

HEARING THE HILLSONG SOUND:
MUSIC, MARKETING, MEANING AND BRANDED SPIRITUAL
EXPERIENCE AT A TRANSNATIONAL MEGACHURCH

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Declaration of Authorship

I **Thomas Wagner** hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

Date: 12 September 2013

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As I write this, the 'i' and 'page down' buttons on my laptop are falling off, a testament to the amount of typing that has gone into the preparation of this thesis over the past four years. There would have been nothing to type, though, without the help of my family, friends and colleagues along the way.

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Abstract

This thesis is an ethnographic exploration of the ways that music and marketing work in the pursuit and production of spiritual experience within a ‘Christian’ lifestyle for members of Hillsong Church London, the European Hub of the Australian transnational Hillsong Church, whose music is inseparable from its message. Specifically, it focuses on branding as a co- and re-productive method of organising, patterning and communicating information in a media-saturated consumer culture. While branding is often seen as a top-down, externally focused method of advertising, I argue that, for members of Hillsong London, the church’s branding is integral to their experience of self.

As a basis for this argument, this thesis posits the brand as an ‘educational’ resource that relies on participation and agency to ‘teach’. Participants seek the sacred experience found in a ‘Christian’ lifestyle, and the brand provides the material for this and a cultural frame in which to do it. Music is an ‘associative enhancer’ for the brand, tying its musicians, media and message to its values. Embodied values are central to the production and maintenance of lifestyle. Therefore, this thesis questions ‘the value of values’. The Hillsong brand is the discursive framework within which cultural action unfolds and is experienced, but one that is not ‘value neutral’. The church provides the branded material and cultural context in which the participant’s sacred experience of self unfolds. However, this requires the participant to want to ‘do the work’ to properly understand, and ultimately embody, the values associated with the brand. Therefore, the brand exerts a kind of Gramscian hegemony that channels the participants’ agency toward the reproduction of the Hillsong brand’s value system. Modern branding is perceived as valuable to all participants, yet the methods with which it directs individual agency raise important questions related to the modern production of social order.

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Introduction - Music, Marketing and Meaning

When you emerge from the Underground station on the northeast corner of Tottenham Court Road and Oxford Street in London's West End, the first thing you see is the giant golden statue of Freddie Mercury that glowers down over the entrance to the Dominion Theatre. Fist held high in the iconic pose he struck so many times during *Queen's* glory days, the statue has welcomed theatre-goers to the jukebox musical *We Will Rock You* since the show opened on 14 May 2002. A roaring review of the iconic British band *Queen's* hits, *We Will Rock You* uses no small amount of quasi-religious imagery to mythologize rock and roll, the apostles *Queen* and the saviour Freddie Mercury.

Constructed in 1928, the Dominion is the West End's largest theatre, boasting a seating capacity of 2,182. Its architecture suggests a mix of a theatre, jukebox and church. Replete with lush burgundy carpeting and audacious gold railings, its lobby recalls both the luxury of high end, old-time theatre going, the outlandish aesthetic of many of Freddie Mercury's outfits and the opulence of an Eastern Orthodox church (Figure 0.1). Inside the theatre, one is struck by the stained glass arches that frame the box seats (Figure 0.2).

Figure 0.1: The Dominion Theatre foyer © English Heritage.NMR



Figure 0.2: The Dominion Theatre auditorium © English Heritage.NMR



We Will Rock You runs six nights a week in the Dominion. On the seventh day, while the rock ‘n’ roll faithful rest, a different group of devotees celebrates another kind of dominion: the dominion of God. At six o’clock on Sunday morning, a sixteen-wheel lorry pulls up to the side entrance of the theatre, and a crew of bleary-eyed volunteers sets to work. This crew is the ‘bump’ team from Hillsong London, a branch of the Australian transnational church Hillsong Church that has held its Sunday services in the Dominion Theatre since 2005.¹ The

¹ Hillsong Church London began as the London Christian Life Centre in 1992, becoming Hillsong London in 1999. After spending time moving between various London university halls and West End theatres, in 2002 it took up residency at the Mermaid Conference and Events Centre. Hillsong London has held services at the Dominion Theatre since January 2005.

services they are setting up for will be every bit as spectacular and professionally produced as the *We Will Rock You* show.² Dry ice will fill the stage. Strobe lights will flash. The music will be loud and rocky. Indeed, to a layperson that saw the musical on Saturday evening and returned for church on Sunday morning, the main difference he or she might notice is that the Hillsong logo is projected at the top left of the theatre's proscenium stage.

On Sundays, Freddie Mercury's statue literally casts a shadow over the entrance to the day's proceedings at the Dominion, and his figurative presence continues to be felt once inside. One can sense him, roaming about the lobby, mingling with the crowd, always just in the background. In the upper foyer, for example, pictures of Mercury's early years peek from behind signs for Hillsong's 'Ask Me' and 'Living in London' team stations. The theatre's merchandising stands, used during the week to sell all things *We Will Rock You*, serve as the church's cloakrooms. In turn, the t-shirts that identify the Hillsong team members who work those stations are juxtaposed against the *We Will Rock You* and *Queen* t-shirts hanging just behind them. This semiotic mash-up contributes to a particular experience of church. In the Dominion Theatre on a Sunday, different values collide, intermingle, clash, embrace and enhance each other in a negotiation of meanings and identities. It is a (post)modern pastiche, a place where music, marketing and meaning coalesce alongside the search for sacred experience.

Research Questions - Music, Marketing, Meaning and 'The New Paradigm'

Hillsong London's presence in the Dominion Theatre is a colourful example of the 'New Paradigm' of evangelical Christianity that has ascended to global prominence since the 1960s, although its antecedents can be traced back to the beginnings of Protestantism (Mall 2012; Moore 1994; Nekola 2009; Twitchell 2007). Donald E. Miller popularized the idea of the 'New Paradigm Church' in his 1997 book *Reinventing American Protestantism*. In it, Miller highlighted the ways in which evangelical Christian organisations are reaching people by appealing to a

² In fact, the Dominion Theatre actually shares some of Hillsong's own equipment.

‘postmodern’ sense of meaning-making. Through popular music, innovative worship styles, informal dress, non-traditional church buildings and an emphasis on experience, these churches convey a powerful sense of life’s purpose in culturally appropriate ways. The ‘culturally appropriate’ method of meaning-making on which I focus in this thesis is branding.

The ‘New Paradigm’ is a broad rubric that describes the ‘seeker sensitive’ (Miller 1997; Sargeant 2000; Trueheart 1996) approach that churches and religious organizations have increasingly adopted since the 1960s. In contrast to established denominations that have struggled to appeal to the post-1945 ‘baby-boom’ generation, whose members lack the ‘brand loyalty’³ of their parents, New Paradigm churches ‘have succeeded in responding to the therapeutic, individualistic and anti-establishment themes of contemporary culture’ (Aldridge 2007: 126). Worship at these churches uses contemporary music and language, and often focuses on physical and emotional experiences (Albrecht 1999). The preaching is rooted in the Bible, and stems from an evangelical Protestant tradition in which the clergy are often not formally trained.⁴ New Paradigm churches encompass a range of forms, the most prominent of which is the megachurch, which is defined as one that attracts at least 2,000 worshippers a week (Aldridge 2007: 127). Thanks to the Internet, these churches have radically expanded the notion of the ‘local church’. Many ‘megachurches’ are now more

³ Here, I am using the term ‘brand’ somewhat interchangeably with ‘denomination’, what James Twitchell and Mara Einstein have called ‘brands of faith’ (Einstein 2008; Twitchell 2007: 86-87). The argument popularized by Miller (1997), that has been taken up by ‘supply side’ theorists of religion (e.g. Stark and Bainbridge 1986; Starke and Finke 2000), is that the ‘shopping mentality’ of the baby boom generation, at least in the United States, has resulted in the ascendancy of ‘niche’ religious organizations, most visibly megachurches, that cater to religious consumers who are ‘increasingly buying spiritual experiences... rather than accepting their father’s religious Oldsmobile’ (Twitchell 2007: 87). The synergy between the terms ‘brand’ and ‘denomination’ becomes more apparent if one understands that a brand is essentially how a story is told (or packaged). In this view, Protestant Christian denominations such as the Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians, as well as other denominations such as the Catholics (the Catholic church is often referred to as one of the world’s most durable brands), tell essentially the same story but in different ways (e.g. with different liturgies). One of the arguments in this thesis is that these old-line denominations are coming under pressure from new, more mobile and responsive branded religious organizations such as Hillsong, which are themselves denominations in function if not in name.

⁴ However, many of the largest of these churches do offer training in the form of literature, seminars, conferences and even their own colleges. For example, Hillsong College offers courses in pastoral leadership, worship music, dance, television & media, production and a Bachelor of Contemporary Ministry. The college’s focus on arts and media-related offerings is telling not only of Hillsong’s communicative focus, but is also reflective of the dominant communicative methods of modern evangelical Christianity.

accurately described as ‘network churches’ as they operate in several locations, either as semi-autonomous entities that hold their own weekly services, as in Hillsong’s model, or by ‘simulcasting’ services from a central location to several auxiliary locations. Individual homes can also be thought of as part of the Network church, as people who do not attend a physical church location because of proximity or other reasons can still participate in the service via live Internet feed (Campbell 2005; 2010).

Although New Paradigm churches are often described as ‘non-denominational’, this is a misnomer in two ways. The first is that, while such churches do not necessarily have a denominational title in their name (Sargeant 2000), the practices of most evangelical Christian churches are rooted in the denominational upbringings of their founders. For example, Hillsong founder Brian Houston’s father was a Pentecostal minister, and Brian Houston was himself the head of the Assemblies of God in Australia from 1997 until 2000, during which time he led the move to rebrand it as Australian Christian Churches. The second is that many of the largest New Paradigm churches have taken over the functions of the denominations that they are supplanting (Sargeant 2000). For example, Hillsong provides clergy training at its college, educational resources for other churches in the form of podcasts, workshops, books, etc., and perhaps most importantly, a musical liturgy. The self-referential nature of these resources leads to a situation where the church brand is, in essence, the ‘new paradigm’ denomination.

Lifestyle, Branding, and the Value of Values

Miller claims that ‘postmodern’ meaning-making (of which music is an important component) is the appeal of New Paradigm churches. This is useful when thinking about the ways that music, marketing and (sacred) meaning are intertwined with lifestyle and the culture industries. In consumer culture, lifestyle is a way of connecting with Truth. This is done through participation in the culture industries, which provide the material for the ‘prosumption’ (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010;

Toffler 1980) and the facilitation of the cultural context in which we experience things.⁵

As will be evident throughout this thesis, Hillsong is a lifestyle brand, and lifestyle and branding are inseparable from ideas of value and values. The culture industries understand and exploit the fact that values are valuable. An important consideration, then, is how values are marketed and experienced. An example of how marketing ‘adds value’ to an experience is shown in an experiment conducted by researchers from the California Institute of Technology and Stanford University in 2007 (Plassmann et al. 2007). In the experiment, subjects were asked to sample and rate the taste of what they believed were five different Cabernet Sauvignons. Each wine was identified by a price tag, with the difference between the lowest and highest costing wine being 900% (either \$5 and \$45 or \$10 and \$90). Unbeknownst to the subjects, though, the lowest and highest costing wines were the same wine – the only difference was the price tag. Although the wines were identical, subjects reported a higher experience of pleasantness after consuming the sample labelled with the higher price. This was confirmed by MRI images, which showed increased activity in the Medial Orbitofrontal Cortex (mOFC), the part of the brain linked to behavioural pleasantness ratings for things like odours, tastes and music (ibid.: 1052). In other words, the expectation of a better experience actually produced it. The more expensively labelled wine was believed to be more valuable, and experienced as such.

The interplay between value and marketing in consumer culture becomes clearer when one contrasts the marketing and critical perspectives of modern branding (Carah 2010). Marketers view branding as co-productive activity that generates

⁵ The term ‘prosumption’ has several meanings in different disciplines. Here, I am using it primarily as Ritzer and Jurgenson use it in their 2010 article ‘Production, Consumption, Prosumption: The nature of capitalism in the age of the digital consumer’. In it, they claim that Web 2.0 commerce is based on consumers engaging in activities that produce value for companies without compensation. This may be the case; certainly the mechanisms through which Web 2.0 marketing and commerce that Ritzer and Jurgenson identify are in play in this study. However, the authors’ insistence on focusing on economic compensation at the expense of other types of compensators (although they acknowledge that most prosumers ‘like’ and ‘enjoy’ their ‘unpaid’ labour) fails to appreciate other types of value that this thesis focuses on, and, I would argue, are the important types of value implicated in the hegemonic brandscape (Carah 2010).

value for all parties. For example, according to the Ford Motor Company, its advertising campaign for its 2013 Fiesta was ‘entirely user-generated’. Participants were provided a Ford Fiesta, fuel and insurance for eight months. In return, they were expected to blog, tweet and post on YouTube (presumably positively) about their experiences of the car (Heine 2013). From a marketer’s view, this ‘Web 2.0’ type of campaign is a win/win endeavour: participants derive value by getting a free car, fuel and insurance, and Ford derives value in the form of user-generated advertising content for a fraction of the cost of a traditional advertising campaign. More importantly, though, Ford has the opportunity to generate long-term value for the brand by integrating its products into the everyday lives of consumers.

While the marketing perspective posits Web 2.0 marketing as beneficial for all parties involved, the critical perspective on branding asserts that, although Web 2.0 marketers claim to afford participants creative freedom, this freedom is illusory because the closed nature of the brand delimits the ways in which branded material can be used and understood (Arvidsson 2006; Carah 2010; Lury 2004). Derived from critical theory, the critical perspective understands Web 2.0 marketing as re-inscribing capital ever more deeply into our cultural fabric and consciousness (Carah 2010). Contrary to the marketing perspective, the critical perspective holds that participants do not create the brandscape through their actions. Rather, their agency only re-creates a cultural context that delimits the range of meanings and uses afforded to them by the brand.

The question, then, is ‘What is the value of marketing?’ How do marketing, expectations and experience interact? What I wanted to know when I began this study was how Hillsong’s branding ‘added value’ to the worship experience. For example, did worshipers ‘find God’ more easily, or have a more intense worship experience, when engaging with Hillsong’s music rather than other music? Did the context matter? For example, what was the experience during the praise and worship section of a service compared to listening on the Tube or in the car? The contrasting views of marketing detailed above also raise questions of agency. On the one hand, participants derive value from their actions. On the other, the brandscape inscribes a pre-existing set of values. A further question that underlies

this thesis, then, is: If branding is a method of communicating in consumer culture, what values and assumptions does this method of communicating bring with it? These questions are not easily untangled. However, I hope this study offers a new perspective for addressing them. In the remainder of this introduction, then, I offer an overview of the existing scholarship on music, marketing and meaning. I then give a chapter overview that provides an outline for reading this thesis.

Bringing branding into Ethnomusicology

This study draws, broadly speaking, on three fields: Music Studies, Marketing Studies, and Religious Studies. While there have been several recent studies of music and branding,⁶ branding and religion,⁷ and countless treatises throughout

⁶ These have tended to be from the marketing perspective, and tend to focus on how music and sound can be used to create an aural brand identity. Strategies can range from associating a brand with a musician or style of music, to developing a company sound logo like Apple's startup 'Boooooong', to fine-tuning the sound of a BMW door closing. Recent examples include *Audio Branding: Brands, Sound and Communication* (Bronner and Hirt 2009), *Sounds Like Branding: Using the Power of Music to Turn Customers Into Fans* (Lusensky 2010), and *Brand Sense: How to Build Powerful Brands Through Touch, Taste, Smell, Sight, & Sound* (Lindstrom 2005). Another genre of brand management book draws identity management lessons from music stars like Madonna and KISS. Examples of this include *Brands that Rock: What Business Leaders Can Learn from the World of Rock and Roll* (Blackwell and Stephan 2004) and *Brand Like a Rock Star: Lessons From rock 'n' roll to Make Your Business Rich and Famous* (Jones 2012). While there are several excellent sociological treatments of branding (Arvidsson 2006; Lash and Lury 2007; Lury 2004; Moor 2007), sociological treatments that focus on music are rare, although two recent books, Nicholas Carah's (2010) *Pop Brands: Branding, Popular Music, and Young People* and Kristin J. Lieb's (2013) *Gender, Branding, and the Modern Music Industry: The Social Construction of Female Popular Music Stars* suggest that the subject is getting more attention in relation to popular music. The only attention by an ethnomusicologist to branding that I am aware of is Tim Taylor's (2010) *The Sounds of Capitalism: Advertising, Music, and the Conquest of Culture*, which traces the development of the role of music in advertising in America in the twentieth century. However, it is not until the final two chapters (from the 1990s onward) that he begins to use the term, reflecting its incorporation into popular discourse during that period.

⁷ Again, these tend to be written from either a 'practical' marketing perspective or an 'analytical' sociological perspective. The former tends to note that both successful companies and successful religions are made up of participants who share an intense corporate culture and set of values. For example, in *Primal Branding: Create Zealots for Your Brand, Your Company, And Your Future* (2006), Patrick Hanlon posits a seven-piece 'primal code' of corporate communication that is shared by successful companies and religious organizations, the idea being that branding taps into the very core of human sociality. Similarly, Jesper Kunde's *Corporate Religion: Building a Strong Company Through Personality and Corporate Soul* (2002) uses case studies of brands like Virgin and Harley-Davidson to find the 'right formula' to create a 'brand religion'. Because of the ethical connotations of 'branding', religious organizations have been slower to adopt branding, at least in name. However, as shown by Phil Cooke's *Branding Faith: Why some Churches and Nonprofits Impact Culture and Others Don't* (2008), as well as a proliferation of church branding consultancies, this has changed in the new millennium. Sociologically-oriented books from

the ages on religion and music, there seems to have been no attempt to study music, marketing and (religious) meaning as a single rubric. This is surprising given the major roles of both marketing and popular music in the spread of evangelical Christianity throughout history (Moore 1994; Nekola 2009; Sargeant 2000; Twitchell 2007). This thesis begins to address this omission, positing the experience of music, marketing and meaning as a gestalt.

Music, Marketing and Experience – A Short History

Music, marketing and religion are all associational webs of meaning spun from temporal, spatial and sensory experiences. Robin Sylvan argues, in his cross-cultural study of the religious dimensions of popular music, that meaning is created in both music and religion through the interaction of multiple facets of experience, including the physiological, psychological, socio-cultural, semiological, virtual, ritual and spiritual (Sylvan 2002: 19-44). This is also true of brands and branding, as several recent studies attest. For example, Lindstrom (2005) emphasizes sound's role in sensory branding (physiological), Fournier (1998) treats brands as relationship partners (psychological), Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) explore brand communities (sociocultural and ritual), Manning (2010) focuses on brand semiotics (semiological), Book (2005) analyses virtual world branding (virtual), and Muñiz and Schau (2005) delve into religiosity in the Apple Newton brand community (spiritual). What this shows is that music, marketing

Religious Studies have tended to focus on the way that religious organizations use marketing to appeal to consumers in a 'religious marketplace'. This includes Finke and Stark's *The Churching of America 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (2005), R. Laurence Moore's *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (1994), and James B. Twitchell's *Shopping for GOD®: How Christianity Went From In Your Heart to In Your Face* (2007). Mara Einstein's *Brands of Faith: Marketing Religion in a Commercial Age* (2008) is a sociological attempt to show the interconnectedness of 'religious' and 'secular' goods and their respective markets. Einstein's insight, gleaned from celebrities such as Oprah and churches like Kabbalah, is that the boundaries between the 'sacred' and 'secular' are collapsing in popular culture. This may or may not be the case (c.f. Gauthier and Martikainen 2013), but the problem with Einstein's work is that her almost exclusive focus on the similarities between the marketing techniques used by the organizations and personalities she studies (perhaps understandably, as she formerly worked in marketing before coming to academia) glosses over more important insights into meaning-making and subjectivity that are implicit in her work. Despite this, *Brands of Faith* is useful because it makes clear that everyone is using the same marketing techniques with the same degree of sophistication.

and religion all access the same basic human sensory and communicative machinery through which we make meaning.

This means that any serious exploration of the relationship between music, marketing and meaning needs to be interdisciplinary. Ethnomusicology is well placed to do this because it is inherently fluid, seemingly unafraid to draw from any number of cognate fields in search of musical understanding. What makes it particularly suited for this study is that, unlike classical Durkheimian sociology that seeks to separate 'sacred' and 'secular' experiences, ethnomusicology understands action and meaning as part of a larger holistic ontology. This orientation is seen in the ethnomusicological studies of so-called 'ecstatic' religions that seek sacred experiences through 'trance' (Becker 2004; Kapchan 2007; Jankowsky 2010; Rouget 1985). While trance states are often sought and achieved in rituals that participants might class as 'special' or 'set apart' from daily life, ethnomusicology's focus on culture as a frame for experiences helps collapse, or at least problematize, the distinction between the 'sacred' and 'secular'. In other words, even 'special' events take place within worldviews that render them part of a holistic experience of self. From this perspective, 'trance' becomes just another normal part of life, what the culture industry would term a lifestyle.

It is here that we find a gap in the ethnomusicological literature. While the studies above do well in presenting the interrelated nature of 'sacred' and 'secular' experience, they do so almost exclusively in contexts that, while certainly influenced by capitalism and (global) marketplaces, are not as thoroughly interpenetrated by the culture industries as the present study. In the above studies, if musicians engage in the 'marketplace' it is often seen as a separate sphere of activity. They may perform or record and sell their music as a commodity, but these activities are separate from the 'real' spiritual activities that take place in a different sphere. While this may not be as cut and dried as it appears, the basic point is that in the above cases, any 'marketing' is outwardly directed. In contrast, this thesis understands marketing as a fundamental part of the sacred experience for participants in consumer culture.

Why is the study of music so important when thinking about marketing, and why is the study of marketing so important when thinking about music? Marketing is communication, and as Jakob Lusensky succinctly puts it, ‘Music’s history is also the story of human communication’ (Lusensky 2010: 13). Both music and marketing are meaning-full modes of communication that, among other things, are infused with the potential to persuade and manipulate (Brown 2006: 21-23). This has been recognized by philosophers since Plato, who, convinced that music had the power to affect people’s morals and values, worried about what music ‘makes’ us do. The ancient Greeks were also the first to connect musical style to identity and personality. For example, they believed that each mode had a personality and named those modes after tribes that exhibited similar traits. Both values and identity are thus profoundly connected to music and, as we will see, are the roots of the meaning-making processes of branding.

Furthermore, music is an important tool for marketers because music and memory are intricately connected (Snyder 2000). Music helps us remember, and sometimes will not let us forget. For marketers, this is a boon – hence the ubiquity of the jingle during the mid-part of the twentieth century (Faulkner n.d.; Taylor 2010). Musical ‘earworms’ like jingles access deep neurological processes of learning and memory, aided by the ubiquity of audio technology. As Oliver Sacks puts it, one of the consequences of our hyper-mediatized auditory environment is, ‘...the omnipresence of annoyingly catchy tunes... that arrive unbidden and leave only in their own time – catchy tunes that may, in fact, be nothing more than advertisements for toothpaste but are, neurologically, completely irresistible’ (Sacks 2007: 53). Jingles are examples of music meant to instil a product’s ‘ideology’ in a consumer, and this takes on perhaps even more serious connotations when music is deployed for political measures.⁸ Should we worry? After all, with the exception of some timeless classics and local markets, the classic jingle may be ‘dead’ (Anderman 2005). But this is only because, while the basic human processes through which music ‘makes’ meaning remain unchanged,

⁸ National anthems are good examples of music deployed for political purposes. The Nazis were well aware of the political implications of music. This is why they banned jazz but promoted Wagner. Music has been used to rally both the left and the right. During the Vietnam War, protest songs abounded. Yet even a protest song’s meaning is slippery, as evidenced by Ronald Reagan’s attempted appropriation of Bruce Springsteen’s ‘Born in the USA’ during the 1984 United States presidential campaign.

the cultural basis on which it works and therefore the form these processes take has changed, and continue to do so. Indeed, if anything, music is potentially more ‘persuasive’ than ever. This is because, today, music is integrated into a marketing mix that reaches into ever-broader areas of culture. Tracing the evolution of the jingle therefore provides a vivid picture of how this associational web has been spun, and provides telling commentary on the relationship between marketplace, ideology and cultural landscape.

Tim Taylor’s *The Sounds of Capitalism: Advertising, Music, and the Conquest of Culture* is a provocative analysis of how music, marketing and meaning have coalesced during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in America. Throughout its history, the jingle’s primary function has been to keep a product in the mind of the consumer (Taylor 2010: 70), although the ways that it has done this have evolved along with technology and culture. According to Taylor, the jingle’s distant precursors were the street cries of merchants that were first noted in the thirteenth century. The *Oxford English Dictionary* traces the use of the term to 1645 (Taylor 2010: 68-69). Yet it was not until the popular adoption of electronic mass media, especially the radio and later the television, that the jingle was able to ‘worm’ its way into people’s minds and become a symbiotic piece of cultural vernacular.

It is both interesting and informative that the (modern) jingle and (modern) branding originate in the final decades of the nineteenth century. In his history of advertising in the United States, Frank Presbrey traces the origins of the non-musical jingle, the verse, to a Sapolio soap advert from 1876-1877 (Taylor 2010: 69). This is instructive for two reasons: first, it coincides with the beginnings of brandbuilding (see chapter two). For example Lever (which is now Unilever) began selling Lever’s Pure Honey soap in 1874 (Olins 2003: 53) and Coca-Cola’s official history places John Pemberton’s discovery of his secret formula in 1886 (Pendergrast 2000: 7). Second, according to Presbrey, it also coincided with a decade that saw a massive increase in the awareness of popular songs. Indeed, Presbrey claimed, ‘Probably in no other ten-year period have we had so many new songs that nearly everybody knew’ (Presbrey 1929; in Taylor 2010: 69). Although Taylor does not say why this is (and I have not been able to find a copy of

Presbrey's book), it is worth noting that, since the mid-nineteenth century, promotional tunes were intertwined with popular music by either writing new lyrics to popular tunes or by changing some of the lyrics of existing songs to fit the brand message (ibid.: 72). These tunes were distributed via sheet music to consumers, often at the consumers' request (ibid.). Here we see that marketers were finding ways to harness consumers' musical agency a century before branding and Web 2.0 codified the techniques. Furthermore, Thomas Edison introduced the phonograph in 1887, heralding the beginning of the recording era.⁹

Popular music and marketing were thus already well-acquainted at the beginning of the twentieth century, but it was the widespread adoption of the radio and later the television that afforded the jingle the avenues it needed to become part of the vernacular of popular culture in its 'classic' form. The direct precursors to the jingle were the theme songs of the company-sponsored radio programmes that provided the nightly entertainment to many American households during the 1920s and 1930s. For marketers, the advantage to these theme songs was twofold. First, they circumvented the era's strict regulations on advertising. A jingle 'could mention a company or product's name without expressly shilling that product' (Faulkner n.d.). Second, theme songs were particularly effective because they were unobtrusive; the perpetually upbeat tunes 'sugarcoated' hard-sell messages 'with a catchy tune' (Taylor 2010: 73). As this 1931 letter in the NBC Archive reveals:

With regard to the use of theme songs, we find that a well-written theme song is a very valuable asset to many radio hours. These not only serve as a reminder to listeners of the products which they represent, but they provide in some instances a means of making an advertisement announcement which is not only effective but *quite inoffensive to listeners*. (Taylor 2010: 76-77; emphasis added)

Here we see the early stages of the 'below the line' marketing techniques (Carah 2010) that are used today. Marketers of the day used music as a way into consumers' hearts and minds, ostensibly through their ears but really through popular culture. By attaching their messages to enjoyable cultural experiences

⁹ *The History of the Edison Cylinder Phonograph*.
<<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/edhtml/edcylldr.html>>; accessed 29 August 2013.

such as serial radio programmes, their products became part of a ritual that constituted the consumer's lifestyle, even if the product itself was not immediately present. Even in the 1920s and 1930s, then, popular music was already established as a way to make the experience of being sold something enjoyable.

As paid advertising took hold after World War II, stand-alone jingles replaced theme songs, but many of these retained their predecessors' strategies of co-opting already well-known popular music. In addition, during this 'golden age of the jingle', famous songwriters were also hired to pen slogans, and copyrights were granted to the composers rather than to the company who hired them (Faulkner n.d.). Furthermore, by the 1950s, both the radio and the TV were staples of the American household, and through them jingles became part of the musical *lingua franca* of the country; so much so that in 1948, NBC asked a dairy company looking for an advertiser, 'Through what medium can your slogans become part of the American Language?' (Taylor 2010: 90). The answer, of course, was the jingle. Because of its ubiquity and memorability, advertising executives quickly realised that the jingle could be 'educational' on a massive scale. For example, Chiquita Banana's jingle following WWII informed listeners that bananas, being tropical fruits, shouldn't be refrigerated and that, furthermore, brown spots were desirable. Apparently this musical education was effective, as all 513 housewives the company surveyed after the release of the jingle responded that, indeed, the refrigerator was the place that bananas 'should never be kept' (ibid.: 94). The Chiquita Banana jingle is such an effective 'public service announcement' that it has been used continuously, with periodic updates to the musical arrangement and lyrics, to the present day (ibid.: 95).

The post-1950s era saw the gradual dissolution of the jingle 'proper' as it evolved from a largely 'stand alone' advertising medium into part of the increasingly complex marketing matrices of the developing culture industries. This was driven in large part by changes in the cultural and consumer attitudes that characterized the 1960s. During this time, consumers were becoming increasingly weary of advertisers and their motives so that by the 1980s, according to Taylor, even the 'sweetest' jingles were seen as 'too obvious a selling device' (ibid.: 141). Part of the problem was the fact that the jingle itself had become so ubiquitous that it had

effectively become a style, if not a genre. The so-called ‘Madison Avenue Choir’ sound, which grew out of the 1950s popular music, had at one time been in step with consumers’ taste and, more importantly, values. However, against a new cultural background of rock ‘n’ roll and the countercultural revolution, this shifted dramatically. Once an asset, the style of the jingle now ‘exposed’ its function as an advertising vehicle (chapter three of this thesis discusses the links between style and values).

Advertising music thus had to find new ways of engaging with culture, and increasingly began to do so by focusing on consumers’ emotions. Besides serving as a vehicle for the (counter)cultural revolution that made the Madison Avenue Choir suspect, rock ‘n’ roll also had the effect of putting many Broadway composers out of business, sending them, perhaps ironically, into jingle composing (ibid.: 109). These composers sought to bring the emotional range of the theatre to their work in advertising. Although they faced an uphill battle in some cases (one lamented that, ‘I can’t get any emotion into Sanka coffee’), the timing of their move was fortuitous, as marketing, increasingly influenced by psychology, was already moving away from the informational to the motivational (ibid.: 107-109; also see chapter one of this thesis for a discussion of this shift). Marketers began to view music as the mood-setter for television commercials. In other words, rather than being a distinct medium of communication, music was now becoming part of a multi-media gestalt. Indeed, a 1960 memorandum from the J. Walter Thompson Company states that:

...basically, it is felt that music... helps set and maintain the feel or mood of the commercial. It complements the copy and picture portion while acting as a unifying cohesive force. It gets under the viewers [sic] skin and helps make the commercial something more than just ‘a commercial’. (Quoted in Taylor 2012: 107-108)

Music, then, was becoming increasingly interconnected with other media in a communicative package aimed squarely at consumers’ emotions. This trend continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s. It is also important to note that the Thompson Company’s above-stated goal for the commercial was to be ‘something more than just “a commercial”’; they wanted to use music to produce an

experience. This presages the current marketing climate, in which entertainment and marketing are often one and the same experience.

As the counter-cultural youth of the 1960s reached middle age in the 1980s, a new American 'ideology of consumption' took hold. Advances in technology allowed new methods of data collection through which new types of consumer information were gathered. This information was used to segment the market into ever-smaller categories, first through demographics and then later psychographics, which were in turn used to develop models of 'consumer lifestyles'. Perhaps the most influential development of this era was that of the 'values and lifestyles' (VALS 1) typology, which used consumer data to market products, often through music, directly to consumers in a 'personalized' way (ibid.:182). As marketers constructed increasingly sophisticated and individualized consumer profiles, identity came to the fore. Also during this time, MTV revolutionized (youth) culture with the music video. In response, brands increasingly aligned their identities with those of musicians, the most spectacular example being when, in 1984, Pepsi signed the newly-minted MTV superstar Michael Jackson to what was at the time the largest endorsement deal ever. What is particularly telling is that Pepsi's campaign used the age-old technique of changing the lyrics of a popular tune to fit the product. In this case, Jackson's monster hit 'Billie Jean' was altered to contain Pepsi content with lines such as 'You're a whole new generation' (ibid.: 185-189). Chapter two of this thesis discusses further the relationship between Pepsi and Jackson in the context of co-branding's relationship to lifestyle.

Since the 1990s, the 'lifestyle turn' in marketing has further integrated music, marketing and meaning into the fabric of consumer culture. Brands and branding have emerged as significant cultural resources. This is evidenced by music's further integration into an ever-expanding entertainment complex of marketing media and marketing strategies that include product placements, brand extensions, celebrity usage (rather than endorsements), corporate productions (increasingly, brands host their own music festivals and produce their own music rather than simply sponsoring it) and so on (Carah 2010). Perhaps the most striking example Taylor gives of the jingle's move 'below the line' is Chris Brown's 2008 top 10

song ‘Forever’, which uses the classic Wrigley’s Doublemint Gum tagline ‘Double your pleasure, double your fun’.¹⁰ The song’s video was nominated for the MTV Video Music Award for Video of the Year, and was later featured in a commercial with Brown. Apparently, Wrigley had commissioned this song, the plan being first to introduce the ‘seeded’ song in a ‘non-commercial’ context and later to tie it into more explicit ‘traditional’ advertising. The marketer responsible for this is quoted as saying ‘Using entertainment assets to introduce products is a platform that needed to get exploited. The lines needed to be blurred. When done correctly, there’s consumer acceptance’ (ibid.: 225).

The evolution of the jingle, then, can be seen as an encapsulation of music’s role in marketing and meaning creation. It communicates on multiple levels of experience, connecting us to a product or an organisation’s associated values. When it is most effective, it does this without our full awareness, yet with our full participation. It ultimately becomes ‘valuable’, then, because it is material with which we create, participate in and experience culture.

Context For This Study

Clearly, the connections between music, marketing and (religious) meaning have long been recognized. However, most studies to date have either used religion as a metaphor, a ‘business model’ or have viewed marketing as a means to strictly economic ends, separate from sacred experience. In this thesis, I seek to go further than this, positing the experience of music, marketing and religious meaning as a gestalt. I posit marketing as essential to the meaning-making process and seek to understand brand value – which is derived from marketing – as an intrinsic part of sacred experience. In other words, I want to prove that an effectively musically-branded church is akin to the bottle of wine with the higher price tag.¹¹

¹⁰ This is one of the top ten taglines of all time: *Ad Age Advertising Century: Top 10 Jingles*. <<http://adage.com/article/special-report-the-advertising-century/ad-age-advertising-century-top-10-jingles/140154/>>; accessed 29 August 2013.

¹¹ Obviously, the strength of this claim is context dependent, and would take different forms and function differently according to the church, religion, region, musical expression and so on. However, the point remains that, because marketing both produces and is material for the production of subjectivity, it is integral to sacred experiences in a broad range of contexts.

How do I go about this? Studies like Plassmann et al.'s Cabernet Sauvignon experiment draw their validity from combining an analysis of participants' self-reports with data gleaned from other methods of data collection, ideally producing as full a picture of human experience as possible. For a variety of practical and ethical reasons, though, imaging participants' brains for this case study was out of the question.¹² I therefore used participant observation (Shelemay 2008) as the primary method of gathering and interpreting data in the ethnographic process. I collected the data used in this thesis through three years of participant observation at Hillsong London, the London branch of Hillsong Church. During this time I attended weekly church services, served on various volunteer teams, participated in small 'connect group' meetings, attended Hillsong's night college and attended several Hillsong conferences and special events. I also conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews, a Skype interview and several email interviews, as well as administering an email questionnaire. My observations and interviews are supplemented by the study of a variety of media produced by and about the church, including CDs, videos, websites, blogs, advertisements, books, press and scholarly articles.¹³

¹² There is, however, a sizable and expanding (but not uncontroversial – c.f. Du Plessis 2011; Randall 2009) body of literature from the emerging field of 'neuromarketing', which studies consumers' sensorimotor, cognitive and affective responses to marketing stimuli. Experiments are often funded by large companies who have partnered with major academic research institutions or, in some cases, set up their own labs. Perhaps the most well-known neuromarketing study to date that specifically addresses brands is McClure et al.'s 'Neural Correlates of Behavioral Preference for Culturally Familiar Drinks', published in 2004 in the journal *Neuron* and popularized in Read Montague's 2007 book *Your Brain Is (Almost) Perfect: How We Make Decisions*. The study is the latest update to the 'Pepsi Challenge'. In it, researchers imaged the brains of participants who were drinking unmarked cups of either Coca-Cola or Pepsi. They then repeated the process while the participants were shown images of either the Coca-Cola or Pepsi logo. While the response to the Pepsi logo was negligible, the MRIs lit up like a Christmas tree when the Coca-Cola logo was shown. This speaks volumes about the effect of marketing on the consumption experience. Because of Coca-Cola's formidable marketing savvy and place in (American) culture, participants had a far greater brand knowledge of Coca-Cola than of Pepsi, which affected their experiences of an otherwise unknown beverage. Brand knowledge is an important part of the argument of chapter three of this thesis.

¹³ I should note that by the time this thesis is published, it will already be out of date. Hillsong moves so quickly and is expanding at such a rate that it would take an army of ethnographers to keep up. For example, since I began my fieldwork in 2010, the church has overhauled its web presence several times, added churches in Germany, Copenhagen, Barcelona and New York, and produced four United and four LIVE albums as well as countless other brand extensions. Furthermore, several new musicians have emerged, while Darlene Zschech, the subject of chapter two, has left the church.

The advantage of participatory research is related to one of the main arguments of this thesis: that participation is ‘educational’ in different, and perhaps deeper, ways than ‘book’ learning. This understanding of the hermeneutic importance of experience is at the heart of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger’s influential theory of learning called ‘legitimate peripheral participation’. Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that while most (Western) *teaching* is done abstractly (i.e. in a classroom), real or ‘deep’ *learning* comes through active participation in social processes. For Lave and Wenger, knowledge is embedded and embodied through experience. Lave and Wenger’s theory is based on their studies of different types of apprenticeships in different cultures, including those of Yucatec Mayan midwives in Mexico, Vai and Gola tailors in Liberia, the U.S. navy quartermasters, butchers in U.S. supermarkets in the 1970s, and ‘nondrinking alcoholics’ in Alcoholics Anonymous. In each study, participants learned to perform skills by engaging in the actual process of trying to perform them; they learned from, and through, experience. It is no coincidence that apprenticeship (either formal or informal) is an essential part of experiential religions in a number of cultures (e.g. Jankowski 2010; Kapchan 2007; Quereshi [1986] 2006). These traditions seek, among other things, a visceral encounter with the divine. The ‘affective volitional’ states (Hirschkind 2001) needed to enter into these encounters are culturally framed, and acquired through various degrees of enculturation, socialisation, acculturation and practice (Becker 2004; Rouget 1985).

During my fieldwork, I was the apprentice. Coming from a ‘mildly’ Episcopalian background in which I was taken to church more to acquire a working knowledge of the Bible than to achieve a spiritual or ideological education, I was able to experience first hand (to a degree) the evangelical Christian ‘educational’ process, beginning as a ‘seeker’ and gradually acquiring knowledge in the beliefs and practices of the group through participation (both in group settings such as services, conferences, small group meetings or hangouts to participation through other means such as recordings, books and DVDs) that would allow me, at least theoretically, to ‘get saved’.

I should make it clear here that I was not actually ‘seeking’ a conversion, nor did I find one. I am not an advocate of the ‘radical epistemology’ espoused by Edith

Turner (1993). Ethnomusicological inquiry is a social process, and therefore the meaning it searches for is inherently unstable and uncertain. Although its focus on participation is meant to close the hermeneutic divide through experience, the divide will always be there to some degree, even if the researcher is a ‘native’ of the (musical) culture he or she is researching. ‘Meaning transfer’ between participants is never a perfect match. The ethnographic problem of communication and representation becomes even more complicated when the audience of the ethnography is taken into consideration. In order to nuance the conversation, then, I have solicited ‘fieldback’ from my conversation partners. Anyone who has been interviewed for and quoted in this thesis has received a draft, and responses have been considered and in some cases included in what follows.¹⁴ On the one hand, the researcher has no choice but to take participants ‘at their word’. Indeed, if they are being honest, what they say is what they mean. However, I seek to balance this assumption with my own voice, and from time to time ‘problematize’ some of what is said in order to provide an alternative view. What I hope emerges is a provocative look into the ways that music, marketing and meaning function in the development of subjectivities and the inculcation of values. What follows is an overview of the structure of the thesis, which is intended to give the reader an initial framework through which to understand the points contained within it.

Thesis Structure

A brand never exists only in the here and now. Rather, its meaning is a condensation of associations distributed across time and space, reaching into the past, suggesting the future and connecting the ‘global’ and ‘local’. I have therefore structured this thesis to reflect the ‘temporal-glocality’ of the Hillsong brand. Each chapter in the main body (chapters two through to five) explores a different formation of ‘imagined’ and ‘imaginary’ community that constitute

¹⁴ I have anonymized or changed the names of some of my conversation partners upon request. Others were happy to have their real names used. It should be noted that out of all of my conversation partners, only Hillsong Church’s General Manager George Aghajanian was authorized to speak, and should be understood as speaking, for the church. All other conversation partners are expressing personal opinions.

Hillsong Church that moves, roughly, from the ‘macro’ to the ‘micro’ (or the ‘global’ to the ‘local’) – although I seek throughout to emphasise the interconnectedness of these constructions. These chapters are bookended by an introductory chapter that gives socio-historical context for the study, and a concluding chapter that (re)associates the main themes explored and ruminates on some of the outcomes and future possibilities of this research.

Chapter one outlines the socio-historical context for this study. I begin by showing how the brand has evolved from a mark of distinction into a media object/belief system. Because brand identities are understood in a similar manner to personal identities in consumer culture, and also because the former and latter are often intertwined, the best way to understand them is to trace how the social roles of brands have developed and expanded since the late Victorian period, particularly in Britain and the United States. In part two of the chapter, I trace the rise of the megachurch, Christian Popular Music (CPM) and the development of a ‘religious experience economy’. This shows how the use of music, media and marketing by evangelical Protestants in the United States has developed in concert with developments in communication technologies. This is significant because the techniques pioneered in the United States have underpinned the ‘globalisation’ of evangelical Christianity in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Finally, I give an example of how the developments outlined above coalesce in Hillsong’s branded music by examining the ways that music production considerations affect the development of a Hillsong-branded ‘liturgical calendar’. By examining the positioning of three types of yearly events – album releases, conferences and holidays like Easter and Christmas – a picture emerges of the ways in which branding dictates the form and content of worship at the church.

Chapter two explores the dichotomy that is essential to the development of Hillsong’s brand identity: the biblical call to be ‘in but not of’ the world cast as a dialogue between the ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’ realms. Evangelical Christians generally agree that the Bible mandates them to engage with the world – especially for evangelical purposes – through ‘worldly’ materials such as language and music but in ‘Christian’ ways. However, how this should be done in practice is sometimes hotly debated. These arguments often manifest themselves

in the discourses that frame CPM. Against this background, I explore how Hillsong manages its identity vis-à-vis 'the world', especially a mass-mediated, celebrity-conscious one. Hillsong's trans-national structure dictates that it uses mass mediated, 'celebritized' images of its musicians to communicate its values efficiently. However, it must do so in an evangelical Christian context in which only Jesus is the 'Famous One' and celebrity is often viewed with suspicion. The 'celebrity' of its musicians must therefore be carefully managed. To do this, Hillsong promotes its values and message through a group of well-known worship leaders who are also part of the church's inner circle. Darlene Zschech, perhaps Hillsong's most well-known worship leader, is co-branded with Hillsong – she and the church are inextricably associated with each other. I argue that the key to the success of this partnership is a synergy of values. Because Zschech holds the same values and beliefs that are the core of the Hillsong organisation, she can represent them *authentically*. Authenticity is both a quality sought by consumers and a key part of experiential meaning-making. However, in both commerce and worship, for authenticity to be recognised and ascribed, the values of the organisation must be synergetic with those of the participant. Zschech is the medium that connects participants to the church, and the activities of all stakeholders are framed by and condensed in the brand. In other words, the brand provides continuity among otherwise disparate notions of fame and sacred intention that continually challenge evangelical culture, and therefore can be used to justify the activities of its participants.

Chapter three explores the evangelical idea(l) of 'The Body of Christ', an 'imagined' and 'imaginary' (Ingalls 2011) community that comprises all the world's Christians. In this chapter, I use an 'ecumenical' evangelical Christian event, the 2011 Pentecost celebration at London's O2 arena, as a case study of how music is used in the formation of Hillsong's brand identity. At this event, Hillsong positioned itself in the Body of Christ by using music in the discursive frame of the Pentecost story to affirm commonalities between itself and similar churches while simultaneously positioning itself as unique. In doing so, an image of Hillsong's brand(ed) community was formed in the hearts and minds of participants, which in turn influenced their worship experiences.

I argue that the efficacy of Hillsong's brand stems from what participants perceive as 'special' about it in comparison to similar churches. While (arguably) all Christian churches offer the same 'product' – a personal relationship with God – every church also offers a unique experience of community. Because Hillsong's community is unique, the worship experience at a Hillsong church is different from that of any other church because of the idiosyncratic way its community brands it. Hillsong uses music to build and articulate its brand community to participants through the signification of social markers such as race, religion, socioeconomics and nationality, to name a few. In doing so, it adds value to the worship experience by positioning its community as 'special'.

Chapter four analyses the global Hillsong Church network. Hillsong brands itself as *part of* a global community, but also *as* a global community in its own right. While chapter three focused on the 'Body of Christ' as a community, this chapter examines the Hillsong Network – the complex web of people and places that act in the socio-cultural entity that is Hillsong Church – as a level of community. Focusing on the prominent London and Australian locations in this network, I argue that the Hillsong brand transforms physical and virtual spaces into places by condensing them into an associational package that, through global flows (Appadurai 1996) and mediated imaginations (Anderson 1983 [2006]), affords participants meaningful experiences of its music – the 'Hillsong Sound'.

In positing a branded 'Hillsong Sound', I first discuss the problem of global translation that Hillsong faces, as well as some of the advantages of and limitations to the use of branding as a method of cross-cultural communication. After defining 'sound' as a primarily discursive construction that posits a space/place as a musical 'centre of production', I note how Hillsong's music production process establishes its flagship Australian church as the centre of production of the music and the brand. This Australian centre of production is imbued with essentialist cultural associations that anchor the 'Hillsong Sound' in its brand's creation story. It is through the brand's mythology that the transcendent efficacy of the music is realised. Finally, I will show how Hillsong London's congregation members' images of places and people in the Hillsong Network inform their experience of Hillsong's worship music vis-à-vis the

‘Hillsong Sound’, which is the sonic signifier of the Hillsong brand. Because the ‘sound’ is important to the efficacy of the music, Hillsong actively positions the church and its network within an evangelical discourse that relies on a global and local dichotomy to articulate its identity.

Chapter five focuses on the individual participant, the locus of the transcendent experience. I argue that the brand is efficacious because it teaches ‘how to listen’. However, the ‘lessons’ of the brand can only be ‘learned’ through active effort on the part of the participant. The brand shapes the transcendent experience by framing participants’ activities, thus suggesting certain ways of understanding while delimiting others. By encouraging participants to actively seek certain affective-volitional states, it adds value to the experience by allowing them to make their experiences their own. In other words, the brand accrues value for both Hillsong and its participants by harnessing the participants’ own productivity.

Chapter six reviews chapters one through five, presenting the main outcomes of the thesis. In addition, it reflects upon the possibilities that branding presents and ruminates upon future research avenues.

Chapter 1

Hillsong in its Socio-Historical Context

Introduction

This chapter places Hillsong Church in a socio-historical context. To do this, I situate Hillsong in relation to two developments that occurred concomitantly with the industrial revolution. The first is the development of an array of sophisticated marketing techniques that fall under the rubric of ‘branding’. The second is the development of a ‘religious experience economy’ and the related emergence of Christian Popular Music (CPM) and ‘New Paradigm’ churches. In the first part of this chapter, I outline the history of branding, tracing its expanding cultural role from a descriptive mark to an associational gestalt, media object, postmodern identity marker and belief/value system. In the second part, I outline the rise of the religious marketplace, CPM, and the New Paradigm church, emphasising the role of marketing in the process. Finally, I discuss Hillsong Church as a brand, paying particular attention to how branding concerns shape the way it functions.

Part I - The Evolving Cultural Context of Brands and Branding

From cornflakes to cars, our daily lives are increasingly dominated by branded goods and brand names; the brand is a prefix, the qualifier of character. The symbolic associations of the brand name are often used in preference to the pragmatic description of a useful object. We speak of ‘the old Hoover’, ‘my new Audi’ or ‘my favourite Levi’s’ – not needing to qualify them with an object description. The brand is at the heart of this process for many of the goods we buy and sell. (Pavitt 2000: 16)

So claims Jane Pavitt in the opening to her book *Brand.New* (2000). For Pavitt, ‘the concept of the brand is central to our society’ (Pavitt 2000: 16). Indeed, the brand is common currency as both an idea and practice in consumer societies. Although the terms ‘brand’ and ‘branding’ are applied to such a variety of objects, places, people and activities that the terms’ meanings may be weakened (Murphy 1998: 1), their ubiquity as part of the vernacular of consumer culture shows that

brands and branding have had and continue to have significant social effects. Perhaps this is why branding has recently attracted the attention of scholars from a variety of disciplinary perspectives outside those traditionally interested in the subject, including (but certainly not limited to) sociology, anthropology and design (Pavitt 2000: 17). While this can be partly attributed to the general erosion of disciplinary boundaries between the social sciences, I would argue that a major reason that brands and branding are of such broad interest and are so ubiquitous to contemporary society is that, as associational gestalts, they tap into basic and arguably universal ways that humans make and experience meaning – especially in regard to values and beliefs – and as such are implicated in an increasingly broad range of identity making activities in everyday life.

It is important to understand the distinction between *a brand* and *branding*. Simply put: the brand is the *result* of the branding *process*. A brand is the condensation of meanings from which a brand identity – an identity that maps onto both the brand and its participants – emerges. Branding is the process through which the brand is realised. Digging deeper, brands are ultimately about ‘value’ in all senses of the term. The branding literature most often describes a brand’s purpose as one of *adding value*. Added value is usually thought of in the economic sense, but it should be emphasised that branding is first and foremost a non-economic activity: it is an integrated communications (or marketing) strategy that condenses associations into a meaningful gestalt by synthesising the physical, aesthetic, rational and emotional elements that constitute it (Murphy 1998: 3). For the consumer, it adds value to the experience of something through emotional associations. For an organization, it adds value by binding the consumer to the organization and its other participants, which include other consumers and also the organization’s employees, thereby strengthening group ties.¹⁵ A brand appeals to the emotions because it is an assemblage of values. On the one hand, it represents the values that an organisation is built upon, and that its employees (ideally) hold and promote. On the other hand, brands are reflections of a

¹⁵ Participants in the branding process are often referred to in the branding literature as ‘stakeholders’. I have chosen to use the term ‘participants’ in keeping with this thesis’s emphasis on the ‘educational’ role of participation in the branding process.

consumer's values. When a consumer's values map onto an organisation's values, then value is added to the consumer's experience.¹⁶

In consumer societies, economic benefits often follow from this. Consumers bound to the brand are more likely to be 'repeat customers' and are more likely to recommend the brand to others. They are also more likely to pay a premium for the branded experience. To paraphrase the famous line from the film *A Field of Dreams*: Build it and they will come; brand it, and they will come back, and pay more when they do. This is often referred to as *brand equity*. Thus, the purpose of the brand is to enhance emotional and economic value for stakeholders in an organisation.

The yearly 'most valuable brands' lists pioneered by the brand consultancy Interbrand reflect the conflation of different types of value.¹⁷ Although a brand is ultimately an 'intangible asset', Interbrand assigns a monetary value to it. This valuation is derived from an analysis of an organization's tangible assets, like infrastructure and available cash flow, balanced against factors such as debt and current sales figures. The added brand valuation is based on the idea of 'brand loyalty': that consumers' (positive) emotional associations with a brand will engender future sales. One need look no further than the historical shift in weighting from tangible to intangible in the valuation of brands to see the rising importance of branding in consumer culture.¹⁸ For example, according to Interbrand, the most valuable global brand in 2012 was Coca-Cola, which it valued at \$77.8 billion.¹⁹ At the end of 2012, the company's stock market capitalization was approximately \$163 billion.²⁰ This means that, essentially, half of Coca-Cola's monetary value was its name alone.

¹⁶ In other words, the object/phenomenon acquires an identity for the consumer and in turn becomes part of his or her identity.

¹⁷ *Best Global Brands 2012*. <<http://www.interbrand.com/en/best-global-brands/2012/Best-Global-Brands-2012.aspx>>; accessed 26 December 2012.

¹⁸ *Brand Valuation*. <http://www.brandchannel.com/images/papers/financial_value.pdf>; accessed 26 December 2012.

¹⁹ *Best Global Brands 2012*. <<http://www.interbrand.com/en/best-global-brands/2012/Best-Global-Brands-2012-Brand-View.aspx>>; accessed 26 December 2012.

²⁰ When the markets closed on 31 December 2012, Coke was trading at \$36.25 a share with 4.49 billion shares outstanding.

\$75 billion dollars is a lot of money for a name. The best way to understand why Coca-Cola and other brands are so ‘valuable’ is to examine how they function in modern society. This may be done by tracing the evolution of the brand and branding from a method of denoting ownership and content to one of connoting different types of values, meanings, reputations and identities for a range of participants. As with other social phenomena, branding’s evolution is inextricable from the changes in technology and communication that have accompanied it. However, although the cultural contexts of the brand and the modes of branding have changed over time (Moor 2007: 15-38; Olins 2003: 46-69; Room 1998: 13-23) the brand’s basic function of distinguishing the offerings of one producer from those of another has (arguably) remained unaltered (Murphy 1998: 1).

The Origins of Branding: Distinguishing Products

The origins of product branding can be traced back to ancient Greece and Rome, where marks indicated the ownership and origin of vessels as well as their content (Moor 2007: 16; Room 1998: 13-14; see also Mollerup 1997).²¹ Over time, the informational content of these marks increased, describing distinctive qualities of the product. For example, in Britain watermarks described the size and weight of paper. Similarly, hallmarks for precious metals indicated their composition, the regional office where they had been tested, and the date of issue and name of their manufacturer. Thus, brands not only became descriptors of content, but also guaranteed quality by linking products to a reputable source (Moor 2007:16).

Brands further became linked to identity during imperial expansion as marks not only for inanimate goods and livestock, but for people as well. For example, during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, slaves were routinely branded. The marks simultaneously identified who owned them and conferred social status upon them by identifying them as slaves. The brand both established and advertised the

²¹ Cattle branding is at least 4,000 years old, tracing back to Ancient Egypt (‘The History of Cattle Brands and How to Read Them’. <<http://kidscowboy.com/history-of-cattle-brands>>; ‘History: The Evolution of Cattle Branding’ <http://www.longmontweekly.com/longmont-columnists/ci_21490023/history-evolution-cattle-branding>; accessed 25 June 2013).

slave's status as a 'permanent marginal' (Moor 2007: 17). However, these brands were also sometimes used as badges of honour by runaway slaves, and were used as symbols of resistance and solidarity (Paterson 1982: 59, in Moor 2007: 17). In branding's nascent stages, then, the contested, multiple meanings of the brand were already evident.

In the 1870s and 1880s, communication, transportation and manufacturing technologies came together to usher in the first great period of branding in the United States and in Europe (Olins 2003: 51). Manufacturers were increasingly able to standardise, and thus regulate, the size and consistency of their products. Also, developments in printing allowed the packaging itself to communicate a greater array of images and meanings, which helped create a distinct identity for the product (Moor 2007: 18-19). Concomitant with these advances was an explosion in population, which provided a market for an ever-widening range of goods, and also subsequent legal developments, in the form of trademark law (Olins 2003: 48-69; Room 1998: 14-15), which increased both the need for the meanings of a brand to be communicated, and the ways through which this could be done. For example, the first great branders in post-Civil War America were the makers of patent medicines. They took advantage of a market in which there were few trained doctors but a relatively high proportion of literate people, expanding newspaper circulation and established transportation and distribution networks. Because of the competitive environment (not to mention the dubious nature of many of their products) the makers of patent medicines were 'the first to sell image rather than product' (Olins 2003: 50).²² It is no coincidence that one of the first great brands, Coca-Cola, began as a patent medicine, claiming: 'COCA-COLA... makes not only a delicious, exhilarating, refreshing and invigorating Beverage... but a valuable Brain tonic and cure for all nerve affections – Sick Head-Ache, Neuralgia, Hysteria, Melancholy, etc.' (Pendergrast 2000: 30-31).

²² Patent medicines were mostly well-advertised quackery, but they were the basis of the fortunes of several philanthropists (Pendergrast 2000: 7-13). In fact, this thesis is part of that legacy: Royal Holloway's founder, Thomas Holloway, made his money peddling patent medicines ('Thomas Holloway, the Pill King'. <<http://www.fulltable.com/VTS/h/holl/b.htm>>; accessed 22 July 2013).

A Move Towards Corporate Identity

The period from the end of the nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century saw an increase in the competition between similar products. This led to a more systematic use of advertising, and particularly a shift away from emphasising the functionality of goods to imbuing them with emotional significance. Advertisers' shift of interest to consumer psychology is often credited to Edward Bernays, who (by no coincidence) was Sigmund Freud's nephew. Bernays was one of the pioneers of market segmentation, setting up focus groups in order to understand what kind of customers wanted what, and then setting about influencing those desires through marketing (Tye 2002).

As the twentieth century progressed, consumer psychology became more nuanced, moving away from an emphasis on wants, needs and desires towards a focus on communal and personal identity. Simultaneously, the idea that corporations had identities and should be understood as 'pseudo-people' was making headway in both theory and law.²³ Initially, corporate identity was seen as a design coordination problem. The post-war period saw an increasing awareness of media in all of its forms, and the importance of different media in building the image of a company through an integrated media strategy. Speaking from a design perspective, Henrion and Parkin (1967) wrote in *Design Coordination and Public Image*:

A corporation has many points of contact with various groups of people. It has premises, works, products, packaging, stationery, forms, vehicles, publications and uniforms, as well as the usual kinds of promotional activities. These things are seen by customers, agents, suppliers, financiers, shareholders, competitors, the press and the general public, as well as its own staff. The people in these groups build up their idea of the corporation from what they see and experience of it. An image is therefore an intangible and essentially complicated thing, involving the effect of many and varied factors on many and varied people with many and varied interests. (Henrion and Parkin 1967: 7, in Moor 2007: 30-33)

²³ The idea of 'corporate personhood' has its roots in nineteenth century legal precedents that granted corporations, as collectives of people, certain legal rights under the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution (Block 2013; Smith 2009). It is related to, but distinct from, the idea of 'corporate identity', which developed in the later part of the twentieth century and grafts 'human traits' onto corporate entities (e.g. Aaker et al. 2004; Fournier 1998).

Henrion and Parkin's work showed that a brand is multifaceted, and that different actors encounter different elements of it in different situations and thus understand it in different ways. For them, the challenge was to coordinate all of those disparate encounters in a way that communicated a single concept.

In contrast to Henrion and Parkin's visual focus, James Pilditch's *Communication by Design: A Study in Corporate Identity* (1970) drew its inspiration from Marshall McLuhan's ideas about the interconnectedness of media and identity. Pilditch argued that companies needed to understand the 'total situation... of information movement'. '[F]ar from being an adjunct of advertising,' he wrote, 'corporate communications have become the new total.... Advertising, like public relations, architecture, merchandising materials, and any part of a company's outpourings, must be coordinated with the rest so that each contributes to one appropriate whole' (Pilditch 1970: 9, in Moor 2007: 32). This acknowledgement that all of a brand's offerings are potential semiotic material in identity design (or assemblage) informed much of the sociological and anthropological consumer-oriented branding that gained currency in the 1990s.

Both Henrion and Parkin's and Pilditch's studies were concerned primarily with communicating an identity to stakeholders outside of an organisation. In contrast, Wally Olins's 1978 book *The Corporate Personality* focused on the internal aspects of corporate identity. In it, Olins argued that, rather than simply projecting an identity, successful organisations had to create one from within. He presaged the 1980s, a time of corporate mergers and globalization that put pressure on newly international companies to streamline their communications and make them cross-culturally comprehensible to their employees (Moor 2007: 30). In this new era, companies needed to create 'a common culture.... [W]hen employees visit one another's factories and offices they [should] find familiar things, familiar names, familiar signs, familiar systems, even familiar furniture – things that make them feel at home' (Olins 1978: 61, in Moor 2007: 32).

Liz Moor (2007) suggests that the sociological orientation of Pilditch's and Olins's works, as well as their frequent oscillation 'between conceptions of workers as employees on the one hand and consumers on the other', points

towards ‘a growing awareness of the shifting relationship between production and consumption [that was occurring in the 1970s], in which people’s identities as consumers were becoming nearly as important as their identities as workers’ (Moor 2007: 33). In other words, both authors recognized that the emergence of post-Fordist economies of flexible labour on the one hand and the rise of post-modern consumerism on the other entailed the need to understand marketing as a social enterprise.

The 1980s mark the beginning of the present ‘branded’ era, a new social context in which brands are now ‘central components of the social fabric’ of our culture (Arvidsson 2006: 3). Until the 1970s, branding was the purview of companies such as Proctor and Gamble, Heinz and Kellogg’s that produced ‘fast moving consumer goods’ (FMCGS) (Olins 2003: 56). During this time (and despite the insights gleaned from Bernays) competitive advantage was still viewed – especially outside of the United States – as product-based. In other words, it was believed that if product A were better designed and cheaper than product B, the consumer would make the ‘logical’ choice of product A. In many cases, this proved to be true. However, at this time, there was much more ‘room’ in the market. For example, in the 1950s, the average grocer’s shop in Britain carried about 2,000 products. At the turn of the millennium, the number had risen to around 40,000 (Olins 2003: 57). Because of the ubiquity of technology, there is today often very little, if any, difference in the quality of similar goods. Thus, from the 1970s onward corporate emphasis has shifted from products to brands, their organizations and to the services that those organizations provide (Olins 2003: 63). In particular, corporate branding recognizes that its human element involves not only internal participants, but external ones as well.

Branding and the Service Sector

Since the practical features of products rarely separate one brand from its competitors, companies seek to differentiate themselves by enhancing their customers’ experiences of their products through *services*. For example, when I owned a Honda Civic, the dealer would email me to remind me when to have it

serviced, schedule an appointment for me and attach ‘discount’ coupons for those services to the email. In doing so, Honda sought to make even the tiresome elements of owning a car, such as maintenance, easy if not enjoyable. In this way, the product and the services became part of the overall experience of owning a Honda.

In some cases, a brand’s products and services are more than just connected; they are one and the same. These are called service brands. Banks and airlines, which provide a specific service to a customer, are examples of service brands. Like all brands, service brands capitalise on developing and maintaining the emotional ties with customers that add value for both parties. Since customers have no products *per se* to interact with, their impressions of an organization are derived from their interactions with the organization’s representatives, usually its employees. Thus, the ideas of corporate branding that originated in FMCGS companies have been extended and refined in the service sector. As meaningful ‘touchpoints’ of interaction with the customer, employees represent the brand and communicate its values. Organizations have increasingly realised that employees are key to brand image. Far beyond uniforms and looks, social cues such as smiles and language are key factors in consumer satisfaction and establishing the relationship that may lead to long-term sales. However, the interaction must be experienced as ‘authentic’. For example, if an employee is thought to be working from a script (‘Welcome to Burger King, may I take your order please?’) rather than being genuinely involved in the interaction, the customer will understand the experience as inauthentic. This is why service brands put large amounts of time, money and effort into employee training programmes. For example, British Airways runs workshops as part of its ‘breakthrough programme’. This programme seeks to ensure that everyone in the organisation shares a common vision and purpose, and follows prescribed steps to communicate this (Hart 1998: 209).²⁴ The idea is that by instilling a sense of purpose and commitment in its employees, they will authentically communicate the airline’s purpose and values through word and

²⁴ Anna Klingmann analyses the branded airline as a combination of design (‘hardware’), entertainment (‘software’) and service (‘humanware’). She sees these elements as the three parts through which the aircraft delivers a holistic experience of an airline’s brand personality (Klingmann 2007: 23). Note the integration (although ‘conflation’ may be a better term) of machine and employee as branded material.

action.²⁵ In other words, BA follows Wally Olins's advice: 'Train your people to live the brand' (Olins 2003: 89).

An Experience Economy

What drives service brands is the desire to enhance the consumer's *experience*. Pine and Gilmore (2011) argue that the current phase of capitalism is one in which the 'consumable experience' is a commodity. For Pine and Gilmore, the first stage of capitalism was the agrarian economy, where raw materials were extracted, bought and sold. When extracted materials were used to produce marketable goods, the industrial economy developed. As an industrialized market matured, it became cluttered with goods of similar type and quality. Producers therefore had to differentiate their products through services, which enhanced and ultimately replaced goods as the primary commodity. Thus, the industrial economy developed into the service economy. Although Olins argues that most service brands 'remain pretty awful' (Olins 2003: 74), as the service economy has matured, good service is quickly becoming common to all service brands, just as quality products became common in the mature industrial economy. Since good service is no longer a point of differentiation, then, Gilmore and Pine argue, the new point of differentiation is the *experience*, which is constructed (or as they put it, 'staged') through a combination of goods and services.

Among the standard-bearers of the experience economy are Nike and Disney. They devote themselves less to creating products than they do to promoting a holistic, multisensory experience of the brand (although products remain an important part of this). This is no more apparent than at their flagship experience hubs, Niketown in Chicago and Disneyland in California respectively. John Sherry, Jr. describes Niketown as 'surely the embodiment of the corporate dictum "Just Do It"' (Sherry 1998b: 109), a branded 'servicescape' or 'brandscape' where the 'brand is both a noun and a verb,' (ibid.: 112; c.f. Klingmann 2007: 86-89;

²⁵ See also: *Getting Employees to Act on Your Brand Promise*.
<<http://businessjournal.gallup.com/content/159425/getting-employees-act-brand-promise.aspx#1>>; accessed 24 June 2013.

Carah 2010). Niketown is designed as a ‘material and symbolic environment that consumers build with marketplace products, images and messages, that they invest with local meaning, and whose totemic significance largely shapes the adaptation consumers make to the modern world’ (Sherry 1998b: 112); a place where ‘[t]he co-creation of experience by marketers and consumers – the performance of negotiated meanings – is engendered... by design’ (ibid.). Niketown is more of an interactive museum than an actual store – it stocks products that cannot be found at local dealers and never runs sales. Customers can ‘touch greatness’ in a variety of ways, from trying out their moves in a new set of Air Jordans on the half-court that covers part of the second floor to taking in the videos running throughout the store that feature the exploits of famous athletes. Niketown strives to create a multisensory ‘rhetoric of the place’ (ibid.: 140) where one can touch, smell (and taste – these two senses are linked), hear and feel ‘Nikeness’.

The sensually immersive experience is even more complete at Disneyland, the iconic theme park that for Mark Gottdiener (1998) is nothing less than ‘a large sign-vehicle of the Disney ideology and [which] forms the semantic universe within which the many objects of merchandising with the Disney theme make sense’ (Gottdiener 1998: 31). Thematic coherence is inspired through ‘architecture, landscaping, costuming and other theatrical effects’ (Chidester 2005: 143) (to which I would add the food, music and the ubiquitous mouse ear hats that are available at every turn) immerse the consumer in the Disney experience. Disneyland even has its own currency, the ‘Disney Dollar’, which further divorces the consumption experience from ‘the real world’, enveloping the consumer in an entire branded ecosystem.²⁶

Nike and Disney understand that we experience brands as we experience life, through all five senses. Because sensory experience is an essential part of how we ‘know’ things (especially because it is linked to our emotional awareness), the more ‘sensual’ are the experiences we associate with a brand, the more

²⁶ Indeed, Disney has perhaps gone further than any other company in attempting to infuse its brand into everyday life: it has its own branded town, the master-planned community of Celebration, Florida (Frantz and Collins 2000).

memorable they become. Branding futurist Martin Lindstrom (2005) suggests that in the years to come, brands will need not only to have signature visual identities, but also oral, auditory, olfactory and sensual ones as well. This is why engineers at car companies such as BMW, Rolls-Royce and Cadillac go far beyond look when designing their automobiles, also focusing on (and patenting) details such as how their cars smell, how the doors feel when being opened and the sound they make when being closed. For these companies, the automobile should be a holistic experience of the brand, a medium that ingrains the brand in the very being of the consumer.

The Brand as a Media Object and a Form of Governance

Even the most powerful sensual experience means nothing without cultural context; the experience of a BMW will mean nothing unless the brand BMW is already associated with something. The meaning of a brand is in constant dialogue with culture and history. It is symbolic, and therefore *is* media. Furthermore, because it is itself comprised *of* and produced *through* different media, it is also a media object (Lury 2004). This duality is interesting because, while the range of meanings available to a brand are dictated by its cultural milieu, it also organises meaning by providing a framework in which branded activities are understood. To borrow a design term, the brand is *afforded* certain meanings while it itself *affords* certain experiences.

Today, as always, knowledge (information) is power. In today's media-saturated 'knowledge' economies, information is arguably more 'valuable' than ever (Castells 2010; c.f. Webster 2006). The brand is an excellent way of converting information/knowledge into economic capital (Arvidsson 2006), which means that it is also a good managerial device, a 'form of *governance*, a way of managing populations and reshaping existing perceptions and practices among citizens as well as workers and consumers' (Moor 2007: 38, original emphasis). As Moor notes:

What unites... functions of branding is a renewed emphasis on the tactility and materiality of communication, and its capacity to affect people at the level of perception and affect rather than only through the more obviously cognitive work of 'persuasion'. (Moor 2007: 38)

Branding is a way of condensing and streamlining flows of information to, from and within an organisation and its stakeholders. In doing so, it both interacts with and to some degree shapes its stakeholders' worldviews. Drawing from information already 'in the world', a brand anticipates certain kinds of meanings, and thus predetermines certain kinds of actions and attachments through a kind of 'framing' (Arvidsson 2006: 74). In other words, brands 'provide part of the context in which products are used' (ibid: 8; see also Carah 2010). However, this does not mean that a brand imposes context or meanings on the user, at least not in the Taylorist sense.²⁷ Rather, in post-Fordist fashion, 'brands work by *enabling* consumers, by empowering them in particular directions' (Arvidsson 2006: 8, original emphasis). Of course, one can see the irony in Arvidsson's observation. His point is that brands exercise control by harnessing the human need to 'create the social'. In other words, by making the information and meanings drawn from associations our 'own' through our own productivity, we are embodying the worldview shaped by the brand on deeply personal levels.

While Arvidsson is chiefly concerned with the economic implications of this form of 'informational capitalism', where social interaction becomes embedded as an economic activity, I am more concerned with the non-economic implications of what could be called, following Arvidsson and Jameson (1992), an 'enabling logic of late capitalism'. If we use brands as part of our natural everyday communication and meaning-making activities – as ways of sharing information that shape our lives and worldviews – then the power and potential of brands becomes clear. Building on Lury and Arvidsson's insights, the brand can be understood as a *social* media object that both creates and extracts value in a 'Web 2.0' manner.

²⁷ Broadly speaking, Taylorism is the 'top down' management theory that seeks to improve productivity through the implementation of rigid guidelines. It is often associated with Fordism, the economic and social system that is itself associated with industrialization and mass-production. In contrast, post-Fordism is associated with flexible labour, small production runs and the 'personalization' of commodities. The Marxist perspective sees both Fordism and post-Fordism as capital's means of control. The difference is that while the former tells the worker 'You must!', the latter tells the consumer 'You may!' (Arvidsson 2006: 8).

The Brand in/as Social Media and Culture Jamming

The insight that brands leverage our innate need to be social and convert it into capital is the economic premise of ‘Web 2.0’, and is exemplified by corporate brands like Google, Amazon and Facebook. These organisations leverage information collected through monitoring and recording of user activity in order to, among other things: target advertisements specific to the customer; outsource technical support to community forums (which has the added value of also creating brand community); and react quickly to consumer suggestions or complaints. The Internet, in other words, provides ways for organisations and brands to connect with participants and stakeholders in unique and personal ways. While the ‘Big Brother’ implications of this are clear, the flip side is that participants are also immediately connected to each other and can therefore to some degree bypass the organisation in the branding process. Since a brand image is social, it is subject to the vicissitudes of ‘the social’. For brands, social media can be a dream come true if people have good things to say about you. However, the smallest rumour or complaint can quickly become a public relations nightmare.

The symbolic nature of the brand simultaneously presents opportunities to, but also creates potential problems for, brand managers. As we have seen, brands have carried multiple or contested meanings for hundreds of years. Thus, while a brand may add value to an experience for some, for others, it may detract from the experience of the same activity. For example, while for some people the daily trip to Starbucks is an important part of their routines, others avoid the chain at all costs in favour of their local café (Thompson and Arsel 2004). One of the best-known articulations of this second type of attitude towards brands is Naomi Klein’s *No Logo* ([2000] 2010). Like some of the examples she gives, such as the ‘Ad-busters’, ‘Culture Jammers’ and World Trade Organization protesters, Klein uses brands as a symbol for the excesses of capitalism and neoliberal hegemony. Yet Klein’s examples also point to why her position is overstated; the mere fact

that brands can be ‘culture jammed’²⁸ suggests that they can be controlled. Although branding is first a non-economic activity, like most things, it very rarely occurs outside the purview of capital. All organisations need participants because of the social and economic capital they provide. In an era of fierce competition, not only in the for-profit but also in the non-profit sector, brands are ultimately subservient to the whims of these participants, who can vote with their feet and their wallets. The recent controversy over Starbucks’ avoidance of corporate taxes in the UK could be seen as an example of this. During the time that the coffee chain was being pilloried in the press and on the Internet, sales of rival British coffee chain Costa rose by 8 percent while Starbucks’ sales dropped by almost the same amount (Bowers 2013). Although some might view the company’s claim that ‘...we felt that our customers should not have to wait for us to become profitable before we started paying UK corporation tax’ (Saul 2013) skeptically, the event nevertheless shows how bad press, or the threat of bad press, can affect corporate action. This suggests that the route to controlling branded organisations lies not in eschewing consumerism, but in ‘directed’ or ‘intentional’ consumerism.²⁹

Section Summary

The above discussion has traced the changing, expanding cultural and social context of the brand and branding. Always marks of distinction,³⁰ the ways in which brands differentiate have multiplied through the centuries. Additionally,

²⁸ Culture jamming is the anti-consumerist practice of altering or parodying adverts of major corporations to make ironic comments on those products and by extension, capitalism in general. (Klein [2000] 2010: 279-309; *Culture Jamming*. <<http://depts.washington.edu/ccce/polcommcampaigns/CultureJamming.htm>>; accessed 22 July 2013). However, as Heath and Potter (2006) point out in their discussions of Klein and also the culture jamming publication AdBusters, culture jamming is at best ineffectual entertainment and at worst perpetuates the same consumerism that it purports to critique.

²⁹ However, see Heath and Potter (2006) for an excellent critique of the effectiveness of ‘ethical consumerism’.

³⁰ The use of the term distinction here will probably remind the reader of Pierre Bourdieu’s *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* ([1984] 2010). There are parallels. For example, Burberry’s problems balancing between popularity and exclusivity (Heath and Potter 2006: 127-129) very much reflect Bourdieu’s analysis of taste and class. While taste certainly comes into play in this thesis, in several places I argue that the brand hegemony and the discourses of ‘unity’ that shape it overrides, tempers or changes taste rather than reproduces it (see chapters three and five).

they have become more *social*; not only as culturally contested symbols but also as ‘people’, complete with personalities and legal rights. Always in dialogue with the past, present and future, the ‘local’ and the ‘global’, the individual and the collective, brands are today a meaningful part of culture and integral to its functioning. Most importantly for this thesis, a brand’s efficacy lies in its ability to add value to our experience of things, or if not (as in the case of Klein’s adherents) at least speak to the values that we hold. In other words, brands are part of how we experience ourselves, others and our environments, whether we like it or not. The next section explores how the socio-historical context described above has influenced the development of a Religious Experience Economy in which branding thrives.

Part II - The Religious Experience Economy

The forces that have shaped the evolution of branding and given rise to the experience economy have also shaped the development of religious institutions and the forms of religious experience and expression associated with them. Organisations reflect the larger socio-economic environments in which they operate, and thus in capitalist societies, they acquire the ‘character and mass-mediated ethos’ of their social milieu (Muñiz and O’Guinn 2001: 412). In other words, market forces affect the ways that participants in various economies organise and communicate in order to achieve their goals – an insight that undergirds the idea of a ‘religious economy’.

The notion of a religious economy first gained currency in sociological circles in the 1960s,³¹ and it is useful for understanding the concomitant developments of New Paradigm churches and Christian Popular Music (CPM), as both styles (in the many ways that the term ‘style’ can be understood) and industries.³² Religious

³¹ Finke and Stark 2005; Stark and Bainbridge 1985: 39-96; Stark and Finke 2000: 193-276.

³² I will use the term ‘Christian Popular Music’ (CPM) because it most accurately describes the contentious interplay between ethical and economic value that is at the heart of the development of the Christian lifestyle. Ingalls et al. (2013) define CPM as: ‘... a sonically diverse umbrella category of late twentieth and early twenty-first century commercial popular music. CPM is characterized by Christian lyrics or themes, created by artists whose self-identification as Christian is central to their public persona, mediated by self-identified Christian companies (i.e., magazines,

market theory posits religion as a commodity and religious organisations as merchants that compete with each other for clients. While many, especially within religious circles, are uncomfortable with using economic terms such as ‘branding’ to describe their activities (Cooke 2008: 10), religious economy theory accounts for the structural and communicative forms that an increasing number of religious organisations – evangelical and otherwise (Einstein 2008) – are taking around the world. However, the weakness in the ‘religious economy’ thesis is that it is grounded in classical economic theory, and therefore essentially posits religious changes as a supply and demand problem governed by rational actors (c.f. Young 1997). Although helpful in understanding the way religious landscapes change over time, its weakness is the same as that of classical economic theory: *homo economicus* is not rational. This is where the related concept of the ‘Spiritual Marketplace’ (Roof 1999) is helpful. The spiritual marketplace focuses on the *consumption* of spiritual ‘goods’, rather than the *production* of them that is the basis of rational-choice based theories of religious economy (Gauthier and Martikainen 2013), and is therefore better suited to an analysis of religion in consumer societies. Indeed, when speaking of religious branding, the most useful concept is that of *prosumption* – the ‘Web 2.0’ economic model in which the production and consumption process are indistinguishable from one another (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010; Toffler 1980).³³

Transnational New Paradigm churches are similar to secular global brands in that they communicate ‘glocally’, harnessing both ‘global’ and ‘local’ discourses and

publishing firms, radio stations, and record labels that promote Christian values), and listened to and purchased by a primarily self-identified Christian audience. In many cases, ‘Christian’ is used as a descriptive adjective to refer to specific genres of this music, such as Christian rock or Christian metal, that fall into the broad class of Christian popular music. Other industrial terms for this music that may be used outside of the US include ‘inspirational’ and ‘gospel’.... Within the category of Christian popular music thus defined, several distinct subcategories based on musical genre, industrial context, or function have emerged, including Jesus Music, Contemporary Christian Music (CCM), Praise & Worship music, and Christian rock.’ Importantly, what defines the genres incorporated under the CPM rubric is intention. For example, some music may be written to facilitate congregational singing, while other music may be written for devotional listening. Furthermore, as Ingalls et al. note, although they may be created with specific intentions, CPM songs often slip between categories as a result of their commodity status. Because the mechanisms of production and distribution are often the same for different categories of CPM music, and also because commercial profitability and popularity often go hand in hand, CPM is often ground zero for discourses over intention that characterized the ‘Worship Wars’. See Howard and Streck 1999; Mall 2012; Nekola 2009.

³³ For an account of prosumption at popular music festivals, see Carah (2010).

images in dialectic processes (Wagner 2013). Like most glocal phenomena, the ‘global’ organisational forms and marketing/evangelising techniques of evangelical Christianity are usually posited as ‘American’ – traceable to what Finke and Stark (2005) describe as ‘The Churching of America’. In Finke and Stark’s account, the separation of church and state inscribed in the U.S. Constitution opened a religious free market in which religious organisations competed for adherents. To gain and retain these adherents, the organisations addressed participants’ wants and needs in ways that were broadly appealing and easily understandable. This stands in contrast to state-sponsored religious organisations in Europe, which enjoyed ‘religious monopolies’.³⁴ These organizations did not need to address their participants’ needs, which led to a stagnation not only in religious participation, but also in diversity and, importantly, actual *belief* (Finke and Stark 2005: 8-12; see also Stark and Finke 2000: 218-258).³⁵

The expansion and diversification of religious organisations in the New World was characterised by successive waves of ‘aggressive churches committed to vivid otherworldliness’ (Finke and Stark 2005: 1). For example, while initially the dominant religions in the colonies were mainline denominations such as the Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Episcopalians, by the 1850s they had largely been supplanted by the more evangelically-minded Methodists. The Methodists were in turn challenged and gradually supplanted by a newer strain of evangelical Christians, the Baptists. The key to these movements’ successes was their preachers, who made ‘careful use of vernacular imagery, metaphors, and stories that applied to the everyday life of their audience’ (Finke and Stark 2005: 86).³⁶ Importantly, the Methodists and Baptists (and later on some Presbyterians) ‘adopted a belief system that justified both intense emotion and religious ecstasy’

³⁴ While there has long been a diverse range of other religions/sects in such countries that were not supported by the state, the lack of a free market meant that they were consigned to the ‘fringe’. Only in a free market could the ‘fringe’ have access to, and thus become, ‘mainstream’.

³⁵ While the religious market functioned differently in Britain, evangelical faiths such as the Methodists and Quakers were far from stagnant in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Indeed, the Quakers might be seen as the first great branders. For example, devout Quakers the Cadburys created the village and community of Bourneville, Birmingham, which reflected a kind of utopia based on their brand values (Dawson 2009).

³⁶ Finke and Stark go on to note that: ‘It is not only content that is involved here, but the style of delivery – Marshall McLuhan might have suggested that in some ways the minister was the message’ (Finke and Stark 2005: 86).

(Nekola 2009: 91), which was seen as proof of salvation. In contrast to the ‘intellectual’ approach favoured by mainline religions, these new upstarts privileged *experience*.

Starke and Finke attribute the early successes of the Methodists and Baptists in part to their informal power structure: for both groups, there was little or no separation between clergy and laity, nor was there a codified system in which clergy were educated. Thus, the history of Protestantism in the United States has been marked by a succession of famous entrepreneurial preachers who were eager users of media and clever marketers. These include George Whitefield and Charles Finney in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the preacher/musician teams of Billy Sunday and Homer Rodeheaver and Dwight Moody and Ira Sankey in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the (multi)media star Sister Aimee McPhearson in the 1930s and 1940s, Billy Graham in the mid- to late-twentieth century, and the current crop of branded preachers like Joel Osteen and T. D. Jakes, who reach millions of faithful across the world and are nothing less than fully-fledged media conglomerates. Through these preachers, a picture of the co-evolution of religious structure and forms of expression, media and marketing can be constructed.

The first great revivalist in the United States was George Whitefield (December 27, 1714 – September 30, 1770). According to Frank Lambert’s study of colonial revivals, ‘what was new about Whitefield was the skill as an entrepreneur, and impresario, that made him a full-fledged forerunner of evangelists like Charles Grandison Finney and Billy Graham’ (Lambert 1999: 813, in Finke and Stark 2005: 88). Finke and Stark note that Whitefield:

...was a master of advance publicity who sent out a constant stream of press releases, extolling the success of his revivals elsewhere, to the cities he intended to visit. These advance campaigns often began two years ahead of time. In addition, Whitefield had thousands of copies of his sermons printed and distributed to stir up interest. He even ran newspaper advertisements announcing his impending arrival. (Finke and Stark 88-89)

Whitefield’s media campaigns were not only effective, but also profitable, so much so that none other than Benjamin Franklin became Whitefield’s publisher.

Franklin evidently knew a good thing when he saw it, as ‘sales of the Great Itinerant’s journals and sermons soon amounted to a very large proportion of Franklin’s gross receipts’ (Finke and Stark 2005: 89).

Whitefield and Franklin were pragmatists, and Charles Grandison Finney (August 29, 1792 – August 16, 1875), known as the ‘Father of modern revivalism’ (Hankins 2004: 137), was more pragmatic still. He wrote that ‘[A revival of religion] is not a miracle.... It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means’ (Finney [1835] 1960: 13, in Finke and Stark 2005: 89). For Finney, this meant not only the judicious use of handbills, pamphlets and newspapers, but also practical measures such as the construction of venues with good ventilation, keeping prayers short, and encouraging participants to leave their dogs and young children at home (Finke and Stark 2005: 90). In doing so, Finney created a worship environment free of distractions, an idea that is central to the design of most purpose-built New Paradigm churches today. Like today’s most successful evangelical pastors, Finney was not afraid of the new. Indeed, he wrote that: ‘The object of our measures is to gain attention, and you *must have* something new’ (Finney [1835] 1960: 181, in Finke and Stark 2005: 90, original emphasis).

‘Something new’ included new music. Congregational singing at the camp meeting, a staple of nineteenth century revivals, was often characterised by new choruses or refrains added to existing hymns by Watts and Wesley (Nekola 2009: 93). As Nekola points out, these songs were easy to learn and remember and had cross-generational appeal because their subject matter eschewed theistic content in favour of a ‘pietistic, emotional, and subjective experience’ (ibid.). Significantly, Finney’s collaborator, Thomas Hastings (15 October 1784 – 15 May 1872), believed music had the power to channel these emotions and thus influence the moral character of its listeners. He believed that by appealing to worshippers’ aesthetic tastes, one could engage them in the act of worship and through this inspire ‘the appropriate mix of devotion and piety’ (ibid.: 100).

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a new generation of celebrity preachers who took advantage of the advances in technology and

communications to spread the gospel. These star preachers were self-reliant, building their own venues and even starting their own publishing houses in order to disseminate materials. Two preacher-musician partnerships that were particularly adept at this were Dwight Moody (February 5, 1837 – December 22, 1899) and composer Ira Sankey (August 28, 1840 – August 13, 1908); and later Billy Sunday (November 19, 1862 – November 6, 1935) and his musical collaborator Homer Rodeheaver (October 4, 1880 – December 18, 1955). Dwight Moody, for example, was not only a famous preacher but also a skilled businessman. He recognised that evangelism took many forms, and to this end he used his fortune to found not only what is today known as the Moody Church, but also the Moody Bible Institute and Moody Publishers, all of which are still thriving. Similarly, Nekola (2009) notes that both Billy Sunday's grand Tabernacle in New York City and his collaboration with Homer Rodeheaver were emblematic of an attempt to control both the physical and emotional atmosphere of his revival meetings (Nekola 2009: 334; footnote 18). As for Rodeheaver himself, he started a successful music publishing house, and later his own record label, Rainbow Records – the first to be devoted exclusively to publishing gospel music. This presages by almost half a century the beginnings of CPM, when record companies devoted exclusively to Christian music, such as Vineyard and Maranatha!, were established.³⁷ By consolidating the means of production and dissemination 'in house', Moody and Sunday were able to control their messages across a variety of platforms.

The twentieth century's evangelical upstarts, the Pentecostals, made full use of mass media from the very beginnings of the movement. For example, the Azusa Street Revival's publication *The Apostolic Faith* had a peak circulation of 40,000 in 1907 and was distributed around the world (McGee 1999). The Pentecostals also used popular music such as the brass instrumentation of the Salvation Army bands (Eskridge 1998). This tradition, infused with the pragmatism and media savvy of previous generations, was embodied in Sister Aimee Semple McPherson (October 9, 1890 – September 27, 1944), who, according to Harvey Cox, 'was a

³⁷ Like Hillsong Music, both Vineyard and Maranatha! began as in-house publishing operations. Vineyard began as Mercy Records at Vineyard Church in 1985 and Maranatha! produced its first records at Calvary Chapel in 1971.

genuine celebrity, one of the best-known women in America' (Cox 1995: 124). As 'the first of... a series of full-fledged Pentecostal media stars' (ibid.: 127), McPherson built her own church, the Angelus Temple, in Echo Park, Los Angeles in 1923. With floors 'softened by red carpets', the temple seated 5,300 and accommodated two large choirs and a full orchestra. Despite its size, 'visitors often lined up for hours to get seats for services' (ibid.: 123).

Cox's description of 'Sister Aimee' aptly describes the mediated Christian celebrity:

Sister Aimee was a talented thespian as well as a legendarily eloquent preacher.... With professional lighting, imaginative costuming, and entertaining scripts typed out by the Sister herself, she had attracted hundreds of thousands of people to the Temple with production values that rivalled Florenz Ziegfeld. (Cox 1995: 124)

In doing so:

Aimee Semple McPherson was the principal pioneer in what has become one of the most characteristic – and most problematical – qualities of Pentecostalism, its uncanny ability to utilize the prevailing popular culture for its own message, while at the same time raising questions about that culture.... in this lover's quarrel with Tin Pan Alley. (ibid.: 128)

This 'lover's quarrel' with popular culture – and especially popular music – came to a head when the 'Worship Wars' broke out in the 1960s,³⁸ but Billy Graham (b. November 7, 1918), was appealing to youth through popular music decades earlier (Eskridge 1998). Graham's use of popular music to engage his audience was nothing new. What was new, though, was that while his predecessors thought of the music as a tool of transcendence and the preacher as the evangelical voice, Graham and later the Jesus Movement viewed music increasingly as a way to spread the message of Christ separately from the transcendent experience. In other words, they saw music as a way into the hearts and minds of unbelievers (Nekola 2009: 335). This is the philosophy behind the 'Seeker Church' strategy, which sees 'churching' as a journey on which the seeker must be invited to take his or her first tentative steps through reassuring, familiar means such as music (Sargeant 2000). So while the use of popular music coalesced with the increasing

³⁸ For an excellent history of the 'Worship Wars' that shaped evangelical worship during the second half of the twentieth century, see Nekola (2009).

influence of Pentecostal-style charismatic worship and the pursuit of transcendence for the faithful, it was simultaneously increasingly divorced from transcendence as a way to reach the ‘unchurched’ (Nekola 2009: 335-336). In other words, the same music was used differently according to market segment; it was initially a means of ‘attracting an audience’ in the hope of eventually transforming the seeker into a believer, at which point it was used as a means of worship.

Bill Hybels (b. December 12, 1951), the founder of Chicago’s Willow Creek Church, is often credited with popularising the ‘Seeker Church’ strategy (Sargeant 2000) that sees the ‘unchurched’ as a distinct market segment. Willow Creek Church is one of the first and largest nondenominational network churches in the United States. While not officially a ‘denomination’,³⁹ its network – the Willow Creek Association – provides many of the organisational functions that have traditionally been the purview of denominations. This includes defining a musical liturgy, providing training and resources, and organizing networks for the sharing of information and hiring of staff (Sargeant 2000: 134). As of January 2013, it claimed over 7,000 members in 85 countries around the world.⁴⁰

Hybels and Willow Creek are just one example of the New Paradigm of church leader and organization that are, in equal parts, media conglomerate and brand.⁴¹ Although this model of church marketing is most strongly associated with evangelical Christianity, it has been adopted by a range of other religious organisations such as the Jewish mystical Kabbalah movement (which counts Madonna as one of its vocal supporters), the Japanese Buddhist organisation Soka Gakkai International, and even Scientology, which has recently engaged in a rebranding effort that includes an advertising campaign on the streets of London. Given the socio-historical context discussed above, it is clear that church growth

³⁹ In the Seeker Church view, a denominational marker may keep a seeker from exploring a new church because, as a mark of identity, it denotes insider/outsider status. Therefore, many of these churches eschew the marker while remaining true to many of the beliefs and practices.

⁴⁰ <<http://www.willowcreek.com/>>; accessed 29 January 2012.

⁴¹ Other U.S. notables include: Rick Warren’s Saddleback Church in Orange County, CA, Joel Osteen’s Lakewood Church in Houston, TX, and T. D. Jakes’ The Potter’s House in Dallas, TX (Jakes also runs the for-profit production company TDJ Enterprises). Outside the U.S., Joseph Prince’s New Creation Church in Singapore and Ulf Ekman’s Word Of Life Church in Uppsala, Sweden are prominent international examples of the ‘New Paradigm’ of evangelical Christianity.

and influence is tied to marketing. In this cultural milieu, Hillsong's mix of music and marketing has made it one of the most influential religious brands in the world. The following section presents Hillsong's musical brand and its branding strategy.

Part III - Hillsong Church

Hillsong Church began in 1983 as the Hills Christian Life Centre. Founded by Head Pastors Brian and Bobbie Houston, the initial congregation of 45 met in a rented school hall in the Baulkham Hills district, a suburb of Sydney, Australia. Today, around 30,000 worshippers a week attend services at its purpose-built 3,500-seat flagship church (which is located in Baulkham Hills) and eight other campuses across Australia's Eastern seaboard (Aghajanian, email exchange with author, 5 September 2013). Furthermore, an estimated 40,000 attend Hillsong-branded churches in major cities such as London, Kiev, Cape Town, Stockholm, Paris, Moscow, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Barcelona and New York City (Carswell 2013). Hillsong's annual conference draws in excess of 28,000 people, while its European counterpart, the Hillsong Europe conference, attracts about 16,000 people annually. The church's beliefs and practices are rooted in Pentecostalism (Brian Houston's father, Frank Houston, was a Pentecostal minister and Brian is a former head of Assemblies of God in Australia, which he helped to re-brand as Australian Christian Churches, or ACC), but Hillsong's website does not align the church with a specific tradition (McIntyre 2007: 176). This is standard practice for most 'seeker' churches (Sergeant 2000). In this respect, then, Hillsong Church is better classified under a broad 'evangelical Christian' and 'New Paradigm' category.

Hillsong is a striking example of the confluence of sophisticated marketing techniques and popular music that has characterized the New Paradigm movement (c.f. Sergeant 2000). Since 1992, it has produced over 45 albums, sold over 14 million albums worldwide, and amassed over 30 gold and platinum awards. These albums are separated into product streams meant for specific target audiences. For example, Hillsong Kids features music produced for children and Hillsong Chapel

offers acoustic arrangements of Hillsong's songs for those who seek a 'quieter' worship experience than that afforded by the electric guitar, keyboard, and drums-driven originals. Hillsong's global popularity, though, stems primarily from its two main product streams, Hillsong United and Hillsong LIVE. Hillsong United is the name of the band that grew out of the Australian church's youth program. Led by the Houstons' son Joel, Hillsong United regularly tours the world and is arguably the most prominent face of the church. In contrast, Hillsong LIVE albums are promoted as the expression of Hillsong's 'global' network; while relying heavily upon the Australian church's creative team, Hillsong LIVE albums incorporate singers and songwriters from Hillsong churches around the world. Despite their separate marketing programmes, there is a good deal of crossover of artists and songs between United and LIVE (Riches 2010; Riches and Wagner 2012), which helps to promote an overall Hillsong musical identity. While Hillsong's global membership is relatively small compared to the megachurches that claim up to six-digit attendances, its worship songs have had an outsized influence on both the Australian and global Christian sonic (and theological) landscapes (Evans 2006: 87-109). Every Sunday, its songs are heard and sung in thousands of evangelical and non-evangelical churches around the world.⁴²

Like most megachurches, Hillsong is structured and operates like a secular business. According to its website, its governance policies are 'based on the Australian Stock Exchange (ASX) Principles of Good Corporate Governance and Best Practice Recommendations, together with adherence to foundational Biblical values'.⁴³ Senior Pastor Brian Houston is the head of its board of directors, which includes members with considerable business acumen, such as General Manager George Aghajanian, who has a background in senior management for Australian and international companies, and Nabi Saleh, CEO of Gloria Jean's Coffees. Unlike secular for-profit companies, though, Hillsong Church is a registered non-profit organization, so it is income tax-exempt. Additionally, it is able to lower operating costs because a significant amount of its labour is provided by volunteers.

⁴² <<http://www.ccli.com/licenseholder/Top25Lists.aspx>>; accessed 23 January 2013.

⁴³ *Corporate Governance*. <<http://myhillsong.com/corporate-governance>>; accessed 07 August 2013.

A general picture of the church's finances can be constructed from its annual report.⁴⁴ Income is generated from donations (its members are encouraged to tithe),⁴⁵ ticketed events such as conferences, and numerous products, including CDs, DVDs, MP3s and books. Its 2010 Annual Report listed earnings of AUS\$64 million, with total assets of \$28.7m and income from conferences of \$6.7m.⁴⁶

Hillsong's music is produced by its own publishing arm, Hillsong Music Australia (HMA), and distributed by Capital CMG in North and South America, and Kingsway Music in Europe and the UK. It can be purchased at church events like weekly services and conferences, through the Hillsong Music website, or via music download sites such as Amazon.com or iTunes. In addition to income generated from album sales, the church also receives royalties paid by other churches that use its songs in services or other events. These undisclosed licensing fees, collected in part through the Christian Copyright Licencing International (CCLI) organization, accounted for between 35 and 45 per cent of all its total musical royalties in 2011 (McKenny 2011). Hillsong's intellectual property extends well beyond its music: in the countries in which it operates, it has trademarks that cover everything from its logo to its services.⁴⁷

Hillsong's mission and message is one of global transformation: it seeks to 'reach and influence the world by building a large Christ-centred, Bible-based church, changing mindsets and empowering people to lead and impact in every sphere of life'.⁴⁸ It does this by building a globally networked community of local churches, and by promoting its brand tagline, 'Welcome Home', which neatly sums up its

⁴⁴ Hillsong's audited financial statements are lodged annually with the Australian Securities and Investment Commission. In 2013, the Australian Government established the new Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission, where future financials will be lodged (Aghajanian; email exchange with author, 5 August 2013).

⁴⁵ Tithing is the practice of giving the first tenth of one's income to the Church. While the practice is not uncontroversial (usually grounded in debates over whether or not it is 'biblical'), it is widely encouraged in New Paradigm churches and often provides them with a significant revenue stream (Teichner 2009)

⁴⁶ Available online at: <<http://mumbrella.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Hillsong-Annual-Report-2010.pdf>>; accessed 6 September 2013.

⁴⁷ This includes trademarks for audiovisual, printed material, clothing, Christian conferences, church and religious services. In Australia, Hillsong holds additional trademarks for microfinance activities, business development training, medical and counselling services, and social welfare services.

⁴⁸ *Our Vision*. <<http://myhillsong.com/vision>>; accessed 28 December 2012.

glocalization strategy. Because Hillsong strategically locates churches in major international cities around the world, its trans-national congregation is culturally and linguistically diverse. This diversity is apparent at some of its larger venues, such as Hillsong London, which serves around 8,000 worshippers weekly, translating its services into seven languages.

Hillsong as a Brand

As noted above, Hillsong is only one of the growing numbers of churches that engage in marketing. The act of evangelising is itself a form of marketing communications, and evangelicals have long travelled far and wide to spread the word. From this view, the mediated rise of the New Paradigm church is a contemporary manifestation of age-old proselytising practices (Coleman 2000: 4). Richard Reising is the president of Artistry Labs, a consulting firm that works with churches to ‘strategically present each client’s unique message’.⁴⁹ According to Reising, although advertising the gospel is nothing new,⁵⁰ referring to it specifically as ‘advertising’ or ‘marketing’ has until recently been avoided:

[T]en years ago it [branding] was met with extreme scepticism. The whole concept of promoting church was taboo. But there has been a growing acceptance over time. Now people realize what it means and what it doesn’t mean. They see it as part of going out into the world to preach, promote and publish the Gospel. (Richard Reising; in Colyer 2005, in Einstein 2008: 61)

The increase in Christian-oriented branding firms since around the turn of the millennium testifies to the acceptance of branding as the ‘new paradigm’. Not only is Hillsong not the first or only church to brand itself, it is also not the first or only church to produce its own music. This has been done since the 1960s, and the Vineyard and Maranatha! labels mentioned in the previous section are probably the best-known examples of this. Additionally, churches like Willow Creek and Saddleback in the U.S., and Planetshakers in Australia, release globally distributed albums every year. Hillsong is unique, though, in that its music and identity are inseparable. Indeed, Hillsong is so named *because* of its music.

⁴⁹ *Our Work*. <<http://www.artistrylabs.com/our-work>>; accessed 23 January 2013.

⁵⁰ The Rev. Charles Stelzle, for example, published *Principles of Successful Church Advertising* in 1908 (Twitchell 2007: 141).

Although Hillsong church has operated continuously since 1983, it was not until 2001 that it officially changed its name from Hills Christian Life Centre to Hillsong Church. Until that time, the ‘Hillsongs’ label was reserved for its musical product. As the ‘Hillsongs’ music became increasingly well known, though, its origins and intent – a congregational expression of worship from Hills Christian Life Centre – became lost. Many listeners thought that ‘Hillsongs’ was just a band. Thus, the decision was made to ‘brand’ the church as the artist – fusing the identity of the organization with the music. According to Brian Houston:

Hillsong was originally the name of our music and the church was called Hills Christian Life Centre, but people used to talk about ‘that Hillsong Church’ and the name Hillsong actually became famous, if you like, around the world. So in the end, we thought, that's what we're known as, so we became Hillsong Church. (Jones 2005)

Music is featured in almost all of the church’s communications. For example, it is present in both the foreground and background of promotional videos and is also played in the lobbies of its churches. Visually, images of its musicians and of congregation members in worship adorn many of the banners, ads and magazines that are distributed. Perhaps most importantly, Hillsong’s music is a primary component in most aspects of the ‘Hillsong experience’ such as services and conferences. While Hillsong’s use of music is not necessarily different from that of the many evangelical churches that emphasise the experiential aspects of worship, its almost exclusive use of its own music reveals the extent to which marketing is interwoven with the life of the church, and to some extent drives it. This in turn speaks to the concomitancy of branding and experience that is the focus of this thesis. An example of this can be seen in the ‘Scarlet Thread’, the leitmotif of Hillsong’s music, preaching and marketing in 2012. To understand the significance of marketing to the overall functioning of the church and the way it delivers its message, it is necessary to examine the production cycle that governs a year in the ‘life of the church’ through the lens of branding.

The Scarlet Thread: Branding as Liturgy

Branding organises disparate media (and their associated messages) into a meaningful gestalt. Each interaction with something or someone associated with the brand – from videos, songs and printed material, to an organisation’s representatives, to word of mouth and things written and said about the organisation ‘in the media’ – contributes to an understanding of its message. While the fundamentals of Hillsong’s message have remained consistent over the years, as the church has grown and its needs, participants and environment have changed, the way it has delivered that message has evolved. This evolution includes not only changes in the music, but also the metaphorical and visual imagery associated with it (Riches and Wagner 2012). The following discussion analyses how this marketing package is disseminated over the course of a year, and how the marketing and roll-out of its musical offerings, and important events such as conferences, to some degree dictate what music is used and when. In other words, branding concerns influence Hillsong’s liturgy and liturgical calendar.

A year in Hillsong’s liturgical calendar begins with ‘Vision Sunday’, which is generally the first Sunday in February. As the name suggests, Vision Sunday is the day that Brian Houston’s vision for the coming year is shared with Hillsong’s global congregation. This is done via a video presentation that is shown in every service at every Hillsong church around the world. Although the style of the video varies from year to year, it always introduces the central message and the metaphorical and visual materials that the church will use to communicate during the particular year for which the video has been produced. For many participants, this is a highly spiritual service in which a prophetic unction is brought for the year (Riches, personal communication; 1 July 2013).

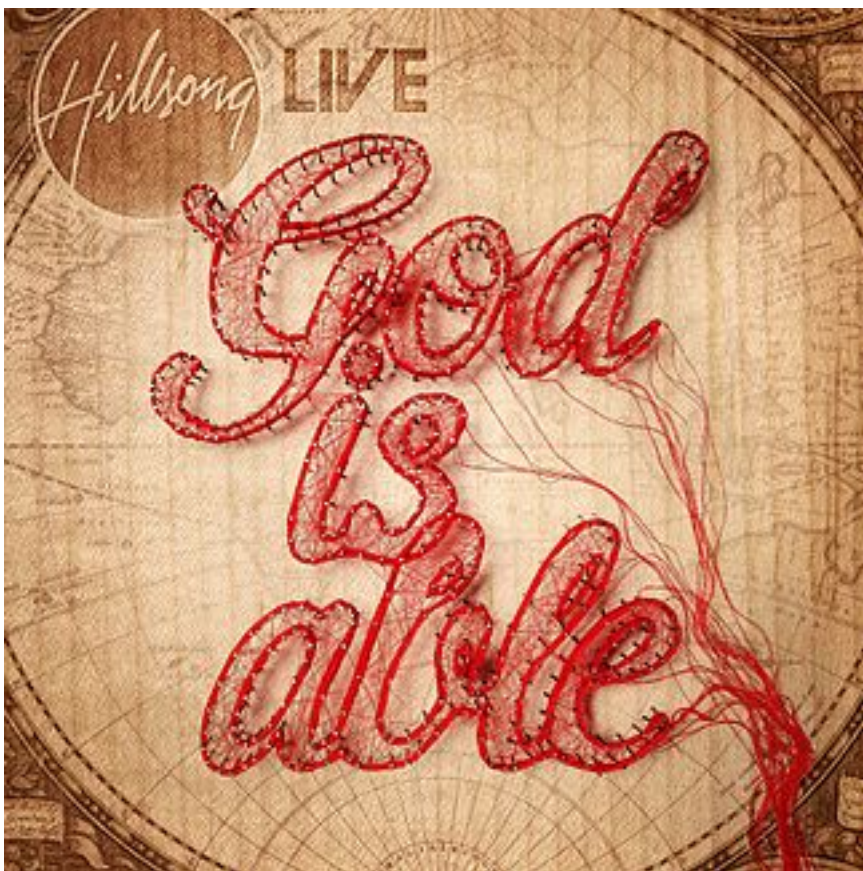
The 2012 Vision Sunday video was entitled ‘The Scarlet Thread’.⁵¹ Shot through an Instagram-like filter, its central image was a red thread that symbolized Jesus Christ as the cord that holds together the tapestry of humanity – the red colour symbolising His blood. Shot in short ‘chapters’, the video intersperses dramatic

⁵¹ Video available at: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VnG1si3xLto>>; accessed 5 January 2012.

scenes of a tapestry being hand-woven on a loom in Jerusalem (the way it is shot leaves the date ambiguous – it could be in the present or two thousand years ago) punctuated with the testimonies of three congregation members (two from Australia and one from a Londoner now at the New York church).

The Scarlet Thread was appeared throughout 2012, in communications such as adverts, in-service videos, pastoral messages, and most spectacularly at Hillsong's conferences. For example, it both figuratively and literally took centre stage at Hillsong's European conference, where a giant loom was erected. It was also the central trope on the cover of the 2012 Hillsong LIVE release, *God Is Able*.

Figure 1.1: The cover of *God Is Able*



Here we see integrated marketing at work. Spread across videos, advertisements, album covers and in preaching throughout the year, the Scarlet Thread ties

together Hillsong’s media in a branded tapestry that draws meaning from (and provides continuity to) its communications.

One important thread in Hillsong’s brand tapestry is its yearly calendar, which is marked by three important kinds of event: conferences, holidays, and album releases. Tanya Riches shows in her analysis of the role of Hillsong’s yearly ‘product rollout’ calendar that the functioning of the church and its branding are directly linked to a production schedule:⁵²

Table 1.1: Hillsong’s yearly production and events calendar

Month	Event	Event
January		
February	Vision Sunday	Hillsong Youth Camps
March	‘Colour Your World’ Women’s conference; Hillsong <i>LIVE</i> Recording	Hillsong United Album Release (option 2)
April	Easter special	
May		Hillsong United Tour
June	Pentecost Celebration (Hillsong London)	
July	Hillsong Conference; Hillsong <i>LIVE</i> Album Release; Hillsong Europe Conference	Hillsong JAM Conference; Hillsong United Album Recording (option 1)
August		
September	Hillsong <i>LIVE</i> Tour	
October	Hillsong USA Conference	Encounterfest Youth Conference; Hillsong United Album Release (option 1); Hillsong United Album Recording (option 2)
November	Men’s Conference	
December	Christmas Production	

As the above chart shows, conferences, which are an important part of Hillsong’s global reach, are synchronised with album releases. Hillsong’s production

⁵² The above table (Figure 1) is based on Table 19 ‘HB and UB Annual Calendar and Marketing Rollout’ (Riches 2010: 146). I have supplemented and updated it (as of December 2012). Some dates change from year to year as it is adapted to new products, the expanding Hillsong Network of churches and local constraints. For example, although Hillsong’s European conference is usually held in London in July, the 2012 conference was held in October in two locations, Den Haag and Stockholm, because of the Olympics. 2013 featured October conferences in the United States in New York and Los Angeles.

calendar can also be thought of as its ‘liturgical calendar’. Hillsong celebrates only a few of the traditional Christian high holidays (Easter and Christmas), and does so with special theatrical productions. Of at least equal importance to these are its own branded events, which are more heavily promoted.⁵³ Taken in the context of the New Paradigm’s quasi-denominational evangelical Christianity, in which independent church networks are supplanting traditional denominations (Sergeant 2000), this is not surprising.⁵⁴

Historically, the form and content (especially musical) of Christian church services have been dictated by a liturgical calendar. At Hillsong churches, the musical content of services is largely dictated by recording concerns. Throughout the year, songs are introduced in the run-up to July’s Hillsong conference, when the year’s new LIVE album is released. For the rest of the year and on until the next, these and new Hillsong United songs are the main repertoire sung in worship services.⁵⁵ According to my interviews, as well as my own observations, there is an overall integration of the year’s message, the weekly preaching and the songs played in services. This is not to say that different messages are not delivered at different churches throughout the year – only that there is a ‘meta-message’ that derives from Vision Sunday. The Vision Sunday themes are integrated into the songs sung in church, although not always explicitly or consciously. This was expressed to me by a number of my conversation partners, including Hillsong’s general manager George Aghajanian:

The songwriters don’t necessarily take the Vision Sunday elements and make them the focal point for the albums. I think the albums are more of an

⁵³ This observation should be nuanced by noting that the holiday specials are more ‘local’ affairs while the conferences are intended to be more globally-focused. Therefore, it is difficult to assign more ‘importance’ to one or the other in the context of Hillsong’s branding. However, this bolsters my contention that traditional holidays and the events most important to Hillsong’s global branding can both be considered ‘high holidays’ in its liturgical calendar.

⁵⁴ Although Hillsong is, to all intents and purposes, ‘non-denominational’ (albeit with a Pentecostal background and leanings), it can also be thought of as a quasi-denomination. Beyond its music, which has not only contributed a number of staples to the developing new Christian musical canon (Hartje-Döll 2013) and also influenced its stylistic development, Hillsong carries out a number of other functions that were formerly the purview of mainline denominations. For example, Hillsong provides training for pastors at its own Hillsong college in Australia, through workshops at its conferences, and also through educational materials which can be purchased on its website.

⁵⁵ Some older ‘favourites’ will from time to time be pulled out, but my observations have been that the repertoire of services largely follows the cycle detailed above.

organic process. Now, at times they'll take the theme of Vision Sunday... like the theme of the Scarlet Thread... and some of those songs may be reflective of that, but that's not the prerequisite for [inclusion on the album]. (Interview with author, 28 September 2011)

Jorim, a worship leader at Hillsong London, echoed this:

I don't purposely sit down and go, 'Right, I need to write a song about healing or about such and such'. I kind of start an idea in the moment. [However] at church here, the songs are for backing up the preach, as opposed to having separate preach and songs. The song should actually back up what [Hillsong Pastor] Gary [Clark] is preaching. (Interview with author, 22 April 2011)

Although songs may not always be written with the express purpose of dovetailing with Vision Sunday, I observed a correlation between the 2011 release of the Hillsong LIVE album *A Beautiful Exchange* (the title of the album and the title track itself are references to Jesus' death on the cross and the act and meaning of communion services) and an emphasis at Hillsong London on these topics in the preaching and also in connect groups and team meetings, where communion was, for a time, instituted.⁵⁶ When I asked Jorim about this, he responded that:

The pastors definitely decide. Like Peter or Gary and then maybe Brian. I'm not sure they're thinking behind preaching, but yeah, *A Beautiful Exchange* that's a perfect example of how a song comes second to preach at Hillsong, and how it literally backs up whatever is being said at the pulpit. I think some of the places that we go to, sometimes it can be a bit misread or misunderstood that we're a band and we're very much not in that sense. Just to reiterate that songs come second to whatever is being preached. Every Sunday, the preparation for a Sunday is literally 'How will this song work in the grand structure of a Sunday after who's preaching and what they're talking about'. So it's very much not left until the last minute. (Interview with author, 22 April 2011)

Here, Jorim is talking about song selection rather than songwriting. At least at Hillsong London, the worship leaders choose songs from the repertoire that are

⁵⁶ Because of factors such as the roughly 2,000 participants in each service, the design of the Dominion Theatre and the need to put on four services every Sunday, it would be impractical if not impossible to offer weekly communion at Hillsong London. Thus, during 2011, communion was practised in team meetings before services and also encouraged at weekly private connect group meetings around London. As of 2012 when my fieldwork had finished, this had subsided at team meetings, although it continued in the connect group I attended. Several participants within the church have told me that the lack of consistency I observed had to do with the difficulties of 'doing church' in a rented space like the Dominion. The point here, though, is that before *A Beautiful Exchange* came out, I had not observed or participated in any communion services, nor had it been emphasised in the preaching. When the album was released, *A Beautiful Exchange* became thematic material – both musically and as an idea – in services for the next year.

pertinent to the pastor's message that week.⁵⁷ Whether the song precedes the preach or vice versa, it is clear that both are integrated in the gestalt message that Hillsong conveys. Chapter four details the process in which songs travel from inspiration to release on a Hillsong album. This includes a number of 'quality control' steps that ensure they are synergetic with Hillsong's mission, values and theology. Here, though, it is enough to say that while songs do not necessarily derive directly from a single pre-planned talking point or theme,⁵⁸ the music and message are nevertheless intimately associated. Furthermore, because the message is also contained in the visual and discursive tropes that are introduced each year, the product releases and their associated events are important temporal markers that influence the rituals that communicate and (re)affirm the church's purpose and values. Hillsong's production schedule can thus be understood as – along with album releases and traditional holidays such as Christmas and Easter – constituting Hillsong's branded liturgical calendar.

Discussion⁵⁹

The previous section presented Hillsong as a brand, a confluence of the historical, individual and organizational effects (Usunier and Stolz 2014) of a 'religious market'. Certainly, Hillsong can be spoken of using the language of branding: for example, it has a brand name, brand personality, brand equity, brand positioning, brand image and brand promise. Even Hillsong's founder, Brian Houston, has recently started using the term 'brand' (with ambivalence) when referring to his church.⁶⁰ However, marketing language is territorially ambitious: as was seen in Part II above, today the notions of a brand and branding have been expanded to

⁵⁷ This is interesting because Hillsong London often welcomes guest pastors to preach. These pastors bring their own messages. However, it should also be noted that these pastors are drawn from a transnational – but still fairly small – circuit of preachers and churches that preach variations on the same theme. Very often, the guest preacher will begin by telling the congregation what good friends he or she is with Gary and Cathy, and how he or she had a great time hanging out with the Clark family the previous evening. Thus, the message never strays from the values that are promoted by the hosts.

⁵⁸ Although they may do, as many of Hillsong's main songwriters are also part of Hillsong's inner circle, and are intimately familiar with the church's long-term plans. See Chapters two and four.

⁵⁹ Many thanks to Liz Moor and Byron Dueck for their thorough readings of this these and helpful comments, which form the basis for this section.

⁶⁰ 'Hillsong has got a credibility that I want to look after. I don't like using a marketing term, but if you did use a marketing term it is "strong brand"' (Carswell 2013)

the point where they can be applied to almost any phenomenon. As David Voas puts it:

... there is little difficulty in applying the terminology of brands to religion. The question is whether it is wise or illuminating to do so. How far are we willing to allow the empire of markets to extend? And are we speaking in metaphors, or is it really the case that religious belief and practice are most usefully analysed with the tools of microeconomics? (Voas 2014, xviii)

The language of branding helps identify some of the tools and strategies used by Hillsong, but perhaps not all. Furthermore, branding language may not be the most helpful language to use when describing the intent of Hillsong's actions. This is to say that, because branding is a *range* of tools and strategies, it is difficult to know when the marketing ends and something else begins. For example, Hillsong collects royalties from its music, and its sales (and thus brand equity) are undoubtedly boosted by the fact that people draw positive associations with its brand name (see chapter three). However, many of Hillsong's musicians, administrators and participants would argue that the economic benefits of branding are a secondary effect of a primary goal (to spread the Gospel); besides which, the money is reinvested into growing the church, which helps achieve this. This can be seen in the church's approach to copyright. While, as noted above, Hillsong's name, music and activities are all trademarked, as far as I am aware it has not actively enforced its intellectual property rights. For example, its music is freely shared on YouTube, most notably as the backing tracks to fan-produced 'worship videos' that often receive several times more views than its official channels (Ingalls forthcoming). By allowing its music to be used in this manner, Hillsong bolsters its claim that its music is first and foremost a resource for worship rather than a source of income (see chapter 2). Simultaneously, though, non-enforcement can be seen as a strategy of music economics in the digital era, in which music is given away in the hope of generating name recognition that drives returns in other areas.

In this thesis, the use of marketing language is to be taken literally when describing some of the tools and strategies regarding matters like distribution mechanisms, but at other times it should be understood as a strong metaphor that points to Hillsong's larger socio-historical cultural milieu. The latter usage can be

found in the final chapters, which explore the normative and governmental effects of branding. This view of branding, held by sociologists such as Arvidsson (2006), Lury (2004), and Moor (2007) is one that I employ because it makes important points vis-à-vis the hegemonic effects of branding (see also Carah 2010). However, one could argue that this view of branding is a ‘market’ perspective on social processes that could equally be explained through other means, such as psychologist Charles Galanter’s systems approach (concluding chapter). In the chapters that follow, then, I use a set of marketing terms that are part of the contemporary cultural and economic conjuncture, in part because they are very active within this conjuncture, but also because they may call into question assumptions about just how far ‘the market’ extends. This is perhaps reflected in the ambivalence that evangelical Christians often feel towards ‘the market’, which is reflected in my collaborator’s own meditations and language use that appear throughout the thesis. Perhaps more importantly, the use of marketing language is meant as a provocation to the ethnomusicological community, whose project is to understand the place of music as a socio-cultural phenomenon. On the one hand, I believe that, in applying the language of ‘the market’ to the things we study, we come closer to understanding how actors in it think, understand and experience everyday life, of which their faiths are an integral part. However, one could also argue that in relying on this language, we further normalize the ethos that we seek to critique (Usunier 2014). Evangelistic faiths have always been litmus tests for the socio-historical milieu within which they exist. In the end, then, the broad application of branding terminology as a way of describing a church like Hillsong (or any organization or social process for that matter) is a way to ‘take the temperature’ of both evangelical Christianity and our own time and self-understandings.

Conclusion

New Paradigm churches are products of a socio-historical cultural milieu in which branding is an integral part of social life. Operating in a religious experience economy, religious brands such as Hillsong may be becoming a new form of denominationalism. If branding functions by appealing to culture – especially to

the ‘ruptures’ in it (Holt 2004) – and is also a resource for shaping world views, then it becomes clear how Hillsong and churches like it have developed.

Hillsong’s form, functioning and expression have been shaped by the social, economic and technological changes that have characterised and driven globalisation. As will be shown in the following chapters, Hillsong is at once a brand, a denomination and a social system. A player in a competitive religious market, its form and actions are driven by a confluence of production needs and vision. This is seen in the way its product roll-out schedule dovetails with its message to create a ‘branded’ liturgical calendar. What results is an integrated brand message.

The next chapter interrogates a specific media object and medium of consumer culture: the celebrity. It does so in relation to the evangelical Christian discourse of the ‘sacred’ and the ‘secular’ that informs attitudes and ways of being ‘in the world’. In other words, it defines how Hillsong’s participants see themselves and their actions in relation to humanity as a whole, the first level of ‘community’ that this thesis explores. Branding provides continuity to the experience of the world for participants who live the contradictions inherent in everyday life, providing the discursive material with which they justify their attitudes and actions as being ‘in but not of the world’.

Chapter 2

In – But Not Of – The (Christian) Culture Industry

Introduction

An effective brand communicates an organisation's purpose and values to its participants, and does so by demonstrating fidelity to and being literate in the idiosyncratic cultural codes of its target market(s) (Holt 2004: 65). As an evangelical organisation, Hillsong has multiple 'target markets'. For example, it seeks the 'unchurched', but also ministers to its participants. While there are myriad differences between and among the individuals that constitute these markets, what unites them is that they are all, to some degree, participants in 'electronic culture' (Sample 1998) whose worldviews are shaped by and embodied through the use of electronic mass media (Coleman 2000; McLuhan [1964] 2001). They speak a language that draws from a variety of 'global' and 'local', 'sacred' and 'secular' sources, in turn both producing and reproducing understandings of what it means to be, among other things, 'Christian'. Brands are part of the language of mass-mediated societies (Lash and Lury 2007), so it should be no surprise that branding is a way through which Hillsong and its participants communicate their purpose(s) and values among themselves and to others.

As noted in chapter one, the integration of brands and branding into the social fabric of consumer culture affords them an influential role in the ordering of culture and the on-going production of the culture industry (Arvidsson 2006; Lash and Lury 2007; Lury 2004; Moor 2007). Like capitalism itself, the culture industry is a paradoxical creature, one that flattens and homogenises while simultaneously feeding on and encouraging diversity. In late capitalism (Jameson 1992), goods and services are marketed to ever-smaller 'lifestyle' groups. This includes groups that aspire to a 'Christian' lifestyle sustained through the consumption of 'Christian' goods and services (Einstein 2008; Ingalls 2008; Nekola 2013). The recognition of Christians as a potentially lucrative niche

market has led to the development of a ‘Christian culture industry’ that exists as both a subset of and an alternative to the ‘secular’ culture industry.⁶¹ Christian Popular Music (CPM) is both part of this industry and emblematic of the forces and discourses that shape it, as the commodity status of the music serves as both a driver of its development and a point of contention in evangelical Christian circles.⁶² The products that constitute the Christian culture industry are often distinguishable from their secular counterparts only because they are marketed as ‘Christian’ (Einstein 2008), and the marketing strategies used by the Christian culture industry to reach its audience are as sophisticated as secular marketing strategies (Nekola 2013; Romanowski 2000). Arguably, then, the only difference between the secular and Christian culture industries is the ‘Christian’ label. If this is the case, it follows that Christian brands function in the same manner as their secular counterparts; both are ‘anointed’ with certain ‘sacred’ aspects, but the meanings of Christian brands are associated with specific Christian discourses.

One fixture of both the Christian culture industry and the secular culture industry is the celebrity. Although the Christian celebrity is not a new phenomenon – all of the influential evangelists presented in chapter one could be considered celebrities – it is now an increasingly globalised one. World-famous pastors, worship leaders and Christian bands circulate both physically and virtually in a transnational web of conferences, products and mass media (Coleman 2000; Ingalls 2011). This is true of Hillsong, which boasts a stable of internationally known worship leaders such as Reuben Morgan, Hillsong’s lead Worship Pastor and author of several famous tunes such as ‘Mighty to Save’; Joel Houston, the son of Brian and Bobbie Houston and the leader of Hillsong United; and Darlene Zschech,⁶³ as well as crossover pop stars such as Brook Fraiser and Natasha Bedingfield and Christian Contemporary Music writers such as Jason Ingram. These musician-spokespersons are the ‘faces’ of the church, which relies on them to disseminate

⁶¹ Economics and religion have always gone hand in hand (Moore 1994). For example, religious commodities have been sold at pilgrimage sites for centuries. The point here is that they are now distributed on a much wider scale, sharing the same production, distribution and consumption patterns as their secular counterparts (Einstein 2008; Ingalls et al. 2013)

⁶² See, for example: Beaujon 2006; Howard and Streck 1999; Ingalls 2008, 2011; Ingalls et al. 2013; Nekola 2009.

⁶³ Zschech now pastors her own church on the south coast of Australia. However, she is still strongly associated with Hillsong.

its message and values. However, while harnessing the communicative power of celebrity, Hillsong must also manage the real and imagined dangers of the culture industry that it is part of. This chapter examines how this is done vis-à-vis branding.

This chapter begins with a short discussion of Contemporary Christian Music (CCM), a subset of both CPM and the Christian culture industry that has historically been a locus of struggle over the values that define Protestantism (Nekola 2009).⁶⁴ As a phenomenon of mass-mediated culture, CCM draws on a variety of ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’ languages, images and discourses to communicate identity and values. Although Christians recognise that CCM is inextricable from the economic and cultural influences of the ‘worldly’ society that they are part of, they are often at odds over which elements from ‘secular’ and ‘Christian’ cultures should be drawn upon and which should be avoided. This equivocation is evident in the unease with which many Christians view celebrity pastors and worship leaders. While it is recognised that they are ‘doing God’s work’ on a global scale, the fame and fortune that often accompanies (but is also necessary for) their approach to this work is viewed ambiguously. Celebrities are mediated products, and it can therefore be argued that they are important not for who they are but for what they represent (Ward 2011). However, I submit that, in a branding context, the expectation of authenticity that participants place on their brands make the ‘who’ and the ‘what’ inseparable. People attach meanings to celebrities, transforming those celebrities into icons – cultural shorthand for a variety of (sometimes conflicting) purposes and values. When associated with a brand, celebrities and the organisations they represent become co-branded in the minds of participants, so that the values of the organisation, the celebrity and the participants become inseparable from one another. Following from this, in the second part of this chapter I analyse how Hillsong’s former worship leader Darlene Zschech communicates⁶⁵ authenticity and authentically communicates the

⁶⁴ Hillsong’s musicians consider their music church-based rather than talent- (artist-) based, and therefore distinct from CCM. As noted in the opening chapter, though, the commodity status of the music means there is considerable overlap between the two definitions. They are perhaps only differentiated discursively at the level of intention. Therefore, a discussion of CCM is useful for analysing Hillsong’s music in a branding context.

⁶⁵ As noted in footnote three, Zschech left Hillsong in 2011 to pastor her own Hope Unlimited Church. The question thus becomes whether to use the past or present tense in this analysis. I have

Hillsong brand's purpose and values in word and action – in other words, through lifestyle choices. I then discuss how Hillsong discursively manages her image – and thus the image of its music and its organisation – in order to tell its own story. Hillsong does this by acknowledging the contradictions inherent in the discourse of CCM and then adopting a range of strategies, vis-à-vis the Hillsong brand, to manage those contradictions. In doing so, the brand provides a way for its stakeholders to understand their activities in terms that resonate with their everyday lives. I conclude by noting that brands rely on cultural contradictions to promote their utopian promises (Holt 2004). Participants use brands to harmonise dissonances in their everyday lives. Hillsong's brand promise is one of transformation and transcendence of the 'sacred/secular' divide, affording its stakeholders a means by which they can live both 'in and of' the world.

Part I - The Christ/Culture Conundrum

The question 'What is religion?' is not easily answered. Sociologists have generally posited religious objects and practices as 'set apart' from those of ordinary life. This is especially true of the functionalist theories most notably set forth by Durkheim ([1912] 2001), Weber ([1922] 1993) and Geertz (1973). One of the most influential articulations of this line of thinking was Emile Durkheim's notion of the 'sacred' and 'profane' (Durkheim [1912] 2001: 36-40). Durkheim argued that religion is not constituted by belief in gods or spirits, but instead in a distinction between things imbued with otherworldly meaning versus things of the world. Religions 'presuppose a classification of things, real and ideal, of which men think, into two classes or opposed groups, generally designated by... the words profane and sacred' (ibid.: 36).

decided to use the present tense because, as will be shown, she is such an integral part of Hillsong's brand evolution that she continues to exert an influence on it. Furthermore, as this chapter argues, the 'Darlene' that is co-branded with Hillsong largely (although not exclusively) exists in and as media. In this respect, the argument can be made that she exists permanently in a branded 'present'. Although not presently with the church, she still 'communicates' as part of its brand.

For many evangelical Christians, the sacred/profane dichotomy is most clearly articulated in the biblical mandate to live ‘in, but not of, the world’, a paraphrasing of Jesus’ words to his followers in John 17:13-16:

13 And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. 14 I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15 I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.⁶⁶

Evangelicals believe that Christians are called upon to engage with society in everyday life (especially for evangelical purposes) but should also maintain a higher moral standard than that of ‘secular’ society. While this call is embraced in theory, there remains considerable disagreement as to how it should be applied in practice. According to H. Richard Niebuhr ([1951] 2001), Christians negotiate the tensions between ‘Christ and Culture’ by adopting five strategies to relate the sacred to the secular. These strategies are differentiated by the degree to which the ‘sacred’ and the ‘secular’ are ‘mixed’. One extreme, which Niebuhr calls the ‘Christ against culture’ view, separates the realms of the sacred and secular and calls for a withdrawal from the latter into the former. The other extreme, the ‘Christ of culture’ view, sees Christian values as the ‘best’ of human culture and thus the two cannot be separated. Niebuhr also posits three mediating positions, which he calls ‘Christ above culture’, ‘Christ and culture in paradox’ and ‘Christ the transformer of culture’. Each of these positions seeks, in different ways, to maintain a distinction between the realms of sacred and secular while still drawing from both. The ‘Christ above culture’ perspective acknowledges the synthesis of the two realms, but argues that Christians must distinguish between the two in daily life. The ‘Christ and culture in paradox’ view essentially argues that Christians must struggle to live a holy life, but will ultimately fail to do so. For those who subscribe to the third mediating position, ‘Christ the transformer of culture’, culture is a product of fallen humans and therefore redeemable through Christ.

⁶⁶ See also James 1:27 and Romans 2:12.

In their book, *Apostles of Rock: The Splintered World of Contemporary Christian Music* (1999), Jay Howard and John Streck apply Niebuhr's typology to show how concepts of the sacred and secular shape Christian Contemporary Music (CCM, a subset of CPM; see Ingalls et al. 2013). Using rhetoric that articulates the Christ and Culture conundrum, Christian music artists, labels and fans adopt different and often contradictory views about the nature and purpose of Christian music in order to justify their activities. For example, 'crossover' artist Amy Grant's songs are grounded in her faith but her lyrics are generally not explicitly Christian. For some, Grant is helping 'covertly' spread Christian values by reaching the 'unchurched'. To others, though, the lack of explicitly Christian lyrics in her songs is understood as a capitulation to the 'secular' market. Arguments over artists like Grant reveal the latent confusion within evangelical Christian culture about how to engage with contemporary 'secular' culture – particularly with its consumer elements.⁶⁷

The (Christian) Culture Industry

Durkheim's dichotomy is part of the sociological tradition that viewed the rise of scientific rationalism and the declining influence of centralised religious institutions as evidence of a 'secularisation' process that would eventually lead to the collapse of organised religion, if not a complete disregard for the otherworldly (Stark and Finke 2000: 57-58). However, challenges to this view began to arise in the 1960s and 1970s (ibid.: 62), and with a few exceptions (e.g. Bruce 2002, 2011), it is now widely recognised that religion is neither dying, nor has it assumed less importance in people's lives (c.f. Berg-Sørensen 2013). Instead, the way people express, practise and experience belief is changing. Religion is being 'updated' to exist as a cultural practice that is natural to its members. This is nothing new. The incorporation of popular culture has long been a defining feature of evangelical Christianity, and the history of CPM shows that it is a continuing dialogue about the relative synergy between the practice of the Church and the culture of its flock (Ingalls et al. 2013; Mall 2012; Nekola 2009). For

⁶⁷ For other accounts, see Beaujon 2006; Joseph 2003; Thompson 2000.

example, along with his 39 treatises, John Calvin is known for re-writing hymns, often setting them to popular tunes of the time. Many missionaries in the American colonies incorporated local repertoires and cultural practices into church services in order to appeal to the local group (Finke and Stark 2005). Furthermore, a contemporary approach to musical mission, ‘ethnodoxology’, looks to ethnomusicology to ‘help missionaries be culturally sensitive’.⁶⁸ Society is not becoming more secular; rather, mainstream evangelical Christianity’s practices are *sacralising* elements of popular culture. The Church now speaks the language of popular culture. It has a dialogue with the broader culture in which it exists, adapting its practices and organisational structures to integrate seamlessly into a larger cultural experience – a lifestyle (Sargeant 2000; Twitchell 2007).

This phenomenon accompanies a massive, growing market for religious goods. From movies, books and music to clothing and coffee, billions of dollars are spent each year on ‘Christian’ products (Einstein 2008: 6). Significantly, much of this money is not spent in niche Christian shops, but in havens of consumer culture like Wal-Mart, which at the turn of the millennium was selling around \$1 billion worth of Christian books, movies, music and other merchandise annually (Coolidge 2003). The appellation ‘Christian’ is now a selling point, a mark of differentiation.

However, while the look, feel and sound of the sacred and the secular may be merging (and even sharing the same worship and retail spaces) the meanings ascribed to the offerings that travel in and between the two spheres are different. It is not always clear, for example, what defines ‘Christian’ music (Beaujon 2006; Howard and Streck 1999; Ingalls et al. 2013), however ‘Christian music’ nevertheless clearly exists, at least as a marketing category that allows the Christian music industry to position itself as a subset of the music industry as a whole. In fact, all of the remaining multinational music firms have dedicated Christian music arms.⁶⁹ The Christian culture industry is big business (Beaujon

⁶⁸ *Ethnodoxology: Calling All Peoples to Worship in Their Heart Language* <<http://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/ethnodoxology-calling-all-peoples-to-worship-in-their-heart-language/>>; accessed 28 October 2012.

⁶⁹ For example, Capital Christian Music Group (Capital CMG – part of Universal Music Group), which distributes Hillsong’s albums in North America.

2006; Mall 2012; Romanowski 2000), but as Howard and Streck (1999) show, this is a source of consternation for many who engage with Christian music. On the one hand, money, fame and corporate backing are often needed to reach a large audience – or at least come with reaching a large audience – and thus they are tools that, theoretically, maximise the evangelical potential of Christian music. On the other, the glitz and glamour needed to be noticed in an over-crowded market risk distorting the values that the music is supposedly grounded in and meant to communicate. Artists, labels and consumers are often forced to make choices based on perceived dissonances between economics, fame and Christian values. These choices are often justified in the same economically-inflected language that is used in the larger music industry (e.g. ‘selling out’), something which points to one of the most influential discourses that shapes all culture industries: the discourse of authenticity.

Authenticity and the Value of Values

Brands, bands and people are all judged according to authenticity (c.f. Cavicchi 1998; Elliot and Davies 2006; Gilmore and Pine 2007; Lim 2005; Thornton 1995). Despite the philosophical arguments that it is an ideal rather than an ontological possibility (e.g. Guignon 2004; Taylor 1991), authenticity nevertheless remains real in that it is socially ascribed and experienced by actors, with measurable consequences (Alexander 2006; Gilmore and Pine 2007).⁷⁰ For Gilmore and Pine (2007), organisational authenticity boils down to expressing a set of values and then performing those values in action through offerings. An organisation whose offerings perform its values is perceived as authentic. An organisation whose offerings are perceived as dissonant with its expressed values will be considered inauthentic. Furthermore, a consumer is most likely to recognise authenticity in an organisation’s offerings when those offerings resonate with the consumer’s own self-image (Gilmore and Pine 2007: 5, 94). In other words, when the values of an organisation and its participants are synergetic, those shared values become

⁷⁰ *Authenticities* is a better term to describe the competing hierarchies that impact in different ways according to context and individual subjectivities. The main point here, though, is that authenticity, while slippery, is nevertheless a powerful concept that affects people’s judgements, decisions and actions. In other words, it is phenomenologically real.

associated with its offerings. The offerings become branded, imbued with the shared ethos and meaning of a brand(ed) community (McAlexander et al. 2002; Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001), which in turn adds value to the experience of those offerings.⁷¹

Musicians are often subject to the same public standards of authenticity as brands. For example, Bruce Springsteen's longevity is due in part to his ability, despite his success, to remain a 'real person' in the minds of his fans. From the stories he tells at concerts to making himself accessible to fans in hotel lobbies and bars, Springsteen's professed desire to remain true to his New Jersey roots is backed up by his actions (Cavicchi 1998: 63-72). For Springsteen fans, his authenticity is connected in the way he uses the music industry machinery for his own ends; like many CPM participants, both Springsteen and his fans seek to be 'in but not of' the industry.

Brands and celebrities (and celebrity brands – see Lim 2005) are culturally important because of the meanings that stakeholders attach to them (Ward 2011). Both are types of cultural shorthand for values. This is one reason why celebrities are often chosen as spokespeople for brands. Yet not just any famous person can promote a brand; for a brand spokesperson to be effective, there has to be synergy between the spokesperson and the brand (Kamins 1990). For example, one of the most successful brand/celebrity pairings of all time is Nike and Michael Jordan. Nike's brand ethos is conveyed in its ubiquitous tagline 'Just do it', which is perfectly embodied in Michael Jordan, who even in retirement is renowned for being willing to 'just do' anything to win. Thus, Nike's swoosh and the iconic Jumpman are cobranded.

⁷¹ This raises the interesting question of 'who' is consuming Hillsong's music. As noted in the introduction, Hillsong's music is the staple of its weekly services around the world, and thus presumably reaches its participants on a regular basis. However, its music is also used by countless other churches around the world. Furthermore, its social media 'likes' and sales, both of which number in the millions, indicate that the 'typical' Hillsong consumer is difficult to pin down (although see chapter five of this thesis). Also noted earlier, the evangelical Christian 'self image' is at least partially shaped by mass media. For example, the worship postures adopted by evangelicals are 'normalized' through live worship DVDs (Coleman 2000) – a genre that Hillsong helped popularize (Riches, personal communication 23 June, 2013).

Pepsi had the opposite experience with another famous ‘MJ’ – Michael Jackson. In 1983 Pepsi signed Jackson to what was at the time the most lucrative sponsorship deal ever, leading to a string of successful ad campaigns. However, Jackson’s increasingly bizarre behaviour began to change this and in 1993 Pepsi chose to drop Jackson after charges of child molestation were filed against him.⁷² Although the charges were never proven, Pepsi did not want the negative publicity around Jackson to be associated with the Pepsi brand. In this case, the suspect value system of ‘The King of Pop’ vis-à-vis children did not play well for a brand with the tag line ‘The Choice of a New Generation’.⁷³

Ethical values are thus an important part of ‘brand value’. The efficacy of a brand is realised when the values of all of its participants – the brand itself, its users, and its spokespeople – are perceived to be synergetic. The difference between the above examples and Hillsong’s ‘celebrities’ is that while Jordan and Jackson were chosen to *market* already existing products, Hillsong’s songwriters *create* the product, and then become celebrities (or at least ‘celebritized’) because of the marketing, distribution and use of their songs. In other words, exposure of the music inevitably leads to the musician becoming a celebrity. Furthermore, because the songs are the creations of the songwriters and by extension the church, the relationship between them and the brand is actually tighter than that of an ‘outsider’ who has been hired to promote a product.⁷⁴ The next section explores how this works in the case of Darlene Zschech and Hillsong, and how the values of each are articulated in relation to ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’ discourses.

⁷² *Pepsi Drops Michael Jackson*. <<http://www.nytimes.com/1993/11/15/business/the-media-business-pepsi-drops-michael-jackson.html>>; accessed 08 August 2013

⁷³ But death can rehabilitate images: Pepsi brought Jackson back posthumously in a new marketing campaign (Horovitz 2012; accessed 01 January 2013).

⁷⁴ As will be seen in this chapter’s analysis of Darlene Zschech, this intimacy has overwhelmingly worked to Hillsong’s advantage. However, Hillsong from time to time has been dogged by behaviour of high-profile members that runs contrary to the church’s professed values. For example, former youth pastor Michael Guglielmucci’s song ‘Healer’, about his battle with cancer, was a hit track on the Hillsong LIVE album *This is Our God*. On the DVD release, Guglielmucci appeared with an oxygen tank, something that he did regularly in performance over a two-year period. It was later revealed that he never had cancer, but was instead attempting to cover up a pornography addiction. Although Hillsong removed the video from later DVD releases of the album, it still serves as fodder for the church’s critics. While Pepsi could easily, if expensively, sever ties with Jackson – who was recognized as an ‘outsider’ – this kind of incident poses a challenge for the church, which markets its music as expressions of its corporate values. Brian Houston’s YouTube response to Guglielmucci’s actions can be found at: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eTZ4F5GW4M8>>; accessed 22 July 2013.

Part II - Darlene Zschech: Face of the Hillsong Brand

Brands and celebrities are important symbolic elements in the mediated language of consumer culture because, ultimately, they are both shorthand for values. A brand and a celebrity that are perceived to have complementary attributes can become synergetic, or ‘co-branded’. Hillsong has built its brand through its internationally renowned musical offerings, and as Dann and Jansen (2007) point out:

... Music relies on brands that are formed by human delivery, and human interaction – the persona of the band or musician is part of the total branding performance.... (Dann and Jansen 2007: 2; in Riches 2010: 143)

Alongside founders Brian and Bobbie Houston, Hillsong’s internationally known worship leaders are the church’s human faces. These worship leaders are at the forefront of many of Hillsong’s marketing communications, continually espousing the values that define the brand through word, song and action. Riches and Wagner (2012) highlight the integration of the worship leader and Hillsong’s branding in their analysis of the church’s musical offerings. They argue that worship leaders’ personalities and song repertoire are inextricable from the musical branding of the church. This is clear in the association between Darlene Zschech and Hillsong. Both have had a lasting impact on CPM. Zschech’s song ‘Shout to the Lord’ (1993) is one of the staples of the new Christian music canon: it is sung in thousands of churches around the world every Sunday.⁷⁵ Having sold over five million albums worldwide, Zschech is one of the most successful Christian music performers in the world (Connell 2005: 326; Evans 2006: 108) and by far the best selling female Australian artist (Sams 2004: 38; see also McIntyre 2007: 177). During Zschech’s tenure as lead Worship Pastor of Hillsong, the church transitioned from a local Australian congregation into a fully-branded transnational organisation (Riches and Wagner 2012). She is, according to Mark Evans, ‘the face and sound of HMA [Hillsong Music Australia] and, in some people’s estimation, of Australian congregational music generally’ (Evans 2006: 107).

⁷⁵ <<http://www.ccli.com/Support/LicenseCoverage/Top25Lists.aspx>>; accessed 15 March 2012.

During Zschech's tenure as Worship Pastor, for example, her image appeared on the covers of all eleven of Hillsong's LIVE album releases, twelve if the re-release of *Friends in High Places* (1995) is counted. This is telling considering that no images of worship leaders appeared on album covers before this period, nor have they since (Riches and Wagner 2012: 26-31). According to Russell Fragar, a worship pastor at Hillsong, Zschech's ubiquitous presence was part of the church's marketing strategy:

I think there was a concerted effort to make Darlene a star.... And the funny thing is, that anyone who knew Hillsong kind of regarded it as a team, but in America, it was just Darlene. And it probably is still like that, to some extent. (Quoted in Riches 2010: 161)

Fragar suggests that the 'concerted effort' to promote Zschech was a response to a particular (American) market, the implication being that Zschech's celebrity was the language that Hillsong felt that an American audience (or at least one with 'American' values) would be drawn to. However, he suggests that those with insider knowledge of the church understood that Hillsong's ethos was more accurately embodied in the worship *team*, while to those unfamiliar with the church (in America) Hillsong was represented by a single star performer. There is an implication here that specifically American consumerist values were in play, and were mapped onto Zschech by the American market but were not necessarily 'authentic' to Zschech or to the church.⁷⁶

Regardless of whether or not this is actually the case, what Fragar's assertion reveals is that Zschech's celebrity image is a focal point where myriad values and associations coalesce and coexist. It also reveals that, at least in the United States, Hillsong's brand name is synonymous with both its music and its musicians.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Fragar's comments were made in 2008, well before Hillsong's expansion to NYC (although Hillsong United had previously toured in North America). As of 2013, there seems to be no culture clash, as Hillsong NYC continues to grow and Hillsong will host conferences this year in New York and Los Angeles.

⁷⁷ Of course, the brand carries different associations for different people, not all of them good. According to former Hillsong musician Tanya Riches, in Australia, '...the music slides into charismatic churches but the prosperity doctrine [the belief that material wealth is a sign of God's blessing] is fought publicly. Many Anglicans don't even know where the music is from, but associate Hillsong and money. This was true of my time in Malaysia also.' (Riches; personal communication, 23 June 2013). In other words, while churches from a variety of traditions use Hillsong's music, they derive meaning from it that is different from the brand meaning that Hillsong intends. This is interesting because it shows the unpredictability of branding. For

While people who are familiar with Hillsong are likely to understand the team ethos as a core value of the church, those less familiar with its everyday activities (but familiar with its music) are more likely to map their own associations and values onto the organisation through the individuals associated with it. As an icon of Hillsong, Zschech is the language through which the church is able to reach new audiences.⁷⁸ This reveals the inevitability of branding for a transnational church. With five million albums sold and a song that is part of the new Christian canon, Zschech's celebrity is an evangelistic opportunity. Hillsong is a savvy marketing organisation, and has leveraged its worship leaders' fame to spread the Gospel across the globe. But, as Ward (2011) has noted, fame is not due to *the celebrity* being everywhere but *the celebrity's image* being everywhere. Celebrity is created through repetition of mediated images that over time coalesce into a set of meanings and associations in the hearts and minds of those who consume them. From this view, it is not Zschech herself who speaks to Hillsong's stakeholders, but her mediated image and the values associated with it.

Shaping the 'Darlene' Image

Many of the branding challenges that Hillsong faces have to do with 'who' the church is. Because it is a transnational organisation, Hillsong must communicate its brand through mass media. This requires it to mediate its worship leaders' images in ways that allow those images, as vessels imbued with values, to be easily disseminated and recognized. The church has done this to great effect; in a secular context, the recognition that Zschech and other Hillsong worship pastors receive would qualify them as rock stars (Hartje-Döll 2013: 144). Yet they do not operate in an exclusively secular context, and for evangelical Christians there is only one rock star: Jesus. Hillsong is thus faced with the challenge of promoting

Hillsong, the music and brand meaning are one and the same. For other churches, however, the two have completely separate meanings. On the one hand, Hillsong's music is a resource for worship. On the other hand, it is presumably divorced from the values of the church, which are seen in these contexts to be associated with money and its attendant negative connotations. It would seem that this is an area that merits further study.

⁷⁸ It should be noted that different Hillsong artists are more or less popular in different markets. For example, according to Tanya Riches, who is familiar with the Pacific Asian and South American markets, Hillsong's male worship leaders are more popular there (Riches, personal communication, 23 June 2013).

‘non-celebrity’ celebrities. It is stuck in the Christ vs. Culture paradox that informs Howard and Stark’s analysis of CCM.

Some Christians see CCM as tainted by the inauthenticity of celebrity commercialism (Ingalls forthcoming; Nekola 2009). Therefore churches, artists and listeners adopt a range of discursive positions in order to justify their activities in relation to it (Howard and Streck 1999). Hillsong, for example, markets its music as a resource for worship – an aid to direct connection to God – rather than as entertainment. Accordingly, the website that promotes its LIVE album series states:

Hillsong LIVE is the congregational expression of worship from Hillsong Church - a local church with global influence. This local church worship team has a commitment to continually resource the Body of Christ with fresh songs of worship and a deep passion to see people connect with the Living God in a real and personal way.... Looking to the future, Hillsong LIVE remains committed to inspiring and empowering the authentic worship of Jesus and resourcing the Body of Christ, everywhere.⁷⁹

By positioning its music as a resource for worship, Hillsong circumvents the suspicions that evangelical Christians hold regarding famous Christian artists by suggesting a use-value that is antithetical to entertainment and economics, and thus to the CCM ‘industry’.

Another way Hillsong tries to avoid celebrity is by emphasising the collective aspects of its musical activities. Hillsong refers to its worship groups as worship teams.⁸⁰ Aside from its paid worship leaders, most of the worship team’s members are volunteers. However, worship leaders are not paid for the performance aspects of their jobs. Rather, they are paid for other activities such as providing pastoral care, carrying out various administrative duties and training of other team members. This important distinction ingrains the notion of worship as a lifestyle

⁷⁹ <<http://live.hillsong.com/>; accessed 28 February 2012>.

⁸⁰ The ‘team’ ethos is a vital part of the Hillsong brand. Numerous volunteer groups carry out most of the work that keep Hillsong’s churches going from week to week, from acting as ushers during Sunday services and conferences to contributing to its many marketing activities like website building and video shooting and editing. This has the dual benefit of both promoting community and instilling a sense of ownership in participants while also, as noted earlier, keeping operating costs to a minimum.

(as opposed to a 'job') into the ethos of the worship team.⁸¹ The make-up and administration of worship teams in Hillsong churches across the globe are, with small variations, standardised. Each team consists of a few worship leaders and a large number of volunteer musicians, who perform according to availability and the needs of the church. A Hillsong worship team is generally made up of an acoustic guitar playing/singing worship leader, five frontline singers (for a total of three male and three female voices), two electric guitars, two keyboards, bass and drums. Depending on the size of the church space, the team will also use backing vocalists. For example, the worship team that leads worship in the 3,500 seat Hills Campus auditorium is usually backed by a full onstage choir. In contrast, Hillsong London's team, which leads worship in the 2,000-seat Dominion Theatre, is supported by a group of four to six off-stage singers whose voices are layered into the front-of-house mix. Although worship leaders lead services weekly, they and the worship team's volunteers will often rotate between morning and afternoon services and, in the case of the multi-site churches like Hillsong London (which also holds services in Surrey and Kent), appear at different locations according to the needs of the church. In doing so, Hillsong makes apparent the number of musicians involved, and also is able to maximise the number of volunteers that can participate on the team.⁸²

Hillsong's team ethos is further evident in its album song credits. For example, a typical Hillsong LIVE album will feature an average of twelve different authors, and songs are often co-written. Additionally, although the songwriters retain the copyrights to their songs, Hillsong Church, rather than its songwriters, is named the 'Artist' in its distribution deals (Riches 2010: 147-149). This set-up further integrates the songwriters into the collective that is the Hillsong brand. Hillsong thus positions its musical product in such a way as to set the songs and the church apart from the CCM industry (in discourse if not in practice) and its attendant associations with consumer and celebrity culture. Yet it would be disingenuous for Hillsong's worship leaders to deny that they are famous. Hillsong's worship

⁸¹ Thanks to Tanya Riches for this insight (Riches, personal communication; 18 April 2013).

⁸² Another benefit of having a large worship team is that new vocalists are always being trained to be worship leaders. Participation as a backing vocalist is part of the training to be a front line vocalist, and participation in the front line is part of the training to be a worship leader. There is never a gap in the team because of this (Riches, personal communication; 18 April 2013).

leaders therefore speak openly and often about the dangers of success, always taking care to acknowledge the true ‘Famous One’. A typical example of this is seen in an interview with Darlene Zschech for AwsomeCityTV:

I think we’ve got to be really careful, because worship is marketable. God will take his hand off once you turn it into just a product or something to do with dollars. I’m not on the ‘Darlene trail’ at all, but people can easily turn it over. So you’ve got to be real careful on why you’re doing it – your agenda. Making sure it’s for the right reasons. Not just for your opportunity to get your songs heard or whatever... but more for that communion with God, to point people towards Christ.⁸³

By proactively acknowledging that they are famous, Zschech and Hillsong’s other worship leaders ‘take control’ of the conversation, an important brand management strategy (Cooke 2008: 88-125; c.f. Holt 2004, especially pp. 39-62 and 155-188). Like all brands, the Hillsong brand is a story, so it is important that the church is the one telling it.⁸⁴

Zschech’s personal brand is a story as well, one of a reluctant star whose rise to, struggle with, and ultimate acceptance of leadership and international fame is inextricable from Hillsong’s brand. A child star from the age of 10, she accepted Christ at the age of 15 and joined the Hills Christian Life Centre’s choir in the mid 1980s (Evans 2006: 107-108). Although she was content to sing in the choir, her talent shone through and she became the vocal director, but only after two years of encouragement by Brian Houston:

I loved to sing, especially in a back up role – but God had another plan. After about two years of trying to convince me, one day as Pastor Brian [Houston] was leading the meeting, he just walked off and left it to me. It was just as well I didn’t have anymore time [sic] to think about it because I was now doing it. (Zschech 1996, in Evans 2006: 108)

⁸³ *Darlene Zschech the Heart of Worship Part 1.*

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfaB6MyzQsY>>; accessed 28 February 2012.

⁸⁴ As noted in the introduction, the rise of the Internet means that brands are subject to the vicissitudes of public opinion as never before. While Hillsong enjoys a great deal of positive press in personal and industry blogs, websites and on social media, it also has to deal with negative press (e.g. Michael Guglielmucci – see footnote 74 in this chapter). Criticism has been particularly pronounced in the Australian press (e.g. Pearlman 2005; Pollard 2010), and also on the web, where several blogs and YouTube videos accuse it of ‘cultish’ activity (although most of this is rather polemical; see, for example: <http://www.jesus-is-savior.com/Evils%20in%20America/Apostasy/hillsong_music_cult.htm>; accessed 22 July 2013). A former Hillsong member has even written a book criticizing the church (Levin 2007).

When Hillsong's first 'star' songwriter, Geoff Bullock, suddenly resigned in 1996 Zschech was thrust into the spotlight, this time on the international stage:

Before the *Shout to the Lord* album... we had been practising for weeks, getting everything ready. And four days before recording, through various situations, he [Bullock] decided to move on. Brian Houston said, 'You have to lead this', and I said, 'I can't, I really can't.' But through Christ we can do all things. For the next 48 hours my friends got on the phone and said 'You can do this, you can do this.' I just thank God we had no video cameras there that night, because all of us cried our way through that project. (Zschech, panel discussion, 15 July 1999; Quoted in Evans 2006: 107)

Following the release of *Shout to the Lord*, which featured the title track that established her as one of the best known worship leaders in the world, Zschech was named the head of the Worship and Creative Arts department, a position she held until 2007. As long-time staff member Donna Crouch maintains, upon Zschech's appointment as worship leader: '... [i]t's almost like Darlene became the face and the leader' of Hillsong's worship (quoted in Riches 2010: 161). With her face appearing not only on the aforementioned LIVE album covers, but also in countless other Hillsong-branded products and communications such as books, videos and event flyers, Zschech's image and that of Hillsong became inseparable. Indeed, despite now co-leading her own church with her husband in New South Wales, she continues to appear regularly at Hillsong conferences.

Even with her hit song, Zschech could not have become such an integral part of Hillsong's image and marketing strategy if she did not also speak to its target audience(s). Zschech resonates with many of Hillsong's participants not only because they like her music but also because they identify with the values articulated in her story. Importantly, she does not just espouse evangelical Christian values of modesty, humility and devotion; she lives them as well. Like Bruce Springsteen, Zschech's mediated image and the 'real' Darlene are seen to be one and the same, and by all accounts this is the case. For example, Don Moen (formerly of the Christian music label Integrity Music, which distributed HMA's music until 2010) writes in the forward of Zschech's book *Extravagant Worship*:

Darlene is a true leader who is passionate about worshipping the Father in spirit and in truth and is committed to raising up others all around the world to do the same. She is real, transparent, and vulnerable as a worship leader, but more important, she is the same person when she is not in front of thousands. (Zschech 2001: 11)

Zschech is an icon of the Hillsong brand not only because she is marketed as such but also because she lives her life in a way that is congruent with the evangelical Christian values expressed by the church and held by its members. Hillsong is a lifestyle brand: it promotes a set of values that are offered as alternatives to secular ones. Zschech is authentic because she lives that lifestyle.

Like Michael Jordan and Nike, Zschech and Hillsong are co-branded. Zschech is a good spokesperson for Hillsong because she embodies its brand values authentically. In her actions and statements, she communicates what the church is about. As a mediated ‘celebrity’, she is shorthand for the brand. Hillsong encourages Zschech’s celebrity image, using it to great effect to spread the Gospel.⁸⁵ Recognising that Hillsong’s vision is one of international Church growth, it becomes clear that Zschech’s celebrity image is concomitant with this mandate. However, while taking advantage of the communicative expediency of celebrity, the church must also manage the negative associations of celebrity culture. This is difficult, because while Hillsong can proactively shape its story, and perform its values in discourse and action, it is ultimately performing for its stakeholders. These are the people who experience the brand as authentic, and with whose values the brand must align in order for it to be a meaningful part of the worship experience.

⁸⁵ According to one Worship Leader I interviewed: ‘I get the impression Brian thinks Darlene is pretty amazing... and [Hillsong Worship Leader Russell] Fragar felt it was the most ironic thing ever, as she is loved by the church because she is ordinary, but Hillsong promote(s) her like she is the only branding power they have. He [Fragar] didn’t feel that it was them using her celebrity, but something that made Brian feel less insecure about the product – which was a self-fulfilling prophecy in a sense.’ (email communication with author, 15 August 2011)

Part III - Worshipping the Worshipper: Fans, Disciples and The Danger of Authenticity

Celebrities (and brands) represent states of being that might be aspired to – ways of, as Pete Ward puts it, ‘being human’ (Ward 2011: 96).⁸⁶ Part of Zschech’s appeal is just this: she presents an image of evangelical Christian femininity that is emulated by many of the church’s participants (Riches 2010: 162-163). From a branding perspective, this presents a number of advantages. However, in the context of the Christian culture industry, Zschech’s appeal also presents a problem: by being authentic, she may inadvertently contribute to her own idolisation. Hillsong’s brand is partly communicated through the ‘Godly’ lifestyle of its worship leaders. But this, combined with an ‘anointing’⁸⁷ of their talents, may lead others to ‘worship the worshipper’ (Toah 2005) instead of worshipping God. As Zschech is always quick to point out, ‘one of the great dangers we face at Hillsong is the fact that we have become famous for our worship. But our job is to make God famous in our worship’ (Zschech 2001:151). Hillsong’s worship leaders work to remind participants that the purpose of their music is to worship God. Yet despite Hillsong’s attempts to position itself in opposition to celebrity culture, the church can never fully extricate itself from the contradictions inherent in the Christian culture industry.

Hillsong is not alone. Indeed, no participant in the Christian culture industry can avoid its contradictions. This is why, while evangelical Christians often mistrust the intentions of famous pastors and worship leaders, many are equally (perhaps more) mistrustful of themselves, and are vigilant in their efforts to direct their admiration away from the platform and towards God. These Christians acknowledge that fame needs an audience, and thus the responsibility of remaining a disciple of Christ rather than of a celebrity ultimately lies with the

⁸⁶ This is of course true in the negative sense as a well – they can represent states to be avoided. Either way, they represent values.

⁸⁷ In evangelical Christian culture, something that is anointed is understood to have God’s blessing and thus is imbued with the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. This is both a powerful (Ingalls 2012) and controversial (Evans 2006: 100-106) trope. In recent years, Hillsong has stopped referring to its music as ‘anointed’, at least in public communications. However, the idea still pervades the church’s culture, as several participants I interviewed used the term to describe the music and/or the musicians.

worshipper. The following passage, taken from an article entitled ‘When Jesus Meets TMZ’ in the online Christian magazine *Relevant*, is a typical expression of this:

When Christians look to pastors for wisdom on how to better love God and love one another, they become better disciples of Jesus and better lights of hope in a dark world. [However], [w]hen Christians look to pastors to tell them how to dress, what to eat, what hobbies to have, what systematic theologies to prefer, how to vote and what personality to adopt, they become creepy, unthinking clones of broken people – and big red warning flags to a culture that has grown increasingly suspicious of authority figures. (Evans 2012)

The description of fans above bears a striking resemblance to the type that dominated the first wave of fan studies and still appears in the popular press. These representations often present fans as leeches feeding unthinkingly on the mediated mush of celebrity culture in order to provide meaning to their lives. In extreme cases, fans are pathologized, their behaviour associated with a mental illness or an allegiance to a cult leader.⁸⁸

The religious-like activities of music fans have been well documented (e.g. Hills 2002). For example, Cavicchi (1998: 41-59) has described the similarities in structure and social importance between Christian conversion narratives and those who ‘found’ Bruce Springsteen. Furthermore, Rodman (1996) has posited Graceland as a ‘sacred space’ that for Elvis fans is akin to a pilgrimage site or church. In each case, fans attach symbolic significance to their own activities, in ways that are similar to those in which worshippers attach significance to theirs. However, as both Hills and Cavicchi point out, the two activities are *similar* but not *the same*. While most fans acknowledge the ritual similarities between their activities and religious ones, and even use religious language to describe their activities, they also strenuously deny any true religious elements in their fandom (Hills 2002: 124). As Ward notes, there is a certain seriousness in religious activities that is absent in fan analogues (Ward 2011: 5, 57-86). One might nuance this observation by suggesting that, while fans often take their activities and the meanings derived from those activities seriously, they rely on a certain quality of

⁸⁸ For discussion, see Hills 2002: 1-23; Sandvoss 2005: 1-10.

‘play’ that is absent from the process of meaning-making in ‘true’ religious activity.

An example of this can be seen in an interview with Roy, a thirty-six-year old member of the worship team at Hillsong London. Originally from the Philippines, he had been collecting Hillsong albums for years before he immigrated to the UK:

TW: So you collected the [Hillsong] albums back in the Philippines?

R: Yeah, because I was collecting all of their albums since the mid-nineties. I’m really an avid fan, I would say! I am an avid fan of Hillsong, from way back home. I am blessed with all their songs. I listened to them almost every day. And I said, ‘Lord, I can’t help but dream of going there’. And the Lord was really telling me, yeah, you have to see the world out there.... I remember one night – I couldn’t help but cry. Because I was listening to Christian music, and then when I searched for the composer and the church behind it, it was Hillsong. I was looking on the Internet for Hillsong. I actually thought that Hillsong is a place in Australia! But I was told it’s not a place in Australia. It’s like David used to sing songs at the top of the hill.⁸⁹ That’s where they started creating the church, Hillsong. (Interview with author, 6 February 2011)

Like Graceland for Elvis fans, for Roy, Hillsong represents a sacred place that is imbued with spiritual power. Hillsong is also a pilgrimage site, both as a geographic destination and as a significant marker in Roy’s personal narrative:

TW: How did you come to Hillsong?

R: It all started seven years ago when I got to collecting every Hillsong album. It all started with a dream, that some day I would have to be either in Australia or somewhere else where there is a branch. I kept asking the Lord. I started praying in the year 2001. And then God made it possible for me, but it took me seven years. Before I came here, I kept asking the Lord. And I said: ‘Lord, why does it take me seven years?’ Then God referred me to the book of Genesis, when it says that, ‘When I created Heaven and Earth, it took me seven [days]. And on the seventh day I rested’. And seven, biblically speaking, speaks of completion. And it speaks of perfection. So I said, ‘Ok, this may be God already giving me a sign to go out, and I just have to follow wherever God will lead me’. When I came here, it took me about – I think two months. Before that, I was surfing the Internet for where it says Hillsong London is actually located. And it was so amazing, because

⁸⁹ ‘After that thou shalt come to the hill of God, where [is] the garrison of the Philistines: and it shall come to pass, when thou art come thither to the city, that thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tablet, and a pipe, and a harp, before them; and they shall prophesy’ (I Samuel 10:5).

I was in the countryside at first. And then somebody called me – my uncle – and he said ‘Why don’t you visit me here, and let’s talk about what you want to do here and we’ll help you out’. And I was surprised, because I was reading a book then by Joyce Myer – I’m really into deep reading. And my flat mate, he asked me, ‘Are you Christian?’ and I said ‘Yeah, how did you know?’ ‘Because I can see from the book you are reading.’ And then he said, ‘Do you want to go to church?’ And I said, ‘What church are you going to?’ And he said ‘Hillsong’. ‘Are you serious?’ I was really quite surprised. It’s so amazing that God really orchestrated this thing. (Interview with author, 6 February 2011)

As Blackwell and Thompson note, ‘Building a brand on the key values of its customers causes them to connect with the brand at an emotional level, much more than just a cognitive level, evoking strong responses and connections that differentiate customers from fans. Fans feel, perhaps without knowing why, “This is my brand”’ (Blackwell and Thompson 2004: 36). In my interviews and conversations, many of Hillsong’s participants referred to Hillsong as ‘my church’ – a testament to its focus on cultivating community. However, unlike Blackwell and Thompson’s hypothetical fans, Hillsong’s stakeholders know and are quite articulate about why Hillsong is their church. The church and the brand are integrated into their life stories, as was evident in Roy’s testimony.

Brands are important to identity-making projects because, through them, we articulate ourselves to ourselves. When engaging with a branded offering, we are in part embodying, or at least taking part in a dialogue with, the values and image of the brand. One important focus of this thesis is the evangelical efficacy of the Hillsong brand. Many of Hillsong’s participants consider the church and its music ‘anointed’. The brand is imbued with biblical authority, and, as a resource for worship, has both internal and external evangelical potential. This is significant for evangelical Christians, for whom evangelising is a mandate:

TW: What is it about Hillsong’s music?

R: Well, I think God’s specific mandate for Hillsong church is to really influence the lives of people through music. Because music for me is really powerful. It has the power to change lives, and move their emotions, you know? And quench their hearts. It’s the life the church. Without music, I don’t think this church would have gone that far. Yeah, that’s pretty much God’s mandate for Hillsong. Because they have been sweeping the land, you know? They’re really sweeping the land. And it’s very popular back home. Every Christian church used to sing the songs from Hillsong. A lot of

Filipinos – Hillsong is really well known to our country because – I mean, all Christian churches know the songs of Hillsong. (Interview with author, 6 February 2011)

Roy endows the music with spiritual authority, recognising Hillsong as anointed with a musical mandate from God. For many of Hillsong's participants, this anointing is part of the power of the music, which brands the church and its people. For example, as Geoff Bullock explained in an interview with Mark Evans:

In the end [the Hillsong] fundamental is that the church is anointed, therefore all those people who come to the church are anointed by association... whatever success [those people] have is because of their association, not because of their own doing. (Bullock, interview with Mark Evans, 1998, in Evans 2006: 99)

Again emphasising the church and the team ethos, Zschech, speaking on a Hillsong Conference panel, noted:

Our church [Hillsong]... [has] an anointing for a new song. We have tried other things, but we have an anointing for a new song. We still sing hymns, we sing them often.... We haven't thrown out the old, but we understand the anointing on our house. Now that is going to be different from the anointing on your house. Once you understand the direction of your leadership [then] operate out of that in strength.... We have so many songwriters coming through, but that is the anointing of our house. (Evans 2006: 100)

The spiritual authority associated with Hillsong's music is key to the experience of the Hillsong brand, and the efficacy of its music. Since the church, its music and its worship leaders are all integrated parts of a sacred understanding of the Hillsong brand, it follows that the musical talents of its songwriters are 'God-given', as expressed by Hillsong's General Manager, George Aghajanian:

Our albums are more of a distillation of many, many songs that are submitted to us through our various songwriters, and those songs are really a reflection of those songwriters' relationship with the church but also more importantly with God. So these guys have their own journey, obviously, their own Christian journey, and their gifting – these guys have got gifting to write music, to lead worship, and so they're writing with the hope that they can get this song to connect people with Christ.... The songs really come back to the anointing that God puts on these guys. And out of that anointing, out of the leading of the Holy Spirit, the songs that they bring – which hopefully are fresh, they're new – [will] help people encounter Christ during a worship service. (Interview with author, 28 September 2011)

Zschech's authenticity is her relationship with God, as with all of Hillsong's songwriters and their songs. Their songs are understood as authentic expressions of their personal relationships with the Lord, and (because they are both songwriters and church members) are as such reflective of the church as a whole. The church, its values, its music and its musicians are all integrated into the gestalt of the Hillsong brand, and Hillsong's participants 'hear' the meanings imbued in Hillsong's brand through its worship leaders and their songs. This is evident in an email exchange between Vicki, a long-time participant/stakeholder at Hillsong London, and myself:

TW: What did you think of the [*A Beautiful Exchange*] album?

V: I especially liked Brooke Fraser's song.⁹⁰ The 'Beautiful Exchange' song has a special meaning for me – it is something extraordinary – the way it is constructed as a song and performed by Joel and the woman.... *It is the blend of music, scriptural truth and the lovely personality of the performers that makes the Spirit of Jesus alive.* Having such songs is a powerful and an all-consuming experience for each and every personality that listens to it. I can imagine many unbelievers get to have a first encounter with our God, who I do not think has been worshipped in such a scale and with such sources on Earth so far... It reminds me of the greatness of God, who remains true to himself – that he is fulfilling every single scriptural promise with the purpose to glorify himself. This performance, the fact that this song is written and sung is a powerful testimony of the truthfulness of God. (Email exchange with author, 13 July 2011; emphasis added)

The key here is to understand that an evangelical (and some might argue a specifically Hillsong) worldview is deeply embedded in the meanings that are imparted on Zschech and the Hillsong brand. In particular, it is important to recognise the centrality of the transformative power of the Holy Spirit to the Pentecostal practice that is Hillsong's lineage (Albrecht 1999; Evans 2006). In Pentecostal belief, every Christian is imbued with the power of the Holy Spirit. This transforms them into a mouthpiece for God, a potential evangelist through whom the Spirit speaks to the world. Although the understandings and manifestations of this power vary amongst Pentecostal communities (Anderson

⁹⁰ Brooke Fraser is a New Zealand pop/rock star and also a member of Hillsong and part of the worship team. Interestingly, she neither wrote the song *A Beautiful Exchange* nor appeared on the album.

2004; Cox 1995; Hollenweger 1972), it is in ritual contexts (where music is often, but not always, involved) that this power is most evident.

For Hillsong and its participants, then, Hillsong's music and musicians are anointed by God. They have the power of the Holy Spirit, with which they can transform the world. As seen in Vicki's statements and Roy's comments above, there is a utopian element to this.

Conclusion - Paradox, Utopia and Transcendence

Utopias are always in dialogue with the real conditions of existence (Wenger 2002) and brands articulate their utopian promises through the contradictions (Heilbrunn 2006), and points of cultural rupture (Holt 2004), that are experienced by participants in their everyday lives. A utopia is literally a 'nowhere', a critical representation that expresses the '*differences* between social reality and a projected model of social existence' (Heilbrunn 2006: 104). It is a picture of what 'could be', but it cannot express itself except from within the dominant systems of values and ideas that structure the real conditions of existence (ibid 105):

Utopia thus has a two-sided nature; on the one hand it expresses what is absolutely new, the 'possible as such', that is what is unthinkable in the common categories of thought used by the people at a given time; it must thus employ fiction or fable to express what it has to say. On the other hand, it appears impossible for Utopia to transcend the ordinary language of a period and of a place, that is it cannot totally transgress the codes by which people make reality significant to them. (Heilbrunn 2006: 105)

For Heilbrunn, the power of a brand's story is derived from its utopian promise: it gives stakeholders a chance to experience what 'could be' through a 'real' offering – in this case Hillsong's music. Hillsong's brand promise is the sacred experience, an encounter with God. This utopian encounter will be further explored in the next chapter.

Douglas Holt (2004) sees brands as sources of material that help people manage the contradictions they experience in their everyday lives. In his book, *How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding*, Holt contends that

iconic brands such as Coke, Harley Davidson and Volkswagen are successful because they provide narratives that help people manage cultural contradiction and rupture. Holt gives the example of his experience of a Diet Coke advert. In it, a nerdy guy stands in the bathroom flossing his teeth while singing along to Cheap Trick's 1979 hit song 'I Want You to Want Me'. A female voiceover intones: 'He flosses too much. But you can't rule out a guy who knows all the lyrics to one of the greatest songs of all time' (Holt 2004: x). Holt confesses that he identified with the advert's character not because he liked the song, but because it 'grabbed familiar cultural material and used it to tell a story about manhood, a story I wanted to believe in' (Holt 2004: x). The song juxtaposed his youth with the pressures of an adult middle-class existence, providing him, in musical shorthand, with 'a little ammunition to manage this contradiction' (Holt 2004: xi).

For Hillsong and its participants, the Hillsong brand provides the material needed to resolve, at least momentarily, the conflicts that arise for evangelical Christians in a world that they are part of but with which they do not necessarily always share the same values. For its part, Hillsong is faced with a Christ vs. Culture conundrum that shapes, even constitutes, the Christian culture industry. On the one hand, as a transnational organisation, Hillsong is dependent on mass media to communicate its message. This means speaking in the vernacular of the culture industry, of which celebrity and branding are part. On the other hand, the church is held to a particular set of evangelical Christian ideals that at first glance may seem dissonant with the economic and communicative realities of consumer culture. However, closer examination reveals that while the mediated forms of the Christian culture industry may be similar, even identical, to those of the secular culture industry, its content is different. Hillsong makes this clear by presenting its musical offerings as spiritual resources, its musicians as team members and its worship leaders as 'reluctant' celebrities, thereby proactively shaping the image of its brand by (re)casting its communication in evangelical Christian language that resonates with the worldviews of its stakeholders. A key part of this worldview is an emphasis on the power of the Spirit and God's anointing, which is inseparable from the power of the music and the brand as a gestalt of the people, places, things, feelings and experiences. The key to this is that Hillsong's discourse

allows its position along Niebuhr's typological continuum to be fluid and multiple.

John J. Thompson claims that 'Christian rock melds faith and culture' (Thompson 2000: 11). As a key part of the Hillsong brand, this is certainly true. Hillsong's branded music harmonises the dissonances between sacred and secular cultures that participants experience in their daily lives. The Hillsong brand harnesses the moral dualisms of the sacred and secular discourse in ways that resonate with its participants, who also ascribe sacred meaning to the church, its music and its musicians. As a product of 'godly' individuals, the brand is imbued with evangelical power. Hillsong's music is a resource, a way to experience the evangelical efficacy latent in brand promise. In other words, Hillsong's branded music affords its participants the possibility of experiencing Heaven on Earth, the power of the Holy Spirit in their daily lives, and even to be for a moment 'in, but not of, the world'.

Having explored how Hillsong's brand allows it to both embrace and distance itself from 'the world', the next chapter investigates how it positions itself in the 'sacred' world – specifically the imagined (Anderson [1983] 2006) and imaginary (Wegner 2002) community of 'The Body of Christ' – which is also an articulation of utopia.

Chapter 3

'Of One Accord': Brand Identity and Participation

Introduction

The O2 arena lights dim. On stage, against a backdrop of deep blues and purples, the silhouettes of Tribe of Judah frame the figures of Hillsong, HTB and Jesus House London musicians on the drums, keyboards and back-up guitars. Suspended chords mingle with dry ice as the 16,000 participants wait expectantly. Presently, a disembodied voice floats out from the arena's surround-sound speakers. A few moments later, the giant digital screen at the back of the stage revealed the voice's owner: Martin Smith of the band Delirious?, one of the best known Christian bands in the UK. Smith proceeds to belt out the introduction to his group's hit 'Rain Down', not from the stage, but from the audience. This signifies that he, the audience and musicians are worshipping as one.

The above ethnographic moment is drawn from my fieldnotes of the Pentecost Festival finale that I attended on the evening of 11 June 2011. As the name suggests, the event was the grand finale to the 2011 Pentecost Festival – a ten-day, citywide celebration of Pentecost that presented public events such as art exhibitions, lectures, workshops and worship services across London.⁹¹ The event drew 16,000 participants to London's O2 Arena for a night of worship. Most of these participants were from Hillsong London, Holy Trinity Brompton or Jesus House London, the three London-based, branded evangelical Christian churches that hosted the event, but some also came from elsewhere in the city or from abroad. The theme of the evening was that of 'one accord', an articulation of unity that is important to the construction of a key evangelical Christian ideal: the 'Body of Christ'. Significantly, not once did anyone on stage explicitly say 'We are all in one accord'. Rather, this was made apparent discursively through appeals to scripture, actively through corporate worship and prayer, and musically through group performances, as well as through the participation of several transnational evangelical Christian music stars.

⁹¹ *History*. <<http://www.pentecostfestival.co.uk/about/history/>>; accessed 12 April 2012.

Chapter two explored the ways in which Hillsong articulates its utopian brand promise by positioning its music and musicians in a value-laden dialogue between the ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’. This chapter examines further the importance of positioning in the musical branding experience. Using the O2 event as a case study, I first explore how Hillsong and its collaborators used music as a ‘register of style’ (Rommen 2007) to position themselves as distinct brands within the global evangelical Christian imagined (Anderson [1983] 2006) and imaginary (Wegner 2002) utopian community of the ‘Body of Christ’. This positioning was dependent on the story of Pentecost, which framed difference as essential to unity. In the second part of this chapter, I use interviews I conducted with two of the events’ participants to explore the ways in which brand identity framed their expectations of their participation. This leads on to the third section, in which I use the experiences of two more of the event’s participants to question the ways in which branding afforded or hindered actual participation and experience. I conclude by noting that, although the Hillsong brand’s meaning is predicated on an appeal to participation in a transnational community, the process of branding may in some cases actually preclude participation and therefore preclude Hillsong’s utopian brand promise.

Part I - ‘Of One Accord’: Community, Style and Brand Identity

Brand positioning is important because brands are markers of differentiation or, in the case of aspirational lifestyle brands such as Hillsong, distinction.⁹² A brand’s identity and the identities of its participants are co-dependent. Participants use brands to articulate values. At the same time, the brand’s identity becomes associated with the perceived ethics and values of its participants. As identity

⁹² The classic understanding of brand positioning is that a brand *differentiates* one product from another product that has similar functional attributes. However, as Heath and Potter (2004) argue, lifestyle is about *distinction*. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu, Heath and Potter argue that consumerism is unavoidable because it feeds on the paradox that ‘good taste’ is ‘exclusive’ (i.e. not everyone can have it, just as not every student can be above average). However, everyone wants good taste, so as soon as the market identifies it, it ceases to be special. This is the fine line trodden by aspirational or lifestyle brands, which are deployed as markers of distinction. The value of the brand (both intrinsically for the user and economically for the maker) is rooted in feelings of exclusivity. As will be discussed below, part of the ‘specialness’ of an evangelical Church brand is that, through it, participants feel part of a ‘mass movement’ in the Body of Christ. However, simultaneously, that feeling is ‘localized’ or ‘personalized’ as a feeling of distinction.

markers, then, brands express what is distinct about the ‘products’ they represent and about their participants in relation to others. The paradox of distinction is that it is achieved as a dialogue with similar ‘others’. A classic example of this is the co-dependent relationship between Coke and Pepsi. The two brands co-exist in and help constitute a ‘product category’ that helps consumers understand what they can expect from the products prior to experiencing them. Most people know that Coke and Pepsi are both fizzy cola drinks, and therefore expect that both will be dark, sweet, and may cause one to burp if consumed too quickly. The two brands’ names refine consumer expectations because each product is associated with distinct, mostly esoteric attributes instilled through the branding process. For example, Coke draws on its century-long history to brand itself as ‘the Real Thing’ – an inseparable and authentic part of Americana (Pendergrast 2000). In response, Pepsi casts itself as ‘the Choice of a New Generation’ – the alternative to the stodgy establishment drink in a red can. Each brand’s tagline seeks to appeal to a set of values, which in turn articulates a community of users for whom cola is not just a beverage choice, but also a lifestyle choice.

Churches are not colas, but the branding principle of differentiation within a product category and the relationship between branding, values and lifestyle discussed above are applicable to both. Hillsong London and its collaborators in the Pentecost Festival can be broadly classified as New Paradigm churches (Miller 1997). It can even be said that they ultimately offer the same ‘product’ – a personal relationship with God. However, the experience of church is profoundly communal, so access to the relationship with God is affected by *participation* in the church community. I will therefore begin by examining how each church that participated in the O2 event produced a distinct culture symbolically, and ultimately practically, through *style*.

Style and the Brand Identities of the O2 Event Churches

Style is composed of different ‘registers’ that include music, fashion and language (Rommen 2007). These registers are not independent and together articulate identity and value positions. While Rommen’s work will provide the main

theoretical positioning for this chapter, I would first like to discuss it alongside Roger Wilk's notion of *systems of common difference* in relation to branding language, particularly brand positioning. For Wilk (1995), globalisation has not diminished local cultural expression. Rather, as more and more people engage with media around the world, the ways in which culture is articulated on the global scale have become fewer. Taking the global Miss Universe beauty pageant as an example, Wilk argues that:

... the global stage does not consist of common content, a lexicon of goods or knowledge. Instead it is a common set of formats and structures that mediate between cultures.... that put diversity into a common frame, and scale it along a limited number of dimensions, celebrating some kinds of difference and submerging others. In other words, difference is recognized through commonality. It's the way the aesthetics are deployed that index the difference.

Brand positioning, particularly the design of packaging, deploys aesthetics in systems of common difference that articulate both difference and commonality. For example, a product's package must communicate to a consumer 'what' the product is almost instantaneously. This is done by drawing on consumers' previous knowledge of the 'product category' that the product is part of. For example, the vodkas Grey Goose and Chopin have similar bottle designs. They are both tall, cylindrical and clear, with a frosting that connotes the temperature and elegance of a fine martini. In contrast, Smirnoff's bottles are tall but feature a tapered base and 'chunkier' design that, along with the use of red, is meant not only to communicate its 'Russianness' but also its pricing, which is mid-range and in line with similarly packaged vodkas like Absolut. The aesthetics of each of the vodkas' packages thus communicates both the similarities and the differences between them.

The music at the O2 event can be thought of in a similar manner. All three groups played music that broadly draws from centuries of musical mixing, particularly between 'European' and 'African' music, such as gospel, blues and rock and roll.⁹³ Furthermore, according to some evangelical definitions, all of the music presented that evening could be said to be 'gospel' music (Ingalls et al. 2013).

⁹³ Indeed, all of these styles have mutually informed one another, particularly in the southern United States.

From this view, all of the musical styles exist within the ‘gospel’ music ‘product category’, in that it was meant to ‘spread the Gospel’ or to praise and worship God. They also all shared similar western tonality, chord progressions, rhythms (duple or triple) and instrumentation (drums, keys, guitars, bass and voice). However, within these broad aesthetic similarities were several noticeable differences that branded each church’s music as unique. Below is a brief description of each church’s style.

Jesus House London:

Located in Brent Cross in North West London, Jesus House London is an affiliate of the Nigerian-based Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), an umbrella organization that claims over 4,000 churches world-wide.⁹⁴ The Jesus House brand can be found across the United States and Europe. The Jesus House London website states that, ‘With... approximately forty [40] nations represented in its membership – and growing – Jesus House can confidently refer to itself as a home “for all nations”’,⁹⁵ yet it is clear from the RCCG website and other media that RCCG-affiliated churches practise an African expression of Pentecostalism.⁹⁶ Indeed, the RCCG’s founder, Enoch Adeboye, describes its brand of Pentecostalism⁹⁷ as: ‘Made in heaven, assembled in Nigeria, exported to the world’ (Rice 2009).

At the O2 Pentecost event, Jesus House London’s gospel choir, ‘Tribe of Judah’, performed its church’s Black/African Pentecostal identity. Its repertoire consisted

⁹⁴ <https://www.lifaco.cc/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=81&Itemid=96>; accessed 17 April 2012.

⁹⁵ *Our People*. <<http://jesushouse.org.uk/our-people>>; accessed 12 April 2012.

⁹⁶ e.g. Anderson 2004: 103-122; Cox 1995: 243-263; Hollenweger 1972: 111-175.

⁹⁷ Throughout this chapter, I will be referring to Pentecostalism in a broad sense. Although HTB is Anglican and Hillsong might be considered ‘nominally’ or ‘neo’ Pentecostal, and Jesus House London more of an ‘African’ expression of Pentecostalism, in the context of the O2 event as a celebration of Pentecost and its associations, I will be applying a broad evangelical/Pentecostal/charismatic definition to all three churches. The three churches are better understood as products of the Charismatic movement that began in the 1960s, which uses Pentecostal expression and takes broadly Pentecostal views (Hocken 2002) and has spawned a number of related ‘church growth’ sub-movements variously termed ‘non-denominational’ (Miller 1998), ‘New Paradigm’ (Miller 1997; Trueheart 1996) or ‘seeker-sensitive’ (Sargeant 2000). As with all classifications, these terms are helpful tools for analysis but also insufficient, both because the practices of the churches they seek to describe/classify usually fall into several overlapping categories, and also because the participants themselves often reject them.

of popular contemporary African-American gospel songs and its performance style included coordinated swaying, hand-clapping and foregrounded the oft-cited call and response that is emblematic of both ‘African’ and ‘African-American’ music (Agawu 1992; 1995). Additionally, Jesus House’s music was more piano-driven than HTB or Hillsong’s. This was most apparent in the musical texture. While the emotional fervour of all three groups was achieved through a thick texturing of instrumental sounds, the ways that this was achieved varied between the groups. HTB and Hillsong are more guitar-driven, so they achieve texture by building a sonic wall of overlapping chordal instruments. In contrast, Jesus House’s music was more piano- and voice-driven. Therefore, the texture was achieved through the improvisation-like interweaving of musical lines, especially between the piano and voice, but also importantly in the bass, which was much more active than in either of the other groups. The African-American gospel choir image was further indexed through the matching outfits its members wore, which comprised black pleated trousers, white dress shirts, matching waistcoats and burgundy ties.

Unlike Hillsong and HTB, Jesus House does not produce its own music. Instead, it draws from the repertoire of popular African-American gospel artists such as Alvin Slaughter III and Bishop Paul S. Morton. The music it worships to is thus widely known, even outside ‘gospel’ circles.⁹⁸ For example, Tribe of Judah performed the song ‘Let It Rain’ at the O2 event. This song has been recorded not only by African-American gospel artists such as Morton, but also by groups that are stylistically similar to Hillsong and HTB, such as Jesus Culture and Delirious?. While widely known, it is not self-referential to the Jesus House brand in the way that the church-produced songs that HTB or Hillsong performed are

⁹⁸ The definition of ‘gospel music’ varies according to social context, and involves judgements about both aesthetics and content. For example, Columbia College Chicago’s Center for Black Music Research defines gospel music thus: ‘The term "gospel music" refers to African-American Protestant vocal music that celebrates Christian doctrine in emotive, often dramatic ways. Vocal soloists are the best-known exponents of gospel, but vocal and choral groups of widely varying sizes have also helped to define the style. In gospel, simple melodies are heavily ornamented by blue notes, glissandi, and a dramatic use of a wide vocal range; and the form conducts an on-going dialogue of influence with blues, jazz, pop, rap, and folk styles.’ (*Gospel Music*. <http://www.colum.edu/CBMR/Resources/Definitions_of_Styles_and_Genres/Gospel_Music.php>; accessed 23 June 2013). At Hillsong churches, and in the New Paradigm movement in general, ‘Gospel’ music is taken in its broadest sense to mean ‘any music that preaches the Gospel’. See discussions in Ingalls et al. (2013) and Rommen (2007).

Holy Trinity Brompton:

Unlike Jesus House and Hillsong, which have their roots in Nigeria and Australia, respectively, Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB) is a ‘homegrown’ church. It is part of the Anglican charismatic movement (Hocken 2002) and seeks to revitalize dying churches through two mediums that are not stereotypically ‘Anglican’: charismatic expression and popular music.⁹⁹ With a constituency that is predominantly white and British, HTB’s music is the most ‘folk-like’ of the three – more centered on the acoustic guitar than Hillsong’s electronic pop/rock aesthetic, and certainly different from the African-American gospel sound of Tribe of Judah. As noted in the description of Jesus House’s music, HTB’s textures were achieved through a layering of strummed chords, with the emphasis on the acoustic guitars giving it a certain ‘twang’. The music was also not as syncopated as that of Jesus House. The members of HTB’s worship band, which is associated with its music ministry, Worship Central,¹⁰⁰ dressed in casual jeans and either button-down shirts or t-shirts, a far cry from the Jesus House choir’s matching uniforms but not as ‘hip’ as the skinny jeans that Hillsong’s musicians favoured.

HTB’s Director of Worship, Tim Hughes, is well known in the UK and internationally, particularly for his Dove Award-winning song ‘Here I am to Worship’, which, like Darlene Zschech’s ‘Shout to the Lord’, has become a staple of the new evangelical Christian worship canon. HTB’s music ministry Worship Central is also similar to Hillsong’s publishing arm Hillsong Music Australia (HMA) in that it produces music, tours, appears at conferences and promotes worship, albeit on a smaller scale. However, in contrast to Hillsong – a church whose brand is synonymous with its music – HTB’s brand is more strongly associated with its 30-year-old Alpha Course, an introduction to Christianity programme that is a case study in international religious branding (Einstein 2008). This was clear in interviews I conducted with non-HTB members, many of whom were familiar with Hughes’ music but couldn’t recall his name, often referring to

⁹⁹ HTB rose to international prominence as the UK centre for the ‘Toronto Blessing’. See Percy (1996); Poloma (2003); Roberts (1994).

¹⁰⁰ *Worship Central*. <<http://www.worshipcentral.org/>>.

him as the ‘Alpha Course guy’ (as opposed to the ‘Worship Central guy’). In terms of the relationship between each church’s branding and its music, then, HTB’s music is branded more strongly than Jesus House London’s, but less strongly than Hillsong’s.

Hillsong London:

In many ways, Hillsong London’s music and its congregation are a ‘blend’ of Jesus House London and HTB. In contrast to Jesus House London’s predominantly black British or African congregation and HTB’s predominantly white British congregation, Hillsong London’s ethnic and racial demographics are much more diverse: its congregation members hail from all six continents, and its weekly services are translated into seven different languages. Hillsong’s heritage is Pentecostal (Evans 2006; Riches 2010), but its theological emphasis and presentation of worship is very much in the mainstream New Paradigm vein that seeks to appeal to church ‘seekers’ and therefore, while not discouraging it, tends to avoid overt displays of the Holy Spirit such as glossalia and holy laughter, that are associated with charismatic Pentecostalism or Anglicanism.¹⁰¹

Although its lineage can be traced back to the early Hills Christian Life Centre albums that exhibited a noticeable gospel influence (Riches and Wagner 2012), Hillsong’s musical style can be described as pop/rock and is often compared to the music of U2.¹⁰² The hallmarks of this style include thick walls of electric guitar and a driving ‘four on the floor’ feel. Also, Hillsong often uses its keyboards and

¹⁰¹ At the O2 event, for example, Jesus House’s pastor Agu Irukwu spoke in tongues and HTB’s Nicky Gumbel encouraged a bout of ‘holy laughter’ that swept through the arena. In contrast, Hillsong London’s pastor Gary Clark led the altar call, but did not explicitly encourage any charismatic expression. Hillsong’s statement of belief, however, does state, ‘We believe that in order to live the holy and fruitful lives that God intends for us, we need to be baptized in water and be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit enables us to use spiritual gifts, including speaking in tongues.’ (*What We Believe*. <<http://myhillsong.com/what-we-believe>>; accessed 07 August 2013)

¹⁰² Hillsong produces several niche product lines in which its music style varies according to the target audience. For example, Hillsong Chapel is acoustic as opposed to the primarily electric sound of United and LIVE. Furthermore, Hillsong’s youth groups produce music that appeals to them. For example, Hillsong London’s youth groups favour more hip-hop oriented styles. However, the overall ‘Hillsong Sound’ that is most associated with the Hillsong brand is derived from its Hillsong LIVE and Hillsong United albums, which have seen a convergence of musical style based on ‘U2 style’ electric guitars, drums and keyboards (Riches 2010; Riches and Wagner 2012).

bass guitar to provide the pedal tones for its texture. These instruments were thus less melodically active than in Jesus House or even HTB, making Hillsong's music sonically distinct. Hillsong's musicians and congregation members tend to be fairly 'hip' in their sartorial choices, favoring skinny jeans and T-shirts. The existence of a 'Hillsong style' was confirmed by several of my conversation partners, including Flo, the head of the translation team at Hillsong London.

Hillsong worship is known for being more rock 'n' roll and simple enough for new people to 'get it'. We also do have a Hillsong-worship-style: v-neck, skinny jeans and what I like to call the 'Peter Wilson' boots¹⁰³... we've had moments of hats and scarves but I think that's gone (for now). (Email exchange; 6 November 2011)

Hillsong's music is the most strongly branded of the three churches that participated in the O2 event. Its 'global' congregation is reflected in all aspects of its musical product, from the visual imagery on its CD covers and in its DVDs to the lyrical content of its songs to its recognizable 'Hillsong Sound' (Riches and Wagner 2012; Wagner 2013; see also chapter four of this thesis). Furthermore, its music is distributed to and used in churches around the world on a regular basis (e.g. Evans 2014). I have spoken to many worship pastors and congregants that refer to a certain contemporary worship sound as 'Hillsong style worship', by which they are referring to the content, songwriting and presentation of worship. Thus, Hillsong has to some degree pioneered a 'style' all of its own.

What is interesting in Flo's statement above is that she observes a confluence of fashion and music in an overall Hillsong worship style. Dick Hebdige introduced the importance of style to sociological thought in his influential book, *Subculture: the Meaning of Style* (1979). In it, Hebdige argued that everyday objects such as safety pins assume different, value-laden meanings when deployed by different groups that inhabit different positions in the 'social order'. For Hebdige, style was a form of resistance in an asymmetric power struggle between the 'culture' and 'subculture' of post-war Britain. One of *Subculture*'s most significant contributions to music studies was that it showed that sartorial and sonic meanings are inextricably associated with one another. The Punks, Mods and Teddy Boys in

¹⁰³ Peter Wilson is the Head of Worship at Hillsong London. He often preaches and leads worship in black jeans, a shirt, and a black sport coat in a pair of large black boots, a style that he is known for throughout the church.

Subculture each preferred a mode of dress and style of music that they used to construct, maintain and express life-styles, and more importantly the values that underpinned those lifestyles.

Registers of Style and The Body of Christ

In his study of Trinidadian Christians, Tim Rommen (2007) also draws attention to the way stylistic choices express values. During his fieldwork, Rommen attended a 'Unity Rally' during which these churches performed together. There, he observed one church perform North American gospel music while its preacher wore a suit and tie and spoke with an affected North American accent. In contrast, another church performed in the 'Gospelypso' style drawn from the local dancehall music. Its members dressed in local garb and spoke the local vernacular. Rommen observes that at this rally, music, dress and language were 'discursive formations in their own right, at once illustrating their own powers of expression and broadening the ethical horizons of discourse about identity by taking their place alongside the use of musical style' (Rommen 2007: 76). The difference between the Punks, Mods and Teddy Boys in Hebdige's study and the Gospelypsonians in Rommen's study is that while the former used style as a clear 'us versus them' demonstration against an 'other', the latter deployed stylistic resistance in an (arguably) more covert manner within a discursive framework that emphasized 'unity'.

To illustrate style's symbolic role in mediating a value-laden Trinidadian dialogue over nationalism, colonialism and faith, Rommen draws a contrast between what he calls the *invisible church* and the *visible church*. The invisible church is conceptualized as the 'sum total of believers everywhere' (ibid.: 72), the global Church. His construction has close resonances with the evangelical Christian idea of the 'Body of Christ', which derives from the Pauline Epistles in Corinthians 12:12-14¹⁰⁴ and is generally understood to be the sum total of all Christians on

¹⁰⁴ 12 For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.

Earth, or the Christian Church with a ‘capital C’. Participation in both of these global imaginaries is often signalled through the use of the ‘non-local’. For example, in Rommen’s study, participation in the invisible church is signalled by the use of North American gospel music, dress and speech, all of which have been imported to Trinidad through conferences and media.¹⁰⁵

Style works largely as an implicit value statement that becomes explicit through the senses. Rommen draws a contrast between the invisible, unified church and what he calls the visible church, a ‘local’ church where Trinidadian Christians’ value differences play out. In his fieldnotes on the event, Rommen writes:

I am somewhat unsure what to make of this Unity Rally. To begin with, the word ‘unity’ does not even come up during the rally, a fact that adds to the uncomfortable sense that the surface sheen of the evening – including banners and flyers – only diverts attention away from a general lack of community. To be sure, a mass choir does perform.... But beyond that, the event itself does not live up to its billing. The choir rehearsal... had the feel of an uncomfortable reunion – everyone knows each other but no one has much to say. (Rommen 2007: 74)

Although the ‘Unity Rally’ was intended to emphasize the *unity* of the invisible church, Rommen argues that the styles gave away the game, effectively displaying the *disunity* of the visible church. Through visible and audible style, participants in Rommen’s case study signalled their attitudinal positions in relation to each other and the discourses that formed the invisible church. His analysis of music’s ultimately differentiating effects highlights difference and unity as dialogically co-dependent. This co-dependence has been highlighted as one of the primary features of globalization (c.f. Appadurai 1990; Featherstone et al. 1995; Wilk 1995), and can be seen in the discourses that underpin ‘unifying’ international events such as the Eurovision song contest or the Olympics. As evangelical Christianity has globalized, it has also become increasingly concerned with expressing unity through music (Marti 2012). The O2 event was an example of this.

13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bound or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

14 For the body is not one member, but many.

¹⁰⁵ Simon Coleman (2000) observes a similar method of building the Body of Christ through music, dress, language and even body movement as they become normalized across cultures in a transnational circuit of preachers, conferences and media.

The vast majority of Christian ‘unity’ rallies, including the O2 event, occur in the evangelical Christian ‘conference’ format. A worship cocktail that is one part music festival, one part church service and almost always uses an appeal to ‘unity’ as its mixer, a conference is a place where style serves as a positioning tool ‘in relationship to local and translocal Others within the global Christian community’ (Ingalls 2011: 266). The vast majority of conferences are not as implicitly hostile as the event described by Rommen, especially not in the United States and UK. This is because they are usually self-contained collections of people who are already united by shared values. While different rallies may attract different ‘types’ of people, each rally in itself will be fairly homogenous. In a real sense, evangelical Christian conferences are articulations of utopia, both imagined and imaginary.

‘In One Accord’: Pentecost as a Utopian Narrative, Imagined and Imaginary

Rommen’s ‘invisible church’ and the evangelical ‘Body of Christ’ are both examples of Benedict Anderson’s ([1983] 2006) imagined community, a community of people who are too spatially and temporally dispersed to meet face-to-face but who nevertheless feel united through the use of common mass media. The imagined community is useful for understanding how people ‘learn’ about, and participate in, the Body of Christ. As Simon Coleman (2000) has proposed, the mass media that has propelled the spread of evangelical Christianity has also led to the creation of a ‘generic Pentecostal’. Through transnational flows of preachers, conferences and especially digital media such as the worship videos that have made Hillsong famous, participants around the world ‘learn’ the normative language (and here I mean verbal, physical and musical) that constitutes evangelical Christian worship and by extension the evangelical Christian. Anderson’s focus on the imagined community being built through mass media therefore illuminates how participants learn about ‘others’ in the Body of Christ, and everyone’s role in it. While there is clearly a utopian element to the imagined community, Anderson does not address this. However, Philip Wegner’s concept of an ‘imaginary community’ does. For Wegner, literary utopian

discourses function not as escapist fantasies, but instead ‘have material, pedagogical, and ultimately political effects, shaping the ways people understand and, as a consequence, act in their worlds’ (Wegner 2002: xviii, in Ingalls 2011: 264). In other words, stories can have phenomenological effects; the lessons they have to teach can be embodied, experienced and made real.

The Pentecost story, then, provided the utopian narrative for the O2 event, painting a picture of a place where everyone worships as one in different but mutually intelligible ways.

1 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, *they were all with one accord in one place.* 2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. 3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. 5 And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. 6 Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. (Acts 2: 1-6, KJV; emphasis added)

This discourse was the frame in which, through musical participation, ‘biblical narrative and personal experience [became] conjoined in a dialectical relationship: the experience of conference worship [was] used to interpret evangelical narratives and beliefs... and vice versa’ (Ingalls 2011: 264). As will be seen below, at the O2 event, registers of style worked between the narrative ‘world as it should be’ and the actual ‘world as it is’. In the act of worship, the ‘world as it is’ was, for a moment, located (and ideally experienced) within a discursive utopian frame.

The Pentecostal movement derives its name and core beliefs from the second chapter of the Book of Acts. In the narrative presented above, the Holy Spirit bestows the gift of tongues on the Disciples, unifying humankind for the first time since God divided it in the Old Testament story of the Tower of Babel. In the Tower of Babel story, distinction was detrimental – it divided mankind and made co-operation towards building the Tower impossible. In contrast, the gift of tongues made distinction an advantage; now, each group could maintain its own language (and presumably identity), but work together towards building the

Church. The Pentecostal use of distinction is the exact goal of transnational branding. Transnational brands seek to unify the local and the global, to be a common language that appeals to common values while being authentically personal to the individual. The ideal brand is a dialogue between distinction and unity.

At the O2 event, distinction and unity were on display through the common media of style, a ‘system of common difference’ (Wilk 1995). Different communication styles were celebrated. For example, when leaving the stage after delivering his message, Jesus House’s pastor Agu Irukwu brought participants to their feet by highlighting his ‘Pentecostal’ nature:

You know, I can’t help it... I am Pentecostal, and we make a lot of noise. So before I go, I want us to raise a shout that would cause an earthquake in the pits of Hell!

The crowd enthusiastically responded with a sustained barrage of clapping, cheering and pounding of feet. Into this cacophony stepped HTB’s pastor Nicky Gumbel, who immediately acknowledged both the diversity of the Body of Christ and established his place in it:

We love every part of the Body of Christ, but we have a very special love for Jesus House and for Pastor Agu. Well, I’m an Anglican, and I need to ask your forgiveness in advance, because I can only talk quietly!

The ethnographic vignette that opened this chapter described ways in which distinction and unity were musically navigated through style, as well as how style articulated ways of participating in the Body of Christ. One obvious move was that musicians from all three churches were represented more or less equally. There was no obvious ‘leader’, as this role was outsourced to Martin Smith. Smith is an interesting choice because of the way his own set of associations map onto the focus of the evening. Smith is the former leader of the recently defunct UK Christian band Delirious?. In Christian music circles, Delirious? is considered a ‘crossover’ band in two respects. First, it has achieved success in both the ‘secular’ and Christian charts.¹⁰⁶ Second, it has achieved international success,

¹⁰⁶ The dialectic between ‘Christian’ and ‘secular’ pop music, their perceived audiences and uses, is complicated. For the standard academic account of how this plays out see Howard and Streck

‘crossing over’ the Atlantic to the U.S. Through Smith, then, the O2 engaged with the transnational character of the Body of Christ in a manner similar to Rommen’s case study. As an internationally-touring musician, Smith does God’s work on a global stage – and as a ‘local boy’ his evangelical efficacy is rooted ‘at home’. In other words, he localized the transnational Body of Christ in the UK.

The localizing of the transnational continued throughout the evening. For example, the first group to follow Smith was HTB’s Tim Hughes and the worship team from Worship Central.¹⁰⁷ The band opened with Hughes’ hit ‘Happy Day’ and followed with ‘For Your Glory (We Will Dance)’, a worship standard written by the UK star Matt Redman. Most of the participants were familiar with both of these upbeat, guitar driven tunes, and clapped and sang along happily. A strong folk influence can be detected in Hughes’ songwriting, but he is also known for venturing further afield in his collaborations with the West London hip-hop group 29th Chapter. In this spirit, the finale of HTB’s set was an electrified hip-hop reworking of Hughes’ hit ‘Spirit Break Out’. In this version, the chorus’ normally smooth hook was given a jagged emotional edge by a rapper whose frenetic repetition of the words ‘Spirit-Break-Out’ whipped the crowd into a chanting, fist-pumping frenzy.

Beyond a stylistic appeal to unity (fusing rock with hip-hop), the song itself appealed to the Pentecost story’s notion of unity through the Holy Spirit. The Chorus of ‘Spirit Break Out’ is the following:

Spirit break out
Break our walls down
Spirit break out
Heaven come down

What I am interested in here is how the O2 event simultaneously built and tore down several ‘walls’, particularly between the local and global. Each church stylistically branded itself, yet performed with the others against a background

(1999), especially pages 89-90 (see also Ingalls et al. 2013). Other views are also instructive; for a fan history of CCM, see Thompson (2000). Joseph (2003) focuses on the current plurality of style in relation to ‘the mainstream’. Beaujon (2006) takes a journalistic perspective.

¹⁰⁷ Worship Central is HTB’s worship music resource hub. Essentially, it is a worship music-training centre that counts the worship team as one of its resources. It also offers sheet music, blogs and online courses that can be downloaded and taught by any church wishing to do so.

that framed distinction as harmony. Furthermore, the transnational nature of the groups – claiming roots in Australia, the UK, and Africa – was localized in the UK not only because London is the home of all three church branches and where the event took place, but also because musical ‘leadership’ of the combined group was ceded to a UK superstar in the form of Martin Smith – himself both an ‘Outsider’ and an ‘Insider’.

Furthermore, Hughes’ engagement with hip-hop brings to the fore associations from which style is inextricable: those of race and ethnicity. An engagement with transnational identity cannot happen without consideration of these ‘categories’. As noted in my description of each church at the beginning of this chapter, race and ethnicity are part of each of the three churches’ identities, and are mapped onto the music. For example, Jesus House’s predominantly Black congregation worships with African-American gospel music, whereas HTB’s predominantly white congregation uses a folk/rock aesthetic. While the connections between race/ethnicity and style are of course problematic, the associations between the two nevertheless exist.¹⁰⁸

Just as the transnational character of the Body of Christ was signalled through an international star, so too was its multi-ethnic dimension. The evening was brought to a close by Israel Houghton, the worship pastor of Joel Osteen’s Lakewood Church in Houston, TX, the leader of the band New Breed and one of the best-known and electrifying performers on the Christian music scene. As a brand, Houghton embodies the discourses that framed the O2 event as well as anyone. As a performer, Houghton’s energy, charisma and technique are unparalleled. His

¹⁰⁸ The connection between musical style and race/ethnicity was also noted in Ingalls’ (2012) study discussed above. Her accounts of the Passion and Urbana evangelical Christian student conferences in the United States reveals that different value sets lead to different articulations of unity as a utopian concept, and that these concepts are revealed through musical choices. For instance, at the Passion conference, standard rock-based contemporary worship tunes played by predominantly white male musicians accompanied preaching that reinforced white male Christian hetero-normative values. In contrast, the Urbana conference’s self-conscious use of a variety of music, from rock to hip-hop to gospel, sung by a worship group that included men and women of a number of ethnicities and led by an African-American articulated the conference’s conception of a diverse ‘Heavenly Choir’. Ingalls notes that both concepts of ‘unity’ were articulations of different visions of a utopian ‘Heavenly’ community. More importantly, music was a way for participants to *access* and experience, if only for the duration of worship, the utopian construction. In other words, music was used to articulate an *imagined* utopian vision of the world as it could (or should) be while also enabling participation in an *imaginary* one.

music defies classification, a mix of rock, country, blues and gospel that reflects his upbringing in the U.S. south. Additionally, Houghton is bi-racial. His personal semiotics cannot be ignored in the context of the evening.¹⁰⁹

The preceding discussion has sought to highlight the interplay of style and identity with values. Style, built through different, interacting registers such as clothing, language and music, interacts with local and translocal Others in dialogues that are, at their roots, about values. While these dialogues work to form pictures of ‘unity’, ultimately it is the production of difference that makes the idea and experience of unity possible. The O2 event highlights the ways in which the production of difference and sameness, within the discursive framework of Pentecost, worked in collaboration with the branded identities of the churches. Pentecostalism’s tendency towards individualism makes it well suited not only to modernity and globalization, but also makes it amenable to branding, which thrives on difference and differentiation. As the discussion above shows, while the Body of Christ is one predicated on unity – on worshipping as one – it is difference that helps it grow. Thus, branding may be one of the biggest coups ever for transnational churches like Hillsong and the transnational imagined and imaginary Church.

In many ways, what the Holy Spirit ‘did’ at Pentecost is what modern global brands seek – mutual intelligibility via distinction within a larger category. Branded identities set up the expectation that engagement with the brand will yield a ‘branded’ experience that is different from that of another brand’s offering. I argue in the next section that brand familiarity and identity set up expectations that structure a worshipper’s entrance into and experience of an imagined transnational and imaginary utopian community.

¹⁰⁹ For a discussion of Houghton, see Reagan 2014.

Part II - Music, Brand Recognition and Expectation

For many of the event's participants, the O2 event was not merely a remembering, retelling or re-enacting of a biblical story; it was an immediate experience of the Holy Spirit, a personal encounter with God that reinforced spiritual identity. As one participant I talked to that night said of the music, 'The songs... reminded me of who I am and why I'm here' (Interview with author, 11 June 2011).

Pentecostalism (and thus Pentecostal identity) is difficult to define because, as Allan Anderson puts it, 'Pentecostals have defined themselves by so many paradigms that diversity itself has become a primary defining characteristic of Pentecostal and Charismatic identity' (Anderson 2004: 10). Indeed, the Pentecostal movement has been characterized by fissures between groups almost since its inception (Anderson 2004: 39-62). Perhaps paradoxically, this tendency towards disunity contributed to Pentecostalism becoming the twentieth century's fastest growing religious movement, as it was able to adapt to almost any socio-economic niche it has been introduced to across the globe (c.f. Anderson 2004; Burgess and van der Mass 2002; Cox 1995; Hollenweger 1972).

Enduring brands use consistency to stake out a piece of 'mental real-estate' in the hearts and minds of participants (Jones 2012: 19-20). As a participant becomes familiar with an organization's values through repeated communications, a brand image coalesces. At the O2 event, the participants I interviewed arrived with already formed ideas of each church and its music. Our conversations revealed that the images they held were derived in part from their familiarity (or lack thereof) of the organization in question. Furthermore, these images informed the expectation of the 'type' of worship they would engage in. An example of this is seen in the following interview I conducted with Matt and his friend Geoff, two men in their early twenties. Matt is a member of HTB and Geoff worships at a 200-member church in Canada (he was visiting to take part in HTB's Alpha Course). I questioned both while they were queuing to enter the arena.

TW: So you've both heard of Hillsong.

M: (immediately) Yes – big fan.

TW: What are you expecting out of tonight?

G: If I know Hillsong is going to be there, I think ‘excellence’ would be one of the things. (M: that’s good, that’s good). And I like excellence because I think it’s worship as well, it’s giving their all. So I know that the music will be tight, the production value will be good, and I won’t find any elements of it distracting from what I’m really there for, which is to worship.

M: Yeah, I’m with that. (Interview with author, 11 June 2011)

Even before he entered the arena, Geoff had an image of the ‘personality’ of each church and its worship. From Hillsong, he expected ‘excellence’, something that Hillsong’s brand has long been associated with both musically and technically (Stackpool 2009). It is also a value that the church constantly promotes in building its corporate culture (Zschech 2001: 125-144). Although the high production value of Hillsong and churches like it has sometimes been criticized as ‘glitz’, the church counters that, for participants who experience the highest-quality level of media production in their everyday lives, anything less than that standard will be deemed amateurish and distract from worship. Geoff, who claimed he knew in advance that there wouldn’t be any technical flaws to distract him because of Hillsong’s level of presentation, supported this contention. Part of branding is establishing consistency over time and across offerings, and over the years Hillsong has built a reputation that engenders confidence in its product. Geoff doesn’t just *expect* excellence – he *knows* it will be there, helping him to worship without distraction.

While Geoff’s image of Hillsong was one of the technical wizardry of Hillsong, his image of HTB’s brand of worship was based on the visibility – or lack thereof – of its musicians:

TW: What about out of HTB, then?

G: Oh, what am I expecting out of HTB? I don’t know... faceless worship? That’s what they’re good at – faceless worship, where you don’t notice the worship leader. Where you don’t notice the worship leader, you just worship together. That’s what I’m expecting.

TW: So do you think that Hillsong is more ‘faced’ then?

G: They get out more. They tour way more, so of course people begin to identify with the performers.

M: It's true. It's a slightly different model, but not in a bad way. I think both are good. I do think Hillsong is about grabbing your attention and pointing you at someone else – at Jesus Christ – whereas I think that HTB is about worshipping Christ and join in if you'd like to. (Interview with author, 11 June 2011)

Although Hillsong and HTB's presentation styles likely lead to different worship experiences, both Geoff and Matt agreed that the sum might be better than the individual parts:

G: It's kind of nice to get both [worship styles].

M: Yeah, it's a good combo. Obviously tonight you've got the gospel choir as well, and Israel (Houghton).

G: I didn't even know about that!

M: Yeah, it's good! (Interview with author, 11 June 2011)

For Geoff and Matt, Hillsong's brand is associated with technical excellence and the recognition of its musicians. It grabs the worshipper. This stands in contrast to HTB's brand of worship, which is often less assertive. The least-strongly branded church (at least in terms of music), Jesus House London, was referred to as 'the gospel choir'. There are many reasons why Matt and Geoff might have been less familiar with Jesus House than Hillsong and HTB, from demographics to simple taste in music. However, I think that the fact that Matt, who lives in Canada, was familiar with both Hillsong and HTB speaks to a disparity in brand recognition that is directly correlated both to the popularity of the two churches' music and also the fact that the music of each is branded.¹¹⁰ Hillsong's music is some of the best known in the world, to which its ubiquitous presence on music charts, at the Dove Awards (the Christian equivalent of the Grammys) and on social media attests. In addition, it boasts a stable of internationally known stars, some of who

¹¹⁰ Expansion strategies also play a role in (brand) name recognition. Hillsong and Holy Trinity Brompton are both parent brands: Hillsong usually plants churches across the globe with pastors trained at its college – often, but not exclusively, in major cities. These churches engage in Hillsong-style worship, and if successful, will eventually become Hillsong-branded churches (See, for example, Evans 2014). HTB 'grafts' its name onto failing Anglican churches in the UK, planting a small number of its congregation in the new church while often revamping the worship style. In contrast, Jesus House London is more of a 'spinoff' in the sense that the Jesus House name is affiliated with the RCCG, an umbrella organization that lacks the branding focus of either Hillsong or HTB. Because of this, Jesus House London's brand image and its attendant associations were not clear in the minds of those who were not members of the church.

are pop stars outside of Christian music circles.¹¹¹ Here we see that distribution and marketing have an impact on the worship experience, something that is addressed further in chapters four and five. In particular, chapter five explores the role of branding, agency and participation in the worship experience. As a prologue to this, the following section explores how branding can affect a participant's ability to participate. The 'God encounter' that is sought in worship is attained through participation, but as we will see, 'the type' of people in a church – a branded community – affects the nature of this participation.

Singing Along: Expectation, Participation, and a 'Branded' Church Community

Geoff and Matt's worship expectations were based on brand familiarity. They expected a different type of worship, in terms of presentation, from each group. Significantly, this meant that the two men expected to *worship differently* depending on the group that was on the platform:

TW: Do you think you'll worship differently for each group?

M: Oh, that's a good question. Well, I suppose being from one church, I'm quite familiar with my own church's songs and stuff, so probably in that sense, yeah. But I hope the heart of it won't be any different anyway.

G: For me, there's going to be familiarity with one band that I know better than another, and that, when you're worshipping and you know the words, you can just enter in. If it's HTB, I might not know all the songs they're going to play, and I might end up spending more time looking at the words. It's obviously a different experience, but I don't think one is better than the other. I think they're very complementary and I like that. (Interview with author, 11 June 2011)

Here, the manner(s) of worship that Geoff referred to are important. Although Geoff was visiting from Canada to attend HTB's Alpha Course, he was more familiar with Hillsong's songs than with HTB's. He admitted that he would probably need to look at the words in order to participate in worship when HTB

¹¹¹ The Grammy award-nominated British pop star Natasha Bedingfield was part of the Hillsong London worship, appearing on *Shout to God's Fame*. Brooke Fraser, a singer/songwriter for Hillsong's Australian team, has achieved fame in her native New Zealand, where her single 'Something in the Water' reached number one on the singles charts (<<http://charts.org.nz/showitem.asp?interpret=Brooke+Fraser&titel=Something+in+the+Water&cat=s>>; accessed 26 January 2012).

was on the platform, though not, presumably, when Hillsong was. Although Geoff didn't explicitly say so, my interpretation of his comments is that he believed it would be easier to attain *flow* (Csikszentmihalyi 1990) during Hillsong's worship set because the text was already internalized.

One of the reasons that hymnbooks are not used in many evangelical churches is that the embodied experience, and particularly the emotional elements of that experience, is thought to be of the utmost importance in a 'God encounter'. This is why contemporary worship songs commonly feature easily sung, memorable melodies and lyrics that are projected above the stage. Simply put, a participant whose head is buried in a book, trying to comprehend unfamiliar text, will be less likely to have the intellectual, emotional or physical freedom necessary to engage with worship in the manner needed to achieve transcendence. The fact that the music is easily remembered is important because familiarity with and the pleasure derived from listening to music are often linked (King and Prior 2013). People enjoy knowing what will come next, which affords certain kinds of participation. It is perhaps no surprise then that Unwin et al.'s study (2002) showed that participants' mood in church singing was improved when they liked the music and knew what was going to be sung.

Brand familiarity, then, is important in terms of how people expect to participate in the rituals that make religion efficacious. This is linked to exposure to the music, which for a transnational church like Hillsong has largely to do with distribution and marketing. A key point that emerges from the interview with Matt and Geoff above is that of brand personality. Brands have personalities (Aaker [1996] 2010). As Matt and Geoff showed, we expect them to act in certain ways (Fournier 1998). However, the connection between a brand's personality and its stakeholders' identity is co-productive. People use branded products to express their identities both to themselves and others. As discussed in chapter two, they often choose brands that have value associations that map onto their own. The flip side of this is that brands, and thus brand identity, become associated with the

‘type’ of person that uses the brand’s products.¹¹² For a musically branded church like Hillsong, then, music will probably be one of the major elements in determining the makeup of the congregation (Sargeant 2000; c.f. Marti 2012).

Part III - The Hillsong Brand(ed) Community: ‘A Certain Type of People’

One of the major assumptions that drives musical selection in evangelical Christian churches is that music plays an important factor both in church choice (Sargeant, c.f. Marti 2012) and the experience of worship (Nekola 2009). To appeal to congregational tastes, churches often feel that they have to choose between classic, organ-based ‘hymns’ and rock-based ‘CPM’ services. Strategies used to address this supposed division in musical taste usually involve either offering separate ‘traditional’ and ‘contemporary’ services, or by offering ‘blended’ services that feature both (Sargeant 2000).¹¹³ Similarly, especially in the United States, the concern to attract a ‘multi-ethnic’ congregation has led many churches to add different ‘ethnic’ styles such as salsa, reggae and rock to their repertoires (Marti 2012).

Within evangelical Christian circles, then, a style of worship music is often associated with a certain ‘type’ or ‘brand’ of person. Furthermore, it may be seen as one of the strongest links between that person and his or her church. Although the theme of ‘one accord’ was the overriding discourse of the O2 event, and participants all acknowledged that each church had great worship music, members of each church nevertheless expressed strong affinities for their own church’s music. As Julie, a Hillsong London worship team member who attended the event (not as a performer), told me in a later conversation:

¹¹² One example of how this relationship can be problematic for brand management is when Tania do Nascimento appeared on the reality show *Big Brother 4*. Burberry is an aspirational brand for which exclusivity (and the social class it connotes) is part of the brand appeal. Nascimento’s antics, which included parading around the Big Brother house in a Burberry bikini while boasting that she would spend her prize money on breast implants, did a great deal of damage to Burberry’s brand image in Britain. As one brand analyst asked: ‘Burberry is supposed to be an aspirational brand. Are people on Big Brother aspirational?’ (Fletcher 2003).

¹¹³ Tellingly, the ‘traditional’ services are usually on Sunday morning while ‘contemporary’ services are held on Saturday night and Sunday afternoon.

Were you at Pentecost? It was so different. Hillsong was my favorite, because everything came alive, and people were actually jumping. The other ones were like... it's like the thing you need to get there wasn't there. Like Hillsong, you know it's going to come. But I think that's also how they make us in the church. The character of the church is like that. (Interview with author, 6 February 2011)

Here we see that the character of the worship is linked to the brand, and the brand to the 'type' of people in the church. However, it would be a mistake to assume that music directly determines the congregation. While it may be an initial identity marker, its efficacy is ultimately located in the community with which it is associated. Hillsong's members often talk about community as the thing that makes the church special. Although the music is often what initially drew them to the church, it is the friends they made and the communities they integrated into that kept them there and cemented the positive emotional associations that give the Hillsong brand its efficacy. As psychologist Charles Galanter has noted, group integration results in satisfaction with and commitment to the group's purpose and values (Galanter 1989: 129-175). This is shown by the very different experiences of two female congregation members at Hillsong. The first, Waithera, is a 30-year-old filmmaker who grew up in Nigeria and recently moved to London:

I didn't know about Hillsong. So I go to London and I'm on the Internet checking out Hillsong, and it was like, mmm, not bad. And it's in a place that I can go, you know? On Tottenham Court Road – that's where I usually work, so that's good. The first day I'm there, this lady introduces me to someone who sat with me, and I began serving that day. I'd not even gone into church and I was serving on a team! I'm welcoming people into church – and I've never been to this church! But anyway, so we went for the 3:30 service, which is usually really cool, and I sat with all of these girls who were on the same team as me, and the music began and I was like 'oh...my...word!' I go for a lot of gigs, and I was like, this is a gig! This is a rave! Are you for real? I was like: 'This is awesome, this is me!' (Interview with author, 16 October 2010)

Recognizing the importance of community as an offering, Hillsong relies on a large volunteer team that is tasked with identifying and 'plugging in' potential new members immediately. In addition to participating in team activities, members are encouraged to attend small, regionally based 'connect groups' that are designed to build the more intimate relationships that may be difficult to establish in larger group settings. In Waithera's case, she was immediately identified as a 'seeker', and given an active role in church life. Importantly, she

connected with the people and music that she encountered. Sergeant (2000) has argued that large churches like Hillsong are often attractive to ‘seekers’ precisely because of the initial anonymity that the size of the church provides (Sergeant 2000: 51, 165). However, if the seeker isn’t soon integrated into the fold, he or she will likely be lost, as the experience of a second woman – a ‘forty-something’ nanny and native of New Zealand named Deidre – shows:

I changed [churches] because [at Hillsong] I found it hard to get to know people. I found it very hard to make friends there. I made one or two friends. I was there for a year, so I gave them a chance. I love the worship, but that was the only thing I loved about it. I need more. I need friends, so I changed churches for that reason.... Hillsong is great and I love it, but you need to push and push to connect with people you can’t. I also found them quite fake, sometimes; like, ‘Hi, how are you?’ and then they’d quite literally just move on from you. (Interview with author, 22 July 2011)

Despite ‘loving’ the church’s music, Deidre did not identify with the communication style that characterizes the church. While both Waithera and Deidre enjoyed the music, one of them easily connected with a group of people, while the other found it difficult to relate. Their differing senses of connection profoundly affected their individual worship experiences. For Waithera:

Hillsong was life changing and the music just added into [the worship experience]. It was that sauce that needed to be put; do you know what I mean? (Interview with author, 16 October 2010)

For Deidre, on the other hand:

TW: Did not being able to connect affect your worship experience?

D: It did, yeah. Because when you’re sitting by yourself in a huge place, and your mates are helping out and no one is around and you have a whole row to yourself. When no one’s sitting next to you, it does affect your ability with God because you’re feeling crappy because everyone else is happy but you and you’ve got no one to talk to. So you sort of find yourself going, ‘you want us to be singing and happy...’ but you’re sort of feeling like you don’t have anyone to be happy with. Even though God is there, you find yourself not worshipping as hard or listening as hard because you’ve got no one to talk to about what you’re saying.

TW: So if I’m hearing you right, you like the music and you like the teaching but you need to bring someone with you to get the full experience?

D: Yeah, to get the full experience, because you will get lost in the crowd.
(Interview with author, 22 July 2011)

Hillsong goes to great lengths to integrate people into its community. Despite these efforts, some inevitably feel left out; taste in music may be enough to attract a seeker, but by itself it cannot provide the satisfaction needed to retain him or her. The social elements of music contribute to its spiritual efficacy. Participants need people that they can relate to, people like themselves. Is there such a thing as a ‘typical’ Hillsong participant? This is where the differentiating power of the brand, and especially music’s role in the formation and deployment of this power, is most apparent.

‘Those Sexy Young Christians’

Accounts of the ‘typical’ Hillsong participant, especially in the popular press, almost invariably describe him or her as young, single and energetic. For example, in a 2003 Sydney Morning Herald article suggestively titled ‘The Lord’s Profits’, George Bearup describes his welcome to the Hills church:

A sexy young Christian, a walkie-talkie clipped to her hipsters, greets us on our walk from the car park. ‘Hi, howya doin?’ she says, with a flick of her mane and a smile. ‘Welcome to God’s house – what an awesome day!’
(Bearup 2003)

Bearup stereotypes Hillsong Australia’s participants for the sake of his article, but his poetic licence is revealing because it is predicated on associations between the church’s music and youth. As discussed above, Hillsong’s international pool of participants is quite diverse. However, there are well-established connections between age, musical preference and religious belief. For example, Holbrook and Schindler (1989) have shown that musical preference is cemented during the teenage and early adult years, while Spilka, Hood and Gorsuch (1985) have shown that religious belief is often solidified by around 15 years of age. This suggests that music has profound implications for the demographics of a brand(ed) community, something both Deidre’s and Waithera’s experiences seem to support.

Deidre, who is in her 40s, told me that she has listened to Hillsong's music 'since the beginning'. She described her preference for the Australian church's older worship songs, which she felt were not as 'loud' as the newer ones. Significantly, she related the loudness of the current songs to the type of person who attends a Hillsong church:

I just prefer the older version better. I like the sound of it better. It sounds calmer. I always find myself going back to the older songs. Now, I'm a quiet person. They [Hillsong] produce lively people – very lively people. To be part of Hillsong, you've got to be a really outgoing, talkative person, because people who aren't will get misplaced. If you wanted to join a Hillsong church, you've got to make sure you're willing to put the effort in to get to know them. (Interview with author, 22 July 2011)

Although it would be a mistake to posit a typical 'Hillsong participant', after three years of participant observation, I feel confident that Deidre's description of the 'typical' Hillsong participant as young and outgoing is, in general, accurate. While Hillsong's doors are open to anyone, the fact that musical taste is one of the main factors in church preference (Sargeant 2000: 64-66) suggests that, in branding itself with a certain style of music, Hillsong will attract a 'certain type' of participant, which brands the community and will attract 'more of the same'.

Conclusion

How, then, does branding affect participation in the imagined and imaginary community of the Body of Christ? This chapter has attempted to tease this out, showing that part of the Hillsong brand's spiritual efficacy is due to communal associations that are inexorably bound up with style, of which music is a 'register'. The O2 Pentecost event was an opportunity for Hillsong to build its brand image by positioning itself both in alliance with and in contrast to other organizations in an 'imagined' transnational community. The discourses that construct this community also framed a 'utopian' imaginary community that 'taught' what heaven is like through the participatory experience. The Pentecost story framed the experience. Like branding, the Pentecost story presents a utopia in which each person's 'heart language' is mutually intelligible and therefore participants can be autonomous individuals in a collective – the answer to

modernity's existential dilemma. This suggestion relied heavily on two expectations that were provoked by participants' familiarity with the brand. First, Hillsong's reputation for energetic, technically excellent music established an expectation of an enjoyable, uninterrupted worship experience. Second, participants' familiarity with the lyrics and melodies sung influenced the mode of the worship experience. In the end, then, the emotional attachments to the community with which each brand was associated gave the brand its spiritual efficacy. As two contrasting communal experiences showed, integration into the brand was, as Waithera put it, 'the sauce that needed to be put'. Thus, it becomes clear that Hillsong's (and every church's) unique offering is not the God encounter *per se*, but the branded community that is associated with it.

This chapter has focused on participation as a key to the experience of the brand. The imagined and imaginary community was shown to be important because it provides a visceral experience of the brand and its associated values. Experience of the music is therefore of great importance to the brand's evangelical efficacy. In the following chapter, I explore further the relationship between imaginaries and experience. However, instead of focusing on the global 'Body of Christ', I will explore the Hillsong Church Network as a set of imaginaries, focusing on how participants' understandings of other participants within the network affect their experiences of the music.

Chapter 4

The ‘Hillsong Sound’: Hearing Place in the Hillsong Network

Introduction

At 2:30 on a wet, grey London afternoon, a queue is already forming outside the Dominion Theatre ahead of Hillsong London’s 3:30 service. Despite the damp, people are in high spirits because this and the following 6:00 service will be special: both will be recorded for the new Hillsong LIVE album A Beautiful Exchange, which will feature music written and performed by Hillsong’s London and Australia-based worship teams. Anticipation has been growing for months, largely because of regular reminders from Head Pastor Gary Clark and the cinematic trailers promoting the recording that have been shown during the ‘what’s going on in the life of the church’ segment of weekly Sunday services. Also, many of the songs that are to be recorded this evening have been in heavy rotation in the services leading up to tonight, so participants know them well and are eager to start singing along.

Fifteen minutes before the service begins, the doors to the auditorium open. People rush to secure the best seats, reserving spots for late arriving friends by draping coats over chairs with one hand while with the other hand trying to communicate their locations through furious text message exchanges. At the appointed hour, the auditorium goes dark. Howls erupt from the crowd as everyone claps in time to a thumping ‘four on the floor’ beat. Not that anyone could help but be in time; each thud of the bass drum can be felt in the core of your being. THUMP – THUMP – WHOOT! – WHOOT!: participants hoot on every third and fourth beat. They know what’s coming. After about 30 seconds, the stage explodes in a barrage of lights and sounds as the worship band cranks out ‘The Answer’. A jumble of lines flashes across the huge LED screen that frames the rear of the stage, sometimes in disarray, sometimes momentarily forming a sphere before dissolving away. This continues until the chorus arrives. Then, as the lyrics ‘When the World...’ are sung, a globe complete with latitude

and longitude lines forms on the screen, eventually coalescing into a fully rendered image of the Earth. Exactly four minutes after it began, the song is over. Worship has begun. (Author's fieldnotes; 8 November 2009)

Six months later,¹¹⁴ *A Beautiful Exchange*, the nineteenth album in the Hillsong LIVE series, was released on the EMI label. It subsequently rose as high as number four on the US iTunes album chart and reached number one on the Australian iTunes chart. On the US *Billboard* charts, it debuted at number one on the Christian albums, number nine on digital albums, and was fortieth on the *Billboard* 200 albums charts. In Australia, it reached number three on the ARIA top 50.

During the month leading up to the album's recording, *A Beautiful Exchange* was marketed to Hillsong London's participants as a collaboration between the Australian and London churches. The album was a move towards a more 'global' Hillsong musical expression. A full night's worship was recorded at the Dominion Theatre that evening. Yet upon final release, only one song made it on to the CD version of the album ('A Father's Heart'). Five others were released on the DVD, but these were relegated to the Bonus Disc.

Why was this? In posing this question to Hillsong's congregational participants, worship leaders and General Manager, I was given several reasons, all of which were connected (although usually not explicitly) to branding.

This chapter explores how marketing and production concerns affect sacred experience. It explores how Hillsong brands itself not only as *part of* a global community, but also *as* a global community in its own right. While the last chapter focused on the Body of Christ as an imagined and imaginary community, this chapter will examine the Hillsong Network – the complex associational web of people and places that constitutes the socio-cultural entity 'Hillsong Church'. My discussion of the Hillsong Network will focus on Hillsong's Australian and London locations because of their prominence in the hierarchy of Hillsong's

¹¹⁴ *A Beautiful Exchange* was released on 29 June 2010 in the United States.

placemaking portfolio (Gilmore and Pine 1999), which comprises all the physical and virtual spaces where Hillsong has established a presence. The definition of space and place varies across disciplines (e.g. Feld and Basso 1996; Lash and Urry 1994; c.f. Hubbard et al. 2004). Here, I am defining a place as simply ‘space made meaningful’. The Hillsong brand makes physical and virtual spaces ‘places’ by condensing them into an associational package that, through global flows (Appadurai 1996) and mediated imaginations (Anderson [1983] 2006), affords meaningful experiences of its music – the ‘Hillsong Sound’.

In positing a ‘Hillsong Sound’, I first discuss the problem of global translation that Hillsong faces, as well as some of the advantages of and limitations to the use of branding as a method of cross-cultural communication. After defining ‘sound’ as a primarily discursive construction that posits a space/place as a musical ‘centre of production’, I show how Hillsong’s music production strategy establishes its flagship Australian church as the centre of production of the music and the brand. This Australian centre of production is imbued with essentialist cultural associations that anchor the ‘Hillsong Sound’ in its brand’s mythological creation story (Holt 2004). It is through this mythology that the spiritual power of Hillsong’s branded music is experienced. Finally, I explore how Hillsong London participants’ images of places and people in the Hillsong network inform their experience of Hillsong’s worship music vis-à-vis the ‘Hillsong Sound’, which is the sonic signifier of the Hillsong brand. I conclude by noting that, because the ‘sound’ is important to the efficacy of the music, Hillsong actively positions not only the church network but also the city of London itself within an evangelical Christian discourse that relies on global and local propositions.

The Hillsong Brand: A Global Language?

Like pop music and evangelical Christianity, brands such as Coca-Cola, McDonalds and Disney seem to be able to penetrate and adapt to any socio-cultural milieu. Furthermore – and also like pop music and evangelical Christianity – the meanings of brands are multiple and contested. For some, brands are globalization’s agents of cultural imperialism (Cocacolonization),

bureaucratic rationalization (McDonaldization) and even engineers of the human imagination (Disneyization) (Chidester 2001: 131-149).¹¹⁵ Others see global brands as symbols of neo-liberal hegemony (Klein [2000] 2010) that homogenise our urban environments into replicated ‘brandscapes’ (Klingmann 2007) and colonise our global ideoscapes (Askegaard 2006). Indeed, the association of branding with the hegemony of ‘American style’ capitalism might lead one to see brands as a brave ‘New World’ religion. However, as Maharaja burgers in India and McSushi in Japan demonstrate, even the most ‘cross-cultural’ brands are subject to local tastes (Chidester 2005: 138-142).

What is common to all the examples above is that brands are shared semiotic material in conflict, negotiation and exchange (Holt 2002). As seen in culture jamming and the now annual anti-globalization protests at the World Trade Organization meetings (Klein [2000] 2010: 280-323), brands are significant symbolic stand-ins for disputes about the ethical and value assumptions that capitalist cultures and societies are built upon. This is because they are systems of common difference (Wilk 1995) *par excellence* that retain core identities even as they are deployed symbolically for often-contradictory purposes. For better or worse, then, it is clear that brands are a form of cross-cultural communication in a globalized world, and branding is therefore not a luxury but an imperative for organizations that aspire to global reach (Tragos 1998), including religious organizations such as Hillsong.

This is not to say that branding is a failsafe method of cross-cultural communication –far from it. Even iconic global brands such as Coca-Cola, McDonalds and Disney have made (sometimes comical) missteps in their attempts at communication. For example, Coca-Cola’s supposedly panhuman message has been lost in translation on numerous occasions, as related by David Chidester:

... Coca-Cola has sometimes generated a chaos of signification in its attempts at global translation. For example, the Chinese characters that most closely reproduce the sound of ‘Coca-Cola’ apparently translate as ‘bite the wax tadpole’. In Dutch, ‘Refresh Yourself with Coca-Cola’ translates

¹¹⁵ For Cocacolonization, see Wagnleitner (1994); for McDonaldization, see Ritzer (2010); for Disneyization, see Bryman (2004).

directly as ‘Wash Your Hands with Coca-Cola’. French-speakers misheard the French version of the song ‘Have a Coke and a Smile’ as ‘Have a Coke and a Mouse’, while Spanish-speakers in Cuba reportedly misread the sky-writing for ‘Tome Coca-Cola’ (drink Coca-Cola) as ‘Teme Coca-Cola’ (fear Coca-Cola). (Chidester 2005: 135-136)

Like Coke, Hillsong faces the problem of cross-cultural translation. As seen in chapter two, authenticity is largely the product of consistently expressing a core value system. For a religious organisation like Hillsong, the specificity of this system is paramount as it is inherently bound up with a claim to Truth. As a transnational church, Hillsong faces a challenge of ‘global’ proportions: it must deliver a specific, consistent and coherent message, and must do so through a broad range of offerings delivered by a number of different people in a variety of cultural contexts. Further complicating the realization of this imperative is the fact that music is one of Hillsong’s main communicative mediums. While popular music is easily absorbed into a variety of cultural settings, and thus is a good vehicle of communication, it is also notoriously subjective, and thus its ability to reliably communicate meaning through either sounds or lyrics is debatable (Negus 1996: 25-35). The culturally specific medium of music thus presents Hillsong with unique opportunities for, as well as challenges to, its ability to communicate in transnational contexts.

Part I - Creating the ‘Hillsong Sound’

‘Sound’ and the City

The word ‘sound’ has multiple meanings and uses. For example, a sound is a psycho-acoustic phenomenon in which vibrations are detected by our sensory organs and interpreted in meaningful ways by our brains. However, a sound can also be thought of as a distinctive style or, as the American Heritage Dictionary defines it, ‘a mental impression; an implication’.¹¹⁶ Through culture and experience, we come to associate certain sounds and patterns of sounds – what we

¹¹⁶ *Sound*. <<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/sound>>; accessed 27 April 2012.

often call music¹¹⁷ – with a variety of things such as emotions, people, life events and so on. The sonic palette of our environment thus profoundly affects the way we experience it and ourselves. Perhaps the most holistic view of sound and experience is that put forth in Steven Feld’s work with the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea (Feld 1984; 1988). Feld argues that the acoustic environment of the rainforest in which the Kaluli live permeates and shapes the interlinked cultural, social and perceptual aspects of their human experience. For Feld, the sonic environment of the rainforest is nothing less than the Kaluli world-view, a ‘sociomusical realit(y)’ (Feld 1984: 406).

Feld’s work in the rainforests of Papua New Guinea dovetails with (post)subcultural treatments of Henri Lefebvre’s writings about the relationship between spatial practices and cultural production in cities. In *The Production of Space* (1974), Lefebvre argued that economic modes of production shape cultural production, and thus the character of cities and their inhabitants. The (sub)cultural theorist Andy Bennett has usefully applied Lefebvre’s work to thinking about the ways music, space and place are intrinsically linked. As Bennett shows in his discussion of the ‘Canterbury Sound’, aficionados of a ‘sound’ claim particular (usually urban) spaces as ‘active centres of production’ (Bennett 2002: 87) of the music(s) they engage with. For Bennett, the technologically enabled mediascape is a space/place where images and information about spaces are ‘recontextualized by audiences into new ways of thinking about and imagining place’ (ibid.: 89). This imagined place exists in a self-referential ‘mythscape’; that is, a space in which stories, discussions and anecdotes exist ‘entirely in relation to that place’s representation as a mythscape’ (ibid.). Myth building is a branding activity (Holt 2004) that cities engage in in the hope of securing cultural capital that will translate into financial capital through tourism (Klingmann 2007). Cities such as Vienna, New Orleans and Memphis have sought to associate their identities with those of a musical artist or genre, thereby differentiating themselves from

¹¹⁷ John Blacking described ‘musical’ sound patterns as ‘humanly organized’ (Blacking 1973). Interestingly, this conception of music might not be as cross-cultural as one might think. For example, Steven Feld maintains that, for the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea, ‘there is no “music”, only sounds, arranged in categories shared to greater or lesser degrees by natural, animal, and human agents.... No hierarchies of sound types are imposed, *no rationales constructed for differentiating human-made sounds from those of other sources*’ (Feld 1984: 389; emphasis added).

otherwise similar cities. If they are successful, their stories become inextricable from the music. As Bennett remarks, ‘the marketing of canonized “genres” such as Cajun, blues, and “world music” has served to create a series of romanticized myths surrounding particular regions of the world as listeners use these musical styles to map out the relationship between social and geographical landscapes’ (Bennett 2002: 89). Listeners connect musical sounds with assumptions about where, why, how and by whom music is/was produced. These assumptions inform ascriptions of authenticity and meaning. In this mix of (extra)musical associations, the city ‘performs an important anchoring role as myths surrounding the city are constructed’ among communities of music consumers (ibid.: 88). Thus, a (branded) ‘sound’ is born.

While Bennett’s work is primarily concerned with ‘insiders’ – i.e. the fans or aficionados of a music or artist – Sarah Thornton’s work on subcultures can be used to further nuance the understanding of the connection between city and sound, through her focus on the roles of ‘outsiders’ in creating a sound. Often, associations between musicians, styles and cities have material truth – for example, the Seattle bands Nirvana and Pearl Jam played formidable roles in the rise of grunge and the concomitant creation of a ‘Seattle Sound’. However, Detroit’s association with techno illustrates, according to Thornton, that a city’s ‘sound’ does not require locally based artists to produce it. Indeed, Thornton asserts that ‘despite the fact that the music was not on the playlist of a single Detroit radio station, nor a regular track in any but a few mostly gay black clubs, the British press hailed ‘techno’ as the sound of that city’ (Thornton 1995: 75). For Thornton, both subcultures and the ‘sounds’ that they are associated with are products of the media. As she observes, ‘communications media create subcultures in the process of naming them and draw boundaries around them in the act of describing them’ (ibid.: 162). Thus, a city’s ‘sound’ is a discursive, highly mediated construct that is at least partially produced by people who may have never visited the city or heard the music in question.

While people brand places, places also brand people. For example, neither Bruce Springsteen nor Bon Jovi would ‘sound’ the same without New Jersey; it is understood that part of each artist’s authentic sound comes from the place in

which it was honed. The same can be said for the ‘typical’ resident of an area, for whom stereotyped forms of self-presentation such as speech patterns, dress and physical mannerisms are often more a matter of ascription than reality.

What the above discussion reveals is that spaces, places, people and musical meaning are all inextricably linked to one another in a ‘sound’. For Hillsong, its ‘sound’ is also part of the larger web of signification that is the brand. As such, the rest of this chapter investigates some of the ways in which the efficacy of Hillsong’s branded ‘sound’ relies on associations among the places – and those places’ people – that constitute the Hillsong Network. These places are both physical and virtual, and are real and efficacious in different, overlapping and mutually constituting ways. Furthermore, participants impart meaning to the places that constitute the Hillsong Network. Of key importance to my argument is that authenticity (see chapter two) is always partially grounded in the ideas and meanings that are associated with people and places, ‘real’ or ‘virtual’. Again, my definition of a place is ‘a space made meaningful’. Places are *made*.

Placemaking

People make space meaningful in countless ways. As a theoretical framework for this chapter, I introduce James Gilmore and Joseph Pine’s discussion of ‘placemaking’ to illustrate how Hillsong makes its network of physical and virtual spaces into branded places (Gilmore and Pine 2007). Gilmore and Pine point out that – like Darlene Zschech in chapter two – organizations need to be perceived as authentic in order to be successful (ibid.: 147). Stakeholders must be afforded the opportunity to experience an organization’s authenticity through its offerings. Therefore, Gilmore and Pine’s suggestion to organizations is:

Stop *saying* what your offerings are through advertising and start *creating places* (my emphasis) – permanent or temporary, physical or virtual, fee-based or free – where people can experience what those offerings, as well as your enterprise, *actually* are. (ibid.: 149, original emphasis)

Recall from chapter one that advertising is only part of the integrated marketing effort that is branding. Everything associated with a brand has symbolic meaning,

and thus can be considered an offering. This includes a brand's spaces, which become places where a brand's authenticity is both experienced and realised (c.f. Sherry 1998a).¹¹⁸ According to Gilmore and Pine,¹¹⁹ a full organizational placemaking portfolio extends from a single place – its flagship location – to ubiquity in the worldwide market. The flagship location, whether it is a single store or geographic area (usually both), is the focal point of the brand. In other words, it is the brand's centre of production. For Hillsong, this is the Hills campus in Australia. 'Experience hubs' are located in major economic centres such as London and New York City, both of which are part of Hillsong's portfolio. Further experience opportunities are presented at 'major venues', which are places that have a population large enough to support a primary outlet. For Hillsong, this includes its smaller (but growing) churches in cities such as Paris and Stockholm. Major venues are followed by places of 'derivative presence', which are venues that distil the essence of a larger venue in the portfolio in a more accessible way. Examples of this are Hillsong London's Surrey and Kent extension services, which are video-linked to services at the Dominion Theatre and thus allow participants outside of London to experience Hillsong London 'first-hand'. Finally a 'worldwide market presence' is achieved when 'every feasible place where customers might encounter [an organization's] offerings' has been occupied (Gilmore and Pine 2007: 160). While Hillsong certainly has not exhausted this level of its portfolio, a quick look at the CCLI charts confirms that participants in churches all over the world encounter its music every Sunday.¹²⁰ A full placemaking portfolio has a virtual counterpart to each of the physical places just described (ibid.: 156). Hillsong boasts a diverse placemaking portfolio that provides worshippers with both physical and virtual access to the 'Hillsong Experience'. The 'Hillsong Sound' is in part a product of Hillsong's placemaking

¹¹⁸ Both physical and virtual spaces can be branded places. Some famous examples of physical spaces are Chicago's Nike Town and Disney World. A good example of a virtual branded space/place is Amazon.com's website (Moor 2007: 50-51). As brand guru Martin Lindstrom has pointed out, though, one of the advantages that a physical branded space has over a virtual one is the potential to engage all five senses in the brand experience (Lindstrom 2005). For example, while a visitor to a Disney theme park can touch, taste, see, hear and feel Disney's myriad offerings, a visitor to Disney's website is unlikely to have his or her sense of taste, smell or touch titillated. Perhaps this is why online retailers such as Amazon, which has been instrumental in the demise of many 'brick and mortar' retailers, and even Google, whose entire identity is web-based, are rumoured to be or are actually building physical locations (Isaac 2011; Sanburn 2012).

¹¹⁹ The following discussion is drawn from Gilmore and Pine (2007: 153-62).

¹²⁰ *Top 25 Songs*. <<http://www.ccli.com/Support/LicenseCoverage/Top25Lists.aspx>>; accessed 5 May 2012.

strategy, whereby Hillsong Australia is the brand's centre of production and Hillsong London its European 'experience hub' (ibid.: 156-157). The hierarchical ordering of importance of these places, in conjunction with touring, album sales, and a ubiquitous Internet presence enables Hillsong to 'entice the greatest number of customers to experience [the church and] its offerings', through its 'rich portfolio of harmonized places flowing one from another' (ibid.: 154). The ideal brand is one where meaning flows between offerings in a harmonized communications gestalt. Here, I seek to understand how Hillsong's congregation members experience the 'Hillsong Sound' in relation to the church's portfolio of branded physical and virtual spaces, to what extent these spaces 'harmonize' to become places, and how this ultimately feeds into participants' experiences of the music and the brand.

Hillsong Australia: The Centre of Production

Branding is a way of communicating a consistent and easily understood message to stakeholders in a variety of contexts through a variety of offerings. To ensure the consistency of its musical offerings, Hillsong has codified a production process through which songs travel from inspiration to recording. First, a worship team member submits a song for consideration. Robert Fergusson – a Hills campus senior pastor – then vets the song to ensure that its lyrics align with the church's teachings. If it passes lyrical muster, the song is then played in services in various Hillsong locations in Australia to gauge congregation members' reactions. This determines whether a song is either rejected or recorded. Although this process is straightforward in theory, song selection is also influenced by extra-musical branding considerations. Hillsong's official policy is that any worship team member may submit a song for consideration, but according to an Australian worship leader with whom I spoke, some songs have a better chance of being recorded than others:

I don't know if you've talked to the guys who have submitted maybe fifty songs and none have gotten returned, but they [Hillsong] do have an idea as to whose songs they'd like to see on the next album. So they want to see a couple from Joel [Houston], a couple from Rueben [Morgan], there's going

to be a couple from Ben Fielding. It's pretty clear, you know? And maybe there will be two from random people in the congregation or the team, maybe a song or two that the youth really love and got brought out during summer camp, but it's pretty set. (Interview with author, 1 June 2011).

In the above statement, we can see the branding process at work. As discussed in chapter two, Hillsong needs 'stars' to be the face of its brand. Another reason is that Hillsong's main songwriters are full-time worship pastors who draw a salary from the church. In contrast to most worship team members who are volunteers, and thus spend the majority of their time occupied with other pursuits, Hillsong's core songwriting team has the time and support to devote to writing songs for their church. They are also part of Hillsong's 'inner circle', and are therefore more intimately familiar with the church's vision at any given time.¹²¹ A strong brand is fluid, changing concomitantly with an organization as it evolves, and therefore its music needs to reflect that.¹²² From a branding perspective, then, it benefits Hillsong to maintain a core of songwriters who are deeply involved in 'the life of the church'.

As described above, if a song passes lyrical vetting, it is then 'field tested' for efficacy in performance, usually during worship services at Hillsong's Australian churches. Since the primary goal of worship music at Hillsong is to afford the transformational and transcendent 'God encounter', it is vital that worshippers engage with it. This is why, according to most worship leaders I interviewed, if a song does not go over well it will often be abandoned right away. However, according to others, a song may get a second chance if it has been identified as a candidate for an upcoming album, especially if a main worship pastor authors it. According to a worship leader of one of Hillsong's Australian extension services:

The [song may not be immediately good], but they are often going to make it work because they know that they want it on the album. So they'll tell you 'we throw a song out if it doesn't have a response', but yes and no. Yes, if it's their song – if they put it out there and it doesn't have the desired response, they know it's not really good enough to get on the album. So they might retract it and rewrite it and then they'll try it again. So Reuben

¹²¹ The above statement could also suggest that personal sensitivities may play a part in the song selection process. For example, leaving out the songs of particular individuals within the inner circle might result in tensions and questions about competence and authority.

¹²² For how Hillsong's musical branding has changed to reflect the changing organizational character and needs of the church, see Riches and Wagner (2012).

[Morgan] will do that, Joel [Houston] will do that, a couple of the worship leaders will do that. But in terms of other songs, it's a mixture. So they'll work a song, they'll do a back and forth. They'll try it in a few contexts. They'll try it with the youth or maybe a couple of the satellite churches to see whether different links or motifs make it work (Interview with author, 1 June 2011).

In keeping with a core group of well-known songwriters, Hillsong manages the 'sound' of its musical offerings by integrating the songwriters' personas and styles with its brand (see also chapter two). Additionally, because songs are primarily field-tested in the Australian church, Hillsong Australia's congregation members become the *de facto* arbiters of taste for the entire Hillsong network. From a 'top down' perspective, then, Hillsong Australia is the centre of production of the music that is identified with the 'Hillsong Sound'. However, a 'sound' also relies on an expanded notion of production that integrates stakeholders outside of the song creation process. As the discussion of views from both Hillsong congregation members and the media in the next section will show, this side of production is mediated and imagined (Anderson [1983] 2006), and relies heavily on essentialist notions of 'others' within the Hillsong Network.

Remix! Part I: A 'London Sound'?

From the previous section, it may be tempting to label Hillsong's music as 'Australian', as it is largely written, produced and vetted in an Australian context. Once it is released, though, the music is experienced in myriad 'local' contexts around the world. The most prominent locality in the Hillsong Network is Hillsong London, which Gilmore and Pine (2007) would describe as Hillsong's European 'experience hub'. Because of its strategic location, Hillsong London is both a destination for international worshippers and a base for evangelistic activities, which includes touring. Hillsong London's worship team regularly tours Europe, presenting Hillsong's worship music in a variety of cultural settings. According to Julie, a member of the worship team, these appearances are quite successful:

Well, actually (Hillsong London Senior Pastor) Gary said something about [touring] yesterday. He said they call it tours, but it's actually [Evangelical]

crusades. Because London goes to Italy, they go to Europe, and like a thousand people get saved in one night. (Interview with author, 6 February 2011)

While Julie may be exaggerating the number of souls saved nightly, her account nevertheless underscores Hillsong London's popularity across Europe. One of Hillsong London's worship leaders that I spoke to, while acknowledging that the team will often play for much smaller crowds, told me it also encounters crowds of over 15,000 people (personal communication, 22 April 2011). However, it is not clear whether Hillsong London's reception is due to an idiosyncratic 'London Sound' or to the overall popularity of the Hillsong brand. Is it the 'Australian' music, or the particular way in which Hillsong London's worship team presents it, that affects people? One worship leader I spoke to believed it was the latter – a 'Euro Sound' that was distinct to Hillsong London:

The London stuff goes off really well in Italy.... It's 'Euro', it's got its own flavour. (Interview with author, 1 June 2011)

This worship leader went on to tell me that, while he understood the confusion it might cause, he believed that a distinct 'Euro' sound would reach more Europeans than a sound they might hear as 'foreign'. Notably, this leader was neither European nor did he live in London; he was born and raised in Australia.

For a time, Hillsong attempted to fashion a distinct musical identity for Hillsong London. From 2004-2008, Hillsong London released four albums under its own name. These releases spoke to a range of stylistic influences, but largely conformed to the overall rock-based style that was coalescing between Hillsong's United and LIVE releases during the same period (Riches 2010). In 2007, though, Hillsong London broke from convention with the release of the *Jesus Is: Remix*. This album remixed the rock-based songs of its 2006 release, *Jesus Is*, as dance tracks. Much of the Christian music media portrayed the album using language similar to the following review:

Passionate Euro-styled worship has been a core driving force for the explosive growth at the new Hillsong London church. A group of talented and creative members of the church have taken 12 songs from the original *Jesus Is* worship project released in 2006 and remixed them from a pop and

rock sound to electronic and ambient versions while maintaining the same lyrics and Biblical messages. Mixing a sound from their Hillsong Australia heritage with the current European/London music scene, this Euro-Worship has a fresh and exciting, yet familiar sound.... This creative project is a perfect addition to any Hillsong music fan and any fan collection of electronic and ambient music.¹²³

Here, the importance of essentialised notions of place in the construction of ‘sound’ (and the media’s role in this construction) is apparent. Australia is posited as a musical lineage that is sonically remoulded in the Euro-London scene. The next section explores the role of these notions in the subjective creation of the ‘Hillsong Sound’.

Remix! Part 2: City, Sound and Scene

While the problems with positing typical ‘Europeans’ or ‘Londoners’ are obvious, what is relevant to this section is the above review’s connection of the *Jesus Is: Remix* ‘sound’ to an implied ‘Euro’ music scene in London. In (post)subcultural theory, a scene is ‘the formal and informal arrangement of industries, institutions, audiences, and infrastructures’ that over time ‘becomes spatially imbedded according to a dense array of social, industrial and institutional infrastructures, all of which operate at a local and trans-local level’ (Stahl 2004: 55; see also Straw 1991). To those who interact with a ‘local’ scene,¹²⁴ it is connected with the level of vibrancy and diversity of active musical life in a place as measured against perceived activity elsewhere. A ‘happening’ scene is one that supports a diverse array of musics or a large number of people involved in music. In contrast, a ‘dead’ scene is characterised by few opportunities to hear or perform music, and a lack of diversity of musical styles available.¹²⁵ Interviews conducted during my fieldwork indicate that, to Hillsong’s musicians and participants, the ‘sound’ of Hillsong London reflects a cosmopolitan ‘Euro-ness’ that itself is a product of the

¹²³ <<http://www.christianscampus.com/2010/04/hillsong-london-jesus-is-remix2010.html>>; accessed 21 August 2011.

¹²⁴ As Stahl (2004) suggests, scenes can be ‘virtual’ and ‘global’ as well as ‘local’.

¹²⁵ Unless one is talking about a stylistic scene (e.g. a ‘goth’ scene or a ‘folk’ scene). However, scenes differentiate internally. For example, what one might be tempted to refer to as the ‘dance scene’ is made up of so many continually-diversifying sub-genres that it would be difficult to speak of an overall scene in a coherent manner. Nevertheless, the associations do remain and are thus efficacious.

diversity of the city's scene. This diversity is held in opposition to the homogenous musical scene of Sydney.¹²⁶ An Australian worship leader who has been involved in Sydney-based projects outside of the church told me:

TW: I've been asking if there is a 'Hillsong Sound' and a 'London Sound', and you seem to think there is.

J: Yeah, I do. I think that I was hearing, like you said, some Green Day influences, almost some ska [On Hillsong London's first album]. And to me that's kind of indicative of England, where the punk movement originated. I feel like that was something that was really appropriate. I read an article in *Christianity Today* on contemporary worship music in which an American and a British person were having a conversation. At the end of this conversation, the British person turned to the American and said, 'Well, in Britain we're just not in love with our guitars as much as you are'. I think that the Euro sound is so much more open to electronica. I think they have a sense of that soul influence in London. There are a lot of different influences that are just not present in Sydney. (Interview with author, 1 June 2011)

If London does in fact have a more diverse music scene than Sydney, then the diversity of the London church's internal music scene, compared to that of the Australian church, seems to validate the worship leader's assertion. Both Hillsong London and Hillsong Australia celebrate Easter and Christmas with 'one off' specials that take the form of music-based theatrical presentations. On these occasions, the music is not the standard repertoire, but is either specially written for the event or – as is more often the case – adapted from current secular pop hits.¹²⁷ Although much of the music is written, arranged and performed by Hillsong's worship team, its youth ministries are given a chance to perform as well. It is here that the divergent tastes of Hillsong London and Hillsong Australia's participants are most apparent.

In contrast to the pop-rock style that characterises the worship music of a normal Sunday service, the music that drives Hillsong London's one-off specials is more

¹²⁶ I refer to Sydney here instead of Australia (as I have been doing) because, as will be shown in the following interview excerpt, interviewees often used the two interchangeably. Hillsong does have a church in Sydney. However, its flagship remains the Hills campus in the suburbs of the city. This is an example of the gravitational pull that the mythologies of some places exert in contrast to other, less 'branded', places.

¹²⁷ This adaptation usually involves changing some lyrics, although Hillsong musicians have told me that in some cases an unchanged secular song can convey a sacred meaning in a church setting. For a discussion of this view in a larger Christian music context, see Howard and Streck (1999), especially pages 75-107.

‘edgy’, incorporating elements from metal, rap, and hip-hop with strobe effects and break dancing. At the London church, the youth ministry will usually cover the latest hip-hop track from artists like Tinchy Stryder, but adapt the lyrics of the song to a Christ-centred approach. In contrast, former Australian church youth pastor Tanya Riches has told me that Hillsong Australia’s special events remain more true to the rock-centred tastes of its participants, and that its youth group prefers to cover guitar-driven rock songs that are closer to the church’s regular worship music (Riches; personal communication with author, 2 August 2011).

If the Euro-London and Austral-Sydney scenes do in fact ‘produce’ different taste publics¹²⁸ (Russell 1997), then it would follow that an effective worship song for Hillsong London’s participants might be different from one for Hillsong Australia’s participants. In this view, each group would prefer songs written by its church’s local writers and featuring on its own albums. Significantly for the Hillsong brand, though, any difference in musical taste between Hillsong London and Hillsong Australia’s participants seems to manifest mainly in non-worship contexts.¹²⁹ When I asked Hillsong London’s participants whether they preferred the worship music written by the Hillsong Australia musicians or the music written by Hillsong London’s musicians, all admitted a preference for the former. This was expressed in separate interviews with Jason and Luke, two men in their early twenties who have been attending Hillsong London for five and six years respectively:

There’s a lot of crossover between Hillsong London and Hillsong Australia, but most of the songs that I think are the better ones tend to be the Australian ones. Maybe it’s just because I like the way Joel Houston writes. (Jason: interview with author, 18 May 2010)

It’s weird, because at London, a lot of the good ones we sing are actually the Australian ones. Most of the ones London has written recently haven’t been, I don’t think, as good. *Faith, Hope, and Love* was a very good album. *Hail*

¹²⁸ ‘A music taste public is a social group comprising devotees of a particular type of music or performer (for example, opera buffs or Elvis fans) and a music taste culture is the set of aesthetic values they share (for example, “Elvis is King”)’ (Russell 1997: 142).

¹²⁹ This is probably because worship (and its attendant music) is such an important part of evangelical church life. Taste in music is one of the strongest determinants of congregational identity (Sargeant 2000: 66, but see also Marti 2012). Thus, it makes sense that most congregation members in a given church would share a taste for the music that is heard regularly in conjunction with the rituals of the service.

to the King wasn't quite so good. (Luke: interview with author, 23 November 2010)

In 2011, the decision was made to officially discontinue the Hillsong London recording line. Julie, the Hillsong London worship team member, attributed a difference in style to the reason that it stopped recording:

The thing is: London tried to write their own music a couple of years ago and it didn't work. They didn't sell a lot of CDs, so they just said, 'Ok, this doesn't work'... Like Jorim [a Hillsong London Worship Leader] had a song on the new CD. They put it on the CD, but it's never sung in church. I don't know actually why this is. I have no idea. Because there are a lot of people who can write good songs here in London. But it's not attractive for the people. But I don't know why, actually. I think it's a certain style. (Interview with author, 6 February 2011)

Style was only part of a larger branding problem that Hillsong faced in relation to the London albums. The original intent behind the recording of Hillsong London albums was, as many of my interviewees suggested, to engage with a European audience. However, this didn't work in the context of Hillsong's global branding strategy. According to a Hillsong staff member who is familiar with the church's decision to discontinue the Hillsong London product line, the albums were creating brand confusion:

[The branding] got too confusing when people were presented with London Hillsong and Sydney Hillsong. Which one is Hillsong? (Interview with author, 1 June 2011)

Hillsong had a problem with 'who' it was. The London church is a brand extension of the Australian church, not the parent brand. Although Hillsong London's offerings were meant to be different musically, they nevertheless had to fit into Hillsong's overall image, which in part is constructed and maintained through product consistency. This is ultimately why the decision was made to discontinue Hillsong London albums, as recounted by Hillsong's general manager, George Aghajanian:

TW: Could you tell me a little bit about why Hillsong London no longer records its own albums?

GA: I think we got to a point where we felt, as a church, we didn't want to fragment with albums coming out of every church around the world.... What had happened was: London had tried a few albums. Other places were

saying, ‘maybe we’d like to record our own albums as well’ and we really wanted to make sure that Hillsong, when it was represented worldwide, didn’t have a variety of different sounds. We wanted to make sure that everything we did was ultimately distilled onto one or two really good albums and not three, four, five, six different albums from all over the world with all different types of sound. Because *London has a very specific sound; Sydney’s got a different sound; Paris would have a different sound, and Kiev*¹³⁰ and so on. So what we wanted to make sure of was that the Hillsong name and the Hillsong reputation for worship was preserved while at the same time being inclusive with what was happening with songwriters around different parts of the world.... We came to the conclusion that we would have a ‘United’ label, so to speak.... so Hillsong United was one stream that we would maintain, because that’s got its own momentum at the moment around the world and it’s really strong. The second one would be our LIVE album, but that would be more and more our global expression of our church. So that’s where our songwriters from London, our songwriters from Sydney, Stockholm, Cape Town, all contribute to make that the Hillsong ‘global’ sound.... And so we felt that that would always be the best that Hillsong had to offer the greater Church, because if you have five albums, that’s sixty songs you’ve got to come up with versus two or three really powerful worship albums that would then be the best experience for the greater Church. And that was really the motivation behind it. (Interview with author, 28 September 2011; emphasis added)

As discussed in chapter three, Hillsong’s focus on consistency and quality is essential to the efficacy of its brand. By consolidating its musical output into its LIVE and United streams, it was able to maintain this. Additionally, the consolidation allowed it to refocus its narrative centre of gravity on Australia, reaffirming it and the Australian church as the centre of production of the music and the brand.

¹³⁰ It should be noted that Kiev writes and produces its own albums and produces parallel product streams to those produced by Hillsong (e.g. the Hillsong Kiev Kids series). This highlights the role that language plays in brand translation. According to Aghajanian, ‘Remembering that the basis behind this is reaching people with the Gospel in song as well as in teaching, we take our worship experience, translate it, and release it into the Eastern European culture. That’s why they’ve [Kiev] probably had a little more autonomy to do some of these albums, and London really hasn’t. Because London, being in the English speaking world, can contribute into our global expression of our worship. Kiev can’t really because of the language issues.’ (Interview with author, 28 September 2011)

Part II - Experiencing the ‘Hillsong Sound’

Hillsong’s Creation Story

So far, we have seen how imagined and essentialised ideas about people and places create mythological centres of production for a ‘sound’. As chapter two showed, ‘creation myths’ are important for the authenticity and efficacy of a brand. This was evident both in how Darlene Zschech’s story provided an identity narrative and the way participants, such as Roy, interwove their takes on Hillsong’s history with their own personal identity projects. The brand myth is the story through which the utopian brand promise is experienced. In chapter three, stories also played a prominent role in the brand’s efficacy, as the Pentecost story provided a conceptual and spiritual framework in which church identity was created, performed and experienced. All strong brands have a creation myth/story, from Coca-Cola’s humble beginnings as a patent medicine to McDonald’s entrepreneur Ray Kroc’s rise from milkshake machine distributor to hamburger impresario.¹³¹ The creation myth is important because it anchors the brand in time and space, which allows its story to be easily understood and thus experienced by the consumer. More importantly, as noted above in the discussion of Bennett’s ‘Canterbury Sound’, the creation myth both relies on and allows access to the larger mediated mythscape where the ‘sound’ resides. Hillsong’s creation story is well known, having been recounted endlessly by its leaders and in popular and academic accounts (e.g. Connell 2005: 319-329, Evans 2006: 94-96; Riches 2010: 6-16). Like most New Paradigm churches, Hillsong’s story is one that centres on growth. However, unlike other churches, Hillsong’s story is also uniquely tied to its music.

It is often assumed that Hillsong has always branded itself through music, yet it did not officially adopt the moniker ‘Hillsong Church’ until 1999, as this story – here recounted by Senior Pastor Brian Houston – illustrates:

¹³¹ For an entertaining and well-researched history of the Coca-Cola company, see Mark Pendergrast’s (2000) *For God, Country & Coca-Cola: The Definitive History of the Great American Soft Drink and the Company That Makes It*. For histories of McDonalds and Kroc, see Kroc and Anderson (1987) and Love (1995).

We started it as *'Hills Christian Life Centre'*, and we started with just two conferences. There were three of us in the swimming pool on a Sunday afternoon. There was Jeff Bullock, Mark Zschech and myself. We were thinking of a name for the conference, and somewhere between the three of us we came up with that name. Hills is the name of the area!

Then we started the praise and worship, and rather than just having *'Hills Christian Life Centre Live'*, I thought it would be good to produce the music under the name *'Hillsong'* so that *people wouldn't box it as just another church's music*. Then we were travelling, and people didn't even know the name of the church. They kept getting the name wrong.

In 1999, after my father resigned, we took over the city congregation, the Hillsong city has merged under one church, and that time is when we thought if we can't beat them join them. So everyone knew us as Hillsong Church, so that's when we started officially calling ourselves *'Hillsong Church'* – just at the end of 1999. (Quoted in Clark 2004; emphasis added)

According to Houston's account, Hills Christian Life Centre had little choice but to change its name; the organisation had been branded by its music. Hillsong's brand name thus has the advantage of arising organically from a set of strong associations. It combines musical associations with geographical, historical and biblical ones into a gestalt. The Hillsong moniker is a combination of its *'birthplace'*, the Hills district where the Hills Christian Life Centre was founded, and the songs that it is famous for. In addition, hills also carry symbolic weight in Christian lore (for example the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus' death at Calvary). This was seen in Roy's quote in chapter two, which I recount again here:

I remember one night – I couldn't help but cry. Because I was listening to Christian music, and then when I searched for the composer and the church behind it, it was Hillsong. I was looking on the Internet for Hillsong. I actually thought that Hillsong is a place in Australia! But I was told it's not a place in Australia. It's like David used to sing songs at the top of the hill. That's where they started creating the church, Hillsong. (Interview with author, 6 February 2011)

Recall from Brian Houston's story above that part of Hillsong's early branding problem was that people did not associate the music with the church. Roy's statement shows why this is important. After hearing the music, he was so moved that he felt compelled to search for its creator. He originally thought Hillsong was a geographical area, and only later discovered it was a church. Notice also that

Roy has integrated his own biblical understanding into Hillsong's creation myth: like David, Hillsong started making music on a hill (rather than the Hills district).¹³²

The sacred associations of space and place that the Hillsong brand holds afford layers of meaning that relate to its sacred efficacy. This can be seen in Hillsong London participant Vicki's email response to questions I put to her about the differences between the Australian and London offerings on the *A Beautiful Exchange* DVD:

TW: For [the *A Beautiful Exchange*] album in particular, but also for any album in general, how do you feel when you see or hear the London team play? How do you feel when you see or hear the Australian team play?

V: I think the Australian part is lovelier, more unique and healthier spiritually. London is more of a crowd, and quite diverse, while Aussies are more homogenous, and after all, the outpouring of those heavenly songs came as a result of their faithful worship, we only got the piece of it. Those people have been worshipping over the years, even when the songs were not that 'tasteful', but for the sake of worshipping God. They have seen a breakthrough. We in London, on the other side, come from a revolution of the 70s, whatever, MTV hits; pop music. So it is purifying for our minds to get to sing massive music to God for free in the idol theatre – [the] Dominion. I think this was a cultural purification for me to experience – because Freddie M. was a symbol of our culture. So what is happening in the Dominion is a cleansing.... We know that the Spirit of God is different from the Spirit of this world. And Dominion is a bit of a fight for a territory in the hearts and minds of God's children raised in a pop idol culture.... Pop culture did what it was meant to do – it deceived the crowd/the general public into a new reality, but now it is our time to declare this reality a pure dominion of God. (Email exchange with author, 13 July 2011)

Vicki's understanding of Hillsong's music falls closer to the 'Christ against Culture' pole on Niebuhr's continuum (discussed in chapter two) than that of most of Hillsong's participants. However, her view is still informed by the associations between style, scene and place that were detailed in the previous sections of this chapter and are held (as we will see) by many of those same participants.

¹³² Although this is probably a reference to I Samuel 10:5 (see footnote 29, chapter two), Roy may also be referring to 1 Chronicles 23:1-25:31 in which King David paid 4,000 singers and 288 musicians to worship God 24 hours a day. However, there is no mention in the Bible of David's tabernacle being on a hill. Also, it turns out that the topography of the Hills district – the area where the school hall in which the Hills Christian Life Centre was born is located – is rather flat (Riches; personal communication, 24 April 2012).

According to Vicki, Hillsong's Australian congregation is 'more homogenous', yet also the product of an older and purer culture than that of London. In contrast, Hillsong London's congregation is more diverse, but its participants share an impure 'cultural' heritage. For Vicki, Australia and London are geographical territories in a spiritual war, territories that are indistinguishable from the terrain of their inhabitants' hearts and minds. In this war, worship (music) is the weapon of choice, one that the Australian church has used to successfully conquer its homeland. In contrast, London is far removed from the centre of musico-spiritual production, a beachhead still to be reclaimed from the moral turpitude of pop culture:

TW: On the *A Beautiful Exchange* DVD, the first disc is – with one exception – filled with the Australian church's music, while London's worship is on the bonus disk. Why do you think this is?

V: Probably because they [Hillsong London's songwriters] are not that good yet. Which is not bad. But we need to worship God first. And we are not over this cultural worship. God is Spirit, and whoever worships Him, does that in Spirit. I really think Hillsong London is a big help for the faith of the believers and for experiencing a genuine fellowship, but we are not yet there as to Spirit of Worship. We are still mixed with the spirit of this world and being in the Dominion is once again a testimony of that.... It is good to be there right now, because we are witnessing in a purifying way how people's lives have been transformed, but we want to see the battle won and find a hill of our own to worship. *In Australia they are on a holy hill, we are still in the Dominion*. Is not it obvious, by the symbolism God is using? (Email exchange with author, 13 July 2011; emphasis added)

For Vicki, the 'Hillsong Sound' coalesces in and achieves efficacy through the myths that surround Australia and London. Geographical spaces and features are imbued with layers of associations that transform 'Australia' into a narrative centre of gravity, a star around which the offerings that comprise the Hillsong brand universe orbit and from which they receive their efficacious energy. As seen in Roy and Vicki's responses, Hillsong's participants contribute to this constellation of mutually referential stories in the mythscape. Yet, as chapters two and three showed, the places that comprise the Hillsong network also exist in a larger context of imagined people, places and communities. In each of those contexts, the transformational and transcendent efficacy of the brand – in other words, the way that worshippers experience the brand in relation to their experience of God – is directly related to how the church positions itself within

those contexts. Therefore, the final section of this chapter examines how participants *experience* music in relation to their imagined notions of Australia and London, and the ‘local’ participants, musicians and music of each.

Part III - London Calling? ‘Welcome Home’

For branding to work, people need to experience it. Hillsong’s brand is largely (and often intensely) experienced through its music, in a variety of physical, social and cultural contexts across and beyond its portfolio of places. As with most (popular) music, Hillsong’s music is primarily disseminated and consumed through electronically mediated forms such as CDs, DVDs, MP3s and the Internet. However, it is perhaps experienced most intensely in live ritualistic group settings such as weekly worship services and touring events (which are presented as opportunities to worship rather than ‘concerts’). The ascendancy of recording technology has created a situation where the mass-replicated copy has become the Urtext (Benjamin 2002; Adorno 1991). Recall from chapter two that one of the reasons Hillsong focuses on consistent ‘excellence’ is so that inconsistency in musical presentation won’t distract the participant’s attention from God. Thus, Hillsong works to maintain fidelity to the recorded version in its live performances. To achieve this, Hillsong largely standardises the instrumentation and tempos of its songs across weekly church services and, to some extent, its albums (Riches 2010: 104-135). While precise replication of the recorded version in live performance is impossible (and according to all of the worship leaders I interviewed, not desirable), ideally, a participant should experience little difference between the recorded and performed versions of any given song.¹³³ However, this aesthetic ideal is mediated by the interdependence of place and identity that is equally, if not more, crucial to the construction of a ‘sound’ in the social imagination of those who engage with it. As Martin Stokes

¹³³ This is not to say that worship leaders do not have the freedom to deviate from the recorded form of the song in performance. The worship team is fitted with inner-ears through which they receive direction from the worship leader in how to shape the song according to the mood. For example, if the leader feels that a moment is particularly ‘worshipful’, he/she may choose to repeat a chorus, raise or lower the volume, and so on. However, most aesthetic elements such as instrumentation (and therefore instrumentation’s attendant elements such as colour, timbre etc.) and rhythm remain constant.

has noted, music ‘is socially meaningful... because it provides means by which people recognise identities and places, and the boundaries which separate them’ (Stokes 1994: 5). In Stokes’ work on nationalism, music is used to articulate social imaginaries in the service of the ideological apparatuses that are used to construct and maintain the nation-state. As part of this process, these imaginaries cleave geography into distinct places that are defined as much by the people who live within them as they are by the physical landscape. Thus, geographical spaces become meaningful places to people both inside and outside them, in relation to perceptions of ‘cultural traits’.¹³⁴

When applying Stokes’ observation to the ‘Hillsong Sound’ it should be emphasised that much of the efficacy of the branded experience of the music has to do with the connectedness that participants feel across the transnational Hillsong Network. Unlike nationalist uses of music, the ‘Hillsong Sound’ is heard within a discourse that emphasises the church’s ability to transcend boundaries rather than to erect them.¹³⁵ In the words of Brian Houston, ‘We are a tiny church with a whole lot of people’ (Vision Sunday video presentation; 6 February 2011). However, this is moderated by a ‘local’ discourse that posits each church location as the ‘local church’ of the individual participant. Thus, the ‘Welcome Home’ message that greets participants in Hillsong churches around the world simultaneously references both the Hillsong Network as a whole and the individual locations that comprise it; the ‘Hillsong Sound’ may be *heard* in churches around the world, but it is *experienced* in specific local contexts. For example, when asked if Hillsong London has its own ‘sound’ or ‘style’, a typical answer was this, given by Kimberly, a 28-year-old female congregation member who hails from London:

Our church plays everything faster and louder, which I guess is what you would expect from such a vibrant place [London]. (Email communication with author, 3 May 2011)

As noted above, this is actually not the case: Hillsong worship teams use metronomes and standardised instrumentation to ensure that worship songs in

¹³⁴ Those to whom these ‘traits’ are ascribed may or may not accept them themselves (e.g. Agawu 1995).

¹³⁵ Although, as chapter three showed, the opposite is equally true.

performance are very close to the recorded version. The music in Hillsong London's worship services is neither faster nor louder than in Hillsong Australia's services.

In contrast, the Hillsong London participants who I spoke to described Hillsong Australia, and its music, as more 'laid back' than their own. Eunice, a 28-year-old Bulgarian who has spent considerable time in both the London and Australian churches, understood this in terms of culture:

There is a lot of overlap. I mean, you get into church and it's Hillsong church, bigger and all of that. But it's slightly different because it's adapted to the culture, the Australian culture, so everything will be a bit slower (laughs), from the songs to – well, everything will be slightly slower. (Interview with author, 7 December 2010)

Both Kimberly and Eunice's responses reveal that the perception of the location and the culture in which music is produced (and by extension the cultural traits of the people who play it) influence the way people imagine and experience it. Although there may be a 'lot of overlap' between the cultures of the Australian and London churches, the difference in the tempos of life is perceived in the tempo of the music. The perceptions of the place in which the music is produced and its culture affect participants' experiences of the music's sonic elements. Hillsong London's sound is experienced as 'edgy', while Hillsong Australia's is experienced as 'laid back'. To manage its 'sound', then, the church must manage how the city 'sounds' to its congregation. This is done through storytelling, the management of the mythology that is central to the 'sound', and the brand efficacy.

Conclusion - (Re)Branding the City

19 July 2009. Hillsong London's 6pm service at the Dominion Theatre, London.

I have just found a seat in row H of the Dominion Theatre; front and centre at Hillsong London's 6pm service, which is known in the church as the most 'rocking' of the day's four services. The message 'Welcome Home' is displayed

prominently on the screen at the back of the stage. As the lights dim to start the service, an ominous industrial groove replaces what had formerly been unassuming, ambient background music. The word 'London' flashes across the otherwise dark screen. London's iconic Tower Bridge appears for a moment, followed by a succession of momentary, jerky shots of Londoners (they are identified by London postcodes that flit about above their heads) going somewhere. Where?

Gradually, the pace of the video accelerates as more active people populate the screen. The camera zooms out, revealing glimpses of London signifiers: here, a glimpse of a man handing out copies of the Metro newspaper; there, a red telephone box. As the visual stimuli increase, so does the music's insistence. The silhouettes of the London Eye and Big Ben appear for a moment, and the screen goes dark again.

An instant later, we enjoy a bird's eye view of the Thames at sunrise. The sun shines into the camera, blinding us for a moment, before revealing that the glint is coming off the golden statue of Freddie Mercury that stands atop the Dominion Theatre's entrance. An instant later, we are inside. Shots of the theatre's busy lobby, filled with people that many of us in the congregation recognise as our friends (we may even see a shot of ourselves), appear in rapid succession as the music grows livelier.

For a third time, the screen goes dark. The music segues into a crunching, metallic guitar riff. A spinning globe appears, overlaid with the Apostle Paul's words: 'The Church is not peripheral to the world, the world is peripheral to the Church'. Ephesians 3:8-10 immediately follows, reminding us that: 'Through followers of Jesus like yourselves gathered in churches, the extraordinary plan of God is being known'. This scripture shares the screen with images of people from around the world who, while nameless, are recognizable by virtue of the 'ethnic' clothing they wear. They are soon juxtaposed with sweeping visions of a sea of raised hands, a scene typical of a large, exciting evangelical event such as a conference or service. Thus, the second half of the video situates London and the church in the larger evangelical Christian project of Church building. 'Church' is

understood here not only as the local church, but also the church with a capital 'C': the global, borderless Body of Christ that incorporates all Christians. Locality becomes manifold, understood as a continuum ranging from the individual's body to the collective manifestation of the Body of Christ. The video, which began with a single word: London, ends with a single name: Jesus.
(Author's field notes, 19 July 2009)

This ethnographic vignette shows that, far from being a passive citizen, Hillsong London actively shapes the way the city of London, and thus the church and its music, is perceived by its members. By situating London in the context of a broadly evangelical Christian and specifically Hillsong worldview, the city becomes a character in the Hillsong brand's storytelling process. The semiotics of the video reflect much of the discourse that shapes the purpose and values of the church: the same purpose and values that inform all of the offerings, musical and otherwise, that construct the Hillsong brand.

Branding is a means of communication that is at once specific and general. An effective branded message adapts to a variety of cultural contexts while still retaining its core essence. The 'sound' of Hillsong's music is its branded message. Significantly, this 'sound' is both constitutive and reflective of a placemaking strategy in which the physical and virtual spaces that the church occupies become mutually referential places in the Hillsong Network. In this network, the Hills campus is Hillsong's flagship location, the centre of production of the 'sound' of the pop/rock-based worship music that its participants favour and which is the recognisable calling card of the church. Although its 'sound' is largely considered 'Australian', this appellation masks the diversity among both Hillsong's participants and the church's (or its churches') music(s). The 'Hillsong Sound' is a social construct, a constantly evolving negotiation among participants.

Hillsong's 'sound' is achieved through both the physical and discursive music produced by the brand. The music production process, which centres on the songwriters, songs and congregation members of Hillsong Australia, ensures the overall consistency of the Hillsong product. The standardisation of objective elements such as tempo and instrumentation further ensures that this consistency

is maintained across the range of its musical offerings and across its network. Yet, despite the objective consistency of Hillsong's musical offerings, participants experience the 'Hillsong Sound' differently according to the idiosyncratic associations they draw between the varied people and places that constitute the Hillsong network. As we have seen, the imagined characteristics of Australia and London/Europe (and those who live in these places) exert a profound influence on the way Hillsong's participants experience the music. While there are undoubtedly differences between the two places and their respective participants, it is the mediated, essentialised ideas about each that complete the 'Hillsong Sound' and make placemaking effective in constructing the Hillsong brand. Hillsong's participants thus hear meaning in the 'Hillsong Sound' through the brand and vice versa. The 'sound' is the brand; they are the same experience.

Chapters two, three and four have progressively moved from the 'global' to the 'local' as sites of experiential, branded meaning-making. The following chapter arrives at the ultimate locus of experience, the individual. In it, I will examine the brand's 'educational' function and the role of values and agency in embodying, and thus 'knowing', the Hillsong brand and its values.

Chapter 5

Learning to Listen

Introduction

I had a housemate... she had, I call it a gift, to look at a normal movie, and see the Jesus story in it. She just drew the parallels. And she would say that and all of us would be, 'yeah, I can see that now.' And sometimes you need someone to draw the parallel, because not all of us look through eyes that see God in everything. But if someone draws those lines for you, it's easier to see the connection. I didn't see *Avatar*. I don't know if I would have made that connection, but because somebody made the connection for me, I'll be watching it with a whole different viewpoint... as dots connected. (Helen; interview with author, 15 June 2010)

The preceding excerpt is from a conversation I had with Helen, a 30-year-old South African woman who had attended Hillsong London for about four years. We spoke a few weeks after Hillsong Senior Pastor Bobbie Houston had used a scene from the movie *Avatar* during a message delivered at Hillsong London to illustrate what Helen was describing above: learning to hear God in everything.¹³⁶ Specifically, Houston was talking about the movie's theme song, Leona Lewis's 'I See You' – a song in which the lyrics have considerable overlap with evangelical language.¹³⁷ Helen hadn't seen the movie, but now she wanted to, and was

¹³⁶ Message delivered by Bobbie Houston during the 1pm service on 30 May 2010 at the Dominion Theatre.

¹³⁷ For example, the first two verses and the chorus are:

(Verse 1)

I see you

I see you

Walking through a dream

I see you

My light in darkness breathing hope of new life

Now I live through you and you through me

Enchanting

(Chorus)

I pray in my heart that this dream never ends

I see me through your eyes

Living through life flying high

Your life shines the way into paradise

So I offer my life as a sacrifice

(Verse 2)

I live through your love

You teach me how to see

All that's beautiful

determined to experience it from a ‘Christian’ perspective. How would she do this?

Sacred experiences often have to be sought. Participants need to be in the right ‘state of mind’, which connects the physical, mental and emotional to embodied knowledge (Becker 2004; Jankowsky 2010; Miller and Strongman 2002; Rouget 1985). This takes ‘work’ on the part of the participant (DeNora 2000). Participants have to somehow expect the experience (for example, the ‘branded’ worship expectations of Geoff and Matt in chapter three), but they also often have to practise to achieve it. In other words, participants have to work to discipline their minds in order to experience a pious lifestyle (Hirschkind 2001). In her book *Extravagant Worship*, Darlene Zschech notes that you must ‘discipline your mind to agree with God’s Word’ (Zschech 2001: 137). This chapter explores the role of the brand and branding in the development and exercise of ‘discipline’. How might a participant like Helen use Hillsong’s brand as a source of inspiration and discipline in constructing, maintaining and experiencing the world through a Christian lifestyle? To what degree does she have the freedom to ‘choose’ her meaning, and to what degree is the meaning already prescribed – ‘branded’ – for (or into) her? In short, what is the nature of ‘branded discipline’?

Having moved through progressively ‘smaller’ layers of the Hillsong brand from the ‘global’ to the ‘local’, this chapter explores how the sacred is experienced and embodied individually as part of a branded social system. In each chapter, we have seen that Hillsong provides the branded materials and context in which meaning is created. However, in each case, space was left for participants to actively create their own meanings. *Brandscapes* are ‘cultural spaces where corporate brands are built experientially by consumers and corporations’ (Carah 2010: 5). In his study of Australian music festivals, Carah explores how brands seek to make themselves part of cultural experience by providing both the materials with which participants create culture and also the spaces and contexts in which they create it. For example, at the Virgin V festival, fans were

My senses touch your word I never pictured
 Now I give my hope to you
 I surrender

encouraged to take pictures of their experiences in the crowd. These pictures were uploaded in real time to the V festival screens, websites and their own social media pages on YouTube, Facebook and Flickr. As these images appeared on the screens, the festival experience was reinscribed as authentic, but mediated by Virgin. According to Carah, these texts ‘work[ed] as value-generating information commodities in several ways: as audience building content for Web 2.0 spaces, as texts that ratify the social experiences that unfold in brandscapes, and as advertisements for Virgin’ (ibid.: 54-55). The V festival set out to ‘construct a mediated social space that harnesses the enjoyment of live music and engages the audience in social practices that mediate that enjoyment’ (ibid.: 55).

Carah’s view of the brandscape as a space/place that directs subjects’ agency towards brand-building is derived from the Gramscian notion of cultural hegemony (Anderson 1976; Gramsci 1971). For Gramsci, dominant structures and ideologies are reproduced and naturalized through the everyday interactions of actors in society. Crucially, this depends on the information that is given to them. For Gramsci, hegemony is not explicitly imposed, but instead works implicitly, relying on the actions of actors to reinscribe the existing social order and the ideology that buttresses it. This, however, makes hegemony that much more totalizing than any overt form of coercion because, according to Gramsci, participants see it as ‘natural’. The difference between Gramscian hegemony and the ‘brand hegemony’ described by Carah is that while Gramsci understands the proletariat as largely being unaware of their role in their continued domination, Carah acknowledges that participants are reflexive, and understand that they are being ‘used’ to generate capital (cultural and economic) for corporations. Rather than resisting this, though, they are mostly resigned to it, preferring to focus on how they can use the brandscape to creatively produce their ‘own’ culture.

As culture becomes ‘user-generated content’ produced by willing (or at least cynically resigned) participants, branding emerges as a form of cultural ‘discipline’. This discipline (or, as Lury (2004) and Arvidsson (2006), who understand the brand as a managerial device – see chapter one – call it,

‘governance’¹³⁸) is not Taylorist. In other words, it does not ‘force’ a particular mode of thought or action on the actor. Rather, it is post-Fordist; the brand is a structuring force, but it structures through suggestions and associations that are realised through voluntary use. On the one hand, participants are free to choose which brands they use and how they use them, deploying brands as symbolic resources in a postmodern assemblage of identity (Belk 1988). On the other hand, the meaning of a brand is rooted in cultural associations that already afford a limited range of meanings and uses (Arvidsson 2006; Lury 2004). The meanings engendered by and imbued in a brand are thus co-produced, concomitantly arising via the interplay of structural and individual agency. Society, organizations and individuals derive value from and create value for one another, framed by the brand and branding.

Part 1 - Ethical Listening: Lifestyle and Learning to Hear God

Music is used in a variety of religious contexts to structure experience and inculcate meaning (Beck 2006). At Hillsong, for example, worship service sections are delineated by the kind of music (e.g. upbeat ‘praise’ or more relaxed ‘worship’ music), and whether or not it is foregrounded or in the background. People also use music in similar ways outside of the religious sphere. Tia DeNora’s study of ‘music in everyday life’ details how people use playlists to structure their experiences of events like yoga classes and romantic evenings (DeNora 2000).¹³⁹ Similarly, Michael Bull’s study of iPod users focuses on the agency through which commuters sonically control their temporal and spatial experiences of the city, transforming the daily commute into a personal, sometimes transcendent experience (Bull 2007). What these seemingly disparate uses of music have in common is they structure experiences as part of a lifestyle. Like the subjects of DeNora’s and Bull’s studies, Hillsong’s participants use music to set a mood or help the commute pass. For Hillsong’s participants, though, there is no neat boundary between ‘religious’ and ‘nonreligious’ contexts.

¹³⁸ ‘Brands exercise a sort of management governance’ (Arvidsson 2006: 129).

¹³⁹ Tellingly, the build-up and warm-down of exercise classes is similar to that of the evangelical worship service.

Worship is a lifestyle, and music is a means through which that lifestyle is maintained. For example, Debbie and her husband Neil, a couple in their mid-thirties who are members of Hillsong London, almost always have music on at home:

TW: So when do you have music on?

D: We have music all the time. The only time I don't have stuff playing is in the bath (we don't have speakers in this flat), and in the kitchen when I make food. But we try to keep that, because we both love music. Both of us feel that music just sets the tone. And that's also why, if there's something on the radio that I don't like listening to or that's making me feel 'bleah', I just go and change it or just skip it, or I grunt and then Neil goes and skips it. (Interview with author, 18 July 2010)

Debbie and her husband use music to create an atmosphere that is appropriate to the task at hand. It is an important part of many day-to-day activities. Music's omnipresence in Debbie's life becomes even more significant to the present discussion when it seen as an everyday technology not just for structuring her experiences, but also for the development and maintenance of a lifestyle:

TW: So you listen to stuff that isn't Christian?

D: Yes. But I do like listening to Christian music more. Let me rephrase: I find, when I listen to Christian music, it's easier for me to connect with God. I find that when I've got the Christian music in my ears, then it's easy to focus on God. But when I don't listen to Christian music, then it's a lot harder to focus on God as my provider, and I'm more self-sufficient in general.... Sometimes I make a decision – like in the mornings, I get quite angry if I wake up with an alarm, because that disturbs me, puts me in a bad mood. So it's music that goes on. I prefer if it's the chilled out Colby Caillet stuff, or praise and worship music in the morning and during breakfast because it gets me into that trusting him feeling and focus. Because I'm quite a task person, so for me it's quite easy for me to have a lot of stuff in my head that's pulling me away from trusting him. So I've already got that little Debbie sitting on my shoulder going: 'Oh you've got this and this and this and this and this to do' and I'm like, starting to get frantic in my head because I'm not even awake yet, so if I've got God stuff playing, it really helps me to remember that I believe in him, helps me almost to 'oh yeah', you know?.... But at lunchtime or in the evening, then I'm sort of into the day, and then it's cool, I can listen to whatever else. (Interview with author, 18 July 2010)

Here, it is not the music *per se* but what it is associated with – Christianity as a frame – that provides the meaning and efficacy for Debbie. Although the 'chilled-

out' character of Colby Caillet is undoubtedly important, a more important element of the music is the teaching, which is so strongly associated with 'Christian' music that it is arguably implicit in it. Evangelical Christianity teaches unwavering trust in God; to worry about everyday things is natural, but when one does this, it implies distrust in God's provision. Rather than try to control things, one should adopt an attitude of trust in God in all aspects of life. When one 'lets go' and relies on God, good things will happen. This is the message associated with the music, and with it Debbie is constantly reminding herself to approach life through God rather than through her own means.

During our interview, it became clear that Debbie listened to a variety of artists other than Hillsong. In fact, while Hillsong songs were part of Debbie's playlist, she rarely listened to them at home, where she preferred a more acoustic aesthetic. However, she told me that she valued Hillsong songs when she participated in worship services because of their volume, which drowned out other voices – including her own. In contrasting the experience of a Hillsong worship service to those she attended growing up in South Africa, she revealed that Hillsong's presentation of worship afforded her the means both to participate and concentrate on God:

T: So there's an element to the way the music is piped in... so you can't hear yourself singing.

D: Yes, exactly, and I can't hear other people singing as much, so I can't put people off, and I don't have to worry about being embarrassed, or I don't have to worry about interrupting somebody else. I just feel comfortable or I don't feel comfortable. So I've been back to South Africa a few times and gone to visit a few friends' churches. And each time I go to all their churches, and it's all the same: I want to get up and be involved, I want to say 'Yes!' and I want to clap and I want to sing loudly and I want to do what I want to do, but I'm VERY aware of the surroundings and what other people are doing. And that almost holds me back from just putting my hand up or clapping and getting involved. (Interview with author, 18 July 2010)

It is interesting that outside of church, non-Hillsong music is Debbie's preferred medium for connecting with God, while in the context of a service, even in another church, she prefers Hillsong's music (or at least Hillsong's worship aesthetic).

For others, the electric aesthetic of the majority of Hillsong's music is what they want both inside and outside of church services. For example, Waithera is a thirty-year old film student who works as a delivery person for a Vietnamese restaurant (where I interviewed her). She uses Hillsong's music to get herself going before work:

W: So, you know, all their songs are awesome... they give you such vavavavoom! You wake up in the morning and you listen to them and you're like, 'ooh!, I'm on a roll!' On those days when I'm on the way here and I don't really want to work, I put it on, pump up the volume, and I'm like 'yeah, I'm going!' By the time I get here, ask these guys – like, I'm bubbly anyway, but they're like: 'Woah, you've got energy'! (Interview with author, 16 October 2010)

For Waithera, and many other participants I interviewed, Hillsong's music is an integral part of the experience of her everyday life. Like Debbie, the aesthetic dimension is important, but ultimately secondary:

TW: Ok, so what is it about the music that does that?

W: There's something about [the music] – it just explains a lot about God.... It just really tells you about who God is and what Jesus did. Wow, it's genius. It really is. You listen to the songs and your heart just starts to shake. I just feel happiness when I listen to that album.

In this second quotation, Waithera clarifies that the 'energy' she gets from the music, which she first attributed to the volume, actually resides in the associated teachings. I pressed her further on this:

TW: Is it the lyrics that do the explaining?

W: Well, yeah.... OK, so you were at Team Vision Night, right? When [Hillsong Pastor] Peter Wilson preached about the meaning of communion, and then they played 'A Beautiful Exchange'? It's like, then I *knew*.

For Waithera, then, the teaching and the music accrued meaning in the Hillsong brandscape. Hillsong provided the resources – which is to say the music, the teaching that is associated with the music, and also the context in which the music was experienced. However, it was Waithera who sought out the experience, who engaged with the music in the moment, and who ultimately formed the meaningful associations.

Debbie and Waithera's uses of music in their everyday lives, while individualistic, were both directed towards the development of an evangelical Christian lifestyle. Debbie used Christian music to relax and trust in God's provision. In contrast, Waithera used music to get up and go. However, the end result of both women's musical use was educational – there was a biblical lesson in the music that could be used in everyday life. These 'lessons' were at least partially learned through engagement with Hillsong's resources – the music, but also the associated preaching, books, podcasts, team meetings, connect groups and so on. In other words, they listened to the music in ways that helped them see the world through Hillsong-tinted evangelical Christian lenses.

Both Debbie and Waithera's use of music was 'educational' – it helped them 'know' Hillsong's teaching through experiencing it in their everyday lives. Their use of music is similar to that described by the anthropologist Charles Hirschkind as 'cultural practice through which the perceptual capabilities of the subject are honed' (Hirschkind 2001: 623-624). In his study of the ways devout Muslims listened to cassette sermons in Egypt, Hirschkind highlights how listeners sought to achieve a particular emotional state of being, a state in which they could 'properly' understand the meaning of the sermon beyond the intellectual level, but within the prescribed limits of a pious Islamic lifestyle. Importantly, this state involved the total being, acknowledging the concomitance of the mental, physical and emotional elements of experience. For Hirschkind's collaborators, in order to 'hear with the heart' (ibid.: 624) the 'proper sermon audition demand[ed] a particular affective-volitional response from the listener... as a condition for "understanding" sermonic speech' (ibid.). Through ethical listening, listeners sought to 'construct their own knowledge, emotions, and sensibilities in accord with their models of Islamic moral personhood' (ibid.: 640).

Hirschkind's ethnography corroborates the view that it often takes 'work' on the part of the participant for him or her to achieve a sacred experience, and that the expectation of, or at least the desire for, that experience often plays an important role in achieving it. In the Pentecostal context, for example, it has been shown that 'the stronger the expectation and desire for "religious experience" and a change in one's own spirit through singing and worship, the greater the likelihood that these

manifestations will come to fruition’ (Miller and Strongman 2002: 15; see also Spilka et al. 1996). Emotion drives the experience, but the participant must first know how to evoke the emotion.

This ‘know-how’ is learned through some mix of socialization, enculturation, and acculturation – in a word, education.¹⁴⁰ Judith Becker (2004) likens the progression of a trance ritual to a story that produces a ‘habitus of listening’ or a ‘script’ that is followed (Becker 2004: 82). Speaking of Sufi ceremonies, she notes that: ‘Musical emotion, musical feeling, and movement in the listener changes both its form and its intensity as the script progresses. The affect of the script, when fully acted out, is the ultimate joy of a direct and personal knowledge of Allah’ (ibid.: 82). This ‘script’ is ‘public, situational, predictable, and culturally sanctioned’ (ibid.: 84):

Within each of these scripts, musical, behavioural, and emotional events will occur within a certain predictable frame. Simultaneously, each individual event will be unique and nonrepeatable. All have developed habits of mind and body in response to specific musical events. These habits are acquired throughout our life experiences of interaction with others in similar situations (ibid.: 85).

¹⁴⁰ Berry (2007) describes ‘enculturation’ as a process through which ‘the individual acquires appropriate values and behaviors by learning what the culture deems to be necessary.... The end result (if enculturation is successful) is a person who is competent in the culture, including its language, its rituals, its values, and so on’ (Berry 2007: 547). According to Berry, this learning process is not necessarily ‘deliberate or didactic’, but rather ‘learning without specific teaching’. In other words, enculturation occurs through the individual’s day-to-day interactions with his or her parents, peers and other members of his or her ‘primary culture’ (ibid.: 546-547). This stands apart from socialization, which refers to ‘the process of deliberate shaping, by way of tutelage, of the individual’ (ibid.: 547). A third concept, acculturation, is essentially a mix of enculturation and socialization. Acculturation occurs through ‘contact with other peoples belonging to different cultures and exhibiting different behaviors’ (ibid.). While enculturation may be thought of as *cultural* learning, acculturation is more accurately described as *culture* learning, which ‘refers to the process of acquisition of features of [a] new culture, sometimes as replacements for the attitudes and behaviors that have been lost [gradually, usually during prolonged lack of contact with the primary culture] but often in addition to them’ (ibid.). To some degree, all three processes are involved in Hillsong’s branding, and vary depending on the individual in question. For example, a child born into or brought up in an evangelical Christian family will be more enculturated than acculturated, whereas a convert to Christianity will be more acculturated than enculturated. (Importantly, most conversions happen between closely related traditions. For example, it is far more likely that someone will convert from Methodism, Catholicism or even Judaism to Pentecostalism than from a tradition further removed, such as Islam or Buddhism (Biet-Hallahmi and Argyle 1997). Also, belief is arguably mostly enculturated, whereas the specific knowledge that frames belief (for example, the names of the books of the Bible) is specifically taught, a socializing process.

This is significant in relation to branding. A brand is in many ways a script, a prescribed way of approaching something the same way over and over again, no matter where the interaction takes place (albeit with concessions to local cultural norms). This is most apparent in interactions with service brands. The experience of ordering a coffee at a Starbucks anywhere in the world, for example, is almost the same. One knows not only what to expect in terms of the quality of the product, but also how to order, from the way the queue forms to the specialized language, to where to find the milk and sugar. Ideally, one could order ‘a tall skinny soy latte’ in any Starbucks in the world without knowing the language of the host country – Starbucks has its own ‘native’ language and ways of doing things. Through repetition, participants have *learned* how to do things the Starbucks way. They have been enculturated to the Starbucks brand culture.

Both Debbie and Waithera ‘speak’ Hillsong’s brand culture. Through their participation in Hillsong’s brandscape, they have learned the social norms, language and, perhaps most importantly, the values that are the basis of the church. They use their agency in order to maintain a Christian lifestyle, often in the Hillsong brandscape. Their agency contributes to the brandscape, but for this to happen the brandscape must already be there. Corporate culture is an on-going process of brand-building. How is this culture created?

Corporate (en)Culture(ation)

One of the reasons many organisations have embraced ‘organisational’ or ‘corporate’ branding is that it increases the efficiency (i.e. the speed, reach and fidelity) with which ideas and information can be disseminated throughout an organisation and beyond (Moor 2007: 78-82; see also Lury 2004 and Arvidsson 2006). An organisation is more likely to succeed in achieving a goal if its participants are focused on it, understand it well and are motivated to work towards it (Aaker 1995: 135). In marketing a service, employee appearance and actions are the semiotic material of a brand. Organisational participants who are fully ‘branded’ are valuable because they are able to communicate clearly the brand’s purpose and values to themselves, other members of the organisation, and

‘outsiders’. Thus, the benefit of cultivating a strong corporate culture, defined as ‘a set of norms and values that are widely shared and strongly held throughout the organization’ (O’Reilly and Chatman 1996: 166), is clear: it puts all participants ‘on the same page’. They live the corporate culture – it is their lifestyle.

When speaking of a large evangelical Christian organisation such as Hillsong Church, the concept of the ‘corporate’ takes on several overlapping and interrelated meanings. In consumer culture, it is usually first associated with being ‘of or belonging to a corporation’ (i.e. a business entity). However, it is also defined as ‘done by or characteristic of individuals acting together; “a joint identity”; “the collective mind”; “the corporate good”’.¹⁴¹ These latter definitions are closer to the evangelical Christian conception of ‘corporate’, and are especially close to the concept of the Body of Christ that was explored in chapter three. Furthermore, ‘corporate worship’ (the worship that happens in group settings rather than individually) is posited as a fundamental part of the evangelical Christian experience. In the evangelical Christian understanding of corporate worship, communication is a ‘horizontal’ exercise among fellow worshippers as well as a ‘vertical’ or one-to-one connection with God.¹⁴² The horizontal element can be understood in terms of education; corporate worship is one of the activities through which participants become acquainted with the ritual flow¹⁴³ and normative gestures involved in the service (Ingalls 2008: 175-258).¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ <www.thefreedictionary.com/corporate>; accessed 25 November 2012.

¹⁴² See, for example, Evans (2006: 8-23, 55-57).

¹⁴³ Two influential accounts of transcendent experiences are ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi 1990) and ‘peak experience’ (Laski 1962; Maslow [1962] 2011, [1964] 1994). As described by Schouten et al. (2007), flow is the ‘total absorption in an activity’ that is ‘achieved through intense, focused engagement in the mastery of an activity’ (ibid.: 367). Most importantly, ‘flow produces a state of transcendence, a suspension of temporality, a sense of separation from the mundane, and a sense of unity with some higher plane of experience’ (ibid.: 367). A related experience is the ‘peak experience’. Flow is achieved through the individual’s own concentration on a task. In contrast, peak experiences ‘seem often to originate from outside the individual and to transport that person to unexpected emotional heights’ (ibid.: 358). Like flow, peak experiences often lead a person to feel ‘intimately connected with some large phenomenon, such as nature, humankind, or the infinite’, and are often implicated in a variety of religious experience such as ecstasies, revelations or conversions (Schouten et al. 2007: 358).

¹⁴⁴ It is not only in ritualized worship settings that the gestures and flow/appearance of the service are learned. As Simon Coleman (2000) suggests, the performance and discourse of evangelical Christianity is now circulated in a highly-mediated web of global preachers, conferences and products that help perpetuate a ‘global, charismatic “consciousness”’ that is ‘not merely a set of ideas, but also engagement in certain physical and material activities, including the development of a spiritually charged aesthetic that encompasses ritual movements, media consumption, linguistic forms and aspects of the internal environment’ (Coleman 2000: 5-6). In other words, evangelical

It is also where the discourses that frame the event are put into action. The horizontal element provides the knowledge needed for the vertical element to be realized. In other words, corporate worship is an activity through which a church's 'corporate culture' is cultivated, transmitted and experienced.

How is corporate culture created? Simply put, it involves education through participation. A strong corporate culture begins from a clear understanding of an organisation's purpose and values. For many organisations, this is expressed in a vision statement, like Hillsong's:

To reach and influence the world by building a large Christ-centered, Bible-based church, changing mindsets and empowering people to lead and impact in every sphere of life.¹⁴⁵

Part of the way Hillsong seeks to realise its vision is through its worship music, which, as noted above, is associated with the discourses that frame the experience of it. Worship can thus be seen as a technology through which Hillsong's purpose and values become embodied. Since its musicians often facilitate worship, the church works to instil its corporate culture in all of its worship team members. This begins with understanding exactly what is meant by 'worship', which at Hillsong is a lifestyle (Zschech 2001: 31-33). Because corporate culture radiates outwards from an organisation's core participants, Hillsong's leadership goes to great lengths to instil ideas of proper intention in the culture of its worship team. Notions of 'worship' and purpose are therefore constantly in the forefront of worship team members' thoughts. This was expressed by Hristo, a nineteen-year-old drummer at Hillsong London who is originally from Bulgaria and studies music at a London conservatoire:

It's not only the music but the fact that when we as musicians are part of the worship team, we don't just go out to have a performance, but we go out on stage focused on God and on leading people into worship. *So the music is*

Christians learn what evangelical Christian practice should 'look' and 'be' like not only through direct participation in events such as worship services, but also by engaging with other types of media, such as DVDs of worship services. The ubiquity of these videos, circulated on internet sites such as YouTube, serves to perpetuate a 'global evangelical Christian' aesthetic that encompasses the visual and aural dimensions of the events (e.g. the lighting and flow of the service), participants' bodily actions (e.g. raising their hands or speaking in tongues), and the 'internal' manifestations – the actual meanings that engender and are derived from the experience.

¹⁴⁵ *Our Vision*. <www.hillsong.com/vision>; accessed 28 October 2012.

not the most important thing; the message of Jesus Christ is the most important thing. I think it's important for the people who lead worship to understand that before they can lead a congregation into worship. (Interview with author, 13 February 2011; emphasis added)

Hillsong's worship team is primarily made up of volunteers, who, while often trained in music, may not be the 'specialists' in the specifics of Hillsong's church culture that its leaders are. Therefore, a considerable amount of effort is put into educating its members in what proper worship is, and what the team members are there for. Julie, a thirty-year-old Belgian who sings on the worship team at Hillsong London, expressed this during a conversation we had at the Starbucks around the corner from the church. During our conversation, Julie admitted that wanting to perform on stage was part of the reason she auditioned for the worship team. However, once on the team, she quickly changed her mindset:

A lot of people start on the worship team, especially if they do music, to get on stage and be seen. The reason I say that is that you're on the team, and you live with the team, and you change your mindset really easy. At a certain point you get it, that it's not about you. It's not about your career, it's not about your minute of fame, it's about God; that's why you worship. That's also why [Hillsong] always put the same people in the front, because those people know why they're there, and not for the wrong reason. They put a lot of emphasis on it. And you grow in it; I grew in it. Because I was a Christian for five months [when I joined the worship team], so I didn't have the context. But you develop it... they put a lot of emphasis on the right reason for being on stage. (Interview with author, 6 February 2011)

Julie started as part of the back-up vocalist group, which performs off-stage and is piped into the house mix. After spending time with the team and learning the accepted way of thinking, she was 'promoted' to the front, where she now appears regularly. Julie is following the 'educational' path that sees vocalists move from the back of the house to front line to worship leaders, ensuring a consistent line of worship leaders in terms of both availability and consistency in training and values. The team functions as a teaching group that helps instil and reinforce both broadly Christian and Hillsong-specific values and ways of thinking. Importantly, this is primarily done through non-musical activities. For example, as Hristo relayed to me, most of the weekly worship team rehearsals are not focused on music, rather:

At rehearsal we get together and there are different talks... about worship. Different guys talk to us and encourage us. The past few weeks, we've been studying the Biblical Finance book.¹⁴⁶ We have team vision nights where the idea of it is just if some people do not quite understand why they're doing something, just to help them understand. (Interview with author, 13 February 2011)

In fact, Hristo told me that less than half of a worship team rehearsal is dedicated to rehearsing for the upcoming service. In the profoundly musical Hillsong culture, music itself is not seen as the most important factor in worship. It is the understanding of why the musicians are doing what they are doing that is seen as the critical element in the music's efficacy. Crucially, this is disseminated through seemingly tangential topics like finance. In other words, the church is promoting the idea of a fully evangelical Christian lifestyle that is 'branded' into the music.

In Julie and Hristo's worship team experiences, we can begin to see how Hillsong's brand educates, and how its participants work to absorb and utilize that education. The brand becomes a self-referential system that perpetuates itself through participants' desire to live a Christian lifestyle. The brandscape is the value-laden frame in which participants orient their actions, but it is also constructed through their actions. As Julie and Hristo noted above, the first step to worship as a lifestyle is to understand why one does things. But understanding the 'why' is not the same as being able to put it into action. Like Hirschkind's collaborators mentioned above, Julie and Hristo have had to practise to achieve the full integration of 'mind/body/spirit'. In other words, they have had to embody the Hillsong brand to *really* understand it.

Part II - Embodying the Brand

Once worship team members understand why they are on the platform, they must also understand 'how' to worship. As representatives of the Hillsong brand, worship leaders and team members are semiotic material in the Hillsong brandscape. Like Darlene Zschech in chapter two, they are symbolic of Hillsong's

¹⁴⁶ Lloydbottom, Mark. *Biblical Finance: Reflections on Money Wealth and Possessions*. Crown Financial Ministries, 2010.

corporate values and are charged with communicating them to other participants. A simple example of how this works in the worship context is the way a musician can ‘lead worship’ by raising his or her hands, a common practice for evangelical Christians. In ritualized situations, inexperienced participants will often imitate the postures and movements of experienced ones (Becker 2004: 119-121), and Hillsong’s musicians are taken as ‘experts’ – or at least experienced – in worship. When they raise their hands, others follow suit. Through socialization, participants understand that the adoption of this posture equates to worship – not just the act, but also the larger set of cultural meanings that go along with it. The visual, observable, aspects of worship are therefore bearers of cultural meaning and powerful agents of socialization (Coleman 2000).

The idea of external postures and actions conveying internal states of being can be seen in the following statement by Roy, who sings backup on Hillsong London’s worship team and was also quoted in chapter two:

You should set an example where people can emulate. So they must see in you the message of the songs. So it’s about relating to them, being able to really cause them to worship the Lord. (Interview with author, 6 February 2011)

A cursory (or cynical) reading of this might imply that a worship leader could simply lift his or her hands and, by ‘appearing’ to worship, incite others to ‘really’ worship (Adnams 2013). After all, business writers such as James Gilmore and Joseph Pine (2007), performance theorists like Jeffrey C. Alexander (2006) and philosophers such as Charles Taylor (1991) and Charles Guignon (2004) have all argued that authenticity is both performed and ascribed. The belief on the part of those observing the act of worship is vital to its engendering a similar experience. However, these authors are not arguing for a postmodern denial of authenticity. They all acknowledge that while authenticity is difficult to communicate, it is ultimately about being true to the inner experience of one’s self. According to Hillsong’s worship leaders (recall chapter two), one actually needs to be worshipping in order to lead others into worship – a sort of radical epistemology. As Roy put it:

You have to really be worshipping God first. You have to be in the right spirit, because you won't be able to lead people if you're not. So – our ministry is a Christian ministry. We minister first to God. And you will feel inside if you are able to touch the heart of the Lord. After that, God will just anoint your worship. And that is how people will see the glory that is in you. And they will just follow. That will cause them to follow you and usher them into the presence of God. You simply have to focus yourself first to God. Like I said, you have to be praying about the songs. You really have to pray and condition your mind and your body, because once you are prepared, then people will see. (Interview with author, 6 February 2011)

The conditioning of mind and body that Roy is describing above is a kind of self-discipline, the goals and manifestations of which are learned through education and exposure to a corporate set of values. But the church cannot 'force' this education upon participants. If one does not open to, accept and then put into practice what is being offered, learning will not occur. In other words, participants must seek the (self) knowledge they need for sacred experience. According to Roy, this takes preparation and discipline:

It takes preparation [to lead worship].... You should be able to not just listen to the songs, you really have to understand what they mean, and how we should be able to relay that message to people. I think you have to meditate over the songs and pray. And you simply have to ask the Lord to prepare you spiritually and physically so that on the day of service, you will be able to answer the presence of God.... I discipline myself, like the day before, I don't usually talk about anything. I just lay in my bed and just worship and pray and meditate. And I don't talk that much. It's part of my discipline. It's really asking the Lord to just anoint you, you know? Because you just have to do your part and God will do the rest. (Interview with author, 6 February 2011)

Over the course of my fieldwork, interviewees routinely claimed that in order to 'really' worship, certain conditions had to be present. For example, Roy had a Saturday routine that put him in the right mindset for Sunday's service. Others described having a favourite music or place that put them in the frame of mind they needed to be in to fully concentrate on God. For worship team members, who are both worshippers and facilitators of worship, a need for certain conditions to be in place to really worship is sometimes problematic. On the one hand, they need to be engaged in worship to be leading others into it. On the other hand, the worship team's job is to afford participants the opportunity for a sacred experience through their on-stage performances, by maintaining the level of 'excellence' that was discussed in chapter three. When watching the Hillsong

London team in action, one might notice that either the backing guitarist or one of the keyboard players has a microphone, but never sings into it. Occasionally, this musician will say something into it that is audible only to the other musicians on stage who are wearing inner ear-pieces. This is the real ‘worship leader’ (as opposed to the lead singer) who directs the musicians through each song. As discussed in chapter four, although many of the elements of the music are standardised, the musicians also have room to regulate the flow of the service in real time, reacting to the ‘mood’ of the congregation or one of the pastors. Worship leaders I spoke to said that they try to gauge ‘where’ the congregation is. They may, for example, repeat a chorus if they feel that it is particularly resonant at that moment. Similarly, they may bring the volume down if Head Pastor Gary Clark seems ready to say something (particularly during the altar call).

There seems to be a contradiction here. On the one hand, the worship team members must be ‘really’ worshipping in order for the music to have the sacred efficacy it is meant to have. On the other hand, circumstances of performance dictate that a worship team member’s attention must be divided between the object of worship and the worship platform. This was a source of tension for Julie:

You have to worship, but at the same time you have to think about everything. Because, like the guys who are on the frontline, they have their ear, and Dave Kennedy (one of Hillsong London’s worship leaders) is always speaking in the microphone. They hear it, so he’s always giving instructions to the musicians, to the singers. So you have to focus on your own voice, you have to focus on Dave; you have to focus on the crowd. So it’s a lot of things you have to think about. And still you have to worship. So yeah, it’s quite tricky.... I find it hard to worship while I’m singing [onstage]. If I’m just in the crowd, no problem. When I’m backstage or onstage, you always have to think about your pitch and the lyrics, what’s going to happen, where are they going to start the song, how it’s going to end, how the intention is. So it’s more like – it’s not a job, but – it’s actually doing a job. (Interview with author, 22 July 2011)

This was generally the response I got from worship team members, who would go on to say that this became less of a problem with practice. However, Hristo claimed to have the opposite experience:

I find it a lot less distracting when I’m actually playing rather than when I’m in the congregation. I don’t know why, but I find it less distracting.... I think one of the things is because I’m a drummer, and when someone else is

playing, I will always either have a critical ear out, or, the ‘I like this’ ear out. I think it’s just a musicians’ thing. It’s not terribly distracting, but I find that I’m way more focused and there’s fewer things to distract me when I’m playing myself. (Interview with author, 13 February 2011)

The worship team members I interviewed faced different challenges in attaining flow, and employed different strategies to overcome them. However, all of these strategies were informed by the understanding that worship was part of a *lifestyle*, as articulated by Hristo:

Worship is not just songs that you sing, it’s your life, really – a way of life. I guess that during a song somebody has to say ‘let’s bring it down’ doesn’t necessarily mean that your worship is being interrupted. Even if it is, I don’t see why it needs to take hours or a period of time to get back into it. I think it’s just a quick snap back into it. Because we are worshipping with our instruments. You don’t stop playing just to listen to them. Even though you’re not entirely focused on what you’re doing, you are still automatically giving worship. (Interview with author, 13 February 2011)

For Hristo, the act of playing the drums on Sunday is not necessarily ‘set apart’ from everyday life. The idea of an evangelical Christian lifestyle contradicts the functionalist sociological perspective of religion, which posits it as a ‘special’ activity. Based on the responses above, it would seem that the apparent contradiction is resolved through a larger worldview, a lifestyle that frames worship as a holistic way of being in the world. In the Hillsong context, it is the brand that is the frame; it provides both the cultural resources that participants use to direct their actions and the cultural contexts within which those actions accrue meaning. Put another way, the brand is educational material and branding is the education that underpins the preparation for, and ultimately is part of, a worship lifestyle.

Part III - Doing the Work to Embody the Brand

Although brands are ‘educational’, they are only educational to the extent that ‘consumers’ actively engage with them. The reason that Hillsong invests so much energy in inculcating its musicians into its corporate culture is that, once a corporate culture is successfully established among an organization’s core participants, it is likely that the culture will radiate outward to others, in this case

the participants in Hillsong's worship services. Yet despite the sometimes overblown rhetoric of the overt power of brands (Klein 2010), it is in fact the covert use of participatory agency through which a brand's hegemony is realised. As in chapter one, the brand does not say 'You must'. Rather, it suggests that 'You may!'. In other words, Hillsong can train its musicians all it wants, but in the end, its participants have to immerse themselves in the brandscape.

Although part of Hillsong's branding is communicated by 'leading by example', it also works through direct teaching, with sermons, books, videos and podcasts available at the church's resource centre and online. This makes self-directed learning available all of the time. Participants can integrate these resources into their daily lives. For example, several told me that they listen to podcasts on their iPods during their commutes, in a manner similar to that described by Michael Bull. Indeed, this is precisely what Darlene Zschech recommends in her book *Extravagant Worship* (2001):

If keeping your thoughts in line with God's Word is difficult for you, then I suggest that you listen to teaching tapes.... I have listened to hundreds of hours of Bible teaching¹⁴⁷ to re-educate my inner man while commuting. (Zschech 2001: 149).

Taking the act of educational listening outside of the Sunday service integrates further the act of seeking Christ into everyday life. Like Hirschkind's Muslim collaborators, who also listened to tapes while going about their everyday lives, it is the listener who is doing the work of self-transformation. This was expressed by Dele, a 32 year-old finance officer and Christian rapper:

TW: This 'learning to listen', is that something you just came upon?

D: It's something I discovered. Because it used to be that I would go to church and be like, 'hmmm, I'm not feeling it. Somehow the worship today didn't bring God's presence in'. That's true sometimes. But sometimes it's you who was expecting a key change or expecting (the worship leader) to take it to another level and he just sang the song plain and simple, and you

¹⁴⁷ I should note that not all of the material on offer at Hillsong's resource centre is directly produced by the church. For example, books by prominent pastors such as T.D. Jakes or Joseph Prince are often for sale, as well as material from a particular service's guest speaker. However, this material is still 'branded' in that it is part of the larger associational web of pastors and media from which Hillsong's brand meaning is drawn. Additionally, because it is being sold at Hillsong's resource centre, it carries the Hillsong 'seal of approval'.

were expecting some skills or expertise or something. So it was you who wasn't worshipping. So it taught me that: to just go in there and keep your heart open and go for it and just worship God. Hillsong definitely taught me that. (Interview with author, 21 August 2012)

An analysis of the language Dele uses to describe how he 'learned to listen' reveals an interesting confluence of structure, discourse and agency in his learning process. Dele begins by claiming that he 'discovered' how to worship (or at least the correct way to think about worship) in order to achieve a sacred experience. Although the worship team is tasked with affording the experience, he notes that there may be a disconnect between the team's intention and the participant's expectation. The participant may expect the worship leader to do something, and not have that expectation fulfilled. As noted earlier, the expectation of (or at least the desire for) a sacred experience is often an important element in achieving it. This is why evangelical Christians often speak of 'inviting the spirit'. However, there is also an improvisational element within the structure of the service, as was clear in the O2 event described in chapter three. As noted earlier in this chapter, one of the tasks of the worship team is to respond to the 'mood' of the participants. Worship leaders facilitate the worship environment and provide examples of how to worship; in other words, they afford the opportunity to worship. However, they cannot 'make' a participant find God. Dele describes having to 'keep your heart open and just go for it', implying that the onus of the experience ultimately lies with the participant, not the worship team. But this work is the most important aspect of branding. By working to elevate his focus from an expectation of what chord will come next to the expectation of an encounter with God, Dele is able to own a personal experience that has been shaped by Hillsong's corporate culture. In other words, Dele discovered the experience, but the Hillsong brand suggested where he should look to find it.

Dele is not unaware of this. Indeed, he confirms that Hillsong 'taught' him how to worship:

I actually learned to separate the love for the music from actually worshipping God. There are some songs that we sing [at Hillsong London] that I'm not really fond of; they're just not my favourite. I'd never listen to them on my iPod or whatever. So [attending Hillsong London] taught me to do that. (Interview with author, 21 August 2012)

This is interesting, given that musical preference is one of the key factors in absorption (Russell 1997; Zillman and Gan 1997). Listeners are more likely to engage with songs they like than songs they don't like. Furthermore, to like something is to feel – *a priori* – well disposed to it, so it is already more likely that the meanings associated with it will be accepted. This is part of the thinking behind the song distillation process described in chapter four. Yet as Dele notes above, Hillsong's profoundly musical branding has taught him to separate his love of the music from the act of worshipping. He has learned to put God first, which is the basis of Hillsong's brand positioning (described in chapter two). Importantly, for Dele, this has been an on-going educational process, something that became apparent as our conversation continued:

TW: How long have you been at Hillsong now?

D: Nearly four years.

TW: Has your worship experience evolved or changed?

D: It's become broader. My taste for stuff to get me into a place of worship has broadened; it's wider. There was a time when, you know, certain songs wouldn't do it for me. I mean, it used to be I heard Darlene Zschech and I wouldn't jump on any of her CDs – I still won't (laughs) – It just wasn't for me, you know? But I learned to appreciate it more, and if I went to a conference or concert where she was there I'd be like 'yeah'! (Interview with author, 21 August 2012)

Even today, Dele won't listen to a lot of Hillsong's music, especially the 'older' Darlene Zschech songs, because he doesn't really like them. Yet he claims that he can worship to them. This suggests that, although music is a deeply constitutive part of Hillsong's brand and branding, it is ultimately the gestalt of the Hillsong brand that provides the educational and spiritual efficacy. The Hillsong brand constitutes the *knowledge* of 'how' and 'why' – the education needed to live a Christian lifestyle. It is embedded in the Hillsong name through its teachings, and experienced every time it is associated with an action.

Conclusion - The Brand as a form of Governance

A brand is constituted from information (Arvidsson 2006; Lury 2004), and in a media-saturated world that has moved to a ‘knowledge’ economy, information is arguably more ‘valuable’ than ever (c.f. Webster 2006). This becomes important in the context of the brand as an informational managerial device (Arvidsson 2006; Lury 2004). Chapter one discussed branding as a way of condensing and streamlining flows of information among an organisation’s various internal and external participants. As an information management device, then, the brand is in some respects responsible for the content and expression of a (corporate) culture. However, as noted above, this culture (or cultural) management is not ‘Taylorist’. In other words, it does not impose a set of meanings or actions directly ‘from above’. Rather, modern branding is ‘(post) Fordist’; it works by interacting with participants’ already-held values. Branding is subject to the freedom of the individual, but it also harnesses it. This was apparent in my conversation with Dele:

What I like about Hillsong is that it gives you the opportunity to actually worship.... There’s enough space to actually worship and not get up in the vibe. Sometimes there’s nothing going on and you’re still worshipping! And that’s when you realise that you are really worshipping and you’re not getting carried away [with the music]. (Interview with author, 21 August 2012)

He continued:

[At] Hillsong, you get to a place where it’s not even about the people, you just have space and time to worship. Everything slows down during that transition from praise into worship. There’s not a lot happening, but you’re just ready and prepared. It’s quiet. A lot of people say that that’s all done to get people – if it is, it works. Do you know what I mean? It really works. Because it gives you time and space to think about what you’re doing and actually worship.

The space that Hillsong creates is important. On the one hand, Dele is referring to the moments of calm, the moments in worship music characterised by pedal tones and suspended chords that are meant for ‘personal’ reflection. But I take his comment as a reflection on the ‘space’ that branding creates for each participant to make the brand his or her ‘own’ *place* (space made meaningful – see chapter

four); in other words, I think Dele is talking about the Hillsong brandscape, the space/place in which branded meaning and values are co-created and (re)inscribed through experience.

Drawing from information already ‘in the world’, a brand anticipates certain kinds of meanings, and thus predetermines certain kinds of actions and associations (Arvidsson 2006: 124-127; Lury 2004). Arvidsson notes that brands ‘provide part of the context in which products are used’, and furthermore ‘work by *enabling* consumers, by empowering them in particular directions’ (Arvidsson 2006: 8). Of course, one can see the irony in Arvidsson’s use of ‘empower’: his point is that brands exercise control by harnessing our agency and human need to create common social experiences. In other words, he is pointing out that by making the information, meanings and associations of a brand ours through our own activities, we come to embody the worldview associated with the brand.

Arvidsson is chiefly concerned with the economic implications of this form of ‘informational capitalism’, where social interaction becomes embedded as an economic activity. However, I am more concerned with the non-economic implications of what could be called, following Arvidsson and Jameson (1992), an ‘enabling logic of late capitalism’ (or perhaps more accurately, ‘the logic of the culture industries’). If we use brands as part of our everyday, natural communication and meaning-making activities, ways of sharing information that shape our lives and worldviews, then the power and potential of branding becomes clear. Brands and branding are part of our culture and our social system. Indeed, it is increasingly difficult to delineate the boundaries between brands and other kinds of phenomena or social formations. In other words, brands and branding shed light on social dynamics and processes that go to the very core of social beings.

This chapter has sought to understand the individual’s role in (re)producing brand values within a cultural and social milieu circumscribed by the brand. In the final chapter, I will consider Hillsong as a ‘branded’ social system. Although the critical view of marketing focuses on the ‘negative’ aspects of hegemony, it is predicated on the fact that participants engage in the brand building process

because they derive value from it. Participants *want* to live a Christian lifestyle, and Hillsong's brandscape is a place where they can do so. In other words, they derive value from Hillsong's values, and simultaneously Hillsong derives value from its participants' values. I ask, then, who has been 'brandwashing' (Lindstrom 2011) whom? What are the potentially positive and negative implications of branding as a form of governance, and who potentially benefits or is harmed? What is the value of values, or perhaps even more boldly, what is the value of hegemony?

Conclusion

Music, Marketing and Meaning: Problems and Potential

Introduction

The overriding concern of this thesis has been to use brands and branding to explore the 'value of values' in a culture in which music, marketing and meaning are thoroughly intertwined. It has sought to present musical brands as associational gestalts woven into the communicative fabric of culture by the culture industry. Branding is a process of patterning information through which subjectivities are shaped. It does so by condensing time, space and the physical, emotional and intellectual into an apparently coherent, experiential story. In this process, music acts as an 'associative enhancer of communication' (Brown 2006: 1), sounding simultaneously at multiple registers in the brandscape. This concluding chapter therefore considers the Hillsong brand as, following John Blacking's definition of music, a 'humanly organized sound' (Blacking 1973). The Hillsong brand is a social system that uses music to organize information, providing a kind of postmodern continuity among the contradictions inherent in modernity and affording meaning and order in people's lives. In doing so, it may be simultaneously valuable to both the group and the individual. The order that social systems provide is potentially beneficial; as Heath and Potter (2004) point out, without some social control, nothing would ever get done. However, social systems are also inherently unequal, and the power that is needed to (re)enforce them is always at risk of being abused. What does a 'cost/benefit analysis' of a system that uses the 'value of values' to its hegemonic advantage tell us about the interplay of structure and agency? Put another way, what is the value of hegemony?

Chapter Review

In **chapter one**, I considered Hillsong's cultural, historical and economic milieu. As an organisation of people who are natives of a hyper-mediated, 'branded' culture, Hillsong can usefully be thought of as the manifestation of two broad, concurrent developments, both of which are related to the broader technological and communication developments of the industrial revolution, the subsequent acceleration of globalisation, and the resulting economic and social changes. The first of these developments is the evolution of the brand from a mark of distinction to a value-laden gestalt of meaning, a condensation of associations that affords a kind of post-modern continuity across time and space through participation. For natives of 'branded' culture, branding is a natural way of communicating and understanding, and thus is used by organisations such as New Paradigm churches.

The second development is that of a 'religious experience economy'. Organisations form and function in particular ways in relation to their socio-economic environments. This is equally true of profit and not-for-profit organisations. As a New Paradigm church, Hillsong is the latest iteration of evangelical Protestant traditions that have thrived in competitive religious environments. In these environments, religious providers are driven to meet the needs of their participants, which both encourages religious belief and rewards those organisations that communicate most effectively. The religious experience economy has also historically rewarded traditions that privilege participation in their practice and have made full use of the breadth and depth of the media available to them. Significantly, successful entrepreneurial preachers and religious organisations have historically used popular music as a medium to communicate and create experiences. Thus, the evolution of the branded-media-conglomerate-cum-quasi-denomination-preacher/church has been concomitant with the development of Christian Popular Music.

What these developments reveal is a broader cultural milieu in which the culture industry has triumphed. Music, marketing and meaning are now so thoroughly integrated and assimilated into our subjective experiences that they cannot be usefully separated (Carah 2010; Taylor 2012). In a culture characterized by

flexible identities and multiple subjectivities, participants adopt positions that ground their actions in lifestyles. For those who participated in my research, the Hillsong brand provided both the material for and the context in which to do this.

Identities are understood in relation to Others. Branding condenses associations and affords continuity among and within the different, multiple and overlapping imagined and imaginary communities in and against which identities are understood and performed, and subjectivities are created and experienced. In the main body of this thesis (chapters two through to five), I therefore considered the different 'levels' of these communities, and how, at each level, Hillsong's brand works.

In **chapter two**, I adopted a 'macro' view to examine what is arguably the overriding discourse that frames and constitutes the Hillsong brand: the 'sacred' and the 'secular'. The evangelical Christian articulation of this dichotomy, being 'in but not of the world', helps set religious activity 'apart' from daily life. At Hillsong and New Paradigm churches, this is done through the pursuit of a 'Christian' lifestyle that is sustained by a particular set of values. Hillsong's size, structure and cultural milieu dictate that it operates in highly mediated ways. This includes marketing its music through mass media, which has the knock-on effect of celebritizing its musicians (which, of course, often leads to more success). While this is to some extent unavoidable, some of the values associated with celebrity culture run counter to evangelical Christian culture. Hillsong therefore discursively positions its music and musicians in a manner that aligns them with the values it promotes as well as with the values of its participants. Through Darlene Zschech, I introduced the idea of authenticity as a brand attribute. Zschech's mediated image and the 'real' Darlene are generally understood (and promoted) as one and the same, a primary requirement of authenticity. Additionally, her values are felt to be synergetic with both Hillsong and its participants. Through this synergy, actors (i.e. Hillsong, Zschech and individual participants) are 'co-branded', which provides the emotional ties and associations that give the brand its spiritual efficacy. Ultimately, Hillsong's brand appeal to a Christian lifestyle strengthens the 'sacred' and 'secular' dichotomy in discourse while attempting to collapse it in practice.

In **chapter three**, I moved from a consideration of a Christian lifestyle in a world that is both 'sacred' and 'secular' to examining a utopian 'sacred' one: the imagined and imaginary Christian community of the Body of Christ. Using a collaborative evangelical Christian event – a celebration of Pentecost at London's O2 Arena – as a case study, I explored ways in which branding influences expectations of a worship experience, and may either assist or hinder the participation needed to realise that experience. Music's role in the articulation of community was foregrounded, as was the role of participation in the sacred experience associated with the community. Participation was shown to be important because it grounded the utopian discourse of the Pentecost story in experience. In other words, the O2 event afforded participants the opportunity to experience, at least for a moment, 'Heaven on Earth'.

Like ecumenism, which articulates unity through difference, branding is an exercise in affiliation and differentiation. On the one hand, the overriding theme of the O2 event was that of being of 'one accord' in the 'Body of Christ'. By performing together and being led by transnational evangelical stars, Hillsong London, HTB and Jesus House London positioned themselves, their actions and the event in relation to local and global Others while grounding themselves in 'unity' and the 'local'. To do this, differences were acknowledged and even celebrated. Through style, each church positioned itself as a distinct community with a distinct brand identity. For example, participants associated Hillsong's brand with the broad evangelical Christian values that framed the event, while also understanding it as a unique body with its own values (e.g. 'excellence'). Because it has a strong brand identity, participants in the O2 event already knew what to expect from the 'Hillsong' worship experience. Furthermore, the strength of the emotional connection that participants felt with others in the brand(ed) community had an effect on their ability to worship. This led to a situation in which some people were able to participate and others were not, suggesting that while branding may be a medium through which the sacred can be experienced, it may also be an impediment to it.

In **chapter four**, I considered Hillsong as a transnational networked community. It was in this chapter that music and branding were most explicitly and intimately associated with experience, as the experience of the ‘Hillsong Sound’ and the Hillsong brand were posited as one and the same. The ‘Hillsong Sound’ connected participants’ ideas about the times, places and people they associated with the Hillsong network with their own embodied experiences of the music. Similar to participation in the imagined and imaginary community of the Body of Christ explored in chapter three, the ‘global’ and ‘local’ dialogue explored in this chapter also revealed the Hillsong brand to be a locus of experience. However, the discursive frame was different. In addition to culturally based associations – for example the idea that London is ‘edgier’ than Sydney – the spiritual efficacy of the music was grounded in ideas about the anointedness of Hillsong’s music and musicians. Although Hillsong’s music is arguably ‘the same’ in terms of instrumentation and tempo in worship services in all of its churches, the music is an ‘associative enhancer’ that effects the ways in which participants experience the music and facilitated the embodiment of brand associations that afford the possibility of a sacred experience.

In **chapter five**, I focused on the interaction between the brand and the individual in the co-creation of branded meaning and experience. It is at the individual level where the work to ‘personalize’ Hillsong’s brand meaning, and thus realize its spiritual efficacy, occurred. This work was done within the framework of Hillsong’s corporate culture. Hillsong’s corporate culture was shown to be neither monolithic nor ‘Taylorist’. On the contrary, each stakeholder exercised his or her agency to maintain and embody the values that he or she associated with the Hillsong brand. This was as true for worship leaders, who must ‘really worship’ in order to lead others, as it was for other participants, who must ‘learn’ to worship through education and practice. Through ‘corporate enculturation’, Hillsong’s brand worked in a ‘post-Fordist’ way, mobilizing the individual in a brandscape that provided branded material and a branded cultural context in which actions occur and subjectivities are formed. The brand was prescriptive, as it reproduced itself through the actions of participants.

The case study of this thesis has been Hillsong Church, its music and its marketing. However, the thesis itself is not really about the church, evangelical Christianity or indeed religion at all. Rather, it is a meditation on the relationship between the mechanisms of industrial cultural production and the subjective experience of Truth, and an exploration of music's role in that experience. With this in mind, then, I would now like to try to tease out a few ways in which these threads can usefully contribute to thinking about the study of associations between music, marketing, meaning and their application in a wider social context.

Reflection

Hillsong is a social system; it is a collection of multiple, overlapping, amorphous, mutually-intertwined associations between and among participants, their values and identities, that are always in dialogue with each other, affording conceptual frameworks that themselves are multiple, overlapping, amorphous and mutually-intertwined. What makes Hillsong unique is the way it perpetuates itself using musical branding to weave the connective tissue that binds participants together in and through a lifestyle that is its branded soundtrack.

Much of the discussion in this thesis has been about the value of values. Concepts of value imply the notions of good and bad. Underlying the dialogue between good and bad is the ever-present spectre of power, a negotiation of systemic hegemonies and individual agencies. In post-enlightenment culture, different concepts of power are valued differently. For example, 'rational' thought is usually prized while 'emotional' decisions are often devalued, and the 'freedom' of the individual is (at least discursively) afforded higher status against 'hegemonic' systemic and institutionalized forces. Anna Nekola (2009) brings to light an important point about Protestant identity in relation to music, namely that the discourses about the appropriate styles and uses of music that framed the 'Worship Wars' between evangelical Christians in the second half of the twentieth century were a manifestation of the age-old conflict between agency and structure. To this insight, I would add that post-modernism has increased the *inward awareness* of this conflict; in an age of relativity (Latour 2007) and reflexivity

(Giddens 1990; 1991), we are painfully aware of the contradictions that we live daily. For Nekola, this is the heart of the Protestant dilemma. This contradiction is also precisely what branding feeds on. As I pointed out in chapter two, branding's efficacy arises from cultural rupture. It affords continuity to otherwise discontinuous elements, including discontinuous experiences of the self. In other words, branding relieves the cognitive dissonance that people feel in their everyday lives. Perhaps this is the reason why religious branding is so effective: the brand condenses otherwise disparate, even contradictory elements into a 'single' post-modern and post-Fordist gestalt of associations. The value of the brand is that it provides (post)modern 'Truth'.¹⁴⁸

Truth through branding, though, is paradoxical. On the one hand, the ability to share ideas – to communicate – is one of our most advantageous traits. Our collective wisdom is seemingly limitless, and the Internet has provided what is perhaps the greatest opportunity yet to harness it through 'crowdsourcing' (Howe 2008). By harnessing the social power of the Internet, in conjunction with other media both 'new' and 'old', branding could provide a mutually intelligible medium through which the diversity of 'the crowd' could be leveraged to attack some of the world's most vexing problems. On the other hand, the 'father of PR' Edward Bernays was convinced that the crowd is inherently stupid, and that the greater good can only be achieved by controlling its fickle machinations. Significantly, he sought to do this through techniques that marketers have borrowed from and improved upon ever since he began developing them almost a century ago (Tye 2002). Branding, then, also presents a real threat, especially as a political and ideological tool. This paradox presents a dilemma in religious contexts. On the one hand, branding can help bind participants to a group and provide an anchor for identity. Membership in a tightly-knit group (such as a religious group like Hillsong) has been shown to provide a measure of psychological well-being (Galanter 1989), something I saw many times during my fieldwork. On the other hand, against the backdrop of religious extremism, serious questions should be asked, especially with regard to critical thinking and the emotional fervour that these groups can engender. Returning once again to the

¹⁴⁸ Or expediency, depending on your point of view.

case study, I offer two examples of branding's influence. The first is one in which branding benefits both the group and the individual. The second offers a pessimistic view, demonstrating that even well-intentioned branding might have undesired effects if it binds the participant 'too' closely to the brand. I conclude with a reflection on branding that presents it in an optimistic light, as a potential agent of societal change. Both of the following examples are based on the notion of a *value exchange* in play between the organisation and the participant.

Steven Brown, in his introduction to the volume *Music and Manipulation*, suggests that 'control is driven by exactly the same social and economic functions as use, and works to achieve behavioural control in a similar manner' (Brown 2006: 12, original emphasis). In other words, the control process works through use, and vice versa. In terms of branding, the *value* for both parties lies at least partially in control. Hillsong's brand is multivalent – a structural, social and cultural associational gestalt, at once enhancing spiritual and psychological value for participants (both individually and as a group) while simultaneously increasing the economic value of the organisation through donations and product sales. The revenue thus accrued can then be reinvested in the organisation and its participants (as well as in more marketing, which may reinforce value).

The marketing and critical perspectives on branding differ in the position each takes with respect to the value of hegemony relative to the values that underpin capitalism. The marketing perspective sees the social order as (at least potentially) valuable for all participants. In contrast, critical theory's Marxist lineage predisposes it to questioning the values that are assumed *a priori* in capitalist exchange. Hegemony works *below the line* (to use a marketing term), and therefore the critical perspective holds that the value participants 'think' they are receiving may be at best ephemeral and at worst detrimental. In other words, the value of the social control exerted by the brand is ultimately a function of the values that frame a worldview. What, then, is the potential 'evangelical efficacy' of Hillsong's branding? Does the brand exert hegemonic social control, and if so, who ultimately benefits from it? As I hope this thesis has shown, a nuanced analysis of this reveals a constellation of symbiotic relationships and fluid processes. Participants are mutually entwined in multivalent network-based value

exchanges that, as the two examples below show, are potentially beneficial, but may also be harmful.

Example One: The Group and the Individual

Charles Galanter (1989) suggests that the psychological benefits of shared beliefs, reinforced by sacred experiences, contribute to the cohesiveness of charismatic groups. The psychological rewards that individuals enjoy when they feel that they share the same beliefs as others binds them to the group (and also enhances the psychological distress experienced when leaving the group). These rewards are further enhanced if accompanied by a sacred experience. In my interviews with Hillsong's members, many spoke about the psychological rewards they experienced after coming to Hillsong. For example, Waithera, a thirty-year old native of Nigeria, found a new social network through the church in the wake of a painful divorce and subsequent identity crisis:

So I'm doing all this soul searching, and – it's that feeling, I don't know if you ever get it, it's that feeling you want to know who God is – who is he, why am I here? – I was finding it really hard with the marriage and stuff, because I was kind of drifting and Sid wasn't drifting with me, and that was making me kind of sad.... So I go to London and I'm on the Internet checking out Hillsong, and it was like, mmm, not bad.... So I went for the 3:30 service, which is usually really cool, and I sat with all of these girls who were on the same team as me, and the music began and I was like 'this is awesome, this is me. I can wear jeans, I can dress like I want to, and I can listen to my kind of music, and still get to know God!' Wow, I couldn't believe it, so I've been there since. And you know what, this is like the best thing ever.... I wish many people could understand it. That would be just so good, because there's so much – life's just gotten better for me. I'm not bitter, there's no kind of emptiness, you know? (Interview with author, 16 October 2010)

For Waithera, the value of the Hillsong brand is tied up with the interpersonal associations and relationships that she has formed. She is now a youth worker in the U.S., having a renewed sense of purpose through the church.

Waithera could be considered one of Hillsong's 'satisfied customers'. As a youth evangelist, she is a spokesperson both for Hillsong and for evangelical

Christianity. A satisfied customer is ‘twice’ valuable to an organisation because, first, they are more likely (in marketing parlance) to be loyal customers, and second, they are more likely to evangelize for the organisation and its values. In an age when advertising is becoming less effective, word of mouth has been proven to be the most effective marketing tool. This is true for both commercial and religious organisations. In a religious context, Poloma and Pendleton found that transcendent experiences, which are viewed as ‘proof’ in charismatic belief, led to satisfied participants, and that they were a major factor in the expansion of the Assemblies of God in the United States (Poloma and Pendleton 1989). In brandspeak, the value that participants find *in* the brand is valuable *to* the brand. Galanter uses different language, but makes a similar point, in his systems approach to charismatic groups:

In looking at a system, we do not first ask what motivates an individual member to act. Instead we say, ‘How are the group’s needs met by the overall behaviour observed in its membership?’ (Galanter 1989: 11)

Taking Galanter’s viewpoint, the benefits of musical branding at Hillsong can be understood primarily on the group level – it is a way of communicating through a web of associations that ensures the long-term survival of the organisation by promoting social cohesion and providing individual benefits. These dynamics are, of course, not unique only to brands. Indeed, this thesis has argued that Hillsong is a social system with dynamics comparable to those in Galanter’s study. Galanter’s study was about cult dynamics. This is not, of course, to suggest that Hillsong is a cult, only that the dynamics in play are similar to those Galanter studies, and to those that create any social system. The difference between the social systems Galanter studied and Hillsong’s is that the latter exists in and as a hyper-marketed brandscape in which music is one of the important and ‘charismatic’ elements (in both Galanter’s and the Weberian sense). Thus the branded music approach to studying group dynamics offers particular insights into charismatic processes that may be more ‘mainstream’ than those studied by Galanter.

Example Two: Creating Zealots

Branding's efficacy lies in the emotional associations it engenders. As we saw in the preceding example, and as has been shown throughout this thesis, these associations are valuable to all participants. From this view, the more a participant is emotionally invested in a brand, the better. However, brands and branding have 'dark' sides; the mechanisms through which they provide value have the potential to be subverted, or, as in the case presented below, to spin out of control. It may be that, in some cases, 'brand loyalty' and the feelings it is associated with may go too far. As noted in the introduction, Patrick Hanlon (2006) claims that if a branded organisation possesses all seven pieces of his 'primal code', it can create 'zealots'; people who feel 'intuitive visceral connections' (Hanlon 2006: xii) to an organisation, but more importantly to the organisation's ethos and the belief system that it engenders. Could Hillsong's use of the 'primal code' create 'zealots'? Could Hillsong's members be, to borrow Martin Lindstrom's (2011) term, 'brandwashed'?

The marketing practices of branding are increasingly being used in political campaigns to instil fervour and create a sense of community in nation building projects (Moor 2007: 136-140; Olins 2003: 148-169). In both political and religious contexts (which are often intertwined), too much 'zeal', or at least the appearance of a lack of critical thinking, can be problematic (e.g. Noll 1994) if not outright dangerous. In a 'lifestyle' driven world, where brands are used to ground actions in, and construct, a post-modern 'Truth', can branding go too far? Can musical branding, neo-Platonic-like, engender or even become ideology? Is the brand ideology from the outset? Some of Hillsong's stakeholders have concerns about church marketing. One is David, a committed team leader at Hillsong London who spends all day Sunday at church and usually one or two other nights of the week at church events:

[The marketing] has in a lot of ways been one of my issues with Hillsong, in that I hate it when people talk about church as a brand. Especially when it's coming from the pastoral team, you know, *marketing* it. I'm not saying that marketing is a bad thing, it's just labelling it as [a] brand.... What I've found with Hillsong – it's not just Hillsong, it's other churches as well – is

the fact that... people get to a point where all they're about is church, not the Church. (Interview with author, 11 June 2012)

David's point is that, in creating a deep attachment to Hillsong Church, Hillsong may be, paradoxically, drawing people away from its stated vision, which is to build the Body of Christ. It is a common criticism that seeker-churches validate themselves through numbers (Sargeant 2000). In seeking numbers as a proof of 'anointing', they take their eye off the ball. However, there is again a paradox here, as the very act of building the Church involves evangelising. This is parallel to the conundrum Hillsong faces in relation to its need to market to a transnational audience through star power, yet at the same time deny stardom (chapter two). To be fair, Hillsong London's pastor Gary Clark often reminds people that all one needs is a good church, not necessarily a Hillsong church. Indeed, as Hillsong's General Manager George Aghajanian said to me, 'There's lots of great worship out there. It's just, I suppose our thinking is if we can contribute to part of what God's doing in this area of worship and resource the church at some level then we've done what God's called us to' (Interview with author, 28 September 2011).

According to David, though, some participants don't understand this:

People just go on about Hillsong and talk about the church they belong to. And it's almost as if – and it's probably not intentional – but it's almost as if, 'my church is better than yours, my worship band is better than yours.' And there's no integration with the rest of it. Just like if you had a child and you wanted to home school it but you still want to integrate it with society. You've got people who are part of Hillsong who are not integrated. They don't want to integrate with other believers. There's this thing that they suddenly develop. When they first became Christians, ANY other Christian would do! Any Christian anywhere would be someone they'd want to have food with or hang out with. And then suddenly they grab a hold of this brand, and they get taught or get to understand that we know things better than the rest of the world does. (Interview with author, 11 June 2012)

As noted in chapter two, part of Hillsong's strategy, shared by the larger Christian culture industry, is to create alternatives to secular lifestyle activities, especially ones that involve social interaction. Participants are encouraged to have coffee with each other before and after services, go to the cinema together, and even live with each other, which is facilitated through Hillsong London's housing connection service, 'Living in London'. On the one hand, this helps mediate the

tension of being ‘in but not of’ the world by affording them the opportunity to engage in everyday activities with like-minded individuals. It also gives the opportunity to develop the intimate bonds that are more difficult to form in the hustle and bustle of the Sunday service. However, because these activities are associated with the church, and often other Hillsong participants, they are at least self-referential if not outright ‘branded’; this bracketing off of social (lifestyle) activity from other groups can be seen, at least by some, as ‘cultish’ (Galanter 1989).

Some, even inside the church, view the zealous attitudes of some Hillsong members as a substitute for critical thinking. David continued:

[Some Hillsong participants think], ‘We have better revelation of scripture than the rest of the world does’, and then suddenly it’s this ‘Hillsong thing’ to the point where you invite a Hillsong member to any other thing and they won’t go, unless it’s endorsed by Gary Clark. They take it further to the point where they join people in talking about or criticising a style of worship – some people just think that Hillsong’s style is the way God intended it to be. And if they find another style someplace else, they’re kind of like, ‘ugh, they don’t really know what they’re doing, they’re not really in tune with God’ because that style is different. So they take it further to the point where they listen to another preacher preach and then go, ‘oh no, we don’t preach it like that, that’s not how you should preach’ and suddenly Gary invites T. D. Jakes to preach at Hillsong Conference, and they’re like, ‘Oh T. D. Jakes is amazing, he’s a man of God!’ and they start buying his books... suddenly it’s endorsed, and they start backtracking on everything. But that’s what happens when people are backing their brand. That’s what’s happening with a lot of people at Hillsong. They’re backing the brand. They’re for the brand. They won’t let you say anything bad about the brand. I don’t care, you know? Because a lot of people in Hillsong in particular, are just jumping on whatever is said to them. And they say things at team meetings like [Hillsong London pastors] ‘Gary said’ and, ‘Pete said’ and, ‘Luke said’ you know? They just quote. (Interview with author, 11 June 2012)

In the previous example, Waithera’s participation in the Hillsong’s brand community helped her resolve emotional issues stemming from her divorce. However, here, David is painting a picture of the brand as a resolution of cognitive dissonance as uncritical thinking, a Gramscian understanding of hegemony. As I noted in chapter two, Hillsong works to subject (its brand) authority to the authority of God. But at the same time, this branding presupposes, relies upon and reinforces its own spiritual authority. On the one hand, the church

has dropped the idea (at least publicly) of its music being ‘anointed’. On the other hand, many of its participants operate under the premise that its music both flows from and affirms God’s blessing on the church and its participants, without which the music would not have its spiritual efficacy. Furthermore, in promoting its brand community, Hillsong risks the situation that David describes above. This is very much like the Pentecost event described in chapter three, where the brand both defines and differentiates Hillsong, and thus is important to the transcendent experience through its provision of added value. At the Pentecost event, the participants I spoke to were most likely to encounter God during Hillsong’s worship set. Recall Julie, who said, ‘It’s what got me saved, so I stick with it!’

‘Into the Maelstrom’: Education and Awareness (Discussion and Conclusion)

From the preceding discussion, one might conclude that branding is an insidious form of mind-control. While this is a gross characterisation that even its most ardent critics (e.g. Klein 2010) probably don’t really subscribe to (more accurately, they view capitalism as the root of all evil and branding as an outgrowth of it), their arguments show that branding is at the very least an effective form of persuasion. This is because the goal of branding is always to *form*, rather than to simply *inform*. In other words, branding seeks to shape information in specific frames rather than simply leaving the information ‘out there’ (as far as this is possible) for consideration. The difference between persuasion and manipulation lies in who has the information, and what the intent behind the communication is. Persuasion is generally understood as an honest exchange in which the sender’s intentions are clear and open, and all participants reap the rewards of the communication process. In contrast, manipulation is generally understood as an asymmetrical exchange in which those doing the manipulating conceal their motivations and perhaps some information (although manipulative motives may not necessarily be ill-intended) (Brown, 2006: 21). Branding is a bit of both. How, then, do we deal with this?

As marketers understand, everything in our environment is potential information. The ‘world’ is media. Marshall McLuhan was concerned with the way each media

form – particularly the new electronic media of his day – acted on different senses in different proportions to create ‘new forms of awareness’ (McLuhan and Zingrone 1995: 3). A media gestalt, branding has the potential to do this in unprecedented ways, and thus presents new possibilities for persuasion or manipulation that may be both beneficial and harmful. For example, branding could yield myriad benefits for the non-profit sector (Olins 2003). Yet it equally has the potential to be misused, or as was suggested in the previous section, to get ‘out of hand’. McLuhan was keenly aware of the dangers of the new media of his day, yet he also understood that it was here to stay, and it would become increasingly prevalent in society. Thus, he advocated a form of ‘resistance’ that was predicated on awareness of how it worked. In the preface to *The Mechanical Bride*, McLuhan notes the sophistication of the advertising that was being disseminated through new media:

Ours is the first age in which many thousands of the best-trained individual minds have made it a full-time business to get inside the collective public mind. To get inside in order to manipulate, exploit, control is the object now. And to generate heat not light is the intention now. (In McLuhan and Zingrone 1995: 21)

McLuhan called advertising (which is an element of marketing) a new programme of ‘commercial education’ that is ‘much more expensive and influential than the relatively puny offerings sponsored by schools and colleges’ (ibid.). But instead of despairing, he asked, ‘Why not use the new commercial education as a means to enlighten its intended prey? Why not assist the public to observe consciously the drama which is intended to operate upon it unconsciously?’ (ibid.). He elucidated this question by recalling the sailor in Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘A Descent Into the Maelstrom’, who saves himself by studying the action of the whirlpool and by cooperating with it. The sailor used that which was set to destroy him to his advantage, making it work for him rather than against him.

Heath and Potter make a similar point in their book *The Rebel Sell: Why the Culture Can't be Jammed*. While McLuhan saw the inevitability of mass media and advertising, Heath and Potter see consumerism as a whirlpool that is too powerful a force to stop or extricate oneself from. They support their thesis by showing how countercultural movements that purport to disengage from or

otherwise undermine 'the system' actually reinforce it. Through the culture industry, capitalism does indeed subsume everything; but if there ever was a 'false consciousness', in Heath and Potter's view, it is held by those that think there is a way out rather than those who engage with it. Rather than try to opt out of the system, they argue that it is far more useful to guide it from within through democratic action.

In both McLuhan's and Heath and Potter's analyses, the answer is *awareness*, an 'education about education' and the key element that Gramsci argued is lacked by the proletariat. For McLuhan and Heath and Potter, awareness is about understanding how the system works. I would add to this by noting that an awareness of how branding works is an awareness of ourselves. Underpinning the relationship between the brand and us, the participants in the brand experience, is a relative synergy of values. Therefore, brand identity is ultimately a reflection of our personal and cultural values; brands and branding are about values that are, ultimately, our own.

What does this mean for the study of music? Although music, marketing and religion have long been connected in different ways, it is clear that marketing has 'found' religion, and religion has 'found' marketing, in idiosyncratic and meaningful ways through the culture industry, and that music's role in the dialectic between the two has never been more apparent whilst simultaneously more difficult to discern. This is apparent in the case of Hillsong, where integrated marketing fuses music, musicians, church services, conferences, products and spiritual pursuit into a gestalt experience that both encourages and relies upon participation to produce meaning. Hillsong is just one of countless examples where music 'hides in plain sight' yet is at the same time embedded 'below the line'. This suggests several interesting lines of inquiry for music scholars.

A notion suggested by this thesis, but not explicitly addressed, is the Weberian concept of charismatic authority (Weber [1947] 1964). Studying the ways that music is used in branded religious contexts such as Hillsong, particularly the ways that different types of spiritual authority are invested not only in the music itself but also in the musicians, leaders, and organisations associated with the music,

would have important implications beyond the initial field of inquiry. Following this, there is much work to be done on the relationship between music and marketing and Weber's other classifications of authority, the traditional and the rational-legal.

This study has also suggested links between music, socialisation into 'charismatic' groups and psychological well-being. Further investigations along this line of thinking, particularly if one applies the principles of charismatic groups to the study of, for example, brand communities, could offer insights relevant to a variety of fields, such as music therapy or medical ethnomusicology (e.g. DeNora 2013; Koen et al. 2008).

Finally, neither marketing nor its use of music as a means of communication shows any sign of slowing down. Indeed, it is apparent that the global flows of commerce and technology that are the focus of this study will continue to 'export' culture industry-based ideas and subjectivities to new 'markets'; at the same time, these global flows are intensifying in markets in which they are already established. Awareness and education to promote awareness of these processes is essential so consumers can make their own judgments regarding whether or not to participate in branding, religious or otherwise. It is critical that music scholars continue to monitor the use of music in the context of marketing and branding, even as our work contributes to the evolution of the 'branded sounds' that we study. This thesis is a small, context-specific contribution to the study of marketing and the role of music in the branding process. Yet it is my hope that the ideas presented in it are applicable in a wide variety of contexts, and that it will inspire more diverse and wide-ranging ethnomusicological studies that take marketing seriously as an integral part of the contemporary human experience.

Epilogue

It has been the contention of this thesis that musical, branded and religious experiences arise in and as a web of associations that is a way we, as humans, experience meaning in the world. We don't just 'know' in one way. Rather, our

knowledge comes from our continual experience of ourselves in our environments. Hillsong's brand is the continually negotiated co-product of participants who interact with each other directly or indirectly at different times, in different places, and through different media. Part of this negotiation is related to power – who has (and who is afforded) the authority to prescribe the values and norms that are then contested, accepted and put into play either positively or negatively in the negotiation of the brand. Ultimately, though, the efficacy of the brand is drawn from the controversies and contradictions with which it is associated and through which it condenses in participants' experiences.

On 3 July 2012, Hillsong LIVE's twenty-first album, 'Cornerstone', was released. It subsequently reached number three on the U.S. overall iTunes chart and number 32 on the Billboard 200 charts in the US. These were not the gospel or Christian charts, but the 'mainstream' charts that include mega-pop stars like Beyoncé and Lady Gaga. It is not clear who is listening – is it simply that every evangelical Christian under 35 is buying the album, or has Hillsong finally found that elusive evangelical mix that speaks to the unsaved? What is clear is that, for some, the integration of the sacred and the secular in a lifestyle proceeds apace. Music, as an element of Hillsong's marketing program, contributes to this process by amplifying the effects of two powerful emotional forces: religion and branding.

In his book *Shopping for God: How Christianity went from in Your Heart to in Your Face*, James Twitchell writes, '...awakenings are an increase in religiosity because of new innovations in storytelling...' (Twitchell 2007: 45). While Twitchell is speaking of the 'Great Awakenings', the increase in religiosity that occurred in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, his observation about storytelling has implications beyond religion. Branding's 'modern turn' was predicated on the belief that the 'crowd' was easily influenced and controlled by the 'stories' marketers 'told' in their messages. However, in the 21st century, marketers realize that a brand's story can be created and amplified by communities of individuals. In these communities, individuals experience the brand in a variety of ways, bonding emotionally with it (and each other), and creating brand 'fervour'. Returning to Twitchell, such an increase in devotion to a

brand can be construed as an 'awakening'. As this thesis shows, music is an integral part of the process by which such brand 'awakenings' occur.

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