimate act of freedom in which the human being is permitted the time and space to contemplate things. In the world of total work, where reaction time trumps contemplation, our intellectual, moral and spiritual lives shrivel up.

Apple promotes a return to leisure – a radical proposition that takes the very instrument that lies at the center of work in the information age and remains a cause of distraction and

diversion – and re-imagines the machine as an escape from drudgery. From the Dionysian feasts of the Greeks to the feast days of the traditional Catholic liturgical calendar, spiritual belief has historically provided the foundation for the nourishment and rejuvenation of humans "born to work" (Plato) "in painful toil" (Genesis 3:17). The "Get a Mac" campaign invokes the Greek gods of old by humanizing the pseudo-sacred characteristics of the personal computer. Hermes, the messenger of the gods and the patron of boundaries was believed to have bridged the worlds of Greek philosophy and Christian theology. Hermes prefigures the spirit of the networked age in which disparate knowledge can be collected, shared, translated and reimagined.

The "Get a Mac" actors play the role of minor gods in the cyberculture pantheon. On a ritual basis they reenact the battle between the world of work and the world of leisure and creativity. The world of work is ritually vanquished by the superiority of the Mac. The *cultus* of Mac worship is thus a repressed reverence for the contemplation of the divine afforded by true leisure. However, in the form of the computer, such contemplation is not aimed at wisdom or enlightenment but information and entertainment.

Bach

The iMac "Bach" features a full screen "visualization" that moves in sync with Johan Sebastian Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 in D Major. The ad is part of a campaign featuring the iTunes software that allows users to copy CDs and digital audio files legally and set the stage for the highly lucrative legal music download market that would explode in the following decade. The signifiers in the ad are the Bach concerto, the animated visualization and the text at the end, "Bach is complex. Burning your own CDs isn't." In this section, I will discuss the significance of these particular signs by exploring their relationship to one another and to the general cultural discourse in which the ad is situated.

Figure 9: iMac “Bach”

The animated visualization is dynamic imagery that is programmed to move in synchronized rhythm with the music being played. The software became popular in the late 1990s when several popular applications began incorporating visualizations into their music player software. The animation can be changed by choosing from a menu of different patterns but tends to feature abstract or geometric shapes that expand and contract as the music changes in volume and rhythm. The Bach piece in the iMac ad is rendered in a neon blue color that dances on a black background. The sensation is one of “watching” the music.

As a semiotic sign, the animated visualization is a complex sign to decode. The visual complexity of the animation mirrors the ad copy, “Bach is complex.” This is one way in which the predominant visual sign in the ad establishes a semiotic relationship with the linguistic signifier that anchors the ad. The visual does not have an easily defined literal or denotative meaning. It is an abstract visual animation that seems to follow a piece of background music. As the music crescendos, the visualization climbs the screen. As the music slows, the movement of the animation is more reserved. The dancing electric blue lines are captivating in concert with the music. There is a melding of aesthetic appreciation that unites two prominent senses, sight

and sound. As Barthes contends, the sign is made up of a signifier and a signified. The animated visualization of the music is an indexical sign that refers the viewer back to the music. The relationship between the visual and aural is thus a closed loop with one translating the other synaesthetically rather than augmenting or explaining.

This experience of transposing the senses where an aural stimuli like music manifests as a visual stimuli like animated colors is similar to the phenomenon of synaesthesia, "an *involuntary* joining in which the real information of one sense is accompanied by a perception in another sense" (Dann, 1998, p. 5). In the case of the iMac Bach ad we are "seeing" the symphony as we hear it. Steve Jobs's has famously claimed that his first time on LSD was one of the most profound experiences of his life. In his recollection of the events that surrounded his first drug trip, he was standing in a wheat field and the field seemed to be playing a Bach concerto. Synaesthetic effects are commonly reported among those who have tried LSD as they report seeing voices or hearing colors. Enthusiasm for synaesthetic experience spiked among the French symbolists at the turn of the 20th century and among the countercultural devotees of 1960s America. Steve Jobs and the Apple Computer company that he founded carry heavy traces of this countercultural spirit. In the 1960s, synaesthetic awareness acquired a transcendent dimension. Synaesthesia was seen as a spiritual antidote to "the same poisons – rationalism, materialism, and positivism – that had vexed the late nineteenth century" (Dann, 1998, p. 165). Psychedelic pioneers believed that they were "storming heaven" as their forays into hallucinated worlds had all the marks of a religious mystical experience.

This interplay of the senses, visual and aural, along with the emotional and hallucinogenic quality of the animation are part of a second-order semiological system that deeply informs the Apple mythology. In the countercultural ethos of the Apple computer

company, the machine is not merely a tool, it is an extension of the creative consciousness that has the potential to elevate the mind to new perceptual heights. It is a domesticated form of the chemical substances that fueled its very invention and development. As a piece of technological iconography, the iMac "Bach" ad promotes the computer as aesthetic object – something to be marveled at for its beauty and grace rather than its cold, lifeless circuitry.

The ad and the messages that it contains are yet another example of the way in which the computer is imagined as a vehicle for personal transformation. In other words, the enhancement of creative perception is seen as a product attribute alongside design and processing power. This enhancement is an invitation to personal transformation, a central tenet in religious belief and experience. Unlike most consumer goods that fit in the realm of conspicuous consumption, products purchased for social status or style, the choice we make when we buy a computer is an answer to the question "which machine thinks and acts most like I do?" The Bach selection lends an air of sophistication to the ad that a pop culture tune might not provide. The Mac user is thus hailed as someone who appreciates the finer things and is shown a machine that not only plays such music but visualizes it as well. The marketing message is aimed at consumers interested in "burning" or copying CDs to their computer hard drive. At the time the iMac ad was released, this was seen as a difficult, technical and cumbersome process. Apple creates a message that says it is not nearly as difficult on an iMac. This is the denotative meaning of the Bach music signifier that is anchored by the ad's linguistic signifier, "Bach is complex. Burning your own CDs isn't."

The Apple iMac "Bach" can be interpreted mythologically as an homage to the chemically- induced transcendental experience of the 1960s counterculture. The combination of the sublime concerto with the "trippy" visuals provides a study in contrasts as well, between the

aristocratic air of classical music and the liberating chaos of electrifying hallucination. The two signifiers come together in a medium tailor-made for mixing cultural signs, the personal computer. Apple has prided itself on initiating these cultural trends and in some sense facilitating them by creating machines geared toward "shuffling" cultural signs and symbols in innovative ways. The arrangement of signs in the iMac "Bach" ad provides yet another representative icon for the Apple cult. Apple is using the most innovative media of the day (their own machines) to create icons that communicate the metaphysics of music and media.

She Comes in Colors

One of the early iMac ads features a group of candy-color computers floating and spinning on a glossy white set. The soundtrack is "She's a Rainbow" by the Rolling Stones from their 1967 album *Their Satanic Majesties Request*. The visual elements are limited to the five computers, colored red, blue, orange, purple and green. The background is a gleaming white which grants visual precedence to the neon computers. After a whimsical piano introduction, the lyrics of the Rolling Stones song announce, "She comes in colors everywhere, she combs her hair, she's like a rainbow. Coming, colors in the air, oh, everywhere. She comes in colors."

Figure 10: iMac "She Comes in Colors"

The refrain “she comes in colors” is one that appeared in several notable places in the psychedelic heyday of the 1960s. In addition to the lyrics of the Rolling Stones song, it was also the title of a 1966 song by a band called Love. “She Comes in Colors” was the title of a 1966 Playboy magazine article with LSD guru Timothy Leary. As a linguistic signifier in the ad it first describes the product attribute of color that Apple has chosen to focus on with its new line of computers. Immediately beneath this denotative meaning is the connotative allusion to two important themes: 1) the anthropomorphizing of the machine and 2) the sensory stimulation delivered by computers and their chemical predecessors, psychedelic drugs.

The signifier ‘she’ denotes that the machine has a personal quality, and more specifically a feminine character. In this way, the computer is something that is to be lusted after. The visual signifiers in the ad support this interpretation as the camera moves slowly and seductively over the curves of the machine and the iMac floats and pirouettes against the white background. The viewer is hailed as a potential suitor for the machine rather than simply a user of technological tools. The instrumental relationship between man and computer is ignored in order to highlight the sensual. There is no mention of computer features in the ad beyond color. The computers are not even on. It is just the body that we are to ogle and admire. Sex appeal is connoted in the ad by the feminine characterization of the iMac by the song “She Comes in Colors” and the attention to aesthetic detail. In the 1966 *Playboy* article “She Comes in Colors,” Leary describes his first drug experience as being the “deepest religious experience of my life” (Leary, 1990, p. 118).

The primary theme that emerges from the iMac textual analysis is the anthropomorphizing of the computer. The computer is depicted as a sensual, thinking, feeling being. The being or essence of the machine is represented metaphorically using actors and

artistic visuals that promote a series of creative and transcendental values. This “technical romanticism” adds to the metaphysical sensibilities that the Apple brand evokes with its mythological iconography.

CHAPTER 4

IPOD

Apple's introduction of the iPod in October 2001 was not typical for the high-profile technology company. Lacking the hype and spectacle of other Apple product launches, the iPod event took place in a smallish auditorium in front of a select group of journalists and investors. The public mood was somber after terrorist attacks in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania the previous month. Apple CEO Steve Jobs paced the small stage in his signature black mock turtle neck and jeans with no belt. He made the case that the new device was faster and had more storage capacity and longer battery life than the other portable music players on the market. The iPod could hold an entire music library and it fit in your pocket.

As with most Apple products, the technical story of the iPod pales in comparison to the cultural significance of the device. In July 2004, Newsweek christened millions of iPod users "iPod Nation," announcing that the music player had gone from "gizmo" to "life-changing cultural icon" (Levy, 2004, p. 42). Apple is nearing a quarter of a billion iPods sold, nearly 21 million were sold in the first quarter of 2010 alone (Apple, 2010). ITunes, the iPod's companion music download software, recently surpassed 10 billion downloaded songs (Apple, 2010). IPod accessories include armbands, speakers, clock radios, cases and plug-ins that track exercise output and biorhythms. The market for add-ons is a $1 billion business and growing. IPods are workout companions, fashion accessories, portable DJs and tokens of membership in the Apple technology cult.

By some accounts it would seem that Apple products are endowed with a share of the divine. The iPod has been called an "object of devotion" that has inspired a "cult of iPod"

(S. Evans, 2005). IPod owners comment on the device's ability to make them feel "cosmically connected" (Bull, 2008, p. 151) to their music and to make their surroundings seem more "spiritual and sacred" (2008, p. 46).

Academic treatments of Apple have identified the brand's user community as one that contains the essential features of a religious community. According to Belk and Tumbat (2005), the Apple brand community is sustained by a series of popular myths and technological rituals that enhance the brand's religiosity. Markus Giesler uses the term "technotranscendence" (Kahney, 2005) to describe consumers who use the iPod to "transcend the here and now" by being physically present but mentally elsewhere, somewhere in the music. Leander Kahney's book *The Cult of iPod* decribes the author's experience using the iPod while working out, "High as a kite off the exercise, the music transports me to nirvana. Sometimes, when the right tune pops up, I'm truly in heaven" (2005, p. 3). Journalists like Kahney are not the only ones who have experienced the mystical qualities of iPod listening. Michael Bull's (2008) research on the iPod and city life found individuals who describe the iPod as a mood regulator and a "contemplative device."

This chapter looks at the question of iPod representation by providing a textual analysis of Apple's advertising for the popular music player. Technology does not speak for itself, it is spoken through social practices and the various ways that it is represented. As the above examples illustrate, the discourse of academics and journalists contributes to the religiosity associated with the Apple brand. In this study, I look at the ways in which the "official art" of the Apple product, the advertising, also works as the iconography of the Apple cult. In order to set the stage for such a reading, I intend to provide two contextual narratives that will inform the meaning making process of the advertisements. First, I will extend the discussion of the first two

chapters by further exploring the intersection of mediation and religiosity as it has been exhibited and theorized by media scholars working in the area of religion, media and culture.

This is not a customary approach that considers the ways in which religion is communicated and practiced through media. Rather, this inverted view considers the ways in which mediation itself absent explicitly religious language still implies a religious grammar. Second, I will continue the historical context in which the iPod and the practice of personal stereo listening was developed and imagined. By situating my textual analysis of the advertising within this theoretical and historical constellation, I am better able to allow the symbols to speak, rather than speaking for them.

From Audiac to iPod

The advertising text does not exist in a vacuum so I will begin by situating the ads in a historical context that considers the iPod as a cultural artifact that shares a formal affinity with other forms of acoustic immersion. I will first consider the story of the invention of the Audiac as an allegorical way of understanding the ways in which iPod "becomes intelligible as it is aligned with a past moment with which it has a secret affinity" (Peters, 1999, p. 2). The following narrative reveals a family resemblance that may be temporally remote but formally aligned.

Part of Apple's religiosity is the company's propensity to reanimate archetypal cultural symbols. The '1984' ad (see Chapter 2) references the 1920s film Metropolis as well as the Orwell novel '1984' in its mythic portrayal of Macintosh unseating IBM's Big Brother. The "Think Different" campaign is a collage of cultural visionaries representing the great minds of the past and present as a way to implicitly christen Steve Jobs, who had just returned to the

company, as one who would join a pantheon that includes Picasso and Einstein. The iPod campaign is a much more abstract text but still provides a series of visual and rhetorical cues that are collected from the cultural debris. This debris provides the material for a rich allegory about humankind's digital infatuation. Apple and its advertising agency TBWA/Chiat-Day build the brand narrative through the accumulation of fragments "without any strict idea of a goal …hoping for a miracle to occur in their arrangement" (Plate, 2005, p. 68).

The devices that Apple develops also represent re-articulations of cultural debris. The iPhone is the cell phone reimagined. The iPad is the previously failed tablet computer reimagined. One could argue that the iPod is the Sony Walkman reimagined. The Walkman does provide some interesting parallels, but I will take a longer view in an attempt to capture more broadly the social and material conditions that led to the development of the iPod. A story in *Popular Science* in August 1960 profiled a Massachusetts dentist who developed an "audio-analgesic" for use during painful dental procedures (Maisel, 1960). The idea behind the device was to create an acoustic overload that would drown out the sound of the 100dB pneumatic dental drill and reduce the associated pain.[1] The device was called the Audiac and was conceived by psychologist and acoustic engineer Dr. J.C.R. Licklider after a routine visit to Dr. Wallace Gardner's office where the two men had a discussion about objectionable sounds in the dental office and how they might be masked. Licklider took the idea to a team of acoustical engineers at his research lab in Cambridge, and the resulting technology was an electronic noise generator that used high-intensity musical sound to mask the sound of the 100 dB drill.

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[1] The danger of hearing loss associated with the iPod has been taken seriously by members of the medical community. Audiologists found that the risk of permanent hearing loss increases with just five minutes of daily exposure to portable music at full volume. The link between portable music players and hearing loss prompted the French government to cap volume levels for portable music players at 100 dB, the same decibel level as a pneumatic dental drill.

Figure 11: Audio-Analgesia (Maisel, 1960, p. 61)

Audio-analgesia now replaces anesthetics

MUSIC TO DRILL TO is the latest offering of dental-equipment manufacturers. A control box held by the patient pipes music into the earphones: classical, popular, or children's selections. A wide-spectrum masking sound blocks out intense pain.

The results were quite positive. By the end of the first year, sixty-three percent of patients reported completely effective suppression of pain. For another 25 percent, the noise-music combination so reduced the perception of pain that they refused anesthetics for later dental sessions. One patient even agreed to have a molar extracted without conventional anesthetic. "As the forceps gripped his molar, the patient turned the noise volume all the way up and closed his eyes. When he opened them again, he couldn't believe the tooth was already out" (1960, p. 62).

Licklider concluded that the Audiac worked largely because it blocked action upon the nerves that transmit sensations of pain. The controlled sound simply swamped the pain "message" to the brain. What is even more interesting about the Audiac is that it comes out of a scientific moment in the early 1960s that witnessed the development of networked computing. The Audiac's inventor, Dr. Licklider, was a founding member of the ARPAnet project that led to the modern internet.

Licklider went on to mentor Robert Taylor, founder of the Xerox PARC's Computer Science Laboratory (CSL). The two men co-authored the seminal article, "The Computer as a Communication Device" that opens with the line, "In a few years, men will be able to

communicate more effectively through a machine than face to face" (Wikipedia, 2010). The work of Licklider and Taylor on human/computer interaction would eventually come to the attention of Apple founder Steve Jobs. During a visit to CSL in 1979, Steve Jobs met with Xerox PARC researchers to discuss graphical user interface (GUI) and later cited the experience as an inspiration for conceiving of the Apple Macintosh operating system (Dodgson, 2000, p. 271).

In addition to crossing paths with the inventor of the Audiac, Jobs had some other experiences in the 1970s that may have planted the seeds for the iPod. Jobs fit into a class of counterculturalists known as "wireheads" who were obsessed with expanding human consciousness, both technologically and pharmacologically. Various members of the ARPAnet project and the CSL experimented with LSD, including Douglas Engelbart who would invent the computer rmouse. In a well-worn tale about Jobs's first experience on LSD in a wheat field, the shaman of high tech recalled something that sounds like the treatment for an iPod commercial, "All of a sudden the wheat field was playing Bach. It was the most wonderful experience of my life up to that point. I felt like the conductor of this symphony with Bach coming through the wheat field" (Niermann & Sack, 2008, p. 57).

In 1979, the same year that Jobs visited the CSL and received his inspiration for the Macintosh, the Sony Walkman was released. In an interview with *Time* magazine in 1981, a New York TV producer declared, "There are buses, airplanes, sirens…You have to replace them with something louder, by force-feeding your own sounds into your ears" (Harbison, Reed, & Balberman, 1981). The Walkman would become the Audiac of urban life in the 1980s. Twenty years later, just weeks after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Steve Jobs would launch the iPod in a historical moment of horrific assault on urban life as jet airplanes smashed into skyscrapers and leveled a section of lower Manhattan. The era of televisual terrorism

universalized the destruction of that day, and the psychic damage was as profound in San Francisco as it was in New York. Society was in need of a mediated antidote.

The timing of the iPod launch was no doubt a product of many factors, and I am not suggesting that the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the iPod are linked in any intentional way. However, an analogical connection can be made that illustrates the impeccable timing of the iPod launch after such a tragedy. Following the shock, there was something needed to fill the void and address the psychological damage that had been done. In a country already gobbling up anti-depressants at astounding rates, the remedy had to be something more personal and even more numbing. In 1900, Georg Simmel describes urban culture in a way that presages the utility of the iPod:

> The jostling crowdedness and the motley disorder of metropolitan communication…would…be unbearable without…psychological distance. Since contemporary urban culture…forces us to be physically close to an enormous number of people,…people would sink completely into despair if the objectification of social relationships did not bring with it an inner boundary and reserve. The pecuniary character of relationships, either openly or concealed in a thousand forms, places [a]…functional distance between people that is an inner protection…against the overcrowded proximity. (Walter Benjamin & Tiedemann, 1999, p. 448)

Simmel's critique (quoted through Walter Benjamin), references the economic character of relationships in the modern city. On a normal day the job defines us and our social function and also serves as a psychological barrier between thousands of anonymous individuals. In the jarring moment of apocalyptic destruction the boundaries are dissolved and the social distance is temporarily eviscerated. The collective becomes communal and functional distinctions are

momentarily forgotten as everyone becomes subject to the catastrophic spectacle. An ad hoc religion emerges in which everyone prays for deliverance from the unbearable circumstances. But the moment is fleeting and something else is ultimately needed to numb the pain. Those who embrace urban life are accustomed to surprise and instability – it is part of what makes city life so stimulating. However, after 9/11 and the incessant replay of the event, the impulse was to change the channel. With the iPod, urban dwellers found a way to move through the tumult of the decapitated city by numbing the pain and self-medicating with music.

At this point, anecdotes about the Audiac and the timing of the iPod launch do not provide any overt associations with religion or transcendence. However, a more thorough consideration reveals a suggestive theme that is established by these two seemingly unrelated events: the narcotizing effect of audio immersion. Scuba divers are susceptible to a condition known as nitrogen narcosis. In this state, caused by an increase in atmospheric pressure, individuals report euphoric effects, relief of anxiety, feelings of tranquility and mastery of the environment. The deluge of electronic stimulation in the contemporary environment creates a very similar sensation.

> [media] is everywhere, too much to take in. It is, in a sense, like nature - that overwhelming presence human beings once found so threatening yet auspicious that they conjured up gods and demons to imagine their way through its ungraspable allness. (Gitlin, 2007, p. 119)

The fear and fascination associated with media consumption and its narcotizing effects is analogous to the encounter with the numinous that Rudolf Otto describes in his anthropology of religious experience, what he calls the *mysterium tremendum* (Otto, 1950). There is also a history in this country of sacramentalizing modes of mediation that bring about such altered

states of consciousness including the Native American Church that venerates the hallucinogenic peyote plant or Timothy Leary's well-publicized experiments with LSD.

Timothy Leary championed the use of LSD as a way to expand human consciousness and drop out of the "tribal game." Leary's social movement utilized and embraced all manner of religious metaphor to further the cause. In 1966, Leary founded the League for Spiritual Discovery, a religion declaring LSD as its holy sacrament. Thirty years later, Leary called the computer the "LSD of the 1990s" (Dery, 1996, p. 22). Steve Jobs's LSD experience in the wheat field reinforces the idea that drugs and computers have a history of being imagined as gateways to enhanced consciousness, a pursuit that has religious connotations.

What began in the dental chair as a way to numb the pain has become a societal coping mechanism. Like the Audiac, the iPod finds itself in a historical context in which the absence or removal of pain has become a belief system. The rise of a therapeutic culture and the decline of traditional religion has been documented in religious sociology (Miller, 2004) as a defining feature of the postmodern age. The therapeutic discourse is constituted by medical practice, popular culture, religious rhetoric and advertising itself. Unlike most ads or products that wistfully promise intense experiences or emotional escape, the iPod actually delivers such experiences through the ritual and universal form of music (Bull, 2008). The iPod works as a sacramental relic in the digital culture. It does not channel the supernatural but it does channel the desired effects of mood enhancement, distraction and diversion that have become the sacraments of therapeutic culture, "the lack of something definite at the center of the soul impels us to search for momentary satisfaction in ever-new stimulations, sensations and external activities" (Simmel, 1978, p. 484).

Semiotic Analysis of iPod Ads

Thirty-three iPod television ads that ran between 2001 and 2009 were organized thematically (see Appendix A) based on three visual paradigms that were identified in the analysis. The most prominent visual motif was the "silhouette" ad where shadows of iPod listeners and musical artists dance and perform on neon colored backgrounds. The second motif is referred to as the "city" ads. The third motif is characterized by the product's design aesthetic with close-up shots of the device highlighting the iPod's form and functionality. Actors are rarely present in these ads, but when they are they tend to be female. These ads fall under the "product design" motif.

The iPod advertisements will be read through the denotative and connotative meanings contained in the ads' visual and linguistic signs. It is through the arrangement of these signs and codes that a technological *mythology* is constituted. In order to read an advertising mythology it is necessary to define the term mythology in this context. To use Roland Barthes's terminology, *myth is a type of speech* (Barthes, 1988, p. 109). As soon as artifacts enter a discourse, be it photography, painting, cinema or advertising, they begin to acquire aspects of mythic speech. Myth in this case is not a fictional story or fable, but a way of representing ideologies through cultural practices like advertising.

Judith Williamson notes that one of the primary functions of advertising has been to replace religion by creating structures of meaning. These structures of meaning are capable of "transforming the language of objects to that of people, and vice versa" (Williamson, 1978, p. 12). Meaning is added to cultural objects through their social usage or the way in which they are put into practice and represented. Understanding cultural objects through their representation and practice challenges the idea that meaning evolves from the "nature of things." The iPod does not have an inherent nature that we can discover. We must attend to the social usage of the

object and how it is represented. The status of the iPod as mythical object depends on the infinite number of suggestive associations that the iPod evokes: private listening, music consumption, and fashion, all discursive formations that color our understanding of the iPod as social object. While I cannot address all of the possible suggestive associations here, the preceding section highlights some of the contextual circumstances that contribute to the iPod meaning making process.

The following section analyzes a representative sample of ads from the Apple iPod advertising campaign. The ads fall into three distinct visual paradigms, summarized by the categories, silhouette, city, and product design. The most prominent visual paradigm initiated by the Apple iPod advertising campaign is the "silhouette." In the campaign, silhouetted figures perform against bright backgrounds filled with neon color. The silhouettes carry white iPods, identifiable by the signature white wires that extend from the small pocket device to the performer's ears. A musical soundtrack animates the performers and celebrates the iPod's primary benefit, aural pleasure. The campaign is enchanting and has achieved a coveted status in American advertising, it is *iconic*.

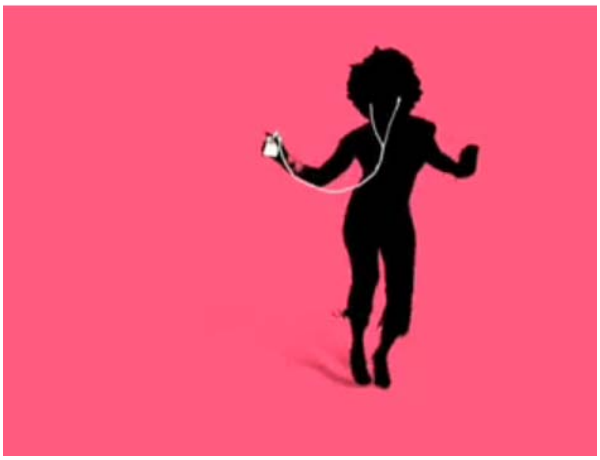
In his work on the iPod silhouette campaign, Jenkins (2008) argues that Apple uses the visual form of icon to construct a "mode of seeing known as symbolical realism" (2008, p. 467). Through symbolical realism, "the icon portrays a hypostasis – a concrete representation of a spiritual quality" (2008, p. 467). For Jenkins, the iPod ads portray a "hypostasis of the immersion in music" (Jenkins, 2008, p. 468). This allows Apple to assert that they are dedicated to the ecstatic experience of immersion in music, not the crass commercial ends of materialism and profit. Jenkins accurately points out that the wild success of the product and the campaign cannot solely be attributed to the fact that it's just hip or cool. If Apple merely positioned the

product as something “hip” then sophisticated consumers would see right through the strategy. The iPod ads deflect this see-through quality and offer up a visual design that is worthy of contemplation. The visual form of the silhouette is sufficiently vague which discourages the projection of stereotypes and clichés. Instead, the reader ponders the identity of the ecstatic figures and perhaps inserts themselves into the black cut-outs.

Hey Mama

The “Hey Mama” ad was part of a trio of 2003 iPod television ads that featured dancing silhouettes on bright-colored backgrounds. The ads are striking in their simplicity. Their minimalism is consistent with the aesthetic of Apple machines, lacking ornamentation and stripped down to essential forms. In the ads, black cut-outs of human figures dance energetically while connected to white iPods via the signature white wires and earbuds. The background of the scene is a rotating series of neon colors. Apple execs hesitated when TBWA/Chiat-Day agency creatives suggested the neon set because it was not consistent with Apple’s signature white background for advertising. The creatives eventually got their way and the colorful array of ads became part of the campaign’s iconic appeal. In the spots, individual dancers are featured in rapid succession, creating a kaleidoscopic effect of kinetic energy and color. The ghostly figures move to the beat of music in an ebullient display of expressive moves, flipping, falling, and jumping around the colored space.

Figure 12: iPod “Hey Mama”



The opening sequence of the “Hey Mama” ad features a close-up of a human profile mouthing the opening line of the song, “La, la, la, la, la.” The blackness of the face obscures the detail of facial features. We see only the profile outline of the nose and mouth. The face is accented by a white line that runs into the ear. The background of the scene is a neon pink color. The visual design of the ad is a study in negative space. In photography, negative space is the area that surrounds the subject of the photograph. The non-descript background gives visual priority to the foreground subject. In the case of the silhouettes, the colored background provides visual contrast, giving shape to the dancers. However, the dancers seem cut out of the background rather than projecting their own dimensionality.

The visual form of the silhouette is sufficiently vague which discourages the projection of stereotypes and clichés. Instead, we ponder the identity of the ecstatic figures and perhaps insert ourselves into the black cut-outs. This aesthetic quality serves an important rhetorical function in the way in which the ads and the product are imagined. In one way, the *lack of dimensionality* in the silhouette ads resists a “deeper” read. Two-dimensional figures dancing on horizonless backgrounds appear to be no more than animated shadows just enjoying the music. However, in their apparent emptiness, the signifiers act as deep reservoirs of a dense narrative about our

relationship with music and technology. The challenge of interpreting such a cultural artifact then is an abundance of meaning rather than a lack.

If we read "lack of dimension" as a signifier, we may consider the steamrolling of identity brought on by the advent of screen-based technology. Life online is characterized by two-dimensional representations of the self. Avatars, emoticons, text, and photographs serve as signifiers of personality and emotion in the absence of body language, inflection and physical presence. This symptom of life in digital culture is rendered allegorically by the silhouette campaign. As such, the iPod and the experience of aural immersion and dance serve as a mode of resistance to such conceptions of identity. Dance is an expression of the entire body. It is kinetic and physical, both qualities that run counter to the sedentary posture attributed to computer use. The paradox of the Apple ideology and iconography is its ability to identify social tensions brought on by greater technology use while also offering redemption from such pessimistic circumstances.

The shadow dancers also connote a binary of presence and absence. This reflects the social trend common among iPod users who make themselves physically present but are mentally elsewhere as they listen to music. The silhouette form makes a figure present by tracing the outline of its shadow, but the shadow is not the person. The shadow is the area where the light does not fall. The bright white iPod then signifies something transcendent. It is the opposite of shadow, it is pure light. Apple's reliance on black and white is reminiscent of Robert Mapplethorpe's photography. Mapplethorpe was raised Catholic and, as a boy, had an infatuation with the symmetry of "little altars." Giles (1992) points out that "the structural patterns of much of Mapplethorpe's photography can be seen to resolve themselves into dialogues between spiritual white and diabolic black" (1992, p. 37).

In a parody of contemporary image advertising where models are chosen for their symbolic appearance, the model/actor is rendered black, opaque and featureless. The silhouette hinges not on resemblance, but semblance, "at its etymological origins [semblance refers to] a phantasm, in other words, a specter. Conjured and then concretized, the practice of the silhouette, like that of black magic is indeed…a *black art*" (emphasis added) (Saltzman, 2006, p. 57). The dancing specters work as metaphysical signifiers. An absent presence animated by the ethereal ecstasy of musical immersion.

The aesthetic minimalism of the iPod ads foregrounds the rhythm and lyric of the song. Through its lack of visual signification the ad draws our attention to the music. The lack of visual stimuli returns us to the aural. In much the same way that music videos became extended advertisements for a particular song, the iPod silhouette "template" offers a visually interesting but generic space for the promotion of sound. The privileging of the song allows us to consider the lyric of the song as the only linguistic message in the ad.

Hey mama, this that beat that make you move, mama/

Get on the floor and move your booty mama/

We the blast masters blasting up the drum, REWIND!/

Cutie, cutie, make sure you move your booty/

Shake that thing in the city of sin/

Hey shorty, I know you wanna party/

The way your body look you make me really feel naughty/

Naw, y'all know, who we are, we the stars/

Steady rocking on y'all's boulevards and looking hard without bodyguards/

Come on mama, dance to the drummer/

La-la-la-la-la, Hey mama

The lyrics are part of a hyper-sexualized style that has become standard fare in contemporary pop, R&B, rap, hip-hop and dance singles. The male singers address an unnamed female or females as “mama” and implore her to “dance to the drummer.” The beat features a heavy bass sound and kettle drum sounds that connote a tribal rhythm. The vocals are distinctively Caribbean in their delivery and intonation. These rhythmic sounds are the primary signifiers of the “reggae” sound that has roots in African dance.

While the lyrics are important for understanding the ad’s message, the beat of the music has its own set of connotations. Like most modern music, the song does not fit cleanly in a single musical category. The iPod campaign as a whole samples artists from multiple musical genres, ostensibly to appeal to listeners who prefer different types of music. “Hey Mama” is a combination of hip-hop, dance and reggae. In the context of American popular music and culture, the reggae sound was co-opted by a number of different artists, most notably dance artists who favor the distinctive beat and Caribbean rhythm. As a form of social expression, the history of African dance loses some of its weight when it is mass produced for dance halls. At the same time, it illustrates a social tension in the music between music for relaxation and escape and music as site of spiritual tension. This tension was tailor-made for the ritual space of the dance hall where “relaxation takes precisely the form of the muscular orgy in which…may be deciphered as in an open book the huge effort of a community to exorcise itself, to liberate itself, to explain itself” (Eze, 1998, p. 230).

The rise of the iPod is inextricably tied to the rise of the sound system DJs that modified dance hall culture in the 1990s. In *The Cult of iPod* Kahney (2005) describes the ways in which

iPod DJ parties factored into the cultural adoption of the technological form. Because of its similarity to the sound system DJs that "liberated" black music from the black community, the iPod permitted a blending of sounds and genres by virtue of its capacious storage capacity and a liberal mythology that viewed such blending as a positive evolutionary step in cultural understanding. Thus, the iPod typifies the liberal desire to promote racial harmony through the universalizing beat of reggae. The tribal reggae beat of the ad along with the racialized black silhouettes hail the viewer as black. The ad is an invitation to privatize and domesticate the dance-hall experience of the black community.

The "Hey Mama" ad demonstrates that the religious resonance of iPod as is not limited to the metaphysical connotations of dancing specters and the veneration of mediation. The religious metaphors and connotations of iPod also work at the social and political level where narratives of liberation from oppression are embedded in movements like reggae and dance hall culture.

Listen to the Music

The iPod Nano 2G "Listen to the Music" silhouette ad features dancers holding glowing iPods that leave trails on the dark background. The only light in the scene comes from the device itself. The iPods in each scene are held in the hand rather than attached to the body and they glow with vibrant greens, pinks and blues. The music is sedate, the refrain "Listen, listen to the music" is repeated over and over at what sounds like a slower playback speed. The musical artist, Cut Chemist, creates music that falls within the genre of acid house music, a repetitive beat with spoken word refrains that are crafted to induce trance. The hip-hop convention of a record scratching punctuates the slow, sweeping movements of the dancers who use the glowing iPods to paint the darkened air with neon light. A trail follows each of their movements in an apparent

homage to the LSD effect of seeing trails behind moving objects. One is reminded of the use of glow sticks at rave events. An anonymous 21-year old female describes the rave experience this way, “Sometimes when I walk into a rave and smell the familiar scent of incense, the sight of glow sticks, and the overpowering beat of trance, I get this light-headed sensation and sense of weightlessness in my body that reminds me of the first experience I had on E. It’s awesome.” (St. John, 2004).

Figure 13: iPod “Listen to the Music”

If we isolate the first descriptor, “the familiar scent of incense,” we are reminded of a sensory appeal commonly associated with a high Catholic Mass. The other details however make it very clear that this form of transcendent experience is not based in any formal religious structure, but in a musical and technological immersion that evokes the sensations associated with mind-altering drugs. One of the ad’s connotations then is that the iPod offers us a rave “to go.” Part of the product’s appeal is its ability to alter one’s mental state. The iPod is a narcotic that has domesticated and legalized the drug trip. Just as a rave offers participants a sensory overload that mimics the effects of ecstasy, the iPod offers something very similar.

The song, with its acid house style and repetitive lyrics is somewhat hypnotic. One aspect of cults that has been explored by members of the American Psychological Association (ICSA,

2010) is the use of hypnosis in cult conversion. I am not suggesting that Apple is engaging in some nefarious attempt at hypnosis to sway consumers, but I am interested in uncovering any and all tendencies that would help explain the widespread inclination to identify Apple as a cult brand. A 30-second music clip in an ad carries a lot of symbolic and semiotic weight when researching the construction of a brand narrative with cult characteristics. Therefore, I find it significant that the hypnotic qualities of acid house music are a fairly common feature in the iPod campaign.

In an example of life imitating art, a phenomenon known as the silent rave has developed around the iPod's popularity. A silent rave is an event where participants gather in a predetermined location to listen to the same iPod playlist. The use of headphones precludes outside observers from hearing what the group is listening to, but the ravers remain in sync musically through their iPods. In April 2010, Harvard students collaborated with the American Repertory Theater to host a "Silent LED Rave." The event was dubbed an "art and social experiment" that was designed to "visualize music" (Liu, 2010). Students downloaded a playlist beforehand that also contained a special LED color that would light up the device screen when the music was played. The concept for the event resonates with the Cut Chemist ad in which iPod users paint the dark with their glowing devices. The notion that one can visualize music seems to be at the heart of the iPod campaign. The visual challenge for the advertiser is to convey aural delight through a visual medium.

Behind the Mask

Masks are the most ancient means of surrendering one's own identity and assuming a new extraordinary identity (Burkert, 1985, p. 103). The iPod silhouette works as a masking signifier – something that conceals the identity of the listener. The mask as a cultural form has

been layered with a number of diverse meanings and associations. With the exception of the Arabic world where Islamic belief has prohibited deification of characters, the mask is a common artifact among a variety of religious traditions. Ritual masks are most commonly used to depict spiritual mythologies in material form. In the Buddhist tradition of the Himalayas, animal spirits battle demonic forces and protect followers from natural calamities. In ancient Greece, masks of animals and the grotesque were infused with animistic spirits and were used in ritual processions and dances. The masks were also offered as votive gifts to the gods, sometimes even becoming cult idols themselves (Wiles, 2007).

Figure 14: iPod "Vertigo"

The mask as signifier in the iPod silhouette ads acquired additional meaning with the launch of a series of ads featuring the faces of well-known artists performing in the visually distinct ads. Like the other silhouette ads in the campaign, it is the music that animates the October 2004 ad for "iPod + iTunes." However, this is the first time that we see the artist performing the song. In this case it is the band U2 performing "Vertigo." This is a subtle but significant departure from the formula of the other iPod silhouette ads. In previous print and television ads, the identity of the dancers had always been obscured by the absence of a face. Now, we see the faces of the band members, Bono, the Edge and Larry Mullen, Jr. and Adam

Clayton. Their bodies remain black but their face reflects a soft spotlight that matches the hue of the background. The band's instruments and microphones are plugged in via the signature white wire, the ubiquitous accessory for the iPod dancers.

The "Viva la Vida" ad opens with a silhouetted figure that quickly comes into view as the first three notes of a song are heard. At first, the mysterious figure resembles the silhouetted dancers of the iPod campaign but a change in lighting brings a male face into view. It is Chris Martin, the lead singer of the popular British rock band, Coldplay. The song is Coldplay's popular single, "Viva la Vida." As the music builds, the black background is illuminated by a burst of purple fog as Martin sings, "I used to rule the world." Martin seems to influence the dispersion of the illuminated fog with the motion of his hand. A number of lens flares and orbs of light seem to issue forth from the rising fog that looks remarkably similar to the celestial events captured by deep space telescopes. The scene cuts to a guitar player who rhythmically waves his guitar to the rhythm of the dramatic string accompaniment. The blending of rock and symphony lends itself to the dance of light and fog being conducted by the rhythmic movement of the band members. Lighted trails follow the head of the guitar as it moves with the music. The camera returns to Martin and pulls up and back as his raised hand seems to attract the rising fog and lighted orbs behind him. The singer continues, "Seas would rise when I gave the word." The chorus is explicitly religious, "I hear Jerusalem bells are ringing, Roman Catholic choirs are singing, Be my mirror, my sword, my shield, my missionaries in a foreign field."

The popular artists are given faces. Like the title of the C.S. Lewis novel "'Till We Have Faces" the suggestion is that the popular artists are divinized by being seen. As producers of the music they are granted a visage, an identity. By contrast, the silhouette dancers of the other ads are containers, receptacles of the musical gift. They are malleable in that their personality and

their movement is guided by the music coming through the device. The musical artist controls the medium and dictates the rhythm and his or her surroundings, they are demigods.

In the silhouette iPod ads, the actors are "masked" by the black cut out. In the ads that feature popular recording artists, the masks are removed. The masks of the other ads conceal the identity of the consumer subject, suggesting that their musical enjoyment is an interior experience that transforms their surroundings. Personal stereos "provide an invisible shell for the user within which the boundaries of both cognitive and physical space become reformulated" (Oakes & Price, 2008, p. 195). The private listening discourse is tinged with the metaphysical, as the "invisible shell" reshapes conscious experience and promises ecstasy through musical immersion.

Ride

The second motif in the iPod campaign is the iPod in the city. The "Ride" ad opens in a narrow hallway. Sunlight floods in from a doorway at the end of the hallway. The scene denotes an urban building that opens onto a city street. We hear the rumble of traffic and sirens in the street. A human figure moves, in silhouette, toward the open door at the end of the hallway. The figure moving toward the door is blackened by the light pouring in from the end of the hallway. This lighting technique that places the actor in silhouette is a subtle nod to the rest of the iPod campaign featuring silhouettes as dancers. Unlike the silhouette ads that are set in an abstract neon space, "Ride" is set in the physicality of an urban environment. The ad does not open with a musical soundtrack, instead we hear the soundtrack of the city street, car engines and police sirens.

The "hallway" scene only lasts a few seconds but it provides some evocative connotations. The literal meaning of the hallway denotes an urban structure, perhaps an

apartment building. The male figure walks out of the hallway into the light. Here again we notice the reliance of Apple representation on the dualism of black and white, dark and light. According to Lessl (1993) the use of this type of irreducible metaphor that references the metaphysical is indicative of religious communication. To read the dark/light metaphor in metaphysical terms recalls Plato's allegory of the cave.

In Plato's allegory, Socrates teaches that sensory perception of the world provides only a reflection of reality. He uses the image of prisoners in a cave to suggest that what we perceive in this world are shadows of ideal forms, and that the real is only accessible in the sunlit space outside the cave where objects come into full view. The prisoners cannot fathom this because their senses have become so accustomed to the shadows that even the light source in the cave would pain their eyes to view, "And suppose once more, that he is reluctantly dragged up a steep and rugged ascent, and held fast until he's forced into the presence of the sun himself, is he not likely to be pained and irritated? When he approaches the light his eyes will be dazzled, and he will not be able to see anything at all of what are now called realities" (Plato & Jowett, 1871, p. 349). This story represents Plato's conception of metaphysics wherein spiritual and material knowledge are divided.

In the allegory of iPod, the literal representation of the darkened hallway opening onto the light of the city street provides a metaphor for understanding one of the primary benefits of iPod, the silencing of echoes. "And suppose further that the prison had an echo which came from the other side, would they not be sure to fancy when one of the passers-by spoke that the voice which they heard came from the passing shadow?" (1871, p. 349). The echoes that haunt the prisoners of Plato's cave are muted by the manufactured sound of the iPod device. The desire to connect dispersed voices and noises to a source is diminished as the interior soundtrack

takes over. The metaphysical implication is that the sensory apparatus is short-circuited and the listener is liberated by pre-selected sounds that stir the emotions and lift the spirit.

The iPod ad also speaks to the death of the flaneur who once soaked in all the sensory stimulation of the city. Now, the traveler is removed, detached, engaged with a species of "angelism" where discarnate music and voices flood the ear, blocking the embodied sounds of the city that once enchanted the urban drifter. As the man steps into the street he checks the iPod display, presses a button, pauses, and then steps onto the sidewalk.. The practical reason might be that fidgeting with the device while walking on a busy sidewalk would put one at risk for a collision. Less prosaic is the notion that the urban environment demands the aural insulation provided by the iPod.

As the ad narrative progresses, the man encounters a pedestrian walking several dogs on leashes. The iPod man smiles at the dogs and steps aside to make room for them to pass. The association we may make here is that the iPod provides man's new best friend on the morning walk. The visual connection between the two men with their tethers, one with headphones and the other with leashes, suggests that we are supposed to connect these two individuals in some way. In a 30-second ad, no visual is wasted or superfluous so it is safe to assume that the dogs mean something. The presence of multiple dogs also seems intentional. The scene provides a visual metaphor for the companionship that the iPod provides.

The next few cuts are fairly quick, less than a second, and provide more images from the man's walk; passing people on a crosswalk, walking by a passing car and walking past a man carrying a small child on his shoulders. Like the image of the dog walker, the man with the child on his shoulders provides another complementary visual that suggesting that the iPod experience is akin to having a portable companion. Both associations are rejections of the idea that city life

is characterized by anonymous isolation. Instead, the presence of a companion, be it canine, child or personal stereo reveals the small but powerful intimacies of city life. The customary sounds of the city street: horns honking, loud voices, automobile engines are muffled and transformed by the soundtrack.

The dramatic turn in the ad occurs at the 13-second mark when the iPod man passes a row of handbills that cover the wall next to the sidewalk. The posters happen to be comprised of 26 iPod silhouette ads. At this point, we are presented with a scene where the most recognizable signifier of the iPod campaign, the dancing silhouette, becomes part of another iPod ad. The mosaic of posters seems to provide the only color in the frame. It becomes clear that the buildings, wall and even a leafless tree that stand in front of the wall are rendered lifeless next to the kinetic and colorful posters. In this way, the posters are not perceived as clutter or visual noise, but provide an energy that enlivens the city street. The shot composition in Figure 11 features the tree in the foreground striking a dramatic pose that seems to mimic the dancers, its arms pushing outward and reaching for the transcendent high that the music delivers.

Figure 15: iPod “Ride”

The Apple iPod posters attract the eye in the otherwise drab urban scene. Without the neon colors and the kinetic energy of the dancing shadows, the scene lacks visual interest, the light from the overexposed sky highlighting the dullest features of the buildings and the dead tree. In a subtle symbolic reversal, it is the ads that are imbued with an animistic spirit while the tree remains lifeless. “Mother tree” of Germanic pagan lore looks rather stodgy standing in front of her animated children, her branches outstretched in an attempt to mimic the contorted bliss of ecstatic dance.

The ads are the most visually arresting element in the scene and also the most enchanted. The posterized figures dance to the music of the actor’s iPod as he walks by, pausing only when he pauses the song on his iPod to take in this strange occurrence. It is this encounter with the animated spirits of the iPod images that ultimately stops the actor in his tracks. Neither the marvels of modern architecture that surround him nor the multitude of other real human beings that cross his path seem worthy of a second glance. The actor traverses the city wrapped in a sonorous envelope, glibly acknowledging the other human beings as passing shadows on his aurally-induced pleasure cruise. It is only when he is confronted with the dancing shadows of the ads come-to-life that he is jolted from his narcotized state. He must stop the music to confirm that he indeed has the power to animate these paper spirits. When the music stops they stop dancing. When the music resumes, they begin dancing again. Their ready response is an extension of what the iPod listener experiences in this particular form of ‘mobile privatization’, that his or her ideal environment is heavily mediated and therefore entirely programmable.

Cubicle

The “Cubicle” ad for the iPod Nano 1G begins with a shot of a single album cover set against a black background. The album cover, for Beck’s Guero release, quickly unfolds into a

series of album covers from other artists, the Doors Van Halen, The Black Eyed Peas. The album covers remain interconnected as they continue to expand and take shape as skyscrapers and buildings in a virtual cityscape. The camera circles the animated scene as the albums unfold in ever-expanding three-dimensional patterns. The effect is dizzying. The city is massive but it looks like a sophisticated house of cards, liable to fall at any moment. At the halfway point of the ad, Frank Sinatra and Nirvana album covers join to form the capstone for one of the buildings. At this point, all of the structures begin to collapse. The fall is dramatic as all of the art seems sucked into a vortex. As the camera tilts down we see the albums being sucked into an iPod Nano.

The lyrics of the accompanying song by Rinocerose are obscure but focus on the bane of corporate middle managers everywhere, the cubicle: “This ain't the first time I caught you out again/You spend all your time in a little cubicle/In a cubicle.” The full song lyrics sound like an argument between two cheating lovers but the meaning of the song is altered when juxtaposed with the computer–generated music environment. Barthes argued that the linguistic signifier in an ad anchors the meaning of the ad. Forceville (1996) modifies this claim by suggesting that the anchoring function of the linguistic signifier may have been more relevant in the sixties when Barthes was analyzing advertising, but “the increasing importance of the visual part of advertisements since that era has as one of its consequences that the text no longer necessarily simply anchors the image. Far more than at that time, there is now a complex interrelation between the two” (1996, p. 43).

We know by the shape of the structures that the assemblage of albums is supposed to represent a city, but it is a hastily constructed metropolis, one liable to fall at any moment. When the inevitable occurs, the lyricist begins to wail with all the force of a primal scream. It is here

that two distinct metaphors take shape. One metaphor is the death of the "album" brought on by the iPod. With individual songs available for download for 99 cents the era of the fifteen-dollar album has passed. This benefits manufactured pop artists like Britney Spears and American Idol winners but alienates more conceptual groups like Wilco, Radiohead and Pink Floyd. So, on one level we are presented with a visual metaphor for the end of the album era as the tracks disintegrate into a grouping of songs that draw from thousands of different albums, none of which have to be purchased in full to enjoy the artist.

Figure 16: iPod "Cubicle"

At another level, we are reminded of the context in which the iPod was launched, just weeks after 9/11. The images of skyscrapers collapsing and killing thousands of screaming victims, many of whom probably worked in cubicles, were seared on the American psyche. The iPod, released weeks later, provided in part a technological escape from the sensory overload of the city. It would become an aural sanctuary and companion on tense subway and bus rides, both modes of transportation that would be targeted by terrorists in London and Madrid in the months and years following 9/11.

The "Cubicle" ad is a "safe" computer generated replay of the graphic destruction of 9/11, the sea of descending album covers resembling the thousands of pieces of paper that

floated over New York City when the towers emptied their contents while collapsing in a tidal cloud of dust and debris. Again we detect Apple's allegorical impulse to reconfigure and resurrect cultural debris. As Walter Benjamin wrote, "That which is touched by the allegorical intention is torn from the context of life's interconnections: it is simultaneously shattered and conserved. Allegory attaches itself to the rubble" (Langford, 2006, p. 56). Benjamin's most relevant work on the topic at hand is his treatment of the "technical developments" that disrupted the organic relations between things. In his time, film was the "new media" that spoke allegorically, and the same can be applied to the iPod ad,

> Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appear to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling. (2006, p. 56)

The artistic brilliance of the ad is its ability to conjure the scar and the healing simultaneously. This parallels Benjamin's claim that media like film can assume a destructive role, but a destructive role that is also redemptive, "Film has the ability to cut through the habit-forming mechanisms of modern life and awaken our capacity for genuine 'experience'" (2006, p. 56). So while commercial music is mass produced and erodes our capacity for "genuine experience" it can also open us up to unique modes of experience. Reading the signifiers of the ad, the city constructed with the flimsy material of mass-produced commercial albums is liable to be destroyed, but by conserving all of the fragments, and re-articulating them through a new media form like the iPod, a unique mode of experience is revealed.

The iPod tableau is allegorical in its presentation of a dialectic of urban existence. On the one hand, humans are herded and caged at dizzying heights in buildings subject to the threat of annihilation. The primitive fears of early 20th century agrarians who detested urbanization for its massive depersonalization and immensity echo here. On the other hand, the urban environment is exhilarating, captured in a note by Baudelaire in the following pair of verses, "The giddiness felt in great cities is analogous to that felt in the midst of nature…Religious intoxication of big cities. Pantheism. I am all; all are me" (Hannoosh, 1992, p. 299). The iPod is emblematic of the city and its tensions as it overwhelms the senses while at the same time making the user giddy with delight. The notion that *all of my music* fits in this relic and that *all of my music is me* is doubtless a sentiment shared by a large number of iPod owners. It provokes its own religious intoxication.

This chapter considers the Apple iPod and its official representations as cultural artifacts that reveal an implicit religiosity at work in the discourse of modern technology. The silhouette ads are markers of an eviscerated sense of identity in the digital age. They convey the ecstasy of musical immersion as a massive tribal ritual open to anyone who purchases and wears the iPod. The ritual is part of a cult of remembrance wherein Apple resurrects cultural forms like the silhouette to establish continuity with the past while also celebrating the transcendent and liberating power of new forms of mediation.

The iPod "Ride" ad reminds us that the chaotic aural environment of the metropolis can be tamed by the iPod mystical talisman that seals the listener in a "sonorous envelope." The iPod campaign provides a rich symbolic resource for reading not only consumer culture but technological culture. It is Apple's ability to capture the zeitgeist of such a moment that makes the brand so iconic and the advertising so persuasive.

The iPod also signifies a romantic return to the aural. In an age where much of life is experienced on a screen, the iPod is positively primordial. In *No Place of Grace,* T.J. Jackson Lears (1981) reflects on the fin-de-secle secularism that gripped early 20th century America. In a reaction to the demystified wave of Enlightenment rationalism and cultural modernism of the time, collectors filled museums and homes with artifacts of the medieval Catholic church. The move was a form of antimodernism that imagined a return to a more unified cultural authority lost in the fracture of millennial anxiety and rapid industrialization and urbanization. Paradoxically, the infatuation with the premodern served as a way to adjust to modern culture while also being a form of protest against it.

Lears's description of early 20th century antimodernism is a good example of the way in which a cultural practice like iPod listening can bear all the marks of religiosity without actually referencing the supernatural. The cult of iPod does not presume any sort of contact with supernatural reality but does invoke experiences of ecstasy and enchantment that music and urban life have to offer. In an anthropological sense, the iPod is a return to the premodern state of a tribalized oral culture in electronic form. Best described by Marshall McLuhan as the "global village," modern electronic culture returns us to the tribal village where everything happens at once. In a similar fit of millennial anxiety we gravitate to those forms that remind us of an insulated and romanticized past.

CHAPTER 5

IPHONE

In this chapter, I review three Apple ads for the iPhone device. The first, called "Touching is Believing," is a print ad that helped launch the device in 2007. The second ad, "Calimari," is one of the first television spots for the iPhone featuring a number of the phone's popular applications in action. The third ad is an ad that features the software application "Shazam," a program that is able to figure out the artist and title of a song played into the iPhone microphone. I chose these three ads as case studies because they exemplify the tone and approach of the rest of the iPhone campaign. The print ad achieved iconic status because it preceded the launch of the first iPhone and thus came to represent the device when it was still pregnant with speculative meaning. The print ad is also very suggestive in terms of religious themes as it offers us a vision of the glowing device hovering above a dark abyss. The "Calamari" ad went into heavy rotation as soon as the iPhone was launched and became a template for many of the future ads. "Calamari" is noted for its visual simplicity and its attention to the various applications or "apps" that the iPhone contains. In my analysis of the "Calamari" ad, I discuss the sensory attributes of the iPhone; the way in which touch becomes a new focal point in the human-computer interaction dynamic. Sensory experience also plays a central role in religious understanding and so this relationship is considered in light of the consumer cult that has grown up around Apple and iPhone. Finally, the "Shazam" ad was produced in the same mold as the "Calamari" ad and provides a good opportunity to discuss the iPhone's cultural role

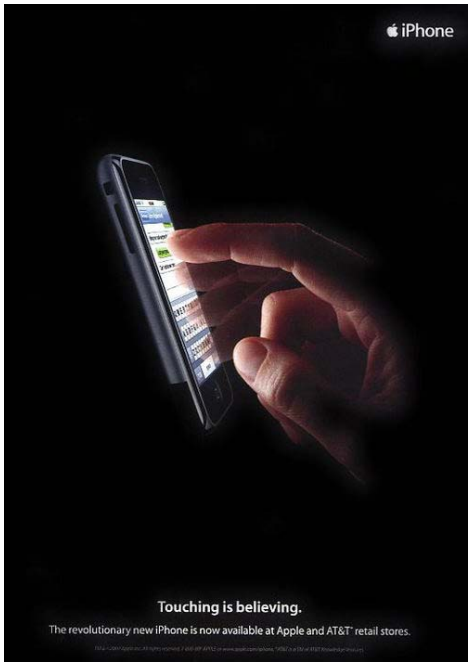
as a leisure device. It is here that I provide a summary argument about the way in which Apple devices occupy a place in the culture once reserved for religious contemplation and reflection.

Touching is Believing

The print advertisement that accompanied the iPhone launch in 2007 is a study in darkness and light. Like the iMac "Window" commercial discussed in the previous chapter, the visual effect of electronic light piercing the darkness plays a central role in the symbolic construction of the ad. The Apple iPhone device is featured prominently as the sole source of light in the ad, projecting its brightly lit screen into the surrounding abyss and providing enough light to illuminate the human hand that reaches out to make contact with the phone. The ad highlights the touch screen technology that shifts the user interface to the screen itself rather than the customary numeric or QWERTY keypad. The Apple version of the smartphone not only redefines the type of content that can be experienced on a mobile device but the sensory means by which that content is accessed and experienced. Touching the face of the screen is one of the primary attributes that makes the iPhone "revolutionary" and is therefore featured in the short but evocative caption, "Touching is Believing."

The caption serves as the ad's linguistic signifier, anchoring the meaning of the image. At the denotative level, the ad poses an equivalency between the sense of touch and the act of knowing. The consumer is invited to touch the device in order to confirm its existence. In some respects, this works as a reference to the prelaunch hype for the iPhone generated by the Apple marketing team that created an air of mystery around the breakthrough phone. The feverish anticipation surrounding the launch is encoded in the image as the simple act of touching the new phone comes to represent the culmination of a man-machine communion months in the making.

Figure 17: iPhone “Touching is Believing”



The phrase “Touching is believing” evokes the similar metaphor “seeing is believing.” While the denotative meaning of the ad copy works as a tongue in cheek reference to the uniqueness of the closely guarded product, the connotative meaning reveals the epistemological shift that digital media favors. “Touching is believing,” like “seeing is believing,” is a metaphor used to describe a particular way of knowing. Seeing something is considered a privileged mode of determining reality or unreality. Aristotle claimed that sight gives us more knowledge and awareness than the other senses. The figures in Plato’s cave were plagued by shadows that inhibited their ability to recognize the light.

What Apple makes present in the ad is that this sensibility has shifted in the age of mass manufacture of images. When images are subject to mechanical reproduction through the technologies of film and technology, it is more difficult to make claims about the authenticity of an image. This condition becomes more exaggerated as digital imaging technologies allow for

the rapid dissemination (and potential distortion) of images.[1] In this way, the caption makes a statement about the literal features of the product (a touchscreen) as well as the epistemological conditions of life in the age of the ever-present screen, an age in which the authenticity of screen images are constantly being called into question. The iPhone adds a tactile layer of expression to the information universe by incorporating the sense of touch and inviting the user to transcend the less dependable knowledge that comes from sight alone. "Seeing is believing" gives way to "Touching is believing."

If the explosion of print and images submerged an ancient oral epistemology, then could the touchscreens and 3-D technologies of the current digital era be displacing the dominant visual mode of experience so common in a culture dominated by phone, computer and television screens? This is not a zero-sum proposition of course. Just as orality re-emerged as a 'secondary orality' in the electronic forms of radio and telephone, visual culture is not receding but changing. "Touching is believing" reminds us of Marshall McLuhan's prophetic assertion that television is not a visual medium but a tactile one. Like many of McLuhan's probes, this one perplexes media theorists who do not see television as anything other than a delivery mechanism for sight and sound. Because McLuhan was a Thomist, it may be fair to say that he was agreeing with Thomas Aquinas when the medieval theologian says that touch is the foundation of all the senses. For Aquinas, sight was the most perfect of the senses, but touch is the most necessary because it is the first to come into existence when an animal is generated (Thomas & Hood, 2002). It is our most primal and instinctual sense.

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[1] Some famous examples of distortions wrought by image editing software include doctored photos of the Israeli/Hezbollah conflict in 2006 and a bikini-wearing, gun-toting Sarah Palin, 2008 candidate for U.S. vice president

The phrase "touching is believing" thus becomes a second-order signification of a central belief in the technological society, that the various electronic techniques of information delivery are preconditions for participation and self-realization in the digital age. In *The Rhetoric of Religion*, Kenneth Burke writes, "'technologism' is a 'religion' to the extent that technology is viewed as an intrinsic good, so that its underlying, unspoken assumption is: 'The more technology, the higher the culture'" (Burke, 1961, pp. 170-171). If one is disconnected from the flow of digital information, the mythology seems to go, then the human need for social connection and information acquisition is amputated and the individual is left powerless, blind, deaf, dumb and set adrift in a sea of unrealized data and screen information.

"Touching is believing" also conveys a Biblical resonance. The 17th century painting by Carvaggio depicting the doubting apostle Thomas placing his finger in Christ's wounded side is evoked by the ad's signifiers and speaks to the wordplay in the ad's linguistic signifier, "Touching is believing." According to John's Gospel account, Thomas insisted that his belief in the risen Christ was contingent on touching the actual wounds, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails and put my finger into the place of the nails and put my hand into his side, I will not believe" (John 20: 25). Eight days later Christ would appear to Thomas and invite him to touch, "Put in thy finger hither and see my hands. And bring hither the hand and put it into my side. And be not faithless but believing" (John 20: 27). Thomas answered with a faith filled, "My Lord and my God."

From a hermeneutical perspective, the actual act of touching is not specifically referenced in the text. So did Thomas merely see Christ and believe or did he follow the Lord's instructions and put his hands and fingers into the wounds? For Carvaggio, who shows the apostle's finger inside the fold of Christ's wound, the answer is a definitive yes.

This is an important point in our understanding of the Apple ad as inheritor of this iconic image and one that has religious resonance. It provides a metaphysical analogy for understanding our supernatural relationship with media technology. One of the claims at the heart of the exegetical disputes over whether Thomas touched or did not touch Christ's wounds is the Gnostic contention that the flesh is corrupt and that the spiritual supersedes the material when it comes to matters of faith. Gnostics challenged official Church teaching on the Gospel story by interpreting the scene as one where Thomas recoils from touching the flesh and proclaims his belief based on a spiritual truth.

Figure 18: Doubting Thomas (Carvaggio)

As discussed in previous chapters the Gnostic view is one that implicitly resides in the discourse of modern technology. The material world is seen as messy, subject to corruption and decay, while the digitized realm represents the liberation and eternal preservation of the human spirit. This preference for spirit over material informs the discourse of modern communication technology. Apple exemplifies this Gnostic yearning by depicting products in preternatural settings, usually abstracted from scenes of everyday life and placed in whitewashed, blacked out or surrealist environments that speak directly to the sensory separation from time and space that

occurs when one enters into a relationship with Apple's immersive objects of technological desire. Walking through the city plugged into an iPod aesthetically transforms the city and the mood of the listener. They exhibit an "absent presence."

The iPhone image presents the phone as a hovering object, suspended over a sea of black, created *ex nihilo*, "out of nothing." The creation myth overtones are enhanced by the hand, with one finger extended, ready to touch the glowing black body of the iPhone. The image evokes the "Creation of Adam" image that makes up part of Michelangelo's magnificent fresco in the Sistine Chapel. In the fresco, the figure of God reaches out to touch the figure of his crowning achievement, man.

Through the arrangement of signifiers in the ad, we are directed to more fully consider the phenomenological act of mediated human communion. A creative tension emerges from the small space between the human finger and the glowing machine. One is reminded of the iconic film image of the young boy reaching out to touch the glowing finger of the extra-terrestrial in the 1982 Hollywood film, ET. The use of touch speaks to a level of intimate contact that no other sense can provide. AT&T's use of the tagline "Reach out and touch someone" speaks to this essential feature of human communion and its appropriation in the field of telecommunications.

The Biblical creation account is defined by God's ability to *speak* creation into existence. Reading the Apple iPhone ad as an oblique allusion to the creation story presents us with the idealization of communication and communion in the maintenance of the information society myth. In other words, the fawning and reverence reserved for the miraculous objects of modern technology are not directed at the machines themselves but their symbolic function as supernatural enhancements to the sacred practice of human communication. Supernatural in this

sense is meant to draw attention to the notion that our use of such objects allows us to transcend and exceed natural or bodily forms of human communication, namely human speech and physical presence. This transformation is no small matter as it places us in contact with people and information that are discarnate, or as McLuhan would say "angelic". It is when we take this condition for granted that we overlook the role technology plays in reordering social relationships in such a way that presence and actual human touch are analogized in telepresence and screen touch. The metaphysical connotations of the iPhone ad place it squarely in the realm of a form of "religious communication" as outlined by Lessl. Religious communication is metaphorical, irreducible to any nonfigurative form of expression and identifies metaphysical referents that can be apprehended but not defined.

Calamari

One of the first television ads for the iPhone features a setup very similar to the "Touching is Believing" print ad. The backdrop is a deep black. A closeup of the phone being held in the palm of a hand fills the center of the frame. A whimsical soundtrack paces the ad as the phone user slides a finger across the screen and presses a colorful onscreen icon labeled 'iPod.' A video is selected from a list and a scene from the Disney film "Pirates of the Caribbean" begins playing on the screen. At this point, the voiceover announces, "Say you're watching Pirates of the Carribbean…" In the scene a giant octopus is attacking a ship that is firing its cannons at the flailing tentacles. As the cannons pierce the tentacles of the large beast, the voiceover muses, "…mmm, did somebody say calamari?" At this point, the user presses a button on the front of the device and a series of icons re-appears. The user presses the "Maps" icon and begins a search for "Seafood" using an onscreen keypad. The voiceover continues, "The closest would be, ah…" Red pinheads drop onto a map of the San Francisco bay area and

show the user a host of restaurant options. The user chooses one labeled “Pacific Catch” at which point a screen full of vital information appears: phone number, web address, and street address of the restaurant. The user presses the phone number and the device automatically switches to phone mode. We then hear a ringtone and the user lifts the device from the frame, ostensibly to complete his phone call. The caption “iPhone” appears followed by a frame that says “Only on the new AT&T” and finally “Coming June 29” with a white Apple logo perched above the white text.

Figure 19: iPhone “Calamari”

A semiotic reading of the ad reveals a number of very practical signifiers designed to showcase the phone’s functionality. The close-up of the hands shows the way that the phone fits comfortably in the palm of the hand and the interface responds to the slightest finger swipe. The phone itself is used to signify the range of activities that can be enjoyed on the iPhone, from movie viewing to dinner reservations, all with the touch of a finger. The phone also rotates during the ad showing the way in which the image on screen adjusts to the position in the hand. If the phone is held at the vertical orientation, the image fills the phone vertically, if horizontal, the image shifts on its own. The device seems to intuitively know what the user wants to do.

What is interesting about the phone as signifier is that the hardware is virtually invisible. The ad focuses on the device screen which occupies the majority of the phone's face. The effect produces the visual sensation of watching a screen (the phone) within a screen (the television). The disembodied hands that handle the device thus become a signifier for the "manipulability" of this form of digital media. The signifier of the hands disrupts the notion that film, digital maps and phone calls are merely sight and sound experiences. They are things to be touched, held and 'manipulated.'

In the world of the iPhone, viewing a film becomes an occasion to immediately indulge a craving for seafood. During a scene involving a murderous octopus the voiceover playfully intones "mmm…did someone say calamari?" Instantly, the screen of the phone changes to a map where the user is able to pinpoint the nearest seafood restaurant in an effort to satiate this impulsive desire. A couple seconds later, the phone function is activated and the user is connecting with the restaurant. From initial biological response to contact with the restaurant, less than twenty seconds has elapsed. What is remarkable of course is that all of this is made possible by the device itself. It provides both stimuli and reward with a few finger swipes. It traverses the realms of entertainment (movies), geography (maps) and communication (telephony) in seconds. It is a catholicon of instant gratification.

Panacea may be a more common term for referring to an all-encompassing solution than 'catholicon' – but my intention is to highlight the religious resonance at work in the Apple campaign. As such, I find the 'catholic' or universal appeal of the object a point worth considering. In Jacques Ellul's seminal work on 'technique,' his term for the social obsession with efficiency via process and technology, he explains the catholicism of technology quite clearly, "Geographically and qualitatively, technique is universal in its manifestations. It is

devoted, by nature and necessity, to the universal…it is becoming the universal language understood by all men" (Ellul, 1964, p. 131). Following Durkheim, Ellul comments on the sociological impact of technique as if it were something religious, "Technique, moreover, creates a bond between men. All those who follow the same technique are bound together in a tacit fraternity and all of them take the same attitude toward reality" (1964, p. 131).

Shazam

The iPhone television ads showcase the phone's applications or 'apps.' Apps are individual software applications that allow iPhone users to accomplish specific tasks. There are apps that provide weather reports, others that provide driving directions, others that provide access to banking information, and so on. There are over 250,000 apps available in Apple's "App Store and over 2 billion applications had been downloaded by App Store users ("Apple-iPhone," 2010). The alliteration of the term 'Apps' and Apple is convenient for marketing purposes and became the subject of a trademark dispute in 2009. In September 2010, Apple was granted a trademark for the phrase (which had become popular among other smartphone marketers).

With more than a quarter of a million apps and counting, Apple would have us believe that there is an app for everything. The Apple website crows that there is "almost no limit to what your iPhone can do." Categories include games, business, news, sports, health, reference and travel. Apps are also available for the iPod and iPad. Unlike personal computing, mobile apps are useful in virtually any context: in a car, at the bank, on a subway. As such, the apps have the ability to add a layer of experience to any environment that enhances the overall experience. For example, in a dance club, if one hears a song but does not know the name, an app called "Shazam" allows the user to hold the phone up to the music while the app identifies

the song and artist. Exercise apps count miles and calories that can then be uploaded to a website to track fitness progress. Some fitness apps are incorporating biofeedback measures like heart rate to further enhance the overall workout experience.

What Apple has managed to do with the iPhone and the App Store is create a realm of productivity that redefines our relationship to creativity and leisure. This is an important point because of the dominant discourse surrounding modern mobile technologies. Devices like the Blackberry are seen as corporate productivity devices while the iPhone is depicted as something more playful and imaginative. This is a trope that Apple initiated with the introduction of the first Macintosh in a predominantly business-oriented IBM world and still persists today.

This is also where the technology as cult concept is most relevant. Apple's consumer cult that bears the marks of a religious following can be traced to the function of the device in the lives of users and the way it is represented in the advertising. If the iPhone is not strictly used for the purposes of accomplishing business tasks but also delivers the types of leisure activities (movies, games, cooking, exercise) sought by the technological society then its role in the lives of users is something quite profound. The iPhone is a virtual remote control device that, through its flexible functionality, plays a central role in the leisure activities of its users. Whether making restaurant reservations, texting or calling a friend, or tracking workout performance, the sophisticated iPhone user seeks ways to wield this universal remote in a variety of situations that previously lacked technological intervention. No matter the situation, it seems, there is an app for it. It is a digital hub around which social activities are organized and on which virtual activities are enacted.

In the Shazam app commercial, a pair of hands hold an iPhone and act out the scenario being presented by the announcer, "You know when you don't know what's song is playing and

it's driving you crazy?" The anonymous user in the spot points the iPhone towards a pulsating speaker and the iPhone recognizes the song and displays all of the information on screen. The commercial concludes with the announcer reminding us that the iPhone solves "life's dilemmas one app at a time." Like many of the iPhone commercials, the action takes place on a white background, devoid of context. The hands appear to be male but are generic enough to signify a pair of "everyhands." The hands denote a capable user and also work to signify the way the device is to be used; by touching the screen, swiping with the fingers and pressing the onscreen icons. These cues provide implicit instructions for viewers who may be unfamiliar with the iPhone's functionality. The hands are also a metonym for the user. A part, the hands, stands for the whole person.

The iPhone re-orders the human sensorium by privileging certain senses over others. In this case, touch is brought to the fore. Visual and aural experience still play an integral role but touch is now made part of the experience rather than just a means to an end. The hands command and conduct the machine, not through a peripheral piece of hardware like a keyboard or mouse, but through the screen itself. The hands caress the mediated icons and images as if they were physical realities. Previously, the images on screen required hardware to manipulate, now the hands make direct contact. This action of manipulation, the etymology of which refers directly to the hands, is one of creation; or in the case of the iPhone, re-creation. The passivity of traditional media experiences gives way to the creative activity of the hands that slide, swipe, minimize and enlarge the elements on screen.

This type of leisure activity now occupies what used to be our most passive moments. Listening to a song, once an occasion for relaxation and pleasure, is portrayed as an occasion of anxiety because not knowing a song could be "driving us crazy." The reason it drives us crazy is

because knowing the name of the song signifies a form of ownership of that piece of culture. If I know the song's name, I own it because it is made familiar and knowable by its assigned label. Further, knowing the name of the song allows one to literally own the song by purchasing the artist's record. The iPhone streamlines this consumerist process by digitizing it. Figuring out the name of the song is no longer a task accomplished by calling the radio station or asking a friend, it is something accomplished by the omniscient iPhone. This leisure activity is no longer profitable in the humanistic sense of enjoying culture for culture's sake. It is deemed profitable once an acquisition has been made, either the name of the song or a record of the song, or both. The speed at which this is accomplished is also portrayed as profitable because it quickly satisfies a craving for information.

The idea of an activity being profitable in the consumerist/technologist sense counters the view of culture that privilege the delight and joy of sustained contemplation. For the Greeks and modern philosophers like Josef Pieper, the contemplation of the true and the beautiful, directed by religious ritual and observance, is a kind of rest. This kind of rest, rooted in contemplative activity is restorative and creative. This, says Pieper, is the basis of culture and human freedom; a view that has been lost in the sea of mediated consumption that demands constant action by the user and resists any forms of pause or silence.

What Apple offers us in the iPhone ads is a false freedom, one that offers amusement and efficiency as counterfeit forms of human leisure. The hands in the ad are the hands of a shackled individual, one who cannot engage the real world without consulting the virtual first. They are also hands without a head. The 'user' surrenders his or her intellectual expansion to the songs, movies, games and apps that now invade the last outposts of human contemplation in

contemporary culture: a subway car on the way to work, a small table in a café, a cross country automobile ride.

It is fitting that we see so many individuals clamoring for phones and entertainment devices in transit because that is what those devices do, they transport. They remove us, temporarily, from reality. This is another point where Apple has managed to tap into a certain religious sensibility. Religious ritual, belief and piety historically occupied the moments of rest and silence in a culture. When those moments are re-purposed for the sake of efficiency or entertainment then religion, in the traditional sense, recedes. What we do in those moments once reserved for reflection and contemplation becomes a de facto religion of sorts. It fills in the gaps and presents a world removed from the one we are in. It is a form of existential escape. Religion, it seems, can be easily aped. By colonizing leisure, the iPhone, like the computer before it, stakes its claim as one of the bases of culture.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Religious icons provide a traditional example of the way in which representation works to elicit devotion. Icons are instructive and contemplative forms of mediation that represent the intersection of the material and the spiritual. Believers look to icons for spiritual reassurance just as consumers seek material reassurance from ads that glorify products that they own or desire. In David Morgan's (1998) study of religious images, he argues that "religious images and the worlds they assemble remain reassuring only insofar as the epistemological apparatus on which they rely can be submerged and naturalized" (1998, p. 17).

Several prominent critics make the argument that consumer advertising also submerges and naturalizes ideology. Williamson and Jhally assert that advertising naturalizes consumerism by submerging a capitalist consumption ideology in the semiotic structure of advertisements. The creative team at Apple likewise imagines the company as the custodian of a particular set of values that informs the relationship between society and technology. Steve Hayden, copywriter of Apple's mythological "1984" Macintosh ad admits, "Macintosh was always bigger than the product. We thought of it as an ideology" (Tan, 2004, p. 66).

The distance between ideology and religious devotion is not far. Disciples of ideology, from Marxism to totalitarianism, are a common epiphenomenon of social and political movements. In the case of technology, the social movement is *noetic*, a shift in the way we interface with information. The sophistication of interfaces, from touchscreens to large LCD visual displays, is seductive. The designers of Apple products have an eye (and ear) for the

capacity of media devices to deliver aesthetic pleasure, but we must take another step to get from aesthetic experience to religious devotion.

The emotional high derived from music delivered on an elegantly designed iPod is not enough to make one "religious" in the anthropological sense. It is the restructuring of one's life following such an experience that constitutes a religious experience (Otto, 1950). IPods restructure the sensorium by placing a heavy emphasis on the auditory sense in situations that should demand full sensory engagement. The simple act of crossing a city street is made perilous when plugged into an iPod. A 38-year old man jogging on a South Carolina beach was killed in 2009 by a single-engine plane trying to make an emergency landing on the beach. The man did not hear the plane approaching because he was wearing an iPod. IPods alter our engagement with the surrounding environment. Everyday social situations have been transformed by the tiny device. The simple act of saying hello has been impacted by the presence of a device that seems to signal, "leave me alone." The iPod is part of an ecosystem of mobile and networked devices that restructure our engagement with the social world. This is not a determinist argument. In fact, it is quite the contrary, we have voluntarily chosen to tune in, turn on, and drop out.

Religion is a mediated experience, but does this make mediation a religious experience? Believers seek God or grace or the supernatural in and through material forms of mediation, a priest, a church, a rosary, an icon. Scholars recognize that religion is not just about dogma and doctrine but that it is also about the aesthetic and sensory experiences that make up religious observance and everyday practice. In her work on religion and popular culture, Colleen McDannell (1995) writes that "experiencing the physical dimension of religion helps *bring about* religious values, norms, behaviors attitudes. It is the continual interaction with objects and

images that make one religious in a particular manner" (1995, p. 2). McDannell argues that there is a very concrete, sensory and aesthetic dimension to religion that must be *practiced* in order to be understood.

Another way in which Apple has managed to transcend the crowded field of consumer electronics is to manufacture products that have a compelling aesthetic appeal. In *The Substance of Style*, Virginia Postrel writes,

> The look and feel of things tap deep human instincts…Having spent a century or more focused primarily on other goals – solving manufacturing problems, lowering costs, making goods and services widely available, saving energy - we are increasingly engaged in making our world special. More people in more aspects of life are drawing pleasure and meaning from the way their persons, places, and things look and feel. Whenever we have the chance, we're adding sensory, emotional appeal to ordinary function. (Postrel, 2003, p. 7)

This trend is consistent with a sacramental worldview that holds that mediation matters. In religious tradition, statuary, medals, rosaries and images possess a sacred significance, not because they are "just symbols," but because they represent deep human longings (Miller, 2004).

In the case of personal technology the physical dimension of mediated experience has a lot to do with our emotional attachment to the devices themselves. In a Time magazine article introducing the Apple iPad (a descendant of the iPod and iPhone), author Stephen Fry writes,

> What [Apple lead designer] Ive and his team understand is that if you have an object in your pocket or hand for hours every day, then your relationship with it is profound, human and emotional. Apple's success has been founded on consumer products that address this side of us. (Fry, 2010)

"This side of us" includes the aesthetic and sensory experiences that accompany our frequent and intimate engagement with personal technology. The iPod penetrates the human body and pours its contents into the ears. It is a sensory delight. It can be carried everywhere, manipulated with the fingertips, displayed as a totem of belonging to the technological tribe, and enjoyed for its aural pleasure. The iPhone augments the aural experience with an elegant touchscreen interface that now allows for real-time video chatting with family and friends. All of this generates an affective bond between person and device. In a society filled with poorly designed mass-produced goods, consumers are captivated by such transcendent design. What Apple has figured out is that aesthetic pleasure matters.

A pseudo-religion like the Apple brand cult, based in technological ritual and practice, need not reference a particular institutional religion per se. The practice of habitual media use combined with the metaphysical aspirations of human communication goes a long way toward miming religious behavior. The issue with most personal technology practices is that the process of mediation becomes an end in itself. There is no transcendent ideal with which one connects. As such, the object of worship is not Apple or iPod or iPhone, but the self. In the Greek Narcissus myth, the young man is captivated by his reflection in a pool of water. Marshall McLuhan reminds us that Narcissus was not admiring himself but mistook the reflection in the water for another person. The point of the myth for McLuhan is that fact that "men at once become fascinated by an extension of themselves in any material other than themselves" (McLuhan, 1964a, p. 41).

The confluence of religious aspiration and technological innovation finds its most contemporary expression in the Apple story, but it certainly does not begin there. The connection between forms of mediation and modes of belief is as old as the spoken word. At the

time the alphabet and printing press were introduced, religious belief was inextricably tied to the new forms of communication. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, all religions of the book, were able to take root and spread as a result of the communication changes that facilitated their growth. As happened during the time of Jesus and St. Paul, when writing transformed the oral cultures of Europe and the Mediterranean, the invention of the printing press in the mid-15th century was a pivotal historical event that helped reshape the religious landscape of the Western world.

It seems a certain "arrogance of the modern" often gets in the way of remembering that ancient Jewish and medieval European culture was not understood separately from religion; rather religion *was* culture. If communication is the way that culture is constructed and maintained, in the ancient and medieval context communication change necessarily implied religious change. The commingling of mediation and religion has its most well-defined roots in medieval Catholicism. The Roman Catholic Mass of the Middle Ages was the original form of "mass" communication. The Holy Mass, vestments, cathedral architecture, votive candles, and frescoes were the mediums *and* messages that served to unify the faithful in a coherent symbolic universe. Additionally, the media and symbols of the Church did not require the specialized skill of print literacy to decode their meaning. The devotional performance of plays, ballads, and carols transmitted beliefs and values to a predominantly oral culture. In the modern context, we still witness the ways in which communication change influences religious change. The radical liturgical changes instituted in the wake of the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s were no doubt hastened by the introduction of the new mass media, television.

The division between religion and media is ultimately a false dichotomy that alternately focuses on the utility or threat of media for believers. The insufficiency of secular reason in

dealing with the rise of religious fundamentalism as a function of media change has induced a malaise in Western thought. It seems that Weber's claim that the old gods were about to ascend from their graves and resume their struggle to gain power over our lives is particularly relevant at this time (Weber, 1958). As Peter Horsfield points out, the ascendance of the old gods is now tied to a techno-religiosity that mimics enchantment, "one can see in the use of technologies a rejection of pure rationalism or empiricism and a re-emergence of those aspects of human experience and society that modernity has displaced: religion, mystery, myth and magic" (Horsfield, et al., 2004, p. xix). The technologies of media are central to this aping of religion because of their ability to gather individuals, communalize their concerns, and provide meaning and identity.

The parody of religious themes throughout the Mac mythology, from the half-eaten forbidden fruit that serves as a logo to the messianic portrayals of CEO Steve Jobs, do not blaspheme the sacred as much as they trivialize it. More importantly, from a media ecology perspective, it is not only the content of media that have ushered in this symbolic imbalance, but the form of our dominant communication technologies that have brought about a change in religious sensibilities.

In this dissertation, I have analyzed the ways in which Apple advertising constitutes a form of religious communication by promoting a distinct brand of syncretism. Christian, Gnostic, new age, and psychedelic metaphors are present throughout the Apple discourse and the ads embody these ideas in visual form. I argue that this stems in part from the countercultural ethos of Apple's founding members, but it is also a reflection of a broader cultural preoccupation with magical objects and ecstatic experiences. Magical technologies that harness the overwhelming information environment work as totems in a society governed by efficiency and

speed of contact and communication. They become sacramental objects to channel the digital-gnosis or special knowledge reserved for those who are connected. The desire for ecstasy in the digital age takes on a more intense character as virtual experiences outstrip the physical world's ability to provoke wonder. A walk in the park is only complete if accompanied by a digitally-rendered soundtrack from the iPod. Apple devices are portrayed in the advertising as objects that promise escape from the mundane and entrance into the realm of creativity and transcendence.

By way of conclusion, I would like to propose an *explicitly* religious structure for imagining human communication in the information age. Rather than shroud my particular bias in art or postmodern illusion, I would rather cast out into the deep and discuss the ways in which a Catholic communication teacher and scholar might approach the question of media technology and representation from a theological perspective. Our students are taught in schools but they do most of their learning in the world, and the most powerful pedagogical influence tends to be the modern media, especially advertising.

Advertising teaches us how to dress, what to consume, where to buy and all of the other essential behaviors in a consumerist economy. Of course, most of us assume we are immune to such messages, but the fact remains that advertising messages are ubiquitous and environmental. Apple ads can be found on billboards, in magazines, on television and on the computer itself. Unless one lives in a cave, there is no escaping their influence.

I propose an alternative 'mythology' for imagining human communication and the community it enlivens by reviving the medieval Rule of St. Benedict. Benedict of Nursia, the founder of western monasticism, compiled the 1400-year old Rule as a set of virtues for living in community. St. Benedict sought a radically different way of life after being disenchanted by the 'degenerate' city of Rome. The ascetic life of the monastery was a conversion from the world

(conversio). We often hear of individuals turning off cell phones or email for days or weeks at a time in an experiment to rediscover their sanity and serenity in an overmediated culture. Living a technologically ascetic life is not practical in the technological society so we cannot say for sure what fruits a permanent conversion might yield. Here, I consider the feasibility of a technologically ascetic life in the context of Catholic, Benedictine liberal arts environment.

At the end of *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre compares our modern state to the Roman Empire,

> This time however the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time. And it is our lack of consciousness of this that constitutes part of our predicament. We are waiting not for a Godot, but for another – doubtless very different – St. Benedict. (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 263)

MacIntyre's concern is a political one that illustrates the disconnect between authority and virtue. I propose a similar argument about the state of human communication in the mass mediated age. As T.S. Eliot wrote in *The Rock*,

> The endless cycle of idea and action,
> Endless invention, endless experiment,
> Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;
> Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;
> Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.
> All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,
> All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,
> But nearness to death no nearer to GOD.
> Where is the Life we have lost in living?

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries

Bring us farther from GOD and nearer to the Dust.

Communication and Benedictine Values

A recent conference at Saint Vincent College featured Benedictine educators from around the country addressing the question of Benedictine pedagogy. What does it mean to teach at a Benedictine institution and how can Benedictine values inform what we do in the classroom and beyond? In his introductory remarks, Saint Vincent Archabbot Douglas Nowicki expressed his concern about the fate of human identity and eternal wisdom when the trajectory of new media technology seemed to be one of "depersonalization and information sharing." The Catholic college, especially one founded by a monastic order, seems to be in an awkward position to address this important issue. Much of what animates digital culture is antithetical to the contemplative and disciplined life of monasticism. The current situation favors shallow consumption over sustained contemplation. The monastic model presents a radically different ideal of human communication and community. It is one rooted in permanence, presence and prayer - a significant departure from the world of simulation, distance and secularism at work in the broader technological environment. However, it is this distance that also provides the critical perspective necessary to study media and culture more deeply. Like the fish unaware of the mediating water that surrounds it, the secular lay person is rarely aware of how much s/he is immersed in the medium of a technological society.

At St. Vincent College our students have the privilege of sharing a campus with more than 100 Benedictine monks. Their spirituality illuminates the campus in a way that cannot be

quantified by social science or photographed for a brochure. This grace and spirituality is the fruit of a brotherhood that treats human communication in a way that transcends academic treatments of the subject. In this conclusion I propose a theoretical and theological framework for studying the modern era's complex communication environment by drawing from the wisdom of Benedictine spirituality and incorporating it into communication theory and instruction.

My research interest is in the relationship between media technology and cultural change. From the invention of the printing press to the explosion of electronic media, Catholic culture has experienced monumental shifts each time the communication environment changes in a substantial way. Media ecology theory understands this cultural shift as a change in relationship between man and his tools of communication. Media are environmental in the sense that any new media technology that gets added to the communication "ecosystem" prompts a series of sensory and social adaptations. The media ecologist studies communication forms like the printing press, the radio, the television, and the computer and asks how their relationship to one another and to those who use them changes our cultural environment. It is anthropological, psychological, sociological and theological.

The theological resonance of media ecology makes it particularly useful for communication teachers and scholars who seek to integrate the knowledge of the Church with the study of human communication. Media ecology's theological character comes from some of its founding thinkers like Marshall McLuhan, Fr. Walter Ong and Jacques Ellul whose religious views had a direct influence on their theorizing. Media ecology places an emphasis on the whole human person as a sensing being who is a product of his or her cultural (media) environment.

Neil Postman, who coined the term media ecology, saw the pursuit of such questions as essential to human survival in an increasingly chaotic world of destabilized symbols.

My primary concern is the way in which new media technologies influence our ability to create meaningful communities that respect the dignity of human subjects and how this perspective can be framed for media and communication students. For all of the utopian rhetoric about technologies that connect the human race and elevate the collective consciousness, there remains an underbelly of information gluttony, social isolation and alienation bred by the same technologies. An effective response to such problems does not lie in the tools themselves but in the ways in which human community and communication are imagined from the start.

In the following sections I begin by describing the Benedictine character of Saint Vincent College and the historical context that led to its formation. Excerpts from the Rule of St. Benedict, a 1400-year old guide for monastic living, are considered for their insights regarding human communication and spiritual formation. I follow with a discussion of the ways in which the insights developed from the Rule have a strong affinity with many of the precepts of the media ecology school. By considering the intersection of a Catholic wisdom tradition and a contemporary media theory tradition, I offer a blended approach to communication research and instruction in a Catholic context by presenting a couple of examples.

The Rule of St. Benedict, a prayerful book written by Benedict of Nursia, provides a description of an environment guided by the Word rather than too many words. Benedictine monasticism resists information overload by developing practices like *lectio divina* (holy reading) and avoiding more superficial forms of information consumption. When freshman arrive on campus at St. Vincent College, one of the first things they receive is a copy of the Rule of St. Benedict. The Rule, contained in a small red paperback book, accompanies stacks of paper

and brochures describing student activities, campus amenities, courses and schedules. The Rule's instructions for praying the night office and job descriptions for the monastery porter and prior must seem like historical curiosities to students more concerned with how to get to the dining hall.

The requirements of the Rule and the spirit of Western monasticism are a foreign concept in the college student's communication environment of text messaging and social networking where the social imperative is to be seen and heard at all times. In the classroom, the laptop and cell phones screens are augmented by projection screens where Powerpoint slides suspend oral discourse, privileging what is seen over what is heard. Our students are subject to what Harold Bloom calls the tyranny of the screen. The screen, be it television, cinema, projector, computer or mobile device, occupies between eight and nine hours of the typical American day, "The tyranny of the screen threatens any order in which literary value or human wisdom can be preferred to the steady flow of information" (Bloom, 2001, p. 18). The problem now is that our values are no longer literary and our wisdom no longer human. In the postmodern age, we are superficial seekers working from a hastily contrived ethic of speed and efficiency.

One of the aims of the faculty is to find ways to integrate the Rule into the pedagogy and practice of their classroom. In many cases, parts of the Rule or values derived from Benedictine life are included on the syllabus and discussed in class. As an instructor of media and communication, I have spent some time thinking about the ways in which the Rule and Church teaching applies to the discipline of media studies and how it might inform instruction. The 1400-year old Rule of St. Benedict makes no mention of media as we know it, but like all Catholic wisdom traditions, there is a universality to the words that transcends the peculiarities of a certain discipline or technology in a specific time or place.

Wimmer's Mission

Saint Vincent Archabbey and College was the first Benedictine monastery established in the United States and marked the arrival of Western monasticism to North America. In 1846, Boniface Wimmer, a monk from the Benedictine Abbey of Metten in Bavaria, led a group of brother monks across unpredictable seas and rugged terrain to build the first North American monastery, a project his superiors strongly resisted. For Wimmer's superiors in Metten, Germany and Rome, an American monastery was inconceivable and posed a serious threat to the Benedictine values of stability and permanence. Wimmer was much too ambitious for their liking. Wimmer's intent was to educate the sons of German immigrants and to train a native clergy for the German-speaking peoples of the United States. When he arrived, he encountered a situation that would require ministering to English and Irish Catholics as well. New York's German priests advised Wimmer to abandon the monastery idea and just settle down in a U.S. parish to which the impetuous monk exclaimed: "Jetzt geschiet's erst recht!" ("I'll do it in spite of all this!") ("Religion: The Black Monks," 1946).

The language difference and arduous travel point to two of the primary themes of Wimmer's mission, innovation and communication. Not only did the impetuous monk need to bridge language and cultural differences, but he was entering an entirely new technological environment. In 1846, the year Wimmer and his group arrived in Pennsylvania, telegraph lines were springing up all over the East Coast. In 1849, the Pennsylvania legislature passed an act incorporating the Atlantic and Ohio telegraph company. The words of John T. Hoffman, governor of New York in 1871, demonstrate the romanticism with which the new technology was being embraced,

> In our day a new era has dawned. Again for the second time in the history of the world, the power of language is increased by human agency. Thanks to Samuel F.B. Morse men speak to one another now, though separated by the width of the earth, with lightning's speed and as if standing face to face. If the inventor of the alphabet be deserving of highest honors, so is he whose great achievement marks this epoch in the history of language – the inventor of the electric telegraph. (Morse & Morse, 1914, p. 484)

America asserted itself as a bastion for individualism and innovation, and her industrious sons and daughters acquired a mythic, if not heroic, status. This tendency to elevate the power of human agency over the providence of God countered the spirit of monasticism that emphasized humility, self-denial and obedience.

Wimmer's transportation of monasticism to the United States occurred at the crossroads of a social and cultural revolution. The new monastery would need to adapt to the explosion of new industrial and communication technologies, testing the fortitude of an institution that was more medieval than media savvy. This swell of progress may help to explain the genesis of Boniface Wimmer's motto now painted above the arched doorway to the abbey's refectory, "Forward, always forward, everywhere forward."

One hundred years after Wimmer's arrival, Time magazine covered the St. Vincent College centennial with an article entitled "The Black Monks: Beer, Romanism, and Permanence" ("Religion: The Black Monks," 1946). The subtext of the article was that the Benedictines never really fit in with American ways and modern society (Oetgen, 2000). The article portrayed the monastery as a place that had failed to adjust to the "pressure of an increasingly industrialized and secularized society" (2000, p. 425). It describes the "naïve, pious grottoes and crèches" built by Brother Victor, who was also in charge of the abbey's electric

power house. Brother Victor's love of religious crafts, described under the article subtitle "The Virgin and the Dynamo," was portrayed as a quaint holdover from the Middle Ages, a symbolic indication that the monastery was incompatible with the modern industrialized world.

The monastery's leadership was upset that St. Vincent was portrayed as a backwards institution that had little in common with the secularized society that surrounded it. However, others in the monastery thought the article got it exactly right. Historian Jerome Oetgen (2000) describes the reaction this way:

> Benedictines, like all committed Christians, *were* outsiders in modern society; it *was* their vocation to be in conflict with the world, whose values and materialism they spurned. Brother Victor's "naïve and pious grottoes" were much more important in the context of eternity than his dynamo, and monks who sought to make friends with the mammon of iniquity were not being faithful to their call. (2000, p. 425)

The history of Saint Vincent College and Archabbey provides a fitting backdrop for those of us struggling with the issue of teaching and learning in the age of information. As we consider the possibility of teaching media and communication courses in a way that supports the integrated health of communities and human persons we may find that our values clash with those of the modern institutions that treat media communication as an end in itself. The promiscuous use of media "just because we can" is a boon for advertisers seeking our attention but does not address the yearning for wisdom and communion that lies at the root of human communication. The prevailing ethic in modern society is one of distraction and diversion rather than contemplation and unity.

In this current morass, educators who are wary of questioning the fundamental makeup of our media environment should take up the call of Boniface Wimmer, "I'll do it in spite of all this!" Media ecologist Neil Postman put the charge this way,

> It seems to me that there is something shallow, brittle, and even profoundly irrelevant about Departments of Communication that ignore [moral questions about technology], that are concerned to produce technological cheerleaders, and even neutralists who offer little historical or philosophical moral perspectives. (Postman, 2000)

The most emphatic call comes from the Church's apostolic constitution on Catholic universities, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*,

> Scientific and technological discoveries create an enormous economic and industrial growth, but they also inescapably require the correspondingly necessary *search for meaning* in order to guarantee that the new discoveries be used for the authentic good of individuals and of human society as a whole. If it is the responsibility of every University to search for such meaning, a Catholic University is called in a particular way to respond to this need: its Christian inspiration enables it to include the moral, spiritual and religious dimension in its research, and to evaluate the attainments of science and technology in the perspective of the totality of the human person. (John Paul II, 1990)

With the Benedictine Rule as a guide, the media is something that can be studied as an extension of our own sensory experience, our own bodies. By anchoring media technology to the body, rather than treating it as a detached form of commercialism or amusement, we refocus our inquiry on the human subject. Questions about how we come to know things, the role of physical presence in the establishment of sustainable communities, and the dignity of the human

person in an age of rampant commercialism and voyeurism begin to form an “info-ethics” that should have a place in all of our courses.

The Rule of St. Benedict begins with the phrase “Listen carefully…” (Benedict & Fry, 1981, p. 1). The monk is admonished to obey his superior and more importantly to discern the Lord’s call, “Today if you hear his voice, harden not your hearts” (Heb. 3:15). Chapter six of the Rule provides directives on the restraint of speech, including the notion that good words be left unsaid “out of esteem for silence” (RB 6.6). This emphasis on disciplining one’s hearing and speaking comes from Scripture, “I have put a guard on my mouth. I was silent and was humbled, and I refrained even from good words” (Ps 38[39]:2-3). The wisdom of religious tradition reminds us that silence is not antithetical to the pursuit of truth. Pope Benedict XVI’s recent visit to the tomb of St. Peter Celestine, the hermit who became pope, prompted this reflection,

> We live in a society in which it seems that every space, every moment must be 'filled' with initiatives, activity, sound; often there is not even time to listen and dialogue. Dear brothers and sisters! Let us not be afraid to be silent outside and inside ourselves, so that we are able not only to perceive God’s voice, but also the voice of the person next to us, the voices of others. ("Benedict XVI calls for silence to hear God," 2010).

The monastic life provides centuries of evidence that silent contemplation is conducive to discovering profound truth. The challenge for the media educator becomes how to reconcile the torrent of mediation with the basic human need for silence that supports careful thought and healthy community.

A youth culture that does not know a world without computers, cell phones and social networks is easily alienated from a religious tradition that scrambles to keep up with new media technologies. Now that the Gospel can be broadcast to all four corners of the earth, how does

one reach the individual who is so plugged in that the Gospel message is only one among many competing messages? One answer is to integrate the wisdom of the Church into our teaching about the very tools with which our students are constantly connected. I am not suggesting a dogmatic approach but one that draws upon the deep well of Catholic thought that has addressed the issue of man and his symbolic environment for centuries. In *Confessions*, St. Augustine writes,

> To entrap the eyes men have made innumerable additions to the arts and crafts….pictures, images of various kinds, and things which go far beyond necessary and moderate requirements and pious symbols. Outwardly they follow what they make. Inwardly, they abandon God by whom they were made, destroying what they were made to be. (Augustine & Chadwick, 1991, p. 210)

This was written well before the invention of the printing press! One can only imagine Augustine's reaction to the current media environment.

Augustine teaches that we should avoid an excess of stimulation because it creates mental fatigue and diminishes our ability to follow God. Recent studies have shown that the ping of an incoming email stimulates a squirt of dopamine in the brain (Richtel, 2010). It is part of our biological makeup as human beings to respond quickly to incoming stimuli so that the deluge of electronic media has prompted our dopamine drip to become more of a flood. The bouts of depression reported by those separated from their media may indicate that their dopamine flow has slowed to an unbearable trickle.

The Religion of Informationism

The Benedictine monk stands as a revolutionary character in the technological drama that is unfolding. He stands in defiant opposition to the religion of "informationism." (Quentin J.

Schultze, 2002). This new ideology overthrows humanist and religious worldviews by displacing man and God in favor of technology. Schultze contends that informationism emphasizes "amoral observation over virtuous intimacy" (2002, p. 33). It preaches the "*is* over the *ought*, *observation* over *intimacy*, and *measurement* over *meaning*" (2002, p. 26) .

There is much more at stake in the discipline of media and communication education than training professionals for work in the information economy. The pervasiveness of the religion of informationism makes it an environmental concern. In one of Marshall McLuhan's famous aphorisms, the media philosopher notes that those things which are environmental are also invisible. We tend not to notice that which fully saturates the culture in such a seemingly natural way. In order to understand such a world we must create anti-environments from which the "natural" world can be studied, "The role of the artist is to create anti-environments as a means of perception and adjustment" (McLuhan, McLuhan, & Zingrone, 1995, p. 36). For McLuhan, artists were the "antennae of the race" – a phrase he borrowed from the poet Ezra Pound to describe the way in which the modern artist was able to reveal the hidden environments of mediated communication.

McLuhan's aphorisms are notoriously cryptic but he expounds on this one very clearly in an essay on "Catholic Humanism and Modern Letters." In the essay, featured in a book on his writing about media and religion, McLuhan argues that the power of art is in its ability to exteriorize the process of human cognition, thereby revealing the spirit of the age. We hear echoes of McLuhan again in the Vatican II document *Inter Mirifica* which states that "the Church welcomes and promotes with special interest those [media technologies] which have a most direct relation to men's minds." The technologies of print, press, telephony, photography and computer are fashioned in close accord with man's cognitive activity. Education researchers

have noted the way in which sustained interaction with certain technologies remaps neurological pathways in the brain. Moving from speech to literacy is the most profound example of this but electronic media have succeeded in reshaping cognitive dynamics as well. For progressive education scholars the logical response to such a shift is to create educational experiences that closely mimic this new cognitive configuration.

McLuhan uses the myth of Narcissus to describe the way in which these technologies, these "extensions of the self," fascinate us because they are in fact reflections of ourselves. In the myth, Narcissus sees his reflection in a pool of water but does not recognize the reflection as himself. Nonetheless, he is enamored by the image and becomes completely consumed by it. Technologies that "enhance" human communication also tend to have this effect. We personalize our laptops and phones by populating them with personal photos, customizing the interface and adding accessories that speak to our personality. The famous marketing battle between Mac and PC demonstrates how technology users tend to fall into camps of identity where values like creativity and productivity become projections of our own sensibilities that are attached to technology products. Beneath this behavior is the fact that we begin to think in the same terms as our information devices. Why ask the professor or fellow student about a particular concept when Google can find the answer more quickly? What is wrong with emailing, texting, social networking and Googling in class if students are still "getting" the material?

Media devices are symbolic forms that allow for the basic human processes of thought and communication to be captured, transmitted, stored, manipulated and displayed in digitally enhanced modes of delivery. The screen both *projects* images and information and *reflects* our most intimate memories, thoughts and desires. Thus, our infatuation with such machinery is its

ability to act as the reflecting pool in the Narcissus myth. As extensions of the self, media technologies seduce the user with the possibility of self-exploration and fulfillment via an extended consciousness. It is not the machines we love as much as the identity we see reflected in them. The effects on communities, especially communities of learning where presence, embodiment and a shared love of knowledge is essential to human understanding, can be calamitous.

We have the tendency, in the age of omnipresent television, omniscient computers and the omnipotent Steve Jobs to idolize the forms by which so much information is delivered to us. Jacques Ellul put the problem this way, "People deify the technical device. It is universal and spectacular, it defies any attempts to master it; it performs what would usually be called miracles; to a large extent it is incomprehensible. It is thus God...Like God it is everywhere, it is watched everywhere, it speaks everywhere…" (Fallon, 2009, p. 197). In *The Metaphysics of Media*, Peter Fallon argues that particular media engender particular metaphysical frameworks through which we shape and interpret reality. Fallon notes that electric connection has become our ultimate concern because of the way it provides a psychic and spiritual connection to nature and to others.

If science has become our era's defining mythology then media technology is its handmaiden. The philosophical debates of the last two centuries effectively removed God from the center of reality and replaced Him with man, and then nothingness. Postmodernists and poststructuralists reject the metanarrative of religious belief and distrust any coherent formulations of self that used to sit at the center of reality. As a result, the ways in which we communicate have likewise dismembered the self by outsourcing the various modes of connection and social participation that used to define our bond as human beings. Electronic

media has made those distant from us seem closer and those close to us seem distant. A video chat with family across the country delivers a sense of presence that seems almost magical. We revere these digital apparitions and the minds that allow them to be. At the same time, a modern family will spend countless evenings engaged in separated forms of electronic engagement with someone watching television, another on the computer and still others playing video games and text messaging on cell phones. This psychic separation in the most intimate of family environments should not be taken lightly. In both cases, whether chatting with digitized distant relatives or sitting in mental isolation among family, an absent presence is created.

A helpful concept here is that of the *communio personarum*. In Pope John Paul II's *Theology of the Body* (1997), the late pontiff reminds us that "the concept of communication has been practically alienated from its deepest, original semantic matrix. It is connected mainly with the sphere of the media…In its original and deeper meaning, communication was and is directly connected with subjects." It is the body that expresses the personal human "self," an intermediary that enables humans "to communicate with each other according to that *communio personarum* willed by the Creator precisely for them" (1997, p. 56). Before the Fall, this communication was unimpeded. In their physical and spiritual nakedness, man and woman entered into a mutually beneficial relationship of self-giving ordained by the Creator. After the temptation and fall, the relationship between man and woman had to be mediated, first by fig leaves to hide their shame, and then more involved symbols and instruments of communication that gradually divorced them from their Edenic roots as embodied beings created one for another by God. The *communio personarum* applies first and foremost to the married man and woman who share their bodies in the most intimate expression of self-giving and physical communion. This concept can also be extended to the family and the college community.

A Catholic Theory of Media

The problem before us then is that we hardly notice the narcissistic and pseudo-religious tendencies that media technology breeds. Their environmental presence helps them escape detection as objects that are due some critical reflection. In *Finnegan's Wake*, Joyce describes the situation this way, "the viability of vicinals when invisible is invincible" (Joyce, 1999). In order to understand media environments in light of Catholic teaching and Benedictine spirituality, it is useful to consider the media ecology approach as a way to make connections between a theologically-informed worldview and the media studies classroom.

Neil Postman coined the term "media ecology" to describe the idea that "a medium is a technology within which a culture grows; that is to say, it gives form to a culture's politics, social organization, and habitual ways of thinking" (Postman, 2000). Postman's primary concern was whether or not the symbolic environments we create with media serve humanistic or anti-humanistic ends. He saw a balanced relationship between man and media as essential to a sustainable culture, "Media ecology looks into the matter of how media of communication affect human perception, understanding, feeling, and value; and how our interaction with media facilitates or impedes our chances of survival" ("What is Media Ecology?," 2010). Our survival as a culture is based on the maintenance of a symbolic balance that can only be achieved through a stable relationship between man and the tools of communication. Pope Pius XII echoed this view decades prior when he said,

> It is not an exaggeration to say that the future of modern society and the stability of its inner life depend in large part on the maintenance of an equilibrium between the strength of the techniques of communication and the capacity of the individual's own reaction. (McLuhan & Gordon, 2003, p. 20)

One of the distinguishing features of the media ecology tradition is the attention to form over content. Marshall McLuhan gave us the infamous phrase, "the medium is the message" to draw attention to the idea that any new communication medium has profound psychic and social consequences. A new medium has the ability to "shape and control the scale and form of human association and action" (2003, p. 9). McLuhan used the metaphor of transportation to illustrate the relationship between form and content,

> The railway did not introduce movement or transportation or wheel or road into human society, but it accelerated and enlarged the scale of previous human functions, creating totally new kinds of cities and new kinds of work and leisure. This happened whether the railway functioned in a tropical or northern environment, and is quite independent of the freight or *content* of the railway medium. [emphasis added] (2003, p. 8)

Boniface Wimmer's was welcomed by both railroad and telegraph when he arrived in America. The change in human perception, culture and communication that would ensue would pose a substantial challenge for the American monastery and ultimately spawn a competing religion of speed and informationism.

McLuhan was heavily influenced by University of Toronto colleague Harold Innis. An economist by training, Innis described the way in which communication systems structure or "bias" relations of space and time, both of which are at the base of social institutions. Innis was concerned with what he called space-binding media and time-binding media. Space-binding media like print enables institutions to exert control across space and provides for centralized structures of government and control. The establishment of empires and commercialism, in Innis's theory, owes a lot to the influence of printed media. Taken to a logical end, space-

binding media like print and electronic media "greatly enhanced the possibilities of centralization and imperialism in matters of culture and politics" (Carey, 1989a, p. 137).

Time-binding media like oral speech is organized around sustaining a society through time. Oral Greek poetry as an example reinforced common beliefs and strengthened collective memory across time. Boniface Wimmer came from a monastic environment that favored time-binding media where media like manuscripts and human speech were the foundation of "close communities, metaphysical speculation, and traditional authority" (1989b, p. 103) These media were biased toward maintaining communities through time. Wimmer was entering a world of space-binding media, fostered by new forms of transportation, electricity and print, where media were being used to cover territory, nurture commercial exchange and extend governmental control. Through his use of the telegraph, Wimmer was able to harness the power of space-biased electronic media and extend the time-bound Order of St. Benedict by sending monks to establish abbeys in other parts of the country.

Wimmer's effort provides an early example of what the Church teaches today with regard to new communication technologies. Used as instruments for fulfilling the spread of the Gospel, new technologies can bear much fruit. Wimmer's appropriation of the new media of his day prefigures the Church's desire to see social communication technologies "spread and support the kingdom of God" (Paul VI, 1963). However, the transmission of the Gospel must be accompanied by a certain level of embodied community ritual that brings the message of salvation to fruition. More than a parish church, the monastery is a thick-rooted organism that preserves the ideals of permanence and prayer in a highly transitory world. The most recent establishment of the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization reaffirms this need to water the roots of Christianity in areas where spirituality has run dry. Pope Benedict XVI said that the

new council will "[promote] a renewed evangelization in countries where the first announcement of the faith has already resounded and Churches of ancient foundation are present, but are living (through) a progressive secularization of society and a sort of 'eclipse of the sense of God'" ("Pope announces Council for Renewed Evangelization for secularized world," 2010). This secularization can be attributed in large part to the media environment in which a culture is situated.

The late Pope John Paul II addressed the relationship between media technology and the character of a culture in his apostolic letter "The Rapid Development," "communications media can be used "to proclaim the Gospel or reduce it to silence within men's hearts" (John Paul II, 2005).

> The communications media have acquired such importance as to be the principal means of guidance and inspiration for many people in their personal, familial, and social behavior. We are dealing with a complex problem, because the culture itself, *prescinding from its content*, arises from the very existence of new ways to communicate with hitherto unknown techniques and vocabulary. [emphasis added] (John Paul II, 2005)

This is a media ecology view through and through noting the way in which a culture "arises" (like the biological metaphor of media ecology indicates) from the means of communication regardless of the content. In the same document, John Paul II references the potential of communications media to transform humanity into a "global village" – a term made popular by McLuhan. It also speaks to a natural fit between the media ecology tradition and Church teaching on mass communication.

A media ecology approach makes possible a fruitful theoretical link between a spiritual tradition like Benedictine monasticism and a study of the contemporary communication

environment. One of media ecology's most prominent thinkers, Walter Ong, a Jesuit priest and scholar, believed strongly in the ability to "connect Christianity, the human mind, and the nature of literature (or communication)" (Soukup, p.182). Ong theorized that changes in a society's dominant mode of communication also changed structures of thought. For example, when oral culture gave way to print literacy, the human mind had to develop brand new cognitive abilities, namely the ability to translate abstract visual symbols like letters and numbers into language and thought. Ong saw the manifestation of human thought in the form of the word as a linguistic example of the way in which God's thought incarnates the Word – the Second Person of the Christian Trinity (Soukup 175). Human experience and culture is profoundly changed in both instances, in the manifestation of the printed word and the Word made flesh. Ong saw the move from oral to print culture as a move away from symbolic exchange that was bounded by acoustic space and speech to a world of private thought, allowing new structures of thought to develop that had direct consequences on the culture, from social and political change to religious revolution.

Wimmer's journey from Germany, a country where the printing press was born 400 years prior, to a new world that was just getting plugged in to the electric age serves as a fitting backdrop to a discussion about the role and function of mass communication education in a Benedictine environment. The application of media ecology theory allows us to connect the spiritual and temporal concerns of mediated communication. The Vatican II document *Inter Mirifica* warns "that men can employ these media contrary to the plan of the Creator and to their own loss" causing the Church much grief (Paul VI, 1963). Rather than focus on the content of media which is indeed infected with a spirit of licentiousness, a theologically-informed media ecology view studies the cultural consequences of communication *forms*. The Benedictine Rule

emphasizes the maintenance of community and the disciplined use of oral communication. It is my contention that the elements of oral culture and time-bound media native to the medieval monastery are a sensibility that offers a necessary counterweight to the culture of electronic media.

Time and Media

The concept of time on a college campus has become somewhat archaic in the digital age. Fixed campus locations that operate on fixed calendars with classes set for 50 minutes clashes with the scheduling of digital natives who live in a world of fluid time, operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week, unrestrained by physical location. The Benedictine concept of time is structured around community prayer. Recognizing that the Rule is written for monks and not students we can still derive a number of important insights about the role and structure of time in the maintenance of community. In fact, the digital native's approach to time is discontinuous and not conducive to the strengthening of local and physical community bonds.

A college *community* is certainly a warm and cuddly idea, but the goal is higher education, not necessarily higher socialization. This is a tragic view when one considers that the years between 18-21 years of age are so formative in shaping one's character. The Rule's close attention to the structure of time impinges on aspects of community life that have both spiritual and physical benefits. For instance, the instructions on the praying of the divine office at night state, "from the first of November until Easter, it seems reasonable to arise at the eighth hour of the night. By sleeping until a little past the middle of the night, the brothers can arise with their food fully digested"(Benedict & Fry, 1981, p. 38). This may strike some as pedantic or even humorous, but the reality is that college students have some of the worst sleeping and eating habits known to man. Furthermore, in thinking about a more productive, relevant and Catholic

approach to media studies, it seems that serious attention should be paid to the whole human person.

In other words, we should not be concerned merely with information gathering and retention skills but the student's physical and mental well-being. This type of care leads to a more favorable set of conditions for discussing the spiritual aspects of what we do with media. A recent study has shown that iPads and other portable screen devices are affecting sleep habits because the screen brightness can alter a person's internal clock that regulates sleep based on levels of light exposure during the day (Sutter, 2010). A lot of screen consumption right before bed can lead to a restless night of sleep. Thus, the Rule's attention to sleep patterns with regard to seasonal shifts in daylight hours remains relevant as we address the flooding of the human sensorium with artificial light from LCD screens especially during evening hours.

The consumption of media is also something that must be "digested." A case of information indigestion can lead to poor performance in class or an inability to retain key concepts. Critics of the current information environment point out the way in which we constantly snack on information like web articles, text messages, "tweets" and blog feeds but rarely engage in deep, sustained reading. Here we encounter a useful response in one of the central practices of the Rule called 'lectio divina' or holy reading. The practice of 'lectio divina' requires the monk to read and re-read sections of Scripture in a prayerful way, allowing the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth that is both personal and eternal. This is often done in groups and would easily translate as a method from the monastery to the dorm study group. This practice encourages dedicated time and attention to topics of spiritual and material interest and allows other intellectual sensibilities to breathe.

A Fruitful Environment

There is a mounting crisis in the discipline of film studies that carries some promise for a Catholic media studies program. A 2006 book series called *Cinema Aesthetics* from Manchester University Press faltered after its first edition because the editors had become fed up with the "repetitive, rehashed, recirculated" writing of postmodern political projects. Sam Rohdie, a professor of film studies at the University of Central Florida says that "film studies has been invaded by cultural studies, which meant that the specificity of films was ignored…The argument that the cinema exists solely to illustrate the politics of a culture, identity, and pleasure is no longer an argument; it is now a 'core doctrine' of film education, particular in the UK and the US" ("Enough With 'Repetitive, Rehashed, Recirculated' Writing," 2010). The antidote is uncertain but the door is clearly open for a Catholic view of film studies is both critical and interdisciplinary.

During my undergraduate years at the University of Notre Dame one of the more memorable courses I took was called "European Film Masters." We spent a semester viewing and discussing the films of Frederico Fellini and Ingmar Bergman. The imagery and pacing of the films seemed so exotic for an eye tuned to the mass produced and formulaic films of American cinema. The films forced one to meditate on the frame, to seek deeper meaning regarding the nature of humans in relationship to one another and to God. One of Bergman's dominant themes was the silence of God. Bergman's stark and minimalist vision of the world conveyed the numbing silence experienced by the characters as they listened for God. To study a filmmaker like Bergman in an environment infused with Benedictine spirituality reminds us of the centrality of listening in the nurturing of faith. From the prologue of the Rule of St. Benedict, "*If you hear his voice today, do not harden your hearts* (Ps 94 [95]:8) And again: *You*

that have ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches (Rev 2:7). And what does he say? *Come and listen to me, sons; I will teach you the fear of the Lord* (Ps 33 [34]:12)."

Fellini's films are distinct because they embody both the man and the environment in which he was raised. Fellini comments on the way in which Catholic Italy informs a worldview, "It's difficult biologically and geographically *not* to be a Catholic in Italy. It's like a creature born beneath the sea – how can it not be a fish? For one born in Italy, it's difficult not to breathe, from childhood onward, this Catholic atmosphere." Here, Fellini acknowledges the central precept of the media ecology tradition, that media are environmental. In this case, the mediation being referred to is not radio or cinema, but the ultimate act of mediation, religion itself. It is in religion that we encounter the sacred gifts of Scripture and the sacraments that *mediate* the divine. Christ himself is made present in the Eucharist, the apotheosis of McLuhan's famous dictum, "the medium is the message."

Fellini's films are not religious per se but they contain many elements that come from Fellini's upbringing in Catholic Italy. This is an important point when one considers the ways in which a film can be Catholic without necessarily focusing on explicitly religious content. In an interview Fellini declares his admiration for those who "declare themselves a detached laity" but one gets the sense that someone who grows up in such an environment is not being honest with him or herself when saying that they are detached. In the world of electronic media it would be akin to saying that one is detached or removed from media in such a way that it does not shape their worldview. Social scientists refer to this as the "third-person" theory, the idea that others are affected by media, but not me. This is impossible in a sense, because we live in an environment that is so infused with electronic media that even a casual conversation with a friend inevitably ends up referencing something that has circulated in the media. In fact, the

electronic media are so much a part of the environment that many interpersonal conversations take place online, on the phone or in text and email messages.

Famous film critic Roger Ebert, who left the Catholic Church and became an atheist has this to say about great directors, “In my childhood the Church arched high above everything. I was awed by its ceremonies. Years later I agreed completely with Pauline Kael when she said that the three greatest American directors of the 1970s--Scorsese, Altman and Coppola--had derived much of their artistic richness from having grown up in the pre-Vatican Two era of Latin, incense, mortal sins, indulgences, dire sufferings in hell, Gregorian chant, and so on. Protestants and even Jews were victims, I suppose, of sensory deprivation (Ebert, 2010). In her memoir, vampire novelist Anne Rice “describes a familiar Catholic upbringing imbued with opulence and mystery. The incense. The statuary. The stained glass. The darkness. She learned the world, she writes, through her senses, through a "preliterate" understanding of the world.” She writes that she possessed "an internal gallery of pictorial images" that, lamentably, was replaced "by the alphabetic letters" she learned later. "You might call it the Mozart effect, but it was the Catholic effect on me," she said.

In the Benedictine institution, we are called to build a household worthy of the Lord. St. Vincent recently renovated the crypt underneath the Basilica. The transformation and attention to aesthetic detail is indicative of an effort to share with the community the best that life in the faith has to offer. In the age of mass mediated images, the Church and her institutions of higher education must present elements of tradition that are both timeless and yet extremely relevant for the modern age. We must offer our students environments that allow for periods of silence that also renew their own “internal gallery of pictorial images” through statuary, stained glass and architecture that rouse the soul amidst the numbing effects of the technological environment.

The Catholic educator must work from a different set of fundamental assumptions. Following Benedictine spirituality, we subscribe to a sacramental view of the world. The materialist view of the world espoused by many media studies academics treats the body politically rather than spiritually. Insofar as media are extensions of the self, their most ordered application is in their ability to reveal something of God no matter how obliquely. Our bodies are not corpses moved by ghosts, or cars steered by angels, but temples of the Holy Spirit.[1]

The fruit of virtual experience is a crisis of identity "facilitated by a glut of speed of light information (Fallon, 2009, p. 71). Marshall McLuhan said "everybody at the speed of light tends to become a nobody." McLuhan's pithiness belies the serious loss of identity and ethical ground that the virtual self breeds. Our participation in the "orgy of instant information" produces "psychic orgasm" and "wild abandonment of the self" which eventually leads to spiritual suicide. If this sounds harsh or overly dramatic, consider the rise in internet addiction being diagnosed here and abroad. Children spend hours a day online playing games and messaging. Adults in high-pressure corporate settings can check email hundreds of times a day. We come to understand ourselves through these relationships that are ultimately founded on a false identity – one that is projected in dizzying amounts rather than performed humbly from the heart of the human person.

The call then is not for abandonment of the medium but restraint. It is here that the Rule of St. Benedict provides noble precepts for the limits that should inform human communication aimed toward the construction and maintenance of a virtuous (not virtual) community. "In a flood of words you will not avoid sin" (Prov 10:19). The deep Scriptural basis of the Rule makes it accessible and useful for all men, not just those living in a monastery. The quotation from

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[1] http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/apologetics/ap0030.html, retrieved July 15, 2010

Proverbs comes from a chapter of the Rule dedicated to the "Restraint of Speech." The abiding concern of the abbot in this case is the spiritual formation of the monk who must maintain a spirit of humility and avoid "vulgarity and gossip and talk leading to laughter" (RB 6:8). These are the conditions for spiritual growth. "I have a put a guard on my mouth. I was silent and was humbled, and I refrained even from good words" (Ps 38[39]:2-3). St. Benedict himself says, "there are times when good words are to be left unsaid out of esteem for silence" (RB 6:2). This seems in many ways to contradict charity and perhaps puts a strain on community life. However, the words of truth are not often found in idle chatter.

It is our obligation as Catholic educators to provide an example for students and other members of the school community that is based on "giving oneself to others and, ultimately, to the service of the truth, which is the school community's binding force" (Byrnes, 2002, p. 78). The binding force of community is rooted in man's capacity to create kinship, friendship, fellowship and social bonds through continual interaction. This is known as "phatic communication" – a term developed by anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski concerned with the relationship between participants in an encounter rather than the exchange of information in the usual sense (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1989). Phatic communication "serves to establish bonds of personal union between people brought together by the mere need of companionship and does not serve any purpose of communicating ideas" (Senft, 2009, p. 227). A friendly smile when passing someone on the street is a good example of this. A simple gesture is often all that is needed to reinforce the social ideal of being open to interaction and communion with one another regardless of the lack of words spoken.

We must also recognize the ways in which communication media are themselves extensions of human cognition. To study the process of television viewing or online media

consumption is to study the way in which the human mind is inclined to process the world. The 'tyranny of the screen' seduces the mind with hyperreal and now 3D imagery. At the same time, the everywhere/always-on capability of modern media replicates oral culture where everything happens at once, a condition Walter Ong calls "secondary orality" (Ong, 1982, p.11). The spiritual fruits of silence are lost to the modern ear that remains plugged into iPods and the electronic environment of ambient sound in automobiles, shopping centers, schools and homes. St. Benedict reminds his monks that they have ears to hear and eyes to see but do not hear or see.

The Church must move beyond the assumption that injecting the Gospel message into modern media constitutes a holistic response to the crisis of attention wrought by modern media. Pope John Paul II's 1999 "Letter to Artists" and Pope Benedict XVI's 2009 meeting with 500 composers, painters, sculptors and musicians are steps in the right direction. The art world, including the media arts, sets the perceptual agenda in a sense. The shiny baubles of high-def media and Twitter accounts will continue to shape our cognitive habits in distinct ways. The success of our response will be judged by our ability to enter this current of cognitive activity and recognize it as an exteriorization of man's desire to know the world. Google teaches that we relish the search, blogs teach us that memory is precious, and the new iPhones show that "face time" is important. These technologies can also atrophy our sense of the unknown. It is imperative that we recall the ways in which media technologies are forms of awareness and speaking that come directly from our own very analog, very human consciousness, made by God to know Him.

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