

Performing the Reformation

Questions to Accompany the Text and A/V Materials

Chapter 1 *Opening the Door*

1. Victor Turner, in his book *From Ritual to Theatre* (1982) writes: “In a complex culture it might be possible to regard the ensemble of performative and narrative genres, active and acting modalities of expressive culture as a hall of mirrors, or better magic mirrors... in which social problems, issues, and crisis... are reflected as diverse images, transformed, [and] evaluated... until many facets of the problem have been illuminated and made accessible to conscious remedial action. In this hall of mirrors the reflections are multiple, some magnifying, some diminishing, some distorting the faces peering into them, but in such a way as to provoke not merely thought, but also powerful feelings and the will to modify everyday matters in the minds of the gazers” (106-107).
 - a. Identify the metaphors employed by Turner in this passage. On which of the senses do these metaphors rely?
 - b. Can you think of alternative metaphors, based on other senses, for describing performative and ritual genres? How do these different metaphors shape your understanding and attitudes toward rites and performances?
 - c. Re-read the section “Tetzel at the Door” (pp. 23-28). Is “Tetzel at the Door” best understood as, in Turner’s words, a “modality of expressive culture” working on a social “problem”? Is there a single “problem” being “reflected”? How could we determine whether Brüder Ignatius’s actions are efficacious? That is, how do we know if his actions “provoke thought,” “powerful feelings,” and a “will” to change?
2. If we consider the commonly held view (found in the thought of Turner, among others) that festivals and public performances are a kind of meta-commentary on social-cultural life, then ethnography of such events becomes a meta-commentary on a meta-commentary—reflexivity squared. I have called “Tetzel at the Door” a “scene.” The very act of calling it a “scene” already indicates certain theoretical and methodological commitments.
 - a. Am I merely adding another “magic mirror” to those already present, perhaps a “distortion,” or is my description of and commentary on the scene a “lens” that does the good ocular/oracular work suggested by metaphors of “focusing,” “magnifying,” and “illuminating” culture?
 - b. Is the task of an ethnographer to add additional mirrors, (is this inevitable?) or is it to remove them in a process of tracing reflections and distortions back to some stable primary reality?
3. In this chapter, I introduced Lindsay’s Jones’s notion of the “ritual-architectural event” (p. 22).
 - a. What does Jones mean by this phrase?
 - b. Which of these categories (or “priorities”) best applies to “Tetzel at the

- Door”?
- c. How does the notion of the “eventfulness” of architecture change how we think about and study a sacred site?
 - d. Using Jones’s morphology of ritual architectural events, map out the variety of sacred sites where you live. Be sure to consider the kinds of ritual and performance events that take place at these sites.

Chapter 2 *The Wittenberg Festivals*

1. The aim of this chapter is to embed Wittenberg’s contemporary Luther festivals in social and historical contexts. In order to manage the sprawling, complex character of Wittenberg’s Luther festivals into bite-sized pieces, I introduced six “frames” (pp. 46-49).
 - a. Create an alternative set of frames that may be helpful in thinking about festivals or cultural performances?
 - b. Using either the frames from the text or the set you created, analyze the various dimensions of a local festival (or another event, such as a high school graduation ceremony).
2. Just as a festival is comprised of multiple frames, its reach extends across multiple cultural domains, such as religion, politics, economics, and entertainment.
 - a. Think of a rite or performance that would typically be located in the religious domain, and then ask yourself in what ways its reach extends into the political or economic spheres.
 - b. On pages 50-51, I discuss civil religion, definitions of religion, and the distinction between religion and spirituality. Write your own definition of religion, and compare it with that of Frederick Ferre, which I cite in the text. Apply your definition to my description of the scene, “A Beer for Martin” (pp. 33-35). Based on your definition, is there anything religious about “A Beer for Martin”? (I return to “A Beer for Martin” on pages 146-149, so you may want to read ahead in thinking about this scene.)

Chapter 3 *A Mighty Fortress?*

1. A distinction is often made between religion and art—although art, especially in German culture, is thought to serve religious (or spiritual) needs. Conversely, the church might serve a society’s aesthetic interests and needs.
 - a. I suggest that during the festival there exists a tension in Wittenberg’s festival worship services, a tension between confessional and aesthetic domains (pp. 61-64). What do you make of this claim? Can you think of others cases where art and religion exist in tension or heightened relation?
 - b. I further suggest that aesthetic-religious tensions introduce a kind of double bind for the church community (p. 64). Explain this double bind in your own words. Can you think of similar cases in which liturgy changes in the direction of aesthetic interests? If a liturgy becomes more focused on art and

- performance, how might this shift impact confessional- and belief- oriented conceptions of religion?
- c. At various places in the textbook, I offer evaluative judgment or criticism of rites and performances comprising the festivals (see, for example, the section titled “Embodiment and the Senses,” , pp. 68-69). Here, I claim that the liturgy of the *Festgottesdienst* was “one-dimensional” and kinesthetically “inert.” Should academics offer such criticism, or should normative value judgments and criticism be avoided?
2. Contemporary public festivals include a variety of voices — voices that sometimes compete for the public’s eye or clash with each other.
 - a. On pages 70-72, discuss how cultural and religious differences and tensions manifested themselves during the Renewal of Vows ceremony hosted by the Wittenberg English Ministry. Like me, those attending the renewal of vows ceremony were guests in Wittenberg. Do you feel it is within their rights to criticize the Luther’s Wedding Festival as “medieval” or “carnavalesque?” tone of the Luther’s Wedding Festival? How does your answer compare with your answer above 1c?
 - b. Can you think of cultural performances in which two or more cultural domains enact tensions or differences, creating a situation of potential conflict?
 - c. On page 76, I quote someone from the Wittenberg English Ministry: “Conservative Lutheran groups come [to Wittenberg] very interested in such questions [as same-sex marriage, and the ordination of women, gays, and lesbians], and [while here] they reaffirm the position of the LCMS on these questions.” What does such a statement suggest about the symbolic power and function of sacred locales?
 3. In the Procession of the Confirmands on Reformation Day, a jovial Dr. Martin Luther leads the group through town to a rally in front of the Theses Door (pp. 83-87; DVD – Processing – Confirmands).
 - a. What are the advantages and potential disadvantages of incorporating the figure of Luther into this confirmation event through the use of heritage performance? Would it be better to compared with, say, present a historical lecture about Luther?
 - b. Does the church have a responsibility to ensure that a performances of Luther, such as we find in the Procession of the Confirmands, conforms to or evokes an accurate sense of the historical Luther?

Chapter 4 *Martin Luther, German Hero*

1. Contemporary images and narratives about Luther owe a great deal to the symbolism and ceremonies of Prussian nationalism. In Germany, Martin Luther played a role analogous to that of Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln in the United States. Like Lincoln, Luther was the heroic figure whose efforts laid the groundwork for the creation of the modern German state.
 - a. a. In chapter 3, I suggest that ritual and performance at the Theses Door

- tend to reaffirm the image of the heroic Luther of nineteenth-century German nationalism, and that narratives about the Theses Door typically do not include stories of its origins in the Prussian era (p. 79; 81-82). I write: “Perhaps performances of civil religion in nineteenth and early twentieth centuries should have a place in Reformation-themed festivity, heritage performances, and theatre in Wittenberg” (p. 82). Drawing on the brief history of how the Prussian state instrumentalized Luther for the purposes of civil religion presented in Chapter 4, design a performance, ceremony, or rite that would incorporate the origins of the Theses Door in the era of German nationalism. Write a one or two page script that outlines of the flow and elements of the performance. What narratives, messages, and values would you hope your performance, if enacted, conveys? What would be the obstacles to incorporating into Reformation festivals performances and rites that highlight the Prussian origins of the Theses Door?
- b. Examples of graffiti and street theatre aimed that cast a light on the dark side of Luther are discussed in the section titled, “Paintbombs and Protests” (pp. 108-112). In the supplementary materials, there is a series of slides titled, “Luther Protests.” (In the collection of photographs, you will find additional images of protest against the contemporary celebration of Luther. Given the economic and social need in Wittenberg to develop cultural heritage, are such protests really necessary? How does the performance you created above compare with the piece of street theatre, “Channeling with the Dead”?
2. Here is a link to a newspaper article about Luther celebrations. The article was written in 1983, and deals with Luther celebration and commemoration in the former DDR. Read: [“East German Party Embracing Luther as New Hero”](#)
 - a. What did the government of the DDR find ideologically useful in the figure of Luther?

Chapter 5 *Sociability, Conviviality*

1. Wittenberg’s Luther festivals are visually vibrant: flags, costumes, banners, decorations, large images and posters create an eye-popping experience. Figure 5.1 is a poster advertising the Luther’s Wedding festival. (A full color version of this image is available in the Supplementary Materials.)
 - a. a. On pages 113-116, I discuss four dimensions of Figure 5.1. Of the four interpretations I offer, are there any with which you take issue? How so? Add further interpretations to the image. What messages, values, emotions, sentiments do you think the poster is meant to convey?
2. Everyone loves a parade, and a center-piece of the Luther’s Wedding festival is the *Umzug*, the festival parade.
 - a. Based on my description of the *Umzug* (pp. 116-120), and drawing on the footage of the *Umzug* on the DVD (Processing – Parade), list four or five chief features of the festival parade.
 - b. In general, what are some key categories that may aid the analysis of a parade or public procession (for example, the parade route, the costuming,

- etc.).
- c. Using two or three of these items, develop a comparative chart and analyze similarities and differences amongst the four different processions shown on the DVD (confirmands, parade, senate and pestumzug).
 - d. How does the festival parade in Wittenberg compare with a parade with which you are familiar say, for example, a Fourth of July parade?
3. In this chapter I introduce the notions of sociability and conviviality (pp. 120-124).
 - a. Based on my brief discussion, define sociability and conviviality.
 - b. I suggest that Wittenberg's Luther festivals encourage sociability and conviviality. What are some features of the Luther festivals that encourage convivial relations?
 - c. Can you generalize about conviviality? What are the conditions necessary to create a convivial atmosphere or event? How, for example, might the layout of a room, the choice and arrangement of furnishings encourage convivial relations? Are classrooms convivial spaces? Can you think of public spaces that seem intentionally designed to limit or constrain conviviality?
 4. I describe "locality" as a one's sense of being from and belonging to a particular place (p. 126), and suggest that part of the function of Wittenberg festivals is to create this sense of locality for the region's residents. I quote the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, who notes that in a globalized world, "even in the most intimate, spatially confined, geographically isolated situations, locality must be maintained against various kinds of odds."
 - a. What forces and factors (social, historical, cultural) at work in Wittenberg threaten or erode a sense of locality?
 - b. How would you describe your home place? What are its defining features, stories, buildings? Are there events (rituals, performance, stories) that create, maintain and strengthen your sense of locality? How do they achieve this?
 - c. Theories and interpretations critical of processes of globalization point to the problems of homogenization (in which social-cultural life becomes increasingly standardized, uniform and, ultimately, bland) and essentialization (through which locales become narrowly identified with a product, a movement, a person, or value-set). Based on your understanding of Wittenberg's Luther festivals, are the processes of homogenization and/or essentialization at work? How so? Give some examples from the text and the DVD.

Chapter 6 *The Carnavalesque, Processing Change*

1. I suggest that Wittenberg's Luther festivals are "carnavalesque" in character, in large part due to the contributions of the *Spielleute* (pp. 145-146).
 - a. What do is meant by "carnavalesque" (pp. 137-139)?
 - b. "The Animators" is a chapter on the DVD. What do you make of how the performers poke fun at the figure of Luther and the church? Ought parody and satire to have a place in a church festival? Why or why not?
 - c. If parody and satire dominate the action and tenor of a festival, can it still be

- a church (or religious) festival? What does your answer reveal about your tacit definition or conception of religion?
- d. I suggest the Luther festivals can be viewed as a kind of “sympathetic magic,” creating connections to the ethos of early modern era carnivals (pp. 162-165). If Luther-themed festivals are, as I suggest, “a drumming and dancing into being of the spirit of a lost world,” what do the festivals suggest about changes to contemporary religion?
2. “A Beer for Martin” is a piece of street theater, the *Festgottesdienst* is a liturgical rite; each contribute to the larger event called the Reformation Day Festival. On page 147 I break down the scene “A Beer for Martin” using a number of frames.
 - a. Using these frames, create a similar chart for the *Festgottesdienst* (festival worship service) on the DVD (Worship – *Festgottesdienst*).
 - b. On the basis of these charts, how would you describe the differences between the two events? How would you characterize the mood or tone of each of these events?

Chapter 7 *Pilgrimage, Sacred Space*

1. The practice of making a journey to a destination deemed sacred appears in diverse cultures, religions, and territories. The human need to leave home, travel to a place in order to establish ties with sacred beings, physically and spiritually heal, and receive new knowledge so that life can be renewed is a fundamental dimension of religious life.
 - a. Why do people travel to sacred destinations (the motivation question)? Who benefits from this travel (the economic question)? What changes to locale culture accompany tourism and pilgrimage (the “impact” question)? Try to provide a range of answers to each question, and illustrate your answers with particular cases.
 - b. Based on your reading of chapter 7, how would you answer the above three questions in the case of pilgrimage to Wittenberg? What more do we need to know to better understand pilgrimage to the Lutheran “Mecca”?
2. Place is important to the formation of collective memory, identity, shared values. At and in a particular place, identity is grounded in a real (or mythic) past, reinforced in the present, and projected into the future. Diverse groups of people are brought together at a pilgrimage site. As a collective group, they share a common religious-historical-cultural core and location, and a common meta-narrative. This view of pilgrimage breaks down somewhat in the work of John Eade and Michael Sallnow, who make the claim that a shrine is a “religious void” (pp. 177-178).
 - a. What do Eade and Sallnow mean by a “religious void”?
 - b. What are the various Lutheran groups active in Wittenberg? How does the use of Wittenberg as a sacred site vary among these groups? In what sense is Wittenberg a “religious void”?
3. In general, scholars have been critical of tourism and pilgrimage sites. The argument runs something like this: (1) culture (or heritage), especially in locales of historical and religious significance, is a resource that, when properly developed,

will draw visitors; (2) the “development cure” may create wealth for some individuals, but it also produces a host of new ills; (3) among these ills is a feeling of alienation from one’s own home place;(4) once a local culture is commoditized and given commercial value, that culture slowly loses meaning and significance for locale residents.

- a. Do you agree with the above critique? What might it be missing or not taking into account? Do you know of any tourist or pilgrimage sites (perhaps locale ones) for which the above critique is relevant? How so? What is happening at these sites?