Where Christ Dies Daily: Performances of Faith at Orlando’s Holy Land Experience

by

Sara B. Dykins Callahan

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Communication
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Stacy Holman Jones, Ph.D.
Eric Eisenberg, Ph.D.
Navita James, Ph.D.
Daniel Belgrad, Ph.D.

Date of Approval:
January 22, 2010

Keywords: tourism, pilgrimage, heritage, sacred, faith

© Copyright 2010, Sara B. Dykins Callahan
To Rick: the reason.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all of the people who supported me through this process and who generously contributed their time and assistance. I’ve dedicated this manuscript to my husband, Rick, whose love, patience, and faith in me are my foundation. I would also like to acknowledge Truman, Tula, and Ollie, for their ability to keep me sane: sitting on my lap when I was dejected, licking my face when I needed comfort, and always their uncompromising adoration. I would like to thank my committee members for their mentorship and their willingness to read this very long document. And thank you, Stacy, for your guidance and your unyielding belief in my ability to finish this project.
# Table of Contents

List of Figures

Abstract

Prelude: It Ends Here

Chapter 1: Genesis

Field Notes: July 14, 2007

To Tell the Old, Old story

Finding “Jesus”

Building a Mystery

Mapping the Site

Controversy With the Jewish Community

TBN and the New HLE

Casting Lots: Administrative Reorganization

A Mixed Marriage: Theological Differences

Shrouded in Controversy

Other Christian-Based Parks and Museums

Local Sites

National Sites

International Sites

Historical Antecedents

Reading into Religion and Authenticity

Clarifying Authenticity

The Secular/Sacred Binary

Strange Bedfellows: Postmodernism and the Christian Master Narrative

The Implications of Simulation

Conclusion

Interlude: Journal, May 4, 2008

Interlude: God-Incidence, Field Notes, August 18, 2007

Chapter 2: I Tell You the Truth: Museum Status and the Educational Imperative

A “Musement” Park

An Educational Imperative
Identity Crisis 55
   To What Purpose? 57
Museums and the Educational Imperative 60
Theme Parks 63
Precursors to the HLE 66
   Chautauqua Institute’s Palestine Park 66
   World’s Fair New Jerusalem Exhibit 70
   Similarities to the HLE 73
Contemporary Museum Exhibits With Religious Content 78
Conclusion 83

Interlude: An Imagined Conversation With Timothy Beal, Journal, April 28, 2008 86

Interlude: The Scriptorium, Field Notes, June 27, 2004 95

Chapter 3: In Situ 100
   Field Notes: July 7, 2007 100
   Is It Real? 101
Museology and the Making of Museums 102
Authenticity, Actuality, and Virtuality 105
The HLE’s Performance of Museum 107
   Of Labels and Learning 107
   The Orchestrated Model and the Co-Creation of Meaning 111
   Into the Scriptorium 113
   In Situ and In Context 115
   The Objectification of Faith: Death of the Living Word? 116
   Displaying Conviction 121
   The Empowered Flâneur 123
Conclusion 127

Interlude: Journal, July 1, 2008 130

Interlude: Journal, August 28, 2008 132

Chapter 4: Heritage, Identity, and a Christian Homeland 135
   Theming and Heritage at the HLE 135
   Theming 136
   Heritage 138
   Living History Museums 139
Turning to the Past 141
   Creating a Christian Homeland 142
   Collectively Confiscating Jewish Ritual 143
The Powerful Draw of Blood 148
   Field Notes: August 18, 2007 149
   Ellnide’s Performance of Pilgrim 152
| Theoretical Approaches to Pilgrimage                      | 153 |
| Pilgrimage as Metaphor and Paradigm                      | 155 |
| A Portrait of Pilgrim History; Or Denying the Indigeneity of Native Americans | 157 |
| Heritage and Home as Catalysts for Change                | 161 |
| Memory, Memorials, and Dark Sites                        | 164 |
| Memory                                                    | 165 |
| Memorials and Dark Sites                                 | 166 |
| Onward Christian Soldier                                 | 169 |
| Conclusion                                                | 172 |
| Interlude: Journal, October 30, 2008                     | 175 |
| Interlude: Good Friday, Field Notes, March 21, 2008      | 178 |
| Chapter 5: And the Word Was Made Flesh                   | 189 |
| Field Notes: March 21, 2008                              | 189 |
| Passion(ate) Performances                                | 191 |
| Theatre, Law, and the Church in the United States        | 193 |
| Introducing the Passion Play in the United States        | 196 |
| Contemporary Passion Plays as Cultural Performances and Ritual | 197 |
| The HLE’s *Behold the Lamb*: A Passion(ate) Play         | 200 |
| Participating in the Passion: HLE Visitors as Spectactors | 202 |
| Witnessing as Spectacting                                | 205 |
| Bearing Witness as an Ethical Action                     | 207 |
| Replacing the Antagonist; Becoming a Silent Witness      | 208 |
| Portrait of a Silent Witness                             | 210 |
| Suffering Through Simulacra: Bearing (False) Witness?    | 217 |
| Field Notes: December 13, 2008 (The Scourging)           | 220 |
| Field Notes: July 27, 2004                               | 223 |
| Suffering, Bearing Witness, and the Role of the Camera   | 223 |
| Conclusion: Suffering Through an Execution               | 227 |
| Interlude: Journal, July 28, 2008                        | 230 |
| Interlude: Journal, August 15, 2008                      | 232 |
| Interlude: Journal, July 6, 2009                         | 234 |
| Chapter 6: In the Beginning                              | 236 |
| Field Notes: June 27, 2004                               | 236 |
| The Beginning of the End of the Beginning                | 236 |
| Behold, an Execution                                     | 240 |
| Repression of the Violence of Execution                  | 242 |
| Sacrifice as Sacred Violence                             | 245 |
Jesus’ Death as Sacrifice and Execution 246
A Postmodern Passion for Pain? 250
Field Notes: June 27, 2004 252
Acquiring Embodied Knowledge of Pain and Suffering 255
Sacrifice Made Strange 256
Field Notes: June 27, 2004 259
Journal: December 21, 2008 259

Notes 264

References 287

Appendices 299
Appendix A: Photographs 300

About the Author  End Page
# List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gates of Damascus</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bedouin Women Weaving</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sara Playing Samson</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Moses and the Ten Commandments</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Herod’s Palace at the Temple Plaza</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The Scriptorium</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Bronze Altar in the Wilderness Tabernacle</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Pilgrims in a Prayer Circle</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Living Room Gallery</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Roman Soldier</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Roman Soldiers</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Where Christ Dies Daily:
Performances of Faith at Orlando’s Holy Land Experience

Sara B. Dykins Callahan

ABSTRACT

This manuscript focuses on performances of place and faith inside the Holy Land Experience (HLE), an edutainment complex nestled in the fantasy nexus of Orlando, Florida. A self-proclaimed living-history museum, the HLE includes animatronic Bible characters and musical dramas. The HLE enacts and embodies evangelical narratives of Christianity and Christian faith, and visitors to the park are asked to join the performances, blurring the distinctions between spectators and professional actors. I argue that visitors’ performances of faith invest the space of the HLE with sacredness, while the location and design of the HLE infuses the space with elements of the secular. The HLE exemplifies the performative nature of the sacred and shows how sacredness is a process (a performance), not an inherent property. Through participant observation, interviews, and critical/cultural analysis, I engage the multiple meanings of the HLE with the intention of facilitating empathic understandings of the complex, embodied phenomenon of faith as it manifests in this hybrid space.
PRELUDE

It Ends Here

1 And the word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

2 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness.)

3 And his name is the Word of God.

4 And they clothed him with purple, and plaited a crown of thorns, and put it about his head.

5 And on him they laid the cross.

6 And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him.

7 And my toes challenge the translucent barrier that keeps the crowd from blocking the path. I strain to see, to find the dying savior. Rick taps my shoulder and points in silence. Christ drags his brutalized body through the street. His knees break beneath the weight of the large wooden cross. Guards mock him; scream at him; kick him. I witness the agony in his dark eyes.

8 And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified.

9 And when they come to the place which is called Calvary they crucified him.

10 And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take.

11 Pictures. I take pictures trying to capture something of the dying Christ. I need a memory, a memento: proof. And then I realize my distance. I am numb and cannot feel His presence, His pain. I want to feel His pain. I try to lower my camera, to witness with my own eyes the horror and the sorrow. But I can’t. The Christ has turned a corner. He is gone.
12 And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts.

13 The crowd, too, seems numb, disinterested, restless. Where is the care for the dying Christ? Rick cares. He is the nonbeliever, but I see Christ’s pain moving through Rick’s face. I am jealous.

14 And Jesus cried with a loud voice saying, Eloi, Eloi lama sabachthani?

15 And I question, Why am I here?

16 And Jesus saith unto me, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.

17 My faith has left me: Judas.

18 And ye are witnesses of these things.
CHAPTER 1
GENESIS

Field Notes: July 14, 2007

“Are you a Christian?”

I knew the question had to be asked sooner or later, but I was still taken aback by Matthew’s bold query. He was ringing up my coffee and handing it to me over the dark wood counter. The young man’s beautiful blue eyes held my gaze and pierced my nonchalant façade.

My colleague, Brianne, and I had just arrived at the Holy Land Experience and were desperately in need of caffeine. I had been in the little café several times and suggested we grab one of their not-too-expensive coffees. The café was intimate and comfortable, cooled by the obligatory air conditioning and shadowed from the blaring July sun. Tasty confections secured inside a plexi-glass case, strongly reminiscent of the museum cases which house Biblical antiquities in the Scriptorium, tempted me. But I resisted, deciding on the simple house coffee.

After assessing the state of my research and finding my interview collection lacking, I had promised myself that this visit, with Brianne as my wing-woman, I would force myself to extroversion. Starting conversations does not come easily to me, but I knew I had to try. So, with this resolution fresh in my mind, I decided to ask Matthew some questions. He didn’t seem intimidating with his fresh face and mop of wispy, blonde hair. I knew he had to be younger than me, and I figured that was a good thing. The older Christians scare me with their intensity and their willingness to transgress personal boundaries.

I introduced myself to Matthew (a spiel I was still working on perfecting at the time) as he rang up my order. “My name is Sara and I’m a student at the University of South Florida. I’m writing my dissertation about this place and why people come here.”
“Wow. That’s cool,” he said with surprise and genuine interest.
“So, how long have you worked here?”
“About three years. Well, three summers. I work here over the summers because I’m in school,” he said as he ran my debit card through the machine. He told me he had just finished his degree at a two-year college and was now looking for a full time, permanent position.

“Do you like it here?” I asked.
“Yeah, it’s great. It’s fun, and I get to be around fellow Christians.”
“So, most of the people who work here are Christian?”
“Well, yeah. And the people who come here. It’s a Christian place.” Matthew tilted his head slightly and began to really look at me, or at least I now perceived him looking at me. I could see him assessing my clothing, a purple tank top and khaki cargo pants (pretty much the same outfit I wore every visit), and then shifting his focus to Brianne. She was also wearing a tank top and shorts. Is there any other choice in the middle of a Florida summer?

Matthew returned his focus to me as Brianne moved away from the counter and towards the shelves lined with souvenirs. He didn’t seem to find our clothing offensive, but I could see that he was finally processing my intent at the park. I was a researcher, a student at a large university, and I hadn’t mentioned why I was studying this site.

With wide-eyed excitement, he leaned forward, straining against the counter, and silently demanded I meet his gaze. I knew in this moment that he was reversing our roles. The air was charged with his enthusiasm and my apprehension. And then he asked,

“Are you a Christian?”
Not a question, but rather an inquisition.

To Tell the Old, Old Story
This is the greatest story ever told. Or, at least a version of it. Many are the tales and many more the tellers: hundreds of years of Biblical scholarship, thousands of thoughts crafted in the minds of great thinkers, billions of notes sung in the service of the Master(’s) Narrative. What can I contribute to a fountain of discourses running so deep
and wide? A simple story? Or, simply, another story? This is the story of a fascinating place that captured my imagination and continues to confound my efforts at sense-making. The story of this place intertwines with the story of my life, lived in and out of religion. My soul, like so many others, is a soul starved for communion in faith; a faith that can never be complete because of constant questioning.

This is a quest(ioning). An inquiry and investigation. A search.

And the Lord said, “Seek and ye shall find.”

What he doesn’t say is where you’ll find it. According to Christian doctrine, salvation is found in the acceptance and profession of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. But where do we find Jesus? This manuscript is a documentation of my quest into, out of, around, and through a spectacular three dimensional simulation of the story of Jesus. But this quest, like most quests, is more complex than a physical journey to and from a space. The thing sought resides in the act of seeking. The quest is both noun and verb. The story I will tell you is the story of a layered and continuing quest.

This is not a dissertation on religion. I know very little about religion. Rather, I am seeking insight into the meanings manifest in contemporary popular expressions of religiosity. This is a story about performances of faith inside the interstices of popular culture, tourism, and Christianity. While this inquiry is framed by communication, sociological, anthropological, and various other disciplinary discourses, it is also intensely personal. I am seeking a purpose for my scholarship, a thesis that will shape and guide my writing, my program of research, my future. I am seeking a salve for the unresolved tensions between myself and my lost faith. I am seeking a resolution in revelation. As I step into this process of creation, of dissertation, of revelation, I wonder what I will find.

Finding “Jesus”

I found “Jesus” in Orlando, Florida. The Holy Land Experience is located just past Disneyland, Universal Studios, and several name-brand outlet malls, situated amongst enormous chain hotels with fantastical facades. It is near the World’s Largest McDonalds and the World’s Largest Checkers, and a number of other World’s Largest
restaurants, souvenir shops, and retail stores. Take Exit 78 off of Interstate 4—the monolith yellow brick road that twists its way through this Sodom or Gomorrah of the Sunshine State—a left and a right and another right brings you to the almost obscure gates of the Holy Land Experience Biblical attraction.

Just as important as its physical location amidst one of the largest fantasy nexuses in the world, is the site’s self-defined geo-temporal location; the Holy Land Experience is an “ancient land that is 2,000 years old and 7,000 miles away.”¹ According to the park’s promotional materials, visitors will be “transported” to ancient Jerusalem via “exact replica[s],” “breathtaking representation[s],” “authentically designed” spaces, “themed landscapes and food and beverages,” and “themed costuming.”² The website specifically refers to a “Total Immersion Experience;” once visitors “pass through the gates”—the massive replica of the Gates of Damascus that separates the twentieth-century United States from the “ancient land…of incomparable religious history”—they “will be immersed in ancient Jerusalem,” “the land of the Bible where the eternal Son of God came to dwell and will reign over all the earth when He returns.”³ Creator Marv Rosenthal’s Holy Land Experience is ancient, Biblical Jerusalem reincarnate.

I visited the Holy Land Experience (HLE) for the first time on June 27, 2004. I was enrolled in a “Travel and Tourism” course that required students to choose a destination and write a paper about their journey. My classmates were travelling all over the country and the world, a luxury I couldn’t afford. Growing up in rural central Florida, travel and tourism became synonymous with Orlando and Disney World. I remembered the first time I went to Disney’s Epcot and thought that the strange conflation of American interpretations of international cultures might be an appropriate and fun juxtaposition to my classmates’ “real” travels. But Epcot felt trite, probably because the class had already discussed Disney ad nauseam. After much deliberation and frustration with my financial limitations, I remembered this Christian theme park. My brother James, an artist, visited the site in 2001. He worked for a local jewelry company that designed jewelry sold in the HLE gift shops. As any good atheist would be, James was sickened and angered by the site and ranted about it for days. Remembering his reaction and vivid description, I knew that this was my destination.
That Sunday morning in June, as my mother and my husband prepared to accompany me to the park, the first of many “coincidences” confirmed my decision to visit the HLE. I opened the *Tampa Tribune* to the “Travel” section, and there in vibrant color spanning half the page was Holy Land Jesus, dead and being lowered from Calvary. The *Tribune* had devoted almost two full pages to an article describing the HLE. After voraciously consuming the article, I begged my family to make haste. Now, I imagined myself on a mission, though I did not know to what end.

Four years later, as I write this manuscript, I continue to question, *To what end?* I look back on my journey through fieldwork and research and know that I have not been interested in the intricacies of institutional religion. Rather, what is pertinent—what I am enamored with—is the materiality of and processes of engagement with the HLE. What does the HLE embody? How do I and other visitors move through the space? What identities are constructed and performed here? What does this site mean when situated amidst contemporary sociopolitical events? Why do I want to return?

In order to begin addressing these questions, I became a participant observer, frequenting the site. Because I was not quite sure of how to engage this space, each visit I would try on different personas: park survey taker, student researcher, book author, doctoral student, Florida resident, infatuated enthusiast, sensationalist, sympathizer, critical Christian, critical cultural scholar, tourist. These personas were never singularly manifest. They tangoed and tickled one another, occasionally merging, boundaries blurring to a state of unrecognizable distinctions. As I moved through the space, actively trying to see through one lens, moments of personal significance I thought were suppressed slipped into consciousness and into my research. Complacent daughter donning pantyhose to be respectable; belligerent girl refusing the racism of a pastor; terrified five year old dreaming of hell; disturbed child thinking she was the antichrist; asthmatic breathing in cheap perfume; bereft soul seeking salvation in the lifeless words of the Holy text; amateur existentialist fearing nothingness, but petrified by the thought of eternity. I am a researcher-subject who recognizes her fluctuating positionality, and rather than attempting to stifle my biases, I embrace them and acknowledge them in this project.
Identifying and understanding my subject position helped me to determine the theoretical framing I use to interpret this site. The HLE is a site of convergences and contestations, an interstitial space which demands an interdisciplinary approach. Themes central to this project include authenticity, identity, and spectacle and are addressed in performance theory, postmodern theory, phenomenological theory, critical theory, cultural theory, and rhetorical theory. Throughout this manuscript, I engage these varied perspectives as archeological tools enabling me to dig deep into and through the conceptual dust and dirt. Sometimes these perspectives act as hiking gear, helping me traverse the rugged terrain of my personal and professional quest. Always, they function as a map providing a landscape where I can locate the HLE within larger sociocultural, political, and historical contexts.

Building a Mystery

The Holy Land Experience opened its gates to visitors on February 1, 2001, and more than eight hundred people attended opening day. Visitors eagerly paid $17 for adults and $12 for kids. Families explored the fifteen-acre site that rivals Disney and Universal, not in size, but in technological innovation and implementation. The HLE cost $16 million dollars to build, and integral to its conception and construction was ITEC Entertainment Corporation, the design team responsible for Islands of Adventure, the Spiderman attraction for Universal Studios, and has also worked for the Kennedy Space Center, as well as designing Disney World’s: Mission Space. Bill Coan, CEO of ITEC, commented, "The challenge of compressing literally thousands of years of Biblical history down to an entertaining and inspiring three-to-five-hour guest experience has driven our design team to come up with some of our most inventive ideas and approaches ever." ITEC does not disappoint. The park is aesthetically interesting, interactive, and technologically savvy. Rosenthal, as demonstrated in the creation of the HLE, embraces new technologies and media as modes of witnessing (telling people about Jesus and Salvation by Grace): “Even before our ministry moved to central Florida in 1989,” says Rosenthal, “I believed that there was a need for a concept that utilizes all the tools of modern technology, that presents accurate Biblical history and creates a one-of-a-kind
experience. This is not only for Christians, but for people from all walks of life. When people come here, we hope the Bible will come alive for them and, I pray, change their lives.”

**Mapping the Site**

Visitors enter through an impressively large recreation of the Gates of Damascus (see fig. 1) and move directly into the Jerusalem Street Market, pausing beneath a fabric-draped Bedouin tent where souvenirs are available for purchase (see fig. 2). A Bedouin woman distributes Welcome pamphlets with accompanying maps and answers visitor questions. Several Centurion guards roam the area, interacting with guests and enthusiastically pointing to their favorite performances. Smile of a Child KidVenture area is immediately south, offering children the opportunity to climb a rock wall, watch a performance in Noah’s Ark Theatre, play Samson destroying the temple pillars (see fig. 3), and step into various Bible scenes. Heading west, visitors discover the Wilderness Tabernacle where white-bearded grandfathers shepherd the flock into a multimedia extravaganza depicting ancient rights of the Lavitical priesthood (see fig. 4).

North of the Tabernacle is a miniature mountain topped with lambs and shepherds. The mountain is a replica of the Qumran Caves where the Dead Sea scrolls were discovered and is the site of an undisclosed future exhibit. From the Caves, visitors have an excellent view of Calvary’s Garden Tomb, the central exhibit and the geographical center of the park. Here, *Behold the Lamb* climaxes with the crucifixion of Christ followed by his resurrection. The Temple Plaza is east of the Tomb, and hosts several musical and dramatic presentations (see fig. 5). This location includes a towering recreation of Herod’s palace surrounded by porticos that offer shade to summer guests. Directly attached to the palace is a theatre where movies specifically created by the park are shown throughout the day.

As visitors move towards the back northeast corner of the HLE, they encounter yet another theatre space, the Shofar Auditorium, designed for live musical performances and lectures. The Auditorium also contains “the world’s largest indoor model of Jerusalem.” Finally, the Scriptorium, a copper-topped stucco building built in 2002 in
cooperation with the Sola Scriptura organization\textsuperscript{9}, marks the end of the journey (see fig. 6). According to promotional materials, the Scriptorium boasts the largest collection of Bibles and scripture paraphernalia in the U.S.\textsuperscript{10} Then a new journey begins as visitors enter the Scriptorium and embark on a fifty-five-minute audio-guided tour of the history of the Bible’s creation and dissemination. At the end of this journey through the story of Witnessing, visitors are compelled to conviction and the ministerial purpose of the HLE is apparent.

*Controversy With the Jewish Community*

Marvin Rosenthal doesn’t mince words. The HLE, a nonprofit organization, was conceptualized as and functions for ministry—the proliferation and dissemination of the gospel of Christ. Zion’s Hope Incorporated, the original parent organization of the HLE, was founded by Marv and Marbeth Rosenthal in August 1989 as a means of witnessing the gospel to Jewish people in the United States and Israel. The Rosenthals left a sixteen-year stint with a New Jersey-based ministry to come to Orlando and launch Zion’s Hope, “an independent, Bible-believing, faith-missionary organization.”\textsuperscript{11} The Rosenthal’s mission was to “fervently, yet graciously share with the Jewish people the Gospel of Jesus, the Messiah.”\textsuperscript{12} Rosenthal is clear regarding the purpose and advertisement of the HLE: "We are interested in sharing the gospel with the Jewish people," Rosenthal says. "But we do not focus exclusively on the Jews. We do not target Jewish people. We think there are a lot of things Jewish people will like here. Other things they will disagree with."\textsuperscript{13} While Rosenthal is seemingly straight-forward in articulating his mission, his statements are also contradictory. If the mission of Zion’s Hope is to “share” the Gospel with Jewish people, then the mission is targeting Jewish people, regardless of Rosenthal’s disclaimer. Yet conversion of Jewish people is not the exclusive focus of the HLE. The HLE is intended to minister to all people. The presence of Jewish history, culture, and ritual at the HLE, and Rosenthal’s emphasis on the Jewish community is a function of his own Jewish heritage.

Rosenthal self-identifies as a Hebrew Christian—a Jew who believes Jesus is the Messiah. He converted to Christianity over thirty years ago and attended Philadelphia
College of Bible and Dallas Theological Seminary. Rosenthal has served as a Baptist minister and missionary since he was ordained in 1968. Over the course of his theological career, Rosenthal has authored two books, *Not without Design* (1980) and *The Prewrath Rapture of the Church* (1990). In these books, Rosenthal details his theories regarding the divine creation of humankind and our inevitable demise. In *Not Without Design*, Rosenthal makes a case for creationism, the intelligent design of the universe and humankind by God. *The Prewrath Rapture of the Church* details Rosenthal’s belief that Christians will be subject to the period of Tribulation when the Antichrist ascends to international power, but that Christians will be saved from the worst of God’s wrath.

Rosenthal’s religious identity and his evangelical aims have caused contention between Jewish communities and Zion’s Hope. His explanation of the ministerial nature of the HLE did nothing to subdue outcries from local Jewish communities. Local Jewish residents took offense to the use of sacred Judaic symbols and rituals, such as the Seder dinner, to convert Jews to Christianity. Leader of the militant Jewish Defense League, Irv Rubin, called Rosenthal a “soul-snatcher.” Rabbi Aaron Rubinger from Congregation Ohev Shalom argues, “They make use of Jewish symbols and use of Jewish history all as props in order to steal Jewish souls. For us that’s terribly offensive. It trivializes what’s sacred in Judaism and it does so for the purpose of alienating Jews from their own faith.”

Though some members of the Jewish community were outspoken in their protests, most congregations in Orlando ignored the opening of the HLE. They did not want to acknowledge, and thus publicize, the park. Rosenthal recognized that the controversy would be good for business, resulting in free publicity from CNN, other news outlets, and conservative pundit Bill O’Reilly. The initial attention from media outlets definitely impacted attendance. By the end of 2001, Rosenthal reported over 300,000 visitors had passed through the park. After the first year, though, the HLE experienced a significant decrease in attendance, mostly because there was no money for advertising. By 2007, the park was on the verge of bankruptcy and was forced to seek financial assistance through a merger with Trinity Broadcasting Network.


_TBN and the New HLE_

On June 9, 2007, the Trinity Broadcasting Network entered into a “marriage” with the Holy Land Experience. The Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) is the faith-child of Paul and Jan Crouch and a subsidiary of their larger evangelical endeavor, Trinity Christian Center (TCC) of Santa Ana, California. The Crouch family, in collaboration with Jim and Tammy Bakker, founded the TCC in 1973. Besides TBN, the TCC is comprised of five other networks, 67 satellites and 12,500 television and cable affiliates worldwide. Two hundred seventy five of these television stations are located in the United States and, according to TBN, attract more than five million viewer households per week, making them the ninth largest broadcaster in the U.S. and the largest Christian television network in the world. With TBN available to over 92 percent of American households and their website (www.tbn.org) boasting more than 27 million hits monthly, TBN is a media empire.

Empires are always seeking to expand. The Crouch family wanted to establish a presence in Orlando and, in September 2006, bought WTGL Channel 52, a local station that reaches over four million viewers. Currently, TBN is planning to use the Holy Land Experience as the host studio for TV-52, as well as a backlot for film productions. “It'll be a faith-based version of Universal Studios,” said Paul Crouch, Jr. The Crouch family often compare the HLE with area theme parks, a risky rhetorical move considering that the nonprofit status of the organization depends upon its definition as not a theme park. In fact, the choice of the term “marriage” to talk about the merger between the HLE and TBN was necessary because it avoids references to money exchanging hands. Nonprofit organizations cannot legally be bought and sold. Clearly, the HLE’s $8 million debt was pivotal in seeking an alliance with TBN, but supposedly TBN did not purchase the site by paying its debt. Rather, as a new ally of the HLE, TBN donated the sum.

Employing the language of “marriage” and “donation” has significant implications for both the HLE and TBN. For the HLE, it means maintaining nonprofit status, a designation intrinsic to the HLE’s identity as a missionary venture. TBN, too, has a vested interest in maintaining the HLE’s nonprofit status. As a subsidiary of TBN,
itself a nonprofit organization, the HLE must maintain its nonprofit designation so that it does not jeopardize the classification of TBN.

*Casting Lots: Administrative Reorganization*

Initially park employees and administrators were optimistic about this marriage, seeing an answer to their prayers in the deep pockets of TBN, a fellow nonprofit organization. Job security was assumed. The Crouches stated that they liked the park the way it was and didn’t have immediate plans for extensive restructuring, only increased advertising. Outside observers weren’t so confident. Professor of American Religious History Randall Balmer compared TBN to “an 800-pound gorilla” whose inclinations are backed by its size and strength.  

While the term marriage connotes a partnership between two existing entities, what has occurred at the HLE is more like a takeover. The Crouches assumed four out of the five positions on the Board of Directors, including Paul Crouch Jr.’s ascension to CEO. Within weeks HLE administrators and employees were being fired and quitting. Numerous employees and former employees responded by posting to the Comments section of Brad Flora’s online news article, “The Holy Land Experience: Who Shall Inherit the Kingdom?” published by NewsInitiative.org. One former employee counted fourteen leadership positions vacated due to TBN, including “CFO [chief financial officer], VP of Park Operations, VP of Productions, Director of Operations, [and] Director of Facilities.” Another poster tipped off Flora to CEO Tom Powell’s departure: “Just about all of the Holy Land's leadership is no longer there—some terminated, some resigned.”

Tom Powell, president of the HLE since Rosenthal’s departure in 2005, and the site’s chief executive officer (and only member of the Board of Directors not related to the Crouch family), resigned August 21, 2007, two months after the merger. One former HLE employee claimed by way of a comment to reporter Flora that Powell was fired, but this assertion couldn’t be proven due to a nondisclosure agreement between Powell and TBN. John Casoria, a TBN spokesperson, did comment, “All I know is that he [Powell]
submitted a resignation. He was offered positions doing similar things at other places, even in the secular world, where he'd be paid a lot more money." Casoria’s reference to the secular world and the possibility of more money casts a decidedly negative tilt to Powell’s departure. Powell was respected at the HLE because of his leadership capabilities, cutting $2 million from the site’s expenditures and securing better credit scores to attract investors after Rosenthal’s departure. Powell was also responsible for contacting and brokering the marriage to TBN. His departure, as reflected in the anonymous poster’s statement, was controversial and cast suspicion on TBN’s motives and intentions for the future administration of the HLE. Casoria’s statement attempts to belie that suspicion and negative attention by insinuating Powell’s disloyalty and less-than-Christian motives for leaving the site.

Days prior to the news of Powell’s resignation, Powell told Flora, "We believe that the way this came together it was designed by God for us to continue the way we need to. I don't think the end result is because of anything any person did. I think it's the end result of what everyone here was asking for." An anonymous park employee asked to respond to the merger told Flora the story of Habakkuk:

A prophet named Habakkuk was distressed by the injustice and strife of his day. So he petitions God to intercede. God answers. His plan? To raise up the Babylonians to “devour,” “capture” and enslave Israel so they will learn the error of their ways. The employee said, “Just because you got what you prayed for doesn’t mean you’re going to get the final result you were thinking you were going to get.”

TBN, while seemingly an answer to HLE administrators’ and employees’ prayers, brought changes that challenged the HLE’s ideological and theological foundations.

A Mixed Marriage: Theological Differences

The changes TBN wrought were visible in the overhaul of the gift shops and the remodeling of administrative spaces. In particular, the Shofar and Scriptorium shops were targeted because of what Crouch Sr. referred to as a deficiency in the “little bookstores.” There were “no books by Pentecostal or charismatic people,” so the shelves were
rearranged and stocked with books by Crouch Sr., as well as with TBN t-shirts, umbrellas, magnets, and bookmarks. The shops were also refurnished with ornate, richly hued chairs, drapes, and counters. The draped fabrics of Bedouin tents were replaced with great, white Roman pillars and porticos. The dusty, village aura of the HLE was quickly transformed into a regal, regimented atmosphere characterized by opulence not always consistent with the historical period of Roman occupation. The Guest Services building, for instance, has been upholstered in red velvet and decorated with furniture distinctly Baroque in design.

The presence of these types of texts and seemingly opulent furnishings signals a shift in ideological and theological perspectives. Wealth demonstrated through material artifacts suggests the influence of the Prosperity gospel. Prosperity theology, also known as Prosperity doctrine, contends that God grants favored individuals material wealth. TBN is known for functioning as a platform for “Word of Faith” teaching, which is similar to Prosperity gospel in that adherents to Word of Faith believe that to speak (with belief) scripture relevant to one’s needs is to ensure that God will grant the fulfillment of those needs. The Encyclopedia of Religion notes that Word of Faith teachings claim “every true Christian believer could have health, happiness, and prosperity by simply claiming it.” In essence, through faith, followers can speak what they desire into existence. This notion is similar to the popular New Age bestselling book The Secret written by Rhonda Byrne, which claims that the power of positive thinking will result in health, happiness, and wealth. Rather than speaking, we should be thinking prosperity into being. The difference between the Prosperity doctrine and this Word of Faith and New Age optimism is that the Prosperity doctrine suggests faith is not enough to achieve prosperity. God has to be on your side. Material wealth and prosperity are indicators that you are favored by God. The Crouches, though they profess Word of Faith rather than Prosperity gospel, embody Prosperity gospel in their lifestyle choices, as well as in the choices they have made in refurnishing the HLE.

The Prosperity gospel is ideologically incompatible with traditional evangelical philosophies of sacrifice upon which the HLE is based. Traditional evangelical Christians shun worldliness (the investment of meaning and value in the secular), though they
understand the necessity of engaging in the secular world in order to spread the gospel of Christ. Integral to evangelical theology is the notion of sacrifice. As Jesus sacrificed his life for humanity, so must humanity sacrifice their worldly possessions to save other people from poverty. Bill Jones, current Senior Bible Teacher at the HLE, refuses to teach the Prosperity gospel—which implies that poor people are poor because they are not favored by God—but doesn’t take issue with TBN’s association with this theological perspective. Powell briefly addressed the possible conflict prior to his departure, saying TBN and the HLE share a “core Christianity.” “We [HLE] have a particular mission and a particular thrust,” says Powell. “TBN has a broader spectrum, but certainly our mission and thrust fits into that and basically we agreed to operate with a similar look and feel for a going forward of a few years before making any significant changes.”

Commenting on the unlikely event of these divergent theologies coexisting at the HLE, Dr. Randall Balmer remarked, “in terms of a true merger between these two traditions, I’d say it’s doubtful.”

Based on Paul Crouch Sr.’s public critiques of the HLE’s relationship with God, Balmer’s speculation proves valid. Crouch Sr., along with several (family) members of the Board of Directors, appeared on a TBN program called “Praise the Lord” talking about the recent acquisition of the HLE. Crouch Sr. weaved a story of salvation around himself as savior. When Crouch set foot inside the HLE he diagnosed the ailing organization’s problem: absence of God. This analysis coincides with Prosperity theology: the HLE wasn’t prospering because it was not favored by God. “The Holy Spirit was not welcome in the Holy Land Experience,” said Crouch after noting the lack of charismatic books in the gift shops. After TBN acquired the HLE, Crouch ordered his autobiography placed on bookstore shelves overnight. “When we started putting those . . . books in the bookstore . . . and we said, ‘Holy Spirit you are welcome in this place,’ in days, just days it turned around.” He stood in the midst of his new real-estate and witnessed the salvation of the park by his own hand: “the Holy Spirit came upon me and I said aloud, ‘Holy Spirit, thou art welcome in this place.’” Crouch spoke the HLE’s holiness into being.
Shrouded in Controversy

Though initial hopes were high in regards to an amicable partnership between original HLE staff and the new TBN administrators, the reality of a corporate takeover has been difficult. The transition has not been helped by news reports speculating about the legitimacy of TBN as a nonprofit organization or the controversies that shroud the Crouch family. The TCC has over $1 billion dollars in assets and is registered as a nonprofit organization. Yet, allegations have been made that the Crouch family used funds from the TCC to support their luxuriant lifestyle, sponsor their youngest son’s Hollywood aspirations (to the tune of $32 million TBN dollars), and pay a $425,000 settlement to employee Enoch Lonnie Ford with whom, it has been alleged, Crouch, Sr. participated in a homosexual encounter. The 1998 Ford incident encouraged unwanted comparisons between the Crouch family and the Bakkers. In 1987, after having an affair with Jessica Hahn, secretary of Praise the Lord ministry (PTL), Jim Bakker paid Hahn $265,000 in hush money, but the money was from PTL coffers, resulting in a national scandal and Bakker’s resignation. Ford’s allegations prompted inquiries into the Crouch family and TBN, and in September 2004, the Los Angeles Times began an investigative series delving into the organizational practices of the nonprofit empire. What they found was a prayer mill. Viewers of TBN are encouraged to call and mail in prayer requests over which the Crouch family were supposed to pray. They did, but apparently without regard to the individual details of the requests. According to the Times, prayer requests “are prayed over in bulk and then shredded.” However, all names and contact information are retained and inputted into a database for mail-outs and fundraising. Apparently, while individual attention was not afforded for the purpose of prayer, it was for marketing.

These controversies, combined with accusations leveled by Christian watchdog groups, such as the Trinity Foundation and MinistryWatch.com, may prove detrimental to the HLE’s long-term success and financial viability. Trinity Foundation founder and president Ole Anthony believes that it is just a matter of time before a federal investigation is launched into TBN: “The TBN is a house of cards. It’s probably financially stable, but I think some Senate agency or government group is going to look
in on it eventually and how it misuses funds.” MinistryWatch.com has given TBN an “F” for their unwillingness to release information regarding their financial transactions. Managing director of research Rodney Pitzer advises charitable people to donate elsewhere: “I would have a concern that they’re [TBN] not open and transparent.” TBN refuses to release the specific financial details of the merger with the HLE, which only reinforces skepticism and suspicion regarding the intentions and practices of TBN.

Individuals who have posted responses to Flora’s online news article addressing the HLE/TBN merger have also noted what they believe to be misuse of funds. One person who identified themselves as a former “team member” of the HLE petitioned readers, “If there is anyone who has the means to investigate TBN and their business practices—now would be a good time.” Another contributor, “Anonymous” because she still works at the HLE, doesn’t argue the right of TBN as the new “owners” to change the facility, but does state that “their actions have been so . . . unwise . . . capricious . . . lacking wisdom. We’re concerned that they continually solicit donations (on TV and otherwise) to ‘keep the ministry running’ when the obvious surplus exposes this as a lie . . . it’s downright painful to see the waste and luxuriant materialism going on in the name of ‘ministry’.”

It remains to be seen how these issues will play out at the local level of the HLE in terms of employee satisfaction, visitor attendance, and administration. However, issues such as these have faced and will continue to face modes of evangelism that embrace contemporary popular culture, information technologies, and business practices. What watchdog researcher Rodney Pitzer referred to as the “murky” deal between TBN and the HLE exemplifies the increasingly complicated relationships between traditional understandings of secular and sacred spaces.

**Other Christian-Based Parks and Museums**

The Holy Land Experience is not a singular or new mode of evangelism. Many examples of entertainment and ministry hybrids exist in our contemporary world. The HLE shares Orlando with several of these sites and scholars such as Timothy Beal and Daniel Radosh have documented similar locations throughout the United States.
Internationally, an HLE employee noted the development of a sister-site to the HLE in Seoul, Korea, and the ArkAlive project is currently in the preliminary stages of development in the United Kingdom.

Local Sites

Christian-themed attractions in the Orlando area include Campus Crusade for Christ, Wycliffe Bible Translators, and Disney's Celebration Presbyterian Church. Campus Crusade for Christ, a nonprofit organization carrying the same 501(c)(3) distinction as the HLE, is a ministerial organization committed to “build[ing] spiritual movements everywhere” by establishing ministries in 191 countries.\(^{43}\) Wycliffe Bible Translators, named for fourteenth-century Biblical scholar and linguist John Wycliffe (whose animatronic effigy performs daily in the Scriptorium), is a mission organization dedicated to the translation of scriptures. They have translators present and working with local populations in more than 90 countries. Wycliffe USA Headquarters and its museum component, WordSpring Discovery Center, are ten minutes from the HLE.

Celebration Presbyterian Church, located on two prime acres of Disney real estate, was commissioned by Disney in 1996. The fantasy empire solicited bids from religious organizations and denominations across the U.S. Because of their funding, as well as their “ecumenical heritage” and “thesis of inclusion,” the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) was awarded the contract.\(^{44}\) The active church is visible from the Irlo Bronson Highway and is one of the primary attractions for visitors touring Celebration.

National Sites

A number of these types of spaces—purportedly educational, entertaining, and religious—exist in the United States, including the Creation Museum in Kentucky, Mount Blanco Fossil Museum in Texas, and Dinosaur Adventure Land in Pensacola, Florida (a creation theme park “Where dinosaurs and the Bible meet!”).\(^{45}\) Currently, Bible Park USA is under construction in Tennessee. Thirty-five miles southeast of Nashville in the town of Murfreesboro, over two hundred acres of land situated in what was once the heart of farm country (though very close to Route 840) have been slated for
The park’s proposed development comes on the heels of massive residential growth. Residents of the area, known as Blackman (Rutherford County), have openly and vigorously opposed Armon Bar-Tur’s assertions of the value of this site to the local economy. Bar-Tur, managing director of the New York-based development company SafeHarbor Holdings, remarked, “This is a very serious undertaking. This is not some hokey park that we’re talking about.”

The Biblical focus of the park has upset many residents who feel that the area was targeted because of its reputation as being part of the Bible Belt, accusing developers of assuming their faith was translatable into dollars. Resident Susan Hunnicutt expressed her intention to fight the development. She considers herself as having a “very conservative background” and told reporter Theo Emery that she was “offended” that the park would be religiously themed. Bar-Tur counters, “This is a very different sort of park”; it is a non-denominational “edutainment” complex the purpose of which is not to proselytize or evangelize. Yet, the park will include spaces for Bible study. Chief executive officer Ronen Paldi locates the value of this site in its ability to offer Americans who cannot or will not embark on pilgrimages to the Middle East a convenient, affordable Holy Land experience. Paldi asserts, “This park will become a national destination for Americans.” Unlike Disney, the park will not contain roller coasters or rides, but Paldi compared the park’s economic benefits to the area as comparable to Disney.

**International Sites**

Sites like these can also be found on the global scene. Brazil boasts a Catholic theme park called Aparecida Magic Park where visitors can ride roller coasters and witness an animatronic Nativity scene. The United Kingdom may soon be home to a Holy Land Experience-type park. Sunday school teacher Andrea Webster began the initial stages of building her evangelical theme park, Ark Alive, in 2005. Like the HLE, Ark Alive claims to be non-denominational and educational. Unlike the HLE, Webster embraces the label “theme park” and openly expresses her desire that the space be comparable to Disney: “It will be a place where Disney meets the Bible.”
Webster doesn’t believe a conflict exists in combining the traditionally secular entertainment focus of the theme park with the educational imperative of a museum and the sacred mission of saving souls. The Ark Alive website states the organization’s (just Webster at this moment) mission is,

To serve Jesus Christ by spreading the Good News through the provision of a Christian visitor attraction based on the Bible. We aim to proclaim and demonstrate the gospel for the whole person by including and welcoming all people.52

Like the HLE, Ark Alive claims inclusivity, purportedly inviting diversity. What is interesting about Ark Alive’s statement is the reference to “the whole person.” Though this is not clarified on the website, I read this statement as acknowledging the multifaceted and mutable nature of personhood. Webster recognizes the need to cultivate and nurture spiritual identity—“We hope that some visitors will find their faith reignited or be encouraged to find out more about the faith so many of us already share”—but also aims to satisfy other aspects of visitors’ lives.

In the segment “What’s it About?” the first section heading reads, “Let’s forget religion for a minute.” In this section, Webster emphasizes the social and cultural importance of the Bible as a book and Jesus as an historical figure. She asserts the value of Ark Alive to non-Christians is being able to hear about how events recorded in the Bible have “influenced our culture, our history and our heritage” from “historical, scientific, geographical or cultural perspective[s].” It is, in short, a learning experience. It is also meant to be “fun” and “entertaining,” offering visitors the opportunity to interact with embodied versions of the Biblical narrative. Like the HLE, it is through the use of these recreational and educational technologies that Webster hopes Ark Alive will “eventually lead people to Jesus.” The goals of Ark Alive mirror the goals of the HLE; both sites are evangelical tools intended to aid in Christian witnessing. It has yet to be seen whether or not this mode of evangelism will fair any better in the U.K. than it has in the U.S.
Historical Antecedents

These modes of witnessing—staged imaginations of the Christian narrative—are not unique to our time. In *Imagining the Holy Land*, Burke Long eloquently describes several of the more prominent creations, including Chautauqua Institute and the “New Jerusalem” exhibit at the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair. In the nineteenth century, the Chautauqua Institute in western New York was host to one of the first incarnations of an imagined, three dimensional Holy Land in the United States. The Chautauqua Institute was designed as an educational facility anchored in immersive pedagogy and intended for training Sunday school teachers. After its opening in 1874, the Institute quickly became a popular recreational destination where visitors could amble through a scale model of Jerusalem and partake in “Biblical entertainments.”

The Jerusalem Exhibit at the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair also offered visitors an opportunity to stroll through the streets of a Jerusalem model. Unlike the miniature model at Chautauqua, the Jerusalem Exhibit, which occupied eleven acres, was an almost full-sized version of Ottoman Jerusalem as it appeared in 1900. World’s Fairs were celebrations of the progress of modernity and advertised as educational and entertaining. The Jerusalem Exhibit was a testament to the achievements of modern Christianity where visitors could witness “the triumph of Christian civilization.” Chautauqua was conceptualized as a tool for witnessing and teaching Christians how to witness. Like Ark Alive and the HLE, the Jerusalem Exhibit and the Chautauqua Institute confound finite distinctions between educational and entertainment complexes, and between sacred and secular spaces.

More recently, and conceptually the closest relative of the HLE in the U.S., was Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker’s Heritage Village, USA. Consumer researchers Thomas O’Guinn and Russell Belk studied Heritage Village in 1987, subsequently publishing one of the few scholarly articles focusing on the site, “Heaven on Earth: Consumption at Heritage Village, USA.” The article details the landscape of the now defunct theme park and identifies the space as a “sacred pilgrimage site” where the Bakker’s successfully reconciled the “sacred” and “profane.” The Bakker’s, who originally partnered with the Crouch family to found the Trinity Christian Center and Trinity
Broadcasting Network, imagined and constructed a 2,300 acre $200 million resort that included a television studio that broadcast Praise the Lord ministry. Heritage Village, USA opened in 1978, and by 1986 was the third most popular theme park in the country, trailing Disney World and Disneyland. Like Disney World, Heritage Village contained a fantasy castle and a Main Street lined with shops. The site had replicas of Jerusalem, but the centerpiece was a five-acre water park that occasionally doubled as a giant baptismal. The Bakker’s preached the gospel of prosperity, the sacrilization of material acquisition, and Heritage Village embodied this gospel. According to O’Guinn and Belk, the physical center and center of congregation in Heritage Village was the shopping mall. What made Heritage Village highly controversial among Christians was the blatant emphasis on worshiping God through mass consumerism.

The Holy Land Experience, like Heritage Village, USA, is grounded in contemporary modes of consumption. Until its recent shift in administration, the HLE was not associated with the gospel of prosperity. What will prove interesting in the coming years is how various ideas about consumption and its relationship to the sacred will play out in the transitioning performances of faith at the HLE. Several contemporary scholars who are interested in convergences of religion and popular culture have probed the relationships between consumption, the sacred, and notions of authenticity at the HLE and offer useful insights into popular performances of faith.

**Reading into Religion and Authenticity**

I am not the first academic to find the Holy Land Experience strange and fascinating. Journalist and popular author Daniel Radosh published his first book, *Rapture Ready! Adventures in the Parallel Universe of Christian Pop Culture*, in April 2008. He devotes Chapter 2, “The new Jerusalem,” to recounting his daytrip to the HLE. Radosh is a self-proclaimed “liberal New York Jew in [his] mid-thirties” known for his witty contributions to periodicals such as *The New Yorker, GQ, The New York Times*, and *Playboy*. He was also recognized as a preeminent blogger by Time.com in 2008.\(^5\) Not only is his narrative about the HLE entertaining, it is also enlightening. Especially useful to my work is Radosh’s conversation with former HLE executive director Dan Hayden
(currently serving as the director of Sola Scriptura) who articulates the HLE as a postmodern project. Though Radosh avoids the academic jargon and theoretical intricacies of postmodernism (noting Hayden’s comments sounded “suspiciously like those French philosophers I tried to avoid studying in college”), his observations clearly situate the HLE within a postmodern paradigm. Postmodernism is a philosophical perspective that questions the grand narrative of human history as characterized by linear progress. Instead of this grand narrative of modern progress, postmodernism suggest that multiple narratives exists and that history is a subjective construction, rather than an objective Truth.

Several scholars have written about the HLE from various other perspectives, but none at length. Kristin Dombek, a theatre and performance scholar interested in popular expressions of evangelical Christianity, offers an analysis of the roles of live animals at the HLE (this was prior to the removal and relocation of those animals) in her article, “Murder in the Theme Park: Evangelical Animals and the End of the World.” Dombek is interested in “apocalyptic zooësis” as it manifests in popular evangelical culture. Apocalyptic zooësis (“zooësis” is a term coined by Una Chaudhuri designating the disciplinary intersection between animal studies and performance studies) theorizes what animals do in Christian apocalypticism: “the animals of evangelical performances and texts” reveal “the fatal humanism at the heart of Christian apocalypticism [and] show us that the apocalypticism that is too often at the heart of secular humanism can be fatally religious.” Evangelical animals function paradoxically, serving as a canvas on which humanity can be projected while signaling the “absolute difference between humans and animals.” Regarding the HLE, Dombek argues that the animals perform what she refers to as authenticity in a space of simulation. (I will return to the concept of authenticity and its applicability to the HLE momentarily). “In this surreal landscape,” observes Dombek, “sheeps, goats, and doves perform authenticity.” Their presence works to evoke the sense of authentic Jerusalem, anchoring visitors’ experiences in somatic engagement (the petting area and the mingling of smells and sounds), and references the necessary concept of sacrifice. Dombek notes, “the landscape is designed to simulate a real place” and the use of animals “give[s] the simulacrum the luster of authenticity” while bringing “tourists
closer than church ever did to the material reality of ritual killing.” The HLE simultaneously reveals and conceals the violence of the Biblical sacrificial system, involving visitors in performances of (in)visible violence.

Religious studies scholar Timothy Beal is also concerned with what the HLE does, what it performs. In his book, *Roadside Religion: In Search of the Sacred, the Strange, and the Substance of Faith*, Beal examines the HLE as a mode of “outsider religion,” meaning non-normative or “aberrant forms of religious expression” created by people “operat[ing] outside the formal institutions and values” of Christianity. Though he proclaims he will “take care to avoid the temptation to make fun or condescend” and “to take seriously as unique expressions of religious imagination and unique testimonials to the varieties of religious experience in America,” Beal reserves this respect for “homespun” creations engineered by individuals who exhibit what he considers “personal authenticity.” Beal does not, however, afford this same respect to the HLE because he interprets the HLE as a corporate entity concerned with profit. Beal’s assessment of his visit to the HLE is incomplete (as was his actual visit since he missed the crucifixion) and is firmly anchored in his repulsion for the site: “I think what repelled me most about the Holy Land Experience was its lack of authenticity.” He accuses the HLE of being dishonest and “lack[ing] personality and soul.” What is useful about Beal’s analysis is the centrality of issues of authenticity, issues which are at the heart of the controversy over defining the HLE’s identity and understanding visitorship.

Anthropologist Scott Lukas, editor of the anthology, *The Themed Space: Locating Culture, Nation, and Self*, is also concerned with authenticity and, in particular, how it is related to the cultural phenomenon of theming. Theming is the organization of an environment based on a specified narrative. Themed spaces offer visitors an opportunity to engage in narratives in an immersive environment. *The Themed Space* contains Lukas’ essay, “A Politics of Reverence and Irreverence: Social Discourse on Theming Controversies,” where Lukas mentions the Holy Land Experience to note how baffling the space is in terms of current discourses on themed spaces. He comments, “After I left the Holy Land Experience I had the reflection that I had just visited one of the best-themed venues that I had ever seen, and, yet, I could not connect to the theming.” He
marvels at his “inability to define” the space because “[i]t was not like a traditional themed venue”; “it presented elements that typically would not be found in other themed venues, and it did so in a very serious manner.” Lukas doesn’t really elaborate on these atypical elements except to note the “predominant narrative,” which he leaves unidentified, “carried throughout the park.” This narrative, which I identify as the narrative of Salvation by Grace (the story of human redemption via Jesus’ sacrifice), is achieved through a “pronounced progression,” a distinct ordering accomplished through the “timing and schedule of shows.” His judgment was that the HLE most closely “resembled an interactive site of worship.” In his effort to make sense of the space, Lukas stumbles directly into the crux of the public, legal, and philosophical debate as to the sacrality of the HLE. Does the HLE resemble a site of worship or is it a site of worship? Is the HLE themed as sacred, or is it an authentically sacred space?

Authenticity is a distinct theme in each of these works. Dombek, Beal, and Lukas use the term authenticity loosely, paying little attention to the complexity and contested nature of this concept. Each author uses the term to reference a perceived genuineness (or lack thereof) of the space. Dombek understands the role of animals as, in part, legitimizing agents whose presence creates verisimilitude between Biblical Jerusalem and the HLE. Beal measures the HLE’s authenticity against that of other, smaller locations. He believes the HLE lacks authenticity because it is associated with a larger organization and located in Orlando, and is therefore corrupted by commercialism. Lukas understands authenticity as a property achieved through strategic use of theming techniques. In all cases authenticity is understood as a quality that is either present or absent. Dombek comes closest to the notion of authenticity I will employ in this manuscript, referring to authenticity as the verisimilitude of the Biblical narrative achieved through the performances of the animals. In the following section I define authenticity as experiential, created through the process of engagement, and I demonstrate how a performative theory of authenticity is necessary to understanding the HLE.
Clarifying Authenticity

The HLE confounds strict frameworks of interpretation, troubling notions of authenticity by transgressing the increasingly ambiguous and often tenuous boundaries between sacred and secular, pilgrimage and leisure travel, and education and entertainment. Scholars from various disciplines have struggled for decades (centuries, in some instances) to understand humans’ encounters with and experiences of their worlds by distinguishing authentic from inauthentic, work from leisure, and sacred from secular or profane. These are all (false) dichotomies constituting moral hierarchies and influencing value systems. Authenticity is a highly contested theoretical concept often used to hierarchically designate landscapes, artifacts, and experiences. Since authenticity is a concept addressed throughout this manuscript, I would like to establish here what notions of authenticity I find useful for this project.

Is it useful to attempt to label the HLE as authentic or inauthentic? In “Transformation of Self in Tourism,” Edward Bruner identifies the concept of authenticity as a “red herring that serves to mystify rather than clarify many issues in tourism research.” The language of authenticity has historically been tied to the language of Truth and the Real. Theorists of travel and tourism have built scholarship upon the dichotomies authentic/inauthentic, sacred/secular, and work/leisure, often uncritically employing them as foundations for grand theories that caricature tourists as dupes who willingly consume the inferior artifice (in the case of Daniel Boorstin) or fall for the front-stage ploy (as suggested by Dean MacCannell). These theorists position authenticity as a fixed property of an object or location; an immutable characteristic that must be diligently sought, critically approached, and tentatively identified. None of these approaches to authenticity can provide anything more than cursory insights into the HLE and its visitors because HLE is a simulation.

Instead, I draw from the works of Edward Bruner and Tracy Stephenson Shaffer in developing a performative theory of authenticity applicable to this project. I am writing both a performance-centered and performer-centered analysis of the HLE. As such, I ascribe to an experiential, performative theory of authenticity, “understanding the concept as a social construction the meaning of which varies with different people, at different
times, and in different places." As Bruner observes, "The problem with the term authenticity, in the literature and in the fieldwork, is that one never knows except by analysis of the context which meaning is salient in any given instance." Thus, it is necessary to employ ethnographic case studies such as this one.

Bruner, in taking postmodernist theories of authenticity derived from Jean Baudrillard and Umberto Eco to task (for asserting that the Real no longer exists, thus there can be nothing authentic), posits what he terms a constructivist perspective of authenticity that locates the meanings of authenticity in social practice. Meaning is emergent in the engagements between individual(s), texts, and contexts. Ultimately, Bruner wishes to "abandon the distinction" between original and copy, authentic and inauthentic. Referencing cultural studies scholar Arjun Appadurai (1986), Bruner argues these distinctions are technologies of power employed to garner and assert power: whose voice is privileged and determines what is authentic? Debates over authenticity (and thus, legitimacy) are struggles for the right to interpret culture and history. Inevitably, both the authentic and the inauthentic are "constructions of the present." So it is more productive to ask, "Who believes this place is authentic and why?" rather than, "Is this place authentic?"

Like Bruner, performance studies scholar Tracy Stephenson Shaffer locates authenticity in the process of engagement. Writing about her backpacking trip through Europe, Stephenson Shaffer argues for the relevance of performer-centered analysis to studies of tourism and to understanding authenticity as experience. "[A]uthenticity," she asserts, "is not found in objects or places, but in the body and its interactions and contexts." Specifically, Stephenson Shaffer makes claims to knowledge based on her "body in space." Further, she theorizes authenticity as performance: "authenticity is . . . constructed by 'appropriate' performances of the phenomenon sanctioned by the participants of the backpacking subculture." Extrapolating her argument to analysis of the HLE, authenticity becomes salient not in the sense of the geographical location, but as a means of evaluating performances of faith, spiritual devotion, and religiosity. And so, my questions in this project are: How does the HLE perform faith and Christianity? How
do visitors interpret these performances, as well as engage in performances of their own? What does authenticity mean in relation to these performances?

In the following chapters of this manuscript, I will employ the concept of authenticity as I have outlined it here (processual and experiential) to speak to my own experiences as researcher, pilgrim, and tourist, as well as to the performances of the site. How does authenticity factor into the legal battle over the nonprofit designation of the HLE? What does authenticity mean in regards to the rhetorical construction of the HLE as a museum? Does the live performance of the crucifixion provide a means of establishing an authentic connection between the visitor and her theology? What constitutes an authentic experience of the sacred in a site marked by secularity?

The Secular/Sacred Binary

In order to begin to understand how the HLE functions as both a secular and sacred space, it is necessary to mention the history of thought that has bifurcated secular from sacred. The Enlightenment, Western dualism (body/mind), and modern rationality spawned the division and subsequent opposition of secular and sacred: that which has to do with the world and that which transcends the world. Religious scholar R. Laurence Moore asserts in his book, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture*, that differentiating between the secular and the sacred has become particularly difficult in contemporary American culture, even though the binaries of church and state are sanctioned by the constitution. Moore highlights the strengths of this binary system, including the acceptability of religious diversity, but argues this promotion of diversity has historically relegated religion to the private sphere of individual choice, restricting the presence of religious dialogue in public spaces. Many scholars who have studied religiosity have supported this theoretical binary, reifying seventeenth and eighteenth century denotations of the sacred and profane as religious and secular.

Inquiries into religion and culture by several contemporary scholars challenge the validity of what they believe to be a false dichotomy. These scholars intend to broaden the scope of the sacred to include icons, rituals, and personalities associated with popular culture. Conrad Ostwalt seeks a more practical understanding of the relationships
between religion and popular culture, specifically taking Peter Berger’s “secularization thesis”—as society becomes more secularized, religion will become unnecessary and vanish—to task. If the institutionality of religion is waning, that does not suggest religion is disappearing. Rather, a shift in religious authority is occurring. Secularization disrupts the locations of spiritual authority in religious institutions, allowing religion and spirituality to move into other arenas. Instead of religion disappearing as the general population becomes more secularly oriented, Ostwalt believes that religion and popular culture exist in a “tandem codependency.” Religion is reliant upon popular culture and vice versa. In a secularized society, religion must embrace popular forms of culture consumed by “the masses” if religion intends to maintain and expand influence. Popular culture must somehow appeal to “the masses’” needs for fulfillment and transcendence associated with spirituality. This tandem codependency is evident in the manifestations of Christianity in various media outlets, as well as in the generic, commercialized spirituality currently linked to the health and wellness industries. This muddling of the boundaries between religion and popular culture further complicates distinctions between sacred and secular. How can we identify something that is authentically sacred in this muddled mess? Only by understanding authenticity and sacrality as fluid identities achieved through performance. The HLE is a manifestation of Ostwalt’s tandem codependency: the HLE relies on characteristics it shares with secular entertainment venues to draw an audience, and that audience is then subject to the educational and ministerial purpose of the site. Performances of faith at the HLE invest the hybrid site with sacredness and authenticity.

Theories of cultural interdependency coincide with David Chidester’s discussion of the plasticity of religion. Religions that survive and remain relevant are protean in nature, adapting to the changing culture. Chidester references Edward Alsworth Ross’ analysis of “solid” versus “plastic” systems of religion, seemingly accepting Ross’ classifications of “the great monotheisms of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,” as solids “which have each developed fixed dogmas and rituals forming a structure that is rigid, resistant to change.” Cults and virtual religions conform more to what Chidester and Ross would consider plastic religions: systems “able to survive profound social changes
by transforming itself into something new.” Contrary to Ross and Chidester, I would contend that Christianity is also plastic, thriving for thousands of years. Its adherents have adapted the system to the cultural context, as exemplified in the nineteenth-century leisure movement, as well as contemporary postmodern sites like the Holy Land Experience.

*Strange Bedfellows: Postmodernism and the Christian Master Narrative*

A remarkable adaptation of the Christian system that proves its plasticity is the adoption and mainstreaming of postmodern theory by some Christian leaders. This is remarkable because the premises of postmodernity—the rejection of a grand narrative for multiple, subjective narratives—would seem to contradict the foundations of Christianity in the master narrative of Salvation by Grace. And yet, some Christian leaders, including individuals related to the HLE, espouse affiliations with postmodern theory. Before discussing this contemporary phenomenon of Christian postmodernism, I will first provide a brief background on postmodern theory.

Postmodern social theorists vary in their perspectives on postmodernism and its implications. In general, postmodern theory suggests knowledge is de-centered and fragmented. The “grand narratives” of Western civilization (especially Enlightenment rationalism’s social and intellectual progress) are subject to questioning and contestation. History no longer exists as a fixed, knowable past. Rather, it is a fluid and mutable process better understood through historiography, the study of how history is conceptualized and told. Our post-industrial, media-saturated society is characterized by whole-sale commodification of culture. Some postmodern theorists offer a decidedly nihilistic reading of the postmodern human condition. Jean Baudrillard, Guy Debord, and Fredrick Jameson see a world defined by commercial culture, characterized by shallow surfaces dancing with “floating signifiers” and lives emptied of meaning. They see a world disintegrating in the shadows of ontological uncertainty; in essence, a crisis of faith in the existence of meaning.

Not all theorists of postmodernity are quite so pessimistic. Ihab Hassan points to the possibilities created by postmodernism. History is not dead; it is rejuvenated—
reinvigorated by voices previously excluded from elitist discourses that determined the Truth of the past. The fragmentation of postmodernism, which disrupts the progress of narratives and the narrative of Progress, encourages “Open, discontinuous, improvisational, indeterminate, or aleatory structures” of investigation and expression.\footnote{97} Intertextuality is valuable for deep inquiry, and bricolage and pastiche become venerated forms of experiencing and writing about the world. Rather than losing the ability to engage in critical engagement (as suggested by Baudrillard), postmodernism is marked by self-reflexivity, questioning, and the collision of seemingly disparate discourses in generative ways. Postmodernism is valuable because it challenges generalizations and essentialization of knowledge and experience established from the perspective of normative masculinity intrinsically tied to Enlightenment rationalism.

It is this challenge of grand narratives and of the essentializing of Truth and the Real that would seem to position postmodernism at odds with Christianity. Radosh briefly reviews literature written by contemporary Christian scholars who address postmodernism. William D. Romanowski, author of *Eyes Wide Open: Looking for God in Popular Culture* and an evangelical professor of Communication Arts and Sciences at Calvin College, believes that “postmodern pluralism” offers a more “open” perspective for understanding and talking about Christianity today.\footnote{98} He believes that postmodernity offers a place for Christianity in public discourse and encourages Christians to forsake the modern adversarial tone of evangelicalism (a master narrative: “This is what we believe and it’s true. Take it or leave it.”) for a postmodern perspective that invites dialogue (multiple narratives: “This is what life looks like from our perspective. What do you make of it?”).\footnote{99}

Also resisting the either/or dichotomy of modern Christianity are Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor, authors of *A Matrix of Meanings: Finding God in Pop Culture*.\footnote{100} Detweiler and Taylor find postmodern popular culture refreshing and necessary to understanding contemporary human experience. Most notably, the authors identify pop culture as “revolutionary” and subversive, providing an “alternative route to a Jesus who for many has been domesticated, declawed and kept under wraps.”\footnote{101} They characterize
Jesus as a revolutionary and a storyteller who employed modes of communication relevant to his time and place:

He developed his theological approach within the marketplace. . . . Pop culture is our marketplace—the arena we visit daily to encounter issues of life and death, to discover what it means to be human, to hear the questions society asks, to meet God. The marketplace cannot (and must!) inform our theology.

Because of its foundations in popular culture, its employment of spectacle and deployment of synaesthetic technologies, the HLE exists comfortably within a postmodern framework. Former HLE executive director Dan Hayden identifies the HLE as a postmodern project offering visitors a mode of experiencing the Bible that jives with contemporary cultural emphasis on somatic knowledge. Hayden’s postmodernism is chosen for ease of use, conceptual elasticity, and current cultural capital. Yet, the nuggets of postmodern theory are there:

Because we’re living in a postmodern world where people are very sensory, they’re not so much interested in the cerebral aspects of things: they want to feel it. . . . The simulation [of Biblical history] helps you realize that Jesus was a real person, he really did die. So that enhances the understanding and turns it from a theological understanding to an experiential one.

The express goal here is to augment theological knowledge with knowledge acquired through the body via simulation. Hayden believes visitors are seeking the “reality” of their faith through a physical relationship with a simulation.

The Implications of Simulation

Jean Baudrillard theorizes simulation and simulacrum as endemic in the postmodern process of engagement and meaning-making. In Simulacra and Simulation, Baudrillard theorizes hyperreality, or a society of the simulacra, by addressing how societies employ certain forms of communication as formative and meaningful. Baudrillard believes, following Marshall McLuhan, that Western societies are increasingly confusing the medium and the message to the point that the medium is no longer identifiable as separate from, or other than, the message. In this collapse of
distinction, Baudrillard also sees the collapse of other distinctions (and the process and probability of distinction in general): “the distinction between cause and effect, between active and passive, between subject and object, between the end and the means.”

Polarities collapse into one another. Baudrillard writes,

[N]othing separates one pole from another anymore, the beginning from the end; there is a kind of contraction of one over the other, a fantastic telescoping, a collapse of the two traditional poles into each other: implosion . . . an implosion of meaning. That is where simulation begins (emphasis original).

The HLE is a site of hyperreality, where polarities are collapsed, the medium (performances of faith) is the message (perform faith). Baudrillard contends, “[N]o matter what domain . . . in which the distinction between these two poles can no longer be maintained, one enters into simulation.” Simulation, according to Baudrillard, is not pretending. Simulation is the performance of presence in the face of absence, thereby producing signs of that which is not there (or does not exist). Signs created in the performance of presence stand in for the absent thing; or as Baudrillard says, simulation is “substituting the signs of the real for the real.” In this way, simulation “threatens the difference between the ‘true’ and the ‘false,’ the ‘real’ and the ‘imaginary’.”

The significant difference between simulation and representation, as discussed by Baudrillard, is that representation is “a dialectical power, the visible and intelligible mediation of the Real.” In other words, representations do not replace or substitute a Real; they are a sign with a clear referent. An original exists to which the sign refers. Simulations, in contrast, are unanchored signs that refer only to themselves; signs for which no original exists (or can be traced). They are copies of copies of copies and so on.

Baudrillard’s theory of simulation offers potential insight into how visitors (or at least I) engage a site like the HLE. The HLE is a system of simulacra. The administration and a good majority of visitors would probably not understand or classify the HLE in this way, seeing it instead as a series of representations. The referent, of course, is the Bible; the Bible being a representation of God’s original Word. But the HLE is a simulation, the enactment of a story, a manifestation of human desire for redemption from our transgressions and salvation from death. It is a hyperreality. Baudrillard uses Borges’s
fable to explain hyperreality: “It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real.” The HLE substitutes performances of belief for belief. “It is thus that for guilt, anguish and death,” says Baudrillard, “there can be substituted the total joy of the signs of guilt, despair, violence and death.” It is thus that for faith, there can be substituted the signs of faith, the performances of faith.

Conclusion

While Postmodernism may seem as though it is simply the next master narrative in a linear progression of intellectual thought, it is itself highly contested and amorphous. Jean-François Lyotard asserts postmodernism does not chronologically follow modernism. There is not a specific, finite transition of eras. Instead, postmodernism exists alongside and within modern narratives. This simultaneity makes room for more complex understandings of postmodern religious expression, travel, and tourism and the inherent identity work that happens in these processes.

I feel an affinity for theories of postmodernity because I am not a linear thinker. My thoughts are fragmented and often filled with contradictions. I thrive on multiplicity and resist any single definition or claim to truth. Once bothered by the instability and ambiguity of liminality, I now find it liberating, filled with gaps and moments and fissures where possibilities sprout like weeds in the cracks of a sidewalk. Through a postmodern framework, I can stand in the midst of my research and breathe. And yet, postmodernism is no savior here. It proves problematic, both personally and theoretically. While the multiplicity of meanings enabled by postmodernism make room for my voice in this project, this multiplicity leaves me awash in an ocean of meaning that, due to its vastness, becomes meaningless. The fragmentation and alienation seemingly inherent in postmodernity compound the alienation I feel when faced with my lost faith.

I have stood in the midst of the Holy Land Experience more than fifteen times over the past two years and have inhaled the pungent odors of salty bodies and sweet jasmine. My lungs have been overcome by suffocating heat and humidity. I have smelled
the contradictions of smoked turkey legs and fake blood. I have breathed in the sweat of fanaticism, the acrid tensions of consumerism and fetishism, and savory moments of fleeting satisfaction.

This is a space of fragmentation and conflation, a dynamic system of meaning-making where identities are in constant (re)construction. It is a space of tourism, theatre, leisure, entertainment, education, history, technology, religion and spirituality, consumerism, nationalism, and fantasy. And each of these tropes is accompanied by specific discourses that find expression in and can illuminate the HLE as a meaningful phenomenon. As I have previously mentioned, this manuscript is not about religion, per se. I am not evaluating or making claims as to the appropriateness of performed expressions of religion, spirituality, and/or faith. Nor am I inclined to provide an exhaustive account of the history of religion in popular culture. That’s been done. What I am interested in is the lived experiences of playing in the both/and of the secular-sacred. I am interested in the power relationships inherent in representing and participating in the enactment of certain narratives of faith, belief, justice, punishment, sacrifice, violence, and love.

What I find most useful for this project is that postmodern theory provides a space for particularity, for examining subject positionalities and the complicated, dynamic processes of identity construction. In the subsequent chapters, I ask how theories of postmodernity can help us better understand people’s quests for the “real” and “authentic” inside a space of popular religiosity. How do people make sense of their experiences playing in the both/and of the sacred/secular? Can we find the sacred in a space of hyperreality and simulation? What do spaces like the HLE mean in contemporary society? How is the HLE used? What does it say? What does it do? What is being created in the interactions of visitors in and with this space? Ultimately, the HLE functions as a stage upon which visitors and site administrators alike perform the signs of faith.

Like the physical, spiritual, and intellectual journeys at the heart of this investigation, this manuscript is a process of engagement and a performance of faith (or more aptly, a performance of the signs of faith). With this in mind, I include selections
from my writings as a researcher, as well as writings from my personal life. Separating the two, making distinctions between my observations as an academic and as a woman living through a profound, intensely disturbing experience, became increasingly difficult as I moved through this process. Separating events and feelings based on their relevance either to this dissertation or to my personal revelations and growth as a human being became impossible. Thus, I have organized this manuscript as a performance of the sometimes competing, often confused, and always passionate voices that constitute my subjectivity. Each Chapter privileges my academic voice, offering analyses of the specific elements of the HLE. Most Chapters contain storied sections from my field notes, providing specific moments of experiences and observations that elucidate the issues addressed in that Chapter. Between Chapters—between the spaces in my life defined by my commitment to research, controlled by the conventions of academia—there are spaces of personal awareness, moments of significance that affect how I engage the world. These spaces manifest in this document as Interludes. Some of the Interludes are derived from field notes, others from a personal journal I kept as I stumbled through this process. All of these writings are intricately connected to my understandings of the HLE as a site where faith is performed. They are also performances of faith—my faith in the process of becoming (a scholar, a seeker, a believer).

In Chapter 1, “Genesis,” I laid the groundwork for this endeavor, hinting at my own fascination while sketching a theoretical framework and method of inquiry through which I will analyze the HLE. In Chapter 2, “‘I Tell You the Truth’: Museum Status and the Educational Imperative,” I examine the controversy surrounding the HLE’s identity as a nonprofit organization. The HLE claims to be a museum, whereas county tax officials argue that it is an entertainment. I argue the HLE is an edutainment complex, which does not preclude it’s tax-exempt status, and situate the HLE’s identity within a discussion of the structure and function of museums in postmodernity. In Chapter 3, “In Situ,” I analyze the HLE’s design using contemporary Museology, specifically focusing on how visitors interact with performative display practices like those employed in the Scriptorium. Chapter 4, “Heritage, Identity, and a Christian Homeland,” continues the discussion of museum design broached in Chapter 3, focusing on the HLE as a themed
space and a heritage site. I argue that the HLE functions as a heritage site offering visitors a means of physically engaging with an imagined past and publicly participating in the narrative of Salvation by Grace. In Chapter 5, “And the Word was Made Flesh,” I discuss the relationship between theatre, performance, and religion in the United States, focusing on the development of Passion plays in the twentieth century. I assert that visitors become actors in the HLE’s Passion drama, *Behold the Lamb*. Chapter 6, “In the Beginning,” closes this project by linking my personal experiences with faith, love, sacrifice, and punishment with larger sociocultural issues of violence.
It’s been months; many, many months since I’ve written anything significant. I love this project. It interests me, fascinates me, and haunts my waking moments. Why can’t I get it on paper, or more precisely, the flat screen staring back into my frustrated eyes? I plead with the screen, Give me something. Anything, really. Just a word. Help me find the answer. Help me find the way.

I seek answers in everything I see and touch. I’ve bought trinkets, kitsch creations that poke fun at my obsession: Jesus the Son of God Tales of Glory figurine, complete with a wide-eyed little boy and his basket of fish. Stacy left a Grow Jesus (“because he is awesome!”) in my office mailbox. He remains in his package, pristine hands reaching out to me. I can grow my own Jesus whenever I want, but right now he remains stunted inside his plastic wrapping. Parachute-Jesus donning his story-book backpack sits prominently on the poorly-mounted white wall-shelf, positioned over my printer—the symbol of completion, text to page.

I seek answers in everything.

* * * * *

Rick and I and Joe and Sapph sit on the living room floor playing games. We finish Cranium and look for another. Sapph wants to play with the tarot cards I bought at Goodwill several months ago. I am reluctant. I remind myself of Brianne’s warning:
You’re not supposed to mess with or take lightly the Tarot.
Rick does Joe’s reading. Joe does Rick’s reading. They joke and goof and only semi-pay attention to the meanings of the cards. I read for Sapph, paying close attention to the cards. She is serious.

I feel the cards in my hands. I imagine I can feel the energy.

Then it’s my turn. I shuffle the deck and cut it multiple times. I am thinking of my question: *How will the next six months of dissertation writing go?*

I hand the cards to Sapph and as she begins to lay them in the Question-and-Answer Spread, I quickly revise my question: *What lay in store for me over the next three months of dissertation?*

The cards have been laid. Sapph turns the first card in the sequence, the card representative of the past.

**Card XV, The Devil** (Key words: struggle, decisions, manipulation, potential)

We all gasp in surprise. Rick and I look at each other and acknowledge the relevance of the card: my past, my fascination with this morbid topic, my mother. The Devil warns of struggle and symbolizes the conflict of opposites. Game on.

“You are tied to a commitment that is enslaving you, but it is your perception of this situation that allows it to continue in a way that is ultimately unsatisfying. A financial agreement, relationship, or career commitment has become imprisonment rather than liberation. Follow your higher instincts and protect your long-term future. In one jump, you can be free.”

In one jump, I can be free.

Is this no longer a game? Maybe it never really was. My gut is now tied to the moment, anticipating the next card. The journey has begun.
We all sit rapt in the pulsing energy that moves inside and among our circle. Sapph flips the next card indicative of the present, the question at hand.

**The Page of Cups** (minor arcana\(^2\))

“The Page is governed by his feelings, so he is emotional, vital, and intuitive. The Page can be any age, so, in a reading, this card may represent a youthful attitude. However, this joie de vivre can belie insecurity. When this card portrays a situation or a person, support and reassurance are key issues.”\(^3\)

The question at hand: the progress of the dissertation. Emotional, vital and intuitive—the characteristics I resist including in this process. I am insecure. I want this dissertation to be meaningful, creative and inspired, but I fear the process. I doubt my ability to produce a beautiful text. I think it would be simpler to write the dry pages of dissertations past. But my mind revolts. I can’t keep myself off the page. Is this scholarship? Will I be accepted? Will I get a job?

The Page of Cups offers support and reassurance.

The Quest continues. The third card—hidden influences that must be considered:

**Card XXI, The World** (Key words: completion, birth, endings, beginnings)

“A successful outcome. When this card appears in a reading it can be taken as a life landmark, a key move in terms of your lifestyle, or an opportunity to discover new territory physically through traveling to new countries. One chapter of your life is closing; now it is time for the next adventure.”\(^4\)

The World is the final card in the tarot sequence. It is completeness and finality seeded with the new and birth. It symbolizes creation. The World gives birth and the cycle begins again.
Rick and I have just moved into our new apartment. We all sit in a circle on the floor because we don’t have furniture. This space is mammoth compared to the dark, smothering space of our old apartment. The light here is magnificent. I have been living in literal darkness for three years. Now, every room teems with the renewing energy of light. I am happy and free. Three years of darkness in the old apartment. Three years of metaphorical darkness in my Ph.D. program. Struggle and oppression and depression. Now, committed to the dissertation process, I can see the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel. I can see myself being birthed into a new life. I understand that my journey, my quest outside the text parallels my quest inside the text.

We sit in silence, in awe of the accuracy and profundity of revelation. Sapph flips the hinge card. It represents the attitudes of others around you.

**The Knight of Swords** (minor arcana)

“The Knight shows challenges on the horizon, and obstacles that need to be overcome. He represents the arrival of battles that are unavoidable if progress is to continue.”

Unavoidable battles. Rick is so close to finishing his degree, but here we are, again, faced with his inability to complete a math class. It’s his final class, a challenge for us both. Challenges, obstacles, and battles. This is the hinge card.

We continue. Next, the best action to take.

**Seven of Cups** (minor arcana)

“The Seven of Cups indicates great potential and creativity, and the importance of achieving a dream. You need to be sure that offers you accept will lead to fulfillment and not the undoing of your hard work. Naturally, confusion threatens to mar your judgment. Go with your first instincts.”
Persevere. Fight. Continue. If we can face the challenges, overcome the obstacles (The Devil and The Knight of Swords), and win the battle, the dream is in reach. It is my dream. I want to write creatively and live a comfortable and fulfilling life as a professor. I want Rick to finish his degree and put that obstacle behind us. It all feels so close. It’s right on the other side of the hinge. (An invisible obstacle: in the narcissism of the dissertation process, I forget to think about what Rick wants.)

The mood is marked by excitement, anticipation, and expectation. We are so close to the outcome. Can the cards stay the course? Will it all fall apart at the end, leaving us in disappointed exhaustion? Will it turn back into “just a game”?

The second to last card indicates Obstacles in my path.

Card XVII, The Star (Key words: Vigor, new life, happiness, imagination)

She’s beautiful and is abundant with energy. She seduces me.

“The Star shows a naked woman by water pouring from two pitchers. The stars around her signify imagination and ambition, and the water represents creativity and rebirth, symbolized by the number of the card, XVII.”

Meaning:

“A new start and wonderful new energy and opportunities surround you. This is a fortuitous card for those starting out on projects or relationships, as it indicates a brilliant combination of conscious and unconscious creativity. This is shown on the card by water flowing onto the ground and into the pool. On a practical level, it indicates that you feel energized emotionally and physically, ready to make your dreams a reality.”

Hmmm. The obstacles are behind me? No more obstacles! But the circle of friends won’t allow this. They shake their heads.

“No.” Joe says, “Read the reversed meaning.”

“But the card is not reversed,” I insist.
“But the position of the card is an obstacle in your path. This suggests the reversed meaning.”

We have known nothing of tarot until this moment. Now, here, it’s as if we are a collective, as if we have been tapping into this force all of our lives and intuitively know the process of directing and interpreting this energy.

They all agree. We must read the reversed meaning.

Reversed Meaning:

“A turning away from potentially good opportunities; creative blocks. The star reversed can also mean living entirely in a dream world with unrealistic expectations that get you nowhere. Equally, this card can advise you to watch out for people appearing to reach for the stars. Don’t be enchanted by weavers of dreams.”

A turning away. Creative blocks. Unrealistic expectations. Nowhere. This is where I am. I am living in a creative block. I have unrealistic expectations of myself and this process. I am spinning my wheels in a motionless race. I am surrounded by peers who appear to be reaching for the stars, surpassing me; overshadowing me in their quest for success.

This is where I am.

We look at each other and take deep breaths. The final card: the outcome. Will it now fall apart and leave us disenchanted? Will the spell be broken? Will it all be meaningless?

Sapph touches the final card. It ends this journey. It is the only reversed card in the series. We know it must be meaningful.

Card IX, The Hermit (Key words: inner knowledge, separation, perspective, individualism)

We exhale.
“Journeying in darkness, the solitary Hermit appears bereft and outcast. Yet his lamp illuminates his path so that although he has chosen to be separate, he can see clearly the road ahead. The Hermit is numbered IX and, like The Fool, is embarking on a quest, but for the Hermit the traveling is within.”

Reversed Meaning:

“The Hermit reversed shows obstinacy and a refusal to face certain problems that you know have been partly created by your own attitude. Resist the temptation to display anger and resentment, and look for meaningful solutions rather than avoidance tactics.”

_The quest. I am living on the edge of change._
The sun is relentless. Rick and I ease our way towards the little bit of cover offered by the textile display tent to the left of the Judean Village stage. The Judean Village is the worst performance venue in the park because there isn’t any shade. Several dozen rough-hewn wooden benches are nestled in the pale sand offering seating for the audience, but no respite from the August heat. We are here to see the Ministry of Jesus, a performance I have yet to witness in its entirety. Besides the crucifixion, this is the only other performance that features Jesus.

We stand close together, trying to make room for the other over-heated bodies vying for even a scrap of the shade. Two women stand next to us, close enough that we bump elbows.


“Oh, hello,” says the shorter, older woman. “Yup, crowded.” She looks around, then back to me. “I’m Cora. This is my friend Alita.”

Cora and Alita are red-faced and glistening with perspiration. Alita looks exhausted, but Cora fidgets, a bundle of energy and anticipation. She bubbles over.

“It’s a hot one today. I can’t believe there’s no shade,” she says as she motions to the benches. Cora is petite, somewhere between four and five feet tall. She reminds me of my grandma Demorest, all white hair and fragile skin. At eighty-two years of age, Cora is fire and brimstone. “Why don’t they put any of those benches over here? Here, in this little bit of shade.”

Alita, sixty-one, is far more subdued. Her blotchy red skin attests to her unfamiliarity with the harsh climate. Noticing their pale skin, so easily sunburned, I figure Cora and Alita are from the north. I ask.
“Ohio,” says Alita. Then she turns to Rick and asks, “Maybe we could move one of those benches over here?”

Ricks agrees and they make their way to one of the seats situated on the outskirts of the audience.

“Is this your first time here?” I ask Cora.

“No. I was here four years ago.” She looks at my badge. Wendy, my HLE liaison, determined that I should have what for all intents and purposes looks like a staff identification badge so that I can pass security without hassle and park in the staff parking lot. I am supposed to wear it when at the site, but have felt self-conscious doing so. I can’t pass as a regular visitor with it on. This is a case in point.

“Do you work here?” Cora asks.

“No. I’m a student at the University of South Florida down in Tampa. I’m working on a research project about the Holy Land. The administration gave me this badge,” I say as I self-consciously begin to remove the badge from my shirt.

Cora nods her head as she scans the audience. She’s fidgety and I try to regain her attention.

“May I ask you some questions about your experience here?”

“Oh. Yes. Sure.” She’s not looking at me, but I continue.

“Have you visited other parks in the area?” I ask.

“Mmmmmmmmm. The Wycliffe Bible Translators.”

“How about Disney?”

“Ackkk. No!” Now I have her full attention. Her face is wrinkled up like she just tasted something sour. Her grimace deepens. “There is something more important for Christians.” Cora is visibly disgusted by the mention of Disney, but then her face softens and she concedes, “I haven’t been there. I won’t go there, but maybe I would like Epcot. I don’t know. There are other Biblical sites in this area, like Campus Crusaders. These are places for Christians to come.”

Alita and Rick return empty handed after being chided by a park attendant. Visitors are not allowed to move the benches. Cora quickly tells Alita I’m an intern, “She
wants to do what you do! Tell her what you do, Alita.” Alita looks puzzled and mentions something about being a clown and working in her church.

“No, no. What you do,” Cora corrects.

“You mean as director of programming?” Alita is only half interested in the conversation. She keeps eyeing the benches. Her physical discomfort seems to be increasing.

“Yes, yes. She’s director and knows about running parks like this,” says Cora. I nod that I understand, but am wondering at Cora’s interpretation of what I said about my project. She motions for me to tell Alita my spiel.

“Oh, well, that’s interesting,” Alita says after my two-minute synopsis. Her focus immediately returns to a futile attempt at battling the heat with her make-shift pamphlet fan.

I look at my watch. “The program should start any minute. It’s not that long, either.”

She looks at me as she begins to vigorously fan herself. “I’m so glad I wore this,” indicating her casual outfit.

“It was a good choice,” I say as I note her white, sleeveless eyelet shirt and her simple white shorts.

“I didn’t really know what to wear, what would be appropriate. I tried to use my discretion, but I wanted to be cool. If I had worn fancy clothes I would melt.”

“Look!” shouts Cora, pointing emphatically. “Look!”

Jesus is walking towards us and our conversation ends.

During the performance, Cora can’t seem to hold still. She grabs Alita and pushes her forward into the sun and closer to the stage. As more people crowd the stage to hear Jesus speak, I lose sight of the women. I forgot to have them sign the IRB release forms!

When the presentation ends, I scan the waning crowd and finally spot Cora’s bright blue tropical shirt. They had moved the short distance from the Judean Village theatre to the Tomb, where the khaki-clad, clean-cut HLE version of Indiana Jones is ready to start his Garden Tomb presentation. Cora and Alita stand without the benefit of
shade at the front of the slowly amassing audience. I want to take notes about our encounter, so Rick and I stay in our sheltered location.

When the fifteen-minute presentation ends, the audience dutifully files down into the Tomb. Cora and Alita are among them. Rick and I weave our way through the lethargic crowd and manage to catch up with the women.

I ask Cora if she wouldn’t mind signing the IRB so that we can use her comments. She grins and grabs the pen, quickly scratching her name onto the paper and picking up our conversation where we left off.

“Forget Disney! Christians need to come here!” I wouldn’t have thought it possible, but Cora seems to be even more energized. Alita, in comparison, appears ready to faint.

We show Alita where Behold the Lamb is listed on the daily agenda.

“I wonder if the HLE’s production will be like my church’s musical cantata? It’s called Behold the Lamb, too,” says Alita. “Oh! The performance isn’t until five o’clock! I don’t know if we’ll make it. This heat is awful. I don’t know if we’ll be able to hold up.”

Alita looks exhausted and red, but Cora is animated and healthy. As we talk to Alita for a minute, Cora goes into the Tomb. Moments later she emerges with two young people. Zandra and Ballmer are twenty-something newlyweds from Mississippi finishing their week-long honeymoon. Zandra has a large pile of mission tracts in her hand and gives one to Cora explaining they are in Spanish, but the address of their church is on the back. Cora smiles and bursts into a stream of Spanish conversation.

Alita turns to Rick and me and explains, “Cora is a teacher and a preacher.”

Looking at Cora, I can’t help but smile. She is reading the tract aloud—in Spanish.

Alita turns her attention to Ballmer, “Are you in the ministry?”

“Well,” says Ballmer as he shifts his weight from side to side, “Jesus says we are all in the ministry. We all must spread the word.” He doesn’t seem comfortable with the question.

Alita chuckles uneasily and says, “Well, of course. But I mean are you a pastor? Are you . . .”
As she searches for appropriate words, the pause becomes awkward.
“Working in the church professionally?” I offer.

Ballmer relaxes a bit and quickly answers, “We are in the choir. God has placed us in the choir for the moment. We await our direction from the Lord.”

Alita, satisfied with his answer, nods her head and says, “Praise God!”

With that brief exclamation, the Godspeak begins. It’s been so long since I’ve been immersed in an environment where people converse in this vernacular. I am a bit lost. Rick stopped listening ages ago. I see the blank stare spread from his eyes to the rest of his face. He’ll be no help translating.

Suddenly, Cora announces, “Let’s pray together” and takes Zandra’s hand. “Let’s pray for Zandra and Ballmer and their new marriage.” They all step into a circle.

Rick and I, too, step into the circle.

“Dear Lord,” Cora begins, “bless these two newlyweds,” She speaks so quickly, with such confidence and command of the language of prayer. I cannot keep up with the many requests for blessings.

She finishes, “and Lord, please bless this place, the Holy Land Experience. Let it grow and bless it. Amen.”

We break apart, our sweaty hands dropping once again to our sides, the brief physical and visceral connection severed. I am overwhelmed by the moment—the event—the surprise and intensity. I didn’t pray. I stood linked to these strangers, feeling an electric sensation, dizzy with the strangeness of the connection. I felt outside of myself. Not transcendent, really. Not spiritually fulfilled. Rather, like I had become permeable. I could not feel where I stopped and they began, where I stopped and the HLE began. The borders of my body, of my being, became fuzzy. My awareness of myself as bounded and separate returned as I let go of Alita’s hand.

Cora wants a picture “with the two young couples.” I stand in shock, like a zombie with a confused, distant smile. Alita snaps the shot with Cora’s camera and then takes another picture for Zandra. Later, I lament my bedazzled state and the missed opportunity to have Alita take a picture with our camera. I would have liked to have had a
picture of the people with whom I participated in this moment of spontaneous community, this occasion of communitas.

At the moment, the conversation turns somehow to “non-believers” (Cora’s term). I believe Cora is extolling the wonderful nature of the HLE as a space that welcomes believers, and pitying non-believers that choose not to share this opportunity for communion.

Still recovering from the shared moment of prayer, I can barely keep up with the conversation. I think that Zandra is expressing how lucky we were to meet one another in this place and to share this event.

Cora laughs, “There’s no such thing as luck! We are blessed. God has blessed us today with one another’s companionship. It’s no coincidence that we met, because there’s no such thing as coincidences! It’s a God-incidence.” Cora pauses to allow her witty term to garner appreciation.

“Oh, I love that!” exclaims Zandra. “I will use it from now on, giving credit to you, of course. I wouldn’t want to infringe on your copyright.” She smiles and Cora beams back. This strange reference to ownership anchors me fully in the present, the hangover from the prayer circle now gone.

I turn to Rick and raise my eyebrow, smiling, but he doesn’t smile back. He looks pale and disgruntled. He tells me later how ostracized he felt during the entire escapade. The language was exclusive and while he couldn’t follow the entire conversation, he was able to glean the meaning, especially the implications concerning non-believers apparently expressed during the prayer, as well as afterwards. Rick didn’t experience prayer circle the way I did—as spontaneous connection, a performance of inclusion, as communitas. Instead, he felt unwelcome, excluded. Where my boundaries blurred, his became precisely defined.

Turning my attention back to the little group of quick-friends, I realize Zandra and Bellmer are saying their farewells. As they walk away, I thank Alita and Cora for participating in my research and wish them a safe journey home.

“God bless,” says Cora as she wraps me in a bearhug.
CHAPTER 2
I TELL YOU THE TRUTH:
MUSEUM STATUS AND THE EDUCATIONAL IMPERATIVE

A “Musement” Park

“How many of you folks have come here from out of town?” Walter Mabry stands center stage illuminated by a spotlight that trails his pacing form. Mabry, like all of the park’s lecturers, wears a khaki shirt and pants reminiscent of Indiana Jones’ archeological gear. Because we are inside the Shofar auditorium, Mabry has removed the trademark Fedora. He continues, “You’re not from Orlando or possibly even from Florida?” Then pauses and scans the crowd. More than half of the people seated in the darkened, partially full theatre raise their hands.

“Okay, well, I’m going to tell you something you probably didn’t know,” Mabry leans toward us as if to share a secret. “And that is,” dramatic pause, “that in Orlando there are a lot of amusement parks.”

We laugh at his feigned seriousness.

Mabry holds up his hand, cuing us to wait a minute. There’s more. He raises his eyebrows, looking truly conspiratorial. “What is an amusement park?”

The crowd quiets. He gleams at us with skepticism. He knows he’s got us. Mabry, now fully embodying his professor character, begins his lesson. “If we have to look at the word ‘muse,’ it’s actually a Greek word. The Greek word ‘muse’ means to think, to reflect, to meditate, okay?”

I poke Rick in the side and glance at him knowingly. Mabry fails to mention that the Greek word “muse” is a reference to Zeus’ daughters, the Muses. Of course Mabry won’t mention the term’s relation to mythology and pagan gods. That would undermine his credibility with this crowd. The credibility he’s striving to attain as he waxes intellectual. I wink at Rick, and he nods his head.
“So ‘muse’ means to think.” Mabry is on a roll now. Excitement saturates each word and quickens his pace. “Well, when you put the letter ‘a’ before it, it negates the word, so that the word ‘amusement’ means non-thinking, non-thinking, okay?”

The crowd collectively “Oh’s.”

“Now, let me say this, The Holy Land Experience is not an amusement park, a non-thinking park. It’s a ‘musement’ park where you are required to think, okay? So, I want you to think.” Mabry pauses and points to us. “I want you to think. Because what I would like to do is propose to you a theory about Hanukkah and Christmas. But in order to tell you how that theory fits together, I have to tell you about the festival or the feast of Hanukkah. And in order to do that, I have to give you some history.” Mabry pauses to take a breath and assess the interest of the crowd, to make sure that we follow his argument. He has our attention.

“Now, I always ask people—because I like honest people—how many of you do not like history?” He waits, searching for raised hands. “You can be honest with me,” he chuckles while he strolls the stage, hands clasped behind his back. Truly, he looks like my high school history teacher walking the isles between our desks, checking for cheaters. Ah, he finds one!

“Thank you, sir. I like an honest man.” The entire audience turns to look at the big man sitting in an aisle seat near the front. The woman with him reluctantly raises her hand, too, and tentatively smiles.

“I like to see a smile on your face. I’m thankful for that. I’m thankful for honesty.” Mabry looks at the rest of us. I have the distinct feeling we are being implicated. Apparently he thinks some of us are hiding our aversion to history. “Now, you two folks are the people that I’m going to be directing my remarks to because by the time I’m done I’m going to guarantee that you are going to like history. How about that?”

The audience bursts into applause.

“That’s my challenge, okay? But seriously, in all seriousness, we can learn a lot from history.”
An Educational Imperative

Walter Mabry is passionate about the educational imperative of the Holy Land Experience and believes it is necessary to school the audience by distinguishing the HLE from other Orlando attractions and theme parks. Why is Mabry so adamant? Why does he take the seriousness of the HLE so seriously? Because the HLE is a fascinating hybrid form of attraction, melding characteristics associated with museums, theme parks, and religious institutions. Its hybrid constitution leads to an ambiguous institutional identity. Traditional typologies of tourism, religious practice, and popular pedagogy are not sufficient when isolated from one another to understanding and analyzing the HLE. Yet attempts have been made by government officials to fit the HLE into a fixed identity category. My primary concern in this chapter will be to underscore the importance of the public debates about the identity of the Holy Land Experience through an analysis of the litigation over the HLE’s nonprofit status. Orange County officials attempted to define the HLE as an entertainment, a theme park. The HLE defines itself as educational, a museum. What certain state officials refused to concede is that entertainment and education are not and have never been mutually exclusive in popular culture.

Edutainment, a contemporary term often used to refer to forms of performance and display that merge the functions of education with amusement, is not a new phenomenon. The HLE can be understood as an edutainment venue—both museum and amusement park—and is closely related to its historical antecedents, including the Chautauqua Institute, the Jerusalem Exhibit at the 1904 World’s Fair, as well as early American museums which employed spectacle and theatricality to elicit patronage. The HLE also has much in common with contemporary museum exhibits whose legitimacy has not been questioned even though the curators employ edutainment techniques similar, and sometimes identical, to the techniques for which the HLE receives criticism and skepticism. I argue that the HLE is subject to these critiques because of its stated purpose: to witness.

I end this chapter with a discussion as to why I side with HLE administrators who successfully argued the site should be designated as a museum and hypothesize about the
implications this identity crisis had and continues to pose for visitors experiencing the site.

Identity Crisis

At the center of the controversies over the creation and presence of the Holy Land Experience are claims of identity. “Is it a church? Is it a museum? Is it a theme park? “What is it?” asked Bill Donegan.¹ Donegan is the Orange County Property Appraiser who, since 2001, made it his mission to challenge the HLE’s federal tax-exempt status. The HLE is now classified as a 501(c)(3) charitable organization, a distinction entitling the HLE to nonprofit organization status reserved for public charities, certain private foundations, and private operating foundations dedicated to educational, religious, or scientific purposes.²

Donegan argued the HLE is more closely aligned to a for-profit business model than a church or museum, stating, “It is a very well-done, thought-out religious theme park, but it is a business. It is not a religious use.”³ Dan Hayden, Executive Director of the HLE in 2006, countered, “This is an unusual Christian ministry. It’s not a church. It looks like a theme park and smells like a theme park. But we aren’t a theme park; we’re a ministry.”⁴ Liberty Counsel,⁵ a nonprofit law organization nationally recognized and known for representing “many notable clients, including Focus on the Family, Child Evangelism Fellowship, Dr. Jerry Falwell and the Christian Educators Association International,” represented the HLE in its efforts to maintain nonprofit status. Liberty Counsel chief attorney Erik Stanely argued, “The Holy Land Experience is a nonprofit ministry. Everything it does is geared toward the purpose of evangelization.”⁶

Four years of litigation resulted in a 2005 ruling by Circuit Court Judge Cynthia MacKinnon in favor of the HLE. It is, Judge MacKinnon decided, a “religious ministry entitled to the same tax-exempt status enjoyed by churches and museums.”⁷ Judge MacKinnon stated, “The property appraiser has failed to direct the court’s attention to any evidence that Plaintiff is using the Holy Land Experience to make money or for some other purpose than evangelizing and worshipping.”⁸ She continued, “The undisputed evidence before the court is that (Zion’s Hope) [the proprietor] is using the property to
spread what it considers to be God’s word to many people at one time. This is in contrast to Disney World’s and Anheuser-Busch’s use of their properties, Epcot and Sea World, respectively, which is indisputably to make money for the companies.”

County Property Appraiser Donegan argued that the profit orientation of the HLE is in part based on admission fees which were initially under $20 per person, but are now $35 for adults and $20 for children ages 6 to 12. Judge MacKinnon countered that many museums also charge admission. Donegan makes explicit the rhetorical dilemma: “I think Holy Land itself is religious, but I’m not convinced that it serves a religious purpose like a church. I guess we’re going to have to find out the definition of a church. When you charge $30 for admission, is that a church?” Frustrated Sen. Dan Webster (R – Winter Garden) attempted to curtail the debate by speaking to the press about the five-year court battle: “It is not predominantly used for profit-making. It is used for religious purposes. And I think it’s time to end it.”

Donegan immediately appealed Judge MacKinnon’s ruling, but the Legislature introduced two bills, SB 2676 and HB 7183, offering state tax exemptions to any organization already receiving federal tax exemption that display “aspects of Biblical history,” or that are “used for displays [regarding] Biblical history & Biblical worship.” The first of the bills, HB 7183, signed by Governor Jeb Bush on June 9, 2006, and effective July 1, 2006, states organizations which “exhibit, illustrate and interpret Biblical manuscripts, codices, stone tablets or other Biblical archives” qualify for property tax exemption. The HLE’s Scriptorium reportedly boasts one of the “world’s top collections of religious artifacts and ancient Bibles,” clearly positioning the HLE under the umbrella of this bill. As it now stands, the HLE is the only Florida property eligible for this bill’s protection, making it clear that the bill was written specifically for the HLE.

The bill HB 7183 was the HLE’s financial salvation. According to 2004 IRS reports, the HLE garnered 8.7 million in total revenues, but 9.2 million in total expenditures. Matt Staver, legal counsel for Zion’s Hope and representative of the HLE in this case, noted that donations contribute to the site’s economic stability, covering expenses and overhead. He likened these contributions to church tithes. Even with the
contributions of patrons, if the HLE had been forced to pay back five years worth of federal income taxes, which amounted to $786,000, combined with yearly property taxes estimated at $215,000, the site would have been forced to close.\textsuperscript{20} The HLE’s financial viability and long-term survival depends on its continued ability to prove its institutional identity as a nonprofit organization.

\textit{To What Purpose?}

This argument over identity has very practical, material ramifications, not the least of which is the financial viability of the site. Issues that emerge in this public discourse center around ontological and epistemological questions. What is religion? What is ministry? What does it mean to worship? What does it mean to educate? What constitutes knowledge? What does a church look like or feel like? What is the purpose of this space? Who gets to make these designations? “I still believe today,” said Donegan in September 2006 after HB 7183 became effective, “that though it’s very religious, it’s a religious theme park, not a religious entity. What does the Holy Land provide? Goliath burgers.”\textsuperscript{21}

Questions about what the HLE provides to visitors also plagued founder Marv Rosenthal. The HLE’s increasing similarity to secular theme parks disturbed Rosenthal, and he parted from the HLE after disagreements about the identity of the park. Rosenthal was dedicated to a vision of the HLE as a ministry and was ideologically opposed to marketing the site as a leisure attraction. As the HLE was in the process of winning public and legal recognition as a religious and educational facility, Rosenthal was packing his bags because he believed the HLE was losing its quintessential identity as a ministry. But what is a ministry? According to the \textit{Oxford English Reference Dictionary}, a ministry is a government office (Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Tourism) or a religious office (pastor, priest).\textsuperscript{22} A ministry is a tool for ministering, which is defined as broadly as to “furnish” and “supply.” Even in the definition of the term “minister,” sacred and secular, church and state are conflated. Denotatively, there are no restrictions on how ministering is accomplished or what is ministered.
Rosenthal locates the term “ministry” within a theological framework that includes witnessing, spreading the word of God; it is a sacred, not secular, activity. Though Rosenthal was obviously willing to blur the sacred/secular binary when designing the HLE, he values the distinction when it comes to the purpose of the site. The purpose, according to Rosenthal, must be sacred, which includes ministry and not marketing. The double-bind is that to be a successful ministry, at least in the situation of the HLE, successful marketing campaigns are necessary. Successful marketing campaigns appeal to the largest possible audience. The board of directors understood this balance and recruited new members to the management team, individuals like Bob Montgomery who had experience working on the board of directors of theme parks. This new management team immediately identified the absence of marketing as the key issue hindering the HLE’s success, and set out to remedy this absence of advertising.

Herein lies the rub, at least for Rosenthal. Scripture dictates that Christians must not act or appear as of the world. Yet Rosenthal’s affinity for an evangelical interpretation of Christian doctrine allows him to embrace certain contemporary and popular technologies to achieve his purpose: winning souls to Christ. But his purpose cannot be compromised by worldly desire for money and wealth. Christians must sacrifice as Jesus sacrificed. I can recall hearing in my childhood that it is more difficult for a rich man to get into heaven than it is to lead a camel through the eye of a needle.\(^{23}\) For Rosenthal, the boundaries between sacred and secular are fluid in terms of mode, but must be acknowledged and maintained in regards to purpose. Ministry must have a sacred directive.

Rosenthal, the HLE’s board of directors, and Donegan each imagined their own criteria for how ministering should be accomplished. The board of directors believed that savvy business management was necessary to sustain the ministry and so implemented marketing strategies influenced by other secular attractions. Condemning its mode, Donegan attempted to classify the HLE as an amusement more akin to secular entertainments such as Disney. Rosenthal appears to have sided with Donegan to some degree, leaving the HLE in part because he believed it was becoming too focused on
marketing. However, in each case the criteria as to what can count as ministry and the subsequent boundaries these individuals attempted to create were tenuous at best.

Doengan’s argument, in particular, is convoluted and often contradictory. His claims hinge on the fact that the HLE is a business. It is commercial and in Donegan’s formulation commercial businesses cannot be religious entities. Businesses are places of trade and work, whereas religious entities (like churches) are spaces of what? Donegan doesn’t have a handle on the latter. He vehemently states that the HLE is “a business. It is not a religious use,” but never defines what religious use means. In fact, his other statements point to his confusion. He classifies the HLE as “very religious” but questions the purpose of the site. Donegan’s statements suggest his frustration with the ambiguous nature of the HLE. It is un categorizable, not fitting neatly into preconceived typologies. This ambiguity troubles the seemingly clear, bounded categories recognized by the law.

Donegan’s dilemma is reminiscent of the distinctions academics attempt to make between pilgrimages—traditionally understood as sacred travel—and religious tourism—a form of mass travel to sacred places (see Chapter 4 for further discussion). The distinctions are ultimately about preserving the categories of sacred and secular, which reaffirm hierarchies associated with elite/popular (travel/tourism) and work/leisure (righteous/hedonistic). By classifying the HLE as a business that is part of a commercial realm, Donegan associates the HLE with work and labor, with the economy, a matter of everyday life distant from the sacred. And yet by declaring it a theme park, he locates the HLE within the realm of leisure and tourism, opposed to the legitimate, righteous category of work. What we can glean from Donegan’s distressed attempts to categorize the HLE is that these existing categories which attempt to function autonomously do not make sense for sites like the HLE. Nonetheless, the struggles and negotiations that result from attempting to fit this square peg into a round hole offer moments of insight into what individuals (and societies) value and how we make meaning.

What may be the most ironic and problematic aspect of the battle over the HLE’s identity is that secular authority conferred upon the HLE sacred status. Judge MacKinnon recognized the HLE as a “religious ministry” analogous to “churches and
museums.” She (and in turn the government) draws distinctions between religious ministry and secular amusement based on profit and, as a result, what happens to the money generated by the site in question. Secular amusements “make money for companies” while religious ministries use their income for “evangelizing [a form of education] and worshipping.” According to MacKinnon, it is not whether an institution generates money that determines its designation, rather where that money goes—to what purpose. In essence, MacKinnon and the law agree with Rosenthal and Donegan in that purpose is the key to identity.

Museums and the Educational Imperative

Park lecturer Walter Mabry knows his purpose. He takes it as his responsibility to teach visitors the difference between the Holy Land Experience and other Orlando amusement parks. The HLE, he insists, is a thinking park where visitors are “required to think.” “I want you to think,” Mabry demands. What he wants us to think about is Christian history and its import to today’s society. Mabry’s challenge is not only to provide information, the obvious directive of lecturers, but also to inspire us to want to learn so that we will believe in and use that knowledge. The HLE’s raison d’être is ministry (education) by any means necessary. In the contemporary United States, education and entertainment are often locked in a tandem co-dependency, each needing the other to stay relevant and attract an audience; a fact that the HLE utilizes.

The HLE clearly defines its purpose in promotional materials: inspiration and education via the distribution of “information,” and the cultivation of “understanding through immersive” experiences. As evidenced in these promotional materials, the HLE is rhetorically constructed as a living Biblical museum. It is no insignificant matter that the HLE chooses to define itself as a museum. Museums accrue significant cultural capital. They are understood as repositories of important objects, communicators of “facts,” and associated with fine art as well as science. Museums are often construed as objective protectors of knowledge; they “promise to safeguard the aura of the original material artefact.”

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) confirms the vernacular use of museum, describing a building associated with scholarly practices “dedicated to the
pursuit of learning or the arts.” The OED also traces the etymology of “museum,” from classical Latin “mūsēum,” rooted in the Hellenic world. It means “a place holy to the Muses.” Museums in this period were sacred spaces, “a school of art or letters” and a place for “philosophy and research” honoring the goddesses or spirits of creativity. It is a temple of and for learning. In this original manifestation, distinctions between museums as secular or sacred spaces did not exist.

Museums continued to be associated with what we now identify as sacred places. Collections of art, antiquities, and objects considered natural curiosities were often owned by religious institutions and displayed together in medieval churches in England prior to the Protestant Reformation. Religious institutions provided a set of rules and procedures for maintaining systems of knowledge-power, as well as the authority of the state. John Burris refers to these exhibits as “the common man’s first museum.” Of course, many of these objects were holy relics strategically displayed to spark patrons’ religious imaginations, inspire awe and veneration, and encourage visitors to leave “a small monetary offering . . . as an act of homage.” Protestant Reformers found this practice too similar to idolatry and condemned the offering as a form of commerce, then set about purging churches of these objects. Few items managed to escape outright destruction, but those that did ended up in secular domains in England. The Tower of London provided refuge for some of these objects and eventually housed England’s national collection.

Public exhibits of cultural artifacts such as art and antiquities date to Renaissance Europe. These collections were typically privately owned and were toured by a small number of visitors ranking among the socially elite. The shift in audience from elites to a general public occurred as collections, cultural displays, and museums became tools to unite “an increasingly restless populace” in support of religious institutions, monarchies and royalty, and later to encourage national cohesion and the construction of public identity as citizens in both Europe and the United States.

Museum conventions as we know them today emerged in relation to other institutional displays, such as International Exhibitions and World’s Fairs where exhibits were intended to showcase the most scientifically innovative and mechanically stunning
creations from around the world. World’s Fairs also displayed other, more culturally oriented exhibits meant to bolster national pride by illustrating the history of a nation, its indigenous peoples and artifacts. London’s Great International Exhibition of 1851 was the first International Exhibition. In the nineteenth century, International Exhibitions became quite popular modes of promoting nationalism, imperialism, and progress narratives. These expositions “were greatly influenced by the exhibition and museum traditions” of display.³⁸ Victorian era expos promoted cohesion and community among members of “civilized” nations who saw themselves as the natural evolutionary ends of the progress continuum which positioned “primitive” and “savage” cultures at the beginning.

Cultural studies scholar Bella Dicks believes that these events served as “large-scale exhibitionary alternative[s] to museums,” appealing to a popular rather than elite crowd.³⁹ Expositions were far more appealing (and geared) to mass visitor-ship than were museums. Early twentieth-century museums embraced their specificity and elitist particularity, refusing to interpret culture for laymen visitors; objects spoke for themselves and it was the spectator’s responsibility to glean the meaning. Though they were open to the general public and purportedly existed for public service and education, museums were closely associated with the well-educated, social elite. It wasn’t until the late-twentieth century (around the 1980s) that a shift occurred in the directives, functions, and structures of museums as a consequence of the burgeoning financial need to actively seek out a mass audience.⁴⁰

How is the concept of museum employed today? Wikipedia, a reference source for popular knowledge, defines “museum” by selectively quoting the International Council of Museums (ICOM): a “permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment, for the purposes of education, study, and enjoyment.”⁴¹ Wikipedia leaves out ICOM’s preceding specification, “nonprofit,” while noting museums usually do not seek profit, though they “sometimes charge an admission fee.”⁴² ICOM narrows the category of “museum” by establishing the criteria of nonprofit. Wikipedia allows for a broader understanding of
this type of institution. Museums can be governmental, non-governmental, nonprofit, or privately or family owned. This broader interpretation is more historically accurate. Museums as we know them today are rooted in the phenomena of privately owned collections of art, artifacts, and curiosities (often referred to as cabinets of curiosities or curio cabinets) popular as early as the sixteenth century.

The difference between ICOM’s and Wikipedia’s characterizations of museums hinges on commercialism. Again, the designation boils down to purported purpose. ICOM suggests that organizations whose purpose is to make a profit are not legitimate museums. Both ICOM’s stipulation that museums be nonprofit and County Property Appraiser Donegan’s insistence that the HLE is not a “religious entity” can be understood as judgments of authenticity, where a for-profit purpose is positioned as secular capitalism and, therefore, does not have an authentic connection to the sacred. A nonprofit purpose, in contrast, is understood as authentic and genuine, sacred because “nonprofit” supposedly suggests a lack of capitalization. Building on MacCannell’s discussion of authenticity as absent in modern capitalist society, Dicks argues that “it is commodified consumer society itself which produces the desire for its own transcendence, to ‘get beyond’ the inauthentic relations of modern life.” Implicit in this statement is the assumption that inauthenticity means capitalism, commodification, and consumerism; in other words, profit. Following this logic, museums and religious entities cannot be authentic if they participate in the market economy. As Donegan accused, they would be closer to a theme park.

**Theme Parks**

What, then, are the differences between theme parks and museums in the contemporary United States? In *Culture on Display: The Production of Contemporary Visitability*, Dicks sketches out some distinctions located in modes of cultural display, such as the use of simulation and simulacrum by theme parks; “They do not set out to recreate reality . . . but to create a believable, yet fictional, dream-world.” Her distinctions implicate purpose. Though not overtly stated, Dicks suggests that the purpose of theme parks hinges on commercialism and capitalism. Theme parks, argues Dicks, are
“very efficient and concentrated selling spaces” in the business of “corporate promotion” and typically owned by “media conglomerates, such as Time Warner,” and in the case of the HLE, Trinity Broadcasting Network.\textsuperscript{45}

The similarities between the HLE and theme parks are striking. Theme parks collapse space and time in order to present an uninterrupted narrative devised around a particular theme. Whereas actual travel through Israel and Palestine would include “dead space,” “non-symbolic, ordinary, unreadable spaces” characteristic of everyday life, the HLE presents a condensed version which includes only noteworthy landmarks and attractions (Herod’s Temple, the Garden Tomb, Quamran Caves).\textsuperscript{46} Though the theme of the HLE appears to be Biblical Jerusalem, the HLE also includes events from other times, such as the Exodus from Egypt and the journey through time offered in the Scriptorium. While the theme would at first appear to be Biblical Jerusalem, it is in fact more accurately identified as the story of Salvation by Grace (which I discuss at length in Chapter 4), of which Jerusalem is only one setting.

Just because the HLE is themed, does not make it a theme park. As Dicks notes, in the contemporary world many (if not most) environments that involve consumption have become themed. Theme parks are the “epitome of the totally themed environment” providing a total immersion experience through a “wrap-around little world.”\textsuperscript{47} They focus on experiential authenticity rather than sociohistorical accuracy. Authenticity in theme park experience is “produced through the ‘feel’ and ‘look’ of the place.”\textsuperscript{48}

In an important analytical move, Dicks asserts that visitors are active agents in theme park performances, choosing to suspend disbelief in order to enjoy the “mimetic, spectacular and transportational capacities of technology.”\textsuperscript{49} I do not believe visitors are looking for actual Biblical Jerusalem, nor is the HLE attempting to fool visitors into believing they have actually been transported through space and time. Instead, the HLE and visitors work together to generate meaningful experiences (now) inside of a simulation (then). This is also the goal of theme parks. They are “intensification[s] of place” that offer “experience” and promise to “transport you to an ‘elsewhere’ and an ‘elsewhen,’ within conditions that are safe and professionally managed.”\textsuperscript{50} These are the same promises made by the HLE in their marketing materials: “When you pass through
the Jerusalem City Gate, you will travel back in time to an ancient land that is 2,000 years old and 7,000 miles away!"51 Like the marketing literature of theme parks, “‘experience’ and ‘journey’ pepper the promotional rhetoric.”52 Indeed, the term “experience” is in the facility’s name!

Like many of today’s theme parks, the HLE moves beyond spectacle and into multi-sensory technologies that emphasize bodily experience. However, unlike the majority of conventional theme parks, the HLE does not have roller coasters or rides. Dicks notes that, though often associated with rides, contemporary theme parks “offer much more,” including, “scenic tableaux and built reconstructions representing well-known cultural iconography or places, as well as swathes of shops and themed restaurants, performances and shows.”53 All of these elements can be found at the HLE. Disney, too, attempts to deemphasize the importance of roller coasters in their philosophy, a statement that comes very close to that of the HLE. Disney steers clear of configurations of rides that might resemble a county fair or carnival. Instead, they organize their parks into “‘lands’ in which a selected theme . . . is presented through architecture, landscaping, costuming, music, live entertainment, attractions, merchandise and food and beverage.”54 The HLE is organized in much the same way, offering visitors the land of “ancient Jerusalem,” “a world thriving with musical dramas, uplifting presentations, and featured exhibits,” and souvenirs imported from Israel.55

The metaphors of journey and discovery employed by theme parks such as Disney and the HLE and operationalized through the theme of “lands” are echoed in contemporary museum design. Museums “promise to take [visitors] on journeys of discovery” through “highly sensory environments.”56 And, like theme parks, “the word ‘experience’ has become central to today’s museum.”57 The HLE is an excellent example of a contemporary site that confounds the boundaries between theme park and museum. As I have demonstrated, there are strong similarities between the structure of the HLE and theme parks, but the site can also be understood as structurally similar to museums. The material distinctions between museums and theme parks have dissipated, if they ever actually existed. In the next section, I discuss precursors to the HLE that also challenged distinctions between spaces of education and entertainment.

65
Precursors to the HLE

The HLE is not the first site to confound these boundaries. Historical examples of parks similar to the HLE include the Chautauqua Institute’s Palestine Park and the New Jerusalem exhibit at the 1904 World’s Fair. These sites challenge the notion that entertainment, education, and religion have ever been mutually exclusive in American popular culture and as such are important precursors to the HLE.

Chautauqua Institute’s Palestine Park

The Chautauqua Institute (originally referred to as the Chautauqua Assembly) in western New York was host to one of the first incarnations of an imagined, three-dimensional Holy Land in the United States. The Institute was founded by John Heyl Vincent and Lewis Miller, both Methodists, the former a minister. Like many of the economically privileged travelers of the mid-nineteenth century, Vincent traveled to Ottoman Palestine to physically and spiritually engage the land of Biblical history. He returned to the U.S. with an almost obsessive interest in the geography of the sacrosanct land and an indomitable desire to teach the history of the Bible through tangible and interactive experience of that land. His answer to the predominant inaccessibility of the actual Palestine was to create the “Park of Palestine” on the banks of the Chautauqua River.

Vincent’s obsession with topography was not unusual to nineteenth-century Americans, who invested importance in the natural environment as the vision and handiwork of God. Travelers, on the heals of Manifest Destiny, sought communion with God in the divine spaces of the sublime. It was a natural extension to understand the soil of Palestine as possessing the spirit of the Bible, and thus the presence of God. Vincent believed “that intimate knowledge of the topography of Palestine was basic to Christian morals, if not salvation.” He craved and promoted communion with the land as a means of deepening understanding of the Bible and practicing religion.

Because the actual Palestine was thousands of miles away and “very wild,” many Americans were not able or did not desire to make the journey. Vincent’s commitment
to a living geography of ancient Jerusalem prompted the construction of a surrogate. Here, it is important to note that though Vincent visited contemporary Palestine, he chose to represent an imagined, ancient version. This space was then a fantasy-enabled reality of a place located in religious rhetoric; in other words, a theme park. Vincent’s extensive notes and documentation of the minutiae of the actual Palestine lent legitimacy to and authenticated (through claims to material accuracy) this imaginative interpretation. Thus, this space was also a museum. His purpose was religiously inspired, but his methods were solidly grounded in empiricism and observation, which eventually would be classifiable as ethnographic methods characteristic of the emerging discipline of anthropology. Vincent experienced Palestine through the lens of Biblical history. When he returned to the States, he constructed the Chautauqua Institute through this same lens.

The Chautauqua Institute was originally a school of sorts, designed for adult education in the study of Christianity. The intention was to provide an intellectually stimulating alternative to increasingly secularized post-secondary institutions and to prepare religiously-minded folks to witness and teach the word of God. The Chautauqua Institute functioned as an edutainment complex. Vincent teamed with Lewis Miller, an industrialist Sunday school teacher who shared Vincent’s vision of standardized curriculum for the Methodist-Episcopal Church and also desired to connect individuals with a natural landscape. As such, it was important to the duo to locate their educational camp in a pristine and sublime environment.

Vincent and Miller were concerned with making clear distinctions between their project and the popular and spectacular camp revivals characteristic of the post-Civil War era. They wanted to avoid speculation that the Chautauqua Institute was guilty of frivolity—read: entertainment. Participants were expected to endure discomfort and primitive camping conditions as a testament to their desire to learn and dedication to cultivating their spirituality. When the Institute opened in 1874, teachers began their training in what were known as “specimen meetings,” where they were schooled on how to use the latest technology in their classrooms. Again, the Institute rhetorically maneuvered itself towards scientific discourse with the use of the term “specimen,” and by emphasizing technologies such as lantern slides and stereographs. These
technologies were also popular as parlor entertainments, foreshadowing the Institute’s eventual association with leisure tourism.

Entertainment aspects of the site were developed as the Institute became nationally renowned and attracted more participants. Students and alumni of the Institute, affectionately known as Chautauquans, often took part in “Biblical entertainments” including “costumed dramas” and “fantasy tours.”63 These tours were initially facilitated by William Henry Perrine, a Methodist minister, Palestine scholar, and professor at Albion College.64 He painted giant panoramic landscapes of how he imagined Biblical Palestine appeared. One panorama measuring 13’ X 30’ was located in the Chautauqua auditorium. Perrine would often stand in front of his creation and lead an audience through a fantasy tour as he narrated their imagined movement through this “landscape.”65 Aided by electric lighting technology, “[a]t least some of the Chautauquans,” Long asserts, “may have imagined themselves as pilgrims to that place of textual memory and religious desire.”

In 1875, the Institute added dramatic enactments of Biblical stories, including those from the Old Testament. “Chautauquans frequently dressed in Biblical costume,” notes Long, “and wandered the grounds, participating in staged performances of Biblical customs.”66 These interpretations often appropriated Jewish ritual and history as a means of demonstrating the fulfillment of prophecy in the New Testament. Reverend J. S. Ostrander dressed in “the miter, robe, and breastplate of the high priest” as he stood in front of a model of the Wilderness Tabernacle and delivered lectures.68 This development in the Institute’s pedagogy redefined earlier statements from reporters and Chautauquans that the site made Biblical history come alive. Now, these presentations literally embodied what were initially textual and psychical imaginations of the scripture.

Institute leader W. W. Wythe oversaw the construction of models of landmarks. He designed replicas of Palestine and Jerusalem to scale in 1874, including “the Jordan River, the Sea of Galilee . . . the Dead Sea” and Mount Hermon.69 The Tabernacle and the Egyptian pyramids followed. As the site increased the number of dramatic presentations, guided tours, costumed performers, and available souvenirs, it became a tourist destination for families. With this shift from somber educational facility to
dynamic entertainment complex, questions of intentionality—of purpose—began to surface. What function was the site now serving? How were visitors using the space? Why were they coming?

Vincent remained confident that the site was serving its original purpose of education and affirmation of Christian beliefs. Indeed, he believed that Palestine Park was an integral tool in combating the increasingly popular discourse that questioned the literality of the scriptures, which he believed was weakening Christian faith in the Bible. He believed that the “days of skepticism and of merciless and conscienceless historical criticism” would be combated by the “truth of Biblical topography:” “Soil and scenery . . . the plain, the wilderness, and the city, all give witness to the word of the Book.”

The land of Palestine was conflated with the imagined reality of Palestine Park. As Long notes, “such intense study of geography and promotion of surrogate pilgrimage could only reaffirm the truth of the Bible for those troubled by skepticism.”

Palestine Park immersed visitors in synaesthetic experiences meant to evoke awe, reverence, and renewed faith, to facilitate a connection between the words of the Bible and lived experiences of its heroes. The models offered guests the opportunity to reclaim their Christian homeland by walking the streets and visually consuming the landscape through a panoptical gaze. They could touch the otherwise intangible history of their faith and purchase souvenirs that would testify to their physical and spiritual journey. The Park collapsed the transcendental divide between God and humans, creating a space for “a personal, unmediated experience of God (Christ) in the heart.” Palestine Park freed Jesus from the two-dimensional text of the Bible, “from the aloof icons of dogmatists and the cold interiors of institutional religion,” allowing him to come alive and return to humanity.

The Chautauqua Institute inspired an elocutionary movement at the turn of the nineteenth century and created a platform for “open discussion of public issues, international relations, literature and science.” It functioned as a stage for uplifting and educational performances, “intended to show people how best to use their leisure time and avoid the growing availability of idle pastimes, such as drinking, gambling, dancing and theatre-going, that posed a threat both to good morals and good health.” It also
established a precedent for interactive, immersive exhibits like the New Jerusalem Exhibit at the 1904 World’s Fair, remarkable for its “unique size” and “enhanced ability to absorb visitors into its environment.”

World’s Fair New Jerusalem Exhibit

The Jerusalem exhibit at the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis was billed as the “Fair’s Greatest Educator,” the “Largest and Most Costly Concession Ever Built”; “A Wonderful Reproduction” that was “The Pride of the Fair.” The reproduction was built on twelve acres occupying a hilled location near the center of the World’s Fair and boasted replicas of the Jaffa Gate, Church of the Holy Sepulcher where Christ was crucified and entombed, the Dome of the Rock (or Mosque of Omar), the Via Dolorosa with nine Stations of the Cross, the Garden of Gethsemane (where Jesus was betrayed by Judas), and the Temple of Solomon.

The argument to include the Jerusalem exhibit in the planning and structure of the Fair was simple. Christian rhetoric was intrinsically tied to nationhood in the early twentieth-century United States, thus references to God already saturated the exposition. The Fair’s official hymn positioned the U.S. as prominent in the global sphere and as one of “the marvels God hath wrought”; America is the “Land of the new and lordlier race!”

The St. Louis World’s Fair was at its core a celebration of the Louisiana Purchase. Ideologically, the Jerusalem exhibit and its Protestant imperialist underpinnings fit well with the philosophy of the exposition: to celebrate the American progress narrative, which included the divine imperative of territorial expansion, Manifest Destiny.

Not without significance, the Jerusalem exhibit was also marketable to Fair coordinators because it served another function. Social and humanistic sciences were developing popular appeal in this era, building on an already established history of cultural displays in previous International Expositions. Supporters of the Jerusalem exhibit were able to appeal to the coordinators’ desires to include anthropological and ethnographic elements into the mix of education and entertainment. The Jerusalem exhibit was structurally similar to (though supposedly conceptually distant from) secular attractions like Mysterious Asia and National Exhibits from around the world. They were
all built environments modeling distant geographies, offering visitors a chance to see and experience the life-ways of other cultures.

International travel was an economic and logistical challenge for the middle and lower classes of American tourists. These expositions and exhibits at World’s Fairs appealed to visitors who were interested in other cultures, but not willing or able to travel overseas. In a speech delivered at the groundbreaking ceremony for the Jerusalem exhibit, Madame Lydia Mamreoff von Finkelstein Mountford (“elocutionist and fantasist of Biblical life”) proclaimed, “You cannot go to Jerusalem, so Jerusalem comes to you. To American energy all things are possible.”

To this could be added the belief that from American energy all things are better. The Jerusalem exhibit was advertised as better than actual Jerusalem for people interested in the “true significance” of the site. Whereas travelers to the actual Jerusalem would be distracted and possibly mislead by “dragomen” guides (non-Christian inhabitants of Palestine who were paid to lead tours through Jerusalem) or “mystified” by the spectacle of the city, visitors to the Jerusalem exhibit would be lead by highly educated guides, such as Madame Mountford.

These “lecturers and guides,” “men and women of education and experience” studying the land of the Bible, would provide access to the “essential Jerusalem and the immediacy of Christian Scripture.”

Maintaining its moral and educational imperative was more difficult than the directors and supporters of the Jerusalem exhibit initially believed. The “dream and a vision” of this New Jerusalem was to be a moral oasis in the vast sea of inequity that characterized large expositions. This amorality was embodied in the Pike, a mile long stretch of “commercial amusements” similar to a carnival or midway, promising to titillate visitors. Unfortunately for New Jerusalem and its advocates, Fair management classified and advertised New Jerusalem as a part of the Pike. Geographically, though, the exhibit was located not on amusement mile, but near the Fine Arts building. Being neither a Pike concession nor a major exhibit (such as the Hall of Electricity), New Jerusalem retained an aura of ambiguity.

This literal, logistical ambiguity worked to cultivate conceptual ambiguity. Madame Mountford, director of exhibits and displays, and Dr. William Beverly Palmore,
As a means of securing their legitimacy, site creators aimed for authenticity; they attempted to achieve historical accuracy as well as embodied, experiential knowledge. The city was to “achieve a realistic illusion” while “encourag[ing] an experience” of the world of Jesus. Executives and planners drew upon the most renowned Biblical scholarship of the time to determine construction specifications and techniques. Around one thousand people were brought from the Middle East to work the exhibit and create many of the cultural souvenirs. Popular Bible experts and authors like James Wideman Lee, who had participated at Chautauqua in the 1880s, were solicited to become members of the executive board and lend cultural capital to the production. Madame Mountford, too, brought considerable cultural weight to the project. Like Lee, Mountford had also been associated with Chautauqua, and her high profile as a Biblical performer lent credence to the accuracy of New Jerusalem, as well as contributing to experiential authenticity through her performances. Though clearly associated with the theatrical (theatre was a suspect institution in her era), Mountford was revered for her performances of Biblical drama, admired for her elocutionary skills, and acknowledged as an expert on Jerusalem because she was a “native.” Experiential authenticity in New Jerusalem was achieved through multi-sensory engagement enabled by (rudimentary to today’s standards) technology. Visitors became part of the performance walking through the dirty streets, talking to a “local,” listening for the sound of a *shofar*, riding a camel, and touching the cities’ ancient walls and architecture.

All of the promotion, design savvy, and moralistic grounding were not enough to sustain New Jerusalem in the actuality of everyday events. The site received bad publicity when construction wasn’t completed on time, employees were injured and killed in
various internal skirmishes during construction, fire caused expensive damages, revenues were low, performers resigned and creditors came knocking. A new management team took over right before the Fair opened and the transition strained the relationship with Madame Mountford. When she, too, eventually resigned, she cited financial troubles. However, in a more revealing tirade published in her autobiography (1908), she accused management of turning the moral and educational foundations of the production into “a burlesque show of the most sacred scenes and localities of the Holy City of Jerusalem.” They had profaned the sacred by succumbing to morally empty theatricality and base entertainments. It is not clear how (or if) the production changed as a result of new management. What is clear is that Mountford was able to invoke the sacred/profane dichotomy when she found it useful. It gave her a morally righteous reason to participate in the endeavor and then to abandon the production (rather than citing unpaid wages or the possibility of tarnishing her reputation). Because of its context as an exhibit in the World’s Fair (a secular production), New Jerusalem, more so than Chautauqua, can be understood as walking the fine (imaginary) line between sacred ministry and secular amusement. Yet the only time this line became overtly manifest was when the “dream and a vision” failed to live up to its divine imagination.

Similarities to the HLE

While other, smaller sites emerged over the course of the twentieth century, none rivaled the size or complexity of Chautauqua or New Jerusalem until the creation of the Holy Land Experience. Both the Chautauqua Institute and New Jerusalem share important commonalities with the Holy Land Experience. These commonalities suggest the solubility of the sacred/secular binary. They also illustrate that education and entertainment have not been mutually exclusive in American exhibitions of knowledge and the knowledge industry. Arguments revolving around the debasement of museums through edutainment, and the contemporary phenomenon of edutainment itself, ignore historical traditions that have long collapsed education, performance, and spectacle.

Claims to education are paramount to Chautauqua, New Jerusalem, and the Holy Land Experience. The Chautauqua Institute was actually founded as an educational and
training facility for Sunday school teachers and grew into the service of public education. New Jerusalem was advertised as an educational exhibit within the World’s Fair, an exposition purportedly intended to celebrate the knowledge and cultural “advancements” of nations around the world. The HLE is fashioned as a space to educate visitors about the life of Jesus and the history of the Bible. The statement of educational goals aligns these sites with other institutions of knowledge production and dissemination, investing these sites with cultural capital and legitimacy. An educational imperative is socially responsible and morally righteous, thus necessary for any institution that desires to be taken seriously while playing in the interstices between the sacred and secular or profane; to challenge the socially constructed binary of what constitutes religion and not religion without risking social ostracization.

Claims that these sites function as surrogates to the actual Jerusalem serve the educational imperative. These sites democratize access to the Holy City by offering an alternative to international travel, enabling individuals otherwise suffering physical or financial restrictions to learn about and experience their Christian “inheritance.”96 Chautauqua, New Jerusalem, and the HLE all emphasize the importance of experiencing the land and geography of Jerusalem firsthand. For the founder of Chautauqua, “intimate knowledge of the topography of Palestine was basic to Christian morals, if not salvation.”97 The ability to walk in the path of Jesus, to retrace His steps along the Via Dolorosa, would establish a tangible connection between Christians and their disembodied faith. According to the HLE, experiencing the land will help visitors understand how Biblical Jerusalem “still impacts the life you live in many ways.”98 Jerusalem as a geographical and imagined place is integral to Christian identity.

In order to create an effective and affective surrogate Jerusalem, Chautauqua, New Jerusalem, and the HLE all embraced and utilized innovative technologies to create spectacles. Spectacles are visual events produced using mass media technologies for the purpose of public consumption. Guy Debord’s *The Society of the Spectacle* offers a critique of modern society’s deployment of spectacles, defining spectacle as a system of power comprised of the mass media, capitalism, and governments.99 Debord understands spectacle as a mode of colonization and repression where the spectacle becomes the
means by which people interact. Key to Debord’s theory of the function of spectacle is his belief that spectacles engender passivity in viewers, that they make otherwise active citizens into spectators satisfied to watch rather than act. Some elements of Debord’s theory are useful to understanding the use of spectacle at Chautauqua, New Jerusalem, and the HLE, in particular his description of spectacle as a system of use rather than a collection of images. Spectacles are events coordinated by motivated groups of people to achieve definite purposes. The purposes of Chautauqua were educational. The Institute insisted that teachers-in-training learn how to use the latest technology, such as “stereographs and lantern slides,” and be able to incorporate this technology into their pedagogy.

The spectacles created by Chautauqua did not, however, engender passivity. Instead, images were used to create immersion experiences that stimulated thought, imagination, and missionary-action in spectators. Immersion technologies at Chautauqua included a “13’ X 30’ panoramic landscape painting” of Biblical Palestine accompanied by manipulation of lighting to create a sentimental aura. New Jerusalem also used panoramic paintings via the Cyclorama of the Crucifixion, which surrounded visitors with life-size images and wax figures, immersing them in the death of Jesus. The HLE, of course, has far more complex and stunning technologies at their disposal. Like its predecessors, the HLE uses large images to narrate visitors’ journeys through the Scriptorium. Rather than wax figures, the HLE presents an animatronic John Wycliffe. Lighting manipulation is a key technique used to guide visitors from station to station in the Scriptorium and to evoke awe in the Wilderness Tabernacle presentation. The HLE also capitalizes on sound technologies to pipe music through the park. Like Chautauqua and New Jerusalem, the HLE depends heavily on spectacle to evoke a “living” quality to the space.

Spectacle also includes moving images, like film and live performances. In all three locations—the HLE, New Jerusalem, and Chautauqua—a great emphasis is placed on the embodiment of the Bible through performance: bringing the Bible alive. Chautauquans often wandered the park “dressed in Biblical costume . . . [and] participating in staged performances of Biblical customs.” In New Jerusalem, “native”
guides would lead visitors through a display meant to be interchangeable with the actual Jerusalem, a feat achieved through the incorporation of “authentic Jerusalemites” and site-specific props and accoutrements, such as camels and souvenirs imported from Jerusalem. At the HLE, the “Bible comes to life” through musical dramas and the presence of Jesus himself (a character omitted from the earlier sites). “Look into the eyes of the One who changed the course of history”; it is both an invitation and a command to physically engage the lead actor of both the Christian narrative and the HLE.\textsuperscript{105} Visitors are compelled to “Feel the power and the passion” accomplished through “original musical productions” at the HLE. This is where Debord’s theory of the spectacle falls short in its relevance to the actual practices of spectators: spectatorship is not passive. It is interactive. While the spectacle may seem to be aesthetically distanced from the spectator, in practice the spectacle imaginatively and psychologically (if not physically) engages the spectator. This interaction is visible in the use of live performances at Chautauqua, New Jerusalem, and the HLE to incite active engagement with spectators.

It is also the presence of these performances and their employment of theatricality that tested the perceived moral rectitude of the early sites. Nineteenth and turn-of-the-century American Christians harbored an abiding distrust of what they perceived as the falsity of theatre (an issue I explore in greater detail in Chapter 5). To convince patrons of Chautauqua and New Jerusalem that the performances they were witnessing were morally righteous, Christian, and family-friendly meant distancing these Biblical dramas from conventional theatre. Both Chautauqua and New Jerusalem depended heavily upon Madame Mountford to accomplish this goal. Mountford fancied herself a performance ethnographer (my term) whose performance work was pedagogical, educating audiences through reenactments of Biblical events, for which she was particularly qualified to interpret and convey. Mountford built her reputation as a performer and elocutionist on her “authentic” relationship with Jerusalem. She was born in the city, coming “from the same land that gave Him birth, the same mountains and hills and valleys that greeted His eyes when He was incarnated into this world greeted mine when I was born into this world.”\textsuperscript{106} She shares a tangible relationship with Jesus because they were both born from the same terrestrial womb.\textsuperscript{107} Mountford makes clear that she speaks with authority
derived from this divine relationship, rather than from the perspective of a “tourist or explorer,” or even as a missionary “who has lived there a few years.”\textsuperscript{108} Her performances are thus sanctified.

Theatricality has also made the HLE suspect. It is, however, the form which the performances take—that of permanent edutainment facility—that creates the suspicion. Passion plays, cantatas, and other types of performance productions have been commonly employed in religious institutions in the twentieth century without casting doubt on the moral righteousness of those institutions.\textsuperscript{109} Though these performances typically occur in a distinct venue, they do not occur daily, year after year. As memorials and commemorative events, cantatas and passion plays employ theatricality to mark the occasions of Jesus’ birth and death. These performances are temporary, and while they are entertaining, they are specifically focused on the ritual process of remembrance. Ritual processes of remembrance typically mark special events, events that are somehow noteworthy and distinct from daily life. They are special in that they are not ordinary. The HLE, because of its permanence and the sheer number of times Jesus’ death is repeated, disrupts the ritual process of remembrance, creating questions regarding the site’s intentionality. The HLE does present seasonal shows, such as a Christmas cantata, that conform to the ritual process of remembrance, so why does the HLE perform Jesus’ death daily? What does this repetition and permanence suggest about the HLE’s identity?

Critics like County Property Appraiser Donegan understand the HLE’s permanence and its use of theatricality to present Jesus’ death as a daily show as indicators of the HLE’s similarity to neighboring entertainment facilities. Because the HLE is located in Orlando and bears similarities to other theme parks, Donegan questions the identity of the HLE as a religious entity, as well as challenges its educational imperative and classification as a museum. Do museums employ techniques similar to those used at the HLE and at theme parks? In the next section I will discuss two contemporary museum exhibits which use entertainment technologies similar to the devices employed at the HLE to display religious objects and incorporate commercialism and capitalism. Yet these exhibits do not suffer the same criticisms as the HLE. Is this because they are temporary, traveling from location to location as itinerate exhibits? Or is
it because these exhibits, while remarkably similar to the HLE, are characterized by one marked difference: stated purpose?

**Contemporary Museum Exhibits with Religious Content**

Striking similarities exist between the Holy Land Experience in Orlando and recent museum exhibits that have toured the United States. In particular, “Cradle of Christianity: Jewish and Christian Treasures from the Holy Land” and “Ancient Treasures of the Holy Land” entice visitors with promises of immersive experiences. These exhibits embrace edutainment philosophies, utilizing cutting-edge technologies to create environments of display that stimulate multiple senses. Like the HLE, these exhibits collapse the distance between the objects being displayed and the spectators by cultivating narrative landscapes and participatory opportunities. Also like the HLE and its predecessors, consumption—of performances and products, like souvenirs and cuisine—are highlighted at these exhibits.

“Cradle of Christianity: Treasures from the Holy Land” was on loan from the Israel Museum in Jerusalem and ran April through July 2006 at the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage in Cleveland, Ohio. It also appeared at the The Museum of Art – Fort Lauderdale and the Michael C. Carlos Museum of Emory University in late 2006 through 2007. Depending on the venue, admission to the exhibit cost between $12 and $15. This exhibit purportedly contains “the most significant Biblical artifacts ever found” including the Temple Scroll (one of the Dead Sea Scrolls found in the Qumran Caves) and “stone ossuaries bearing the Hebrew names of Jesus and members of his family and circle.”

“Cradle of Christianity” presents visitors with “an unprecedented opportunity to learn about aspects of early Jewish life, the concurrent birth of Christianity, and how the two faiths influenced each other by presenting archeological treasures excavated in Israel.”

Another Biblically based museum exhibit, “From Abraham to Jesus,” opened its national tour in Atlanta, Georgia in September 2006. When it arrived in Texas in March 2007, it had been re-titled, “Ancient Treasures of the Holy Land.” Admission was $16.95 for adults and $6.95 for children 6 to 13 years. The display was billed as “the largest touring collection of sacred texts and artifacts [over 340] from the Holy Land.”
intended to offer visitors an opportunity to see and be in the presence of objects such as the Isaiah Scroll and the container that held the remains of Simon the Cyrene (who shouldered the burden of Jesus’ cross).

Moira Bucciarelli observes of the “Cradle of Christianity” artifacts, “These ancient stones, bones, pots, and mosaics tantalize, teach and thrill; they are often the only material proof we have for persons mentioned in the Bible.”¹¹⁴ For Bucciarelli, the exhibit serves not only a tautological function, but also operates as evidence of the actuality of Bible stories. The official stated purpose of “Cradle of Christianity” is not to offer proof of Biblical accounts, but rather to “show how the Jewish and early Christian communities influenced each other and to highlight the similarities in their values, faith, communities, and politics.”¹¹⁵ This statement makes claims to education as well as the cultivation of inter-faith relationships. What the exhibit accomplishes is very similar to what the HLE accomplishes in appropriating Jewish culture: the location of Christian heritage in the history of “God’s chosen people” (I discuss the relationship between Christian and Jewish heritage in Chapter 4).

Cary Summers, president of the Way Makers, one of several institutions sponsoring “Ancient Treasures of the Holy Land,” connected the importance of this exhibition to contemporary international mobility and the conflict in the Middle East. “So few people,” she laments, “actually get to go to the Holy Land.” Summers’ statement echoes the rationale of Chautauqua and New Jerusalem. “Bringing Israel to the States,” announces a headline reporting the opening of “From Abraham to Jesus.”¹¹⁶ As Madame Mountford declared, “Jerusalem comes to you!” This sentiment also resonates with visitors to the HLE, some of whom noted their inability or lack of desire to make the expensive and risky international trip. Like the HLE and its predecessors, these museum exhibits offer visitors a way to experience a tangible relationship with objects symbolic of faith without sacrificing safety or financial hardship.

The official purpose of “Ancient Treasures of the Holy Land” is to create an immersive experience that “bring[s] Israel to America,” said Summers.¹¹⁷ According to curator Rusty Maisel, it “tell[s] the story of the Bible, from Abraham to Jesus.”¹¹⁸ Summers added, organizers wanted the event to be “highly entertaining, factual and
motivational all at the same time.”¹¹⁹ Note the term “motivational.” The HLE is clear about their motivational purposes: witnessing and conversion. But this museum exhibit is ambiguous. What do organizers want visitors to be motivated to do?

Reporter Elizabeth Langton from the *Dallas Morning News* remarked, the exhibit “attempts to transport visitors back thousands of years and around the world to experience the Holy Land as it was in Biblical times.”¹²⁰ This suggests that “Ancient Treasures of the Holy Land” is designed to do the same imaginary work as the HLE. In fact, this statement is almost identical to those found in the HLE’s promotional materials. The HLE claims to “take you 2,000 years back in time to the world of the Bible.”¹²¹ “Cradle of Christianity” also works to create immersive environments that function to imaginatively connect visitors with artifacts and Biblical Jerusalem. Bucciarelli notes in her review of the exhibit, “These physical witnesses [the artifacts] bring to life sacred stories and aid the religious imagination.”¹²² As Bucciarelli listens to the audio-narration of the Wedding at Cana (a Bible story) and views the representations of “six large stone water vessels” mentioned in the story,

The story suddenly pops to life. The girth and depth of the vessels, the image of them brimming with wine even as the party has peaked, becomes a visual metaphor for God’s abundance. It’s a combined impression from sight and sound that makes an old text seem new.¹²³ Experiential authenticity is achieved through imagination and reproduction, and is located in visitors’ experiences of the HLE, “Cradle of Christianity,” and “Ancient Treasures of the Holy Land.”

Biblical Jerusalem can only ever be an imaginary construct. The curators of “Ancient Treasure of the Holy Land” construct this imaginary place through discourses of the sacred, authenticity, and history in a “high-tech entertainment experience” using “photomurals, thematic sets, digital surround sound, the first 3D video shot in Israel, state-of-the-art lighting and narration, combined with a musical score . . . to help visitors see, hear and feel 2,500 years of Biblical history.”¹²⁴ The exhibit also offers children an interactive space where they can hone their archeological skills, an eatery specializing in
first century foods, and “a 5,000-square-foot souvenir and gift bazaar.” In form, the HLE and this museum exhibit are almost identical.

Similarly, Bucchiarelli, writing for The Society of Biblical Literature, describes the “Cradle of Christianity” exhibit as compact but rich—six centuries are spanned in almost six rooms. But while time is compressed, the interplay of artifact, text, and audio creates a three-dimensional experience that brings stone and clay to life in an exciting way: the past becomes real.

Biblical Jerusalem here, too, is realized through imaginary constructs manifest through technologies of display. The curators of this exhibit contextualize the artifacts using written descriptions and explanations. These texts are “complemented by photographic blowups, maps, and some lively imaginative touches”:

To show the explosive growth of Christianity and its impact on the area’s economy as it became a pilgrimage destination, the museum commissioned the recreation of a mosaic map of the Holy Land still on the floor of the sixth century church in Jordan. . . . A spotlight trained on the mosaic traces the journey.

Sandy Mitchell describes the mood of the exhibit as “solemn and reverent” and is impressed by the “recreation of an early (4th to 6th century) Byzantine church, complete with marble columns, bronze crosses, a stone chancel server, and piped in Gregorian chants.”

While they use similar display technologies, museum exhibits like “Ancient Treasures of the Holy Land” and “Cradle of Christianity” do not encounter the same skepticism and criticisms from government representatives that bombarded the HLE. What, then, is the difference that allows these types of exhibits to garner broad social acceptance and legitimacy? They are housed in museums, but museums are increasingly influenced by the entertainment industry and classifiable as edutainment. The form of display—how these exhibits take shape—is strikingly similar to the form of the HLE. Do these exhibits avoid controversy because they are perceived as being more authentic in the sense of historical accuracy? Probably not. Their promises of time travel and exoticism cater just as much to fantasy and imagination as does the HLE. Are these
museum exhibits free from the corrupting influences of commercialism and capitalism? Not at all. They advertise using marketing strategies characteristic of any other commercial amusement, and museums more often than not now house food and beverage outlets, as well as gift shops. So, does it boil down to purpose? The most poignant differences between these museum exhibits and the HLE is stated purpose. The HLE is a facility whose entire premise is based on ministry, a specific kind of pedagogy. The museum exhibits discussed in this section set forth a far more ambiguous purpose, that of education.

Yet Cary Summers’ statement about the “Ancient Treasures of the Holy Land” being motivational suggests something beyond general education. What does Summers want visitors to be motivated to do? Embrace their religious heritage? Immerse themselves in the study of Christian history? Find their faith? What is being left unsaid? Would a clear statement of evangelical purpose similar to the HLE’s then subject this exhibit to similar controversy and criticisms? I believe so. It is the rhetorical construction of purpose that underpins the distinctions between theme parks, religious institutions (churches), and museums. If the curator of the “Ancient Treasures of the Holy Land” exhibit were to amend the exhibit’s purpose to include witnessing or evangelization, then its museum status would be questioned (it would no longer don the cloak of objectivity and, thus, authenticity).

While blurring the boundaries between entertainment venues, such as theme parks, and educational venues like museums is somewhat controversial, both venues exist within the imagined category of the secular. When religious institutions become intertwined with museums and theme parks, such as is the case with the HLE, secular and sacred are not only blurred, they are collapsed and, in many respects, become irrelevant. This is a far more controversial move for an organization interested in ministry; one likely to cause public conflict and criticism, if not outright damnation. Within this framework, planners of an exhibit (temporary or permanent) must carefully consider their answer to this ultimate question, to what purpose?
Conclusion

The HLE is a hybrid institution that employs philosophies and display techniques akin to theme parks and museums. Because of its ambiguity and its inability to be easily classified as either an educational, religious, or entertainment form, public debates ensued as to the identity of the HLE. These public debates were prompted by government representatives who refused to confer upon the HLE identity as either a museum or a religious entity. County Property Appraiser Donegan insisted that the HLE was a theme park. These debates were in part fueled by Donegan and his supporters’ inability to reconcile religious practice with popular culture entertainment. Entertainment, education, and religion are not and never have been mutually exclusive in American culture. The Chautauqua Institute and the New Jerusalem Exhibit at the 1904 St. Louis World’ Fair offer excellent historical examples of religiously-oriented edutainment. “Ancient Treasures of the Holy Land” and “Cradle of Christianity” testify to the continued blurring of the already vague distinctions between education and entertainment as modes of presenting (practicing) religion.

Establishing clear boundaries between museums and other attractions of cultural display have always proven problematic. Theme parks can look a lot like museums and museums can look a lot like theme parks. While the current social trend seems to be to invest museums with more cultural capital than theme parks, historically, the two types of facilities share foundations. The “origins of modern-day theme parks can be found” in nineteenth-century exhibitions, which were significantly influenced by cabinets of curiosities and early museum displays. Whether explicitly acknowledged as such, delivering information via entertainment has historically been the realm of museums. Late-nineteenth century Englishman Edward Hingston commented on American museums,

A ‘Museum’ in the American sense of the word means a place of amusement, wherein there shall be a theatre, some wax figures, a giant and a dwarf or two, a jumble of pictures, and a few live snakes. In order that there may be some excuse for the use of the word [museum], there is in most instances a collection of stuffed birds, a few preserved animals, and a stock of oddly assorted and very dubitable
curiosities; but the main-stay of the ‘museum’ is the ‘live art,’ that is, the theatrical performance, the precocious mannikins [sic], or the intellectual dogs and monkeys.¹³⁰

P.T. Barnum’s American Museum in New York City epitomized this observation. Barnum’s Museum was a fascinating mix of commercialism and capitalism, interactive engagement, and knowledge production. While Barnum’s use of “humbugging”—skilled attempts to deceive visitors into believing in the authenticity of an artifact—and his overt capitalist impulses were apparently eliminated from the formalization of museums as public institutions of knowledge, other aspects remained. Commercialism and interactive engagement—the “live art”—have become constants in contemporary museology.

Contemporary museums are returning to performance and theatrical displays in part because they are being pushed deeper into the market economy. They are forced to seek out alternative sources of funding and increasingly compelled to compete with other attractions (such as theme parks) for visitors, their government funding often depending on the number of visitors they host. Obviously, a difference exists between the destinations of monies generated by theme parks and nonprofit museums, but the techniques employed to acquire those monies are very similar.

The notable difference between nineteenth-century edutainment and today is our seeming preoccupation with actually articulating boundaries. What constitutes a museum? What makes a theme park? When considering the articulation of these boundaries, the question must then be posed, “What’s at stake?” Why does it matter if these spaces are categorized as theme parks or as museums? In the case of the HLE, what was at stake in the legal battle defining the site was nothing less than its sustainability. Without nonprofit status the HLE would have had to declare bankruptcy and close down. But was this the only arena in which the question of designation was important?

These public designations continue to impact the social legitimacy and cultural capital attached to sites. Though frequently dotting individuals’ vacation itineraries, museums are considered a “higher” caliber of leisure than theme parks because of their purported educational imperative. Their purpose is to disseminate information and educate the public. It behooves institutions that dwell in the interstices of definable
categories to somehow make a claim to belonging in at least one of those categories. The HLE claims to belong to the category of museum via its stated purpose. The presumed purpose of museums as educational and service-oriented dovetails nicely with the HLE’s stated purpose of ministering, offering a “new world of information and understanding” to visitors.\textsuperscript{131}

In the next chapter, I will deepen my interrogation into how visitors experience the HLE as an immersive, educational facility. Specifically, I will describe how the HLE functions in terms of relevant, contemporary museological theory. Visitors move through the HLE in ways that activate the narratives being presented. Ultimately, the structure of the HLE is such that visitors are conscribed into the action and actively participate in re-creating Biblical Jerusalem.
INTERLUDE

Journal
April 28, 2008
An Imagined Conversation With Timothy Beal

As I read Timothy Beal’s book, Roadside Religion: In Search of the Sacred, the Strange, and the Substance of Faith, I am incensed, and I find myself talking back to the author. This is a documentation of my imagined conversation with Beal. All of the dialogue I attribute to Beal is quoted directly from his book.

On Faith

Sara: I don’t know why I started this project. I can’t pinpoint the origins of my fascination with this place. I know I am searching for something. It’s some sort of quest. I guess I’m having trouble locating myself in the phenomenon.

Beal: On a personal level, I’ve been driven by a desire to venture beyond the secure borders of my own self-assured cynicism in order to encounter faith in all its awesome absurdity.

S: Faith. Yes, I think faith is also central to my search. I miss it. Though, I’m not sure I ever really had it. Do we ever really know if we have it? Is it tangible, something that can be had?

B: Faith, as the New Testament letter to the Hebrews puts it, is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”
S: So you don’t think it’s tangible? We can’t feel it sitting in our bodies, infused in our blood, or resting in the sensitive palms of our hands?

B: It’s a divine madness. Faith is about devoting oneself, body and mind, to that which is not verifiable.

S: So it is tangible? We can touch it? Do you have it? Faith?

B: I’m no pure cynic when it comes to religion. But my relationship to my own religious tradition is as tentative and complicated as it is abiding and deep. I grew up with a clear religious identity within a particular religious culture, namely conservative evangelicalism. I should mention that Clover [Beal’s wife] is an ordained Presbyterian minister.

S: That’s interesting. So, then you’re involved in a church?

B: I go with my family nearly every Sunday. Clover is one of the ministers and I sincerely believe in her calling to that ministry. I, myself, teach Sunday school there. But the way I teach it is a far cry from the way it was taught when I was a kid.

S: I was a Sunday school teacher, too, at a Baptist Church in Zephyrhills. But I was just a kid. Twelve, I think? It was called Children’s Church. I guess you could say I also grew up rooted in evangelical Christianity. But, as I got older and as I entered college, I drifted away from religion. It just seemed silly. I don’t know. I felt like I was surrounded by extremely intelligent professors who lived in a rational world where religion, like Marx said, was the opiate of the masses. I didn’t want to be one of those masses. But, I didn’t go into the discipline of religious studies like you. Your students probably don’t feel silly. How do you introduce your students to religious studies? What do you tell them?
B: I tell my students that the study of religion is fundamentally about *making the strange familiar and the familiar strange*. It’s about encountering religious ideas, practices, traditions, and institutions that initially appear to us as “other,” disturbingly foreign, and coming to a point where we understand how they can make sense given a certain set of circumstances.

S: Yeah. I think I always recognized the strangeness in my familiar. The trinity always threw me. And the idea of being married to the Church, and the Church, which was us, of course, being married to Christ or God or however that works. And the virgin birth. Not to mention praying over our meals. I think what I found most strange in my familiar was the fact that my mom and my grandma seemed to always look forward to the Rapture. That scared the shit out of me. I guess I thought it might be better than dying, but they seemed to think it was upon us. Like, it would happen any day. And, you know, I really hadn’t—haven’t—lived much of my life yet. I just didn’t want it to be over. Because what scared me the most, I think, was—the thought of an eternity I can’t imagine. An eternity that stretches out beyond time and doesn’t exist in a place. Everlasting life is terrifying. And they wanted it so bad.

B: It’s a divine madness whose hope comes, as philosopher Søren Kierkegaard famously put it, “by virtue of the absurd.”

S: Faith. A divine madness. You never answered my question. Do you have it? Faith?

B: I no longer call myself a conservative evangelical. And conservative evangelicals would hesitate to call me a Christian at all. I grew alienated from that culture and its theology during college. My work as a professor and researcher in the academic study of religion creates within me a certain distance from my own religious life.
S: Me, too. But, at the same time, I feel like I am surrounded by people who are also searching for something. Research, right? That’s why we love to research? We are searching. Academia seems to be . . .

B: a profession in which you’ll find a great many ex-evangelicals [laughs], along with countless other lapsed or disaffected religious types.

S: I guess I am one of those. But, I crave a reconnection. But, not. It doesn’t make sense. Why do you do it?

B: No doubt, rereading Christian tradition as I try to do in the church and studying it from academic perspectives as I try to do in the university are my ways of negotiating and making sense of my own inheritance from conservative evangelical Christianity without abandoning the religious life altogether. No doubt.

S: Does it work? Do you feel like you have a meaningful connection with religion?

B: [Pauses] Some would say that religion is like a raft. For a religion to be worth its salt, it has to be seaworthy enough to carry you across life’s deepest, stormiest, most chaotic waters. And a raft of questions, riddled with theological leaks and tears, won’t carry you very far. Perhaps that’s my religion, and I won’t realize it till I’m in over my head. Or perhaps I feel so securely buoyed by the faith of my childhood, the faith of my fathers, the faith of my minister wife, that I’m not afraid to peek over the sides of the raft into the abyss. And perhaps that’s a kind of faith, albeit a borrowed one.

S: Salvation by association.

B: But it’s not the kind of faith that Kierkegaard is talking about. It’s not that kind of faith that hears God talking.
S: Divine madness?

B: Not that I want that kind of faith. I don’t think I do.

S: That’s what worries me. I am afraid that’s it. That’s the kind of faith I crave.

On the Holy Land Experience

Sara: So, you’ve been to the Holy Land in Orlando?

Beal: It was August of 2003, less than three months since George W. Bush had announced the end of major combat with Iraq and the beginning of the occupation.

S: What were your first impressions?

B: We weren’t in Virginia anymore. It is worlds away from the blue highways and Blue Ridge Mountains of Holy Land USA.

S: You spend a lot of time in your book comparing the two, the Holy Land Experience and Holy Land USA. Isn’t this an unfair comparison? I mean, I can see the similarities . . .

B: The Holy Land Experience is a fundamentalist Magic Kingdom. Indeed, it’s almost as far from that world of homespun hospitality and personal piety as twenty-first-century Disney World is from first-century Nazareth.

S: Okay, but I wonder about your use of “homespun hospitality.” It lends an air of romanticism to your discussion. Also, several times you characterize the HLE as fundamentalist. I don’t know about that. Evangelical, obviously, but doesn’t
fundamentalist carry different connotations? I think you are vilifying the park, maybe inadvertently? Or not. You do seem to have an affinity for the Holy Land USA.

B: Think of the Holy Land USA where the land of the Bible sinks itself into the lush woods of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Such places are rooted in the land and grow from it. These are the kinds of places I’ve found most compelling. They are personal, marked by the particular, local experiences and vision of a particular person. In these places I experienced a correlation between connectedness to the land, personal authenticity, and openness to others.

S: Personal authenticity? How so?

B: Hospitality; a welcoming of the unknown other into relationship by revealing very personal religious experiences in a very open and vulnerable way.

S: And the Holy Land Experience isn’t hospitable?

B: Hospitality is always local.

S: I think the HLE is local. It grows from the landscape of Orlando. Granted, the landscape is not “natural,” as you use the term, but it is naturalized. Doesn’t this make the HLE local?

B: The Holy Land Experience is an overlay of a particular imaginary construction of the “land of the Bible” on a place that has already been so completely transformed by commercial buildings, landscaping, and highway construction that its indigenous ecology is nearly impossible to recognize. Such places are indeed foreign religious impositions, almost entirely oblivious of the landscapes and ecologies they have overtaken.
S: Again, I think this is an unfair indictment of the HLE. You are accusing them of colonization and imperial usurpation of a space that was already built into a landscape of commercial fantasy. Not only that, but you seem to be suggesting that for these spaces to be “sacred”—a term which you define according to phenomenological logics influenced by Mircea Eliade—they must be intrinsically tied to a “natural” landscape. A pristine land of indigenous religions that, when you cite Vine Deloria Jr., clearly positions Christianity as inferior because of its transience. I won’t argue that Christianity is notoriously responsible for atrocities linked to expansion, empire, and genocide. And I think you make a good point about the flexibility and adaptability of Christianity. It seems landless. But does that make it any less meaningful?

B: American Christianity chose to import another mythical world—the world of the Bible—and to lay it over the land, re-creating it in the image of its own story world.

S: There is no latent, original, authentic story buried in the land. Stories create the land: the landscape. Places are wrought from spaces, invested with meaning by storytellers always already co-opting the topography. Your problem is that you think “natural landscapes” exist. Place is always in process. Your use of authenticity suggests a stable, fixed reality; a true thing. Maybe something transcendent? And the HLE is not that?

B: I found myself repulsed. What repelled me most about the Holy Land Experience was its lack of authenticity. It is inauthentic in that it is not forthright about its larger agendas, especially its mission to proselytize Jews into its own peculiar form of Christianity.

S: A more appropriate term would be “disingenuous.” And, in fact, Rosenthal was always fairly clear about the purpose of the park: witnessing. That includes converting Jews.

B: Second, it was inauthentic in that the actual physical place lacked personality and soul.
S: Well, that’s subjective and unarguable. All I can say to that is that I have found a great deal of personality—meaning a distinct character—to this place. It may not be a character you like, but it is definitely evident. As far as soul, what an obscure term. I’ll have to think about that. I’ve found something there, at the HLE, which keeps me coming back. Maybe that’s soul? Or hospitality? You define hospitality as invitational . . .

B: Another dimension to faith, one that has less to do with belief and more to do with relationship. Faith as vulnerability, risking relationship. Faith is a leap of hospitality.

S: A leap of hospitality that you believe can only be accomplished between individuals?

B: The other might be God or it might be another human being. Faith finds expression in welcoming the other into one’s space, one’s home, but also into one’s self, one’s inner life, one’s dreams and visions.

S: I feel the invitation in the HLE. I feel like I have entered the dreams and visions of a community.

B: This is the lesson I learned about faith from places like Holy Land USA.

S: Because you made a personal connection with the creator.

B: The gesture of the place and its creator was one of self-exposure, revealing very personal religious experiences in a very open and vulnerable way. Holy Land USA intends to host a religious experience through an encounter with the Biblical narrative that makes it “really real” in the present. The Holy Land Experience intends to host an induction of visitors into an ideology that links a certain historical view of ancient Israel to a certain Biblical-theological anticipation of the Second Coming. The Holy
Land experience has been created as a popular, relatively accessible entry point into Rev. Rosenthal’s ideological-theological movement.

S: Don’t get me wrong. I am not agreeing with their tactics or overall purpose. What I am saying is that I think you are too quick to dismiss the relevance of this place to contemporary American Christianity and popular culture. You walked in with a flippant, aggressive attitude. I think that the HLE was an easy target for your frustration with the other sites, which you did not want to pick on because of the individual faces you were forced to associate with the creation of these spaces. The HLE, as you note, is easily lumped with larger organizations and institutions. It can be faceless. You even specifically said that you feel accountability and obligation to the smaller, mom-and-pop productions. It’s funny, because I feel accountability to the HLE, to the people who work there and the visitors who come seeking something, be it entertainment, affirmation of belief, or a moment of tangible faith. You ignored the faces.

I don’t like the tone of our conversation. I stand up and walk away, not allowing Beal to respond.
INTERLUDE
The Scriptorium
Field Notes: June 27, 2004

My companions and I approached the Scriptorium, mindful of the time—we only had about two and a half hours left to finish our tour before the HLE closed. I had imagined the Scriptorium as a large museum containing wonderfully ancient relics of Christianity such as the Shroud of Turin, shards from Calvary, maybe some holy water blessed my Jesus himself, or the Holy Grail encased in glass and dimly lit to promote the reverent atmosphere. I imagined beautiful, fantastic antiquities housed in the architecturally interesting, terracotta-colored building reminiscent of a mausoleum. To avoid the nagging realization that I was waiting in a long, annoying line trying to defend my camera from the dense, cool mists of water emanating from the water-sprayer / mini-fan employed by a swirlly haired, prepubescent kid trying to ease his parched, burnt skin, I turned my attention upwards to the cheap color televisions nestled into corners where the walls met the ceiling. A B-grade actor with an awful, fake British-intellectual accent was dressed as a scribe and explaining the process of making parchment (I never knew it was made from goat skin!). When his spiel was finished, the screen presented a form of Bible trivia with multiple-choice questions. Unable to answer more than one of the first several questions, I lost interest.

Fifteen minutes later, we (the next thirteen visitors in line) were ushered into the first of many chambers of the Scriptorium to begin what a deep, booming voice announced would be the “most important journey [we] would ever take.” The welcome literature described the Scriptorium as a “world-class facility . . . [exhibiting] Biblical artifacts” in “spectacular settings” over the course of “a one-hour, highly-themed, walk-through experience” designed to “dramatically portra[y] the story of how the Bible came into being,” all in a climate-controlled environment. The air condition felt very good. The
ceiling of the round room lit up in a phosphorescent blue, compelling the group of “travelers” to look up into a glowing abyss. The booming voice continued a monologue designed to prepare us for what was purported to be a life-altering experience. We, twentieth-century tourists, were about to be privileged to witness what so many men over innumerable centuries had bled and died for! And then, climactically, the walls lit up and revealed a retro-space-aged depiction of Mesopotamia, where our journey would begin.

Timed-lighting and the booming voice led us from room to room, century to century, moving through now and then simultaneously. According to the HLE brochure, we traveled through “Babylon and Egypt, a Byzantine church in Constantinople, 15th and 16th century Germany, 14th and 17th Century England, and the deck of the Mayflower.” The journey was a blur. Instead of interesting antiquities, I found Bibles from numerous lands and in various stages of completion. The Scriptorium is dedicated solely to the history of the production of the Bible and its distribution to the laymen of the world. It was a literal Bible buffet. I saw ancient scrolls and early, bound versions of Bibles and copies laboriously rendered by the hands of monks and scribes and pages from the first printed Bible and illuminated Bibles and the first Bible printed in English and an animatronic Mr. John Wycliffe who was executed by King Henry VIII for translating that Bible into English and a Bible with somebody’s blood on it and a Bible printed in 24 karat gold.

As we entered one of the final rooms, we were placed on the bough of a ship, the Mayflower, looking towards land and a group of primly dressed pilgrims who were kneeling and praying. We were told by the booming voice that these were, indeed, the Puritans who crossed the ocean in search of religious freedom and founded this great country, the United States. The image of the pilgrims was painted on cloth and at the designated moment, in an effort to heighten our sentiments, was dramatically backlit and seemed to glow with the blessing and sponsorship of the one, true God (as opposed to the untrue Gods that bless and sponsor other countries). We then entered a room that replicated the interior of what ITEC—the corporate design team responsible for Universal Studios “Spider Man” and Walt Disney World’s “Mission: Space”—imagined a nineteenth-century rural church to look like.¹ This room was a welcome relief because
we had been on our feet walking through this diorama for almost an hour. Rick and I sat in the provided pews and relaxed while listening to the booming voice tell us that during the settlement of the American frontier, Christian missionaries risked life and limb to “bring” the word of God to the natives. I was struck by the wholly ethnocentric interpretation of the bloody confrontation between European settlers and Native Americans. The booming voice accepted no responsibility for the multitude killed in the name of Manifest Destiny. Rather, he celebrated the missionaries and their courage. I shook my head in disbelief and wondered if Rick and I were the only visitors to realize this manipulation. We moved on.

The “brilliant multi-media finale” that was to put a “stunning exclamation point on [our] experience” commenced in a circular, domed room very similar to the one at the beginning of our journey. The walls of this room were curtained in thick red velvet with twisted gold ropes accenting the already too-rich visual texture. We stood and waited. The room went black, and the booming voice began what I believed to be the conclusionary monologue. We had just been through history. We had witnessed what men had sacrificed their lives for: the words of God. Now it was time for us to undergo conviction. The booming voice dropped an octave and boomed even louder as he began to introduce important characters of the Bible. “Moses,” he announced, and a red velvet curtain magically rose to unveil a romantic portrait. “John the Baptist,” again a curtain rose, but on the opposite side of the room. Our eyes and bodies were made to turn to witness the unveilings. Peter, Mary mother of Jesus, Paul, and at least six or seven others were announced—not even my mother can remember them all. The booming voice declared the significance of each Biblical superstar. Then the lights went out and the ceiling illuminated and we saw the tablets of the Ten Commandments and, in true Charlton Hesston-style, the booming voice pronounced each of the Commandments (although abbreviated versions). As he did so, the edict appeared on the tablet in fiery red script, as if the finger of God was actually there etching words into stone. Suddenly, a cross descended from the black sky, cast in bright halogen light and the booming voice quoted, “For God so loved the World that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not parish but have everlasting life.” In my mind, I chanted the
words right along with the booming voice, as I had hundreds of times in Sunday school and church and various other times in my life, and I wondered at my ability to mechanically recall and recite this and other scriptures. Though my heart pounded from the oppressive bass of the booming voice as it rattled inside my chest, I was not moved.

I have since thought about that moment, in what amounts to the Hall of Prophets, in respect to Marv Rosenthal’s claim that this facility, though Bible-believing and obviously Christian, is non-denominational and Jew-friendly. The imposed darkness, the cross ominously lowered from the ceiling, and the booming voice yelling New Testament scripture make this a decidedly violent experience. The HLE, in this moment more than any other moment designed and implemented for the purposes of conversion, thrusts Christ and Christianity onto the audience, literally. We are trapped in a dark space, the only light coming from police-like spotlights intermittently blasting psychedelic rays from above, forcing us to look up, forcing our bodies into a physical symbol of reverence and insignificance. We are meant to feel small; we are meant to acknowledge the vast and imposing nature of creation, of humanity, of the universe, and ultimately of God. The booming voice becomes more threatening, telling us that “Truth” has been revealed, rocking our bodies with sound. And the cross looms in the blackened sky demanding to be recognized. Here in this small, round room, the HLE attempts to create the sublime—“all that surprises the soul, all that creates a sense of fear.”

The booming voice stilled and I felt a hollow cavern open up between my diaphragm and my throat—the voice no longer resonated within my body. The atmospheric lights went out and house lights came on, bright, fluorescent, and offensive. Surprisingly, this was not the end. We were guided from this space into yet another room. Oddly enough, it was a contemporary “living-room” equipped with entertainment center, personal computer, stereo, and family pictures. The booming voice returned, but was much softer (or maybe I had become partially deaf). I could barely hear the narrative, but from what I could discern we were being told about the wonders of communication. The moral of this entire drama was here plainly detailed: we (pointedly addressing the Christians in our midst) were living in a time of communicative revolution and, though we currently have the ability to disseminate information in an instant with simply the
touch of a button, we are not adequately utilizing these resources to spread the word of God. Shame on us. All of these men whom we just “met” sacrificed blood and life to spread the word, yet we who need sacrifice only time, desecrate the memory of these great characters with our apathy.

It was finally time to exit this odd composition of re-created places and simulated divinity, and it felt like disembarking a rollercoaster, all spatial-temporal twists and turns and loops. Like It’s a Small World at Disney World, we exited the “ride” and were directed right into a gift shop. We were guilted and then presented with ways to assuage our guilt. The gift shop, named Ex Libris and advertised as “a specialty shop,” was well-stocked with literary paraphernalia, including various types of Bibles, ink pens that looked like quills, wax seals, book plates, bookmarks, framed artwork reminiscent of pages from an Illuminated Bible, and leather-bound prayer journals. My companions and I spent more minutes than we intended to in this shop because, while we were taking our “life-altering” journey through the Scriptorium, the fickle Florida weather shifted from bright and unbearably hot to rainy and dangerously electrical. Bravely, we decided to chance the weather rather than stay in the small shop. Opening the door, I peered out at the ominous (much more ominous than any production of the HLE could ever be) slate sky and the bright white rolling clouds that always herald the front of particularly vicious storm systems.
Field Notes: July 7, 2007

A small boy stands close to one of several glass display cases in the Shofar Shop. His fingers twitch as he peers inside. The boy’s mother is several steps ahead, focusing on an umbrella patterned with the HLE insignia. As he casts a quick glance to confirm his mother’s presence, but assure she is not looking, the boy lifts his hands to touch the glass. His palms hover, charged with the electricity of desire, but restrained by inconvenient etiquette. We all know we are not supposed to touch the glass.

He gnaws on his lower lip as he makes the decision to delicately rest several fingertips on the already smudged case. Inside, set against deep blue velvet, are gold and silver necklaces, charms, bracelets, and earrings for sale. All of them depict some symbol of Judeo-Christian culture. The Cross neighbors the Star of David.

The boy’s eyes are wide, radiant with curiosity and appreciation, but he’s not looking at the jewelry. Rather, he is fascinated by a small piece of pottery, a decanter maybe two inches tall, in the corner of the display. It’s not for sale.

“Mama. Mama!” The boy desperately tries to get his mother’s attention without forsaking his spot in front of the display; without removing his fingers from the glass.

His mother responds, not bothering to look, “What?”

“Mama, look. Is this real?” he asks.

“What? Yes. Yes, of course it’s real,” she replies, still not looking. She obviously doesn’t realize the boy is referring to the vase and not the jewelry. Or maybe she does. Maybe she assumes anything beneath the glass is “real.”

The boy considers her answer, gazing at the tiny replica. After a lingering moment, he seems to come to some sort of conclusion. He drops his hands and darts off to the next glass case.
Is it Real?

The presence of museums in our society suggests that a “real” exists that can be captured, observed, and preserved. Conventionally, museums authenticate (a process of establishing actuality and value) their contents by distancing the viewer from the viewed, labeling, and narrating. Glass vitrines are popular tools used to create physical separation, but allow visual consumption; they signal actuality and value. The boy in the Shofar gift shop was familiar with traditions of cultural display that use glass display cases: look, but don’t touch. What lies beneath the glass is special, important, valuable, and should be a “real” artifact. Yet the boy is compelled to ask, “Is it real?”

The museumization of culture, resulting in part from sociocultural effects of Walter Benjamin’s watchful *flâneur*, supports what Dean MacCannell terms “the generalized anxiety about . . . authenticity . . . in modern society.”1 Is it real? When the *flâneur* strolls the streets observing the world as if it all exists behind glass, she turns the quotidian into spectacle. In this way, “A neighborhood, village, or region becomes for all intents and purposes a living museum in situ.”2 Everything becomes something of value and import and is subject to isolation, examination, and petrifaction inside a museum. Everything is an authentic artifact worthy of study. Everything is invested with the weight of the real and the authentic. The problem with investing everything with authenticity is that then nothing feels authentic. Spectacle is institutionalized as tourism, *flâneurs* become tourists (of their own or other cultures), and the boundaries between presentation, representation, and “reality” blur to the point of obscurity. “The spectator feels at home nowhere,” argues Guy Debord, “for the spectacle is everywhere.”3 Thus, we are increasingly compelled to ask of the events we experience and the things we encounter: Is it real?

In the English vernacular, “authentic” and “real” are often conflated. While the two terms are complex and not synonymous, they are used interchangeably by visitors remarking on the HLE. In the contemporary United States, “reality” as a concept is undergoing transformation in large part due to reality television.4 The ubiquitous presence of television programs claiming to be “real”—though obviously scripted,
directed, and edited—positions “real” within the realm of representation and spectacle. Staged reality (a derivative of McCannell’s “staged authenticity”) contributes to anxiety about what constitutes authenticity. The HLE is a performance of a reality. Because of its structure (an orchestrated model with in situ displays), the staged reality in the Holy Land Experience may contribute to a visitor’s anxiety regarding the authenticity of her experience and questions regarding the reliability of the HLE’s interpretation of Biblical events. She moves through the HLE continually negotiating performers and scenes, constantly faced with questions of “reality.”

Is it real? The answer to the question posed by the boy in the Shofar gift shop is literally, yes. The jar is real in the sense that it exists. But the boy’s question about reality belies his true interest: Was this decanter made in Biblical Jerusalem? Is it actually an artifact from that time and place? Am I witness to an object that Jesus may have touched? The boy’s desire to know whether or not this prop is “real” may suggest a need to anchor his belief in the virtuality of the HLE in a material “real.”

In Chapter 2, I discussed the debate regarding the identity of the Holy Land Experience as a museum, theme park, and religious institution. It is important for the HLE to identify as a museum in order to qualify for tax-exempt status, as well as to legitimize its stated purpose as an educational institution. If we take the HLE on its own terms, as a living Biblical museum, then we may question how the HLE functions as a museum. To this end, it is useful to examine the HLE within the context of museological discourse. In this chapter, I briefly outline some threads of museological theory directly applicable to this project, starting with a brief, selected history of philosophies integral to museum construction in the United States. Then I elucidate how elements of design and organization employed by the HLE are performative. The HLE performs its identity as museum via these elements.

**Museology and the Making of Museums**

Museological scholars assert that the institution of the modern museum is undergoing significant transformation. Whereas traditional museums purportedly focused on intellectual and cultural refinement, emphasizing the self-improvement of the
visitor and associated with high culture, new museums are actively embracing “edutainment” in an effort to compete with modern forms of leisure activities. Some museologists find this problematic fearing that movements toward popular modes of representation and engagement will lead to the disintegration of the museum into entertainment, considered a low culture form. The fear is that museums will lose their cultural capital (as will museologists) and authoritative presence (their power) as articulators of U.S. social, historical, and cultural narratives.

While the conservative strain of museological philosophy may continue to promote the high culture / low culture distinctions characteristic of the education / entertainment dichotomy, many scholars recognize these boundaries are at best blurred, but are often erroneous. Museologists like Valerie Casey believe that education and entertainment coexist in contemporary museums. As I demonstrated in Chapter 2, education and entertainment have not been mutually exclusive in American popular culture, including museums. After examining approaches to museum design over time, Casey has established a typology of museum models based on visitor engagement, positing a performance model of museology.

Casey sketches the trajectory of museums from the early-nineteenth century to our current twenty-first century, arguing that museums have always been spaces of performance. She identifies three models of museum organization: legislative, interpretive, and orchestrated. The legislative model of museums privileges the object as value laden, speaking for itself. This mode depends upon visual consumption of the object. Legislative models emphasize the object as having inherent meaning that viewers are supposed to phenomenologically intuit by simply being in the presence of the object. Legislative models emphasize the object as having inherent meaning that viewers are supposed to phenomenologically intuit by simply being in the presence of the object.

The introduction of interpretive models in the nineteenth century meant a shift in location of meaning from inherent in the artifact (perceived via aesthetic appreciation) to articulated by a professional (via rational, empirical study). Interpretive models shift authority from the artifact to the curator who must analyze the artifact, determine relevance and value, then communicate the determined meaning to the audience through narrative design and spatial manipulation. The object is understood as metonymic of cultural knowledge, an illustration of sorts, and is contextualized within a specific and
intentional conceptual and physical framework. Labels are of utmost importance, as are architecture and interior design—the ways visitors are guided through the space—because they influence visitors’ interpretations of the meanings curators attempt to communicate; they influence the creation of knowledge.

As a result of interpretive philosophies of museum design, many specialized museums focusing on specific moments in history, science, and art emerged in the late-nineteenth century. Broad, eclectic collections once popular because of their curiosities were supplanted by specialized collections. In an effort to organize their collections into meaningful narratives, larger museums fragmented their spaces devoting particular areas to groupings of objects and organizing these collections by themes. While the purpose of legislative models was to expose audiences to artifacts, interpretive models were supposed to impart knowledge—teach audiences about the artifact. Interpretive museums employed docents equipped with scripts to educate visitors, emphasizing the new pedagogical function of the museum institution. In the latter half of the twentieth century, developing media technologies resulted in self-guided audio tours and videos, supplementing live performances by docents (who were often volunteers). Through this reorganization, the museum’s authority as purveyor of meaning—its power to dictate the narratives that define social, cultural, historical, and political truths—was established.

The third model that Casey identifies in her typology is the orchestrated model. Orchestrated models, Casey asserts, are contemporary phenomena that affect the didactic purpose of interpretive models through media technologies and live performances. Orchestrated models are characterized by their emphasis on the process of engagement—“entertaining reenactments and re-creations,” edutainment, and immersive experiences. Overt theatricality, the hallmark of orchestrated models, is achieved through technologically sophisticated, elaborate representational and communicative strategies. “This orchestrated performance of museum narrative,” argues Casey, “is akin to performance art itself, where the viewer is confronted by the artwork, and meaning is derived through participation.”

Because of the emphasis on entertainment, theatricality, simulation and simulacra, museums which employ orchestrated models of design are subject to intense criticism.
regarding their nature as serious museal endeavors, “serious” being defined by legislative and interpretive perspectives. “[T]he exhibit,” argues Casey, “interprets history and engages visitors through narrative sequence, harmonizing authentic historic artifacts with facsimiles that are guaranteed to elicit a reaction” (my emphasis).\(^\text{10}\) Orchestrated models are plagued by questions of purpose framed inside of that complex, contested concept of authenticity. When a museum presents facsimiles beside “actual” artifacts, do they somehow reduce the value of the artifact or confuse “reality”? Do museums that emphasize performances and experiences of artifacts through simulated environments and spectacles dilute the importance of the actual artifact, the thing-in-itself? Can museums that depend on entertainment technologies actually fulfill their supposed pedagogical purpose? As curators increasingly seek embodied re/actions in visitors, does the emphasis on evoking sensory and emotional responses undermine visitors’ intellectual engagement? Can a museum that contains few or no actual artifacts be considered an authentic museum? How can we understand the relationships between the complex and contested term authenticity and the function of museums? In the following section, I propose that we reframe authenticity as an experience accomplished (or not) through performances of virtualities.

**Authenticity, Actuality, and Virtuality**

Issues of authenticity continue to haunt discourses surrounding museums because authenticity continues to be loosely defined as a characteristic inherent in or absent from an artifact or event. For the purpose of this discussion, I will employ performance studies scholar Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s concepts of virtualities and actualities to distinguish between imagined meanings and physical objects and locations. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett shirks off the term authenticity and what she considers its encumbering, if not wholly stifling, academic baggage. Authenticity as a fixed characteristic is not useful in understanding contemporary cultural displays. Instead, she uses the terms “actuality” and “virtuality” to distinguish between certain characteristics of objects and locations.

Actuality refers to material objects, such as artifacts. Virtualities are performative accomplishments intrinsically linked to human imagination, requiring interactions
between people and actualities. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett suggests virtualities are “collaborative hallucination[s] in an equivocal relationship with actualities.” Virtualities require the human imagination to create stories, interpret meanings, and thereby animate actualities, which are physical things, a thing-in-itself. Thus, when analyzing the meanings of a museal location like the HLE, two questions should be considered. First, is it the actual location of the event present? Regarding the HLE, the simple and obvious answer is no. The second question is, Does the location offer visitors experiential authenticity achieved through virtuality—does it feel, look, smell, and appear to be the location of the event represented? This question is far more useful than, Is the HLE authentic? Understanding the relationships between actualities and human imaginations as generative of virtualities locates the meanings of artifacts and events in the space of performance. This is what critics of orchestrated modeling actually critique—and fear. Locating meaning in visitors’ experiences threaten the authority of interpreters (curators). No longer do visitors necessarily assess the authenticity of the artifacts; instead they assess the authenticity of their experience of the artifact as achieved through virtualities—simulations and performances.

While I will be employing Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s terminology because of its compatibility with a performance perspective, I do not relinquish the use of authenticity as a frame for how people make sense of their engagements with the HLE. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s concept of virtuality and actuality (and the relationships between the two) helps clarify discussions that follow regarding the conceptual and physical structure of the HLE as a site where identities are negotiated and performed. For clarity, I redefine authenticity as an achievement—experiential and performed—and will employ the phrase experiential authenticity to refer to visitors’ feelings evoked and performed in the space. Experiential authenticity provides a language for talking about why visitors come to the HLE, what they hope to find, and how they articulate their experiences.

In the following section, I identify the elements of the legislative, interpretive, and orchestrated models of museum design present at the HLE and discuss how they operationalize the HLE’s narrative of Salvation by Grace. While the HLE-proper is clearly an example of orchestrated design, the Scriptorium provides a more conventional
museum experience for visitors by drawing on legislative and interpretive elements, such as the use of glass vitrines. The HLE’s performance of museum is intended to enable visitor’s experiential authenticity.

**The HLE’s Performance of Museum**

The HLE performs the identity *museum* by using systems of organization and cultural display characteristic of museums. As a whole, the HLE is most similar to an orchestrated model of museum design. It offers entertaining performances and simulated, immersive environments. As the HLE embraces this performance-oriented model of museum design, it also utilizes elements of the interpretive model. In particular, labels are significant because they are popularly recognized as signs of a museum and therefore lend credibility to the HLE’s claim to museum identity.

*Of Labels and Learning*

Of utmost importance to interpretive models of museum display are the interpretive texts—the labels—that perform the intended meanings. The HLE presents a plethora of labeling associated with conventional museum display. Varieties of flora are identified by their Latin names followed by a description as to their native geographical locations and their relevance to Biblical life. Inside the Scriptorium, beneath the glass vitrines, white plastic indicators etched with bold black letters give the briefest identification of each artifact. An automated narrator fills in the gaps, providing extensive context. In essence, these labels, whether written or oral, perform the meanings of the artifacts. Similarly, I argue that dramatic performances and lectures occurring outside the Scriptorium (in the HLE-proper), which are characteristic of orchestrated museum modeling, also perform the interpretive function of instructive labels.

The nineteenth century marked a distinct shift in location of meaning and authority from the object itself to the interpretive texts. Director of the U.S. National Museum in the late-nineteenth century, Dr. George Brown Goode, proclaimed the superiority of the label in exhibition design: “An efficient educational museum may be described as a collection of instructive labels, each illustrated by a well-selected
specimen.” In fact, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes an ethnographic lecture given by amateur anthropologist Washington Matthews in 1893, as a “long label, a performed description” of what Matthews himself referred to as “trifles,” objects that constituted his mobile, “little museum.” He believed these objects would be meaningless to his audience without his accompanying monologue, a collection of “dry facts” that attested to Matthews’ expertise on this topic.

Matthews’ monologue is similar in format to lectures delivered by Lydia Mamreoff von Finkelstein Mountford whose elocutionary skills animated the arid lands and made meaningful the scale models of the New Jerusalem Exhibit at the 1904 World’s Fair. Matthew’s monologue and Mountford’s lectures bare notable resemblance to lectures delivered by HLE performers, including Walter Mabry. Mabry’s “The Empty Tomb” lecture is a particularly good example of lecture-as-label. As he stands on a platform positioned above the crowd and the tomb, Mabry is back-dropped by Golgotha. He begins his lecture by situating the crowd geographically, gesturing towards the Garden Tomb:

It is located on the northwest side of Gordon Calvary, less than a hundred yards from where we think the crucifixion would have taken place, so it was not a great distance for the followers of Jesus who brought his body for burial.

Mabry continues his introduction by acknowledging the disputed nature of the Garden Tomb as the site of Christ’s burial, and he mentions the popular alternative, the Holy Sepulcher.

There is in the City of Jerusalem a second tomb location. It is about a quarter of a mile southwest of here and it’s commonly called the Holy Sepulcher site. A number of large religious denominations hold that as the place of burial and resurrection.

As he satisfies one of the critical rules of persuasion, acknowledging counter arguments, he also establishes his credibility and authority: “Those who have had the great privilege as I have of going to Jerusalem and visiting both tomb sites, obviously not everyone agrees which one is the actual place of burial and resurrection.”
Then Mabry rhetorically situates the HLE Garden Tomb as, if not wholly interchangeable with, then experientially equivalent to its referent:

However, everyone does pretty much agree on two things: first of all, both tombs are empty. [Crowd cheers]. And secondly at the two locations there is an aura, there is a spirit that surrounds this particular tomb that literally has to be experienced to be believed. It’s just an aura of worship that is absolutely incredible.17

As Mabry emphasizes “this particular tomb,” he points to the HLE version, and the audience’s gaze follows. With this gesture, he collapses the actual site with its representation. Mabry invests the HLE tomb with the aura he found at the actual site. The crowd looks at the tomb with interest and awe. For the purposes of visitors who have not been and may never travel to the actual location, the HLE representation offers a substitute, for it is constructed to the specifications of the original (barring minor changes “for the sake of safety” and in compliance with “OSHA or the insurance companies”). Mabry makes sure to provide enough detail to indicate accuracy:

It was not a very large tomb by the standard of that day. It was about 11 x 14 inside, but it was designed to hold only two bodies. Now, please understand that many of the tombs of that day could accommodate forty or fifty. They have found some that could hold as many as a hundred bodies at any one given time. So the fact that this one held only two was rather unusual, especially for that much space, as we’ll see in just a moment. Interesting to look and see what the gospel writers said about the tomb.18

At this point, Mabry moves into the cultural significance of the tomb. Referencing the Bible often (as well as mentioning his familiarity with its contents: “I’ve been through my Bible dozens and dozens of times”), Mabry tells us stories meant to convince us that this, indeed, is as good as the tomb from which Jesus was resurrected. Like the actual tomb in Jerusalem, the most important function of the HLE tomb is as a sign for Salvation by Grace. Its emptiness is the ultimate signifier of human salvation. The performance of Jesus’ absence from the tomb creates the presence of Jesus Christ as
savior. After Mabry finishes his presentation, many members of the audience make their way down to the Garden Tomb, line up, and take turns experiencing the emptiness.

The dramatic musical performances, though not stylistically similar to the lectures-as-labels, function in much the same way. Instead of embracing the “ tiresome” style of delivery used by Matthews and mimicked by the HLE lecturers, the dramatic performances carry out their educational task through spectacle and entertainment. They act as labels by investing the architectural structures (replicas and recreations of significant Biblical structures) with interpreted meaning. For visitors who may not be interested in conventional, scholarly-esque lectures, musical dramas provide the necessary interpreted meaning. The Garden Tomb is labeled with Mabry’s lecture, but it is also labeled with the musical drama Behold the Lamb.

Behold the Lamb, a musical drama similar in content to traditional passion plays, is literally a performed description of the significance of the Garden Tomb and the Via Dolorosa. A female performer stands on the same platform Mabry uses and begins to sing:

Down the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem that day / the soldiers tried to clear the narrow streets / but the crowd pressed in to see / the man condemned to die on Calvary / . . . / down the Via Dolorosa on the way to Calvary / the blood that was shed / the soul of all men / makes his way through the heart / of Jerusalem / down the Via Dolorosa called the Way of Suffering / . . .

The lyrics highlight the importance of the path marked out by lines of red paint and heavily patrolled by HLE staff members. Jesus, tormented by Roman soldiers, stumbles down this path confirming visually the details presented in the song, and explaining why this path is important.

The final song, “Arise,” is belted out by a male performer accompanied by a chorus, and trumpets the resurrection of Christ from the Garden Tomb.

“. . . deep inside the garden tomb / he heard his father’s voice / Arise, arise / the sun of the morning sky / Come forth my anointed one / into eternal life / Arise, arise / cast away the darkest night / My glorious one / victorious one / in majesty arise / The earth began to tremble / The ground began to quake / The mighty stone
that sealed the tomb / of death began to shake / Then suddenly the darkness / was shattered by great light / as Jesus Christ the son of God / burst through the door alive. . . .”

These songs, among others, are sung as performers enact the crucifixion of Jesus (see Chapters 5 and 6 for discussions of Behold the Lamb). They tell the story of events that invest these locations with a particular significance. The performances become the objects of attention, epitomizing the nineteenth-century belief, “The label is more important than the specimen.” In the midst of the performance, the actuality of our location becomes secondary, if not mute, to the virtuality. It is this collapsing of the distinctions between actuality and virtuality that engenders nearness between visitor and artifact not achieved in legislative and interpretive models of museum design.

The Orchestrated Model and the Co-Creation of Meaning

The orchestrated model of museum design employs live performances to collapse the traditional distance between viewer and artifact. At the HLE, performers interact with the visitors, boundaries between spectators and actors become blurred, and the performances become the objects of visitors’ attentions. “Live performance in the contemporary museum,” according to Casey, “has not only dispensed with the primacy of the [artifact], but it has become the object [of attention] . . . the visitor does not experience the [artifact], but the performance of the [artifact].” Because of this shift in the location of focus from the thing-in-itself to the performance of the thing, theoretically, museums like the HLE no longer need actual artifacts.

Yet as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett points out, “ethnographic objects, those material fragments that we can carry away [from actual origins], are accorded a higher quotient of realness. All the rest is mimetic, second order, a representation.” While visitors may more than willingly and quite happily consume simulations and engage in performances interpreting them as experientially authentic, it is also necessary for orchestrated models to incorporate more traditional elements that signal the presence of actual artifacts. Museologist Hilde Hine contends that museums still own the responsibility of presenting “the real thing.” Hine will not allow experience or performance to supplant the primacy
of actual artifacts because actual artifacts are tangible and indicate the existence of the Real; “Experience is real,” concedes Hine, “but it is not a thing.” Experience is a process constituted by engagement and interaction. In the process of experience, meaning becomes contingent, dynamic, and plural, rather than static and singular.

Hine believes that museums must continue to exalt the things, the artifacts, what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett terms actualities. In this sense Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Hine agree: actualities are necessary in the process of visitors’ experiences of museums if visitors are to achieve experiential authenticity. It is the “presence of those material realia and their associated ‘truths,’” Hine contends, “that differentiates a museum from an amusement park.” Hine’s understanding of the purpose and structure of museums reinforces the dichotomies of education/entertainment and knowledge/imagination. In respect to this more conventional way of defining museums, the HLE incorporates the Scriptorium.

Differentiating the HLE from amusement parks and other attractions logistically and conceptually is vital to the HLE’s survival. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes the importance of difference in attracting visitors to a site. In Orlando’s tourist maelstrom, the value of difference is paramount in attracting visitor attention. The HLE accomplishes this by juxtaposing the sacred with the secular, and in so doing embodies the “tourist surreal—the foreignness of what is presented to its context of presentation.” The surreal, accomplished by incongruity and conceptual dissonance, is psychically and sensually stimulating. Museological scholars Priscilla Boniface and Peter Fowler emphasize the need to “stimulate and educate the viewer” and believe that stimulation, at least, can be accomplished through “dissonances . . . visual and cerebral, set in motion by . . . the housing of a collection in a curious context.” In the contemporary global market, “[a]n exhibition has to ‘shout’ to bring in the thousands of visitors, many of whom perhaps would not normally go into a museum or gallery.” Could a museum comprised solely of a bunch of Bibles attract thousands of visitors or the funding it would need to survive? Probably not. Packaging a collection of Bibles within a larger, Biblically themed education and entertainment complex such as the HLE increases the likelihood that people will come see and experience the exhibit. The Scriptorium and the HLE-
proper share a symbiotic relationship. Without the HLE, the Scriptorium (exhibiting the Van Kampen collection) would probably not attract enough public attention to sustain visitorship. Without the Scriptorium, the HLE would be hard-pressed to convince people, and specifically state officials, that it is a museum and should be eligible for nonprofit status. In the following section, I identify the elements of the Scriptorium that perform *museum*.

*Into the Scriptorium*

The Scriptorium: Center for Biblical Antiquities performs precisely the function Hine requires of museums—it provides artifacts for the inspection of visitors. The Scriptorium functions as a “conservative display” system, meaning it uses display practices, like glass vitrines, which are associated with interpretive models of museum design and “reif[y] the museum’s institutional status.” Without the Scriptorium, the HLE would have great difficulty laying claim to any type of museum status.

Structurally the Scriptorium utilizes design elements clearly associated with more conventional museum organization. The building is the most prominent feature of the HLE. The copper-domed, faux terracotta edifice is reminiscent of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. According to promotional materials, the Scriptorium “utilizes authentic artifacts, ancient cuneiform, rare scrolls, manuscripts, and printed Bibles to tell the story of the authenticity, accuracy, and authority of the Word of God.” The artifacts are used to illustrate the narrative constructed by the curators. The exhibit referred to as the Van Kampen collection—a tribute to the couple who donated the objects and funding—is comprised of the “largest, privately held collection of some of the rarest Biblical artifacts to date.” Visitors enter this space with the understanding that they will be present with actual artifacts displayed using recognizable, known conventions of museum design. While the Scriptorium performs the role of traditional museum, it simultaneously introduces visitors to display practices characteristic of the newer, performance-oriented orchestrated model. In the Scriptorium, visitors learn how to read and interact with performance environments similar to those that constitute the HLE-proper, and are thus socialized to understand the HLE-proper as a museum.
The Scriptorium requires visitors to participate in an intensely structured, spatially and temporally linear journey along a predetermined path. Legislative and interpretive models of museums employ spatial arrangement techniques that strictly control visitor movement and engagement with displays.\textsuperscript{34} While visitors are compelled to physically move through the space, thus actively engaging to some extent the displays, the terms of engagement are clearly demarcated. Appropriate paths lead visitors through time and space. Galleries are closed off from view from other galleries so “the exposure of the space and its contents occurs over time, in pieces and fragments,” enveloping the viewer in a dramatic procession of “revealing and concealing.”\textsuperscript{35} Following this highly controlled model, visitors to the Scriptorium may not amble at their own rate. Rather, they are instructed to stay with their group and warned not to move ahead of the lighting cues and automated guide.

Upon visiting the HLE with my mentor Dr. Rose Carlisle and her mother, we discovered that we didn’t have time to adhere to the fifty-five minute scripted tour of the Scriptorium if we wanted to see \textit{Behold the Lamb}. In an effort to speed up our Scriptorium experience, we darted through the first several chambers passing other groups in our fervor to make it through the space. While no one appeared from backstage to stop us or reprimand us for our flagrant disregard of the rules, we did find ourselves stuck in John Wycliffe’s Study with an inanimate John Wycliffe, little lighting, and nothing to do but wait for another group to catch up with us and activate the narrative. There are two such stop-loss galleries along the route—John Wycliffe’s Study and the Mission Prairie Church—which contain automated doors that refuse entry or exit outside of the prescribed times. In this way, the Scriptorium presents a vivid contrast to the structural openness of the rest of the HLE.

In each of the Scriptorium galleries, visitors encounter several glass cases containing Biblical antiquities (mostly Bibles and an occasional scroll) physically and conceptually distanced from the viewer. The glass functions as a window limiting the visitor’s interactions with the artifact to viewing—it is a “voyeuristic staging” meant to cultivate contemplation.\textsuperscript{36} The artifact becomes a spectacle. Casey uses the theatrical reference of the proscenium stage to describe the distanced relationship between audience
and “performer” (the artifact). Artifacts, both actual and facsimile, continue to be distanced from the viewer, though the increasing complexity and illusion affected by these display environments creates a feeling of proximity between visitors and objects. For instance, in the Gutenberg Press gallery visitors are presented with several Bibles inside glass cases, but we also walk into an environment that stages a printing studio and contains a mechanized, automated reproduction of what we are led to believe is the Guttenberg Press. While we are unable to share the same space with the Bibles (which exist inside temperature controlled glass vitrines), we are present with the press itself. This type of design display, which creates immersive environments for visitors, is called *in situ* and is often employed in interpretive, but especially in orchestrated models of museum design.

_In Situ and In Context_

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett identifies two forms of cultural display—*in context* and *in situ*—in her benchmark manuscript, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*. Interpretive and orchestrated models of museum design employ these modes of cultural display to communicate meaning. In context displays position an object within a framework and articulate the object’s relationships to other objects. According to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, in context displays “establish a theoretical frame of reference for the viewer, offer explanations, [and] pose questions.” Order and arrangement are imperative for displays of objects in context; artifacts are often organized into typologies or categories, such as temporal (Jurassic period) or chronological, conceptual (“primitive” to “civilized”), geographical (North America), or species (*homo sapiens*). The object continues to be the primary actor, acting the meanings scripted by interpreters.

In situ approaches to museum installation embrace the partialness of the object—the object as fragment, as metonymic. In situ displays tend to be environmental, “enlarg[ing] the ethnographic object by expanding its boundaries to include more of what was left behind, even if only in replica.” While both modes of display tell stories about the objects, in situ installations emphasize the processual nature of artifacts-in-use. The
artifact is no longer the primary actor; the environmental staging of use becomes the focus of attention. These installations are meant to appear as a “slice of life.”

In situ and in context displays are not mutually exclusive. The HLE is an excellent example of the how both styles of presentation can be used simultaneously. As I discussed in the previous section, the Scriptorium, while occasionally drawing on orchestrated model characteristics, is clearly recognizable as an interpretive model of museum design. Visitors travel along a specific, highly regulated path through space and time. Each gallery through which the visitor passes is a staged environment that employs both in context and in situ displays.

The Tyndale gallery, like all fourteen galleries, is small, barely able to fit the thirteen to fifteen visitors that constitute each tour. Upon entering, we are immediately positioned in the aftermath of a violent event. A large wooden printing press has been smashed into pieces and black ink is splattered on the walls and floor (reminiscent of a monochromatic Jackson Pollock painting). An arched window, in which glass panes have been shattered by vandals, is positioned over one of two glass vitrines in the gallery. The Bibles in the vitrines illustrate the story of violence and persecution being told by the narrator and the scene. The glass vitrines, artifacts, and labels are in context display choices. The scene staged for visitors to walk through is an excellent example of in situ display. None of the props used in staging this seen are actually from the represented historical period or were present at the event portrayed. They are representations meant to suggest the event and contextualize the objects in the vitrines. Visitors recognize these objects as actual artifacts, a legitimizing presence. This legitimacy then permits visitors to accept and embrace the staged, in situ environments. The combining of in context and in situ display practices enables a successful virtuality by facilitating experiential authenticity. In the next section, I examine how visitors interact with the performances of the artifacts (the Bibles) and the in situ environments in the Scriptorium.

*The Objectification of Faith: Death of the Living Word?*

Besides the jewelry contained in the glass cases of the gift shops, the only other vitrines at the HLE are in the Scriptorium encasing Bibles. The Scriptorium functions to
legitimate the HLE as a museum because it provides the artifacts—the actualities—required of conventional museums. The Bibles act as material anchors for the virtuality—the simulacrum—that constitutes the HLE. The process of positioning the Bibles in glass cases with descriptive labels is a performative process whereby the HLE performs its identity as museum and thereby transforms the value of the Bibles.

The Bibles-behind-glass allow visitors to recognize the HLE as a museum and believe in the truthfulness (or accuracy) of the narrative of Witnessing—and thus achieve experiential authenticity—by providing actualities to justify those beliefs. Yes, the HLE is a real museum because it has actual, priceless artifacts. In return, the HLE authenticates the Bibles. Yes, they are real because they are behind glass and accompanied (and accomplished) by labels. The irony is that the “real” value—the use, religious, and spiritual value—of the Bibles is altered in the service of proving the HLE is a real museum.

The Bible, as a material manifestation of God and faith, serves as a medium for individuals’ to experience embodied religiosity. Christians have not always had personal access to the Bible. Poverty, illiteracy, and institutional authority often prevented laymen from reading or owning a Bible. Bibles were used by clergy as props in their performances of sermons. As more people learned to read and the authority of the Church as the sole interpreter of scripture diminished, the use of the Bible expanded. In the nineteenth century, in particular, and to some extent today, Bibles were invested with familial import, serving as records of ritual events (marriages, births, deaths) and passed down as an inheritance. It was through a tangible relationship with the Bible-as-object in the nineteenth century that Christians (Protestants in particular) began to embrace an erotics of religion: “Protestants explored the connection between faith, sensation, and emotion through the Bible.” The intimacy of contact, “looking at and touching a Bible,” can “evoke spiritual emotions.”

What happens, then, when Bibles are dislocated from their use systems, distanced from the human bodies integral to their original purpose, and frozen in time and space? What happens when Bibles are placed in glass vitrines? When aspects of living systems are separated from the system itself and isolated for observation, distancing occurs. This
de-contextualization and physical distancing (glass, ropes, and/or other barriers) creates a metaphorical distancing, reframing everyday religious items, such as the Bible, as objects-of-study. The distinction between viewer and viewed fetishizes the objects as something to be seen, examined, appreciated, and contained, rather than possessed and held, an aspect of society to be engaged. The Scriptorium Bibles are framed as objects to be examined, as evidence of the human science of writing and commitment to faith. The glass vitrines are reminiscent of microscopes in their association with scientific examination, and they function as literal frames structuring visual engagement.

Vitrines are often found in interpretive museum models which depend on in context display. In interpretative museum models, these objects become illustrations of a narrative told via interpretive texts, such as labels and narrative scripts. The Bibles behind glass in the Scriptorium lose their individual power as communicators of a grand narrative and become fragments strung together, organized chronologically to illustrate a story constructed by the curators. Here, the HLE curators tell the story of Witnessing, the reproduction and dissemination of the Word of God. Ironically, this story revolves around the dynamic and dangerous processes of ministering the Living Word, while rendering the Words themselves petrified, locked in a perpetual moment of stagnation. The pages are not to be turned. The contents are, for the most part, indecipherable to most visitors (most of the Bibles are written in various, antiquated languages). Their uselessness is epitomized by the brail Bible, begging to be touched to be known; untouchable, useless in itself as it stares from behind the glass.

The value of these Bibles shifts. “The mode of educational representation encouraged by museum display,” Shaw contends, “completely disassociates itself from religious practice.” By becoming illustrative of the narrative of Witnessing, the content of the Bibles becomes mute. Visitors do not need to be able to decipher the text to understand what is being communicated inside the Scriptorium. Instead, these Bibles serve as testaments to the human labor invested in producing and disseminating God’s Word. Traces of blood still stain the Martyr’s Bible (located in the Tynsdale gallery), a morbid indication of the extent of human sacrifice. These Bibles are also examples of human technological progress: handwritten scrolls, painstakingly copied Illuminated
pages, the printing press, mass production, and finally, digital media. These Bibles become objects that illustrate a grand narrative centered on humanity. The narrator of the audio-guided tour informs us,

Throughout history, God has called upon the people to help carry forward his blessed plan of redemption of mankind. . . . Through the generations, the divinely inspired scriptures were faithfully copied and handed down intact. Their authority, their accuracy, their authenticity never diminished, never compromised. This is the story of the incredible danger-fraught journey that has resulted in the universal availability of God’s Word today.\textsuperscript{45}

The narrator assures us that the Bibles we see through the glass are indeed the same as the Bibles in our homes and churches, thus alleviating any desire to read these Bibles for ourselves. Content-wise, they are interchangeable with the Bibles being sold in the gift shops. Thus, their value shifts from use to market.

These Bibles are valuable because they are actualities, original to the historical contexts described by the audio-guide. The Bible is the most widely reproduced literary text in the world’s history. What distinguishes the Scriptorium Bibles from the billions of other reproductions are the meanings invested in them via museum display. “[T]he uniqueness of the original,” asserts John Berger, “now lies in it being the original of a reproduction . . . its first meaning is no longer to be found in what it says, but what it is.”\textsuperscript{46} As the Scriptorium Bibles lose their value for religious practice, they become “holy relics.”\textsuperscript{47} John Berger explains this distancing and fetishization as “bogus religiosity,” functioning to mystify the contents of museums and bestow upon them designation as “holy relics.”\textsuperscript{48} Artifacts are removed from lived systems and disassociated from religious practices, yet in this isolation they are reinvested with sacred meaning through mystification. Berger explains this process:

Now [the object exists] in a room by itself. The room is like a chapel. The [object] is behind bullet-proof perspex. It has acquired a new kind of impressiveness. Not because of what it shows [or does]—not because of the meaning of its image [or use]. It has become impressive, mysterious, because of its market value.\textsuperscript{49}
Berger’s theory indicates museums transform the practical use value of an object to popular market value via aestheticization. In a fascinating discussion of the mystification process which leads to a painting being designated as a “work of art,” Berger sketches the relationship between practical value, market value, and spiritual value. The original work, deprived of its practical value when removed from its system of use and placed in a museum, becomes valuable based on its rarity—how difficult is it to acquire such a work? Rarity—how many of these objects have survived the passage of time—affects the work’s market value. Yet “because art is thought to be greater than commerce,” its spiritual value is of true importance. The concept of spiritual value is the culmination of the mystification process that transforms objects-of-use into objects-of-veneration, holy relics. The rub is that spiritual value is difficult to communicate and thus is most adequately conveyed via reference to a market price.

What does this mean for the Scriptorium Bibles destined to stasis behind glass? It means they have been stripped of their original spiritual value (as containers of God’s Word) and practical value (performative texts integral to religious practice), subjected to a mystification process that locates their worth in rarity, positioning them within a market economy where their value is determined by logistics (When were they produced? Who created them? How well have they survived? How many exist in the world?), and then reinvested with spiritual value based on these logistics, their new status as artifacts, and their presence behind the glass.

The relationship between the Bibles in the Scriptorium and the visitors who see them is very different than the relationship between those visitors and Bibles circulating in lived systems of use. The mystification process has imbued the Bibles behind the glass with a certain aura of spirituality achieved through market value. The yellow-robed woman who admitted me to the Scriptorium was adamant that, “The items on display are considered priceless.” They are not priceless because they are the Words of God. They are priceless because they are irreplaceable. Visitors stand next to these vitrines, in the presence of antiquated artifacts whose market value is, according to the docent, beyond number. We are physically and conceptually distanced from the practical value of these Bibles, whereas Bibles in circulation are meant to be touched, read, used, and cherished.
What does this distance mean for visitors experiencing the Scriptorium? I cannot say, for sure. Most visitors I observed only casually glanced at each Bible, with the exception of the blood-stained version. Like many museums, in the first several chambers visitors take turns pressing against the glass to see what the audio-guide describes. By a quarter of the way through the tour, however, almost all visitors lose interest in the glass vitrines. Books inevitably look the same. Once visitors are convinced the Bible’s are actual artifacts, they accept the legitimacy of the space and focus on more engaging elements: the scenes—environmental displays constructed to emulate John Wycliffe’s study, Gutenberg’s printing press, the ink-splattered walls of William Tyndale’s vandalized print shop, John Bunyan’s jail cell, the bow of the Mayflower, and a Prairie church. When we finally spill into the Ex Libris Book Shoppe, many visitors appear dazed and exhausted from the fifty-minute journey. Almost always, there is silence. People meander around the gift shop, finally able to touch Bibles, but seemingly uninterested in purchases. These Bibles are just Bibles, likes the ones visitors presumably have at home. The value invested in the Bibles-behind-glass doesn’t translate to the gift shop Bibles. Maybe if the gift shop was designed as another gallery—another display interface—and the gift shop Bibles were placed in glass vitrines, maybe then they would sell.

Displaying Conviction

The galleries in the Scriptorium are what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett terms “display interface[s].”51 Basically, displays of any sort—either in context or in situ—are interfaces or mediums through which visitors encounter messages and stories. The techniques and choices employed by designers to create these display interfaces are heavily weighted with political and cultural messages (“curatorial interventions”) that reflect the belief and values of contemporary life.52 The stories we tell about our pasts are infused with how we understand our present. For instance, the Living Room gallery sums up the history of Witnessing in relation to what the curators believe is a comparative lack of witnessing in the contemporary world. The Scriptorium is heavily weighted with the curatorial message of conviction (in the sense of convicting contemporary Christians of not witnessing
enough, as well as in the sense of the soul being convicted by God to accept Jesus Christ as savior). The Hall of Prophets is an excellent example of a display interface designed to simulate the experience of conviction, communicating verbally and synaesthetically the Christian message of Salvation by Grace.

The Hall of Prophets is circular, draped in deep crimson velvet fabric, and dark. Like most of the other galleries, this room doesn’t offer visitors seating, but it does contain rails that run through the center. Once the drama begins to unfold, the rails play a key role in our physical participation. Many of us must lean on the rails in order to look up to the ceiling where half of the performance takes place. As the drama begins, the crimson curtains lift to reveal life-sized paintings of ten Bible characters. The reveals oscillate between the left and right sides of the gallery space, eventually finishing by revealing Paul in the center. In order to see each reveal, we must turn our heads from right to left, effecting a bit of dizziness. Immediately after Paul is unveiled and his lines are spoken by a loud, deep voice, the ceiling flicks with red light and we must look up. Tablets are outlined in the blackness of the sky and a glittering red light begins to trace the Ten Commandments into the ceiling. The voice of “God” bellows,

I am the Lord your God who led you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. Thou shall have no god before me. Thou shall not make unto thee any craven images. Thou shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Honor thy father and thy mother. Thou shall not kill. Thou shall not commit adultery. Thou shall not steal. Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor. Thou shall not covet thy neighbor’s house, wife, nor anything that is thy neighbor’s. 53

Still facing the ceiling, we are presented with a glowing green cross, and the booming voice of the narrator tells us,

Man has never been able to keep these commandments, and is therefore under the judgment of God. But Jesus Christ, the son of God, became the savior of mankind by his perfect life, sacrificial death, and miraculous resurrection from the dead. All who place their faith in him receive the gift of eternal life. This is the only hope of mankind. 54
We can see the cables from which the green cross is suspended. In a Brechtian move, the HLE does not try to hide the mechanics of the display interfaces. Staging is overt. Unmasking the theatrical infrastructure lends credibility to the HLE’s stated purpose of witnessing and education. By revealing the theatrical elements involved in the production of this performance, the HLE shirks the connotations of fakery associated with theatre. The HLE does not intend to trick the audience into believing they are present to the actual event of the creation of the Ten Commandments. Instead, site designers want visitors to see they are not disguising the artifice of the environment, but are instead creating simulations that allow visitors to actively participate in virtualities that enable experiential authenticity. Rather than being concerned with the accuracy of the simulations, visitors can focus on sensory perceptions and feelings evoked in the process of engaging the narrative—faith, Christian community, and conviction!

The Empowered Flâneur

In situ displays encourage visitors to focus on the physical, visceral, and emotional processes of engaging a simulated environment. In the HLE-proper (outside of the Scriptorium) these displays are operationalized by a particular sensibility and orientation to the world reminiscent of the flâneur. Walter Benjamin’s flâneur strolls urban byways nurturing an aesthetic and critical distance between her and the world she physically traverses and visually consumes. While the flâneur has often been understood as a visual epistemology defined by the flâneur’s assessing and objectifying gaze, it is reasonable to assert that the flâneur also comes to know her world sensually, kinesthetically as she physically engages the terrain. Engaged in an imaginative process, the flâneur immerses herself in a multitude of histories and pasts while purposefully wandering through the actualities of the present. According to Benjamin, the flâneur is a hunter; a “werewolf restlessly roaming a social wilderness” seeking the intoxicating effects of an immersive experience of “far-off times and places,” through everyday landscapes of her “present moment.”55 Benjamin describes this intoxication:
[T]he blood is pounding in the veins of the happy flâneur, his heart ticks like a clock, and inwardly as well as outwardly things go on as we would imagine them to do in one of those ‘mechanical pictures’. Here, the experiences of the flâneur are conflated with a nineteenth-century entertainment technology where illustrations achieve movement, simulating life. This conflation is emblematic of the systems of engagement that produce anxiety about reality and authenticity. While the flâneur creates the requisite distance between herself and “other” characteristic of purportedly objective data collection and analysis (that inevitably informs museum collections and interpretation), she also experiences a dream-like journey through her environment, a feeling akin to experiencing Baudrillard’s simulation; what today we might describe as film-like. Or, what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes as virtuality.

Casey argues the “museum flâneur” who wanders the contrived landscapes of contemporary museums is “the director of her personal stage-set.” A product of postmodernity, the museum flâneur roams the HLE with a heightened sense of awareness enabled by her ability to “move in and out of the active space, while all the time critiquing its constructed normativity.” Casey imagines visitors as sophisticated performers whose familiarity with “mass mediation” allows them to “decode the network of museum signs” and actively participate “in the spectacle by circulating its image” through identifying, capturing, and distributing the “(Kodak) moment.” The visitor’s participation in the spectacle disrupts the “closed contemplative circuit” characteristic of conventional museum display. Contemplation is displaced by active, embodied participation, shattering the reverent silence and allowing multivocality. By allowing the perspectives and voices of visitors to resonate in the museum space, the cultural authority of the museum shifts away from the curator. To some extent, visitors become the directors of their own experiences, finding freedom to organize their agendas and thus affect the meanings made in the processes of engagement. Of course, the degree of power they have in constructing and interpreting their experiences continues to be guided by the structural framework of the HLE.
The HLE is conceptually organized around Jesus’ crucifixion, but spatially, the HLE is loosely constructed as a village. Visitors enter through the Gates of Damascus, peruse the wares offered for purchase in the street market, and walk along the dusty roads of the Judean Village. Employees performing Bible characters wander through the space, adding unpredictability to visitors’ experiences. Will Simeon stop and speak to you? What will he say? What will you say? The Scriptorium’s path is predetermined and unalterable; the paths leading through the HLE-proper offer visitors options, empowering visitors with agency to direct their encounters, experiences, and personal narratives.

Visitors can choose to follow the suggested itinerary provided on the Daily Schedule of events and performances. Or, they can choose to plot their own route, visiting the places and performances they find most interesting at the exclusion of other events. In fact, if visitors wish to visit the Scriptorium and participate in the fifty-five minute guided tour, they must forsake at least one of the live shows and presentations. There is simply not enough time in the park’s day (10am to 6pm) to witness all of the performances and lectures and tour the Scriptorium. Choice is inherent in the HLE visitor’s experience. The HLE emphasizes visitor agency (and, more important, human agency—humans must choose between God or the Devil, sacred or profane) by offering choices.

One of the choices visitors face is whether or not to take another day of vacation to return to the HLE and complete the tour. By designing daily programs that offer more event options than visitors can possibly attend, the HLE guarantees that visitors’ experiences will be incomplete. When visitors leave the park, they may not feel as though they have “really” experienced the park in its entirety. In an effort to encourage visitors to return, the HLE instituted a promotional offer allowing entrance to the park for eight days after purchasing a ticket. Patrons may return to complete their tour without additional charge. This option asks vacationers to assess their availability. Did they plan to spend more than one day at the HLE? If not, they are now faced with a choice: finish experiencing the HLE or visit another local attraction such as Disney. Giving visitors choices—allowing them to choose their paths through the site and offering them the opportunity to return without additional charges—emphasizes visitor agency while also implicating visitors as responsible for their own experiential authenticity. Agency and
responsibility are accompanied by implicit guilt—return to the HLE and complete the tour or indulge in secular entertainments?

While some visitors may question the experiential authenticity of their HLE excursion based on completion of park events (getting to see all of the performances and lectures, as well as spend time in places like the Garden Tomb and tour the Scriptorium), my initial experience of the park lacked in a different sense. In my field notes from June 27, 2004, I wrote:

I’m not really sure what I expected, but I do know that I walked away feeling unfulfilled and somehow void, though not cheated. I walked through the Street Market towards the great, stonewalled exit looking around me, searching for something that I had not yet seen or heard or felt; but nothing was there that hadn’t been there when I entered the park five hours before. The chickens were still caged, the souvenir Acacia trees, though fewer in number, were still atop the table made to look like a peddler’s cart. I bought one of those trees, small and wiry sitting in the shade of its full-grown counterpart—a little piece of living memory—like the “living, Biblical museum” where I purchased it; living like “the living Word” or like “the living God” whom I came to see. But even the contrived symbolism of this tiny bit of history—branches from this tree formed Christ’s prickly, bloody halo—didn’t satisfy the irksome feeling that I was missing something. I walked through the turnstile and into the parking lot, immediately aware of Interstate 4, Seven Eleven, asphalt, and the inevitable two-hour drive back to Zephyrhills. I took a couple deep breaths of dense, saturated air, shook off feelings too similar to failure, climbed in my car and headed home.

I left the site feeling incomplete. I was able to attend most of the performances, and I saw Jesus crucified. But I did not feel as though I had an authentic experience of religious or spiritual communion. The HLE is supposed to be a broker of religious experience, a space of spiritual communitas, where faith is affirmed or the soul is convicted. I was not convicted. Or maybe I was, just not in the sense that I had hoped. I walked away from the HLE with the conviction that I am responsible for my own redemption.
The failure I felt was my own, not the HLE’s. My failure was related to my inability to spiritually connect with the content of the place, and nagging guilt at using the site for a critical, academic project. The HLE successfully performs museum and, though it cannot claim the physical actuality of Jerusalem, its use of simulation and immersive environments enables a successful virtuality. The brilliance of the HLE lies in its conscription of visitors into the process of meaning-making. Because visitors are given choices as to how they move through and engage the site, they do not simply consume the interpretations of the curators. Visitors actively participate in creating the virtuality and perform their experiential authenticity. If, like me, the visitor leaves the site feeling as though she did not achieve experiential authenticity, then she herself is implicated in that failure. By positioning visitors as directors of our own experiences, by encouraging us to make choices and prioritize our itineraries, the HLE places the responsibility of the success of our journeys through Biblical Jerusalem squarely at our feet.

Conclusion

The HLE is a savvy museum that employs elements of legislative, interpretive, and orchestrated museum designs to create an immersive environment that requires visitor engagement in the process of meaning-making. While increasing numbers of contemporary museums embrace simulation, interactive displays, and technologies characteristic of entertainment venues, historically, museums have been characterized by a rigid educational imperative that required separation of visitor from artifact and a perceived objectivity in terms of interpretation. The structure and functions of museums changed in the nineteenth century. Broad, eclectic collections were supplanted by specialized collections focusing on Art, Science, and History. Philosophies of organization were heavily influenced by rationalism and empiricism. Objects could no longer speak for themselves, their meanings apprehensible through visual phenomenology. Curators were required to interpret the meaning and significance of these objects, and then affix prosthetics (labels, descriptions, themes and narratives) in order to make them into logical, readable stories. These changes in the structure of modern museums affect the location of the visitor in relation to the object on display. The
object, once invested with meaning as a thing-in-itself and distanced from the visitor, becomes a prop in the staging of a narrative. The performance of the narrative is accomplished through the dynamic interaction between the object, its location within the constructed museum space, and the visitor (social actor).

While many interpretive models of museums maintain a conventional approach to display (maintaining distance between the visitor and the artifacts), some establishments challenge the tradition of subject/object separation. Orchestrated models of museum design privilege the performances of the objects over the objects themselves, often incorporating in situ models of display that simulate the environment from which the object was derived. Most importantly, orchestrated models offer opportunities for visitors to participate in the production of knowledge by participating in the performances.

Entertainment and education, which I argue have not been mutually exclusive in American popular culture, are overtly intertwined in museums that employ orchestrated modeling. According to Casey, it was during the late-nineteenth century when “the [museum] institution’s educational and civic aims are carried out by arousing curiosity, by entertaining, and by promoting learning through its collected art and artifacts” (my emphasis). The conflation of education and entertainment in museums has become a point of contention in the contemporary United States. Edutainment, as the trend is termed, has been lauded by some museologists and condemned by others. Nonetheless, it is a widely employed strategy.

The HLE is clearly an entertainment complex, but in this chapter I argue the HLE is an edutainment complex that draws on the philosophies and structures of museum design for the purposes of public education. While the HLE most closely resembles the orchestrated model of museum design, the Scriptorium is clearly dependent upon interpretive principles. The HLE needs the Scriptorium to legitimize its claims to museum status. Performances and lectures help to construct the virtuality (the collective hallucination that this is Biblical Jerusalem), but in order to cultivate experiential authenticity, the HLE must be able to make certain claims to reality. By offering visitors a more traditional museum experience in the Scriptorium, including emblematic glass
vitrines, the HLE provides an anchor for visitors’ belief in (their buying into) the virtuality, thereby enabling experiential authenticity.

In the following chapter, I will develop my discussion of theming as it is applicable to the HLE. Theming is the application of a narrative to an environment. Virtuality can be achieved by structuring a space like the HLE according to a specific theme or story. In the case of the HLE, that story is Salvation by Grace. The narrative of Salvation by Grace is also a heritage narrative—a story of a particular past that has relevance to a group of people. Heritage uses memory and the process of remembering to engage visitors in meaning-making and facilitate experiential authenticity.
INTERLUDE
Journal
July 1, 2008

I feel like I’m wandering.

When I was a child in Sunday school I learned Moses and the Israelites wandered the desert for forty years. I imagined the wind whipping scorched land into frenzies of dust, settling on sun burnt skin, clogging the corners of tearless eyes, and crusting the delicate mucus membranes inside nostrils; cracked lips barely able to speak through grit-encrusted teeth; tongues too heavy to plead.

The arid land affects a slow suffocation. Its barrenness stretches patience and sanity, coaxing the mind into hallucination. Movement is simultaneously imperative and meaningless.

I feel like I’m wandering.

I can’t stop going there. It’s a compulsion. Interstate 4 stretches out before me, a long, unbroken path, straight like a line inked by an artist’s free hand. The sun quickly heats the interior of my black Toyota Camry, trying the aptitude of the air conditioning. Sometimes it’s a two-hour drive. I wouldn’t call it arduous, but neither is it convenient or easy, especially with gas prices increasing exponentially. Fieldwork has become a financial hardship. I find every trip significantly more difficult to justify. My field work should be finished, yet I concoct new reasons to make the journey. Just yesterday I asked one of my mentors if he wanted to go for a Holy Land experience. He’s Jewish. I haven’t interviewed any Jewish visitors.

It seems a plausible justification, but I can’t sell myself the sham. I just want to go again. Is there something there that I haven’t yet been able to find? I’m missing something, something big and important. It doesn’t help that the HLE is in a constant state of transformation since TBN took over. I find myself thinking that maybe this next
visit I will encounter something new or see something old in a new way and then I’ll have it—the epiphany.

That’s it, of course. I haven’t had my epiphany, no moment of ultimate awareness or clarity, no communion with a supreme being, no self-transformation. Where’s my transcendent experience? When I allow myself this honesty, the acknowledgment that I really am looking for an epiphanic moment that will result in some kind of transformation, I can understand this process of dissertating as a pilgrim’s quest. I begin to draw upon the concept and history of pilgrimage in order to help me make sense of my current dilemma.

I continue wandering.
INTERLUDE

Journal

August 28, 2008

A landscape haunts, intense as opium.

-- Stephané Mallarmé

When I was a child, Orlando seemed like a distant, exotic land of waking dreams and tangible fantasies. Technically only two hours or so from my rural, Zephyrhills home, Orlando and its delectable treasures was a world away from me as I grew up on a haphazard farm (more like a miniature petting zoo, except when the butcher visited).

Thinking of home is dangerous.

Home is sandspurs and redbugs, lazy Spanish moss and lightening-scarred oak trees. Home is the incessant buzzing of mosquitoes and the suffocating density of summer afternoons; dappled shade and dried cow patties flaking into dust; Golden Rod and brown pollens powder the world, carried miles on a breeze; Sinusitus and swollen eyes; midnight skies dancing with constellations and the secret promises of the North Star; Mocking birds screaming as they careen over land laden with the bones of pets long past; warm breezes on even warmer days; thrill and terror as impossibly opaque, stark white clouds are pressed forward by the deep iron darkness of a mid-August thunderstorm; the poetry of crickets and frogs at dusk.

Nostalgia is real. It moves through my chest, pulsating in my limbs. My fingers ache to touch something that will reconnect my longing soul with a tangible home. The pain swims behind my storm-gray eyes. Eyes the color of the thunderstorms I fear and love. I was always proud that the color of my eyes matched the fierce hue of a Florida storm.
Of course, I still live in Florida. Florida is not gone from me, nor I from her. But my Florida is gone. My home is gone. Some days, as I admire the tenacity of characteristics that will not change (lightening striking in my backyard, steady layers of rain pounding the grass while the sun still beams overhead), I sit and imagine a thousand years in the future, wistfully erasing the elaborate veining of the highway systems, freeing the ivy and weeds to creep over ruins of once-modern buildings. I see the swamps swell and engulf the suburban sprawl that came and stole the cypress trees. My future Florida doesn’t include me.

When I moved to Massachusetts for nine months, I barely survived. Psychologically, I teetered on the edge of despondency. Many factors contributed to my failed relocation, but the most enduring memory I have is a feeling of loss and disconnection. I couldn’t connect to the place, to the land. The vistas were stunning and mountain roads thrilling to a girl who had only driven the flatlands of Florida. Central and northern Massachusetts’ inherent beauty was undeniable. But when I touched it, we didn’t bond. As months passed, I learned that “homesickness” is not simply a rhetorical concept. It is embodied and manifests like any other illness. Symptoms are probably particular to the individual, but I fell truly ill. Plagued by fatigue, muscle pain, headaches, stomach aches, and panic attacks, I finally uttered the words: “I want to go home.” It was an epiphany and a plea. Up to this point, all I had ever wanted was to escape home, escape Florida. But in this moment—“I want to go home”—I finally understood that we are truly bound together. Or at least I am bound up in Florida. My tears are salty rivulets flowing from the Gulf.

As I huddled in the passenger seat of our little red Corolla, my husband guiding us down I-75, I shook with the immediacy of home. I cannot remember any other time in my life when I have cried with relief or happiness. But as I rolled down the window and inhaled soggy air, feeling it settle on my skin and seep through the permeable layers into my body; as I watched the setting sun touch the tops of palms and pines, rays of light confidently stretching across the sky holding off the onset of dusk, I cried. I cried like an injured child finding safety and solace in her mother’s arms.
Home is a concept that suggests stability. Roots. Heritage. “Home is where the heart is,” so goes the age-old adage. Home has everything to do with people and stories, but it also has everything to do with place. Physical, tangible spaces invested with meaning so that they become places. Home is about boundaries—and about being bound.
CHAPTER 4
HERITAGE, IDENTITY, AND A CHRISTIAN HOMELAND

Theming and Heritage at the HLE

In the previous chapter, I proposed that the HLE draws on several design paradigms, but most closely resembles the orchestrated model of museum design and depends heavily on in situ display. Now, I consider how the HLE deploys the popular twentieth and twenty-first century approach to environmental design: theming. Theming is often associated with leisure and entertainment venues, but is also characteristic of contemporary museum design. Essentially, theming is the organization of an environment around a particular narrative. Theming narratives often have to do with history, myths, legends, and fairytales. In *The Disneyization of Society*, Alan Bryman argues, “immersing visitors in a life that presents a different time and place in effect generates and constitutes a theme in its own right.”

In this chapter, I argue that the HLE is organized around the narrative of Salvation by Grace and uses a particular past, Biblical Jerusalem, as a theme. Because the theme of the HLE is a story of a particular past, the HLE also functions as a heritage site. In general, heritage is a process of interpretation and performance of the past—it is constituted through stories and is often concerned with place. Therefore, heritage can be deployed as a theming strategy. Heritage, as a process of selecting and embodying specific narratives (always at the exclusion or reduction of other narratives, thus becoming *a* past), creates stories about the past; these stories then become themes that organize institutions like the HLE.

Heritage is concerned with identity. As a design practice and process of cultural production, heritage “engages with acts of remembering” and works “to create ways to understand and engage with the present.” Heritage is a discursive and performative practice that is both generated through and generates social and cultural narratives, which
intertwine with the individual narratives of visitors. In the following sections, I discuss the processes of theming and heritage as relevant to the HLE, highlighting some of the most recent and relevant work in the fairly new interdisciplinary field of Heritage Studies. In particular, I am concerned with how theming and heritage create opportunities for visitors to engage in identity work. As a heritage site, the HLE offers visitors an experience of their spiritual homeland and a means of publicly participating in the narrative of Salvation by Grace. Because the HLE functions as a themed space and a heritage site, visitors must negotiate not only the blurry boundaries between entertainment and education, but also determine the import of their experiences at the HLE in relation to the broader scope of their lives.

*Theming*

A theme is a central idea that binds together elements into a unifying and cohesive structure, a narrative. “Theming,” states Scott Lukas, “is a motivated form of geographical representation in which meaningful connections are made among unifying ideas, symbols, or discourses.”3 In short, theming is “the application of a narrative to institutions or locations.”4 A themed space, such as the HLE, is organized by a particular set of ideas or stories that constitute a perspective or frame through which visitors encounter and experience an environment. The narrative that structures the HLE is Salvation by Grace, the rescue of the human species by God through the persecution, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus. All elements of the HLE in some way relate to the theme of Salvation by Grace.

As Bryman notes, themes or narratives applied to sites are usually vaguely related, and often completely unrelated, to the site itself. The distance between theme and site manifests “in terms of space, time, [and/or] sphere.”5 In the case of the HLE, distance between site and theme is evidenced in all three areas. Obviously, a great physical distance exists between the HLE and Jerusalem. Add to this distance at least two thousand years. Then combine these enormous spaciotemporal distances with the conceptual distance between the sphere of the narrative—spirituality/religion—and the
sphere of the HLE—Orlando’s fantasy nexus anchored in entertainment culture. The resulting phenomenon is rife with contradictions.

If increasing numbers of visitors are an indication of effectiveness, then the HLE, regardless of the contradictions and the distance between the narrative and the site, is effective in terms of creating a successful themed experience. How can this be? What do visitors find engaging and convincing about the HLE? Like so many other themed spaces, the HLE offers consumerism as a means of satisfying human desires. Visitors are literally purchasing their way into a space of performative faith. The desire to physically experience Biblical Jerusalem and walk in the tortured footsteps of Jesus is available for the price of admission. As with other themed spaces, souvenirs can be purchased inside the space. These mementos function as objects of memory or tangible testaments: been there, done that.

But the visitors to the HLE are also participating in another type of economy. They are actively engaged in the production and consumption of identity—of faithfulness. The theme that structures the HLE—Salvation by Grace—is a frame intricately bound up in religious history, ritual, myth, and the everyday practices of many Christians. As opposed to the overtly fantasy-themed spaces of Disney, the HLE purports to be a themed space anchored in the lived practices of Judeo-Christian culture. Intrinsic to the theme itself is the biography of Jesus Christ, his “life history narrative.” As Scott Lukas observes, themed spaces that pivot around the life history narrative of an individual, such as Dollywood (honoring Dolly Parton’s life), “establish an effective anamnesis or recollection of the past” in order to facilitate an intimate connection between visitors and the honored individual. This is a particularly powerful notion when the honored individual happens to be Jesus Christ, the son of God and savior of world.

It is a personal relationship with Christ that assures (Protestant) Christians entrance into heaven. “Do you have a personal relationship with our Lord and Savoir Jesus Christ?” I think about how many times in my life I have been asked this question, or have heard others being asked this question. It is the crux of Protestantism. This personal relationship is supposed to be cultivated through performances of faith—prayer, worship and church attendance; Bible study; and using the teachings of Jesus as a model
for living. The HLE provides visitors with the opportunity to physically encounter the life and death of Jesus, thereby developing a living, tangible relationship with the master narrative, and potentially deepening the visitor’s perceived relationship with God.

Whether or not visitors find or deepen their personal relationships with God, the HLE effectively offers a platform for taking stock of one’s religious identity. How well do we know the stories and the songs? Can we answer the trivia questions projected on the television screen prior to entering the Scriptorium? Do we want to participate in the call-to-altar solicited at the Special Prayer and Healing Service? As visitors determine their level of comfort and engagement with the various elements of the HLE, they are actively re/constructing their identities. Because the HLE offers a site where identity work can take place and asks visitors to engage in re/constructing and performing their identities in relation to the theme, the HLE performs the functions of a heritage site.

Heritage

Heritage, declares Bella Dicks, is “history made visitable.” Heritage, though now a term and concept contested in numerous disciplines, is typically associated with public knowledge based on objective investigation and analysis and is located in written texts. Heritage, by contrast, is subjective, personal, and mobilized for particular, idiosyncratic purposes. Heritage is often communicated through embodied performances of cultural rituals. When Dicks states that heritage is history made visitable, she is referring to the location of history within the conceptual framework of visitability: “the principle of visitability works to produce particular kinds of historical representation, which need to be ‘readable’ by, and interesting to, a wide range of visitors who are there primarily for identity-oriented reasons.” Heritage is a type of theming, an interpretive process germane to both contemporary museum philosophy and tourism. Heritage theming is an excellent example of how museums can employ popular strategies of cultural display to increase visitability. As a mode of cultural production and display, heritage offers a visitor-accessible version of an imagined past. Heritage functions as an access point for individuals who want to weave their biographies into a broader, public history. Within
the often elaborate staging of heritage museums, visitors participate in the (re)creation of individual and sociocultural identities.

The HLE, because it is a simulacrum, would not typically be considered a heritage site. Heritage sites are mostly constructed in the geographical locations to which they refer. They are anchored in geographical actualities. Though the HLE is a simulation, I argue that it functions similarly to other heritage sites. Visitors come to the HLE for numerous identity-oriented reasons: to engage their identities as Christians or persons of faith or persons interested in the story of Jesus. Visitors come to experience a particular public history in an intensely personal way. The HLE offers visitors a chance to add their individual stories to the grand narrative of Salvation by Grace, while experiencing that grand narrative in a way that is private. This public narrative thus becomes a part of the individual’s remembered past—her life story. The HLE functions as a heritage site by offering visitors the opportunity to locate individual experiences within a grand narrative, a public history, effectively animating that narrative—bringing history to life.

Living History Museums

In contrast to heritage sites that bring history to life, museums using conventional display practices, such as glass vitrines, can seem like spaces of unnatural stasis. Objects are carefully preserved for posterity, detached from the living processes of their creation and use. Living history facilities and events, like the HLE, are invested in “making history more authentic, more real and more immediate” by animating stories of a particular past.11 The label living history museum is often used interchangeably with the term heritage museum because both use heritage as the structuring theme. Not all heritage museums, however, utilize live performances, which characterize living history museums. Some heritage museums would more aptly be described as museums displaying heritage collections.

All heritage sites, whether they include live performances or not, work to represent history as lived, depending on in situ display practices (dioramas, preserved or restored buildings, tableaux, etc.). Living history, while not always reanimating the
objects themselves, offers live performances of the object and its meaning. Dicks distinguishes two types of heritage sites (not mutually exclusive): sites that strive for historical accuracy through careful research and sites that focus on “creating sensory drama through technology, multi-media display and high-tech rides and simulations.” The later she refers to as “simulated ‘experience centre[s].’” Living history museums and simulated experience centers depend heavily on Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s notion of virtuality (or what Dicks terms “experiential reality”) instead of actuality (or “material reality”).

Many living history sites fall into the category of simulated experience center because they incorporate advanced display technologies in order to bring history to life. They are vulnerable to charges of inaccuracy and subject to accusations regarding seriousness (they are too entertaining to be properly educational). Simulated experience models of heritage museums are controversial because of their emphasis on virtuality. Structurally, simulated experience centers are closely related to theme parks, which contributes to debates surrounding the increasing pervasiveness of edutainment philosophy. The HLE, because it can be classified as a simulated experience center, suffered criticism from Orange County Property Appraiser Bill Donegan for precisely this reason.

These controversies and criticisms extend from popular and academic understandings of what heritage should be. Heritage has been traditionally defined as a thing or object: “anything that is or may be inherited.” The focus on materiality in Western ideas about heritage has contributed to what Laurajane Smith refers to as a hegemonic heritage discourse or authorized heritage discourse (AHD). The AHD naturalizes a particular understanding of heritage that privileges things-in-themselves, such as locations (Jerusalem), built structures (the Dome of the Rock), and objects (Bibles). What it does not allow for, according to Smith, is that heritage is not an innate and inherent property to be passed along; heritage is the process of meaning making that invests the tangible with the intangible. Smith contends, in contrast to many heritage scholars and the AHD, “heritage [is] an act of communication and meaning making—indeed [it is] an experience.”
Smith’s conception of heritage is useful for understanding how the HLE functions as a heritage site precisely because Smith contests the importance placed on the object or location itself. Heritage is a process rather than a product; it is a performance. Like experiential authenticity, heritage is achieved (or not) through engagement. What roles, then, do material items play in the performative processes of heritage and identity work? The material elements associated with heritage—the sites and objects—function as markers and symbols (the signs organized by the unifying theme making the space readable); they are the props and backdrops to the stories being told. When we understand the importance and usefulness of material objects and locations within this framework, the actuality of those objects becomes secondary. Heritage is located in experience, and accuracy of the actuality is less important than the collaborative hallucination generated through virtuality. The HLE is a completely simulated environment that references actual locations, but is not itself the site of the original events to which it makes reference. Thus, the HLE would typically not be considered a heritage site. Yet it functions in ways very similar to institutionally recognized heritage sites such as Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia. Smith’s theory broadens the definition of heritage and makes room for sites like the HLE, which perform heritage work. The HLE is a site where individual and collective identities engage with, shape, and are shaped by a performed past.

**Turning to the Past**

Heritage is produced in the present (socially constructed) and itself is an engine of production, producing the past. Why are individuals turning to performances of a past to engage in identity work? “Claims to the past,” states Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “lay the foundation for present and future claims. Having a past, a history, a ‘folklore’ of your own, and institutions to bolster these claims, is fundamental to the politics of culture.”¹⁸ The HLE functions as an institution that bolsters the claims of Christians to Jerusalem as the Holy City and site of Christ’s eventual return. While not a forced migration—or even a migration in the actual sense—a Christian Diaspora exists in the Christian imagination. Jerusalem is the “home” of Christianity.
Creating a Christian Homeland

From the moment the Puritans set sail from the banks of Great Britain, the “New World” was rhetorically fashioned as “New Jerusalem.” Colonists fancied themselves “like the children of Israel . . . traversing an imposing body of water to escape persecution.” The Israelites were a landless people who wandered the wilderness searching for their promised land. When the Biblical nation finally settled, the land they chose became the Holy Land: Jerusalem. The Puritans, too, transformed their chosen land into a Holy Land by naming the topography after Biblical places, molding the cultural landscape in the image of the Biblical landscape. Americans were steeped in a history of nationhood that located the United States in a larger narrative of Biblical prophecy. As art historian John Davis observes, “The special relationship with the lands of the Bible that Americans constructed for themselves was premised on a single metaphor . . . the United States as a new Israel.” The actual Palestine and Jerusalem became important as “validation, not only of the authenticity of the Bible, but also of the notion of America as heir to the sacred topography.”

In the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, Americans embraced the Holy Land as their ancestral home (conveniently disregarding the colonial relationship to England). Today, vestiges of this sentiment remain evidenced in Christian rhetoric, the U.S. government’s international policies regarding the Middle East, and heritage tourism. Historian David Lowenthal describes heritage as the “prime lure of tourism” in the late twentieth century; “The whole world is busy lauding—and lamenting—some past, be it fact or fiction.” Many people organize their leisure travel around exploring a past with which they feel a connection. Roots-tourism has become particularly popular in recent years. Roots-tourism, contends Paul Basu, is characterized by sustained interest in seeking a metaphorical home, homeland, and homecoming; quests he describes as “genealogical journeys.” Home is characterized by origins and stability; it “may be understood as a place where one belongs in a profound sense.” Homeland is the location of one’s home and the “cradle of one’s people.” A homecoming, then, is the
process of returning to the homeland and home. The rhetoric of home, homeland, and homecoming has been used by diasporic communities like Christians. As Basu notes,

There is a tendency in some settler societies for previously assimilated ‘groups’ (groups, that is, whose ‘group identity’ has actually been lost over successive generations) to seek to dissimilate themselves and recover a more distinctive ethnic identity: often central to this is the recovery of lost ‘historic memories and associations’ with lost homelands.27

American Christians in the nineteenth century attempted to “recover a more distinctive ethnic identity” through appropriating Jerusalem as their collective homeland.

Today, the HLE can be understood as another manifestation of the Christian Diaspora’s desire to re/locate their roots in a geographical and metaphorical homeland. Take, for instance, the HLE’s Wilderness Tabernacle presentation in which Christians are positioned as the inheritors of ancient Levitical traditions. The HLE, while claiming to be nondenominational, clearly tells the story of Jesus through a Protestant lens. Jesus is the hero, the main character, and all other characters are secondary. (There are no saints at the HLE.) While the HLE does embrace traditions of Judaism and emphasizes the importance of the Old Testament, these elements are important insofar as they are prophetic of Jesus’ birth and death. The beliefs and rituals of Jewish culture serve as evidence of God’s ultimate plan to save humanity through Jesus’ blood. This rhetorical strategy is nowhere as evident as in the Wilderness Tabernacle presentation. The HLE encourages us to determine who we are by showing us who we are not.

Collectively Confiscating Jewish Ritual

A gnarled old gentleman, short in stature and weighted down by a very long, very real white beard blows a shofar and ushers us into a nondescript building fronted by a canopy of sand-colored canvas. As we enter, I squint to see while my eyes adjust to the heavy darkness. I sit in the front row of a small stand of bleachers and listen to the welcoming words of our host, “Shalom! Welcome to the Holy Land Experience.” The Wilderness Tabernacle presentation leads visitors through the rituals enacted by the High
Priest Aaron on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. “There are seven feasts of Israel mentioned in the Bible,” explains our host. He continues,

The Day of Atonement is the sixth of the seven feasts mentioned. It is probably the most solemn and holy of all the seven feasts of Israel mentioned in scripture. In fact, the Bible says if anyone works on the Day of Atonement, on Yom Kippur, the penalty would be death. . . . That was the day once a year that the High Priest could go into the tabernacle. He would go from the Holy Place into the Holy of Holies, and there he would offer that blood sacrifice upon the altar; upon the Arc of the Covenant; upon the Mercy Seat of God. Not only for his sins of that year, but for the sins of all Israelites that were around the tabernacle. 28

As the next segment of the performance begins, the already dim lights are extinguished and our host walks into the scene and becomes the High Priest Aaron. A prerecorded shofar is trumpeted and a baritone voice sings in Hebrew. Then a narrator begins the story of the Tabernacle:

I am an old man now, having grown long in years. My name? It is not important. You need only know that I am one of the children of Israel, of the family of Aaron, of the tribe of Levy. Until my twentieth year I was a Hebrew slave in Egypt laboring with my brethren to build monuments and cities for Pharaoh. During our four hundred years of cruel bondage, we had begun to forget our culture, our heritage, our language, and worst of all we had begun to lose our faith in the Lord. But God heard our cries of affliction and sent Moses to deliver us from Pharaoh’s oppression. A nation of two and a half million did he deliver, dividing the red sea so that we might cross to freedom. I remember how Moses ascended Mount Sinai to meet with the lord and receive the Ten Commandments, along with the six hundred three other laws of our sacred covenant. And when he had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone written with the finger of God. And with these laws God also gave Moses precise instructions for the building of a portable place of worship that would reestablish the lord in our midst. 29
He describes the assembly of the tabernacle and the clothing the priests would wear. Aaron, we are told, was anointed the first High Priest. The narrator establishes his credibility by explaining he, being a descendant of Aaron, also served as a High Priest: “When I was a younger man I was fortunate enough to be selected as one of those priests, for I am of the family of Aaron and the tribe of Levy.” He continues to explain that the tabernacle is at the center of the sacrificial system, and this ritual sacrifice would include the shedding of animal blood. The narrator then describes the five types of daily sacrificial offerings. “Each of these serves in its own way to reconcile the worshipper with God. [Goats bleat and lambs “bah” in the background] Because our living God desires to be deeply honored and satisfied through the burnt offering morning and evening everyday, He instructed Moses to build an altar of bronze.” A spot light illuminates the altar of bronze on the stage (see fig. 7).

Our host, who is now silently performing the duties of the High Priest Aaron, emerges from behind a screen off-stage and approaches the altar. This begins the enactment of the ritual sacrifice of a lamb. We watch as the Priest hits the invisible lamb with an imaginary club and carries it to the altar. The voice of God (an almost monotone chorus of baritone male voices) recites: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls. For it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.” The narrator clarifies, “In this manner we achieve a temporary reconciliation with the Lord and so preserve our sacred covenant.” This statement foreshadows the later use of Old Testament scripture to support Jesus as the Lamb of God who is the final blood sacrifice, atoning for the souls of all humankind.

This performance links Jewish and Christian heritage for the purposes of providing contemporary Christians a relationship to the Old Testament and a sense of history and place otherwise absent from their cultural heritage. Christians may claim rituals associated with the practice of Judaism, such as Yom Kippur, and transform their meaning. The Tabernacle performance teaches visitors about more than the intricacies of Yom Kippur and the procedures of the Atonement ritual. It is a reminder of the importance of cultural heritage and positions contemporary Christians as the decedents of the Israelites. In his opening monologue, the narrator laments, “we had begun to forget
our culture, our heritage, our language, and worst of all we had begun to lose our faith in the Lord.” He stresses the importance of culture and heritage, simultaneously linking these concepts to God. The implication is that in order to cultivate faith and maintain a relationship with God, we must remember our culture and heritage. For Christians who may not feel a cultural connection to the Israelites (God’s “chosen” people), the HLE facilitates this link. The Jewish heritage is appropriated as Christian heritage, and for the purposes of the HLE Protestant heritage, in order to anchor Protestants in a heritage that includes Jesus and his homeland.

The recorded section of the Wilderness Tabernacle performance ends as our unidentified narrator ponders the future of the ritual of Atonement, while a silhouette of the Nativity is projected onto an elevated screen:

Though I near the end of my years, I dare to hope that I will live long enough to see the glorious day when the children of Israel will leave the wilderness and cross into the Promised Land. And lately, I dream of a great temple where the Arc of the Covenant will reside ever-after, and where our services will continue throughout our generations. Yet I wonder, is there more? Does God in his infinite wisdom have a greater plan for His chosen people? Could it be that our blessed sacrificial system is merely a rehearsal, a shadow of wonderful things to come? Might the prophets of Israel be foretelling of a day when God will provide his perfect Lamb as a final sacrifice for the sin of the world? Perhaps not in my own lifetime, but somehow I believe it will come to pass.30

Now it is clear why this narrator never specifically identifies himself. The HLE developed a character who would not be subject to historical contradiction. If they had chosen to use one of the actual, documented High Priests who presided over the Levitical Priesthood, they could not have attributed this monologue to him. As long as this narrator remains anonymous, the only opposition is the unlikelihood that any Levitical Priest would have thought, much less uttered these sentiments. The narrator argues the Jewish ritual of Atonement was the foreshadowing of Christ’s death. While this is not a new interpretation of Old Testament scripture, the HLE emphasizes the irrelevance of Jewish tradition to the point of insult. Using a High Priest and Yom Kippur as the vehicles of this
message suggests that the “truth” of Salvation is inherent in Judaic belief and contemporary Jews simply ignore this fact. Worse, the narrator refers to Jewish sacred traditions as “merely a rehearsal, a shadow,” inconsequential in comparison to the beliefs of Christians.

Our host resumes his position at his podium and leads the audience through the “custom and tradition” of closing the presentation with a blessing found in Numbers 6:24. He delivers the blessing first in Hebrew, then English: “May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you His peace.” Amen. He continues with barely a pause:

Well, we hope you’ve been inspired to take a fresh look at God, His word, and His wonderful plan of redemption, the Lamb of God who gave his life for the sin of the world. Jesus the Messiah, praise God that our High Priest Jesus gave his life once and for all at the cross of Calvary so that this annual sacrifice for sin would not have to continue on forever. Hallelujah! We have a wonderful savior. Aren’t you glad when Jesus said it was finished at that cross, that veil of the temple was rent, and now folks we can come only into the Throne of Grace through the blood of Jesus? It all pointed to Jesus, and when you put your faith and trust in him as Lord and Savior, God promises to give you eternal life. Hallelujah!31

Our host continues: “Praise God that our High Priest Jesus gave his life once and for all at the cross of Calvary so that this annual sacrifice for sin would not have to continue on forever.” “Aren’t you glad?” he asks. In one masterful stroke, the HLE creates an association (via appropriation) between contemporary Christians and an ancient Jewish community, while delineating the necessary differences between Christians and contemporary Judaism. Christians are the descendants of the Old Testament Jews and their traditions, but because of the fulfillment of prophecy, are no longer required to practice the rituals characteristic of those traditions. So Christians get to claim the Jewish heritage without identifying with contemporary Jewish communities. Jewish rituals are important insofar as they point towards Christian beliefs.
The Powerful Draw of Blood

Many American Christians have journeyed to Jerusalem attempting to experience the ancient landscape inherently tied to Jewish and Hebrew traditions, touring the desert where the High Priest Aaron and the Israelites wandered and performed the rituals enacted in the Wilderness Tabernacle presentation. Such Christian tours to Jerusalem would not necessarily conform to Basu’s notion of roots-tourism. Roots-tourism is a subset of heritage travel, where roots-tourists trace specific ancestry; their interests lay beyond the boundaries of national and cultural identity (social and community relationships) in bloodlines as they seek to identify their ancestors. Due to its finite objectives, roots-tourism would seemingly not be an applicable concept for understanding the HLE. I believe, however, that because we are working in the realm of the metaphorical, it is appropriate and useful to cast bloodlines as a figurative concept. Members of the Christian Diaspora can be understood as roots-tourists who find in Jerusalem a blood connection. It is the blood of Jesus—the shared genealogy of human salvation—that Christians seek in the homeland. I choose to employ roots-tourism, a subdivision of heritage tourism, because of the impetus—seeking a homeland.

Roots-tourists use pilgrimage, quest, and homecoming as metaphors for processing and communicating the meanings of their journeys. Drawing on George Lakoff’s and Mark Johnson’s work, Metaphors We Live By, Basu defines metaphors as “a faculty of cognition through which we perceive and experience the world.” Metaphor is a process by which we interpret our physical, emotional, and intellectual engagement with our environment and create meaning through translation: “an understanding of one thing in terms of another.” In short, Basu argues for a “grammar” of travel constituted by these metaphors creating a horizon of significance against which individuals define their experiences. These metaphors “empower these journeys with the capacity to effect personal transformations” and “life-changing experience.” Of these three metaphors, pilgrimage is particularly poignant in respect to the HLE. In the next section, I discuss HLE visitor Ellnide Lefevre’s framing of the HLE as a pilgrimage site.
Before I could swat them away, the large droplets of sweat pooled at my hairline streamed down my temples into the corners of my eyes. I had been battling all day with my errant fluids. The August heat had already felled several HLE visitors; young kids whose flushed faces were testaments to heat exhaustion, as well as older adults huddled into shady corners or sprawled in chairs inside air conditioned buildings. They gulped down $2.50 bottled waters and vigorously fanned themselves with Welcome pamphlets.

I look at Ellnide Lefevre with admiration. She sits relaxed and contemplative across the weathered wooden table underneath the overhang shading diners who dare sit outdoors at the Oasis Palms Café. Ellnide doesn’t appear overly taxed by the heat. I am a bit self-conscious in my purple HLE shirt as evidence of my increasingly damp underarms darkens the fabric. I know I look like a blotchy-faced kid, sun-burnt and dehydrated. My staff badge, HLE shirt, and khaki pants lend some credibility to my presence, suggesting I am working in an official capacity for the park. The clipboard is a nice finishing touch.

Today I want to try a different tactic in securing interviews. Maybe if I look official, visitors will be more likely to spare a couple of moments and actually talk to me. So far, my plan hadn’t worked. It was almost 2:00 p.m. and, even though I had been on site since 10:00 a.m., I hadn’t garnered more than ten words from prospective interviewees. The ones who I had managed to corner quipped quick, one-word answers to my ice-breaker questions.

“Have you been to the HLE before?” I ask.
“No,” they reply.
“What do you think so far?”
“Fine.”

After a quick assessment of my attire and the occasional cocked eyebrow, most of them determined I was an obstacle, in the way as they tried to experience the site. Or they simply looked right through me and towards their next destination.

When I saw Ellnide sitting alone at the Café, I saw an opportunity to sit in the shade and maybe, just maybe, have a conversation. Ellnide graciously nodded when I
asked if she would mind answering some questions. At first, she was reserved and her remarks abbreviated. “Yes,” this was her first visit to the park. So far, “the park is okay.” But after several minutes of asking the questions on my survey sheet, I decided to go off script. I set my clipboard down.

“Do you like to travel?” I ask.

“Oh, yes,” her eyes brighten and she leans towards me. “But I only engage in spiritual travel, like Tibet and India. I find a specific spot to meditate or pray.” She shakes her head and deliberately sustains eye contact. One delicate brow rises, emphasizing her seriousness and implicating me. “Not here,” she says. I feel the critique, but am still busy processing her previous comments.

_Tibet and India!_ I am awestruck. Romantic images of serene, snow-capped mountains and emerald green landscapes distract my attention. I think, those are _real_ spiritual places. Ellnide’s finishing thought, “Not here,” jars me back to surroundings that immediately seem vapid in contrast to my dreams of Tibet.

“Then why did you come here?” My question is more forthright than I intended.

“I’m visiting with my Episcopal church. They come every year, but this is the first time I decided to join them. I was curious,” she says.

“But you’re not impressed?”

“I was expecting there to be a mosque or chapel; a holy place. Some place to meditate or pray. I expected to have to take my shoes off, but you don’t feel like you should have to take your shoes off.”

I nod.

“The name does not correspond to this place,” she finishes.

“You’re right,” I say. “There isn’t a specific place set aside for thinking or praying. The Holy Land Experience is missing a space to encounter the holy.”

“The park is a well done replica,” she continues, “but it feels like a theme park.”

“We _are_ in Orlando,” I challenge, wanting to see how she makes sense of her apparent disappointment in this location.

Ellnide smiles, “True. Florida is _the_ tourist place.” I wait for her to say more, but she just smiles.
“Have you been to Disney?” I ask, trying to get her talking again.
“Yes.”
“Well, how do you think the Holy Land Experience compares?”
“There’s no comparison,” she laughs. “Here, you have to be a Christian. It’s a different level.”
“But if it’s a different level than a theme park and you have to be a Christian, doesn’t that make this a spiritual place?”
She looks away. How does she make sense of this place? Am I pressing to hard? Will she not want to continue our conversation? I worry at my lack of interviewing prowess.
Ellnide folds her hands and places them on the table, lightly beating a rhythm while she looks off into the sky. She tilts her head slightly, and I know she is struggling to make sense of what she hadn’t thought about before, what may be a paradox.
She looks at me again and says, “I was hoping this place would offer a spiritual experience. I think that it can. You can find spiritual experiences in many types of places. When I was in Tibet, I climbed a mountain. It was difficult, but when I got to the top and looked out around me, I felt I was in a holy place,” she pauses. “In Haiti, every August 15th pilgrims come from around the world to collect water from a particular waterfall. It’s a holy place on that day. I think that the Holy Land is a holy place, but it just needs something.”
She continues thinking and I do my best not to interrupt. I want desperately to fill the silence, to ask more questions, but the most important thing I ever learned about interviewing is the value of silence. Keeping my mouth shut encourages the interviewee to fill the void.
“They need to come up with something like that here,” she finally continues. “People are believers. If they have a problem, they can come here to meditate or pray and should go home feeling fulfilled.” Suddenly, Ellnide smiles, a big, wide smile that signals an epiphany. “The Nile!” She exclaims. Then she looks at my discarded clipboard and again raises that disciplined brow. I quickly pick up the pad and pen and make ready to write.
“The Nile River could solve the problem. They could make a Nile River run through the park. Visitors could float down it in boats.” Like Moses as a baby in that basket. “They could dip their fingers in the water of the Nile and then buy a little vessel of the water to take home. All of the gift shops could sell the water. I would buy it. It would be a spiritual memento. It would be more authentic than the trinkets they sell in the shops now.”

I finish scratching out the details of Ellnide’s idea and then sit, speechless, staring at her. What to say? Now it’s my turn to be stumped, unable to make sense of relationships between pilgrimage, spirituality, tourism, consumption, and authenticity which Ellnide has just elaborated. My pause must have lingered a bit too long, allowing Ellnide’s excitement from her epiphany to subside. She looks down at her watch, then back at me.

“Well,” she lets the word hang in the air between us. My time is up.

I nod and smile, forcing myself to temporarily set aside all of the questions and connections spinning through my mind. Is the HLE a pilgrimage site? Can visitors experience something sacred in the contrived landscape of a simulation? What is real here? Does Ellnide’s search for spiritual authenticity make the HLE a pilgrimage site? Is Ellnide a pilgrim or a tourist? Can she be both?

“Thank you so much for your time. I truly appreciate all of your thoughts, and I know the HLE administrators will value your suggestions. I hope you enjoy the rest of the park. I hope you find at least a little bit of what you’re looking for.”

Ellnide’s Performance of Pilgrim

Ellnide Lefevre is a pilgrim. She seeks spiritual experiences in “holy spots” where she can meditate and pray; places where she feels closer to God. She prides herself on finding these locations and considers her motivations in this endeavor as superior to leisure travel. How she constructs her identity as a traveler helps us understand how she perceives the Holy Land Experience as a destination. Ellnide came with her church to the HLE because she believed the HLE might offer the type of experiences she found in other holy spots. The HLE for Ellnide is, at least potentially, a spiritual destination.
Ellnide’s ideas about what a spiritual destination should be affected her encounter with the HLE. She expected the space to be arranged in a way that encourages self-reflexivity, devotion, and communion with God. For her, this arrangement should have included a specific location set aside from the hubbub of the crowd, a space of quiet and contemplation, a space akin to a temple or church. Such as space did not exist.\(^{36}\)

The disappointment of Ellnide’s expectations did not lead her to conclude that the HLE was not a spiritual location. She clearly positions it as Christian, “on another level,” presumably higher, than secular entertainments like Disney. But, Ellnide does believe that the HLE is missing something significant—a space to intimately commune with God, a place to pray. Ellnide translates this absence as a lack of authenticity. At least at the time of our interview, Ellnide had not achieved experiential authenticity.

Though she believes the site is a good “replica,” she refers to the trinkets sold in the gift shops with some derision. Rather than souvenirs, she wants a “spiritual memento.” As I spoke with Ellnide, the lines (if they ever existed) between spirituality/authenticity and commercialism/marketing/fiction became muddled. She obviously understands the commercial needs of the HLE to market and sell products, as well as her own identity as a consumer interested in acquiring meaningful experiences and mementos (souvenirs). While Ellnide is performing the role of tourist, her earlier statements about spiritual travel, meditation, and prayer suggest she is also a pilgrim. Pilgrimage is a performance of faith, the meaning of which is achieved (or not) in the process.

**Theoretical Approaches to Pilgrimage**

Victor and Edith Turner were the avant garde of anthropological studies of pilgrimage in the mid 1970s, proposing a theoretical model based on liminality and Arnold Van Gennep’s theory of rites of passage. Van Gennep, a French folklorist who studied preindustrial ritual rites of passage, delineates three stages: separation (pre-liminal), liminal, and incorporation (post-liminal).\(^{37}\) Pre-liminal involves the practices of separation from home. Liminal refers to the acts of transitioning, being in-between. The post-liminal stage is characterized by communitas (incorporation). The Turners
investigate religious systems of societies through this theoretical lens and extrapolate Van
Gennep’s model to pilgrimage practices.

In *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, Turner and Turner define
pilgrimage by way of the destination, the site of pilgrimage. Pilgrims travel to sites that
“are believed to be places where miracles once happened, still happen, and may happen
again.”\(^{38}\) Turner and Turner refer to the process of pilgrimage as “something of a
penance” where an individual embarks on a potentially perilous journey to “a far holy
place” away from the routine of home and encounters “the basic elements and structures
of his faith in their unshielded, virgin radiance.”\(^{39}\) This encounter is potentially
transformative. “Religious images strike [the pilgrim], in these novel circumstances, as
perhaps they have never done before” because the pilgrim has been physically and
emotionally challenged along the journey; thus, she is “quite vulnerable” to sacred
symbols.\(^{40}\) The pilgrim “becomes increasingly capable of entering in imagination and
with sympathy into the culturally defined experiences” of the people associated with the
pilgrimage site.\(^{41}\) Pilgrimage enables empathy.

Overlaying this model onto the processes of pilgrimage has proven problematic
because this model does not account for the complex, multiple motivations of travelers.
Scholars such as E. Alan Morinis, John Eade and Michael Sallnow have presented studies
of diverse pilgrimage practices that resist the fixed and narrow structural framework set
forth by the Turners, lobbying instead for a more flexible theory that allows researchers
to consider the idiosyncrasies of specific pilgrimages.\(^{42}\) Eade and Sallnow challenge the
Turners’ lack of attention to the friction caused by individual interpretative differences
inherent in the pilgrimage phenomenon. The pilgrimage itself is a site of dynamic
relational sense-making and the destination is a repository of individual and institutional
meanings, a “religious void, a ritual space capable of accommodating diverse meanings
and practices.”\(^{43}\) In understanding pilgrimage as a performance (a process of
engagement), which may result in the pilgrim investing a space with religious/spiritual
meaning, the concept and application of pilgrimage expands to include all manner of
travel making it impossible for scholars to strictly define pilgrimage as religious.
Pilgrimage as Metaphor and Paradigm

Pinning down pilgrimage as a bounded, definable system (a thing-in-itself) continues to bewilder scholars. Here, I have no use for arguing for or against pilgrimage as a definitive system of human travel. Rather, I believe pilgrimage is usefully understood as both metaphor and paradigm. Pilgrimage as metaphor frames any type of movement (physical, visceral, emotional, intellectual, and/or spiritual) as a journey fraught with obstacles and hardships and results in some form of transformation. Pilgrimage as paradigm provides a model for any traveler wishing to affect transformation. Various large-scale, coordinated events, including the eleventh century Crusades (referred to as armed pilgrimage), the Protestant Pilgrim’s settlement in Plymouth, and the Quaker City cruise (a boat full of nineteenth-century American travelers headed for Ottoman Palestine) have been described as pilgrimage. Individuals also employ pilgrimage in order to narrate their personal travels. Nineteenth-century American travelers often referred to themselves and their compatriots as pilgrims venturing through the sublime landscapes of Niagara Falls, Yosemite, and Yellowstone. These spaces became invested with spiritual and religious meanings through the processes of pilgrimage.

The dominant historical narrative of the settlement and expansion of the United States is framed as pilgrimage. Each November, many of us celebrate Thanksgiving, marking the survival of our forbearers, the Protestant Pilgrims who sought a Promised Land, or new Zion, in the American wilderness. This narrative is a function of geopiety, the reverential attachment of people to place, and has played a significant role in defining an American national identity. Geopiety is a concept originally coined by geographer John Kirtland Wright to describe complex relationships between people and geographical features. These relationships are characterized by emotional responses often times expressed through religious language. Cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan elaborates upon this concept, underscoring the “devotional” aspects of “piety” and defining this type of relationship between humans and nature as a reverential attachment to a place that embodies home. The Christian Holy Land, as both imagined and physically manifest in Jerusalem, is as Lester Vogel argues, “the land of the birth of what is held to be the
incarnation of the religion’s deity and, by extension, the land where the society’s acknowledged culture of the sacred was born.” Though most Christians in the United States cannot lay claim to Jerusalem through the kind of attachment Tuan describes between people and their physical “home,” they can and do identify the Holy Land as their spiritual homeland.

In an era often perceived as lacking stability and characterized by increasingly intangible interpersonal relationships (via the technological and communication revolutions), “there is much to justify the view that [home,] this seemingly most commonplace of locations has . . . also become one of the most elusive.” In the United States, almost fifty percent of the population changed living locations between 1995 and 2000. Transience and physical displacement strain the idea of home as a stable, immutable location. Cosmopolitanism and globalization affect a swirling, blurring maelstrom of social practices, rituals, and beliefs. Postmodern sensibility, which flaunts fluidity and deals in fragmentations, suggests contemporary familiarity (and a level of comfort) with mobility, discontinuity, and change. Durkheim, however, accuses “external mobility” of shattering “traditional society,” catapulting the modern individual into a “permanent identity crisis.” This sense of instability and inconsistency, and the sense of alienation so often associated with postmodernity can be understood as the absence or loss of a metaphysical home. As Basu observes, “The search for identity may thus be equated with a metaphysical search for home.”

The HLE is a manifestation of a Christian desire for a metaphysical home located in a physical homeland. Many American Christians locate their spiritual roots in Jerusalem and understand themselves as people living in diaspora—physically separated from their spiritual homeland. “[T]he experience of living in diaspora,” says Dicks, “creates a powerful heritage urge.” This heritage urge is characterized by a desire for connection and a sense of ownership or stewardship. Heritage is political (it involves territories and national identity and power) and the process of claiming a homeland (be it physical or symbolic) can result in conflict and bears the possibility of colonization.

The connection between origins, homeland, and heritage tourism fuels critics’ accusations that heritage sites and their visitors engage in sentimentalism and nostalgia.
There is no question that romanticism, sentimentalism, and nostalgia can affect how history is storied, leading to the silencing of alternative stories and voices. In a poetic elucidation of the paradox of the work of heritage, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett states, “remembering is a prelude to forgetting, and the collecting of error an overture to its eradication.”55 Certain stories get told certain ways while others are forgotten. In the telling, rituals, practices, and traditions of peoples are objectified and categorized. In this process, “errors” are transformed into heritage, safe for consumption. This archaizing of errors is present in the Scriptorium’s narrative of the settlement of the United States, a narrative that frames the migration of the Puritans to North America as the pilgrimage of righteous people to a Promised Land.

A Portrait of Pilgrim History; Or Denying the Indigeneity of Native Americans

As our small group of visitors moves into the next gallery in our Scriptorium tour, we are greeted by the sounds of a strong wind blowing across the bow of a harbored ship. We crowd into the narrow space and peer out over the wooden railing onto the near shore. Painted on a backlit screen is the image of a small congregation of settlers kneeling in a prayer circle (see fig. 8). They are surrounded by the frigid wilderness. Insufficiently clothed for the weather, without shelter, they appear to be facing certain death. The narrator begins to tell their story:

As the Reformation struggled to gain a foothold in England and Europe, there were those who sought their spiritual destinies elsewhere. Yearning for the religious freedom denied to them in their homeland, they boarded the tiny ship Mayflower and set off from England on a voyage across the storm-tossed Atlantic. [Waves break against the ship’s hull]. Finally, on December 26th in the year 1620, one hundred two brave defenders of Christian liberty came ashore on the rugged coast of Massachusetts. Here, these pilgrims planted the seeds of their faith in Christ, which would soon blossom across the New World. [The haunting, hollow wind strengthens] . . . . Historians believe that the pilgrims, in their pursuit of religious freedom, carried Geneva Bibles to the New World aboard the Mayflower. In their pages the pilgrims found the strength they needed to endure
the hardships they would face as they struggled to establish America’s first permanent New England colony, a colony founded on the ideal of religious freedom.\textsuperscript{56}

In the painting, the male character located in the center of the prayer circle is thrusting his Bible toward heaven. A man’s voice, presumably the voice of the character depicted in the painting, announces:

\begin{quote}
We came over this great ocean and were ready to perish. But we cried unto you Lord, and you heard our voices, and looked on our adversity. Let us therefore praise you Lord, because you are good, and your mercies endure forever. Yay, let we who have been redeemed of the Lord show how you have delivered us.\textsuperscript{57}
\end{quote}

The voices of his followers sing \textit{Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow} as we exit this scene and find ourselves in the rustic Prairie Church. A choir sings a hymn accompanied by a fiddle. The narrator explains,

\begin{quote}
In the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} Centuries the vast, untamed North American frontier was filled with both promise and peril. It took a special commitment and determination to spread the Word of God across such a tremendous expanse. In the shadows of the majestic mountains, in the solitude of the green forests, on the sweeping expanses of the great prairies, the indomitable American spirit was forged. That spirit comes across in the indigenous versions of the Bible produced by these steadfast missionaries. With bibles in hand, circuit rider preachers penetrated this new land, and courageous evangelists carried the message of the gospel to the outlying territories, and eventually beyond the shores of America. The Eliot Bible printed in 1663 is not only the first bible printed in America, it is also the first specifically translated and printed for the purpose of proclaiming the gospel to Native Americans. As missionaries to the Algonquian tribe, the Puritans in their efforts heralded the beginning of missionary work in America, leading to American missions around the world.\textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}

We are given little time to process the story of our (American) birth and missionary purpose before we are positioned for Conviction in the next chamber, the Hall of Prophets. But I can’t shake the aching ethnocentrism of this national story. The HLE
constructs the ten-minute tale to elevate the pilgrims as anointed warriors whose heroic efforts result in the salvation of a wild land and its people. This, of course, is not a new take on the events that transpired in the settlement and colonization of the Americas. It forms the basis of the popular myth of our national genesis, which has only recently (in the last half of the twentieth century) been challenged.

The HLE’s choice to reify this particular story can be understood as a performance of nostalgic nationalism that effectively silences alternative stories and indigenous voices. The story they choose to tell is common in its ignorance, playing on the sentimentality of any visitor who has grown up celebrating Thanksgiving with Charlie Brown, construction paper hand-turkeys, and children’s games of Pilgrims and Indians. But the way the narrator weaves the tale, its rhetorical construction, encourages visitors to accept and embrace the violence.

The Puritan pilgrims who sailed on the Mayflower are described as “brave defenders of Christian liberty,” political exiles whose “homeland” denied them “religious freedom.” “Religious freedom” is repeated throughout the narrative, successfully linking the idea of freedom (with all of its contemporary connotations) with Christianity. The pilgrims, and thus Christians, are positioned as oppressed peoples forced from their place of birth into diaspora. By positioning the pilgrims as oppressed, it becomes conceptually difficult to think of them as oppressors. If they were fighting for religious freedom, how could they be oppressing other folks? In this way, the story sets up the pilgrims as heroes whose actions must be righteous, rendering the subsequent violence invisible.

The Pilgrim chamber alludes to the content of the following gallery, the Prairie Church, by foreshadowing Manifest Destiny. The Pilgrims are characterized as cultivators, God’s gardeners, who “planted the seeds of their faith in Christ, which would soon blossom across the New World” (my emphasis). By describing the violent process of colonization and Manifest Destiny as a flower blossoming, the narrator establishes an image of growth, progress, and positivity. Visitors carry this association with them into the Prairie Church where we are encouraged to take pride in the success of our ancestors. The Prairie Church narrative continues to champion the heroism of American settlers introducing some particularly aggressive language. The “steadfast missionaries”
demonstrated “determination” and an “indomitable American spirit” as they tamed the “untamed . . . frontier” and “penetrated this new land” to proselytize the indigenous peoples. Even as these descriptors suggest domination and violence, they have been somewhat neutralized by the existing framework of cultivation and progress established in the Pilgrim chamber.

What is particularly fascinating about the telling of this tale is the positioning of the missionaries as indigenous. By asserting the settlers were creating “indigenous versions of the Bible,” the narrator associates the term indigenous with the missionaries rather than with the indigenous Native Americans who are mentioned later as “Native Americans,” and not “indigenous peoples.” The word “indigenous” indicates rightful placement, original location and, in a sense, ownership. To refer to copies of the Bible created in America as “indigenous” suggests these bibles “originate naturally in [this] region.” They are natural, thus their creators, too, are natural to the region. The settlers “belong naturally to [this] place.” Situating the settlers and their bibles as rightful and natural inhabitants of America displaces and denies the indigeneity of Native Americans and positions them for removal.

The Puritans’ pilgrimage to North America did not foster empathy for the indigenous peoples associated with the pilgrimage site, as Turner and Turner hypothesized. Nor did the Puritan journey fit the strict definitions of pilgrimage outlined by Turner and Turner. The site to which the Puritans journeyed was not a sacred site associated with miracles, and their journey was not circular; they stayed in North America. Yet the Puritan journey and settlement was and continues to be framed as pilgrimage (the “Pilgrims”), and there are similarities to pilgrimage as defined by Turner and Turner. The Puritans embarked on a long, laborious, and perilous trip to a far place, which they imaginatively constructed as holy. The Puritan journey can be understood as pilgrimage by employing the broader, performance-based definition of pilgrimage defined by Eade and Sallnow. The Puritans invested North America with sacredness by imagining and overlaying that sacredness onto the landscape. For the Puritans, “pilgrimage” was a tool for understanding their experiences—a process of dynamic, relational sense-making.
In imagining their journey as a pilgrimage, the Puritans constructed a specific framework through which to interpret their experiences. This framework was selective, emphasizing elements that reinforced a religious and spiritual tone, and positioned elements that could prove contradictory (the presence of indigenous peoples in the Promised Land) within the established narrative (souls in need of saving or evil that must be eradicated). The HLE’s interpretation of the European settlement of North America constructs a Christian heritage based on the Puritan pilgrimage narrative. As evidenced in the Scriptorium’s story of American settlement, heritage as a process of cultural re/production is selective. When engaging a heritage site we must ask, Whose stories are being told and whose are excluded?

Heritage has been criticized for more than its selective storytelling. It has also been criticized as a nostalgic rejection of the present, an effort to slow down the dizzying progress of modernity. Postmodern theorists such as Fredric Jameson may understand heritage as a desperate attempt to reestablish a linear, progressive narrative of our lives in the midst of postmodern fragmentation, and the dissolution of Self and History. Postmodern understandings of identity (self) as mutable work almost paradoxically. Mutable selves mean we are empowered agents who can construct and shape our identities, but it also means our identities are not anchored (not stable or predictable). The ebb of the cultural tide can leave an unanchored identity flailing. Heritage offers the flailing identity a buoy, if not a safe harbor.

**Heritage and Home as Catalysts for Change**

Heritage does not always engage in nostalgic appeals and “can be seen as staging a particular self-other relationship with the past.” Visitors to the HLE are able to compare their own lives to those of early Christians by witnessing the trials and tribulations performed in the various presentations. This self-reflexivity engenders a distancing from one’s own life; visitors may “see their own lives as ‘other.’” Gaining such a perspective can be a powerful catalyst to change, to do something differently. The HLE structures visitor experiences in order to cultivate this perspective and encourage visitors to change their lives outside of the HLE. The HLE uses heritage to teach visitors
how to live in the present, rather than simply reject it or nostalgize the past. It is a means of reviving interest in contemporary Christian life and reinvigorating ideas of witnessing and ministry. The HLE uses heritage in order to make people think about their everyday lives and to do things now.

The final gallery in the Scriptorium is an excellent example of the HLE placing visitors in a position to see their own lives as other while petitioning them to do something to change their worlds. This gallery asks us to examine ourselves, our contemporary lives as other within the context of the historical narrative of Witnessing. As I noted in “Interlude: the Scriptorium,” this gallery proclaims the wonders of modern communication technologies. After the overwhelming light and sound show in the Hall of Prophets where we are meant to feel Conviction, visitors move into a gallery arranged as a living room in a middle-class home—large TV, attractive floral sofa, desk with computer, family portraits hung in simple white frames on the taupe walls (see fig. 9). It feels as if we have just entered someone’s home. Or maybe we have entered a slightly different version of our own homes. The space looks a lot like my last apartment; it is both familiar and strange. As we stand waiting in this living room, I feel like a voyeur. The automated narrator, who has guided us through the history of the technology of writing as it relates to the production and dissemination of the Bible, begins to speak:

Having journeyed through time and witnessed God’s sovereign hand in the preservation and transmission of His glorious Word, we welcome you back to the time we know as Now, the 21st Century. A time filled with distractions [sounds of a cat meowing, dog barking, and baby crying]. Because of the unceasing efforts and personal sacrifices of so many courageous people through the centuries, the Bible is more readily available to us now than ever before. And yet with all these distractions it is far too easy to take this priceless gift for granted. What are you doing with the word of God in your world today? The Word of God contains the answers to all of your questions and all of your needs. May God grant you Grace and Mercy as you begin, continue, or reunite in the study of his glorious Word, the standard for Truth.65
According to the narrator, we have just rejoined the present, stepping back into our own time, our own lives. Building on the already established familiarity between the visitor and the living room, the narrator continues to cultivate our identification with the space by emphasizing “distractions” associated with our own lives and homes. After we have been sufficiently prepared (we can see ourselves in our own homes, assessing the similarities and differences between this model and our actual residence), the narrator articulates the moral of the whole fifty-five minute Scriptorium tour: “What are you doing with the word of God in your world today?” It is question, accusation, and directive. Assess yourself. The aesthetic distance engendered by this representation of my home allows me to see what is otherwise obscure or invisible. I have significant communicative technologies at my fingertips. Through the Internet, I have access to an international audience; access to the world. My potential for proselytizing is enormous! Inside this model of a living room, I can see my agency and my power clearly. I can also see my apathy.

The narrator asks us to compare ourselves with the “many courageous people” who sacrificed comfort, social respectability, and often their lives to study, reproduce, and make public the Bible. Now, in a time and place where distribution can even be accomplished electronically, what are we—Christians—doing to witness? The narrator is compelling us to engage in identity work. I am not a good Christian. Not that I’ve ever desired to be a good Christian. But in this “living room” in this living history museum, I make this judgment based on the question, “Who am I in this space?” Who am I in relation to the visitors sharing this space? Who am I in relation to John Wycliffe or John Bunyan or the guy whose blood stains the Martyr’s Bible? Who I am is Not-A-Good-Christian. The narrator implies that many of us may find ourselves lacking when we engage in this self-assessment. But our identities can change; our identities should change. We are charged with changing the way we live our lives. The narrator asks God to grant us “Grace and Mercy” as we “begin, continue, or reunite in the study of His glorious Word.” Reading the Bible, engaging in study of the Bible, is not framed as an option. According to the narrator, we must do this now. This compulsion to change—to do differently—is a political plea to act on behalf of our (presumed) community. In this
space visitors negotiate their identities as Good Christians and make decisions as to how they want continue their lives in the world.

**Memory, Memorials, and Dark Sites**

Heritage sites are spaces where individual and cultural stories are brought together, “a space for the intertwining of public, exhibitionary space and private, biographical space.”66 The living room scene in the Scriptorium effectively accomplishes the integration of the personal within the public. It is a space in which we are asked to project our personal stories, our individual experiences. It is literally an exhibitionary space (a model inside of a museum) that is meant to evoke the private space of a home, to provoke personal reflection and assessment. While visitors cannot physically mark the space with their individual biographies, the space feels full of thousands of thoughts. Visitors to the HLE become a part of the public narrative of Christianity. In the Scriptorium, we become the next chapter in the narrative of Witnessing. In other areas of the HLE, we participate in and thus become part of the meaningful cultural narrative of Jesus’ life and death. We are offered opportunities to negotiate and publicly perform our chosen identities. In doing so, this larger cultural narrative becomes a memory, a tangible part of the visitor’s life-story.

Inherent in the practice of memory, and thereby heritage, are the processes of forgetting and what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett refers to as the processes of “archaizing the ‘errors’.”67 The archaizing of errors is exhibited in the story of American settlement told in the Pilgrim and Prairie Church galleries in the Scriptorium. In telling certain stories certain ways, other stories are overlooked and forgotten. In the telling, rituals, practices, and traditions of peoples are objectified and categorized. “What one was too ashamed to do, one could study, collect, and display.”68 In this process, “errors” are transformed into heritage, safe for consumption. Genocide is a particularly dramatic, though apt example. The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., has safely packaged the atrocious violence and annihilatory practices of the Nazi regime into a heritage experience intended to educate and memorialize. The HLE has effectively accomplished a similar objective: packaging the violent assassination of a man named Jesus for the
purposes of education and commemoration. Jesus’ torture and crucifixion are the Christian heritage and the HLE serves as a memorial. Memory is mobilized as a technology of heritage at the HLE.

Memory

Memory is subjective, selective, partial and always contingent. Therein lay its beauty and its frailty. Memory is performative—through its articulation, memory performs the past. The act of memory is action, an exercising of agency, a body practicing what matters. It is a process of sense-making “root[ed] in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects.” Memory is both individual and communal, linked to heritage through human desire. Heritage depends on groups of people wanting to remember and memorialize events. In the case of the HLE, visitors engage in a collective memory of Jesus’ death. As visitors engage in the HLE’s recollection, they contribute to the continual recreation of this particular past through the framework of the present. Memory serves the needs of the present. Smith, building on Maurice Halbwachs’ understanding of collective memory, notes: “Shared or collective memories are socially constructed in the present and are collectively legitimized in that they make meaningful common interests and perceptions of collective identity. They work to bind the collective and give it stability and continuity.” The collective memory of Jesus’ death and resurrection enables the collective identity Christian. Like nations, Christian is an imagined community because, while impossible to fully assemble at any given time or place, it exists as a community in the minds of each member. As Benedict Anderson observes, “in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”

That said, collective memories are not static or uncontested. Through the present act of shared remembering, individuals engage in “active negotiation[s] . . . [of] the values, meanings, and ideologies represented in the links individuals and groups establish with the past, and the sense of continuity and identity that is drawn from those links.” As visitors encounter the HLE’s rehearsal of the collective memory of human Salvation by Grace, they are actively negotiating the values, meanings, and ideologies represented in the HLE’s version of the Salvation by Grace narrative, and determining their
individual position (their values, interpretations, and ideologies) in relation to the HLE, other visitors, and the larger (imagined) Christian community.

Memorials and Dark Sites

As visitors engage in the recreation and performance of the collective memory of Salvation by Grace, they are participating in memorialization, constituting the HLE as a memorial. Memorials are performative manifestations of memory: “this do in remembrance,” recollecting, eulogizing, warning (memento mori). While the HLE functions as a living history museum, it also acts as a memorial to the life and death of Jesus Christ. It is the anamnesis of which Scott Lukas speaks when describing spaces that focus on the life history narrative of an individual. Rather than being a general anamnesis, though, the HLE is the anamnesis, in its Ecclesiastical sense. Anamnesis is the component of the Eucharist73 “recalling the Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ.”74 On a daily basis, the HLE memorializes the martyrdom of Jesus.

Memorials have been studied by researchers interested in what has been termed dark tourism. Dark tourist sites are spaces associated with death and/or destruction, and that invite visitation by employing dark themes—themes anchored in pain. Usually, these spaces are popularly understood as spaces of commemoration or memorial. In this sense, the HLE can be understood as a space of dark theming and dark tourism. Lukas claims dark theming characterizes spaces that “use the symbolism of death, concepts of destruction, or intimations of tragedy, as a means of creating their unique spaces” (emphasis mine).75 Lukas sees clear distinctions between dark theming and dark tourism. While he acknowledges the relationship between the two, he contends that dark theming is more abstract: dark themed sites are “spaces themed around death or tragedy—by their nature of being less clearly defined as heritage sites of real death or depictions of real death, and being between education and entertainment—that invite discourse that is at once personal and uncomfortable” (emphasis mine).76 Dark tourist sites are more concretely related to the tragedies they mark (the actual concentration camps that housed and executed Holocaust victims).
While not all of Lukas’ insights regarding dark tourism are applicable here—for instance, his reinforcement of the dichotomy entertainment/education—what is important in Lukas’ statement about dark theming is that these spaces invite “personal and uncomfortable” discourse. These are spaces where individual sensibilities collide with the public staging of dark narratives. People choose to visit these dark sites and engage in the performances. For our purposes, sites that employ dark theming are sites of dark tourism.

In *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster*, John Lennon and Malcolm Foley theorize dark tourism, asserting interest in “deaths, disaster and atrocity is a growing phenomenon in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.” Lennon and Foley define dark tourism as a subgenre of cultural tourism and a product of postmodernity. Specifically, dark tourist sites can be identified as sites whose themes engage some type of destruction, catastrophe, or death which has occurred in recent history (post-Titanic). Lennon’s and Foley’s exploration of dark tourism is informed by the traditional view of the separation of sacred and secular travel. The authors recognize that sites of death have historically attracted interest and visitation, often in the form of pilgrimage. They briefly discuss pilgrimage, but only in order to distinguish pilgrimage from dark tourism. According to the authors, pilgrimage is usually associated with sites of martyrdom that have religious and/or ideological significance, “which transcends the event itself to provide meaning to a group of people.” They make theoretical distinctions between pilgrims and dark tourists based on motivation—the pilgrims apparently with some and dark tourists there from happenstance—while simultaneously acknowledging that little research has been done to back up claims regarding visitor motivation. Thus, they are unable to explain if and how meanings differ between pilgrims and visitors of dark tourist sites.

Though Lennon’s and Foley’s theory of the recent emergence of dark tourism is problematic, the foundations for dark tourism they outline are useful in developing more nuanced understandings of the functions of sites like the HLE. The authors set forth three “main features” of dark tourist spaces: 1) the use of media and communication technologies to create interest and collapse space and time; 2) the space introduces
anxiety and doubt about the “project of modernity”; 3) “the educative elements of sites are accompanied by elements of commodification and a commercial ethic which (whether explicit or implicit) accepts that visitation (whether purposive or incidental) is an opportunity to develop a tourism product.”

The HLE is constituted by technology, uses and advocates the use of modern technology for Witnessing, and questions the lack of use of this technology in the progress of the gospel. Progress and technology are especially applicable to questions of the success of modernity. The HLE also emphasizes the Bible as technology (the technology of writing and replication and distribution of that writing) and uses actual Bibles as illustrative artifacts.

Lennon and Foley also note that dark sites are increasingly characterized by discord as stories of nationalism are being refashioned to include not only tributes to victims, but also to “former oppressors” (especially in the case of many World War II memorials). The refashioning of sites to reflect the newest retelling of a story exemplifies the process and implications of selective memory when re/constructing and memorializing a past. For instance, at the HLE TBN’s decision to add opulent props and settings complicates the story of Jesus, the simple carpenter, by visually contradicting the parables performed in the space. One example of this contradiction is the introduction of a military presence by way of Roman Centurions. Where the HLE originally employed several actors to patrol the park in Centurion costumes, challenging visitors and posing for photos, once the site was purchased by TBN, the space was also fitted with numerous imposing statues of Roman soldiers (see figs. 10 and 11).

TBN’s choice to emphasize the power of the Roman military reframes visitors’ experiences of the narrative of Salvation by Grace. Rather than cultivating a sense of peace and communion, the HLE now pulsates with intimidation, fear, and a strong sense of imperialism. Add to this the fact that the new security personnel carry actual weapons (guns) and security cameras are now found throughout the facility. The violent past being created for visitors to experience is made acute by these performances of physical and panoptical power. While the space has always been organized around the crucifixion of Jesus, the constant sense of surveillance and domination affected by the actual and
imaginary patrols intensifies the “darkness” of this space by suggesting the potential for spontaneous violence.

“Dark tourism,” argues Lennon and Foley, “is likely to involve some element of storytelling, although the ideological and political elements are likely to dominate.” At the HLE ideological and theological elements do dominate. The HLE establishes parallels between the past they create and the present in which visitors dwell. In the Scriptorium, this is accomplished through the Living Room gallery. In the HLE-proper, the HLE draws connections between the “military” presence of Roman soldiers and the popular reference to Christians as soldiers for Christ. (In Sunday school we would sing: “I may never march in the infantry / ride in the calvary/ shoot the artillery / I may never fly ‘or the enemy / but I’m in the Lord’s army / Yes, sir!”). Through the Special Prayer and Healing Service, the HLE positions visitors as soldiers in battle for the salvation of the world.

*Onward Christian Soldier*

Rick and I rush to get to the alternative entrance in the Shofar gift shop before it closes. We are five minutes late. The Special Prayer and Healing Service has already started. The auditorium isn’t crowded, though; maybe half full. We find good seats in the fifth row towards the center. Five performers are on stage, four are recessed as a chorus.

The male performer leading the service, acting as Minister, implores the audience to come and pray at the altar (which is the stage): “If you need peace in your lives, you are battling those things that just want to drag you down in you mind, come let us pray for you!” He tells us that “this can change the atmosphere of your life, shift the Heavens.”

The back-up singers sing: “Come as you are, lost and alone. Let the Good Sheppard, carry you home.”

Rick and I watch as people stream to the front, grasping one another in prayer; we are flanked by people whose hands are raised in praise and supplication and desire. I feel as though I am peeking at those private, written prayer requests deposited in that podium in the prayer garden. I feel like a voyeur. Anyone who happens to look at me will see that
I am a voyeur: watching, judging, skeptical. And I am afraid they will see me. So I sway back and forth to the lulling rhythm of the music and the Minister’s voice. I try to sing along, but I cannot. I just can’t pretend that this is an experientially authentic moment: that I am a part of this community; that I am feeling the pull of *communitas*. I sit stiff and afraid and ashamed. This feels nothing like the calls-to-altar I grew up with, the calls that stirred my senses and pulled me towards the altar and maybe, just maybe towards release, relief, hope, God. No. This feels like plastic and glitter.

Minister’s voice resonates with a tone of practiced penance, of calculated emotion, and as I watch him summon tears that he consciously allows to streak his cheeks, I become nauseous. He begins his testimony. He has a thirteen year old child who “has a sound mind,” but “is trapped in his little body” unable to speak or move. Minister talks about his battle coming to terms with his child’s disability and God’s role in allowing the tragedy. Ultimately, Minister (shedding tears, because it is necessary to his monologue that he shed tears) understands that it is God’s plan that he use his tears to “touch and minister.”

I can feel Minister’s desire to affect the audience, slick, yet sticky like honey. He feeds off the crowd, seeing raw yearning contort their faces into masks of almost-pain. Their lack—the holes they feel in their lives—are gaping wounds almost visible through their tightly scrunched eyes.

I look at Rick. He looks at me. Our eyes are supposed to be closed. Minister sees our open eyes, and I feel like he knows that I know what he is doing. Minister sees me seeing his power. As I sit there unmoved in the ways I am supposed to be moved, I know the power of this man on the stage, and feel just the edges—just the minute tendrils—of what he must be feeling. To orchestrate a room full of souls willing to cry and speak and pray and move, to direct their energy and carefully stoke their emotions, their passions, and their faith, like a controlled forest fire—that is intoxicating power!

And he is expertly directing their energy. Break them down, and then build them up. He is directing the audience to become an army, God’s army, soldiers that wield weapons of worship and change the atmosphere.
“Father,” he croons as he leads the closing prayer, “I declare this is a mighty band of worshipping warriors that has the power to change the atmospheres of their lives and the lives that they touch! And father I ask that you would just raise them up to be voices that speak your Truth. . . . This world expects an army of mighty, equipped, proper, upright-looking kind of people, and God is just likely to take a band of least-of-these, broken-down misfits like us and form with His power and His glory a Mighty Glorious Army of worshippers that can change the atmosphere of this country, this world! Don’t think that you don’t have a call on your life, because I’m looking at an army that could impact cities and states and countries and this world in Jesus’ name.”

As the performance closes, some people leave. Others flock to the Minister’s side. I remember one of my mother’s favorite hymns and softly hum the tune as we make our way through the crowd: “Onward Christian soldiers / marching as to war / with the cross of Jesus / going on before.”

Through this performance, the HLE reminds visitors of the social and physical power latent in the Christian (imagined) community. The dark elements that rhetorically position visitors as soldiers seem like an allusion to the Crusades (go ye therefore and take all nations), and may also remind visitors that the United States is currently at war with Afghanistan and Iraq, wars popularly conceived as religious (pitting Christians against Muslim-extremists). TBN’s accentuation of the militaristic elements at the HLE impacts the way the story—Salvation by Grace—is told. This interpretive shift affects visitors’ experiences of the collective memory, of the process of remembering, and the individual memories created.

As Lennon and Foley claim, “[m]emory and remembrance are central” to dark tourism. Memory (collective storying) and remembrance (collective marking) are also central to heritage. Thus, many heritage institutions can also be classified as dark sites. Here I return to Lennon’s and Foley’s distinctions between visitors’ motivations. Why go to dark sites? Lennon and Foley propose that visitors are attracted to dark sites as a result of the postmodern condition of desensitization in part created by media saturation. Our familiarity with images of pain via the mass media leaves us in what the authors refer to as a “post-emotional state”: “deep identification with the suffering and pain of others.
beyond the immediate family circle is impossible.” In other words, we seek out more acute experiences of pain and suffering so that we can feel, because we have lost our ability to feel from our constant exposure to pain and suffering via the media. In a sense, what Lennon and Foley are claiming is that visitors to dark sites are, like visitors to heritage sites, engaged in identity work. They are attempting to retrieve or recreate their identities as empathic human beings.

For heritage visitors, identity is clearly implicated in motivation. They visit sites that somehow contribute to their sense of self, and allow them to locate their positionalities in broader, sociocultural events. Dark theming adds another layer to the horizon of significance a visitor defines themselves against. It complicates interpretation and sense-making. How can we make sense of our experiences in a space located among theme parks, which uses technologies characteristic of theme parks, yet functions as a heritage site (a point of access to a particular past organized by a collective memory), and also asks us to participate in the violence of torture and assassination? Who are we in relation to this complex? Tourist? Seeker? Voyeur? Through the careful selection and articulation of stories, the HLE provides guidance to visitors trying to make sense of their experiences in the space.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the HLE through the framework of theming. Theming is the process of applying a narrative to a site. I identified heritage as a specific type of theming having to do with individual and group relationships with a particular past. Heritage functions as an access point, allowing visitors to engage in identity work. Visitors locate themselves, their personal stories, within the context of a broader sociocultural narrative. The HLE functions as a heritage site by employing the grand narrative of human Salvation by Grace to organize a space, creating an access point where visitors can engage and locate themselves in relation to this narrative. It offers a space where visitors can re/create and publicly perform their identities.

“Heritage,” argues Dicks, “. . . is about journeys.” It is about journeys and it is about identities. According to Smith, “performative experience of heritage engages with
the creation, recreation and legitimization of social and cultural bonds and identity in the present.”

Dicks sees heritage as a mode of cultural production “symptomatic of a much-discussed ‘turn to the past’ in contemporary society.” Why are contemporary individuals turning to the past to engage in identity work? If we follow John Berger, it is because the past “is a well of conclusions from which we draw in order to act.” These conclusions, of course, are by no means conclusive; they shift and transform based on the present circumstances of their construction. The past, pliable though it is, offers an illusion of stability, of roots, and continuity. In this sense, the HLE can be understood as a manifestation of Christian desire for roots, for a homeland.

Such approaches to the past have been labeled nostalgic and sentimental and have fueled critiques of the “heritage industry,” critiques which sound strikingly similar to those critiques leveled at the “tourism industry” and the “culture industry.” In a post-industrial, postmodern world of globalization and fragmentation, where identity is mutable, people turn to an imagined past for security and to find something “real.” Dean MacCannell’s tourists desperately seek authentic experiences as they trudge through the fakery and simulation of the present, yanking back red velvet curtains in an effort to find the backstage. Heritage visitors are engaged in their own search for authentic experiences, peeling back the present to step into an imagined past. Like MacCannell’s tourists, heritage visitors find only another representation of an imagined place and time. But for many heritage visitors, like many tourists, this is enough. They find what they are seeking—experiential authenticity. They find a virtuality with which they can identify. Sometimes, they find a metaphysical home.

Heritage, however, is not an innocent process. Like all manifestations of memory, it is partial, contingent, and mutable. It is selective storytelling. The HLE chooses to tell the story of Christ’s life and death through a Protestant lens, referencing traditions and rituals of Judaism as prophetic of “God’s plan” realized through Jesus. This is demonstrated in the Wilderness Tabernacle presentation. The HLE enacts Jewish rituals in order to re/create a connection between contemporary Christians and the Israelites, and then uses those rituals to legitimate Christian doctrine, anchoring Christian identity in Jewish heritage, and fostering a sense of cultural ancestry and continuity. In this manner,
the HLE works to shape visitors’ identities, providing a link to the Israelites who sought the Promised Land, and offering a cultural and historical anchor. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett believes “museums are about people not things. What is on display above all is the presence, the vitality, the survival of [Christians] themselves. What visitors discover [at the HLE]…is what the objects of display mean to [Christians] today.”93 The HLE is a stage upon which visitors can celebrate their connections to a homeland in the absence of the actual Jerusalem. They can celebrate the continued presence of their faith in American culture. The Scriptorium’s narrative of American settlement engages in nostalgic nationalism, positioning the missionary settlers as indigenous to the continent, and thus effectively situating the Native American population for displacement.

In this chapter I also introduced the concept of dark tourism, arguing the HLE is a dark site because it memorializes a dark event, the torture and assassination of Jesus. Everything at the HLE pivots around the Garden Tomb, physically and symbolically. “As much as it reflects the joys and hopes of people, theming also projects their demons.”94 As visitors engage with, negotiate, assess, and ultimately accept or reject the HLE’s performances of this narrative, they are also creating individual memories of a particularly violent experience. In the following chapter, I will discuss the performance of Christ’s crucifixion as a dark heritage event involving visitors in the performance, positioning them as “spectactors,” both spectators and actors.
I’m thinking about identity a lot lately. I’m thinking about identity and how mine is caught up in the work I do. How does identity manifest at the HLE? Who am I in relation to the HLE? These questions had at one point not long ago kept me awake at night. But now they are overshadowed—dwarfed really—by questions of my identity as an academic.

An article I submitted to a journal was rejected. Rejections always make me question my intellectual acumen and my place in the academy. Rejections are about reevaluating the research I have done in relation to other researchers’ observations and ideas. That’s to put it nicely. Diplomatically. Rejections are really about whether or not I can pick myself back up after a thorough thrashing. Can I pick up and move on? Thus far, the answer has been Yes, whispered on a sigh and stuffed into another file folder relegated to the cabinet designated, Work I’ll Finish Later.

But this recent rejection is different in no small part due to context. Not only has my intellectual rigor been challenged and found desperately lacking, but my integrity has been assaulted. Does my research hurt people? Am I truly irresponsible with the stories entrusted to my care? While these allegations are far more serious than any ever leveled at my work before, I think I would still be able to file them and move on.

Except that my world has changed. My journey has shifted, and the landmarks I once clung to for guidance are gone.

Dr. Patricia Hop was the reason I began this journey. She showed me it was possible to live in a world where knowledge-creation is a daily occurrence. She bled red ink to shape me into an articulate, critical teacher-scholar. Now she’s gone. Her work is left unfinished. Since I was informed of her death, I have been obsessing about her
unfinished research; she was writing a book based on her grandmother’s letters from college. She’d been working on it since I was an undergraduate. Will it remain forever unfinished? Rick looks at me as if I am mad, worrying about unfinished research projects. The woman is dead; she is past the point of caring about her job.

But I continued to obsess, and at her memorial service two weeks after her death I asked a colleague if she knew what would happen to Dr. Hop’s work.

She didn’t.

I whispered, “I hope someone finishes my work for me if I die in the process.”

She laughed and said, “I don’t think you’ll care at that point.”

She’s right, of course. I’ll be dead. So why have I been obsessing about Dr. Hop’s unfinished work?

I realize: because I’m her unfinished project. She left before I was complete.

While I haven’t been in a class with Dr. Hop for years and haven’t maintained consistent contact with her, I knew she was there. She was a pillar, solid and tall and testimony that I could finish this tumultuous journey. Now she’s gone. And I’m not finished.

Two days before Dr. Hop’s memorial service, I sat in Rose’s office—my former advisor, the once-chair of my dissertation committee, and a woman I deeply admire. She is so different from Dr. Hop, yet so similar: strong, terrifyingly intelligent, loved by her students, committed to her work and to social justice in academia.

Rose was denied tenure. This shift in her academic career also changed her involvement in this past year of my life. She stepped down as my chair, and we knew we would be applying for some of the same jobs. It was awkward and frightening. Rose had been a model for who I wanted to be as an academic. And now her career had tumbled around her.

Two days before Dr. Hop’s memorial service, Rose told me she was leaving the academy. Done. Gone. The academy, she said, “is killing my soul.”

Two mentors gone; two strong, capable women gone. They were my heroes.

They are my warning. Dr. Hop sacrificed personal relationships to break the glass ceiling. She worked within the system to change the system—at the expense of her
personal life. She was lonely and isolated and drank in the middle of the day (a habit I, too, adopted). Rose worked against the system to change the system—at the expense of her career. While surrounded by friends and people who loved her, she still seemed lonely and isolated.

I feel myself slipping into numbness, a self-imposed isolation? I feel myself slipping into apathy; into disregard; into a weightless liminal space of fuzzy white gauze and days that are indistinguishable from nights. I feel myself slipping away from the love and support of a partner who sees the possibilities of our tattered future. I feel myself slipping, and I don’t care enough to reach for a grip.

I allow myself to wade into the deep end of self pity. I am lost . . .
INTERLUDE

Good Friday

Field Notes: March 21, 2008

Rick and I rest on a bench near the Judean Village waiting for the second showing of the Last Supper at 4:35 pm. Across the path, visitors are having their pictures taken with some of the Judean villagers, a female character named Rifka and a male character named Simeon. As the visitors walk away, I notice Simeon noticing us. Simeon is a tall white man in his thirties who has worked for the HLE for three years. He meanders around and finally approaches: “Shalom.”

“How are you folks today?” he asks.

“Hi.”

“Good, thanks.”

“I noticed you have a notepad.” He points to the pad on my lap.

I immediately go into my spiel: “I am a student at the University of South Florida. I’m researching the Holy Land for my dissertation.”

He looks surprised and impressed, “Your dissertation! What field are you in?”

“Communication.”

“Communication. Hmmm,” he says and looks a bit puzzled, but I don’t expound. Something in his manner makes me uncomfortable, and I don’t want to encourage conversation.

“Well,” he says, “can I share something with you? Can I ask you a personal question?”

Rick and I hesitate, warily glancing at one another, fearing the intrusion and the inevitable proselytizing. Seeing our hesitation, Simeon wisely decides to appeal to my latent researcher-self.
“If nothing else,” says Simeon, “it’s something you can write about in your book.”

I smile and laugh and say, “Sure, why not!”

Taking a step closer to us, Simeon looks deeply into my eyes and asks, “If you were standing before God on judgment day, what would you say if he asked you why he should let you into heaven?”

I’m surprised. I was positive he would ask if I was a Christian, if I was saved. It takes me just a second to realize that that is what he’s asking—just rephrased. I stammer, not knowing how to respond. “Well, I guess I would say because I believe Christ was his son and I am saved?” This comes out as a question rather than the statement I intended. Not satisfied with the tenor of my answer, I continue, “Probably also because I have tried to be a humane and kind person and have worked to make this a better world.”

“Hmmm. Ummhm.” His face contorts into a skeptical, questioning mask.

Is this not the right answer? I’m not sure. He looks at Rick and both Simeon and I say, “How about you?” Immediately, I feel like a traitor, but I am overcome with the need to deflect attention away from myself. Rick looks shell-shocked, but at least he has had a couple of seconds to think about the question.

I stall for him, “That’s a pretty deep question, really.” But Simeon doesn’t seem to buy that. He raises his eyebrow and shoots me an incredulous look. Apparently there is a right answer.

Afterwards Rick told me, “I knew what he wanted to hear, but I wasn’t gonna give him the answer. I knew exactly what he wanted to hear. He wanted me to say that I have accepted Christ as my savior. I’m not stupid. That’s when the battle began. What could I say that wouldn’t compromise my beliefs, but would make him go away?” Rick understood this moment as a “test of [his] convictions.”

Panic and adrenaline blur the moment.

Rick looks squarely at Simeon and answers the question: “I would say that God should let me into heaven because I did the best that I could to live a life marked by kindness and generosity. I tried to positively contribute to our world . . .”
Before Rick can finish his sentence, Simeon, seeing a chance to witness, abruptly interrupts.

“Well,” he says, “let me ask you then if you can interpret some scriptures, some of God’s words, because God gives us guidance through the Bible.”

So begins a long, dizzying question-and-answer session where Simeon asks us to interpret scriptures he recites: “Okay, what does that mean?” “So tell me what this means.” “You guys are pretty good, but this is a hard one.”

Rick and I answer with relative ease, but I keep over-thinking the questions, not yet aware of the overarching narrative being weaved by our answers. Not yet understanding that it is in the best interest of Simeon (and the Gospel) to keep these questions simple so that people can answer and feel good about their knowledge of the Word. Of course, the scriptures Simeon is quoting narrate the path to salvation. Its just such a long path that I didn’t recognize it at first.

When we ask him to repeat one passage for clarification, Simeon stumbles. No longer eloquent and quick, Simeon begins “Ummm-ing” his way through a mish-mesh paraphrasing of his original statement. Simeon is working from a script and we have interrupted his rhythm. He has trouble reestablishing his location. As he makes another attempt at repeating his original lines, I wonder who writes these scripts and how many alternative scenarios exist? Is this the designated script for soul-in-need-of-saving? Would this uncomfortable situation be occurring if Rick had professed to being saved? Probably not. What other situations do performers anticipate? How many scripts exist?

Simeon has recovered from his slip and has begun the final scripture he wants us to interpret.

“Okay,” says Simeon. “Last scripture. This one should be easy for you two. Okay. This is it. ‘For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.’ Okay, so what do you make of that?”

“Well,” I say feeling patronized because John 3:16 is the most famous scripture in Christendom, “I guess that would mean that if you believe that Jesus was the son of God and that God sacrificed him to save humanity, then you’ll live forever.”
Simeon, missing the slight edge of sarcasm in my voice, continues on enthusiastically: “That’s right! You’re right! All you have to do is believe,” he says turning to Rick. “All you have to do is believe in Jesus’ sacrifice and you’ll go to heaven.” I am quickly consigned to Simeon’s periphery as he focuses on saving Rick’s soul. Simeon is now absorbed in the zeal of witnessing, the God-speak spilling forth like an unstoppable tide.

“He loved us so much, loves us so much. Do you get that? Do you understand what he sacrificed so that we won’t burn in the fires of hell?” He leans towards Rick and extends his hand. “Will you pray with me now brother? Will you ask God to forgive you your sins and pray to Jesus? Will you profess faith in Christ and ask him to save your soul?”

Rick is visibly uncomfortable. He shifts his body left and then right, glances over his shoulder as if seeking an escape route, and replies, “Ah, you know, I’m just really not in that place right now. I, uh, no. Not right now.”

But Simeon is dazzled by his own rhetoric, enamored by his own performance of witnessing, confident that he can save Rick’s soul; he is undaunted.

“Okay, I know what you mean. I get that,” Simeon says. “But let me tell you about God’s expansive and unerring love. Let me tell you about what he did for me and how he saved my life.” Simeon begins his testimony, recounting his heathen lifestyle in New York City and the path to destruction and hell he was on: drugs, sex, flagrant disregard of the law, and loneliness. “I was so alone. I mean there were always people around me, but I just felt so alone, so isolated. You know, I didn’t think anyone cared about me. I was drowning in isolation and self pity. Then, I found Jesus, man. And Jesus saved me from that life.”

As his narrative progresses, Simeon’s excitement grows. He inserts lots of “Amens” and “Praise Jesus’s” and moves his body and hands emphatically. He’s on a roll, but again we disrupt the script, throwing off his rhythm when we don’t respond to his call-and-answer with our own “Amens.” Because the “Amens” are not statements, they are questions.
“Amen?” He looks to Rick and then to me. I give him a half-smile and partial nod. Rick mumbles a begrudging “Amen.” His resolve is weakening. I can see the strain on his face. Rick is tiring of the conversation, tiring of humoring this aggressive man who wants to ensure his salvation. He’s tired of the battle. What I didn’t know at the time was that Rick was seriously considering “accepting Christ” as a means of escaping this gauntlet and ending this interaction.

What would I have done had this happened? Would I have allowed him to be goaded into a profession of faith? I like to think I would have stopped it by intervening, telling Simeon that enough was enough. Maybe I would have reminded Simeon that we agreed to answer his questions because it would make interesting copy for my book. Rick was only suffering through this episode for me and my dissertation. I couldn’t stomach watching the true blasphemy that Rick’s conversion would have been. I couldn’t stomach watching Rick forsake his integrity for my benefit, for a research project. It’s where I know I would have drawn the line. And not just for Rick’s sake. Why do I care about the sanctity of this ritual in which I don’t solidly believe? I am willing to blaspheme in other ways, so why not this?

I return to the moment to hear Simeon insist, “God doesn’t force himself on anyone.” It is a mantra, a refrain that Simeon always returns to after each failed attempt to pressure Rick into conversion. Apparently, Rick said “No” again.

“Sure, brother, I understand,” says Simeon. “God doesn’t force himself on anyone, you know? But brother, I’ve got to tell you, I’m concerned for your soul. I want to see you in heaven. Won’t you reconsider? Are you willing to accept Christ today?”

In the midst of Simeon’s concerted efforts to bring Rick to God, we are interrupted by a man who wants his picture with Simeon. A reprieve for Rick, who levels a pleading and annoyed look at me. But the break seems to be enough for Rick to breathe and collect himself.

I turn and watch Simeon join the man for a photo. What I am witnessing is the negotiation between good Christian and park employee. Simeon swivels quickly, poses and smiles. Over his shoulder, as the picture is being snapped, he gives me a quizzical
and apologetic look that seems to say, “Sorry. This is my job.” But within a span of twenty seconds Simeon is back to focusing on the salvation process and my notepad.

When he rejoins us, Simeon is very interested in my note-taking, or more aptly, my lack of note-taking. He scans my pad and finds the page empty. From the beginning of this episode, Simeon has kept close tabs on my notebook. I watch as he assesses the empty page.

“You haven’t written anything down? No notes?” he asks.

“Ah, well,” I am taken aback by his forthright questions. Honestly, I have been too concerned with the flow of conversation and Rick’s discomfort. Also, I have decided to stop taking notes while speaking with employees because they always lean in and try to peek at what I’m writing.

Recovering, I respond, “I was really caught up in your story. I forgot to take notes. But I have an excellent memory. I’ll start jotting stuff down now.”

Appeased, he launches back into his monologue, becoming increasingly animated. Every few seconds he glances my way to see if I am now writing. So I scratch out the metaphor he uses to describe to Rick how we shouldn’t follow and can’t trust our feelings: “Feelings are misleading. It is not enough to feel. We have to publicly profess and accept Christ.” He stresses publicly. He describes a train with an engine, a coal train, and a caboose. The caboose represents our feelings, being drug along (or guided) by the engine, which is God’s Word. The coal train links the two other sections and is the fuel that powers the train. The coal train represents our faith.

I scribble as fast as I can, filling the empty page.

“Would you mind repeating that metaphor so I can get all of it?” I ask, interrupting his “Praise Jesus, brother will you now pray with me and accept . . .”

I thought he would be annoyed that I interrupted yet another attempt to get Rick to profess belief. Instead, he is excited.

“Sure, yeah. No problem!” He turns away from Rick and haphazardly recounts the metaphor.

“You know,” he continues, “I’ve got lots more of those. I’ve come up with a bunch myself.”
“Really?” I ask.

“Oh yeah! Do you want to hear some? I mean, you are interested in communication, right?”

Fascinated by his willingness to temporarily forsake Rick’s soul for the chance to be in my book, I nod vigorously and say, “Definitely! I’d love to hear them.”

Now completely off script, Simeon rushes into an explanation of a confusing metaphor about jumping from a plane with a loosely fastened parachute. Several more half-formed metaphors follow, but he gives up on finishing them when he sees they aren’t making sense.

“There is one more that I’ve been working on,” he says as he prepares to impart his prized metaphor. “This one’s all mine. I came up with it a hundred percent myself.”

The “massage chair” is the most ill formed and confusing metaphor I’ve ever heard. I suspect he is developing it on the spot.

“Who would you expect to know more about how a massage chair works? The store that sells it, or the manufacturer? Well, obviously the manufacturer, and God is the manufacturer of us! He created us, so it makes sense that he knows how we function and what is best for us.”

I write this down, unconsciously straightening out his logic and making the metaphor sound far more lucid than it actually is. He grins broadly as he watches me write it down.

“You can put that in your book!” he exclaims.

“Thanks, I will.”

Simeon turns his attention back to Rick and I continue to write notes, now focusing on recording the beginning of our conversation with Simeon. I vaguely hear Rick telling Simeon about his trip to Cuba and his spiritual awakening. Simeon ignores the point of Rick’s story—that Rick is on a spiritual journey.

“Feelings, man. Feelings are misleading. You may feel like you are finding a pathway, but that pathway could be the devil’s, you know. You can’t trust your feelings. You’ve got to just turn to Christ and profess acceptance of his love. Aren’t you ready to accept Christ? Don’t you want to be sure about your destination?”
As Simeon asks this question for the umpteenth time, my patience begins to wane. I interject, “Is this really the place for that? It is a . . .” I cut myself off before I finish the sentence, *theme park*.

Rick and Simeon both look at me and say, “You can accept Christ anywhere.” Simeon gives me a skeptical look, quirking his eyebrow. Sara the Christian should have known the answer to that. Sara the Christian shouldn’t think of the HLE as just a theme park. “Twenty-one people were saved here last week!” exclaims Simeon. I show appropriate surprise and awe, and the surprise is real. I am struck by the specificity of the number. Someone keeps count! A specific accounting of souls saved.

As Simeon turns back to Rick, I look at my watch and realize we will be late for the Last Supper if we don’t leave soon. Trying to move our conversation towards an end, I recoup my researcher persona, pulling the survey flyer and a business card from my bag.

“We have to go if we want to see the Last Supper,” I say to both Rick and Simeon. In a clear demonstration of power, I snap my notebook shut and stuff it into my bag, signaling to Simeon that the official documenting of his performance is over. He takes the hint and in a quick, last-ditch effort to win Rick’s soul Simeon asks, “Are you sure you’re not ready to accept Christ?”

Rick’s mood instantly improves knowing the conversation is ending. He smiles. “No. Not today,” he tells Simeon. “But we’ll be here a lot in the coming months because of my wife’s dissertation. You’ll be seeing us a lot more. I’ll keep you updated.”

“Great. Well,” Simeon says, “sorry for taking up your time.”

“No problem. Not at all,” I say. “It was really nice talking to you. And really informative. Would you mind taking this flyer and business card?”

“Sure,” he says as he covertly accepts the materials. He positions his body so that onlookers can’t see. Is this wrong? Should I not have offered the materials? Could he get in trouble? Could I be compromising his employment?

“What’s your name?” I ask. “I mean, you don’t have to tell me if you’re not comfortable or if it’s a problem.”

He hesitates, then answers, “Simeon the Tanner.”
I nod that I understand his predicament and shake his hand. “Nice to meet you Simeon the Tanner,” I say.

As he grips my hand he leans in and whispers, “Michael.” It’s a secret. A bond. His desire to be known wins out.

“Thanks Michael,” I whisper.

“Thank you guys, and sorry again that I took up so much of your time. You better get going over to the Last Supper. I don’t want you to miss it!”

I find it strange that he apologizes. It seems to me that the work of witnessing and saving a soul is far more important and immediate than watching a musical drama. I think here, Simeon and Michael are wrestling. Simeon has a job to do as a park employee—facilitate visitors’ enjoyment and use of the park. But Michael should have been answering to a higher call—save this soul. I see these thoughts flick across his face as he negotiates this dilemma. Simeon wins.

“Thanks again,” I say as we walk away.

Rick turns to me, relief radiating from his face and says, “I wanted to tell Simeon ‘You’re battling more than the devil; you’re battling A.D.D.!’”

The entire conversation lasted around twenty minutes. Most of the religious content (the actual scriptures) were lost to me. I answered questions instinctually, drawing, I suppose, on the years of inculcation growing up in a Baptist church. What captured my attention was the complexity of our performances, the layers of meaning created as Simeon, Rick, and I attempted to negotiate our multiple roles.

Throughout the interaction, I found myself torn between my researcher-persona and Sara-as-wife/lover/friend. The episode with Rick and Simeon challenged my positionality in this project and in the park. I “observed” their interaction, but was pulled towards interjecting to “protect” Rick from what felt like an assault. Later, Rick told me he was really disturbed by the interaction; he described it as extremely aggressive, comparing it to a “mild raping” (while this is an obvious overstatement, there are few things that Rick finds as invasive, aggressive, and hurtful as Christian proselytizing). I wanted the interaction to end for Rick’s sake, yet I knew that this episode would be useful to my research. While I feared a heightened conflict knowing that Rick hates
confrontation, I also wanted to see how this would play out. I wanted to know how Simeon would handle this situation. I apologized to Rick afterwards, but he said that he recognized the value of this event to my work and that’s why he continued the dialogue. Rick also described this moment as a “test,” a challenge to his ability to express and make a space for his own beliefs, relationship with God, and philosophies of spirituality. He expressed pride that he was able to “win” this “battle” and not give in to the temptation to “just tell him [Simeon] what he wanted to hear.”

I told Simeon what he wanted to hear. I am what Simeon would term a backsliding Christian, a Christian who has lost her way and turned from God. I didn’t want him to know this so, without Simeon asking directly, I offered up the information that I am saved and a believer. This is not necessarily a lie, but neither is it true to my current spiritual state. I knew what he wanted to hear. I knew that this was the easy way out of a problematic and possibly volatile conversation. I also believed that I could compromise my position in the park and my research if I professed my doubts and questions. It was a split-second decision that was instinctual. I wanted Simeon to believe that I am a believer. I wanted him to trust me so that I could garner information and interesting material for this project. I wasn’t willing to take the chance of alienating him by revealing my lost faith.

Rick took the chance. He tried to explain his awakening on a trip to Cuba and his subsequent encounters with religion and philosophy. But true to the stereotypes, Simeon wanted affirmation that Rick was saved. Journeys and quests are not sufficient here. As Simeon consistently stated, in order to be saved a person must verbally state acceptance of Christ. Salvation is achieved through the public profession of belief. In this sense salvation is performative. Faith and belief are created in the performance of salvation, in the saying. Salvation is about the product—the testimony, the confession and profession and the words. Simeon needed to hear those words from Rick in order to succeed in his conversion endeavor, but Rick didn’t want to convert and he didn’t want to say those words and not mean them. Rick’s performance of faith was not saying those words. By refusing to state his acceptance of Christ, even to end this terrible battle, Rick performed his faith in the process of spiritual development he has chosen to follow.
As for Simeon, he is a follower of Christ both inside and outside the park. His character would have been charged with spreading the word of Christ two thousand years ago. His real-life persona as a Christian is compelled to spread the word and witness: “Go ye therefore and teach all nations.” As a performer at the HLE, Simeon engages in multiple roles including entertainer, preacher, and spiritual guide. My presence offered Simeon other roles—informant and celebrity. Simeon wanted to give me that interesting information for my dissertation. He wanted to be a hero in my book. He wanted to demonstrate—to prove to me and the world—that he is a good and faithful servant, a true Christian. He vacillated between his character, Simeon the Tanner, and his outside persona, Michael, constantly looking to me, making eye contact and seeking my face and my notepad for confirmation that I was recording this moment. I offered Simeon the opportunity to successfully perform all roles. That’s why he wanted to save my husband from the depths of hell right in front of me.
CHAPTER 5
AND THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH

Field Notes: March 21, 2008

We stand behind the painted red lines, the barrier between our bodies and the Way of Sorrow, the Via Dolorosa. We knew he would come, carrying the cross along this clandestine path. We can’t get close enough. I see the guards, Roman Centurions in armor and red capes bearing swords and yelling at us to “make way!” And then he is there, his tattered white robe dusting the cement beneath his feet. The wooden cross is heavy; his shoulders hunch under the weight. I see the crown of thorns. I see the blood that spills from wounds inflicted by the flagellation.

*       *       *

When I was a child, I would sit motionless in the hard wooden pews listening to the pastor give another tedious sermon concerning how we, as individuals and as a society, had done wrong. We have been born into sin and we will die in sin. But, because God sacrificed his son Jesus Christ, we can live forever (either with or without corporeal form, depending on whose interpretation you believe). Christ embodied, lived and died the ultimate sacrifice. His body endured torture and crucifixion. The Christian narrative is anchored in both the rhetoric and lived experiences of bodies.

Yet, historically, the human body has been denigrated and banished to the realm of the profane. Demonizing the human body in Western history began in the age historians term the long Reformation, approximately 1300 to 1700 C.E. in Europe and the American colonies. Catholics and Protestants engaged in debate over the definitions of religion and, specifically, what constituted the sacred and profane, with the sacred signifying that which transcends the world and the profane that which is of the world.¹ People lived their religions through everyday embodied practices concerning their material welfare. Religion was embodied in approaches to the economy and health.
Meredith McGuire, scholar of religion and sociology, notes, “the ordinary religious practices which previously had linked the spiritual realm with people’s pragmatic, quotidian needs, such as healing, fertility, protection from adverse fortune, and obtaining desired material goods” were redefined as “marginal and impure” by Western societies during the period of the Long Reformation.\(^2\) As the boundaries between sacred and profane were honed and reinforced, daily embodiment was relegated to the profane. The mind became associated with reason and the body with emotion. Previously acceptable daily rituals and incarnations of religion, such as “the ritual practices surrounding food—obtaining it, preparing it, serving it, eating it—no longer counted as ‘religious’ practices,” unacceptable and often labeled dangerous or blasphemous.\(^3\) Religious institutions were able to exert more control over people through these definitions. Institutional and social control over the body soon followed.

The philosophical and theological separation of body from mind and the subsequent alignment of the spirit or soul with the mind have eclipsed the importance of religion-as-lived through corporeal practices in the contemporary United States. Even though Christian rhetoric routinely refers to the body of Christ (especially in the ritual of Communion or Eucharist) and reminds us of the brutality involved in Christ’s sacrifice, many Christian institutions are wary of involving the human body too deeply in worship practices. McGuire has noted that “Many Christian churches today are uncomfortable with any practice that treats bodies as anything but profane.”\(^4\) The body is to be transcended so that individuals may experience communion with God.

As a child sitting in those straight-backed, severe wooden pews, I longed for movement. I envied my Pentecostal friend whose church embraced a physical spirituality that shook the sacred walls. I envied my Catholic friends their rosaries and confessionals, their kneeling and their diligent fingers working through delicately-carved beads. And I looked forward to the too few days when I could consume the body of Christ and drink his holy blood. I craved a physical connection with my waning spirituality. I wanted to maintain my faith, but felt as if I couldn’t hold on to it. It was intangible; “Without the full involvement of the material body, religion is confined to the realm of cognitions.”\(^5\)
The Holy Land Experience offers visitors an opportunity to live their faith. Marv Rosenthal created a Jerusalem through which visitors can walk and touch and smell and see. He crafted a space of tangible faith, an opportunity to establish that necessary physical connection with an otherwise ethereal concept. Here, we can not only witness the death of Christ, we can also participate as a member of the crowd; “The ultimate goal of religious desire is not vision but touch.”6 We become to some degree actors in the spectacle.

The Holy Land Experience repositions bodies as central to practices and performances of faith. In Chapter 4, I argued that the HLE functions as a heritage site offering visitors a means of physically engaging with an imagined past and publicly participating in the narrative of Salvation by Grace. In this chapter, I discuss the relationship between theatre, performance, and religion in the United States, focusing on the development of Passion plays in the twentieth century. I then assert that visitors become actors in the HLE’s Passion play, Behold the Lamb. As participants in the drama (or what Augusto Boal terms “spectactors”), visitors bear witness to, record, and remember the event. At the end of Chapter 4, I introduced dark tourism and dark theming, tentatively positioning the HLE as a dark site. In this chapter, I expand this claim, arguing that the HLE functions as a dark site in several ways, most specifically by offering visitors a chance to witness and participate in a public execution.

Passionate Performances

I sat alone in an olive green, vinyl seat on a decommissioned school bus which served to trundle parishioners to and from various church events. Encompassed by the humming vibration of its rhythmic engine and darkness intermittently perforated by streetlights, I felt isolated, distanced from my family who sat several rows behind; distanced from my life as I knew it. I sat in between the memory of my first theatrical event and the awareness of no longer being a part of that event.

At nine years old, I had never been to the theatre. We lived in what was in the late 1980s, rural central Florida. We were poor. My first experience with a large-scale theatrical event (seemingly professional because it wasn’t hosted by my school or church)
was the Passion play, “The Story of Jesus,” sponsored by the Lord’s Church at Wauchula.  

Memories of those early years of my life are partial and fragmented, like glimpses of my reflection in the scattered shards of a broken mirror: the images move, twinkle, overlap, and vanish. My memories of this event, my first theatrical experience, are fragments edged with awe: bright lights illuminating the late spring dusk; mosquitoes and the heaviness of humid air stirred only by fanning my paper program; camels, donkeys, and chickens parading across the stage; the mystery of exoticism manifest in costuming; the formidable presence of a stage set that included what looked like a castle; the thrill of seeing a living Jesus dragging his terrible wooden burden; the vastness of a star-drenched sky and questions of eternity.

I was enchanted and afraid. Sitting on that bus wheeling my way back to the cow pastures of Zephyrhills, I couldn’t help but feel like I had been on a fantastic journey. For three hours, I was in the midst of the turmoil, watching the God-Man who was to be the savior of the world suffer, die, and—to the utter exaltation of the crowd—return. I remember an acute feeling of confliction: love and desire for the stage and its craft, shame for enjoying the Savior’s torture and death. I thrilled to the drama unfolding before me, the desperation in the Disciples’ voices as they pleaded for Jesus’ life, Mary’s body wracked with sobs, the songs sung with passion and skill, Jesus’ bloody robes, the lights illuminating the freshly resurrected Christ. I loved it. I loved watching Jesus crucified. I sat on the edge of my seat, my body rigid with anticipation and excitement. In that moment, I felt the story in my body and it hummed, resonating. I projected myself into the role of Jesus. I was the martyr. I was being crucified to save the world. The shame came after the initial adrenaline high subsided. I desecrated Jesus’ sacrifice by pretending it was my own. I took pleasure in watching the execution—not really caring for the resurrection. That was supposed to be the most important part. Instead, I let my imagination and my sensation fixate on the hammer driving the nails into Jesus’ palms.

For me, the relationship between theatre and religion has always been apparent and formative to my understandings of performance and spirituality. The relationship between Christianity and theatre has not always been collegial in the United States.
Professional theatrical events—religious or not—did not gain mainstream acceptance until the mid-nineteenth century. Passion plays were not widely accepted by and accessible to general audiences until the 1930s. The history of religion’s relationship with theatre in the U.S. has been tumultuous, threaded with moral and political debate.

Theatre, Law, and the Church in the United States

The original American colonies were closely associated with specific religious sects, including Anglican (prominent in the southern colonies), Congregationalist (the New England colonies), and Quaker (primarily Pennsylvania). Continuing a trend already established in England by the mid-seventeenth century, the American colonies rejected theatrical performances as immoral and, thus, criminal. Law in the early American settlements was inextricably tied to dominant religious institutions. Alan Nielsen notes, “As long as power in the respective colonies resided with the church, the legal suppression of the stage was accomplished with little or no opposition.”

In the pre-Revolution American colonies, religion was seemingly diametrically opposed to theatre. Yet, theatrical spectacle and a stage, of sorts, were embraced by some religious persons who participated in the Great Awakening, and embodied by English evangelical orator George Whitefield. Whitefield toured the colonies from 1739 to 1741, inciting thousands of emotionally rapt revivalists to (re)commit their lives to Christ. Critics accused him of flagrant theatricality, and pointed accusingly at his youthful interest in the stage. Whitefield admitted his former love of drama and acting, but also reminded critics that he had renounced his sinful ways, declaring his “repentance as to seeing and acting plays.”

Whitefield and the Great Awakening effectively spawned a religious revolution in the colonies in the mid eighteenth century, offering colonists a lively alternative to the traditionally staid practices of the official colonial churches. The Great Awakening also introduced the pleasures of the stage into American culture and everyday life, albeit subversively and without a much needed nod to the theatre. While theatricality—the elements of performance—was clearly embraced and enjoyed by thousands of participants in tent meetings, the theatre—the institution—was still persecuted.
As the Revolution approached, colonial life became increasingly secularized. Political matters were influenced by the developing merchant economy rather than solely by religious interests. Communities formed less around religious affiliation and more around trade. Now, not only was theatre attacked by religion as immoral, but political leaders (especially those who opposed British rule) also waged war against colonial theatre owners and actors. The continued association of theatre with England and British colonialism only bolstered revolutionary suspicion and ire. Theatre, asserted the First Continental Congress in 1774, was an unnecessary extravagance and a culturally dissipating practice. Though few theatres had managed to weather the fire and brimstone brought down by religious institutions in the preceding decades, the ones that managed to survive (such as the American Company, a troupe established by William and Lewis Hallam) were now compelled to close.

“Generations-old religious hatred now joined with economic resentment of a perceived upper-class luxury,” asserts Nielsen, “to create an anti-theatrical sentiment that could be subscribed to by pietist and patriot alike.”

Notably, Nielsen identifies “control” as the foremost reason for the First Continental Congress’ decision to ban theatre productions. Theatre audiences, suggests Nielsen, could be rowdy and harbored the potential for violence. I would add to this the potential for action, possibly insurrection. Theatre was and is a dangerous space; a space of potentiality, a space where large numbers of people can congregate and witness, if not act on, productions dealing with social issues. The theatre can be a space for change.

One would think as colonial leaders began ironing out the social contract that would become the Constitution and the Bill of Rights—emphasizing the inalienable right to freedom of speech—that theatre would be included as a medium to be protected (like the press). Not so. While the ratification of the Constitution solidified the separation between Church and State, the State continued to rely on the Church’s knack for social control: “religion could yet be a powerful agent of moral order.” Theatre continued to be repressed.

Even as professional, secular theatre productions were accused of being playgrounds of the Devil, harbingers of vice, and just plain uncivilized, Protestant preachers riding the revivalist wave found themselves increasingly dependent on
spectacle and theatrical devices in order to compete for the attention of parishioners. As R. Laurence Moore notes, “Revivals quickly became entangled in controversies over commercial entertainments which they both imitated and influenced . . . shov[ing] American religion into the market place of culture.”20 It was increasingly difficult for religious leaders to publicly condemn the stage and its professionals when these same leaders drew heavily and overtly from the techniques and tools of stage craft.

Revivalist ministers who openly subscribed to theatrical methods of presentation emphasized their use of the theatrical style, continuing to degrade the content of popular plays. Stage-actors were considered immoral and perverse “because of their necessarily close identification with an endless variety of characters,” both good and evil.21 According to revivalist preacher Charles Grandison Finney,22 what separated the stage-actor from the method-preacher23 was the “steadiness” of the method-preacher’s role.24 His training only involved close identification with one character, the devout, God-fearing minister spreading the Word of God to save the souls of man. While this differentiation functioned to theoretically separate the pulpit from the stage, in practice, Americans were increasingly seeking excitement in secular entertainment venues. The paradoxical relationship between the pulpit and the stage resulted in the former creating parameters for the widespread acceptance of the latter into American society.

Theatre could be acceptable if it was “performed under proper conditions,” stated moral intent, and was aesthetic.25 New England minister and gentleman Henry Ward Beecher understood the necessity of cultivating a relationship between religion and secular entertainment. Americans’ lives were becoming increasingly saturated with entertainment choices fostered by the market economy. Beecher recognized the opportunity to extend religious morality, and thus control, into the capitalist market by encouraging his parishioners to become righteous consumers. Beecher attended theatrical productions he believed reinforced the moral codes of Christianity and compelled his congregation to “demand uplifting commercial entertainments.”26 The Theatre was beset by the Church.
Introducing the Passion Play in the United States

One might think that a Passion play would be precisely what Beecher ordered. A Passion play or drama is typically a live production of a script (often adapted from at least one book of the four Gospels\(^\text{27}\) by the producer of the play) chronicling the last week or so of Jesus’ life, including his judgment, crucifixion, and resurrection. It is the enactment—the embodiment—of the climax of the Salvation narrative. Yet the first Passion play produced in the United States ignited a moral and legal battle that ended with the suspicious death of its author and producer, Salmi Morse. Morse opened *The Passion: A Miracle Play in Ten Acts* in San Francisco in 1879, to the outrage of religious and political leaders who accused Morse of blasphemy and “moral degeneracy.”\(^\text{28}\)

Representing God (even in his human form) on the stage was beyond predominantly Protestant Victorian America’s toleration. Moralists accused the drama of being a sacrilege and turned to the law to suppress the play’s production.\(^\text{29}\)

On April 11, 1883, Judge Barrett of the New York City Superior Court concluded the last of Morse’s numerous trials by making permanent an injunction against any unlicensed production of *The Passion*. Judge Barrett ruled that Morse was in violation of the Licensing Act of 1872, which required that any “dramatic entertainment” apply for and receive a license from the mayor of the city where it was intended to open.\(^\text{30}\) “The beauty of this,” remarks Nielsen, “was that no mayor would ever grant such a license for *The Passion.*”\(^\text{31}\)

Dramas and plays featuring Old Testament stories had been successfully produced and enjoyed some degree of popularity in the nineteenth century. A drama depicting the death of Christ and salvation of man had never been attempted in the United States until Morse’s *The Passion*. There was, however, a precedent established internationally for staging Christ’s story. In Germany at Oberammergau, *Passionsspiel* has been produced at the end of each decade since 1634.\(^\text{32}\) Other Passion dramas had been produced in Jerusalem, Madrid, and Rondo (Spain).\(^\text{33}\) Passion dramas such as the *Passionsspiel* were primarily sponsored by and associated with Catholicism. Indeed, it is noteworthy that when Salmi Morse sought the approval of the Church when editing his script, he chose to
present a draft to Catholic Archbishop, Joseph Sadoc Alemany of California. Alemany purportedly supported the script and even offered revisions.\textsuperscript{34}

The problem with appropriating modes of representation indelibly associated with Catholicism was that, in the late-nineteenth century United States, the once majority Protestant population was undergoing a dramatic shift in demography. Large numbers of Eastern European immigrants were shuttled to the shores of the U.S., bringing with them their cultural and religious traditions, especially Catholicism. As a result, a Protestant backlash fueled racism and persecution of these immigrants, their traditions, and beliefs. Seeking approval and public support from a Catholic authority may not have been the best route for a production needing the patronage of a wealthier, primarily Protestant audience.

In the United States, the acceptance of Passion plays as appropriate expressions of faith and legitimate theatrical entertainment only occurred in the twentieth century. The first successful Passion play to depict Christ and the Crucifixion was produced in 1909 by St. Boniface’s Church in San Francisco. Today, Passion plays can be found throughout the country. Several permanent structures have been built to host versions of the drama. In Eureka Springs, Arkansas, a quaint, Victorian-era town, Gerald L. K. Smith built the grandiose statue Christ of the Ozarks, and produced \textit{The Great Passion Play} in 1968. In 2009, the season runs May through October and is one of the primary attractions in the area. The Miracle Theatre in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, just finished its fourth season of the production \textit{The Miracle}, an expanded passion play.

\textit{Contemporary Passion Plays as Cultural Performances and Ritual}

Though Passion plays have been and continue to be popular performances of religiosity, Passion plays, as performance scholar Dorothy Chansky observes, “fly under the radar of most theatre scholars, arts journalists, and ‘regular’ theatergoers.”\textsuperscript{35} Today, Passion plays in the United States are largely sponsored by evangelical Protestant communities as a spiritual community theatre. These are local productions with quasi-local audiences. The plays are typically offered certain times of the year (spring and summer) and are staffed by amateurs and volunteers.\textsuperscript{36}
Passion plays are cultural performances of community. Cultural performances are events of sense-making and communicating knowledge about our worlds. These performances are generated from and generate cultural texts—construed in the broadest sense—and often function as tools for community building. They include forms such as “stories, legends, gossip, ceremonies, rituals . . . stage dramas, films, and literature.” Through cultural performances, “we continue to learn our own culture, to give life meaning beyond the immediate present, to confront fundamental values, and to discover the principles for right living.” Passion plays function in this way: communicating the narrative of Salvation by Grace that solidifies the imagined Christian community; providing a narrative in which individuals can situate themselves, linking past, present, and future; asking audience members to confront Sacrifice and reassess their worthiness; using Jesus as a model for ultimate, self-abnegating love and faith.

Cultural performances are not static, nor are they simply mirrors of their culture. Cultural performances, asserts John MacAlloon, are “occasions in which as a culture or society we reflect upon and define ourselves, dramatize our collective myths and history, [and] present ourselves with alternatives” (emphasis mine). Victor Turner emphasizes the reflexive function of cultural performances: “they are not simple mirrors but magical mirrors of social reality” wherein we not only see reflections of ourselves, but also, as Barbara Myerhoff observes, become conscious of “ourselves as we see ourselves . . . conscious of our consciousness.” These performances are about the constant re/creation of communities and individual identities. As such, cultural performances can be catalysts for affirmation/reinscription and/or transformation.

Moments of transformation are often marked by ritual, a form of cultural performance. The concept of “ritual” has a long, complex theoretical history. Because of their contributions to performance theory and the relationships they’ve established between ritual, theatre, and performance, I will reference ritual paradigms detailed by performance scholar Richard Schechner and anthropologist Victor Turner. Rituals are cultural performances, processes characterized by repetition and linked to the cultural knowledge and identities of communities. For Turner, ritual is “the performance of a complex sequence of symbolic acts” that necessitates some sort of transformation of the
participant(s) and/or the community. Almost conversely, Schechner writes: “Rituals provide stability.” What he is referring to, however, is not stasis, but familiarity and a sense of safety found in the repetition of specific actions and their correlative meanings. Both Schechner and Turner believe that rituals are conceived as a means of mediating potentially disruptive, troublesome, or volatile human interactions often associated with “hierarchy, territory, and sexuality/mating.” As such, Schechner agrees with Turner’s assessment that rituals are transformative processes: “[Rituals] also help people accomplish change in their lives, transforming them from one status or identity to another.” Schechner claims that in ritual performances, “There is no audience. Rather there are circles of increasing intensity.” All people present are in some way participants in the performance.

Turner’s theory of the ritual process includes three stages: separation, liminality, and reaggregation. In separation, individuals move from the space of their everyday lives to a separate, “special” space-time (referred to as “liminal” if associated with the sacred or “liminoid” if secular). In this special spacio-temporal moment, individuals experience the liminal or liminoid where they are in-between identities. It is in this space where transformation can happen, at least temporarily, and where communitas may be experienced. Turner defines “communitas” as the “relation quality of full, unmediated communication, even communion, between definite and determinate identities, which arises spontaneously in all kinds of groups, situations, and circumstances.” Like many church sermons and dramas in general, the Passion play moves its audience through an emotional arc. First, as they witness the betrayal, judgment, and persecution of Jesus, audience members experience “feelings of lowliness, depression, and negativity . . . isolation, separation, and being outcast.” Then, when Jesus is resurrected and the world is offered salvation and a spiritual union with Christ—the transformative climax—the audience might move into exaltation and communitas. Reaggregation occurs as the audience disperses, leaving the special space-time, and returns to their everyday lives.

In addition to the narrative arc of the Passion play follows the trajectory of Turner’s ritual process, Passion plays also exhibit other ritual elements that position them as rituals. They are typically enacted in commemoration of Easter. Large groups of
(presumably) Christians assemble to witness these dramatic productions as a means of “remembering” an event critical to their community and individual identities. The audience is separated from their everyday lives, moving into a special space-time. As the event unfolds, the audience exists in a liminal space with other like-minded participants. They are led through the lows and highs of an emotional journey meant to result in communitas. Passion plays, as cultural performances and performances of rituals, function as a medium for participants to connect their individual lives and experiences with the experiences of a larger community. These events link past, present, and future: recreating an image of a desired past, challenging participants to understand themselves in relation to that past, and creating a space for thinking about the future.

**The HLE’s Behold the Lamb: A Passion(ate) Play**

There are several large-scale productions that resemble professional theatre productions and attract visitors from afar. *The Great Passion Play* at Eureka Springs is one such example, complete with a permanent set, special effects, and a gift shop. The Holy Land Experience is another. There are differences that exist between traditional Passion plays and the HLE’s *Behold the Lamb*; however *Behold the Lamb* can be contextualized within the larger cultural history of Passion dramas due to its purpose and structure.

*Behold the Lamb* presents the story of the last days of Jesus’ life, recounting through song the events that brought the characters to their current moment (and the body of this performance)—the torture and crucifixion. In this sense, the production is episodic, like most Passion plays, but rather than focusing on several events leading up to the Crucifixion and Resurrection, *Behold* briefly references those events in the opening song, then jumps directly into the business of torture and death. The audience is expected to have a working knowledge of the story being presented, thus making detailed explanations, transitions, and character development unnecessary. Thus, like most Passion plays, *Behold* is geared toward an insider community. The content, style, and focus of *Behold* parallel those of contemporary American Passion plays.
There are, however, some significant differences between the production and function of *Behold* at the HLE and its contemporary counterparts. First, *Behold* is a professional production with trained, skilled actors filling all roles. These actors are selected via casting calls and auditions and are paid for their labor. In no sense is *Behold* an amateur (or volunteer-based) production. The implication of *Behold*’s professional standing is that it is not, then, community theatre in the conventional sense. I would argue, though, that when community theatre is understood in its broadest sense—*theatre created by and for a particular community*—that *Behold* is still a product of community theatre. It is created by and for an imagined community of Christians. So, while *Behold* exudes professional polish rather than that down-home charm often associated with amateur Passion plays, it still makes very strong claims to community.

*Behold* has a permanent stage set, which comprises a great section of the HLE landscape. The park pivots around the central geography that constitutes the stage (the Garden, the Tomb, the Qumran Caves, and the pathways winding through these areas). The permanence of the set, though rare in American passion plays, is not outside of the tradition as evidenced by Eureka Springs. The stage does, however, mark a critical difference between other Passion plays and *Behold*. During the *Behold* performance, the audience is in effect on the stage. We are made a part of the performance by our positioning as members of the mob who called for and witnessed Jesus’ death.

As ritual performances, Passion plays encourage internal participation from their attendants in the form of empathy and reaffirmation of faith. But *Behold the Lamb*, in Schechner’s words, intensifies the participatory “circle” in which the audience resides. This is the only American Passion play that includes the audiences as actors in the drama. As with traditional theatrical venues and events, a distinct separation between audience and performers characterizes other Passion dramas. The audience sits off-stage in a clearly demarcated section where rows of seats securely contain their bodies and control their interactions with the performance. At *Behold*, the audience swirls around the actors (though ushers do their best to keep the poorly marked paths clear) and is positioned bodily within the play, as well as conceptually inside of the performance. In this way, the HLE compels visitors to think about and experience a relationship to the
Salvation narrative, to Jesus as a bodied man, and to society. Chansky poses an insightful question: “Can passion plays as a genre offer spectatorial options beyond the either/or of reaffirmation/resistance?” At the HLE, where audience members are dislodged from their roles as spectators and charged with the responsibility of becoming spectactors, the answer is yes.

Participating in the Passion: HLE Visitors as Spectactors

As a form, Behold the Lamb is a hybrid of ritual and theatre. According to Schechner, in theatre the audience watches; they are spectators. Whereas in ritual the audience participates; they are actors. Experientially, Behold the Lamb does not conform to either theatre or ritual. It is something hybrid, an event that repositions the audience as participants reshaping our conventional knowledge of the Salvation narrative by asking us to become the antagonists—the characters acting against the protagonist—in the story. In an effort to make sense of the phenomenology of being both an audience member and participant, I will draw on the work of Brazilian theatre-activist Augusto Boal who theorized the spectactor—the spectator as performer.

In 1950s Brazil, Augusto Boal was the director of the Arena Theatre in São Paulo, where he privileged the stories and experiences of local residents rather than those that came from the traditional, European theatrical canon. His motive was to destabilize elitist power tied to colonialism. As Brazil underwent severe political upheavals in 1964 and 1968, Boal diligently worked towards democracy via “socio-dramatic means” creating and producing agitation-propaganda (agit-prop) plays for audiences comprised of laborers, as well as members of the middle class. In these productions and his interactions with audience members, Boal recognized the failure of agit-prop plays to address the needs of the people, thus lacking affective and effective impact. From these experiences, Boal developed forum theatre, a format that would encourage audience participation by staging situations and events derived from that audiences’ lived experiences. “Through storytelling techniques,” writes Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz,

Boal worked with groups to create a scene in which a protagonist is failing to achieve what s/he needs or desires. Audience members stop the dramatic action at
any moment they feel the protagonist has an option s/he is not exercising. They then physically replace the protagonist in the scene and improvise their alternative action, thus rehearsing for social change. Boal coined the term “spectator” to help define a new theory of and orientation towards audiences. In Theatre of the Oppressed, Boal relates a creation story he fashioned for the origination of contemporary theatre. He laments,

In the beginning the theatre was the dithyrambic song: free people singing in the open air. Later, the ruling classes took possession of the theatre and built their dividing walls. First, they divided the people, separating actors from spectators: people who act and people who watch—the party is over!

Boal, writing in part to instruct how to use theatre for social revolution, calls for a bridging of this divide, a shift in audience/actor relationships. Rather than passively gazing (though this is problematic, as gazing is not passive) upon a theatrical production, Boal challenges the audience to participate in the dramatic action, to become agents of change: spectactors. The importance of such a shift is the audiences’ reclamation of power. Through active participation in the drama, the spectactor may change herself as well as her society.

Boal’s spectactor is a useful framework for understanding the phenomenological experience of participating in Behold the Lamb. Visitors at the HLE are given the opportunity, within a defined physical and ideological structure, to become a part of the dramatic production. The visitor has a potential for power. By locating the visitors in the action, as the mob that demands Jesus’ death (or whose silence works to the same end), the HLE offers visitors the power to act. Yet, the HLE is acutely aware of the potential disruptive nature of this power and institutes certain mechanisms of control in order to direct visitors’ actions. Ultimately, what the HLE desires is for visitors to leave the performance ready to change their lives and their worlds. Of course, the HLE cannot completely direct the visitors’ actions. As a spectactor, the visitor can reinscribe and/or resist the drama in which she is participating.

Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), the name given to Boal’s collection of techniques and those who practice them, offers an aesthetic language and a set of techniques for
interrogating the relationships between Oppressed and Oppressor. Within its original context—1960s and 1970s Latin America—TO readily identified and pragmatically addressed these relationships. Clearly exhibiting philosophies parallel to Marxist thought, the Oppressor(s) was typically the ruling class, elites whose money and power controlled the state. The Oppressed were the people, the Proletariat, whose labor was abused and devalued, and who suffered tangible, physical and economic hardships. Mady Schutzman notes, “It is problematic to transpose a ‘third-world’ aesthetic of resistance to a ‘first-world’ aesthetic of self-help. Not only are we dealing here with a significant time lapse (1960s to 1990s) but with the asymmetric power politics that marks the change in context from Latin America to North America and Europe.”

We must redefine Oppressed and Oppressor, recognizing the differences between what Oppression (and thereby Revolution) looks and feels like in this new context.61 “What’s the use of Theatre of the Oppressed,” asks Schutzman, “for middle-class Americans . . . in late capitalist, consumer society?”62 We are in the continual process of finding out. As TO roots itself in the U.S., the techniques are being adapted to address participants’ experiences of oppression, both external (as in overt institutional racism, sexism, classism, etc.) and internal (what Boal refers to as cop-in-the-head:63 our psychological self-oppression).

I have chosen to spend time detailing the history of TO in order to establish precedent for my use of the spectator. My use of Boal’s theories of audience/actor relationships is unconventional. Using Boal’s techniques in the capitalist, bourgeoisie United States is also unconventional, yet has proved useful in investigating visible and invisible power relationships, and contributing to social justice. I am using the spectator out of context insofar as Behold the Lamb is not forum theatre. Spectators are not invited to literally replace the protagonist, in this case Jesus, and enact alternative solutions. However, the spectator is not only a tool or technique; it is also a theory of audience/actor relationships. It is a way of being and knowing in a particular dramatic event. At the HLE and in the presence of Behold the Lamb, the dramatic (and theatrical) event is not limited to the production of the Passion play itself, but extends beyond the parameters of the amorphous stage to include the moment of witnessing and sense-making taking place around the play. This is a social drama where participants are
confronted with a breach of norms (we are positioned inside the production as members of the mob), and a resulting crisis (What do we do? How do we act? Should / can we intervene?). As I stand in the midst of the mob, I am not, in the words of Jan Cohen-Cruz, “merely a witness of a personal creative act but a participant, a spectactor, in a social drama.”

Witnessing as Spectacting

I wait in my carefully selected position, toes touching the red lines. The Behold the Lamb presentation is about to begin. I can feel the electricity of the crowd, so many bodies jockeying for space, shifting and adjusting. The afternoon sun beats down, encouraging droplets of sweat to collect on my brow. The heat is intensified by the hundreds of bodies pressing so close together. We are an expectant, discomfited mob.

Centurions take the stage. A cast member announces over the loud speaker, “This is a sensitive drama,” and requests that guests “not walk around.” While this is the first time I have heard them give explicit instructions to the audience, an instructive element has been consistently present in this performance. The Centurion soldiers stand in formation atop the mountain and speak to the crowd:

Guests of the Roman Empire, today by an order of the Roman prostrate, Pontius Pilate, for the crime of treason against the Roman Empire and Caesar himself, we will crucify the seditionist and self-proclaimed King of the Jews, Jesus of Nazareth. We understand that many of his followers are here with us today. [Several half-hearted cheers rise from the crowd]. Good! Now you see for yourself where your misguided beliefs will lead you. Now, we expect to have no trouble from any of you or, mark my words, we are more than willing to provide you with a cross of your own so that you may join your King up on the hill! Bear witness and hold your tongues!

This statement functions in several ways. It announces the beginning of the performance. It positions the audience within the performance and guides audience members in appropriate audience behavior. The Centurion addresses the audience as “guests of the Roman Empire,” setting the stage for the forthcoming drama and identifying audience
members as characters within the performance. Then audience members are invited to witness and respond by reaffirming their identities as followers of Christ. The Centurion pauses at length after stating that “many of his followers are here with us today.” Some members of the audience take the cue and shout and cheer. The majority remains silent, their attention fixed. Do they not understand the invitation? Why do they choose to stay silent? Maybe they feel it’s provocation.

First we are addressed as welcome guests, and then we are insulted about our misguided beliefs. The Centurion then charges the audience to “see for yourself”—to behold—the ramifications of faith in Christ. Yet, the script doesn’t specify that these “misguided beliefs” are centered in the faith of Salvation by Grace. It is assumed that this is the case. What the Centurion does specify in his declaration of criminal charges is that the crimes Christ has committed are overtly political crimes against the nation/state: sedition and treason. We are then warned if we, too, engage in sedition that we will also be crucified.

The question of intentionality prompts me to think of alternative readings of this statement. It is impossible to deny or forget our current sociopolitical moment. The United States continues to host a military presence in Iraq. The events of and after September 11, 2001, have created an atmosphere of suspicion, where individuals’ demonstrations of patriotism are subject to question. President Bush extended the jurisdiction of the government into the private lives of Americans through the Patriot Acts. The aura of the age parallels in many ways the Red Scare of the mid-twentieth century. “Are you now or have you ever been?” I am struck by the label, “seditionist.” The statement directly correlates seditionism with treason, for the wages of sedition is crucifixion. Purposeful or not, this message is latent within the monologue.

Outside of what I perceive as a veiled attempt to influence our performances of citizenship, I also recognize the practical value of this script as a tool to instruct audience members as to the appropriate behavior for audiencing this performance. HLE attendants have already cleared the Way of Sorrow, pressing recalcitrant guests behind the painted lines. But this monologue warns the crowd, do not interfere: “We expect to have no trouble from any of you” (because you are good Christians and you know how to
behave), “but mark my words, we are more than willing to provide you with a cross of your own” (you will be disciplined if you disturb the proceedings).

This time, in this moment, I feel the weight of the Centurion’s words leveled at me (the spectator). Don’t cause trouble. What haunts me from this scene is the order, “Bear witness and hold your tongues.” Bearing witness is what this park is about. Watch. See. Experience. Live. Tell. But the telling is forbidden? What am I forbidden to speak? Hold your tongue. Silence. Participate, to a point. But above all: bear witness.

**Bearing Witness as an Ethical Action**

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “bear” as “to carry burdens”; and “to bear witness” as “to testify.” Bearing witness is an action laden with responsibility. According to communication scholar Barbie Zelizer, to bear witness is “an act of witnessing that enables people to take responsibility for what they see . . . bearing witness moves individuals from the personal act of ‘seeing’ to the adoption of a public stance by which they become part of a collective working through trauma together.” Shoshana Feldman understands bearing witness as not only a personal accounting of an event, but a commitment of oneself and the narrative to others. It is an “an appeal to community” to “take responsibility for history, for the truth of the occurrence.” Carrie Rentschler contends witnessing “means far more than to just ‘watch’ or ‘see’” or to narrate, “it is also a form of bodily and political participation.” She continues, “witnessing is a form of participation . . . in others’ suffering.”

The HLE wants visitors to participate in Jesus’ suffering; to bear witness for the purpose of witnessing; to take responsibility for Jesus’ torture and death, and then communicate that narrative (that truth) to others. Bearing witness is an act of spectatorship. Whereas to witness is to watch, to “see” an event (voluntarily or not) as a spectator, to bear witness is to watch, to participate, and to act. To bear witness is to experience for the purpose of remembering, and remembering, as I stated in Chapter 5, is a constitutive process (involving body and mind) where a past is continually recreated and identity is negotiated. Participants in these processes are actively engaged in the dramatic event of remembering Jesus’ sacrifice. Susan Sontag states, “Remembering is
an ethical act, has ethical value in and of itself.” Note that Sontag refers to remembering as an act, an action, a doing with an ethical impetus and implications. In this sense, the participation of spectactors at the HLE and spectactors in Boal’s workshops are not so different. They are all concerned with humanity and “the principles of human duty.” The HLE’s spectactors rehearse and remember Jesus’ sacrifice, what they believe to be the ultimate solution to cosmic human oppression.

Replacing the Antagonist; Becoming a Silent Witness

When distinctions between oppressor/oppressed (antagonist/protagonist) become blurred and oppression cannot be singularly or independently defined, participants gravitate towards the role most similar to the reality of their own lives. Oftentimes, the roles with which participants identify, in which they see reflections of themselves, are the roles of “silent witnesses.” The silent witness is a new character theorized by Schutzman. While the silent witness is present in an oppressive scene, she is neither the oppressor nor the oppressed, per se. In the scene, the oppressor becomes somewhat superfluous in that she is not the cause of the [problem] nor of the silent witness’s feeling of powerlessness. . . . Yet by virtue of feeling overwhelmed by the problem (oppressed?) and then, accordingly, doing nothing to help (oppressor by . . . association), we could say this silent witness shares qualities with both in a theoretical sense.

The silent witness exists in a liminal space between oppressor and oppressed, often experiencing oppression psychologically in the form of confusion and powerlessness. “For many of us,” writes Schutzman, “a kind of madness of ineptitude pervades our daily lives, immersed as we are in an environment that casts us frequently in the roles of isolated witnesses to daily crimes of inhumanity.”

Applying Schutzman’s theory of the silent witness to the HLE’s performance of Behold the Lamb provides insight into visitors’ experiences of participating in the event. Spectactors cannot replace the protagonist Jesus, nor the overt antagonist soldiers. Instead, they are cast as the mob that called for (or did not stop) Jesus’ torture and assassination. This mob likely included supporters and followers of Jesus who, because
of the situation, justifiably felt they could not intervene. To intervene meant, as the Centurion introducing *Behold the Lamb* so adeptly stated, to be given “a cross of your own so that you may join your King up on the hill.”

HLE visitors step into the collaborative role of mob while simultaneously retaining their individual roles as witnesses to a crime of inhumanity. Witness is not a neutral role. To be a silent witness is not to be absolved of responsibility and excused from subsequent action. Rather, the role determines the range of actions available to the spectator. Within the framework of the scene, choices must be made. Visitors to the HLE step into the role of silent witness, performing confusion and compliance. In casting us into this role, the HLE asks us to consider our choices and our actions not only as participants in this performance, but also as Christians in the world.

A range of options or actions are available for the spectator. The plausibility and possibility of these actions is determined by the limitations of the scene and the spectator’s role. In forum theatre, spectators are always invited to replace the protagonist (the main character who struggles for a cause). This is not, however, a tenable prospect for the HLE because the goal of involving visitors as spectators is not to change the outcome of the Passion play itself, but rather to change the outcome of the dramatic event of visitorship. The HLE wants visitors to leave the park and change their lives—to live a more Christian life like Jesus, or to redouble their attempts to witness to others. Thus, the issue at hand is not the crucifixion of Jesus, which is inevitable, but the need for witnessing in contemporary society. It does not make sense, then, to have spectators replace Jesus or even the Centurions. The characters with the potential to change the outcome of the dramatic event are the members of the mob present at and witnessing Jesus’ assassination—the witnesses. The HLE asks visitors to step into the role of the mob to witness, and to bear witness to—take responsibility for—the event.

In the scriptural narrative of Jesus’ assassination, the mob called for his death. They were antagonists (characters who worked against the protagonist) in the dramatic event. As spectators participating in the HLE’s performance, visitors are seemingly stepping into the roles of the antagonists. But to classify mob members as traditional antagonists is not quite accurate. Silent witnesses, who comprised at least part of the
mob, were certainly complicit in Jesus’ death (because they did not actively try to intervene); they were not antagonists as such.

The HLE imposes a policing structure to direct the movements of the mob and prevent certain forms of interference.\(^7\) As participants in this mob, we are faced with options: play the role of antagonist and call for Jesus’ death; reject the role of antagonist and work to cease the event; or witness the event without interfering. To embrace the role of antagonist and call for Jesus’ death would not be a useful solution for the spectator. It would not positively change the event and it would be conceived as a traitorous act by the Christian community. To reject the role of antagonist and somehow (verbally or physically) advocate for the cessation of the event is tempting, but tricky as it could result in expulsion from the performance. Not only that, but calling for Jesus’ release would be problematic; it would interrupt history. The spectator is presumably sympathetic to, if not a member of the Christian community. As such, the spectator, along with the community, believes that Jesus’ crucifixion was prophesied and necessary for the salvation of humankind. To stop the event would be to interfere with divine providence and to jeopardize the immortal future of humanity. Visitors are caught in a Catch-22. The resulting confusion of facing choices that cannot be reconciled leads visitors to choose to participate as silent witnesses. What options and actions are available to a silent witness in this situation?

*Portrait of a Silent Witness*

Jesus lay prone on the cement sidewalk, writhing in agony from the flagellation and the unmanageable weight of the wooden cross. This is the second of three scheduled falls. His face is contorted in pain, searching for assistance from the faces in the surrounding crowd. Dr. John Lewis, my mentor and friend from the American Studies program, is only inches away from the sprawled body of the actor, and visibly discomforted by the proximity. I thought I was doing him a favor by scoping out what I believed to be the best location for audiencing the Passion play. What I would later discover is that this was Lewis’ first Passion play, and he would have much rather remained physically distant from the action.
I watch Lewis watch the prone, broken body of Jesus. Lewis’ feet are planted in position, refusing to move towards the site of trauma, yet his upper body leans forward betraying his interest, seemingly drawn to the intensity of the event. Watching Lewis watch, I am reminded of a particularly unsettling experience I had at this site not long ago.

* * *

The crowd begins to form. As always, I feel the pressure of people seeking the best spots: the politics of positioning and placement. Rick and I are standing on steps under the Judean Village tent directly facing the front of the Garden Tomb. Our step is right next to the narrow path upon which Jesus will stagger. This is our first time seeing the drama from this angle.

Several older women, somewhere between forty and sixty years old, push in on us forcing themselves onto the steps right beside my feet. They bump my legs once, twice, again, in an attempt to make me move. I am annoyed, as usual, at the lack of civility. They mumble under their breath to one another, just loud enough for me to hear, about being older and needing this space to sit. Such snarky comments for Christians, I think. So, I refuse to move.

A man in his early forties stands next to me. I smile and nod. He grins and motions with his head towards the older women at my feet who are still mumbling. He tells me the group of people surrounding us is together, all visiting from the same church in Miami. There are thirty seven of them on a day trip. It’s his first time to the HLE, but some of his companions have been here before. The man looks down at my notepad, interested in what I am writing. I tell him who I am. He responds flatly, “Oh,” then looks away as the drama begins.

Three Roman centurions stand at the top of the mountain and begin their announcement. The Roman who is speaking pulls his sword and levels it at the audience. “We do not expect to have trouble from any of you . . .” I know the drill: bear witness and hold our tongues. The performance commences.

As Jesus is led towards us, he drops the cross (the second of three scheduled falls) and Simon of Cyrene gathers it. I notice that the cross is only the top cross bar. I had not
noticed this before, imagining instead the entire cross. What other blanks does my mind automatically fill in? Or has the performance changed?

Jesus is gory today. I have trouble making out his face. I’m can’t even be sure which actor he is. He stumbles close and falls before me. I feel the absence of the camera. Rick’s taking the pictures today. I am free, or obligated, or compelled to engage without mediation. Jesus lay on the path, his fake blood seeping into the cement, and I watch as the Roman guard, whose face and arms are stained with that same blood, wrenches the crown of thorns from Jesus’ head, tugging and pulling hair. The crown twists, and I am aware that physical discomfort and pain must be commonplace to the actors who play Jesus. His falls are real; the pushing is real; the yanking is actually happening.

This feels as close as I have ever been to the tortured body. I am mere feet away. An arm’s reach, really. I have been this close before, but this is different. Today is different. I am emotionally moved in a way I have not been since my initial visit. I want to help him, to reach out and wipe the sweat and blood from his eyes, to tell him that he doesn’t have to endure this pain. Yet, I feel disconnected from the story. This is not Jesus in front of me. It is a man, a human, in pain and enduring ridicule. I want to touch him—the human—to reach out. Instead, I stand there staring, holding my breath.

The moment is broken as he regains his footing and moves on.

I search the crowd and find children watching, mostly stone-faced. One petite blonde girl, maybe nine years old, has been watching the spectacle with open-mouthed awe; her hand hovering and fluttering around her lips. Another girl, younger, clutches a blonde woman’s arm, nestling her face into the woman’s shoulder, watching from the comfort and safety of a stable and anchored adult. She ends up in the woman’s lap by the end of the performance.

The initial reactions of awe, and possibly fear, in the children seem to drift away as Christ is led from proximity and stationed on top of the mountain. My distress also eases as Jesus steadily increases his distance.

Hammer-blows recapture our attention, and the petite blonde girl mimics the pounding of the hammer into her own palm.
I look through the crowd and see another little girl, maybe four years old, atop a man’s shoulders watching the drama and wearing a bright pink Mini Mouse cap.

After the drama finishes with Jesus resurrected and quickly ushered from view, two boys make their way to a spot on the path directly in front of me. They look at the blood-stained cement, fascinated, and begin to smear it with their toes, laughing.\footnote{77}

* * *

Watching Lewis struggle to make sense of the scene so close to him, of the real human body prostrated on that path just inches away, I sense his confusion and powerlessness. In this moment I know that I brought Lewis here because I want him to feel what I had felt and what I continue to feel as I witness the suffering of this actor/man. Though reeling in confusion and overwhelmed by the magnitude of participating in this performance, I also feel compelled to share this event.

On our drive home, I ask him to tell me about his impressions, to begin to talk through and make sense of the experience. I provide a framework, telling him I’m thinking about the audiences’ relationship to the events, issues of spectatorship and participation, and grappling with the question of witnessing and bearing witness to trauma.

Lewis: The crucifixion is the most problematic thing.

Sara: So what was your take on the crucifixion?

Lewis: Well, feeling confused between being a spectator. What were you a spectator of? They say something about the people who came to watch the original crucifixion, how this mob came to watch and mock. You can’t help feeling a little bit, you know, like you’re part of the same mob that came to watch. So it’s just this spectatorship problem, but on the other hand it almost seems like—you know how they say that you reenact the trauma and try to make a different ending?—like they’re reenacting it but this time the mob is sympathetic to Jesus. When you’re the victim you can’t do anything about [the aggressor] but
then later on you reenact it... and this time you’re empathizing with the victim but you’re in the position of strength.

I think about Lewis’ comments. He obviously feels as though he is positioned as a participant in the mob and he is conflicted about his role. Is he there only to empathize? To say “only to empathize” diminishes the power of empathy. Empathizing is an action that, at least as Lewis understands it, changes the event. But as Boal argues, empathy can lead to the wrong kind of catharsis, a catharsis that precludes action. Empathy, according to Boal, is “an emotional relationship between character and spectator,” “mak[ing] us feel as if we ourselves [spectators] are experiencing what is actually happening to others.”

Boal, I think, underestimates the activeness of empathy, considering it to be a result of passive viewing. Even if understood only as an emotional relationship, empathy is still a doing, an action, a performance of connection and caring between people. Relationships are continually remade through the process of relating. Thus, to choose to empathize—to care for and with another—as a way of relating can be a revolutionary act. This is how Lewis understands empathy as it is done in and through Behold the Lamb. In reenacting the event as an empathetic mob participant, Lewis feels as though he is making a choice that changes, to a certain extent, the ending.

I return to the conversation with one of Lewis’ questions in mind: “What were you a spectator of?”

Lewis: I wanted to recognize the Centurions as familiar cast members. I noticed that the three guys who were escorting Jesus down the Via Dolorosa were all members of the Southern Gospel singing group we saw in the morning. It made me feel less frightened. I was purposefully distracting myself from the action.

Sara: Really?

Lewis: Yeah, I was too close, you know. The guy was suffering right there at my feet. It was embarrassing. Upsetting. So I wasn’t even watching, like when he
stumbles and falls there on the floor. I was like, “The Centurions are the singers. Oh, those kids across the way, how are they feeling?”

Sara: That’s totally my fault, I . . .

Lewis: Well, I could have been a little farther back. I knew it was an actor; it wasn’t for real. Still, you know it’s upsetting a guy stumbles, falls down. That was the most upsetting part, really. When he first comes around the corner and falls down and then walks and falls down again. They’re like, “Oh, get up!”

Frightening. Embarrassing. Upsetting. What are we watching? Lewis states that he knows what he is watching is a staged performance and that the man prostrated at his feet is an actor; “it wasn’t for real.” And yet, the reality is that Lewis feels embarrassed and is upset by his proximity to the “guy [who] was suffering right there at my feet.” The guy—the actor not the character Jesus (and yet as Schechner would say, “but not not”79 Jesus)—was suffering. To deal with this situation, Lewis chooses to distract himself by trying to recognize actors and focusing on other audience members. What are we watching? We are watching a man suffering. We are watching others watching a man suffering. We are watching ourselves being watched as a man suffers.

Sara: Yeah that’s the part we [Rick and I] found the most disturbing. Because once there’s distance, once there’s that physical distance . . .

The physical proximity, our closeness to a live body falling, knees skinned on pavement, limbs twisted, back hunched and chest heaving, that proximity implicates us in the event. We are close enough to help him.

Lewis: I was wondering, like “Oh shit!” I hope they’re not gonna ask for volunteers from the audience to [laughs], “Here, carry the cross—YOU!” But that would really—given that they ask for audience participation other times during
the day—that would be pretty provocative if they would take . . . someone from the audience. It makes you think about what if they did take someone from the audience? Of course, in the real thing they did just grab somebody from the audience. I think maybe they play it that way on purpose. You’re supposed to be worried that they may just pick you. Then you’re kind of relieved, “Oh, it’s that guy in costume. He’s the one.” You never know how much of a theatre of the fourth wall it is.

The conflict: we want him (Jesus and the actor) not to suffer, yet we don’t want to be chosen to carry that cross in front of all the other visitors. What is real here: the discomfort of witnessing suffering; the weight of implication; the anticipation and fear of being chosen; the relief that I am not the one; the shame of not helping? We resist direct intervention. We choose, instead, to participate as a silent witness. But this choice is not without complexity. What does it mean to participate as a silent witness?

Sara: The centurions position the audience with their introduction. They’re speaking to us as if we are the mob.

Lewis: Right. Which adds to your sense of confusion. Well, maybe all that confusion is part of the manipulation. They tell you that you’re the sinner who’s come to mock. And you have to prove to yourself that you’re not somehow, by empathizing. It’s not a difficult task that they give you. You just prove that you’re not a sinner that’s come to mock by feeling sorry for Jesus and realizing that that makes you different from the original crowd that didn’t. You end up feeling like one of the good guys.

I don’t feel like one of the good guys. Lewis didn’t feel like one of the good guys when he feared selection to carry the cross. Maybe the HLE wants us to feel like the good guys when we leave? That’s a possibility. It’s also a possibility that, rather than feeling like one of the good guys, we are meant to feel confused, to question our (in)actions.
Lewis: I give them credit for being savvy. Originally when I heard about it I was thinking . . . they were trying to present this pageant, and they just unintentionally created this bizarre situation of conflict between spectatorship and worship. Now I think that it’s calculated. I’m not sure to what degree its self conscious, but I think that they hit upon it as a formula somehow. I’m surprised they don’t try to sell you something right there. That’s sort of also a successful sales technique. That’s when you can sell somebody something: when you’ve got them off balance, when you’ve got them confused about who they are. If you’re thrown off balance in terms of your identity—are you one of the good guys, one of the bad guys?—you’ll buy something to buy your way out of that situation.

From this conversation, we can extrapolate some of the possible, optional actions for the spectator as silent witness: empathy, assessing the crowd, assessing oneself. To empathize would be to engage in a relationship—to care for and with the other—with the actor/character. In actively caring, participants can change how an event is understood and articulated. Assessing the crowd and assessing oneself are acts of observation, reflection, and reflexivity. We implicate one another and we implicate ourselves as participants in this traumatic event. We judge others’ performances of empathy against our own. In this relational process, we may begin to develop an understanding of what it means to bear witness.

Suffering Through Simulacra: Bearing (False) Witness?

. . . it is always a false problem to wish to restore the truth beneath the simulacrum

-- Baudrillard (Simulacra and Simulation, 27)

What are we witnessing? A representation of a symbolic event? An aesthetic interpretation of an historical event? A theatrical performance? A simulation of an assassination? Because the HLE collapses the distinction of the medium
(education/entertainment, sacred/secular), what we are witnessing becomes inextricably fused with how we are witnessing.

While simulation may connotatively suggest something false, fake, or of pretense, simulation as I employ it here is a generative process. Baudrillard defines simulation as a powerful force of erasure, superseding the real. Yet, if simulation is performing the presence of something absent, and thereby producing signs that function in place of the absent thing, then simulation is a process of production and a process of meaning-making. I understand simulation as a powerful force of generation, continually reconstituting a plethora of virtualities and contingent truths. The HLE is a site of hyperreality, a system of simulacra, generated by and generating performances of faith. How do we meaningfully engage, and ourselves produce, these performances? Can we meaningfully engage in and with simulations? What does it mean to bear witness to a simulated event?

As I stood in the midst of Behold the Lamb—participating as a silent witness, contemplating how others participate, conscious of others watching me participate, questioning my relationship to the event, to the story of Salvation by Grace, caught in the crux of a crisis of identity, not knowing who I am in this space/time, or how to make sense of the actual violence I witness—I struggled to differentiate what was real from what was not real. A futile effort, considering the complexity and ambiguity of the real. Here, at the HLE, the real is useless. The HLE is a system of simulacra. As such, analysis by way of the real is ineffective and inappropriate. As I have discussed in previous chapters, real is a subjective, problematic concept too broad for effectively analyzing the HLE. Instead, I have gravitated towards terms that offer a narrower, contextualized framework, such as actuality and virtuality, and experiential authenticity.

Significant questions arise regarding what the HLE is asking visitors to do: actively participate in the performances, engage in self-reflexivity, change our lives, change the world. Because of a day spent in an edutainment complex in Orlando? Because of witnessing a Passion play? John Peters defines a witness as someone possessing “privileged (raw, authentic) proximity to fact” (emphasis mine). As visitors to the HLE and audience members at Behold the Lamb, we are close to the event, to the
bodies that enact the event, and to the story being dramatized. What other facts are we witnessing in this simulation?

I contend that, though *Behold the Lamb* is a simulacrum, the performance involves actual human suffering. The Passion play itself is what Susan Sontag might refer to as an “image of the atrocious.”[^81] What is the attraction of attending performances of suffering? Here, I will quote Sontag at length,

As objects of contemplation, images of the atrocious can answer to several different needs. To steel oneself against weakness. To make oneself more numb. To acknowledge the existence of the incorrigible. . . . It is a view of suffering, of the pain of others, that is rooted in religious thinking, which links pain to sacrifice, sacrifice to exaltation—a view that could not be more alien to a modern sensibility, which regards suffering as something that is a mistake or an accident or a crime. Something to be fixed. Something to be refused. Something that makes one feel powerless.[^82]

I believe *Behold the Lamb* has the potential to address several of these needs. Specifically, fortifying against weakness and acknowledging the incorrigible. However, I do not believe that the intention of the HLE is to function as a numbing agent. Indeed, the opposite is true. These performances are supposed to enliven the emotions and work to combat the apathy characteristic of (post)modern society. The HLE is trying to reclaim the exaltation of the Christian experience: the transcendence and communion with God through heightened sensibilities. In *Behold the Lamb*, we are witnessing a representation of the torture and death of a character in a story. We are also witnessing a simulation insofar as the actors perform pain and suffering—producing the signs of pain and suffering—so that a form of pain and suffering now exist in this spacio-temporal moment. Which begs the question, are we witnessing a performance of human suffering or actual human suffering? My contention is that the performance of human suffering brings into existence actual human suffering. The HLE functions to elevate suffering again to the forefront of belief. As Christ suffered, so must the Church. The spectator may reclaim power through suffering and exaltation.
Field Notes: December 13, 2008 (The Scourging)

The red lines that designated where we should stand have been erased. I noticed this earlier and wonder at the change. Does this mean there are other changes to the performance that anchored the HLE? I ask one of the women charged with directing foot traffic.

“Yes. Some changes,” she says with a sly smile. “You should get a seat now so you can see.”

“But why did they erase the lines?” I ask.

“Artistic reasons,” she says as she’s distracted by a family drifting into the no-standing zone. Again focused on me she continues, “They didn’t work with the new director’s artistic vision.”

“Oh, I see,” I reply as she gently shoves us along. But it is too early to sit and wait. The show won’t begin for forty-five minutes, so Rick and I wander towards Herod’s Temple and the new Last Supper display where I sit in Jesus’ seat and eat my snack-bar.

Returning to retrieve our “good” spot for Behold the Lamb, we immediately regret our decision not to stake out a position earlier. I am shocked at the sheer number of people congregating around the Garden Tomb. (One employee estimated that there were at least one thousand five hundred people in attendance for this performance). We stand on the very outskirts of the crowd, near the Qumran Caves. I ask one of the employees dressed in plain clothes (an older gentleman with curly grey hair who looks official and is wearing a badge) how the performance has changed.

“A lot more action,” he says.

“Action?”

“Yeah, they’ll be whipping him there,” he points to the Qumran Caves platform, “and down there.” He indicates the recessed space in front of the Garden Tomb. “And they’ll be coming right through here.”

It just so happens that we stumbled into an excellent spot to witness the new horror: the scourging.

As the woman whose job it is to keep the pathway clear of loiterers valiantly, but futilely, herds the crowd, the performance begins. A new scene has been added: in the
Garden of Gethsemane Christ is praying, then Judas is betraying. We can’t see. I strain my body, up on tip-toes, craning my neck, but no luck.

I hear the Centurions taking Jesus into custody. Apparently they double back around the rear of the Garden Tomb, because all of a sudden Jesus is right behind me. He is being dragged by the Centurions to a slightly elevated, recessed spot on the wall of the Qumran Caves.

It is here that the performance changes (for) me. They beat him with grey Styrofoam noodles. It may sound funny or absurd, but to be present as a man is strapped to a wooden whipping-post and beaten by two other men is profoundly disturbing. The visual testament to weapon on flesh will become visible minutes after the sickening sounds of connection die away.

I am ripped out of the performance, shocked. My growing disbelief that the HLE administration would make this choice is only surpassed by a growing concern for the actor. I am overwhelmed. My entire body feels tingly and numb. I cannot process what is happening.

I take pictures to try and insert the camera between myself and the trauma—I need distance—but it doesn’t work. My throat tightens. I can’t take my eyes off the violence, and I twitch at the sound of the connection between weapon and flesh, as if someone is slapping the inside of my head.

I am disgusted and scared and profoundly moved. But not for God or Jesus. The actor is the focus of my empathy, of my concern. I lost Jesus in the performance. I never saw him after the first blow. It is always and only the actor. They continue to beat him as he makes his way down the Via Dolorosa, where these new sections of the performance intersect with the old.

Later, when the shock subsides, I am able to identify other changes in the performance, such as a shift from live musical performance to recordings; the absence of the roman guard’s introduction and warning to the crowd; the omission of a Spanish translation. But now I can only think about the scourging.

I am compelled to ask—I can’t stop myself even though Rick is done and ready to go—I have to have confirmation: Were they really hitting that actor?
“Yeah,” three employees exclaim simultaneously. I had seen them conferring at the Qumran Cave site after the performance. Two are costumed and one is wearing administrative apparel.

“Of course they really hit him,” says the man dressed as a citizen of Jerusalem. “They really hit Jesus.” The employees attempt to stay in character, and I insistently speak to them as people, witnesses. My concern for the actor is clear, and the woman administrator quickly explains, “They’re just Styrofoam noodles. They don’t really hurt.” *But I saw the red blotches and welts on the actor’s back,* I think.

The three of them face me with anticipation: “What did you think?” “Did you think it was too violent?”

The questions come simultaneously, and I sense that they are not happy with these changes to the performance. The administrator, who I find out was actually directing props and effects (she sprayed Jesus with blood during the flogging) says, “We tried to find something better than the noodles. Something that looks more believable, but everything else we tried hurt.”

“Yeah,” I say to her. “I bet it did hurt.” Turning to the man and the other woman, I answer their questions: “Well, if I had been asked before I witnessed the performance if I thought such a change would be too violent, I probably would have said, ‘No.’ Hitting an actor with a Styrofoam noodle wouldn’t sound violent, much less disturbing. But after witnessing it, yes. I think it was too violent. I think it crossed the line.”


“What do you think about it?” I ask.

He pauses for a second and considers the question. Then: “Well, you know what happened to Jesus was pretty bad. I guess she [the new director] wants to get the crowd aware of that. We want them to feel it more.”

“When did they make these changes?” I ask.

“Well, it’s kinda still in process,” says the man. “That’s why they’re using all the recordings. They don’t want the cast to have to keep memorizing new stuff until they got it how they’re gonna keep it. Two months, thereabouts. That’s how long they’ve been doing the scourging.”
Field Notes: July 27, 2004

Jesus is being “nailed” to the cross—hammer-blows pounding spikes through skin, muscle, and bone, broadcast via invisible loudspeakers—his agony evident in the screams and groans of his followers (the apostles and the Marys) as they “witness” the episode. The cross is then hoisted into the air by a hydraulic motor and Jesus hangs there dying. Again, I want to be emotionally compelled by this sight; I want to feel something other than distanced apathy. Having surveyed the audience, I realize that I am not the only witness who appears to be unaffected. For the most part, the audience is fairly silent and still, though a number of people on the outskirts of the mass wander, disinterested; others eat cold treats, but most watch with cameras trained toward Calvary, recording. One woman stands with her cell phone raised toward the spectacle. Is she sending the sounds of the Savior’s death to absent friends and family? Is she capturing the Messiah with one of those new spy-type cell phones, digitalizing his agony, imprisoning his sacrifice in binary code, and launching the event into communicative-space? She stands there, phone raised, offering it as sacrifice (or redemption?) to the dying Christ. And then when she is finished she walks away.

Suffering, Bearing Witness, and the Role of the Camera

Many audience members take action as spectators by recording the event. Recording the event serves multiple purposes, including mediating the disturbing and traumatic experience of witnessing. Over the past four years, I have used my camera in various ways. Predominantly, it functions as a tool for recording the physical structure of the space. I have used it to record moments of performances, the photos to be used as an aid in remembering those moments. These photos also function as a testament—evidence, proof of presence, illustration, and souvenir—and the camera as a means of bearing witness. On a few occasions, I have used my camera to create distance between myself and an event, such as occurred the first time I visited the HLE and witnessed Jesus fall, and in my most recent witnessing of the new scene, the scourging. In both of these
instances, the trauma was too close, too profound of an experience for me to process. I used my camera as a tool to intervene between myself and suffering.

Since its creation, photography has been intertwined in various ways with human suffering. It was used to document the American Civil War in the mid-nineteenth century, then used to capture images of indigenous peoples for posterity as “civilization” made its way westward across the continent. Initially, photographs were understood as reliable transmitters of fact, of reality. By the early-twentieth century, however, photography’s objectivity became suspect. Noted photographers such as Matthew Brady (who photographed the Civil War) and Jacob Riis (who photographed urban slums) had staged some of their more famous shots, which showed that the reality present in a photograph was not untouched by the subjectivity of the photographer. The history and philosophy of photography, the debates over its ontological status, are not my concern here. Innumerable scholars across a multitude of disciplines address the nature of photography and the politics and aesthetics of photographs. What is relevant to this discussion is the undeniable pervasiveness of (both still and moving) cameras at the HLE, and how they are employed in visitors’ experiences with and performances of faith. Cameras are tools for mediating witnessing and for bearing witness.

To witness, as John Peters notes, is to be in proximity to an event. Proximity suggests nearness, closeness, and immediacy. Physical presence is the most literal interpretation of proximity, though more conceptual interpretations (nearness in time, kinship, emotionality, perspective, intellectual thought, etc.) are also useful. The HLE intends to bring visitors closer to God by way of collapsing the space/time distance between visitors and the narrative of Salvation by Grace. While physically not near Biblical Jerusalem, we walk through, touch, taste, and smell the HLE’s simulation of Biblical Jerusalem and, thus, feel nearer to the imagined original. This is the purpose of immersive technologies and synaesthesia, to envelop participants in a scene and create a perceived proximity to an event. In so doing, the HLE brings visitors into proximity with suffering. As spectators performing silent witnesses in Behold the Lamb, visitors are not only physically close to the suffering body of Jesus/the actor, we also experience empathy. Empathy moves us closer to the experiences of the other by way of projecting
ourselves into the others position—emotionally, psychologically, viscerally. To empathize is to experience *with* the other.

Witnessing human suffering can be overwhelming. To participate in human suffering via empathy, to suffer *with* the other, can be too confusing and painful to bear at certain moments. What can a witness who feels too close to a traumatic event do to gain distance? At the HLE, witnessing is voluntary. Witnesses can walk away if they so choose. But walking away is not a simple or easily executed choice, especially if the witness is positioned on the front lines physically encompassed by a mob, pressed forward by others’ desires to see the event. Nor is it a simple decision, as visitors are psychologically compelled into not only witnessing, but bearing witness to Jesus’ sacrifice. He endured all of this pain and suffering for us, therefore the least we can do is witness this simulation of his sacrifice. What we should do, according to the logic of the HLE, is suffer *with* Jesus and bear witness. To walk away or to look away, then, is to deny Jesus’ sacrifice, to belittle his pain and death.

In this case, the camera is an excellent distancing option, an appropriate means of creating distance between the witness and the suffering without the appearance of denying that suffering. Whether looking through a traditional viewfinder or at a digital screen, the witness asserts her power over what she sees and experiences by framing the event. As Sontag observes, to photograph or film is to frame. The frame narrows the scope of the witness’ perception, focusing on only a segment of the action, fragmenting the event, and parceling it into digestible visual sound-bites. While in a sense telescopic, seemingly bringing the witness closer to a particular scene (Jesus’ tormented face or the Centurion’s raised whip), the mediation or intervention of the machine, as well as our cultural knowledge of representational forms, creates an aesthetic distance. No longer are we immersed in the live performance of suffering. We are trying not to look at or to experience suffering. We rationalize our evasion through the aesthetics of representation: we are looking for the best angles, trying to get the perfect shot to make the perfect picture.

Recording the event is also an act of agency, a means of bearing witness. Barbie Zelizer observes that the individuals who participated in the initial liberation of
concentration camps after the Nazi surrender witnessed the unmediated horror of torture and genocide. In order to process and begin dealing with this trauma, these liberators took pictures. "Facing scenes that were unexpected, horrific and beyond belief," writes Zelizer, "these individuals needed personally to engage in the act of bearing witness in order to work through to recovery." Here, Zelizer refers to bearing witness not only as responsibility and an ethical act, but also as a means of therapy. The camera acts as a device of mediation by distancing the witness from the event; as an ethical act it is action in the face of injustice; as a therapeutic practice it is a means of attending to psychological trauma. "The availability of cameras made the act of taking pictures an obvious way to respond personally to trauma." Witnesses can do something about the terrible scene by recording it and bearing witness through these images they have created.

The HLE wants visitors to objectify and take ownership of the event, to possess and share the experience of the narrative of Salvation by Grace. In taking ownership, the HLE wants visitors to take responsibility. They want visitors to participate as spectators, snapping pictures and film as a means of bearing witness. The trajectory of the performance is designed with this in mind. Jesus’ death walk involves photo-ops: three traumatic scenes where Jesus falls, is tormented by soldiers, struggles, regains his footing and continues. These scenes occur at the beginning, middle, and end of the Via Dolorosa, strategically located to provide most witnesses with an up-close encounter with Jesus, and an opportunity to record a particularly painful moment along his journey.

What do people do with these records (photos and film)? Are they shared with others? Where are they stored? What roles do they play in witnessing and, later, proselytizing? Or do they simply become souvenirs, illustrations of a day-tip to ancient Jerusalem? The photographs from my first visit remain undeveloped, the rolls of film contained in their little canisters. After several years, they were misplaced. I’m not sure why I never had them developed. It wasn’t a conscious decision, but a result of procrastination. I didn’t have specific or impending plans for their use. Yet I can’t help but feel I was emotionally resisting the visual memory of that first experience. At the time, I wasn’t able to make sense of the traumatic scene or of my reaction. I was left confused and profoundly disturbed by the experience. Did I unconsciously refuse the
memory of the performance of pain and suffering because I wasn’t able, or didn’t want, to work through what this moment meant to/for my faith? Hindsight suggests the latter. This was the first time I had allowed myself to consider the state of my relationship to Christianity, to the Salvation narrative, and to God. This was the moment when I first coherently acknowledged the foundering of my identity, not as a Christian (as I had already detached myself from the dogma of practicing religion), but as a believer—as someone who believes in God or a divine force. Did I leave those rolls of film undeveloped and securely contained because I no longer knew how to participate in the act of remembering Jesus’ sacrifice?

It is the duty of Christians to remember the sacrifice of Christ. The HLE wants visitors to become spectactors by creating a living memory of the pain and suffering of Jesus, a memory they will share with others. Photographs are excellent visual aids helping visitors illustrate the narrative of Salvation by Grace in an immediate, personalized way. Photographing and filming *Behold the Lamb* is also a means of changing how visitors experience the simulation of pain and suffering present in the performance. By way of simulation, the HLE creates pain and suffering, a traumatic event to which visitors must choose how to witness. Cameras offer a tool for mediating the immediate presence of suffering, of creating aesthetic and perceptual distance, while also doing something about the event.

**Conclusion: Suffering Through an Execution**

The HLE deals in the dark matter of corporeal pain and suffering, which solidifies its classification as a site of dark tourism and not only of religious interest. Christians are encouraged to be strong in the face of persecution. The Shofar Shop offers Bibles embossed with swords. Statues of Centurion guards are prominently featured in the park. Visual images such as paintings depict physically strong disciples with bulging muscles, especially biceps and pectorals. Do park visitors imagine themselves in the role of soldier? Popular discourses have suggested and continue to allude to the Christian practice of faith (especially witnessing) as a battle: “Onward Christian soldiers / marching as to war / with the cross of Jesus going on before.” Christians are constantly at
war; with temptation, with their inner doubts; with the secular world, with other religions, and with the devil. Being a Christian, then, requires fortitude and strength of will, as well as physical strength. The HLE reaffirms this need to steel oneself against emotional and physical weakness, while creating a space for visitors to actively witness suffering, and then to suffer themselves.

I am accustomed to images of pain and suffering. I am familiar with representations of body trauma. I’ve seen it in photos, films, and on TV. I’ve even seen it in person, in the failing body of my Grandmother as she lay in her death bed. I know that I should be suffering along with Jesus as he makes his way to Calvary. The HLE wants me to be active in the performance; to feel and cry; to shout my identity as a Christian; to exalt in the resurrection and cheer for the reappearance of Christ. Yet, they also require a degree of constraint. I have been warned not to interfere. I have been informed of appropriate and expected audience behavior. How, then, am I to participate?

The dramatic production of Jesus’ torture and assassination at the HLE are designed to whip the crowd into an emotional frenzy of compassion, empathy, anger, awe, and distaste. The HLE is a space where Victor Turner’s *communitas*, once experienced by crowds at public executions can be at the very least synthesized. Whether the production achieves this intended frenzy is questionable. Though the dramatic productions at the HLE are highly regulated and intricately orchestrated, the inclusion of visitors-in-the-act, as audiencing and bearing witness to the execution, creates opportunities for performances of acceptance, ambivalence, and resistance.

How do visitors exercise their agency as spectators? How do they participate? They witness and they remember. Part of the importance of presenting passion plays is the process of remembering. *Behold the Lamb* is a mechanism of memory functioning to re/tell the story of Salvation by Grace. In this way, *Behold the Lamb* is also a heritage device. The Passion drama offers visitors an opportunity to participate in the pivotal event in Christian history through a well-constructed virtuality. By participating as spectators, visitors establish a tangible relationship between themselves, a Christian heritage, and Jesus. The drama becomes a part of the individual’s lived experience, a memory to be accessed and shared. Witnesses are able to interiorize the event as a living
experience—an event in which they participated—and may walk away with a sense of experiential authenticity. I am not suggesting that HLE visitors are unsophisticated dupes who believe that the performance they are witnessing is the actual crucifixion of Jesus. What I do argue is the HLE advertises a total immersion experience via simulation. Visitors are transported to Biblical Jerusalem by way of actualities and virtualities. They connect with a vibrant physical environment and with a compelling narrative of Christian heritage. This context encourages visitors to suspend disbelief, participate in the performance, and invest the HLE with sacredness.

In the following chapter, I conclude this manuscript by discussing the relationships between sacredness and violence. It is through performances of violence that visitors experience a connection with their Christian heritage and with Jesus. It is through performances of violence that visitors experience the sacred. Through a framework that posits a symbiotic relationship between the sacred and the violent, I analyze Behold the Lamb as a public performance of capital punishment—an execution.
I am torn. I can’t make sense of my place in academia anymore. I had thought this was my calling, but now I just want to escape—the pressure, the inadequacy, the competitiveness. I’m tired. Exhausted, actually. I’m on a pilgrimage that doesn’t fit the definitions of pilgrimage I keep reading about. I’m writing about a topic with skepticism when all I really crave is to sink myself into the comfort and safety of blind faith. Faith that I’ll finish this project. Faith that it will turn out useful and readable. Faith that all these years of juggling anxieties like hair-cracked eggs will finally be fruitful. Faith that what I’ve asked of my family hasn’t been too much. Faith that I’ll actually find what I’m looking for professionally and personally in that ideal job that seems perpetually out of reach. Most of all, I want the faith to believe that I’m not wasting my life, disregarding those precious few moments we are granted to experience the peaks and pitfalls of human existence.

My most intimate relationship these days is with this machine. My fingertips fly over the lightly textured, moderately warm keys, enjoying the give as I apply a delicate pressure. I pretend I am a pianist, convinced the sounds I am making would inspire transcendence. Actually, what I produce is either drab meandering recitations of already rehearsed history or these ultimately useless rants. In my mind, a chorus continually resonates: “At what price?” How can this be my calling?

* * *

I’m being “called” to the altar. My fingers grasp the pew in front me, digging into the maple-stained pine. I lean forward, fixated on the kneeling-bench that stretches across the front of the sanctuary below the steps that lead to the pulpit. I approximate the
distance between me and the bench: twenty-five or thirty of my long-legged strides. I have my panty-hose on today. If I kneel, will they snag?

Peering from beneath lowered lashes and bowed head, I see Mrs. Bower make for the altar. She floats in her calf-length flowered dress with its tidy, white-lace collar. Her emaciated frame suggests frailty. Sharp, bony ankles poke overtop of her low-heeled pumps. She seems so old, but I know she can’t be more than thirty-five. Mrs. Bower is married to a man who doesn’t come to church.

Like my father.

The call won’t last long. I have to decide. This decision haunts me every week. The lilting, slightly nasal voices of the choir encourage me to move. They always sing too high and usually off key.

Not like my mother. She sings sweet and clear, and I’m always embarrassed to sing next to her with my pitchy caterwauling.

The sound of these twelve voices gets inside of me, and what I hear are the voices of thousands trying valiantly to breech the sky and ascend into the dark depths of an unimaginable eternity. They try to take me with them.

If I go, people will see. They’ll think something’s wrong. With me. With my family.

Something is wrong with me and my family.

I will look pious and devout, a good girl drawn by the voice of God to pray on the altar of His Grace and Divinity.

I will look like a traitor to my family, to my mother who will watch me and know what I’m thinking. I’m not supposed to raise questions. I always draw too much attention.

The sins of the mother . . .

But it’s calling me. I want to move. I feel something inside of me straining to reach that altar. Is it the Spirit? Is it God? Is it my resentment and hatred needing to provoke a confrontation?

With whom?

I stand.
Yesterday we ate Chinese take-out and listlessly watched the *Ellen Show*. Ellen and Jeff Foxworthy were talking about how they always cried watching *Extreme Makeover*, especially when Ty Pennington yells “Move that bus!” and the lucky family, gripped by some kind of terrible misfortune, sees the grand architectural wonder they can now call home (if they can afford to pay the property taxes).

“How!” I said. “How can they cry over that? I never cry over that stuff.”

“I know.” Rick said. “You’ve lost something. You’ve become emotionless and distant.”

Where had that come from? I was shocked and speechless. What kind of comment was that? I wasn’t asking for an opinion, but apparently he thought this needed to be said.

Once I recovered from the shock I asked, “Really? You really think that?” As I asked for confirmation, I knew he was right. I have become cynical and bitter. I know it; I just hadn’t thought it was noticeable.

“I’m sure it’s just a defense mechanism,” he continued. “You know, part of this whole dissertation process. You have to shut yourself off in order to get through it.”

I think about the fear and self-doubt which hold court in the recesses of my consciousness. I think about the panic that wakes me in the middle of the night, refusing to subside, refusing to let me sleep. I think about the parade of “what ifs” clamoring to be voiced. I think about the near-debilitating pain that has nested in the muscles between my shoulder blades. I think about the constant pull of exhaustion, dangerous like an invisible undertow. I think about limbs, feeling the atrophy claim calf muscle, quadricep, hamstring, bicep.
No one tells you what a physically excruciating process this is. The quest for dissertation is framed as an intellectual challenge. Are you smart enough? Prove it. But I have learned—am learning still—the true nature of the quest. It is a challenge of the will. Do you want it enough? What will you give? What will you do? Can you make it through the gauntlet?

Quests have felled many, many would-be heroines and heroes. What will I give? What have already given?
Fifteen pages, give or take, that’s all that remains; I am so very, very close. The conclusion awaits my profound realizations, my pithy, witty summaries of significant points made throughout this manuscript. The conclusion, the resolution, awaits revelation.

* * *

I picked Rick up from the airport yesterday afternoon and found an uncompanionably quiet, brooding man. Visiting his family was a last-minute decision based on their apparent need to be visited. He has returned solemn, decidedly hostile, and intent on moving us to Massachusetts post-haste: Why can’t you finish writing in Massachusetts, and then fly down for your defense? Why can’t we move now? Enough is enough.

Is enough? We’ve reached the end, the seemingly unending end of a tedious and questionable process. He’s ready to go. He’s done.

Fifteen pages, give or take, and then?
I’m done.

Actually, I am undone. This process has taken me apart, bit by bit, until all I have become rests in fragments strewn about the coarsely carpeted floor of our ghetto apartment. I am undone; I know not who I am or where I’m going (though it appears the destination is Massachusetts). For what am I fit?

I think, I will leave the academy. It feels less like a decision and more like a means to survival. In recent months, I have determined I am not one of the fittest—I lack certain tolerances necessary to remain in the game, and I choose not to engage in any more attempts to cultivate what surely will never grow.
I am undone—confused, reeling, devastated, panicked, without course—and afraid. This is not how I expected this process to end. I thought I would be degreed, pedigreed, conferred into a world of thought and constant development, a member of a community of scholars who love learning and love teaching, who support one another as we extend ourselves beyond boundaries into a brave new world of revolutionary ideas and practical applications that contribute to helping our communities.

What I have concluded is that this optimistic, idealization of the academy was my Heaven. I was doing good works and I believed in the face of adversity; my faith was solid and I practiced my belief. I worshipped at the altar of Disciplinary Knowledge. This manuscript, this dissertation, was my performance of faith.

And how I have cried since I found my world-shattering, beast-infested Revelation: Heaven doesn’t exist.
CHAPTER 6
IN THE BEGINNING

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death . . .
-- Psalm 23:4

Field Notes: June 27, 2004

I’m not really sure what I expected, but I do know that I walked away feeling unfulfilled and somehow void. But not cheated. I walked through the Street Market towards the great, stonewalled exit, looking around me, searching for something that I had not yet seen or heard or felt. The chickens were still caged, the souvenir acacia trees, though fewer in number, were still there atop the table made to look like a peddler’s cart. I bought one of those trees, small and wiry sitting in the shade of its full-grown counterpart—a little piece of living memory—living like the “living, Biblical museum” where I purchased it; living like “the living Word” or like “the living God” whom I came to see. But even the contrived symbolism of this tiny bit of history—branches from this tree formed Christ’s prickly, bloody halo—didn’t satisfy the irksome feeling that I was missing something. I walked through the turnstile and into the parking lot, immediately aware of Interstate 4, Seven Eleven, asphalt, and the inevitable two-hour drive back to Zephyrhills. I took a couple deep breaths of dense, saturated air, shook off feelings too similar to failure, climbed in my car and headed home.

The Beginning of the End of the Beginning

The narrative of Salvation by Grace ends with Jesus’ resurrection and his directive to his disciples to “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” Behold the Lamb also ends with Jesus’ resurrection, but omits the directive. It is implied. The entirety of the HLE is
a directive to “Go ye therefore.” Not quite as clear is what, precisely, the HLE wants us to go-ye-therefore and do.

I watch as Jesus ascends the mountain, his stark white robes billowing, arms stretching wide in effigy of his own sacrifice. He stands in the pose emblematic of God’s love. How much does He love us? From the palm of one nail-pierced hand to the other. How much does He love us? Enough to descend into human form, to suffer corporeal pain, to undergo the horrific process of public execution—enough to be pierced by nails and die on a wooden cross.

When I was a kid, I would sit and watch the pastor of our church stand atop the stage above the altar and assume this pose. He reveled in the drama: “And we sinners ask, ‘How much does God love us?’” My pastor would then open his arms into a caricature of a hug, arms not fully extended, head slightly tilted. “This much? Does God love us just this much?”

And we, the audience, would respond, “No, Brother!” “No sir!” “That’s right Brothers and Sisters. He loved us this much!” His arms thrashed out, hyper-extending his chest, his head falling backwards as he mimicked the crucified body of Jesus. Then the pastor slowly looked from one hand to the other, and then to us. “He loved us this much! He gave his son as sacrifice to atone for all of our sins. Jesus hurt, and bled, and died for us! For you, for me! He loved us this much!”

“Yes, Brother Johnny!” “Amen!” “Praise the Lord!” “God, you are so good!” “Thank you God, thank you!”

The choir would begin to sing, “He arose, He arose, Hallelujah Christ arose!”

The exuberance rose to fever-pitch. But before we could be overcome with the Spirit, like our Pentecostal counterparts—before we could begin to move and groove with the Holy Ghost, before we could open our mouths and embrace the speaking of tongues—our white Southern Baptist congregation was subdued through prayer.

“Brothers and Sisters let us pray. Dear Lord, we are gathered here to today to praise You and to thank You for all that You’ve done for us, for Your sacrifice, and for Your unerring forgiveness. Thank You, Lord, for giving us this opportunity to worship You and spend eternity acting as Your humble servants. But Lord, I fear that today there
are those among us who have not accepted Your Grace and Your Love. Lord, I fear there are those here today who will not be joining us in Blessed eternity. Please Lord, work in the hearts of these individuals and bring them to the altar to accept Your everlasting gift.”

The choir’s low humming began to increase in volume, and then they sang, “Come as you are, lost and alone . . .” I always felt those lines echo in the hollows of my chest.

Most days someone would respond to the call-to-altar: a member of the church currently experiencing hardship in her life, a guilty soul seeking public forgiveness for some small wrong. Rarely would there actually be a person in the congregation whose soul needed “saving.” Yet this is how we ended each service: emotional tidal wave, then the prayer calms, refocuses, and compels the audience, someone heeds the call, and finally, “Thank you, Lord, for Your Greatness and Mercy. Be with each one of us this week as we make our ways through this world. In Jesus’ name, Amen. Thank you everyone for being here this morning and don’t forget that this Friday night we’ll be hosting a fish-fry.”

We milled around a bit, speaking to friends and acquaintances, making plans for later in the week, or simply saying our goodbyes. As we stood amongst one another, ending the morning’s worship session, we knew what we were doing. We knew where we were going. There was never a sense of confusion as to what followed.

Now, as Behold the Lamb finishes and I stand among the mob trying to make sense of the Passion performance in which I just participated—as I feel the absence of a Jesus whom I had just come to know through his physical suffering—I think, “What do we do now?” Jesus has left the stage and is quickly ushered by four security personnel through the white, wooden gates at the rear of the site. I look around and notice other audience members also looking around. Some people are moving quickly, gathering their belongings and their children and heading straight for the HLE’s exit. They witnessed the culmination of the HLE’s dramatic offerings. Now they want to beat the traffic out of here.²
What do I do now? I watch as other visitors file into the Jerusalem Market gift shop for one final consumer purchase. A souvenir that somehow captures what we have just experienced? Maybe one of the decorative crosses made of authentic olive wood and imported from Jerusalem? Or maybe an actual crown of thorns made from twisted acacia branches gilded in gold? For me, it was parachute Jesus. At the end of our first visit to the HLE, Rick, my mother, and I wandered through the gift shop. I can still remember the distracted way I drifted through the space, tentatively touching possible souvenirs, my fingers delicately brushing over bookmarks, Bibles, toy swords, stuffed lambs, and pottery. Then, in the area designated for children, I found parachute Jesus sitting on the edge of a shelf, seemingly ready to jump. He was at eye level and accompanied by some other parachute people, all characters from the Bible, of course. I looked at him and knew he was coming home with me. Sitting on the edge of that shelf, a mighty precipice for a little man only five inches tall, parachute Jesus (as I have fondly come to call him) was my perfect savior souvenir. Parachute Jesus, robed and sandaled, a seven-page summation of his human-counterpart’s life strapped to his back like a sky-blue parachute, is the epitome of commercialized Christianity, telling tales of faith, desire, commodification, and redemption.

Five years later, he sits watching me, again perched on the edge of a shelf overlooking the computer as I write this tale. I look at him and I wonder, “How does this story end? Why did all of these people come to this place? Why did I go to the Holy Land Experience? Why do I keep going back?” Throughout this manuscript, I have suggested some possible reasons why visitors come to the HLE: as an alternative to secular amusement parks like Disney, as a means of worship and experiencing communion with other people of faith, as a way of physically experiencing and performing faith, creating a tangible relationship with the story of Salvation by Grace, and as a way of establishing connections to a Christian heritage.

But why did I go to the HLE? Why did I keep going back? Why, even now, do I want to return? The easy answer is that I see in the HLE a fantastic amalgamation of ideologies, cultural expressions, and performances of identities. It is without doubt a riveting and lush site for a researcher interested in cultural performances and
performances of culture. I knew in that first semester of my doctoral program that the HLE would be the site of my dissertation research.

That is the easy answer, but to leave it at that would be to ignore the presence and influence of my own subjectivity, to pretend that my own feelings and motivations have not dramatically shaped this project. What is at the heart of my fascination with this place? This is the question with which I have been grappling as I have worked through each chapter in this manuscript. And while each chapter reflects my varying interests (constructions and performances of institutional and individual identities, travel practices in postmodern society, and engagement with spaces of simulation), it was in Chapter 5 where I wrote through the experience of participating in the death of Jesus that I realized the roots of my obsession. In my field notes from my first visit on June 27, 2004, I wrote: “If tourists demand death and destruction, the HLE delivers.” The HLE does deliver death and destruction. This is the crux of my obsession with the place. It offers me the opportunity to participate in a public execution, an assassination, albeit simulated. In the summation of those original field notes, I find this statement: “I went to see Jesus tortured and hung from a fake wooden cross.” Through Behold the Lamb, I kill Jesus.

In this final chapter, I investigate and try to make sense of the HLE as a site where public execution is performed and where visitors participate in this process. To do this, I return to the idea of dark tourism. In the process of deconstructing Behold the Lamb as a performance of execution, I also suggest reasons for visitor attraction to the violence of this sacred.

Behold, an Execution

The presence of the HLE in contemporary society challenges movements to alleviate and eliminate suffering from the human experience. According to the logic of the HLE, suffering must be central to our worlds. Behold the Lamb is the foci of the site, both physically and conceptually. The drama is often only offered once a day at the end of the day, the culmination of visitors’ tours. The location of the performance is close to the center of the site’s geography. The emphasis of the performance is clearly on torture and execution, the process of which comprises fifteen out of twenty minutes. Makeup
artists do their best to transform the healthy body of the actor into the tortured and failing body of Jesus in an attempt to create empathy in the audience. Can we imagine our bodies in his place? We are meant to try and to be overwhelmed with visceral pain, acknowledging our inability to carry and persevere through such a burden.

By emphasizing corporeal pain and dramatizing torture and crucifixion, the HLE is offering visitors the opportunity to engage in a (simulated) public execution. State sanctioned public executions have been absent from the United States for almost a century. The Holy Land Experience dramatizes an execution daily. This may be one of the only locations in the United States where audiences can participate as spectators in a live performance of torture and execution.

There is, however, a marked difference between the HLE performance of execution and contemporary philosophies and modes of execution in the United States. *Behold the Lamb* creates a space where spectators can participate in a public execution inside the framework surrounding two powerful discourses: religious devotion and capital punishment. Violence is inherent in the beliefs and practices of religion and the national penal systems. Religion employs violence through sacrifice, whereas the judicial system uses violence through punishment. The goals of our contemporary judicial system parallel the goals of ritual sacrifice. As Rene Girard notes, “the judicial system and the institution of sacrifice share the same function,” to avert further violence. Girard’s theories of violence are applicable to this project because they allow me to investigate *Behold the Lamb* as a performance of sacrifice (sacred and profane) and penal justice (secular). Contextualizing the HLE drama within institutionally sanctioned performances of faith (sacred) legitimizes the presentation of a human, embodied Christ messy with his corporeal pain (profane). But the modern processes of capital punishment (secular) suggest the inhumanity and inappropriateness of such a display. Visitors are constantly negotiating these discourses and these negotiations are particularly evident at *Behold the Lamb*. 
Repression of the Violence of Execution

In his article, “Lynching Performances, Theatres of Violence,” Kirk Fuoss studies executions, specifically lynchings not authorized by the judiciary, through a performance framework. He argues that performances in and around lynchings of African Americans in the United States often included taboo subjects like sex. Taboos regarding sexual matters created an atmosphere of sexual repression in the Victorian era. Fuoss understands the explicit presence of sexuality in the performances of and related to lynchings as “the return of the repressed.” Following Fuoss and guided by Girard, I understand Behold the Lamb as an act of contained, orchestrated violence which functions to vent a repressed social violence. I suggest that dark tourism in general and Behold the Lamb in particular are instances of the “the return of the repressed” insofar as contemporary practices of capital punishment repress the violence inherent in execution.

The past four hundred years in the United States have been marked by significant changes in the processes and meanings of legal executions. For the majority of those years, executions were the most popular performance genre in the United States, drawing sprawling crowds. These public executions were originally bound up in the rhetoric of Christianity. They functioned, among other things, as morality plays where a criminal faced torture and death as a result of breeching social codes and/or challenging those in power. Even after the official judicial ruling, the malefactor was, yet again, judged. The crowd weighed the protagonist’s performance at the scaffold. If the criminal repented and embraced her punishment, accepted confession and publicly professed a relationship with God, she was judged to have “made a good end—what medievals [societies] called the ‘good death’”; whereas, an unrepentant scoundrel who refuses confession and voices no remorse for the crime is judged deserving of an excruciating end. Yet no matter the crowd’s verdict, both the penitent and unrepentant felons faced the same process of torture and execution. The difference was in how witnesses made sense of the mutilated body. The pain afflicted upon the penitent body was understood by onlookers as a process of purification and noble suffering, manifesting the sacred and endowing martyr-like status upon the deceased. The unrepentant body in pain was deserving of the torture that would mark her last moments on earth and pave her way to hell.
In the contemporary United States, the violence inherent in our penal system and the reality that capital punishment is murder are repressed topics. One of the most pertinent contemporary characteristics of execution rituals is a predisposition towards humane delivery of death through the medical model of lethal injection. These practices are implemented to control and sanitize the execution performance. Ideally, in a modern execution, the criminal body demonstrates no outward signs of discomfort or pain. The body remains intact and clean. Witnesses are left with the impression that the deceased has fallen into a deep, peaceful sleep. The intention is to remove the corporeal from capital punishment.

Michel Foucault argues in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* that in contemporary Western societies, at least, performances of corporeal and capital punishment have dramatically shifted from public displays to private events in order to disguise the violence of the state. Dwight Conquergood affirms this observation in his article “Lethal Theatre: Performance, Punishment, and the Death Penalty,” noting that the ritual performances of executions have shifted from the public sphere of spectacle to the veiled private sphere. This shift in access is muddled and marked by issues of inclusion/exclusion, popular/elite, and redemption/retribution. Whereas executions were once performances directed towards the public, including individuals of all classes, a spectacle of potential redemption through state retribution, the shift to public exclusion and the privileging of a private, elite (state selected) audience obscures the possibilities for public redemption and attempts to disguise the actuality of state retribution. In its supposed humanity, these new processes of execution only hide the evidence of violence and brutality. As Conquergood writes, it “is more about cosmetics than compassion.”

Foucault understands this shift as an indication of a shift in the relationship between power and discipline (from external suppression by demonstration to internal repression, which Foucault finds positive because it supposedly decreases the presence of raw, physical violence in societies). In contrast, Conquergood minimizes the importance of this shift by emphasizing the frequency of execution practices. While he recognizes that a shift in visibility has taken place, Conquergood undermines the importance of this shift by focusing instead on the increased popularity of the practice of execution as
punishment. He notes that between 1968 and 1976, there were no executions in the United States. To his chagrin, at the printing of his article in May 2002, there had already been 31 people executed that year. He attributes this increase in blood-lust (or rightful punishment, whichever you prefer) as “enthusiasm for spectacles of the scaffold.” But the spectacle of the scaffold to which Conquergood refers is not a spectacle of death or dying, as it was in the context for which Foucault coined the phrase, but rather the image of the death mechanism (such as the electric chair or gas chamber). The human body being disciplined is absent from Conquergood’s spectacle. Here I would like to note a parallel with the Christian spectacle of the scaffold. In Protestant traditions (but not Catholicism), Jesus’ body is omitted from the spectacle of his death. The cross—the death mechanism—is often exhibited, but the tortured, dying body is absent. While Protestants may argue that the omission is largely an indicator of theological emphasis (the resurrection rather than the embodied trauma), the absence of Jesus’ body represses the violence of his torture and death. To his credit, I believe what Conquergood is attempting to do is raise awareness of a change in the social atmosphere, an increased interest in and desire for spectacles of punishment and death. And while the Protestant spectacle of the scaffold may officially omit Jesus’ body, contemporary manifestations of Protestant religiosity, such as the HLE, demonstrate a public interest in the tortured body of Jesus.

Where can we find spectacles of punishment and death if not overtly in our own system of capital punishment? I suggest that contemporary audiences may seek these spectacles—or more appropriately these experiences—of punishment and death in edutainment and entertainment venues like the HLE in order to help them make sense of their worlds. Specifically, sites classifiable as dark sites offer visitors the opportunity to witness and experience moments of terror, pain, and death otherwise unavailable in our culture. As I stated in Chapter 5, dark sites are spaces whose themes engage some type of destruction, catastrophe, or death. In a society where the violence of punishment and death are repressed, hidden, sanitized, and taboo, the increasing popularity of dark sites as destinations of visitation suggests the repressed is returning in interesting ways, notably via performances and simulations found in educational venues.
Because they are technologies of cultural and national memory, museums are not only permitted to display atrocities, but are compelled because of their educational imperative to create scenes that will emblazon these atrocities in visitors’ psyches. Still, boundaries of decency intrinsically tied to the discourse of capital punishment will only allow dark sites in the U.S. so much latitude in presenting torture and death. The Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., offers pictures of brutalized bodies, sounds of execution, interactive stage sets that include the train cars which carried multitudes of people to their doom. Yet the museum does not and will never perform a simulated execution. Showing the mechanisms of death is different than presenting a live performance of the execution itself.

Films and photographs are able to portray torture and execution without much moral reprisal. In fact, some films are heralded for their educational and emotionally compelling presentations of executions (documentaries chronicling World War II and Vietnam, as well as works of fiction like *The Green Mile* come to mind). The two-dimensional quality of the film engenders a distance between the viewer and the event, no matter how “caught up” or immersed one may be in the action. To present a live performance of an execution as an edutainment event has largely been the territory of Passion plays. Jesus’ execution provides a morally acceptable subject because it is not understood as an execution, but rather a sacrifice. Visitors are able to reconcile the fact that they are witnessing state-sanctioned torture and execution (corporal and capital punishment)—a taboo performance—by couching the act in the religious rhetoric of sacrifice.

*Sacrifice as Sacred Violence*

In his treatise on the relationship between violence and the sacred, Renee Girard differentiates ritual sacrifice from punishment meted out by contemporary Western judicial systems. With these distinctions in mind, he then argues that the violence inherent in both systems is the same. Both systems employ violence in order to curtail more violence (“reciprocal revenge”). Sacrifice is preventative, “an act of violence inflicted on a surrogate victim” who receives the violence in order “to protect the entire
community.” Theological interpretations of sacrificial practices, such as those outlined in the Old Testament of the Bible, posit a god or deity who demands sacrifice and the community offers a blood sacrifice (typically) via animal slaughter. This sacrifice is meant to appease the god so that no further violence (violent acts of nature such as floods or famines or disease) besets the community.

Girard suggests that the theological interpretation of sacrifice obscures the actual function of sacrificial systems in societies. By understanding these systems as religious, and often dismissing them as imaginary or absurd, scholars facilitate a misunderstanding of sacrifice. Sacrifice, argues Girard, is a means of controlling and directing violence, a safety-valve of sorts, which allows a society to vent its violent impulses in a proscribed and meaningful way. The ultimate goal of sacrifice is to prevent further violence.

What constitutes a sacrificeable victim? Typically, a sacrificial body is an abject body—someone on the margins or outside of the community. Again, sacrificial victims are typically non-human, but share some kind of meaningful relationship with humans. For instance, lambs were commonly sacrificed in the Old Testament because of their high use-value to their human counterparts. Animals, because of their non-human status, are popular choices, but human sacrifice in certain communities has been documented. When choosing a human sacrifice, it is important that the victim be “exterior or marginal individuals, incapable of establishing or sharing the social bonds that link the rest of the inhabitants.”8 The sacrifice of an abjectified victim “does not automatically entail an act of vengeance.”9 The abject status of the victim is vital to the sacrificial process because the goal of sacrifice is to prevent further violence.

*Jesus’ Death as Sacrifice and Execution*

We can understand Jesus’ death as simultaneously ritual sacrifice and execution, a death sacred, secular, and profane. As a sacrifice, Jesus’ death was supposed to function to end violence and save the world. Scripture describes Jesus as a sacrifice:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his
Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.  

Though sacrifice has been the conceptual framework through which Christians interpret Jesus’ death, Jesus was actually executed—arguably assassinated—because he posed a political threat. His death was a decision reached by the governing judicial body, and thus does not conform to the characteristics of ritual sacrifice. But it is imperative to the Christian belief system that Jesus’ death be understood as sacrifice so that the community can experience Salvation by Grace. Thus, in order to position Jesus’ death as a sacrifice, some rhetorical strategy is necessary. This rhetorical strategy consists of referring to Jesus as the Lamb of God, equating him to the animal victim most often slain in Jewish ritual sacrifices. Also critical is Jesus’ identity as an outsider to the community for which he serves as a surrogate. In his divinity, Jesus is abjected. Like the example Girard provides of kings who have been the victims of sacrifice, Jesus though a leader of his community, is abject precisely because of “his position at the center [which] serves to isolate him from his fellow men. . . . He escapes from society, so to speak, via the roof.” Finally, Jesus’ death is positioned as sacrifice by being free from the possibility of reprisal. Jesus is the son of the god to whom he is being sacrificed; his death is preordained, required, and sanctified through prophesy: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son” (my emphasis). Ideally, there is no risk of vengeance, no possibility that Jesus’ disciples or his family will seek to avenge his death. In this sense Jesus is the ultimate sacrifice because his death theoretically ends violence. His death ends the need for the sacrificial system. His death rescues humanity from death (“that whosever believeth in him, should not perish but have everlasting life”). Jesus’ death is narrated by Christians as not just a sacrifice, but the perfect sacrifice and gift.

Even as the Christian narrative constructs Jesus’ death as the ultimate sacrifice, it also highlights the secular, political nature of the crucifixion as public execution. In systems of ritual sacrifice, the victim being sacrificed is not guilty of a crime, but is a surrogate for the community. In executions, the victim has committed some crime against the community, has undergone some form of judicial process to ascertain guilt, and is then sentenced to a punishment by the judicial institution. Jesus was arrested and charged
with treason. Allegedly, he claimed to be a king, to which accusers asserted, “whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar.” Pilate, the governing authority who represented the Roman Empire, never convicted Jesus of the alleged crime, but sentenced him to crucifixion at the behest of the council of elders who governed the Jewish community. This is an important element in maintaining the rhetoric of sacrifice: Jesus was not officially deemed guilty of any crime by the state. And yet, he was sentenced as a criminal and crucified beside two other criminals. This act of violence is simultaneously sacrifice and execution, sacred and secular, and saturated with the profane.

The profanity of the act is present in Jesus’ torture and humiliation. Here, the profane manifests as violently opposing the sacred, “desecrating what is holy.” The soldiers who scourged Jesus

    clothed him with purple, and plaited a crown of thorns, and put it about his head,
    And began to salute him, Hail, King of the Jews! And they smote him on the head
    with a reed, and did spit upon him, and bowing their knees worshipped him. And
    when they had mocked him, they took off the purple from him, and put his own
    clothes on him, and led him out to crucify him.”

Later, as Jesus hung upon the cross dying, the audience “passed by [and] railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, Save thyself, and come down from the cross.” The chief priests mocked Jesus, as did the criminals who hung beside him. When they believed he was thirsty, the soldiers offered him vinegar.

Torture, humiliation, and shame were common elements of the process of public execution until the eighteenth century, but these elements were not technologies of the profane. Indeed, they were often understood and invoked as purifying elements that could result in criminals experiencing redemption and the sacred. The profane is neither a part of the secular judicial system nor the system of ritual sacrifice. Its presence in the process of Jesus’ execution complicates categorization of the event as sacrifice or execution. Because the profane is present, Jesus’ death cannot be confined to common ritual sacrifice or simple secular execution. It performs elements of each while it transcends both categories. By including the profane in this narrative, Jesus’ death is proven to be
something other than secular violence. It is a performance of humankind’s violence against God, our profane nature, and thus the reason we need divine forgiveness and redemption. In the process of saving us, Jesus’ death proves that we need saving. It is the lynch pin of the logic of the narrative of Salvation by Grace.

The importance of the profane to the narrative of Salvation by Grace is not neglected in the HLE’s rendition of the story. *Behold the Lamb* originally performed the profane via Jesus’ death walk. The Centurions spit upon him and push him down, mocking him by calling to the crowd, “Make way for the King of the Jews!” Now, *Behold the Lamb* also includes a scene of the scourging where Jesus is flogged, draped in the purple robe, and “crowned.” Standing in the midst of this event, participating as a spectator, bearing witness to these things, I cannot make sense of the layers of violence. I try to use my experiential knowledge of violence as a framework, but I do not know this kind of ritual sacrifice or this kind of corporeal punishment. This is not to say I do not know pain, but like so many of my contemporaries, I do not know severe physical pain through extreme physical violence. Nor do I know extreme physical suffering as sacrifice. How, then, do I make sense of the story of Salvation by Grace, or of the narrative event that is the execution of a man named Jesus?

Historically, people experienced and made sense of violence through their experiences with sacrifice and punishment. Girard believes that “moderns” cannot understand ritual sacrifice because we have been privileged to live in societies governed by powerful, transcendent judicial systems that eliminate the need for what he terms “private vengeance.” Private vengeance is enacted by individuals in societies that do not have formal judicial institutions and must employ other practices—such as sacrifice—in order to thwart reciprocal revenge. Private vengeance is rare in our society and typically met with judicial repercussions (“public vengeance”). Theoretically, what makes our contemporary judicial system useful in controlling violence is its ability to “deflect the menace of vengeance” by “effectively limit[ing] [vengeance] to a single act of reprisal, enacted by a sovereign authority specializing in this particular function.”

Foucault would agree that private vengeance in our society is deterred by the specter of public vengeance, rather than overt punishment of bodies. Contemporary
Americans, Foucault might suggest, cannot understand the torture of bodies by earlier penal systems because our disciplinary system’s ability to effect control through the compulsion of self-surveillance (the constant assessment of an individual’s delinquency against the horizon of the norm) combined with the carceral system of detention and rehabilitation has limited the use of execution: “We are now far away from the country of tortures. . .”\textsuperscript{16}

But, as Conquergood astutely notes, violence still exists in our society’s methods of controlling violence. The diminishing of violence through the obfuscating technologies of sacrificial and judicial systems has not vanquished violence, only repressed its visibility. Today, a veil of secrecy disguised as decency obscures the public’s view of judicial vengeance, and when we speak of sacrifice, it is often in economic terms (Have you tithed this week?).

At the HLE, we are able to lift the veil of secrecy and glimpse the processes of sacrificial and judicial violence. By transporting us through space and time, the HLE recovers an era in human history where both sacrifice and judgment were articulated through a body’s physical suffering. We are able to experience this performance of pain and suffering because it is morally right that we do so—we must witness the sacrifice. We must understand what the world did to the body of Jesus through the fallibility of human judgment.

\textbf{A Postmodern Passion for Pain?}

To witness the violence of sacrifice and judgment upon a human body through a live performance is a profound experience. The fact that a performance such as this is being enacted everyday at a Biblical edutainment complex located amidst a tourist Mecca is a complicated phenomenon. It is an event that suggests contemporary society’s perspectives regarding the repression of pain and suffering as appropriate public performances may be changing.

Prior to leaving for the HLE on March 21, 2008 (Good Friday), Rick and I listened to the Glen Beck Show’s rock rendition of the Passion on the radio. The story of the crucifixion as interpreted by Beck was weaved through a hodge-podge of Pink Floyd
music. He says he plays this piece every year, and he continually gets calls from listeners wanting to know why he focuses on the death of Christ, rather than the resurrection. Beck launches into an enlightening response:

On Good Friday [I] just want to spend a few minutes with you just talking about the meaning of Good Friday. Doesn't matter if you're a Christian or not. The meaning is universal truth, and I guess I started it with pain—that you've got to have the pain. You have to go through the pain, and it's what you do with the pain. You've got to have the pain and then stop and recognize it; and everybody always asks me on Friday, on Good Friday, why that piece that we played at the beginning of the hour ends at the crucifixion and the death. Well, because the resurrection comes later. Focus on the pain for a minute and recognize the pain.

Beck accuses, “We try to take the pain away from everybody,” then charges us to “recognize the pain today” because “it's the only way to really live.” I believe Beck’s interpretation of the Passion and his emphasis on Jesus’ pain and death is generated by the same impulse as that of the HLE’s Behold the Lamb.

One of the tropes of the postmodern condition is anaesthesia, a sense of numbness. The definition of anaesthesia is the “artificially induced insensitivity to pain.” Typically, the term refers to the medical technology employed to numb the senses prior to any procedure which will cause pain. It is easy to understand, based on the definition, how this term has become a trope of postmodernity: the dulling of sensitivity to pain through artifice. Our thriving medical industry doles out prescription drugs specifically for this purpose—the dulling of emotional and/or physical pain. If we’d rather not involve a doctor, we can self-medicate with alcohol or narcotics. Thus, the connotations of postmodernity are often negative. People do not feel as if they are living their lives. They feel detached and alienated, a strange drifting that is existence, not life. Living is conflated with authentic experiences, with risk, with the (calculated) nearness of pain and death. What is the social anesthetic which leaves us feeling numb?

Some scholars might suggest it’s the Information Age itself—the age of media saturation where images of everything are available in an instant. Media mediates our experiences with our worlds. Media mediates self and other. Speaking of Holocaust death
camps, Claude Lanzmann—the filmmaker who produced *Shoah* (1985), a nine-and-a-half hour documentary about the Holocaust—argues that world-wide knowledge of images through media “can reduce the emotive reaction and harden the visitors” to the actuality of the concentration camps themselves. \(^{18}\) “In this way,” Lanzmann continues, “the emotion is lost, reduced by knowledge in anticipation and familiarity from media images.” \(^{19}\) Upon my first visit to the HLE, I found myself devastated and disgusted by own apparent emotional distance from the performance of pain. I believed I had become desensitized to the pain of others, a product of our media( ted) age.

*Field Notes: June 27, 2004*

As we walk away from this site of torment and murder [*Behold the Lamb*], I wonder at my lack of emotion, my apparent desensitization. I thought that I had come here a willing participant in the illusion, but am I now subconsciously rejecting the construct or have years of exposure to this story dulled my sensitivity? Maybe my fairly recent viewing of Mel Gibson’s graphic film, *The Passion of the Christ*, has overshadowed my experience of HLE-Christ’s death. Mel Gibson’s cast speaks Hebrew. Mel Gibson’s Jerusalem is sandy and dirty and gritty and “real.” Mel Gibson’s Jesus really looked flailed of flesh and donned a pretty wicked crown of thorns. Mel Gibson’s Jesus bled; I cried. The HLE’s Jesus bled, but I felt nothing except this sickening compulsion to take pictures.

Maybe my lack of emotion can be blamed on current socio-political events or on the Media’s obsession with violence and death exhibited in coverage of recent beheadings [in Iraq]. Jesus had it pretty bad, but he wasn’t beheaded. He wasn’t forced into a kneeling position, hands secured behind his back, blindfolded (or maybe not), shaking in fear, defecating himself because he has the knowledge that his head will soon roll from his shoulders.

Or maybe my emotionless reaction was because Jesus was tortured in a way that contemporary Americans simply cannot imagine and, though filmmakers and Marv Rosenthal try in earnest to give us the imagery that we lack, their efforts seem in vain. Jesus is an historical character, distanced in time and space from us. Can we feel
authentic emotions for someone who is so far removed from our current reality? Maybe the real issue—what compels evangelists to recreate and assert this graphic imagery—is fear of an increasing detachment of the individual consciousness from the ultimate sacrifice. Contemporary Christians can no longer empathize with Christ and, thus, his sacrifice becomes trivialized.

 Later, I understood (or maybe I rationalized?) this initial reaction as shock. It wasn’t that I didn’t feel anything that first time I experienced Behold the Lamb. Indeed, it was the opposite. I was so overwhelmed with the sensuousness of suffering that I could not process or make sense of what I was witnessing. I was in shock. As I wrote through those rough field notes trying to grapple with the event and my seeming lack of engagement, I drew upon the only frames I had for understanding this sort of performance: film and documentary reports—two-dimensional media. The shock (my “acute state of prostration”\(^{20}\)) of being present in a living performance of such profound violence has now settled into confusion, sadness, anger, disgust, and vulnerability, all emotions I can identify and understand. “Shock can become familiar,” asserts Sontag. “Shock can wear off . . . one can become habituated to the horror of certain images.”\(^{21}\)

 Speaking of the mass distribution of images, Sontag argues that boredom is an expectation, and thus aspect, of the medium that precludes the fact: “Images shown on television are by definition images which, sooner or later, one tires.”\(^{22}\) Sontag’s assertions parallel Lennon’s and Foley’s theories regarding the motivations of visitors interested in dark sites: “Consumers droop. They need to be stimulated, jump-started, again and again.”\(^{23}\)

 Cultural and media critics, like Lennon and Foley, suggest that the public is experiencing a mass desensitization to violence affected through the pervasiveness of media-generated imagery. Glen Beck, in his Good Friday radio broadcast, clearly echoes theories of media desensitization (oh, the irony!), and bemoans the anesthetizing of U.S. culture. Lennon and Foley argue that “the unimaginable, grotesque, and violent are central to American society’s post-emotional state (in which deep identification with the suffering and pain of others beyond the immediate family circle is impossible).”\(^{24}\) Maybe
this is the case. Maybe we, as a society, are finding it more challenging to empathize with the pain of others. Maybe we do not feel the emotions we believe we should feel when we see images of pain and suffering. What I suggest is that, if this perceived desensitization is the case, individuals are not seeking out new experiences of pain and suffering simply for emotional stimulation (though I won’t rule this out), but also as a means of reclaiming their agency. “People don’t become inured to what they are shown—if that’s the right way to describe what happens—because of the quantity of images dumped on them,” argues Sontag. Rather, “It is passivity that dulls feeling. The states described as apathy, moral or emotional anesthesia, are full of feelings; the feelings are rage and frustration.”25 To be passive is to “suffer action; to be acted upon,” “offering no opposition; submissive.”26 To be passive, to be “inert,” is the cause (not the result) of desensitization. Sontag eloquently sums up the postmodern condition as not lacking feeling, but suffering from an overabundance of feeling. Desensitization is not a characteristic of postmodernity because of the pervasiveness of images, but because we stop trying to engage those images. Our rage and frustration at our seeming inability to change the conditions of suffering displayed in those images leads us to stop trying—to passivity, which is the harbinger of desensitization.

Contemporary interest in dark sites, especially performances of pain and suffering like Behold the Lamb, can be understood as means of reclaiming our agency through cultivating sensitivity. We are counteracting desensitization by choosing to become active, to become spectator. People are seeking out ways to develop their sensitivity—sensitivity being a method of sense-making, an analytical skill—ways to experience violence that will allow them to help make sense of their worlds; to connect, to empathize with others who have lived or are living through suffering. We want to touch the pain of others so that we may deepen our understandings of the human experience of pain and death. It is our curiosity and our desire to know experientially, and to organize and control the ultimate abstract—death—that compels us to seek the macabre.
Acquiring Embodied Knowledge of Pain and Suffering

A desire for the macabre is manifest in contemporary travel practices that include dark sites as destinations. Live performances of suffering and death are generally absent from the contemporary cultural lexicon. This absence, or rather this disguised presence, is felt as a shift in reality—a lack of authenticity. Dark tourism attests to the growing fascination of late modernity with the spaces, acts, and histories of death and human suffering (specifically physical, bodied suffering). According to Lennon and Foley, “[T]ourist interest in recent deaths, disaster and atrocity is a growing phenomenon in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries and that theorists have both noted and attempted to understand it.”\(^{27}\) I argue that while we are subject to a barrage of images of pain, death, and destruction on a daily basis through the media, most of us do not have experiential knowledge to draw upon in making sense of these two-dimensional images. We desire an embodied knowledge of events that saturate our media and so we seek out these experiences in our travel destinations.

If we have become desensitized to the pain of others in this postmodern world, then edutainment venues like the HLE allow for new ways to experience pain. Lennon and Foley argue,

Museum objects, whether it be a fortification, site of imprisonment, place of death, take on a key role in a culture that is dominated by moving images and fleeting visions in modern technology. Permanency of monuments, ruins, preserved spaces, can serve to attract a public dissatisfied with . . . [the] media culture of the modern age.\(^{28}\)

Edutainment venues that include live performances use the medium of performance to achieve virtualities and offer experiential authenticity. Ellen Strain contends, “certain types of experience can strip away the typical mediations that intervene in the experience of reality: and renews perception by reconnecting with the authentic.”\(^{29}\) The HLE provides this type of “demediating” mediation. Demediating, according to Strain, is “a composition of ‘short-circuited signifiers’ whose resemblance to reality obscures their status as mediated and authored, thereby producing the illusion of direct access to the lost world.”\(^{30}\) In a sense, demediating parallels Baudrillard’s *simulation*. In Chapter 5, I
defined simulation as performing the presence of something absent, and thereby producing signs that function in place of the absent thing; simulation is a process of production and a process of meaning-making. Simulation is a powerful force of generation, continually reconstituting a plethora of virtualities and contingent truths.

Demedia
tion is the use of media to trouble mediation. Like simulation, demediating is a generating force that creates opportunities for experiential authenticity. *Behold the Lamb*, an embodied performance of sacrifice and execution, is a demediating event insofar as it troubles typical mediated representations of the event (such as Gibson’s film and innumerable artistic renderings) by offering a simulation—in which pain and suffering are created via the performance—of an imagined reality always already mediated. Spectators in the event may experience a renewed perception of the narrative of Salvation by Grace because they are experiencing it as a live, embodied event. They may also experience a renewed perception of sacrifice and capital punishment. This renewed perception through direct experience creates a sense of reality, which translates to experiential authenticity—a feeling of having sacrificed.

*Sacrifice Made Strange*

I have been fascinated by the concept of sacrifice since I was a child. Growing up in the Church, I always defined sacrifice in relation to Jesus’ crucifixion, but I couldn’t understand it. More than anything, I wanted to understand that sacrifice, I wanted to touch the pain of Jesus, to know how it felt to give everything you have to save another. I associated sacrifice with love. *Sacrifice is the ultimate expression of love*, I believed. Maybe I still believe this. *Sacrifice is the ultimate performance of faith*, I believed. Maybe I still believe this, too.

My understandings of faith, love, sacrifice, and punishment have been twisted up together for as long as I can remember. It is through these tropes that I have attempted to make sense of my attraction to the HLE. It is in this fun-house mirror, which their mingling creates, that I see how I have experienced the violence of *Behold the Lamb* and the violence of writing this dissertation.
I have stumbled through this process—spiritual journey/research project, another manifestation of sacred/secular, another false binary—always questioning my worthiness: Am I smart enough, critical enough, reverent enough? Always questioning my sacrifice: Have I given enough time, energy, money? Always questioning my devotion: Do I want this badly enough? Do I love it above all things? Have I proven my faith? And I always find myself wanting. Herein lies the violence of my sacred—the sacrifice and the punishment.

I learned martyrdom from my mother, but I refined it in the halls of the academy. Worship at the altar of knowledge and find redemption. Publish in the annals of the discipline and find immortality. Devote myself to interpretation and understanding and receive peace of mind. No one told me these things. I overlaid my desire for communion and transcendence onto what seemed like a noble pursuit—the acquisition of knowledge for the benefit of humanity. Faith, love, sacrifice, and punishment are easily translated from the institution of Christianity to the institution of Knowledge. I had faith that what I was doing was good and useful and would save my soul from degeneration and desolation. I loved my research and my writing. But the sacrifice: At what price knowledge? What will I give? These are questions I thought I heard chiming like church bells in the hallowed halls of my university. These are the questions that have haunted me as I struggled through this project.

What I have come to realize is that I have constructed this manuscript around issues I face in my life: identity, desire for community, desire for cultural and historical anchors, my own educational imperative, performances of faith, and need to make sense of my attraction to the violence inherent in the space of the HLE.

In Chapter 1, “Genesis,” I laid the groundwork for this endeavor, hinting at my own fascination while sketching a theoretical framework and method of inquiry through which I analyzed the HLE. Chapter 2, “‘I tell you the truth’: Museum Status and the Educational Imperative,” I examine the controversy surrounding the HLE’s identity as a nonprofit organization. The HLE claims to be a museum, whereas county tax officials argue that it is an entertainment. I argue the HLE is an edutainment complex, which does not preclude it’s tax-exempt status, and situate the HLE’s identity within a discussion of
the structure and function of museums in postmodernity. In Chapter 4, “In Situ,” I analyze the HLE’s design using contemporary Museology, specifically focusing on how visitors interact with performative display practices like those employed in the Scriptorium. These performative display practices characteristic of orchestrated models of museum design function to create virtualities and facilitate experiential authenticity. Chapter 5, “Heritage, Identity, and a Christian Homeland,” continues the discussion of museum design broached in Chapter 4, focusing on the HLE as a themed space and a heritage site. I argue that the HLE functions as a heritage site offering visitors a means of physically engaging with an imagined past and publicly participating in the narrative of Salvation by Grace. In Chapter 6, “And the Word was Made Flesh,” I discuss the relationship between theatre, performance, and religion in the United States, focusing on the development of Passion plays in the twentieth century. I then assert that visitors become actors in the HLE’s Passion drama, Behold the Lamb. As spectators, visitors participate in Jesus’ crucifixion, investing sacred meaning in the violence of execution. The violence of the HLE positions the location as a site of dark tourism. In this final chapter, I argue that visitor attraction to dark tourist sites like the HLE can be understood as a means of sense-making and resensitization—a combating of the anaesthesia of postmodernity—a means of reclaiming agency through witnessing.

Which brings us here: the end? Actually, this is a beginning of sorts. It is the beginning of resensitization, my active attempt to understand the relationships between faith, love, sacrifice, and punishment that influence this work; that influence the ways I have been moving through my life, including and especially the academy. Now, I will end with the beginning—the rambling, confused, angry, and defensive thoughts of a girl whose faith has been interrupted—and begin with the ending—the rambling thoughts of a girl performing the beginnings of a faith she wants to find.
**Field Notes: June 27, 2004**

This is not a story of conversion or conviction. I did not venture to the Holy Land Experience to worship God or celebrate Christianity or eat quasi-Middle Eastern food or buy trinkets directly imported from Israel or delude myself into substituting this experience for an actual pilgrimage to Jerusalem. I did not go to the HLE to criticize other tourists or the park. I went to see “Jesus” tortured and hung from a fake wooden cross. I went to see an imaginary construct of a mythic place and time, a “historically based” make-believe land of miracles and God-incarnate. I thought I wanted convenient, pre-fab fantasy packaged in a safe environment and equipped with colorful characters. Yet, leaving the park, I was overcome with a sense of defeat. Though I did not go to the park to find redemption or experience the sublime, I did want to feel something. Maybe I did want my spirit moved and my faith reaffirmed and some kind of tangible sign that we are not alone in our ephemeral journey through this universe and that death is not really the end. I was searching for authentic emotional responses in an elaborately contrived, commercially driven themed-production. Logically, I knew that the Holy Land Experience wasn’t really going to answer “life’s most important questions,” but I thought that being immersed in a religious theme-park surrounded by what I believed would be other religious people, I might feel more religious. Instead, I took home parachute Jesus.

**Journal: December 21, 2008**

*And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.*

-- *Matthew 28:20.*

“I still don’t get it. I don’t understand how people can believe this stuff,” Rick says.

I stare into the vast expanse of the road ahead, one hand on the wheel, the other dangling outside the window. The warm breeze reminds me why Christmas never feels like Christmas in Florida. The sun is already beating heat on my leg, and I think I may need to turn on the air conditioning soon.
Half in and half out of the trance-like state engendered by driving familiar roads, I lackadaisically respond: “Hmm? What do you mean?” Though I know exactly what he means.

“How can people believe that there’s a God out there who listens to everything everyone in the entire world says? A God who cares about everybody, but doesn’t intervene in the world’s atrocities? You know? And how can they think that he sent a man, a real person, to save the world by dying on a cross? We’ve been here so many times and I still don’t get it.”

This is our final trip to the HLE. Our passes expire today, four days before Christmas. How many times have I cajoled Rick into coming with me? A lot. He’s glad to be done. He’s said so several times today: “I like the place and all. It’s fascinating, but I’m done with it. I’ve been done with it. I’m glad this is it.” I got him to accompany me today by promising to go to the Orlando Prime Outlets afterward.

I hear the disgust in his tone, subtle but present, as he questions the logic of belief. I wait, thinking it may be a rhetorical question; more venting about the colonialism of Christmas. Rick is seriously anti-Christmas this year: “I’m tired of people assuming I’m Christian: ‘Merry Christmas!’ I just want to say, ‘Thanks, but I’m not a Christian. I don’t celebrate that fairytale.’ It’s oppressive.” He has a new co-worker whose zealotry has been rubbing him the wrong way. “I don’t force my beliefs on other people. Why do they have to force theirs on me?”

“Did you hear me?” he asks as we speed down I-4. The question was apparently not rhetorical.

“Yeah. I was thinking.” I pause for effect. “You know, I believed that stuff when I was a kid.”

“You said you were always skeptical, always critiquing the stories and the people telling them. You didn’t really believe.”

“Maybe. I don’t know. It’s complicated. You weren’t raised that way, so you don’t feel the obligation and the guilt. I know, I know. You’re Catholic. But you’re not. You only went to a Catholic school for a couple of years. And institutional pressure to believe is different than familial pressure to believe. Your mom doesn’t even believe in
God. She’s pretty much an atheist. Your dad doesn’t care about religion. You got to grow up free from the fear and guilt.”

“True,” he says as he nods his head in tentative agreement.

I pause again, this time because I’m really thinking. And feeling this stirring inside. It’s in my gut, this guilt and desire. I haven’t resolved the tensions that have plagued my soul. I haven’t come to the resolution for which I had hoped. The one I sought as I embarked on this journey. But something is coming to me; a knowledge that I know I have known, but never articulated. I feel it stirring and I sit up straighter in my seat, as if adjusting my posture will allow it to move up into my consciousness and out through my words. It’s not a rational knowledge. I know it in my bones and my core and that strange place in my chest that hollows out at those most terrifying moments of depression, desperation, and loss.

Focused on the asphalt in front of me, but seeing and feeling fragments of my childhood, I try to speak this new, yet ancient awareness: “The story of Christ is so compelling because if we believe it, then that means a God exists who loves us unconditionally. Enough to make a monstrous sacrifice. Nobody on earth loves us unconditionally. You know, there are always boundaries, limits. If we believe that there’s a God out there who loves us that much, then we are never truly alone.”

“Yeah. I guess I get that, but I just don’t know how people buy into that particular story: virgin birth, infallible man, resurrection. Come on! If God is God, then why would He have to make a sacrifice to save humanity? He’s God. He can make things the way he wants them. It’s just not believable. I understand why people want to believe it, but how can you really make yourself not see the inconsistencies?”

My awareness of my own relationship with faith is sharpening, like a kaleidoscope as it settles on a particular formation. No coherent image or representation, per se, but a clear view of how separate particles dance together and create a distinct, fragile moment of beauty.

“Because the alternative is profound emptiness,” I whisper. “We believe because if we don’t then we have to face the reality that there is no source of boundless, unconditional love. If we forsake the story, then we have to admit to being ultimately
alone. When I was a kid sometimes the only solace I had was in thinking that there was someone out there in the stars who gave a shit about me. Someone who would listen and care about how sad and alone I was. The days when I doubted God’s existence were the days I felt the most profound emptiness; days of desolation and asking myself why I should even continue to live. In the most desperate hours when we have nothing else, no one else, then who can we turn to? Who will care about us? I needed that belief in those moments. I needed that faith to survive another day.”

The moment I allowed myself to acknowledge the inconsistencies and irrationality, the utter ridiculousness of the stories I was raised to believe, was the moment that a vast, terrifying abyss opened up at the edge of my consciousness. I feel it so close to my soul, and I am sick with fear that one day my soul will step wrongly and will spiral down into bleak, bottomless nothingness. Empty. Alone.

Rick watches me as I sit tense and uncomfortable. I feel raw and vulnerable. I have valued my strength above all things since I was a child. I was the anchor that held my family fast in the maelstrom of poor choices, incessant battles, and psychosis that characterized my childhood. I had the broad shoulders, open ears, and comforting words. I didn’t waiver and I didn’t cry. Except silently, in the middle of the night, as I begged God to hear me and send me refuge.

To admit to those moments of weakness, of fear and doubt and utter desolation, comes easier now as distance allows me to look critically at the events and my role in perpetuating the craziness. But to admit to these moments now—to acknowledge to myself and to Rick that I can’t handle the pressure of the life I’ve created; that I feel my control slipping with my strength; that I fear emptiness and constantly battle a sense of isolation; that, even though my faith has gone, I still beg God to hear me and send me refuge—leaves me exposed, tender, and frightened.

I don’t know if Rick sees the vulnerability through the anxiety and defensiveness, but he seems to accept my ramblings.

He says, “Yeah. I guess I understand that part of it. I guess with me it’s that I never felt like I wasn’t loved. I’ve been surrounded by people who love me, so I didn’t need to believe in a person like Jesus or in God as he exists in Christianity. And I think
that my spirituality functions in the same way, at least foundationally. I feel like we are all a part of the universe and so we are never alone. Interconnected.”

I envy Rick because he is in a place spiritually that I don’t know if I will ever find. He is contented. But he also actively *seeks* his contentment. I have just waited for mine to find me.

Until now.

This is a beginning.
Chapter 1: Genesis

12. Zion’s Hope.
16. This belief is consistent with Prewrath Tribulationists who believe that Christians will experience some of the terrible events associated with the Tribulation, but will be raptured by Christ prior to what are known as the Seven Vial (Bowl) Judgments of the wrath of God. These judgments include seas turning to blood, massive earthquakes, and intensification of sun (burning) all for the purpose of destroying the members of humanity who have accepted the mark of the Beast.


32. “Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.” *The Bible*. Matthew 19:21 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994). Authorized King James Vers.


36. CharityNavigator.org provides a breakdown of organizational expenses and lists the “compensation” rate of certain administrative positions. Currently, Paul Crouch, Sr. as president and director of TBN receives a salary of $419,500. His wife Jan, Vice President, receives $361,000, and son Paul, also Vice President, receives $130,000.


Dinosaur Adventure Land is currently closed because the property has been seized by the federal government due to unpaid fines.
49. Emery, 10 June 2007.
50. Emery, 10 June 2007.
52. Ark Alive.
54. Long, 45.
55. Long, 51.
57. Radosh reports that the location is currently owned by Rick Joyner, who plans to revitalize the site.
58. O’Guinn and Belk, 237.
63. Christian apocalypticism refers to the Christian belief that the end of the world is planned by God and has been detailed in the Bible.
64. Dombek, 141.
65. Dombek, 140.
66. Dombek, 142.
67. Dombek, 142.
69. Beal 6, 52, 212.
70. Beal, 68.
71. Beal, 68.
74. Lukas, 275.
75. Lukas, 275.
76. Lukas, 275.
77. Lukas, 275.
81. For the purposes of simplification, Bruner suggests that the foundation of constructivist theories is “the view that the meaning of the text is not inherent in the text but emerges from how people read or experience the text.” Bruner, “Abraham Lincoln” 407.
84. Stephenson Shaffer, 141.
85. Stephenson Shaffer, 142.
89. See Berger, The Sacred Canopy.
90. Ostwalt 5.
91. Ostwalt 3.
93. Chidester 52.
94. Chidester 52.
95. The leisure movement of the late nineteenth century focused on improving moral character through encountering sublime spaces, such as Niagara Falls, Mammoth Cave, the Grand Canyon, and Yosemite National Parks. Sublimity was in this era intrinsically tied to geography. The United States was culturally immature and couldn’t compete with the ancient religious institutions that existed in Europe. Thus, in order to find God in their own country, Americans turned to the land. Tourists were encouraged to visit these sites, commune with God, and experience spiritual transformations. See John Sears, Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989).
102. Is it a coincidence that when I stepped through the Damascus Gates at the HLE, I stepped into a marketplace? Literally, I stepped into the Jerusalem Street Market and I bought God’s Son, Parachute-Jesus. It was a surreal experience in postmodern theology.
103. Radosh 20-1.
104. My emphasis, Radosh 31.
105. Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation 30.
110. Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation 2.
112. Stacy Holman Jones, Kaleidoscope Notes: Writing Women’s Music and Organizational Culture (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1998) 66.

268
Interlude: Journal, May 4, 2008

2. Minor arcana cards are the most common cards comprising fifty-six cards of the seventy-eight card Tarot deck. These cards are not accompanied by the detailed descriptions or keywords characteristic of the major arcana cards. According to Dean, “The minor cards represent day-to-day events, rather than the deeper changes signaled by the major arcana.” Dean, 36.
3. Dean, 42.
4. Dean, 35.
5. Dean, 56.
6. Dean, 40.
10. Dean, 23.
11. Dean, 23.

Chapter 2: I Tell You the Truth: Museum Status and the Educational Imperative

2. Public charities are defined by the IRS in Internal Revenue Code (IRC) sections 509(a)(1) through 509(a)(4). Public charities typically receive the majority of their funds from the general public and/or the government. Private foundations, as defined by IRC section 509(a), are funded primarily through investments and endowments, which are then distributed through the private foundation to other charitable organizations. Private operating foundations, see IRC 4942(j)(3), direct the majority of income into the foundation’s own tax-exempt charitable activities. IRS.gov, Internal Revenue Service, n.d. Web. 31 March 2007.
5. Liberty Counsel is a “nonprofit litigation, education and policy organization dedicated to advancing religious freedom, the sanctity of human life and the traditional family.” The counsel is also designated as a 501(c)(3) organization with offices located across the United States. The counsel, established in 1989, refers to itself as a ministry and accepts donations to function. The firm boasts a 92% victory rate since 2004, a significant increase from its historically maintained 86% win ratio. “Home page,” Liberty Counsel, n.p., 1995. Web. 1 Aug. 2008.
12. Bill SB 2676 became effective January 1, 2007. It “provides tax exemption for property owned by organization that is exempt under s. 501(c)(3) of Internal Revenue Code & used for displays re Biblical history & Biblical worship, if property is open to public as specified & organization has received from IRS written statement that such use of property does not adversely affect organization’s federal exemption, etc. creates 196.1987.” Florida House of Representatives, MyFloridaHouse.gov., 2003. Web. 1 Aug 2008.
14. From HB 7183; from SB 2676. Florida House of Representatives.
23. This position sharply contrasts with the teachings of prosperity gospel, with which TBN is closely affiliated, thus eliminating the conflict at least for the parent organization.
26. So the conflict becomes, who gets to define religion as institution and as practice? Isn’t it a conflict of interest to allow the state, specifically in the form of the County Property Appraiser (involving taxes) or of a Circuit Court Judge, to render these distinctions?
27. Discovery Guide.
30. “Museum,” OEDO.

32. The Protestant Reformation took place in the sixteenth century in Europe. Martin Luther was an infamous leader launching criticisms of the Catholic Church in his *Ninety-Five Theses*. Reformers were particularly perturbed by some of the Pope’s practices, such as selling indulgences. Indulgences are pardons from sin and the subsequent punishment of that sin, typically associated with Purgatory or some earthly penance.


34. Burris, 10.

35. Burris, 10.

36. Dicks, 4.

37. Burris, 3.

38. Burris, 3.


42. ICOM is an extra-governmental, not-for-profit organization founded in 1946 and based in Paris, France. ICOM defines itself as “the international organisation of museums and museum professionals which is committed to the conservation, continuation and communication to society of the world's natural and cultural heritage, present and future, tangible and intangible.” The organization boasts over 26,000 participants from 151 countries. *International Council of Museums*, UNESCO, n.d. Web. 3 Aug 2008.

43. Dicks, 32.

44. Dicks, 94.

45. Dicks, 100-01.

46. Dicks, 93.

47. Dicks, 94.

48. Dicks, 99

49. Dicks, 94

50. Dicks, 94.

51. *Discovery Map and Guide*.

52. Dicks 94.

53. Dicks 98.

54. Dicks 98.


56. Dicks 165.

57. Dicks 165.

58. This section is built on information synthesized from the following sources: Burke O. Long, *Imagining the Holy Land: Maps, Models, and Fantasy Travels* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003); John Davis, *The Landscape of Belief*.

59. Manifest Destiny is a term identifying religious and nationalist motivations that inspired policies of expansionism in nineteenth-century America. Settlers of the U.S. believed that God was directing them to move west across the continent, domesticating the land and proselytizing the people they encountered. For more on the relationships between Manifest Destiny and tourism, see Marguerite S. Shaffer, See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001).

60. Long, 11.
61. Long, 12.
62. Long, 12.
63. Long, 14.
64. Davis, 89.
65. Long, 17.
66. Long, 17.
68. Davis, 92.
69. Long, 28.
70. Long, 31.
71. Long, 30.

72. Synaesthesia refers to the stimulation of multiple senses (touch, smell, taste, sight, and hearing) in order to evoke complex, mental impressions and physical sensations.

73. Long, 39.
74. Long, 40.
75. “History/Archives,” The Chautauqua Institution, n.p, n.d. Web. 7 Sept. 2009. The Chautauqua Institute continues its work today, now known as the Chautauqua Institution. According to the website, the Chautauqua Institution is “a not-for-profit, 750-acre educational center beside Chautauqua Lake in southwestern New York State, where approximately 7,500 persons are in residence on any day during a nine-week season, and a total of over 142,000 attend scheduled public events. Over 8,000 students enroll annually in the Chautauqua Summer Schools which offer courses in art, music, dance, theatre, writing skills and a wide variety of special interests.”

76. “History/Archives,” The Chautauqua Institution.
77. Davis, 96.

79. Long, 50.
80. Long, 62.
81. Long, 59.
82. Long, 58.
83. Long, 59.
84. Long, 50.
Mountford participated in the Chautauqua Movement, which framed her performances as morally righteous and educational. The Chautauqua Movement, emerging from the Chautauqua Institute, and the performances (lectures, readings, and theatrically-influenced enactments) associated with it were popularly understood as acceptable, morally uplifting modes of education and entertainment and were closely associated with elocution. Elocution in the nineteenth-century United States was a scholarly and artistic approach to public address, often concerned with the professionalization of public readings of literature. In particular, elocutionists studied the intricacies of presentation and public speaking focusing on scientific ways to improve techniques of voice, poise, and affect. While these practitioners of elocution may today be understood as related to theatre, elocutionists and the practice of elocution were distinctly separate (at least conceptually) from the theatre in the nineteenth century. The theatre was considered debauched and lascivious. I discuss these early biases against theatre in Chapter 5. See Elizabeth Bell, “Performance Studies as Women’s Work: Historical Sights/Sites/Citations from the Margin,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 13 (1993): 350-374; Richard Bello, “The Contemporary Rise of Louisiana Voices and Other Neo-Chautauquas: A Return to Oral Performance,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 17 (1997): 182-196; Dwight Conquergood, “Rethinking Elocution: The Trope of the Talking Book and Other Figures of Speech,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 20.4 (2000): 325-41.


Mountford also discusses the New Holy Land in Eureka Springs, Arkansas. The New Holy Land consists of the Christ of the Ozarks statue, an amphitheatre that houses the Great Passion Play performance, and several acres of pasture land that are supposed to resemble the landscape of Palestine. Gerald L. K. Smith began building the New Holy Land in 1966. In *Roadside Religion: In Search of the Sacred, the Strange, and the Substance of Faith*, religious scholar Timothy Beal records his tour of numerous religious spectacles like Holy Land USA in Bedford County, Virginia. Holy Land USA is a scale model of Biblical Jerusalem. Another site he visits is Golgotha Fun Park in Cave City, Kentucky. See Beal for discussions of contemporary sites of religious spectacle.


100. Debord, 12.

101. Long, 12.

102. Long, 12.


109. See Chapter 5 for a discussion of religious performances such as passion plays.


112. Admission for senior citizens was $13.95. Children under six years of age were admitted without charge.


116. “‘Bringing Israel to the States’: Exhibit Uses Artifacts, Art and Technology to Tell Holy Land’s History.”


118. “‘Bringing Israel to the States’: Exhibit Uses Artifacts, Art and Technology to Tell Holy Land’s History.”


120. Langton, 10 March 2007.


124. “‘Bringing Israel to the States’: Exhibit Uses Artifacts, Art and Technology to Tell Holy Land’s History.”
129. Dicks, 95.
130. Sears, 28.
131. Discovery Map and Guide.

Interlude: The Scriptorium

2. The audience is presented with specifically selected periods of U.S. history determined by HLE administrators to be emblematic of God’s influence on and favor of this nation, but chose to omit certain details of these selected periods in an effort to maximize tourist-pride and minimize tourist-guilt; an excellent example of tourist attractions presenting “tangible politics of vision and images which translate history through an aesthetic of sentimentality.” Mark Neumann, On the Rim: Looking for the Grand Canyon (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001) 205.
3. The Bible, John 3:16.

Chapter 3: In Situ

3. Debord, 23.


7. See Casey; Dicks; Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

8. Casey, 85.


10. Casey, 84.


17. Mabry, “The Empty Tomb.”


21. *Behold the Lamb*.


23. Casey, 85.


27. Hein, 3.


30. Boniface and Fowler, 112.

31. Casey, 86.

32. *Gift Catalog*.

33. *Gift Catalog*.

34. Casey, 82.

35. Casey, 82.

36. Casey, 82.

40. I have named the galleries based on their content: Ancient Mesopotamia (the round room where we are introduced to the intentions of the museum), Cuneiform gallery, Scrolls of Ancient Egypt gallery, Codex Workshop, Scribe gallery, John Wycliffe Study, Guttenberg Press gallery, Tyndale gallery (with the Martyr’s Bible), John Bunyan’s Cell, Spurgen’s Opera Hall, Mayflower Bow, Mission Prairie Church, Hall of Prophets, Contemporary Living Room, Ex Libris Gift Shoppe.
41. McDannell, 68.
42. McDannell, 68.
43. McDannell, 85.
44. Shaw, 134. My emphasis.
49. Berger, 23.
52. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 8.
53. *Scriptorium*.
54. *Scriptorium*.
57. Casey, 87.
58. Casey, 87.
59. Casey, 87.
60. Casey, 87.
61. Casey, 83.

**Chapter 4: Heritage, Identity, and a Christian Homeland**

2. Smith, 44.
3. Lukas, 2
6. TBN reports a 47% increase in park attendance from December 2006 to December 2007. Sara Clarke, “Holy Land Experience Details Its Expansion: The

7. Lukas 11.
8. Dicks, 134.
10. Dicks, 134.
11. Dicks, 122.
12. Dicks, 123.
13. Dicks, 123.
14. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 167; Dicks, 124. Notably, the HLE is marketed as a “living Biblical museum.” The substitution of “history” with “Biblical” suggests that there may be a conceptual difference between the HLE and other museums that present history in this format. I would venture to say this difference could be anchored in the perceived difference of authorship: humans write history, God wrote the Bible. While this difference is significant to the interpretation of the site, it doesn’t impact the structural similarity between the HLE and other living history museums. Thus, I will refer to the HLE in terms of a living history museum.

15. “Heritage,” OERD
17. Smith, 2.
20. Davis, 3.
22. Under the administration of President Bush.
29. Wilderness Tabernacle.
30. Wilderness Tabernacle.
31. Wilderness Tabernacle.
32. Basu, 152.
34. Basu, 154.

36. It does now. The HLE now includes a Prayer Garden.


40. Turner and Turner, 11.

41. Turner and Turner, 10-11.


43. Eade and Sallnow, 15.


45. See Sears.


47. Vogel, 8

48. Vogel, 10.

49. Basu, 158.


51. Basu, 158. Quoting Durkheim, 184, 78 (italics original).

52. Basu, 159.

53. Dicks, 126.


55. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 159.

56. Scriptorium.

57. Scriptorium.

58. Scriptorium.


60. “Indigenous,” *OERD*.


63. Dicks, 131.
64. Dicks, 131.
65. *Scriptorium*.
66. Dicks, 126.
70. Smith, 59.
72. Smith, 63.
73. The Eucharist is the official ritual commemorating the Last Supper and the forthcoming sacrifice of Christ.
74. “Eucharist,” *OERD*.
75. Lukas, 277.
76. Lukas, 277.
77. Lukas, 277.
79. Lennon and Foley delineate this somewhat arbitrary period of “recent” in order to make their argument that dark tourism is a phenomenon intrinsically tied to postmodernism (which they loosely define as doubt in the Modern project of progress). The authors argue that events prior to the sinking of the Titanic do not qualify as dark tourism because “these events did not take place within the memories of those still alive to validate them,” and that they “do not posit questions, or introduce anxiety and doubt about modernity and its consequences” (79). Lennon and Foley clearly do not take into consideration the processes of the production, maintenance, and transformation of collective memories. Nor do the authors recognize the project of History as processual and shaped by the needs of the present. If they did, then they would not be able to ignore the reconstitution of events prior to the Titanic in popular culture.
80. Lennon and Foley, 3.
81. Lennon and Foley, 11.
82. Lennon and Foley, 37.
83. Lennon and Foley, 120.
84. Lennon and Foley, 146.
86. Dicks, 126.
87. Smith, 6.
88. Dicks, 119.
89. Berger, 11.
90. Smith, 28.
91. See MacCannell.
92. MacCannell, 100-01.
93. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 159. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett was originally referring to statements made by Jonathan Mane-Wheoki about the exhibit All Roads Are Good housed at the National Museum of the American Indian in New York.

94. Lukas, 7.

Chapter 5:

6. Plate, 66.
7. The Story of Jesus, Power and Light Production, Inc., n.d. Web. 7 Sept. 2009. While the play continues to be directed by Mike Graham, the production is now sponsored (and owned) by Power and Light Production, Inc., a manufacturer of professional sound equipment.
9. Nielsen, 12. In England, theatre companies had been consistently under attack by religious groups throughout the latter half the sixteenth century. These tirades resulted in the mandatory closing of all theatres in England in 1642.
11. The First Great Awakening was an international revivalist movement characterized by evangelical speakers hosting tent meetings and reinvesting religious practice with emotionalism. In the American colonies, the established, officially recognized and state-sanctioned churches (Anglican, Quaker, and Congregationalist) ignored the upstart movement. The minority churches (Baptist, Calvinists, and Presbyterians) embraced the tent revival meetings, and used the evangelical performances to increase and strengthen their congregations. In effect, destabilizing the prominent positions of the established churches and creating a platform to lobby for religious and political power. Nielsen, 14.
12. Moore, 41.
15. The American Company, originally known as Hallam Company and then London Company, is widely considered to have been the first full-time, professional acting company to open in the American colonies. For more information on the American Company, see Michael A. Morrison, “Shakespeare in North America,” The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Stage, eds. Stanley Wells and Sarah Stanton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 230-32.
22. Finney was a highly celebrated revival minister who embraced method-preaching beginning in the 1820s.

23. “Method-preacher” is a term coined by Moore to refer to the systematization of the performance of preaching developed in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Like today’s method actors, method-preachers immersed themselves in their roles as conduits of God’s Word. According to Finney, the actor’s burden is “to throw himself into the spirit and meaning of the writer, as to adopt his sentiments, make them his own, feel them, embody them, throw them out upon the audience as living reality.” Finney believed preachers should give the same consideration and effort to the Words of God. Moore, 50.


25. Moore, 43-4, 53. Here, aesthetic refers to products (plays, paintings, music, etc.) evidencing artistic conventions associated with what was considered high art.


27. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the first books in the New Testament, are known as the four Gospels.


29. See Nielsen for a complete history of the legal battles that ensued over Morse’s attempts to stage The Passion in various states. Ultimately, Morse forced questions about the relationship between drama (and the arts) and freedom of speech. His legal challenge and the national attention it brought demanded discussions about the scope of the First Amendment.

30. Nielsen, 203.


33. Nielsen, 52.

34. Nielsen, 50.


36. Chansky, 122.


38. Speer 121.


42. Turner, 75.

43. Turner, 75.

44. Schechner, 230; Turner, *Anthropology of Performance* 34-5, 76. Turner theorized social drama as a model with four phases: breach, crisis, redress, and reintegration or recognition of irreparable schism. Note, it is in the phase of redress where rituals may be invoked, as a result of the antagonistic interactions of the crisis phase.

45. Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002) 81. I cannot draw from Schechner’s theory of ritual without briefly addressing his theory of an efficacious/entertainment continuum. According to Schechner, all performances exist in terms of purpose somewhere along this continuum. Performances with strong efficacious goals are more like ritual, whereas performances that (seemingly) value entertainment are likened to theatre (note Cohen-Cruz’s description of community theatre). Context, rather than the content or structure of the performance, determines its place along the continuum. To what purpose and for what audience is the performance being produced?

As I have discussed throughout this manuscript, the HLE challenges binaries, polarities, and continuums that pit entertainment against education, tourism against travel, play against work, profane against sacred. Here, too, the HLE challenges Schechner’s continuum efficacy/entertainment. *Behold the Lamb* functions efficaciously as a performance of ritual, while existing within the context of an entertainment venue. To what purpose? For ministry (efficacy) and for leisure.


50. Originally, *Behold the Lamb* only enacted the death walk, crucifixion, and resurrection. However, after TBN assumed ownership and creative control over the site in 2007, the Passion play underwent revision. Currently, the staff members with whom I spoke commented that the drama is in a state of transition. The last presentation I witnessed in December 2008 had changed considerably from the original production.
Additional scenes were added, including Jesus’ betrayal by Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus’ judgment before Pilot, and—disturbingly—Jesus’ flagellation.

51. Recall my earlier definition and use of “imagined community.” The collective memory of Jesus’ death and resurrection enables the collective identity Christian. Like nations, Christian is an imagined community because, while impossible to fully assemble at any given time or place, it exists as a community in the minds of each member. As Benedict Anderson observes, “in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities (London: Verso, 1991) 6.

52. I cannot make this claim for every small, local performance of the Passion, but it holds true regarding popular, large presentations that are nationally known.

53. Chansky, 122.


57. Because of his activist work, Boal was arrested and tortured for three months in a Brazilian prison in 1971. After his release, Boal moved to Argentina, where he continued to develop his techniques, creating image theatre and leading workshops in Peru. Image theater privileges the body as a way of knowing and communicating human experience. The body, Boal says, is “the first word of the theatrical vocabulary.”

During Boal’s residence, Argentina, too, experienced political unrest and severe military repression. Increasingly, Boal’s practice of his craft was limited by the government. These limitations resulted in Boal focusing on documenting his philosophies, theories, and techniques in books: Theatre of the Oppressed (1974), Latin American Techniques of Popular Culture (1975), and Two Hundred Exercises and Games for Actors and Non-actors (1975). In 1976, he was exiled and moved to Europe where his theatre techniques thrived and, ultimately, became a global phenomenon.


58. Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz, 2.


61. Schutzman observes that “When Boal’s techniques . . . are placed within the constructed frameworks of invisible power dynamics and fragmented identity politics, they are somewhat incapacitated . . . .” Schutzman, 140.

62. Schutzman, 142.
64. Here I am drawing from Turner’s model of social drama. Turner, Anthropology of Performance, 34-5.
70. Rentschler, 297.
72. “Ethics,” OEDO.
73. Schutzman, 144.
74. Schutzman, 144.
75. Schutzman, 144.
76. Arguably similar to the structure of the original historical event in that the mob had to be controlled to a certain extent.
78. Boal, 35.
81. Sontag, 98.
82. Sontag, 98-99.
84. Zelizer, 700.

Chapter 6

1. Bible, Matthew 28:19. Variations of this statement can also be found in Mark 16:15 and Luke 24:47.
2. The number and frequency of the *Behold the Lamb* performance has varied over the years. When I first attended in 2004, the performance was offered twice a day at noon and forty-five minutes before closing time. At one point, the frequency of performances was limited to once a day at the end of the day. Then, during the Christmas holiday season, the performance was canceled altogether. The last time I visited the HLE in December 2009, *Behold* was being offered twice a day again.


6. Of course, this is not always the case. More than several cases have been documented where the convicted has not died quickly or without pain, the body convulsing.

7. Conquergood, 352.
8. Girard, 12.
10. *Bible*, John 3:16
11. Girard, 12.
15. Girard, 15.
17. “Anaesthesia,” *OERD*.
18. Lennon and Foley, 61.
21. Sontag, 82.
22. Sontag, 105.
23. Sontag, 106.
27. Lennon and Foley, 3.
28. Lennon and Foley, 147.

References


287


Appendices
Appendix A: Photographs

Fig. 1. Gates of Damascus.
Fig. 2. Bedouin Women Weaving.
Appendix A (Continued)

Fig. 3. Sara Playing Samson.
Appendix A (Continued)

Fig. 4. Moses and the Ten Commandments.
Appendix A (Continued)

Fig. 5. Herod’s Palace at the Temple Plaza.
Appendix A (Continued)

Fig. 6. The Scriptorium.
Fig. 7. Bronze altar in the Wilderness Tabernacle.
Appendix A (Continued)

Fig. 8. Pilgrims in a Prayer Circle.
Appendix A (Continued)

Fig. 9. Living Room Gallery.
Appendix A (Continued)

Fig. 10. Roman Soldier.
Appendix A (Continued)

Fig. 11. Roman Soldiers.
About the Author

Sara B. Dykins Callahan (Ph.D.) is a graduate of the Department of Communication at the University of South Florida. Sara’s research concentrations are Performance Studies and Critical/Cultural Studies. She completed her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in American Studies at the University of South Florida. In 2005, Sara received the Norman K. Denzin Qualitative Research Award for her research on classism in academe. This dissertation received the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry 2010 Distinguished Dissertation Award in the category of Mixed Methods. An abbreviated section from this dissertation has been accepted for the Top Contributed Papers Panel in the Performance Studies Division at the 2010 National Communication Association Annual Convention. Sara loves her husband and her dogs deeply and is committed to community work and support of animal rights organizations. She hopes that her “(in)finite sense of justice” will contribute to a more compassionate and humane world.