Realms

A Phenomenological, Socio-Cultural and Theological- Religious Studies exploration of Musical Spaces

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Abstract

This thesis sets out to explore the ways people use and interpret experience of music, the divine and interaction with other people within discrete musical spaces. This exploration takes place in two sites: a Pentecostal church in suburban Perth, Western Australia, and the West Coast Blues & Roots festival, a well known music festival held annually in Fremantle, Western Australia. I have nominated these two sites as “realms” because they are spaces set up for the performance and experience of music.

My primary questions about these sites relate to how people interact with music, each other and the divine within these realms. This study combines socio-cultural and theological-religious studies theories to illuminate the processes, experiences and interpretations occurring within these musical realms. This has important implications for understanding how people use and interpret music in relation to the world outside the musical realm. People use these experiences to dream and imagine the shape of ideal relationships and communities with each other and the divine presence, and to escape and transform the world outside the musical realm.

In this thesis I compile data from participant observation and in-depth interviews at both sites, as well as published interviews with performers. I construct two case studies of the sites, portraying a “day in the life” of a participant in both realms. For each case study I outline ten different interpretive paradigms, five from socio-cultural theorists and five from theology and religious studies. I analyse the data using the phenomenological method, taking a component of data from the fieldwork and comparing and contrasting it with theory. At the end of each chapter I summarise the process and make some remarks relating to the implications of the study.
The resulting work makes important contributions to understanding how socio-cultural studies and theological-religious studies can work together in an interdisciplinary fashion to illuminate phenomena. The study sheds light on the nature of musical “realms”, as well as “proto-religious phenomena” and “methodological agnosticism”. Further, this work presents useful contributions into the ways churches may understand and interact with spiritual experience that occurs outside of religious settings. Finally, performers and artists and community workers will benefit from the conclusions of this study on the ways in which people use music and realms to escape, transform and imagine community and society.
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I dedicate this thesis first to my beloved Nanna, Doreen Patricia Jennings, who passed away in the first year of my writing. I have been comforted many times by your memory and, I believe, by your presence, over the course of this writing.

My final dedication goes to my deeply loved daughters, Isabella and Beatrice. You have changed my life, and everything I do is because of you.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Many of us have felt music’s power to create another world. Recently, toward the end of completing this PhD thesis, I was in bad shape. My marriage of five years was disintegrating, and I was missing my children and wife terribly. One lonely night as I waited for the bus to arrive I listened to Damien Rice’s acoustic ballad “The Blower’s Daughter” on my iPod. The ethereal sound of Rice’s Irish voice, and the haunting and incredibly sad lament “I can’t take my eyes off of you” (not of course to be confused with the famous song of that title) added layers and nuance to my melancholy. Rice’s song, echoing in my earphones, seemed to be performed just for me, and the music maintained a fragile space where my sadness seemed epic, something that you might write a novel about.

As I continued waiting for the bus, I decided that a change of scene was needed, so I picked a number of blues selections. Once again I was in my own private performance, where Gary Moore and Eric Clapton howled with their voices and guitars. Oblivious to the people driving past, I sang along and played air guitar as I waited for my bus, imagining myself on stage bellowing out the blues. Actually getting on the bus slowed down my own performance a bit, but I still mimed the lyrics and pounded my feet on the floor as the bus carried me back to where I was staying. For a while, in a private space maintained by a bubble of music emanating from my iPod, I was in a world where I was the performer; not a lonely father and husband.

This thesis examines a similar phenomenon that happens in group settings. If you have a fully functioning auditory sense, or even if you do not, chances are that you
have similar experiences of music. Perhaps you were in a magnificent cathedral, listening to a choral mass, or in a suburban backyard, as a group of friends rocked out with one guitar, or a karaoke machine. Alternatively, you may have been in a discotheque, night club or rave, accompanied by dancing.

In this thesis, the two musical settings under examination involve similar and common sites. One is a Pentecostal church, which greets regular attendees and newcomers with a sound designed to help them “break free” from the world outside the church meeting and come into a space where the divine can be encountered through music. The other is the West Coast Blues & Roots festival, an annual music festival held in Fremantle, Western Australia. At this event, many different performers and participants gather to inhabit a unique realm whose existence and rationale for being is music, a space maintained by the performance of music, where a different order of behaviour and meaning from the world outside exists.

In both these spaces, music creates a world within a world, and enables passage from one to the next. The “realm,” the space maintained by the music, is the subject of this thesis. In this realm, a different set of rules, order and way of being seem to apply. People engage in behaviour within these musical realms that they would be unlikely to indulge otherwise. At the music festival I witnessed a man standing on another man’s shoulders, strangers embracing each other and people dancing, screaming and jumping as hard as they could. At the church I heard people utter streams of gibberish, seemingly unaware of what they sounded like, and I saw people standing with outstretched arms and closed eyes lifted to heaven, totally oblivious to appearance.
Above all, these realms are where people gather to have a particular set of experiences. In both the festival and the church I saw and participated in experiences of euphoria and ecstasy. I also participated in and witnessed an experience of camaraderie and unity with a group, where the boundaries between individual persons started to get fuzzy. In both realms I have wondered at the seemingly boundless and unique ability of certain individuals, leaders who exercise a charismatic power to catalyse ecstatic experiences and group unity. Both realms, it seems to me, are very, very different from the world outside — a world which, in contrast, seems strict, formal and staid compared to the abandon and euphoria I and others participated in. Both realms can become an important, even life-changing, part of the story of those who participate in them. And, in both realms, there are echoes of an entity some call the “divine,” expressed in many different ways but underlying everything that takes place.

Are these worlds as different as they appear to be, or is there something common to both of them? One is about the kingdom of God, the other about a Dionysian leisure experience of carnival. Or are they? Perhaps both are manifestations of what Emile Durkheim refers to as “collective effervescence,” the ecstatic euphoria people in groups get from being together en masse. Conversely, maybe both are examples of the divine spirit “blowing where it will” (John 3:8), distinct yet connected manifestations of what Rudolf Otto calls “the numinous,” or the sacred.

These two realms have often been conceived as very different, sharing only the common denominator of music. In this dissertation, however, I explore both realms to ascertain if they have more in common than I may have first thought. The realms are engaged through “participant observation,” one of the techniques employed
within the disciplines of ethnography, sociology and anthropology, as the means by which observation, albeit as a participant, may be made. I also conducted a number of in-depth interviews with other participants in both settings, and drew on material from published interviews with performers, and even song lyrics. The purpose of this exploration was to illuminate both realms from the inside, from the participant’s point of view.

However, this was only the first step. In order to compare and contrast both realms effectively, I trained the lens of a particular group of theorists on the data. Five socio-cultural and five theological-religious theorists whose work was regarded as helpful in illuminating the data were chosen. In the chapters that follow, observations made from both realms are examined using the ideas propounded by these authors. My purpose was not merely to see if the paradigm “fits” the data; but what the comparison would reveal about the realms. A number of important questions, outlined in the following section, will be answered as this investigation proceeds.

**Important questions**

As I commenced work on this thesis, a number of questions appeared to be very important. How do people engage in different behaviours within these realms, in the presence of music, interaction with each other and in an encounter with the divine? What, if anything, is accessed through these experiences? How can a variety of socio-cultural and theological-religious theories work together to deepen and broaden our understanding of what may be occurring within these realms?

As I began to analyse the data using the theories and paradigms of the authors identified below, the crucial questions began to crystallize. The first question
concerns how people experience and interpret experience within the musical realms; the second asks how people use their experiences within these realms in interaction with the world outside the realm. Together, these two questions form the primary concern of this thesis; their answers will be uncovered as this exploration progresses. I have undertaken some unusual comparisons in order to achieve this. I will briefly elaborate on these comparisons in the chapter outlines.

**Chapter Outlines**

A broad outline of the shape and scope of the thesis, as produced above, must be accompanied by a brief description of the research methods employed. In the present chapter, I will comment on the nature of the ethnographic field work which was undertaken at both sites. Also, I will elaborate upon the phenomenological style in which the bulk of the thesis is written.

Chapter two contains the first of the case studies. The case study begins with a detailed description of a service at “Breakfree” Church, a suburban Pentecostal church in Western Australia. In total, four months were spent conducting participant observation and in-depth interviews at the church. From this time with the congregation, I have distilled a “day in the life” of Breakfree church, commencing with the set up of the hall in which the church meets to the “pack down” and community time at the end of the service. This descriptive section is followed by some observations that are made regarding the role of music in creating and maintaining the experience within the “realm” of the service. The case study describes this day in detail, with particular focus on the role of music.
Chapters three and four are considerably longer and extend the observations about the case study of Breakfree church. These chapters are each divided into five broad sections and a conclusion. At the beginning of each section I introduce a theorist and outline the specific area of their work which is relevant to the task at hand. Following this I compare the paradigm outlined with an aspect of the data garnered from Breakfree church. This phenomenological method of outlining theory and then comparing that theory with data is maintained throughout the five sections. Each chapter is concluded with a summary that briefly revisits the theorists and comparisons made, and finishes with some remarks about the significance of the study.

Chapter three applies theological-religious theory to the data gathered from field work at Breakfree church. Specifically, I draw on the work of five thinkers: theologians Friedrich Schleiermacher, Rudolf Otto and Paul Tillich; religious scholar Mircea Eliade and philosopher Paul Ricoeur. I begin with Friedrich Schleiermacher’s conception of religion beginning with an experience he called “intuition of the universe.” I also raise the importance of music to Schleiermacher, particularly the role he understood music to play as a catalyst for religious experience. I compare Schleiermacher’s ideas to Breakfree’s commitment to experience and music. Secondly, I describe Rudolf Otto’s phenomenological concept of the numinous, the divine as the wholly other. I utilise Otto’s “wholly other” in order to understand the practice of glossolalia at Breakfree church.

The third section outlines Mircea Eliade’s study of shamanism and “hierophanies.” In this section I explore the possibility of understanding the Breakfree music team as shamans. Paul Tillich’s definition of faith and religion as that which is of “Ultimate
Concern” is the focus of the fourth section. I use this paradigm to help explore Breakfree church’s ultimate concern in relation, once again, to music. Finally, I profile the three stage mimetic hermeneutic of Paul Ricoeur. Specifically, I examine the ways in which two Breakfree music team members use music and their faith to come to terms with bereavement.

Chapter four adopts a very different approach to the Breakfree case study, in as much as it is based on the work of sociologists Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, anthropologist Victor Turner and philosopher Michel Foucault. I begin with a précis of Durkheim’s models of collective effervescence and the conscience collective. Durkheim’s ideas are used to analyse Breakfree’s pre-service prayer meeting. Max Weber’s ideas on charisma, specifically his later musings on charisma and his categories of priests, magicians and prophets as bearers of religious charisma are examined next. I draw on Weber’s categories to analyse the role of the music team at Breakfree church. In the third section I delineate the key features of Mikhail Bakhtin’s treatment of carnival. In particular, Bakhtin’s treatment of ambivalence in carnival is explored as a way to explicate Breakfree church’s relationship with popular culture, particularly in their use of music forms.

The fourth section contains a sketch of Victor Turner’s limen and communitas, both spatial paradigms he applied to religious space in pre-industrial societies and leisure space in industrial and post-industrial cultures. Turner’s limen, the passage from structure to “anti-structure,” and communitas, which articulates the egalitarian nature of anti-structural space, are especially useful as tools to illuminate what is happening during the ecstatic experience of “free worship” within the Breakfree service. Finally, two Foucauldian concepts, heterotopia and the “limit experience,” are briefly
described and their significance examined. Using these categories, I conceptualise Breakfree’s service as a profoundly different space, a realm for a religious form of limit experiences.

Chapter five introduces the second case study. In 2007, 2008 and 2009 I attended the West Coast Blues & Roots Festival in Fremantle, a coastal city in Western Australia. I took detailed notes as a participant observer of the music and experience taking place in the festival grounds. I also conducted a number of in depth interviews with fellow participants at the West Coast Blues & Roots festival (hereafter WCBR). From my own observations and the interview data, I constructed a detailed picture of a day at the festival, beginning with the sparsely attended morning sessions and ending with the excitement of the densely packed night performances. In the case study, close attention was paid to euphoric experiences catalysed by the music, and the differences between those participating as ‘fans’ and others who I classed as ‘listeners.’

Following the same broad structure as in the first half of the dissertation, chapter six is based on the work of the same five socio-cultural theorists as featured in chapter four. However, in most cases the emphasis on their work is slightly different. For instance, I begin by revisiting Durkheim’s “collective effervescence,” focusing on it not only as a religious but also a cultural phenomenon. Armed with this understanding, I analyse the Wolfmother set at the 2007 WCBR, comparing it with Durkheim’s ideas of “affirming effervescence” and “positive delirium,” a necessary experience of release. Secondly, I outline Weber’s earlier thought on charisma, in which he classes it as a discrete form of ‘rule’ or leadership, contrasting with traditional and bureaucratic leadership. I also investigate Ben Harper’s role as a
charismatic leader, as one who inspires a “better way” through his music and performance.

Bakhtin’s carnival is revisited at this point in the discussion, focusing on the importance of carnival in medieval culture as a “second world” of the people, one which is characterised by laughter and the pulling down of power structures. I compare Bakhtin’s theories about carnival to the time between sets immediately prior to Xavier Rudd’s performance at the 2008 WCBR. Next, I open up Victor Turner’s innovative conception of the “liminoid” — industrial and post-industrial spaces which mirror the experience of the liminal in pre-industrial religious rituals. This paradigm also offers some useful insight into the repertoire people use to help create a sense of community and solidarity. I apply Turner’s “processual analysis” to the progression evident in Don McLean’s set, beginning with less well known songs and leading to “canonical” songs. Finally, I return to Foucault’s heterotopia, as spaces people enter to escape the all pervasive power of the everyday world. Using this understanding, I critique the WCBR as a space for the escape from power, rather than contestation of it.

Chapter seven brings the phenomenological analysis to a close with a theological-religious reading of the WCBR. I return to Schleiermacher’s “intuition of the universe,” building on this descriptive category to conceptualize “proto-religious phenomena” at the WCBR. These are experiences which have the same genesis as religious experience but do not develop into organised religion. I next articulate Otto’s “numinous,” exploring the possibility of non-theistic numinous experience through music. I conceptualise the Eric Burdon set at the 2007 WCBR as an example of such a non-theistic numinous experience. I revisit Mircea Eliade’s analysis of
shamanism and hierophany, with a focus on the techniques a shaman may use to catalyse the ecstatic trance. I contrast Xavier Rudd’s performances at the 2007 and 2008 WCBR, as well as his self-understanding of his role in performance, with Eliade’s shaman.

Fourthly, I return to Tillich and ultimate concern. I explore Tillich’s at times ambiguous articulation of ultimate concern, noting that it can be applied to any concern which grasps an individual. I apply this thought to the ‘echoes’ of ultimate concern I observed in the lyrics and self-articulation of performer John Butler. Finally, I revisit Ricoeur’s work on threefold mimesis, and particularly the manner in which Theodore Turnau appropriates this concept to explore popular cultural artefacts as “alternative religions.” I then illustrate through interview excerpts with participants at the WCBR the manner in which some fans use the experience to change or create their own stories.

In chapter eight, I conclude the thesis with a brief summary of the ground covered. I revisit some of the questions raised in the first part of this chapter. I make a number of remarks and suggestions as to future directions for study in relation to realms, music, religion and culture. The thesis has implications for interdisciplinary relationships, particularly with reference to the categories of “realms,” “proto-religious phenomena,” and “methodological agnosticism,” which open up new areas of dialogue between theology and religious studies on the one hand and sociocultural studies on the other.

“Realms” refers to the spaces set apart for music. Within these realms, as will be evident in the case studies and analysis chapters, a different order of reality exists.
The realms outlined in this thesis have a vertical dimension, referring to the spiritual transcendence people experience within these spaces, and a horizontal dimension, which describes social interactions in the realm. “Proto-religious phenomena” is a name I have coined to describe experiences which share common features with religious experience. However, the religious trappings of doctrine or ritual do not develop around these experiences in the same way as with religious experience. “Methodological agnosticism” is a term borrowed from Douglas Porpora (2006), which describes an appropriate starting point for dialogue between the social sciences and theology.

This dissertation also has practical implications for appreciating the ways in which people imagine and develop communities because the world created within the realm reveals much about how people dream and imagine community in the “real” world. Also, this study suggests how churches, religious and other organisations may carry out mission and pastoral care using music, space, experience and popular culture. Churches and religious communities have a number of choices in how to interact with and interpret proto-religious phenomena, including baptising these phenomena, setting themselves up as the official interpreter or accepting these experiences as valid and equal to experience taking place in “official” religious contexts. Artists, performers and youth workers and teachers are also professions that stand to benefit from the findings of this thesis.

**Method**

**Ethnographic methods**

Ethnography means the “writing of people”. The simplest definition of ethnography I have encountered is given by Hammersly and Atkinson.
In its most characteristic form [ethnography] involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research (1995, 1).

It is important to note that an “extended” period of fieldwork is usually part of ethnography. While I participated in the Breakfree church services and practices over a period of four months, my attendance at three West Coast Blues & Roots festivals would not normally fit the criteria of extended fieldwork. For this reason, I have emphasised that I draw upon some of the tools used within ethnography, particularly “participant observation.”

Ethnography has a long tradition in the discipline of anthropology, where it normally involves field work over extended periods in locations foreign to the researcher. As the above definition indicates, the researcher usually takes the time to learn the language and customs of the ‘natives,’ and then builds a picture of the lifestyle of the society or culture, from an insider’s perspective. Within the discipline of sociology, ethnography is associated with the qualitative work of the Chicago school, and is often referred to as “participant observation.” In sociology, there has typically been a focus on shorter times in the field and familiar sites, rather than exotic locations. However, the commitment to building a perspective from the point of view of the insider remains the same in both disciplines.

“Participant observation” can be defined as the method in which the researcher participates in and observes the lives and habits of the group under study. This data is often compiled into a rich descriptive narrative, written from an “emic” (or insider’s) perspective (Brewer, 2000, 59–63). Karen O’Reilly (2005, 3) maintains the process is “iterative-inductive,” because the researcher, as one who participates in group life
as he or she observes, is in the perfect position to ask questions about the significance and meaning of particular practices as they arise and can always come back to the same person or group seeking further clarification. Labelling this process “inductive” does not mean that the researcher embarks upon fieldwork with no theories or presuppositions that he or she is interested in investigating. Participant observation requires a more “sophisticated inductivism,” in which the researcher is aware of his or her own preconceptions and is broadly informed by the existing literature, but is “open to surprises,” allowing the process of observing and participating in the field to shape theory and challenges or refines assumptions brought into the field (O’Reilly 2005, 26–27).

For the purposes of this study, I engaged in participant observation in two sites. I chose these two sites because, in both, music is used in a process to create and maintain a unique space, different in a number of ways from the outside world. The purpose of this participant observation was to build an insider’s picture of both sites, which I present in the case studies. The two case studies present a day in the life of both sites, and constitute the ethnographic database of the thesis.

I attended the West Coast Blues & Roots festival over three years (2007–2009) and recorded detailed notes of my personal observations and sensations during attendance. I also conducted in-depth interviews with six individuals who attended the festival in 2007 and 2008. These participants interviewed for the WCBR case study were all university students. All but one was female, in contrast to the Breakfree informants who were primarily male. A range of different religious view points were represented, from practicing religious adherents to agnostic. I discussed music with all participants, and while some were musicians themselves, all were self
professed lovers of music. The ages of the informants ranged from early twenties to early thirties.

In order to represent the views of performers in relation to this dissertation, I have also drawn substantially on material from interviews with performers published in newspapers and magazines. Attempting to interview international performers would have been impractical, and all of the information I required was available through this unobtrusive method.

Likewise, I attended the pseudonymous “Breakfree” church* for a period of four months. I went along to the mid week music practices and the Sunday morning services. I conducted seven in-depth interviews with leaders and music team members at the church. All but one of the music team members interviewed were male, as females are significantly under-represented in the Breakfree music team. All were committed Pentecostal Christians and ages ranged from early twenties to early thirties. It should be noted that while all informants at Breakfree were performers, they were also members of the congregation, and spent time both on stage and in the pews. Therefore their observations relate both to performance and participation.

The small number of interviews involved would be problematic in a methodology relying primarily on interviews. However, as I have indicated above, and as will become clear through the course of this dissertation, interviews were supplementary to the main data gathering methodology, participant observation. The point of view provided by informants in participant observation augments the emic perspective

*As is made clear in the case study of chapter two, the pseudonym “Breakfree” comes from the song “Break Free,” which featured so prominently in the service during my fieldwork at the church.
developed through immersion in the field by the researcher him or herself. Indicative interview questions and consent forms can be found in the Appendix.

Ethics clearance to conduct this research, including interviews in both sites was applied for and eventually granted by the Human Research Ethics committee. Informed consent was relatively straightforward to obtain from the music team members. I attended a music practice with all performers present and briefly introduced myself and my research. I asked permission from the church pastor to attend this session, and I briefly negotiated consent from the group to participate in practices and take notes. An information sheet was given to all informants, which is included in the Appendix. All the participants were assured that identities would remain confidential and that they were not required to participate in interviews if they did not feel comfortable to do so.

As the nature of my participation at music practices was unobtrusive, I did not anticipate that anyone would find my presence uncomfortable, and this proved to be the case. I was also able to conduct interviews in proximity to the rehearsal venue in a convenient and safe space for all those who participated in interviews. My attendance and participation at church services was likewise unobtrusive, however obtaining informed consent from every congregation member would have been impractical. The church service was regarded as a public event, and as such informed consent was not required. The more thorny issue related to my taking of copious notes during services, which would naturally be obvious to any congregation members who happened to be observing me. Happily, note taking during church services is not an unusual practice among conscientious church attendees, and as I
generally sat near the back I am confident my research was conducted in a very unobtrusive manner.

The public nature of the WCBR presented a number of different challenges. As performances occurred in a public event, according to university policy I was not required to apply for consent to conduct participant observation. I took copious notes during breaks between sets at the festival, recording my own experiences from the first person point of view. I transcribed these notes, as well as my field notes from Breakfree church, for easy reference and coding.

However, the main issue revolved around recruiting informants at the WCBR. As I was tutoring in two universities at the time, I issued an informal invitation to my students asking if anyone who attended the WCBR would be willing to participate in research. There was no “pressure recruiting” of any kind. A small number of students elected to be engaged in interview over the course of the two years, and these students were given the information sheet and asked to sign consent forms prior to interview. Interviews were recorded in public spaces, where informants were free to leave at any time. As the nature of the interview questions was not particularly confronting, I did not anticipate this would be a problem, and it turned out not to be.

Having compiled the data using ethnographic methods, the information was coded using thematic analysis. I read over my transcribed field notes and interviews a number of times to isolate data into themes, naturally cross referencing data which could be classified into several broad thematic areas. I further drew on the tradition of ethnographic phenomenology in order to provide a detailed analysis of the data. In
the following section I discuss the phenomenological tradition in qualitative
sociology, and how it is applied in this thesis.

**Phenomenology**

Phenomenology is the sub-discipline within philosophy that is based on the attempt
to orient all knowledge around experience. In the twentieth century, the discipline
was associated most with two German philosophers, Edmund Husserl and Martin
Heidegger, both of whom made massive original contributions to phenomenology
and to philosophy in general. Phenomenology attempts to begin afresh, describing
experience from scratch in order to radically re-orient experiences in terms of
subjectivity and reason. It is “the study of structures of consciousness from the first
person point of view” (Smith, 2008).

Phenomenology has been co-opted as a method in the social sciences, providing as it
does a useful framework for dealing with the first person accounts of experience
which are so critical in ethnography and some of the other qualitative methods. One
of Husserl’s students, Alfred Schutz, took phenomenology and applied it to the task
of sociology. In his essay “The Stranger,” Schutz traces the manner in which the
researcher must look at the familiar from the point of view of an alien, bracketing his
or her own personal knowledge and understandings in order to provide a fresh
perspective on observed phenomena (Schutz, 1971, 92–93; Maso, 2001, 136). Ilja
Maso notes that the bracketing Schutz envisioned is no longer perceived as possible
or desirable, as a result of the reflexive turn in the humanities and social sciences
(2001, 138–139). However, phenomenology as social research method is useful in
focussing the researcher on exploring experience from a number of different
perspectives. As such, it fits well with the post-structural context in which
researchers must operate today.
The fresh description of experience from a personal point of view is central to phenomenology. Hence when we come to participant observation, which deals firstly with the observations of the researcher as she or he participates in the field, and secondly with the accounts of personal experiences of others, phenomenology lends credibility to this exercise as a process which has a distinguished history. The process can also be a frame upon which to execute method. In this case, the “case study” method is employed: a typical “day” is sketched in each of the research sites. This is followed by an outline of the theories through which the phenomenon of the research site — either church or festival — are to be examined. Each theory will shed fresh light on an aspect of the experience of the site.

Building on the case studies, I have compiled four phenomenological chapters exploring different approaches to the data. Two of the chapters approach the data using socio-cultural theory and paradigms. I have chosen to work with well established classical theorists: Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Mikhail Bakhtin, Victor Turner and Michel Foucault. Conversely, the other two chapters include theological-religious studies theorists and paradigms. The five chosen for this category are Friedrich Schleiermacher, Rudolf Otto, Mircea Eliade, Paul Tillich and Paul Ricoeur. All ten theorists made massive original contributions to their respective fields, and present very useful paradigms for interpreting the data.

The process involves sketching the theories and then comparing a section of the data to the theory. Thus the theory acts as a comparison and contrast point for the data, illuminating the phenomena and providing some interesting interpretations for it. Both case studies are investigated using both sets of theories. Thus, the Breakfree
church study is compared both to theological-religious theory and socio-cultural theory, and vice versa — the WCBR study is compared both to socio-cultural theory and theological-religious theory. There are a number of reasons for this. First of all, it was an interesting exercise to train theological and religious studies paradigms on a popular cultural event like the WCBR, which is not common practice, and likewise to explore a setting such as Breakfree church from the point of view of socio-cultural theory.

It was also hoped that in doing so, segments of the data that might be missed or overlooked because of the particular emphases of the different data sets might be drawn in, providing a more nuanced and rich reading in both cases. For example, it was thought that a socio-cultural reading would normally focus on the empirical data and leave non-empirical possibilities, such as the affect of the divine, out of analysis. Traditions such as theology and religious studies take the possibility of the divine more seriously, and thus allow possibilities and insights that socio-cultural theory would not consider. Of course the reverse is true, as socio-cultural theories focus on the interaction of people and culture draws attention to the human dimensions and provides a foil to the theology and religious studies emphasis on the transcendent. Such an approach demonstrates the way that the disciplines can work together.

**My position**

It is worth noting at this point that I might be regarded as a “native” of both sites, in a sense. I grew up as a Pentecostal Christian, and from childhood some of the more unusual practices of this tradition, such as “speaking in tongues,” have been accepted parts of my experience. In my late teens through to my mid twenties I was part of a music team in a local church — that is, one of the producers of the sound which catalyses the divine-human encounter. My own experiences of the more conservative
and fundamentalist spectrum of Pentecostalism led me to abandon the tradition
which had been part of my own personal story. Recently, I have returned to
worshipping at a local Pentecostal church — it is not Breakfree church, the
pseudonymous church which appears in this thesis.

I have also performed as a musician and singer in bands, producing popular music in
events which resembled the West Coast Blues & Roots festival in energy if not in
scope. I still enjoy participating in “jams,” particularly blues and rock music.
Performance is something I have toyed with returning to. In a sense, I have
experienced both realms as a participant and a performer (though I must reiterate I
have not performed in front of crowds as large as at the WCBR). It would be
pointless and unhelpful to suggest that I am an ‘objective’ outsider to this process, as
my phenomenological participant observation depends at least partly on heuristic
analysis of my own experience.

The following chapter begins this musical odyssey, beginning with the first case
study, Breakfree church.
Chapter 2: Case Study 1

Breakfree Church

A day in the life of Breakfree Church

Would you believe me, would you listen if I told you that
There is a love that makes a way and never holds you back
So won’t you break free
Won’t you break free
Get up and dance in this love…

(Breakfree — Hillsong United 2007)

It is Sunday morning, and I am standing in the darkened performance hall of the local high school. It is early on the classic Australian sleep-in day, but I am not alone. Standing in front of rows of hard plastic chairs, people all around me are bouncing, quivering, shouting, singing, raising their hands and swaying, most with their eyes closed and faces raised upwards. The expressions of those around me are astonishing. They display intense passion and even ecstasy, often with tears or laughter. On a pushed together block stage in front of us, a group of musicians and singers pound out a loud, heavy musical sound that builds and disperses in waves of volume and rhythm. The white screen, stark in this dim environment, displays the words of the current song, but most do not seem to need them. They sing from memory, or do not sing at all, allowing the sound to wash over them as they stand with arms outstretched to heaven. This is worship time at Breakfree Church, a Pentecostal congregation in the suburbs of Perth, Western Australia.

In this chapter, I make use of the ethnographic methods described in the introduction, combining participant observation with interviews, to investigate the function and
significance of music in the Breakfree service. I begin by describing from my field notes the processes and techniques via which the music team “set an atmosphere,” catalysing a divine-human “encounter.” In the following section, I continue my description of a typical Sunday morning service at Breakfree church.

**Breaking free: Music as a passage from profane to sacred space**

The church meets in the performance hall of a local high school. The service proper will begin at 9:30 am, but a committed core of congregants arrive before 8 am to set up the hall. Many of them are the singers and musicians who will be playing later that morning. In the main hall, the stage must be pushed together, and instruments such as drum kits need to be assembled. Chairs must carefully be set out in hard plastic rows of blue. Sound and lighting are crucial in the service, and the church provides all their own equipment.

Upon arriving on my first day at the church at 8am, my offer to help was conveyed to a harried looking man, who turned to me apologetically from the leads he was unravelling and explained “Everyone has their jobs.” Nevertheless, the drummer and bassist gratefully accepted my help in setting up the Perspex cage surrounding the drums. Outside the hall there is a foyer, which was set up with a large flat screen TV and notebook computers, displaying ‘Breakfree news.’ There are chairs and tables for people to sit at afterward and eat. This foyer is an important transition section between the world outside and the church service, a ritual journey into the “presence of God,” and separation from time and space outside (Eliade, 1959, 25).

More people join the core set up group around 9 am for the penultimate ritual: the prayer meeting. The musicians who have been squeezing in a last minute practice all stop and move down from the stage, except for the keyboardist, who remains. Often,
she or he is joined by an acoustic guitarist. These instruments will play throughout the prayer meeting, the keys maintaining a steady digitised “pad” sound (50% strings, 50% piano). The prayer “leader,” standing near the stage with a microphone, calls the church to prayer, often by “speaking in tongues,” the most Pentecostal of phenomena, which sounds like an unintelligible language. As the leader does this, the guitarist strums full, bright chords, increasing in tempo as the intensity in the room lifts.

Although there is one leader, those present spread out across the hall praying simultaneously, some in tongues, many exhibiting other ecstatic behaviour such as bouncing, pacing, shaking, swaying, arms raised, faces raised. Various people will take the microphone during the course of the prayer meeting, delivering inspired “prophecies” or “words” believed to be messages from God. The messages are often an encouragement for people to be open to the experience of God, to “abandon themselves.” The guitar tempo rises, building to a climax, and then breaks, washing over the congregants. The prayers are extemporaneous and the content is spontaneous, often consisting of calls for God to come and be experienced, or to grow the church.

There is a brief interlude after the prayer meeting, and then the church service proper begins. A typical Breakfree Church service commences with at least one loud, fast song: drums pound a 4/4 rhythm and a distorted guitar reverbs a rock riff through every pulsating body in the hall. Often in the months that I attended this first song was “Break Free,” quoted at the beginning of this chapter, by Hillsong United. The purpose of beginning with a fast and loud song like this is to “set the atmosphere” — a phrase which the music team at Breakfree use extensively — to alert congregants
and visitors that the service is beginning. Pastor Charles,∗ Breakfree’s senior minister, suggests that “fast songs wake people up physically so they can come into a spiritual encounter” (Charles, interview, 1 June 2007). Music is clearly one of the mechanisms used to signal to participants and potential participants that the action is underway, and that there is something inviting and essentially different going on in the hall.

The setting is calibrated in various other subtle ways to help facilitate self-forgetfulness and detachment. The stage is very well lit, but the floor where the congregation sits (or stands for the most part in front of hard plastic chairs) is darkened. The dim light together with the all permeating sound of the music gives the impression of anonymity — it is as if one can speak without being overheard. Focusing attention on the stage means that unusual bodily movements (such as dancing or swaying) among the congregation are also not as noticeable. Further, on the stage standing in front of the musicians are at least four attractive, well presented singers. The importance of these singers cannot be overstated. Pastor Charles explains their role in the following excerpt.

The music team are an example, they model worship for the congregation. It doesn’t mean that they give faith to the congregation, but through seeing them worship the congregation may be impacted. When I see people passionately worshipping God it has an impact on my heart and life (Charles, interview, 1 June 2007).

The singers lead the congregation, facing them. They sing enthusiastically, often smiling, vigorously gesturing, and dancing on the stage during some of the songs. And the congregation respond in kind, lifting their arms, closing their eyes and dancing. The singers model the correct way to experience the presence of God, and the congregation respond appropriately.

∗ All names are pseudonyms
What sets Breakfree Church — and Pentecostal churches like it — apart here is the deliberate manner in which music is used to try and draw people away from the outside world to a space where God is to be experienced. Once it is clear that the church service is set up to facilitate this separation between time and space inside and outside, many other factors become understandable. Pastor Charles’ remarks make sense if understood in this way.

Unchurched people come into the church and often say to me “There’s something here.” God’s presence has come down. We have prepared an atmosphere where God can move. Music is one of the best ways to create atmosphere — it is a God given way … Worship is not just a physical experience, but an emotional and spiritual one. Physical acts, like clapping or singing, open up your soul. Only when your soul is opened up to the spiritual can you experience encounter with God. The worship team is to encourage people to open up so they can “enter in” to the experience (Charles, interview, 1 June 2007).

Once the fast song or songs have served the purpose of helping people to wake up, acknowledge that they are in a sacred space and open up to the experience of God, the music changes. Where fast opening songs tend to maintain a fairly constant volume and rhythm throughout, the following two or three songs will be played with a number of variations. These may seem impromptu, but they are actually carefully set in place in order to achieve the desired effect. The following excerpt from my field notes describes this process.

[In] the fourth song,…The sound developed into quite a heavy song with pounding bass, insistent rhythm on drums including rolls and droning electric guitar. It appears to me that the song is engineered to lead to a feeling of being carried by music to another place, expertly built and then dropped to “lift” people and then leave them to soar in “free worship” (Unpublished field notes, 23 May 2007).

These songs will build and break in waves. Participants symbolise their inner experience with gestures that indicate they are soaring, arms spread eagled, necks craned and faces lifted upward. This experience is the centre of the Breakfree service.
The “Encounter”

Often as the ultimate song is winding down for the last time, the senior pastor will take a microphone. He is concerned that everyone in the building experiences the “encounter.” It becomes more and more clear why this experience is so important. Firstly, for this Christian congregation, the encounter is the way in which they experience the presence of God. If an encounter that can actually be felt or experienced does not occur at Breakfree, then the service and the music have not served their purpose. This explains the urgency of the pastor to make sure that, even after the songs have finished, his congregation really do “break free.”

Secondly, the participant is encouraged to check his or her life at the door not just to create mental and emotional space for an experience, but because the “encounter” is actually the solution God offers for hard times. Physical healing, emotional wellbeing and the somewhat nebulous term “revelation” are all connected to the experience of God. The following example illustrates this.

Following the final song … [the pastor] prays for “breakthrough” in healing. In response, people put their hands up to be prayed for, and people in the congregation gather around those who raise their hands, and pray for them. He prays: “We don’t put our faith or confidence in doctors, although we thank God for doctors, but we put our confidence first and foremost in you God.” (Unpublished field notes, 5 August 2007)

Pastor Charles’ prayer suggests that what is required of those who need healing is a “break free” from what is rational, and what is known. In the sacred space of the service, the divine is capable of transcending natural laws and possibilities.

Following the worship songs, the congregation is free to relax in the aftermath of the ecstatic experience by watching the light-hearted news bulletin, a multimedia presentation listing the upcoming events within the church community. Even the news bulletin is set to music. On one occasion, a finance report was presented during
this part of the service — and even this had a musical backing. The only space in the service without musical accompaniment is the sermon.

Congregants sit for the sermon, and while they are not as animated as before they are encouraged to participate and exclaim in agreement and affirmation for the speaker. Sermons at Breakfree tend to be thematic, drawing in many scriptural references to illustrate a series of topics. Toward the end of the sermon, the speaker will invite the musicians to “help” him or her. This usually meant that the keyboardist returned to the stage, sometimes accompanied by the acoustic guitarist, to assist the speaker to elicit a response from the congregation. Those responding are required to come to the front, where the speaker will pray personally for them. It seems that once again, music is a necessary component in helping individuals “break free,” to help animate them from their passive listening state to get up and respond. Also, the volume of the music allows those responding to speak about their personal lives without being overheard.

After the service, congregants will mingle in the foyer until departure. So ends a Sunday morning service at Breakfree Church. In the two chapters that follow I will focus on certain components of Breakfree’s practice in greater detail, using theory drawn from theology and religious studies and socio-cultural studies to illuminate the data.
Chapter 3: Toward a Theological-Religious reading of Breakfree Church

The previous chapter contained an outline of a service at Breakfree church from a participant’s point of view. This chapter provides an overview of the work of five theorists from the disciplines of theology, religious studies and philosophy. As the outlines of the theories of each are traced, I will have cause to draw in detail on a section of the ethnographic data gathered during field work at Breakfree church. This data consists of reflective descriptions from my participant observation and excerpts from interviews with music team members. In many cases it includes data from both sources. Using the phenomenological method, the theory will then function to illuminate the field data.

The chapter to follow will build upon this foundation inasmuch as it employs a similar process with a very different set of theorists from the socio-cultural disciplines. In this way I will be exploring and illuminating the field data from various perspectives, a strategy which will provide some unique insights into the experiences and practices of the Breakfree music team members and the service itself. In this thesis, realms are spaces which have a vertical and horizontal dimension. The vertical dimension refers to the interaction between people within the realm and an entity generally referred to as the “divine.” Conversely, the horizontal dimension of the realm describes the human to human interactions within these spaces. Beginning with theology and religious studies affords vertical insight into the nature of the Breakfree realm as well as applying insights from the history of
interpretation of and reflection on the experience of the sacred in contact with humanity.

In 1799, a German pastor and theologian published his classic work *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*. For many, this book marks the beginnings of Christian theology’s engagement with modernity. The man was Friedrich Schleiermacher and it is his ideas about religious experience, music and “intuitions of the universe” that will prove instrumental in the analysis of what happens at Breakfree church.

**Friedrich Schleiermacher: Music and Religious Experience**

Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768-1834) was a German theologian, minister, philosopher and classicist who lived and worked in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. He was, arguably, the most influential theologian of the modern period and is often referred to as the “Father of Modern Theology” (Gerrish, 1984, 11).

It is beyond doubt that Schleiermacher’s contribution to theology is immense. Most important in relation to this analysis, however, is his emphasis on religious experience. The significance of Schleiermacher’s innovation is difficult to grasp today, because it is common now to think of experience as being central to religion. As Sharf (1998) points out, the exalted status of experience in contemporary society as a whole, but in religion especially, is a relatively new phenomenon. For Friedrich Schleiermacher, experience was not only significant; it was the very beginning and purpose of religion. In *On Religion*, Schleiermacher assembled a theology centred on
religious experience. This was an exercise in apologetics for, according to Schleiermacher, religion was an experience common to humankind. Moreover, if his intelligent but sceptical readers could merely perceive the truth that many of their most valued experiences were in fact experiences of religion, their cynicism would wither on the vine.

Prior to Schleiermacher, the basis for authority in religion was to be found in canonical texts, such as the Bible, and the historical testimony of the interpreting community, known as tradition (Sharf, 1998, 98–103). By the time of the Enlightenment, a third source of authority, reason, was beginning to hold an increasingly important place in eighteenth century Western European society. The church had a long tradition of theologians and scholars who, like Schleiermacher, employed reason in the service of tradition and scripture. Other brilliant thinkers, however, would utilise reason and rationality to attack the whole idea of religion. Schleiermacher boldly attempted to establish that experience was the heritage of religion. It is not ethics that religion gives us, but a curious phenomenon known to Schleiermacher as “intuition of the universe” (1996, 24). This phrase, which only appears in the early edition of On Religion (1799), is enigmatic, attempting to convey the human response to a transcendent experience.

This response, claims Schleiermacher, is a double movement of intuition and interpretation. His own words are worth quoting at length here.

That first mysterious moment that occurs in every sensory perception, before intuition and feeling have separated, where sense and its objects have, as it were, flowed into one another and become one, before both turn back to their original position — I know how indescribable it is and how quickly it passes away. But I wish that you were able to hold on to it and also to recognize it again in the higher and divine religious activity of the mind. Would that I could and might express it, at least indicate it, without having to desecrate it! It is as fleeting and transparent as the first
scent with which the dew gently caresses the waking flowers, as modest and delicate as a maiden’s kiss, as holy and fruitful as a nuptial embrace; indeed not like these, but it is itself all of these. A manifestation, an event develops quickly and magically into an image of the universe (1996, 31–32).

For Schleiermacher, such experiences have the power to lift a human being out of the horizontal plane of existence into a space where he or she can see the whole cosmos from a religious point of view (significantly, Schleiermacher does not use the term “God” in this deliberately apologetic work). There is a fundamental re-ordering in this experience, and this is the beginning of a person’s religious consciousness and indeed of religion itself. In “intuition of the universe,” the phenomenon is experienced and interpreted in a simultaneous double movement, wherein the mystery of the order of all there is, for an instant, fits perfectly together. It is little wonder, then, that Schleiermacher laments the fleeting transience of this phenomenon, that bringing it to the surface and trying to express it in something as vulgar as language is to “desecrate” it.

Schleiermacher had nothing but contempt for those who claimed to be religious but had no experiences of religion (1996, 8-9). He poured derision upon those who saw in religion only morality, rules for righteous living (1996, 19-20). Morality certainly had a place in religion for the German pastor; but it only made sense in the context of religious experience. Only after intuiting the universe, seeing for a transcendent moment how every human being fits in the eternal order of the cosmos, and in understanding that all people are capable of having similar experiences — only after this revelation does morality have an appropriate context. An individual treats his or her fellow human beings differently, with honour and charity, in light of such experience (1996, 32-33). Without it, religion as morality is largely empty, the letter that kills without the Spirit that gives life.
Schleiermacher also held that music was extraordinarily significant in religion and religious experience. Schleiermacher’s one work of fiction, Christmas Eve, was inspired by his attendance at a flute recital (Stolzfus, 2006, 54). In that work, Schleiermacher articulated his own approach to piety and worship through a story about Yuletide. One of the characters in this story, Eduard, states that “Christianity and music must adhere closely together, because they elevate and give radiance to each other” (1990, 47). The last character to be introduced in Christmas Eve (and possibly the one most like Schleiermacher) is Josef, who chides the men for engaging in serious theological dialogue when they should be celebrating the Christmas miracle, saying “Now just think what lovely music they [the women] could have sung for you, in which all the piety of your discourse could have dwelt far more profoundly” (1990, 85).

I can state the significance of music no more plainly than Schleiermacher himself.

[The Herrnhüter] have worked song into a position of independence, and it serves not only as a setting for the spoken discourse, but is alone the object of whole assemblies. Their Singing Hours in which verses from various songs are arranged into a whole … make a tremendous religious effect, and such a service is worth more than many beautiful sermons (Schleiermacher, 1804, 110).

This indicates clearly that Schleiermacher was involved with congregations which used and valued music as a medium for religious experience in a way not dissimilar to modern Australian Pentecostalism as exemplified at Breakfree church. It would be going too far to state that Schleiermacher would have appreciated the rock and pop influenced music at Breakfree — such a claim would be anachronistic. What can be surmised, however, is that the theologian who spent his career attempting to bring genuine reform to the Church’s dated creedal formulae (Gerrish, 1984, 39) would

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have lauded any attempt to make church practice move with the times, even if the music may not have been quite to his tastes.

**Schleiermacher, Music, Experience and Breakfree**

There is perhaps no other theologian who fits better with Breakfree’s understanding and articulation of their own religious practices than Schleiermacher. Breakfree church places a very similar emphasis on experience, particularly that which they term “the encounter,” which is understood as the experience whereby the presence of God enters the service. For the Breakfree congregation, this experience is not simply about feeling good, but is the basis for a re-ordered reality within the Breakfree realm. Like Schleiermacher, the Breakfree congregation believe this experience to be both the beginning of the Christian journey and a necessary ongoing component of a healthy Christian life. Breakfree’s understanding of the musically catalysed “encounter” will be explored in greater detail below. Especial attention will be afforded to a description of the manner in which the music team members interpret the experience that echo Schleiermacher’s concepts.

The phrases “encounter,” “breaking through,” “breaking free,” “going to the next level,” and “having new revelation” are all used by Breakfree music team members to try and articulate, describe and signify the experience which is central to the Breakfree service. The fact that this experience is understood as the beginning of Christian faith is demonstrated in Alex’s description of his own conversion.

Someone invited me to church and that’s when God touched me. How I came to know Christ was my brother died in a helicopter crash, and I was literally broken, and a friend of mine invited me to church and in that service I just felt that thing go away and peace just come into my heart and I knew, or I know now, that’s God definitely doing something in my life (Alex, interview, 4 July 2007).
It is interesting to note here that Alex implied that while he may not have been aware of the significance of the experience at the time, he later understood it to be attributable to God. He made a similar point when talking about people experiencing the “encounter” for the first time in the Breakfree service.

Many new Christians, many non-Christians, may experience the presence of God and not know that it’s the presence of God, until they’re told that “That’s the presence of God” (Alex, interview, 4 July 2007).

This pattern of experience followed by interpretation reflects Schleiermacher’s approach. While it may sound self-evident, it is in fact indicative of what Jacqueline Mariña calls Schleiermacher’s “Copernican revolution in theology” (2008, 461). Prior to On Religion, it was thought that religious feelings were a response to proclamation, such as a feeling of gratitude acknowledging the doctrine of salvation. Schleiermacher turned this idea upside down, insisting that experience precedes doctrine (Mariña, 2008, 461). I have suggested elsewhere that in reality this may not be so simple. Breakfree engage in an uneasy collaboration between spiritual experience and traditional Christian proclamation (Jennings, 2008, 171).

The apologetic task Alex describes of interpreting transcendent experience as, specifically, religious experience is similar to Schleiermacher’s engagement with his “cultured despisers,” in interpreting some experiences as religious. The fact that the Breakfree “encounter” takes place in a religious setting makes the connection between the “encounter” and the “presence of God” more logical and easy to trace. It would seem that for both Schleiermacher and Breakfree this interpretation is a necessary step because without it those who do not understand the religious nature of such experiences would miss their significance.
Encounters are not merely a once-off experience in Breakfree practice. They serve the important function of bringing people into faith. The heart of Breakfree spirituality is the constantly renewed encounter experience. The importance of the experience cannot be overstated. As I noted in the case study, Pastor Charles often keeps the music going for several minutes after the songs have finished, hoping to allow everyone present to participate in an encounter experience. The centre of the Breakfree service is the encounter, which is catalysed by music. Pastor Charles expressed it succinctly in the following excerpt.

The tangible presence of God, peace feeling, whatever you want to describe it as, where you sense there’s something different in the atmosphere here, is the number one thing. We go hard after that with our prayer before the service, we go hard after that with our worship (Charles, interview, 10 October 2007).

Encounters are central to the service, but the service is not the only site for the encounter experience. Encounters are understood to extend and deepen an individual’s faith. There are several corollary affects of this. Firstly, those who are experienced in having encounters can start to replicate the experience alone, outside the boundaries of the Breakfree realm. Breakfree music director Alex, an experienced musician and Christian, makes this point.

In my own house, I’ll just pick up the guitar and start playing and start worshipping God, it doesn’t need to be a set song written by somebody else, it just flows from my own heart to him (Alex, interview, 4 July 2007).

The significance of music in facilitating this individual experience is noteworthy, and I will return to discuss this point later. What is most significant here is that, in effect, such individuals are able to recreate the realm of the service in their own contexts, making use of their own musical ability or using recorded worship music.
Secondly, encounters that take place either within the Breakfree service or in smaller individualised realms can have a powerful countering effect on negative emotion and even illness. Perhaps the clearest way to understand this is to perceive the interplay between the Breakfree realm, which is characterised by encounter with the supernatural presence of the divine, and the profane “real” world outside this realm. The realm contains a different experience of reality. Outside the realm, sickness may be incurable, or there may be no relief for low feeling or depression. This different reality within the Breakfree realm is illustrated in the following excerpt from an interview with Adam, a young Breakfree musician.

If I’m having a bad week, and if you put on worship music it changes your whole mindset and mentality. It helps you see that God is so great and in the big picture you’re just this small person, but God still cares about you (Adam, interview, 4 July 2007).

Adam’s reflections are a clear echo of Schleiermacher’s articulation both of the need for repeated religious experiences and the function of such experiences. The experience lifts individuals and the group to a transcendent point, a God’s eye view, where what seems impossible becomes real. For Schleiermacher, as for Breakfree, these experiences produce and strengthen this religious understanding of the world. In this view, the religious person is the one who has many encounters, both in corporate and private settings.

As I have noted, music had a very special place in religious experience for the German pastor. The significance of music in the Breakfree service is demonstrated best in the following excerpt from my field notes.

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of music in the service. It was the background to everything, from DVD presentations with soundtracks, to the songs which had words projected on the screen for the congregation to sing along to, to the free worship, and during “testimonies” when members of the congregation got up and told personal stories. Music was the backdrop for the spontaneous utterances, such as prophecies and “words,” messages in tongues and prayers. Only
during the preaching did the music stop, but when the sermon was coming to an end, the musicians were invited back on stage as the preacher reached the part of the sermon which called for a response from the congregation. Music drenches everything this group do, there is very little silence or respite from music (Unpublished field notes, 20 May 2007).

For Schleiermacher, music is a phenomenon that lends itself more readily to transcendent experience than the logic of discussion or sermonising. This is significant because that which is important for Schleiermacher is not theological propositions but actual first-hand experience of religion. Music catalyses this experience more readily than discourse. It is, in fact, music that constitutes the appropriate setting for pietistic statements and discussions. Music, while beautiful in and of itself, is for Schleiermacher a point of contact with the divine, a way of experiencing his intuitions of the universe.

Similarly for Breakfree church, music is the ultimate “tool” for catalysing divine encounters. I asked a number of music team members about the significance of music in the Breakfree service. Music leader Alex commented on music’s universal appeal as important in providing a portal into the divine presence.

Music is important, it’s something that people relate to, and there’s something about music and the presence of God, there’s just something about it, and when we sing to him, that’s when God comes, and I can imagine in heaven when the angels are singing “Holy, holy, holy, God Almighty”… music is something I feel that is a reflection of heaven. Worship is taking place 24/7 in heaven, and we’re just taking a snippet of that on Sunday (Alex, interview, 4 July 2007).

Jerome, a multi-instrumentalist, suggests music functions to focus the attention of the congregation and makes an encounter possible.

I love music, music does help, I always go back to music, and it just sets the tone, and like I said the focus, so when you get the focus you’re able to come to God better, you get over all the distractions (Jerome, interview, 28 July 2007).
For Schleiermacher and Breakfree church, music points beyond itself to the beauty and wonder of the divine. In this way, then, music is the catalyst *par excellence* for religious experience. I will explore this idea more carefully in the section on hierophany in the thought of Mircea Eliade. It is enough to say here, however, that Breakfree and Schleiermacher appear to share a *sacramental* view of music, as an object which mediates the divine presence.

Schleiermacher’s theology centred on religious experience, and the importance he attached to music as a catalyst of this experience fits well with Breakfree’s practice. His work is, however, not the last word. Schleiermacher’s conception of religious experience and the enigmatic “intuition of the universe” are difficult to imagine or see clearly today without the work of Rudolf Otto, a theologian who developed the concept of religious experience further in Schleiermacher’s wake. The two German thinkers’ legacy is a brilliantly conceptualised articulation of the significance of religious experience. However, Rudolf Otto diverges from Schleiermacher at several key junctures, and it is precisely those divergences from Schleiermacher’s ideas that offer significant insight into what has become ritualised practice at Breakfree Church.

**Rudolf Otto: The Non-rational elements of the “Numinous”**

German Lutheran theologian and scholar Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) is in many ways the foil to Schleiermacher. The link between the two German thinkers is so strong that academic works at times treat them together, comparing and contrasting the thought of each against the other (Dole 2004; Mariña 2008). Otto’s seminal work *The Idea of the Holy* engaged in a deep exploration of what he nominated the “non-
rational” elements of religion. He also coined a new phrase for the sacred, the “numinous,” which is still popular today in the field of religious studies (Otto, 1970, 6-7). The term does not just describe the holy attributes of the divine, but its profound “otherness.” It is precisely this focus upon “otherness” that lies at the heart of Otto’s theological analysis.

The heart of Otto’s thought is the radical distinction between the sacred and profane. For Otto, the experience of the divine as “wholly other” lies at the centre of this distinction (1970, 28). Firstly there is the experience of that which is basically “non-rational,” or of that which transcends human reason. For Otto this transcendence will not one day be grasped and understood as our base of knowledge increases. This is fundamentally the wrong way to understand what is going on in the experience. In the encounter with the non-rational in the numinous, humanity is engaged by something that is totally different, of an entirely alien reality. Otto stated that in fact the numinous does not actually exist in a sense, because it is not part of profane reality (1970, 29). This is not to say it is not real, but rather that it is of a different order of real.

Thus, for Otto, between the sacred and the profane, the numinous and the creature, is an insurmountable chasm. He held that there is essentially no commonality between the non-rational elements of the numinous and the created world. Indeed, in Otto’s opinion, the existence of personal deities, spirits and demons with personalities, are nothing more than anthropomorphic attempts to rationalise the experience of the non-rational. Otto does not see any problem with this. Rather, religion must have many rational categories and concepts for understanding the numinous. Otto regarded Christianity as a superior religion for this reason: it has more concepts than
any other religion (1970, 1). Yet, he critiqued any religion, Christianity included, which attempts to bring into the rational sphere all that there is in the numinous. This, according to Otto, is essentially a flawed approach (1970, 3).

At first glance, it might appear that Rudolf Otto’s thought is continuous with Friedrich Schleiermacher’s view that religious experience is the genesis of religion. Notwithstanding the debt he owes to Schleiermacher, Otto critiques his thought sharply. The problem, identified by Otto, is that Schleiermacher’s theology is at the same time too immanent and too rational. Schleiermacher’s description of the feeling of absolute dependence is for Otto too rational a description of what is occurring in the divine-human encounter. It unnecessarily introduces the self into the encounter. For Otto, what is actually going on in such an experience is precisely a conscious awareness of the presence of the divine and the non-existence of the self (1970, 10).

To unpack this statement further, it is necessary to return to Otto’s radical distinction between the numinous and the created order. Otto freely admitted to the influence of Plato in *The Idea of the Holy* (1970, 95), therefore to conceive the distinction that he makes in overtly Platonic terms may be helpful. The divine exists in a transcendent realm, untouchable by the created order and essentially different from it. The divine created that which is, but is entirely and eternally separate from it. This is not to say that the numinous does not make contact with creation, but in this contact what becomes apparent is this extreme otherness. In other words, in the divine-human encounter it is the reality of the numinous which becomes definitive of what is real. In the encounter, a human being is taken to another level of reality, such that it could be said for that person that creation does not exist, because it is of another order to the numinous. It is a fundamental re-orienting of perspective. The human self, as
A creature, is at best merely aware of its status as a creature, as a part of creation. Thus, for Otto, the numinous is an a priori reality, something that can be revealed and experienced by the human senses but exists whether we are aware of it or not (1970, 112).

Here, Otto offered a strong critique of Schleiermacher’s concept of the “intuition of the universe.” Schleiermacher’s mistake, according to Otto, consisted of the injection of the rational into what is essentially a non-rational experience (1970, 20). Otto’s contention, on the other hand, was that the encounter with the numinous cannot be expressed or conceptualised. At best, it can be talked about in metaphors and analogies. By introducing the element of the non-rational, Otto was strongly advocating against the position that the numinous must operate according to the rules of reason. The biblical testimony to God, the ancient texts of Hinduism, the totemic religions of Aboriginal peoples and Native Americans — all testify to the fact that the divine does not operate entirely according to human reason. There are blasts of capricious fury, and bursts of euphoric, almost erotic, pleasure; there are accounts of healing and hope, and of disaster and chaos (1970, 14-15, 58-59).

While it is arguable that Otto has misunderstood Schleiermacher in this regard (Mariña, 2008, 469), it is evident that Schleiermacher is more romantic in his approach to religious experience, whereas Otto’s “numinous” is wild and untamed. Otto approached the edge of what it is to be human. The experience of the holy is indescribable — there are no words or categories for it (1970, 5). It is not something that can be taught or passed on, but rather it encounters us from outside ourselves and grips us. It may be “induced, incited and aroused” but it cannot be controlled (1970, 60). The experience of encountering the numinous is as likely to be terrifying
or weird as it is pleasurable, and Otto critiqued the Western religions for not developing a mysticism of the “weird” (1970, 105-106).

Otto’s classic work has been lauded and critiqued since it first appeared, and his categories are the source of much provocative debate. It has been pointed out that by insisting that the numinous has its source in an *a priori* divine entity, Otto ended up talking about something that cannot be talked about. His emphasis on the “wholly other” nature of the numinous means that the very subject of discussion — the numinous — transcends category and language, placing it beyond discussion, contemplation and comprehension. Consequently, it begs the question of how religious faith necessarily develops from numinous experience.

In the section that follows, an examination of the phenomenon of *glossolalia* and the importance it has for the religious practices occurring in Breakfree’s services will be conducted in the light of what has been learned from Rudolph Otto’s conception of the “wholly other” nature of the experience of the numinous.

**Otto, the Numinous and Breakfree**

Speaking in tongues, or *glossolalia*, an important feature of embryonic Pentecostalism, is not a major component of the Breakfree service. The public practice of speaking in tongues is encouraged in settings such as the music practice or the prayer meeting: contexts in which it is expected that only practicing Christians will participate. However, it is significant that speaking in tongues does not constitute a major part of the Breakfree public service; yet, it is considered a significant component of the church’s self identity as a Pentecostal congregation.
This section investigates the phenomenon through the lens of Otto’s “numinous experience.”

Typically, speaking in tongues happens in three primary contexts within the life of Breakfree church. The first two are common while the last is very uncommon and, in fact, did not occur during my time at the church.

The first setting in which public speaking in tongues is practised at Breakfree are communal settings such as the prayer meeting prior to the service, the music practice, or in the middle of songs. Such occurrences of the phenomenon are relatively discreet and private insofar as everyone is speaking at once or is accompanied by loud music. Secondly, the members of Breakfree church are encouraged to speak in tongues as a private spiritual discipline. For obvious reasons, this second occurrence of the phenomenon is more difficult to observe as individuals engage in the practice while alone or quietly in some public settings.

The third context of tongues speaking is becoming increasingly rare and, as indicated above, did not take place at all while I was in attendance at Breakfree. From its very inception, the Pentecostal tradition has encouraged congregants to deliver a message in tongues – a person stands in the middle of a service and, with attention focused on them, delivers a stream of glossolalia. It is considered sound practice to wait for someone in the congregation to provide an “interpretation” in the vernacular language for the edification of those present.

The Breakfree prayer meeting often begins with a leader speaking in tongues into the microphone. The phenomenon quite simply sounds like a stream of gibberish, like a
series of flowing noises that have no discernible structure or meaning. Syllables run into each other, strange noises are repeated. While no-one in the prayer meeting seems to notice the profoundly strange nature of the phenomenon, there is no question that it is certainly one of the weirder expressions of contemporary religion. The individual or group in the ecstatic state manifest an inward experience, which is so profound as to be beyond ability to express, and results in the issuing of the strange sounds of **glossolalia**.

As I have demonstrated above, Otto discusses at length the non-rational nature of the holy, arguing that it transcends language and reason. For Otto, the holy is ultimately an experience of something so profoundly other that it cannot be adequately expressed in concepts or language. Indeed, Otto is at pains to mention that many religions contain a spirituality of horror, and a fascination with the weird and terrible, something which generally seems to be lacking in Western Christianity. Pentecostals such as the Breakfree congregants believe that in a mysterious way that defies description or conceptualisation, the practice of speaking in tongues links them to that which is inexpressible holy - viz, the Holy Spirit, who is the member of the Godhead at once most immanent and enigmatic.

The following excerpts all involve **glossolalia**, linked with other worship practices, and were observed during the course of my time with Breakfree church. The first took place at a mid-week music practice led by one of the young singers, Joanne.

The slower song was called “Lead me to the Cross,” it had a powerful slow sound with builds and breaks like waves. Free worship in the middle with Joanne leading in a powerful voice. Some of the singers sing improvised lyrics during free worship, or sing in tongues. Then she returned to praying, asking God to come, to remain. Then the musos were playing alone together, with no singers, in remarkable unity (Unpublished field notes, 6 June 2007).
This excerpt contains a very Ottonian mix of the various rational and non-rational elements that have been outlined previously. The lyrics of the song and Joanne’s prayers in ordinary English are examples of the former. The music itself, the free worship and, of course, the speaking in tongues are manifestations of the latter, the non-rational or that which is too vast for expression. No one expresses doubt that the experience is connected to God but everyone present was content for it to remain uninterpreted, as a profound experience of the wildness of the other.

While the congregation may be used to the strange sounds of glossolalia and not feel threatened by them, there is little doubt that a newcomer would find the strange sounds weird and disconcerting. Another excerpt, again from a mid-week music practice, provides yet another example of the mix of rational and non-rational elements.

The “free worship” together with an extended session of “speaking in tongues” and a prophecy which was explained as a “picture” to the group, form an important part of distinctive Pentecostal cultic practice (Unpublished field notes, 16 May 2007).

It is fascinating to consider whether Schleiermacher or Otto better captures the distinctiveness of Breakfree’s practice here. Do essentially non-rational experiences feed into discursive practice that “makes sense;” or, do rational and non-rational elements co-exist in such a way that the tensions and paradoxes between them remain unresolved? In the case of glossolalia I suspect Otto’s paradigm is a better picture of Breakfree’s practice. The congregation make very few attempts to explain the practice; it is basically accepted as something wild and irregular, almost to the point where it becomes a mundane part of the service.

Words fail both Otto and the Breakfree music team members that I interviewed when it came to the subject of music itself. For Otto, music is a good example of the
relationship between the rational and the non-rational in the numinous. The music itself, if it could be imagined as “naked” i.e., without a song — would be utterly incomprehensible, wild and irrational. The song is that which schematizes the music, combining rational elements, rules and systems, to bring it to earth in some way. Yet there remains something deeply non-rational about music, that edge that is wild and transcends all human attempts to signify it. Thus, the analogy of music, with both rational and non-rational elements, is used as an illustration of the nature of the numinous. There are elements of music which can be grasped, that do make sense and fit into systems and life; but there are also some aspects which are mysterious and enigmatic phenomena that can only be experienced, they are mystical and defy conceptualization (Otto, 1970, 70–71).

Similarly, when observing the effect of music in the Breakfree service it is easy to ‘hear’ the echo of Schleiermacher and Otto. There can be no doubt that the music team members schematize the experience of the numinous, trying to engage in a set of practices which will result in the experience being replicated regularly. This practice is the heart of religion perceived by Schleiermacher insofar as it is the desire to elicit the experience of the divine which fundamentally re-orders peoples’ perception of everything. When the music team members talk about the experience of the divine presence, catalysed by the music performance, it is clear that they, too, perceive this ordering.

Yet observing the response of church members who are basking in the experience of music, I began to wonder how much of the music teams’ responses constitute attempts to rein in something that may be too enormous and transcendent. If Otto was correct to say that in the encounter of the numinous humanity comes into contact
with something that is not rational and will not do as it is told, then perhaps this is at times a frightening experience. Thus the Breakfree realm needs to be perceived as not merely a space where a transcendent religious experience is provoked (a la Schleiermacher), but also where it is contained. Through repetition, the music team and the pastor walk a line between catalysing this experience of the transcendent and controlling it.

It was noted above that while Otto strongly criticized Schleiermacher, he was also greatly indebted to him, more so than he ever realised. In contrast, Mircea Eliade readily acknowledged the debt he owed to Otto. Eliade’s conception of hierophanies and shamanism provide a third phenomenological paradigm for understanding the Breakfree service.

**Mircea Eliade: Hierophanies and Shamans**

Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) was a Romanian born polymath, who virtually invented the discipline he called “history of religions.” The discipline Eliade designed and popularised is a particularly phenomenological approach to religion. In short, Eliade pioneered the study of religious phenomenon manifested in the present experience of people, in light of the historical-cultural context of the experience.

Eliade’s life and career was somewhat enigmatic. He was associated, albeit only tangentially, with the “Iron Guard,” a militant right wing political group in Romania, and the stigma of this connection dogged him for the rest of his life, and may have been one of the reasons he fled to the United States. Less controversially, but more relevant to this inquiry, was the fact that he was also accused of being an essentialist – that is, someone who believes that religious phenomena had actual divine origins.
In other words, Eliade was accused within the academy of being a believer in the divine (Studstill, 2000, 177).

The accusation persists, at least in part, because of Eliade’s unrepentant and determined attempt to always regard religious phenomena as primarily *religious*. This sounds self-evident. However, many theorists have followed Emile Durkheim in regarding religion as essentially a social phenomenon, capable of being investigated using sociological or cultural methods. For Eliade, such an attempt is wrong-headed inasmuch as it refuses to acknowledge the basically religious nature of religious belief and phenomenon. He held to the view that to use any other methods or tools to examine religious phenomena may not be entirely without use, but it will, inevitably, miss the basic significance of what the phenomena actually is (Studstill, 2000, 180). Any attempt to understand that which is religious, according to Eliade, must employ genuinely religious methods.

In some ways, Eliade saw himself as the heir and logical descendent of Rudolf Otto’s thought. In one of his most accessible books, *The Sacred and Profane*, he outlines his own indebtedness to Otto, particularly *The Idea of the Holy*. Eliade was at pains to preserve Otto’s deep ontological distinction between the divine and humanity, the sacred and the profane (1959, 8-9). He is, however, less interested in the non-rational aspects of the numinous than with the manner in which the numinous is experienced by people (1959, 10). Eliade was particularly fascinated by the apparent paradox whereby the infinite is revealed in the finite, and the holy is manifested within the profane.
The intersection of the profane world and the sacred realm of the divine takes place by means of “hierophanies,” a term coined by Eliade to replace the more overtly Christian category “theophany.” For Eliade, anything from the profane world can become a hierophany to the extent that it becomes the means by which the presence of the divine is revealed, contacted and even touched by those in the world (Eliade 1959, 11-12; 1987; Eliade and Sullivan, 1987, 3970). Objects such as mandalas and rocks, intangible phenomena such as ceremonies and rituals, and even people like shamans or priests can all be conduits through which the divine can be accessed. To the extent that these objects, people and events convey the divine, Eliade argued that they function as hierophanies. According to Eliade, Jesus of Nazareth is a hierophany (1959, 11), inasmuch as he is the divine entity revealed in a profane human being.

The paradox of the sacred becoming manifest in the profane is not the end of the story. Eliade turned his considerable erudition to the phenomenon of shamans, suggesting that such individuals are those who “experience the sacred with greater intensity than the rest of the community…incarnate the sacred, or rather are lived by the religious ‘form’ that has chosen them” (Eliade, 2004, 32). The shaman specialises in trancing, an ecstatic state wherein the soul is believed to leave the body and enter the sacred realm (Eliade, 1987, 8269; Eliade, 2004, 4–5). Thus shamanic practice is closely linked to the experience of ecstasy, as is suggested by the title of Eliade’s book, *Shamanism: Archaic techniques of Ecstasy*.

Eliade traced the phenomenon of shamanism from its early history in ancient Siberia, and central and northern Asia. He noted that similar phenomena have been recorded in other parts of the world, including North and South America, Indonesia and Oceania (1987, 8269). It is important to be aware of this historical context, as the
term can be applied in a fairly haphazard manner to any individual capable of eliciting the ecstatic trance state. The shaman not only specialises in the ecstatic trance, but is believed to be in control of the spirits with whom he or she has contact; not possessed by them (2004, 5).

The shaman is recognised as such precisely because of traits that have often been thought of by modern Western theorists as mental disorders — absentmindedness, hallucinations and other manifestations that might be diagnosed as psychotic. Eliade rejects the simple identification of shamanism with psychopathology, noting however that often shamans are recognised because of an ability to heal themselves from mental illnesses and physical ailments (Eliade, 1987, 8269–8270). One of the key distinctions drawn between shamans and those suffering psychological or psychiatric disorders, according to Eliade, is the shaman’s control over the trance state. An epileptic, for example, cannot deliberately enter the trance state (2004, 24).

This ability to trance and have ecstatic mystical experiences is not merely innate, but is a learned set of techniques. Eliade notes that the séance, a religious ceremony whereby the shaman makes contact with spirits of the dead and travels into either heaven or the underworld, is one of the key techniques of the archaic shaman (1987, 8272). Likewise the drum, which becomes a hierophany, is central to the shaman’s ecstatic techniques: from the choosing of the tree from which the drum will be constructed, to the act of rhythmic drumming itself, which tracks the shaman’s ecstatic journey to the Centre of the World, the Cosmic tree from which it is believed the drum is constructed (Eliade, 2004, 168–169, 172–173).
Academic work on ecstasy has generally attempted to distinguish between ecstasy and the state of “possession,” where it is understood that the person is taken over by the divine or spirit world and will have no memory of the experience. Eliade’s work on shamanism has led to a third category – viz, “shamanic ecstasy.” Malinar and Basu (2008, 244-246) develop this distinction in their work on ecstasy. In contrast to the state of “possession,” the shaman retains control of him or herself during the trance and remembers the experience, but is transported away from the body into the sacred realm to receive special knowledge. In similar fashion to ecstasy as it has been traditionally described, shamanic ecstasy often overflows in positive feelings of joy, pleasure, love or peace, and is understood to have potential therapeutic benefits. Unlike the traditional concept of ecstasy, shamanic ecstasy can be catalysed by the use of music or drugs, or other devices that may function as hierophanies (Malinar and Basu, 2008, 245).

Clearly, the category of shaman is one that should be applied with caution, especially in the light of Eliade’s particular concern with historical and cultural context. The potential links to Pentecostal practice are, however, too tantalising to pass up. For example, Karin Horwatt (1988) links shamanic techniques to Pentecostal spirituality by drawing heavily upon the work of Mircea Eliade and Claude Lévi-Strauss and, thereby, develops a shamanic understanding of Pentecostal practice. She suggests that the Pentecostal preacher, or faith healer, acts as a shaman. Specifically, it is by bringing the “patient” (that is the individual who requires healing) and the congregation into an ecstatic state through rhythm that divine power to heal is released through the preacher. Horwatt proposes a reductionist interpretation of this phenomenon, suggesting it is the ecstatic state itself which facilitates this healing, mainly by eliminating stress (1988, 128, 136).
Horwatt’s analysis, whether it stands the weight of scrutiny or not, is a provocative attempt to link shamanic environments and techniques with contemporary Pentecostal practice. Breakfree’s musical techniques, and their use of the term “revelation,” will be examined in the next section through recourse to the paradigms of hierophany and shamanism developed by Eliade and described above.

Hierophanies, shamans and Breakfree church

In this section the focus will be on the music itself, drawing from my field notes on the phenomenological experience of rhythm in the service and its effect on the emotional state of participants. I will assess the status of music in the Breakfree service as a hierophany, a profane object which bears the presence of the sacred. Further, I will explore the way in which “revelation” is used at Breakfree to describe a special knowledge that comes to participants through contact with the divine presence, and investigate possible links to shamanic ecstasy as characterised by Eliade.

According to Eliade, music, as an intangible object, has the capacity to function as a hierophany. While music, unlike a rock for example, is something that cannot be seen or touched, it is something that can be sensed. That music is deliberately and intentionally utilised at Breakfree church to contain and convey the presence of the holy is indisputable. Three factors that are of interest here are i) the ways in which the music team and the pastor understand and employ the hierophanic attributes of music; ii) the ways in which the music team members function as neo-shamans, experiencing and catalysing the ecstatic encounter; and iii) the shamanic-ecstatic quality of this phenomenon.
Eliade was careful to note that the hierophany itself is not to be worshipped because it is only a site for the paradox of the intersection of the divine and human. The musicians at Breakfree make a similar distinction. Their favourite designation for music is that it is a “tool:” something useful for helping participants come into contact with the divine presence; but it is not divine itself. By extension, the music team and pastors may have “gifts” which enable them to encounter the divine presence more readily than other members of the congregation, but they themselves are not to become the objects of worship. The entity to be worshipped is the sacred, that which becomes available through the music and the music team members.

The most pressing question at this juncture is how, exactly, does a profane object such as music become endowed with efficacious power to mediate the divine in Breakfree’s practice? I did not get a clear answer from any of the people interviewed on this phenomenon. On the one hand, some respondents emphasised that the intent of the lyricist and the genre of the music was of supreme importance. One of the vocalists, Joanne, made this point about the unique nature of worship music as a bearer of “revelation.”

Worship songs bring revelation to your heart. You can feel good when Michael Jackson or someone is playing, it’s a good beat and its cool, but those words don’t speak to my life, they don’t empower me to do anything, they don’t make me want to be a better Christian or they don’t make me want to get closer to God but that’s what worship songs do (Joanne, interview, 5 September 2007).

However, in other instances Breakfree music team members emphasised the “heart attitude” of the person consuming the song: whether listening to it or singing it in church or in private. The attitude of the congregation was so important that Alex indicates in the following excerpt that it is the job of the music team to “impart faith” through the music to the congregation.
When we sing a song that is purely out of our own head, it probably does nothing for anyone. But when we combine that with our spirit … so we are combining our spirit with whatever song we’re singing and that pleases God, and that’s when faith arises within us, and it also creates an atmosphere of faith in that meeting, so that people out there in the congregation as they join in they will sense that presence and they will start receiving that atmosphere, they will be part of that atmosphere and they will start imparting their own faith (Alex, interview, 4 July 2007).

The specific technique used at Breakfree to connect music team members to the divine presence is prayer. Hence the ecstatic prayer meeting precedes the service and serves, according to Charles, to “prepare the people that are ministering, to connect with God, draw from him” (Charles, interview, 10 October 2007).

The exact point at which it can be said that music takes on the status of hierophany is difficult to determine, and seems to depend on a number of factors, such as the genre, the lyricist’s intention and the attitude of the listener or participant. If pushed, it seems that the last factor is the most critical to the Breakfree music team members. This means that a person’s attitude is of vital importance in facilitating the connection, through music, between the individual worshipper and the sacred. The music team is required to prepare to assist the congregational members to connect with the sacred: one of the ways they prepare themselves for this particular ministry is through prayer. At this point, it has become clear that the similarity of response from the Breakfree musicians and Eliade’s descriptions of shamanism demands further exploration. The fact that the music team function as self-conscious neo-shamans will be examined in greater detail below before attention is afforded to the Breakfree musicians’ reference to “revelation” as a phenomenon which bears similarities to Eliade’s shamanic ecstasy.

One of the pillars of Breakfree’s practice is the understanding that musicians are not simply playing music, but are actually those specifically gifted to catalyse the divine
presence in a service. The following long excerpt from Pastor Charles illustrates this process well. He describes the nature of worship, and the manner in which the music team participate in and bring about an ecstatic experience of the sacred.

Worship has flows to it. So a good worship team and song leader need to be spiritually aware to catch what’s going on, attentive to flow. Sometimes if the service is not breaking open, as in you sense something spiritually blocking, people aren’t connecting, I’m sitting there in the front row saying “Okay God, tell me, what is the key? Is it people need prayer, is it people need repent?”… So the worship team need to understand that there are ebbs and flows, they need to be really sensitive. It’s catching the flow. You can have brilliant musicians who do not understand the things of the spirit, and then you may have good musicians, not brilliant, who are very spiritually aware of the flow, of what needs to be played there. Because a lot of our worship is free worship, which means that there’s really no structure, there’s no music written out for it and there’s no conductor. It can’t be practiced … So the ones that are really spiritually in tune, they tend to lead brilliantly. What we tend to do with our younger musicians is teach them not so much the practicals but teach them to sense “Ok what needs to come in right now?” “Singers, what do you need to be singing right now?” We see the conductor as the Holy Spirit, you still have one conductor, you can all be singing and playing in the same song without even having any practice (Charles, interview, 10 October 2007).

Charles’ description of the way that the musicians interact with the “Holy Spirit,” the divine entity held in Pentecostalism to be most involved in experience, is much closer to shamanism than possession as they were defined above. He clearly expects that the musicians will retain control of themselves, even in the midst of the “flow” of worship. In describing his own thoughts as the leader of the meeting, he shows that there are a number of techniques that are important. If the trance does not happen as expected, he is gifted to be able to hear from God regarding whether it is prayer or repentance that is required. Likewise, the singers are gifted to know what they must do next. The musicians, too, must know when each should come in. As the conductor is the divine presence, only those gifted in this shamanic manner can facilitate the trance which will connect to the divine presence. Charles offered further insight into the role and experience of the musicians in the worship and ecstatic trance when he described a recent experience of worship music at a youth camp.
The musicians played till midnight plus, from seven, each night, as people just lost themselves in the presence of God. They were brilliant “in-tune” musicians, they practiced four songs but they played for five hours. The songs that they played were beautiful, they were prophetic, sensitive, they would build up then they would ebb and flow. Certain artists would play others would pull back, certain ones would sing, others would pull back, certain ones got new songs right there and then … It’s the atmosphere. Someone who’s on the pulse of the Holy Spirit, they’re building this and it’s increasing the atmosphere of God in the place, playing the song prophetically, it’s actually got nothing to do with “What’s a good fill in for this bit here?”… but what I’m actually talking about is the presence of God, the tangible presence of God, that feeling of peace, that’s increased. To the point where on Sunday night at this camp it felt like God was in the tent. I turned around to ask the singers and musicians to help me sing a song, and there was no one standing on stage, as in everybody was on the floor a mess, crying … apart from the keyboard player who was standing there lost in the worship himself, everybody else was on the floor either weeping or crying or out to the power of God. So it built and it built and it built and it built to the point where you couldn’t even stand in the presence of God (Charles, interview, 10 October 2007).

Charles vividly describes the experience of the trance, making the critical point that it is not just the congregation who experience the ecstasy, but the musicians themselves. As he points out once again, prodigious musical ability is not the most important factor. Rather, sensitivity to the divine will and the “flow” of the service is the most important ability. Musicians at Breakfree, like the shamans described by Eliade, are valued for their gifts in catalysing the ecstatic trance which connects themselves and others to the divine presence.

The hierophanic music leads the participants on a ritual journey into a spiritual dimension. It is not only the forms of this journey, such as the rhythm of the music, which are similar to shamanic practice. Once participants have entered the trance state, they experience indescribable bliss, peace, joy and even healing. As noted above, Horwatt links this experience of shamanic ecstasy in Pentecostal spirituality to healing from stress related illness and ailments. At Breakfree church, the ecstatic trance in which participants are lifted up to soar in the presence of the sacred is also
the site for “revelation.” Revelation, for Breakfree church participants, is the special knowledge that is mediated through an encounter with God.

In Jerome’s understanding, it is as the Breakfree music team ‘pushes through’ spiritually, as they “go to the next level,” that they gain “fresh revelation.”

So whenever you hit the level, you’re like “No I’m not going to stop there, I want to learn something new, I want to be able to worship you more, I want to have a fresh revelation, I want to have that connection going, I don’t want to lose that love” (Jerome, interview, 1 August 2007).

There is a strong parallel here to Eliade’s description of the shamanic trance. The shaman enters the trance through some of the techniques we have discussed here in order to leave the body and encounter the spirit world. The purpose of this is to gain revelation, insight from the spirits into how to approach something in the profane world. The spirits may inform the shaman as to which ritual is necessary to affect a cure, or the type of offering that is required. There is a more relational and slightly less utilitarian aspect to Breakfree’s practice, but the similarities are plain. Revelation gives Breakfree participants new spiritual insight into living, assists in spiritual warfare, deepens the individual’s relationship with God, and may even result in healing. Revelations which come to Breakfree participants during the service are often communicated to the group as ecstatic messages, sometimes referred to as prophecy. Jerome refers to the practice of prophecy in a Breakfree service.

It’s great when someone has a fresh revelation of God; someone takes the mic and says “I believe God is saying this” (Jerome, interview, 1 August 2007).

Pastor Charles, too, mentions those in the church who are especially “gifted” to prophesy during the service, communicating revelation they have received through the ecstatic experience of God to the whole congregation.
There’s different people who have the gift of prophecy in our church and they know it’s a time to wait on God. Tim will often get something prophetically and come up and share, or someone will come up and share, so that’s what we’re doing, we just don’t want to miss a God moment (Charles, interview, 10 October 2007).

Clearly, in Charles’ view at least, the context of this revelation, and the catalyst for it, is the ecstatic trance experience wherein it is believed that the human and divine realms come into contact. According to Eliade, the role of facilitating the ecstatic trance historically belongs to the shaman. It is too much to say that what is taking place at Breakfree church is shamanism insofar as the latter is a distinct historical and cultural phenomenon. Nevertheless, there are strong links between Breakfree’s practice and archaic shamanism and neo-shamanism.

Schleiermacher, Otto and Eliade, each in their own way, developed phenomenological categories for conceptualising religious experience. In the next two sections, two scholars who share the first name of Paul — Paul Tillich and Paul Ricoeour — bring something unique to this analysis. Tillich’s famous definition of faith and religion as “Ultimate Concern,” together with Ricoeur’s narrative hermeneutic method, provide two provocative paradigms for investigating the ways in which Breakfree members interpret their experiences within the religious realm.

**Paul Tillich: Ultimate Concern and Religious Experience**

Paul Tillich (1886–1965) was one of the few European academics in the early twentieth century to be conversant with both European and North American theology and philosophy. While he served as a German army chaplain in World War 1, an experience which profoundly changed him, his outspoken opposition to Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party forced him into exile in the United States in 1933. Consequently, prior to 1933 he completed all of his writing in German. During his career at the
famous Union Seminary in New York and Chicago School of Divinity, however, his English writings exerted an enormous influence upon an audience in the university as well as in politics and the courts (Tillich and Brown, 1965, xiv-xv). Grenz and Olsen go so far as to nominate Tillich the “apostle to the intellectuals,” the one who was committed to an apologetic theology that allowed philosophy and culture to set the questions for the theological task as well as the language in which the answers were to be framed (Grenz and Olsen, 1992, 114). To the extent that theology was to speak to the real issues of human existence, as opposed to a narrow focus upon questions that nobody was asking, Tillich remained unrepentant about the necessity of the apologetic task.

In line with his commitment to framing theology in language meaningful to the society in which he found himself, Tillich made one of his most important and enduring contributions in his popular monograph *Dynamics of Faith*. In this book, Tillich defined faith as “that which is of ultimate concern” (1957, 1). In a later work, Tillich extended this definition and spoke about religion as “a state of being grasped by an ultimate concern” (1965, 4). In typically Schleiermacherian fashion, Tillich began the theological task with the reality of human experience rather than *a priori* categories. In dialogue with students in Santa Barbara two years before his death, Tillich unpacked and explored his understanding of that which constituted “ultimate concern.”

Simply put, a person’s ultimate concern is what is of central significance to that individual’s life. This could be God, or the nation, or love for family — anything in fact which is of such supreme importance to a person that is the basis of meaning in existence. Tillich defined the ultimate as something that grasps a person. If an
individual were free to choose to either hold or reject some view or belief, that very concept could not be ultimate. Taking a phenomenological approach, one which regards human experience and consciousness as primary, Tillich demonstrated that while our ultimate concern grips us, our response is a “total reaction of our centred being” (Tillich and Brown, 1965, 17). Here, it is clear that Tillich is striving to hold in tension the ontological character of the ultimate as something which confronts human beings from without, in line with the theological tradition stretching back through Otto and Schleiermacher to the New Testament, and the existential human experience of moral commitment to the ultimate.

This tension may seem artificial, indeed unnecessary. It may even make the postmodern person, one used to thinking of reality as something that can be constructed, uncomfortable. However, without this tension Tillich’s theology has nothing to say to human experience. To be sure, Tillich is not merely hanging on to an untenable position here; he is intent upon describing the experience of many people throughout recorded human history who have professed belief. But Tillich does so much more than offer a description; he outlines the profound nature of the experience of the religious person, that experience which is so grounding that the person is grasped by it, rather than the other way around (Tillich and Brown, 1965, 8-11).

Tillich goes on to develop the categories of “profanized” and “idolatrous” (Tillich and Brown, 1965, 23). The former refers to the process whereby faith is secularized to the point that it is drained of ultimate content. The second is more significant for those who, like Tillich, wish to preserve the religious character of faith. His point is that some “ultimate” concern is not ultimate; it does not transcend the self or the
human condition and grip us from the outside. In Tillich’s day, nationalism provided a good example of faith which masquerades as being concerned with the ultimate but is not. Tillich labels this kind of faith as “idolatrous,” because it raises the profane or temporal to the level of the ultimate and transcendent (Tillich, 1957, 12), and it is in this very context that his extremely outspoken opposition to Hitler must be understood.

Ultimate concern, for Tillich, then, is that which underpins everyday life. Often, it is the unseen context or plot of human existence. Conceived thus, the ultimate is both the endpoint and the context of the everyday. Everyday concerns and activities need an ultimate concern, something that underlays life, giving it meaning. To use another Tillichian term, the ultimate concern is the “ground of being” (Tillich and Brown, 1965, 43).

One of Tillich’s chief interests was in preventing religion from lapsing into idolatry through inadvertently placing faith in something that is not ultimate. For Tillich, idolatry was a constant danger, whereby in the attempt to make sense of the experience of the numinous, human beings effectively manufactured a ‘god’ who conforms to their understanding of what that god should be. For Tillich, however, true worship is always and must always be directed to the “God beyond God,” a somewhat confusing and enigmatic phrase which basically refers to the divine entity as it actually is, not as finite human imagining perceives it to be (Tillich and Brown, 1965, 14). Tillich indicates that historically it is the role of the prophet and the mystic to bring people back to this understanding of the divine, to judge idolatry and correct it by restoring the vision of ultimate concern.
The process of coming to faith for Tillich then is the journey in which an individual or group become aware of ultimate concern. This does not mean that Tillich intended to suggest that only those who can articulate their ultimate purpose are acting in faith. This would limit genuine faith to those with a relatively strong command of language. It does point, however, to the importance of intent and awareness because, for Tillich, those who are not aware of their ultimate concern remain ignorant of the powerful motivating forces within their own lives.

**Ultimate concern and Breakfree church**

Previously, the practices of the music team members at Breakfree church were investigated using Eliade’s exposition of the role and practice of shamans. In this section I will consider the status of the music team and the pastors as guardians of ultimate concern.

One of the side effects of associating religion with experience is that for many religion is shifted into the sphere of leisure, something that can be chosen and consumed in the same way someone might choose between a movie and an ice cream. There can be no doubt that Tillich would understand such an attitude toward faith as deeply, indeed even fatally, flawed insofar as ultimate concern is that which lays hold of a person and in that sense cannot be chosen by the individual. The specific manifestations of ultimate concern are not as critical — everyone experiences ultimate concern. Whether one is Christian, Jew or Pagan is not of major importance, what is critical is concern for that which is truly ultimate. Tillich and Breakfree part company on how widely they draw the lines encompassing authentic religious experience. However, Breakfree church, too, faces a continuous struggle against the leisure based view of religion, seeking always to link experiences of the
congregants to the ultimate concern characterised within traditional Christianity as God.

It has been noted above that the Breakfree music team members deliberately orient their religious practice around the ultimate concern in their lives, God. This is a very important point, one which cannot be underestimated for it must be acknowledged that the religious person takes the existence of a transcendent reality as a given. To put this another way, unless it is understood that the touchstone by which the Breakfree participants themselves make sense of their practices and experiences is their faith in God, it will be impossible to reach any conclusions which they could possibly regard as valid. Ultimate concern, then, really is of enormous significance in seeking to connect with, and thereby understand, the worldview of the Breakfree music team members, pastors and participants.

It is hardly surprising, then, that in every interview I conducted with Breakfree music team members, God was cited as the centre of Breakfree music and spirituality. Joanne’s observation illustrates the point perfectly.

I would say it’s [worship music] pretty important, because I’m a Christian, God makes up a lot of my life, like the whole of my life, so worship music is important in entering into his presence, and helping others enter into God’s presence at church (Joanne, interview, 5 September 2007).

Right from the start of our time together, Joanne made clear that God is the point from which the music practices of Breakfree church must be understood. This is a tacit signal that it is only from the position of an insider; one who understands their belief in the relationship that they maintain with God, that anyone can expect to grasp the significance of the service. Joanne went on to describe the orienting spiritual act of someone engaging in the act of worshipping God through music.
I think a lot of different things can happen when you worship God, depending on what God wants to do at that point in time, and I think worship is an opportunity to set your mind on the things of God. Whereas if you are sitting normally doing everyday stuff you might not always focus on God, even though you should, but when you come into worship you know that that time is dedicated to setting your mind on God (Joanne, interview, 5 September 2007).

This is a very significant observation, because without being directly questioned about it Joanne unconsciously articulates the real distinction Breakfree maintain between the quotidian and the spiritual. Gordon Lynch makes the point that the sacred-profane binary set up by Durkheim and Eliade, among others, is not a particularly accurate descriptor of the way people actually distinguish between the everyday and the spiritual or religious in real life (Lynch, 2007, 136). I postulate that, while Lynch is making too strong a claim, Joanne’s simple distinction validates his point. One should, according to Joanne, be able to focus on God all the time. However, the point here is that worship music provides a realm which makes this easier, more accessible.

Ultimate concern is also the foundation of the distinction that Pastor Charles makes between the music used in worship at Breakfree church and “secular” music. First of all, Charles makes a distinction between music and worship, suggesting that the two concepts are only connected by faith. It is only when ultimate concern is applied to the process of making music that music becomes worship.

Music is connected to faith only through worship. Music itself is not connected to faith. Only music directed in the form of worship builds faith through encounter. This can only happen through worship. Music is not worship. Worship must be directed to God (Charles, interview, 1 June 2007).

Charles held this view so strongly that when, at the end of the interview, he was asked if there was anything further to be adding, he went back to that very point.

I would hate to end this session without making it clear that I don’t think worship and music are the same thing. Worship is purely an experience
between God and us. Music can facilitate an atmosphere, but it doesn’t do anything on its own (Charles, interview, 1 June 2007).

Two points are central to Charles’ position: not only is it unlikely that an individual will have an encounter with God through secular music, it is also possible that someone participating in worship music will not have an encounter either. Only to the extent that participants are focused on the ultimate concern do they stand a chance of having an encounter. Ultimate concern, then, is important within the realm of the Breakfree service because simply being within the realm does not guarantee an encounter with God. To encounter God, one must adopt the appropriate attitude of surrender to God as ultimate, and focusing upon that reality rather than the everyday.

Some of the music team members were more open about the possibility of someone connecting to God through music forms and contexts other than worship music. Nevertheless, they maintained that ultimate concern is the pre-condition for authentic experience of God. Darryl, for example, suggested that

If your heart’s right you could probably seek God in popular culture … Even music from popular culture can speak to you in that sense. It can be if you’re out for something God can speak to you in any way. Something that’s meant for something else can actually speak to you (Darryl, interview, 15 August 2007).

Clearly, in Darryl’s understanding, ultimate concern is the arbiter of authentic religious experience. The individual who seeks revelation of the divine in popular culture and approaches with a pious attitude may well find the sacred within that culture. The reason this is unlikely to happen is because the context, the symbols and the attitudes of participants in other settings is generally not as focused on the divine entity in contexts other than religious settings.

The music team members are drawing a distinction between what is essentially a leisure practice — listening to music — and participating in a spiritual practice,
something which is of ultimate concern. Without this distinction, the encounter becomes part of a landscape of leisure choices, a site for experience. For the music team members, only when music is combined with ultimate concern in God is it worthwhile as a mediator of authentic Christian experience. When this does not happen, music can become idolatrous or profanized — something that is worshipped in and of itself as a mediator of experience, or an object totally devoid of divine content.

For Tillich, it is important, if not absolutely necessary, that faith be conscious of the object of ultimate concern (Tillich and Brown, 1965, 184). There is nothing to suggest that Breakfree music team members would disagree with this view. While they concede the possibility of experiencing God without being conscious that God is the content of the experience, intention is all important and is that which distinguishes the Breakfree service from other musical settings. Together with the unbridled experience of the encounter catalysed through music, there must be interpretive elements which enable the congregants to know and understand the entity with whom they are communing. Without this intentionality, the experience cannot be the centre of a deeply transforming and grounding faith.

It may be useful to think of ultimate concern as the central “story” that each Breakfree participant brings to the experience of the service. Paul Ricoeur, in interaction with Tillich’s thought, stated “‘Ultimate concern’ would remain mute if it did not receive the power of a word of interpretation that elevates it into language” (1991, 47). The next section considers Ricoeur’s narrative interpretive framework as a guide to understanding how Breakfree members make sense of the experience of bereavement.
**Paul Ricoeur: Mimesis**

Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) was a French philosopher who devoted much of his career to the branches of philosophy concerned with experience as the basis of knowledge (phenomenology) and the interpretation of texts (hermeneutics). Unusually for a Frenchman, Ricoeur was also a “Huguenot” or Protestant. While not a theologian, he was by all accounts a devout believer and wrote at length on themes connected to religion, theology and the sacred.

One of Ricoeur’s most important contributions to philosophy was his theories about the interpretation of texts and the theory of narrative. Ricoeur depicted the interplay between readers and “texts” (and it is important to consider that anything that communicates can be considered a text in hermeneutics) as the intersection between “worlds.” He held that human beings “emplot” their lives, making sense of the series of events which have taken place in their personal histories precisely through the construction of narratives (Ricoeur, 1984, 57). The story of the interpreter, including everything that he or she brings to the process of interpretation, constitutes one ‘world’ which encounters the world of the text in a process which results in something new. Ricoeur suggests that the process of interplay between people and text-worlds is characterised by “mimesis,” or imitation. Mimesis, in Ricoeur’s thought, is a three-stage event: pre-figuration, configuration and re-figuration (1984, 52–54).

The first mimetic stage (1984, 54–64), pre-figuration, is the world the individual currently inhabits. This world prepares him or her for the different world about to be entered. Implied in this idea is that there is something lacking in the world currently inhabited and this lack, in turn, is the cause for a person to begin looking for
something else. I have intimated above that, for Ricoeur, people emplot their own lives, making meaning out of existence by articulating life events in the form of a story, with a plot and a denouement (Ricoeur, 1984, 75). A person’s own story contributes to the “narrative imagination” that he or she brings to an interaction (Ezzy, 1998, 244). The pre-figuration stage, then, is like the back story, the history of the characters that is necessary to understand the story but not the main story itself. There would be no story without the back story and yet it is quite enigmatic and shadowy: it is where the characters emerge to engage in the plot for the story proper.

The second mimetic stage (1984, 64–70) is configuration. For Ricoeur, this is the world of the story itself. The configuration stage represents the story that is unfolding in the present. In the unfolding of the story, the individual encounters a new realm, one beyond his or her control that has its own set of rules and norms. Ricoeur likened configuration to the process of reading a story. The first stage is the reader’s own story and world, which she or he brings to the process of reading. The second stage is the world of the text, the world of the novel or the theory of the textbook. For Ricoeur, it is only when these two stages are perceived as discrete that we will really begin to understand the way people make sense of and find meaning in stories in texts, and in the unfolding narrative of living. In other words, Ricoeur’s second stage is concerned with the meaning that is produced as two worlds come into contact.

The third and final stage that Ricoeur described is known as re-figuration (1984, 70–71). In this mimetic stage, he held that something new is created. The interplay of the two worlds has an effect on the reader. She or he had a back story, an emplotted life that they brought to their encounter with the new world unfolding before them, and
subsequently that story has been altered, changed or affected. Ricoeur understood that it is the function of hermeneutics to lead us to this point.

It is the task of hermeneutics to reconstruct the entire set of operations by which a work lifts itself above the opaque depths of living, acting, and suffering, to be given by an author to readers who receive it and thereby change their acting (1984, 53).

For Ricoeur, then, reading and interaction are never passive processes because, invariably, the intersection of one’s own life story and the story contained in the text will result in a change in one’s own story. It may result in a different plot and may alter the story in a, seemingly, inconsequential manner but the process of change is unavoidable because, according to Ricoeur, the heart of the concept of mimesis is that all people create such meaning worlds in order to understand reality. There is no way to “opt out” of this process without abandoning meaning altogether.

Of course, if this mimetic process is going to be any use for any other act except reading, it is important to remember that texts in the sense Ricoeur means are not simply books or literary texts. Ricoeur himself outlined the ways in which acts may be considered as texts, using a form of his hermeneutic process to interpret the phenomenon of action (Ricoeur, 1981). However, it is not Ricoeur’s method of interpretation that is of most importance here, but his insights into the way two worlds of meaning intersect and produce something new.

One contemporary theologian to have appropriated Ricoeur’s thought extensively is Dan Stiver. In *Theology after Ricoeur*, Stiver focuses upon the potential latent within Ricoeur’s thought for the practice of biblical interpretation, a theme that the French philosopher himself addressed from time to time, albeit never systematically. Stiver also sees great possibilities for Ricoeur as a resource for postmodern theology particularly given the postmodern preoccupation with the non-objective mediation of
knowledge through language, a feature of Ricoeur’s work (Stiver, 2001, 4-15). Stiver provides a useful introduction to Ricoeur, and I have drawn on his summary as a resource informing this outline and the section that follows. A thorough investigation of Ricoeur’s mimetic process will demonstrate its usefulness vis-à-vis adding yet another way with which to understand the way Breakfree music team members receive and process the experience of hard times and the healing character of the Breakfree realm.

**The threefold mimesis and Breakfree church**

This examination of the practices of Breakfree church has already considered a number of different theories and shown that, in the case of Breakfree, a very deliberate distinction can be drawn between two meaning worlds. Where other theorists, such as Eliade or Durkheim, describe these two worlds as “sacred” and “profane,” these terms are also laden with various layers of meaning and interpretation. Ricoeur’s work draws attention to the fact that there is a pre-figured world that exists for every person who attends the service, whether they are a visitor or a regular congregant. The service itself represents a second world, or realm, inside the everyday world.

For Breakfree music team members, the worship service is a site of revelation where it is possible to have contact with a new set of meanings that are superior to the world that people bring to the service. This distinction is particularly noticeable when the music team members talk about visitors to the church who have no history of church attendance. This group is normally spoken about as the “unchurched.” The unchurched people who come to the Breakfree service are problematized, at least for Breakfree attendees, inasmuch as the unchurched need to attend church as the
prerequisite for dealing with the issues in their lives. In short, their back story has driven them to find a new set of meanings because there is something missing in their lives or because they find themselves in the middle of a crisis.

The experience of the Breakfree service, and the encounter with the divine presence which this entails, is the configuration, the second stage in the process. For unchurched attendees, the service represents the climax of a story of lack of fulfilment, of loneliness or some other kind of crisis. The expected change that occurs as a result of an encounter with God through the Breakfree service represents the refiguration stage in Ricoeur’s schema.

For regular congregants, the Breakfree realm is where the faithful “break free” from the hassles and troubles of the back story of the week. It is a place where the crisis can be re-evaluated and re-signified. Two lengthy excerpts from interviews with music team members Darryl and Tristan will be examined in the light of what has been learned from Ricoeur about threefold mimesis. In particular, the discussion will focus upon the way their back-stories of bereavement intersect with the sacred nature of the Breakfree realm, a realm characterised by healing, wholeness and most importantly, worship.

As I have intimated already, it is clearly the intention of the Breakfree music team and the pastor that the Breakfree service produce an experiential change in participants. The intersection of the two worlds, the back-story of the attendees and the realm of the Breakfree service, is intended to forge a new reality rather than to give people in the service a pleasant feeling for a few minutes. Those who attend a Breakfree service and encounter God are supposed to leave the service with a new
story. An interview with Breakfree guitarist Darryl illustrates this process. Darryl and the Breakfree music team were praying together when someone in the group started singing a song that connected Darryl with a painful part of his personal “back story.”

All of a sudden we just started singing this song that I never expected anyone to sing, because it’s a really old song, which was the song that my Mum used to sing on her deathbed. For the two months before she died she was on her deathbed and she would sing that song all the time … Basically when she sang the song she sang the song from her heart and she sang the song in faith, and that in turn actually motivated people around her. And I’m there yesterday in the prayer meeting, and I can’t get into it, and we started singing the song and it brought back memories, you get flashes of your Mum on her deathbed, this is not the very best of feelings, and it’s a sad thing, but you tell yourself, and you choose to say, or I choose to say, God spoke to me, and said “If your Mum on her deathbed can still sing praises to me, why can’t you, when you’re perfectly well right now?” And then that gives you motivation, “Hey, I can do this, I believe that my God is real.” And that gives you your confidence, it gives you your motivation, it gives you the added desire to seek God more. You get your confidence, you’re like “I can stand strong,” you literally stand with your shoulders pulled back a bit more, I’m not going to whinge for the rest of my life, or at least I’m not going to whinge for the next couple of hours (Darryl, interview, 15 August 2007).

Clearly, according to Ricoeur’s schema, the back story, or pre-figuration, in this example is Darryl’s memory of his mother’s struggle with illness. This intersects with the configuration stage, the realm of the prayer meeting prior to the commencement of the Breakfree service. It is here that the use of music evokes this memory and brings it to the foreground of Darryl’s consciousness. This realm is characterised by encounter with the presence of God. In the third stage, re-figuration, the memory is still painful but also profoundly motivating and healing. Darryl’s encounter with the divine presence re-signifies the memory, inspiring a new reality characterised by confidence and motivation rather than the feeling of “not getting into it.”
In the next excerpt, Tristan tells the harrowing story of his brother’s death the previous year. In coming to terms with his brother’s death, Tristan utilises the character or practices of the Breakfree realm to produce a new story.

Last year on Christmas Eve my brother back home died in a car accident. Just four hours before that I was talking to him. It was just really, really bad … I was the youngest of nine, and my Dad died when I was young, and then five years later my Mum died as well. I was about 14. When my Mum died that really messed me up. My oldest brother took me in, he’s the one who saw me through my education … And my sister in law is the one who got me into God and all that stuff, they became like my surrogate parents. This very brother who took me in is the one who died in a car accident last year. And I was like “What on earth is this?” I had so many questions to ask, why is it happening like this, everything is supposed to be good, why, why, why? At first I just couldn’t accept it. When that happened to me I said to God “This has got to be your will, so how come your will is like this? If it’s really making sense to you, it’s not making sense to me at all.” … But then there was this song by Fred Hammond, he’s a Christian musician. This song says “I will find a way to lift up my hands, to praise God.” So that song really appealed to me in that situation, because he starts off the song saying “Here I am, with everything that I have hoped in, everything that I’ve held, everything that I’ve seen is valuable to me, I’ve lost it, and all of a sudden I feel like I’m going to go crazy, I’m going to go insane, nothing can console me in this situation, but God one way or another I’ll find a way to still praise you.” So that was the song that really helped me, because I just couldn’t understand how on earth I’m supposed to go “Bless you God, bless you God.” I found it really hard. So when I listen to that song, it was like that song was actually saying what I was going through, it was like a voice to me, it was just an outlet, so I was just singing along to that song. I listened to that song for a long time, even months later, because I think that song really helped me in some way to relate to the situation that I was in. It really did something, you know what I mean? It really did something (Tristan, interview, 23 August 2007).

Pentecostal spirituality is at times critiqued for an undue focus on celebration. It is evident from Tristan’s story that the situation is not quite so simple. Tristan actually has a fairly sophisticated way of interacting with the tragedy, attempting to align himself with an incorrigible belief in the essential virtue of praising God in all circumstances. Thus celebration here becomes the way in which he finds a new story. His own pre-figured world of grief at the sudden loss of his beloved brother encounters the Breakfree realm of God’s providential care and worthiness, a world in
which the appropriate response to the divine presence is praise and awe regardless of present circumstances.

Through the technology of music, using it over and over again, the Breakfree realm had an effect on Tristan’s story. He forged a new reality, a new story, incorporating both his loss and the reality of praise and awe in God characteristic of the Breakfree realm. What is even more important, however, is the realisation that in his re-figured story Tristan is able to hold together two seemingly incongruent realities — the death of a loved one and the act of celebrating God’s goodness.

It would be a mistake to suggest that such a change is always permanent or as profound as this example. The effect may only last a couple of hours. Ricoeur’s conceptualisation draws attention to the fact of change itself, rather than an assessment of the importance, impact, or even longevity of the re-figured stage.

**Conclusion**

This chapter commenced with a brief overview of the contribution of Friedrich Schleiermacher, the first Christian theologian to make a serious attempt to base religion on experience. Schleiermacher’s concept of “intuition of the universe” is a way of talking about transcendent experience. Schleiermacher opened a door — a door which has remained open — to the possibility of experiencing “intuitions of the universe” that lead to religion from sources outside that which are normally linked to religion. This segues into a theme very important to Schleiermacher, the experience of music. If, as he suggested, music is a more effective catalyst for “intuitions of the universe,” then surely it is logical to rely on music more so than upon other more traditional religious practices, such as the celebration of the Eucharist or sermons. It
is to be noted that Schleiermacher did not advocate discarding any of these traditional elements of Christian practice; rather he intended to put them in their proper place – i.e., in the context of experience.

It is easy to see the link with Breakfree Church’s strong emphasis on experience and, especially, upon music as a catalyst for this experience. The Breakfree service is a realm of experience of the divine, and it is constructed and maintained by music. Music is a tool for the church, a means for catalysing the encounter between humanity and God that takes place within the service. Having catalysed the experience, the church is on hand to offer interpretation of its significance, linking it to the God of the Christian tradition and particularly with the third member of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. This is an apologetic task, one that mirrors Schleiermacher’s own attempt in *On Religion* to compose an apology for “cultured despisers.” It the sum of this understanding that gave rise to my claim that Schleiermacher is really the lost theologian of Pentecostalism (Jennings, 2008, 168).

Moving on from the work of Schleiermacher, I outlined the thought of Rudolf Otto, who coined the term “numinous” as a phenomenological descriptor for the encounter between the divine and human beings. Otto postulated that the numinous has a non-rational aspect, something “wholly other” to human beings and is, as such, something which can never be understood entirely. Furthermore, Otto was of the opinion that the experience of the numinous is not always pleasurable as Schleiermacher seems to imply, but may be terrifying or weird. Still, Otto attempted to draw a link between this experience and religious interpretation, pointing out that religion “schematizes” or makes rational the experience of the numinous. This schematization is the “Holy.”
In relation to Breakfree’s practice, the non-rational revelation of the numinous was linked with the distinctly Pentecostal practice of *glossolalia*, or “speaking in tongues.” The practice of speaking in tongues was explored as a manifestation of the mysticism of the weird, which Otto suggests is missing from much of Western religion. In the case of Breakfree church, attempts are made to limit the practice of *glossolalia* to the pre-service prayer meeting where little attempt is made to rationalise the experience. On the other hand, when *glossolalia* is practiced in the congregational service it is supposed to be interpreted — it may be a manifestation of the “wildness” of the divine but it is still “reined in” by discursive practices. Viewed in this way, the Breakfree realm is not only a space in which the encounter with the divine is catalysed, but also where it is contained.

Mircea Eliade continued in the tradition of Rudolph Otto, drawing once again the radical distinction in religious understanding between the sacred and the profane. Eliade coined his own term, “hierophany,” to describe the points at which the divine and the human come into contact. Hierophanies can be any object — including rocks and human persons — that are endowed with efficacy to act as a medium for the divine. Hierophanies are essentially paradoxical because it is through them that the infinite becomes finite, limited to space and time. Eliade also completed an important study into the archaic practices of shamanism, describing the shaman as the one who specialises in catalysing the ecstatic trance. The shaman is one who is able to leave his or her own body by means of the trance and travel into the divine realm to receive revelation.
I related Eliade’s hierophany directly to music at Breakfree church, suggesting that it is music itself which is the profane object via which the divine comes into contact with human beings. Thus music does not simply create the Breakfree realm, marking out its boundaries, but is the constitutive matter of this realm, the site of contact between the sacred and profane. Following Karin Horwatt, the function of the Breakfree music team members and pastor were likened to Eliade’s shamans inasmuch as they are the ones who are responsible for performing the techniques which will catalyse the ecstatic trance for themselves and those present in the congregation. Moreover, it is this ecstatic trance state which gives rise to the Breakfree concept of “revelation,” a special connection with or knowledge gained from the divine that is experienced both privately and corporately and is often announced in the service through the practice of “prophecy,” the delivery of ecstatic messages that are believed to come from God.

Paul Tillich posited “ultimate concern” as something (such as religion, a cause, a person etc.) which is of central importance to us. Our ultimate concern grips us and, thus, is not experienced as something chosen from a smorgasbord of options. This idea directly contradicts the more postmodern conception of religion as an optional component within the larger sphere of leisure, but stands in remarkable conformity to a very long tradition of the description of religious experience by religious people themselves. Importantly for Tillich, ultimate concern cannot be limited to religion as traditionally conceived; rather, it is open, allowing that many concerns outside of church, temple or mosque may compel the individual as “ultimate.” An important goal for Tillich was that people become consciously aware of their own ultimate concerns or risk continuing in a state where the powerful motivating drives in life exist below the level of conscious awareness.
I postulated that ultimate concern is the means by which Breakfree music team members make sense of their own practices. It is also the way in which they distinguish between their own practice of music within the Breakfree realm and other music in different contexts. What separates an experience at Breakfree from an experience of music at a festival, concert or on the radio is the intention of the individual or the group. If a musical experience is connected with ultimate concern, it can be a conduit for connection with God because as the church community is unwilling to “limit God.” However, they also suggest that such intention is unlikely to occur in other contexts and settings and so the unique nature of the Breakfree realm and religious contexts like it consists of the offer to participants of an opportunity to connect music, experience and ultimate concern.

Finally, I looked at Paul Ricoeur’s ideas on narrative and interpretation as a way of understanding the ways in which individual music team members make sense of the experience of suffering within the context of Breakfree’s ethos and practices. Ricoeur outlined a threefold “mimesis,” a schema to explain human engagement in the interpretation of “texts.” The first mimetic step is called pre-figuration. Ricoeur postulates that humans “emplot” their lives, making sense of the series of events which take place in personal histories by composing them as stories with plots. This is the “back-story” people bring to every text at the pre-figuration stage. The second stage is configuration and involves the world of the text itself. Through interaction, the pre-figured world comes into contact with the world of the text. The third stage, re-figuration, is the resulting change in an individual’s personal story as a result of interaction with the text world.
Ricoeur’s narrative ideas were employed to interpret the stories of two Breakfree music team members. The common theme of their stories was bereavement and consequent sadness: this was the back story or the pre-figured world. The Breakfree realm, a space where God is celebrated and encounters individuals for the purpose of bringing healing and wholeness through worship, represents the configuration stage. The process whereby each music team member brought their own experiences into interaction with their practices as Breakfree participants, without denying the reality of their own bereavement, represents the re-figuration. Importantly, it was argued that Christian worship of God is not a denial of experience, but is a narrative journey whereby sadness can be accepted and transformed, motivating still further engagement with Breakfree practices and techniques. Thus, Ricoeur’s programme of threefold mimesis illustrates the way faith can incorporate experiences which are negative and seemingly contradictory into a new reality, without threatening that reality with disintegration.

This chapter is concluded as it began, namely by acknowledging that insights from theology and religious studies yield a vertical perspective on the phenomenon of the Breakfree service. There is more to the story than a present connection with the divine, however. Schleiermacher, Otto and Eliade in particular attempted a phenomenological description of religious experience, one which connected human experience to the concept of religion and links history with present experience. In the language of Tillich and Ricoeur, this joins an experience that is occurring now to the experiences of ultimate concern told and retold in the stories of myriad individuals and communities.
The uneasy union of the social sciences and humanities in this paper is shown to consist in sharpest focus precisely in the tension between the empirical and the revealed. This tension remains unresolved, indeed unresolvable. The fact is that we are analysing the behaviour and beliefs of people engaged in religious practices and to ignore the transcendent religious dimension is to not only spurn the testimony of history but it is a refusal to take seriously the experiences of the subjects of the study. This runs the risk of missing key insights.

The transcendent vertical dimension offered by this analysis opens a narrow door into something so enormous, so different from our everyday existence, that Otto and Tillich argue that it doesn’t exist as we understand the term at all. This is not to say that it is not there, but rather to say it is there in such a “wholly other” way that it is impossible to comprehend. Schleiermacher issues an invitation to participate in a God’s eye view of the universe, where everything fits in a way that is impossible to perceive otherwise. Otto holds forth the possibility, which if it cannot be proved cannot be disproved either, that the experience of transcendence, of something so profound and deep, is actually a point of contact with another realm of existence. Eliade points to the objects and the people through which this extraordinary other makes contact with us. Tillich and Ricoeur offer a reminder that these experiences are connected to a story, an old one that is renewed everyday as the race continues to experience and reflect. I will draw out the implications more vividly in the conclusion chapter.
Chapter 4: Toward a Socio-Cultural reading of Breakfree Church

This chapter will build on the case study of Breakfree church, making use of a number of socio-cultural paradigms. Using the same phenomenological pattern followed in chapter three, I will draw on these paradigms to illuminate specific ethnographic examples from the case study. The important difference is that here the theories and paradigms are mined from socio-cultural thinkers, and so the focus of the discussion will shift from the transcendent and intangible to the empirical and observable, from divine-human interaction to person to person relationships. In other words, this chapter is concerned with the horizontal elements of the Breakfree realm, as opposed to the vertical elements surveyed in chapter three above.

Where theology and (to a lesser extent) religious studies tend to begin with the a priori assumption of the existence of the divine, such a stance is not typically assumed in socio-cultural studies. These disciplines have tended to exclude that which is not verifiable by the senses. As will be particularly evident in Durkheim’s work, socio-cultural theorists often analyse religion in social, rather, than spiritual, terms. This is reflective of the position described by Peter Berger as “methodological atheism,” in which the appropriate starting point for empirical research into religion is to bracket belief in the divine (1969, 100). Arguably, a more appropriate position for engaging religious experience is actually “methodological agnosticism,” which takes seriously the possibility of a divine entity which cannot be verified or ruled out empirically (Porpora, 2006, 70, 74).
Several theorists, most notably Durkheim and Weber, theorised that religion would die out as society became increasingly secularized. The meteoric rise of Pentecostalism, one of the fastest growing religious movements in recorded history, presents a major problem for the secularization theory (Miller and Yamamori, 2007, 36–38). Failed predictions aside, the attention to empirical detail and construction of theory based on observation which these socio-cultural theorists provide represents a rich resource for the illumination of many kinds of experience, including phenomena that might be thought of as “religious” or “spiritual.” This is true regardless of the religious convictions of the theorists in this section, which range from Michel Foucault’s atheism to Victor Turner’s Catholicism. These theorists also draw attention to the fact that Breakfree church is a social phenomenon, comprising people interacting in groups, and the important implications of this.

I begin with French sociologist Emile Durkheim’s thought on the “conscience collective” and “collective effervescence.”

**Emile Durkheim: Collective Effervescence and the Conscience Collective**

Emile Durkheim’s (1858–1917) sociology of religion is characterised by a rigorous attempt to understand religious phenomena through social lenses. Two aspects of Durkheim’s sociology of religion are relevant to this discussion. The first is his category for the shared experience which he believed was the starting point for religion, which he nominated “collective effervescence.” The second, the “conscience collective,” by which he meant the fusion of individual consciousnesses into a unified group manifestation, is also a useful category for understanding religious phenomena. This section will conclude with the application of these
paradigms to an important component of the Breakfree service — the prayer meeting prior to the service proper.

It is worth noting at this point that I am not attempting a “Durkheimian analysis” of Breakfree church in this section. Such an analysis might be expected to comment on experience leading to a sense of shared morality, or a sense of commitment to the group. This would lead the analysis in the direction of observation of congregation members both during and outside of service times. While these are useful points that are worth exploring, the focus of this section is on using Durkheim’s categories to shed light on the significance of Breakfree’s use of music for catalysing religious experience within the space of the service.

In his classic work treating the origins of religion, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim drew upon anthropological studies of Australian Aboriginal tribes who were believed to be the most “primitive” extant society at the time. In so far as the practices of these groups were free from the cultural, philosophical and historical crust which obscured sophisticated Western religious forms, Durkheim believed that analysis of the Aboriginal religious forms were closer to the origin of religion. Examination of these forms, therefore, would potentially answer the question of how the human religious consciousness begins (Durkheim, 1976, 3–5).

Durkheim came to the conclusion that religion begins in a corporate experience he called “collective effervescence.” Durkheim went to explain this term as follows:

> We indeed know from experience that when men are all gathered together, when they live a communal life, the very fact of their coming together causes exceptionally intense forces to arise which dominate them, exalt them, give them a quality of life to a degree unknown to them
as individuals. Under the influence of collective enthusiasm they are sometimes seized by a positive delirium which compels them to actions in which even they do not recognize themselves (Durkheim, 1975, 183).

When human beings gather together, they often experience an exciting of emotional state brought about by the combination of their ecstatic consciousnesses. In this heightened, out of control state, they often exhibit behaviours that would not be displayed at other times, ranging from crying and shrieking to deviant sexual practices (Durkheim, 1976, 215–217). The experience is of something greater than the individual’s consciousness and beyond his or her control. This leads to the development of the idea of the supernatural realm. However, Durkheim argued that what is interpreted as supernatural is really society itself, in as much as society stands in relation to its individual members in the same way that a ‘god’ does to his or her worshippers (1976, 206).

In this way, Durkheim located the beginning of religion not only in an experience, but in collective experience. It is important to bear in mind the subtleties of Durkheim’s understanding of religion. He did not believe, for example, that religion was an experience of delusion. To the contrary, Durkheim remained convinced that religious consciousness was birthed in the reality of corporate human experience. His specific point was that religion was a social reality rather than a spiritual one (1976, 81–84, 87). He argued that religious experience was real, not delusional. The point of contention for Durkheim was the interpretation of these experiences specifically as socially — rather than spiritually — mediated phenomena (Miller and Yamamori, 2007, 133–134).

Durkheim’s project, therefore, must be read in the light of his attempt to reinterpret religious experience in social terms. This was not simply because of distaste for the
concept of the divine, but because to confine this experience to a religious interpretation immediately removed the possibility of stating anything about its origins which has empirical merit. Durkheim believed that that when the experience was defined religiously, it is in the end simply mysterious, and as such was beyond scientific evaluation. Committed as he was to the social interpretation of all phenomena, Durkheim replaced the religious genesis of the experience with the directly observable presence of individual human beings coming together in a group, which produces a collective consciousness greater than the sum of their individual cognitions.

This segues into one of Durkheim’s most creative concepts, the “conscience collective.” Similarly to collective effervescence, Durkheim understood the conscience collective as a group experience of an intersubjective reality. In other words, he held that in certain group settings the individual consciousness of each participant was joined to that of all the other participants in a unique way. The result was not simply the combination of various individual consciousnesses that maintain their discrete status. Instead, the shared awareness of the group has a *sui generis* existence of its own. Durkheim was adamant that the conscience collective was greater than the sum of all the individual parts, and beyond the control of any individual within the group.

Above and beyond all the dogmas and all the denominations, there exists a source of religious life as old as humanity and which can never run dry; it is the one which results from the fusion of *consciences*, of their communion in a common set of ideas, of their co-operation in one work, of the morally invigorating and stimulation influence that every community of men imposes on us … There exists in us, outside us, religious forces that depend on us for their release, need us to call them into being: forces that we cannot but engender by the mere fact of coming together, thinking together, feeling together, acting together (Durkheim, 1975, 185).
In effect, Durkheim was postulating that what has been interpreted as a divine entity is, in fact, the fusion of group consciences. It is easy to see how such a phenomenon could be understood as the presence of a sovereign and transcendent entity, because it cannot be explained away as the manipulation of an influential individual or “groupthink.” To the contrary, this collective phenomenon is autonomous from the control of individuals and is not necessarily reflective of the combined thought of those within the collective, but appears to have a will of its own. It can be compared to the chemical process whereby the combination of elements produces a compound with entirely different properties from that of the original elements (Hagens, 2006, 216).

The term “conscience” is ambiguous in the French, implying consciousness as well as the normative moral meaning it carries in English usage. It is clear that Durkheim intended both meanings, even though I have focused on the consciousness aspect of the conscience collective. Through this group experience, the collective norms of the group become a part of each individual. This hints at the importance Durkheim placed on religion for maintaining moral order in society. He perceived that through the social experience of the conscience collective, social morals — which are socially directed (rather than being self directed) — become implanted in the individual (Hagens, 2006, 217).

Matthew Lawson (1999) applied these ideas to a Catholic Charismatic prayer meeting he observed over the course of several months. He suggests that what members of the group understand as the “Holy Spirit” can be understood as “a manifestation of a learnable pattern of social interaction that may generate a superindividual dialogic unity” — the conscience collective (1999, 341). The fact
that this is a ‘learnable’ interaction pattern suggests that through repeated participation in the experience group members undergo progressive socialisation into the group norms. Lawson goes further, suggesting that once these patterns have been internalised, individuals are able to reproduce the intersubjective experience on their own (Lawson, 1999, 357).

Durkheim’s two categories, collective effervescence and the conscience collective, offer a thought-provoking and potentially controversial insight into the significance of the Breakfree “realm.” Together with the observations made by Matthew Lawson, these concepts fit well with the intersubjective nature of the experience of the Holy Spirit at Breakfree church where participants describe an ecstatic experience that everyone shares together. One particular segment of the Breakfree service which can be interpreted through the concepts articulated by Durkheim is the pre-service prayer meeting.

**Breakfree, Collective Effervescence and the Conscience Collective**

At around 8am on Sunday mornings, Breakfree congregants gather together in the darkened hall to participate in a Pentecostal prayer meeting. For the uninitiated, this would seem like a strange and even frightening ritual, because everyone in the room is on their feet, pacing or bouncing, swaying or shouting. No one appears to lead, although one person stands at the front of the hall with a microphone in hand. Typically, this person will begin the prayer meeting by exhorting everyone in the room to prayer, usually with repeated phrases like “Come on church, its time to meet with God.” The focus of those in the room is on another entity, one invisible but very real in the experience of those present. The Breakfree congregation know this entity as the Holy Spirit.
As those present start to pray, chanting and singing, the room is filled, seemingly with noise and chaos. The focus in the darkened room is deliberately unfixed. The space may seem chaotic but it has an order which can quickly be learned. There are more people at the back of the room where there is some space behind the chairs. Those at the back of the room, free of observation from anyone standing behind them, are free to do as they please. These participants will mostly stay in one spot, bouncing, swaying or perhaps crouching as they engage with intense piety in their personal prayers. Those at the front of the room are more likely to take the microphone from the leader and lead the room in a prayer or deliver an inspired “prophecy” or a vision from God.

The exercise of leadership differs slightly from that described in Lawson’s Catholic charismatic prayer meeting, where authority could seemingly be wrested from the nominal leader (Lawson, 1999, 353). Leadership in the Breakfree prayer meeting requires the ability to authoritatively interpret the experience of the Holy Spirit. The church’s senior pastor always took the microphone at some stage of the prayer meeting, and it seems that only those who were practiced at the art of interpretation and public prayer were permitted to go to the front and lead the group. In this sense those who took the leadership were those with experience of the type of behaviour and language required. It was common to read from the Bible and apply the passage in a prayer to the church meeting or the surrounding suburban community.

The distinctly Pentecostal practice of glossolalia, or speaking in tongues, rarely occurred in the service proper, but was restricted by and large to the pre-service prayer meeting. In the early years of the movement, speaking in tongues was an
enormous bone of contention between early Pentecostals and other Christian denominations. The former group believed that this strange sounding manifestation was a sign of the blessing of God, harking back to the tongues of fire which are recorded as being manifested among the early Christians in the New Testament (Acts 2:1–4). The fact that at Breakfree this practice is largely confined to the prayer meeting before the service, a section of the service that is not open to the public, is a tacit admission that Pentecostal ritual involves a process of socialisation.

Along with glossolalia, another ecstatic phenomenon at Breakfree prayer meetings is the frequent prophecies, or inspired messages. The apparent chaos of the prayer meeting is punctuated by the utterances by these prophets who periodically take the microphone. The following excerpt illustrates this.

A man with a Scottish accent led the meeting, pacing back and forth at the front next to the stage. The guitarist and keyboard played throughout. The prayer leader said “stir yourselves up, church; God wants to use each and every one of you here.” People in the hall were pacing, bouncing on the spot, swaying, swinging their hands, mostly with expressions of intense piety on their faces, which were often lifted up to the ceiling. Stirring up is what these meetings seem to be about. Pastor Charles led the prayer meeting next, very enthusiastically … A woman took the microphone and talked about a mental picture she had, describing the church in very militaristic, masculine terms. Next an Asian woman took the microphone and prayed with such intense piety that she was moved to tears. Charles returned to exhort people to “abandon” themselves — a call to the spiritual experience of ecstasy (Unpublished field notes, 10 June 2007).

Music was a constant presence at the prayer meeting. At every prayer meeting I attended there was the gentle, soothing sound of digital keyboard playing, acting like the base upon which everything else was built. The keyboard sound rarely varied, two or three chords were played repeatedly the whole time. The keyboard sound lubricated the chaotic noise in the room and lent a sense of privacy. The keys both softened and deadened the sound, and the presence of others in the room also praying aloud meant that individual voices were muffled.
Perhaps even more important was the presence of an acoustic guitarist, who played an instrumental role in controlling and leading the group experience. Most often, he stood centre stage and strummed open, bright chords. Once again, this individual was practiced in the art of interpreting experience. He would raise the tempo of his strumming at certain times, and at other times go almost completely quiet, in response to the manifestations and behaviours of the group members present. It seemed to be a symbiotic relationship: as if the guitarist both influenced the experience of the group and was influenced by it.

It was evident that prayers in this setting take a particular form and were guided by the group consciousness. I noted at one time that, although that week there had been a flood disaster in the Australian city of Newcastle, no petitionary prayers were offered during the prayer meeting. This does not mean that people in the group were lacking in compassion for those in need; rather it indicates the inward focus of the group on the “realm” being created every week. While the unity of the group could be, and generally is, attributed to the governance of the Holy Spirit, it is also evident that the participants in the prayer meeting have learned the form and content of acceptable prayer for this time and space.

It would be easy to assume Durkheim’s functional view would lead him to the conclusion that these experiences were illusory. This would be an over-simplification of his view. While certainly not an essentialist, Durkheim had no interest in suggesting that these experiences are not actually happening, nor did he suggest that the people having such experiences were deluded. Instead, Durkheim acknowledged the reality of the experience, but chose to interpret it differently. While Pentecostals
might refer to the presence in the prayer meeting as the “Holy Spirit,” Durkheim attempts to understand the phenomenon as a social reality that has an empirical base. In other words, the focus is shifted from an unseen enigmatic presence to the behaviour and practices of the group experiencing this phenomenon, from the unseen to the observable.

Within the Breakfree congregation, the most important task of the conscience collective is to catalyse a divine-human encounter within the church service. Thus the primary focus is internal. Public prayers which are directed to external ends detract from this focus. Even when members prayed for the outside community, these prayers were focussed on extending the realm of the service, or drawing people within the realm. In this way, the inward focus was not diminished, but augmented. Prophetic utterances spoken into the microphone during the prayer meeting, also shared this inward focus. It became clear that the focus of the conscience collective at Breakfree Church remains upon inducing the experience of ritual collective effervescence.

Applying these concepts to the music played throughout the prayer meeting yields further insight. It would be incorrect to suggest that the guitarist was simply making the experience happen through the tempo of his playing. That would not be the whole story. The guitarist acted in line with a learned set of behaviours, and also in response to the mood of the group in front of him. A Breakfree guitarist playing during the prayer meeting will not indulge in flashy solos, but sticks to the full open chords, only varying the tempo. Anything more would distract the audience and perhaps lead them to admire his virtuosity, detracting from the experience of the
Holy Spirit, or collective effervescence. The keyboardist maintains the steady sound, repeating it over and over again.

This excerpt from my field notes describes the prayer meeting phase of a music team practice. Prior to the practice the team had a devotional time, with one guitarist and a singer leading on stage facilitating the music:

Stanley is playing guitar, strumming chords nothing fancy. Josephine is free styling lyrics over the top of the guitar. As music is going, people are very kinetic — swaying, swivelling, bouncing, shaking. As music quiets they become more static — kneeling, standing with hands raised. Stanley controls the tempo with guitar — is he responding to the Holy Spirit experience or actually autonomously exercising control over groups’ response? He controls what is happening by strumming louder or softer. Often he plays with eyes closed, seems to be experiencing something himself which is perhaps affecting what he is doing. He quiets as Josephine prays: when words are involved music moves more to the back … like a soundtrack (Unpublished field notes, 8 August 2007).

The rhythm of the music has a shamanic quality, which draws the participants into a state of effervescence. Durkheim’s conscience collective also sheds light on the music as a tool, useful for maintaining the space and the norms of the group. Although appearing spontaneous and charismatic, the group’s norms are, in fact, a learned set of behaviours that facilitate this collective space and consciousness.

This discussion of collective effervescence and the conscience collective has touched tangentially upon the role of leaders and charisma. In the following section I will draw on the thought of Max Weber on charisma, religion and leadership.

**Max Weber: Charisma and Religious Leaders**

Much of the secondary literature on Max Weber’s (1864–1920) conception of charisma focuses on his early writings, where he wrote about three types of Herrschaft ("rule"): charismatic, traditional and legal-rational authority. However, in
his later writings, and particularly in his work on religion, Weber extended his ideas on charisma, broadening the concept considerably beyond leadership. The older Weber made charisma the centre of his sociology of religion (Riesebrodt, 1999, 2). This distinct understanding of charisma appeared in the book length chapter on religion which appears in *Economy and Society*, and was published separately under the title *The Sociology of Religion* (1965). In his earlier work, Weber conceived of charismatic leadership as a force for revolutionary change. Conversely, Weber’s broader use of charisma in *The Sociology of Religion* suggests that it functions to maintain and extend tradition (Riesebrodt, 1999, 10). Also, rather than referring to a particular type of leadership, in this volume Weber understood the term to be interchangeable with *mana*, the religious characterisation of extraordinary or superhuman power (Weber, 1965, 2).

Weber traced the concepts of the soul and divine spirits to the experience of ecstasy, mediated by the bearers of charisma. As Martin Riesebrodt (1999, 2) notes, for Weber the bearers of charisma were not necessarily people, but could be depersonalized objects. Riesebrodt argues that although Weber developed the two distinct concepts of charismatic leadership and charisma in different contexts, he never clarified the differences between them. Weber developed three ideal types of religious leaders who may be endowed with charisma. Unlike Durkheim, Weber made no distinction between magic and religion, nominating the three types of religious leaders as “magicians,” “prophets” and “priests” (1965, 28–31, 46–59).

Weber’s characterisation of these categories will be outlined in the discussion to follow. Of particular interest will be Weber’s reference to the category of priests, because it provides the conceptual framework within which the music team’s priestly
role of handling the charismatic object of music at Breakfree church may be investigated.

The three types of religious leaders identified by Weber are distinguished from the layperson, who can experience charisma in the form of ecstasy and bestow recognition on those who are endowed with charisma, but are not themselves so gifted (Weber, 1978, 243–4; Riesebrodt, 1999, 6). The first category of religious leader are the magicians, those who, according to Weber, are “permanently endowed with charisma” (1965, 3). Unlike the layperson, who must rely on alcohol, narcotics or music to experience ecstasy, the magician is practiced and devoted to producing the experience of ecstasy whenever and wherever it is required. In societies which honour the authority of magicians, the ecstatic state is understood as a point of contact with gods and spirits. It is this ecstatic state where supplication for illness, hunting, rain and childbirth can all be offered. Thus, anyone who claimed to be able to manipulate this important sphere of life was held in high regard (1965, 25), at least for as long as this claim could be substantiated.

The magician is practiced in the arts of ecstasy and charisma, and is understood as being more powerful than the deities, because through the exercise of magical arts, the magician could coerce the gods to act in accordance with their will. The magician must be able to continue to produce results to forestall having his or her status called into question. Weber postulated that magicians were often self-employed and worked alone, relying less on codified forms of belief (or “doctrine”) and more on charismatic ability to produce results (Weber, 1978, 243–4).
Weber also traced the practice of worship, including prayer and sacrifice, back to the “primitive” desire to coerce or compel the gods to accede to one’s own will. He suggested a development from magic toward religion, while refusing to make a firm distinction between the two. Importantly, he suggested that the practice of sacrifice may have its origins in the primitive motive of coercing the gods through a treaty or alliance, or alternatively may derive from a desire to commune with the gods, sharing a ceremonial meal together (1965, 26–27). Weber’s ideas here are important for understanding the shape and underlying motives for Breakfree church’s use of music in worship.

The development toward organised religion, according to Weber, was aided in no small part by the development in many societies of the group known as “priests.” He resisted making a firm distinction between priests and magicians. While the former are generally part of a social organization, participate in regular cultic practices and hold to a set of doctrines as formally codified beliefs, this may also be true of some magicians. The chief distinction is worth quoting in full.

It is more correct for our purpose, in order to do justice to the diverse and mixed manifestations of this phenomenon, to set up as the crucial feature of the priesthood the specialization of a particular group of persons in the continuous operation of a cultic enterprise, permanently associated with particular norms, places and times, and related to specific social groups (Weber 1965, 30).

In other words, the chief characteristic of priests is their development as a distinct class or group, who take responsibility for controlling through ritual or other means the ecstasy of religious encounter. Daniel Pals (2006, 166) suggests that the key difference between the magician and the priest in Weber’s thought is that the priest’s charisma is derived from his or her office and not specifically from their own gifts or abilities; the reverse being true for magicians.
The final type, to which Weber devoted considerably more space, is the prophet. The prophet differs from the priest in that he or she is not part of a social organization and accepts no salary, but works alone and lives off the gifts of others or is self-supporting (1965, 47–48). Also, like a magician, a prophet’s charisma is based on personal gifts, not the office itself as with a priest. The prophet differs from the magician insofar as it is the prophet who brings doctrine or new revelation, not magic (Weber 1965, 47). This doctrine is new, and is not based on a previously established authoritative tradition or scripture, as with the priest. Far from being concerned with coercing the gods or nature, the prophets task is to order human life to the meaning of the cosmos, whether this be understood as an impersonal force or the will of a personal divine entity (1965, 59).

Weber never tried to make these distinctions too rigid, because he understood that many historical and contemporary figures would fit several of these categories. In the following section, the Weberian types are applied to the role of the music team in the Breakfree service. While it is evident that the “priest” fits most effectively with the role of the Breakfree music team, it is also clear that all of the categories could be applied in some way.

**Breakfree, Charisma and Musical Priests**

My intention in this section is to investigate the role of the music team as bearers of charisma. For Weber, as for Durkheim, religion was basically a social, rather than a spiritual, reality. This means that Weber was interested in how religion is manifested, and was largely unconcerned with the question of whether or not it is what its adherents claim it to be. Looking at the Breakfree service through these social-anthropological lenses provides insight into what is occurring on the horizontal
plane, illuminating the human manifestation of religious practice as distinct from the faith-laden meanings attached to this behaviour by adherents. Having said this, the transcripts reveal these meanings in the congregant’s own words, so the purpose here is to develop a nuanced picture, like an orchestra incorporating numerous instruments.

The first thing to note is that music itself is an object at Breakfree Church. Music is itself endowed with *mana*, or charisma. In the church’s understanding, music itself is a divinely efficacious object. The music team at Breakfree Church is a crucial component of the church’s ministry and self-identity. As well as playing during church services on Sunday morning, they gather for weekly practices and are led by a dedicated music pastor. Although the group is comprised of volunteers, practices are well attended.

All three Weberian types of charismatic authorities are readily identified in the practices of the Breakfree music team. They act as “prophets” through the production of music which catalyses new “revelation,” a phenomenon at Breakfree that combines divine communication and ecstatic experience. In creating an inner realm through music, the music team brings the divine order into reality within the space of the service — a characteristic role of the Weberian prophet. This observation should be qualified, however, because the Weberian prophet is based largely on the classical prophets of the Hebrew Bible, who where primarily concerned with divine order in the non-sequestered, everyday world. The second world, which I am calling the “realm,” is the domain of priests and magicians.
The music team’s ability to catalyse the ecstatic charisma may suggest that it is best to think of them as “magicians.” They are separated from the laypeople of the congregation in that the laity experience charisma, but lack the ability to bring it about. However, if the Breakfree music team are to be understood as magicians, then their personal, individual abilities to catalyse charisma would be the primary focus. While this may happen from time to time, for example, the ability of one particular individual to bring about the ecstatic experience is celebrated, most often at Breakfree the focus is upon the music team. It is the significance of the team, the music itself and the status of the individuals as music team members that has primary significance. This stance fits well with Christian theology in general, where it is understood that God is the source of what we are calling here charisma, and people are merely conduits to be “used” (this actual term was in currency at Breakfree) to bring about this experience.

Conversely, Mark Evans’ description of the role of Darlene Zschech, the prominent Hillsong worship pastor is of interest (2006, 107–109). In contrast to Breakfree church, where the whole music teams is responsible for creating and sustaining charisma, Zschech stands out as one who exercises a much more significant individual role at Hillsong church. Like Weber’s magician, Zschech has a level of personal charisma that is based on her abilities as a song writer and worship leader. Based on Evans analysis, I would argue that unlike the music team at Breakfree church, Zschech’s charisma is not only derived from her position as worship leader, but is the product of her reputation as a catalyst of the divine encounter. Thus she is more like Weber’s magician than the Breakfree music team are.
Perhaps the most useful Weberian category to apply to the Breakfree music team is that of “priests,” because in Weber’s schema, charisma is vested in the office, not the individual members. Furthermore, the music team function in a worship cultus, a system involving other members and a tradition developed and practiced over time and performed regularly, week in and week out. The musicians’ task is not primarily to catalyse charisma upon command, but to stake out the charismatic realm of a Breakfree service and facilitate the ecstatic experience within this time and space. The musician has the authority to lead within the context of the meeting because he or she catalyses the experience of the Holy Spirit, which is so central to Breakfree’s identity. However, the need to ensure the iterative nature of the ecstatic experience week to week ensures that musical practices become ritualised.

The Breakfree music team are engaged in the performance of charisma on a regular basis. It is by these means that they create the realm of the Breakfree service. Where priests and shamans in other cultures and contexts may use mandalas, symbols or incantations, the primary mana of the Breakfree music team is their performance of music. Team members are trained in the art of catalysing the charismatic realm. The following examples from my field notes illustrate this. The first is from one of the weekly music practices, where music team members rehearse the songs for the upcoming service, and are led in devotions by Breakfree’s music pastor, Alex. The techniques specific to Pentecostal worship music practice were outlined by Alex as he introduced the phrase “going to the next level,” a technical term used at Breakfree to describe heightened ecstatic experience.

As part of the sermon … [Alex] stated that the group responsible for the music needed to keep the music simple, in the manner which he had observed in his visit to a church in Singapore. Doing this would ensure that they would lead the church to the “next level.” The music group was to “impart” faith to the congregation through the medium of the music. Emphasis was put on having enough faith to trust God would use the
medium of music no matter what the personal emotional or spiritual state
of the performer (Unpublished field notes, 16 May 2007)

It is evident from this excerpt that it is not the personal charisma of the musicians
which is of primary importance, but the task of performing the music itself. It should
also be noted that charisma is invested in the music itself, rather than with the person
performing it. When the Breakfree music team practiced songs, the focus was on
reproducing the music score and the sound on the CDs closely. There is room for
improvisation in the phenomenon known as “free worship,” where music is played
without set lyrics and the congregation and singers enjoy the ecstatic experience.
However, even at these times the focus, as Alex suggests, is on “keeping it simple,”
as too much personal virtuosity is a distraction.

The music team is disciplined and trained to focus solely on their purpose. They act
as priests who serve the charisma rather than heroes who are to be admired
personally for their prowess. Alex, the music pastor, clearly articulated the priestly
function of the music team in performance.

Music is an important area to create an atmosphere, the singers how they
present themselves on stage creates an atmosphere, how they sing creates
an atmosphere, but music definitely creates an atmosphere. They have to
get to the place where the presence of God comes into the service, that’s
the job of the music team, as well to lead people into his presence (Alex,
interview, 4 July 2007).

The discipline of the music team in building the Breakfree sound is unmistakeable.

The group use all kinds of techniques to build songs – single note solos
on the electric guitar which cut through the sound, droning rhythms …
drum rolls. They are disciplined enough to go from a wall of sound to
minimalism and then back in a matter of seconds. This may be the reason
for the control of playing things the same way and matching the music
exactly. The focus is not improvising virtuosity, but a lifting experience –
things are not to distract people from this (Field notes, 23 May, 2007).

This teamwork differs from Weber’s alternative concept of the individual
charismatic leader, who rules by virtue his own personal charisma, understood as a
world-changing energy (Weber, 1998, 116). At first glance this seems to be very different from the manifestation of charisma in the Breakfree service, which appears to build a discrete boundaryed realm that is separated from the real world rather than transforming it.

Having said this, it is evident that the exercise of charisma in the Breakfree service is world-changing. The world that is being changed, however, is primarily a spiritual-emotional one. The emphasis is not on society, but the spiritual realm. It would be unfair and disingenuous to suggest that Breakfree had no interest in social issues such as inequality or politics. Nevertheless, the Breakfree experience is geared toward transforming spiritual reality. It is intended to engineer an emotional breaking away from society which exists outside the church and entering the realm of the sacred. While this may differ markedly from Weber’s conception of charisma as a social force, ironically it is precisely at this point that there is a great deal of similarity between Breakfree and the WCBR, which will be the focus of discussion in the second half of this dissertation. In both realms, charisma is exercised for a space and time, and there is little expectation that it will extend outside the bounds of the church or festival.

Both Weber and Durkheim outline phenomenological descriptors of the experience catalysed within a space — charisma, collective effervescence and the conscience collective respectively. In the sections that follow, I will trace the spatial-phenomenological categories presented by Bakhtin, Turner and Foucault. These theorists offer some fructile ideas concerning the context and shape of the space within which charisma and effervescence operate. Significantly, they locate these
boundaried experiences within a “second world,” a world in which a different order of reality seems to apply.

**Mikhail Bakhtin: Carnival, Ambivalence and Laughter**

Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975) completed his doctoral thesis on the writings of French Renaissance writer François Rabelais (1494–1593). Bakhtin’s work was published in English as *Rabelais and his World*, and contains some unique insights into the nature of medieval carnival. Bakhtin’s ideas on carnival have been applied across the disciplines as a fructile paradigm for understanding the tension that may exist between official culture and the unofficial spaces of popular culture.

In medieval Europe Carnival preceded the observance of Lent, the period of fasting observed 40 days before Good Friday and Easter in the annual religious calendar. In the same way that Pancake Tuesday comes before Ash Wednesday in order to get rid of all the yeast in the house before Lent, so carnival was understood as having the function of allowing the faithful to get the world “out of their system.” In the writings of Rabelais, Bakhtin discovered a carnival which gloried and celebrated the sensuous and the grotesque. It was a time for debauchery and illicit sexual practices, lewd humour and billingsgate. Human functions such as copulation, defecation and urination — functions which in official culture were viewed as embarrassing and shunned — were celebrated during carnival and in carnivalised writing, such as Rabelais’ own work (cf. Bakhtin, 1984a, 190–192, 371–372).

Bakhtin developed his concept of “grotesque realism” from Rabelais. Once again in contrast to the classically beautiful, the complete or perfect, the grotesque realism of carnival glories in what is incomplete, or in the process of becoming, a “pregnant
death” (Bakhtin, 1984a, 25–26, 32, 339). This is the interpretive key for understanding the energy of carnival. Official culture and hierarchy is mercilessly lampooned and pulled to earth in carnival, and for a time nothing is sacred. This pulling to earth is not simply to destroy, but to remake, for the earth is simultaneously the site of death and regeneration (Bakhtin, 1984a, 20–22). In the second world of carnival, people are reminded that all are human and that the hierarchies and structures of official culture are not fundamental to the jointly shared human condition (1984a, 92). Even more importantly, carnival’s process of pulling down in order to regenerate critiques and renews official culture.

Carnival was tolerated by the powers of medieval culture — the church, the monarchy and nobility — even if they did not relish its excesses or more particularly its tendency to pull down hegemonic structures (Bakhtin, 1984a, 74-75). An at times uneasy symbiosis existed between carnival and the church, functioning in a similar fashion to the Amish tradition of *rumspringa*, where unbaptised young people are permitted to leave the community and “run around” — that is, to indulge in behaviour that, ordinarily, would not be tolerated. It is hoped that those who return to the Amish community for baptism will remain faithful to the strict behaviour codes of the sect from that point forward, having “expelled the demons” in a manner of speaking (Shachtman, 2006).

The link between carnival and religion is licensed licentiousness, a space and time where the physicality of being human is celebrated and indulged. It may seem that there was little connection between the chastity and temperance demanded by medieval religious culture and the rampant physicality of carnival. Yet the point really is that the body is inescapable — one cannot exist without a body. Carnival
was a time and space where the finite and physical was celebrated, indulged, laughed at and mocked, ripped apart and reborn. This is the ambivalence of carnival itself — a destruction that does not destroy but renews (Bakhtin, 1984a, 175–176). The relationship between official culture and popular culture represented in the carnival deepens this sense of ambivalence because the iconoclastic and irreverent spirit of carnival was both deplored and accepted by the official culture. Bakhtin understood this to be a necessary, dialectical process between carnival and the everyday world, with particular reference to the power exercised by the church in medieval society.

Although he does not draw explicitly on Bakhtin’s work, Craig Mosher (2008) highlights the deep ambivalence in the intertwined relationship between popular music and Pentecostalism. Many who are now regarded as progenitors of rock and roll — Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash, Ray Charles, Marvin Gaye and Sam Cooke — grew up Pentecostal and learned many of their distinctive performance techniques and music in church. As Mosher notes, both Pentecostal worship and rock and roll are “characterized by open emotional displays, exuberance, physicality, the quest for transcendence and (at their most intense) high mystical states” (2008, 96). Mosher cites the story of Jerry Lee Lewis, whose frenzied boogie woogie piano playing got him expelled from the Southwestern Bible Institute. Lewis exemplifies the aching ambivalence experienced by many of the early stars with roots in Pentecostalism — allured by the passion and energy of rock and roll and at the same time craving redemption from what he regarded as sinful (2008, 102).

This creative symbiosis between rock and roll and Pentecostalism mirrors the ambivalence Bakhtin noted between medieval carnival and official culture. For
Bakhtin, carnival is the supreme expression of medieval popular culture. In giving birth to the Renaissance, carnival passed away, succumbing at last to the elements in official culture that had long plotted its demise. Although carnival is a historical phenomenon localised in medieval times, Bakhtin’s thought can and has been applied across many disciplines as a fecund paradigm for theorising the interplay between popular culture and the official world. In the following section I will draw loosely on Bakhtin’s understanding of carnival to shine some light on Breakfree’s ambivalent relationship with popular culture.

**Breakfree, Popular Culture and Ambivalence**

At first glance, there seems to be little in common between medieval carnival and Breakfree church. In contrast to the debauchery of the carnival, which is the essence of its utopian “otherness” from the everyday, Breakfree church is a seemingly sanitized space where the body is not celebrated but repressed. How is it possible to make a link here without doing violence to the ethnographic material?

Breakfree also engages in the dialectical process that Bakhtin postulated was the result of the ambivalent yet symbiotic relationship between sacred and popular culture. In its use of rock music and techniques to facilitate spiritual experience, the church embraces, perhaps unwittingly, something of the essence of popular culture. In true dialectical style, both influence each other, in much the same way that Pentecostalism influenced the development of rock and roll music in the United States. However, my intention in my examination of the music engaged in this space is to determine what extent, if any, carnival and popular culture exert a transforming influence on Breakfree.
Australian Pentecostalism in the early twenty-first century has by and large moved away from hymns and choirs and embraced popular musical forms. Pentecostal music in Australia is similar in many ways to popular music. As we noted above, the development of popular music, particularly rock and roll as the descendent of rhythm and blues in the United States, is intertwined with Pentecostalism. In Australia, however, the adoption of popular music forms is relatively recent, coinciding with the rise of Hillsong Church in New South Wales, and more recently Planetshakers church in Melbourne, Victoria. Both churches have made use of contemporary popular music forms and performance techniques, and their songs and performance styles are marketed to other churches in Australia and internationally (McIntyre, 2007, 178, 187–188).

A visitor to a Breakfree service might note the combination of the elements of rock music — a rhythm section comprising electric bass and drums, amplified electric and acoustic guitars, keyboards, background vocals and lead singers — together with liturgical practices. Driving 4/4 rhythms, wahhed or distorted electric guitars and blazing blues solos, and performance style lead vocals are also evident. A distinguishing feature of this music is that it is meant to be sung by a congregation, not simply performed by a band. Lyrics are reasonably simple, and more importantly are displayed on large screens using digital projectors. Singers are charged not merely with performing the music, but actually leading the church in singing.

The confusion latent in this seemingly paradoxical setup, no doubt exacerbated by the fact that group public singing is not practiced anywhere else (at least not regularly) in contemporary popular culture is alleviated by these participatory elements. In other words, when confronted by a screen displaying the words you can
hear being sung, and faced by a line of attractive young people who are encouraging you with smiles and gestures to sing, it is an unusual individual who will not at least attempt to mouth the lyrics, comforted by the relative anonymity of the lighting and concert level volume.

Given the similarities between popular music and contemporary Pentecostal “praise and worship” music, it is conceivable that the experience of the service can be reproduced in other contexts, with other music. I decided to ask the informants if a similar ecstatic experience of God to that which occurs in their service could be shared by those at a concert, featuring music that is not specifically Christian in content. The first response was from Breakfree’s senior pastor, Charles.

Me: “So can you worship through secular music?”
Charles: “You can. It depends on the heart of the person doing it. So it doesn’t necessarily matter what the original writer intended, the person listening or singing can worship through it regardless.”
Me: “So can you encounter God through other forms of music?”
Charles: “No. You can’t encounter God through other forms of music. You can turn a song into worship through your heart attitude. I know of a woman who had been far from God for a time, and heard the song ‘I just called to say I love you’ by Stevie Wonder. She broke down in tears, and she knew that it was God speaking to her. Her heart turned it into a worship experience.” (Interview, 1 July 2007)

I found this response confusing. At first, Pastor Charles seemed to affirm that worshipping God could happen through secular music. However, in his next response he seemed to contradict his previous statement, stating that a person cannot encounter God through secular music. Yet he continued to postulate that if a person’s “heart attitude” is right, God could be encountered. He attempted further clarification at the end of the interview by focusing on the content of songs.

Any positive songs can have a good influence, but it’s not at the same level as the supernatural words of God. A lot of the songs use spiritual
principles, without crediting the Bible or under the deception that they came up with it themselves (Interview 1 July 2007).

This statement mirrors carnival ambivalence. For Bakhtin, the carnival was the location for the tearing down of official society, yet this pulling to earth of structures represents an ambivalence. This is because in returning all things to the earth, they are renewed and reborn, not eradicated completely. Pastor Charles’ confusing remarks demonstrate that ambivalence works in the other direction also. Officially, Breakfree cannot tolerate the sacrilegious nature of popular culture; yet it borrows from this very culture in its own most holy practice — worship.

The ambivalence that was found in Pastor Charles’ comments above is also evident in the thoughts of other Breakfree music team members. The worship pastor Alex, for example, responded to a question about using pop music as worship by stating:

Music was created by God, there’s no doubt about that, and people in the world are using music in all different forms, whether it’s jazz or rock and roll or pop, it’s our responsibility as people of God to make use of what God’s created, and for us to release it back to him in that measure, whether our music comes out to be a certain type, if it’s directed to God its our worship to him (Interview, 4 July 2007).

Alex’s response represents an unproblematic view that worship music is not genre specific, but is merely music that Christian people can “direct” to God. Later when I asked him if people could have the same kind of encounters of God at a festival or concert that they might in the Breakfree service, he was more reticent.

Yeah probably, but it would be more difficult for them to encounter God because those songs are not glorifying God. God inhabits the praises of his people, and 99% of songs in the secular world do not glorify God, they would have a tough time experiencing the presence of God. I wouldn’t box God, he can work in the most difficult of circumstances anyway (Interview, 4 July 2007).

Interestingly, this response differs quite markedly from Pastor Charles initial statement, where he intimated that it is not the writer’s intention but the heart attitude
of the one who sings that makes a song “worship.” My intention here is not to expose a deception or a conspiracy of some kind, because I do not believe there is one. The apparent confusion of the responses reflects the tension within the ambivalent relationship between Breakfree’s sacred culture and popular culture. The church makes use of popular cultural forms at the same time as trying to distance themselves from the secular ethos of popular culture.

There are many more examples of this ambivalence. I asked musician Stanley about the importance of lyrics, and among other things, he shared the following thoughts about using secular music lyrics in church.

If lyrics weren’t important we could be singing any secular song, but it doesn’t work that way, like we could sing Linkin Park at church, you wouldn’t have that experience of God. Although what people say is “Any truth is God’s truth,” so let’s say a song is talking about a certain thing, let’s say ‘Heal the World’ or something, some people may get really moved by it, because it’s actually truth if the world is healed and that kind of thing, there’s a new revelation, so the lyrics can become Christianized in some way (Interview, 18 July 2007).

This is somewhat confusing, because Stanley at first demonstrates a negative attitude to secular lyrics, as per his comment about Linkin Park. Yet in the same breath, he makes the proviso that “all truth is God’s truth,” which he then uses to suggest that secular lyrics can be Christianized. I asked for further clarification.

Me: “So you can experience God through secular music?”
Stanley: “I wouldn’t say experience God, but sometimes I listen to some non-Christian music and found the words are actually written in such a way that God can actually use it to speak to you, because any truth is God’s truth, the words have a deeper meaning. Let’s say someone was really down and didn’t know what to do, they listen to a really uplifting song, like ‘You Raise me up,’ I don’t think that’s a Christian song, but if you listen to that and can just feel that experience of God raising you up, it’s not the purpose or intention of the song.”

Me: “So God can do it?”
Stanley: “Yeah, well God is God. But with worship music and lyrics, there’s an intention behind it, because there’s the
intention I think it’s a lot more powerful what happens, people get drawn closer to God and what the purpose of the lyrics were works a lot better.” (Interview, 18 July 2007)

Stanley reacts to my initial question, refuting the concept that God can be “experienced” through secular music or lyrics, yet simultaneously reaffirms that God can speak through secular lyrics. It is possible that the confusion relates to a distinction between ecstatic experience and God “speaking” to people. Even if this is the case, the reluctance of the three informants to be unequivocal on this point is more indicative of a deep seated ambivalence. This ambivalence may result in confusion about the real significance of popular culture and music for Breakfree’s own practice.

It seems the ambivalence of Bakhtin’s carnival is mirrored in the sacred culture in what maybe a symbiotic relationship as well as a dialectical one. Breakfree needs popular culture as a source as well as a touchstone, an “other” to show what they themselves are not. This is, as Bakhtin envisioned, a fructile and illicit relationship.

The premise of carnival, according to Bakhtin, is that it comprises the “second world” of the people, a utopian space discrete from established society. Perhaps the most striking thing about Bakhtin’s carnival is the sensuous, embodied nature of the space, where physicality, sexuality and mortality are celebrated, in sharp contrast to the traditional church forms where the body is denigrated and ultimately transcended. I suggest that the Breakfree service is a more ambivalent space even than the carnival, where the established is mocked and torn down in order to rebuild and renew it. The profound tension exhibited in the physicality of Pentecostal worship, which is barely held in check by norms of Christian decency and morality, is further
exacerbated by the invasion of popular culture into this space, and is almost unbeatable at times.

The fact is, the Breakfree experience is intentionally aimed at the body prior to the spirit. Pastor Charles indicated to me that physical acts, such as clapping and singing, are intended to “open up your soul.” He further postulated that fast songs were designed to wake people up physically so they could come into a physical encounter (Interview, 1 July 2007). Breakfree Church does not shy away from the physicality of what is occurring within the space of the service. Yet the dichotomy between spirit and body is left firmly in place, even reinforced. The body is a tool to get to the spirit, for it is by means of animating the body that the spirit is engaged.

This ambivalence is also displayed in the lyrics of the songs in the service. Many of the lyrics describe the relationship between worshippers and God in romantic and even erotic terms. The following lyrics demonstrate this. The first is from “My Future Decided,” which was a Hillsong United song regularly used during my attendance at Breakfree church.

My eyes on all of the above
My soul secure in all you’ve done
My minds made up
And you are the only one for me

Jesus, saviour, in my life you are everything
My future decided, I will praise your name
And I know that I am, I am yours
Yeah, I know that I am, I am yours

The second lyrical excerpt is from “The Stand,” another Hillsong United song used extensively in Breakfree’s service.

So what could I say?
And what could I do?
But offer this heart oh God
Completely to you

So I’ll stand
With arms high and heart abandoned
In awe of the one who gave it all
So I’ll stand
My soul Lord to you surrendered
All I am is yours

Arguably, this is indicative of the deep seated ambivalence between the indulgence of sensuality and the carnal in popular music, from which Australian Pentecostal music has borrowed extensively, and the sanitized suppression of sexuality and the body latent in parts of the Protestant Christian tradition. The emphasis on personal spiritual ecstasy is the corrective offered by the church to this latent sexuality. What is offered in the Breakfree service is a personal ecstatic experience, using carnival forms but thoroughly “de-carnivalised,” putting emphasis squarely on the spirit rather than the body and the vertical relation between the individual and God rather than the horizontal relation that participants share with each other. The tension, however, cannot be eliminated, but only held in check. The ambivalence remains — with handsome and well groomed singers lead the congregation in dancing and singing the physicality of the experience cannot be denied, it can only be cloaked.

Breakfree church models the dichotomy between Lent and Carnival that is such a feature of Bakhtin’s thought. There is a deep, aching ambivalence in Breakfree’s perception of the carnivalesque realm of popular culture. The ambivalence manifests in Breakfree’s appropriation, through Hillsong United and Planetshakers, of Christianized forms of popular music. However, the attitude of Breakfree’s music team and senior pastor toward popular music being a medium for the experience of God outside of the church ranges from emphatically negative to a grudging admission that God is capable of anything, no matter how unlikely.
Carnival is an uneasy, yet appropriate, paradigm for understanding the experience of the Breakfree service. Victor Turner’s *limen*, *communitas* and performance, on the other hand, are the spatial-phenomenological categories which offer the best fit for the Breakfree service.

**Victor Turner: Limen and Communitas**

Victor Turner (1920-1983) was a Scottish anthropologist. While doing his postgraduate work under the supervision of Max Gluckmann in Manchester, Turner’s field work consisted of study of the Ndembu tribe in Central Africa. Turner developed an abiding interest in Ndembu religious ritual and he started to theorise about the distinction between the “structure” observed in the everyday life of the Africans and the “anti-structure” of religious ritual. In this section I will outline Turner’s anti-structural categories: *limen*, “liminoid” and *communitas*. This section will conclude with a phenomenological description of Breakfree Church’s musical ritual process using Turner’s ideas.

During his fieldwork with the Ndembu tribe in Central Africa, Victor Turner became interested in the religious rituals of the Ndembu and the significance of these rituals. Basing his concepts on thorough anthropological ethnography, Turner observed that through ritual the participants were sequestered from the everyday society of structure and hierarchy. The ritual forms a passage from the everyday world into a new realm. Turner nominated this realm “anti-structure,” and the ritual passage whereby people transition into it he christened the *limen* (Turner, 1969, 94).

For Turner, the anti-structure space operated very differently from the hierarchical and structured order of the everyday Ndembu society. Using grammatical metaphors,
he related the latter to the “indicative” mood, showing the way things are. The latter, anti-structure, he compared to the “subjunctive” — the mood of uncertainty, suggestive of what might be. In this sense, the anti-structure of ritual represented a “realm of pure possibility” (Turner, 1986, 101–102). This unique space was characterised by the experience of communitas, in which all participants stand equal before the spiritual elders (Turner, 1969, 96–97). This uniquely egalitarian realm existed only for a time, and was not intended to supplant the everyday order. In a sense, it does and does not exist, because it is made real only through ritual. For Turner, there could be no society without communitas, but communitas that loses its liminal nature is in danger of becoming mere fetish, which is no communitas at all (Driver, 1991, 160,162).

Turner’s thought has been applied to many different cultural spheres, including both industrial and post-industrial societies. Turner himself made a distinction between liminal ritual in pre-industrial societies — where religion occupies central importance — and “liminoid” practices, which occur in industrial societies. In industrial and post-industrial cultures, religion no longer occupies the central cultural sphere, having been largely consigned to the sphere of leisure, there to compete with other practices such as art, sport and recreation (Turner and Turner, 1978, 35). Tom Driver makes the provocative suggestion that liminality in post-Enlightenment societies is “suppressed.” Driver theorises that this suppression is connected to the increase in power of both nation states and institutions, including churches and religious places of worship. Liminality is suppressed, Driver suggests, because it diminishes these institutions ability to control ideas, emotions and behaviour (Driver, 1991, 159). Driver’s position is well stated, but not strongly qualified by evidence.
One of Turner’s critics, J. Lowell Lewis, cautions against the uncritical application of the *limen* to practices which probably do not warrant it. For Lewis, it is only when participants self-consciously engage in practices of ultimate concern, a category he borrowed from Paul Tillich, that they can be said to be engaging in ritual (2008, 50). Lewis also sets up an interesting dichotomy between “play” and “ritual,” which may or may not exist (2008, 46–48). Conversely, Ronald Grimes notes a deep ambivalence within Turner’s work, suggesting that Turner himself at times (particularly earlier in his career) attributed an “agonistic” quality to ritual, contrasted with an emphasis on the “ludic” quality he attached to ritual later in his life (1995, 154). This would suggest that Lewis’ dichotomy may be too sharp, as play may function as an important component within ritual rather than being a discrete category from it.

While the Breakfree congregation certainly do participate in practices which they hold to be of ultimate concern, there is a significant element of performance, and even play, involved in these, practices. Returning to Driver, this is exactly what should be expected when liminality is no longer repressed but returns to one of its chief functions: releasing individuals from social pressures by catalysing *communitas* (Driver, 1991, 160).

A detailed examination of the musical processual passage which congregants traverse in order to encounter the divine presence, drawing extensively on Turner’s categories, follows in the next section.
**Breakfree: Liminal transition to communitas**

Breakfree Church have developed a ritual process revolving music which is intended to draw people out of the profane world and into the sacred space where God can be encountered in ecstatic experience. In short, this is the whole purpose of the Breakfree service. The goal is to participate in an ecstatic encounter with God. For Turner, the pursuit of that goal is described as an experience of *communitas*. While I will focus elsewhere on what might be called the transcendent or vertical aspects of this process, the discussion at this point will be confined to the empirical landscape: that is, the observable horizontal relations between congregant members and their own articulations of the affects of the experience.

Many churches, religious buildings or sacred sites mark in some manner a transition or a symbolic passage from the profane to the sacred. As Breakfree church meets in a school hall and lack the means or desire to utilise expensive and cumbersome religious symbology, it relies on music to demarcate this passage. Rather than employing traditional Christian symbols such as a crucifix or candles to convey religious meaning, Breakfree draws participants in to an experience of God through the intentional use and control of music tempo and style. The first song is purposefully loud in order to alert those present that a new phase of the service is beginning. It is a tacit announcement that the prayer meeting has concluded and that conversation in the foyer should draw to a close as people move into the main hall. Thus, the first song is essentially a call to begin participation in the ritual journey toward the sacred.

The Breakfree music team deliberately employ the first song to forcibly break people away from profane space. Thus the music itself becomes the spatial and temporal
portal into the liminal realm. Prior to the commencement of the first song in the service, and outside of the main hall is the threshold of entry into this realm. Within the musical realm, focus on the music and sacred is exacting, in no small part because the sheer volume of the music makes conversation between congregants almost impossible. To speak above the volume of the music is to risk being overheard, and to draw the ire of other participants who are trying to focus. The lighting draws the participants’ attention toward the stage, which is the focus of authority in this realm. It is here, in front of the stage, that the participants all stand equal before the spiritual guides, those who provide the music and singing and, later, the authoritative preaching of the sermon and inspired prophecies.

Having established the boundaries of the realm of sacred encounter, the next function of the music is to fill out this realm and give it shape. Most importantly, the style of the music and its performance will lead the congregation on a journey toward ecstatic experience. The next few songs build in layers, symbolising the journey toward the sacred that the congregation are participating in. Rock solid rhythms pound repeatedly, while melodies and chord structures soar and carry members with them, only to fall silent, allowing the participants to float in the *ecstasis*. Only when this journey has been completed in the judgement of the senior pastor will the musicians fall silent. Until then, the “tool” used to lift people into the liminal passage which, in turn, leads people into intense *communitas*, is music.

A Breakfree song service may only consist of three or four songs, but they will be played in such a manner that the music component of the service frequently lasts for an hour. Historically, Pentecostal churches are known for playing songs repeatedly. At Breakfree, this repetition is more sophisticated, with songs that are relatively
complex and scores designed to be followed. The recorded versions of the music played in the church, usually emanating from Hillsong Church in New South Wales, are generally regarded as the authoritative version. The written score will reflect this version, but the music team at Breakfree exercise some autonomy in deciding how often to repeat choruses, or which section to segue into.

Songs are played repeatedly, and often hold their place within the service for several weeks or even months, until participants know the songs and lyrics without the need to follow visual prompts. The fact that most of the songs are available on compact disc or other recordable media prior to being performed in the church means that many people already know the lyrics and melody of these songs, sometimes months prior to them being introduced to the service. Hillsong is well known for its mass-produced music notation of their songs, together with instructional media on how to perform various parts of the music, from guitar solos to backup vocals.

Participants in the Breakfree service do not have to concentrate on unfamiliar lyrics or distracting new melodies or chord structures. The songs are known, and there are no surprises. This means that congregants are free to close their eyes and sing the words without unnecessary cerebral engagement. The higher the level of the audience’s knowledge of the lyrics and structure of the song, the more likely they are to participate in singing, and start to move into the trance like state of “deep listening” (Becker, 2005, 54–56). Comprehensive and habitual knowledge of the song through performance and repeated listening catalyses the trance state, which is a necessary prerequisite for ecstatic experience. Thus the music itself is Breakfree’s limen, the passage into the anti-structure space where the divine and human come into contact.
Possibly the phenomenon which most resembles Turner’s *communitas* at Breakfree church is what congregants call “free worship.” Often in a Breakfree service the musicians will continue playing after the song’s lyrics are finished. This serves the function of smoothing out the transition between songs, so that the music segues seamlessly together. More importantly, however, “free worship” serves as the medium for congregants to continue to bask in the ecstatic experience. Usually without any prompting by the leaders, participants continue to sway, holding their arms aloft or simply closing their eyes to allow the sound to wash over them. Sometimes a member of the congregation or the music team will sing an impromptu, unrehearsed song at this time. Generally speaking, though, no one person leads the free worship, for this is a time when inspired participants deliver prophetic messages or public prayers.

My questions about the phenomenon of free worship to a number of music team members yielded answers that referred mainly to the singing of impromptu lyrics between the rehearsed songs. The first respondent is Alex, the worship pastor at Breakfree.

Me:  “What is ‘free worship’ and what’s going on in free worship?”

Alex:  “Our own personal expression to God. When we’re singing a song it is someone who has penned words onto paper and created music around those words that is a worship song to God, but the other level of worship is our own personal expressions to God, how we are singing to him in our own words that is not necessarily penned on paper.” (Alex, interview, 4 July 2007)

A young singer on the Breakfree music team, Jason, defined free worship this way.

Free worship is where they’ve got the music playing, but you’re worshipping God how you want to worship, there is no set lyrics, you can just sing anything and everyone will sing different things, because
that’s what they want to worship God with, its what you want to tell God (Jason, interview, 4 July 2007).

For Alex and Jason, the experience of free worship is where congregants and leaders are on a level with the songwriters. Although free worship may only be practiced in the service by a few brave individuals, no special status is afforded to them, because everyone is singing their own song to God, simultaneously. It is a perfect union of complete solitude, where everyone is lost in their own experience, and a sense of total togetherness, where people participate in shared ecstasy.

This is a very similar phenomena to Turner’s *communitas* — a space created by religious ritual in which everyone participates in a realm of equality and camaraderie, standing on the same level before the spiritual elders. It also reflects the creativity present in Turner’s later ludic emphasis on the purpose of ritual, resulting in a free space of artistic energy and emotion more characteristic of “play” than “work.” It is a space where all are free to worship in song unconstrained by lyrics, free perhaps even to think and feel in ways that are unprescribed.

Turner spoke about this space as “the realm of pure possibility.” His description also fits well with the experience of the Breakfree service. Within the realm created by the music, the miraculous occurs. God comes into contact with humanity; people speak in heavenly languages, deliver inspired messages and are even healed.

**Foucault: Heterotopia and Limit Experience**

Michel Foucault (1926–1984) was a philosopher who developed theories about spatial categories, for describing “different” places. The following section completes the socio-cultural readings of the Breakfree service with an outline of Foucault’s “heterotopia” and “limit experience.” Michel Foucault, an extremely influential
French philosopher, coined the phrase “heterotopia” in order to describe places that at first glance may appear to be utopias. Foucault rejected utopias as ideal spaces which cannot exist. In contrast, heterotopias are spaces which are set up with utopian ideals in mind, but reflecting a reality which differs in important ways (1998, 178). For Foucault, the major difference between utopias — such as Bakhtin’s carnival or Turner’s *communitas*, for example — and heterotopia is that people enter heterotopias primarily to escape the world, not to transform it.

Foucault introduced heterotopia as a spatial (rather than a linguistic) concept in a lecture presented to a group of architects in March 1967. The most recent printed version of this lecture is entitled “Different Spaces,” translated by Robert Hurley (1998). In this lecture, Foucault sketched an outline of a concept which has captured the imagination of several social theorists and ethnomethodologists. Using a series of superb examples to illustrate the bare bones of this outline, Foucault constructed a paradoxical concept, insisting that utopias are “unreal” — they do not exist. However, in the very next paragraph, Foucault described heterotopias as “actually realized utopias.” Illustrating this by means of a mirror, which Foucault describes as both a utopia and a heterotopia, he makes clear that the latter is actually characteristic of the really existing and the unreal at the same time. Thus heterotopias, while existing and localizable, are inherently paradoxical and ambivalent, simultaneously real and unreal (1998, 179).

Foucault goes on to distinguish between “crisis heterotopias,” where people experience significant change, and “heterotopias of deviation” in which people who are different can be emplaced in a space that differs from the everyday society. Examples of the former include boarding schools or military service where the crisis...
of growing up or discovery of sexuality is sequestered off from the real world, in a placeless place. To illustrate the heterotopias of deviation, which Foucault suggests are becoming much more prevalent in modern society, the Frenchman provides the examples of retirement villages, prisons and psychiatric hospitals (1998, 179–180). These are all places for those who are themselves different, not just engaging in different behaviour for a time.

Foucault suggests that heterotopias have a system of passage, of opening and closing, of isolating and making them penetrable, and function best, as in a festival, when there is a break in time (1998, 182–183). Finally, heterotopias have the ability to expose “real” spaces as more illusory than they seem or, alternatively, as compensating for the chaos of real space by constructing a perfectly ordered space. He concludes with the example of the ship, which is at once a place and not a place, bounded yet open to the sea (1998, 185).

The most important distinction to note at this point between utopias, as characterised brilliantly by Bakhtin’s carnival, and heterotopias, is that the latter are places which do not contest, but escape, the outside world. Heterotopias may function to splinter reality, offering a version of reality which is “unthinkable,” but they do so not in order to transform the real, but in order to provide a means of fleeing it. They are power free spaces in the sense that people enter heterotopias as havens from the exercise of power, which is utterly inescapable in the real society (Johnson, 2006, 86–87). The breadth and variety of Foucault’s examples may be frustrating to some because they are difficult to reconcile into a coherent spatial concept. They do, however, provide insight into the radical difference of heterotopic space. This space
is characterised not by order or chaos, but simply by *difference*, which may mean order or chaos, or both, or neither.

It is also illuminating to think of heterotopias as sites of “limit experience,” which is another key Foucauldian concept. Throughout his career, Foucault engaged in the iconoclastic task of attempting to pull down the tenets of Cartesian metaphysics, which enshrined the thinking subject in a transcendental position. For Foucault, the transcendent subject was an illusion. The subject is actually “constituted in and through a historical network of discursive and non-discursive practices” (Heiner, 2003, 24-25). The limit experience, wherein the subject is wrenched free from what he or she conceives to be the self, is essential to the process of “desubjectivation,” freeing the individual from what he or she held to be “certain” or “true” (Foucault, 2000, 241,244). Thus, the limit experience is a necessary purging prior to radical change — it breaks an individual from what he or she imagines to be the “self.”

One of the better known popular works on Foucault, James Miller’s *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (1993), focuses explicitly on the limit experience as the touchstone for all of Foucault’s work. Miller’s reading is insightful inasmuch as Foucault himself makes a similar claim in an interview with Duccio Trombadori (Foucault, 2000, 246). It would be easy to read a kind of religious mysticism into Foucault’s thinking on the limit experience. This is exactly the route Miller takes and his work has been criticized for adopting this approach (cf. Jeremy Carrette’s introduction in Foucault, 1999, 19–24). The most that can be said is that the Foucauldian limit experience has clear and obvious parallels with Christian mystical experience. According to Foucault there is no union with the divine at the limit, but merely a purging of the objective categories of knowledge and an admission that the self is a
product of construction. Indeed it is a disturbing, even destructive experience of reaching the boundaries of what one thinks of as the “self.”

Coupling the rather nebulous idea of heterotopia with the more concrete concept of limit experience in Foucault provides a powerful mechanism for exploring the Breakfree service, as a place people enter to “break free.”

“Breaking free:” Limit experience within the Breakfree heterotopia

The entire Breakfree service is a heterotopia, a place where people come to participate in behaviour which might be characterised as deviant, or as a place of illusion or compensation. The pseudonym I have chosen for the church, Breakfree, is borrowed from a Hillsong United song which was performed several times during my attendance at the church. According to the composers for the song, it is designed to catalyse a type of limit experience that marks off the special space of the service as different from the outside world:

The best thing about [the song Break free] is it serves its purpose. It’s that song that if people hear that guitar riff at the start they know what they’re in for, and they know they’re going to be up on their feet and dancing around. Like get break free, you know you gotta break free out of what’s happened out of that week, and I’m just pumped that this song is doing what it’s meant to be doing (Crocker and Ligertwood, 2007).

This “break free” experience is critical to the constitution of the heterotopia. Unlike some of the more tangibly distinct places Foucault suggests, there is not much to separate the Breakfree congregation from the outside world. During my attendance, they met in the performance hall of a local high school, with no access to the symbolic architecture of a traditional church which demarcates unique space. Music was the primary technology by which the ethereal boundaries of the Breakfree
heterotopia were maintained. The purpose of the music is to break individuals free from the outside space in order to prepare them to experience the Breakfree realm.

The term “setting an atmosphere” was used by nearly every Breakfree participant I spoke with or interviewed. The term itself is paradoxical: the metaphor “atmosphere” is borrowed from the exterior space around us as human beings, which is necessary for life, and yet beyond human control. On the other hand, “setting an atmosphere” implies the ability to control the space, to manipulate it for the purpose of attaining certain ends. To claim to be able to “set” or “build” an atmosphere implies the ability to organise a space so that it becomes something other — a heterotopia. For the music team to claim the ability to change and affect the feel of space is no less than to construct a heterotopic placeless place wherein the world can be escaped for a time.

The technology for creating this different space within the service revolves around music, but also includes other factors. Pastor Charles details a comprehensive inventory of the heterotopia which is the Breakfree service. As is evidenced below, the congregation carefully controls, or desires to control more efficiently, the space created by the music.

We’re not very good with our lighting, we’re very limited, in the venue that we have. Personally I would love to get in a lighting consultant to come in and do up the place for us. Lighting is important. I believe very strongly in our venue representing the glory of God, and the nature of God. God is magnificent, beautiful, God is holy, mighty and powerful and so everything that represents church needs to be beautiful and magnificent and holy, right down to our offices. It all represents the God that we serve. The paintings on stage, the lighting — atmosphere’s created by everything you see, hear, smell (Charles, interview, 10 October 2007).
Such descriptions articulate how the heterotopia is constructed and maintained. However, what is the purpose of this unique realm, in Foucauldian terms? The descriptions provided by Alex and Charles indicate that Breakfree’s service is what Foucault would characterise a heterotopia of compensation. It is a space organised by order, hope and faith, and of course music, which stands in tacit judgement of the profane space around it. This judgement is strongly ambivalent, as evidenced by Breakfree’s appropriation of popular music forms à la Bakhtin’s carnival. Ambivalence and paradox characterises heterotopia in a way that sets it apart from utopia. The nebulous term “atmosphere” captures well the ethereal boundaries of a realm that is, after all, encapsulated by something as intangible as music.

Further to the observations that the Breakfree atmosphere is compensatory, it is notable that the purpose of setting the atmosphere in a service is to create a space that is in opposition to the profane space outside. Within this atmosphere created by the music and musicians, everything is ordered and, most importantly, represents an atmosphere of “faith.” For Breakfree vocalist Joanne, faith is both constructive and edifying.

In a way worship sets an atmosphere of faith, it builds people up, it gives you hope that God is there for you when you sing the songs (Joanne, interview, 5 September 2007).

Unlike the space outside Breakfree church, the atmosphere created within the service is one of hope and encouragement. It is a place where people can flee from the godless and come into ‘God space.’ The atmosphere of the Breakfree space can exist outside the realm of the Breakfree service, as long as the music remains constant. In effect, another atmosphere can be created in another space; another place can be rescued from the profane, much like land being reclaimed from the sea. Disorder and
lowness can be transformed within this redeemed space into order and purpose.

Senior pastor, Charles, makes this very point.

Music is an atmosphere builder … We have to build a proper attitude around our life. Music is important for this. I believe the suicidal teenager who listens to horrible music is building a bad atmosphere. We are a product of our atmosphere and our environment. When my wife had our first child, she was home all the time and she started to feel bored and down. I invested in music for her and she used to put it on during the day, and it built a different atmosphere in the house. An atmosphere or environment that is honouring God through music and lyrics builds faith (Charles, interview, 1 July 2007).

Unlike the ambivalence of carnival space, which Bakhtin believed set up an opposition to society and, ultimately, had the power and purpose to transform the latter, the heterotopia of the Breakfree service is more akin to a bubble of faith and order, sequestered off from a profane biosphere of chaos. Other spaces can be similarly redeemed and become similar spatial realms. This process was clearly described by Pastor Charles above, where he helped his spouse create just such a realm with music similar to that played during the Breakfree service. Clearly, as Foucault envisioned, the Breakfree “atmosphere” and similar spaces are portals of escape from the world, rather than transformative utopian critiques.

Ending this exploration here would result in missing the key insights of the other Foucauldian theme — the “limit experience.” Ecstatic experience is the centre of the Breakfree service, and absolutely critical to the maintenance of the discrete realm of the service. Within the space of the service, people are required to abandon themselves, in order to let go of what may pass for truth, or reason, or sensibility in the world outside. The Breakfree service represents a direct challenge to the modern secular person, because, within this heterotopia, what is impossible outside becomes possible. People can be cured of incurable diseases. Profane human beings can come into contact with the essence of the sacred. In short: it is by taking those within the
service to the limit of sensibility, of what is known, that the “other” reality of the realm is to be perceived. There is no heterotopia, no Breakfree realm, without the limit experience.

The connection between the “atmosphere” of the service and the limit, where the impossible becomes reality, is articulated by music team member Alex.

It’s something that’s sensed, rather than something you can put your finger and say “that equals that.” It’s the atmosphere within that meeting, you can literally sense whether it’s a flat atmosphere or there’s an atmosphere of expectation and different levels of expectation, so with faith there are different levels of faith. Someone could be there just expecting for a headache to go away in the presence of God and that happens, but someone else could have a higher level of faith, with some sickness in their bodies, so they are expecting God to come through for them even as they worship God, and it does happen (Alex, interview, 4 July 2007).

It should be recognised, however, that Foucault’s attitude toward the sacred is nihilistic and he certainly did not regard the limit experience as an experience of the divine presence in the same way as Breakfree church. It is difficult to know what Foucault might have thought of the peak experience of the Breakfree service. He may have perceived it as a retreat from the true limit, a last second refusal to enter the chaos of the limit of self by clinging to a historically conditioned object of knowledge — the divine. A fascinating comparison between Foucault’s thoughts on the limit and Otto’s thinking on a spirituality of horror and the weird falls, regrettably, outside the scope of this current discussion. Nevertheless, it promises to provide a fruitful avenue for further research.

I will now draw the disparate strands of this chapter together in summary. Following the general pattern, I will make some concluding remarks based on our journey in this chapter, while leaving the more substantial insights and evaluations to the final chapter.
**Conclusion**

The starting point of this chapter was French sociologist Emile Durkheim’s musings on the nature of religion and society. Durkheim postulated that when people gather together in groups a corporate excitement of their emotional states may occur. He coined the phrase “collective effervescence” as a descriptor of this experience. Furthermore, he held that in the state of collective effervescence, people may act in ways that are out-of-the-ordinary. Importantly, individuals in this excited state perceive the phenomenon to be beyond their control and extrapolate from this experience the existence of a supernatural entity. In effect it has a life of its own, a *sui generis* existence, because it is not under the control of any one person in the society. This phenomenon, which Durkheim labelled the “conscience collective,” has been interpreted as a transcendent entity, something that exercises its will on human beings from outside and beyond them. This interpretation is an error according to Durkheim, as this experience has its genesis in human society itself.

The next step was to apply these two creative concepts to Breakfree Church’s preservice prayer meeting. In line with Pentecostal practice and history, the phenomena demonstrated in the prayer meeting — loud corporate praying, shouting, bouncing, swaying and particularly *glossolalia* — is attributed to the presence of the Holy Spirit. Durkheim’s concepts offer an alternative explanation for this phenomenon. Throughout this study we have observed that, at Breakfree, there are a number of learned practices employed to lead the congregation into an experience of collective effervescence. Prayers are directed toward facilitating this experience, while the music is performed specifically to excite the emotional state of those present. This set of learned behaviours that assist in facilitating the experience of effervescence indicate that the phenomena interpreted as the Holy Spirit may actually be generated
by the group themselves, as a manifestation of what Durkheim called the conscience collective. At the very least, Durkheim’s categories draw attention to the social components of the experience of the Holy Spirit within the Breakfree realm.

The enigmatic power of the Holy Spirit or conscience collective segues into the understanding of charisma put forward by Max Weber. In his later work on religion, Weber focused on charisma as an enigmatic power, similar to the mystical mana of the shaman. Weber suggested that most people in society do not exercise the ability to control this charisma. There are, however, individuals in society who are so gifted and, for Weber, they fall into three categories: magicians, priests and prophets. Magicians are individuals who usually work alone, and demonstrate the ability to catalyse charisma at will. Conversely, priests do not work alone but are part of a larger social organization, and are dependent on the office of the priesthood and a set of codified doctrines and practices in order to generate and manipulate charisma. Prophets are responsible for bringing about new doctrine and this is their unique manifestation of the charismatic power.

Having elucidated these three categories, I then compared the music team at Breakfree church with the Weberian types of charisma bearers. Like the magician, the Breakfree music team may be perceived to be gifted catalysers of charisma. However, they generally do not work alone and are not reliant on their own means to catalyse or control charisma, relying almost exclusively on music. Like the prophets, the charisma catalysed by the music team may result in new “revelation” in the midst of the Breakfree service. The service is often the site of ecstatic prophecies, and individuals often talk of the ecstatic state catalysed in the service as “revelation,” an experience where God speaks to them. The Weberian category which provides the
best fit is priests. Like Weber’s priests, the music team do not claim the source of their charismatic power as their own, but are reliant on their position as office bearers and on developed corporate practices of inducing charisma.

If, as I have suggested the music team members are best described as priests, this lends a particularly sharp edge to the ambivalence introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin’s carnival. Initially the period prior to the observance of Lent in the religious calendar of medieval Europe, carnival became a popular culture phenomenon. It was variously situated in “carnivalised” expressions of art, writing and even scholarship. Carnival was characterised by an irreverent ethos, it contained a popular energy of mockery and insult, and aimed to pull down the structures of official culture including the monarchy and the church. This simultaneous movement of pulling down and regenerating emphasises the latent ambivalence in carnival. Echoes of carnival energy and ambivalence are evident in the relationship between popular music and Christianity in the twentieth century and beyond (Kohl 1993). Craig Mosher (2008) and Harvey Cox (1995) are two contemporary authors who note that popular music forms such as jazz and rock and roll are intertwined with the development of American Pentecostalism. Many stars of early rock and roll exemplify the ambivalent relationship between popular music and Pentecostalism.

Breakfree Church also models this ambivalence, evidenced in the, at times, confused responses to my questions about experiencing God through popular music. Australian Pentecostal movements such as Hillsong United and Planetshakers draw on youth culture and popular music forms in their worship, using music that is arguably indistinguishable from popular music if not for the lyrics. Breakfree church makes extensive use of music from Hillsong United and Planetshakers and others
sources like them. Even the bodily experience of music is acknowledged at Breakfree, and techniques such as lining the stage with attractive singers facing the congregation are used to encourage participation. However, when confronted with the question about whether similar experiences can be accessed in other, secular, contexts, the Breakfree music team members were reluctant to allow this. Perhaps it is this ambivalent relationship with popular culture, embracing and utilising it at the same time as rejecting it, that is at the heart of the ambivalent impetus driving Breakfree and Australian Pentecostal churches to continue to change and adapt.

The work of Victor Turner, who presents a spatial paradigm that has been compared with Bakhtin’s carnival, was introduced next. In the early part of his career as an anthropologist, Turner completed a detailed ethnographic account of the ritual practices of the Ndembu tribe in Central Africa. He noted that religious ritual was characterised by a phenomenon he called “anti-structure.” In contrast to the structure of everyday practices and society in Ndembu culture, Turner argued that ritual practices constituted a passage — the limen — from structure to anti-structure. This liminal passage led into a realm of “pure possibility,” a space sequestered from the everyday world, and has much in common with Bakhtin’s “second world of the people.” This space was characterised by communitas, an ethos of camaraderie and lack of hierarchy, where all people in the society stood equal before the community’s spiritual elders.

I have taken the opportunity afforded by this thesis to compare and contrast Turner’s work to Breakfree’s practice, and particularly their use of music. Breakfree church uses music to create a liminal passage from the sacred to the profane. Music drenches the Breakfree service. The song “Break free,” from which I have taken the
pseudonym used for the church, is designed to separate people from the outside world and draw them down this passage into a realm of encounter with God. Music is designed to lead people on a corporate and individual spiritual odyssey. Building and breaking rhythms are crafted to lift people into ecstasy before dropping away to allow them to soar. Songs are played repeatedly, and lyrics are internalised, further leading the congregants into entrancement. The phenomenon of “free worship,” where the music continues but congregants and leaders are free to sing their own lyrics, is an example of *communitas*. Everyone, regardless of status, is invited to sing together, and the congregation is united before the pastor and the music team.

The final spatial category in this chapter was Michel Foucault’s heterotopia. Heterotopias are the actualisation of utopias, which are essentially unreal places. Foucault distinguished two broad categories of heterotopias, coining the phrase “crisis heterotopias” for places where people go to experience life changes. More common in modern society, however, are the “heterotopias of deviation,” where people enter or are emplaced in order to engage in deviant behaviour or because they are perceived as deviant. Also, Foucault theorised that heterotopias may function to compensate for the real world, creating a place which contrasts the disorder and chaos of the normal world. This concept can be combined with Foucault’s ideas on the limit experience, in which the individual is taken to the edge of what is thought of and experienced as the self. The person comes to face the reality that the concept of the self is historically constructed. We noted that while some have suggested that this idea contains a type of spiritual mysticism, Foucault himself held that there is nothing beyond the limit; it is simply the boundary of what is “known.”
The next step was to consider the Breakfree service as a heterotopia of deviation, compensation and limit experience. Congregants are able to engage in ecstatic behaviour within the Breakfree service, behaviour that would be regarded as deviant in the everyday world. They sing, shout, sway, chant and speak in tongues. Interestingly, congregants also treat Breakfree as a heterotopia of compensation, a place where, in contrast to the profane nature of the everyday world, the kingdom of God is brought to earth in time and space. Within the Breakfree realm the impossible is possible and people can be healed from diseases as well as experience the divine presence. The ecstatic experience which is characteristic of the Breakfree service is similar to the limit experience, as it takes people into areas of “new revelation.” An “atmosphere” is created using music every week, which serves to form the boundaries of the heterotopia. Foucault would perhaps dispute the authenticity of the Breakfree limit experience however, because at Breakfree the historical category of the divine is emplaced at the boundary of self instead of the nothing which he seems to have believed to be located there.

The Breakfree service exhibits characteristics evident in all of the paradigms examined in this chapter. It is characterised by the experience of effervescence, perhaps catalysed by the fused conscience collective exercising a transcendent-like control and influence on the space. It is charisma’s realm, where music team members carry out the priestly function of catalysing in repeatable forms the charismatic power usually attributed to the Holy Spirit. In itself, the Breakfree service combines some of the elements of religious ritual, or Turner’s limen, and the carnival energy of popular culture. This results in an ambivalent tension at the central space of the service, similar to communitas, where all are equal, but the bodily reality of the experience is both repressed and embraced. Finally, it is a heterotopic realm of
a form of limit experience, insofar as the congregation celebrate regular experience of self transcendence resulting in deeper union with the divine.

Apart from Turner’s limen and communitas, these are all categories which can offer an interpretation of the data from our case study without necessary reference to a divine being. Even Turner’s ideas are expressed mostly in empirical terms. These paradigms are useful in drawing attention to the horizontal nature of the Breakfree realm. Rather than rushing to a religious interpretation of this phenomenon, these thinkers promote consideration of how people behave, they seek to understand what kinds of actions and technologies catalyse certain states of experience. The discipline of listening respectfully to the voice of these observers helps in illuminating the human richness of this realm, that which can be seen, even if one arrives at the final decision that a transcendent power or entity is required to make sense of the whole phenomenon.

I will return to the interplay of relationship between socio-cultural and theological-religious disciplines in the final chapter. For now, it bears reflection that the significance of the ambivalence of the space and the ritual nature of human behaviour are among those things which may be misunderstood or completely overlooked without the assistance of careful ethnography and socio-cultural analysis. The Breakfree realm is a temporal reality, existing for a time and within a space. As such, it assumes the existence of a profane or everyday world to be “other” to.
Chapter 5: Case Study 2

The West Coast Blues & Roots Festival

The sun is bright over the coastal city of Fremantle in Western Australia. The bitumen under my feet is familiar — I often come here with my daughters when we visit the Esplanade. But it doesn’t feel familiar today. It has been transformed into the entrance portal into the West Coast Blues & Roots Festival (WCBR). On the left is the Little Creatures micro brewery and beer tent, directly opposite the Crossroads stage, where punters can gulp down an ale and enjoy performances. Further in on the Esplanade grass, where I have played chasy with my eldest daughter, two enormous stages are set up — the “Big Top,” under a blue canvas circus canopy that almost makes it seem indoors, and the “Harbour Stage,” where participants watch acts in the blazing March sun.

Passage into the arena is currently easy, because it is still several hours before crowds of people will show up, choking the area it with a mass of bodies and noise. They will arrive as the sun retreats and the encroaching darkness lends anonymity to the proceedings. They come to spend the evening with friends, to enjoy the presence of their favourite musicians and, most of all, for the music. Many will participate in an indescribable experience, a connection with something transcendent, made possible by, among other things, the crowds, the atmosphere, the alcohol, and the music.

In this chapter, I will build up a descriptive narrative of a day at the festival, with an emphasis on the process whereby music becomes a portal into a shared ecstatic
experience. Following this description, I will develop a detailed analysis of the components which go into the social and cultural construction of peak experience in the context of the WCBR. I attended the festival on five days spread over two years, and therefore this account does not represent a strictly chronological recording of events. Rather, I will use the processes involved in the collaboration producing euphoric experience as a framework upon which to hang a portrait of a typical day. I make note also of the activities of those who are not necessarily participating in a euphoric experience.

**A long prelude: morning and afternoon sessions**

Nearly everyone who enters the WCBR is funnelled through the entrance I described above. Entryways serve a pragmatic function, and in this case a commercial one, as the entrance leads punters inevitably past the beer tent. Security was another function of the entry — twice I was asked to open my backpack and empty the malicious looking water from my canteen onto the ground. The entry point served as a clear division between the insiders and those who had no tickets, forced to listen from outside the fence. In a similar manner to a religious setting such as a church or mosque, the entryway marks the passage into a significant space. Participants encounter a portal which symbolically marks the journey from the outside world into an inner, musical realm. In this realm, for many of those involved, the goal is not earning a living or working toward a degree. Within this designated space and for a period of time, the normal rules, conventions, goals and needs do not apply. In this realm, it is all about the music.

For those committed participants who, like me, arrived in the bright sunshine of Saturday morning, anticipation would have to wait some time for consummation. A
handful of people were lounging on the grass under the Big Top, or in the shade of a
tree near the Harbour stage as I walked out onto the grassed area. The mood was laid
back; many of the bands played their instruments seated. None of the musicians seem
disappointed at the temperate reception they received. They acknowledged the
crowds and interacted self-consciously with each other and those close to the stage.
The early crowds took the opportunity to wander around the festival grounds, which
were set up to lead people around in an oval, past all the merchandise. The food stalls
were outrageously expensive, but some of the other merchandise was relatively good
value. As the unhurried punters wandered around, the speakers blared out the music
and lyrics of the early acts. Many seemed to use the music as a soundtrack for their
other activities.

Those who were watching acts performing on the Crossroads stage could take shelter
in the beer tent. Others took refuge in the shade of the sound desk, where they could
stand closer to the stage. At the Harbour stage, many also sat in the shade of the
sound desk. However, the majority of punters were to be found under the trees.
There were those who were prepared to take the brunt of the heat and stand in the
full sun near the stage. However, participating in this way during the earlier parts of
the day was not necessarily easy or pleasurable. The sensation of the sun burning on
skin or slicing painfully into eyesight rendered ecstatic enjoyment of the music
almost impossible.

The Big Top was a unique venue, providing a more easily negotiable access into the
ecstatic experience of music. Under the Big Top, the sun was not an issue. Organizers took advantage of the relative darkness and intimate atmosphere in the
big tent, where sound and light could be more easily controlled, to schedule some of
the veteran performers. Marijuana smoke was retained in the covered setting. This was evident in the spirals of smoke rising toward the ceiling and the smell. Many of us passively inhaled and experienced a high not directly linked to the music. The Big Top was not without its problems however, and was plagued with sound issues in the second year of my attendance. The painful sound of feedback and fuzz made it very difficult to engage deeply with the music. Also, the close atmosphere meant that the sound of people talking to each other in the tent was almost deafening, sometimes threatening to drown out the performers.

Notable in the daytime sessions, particularly those in the morning, was the lack of connection between the performer and the audience. This could not simply be put down to lack of experience, as some of the artists were veterans. In a different context, for example an intimate indoor setting where the lighting can be more easily controlled, there may have been a higher level of collaboration between audience and performers. That was not the only factor, however, as audiences clearly found it easier to get involved with more well known performers whose lyrics they were familiar with. Acts such as Eric Burdon, Tony Joe White, Seasick Steve and Don McLean managed to get people involved with very well known songs and the charisma developed through years of performance in front of much larger crowds, as the following excerpt demonstrates.

The House of the Rising Sun [by Eric Burdon and the Animals], particularly, is a song which I’ve played with friends, but it’s a song that, it’s one of those songs that when we’re together, its one of the songs that I can half sing, and we really hammer it and pound it when we do it, so it evokes all those memories of sitting around with guitars and saying “what about House of the Rising Sun?” and then just going off, and then to actually be sitting there and see the guy who was part of creating that

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* The role of mind altering substances such as marijuana, alcohol and other substances is a fascinating study which falls outside the realm of this thesis. I confined my work phenomenologically, taking note of what I actually saw and experienced myself. Together with this, my interest was primarily in music as a catalyst for ecstatic experience, and drugs have a supplementary, rather than a primary, role in this. For a more developed argument along the same lines, see Takahashi, 2004.
song almost doing the same thing with his band was just fantastic (David, interview, 10 April 2007).

As the afternoon wore on, not everyone was lounging in the shade or leaning against the posts in passive observance. However, it was only the very brazen, or inebriated, who ventured out to stand near the front and dance to the music. The performers themselves seemed to recognise that audience participation would increase as the day progressed. This excerpt from my field notes was written after observing one of the acts in the early afternoon under the Big Top.

At times the lead singer was talking to someone off stage during the solo, seemingly not particularly connected to the music himself. Then he unslung his guitar and screamed the last lyric, a charismatic gesture that fired some in the crowd … [He told] the audience that it was the afternoon and it was “time to get into it now.” (Unpublished field notes, 31 March 2007)

As the day progressed, the grounds became more and more densely populated. Some of the bigger names, such as Missy Higgins, the Waifs, Eskimo Joe, Paul Kelly and Xavier Rudd did not appear until the late afternoon. Anticipating the arrival of more popular acts, plenty of fans showed up later in the day. The atmosphere at both stages started to change as the attendees continued to swell in number and volume. A clear distinction became evident between the “fans,” who were located as close as possible to the front, and the “listeners.” The latter group seemed to use the music as a backdrop for whatever else they were doing: drinking, socialising, wandering around the market stalls, buying and consuming food. The listeners were not a static group. Many dropped to the back for acts they were not particularly interested in, and conversely people who were happy to stand with their backs to the stage while talking with friends dived into the tightly massed pack in front of the stage when their favourite act appeared.
During the afternoon and evening it seemed that, although everyone present wanted to experience the amazing ecstasy of getting lost in the music, no one was prepared to make that happen. The elusive equation seems to combine a sufficient number of people jostling in front of the stage, combined with songs most punters know and love, and a performer with enough charisma to churn the crowd up without making the experience seem contrived. The night sessions held infinitely more promise. As the brief West Australian dusk started to fade, the sense of anticipation approached critical mass.

A different world: Night sessions

At night everything changed. Those performers most revered — acts such as the John Butler Trio, Sinéad O’Connor, Buddy Guy, Wolfmother, John Mayer, Ben Harper and the Innocent Criminals and John Fogerty — emerged to excite the devotion of those gathered to orgasmic frenzy. The close proximity of bodies, increasingly dim light — at least away from the stage — loud music and alcohol, united to create an intense and devoted atmosphere in “the pit.”

I’d say there’s a lot more buzzing atmosphere at night definitely. No one’s rushing around … I think people are moving around a lot more at night (Melissa, Interview, May 1 2008).

With the better known performers and songs came the elusive ingredient of participation, as the crowds sang along lustily with well known lyrics, rather than being passive observers. The fact that the songs were so well known to the audience is significant in a number of ways. It means the words (at least for the chorus) are internalised, and so one does not have to struggle to understand lyrics during listening.
It means that the rhythm and melody are also internalised, which may be even more important. Fans were able to anticipate the chorus and familiar phrases, where they could join in unprompted and sing along lustily. The discursive process of hearing and interpreting the music and lyrics as well as making sense of them is in some sense bypassed. Fans are able to feel like they are part of the performance too. Perhaps they, as I have, imagine what it would be like to be on stage performing the song themselves. The canonical song turns everyone present into a performer. The following excerpts from interviews with participants at the WCBR demonstrate the impact of well known songs for helping build a connection between performers and participants, and help everyone “get into it.”

When they [performers] speak to you they say it’s unbelievable that you guys actually know all the words to that song, it just blows us away, we never thought that we’d be anything and here we are at a concert and you guys are singing our song back to us, it’s overwhelming, its brilliant, so sometimes you feel privileged to know that you’re supporting them and enjoying their music for them (Olivia, Interview, 3 May 2007).

I also danced to John Fogerty. I didn’t know he did half those songs, I knew a lot of them, it was brilliant. I only knew a few of them were his, like Fortunate Son … It was good because I was with my friend and we weren’t just singing along we were singing and dancing and skipping and being real losers because we didn’t realise we knew them. ’Cause their childhood songs that your parents have sung to you, I wish my parents had better taste in music, but it felt good (Melissa, Interview, May 1 2008).

The musical performers stoked this incredible energy and fed off it. None of them stood passively strumming as if we were not there. As singers bantered with the crowd, massive screens showed the faces of myriad front rovers, ecstatic in the close proximity of their fantasized-about idols. Songs built, and thumped, and “wahhed,” driving the group to an experience of euphoria — an adrenaline laced high. Gone with the sun was the reticence, the self-consciousness of both bands and audience. The audience participated in the performance of songs they knew. Between sets, people jammed too tightly to move conversed with total strangers, forming
temporary, liminal communities. On this warm but windy night, clothing was minimal, and in the writhing mass of humanity skin contacted skin in a hormone drenched, erotically charged zone. Of course, skin contact is not always pleasant, as those unwise enough to wear open toed shoes could testify.

Within this space, and for this time, it became clear that the rules of acceptable behaviour changed. Clearly the influence of substances such as marijuana and alcohol had an impact, as well as being part of a large crowd. While drunk or high people might act this way in a crowded city street, their behaviour would be considered inappropriate. In the midst of the musical space, however, this behaviour was not out of place. The rules are different within this realm. Normal social conventions can be bent, and perhaps ignored. A new set of social norms are forged within the temporary community, meeting together for the purpose of the ecstatic experience of music.

Nevertheless, it is also fair to say that not everyone involved was having an ecstatic experience. Those not dancing, singing, shouting, cheering and clapping were the odd ones out, often relegated to the more spacious area near the back of the stage. These night time “listeners” preferred to use the music as a background to socialising, hooking up and drinking rather than participating in the devotion to the music and performance practiced by the frenzied faithful closer to the front. Many stared in some trepidation at the wildly gesturing performers of the human sea around them. Often the next song or performer brought well known lyrics to these lost souls, who were again able to engage and be carried, lost in the experience of the music.
Thus ends a typical day at the West Coast Blues & Roots festival. The chief component in constructing a portal into the ecstatic experience is music. Yet music alone does not construct or maintain the space in which this experience can be accessed. The following two chapters will focus on certain components of the WCBR, using theory drawn from theology and religious studies and socio-cultural studies to illuminate the data.
Chapter 6: Toward a Socio-Cultural reading of the West Coast Blues & Roots festival

This chapter builds upon the WCBR ethnographic case study presented in chapter five. As with the Breakfree church case study, the data will be analysed using socio-cultural theories as well as theological and religious theories. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the contribution which a number of socio-cultural paradigms can make to interpreting the unique nature of the festival space as something distinct from the extra-festival world. To achieve this end, I will present sections of ethnographic data gathered from my field work at the WCBR. Using the phenomenological approach, the theories will then be utilised to illuminate the data. Chapter seven will extend this analysis by offering a theological and religious studies perspective on the WCBR.

Socio-cultural studies provide a useful set of methods and theories for exploring and interpreting the effects of music in social realms such as the WCBR. Methodologically, participant observation and ethnography facilitate careful attention to what people experience and articulate about their experiences. The strength of participant observation in such a context is the ability to combine observation with interviews. This results in the combination of the researcher’s own experiences together with the thoughts and feelings of others, resulting in a rich and nuanced descriptive narrative of phenomena. The commitment of the socio-cultural theorists to prioritise the empirical data — what we have elsewhere referred to as the horizontal vista, meaning the sea of human interaction and inter-relationships — further deepens this exploration.
The central issue addressed in this chapter revolves around the significance of music for creating and maintaining space, and how the nature of this space is to be interpreted. If ecstatic experience takes place within the festival space, can socio-cultural theories provide a convincing explanation for this phenomenon? If so, what new insights are made plain by the application of these theories? In keeping with the spirit of this work, the purpose of this exploration is not to exclude potential theological or religious interpretations for the phenomena observed. Instead, the religious and theological theorists will round out the description of the realm in the next chapter, presenting a fully-orbed view of the nature of the WCBR realm.

I begin this chapter with Emile Durkheim’s thought on the sacred and profane in society and religion, and revisiting in more detail his conception of “collective effervescence.”

**Emile Durkheim: The Sacred and Profane and Collective Effervescence**

Emile Durkheim was interested in forging the new discipline of sociology into a science in its own right, distinct from other disciplines such as psychology. I have already drawn on Durkheim’s classic work, *The Elementary forms of Religious Life*, in chapter four, with particular emphasis on “collective effervescence” and the “conscience collective.” This chapter introduces Durkheim’s analysis of the separation between the sacred and profane, which he called the most profound distinction humankind has ever learned to make between objects in the world. I will also revisit Durkheim’s conception of “collective effervescence.” This section will conclude with the application of these paradigms to the experience of being in the mosh pit at Wolfmother’s set at the 2007 WCBR.
Durkheim noted that all religious systems share one characteristic: the classification of all things into two opposed groups. These two groups are known as the “sacred” and the “profane” (1976, 37). These two orders of existence are profoundly heterogeneous, such that passage between them requires a “veritable metamorphosis”, generally involving initiation rites which transport an individual from one realm to the other (1976, 38–39). Durkheim argued that this classification is central to many of the patterns and rhythms of everyday life experienced across cultures. Harvest and planting, sex and abstinence, marriage and death, are all intimately bound up in the distinction between the sacred and profane (Durkheim, 1976, 40–41).

Durkheim’s view of religion was functional. That is not to say that he believed that religion was entirely made up; his understanding is much more subtle, insofar as he sought to interpret “social facts” by means of the social itself. In Durkheim’s understanding religion is a social reality, not a spiritual reality, because it resulted in observable religious behaviour. Durkheim found it easy to deflect the question of whether or not religion was based on truth or not: religion cannot provide “scientific” knowledge. The importance of religion is not in providing truth; “it is a system of ideas with which the individuals represent to themselves the society of which they are members.” Religion’s function, therefore, is to give energy and strength to people who participate in it (1976, 226; Pickering, 2008, 443).

This is important, because if the utility or function of religion is not directly linked to the truth of what religion claims to represent, religion itself must be changeable or expendable. Durkheim believed, as many sociologists did, that scientific knowledge
would one day result in a secular world. However, for Durkheim secularization would potentially come at an enormous cost, because human moral codes were based on religion. The only solution was if society itself was sacralised, replacing religion as the object of veneration. Durkheim suggested that this was in fact the beginning of religion as we know it today. By tracing the development of what he believed to be the most elemental religious form — totemism — Durkheim postulated that the genesis of religion lies in the sacralisation of clan totems, and thus is nothing more than the worship of society itself (1976, 119, 126, 206, 225).

Many of Durkheim’s ideas have been discredited. He was criticized for making the assumption that by studying the “simple” forms of religion evident in the Aboriginal tribes, he could explain the “complex” religions of European and Asian societies (see Robert Nisbet’s introduction: Durkheim, 1976, xi–xii). Yet the thesis that religion, as something that serves a function that could conceivably be filled by something else, is an enticing one. For Durkheim, any object, relation or person can become associated with the sacred. His proposal can either be understood in a socio-secular sense as sacralisation apart from religion, or in a socio-theological sense as the birth of new religion or religions.

One of Durkheim’s most controversial and useful concepts is “collective effervescence” (1976, 206–214). A brief outline of what Durkheim meant by this term was provided in chapter four above. Here, however, I intend to describe “collective effervescence” in greater detail. Durkheim described this particular phenomenon while drawing on ethnographic data gathered by anthropologists as part of their study of Australian Aboriginal tribes.

But when a corrobbori [sic] takes place, everything changes … There are at once transports of enthusiasm … crying shrieking, rolling in the dust
... When they come together, a sort of electricity is formed by their collecting which quickly transports them to an extraordinary degree of exaltation ... and since a collective sentiment cannot express itself collectively except on the condition of observing a certain order permitting co-operation and movements in unison, these gestures and cries naturally tend to become rhythmic and regular; hence come songs and dances ... This effervescence often reaches such a point that it causes unheard of actions ... They are so far removed from their ordinary conditions of life and they are so thoroughly conscious of it, that they feel that they must set themselves outside of and above their ordinary morals (Durkheim, 1976, 215–216).

For Durkheim, the effervescence here described was the genesis of religion itself. In these transcendent experiences, participants were transported into a special world “with exceptionally intense forces that take hold of and metamorphose” them (1976, 218-219). Thus, it was these experiences which led early humans to hold that there was a distinction between the everyday world of the profane and the powerful, transcendent realm of the sacred.

While Durkheim’s descriptions of effervescence in *The Elementary forms of Religious Life* were based upon observations of Aboriginal tribes, he did not limit this phenomenon to the Australians. Consistent with his thesis that studying primitive social forms afforded a portal into the beginnings of universal structures, he applied the concept of effervescence broadly (1975, 183). Durkheim held that such human experiences must be understood as a social phenomenon because it was the result of people interacting in groups. Moreover, Durkheim’s functional view of religion led him to the understanding that people gather in groups to celebrate or perform rituals in order to transcend the monotony of everyday living (Pickering, 2008, 443).

Durkheim did not restrict collective effervescence to religious settings or rituals. He pointed out examples from his own nation’s history, such as the ascendancy of Joan of Arc and the French Revolution, as examples of collective effervescence (1976,
Durkheim also made a distinction between belief and ritual, which underpins his thought on effervescence. He was ambivalent about which of these two elements is primary, but insisted they are dependent on each other. Myth provides the *raison d’être* for ritual, and ritual is the acting out of myth (Pickering, 2008, 449). Effervescence which is the result of belief can produce tremendously energised and transforming forces. Conversely, effervescence connected to ritual also results in tremendous energy release, but no change. It affirms the ritual, rather than creating a new one (Durkheim, 1974, 134).

Durkheim has also been criticized on the grounds that his concept of collective effervescence, when coupled with his functional view of religion, inevitably suggests that the context of the experience is unimportant. In other words, there is no requirement that effervescence must take place in a religious or even highly symbolic setting. Gaston Richard, a contemporary of Durkheim, made the point that effervescence:

> is no less true of a group of drinkers, gastronomes, race-goers, sportsmen, enthusiasts and gamblers, of an association of patriots or a community of believers. Everywhere the act of gathering reinforces collective states without drawing a distinction between them (Richard, 1975, 247).

Richard also noted that effervescence in these settings may not have positive effects, but lead to violence and cruelty (Richard, 1975, 248).

Richard’s critique highlights one of the problems with Durkheim’s conception of effervescence. As Pickering notes, the issue at stake is not the question of whether effervescence needs to be connected to religion, but that the concept needs to be extended beyond mere description. The alternative is that collective effervescence becomes a catch all for every emotional experience encountered in a group
Durkheim, too, was clearly aware of the need to nuance the use of the concept carefully, suggesting that the collective experience of effervescence “must possess a sense of unity, of intimacy, and the forces it releases must be sufficiently intense to take the individual outside himself and to raise him to a superior life” (cited in Pickering 2008, 450). Thus, collective effervescence leads to positive and life-affirming energy, rather than toward evil.

Durkheim’s nuanced description of effervescence in group settings is similar in some ways to Schleiermacher’s intuition of the universe in the individual. Like Schleiermacher, Durkheim understood that the genesis of religion was to be found in human experience. The development of totem worship, according to Durkheim, was the primal religious form that is linked to the experience. Durkheim claimed that early humans encountered effervescence in relation to group rituals and ceremonies connected with the clan totem, and began to associate the totem object itself with the “higher world” encountered during this experience. This, he argued, formed the beginning of the cult, which substantially developed over time as human cultures became more complex and sophisticated (1976, 35).

If Durkheim’s thesis concerning the origins of human religion being located in the distinction between the sacred and the profane and collective effervescence are correct, arguably some examples of ‘secular sacralisation’ should be evident in modern society. For example, Edward Tiryakian links effervescence, together with Weber’s charismatic leadership (which we will explore shortly), to the massive social change which occurred during the 1989 revolution that brought about the end of the Soviet regime. In making these connections, Tiryakian takes the concept of effervescence out of the religious context that Durkheim had first identified and
applies it to social and political change (Tiryakian, 1995). In the following section, I will link Durkheim’s ideas to the group experience at the WCBR. This is not to suggest, of course, that the WCBR is identical to political revolution, but it does mean that the paradigm of collective effervescence can and has been demonstrated to have application outside of religious settings.

**Collective effervescence and the WCBR**

The following description is of the time immediately prior to Wolfmother’s set at the 2007 WCBR. The primary focus, as will become clear, is the experience of actually being part of the crowd in front of stage while Wolfmother performed.

Wolfmother are an Australian three piece band who play psychedelic music reminiscent of older bands like Led Zeppelin. My friends and I elected to try and stay in the crowd between gigs so as to be in the best possible position to see Wolfmother perform. I pushed as far as possible forward into “the pit” in front of the stage where the crush of bodies was extreme: a very physical experience of touch and smell. Normal boundaries and comfort zones were suspended as people pressed close on every side. Total strangers, brought into close proximity, began talking to each other. There was no privacy in this space, the only boundary was skin and it seemed even this was being imposed upon. Movement in and out of the mosh pit was next to impossible, and those who attempted to do so were often greeted by anger from those forced to contort their bodies to allow passage. It was a very intense experience, and at this point there was not even any music playing.

There was a building sense of anticipation in the crowd gathered to hear the set. Excitement heightened prior to the expected release that would be consummated in
the performance. The proximity of so many people together in a confined space can have a number of effects. Without the charisma of the musical performance and stars themselves, this proximity may be disconcerting. Conversely, as will be evident in the section on carnival, some people enjoyed the suspension of official or polite boundaries, enjoying the space where the taboo was momentarily allowed.

Eventually Wolfmother came on stage. The band played only a few metres from where we were standing. The arrival of the performers and the start of the music became the focus of my attention, immediately relegating other experiences I described above to secondary status. My feet had been aching from standing for so long. My toes were sore, having been trod on repeatedly in the mosh pit. About half an hour into Wolfmother’s set I remembered my sore feet, and to my surprise became aware that they were no longer hurting. Similarly, I was no longer aware of the feelings of thirst I had experienced prior to the set either. The proximity of bodies — rubbing and in some cases jostling and slamming into me — was impossible to ignore. One fan described this as a positive experience.

Being at the front you tend to be with a crowd that’s really getting into it … that brings a certain mass group liberation to engage people with the music as well. Up the front you’re being jostled by people, you’re moving together, and it’s a friendly, sort of warm togetherness about being there … up the front you’re sort of a group enjoying it together (David, interview, 10 April 2007).

However, not everyone I interviewed shared this view. Gemma said that she found the skin contact near the stage “gross” (interview, 16 April 2007). Natasha complained that “we got squashed and people are quite aggressive, and they wouldn’t get out of the way, they were very pushy and shovey, at the front as soon as you moved you lost your spot” (interview, 13 May 2008). The differences between the male and female perceptions of the mosh pit are perhaps not without significance.
However, the more obvious observation to draw from these responses is that collective effervescence may not be a positive experience for everyone involved.

Wolfmother had a great stage presence. Andrew Stockdale, the lead singer, wailed and leaned into the crowd. He brought out a dual neck guitar at one point. The bassist thumped out in time with the bass drum, and at other times unslung his bass and played a heavily synthesised keyboard. Watching him play was extraordinary, because at times he would push and pull the keyboard around like he was being buffeted by invisible waves. It was frequently sideways, and he was getting psychedelic sounds out of it the whole time. The sound of the instruments was layered, building to a massive “soundscape.” After the last song the bassist/keyboardist picked up the keyboard and left it ringing out lying down sideways on top of one of the amps.

Gestures like that helped the crowd connect to the music and the performance and really participate. Earlier, Andrew Stockdale had unslung his guitar completely, discarded it to the side, and pulled the microphone free from its stand before swinging it in an arc. He had another microphone set up on top of an amp, into which he would sing with his back to the audience. At one point he spoke into it and looked back at the crowd, who could not hear him, clearly expecting them to respond to what he was saying. Altogether, the Wolfmother set was a very highly energising, thumping, wailing and powerful way to end the first day of the festival.

Understood from a Durkheimian perspective, the Wolfmother set at the WCBR could be interpreted as an affirming experience of collective effervescence. This interpretation connects the experience of festival participants, including the band,
with ritual rather than belief. Durkheim believed that such affirming effervescence resulted in an enormous release of energy, which was not channelled into change as a result of belief, but affirmed the ritual as a necessary component of life. He held that such energy releases are necessary to allow people to cope with the everyday, mundane nature of life. The WCBR, therefore, may be understood as one of the rituals on which some people draw to escape the normal world for a time. The behaviour indulged within this space, which might be characterised as deviant in normal society — such as gratuitous alcohol and drug consumption or the invasive closeness of the mosh pit — have a function here. Festival spaces function to release this energy within a discrete realm, so that, afterward, people can return to productive life in the “real world.”

This is one possible reading of the experience of the festival from the perspective of a participant. To explore the role of the performer more fully, I now turn to Max Weber and charismatic leadership.

**Max Weber and Charisma**

Max Weber, together with Durkheim and Karl Marx, is considered one of the key influences on the early development of sociology. Of the many different subjects that Weber addressed, of chief interest here is his thought on charisma. Chapter four above presented an outline of the older Weber’s ideas on charisma as a feature of his sociology of religion. This section will focus on Weber’s earlier thought on charisma as a form of leadership.

Weber’s treatment of charisma falls under the broad heading of authority, and he distinguished three primary types: traditional, bureaucratic or legal, and charismatic.
Traditional authority is based on precedent and customs. An example of this is the rule of kings which is inherited through lineage. This kind of authority was often called “eternal,” because it was thought to be based on divine principles. In an increasingly rational world, Weber argued, traditional authority was progressively giving way to the second type, bureaucratic authority. This type of rule was based on rules and rational systems. An example of this is the process by which someone might become qualified to be a professional or a tradesman. There is a process of training, whereby an individual becomes qualified and authorised to practice as a doctor, lawyer or carpenter. The authority of law and politics, based on rules and reason, are also examples of this kind of authority. For Weber, the fact that both traditional and bureaucratic authority had a basis that could be perceived and understood meant that these types of authority were rational and sustainable (Weber, 1978, 243-244).

Weber understood charismatic authority to be completely different. Unlike traditional and bureaucratic authority, which are associated with everyday life, charismatic authority was “extraordinary.” Moreover, charismatic authority was personal, based on interaction between the leader and his or her followers rather than impersonal factors such as rule or customs. The charismatic leader demonstrates his or her charisma through magic, signs and wonders or heroic acts. The leader’s authority is entirely dependent on the recognition of the followers. In this sense, Weber understood charismatic authority to be irrational, as it is not based on external and impersonal rules or traditions but entirely on the subjective state of the leader-follower relationship (Weber, 1946, 295-296; 1978, 244).
The transitory nature of charismatic leadership was significant to Weber. Early in his career, Weber apparently saw the *Führerdemokratie mit Machine*, or the charismatic leader, as the antidote to the uncontrollable domination of society by bureaucracy. However, Weber was not unaware of the drawbacks of charismatic leadership. The aftermath of World War 1 and the German revolutions left him with significant reservations about the nature of the influence of the charismatic demagogues (Adair-Toteff, 2005, 198). Weber argued that the temporal nature of charismatic authority was its chief drawback: simultaneously, it was also the chief defence against its excesses. In the end, charismatic authority would be transformed and negated as leaders either lost their authority or adopted the forms of bureaucratic power in order to reposition their own right-to-rule from the unstable extraordinary state to the stability of everyday routine authority (Weber, 1978, 246). According to Weber:

> Each charisma finds itself on this way from a stormy-emotional economic-alien life to a slow suffocating death under the weight of material interests in each hour of its life and indeed with each growing hour in increasing measure (Weber, 1976, 661).*

To summarise: for Weber, charismatic authority is a temporal and irrational form of power which is prone to instability. It is also an extraordinary and difficult to comprehend force generated from the mysterious nature of the relationship between the charismatic leader and her or his followers. Max Weber’s understanding of charismatic authority will be employed in the following section as a means of interpreting the significance of Ben Harper’s performance at the 2007 WCBR festival.

**Charisma and the WCBR**

Perhaps the most obvious connection between Weber’s conception of charismatic leadership and an event like the WCBR is to be found in related terms celebrity and

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* This translation from the original German by Adair-Toteff, 2005, 199
“fandom.” For an individual or group who self-identify as fans of a particular performer, the performer may be perceived as possessing some of the same characteristics as the charismatic hero. Whether or not this is clearly articulated, fans may come to believe that the performer has “matchless, God-given, creative gifts” (Rojek, 2001, 32-33).

The intersection of politics and the performer at the WCBR is also significant. Many of the performers at the WCBR adopt an overtly political stance, demonstrated by their lyrics in particular. Unlike the politician, characterised by Weber as one who generally lives “from politics” (i.e. politics is his or her job, and therefore supports them), performers may fit into Weber’s charismatic type as those who live “for politics” (Adair-Toteff, 2005, 197, emphasis added). Musical performers’ politics are perceived, rightly or wrongly, as purer than that of politicians because they do not receive remuneration from their political stance or activities. Performers such as John Butler, Ben Harper, Xavier Rudd, Sinead O’Conner and many others made open forays into political themes in their lyrics and, at times, between songs. In particular, the references related to the environmental crisis and the Iraq war.

This point is tangential, however, to the main experience of the charismatic performer’s interaction with the crowd at the festival. Weber wished to highlight the extraordinary nature of charismatic authority, distinguishing it from the “everydayness” of the two other types of authority. This fits well with the extraordinary nature of the musical space which is the WCBR and so many festivals like it. The utility of Weber’s contribution here is probably best understood if linked to other concepts, such as carnival space, collective effervescence or communitas, which explicate the unique nature of the musically constructed and maintained space.
of the WCBR. It is within this space and for this time that the charismatic heroism of
the performer has an almost mystical appeal, albeit one which everyone present
knows to be temporary.

There were a number of performers over my years of attendance at the WCBR who
could be described as charismatic. One of the best examples of the charismatic hero
observed at the WCBR was the set performed in 2007 by Ben Harper and the
Innocent Criminals. Ben Harper’s set was the final act of the festival, and the
collective sense of anticipation for his set was enormous. My vantage point for
Harper’s set was at the back, giving me an opportunity to observe his performance
without having to jostle for space in the mosh pit.

Harper brought an enormous energy to his performance. Harper and his band were
very good at ‘working the crowd.’ Even when playing a lap guitar seated, he knew
precisely how long to let a note ring out or even fall silent to build the tense
anticipation of the crowd to critical mass. Sometimes he would lead singalongs,
stopping in the middle of singing while the crowd roared for the next line, sometimes
leaving his guitar to retreat to the back of the stage where he would hammer out a
rhythm on the drums. His virtuosity as a guitarist and lyricist was laudable: but it was
his ability to deliver a complete charismatic performance which was most important
for this study.

I was struck by how important the lyrics were to Harper, not just the music. He
pleaded, growled and cajoled the crowd with his lyrics, calling for ecologically
ethical, political and humanitarian action. He seemed to be a preacher who used
music and lyrics to get his message across. He screamed and pleaded with his last
song “Better way,” imploring the whole crowd to heed his message, shaking his hands and quivering with the intensity of his performance. Speaking personally, he left me in no doubt as to his sincerity and authenticity. This is important for, as Weber points out, the charismatic leader cannot rely on legal power or precedent to assert authority to lead; he or she must have their abilities and qualifications recognised by the followers (1978, 655). In a Weberian reading, then, Harper was convincing those present of the authority and authenticity of his message through the power of his performance.

Two excerpts from interviews with festival participants serve to illustrate the importance of authenticity in connecting with an audience and building charisma. When Olivia confided that she had enjoyed Ben Harper, I asked what she liked about his set.

   His performance was absolutely brilliant, it was pretty much what’s on the CD, he doesn’t change it much for a live performance, you know, that’s him up there, basically (interview 3 May 2007).

For Olivia, consistency of musical performance, both live and recorded, demonstrates the artist is not a pretender. The next excerpt is from Gemma, who self-identifies as a fan of Ben Harper.

   Like I think Ben Harper, his music’s incredible, but I think just from seeing him and seeing interviews with him he seems like a very incredible person as well … I think you have to sort of relate to them on some level also to appreciate the music more (interview 16 April 2007).

Once again it seems that consistency is important, this time consistency between the musical and non-musical performance. For the charismatic hero to charm followers, he or she must be perceived to be authentic.

This Weberian articulation of the performer’s charismatic heroism and leadership works in this instance within the space of the festival. Weber was quick to
acknowledge that charisma was temporal. I would suggest that in this case it is also spatially constrained. Entering the festival grounds was like coming into a realm where the chief concern was music. For a time and space, sheltered from a bureaucratic world that is governed by forces beyond our control, the message of Harper’s music and others like him is righteous, it makes sense, and it advocates a “Better Way.” To use another phrase favoured by Weber, it is like an “enchantment.” Weber might go so far as to say that such an experience is irrational (Adair-Totteff, 2005, 195-196), because the realm of enchantment often operates in a way contrary to what we “know” to be true. Within this realm people exist in a spontaneous community gathered for the purpose of experiencing the music and the charismatic performer; and it is here that the evils of the bureaucratic-legal world, such as globalisation and global warming, can be overcome.

The following excerpt from my field notes illustrates the transitory nature of Weber’s charisma.

I must admit I was a bit sceptical, not of Harper but of those of us listening — were we just enjoying ourselves or would we take the message to heart? The myriad empty cans and trash I waded through on the opening night didn’t give me a lot of hope. It just struck me that the experience of music can be very subjective, individualistic, and doesn’t necessarily lead to “positive” action, whatever that might mean. I didn’t want to save the world after listening to Harper or John Butler, I wanted to live in the experience of the music and the feeling of being lost in a crowd all experiencing the same thing (Unpublished field notes, 1 April 2007).

Perhaps all this observation demonstrates is simply my own cynicism. It is equally possible, though, that the litter on the grounds of the festival symbolise the end of the enchantment which existed during the festival, and the return to the mundane reality of the non-musical world outside. Weber certainly would not struggle with the fact that charisma comes to an end. He understood that return was inevitable.
Unlike the paradigms which follow, Weber’s ideas are not primarily about the space in which the festival takes place but the relationship between the performers and the group. Weber’s “charisma’ works especially well when combined with Durkheim’s “collective effervescence” as the means by which to describe the nature of the experience of those participating in the WCBR and the manner in which these experiences are led by a charismatic performer. The following theories attempt to grapple with the nature of the space in which the festival takes place. The first is Mikhail Bakhtin and Carnival.

**Mikhail Bakhtin’s Carnival and Popular Culture**

The writings of Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin on medieval carnival hint provocatively at a paradigm for conceptualising the unique space of the festival. In one of his best known works, *Rabelais and his World*, Bakhtin explored the shape and scope of carnival, drawing extensively on the literature of French humanist writer François Rabelais.

Bakhtin painted carnival as a “second world” standing in contrast to the official, ecclesiastical and ordered everyday world (1984a, 6). In so doing, he articulated an extraordinarily fruitful and fascinating aesthetic, one which “celebrates the anarchic, body-based and grotesque elements of popular culture, and seeks to mobilise them against the humourless seriousness of official culture” (Dentith, 1995, 66). Bakhtin’s work on Rabelais and carnival has been explored and applied in disciplines falling well outside the scope of studies on medieval literature. It has been applied to popular music studies by theorists such as Paul R. Kohl (1993, 1996) and Karen
Halnon (2006). I also made use of this paradigm in chapter four above as a way of understanding Breakfree church’s ambivalent relationship with popular culture.

As noted in chapter four, carnival probably began in medieval Europe as a celebration immediately prior to the religious observance of Lent. In medieval times, however, the carnivals were not restricted to this time period, but were also often linked to official church feasts (1984a, 8; 82). Bakhtin postulated that it was in the marketplace carnivals — unauthorised but permitted (and at times even celebrated) by the Church — that the people entered their “second life.” He claimed this was a utopian realm of “community, freedom, equality and abundance” (1984a, 9), which had the power to lift the ordinary people out of the existing world order into a time and space where hierarchy was ridiculed and ritually debased, a second life organised on the basis of laughter (1984a, 8).

Within the realm of carnival, the established order of the official world was turned upside down. Serious rituals and ceremonies were mimicked and ridiculed. A new “comic protocol” existed within the carnival realm (Bakhtin, 1984a, 5). Medieval carnival often parodied the institutions of formal societies, symbolically tearing them down not in a mere frenzy of destruction but to unite them with the earth from which regeneration and renewal spring. This simultaneous tearing down and regenerating and renewing is described by Bakhtin as the “ambivalent” laughter of carnival (1984a, 11–12). The energy of carnival was not directed at merely destroying or supplanting the established world, but to return it to the place of birth and regeneration. It is this function of carnival which Bakhtin believed has largely disappeared from modern festival. All that remains are occasional events which are mere shadows of the original, exuberant feasts and spectacles.
Bakhtin introduced the important concept of “grotesque realism” in order to articulate the nature of carnival aesthetic. Within Rabelais’ “carnivalised writing,” the focus was not on the completed and perfect human body of classical art, but the human actions of eating, drinking, digesting, copulating and defecating. These actions are emphasised in often bizarre and grotesque ways as a way of showing that the body is unfinished and open, emphasising its ever renewing status. Once again, this persistent focus on degradation is more than mere negative destruction. Degradation is ambivalent, for in the same action of death and destruction comes renewal and regeneration (Dentith, 1995, 67). Similarly, the terror of death and nature are transformed by the grotesque into comic entities, monsters that are defeated in the feasting of the people.

The power of the common laughter of the people in carnival is one of the most important features of Bakhtin’s analysis. Festivals such as the “feast of fools,” where the rituals and symbols of the church were often degraded and mocked, were tolerated and celebrated because of the medieval understanding of the significance of laughter in the life of the people. Bakhtin quoted a circular letter from the Paris School of Theology in 1444, defending the feast of fools and referring to the need to indulge humankind’s “second nature,” which they understood to be “foolishness.” Thus the feast of fools provided a vent from the official seriousness of ecclesiastical culture (Bakhtin, 1984a, 74-75). Bakhtin proclaimed that carnival laughter functioned as the “social consciousness of the people,” inasmuch as through comedy and mirth, medieval people understood themselves communally as part of the continually growing and renewing mass. It was thus laughter which brought a new outlook, relativised the authoritarian structures of the officialdom, and even
transformed the terror of death and hell into grotesque monsters that could be debased and mocked (1984a, 90-92).

The powerful and those who represent what was thought to be absolute and eternal authority (kings and clergy, for example) disliked carnival. This was not only because they hated being mocked, but also because the very existence of carnival opposed the extent of their absolute power in time and space. For Bakhtin, it was in carnival that the common people understood their union and their “immortal, indestructible character.” It is the site of the realization that official power and authority does not share this status, they are relative (1984a, 256) because there is a time and space where they do not reign supreme. Harvey Cox describes the feast of fools as the feast in which the arbitrary quality of social rank was exposed, allowing people a vision that “things need not always be as they are” (Cox, 1969, 5).

Carnival is still practiced today, perhaps most famously in Rio de Janeiro. However, Bakhtin lamented that the status of carnival as a discrete and recognised second world, standing as an enduring critique to official society, no longer exists in modern society. Kohl (1993) writes that in the medieval carnival the outside world was left behind, sometimes for weeks at a time. “Outside” is the world of structure and order, hierarchy and etiquette, good and evil. Within the time and space of the carnival, however, this order is turned on its head. Bakhtin postulated that in carnival “the laws, prohibitions and restrictions that determine the structure and order of ordinary life are suspended” (1984b, 122-123).

Indeed, it is at this point that carnival most resembles, and differs most sharply from, Victor Turner’s communitas. Carnival, like communitas, is a peculiar space, for a
particular time, and as such is not intended to remake or replace the existing order. It exists alongside the everyday world. In fact, it may function to renew it or draw it back to its roots. However, in *communitas* all co-exist equally under the authority of the spiritual elders. In contrast, carnival inverts the established order. Consequently, carnival is not an apolitical space in the way that Turner’s *communitas* purports to be.

The paradigm of carnival has been employed in many different disciplines, including popular cultural studies. Kohl, for example, uses Bakhtin’s theories on carnival as a paradigm for understanding the phenomenon of rock and roll in the 20th Century. Kohl claims that, like the medieval carnival, rock and roll was “a voice that celebrated equality, the overthrow of hierarchy, and the beauty of the lower bodily stratum, the dirt of mother earth and the grotesque” (1993, 146). Kohl postulates that the separation brokered by rock and roll takes place on generational, rather than social, lines (1993, 147-148). I would question at this point whether or not the same ambivalence Bakhtin described so clearly in carnival is present in rock and roll.

In addressing this ambivalence, Kohl turns to an enduring symbol of rock and roll’s remaking and regenerating spirit — the Woodstock Music and Art fair celebrated over three days in August 1969. At this free festival in upstate New York, over 300,000 people gathered at the Woodstock farm to witness performances by musicians Jimi Hendrix, the Who and Santana among many others. At Woodstock a spontaneous community formed around the festival, remembered by those present as a celebration of an alternative world of freedom and egalitarianism. The fragile and temporal nature of this celebration came symbolically to an end at the disastrous Altamont Speedway free festival in December the same year. For Kohl, Woodstock
represents a resurrection of the ethos of carnival, a utopian space standing as a radical critique to the hierarchical established society (Kohl, 1993, 159-160).

I wonder if too much is not being made of Bakhtin’s paradigm here, particularly by writers such as Kohl. Bakhtin himself seems to have been of the view that the spirit of carnival, with its ambivalent laughter that tears down and builds up in one motion, was gone forever with the beginning of its greatest triumph: the Renaissance. Nevertheless, it is possible that the same exuberant iconoclasm is echoed, however faintly, in modern popular music. Certainly a festival such as the WCBR which celebrates Blues and Roots music, the folk culture of people for generations, seems at times to bear the same spirit.

Following the same pattern that has been used throughout this study, Bakhtin’s theory of carnival will be used in what follows as a set of lenses to explore an experience I participated in at the WCBR in 2008. The following snapshot is based on my participant observation of the thirty minutes before Australian multi-instrumentalist Xavier Rudd performed, a time in-between sets, together with a selection of incidents during this and other sets.

**Carnival and the WCBR**

While waiting for Xavier Rudd to appear at the 2008 WCBR, I observed the behaviour of people in the crowd before and during the set, not directly related to music. The atmosphere in the pit in front of the Harbour Stage was festive. The times between sets are very interesting. As a group, the crowd anticipate the commencement of the next performance, and of the spectacle to come. Yet for up to half an hour, sometimes even longer, the people are left to entertain themselves as
the stage is set up for the next artist. Before the set of a highly anticipated performer like Xavier Rudd, leaving the pit and returning later is not an option, because proximity to the stage will be lost. Most chose to stay. In another setting the closeness of so many bodies might be uncomfortable, and no doubt it was for some on this day.

Yet this in-between time, where the crowd is not being entertained but still maintains the space, has much in common with the medieval by carnival. As Bakhtin noted, in carnival there are no footlights and no focus on one performing for the many (1984a, 7). It is a participatory time and space, where all are aware of being part of an equal group. Prior to the commencement of Xavier Rudd’s set, everyone in the crowd became a performer as impromptu high jinx erupted spontaneously from the crowd. One man who stood on his friend’s shoulders certainly got my attention because I felt sure he would fall on us. Several women were shoulder lifted; one lifted her top and exposed her breasts. No one became the focal point for long, however. It was a festive and comic space, with a distinct and “unofficial” set of norms and protocols.

The sheer bodily physicality of this space is worth noting. On a warm day in Fremantle, people emit an astounding variety of odours and noises. People are in skin-to-skin contact with strangers. Putting the body on display, such as exposing parts of it normally covered up or raising it up on the shoulders of others serves to emphasise the importance of the body in this space. The humorous and slightly seductive apology offered to me by a girl who noted that she “tit--elbowed” me (that is, nudged me in passing with her breasts) as she squeezed past drew attention to the sensuousness, carnality and proximity of the space. Nearby, two women touched the neck of a young man, wondering aloud what the gothic lettering of his tattoo read.
He seemed oblivious to their attention, but his girlfriend who was standing behind him patiently explained that the featured word was “Sublime.”

Bakhtin conceptualised the significance of the physicality of carnival space vividly.

This festive organization of the crowd must be first of all concrete and sensual. Even the pressing throng, the physical contact of bodies, acquires a certain meaning. The individual feels that he is an indissoluble part of the collectivity, a member of the people’s mass body … the people become aware of their sensual, material bodily unity and community (1984a, 255)

The language of this space was akin to Bakhtin’s carnival billingsgate: profanity, oaths and raucous laughter filled the air. One man on crutches was lifted up on the shoulders of two other men. In gratitude he yelled at us all, “These are my boys, these are my fucking boys!” A man near me lit up a joint, and a profanity laced discussion about the merits of the weed started among those near by. The cigarette was passed around among members of the crowd, I was offered but declined. Marijuana and alcohol are celebrated here, the smell of the smoke clings to skin, clothes and hair and often alcohol is thrown randomly to drench unsuspecting crowd members.

Not long before the beginning of Rudd’s set, an incident took place which highlighted the distinction between the carnival second world and the official world outside the festival, where politics and work reign. A Noongar woman approached the microphone and read a poem, only barely audible over the raucous crowd, welcoming festival goers to boodja (the Noongar word for “country” or “land”). The poem was not long; the woman’s whole address could not have taken longer than five minutes. On my left, while the woman was still speaking, one fan turned to another and a clearly audible voice commented “This is too political for me, eh?”
There was appreciative applause following the welcome, but I sense that many in the crowd shared the aforementioned fan’s discomfort.

The fact that this discomfort was not based on racial discrimination or politics became clear early in Rudd’s set. Xavier Rudd self identifies as an Aboriginal performer and as one connected to Aboriginal spirituality. For one of his songs, he was joined on stage by several Aboriginal dancers in full traditional dress. They danced on stage in front of Rudd and his percussionist, and the crowd was ecstatic. In every direction, all I could see were hands holding up mobile phone cameras, attempting to capture the spectacle of the dancers. When they retreated from the stage after the song, one male fan called out loudly to Rudd, “Bring back the dancers, you fucker!” Although he was taken to task by a nearby female fan, this is probably best seen as an example of the ambivalence of carnival abuse.

The reaction of the crowd to the Aboriginal dancers shed some light on the atmosphere in the crowd when the poem was being read. I believe the discomfort, as articulated honestly and concisely by the fan quoted above, was prompted by the intrusion of politics into this carnival space. Politics is part of the discourse of the official world which exists outside the festival, and its appearance in this realm, however benign, is resented. Given the history of race relations in Australia, it would have been inappropriate to denigrate the woman who presented or the poem. Yet this is exactly what happens to politics, or any echo of the extra-festival “official” world, inside the carnival space. Carnival ambivalence tears down the discourse of the official world, or turns it upon its head, not simply to destroy it but to renew and invigorate it. The reading of the poem was an occasion where the official world
intruded upon the carnival world with impunity, not subject to the denigrating and re-
invigorating ridicule and laugher of the carnival.

The appearance of the Aboriginal dancers does not necessarily fit into the sphere of
carnival either. As we have stated previously, carnival is not really about
performance, it is a space in which all the people together celebrate something that is
neither art nor life, but is on the borderline of both. The Aboriginal dancers and
Rudd’s set are more correctly understood as similar to spectacles witnessed in
medieval carnival culture. Within this culture, spectacles functioned like a
component within carnival. The performance of the dancers proclaimed a similar
message to the opening welcome, announcing the Aboriginality of the performance
and the setting. Yet it became an “unofficial” message, devoid of the seriousness and
sobriety associated with the welcome. As such, it fits with the carnival setting, and
hence the mocking insult of Rudd at the end of the performance by one fan may have
been a signal that things had returned to the way they should be. The carnival spirit
was once again ascendant in the festival realm.

This is why serious political messages delivered during the festival were often done
with an apologetic tone. When Felix Riebl of The Cat Empire addressed the crowd
about preventing ecological crisis between songs, he sounded uncomfortable. He
ended as quickly as he could with “Enough of the preaching…back to the music!”
Other political messages were carnivalised, either delivered as song lyrics or part of
collaborative performance between the audience and performers. An example of the
former would be the overtly political lyrics of the John Butler Trio or Ben Harper
and the Innocent Criminals. An example of the latter — i.e., carnivalised
collaborative performance — occurred when Garrett Dutton of G.Love & Special
Sauce led the audience in raising the peace sign and chanting “Peace in the Middle East.” In neither case did the political message, even if it was overt, seem out of place.

This hints at the radical role carnival can have in relation to the “official” world. Within the time and space of carnival the norms, values and etiquette of the outside world are ridiculed, subverted and debased. The ambivalence of this action is in the fact that such debasing is not intended to destroy, but renew and regenerate. Every component of the heavenly or royal realm is brought down to the realm of the body, the grotesque, the common, where it is brought to death and new life. When this radical function remains within the boundaries of carnival, as in the example of the Aboriginal dancers, the lyrics of John Butler or the performance of Dutton, it retains its radical role in critiquing the world outside.

Although there appears to be an exuberant glee about breaking polite boundaries and official barriers within the carnivalised space, it is not as if these norms and rules no longer exist. The pleasure in transgressing them is derived from entering a time and space where the breaking of official rules and barriers is celebrated, rather than punished. This may be a faint shadow of the raucous “second world” of medieval carnival which Bakhtin celebrated in Rabelais and his World. All attempts by the official society or world to sanction, punish or suppress the popular spirit of carnival are burst by the exuberance, carnality and deliberate transgression of the “unofficial” laughter of carnival.

The final two theories that will be utilised in this chapter are more recent, and subsequently the ground is less well ploughed. The first is Victor Turner’s
conception of liminal space and *communitas*. The second, standing as a critique of some of Turner’s tendencies, is “heterotopia,” a term conceived by Michel Foucault.

**Victor Turner: Limen, Communitas and Process**

In chapter four above, reference was made to the work of Scottish anthropologist Victor Turner and his categories of “anti-structure,” *limen* and *communitas* in order to explore Breakfree church’s ritual music use. In this section, Turner’s thought will be revisited and new emphasis on placed his ideas on *limen* and process in performance.

Turner observed the dialectic between “structure” and “anti-structure” as a result of his fieldwork among the Ndembu people. He called the passage from structure to anti-structure the *limen*, a phrase borrowed from Arnold van Gennep’s description of the transitory phase in his three stage rites of passage model (Turner, 1969, 94). Within the space created and marked out by the Ndembu ritual, Turner noted that normally operative societal structures are disregarded and all participants are equal under the authority of the ritual elders. He called this experience of egalitarian utopia *communitas*, borrowing the phrase from Paul Goodman and redefining it to fit his own ends (Deflem, 1991, 14). *Communitas* exists where structure does not; it is distinguished by the void of hierarchical relationships and is filled with the comradeship of equality in the “neither here nor there” space (Turner, 1969, 96–97).

According to Turner, structure and anti-structure exist in dialectic, the result being society (Turner, 1969, vii, 201; Grimes, 1995, 152). They are symbiotic, because structure has no significance without anti-structure, and the anti-structural space can only exist within structure for a time. Thus the utopia of anti-structure is never
intended to replace the real world of the everyday, but exists in eternal communion with it, changing and remaking it. Turner’s ideas have been compared to Bakhtin’s conceptualisation of carnival, and clearly they are similar. For Turner, however, the anti-structural space exists originally within religious ritual (Deflem, 1991, 16), and only in industrial societies is it moved, together with religion, into the space of leisure (Turner and Turner, 1978, 35; St John, 2008, 9). Turner, therefore, does not share Bakhtin’s antipathy for religion.

Perhaps one of the most startling features of Turner’s work is the breadth with which he applied it. Not content to understand *limen* and *communitas* as simply relics of pre-industrial religious ritual, Turner started to conceptualise his categories in terms of the industrial world. He coined the term “liminoid” in order to describe non-religious, leisure-based ritual in the industrial world which he perceived to have a similar function to the *limen* in Ndembu religion. For example, Turner applied the descriptor “liminoid” to the hippie counter-cultural movement in the 1960s United States (1969, 112–113; 1982, 20).

Turner’s ideas and concepts have proved enormously fertile across several disciplines. Together with Richard Schechner, he pioneered the discipline of “performance studies,” incorporating many of his findings on ritual and the dialectic between structure and anti-structure. While Turner’s work is often read uncritically as a utopian critique of everyday hierarchical life, he held that *limen* and *communitas* can function either to oppose the everyday order or to affirm it. At this point, Turner’s views have marked similarities with both Durkheim and Bakhtin, who understood effervescence and carnival respectively as functioning to challenge or
support and renew. This emphasis is often missed by those preoccupied with social change.

As observed previously, Turner is not without his critics. In a predominantly atheistic academic discipline, Turner’s strong Catholic faith, which, as he and his wife Edith openly admitted, influenced his ideas, did not sit easily. J. Lowell Lewis, whose critique of Turner has already been noted in chapter four, suggests reconstructing and even renaming some of Turner’s concepts to avoid religious overtones (Lewis, 2008, 50). A much more significant criticism made by Lewis, however, is when he suggests that Turner was wrong to lump all ritual together under the category of limen. This, according to Lewis, results in an uncritical use of both the terms “ritual” and limen, where some aspects of human activity would really be better understood as “play.” Lewis suggests that play is an older form of activity than ritual, something humankind shares with its ancestors. Moreover he argues that activities such as festivals, celebration and film, for example, would be better understood in this way, rather than forcing them to fit into the category of ritual (Lewis, 2008, 46–48, 51).

Australian anthropologist Graham St John likewise notes the utility of Turner’s categories, but critiques him for emphasising the utopian nature of communitas and ignoring the reality of the limen being “a contested space.” He also notes that the limen in Turner’s thinking is “a temporary horizontal epoch of minds and souls, but not bodies” (2001, 60), and accuses Turner of being “more preoccupied with reflexive semiotica than gratifying erotica” (2001, 58). St John prefers the Foucauldian paradigm “heterotopia,” which has the capacity to acknowledge that while there is a unique space created in which new worlds are envisioned, there is
generally no unity of vision as to the norms and structures of this new world for participants (2001, 51; 2008, 14).

**Turner and the WCBR**

Victor Turner’s ideas on process, *limen* and *communitas* will be useful tools with which to explore the significance of the process in Don McLean’s set at the 2008 WCBR. Paying heed to Lewis’ critique of Turner’s overly broad use of the liminal category will afford the opportunity to on his “reconstructive” approach to Turner, incorporating play theory. I will bring this unique combination of theories to bear on the Don McLean performance. It was a mid afternoon set performed in the Big Top marquee.

McLean followed a process in the performance of his set. He started with a mix of new songs that no-one knew, mingled with some of his back catalogue that people might have heard before without knowing it was his. It takes some courage to do this, as people can get fed up with songs they do not know. McLean and performers like him, however, have the carrot dangling in front of the fan all the time: “stay long enough and I will play that one, the one you know, the one you came to see.” McLean was following a time honoured performance protocol, making sure he gave some time to his new songs so that people can get used to them, while keeping the carrot dangling so that people will stay. Then the performer ends with the ‘canonical song’ everyone has been waiting for, in McLean’s case “American Pie.” This technique was also employed by performers from Eskimo Joe to John Fogerty.

As Clinton Sanders (1974) notes, sometimes performers play their best song at another time in the performance, to try and win the crowd over. However, when a
performer has as many ‘canonical’ songs as McLean to draw on, this can happen at multiple points in the performance. The fact that the performer plays to achieve some kind of effect on his or her audience becomes evident when such an affect is thwarted. When McLean played his first “big” song, “Vincent,” the crowd roared initially. Unfortunately because it is such a quiet song the audience had difficulty hearing it because of a particularly loud performance happening simultaneously on the Harbour Stage. McLean was notably displeased at this, grimacing in the direction of the loud sound and rolling his eyes. This is evidence that it was not just about performing the song for its own sake. He had hoped that through unveiling the first big song to lead the audience somewhere deeper in the performance.

This deep place was achieved during the next big song he played. I describe this experience as going into a trance. I include an excerpt from my field notes verbatim below.

I am not sure exactly when it happened, I think during McLean’s performance of “Crying,” but I realised I had entered a trance, a higher level of focus. The rest of the set was in this space. We knew American Pie was coming. He played some faster songs and I know people had gone into the trance with me, because suddenly more people — heaps more people — were dancing and moving (Unpublished field notes, 15 March 2008)

Turner really comes into his own in illuminating the process which leads to the trance. The ritual, or performance, is the passage followed to catalyse the new realm, the space where everything is different. He called this realm *communitas* and claimed that it was a utopian space of comradeship and egalitarianism, where ordinary hierarchy is destroyed and everyone stands equal before the religious leaders, who are the ones through whom the space is mediated (Turner, 1969, 69). While people have critiqued this concept of *communitas* as utopian, in some ways it
is reflective of the nature of the ecstatic space within performance. As Don McLean began his final song, I too was drawn into an experience of *communitas*.

American Pie got a huge yell, and was surreal. It was like being in a moment of history, the guy who actually wrote and sang such an iconic song was there performing it. Everyone sang, especially at the chorus, people were clapping in time, shouting the lyrics (not just singing them), raising their arms, cheering, closing their eyes and basking. It was ecstasy, pure and simple … I wasn’t thinking, it was all about the song. I had such amazing focus. Everyone sang along with the chorus, he played through the song a number of times (Unpublished field notes, 15 March 2008).

Turner’s concepts fit with the experience of the realm I am describing here. Through his or her performance the musician leads the participants to a space which is very different, where people behave in ways that they would not elsewhere. Where some senses are heightened, others seem to be bypassed completely. Personally, I had stopped thinking about anything else, what I looked like or sounded like, how much my feet hurt or how uncomfortable it was being so close to everybody else.

Don McLean led his audience on a journey, following a slightly redundant (in the age of online music) process of getting the new songs out there mixed up with his back catalogue, allowing the audience’s anticipation to build to critical mass. The tension of waiting was relieved slightly by the occasional canonical song, but for some of us at least this had the effect of leading us further in to the rabbit hole. Finally consummation was fully achieved with his very last song. He performed and led “American Pie,” dragging it out as long as he could. And in the space created by this processual musical odyssey, all the boundaries were down. The norms regulating behaviour in the outside world of bureaucratic power that Weber described so convincingly were seemingly suspended. People were comrades, in some cases touching, talking to, singing and dancing with people they had never before met.
Perhaps it is true that Victor Turner raises at least as many questions as he answers. Certainly many academics have struggled with the scope of his ideas, while at the same time admitting the incendiary brilliance of them. The final section of this chapter focuses on Foucault’s “heterotopia,” a theory advocated by some scholars as a corrective to the overly utopian tendencies of both Bakhtin and Turner.

**Heterotopia: Michel Foucault on “Different spaces”**

As I have noted already, Graham St John appropriates Victor Turner’s categories of *limen* and *communitas* with a considerable amount of caution. In the end, St John looks beyond Turner for a category adequate to illuminate the ConFest, an Australian alternative lifestyle festival held annually in Victoria. His reasons for leaving Turner behind include Turner’s failure to account for “liminoid embodiment,” “a pleasurescape of transgressive sensuousness and carnal sociality” (2001, 48). Also, St John remarks that Turner’s conception of *communitas* as an egalitarian utopia is totalising and, as such cannot accommodate competing groups (St John uses Maffesoli’s term “neo-tribes”) jostling within a performative space for prominence and control (2001, 60).

In his search for an alternative paradigm, St John settles in the end for Michel Foucault’s loosely defined term “heterotopia” (St John, 2008, 14). I drew upon this paradigm in chapter four above. Foucault’s conception of “different space” has been widely appropriated across many disciplines, despite the fact that it has been described as frustratingly incomplete (Soja cited in Johnson 2006, 81). In this section I will briefly revisit this concept.
Foucault constructed heterotopias as “placeless places.” They differ from utopia in that they are enacted utopias, but they maintain ambivalence by managing to be real and unreal simultaneously. They are primarily places of disruption. The first in a series of examples Foucault suggested is a mirror, which shows me myself where I am not, and in this sense is unreal. Yet a mirror does actually exist, and thus is real, and is disruptive in the sense that in showing me where I am it simultaneously shows me that from the standpoint of the mirror I am absent from where I am, since I am visible in the mirror in another space. What I see in the mirror is absolutely real, and at the same time absolutely unreal (Foucault, 1998, 179).

Foucault went on to provide a broad outline, using many examples, of the way in which heterotopias can be redefined and realigned over time. He also suggested that in a heterotopia several different emplacements that may be incompatible come together. He argued that heterotopias function best when there is a break in time, such as festivals which are linked to time at its most transitory, absolutely temporal. Heterotopias have a system of passage, of opening and closing, isolating and making them penetrable (Foucault, 1998, 183). Finally, heterotopias have the ability to expose “real” spaces as more illusory than they seem, or alternatively an almost utopian function of compensating for the chaos of real space by constructing a perfectly ordered space (1998, 184). His ultimate example was the ship, an eternally placeless place, closed in on itself and yet at the same time open to the infinity of the sea (Foucault, 1998, 184–185).

The genius of heterotopia, argues Peter Johnson, is their relation to utopias and also to power in normal places. Johnson postulates that heterotopias disrupt utopias and also the everyday. They “meddle with our sense of interiority” and draw us out of
ourselves (Johnson, 2006, 84). One of Foucault’s critiques of utopia related to his understanding regarding the all pervasive nature of power. Although the utopia is imagined, and unreal, to imagine the new requires taking elements of the existing system and reconstituting them. Therefore, “to imagine another system is to extend our participation in the present system” (Foucault, 1977, 230–231). However, escape from this all pervasive power is one of the key reasons people imagine utopias, even if such an escape is not possible. Heterotopias, as realised utopias, are built to facilitate this escape. Therefore, people enter heterotopias not to contest hegemony, but to escape the all pervading power of the everyday for a space and time (Johnson, 2006, 86–87).

The example Johnson gives is Jeremy Bentham’s famous *Panopticon*, a utopian place of perfect monitoring of criminals. If the *Panopticon*, which does not exist and has never existed, is the utopia, real prisons are the heterotopia — enacted utopias. Prisons are deeply ambivalent places, functioning simultaneously to punish and generate criminals. Foucault’s other great example, the asylum, is likewise a heterotopia which serves to “unstitch, undermine and transform” the utopian ideal, functioning to liberate and imprison the mad (Johnson, 2006, 85).

Johnson also refers to Foucault’s distinction between heterotopias of illusion and compensation. The former, an example of which is the brothel, are places which expose so called “real space,” with its imaginary partitioning of life, as even more illusory. The latter is illustrated by the Jesuit communities in South America, regulated in every way by the chime of the bell and the sign of the cross (Foucault, 1998, 184). Such heterotopias of absolute perfection contrast the chaos and disorder of real space. In both cases, they do not function as competitive realities, contesting
the established order with the hope of overthrowing it. Rather, such spaces splinter reality by offering a version that is, in a sense, unthinkable. These spaces offer “no resolution or consolation, but disrupt and test our customary notions of ourselves” (Johnson, 2006, 87).

It is ironic that the theory of heterotopia has been adopted as a spatial category so uncritically, and as Johnson notes, probably incorrectly. After all, it is barely outlined by Foucault and is not really based on anything other than a few typically brilliant Foucauldian examples. This is in contrast to Turner’s structure and anti-structure dialectic, or Bakhtin’s carnival, which were based at least partly on ethnography and literary criticism respectively. Even more frustratingly, Foucault did not elucidate how one enters a heterotopia, the process involved, or even how it is constructed or maintained. Perhaps it is the fact that the heterotopia is so loosely defined that proves so attractive to many academics. It runs the danger of becoming a catch all category, ironically replicating the very crime of which Turner’s concepts have been accused.

The best we can do here, with such a vague concept, is follow the phenomenological process engaged up to this point. Taking an example from the festival itself, I will sketch it briefly before comparing it to Foucault’s paradigm in any way. In the following section I will consider the festival grounds as a heterotopia.

**Heterotopia and the WCBR**

The first thing to note about the festival site is that it was constructed on top of another space. The WCBR is set up on the Esplanade Park in the west coast city of Fremantle in Western Australia. Ordinarily, the park serves a different function, though one still related to leisure. I have been there many times with my children,
because the park has a playground with swings and slides where my eldest daughter
has enjoyed many hours. During the festival, however, the playground was boarded
up and inaccessible. What is normally an easily accessible parkland space is enclosed
by fences, with an entrance and security guards. Entry is restricted to those who have
a ticket, and security ensures that no malicious items or persons penetrate the festival
grounds unchallenged.

Inside the grounds, the normally open space has been sequestered. The carpark forms
an awkwardly shaped passage way, guiding attendees past the cloak room and the
beer tent. The sound of the music wafted over the little hill next to the carpark, and
led most of us on to the festival proper. Here the two big stages, the Big Top and the
Harbour Stage, awaited us. The two stages formed two different points of an
isosceles triangle, and in the centre were the merchandise stalls. It was a
straightforward matter to walk past these stalls between acts, and it was even
possible to hear most of the music, particularly from the open Harbour Stage, while
buying food or accessing the toilets.

A festival is described by Foucault as a celebration of time at its most transitory
(1998, 182). Unlike the opposite, a museum or a library which tries to contain all of
time within its bounds, a festival is understood by everyone concerned as an event
which comes, is enjoyed, and ends. I think a case can be made for looking at the
WCBR as a carefully constructed and organised “heterotopia of compensation.” In
this sense it is a placeless place which is intended to contrast sharply with the
everyday world outside it. Like the South American Jesuit villages which were
strictly ordered according to the chime of the church bell, the WCBR is a place
ordered by music, in contrast to the outside world of noise and bureaucratic power.
People come together in this space and time for the enjoyment of music, and all other activities that take place in the festival exist in the context of music. Music is the *raison d’être* for the WCBR, without it the festival would not exist.

To this point, Foucault’s ideas sound similar to Bakhtin. The key difference is that for the Frenchman, people enter heterotopia not to contest the real world, but to escape it. Thus when Kohl appropriates Bakhtin’s ideas for the purpose of conceptualising Woodstock, he perceives it as a space which contested everyday society in 1969. Not only did the hippies contest within the space of Woodstock, but Kohl suggests that the dream of the Woodstock ‘nation’ was to transform society into the image of Woodstock. This was a dream of a world ordered by music and art, peace and harmony, in contrast to the bureaucratic power of the world outside (Kohl, 1993, 159). Such a thesis is often accepted uncritically, particularly regarding the hippie movement.

Conversely, heterotopia is a concept which, if appropriated well, can do justice to the many varied expressions and understandings of participants in a festival. For Foucault, utopias are not real spaces; heterotopias, on the other hand, are the realisation of utopias, what they actually look like when manifested. Turner and Bakhtin’s paradigms can run the risk of becoming totalizing theories to the extent that they unite everyone within a space under a common banner, when in fact people go into different spaces for many reasons. St John notes in his analysis of ConFest that organisers often find their purposes frustrated by the motives of attendees (2001, 54, 56).
If use of a different space is understood as a contestation of the real world, with the purpose of remaking society in the image of the space, than this assumes to some extent that everybody is of one mind. A meta-narrative is required, one of resistance, conflict, triumph and reform. However, if escape from everyday power is understood as the primary motive for accessing a heterotopia, than the meta-narrative can be dispensed with. People are free to use the space in their own way and for their own purposes. This is exactly what occurs at the WCBR. While many participants attend for the music, while others are there with friends and use the music mainly as a “soundtrack” for other activities. There is no single, unifying purpose which joins everyone at the event together.

There can be no doubt that for some attendees the WCBR is a heterotopia of limit experience. Perhaps it can be viewed as a heterotopia of deviance, where people come to indulge in behaviour that is not permissible in the ordinary world. To appropriate this motivation uncritically to the WCBR, however, is to discard the very thing that makes Foucault’s heterotopia useful as a phenomenological category. It is perhaps the concept that takes most seriously the sheer diversity of experience within such a realm.

**Conclusion**

At this point, it is appropriate to draw together all the disparate threads of the material in this chapter. First was French sociologist Emile Durkheim and “collective effervescence,” a category he developed in his classic work *The Elementary forms of Religious Life*, in which he analysed data gathered by anthropologists observing the religious practices of Australian Aboriginals. Durkheim postulated that when people come together in certain contexts they share an experience of being transported into
another world. Durkheim’s functional view of religion led him to the conclusion that such times of “positive delirium” were entirely necessary for human beings to maintain function in the everyday world without descending into anomie.

For Durkheim, this collective effervescence was the beginning of early humanity’s belief in the spiritual realm. However, he held that this phenomenon should be understood as the result of the shared consciousness of people in groups, rather than actual encounters with the divine. Durkheim suggested that some experiences of collective effervescence are “creative,” resulting in social and political change, and some are “affirming,” essentially reinforcing existing rituals. While Durkheim believed that such group gatherings were originally for the purpose of religious observation, he did not restrict collective effervescence to religious contexts, suggesting that it is to be linked to the gathering of people in groups for any purpose.

Durkheim’s theory of collective effervescence provided a useful tool with which to analyse the Wolfmother performance at the end of the first day on the 2007 WCBR. Drawing on the experience of being part of the group in the mosh pit at the Wolfmother set, I postulated that this could be an example of affirming effervescence. This collective effervescence did not result in world transformation, but offered a temporary realm where behaviour that unacceptable in the “real” world could be expressed and perhaps “exorcised.”

This segues into Max Weber’s thought on charismatic authority. Weber conceptualized three different types of leadership or authority — traditional, bureaucratic and charismatic. Charismatic authority was for Weber completely different from the other two forms. Charisma is irrational and subjective, based on
the relationship between the leader and his or her followers. The leader maintains authority through the exercise of miraculous acts or magic, which may be understood as the performer’s prodigious ability to catalyse the ecstatic trance in followers, among other things. Charismatic authority is also the most volatile and enigmatic of the forms of authority. Ultimately it is unsustainable, but while it lasts it is the potential antidote for the ubiquitous disenchantment of the world brought about by the gradual encroachment of bureaucratic authority. Charismatic authority goes some way toward explaining the manner in which political lyrics and statements made by performers are often embraced more easily than those made by politicians.

Having articulated charismatic authority as understood by Weber, the next step was to apply it to Ben Harper’s performance at the 2007 WCBR. Harper stands out among performers for his openly political and spiritual lyrics, and his ability to forge a connection with fans during a performance. He exhibits an authority within the festival which differs from the everyday world outside. Within the festival and particularly within the realm created by Harper’s prodigious performance, a different world order is promulgated, albeit for a brief time. It is a realm of the “Better way” (the title of one of Harper’s best known songs), where ecological, social justice and spiritual concerns triumph over everyday preoccupation with money or power. The power of the “better way” Harper advocates is very transitory, perhaps not even outliving the performance itself, as seen in the evidence of the litter on the ground after the festival.

The next section explored the work of Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin on carnival. Bakhtin describes carnival as the “second world” of the people. Standing in stark contrast to the official jurisdiction of the medieval institutions — church and
monarchy — carnival was a time and space where all authority was mercilessly ridiculed and inverted. Bakhtin postulated that the purpose of such carnivalised destruction was to bring all symbols of power in the official world to earth, as a precursor to remaking them. This was tolerated by the guardians of the official structures because carnival was understood as a necessary period of debasement and foolishness. Bakhtin lamented that the carnival spirit did not survive into modernity, and is only poorly echoed in the insipid festivals of today. Kohl suggested that carnival lived on in the popular cultural movement of rock and roll, which at its peak opposed and tore down official structures and represented a modern second realm of young people.

Bakhtin’s carnival was used as a paradigm for exploring Xavier Rudd’s set at the 2008 WCBR. Prior to Rudd’s performance, people were in close proximity, without the focus of a performer, and yet they maintained a carnivalised set of behaviours that differed sharply from what might be accepted as normal in the outside world. People were standing on the shoulders of others, women flashing their breasts, the air thick with billingsgate and marijuana smoke, people touched and spoke to each other in ways that would almost certainly be regarded as inappropriate outside the festival. This space and time was more brief and indefinite than the debauchery and abandon that Bakhtin described in medieval carnival; nevertheless it served as a tonic to the real world outside the festival. The least that can be said is that there is a discrete realm in place at the WCBR where the second world of popular culture, standing as distinct from official culture, is celebrated.

Victor Turner’s work on *communitas* and the *limen* has been compared with Bakhtin’s carnival. There are many similarities but where Bakhtin understood the
carnival second world to be antithetical to religion, Turner held that the unique realm created by “anti-structure” sprang from religious ritual. This is a realm of “pure possibility,” where normal societal structures are suspended for a time. This void is filled by the experience of *communitas*, where society’s hierarchy disappears and all stand equal before the tribal spiritual elders. Turner understood this interplay between structure and anti-structure to be dialectical, resulting in the production of society. Turner coined the term “liminoid,” in order to apply his ideas to modern industrial society, finding in movements such as hippie counter-culturalism an example of modern *communitas*. While admitting that religion no longer held a central place in industrial and post-industrial society, he used the liminoid to link many aspects of modern culture with ritual.

I next applied Turner’s thought to the performance of Don McLean at the 2008 WCBR. McLean followed a process in his performance, beginning in time honoured fashion with his new songs, and inserting the occasional “canonical” song in the mix to lure his listeners into the ecstatic trance. The process produced, eventually, a unique space which resulted in the disappearance of ordinary boundaries and taboos. By the time McLean ended with *American Pie*, people were dancing, stomping, screaming, embracing strangers and singing at the top of their lungs, completely unselfconscious in the midst of a unique performance space. Using Turner’s categories, we labelled this as “liminoid” space, a realm of pure possibility, where there is a unique experience of togetherness and equality. For Turner this realm may exist as a utopian critique of the outside world, but should not understood as a permanent phenomenon.
The final category was Michel Foucault’s heterotopia. Heterotopias are realised utopias. Far from realising the ideal, these realms contest and in some cases unravel reality. Heterotopias have varied functions, from exposing the illusory nature of the world on the one hand to providing a more perfectly ordered version of the real on the other. They are places in which many different “emplacements,” some of which may be incompatible with each other, can come together in space and time. One of the most important functions of heterotopias for the French thinker is that they function as realms in which to escape power. In this sense they are profoundly ambivalent realms, where paradoxical purposes come together. Foucault’s examples include the asylum and the prison, heterotopic realms which both liberate and imprison “mad and bad” people simultaneously. Heterotopias function by holding such paradoxes together in space and time.

Foucault’s heterotopia is frustratingly broad, vague and brilliant, and can be applied with some trepidation to the WCBR. I analysed the grounds of the festival as a heterotopia, a realm of many diverse experiences being held together in tension. The WCBR can be understood as a “heterotopia of compensation,” a space ordered by music and charisma in sharp contrast to the chaotic and bureaucratic “real world” outside. However, it is clear that people attend an event for a number of different reasons, coming together in a space for varying and perhaps contradictory purposes. Music provides order to this space, but there is no overarching meta-narrative about how people within it are to use or enjoy the music here. Therefore, the WCBR should be understood clearly as a temporal realm, not of contestation and transformation, but of escape and temporality. It exists not to change the world, but to be different from it.
As this chapter draws to a close, it is evident that the socio-cultural paradigms explored here are both convincing and effective in illuminating the phenomena of space and experience in the field work examples. These socio-cultural ideas are very useful in drawing out the significance of shared experience of musical space. Within this realm and at particular times — for example in the middle of the musically catalysed ecstatic trance — participants and performers are joined in unique ways. There is a blurring and fuzziness to everyday boundaries and acceptable standards and norms of behaviour. A discrete realm of experience and music, characterised by effervescence, charisma, carnival and liminality, is maintained by the coming together of individuals to participate in music, as fans, listeners and performers.

For many, the reality of the liminal realm may be preferable to the strictures and boundaries of the normal world outside. The Socio-cultural theories and examples witness to the fact that this is a temporal reality. The musical realm exists only for a time and within a clearly defined place and therefore exists in contrast to the real world. It is a heterotopia, an “other” space, but in order for it to be such a place it must have another realm to be “other to. Foucault’s heterotopia demonstrates that it is the nature of people to seek out a different realm to escape from the real. It cannot be assumed, however, that simply because people share experience within a realm that their reasons for seeking such experience and their reactions to it are homogenous. This is precisely where problems may be encountered with the utopian emphases of Bakhtin’s carnival or Turner’s *communitas*.

The WCBR realm is essentially a different space. In the realm participants may join in collective effervescence, finding a necessary tonic and release from the pressures of everyday living. It is a realm characterised by charismatic authority, where the
bureaucratic power of the outside world is despised and the charismatic hero maintains his or her authenticity by exciting the ecstatic trance and representing a “better way.” It is a carnival realm, the second world of the people, where bodily sensuality and the symbolic tearing down of power through iconoclasm and billingsgate is celebrated, not repressed. It is a liminal realm, a space between spaces of anti-structure, where individuals are joined in an experience of *communitas* where boundaries and hierarchy disappear. Finally, it is essentially an “other” place, uniting many disparate and even opposite experiences into a shared escape from the outside.
Chapter 7: Toward a Theological-Religious reading of the West Coast Blues & Roots Festival

This chapter builds on the case study of the WCBR from a theological and religious perspective. I will briefly outline a number of theological and religious paradigms. Using the same phenomenological pattern followed in the previous chapters, these theories will be used to illuminate ethnographic data from the festival. The purpose here is to explore the provocative thesis that festival experiences can be understood as similar in structure and function to religious or spiritual experiences. Indeed, at points I make the argument that from a phenomenological perspective, the experiences which may occur at festivals (particularly ecstatic experiences) are indistinguishable from similar experiences in “religious” contexts.

The theological and religious studies paradigms in this chapter offer further insight and illumination into the vertical nature of this realm, serving to locate the sui generis existence of a divine entity which participates in the realm dynamics. Importantly, the socio-cultural theories articulated in this thesis do not exclude the possibility of human-divine interaction, but focus on what Durkheim nominates as “social facts” — that which can be verified empirically. Nevertheless, drawing in the work and thought of several theologians and religious scholars will offer deeper and richer possibilities for the interpretation of the realms people create through music.

The starting point, once again, is Friedrich Schleiermacher’s enigmatic conception of intuition of the universe. Schleiermacher based religion on experience, thereby
broadening its application beyond the confines of organised religious practice. However, the great German thinker did perceive some boundaries for his concept, and some of these are outlined in the following section.

**Friedrich Schleiermacher: Intuitions of the universe, culture and religion**

Friedrich Schleiermacher was among the first religious thinkers to extend the definition of religion by grounding it in experience, rather than sacred texts and rituals (Mariña 2008, 461). In taking this phenomenological starting point for religion, Schleiermacher redefined the locus of authority, elevating experience and relegating texts, doctrines and the other trappings of organized religion to secondary status. This is not to say that they are insignificant; rather, their utility, as Jacqueline Mariña puts it “is not to mirror the real but to give logical coherence to a system of symbols” (2004, 129–130).

In this section I will revisit Schleiermacher’s useful, if unusual sounding, concept “intuition of the universe.” It will also be necessary to distinguish between “religions” — systems of doctrine and practice which have developed around these intuitions — and “proto-religious phenomena.” The latter are intuitions of the universe around which no systems or religious trappings have developed, and are often not thought to be religious at all. It is precisely these experiences that Schleiermacher wishes to claim as the birthright of true religion. Finally, the path Schleiermacher treads between the so-called “positive” (also known as “revealed”) religions and “natural” religion, gives rise to another option. This has implications for art and culture, insofar as the third way involves bringing an individual’s artistic, cultural and philosophical resources to bear in reflecting on experience.
The enigmatic phrase “intuition of the universe” is the key to understanding Schleiermacher’s experiential approach to religion. Intuition of the universe is the name Schleiermacher gave to the “parallel processes” of intuition and feeling (Jensen, 2008, 821). Intuition here means the immediate perception of something in the form of an image, whereas feeling refers to immediate consciousness of how something affects the self (Schleiermacher 1996, 26, 29; Klemm 2005, 255). In other words, an individual experiences something, for example viewing a sunset, and simultaneously is aware of a feeling and a concept. Experience and interpretation of experience occur at the same instant.

However, Schleiermacher was not talking about every single experience. As the name “intuition of the universe” suggests, it refers to an experience capable of producing “an image of the living universe, the vibrant whole, interacting with the self in its deepest feelings” (Klemm 2005, 255). For that instant, the individual is aware of connecting to something that transcends self. Schleiermacher was in effect suggesting that such an experience yields a divine insight into the meaning and value of life, existence and all there is.

The significance of this is that every “intuition of the universe,” can be the starting point of religion. Schleiermacher postulated that any particular religion is established by “making a particular intuition of the universe the centre of the whole religion and relating everything therein to it” (1996, 104). It is hardly surprising that Schleiermacher was a strong advocate for the necessity of a plurality of religions (1996, 96). Each intuition of the universe joins intuition and feeling in the individual together to perceive one facet of an infinite whole. No single experience, upon which
each particular revealed religion is ultimately based, can realistically claim to represent the whole sphere of the divine (1996, 105).

Using Schleiermacher’s concept of intuition of the universe as a starting point, it is possible to draw a distinction between experiences around which have developed a religious system of doctrines, symbols and concepts, and those which have not. Schleiermacher referred to the former as “positive religions.” These are religious systems which make particular claims about the nature of the divine, based on revelation which is often codified in sacred texts. In this section, such phenomena are referred to simply as “religions.” A succinct term to designate the other category — intuitions of the universe around which no system is formed — is “proto-religious phenomena,” a phrase I have coined as a way of speaking about that which precedes religion. This suggests that it is possible for people to have intuitions of the universe which not only take place outside of religious contexts but are not regarded as religious experiences. To paraphrase Karl Rahner (1976, 283), these are “anonymous” religious experiences, experiences of the divine in contact with humanity that are not connected to any of the positive religious systems.

It could be argued at this point that what I have defined as “proto-religious phenomena” is in fact “natural religion.” Natural religion differs from positive or revealed religion to the extent that it is universal in scope and makes no particular claims about the nature of the divine, redemption or the after life. Advocates of natural religion suggest that all human beings are inherently religious, but they reject the formal systems and creeds as exclusivist. Schleiermacher vehemently opposed natural religion, regarding it as merely abstract reasoning devoid of experience (1996, 98, 100). Understood this way, natural religion is a very different concept to
that which I have called proto-religious phenomena, which like positive religion is
grounded in experience. While the universal scope of natural religion may appear
attractive to advocates of “spirituality,” I suspect that this ill-defined term is actually
closer to proto-religious phenomena — experience that does not develop into a
comprehensive religious system.

In a helpful article, David Klemm elucidates the above distinction between natural
and positive religion in Schleiermacher’s thought. He suggests that while
Schleiermacher clearly favoured positive religion over natural religion, in reality he
advocated a third option — philosophical theology (Klemm 2005, 259-262). The
advantage of philosophical theology is that it combines the two elements of
Schleiermacher’s intuition of the universe — feeling and intuition — in a manner
which enables reflection on first hand experience without the hampering of exclusive
or legalistic religious systems.

It is reasonable to suggest, as Klemm does, that Schleiermacher developed this
“philosophical theology” as a more perfect via media between revealed and natural
religion. Klemm goes on to trace the implications of Schleiermacher’s thought for
the place of art and culture in his day. Religion and art stand on an equal footing,
“like two friendly souls whose inner affinity, whether or not they equally surmise it,
is nevertheless still unknown to them” (1996, 69). Schleiermacher’s own musings on
the nature of music and religion, particularly in his single work of fiction Christmas
Eve, make it plain that he held a particularly exalted view of music among the arts as
a medium for intuition of the universe.
This means that for Schleiermacher culture and art are resources upon which an individual may draw in order to reflect on the nature of intuitions of the universe. If art and culture were used in this way, the strong points of positive religion (based on experience) and natural religion (universal application) can be brought together, without any of the unhelpful flotsam associated with either position. I will apply this thinking to the examples from the WCBR listed below, noting that these “proto-religious phenomena” have the same starting point as the revealed religions — “intuition of the universe” or transcendent experience — but have not been surrounded by the trappings associated with religion, such as doctrine or ritual.

This last point of course is debatable; it could be argued just as legitimately that WCBR participants exhibit at times an almost religious attitude toward the performers. What can be said unequivocally is that Schleiermacher believed that intuitions of the universe, as the starting point of all true religion, can and do happen in diverse settings where transcendent experience is possible. The WCBR is an example of such a setting.

Having said this, two provisos must quickly be added. Firstly, Schleiermacher was enamoured particularly with high culture and classical music, both religious and secular, not popular culture and music. The second proviso is even more critical — for Schleiermacher art could never replace religion. While art such as music can be a medium for the transcendent experience of religion, it functions to open this portal for those who are able to intuit the universe through art, and also serves as an educator. Art and culture are resources, enabling the individual to reflect on the nature of experience more thoughtfully and with more insight than would otherwise
be possible. This is why Schleiermacher believed that high art and culture offered a more refined and sophisticated view of the nature of the universe.

In summary, Schleiermacher understood art to be supplementary to religion. It is therefore not the same thing as religion, although he admitted that those with the “artistic sense” can experience the “intuitions of the universe” through art. Art and religion stand together in his thought; nevertheless he made a distinction between them. Following this line of reasoning, I will explore the possibility that the WCBR is a realm of “proto-religious phenomena” by drawing upon interview excerpts from performers and participants at the WCBR and comparing some of these statements with Schleiermacher’s concept of intuition of the universe.

**Intuitions of the universe and the WCBR**

I begin with a much quoted excerpt from Schleiermacher. Although this description of intuition of the universe appears in a previous chapter, it bears repeating, at least in part.

> It is as fleeting and transparent as the first scent with which the dew gently caresses the waking flowers, as modest and delicate as a maiden’s kiss, as holy and fruitful as a nuptial embrace; indeed not like these, but it is itself all of these. A manifestation, an event develops quickly and magically into an image of the universe (1996, 32).

I suggest that it is possible to understand the WCBR, like Breakfree Church, as a constructed realm where people can come and participate in similar experiences. Unlike Breakfree, these intuitions of the universe are not the centre of a developed cultus or system of codified doctrines. Therefore, the WCBR is a realm of “proto-religious phenomena” — a place of transcendent experiences that are not necessarily linked to formal religion.
The fact that many people have transcendent experiences in the presence of music which are similar to Schleiermacher’s conception of intuition of the universe is not difficult to demonstrate. A published interview with WCBR performer Ben Harper, for example, records the performer’s attempts to capture the enigmatic experience of a performance.

When I pick up an instrument, I go somewhere. It takes me — I can’t say where, and I don’t even want to know where. And then I try to bring the people with me to where it trips me out to. Then it’s a good show (Obrecht, 1997, 41).

It is clear, then, that a shared experience of transcending time and space in an indescribable way is important, in Harper’s understanding, to a good show. The emphasis is on the experience itself, the “trip,” rather than on developed concepts or doctrines concerning the nature of the experience. Harper prefers that the experience remains enigmatic, not knowing or caring where he is going. In a similar spirit, Schleiermacher lamented the fact that talking about experience “desecrates” it, marking a preference for remaining in the experience over theorising about it (1996, 32).

This second excerpt from another interview with Ben Harper demonstrates an attempt to articulate experience using religious symbols and language.

Music is the strongest spirit of all creation. It keeps humanity together. It breaks all barriers — age, language, colour, even time and space. It is a spirit that you must humbly pay homage to and hold in the highest regard (Obrecht, 1997, 41).

Harper’s language here is interesting, because it suggests a reflection on the nature of music and experience which moves beyond the level of proto-religious phenomena. In other words, he has graduated from simple articulations about the experience to thinking in more general terms about the nature of the experience. However, this is not to say that Harper is making music into a religion. It would be more accurate to
suggest that Harper is perhaps engaging in what Klemm calls “philosophical theology,” by drawing on his own cultural background and thinking to articulate the personal significance of his experience.

Moving away from the performers to the participants at the WCBR, the following excerpt from David also describes his experience of music in religious language.

Quite a lot of what I enjoy about music is that feeling of exaltation, which is, I guess, almost a lifting of the spirit and a feeling of being stirred up inside and being carried along with something on quite an emotional level really, and I guess it's being transported away from just a regular sort of daily grind (David, interview, April 10 2007).

It is evident that David is describing something which resembles Schleiermacher’s intuition of the universe. It would be forcing the issue to suggest that David thinks of his experiences as necessarily religious. However, what can be said is that David’s experience could be the starting point of a religion because, according to Schleiermacher, all positive religion begins with such phenomena. The fact that in this case the experiences do not develop into full-blown religious systems is the reason I have named them proto-religious phenomena. They have the same starting point as religion, but never develop into a religion.

In this excerpt, I asked Melissa about the possibility of experiencing God at the festival.

Me: “Any artists over your attendance at the festival for three years that you’ve felt a connection to God through?”

Melissa: “Yeah. An inclusion of God, like this is part of God as well. Moments where I will be quickly thankful for something, like ‘Thanks for this experience God’ as opposed to thanking the artist, to feel blissful at this point I thank God for that.” (Interview, May 1 2008)

Melissa perceives the WCBR as a realm wherein God comes into contact with humanity through experience of music. Schleiermacher would have lauded such an
understanding. However, his interest was in broadening the definition of a religious experience, embracing all intuitions of the universe regardless of how they are interpreted. To quote his own impassioned plea to the cultured despisers of religion, “if only you had the religion you could have, and only were conscious of what you already do have!” (1996, 44). The transcendent experience he calls intuition of the universe is common to all people, opening a portal to the phenomenon of religion, if only they are able to see it for what it is.

A final excerpt illustrates the opposite perspective: the fundamental difference between the experience of music and religious experience.

Me: “Do you think music can be a spiritual experience?”
Olivia: “I guess so. I don’t know if a spiritual experience for myself, other experiences maybe, I just can’t think of a spiritual one.”
Me: “What do you understand when I say ‘spiritual experience’?”
Olivia: “I think of more a connection to my faith, something like that. I’m Catholic. I can’t think of a time where my faith connected to music as such.” (Interview, 3 May 2007).

For Olivia, spiritual experience is connected to revealed religion. The connection may be enigmatic, and the distinction may be inchoate, but it is there nonetheless. While this may appear to run counter to the thread of this section, in fact it does not. What is argued here is that there are some experiences at the WCBR, particularly linked with the ecstatic state, which share commonalities with the intuitions of the universe which Schleiermacher described as the centre and starting point of all revealed religion. The fact that such phenomena may never be linked to revealed religion does not negate this point.

Such experiences taking place in the WCBR can be classified generally as proto-religious phenomena. They are tastes of religion without some of the formal
trappings of organised religion. Schleiermacher desired that all people would perceive in such tastes the essence of true religion. Rudolf Otto, whose thought occupies the following section, deepened and broadened Schleiermacher’s intuitions of the universe dramatically, providing a provocative set of ideas for understanding the possible links between music and the divine.

**Rudolf Otto: The numinous, the holy and the essence of religion**

Like Schleiermacher, Rudolf Otto grounded religion in phenomenological experience. In this section, I will briefly revisit Otto’s thought, with particular emphasis on his understanding of the “otherness” of the numinous as compared to humanity and creation. An exploration of the forms in which this otherness becomes manifest in ways that can be experienced in our world leads to a process which Otto calls “schematization.”

Otto regarded music as a useful analogy for the schematization process, but he never explained why music is only an analogy that cannot in and of itself become an experience of the numinous. I will draw out the utility of Otto’s concepts for articulating depth experience and connecting these with the divine, because it is here that “traces” of the numinous can be perceived in such experiences. This section will conclude using Otto’s concepts to illuminate Eric Burdon’s set at the 2007 WCBR, offering suggestions that in such experiences of bliss and collective union traces of the numinous may be perceived.

For Otto, the divine is something totally distinct from the created order, something so alien that it cannot be expressed directly in concepts or represented accurately in
objects (1970, 5). At best, language and objects could function as analogies. To human beings, standing as they do within the created order, the holy is an impenetrable mystery. Otto coined the term “numinous” as a descriptor for the enigmatic union of both rational and “non-rational” elements: that which can be understood by human reason and that which goes beyond it (1970, 6–7). For humanity, the non-rational is manifest in indescribable experience, perhaps of sublime bliss, possibly of unexplainable terror or dread (1970, 12–14). Thus, the numinous is essentially a phenomenological category.

Otto was clearly dependent on Schleiermacher, a debt he acknowledged, but he wished to go beyond him. Otto criticised Schleiermacher, suggesting that the latter made religious consciousness into a type of self-consciousness. He gleaned this impression from Schleiermacher’s famous definition of religion as “the immediate feeling of absolute dependence” (Schleiermacher, 1999, 17). For Otto, what is immediate in a religious experience is not primarily the self; but the numinous as “other.” A person becomes aware of the self only in relation to the ‘wholly other.’ She or he has a “creature-consciousness” — becoming aware of self as being completely different and vastly inferior to the enigmatic presence responsible for existence (1970, 10–11, 20).

Needless to say, Otto placed a stronger emphasis than Schleiermacher on the enigmatic nature of the divine. In placing such a strong focus on the experiential and non-rational characteristics of spiritual experience, Otto’s numinous was ‘wilder’ than anything in Schleiermacher. The numinous is experienced through extraordinary bliss, but also in unexplainable dread and even terror. Not only is the divine manifest in transcendent beauty, but also in irrational weirdness (1970, 14–15, 18, 31). If the
numinous is beyond human comprehension, than this meant for Otto that it is manifest in ways that are incomprehensible in every way imaginable, and not just in forms that are desirable, as he understood Schleiermacher to suggest.

One of Otto’s most sympathetic modern interpreters, Todd Gooch (2000), suggests that Otto may well provide a resource for understanding the human desire for depth experiences of the numinous. Where previously such a desire was met by participation in religions, the decline of organised religion coupled with what Otto perceived as a failure on the part of European religion to develop a spirituality of horror or the weird — numinous experience which leads to feeling of “uncanniness” or dread — have left a significant void in Western societies (1970, 105–108). Otto’s unrepentant focus on experience of the numinous may be of assistance in projects which attempt to illuminate possible traces of the divine in contexts usually thought of as distinct from religion (Gooch 2000, 216–218).

Otto provides a powerful resource with which to continue the phenomenological exploration of the WCBR. However, there is one potentially troubling issue which must first be addressed in Otto’s thinking. The “ugly, broad ditch”* which must be crossed to connect numinous experience with the historical idea of the divine can only be bridged by holding to the a priori existence of the divine. In other words, there can be no way of demonstrating a necessary connection between the non-rational experience Otto described and the entity he labelled as the numinous.

* This term is borrowed from German Enlightenment scholar Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, who coined it in an attempt to articulate his personal difficulty in accepting the divinity of Christ based on the Scriptures (Lessing, 1956, 55)
This is a particular problem for Otto because he succeeded in making the numinous inexplicable and non-rational. In extending Schleiermacher’s thought to its logical conclusion, Otto also demonstrated that the numinous exists on such a radically different level that “it is a thing that doesn’t really exist at all … something which has no place in our reality but belongs to an absolutely different one” (1970, 29). In the end, this means that the divine as a category cannot be proved or demonstrated as a logical necessity (Ware, 2007, 55). In short, Otto’s system is founded upon the fact that the a priori existence of the numinous must be taken on faith.

This is not necessarily a problem, but it is important to make clear the way in which this radically different order of reality is made manifest in this world. Otto described the process whereby the numinous is manifest to creation as “schematization” (1970, 45). For Otto, music is as an example of the process of schematization. Music itself is non-rational, and the experience of it is beyond comprehension, but the process of song-crafting brings the music down to earth, in a form where it operates according to rules and can be enjoyed. In this way, Otto used music as an analogy of the process whereby the incomprehensible numinous is schematized so as to become manifest to humanity (1970, 47–49).

Owen Ware (2007) questions Otto’s analogical use of music at this point. He asks why the incomprehensible experience of music should not be regarded as a non-theistic manifestation of the phenomenon Otto labelled the numinous. If the necessity of regarding the numinous experience as necessarily connected to the idea of the divine discussed in religion is discarded, music does not have to be merely an analogy, but actually becomes in and of itself a manifestation of numinous experience (Ware, 2007, 53, 59).
This leads back to Schleiermacher’s postulation that transcendent experience is religious experience, and is logically prior to any concepts about the divine or the nature of religion. The problem is that Ware’s position dismisses the possibility of saying anything positive about numinous experience. It merely becomes an experience of something enigmatic that defies description. While any deep experience can thus be seen as an experience of religion, as Schleiermacher envisioned, there remains an ugly broad ditch between this experience and any form of revealed religion which may be able to comment or articulate the meaning of this experience.

Nevertheless, Otto’s brilliant conception of the numinous provides a fructile device with which to interpret some of the events at the WCBR. The particular focus of the next section is upon Eric Burdon’s performance at the 2007 WCBR.

The numinous and the WCBR

Eric Burdon, legendary front man for the British sixties group “The Animals,” performed in the afternoon of the first day at the 2007 WCBR. His gig took place in the Big Top, the stage set up within an enormous circus tent to keep participants and performers out of the blazing March sunshine. The late afternoon, when Burdon’s gig began, is when the crowds really start to pour into the venues in anticipation of the night performances. The Big Top was packed full of people, presumably hoping to catch a glimpse of the man who performed such canonical songs as “House of the Rising Sun” and “We gotta get out of this place.” In the close atmosphere, the tent served to recreate the atmosphere of an intimate evening gig indoors.
Veteran performers with a litany of “canonical” songs are very important at events such as the WCBR because they help build anticipation for some of the headline night time performances. When Burdon arrived on stage it was clear he knew how to work a crowd. Even though he was in his mid-sixties and performed most of the gig seated behind music stands presumably containing song lyrics, he rose to his feet at important times in the performance and whipped the crowd into a frenzy. Participants responded with wild exultation when the big songs were played, joining in singing the lyrics for whole verses and choruses. The music was sixties style rock and roll, rhythmic and energetic.

The experience of being together in an enormous crowd lost in the music bears many similarities to Otto’s numinous experience. I attempted to describe this experience in my field notes.

Unlike some of the other performers, Burdon was not content to play well and let the crowd respond or not — he wanted to bring us along with him and he knew many ways to achieve this end. With such well known songs, many of us were dancing, swaying, singing along, clapping and getting right into the experience of the music. It is a unique feeling of being joined to the big group all around you, of pure subjectivity at the same time as being anonymous and lost in the huge crowd, sound and experience. You are aware of yourself yet not self conscious, aware of how you feel yet uncaring of how you look … It was what we were longing for and Burdon, a veteran charismatic performer, knew how to take us there (Unpublished field notes, 31 March 2007).

This was musically catalysed ecstasy. The experience of being joined to the crowd, of loss of self consciousness and awareness, and of trance all fit with Otto’s articulation of bliss as an emotive response to the presence of the numinous. Participant David found the familiar nature of some of the “canonical” songs in Burdon’s set lends itself to ecstatic bliss, both when performing and witnessing as a participant.
The House of the Rising Sun, particularly, is a song which I’ve played with friends, but it’s a song that, it’s one of those songs that when we’re together, it’s one of the songs that I can half sing, and we really hammer it and pound it when we do it, so it evokes all those memories of sitting around with guitars and saying “what about House of the Rising Sun?” and then just going off, and then to actually be sitting there and see the guy who was part of creating that song almost doing the same thing with his band was just fantastic (David, interview, April 10 2007).

As outlined in the description of Don McLean’s set in chapter six above, many artists follow a process of beginning with less well known material and progressing to the more canonical songs, leading the crowd “down the road to ecstasy.”* Such a process was not as discernable in Burdon’s gig, as he had so many well known songs to draw on. With no clear process, the crowd responded to Burdon himself, roaring every time he rose to his feet and raised his hands. The best way to describe the experience was enjoyable chaos.

This experience cannot really be explained, articulated or captured. It is too large and deep to be held by description and phrase. The significance of such an experience is also beyond comprehension. These characteristics fit with Otto’s ideas about the numinous experience although, as we have noted, he had many other descriptors besides these, such as dread or weirdness.

However, Otto would not agree that the experience I have outlined here is actually a numinous experience itself. For Otto, the numinous must be linked to religious faith. The ecstatic experience here articulated can function only as an analogy of the numinous, to illustrate how this experience works in manifesting the indescribable into a finite form. The problem in Otto’s thought here is that there is nothing in particular about the experience itself that is of a different quality to a ‘genuine’

* A particularly appropriate line from Bob Dylan’s *Idiot Wind.*
experience of the numinous. While this may be a controversial statement, there is no phenomenological difference between the experience of Eric Burdon’s performance and the experience of being in a worship service at Breakfree church. The difference, if there is one, occurs at the level of interpretation of experience. It is for this reason that factors such as the context that the experience takes place in (an experience taking place in a church is likely to be interpreted differently from occurring at a popular music festival) and the individual’s cultural and psycho-social background are determinative of the ways in which phenomena are understood and reported.

Gooch (2000, 211–219) offers a possible solution to this conundrum. While Otto wants to cling to the a priori existence of the divine as necessary to proper interpretation of numinous experience, it is arguable that my experience of the Burdon gig acts in similar ways as deep experiences of the numinous do in other contexts. It seems there are two options available here. One is to strip the experience of any transcendent value, and deny the existence of the sacred. The second is to acknowledge the existence of the sacred as something that is possible but cannot be proved, and perceive in such depth experiences ‘traces’ of the numinous. This may be a controversial conclusion for those who wish to limit religious experience to religious contexts or emotions. In support of this second option is the work of David Hay. Hay conducted surveys in the United Kingdom in the late eighties and early nineties investigating the reporting of spiritual experiences, and noted a 60% increase in such reporting between 1987 and 2000. He attributes this increase to the decline of organised religion, resulting in people being increasingly comfortable admitting to spiritual awareness outside of religious contexts (Hay, 2006, 8–25).
Otto provides an insightful if potentially controversial category which illuminates the transcendent, vertical vista of the WCBR. A man who saw himself as the heir to Otto in many ways was religious scholar Mircea Eliade, to whose work I now turn.

**Mircea Eliade: Shamanism and Hierophanies**

Chapter three above traced the outline of Romanian born scholar Mircea Eliade’s thought on hierophanies and shamanism. Some of that section will be reviewed here as the background to a fuller exploration of Eliade’s conception of shamanism in relation to popular culture. A number of scholars and writers have borrowed the idea of Eliade's shaman and applied it to modern popular culture, even though this was a link that Eliade never made himself. Some of these contributions will be investigated, noting potential links between the shamanic role and the modern celebrity or performer. The object will be to draw a comparison between Eliade’s shaman and Australian multi-instrumental performer Xavier Rudd.

Eliade was certainly not the first to explore the archaic enigma of shamanism, a religious phenomenon originating in far north-eastern Russia. The shaman was one who specialised in the ecstatic trance (Eliade, 1987, 8269; Eliade, 2004, 4–5). He or she employed several techniques to induce this trance, often including the use of hierophanies. A hierophany is a profane object which is believed to act as a contact point between the material and divine worlds (Eliade, 1959, 11-12; 1987; Eliade and Sullivan, 1987, 3970). An important hierophanic object in the archaic shaman’s repertoire was the drum.

The drum is a highly significant instrument at many different levels in shamanism. First, the tree from which the drum is constructed is also a hierophany. It is selected
by various means and becomes a hierophany of the “Cosmic Tree,” the tree which is at the centre of the world. By climbing up and down this tree in the ecstatic trance the shaman is able to leave his or her body and enter the divine realm, the realm of the dead or paradise. Beating the drum rhythmically serves to evoke the trance, which in turn is the means through which the shaman connects with the Cosmic Tree (Eliade, 1987, 8272; Eliade, 2004, 168–169, 172–173).

The shaman also has the power to open a vista on another world. Eliade’s thought in the following passage is worth quoting verbatim.

> The exhibition of magical feats reveals another world — the fabulous world of the gods and magicians, the world in which everything seems possible, where the dead return to life and the living die only to live again, where one can disappear and reappear instantaneously, where the “laws of nature” are abolished and certain superhuman “freedom” is exemplified and made dazzlingly present … they also stimulate and feed the imagination, demolish the barriers between dream and present reality, open windows upon worlds (Eliade, 2004, 511).

Who might be considered the heirs of the shamans in modern society? Is it possible that certain individuals still exercise this power to open up a vista into another world and specialise in techniques of ecstasy and exaltation?

The connection between shamans and modern popular culture is tantalising. Recently Chris Rojek (2001) linked Eliade’s conception of the shaman with the modern celebrity of popular culture. Rojek argues that the celebrity is secular culture’s equivalent of the ancient shaman (2001, 53). According to this view, the miraculous power of the shaman translates to the enigmatic ability of the modern performer or star to excite the ecstatic trance (2001, 69). The ancient shaman’s supernatural ability to break ‘normal’ rules is reframed in modern celebrity culture in the massive earning ability and seemingly limitless ability to transgress sexual and moral norms of the modern day “star” (2001, 71–73).
Rojek notes with approval the secularism thesis of Durkheim and confirms that modernity is be marked by a decline in organised religion. Secular society, Rojek claims, has historical roots in Christianity, and consequently some of the rituals and myths significant in secular culture are drawn from Christianity (2001, 74). The traditional ascent and descent of the ancient shaman has its equivalence in the elevation of the modern star through advertising and the cult of celebrity, and the spectacular “fall from grace” (to quote the religious language often used) of the star who abuses his or her ability to transgress societal norms through excessive or criminal behaviour (2001, 74–87).

Rojek’s analysis is creative and insightful, but while making use of Eliade he commits the very transgression that Eliade sought most ardently to redress — i.e. attempting to understand religious phenomena in non-religious ways. Thus, Rojek ends up with what is essentially a functionalist reading of shamanism, whereby the role of the ancient shaman is replaced to a large extent by modern celebrities. This fails to acknowledge that the transcendent experience often associated with shamans and celebrities is a very real phenomenon to those who feel it.

In *Traces of the Spirit*, Robin Sylvan makes a case for linking shamanic religion and American popular music. Perhaps his most useful contribution in that volume is to explore the link between West African ritual religion (particularly voodoo) and the distinctively American musical forms — blues, jazz and rock and roll. Drawing on the writing of essayist Michael Ventura and others, as well as his own observations of West African religious rites, Sylvan draws the link between the slave trade where
Africans were brought to the United States and the Caribbean and the latent spirituality present in African-American forms of music (Sylvan, 2002, 53–61, 68).

Sylvan also presents a detailed description of the nature of West African voodoo. A key feature of voodoo is where an individual is taken over during the ritual worship of the community and becomes a shaman or spirit guide — a channel by which the spirits come into contact with the human world (2002, 46). Critical to this process is the incessant rhythm of drums and music which allows participants to enter a trance-like state (2002, 50). In this state, the spirit world can encounter the human world and the shaman is able to offer supplication on behalf of the community.

The onset of European contact with Africa, and the beginning of the slave trade, displaced thousands of West Africans from their communities. Many were resettled in the United States, resulting in the substantial African American population there today. Forcibly removed from their religious contexts and communities and deprived of the right to engage in their former spiritual practices, black women and men needed to find another way, simply put, to worship. Many found this in Protestant Christianity, albeit by retaining some Christianised voodoo practices. It may also be the case that Pentecostalism in the United States has its genesis here. For others, deprived of freedom to express this vodun spirituality openly meant that the rhythmic voodoo ritual was subsumed within the blues which can be played by a single musician and has an implicit beat, negating the need for drums (Ventura 1985, 137–138). Sylvan and Ventura speculate about possible historical links between West African voodoo shamanism and popular music. This is a useful, if controversial, position, and serves to locate the origins of popular music in a religious context.
The most important shamanic quality possessed by contemporary musicians and performers is the ability to open a vista for participants into another world, or realm, through the experience of a performance. The seemingly magical ability to excite a frenzy of ecstasy over the course of a performance is the focal point. Michael Ventura’s descriptive prose about the power of popular music to act as a portal to this experience evokes not only Eliade’s shaman but also Schleiermacher’s intuitions of the universe and Otto’s numinous experience. Ventura states:

Anyone who has felt it knows it is a precious energy, and knows it has shaped them, changed them, given them moments they could not have had otherwise, moments of heightened clarity or frightening intensity or both; moments of love and bursts of release (1985, 154–155).

Ventura draws clear parallels between the task of the voodoo shaman and the modern musical performer.

**Shamanism and the WCBR**

Of all the concepts and theories detailed in this study, Eliade’s shaman is one of the most useful categories for exploring the significance of the performers and performances at the WCBR. If there was any kind of spirituality practiced at the festival, it was certainly connected to rhythm and ancient techniques of invoking ecstasy and special knowledge. One performer in particular who self-identifies as a holy man or shaman is Australian multi-instrumentalist Xavier Rudd. In this section, I will focus on Rudd’s own conceptualization of the significance of his music and performances.

Xavier Rudd performed at both the 2007 and 2008 WCBR. He is an extraordinarily talented musician, often playing several *yidakis* (didgeridoos), drums, guitar, harmonica and chimes in the course of a song, at times using several instruments at once, all while thumping a rhythm with his bare feet on an amplified board, and
singing. In 2007, Rudd performed as a solo act; the following year he had a dedicated drummer to assist with the rhythm and a group of Aboriginal dancers performed at various stages through his set.

The spectacle of Rudd’s performance has an almost superhuman quality about it. Extracting rhythmic, tuneful sounds from several sources at once — such as guitar, drums, thump board and vocals — all while co-ordinating even more instruments over the course of a set, demonstrates Rudd’s prodigious talent. Rudd seems to possess an almost supernatural musical ability, as evidenced by the obvious ease with which he manages his performance. He frequently smiles at the crowd and encourages participation by waving an arm or a knowing look.

Rudd perceives himself as more than a performer. He self-identifies as a representative of Aboriginal spirituality (Lander, 2007), bringing something very different to the smorgasbord of music on offer at the festival. Specifically, Rudd believes that his music has its source in spirits. In several published interviews, for example, Rudd sketches the importance of his connection to the spirit world and his music.

Spirits come through me and that’s where my music comes from … sometimes it’s a vehicle for a spirit to come through for whatever reason that is … its almost like I’m a vehicle for it, it all spills out in its own way, and I’m almost trying to decipher it as anyone else would, and listen … at the end of its like “Wow, where did that come from? What’s that about?” Sometimes I won’t understand it for quite a while in my mind, and then eventually I’ll understand it (Russell, 2007).

Rudd’s description of his music as a vehicle for spirits conforms to Eliade’s conception of hierophany, where profane objects manifest the divine. His language, moreover, is reminiscent of possession, except that Rudd maintains control of his instruments at all times. Rudd practices the techniques that open this portal into the
spirit world, much like the archaic shaman, and eventually exercises an ability to understand the result. Interestingly, Rudd does not claim that his own understanding of the music is definitive, because, as he is quick to point out, its source is not within him. Rudd is unequivocal that he is not the source of the music he plays and that he makes no attempt to edit the spirit communication.

It’s not really something that I’m trying to do – it’s not me thinking, ‘Okay, I want to say this.’ Sometimes it’ll be a spirit that comes through me. It comes through me so strong that it’ll just fall out of me. It’s a real gift to be a vehicle for it, but I don’t involve my mind. I let it come through and I let it come through in a way it needs to come through, to the point where at times I’ll stand back and go, ‘Wow, what is that?’ It comes out, then I might understand why it makes sense a little later. For me, that’s a real gift and an honour, and to involve my mind to alter it at all would be disrespectful to that spirit that’s coming through (Grey, 2006).

Once again, Rudd’s language describes his music as hierophanic. Music, to use Rudd’s own word is a “vehicle” for spirits. Rudd’s description differs slightly from Eliade’s idea of the shaman in that Rudd does not talk about exiting his body and entering another realm, but is much more focussed upon allowing the spirits access to this world through his music. Rudd makes this point emphatically:

If I’ve got a spirit coming through me for a reason, and I’m not sure in my little mind in this world that I live in right now, what that spirit is, but it’s chosen me to come through, for me to influence that with my mind, and place it in a place, or interfere with it, would be disrespectful to what that is. That’s the way I think about it, when it come through and shapes itself, so anything creative that’s kinda my rule (Russell, 2007).

Once again, Rudd emphasises the hierophanic nature of the music, and the catalysing of the entry of spirits into the world rather than his own shamanic role in performance. Nevertheless, the fact that he claims that spirits communicate to and through him confirms his status as a conduit to the spirit world, which is the role of the traditional shaman. His ability to excite devotion and ecstatic trance through his performance — although certainly not unique to him at the WCBR — is further
evidence of Rudd’s shamanic status as one who mediates ecstasy and performs superhuman deeds.

Rudd stands out because he perceives a spiritual significance in his own performance. Like Eliade, he understands a phenomenon as religious and uses religious categories in his attempts to explicate it. Other performers at the WCBR demonstrated the ability to catalyse ecstatic experience in the fans, but may not be so forthright in their self-assessment, preferring to shy away from expressing themselves in such overtly spiritual language. It would be disingenuous to suggest that all performers operate as self-conscious shamans; however, there is considerable evidence that Xavier Rudd does.

When coupled with the previous phenomenological descriptions of the nature of religion from Schleiermacher and Otto, Rudd’s self-understanding of his role and performance is another example of the vertical dimension of a realm operating at the WCBR. Whether or not this vertical dimension is valid or simply imaginary remains an uneasy question. Paul Tillich had another, extremely influential approach to the problem of the nature of religion.

**Paul Tillich: Ultimate concern**

Paul Tillich’s “ultimate concern” has proved to be a useful concept for elucidating the heart of religion and spirituality. Tillich held an ambivalent view of culture, ranging from the youthful optimism that culture could speak prophetically to the church and humanity to a pessimism anchored in the disappointment and horror of World War II (Cobb, 1995). The common thread through Tillich’s theology is ultimate concern, a phrase employed to speak about that which transcends the
“narrow” view of religion (roughly equivalent to “organised religion”) and embraced all humanity. Thus, if ultimate concern is a valid concept, it should be possible to find it underpinning areas of existence not normally associated with religion. This section will conclude by investigating the performance and self-understanding of John Butler of the John Butler Trio — through the lens of Tillich's ultimate concern.

For Tillich, ultimate concern is a phenomenological descriptor of the experience of being grasped by the transcendent. Drawing upon Judaeo-Christian traditions, Tillich perceived that the experience of the individual devoted to an ultimate concern is like being gripped (Tillich and Brown, 1965, 8-11, 17). He extended this outside the boundaries of what he called “narrow religion” to all humanity in “broad religion” (Tillich and Brown, 1965, 5-7). Ultimate concern, therefore, is universal insofar as it is common to all humanity, because all are gripped by something regarded as having ultimate status. Defining religion and faith as “the state of being ultimately concerned” (1957, 1), Tillich broadened the definition sufficiently to make them applicable to all humanity. Regardless of whether an individual’s ultimate concern is the Judaeo-Christian God, or Vishnu, or the nation or family, that individual is nonetheless gripped by ultimate concern. Therefore, faith is an experience common to all humanity.

Ultimate concern was for Tillich the single distinguishing feature that separates genuine faith in a transcendent reality from anything else masquerading as faith. Tillich’s claim to identify the foundational attributes of religious faith is as definitive as that made by Schleiermacher more than a century and a half before. Schleiermacher started from a very open position and then worked his way in, claiming that religion is in every transcendent experience from a kiss to the view of a
beautiful sunrise and the dew on the grass. Tillich’s idea is still universal in scope; yet not every experience and every object of belief, hope or joy is an example of ultimate concern. For Tillich, only those consciously linked to a transcendent reality, to something beyond this present plane of existence, can rightly claim to be of ultimate concern (1957, 4–5). Those things that pose as being of ultimate concern but are in reality temporal — like nationalism, or the family, or pleasure — Tillich labelled idolatrous (1957, 12).

The distinction made here is of crucial importance for this present study, because Tillich expressed in very lucid terms that which distinguishes the Breakfree and the WCBR realms. In contemporary society, idolatry may have some unhelpful or even fundamentalist connotations, but that was not the case for Tillich. The German was merely pointing out the fact that faith is supposed to sustain and give life meaning. A faith placed in an object that is not ultimate does not lead beyond this world to a transcendent reality. It may not be an immoral object. People tend to hold on to a belief about the way things are, the essential nature of reality, the rhyme and reason behind it all. Locating this belief in an object that is subject to chance, to decay, to corruption and immorality, is to risk disillusionment at best. At worst, such a path can lead to total despair or fanatical desire to remake the world in such a way that it fits our belief systems. The potential cost, to borrow from another outstanding German thinker Max Weber, is “disenchantment.”

Conversely, ultimate concern can lead, potentially, to the abandonment of all temporal concern — if the ultimate reality is our goal, present existence is of no real importance. In a well argued paper, Peter Phillips criticises Tillich on the grounds that he appears confused, unable to understand that his own language is essentially
analogical (Phillips, 1996, 31–32). Moreover, ultimate concern which proves not to be ultimate is idolatrous precisely because it can so easily be confused with authentic faith. Phillips uses Tillich’s own example — faith in Hitler and the Third Reich. A genuine and sincere faith in Hitler is erroneous, nevertheless it points beyond Hitler to Hitler's “demonic” analogy — faith in the transcendent reality of God (Phillips, 1996, 32–33). Less extreme examples, such as faith in the family, the nation or success function well in Tillich’s system to the extent that they are recognised as analogies of the transcendent and point toward the ultimate. Yet when they assume the status of ultimate concern, such entities become idols.

Tillich himself, in an essay on utopia, argued against an approach which is transcendental at the expense of the existential. In elucidating the transcendent nature of true utopia, Tillich pointed to the paradoxical nature of utopia and the tension between possibility and impossibility (1973, 302). He critiqued religious ideas of utopia for becoming enamoured with the transcendent nature of utopia, locating all that is important and ultimate in a plane of existence beyond present place and time — the afterlife. Such a purely transcendental view of the ultimate leads those who hold it to “forfeit their influence over history” (1973, 304–305). In other words, an ultimate utopia that is purely transcendental means that, ultimately, this world does not matter, and all attempts to change present reality are seen as unimportant.

However, Tillich also noted that those who discard all transcendent ideas of utopia and the ultimate in favour of a more temporal ideal pay a large price as well. The problem that arises when ultimate concern is not ultimate, and when utopia is not transcendent but actualized, is that it is necessarily transitory. The profound effect of the rise of the Third Reich once again exercised its influence on Tillich’s thought
here, as he viewed Nazism as an idolatrous faith and an actualised utopia insofar as both were proved to be transitory and dystopian. In Tillich’s own words, such an “aggressive utopia” eventually:

shows that it is nothing more than a finite form masquerading as an infinite, an absolute one: and at that moment it collides with other finite forms and is itself shattered in the collision (Tillich, 1973, 307).

A nuanced reading of Tillich’s approach to ultimate concern illuminates a certain ambivalence in the human condition with regards to the relation to the divine. On the one hand, all human beings are gripped by ultimate concern. That which grips us may be something ordinarily identified as religious — such as God — or not — such as the family. Here, ultimate concern must be understood as analogous to the divine as it actually is — to use Tillich’s often misunderstood phrase, the “God beyond God” (Tillich and Brown, 1965, 14) — or it runs the risk of assuming divine status itself, leading to idolatry.

The younger Tillich, as Kelton Cobb makes clear, seemed to regard culture with optimism, as an entity which could positively speak to the church and humanity (Cobb, 1995, 55–59). It should be noted that Tillich only perceived high culture as instrumental in this sense; he seems to have had little regard for popular culture (Cobb, 1995, 53–54). Hardened by the devastating experience of World War II, the older Tillich took a more negative view reflected in the theory of ultimate concern. Culture, he argued, must function only to point to transcendent reality, effectively to direct away from itself. That is to say, for Tillich, culture’s value is apologetic, provoking questions which only religion can answer (Cobb, 1995, 60).
Ultimate concern and the WCBR

The John Butler Trio was the second last act to perform on the first night of the WCBR festival in 2007. John Butler was born in the United States and moved to Pinjarra in Western Australia in his early teens. Later, he performed music as a busker in Fremantle. He still lives in the area, and is at times called upon to perform or be an advocate for various causes in Fremantle, including taking an active part in the protest against proposed development of the harbour in 2007. He is also well known as an advocate for environmental and social justice causes, both through his music and to a lesser extent in public life.

At the 2007 WCBR festival, Butler and his trio set up the stage, with Butler in the corner with his stomp box, microphone and a number of guitars. Some of his guitars were played in lap slide mode (where the guitar placed horizontally on the player’s lap as he sits and slides up and down the frets with a heavy steel bar), while others he played conventionally. His long dreadlocked hair was tied back. Although he played most of the set seated and to the left of the stage, rather than standing in the middle like most other performers, there was no question that he was the leader of the group. He sang the main lyric of all the songs, led most of the interaction with the crowd between songs and directed the response from the crowd at times during the set.

The crowd responded to many of the acts with undisguised awe and hero-worship, but there was more warmth and familiarity in the interaction with the John Butler Trio, who were regarded as a local act. Butler encouraged this, referring to the time he played one of his early songs, “Treat Yo’ Momma,” not far away in the Fremantle markets as a busker. He repeatedly thanked the fans for their role in his success. Many of his earlier songs, such as “Something’s gotta give,” have profound
ecological and/or social justice themes. The crowd responded with a roar when he started playing “Zebra,” as well as many of his other well known songs. I could see many in the crowd singing along with the songs they knew.

Personally, I found that Butler’s set didn’t inspire the same frenzied ecstasy as some of the other performers, such as Wolfmother, Ben Harper or even Eric Burdon. He has taken his own way, both musically and in his journey to fame, and I think his music was more thought provoking and inspiring than frenzy inducing. Notwithstanding this, there was evidence enough in the huge response to “Zebra” that the Trio could inspire the same trance that was observed during other acts.

What marks Butler as different from many other performers is his sense of his own mission and his concept of what constitutes a “gig.” While he did not tend to speak much about such concerns between songs — perhaps a concession to the fact that people who attend a festival are generally more interested in leisure than politics or religion — some of his lyrics are linked to Butler’s own deepest concerns. To return to Tillich’s language, there is a more obvious undercurrent of ultimate concern in John Butler’s lyrics and performance than was evident in some of the other acts. Butler’s concern with environmental issues is evident in the lyrics of “Treat Yo’ Momma.”

I got a couple of friends up in a tree in North Clifton
You know they’re doing their part
You know they’re doing their bit.
Trying to save our Mother from all this greed
You know they know what she wants,
You know they know what she needs.
I got a couple of sisters in South Australia,
Stopping the Uranium from coming up,
Oh yeah man you know they know what she needs
They're stopping all of that government corporate greed!
The John Butler Trio was certainly not the only WCBR act to perform songs that gave voice to environmental or social justice concerns. In addition, it would be a serious misrepresentation to suggest that all of their songs contained lyrics associated with these concerns. Butler has made it clear, however, that he conceives the experience of performance and his own role in that performance as related to the ultimate. Australian television interviewer Andrew Denton asked John Butler what a good night, or performance, feels like.

I don’t know what a good church sitting would be like or a good corroboree would be like, when you feel completely at one with your community and have a sense of purpose and connection to something that’s a lot bigger than you. It’s like that, you know? It’s like a communion. It’s like church, it’s very sacred. It’s spiritual, it’s fun, it’s exciting. It could be scary as hell, it makes you realise why you’re here. For me, it’s like “Okay, this is why I come up here and scare the hell out of myself every night,” because sometimes this happens (Butler and Denton, 2006).

The symbols Butler used to describe a great night are religious, both Christian and Aboriginal. In other interviews, Butler talked about his own career in terms of mission: specifically, to leave the world a better place than it was when he arrived. He involves himself in a number of environmental and social justice causes, as well as organising and financing a seed programme to fund talented new performers (Dwyer, 2007, 48).

John Butler’s commitment to these deeper concerns links to Tillich’s conception of ultimate concern. The John Butler Trio are located in a spiritually plural historical context. Butler’s own articulations of the significance of a gig are couched in pluralistic terms. As already noted, he compares a gig to both a church and a corroboree, suggesting that while the forms may differ the substance remains the same. A musical festival like the WCBR is also a uniquely pluralistic space, where many different bands and types of music come together. Fans and listeners also
attend for a vast number of possible reasons. The space is united by music, which is
the *raison d’être* for the event.

I suggest that in the midst of the pleasurescape of the festival, the John Butler Trio
served as a prophetic reminder of the need to remember those things that are of
ultimate concern — the environment which sustains life, social justice which ensures
that all are treated equally and removes the stain of shame and guilt, and the spiritual
source. In short, there are times that the sets can actually take either the substance or
the form of worship. This is perhaps behind the enigmatic statements of those like
Butler, Ben Harper and Xavier Rudd, all of whom have stated that they experience
performance as a spiritual odyssey.

The status of environmental and socio-political concerns as examples of latent
ultimate concern in popular culture is a fascinating and controversial topic.
Performers and participants alike tend to view “preaching” and politics prior to or
between songs with suspicion. However, when such concerns appear in lyrics, they
are celebrated. It will be very interesting to observe over the course of the next few
years whether environmental issues will start to assume the status of ultimate
concern, coupled with an existing utopian desire to re-make the world and culture in
a new image.

I suggest that there are pockets of ultimate concern already present in activities and
events at the WCBR, these intangible instances where the festival transcends play
and pleasure and takes on a deeper and wider significance. This is reflected in
Butler’s own ideas about performance. These environmental, socio-political and
overtly spiritual concerns may be reflective of an ambivalent utopianism that desires
to transform the world and yet points to another reality beyond it. To suggest that everyone is united in an act of worship when there are so many different reasons for attending the festival and so many experiences taking place simultaneously is problematic. However, for those who are seeking them, these pockets clearly exist, and the perspective of performers like Butler who see so many of these events is useful in articulating this.

The significance of a performance or a performer in articulating matters of ultimate concern is a subjective matter. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of the relationship between fans and performers, and the realm created between these two entities, demonstrates that ultimate concern and religious experience are matters that require interpretation. The final phenomenological section of this chapter enlists the assistance of a philosopher uniquely equipped to assist in matters of interpretation and religious experience — Paul Ricoeur.

**Paul Ricoeur: The Threefold Mimesis**

Ricoeur’s threefold mimesis, as noted previously, is a scheme for understanding the ways in which people interact with texts. Some of the experiences of participants at the WCBR, both musicians and attendees, will be analysed using Ricoeur’s scheme, with particular focus on the performer-fan collaboration.

Although his career initially was concerned with the discipline of phenomenology, Paul Ricoeur was drawn increasingly into issues surrounding interpretation and interaction with texts, a specialist field within philosophy and theology known as “hermeneutics.” He rejected the idea that interpretation involved the discovery of a fixed and objective meaning. Rather, for Ricoeur interpretation is a dynamic process,
involving a threefold process of “mimesis” (or “imitation”) (Ricoeur, 1984, 52–53). Perhaps the most straightforward way to think about this process is to imagine a person reading a book. According to Ricoeur’s threefold mimetic “arc,” the person begins with their own world of lived experiences, their own personal history. Ricoeur theorised that people generally “emplot” their lives, meaning they construct the events making up their own personal histories in the form of a story with a plot (Ricoeur, 1984, 75). He argued that this process is fundamental to the way people construct meaning in existence.

Personal history can be called the first mimetic stage, or mimesis\textsubscript{1} (Ricoeur, 1984, 54–64). The second mimetic stage involves the intersection with another world — the world of the text (1984, 64–70). To take the example of someone reading a book, the “world” within the book comprises mimesis\textsubscript{2}. The book itself is another story, with its own set of rules, conventions and a plot that is discrete from the person reading it. What this means is that interpretation is, according to Ricoeur, the intersection of two stories. In this case, this means the story full of meaning which the person brings to the reading of a text, intersecting with the world of meaning in the text itself.

The dynamism of the process is concentrated in the third stage, mimesis\textsubscript{3} (1984, 70–71). In the third mimetic stage, the intersection of the two worlds, the world of the reader and the world of the text in our example, produces a change. The person who is reading a text is not simply engaging in a passive process. Not only is the meaning of the text directly affected by the back story the person has imported into the activity of reading (mimesis\textsubscript{1}), but the reader’s personal world is actually affected by

* The subscription used in this section follows Ricoeur’s own usage.
the act of reading the text. The interaction with the text actually changes, to a large or small extent, the reader’s own story — she or he is different from the person they were prior to reading the book. This change at mimesis3 will affect the way the individual interprets other texts and actions.

This is a complex enough process when something like a book is involved, which is an encoded and “frozen” text. This is not to say that the meaning of a book is fixed, and in fact the process Ricoeur describes is the exact opposite of any conception of “fixed.” However, the process is even more dynamic and complicated when it is applied, as Ricoeur himself did, to human action and interaction with other people in real time (Ricoeur, 1981). To picture this, imagine a person involved in a conversation with another person. There is still the back story that both bring to the conversation (mimesis1), plus the interaction with the story of the other person (mimesis2). However, whereas the book remains encoded at the end of the reading process in the same way as it was at the beginning, in a conversation both parties are affected by interaction with each other and so both parties experience a change at the mimesis3 stage.

Ricoeur’s third mimetic stage is where a realm is really constructed, as a result of the coming together of two texts. This can be a very dynamic process with far reaching implications, as Ricoeur spells out when theorising the utopian function of imagination.

May we not say that imagination itself — through its utopian function — has a constitutive role in helping us rethink the nature of our social life? Is not utopia — this leap outside — the way in which we radically rethink what is family, what is consumption, what is authority, what is religion, and so on? Does not the fantasy of an alternative society and its exteriorization ‘nowhere’ work as one of the most formidable contestations of what is? (Ricoeur, 1986, 16)
This is not to say that mimetic process will result in a utopian ‘imagining.’ However, it does hint at the enormous scope for change latent in the mimetic process.

Ricoeur’s threefold mimesis has been appropriated by Theodore Turnau, as a resource to outline a theory of popular culture and alternative religions. Turnau appropriates Ricoeur’s narrative arc in order to demonstrate that people engage in popular culture in search of something, bringing a pre-narrative world to the popular culture worlds they participate in. This represents the prefiguration phase, or mimesis1 (Turnau, 2008, 328-329). The second stage, configuration or mimesis2, comprises the other world of popular culture. The two examples Turnau draws on are popular romance novels and the British nightclub Shoom during the “Second Summer of Love” in London, 1988 (2008, 338-342). Both the novels and Shoom, argues Turnau, comprise discrete and other worlds with different values and rules from the prefigured pre-narrative of those who participate in them.

Finally the re-figured stage (mimesis3) is the fusion of the horizons of the two worlds, producing a new reality. This new reality may be temporary, existing only for a short time, or it may have long term and long reaching effects. As a theologian and apologist, Turnau links this process to the theological idea of general revelation, suggesting popular culture has the potential to draw people out of their pre-narratives in search of what is eternal (2008, 329, 332).

Having retraced the structure of Ricoeur’s threefold mimetic theory of interaction and interpretation, and observed Turnau’s application to popular culture, in the following section I will investigate the phenomena of fan-performer collaboration using the threefold mimesis.
The threefold mimesis and the WCBR

In the WCBR case study of chapter five, I made a distinction between “listeners” and “fans” at the festival. This is a fluid distinction because the festival has many different performers. Participants who are fans of one performer may become listeners for the next act, often moving from close proximity to the stage to the back of the crowd where conversation with other listeners can take place more easily. In contrast, fans exhibit much more devotional behaviour depending on a range of factors, including how highly they rate the performer, the fan’s age and perhaps how much alcohol or marijuana they have consumed.

At the most passive level, a fan of a particular performer will make this plain by paying close attention to the performance, usually singing along with songs they know and responding to the performer’s interaction with the crowd. At a higher level of fandom, fans may exhibit almost religious devotion to performers or music. In this section I will explore the phenomenon of fan-performer collaboration at the WCBR drawing on interview excerpts from participants and performers, and interpreting responses through the lens of Ricoeur’s mimetic theory of interaction.

The first stage of the mimetic process is pre-figuration, or mimesis\(^1\). In this stage, the participant has a “pre-story” that they bring into an interaction. In the fan-performer collaboration, both performer and participant bring their own expectations to an event such as the WCBR. The first two excerpts illustrate this anticipation from the performer’s point of view. John Butler, when asked by an interviewer about an upcoming gig, stated:

*We’re looking forward to it. You know, it’s a collaborative event. We’re not coming for the crowd to make the gig happen, and they’re not coming for us to make it happen. We’re coming to make it happen with*
the audience together – it’s a symbiotic relationship. We’re really looking forward to that collaboration (Butler 2008).

Australian multi-instrumentalist and WCBR performer Xavier Rudd added:

I’m such a lucky person to be able to go and play music around the world and have people come and bring me all their good energy. They’re bringing their good stuff to the show and leaving their bad stuff behind, they’re feeding me that and that’s a big gift for me (Grey, 2006).

The performer’s anticipation of the gig and expectation of participant involvement is generalised. Neither Rudd nor Butler was describing one particular person, but the whole group of participants who will come to their gig. As a group the fans make a collaborative contribution to the performance.

In contrast, a number of participants illustrate the pre-story from the fan’s point of view. Often, the fan has attended to see a particular act or a specific performer. Olivia, who attended the event in 2007, is a self-confessed fan of the Waifs and Missy Higgins.

I liked Missy Higgins from the way that she started, through the Unearthed competition on Triple J and she’s just, the reason why I’ve seen her so much is I’ve seen her support a lot of bands that I’ve watched as well and she’s just come up and I’ve followed her through that, I got the Unearthed CD with her song on it, and then I got her EP and then I gradually got her album so I followed her the whole way through like a path so I followed it with her sort of thing, so its just really good to see her where she’s come from and how she got there without having her image, you know, changed. You know how some artists change their image to get more popularity, she’s not about that, she knows who she is she knows what she likes and that’s who she is basically and that’s who she portrays, that’s why I like her she isn’t trying to be someone else it’s just her, basically up there telling her story (Olivia, interview, 3 May 2007).

Olivia illustrates the complicated building of the pre-story in the life and mind of the fan. It is significant to Olivia that she has followed Higgins’ career from the beginning. Also, she has shaped a story around the significance of Higgins’ path to success and fame in music. Understanding something of this pre-story is significant.
in perceiving the significance fans attach to their favourite performers and stars. This pre-story is augmented by the recorded music produced by artists. People have often built up a number of associations between songs and artists and experiences in their own lives, helping shape the pre-narrative. Therefore, there is considerable depth and nuance of the pre-understanding that a participant brings to an event such as the WCBR. Participants expect something from the collaboration; they expect the interaction to affect them: and that is exactly what Ricoeur’s model anticipates.

Another informant, Belinda, attended the WCBR in 2007. As will be evident, Belinda is a fan of John Mayer.

Belinda:  “My friend was emailing me about [the WCBR], and then I realised John Mayer was playing, so I had to go. I love him!”
Me:    “What is it about him?”
Belinda:  “He’s just so sexy (laughs)! When he sings, I don’t know I like everything about him and I’ve liked him for quite awhile so I had to go and see him. I think his voice has a bit of a rusty charm to it, I think on the stage he’s very charming and sort of draws you in a bit, whereas [my friend] didn’t think that he was that good, but I thought he was so amazing because I just like him so much and admire his sort of guy (laughs)” (Belinda, interview, 21 April 2007).

Belinda’s response demonstrates the pre-story of expectation and desire that a fan brings to an interaction with a favourite performer. The performance itself constitutes the configuration, or mimesis\textsubscript{2} in Ricoeur’s model. Fans of a particular performer or music (some participants are fans of the “canonical” songs, such as “American Pie” or “Proud Mary,” without necessarily being aware of the performer’s identity) often exhibit ecstatic behaviour during a performance, as illustrated by the following excerpt from 2007 participant David.

Wolfmother’s there, you’re all just open, your barriers are down, and you’re just — it’s that whole exaltation but in a group sort of thing, very similar, you know your hands are up in the air, no real reason for your hands up in the air but you just have to get them up there, and you just
want to shout “This is great! This is really good stuff!” and almost give 
back, encourage the guys who are up on stage and honour or worship 
them as well, you know say “I’m loving what you’re giving, you know, 
keep going!” (David, interview, 10 April 2007).

David also reaches for religious language to describe the significance of being in a 
crowd of fans near the front during a performance. In contrast, Belinda describes the 
experience of being carried away by a performance very differently.

You start singing and you start dancing, then the next person starts doing 
the same thing, and as the sound gets bigger and louder you sort of just 
focused on that and you’re not so focused on the people around you. It’s 
different for each band. When you don’t like the music or don’t know it 
as much you’re sort of sitting back and just observing, and when you’re 
into it its just about you and the person singing that’s the connection 
(Belinda, interview, 21 April 2007).

Clearly, both respondents have the desire to participate in an experience of the music 
so deeply that awareness shifts away from the self and surroundings to another level. 
The boundaries between self and others are fuzzier in this setting. This is, for some 
participants, the experience that they are hoping for in the fan-performer 
collaboration.

Performers interact with the performance and the crowd in similar ways. The 
following excerpts illustrate the configuration stage of a performance from the point 
of view of the performer. Andrew Stockdale, lead vocalist and guitarist of Australian 
band and 2007 WCBR act Wolfmother, related the experience of seeing fans singing 
lyrics from his song “The Joker and the Thief” back to him.

I see big muscly dudes with bald heads singing, ‘As she’s standing in a 
field of clover,’ and I’m like ‘What the fuck? How’d I manage this?’ It 
makes no sense, but they can relate to it (Gook, 2005-2006, 54).

Many performers lead the crowd in singing along with well known songs, and take 
pleasure seeing that participants know the lyrics to their songs. The next excerpt, 
from former Wolfmother bassist and keyboardist Chris Ross, demonstrates that
performers try to “read” what participants want from the performance and respond appropriately.

We’ll read the dancefloor. If the crowd is chilled out we’ll say, ‘Let’s make this jam really spacious,’ but if the crowd is really nuts we’ll just make this jam fucking banging and try to incite a riot (Carter, 2007 p39).

Already in this thesis a number of techniques artists draw on to “incite” the crowd have been identified, from building up to a well known song, standing or interacting with the crowd at crucial points or controlling the rhythm. Performers take pleasure in the enjoyment and entertainment that fans experience in their music. Thus, musicians interact with the collaborative experience of the performance as much as fans do. Understood in this way, a performance is clearly not a group of musicians playing to a passive audience, but involves interaction and collaboration between both. This results in a change for both performers and fans; what Ricoeur called refiguration.

As Turnau illustrates in his exploration of Shoom nightclub during the Second Summer of Love in the UK in 1988, the third mimetic stage produces a change as a result of interaction. This change may not last for very long, and it may or may not be a big change (Turnau, 2008, 341). For Gemma, participation in John Mayer’s gig facilitated a significant change for her.

I just went through a really bad breakup with this guy and we were keeping in touch and I knew he was going to be at the festival and I was sort of not looking forward to seeing him but I was like “how many thousand people are going to be there, we won’t run into him.” I did, and he was with his new girlfriend. So it was one of those horrible experiences … and then we pushed up to see John Mayer and I could see him and her in the corner of my eye and I was mad and I was so upset and then John Mayer started playing and I thought “You know what? Screw that. I’m not going to let this ruin my day, I’m not going to be in a crappy mood because of him, I bought my ticket to come and watch [John Mayer] play,” like I totally forgot about it, I was like “You know what? I’m just gonna totally let it go, I’m not going to be negative.” It totally changed, just seeing him play and hearing it and dancing and thinking “I’m with my friends, what can be better than this” and that
totally changed my whole outlook, it was really kind of weird, normally I would have stayed in a bad mood for the whole day and been shitty about it, but it was really good and then Ben Harper played and then I was like on a high, like I felt so good. So it can totally change what’s going on in your life, whether it’s being crammed up in a crowd or feeling that horrible feeling of seeing someone you don’t want to see, totally, totally changed it (Gemma, interview, 16 April 2007).

Gemma used the experience of the performance to effect a change in her mood and eventually in her personal life. There was a very real change in her personal story as a result of her participation in the performance. Perhaps it is more common, as David describes in the excerpt below, to experience a more transitory shift in the order of things.

There is a very real loss of self consciousness, like we’re very self conscious really in our daily lives about showing joy completely unrelated to some sort of intellectual stimulation. You’ve got that feeling of fun I guess but you’ve got a joy that doesn’t have sarcasm or incongruity about it and I don’t think it’s very often in our daily lives that we share that with very many people together, and to all have those barriers down together is a special thing. I guess your transcending some of the barriers we put around ourselves in daily life. Its almost a feeling of the boundaries are down and you’re much closer to one another in a way that as soon as that music stops you know the boundaries are back up again and how you relate to one another is going to be strained by comparison (David, interview, 10 April 2007).

The resulting change in the mimesis stage need not be permanent or enduring. This is probably to be expected, given the particularly enigmatic and existential experience of listening to music. However, while the music is playing, a new world or realm is created where people relate differently and out of the ordinary behaviour takes place. In this sense, it is easy to see a commonality between the WCBR realm and the Breakfree realm. Ricoeur’s mimetic process illustrates that in both realms a similar interpretive process is taking place. Regardless of whether the activity is associated with religion or leisure, or both, they function in some similar ways.
Conclusion

This section concludes by reviewing the journey so far. The chapter began with a review of Schleiermacher’s “intuition of the universe” as the transcendent experience which is the starting point of religion. Intuition of the universe can be experienced in a plurality of contexts. A maiden’s kiss was for Schleiermacher as appropriate a context for an intuition of the universe as anything linked to a synagogue, church or mosque. Using Schleiermacher’s schema, I coined the phrase “proto-religious phenomena” to describe intuitions of the universe which are not necessarily associated with religion or never develop a system of doctrines or worship rituals around them. In other words, proto-religious phenomena are ‘religionless’ religious experiences. David Klemm coined the phrase “philosophical theology” to describe Schleiermacher’s approach. This involves an individual bringing their own cultural, artistic and philosophical resources to bear on proto-religious phenomena, resulting in an interpretation. The result is based on experience, but has the potential for universal scope and rejects dogmatic statements based on revelation that are untenable. This is significant inasmuch as it blazes a trail whereby art and culture can be resources for both experiencing and understanding proto-religious phenomena.

The first section concluded by exploring articulations of proto-religious phenomena at the WCBR, drawing on statements from performers as well as participants at the festival. We noted that many of these articulations bear a resemblance to Schleiermacher’s intuitions of the universe, but have not developed into religions in the ordinary sense of the word. Thus they can be called proto-religious phenomena, experiences which Schleiermacher would claim as religious but which do not have the trappings of organised religion. Some participants and performers seemed happy
to connect their experiences at the festival with religion, while others resisted such a connection.

At this point I reintroduced Rudolf Otto and the numinous to the analysis. Otto ran into problems because he articulated the radically other nature of the numinous so well. To deal with this, Otto suggested that the numinous becomes known through a process he called “schematization.” In this process, the numinous is revealed in a manner that can be understood, the rational elements of the divine are made plain in ways that can be grasped and the non-rational elements are de-emphasised. Using music as an analogy, Otto suggested that music is non-rational, wholly other in its power to affect us. Otto’s use of music as an analogy is problematic, as Owen Ware points out, because he never articulated a plausible reason why the experience of music should not be understood as non-theistic numinous experience. By extension, using Otto’s categories a phenomenological distinction cannot be made between the experience of music at the WCBR and at Breakfree church. The distinction exists only at the hermeneutical level. Todd Gooch suggests that the best use of Otto’s schema is as a resource for searching out traces of the divine in human experiences of the world.

The next step was to use Otto’s categories to illuminate my experience of Eric Burdon’s set at the 2007 WCBR. My field notes record a deep experience of unity with the people around me and a loss of self-consciousness as I was swept away along with other participants in Burdon’s performance. Beyond this observation, little can be said, because the experience becomes transcendent to the point of being indescribable. Using Otto’s schema, as well as drawing on the suggestions of Gooch and Ware, I postulated that in the Burdon set I experienced something which cannot
be phenomenologically distinguished from numinous experience. Nor is it necessarily desirable that such a distinction be made. In Burdon’s set I found something which can be equated with numinous experience or, to use Gooch’s language, in this realm traces of the numinous can be perceived by those who take this interpretive step.

In the next section, Mircea Eliade’s historical and phenomenological study of shamanism was revisited. Eliade described the shaman as the specialist in the ecstatic trance, who is able to leave his or her body through the trance and enter other realms of existence. One of the important instruments in a shaman’s repertoire is rhythm, particularly the drum, by which the shaman can catalyse the ecstatic trance. In the ecstatic trance catalysed by the shaman worlds of magic possibilities open up: the dead can live again and the visible can vanish. Chris Rojek offers an insightful comparison of shamanism and the modern celebrity who may exhibit the same power to excite the ecstatic trance in star-struck fans. Robin Sylvan has also linked shamanism to popular culture, with a particular focus on popular music. Sylvan draws a historical link between the African shamanism practiced prior to slavery and modern popular music which comes to us predominantly through African-American blues, jazz and rock and roll. This historical analysis is useful for contextualising the phenomenological experience of popular music today.

Returning to the phenomenology of Eliade’s shaman, I revisited Xavier Rudd’s performances at the 2007 and 2008 WCBR. Rudd’s performances have an almost superhuman quality, as he easily manages to coax sounds from several instruments at once while singing. He, along with several other performers at the WCBR, exhibited the ability to catalyse the ecstatic trance in participants. What really sets Rudd apart,
however, is his own self understanding of the significance of his performance. A number of excerpts gleaned from published interviews with Rudd, demonstrated his self-understanding as a conduit for spirits, a living hierophany through which spirits can contact the profane world. Rudd’s self-perception fits well with Eliade’s shaman as the one through whom the ecstatic realm can be accessed and as the performer of superhuman deeds.

Following this, the next section returned to Paul Tillich and the concept of “ultimate concern” he developed as the heart of faith and religion. Tillich also engaged the difficult task of discerning which concerns are truly ultimate from those which are not. However, Tillich’s thought is somewhat confusing when it comes to pinning down his thought on ultimate concern. Philips makes the point that Tillich would have been well advised to treat his own language as analogical. Since the ultimate cannot be comprehended by the human mind, the only way to understand it is through analogy. Understood as analogy, ultimate concern can be found in many different experiences and entities, all pointing to the transcendent reality of the truly ultimate. This distinction is necessary in order to maintain Tillich’s own safeguards against “idolatrous” ultimate concern.

Ultimate concern formed the basis for interpreting the performance of the John Butler Trio at the 2007 WCBR, and, in particular, the observation of ‘pockets’ of ultimate concern. While the majority of a festival such as the WCBR is devoted to leisure, and politics and preaching are viewed with suspicion, it became clear that the lyrics of performers such as John Butler contain a latent and even prophetic reminder of the ultimate. Themes such as the environment which sustains, social justice and the spiritual source of all there is are at times evident in Butler’s performance and in
his self-understanding of the nature of his role in performance. If these are to be understood analogically, as Philips revised version of Tillich’s thought suggests, than such themes point to an unseen presence.

The chapter ended with French hermeneutic philosopher Paul Ricoeur and his threefold mimesis. Theodore Turnau has made an adroit and creative connection of Ricoeur’s mimetic theory to the ways in which people appropriate popular culture as new religions. With Turnau’s work as an inspiration, I considered the fan-performer collaboration at the WCBR using Ricoeur’s threefold mimesis. Fans and performers bring a pre-story to an event such as the WCBR. Performers, also, have expectations based on prior performances of the experience of gigs and fans, too, have ideas about their favourite performers and their significance. This represents mimesis₁, or pre-figuration.

Configuration, or mimesis₂, is represented by the performance itself. The pre-story of both fan and performer expectations meets the actuality of the performance, where fans and performers collaborate together to produce the experience of a gig. The re-figuration stage, or mimesis₃, is the effect of the performance on fans and performers. Interview excerpts with participants at the WCBR demonstrated that fans can use the performance to create a liminal realm of existence. This may be a very transitory reality, such as the temporary lowering of boundaries between participants during the gig, which ends as the music fades. Drawing on Ricoeur and Turnau, I postulated that while such experiences may not necessarily be religious, but they may also perform the same function as religious experiences and operate as de facto religion in this sense.
The WCBR, however, is not an example of religion. The only way we could make such an assertion is to abandon the established meaning of the term religion and start again. Such a project of redefining religion was undertaken by our first dialogue partner, Schleiermacher, over 200 years ago. He broadened the base of what can be considered a religious experience, but drew the line around religion in roughly the place it had been for time immemorial. The other theorists who feature in this chapter, from Otto to Ricoeur, have all made contributions to deepening and widening still further the meaning of religious experience, without radically redefining the word religion itself.

Basing religion on experience, as Schleiermacher and Otto did, means that many experiences can be viewed as depth experiences of the divine. In other words, there is no reason at all that the numinous or the sacred should limit itself to the contexts assigned to it. Thousands of years of recorded human experience lead to one unalterable conclusion about the nature of the gods, if they exist at all: they behave however they like.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

This chapter commences with a summary section, revisiting the case studies and socio-cultural and theological-religious theories and theorists engaged throughout the body of this study. Following this, I will explore the implications of this thesis. Next I will briefly describe the limitations of this thesis, and point out those areas where there may be potential for future research. I will conclude with some final remarks about the significance of music and realms.

Summary

This thesis commenced with a case study of Breakfree church. My fieldwork at the church provided the data from which I composed a portrait of a typical Sunday morning at Breakfree church, from set-up to the conclusion of the service.

Chapter three provided an analysis of the case study as it was viewed through the lens of Theological-Religious studies theory. Ecstatic experience is the centre of the Breakfree service. Music is the catalyst for this experience. This experience is basically non-rational and involves the manifestation of some very strange practices, such as speaking in tongues. These practices mirror (or perhaps create) the non-rational nature of the divine. There are a number of gifted participants who exhibit a talent for using music to catalyse an ecstatic trance, much like the archaic shamans. Breakfree members link the music and experience closely to God. Music or experience which is not overtly Christian is viewed by Breakfree music team members as suspicious at best, demonic at worst. Further, Breakfree members use music as a technology to catalyse the ecstatic encounter with God, and use this encounter to change their own stories.
In chapter four, socio-cultural theories were outlined, offering a different perspective. At the heart of the Breakfree service is collective effervescence, a peak experience generated by music and the gathering and collective presence of the participants. This phenomenon is so much greater than the consciousness of any one person that it is interpreted as a transcendent entity. The music team members who catalyse and direct this effervescence or charisma function primarily as priests inasmuch as their ability is conferred by position rather than based on personal gifts. The music is an ambivalent mixture of popular culture and sacred culture and is used to construct a ritual passage from the profane outside world to the divine presence inside. Within this musical realm, participants enter a different space where they are taken to the limits of that which is known and beyond — here Breakfree participants believe they encounter the divine.

The second case study, presented in chapter five, was the West Coast Blues & Roots festival. This time I drew on fieldwork notes to put together a composite example of a day at the festival, including the morning sessions and afternoon sessions as well as the night acts.

Chapter six presented a socio-cultural reading of the festival. One of the most important components of the festival is the coming together of participants drawn by the promise of the experience of music. In this collective experience of music many participate in the release and anomie of effervescence. Performers gifted in catalysing this effervescence exercise a type of leadership that is characterised by enigmatic charisma, and maintain their charismatic authority by exciting the ecstatic experience through music. The coming together constitutes the second life of the
people where, for a time, the official order is pulled down and replaced by laughter, dance, singing, play and carnival. Performers who are practiced in facilitating ecstatic experience use music in a processual manner, building the experience via ritual in a similar way to that used at Breakfree church. Music is the ruler of the unique festival realm, which is constructed as an alternative place to the “real world.”

Finally, Chapter seven drew upon theological-religious theory to explore the festival. It was argued that the ecstatic experiences at the WCBR are examples of “proto-religious phenomena” and are similar to those which lie at the heart of organised religions, including Breakfree’s Pentecostalism. Moreover, these phenomena take place in the presence of music which mirrors the essentially non-rational nature of the experience of the divine. In this way, the performers exhibit the shamanic ability to facilitate ecstasy through music, opening portals into the supernatural realm. Throughout the festival there are pockets of ultimate concern that were manifest in the political and eco-spiritual lyrics and interactions of performers and participants. In the musical realm, some participants use the charismatic ecstatic experience of music to create a “better way” (to quote the title and refrain of one of Ben Harper’s songs) — changing their own stories of the story of the world they inhabit.

**Implications**

At this point I take the opportunity to elaborate on some of the implications of this work for various professions and groups within society. I begin with methodological and theoretical implications and end with practical applications of this work
Music and space — “Realms”

I have used the term “realms” as a means of speaking about the unique nature of the spaces constructed in both sites. They are boundaried “second worlds” or heterotopias, created within the real world. The concept of realms suggests that in both popular and sacred culture people set apart certain spaces for special purposes. The two realms explored in this thesis are given substance by music. In both case studies, the utility of music in outlining the boundaries of this realm and ordering experience within it was repeatedly evident. Music is used as a technology in both settings; it is a catalyst for ecstatic experiences, and it is used to draw people together as they participate in the experience of music.

It is possible to discern both a horizontal and vertical dimension to the realms. Individuals engage in peak experiences of self transcendence, which has the effect of lifting them into ecstasy, literally a “standing outside oneself.” Historically this has been linked with the spiritual realm, and represents the vertical dimension of the musical realm. At the same time, people experience less self-consciousness and inhibition while engaging with the peak experience. Participants experience a more profound sense of unity where social boundaries regarding touching and personal space are lowered, becoming fuzzy and indistinct. In the same movement, participants are lifted up from within their own experience of self and joined to others present. This joining with other people represents the horizontal dimension of the realm.

In this thesis the two realms detailed in the case studies are temporary in nature. For a space and time both are set apart as realms for experience. Their very temporality is significant, inasmuch as it points to the deeply ambivalent relationship between the
realm and the “real world.” History records several attempts to remake the real world in the image of a musical realm — the most recent example may be the so-called Woodstock nation. History also bears witness to the temporary nature of both the realms and the often well intentioned attempts to remake the world into the realm.

**Music and ecstatic experience**

At both sites music was the key catalyst for ecstatic or euphoric experience. Of all the activities which take place in both the festival and Breakfree church, music is the most significant and occupies the most time, space and effort. Further, in the instances at the WCBR where ecstatic experiences do occur, music is used in a ritual or processual manner which has much in common with the way it is used at Breakfree church. This suggests that there is a ritual or *liminal* process in both contexts. It is precisely here that the work of Victor Turner is useful in articulating the significance of this process. Indeed, he came to similar conclusions when he applied his theories to phenomena such as the hippie counter-culture in industrial societies.

As Otto intimated, music is very enigmatic. While making no attempt at a musicological evaluation of the music at either site, this study has clearly demonstrated that there is a connection between the processual use of music and ecstatic experience. This may go some way to explaining the tendency to use music as a therapeutic technology where the turning on of stereos or iPods helps recovery and healing from trauma, stress or fatigue. More directly, it points to the therapeutic effect of music in corporate settings, including the ways people use music as a technology to alter their stories. This study fits alongside Tia DeNora’s *Music in Everyday life* (2000) and other similar works insofar as it attempts to understand people’s use of music through ethnographic methods.
Proto-religious phenomena

This thesis had cause to drawn upon the phenomenological approach to religion demonstrated by Eliade, Schleiermacher and Otto. Moreover, I coined the phrase “proto-religious phenomena” as a way of speaking about the experience devoid of the interpretive handles which link it to an existing religion. Alternatively, such experiences may well form the genesis of a new religion. “Proto-religious experience” is a category for the peak experience which can happen in many settings. In some contexts and in certain circumstances, these experiences can become the seed of personal faith and religion, perhaps even giving rise to a new religion. In other settings and contexts, however, the rituals, doctrine and priest hood which historically form around a religion do not develop around the experience.

This has important implications for the study of new and emerging religions as well as for the study of the common ground between religious traditions. Adam Possamai has intimated in his book on hyper-real religions that there are a number of new religions and spiritualities appearing today — for example, “Jediism” and “Matrixism,” based on the hugely successful Star Wars and Matrix films respectively (Possamai, 2005, 99–101). Applying proto-religious phenomena may help in understanding how religions begin and what they have in common with other practices which may not be thought of as religious. Also, application of this category can help illuminate the significance of religious techniques appearing in other settings, such as advertising, politics and therapies. For example, the creeping significance of religious language and imagery in speeches related to the so called “war on terror” is more explicable if understood from the point of view of proto-religious phenomena. The imagery and language used can be classified as proto-
religious phenomena, or that which shares beginnings with religion but should not be uncritically linked with religion.

“Methodological agnosticism”

On the surface, it would seem that the Breakfree Church and WCBR sites are very different. One is a religious setting, one is a secular setting. Yet, throughout this thesis I have demonstrated that music is used as a key technology for catalysing religious and social phenomena at both sites. This thesis also demonstrates that there is more going on than is generally assumed by participants. For example, while the experience of the divine is generally credited to the divine presence of the Holy Spirit at Breakfree church, I have shown through careful observation of Breakfree’s practices that there are key performance techniques used to catalyse experience in the church. In the understanding of several Breakfree participants, these practices combine with an unseen entity — the divine — in order to produce spiritual ecstasy.

The enigmatic euphoric experience which sometimes occurs at music festivals can be understood to be the result of the combination of social factors, such as collective effervescence or charisma. Even these explanations can be thought of as inchoate and mystical, because they provoke more questions than they answer. It can be theorised that there is an x-factor present, known throughout history as the divine. This would mean that ecstatic experiences at music festivals are examples of spirituality that connect with the transcendent divine, or at least the transcendent within humanity. The stance often adopted in socio-cultural studies, best described by Peter Berger as “methodological atheism,” is that divine entities cannot be empirically verified and, therefore, must be bracketed (1969, 100; 1979, 34).
This study demonstrated that “methodological agnosticism,” as advocated by Douglas Porpora (2006) is actually a more appropriate approach to the possibility of the divine in the social. Methodological atheism brackets the divine entirely, enjoining only naturalistic explanations of religious experience. In contrast, methodological agnosticism is a more neutral stance, allowing the possibility that not all reality is socially constructed. This is an appropriate position to take in regard to religious experience, because it allows the object of the experience — which for many is the divine — to inform the content of experience (Porpora, 2006, 58–59).

In other words, methodological agnosticism allows the researcher to take the religious interpretation of religious experience seriously, and encourages the genuine comparison and assessment of the merits of all points of view. The phenomenological ethnographic work engaged in here is intended to deepen and widen the experience of music in a festival realm by drawing on the rich and varied categories of theology and religious studies, as well as socio-cultural studies. Methodological agnosticism is the position that facilitates this goal most fully.

At this point, I will turn to more applied implications of the work explored in this thesis, beginning with some discussion of how this work may help artists and performers.

**Artists and performers**

Performers and artists can embrace without fear the charismatic power they wield within musical realms such as the WCBR. Through both writing and performance, the performer can draw on the power of music to catalyse ecstatic experience and inspire the audience to pursue a “better way.” This power can be very important for both offering an alternative to the “real world,” and providing some temporary relief
from it, re-energising and refreshing those who participate in these realms. In this way, performers fill a very similar function to religious functionaries such as shamans, priests or magicians.

There is a place for the pure release and hedonism of participating in a festival, I am convinced that this has an important effect on life which may be difficult to quantify or articulate. Yet, to the extent that both performer and participant are alive to the possibility of transcendence, of awareness of those moments that can change life forever and cause people to be gripped by ultimate concern, enormous and lasting change may be realized. Understanding such experiences from the point of view of religion and spirituality may help in accepting and embracing the change that results. However, performers also need to treat this power with caution because attempts to remake the real world in the image of the musical realm are at best well intentioned attempts that are doomed to failure. Performers and artists thus need to take charisma, and their own role as surrogate priests or shamans, very seriously, and ensure they do not abuse this power.

Christian lyricists and performers should draw inspiration and learn new techniques and styles from the rich and varied musical forms which have developed in popular music. As Mark Evans (2006, 98, 103–104) notes, Pentecostal music tends to be homogenous and subjective, containing at times repetitive musical patterns in an attempt to catalyse the encounter experience. If ecstatic experience is the goal, perhaps Pentecostal lyricists and songwriters can be challenged to rediscover the fact that such experiences actually occur through many different styles and genres of music, just as they do at the WCBR. Christian lyricists would once again be free to broaden lyrical horizons, utilising both the deep and wide popular music tradition
and the Biblical tradition, particularly the Psalms. Themes such as bereavement, anger and lament, as well as the political protest so evident in the Biblical prophets, could provide the framework for a genuine renaissance in Pentecostal musical forms and lyrics.

**Community development**

Projects which attempt a thoroughgoing reordering of the “real” world in line with the musical realm do not typically work well. An example of this is the powerful “Myth of the Woodstock Nation,” purportedly an attempt to remake America in line with a music festival, to see this (Fischer, 2006, 298–312). However, this does not mean that there are no elements of the musical realm which can be translated in some way into the real world. Understanding that musical space is transcendent space, for example, can assist people in creating everyday spaces filled with sound and music which bring out the parts of life that make living possible and enjoyable. The links between leisure and spirituality points toward the utility of music as an agent for transforming “secular” space into spiritual space.

John Fiske’s creative use of the carnival paradigm in modern popular culture studies is worth mentioning here. For Fiske, the “excessive pleasure” of carnival represented a threat to social control, noting that “when these pleasures are those of subordinated groups the threat is particularly stark” (1989:75). Fiske also notes that disciplinary action against carnival pleasures are not necessarily repressive, pointing out the Victorian approach was to move excess away from the public and into the private sphere (1989:75–76). Fiske’s point makes clear the important distinction between recorded music, available through mass production to be consumed privately at homes or iPods, and live music performance taking place in events such as the WCBR. While a mini realm can be created through a bubble of personal music, a
collective musical realm that represents the shared yearnings, fantasies and pleasures of mass of people can only be constructed in public live performances. Therefore, the relationship between live music performance and community is an important area for future study.

It should be pointed out that musical spaces can be heterotopias of compensation, spaces set up as pockets of perfect order where people can escape the anomie of the real. Alternatively, music and the arts continue to have a critical role, and this is where community workers may find the work in this thesis particularly stimulating. Musical spaces may offer clues as to the world people dream of inhabiting. The enigmatic power of charisma within these realms at times spills over into the ‘real’ world and brings about social change. Historically this has occurred in Pentecostalism and also in relation to popular music and festivals. The fact that this change may not last forever is not problematic — Ricoeur’s mimetic process points out that all interaction results in change of some kind. Music is a renewable resource, and every engagement with music can lead to charisma, hierophany or effervescence, resulting in a small or large remaking of the world.

**Pastoral care and the helping professions**

Understanding the ways in which music is connected to space and the creation of second worlds and/or realms is important for those who work in the helping professions. Music and art are becoming increasingly important tools in therapy (cf. DeNora, 2000, 14–16). A musical realm, whether the sort of corporate space I have described in this study or an individual realm maintained by an iPod or car stereo has a different set of orders and realities, a realm of “pure possibility” to quote Turner. What may seem impossible in the “real” world may be possible within the realm. People are willing to try new things, to empower themselves to take important or
new steps as a result of inhabiting these realms and finding the edge of their perceived limitations.

This is important for those who work with young people. Youth culture and popular culture are strongly connected. Australian Pentecostalism is also strongly linked to youth, particularly through such groups as Planetshakers and Hillsong United, which provided much of the music used by Breakfree church. Young people experiencing tough times often use music therapeutically. An understanding of the ways that people create personal realms in order to challenge, escape or reconfigure their experiences of the real world would be useful for those who are involved in helping other people. Young people and their connection to music can be our teachers here, particularly the practices they use to transcend their own limits through music.
Social change

Ultimate concern is an important political as well as a religious principle. Tillich’s concept describes something that is of central importance, something that grasps an individual from the outside. Musical realms are spaces for the manifestation of latent ultimate concern. This is obvious at Breakfree church where the ultimate concern is connected to God. At the festival, ultimate concern is linked to the music itself, because in the realm of the festival, music is the ultimate concern for a space and time. Alternatively, I have outlined pockets of ultimate concern connected to the environment, social justice and politics at the WCBR. Ultimate concern is revealed in these spaces more clearly than in others, and has the potential to change the experience of those outside these discrete realms.

Churches and church leaders

Church leaders and missiologists could understand and apply the findings of this thesis in three primary ways. The first could be called the baptism ing approach, and is a way of describing what is already occurring in Australian Pentecostalism. This means that the churches embrace popular music forms but change the lyrical content, ‘baptising’ the music for use in churches and by Christians. Christian contemporary music, which has a large following in the United States, can be seen as a variation of this approach.

The next way of appropriating these findings might be called the Unknown God approach, after the account of the apostle Paul’s adventures in Athens recorded in Acts 17. According to the writer, Paul noted that the people of Athens worshipped an “unknown god,” and that he proposed to make this enigmatic deity known to them. The Unknown God approach is to perceive proto-religious phenomena as genuine but incorrectly interpreted by the “unchurched.” In this model, churches like Breakfree
would exercise the role of guide, pointing out that proto-religious phenomena in other settings may be valid, but only the church can offer the correct interpretation of this experience. I noted some variations on this approach in the responses of the Breakfree music team. Some suggested that while God could be experienced outside the church, it would be difficult to hear his communication in other settings.

The third approach might be called the *plural* approach. It bears some similarities to the “revised correlational method” suggested by Gordon Lynch (2005, 103–105). This approach would involve churches and religious organisations accepting that proto-religious phenomena takes place in other contexts, and that religious spaces have no monopoly on transcendent experiences of the divine. Religions have to work hard to establish their own niche in the marketplace of spiritual phenomena. This would also mean that churches and religious organisations are not the exclusive guardians of the “correct” interpretation of religious experience and, therefore, are freed up for genuine dialogue with popular culture, so that both learn and teach each other.

**Directions for future research**

As indicated above, I am not a qualified musicologist and have thus avoided commenting on musicological aspects of this thesis. I share Tia DeNora’s (2000, 38–39) belief that the question of how music is used and effects people is a question primarily for ethnographers, not musicologists. Notwithstanding this, I think an interpretation of the material using music theory and the history of music would open interesting new perspectives on the topic. Therefore, I believe there is scope for a musicological ethnographic approach to the phenomenon of ecstatic experience in musical realms.
This segues into another limitation of this thesis, which is its scope. I have explored two sites where music is experienced corporately — a church service and a music festival. There are many other sites, such as dance nightclubs, rave parties, guitars around the bonfire, karaoke, orchestral performances, opera, jazz clubs — to name only a few. Using the concept of realms as a starting point, there is significant scope for many such comparative studies, or even exhaustive ethnographic studies of single sites. Continued ethnographic research into these musical realms would reveal much about the way people interact with music and the potential for a deeper and more informed understanding of how music is used in a number of different settings.

“Proto-religious phenomena” is a category that opens a number of possibilities into research on new and emerging religious movements. Some of this research has already begun, as exemplified by Adam Possamai’s work (2005). As people continue to engage in spirituality and popular culture, new forms of religious expression and proto-religious experience that does not develop into “religion” are being uncovered. Research into new religions, spiritualities and phenomena can inform an understanding of the role religion continues to play in the life of people, and the way it is adapting and being appropriated in the post-modern, hyper-real world.

This thesis explored the phenomena of musical realms from the point of view of the observer, participant or consumer. I have attempted to ameliorate this by drawing on published interviews with performers and interviewing music team members at Breakfree church. There is enormous scope for a researcher to undertake the same study while working as a musician. Someone working as a producer of the music, both in a religious and “secular” context, and simultaneously undertaking participant
observation, would provide a different perspective on the phenomena. This approach may reveal more about the nature of charisma from the point of view of the charismatic leader, and perhaps even lend some insight into the fan-celebrity partnership from a point of view rarely researched from the inside. The emic perspective, which is so important in ethnography, would be further developed with such an approach.

There are endless possibilities for incorporating realms into a number of areas, such as urban planning, pastoral care, community development, youth work and church mission. A project which begins with setting up a deliberate realm in a public space for the production of music and ecstatic experience, chronologically recording data from the beginning of set up to the final effects, would allow us to see the outcomes of the application of realms and music in the real world. Some of the implications for using music as a therapeutic technology could then be tested and analysed.

The potential for using realms is unbounded, because of the nature of these unique spaces. The central contention of this dissertation is that in the corporate experience of music, an intangible realm is created. In the presence of music, human beings interact with each other and an enigmatic “other” in unique and fascinating ways. In these realms, it seems anything is possible. People can make contact with the spirits, or imagine a new world or simply escape reality. Musical realms, for all these reasons, will continue to enchant us.
Appendix 1: Consent Forms and Information

Letters

School of Social Sciences and Humanities.
Mark Jennings B.A; B.Theol (Hons)
South Street, Murdoch.
Western Australia 6150

INFORMATION LETTER FOR BREAKFREE PASTOR

RESEARCH PROJECT: REALMS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL, SOCIOCULTURAL AND THEOLOGICAL-RELIGIOUS STUDIES EXPLORATION OF MUSIC AND SPACE

My name is Mark, and I am a student from Murdoch University. I am doing some research into the ways young people use music. My particular interest is in the way music can be helpful for young people going through “hard times”, when life seems more difficult than normal. I think we need to have “faith” in order to make it through the hard times. By “faith” I mean having the sense that our lives are important, and having dreams and hopes for where our lives might end up.

I am doing this work so I and others can learn more about how people can use music, what kind of personal skills need to be developed to cope with tough times, and what young people can teach everyone about faith and meaning.

I am seeking your permission to participate in your music programme as an observer. I would like to join in group activities where appropriate and try and get a perspective from inside your group for the purposes of this research. I will keep a journal of my observations, but no names or identifying features will be recorded. I am committed to keeping the identities of participants in the group completely confidential. If I need to interview any of the participants, I will gain their written consent and the consent of parents or guardians if appropriate.

I believe this research will be an important contribution to the study, which I hope to publish in a thesis in 2009. I hope you will agree to my participation.

If you have any questions you want to ask me about this study, you can call me on the number below:

Mark Jennings
Tel: 0421 852 021
You can also call my supervisor with any questions about this study on this number:
David Palmer
Tel: (08) 9360 2288

If you want to talk to an independent person about this work, you can call Murdoch University's Human Research Ethics Committee on (08) 9360 6677.
PERMISSION FROM FACILITATOR TO CONDUCT RESEARCH:

Project Title — Realms: A Phenomenological, Socio-Cultural and Theological-Religious Studies Exploration of Music and Space

I, Pastor __________, have been informed about all aspects of the above research project and all questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

Please circle one:

Yes/No I agree to Mark joining the programme for the purposes of research, with the proviso that he has consent of participants.

Yes/No I agree to participate in an interview. I realise that I may withdraw at any time.

Yes/No I agree to the interview being recorded.

Yes/No I agree that the research data gathered for this project may be used for teaching purposes and published in academic journals, books and youth affairs reports.

Facilitator: Date:

Investigator: Date:
REALMS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL, SOCIO-CULTURAL AND THEOLOGICAL-RELIGIOUS STUDIES EXPLORATION OF MUSIC AND SPACE

My name is Mark, and I am a student from Murdoch University. I am doing some research into the ways young people use music. My particular interest is in the relationship between music and ecstatic experience. Part of my work has involved attending the West Coast Blues & Roots festival in Fremantle in 2007 and 2008, participating in and talking to people about the experience of music. I am also interested in the parallels between ecstatic experience and spiritual or religious experience.

I would like your permission to conduct an interview with you. If there are any questions in the interview that you don’t want to answer, you are under no obligation to. With your permission, I will digitally record the interview. When the interview is transcribed (i.e. typed up), I will erase the tape, and I will not record your name or anything which could reveal your identity in anything I write. If during the interview you decide you no longer want to be part of this project, all information on you I have recorded will be destroyed. If you request, you will also be able to look at the transcription of your interview and make suggestions or ask for content to be deleted, and it will be done.

I believe this interview will be an important contribution to this study, which I hope to publish in a thesis in 2009. I hope you will agree to talk with me.

If you have any questions you want to ask me about this study, you can call me on the number below:

Mark Jennings
Murdoch University
Tel: 0400 383 085

You can also call my supervisor with any questions about this study on this number:
David Palmer
Tel: (08) 9360 2288

If you want to talk to an independent person about this work, you can call Murdoch University's Human Research Ethics Committee on (08) 9360 6677.
CONSENT FORM Project Title: Realms: A Phenomenological, Socio-Cultural and Theological-Religious Studies Exploration of Music and Space

I (________________________________________) have been informed about all aspects of the above research project and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in this interview and be recorded. I realise that I may withdraw at any time.

I agree that the research data gathered for this project may be used for teaching purposes and published in academic journals, books and youth affairs reports.

Participant: Date:

Investigator: Date:
Appendix 2: Indicative Interview Questions

Please note: These question schedules are indicative, meaning that they are possible questions. I did not stick rigidly to these schedules, often adding or deleting questions depending on how the interview was proceeding.

**Breakfree Indicative Interview Questions**

- What is worship music? How would you define it?
- How can worship music help people? How does the experience of worship help people?
- Has worship music ever helped you through hard times?
- How important is the music in the church service for facilitating the experience of God? How do you see the connection between music and spiritual experience?
- Can you tell me what you mean by the word “faith”?
- How do you think music and faith might be connected?
- How do you think faith and the experience of God are connected?
- How significant are the lyrics in worship? Have you ever written your own worship lyrics?
- I have heard on a number of occasions about the importance of “creating a good atmosphere.” Can you tell me what this means?
- Can you explain what you mean by the term “free worship”? How important is free worship?
- What do you mean by terms such as “going to the next level” and “breakthrough”?
- Can you explain what it means to talk about “imparting faith” through the music?
· Do you think it is possible to experience God through other forms of music (e.g. popular music)?

· How important is it for you personally to be part of the music team?

· Anything else you want to say about the experience of God, or music, or faith or hard times?
**WCBR Indicative Interview Questions**

- Why did you go to the festival? What led to you deciding to go?
- Can you tell me about some of your favourite moments at this festival?
- Did you go to all the venues? Which was your favourite?
- Have you seen any of the acts you saw perform live elsewhere? How did this time compare?
- Were there any acts you didn’t enjoy?
- Which is better: live performance or recorded music?
- Did you find anything at the festival besides the music interesting?
- How were people in the crowd acting?
- Did people in the crowd behave differently in different venues? For different acts? At different times of day?
- How do people act or behave differently in a crowd to how they might in another setting?
- Did you go up near the stage at any time? How was that different to being at the back?
- Do you remember responding to any of the songs with a feeling of sadness?
- Were there any songs that connected you to a memory of experience you have had in the past?
- Was that connection linked to lyrics, or the music, or something else?
- Do you like it when a performer explains something about a song? Or should they just sing it and let people interpret it however they like?
- Did you feel that way about any of the acts at the festival?
- How do you think male performers or predominately male bands are different from female? Is there any difference?
- How do you use music in relation to hard times?
· Why did you go to the festival? What led to you deciding to go?

· Was there anyone you were looking forward to seeing? Were they what you expected?

· What was your best moment at the festival? Please describe.

· Who was the best act you saw? What do you remember best about them?

· If a song you know was performed, did you sing along? Did the people around you?

· Do you think some performers were better at getting people into the music than others? If so, who? How did they do that?

· Did you find anything or anybody irritating or distracting at the festival?

· If I use the term “ecstatic experience”, what do you understand that to mean?

· Using your definition, do you think you had an ecstatic experience of music at the festival? If so, please describe.

· Given the festival starts in the morning, when it is light, did you notice any differences when it was day and when it was night? If so, please describe.

· Did you drink any alcohol during the festival? Take anything else? Do you think this had any affect on you, and if so, how?

· Did you have a favourite venue (Harbour stage, Big Top, Crossroads stage)? If so, why?

· Would you call yourself a “fan” of any of the festival acts?

· If so…In what way are you a fan? Collect music, or posters, or memorabilia (e.g. autographs)?

· Have you ever thought of listening to music as a spiritual experience?

· If so, in what way?
Bibliography


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