

Simone Heidbrink, Nadja Miczek (Eds.)

# Aesthetics



## and the Dimensions of the Senses

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## and the Dimensions of the Senses



**Simone Heidbrink / Nadja Miczek**

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## **THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE PRAYER WALL**

THEO ZIJDERVELD

### *Introduction*

The web is one of the most important ‘spaces’ of our society. Religious websites and social networks deserve our attention because they show us that people are experiencing religion in new ways. Prayer is one of the core religious practices and has moved online in different ways. The *tangle.com Prayer Wall*<sup>1</sup> is a fascinating example of this. Recently, however, significant changes have been made to it. While the old *Prayer Wall* was a Flash tool with high-resolution graphics, animation, and sound, the current online version is an interactive social media application. Sociologists and theologians have often focused on the rational dimension of religion, yet their tendency has been to neglect the physical and sensuous experiences that are so important in religious life. The following analysis of the old and current *Prayer Wall* is based on my conviction that a change in design has implications for the experience of praying online.

In 2007 I conducted my first research on the *Prayer Wall*, and investigated why people were using it. Does the wall function as a sacred space, as a new form of churches and cathedrals where people go to pray, or where the divine seems to dwell? The design of the wall seemed to point in this direction. One of the great differences between traditional prayer and the way it is experienced on *tangle.com* is that prayers now become public. In some cases this can transform the wall into a message board, especially as users email the prayer to others. My research led me to conclude that the *Prayer Wall* is an example of mediatized ritual on the internet. The traditional ritual of prayer is changed to the logic of internet applications and to the way online communities exist. An important feature of rituals is that they draw the attention away from the mundane and everyday to a transcendent element. In the case of the *Prayer Wall*, this transcendent element is the assumed communication with an all-knowing God

<sup>1</sup> Old *Prayer Wall*, <http://www.tangle.com/prayerwall>. Retrieved 8 November 2010. New *Prayer Wall*, <http://www.tangle.com/prayers/>. Retrieved 8 November 2010.

who hears the prayers of the people. The community, or that part of the community involved in these prayers, becomes itself a part of a wider, greater horizon. The prayers should be seen as ritual communication, where people are reassured that they form part of a Christian community. When members post a prayer, they become part of a group of (largely anonymous) people who have done the same. Those who read those prayers in turn can become participants when they feel connected to other people who demonstrate their faith in the same way as they do, and further express their prayers publicly.

In this second study, I will trace how the transformation of a flashy *Prayer Wall* into a Web 2.0 application has changed the aesthetical experience. In order to accomplish this, I will, by drawing on recent studies on online prayer, first give an overview of the tangle.com website and outline how the *Prayer Wall* fits into this online community. Second, I will compare the old *Prayer Wall* with the current version in greater detail. In order to be able to frame the experience of the old and current *Prayer Wall* in a comparative analysis, I will in the third place sketch out the context of aesthetics and religion, and, fourthly, narrow the discussion by comparing Catholic and Protestant approaches to experiencing religion. The fifth and longest part of this essay is devoted to an evaluation of the old and current *Prayer Wall* through a synthesis of these insights on aesthetics, applied to the theory of remediation as described by Bolter & Grusin (2002). This essay will close with a number of conclusions on the relationship between religion, aesthetics, and media.

### *1. Why Tangle.com?*

The last few years have seen a number of studies on the phenomenon of online prayer, most notably those of Young (2004), Helland (2005), and Campbell (2005). Glenn Young argues that online prayer requires a level of participation from the practitioner. On the internet, many prayers are either prayer requests sent to Christian organizations that are invisible to other readers, or (formalized) prayers that can be read and recited by visitors. Young shows that the debate on ‘religion online’ (information online about offline religions) versus ‘online religion’ (participation in religious activities that take

place online) is not the best way to frame the discussion.<sup>2</sup> We have since then moved beyond that discussion, and the subsequent studies of Young and Helland illustrate that on many religious websites references to both offline practices as well as online participation are common.

Christopher Helland notes that religious organizations and institutions are very conscious about the way their websites function. Ideally, online communication is many-to-many communication, unlike the traditional religious systems where communication is more top-down and one-to-many communication. Helland shows how many religious websites do not allow for interaction between the users, but expects that, as the internet continues to develop as a social space, religious institutions will begin to develop environments for online religion.<sup>3</sup>

Heidi Campbell writes about online prayer in small Christian communities that are facilitated by e-mail and newsgroups. She shows how prayer requests are very valuable for the group and that they also help to members open up about personal problems and challenges.<sup>4</sup> In her overall research on religious communities online, Campbell argues that online communities enable people to be more personal than they would be in their local communities. Geographical boundaries become irrelevant for online communities where people develop online friendship, and trust each other with their most intimate private life.

Studying the tangle.com *Prayer Wall* will help to move the discussion about prayer online to a new level. As Helland expected, online environments for religion would be developed as they now have, and the *Prayer Wall* is a good example of many-to-many communication, supported by a large online community. Many of the prayers also witness to the veracity of Campbell's observation: people do indeed trust each other – every visitor, in fact! – with the most private details of their life.

The evangelical subculture has from an early stage been very open to the use of audiovisual media, with televangelists, Christian movies, and the large Christian contemporary music scene providing many ways in which religion can be both experienced and shared.<sup>5</sup> Tangle.com, a very large evangelical Christian website, is no exception. In addition to providing a large online community and access to videos, one of the most important features of the tangle.com website is its *Prayer Wall*. The tangle.com banner is displayed along the top of the page, with links to the different sections of the

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<sup>2</sup> See Young 2004, 105; see also Helland 2005, 2.

<sup>3</sup> See Helland 2005, 13.

<sup>4</sup> See Campbell 2005, 134.

<sup>5</sup> See Hendershot 2004.

website. The *Prayer Wall* itself uses tabs, displays in the background a photo of what appears to be the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, and functions in a manner that is similar to an online forum. Everyone can read the prayer online, although you have to log in to see all the prayers. Similarly, only tangle.com members can actually post prayers. Users fill in a form to provide title, prayer, and topic (love, suffering, etc.), and can add a verse, video, or photo. Prayers appear on the prayer page, where users have several display options. As such, it contains a prayer database that makes it among the largest on the internet, and a good example of ‘mediatized ritual’.<sup>6</sup>

But religious experience is also combined with community in a most dynamic way. Whereas on other sites prayers can only be sent, tangle.com makes it possible for others not only to read but also to comment on posted prayers. Unless they are posted anonymously, all prayers can be traced to the members of the social network. In fact, commenting and responding to prayers is encouraged by such features as the ‘Top Prayer Responder’ list. Users can also see the ‘Top Praying Members’ and the ‘Top Prayer Responders.’ Tangle.com thus can function as a Christian alternative to such websites as both YouTube as well as Facebook.

## *2. The Old and the New Prayer Wall*

When I first started my research on the *Prayer Wall* in 2007, the *Prayer Wall* had a look that was very different from the current design. The old *Prayer Wall* (still accessible through <http://www.tangle.com/prayerwall>) is a Flash application, highly graphical, with animations and sound. It used to start with an animation – now entirely absent – where the screen showed a large wall that zoomed into view.<sup>7</sup> This wall is large, like that of a church. Arches are visible in the upper left- and right-hand corners, and the titles and authors of prayers are displayed over the surface of the wall. When one clicks on a title, the entire prayer appears, with the *Prayer Wall* remaining visible in the background. In the middle, a large iron cross can be seen. There are a number of niches in the wall with candles that members can light by clicking on the ‘Light a Candle’ button. In the bottom right-hand

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<sup>6</sup> See Zijderveld 2008; see also Hjarvard 2008.

<sup>7</sup> The ‘old’ *Prayer Wall*, which remains accessible right now, is not exactly the same as the version that I used for my study in 2007; it is not the original animation that is being used in the current ‘old’ version online.

corner, you can also click on ‘More Prayers.’ The wall moves to display more prayers, giving the impression that it is very long, and covered entirely with prayers. In the background, you can also hear mellow synthesizer sounds. In spite of its overall attraction, however, the old *Prayer Wall* animation is slow and rather difficult to navigate. Moreover, in order to connect with the social network opportunities the user must leave the *Prayer Wall*.

How does the current version of the *Prayer Wall* compare with its predecessor? The image of the original wall has been replaced, and instead a depiction of what seems to be the Wailing Wall appears. Rather than forming the focal point of the screen, this graphic is set in the background. A number of other significant aesthetical changes have been made as well. The foreground of the Wall page has been integrated into the overall tangle.com design so that it now has a much ‘cleaner’ look. It presents the prayers in a much more text-based fashion, and is no longer highly graphical. Also the animations and sounds are now absent. On the other hand, the interaction features are now much better arranged, making the new *Prayer Wall* a typical Web 2.0 application.<sup>8</sup>

Given the openness in the evangelical world to new, vivid audiovisual media, these changes that would appear to tone down the aesthetic value may seem difficult to explain. What do they say about the aesthetic and religious experience of the *Prayer Wall*?

### *3. Reframing Aesthetic Experience*

In order to be able to frame a visit to the *Prayer Wall* as an aesthetic experience, we need to acknowledge that aesthetics have since Kant been associated with high art.<sup>9</sup> Kant argued for a rational approach to aesthetics where feelings could be described in terms of pleasure or reluctance. The feeling that occurred during the experience of an object was subject to a rational analysis. Moreover, the characteristics of a real aesthetic experience were that it was not related to a goal or desire outside of the object that was being experienced. The experience with beauty could lead to a feeling of

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Web 2.0’ is a term associated with user-centered design. Important keywords are ‘information sharing’ and ‘corporation.’ A Web 2.0 website gives users free choice to interact with each other, and to produce and edit user-generated content. Video sharing and social networking sites are examples of Web 2.0. Since it is now easier to browse, select, and categorize material on the *Prayer Wall*, the content is more user-centered than experience-centered.

<sup>9</sup> See Meyer & Verrips 2008, 22; see also Meyer 2005.

amazement, anxiousness, and awe. This is what Kant calls the ‘sublime’ (*Das Erhabene*). After all, aesthetics were concerned with a rational reflection of the experience.<sup>10</sup> Only people with a well-developed taste would be able to value art. Popular mass production was not considered to be real art. After Kant, the separation between the artistic and religious domains became more obvious. Religion, especially in its ‘superstitious’ mystical and sensuous form, would disappear and be replaced by high art.

As Meyer argues, however, this is not the original meaning of aesthetics. According to Aristotle, we use our senses to perceive the world.<sup>11</sup> We can experience the world as a whole through our senses, and this is our primary way to come to know the world. In the course of western history, the eye has become the primary sense organ through which we know the world, and abstraction and analysis have become the most ‘pure’ way of achieving knowledge. Obtaining knowledge of the world through the senses was considered less intellectual, especially after Descartes’s strong separation between body and mind.<sup>12</sup>

Meyer uses the term ‘religious aesthetics’ for an approach where sense experiences play an important role in the religious experience. Following the phenomenological tradition, she suggests a broader perspective on aesthetics than the Kantian approach. The phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty has prioritized sense as a central way of achieving knowledge.<sup>13</sup> This is especially relevant for the study of religious phenomena where the senses play a major role. In many world religions taste, smell, and touch are essential senses for religious practice. The Catholic and Byzantine traditions, and more recently the Pentecostal and evangelical movements, make full use of the sense phenomena in liturgy. Touching the icons, tasting the communion wafer, and smelling the incense are essential to the religious experience. However, the traditional Protestant approach religion has been very suspicious of aesthetics and religious experience, privileging the Word instead.

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<sup>10</sup> See Kant 2001.

<sup>11</sup> See Aristotle, *De Anima*.

<sup>12</sup> See Meyer & Verrips 2008, 22.

<sup>13</sup> See Merleau-Ponty 1945; Marion 1991.



#### *4. Catholic and Protestant?*

Whereas the Catholic liturgy presented and represented God's Word in a variety of sensual, formal, and aesthetic embodiments, the Word in Protestant liturgy is desiccated, information-oriented, apprehended through Scripture and sermon but most emphatically not in stained glass, statues, or the taste of bread upon the tongue.<sup>14</sup>

On comparing the new *Prayer Wall* to the old one, it immediately becomes clear that the old version is much richer in aesthetic experience. The old *Prayer Wall* is a coherent whole of image and sound, and differs from the design of normal websites. It is – to use the famous distinction drawn by Eliade (1957) – a sacred place, 'set apart' from the profane, supported in this by music and animation.

While it may seem strange to view a webpage as a sacred space, a famous essay by Umberto Eco (1994) about the distinction between Mac and MS-DOS can help us understand how a computer interface can be framed in a religious discourse. It is important to remember here that MS-DOS was a text-based operating system, and that Apple (Macintosh) was the first widely-used operating system with a graphical interface.

Eco argues that he firmly believes that Macintosh is Catholic, and that MS-DOS is Protestant. The Macintosh is friendly, conciliatory, and simple icons explain the essence of revelation. Everybody can understand it. MS-DOS is Protestant, even Calvinist, because it allows free interpretation of 'scripture' and demands difficult personal decisions for the user. To make the system work, you need to interpret the program yourself. In this rather hilarious essay, Eco gives us a useful metaphor in which a graphical, simple, intuitive interface (that was first designed by Apple) makes it much easier for people to understand and to 'gain salvation.' MS-DOS, on the other hand, with its difficult commands and absence of a clear overview, demands a lot more from its users. DOS is analytical, and Apple is intuitive. The same 'schism' can be applied to the different approaches that separate traditional Protestants and more evangelical-minded believers.

Eco's analysis is in line with Stephen O'Leary's "Cyberspace as Sacred Space" (2004). In this article he raises the question as to how the sacred can be represented. For his inquiry into the

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<sup>14</sup> See O'Leary 2004, 43.

implications of computer-mediated religion, he discusses Walter Ong's book "Orality and Literacy" (1982). Walter Ong shows how the invention of the printing press and the Reformation radically changed practices and rituals. Orality, the act of speech, is outward, where the senses (hearing, listening, and seeing the speaker) are being used. Primary orality can be described as the pre-literacy period, where communication could not be registered or fixed. According to Ong, when speech is fixed in text, it opens up to the psyche both reflection and interior awareness of the self. The emergence of reading and writing, especially after the invention of the printing press, thus changed the way people communicated. Writing divorces the production of a communicative act from its reception.<sup>15</sup> Ong describes the emergence of audiovisual media as secondary orality, where the senses of sight and hearing receive more attention. He goes on to connect Catholicism with orality, and Protestantism – with its emphasis on the text and on interpretation – with literacy. Moreover, the culture of Protestantism is connected to the culture of modernism and the rise of literacy. During the time of the Reformation, the Swiss Reformer Zwingli even removed the ornaments from the church. According to him, only the textual interpretation of the Bible constituted the correct way to religious experience and revelation. Umberto Eco and Stephen O'Leary both argue how a Protestant and a Catholic perspective on media changes the way technology can work. How can we apply this to the two versions of the *Prayer Wall*?

### *5. Religious Aesthetics and the Tangle.com Prayer Wall*

The old *Prayer Wall* uses animations, images and sound and, with its warmly glowing candles and the roughly-textured stone, indirectly suggests that more senses are being used. Altogether, posting or reading a prayer on the old *Prayer Wall* takes place in a virtual space that 'speaks' to several senses in order to create an intuitive, sacred space. Though the prayers are mostly text-based, they are part of so rich an audiovisual environment that a cognitive analysis of the prayers is certainly not the only activity that can take place. The old *Prayer Wall* mediates an atmosphere that is more 'Catholic' than 'Calvinist.' As Birgit Meyer has argued, we should take such mediation seriously because the aesthetic

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<sup>15</sup> See O'Leary 2004, 39.

experience is so important for religious experience.<sup>16</sup> However, tangle.com is an evangelical website, not Calvinist. The Reformation broke radically with many mediated forms such as images, incense, statues, and mystical languages in order to experience the divine and to promote a more intellectual analysis of faith that focuses on the interpretation of Scripture. The evangelical and Pentecostal movements differ from the older Protestant movements by centralizing the experience, often mediated by charismatic speakers, speaking in tongues, or worship music. Moreover, they have adapted media technologies very successfully in order to mediate these experiences.

Evangelical Christianity in general thus adapts very well to contemporary culture. The ‘form’ of worship, for example, is very similar to popular music. The design of the new *Prayer Wall* is definitely less sophisticated, but is more integrated into tangle.com as a whole. The form of online prayer has been adapted to the common Web 2.0 structures. Because websites have become more user-friendly, better accessible, and more targeted to social networking, it should come as no surprise that tangle.com has also changed the format of the *Prayer Wall*. Flash animations are not very user-friendly, since they require the user to stay on the same webpage, while dynamic websites enable users to switch easily between different applications on a website. What do all of these changes mean for the experience of the new *Prayer Wall*?

The ‘sacred,’ set-apart status of the *Prayer Wall* has been changed to a more user-friendly website. This does not mean that it has become a ‘Calvinist’ website; the background continues to depict the Wailing Wall, and constitutes a clear reference to a physical place. Moreover, tangle.com itself is a rich multimedia website, full of animations and video. Thus, in spite of its much more primitive aesthetic value, the new *Prayer Wall* does not represent a capitulation to ‘Calvinist’ impulses, but is rather an example of how sophisticated evangelical Christians make use of the media.

#### *i. Media Framework*

The difference between the Catholic and Protestant ways of experiencing religion, where the latter has a more analytical vision on religion, is closely related to the emergence of literacy. Ong’s analysis

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<sup>16</sup> See Meyer 2008, 25.

helps us to understand how literacy caused an internalization of communication and an emphasis on reflection. When analysis and reflection prevail over an aesthetic worldview, it is not surprising that a severe separation between body and mind occurs.

Birgit Meyer has argued for the need for more research on the aesthetical dimension, especially when analyzing religion and religious experience. After all, modernity has not caused a diminishment of feeling and experience in religion; in fact, the contrary even holds true. While this may have been the case with sociologists and philosophers who predicted the end of religion and ‘superstition,’ the converse applies for the lives of the millions who have embraced all kinds of religion and spirituality where (personal) experience is extremely important. In order to understand the role of media, we will pay attention to Bolter & Grusin (2002) who have elaborated on the concept of remediation. In their analysis of media, they do not focus on the content of texts, but on the form. They have concentrated on the visual dimension of media, analyzing paintings, collages, photos, movies, and websites.

### *ii. Transparent Immediacy*

During the Renaissance, when the book industry received a major impulse by the invention of the printing press, artists experimented with perspective. Bolter & Grusin argue that the technique of using perspective enabled artists to paint in such a way that the painting became real. In a way, looking at a painting creates the effect of looking at a different world. Painters strove to make their paintings so real that the medium itself – the canvas – tends to disappear: the medium itself becomes almost transparent. Bolter & Grusin call this ‘transparent immediacy’.<sup>17</sup> They further argue that this was part of the desire to go beyond the limits of representation and to achieve the real.<sup>18</sup> Artists were not striving for the real in a metaphysical sense, but in terms of the viewers’ experience. This experience would evoke an immediate and authentic emotional response.

The desire for an experience that is as authentic and real as possible has been further refined in photo, film, and, later on, in virtual reality. In virtual reality, it becomes possible to actively wander in a ‘different’ world. The old *Prayer Wall* may not be an example of a virtual painting with perspective,

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<sup>17</sup> See Bolter & Grusin 2002, 21.

<sup>18</sup> See *ibid*, 53.

but it nevertheless does represent an effort to create an immediate, real world on the internet. The technological limitations of the internet (bandwidth, memory) made it hard to create a 3D world. But by using graphics, animations, and sound, as well as by integrating the text into the environment, the old *Prayer Wall* seizes the opportunity, as it were, to create an experience where the medium itself (i.e. the internet browser) seems to disappear.

### *iii. Hypermediacy*

In addition to this first way ('transparent immediacy') of achieving the experience of a new reality by trying to erase the medium, there is a second method that refashions and critiques the real in order to achieve it. By creating images, photos, films, or collages, references to another reality or place are created. This image becomes a new reality in itself, because it has reframed and refashioned the reality (or other media) to which it refers. Here the artist always uses her own perspective and accents. In new (electronic) media, other 'older' media are being reused in new and different ways. This is what Bolter & Grusin call 'hypermediacy'.<sup>19</sup>

With the opportunities for optimal mastery of images (for example, in photography), we see a counter movement that centralizes the medium itself. Many artists do not strive for a depiction of a coherent reality. The process of active interpretation is more important than striving for the perfect image or even a virtual reality. We see this in the paintings of Mondrian, where every reference to the 'real' world seems to have disappeared. Magritte's painting of a pipe, accompanied by the text "*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*" ("This is not a pipe"), shows the play with reality. The painting is a sign that refers to physical pipes, but the whole is at the same time also Magritte's painting. In that way, the viewer can become confused about what is real. Similarly, a collage shows how different photos and images are assembled into a new whole. But the fact that it is a collage remains very much visible because the individual parts do not connect perfectly.

In new media, the idea of 'hypermediacy' is visible in the design of the windows of the graphical interfaces of Windows, Linux, Apple, etc. Computer users are used to operating on several windows at

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<sup>19</sup> See *ibid*, 31.

the same time. The medium, or the interface, is essential for navigation. The experience of the interface is natural if the user can switch without problems between the several windows. The environment is heterogeneous, and the windows are not necessarily linked to each other. For the user, this is no problem. As the media theorist Erkki Huhtamo (1995) points out:

Technology is gradually becoming a second nature, a territory both external and internalized and an object of desire. There is no need to make it transparent any longer, simply because it is not felt to be in contradiction to the ‘authenticity’ of the experience.<sup>20</sup>

In the new *Prayer Wall*, navigation is more visible and central to the design. It is easier to browse through the prayers, to categorize them, and to surf to other parts of the tangle.com website. Because people are so used to the navigation structures, the feeling does not have to be less ‘authentic.’ Moreover, the text of the prayers is now more central because the graphical dimension of the website is less obvious than it was on the old *Prayer Wall*. The senses are being used in a different way. ‘Hypermediacy’ does not contradict ‘transparent immediacy’ because both are ways to depict reality. It is thus not so that the *Prayer Wall* becomes less realistic when the sophisticated graphics are replaced by a simple but more interactive design. Rather, it reflects the understanding that surfing through the *Prayer Wall* and the tangle.com website and community has become more important than contemplating on a single prayer page.

### *Conclusion*

The initial question of this paper was how the transformation of the *Prayer Wall* has changed the aesthetical experience of praying online. An answer to this question required exploring aesthetical and media theory. The previous studies on prayer online focused on community, participation, and interaction. We can partly explain this by the fast development of the internet. Another explanation is the lack of interest in religious studies and sociology in the aesthetical dimension of religious

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<sup>20</sup> See Huattamo 1995, as cited in Bolter & Grusin 2002, 42.

experience. Although reality is always more complicated, framing this lack of interest in the light of the Reformation, the invention of the printing press, and the focus on reading and rational analysis, helps us to understand why such a perspective does not receive the attention it deserves.

Distinguishing a ‘Catholic’ and ‘Calvinist’ approach to religion enables us to put the sensuous, more spontaneous and visually rich context of Catholic liturgy against the sober inwardness of Calvinism. Art philosophy, with Kant as one of the main protagonists, has privileged ‘high’ art and disconnected aesthetics from religion. Birgit Meyer's plea for more attention to the aesthetical dimension is especially useful in the context of the website [tangle.com](http://tangle.com). Evangelical Christians have been masters in integrating images, music, and emotions into religion, thereby fulfilling a dimension that was often neglected in Protestantism. It is not surprising that this evangelical website is one of the most sophisticated religious sites on the web.

The old *Prayer Wall* uses animations, sound, and sophisticated graphics. It offers a rich aesthetical experience. Why would a new design even be necessary? In order to explain this transformation, we needed to go beyond aesthetics and pay more attention to the role of the medium. The transformation of the web into a more interactive, user-centered, and community-based internet, requires a different design. Bolter & Grusin have showed that ‘transparent immediacy’ and ‘hypermediacy’ are two distinct ways to an authentic medium of reality. The old *Prayer Wall* offers a homogenous, almost virtual reality, while the new *Prayer Wall* uses the hypermediated heterogeneous space that enables fast navigation and interaction. This technological web-environment has become so natural that the interface itself does not frustrate the ‘flow’ of surfing on the Internet.

What does the transformation of the *Prayer Wall* mean for praying online? In my 2007 research, I concluded that the *Prayer Wall* was an example of a mediatized ritual. The logic of the technological opportunities and challenges itself was the way prayer took place online. The new *Prayer Wall* shows how important a user-centered design, with interaction and social networking as key features, really has become. Praying, or reading prayers, in a Web 2.0 environment leaves little room for contemplation online. It is fast, offers many opportunities, and encourages – even pushes! – the user to browse for comments, to read more prayers, or else to find out who the person behind the prayer is. The old *Prayer Wall* seemed to have ‘Catholic’ features, providing a rich sensuous experience that invited the user to stay, to linger, and to contemplate. The new *Prayer Wall* is evangelical, fast, contemporary, up-

to-date with the newest technological trends, combining the original concept of the *Prayer Wall* with the entertainment of tangle.com movies and music videos, and integrating it harmoniously with the most current ways people connect with each other on the internet today. The transformation of the *Prayer Wall* shows how tangle.com has been keen to adapt to the pace at which the internet is developing. In order for research into online religion to keep this same pace, studies would do well to keep track of religious websites that use state of the art technology and interface. While the examples studies by Young, Helland, and Campbell still do exist – some even without change – I do expect religion online in the coming years to take the shape much more of the tangle.com *Prayer Wall* than of simple prayer request pages, and that e-mail groups will be all but completely replaced by social networking sites and applications.

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