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Haunted: Religious Modernity and Reenchantment

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A B S T R A C T

The academic study of religion has for too long laboured under a flawed understanding of the relationship between modernity and religion. Any narrative of the *displacement* of religion by a universal and secularising modernity fails to recognise the complexity of the historical and cultural realities. While modernity has demonstrably contributed to the erosion of certain forms of religion, there is a growing body of evidence, and new interpretations of existing evidence, which suggest that the interconnections between modernity and religion are far more complex than any simple opposition could account for. Indeed, modernity appears, in certain circumstances, to be capable of *producing* its own religious effects. This thesis seeks to answer what then becomes a fundamental question: what does it mean for the study of religion if we accept that modernity can *generate* the religious?

New conceptual tools are needed to deal critically with the far-reaching consequences of embracing the true density of modernity. The study of religion can be greatly enhanced by one such concept: *reenchantment*. However, reenchantment, as an *interpretive framework*, must be carefully formulated. Reenchantment cannot be properly understood as a *reversal* of disenchantment, a conception this thesis will be calling *thin reenchantment*, but as an ongoing *dialectic* of reenchantment and rationalisation, which this thesis will be calling *thick reenchantment*. The formulation of a credible and useful concept of reenchantment can in turn be aided by the work of the philosopher and cultural critic Jean Baudrillard. Baudrillard's work is not itself an *expression* or *example* of reenchantment, but it demonstrates a remarkable *congruence* with the concept of thick reenchantment, as both interrogate dominant understandings of modernity in relationship to differing systems of *value*.

The thesis is divided into two sections. The first, substantially longer, section presents in some detail thick reenchantment as an interpretive frame. Though it does not claim to offer any *new* evidence, the first chapter outlines the evidential background for the thesis, which adopts the concept of *religious modernity*, developed by sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger, as a way of framing this evidence. The second chapter develops the concept of reenchantment and the typology of thin and thick reenchantment in relation to the foundational work of Max Weber. The third chapter is an analysis and review of the extant

multidisciplinary discourse on re-enchantment. The fourth chapter, the theoretical core of the thesis, presents an innovative reading of Baudrillard's considerable body of work.

The second section elaborates on a further insight of the first – that *text* is a necessary element in the study of religious modernity – by offering detailed readings of the work of three contemporary authors – novelists Douglas Coupland and Chuck Palahniuk and filmmaker Tom Tykwer – as *instantiations* of the sorts of cultural artefacts that the conceptual framework of thick re-enchantment means to explore.

Though its claims remain conceptual and interpretive rather than evidential, normative, or explanatory, this thesis, interdisciplinary as it is, is intended as a contribution to a number of related fields, from the study of contemporary literature and film to the exploration of Baudrillard's work, which the study of religion has to date largely neglected, to its detriment. However, its primary purpose is to suggest new and fruitful ways to approach the study of religion in modernity.

A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

Any work of the length and complexity of a doctoral thesis is necessarily the product of many months of research and writing. Given this, such a project in reality represents the efforts of many people aside from myself (though its deficiencies are mine and mine alone), to whom I owe much more than a simple thanks. Nonetheless, thanks are due to:

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To anyone I've forgotten and, finally, to Greg Dawes, for 'I'm sorry, Eric, but I have *no idea* what you are talking about here ...'

Again, cheers.

EPIGRAPH



THERE ARE MORE THINGS IN
HEAVEN AND EARTH, HORATIO,
THAN ARE DREAMT OF IN
YOUR PHILOSOPHY

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*Epigraph illustration by Carolyn Townsley.

THE INTRODUCTION

Human reflection cannot be casually separated from an object that concerns it in the highest degree; we need a thinking that does not fall apart in the face of horror, a self-consciousness that does not steal away when it is time to explore possibility to the limit.

Georges Bataille¹

Despite the ballyhoo to the contrary, the world at the dawn of the twenty-first century is not experiencing a profound and unprecedented reenchantment. Nor is it experiencing a return to religion. The reasons for this are simple and perhaps not what is to be expected. The world is not experiencing a contemporary reenchantment because the world has never been disenchanting. We are not witnessing a return to religion because religion never went away; instead, it has mutated and relocated within the broader cultural patterns of the modern age. This, in short, is the fundamental contention of this thesis.

The argument is divided into two sections joined together by a brief intermission. The first, longer and more substantive, section, encompassing the first four chapters, lays out the theoretical and conceptual material dealing with religious modernity and reenchantment. In the first chapter, we will be approaching from two different directions our fundamental argument that religion and modernity do *not* exist in a strictly antagonistic relationship. Firstly, we will be tackling this controversial claim from a strictly *conceptual* standpoint. We begin with *defining* the concepts of ‘modernity’ and ‘religion’, or more accurately, for reasons that will become apparent, ‘*the religious*’. It is important to draw out the *interconnections* between these two concepts, which are both historically contingent, dynamic cultural constructions of European origin. The two are intertwined so deeply that it is difficult, if not impossible, for them ever to be fully separated. ‘Religion’, as a *general category*, is an invention of modern European social science. ‘Modern’ is an historical designation that relies on the understanding of a moving away from or an evolution beyond a past that was, in some important sense, ‘more religious’ than the present. Secondly, we will be outlining some of the sociological evidence that suggests that religion and modernity exist in a complex interplay that renders any fixed and one-way relationship overly simplistic. There is ample, although still controversial, evidence to suggest that religion and modernity, under certain cultural and historical circumstances, not only cohabit comfortably but even reinforce each other. The evidence gives us ample reason to

¹ Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, vol. 2, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 14.

reject any sociological formulation, such as that found in the classical secularisation paradigm, which argues that modernity *necessarily* displaces religion. This being said, I have no wish to deny that modernity has contributed to the severe decline or even outright destruction of once-vibrant and culturally significant religious forms, nor would the evidence allow us to do so. This has been most visible in the case of institutional Christianity in parts of Western Europe and in some former European colonies. However, these instances of religious decline are only part of the story. Religion in myriad forms has maintained its strength and is even thriving in many other parts of a world in which there are precious few places that have had no experience of modernity. This suggests that much of the earliest sociology of religion, which predicted the inevitable and irreversible decline of religion the world over, based its forecast on something other than strictly empirical observation. The evidence, both conceptual and empirical, is strong enough to *require* that the study of religion seek out different, more nuanced ways of approaching the question of the relationship between modernity and religion. The first chapter argues, and seeks to demonstrate, that the idea of *religious modernity*, as developed by sociologist of religion Danièle Hervieu-Léger, offers a compelling alternative framework for the analysis and interpretation of religion in modernity. The most intriguing suggestion of religious modernity, one in direct contradiction to long-standing trends in the academic study of religion, is that modernity, under certain circumstances, *generates* the religious.

The second chapter begins our exploration of the concept of *reenchantment*, which comprises the bulk of the thesis. ‘Reenchantment’, as it is used, both within academic discourses and in the larger cultural context, often has more to do with a general understanding that the world has been *disenchanted* than with Max Weber’s foundational theory of *Entzauberung*, or rationalisation. The chapter engages with this misprision and suggests a two-tiered typology to which I have given the names *thin reenchantment* and *thick reenchantment*. Though both use the language of reenchantment, this typology really represents two divergent conceptual frameworks that offer radically different interpretations of history. As this division encompasses within it many of the most important ideas of the thesis, it is worth laying out the differences in some detail at this early point. Thin reenchantment envisions reenchantment as a contemporary movement *away from* disenchantment. This is reenchantment as a *reversal* of an already-accomplished disenchantment, or as the *recovery* of enchantments imagined to be lost in a tide of rationalisation that is simply *assumed*. Such a conception of reenchantment is problematic

in a number of ways, but its most grievous error is that it takes as a *given* the general thrust of received narratives of modernity as a wholly disenchanting process, which are in turn tied to an important form of modern self-understanding that is rooted in dubious ideological soil. As a whole, this use of the term ‘reenchantment’ is misguided and simply incoherent, given that, in many cases, its usage reinforces a monolithic picture of modernity that such reenchantments are evidently concerned with undermining.

This does not mean, however, that the concept of reenchantment is inherently flawed or that it possesses no analytical or theoretical value. Quite to the contrary, *properly understood*, the concept of reenchantment holds a great deal of promise for the study of religion in modernity. There is another way to conceptualise reenchantment in line with the insights about religion and modernity presented in the first chapter, one that is used with comparative rarity. Thick reenchantment envisions reenchantment and rationalisation in an ongoing and *dialectical* relationship in which each element exists always in relation to the other. Thick reenchantment posits a constant presence of enchanted elements within even the most rationalised contexts and questions the extent and effectiveness of modern rationalisation. However, in concert with the insights offered by ‘religious modernity’, thick reenchantment extends the logic of this dialectic in a challenging direction, leading towards the conclusion that, under certain circumstances, rationalisation *generates* its own enchantments or reenchantments. Disenchantment fuels reenchantment, which is then again broken down by disenchantment in an open-ended dialogue between the two. This does not mean that reenchantment and rationalisation are equal partners in this exchange; the dominant direction of modern history has been that of rationalisation while reenchantment tends to manifest itself in ephemeral, ever-shifting forms. Despite this, I am arguing more radically that reenchantment is as defining a characteristic of modernity as disenchantment. Again, I have no wish to argue that there has been no observable phenomena that can properly be described as ‘the disenchantment of the world’. Rationalisation, while powerful and pervasive, accounts, however, only for part of the story. Nor does it mean that reenchantment can return the world to a less rationalised time, though many who use the word ‘reenchantment’ argue precisely for such acts of *return* or *recovery*. Modernity, despite its mostly unacknowledged debts to the past, including its roots in the Judeo-Christian religious milieu, represents a radical innovation in human history; there can be no turning back the clock. These are *new forms* of enchantment that are constantly being generated

and regenerated within modernity. Thick reenchantment proposes, first and foremost, that the disenchantment of the world has never been, and can never be, complete. Thick reenchantment does not assume a *direction* or a *telos* to the processes of rationalisation or the counterprocess of reenchantment but argues merely there are necessarily cross- and counter-currents within the ongoing movement of rationalisation. This *dialectic of enchantment*, I am arguing, presents a new conceptual tool for a more nuanced study of religion in modernity.

Following upon the formulation of thick reenchantment, the third chapter is primarily a review of the extant academic discourse on reenchantment in light of the proposed typology from the second chapter. It is at one and the same time a literature review and a study of the discourse of reenchantment, which is spread across any number of disciplines, from geology to law to the study of religion. In exploring this discourse, the chapter also seeks to offer some insight into the myriad uses of the concept of reenchantment. Much of this discourse tends toward blatant apologetics in praise of the emergence of, or return to, various forms of religion, or in praise of the imagined epistemic and ideological freedoms of the postmodern turn, especially the free play of signifiers therein. Despite the polemical intent, such uses of reenchantment are bound to be self-defeating given that they do not take their critique of modernity far enough and instead rely upon received narratives of modern history that simply assume the reality and scope of rationalisation. Thus, the concept of reenchantment has been used to reinforce misguided and universalistic pictures of modernity. As part of this review, we will be examining more fully the logic of thick reenchantment and attempting to place the current discourse of reenchantment within a historical continuity of other moments when enchanted or reenchanting narratives of the world become more prominent. This search for historical antecedents to the current discourse in reenchantment grows naturally out of the conception of the dialectical nature of reenchantment, which postulates, if implicitly, the continual and identifiable existence of enchanted elements within modernity. To take what is likely the most important of these ‘moments’ – really periods of years or even decades – there are specific and telling points of similarity between the contemporary discourse of reenchantment and Romanticism. This is by no means to suggest that the historians, sociologists, physicists, philosophers, literary scholars, theologians and postmodern theorists who comprise the contemporary discourse will have the same lasting historical impact as Novalis, William Blake, Mary Shelley or Friedrich Schlegel, but instead to point to the continuities that exist across the centuries.

The final conclusion we can draw from this study of the uses of reenchantment is that such ‘moments’ arise during periods of crisis, unease, and accelerated cultural or technological change.

The fourth chapter is in many ways the theoretical heart of the thesis. In this chapter, we take on the work of the late philosopher and cultural critic Jean Baudrillard in light of the concept of thick reenchantment. Baudrillard is not an *example* of reenchantment, rather, there is a remarkable *congruence* between Baudrillard’s work and the theoretical frame of thick reenchantment. His considerable body of work, fractured and difficult as it is, can help us to *think* reenchantment, to further explore the idea of thick reenchantment. Though Baudrillard never uses the equivalent French term, ‘*réenchantement*’, his philosophy of history and his critique of modernity nonetheless constitute a compelling and challenging account of the necessary persistence of enchantment within a heavily disenchanted world. Baudrillard’s work is wide-ranging, his attention restless, his vision bordering on the nihilistic but at the same time remaining deeply Romantic. Yet his work is surprisingly coherent once we penetrate his stylistic tics and his deliberate obscurity. This coherence largely comes from the fact that, in an important sense, the whole of Baudrillard’s work, which stretches for almost forty years, is tied up in the concept of *symbolic exchange*, which he borrowed from the anthropologist Marcel Mauss and continued to develop in a variety of ways until his death in 2007. This chapter traces the movement of symbolic exchange throughout his work from the publication of his first major book in 1968. We will also be taking on Baudrillard’s philosophy of history and his enigmatic claim that history has ended, which is tied both to his construction of the *ruptural event* and to *symbolic exchange*. Both of these ideas offer valuable tools for the further exploration of the theoretical framework of thick reenchantment and offer myriad ways of relating the dialectic of enchantment to economics, history, and dominant forms of modern self-understanding. In taking on Baudrillard and his work, I am here intending to bring his powerful, if ambivalent, gaze into service for the study of religion, which has to date been reluctant to engage seriously with his ideas, due no doubt to both their inherent difficulty and the fact that Baudrillard has been consistently, even wilfully, misread within the academy as a whole.

The second section of the thesis, which comprises three chapters with a parallel structure, is intended as a demonstration of the claims of the first. After a brief intermediary

reflection, I set out to do this by offering *interpretations* of a number of important contemporary fictions from within the theoretical framework of thick reenchantment, helped considerably by Baudrillard's concept of symbolic exchange, and to a lesser extent by his work on ruptural events. The fifth chapter takes on the work of the Canadian novelist Douglas Coupland, best known for his seminal 1991 novel, *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*. In Coupland's case, we will be focusing on two important and interrelated themes. Coupland presents in his novels fleeting, flickering views of an enchanted world that lies underneath and behind the visible surface of the quotidian world. For Coupland, the ubiquitous presence of information and communication technologies has led, paradoxically, to a lack of narrative and moral coherence, which he calls 'denarration', in contemporary North American culture. Over and against this, Coupland presents a reevaluation of the communal practice of storytelling as a way of fostering community, working towards self-understanding, and ultimately, revealing and sharing the presence of the enchanted world. The chapter unpacks this tension between differing kinds of information exchange in light of Baudrillard's work and offers some suggestions on its possible meaning within the larger religious landscape. Next, our sixth chapter offers a reading of the confrontational American writer Chuck Palahniuk, best known for his incendiary 1997 novel, *Fight Club*. Palahniuk, like Coupland, seeks to recover the symbolic power of language through story; however, he moves into more radical, even disturbing terrain as he seeks to revalue willed *suffering* as a path to authentic knowledge and experience. The seventh and final chapter takes on a selection of films by the German director Tom Tykwer, best known for his kinetic 1998 film *Lola rennt*. Tykwer's films create a world in which magic plays an almost naturalistic role and celebrate what becomes the *literal* magic of interpersonal love in a fragmented and excessively mediated world. Tykwer's latest film, *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*, based on the highly influential novel of the same name by Patrick Süskind, tells the story of a supernaturally gifted killer in eighteenth-century France that is at the same time a powerful allegorical critique of Enlightenment rationalism and technique-obsessed rationalisation. The film operates almost entirely through an exploration of the dialectic of enchantment, which my reading will attempt to tease out in some detail. In the film, modernity not only produces scientific and intellectual progress but awakens sleeping monsters of unreason and allows them to thrive through new technologies and techniques of world mastery. An extended meditation on this film will serve as a platform on which to gather the many threads of this thesis into a single act of interpretation.

This thesis, then, is about a good number of things; however, we are primarily concerned with offering a potent new conceptual tool for the academic study of religion, one that can be used in the necessary task of rethinking the relationship between modernity and religion. Crucially, I am concerned with examining the potential value of a properly formulated reenchantment, aided by Baudrillard, as a tool for this ongoing examination. Given its interdisciplinary nature, the thesis is intended as a contribution to a number of fields. It is also meant, by way of example, to be a defence of the importance of literary and film interpretation as a *necessary* part of contemporary religious studies. A diverse method is needed in order to uncover religion within the interstices of contemporary culture, where the religious has taken root as traditional religious power structures have been radically altered within modernity. Finally, I am offering new readings of the work of three significant contemporary artists in the light of both Baudrillard's theory of symbolic exchange and the larger conceptual framework of thick reenchantment, which allow us to make new and compelling sense of the texts themselves.

It is of equal importance to underline what this thesis is *not* doing. Given the difficult ideological ground I shall be treading, it is perhaps necessary to point out that this is in no way intended to be an apologetic account of religion. Nor is it an apology for a universal, value-free modernity. To argue that there are necessary interconnections between religion and modernity implies no judgement one way or the other as to the social value or liability of either, but is rather to note that these connections exist and that any properly self-critical study of religion must take them seriously. The thesis, even given its conceptual nature, is limited in its geographical and historical scope and will be concerned almost exclusively with what I will call *European modernity* – an operational fiction or an ideal type – which serves as a shorthand for the experiences of modernity and modernisation not only in Western Europe proper but also in former European colonial nations from the United States and Canada to Australia and New Zealand. As such, the thesis is concerned almost exclusively with the intersections of religion and modernity in the places where modernity is *native*.

In addition, what follows is not an argument *for* or a defence of an observable cultural reenchantment, but rather an examination of reenchantment as a theoretical construct, a concept, or an interpretive framework that can greatly enrich the contemporary study of

religion. Indeed, the thesis is almost entirely conceptual, not out of a misguided humility or a preoccupation with analytical pretension, but rather out of necessity. There has been so much wrong-headed thinking about reenchantment that a thoroughgoing conceptual analysis is needed before exploring any cultural realities that might rightly be given the label of 'reenchantment'. The consistent misreadings and misuses of the word reenchantment, which has been used to refer to everything from the theology of Jonathan Edwards to the revaluation of the ancient Hindu element of *Akasha*, demands that such in-depth conceptual work be undertaken as a first step in a larger project. Given this, I am not concerned with presenting any new sociological or empirical evidence but rather with offering a new tool for the essential job of rethinking existing evidence concerning the relationship of modernity to religion. The thesis suggests, albeit largely implicitly, that this sort of constantly renewed self-criticism is in fact a necessary part of the modern project, and a necessary part of the modern study of religion. Let us begin.

CHAPTER THE FIRST: MODERNITY
AND THE RELIGIOUS, OR
RELIGIOUS MODERNITY

To say that 'religion exists, we have seen it manifest itself' is no less empty a proposition than that which, thirty years ago, consisted in saying, more or less: 'religion is an ideological phantom, proof of which is that it continues to dissolve in our rationalist society'.

Danièle Hervieu-Léger¹



Even as a simple phrase, 'religious modernity' is provocative. The juxtaposition of the words raises a number of difficult questions for a dominant strain of modern self-understanding which would interpret the phrase as fundamentally contradictory or, worse, simply meaningless. On this account, modernity and religion are *opposing* historical forces and to place them in concert is deeply problematic. The concept of religious modernity, as developed by sociologist of religion Danièle Hervieu-Léger, offers a new and challenging account of the relationship between religion and modernity (at least European modernity) which argues that the two are not *necessarily* incompatible or strictly antagonistic. Modernity is, Hervieu-Léger argues, under certain conditions, quite capable of *producing* its own religious forms and responses.

This chapter lays out the background for what follows. Firstly, we shall establish working definitions for both modernity and religion, or more precisely, the *religious*. Secondly, we shall draw out some of the ways in which religion and modernity are related at the conceptual level and explore how this has affected the academic *study* of religion. Thirdly, we shall approach the claim that an oppositional account of modernity and religion is *inadequate* from two different, but ultimately related, directions – the first conceptual, the second evidential. Conceptually, and more importantly, religion and modernity do not exist in a simple antagonism because both are *dynamic cultural constructions* that are deeply intertwined. 'Modernity' cannot displace 'religion' because there are no universal phenomena that answer to the name 'modernity' or 'religion'. To posit *any* fixed relationship between the two is to fundamentally misunderstand their nature. Evidentially, there are ample, if controversial, sociological data to indicate that some forms of modernity and some forms of religion can and do coexist comfortably and can even be mutually

¹ Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, trans. by Simon Lee (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 23.

supportive. Ultimately, we shall be arguing that the evidence, both conceptual and sociological, *requires* that the study of religion search for alternative conceptual frameworks in the pursuit of the religious in modern and contemporary cultures. Religious modernity, as a theoretical frame, offers a far more compelling and consistent account of the available evidence than that which is offered by the secularisation paradigm or any other existing theory that posits an absolute relationship between religion and modernity.

It is important to note, especially given the fraught ideological territory of the secularisation thesis, that I am here making no apologies for either religion or secular modernity, but am arguing simply that these interconnections exist and must be taken seriously. Furthermore, I have no wish to claim that the religious productions of modernity will lead to a steady state of religion in the West or to a reversal of the changes modernity has wrought on the religious landscape. If we can be sure of anything, we can be sure that the concrete world of the past is no longer available. Modernity, for all its unacknowledged debts to various traditions, represents a genuine innovation in human history. Nonetheless modernity must be understood in *relation* to rather than in *opposition* to those things it claims to reject or surpass. The lasting importance of such traditional inheritances within modernity remains unclear. Precisely what this means for both modernity and religion remains an open question to which we may hope, at the end of this investigation, to have glimpsed an answer.

What is Modernity?

I am restoring to our silent and apparently immobile soils its rifts, its instability, its flaws, and it is the same ground that is once more stirring under our feet.

Michel Foucault²

The word ‘modernity’ or the period of history known as the ‘modern age’ calls to mind a specific set of associations, most of which are related to the European context: the self-conscious rejection of tradition; the end of monarchy; the beginnings of democracy and the nation-state; the rise of capitalism; growing social equality; the central significance of the individual subject; exploration and the early stages of European colonialism; urbanisation; industrialisation; scientific rationalism; and, most importantly for our current concerns, rationalisation and secularisation. Such common associations leave fundamentally untouched a very basic question: what is modernity? Is it an historical era? A simple narrative? A philosophy of history? An ideology? Is modernity a universal outside of the

² Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, trans. unknown (London: Routledge Classics, 1966), xxvi.

influences of culture? If modernity is a distinct period in history, *when* did it begin? With the fracturing of the onto-theological synthesis in the late Middle Ages?³ With the Renaissance? The invention of the printing press? The Reformation?⁴ The Cartesian *cogito*? The Enlightenment? Kant's *sapere aude*? With the publication of *Hamlet* or *Don Quixote*? Or was it significantly later, with Nietzsche's pronouncement of the death of God? With the staging of Igor Stravinski's *Rites of Spring* in 1913?⁵ Or is it the case that we have never been modern?⁶

From the myriad of possible conceptualisations of modernity, I will be adopting here that of Frederic Jameson in his lengthy essay, *A Singular Modernity*, which views modernity as a *narrative matter*:

Modernity is not a concept, philosophical or otherwise, but a narrative category. In that case, we will not only wish to abandon the vain attempt to formulate a conceptual account of modernity as such; but we will find ourselves likely to wonder whether the modernity effect is perhaps not best reserved exclusively for the rewriting of moments of the past, which is to say of previously existing versions or narratives of the past.⁷

Identifying modernity as a style of narrative rather than a definable span of time has distinct advantages, not least that it avoids the tedious and largely unnecessary task of establishing a starting point for modernity. Jameson's move also highlights that modernity is more a *dynamic interpretive framework* through which to view the past than an historical period.

³ This is Louis Dupré's argument in *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). He concludes: 'Only when the early humanist notion of human creativity came to form a combustible mixture with the negative conclusions of nominalist theology did it cause the cultural explosion that we refer to as modernity. Its impact shattered the organic unity of the Western view of the real'. Dupré, *Passage*, 3.

⁴ Mark C. Taylor makes this argument in *After God*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007). Taylor, of course, is not the first to underline the absolute importance of the Reformation for modernity. He is preceded in this reading by Max Weber, Alan Gilbert and Peter Berger, to name only a few. Taylor concludes, 'Indeed, it is no exaggeration to insist that not only the modern but also the postmodern world effectively began with the Protestant revolution of the sixteenth century ... there is an unrecognized religious dimension to globalisation that does not reflect a generic spirituality but is Protestant through and through'. Taylor, *After*, 3.

⁵ This is the challenging suggestion of Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Boston: Mariner Books, 1989). For Eksteins, Stravinski's opera prefaced World War I, in which he finds the epitome of the modern: 'The Great War was the psychological turning point, for Germany and for modernism as a whole. The urge to create and the urge to destroy changed places. The urge to destroy was intensified; the urge to create became increasingly abstract'. Eksteins, *Rites*, 328.

⁶ This is the central point made in Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). Modernity, he argues, has never lived up to the standards it has set for itself. He concludes that scientific societies have instead maintained a premodern view of the world. He asks, 'How could we be capable of disenchanting the world, when every day our laboratories and our factories populate the world with hundreds of hybrids stranger than those of the day before?' Latour, *Never*, 115.

⁷ Frederic Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002), 40-41. This is a fitting path for Jameson, who writes elsewhere that narrative is the 'the central function or *instance* of the human mind'. Frederic Jameson, 'The Vanishing Mediator: Narrative Structure in Max Weber', *New German Critique* 1 (Winter 1974): 69. Emphasis in original.

This, however, only gets us so far. It tells us nothing about the specific *contents* of the narrative. What, exactly, are the stories of modernity? The first clue to this can be found in the etymology of the term itself. In *The Passage to Modernity*, Louis Dupré argues that ‘modern’ implies a structure or a philosophy of history:

The modern age was the first to distinguish itself from all others by a time indicator: *modo* – ‘now’. Anxious to assert its superiority to past epochs, its culture exchanged the older claim of upholding a tradition for the one of surpassing it. A different sense of time directly followed the new sense of freedom. An unprecedented awareness grew that what humans accomplish in the transitoriness of time definitively changes the very nature of human life. History thereby suddenly acquired an existential significance that it had not possessed before ... Paradoxically, the modern orientation toward the future created a more acute awareness of the past.⁸

This carries over into the realm of the self-identification of the modern subject, as Mark C. Taylor argues: ‘Whether considered philosophically, theologically, or historically, modernity presupposes self-reflexivity – to be modern, it is necessary to regard oneself as *different* from others who have gone before’.⁹ Gustavo Benavides claims further that this requires a necessary act of *will*: ‘a condition of modernity presupposes an act of self-conscious distancing from a past or a situation regarded as naïve’, a process which he notes is necessarily open-ended.¹⁰ Modernity can thus be seen as a narrative category or strategy that tells the story of the present as a decisive *break* from the past, as a *rejection* of tradition and an *evolution* beyond what has gone before. This is arguably a common, even dominant, form of modern self-understanding. However, to view modernity in such a way is to misunderstand its true density and complexity. I want to argue instead that European modernity, while at the same time accounting for genuine innovations in history, remains deeply intertwined with its historical inheritance and is not easily separated from the traditions it claims to reject. Modernity, then, as we will be using it here, refers to narratives of the present that trade on the rejection of the past, yet exist always in tension with the fact that these narratives are historically contingent and indebted to that past.

⁸ Dupré, *Passage*, 145. The word and its delineation of past from present has its roots in the particular relationship between Christianity and history, which turns on the Incarnation as the singular event upon which all of history turns, as Jameson notes: “Modernity” as a concept is so often associated with modernity that it comes as something of a shock to find the word “modern” in use as far back as the fifth century AD. In the use of Pope Galasius I (494/5) it simply distinguishes the contemporaries from the older period of the Church fathers, and implies no particular privilege (save for the chronological one) for the present. Present and immediate past are here in continuity, both of them sharply distinguished from the unique historical time in which witnesses saw Jesus alive’. Jameson, *Singular*, 17.

⁹ Taylor, *After*, 45.

¹⁰ Gustavo Benavides, ‘Modernity,’ in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 187.

The mention of a specifically *European* modernity also makes it clear that we are treating modernity as a multifaceted cultural and historical construct rather than an ahistorical universal. Jameson hints at this tension above with the conjunction of the word ‘singular’ in his title and the multivalent nature of the modernity he describes. There are some theorists and observers who argue that, because of the variations in the experience and reality of modernity, it is more accurate to speak of modernities in the plural. Benavides lays out the basics of this position:

even as we identify the characteristics that constitute modernity, we must keep in mind, first, that those characteristics are not found all at once; second, that they tend to coexist with and in some cases generate opposite forces, namely, a countermodernity; third, that instead of a modernity we may find modernities; and fourth, that the concept should not necessarily be understood in a teleological manner.¹¹

Without a doubt, Benavides’ conception of multiple modernities is compelling. It is also rather unwieldy, as evidenced in the fact that, in practice, he continues to write of ‘modernity’ in the singular. Like Jameson and Benavides, I will be retaining the singular ‘modernity’ to refer to a dynamic discourse that has taken a myriad of forms across cultures and over time. Benavides’ analysis also underlines crucial aspects of modernity that we cannot overlook, not least that significant forms of modern self-understanding view the modern world as the culmination of an inexorable march of history as *progress*. Most importantly for our purposes, we must recognise, as does Benavides, that modernity can and does generate that which is *opposed* to it.

It should be noted that there is definite and long-standing opposition to this view of a dynamic modernity. Dupré, for one, presents us with a view of modernity as a singular occurrence *in* history:

Modernity is an *event* that has transformed the relation between the cosmos, its transcendent source, and its human interpreter. To explain this as the outcome of historical precedents is to ignore its most significant quality – namely, its success in rendering all rival views of the real obsolete. Its innovative power made modernity, which began as a local Western phenomenon, a universal project capable of forcing its theoretical and practical principles on all but the most isolated civilisations. ‘Modern’ has become the predicate of a unified world culture.¹²

¹¹ Benavides, ‘Modernity’, 189.

¹² Dupré, *Passage*, 249. Emphasis in original.

Though there is much to admire in Dupré's telling of modernity, his claim that modernity renders all rival views obsolete is difficult to reconcile with the experiences of history. While modernity doubtless provides powerful narratives, there remains even now, in a period of rapidly globalising modernity, room for conflicts between rival conceptions and experiences of modernity, some of which coexist more or less comfortably with religious notions that a universal modernity claims to have discarded. Such conflicts of interpretation are nothing new; the stories of modernity has long been bitterly disputed territory, as philosopher Charles Taylor notes: 'the narratives of modernity have been questioned, contested, attacked, since their inception in the eighteenth century'.¹³ That this questioning continues today is amply illustrated by the convolutions of the postmodern turn, which has sought, with not inconsiderable success, to challenge the received picture of an ahistorical modernity free of the influences of language, culture and ideology.

Taylor, in his recent book *A Secular Age*, evocatively labels such universalising narratives 'subtraction stories':

I mean by this stories of modernity in general, and secularity in particular, which explain them by human beings having lost, or sloughed off, or liberated themselves from certain earlier, confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations of knowledge. What emerges from this process – modernity or secularity – is to be understood in terms of underlying features of human nature which were there all along, but had been impeded by what is now set aside.¹⁴

For Taylor, these narratives have had wide-ranging consequences: 'our sense of where we are is crucially defined in part by a story of how we got there ... And just because we describe where we are in relation to the journey, we can misdescribe it grievously by misidentifying the itinerary. This is what "subtraction" accounts of modernity have in fact done'.¹⁵ Against this, Taylor argues, as Benavides argues, as I do, that modernity is a product of specific circumstances that have less to do with the discovery of inherent truths and more to do with culture, creativity, and circumstance. Given this, Taylor suggests that what is needed is a narrative of modernity that assumes no *telos* but rather appreciates the complexity of the historical and cultural factors that led to the rise of modernity: 'Instead of seeing it as the scene of a two-sided battle, between "tradition", especially religious tradition, and secular humanism, we might see it as a kind of free-for-all'.¹⁶ For Taylor, these

¹³ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 717.

¹⁴ Taylor, *Secular*, 22.

¹⁵ Taylor, *Secular*, 29.

¹⁶ Taylor, *Secular*, 374.

narratives underestimate historical continuity in their eagerness to highlight change and innovation. Similarly, the sociologist Linda Woodhead argues:

One of the great problems with the catch-all universals ‘modernity’, ‘postmodernity’ and ‘premodernity’ is that they blind us to the interplays of past and present. They assume that history can be divided up into neatly bounded homogenous chunks, when in truth no one of these eras is uniform in either socio-political or cultural terms, or unaffected by another. Premodernity is carried into modernity as well as postmodernity, and modernity is constantly traditionalised, whilst tradition is constantly modernised.¹⁷

Though I have little interest here in engaging with Taylor’s intriguing examination of modern ‘exclusive humanism’ from his Catholic-informed theological standpoint, I will be adopting the language of ‘subtraction stories’ as elegant shorthand for the evolutionary tendency within the narratives of modernity. Taylor’s very sensible suggestions for thinking outside this tendency foreshadow an important point of discussion to which we shall shortly come: what consequences does the challenging of simplistic pictures of modernity carry for the *study* of both modernity and religion? Before we can attempt to answer that question, however, there are others we must address first.

What is Religion?

Has the term religion ever merely named, then designated, and, finally, conceptualised something remotely specific? ... Nothing in the history of doctrinal or confessional theology, let alone in the nineteenth century invention of the science and history of religion and its twentieth century successors ... suggests that this was ever the case.

Hent de Vries¹⁸

Even if it were not an important question internal to the study of religion, the definition of religion is something we need to grapple with for the simple reason that it is directly implicated in the fraught relationship of religion and modernity. If religion played a part in the past that modernity wishes to surpass, as is undeniably the case in the European context, different conceptions of religion will produce different perceptions of modernity. ‘Religion’, as an *idea*, is inextricably linked with the narrative of modernity as different from a past that was in some important sense ‘more religious’ than the present. ‘Religion’ is also a *modern invention*. This link has been well established within the field. To cite but one scholar who has recognised this, Jonathan Z. Smith famously (and ungrammatically) argued: ‘While there is a staggering amount of data, of phenomena, of human experiences and expressions that might be characterised in one culture or another, by one criterion or another, as religious – *there is no data for religion*. Religion is solely the creation of the

¹⁷ Linda Woodhead, ‘Religion and Past Modernities’, *Cultural Values* 3, 2 (April 1999): 123.

¹⁸ Hent de Vries, ‘Introduction: Why Still “Religion”?’, in *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, ed. Hent de Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 2-3.

scholar's study'.¹⁹ To argue that 'religion' as a concept is a product of modernity is not to deny, however, that it cannot accurately describe certain aspects of lived human cultures. I contend instead that the two concepts exist in a dense interplay that denies any straightforward account of their relationship.

There is perhaps as much debate on the question of definition today as there ever has been, particularly in relation to the idea of 'world religions'.²⁰ A cursory search of the literature yields scores, if not hundreds, of different, often contradictory, definitions of 'religion'. Hent de Vries, in a recent essay, hints at the perennial difficulties when he describes the word as a 'semantic black hole whose "absence-presence" lets no single light escape'.²¹ As was true of the singular form or 'modernity', a general concept of religion is, nonetheless, necessary as an organising framework for the study of religion, or at least as a way to limit the field of exploration. In this spirit, Smith argues that religion 'is a second-order, generic concept that plays the same role as establishing a disciplinary horizon that a concept such as "language" plays in linguistics and "culture" plays in anthropology. There can be no disciplined study of religion without such a horizon'.²² Given this, we need not read the squabbling over definition as a signal of the inherent weakness or uselessness of the concept, which has managed to survive calls for its demise.²³ We could just as easily read the ongoing debate as an indicator that the search for a convincing concept of religion is *in itself* a valuable form of scholarship.

The academic study of religion needs a definition, or definitions, that avoid the conceptual pitfalls associated with the subtraction stories. Though there have been other more or less

¹⁹ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), xi. Emphasis in original.

²⁰ See Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) for a thorough and intriguing recent discussion of this problem.

²¹ De Vries, 'Introduction', 8.

²² Jonathan Z. Smith, 'Religion', in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 281. It should be noted that definitions carry with them real-world consequences, as James Beckford notes: 'in certain circumstances, definitions have a broadly political significance in the sense of relating to struggles for power'. James A. Beckford, 'The Politics of Defining Religion in Secular Society: From a Taken-for-Granted Institution to a Contested Resource', in *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion: Contexts, Concepts and Contests*, ed. Jan Platvoet and Arie L. Molendijk (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 23.

²³ Wilfred Cantwell Smith argued in 1963 for abandoning the term 'religion' altogether. He writes, 'the word, and the concepts, should be dropped ... This is on the grounds not merely that it would be helpful to do so; but more strongly, that it is misleading to retain them.' Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 50. Though he argues his case eloquently, Smith was without a doubt overconfident when he concluded of 'religion' and 'religions': 'I am bold enough to speculate whether these terms will not have in fact disappeared from serious writing and careful speech within twenty-five years'. Smith, *Meaning*, 195.

successful attempts at defining religion outside of the reductive logic of evolutionary narratives of modernity,²⁴ it is the radically desubstantialised definition offered by Hervieu-Léger with which we shall be operating for the purposes of this thesis. Her work is influenced primarily by Emile Durkheim's foundational theories on the social functions of religion but also incorporates ideas from Michel de Certeau and Maurice Halbwachs. Hervieu-Léger sets out to resist the sorts of essentialism that have grown out both substantive and functional definitions of religion, taking a big step in this direction with the simple shift from defining 'religion' to defining '*the religious*'. Echoing Smith, she qualifies her definition as an ideal type, or 'as a tool, a practical instrument designed to aid the researcher in his attempt to think socioreligious change, as well as to think the modern mutation of the religious'.²⁵ Her *formal* definition, in its clearest formulation, is as follows: 'one designates as "religious" all forms of believing that justify themselves, first and foremost, upon the claim of their inscription within a *heritage of belief*'.²⁶

Hervieu-Léger operates under a very broad understanding of what constitutes *believing*, an understanding partly indebted to the work of de Certeau:

The term denotes the body of convictions – both individual and collective – which are not susceptible to verification, to experimentation, and, more broadly, to the modes of recognition and control that characterise knowledge, but owe their validity to the meaning and coherence they give to the subjective experience of those who hold them ... [believing includes] not merely beliefs in the accepted sense, but all the resources of observance and language and the involuntary action which such belief in its multiple forms displays: believing is belief in action, as it is experienced.²⁷

As this conceptualisation of religion is inseparable from tradition, which values continuity and stability over innovation, it is worth further noting the connections that Hervieu-Léger draws between the two:

²⁴ To cite two recent examples, in *After God*, Mark C. Taylor offers the following definition of religion, couched in network theory: 'Religion is an emergent, complex, adaptive network of symbols, myths, and rituals that, on the one hand, figure schemata of feeling, thinking, and acting in ways that lend life meaning and purpose, while on the other, disrupt, dislocate, and disfigure every stabilising structure'. Taylor, *After*, 12. In a more radical vein, in a recent paper, Douglas Ezzy attempts to confront the 'anthropocentric' tendency in the academy with the following definition: 'Religion is an etiquette of relationships with other-than-human persons'. Douglas Ezzy, 'Religion as an Etiquette of Relationships', Keynote Address, 'Alternative Expressions of the Numinous' conference, 17 August 2008.

²⁵ Danielè Hervieu-Léger, 'Religion as Memory: Reference to Tradition and the Constitution of a Heritage of Belief in Modern Societies', in *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, ed. Hent de Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 253.

²⁶ Hervieu-Léger, 'Reference', 256. Emphasis in original. She restates this definition in differing forms in different places, formulating it in her major work, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, as follows: 'a religion is an ideological, practical and symbolic system through which consciousness, both individual and collective, of belonging to a particular chain of belief is constituted, maintained, and controlled'. Hervieu-Léger, *Religion*, 82.

²⁷ Hervieu-Léger, *Religion*, 72.

What defines tradition (while, in fact, it serves present interests) is that it confers transcendent authority on the past ... All that constitute tradition in the proper meaning of the term are the parts of this stock whose value is linked to the continuity between the past and the present of which they are the evidence and which on this account they are passed on. The invocation of such continuity may be fairly crude ('it's always been done') or highly formalized, viz. the case of all doctrinal tradition ... tradition describes the body of representations, images, theoretical and practical intelligence, behaviour, attitudes and so on that a group or society accepts in the name of the *necessary* continuity between the past and the present. Thus what comes from the past is only constituted as tradition insofar as anteriority constitutes a title of authority in the present. Whether the past in question is relatively short or very long is of secondary significance. The degree of ancientness confers an extra value on tradition, but it is not what initially establishes its social authority.²⁸

This definition, which is perhaps more radical than it might seem at first glance, offers, for a number of reasons, a substantial improvement over other existing definitions of religion. Firstly, Hervieu-Léger avoids entirely the question of the supernatural. Though it would be folly to reject entirely the idea that what is commonly called religion or the religious is closely tied to the supernatural, however it may be embodied, insisting upon the supernatural is also needlessly exclusive of other things that are widely considered as religious. As we shall see shortly, the focus on the supernatural, often more specifically on the example of the Abrahamic God, is a product of the theological and Eurocentric biases of early studies of religion rather than of any thorough consideration of what 'religion' entails.²⁹ Dropping the supernatural aspect of the religious also allows for fruitful speculation on whether or not something like a deeply-held and tradition-bound nationalism – I am thinking particularly here of the case of American rhetoric of patriotism, particularly in the wake of the putative 'war on terror' – is more than just a quasi-religious phenomenon.³⁰ If such things can be formally considered as religious, this offers new questions for the study of contemporary religion and further challenges simplistic

²⁸ Hervieu-Léger, *Religion*, 86-87. Emphasis in original.

²⁹ The persistence of the supernatural in definitions of religion is reflected in the fact that both Steve Bruce and Rodney Stark, arguing on opposite sides of the secularisation debate, employ the category in recent attempts to define 'religion'. Stark's definition: '*Religion consists of explanations of existence based on supernatural assumptions and including statements about the nature of the supernatural and about ultimate meaning*'. Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 4. Emphasis in original. Bruce's definition: 'Religion, then, consists of *beliefs, actions and institutions which assume the existence of supernatural entities with powers of action, or impersonal powers or processes possessed of moral purpose*. Such a formulation seems to encompass what ordinary people mean when they talk of religion.' Steve Bruce, 'The Pervasive World-Views: Religion in Pre-Modern Britain', *The British Journal of Sociology* 48, 4 (December 1997): 668. Emphasis in original.

³⁰ This suggestion is a natural outgrowth of Hervieu-Léger's own work in that it is deeply informed by the work of Jean Séguéy on 'metaphoric religion', which argues that metaphoric religion is one of the driving forces in modern religion. See Jean Séguéy, *Conflit et Utopie, ou Réformer L'église: Parcours Wéberien en Douze Essais* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1999), in particular the chapter 'L'approche Wéberienne des Phénomènes Religieux', 69-104. See also Hervieu-Léger, *Religion*, 66-75.

separations of modernity and the religious. Secondly, Hervieu-Léger's concerted effort to avoid reiterating either a functional or a substantive definition of religion allows her, for the most part, to avoid the ideological and historical mistakes of both. William Swatos and Kevin J. Christano note a connection between functional definitions and the reductionist tendencies of the subtraction stories: 'on the basis of a functional definition of religion, religion has appeared to those theorists denuded of almost all the functions it had previously appeared to perform. In this view, religion harked back to some prior level of human evolution and was now uselessly appended to the modern cultural repertoire'.³¹ Thirdly, and more significantly for our current interests, Hervieu-Léger's shift in focus to tradition interrogates directly the dominant self-understanding of modernity as a *break* from tradition. This is something she recognises: 'To put the act of believing at the centre of one's thinking is to preliminarily admit that believing does in fact constitute a major dimension of modernity. This idea is far from evident'.³² What she offers, then, in addition to a self-conscious challenge to the subtraction stories, is a way to *think* or study the religious while paying proper attention to the intertwining of the religious and modernity.

What does this mean for the relationship of religion and modernity and the modern *study* of religion? The point is simple, though its consequences are anything but: there is no such thing as a universal modernity and no such thing as a universal religion, and there can certainly be no one such thing without the other. On a conceptual level, modernity requires religion for its meaning and religion is itself a modern creation. To lock the two into a static relationship *of any kind* is to draw conceptual and cultural lines where there is only a constantly shifting borderland between two indeterminate, amorphous and imperfect models of broad cultural realities. However, as we will see, the study of religion has long informed, and been informed by, dominant narratives of modernity that simply assume such static relationships.

³¹ William H. Swatos, Jr. and Kevin J. Christano, 'Secularisation Theory: The Course of a Concept', *Sociology of Religion* 60, 3 (Autumn 1999): 215.

³² Hervieu-Léger, 'Reference', 254.

The Subtraction Stories and the Study of Religion

Why did this apparent reversal occur in such a short span of time? How could so many intelligent people have been so wrong about religion and the modern world? The short answer to these complicated questions is that influential commentators, critics, and theorists simply misunderstood the relationship of religion to modernisation and secularity.

Mark C. Taylor³³

The convoluted conceptual relationship between religion and modernity is inscribed within the field of inquiry itself. The roots of the academic study of religion are complex and even contradictory. Mike Grimshaw captures this with his recent description of the academic study of religion as ‘a Western-derived, Enlightenment-derived, theologically-derived discipline’.³⁴ Religious studies carries with it both the progressive dream of modernity, usually in the form of Enlightenment rationalism, and the problematic religious inheritance of European modernity. However it might cast itself, the modern study of religion, like modernity itself, has deep roots in the Christian tradition. This has had a number of consequences. Firstly, institutional Christianity has long been held, either consciously or unconsciously, as the exemplar of what constitutes not only a religion, but a highly-developed (as opposed to ‘primitive,’ ‘primal’ or ‘archaic’) religion. As the first modern scholars of religion were almost exclusively European – more particularly, British, French and German – this identification is perhaps only natural. This bias, which has manifested itself in the study of religion in a tendency to focus on organised, monotheistic forms of religion, blinded such study not only to formally atheistic traditions like Taoism, Confucianism and some elite forms of Buddhism, but also to more diffuse, extra-institutional religious practices in Western cultures.

There are, in addition, more subtle and ideologically weighted connections between the modern study of religion and the religious milieu out of which it grew, a largely Protestant theology in particular. Sociologist Bryan Wilson summarises this influence:

Some of the basic categories of analysis were all too evidently drawn from Christian theological concepts, such as the distinction between the sacred and the profane; this-worldly and other-worldly; clergy and laity; and orthodoxy and heresy. Other categories, such as particularism and universalism, may have had a less tainted provenance, but in their application to the religious field, it was perhaps too easy for sociologists to assume that the western case – that is the Christian case – provided the paradigm by which all of these cases must be analysed.³⁵

Mark C. Taylor argues that these theological roots and biases remain even today deeply ingrained in the academic study of religion: ‘The Cartesian promise of a proper method is,

³³ Taylor, *After*, 2.

³⁴ Mike Grimshaw, ‘Regionalism or Provincialism? Beyond the Crisis in Religious Studies’, paper delivered at the New Zealand Association for the Study of Religion Annual Conference, 4 July 2008.

³⁵ Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 24.

in fact, a secularised version of theology's dream of an unconditional principle of principles. For those with eyes to see, theology casts a long – perhaps inescapable – shadow'.³⁶ Though he does rather badly overstate the case, it must be acknowledged that there are deeply-rooted theological biases within the academic study of religion, and any such study must be aware constantly of not only these ideological biases but those that have their provenance elsewhere.

There are prejudices derived from Enlightenment rationalism that are equally ingrained in the foundations of the academic study of religion. How have these roots manifested themselves? There can be little doubt that the earliest sociologists argued that religion would eventually *disappear* in the face of scientific rationalism. There can also be little doubt that they did so for questionable reasons. Their conclusions about this disappearance may have been partly due to their observations of the cultural realities of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe. Their reasoning was due also to the decidedly unscientific motivations of many of the scholars themselves, which are tied more or less directly into the subtraction stories. Much of the earliest sociology, in particular that of Auguste Comte, was motivated by a deep *hostility* to religion. Wilson points to the fact that this ran far deeper than a mere suspicion of the religious: 'It would not perhaps be too much to say that the founders of sociology ... saw the new science ... as a replacement of the theological interpretation of social phenomena'.³⁷ That this did not happen goes without saying and such crude, normative thinking is rare among contemporary sociologists of religion;³⁸ the subtraction stories nevertheless continue to influence the study of religion in other ways.

The conception of religion as a *survival* from earlier periods of history is a further ideological consequence of the narrative of modernity as a break from tradition that has become deeply implicated in the modern study of religion, as Mark C. Taylor notes:

Modernisation and secularisation, according to this argument, are inseparable: as societies modernise, they become more secular. Moreover, this process, many argued, is inevitable and irreversible. It is important to stress that this line of analysis is not merely descriptive but also normative – the disappearance of religion

³⁶ Mark C. Taylor, 'Introduction', in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 13.

³⁷ Wilson, *Religion*, 1-3.

³⁸ Nonetheless, the language of disappearance lasted well into the twentieth century. As late as 1966, Anthony Wallace wrote, 'The evolutionary future of religion is extinction ... Belief in supernatural powers is doomed to die out, all over the world, as the result of the increasing adequacy and diffusion of scientific knowledge'. Quoted in Rodney Stark and Laurence R. Iannaccone, 'A Supply-Side Reinterpretation of the "Secularisation" of Europe', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 33, 3 (1994): 230.

tends to be regarded as a mark of human progress. When explicitly articulated, different versions of the philosophy of history that underlie this theory of modernisation chart the movement from the primitive to the modern, the infantile to the mature, instinct to reason, superstition to enlightenment, and bondage to freedom. Within any such schema, the so-called return of the religious during the latter half of the twentieth century and opening decades of the new millennium can only be regarded as a regression that threatens to plunge the world into a new primitivism made all the more dangerous by the destructive potential of modern technology.³⁹

E. B Tylor, one of the earliest historians of religion, formulated in the 1870s a ‘doctrine of survivals’ which he felt accounted for the elements within culture that lagged behind in an assumed evolutionary process.⁴⁰ James Frazer, working a few decades later, showed a similar disdain for the religious in the face of rational scientific knowledge, which came into the world in a historical progression from ignorance to enlightenment, from simplicity to complexity. Magic, for Frazer, was displaced by religion, which would in turn eventually be replaced by science.⁴¹ In the face of this unilinear and unidirectional progress, any magical or religious aspects of the modern world naturally appear as potentially dangerous holdovers from earlier periods. William James, in his classic work, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, noted this tendency even before Frazer published his immensely influential (and largely erroneous) study of ‘primitive’ cultures, *The Golden Bough*. James notes, ‘There is a notion in the air about us that religion is probably only an anachronism, a case of the “survival”, an atavistic relapse into a mode of thought which humanity in its more enlightened examples has outgrown’.⁴² James rejects this reductionist argument: ‘I

³⁹ Taylor, *After*, 131-132. There is widespread recognition of the inherent biases in the early study of religion. Hervieu-Léger notes it: ‘the decline of religion was not only presented as an observable fact ... it also represented a normative horizon of research itself and was supposed to contribute, by its critical exigencies, toward ensuring the triumph of reason over illusion’. Hervieu-Léger, ‘Religion and Modernity in the French Context: For a New Approach to Secularisation’, *Sociological Analysis* 51, S (1990): S18-19. In the interest of fairness, I should note that Hans Kippenberg argues quite the opposite of the history of religions in the period leading up to the 1930s: ‘While their subjects ranged from nature mysticism, souls, rituals, magic, mysteries, redemption, the experience of power, social morality, rejection of the world, and ecstasy, they restored to modern society its other, officially ignored half: the power of life that does not serve progress ... Not only did they see modern civilisation itself as a product of the history of religions, they also discovered a permanent world of non-enlightened thought and feeling beneath its surface’. Hans G. Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age*, trans. by Barbara Harshaw (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 193-194.

⁴⁰ See Daniel L. Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 23-24 for more detail.

⁴¹ See Pals, *Eight*, 44 for a summation of Frazer’s take on the question of religion as a survival. Frazer made this accusation in no uncertain terms: ‘A mass, if not the majority of people in every civilised country is still living in a state of intellectual savagery, that, in fact, the smooth surface of cultured society is sapped and mined by superstition ... We appear to be standing on a volcano which may at any moment break out in smoke and fire and spread ruin and devastation among the gardens and palaces of ancient culture wrought so laboriously by the hands of many generations’. Quoted in Kippenberg, *Discovering*, 96. However, Frazer’s overall view was more nuanced than it may appear from this. He writes also: ‘We shall never understand the long course of human history if we persist in measuring mankind in all ages and in all countries by the standard, perhaps excellent, but certainly narrow, or the modern English middle class’. Quoted in Kippenberg, *Discovering*, 92.

⁴² William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 363.

unhesitatingly repudiate the survival-theory of religion, as being founded on an egregious mistake. It does not follow, because our ancestors made so many errors of fact and mixed them up with their religion, that we should therefore leave off being religious at all'.⁴³ In this, James anticipates the stance of a far more nuanced understanding of religion in modernity.

James wrote more than a century ago, but the idea of religion-as-survival has proved to be remarkably persistent. How else are we to explain the common assertion within some schools of postmodern thought that the contemporary world is witnessing a *return* of religion in the later days of the twentieth century?⁴⁴ In this, the postmodern is affirming that which it claims to reject, that is a universalist picture of modernity, in which the replacement of religion played a crucial role. Taylor states this crucial connection clearly: 'secularity and religion are coemergent and codependent. It is, therefore, misleading to speak of a "return of" or "return to" religion. Religion does not return because it never goes away; to the contrary, religion haunts society itself, and culture even – perhaps especially – when it seems to be absent'.⁴⁵ There is a subtle but unmistakable echo of the doctrine of survival in Taylor's use of the language of haunting, which implies an unwelcome visit from the spirit of something that has not quite died. Taylor here inadvertently underscores just how deeply the idea of survival has permeated the study of religion at the same time he is attempting to refute it.

Moving beyond the earliest days of the sociology or history of religions, this fundamental relationship between modernity and religion is revealed most clearly in the contentious question of *secularisation*. We have seen already that the concepts of the modern and that of the secular are closely related. They are also similar internally in that, like modernity, the secular is rooted in the idea of time and differentiation. The word is derived from the Latin

⁴³ James, *Varieties*, 370.

⁴⁴ To cite a single example, Gianni Vattimo writes: 'In religion, something that we had thought irrevocably forgotten is made present again, a dormant trace is reawakened, a wound re-opened, the repressed returns and what we took to be an *Überwindung* (overcoming, realization, and thus a setting aside) is no more than a *Verwindung*, a long convalescence that has once again to come to terms with the indelible trace of its sickness ... We therefore want to follow this trace of the trace, to take as constitutive the very fact of its return, its representation, its calling to us with a voice that we are sure we have heard before'. Gianni Vattimo, 'The Trace of the Trace', in *Religion*, ed. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 79-80.

⁴⁵ Taylor, *After*, 132.

saeculum, which means, among other things, an age.⁴⁶ In this section, we will begin our investigation of the secularisation paradigm on a purely *conceptual* level, which by no means frees us from the fact that the secularisation thesis remains highly contested. Even the question of whether or not there has ever been a ‘secularisation thesis’ is a matter of considerable debate. More than a simple description but less than a unified theory, ‘secularisation’, is, as David Martin notes, ‘semantically rich, contradictory and paradoxical, as well as saturated in resonances, many of them to do with the immanent direction of history’.⁴⁷ Wilson, one of the most influential supporters of the secularisation thesis, lays out the scope of the term:

Secularisation is a word, which, for sociologists, is as much a concept as a mere descriptive term. The phrase, *the secularisation thesis*, denotes a set of propositions, often loosely stated, which amount almost to a body of theory concerning processes of social change that occur over an unspecified period of historical time ... the thesis itself implies that there are processes of society ‘becoming more secular’ which extend backward in time over the long course of human history, and which have occurred intermittently, and with varying incidence and rapidity.⁴⁸

Though there are some objections,⁴⁹ there is general agreement that this immanent direction of history, viewed by the classical secularisation thesis, involved the *necessary* decline of religion in modernity. Peter Berger, whose 1967 book *The Sacred Canopy* is a classic statement of the secularisation thesis but who has since reversed his position, describes the classical theory: ‘Modernisation necessarily leads to a decline in religion, both in society and in the minds of individuals’.⁵⁰ Even if the classical sociological view of secularisation was not universally tied to the idea of religious decline, it is this version of the theory that has taken root in larger discourses on religion, as Gregory Baum notes: ‘The thesis that modernity is necessarily at odds with religion and will therefore reduce its

⁴⁶ For a genealogy of the term in European languages, see Jan N. Bremmer, ‘Secularisation: Notes Toward a Genealogy’, in *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, ed. Hent de Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 432–437.

⁴⁷ David Martin, *On Secularisation: Towards a New General Theory* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 58.

⁴⁸ Wilson, *Religion*, 148. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁹ David Yamane, for one, claims that ‘postsecularisation theorists misrepresent secularisation theory by claiming it advances the idea that religion will decline in modern society, when in fact the core architects of the paradigm have always theorised not the decline or disappearance of religion but its transformation’. David Yamane, ‘Secularisation on Trial: In Defence of a Neosecularisation Paradigm’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36, 1 (1997): 113.

⁵⁰ Peter Berger, ‘The Desecularisation of the World: A Global Overview’, in *The Desecularisation of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, ed. Peter Berger (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 2. Stark describes the theory in very similar terms: ‘the secularisation doctrine has always nestled within the broader theoretical framework of modernisation theories, it being proposed that as industrialisation, urbanisation, and rationalisation increase, religiousness *must* decrease’. Rodney Stark, ‘Secularisation R. I. P.’, *Sociology of Religion* 60, 3 (1999): 251. That Berger uses the term ‘desecularisation’ to correct what he now sees as mistaken conclusions about the decline of religion indicates just how deeply embedded the secularisation paradigm is rooted in the sociology of religion; in simply *reversing* the flow of religious change, ‘desecularisation’ questions the universality of the theory, not the general structure of the theory itself.

power and influence in society, has been adopted by many scholars and educated people in general, who have reflected on the changes going on in contemporary culture. For a great number of people the thesis has become an obvious truth'.⁵¹

Even the most ardent contemporary supporters of such a thesis acknowledge that it has its roots in the same normative strategies that fed the earliest sociology of religion. Steve Bruce, perhaps the most prominent, and certainly the most articulate, champion of the secularisation paradigm working today, acknowledges these ideological biases: 'The secularisation thesis has at least some of its roots in *secularism*. Comte was certainly more influenced by his desire to see the disappearance of the unhealthy superstitions of religion from the modern world than by an "objective" assessment that such changes were taking place'.⁵² Bruce directly confronts the charges of ideological interest while defending a carefully nuanced, though essentially familiar, version of the secularisation thesis: 'I have no commitment to any suggestion that secularisation can be explained by such value-laden notions as Progress or Enlightenment'.⁵³ Despite the efforts of Bruce and other sociologists, mostly working in Europe, it is perhaps not too much to say that the secularisation paradigm has lost its central place in the contemporary sociology of religion. Callum Brown quite accurately calls it 'a narrative in crisis'⁵⁴ and it is difficult not to agree with Larry Shiner's conclusion, voiced in 1967, that the term is heavily weighed down by its history: '[secularisation] is swollen with overtones and implications, especially those associated with indifference or hostility to whatever is considered "religious" ... the careless and partisan uses of "secularisation" is so general that its polemical connotations will continue to cling to it despite the social scientist's efforts to neutralise it'.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Gregory Baum, 'Does the World Remain Disenchanted?', *Social Research* 37, 2 (June 1970): 155.

⁵² Steve Bruce, 'Introduction', in *Religion and Modernisation: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularisation Thesis*, ed. Steve Bruce (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 1.

⁵³ Steve Bruce, 'Modernisation, Religious Diversity and Rational Choice in Eastern Europe', *Religion, State & Society* 27, 3/4 (1999): 266. In 2002, working from a substantive definition of religion, he offers a reformulation of the basic secularisation thesis which removes the language of necessity and even the language of modernity, though it remains implicit: 'I see secularisation as a social condition manifest in (a) the declining importance of religion for the operation of non-religious roles and institutions such as those of the state and the economy; (b) a decline in the social standing of religious roles and institutions; and (c) a decline in the extent to which people engage in religious practices, display beliefs of a religious kind, and conduct other aspects of their lives in a manner informed by such beliefs'. Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularisation in the West* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 3.

⁵⁴ Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000* (London: Routledge, 2001), 30.

⁵⁵ Larry Shiner, 'The Concept of Secularisation in Empirical Research', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 6, 2 (Autumn, 1967): 218-220. The secularisation thesis has been the subject of a good deal of theoretical navel-gazing. Reflections, summaries and critiques of the thesis are common within the field. See Swatos and Christiano, 'Secularisation'; Frank J. Lechner, 'The Case Against Secularisation', *Social Forces* 69, 4 (June 1991): 1033-1119; Yamane, 'Secularisation' (to note that Yamane and Lechner both use courtroom language in their interrogation of the theory gives an impression as to the general tone of the debate); Olivier Tshannen, 'The

All considerations of bias and ideology aside, on a conceptual level the secularisation thesis can have little if any value as a scientific theory (at least in the sense of Popperian falsifiability). Firstly, the secularisation thesis will always face problems with the empirical data needed to prove the case of decline. At the very least, no premodern historical evidence, even ignoring questions of prejudice and incompleteness – most of the historical records were kept by the Christian churches themselves – will ever match the relative sophistication of contemporary sociological techniques and any convincing *comparison* is all but impossible. Secondly, and more fundamentally, the theory lacks credibility due to the multivalence of the concept of religion. In the end, one's judgement on the secularisation debate depends largely on how one defines religion or what is important in religion. Shiner notes this problem in the form of a question that has never been answered satisfactorily:

What is an index of secularisation? Is it church attendance? Belief in immortality? The amount of private prayer? The number of scientists who believe in God? Or could it be that the indicators are more subtle, so much so that secularisation could even permeate what on the surface appears to be religious fervour? Is secularisation a low score on a conventional index of religiosity? Or is it another form of religiosity? Or is it an independent process quite uncorrelated with religiosity?⁵⁶

Given this and other unanswered – or unanswerable – questions, the time has come for the secularisation paradigm to be laid to rest, or, to use Rodney Stark's words, 'once and for all, let us declare an end to social scientific faith in the theory of secularisation, recognising that it was the product of wishful thinking'.⁵⁷

This, however, only gets us so far. While the secularisation paradigm makes one common mistake, there have been attempts to refute it that equally distort the relationship of modernity and religion. That religion and modernity are deeply interconnected on a conceptual level need not mean that we must follow Taylor to the extreme, and unwarranted, conclusion that 'religion and secularity are not opposites; to the contrary, Western secularity is a *religious* phenomenon'.⁵⁸ There is nothing that necessarily connects

Secularisation Paradigm: A Systemisation', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30, 4 (December, 1991): 395-415; Karel Dobbelaere, 'Some Trends in European Sociology of Religion: The Secularisation Debate', *Sociological Analysis* 48, 2 (Summer 1987): 107-137; and Bryan R. Wilson, 'Reflections on a Many-Sided Controversy', in *Religion and Modernisation: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularisation Thesis*, ed. Steve Bruce (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 195-210 for examples.

⁵⁶ Shiner, 'Concept', 207. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁷ Stark, 'R. I. P.', 269. In the 1960s, both Shiner and David Martin Shiner published calls for the abolition of the secularisation thesis. See Shiner, 'Concept' and David Martin, 'Towards Eliminating the Concept of Secularisation', in *Penguin Survey of the Social Sciences*, ed. J. Gould. (Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1965), 169-182.

⁵⁸ Taylor, *After*, xii.

these two claims and Taylor here appears to be merely choosing one extreme conclusion that is just as inaccurate as its opposite. There is no reason to conclude that Western society is at some unacknowledged level *fundamentally* religious. Modernity is, aside from its historical inheritance, also a matter of radical innovation. As Charles Taylor argues, the modern elevation of the individual as the ultimate arbiter of all things is ‘one of the great realisations in the history of human development, whatever our ultimate views about its scope or limitations.’⁵⁹ Modernity is thus not something that can be considered as a mere continuation of the traditions that it seeks, at least formally, to do away with. As Talal Asad notes, the chains of causality are complex, rendering any generalisation that seeks to equate modernity with religion, which may seem on the surface to offer a corrective, as unsupportable as the secularisation thesis:

I take the view, as others have done, that the ‘religious’ and the ‘secular’ are not essentially fixed categories. However, I do not claim that if one stripped away appearances one would see that some apparently secular institutions were *really* religious. I assume, on the contrary, that there is nothing *essentially* religious, nor any universal essence that defines ‘sacred language’ or ‘sacred experience’. But I also assume that there were breaks between Christian and secular life in which words and practices were arranged, and new discursive grammars replaced previous ones ... liberalism’s secular myth should not be confused with the redemptive myth of Christianity, despite a resemblance between them ... I simply want to get away from the idea that the secular is a mask for religion, that secular political practices often simulate religious ones.⁶⁰

The lesson that the academic study of religion must take away from the dissolving of the rigid boundaries between religion and modernity is not that there is a simple and unproblematic religious inheritance embedded in the fabric of the modern narratives, but that drawing rigid distinctions – modernity *versus* tradition, science *versus* religion, rationalism *versus* magic – will always yield a flawed vision of the complexities of history. The connections between the two concepts are so deep that one will likely never be free of the other. But this need not deny that modernity, or the modern study of religion, is incapable of genuine originality or a relatively clear vision of the world, just that it has to be endlessly self-critical; as Akeel Bilgrami suggests, this endless self-evaluation is another example of the necessary and open-ended project of modern reflexivity:

⁵⁹ Taylor, *Secular*, 255. Charles Taylor makes this particular point using the language of ‘exclusive humanism’: ‘So exclusive humanism wasn’t just something we fell into, once the old myths dissolved, or the ‘infamous’ ancien régime church was crushed. It opened up new human potentialities, viz., to live in these modes of moral life in which the sources are radically immanentised. The subtraction story doesn’t allow us to be as surprised as we ought to be at this achievement – or as admiring of it’. Taylor, *Secular*, 255.

⁶⁰ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 25-26.

It wouldn't be too lofty to describe the extensive debate in many related disciplines over the last few decades about the inherited ideas and ideologies of the Enlightenment as our intellectual efforts at self-understanding – in particular, our efforts to come to a more or less precise grip on the sense which we belong to a period properly describable as our modernity.⁶¹

The study of religion needs a middle path between the two extremes that would read modernity as a simple continuity with the religious traditions out of which it grew or as the eventual victor in a battle between two radically opposing sides. We cannot downplay the interconnections of modernity and religion in defence of a universal modernity. Just as certainly, we cannot simply baptise modernity as a hidden religious phenomenon, nor must we conclude, as Mark C. Taylor does, from the fact that European modernity is deeply tied up with the intellectual revolutions of the Reformation, that 'Modernity is a theological invention'.⁶² Provocative and even potentially useful as this sort of thinking may be, it is far more defensible, and more accurate, to conclude, as does Charles Taylor, that 'societies in the West will forever remain historically informed by Christianity'.⁶³ It should also be acknowledged (something which both Charles Taylor and Mark C. Taylor ignore) that European modernity is indebted to more than just the Judeo-Christian inheritance, important as this inheritance undoubtedly is. Modernity carries with it ideas derived from the classical and mediaeval periods, from – to take two examples pretty much at random – Aristotelian natural philosophy and the long traditions of alchemy and other forms of Western esotericism.

The study of religion needs to focus not on decline or on facile historical equivalences but instead on documenting the *varieties* of modern religion and the *mutations, changes, or relocations* of the religious that occur in the social and intellectual conditions of modernity. What is needed, then, are *alternative* ways of looking at the essential question of religion in modernity.

⁶¹ Akeel Bilgrami, 'Occidentalism, the Very Idea: An Essay on Enlightenment and Enchantment', *Critical Inquiry* 32, 3 (Spring 2006): 381.

⁶² Taylor, *After*, 43. It is perhaps worth noting that there are others in other fields who make similar leaps. To cite one example, political philosopher John Gray contends, 'Modern politics is a chapter in the history of religion ... The world in which we find ourselves at the start of the new millennium is littered with the debris of utopian projects, which though they were framed in secular terms that denied the truth of religion were in fact vehicles of religious myths'. John Gray, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (London: Penguin, 2007), 1.

⁶³ Charles Taylor, 'The Future of the Religious Past', in *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, ed. Hent de Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 214.

An Alternative: Religious Modernity

We must make up our minds: if we do not wish to greatly impair our understanding of religion, we can no longer avoid the challenge of a broader horizon and all the uncertainties and difficulties this involves. We must not delude ourselves about the limits of this undertaking, nor imagine that we can go beyond them.

Maurice Gauchet⁶⁴

In answering this question, Hervieu-Léger's wider work presents itself as a valuable resource. The concept of *religious modernity* is tied to her understanding of religion as the evocation of chains of tradition, so it is worth recalling her exact definition: 'one designates as "religious" all forms of believing that justify themselves, first and foremost, upon the claim of their inscription within a *heritage of belief*'. Working with this definition as a speculative instrument, Hervieu-Léger argues that the decline of some forms of organised Christian practice in some European cultures does not equate to a simple decline of the religious:

On the one hand, it is observed that the cultural and political power of the mainline churches is diminished, as is their capacity to organise the symbolic life of society. In certain countries in northern Europe, it is a matter of the virtual collapse of mainline religion ... On the other hand, empirical investigations dealing with beliefs within these very societies attest with the same consistency that individual interest in the spiritual and the religious has not undergone any decline, despite a disenchantment introduced by the pervasive expansion of instrumental reason in all regions of life.⁶⁵

Hervieu-Léger concludes from the evidence that religion has not declined but has *mutated* under the social conditions of modernity. The religious has been taken out of its once-stable institutional bases and dispersed into the realm of privatised, subjectivised belief. Hervieu-Léger's work is helpful to our current discussion chiefly because of her claim that the religious call to tradition within modernity *is a product of modernity itself*. In other words, *modernity produces its own religious effects and narratives of tradition*. In formalising this claim, she repudiates both the subtraction stories and the concomitant notion of religion as a mere survival:

the fundamental need to cope with the structural uncertainty of the human condition by assuring the identification of subjective significations of lived experience and objective definitions of reality is not obliterated by the sole fact that these sacred cosmicisations are badly damaged by the process of rationalisation and historicisation ... It fails to subsist even as a residue of a social universe become obsolete. It re-emerges from modernity itself, in redistributing itself into a multiplicity of seeking after sense, all the more demanding inasmuch as it is no longer a question, for social actors, of conceptualising their place in a stable world, presumed to reflect the very order of nature projected as a creation, but to situate

⁶⁴ Maurice Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, trans. by Oscar Burge (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 18.

⁶⁵ Danièle Hervieu-Léger, 'Individualism, the Validation of Faith, and the Social Nature of Religion in Modernity', in *The Blackwell Companion to Sociology of Religion*, ed. Richard K. Fenn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 161.

themselves in an open social space, in which change and innovation are erected as norms ... To the same degree that modernity does not eliminate the question of sense, it quite certainly produces belief, but it produces atomised, shattered belief, reflecting, in its very crumbling, the reality lived by those concerned.⁶⁶

To describe the situation, Hervieu-Léger coins the suggestive phrase 'religious modernity', which encompasses within it the contradictory nature of the situation and the challenges it presents to dominant self-understandings of modernity.

What Hervieu-Léger means by religious modernity, however, is in some ways uncertain. At one point, she writes simply, 'Religious modernity is individualism'.⁶⁷ Yet she also notes that religious modernity is something more than this. It is rather the surfacing and commingling of certain tendencies within modernity:

Religious individualism no more makes for modernity than modernity invents religious individualism. What characterises the contemporary religious scene is not religious individualism as such: it is rather the absorption of religious individualism within modern individualism ... 'Religious modernity' is, fundamentally, a product of this process. It incorporates the spiritual quest into a psychological modernity characterised by individual concern for the perfection of self. These tendencies – consistently emphasised by empirical inquiries into the subjectivisation of traditional religions, the rejection of received 'truth' from others, along with the valorisation of the authenticity of the spiritual journey which everyone is supposed to conduct according to their dispositions and interests – are the principle indicators of this movement.⁶⁸

This is, again, perhaps a more radical assertion than it at first appears. It contradicts the fundamental idea of religion-as-survival. To assert, as Hervieu-Léger does, that the religious is *intrinsic* to modernity in at least the European context is to take the conceptual experiment of divorcing the study of religion from its long-standing assumptions about the relationship of modernity to the religious to its logical and most challenging conclusion.

Viewed from the perspective of a universalising and evolutionary account of modernity, there is something deeply unsettling about the argument that modernity *produces* religion, something Hervieu-Léger readily recognises: 'Modernity and religion are not mutually exclusive ... one has to accept the paradox that modernity produces what is of essence

⁶⁶ Hervieu-Léger, 'Tradition', 75.

⁶⁷ Hervieu-Léger, 'Validation', 161.

⁶⁸ Hervieu-Léger, 'Validation', 164-165. This is a complex and dynamic historical trend, not a matter of the simple displacement of one cultural form by another: 'I am not suggesting that the movement leads to a disintegration, pure and simple, of institutional religion; rather, I want to emphasise a tendency that shapes religious institutions and profoundly transforms them while also provoking a global reorganisation of the religious landscape'. Hervieu-Léger, 'Validation', 173.

contrary to it, namely heteronomy, submission to an order endured, received from outside and not willed'.⁶⁹ This unsettling is precisely the *highest value* of religious modernity as a conceptual framework; it pushes at the boundaries of study and demands that we ask new questions and seek out new methodologies to answer them. As we will see in greater detail in the brief Intermission that divides the two parts of this thesis, this unsettling also has the consequence of considerable broadening the field of *sources* that are relevant to the study of religion. The study must now necessarily consider a far greater span of cultural artefacts, including literary and poetic works as well as other forms of narrative popular culture, such as film, television and other visual media. As the religious has fragmented and diffused across the wider culture in modernity, the study of religion must, methodologically, be able to pursue its object wherever it might lead. The complexity of the historical relationships conjectured by religious modernity has other serious consequences for the study of religion. Properly describing the chain of influence or causality in religious modernity is a slippery affair: does modernity *produce* its own distinct religious forms and responses, *allow* them, *encourage* them, or does it *modify* or *adapt* extant forms? I would contend that modernity, in its many incarnations, does *all* of these things.

The Religious Lives of Religious Modernity

In many respects, our time resembles the early Christian era, when a panoply of religions, sects, and cults existed side by side, proliferating wildly.

Arthur Versluis⁷⁰

Our concerns to this point have been almost entirely conceptual, our approach to the religious almost entirely theoretical. This preoccupation is certainly going to remain visible as we progress. However, in order to more fully flesh out the reasons for adopting the alternative conceptual framework of religious modernity, we need to grapple with at least some of the relevant empirical evidence. Does that evidence *require* that the study of religion take seriously such an alternative methodological and conceptual approach? Does the concept of religious modernity yield a more convincing account of the contemporary religious landscape than the secularisation paradigm? On a smaller scale, can we describe the forms of religion that do exist in the contemporary West as something *other than* simple survivals from earlier times – as, precisely, religious *productions* of modernity? It is not enough to point out that these forms *behave* in many ways as do other modern organisations – that they, for example, rely heavily on the mass media, as many contemporary religious forms and organisations indeed do. The intersections of

⁶⁹ Hervieu-Léger, *Religion*, 93.

⁷⁰ Arthur Versluis, *Restoring Paradise: Western Esotericism, Literature, Art, and Consciousness* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 3.

contemporary religion and popular culture take on myriad forms, from the deft use of the Internet and the mainstream media by militant Islamist groups, all the way to the existence of Christian-themed amusement parks such as the Holy Land Experience.⁷¹ However, this does not mark these forms out as inherently modern productions. To demonstrate the claims of religious modernity, the connections between modernity and the religious must be more substantial than this. To ask if we can demonstrate that the varied forms of contemporary religion are productions of modernity is to expand on the concept of religious modernity from Hervieu-Léger's usage, which is largely confined to the diffuse realm of individualised religion. I wish to take the logic of her arguments further and argue both that the diverse forms of the religious in contemporary culture can *only* be understood as productions of modernity and that religious modernity provides a more coherent frame for the sociological evidence than those offered by the secularisation paradigm or, more broadly, by the subtraction stories.

Describing the fragmented, diverse religious atmosphere in the West is no less difficult than theorising about it. Sociologists, philosophers, historians and scholars of religion have employed a number of metaphors to come to terms with the observable situation. Perhaps the most evocative of these is Erik Davis' description of contemporary religion as a 'tattered carnival'.⁷² Birgit Meyer fills in the details:

The idea that the public relevance of religion would decline with modernisation and development, yielding a disenchanted world, has been contradicted by actual developments, from the manifestations of so-called political Islam to the rise of Pentecostal-charismatic movements propagating the Gospel of Prosperity, from wars that mobilise religious convictions to acts of terror in the name of God, from contests over blasphemous representations and sacrilege on the part of Muslims and Christians to the deep entanglements of religion and entertainment, from

⁷¹ For more on Holy Land parks, see Mark C. Taylor, *About Religion: Economies of Faith in Virtual Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 168-170. Taylor gives a hint to the complexities involved in this particular collision of religion and popular culture: 'From one point of view, Holy Land is a bitter parody of the Holy Land. There is indeed something apocalyptic about "virtual reality, holographic, theatrical, and statuary recreations of scenes from the Bible". Yet, from another point of view, it is possible to rewind the tape of history and replay it in a way that makes this oasis in the desert the Promised Land toward which we have always been heading ... In the hot sands of [Las] Vegas's silicon lights, the transcendence of the real vanishes, leaving nothing in its wake. In the dark light of this nothingness, it appears that what is is what ought to be'. Taylor, *About*, 201. For more on another Christian theme park, Jim Bakker's Heritage, U. S. A., see Conrad Ostwalt, *Secular Steeples: Popular Culture and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Trinity Press International, 2003), 51-52. Many new religious movements rely very heavily on the mass media to spread or even market their message like commodities. Writing of the Japanese context, Erica Baffelli notes, 'One of the principle effects of this interaction between mass media and religion is the way the latter turns into a *spectacle* ... The result of this effect is that, now, any religious group that disregards the codes of mass communication, and the necessity of *appearing*, inevitably runs the risk of disappearing from view'. Erica Baffelli, 'Mass Media and Religion in Japan: Mediating the Leader's Image', *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 4, 1: 85. Emphasis in original.

⁷² Erik Davis, *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic and Mysticism in the Age of Information* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2004), 10.

accusations of witchcraft to the organization of Wicca fairs, from online wonders to magic in advertisements, from public crusades dedicated to defeating the Devil to high-tech evangelical youth conventions, from Internet religiosity to the upsurge in religious tourism.⁷³

Viewed from within the secularisation paradigm, such a situation is paradoxical, even nonsensical. John D. Caputo notes the contradictions: ‘We live in a world where the most sophisticated scientific and high-tech achievements cohabit not only with traditional religion but also with the most literal-minded fundamentalisms, New-Age spiritualities, and belief in all sorts of bizarre, hocus-pocus phenomena’.⁷⁴ Such things should not coexist, nor should they coexist without more conflict. From the standpoint of religious modernity, such a wide and seemingly bizarre diffusion of religion throughout the larger culture is far easier to account for.

To begin, we should acknowledge that, charges of ideological motivation aside, there *have* been prominent societal manifestations of what seems to correspond more or less exactly with the narrative of secularisation. The most prominent example of this is the waning, by most accounts over a period of several centuries, of church-going Christianity in many parts of Western Europe, Britain and the Scandinavian nations in particular.⁷⁵ Where church membership was once a given for a large majority, church attendance numbers and institutional adherence have fallen precipitously, leaving a landscape scattered with empty or converted churches. Though there remains some disagreement about the degree to which Europe has secularised⁷⁶ and about contemporary levels of religion in Europe in comparison to earlier eras,⁷⁷ the strength of the evidence is such that many of the most

⁷³ Birgit Meyer, ‘Religious Sensations: Why Media, Aesthetics, and Power Matter in the Study of Contemporary Religion’, in *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, ed. Hent de Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 704.

⁷⁴ John D. Caputo, *On Religion* (London: Routledge, 2001), 71.

⁷⁵ Bruce concludes of the situation in Britain, ‘While we may legitimately argue about the causes and exact trajectory of secularisation, no amount of ... revisionism will change the fact that, if we can legitimately extrapolate from well-established trends, organised Christianity in Britain is in serious trouble’. Steve Bruce, ‘Christianity in Britain, R. I. P.’, *Sociology of Religion* 62, 2 (2001): 191. For a good overview of the Scandinavian situation, see Thorleif Pettersson and Ole Riis, eds. *Scandinavian Values: Religion and Morality in the Nordic Countries* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 1994).

⁷⁶ An example: in the case of contemporary Britain, Stark and Iannaccone, from the perspective of their ‘supply-side’ refutation of secularisation, write simply: ‘We dispute the claim that any European nation is very secularised’. Stark and Iannaccone, ‘Supply-Side’, 231.

⁷⁷ By way of example, it is worth quoting two radically divergent assessments of the historical comparisons. On the one hand, Bruce concludes: ‘If instead of thinking in terms of dominant ideologies, we think of pervasive world-views, there seems no doubt that an appropriate short-hand for describing the difference between the “world we have lost” and our world is “religious” and “secular”’. Bruce, ‘Pervasive’, 679. On the other hand, Andrew Greeley argues, ‘There is no reason to believe that the peasant masses or Europe were ever very devout Christians, not in the sense that we usually mean when we use these words. There could be no de-Christianisation as the term is normally used because there was never any Christianisation in the first place. Christian Europe never existed’. Andrew Greeley, *Religion: A Secular Theory* (New York: The Free Press, 1982), 63.

passionate critics of the secularisation paradigm agree on its usefulness in describing the situation in Western Europe. R. Steven Warner, for one, writes, ‘much of secularisation theory’s best evidence and most forceful advocacy comes from Europe, where secularisation is arguably a historical fact as well as a theory’.⁷⁸ This suggests that the mistakes of the secularisation thesis are not necessarily in the empirical data themselves but lie rather in the *interpretation* of them. The logic of the classical interpretation, which echoes the subtraction story, is simple: as Europe modernised, the churches lost cultural and intellectual power; therefore, when the rest of the world eventually reaches this same point in the natural course of history, religion will inevitably decline in influence and importance the world over. However, outside the basic framework of the subtraction stories, even if we are to concede Bruce’s⁷⁹ and Brown’s⁸⁰ final diagnoses that Christianity in Britain has been fatally wounded in the modern era, there is no reason to extrapolate from this to a general rule. From the particular evidence of Britain we can conclude only that the particulars of the modern experience in Britain have led to the near-death of a long-standing and once-powerful religious tradition *as it once manifested itself*.

Quite against the relentlessly simple logic of the secularisation thesis, there is good evidence to suggest that European patterns of decline are today the *exception* rather than the rule. Religion in many other parts of the world has maintained its role in culture and even in some cases seen rapid growth in the modern era, as José Casanova has noted:

From a global perspective, since World War II most religious traditions in most parts of the world have either experienced some growth or maintained their vitality ... The main exceptions to this apparently global trend are the rapid decline of primal religions, the sudden and dramatic decline of religion in communist countries following the establishment of communist states, and the continuous decline of religion throughout much of Western Europe (and, one could add, some of its colonial outposts such as Argentina, Uruguay, and New Zealand).⁸¹

⁷⁸ Warner, ‘Work’, 1048.

⁷⁹ Bruce summarises his conclusions: ‘unless long-stable trends are reversed, major British denominations will cease to exist by 2030’. Bruce, ‘R. I. P.’, 191.

⁸⁰ Brown asserts, though he comes to this conclusion through a very different method than Bruce, examining Christianity as a *discourse* in modern Britain: ‘the culture of Christianity has gone in the Britain of the new millennium. Britain is showing the world how religion as we have known it can die’. Brown, *Death*, 198. It is only fair to note, as I’ve cited Bruce’s critics, that Brown is not without his own. Bernice Martin, for one, charges that that his depiction of ‘discursive Christianity’ is ‘wholly inadequate to the subtlety and many-layered complexity of Christianity as a symbolic system’. Bernice Martin, ‘Continuities in Christian Culture’, in *Christianity in the Post Secular West*, ed. John Stenhouse and Brett Knowles (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2007), 62. Linda Woodhead makes a similar criticism of Brown’s work, arguing largely along similar lines to the larger argument being offered here about religion and modernity: ‘Part of the reason he succumbs to the rhetoric of a sexual “revolution” is that he dwells on changes in personal attitudes, values, and intimate behaviours to the neglect of what was happening in the public realm ... Brown is right about the change, but neglects the continuity’. Linda Woodhead, ‘Gendering Secularisation Theory’, *Social Compass* 55, 2 (2008): 189.

⁸¹ José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 26.

Woodhead points out that, even within the places that have been highly secularised, the theory, and its implicit narrative structure, remains blind to the density of cultural reality:

Many existing theories of secularisation single out one or more aspects of modernisation as responsible for religious decline, including rationalisation, bureaucratisation, urbanisation, societalisation, and individualisation. Behind them all one discerns a similar narrative, which tells how a rural labourer leaves behind the stable and meaningful world of village life and enters into the modern city where, within the iron cage of factory or office, community gives way to impersonal structures, human meaningfulness is less important than rational efficiency, and the law of competition replaces that of co-operation. In the process, the world becomes disenchanting, religion loses its traditional functions, an ethic of duty and self-sacrifice loses its relevance and our labourer ceases to be a religious believer and believer. I have no wish to deny the power and plausibility of this way of explaining secularisation. But I do want to deny that it does anything more than explain *male* disaffiliation from religion ... For women, industrialisation is experienced very differently ... So existing theories of secularisation do a good job at explaining men's religious disaffiliation but a bad job of explaining the situation of the other half of the human race.⁸²

Even highly rationalised, highly modernised cultures with a dominant European cultural heritage have not followed the path of Britain or Scandinavia. The level of institutional decline is not constant even within the boundaries of Western Europe. To note two prominent examples, Poland and Ireland show a far higher rate of religious adherence than do the majority of their neighbours, due, some sociologists argue, to the fusion of Catholicism with narratives of national identity over and against powerful outside forces, in the form of Communism and British rule, respectively.⁸³

On the other side of the Atlantic, America, in terms of the public sphere, and Americans, in terms of the private sphere, are far more religious than their European counterparts. According to the secularisation thesis, they are also far more religious than they *should* be. There have been various attempts to explain the uniqueness of the American case, focusing on the lack of an established state church and other societal factors.⁸⁴ Alternatively, we can

⁸² Woodhead, 'Gendering', 189-190. She notes the demographics that would disturb classical secularisation thinking if it were to consider gender differences more seriously: 'Women are more religious than men on every index of commitment, out-numbering them by a ratio of around 3:2 in most churches in both Europe and America. The typical churchgoer is now an older woman ... Women also outnumber men in those forms of "alternative" spirituality which have burgeoned since the late 1980s, and which include New Age, holistic therapies, and neo-paganism ... women make up 80 per cent of those who were involved in such spirituality, as both clients and practitioners'. Woodhead, 'Gendering', 188.

⁸³ See Martin, *Secularisation*, 32-33 and 113-119 for more detail on the cases of Poland and Ireland. For a general empirical picture of these two nations in the European context, see Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2002), 1-26.

⁸⁴ See, for example, Grace Davie, *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 27-52; Ostwalt, *Secular*, 49-61; and Martin, *Secularisation*, 100-111. The high level of religiosity in

put the matter broadly in the terms of this thesis, and say simply that modernity and the religious have long coexisted comfortably in the American context. During his travels in the United States in the early nineteenth century, Alexis de Tocqueville famously noted: ‘in America, one of the freest and most enlightened nations in the world, the people fulfil with fervour all the outward duties of religion’.⁸⁵ Almost two centuries later, Casanova notes again what seems to be a central contradiction: ‘the United States has always been the paradigmatic form of a modern secular, differentiated society. Yet the triumph of “the secular” came aided by religion rather than at its expense’.⁸⁶ If anything, the American case demonstrates strongly that certain forms of the religious can even reinforce some forms of modernity, as David Martin notes:

Americans do not think of science and religion as different modes of apprehension, but as aspects of the same common-sense reality ... America is a religious country: Hebrew and philosemitic, progressive and providential, enlightened and pious, religious in its secularity, secular in its religiosity, this-worldly in its apocalyptic, Protestant in its Catholicism and offering immortality not so much by faith as by natural right.⁸⁷

The classical secularisation paradigm can make no sense of American religiosity. However, in the framework of religious modernity, where modernity is capable of producing religious effects, there is no contradiction in asserting that the experience of modernity in much of

the United States affects the whole of the religious landscape. Nancy Foner and Richard Alba write of the differences in role of religion for immigrant populations: ‘A bottom-line conclusion in the social science literature is that religion helps to turn immigrants into Americans and gives their children a sense of belonging or membership in the United States ... In Western Europe, religion is generally viewed as the problems, not the solution, for immigrant minorities ... In the US, to be religious is to be in synch with prevailing mainstream American norms, which put great emphasis on the value of religious observances ... A secular mind-set dominates in most Western Europe countries. Claims based on religion have much less acceptance and legitimacy there – and when the religion is Islam, these claims often lead to public unease, sometimes disdain and even anger, and, not surprisingly, tensions and conflicts’. Nancy Foner and Richard Alba, ‘Immigrant Religion in the U.S. and Western Europe: Bridge or Barrier to Inclusion?’, *Immigration Migration Review* 42, 2 (Summer 2008): 365–376.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Stark, ‘R. I. P.’, 254.

⁸⁶ José Casanova, ‘Public Religions Revisited’, in *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, ed. Hent de Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 105. This has been true on a microcosmic scale in American history as well; some periods of rapid modernisation were accompanied with upsurges in new religious movements and religious revivals. To cite a representative example: in the period directly preceding the Civil War, which saw massive social restructuring and the rapid development of new technologies (including, crucially, the telegraph), upstate New York saw so much evangelising during the Second Great Awakening and the creation of so many new and influential religious movements that it came to be called the ‘Burned-Over District’. See Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800–1850* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965) for the definitive study. For the larger historical context, see also Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianising the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990) particularly Chapter Eight, ‘Toward the Antebellum Spiritual Hothouse’ (225–256).

⁸⁷ Martin, *Secularisation*, 101. The particular narrative economy of the American self-understanding is another key to these differences. Martin writes, ‘The USA as the first new nation and first unchallenged superpower traces genealogies designed to paint an icon of America as the abode of the persecuted innocents who have turned the wilderness into a Promised Land of milk and honey, as well as the successor to republican Rome. In the course of this idealized self-presentation, God has been put on contract to deliver by ensuring victory in war, prosperity in peace and provisional immortality for every citizen. It is this postulate of New Israel or the *Nova Ordo Seclorum* which helps explain the language of fractured and violated innocence following the events of 11 September’. Martin, *Secularisation*, 131.

Western Europe has led to the decline of traditional religious observance, while the experience of modernity in much of the rest of the world has led instead to religious vitality. In the end, from the standpoint of religious modernity, we can conclude confidently with Berger that 'Modernity is *not* intrinsically secularising, though it has been so in particular cases'.⁸⁸ We can also agree with Grace Davie that 'secularisation is essentially a European phenomenon and is extrinsic rather than intrinsic to the modernising process per se'.⁸⁹

A further interpretive mistake, as we noted earlier, connected to functional definitions of religion, is that institutional decline does not necessarily equate to the wholesale decline of the religious but can instead signal its relocation, mutation, or change. To use Davie's language: 'An evident fall in both religious practice and *strictly Christian* beliefs in the post-war period does not lead either to a parallel loss in religious sensitivity (indeed the reverse is often true as individuals sense a greater freedom to experiment), or to the widespread adoption of secular alternatives'.⁹⁰ Nor has belief in the tenets of traditional religion been replaced in modernity by a thoroughgoing scientific rationalism, as was argued by both early thinkers like Frazer and the classical secularisation thesis. In fact, contact between heavily rationalised modern and non-modern cultures has historically shown to be a point where the religious *flourishes* in new and unique forms. We can see this, for example, in the Ghost Dance movement among the Northern Paiutes on the American plains⁹¹ and in the 'cargo cults' of Pacific Island cultures in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As opposed to the logic of the doctrine of survivals, such religious responses cannot be understood as the simple growing pains of primitive cultures as they are catapulted into the modern world but ought to be viewed, as Charles Long argues, as important appropriations and renegotiations of the meanings of modernity itself:

One aspect of this religion of contact is the phenomenon of cargo cults. They provide a unique and alternate meaning of human freedom in the modern world. Their traditions demythologised through contact with the modern world, the cargo cult prophets undertake a new quest for a world of sacred meaning. This quest is

⁸⁸ Peter L. Berger, 'Secularisation Falsified', *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life* 180 (February 2008): 23. Emphasis in original. For Berger, two of the most important exceptional cases are the situation in Western Europe and that of Western-style intellectuals the world over, 'essentially a globalisation of the Enlightened intelligentsia of Europe. It is everywhere a minority of the population – but a very influential one'. Berger, 'Falsified', 24.

⁸⁹ Davie, *Exceptional*, 161.

⁹⁰ Davie, *Exceptional*, 8.

⁹¹ On the Ghost Dance phenomenon, see Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West*, 30th Anniversary ed. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000): 431-439 and Alice Beck Kehoe, *Ghost Dance: Ethnohistory and Revitalisation* (London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1989).

not a return to the precontact situation, nor a mere acquiescence to the conquerors. The ingredients of the past and the present are reconceived as sacred forms, and from this sacrality new human beings are to be created. A revalorisation of matter, time, money, and human exchanges is adumbrated in these movements, for they represent one of the most powerful attempts of modern human beings to live an authentic sacred life.⁹²

In more ordinary circumstances, there is evidence that the decline of institutional religious belief has not been replaced by a strict secularism. Despite the decline of some forms of observance, religion remains an essential part of European discourses, or, as James Beckford has it: 'religion serves as a "language" in which many people who may no longer be associated with any religious organisations still choose to express their strongest fears, sorrows, aspirations, joys, and wishes ... the symbols are no longer the exclusive property of religious organisations or faith communities'.⁹³ Even in Britain, there exists there a good deal of what Davie calls 'believing without belonging', a situation in which 'most people in the country – whatever their denominational allegiance – express their religious sentiments by staying away from, rather than going to, their places of worship'.⁹⁴ On Davie's account, the levels of belief in God and levels of self-identification of people as religious far outpace the numbers of people who regularly attend institutional religious services.⁹⁵ This is the central transformation of religious modernity, the dispersion of religion from its institutional bases to the level of the individual subject.

Looked at in this sense, religion has been relocated, or as Beckford has it, religion 'has come adrift from its former points of anchorage but it is no less potentially powerful as a result'.⁹⁶ This free-floating, decontextualised religious consciousness finds expression in the myriad forms of the highly individualistic religiosity often given the problematic label of 'spirituality'.⁹⁷ In 1967, Thomas Luckmann gave these forms of syncretic practice the more

⁹² Charles H. Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Aurora, CO: The Davis Group, 1995), 103. For more on the cargo cult phenomenon, see Peter Worsley, *The Trumpet Shall Sound* 2nd ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1970) and Kenelm Burridge, *Mambu: A Melanesian Millennium* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).

⁹³ Beckford, 'Politics', 25.

⁹⁴ Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing Without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 2. For more on this theory and its relation to the evidence, see also Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exceptional Case* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2002); and Davie, *Modern*. In this last book, Davie works with Hervieu-Léger's definition of religion to offer an account of the decay of collective memory-based religion in the European context.

⁹⁵ See Davie, *Believing*, particularly Chapter Five, 'The Ordinary Gods of British Society', 74-92, and Chapter Six, 'Believing Without Belonging: Variations on a Theme', 93-116.

⁹⁶ James A. Beckford, *Religion in Advanced Industrial Society* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 170.

⁹⁷ I have chosen not use the term 'spirituality' because, as another word taken largely from the Christian tradition, it offers no substantial improvement upon the general label of 'religion' and in fact sets up a largely artificial distinction between individual religiosity and organised religion. Nonetheless, 'spirituality' is a popular designation both within the academic study of religion and in the larger cultural discourses in the Western world. Steph

apt label of ‘invisible religion’,⁹⁸ which underlines both their fundamentally religious character and their relatively low public profile, as such forms do not produce such highly visible cultural symbols as churches and tend toward constantly shifting, ephemeral expressions, leading some theorists to question their importance.⁹⁹ There are, however, recent studies which have indicated that those who self-identify as ‘spiritual not religious’ may comprise as much as 20 percent of the population in some places.¹⁰⁰ Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead note the growing importance of such practice in the larger culture: ‘The declining influence of religion – particularly Christianity – in western societies has been the chief topic of the study of religion for over a century, but in recent years the emergence of something called “spirituality” has – increasingly – demanded attention. Survey after survey shows that increasing numbers of people now prefer to call themselves “spiritual” rather than “religious”’.¹⁰¹ These diverse forms are what Hervieu-Léger refers to when she writes of the ‘atomised, shattered belief’ produced by religious modernity.

Aupers and Dick Houtman offer a good short definition of the term: ‘What is spirituality? Traditionally, the concept is used to refer to the experiential dimension of religion ... Commonly regarded as the outgrowth of what emerged as the New Age movement in the 1960s counterculture, contemporary spirituality is self-referential – it is a spirituality standing on its own two feet, broken from the moorings of particular religious traditions. In short, contemporary spirituality refers less to a dimension than to a particular type of religion’. Steph Aupers and Dick Houtman, ‘The Sacralisation of the Self: Relocating the Sacred on the Ruins of Tradition’, in *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, ed. Hent de Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 798.

⁹⁸ Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967). The existence of this kind of belief and practice is central not only to Hervieu-Léger’s religious modernity but also to one sociological alternative to the secularisation thesis. Detlef Pollack and Gert Pickel call this the ‘religious individualisation thesis’, a thesis which argues ‘that the de-institutionalisation of traditional church affiliation and religious individualisation are two complementary and perhaps even compensatory practices’. Detlef Pollack and Gert Pickel, ‘Religious Individualisation or Secularisation? Testing Hypothesis of Religious Change – The Case of Eastern and Western Germany’, *The British Journal of Sociology* 58, 4 (2007): 626.

⁹⁹ See the chapter ‘The Failure of the New Age’ in Bruce’s *God is Dead* (pages 75-105) for an example of such scepticism, based almost entirely on empirical considerations. He concludes, ‘while I see every possibility that some sections of the population will continue to be interested in spirituality, I cannot see how a shared faith can be created from a low-salience world of pick-and-mix religion’. Bruce, *God*, 105. Other sociologists conclude the exact opposite. Thomas Luckmann, for one, argues, ‘What are usually taken as symptoms of the decline of traditional Christianity may be symptoms of a more revolutionary change: the replacement of the institutional specialisation of religion by a new form of religion’. Luckmann, ‘*Invisible*’, 90-91.

¹⁰⁰ Eeva Sointu and Linda Woodhead write of invisible religion: ‘The growth and numerical significance in Europe and North America is beginning to be established. A number of recent studies suggest that the number of active, highly committed, regular participants stands at around 2-5 percent of the population; that the level of adherence (indicated by those claiming to be “spiritual not religious”) stands at around 10-20 percent; and that the level of belief in “some sort of spirit or life force or “God as something within each person rather than something out there” lies between 20 percent and 40 percent’. Eeva Sointu and Linda Woodhead, ‘Spirituality, Gender, and Expressive Selfhood’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47, 2 (2008): 259. (Extensive author/date references omitted).

¹⁰¹ Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, with Benjamin Seel, Bronislaw Szerszynski, Karin Tusting, *The Spirituality Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 1. *The Spirituality Revolution* is a book-length study of The Kendal Project, a ‘locality study’ of the religious and spiritual life of the town of Kendal, in the north-west of England. They summarise their purposes ‘this book explores the spiritual revolution *claim*: that traditional forms of religion, particularly Christianity, are giving way to holistic spirituality, sometimes still called “New Age”’. Heelas and Woodhead, *Spiritual*, x.

Given the importance of invisible religion to the conception of religious modernity, it is worth taking a more detailed look at what this particular religious production of modernity entails. In the contemporary religious landscape of the West, many religious seekers create their own often highly syncretic religious systems from elements borrowed freely from diverse traditions, from personal experience, from popular culture, even from science and technology. Though these practices can be highly individualistic, there are broad similarities between them. Paul Heelas writes of the branch of invisible religion known collectively as the New Age: ‘Beneath much of the heterogeneity, there is a remarkable constancy. Again and again, turning from practice to practice, from publication to publication, indeed from country to country, one encounters the same (or very similar) *lingua franca*’.¹⁰² This *lingua franca* includes a focus on practice over doctrine, on process rather than ends and, most importantly, on the cultivation of the self and authentic emotional experience. More specifically, Steph Aupers and Dick Houtman argue that perennialism – ‘the belief that diverse religious traditions essentially refer to the same underlying spiritual truth’¹⁰³ – is the single most important element in this mix, one that is related to the primacy of the literally sacralised self.¹⁰⁴ As Hervieu-Léger implies, such religious forms are unimaginable outside of the cultural conditions of modernity and are indebted particularly to the modern focus on individual and the absolute importance of the self as subject and as arbiter of all things religious. In a qualified sense, invisible religion is Kant’s *sapere aude* inscribed in the religious field.

Invisible religion, as Luckmann argues, also has important roots in modern consumer capitalism, which has come to characterise the whole of Western culture.¹⁰⁵ Religion and the religious have joined the array of commodities available for consumption and reconstruction in myriad shifting and unstable forms. The consumer orientation of such

¹⁰² Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralisation of Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 2.

¹⁰³ Aupers and Houtman, ‘Sacralisation’, 800. Adam Possamai similarly writes, ‘New Age and Neo-Paganism are only parts of a larger spirituality that I have called perennism, and that includes more than these two subgroups ... Perennism has three characteristics and can be defined as a syncretic spirituality: 1. that interprets the world as *monistic* ... 2. whose actors are attempting to develop a *human potential ethic* ... 3. whose actors are seeking *spiritual knowledge*’. Adam Possamai, ‘Alternative Spiritualities and the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism’, *Culture and Religion* 4, 1 (2003): 33. Emphasis in original.

¹⁰⁴ They write, ‘the belief that in the deeper layers of the self one finds a true, authentic, and sacred kernel, basically unpolluted by culture, history, and society, which informs evaluations of what is good, true, and meaningful’. Aupers and Houtman, ‘Sacralisation’, 801.

¹⁰⁵ He writes: ‘the consumer orientation, in short, is not limited to economic products but characterises the relation of the individual to the entire culture. The latter is no longer an obligatory structure of interpretive and evaluative schemes with a distinct hierarchy of significance. It is, rather, a rich, heterogeneous assortment of possibilities, which, in principle, are accessible to any individual consumer’. Luckmann, *Invisible*, 98.

religious forms is strongly reflected in many of the metaphors used by scholars to describe this form of religion, which include ‘Sheilism’,¹⁰⁶ ‘bricolage’,¹⁰⁷ ‘privatised religion’,¹⁰⁸ the ‘spirituality of seeking’,¹⁰⁹ ‘the spiritual marketplace’,¹¹⁰ ‘smorgasbord spirituality’,¹¹¹ ‘pick and mix religion’,¹¹² and ‘religious consumption à la carte’.¹¹³ As is the case with consumer culture generally, the practises of consumption in invisible religion are strongly related to the emotional life of the individual subject. Adam Possamai notes of practitioners: ‘by constructing their subjective myth, there is an eclectic – if not kleptomaniac – process of selecting culture(s) and religions in a way that given immediate pleasure; in a way that “speaks to the heart”’.¹¹⁴ Invisible religion is an ideal religious form for an affectively-centred age, though William Swatos argues that this is a general trend in contemporary religion: ‘Religions that address the culture of the emotions within the complexity of postmodernity draw comparably more converts from the populace at large, while those that engage in theological revisionism draw a smaller and smaller, largely intellectualised, sector of the population’.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁶ This is based on a well-known instantiation of invisible religion in which Robert Bellah described the case of a young American nurse, Sheila Larson, who described her personal religion as ‘Sheilism’. Larson told Bellah, ‘I believe in God. I’m not a religious fanatic. I can’t remember the last time I went to church. My faith has carried me a long way. It’s Sheilism. Just my own little voice ... It’s just try to love yourself and be gentle with yourself. You know, I guess, take care of each other. I think he would want us to take care of each other’. Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 221.

¹⁰⁷ The term ‘bricolage’, taken from the French word that roughly translates as ‘DIY’, appears often in Luckmann, *Invisible and Reginald W. Bibby, Fragmented Gods: The Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Irwin, 1987).

¹⁰⁸ This is Davie’s choice for labelling this invisible religion. See Grace Davie, ‘Religion in Modern Britain: Changing Sociological Assumptions’, *Sociology* 34, 1 (2000): 117.

¹⁰⁹ See for example, Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), and Robert Wuthnow, *Creative Spirituality: The Way of the Artist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), which describe and attempt to interpret invisible religion. He opts for the descriptor ‘seeker spirituality’, which is contrasted to the more settled aspects of traditional religion, which he describes as a matter of ‘dwelling’. See his chapter, ‘From Dwelling to Seeking’, in *After* (pages 1-18) for an overview.

¹¹⁰ ‘Spiritual Marketplace’ figures in the title of an influential book: Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). See also David Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000) for another example of this usage.

¹¹¹ Ivor Davidson, ‘Theology’s Business’, University of Otago Inaugural Professorial Lecture, 1 November 2007.

¹¹² Malcolm Hamilton, ‘An Analysis of the Festival for Mind-Body-Spirit, London’, in *Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality*, ed. Steven Sutcliffe and Marion Bowman (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 188-200.

¹¹³ Possamai, ‘Alternative’. Though much of this kind of seeking takes place outside of and even in opposition to traditional religious institutions, there is also evidence that this consumerist DIY ethos carries over into more traditional, church-going forms of religious practice. Karel Dobbelaere and Liliane Voyé describe Belgian Catholicism with a similar series of metaphors: ‘People, even those practicing regularly, “pick and choose” what to believe and what to practice. They no longer accept the “set menu” of their Church. They prefer to practice religion “à la carte”, and the “bricolage” includes elements alien to their own religion’. Karel Dobbelaere and Liliane Voyé, ‘From Pillar to Postmodernity: The Changing Situation of Religion in Belgium’, *Sociological Analysis* 51 (1990): S4.

¹¹⁴ Possamai, ‘Alternative’, 40.

¹¹⁵ William H. Swatos, Jr., ‘Introduction’, in *A Future for Religion? New Paradigms for Social Analysis*, ed William H. Swatos, Jr. (London: Sage Publications, 1993), xi.

Despite the fact that much of the rhetoric of invisible religion is centred on resistance to the anaesthetising effects of contemporary culture and the *recovery* of things lost in modernity and rationalisation, Tomoko Masuzawa argues that invisible religion, and the changes in thought and practice that it represents, are tied up inextricably with the subtraction stories:

The assumption here is that, in a society such as ‘ours,’ something like the general essence of religion, which is perforce less tangible and more universal than any particular religion (and is nowadays often referred to as spirituality), *used to be* embodied in religious institutions but now has been partially liberated from those traditional institutional confinements and can find more personal, ‘freer’ expressions through a variety of cultural venues. This deinstitutionalisation takes place, supposedly, as society becomes ‘modernised’ and ‘secularised’. The overwhelming sense that somehow all this is self-evident tends to mask an important reality: the categories of religion and culture in these configurations are both historically specific, fairly recent formations, and our daily employment of these terms ... is in fact mobilising and energising a powerful ideology of modernity, both feeding on and feeding into a certain logic that is central to our notion of who we are and what we are.¹¹⁶

Taking a cue from Masuzawa, it is possible to frame this inherent tension in relation to the subtraction story: stated very broadly, practitioners of invisible religion extend the logic of the subtraction story by adding another chapter, in which the institutional trappings of religion fall away to leave bare the perennial essence of a universal religion without religion. The currents, cross-currents and counter-currents that manifest themselves within the swirl of practices and ideas that constitute invisible religion illustrate the seeming contradictions of religious modernity in concrete cultural terms. In a sense, there is an element of the classical secularisation thesis that accounts for the movement of invisible religion, which represents a movement of the religious from the public to the private sphere, which was long one of the central tenets of the secularisation thesis.¹¹⁷ However, there is little concrete theoretical reason to argue that this represents a loss of religion *as a whole*. Invisible religion is rather one of the most consistent indicators of religious *change* in the modern context.

While the secularisation paradigm does address the movement of privatisation, it cannot convincingly account for the visible *reversals* of privatisation with the re-emergence of

¹¹⁶ Tomoko Masuzawa, ‘Culture’, in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 71.

¹¹⁷ To cite a single example, Yamane writes, ‘A secularised society is one in which people will feel free to believe and act in ways which differ from or even go against the prescribed views of religious authorities. People’s views and behaviours will be characterised by autonomy and choice’. Yamane, ‘Trial’, 116.

religion as a matter of public concern even in places that had experienced institutional decline. The closing decades of the twentieth century saw the reappearances of religion as a very public matter in forms as diverse as the Islamic revolution in Iran, the rise of Catholic liberation movements in South America and in Eastern Europe, and the emergence of powerful right-wing Christian organisations as a potent political force in the United States. Casanova writes of the 1980s:

Throughout the decade religion showed its Janus face, as the carrier not only of exclusive, particularist, and primordial identities but also of inclusive, universalist, and transcending ones. The religious revival signified simultaneously the rise of fundamentalism and of its role in the resistance of the oppressed and the rise of the 'powerless' ... It all looked like modernisation in reverse, from rational collective action back to primitive rebellion ... What was new and unexpected in the 1980s was not the emergence of 'new religious movements' ... but rather the revitalisation and the assumption of public roles by precisely those religious traditions which both theories of secularisation and cyclical theories of religious revival had assumed were becoming ever more marginalised.¹¹⁸

Outside of these particular movements, which have made fewer waves in Europe, even the most radically secularised European nations are being confronted anew with the question of religion in other ways that point to the coexistence of modernity and the religious. Immigration, often from former colonial holdings, has led to an increase in Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and other non-European traditions throughout the traditionally Judeo-Christian West. In the larger European context, Davie argues that such immigration is, from 'a religious point of view, one of the most significant evolutions of the late twentieth century'.¹¹⁹ Nor are the immigrant traditions limited to non-European imports, as Davie notes with an illustrative case of historical reversal: 'Ghanaian communities in The Netherlands see themselves as missionaries on a secular continent. Drawing on the Old Testament image of "dry bones", members of these churches construct Europe as a spiritual desert to which they are called as evangelists, a fact that is not always appreciated by the host society'.¹²⁰ Unlike the case of the United States, which has long been familiar with religious diversity, religion and modernity in this case exist in an uneasy coexistence. These introductions of religion into heavily secularised cultures from the outside has led, in some cases, to confrontation, as Beckford notes: 'In fact, one of the main reasons for the contentiousness of religion in the U.K. is that migrations ... from the Caribbean, Hong Kong,

¹¹⁸ Casanova, *Public*, 4-5. Casanova notes from these revivals that privatisation is a dialectical rather than a unilinear movement. Casanova concludes: 'while religion in the modern world continues to become ever more privatised, one is also witnessing simultaneously what appears to be a process of "deprivatisation" of religion'. Casanova, *Public*, 41.

¹¹⁹ Davie, *Religion*, 23.

¹²⁰ Davie, *Exceptional*, 85

South Asia, and East Africa since the early 1950s has sharply increased the degree of religious diversity in the country'.¹²¹

This contentiousness is perhaps most visible in the rise of fundamentalist Islam, which is becoming a serious cultural matter in ways that underline the continuing cultural importance of the subtraction stories. The reductive polarities that such evolutionary understandings of modernity can engender are particularly visible within current public, political and journalistic discourses on Islam. Edward Said notes this in the 2003 foreword to his classic, *Orientalism*:

There has been so massive and calculatedly aggressive an attack on the contemporary societies of the Arab and Muslim for their backwardness, lack of democracy, and abrogation of Women's rights that we simply forget that such notions as modernity, enlightenment, and democracy are by no means simple and agreed-upon concepts that one either does or does not find, like Easter eggs in the living room.¹²²

Said demonstrates the power of the subtraction stories and their tendency to oversimplify the situation.¹²³ For the forms of fundamentalism are not incidences of the re-emergence of archaic, reactionary survivals from a pre-modern, pre-rational past. Despite all their avowed anti-modernism, the various forms of fundamentalism (which can be found in many religious traditions today but are most often identified with the Abrahamic monotheisms) are religious productions of modernity. The rise of fundamentalisms, and the narratives of tradition and purity on which they trade, represent something rather different from the way in which fundamentalists are often represented, and is indeed often

¹²¹ Beckford, 'Politics', 26.

¹²² Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), xix. To cite one recent example of the operation of the discourse, Asad writes of the widely publicized 2005 controversy surrounding the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* and its publication of a number of cartoons of the Prophet Mohammad, which were widely seen as blasphemous and deliberately provocative and which were met with protests and even threats of violence: 'The conflict that many Euro-Americans saw in the Danish cartoons scandal was between the West and Islam, each championing opposing values: democracy, secularism, liberty, and reason on the one side, and on the other their many polar opposites – tyranny, religion, authority, and unreason'. Talal Asad, 'Reflections on Blasphemy and Secular Criticism', in *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, ed. by Hent de Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 581.

¹²³ Foner and Alba note that such public perceptions have influenced social-scientific approaches to Islam: 'Popular attitudes toward Islam have helped to shape the social science literature. Many social scientists have documented actual practices and beliefs among immigrant Muslims and their children, often as a way to counter negative stereotypes and prejudices about these practices and beliefs; others have attempted to explain the animosities and conflicts that have developed; and still others have offered, on the basis of their analyses, policy recommendations for improving relation and reducing strains or, in some cases, preserving what are felt to be basic universal, European, or national values that are seen to be in danger'. Foner and Alba, 'Immigrant', 368. Frank Buijs and Jan Rath argue a point even closer to Said's: 'To put in bluntly, Muslims are often associated with premodern attitudes and practices and this has, to some extent, influenced the research agenda. A lot of attention is dedicated to such themes as gender relations (including headscarves), freedom of speech (including the Rushdie affair, Muslim radicalism and so forth) and the compatibility of Islam and modernity'. Frank J. Buijs and Jan Rath, 'Muslims in Europe: The State of Research', IMISCOE Working Paper (http://edoc.bibliothek.uni-halle.de/servlets/MCRFileNodeServlet/HALCoRe_derivate_00001738/MuslimsinEurope-Thestateofresearch.pdf?hosts=. Accessed 14 September 2008), 28.

the way such groups choose to represent themselves. Fundamentalist religion is in many ways a reaction *against* modernity but is at the same time reliant upon modern epistemic categories. Political philosopher John Gray notes the modern character of fundamentalism, or at least the deep roots that fundamentalism has in the Enlightenment, which we must recall is a crucial act in the rise of modernity:

Fundamentalist religion is not the radical rejection of modernity it imagines itself to be: like Nazism, it is a peculiarly modern phenomenon. Radical Islam sees itself as the enemy of the Enlightenment; but Islamist thought has been deeply shaped by modern Western radical ideologies – such as Jacobinism and Leninism – that seek to realise Enlightenment hopes by the methodical use of violence. Christian fundamentalists may believe they reject the modern world. Yet their flirtation with pseudo-sciences such as Creationism and Intelligent Design shows that they submit to the power of modern science, and like followers of the Enlightenment believe human salvation can be found in an increase of knowledge. Though they reject the Enlightenment, they are unable to escape its spell.¹²⁴

Considered from within the perspective of an evolutionary modernity, fundamentalist religion is perhaps the most troubling of the productions of religious modernity. If we understand such forms of religion as products of the modern world and as creations of chains of tradition within contemporary amnesiac cultures, the challenges they present to the idea of modernity and the universality of modern progress are absolute, as Ali Hassan Zaidi argues in relationship to terrorism: ‘Whatever else 9/11 represents, surely it stands as a pre-eminent sign of the appropriation and deployment of modern scientific knowledge, technology and skill against the very heart of economic and institutional modernity in the name of religion. It is the deployment of modernity against itself.’¹²⁵ Similarly, Gray concludes, ‘A “postmodern” organisation serving “premodern” values, Al Qaeda has planted a question mark over the very idea of what it means to be modern’.¹²⁶

Though it is, as a whole, less contentious than fundamentalist movements, it is worth noting that evangelical Christianity, in its many forms, is, in different ways, an identifiable product of modernity. One of the most visible iterations of the evangelical is the upsurge in Pentecostal churches in the United States, South America, Africa, Asia, and Europe, often among marginalised or displaced peoples. Pentecostal worship, focused as it is on speaking in tongues and other gifts of the Spirit, is very often characterised by movement, music and

¹²⁴ John Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age* (London: Routledge Classics, 1995), xv.

¹²⁵ Ali Hassan Zaidi, ‘Muslim Reconstruction of Knowledge and the Re-enchantment of Modernity’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, 5 (2006): 69.

¹²⁶ John Gray, *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals* (London: Granta Books, 2002), 175-176.

emotional experience and (at least in its earliest forms) was suspicious of mediation in any form. It is, as Harvey Cox notes, ‘the most experiential branch of Christianity, a movement that first arose ... as a protest against “man-made creeds” and the “coldness” of traditional worship’.¹²⁷ Martin notes its distinctly modern character, foreshadowing as he does so the necessary presence of countercurrents to rationalisation that will become important in coming chapters:

The metanarrative of Pentecostalism is not based on rationalisation and bureaucracy but rather on story and song, gesture and empowerment, image and embodiment, enthusiastic release and personal discipline. One has to view this potent combination of empowerment with release as just as viable in terms of advancing modernity as rationalisation.¹²⁸

Andre Droogers likewise argues that Pentecostalism ‘is typically modern in its focus on the individual, its world-wide mission, its rapid spread across the globe, its use of modern communication techniques, but most of all in its critical reaction to modernity and its excesses’.¹²⁹ From its beginnings with the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles in 1906, Pentecostalism is today a global phenomenon, making headway even in places, like parts of Latin America, where the Catholic Church has long been the voice of the oppressed. Pentecostal Christianity is, like many of the permutations of invisible religion and like the various forms of fundamentalism, permeated with the language of *recovery*, in this case, the recovery of the spirit of the early Christian church before the accretions of doctrine and institutional mediation. As a broad category, Pentecostalism is a form of worship focused on, in Cox’s words, ‘restoring to Christianity many of the primal religious elements – visions, signs, wonders, and healings – that were edited out during the Protestant Reformation’.¹³⁰ Again, like invisible religion, Pentecostal Christianity is a distinctly modern religious form. Like invisible religion and fundamentalism, the success of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements is incomprehensible outside the context of modernity.

On the evidence of these three highly visible forms of the religious, it is tempting to read recovery as the preferred call to tradition within modern Western cultures and thus the primary motivator and indicator of the religious. The secularisation paradigm, or more

¹²⁷ Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1995), 14. For more on Pentecostalism, see David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

¹²⁸ Martin, *Secularisation*, 142.

¹²⁹ André Droogers, ‘As Close as a Scholar Can Get: Exploring a One-Field Approach to the Study of Religion’, in *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, ed. Hent de Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 459.

¹³⁰ Cox, *Fire*, 51.

broadly, the subtraction stories, can again make little sense of the sociological evidence of the strength of these varied manifestations of the religious. On the other hand, the conceptual framework of religious modernity allows us to account for the vitality of such forms of seeking after sense and meaning in the past as productions of modernity itself.

Conclusions

In order to grasp the relevance of religion, we need what I would like to call a post-secularist approach, post-secularist in the sense that, rather than inscribe into our theoretical frameworks the opposition between secular and religious that has entered our modern social imaginaries, we need to take this opposition as an object of study

Birgit Meyer¹³¹

There are solid conceptual and evidential reasons for adopting an interpretive frame that rejects the simplistic argument that modernity necessarily displaces the religious and its reliance on tradition and continuity. The conclusions we can draw from this investigation suggest that the study of religion needs to pursue its work under alternative theoretical frameworks. Among these, Hervieu-Léger's religious modernity is among the most compelling in that it avoids the polarised mistakes of the secularisation paradigm and those of other accounts which argue that modernity is a simple continuation of Christian tradition. Religious modernity formalises the argument that the religious forms found in the cultural conditions of modernity, and the need for chains of tradition that they satisfy, are not simple survivals from earlier and less enlightened times. Rather, they are the active and continual productions of modernity itself. A survey of a selection of the most important sociological evidence bears out the conclusions of the conceptual argument for adopting religious modernity. Though she largely focuses on the diffuse forms of individual religiosity, which Luckmann calls 'invisible religion', Hervieu-Léger's concept is also useful as a broader frame of reference, in that it allows us to make sense of more organised movements like various forms of Pentecostal and fundamentalist religion, both of which trade on narratives of recovery and unbroken tradition.

One of the many consequences of this inquiry into definition and methodology is the realisation that, to properly understand the contemporary religious world, indeed, to properly understand modernity itself, the study of religion needs to restock its bag of conceptual tools to face the new challenges that this presents. We turn next to one such concept: *reenchantment*.

¹³¹ Meyer, 'Sensations', 705. Emphasis in original.

CHAPTER THE SECOND: MAX
WEBER AND RATIONALISATION,
OR THE DISENCHANTMENT OF THE
WORLD

Weber... was offering a sociological – perhaps even an ethical or moral – provocation which continues to resonate today. The challenge of Weber’s choice of words, and of his analysis, is that he understood, perhaps better than most of his contemporaries, the complicated and contradictory nature of the times in which he lived, and we still live; that ‘progress’ is, at best, a mixed blessing, and that one of the definitive tasks of sociology ... must be the exploration and better appreciation of that somewhat bitter mixture. He is not, however, suggesting – in anticipation of the post-modern posture, perhaps – that progress is an illusion. Nothing so simple.

Richard Jenkins¹

Reenchantment derives its meaning from what looks to be its antonym, ‘disenchantment’. This need not suggest, however, that the concept of reenchantment as it is commonly used is related in any real way to Max Weber’s *Entzauberung*, his foundational theory of rationalisation. It is rather from commonplace cultural understandings of disenchantment that the term reenchantment derives much of its immediate suggestiveness and takes on much of its meaning. Since the early 1970s, ‘reenchantment’ has been used for a variety of purposes in a number of academic fields; however, the concept itself remains largely unexamined. Its meaning is too often simply *assumed*, and this, at times, even if unintentionally, reinforces dominant forms of modern self-understanding rooted in the subtraction narratives. This does not mean that the idea of ‘reenchantment’ is inherently without value; indeed, *if properly understood*, the concept holds forth a good deal of promise for the study of religion. This chapter poses the seemingly nonsensical question: what happens if we formulate a concept of reenchantment using Weber’s actual sociological work on *disenchantment*? Weber certainly never suggested the possibility of reenchantment, or anything like it; nonetheless, there is perhaps more than might be expected in his work to suggest that the process of rationalisation is, and necessarily remains, incomplete.

In response to the question posed above, in this chapter I will, after a review of Weber’s work and the pervasive cultural meanings of disenchantment, be proposing a two-tiered typology for reenchantment: *thin reenchantment*, which covers what has to date been the

¹ Richard Jenkins, ‘Disenchantment, Enchantment and Re-Enchantment: Max Weber at the Millennium’, *Max Weber Studies* 1 (November 2000): 11.

dominant usage, despite its inherent incoherence, and *thick reenchantment*, which is both conceptually more complex and internally more coherent. *Thin* reenchantment repeats the logic of the subtraction stories by proposing reenchantment as the simple *reversal* of an assumed and mostly completed disenchantment. In this, it is not reenchantment at all, but a restatement, clothed in the garb of a challenge, of some received stories of modernity. *Thick* reenchantment conceptualises reenchantment as a dialectical counterpart to rationalisation. It proposes that rationalisation produces its own reenchantments, in much the same manner that modernity produces its own religious responses, and more radically that reenchantment, perhaps *as much as* disenchantment, is a defining characteristic of modernity.

Max Weber and Disenchantment

It is the intellectual who transforms the concept of the world into the problem of meaning. As intellectualism suppresses belief in magic, the world's processes become disenchanted, lose their magical significance, and henceforth simply 'are' and 'happen' but no longer signify anything. As a consequence, there is a growing demand that the world and the total pattern of life is subject to an order that is significant and meaningful.

Max Weber²

Like many of the formative voices in sociology, Weber was not himself a religious man: 'I am a-musical as far as religion is concerned, and I have neither the desire nor the capacity to build religious architectures in myself'.³ Despite this, Weber managed to avoid much of the outright hostility that figures like Auguste Comte aimed at religion. Drawing on a diverse background in law, theology, and history that would later influence his vision of human culture as an interconnected web, Weber laid the foundations for the sociology of religion with studies (some never completed) of traditions as diverse as ancient Judaism, Indian Buddhism, Hinduism and medieval Catholicism. Despite his wide-ranging interests, Weber is remembered primarily for his theory and concomitant narrative of rationalisation, which provided the unifying element in his work. Weber did not coin the phrase 'the disenchantment of the world', but he undeniably popularised the *language* of disenchantment; however, it would be a mistake to assume that the related concept of reenchantment takes its meaning from Weber's work. In fact, the dominant meaning of the word 'reenchantment' comes from another source entirely.

The idea of disenchantment is, as Charles Taylor argues, an integral part of both the modern self-understanding and the subtraction stories:

² Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. by Ephraim Fischhoff (Boston: Beacon Press Books, 1965), 125.

³ Quoted in Klemens von Klemperer, *The German Uncertainties, 1914-1945: The Stones and the Cathedral* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), 145.

it is a crucial fact of our present spiritual predicament that it is historical; that is, our understanding of ourselves and where we stand is partly defined by our sense of having come to where we are, of having overcome a previous condition. Thus we are widely aware of living in a ‘disenchanted’ universe; and our use of this word bespeaks our sense that it was once enchanted. More, we are not only aware that it used to be so, but also that it was a struggle and an achievement to get to where we are; and that in some respects this achievement is fragile. We know this because each one of us as we grew up has had to take on the disciplines of disenchantment, and we regularly reproach each other for our failings in this regard, and accuse each other of ‘magical’ thinking, of indulging in ‘myth’, of giving way to ‘fantasy’; we say that X isn’t living in our century, that Y has a ‘mediaeval’ mind, while Z, whom we admire, is way ahead of her time.⁴

It is primarily from *this* understanding of disenchantment, which Taylor captures quite accurately, that the idea of re-enchantment takes its meaning, even in the academic context, where Weber’s work, we would assume, is well known. Paradoxically, much of the current discourse on re-enchantment provides an indicator of just how deeply the evolutionary narrative of modernity remains embedded in the academic study of religion, despite the successes of the postmodern turn, and in spite of recent theoretical and sociological work within the field itself which challenges these assumptions. Many of the uses of re-enchantment are thus rooted in the uncritical acceptance of flawed narratives of modernity. Thus, if we are to take the criticisms of the subtraction stories seriously, as the previous chapter argued we must, this has serious consequences for the conceptualisation of re-enchantment. To formulate a concept of re-enchantment that is of any use to the study of religion as it strives to *move past* these flawed understandings, we must find a starting point *other* than that of the larger cultural discourse on disenchantment. I want to suggest here that Weber’s writing on disenchantment provides a valuable and largely untapped resource for thinking re-enchantment outside of the evolutionary narratives of modernity. There is a curious disconnection between this *generic* cultural understanding of disenchantment and Weber’s sociological work on disenchantment, without which the general impression never could have developed. Weber remains an almost subliminal influence on the discourse of re-enchantment and his theory of disenchantment is broadly familiar and we need not rehearse it in any great detail here; nevertheless, a brief review of rationalisation may be helpful before moving on.

⁴ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 28-29.

Throughout his career, Weber worked almost exclusively with *ideal types*, and rationalisation, as an *abstraction* of concrete historical processes, was without a doubt the most important of these models, as Frederic Jameson notes:

Weber only dealt, over and over again, and in the most varied forms, with a single sociological phenomenon ... The story is of course that of rationalisation, a process Weber finds to be at work in ancient prophecy just as much as in modern bureaucracy, in Prussian agriculture just as much as in Protestant theology ... rationalisation, surely, is a model rather than an empirical fact, an 'ideal type' rather than an observable social institution.⁵

Even given that it is an artificial scholarly construct, not unlike that of 'religion', what Weber meant by rationalisation is in many ways unclear, as he never provided a systematic treatment of the term. The problem is aggravated by the fact that he died before finishing a planned major retrospective work, which was published only later and in fragmentary form. To gather a picture of rationalisation from Weber's work requires a careful, close reading that gathers in details spread over a number of books, essays and speeches.

In 1918, mere months after the end of the mechanised slaughter of the First World War, Weber gave his famed lecture, 'Science as a Vocation', in which he laid out the most forceful and perhaps best-known formulation of his theory. He told the students who gathered in Munich to hear him speak, 'The fate of our times is characterised by rationalisation and intellectualisation and, above all, by the "disenchantment of the world". Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations'.⁶ The question of *value* is central to Weber's theory of rationalisation, which is, in general terms, elegant in its simplicity. Put very briefly: in the millennia-long process of rationalisation, all considerations of value are gradually subordinated to considerations of function, operation and utility. It is the general tendency in human societies to move from valuing questions of *why* to valuing questions of *how*, to move from a value-based rationality focused on the ends of action to a detached, instrumental rationality concerned only with

⁵ Frederic Jameson, 'The Vanishing Mediator: Narrative Structure in Max Weber', *New German Critique* 1 (Winter 1973): 80. It is also worth noting that Weber also argued that human beings and human cultures were not amenable to strictly scientific study. Daniel Pals identifies *Verstehen* as one of Weber's primary methodological concerns: 'The principle of *Verstehen* presumes that we cannot explain the actions of humans as we explain occurrences in nature ... Their behaviour is guided not just by external forces such as gravity but by internally held ideas such as the belief in freedom and inwardly experienced emotions such as feelings of love'. Daniel L. Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 2nd ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 153.

⁶ Max Weber, 'Science as a Vocation', in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and ed. by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 155. Weber's attitude towards the war was ambivalent: he once wrote that the war was 'despite its hideousness ... great and wonderful and worth experiencing'. Quoted in Klemperer, *German*, 35. Though Weber was in his 50s and in poor health when the war broke out and was unable to serve in combat, he worked in a military hospital for a year during combat.

the means. Like the classical secularisation paradigm, Weber's rationalisation describes in the march of history a definite structure that is both largely unilinear and irreversible.

Weber traced the roots of rationalisation to an originary fragmentation of a world which he understood as *enchanted*. As was true for many of his contemporaries, and as remains so for a not inconsiderable number of thinkers even today, Weber's sociology assumes the existence of a unified prehistoric human culture, an animistic order deeply rooted in nature, out of which more modern cultures would eventually arise. Inhabitants of this world interacted frequently with what Weber called *spirits* through a rudimentary form of mediation:

A process of abstraction, which only appears to be simple, has usually already been carried out in the most primitive instances of religious behaviour which we examine. Already crystallised is the notion that certain beings are concealed 'behind' and responsible for the activity of the charismatically endowed natural objects, artefacts, animals, or persons. This is the belief in spirits. At the outset, 'spirit' is neither soul, demon, nor god, but something indeterminate, material yet invisible, non-personal and yet somehow endowed with volition. By entering into a concrete object, spirit endows the latter with its distinctive power.⁷

With the help of charismatic mediums, shamans or medicine men, people living in this enchanted world implored the spirits for assistance in quotidian, *this-worldly* matters like the health of a child, a successful harvest, or victory in battle.

This primordial unity, however, was shattered by the appearance of individual, often anthropomorphised gods, the beginnings of a process of distancing where what was once direct contact with the mysterious was increasingly *mediated* by symbols, rituals, or religious professionals who operated with a *routinised* rather than revolutionary charisma. Weber summarises this movement simply: 'Magic is transformed from a direct manipulation of forces into a symbolic activity'.⁸ This fracture is not, however, the end of the story, as Gustavo Benavides writes: 'one would have to consider this primordial

⁷ Weber, *Sociology*, 3. Weber found evidence for such this-worldly magic across early human cultures: 'All the primeval magical or mystagogic ways of influencing spirits and deities have pursued special interests. They have striven for wealth, as well as long life, health, honour, progeny and, possibly, the improvement of one's fate in the hereafter. The Eleusian mysteries promised all this, just as did the Phoenician and Vedic religious, the Chinese folk-religion, ancient Judaism, and ancient Islam; and it was the promise held out to the pious Hindu and Buddhist laymen'. Max Weber, 'Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions', in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and ed. by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 331.

⁸ Weber, *Sociology*, 6. Weber saw this as a cross-cultural, even universal, event in human history. Tracing this development in Indian Vedic religion, in ancient Babylonia, in Europe and in other places, he writes, 'there is generally a tendency for a pantheon to evolve, once systematic thinking concerning religious practice has taken place and a certain (though quite variable) level of rationalisation of life generally has been attained, resulting in certain characteristic demands with regard to the various gods'. Weber, *Sociology*, 10.

disenchantment (*Entzauberung*) as one of many, in some cases contradictory, acts of a drama'.⁹ Perhaps the most crucial act of the long drama of rationalisation was for Weber the arrival of the radically transcendent (at least in terms of what had come before) god YHWH in ancient Judaism, whom Weber called a 'universal god'. As Nicholas Gane, reviewing Weber's theory, notes, the recently united tribes of Israel accepted YHWH

under oath, entering a contractual relationship that demanded his commandments be satisfied. This said, Yahweh's will was always changeable, with the consequence that the believer could never be sure that these demands had actually been met (a condition later reproduced in ascetic Protestantism) which led in turn both to the progressive systematisation of conduct and to the pursuit of an ordered understanding of Yahweh's demands and purpose.¹⁰

The process of rationalisation reached its definitive moment millennia later with the seventeenth-century Puritan settlers in North America, who pursued a highly intellectualised, rationalised path to salvation deeply indebted to the theology of the Swiss Reformer John Calvin. Weber concludes, 'Only ascetic Protestantism completely eliminated the supernatural quest for salvation, of which the highest form was intellectualist, contemplative illumination'.¹¹ This asceticism was derived in part from monastic practices, indeed, as Jameson, argues, 'Calvin did not desacralise the world; on the contrary, he turned the *entire* world into a monastery'.¹² Weber argued that this led the Puritans to lead focused, rigidly ascetic lives:

This religion demanded of the believer, not celibacy, as in the case of the monk, but the avoidance of all erotic pleasure; not poverty, but the elimination of all idle and exploitative enjoyment of unearned wealth and income, and the avoidance of all feudalistic, sensuous ostentation of wealth; not the ascetic death-in-life of the cloister, but an alert, rationally controlled patterning of life, and the avoidance of all surrender to the beauty of the world, to art, or to one's own moods and emotions. The clear and uniform goal of this asceticism was the disciplining and methodical organisation of the whole pattern of life.¹³

⁹ Gustavo Benavides, 'Modernity,' in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 191.

¹⁰ Nicholas Gane, *Max Weber and Postmodern Theory: Rationalisation versus Re-enchantment* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 18. In this, Weber is by no means alone. Thinkers as diverse as Friedrich Schiller, Mircea Eliade, Alan Gilbert and Peter Berger also attribute particular importance to the arrival of Jewish monotheism in the course of Western history.

¹¹ Weber, *Sociology*, 269-270. Elsewhere, he fleshes out this explanation: 'When religious virtuosos have combined into an active asceticist sect, two aims are completely attained: the disenchantment of the world and the blockages of the path to salvation by a flight from the world. The path to salvation is turned away from a contemplative "flight from the world" and towards an active ascetic "work in this world". If one disregards the small rationalist sects, such as are found all over the world, this has been attained only in the great church and sect organisations of Occidental and asceticist Protestantism'. Max Weber, 'The Social Psychology of the World Religions,' in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and ed. by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 290.

¹² Jameson, 'Vanishing', 76.

¹³ Weber, *Sociology*, 183.

The practice of this sort of Protestantism, Weber argued, led, if indirectly and unintentionally, to the rationalisation of the whole sphere of social and cultural action, a world that is dominated by the concerns of the functional, the operational, and the instrumental. Weber concluded that rationalisation gradually became divorced from its original religious and theological motivations in the modern world, and instrumental rationality became an end in and of itself.¹⁴

From this brief glance, Weber appears to be offering here a philosophy of history that is very much like that of a subtraction story. However, things are not that simple. Firstly, Weber by no means treated the arrival of a rationalised world as a triumph. Weber's at times virulently critical assessment of rationalisation, which places him immediately at odds with the *conclusions* drawn by the evolutionary account of modernity – though not with its general structure – is visible even in the simple fact that his study of values has strong resonances with Friedrich Nietzsche's definition of European nihilism: 'What does nihilism mean? *That the highest values devalue themselves*. The aim is lacking: "why?" finds no answer'.¹⁵ Weber's assessment of the costs of rationalisation is often bitingly critical, his vision of the future markedly pessimistic, his criticisms of disenchantment a natural outgrowth of his theoretical work. Rationalisation inevitably leads, he argues, to irrational, inhuman and ultimately self-defeating consequences, captured in the evocative description of an 'iron cage'. In one of his more poetic moments, he laments, 'Not summer's bloom lies ahead of us, but rather a polar night of icy darkness and hardness'.¹⁶ Detlef Kantowsky takes Weber's cynicism as far as to write, 'He was certainly not an anthropologist of progress but rather a prophet of doom; it was ... the unique form of overdevelopment of the West and its destructive potential which haunted him'.¹⁷ Weber indeed interrogates directly the

¹⁴ Though it is incidental to our concerns here, Weber singles out this asceticism as the unique feature of Calvinism, again divorced from its value-laden roots, which led more or less directly to the rise of capitalism in the West, and only in the West. He elaborates: 'The inner-worldly asceticism of Protestantism first produced a capitalistic state, although unintentionally, for it opened the way to a career in business, especially for the most devout and ethically rigorous people. Above all, Protestantism interpreted success in business as a fruit of a rational mode of life ... One of the most notable economic effects of Calvinism was its destruction of the traditional forms of charity ... For Calvinism held that the unsearchable God possessed good reasons for having distributed the gifts of fortune unequally. It never ceased to stress the notion that a man proved himself exclusively in his vocational work'. Weber, *Sociology*, 220-221.

¹⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1967), 9. Emphasis in original.

¹⁶ Max Weber, 'Politics as a Vocation', in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and ed. by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 128.

¹⁷ Detlef Kantowsky, 'Max Weber on India and Indian Interpretations of Weber', *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 16, 2 (1982): 168.

dominant modern understanding of progress, though his view is nuanced enough to avoid any facile rejection of a positive assessment of modernity:

Does it mean that we, today ... have a greater knowledge of the conditions of life under which we exist than has an American Indian or a Hottentot? Hardly. Unless he is a physicist, one who rides on the streetcar has no idea how the car happened to get into motion. And he does not need to know ... The savage [*sic*] knows infinitely more about his tools ... the savage knows what he does in order to get his daily food and which institutions serve him in this pursuit. The increasing intellectualisation and rationalisation do *not*, therefore, indicate an increased and general knowledge of the conditions under which one lives. It means something else, namely, the knowledge or belief that if one but wished one *could* learn it at any time. Hence, it means that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed ... Who ... still believes that the findings of astronomy, biology, physics, or chemistry could teach us anything about the *meaning* of the world?¹⁸

This sense of meaninglessness is central to Weber's critique of modern rationalised societies. As rationalisation proceeds, he argues, 'Culture becomes ever more senseless as a locus of imperfection, of injustice, of suffering, of sin, of futility. For it is necessarily burdened with guilt, and its deployment and differentiation thus necessarily become ever more meaningless'.¹⁹ Rationalisation, he concludes (at least on some occasions) has robbed the world of its meaning and led ultimately to a sterile, inhuman world populated largely by dull and uninspired people:

With the progress of science and technology, man has stopped believing in magic powers, in spirits and demons; he has lost his sense of prophecy and, above all, his sense of the sacred. Reality has become dreary, flat and utilitarian, leaving a great void in the souls of men which they seek to fill by furious activity and through various devices and substitutes.²⁰

Even given this, Weber did not foreclose on the future quite so radically as is often assumed:

No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanised petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance. For of the last stage of the cultural development, it might well be truly said: 'Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved'.²¹

¹⁸ Weber, 'Science', 139-142. Emphasis in original.

¹⁹ Weber, 'Rejections', 357.

²⁰ Quoted in Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas. *Religion in Modern Times: An Interpretive Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 311.

²¹ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. by Talcott Parsons (London: Unwin University Books, 1930), 182. A newer, more accurate translation of the *Ethic* by Stephen Kalberg is forthcoming from Oxford University Press but will, unfortunately, arrive too late to be incorporated into this thesis.

Though Weber was ambivalent about the shape of the future course of rationalisation, his pessimistic assessment of rationalised cultures is far better represented in contemporary scholarly and postmodern critiques of culture than are his isolated moments of optimism. Edward Tiryakian calls his work ‘the common denominator to the various approaches on the problematics of modernity’.²²

While Weber’s suspicion of rationalisation distances him from the simplistic evolutionary accounts of modernity, in other ways he remains deeply indebted to such narratives, as Gregory Baum notes: ‘Weber’s thesis of the disenchantment of the world is different from, through related to, the famous doctrine of Auguste Comte and the positivists that religion corresponds to a primitive stage of human development and necessarily disappears with the evolution of the scientific and critical spirit’.²³ Weber was able to avoid the worst of the reductionistic mistakes of which his contemporaries were guilty, but not, it turns out, all of them. Even granted that he worked with ideal types rather than with concrete historical realities, Weber’s disenchantment is too unilinear and too prescriptive to account for the character and shape of European modernity. That disenchantment has never been a simple unilinear process is readily evident with even a cursory look at European history, the locus for much of Weber’s thinking on rationalisation. To cite one glaring example of the extent to which Weber’s grand narrative fails to match the historical record, Alan Gilbert notes that the whole of the medieval period presents a problem for the unilinear nature of Weber’s narrative: ‘The medieval world may have been a far cry from the “enchanted garden” consciousness of primitive societies, but it certainly bore the marks of partial “re-enchantment”. In Weber’s less than euphonious expression, it had been “re-sacralised”’.²⁴ Indeed, Weber’s primary failing lies in the simplistic pictures he draws of complex historical realities. Richard Jenkins offers us another instance:

It is, for example, questionable whether the ‘enchanted world’ was ever as unified as Weber’s argument seems to presume. Even if we disregard the rich variety of communities and ethnicities in the pre-modern world, there is every reason to suggest that the European world, at least, has been disenchanted, *in the sense of epistemically fragmented*, for as long as we can perceive in the historical record. Scepticism, heresy, and pluralism are plain to see. Similarly, it is now conventional

²² Edward A. Tiryakian, ‘Dialectics of Modernity: Reenchantment and Dedifferentiation as Counterprocesses’, in *Social Change and Modernity*, ed. Hans Haferkamp and Neil J. Smelser (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 78-79.

²³ Gregory Baum, ‘Does the World Remain Disenchanted?’ *Social Research* 37, 2 (June 1970): 154.

²⁴ Alan D. Gilbert, *The Making of Post-Christian Britain: A History of the Secularisation of Modern Society* (London: Longman, 1980), 19.

anthropological wisdom that homogenous 'primitive society' is a fiction which reflects a set of tacit presumptions about modernity.²⁵

It must be admitted that in many ways, Weber's work is deeply flawed. Rodney Stark dismisses Weber completely on the grounds that some of his most important conclusions, including his foundational link between ascetic Protestantism and the rise of capitalism, were later found to be indisputably wrong. Stark concludes, 'the fact remains that our progress as a field requires us to think anew, not to become disciples of this very fallible, notably anti-Catholic, writer of abominable prose'.²⁶ Weber's theories are certainly imperfect and even guilty of some of the same mistakes as dominant evolutionary narratives of modernity. It is no less true that Weber's demonstrable inaccuracies do not completely undermine the usefulness of his larger framework of rationalisation as an approach to the study of religion. There is no need to throw the baby out with the bathwater. There is a middle ground that Stark chooses to ignore in his fierce attempts to justify the scientific nature of the sociology of religion. As Taylor notes of Weber's conclusions about capitalism and history, 'What started us on this path were changes on several levels, not only economic, but political and spiritual. In this I think Weber is right, even if not all the detail of his theory can be salvaged'.²⁷ There is a way to use Weber's work in a manner that builds upon its strengths while at the same time thinks things anew, a point made by Baum as long ago as 1970: 'it is still relevant to study Max Weber on the question of the disenchantment or the possible re-enchantment of the world'.²⁸ What Baum does not do is offer us any idea as what re-enchantment might entail, a question which bears careful consideration.

²⁵ Jenkins, 'Disenchantment', 15. Emphasis in original.

²⁶ Rodney Stark, 'SSSR Presidential Address, 2004: Putting an End to Ancestor Worship', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43, 4 (December 2004): 468. Stark, in an extreme case of the criticism of Weber, condemns anyone who regards Weber's work (as well as that of Emile Durkheim and Karl Marx) as serious social science as guilty of an uncritical 'ancestor worship'. Stark takes Weber to task for his thesis linking ascetic Protestantism with the rise of capitalism: 'Perhaps because it was such an elegant thesis, it was widely embraced despite the fact that it was obviously wrong'. Stark, 'Ancestor', 465. Pals sums the impact of this aspect of Weber's theory: 'From almost the moment in appeared, *The Protestant Ethic* sparked a vigorous intellectual debate that has never really ended'. Pals, *Eight*, 165.

²⁷ Taylor, *Secular*, 179. Taylor elaborates, 'Now people often object to Weber's thesis that they can't verify it in terms of clearly traceable correlations, say, between confessional allegiances and capitalist development. But it is the nature of this kind of relation between spiritual outlook and economic and political performance that the influence may also be much more diffuse and indirect ... Certain moral self-understandings are embedded in certain practices, which can mean both that they are promoted by the spread of these practices, and that they shape the practices and help them get established'. Taylor, *Secular*, 156.

²⁸ Baum, 'World', 159.

Max Weber and Reenchantment

Durkheim explained why all men were rational and Weber, why some were more rational than others ... Durkheim explained the rationality of ancient unreason. Weber showed the irrationality of modern reason.
Ernest Gellner²⁹

As we have already noted, reenchantment is most often based on the common modern self-understanding of the world as disenchanted. However, building a theory of or a meaning for reenchantment from Max Weber's sociological writing yields another, and far more compelling, conceptualisation of reenchantment which has a considerable utility for the study of the religious in modernity. It might be objected that Weber's picture of the world is too deterministic to be of any use in conceptualising reenchantment. However, on closer inspection, it becomes clear that his notion of rationalisation was never entirely closed and that he leaves some room for play within his frameworks. For Baum, who sees rationalisation as 'rich and many-levelled', Weber offers something other than a simple subtraction story:

There are, however, many pages in Weber's work where the concept of rationalisation ... almost assumes the role of a principle of evolution, though a careful reading of the text shows that he does not claim this process to be necessarily at work in every society nor always improve the conditions of life. But when dealing with modern life in particular, Weber tends to think of rationalisation mainly in terms of the technological and bureaucratic expansion of society.³⁰

Ultimately, there is a tension that is never fully resolvable running throughout Weber's work in how he treats *reversals* of, or more importantly, *alternatives* to, the process of rationalisation. It should perhaps be noted that Weber's attitude toward many things was highly ambivalent. To take one example, though this is often hidden within his carefully-maintained façade of neutrality, Weber, as Baum notes, 'lamented modern man's insensitivity to the prophetic and the sacred'³¹ despite the fact that, we should remember, he was decidedly not religious himself. On the other hand, he writes dismissively of those who are resistant to the changing modern world and reluctant to leave religion behind, revealing again his ambiguous debt to the subtraction stories that he has helped to maintain with his language of disenchantment:

To the person who cannot bear the fate of the times like a man, one must say: may he return silently, without the usual publicity build-up of renegades, but simply and plainly. The arms of the old churches are opened widely and compassionately for him. After all, they do not make it hard for him. One way or another, he has to bring his 'intellectual sacrifice' – that is inevitable.³²

²⁹ Ernest Gellner, *Plough, Sword and Book: The Structure of Human History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 128, 255.

³⁰ Baum, 'World', 153.

³¹ Baum, 'World', 154.

³² Weber, 'Science', 155.

Weber also had good reason, given his historical context, to be suspicious of any widespread attempts to reverse the tide of rationalisation. When Weber delivered his lecture 'Science as a Vocation' his words were tinged with a looming sense of unease over what he saw as a dangerous attraction of the neo-Romantic *Jugendbewegung* movements in Germany following its defeat in World War I and its subsequent humiliation and the hands of the Treaty of Versailles. Baum notes that the speech was, for Weber, uncharacteristically personal: 'Weber abandoned the neutrality that usually characterised his scholarly essays, and manifested his deep convictions about the modern age and its cultural frame'.³³ Weber felt compelled to offer his gathered audience a thinly-veiled warning:

Redemption from the rationalism and intellectualism of science is the fundamental presupposition of living in union with the divine. This, or something similar in meaning, is one of the fundamental watchwords one hears among German youth, whose feelings are attuned to religion or who crave religious experiences. They crave not only religious experience but experience as such. The only thing that is strange is the method that is now followed: the spheres of the irrational, the only spheres that intellectualism has not yet touched, are now raised into consciousness and put under its lens. For in practice this is where the modern intellectualist form of romantic irrationalism leads. This method of emancipation from intellectualism may well bring about the very opposite of what those who take it conceive as its goal.³⁴

Though he may have lamented the disenchantment of the world at the hands of science, and though he was speaking at a time when the irrationalities of rationalisation and technology had never been more apparent, he may also have had an inkling of the dangers lurking over the horizon. Historian Anne Harrington speculates similarly on Weber's intentions:

Weber knew that the students listening to the talk were hungry for existential and moral orientation and would be hoping for a message from him that addressed their demands for personal relevance and larger meaning in their studies. He did not feel able to comply ... Weber's lecture in 1918 was intended as a direct response to the widespread mood of restless antimodernism and antiscience that was so palpable in the wake of that lost war and the fall of the Wilhelminian regime.³⁵

³³ Baum, 'World', 153. Baum offers an interesting take on the ultimately irresolvable tension in Weber's work by drawing a distinction between his public and private thoughts: 'We may conclude that the equation between rationalisation and the trend towards technocracy, found in the passages where Weber foretells the disenchantment of the world, does not correspond with his deepest thoughts on the matter. He never made this equation in his scholarly work when he observed what he called the method of value-neutrality. Only when he assumed a more personal note ... does he permit his own feelings to come to the fore and influence his evaluation of the contemporary age ... These judgements, it seems to me, were personal feeling rather than the impartial results of his own scholarship'. Baum, 'World', 164-165.

³⁴ Weber, 'Science', 142-143.

³⁵ Anne Harrington, *Reenchanting Science: Holism in German Culture from Wilhelm to Hitler* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), xv-xvi.

Here again Weber shows the keenness of his vision. This irrationalism would have disastrous consequences. As we shall see in the coming chapter, Nazi Germany can be viewed as one particularly telling moment of re-enchantment in the West.

However, Weber's attitude towards resistance to rationalisation is more complicated than this. In his companion speech, 'Politics as a Vocation', he suggested what he saw as more constructive strategies of resistance to rationalisation through the pursuit of a political practice steeped in a value-based rationality. Perhaps surprisingly, he quotes Martin Luther's defiance when facing the Diet of Worms. Weber notes of the man who practices politics with the proper respect for value-based rationality:

He then acts by following an ethic of responsibility for the consequences of his conduct and really feels such responsibility and somewhere he reaches the point where he says: 'Here I stand; I can do no other'. This is something genuinely human and moving. And every one of us who is not spiritually dead must realise the possibility of finding himself at some time in that position. In so far as this is true, an ethic of ultimate ends and an ethic of responsibility are not absolute contrasts but rather supplements, which only in unison constitute a genuine man – a man who can have the 'calling' for politics.³⁶

Even in his more sober, empirical work, Weber makes room in his narrative of history and his analysis of the modern rationalised world for the value of the irrational in the cultural lives of human beings, as Ann Swidler argues:

For Weber, rationalisation gives ideas their power, because rationalisation intensifies and deepens the meaning of inherently non-rational, and ultimately *non-rationalisable*, aspects of human experience. Precisely because injustice and evil are incomprehensible in a universe created by an all-powerful, just and merciful god, they generate continuous religious creativity ... For Weber, the non-rational animates human life, but rationalisation focuses and directs the power of the non-rational ... religious attempts to find coherent terms in which to confront the inherent irrationality of life ultimately generates those moments, such as the rise of Calvinism, in which religion can have a world-transforming significance.³⁷

Swidler here pushes us toward the realisation that, in fact, the basis for much of Weber's theorising is a broadly defined theodicy that he equated with the persistent presence of the irrational. Or, as Weber has it, 'This problem – the experience of the irrationality of the

³⁶ Weber, 'Politics', 127. Emphasis in original. It is worth noting that Weber was active politically. True to his roots in classical Marxism, he was a champion of German agrarian workers against the power of large landowners. Nonetheless, in 1919, he turned down a seat in the Weimar National Assembly which was set to rebuild Germany's government under the harsh terms of the peace.

³⁷ Anne Swidler, 'Forward', in Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. by Ephraim Fischhoff (Boston: Beacon Press Books, 1965), xv-xvi.

world – has been the driving force of all religious evolution’.³⁸ For Weber, the irrational was a powerful and ambiguous force within modern culture, rationalised as it may have become.

In addition to this, Weber notes in various places that magic had not fully withdrawn from the world, though magic is seen almost exclusively as a matter of *survival*, in parallel with the role of religion in the subtraction stories. With a dismissive tone that is perhaps surprising coming from a passionate advocate for the proletariat, he locates its survival in popular religion, in ‘the needs of the masses, which everywhere tend toward magic and idolatry’.³⁹ The masses, he argues, ‘have everywhere remained engulfed in the massive and archaic growth of magic – unless a prophecy that holds out specific promises swept them into a religious movement of an ethical character’.⁴⁰ Aside from what he saw as survivals of magic within popular religion, Weber’s category of *charisma* provides another avenue for the survival, or the creation, of enchantment, even in the most rationalised places. Weber defines charisma as ‘an *extraordinary* quality of a person, regardless of whether this quality is actual, alleged, or presumed’.⁴¹ Charisma lies at the heart of Weber’s theory: ‘that men are *differently qualified* in a religious way stands at the beginning of the history of religion. This fact has been dogmatised in the sharpest rationalist form in the “particulars of grace”, embodied in the doctrine of predestination of the Calvinists’.⁴² Gerth and Mills draw the sharpest of oppositions between rationalisation and charisma:

This process of rationalisation is punctured, however, by certain discontinuities in history. Hardened institutional fabrics may thus disintegrate and routine forms of life prove insufficient for mastering a growing state of tension, stress, or suffering. It is such crises that Weber introduces a balancing conception for bureaucracy; the concept of ‘charisma’ ... meaning literally ‘gift of grace’.⁴³

There was for Weber something highly powerful in charisma: ‘Charismatic rule is not managed according to general norms, either traditional or rational, but, in principle,

³⁸ Weber, ‘Politics’, 123. He elaborates on this theme elsewhere: ‘The rational need for a theodicy of suffering and of dying has had extremely strong effects. As a matter of fact, this need has moulded important traits of such religions as Hinduism, Zoroastrism, and Judaism, and, to a certain extent, Paulinian and later Christianity. Even as late as 1906, a mere minority among a considerable number of proletarians gave as reasons for their disbelief of Christianity conclusions derived from modern theories of natural sciences. The majority, however, referred to the ‘injustice’ of the order of this world’. Weber, ‘Social’, 276-277.

³⁹ Weber, *Sociology*, 244. This is something, he argues astutely, that religions have had to accommodate: ‘With the exception of Judaism and Protestantism, all religions and religious ethics have had to reintroduce cults of saints, heroes or functional gods in order to accommodate themselves to the needs of the masses’. Weber, *Sociology*, 103.

⁴⁰ Weber, ‘Social’, 277.

⁴¹ Weber, ‘Social’, 295. Emphasis in original.

⁴² Weber, ‘Social’, 287.

⁴³ H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, ‘Introduction: The Man and his Work’, in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Trans. and ed. by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 52.

according to concrete revelations and inspirations, and in this sense, charismatic authority is “irrational”. It is “revolutionary” in the sense of not being bound to the existing order’.⁴⁴ For Weber, charisma is a human universal and is, like magic, a matter of popular rather than more intellectualised religion; it is ‘one ineradicable basis of popular religion’.⁴⁵

Though Weber is often painted as deterministic and his theory of rationalisation as monolithic, a closer examination reveals that there is a good deal of play within his work, enough, perhaps to suggest that the concept of re-enchantment is not *necessarily* in conflict with the basic organising narrative of rationalisation. What Weber does, and does rather well, is to identify the *dominant* partner in what is in fact a *dialectic*. He describes a movement in history – disenchantment – which accounts for the growing importance of instrumental rationality within modernity. What he does *not* identify, at least not explicitly, is that disenchantment is accompanied always by a concomitant movement of re-enchantment. It is not enough, however, simply to assume a proper meaning for the idea of re-enchantment; the matter must be thought through in light of the concept of religious modernity.

A Typology of Reenchantment(s)

The most obvious problem is that a Weberian framework does not seem to allow for any further development with a religious tradition that has arrived at what is taken to be its most fully systematised and rationalised ‘end-point’.

Colin Campbell⁴⁶

It is the task of the following chapter to review and evaluate the wide-ranging discourse of re-enchantment, but some preliminary comments are necessary before plunging head-long into the mass of usages. Even a cursory look at the growing multidisciplinary discourse of re-enchantment reveals that the term has acquired any number of meanings. The definitions given to re-enchantment are legion and it is worth noting a few representative definitions here. In an apologetic vein, Suzi Gablik, writing in relation to art, proposes: ‘Re-enchantment, as I understand it, means stepping beyond the modern traditions of mechanism, positivism, empiricism, rationalism, materialism, secularism and scientism – the whole objectifying consciousness of the Enlightenment – in a way that allows for a return of the soul. Re-enchantment implies a release from the affliction of nihilism’.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Weber, ‘Social’, 296.

⁴⁵ Weber, *Sociology*, 25. He made the claim of universality with no equivocation: ‘Charismatic leadership has emerged in all places and in all historical epochs’. Weber, ‘Politics’, 80.

⁴⁶ Colin Campbell, ‘Weber, Rationalisation, and Religious Evolution in the Modern Era,’ in *Theorising Religion: Classical and Contemporary Debates*, James A. Beckford and John Walliss, eds. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 22.

⁴⁷ Suzi Gablik, *The Reenchantment of Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 11.

Raymond Lee's definition, though coming from the perspective of the sociology of religion, is similar: 'Re-enchantment refers to the reclamation of the magical. It is a process of re-filling the world with credulity towards the supernatural. A re-enchanted worldview ushers in beliefs that are less cynical of realities beyond the boundaries of the natural world'.⁴⁸ David Tacey and Christopher Partridge equate reenchantment with the rise of invisible religion and new religious movements.⁴⁹ Morris Berman imagines reenchantment as the emergence of 'holistic, or participating consciousness' which is essential to the very survival of the human race in a time of severe crisis.⁵⁰ James Kirk, writing in a radically interdisciplinary defence of an organic metaphor of the world, offers a more nuanced take: 'Reenchantment happens when ossified rubrics are undermined, clearing the way for a refreshing advance into an unpredictable future ... A new context of understanding must emerge through the transformation of hardened categories into fresh pathways of exploration. This is reenchantment'.⁵¹ Ernest Laszlo, David Ray Griffin, Nasr M. Arif, Anne Harrington and others see the rise of non-dualistic sciences, both physical and social, as reenchantment.⁵² Martin Harries views reenchantment as an essential, if paradoxical 'aspect of modernity' that is revealed at points when the persistence of the supernatural makes its presence known through intertextual quotation.⁵³ Jenkins offers another take, one that relies on just this sort of quotation: '(re)enchantment will be take to refer to two linked tendencies: one which insists that there are more things in the universe than are dreamed of by the rationalist epistemologies and ontologies of science, the other which rejects the notion that calculative, procedural, formal rationality is always the "best way"'.⁵⁴ Edward Tiryakian sees reenchantment as a 'counterprocess' of modernity.⁵⁵ Though all of these definitions may seem to be similar, a closer look reveals significant differences.

⁴⁸ Raymond M. Lee, 'Mortality and Re-enchantment: Conscious Dying as Individualised Spirituality', *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 22, 2 (2007): 231.

⁴⁹ Tacey, David. *ReEnchantment: The New Australian Spirituality* (Sydney: Harper Collins Publishers, 2000); Christopher Partridge, 'The Disenchantment and Re-enchantment of the West: The Religion-Cultural Context of Contemporary Western Christianity', *The Evangelical Quarterly* 74, 3 (2002): 235-256; Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, vol. 1, *Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralisation, Popular Culture, and Occulture* (London: T & T Clark International, 2004); Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, vol. 2, *Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralisation, Popular Culture, and Occulture* (London: T & T Clark International, 2005).

⁵⁰ Morris Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 23.

⁵¹ James Kirk, *Organicism as Reenchantment: Whitehead, Prigogione, and Barth*. New York: Peter Lang, 1993), xi-xii.

⁵² Ervin Laszlo, *Science and the Reenchantment of the Cosmos: The Rise of the Integral Vision of Reality* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2006); David Ray Griffin, ed. *The Reenchantment of Science: Postmodern Proposals* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988); Nasr M. Arif, *The Reenchantment of Political Science: An Epistemological Approach to the Theories of Comparative Politics* (New York: University Press of America, Inc., 2001); Harrington, *Reenchanted*.

⁵³ Martin Harries, *Scare Quotes from Shakespeare: Marx, Keynes, and the Language of Reenchantment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 9.

⁵⁴ Jenkins, 'Disenchantment', 12.

⁵⁵ Tiryakian, 'Dialectics', 83.

Gablik and Lee cast a nostalgic eye back to an imagined premodern past while Kirk looks to the future. Partridge connects reenchantment to religion, while Berman connects it to physics and Arif to political science. Most of these writers, regardless of their disciplinary background, see reenchantment as an opportunity of one sort or another and many of the usages of the term are blatantly *apologetic* rather than descriptive or theoretical. Of those quoted above, Harries and Tiryakian are the lone exceptions to this and they both imagine reenchantment as natural part of the modern milieu.

Broadly, there exist two understandings of reenchantment, both of which are evident in the examples I have cited. I shall call these *thin reenchantment* and *thick reenchantment*.⁵⁶ They do not represent mere nuances on a single concept but are in actuality two radically different conceptions of the history and character of modernity. Thin reenchantment, without question the dominant form (at least in terms of frequency of usage), is based on the simple acceptance of a commonly understood disenchantment, which, as we have seen, misrepresents the complexity and ultimately indeterminate nature of Weber's *Entzauberung*. While oversimplifying Weber's work is not necessarily all that damning a problem in and of itself, given that much of the writing on reenchantment ignores his texts, thin reenchantment is problematic in other and far more serious ways. Perhaps its greatest failing is that it reinforces the logic of modernity as a decisive break from that which preceded it. Thin reenchantment is predicated on the idea of disenchantment and reenchantment as oppositional *linear* movements within history; it thus has a difficult and contradictory relationship with the subtraction stories. In conceptualising reenchantment as the historical successor to disenchantment as a largely completed historical process, thin reenchantment misses the true complexity suggested by the idea of reenchantment while at the same time restating a flawed and ultimately simplistic understanding of modernity. In thin reenchantment, the complete, or near-complete disenchantment of the world is simply assumed as the background against which reenchantment takes place. While many of the uses of thin reenchantment are couched in the rhetoric of the return to an earlier point in the story of disenchantment, as we can see with Gablik and Lee above, it remains always the *same* story. Even if the polarities are reversed, and instinct or emotion are elevated over rationality, such uses at the same time retreat to the logic of evolution by

⁵⁶ I should note that this usage of the distinction of *thick* and *thin* is inspired by, but by no means coextensive with Clifford Geertz's well-known use the term 'thick description', which he in turn borrowed from philosopher Gilbert Ryle, who developed the concept largely in the essays 'Thinking and Reflecting' and 'The Thinking of Thoughts: What is "le Penseur" doing?' Gilbert Ryle, *Collected Papers*, vol. 2, *Collected Essays 1929-1968* (London: Huteson of London, 1971), 465-479, 480-496.

arguing that history must rid itself of the damaging modern elements of rationalism and empiricism. In this, the discourse of reenchantment as *recovery* or *reclamation* merely adds another chapter in the subtraction narrative, but fails to take on the logic and the accuracy of the story itself. Enchantment becomes in this view an either/or proposition. Such a concept of reenchantment lacks any real value as a theoretical or conceptual tool and can contribute little if anything to the study of religious modernity.

However, a more complex and ultimately more compelling understanding of reenchantment emerges with a further examination of the discourse, as hinted at above with Harries' and Tiryakian's work. Weber himself gives us our first clue when he accounts for interruptions of disenchantment as creations of rationalised systems themselves:

the calculation of consistent rationalism has not easily come out even with nothing left over ... The various great ways of leading a rational and methodical life have been characterised by irrational presuppositions, which have been accepted simply as 'given' and which have been incorporated into such ways of life. What these presuppositions have been is historically and socially determined, at least to a very large extent, though the particularity of those strata that have been the carriers of the ways of life during its formative and decisive period ... Furthermore, the irrational elements in the rationalisation of reality have been the *loci* to which the irrepressible quest of intellectualism for the possession of supernatural values has been compelled to retreat.⁵⁷

Extending the logic of the complex, dialectical understanding of modernity and the religious established in the first chapter, *thick reenchantment* conceptualises reenchantment as a *dialectical counterpart* to disenchantment. Reenchantment cannot thus be understood as a matter of the reversal or survival of enchantment but rather as a through-line of thought and practice that accompanies disenchantment, even in the accelerated rationalisation that characterises modernity. Reenchantment and rationalisation exist in a both/and relationship that I shall call the *dialectic of enchantment*. If at this point we need a definition of 'enchantment', the tentative suggestion made by Jenkins is as good a place to go as any, especially if we keep his caveats firmly in mind:

Enchantment conjures up, and is rooted in, understandings and experiences of the world in which there is more to life than the material, the visible, or the explainable; in which the philosophies and principles of Reason or rationality cannot by definition dream of the totality of life; in which the quotidian norms and routines of linear time and space are only part of the story; and in which the collective sum of sociability and belonging is elusively greater than its individual parts. This is a

⁵⁷ Weber, 'Social', 281-282.

deliberately loose and catch-all definition; everything else would disenchant the issue before we had even begun to consider it.⁵⁸

That the relationship between disenchantment and re-enchantment is dialectical need not imply, nor is it intended to do so, that re-enchantment and rationalisation have been of equal importance. With some exceptions, as Gilbert noted above in relation to the Middle Ages in Europe, the movement of rationalisation, which permeates many aspects of life, even those that many people claim as enchanted, has long been dominant. Even as an ideal type, a thoroughgoing re-enchantment of the world is all but impossible to imagine. Rationalised systems, as Weber pointed out, are necessary for the administration of large-scale social structures such as taxation and education. The diversity, complexity and sheer size of the contemporary world renders the total absence of rationalisation neither desirable nor possible. Simply, thick re-enchantment renders the question of rationalisation always already open. The concept of thick re-enchantment allows for both losses and gains in enchantment, and assumes the necessary triumph of neither rationalisation nor re-enchantment. In the logic of thick re-enchantment, disenchantment is a *tendency* rather than a *telos*. Thick re-enchantment asserts that the disenchantment of the world has never been, and can never be, complete.

However, the logic of thick re-enchantment goes farther than this. Enchantment within modernity, again following a logic parallel to that of religious modernity, cannot be seen as a matter of survival or persistence. Not insignificantly, Hervieu-Léger describes just such a dialectic between rationalisation and the religious that lends to religious modernity its somewhat schizophrenic quality:

This logic of anticipation that lies at the very heart of a modern culture progressively dominated by instrumental reason (which only knows how to ask how), in fact constantly generates a space to be filled by the products of imagination, but rationalism just as unceasingly breaks it apart. It is through his imagination, in fact, that Man fills the gap between the world of concrete determination (the ordinary, everyday world, with its constraints and its routines) and the order of values and ends which motivates his efforts in the world (the aspiration toward the abolition of all uncertainties and constraints). The opposition between the limited world of the present, with its contradictions, and the unlimited world of the future (the horizon of progress) creates its own 'space for belief' at the very heart of modernity (which can do without 'religions'). This 'believing' tension in modernity can be expressed in the very language of modernity itself: progress and development. Such is the case in periods of expansion and growth that also coincide with the emergence of political, scientific and technological 'secular religions' ... In

⁵⁸ Jenkins, 'Disenchantment', 29.

certain periods of profound mutation, such as the present one, there may be a permanent lack of fit between the modern utopia and this space that is emptied by the process of change itself.⁵⁹

In challenging the separation of enchantment and disenchantment, Jennifer Wicke pushes us toward a very similar interpretation:

Disenchantment may take on the aura of demystification, but disenchantment seems to require every bit as much waving a kind of cultural magic wand as ‘enchantment’ was supposed to have required in the first place. What is odd, though, is that enchantment is more or less a given, while disenchantment is considered an active process, paradoxically strewing a good deal of pixie dust of its own.⁶⁰

The final and most radical conclusion one can draw from the idea of thick reenchantment is not that rationalisation constantly generates its own reenchantments, but that each process is every bit as natural and every bit as characteristic of modernity as the other. As Jenkins suggests provisionally: ‘As a beginning, (re)enchantment must, perhaps, be recognised as an integral element of modernity. Not just as a consequence, or a reaction, but right at the heart of the matter’.⁶¹ Jenkins’ use of ‘(re)enchantment’, while awkward, points to an important aspect of reenchantment, which is that it embodies a convoluted relationship of present enchantments and those of an imagined past often imagined as premodern or even pre-Christian. Though this idea can only be fleshed out gradually over the coming chapters, I want to offer my absolute agreement with Jenkins’ final conclusion: ‘Disenchantment has indeed been the fate of the world, but this has only served to open up new vistas of possible (re)enchantment ... it may be high time to think about (re)enchantment as no less diagnostic of modernity than disenchantment’.⁶²

Though the specific language of thick reenchantment, and the path by which I have come to argue for its value to the study of religion, are new, thinkers across varied disciplines (as we see in broad strokes above) have offered similar dialectical understandings of reenchantment in general. Philosopher Zygmunt Bauman, revealing an obvious debt to the specifics of Weber’s critique of instrumental rationality, toys with the notion of a dialogic

⁵⁹ Danièle Hervieu-Léger, ‘Religion and Modernity in the French Context: For a New Approach to Secularisation’, *Sociological Analysis* 51, S (1990): S23. Elsewhere, she underlines this point, writing that disenchantment ‘produces, contrary to its own logic, the revivification of attempts to give legitimate definitions of the world’s meanings’. Danièle Hervieu-Léger, ‘Present-Day Emotional Renewals: The End of Secularisation or the End of Religion?’, in *A Future for Religion? New Paradigms for Social Analysis*, ed. William H. Swatos, Jr. (London: Sage, 1993), 138.

⁶⁰ Jennifer Wicke, ‘Enchantment, Disenchantment, Re-enchantment: Joyce and the Cult of the Absolutely Fabulous’, *Novel* 29, 1 (Fall 1995): 132.

⁶¹ Jenkins, ‘Disenchantment’, 22.

⁶² Jenkins, ‘Disenchantment’, 28-29.

reenchantment as he draws out a comparison, even an identification, between reenchantment and postmodernity:

Postmodernity ... brings 're-enchantment' of the world after the protracted and earnest, though in the end inconclusive, modern struggle to dis-enchant it (or, more exactly, the resistance to dis-enchantment, hardly ever put to sleep, was all along the 'postmodern thorn' in the body of modernity). The mistrust of human spontaneity, of drives, impulses and inclinations resistant to prediction and rational justification, has been all but replaced by the mistrust of unemotional, calculating reason. Dignity has been returned to emotions; legitimacy to the 'inexplicable', nay *irrational*, sympathies and loyalties which cannot 'explain themselves' in terms of their purpose ... The postmodern world is one in which *mystery* is no more a barely tolerated alien awaiting a deportation order.⁶³

On a more specific level, Wouter Hanegraaff, a scholar of Western esotericism, proposes a novel theory to explain what he sees as a more or less comfortable coexistence of enchantment and disenchantment. Magic, he argues, exists in a 'separate-but-connected "magical plane"' which exists on a different level of reality ... Processes of secularisation and disenchantment in the everyday world simply *have no bearing on the magical plane*, and hence do not have to affect the reality of magic'.⁶⁴ Hanegraaff, who envisions magic as a form of participation, argues, like Hervieu-Léger, that rationalisation paradoxically stimulates the need for its own opposite: 'not only does the feeling of participation explain the continuous attraction of magic in a disenchanted world – the experience of disenchantment actually causes an emotional need to reaffirm participation'.⁶⁵ Hanegraaff writes of the theory of disenchantment in language that is again very reminiscent of our discussion of 'religion' in the first chapter:

apart from the lack of evidence for a decline of magic, the theory of survivals rests upon completely unhistorical foundations. It assumes that magic is a static phenomenon which is essentially the same everywhere and in all historical periods; under secular conditions it therefore has no other option that either to vanish or try to stay alive as an essentially isolated anachronism.⁶⁶

In one of the earliest serious usages (from 1970) of the term 'reenchantment', Baum makes an intriguing analysis of hippy counter-cultural communes in a fashion that brings to light the dialectic of enchantment, though he never uses the language of dialogue. He sees the then-burgeoning hippy counterculture as both 'prophetic', in the sense that Weber used the word, and as an example of 'genuine religion'. However, he notes the difficult relationship

⁶³ Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 33. Emphasis in original.

⁶⁴ Wouter J. Hanegraaff, 'How Magic Survived the Disenchantment of the World', *Religion* 33, 4 (October 2003): 370. Emphasis in original.

⁶⁵ Hanegraaff, 'Magic', 377-378.

⁶⁶ Hanegraaff, 'Magic', 359.

of this enchantment, which both resists and reinforces dominant forms of cultural control: ‘The youth movement has adopted dangerous practices. Who can fail to see that the conversion to the irrational often leads to self-destruction and creates a new, parasitical dependence on society?’⁶⁷ The hippy movement, in Baum’s analysis, demonstrates the both/and, back-and-forth nature of contemporary reenchantment.

How exactly does this dialectic play out on a conceptual level? Disenchantment and reenchantment exist in a constant state of flux and always in relationship to each other. At times, elements of enchantment or reenchantment are obscured, existing only in the background, while at other times, such elements move to the forefront and become increasingly visible and perhaps increasingly significant in a cultural or even a political sense. Provisionally, I would like to suggest that this is particularly true during periods of wide-spread uncertainty. As the review of the extant contemporary discourse on reenchantment will show, this is certainly true of the last few decades, characterised as they have been by religious, political, environmental, economic, intellectual, and cultural change that is proceeding, or at least seems to be proceeding, on an unprecedented scale and at an unprecedented pace. Such a dialectic argues for the necessity throughout the modern period of such ‘moments’ where the incidences of reenchanting increase. More needs to be said about this language of a ‘moment’, which refers to periods of years or even decades when reenchantment comes more to the forefront of the dialectic of enchantment. This foregrounding can happen in a number of ways and can take various forms. Reenchantment, however, is a fleeting, momentary thing, even in times where it manifests itself flamboyantly. All the while, rationalisation proceeds in a more steady and often less spectacular fashion. For our present purposes, it is worth pondering one crucial question: *have* these moments happened throughout modernity?

The Romance of Reenchantment (One)

... history has marked a number of moments when ghosts, spirits and the undead should have been banished once and for all.

Colin Davis⁶⁸

There is a poetic conjunction between disenchantment and Romanticism. It is no coincidence that Weber borrowed the phrase ‘disenchantment of the world’, from Friedrich Schiller, an important figure in German Romanticism who, in his 1788 poem ‘Die Götter

⁶⁷ Baum, ‘World’, 193

⁶⁸ Colin Davis, *Haunted Subjects: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis and the Return of the Dead* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 151-152.

Griechenlandes', speculated that the gods driven out of the world by monotheistic religion and modern rationality had taken refuge in Romantic poetry.⁶⁹ There is a good deal of similarity between what Schiller stated poetically and what Weber argued sociologically; indeed, Edward Shils goes as far as to call Weber's work an example of 'German sociological romanticism'.⁷⁰ I want to suggest here, though others have done so before me, that the Romantic movement in its earliest days forms the first, and without a doubt the most important of these moments of reenchantment within modern history. Romanticism cannot be understood, as the subtraction stories would no doubt wish to claim, as an anomalous and insignificant anti-rational and anti-modern movement. Quite to the contrary, Romanticism and its revolutions have played a crucial role in modernity, as Taylor suggests:

These two big and many-sided cultural transformations, the Enlightenment and Romanticism with its accompanying expressive conceptions of man, have made us what we are ... our cultural life, our self-conceptions, our moral outlooks still operate in the wake of these great events. We are still visibly working out their implications or exploring possibilities which they opened up for us.⁷¹

Taylor argues elsewhere that the Romantic movement is an important part of what he labels 'the immanent counter-Enlightenment', an internal movement within modernity that is rooted in elements within Enlightenment thought 'which give a positive significance to the irrational, amoral, even violent forces within us'.⁷² He concludes, 'no serious attempt to understand the Enlightenment today can do without a deeper study of the immanent counter-Enlightenment'.⁷³ Romanticism, trading as it does on an often-nostalgic refiguring and renegotiation of the symbolic languages of the past, falls also into what Svetlana Boym calls the *off-modern*, 'a tradition of critical reflection on the modern condition that

⁶⁹ Schiller's original phrase was '*die entgötterte Natur*' – the 'disgodding' of nature – which Weber later transformed into '*die Entzauberung der Welt*'. For the text of the poem, see Friedrich Schiller, *Gedichte von Friedrich Schiller*, Interpretationen, ed. Norbert Oellers (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, Jr, 1996), 64-83.

⁷⁰ Edward Shils, 'Daydreams and Nightmares: Reflections on the Criticism of Mass Culture', *Sewanee Review* 65 (1957), 587-608.

⁷¹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 393.

⁷² Taylor, *Secular*, 369. He elaborates on the idea of the immanent counter-Enlightenment: 'The idea is, in various forms, that these cannot simply be condemned and uprooted, because our existence, and/or vitality, creativity, strength, ability to create beauty depend on them. This turn finds a new moral meaning in our dark genesis out of the wild and prehuman. It comes of a rebellion against the standard form of modern anthropocentrism, along the 'tragic' axis, rejecting the too-harmonised picture of life, in which suffering, evil and violence have been painted out. This is a turn against the values of the Enlightenment. But unlike what we usually call the counter-Enlightenment ... It is not in any sense a return to religion or the transcendent. It remains resolutely naturalist'. Taylor, *Secular*, 369.

⁷³ Taylor, *Secular*, 639.

incorporates nostalgia'.⁷⁴ Conceptually, thick reenchantment allows us to account for at least some of this counter-Enlightenment and some of this tradition of off-modernity.

Romanticism, then, is not an isolated incident, but is rather a constant presence in modernity, as Tiryakian has noted:

Perhaps the most important Western cultural movement of the modern period has been the romantic movement. It began somewhere in the second half of the eighteenth century and, depending on what we take as its central characteristics, we can either take a conservative approach and say that it came to a close somewhere in the middle of the nineteenth century, or take a bolder stance and propose that romanticism has remained a powerful cultural current since its emergence ... a basic orientation of romanticism in its various forms is a rejection of one major side of modernity: the seemingly cold, drab, impersonal, anonymous, standardised, rationalised, lifeless, technocratic industrial order. But it is more than a rejection; it is also an orientation that seeks and finds, often in the imagination, the creative centre of human energy, the potential for altering or conjuring a different order than the industrial one at hand.⁷⁵

Romanticism has had demonstrable effects on very specific aspects of modernity. A single, extraordinarily important, example should suffice. Terry Eagleton argues that the Romantic movement has deeply affected the relationship of modernity to its own literature: 'It was, in fact, only with what we now call the "Romantic period" that our own definitions of literature began to develop ... by the time of the Romantic period, literature was becoming virtually synonymous with the "imaginative": to write about what did not exist was somehow more soul-stirring and valuable than to pen an account of Birmingham or the circulation of the blood'.⁷⁶ Similarly, Azade Seyhan notes the influence of the Romantics on modern understandings of literature and its place in culture: 'The critical agenda of early German Romanticism generated a reconceptualisation of knowledge through an understanding of literary texts as explorations in epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics and as intertextual and interdisciplinary artefacts'.⁷⁷

In line with a passing suggestion I made above, the Romantic movement, as a moment of reenchantment, was the product of a troubled time beset by wide-ranging political, economic and cultural change, not least the massive upheavals and crushing

⁷⁴ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xvi.

⁷⁵ Tiryakian, 'Dialectics', 84-85.

⁷⁶ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 18.

⁷⁷ Azade Seyhan, *Representation and Its Discontents: The Critical Legacy of German Romanticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 136. This foreshadows a point that will become important as we move between the two sections of the this thesis and which we will draw out in more detail in the Intermission.

disappointments of the French Revolution. Jerome J. McGann argues this point: ‘What we have come to call Romanticism in literature was a movement born in an era marked by radical sets of conflicts and contradictions.’⁷⁸ Seyhan adds some necessary detail:

Romanticism’s critical anxiety is largely triggered by the hitherto inexperienced violent births in political and intellectual history. The observers cannot name the newborns. Furthermore, they are ill at ease at the sight of the Janus-faced progeny of the time. The French Revolution that represented the golden age of freedom and social justice for German intellectuals turned into a nightmare of dashed hopes with the French occupation.⁷⁹

The nostalgic side of the Romantic is arguably the product of social upheaval, something that Boym notes more generally: ‘Nostalgia inevitably appears as a defence mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals.’⁸⁰

The artistic products of the Romantic era reflect this atmosphere. The Romantic poem, McGann argues, ‘characteristically haunts ... borderlands and liminal territories. These are Romantic places because they locate areas of contradiction, conflict, and problematic alternatives.’⁸¹ As Jameson remarks, Romanticism is permeated with a growing sense of absence: ‘We may thus describe Romanticism as a coming to consciousness of some fundamental loss in shock and rage, a kind of furious rattling of the bars of the prison, a helpless attempt to recuperate lost being by posing and assuming one’s fatality in “interesting” ways’.⁸² Similarly, Thomas McFarland writes of what he calls the ‘diasparactive triad’: ‘But the pervasive longing of the Romantics for an absent reality was at the same time an index to a prevailing sense of incompleteness, fragmentation, and ruin’.⁸³ The original Romantics were revolutionary artists, reacting in part against the acceleration of rationalisation that came with the emerging modern consciousness. Jack Zipes writes:

No matter what became of German romanticism, it began as a progressive avant-garde literary movement. Its thrust not only depended on a negation of the philistine substance and life-style of the emerging bourgeoisie and protest against the utilitarian ordering of life to further industry, but it was also a reaction against the backward feudal ideology and conditions of authoritarianism as well as a desire

⁷⁸ Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 17.

⁷⁹ Seyhan, *Representation*, 6.

⁸⁰ Boym, *Nostalgia*, xiv.

⁸¹ McGann, *Romantic*, 73. McGann notes further, ‘Romanticism was a movement which attacked received ideas of uniformity, standardisation, and universality with “the idealisation of diversity”, with a program which set the highest value upon the unique, the peculiar, the local: what Schlegel called “the abnormal species of literature ... even the eccentric and monstrous.”’ McGann, *Romantic*, 31.

⁸² Jameson, ‘Vanishing’, 56.

⁸³ Thomas McFarland, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Modalities of Fragmentation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 11.

to create new art forms and worlds commensurate with radical changes in Europe ... the romantics conceived artistic forms to clarify the social limitations of personal freedom and to imagine possible situations in which subjective fulfilment might be reinforced by objective conditions that lead to creativity, love and equality.⁸⁴

Romanticism is thus our first moment, and in many ways the model for the continual renewal of enchantment within a rapidly rationalising modern age.

Conclusions

Whoever pushes rationality forward also restores new strength to the opposite power, mysticism and folly of all kinds.

Friedrich Nietzsche⁸⁵

The meaning of 'reenchantment' is inextricably tied up with common perceptions – real or imaginary, explicit or anonymous – of what Weber meant when he borrowed the phrase 'the disenchantment of the world'. That Weber's writing is less prescriptive and presents a less monolithic picture of rationalisation than is commonly supposed suggests that the word disenchantment has been detached from its sociological roots to become an important element within an influential form of modern self-understanding. However, there are good reasons to question whether or not modern Western culture has ever been as disenchanted as it is said to be. In so far as the academic study of religion needs conceptual tools to describe and interpret these counter-currents within rationalisation, Weber's foundational narrative needs to be augmented with a counter-narrative of reenchantment. Yet, the study of religion needs to be cautious when formulating such a concept, since, as we have seen, the language of 'reenchantment' by itself, if employed casually, can easily serve to reinforce the power of the subtraction stories. In contrast, *thick reenchantment*, which proposes a *dialectic of enchantment*, interrogates such evolutionary narratives directly by highlighting the ongoing interactions between and intertwining of disenchantment and reenchantment. It is this dialectic, not the unilinear movement of rationalisation, that characterises European modernity. In parallel with the logic of religious modernity, it is essential to recognise that the enchantment or reenchantment are not simply survivals or historical anachronisms: they are the *productions* of rationalisation itself.

We turn next to a necessarily limited survey of the usages of reenchantment, both thick and thin. This will serve as both a review of the extant literature and a survey of what is

⁸⁴ Jack Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*, Revised and Expanded Edition (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 63-64. It is instructive to note that, like several writers in our third chapter, Zipes concludes, 'the romantic attack on the Enlightenment was in actuality an attack on the *betrayal of the Enlightenment*' by in the interests of political and economic control'. Zipes, *Breaking*, 66.

⁸⁵ Nietzsche, *Will*, 523.

perhaps another 'moment' of reenchantment in response to widespread feelings of uncertainty.

CHAPTER THE THIRD: THE REENCHANTMENTS OF THE WORLD, OR THE USES OF REENCHANTMENT

Just as myths already entail enlightenment, with every step enlightenment entangles itself more deeply in mythology. Receiving all its subject matter from myths, in order to destroy them, it falls as judge under the spell of myth. It seeks to escape the trial of fate and retribution by itself exacting retribution on that trial ... Enlightenment dissolves away the injustice of the old inequality of unmediated mastery, but at the same time perpetuates it in universal mediation, by relating every existing thing to every other.

Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer¹



As far back as 1977, Serge Moscovici felt he could write, 'It is a curious thing that the question of reenchancement is so simple. Everyone understands it at once'.² Almost a decade ago, Harri Englund and James Leach described the term 'reenchantment' as a 'familiar sociological abstraction'.³ The question of reenchancement is anything but simple and, as an abstraction, reenchancement has been used to refer to almost anything, up to and including rationalisation. Despite this confusion, there exists to date no critical survey of the word and its usage. This chapter seeks to redress this deficiency with both a review and a critique of the dominant ways in which the idea has been employed. The wide-ranging discourse on reenchancement touches on a surprising range of topics, from quantum physics to literature, from law to education, from second-hand clothing to Tibetan Buddhism. It must be noted straightaway that much of the discourse is deeply polemical, even in the academic context and there even in works that tend more towards description or empirical study. This is true of both thin reenchancement and thick reenchancement, though perhaps more so of the former. In the vast majority of cases, the reenchancement of the world or the reenchancement of any of the constituent elements of that world is viewed as a positive, indeed *necessary*, development in history; reenchancement can even be hailed, as Jean Staune argues in all seriousness, as 'une clé pour notre Survie'.⁴ As we shall see, Staune is by no means alone in making this claim. There is a good deal of thinking and writing on reenchancement in which the meaning of the term is simply

¹ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 8.

² Serge Moscovici, 'The Reenchancement of the World', in *Beyond the Crisis*, ed. Norman Birnbaum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 142.

³ Harri Englund and James Leach, 'Ethnography and the Meta-Narratives of Modernity (1)', *Current Anthropology* 41, 2 (April 2000): 225.

⁴ Jean Staune, 'Le Réenchancement du Monde, une Clé pour notre Survie', *Textes et Travaux dans Différents Domaines Scientifiques*, posted online 18 April 2005 at <http://www.staune.fr/Le-reenchancement-du-monde-une-cle.html>, accessed 1 September 2008.

assumed as an opposite movement to a loosely understood historical process of disenchantment. From the standpoint of the typology I have proposed, we can say with some confidence that this thin reenchantment, which re-inscribes, at times quite unconsciously, the subtraction stories, has to date been the more prevalent usage of the term. Thick reenchantment is something else entirely. It seeks to redefine, or add nuance to, our understanding of modernity itself by questioning assumptions about the relationship of modernity to rationalisation. Though much of the writing on reenchantment repeats the failings of the subtraction stories, there are also scattered examples that demonstrate the usefulness of a properly formulated concept of reenchantment, particularly its ability to draw out the necessary interconnections of the religious, aesthetic, scientific and economic spheres.

Whatever thoroughness it may claim, this review clearly cannot pretend to be exhaustive, given the sheer volume of the material. The examples have been chosen because they are representative of larger trends, are particularly pertinent to our larger preoccupations with religious modernity, or simply because they recommend themselves by their erudition or insight. In order to impose some sense on the baffling proliferation of usages and meanings, I have broken up the discourse into smaller sub-discourses that, it must be admitted, are somewhat artificial and highly permeable. The chapter closes by fleshing out the connection between reenchantment and Romanticism suggested in our last chapter and by tackling the potential dangers of reenchantment by examining the rise of National Socialism in Germany between the world wars as a 'moment' of reenchantment brought on by uncertain times. A few summary comments will help us to maintain a sense of order as we travel through this diverse and contradictory discourse. There are some more or less common elements that appear frequently within the widely-scattered uses of reenchantment: the language of recovery or rediscovery of lost ways of living or knowing; the language of revaluation and the negotiation of value; a respect for mystery, indeterminacy and incompleteness; a concern with holistic thinking; and a related concern for revealing points of connection. It must be underlined that I am not arguing here for the social benefits or liabilities of reenchanting the world, which in the end represents an incoherent wish or fear, as the world, in an important sense, was never disenchanted in the first place. To argue for the usefulness of the concept in a theoretical sense is to do that and *only that*.

Given that we are largely concerned with the academic study of religion, I have in the main confined my discussion to the uses of the term in what can be considered more or less academic sources. However, it would perhaps be instructive to engage briefly with the uses of reenchantment in the wider culture, where the word appears most frequently in what can be considered broadly a New Age context. A few examples should suffice to capture the tone and character of these usages. Perhaps the most visible use of reenchantment outside of the academy is Thomas Moore's volume, *The Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life*. Moore, who is well-known for his bestselling *Care of the Soul* books, lays out his reenchantment with the personal, confessional tone and the language of nature, experience and healing which constitute New Age genre conventions. The opening paragraph serves as an apt summary of much of the popular discourse on reenchantment, which builds on common cultural understandings of the world as disenchanted:

Enchantment is a spell that comes over us, an aura of fantasy and emotion that can settle on the heart and either disturb it or send it into rapture and reverie. One day you fall in love, and a person who yesterday was like anyone else has suddenly become translucent with grace and infused with otherworldly value. You stumble across a roaring, resplendent waterfall, as I once did, in the middle of a quiet forest, and you become profoundly entranced. The stunning vision fixes itself in memory, and you wish you could have other of moments of similar transporting charm.⁵

Moore uses the platform of reenchantment to champion a certain approach to relationships, parenting, business and environmental practice, much of which is couched in the language of reclamation. Beverlee Zell-Tamis *The Day the Music Stopped: Re-enchantment of our Lost Spirit*, treads very similar ground as she recounts her experiences as a therapist. She writes, employing the language of the recovery of a purer self that is common in the discourse of invisible religion:

I have to come to believe, to see that for most of us a path to restoring our authentic self is possible. A way to be, to think, understand, and to act exists to restore our dislocated and lost self. Transformative work, play, love, creativity, humour, relationships, and discovery of our true self becomes the path of our restoration, our re-enchantment ... *Re-enchanted, transcendent beings are those who discover their richer material, prima material, and they know the heart of their personal mystery.*⁶

Similarly, *The Re-Enchantment of Learning* celebrates a holistic approach to education in the form of an instructional guide for teachers which champions the value of personal experience, the renegotiation of authority in the classroom, and 'expanding our possibilities

⁵ Thomas Moore, *The Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life* (Sydney: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996), ix. Moore imagines this volume as a third volume in his *Soul* series.

⁶ Beverlee Zell-Tamis, *The Day the Music Stopped: Re-enchantment of our Lost Spirit* (New York: Carlisle Press, 2001), xiii-xiv. Emphasis in original.

as human beings'.⁷ The book offers advice for educators – such as ‘seek persistent disequilibrium’⁸ – as a way to reawaken what the authors see as a forgotten outlook. Though there is a very interesting survey and analysis to be made of this discourse, it is not our preoccupation here. It is simply interesting to note there are some telling similarities between the larger discourse on re-enchantment and its academic counterpart.

A Different Universe: Revaluation in/as Reenchantment

Even so, letting nature have her way with us now and again seem like a useful thing to do, if only to bring our abstracted upward gaze back down to Earth for a time. What a re-enchantment of world that would be, to look around and see the plants and the trees of knowledge grow in the garden still.

Michael Pollan⁹

If we were to assign a meaning to ‘reenchantment’ based solely on its statistical usage in academic terms, it would have to represent ‘revaluation’, or more specifically, ‘the negotiation and renegotiation of differing systems of valuation’, a notion that has resonances with Max Weber’s original conception of disenchantment as the erosion of value-oriented rationality. Nonetheless, even in this case Weber’s work is referred to rarely, and then never systematically.¹⁰ This initial review may seem particularly scattershot. This, however, reflects the character of the discourse, as this meaning of the word, which flirts between thin reenchantment and thick reenchantment, is employed indiscriminately across disciplines and fields of study. Writing of land law practices in Mexico, Monique Nuijten defines ‘re-enchantment of governmental techniques’ as ‘the use of existing procedures for new purposes’,¹¹ which involves the renegotiation of the legal

⁷ Sam Crowell, Renate N. Caine and Geoffrey Caine, *The Re-Enchantment of Learning: A Manual for Teacher Renewal and Classroom Transformation* (Tuscon, AZ: Zephyr Press, 1998), vi. Crowell followed the book up several years later with an article which reiterates the same points. See Sam Crowell, ‘Attributes of the Heart that Reenchant Learning’, *Paths of Learning* 16 (Spring 2003): 6-10.

⁸ Crowell, et. al., *Re-Enchantment*, 175. In the context of education, though in a very different form, Ken Larson’s novel *ReEnchantment: A Schoolboys’ Adventure* tells the story of the Jacobsen family’s move to California and their subsequent struggles with a godless and threatening public school system. The book amounts to a spirited defence of home-schooling in the interests of an education that paradoxically focuses on both Christian teaching and the reclamation of the magic of the world. Ken Larson, *ReEnchantment: A Schoolboys’ Adventure*. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2007.

⁹ Michael Pollan, *The Botany of Desire: A Plant’s-Eye View of the World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), 193.

¹⁰ It is worth noting at the outset that re-enchantment in its many forms is at some point tied to each of the diverse meanings of ‘enchantment’. The Oxford English Dictionary provides us with several definition of ‘enchant’: ‘to exert magical influence upon: to bewitch: to lay under a spell. Also to endow with magical powers or properties; ‘to charm, delight, or enrapture’. On rare occasions, re-enchantment is even used to mean the opposite of ‘disillusion’. Paul Kurtz, lamenting the ‘vulgar post-modernist cacophony of Heideggerian-Derridan mush’, writes, ‘we need to awaken *re-enchantment* with the Enlightenment: there is indeed a pressing need for a *New Enlightenment*’. Paul Kurtz, ‘Re-enchantment: A *New Enlightenment*’, *Free Inquiry* 24, 4 (April/May 2004): 6. Emphasis in original. For a very similar employment of ‘reenchantment’, see Gail Dutton, ‘The Re-enchantment of Work: Keeping Your Best and Brightest May be the Wisest Business Decision you Make’, *Management Review* 87, 2 (February 1998): 51-54.

¹¹ Monique Nuijten, ‘Illegal Practices and the Re-enchantment of Governmental Techniques: Law and the Land in Mexico’, *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 48 (2003): 164. For another, very different, usage in relation to the legal realm, Mark C. Modak-Truran argues that neither religious commitment nor indeterminacy are a hindrance to the practice of law: ‘Rather than presenting an unfortunate feature of the legal system, legal indeterminacy facilitates both religious liberty and the *reenchantment of the law*’. Mark C. Modak-Truran,

value of both land and tradition. In a therapeutic context, Håkan Jönson and Jan Arne Magnussen identify, if dismissively, ‘a search for a re-enchanted aging’ which ‘can be compared to other, similar utopian New Age projects to re-enchant existential issues, for instance, Jung’s project to re-enchant the disenchanting human spirit back from the natural sciences’.¹² From another very different perspective, Scott Roulter concludes his *Kantian Virtue at the Intersection of Politics and Nature* with a brief chapter titled, ‘A Modest Re-enchantment of the Vale’. For Roulter, John Keats’ poetic ‘vale of soul-making’, which underlines the pedagogic value of suffering, is a parallel to Kant’s thinking of the world as ‘a beneficent force, a *facilitator* in our pursuit of character and virtue’.¹³ Roulter notes that Kant’s philosophy was an agent of disenchantment, but argues also that ‘compared to Weber’s sober assessment of the modern human predicament, Kant’s philosophy appears naïvely optimistic and, if the vale of soul-making metaphor is taken seriously, even “world-enchanting”’.¹⁴ Roulter here uncovers a dialectic of enchantment in Kant, whose philosophy has had a profound influence on modern thought.

Costica Bradatan’s *The Other Bishop Berkeley: An Exercise in Reenchantment* is a conscious effort at revaluation. He sets out, paying particular attention to George Berkeley’s much-maligned *Siris*, to reclaim and revalue Platonic, apologetic, alchemical, utopian and eschatological elements in Berkeley’s philosophy that have been ignored by – or are embarrassing to – contemporary Berkeley scholars. Bradatan aims also to revalue history for the sake of history: ‘There is a certain inclination in this scholarship to consider Berkeley interesting only insofar as he has something relevant to say about the problems we are concerned with, and only as long as he is able to solve what we consider significant philosophical problems’.¹⁵ Bradatan shows the possibilities of a reenchantment steeped in Weber’s understanding of reenchantment when he concludes that scholarship that pursues

‘Reenchanting the Law: The Religious Dimension of Judicial Decision Making’ (PhD. diss, University of Chicago, 2002), 1. Emphasis in original.

¹² Håkan Jönson and Jan Arne Magnussen, ‘A New Age of Old Age? Gerotranscendence and the Re-enchantment of Aging’, *Journal of Aging Studies* 15 (2001): 324. Emphasis in original. Jönson and Magnussen attack fellow gerontologist Lars Tornstam for his concept of ‘gerotranscendence’, which attempts to renegotiate the ‘value-dependent theories’ imposed on the elderly. They accuse the theory of being ‘empirically weak’ and accuse Tornstam of a ‘romantic Orientalism’.

¹³ Scott M. Roulter, *Kantian Virtue at the Intersection of Politics and Nature: The Vale of Soul-Making*, vol. 7, North America Kant Society Studies in Philosophy (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2004), 4. Emphasis in original. Roulter quotes Keats on suffering: ‘Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul? A place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways’. Quoted in Roulter, *Kantian*, 3.

¹⁴ Roulter, *Kantian*, 150.

¹⁵ Costica Bradatan, *The Other Bishop Berkeley: An Exercise in Reenchantment* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 2-3. Emphasis in original. Interestingly, the word ‘reenchantment’ appears only in the title of Bradatan’s book, leaving the reader to deduce his meaning from the context.

history for its own use results in a situation where ‘history becomes *instrumental*, and does not have any epistemic value per se’.¹⁶ In a very similar act of renegotiation, George Levine demonstrates the ability of reenchantment to find connections across cultural and epistemological realms as he pursues a defence of Charles Darwin’s theory of natural selection through the reclamation and revaluation of forgotten or neglected elements in Darwin’s work. Levine’s argument is based on a close reading of the formal elements of Darwin’s writing, treating him as a literary figure and as a historical human being as well as a scientist. He praises Darwin’s writing as concerned, human, emotionally stirring, full of wonder, highly moral and ‘dazzlingly imaginative in its metaphorical work’.¹⁷ He summarises, ‘Darwin’s science was not at all “disenchanted” or anaesthetic or dehumanising or amoral; it was rather a science enchanted from its inceptions with awareness of and awe at the complexities, varieties, beauties, and dangers of nature, and that was made possible by a deep romantic feeling for nature and its organisms’.¹⁸ Levine ultimately concludes, against the common wisdom that Darwin’s theories stripped humanity of its mystery, that ‘Darwin’s work can be read as contributing to a radical *re-enchantment* of the world’.¹⁹

The revaluation of premodern forms of enchantment is another crucial constituent in the discourse of reenchantment, one which is again tied to the rhetoric of recovery and the return. This often carries with it an implicit Orientalism, as in this particularly glaring example from David Tacey’s *ReEnchantment: The New Australian Spirituality*: ‘But spirituality is not beyond our grasp; in fact, it is the normal way of being. In tribal and indigenous societies, spirituality is an entirely natural mode of being in the world, and it is still available to modern people as well, if we can open ourselves to this dimension of experience’.²⁰ In many cases, while evidently attempting to challenge the superiority of the modern, these uses of reenchantment inadvertently reinscribe the narratives of modernity that sought to overcome such enchantments. This aspect of reenchantment has led to a

¹⁶ Bradatan, *Berkeley*, 10. Emphasis in original.

¹⁷ George Levine, *Darwin Loves You: Natural Selection and the Re-enchantment of the World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 18.

¹⁸ Levine, *Darwin*, 205.

¹⁹ Levine, *Darwin*, 22. Emphasis in original.

²⁰ David Tacey, *ReEnchantment: The New Australian Spirituality* (Sydney: Harper Collins Publishers, 2000), 18. At other times, Tacey is apparently aware of such Orientalist tendencies. He writes later in the book, ‘Ancient tribal cultures, in particular those of the North American Indian and Aboriginal groups, are seen to possess the desired spiritual ideas and cosmologies, and desperate white people in search of a new consciousness simply plunder these cultures for their spiritual booty. This is a serious cultural problem, since this attitude does considerable damage to indigenous cultures.’ Tacey, *ReEnchantment*, 178.

consequent revaluation of narrative epistemologies associated with imagined past cultures. Rebecca-Lynne Vincent, to cite but one example, relates a call for reenchancement to the revival of traditional mythical understandings of water: 'To solve the serious problems with water in the contemporary world, people must experience some kind of *reenchantment* with water ... Restoring awareness of the spirit dimensions of water, expressed in myths and stories from around the world of deities and numinous beings animating water's myriad's forms, expands human consciousness'.²¹

In a different field, historian Joseph Mali connects the mythic and the artistic: 'The fact that such aesthetic and mythic sensations still arise in us when we look at a work of art or at natural objects ... indicates that a reenchancement of the world could still be viable through the reactivation of myth'.²² The revaluation or even the elevation of nature has consistently been a significant element within the discourse going back to its beginnings. A characteristic example will suffice. Writing as part of the 'Industrial Society Project Group', which was working in part as a reaction to the energy crisis of the late 1970s, Serge Moscovici writes of reenchancement:

Its aim is not the cult but the practice of nature. Its method is not to remedy the ills of existence but to produce new modes of existence. Its lever is not the body or daily life from which it will not soon emerge. In its horizon and tomorrow in ourselves, we will at last know that fighting for nature in our nature, rooting men, reoccupying society, making societies of living beings, untaming life – these are all one and the same thing. Tomorrow we will reenter earth's atmosphere, this green planet that the astronauts have glimpsed in space, the *only* planet, for we have no other.²³

Moscovici's tone is pessimistic – 'It is impossible to ignore the crumbling of the entire economic, social, and cultural face of the world'²⁴ – but his view of the future is decidedly utopian: 'The essential point is that we have at our disposal a new horizon, one that covers every aspect of human life: the reenchancement of the world. It embraces a different universe'.²⁵ Moscovici is representative in that he imagines the reenchancement of the world through nature as at once forward-looking and nostalgic, highlighting the 'off-modern' aspects of reenchancement as revaluation. It must be noted that not all evaluations of reenchancement as revaluation are quite as optimistic. Taking an oppositional view from a

²¹ Rebecca-Lynne Vincent, 'Mythic Water Creatures and Spirit Beings of the Deep: Reenchancing the World of Water' (PhD diss.: Pacifica Graduate Institute, 2002), 1. Emphasis in original.

²² Joseph Mali, *Mythistory: The Making of Modern Historiography* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 234.

²³ Moscovici, 'Reenchancement', 168.

²⁴ Moscovici, 'Reenchancement', 133.

²⁵ Moscovici, 'Reenchancement', 146.

feminist standpoint, Jessica Benjamin, in *The Bonds of Love*, criticises what she sees as superficial revaluations:

The contemporary celebrations of motherhood are a classic example of reenchantment, which is the attempt to replace a lost relationship with an ideal. Disenchantment ... inevitably stimulates the search for reenchantment, in this case, for a regenerated version of society. Such regressive reenchantment can rely on the structure of gender polarity that is preserved, albeit beneath the surface, by rationalisation. Thus as the concrete forms of maternal care and recognition diminish, their loss is repaired by the symbolic evocation of motherhood.²⁶

As a first brush with the wider uses of reenchantment, the many varieties of reenchantment as revaluation give a fair indicator of the complex and contradictory character of the discourse as a whole.

A Fantasy Nonetheless: Reenchantment and Commodity Culture
Objects unfold a red carpet to a utopia that, far from being absorbed by consumerism, transforms the vocabulary of exchange, that is, commerce, into an 'Frigidaire mystique'.
Michel De Certeau²⁷

In another connection of reenchantment with systems of value, the concept has been employed in relation to commodity culture in complex and contradictory ways. The matter of enchantment, disenchantment and reenchantment in relation to political economy defies easy analysis or categorisation, as the lines that separate culture from economics, enchantment from marketing, use-value from nostalgic value are highly fluid. Commodification is never a matter of simple disenchantment as commodities are deeply intertwined with various processes of enchantment which *extend* the value of an object (or a service, a person, or an experience) beyond considerations of use or economic exchange value. In terms of establishing a nuanced and critical understanding of reenchantment, it is in relation to commodities and commodification that some of the most compelling work on reenchantment is being undertaken, which may well indicate that Weber's Marxist roots were more of an asset than a liability, especially given that writers in this area engage more directly with Weber's work than is common. There are two distinct visions of the enchantments of commodity culture running through the discourse.

²⁶ Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), 206-207. For Benjamin, this idealisation is ultimately harmful: 'The dynamic which first undermines the mother concretely and then attempts to repair her through symbolic reenchantment gives rise to two ideal figures: the perfect mother and the autonomous individual, bound in a relationship of domination ... The ideal mother is the after-image of the true lost other, who can return only when she ceases to be split off from the autonomous individual'. Benjamin, *Bonds*, 215.

²⁷ Michel de Certeau, *Culture in the Plural*, trans. by Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 20.

On the one hand, there are those who see the practice of consumption itself as a path to genuine re-enchantment. In an influential 1995 article, A. Fuat Firat and Alladi Venkatesh argue for the 'liberatory' character of consumption in the postmodern age, in which the consumer can resist the logic of the market by consuming according to their wishes: 'The postmodernist quest is therefore to "re-enchant human life" and to liberate the consumer from a repressive rational/technological stance'.²⁸ They argue that, when playful and celebratory, consumer behaviour maintains the possibility of liberation from the dominant force of the market through what they call 'micro-emancipatory ends – as opposed to grand emancipatory projects'.²⁹ Firat and Venkatesh argue that consumption need not follow slavishly any totalising logic, finally concluding that postmodern fragmented consumption constitutes 'an emancipatory response to the totalising logic of the market'.³⁰ In another positive assessment, Nicky Gregson and Louise Crewe discuss the practices of the transformation of second-hand consumer goods – they focus chiefly on clothing – using the language of recovery, redefinition, divestment and re-enchantment. These transformations are centred on the negotiation and renegotiation of the *intangible* value of consumer products. Re-enchantment here is understood as a way to approach used goods and 'imbue them with value'.³¹ This value is contained within 'the imagined memories trapped with the commodity'³² and 'the imaginative potential of its former life'³³ or with reconstructed familial histories as embodied in second-hand goods. In other words, consumers give their second-hand goods interesting life stories of their own and these stories in turn add value to the goods themselves. In these imagined narratives, some objects prove to be more enchanted than others, in particular objects associated with celebrity figures like Princess Diana or with the touchstone decade of the 1960s. Gregson and Crewe conclude, echoing the central argument of Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*: 'What people

²⁸ A. Fuat Firat and Alladi Venkatesh, 'Liberatory Postmodernism and the Re-enchantment of Consumption', *Journal of Consumer Research* 22, 3 (December 1995): 239-240.

²⁹ Firat and Venkatesh, 'Liberatory', 245. They see themselves, as researchers, freed by these same processes: 'Consumer research will thus become an enterprise in the service of consumers ... We do not advocate the abandonment of "scientific" procedures, for nothing in postmodernism suggests such a move. Postmodernism simply argues that "scientific" knowledge is not the only knowledge and that science should not relentlessly pursue universal knowledge. Translated into the field of consumer research, it means that we must opt for multiple theories of consumer behaviour rather than a single theory that silences all other theories'. Firat and Venkatesh, 'Liberatory', 260-261.

³⁰ Firat and Venkatesh, 'Liberatory', 255.

³¹ Nicky Gregson and Louise Crewe, *Second-Hand Cultures* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 145.

³² Gregson and Crewe, *Second*, 144.

³³ Gregson and Crewe, *Second*, 145.

actually do with things, how they use them is as important to producing commodity biographies as the geographies of the commodity chain'.³⁴

On the other hand, the sense of re-enchantment as a *bewitchment* often comes to the forefront in the discourse on re-enchantment and consumer culture. Re-enchantment is thus understood as the deployment of dark magics wielded in the name of ideological advantage or simple profit, because, as James Beckford notes, 'the appearance of magic, mystery and enchantment in culture is rationally produced and marketed, sometimes in conditions of cut-throat competition'.³⁵ Paul Knox summarises this sceptical approach to re-enchantment:

Successive phases of capitalist development have required material products to become enchanted – freighted with positive symbolic meaning – to enhance their appeal to consumers. Rethinking contemporary American suburbia as re-enchanted means that we must address the fundamental questions of re-enchantment by whom, and re-enchantment for whom.³⁶

The sociologist George Ritzer, author of the immensely popular 1993 book *The McDonaldisation of Society*, is at the forefront of this neo-Weberian consumer analysis.³⁷ Ritzer, in a later book, *Enchanting a Disenchanted World*, details this dubious magic in contemporary shopping malls and amusement parks:

The new means of consumption can be seen as 'cathedrals of consumption' – that is, they have an enchanted, sometimes even sacred, religious character for many people. In order to attract ever-larger numbers of consumers, such cathedrals of consumption need to offer, or at least appear to offer, increasingly magical, fantastic, and enchanted settings in which to consume.³⁸

³⁴ Gregson and Crewe, *Second*, 6.

³⁵ James A. Beckford, 'The Disenchantment of Postmodernity', *New Blackfriars* 78 (March 1997): 124.

³⁶ Paul Knox, 'Vulgaria: The Re-Enchantment of Suburbia', *Opolis: An International Journal of Metropolitan Studies* 1, 2 (2005): 35-36. *Vulgaria*, incidentally, is the name of the fictional European country in the classic children's story *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, a place where children are outlawed.

³⁷ Rationalisation, indeed, has been the central feature of his work since before the success of the idea of McDonaldisation, as we can see with a quick look at such early work as the article 'Rationalisation and the Deprofessionalisation of Physicians', written with David Walczak. They argue that the instrumental, routinised and bureaucratic - in other words, the *formally* rationalised – elements in contemporary medicine have reduced the social and symbolic value of the individual physician. In the article, the authors refer to the fast-food-like nature of some health-care organizations, anticipating Ritzer's best-known thesis by a decade, even introducing the term 'McDonaldisation'. See George Ritzer and David Walczak, 'Rationalisation and the Deprofessionalisation of Physicians', *Social Forces* 67, 1 (September 1988): 9, 17 note 9.

³⁸ George Ritzer, *Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Revolutionising the Means of Consumption* (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 1999), 8. He takes Disney World as his exemplar of such a cathedral, a place where rationalised capitalist techniques are mixed with enchantments that are manufactured technologically. Ritzer's use of religious language is not incidental; he extends this synthesis and argues the American shopping malls have 'much in common with the religious centres of traditional civilisations'. Ritzer, *Enchanting*, 8. He argues also that these new forms of rationalisation, like all forms of rationalisation, have a built-in irrationality and be self-defeating, 'Although such rational, machine-like structures can have their enchanting qualities (food appears almost instantaneously, goods exist in unbelievable profusion) they are, in the main, disenchanting; they often end up *not* being very magical'. Ritzer, *Enchanting*, 9. Emphasis in original.

For Ritzer, the enchantments offered by such cathedrals, generated almost exclusively by technological means, are intentional and necessary strategies: 'The cathedrals of consumption must be reenchanting if they are to maintain their ability to attract a sufficient number of customers. Without large numbers of consumers, the mechanisms oriented to control and exploitation will not yield the desired profits'.³⁹ These enchantments must constantly be renewed, because, as he notes, 'No matter how astonishing, consumers grow accustomed to extravaganzas'.⁴⁰ Ritzer argues that such forms of reenchantment are highly deceptive in that they hide their mundane, practical aim to overcome the alienation of the consumer and bring them back to the cathedrals to buy: 'I contend that the spectacle is used to overcome the liabilities, especially the disenchantment associated with rationalised systems'.⁴¹ Though he leaves some room for genuine reenchantment within the strictures of rationalised cultures, his criticisms of rationalised systems and settings are often scathing, as in a recent article where he refers to contemporary suburbia as 'islands of the living dead'.⁴² One of the great benefits of Ritzer's thinking is that he is aware of the *seductiveness* of rationalisation and aware that many people derive pleasure from the illusive reenchantments of spectacular consumer society. Without this realisation, there can be no accounting for the success of commodity culture, which can be highly alienating but relies on strategies of enchantment and on the enchanted extension of objects beyond their use or exchange value. There is good evidence that indicates that this enchantment is working, as Olivier Badot and Bernard Cova, writing in relation to Firat and Venkatesh, note:

Ce réenchantement de la consommation se lit dans le vécu quotidien de nos contemporains. On peut se demander, par exemple, quel est le premier site touristique au Canada. Non pas les chutes du Niagara, mais le plus grand et extravagant centre commercial du monde, le West Edmonton Mall à Edmonton et Alberta ... De même, le 5^{ème} site touristique français n'est ni le château de Versailles, ni le Musée d'Orsay ... mais une grande surface d'informatique dans le XII^{ème} arrondissement de Paris, à l'allure d'une foire au vin et réalisant plus de 150 millions d'Euros de chiffre d'affaires: Surcouf.⁴³

³⁹ Ritzer, *Enchanting*, 104.

⁴⁰ Ritzer, *Enchanting*, 216. Here Ritzer is working with Guy Debord's argument, from *The Society of the Spectacle*, that the chief function of spectacle is to conceal the mercenary logic of the system itself: 'The society which rests on modern industry is not accidentally or superficially spectacular, it is fundamentally *spectaculist*. In the spectacle, which is the image of the ruling economy, the goal is nothing, development everything. The spectacle aims at nothing other than itself ... As the indispensable decoration of the objects produced today, as the general exposé of the rationality of the system, as the advanced economic sector which directly shapes a growing multitude of image-objects, the spectacle is the main *production* of present-day society'. Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. unknown (Detroit: Black and Red, 1967), paragraphs 14-15. Emphasis in original

⁴¹ Ritzer, *Enchanting*, 105-106.

⁴² George Ritzer and Todd Stillman, 'Islands of the Living Dead: The Social Geography of McDonaldisation', *The American Behavioural Scientist* 47, 2 (October 2003): 4.

⁴³ Olivier Badot and Bernard Cova, 'Néo-Marketing, 10 Ans Après: Pour une Théorie Critique de la Consommation et du Marketing Réenchantés', *Revue Française du Marketing* 5, 5 (Novembre 2003): 81. A note on 'reenchantment' in European languages: there is an extensive discourse on reenchantment in French that

Ritzer's work is compelling in that he describes in some detail the workings of the dialectic of enchantment at work in the economic sphere:

There is no question that although rationalised systems lead in various ways to disenchantment, they paradoxically and simultaneously serve to create their own kinds of enchantment ... Yet this disenchanted structure produces another kind of fantasy – that of finding oneself set loose in a warehouse piled to the ceiling with goods that, if they are not free, are made out to great bargains. It is a cold, utilitarian fantasy, but a fantasy nonetheless.⁴⁴

The complex of enchantments surrounding commodity consumer culture is not limited to the Western context, as Anne Allison notes of contemporary Japanese culture:

in an environment of intense work demands, individualisation, and materialism, the reification of life is extreme. It is not surprising, then, that people seek 'life' in material things: objects that become the conduit for various forms of communication, intimate relationships, and arousals. Integral as it is to millennial capitalism, this passion for material goods that are invested with the power to animate the lives, identities, and communications networks must be examined seriously. For it signals not only New Age commodity fetishism but also ... the reenchantment of a darkly empty and rationally modernist world with the animism of spirituality.⁴⁵

In a more philosophical vein, both Patrice Haynes and Alison Stone write of Theodor Adorno's work on commodities in terms of reenchantment.⁴⁶ Stone argues that Adorno offers a reenchantment based on the irreconcilable otherness of all material objects, which possess an unknowability that lends a measure of enchantment, in the form of mystery, even to the natural world: 'these kinds of thought re-enchant natural phenomena, making us aware that these phenomena have an indeterminate (but still discernible) history of suffering'.⁴⁷ Again in relation to the Frankfurt School, Susan Buck-Morss finds in Walter Benjamin's never-completed Arcades project (at one point given the tentative title 'Paris Arcades: A Dialectical Enchantment') another reenchantment through the consumer object:

closely mirrors that in English. There is, however, little if any writing in German on reenchantment, or as it would translate literally, *Rueckzauberung* or *Gegenzauberung*. Additionally, a short, informal dialogue with a colleague revealed that there is likewise no cognate term in Italian, only designations for phenomena that are often confused with reenchantment in English, such as 'desecolarizzazione' (desecularisation) or 'risveglio religioso' (religious awakening/reawakening), both of which have more to do with general cultural impressions about contemporary upsurges in religion than with reenchantment as I am using it here.

⁴⁴ Ritzer, *Enchanting*, 101.

⁴⁵ Anne Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 86.

⁴⁶ Haynes writes, 'For Adorno, the re-enchantment of the world (and the re-sensualisation of the thinking subject) requires a form of cognition that takes its lead from the material object itself as it is held to have distinct qualities of its own ... Adorno's negative dialectics suggests ways we might reconsider cognition in terms of love, that is to say a thinking sensitive to the sensuous particularity of the other'. Patrice Haynes, "'To Rescue Means to Love Things": Adorno and the Re-enchantment of Bodies', *Critical Quarterly* 47, 3 (Autumn 2005): 65.

⁴⁷ Alison Stone, 'Adorno and the Disenchantment of Nature', *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 32, 2 (2006): 248.

Benjamin's central argument in the *Passagen-Werk* was that under conditions of capitalism, industrialisation had brought about a re-enchantment of the social world and though it, a 'reactivation of the mythic powers' ... Underneath the surface of increasing systemic rationalisation, on an unconscious 'dream' level, the new urban-industrial world has become fully enchanted.⁴⁸

Benjamin's work, as Buck-Morss reads it, suggests a new understanding of the history of modernity and production: 'The *Passagen-Werk* suggests that it makes no sense to divide the era of capitalism into formalist "modernism" and historically eclectic "postmodernism", as these tendencies have been there from the start of industrial culture. These paradoxical dynamics of novelty and repetition simply repeat themselves anew'.⁴⁹

There are numerous readings of the intersection of re-enchantment and consumption that reveal the complex, at times contradictory dialectic of enchantment at work within commodity culture. Building on this, we can suggest, if tentatively, that the interaction of re-enchantment and rationalisation within the economic sphere are not inconsequential or secondary matters. Modern consumer capitalism relies on various kinds of enchantment for its very existence.

Beyond Human Reason: Reenchantment and Traditional Religion

Reenchantment does not necessarily mean 'irrationalisation', though this is often the reception it receives in secularised cultures; reenchantment can be based on the old symbolic resources of religious orientations.

Klaus Eder⁵⁰

The academic study of religion has evolved a number of uses for the idea of re-enchantment in relation to more traditional manifestations of the religious, seeking alternately to separate the two neatly, to equate re-enchantment with a perceived return of religion in contemporary culture, or to use the word to designate any and all religious aspects of modernity. One of the more common *misuses* of the concept is the confusion of re-enchantment with changes within the religious landscape that are given problematic labels such as 'desecularisation', 'resacralisation' or 'the return of the sacred'. This tendency is clearly reflected in the translation of Peter Berger's volume *The Desecularisation of the World* into French as *Le Réenchantement du monde*.⁵¹ Even ignoring the problems attendant to the notion of secularisation, this is problematic, as secularisation involves such

⁴⁸ Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1989), 253-254. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁹ Buck-Morss, *Benjamin*, 359.

⁵⁰ Klaus Eder, 'Contradictions and Social Evolution: A Theory of the Social Evolution of Modernity', in *Social Change and Modernity*, ed. Hans Haferkamp and Neil J. Smelser (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 337.

⁵¹ Peter Berger, ed. *Le Réenchantement du monde*, trans. by Jean-Luc Pouthier (New London, CT: Bayard, 2001).

things as changes in patterns of church attendance and institutional allegiance, while disenchantment involves a wholly different set of associations and revolves more around differing spheres of value. To equate the two is to misunderstand both, as Richard Jenkins notes, 'Secularisation and disenchantment are not the same things, though they are easily confused'.⁵² It must be remembered that for Weber both Judaic monotheism and Protestant asceticism played a crucial role in the *disenchantment* of the world.

Some of the most blatant confusions about disenchantment, at least in relation to Weber, come perhaps surprisingly from the study of religion. I will take two obvious examples. Jeffrey Paine's *Re-enchantment: Tibetan Buddhism Comes to the West* is a populist, apologetic history of Tibetan Buddhism and its interactions with the West, beginning with the enigmatic figure of Alexandra David-Neel, moving through Thomas Merton and ending with the current and immense cross-cultural popularity of the Dalai Lama. He writes, 'Tibetan Buddhism's appeal ... was that it promised them a way to re-enter that earlier stage of religion that Max Weber had described, when spirituality was charismatic, overflowing, and molten'.⁵³ Contrary to a Weberian sense of enchanted, however, the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, long permeated with magical and supernatural elements, is transformed in the move westward into a practice intended to produce individual happiness. Paine concludes, 'The Dalai Lama has swapped a thousand years of magic and mystery for kindness and friendship'.⁵⁴ This is nothing less than *rationalisation* described as re-enchantment. Similarly, though the geographical background is very different, Avihu Zakai writes of the American Puritan preacher, theologian, and best-selling author Jonathan Edwards: 'Against the de-Christianization of history and the de-divinization of the historical process, as evidenced in the various Enlightenment historical accounts, Edwards looked for the reenthronement of God as the author and Lord of history, the re-enchantment of the historical world'.⁵⁵ Zakai's confusion is at first glance even greater than Paine's, given that Weber's narrative of rationalisation climaxes with the Puritans in the American British colonies, where Edwards

⁵² Richard Jenkins, 'Disenchantment, Enchantment and Re-Enchantment: Max Weber at the Millennium', *Max Weber Studies* 1 (November 2000): 19.

⁵³ Jeffrey Paine, *Re-Enchantment: Tibetan Buddhism Comes to the West* (London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2004), 12. The Tibetan Buddhist ambassadors to the modernised West following the occupation of Tibet by China in 1959 offered the last chance to glimpse these original enchantments: 'To win a place in the modern world, those Tibetans had to cross a thousand years of religious development, and do it in double time. In effect they recapitulated the history of religion – went from the Abbey of St. Denis to downtown Manhattan, as it were – in a single generation. Nothing quite like this had happened before, and with no other indigenous religions left intact, nothing like it will ever happen again'. Paine, *Re-enchantment*, 13.

⁵⁴ Paine, *Re-enchantment*, 197.

⁵⁵ Avihu Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History: The Reenchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), xiv.

lived and taught; however, a closer look at the specific character of Edwards' theology would be necessary before we condemn Zakai's employment of re-enchantment.

A number of scholars of religion have proposed re-enchantment as a label for transformations in the contemporary religious atmosphere. Perhaps the best and most helpful of these is Christopher Partridge, who, in his two-volume *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, starts from the observation that 'cracks are appearing in the disenchanted landscape and new forms of *significant* spiritual life are emerging'.⁵⁶ These new religious forms are emerging out of what Partridge describes as a paradoxical social and cultural environment characterised by 'a confluence of secularisation and sacralisation'.⁵⁷ What Partridge offers is less a study of re-enchantment in a specific sense and more an extensive survey of the contemporary religious marketplace backed up with a wealth of empirical data of varying quality. Partridge takes as a given the general truth of the secularisation thesis and sees re-enchantment as a movement against this largely-completed movement in history: 'the deteriorating/secularised Christian culture is being replaced with a cultic milieu, which is not shaped like sectarian, denominational or ecclesiastical religion'.⁵⁸ He calls this cultic milieu 'occulture'. This milieu is diverse, creative, diffuse, anti-authoritarian, steeped in and perpetuated by popular culture, significant, ongoing, and 'characterised by new hybrid forms of religion which are the result of a dialectical process of re-enchantment of the secular and the secularisation of the sacred'.⁵⁹ Practices, ideas and cultural forms as diverse as UFO culture, traditional religions, new religious movements, psychedelic drugs, the Beatles, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* all come under the umbrella of Partridge's occulture. Though his survey deals mainly with the contemporary world, Partridge makes some successful efforts to expand his understanding of re-enchantment beyond the present and address the continuing dialectic of enchantment; for example, he writes of contemporary

⁵⁶ Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, vol. 1, *Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralisation, Popular Culture, and Occulture* (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 43. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁷ Partridge, *West* I, 4.

⁵⁸ Partridge, *West* I, 40.

⁵⁹ Partridge, *West* I, 44. He defines occulture as follows: '[it] is not a worldview, but rather a resource on which people draw, a reservoir of ideas, beliefs, and symbols. Consumers of occulture may be witting or unwitting; they may themselves contribute to the pool of occultural knowledge or they may simply drink from it. Occulture is the spiritual *bricoleur's* Internet from which to download whatever appeals or inspires; it is the sacralising air that many of our contemporaries breathe; it is the well from which the serious occultist draws; it is the varied landscape the New Age nomad explores; it is the cluttered warehouse frequently plundered by producers of popular culture searching for ideas, images, and symbols'. Partridge, *West* I, 84-85.

'eco-enchantment' as part of a long-standing tradition of ecological thought that includes the classical Romantics as well as the work of William Blake and Friedrich Schleiermacher.⁶⁰

Partridge is by no means the only one to tie reenchantment to the fragmentation of religion. Alain Touraine makes a similar point in a very different context, writing in his *Critique of Modernity*:

Secularisation means the humanisation, and not the destruction, of the subject. It does not simply mean the disenchantment of the world; it also means the re-enchantment of human beings. It leads to an increasing divorce between their various aspects: their individuality, their ability to be subjects, their Ego and the Self that is constructed from the outside by social roles. The transition to modernity is not a transition from technical or bureaucratic action; it leads from adaptation of the world to the construction of new worlds, from the reason that discovers eternal ideas to the action which, by rationalising the world, liberates and recomposes the subject.⁶¹

In a similar vein, Luyckx writes of what he calls 'la transmodernité', a cultural stage that is replacing the postmodern but which remains very fragile:

La transmodernité est capable de réenchanter le monde car elle peut libérer l'accès à l'âme. Si la dimension spirituelle n'est pas tabou, une réconciliation entre corps, intelligences, esprits et âmes, ces différentes qui compose toute personne, devient possible. Cette réconciliation libère une énergie profondément enfouie en nous, inattendue et puissante. À l'opposé du désenchantement, ce réenchancement peut commencer lorsque l'âme se reprend à vivre et à espérer. Mais la transmodernité peut aussi dégénérer en un désenchantement plus profond encore que celui qui baigne le monde actuel si elle se heurte à la résistance musclée d'autres paradigmes.⁶²

Other uses of reenchantment focus on smaller areas of religion in contemporary society and demonstrate the value of empirical and ethnographic study for understanding reenchantment. Cheris Shun-Ching Chan locates her ethnographic study of the Lingsu Exo-

⁶⁰ Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, vol. 2, *Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralisation, Popular Culture, and Occulture* (London: T & T Clark International, 2005), 43-50. Phillip Taylor uses the word in a similar fashion, though in a very different geographical setting. Here again, he uses reenchantment to signify a generalised upsurge of varying kinds of religion: 'Religion in Vietnam has been thriving in recent years. Churches, pagodas and pilgrimage sites are crowded with devotees, offering signs of fervent faith and unmistakable religious vitality. Religion commands a large share of the material resources of this increasingly prosperous society'. Philip Taylor, 'Modernity and Re-enchantment in Post-revolutionary Vietnam', in *Modernity and Re-enchantment: Religion in Post-revolutionary Vietnam*, ed. Philip Taylor (Pasir Panjang, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007), 1.

⁶¹ Alain Touraine, *Critique of Modernity*, trans. by David Macey (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 230. For Touraine, this subjectivist reenchantment is a part of a 'demodernisation'. James Beckford notes, 'Subjectivisation, in Touraine's usage, is therefore a spiritual and social movement in so far as it represents a challenge to established social order in the name of transcendent creativity, freedom and self-production'. James A. Beckford, 'Re-enchantment and Demodernisation: The Recent Writings of Alain Touraine', *European Journal of Social Theory* 1, 2: 198.

⁶² Marc Luyckx, 'Le Rôle de l'expert: Pariciper au Réenchantement du Monde', *Reflets et Perspectives*, XLI, 1 (2002): 96.

Esoteric movement in Hong Kong against ‘the societal tide of reenchantment’ and suggests, ‘the concept of reenchantment and its relation to disenchantment should be delineated by empirical studies of the reenchanting religious order’.⁶³ Much like Partridge (who cites Chan), but in a narrower context, she argues that the Lingsu embody a dialectic of the ‘sacralisation of the secular’ and ‘secularisation of the sacred’ in a constant melding of anti-rational and instrumentally rational elements. In another case, Barbro Klein writes of a highly publicized 1992 incident in the small Swedish town of Södertälje as reenchantment. Samira, a young Syrian immigrant, claimed that a saint had repeatedly appeared to her, commanding her to heal a long-standing rift in the Assyrian Orthodox Church. Klein locates Samira’s story firmly within a ‘chain of events enmeshed in a complex field of contestations’⁶⁴ which also includes European secularisation, immigration, the history of the Syrian diaspora, and the Swedish news media, who were responsible for exploiting and ‘othering’ Samira. The role of the media, for Klein, was to spread the news of the events: ‘mass media contributed to a “re-enchanting” and “resacralising” of a secularised world’.⁶⁵ Klein moves her analysis into the territory of thick reenchantment by placing the case of Samira within a long tradition of saintly appearances: ‘Taken together, all the narratives, reports, and testimonies concerning the events in Södertälje can be fitted into a larger template that developed long before television entered peoples’ lives’.⁶⁶ Elsewhere on the globe, Thomas Csordas, in his article ‘Global Religion and the Re-enchantment of the World’ describes ‘the Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement’ as a ‘particularly apt example of globalisation or re-globalisation ... of world religions’.⁶⁷

Suggesting that situations of transition and conflict lead to the rise of reenchanting cultural forms, or to the rise in interpretations of cultural forms as reenchanting, he writes of India, Nigeria, and Brazil: ‘Standing economically between the developed and developing worlds,

⁶³ Cherie Shun-Ching Chan, ‘The Sacred-Secular Dialectics of the Reenchanting Religious Order – the Lingsu Exo-Esoterics in Hong Kong’, *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 15, 1 (2000): 46. For a lengthier report on the same study, see Cherie Shun-Ching Chan, *Hong Kong in Reenchantment: A Case Study of the New Religious Discourse* (Hong Kong: The Chinese Universities of Hong Kong - Hong Kong Institute of Asia Pacific Studies, 1996).

⁶⁴ Barbro Klein ‘The Miracle in Södertälje, Sweden: The Re-enchantment of Sweden and the Othering of a Young Woman’, in *Creating Diversities: Folklore, Religion and the Politics of Heritage*, ed. Anne-Leena Siikala (Finland: Finnish Academy of Science & Letters, 2003), 71. For another tightly focused ethnographic study, see Douglas Ezzy’s study of the popularity of contemporary witchcraft books among teenage girls: ‘Spell books re-enchant everyday life, promoting a sense of holistic integrations between body and spirit through encouraging young people to do magical spells’. Douglas Ezzy, ‘New Age Witchcraft? Popular spell books and the Re-enchantment of Everyday Life’, *Culture and Religion* 1, 1 (2003): 57.

⁶⁵ Klein, ‘Miracle’, 82.

⁶⁶ Klein, ‘Miracle’, 72.

⁶⁷ Thomas J. Csordas, ‘Global Religion and the Re-enchantment of the World’, *Anthropological Theory* 7, 3 (2007): 296.

these three crucibles of globalisation may also be points of convergence between the fetishisation of commodities and the fetishisation of experience – ideal crucibles of religious ferment and re-enchantment. Part of this is certainly related to the technological possibilities for mediatisation of spirituality in the nearly-developed nations'.⁶⁸ Csordas here points to the intriguing points of contact between reenchantment, traditional religion and the economic sphere. Writing of 'l'expansion et la réinvention des religions Afro-Brésiliennes' as 'réenchantement', Roberto Motta asks again the question of religion and modernity:

Il n'y aura pas, finalement, de corrélation entre spiritisme de Umbanda et modernisation. Le retour à la tradition se ferait simultanément avec un processus de modernisation assez rapide des structures économiques et sociales. Or, il est sans doute contraire aux postulats de la sociologie de la religion, d'inspiration tant marxiste que wébérien, de poser que la poussée de la modernité puisse se faire de façon simultanée à la croissance d'une religion dans laquelle beaucoup et non sans de bonnes raisons, découvrent le prototype de la manipulation magique du monde et des divinités. Ce qui amènerait à penser qu'elle serait destinée à disparaître du fait de la rationalisation généralisée associée au développement économique et social.⁶⁹

Others use the term to describe the rise of various fundamentalisms. In doing so, some of these thinkers help to flesh out the suggestion made in the first chapter that fundamentalist religion is a production of modernity itself. Ali Hassan Zaidi locates reenchantment in the 'reconstruction of knowledge' from a Muslim standpoint, exemplified in the idea, suggested by S. H. Nasr, of an 'Islamic Science', which treats modernity as an aberration and calls for a return to an Islamic metaphysics.⁷⁰ Similarly, Roxanne L. Euben argues for reenchantment as a way to understand the rise of fundamentalisms in politics:

fundamentalism can be understood as part of the larger attempt among various groups and theories to 're-enchant' a world characterised by the experience of disenchantment ... Given the strength and political and cultural diversity of voices intent on 're-enchanting' a disenchanted world, then we need to understand to what extent they are capturing and exploiting real or perceived failures of post-Enlightenment, rationalist ways of understanding and thus organising political life.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Csordas, 'Global', 307.

⁶⁹ Roberto Motta, 'L'Expansion et la Réinvention des Religions Afro-Brésiliennes: Réenchantement et Décomposition', *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 117 (2002): 116.

⁷⁰ Ali Hassan Zaidi, 'Muslim Reconstruction of Knowledge and the Re-enchantment of Modernity', *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, 5 (2006): 71-74. Quoted in evidently indebted to Weber: 'The classical error of modern civilisation is to mistake the quantitative accumulation of information for qualitative penetration into the inner meaning of things', and even cites him directly, 'Certainly my goal is to move in the opposite direction of what Max Weber called the *Entzauberundprozess*'. Quoted in Zaidi, 'Muslim', 75. This reenchantment is not confined to our particular time; Zaidi writes 'Early Muslim attempts to re-enchant modernity occurred with the *salafi*-reformists' of the nineteenth century who 'combined an anti-imperialist, pan-Islamic vision with an admiration for modern rationality and science'. Zaidi, 'Muslim', 72

⁷¹ Roxanne L. Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism – A Work of Comparative Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 15.

Euben notes again that fundamentalist thinking arises out of problematic contact between the modern and the non-modern worlds. She writes of the influential Islamist thinker Sayyid Qutb: ‘his critique of modernity arises out of a widely shared experience of colonialism and cultural imperialism whereby modernisation and modern political thought were intimately intertwined with the experience of foreign domination’.⁷² Euben notes again that Qutb’s attitude toward modernity is deeply ambivalent: ‘Should modernity be taken to connote an emphasis on modern technology, progress, and worldliness, Qutb is essentially modern. Should it be understood to imply an openness to Westernisation, or commitment to secularism, Qutb is deeply anti-modern’.⁷³ Here again we can see the value of a properly understood reenchantment to challenge received notions of modernity through an unpacking of one of its religious forms.

Euben, echoing the central concern of this thesis, argues that such reenchanting politics call for a more sophisticated understanding of modernity and its ability to generate significant religious calls to tradition:

What is problematic about Qutb’s political thought cannot be captured by the language of irrationalism, pathology, and antimodernism. It cannot be captured in this language in part because such rhetoric does not allow for the tensions embedded in the complex of influences and allegiances that shape and inform Qutb’s thought. Moreover, the very language of irrationality and antimodernism replicates the very mistake Qutb makes so often in his critique of modernity by ignoring its own conditionality ... It is perhaps more illuminating to characterise Qutb’s work as an embrace of the nonrational, that is, an argument for the authority of knowledge that is by definition beyond human reason ... in Qutb’s work we are witnessing not antimodernism but rather another perspective on and attempt to redefine what it must mean to live in the modern world, a perspective that challenges the so-called imperatives of modern rationalism in the name of other possible modernities.⁷⁴

In an analysis that likewise asks challenging questions about the relationship of modernity and religion by identifying counterintuitive historical continuities, Akeel Bilgrami argues that the anti-Western writings of Qutb have certain parallels with the criticisms of modernity levelled by Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi’s critiques in turn had ‘antecedents in a tradition of thought that goes all the way back to the seventeenth century in England and elsewhere in Europe, *simultaneous* with the great scientific achievements of that time’.⁷⁵

⁷² Euben, *Enemy*, 8-9. It is worth noting that Qutb also makes an appearance in Zaidi’s discussion of reenchantment.

⁷³ Euben, *Enemy*, 85.

⁷⁴ Euben, *Enemy*, 87.

⁷⁵ Akeel Bilgrami, ‘Occidentalism, the Very Idea: An Essay on Enlightenment and Enchantment’, *Critical Inquiry* 32, 3 (Spring 2006): 395. Emphasis in original. Bilgrami is here writing in response to two books: Ian Buruma and

Bilgrami describes this tradition as it relates to differing notions of the nature of the world, between that of mechanistic science, which sees matter as ‘*brute and inert*’ and thinkers like Gandhi, for whom the world was instead ‘*suffused with value*’, a world which made very different ethical demands:

if it were laden with *value*, it would make *normative* ethical and social demands on one, whether one was religious or not, normative demands therefore that did not come merely from our own instrumentalities and subjective utilities. And it is in this sense of forming commitments by taking in, in our perceptions, an evaluatively enchanted world, which – being enchanted in this way – therefore *moved* us to normatively constrained *engagement* with it, that the dissenters contrasted with the outlook that was being offered by the ideologues of the new science. A brute and disenchanting world could not move us to any such engagement since any perception of it, given the sort of thing it was, would necessarily be a *detached* form of observation ... far from being anti-West Gandhi’s early antecedents in the West, going back to the seventeenth century and recurring in heterodox traditions in the West since then, constitute what is, and rightly has been, called the radical *Enlightenment*.⁷⁶

By arguing that modernity is permeated with largely unremarked forms of enchantment, Bilgrami provides the fullest demonstration yet in this survey of the consequences of taking seriously the concept of thick reenchantment, even if doesn’t use the language of reenchantment. As a consequence, Bilgrami draws a radical conclusion that bears serious thought: if Islamic critiques like Qutb’s are in line with this radical Enlightenment, then ‘To not take these words seriously and to not see them as genuinely motivating for those who speak them is as morally cretinous as it is to absolve the terrorist actions that a fringe of those who speak these words commit’.⁷⁷

The collision of tradition religion and reenchantment also emerges within various circles of Christian theology. From the standpoint of ‘radical orthodoxy’, Graham Ward takes an oppositional view of contemporary reenchantment as someone like Partridge sees it:

So we have, on the one hand, a re-enchantment of the world in which religion provides a symbolic capital, empty of content and yet pre-eminently consumable – like caffeine-free, sugar-free Coke. On the other hand, we have strong theological commitments increasingly confident about voicing, and voicing aggressively, their moral and spiritual difference.⁷⁸

Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism: A Short History of Anti-Westernism* (London: Atlantic Books, 2004) and Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Doubleday, 2005).

⁷⁶ Bilgrami, ‘Occidentalism’, 396-400. Emphasis in original. This movement, he writes, includes ‘Blake, Shelley, William Morris, Whitman, Thoreau, and countless anonymous voices of the nontraditional Left, the Left of the radical Enlightenment, from the freemasons of the early period down to the heterodox Left in our own time, voices such as Noam Chomsky and Edward Thompson’. Bilgrami, ‘Occidentalism’, 403-404.

⁷⁷ Bilgrami, ‘Occidentalism’, 404-405.

⁷⁸ Graham Ward, *True Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 139.

For Ward, re-enchantment is a superficial phenomenon, part of the narcissism and commodification of contemporary culture. Striking a very different note, Alister McGrath's confessional *The Re-enchantment of Nature* argues that the long-standing opposition between Christianity and both natural science and environmentalism is false. For McGrath, re-enchantment lies in the combination of the three.⁷⁹ On an equally different note, David Ray Griffin's *Reenchantment Without Supernaturalism* offers a re-enchantment through what he calls a 'process philosophy' based in part on 'completely rejecting supernaturalism'. He concludes: 'We can ... claim knowledge of such things as the reality of freedom, normative values, genuine evil, a Holy Power, and ultimate meaning. We can be said to know the falsity, therefore, of a wholly disenchanted worldview'.⁸⁰ Griffin's re-enchantment is, like Zakai's, bluntly contradictory, tied as it is to a thoroughgoing rationalising of the supernatural. Others stir theology into re-enchantment as part of the syncretic mix of invisible religion. Grey writes of a 're-enchantment of childhood' that involves a 'Liberation Theology for children'.⁸¹ Tacey's talk of Australian spirituality is mixed in with a loosely-defined Catholic Christian theology that emerges, seemingly out of nowhere, many pages into his book'.⁸²

Raymond M. Lee's and Susan Ackerman's *The Challenge of Religion After Modernity* (2002)⁸³ is perhaps the most in-depth exploration to date of the concept of re-enchantment in relation

⁷⁹ For McGrath, the real culprit is the mechanical worldview that robs nature of its beauty and its ontological uniqueness; he writes, 'The Christian – indeed anyone aware of the spiritual dimensions of nature – believes that God as creator and redeemer offers a compelling and attractive explanation of many things – such as the ordering of nature and the ability of the human mind to understand and represent this'. Alister McGrath, *The Re-Enchantment of Nature: Science, Religion and the Human Sense of Wonder* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2002), 182. For a similar usage, see Michael G. Leffel. 'Prevenient Grace and the Re-Enchantment of Nature: Toward a Wesleyan Theology of Psychotherapy and Spiritual Formation'. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 23, 2 (2004): 130-139.

⁸⁰ David Ray Griffin, *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism: A Process Philosophy of Religion* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 391.

⁸¹ Grey, 'Childhood', 16.

⁸² He writes, 'My own sense is that a theology of the Holy Spirit is what contemporary culture longs for ... The new cultural form is actually very close to Christ's original message of redemption, hope, love and inclusiveness'. Tacey, *ReEnchantment*, 230.

⁸³ Raymond Lee and Susan Ackerman, *The Challenge of Religion After Modernity* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002). Lee has published extensively on re-enchantment: see also Raymond M. Lee, 'The Re-enchantment of the Self: Western Spirituality, Asian Materialism', *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 18, 3 (2003): 351-367; Raymond M. Lee, 'The Re-enchantment of Death: Near-Death, Death Awareness, and the New Age', *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 22 (2003): 117-132; Raymond M. Lee, 'Mortality and Re-enchantment: Conscious Dying as Individualised Spirituality', *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 22, 2 (2007): 221-234; and Raymond M. Lee, 'La fin de la religion? Réenchantement et déplacement du sacré', *Social Compass* 55, 1 (2008): 66-83. In his most recent article, Lee argues that, contrary to the conclusions of 'Weber's diatribe', 'Re-enchantment therefore attempts to restore death its transcendent value ... To be relexive about death is not merely being melancholic about passing from this world, but reframing the meaning of passing from this world in the light of re-enchanted knowledge for completing the quest for transcendence'. Raymond M. Lee, 'Modernity, Mortality, and Re-enchantment: The Death Taboo Revisited'. *Sociology* 42, 4 (August 2008): 745-759.

to contemporary religion and is, therefore, worth more extensive comment and critique. Adopting the language of semiotics, Lee and Ackerman argue that reenchantment is a contemporary phenomenon that grows out of the free play of signs in postmodern culture:

In this context of sweeping changes in economy and society, the interaction between the symbol and the sign becomes critical in understanding the reenchantment of religion. The symbol has played a dominant role in various representations of the sacred, and it is almost unthinkable for many of us to talk about religion without the mediation of symbols. But, in the New Age, the sign replaces representation with revelry, a type of celebration of the sense that promotes bricolage, depthlessness and homogenisation.⁸⁴

There are distinct similarities between their argument and Firat's and Venkatesh's 'liberatory postmodernism', though Lee and Ackerman conceptualise reenchantment as something far more sweeping and significant than the 'micro-emancipatory' reenchantment that Firat and Venkatesh establish for the free play of the market.⁸⁵ For Lee and Ackerman this endless play, liberated from the symbolic systems of traditional religious and Enlightenment thought, allows for the formation of an unformed transcendental consciousness and an evanescent charisma. Their understanding of charisma, however, bears little resemblance to Weber's:

charisma is conceptualised as an immanent power without explicit association to individual consciousness, behaviour and action. In this respect, charisma represents a unique source of empowerment not embodied in human agents, but transmitted through ritual action, interpretation and belief. The immanence of charisma simply means that it is not a property of individuals, although specific individuals can claim to manifest it ... The immanence of charisma suggests that the route to reenchantment cannot be completely displaced by the forces of modernity because rationalisation is merely a veneer of institutional control that cannot effectively subdue a power without a centre.⁸⁶

To take one example of how this plays out, they see the Internet as a value-neutral vehicle for the manifestation of free-floating charisma:

⁸⁴ Lee and Ackerman, *Challenge*, vii.

⁸⁵ In fact, there is a close connection between Lee and Ackerman's celebration of the free play of signs and the marketplace as Firat and Venkatesh describe it. Lee and Ackerman write: 'In short, the sign rearranges the relationship of symbols into new forms of spiritual association that are not under the influence of religious institutions but the market forces of supply and demand ... The individual seeker is exposed to a wide range of choices in a market situation where signs compete for the attention of religious consumers. He or she becomes enmeshed in a vast network of images and messages that are consumed as commodities of salvation'. Lee and Ackerman, *Challenge*, 15.

⁸⁶ Lee and Ackerman, *Challenge*, 23-27. They dismiss the importance of personal charisma in contemporary culture which exists from the fringes, in figures like Jim Jones or Marshall Applewhite, to mainstream culture, in politicians, athletes, musicians, actors and other celebrity figures. Lee and Ackerman label this 'manufactured charisma', which 'lives on in modern technology, and appears dazzling and innovative for the purpose of renewing people's faith in existing institutions. Generally, it has no revolutionary qualities'. Lee and Ackerman, *Challenge*, 22.

New Age seekers are free to come and go from tantric websites without experiencing any sense of pressure or commitment to become fully-fledged tantric practitioners. The charisma of New Age tantrism, therefore, cannot be routinised in the Weberian sense of the word. Since tantric teachings and methods are now widely available on the Internet, the charisma associated with tantrism cannot be reined in by the structures of authority.⁸⁷

This reading of re-enchantment commits several critical errors. Firstly, neither the market nor the spaces generated by communication technologies are neutral arenas which allow for the free play of signs; both carry with them subtle yet powerful ideological biases that privilege certain kinds of knowledge and practice over others. Secondly, both the market and technology are implicated in both movements within the dialectic of enchantment and neither is either fully rationalised nor fully re-enchanted, as we saw in our discussion of commodity culture. Thirdly, Lee and Ackerman roundly ignore the mediating aspects of technology, writing, 'Re-enchantment under the sign revives the significance of magic ... as a domain of direct experiential power.'⁸⁸ There is something unmistakably apologetic, even triumphalist, about their argument, which is intended both as a loose description of the cultural forms of re-enchantment and as an argument for re-enchantment as a positive development in the history of religions. With their insistent language of liberation and their characterisation of the present day as standing at the 'doorway between the Age of Reason and the New Age',⁸⁹ Lee's and Ackerman's use of re-enchantment is shot through with a millennial optimism that owes a substantial debt both to the doctrinal forms of religion they argue have been displaced and to the utopian ideals of the Enlightenment thinking they argue has ended. Lee and Ackerman, for all their celebrations of the end of modernity, nonetheless restate something that looks remarkably like a classical subtraction story, to which they add a re-enchantment that sloughs off positivist and disenchanting elements of Enlightenment thought. Theirs is, in the end, a thin re-enchantment predicated on defined limits for disenchantment and steeped in language of reversal, rediscovery, reintroduction, restoration, displacement, and transformation. Re-enchantment is, they conclude, 'the very opposite of disenchantment'.⁹⁰ Strangely, Lee elsewhere displays a more subtle and more dialectical understanding of re-enchantment:

Cela dit, la question est de savoir quelles sont les forces qui s'opposent au désenchantement ; ou de découvrir ce qui, dans le désenchantement, ouvre une possibilité de réenchantement dans un monde rationalisé. Une de ces forces de

⁸⁷ Lee and Ackerman, *Challenge*, 29.

⁸⁸ Lee and Ackerman, *Challenge*, 120-121.

⁸⁹ Lee and Ackerman, *Challenge*, vii.

⁹⁰ Lee and Ackerman, *Challenge*, 13.

désenchantement fur le romantisme ... Le réenchantement devient donc un élément concomitant au processus de désenchantement, étant donné que celui-ci affaiblit autant qu'il redynamise les significations religieuses. Dans le contexte de la fin de la modernité ou de la postmodernité, la réflexivité, la relativité et le syncrétisme se sont engouffrés dans la notion de désenchantement.⁹¹

Setting thick reenchantment as our standard for judgement, it is apparent that much of the writing on reenchantment and religion tends to misunderstand reenchantment, either by equating it with whatever tradition is being analysed or by arguing from the standpoint of secularisation. The conception of reenchantment in such instances, and here Tacey as well as Lee and Ackerman provide good examples, begins to take on the form of a new and equally inaccurate subtraction story. In contrast to such thin, contradictory understandings of reenchantment we can place the analyses of Bligrani and Euben, which reveal the complexities of the development of fundamentalist thought as a challenging aspect of religious modernity, one that has a complex and contradictory relationship to modern science and technology.

Remarkable Insights: Reenchantment and the Sciences

Alors quoi? Le choix impossible, tragique, proposé par des savants comme J. Monod ou I. Prigogine entre le mythe qui réenchante le monde mais nous en rend esclaves, ou la raison qui désenchante mais nous en rend maîtres? ... L'alternative ainsi posée réinscrit la question du telos non seulement dans l'opposition rationaliste désastreuse du mythe et de la raison, mais aussi dans le conflit entre raison d'une part, et la participation à l'ordre naturel de l'autre.

François Gaillard⁹²

Outside of the study of religion, perhaps the largest subset of the discourse of reenchantment, and one of the most controversial, is that which argues for the reenchantment of the sciences or the reenchantment of the world *through* science. Broadly stated, the reenchantment of science is concerned with making two related arguments. The first, and more important, of these arguments asserts that science, if practiced properly, need not be a factor in the disenchantment of the world. The second is the claim that science is not, and has never been, a bastion for value-free knowledge and is in fact infected with non-modern and even magical elements, an argument that has also been influential outside the discourse of reenchantment.⁹⁴ This subgenre of reenchantment is related also to

⁹¹ Lee, 'Déplacement', 70.

⁹² François Gaillard, 'Le Réenchantement du Monde', *Cahiers de l'Hermétisme: Colloque de Cerisy*, ed. Antoine Faivre et Frédéric Tristan (Paris: Albin Michel, 1987), 57.

⁹⁴ Louis Dupré, for one, argues for a more complex view of the history of modern science: 'Too often the cosmology of the early modern age continues to be viewed as a prehistory of the scientific revolution, as if there had been nothing between the Aristotelian picture and the mechanistic one. Such a view overlooks a prolonged attempt to understand the universe through chemistry rather than through the laws of mechanics. Until the end of the seventeenth century alchemy developed side by side with mechanical physics as an alternative science'. Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 52.

influential movements in the philosophy of science represented by E. A. Burtt's 1954 book, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science*,⁹⁵ Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*,⁹⁶ and later works like Paul Feyerabend's *Against Method*,⁹⁷ James Lovelock's work on the 'Gaia hypothesis',⁹⁸ Fritjof Capra's bestselling 1975 *The Tao of Physics*,⁹⁹ and to a lesser extent Eugene Marais' *Soul of the White Ant*.¹⁰⁰ Much of the writing on re-enchantment and the sciences, whatever scientific merit such thinking may or may not have, falls into the category of thick re-enchantment in that it interrogates fundamental assumptions about the character and epistemologies of modern science.

The seminal work of the subgenre is Morris Berman's 1981 book *The Reenchantment of the World*, the first widely available work to rely on the concept of re-enchantment. What Berman argues here is at least implicit in many of the works on re-enchantment, scientific or otherwise: modernity is best understood not as a pinnacle of human progress, but as a dangerous and potentially catastrophic anomaly. He writes,

the modern epoch contained, from its inception, an inherent instability that severely limited its ability to sustain itself for more than a few centuries. For more than 99 percent of human history, the world was enchanted and man saw himself as an integral part of it. The complete reversal of this perception in a mere four hundred years or so has destroyed the continuity of the human psyche. It has very nearly wrecked the planet as well ... *Some* type of holistic, or participating consciousness and a corresponding socio-political formation have to emerge if we are going to survive as a species.¹⁰¹

This participating consciousness 'involves merger, or identification, with one's surroundings, and bespeaks a psychic wholeness that has long since passed from the

⁹⁵ Edwin A. Burtt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science: A Historical and Critical Essay* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1954).

⁹⁶ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

⁹⁷ Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge* (London: Verso, 1975).

⁹⁸ See James E. Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) and James E. Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia: Why the Earth is Fighting Back – and How We Can Still Save Humanity* (London: Allen Lane, 2006).

⁹⁹ Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism*, 25th Anniversary ed. (Boston: Shambala, 2000). It should be noted that Capra has been a formative influence on the re-enchantment of science. He also foreshadows many of the problems that plague the genre, including a subtle Orientalism that lies hidden under the surface of the praise of mystical knowledge – seen in such language praising the new apprehension of knowledge: 'This time, however, it is not only based of intuition, but also on experiments of great precision and sophistication, and on a rigorous and consistent mathematical formalism' (Capra, *Tao*, 19) – and the reductive tendency to treat the 'Eastern worldview' as a coherent, if not monolithic, tradition that can be easily generalised, often involving misunderstandings of the traditions involved. See Capra, *Tao*, 98 for a representative error concerning Buddhist teaching about nirvana.

¹⁰⁰ Eugene N. Marais, *The Soul of the White Ant*, trans. by W. De Kok (London: Penguin, 1973).

¹⁰¹ Morris Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 23. Emphasis in original.

scene'.¹⁰² Following Carl Jung, Berman is also deeply concerned with the revaluation of the arts of alchemy, which he calls 'the last great coherent expression of participating consciousness in the West'.¹⁰³ Berman calls for a future metaphysics or a future holistic science which would 'take incompleteness and circuitry as axioms',¹⁰⁴ and is rooted in a participating consciousness that is not supernatural: 'There is no "transcendence" in the conceptual schema; there is no "God" present in the usual sense of the term. It is not *mana* that alters (or permeates) matter, but the human unconscious, or more comprehensively, Mind'.¹⁰⁵ In the end, Berman's relation to the evolutionary narratives of modernity is ambivalent in that he oscillates between, on the one hand, seeing modern science as disenchanting and arguing that 'Holism haunts modern man'¹⁰⁶ and, on the other hand, proffering that the epistemology of modern science 'contains participating consciousness even while denying it'.¹⁰⁷ His program, he is adamant, is not one of return – 'at no point did I suggest that we could solve our dilemmas by attempting to return to the premodern world'¹⁰⁸ – but rather one of integrating fact and value that constitutes a form of thick reenchantment.

In addition to his work in process theology, Griffin edited the anthology, *The Reenchantment of Science*, which seeks to distinguish 'between *modern science*, which disenchanters, and *science as such*, which may be open to reenchantment'.¹⁰⁹ He claims that the materialistic, dualistic foundations of modern science are predicated on the false supposition that nature is insentient, and argues instead for a mix of science and the religious he calls 'relational, ecological, planetary, postpatriarchal'.¹¹⁰ Like Capra before him, Griffin maintains that quantum physics is 'not only destroying the Cartesian-Newtonian worldview but ... also

¹⁰² Berman, *Reenchantment*, 16.

¹⁰³ Berman, *Reenchantment*, 16.

¹⁰⁴ Berman, *Reenchantment*, 254

¹⁰⁵ Berman, *Reenchantment*, 147.

¹⁰⁶ Berman, *Reenchantment*, 172.

¹⁰⁷ Berman, *Reenchantment*, 136.

¹⁰⁸ Berman, *Reenchantment*, 195.

¹⁰⁹ David Ray Griffin, 'Introduction: The Reenchantment of Science', in *The Reenchantment of Science: Postmodern Proposals*, ed. David Ray Griffin (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 8.

¹¹⁰ David Ray Griffin, 'Preface', in *The Reenchantment of Science: Postmodern Proposals*, ed. David Ray Griffin (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), xiii. Elsewhere in the volume, Frederick Ferré argues like Durkheim that scientific images of the world share a good deal with 'religious world models' and must be understood in that light. Frederick Ferré, 'Religious World Modelling and Postmodern Science', in *The Reenchantment of Science: Postmodern Proposals*, ed. David Ray Griffin (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 88, 96. There is also a forerunner McGrath's reenchantment of nature in John B. Cobb, Jr.'s claim that 'The ecological movement is religious, and Biblical thought (like most religious thought), from which Christianity arose, is ecological'. John B Cobb, 'Ecology, Science, and Religion: Toward a Postmodern Worldview', in *The Reenchantment of Science: Postmodern Proposals*, ed. David Ray Griffin (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 99.

suggesting a new worldview – or a return to an old one, usually a mystical worldview, perhaps Taoist or Buddhist'.¹¹¹ Similarly, Staune observes with a sense of wonder the developments in particle physics:

Mais voici qu'il se passe quelque chose d'extraordinaire. Voici que de l'infiniment petit à l'infiniment grand, des sciences de la vie aux sciences de la matière, surgissent de nouveaux concepts – bien que rappelant parfois des idées anciennes. Ainsi, ces petites billes de matière qui devaient être le fondement de la réalité, se sont dématérialisées.¹¹²

Ervin Laszlo's populist *Science and the Reenchantment of the Cosmos* is a recent and popular entry in the long series of books and articles to take up Berman's project. He summarises his argument, which seeks to include the human observer into the picture of a holistic science:

At the cutting edge of contemporary science a remarkable insight is surfacing: the universe, with all things in it, is a quasi-living, coherent whole. All things in it are connected. All that happens in one place also happens in other places; all that happened at one time happens at all other times. And the traces of all things that have ever happened endure; nothing is entirely evanescent, here today and vanished tomorrow. The universe is not a world of separate things and events, of external spectators and impersonal spectacle. It is an integral whole.¹¹³

Calling on recent research in astronomy, genetics, transpersonal psychology, quantum mechanics, non-linear mathematics and Jungian psychotherapy, Laszlo argues that there exists a 'strange space-and time-transcending connection'¹¹⁴ that underlies reality as we know it. For Laszlo, this is a matter of *rediscovery*, as is the case for Berman, Staune, and Capra: 'A cosmos that is connected, coherent, and whole recalls an ancient notion that was present in the tradition of every civilisation; it is an enchanted cosmos'.¹¹⁵ Laszlo specifically relates his discoveries to ancient Hindu cosmology, calling the space-and-time field he postulates the Akashic field, named after the Akasha, 'the most fundamental of the five

¹¹¹ Griffin, 'Introduction', 13.

¹¹² Staune, 'Survie', 3.

¹¹³ Ervin Laszlo, *Science and the Reenchantment of the Cosmos: The Rise of the Integral Vision of Reality* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2006), 1. The book has a counterpart in the surprise hit film *What the #\$*! Do We (K)now!?*, dir. William Arntz and Betsy Chase, 109 minutes, Samuel Goldwyn Films: 2004. In a similar fashion, Capra's work was popularised in the 1990 film *Mindwalk*, dir. Bernt Amadeus Capra, 112 minutes, Triton Pictures: 1990. This sort of integrative thinking is also popular in speculative fiction. See Dan Simmons, *The Hollow Man* (New York: Spectra, 1993) for just one, if far better than average, example.

¹¹⁴ Laszlo, *Reenchantment*, 12.

¹¹⁵ Laszlo, *Reenchantment*, 2.

elements of the cosmos',¹¹⁶ further underlining his revaluation of 'mystical and religious insight'¹¹⁷ in light of the discoveries of the sciences.

James Kirk's radically interdisciplinary *Organicism as Reenchantment*, which joins together the process theology of Alfred North Whitehead, the fiction of John Barth, and the thermodynamics of Ilya Prigogine, is similarly concerned with the valuation of complexity in modern science, though he does not relate his call for reenchantment to the now-familiar act of the recovery of forgotten outlooks. In contrast, Kirk understands disenchantment as the movement toward superficiality. The craving for certainty that characterises modern European intellectual life has led to 'an ontology of surface' that is for Kirk a nihilistic but nonetheless fundamental aspect of modern scientific thought: 'What has happened here, I suggest, is that the concept of clarity and distinctness has been substituted for the concept of truth without conscious acknowledgement'.¹¹⁸ This reenchantment comes, for Kirk as it does for Berman, through the embrace of 'a view of nature which includes internality'.¹¹⁹ This is only achievable by acknowledging the complexity of the worlds of both nature and culture. For Kirk, this is what unites the disparate work of Whitehead, Prigogine and Barth. The synthesis he offers here is challenging, not least his assertion that 'cultural activity is the far edge of nature',¹²⁰ and 'that culture is an extension of nature, not its contradiction ... Culture is a presentation of reality, not a secondary representation'.¹²¹ He sees both in the new physics and in literature the ability to uncover momentarily the world in its enchanted state, with all its complexity and ambiguity: 'If, however, we view the clear and distinct elements of our experience as markers which "stir the depths", pointing us toward that unmanageable but undeniable reality of which we are a part; then we see an exact correlation between nature's processes and art'.¹²² Kirk here uses reenchantment again as a way to draw connections between

¹¹⁶ Laszlo, *Reenchantment*, 25.

¹¹⁷ Laszlo, *Reenchantment*, 44. The second half of the book, titled 'The Re-Union of Science and Spirituality', is comprised of a number of essays by other writers, from Jane Goodall to Swami Kriyananda, championing Laszlo's central conceits.

¹¹⁸ James Kirk, *Organicism as Reenchantment: Whitehead, Prigogine, and Barth* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 9. Despite this, Kirk does not advocate abandoning totally the mechanical metaphor of the world, as do many in the reenchantment of science: 'In the end of the day it is perfectly legitimate to use the machine model as a heuristic device. But when we begin to think that we are approaching some final explanation of things, serious problems arise'. Kirk, *Organicism*, 127.

¹¹⁹ Kirk, *Organicism*, 14

¹²⁰ Kirk, *Organicism*, xiii

¹²¹ Kirk, *Organicism*, 65.

¹²² Kirk, *Organicism*, 118.

disparate ways of knowing in a far more convincing way than that of Capra and his connection of quantum physics and a generalised 'Eastern mysticism'.

It is worth noting briefly that the calls for re-enchantment are not limited to the hard sciences. Nasr M. Arif's *The Reenchantment of Political Science* argues for a new epistemological complexity in political science – one in which 'we do not presume to arrive at the truth'.¹²³ He writes, echoing both Weber and many thinkers of the postmodern turn, of a new comparative political science that is yet again concerned with revaluation of older systems of valuation. He concludes on a familiar note: 'It is a restoration of old, yet valid, discourses. Not everything old is bad'.¹²⁴ This final insight is echoed by many in the discourse of re-enchantment, and many in the re-enchantment of the sciences in particular. Berman and Laszlo likewise explicitly connect the work of the sciences with the recovery of forgotten knowledge, as do others who call for re-enchantment through the rediscovery and revaluation of narrative and mythic ways of knowing. Painting such 'pre-modern' epistemologies as ripe for recovery by modern science demonstrates an occasionally provocative, occasionally maddening mixing of modernity, enchantment and the religious. At the same time, some of this work – and here James Kirk is a good example – offers a corrective to simplistic subtraction stories by complicating the picture of modern science and suggesting points of connection between scientific, religious and artistic epistemologies. That the language of recovery and chains of tradition play such a crucial role in this scientific discourse is in itself an indicator of the depths to which the modern era is indebted to the traditions it wishes to surpass.

Indistinguishable from Magic: The Enchantments of Technology

It is literally impossible for the public to believe that so much effort and intelligence, so many dazzling results, produce only material effects. People simply cannot admit that a great dam produces nothing but electricity ... In short, man creates for himself a new religion of a rational and technical order to justify his work and to be justified in it.

Jacques Ellul¹²⁵

The connections of re-enchantment and technology are closely related to both the re-enchantment of science and that of commodity culture. The discourse of enchantment

¹²³ Nasr M. Arif, *The Reenchantment of Political Science: An Epistemological Approach to the Theories of Comparative Politics* (New York: University Press of America, Inc., 2001), xiii. This should not be confused with another anthology also titled *The Re-Enchantment of Political Science*, which argues that a stance informed by Christian theology is proper for pursuing political science in the postmodern age, which has revived the possibility of 'situated theorising' and 'faith-informed scholarship'. The introduction to the volume states, 'Thus, while methodological critiques of positivism and the renewed role of political theory in the recovery of a science of man do not deliver to us a Christian social science, they do open the door again to the possibility of practicing a social science that includes such adjectives'. Thomas W. Heilke and Ashley Woodiwiss, eds. *The Re-Enchantment of Political Science: Christian Scholars Engage Their Discipline* (Boulder, CO: Lexington Books, 2001), 2.

¹²⁴ Arif, *Reenchantment*, 224.

¹²⁵ Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. by John Wilkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), 324.

and technology features millennial views of technology as a magical or salvific force as well as more suspicious readings of technological development as the purveyor of dark, bewitching magic. Thick reenchantment offers a way to approach the complex of interactions between technology and the religious and the enchanted. Exploring this dynamic critically is an essential task for unpacking the complexities and understanding the interrelationships of the religious and modernity, as Graham Murdock argues:

Exploring the shifting interplay between established and emerging communication systems and the contemporary forms of religious life they are constructing is a major task for future research. But ... it must be seen not as a specialised topic in media studies or the sociology of religion, but as part of a wider effort to understand the institutional and cultural transformations of modernity and the dynamics of re-enchantment. To understand the present and to make informed guesses about the near future, we need to return to the central themes of inquiry and speculation that lie at the core of the human sciences' long struggle to make sense of the contemporary world.¹²⁶

However instrumental and rational it may seem, technology is often received and understood in the wider culture in ways that are anything but purely instrumental or value-neutral. It is essential to realise, building on the logic of thick reenchantment, that technology is by no means a purely disenchanted realm, nor can it be a neutral vehicle for a simplistic reenchantment of the world. The intersections of technology and culture are often sparkling with religious and even magical thinking. Technology is haunted by enchanted ways of thinking and being. The late science-fiction giant Arthur C. Clarke captured this point in his oft-quoted 'third law': 'Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic'.¹²⁷

The reenchantment of technology relies on an understanding of technology as a complex cultural artefact. As Erik Davis reminds us, it is crucial to acknowledge that technology is always more complex than its functions:

We cannot afford to think in the Manichean terms that often characterise the debate on new technologies. Technology is neither a devil nor an angel. But neither is it simply a 'tool', a neutral extension of some rock-solid human nature. Technology is a trickster, and it has been since the first culture hero taught the human tribe how to spin wool before he pulled it over our eyes. The trickster shows how intelligence

¹²⁶ Graham Murdock, 'The Re-Enchantment of the World: Religion and the Transformations of Modernity', in *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Stewart M. Hoover and Knut Lundby (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997), 100.

¹²⁷ Arthur C. Clarke, *Profiles of the Future: An Inquiry into the Limits of the Possible*, Millennium ed. (London: Victor Gollancz, 1999), 2.

fares in an unpredictable and chaotic world; he beckons us through the open doors of innovation and traps us in the prison of unintended consequences.¹²⁸

In examining the dialectic of enchantment, the first thing that must be kept in mind is that there is no inherent connection between technology and disenchantment. Even Weber was ambivalent about technological development and its relationship with rationalisation:

The fact that what is called the technological development of modern times has been so largely oriented economically to profit making is one of the fundamental facts of the history of technology. But however fundamental it has been, this economic orientation has by no means stood alone in shaping the development of technology. In addition, a part has been played by the imagination and cognition of impractical dreamers, a part by other-worldly interests and all sorts of fantasies, a part by pre-occupation with artistic problems, and by various other non-economic factors.¹²⁹

There is a persistent feeling that technology is a salvific force that is able to save humanity from the alienating effects of modernity or even from the problems that technological development itself has caused. This is particularly true of information and communication technologies, as James Carey notes:

as can be seen in contemporary popular commentary and even in technical discussions of new communications technology, the historic religious undercurrent has never been eliminated from our thought. From the telegraph to the computer the same sense of profound possibility for moral improvement is present whenever these machines are invoked.¹³⁰

Stef Aupers, Dick Houtman and Peter Pels likewise note that this soteriological vision of technology and technique is a long tradition of thought: ‘Salvation by technology – the liberation of humanity from toil and want in order to indulge in the development of its

¹²⁸ Erik Davis, *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic and Mysticism in the Age of Information* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2004), 12. It is Davis’ stated mission to expose some of the trickster’s illusions. To cite one example: ‘The utopian rhetoric of the Internet paves over a host of troubling issues: the hidden machinations of the new corporate media powers, the potentially atomising effects of the terminal screen on social and psychological life, and the bedevilling issue of access, as communication technologies hardwire the widening global gap between rich and poor’. Davis, *Tech*, 22.

¹²⁹ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation*, trans. by Talcott Parsons (New York: The Free Press, 1947), 163.

¹³⁰ James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 18. Jesús Martín-Barbero provides a good example of this view of communication technologies which combines the reading of reenchantment as synonymous with ‘resacralisation’ with a Durkheimian understanding of religion and with reenchantment: ‘The mass media are the places where many people – indeed, an increasing number of people – construct the meaning of their lives. The media offer the opportunity for people to come together to understand the central questions of life, from the meaning of art to the meaning of death, of sickness, of youth, of beauty, of happiness, and of pain. Thus, I am suggesting that we should look for the processes of re-enchantment in the continuing of experience of ritual in communitarian celebration and in the other ways that the media bring people together’. Jesús Martín-Barbero, ‘Mass Media as a Site of Resacralisation of Contemporary Cultures’, in *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Stewart M. Hoover and Knut Lundby (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997), 108

“higher nature” – has, of course, long been a feature of European thought’.¹³¹ These connections, distinctly modern as they may be, are not confined to European contexts. Jesús Martín-Barbero notes this of Catholic Latin America, echoing Weber’s thinking on popular religion:

the electronic church is supplying the magic that established religions have intellectualised, made cold and disenchanting. The electronic church has taken hold of the technologies of the image and of the sentiments to capture the messianic, apocalyptic exaltation of the feelings ... For intellectuals, there remains little magic in the world. But for the great majority of people, the media are mysterious, magic, exciting, and enchanting.¹³²

The mass media, Jeremy Stolow concludes, has powers that are ‘transcendental, enchanting, thaumaturgical, uncanny, haunting’.¹³³ Just as it engages in utopian optimism about technology, the discourse on the re-enchantment of technology engages critically with the negative aspects of such enchantments. For example, Grey argues that people trapped in the web of technological consumer culture are ‘bewitched, robbed of heart, health and wholeness’.¹³⁴ Davis writes of information technologies as a dark magic in language that is distinctly reminiscent of Weber’s more pessimistic passages:

its universal application saps the marrow from the rich lifeworld of meanings that humans actually inhabit – a world whose nuanced ambiguities are better captured by, say Shakespeare’s soliloquies and Yoruban myth than by statistical algorithms ... But today many people confuse information and meaning, which leads to a rather disturbing paradox: Our society has come to place an enormous value on information even though information can tell us nothing about meaning.¹³⁵

In the discourse of re-enchantment which reflects a more positive outlook on technology, Partridge underlines the role of technology, including in his study of re-enchantment a comprehensive chapter on ‘cyberspirituality’ that touches on everything from technopagans to online religious communities like The Church of MOO.¹³⁶ For Partridge cyberspace constitutes nothing less than ‘a sacralisation of technology, a renaissance of the sacred, a re-enchantment of the West’.¹³⁷ Aupers extends this insight and draws out connections between science, religion and commodity culture:

religion has had to make way in many sectors of Northern European and North American societies for a modern gnosis that is not just privatised, but made

¹³¹ Stef Aupers, Dick Houtman, and Peter Pels, ‘Cybergnosis: Technology, Religion, and the Secular’, in *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, ed. Hent de Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 694.

¹³² Martín-Barbero, ‘Media’, 110-111.

¹³³ Jeremy Stolow, ‘Religion and/as Media’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 22, 4 (2005): 124.

¹³⁴ Grey, ‘Childhood’, 12.

¹³⁵ Davis, *Tech*, 101-102.

¹³⁶ See Partridge, *West II*, 138-164 for more detail.

¹³⁷ Partridge, *West II*, 154.

massively present in the consumerist public sphere. This contemporary form of enchantment receives a tremendous boost from science and technology, now especially in the guise of the engineering of the immanent, 'this-worldly other world' of cyberspace ... the phenomenon of cybergnosis shows that both the secular and technology have to be dislocated from this binary opposition and relocated in a third term in order to understand how and why modern people use and need *both* the sacred and the secular in order to portray themselves as modern people.¹³⁸

They conclude that such gnosis, entwined as it is with technology, 'disturbs classical theories of secularisation, which were largely predicated on the replacement of religion by science in the most important social realms'.¹³⁹

Christopher Coker draws rather different conclusions about the role of technology in reenchantment by considering the future of warfare. War, which Coker sees as an innate human activity, has been disenchanting by the mechanisation and impersonal slaughter of modern warfare and by a narrow, instrumental understanding of war. Looking into the future, Coker sees something rather different:

war has been *reenchanted*. And the principle reason has much to do with the fact that we live in a post-industrial age. Of the three revolutions that have dominated our imagination, the atomic may well have led war into an end game. The information and biotechnological [revolutions], however, would seem to have invested it with a renewed lease of life, if not a determination to play the game a little by other rules.¹⁴⁰

What Coker is concerned with are the metaphysical and symbolic aspects of war in which personal sacrifice on the battlefield, properly understood, is both an authentic and a valuable death, one 'performed in defence of values'.¹⁴¹ He continues, 'A true warrior must make sense of his suffering. His willingness to sacrifice his life makes sense of his life. If his death has meaning for others, then he can accept that death is his destiny – the natural completion of his life. At the moment of death, his life is transfigured. Sacrifice sacralises suffering'.¹⁴² This traditional economy of meaning, Coker argues, was interrupted by the sheer scale of modern warfare and by weapons that depersonalised killing: 'Until the early nineteenth century, war had been enchanted not by gods or spirits but by heroes and heroic action, by the existential realm in which the best (as well as the worst) of human behaviour

¹³⁸ Aupers, et. al., 'Cybergnosis', 702-703.

¹³⁹ Aupers, et. al., 'Cybergnosis', 693.

¹⁴⁰ Christopher Coker, *The Future of War: The Re-Enchantment of War in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Blackwell, 2004), xii. Emphasis in original.

¹⁴¹ Coker, *Future*, viii.

¹⁴² Coker, *Future*, 12.

was exhibited'.¹⁴³ Biotechnology, which could fundamentally refigure the warrior, is the locus of Coker's hopes for the future of war, which he sees as less destructive and more humane. Coker offers us a vision of the reenchantment of the human through the technological extension of the body. His constant attempts to understand the reenchantment through a chain of sacrifice in human history also marks his thought out as formally religious.

The rise in reenchanting understandings of technology in contemporary society is part of a long tradition of thinking about technology in a magical or teleological fashion that is deeply intertwined with subtraction stories of modernity. This kind of thinking, while always present within culture, becomes more visible in times of transition and accelerated technological development. Two examples from outside the discourse of reenchantment will suffice to illustrate this conjunction of enchantment and social change. The rise of Spiritualism in the mid-nineteenth century provides our first instance. The massive and highly varied religious revivals of the antebellum United States (which resulted not only in the spread of Spiritualism but also the founding of Christian Science and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints) were at least in some respects a reaction to rapid technological development, as John Lardas Modern notes: 'At mid-century, the stories Americans told themselves in order to be themselves increasingly addressed invisible forces and atmospheric effects. Occult narratives of American citizenship, the American nation-state, and the spectral world they inhabited ... were rather accurate portrayals of life on the cusp of technological modernity'.¹⁴⁴ Spiritualism, advertised at the time as the 'Spiritual Telegraph' after the then-new technology of telegraphy, melded together cutting-edge science, popular technology, and the religious. Stolow writes of Spiritualism as a religious movement in which technology was in no way incidental:

By embracing technologies and performative principles that existed both within and beyond the séance chamber, Spiritualism gathered under its penumbra what could only superficially be understood as disconnected activities of religious faith, scientific experimentation, medical intervention, entertainment, or rationalised labour. And the telegraph, for its part, possessed an elective affinity with Spiritualism because, perhaps more than any other technology, it signalled the coming of new global order of instantaneous virtual presence and a new way of dreaming about the liberation of the soul from the mortal body.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Coker, *Future*, 5.

¹⁴⁴ John Lardas Modern, 'Ghosts of Sing Sing, or the Metaphysics of Secularism', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 75, 3 (September 2007): 619.

¹⁴⁵ Jeremy Stolow, 'Salvation by Electricity', in *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, ed Hent de Vries (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 686.

Similarly, John Wallis concludes, ‘the Spiritualists sought to (re-)enchant sites within modernity that from a Weberian perspective would be seen as carriers of disenchantment, specifically science and technology’.¹⁴⁶

The Futurists, a movement in the arts in early twentieth-century Europe which included painting, music, fashion, cinema, theatre, and sculpture, further illustrate these tendencies. The movement, like Spiritualism, arose during a period of profound unease and unchecked technological development which would culminate in the outbreak of the First World War. Rebellious from the glorification of the past, the movement gloried instead in madness, militarism, quantification, the language of confrontation, and the wholehearted embrace of the beauty of new technologies. F. T. Marinetti, one of the movement’s founders, writes in the 1909 ‘The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism’:

Let’s break out of the horrible shell of wisdom and throw ourselves like pride-ripened fruit into the wide, contorted mouth of the wind. Let’s give ourselves utterly to the Unknown, not in desperation but only to replenish the deep wells of the Absurd ... We affirm that the world’s magnificence has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing car whose hood is adorned with great pipes, like serpents of explosive breath – a roaring car that seems to ride on grapeshot is more beautiful than the *Victory of Samothrace*.¹⁴⁷

Despite their intentions, Futurist language was often deeply indebted to religious sources, with frequent references to the transcendent and the spiritual – ‘Our forebears drew their artistic inspiration from a religious atmosphere which fed their souls; in the same way we must breathe in the tangible miracles of contemporary life’¹⁴⁸ – or the blatantly Romantic – ‘In order to conceive of the beauty of a Futurist picture, the soul must be purified; the eye must be freed from its veil of atavism and culture, so that it may at last look upon Nature and not upon the museum as the one and only standard’.¹⁴⁹

The discourse that envisions technology as an enchanting force for the good of all must be seen as the latest iteration of long-standing tendencies in the patterns of thought surrounding technological development. The same is true of the negative assessments of

¹⁴⁶ John Walliss, ‘Spiritualism and the (Re-)Enchantment of Modernity’, in *Theorising Religion: Classical and Contemporary Debates*, James A. Beckford and John Walliss, eds. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 40.

¹⁴⁷ *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. Umbro Apollonio, trans. by Robert Brain, R. W. Flint, J. C. Higgitt, and Caroline Tisdal (Boston: MFA Publications, 1970), 21.

¹⁴⁸ *Futurist*, 25.

¹⁴⁹ *Futurist*, 29.

the enchantments of technology. Taking a cue from the Futurists, we turn now to reenchantment by and of the arts.

More Things in Heaven and Earth: Reenchantment and the Arts

For the disenchanted world the fact of art is an outrage, an afterimage of enchantment, which it does not tolerate ... it is only through its blackness that this art can outmanoeuvre the demystified world and cancel the spell that this world casts by the overwhelming force of its spectacle and of commodity fetishism

Theodor Adorno¹⁵⁰

The revaluation of art is one of the strongest points of connection between Romanticism and the current iteration of reenchantment. Even Weber noted the connection of religion and the arts: ‘Religion and art are intimately related in the beginning. That religion has been an inexhaustible spring of artistic expressions is evident from the existence of idols and icons of every variety, and from the existence of music as a device for arousing ecstasy or for accompanying exorcism and apotropaic cultic actions.’¹⁵¹ Much of this discourse falls into the category of thin reenchantment and tends towards the revaluation of nonmodern art forms or the arts of premodern cultures in a way that subtly manifests a nostalgic Orientalism. The best-known example of this corner of the discourse is likely Suzi Gablik’s oft-cited *The Reenchantment of Art*. She sees art as a corrective to disenchantment and she aims to ‘restore to our culture its sense of aliveness, possibility and magic’, using ‘the methodology of the marvellous’.¹⁵² That this kind of thinking about art is popular also within the New Age movement is an interesting topic for the academic study of religion.

More importantly, given the latter part of this thesis, there exists a considerable body of material on reenchantment of and through literature, which is worth exploring in some depth. Again demonstrating the ability of thick reenchantment to draw out connections across the field of culture, David Payne teases out a complex dialectic of enchantment in Victorian England. He argues,

Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray and George Eliot reenchant the Victorian world when they delivered their gospel of disenchantment in the symbolic vessels of Christianity, still the primary source for their society’s ordeals of development, and in the literary form of the serial, a potent sign of the commodification of culture.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Quoted in During, *Enchantments*, 65. During’s translation comments have been removed.

¹⁵¹ Weber, *Sociology*, 242.

¹⁵² Suzi Gablik, *The Reenchantment of Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 1. For more on reenchantment and the visual arts, see Graham Gordon, *The Re-enchantment of the World: Art Versus Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) and the forthcoming, James Elkins and David Morgan, *Re-Enchantment* (Oxford: Routledge, 2008).

¹⁵³ David Payne, *The Reenchantment of Nineteenth-Century Fiction: Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, and Serialisation* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), ix. For Payne, these three writers were ‘emblems of Victorian

Payne again locates this moment of re-enchantment in a turbulent time, one 'haunted by competition, contraction, and loss'.¹⁵⁴ The work of these three prominent authors is deeply permeated with the tensions inherent in re-enchantment as each 'oscillates between two contradictory dispositions: that Victorian social life, however disenchanted it may seem, must contain some hidden, sacred, and lively essence; and that only the suffering palpable in that life could atone for a fall into modernity'.¹⁵⁵ Payne thus locates their work as productions of religious modernity. These novels are

products of struggle within a field of cultural production; and, most important, as expressions of the religion of benevolence appropriate to a society of commodity producers ... All three novelists, then, succeeded in sacralising Victorian modernity by incarnating their age as a moment of transcendent fulfilment, or, when that failed, by re-enacting bloody rituals of sacrifice from a fading cultural past.¹⁵⁶

Capturing the dialectic of enchantment in popular culture by way of instantiation, Michael Saler writes of the complex of enchantments that surrounded Arthur Conan Doyle's fictional detective Sherlock Holmes, 'the first character in modern literature to be widely treated as if he were real and his creator fictitious'.¹⁵⁷ Holmes was a contradictory figure who

represented and celebrated the central tenets of modernity adumbrated at this time – not just rationalism and secularism, but also urbanism and consumerism. The stories made these tenets magical without introducing magic: Holmes demonstrated how the modern world could be re-enchanted through means entirely consistent with modernity ... He expanded the definition of rationality beyond a narrow, means-end instrumentalism to include the imagination – he calls his procedure 'the scientific use of the imagination' – resulting in a more capacious concept that can be termed 'animistic reason' because it imbues its objects with meaning ... It re-enchanted the world by imbuing everything with hidden import.¹⁵⁸

Doyle himself ran afoul of the cultural suspicion of overt belief in enchantments when he was mocked and derided after adopting Spiritualism and publishing in 1920 an article in a popular magazine professing his belief in fairies, accompanied by a famed series of

modernity' who delivered 'their news of alienation and disenchantment in and for a historical consciousness, but simultaneously invoking myths of benevolence and sacrifice from a lost Christian culture'. Payne, *Dickens*, 147.

¹⁵⁴ Payne, *Dickens*, 2.

¹⁵⁵ Payne, *Dickens*, 5.

¹⁵⁶ Payne, *Dickens*, ix-xi.

¹⁵⁷ Michael Saler, "Clap if you Believe in Sherlock Holmes": Mass Culture and the Re-enchantment of Modernity, c. 1890-c. 1940', *The Historical Journal* 46, 3 (2003): 600. Saler discusses two types of people who believed in Holmes, the 'naïve believers' who genuinely believed that Holmes was a flesh and blood man with his violin and his cocaine somewhere on Baker Street and the 'ironic believers' 'who were not so much willingly suspending their disbelief in a fictional character as willingly believing in him with the double-minded awareness that they were engaged in pretence'. Saler, 'Clap', 606.

¹⁵⁸ Saler, 'Clap', 603-614.

photographs which later proved to be a hoax. Saler concludes: 'But Doyle's belief in fairies and supernatural spirits, a premodern form of enchantment, no longer had a future. Instead, many of his readers believed in Sherlock Holmes as a way to re-enchant the modern world without rejecting the secular and sceptical tenets of modernity'.¹⁵⁹

In another instance of thick reenchantment related to literature, Jennifer Wicke writes of reenchantment in the work of James Joyce, particularly *Ulysses*, which was, she points out, roughly contemporary with Weber's later work. She locates the reenchantment in Joyce in the presence of 'celebrity and celebrity discourse' in the 'Circe' chapter of his landmark novel, through which 'the text participates in strategies of re-enchantment undreamt of in Weber's philosophy'.¹⁶⁰ She writes, 'Celebrity is a major part of the re-enchantment process that the disenchantments of modernity paradoxically summon ... The flotsam and jetsam of celebrity trivia, the tidbits and titbits, circulate deliriously, contingently, inexorably, but magically'.¹⁶¹ The charisma embodied in celebrity culture, in fact, makes not infrequent appearances within the discourse of reenchantment, as we saw briefly above in the creation of imaginary narratives of second-hand consumer items that connect them to celebrity figures. Lee notes this in one of his frequent writings on reenchantment: 'Charisma as the antithesis of disenchantment keeps resurfacing in culture, politics, religion, and even in the domain of mass entertainment to undermine the trust embedded in a hierarchical world of arid routines and somnambulistic technologies'.¹⁶² In a very different vein, Wesley Kort strikes an apologetic tone in his discussion of C. S. Lewis in terms of reenchantment. Kort locates Lewis' reenchantment again not in the rejection of modernity but in a dialogue between culture and Christianity. Kort writes, 'He affirms rationality, proposes its exercise within a healthier cultural context, and points to the necessary relation between the cultural reenchantment of the world and the presence of religious faith'.¹⁶³ In another specific instance of an author and reenchantment, Ralph Schroeder writes of novelist Thomas Pynchon's reenchantment:

¹⁵⁹ Saler, 'Clap', 609. It is worth noting that Doyle is not the only writer to be given such treatment. Wouter Hanegraaff notes this of H. P. Lovecraft: 'Already during Lovecraft's own lifetime, some of his readers were convinced that his stories were more than fiction, and in fact contained valid occult knowledge ... Clearly Lovecraft found this ridiculous, and he would have been amazed (and probably worried) to see how many occultists would come to hold similar views especially from the 1960s on'. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, 'Fiction in the Desert of the Real: Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos', *Aries* 7 (2007): 95.

¹⁶⁰ Jennifer Wicke, 'Enchantment, Disenchantment, Re-enchantment: Joyce and the Cult of the Absolutely Fabulous', *Novel* 29, 1 (Fall 1995): 129.

¹⁶¹ Wicke, 'Enchantment', 5.

¹⁶² Lee, 'Self', 351.

¹⁶³ Wesley A. Kort, *C. S. Lewis Then and Now* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2001), 39.

His main response to rationalisation and disenchantment is to re-enchant places and things ... but this re-enchantment goes much further: Pynchon does more than simply give a prominent role to characters or objects with charismatic or 'supernatural' powers. He also endows landscapes, places, peoples, historical figures and events – in short, whole worlds – with non-everyday meaning and magic ... One could go as far as to say that Pynchon wants to counter disenchantment by re-connecting ways of knowing with the places and cultural environments he describes.¹⁶⁴

In one of the most intriguing works on reenchantment, at least from a conceptual standpoint, Martin Harries, in his analysis of the influential language of William Shakespeare, gives us a pointed study of very specific instances of reenchantment, tied to the earliest moments of modernity. Harries offers a succinct definition of reenchantment as the 'perseverance or return of the supernatural where modernity flatters itself culture has become disenchanted',¹⁶⁵ which allows him to make connections across centuries and between economics, history, and literature: 'Both Marx and [twentieth century economist John Maynard] Keynes allude to the supernatural in Shakespeare where they encounter blind spots in their analyses of critical moments in European history'.¹⁶⁶ What these 'scare quotes' – defined by Harries as allusions or quotations that 'defamiliarise the supposedly solid structures of second nature', a second nature of which the Bard is a key component¹⁶⁷ – show is that the supernatural haunts modernity even at its very inception with *Hamlet*. The supernatural persists, Harries argues, as an oppositional element that 'is not an ornamental or accidental discourse, but a necessary one'.¹⁶⁸ Marx's allusion to *Hamlet* (the reference to the spectre of the murdered king in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*) reveals to Harries that there remained in Marx's thought, which imagined itself to be fully rational, the ghosts of irrational and even supernatural elements. Harries again brings out intriguing

¹⁶⁴ Ralph Schroeder, 'Weber, Pynchon and the American Prospect', *Max Weber Studies* 1, 2 (2001): 168.

¹⁶⁵ Martin Harries, *Scare Quotes from Shakespeare: Marx, Keynes, and the Language of Reenchantment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 1.

¹⁶⁶ Harries, *Scare*, 6.

¹⁶⁷ Harries, *Scare*, 4. He outlines the influence of Shakespeare on second nature: 'supernatural moments in Shakespeare provide a privileged language for the perception of reenchantment ... I argue that a particular aspect of modernity, reenchantment, discovers its image in appropriations of supernatural aspects in Shakespeare's plays'. Harries, *Scare*, 9.

¹⁶⁸ Harries, *Scare*, 7. It has been argued more than once that Hamlet represents the first truly modern man (in fiction or otherwise). This argument is made with perhaps no greater eloquence than by Harold Bloom in his *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. Bloom never frames his argument in terms of modernity, but his claim, 'that Shakespeare, by inventing what has become the most accepted mode for representing character and personality and language, thereby invented the human as we know it' amounts to much the same thing. Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999), 714. Hamlet stands tall in Bloom's massive, hagiographic volume as the epitome of Shakespeare's humanity (approached only by Falstaff); indeed, he writes, 'His total effect upon the world's culture is incalculable. After Jesus, Hamlet is the most cited figure in Western consciousness, no one prays to him, but no one evades him for long either'. Bloom, *Shakespeare*, xix. Similarly, Dupré writes of Shakespeare in terms of modernity: 'In Shakespeare's great tragedies ... the modern conception of freedom redefines the very essence of the drama. Its protagonists no longer struggle with fate or supernatural power but with the awesome responsibility of having to shape their own lives without being able to predict the consequences'. Dupré, *Passage*, 125.

historical continuities: 'The association of ghosts and allusion is not accidental; the allusion, like the ghost, is a revenant partly unloosed from its historical moorings ... Allusion and ghosts are aspects of a concern central to his work; the problem of the tenacity of an oppressive political and historical inheritance'.¹⁶⁹ On Harries' astute reading, Marx is haunted by spectres just as the young prince is haunted by the vengeful, feudal spirit of his father, who is, as Harries writes, 'a relic of the pre-modern'.¹⁷⁰ Harries concludes, underlining the inextricable ties of modernity and enchantment, 'it is precisely *Hamlet's* figuring a modernity inextricably linked to ghostly injunctions that makes the play so telling an icon of modernity'.¹⁷¹ Harries again points to the fact that reenchantment is not incidental to modernity, but is rather foundational. For Harries and for some of the others cited above, literature becomes a privileged site for the revelation and exploration of the enchantments inherent in modernity. This thesis seeks to extend this exploration in its later chapters with a detailed examination of three important contemporary authors who reveal the unacknowledged inheritance and productions of modernity.

The Romance of Reenchantment (Two)

Romanticism, confronting a world it views as disenchanted into mere clockwork by the mechanisms of the Enlightenment, proposes its re-enchantment by a new priest: the poet. It dialectically reacts against yet also reiterates the Enlightenment critique of religion, relocating it outside all churches and assigning god-like attributes to the poet-priest.

Paul Coates¹⁷²

Having made a thorough survey of the terrain of reenchantment, the time has come to revisit the final section of our previous chapter, which argued for a connection between reenchantment and the central tenets of the Romantic movement. The parallels should by now be even more clearly drawn. I want to argue here that both the initial flowering of Romanticism and the current discourse on reenchantment represent moments in the dialectic of enchantment when reenchantment becomes more visible. Drawing out the specifics of this current moment of reenchantment is one of the primary goals of the foregoing survey, though our concerns have been entirely conceptual. Before we proceed, it should be noted that other writers have made similar connections between Romanticism and reenchantment. David Martin, for one, writes, 'The opposition to a mechanised, disenchanted world came from various sources, such as Blake and Swedenborg, but above

¹⁶⁹ Harries, *Scare*, 71. Harries also locates an early version of Marx's commodity fetishism in the prince's wonder at the inflated prices for images of this treacherous uncle as part and parcel of the 'more things in heaven and earth' subtext of the play. Harries, *Scare*, 109 -111.

¹⁷⁰ Harries, *Scare*, 117.

¹⁷¹ Harries, *Scare*, 118.

¹⁷² Paul Coates, *Cinema, Religion, and the Romantic Legacy* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 15.

all from the holistic re-enchantment of nature sought by Romanticism, which stressed reverence, awe and participation rather than ‘measurement and line’.¹⁷³

Though there are differences, Romanticism and reenchantment in its current moment share distinct points of similarity. Very broadly, both are focused on harmony, unity, and discovering and nurturing a divine order, though an order which is conceived in varied ways. Both moments are marked by the elevation of nature to the status of a religious or quasi-religious object and by a similar elevation of emotional experience, the arts and poetic language. Friedrich Schiller, for one, wrote frequently and longingly about the wonders of the natural world. In his letters on aesthetics, he writes, ‘So nature gives us even in her material realm a prelude to the infinite’.¹⁷⁴ Romanticism’s valuing of poetic language has not disappeared in the ensuing centuries. In relation to poetry, Charles Taylor writes, ‘The Romantics made the poet or artist into the paradigm human being. Modernists have only accentuated this. The bringer of epiphanies cannot be denied a central place in human life’.¹⁷⁵ Additionally, there is a strong tendency within both to devalue quantification and instrumentality as dehumanising and destructive. Both discourses seek to revalue mystery, secrecy and the indeterminate. There is also, in many Romantic writings, a marked interest in the wisdom of non-European cultures, Indian and Egyptian in particular, just as there is in the current discourse of reenchantment. Friedrich Schlegel himself writes, ‘It is in the Orient that we must seek the highest Romanticism’.¹⁷⁶ Lee notes the complexities of the historical intertwinings of these tendencies:

The romantic movement in the West ... drew upon Asian cultural, philosophical, and religious traditions for spiritual inspiration. The romantic self recreated Asia in the image of a colossus of wisdom, a timeless repository of higher knowledge from which melancholy could be transformed into euphoric understanding ... If not for romanticism, the West may have ignored Asian sources of re-enchantment as a vital means for transforming consciousness.¹⁷⁷

Of course, this was, and still is, an ideologically loaded practice closely tied up with dominant strains of Orientalism; as Azade Seyhan notes of the Jena Romantics,

¹⁷³ David Martin, *On Secularisation: Towards a New General Theory* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 129. Partridge likewise argues that contemporary reenchantment ‘can be traced back to eighteenth and nineteenth century Romanticism’. Christopher Partridge, ‘The Disenchantment and Re-enchantment of the West: The Religion-Cultural Context of Contemporary Western Christianity’, *The Evangelical Quarterly* 74, 3 (2002): 242.

¹⁷⁴ Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a series of Letters*, ed. and trans. by Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 133.

¹⁷⁵ Taylor, *Sources*, 481.

¹⁷⁶ Quoted in Thomas McFarland, *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Modalities of Fragmentation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 8.

¹⁷⁷ Lee, ‘Self’, 363-366.

'representations of antiquity and the Orient are thinly veiled allegories of contemporary Germany'.¹⁷⁸ Despite this, Seyhan argues of the Romantics, 'their representation of the Orient, unlike that of Hegel and the nineteenth-century Orientalists, was not motivated by a desire for cultural hegemony or for marking the progress of Western history'.¹⁷⁹ Again like contemporary reenchantment, the rhetoric of the Romantics was of *rediscovery* or *recovery* rather than *innovation*: 'German Romanticism's India constitutes the recovery and reinvention of an occulted system of representation that gives the Western imagination access to an alternative and unexplored path of signification'.¹⁸⁰

There are a number of writers, some of them within the discourse of reenchantment, who argue that the enchanted worlds and minds of the Romantic period are a fuller expression of the Enlightenment rather than its opposite. We have encountered similar views earlier with Bilgrami's arguments on the 'radical Enlightenment', which included figures like Mahatma Gandhi. The idea is also visible, in a slightly attenuated form, in Saler's analysis of Sherlock Holmes' engaged and highly creative rationalism. Alison Stone makes a similar point in relation to Schlegel's reenchantment, enacted as it is through the elevation of nature and poetry:

Schlegel reconceives this modern form of rationality more positively, as making possible a new kind of literature – an ironic, fragmentary, romantic poetry – which can reinvest natural phenomena with the very mystery of which analysis and reflection, in their more usual application, have deprived them ... by reconceiving nature itself as poetic and creative, so that human beings create freely only by participating in nature's own, more primordial, poetic process.¹⁸¹

Stone argues that Schlegel, like figures as diverse as Morris Berman, Charles Dickens, Sherlock Holmes and, as we will see later, Douglas Coupland, strives to uncover via the arts a secret world that exists alongside our own: 'In Schlegel's revised view, romantic literature depicts natural phenomena as partly mysterious by portraying them not as the embodiment of the gods but as indications of an unknowable, underlying reality'.¹⁸² Stone concludes from this that 'Schlegel's call to overcome modernity's disenchantment of nature is not a retreat from modernity but rests on the idea that the modern form of rationality

¹⁷⁸ Azade Seyhan, *Representation and Its Discontents: The Critical Legacy of German Romanticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 9.

¹⁷⁹ Seyhan, *Representation*, 80-81.

¹⁸⁰ Seyhan, *Representation*, 77-78.

¹⁸¹ Alison Stone, 'Friedrich Schlegel, Romanticism, and the Re-enchantment of Nature', *Inquiry* 48, 1 (February 2005): 5.

¹⁸² Stone, 'Schlagel', 10.

contains opposing tendencies'.¹⁸³ Schlegel was by no means the first representative of this oppositional strain of re-enchantment within modern thought. Arthur Melzer bestows this honour upon Jean-Jacques Rousseau:

The counter-Enlightenment begins with Rousseau. He not only launched the famous attack on the arts and sciences or on modern rationalism generally but also initiated that paradoxical effort, pursued variously by Romantics, Existentialists, and postmodernists: the philosophical project to re-enchant the world ... Does the Enlightenment, which seems secular and rationalistic at its core, have a still more fundamental core that is hospitable to religion and re-enchantment? Does the counter-Enlightenment, which seems so radical (especially in contemporary, postmodernist forms) represent less a rejection than a deepening, or alternate form, of the Enlightenment?¹⁸⁴

Melzer concludes that, with Rousseau's 'new religion of sincerity' and authenticity, 'the Rousseauian counter-Enlightenment is ultimately a deeper, more self-consistent expression of the Enlightenment'.¹⁸⁵ Again, if we are to take this seriously, it provides a further challenge to the subtraction stories and the self-understandings that emerge from them. The dialectic of enchantment is not in any way incidental to modernity: it is of central importance.

An Unsettling Instance of Reenchantment

If one tries intellectually to construe new religions without a new and genuine prophecy, then, in an inner sense, something similar will result, but with still worse effects. And academic prophecy, finally, will create only fanatical sects but never a genuine community.

Max Weber¹⁸⁶

By way of summary and review, an even more focused study can be made of re-enchantment as it played out in Germany in the twentieth century, a study that underlines both the significance of cultural re-enchantment and the dangers that haunt it, something that is conspicuous in the discourse only because of its absence. This 'moment' of re-enchantment represents a collision of commodity culture, technology, tradition, nature, and violence and it brings together many of the elements that have so far comprised our study of the discourse of re-enchantment. The ability, even perhaps the necessity, of modernity to produce that which is contrary to it is evident in the rise of the National Socialists. A number of writers from various fields have used re-enchantment as a way to analyse and describe the culture of Nazi Germany. Jenkins simply argues, hammering home the

¹⁸³ Taylor, *Sources*, 13.

¹⁸⁴ Melzer, 'Origin', 344.

¹⁸⁵ Melzer, 'Origin', 345. This religion relied on 'inner sentiment' rather than on revelation and solved the 'great problem of reason's limitations ... Sincerity replaces truth or orthodoxy as the basis of salvation'. Melzer, 'Origin', 353.

¹⁸⁶ Quoted in Kyriaki Goudeli, 'In Quest of a Possible Re-Enchantment of the World: Reflections on Schelling's Study on the Deities of Samothrace', *European Journal of Social Theory* 4, 3 (2001): 308.

connections drawn out in the previous section: ‘the Nazi state was in part an exercise in re-enchantment rooted in German Romanticism’.¹⁸⁷ Klemens von Klemperer writes of the victory of the National Socialists as re-enchantment, a time when ‘a more or less marked quest for new and substitute certainties’ had disastrous consequences: ‘But, whether or not the Nazi consensus was built upon intoxication, or terror, the *Volksgemeinschaft* it claimed to represent was a prison. The re-enchantment of a disenchanted world turned out to be a myth’.¹⁸⁸

Anne Harrington ties the re-enchantment of National Socialism to a vision of science that would not be unfamiliar to Berman or Laszlo, vastly different though their aims might be: ‘What the old science of the Machine had wrought, a new science of Wholeness would heal. It would “re-enchant” the world’.¹⁹⁰ This new holistic worldview, ‘really more of a family of approaches than a single coherent perspective’, involved the physical sciences, sociology, medicine, popular culture, cultural criticism, and politics mixed together with a marked nostalgia for an imagined and idealised German ‘paganism’.¹⁹¹ The revolution in thought had far-reaching consequences as the situation in post-World War I Germany deteriorated:

as intellectuals in the 1920s increasingly descended into greater depths of discontent, aspects of the scientific Wholeness/Mechanism oppositional imagery began to take on dimensions that both German-speaking central Europe and the rest of the world would learn to regret. Jews would be increasingly identified as both cause and as flesh-and-blood instantiation of the worst values of the machine – summative, nonsynthetic thought, soulless, mechanistic science, rootless, mercenary social relations.¹⁹²

Harrington notes that this focus on holism had a long cultural and even mythological – through the all-important Aryan narratives – background, one again tied to Romanticism: ‘Early in the nineteenth century, a heterogeneous group of German scientists and philosophers who identified with the Romantic impulse of that era found themselves haunted by the image of fragmentation and mechanism that they traced back especially to

¹⁸⁷ Jenkins, ‘Disenchantment’, 22.

¹⁸⁸ Klemens von Klemperer, *The German Uncertainties, 1914-1945: The Stones and the Cathedral* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), 148. The academy is not free of these dangers. Richard Jenkins writes, ‘Within the academy, tensions between Romanticism and Rationalism have been formative and remain definitive of the identity and perspective of disciplines such as archaeology, cultural studies, folklore, history, literary criticism and anthropology. Some of these have been – and indeed still are – heavily involved in nation-building projects. The connections between nationalism and Romanticism are many, obvious, and important’. Jenkins, ‘Disenchantment’, 19.

¹⁹⁰ Anne Harrington, *Reenchanted Science: Holism in German Culture from Wilhelm to Hitler* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996) xvi.

¹⁹¹ Harrington, *Reenchanted*, xviii.

¹⁹² Harrington, *Reenchanted*, xx.

Newton's establishment of the law of universal gravitation'.¹⁹³ The National Socialists traded on this nostalgic vision of unified, authentically German values of the past, including a revival of pre-scientific German healing and health practices. Tied closely to this holistic view of Germany was the *Führerprinzip*, which 'declared that, since Adolf Hitler embodied the will of the people, his authority over them was absolute and incontrovertible'.¹⁹⁴ There is in the charisma of Hitler something to be learned of the continuing power of personal charisma against a diffuse cultural charisma of the kind established by Lee and Ackerman. Harrington writes, 'The crucial Weberian category of charisma ... found its most frightening embodiment in the middle of this century. Charismatic rule with irrational, sometimes occult, underpinnings is in no way incompatible with highly efficient, formally rationalised administration'.¹⁹⁵

Paul Betts likewise draws connections with the Nazis and re-enchantment, though in a very different sense. Writing of commodity culture and industrial design in Germany, he attempts to answer the question of 'how and why the broad initiative to "re-enchant" the everyday commodity assumed such scope and gravity within Nazi culture'.¹⁹⁶ This re-enchantment resituated the dominant modernist aesthetic of the 1920s in a specifically Nazi framework and revalued modern objects by forging explicit connections with both a mythical German past and with National Socialist values. This by-now familiar mix of the modern and the imagined premodern was also a shift between different systems of valuation: 'the radical '20s tendency to demystify the cultural object by reducing it to its material use- and exchange-value was replaced by a pronounced emphasis upon the object's transcendent, even spiritual, qualities ... the Nazis worked to bathe these industrial things in the soft-glow metaphysics of *Gemütlichkeit*'.¹⁹⁷

Betts underlines the very important point made by Harrington above: 'It was hardly coincidental that the Nazi campaign to "reunite" Germans with their "re-encharmed" object world occurred at precisely the same moment when Jews and other newly designated "non-Germans" were being excluded from it altogether ... The spiritualisation of material things

¹⁹³ Harrington, *Reenchanting*, 4.

¹⁹⁴ Harrington, *Reenchanting*, 179.

¹⁹⁵ Harrington, *Reenchanting*, 12.

¹⁹⁶ Paul Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects: A Cultural History of West German Industrial Design* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 25.

¹⁹⁷ Betts, *Authority*, 41-43.

was thus the obverse of the fateful reification of outcasts'.¹⁹⁸ Again, rechantment is here rooted not in changing the objects themselves, but in changing their cultural and narrative connotations and thus their interior structure of value. Though it would likely make many of the writers in the discourse uneasy to consider Nazi Germany as an iteration of rechantment, there is, on closer examination, a good deal to recommend this interpretation. Like much in the current discourse of rechantment, Nazi culture traded on the language of nostalgia, recovery and holism and operated through a problematic mix of commodification and enchantment that lent new life to both material objects and the act of consumer choice. Weber, it should be remembered, warned against this sort of enchantment in 1918. The horrors of the Nazi eugenics and extermination projects, which were tightly controlled, efficient and heavily rationalised undertakings, began to take hold under a confluence of reenchanted and disenchanting thinking. Disenchantment bred rechantment, which then used rationalisation to realise its decidedly irrational goals. If the startling conjunction of Nazism and rechantment tells us anything, it is that we must take the idea and the cultural iterations of rechantment seriously.

Conclusions: Rechantment and Religious Modernity

One of the ways in which modern culture has celebrated (and criticised) itself is by describing and presenting itself through a rich vocabulary of inherited magic words. Fascination, prestige, enchantment, glamour, charm, enthrallment, entrancement, and magic itself are terms that trip off the tongue when we wish to describe the power and effects of books, tourist attractions, pictures, films, shows, celebrities, sporting events, indeed almost any cultural product.

Simon During¹⁹⁹

The word 'rechantment' can – and indeed has been – used to mean almost anything. The vast range of uses is largely composed of what I am calling thin rechantment, which imagines the welcome reversal of a definitive historical process of rationalisation while never questioning its accuracy as an account of the contemporary world. In this spirit, rechantment has been used so casually in relation to a broadly imagined disenchantment that it has even been confused at times with rationalisation. Thick rechantment, which imagines rechantment as a dialectical process in constant tension with rationalisation, allows for critiques of commonly held pictures of modernity. At the same time, it offers a more nuanced understanding of the process of rationalisation which allows us to draw connections across realms of culture as diverse as economics, religion, and scientific development.

¹⁹⁸ Betts, *Authority*, 54

¹⁹⁹ During, *Enchantments*, 39.

Though some of the connections are drawn out sharply above, it is time to make explicit the associates of re-enchantment and the broader context of religious modernity. Even if it were possible at other points in history, it is impossible to cleanly separate religion from enchantment in the contemporary religious marketplace. The various moments of re-enchantment, which often accompany periods of significant dislocation, unease or change, can also be understood as instantiations of the religious productions of modernity. This is, however, not to argue that re-enchantment and religion are one and the same or that both have an identical relationship to modernity. There are important differences, as Cristián Parker argues:

[the] current transformation of global culture is eroding the boundaries between religion and magic. These borders are becoming tenuous, porous and at times non-existent ... The distinction between magic and religion cannot be adequately framed with the Cartesian paradigm. If, however, the magic-religion continuum is analysed in a dynamic, dialectical form it is possible to see how the modern process of secularisation has had a more detrimental effect on religion than magic.²⁰⁰

To confine the discussion to the terms laid out in this thesis, re-enchantment and the religious are both ways of remembering, ways of investing in or creating a chain of belief. That the discourse of re-enchantment is concerned with creating the connections with these chains is evident in the use of the 're-' prefix itself, which calls forth historical connections. Two examples of this tendency will suffice. Firstly, Laszlo's connection of contemporary science with the ancient Hindu notion of the Akasha values revolutionary scientific theories not as discovery, but as *recovery*, claiming its primary justification from an imagined chain of tradition fading back into the mists of prehistory. Secondly, it is evident in both the cases of modern aesthetics in Nazi Germany and the creation of imagined histories of contemporary second-hand clothing that the re-enchantment of commodities is likewise concerned with chains of valuation and belief.

As we have seen, though her thinking is indebted to a greater degree to Durkheim, there are substantial agreements between Hervieu-Léger and Weber, enough to argue that it makes sense to discuss their sociological work together. Her conclusions about memory share a marked resonance with Weber's preoccupation with instrumentality versus value: 'one might venture to say that the gouging of religion from modern society has reached its culmination through the process of rationalisation certainly, but no less effectively through

²⁰⁰ Cristián Parker, "Magico-popular Religion" in *Contemporary Society: Towards a Post-Western Sociology of Religion*, in *Theorising Religion: Classical and Contemporary Debates*, ed. James A. Beckford and John Walliss (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 66-67.

the amnesia induced, in the more technologically advanced societies, by the obliteration of all recall that is not immediate or functional'.²⁰¹ There are, in the end, a great many aspects of thick reenchantment, as a theoretical frame, that are consistent with Hervieu-Léger's definition of religion as a mode of believing. If nothing else, thick reenchantment offers us a valuable interpretive tool for the unpacking of the conjunction of differing systems of value within religious modernity, a task which is a vital part of the larger project of securing a more nuanced understanding of both modernity and the religious. Particularly in regard to commodity culture and technology, thick reenchantment offers the academic study of religion a powerful conceptual and critical tool for comprehending some of the rich alternative narratives produced within and by modernity. One of its primary values, as we have seen repeatedly, is that it can help in tracing hidden or obscured connections between disparate areas of culture.

Having laid out a concept of reenchantment and examined the discourse, we turn next to the work of a thinker whose view of the world demonstrates a remarkable congruence with that offered by the idea of thick reenchantment – Jean Baudrillard.

²⁰¹ Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, trans. by Simon Lee (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 140.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH: THE
GIFT, OR JEAN BAUDRILLARD'S
SYMBOLIC EXCHANGE AND
REENCHANTMENT

Radical thought situates itself in the zone of impossible exchange, of non-equivalence, of the unintelligible, the undecidable.

Jean Baudrillard¹

Underpinning much of the discourse on reenchantment is a revaluation, even an elevation, of mystery, ambiguity and incompleteness. Having outlined a general understanding of religious modernity and having examined the concept and uses of reenchantment in some detail, we turn to the highly ambiguous work of the late cultural critic and philosopher Jean Baudrillard, which is concerned almost wholly with the irreducible elements of incompleteness and mystery in the modern world. Baudrillard never uses the word 'réenchantement' in his work; however, his work, properly understood, offers a remarkable *congruence* with the concept of thick reenchantment. In short, Baudrillard can help us to further *think* thick reenchantment. Baudrillard is particularly helpful to this project for his work on two closely related ideas, *symbolic exchange* and *the ruptural event*, both of which are largely hidden by the transformations of modernity but remain under the surface to haunt any narrative or picture of the world that claims to be complete. This chapter offers a new reading of Baudrillard's body of work as a way to aid in understanding and further exploring the theoretical possibilities of thick reenchantment.

This explication of Baudrillard is also intended as a corrective to the common misinterpretation of Baudrillard's theory as a wholly negative and deterministic assessment of modernity. While it is undeniable that his work represents a virulent condemnation of much of what contemporary culture represents, his picture of the world always leaves room for some degree of play, some small openings for disruptive thought and action. This open space, which remains even today, at the height of what he sees as a simulational culture, is, contrary to popular opinion, absolutely central to Baudrillard's theory of contemporary

¹ Jean Baudrillard, *Paroxysm: Interviews with Philippe Petit*, trans. by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1998),

3.

culture and his philosophy of history. This open space, this necessary incompleteness, makes its way into his work in a number of different guises, from the 'singular object' to 'the intelligence of evil'. It is also connected at various points with the arts and with poetic language, leading us towards the surprising realisation that Baudrillard was, among many other things, a deeply Romantic thinker. But symbolic exchange, as the foundation of the various incarnations of this open space, formed the very heart of work for more than thirty years.

The chapter begins with a brief introduction to Baudrillard's work, which, like Max Weber's, is perhaps known more from second-hand readings and inaccurate general impressions than from close and serious readings. The bulk of the chapter is concerned with a detailed unpacking of the movement of symbolic exchange and the ruptural event through Baudrillard's corpus and closes with a discussion of this work in the light of both thick reenchantment and religious modernity. The benefit of such a project is twofold: not only does it allow us to bring Baudrillard to bear as a useful theoretical tool for the study of religion, which has to date largely ignored his work; it also allows for a coherent reading of Baudrillard's thought, which is notoriously, if purposefully, resistant to interpretation.

Jean Baudrillard and his Work

Whereas Max Weber, whose basic orientation was remarkably similar in general to Baudrillard's, opted for responsibility, realism, on the basis of vast historical demonstration, Baudrillard opts for a position beyond responsibility, beyond nihilism, in the play between seduction and simulation, on the basis of vast, implicitly comparative, but above all contemporary demonstration across all domains. Theory becomes a mode of reenchantment.

Mike Gane²

Baudrillard was born, rather prophetically, in July of 1929, three months before the stock market crash that ushered in the Great Depression. In his *Cool Memories*, journal-like works that are alternatively confessional, aphoristic and purely random, he writes of his birth, 'One is never simply the child of a father and a mother. I was born ... under the sign of Leo and the Crisis. These mythical powers never leave you'.³ Baudrillard's vision is of a world that has come unanchored in space and time, a place that traditional thought is unable to grasp. The state of the world is such that closed, determinist or even linear thinking can make no sense of things. To understand Baudrillard, we must first understand his methods. Baudrillard's writing is often difficult, full of disjointed phrasing, incomplete sentences,

² Mike Gane, *Jean Baudrillard: In Radical Uncertainty* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 28.

³ Jean Baudrillard, *Cool Memories*, trans. by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1990), 144. To give a general impression of the tenor of these works, we must only note that Baudrillard describes this first volume as 'a subtle matrix of idleness'. Baudrillard, *Cool I*, 234.

diffuse, poetic language, and seemingly non-sensical assertions.⁴ His work is connotative rather than denotative, oblique rather than direct, a subtle, surprising metaphysics of the cultural and the technological. His diffuse methods reflect in their forms (and frustrations) the complexities, contradictions and paradoxes of the subject matter at hand, at times, particularly in his later years, straying dangerously close to a sort of hyper-articulate nonsense. There is an intentionally random element in many of his works, something he explains in his 2003 reflection on his key terms, *Passwords*:

We are in a random world, a world in which there is no longer a subject and object distributed harmoniously within the register of knowledge. As for random phenomena, they are not simply in things, in material bodies: we, too, are part of the molecular microcosm by our very thought – and that is what creates the radical uncertainty of the world ... All we can do now is meet random processes halfway, by means of a thinking that is itself random.⁵

For Baudrillard, the goal of thought and theory is not clarity or interpretation, but rather to maintain the mystery of the world. He summarises: ‘The world was given to us as something enigmatic and unintelligible, and the task of thought is to render it, if possible, even more enigmatic and unintelligible’.⁶ Reading Baudrillard can thus be something of a disorienting experience, as Mike Gane notes: ‘Because he is not where you believe he is, there is always a sort of vertigo in the encounter and thus always something of the unexpected in reading him’.⁷ For Zygmunt Bauman, Baudrillard remains ‘the only writer to reflect the experience of the postmodern condition, its rhythms, the uniformity of form and content, its rapidity and confusion’.⁸

Part of this reflection is to be found in Baudrillard’s determinedly interdisciplinary tendencies; ideas and technical terms from psychoanalysis, anthropology, literary theory,

⁴ I will be dealing with Baudrillard entirely in English translation, for the simple reason that I wish to present as thorough a reading of his body of work as possible within such a confined space. There are also lucid translations of much of Baudrillard’s work available at this point in a number of languages. In English, many of Baudrillard’s most important work have been translated by Chris Turner, which offers a good deal of consistency even while working in translation. When presented with a choice of translations of the same work, as was true for example with *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities or the End of the Social*, I opted for either Turner’s translations where applicable or for the most recent editions. For the most part, Baudrillard’s translators do a fine job in preserving his enigmatic style.

⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *Passwords*, trans. by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2003), 45.

⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *Impossible Exchange*, trans. by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2001), 151. In *Perfect Crime*, he offers a set of cryptic, if telling, instructions for radical thought: ‘Cipher, do not decipher. Work over the illusion. Create illusion to create an event. Make enigmatic what is clear, render unintelligible what is only too intelligible, make the event itself totally unreadable’. Jean Baudrillard, *The Perfect Crime*, trans. by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1995), 104.

⁷ Gane, *Baudrillard*, 3. Gane argues that it is this recognition and embrace of indeterminacy that has led to Baudrillard’s popularity: ‘Baudrillard’s thesis that the world is changing more radically than thought itself corresponds at least to wide experience and that is why his imaginative responses have a significant readership’. Gane, *Baudrillard*, viii.

⁸ Quoted in Gane, *Baudrillard*, 8.

quantum physics and any number of disciplines appear in odd, unexpected places in his work. In doing this, Baudrillard challenges any assertion of the necessary relationship of modernity to an ordered, rational, and sane society. Baudrillard brings together modernity and its pretensions that all is explainable with its unacknowledged double of unreason and incompleteness; he writes, haunted by the symbolic cultures of the past, his own roots in rural France, and the failures of contemporary culture, of a forgotten economy of exchange and sacrifice that haunts contemporary culture as its enchanted double. The language of haunting permeates Baudrillard's own writings through the decades. He employs the spectral presence of seduction, the symbolic, and the threat of death in his efforts to undermine the totalising comforts of consumer capitalism. The tone of his writings, even more so than Weber's, is decidedly grim, an almost fatalistic summation of contemporary culture, permeated with the chill language of death, loss, and violence. Nonetheless, there is room to move in other directions: at odd intervals, Baudrillard allows room for a distinct ray of light to enter his work. For example, in his career retrospective *Passwords*, he writes: 'Thought must play a catastrophic role, must be itself an element of catastrophe, of provocation in a world that wants absolutely to cleanse everything, to exterminate death and negativity. But it must at the same time remain humanist, concerned for the human and, to that end, recapture the reversibility of good and evil, of the human and the inhuman'.⁹ As Sylvie Lotringer writes on the occasion of Baudrillard's death, 'Contrary to what one thought, there was something deeply humanistic, even moralistic about his vision, *but to the extreme*'.¹⁰

In the course of his long career, Baudrillard amassed more than his share of critics. Many critics saw his essay 'The Gulf War did not take place' as, in Paul Patton's words, the 'definitive exposure of the intellectual and political bankruptcy of postmodern thought'.¹¹ In particular, Baudrillard has been attacked by scientific¹² and feminist scholarship. Gane notes that Baudrillard's assertion in *The Transparency of Evil* (hereafter *Transparency*, 1993)

⁹ Baudrillard, *Passwords*, 92.

¹⁰ Sylvère Lotringer, Chris Kraus and Hedi El Kholi. 'Introduction: Requiem for the Masses', in Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities or the End of the Social*, trans. by Paul Foss, John Johnston, Paul Patton and Andrew Berardini (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), 17.

¹¹ Paul Patton, 'Introduction', in Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War did not Take Place*, trans. by Paul Patton (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 15.

¹² Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont include a chapter on Baudrillard in their critique of postmodern thinking and the sciences, criticising his inaccurate, metaphoric use of technical terms such as 'hyperspace', 'refractivity', and other terms borrowed from contemporary science and mathematics. Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont, *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of Science* (New York: Picador, 1998). See Chapter 8, 'Jean Baudrillard', 147-153.

that 'It is better to be controlled ... oppressed, exploited, persecuted and manipulated by someone other than by oneself',¹³ saw Baudrillard labelled at best as a reactionary and at worst as a 'proto-fascist chauvinist'.¹⁴ Such criticisms are perhaps to be expected, as Baudrillard's work is often deliberately obscurantist and provocative. Ryan Bishop and John Phillips, argue that Baudrillard has been consistently misunderstood both within and outside of the academy:

As a stylist and rhetorician of formidable power, Baudrillard often attracts misreading resultant from tin-eared overly-literal engagements with his writings. Because of his eminently quotable style, his compelling rhetoric and his willingness to flirt with hyperbole, Baudrillard is often dipped into, read far too casually and quoted in outlandish decontextualization ... this sort of bleeding over into the public discursive sphere of pundits is not troubling; rather it is the consistent misreading of his work from within the humanities and social science that give one pause.¹⁵

Baudrillard lamented that he was rarely taken seriously, telling an interviewer, 'I'm not received as a philosopher's philosopher. I'm not institutionally legitimated, so to speak, by the philosophers, and not just by the academic, professional philosophers, but also by the rather more subtle philosophers, if I may put it that way – those people I consider to be the true philosophers'.¹⁶ Gane concludes simply that 'there is yet no analysis of Baudrillard's writings which is adequate or altogether convincing'.¹⁷ In an attempt to offer partial compensation for this lack, and to tease out Baudrillard's use for the academic study of religion, it is essential to undertake a thoroughgoing analysis of symbolic exchange and the event as they move through and inform his considerable body of work. As symbolic exchange is the more important of these two elements, it is with it that we will be spending more of our time and with which we must begin.

¹³ Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*, trans. by James Benedict (London: Verso, 1993), 167.

¹⁴ Gane, *Baudrillard*, 30. One must admit that there is at least a surface truth to this criticism, as Baudrillard's next comments are particularly inflammatory: 'In this sense the entire movement for liberation and emancipation, inasmuch as it is predicated on a demand for greater autonomy – or, in other words, on a more complete introjection of all forms of control and constraint under the banner of freedom – is a regression'. Baudrillard, *Transparency*, 167.

¹⁵ Ryan Bishop and John Phillips, 'Baudrillard and the Evil Genius', *Theory, Culture & Society* 24, 5 (2007): 139.

¹⁶ Roy Boyne and Scott Lash, 'Symbolic Exchange: Taking Theory Seriously. An Interview with Jean Baudrillard', *Theory, Culture & Society* 12 (1995): 79.

¹⁷ Gane, *Baudrillard*, 24.

Symbolic Exchange and Reenchantment (One)

A critique of general political economy (or a critical theory of value) and a theory of symbolic exchange are one and the same thing.

Jean Baudrillard¹⁸

For Baudrillard, as in thick reenchantment, the enchanted and the disenchanting exist always in a dialectical relationship, or, as George Ritzer writes, 'For Baudrillard, the enchanted world of symbolic exchange continually haunts, and poses a threat to, the modern disenchanting world of economic exchange'.¹⁹ The existence of this enchanted world is essential to Baudrillard's attack on simplistic, universalising narratives of modernity. Nicholas Gane summarises Baudrillard's subversion of the subtraction story:

He argues, against the accepted Enlightenment view, that Occidental history is a fall (rather than an ascent) from a 'primitive' (in fact highly complex) symbolic order to a modern order of value that is characterized by equivalence and sameness ... This fall is not, for Baudrillard, a strictly linear descent, but the temporary outcome of an agonistic relation between two orders (the enchanted symbolic order and the rational order of value) which exist on radically different principles (linearity versus cyclical exchange), and which can never fully efface the other.²⁰

It should be noted that I am not the first to connect Baudrillard to the idea of reenchantment. François Gaillard concludes a long passage with a definitive note:

Voici qu'aujourd'hui – et ce «aujourd'hui» vaut pour une période qu'il serait vain de circonscrire plus précisément, car si l'aube de ce jour naît avec le romantisme allemand, son midi éclate dans notre ciel –, voici donc qu'aujourd'hui la rationalité est sommée de devoir s'expliquer, c'est-à-dire rendre compte d'elle-même et de sa légitimité, à tel point que l'on peut avancer que le pathologie du monde moderne c'est le scepticisme à l'égard de la raison, le doute quant à ses fondements. Qui ceci ne soit que la traduction philosophique d'un malaise de – nous aurions envie d'ajouter : «dans» la culture occidentale, ce n'est que trop évident. Cette méfiance envers la raison, réactualisée par certaines déceptions historiques, peut, pour aller vite, entraîner la pensées philosophiques sur trois voies déjà frayées : *le cynisme, le ludisme, l'irrationalisme*. C'est cette dernière tentation intellectuelle qui devrait faire réfléchir tout théoricien du mythe. Certains de nos penseurs en viennent en effet à «imaginer» – car ce ne sont heureusement que solutions imaginaires – que l'humanité ne pourra éviter la catastrophe provoquée par la désertification du sol ou s'enracinent les croyances, que par une opération de « réenchantement du monde ». J. Baudrillard, avec son livre, *Les Stratégies fatales*, fait partie de ceux-là.²¹

¹⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. by Charles Levin (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981), 128.

¹⁹ George Ritzer, *Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Revolutionising the Means of Consumption*, (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 1999), 73.

²⁰ Nicholas Gane, *Max Weber and Postmodern Theory: Rationalisation versus Re-enchantment* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 86.

²¹ François Gaillard, 'Le Réenchantement du Monde', in *Cahiers de l'Hermétisme: Colloque de Cerisy*, ed. Antoine Faivre et Frédéric Tristan (Paris: Albin Michel, 1987), 50.

Gane, in his *Max Weber and Postmodern Theory: Rationalisation versus Reenchantment*, describes the work of Weber,²² Jean-François Lyotard,²³ and Michel Foucault²⁴ in terms of their *resistance* to disenchantment, he reserves his use of ‘reenchantment’ for Baudrillard alone, though he directly equates the two, which I am singularly reluctant to do, operating as we are on the conceptual level. In his dissection of what he sees as Baudrillard’s reenchantment, Gane focuses solely on his use of seduction, writing that the possibility of reenchantment ‘lies in the celebration of appearance rather than the pursuit of meaning, in the preservation rather than the disenchantment of that which remains secret’.²⁵ Though Gane’s argument about seduction undoubtedly captures some of the spirit of the congruence between Baudrillard and thick reenchantment, there are far deeper and more interesting connections between the two.

The roots of this essential congruence lie entirely in his conception of symbolic exchange. In *Passwords*, Baudrillard introduces his retrospective view of symbolic exchange:

Symbolic exchange is the strategic site where all the modalities of value flow together towards what I would term a blind zone, in which everything is called into question again. The symbolic here does not have the usual sense of ‘imaginary’, nor the sense given to it by Lacan. It is symbolic exchange as anthropology understands it. Whereas value has a unidirectional sense, whereas it passes from one point to another according to a system of equivalences, in symbolic exchange the terms are reversible. The point for me in using this concept was to take the opposite stance from commodity exchange and, in that way, make a political critique of our society

²² Gane attempts, with some success, to draw parallels between Weber and the larger movement of postmodern theory: ‘[it is] not only that Weber’s work addresses a number of the same issues as postmodern theory (for example, the nature and trajectory of modern rationalism; the differentiation of modern culture; and the question of cultural rationalisation and disenchantment), but that postmodern theory, implicitly rather than explicitly, develops and extends his account of the rise, nature and trajectory of modern culture’. Gane, *Rationalisation*, 87.

²³ Gane locates Lyotard’s resistance to disenchantment in his praise of the pure play of the language game and the indeterminacy of the aesthetic sphere and its sublime. He summarises, ‘For Lyotard, both postmodern science and radical artistic practice, which are not far removed from each other, contain an emancipatory moment that stands against the instrumental nature of the modern order’. Gane, *Rationalisation*, 112.

²⁴ Gane locates Foucault’s resistance to rationalisation in his historical practices of archaeology and genealogy, both of which seek to redefine and renegotiate accepted narratives of history: ‘This historical practice shatters the appearance of unilinear human progress by revealing the unstable multiplicity of historical descent. It does so by operating at a micro-level, eschewing grand narratives in favour of local events ... this practice is a radical form of political provocation that seeks to invigorate the present by using the past to reveal and contest the limits of existence today’. Gane, *Rationalisation*, 117.

²⁵ Gane, *Rationalisation*, 145. It is worth noting that Raymond Lee and Susan Ackerman, in *The Challenge of Religion after Modernity: Beyond Disenchantment* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), which I examined in some depth in the previous chapter, also take on Baudrillard in the context of reenchantment. They interact with a number of his works, from *Symbolic Exchange and Death* and *The System of Objects* to *Cool Memories* and *Fatal Strategies*. However, they singularly fail to appreciate the potential value of his work in the conceptualisation of reenchantment, as they largely assume the meaning of the term. Lee and Ackerman, in equating reenchantment with the endless free play of signs in the postmodern, argue precisely the opposite of what this chapter will be arguing, which is that the endless circulation of signs is exactly what is *resisted* by Baudrillard’s work and in thick reenchantment.

in the name of something that might perhaps be dubbed utopian, but that has been a living concept in many other cultures.²⁶

Though decidedly lacking in specifics, this brief passage offers a good preview of the important features of symbolic exchange: its grounding in classical cultural anthropology; its opposition to political economy; its reliance on absolute reversibility or reciprocity and the potential revolution of value buried within. Later in the entry, he notes several of the other important aspects of symbolic exchange: the symbolic aspects of the game, and of play in general; the symbolic element present in any authentic economy of sacrifice; the fundamental sense that symbolic exchange is something we have *lost*; and the ambivalent possibility of symbolic exchange as an enchanted, alternative order to that of the closed system of exchange and use value in political economy. The absolute importance of symbolic exchange to Baudrillard's whole system of thought is reflected in the fact that the concept makes several appearances in other parts of *Passwords*, particularly in relation to the concepts of 'seduction',²⁷ 'destiny',²⁸ and 'thought'.²⁹ To fully appreciate the foundational role of symbolic exchange for Baudrillard, it is necessary that we start our investigation at the very beginning of Baudrillard's career and see it through until the very end.

²⁶ Baudrillard, *Passwords*, 15. It is important to note that Weber also employed the language of the symbolic, but to a wholly different end. For Weber, the emergence of a symbolic dimension was the signal of a moving away from a pure form of magical religiosity into a form of interaction between humans and magical, enchanted forces that is rather mediated by the symbolic, in whatever form this may take. In fact, Baudrillard's use of the language of symbols follows only that of Marcel Mauss rather than any other classical understanding of the relationship between sign and symbol like that of Charles Sander Peirce. To flesh this out, we will borrow an excellent condensation from Stephen Grimwood, who writes in the context of Baudrillard: 'put simply, a sign is that which signifies some "other" that is beyond the sign, whereas the symbol directly mediates the reality that is being represented within itself'. Steven Grimwood, 'Iconography and Postmodernity,' *Literature and Theology* 17, 1 (March 2003): 80. Grimwood is working from the definitions offered by theologians Leonid Ouspenski and Paul Evdokimov. Evdokimov defines the symbol as 'a bridge which links two shores: the visible and the invisible, the earthly and the heavenly, the empiric and the ideal. The symbol makes it possible for the two to interpenetrate each other'. Paul Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty*, trans. by S. Bigham (Redondo Beach, CA: Oakwood, 1990), 86. Ouspenski describes the differences: 'A sign only portrays reality; a symbol always qualifies it in a certain way, bringing forth a superior reality. To understand a symbol is to participate in the presence; to understand a sign is to translate an indication'. Leonid Ouspenski, *Theology of the Icon*, vol. 1, trans. by Elizabeth Meyendorff (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978), 17.

²⁷ 'For me, the universe of seduction was what stands out radically against the universe of production. It was no longer a question of bringing things forward, of manufacturing them, of producing them for a world of value, but of seducing them – that is to say, of diverting them from that value, and hence from their identity, their reality, to destine them for the play of appearances, for their symbolic exchange'. Baudrillard, *Passwords*, 21.

²⁸ 'Destiny is this symbolic exchange between us and the world, which think us and which we think, where this collision and collusion take lace, this telescoping of, and complicity between, things'. Baudrillard, *Passwords*, 69-70.

²⁹ He writes, significantly for our purposes, 'The fact remains that the disappearance of the fixity of the thinking subject, the basis of our Western philosophy, and the awareness of a symbolic exchange between the world and thought are destabilizing the discourses of order and rationalisation'. Baudrillard, *Passwords*, 85.

*The System of Objects and For a Critique of the Political
Economy of the Sign*

*Objects and words also have hollow places in which a past sleeps, as in the everyday acts of walking, eating, going to bed,
in which ancient revolutions slumber.*

Michel De Certeau³⁰

One does not get twenty pages into Baudrillard's first major book, *The System of Objects* (hereafter *System*, 1968), before the language of the symbolic materialises.³¹ In *System*, among the most conventional, the most evidently Freudian, and the most classically Marxist of his works, Baudrillard is concerned primarily with the 'secondary meaning' of everyday objects. He writes, 'We shall not, therefore, be concerning ourselves with objects as they are defined by their functions or by the categories into which they might be subdivided for analytic purposes, but instead with the processes whereby people relate to them and with the systems of human behaviour and relationships that result therefrom'.³² The object is here always *more* than its function, if it has a function at all. Baudrillard writes of the object as text, even as an agent that can solidify individual and communal relationships. The key to his analysis is the symbolic: 'Traditional symbolic objects (tools, furniture, the house itself) were the mediators of a real relationship or a directly experienced situation, and their substance and form bore the clear imprint of the conscious or unconscious dynamic of that relationship'.³³ Baudrillard always looks upon the erosion of the symbolic order with a sense of *loss* and there is something undeniably nostalgic about *System*. In the contemporary system of objects, he writes, 'Nothing has presence, nothing has a history'.³⁴ Baudrillard's fondness for the bucolic rhythms of the French countryside are perhaps most apparent in this earliest work. The language he uses to describe the symbolic – permeated as it is with intimations of beauty, gentleness, safety, comfort, naturalness – gives us our first hint that there is something deeply Romantic in Baudrillard's thought. In contemporary consumer culture, the person's relationship to his or her objective (literally) environment has become objective (figuratively) rather than affective, but this relationship is tempered always by the persistence of the symbolic. Symbolic objects have a mythological and traditional extension that most objects simply lack, a response to the 'demand for definitive or fully realized being'.³⁵ In the terms of Daniele Hervieu-Léger's definition, this gives them a formally *religious* quality. The lack of

³⁰ Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, vol. 1, trans. by Steven Rendell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 108.

³¹ Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. by James Benedict (London: Verso Radical Thinkers, 1996), 15.

³² Baudrillard, *System*, 2.

³³ Baudrillard, *System*, 218.

³⁴ Baudrillard, *System*, 220.

³⁵ Baudrillard, *System*, 79.

symbolic objects is what lies behind, Baudrillard suggests, contemporary culture's ever-growing fascination with authenticity.

However, it is in *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (hereafter *Critique*, 1972)³⁶ that he truly lays the foundations for his challenge to dominant concepts of value. For much of his early work, and in particular the *Critique*, Baudrillard owes a substantial debt to the work of French anthropologists. Though he refers to Levi-Strauss, and owes to him, in Charles Levin's words, a sizable 'symbolic debt',³⁷ his most visible influence in the late 1960s and early 1970s is Marcel Mauss' 1925 essay *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*.³⁸ Mauss' brief essay has been massively influential; indeed, Marshall Sahlins calls it Mauss' 'own gift to the ages'.³⁹ As it is impossible to understand Baudrillard's symbolic exchange without Mauss, it is worth casting a brief eye over this work. The whole of Mauss' essay turns on the idea of symbolic exchange in opposition to more developed, more properly *economic* forms of exchange. The study is centred on an attempt to understand what he sees as a system of gift, counter-gift, obligation and reciprocity in non-modern cultures. Mauss builds his essay on a comparison of evidence, in the form of ethnographic reports, from a far-flung group of societies, some living, some destroyed, from Samoa to the Pacific Northwest of North America to New Zealand (where he made particularly influential statements about the Māori practice of the *hau*), touching also on societies in Europe of both past and present. For Mauss, the system of gift and exchange is a total system, one that is at once economic, religious, and ethical as well as being implicated in the key narrative structures of the social. Of the Trobriand Islanders, Mauss writes, 'Social life is a constant give-and-take'.⁴⁰ Nor are these systems of exchange optional; rather they are 'prestations which are in theory voluntary, disinterested and spontaneous, but are in fact obligatory and interested'.⁴¹ Sahlins argues that the total prestation of gift giving is for Mauss the 'primitive analogue of social contract', in a sense very much like that of Rousseau.⁴² These prestations come in the form of the *potlatch*,⁴³ the *kula* and other forms of

³⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. by Charles Levin (St. Louis: Telos Press), 1981.

³⁷ Charles Levin, 'Translator's Introduction', in Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. by Charles Levin (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981), 25.

³⁸ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. by Ian Cunnison (London: Cohen and West, LTD, 1954).

³⁹ Marshall Sahlins, 'The Spirit of the Gift,' in *The Logic of the Gift: Toward an Ethic of Generosity*, ed. Alan D. Schrift (New York: Routledge, 1997), 70.

⁴⁰ Mauss, *Gift*, 27.

⁴¹ Mauss, *Gift*, 1.

⁴² Sahlins, 'Spirit', 84.

ritualised gift exchange, communal consumption, and even the wilful destruction of property. Mauss argues that symbolic exchange is far more than a simple exchange of goods: 'Whatever it is, food, possessions, women, children, or ritual, it maintains a magical and religious hold over the recipient. The thing given is not inert. It is alive and often personified, and strives to bring to its original clan and homeland some equivalent to take its place'.⁴⁴ Thus this symbolic exchange relies wholly on the promise, or even the threat, of *reciprocity*.

Such systems of exchange are not altogether absent in contemporary cultures, Mauss argues, going on to illustrate the various survivals of symbolic exchange he saw still extant in the more recent past in both Germanic and Hindu practices and literature, as well as in a point of Chinese law that connects forever an object and its original owner.⁴⁵ Mauss finds present-day evidence of symbolic survivals in France in the 'symbolic presents' offered at Provençal birth celebrations.⁴⁶ The typical gift in these places, he argues, is that of alcohol, which embodies the twin meanings of the word 'gift' in German as both poison and present. Significantly, he notes that there is an enchanted element in some forms of gift-giving. He writes of 'an object enchanted with the whole authority of the giver', which 'creates a bond between master and servant, creditor and debtor is a magical and ambiguous thing. It is at the same time good and dangerous ... the drink of friendship, or love, is only dangerous if the enchanter wants it to be so'.⁴⁷ Mauss wrote in very much the same time and in similarly fragmented social conditions as Weber did, and was similarly concerned with value: 'It is our good fortune that all is not yet couched in terms of purchase and sale'.⁴⁸ For Mauss, symbolic exchange consisted of exchanges that served to solidify human relationships outside of use or exchange value, exchanges that have largely disappeared in modernity but still form vital parts of living human cultures.

⁴³ Mauss borrows the term *potlatch* from the Chinook language and notes that it has passed into common usage in modern languages. Mauss, *Gift*, 4.

⁴⁴ Mauss, *Gift*, 10.

⁴⁵ Mauss, *Gift*, 54-62. Mauss identifies the *Mahabharata* in particular as an extended narrative of a *potlatch* ceremony and points to the extended peasant history of the Germanic lands as a lesser example of such a survival. Elsewhere, Mauss also extends his field of *potlatch* into the European realm: 'An unceasing circulation of both goods and persons, of permanent and temporary services, of honours and feasts given, returned and to be returned; this is how one has to imagine a good part of the social life of ancient peoples of Germany and Scandinavia'. Marcel Mauss, 'Gift, Gift', in *The Logic of the Gift: Toward an Ethic of Generosity*, ed. Alan D. Schrift (New York: Routledge, 1997), 29.

⁴⁶ Mauss, *Gift*, 64.

⁴⁷ Mauss, 'Gift, Gift', 30-31

⁴⁸ Mauss, *Gift*, 63.

Though their agreement is by no means absolute, many of the essays that comprise Baudrillard's *Critique* are dedicated to furthering Mauss' project and offering a precise definition of symbolic exchange. His definition of symbolic exchange, in its clearest form is as follows:

In symbolic exchange, of which the gift is our most proximate illustration, the object is not an object: it is inseparable from the concrete relation in which it is exchanged, the transferential pact that it seals between two persons: it is thus not independent as such. It has, properly speaking, neither use value nor (economic) exchange value. ... It is arbitrary, and yet absolutely singular ... As distinct from language, whose material can be disassociated from the subject speaking it, the material of symbolic exchange, the objects given, are not autonomous, hence not codifiable as signs.⁴⁹

Baudrillard takes this further and argues that symbolic exchange is radical in its economic uselessness, even if the objects involved in such exchange are not. Symbolic exchange takes place outside of and in opposition to any exchange that relies on the *use* or *exchange* value of the items in question: 'Thus, only that which assumes its meaning through continual reciprocal exchange eludes exchange value, in the gift and counter-gift, in the ambivalence of an open relationship, and *never in a final relation of value*'.⁵⁰ He defines symbolic exchange in opposition to the totalising logic of value and the system of signs, which he refers to as a 'code': 'there is no symbolic "value", there is only symbolic "exchange", which defines itself precisely as something distinct from, and beyond value and code. All forms of value (object, commodity or sign) must be negated in order to inaugurate symbolic exchange. This is the radical rupture of the field of value'.⁵¹

Baudrillard makes it clear time and again that the 'thoroughly vulgar metaphysic'⁵² of the endlessly circulating system of signs and consumer objects in the contemporary world runs counter to the reciprocity of symbolic exchange, stating simply: 'The sign is the apogee of the commodity'.⁵³ The logic of the symbolic must be mutated or destroyed for the logic of the commodity to be brought into play: 'An object is not an object of consumption unless it is released from its psychic determinations as a *symbol*; from its functional determinations as *instrument*; and is thus *liberated as a sign* to be recaptured by the formal logic of fashion,

⁴⁹ Baudrillard, *Critique*, 64-65.

⁵⁰ Baudrillard, *Critique*, 212. Emphasis in original.

⁵¹ Baudrillard, *Critique*, 125.

⁵² Baudrillard, *Critique*, 63.

⁵³ Baudrillard, *Critique*, 206.

i.e., by the logic of differentiation'.⁵⁴ In an important sense, this idea is the backbone of the whole of Baudrillard's decades-long critique of mass culture:

It is because *the logic of the commodity and the political economy is at the very heart of the sign*, in the abstract equation of signifier and signified, in the differential combinatory of signs, that signs can function as exchange value (the discourse of communication) and as use value (rational decoding and distinctive social use) ... It is because *the structure of the sign is at the very heart of the commodity form* that the commodity can take on, immediately the effect of signification ... because its very form establishes it as a total *medium*, as a *system of communication* administering all social exchange. Like the sign form, the commodity is a code managing the exchange of values.⁵⁵

Symbolic exchange is at once the most basic and the most concrete form of exchange, one that derives its value from its *relation to* and *creation of* social bonds rather than any already extant system of signs or functional value. The power of symbolic exchange is never mediated, by consideration of economic equivalence, as it relies on the principle of direct reciprocity. It is itself a facilitator of relationships. The symbolic is pre-ideological, pre-conceptual and, most importantly, resistant to the totality of the sign system: 'Only total revolution, theoretical and practical, can restore the symbolic in the demise of the sign and of value. Even signs must burn'.⁵⁶ For Baudrillard, symbolic exchange, while diminished, remains important even in contemporary culture: 'something of these primitive practices still haunts contemporary objects and always makes their presence vehement, powerfully expressive, never neutral'.⁵⁷ Even in this, his most definite and positivist work, the spectre of incompleteness and indeterminacy can be seen flitting on the edges of his vision; we have here the earliest indicator that his approach to the symbolic was to become considerably more complex, more problematic and, ultimately, more interesting.

Symbolic Exchange and Death

Bourgeois society is ruled by equivalence. It makes dissimilar things comparable by reducing them to abstract quantities. For the Enlightenment, anything which cannot be resolved into numbers, and ultimately into one, is illusion; modern positivism consigns it to poetry.

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno⁵⁸

Baudrillard's next major book, *The Mirror of Production* (hereafter *Mirror*, 1973)⁵⁹, offers a systematic, and at times virulent, critique of Marx and of Marxism that hinges wholly on symbolic exchange, which he offers as an *alternative* to historical materialism. *Mirror* is

⁵⁴ Baudrillard, *Critique*, 67. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁵ Baudrillard, *Critique*, 146. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁶ Baudrillard, *Critique*, 163.

⁵⁷ Baudrillard, *Critique*, 41.

⁵⁸ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 4-5.

⁵⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, trans. by Mark Poster (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975).

perhaps most interesting for us in that Baudrillard here reverses the polarity of the subtraction story. Baudrillard insists that we must not understand primitive societies as underdeveloped forerunners to the advanced modern societies, but rather the other way around: 'It is the opposite: to the extent that these terms apply here, "subsistence" and "economic exchange" are the *residue* of symbolic exchange, a *remainder*'.⁶⁰ More than a confusion of categories, for Baudrillard, Marx's failure here is epistemological, fundamental. Baudrillard concludes of historical materialism, 'This crushing argument masks the entire problematic of the symbolic under a functionalist, finalist retrospective view of mythology (and magic) in which it only awaits man's rational and technical domination in order to disappear'.⁶¹ Though his critique of Marx is interesting in its own right, it adds little to his own theory of symbolic exchange, so we can feel justified in passing over it quickly.

It is not until 1976 and *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (hereafter *Symbolic*)⁶² that symbolic exchange comes to full fruition in Baudrillard's thought. It is, as Mike Gane notes, 'without a doubt Jean Baudrillard's most important book'.⁶³ It also marks a turning point in Baudrillard's work in terms of style and method. From this point on, his writings become less direct, more diffuse, more confrontational, and markedly less recognizable as either sociology or philosophy. The book opens with spectral, archaic imagery that brings the opening passage of *The Communist Manifesto*⁶⁴ immediately to mind (and here we should recall Martin Harries' claim from the previous chapter that such allusion is a form of reenchantment in its own right): 'Symbolic exchange is no longer the organising principle of modern society. Of course, the symbolic haunts modern social institutions in the form of their own death. Indeed, since the symbolic no longer rules these social forms, they experience it only as this haunting, and as a demand forever blocked by the law of value'.⁶⁵ Extending radically the logic of Mauss' seminal essay, here Baudrillard brings the importance of reciprocity to the forefront of his analysis,:

Everywhere, in every domain, a single form predominates: reversibility, cyclical reversal and annulment put an end to the linearity of time, language, economic exchange, accumulation and power. Hence the reversibility of the gift in the counter-gift, the reversibility of exchange in the sacrifice, the reversibility of time in

⁶⁰ Baudrillard, *Mirror*, 79. Emphasis in original.

⁶¹ Baudrillard, *Mirror*, 83-84.

⁶² Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. by Iain Hamilton Grant (London: Sage, 1993).

⁶³ Mike Gane, 'Introduction', in Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. by Iain Hamilton Grant (London: Sage, 1993), viii.

⁶⁴ The *Manifesto* begins, 'A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of Communism'. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. by Samuel Moore (London: Penguin, 1967), 218.

⁶⁵ Baudrillard, *Symbolic*, 1.

the cycle, the reversibility of production in destruction, the reversibility of life in death, and the reversibility of every term and value of the *langue* in the anagram.⁶⁶

But what happens when this reversibility is broken down? For Baudrillard the answer can only be *death*:

We must therefore displace everything into the sphere of the symbolic, where challenge, reversal and overbidding are the law, *so that we can respond to death only by an equal or superior death*. There is no question here of real violence or force, the only question concerns the challenge and the logic of the symbolic ... *To defy the system with a gift to which it cannot respond save by its own collapse and death*. Nothing, not even the system, can avoid the symbolic obligation, and it is in this trap that the only chance of a catastrophe for capital remains Nothing *corresponds* to death except death. Which is precisely what happens in this case: *the system itself is driven to suicide in return*, which suicide is manifest in its disarray and defeat.⁶⁷

Thus, for, Baudrillard all deaths are not equivalent in their symbolic power. A true symbolic death, a death with meaning, is an act of *will*: 'Violent death changes everything, slow death changes nothing, for there is a rhythm, a scansion necessary to symbolic exchange: something has to be given in the same movement and following the same rhythm, otherwise there is no reciprocity and it is quite simply not given'.⁶⁸ In the world of political economy, the dead have been increasingly pushed to the margins, to the point of disappearance; they are 'thrown out of the group's symbolic circulation'.⁶⁹ This disappearance is paradoxical; our world is at once a world *without the dead* and a society of death. Death has been exiled, Baudrillard argues, but it has not gone: 'The cemetery no longer exists because modern cities have entirely taken over their function: they are ghost towns, cities of death. If the great operational metropolis is the final form of an entire culture, then, quite simply, ours is a culture of death'.⁷⁰ It is, however, a particular form of death; Baudrillard argues: 'the obsession with death and the will to abolish death through accumulation became the fundamental motor of the rationality of political economy. Value, in particular time as value, is accumulated in the phantasm of death deferred, pending the term of a linear infinity of value'.⁷¹ This death follows a different logic, and

⁶⁶ Baudrillard, *Symbolic*, 2.

⁶⁷ Baudrillard, *Symbolic*, 36-37. Emphasis in original.

⁶⁸ Baudrillard, *Symbolic*, 40.

⁶⁹ Baudrillard, *Symbolic*, 126. This is as much a practical as a philosophical matter: 'The majority no longer have the opportunity to see somebody die. In any other type of society, this is something impossible ... In any case, we no longer die at home, we die in hospital – for many good "material" reasons (medical, urbane, etc.), but especially because the sick or dying or man, as biological body, no longer has any place but within a technical milieu. On the pretext of being cared for, he is then deported to a functional space-time which is charged with neutralising the symbolic difference of death and disease'. Baudrillard, *Symbolic*, 182-183. Emphasis in original.

⁷⁰ Baudrillard, *Symbolic*, 127.

⁷¹ Baudrillard, *Symbolic*, 146.

suits a different purpose, in that it represents the *acquiescence* to an order of unwilled, instrumental death.

This death without meaning is tied to instrumental rationality: 'The irreversibility of biological death, its objective and punctual character, is a modern fact of science. It is specific to our culture. Every other culture says that death begins before death, that life goes on after life, and that it is impossible to distinguish life from death'.⁷² Death has become a separable, quarantined fact of life that is irreversible and thus falls outside of the logic of symbolic exchange. All the while the spectre of death haunts this life through the spirits of the accident, the madman and the deafening silence of the dead. Years later, Baudrillard would lament the banality of life in relation to death, writing, 'Worse than the desire to destroy life is this refusal to risk it – nothing being worth the trouble of being sacrificed. This is truly the worst offence, the worst affront possible. It is the fundamental proposition of nihilism'.⁷³ In a culture with an instrumental understanding of death, any indication of a symbolic reversibility of life and death, in the forms of violence or personal sacrifice, subvert the foundations of political economy.

Symbolic also introduces the concept – that of the simulacrum, simply, a copy with no original – that has become Baudrillard's best-known contribution to the body of postmodern thought. In a fashion reminiscent of Weber's narrative of disenchantment, Baudrillard traces the changes in human culture from an original, enchanted time dominated by symbolic exchange through to the present, which is dominated by an endlessly circulating and endlessly functional system of signs and commodities with no reference to anything outside of that system. From the age of the symbolic, there 'are three orders of simulacra, running parallel to the successive mutations of the law of value since the Renaissance',⁷⁴ the stages of counterfeit, production, and simulation, for which he offers a rough periodisation: 'The *counterfeit* is the dominant schema in the "classical" period, from the Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution', '*Production* is the dominant schema in the industrial era', '*Simulation* is the dominant schema in the current code-governed phase'.⁷⁵ That the connection between symbolic exchange and the simulacra is rarely

⁷² Baudrillard, *Symbolic*, 159.

⁷³ Baudrillard, *Perfect*, 141.

⁷⁴ Baudrillard, *Symbolic*, 50. For a more detailed account, see Baudrillard, *Symbolic*, 50-86.

⁷⁵ Baudrillard, *Symbolic*, 50. Emphasis in original. To this Baudrillard would later suggest the addition of a fourth, 'fractal' or 'viral' stage of culture, one brought on by the further proliferation of communication technologies. He writes, 'At the fourth, the fractal (or viral, or radiant) stage of value, there is no point of reference at all, and value

mentioned stands as further evidence that Baudrillard is in many ways rather poorly understood. Having established a solid base for understanding Baudrillard's use of symbolic exchange, we will jump ahead a number of years to the later transformations within his work on the symbolic universe. Even at this relatively early stage, however, the congruence between thick reenchantment and Baudrillard's work is starting to become clear, primarily through Baudrillard's foundational argument that closed, rationalised systems of exchange and use value coexist *necessarily* side by side with the hidden and enchanted presence of symbolic exchange.

Impossible Exchange

It is said that the world is in a state of bankruptcy, that the world owes the world more than the world can pay, and ought to go into chancery, and be sold.

Ralph Waldo Emerson⁷⁶

Though symbolic exchange remains a foundation stone in Baudrillard's theory, it is driven into the background for a number of years by his better-known discussions of simulacra and seduction. However, the publication in 1999 of *Impossible Exchange* (hereafter *Impossible*) brings the idea of symbolic exchange back to the forefront of his writing, even if through its partial negation. Frequent translator Chris Turner points to the concept of 'impossible exchange' as part of Baudrillard's continuing project to lessen the importance of the symbolic in his work, this time with a term that is 'ostensibly more accurate'⁷⁷ than its predecessor. What we have with impossible exchange appears to be a symbolic exchange that is stripped of its symbolic language but nevertheless serves the same transgressive, parabolic purpose. In contrast to the spectral imagery of *Symbolic*, *Impossible* opens with a very different, definitive tone:

Everything starts from impossible exchange. The uncertainty of the world lies in the fact that it has no equivalent anywhere; it cannot be exchanged for anything ... That might even be said to be its definition – or lack of it. No equivalent, no double, no representation, no mirror ... There is not enough room both for the world and its double. So there can be no verifying of the world. This is, indeed, why 'reality' is an imposture. Being without possible verification, the world is a fundamental illusion. Whatever can be verified locally, the uncertainty of the world, taken overall, is not open to debate ... the other spheres – politics, law, aesthetics – are characterized by the same non-equivalence, and hence the same eccentricity. Literally, they have no meaning outside themselves and cannot be exchanged for anything.⁷⁸

radiates in all directions, occupying all interstices, without any reference to anything whatsoever, by virtue of pure contiguity'. Baudrillard, *Transparency*, 5.

⁷⁶ Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Gifts,' in *The Logic of the Gift: Toward an Ethic of Generosity*, ed. Alan D. Schrift (New York: Routledge, 1997), 25.

⁷⁷ Chris Turner, 'The Intelligence of Evil: An Introduction,' in Jean Baudrillard, *The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact*, trans. by Chris Turner (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 10.

⁷⁸ Baudrillard, *Impossible*, 3.

Here the differentiation of the two concepts becomes evident. Baudrillard appears to be making a very simple but universal statement and impossible exchange is, at least at this point, more about *indeterminacy* and the endless circulation of signs than about exchange per se:

Any system invents for itself a principle of equilibrium, exchange and value, causality and purpose, which plays on fixed oppositions: good and evil, true and false, sign and referent, subject and object. This is the whole space of difference and regulation by difference which, as long as it functions, ensures the stability and dialectical movement of the whole. Up to this point, all is well. It is when this bipolar relationship breaks down, when the system short-circuits itself, that it generates its own critical mass, and veers off exponentially. When there is no longer any internal reference system within which exchange can take place (between production and social wealth, for example, or between news coverage and real events), you get into an exponential phase, a phase of speculative disorder.⁷⁹

Baudrillard sets up impossible exchange as a barrier that renders all systems essentially meaningless, bringing the language of haunting back into his analysis:

The most structured systems cannot but be thrown out of kilter by the reversion of this Nothing which haunts them. And not in the aftermath of some future catastrophe, but right now. Here and now, the whole edifice of value is exchangeable for Nothing. The true formula of contemporary nihilism lies here, rather than in any philosophical or moral considerations: it is the nihilism of value itself. This is our fate, and from this stem both the happiest and most baleful consequences.⁸⁰

This is also the case for thought itself. Truly critical thought exists outside of the systems of value and utility, and is able to demonstrate its 'radical uselessness',⁸¹ an idea anticipated by the negation of use value in symbolic exchange. This newly freed thought carries with it both possibility and threat, much as does symbolic exchange: 'thought becomes free to lead nowhere, to be the triumphal effectuation of the Nothing, to revive the principle of Evil'.⁸² On the other hand, for the world, impossible exchange is a threat impossible to bear: 'So all of our systems are converging in a desperate effort to escape radical uncertainty, to conjure away the inevitable, fateful act of impossible exchange'.⁸³ This is also the radical inbreaking of the *poetic* into critical thought: 'Words and language are free to correspond without passing through meaning ... This is how the poetic transference operates'.⁸⁴ Thought thus

⁷⁹ Baudrillard, *Impossible*, 5-6.

⁸⁰ Baudrillard, *Impossible*, 6-7.

⁸¹ Baudrillard, *Impossible*, 111.

⁸² Baudrillard, *Impossible*, 120.

⁸³ Baudrillard, *Impossible*, 14.

⁸⁴ Baudrillard, *Impossible*, 121.

enters into a new relationship with the world that thinks it, and which it in turn thinks. For Baudrillard, language ‘does not seek to penetrate some mystery of the world, nor to discover its hidden aspect – it is that hidden aspect. It does not discover that the world has a double life – it is that double life, that parallel life’.⁸⁵ This thought, inaugurated by impossible exchange, is of a wholly different order:

Radical thought is at the violent intersection of meaning and non-meaning, of truth and non-truth, of the continuity of the world and the continuity of the nothing. It aspires to the status and power of illusion, restoring the non-veracity of facts, the non-signification of the world, and hunting down that nothing which runs beneath the apparent continuity of things.⁸⁶

Thus, impossible exchange inaugurates a form of thinking about a world that necessarily includes the possibility of such interruptions that can help us to see more clearly the conceptual boundaries of thick reenchantment.

The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact

The spectacle is the moment when the commodity has attained the total occupation of social life. Not only is the relation to the commodity visible but it is all one sees: the world one sees is its world ... One cannot go into exile in a unified world.

Guy Debord⁸⁷

The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact (hereafter *Pact*)⁸⁸ appeared in French in 2004 and demonstrated that the symbolic played a foundational role in Baudrillard’s thought to the very end. An act of almost prophetic summary given that it would become the last major work published in his lifetime, *Pact* touches on almost all of the important themes in his work: the symbolic as resistance, the virtual culture of the mass media, war and the challenges and possibility of the future. The book resonates with the sights and sounds of a war between two orders, the symbolic and the virtual. Baudrillard here introduces a new concept, that of ‘Integral Reality’, which solidifies and updates his early work on the all-inclusiveness of the system of signs in political economy. Integral Reality refers to the wholesale absorption of the world - time, space and people included - into the virtual world of the news media, into a pervasive interactivity:

What I call Integral Reality is the perpetrating on the world of an unlimited operational project whereby everything becomes real, everything becomes visible and transparent, everything is ‘liberated’, everything comes to fruition and has a meaning (whereas it is in the nature of meaning that not everything has it). Whereby there is no longer anything on which there is nothing to say ... when we say reality has disappeared, the point is not that it has disappeared physically, but

⁸⁵ Baudrillard, *Impossible*, 149. Emphasis in original.

⁸⁶ Baudrillard, *Impossible*, 150-151.

⁸⁷ Guy Debord, *Panegyric*, vol. 1., trans. by James Brook (London: Verso, 1989), 42, 47.

⁸⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact*, trans. by Chris Turner (Oxford: Berg, 2005).

that it has disappeared metaphysically. Reality continues to exist, it is its principle that is dead ... Objective reality – reality related to meaning and representation – gives way to ‘Integral Reality’, a reality without limits in which everything is realised and technically materialised without reference to any principle or final purpose.⁸⁹

More accurately, what Baudrillard is arguing is that everything has been *reified*. This complete reification, which he calls elsewhere ‘a bloodless, undifferentiated world ... the integrism of emptiness’,⁹⁰ is expanding as part and parcel of globalisation. Like all complete or perfected things in Baudrillard’s universe, this Integral Reality is profoundly inhuman, even unbearable. This reality is a product of rationalisation, a ‘turn to an objective world, shorn of all hinterworlds’.⁹¹ It is also a *contractual* reality: ‘What binds us to the real is a contract of reality. That is to say, a formal awareness of the rights and duties attaching to reality. But what we long for is a complicity and a dual relation with beings and things – a pact, not a contract ... Against the moral contract that binds us to reality we must set a pact of intelligence and lucidity’.⁹² This integrated reality, however, is doomed to failure because it fuels resistance and is thus in some sense counterproductive or even *suicidal*: ‘Everything which offends against duality, which is the fundamental rule, everything which aims to be integral, leads to disintegration through the violent resurgence of duality – or in conformity with the principle of evil, whichever you prefer’.⁹³

Evil, present in some strength in Baudrillard's work since *Transparency*, here takes centre stage. What he means by evil, however, is by no means what the reader might expect: ‘Before being an immorality, evil is first an antagonistic principle. We can, however, retain from the religious vision of evil the idea of negation, illusion, destruction. From this point of view, evil is an unbinding agent’.⁹⁴ For Baudrillard, evil is less a theological concept, less a metaphysical conceit, than the inbreaking or a showing through of the alternative symbolic order. Evil, as it is conventionally understood, is for Baudrillard nothing more than a part of the Integral Reality and is thus devoid of any symbolic power: ‘There is no longer any metaphysical presence of evil ... Our evil is faceless and imageless. It is present everywhere

⁸⁹ Baudrillard, *Pact*, 17.

⁹⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *Screened Out*, trans. by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2002), 65.

⁹¹ Baudrillard, *Pact*, 39.

⁹² Baudrillard, *Pact*, 45–46.

⁹³ Baudrillard, *Pact*, 185

⁹⁴ Baudrillard, *Paroxysm*, 25. In *Transparency*, he summarises: ‘The spectre of the Same had struck again. In every compulsion of resemblance, every extradition of difference, in all contiguity of things and their own image, all conflation of beings and their own code, lies the threat of an incestuous virulence, a diabolical otherness boding the breakdown of all this humming machinery. This is the reappearance of the principle of Evil in a new guise. No morality or guilt is implied, however; the principle of Evil is simply synonymous with the principle of reversal, with the turn of fate’. Baudrillard, *Transparency*, 65.

in homeopathic doses ... but it no longer has any mythic presence'.⁹⁵ He writes, 'Of evil in the pure state it is impossible to speak. What one can speak of it is the distinction between evil and misfortune, the reduction of evil to misfortune, and a culture of misfortune that is complicit with the hegemonic culture of happiness'.⁹⁶ In contrast to the banal visibility of misfortune, true evil is hidden. It is evil that 'shows through: it is what you see when you see through',⁹⁷ and it is this *showing through* of the enchanted order of the symbolic that he evokes in the enigmatic phrase 'the transparency of evil'. Baudrillard's understanding of evil is at times challenging; in passages stretched across many of his works he refers to anti-Western terrorism, which he refers to as 'symbolic attacks', as powerful instantiations of evil, acts that make visible alternatives to the dominant order of consumer capitalism. He writes in *Pact*: 'If terrorism is evil ... then it is this intelligence of Evil we need; the intelligence of, the insight into, this internal convolution of the world order, of which terrorism is both the event-moment and the image-feedback'.⁹⁸ The discomfort that Baudrillard's final point here likely engenders recalls the profound threat that any form of terrorism, particularly the invitation of willed death in suicide bombing, poses to an ordered and evolutionary understanding of modernity.

The intelligence of evil is thus another way of approaching the radical indeterminacy of the world and another way of denoting the proper path of critical thought. Elsewhere, he writes, 'whereas the failure of an attempt at completion is, necessarily, negative, the failure of an attempt at annihilation is, necessarily, vital and positive. It is for this reason that thought, which knows it will fail in any case, is duty-bound to set itself criminal objectives ... Such is the well-tempered application of the principle of evil'.⁹⁹ Evil is thus a concept of clarity and even celebration, a negation only of completion: 'Thinking based on evil is not pessimistic; it is the thinking based on misfortune that is pessimistic because it wants desperately to escape evil, or, alternatively, to revel in it'.¹⁰⁰ Baudrillard repeatedly

⁹⁵ Baudrillard, *Pact*, 173.

⁹⁶ Baudrillard, *Pact*, 139.

⁹⁷ Baudrillard, *Pact*, 142. Baudrillard often equates the hidden with evil; indeed, the whole of *Transparency* is dedicated to that idea. In *Passwords*, he writes, 'When everything tends toward the visible, as is the case in our world, what becomes of the things that were once kept secret? They become occult, clandestine, maleficent: what was merely secret – or, in other words, given to be exchanged in secrecy – becomes evil and must be abolished, exterminated. But these things cannot be destroyed: in a certain sense, secrecy is indestructible. It will then be diabolised, and come out through the very instruments used to eliminate it. Its energy is that of evil, the energy that comes from the non-unification of things ... From that point on, everything based on duality, on the dissociation of things, on negativity, on death, is regarded as evil'. Baudrillard, *Passwords*, 33.

⁹⁸ Baudrillard, *Pact*, 164.

⁹⁹ Baudrillard, *Perfect*, 151.

¹⁰⁰ Baudrillard, *Pact*, 143.

intimates that we, as thinkers and as human beings, *need* evil, that shining through of duality, of incompleteness and of imperfection. Evil, like the symbolic, haunts integrated reality with the presence of a forgotten or forsaken alternative, or at least the acknowledgement of the possibility of something other, a dark double and a spectre. Being continually aware of this enchanted other is the lucidity pact and, for Baudrillard, all radical thought must take it seriously. Baudrillard, though he uses different language and takes the point to new extremes, is demanding a constant awareness and acknowledgement of the dialectic of rationalisation and re-enchantment within religious modernity.

Consumer Culture, or the Poverty of Excess

How could anything have been more important, for everyone, than the certainty, at one point, of attaining a useless splendour, or surpassing at that point the poverty of utility?

Georges Bataille¹⁰¹

The unifying theme of the whole of Baudrillard's work is a pointed critique of consumer capitalist culture, which he understands as directly opposed to symbolic exchange. Baudrillard rages against the dehumanising effects of capitalism, arguing more or less explicitly that we have become a different, lesser sort of humanity. Baudrillard's critique of consumer culture has many direct parallels with Weber's critique of rationalisation, and is often couched in his language. For example, Baudrillard writes of a system 'exclusive of passion',¹⁰² and continues, 'I have come to think of the new means of consumption as "fantastic cages"'.¹⁰³ In Baudrillard's world, everything is at risk of being implicated in the operational logic of the commodity system, from space,¹⁰⁴ to time,¹⁰⁵ even to human ontology.¹⁰⁶ For Baudrillard, consumption is an almost entirely closed system, precisely like that of the sign, an all-encompassing, homogenising, quantifying force that forms nothing less than the mythic structure of contemporary culture, particularly the narratives that

¹⁰¹ Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, vol. 2., trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 226. Emphasis in original.

¹⁰² Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, trans. by Chris Turner (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 114.

¹⁰³ Baudrillard, *Consumer*, 17.

¹⁰⁴ Here Baudrillard is specific, writing of life at the street level: 'With the disappearance, advertising invades everything (the street, the monument, the market, the stage, language). It determines architecture and the creation of super-objects such as Beaubourg, Les Halles or La Villette [all heavily commercialised areas in metropolitan Paris] – which are literally advertising monuments (or anti-monuments) – not so much because they are centred on consumption, but because from the outset these monuments were meant to be a demonstration of the operation of the culture, of the cultural operation of the commodity and that of the masses in movement'. Baudrillard, *Ecstasy*, 19-20.

¹⁰⁵ See Baudrillard, *Consumer*, 151-158; Baudrillard, *Symbolic*, 63; and Baudrillard, *Pact*, 131-132.

¹⁰⁶ 'The religious, metaphysical or philosophical definition of being has given way to an operational definition in terms of the genetic code (DNA) and cerebral organisation (the informational code and billions of neurons). We are in a system where there is no more soul, no more metaphor of the body – the fable of the unconscious itself has lost most its resonance. No narrative can come to metaphorise our presence; no transcendence can play a role in our definition; our being is exhausting itself in molecular linking and neuronal convolutions'. Baudrillard, *Ecstasy*, 50-51.

teach that 'growth means affluence', and 'affluence means democracy'.¹⁰⁷ This mythic dimension exists separately from the more concrete aspects of consumer culture: 'The historic emergence of the *myth* of consumption in the twentieth century is radically different from the emergence of the technical concept in economic thinking or science, where it was employed much earlier'.¹⁰⁸

Rather than true democracy or affluence, Baudrillard argues, what modernity and capitalism have achieved is a crushing if comfortable banality, which I will be calling the *poverty of excess* and which has parallels in the work of Georges Bataille, Ritzer, and particularly the Situationist Guy Debord. Baudrillard writes, 'This is what we have forgotten in modernity: subtraction brings force, power is born of absence. We have not stopped accumulating, adding, raising the stakes. And because we are no longer capable of confronting the symbolic mastery of absence, we are now plunged in the opposite illusion, the disenchanting illusion of profusion'.¹⁰⁹ Baudrillard's work is permeated with the contradictions and paradoxical excesses of modernity; he writes of the excess of indifference,¹¹⁰ demand,¹¹¹ gesture,¹¹² surface,¹¹³ meaning (but not persuasive meaning),¹¹⁴ and waste,¹¹⁵ to name just a few. He sums up as follows: 'We are no longer in a system of growth, but of excrescence and saturation, which can be summed up the fact that there is too much. There is too much everywhere, and the system cracks up from excess'.¹¹⁶ It is, in a word, a world of hyperdensity, one in which people suffer from 'an over-proximity of all things, a foul promiscuity of all things which beleaguer and penetrate'.¹¹⁷

¹⁰⁷ Baudrillard, *Consumer*, 51. As is the case with all mythology, these particular narratives remain very much in the background: 'This results in the fact, which is indeed perceptible in everyday life, of the total ambiguity of Affluence and Consumption: they are always lived as myth (the assumption of happiness beyond history and mortality) and endured as an objective process of adaptation to a new type of collective behaviour'. Baudrillard, *Consumer*, 82.

¹⁰⁸ Baudrillard, *Consumer*, 194.

¹⁰⁹ Baudrillard, *The Conspiracy of Art: Manifestos, Interviews, Essays*, trans. by Ames Hodges, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 2005), 114.

¹¹⁰ See Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, trans. by Bernard and Caroline Schutze (New York: Semiotext(e), 1987), 94; Baudrillard, *Symbolic*, 34; and Jean Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End*, trans. by Chris Turner (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 3, 4.

¹¹¹ See Baudrillard, *Illusion*, 57.

¹¹² See Baudrillard, *Pact*, 110.

¹¹³ See Baudrillard, *Critique*, 42.

¹¹⁴ See Baudrillard, *Ecstasy*, 63.

¹¹⁵ See Baudrillard, *Illusion*, 78-80 and Baudrillard, *Consumer*, 47, 58.

¹¹⁶ Baudrillard, *Pact*, 191.

¹¹⁷ Baudrillard, *Ecstasy*, 27.

Baudrillard employs a number of techniques, phrases and metaphors to describe and critique this situation. At turns, he writes of a 'sidereal era of boredom' and of 'horizontal madness',¹¹⁸ looking always to something better: 'Let us hope the random universe outside smashes this glass coffin'.¹¹⁹ In *Transparency* he links banality to the effects of technology. 'We have left the hell of other people for the ecstasy of the same, the purgatory of otherness for the artificial paradises of identity. Some might call this an even worse servitude, but Telecomputer Man, having no will of his own, knows nothing of serfdom. Alienation of man is a thing of the past: now man is plunged into a homeostasis by machines'.¹²⁰ For Baudrillard, the rise of information technologies, at best a paradoxical form of plenty, serves as a primary illustration of this tendency. In *In The Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (hereafter *Shadow*, 1982), he writes,

We are in a universe where there is more and more information, less and less meaning ... Everywhere information is reputed to produce an accelerated circulation of meaning, a plus-value of meaning homologous to the economic plus-value which results from the accelerated notion of capital. Information is given as creative of communication, and even if the wastage is enormous a general consensus would have it that there is in the total nonetheless a surplus of meaning, which is redistributed in all the interstices of the social fabric ... We are all accomplices in this myth. It is the alpha and omega of our modernity, without which the credibility of our social organisation would collapse. Yet *the fact is that it is collapsing*, and for this very reason. Just where we think that information is producing meaning, it is doing the exact opposite.¹²¹

Again, this ties back to the fundamental distinction between symbolic and utilitarian systems of value:

Such as it is, our culture is haunted and jammed by this gigantic, petrified, residual instance: by means of an escalation of language it attempts to reduce a tendential decline in the rate of 'communication'. Nothing happens. Just as every commodity, that is to say, everything produced under the sign of the law of value and equivalence, is an *irreducible residue* that comes to bar social relations, so every word, every term, and every phoneme produced and not symbolically destroyed accumulates like the repressed, weighs down on us with all the abstraction of dead language.¹²²

This separation surfaces time and again: Baudrillard writes in *Pact* that real-time communication, in particular the news media, is composed of language that is merely

¹¹⁸ Baudrillard, *Conspiracy*, 109.

¹¹⁹ Baudrillard, *Illusion*, 88.

¹²⁰ Baudrillard, *Transparency*, 58-59. Baudrillard relates his ideas on the banality of everyday life to Heidegger's assertion that the banality is nothing short of a second Fall of humanity. See Baudrillard, *Ecstasy*, 84 and Baudrillard, *Pact*, 25.

¹²¹ Baudrillard, *Shadow*, 99-100. Emphasis in original.

¹²² Baudrillard, *Symbolic*, 202. Emphasis in original.

instrumental, that which ‘signifies only what it signifies’.¹²³ The media are thus in the process of continually eroding the symbolic, enchanted dimensions of language: ‘Here again, we have the phantasm of materialising all that is parable, myth, fable and metaphor’.¹²⁴ Following Marshall McLuhan, Baudrillard argues that this is built into the very form of the media: ‘The mass media are anti-mediatory and intransitive. They fabricate non-communication – this is what characterises them, if one agrees to define communication as an exchange, as a reciprocal space of speech and a response, and thus of a responsibility’.¹²⁵ Thus language exists on two discrete levels, the functional and the *poetic*. He writes, ‘The model of a symbolic exchange also exists within the field of language, something like the core of a political anti-economy, a site of the extermination of value and law: poetic language’,¹²⁶ and later writes of the poetic in revolutionary terms, as do many in the discourse of reenchantment: ‘The poetic is the insurrection of language against its own terms’.¹²⁷

In this elevation of poetic or non-operational language as potentially revolutionary, Baudrillard reveals again his well-hidden but undeniable affinity with Romanticism, as Jerome J. McGann reminds us, ‘This idea that poetry, or even consciousness, can set one free of the ruins of history and culture is the grand illusion of every Romantic poet’.¹²⁸ Terry Eagleton likewise reminds us, ‘Few words are more offensive to literary ears than “use”, evoking as it does paperclips and hairdryers. The Romantic opposition to the utilitarian of capitalism has made “use” an unusable word: for the aesthetes, the glory of art is its utter uselessness’.¹²⁹ Baudrillard proposes other avenues of resistant language. He sees human speech as an enchanted form, just as poetic language is: ‘It is the frayed space of the symbolic exchange of speech – ephemeral, mortal: a speech that is not reflected on the Platonic screen of the media. Institutionalised by reproduction, reduced to a spectacle, this speech is expiring’.¹³⁰ In a novel extension to this, Baudrillard writes in praise of another form of unofficial, symbolic language as part of his critique of the contemporary urban experience, which he sees increasingly dehumanising: ‘The urban city is also a neutralised,

¹²³ Baudrillard, *Pact*, 30.

¹²⁴ Baudrillard, *Pact*, 69.

¹²⁵ Baudrillard, *Critique*, 169.

¹²⁶ Baudrillard, *Symbolic*, 195.

¹²⁷ Baudrillard, *Symbolic*, 198.

¹²⁸ Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 137.

¹²⁹ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 208

¹³⁰ Baudrillard, *Critique*, 176-177.

homogenised space, a space where indifference, the segregation of urban ghettos, and the downgrading of districts, races, and certain age groups are on the increase. In short, it is the cut-up space of distinctive signs'.¹³¹ Baudrillard refers throughout his work to the practice of graffiti as a means of humanising the modern city, writing for example, 'Graffiti covers every subway map in New York, just as the Czechs changed the names of the streets in Prague to disconcert the Russians: guerrilla action'.¹³² In *Simulacra and Simulation*, (hereafter *Simulacra*, 1981)¹³³, Baudrillard compares graffiti in the subways to 'Symbolic ritual of incision and marks'¹³⁴ and makes explicit a theme in many of his works by writing, 'Only the wounded body exists symbolically'.¹³⁵ Here Baudrillard recalls forcefully Michel De Certeau's enigmatic statement, 'Haunted places are the only ones people can live in'.¹³⁶ This hell of the same is tied strongly to the disillusion of the symbolic order; however, the existence of resistant languages like speech, poetry and graffiti, a form of unofficial, unregulated language, points to the continuous presence of the enchanted world of the symbolic. Despite this pessimistic assessment of contemporary media culture, Baudrillard's thought always leaves room for the symbolic to penetrate, or at least become visible though the larger culture. The same is true of Baudrillard's philosophy of history and the final element in Baudrillard's work that is important to thinking thick reenchantment can be found buried within his conception of history, which reverses and undermines the strength of the subtraction stories.

The End (or the Impossibility) of History

History's domain was the memorable, the totality of events whose consequences would be lastingly apparent, And thus inseparably, history was knowledge that would endure and aid in understanding, at least in part, what was to come ... With the destruction of history, contemporary events retreat into a remote and fabulous realm of unverifiable stories, unchecked statistics, and untenable reasoning.

Guy Debord¹³⁷

The end of history is a common theme in Baudrillard's work, the conviction that a unified and unifying collective narrative of the world is no longer possible, that history and

¹³¹ Baudrillard, *Symbolic*, 76.

¹³² Baudrillard, *Symbolic*, 81. His first analysis of graffiti, as is true of many things, comes when he faced the Events of May from his perch at Nanterre: 'The real revolutionary media during May were the walls and their speech, the silk-screen posters and the hand-painted notices, the street where speech began and was exchanged'. Baudrillard, *Critique*, 176-177.

¹³³ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1981).

¹³⁴ Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, 112.

¹³⁵ Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, 114. He calls back to archaic societies with this image of the marked body: 'The savages knew how to use the whole body ... in tattooing, torture, initiation – sexuality was only one of the possible metaphors of symbolic exchange, neither the most significant, nor the most prestigious, as it has become for us in its obsessional and realistic reference, thanks to its organic and functional character'. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, 115.

¹³⁶ De Certeau, *Practice I*, 108.

¹³⁷ Guy Debord, *Comments on Society of the Spectacle*, trans. by Malcolm Imrie (Verso: London, 1988), 15-16.

memory have been rendered problematic by the technologies and mediations of religious modernity. In this he offers a reversal of the triumphalist narratives of modernity, which argue that modernity has brought to an end the struggles of history by realising its promise. For Baudrillard, the continuation of history as we have known it is impossible: 'Here at the summit of history, dismantled by its very violence, all is calm and spectral like a piece of waste ground in November'.¹³⁸ Baudrillard's conception of history has been controversial and considerably misunderstood. It is also, given our current concerns, one of the more intriguing elements of Baudrillard's theory, as Arthur Kroker writes: 'If Baudrillard can be a radical empiricist of the new material world of techno-culture, it is because a greater, more daring, historical vision is at work in his thought'.¹³⁹ As with so many of his ideas – and this is both his great strength and his great weakness – the conception of the end or impossibility of history appears at first glance to be entirely counterintuitive, if not simply nonsensical. In *Passwords*, Baudrillard writes:

My hypothesis is that we have already passed the point of irreversibility; that we are already in an exponential, unlimited form in which everything develops in the void, to infinity, without any possibility of reapprehending it in a human dimension; in which we are losing the memory of the past, the projection of the future and the possibility of integrating that future into a present action. We might be said already to be in an abstract, disembodied state where things continue by mere inertia and become simulacra of themselves, without our being able to put an end to them ... Admittedly, this assures them of an existence and a kind of immortality and eternity – that of the clone, of a clone universe. The problem raised by history is not that it might have come to an end, as Fukuyama says, but rather that it will have no end – and hence no longer any finality, any purpose.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Baudrillard, *Cool I*, 135. It should be noted that Baudrillard is not alone in his conception of the end of history; indeed, it is a popular theme in the postmodern turn. Citing a few of what could be many examples will help place Baudrillard's thinking in a larger context. Jean-François Lyotard writes: 'Never, in human societies, has there been so much talking as today. We are so happy to dispose of these means of communicating that you would think it was above all a question of making sure they're really there. The message, that is to say, the information that answers a question, is pretty much neglected. On all the supporting devices, there is an abundance of false questions, the ones everyone knows or whose answers can be guessed. We don't inform, we reassure: oh yeah, that's just what I thought. The opposite of intriguing. We're starting to get bored. We dream of being upset. We wait for an event'. Jean-François Lyotard, *Postmodern Fables*, trans. by Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 38. Gianni Vattimo writes also of the breakdown of history: 'This dissolution of history means, first and foremost, the breakdown of its unity, and not that it has simply come to an end ... thanks to the use of new means of communication (especially television), everything tends to flatten out at the level of contemporaneity and simultaneity, thus producing a de-historicisation of experience'. Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 8-10. Finally, Slavoj Žižek writes, mirroring Baudrillard's position closely, 'today, we are approaching a kind of 'end of time': the self-propelling explosive spiral of global capitalism does seem to point to a moment of (social, ecological, even subjective) collapse, in which total dynamism, frantic activity, will coincide with a deeper immobility. History will be abolished in the eternal present of multiple narrativisations'. Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003), 134.

¹³⁹ Arthur Kroker, *The Possessed Individual: Technology and the French Postmodern* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 58.

¹⁴⁰ Baudrillard, *Passwords*, 56-57. Baudrillard is here referring to Francis Fukuyama's best-selling book *The End of History and the Last Man*, which argues that the triumph of liberal democracy allows us to ask the question of Universal History, posed originally by Kant and first answered by Hegel, once again. Fukuyama bravely answers the question by restating a classical and uncritical subtraction story, writing that 'there would be no further

Echoing Marx while refuting him, Baudrillard laments, 'we are weighed down by a hole in our memories, weighed down by the retrospective emptiness of our history'.¹⁴¹ For Baudrillard the end of history is twofold: firstly, the contemporary Western world is so banal and has done such a thorough job in absorbing and neutralising any dissenting voices that it has entered a phase where significant historical events can no longer take place, and, secondly, history is being rewritten and thus recreated in a fashion quite different from cultural memory. In concert with Hervieu-Léger, Baudrillard places much of the blame for this loss of collective narrative on the proliferation of the mass media and the rapid spread of information. What is being lost is cultural memory, the ability of culture to create and maintain coherent narratives that give order and sense to the world. This loss is the natural consequence of a world in which events in history are instantly over-exposed, over-examined, over-determined and over-analysed, a view of the world Baudrillard captures with the phrase 'a microscopic pornography'.¹⁴² Baudrillard asserts: 'No human language can withstand the speed of light. No event can withstand being beamed across the whole planet'.¹⁴³ For Baudrillard, this end is the fate of history when everything arrives pre-digested by the news media, which is nothing more than 'a gigantic machine for producing the event as sign ... in short, for producing non-events'.¹⁴⁴ In this, he is unequivocal: 'History in real time is CNN, instant news, which is the exact opposite of history'.¹⁴⁵ Here is it essential to recall that whatever is created as a sign is, in Baudrillard's thought, reified. He makes this point in precise relation to the symbolic: 'There is a profound incompatibility between real time and the symbolic rule of exchange. What governs the sphere of communication (the interface, immediacy, the abolition of time and distance) has no meaning in the sphere of exchange'.¹⁴⁶

progress in the development of underlying principles and institutions, because all the really big questions had been settled', settled by what he sees as the universal triumph of democracy. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 2006), xii.

¹⁴¹ Baudrillard, *Illusion*, 42. This passage recalls Marx's oft-quoted words from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: 'The legacy of the dead generations weighs like an alp upon the brains of the living'. Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, trans. by Eden and Cedar Paul (London: George Allen Unwin, Ltd., 1926), 23.

¹⁴² Baudrillard, *Ecstasy*, 21.

¹⁴³ Baudrillard, *Screened*, 2.

¹⁴⁴ Baudrillard, *Impossible*, 132.

¹⁴⁵ Baudrillard, *Illusion*, 90.

¹⁴⁶ Baudrillard, *Perfect*, 31.

In addition to this ever-encroaching loss of memory, Baudrillard argues that history is being rewritten in such a way that integrates it into the all-consuming code of Integral Reality, something he calls ‘Operational Whitewash’:

A mania for trials is taking hold of us in recent times, together with a mania for responsibility, precisely at the point when this latter is becoming increasingly hard to pin down. We are looking to remake a clean history, to whitewash all the abominations ... which consists in reviewing everything, rewriting everything, restoring everything, face-lifting everything, to produce, as it seems, in a burst of paranoia a perfect set of accounts at the end of the century, a universally perfect balance sheet ... all that has happened in this century in terms of progress, liberation, revolution and violence is about to be revised for the better.¹⁴⁷

This rewriting is both dishonest and simply ignorant of the shadows of recent history; it is, for Baudrillard, nothing short of a betrayal of authentic cultural memory. To this closed system of history, Baudrillard proffers the concept of *the event*, which functions like symbolic exchange as the enchanted other in the code of political economy.

The Elusive Event

Because history itself haunts modern society like a spectre, pseudo-histories are constructed at every level of consumption of life in order to preserve the threatened equilibrium of present frozen time.

Guy Debord¹⁴⁸

For Baudrillard, the event is an elusive category, one tied up with the symbolic, the end of history, and the move toward Integral Reality. He writes, ‘This world order is aiming at a definitive non-event. It is in some ways the end of history ... through preventive terror, a counter-terror that precludes every possible event’.¹⁴⁹ What constitutes an event for Baudrillard is never a simple matter, made all the more difficult by the slipperiness of his terminology. On the one hand, he uses ‘event’ to describe ordinary occurrences, as in this passage from the first volume of *Cool Memories*: ‘The hysterical obsession with events is itself a result of the end of history. Since there is no longer any history, events should follow one another in endless succession. Since there are no longer any causes, effects must be produced without any break in continuity’.¹⁵⁰ On the other hand, he intends ‘event’ to signify something more than this:

When it comes to world events, we had seen quite a few. From the death of Diana to the World Cup. And violent, real events, from wars right through to genocides. Yet, when it comes to symbolic events on a world scale – that is to say not just events

¹⁴⁷ Baudrillard, *Illusion*, 11-13.

¹⁴⁸ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. unknown (Detroit: Black and Red, 1967), section 200. Emphasis in original.

¹⁴⁹ Baudrillard, *Shadow*, 115.

¹⁵⁰ Baudrillard, *Cool I*, 37.

that gain worldwide coverage, but events that represent a setback for globalisation itself – we have had none.¹⁵¹

He defines the meaningful historical event in symbolic terms: ‘in the banal context of social and personal life these excessive events are the equivalent of the excess of signifier in language for Lévi-Strauss: namely, that which founds it as symbolic function’.¹⁵² These ruptural events are few and far between, though their continued possibility allows us another glimpse of the enchanted other, ‘That which in history is irreducible to history’.¹⁵³ In the essay ‘Event and Non-Event’, he explicitly identifies event and symbolic exchange as parallel structures:

Policing the event is essentially the job of information itself. Information is the most effective mechanism for the derealisation of history. Just as political economy is a gigantic mechanism for the fabrication of value – the fabrication of signs of wealth, but not of wealth itself – thus the entire system of information is an immense machine made to produce events as signs, as values exchangeable on the universal market of ideologies, of spectacle, catastrophe, etc., in short, for the production of non-events.¹⁵⁴

On the other hand, in the same essay, he nonetheless affirms the possibility of ruptural, symbolic events:

But the end of history is not the last word on history. Since, against the background of perpetual non-event, another type of event emerges. Ruptures, unexpected events, events that are unclassifiable in terms of history, outside the logic of history – events that are generated against their own image, against their own simulacrum ... They are not events *in* history, but *beyond* history, beyond the end of history. They are events in the system that ends history. They are the convulsion within history.¹⁵⁵

Such ruptural events, as is true of all things symbolic, are profoundly threatening: ‘We must retain the event’s radical definition and its impact on the imagination. It is characterised, in a paradoxical way, in terms of the uncanny. It is the irruption of something improbable and impossible as well as disquietingly familiar’.¹⁵⁶ Symbolic events are what constitute, in Baudrillard’s thinking, authentic history:

Ruptural events, unforeseeable events, unclassifiable in terms of history, outside of historical reason, events which occur against their own image, against their own simulacrum ... that break the tedious sequence of current events as relayed by the media, but which are not, for all that, a reappearance of history or a Real irrupting in

¹⁵¹ Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Requiem for the Twin Towers*, trans. by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2002), 3.

¹⁵² Baudrillard, *Pact*, 134.

¹⁵³ Baudrillard, *Paroxysm*, 113.

¹⁵⁴ Baudrillard, *Shadow*, 117.

¹⁵⁵ Baudrillard, *Shadow*, 121.

¹⁵⁶ Baudrillard, *Shadow*, 125.

the heart of the Virtual ... They do not constitute events *in* history, but *beyond* history, beyond its end; they constitute events in a system that has put an end to history.¹⁵⁷

It is possible to trace the history of the late twentieth century and its relation to the elusive event by paying close attention to these elements across his work. A brief look at a number of important moments in recent world history will serve to flesh out Baudrillard's conceptualisation of the event. We will take the 'Events of May', a profoundly influential force in Baudrillard's work, as a first example. The student uprising in France in 1968, which included the Nanterre campus where Baudrillard was teaching, left a lasting impact on Baudrillard, as it did on many other French intellectuals. Years later, Baudrillard writes in a melancholy, elegiac tone: 'What can one brandish today? No longer even the ruins of knowledge, of culture – the ruins themselves are defunct ... 1968 is dead, repeatable only as a phantasm of mourning'.¹⁵⁸ The Events themselves were, he judges, authentic history: 'The action of March 22 at Nanterre was symbolic because it was transgressive: at a given time in a given place, an act of radical rupture was invented'.¹⁵⁹

In contrast to this genuine historical event, Baudrillard considers the Vietnam War:

What meaning did this war have, and wasn't its unfolding a means of sealing the end of history in the decisive and culminating historic events of our era? Why did this war, so hard, so long, so ferocious, vanish from one day to the next as if by magic? ... If it had really signified the failure of the planetary strategy of the United States, it would necessarily have completely disrupted its internal balance and the American political system. Nothing of the sort occurred. Something else, then, took place. This war, at bottom was nothing but a crucial episode of peaceful coexistence. It marked the arrival of China to peaceful coexistence.¹⁶⁰

The next example marks a notorious episode in Baudrillard's career which demonstrates how consistently he is misread and misunderstood. His infamous series of essays – 'The Gulf War will not take place', 'The Gulf War: is it really taking place?' and 'The Gulf War did not take place' – written during the build-up, combat, and aftermath of the 1991 war in Iraq and Kuwait do not argue, as many people claimed they did, that the war would not happen, was not happening, or did not happen. This is Baudrillard as an obscurantist of the highest

¹⁵⁷ Baudrillard, *Pact*, 126. Emphasis in original.

¹⁵⁸ Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, 151. In the same work, he questions the outcome of the Events, writing 'we were trapped, we trapped ourselves, after 1968, into giving diplomas to everybody'. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, 156.

¹⁵⁹ Baudrillard, *Critique*, 174. Baudrillard's understanding of the Events as somehow enchanted is not an isolated case. Charles Taylor writes, 'In some respects, the actual goals which inspired the students' revolt of May 1968 in Paris, for all the borrowing of modernist forms from Situationism, Dada, Surrealism, avant-garde cinema, and the like, were closer to Schiller than to any twentieth-century writer'. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 497.

¹⁶⁰ Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, 36.

order. In reality, his argument here is two-fold: the Gulf War, being incredibly one-sided, was not properly a war and most people, as mere spectators, had no access to its reality but only to its flawed and repressive reproduction. It was, at best, an *illusive* event. On the first point, Baudrillard is unequivocal: 'But this is not a war, any more than 10,000 tonnes of bombs per day is sufficient to make it a war. Any more than the direct transmission by CNN of real time information is sufficient to authenticate a war'.¹⁶¹ For Baudrillard, this and all highly visible wars are without symbolic stakes or symbolic power. It was a 'dead war', a disenchanting media war 'stripped of its passions, its phantoms, its finery, its veils, its violence, its images ... and then reclothed by them with all the artifices of electronics, as though with a second skin'.¹⁶² This is the event as commodity, as sign, stripped of its essential reality by the reifying images generated by the media's witness. The amnesia that surrounds it is, in itself, a confirmation of its unreality: 'Overexposed to the media, underexposed to memory. Forgetting is built into the event itself in the profusion of information and details, just as obsolescence is built into the object in the profusion of useless accessories'.¹⁶³ On his second point, he would write in *The Illusion of the End* (hereafter *Illusion*, 1992):

The Gulf War and the events in Eastern Europe are among those quasi-unreal events which have less meaning in themselves than in the fact that they have put an end to things that long ago ceased to have meaning (communism in the Eastern bloc countries, the Cold War for the Gulf). In this sense, they are, after all, symptomatic, but ambiguous events – immediately credible (via the media), but fundamentally undecidable ... [they are part of] that set of objects which are unverifiable other than on the screens, which immediately degrade into news and are rapidly laundered and forgotten like any other spectacle.¹⁶⁴

Another roughly contemporary event to fall under Baudrillard's erasure is the end of the Cold War, as noted just above. Baudrillard argues, primarily in *Illusion*, that the events surrounding the end of the Cold War did not represent an inbreaking of history, merely a watered-down repetition of another history, that of the Western democracies. It is an *illusive* rather than a symbolic event. He writes, tongue firmly in cheek:

Hooray, history is back from the dead! The great event of the end of the century is under way ... How can its reality and vitality be doubted when such events are taking place before our eyes? ... Because the enthralling thing about these events in Eastern

¹⁶¹ Baudrillard, *Gulf*, 61.

¹⁶² Baudrillard, *Gulf*, 64. Baudrillard's writings on the non-history of the simulacrum stage of history have often been interpreted as callous, but it is important to note that he writes, with no qualification, 'war is no less atrocious for being only a simulacrum – the flesh suffers just the same, and the dead and former combatants are worth as much as in other wars'. Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, 37-38.

¹⁶³ Baudrillard, *Illusion*, 63.

¹⁶⁴ Baudrillard, *Illusion*, 54-55.

Europe is not to see them meekly coming to the aid of an ailing democracy by bringing it fresh energy (and new markets), but to see the telescoping of two specific patterns of the end of history: the one where it ends deep-frozen in the concentration camps and the other where, by contrast, it ends in the total, centrifugal expansion of communication. In each case, it is a final solution.¹⁶⁵

Thus we are again denied an authentic event, and are offered instead merely the further expansion of the totalising system of signs, part of the reversal that marks the central argument of *Illusion*: ‘This confused state of thawing relations, of rehabilitation, of liberal redemption and support for human rights is part of a reheating of history, not a revolutionary ferment’.¹⁶⁶ What we see is simply the spread of the culture of simulation to new areas. This represents also the movement of Integral Reality into the past, another whitewash under a different name, an unreal resuscitation of events, the movement in Eastern Europe toward the hell of the same already operational in other places:

Even more ironic is the fact that we are not at all threatened by the totalitarian (Stalinist) rewriting of the past, but the democratic rewriting of history: the very images of Stalin and Lenin swept away, streets and cities renamed, statues scattered, soon none of all that will have existed. Yet another ruse of history – not the last but, as ever, the best.¹⁶⁷

Roughly ten years later, on 11 September 2001, Baudrillard and his philosophy of history collided with a symbolic event, an event outside of the integral history where all events are reified as signs. He writes of the attacks on the United States as an ‘exceptional, earth-shattering event’¹⁶⁸ and also of ‘that sense of exaltation and horror felt in the radical event.’¹⁶⁹ In *The Spirit of Terrorism* (hereafter *Terrorism*, 2002), published a scant year after the events, Baudrillard spares no room for equivocation: ‘Whereas we were dealing before with an uninterrupted profusion of banal images and a seamless show of sham events, the

¹⁶⁵ Baudrillard, *Illusion*, 29.

¹⁶⁶ Baudrillard, *Illusion*, 36.

¹⁶⁷ Baudrillard, *Illusion*, 43. He ties his critique to other specific incidents in the same broad movement. He writes of the staged ‘massacre’ in the Romanian village of Timișoara, ‘the artificial heaps of corpses will have been of some use, all the same ... Never again shall we be able to look at a television picture in good faith, and this is the finest collective demystification we have ever known’. Baudrillard, *Illusion*, 60.

¹⁶⁸ Baudrillard, *Pact*, 117. Incidentally, the World Trade Centre towers in New York make a number of appearances in *Symbolic* and in other places as ‘the visible sign of the closure of a system in the vertigo ... They ignore the other buildings, they are not of the same race, they no longer challenge them nor compare themselves to them; the two towers reflect one another and reach their highest point in the prestige of similitude’. Baudrillard, *Symbolic*, 70. Years later, he writes of the towers themselves as singular objects: ‘We can say that the World Trade Centre alone expresses the spirit of New York City in its most radical form: verticality ... They are the city itself and, at the same time, the vehicle by means of which the city as a historical form has been liquidated – repetition, cloning’. Jean Baudrillard and Jean Nouvel, *The Singular Objects of Architecture*, trans. by Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 38.

¹⁶⁹ Baudrillard, *Terrorism*, 130-131.

terrorist act in New York has resuscitated both images and events'.¹⁷⁰ This then is an event in the true spirit of symbolic exchange:

Here, then, it is all about death, not only about the violent irruption of death in real time – 'live' so to speak – but the irruption of a death which is far more than real: a death which is symbolic and artificial – that is to say, the absolute, irrevocable event. This is the spirit of terrorism ... Defy the system by a gift to which it cannot respond except by its own death and its own collapse.¹⁷¹

He would write of the day two years later as 'The only event worthy of the name, standing out against the non-event to which we have been condemned by the hegemony of world order that nothing could disturb'.¹⁷² It is also in relation to the World Trade Centre towers that he makes one of his most virulent critiques of contemporary society, underlining the terms of his renegotiation of death in *Symbolic*: 'In terms of collective drama, we can say that the horror for the 4,000 victims of dying in those towers was inseparable from the horror of living in them – the horror of living and working in sarcophagi of concrete and steel'.¹⁷³ Provocatively, Baudrillard here collapses life and death into a single order by erasing the separation between those who died unwillingly in the towers and those who willingly enacted a living death on a daily basis while within their walls. In this, he is pointing to the extent to which everything is taken into and neutralised within the endless circle of signs in commodity culture.

The second United States-led war in Iraq, still being waged at the time this thesis is being written, on the other hand, represented to Baudrillard a return to the business of non-history as normal, a war 'which has been so predicted, programmed, anticipated, prescribed and modelled that it has exhausted all its possibilities before even taking place. There is no longer anything of the event in it'.¹⁷⁴ He writes as early as 2003 of the putative War on Terror as a non-event: 'There is nothing event-like about it. Nothing about it betrays the exaltation and the experience of dream experienced in the radical events of September 11th, which resembles the feeling of the sublime that Kant talks about. The non-event of the war only leaves us with a feeling of mystification and nausea'.¹⁷⁵ It is, if nothing else, part of the whitewash of history, 'it is in fact retrospective, its aim being to defuse the terrorist event of 11 September, the shadow of which hovers over the whole strategy of planetary

¹⁷⁰ Baudrillard, *Terrorism*, 27.

¹⁷¹ Baudrillard, *Terrorism*, 17.

¹⁷² Baudrillard, *Shadow*, 113.

¹⁷³ Baudrillard, *Terrorism*, 45.

¹⁷⁴ Baudrillard, *Pact*, 130.

¹⁷⁵ Baudrillard, *Shadow*, 125.

control'.¹⁷⁶ Baudrillard uses the opportunity to underline his original point in no uncertain terms: 'The virtuality of war is not, then, a metaphor. It is the literal passage from reality into fiction, or rather the immediate metamorphosis of the real into fiction. The real is now merely the asymptotic horizon of the virtual'.¹⁷⁷ Again this is the event subsumed into its image, into its official version about which the public is *informed* rather than educated.

As is the case with symbolic exchange, there is a tension throughout Baudrillard's work in relation to the event. He writes of the many non-events that are served, pre-digested, by the mass media and of the true event as a rarity, however, late in his career, he said, 'I think that in every building, every street, there is something that creates an event, and whatever creates an event is unintelligible. This can also occur in situations or in individual behaviour'.¹⁷⁸ He writes of Duchamp's act of making an ordinary urinal into a work of art, 'The event itself is unique, singular, and that's the end of it. It's ephemeral'.¹⁷⁹ Again, what Baudrillard is concerned with in the symbolic or ruptural event are isolated moments which the integrated, endlessly circulating code of simulational culture is unable to integrate, an analogue to symbolic exchange in the realm of history. Here again Baudrillard provides us with ways to further think reenchantment, this time in the field of history and the effects of the mass media on that history.

Symbolic Exchange and Reenchantment (Two)

Sheer pointlessness is a deeply subversive affair.

Terry Eagleton¹⁸⁰

To say that the spectre of the symbolic haunts the whole of Baudrillard's corpus would be to risk a considerable understatement; indeed, in his theory the symbolic is a constant, if often scarcely visible, enchanted other lying in wait outside of the system of signs. Thus far, we have confined the discussion to the most important works in relation to symbolic exchange. However, the presence of symbolic exchange hangs over the whole of his writing. It is important to point out that many of Baudrillard's best-known ideas owe their existence to

¹⁷⁶ Baudrillard, *Pact*, 119. His ambivalence about the event and its aftermath is mirrored by Žižek, who writes, 'far from rousing the United States from its ideological sleep, September 11 was used as a sedative enabling the hegemonic ideology to "renormalise" itself: the period after the Vietnam War was one long, sustained trauma for the hegemonic ideology – it had to defend itself against critical doubts; the gnawing worm was continuously at work, and couldn't simply be suppressed: every return to innocence was immediately experienced as a fake ... until September 11, when the United States was a victim, and thus allowed to reassert the innocence of its mission. In short, far from awakening us, September 11 served to put us to sleep again, to continue our dream after the nightmare of the last decades'. Žižek, *Puppet*, 166.

¹⁷⁷ Baudrillard, *Pact*, 124.

¹⁷⁸ Baudrillard and Nouvel, *Singular*, 16.

¹⁷⁹ Baudrillard and Nouvel, *Singular*, 22.

¹⁸⁰ Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Penguin, 2003), 39.

the unspoken influence of the narrative implied by symbolic exchange. A few comments should suffice. In *Transparency*, and at various points in his career, in moments collected under the title of *The Conspiracy of Art*, he laments the end of art as a ‘symbolic pact’ and of the artwork as a singular object in the age of reproduction and banality.¹⁸¹ In *Seduction* (where, we should remember, Nicholas Gane identifies reenchantment in Baudrillard’s work), he writes of the women’s movement, ‘They do not understand *that seduction represents mastery over the symbolic universe, while power represents only mastery of the real universe*’,¹⁸² and lovingly describes gambling in telling language: ‘What is fascinating about a miraculous win at the gaming tables is not the money: it is the resumption of ties with these other, symbolic circuits of unmediated and immoderate bidding, with concern the *seduction of the order of things*’.¹⁸³ Seduction in Baudrillard’s work is more or less directly equated with the symbolic and it should be pointed out that seduction, over and against the overt sexualisation of the culture, ‘is the world’s elementary dynamic ... the symbolic equilibrium is founded on these relations of seduction and playfulness’.¹⁸⁴ In *The Ecstasy Of Communication* (hereafter *Ecstasy*, 1987), he likewise equates reversibility, the defining feature of symbolic exchange, with both seduction and magic.¹⁸⁵ In *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (hereafter *Consumer*, 1970), he writes of the ‘*breakdown of the ambivalent logic of desire and hence of the loss of the symbolic function*’,¹⁸⁶ and states bluntly, ‘In the symbolic dimension, gold and money are *excrement*. It is the same with objectivised time’.¹⁸⁷ As we saw above, his precession of simulacra is tied absolutely to symbolic exchange, which thus plays an important role in what is arguably Baudrillard’s best-known and best-loved theme, that of the disappearance in stages of the real in the face of overwhelming mediation. Far removed from the order of the symbolic, contemporary culture is now at the stage of the simulacrum, where the logic of simulation permeates everything. The simulacrum is above all deceptive: ‘*Thus the simulacrum is not that which hides the truth, but that which hides the absence of truth*’.¹⁸⁸ Echoing a respect for mystery and secrecy that is present in much of the discourse on reenchantment, Baudrillard argues that, in all of this, the real, as opposed to the reified, remains the ‘true mystery’.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸¹ Baudrillard, *Transparency*, 14-15.

¹⁸² Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 8. Emphasis in original.

¹⁸³ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 143. Emphasis in original.

¹⁸⁴ Baudrillard, *Ecstasy*, 59.

¹⁸⁵ Baudrillard, *Ecstasy*, 71.

¹⁸⁶ Baudrillard, *Consumer*, 177. Emphasis in original.

¹⁸⁷ Baudrillard, *Consumer*, 155. Emphasis in original.

¹⁸⁸ Baudrillard, *Pact*, 32.

¹⁸⁹ Baudrillard, *Impossible*, 98.

Symbolic exchange thus forms the heart of Baudrillard's work, to an extent that one is forced to wonder whether or not his extension of Mauss' ideas was his singular moment of innovation and if this single-minded devotion to such a simple concept undermines his argument about the complexity of culture. This also begs the question of whether or not the whole of his corpus would collapse if one were to undermine Mauss' arguments about the existence and character of symbolic exchange, which relied rather heavily on the work of Bronisław Malinowski and others, the accuracy of which has long been debated.¹⁹⁰ Impossible exchange offers a way around this problem, as it plays a very similar role to symbolic exchange but is built on a very basic, if still debatable, philosophical statement that is not dependent on the historicity of Mauss' claims. There is a tension, then, in reading Baudrillard. On the one hand, his work appears as an brilliant if impenetrable moulding of the logic of symbolic exchange into a challenging and coherent theory of contemporary consumer culture. On the other hand, his work appears as a three-decades-long repetition of a single idea that is, frankly, highly derivative. It is similar to points made by Martin Heidegger and Nietzsche, among the loudest voices in a crowded room, before him. Perhaps this point was made best, if in an oblique way, at the very dawn of the modern age by Hamlet when confronted by his father's ghost. He tells his only steady friend: 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy'.¹⁹¹ Martin Harries, it should be noted, also draws this conclusion: 'Hamlet is an image of reenchanted modernity ... one that locates a troubled nexus at the heart of modernity – the phantasmagorical intersection of antiquated but powerful authority, the supernatural, and, in the mines, the material base of a commodity culture'.¹⁹² Baudrillard, if nothing else, suggests strongly that such a conception of the world is indeed a through-line in modernity, dating back centuries. Even though it possible to seriously question Baudrillard's conclusions, as I have briefly done, it is essential to keep in mind that, as Daniel Pals has it, 'In religion, as in other fields, a suggestive and original theory can, even in failure, stimulate new inquiry or reformulate problems in such a way as to promote fruitful new understandings'.¹⁹³ The suggestive theory to which Baudrillard returns time and again by different trajectories is the idea that *nothing*, no system, no world, no text, no

¹⁹⁰ Mauss, in fact, wrote *The Gift* purely from the ethnographic reports of others, composing a foundational work of comparative anthropology without ever leaving his flat in Paris.

¹⁹¹ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 96.

¹⁹² Martin Harries, *Scare Quotes from Shakespeare: Marx, Keynes, and the Language of Reenchantment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 116.

meaning, is ever *fully closed*. In short, nothing is ever as simple as it seems. What we are left with is a world composed of infinite layers of complexity ruled by a paradoxical logic.

Baudrillard approaches this inherent incompleteness from a number of different angles, all of which offer fruitful ways of further exploring the idea of thick reenchantment. In addition to the idea of evil, he writes of what he calls ‘singular objects’, examples of which include his frequent references to the World Trade Centre and the Beaubourg museum in Paris, though he also writes, ‘Often it’s in the poorest cities that you find spontaneous acts of creation. These can be considered magnificent architectural achievements, even when they use corrugated sheet metal or pieces of rag’.¹⁹⁴ Baudrillard reconciles this tension slightly by writing in praise of ‘the pure architectural object ... an object beyond the control of architects, which roundly repudiates the city and its uses, repudiates the interests of the collectivity and individuals and persists in its own madness’.¹⁹⁵ In a conversation with the architect Jean Nouvel, he stated,

A successful object, in the sense that it exists outside its own reality, is an object that creates a dualistic relation, a relation that can emerge through diversion, contradiction, destabilisation, but which effectively brings the so-called reality of a world and its radical illusion face-to-face ... to create something like an inverse universe, you must completely destroy that sense of fullness, that sense of ripe visibility, that oversignification we impose on things.¹⁹⁶

He speaks also of the loss of ‘this secret that works of art and creative effort might reveal and which is something more than aesthetics’,¹⁹⁷ a secret that runs counter to the total visibility, the obscenity, as he terms it, of contemporary culture. The singular object in art is thus another vehicle for the fragmentary and momentary rupture of the closed system of signs that Baudrillard’s thought allows for, that it indeed relies on: ‘A work of art is a singularity, and all these singularities can create holes, interstices, voids, et cetera, in the metastatic fullness of culture’.¹⁹⁸ Like symbolic events, symbolic objects are few and far between, however, it is in the light of such singularity that he offers one of his most

¹⁹³ Daniel L. Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 10.

¹⁹⁴ Baudrillard and Nouvel, *Singular*, 51-52.

¹⁹⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1986), 17.

¹⁹⁶ Baudrillard and Nouvel, *Singular*, 9-11. It is not always the beautiful objects that become singular, nor is singularity a matter of intent, as Baudrillard argues, ‘at first we don’t know whether an object will become singular or not ... Sometimes even circumstances, whether they’re historical, sociological, or whatever, trigger an object’s singular becoming’. Baudrillard and Nouvel, *Singular*, 68.

¹⁹⁷ Baudrillard and Nouvel, *Singular*, 19.

¹⁹⁸ Baudrillard and Nouvel, *Singular*, 21.

optimistic, even utopian statements: 'I'm an idealist, I still believe we can change the world through architecture'.¹⁹⁹ Echoing this, Gane concludes of Baudrillard's work on seduction:

Western history is thus not to be understood as a movement towards the complete disenchantment and elimination of all symbolic forms, for since the symbolic order exists outside of the order of value, as its radical other, it can never be fully removed from the world by this order ... symbolic forms, though reduced to a subordinate position within contemporary culture, continue to haunt this world in the form of its other. This fact is crucial as it effectively means that forms of enchantment and re-enchantment are, for Baudrillard, never completely excluded from Western culture, and may even be reactivated to destabilise capitalist modernity.²⁰⁰

In the final analysis, Baudrillard never totally closes the possibility of symbolic exchange or of the ruptural event; indeed, the very core of his work argues that such total closure is impossible. Symbolic exchange remains a threat. In terms of concrete illustrations, one of Baudrillard's most frequent examples of symbolic exchange, and one of the most helpful, from the perspective of the study of religion, is that of terrorism as opposed to the growing totality of global capitalism. He writes in *Gulf*:

The crucial stake, the decisive stake in this whole affair is the consensual reduction of Islam to the global order. Not to destroy but to domesticate it, by whatever means: modernisation, even military, politicisation, nationalism, democracy, the Rights of Man, anything at all to electrocute the resistances and the symbolic challenge that Islam represents for the entire West.²⁰¹

Over the decades, Baudrillard makes frequent explicit reference to the potent symbolic power of terrorism, echoing points made by others in the discourse of reenchantment and Slavoj Žižek's enigmatic phrase, 'the terrorism that characterises every authentic ethical stance'.²⁰² What terrorism offers are momentary contestations of a monolithic modernity and glimpses of alternatives: 'Terrorist acts, like the stars, "flicker": they do not enlighten; they do not radiate a continuous, white light, but an intermittent, cold light ... they fascinate by the suddenness of their appearance and the immanence of their

¹⁹⁹ Baudrillard and Nouvel, *Singular*, 53.

²⁰⁰ Gane, *Rationalisation*, 139.

²⁰¹ Baudrillard, *Gulf*, 85.

²⁰² Slavoj Žižek, *Did Someone Say Totalitarianism?: Five Interventions on the (Mis)Use of a Notion* (London: Verso, 2001), 91. Žižek writes of this same thing elsewhere, 'Today, we ultimately perceive as a threat to culture those who live their culture immediately, those who lack a distance toward it. Recall the outrage when, two years ago, the Taliban forces in Afghanistan destroyed the ancient Buddhist statues at Bamiyan: although none of us enlightened Westerners believe in the divinity of the Buddha, we were outraged because the Taliban Muslims did not show the appropriate respect for the "cultural heritage" of their own country and the entire world. Instead of believing through the other, like all people of culture, they really believed their own religion, and thus had no great sensitivity toward the cultural value of the monuments of other religions – to them, the Buddha statues were just fake idols, not "cultural treasures."' Žižek, *Puppet*, 7-8.

disappearance'.²⁰³ Writing of the *fatwa* on author Salman Rushdie, which he in other places refers to as evil (in his sense of the intelligence of evil), Baudrillard claims:

the Ayatollah has offered spectacular proof of how it is possible to overturn all existing power relations through the symbolic force of an utterance ... Terrorism ... is *par excellence* an act that punches just such a hole in a universe (ours) that is both artificial and artificially protected. Islam as a whole – Islam as it is, not the Islam of the Middle Ages: the Islam that has to be evaluated in *strategic* terms, not moral or religious ones – is in the process of creating a vacuum around the Western system ... and from time to time puncturing this system with a single act or utterance, so that all our values are suddenly engulfed by the void.²⁰⁴

It is here in particular, where Baudrillard is truly troubling, where his work offers a way to approach the particular problematic of the terrorism and violence that are generated by modernity.

He states his confidence in the existence of thought, action, and event outside of the Integral Reality in sufficient instances, and in sufficiently diverse ways, to undermine considerably his pessimism and his determinism. However, the singular object, symbolic exchange, the intelligence of evil are all ephemeral, momentary fissures in the reified screen of the world, not a coming revolution. Baudrillard's revolution is one of fragmented moments, not sweeping cultural changes. Andrew Koch and Rick Elmore identify this tendency in Baudrillard:

His pessimism about the future is not matched with a plan for action. Resistance is personal and private. It does not take the form of a coherent political movement. However, from his analysis it is clear that any collective political response would have to include a serious examination and rejection of consumer culture. This would mean a confrontation with the ethos of the tendencies of late industrial capitalism.²⁰⁵

In thick reenchantment, and in Baudrillard's radical thought, the enchanted and the disenchanted have always existed, and will always exist, *necessarily*, in a dialectical relationship. The dominant rationalised world is not, and can never be, fully disenchanted, for the symbolic will always exist as a threat, even during the accelerated drive for rationalisation within modernity. Symbolic exchange shares certain crucial commonalities with the diverse reenchantments of the last chapter: it is by definition a renegotiation of value; it draws at least some of its power from its relation with past forms of exchange in a

²⁰³ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 96.

²⁰⁴ Baudrillard, *Evil*, 84.

²⁰⁵ Andrew M. Koch and Rick Elmore, 'Simulation and Symbolic Exchange: Jean Baudrillard's Augmentation of Marx's Theory of Value', *Politics and Policy* 34, 3 (2006): 574.

way that borders on the religious; and it calls into question the foundations of the contemporary consumer culture. Baudrillard's work shares much with – and in fact has been an important influence on – the subset of re-enchantment that views technologies, in particular communications technologies, as sources of a dangerous dark magic. He states the case simply: 'If man is haunted by the evil genius of technology, which pushes him to the limits – and even beyond his capabilities – then technology is haunted by man, who identifies with it and projects all his passions into it'.²⁰⁶ Symbolic exchange also argues against any sort of sweeping liberatory postmodern consumerism as re-enchantment as argued influentially by A. Fuat Firat and Alladi Venkatesh,²⁰⁷ and underlines just how micro-emancipatory these practices truly are. Symbolic exchange shares with the critical strain of re-enchantment in that both seek to redefine the value of objects away from the narrow restrictions of market or use value, as Patrick Curry writes of what he calls 'genuine contemporary enchantment' (here understood as opposed to the false enchantments of the market and of technological spectacle) as 'literally useless'.²⁰⁸ Baudrillard's re-enchantment negates entirely many of the writers who claim to be identifying or demonstrating a genuine re-enchantment, in that so much of it is commodified and is part of the system of production and consumption, implicating it in the system of exchange determined by use and market value, something that is again underlined by the decidedly economic cast of some of the discourse, as epitomised by Thomas Moore's *The Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life*²⁰⁹ Again, Baudrillard's conception of the media would seriously question Christopher Partridge's optimistic claims that 'cyberspace has an anarchic dimension'.²¹⁰ Baudrillard's objection to this kind of thinking is readily apparent; the content of the media is less important than the media itself, or, in his words: 'the interactivity we're being offered will never- by a long chalk – be the equal of the interactivity we already suffer: the collective interpassivity which the other form merely prolongs with information and communications technologies'.²¹¹ Partridge perhaps foresees such an objection, as he writes of Baudrillard: 'if he is correct, disenchantment has been far more radical than Weber even envisaged. The

²⁰⁶ Baudrillard, *Screened*, 166.

²⁰⁷ A. Fuat Firat and Alladi Venkatesh, 'Liberatory Postmodernism and the Re-enchantment of Consumption', *Journal of Consumer Research* 22, 3 (December 1995): 239-267.

²⁰⁸ Patrick Curry, 'Magic vs. Enchantment', *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 14, 3 (1999): 409.

²⁰⁹ Thomas Moore, *The Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life* (Sydney: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996).

²¹⁰ Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, vol. 2: *Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralisation, Popular Culture, and Occulture* (London: T & T Clark International, 2005), 141.

²¹¹ Baudrillard, *Paroxysm*, 56-57.

collapse of the distinction between objects and their representations, between reality and unreality, has necessarily led to a profound erosion of meaning'.²¹²

Though Baudrillard does indeed describe a degree of dehumanising disenchantment that might have even surprised Weber, he also imagines a disenchantment that is not, and can never be, complete. Over and against complete disenchantment he places not only symbolic exchange but the ruptural event, the singular object, seduction, the intelligence of evil, poetic language, and radical thought. A close reading of his work leads us to the conclusion that symbolic exchange and ruptural events are possible, but elusive, momentary, and necessarily resistant within modernity. In his creation and use of these strategies, Baudrillard's revision of the modern narratives of history offers us a number of ways to further pursue the conception of thick reenchantment. This is also true of the larger context of religious modernity.

Jean Baudrillard and Religious Modernity

There have always been churches to hide the death of God, or to hide the fact that God was everywhere, which amounts to the same thing.

Jean Baudrillard²¹³

Religion is (tangentially) nowhere, or else it is everywhere, which in the final analysis adds up to exactly the same thing.

Danielle Hervieu-Léger²¹⁴

At this point, as a summation, we must pose a crucial question: what allows us to draw a connection between Hervieu-Léger's sociology of religious modernity and Baudrillard's symbolic exchange? Given that, to date, the academic study of religion has largely avoided Baudrillard and the implications of taking his work seriously, why turn to Baudrillard at all? First, a few brief comments on Baudrillard's interaction with religion are in order. Baudrillard writes comparatively little regarding religion, but this is not to say that his work is either alien to or unacquainted with religion or the religious. Baudrillard frequently resorts to religious language, or as Lissa McCullough notes, 'an inverted religious language', one that constitutes a 'thoroughly ironic mode'.²¹⁵ He employs any number of words borrowed loosely from any number of traditions, including enlightenment, worship, sacrilege, sacrifice, ecstasy, salvation, transcendence, imminence, suffering, dogma, and ritual, to name a few. Baudrillard's understanding of religion owes a great deal to that of

²¹² Partridge, *West II*, 143.

²¹³ Baudrillard, *Symbolic*, 19.

²¹⁴ Danièle Hervieu-Léger, 'Tradition, Innovation and Modernity: Research Notes', *Social Compass* 36, 1 (1989): 77.

²¹⁵ Lissa McCullough, 'Jean Baudrillard and the Death of God', *The Journal of Cultural and Religious Theory* 2, 3 (August 2001), <http://www.jcrt.org/archives/02.3/index.html?page=mccullough.shtml>. Accessed 12 September 2007.

Weber. He implies what Weber made specific, that the arrival of a particular sort of Christianity was a decisive step in the disenchantment of the world:

Christianity is thus on the hinge of a rupture of symbolic exchanges. The ideological form most appropriate to sustain the intensive rational exploitation of nature takes form within Christianity during a long transition: from the 13-14th century when work begins to be imposed as value, up to the 16th century when work is organized around its rational and continuous scheme of value – the capitalist productive economy, that secular generalisation of the Christian axiom about nature. But this revolution of the rational calculation of production which Weber noted is not the beginning; it is prefigured in the Christian rupture. Political economy is only a kind of actualisation of this break.²¹⁶

However, and by far, Baudrillard's most frequent reference to religion is to the death of God in a very Nietzschean manner, as is apparent in *Impossible*: 'It is only since God died that the destiny of the world has become our responsibility. Since we can now no longer be justified in another world, it has to be justified here and now'.²¹⁷ Elsewhere, he writes, 'The order of the world is always right – such is the judgment of God. For God has departed, but he has left his judgement behind, the way the Cheshire Cat left his grin'.²¹⁸ In *Symbolic*, he offers a discussion of the name of God as an anagram, a point he repeats in *Pact*: 'It is the same with Anagrams in language: the name of God is scattered through the poem; it now appears only fragmented, dismembered. It will never be revealed'.²¹⁹ This dispersion, we should remember, is the crucial transformation of religious modernity.

Against this, Baudrillard acknowledges the religious, even theological, implications of impossible exchange, which requires the presence of what looks to be a traditional monotheistic creator:

For mankind is faced with the impossibility of making a sacrifice to equal this gift of God's [in this case, the gift of creation], the impossibility of making restitutions and wiping away the debt. Being unable to take up this challenge, it has to humble itself and give thanks. It is at this point that God chose to cancel the debt himself by sending his beloved son to sacrifice himself on the cross. He pretends to humble himself, and, in so doing, inflicts an even greater humiliation on humanity by making it conscious of its impotence. Henceforth humanity is condemned to give thanks, not just for having been created, but for having been saved ... This is the greatest act of manipulation ever.²²⁰

²¹⁶ Baudrillard, *Mirror*, 64-65.

²¹⁷ Baudrillard, *Impossible*, 13. In other places he writes of the judgement of the traditional God as being like 'the light of dead stars' and of 'His ghost and His metastases'. Baudrillard, *Impossible*, 41, 131.

²¹⁸ Baudrillard, *Cool* I, 4.

²¹⁹ Baudrillard, *Pact*, 209. For the original discussion, see Baudrillard, *Symbolic*, 195-238.

²²⁰ Baudrillard, *Pact*, 157. Only a few years earlier, he had offered a softer position: 'Another explanation for our fall from grace is that the world is given to us. Now, what is given we have to be able to give back. In the past we

What is perhaps surprising here is that there has never been any systematic exploration, either by Baudrillard or his followers, of symbolic exchange and the two primary economies of sacrifice that have informed the history of the Western world for millennia – Abraham’s interrupted sacrifice of Isaac and the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. In contrast, there has been some work done in theology applying his ideas of representation and reification, much of which turns on an overly general passage that again evokes symbolic exchange: ‘All Western faith and good faith became engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could be exchanged for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange – God, of course’.²²¹ McCullough writes, ‘Though little attention is paid to the theological dimension of his work by his popular and critical readership, Baudrillard consistently reflects on contemporary culture in its negative relationship to the symbolic world of Judeo-Christian tradition’.²²² Andrew Tatusko points to the value of Baudrillard in rectifying the absence of ‘discussion that fruitfully attempts to merge the stream of the technology/culture discussion with the culture/theology discussion’.²²³ For Tatusko, Baudrillard’s simulacrum is a very real challenge – ‘the challenge this poses to theology resides in discerning what is real’²²⁴ – to the study of religion and technology, in particular such things as the Virtual Church. Steven Grimwood makes similar claims about simulacra and the study of iconography and the theology of Marion.²²⁵ The theologian Graham Ward, who points to the profusion of religious, specifically Catholic, language in Baudrillard’s work, is one of the few to use Baudrillard and the procession of simulacra seriously, to underline the theological repercussions of the contemporary city.²²⁶ Outside of theology, Hugh B. Urban makes a compelling case that Baudrillard’s concept of simulacra and simulation can help to make sense of the suicides of the members of the Heaven’s Gate group in 1997.²²⁷ It is worth repeating here that there is in Baudrillard’s work a valuable, if difficult, resource for the study of religion from either an emic or an etic perspective.

could give thanks for the gift, or respond to it by sacrifice. Now we have no one to give thanks to. And if we can no longer give anything in exchange for the world, it is unacceptable’. Baudrillard, *Impossible*, 13-14.

²²¹ Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, 5-6.

²²² McCullough, ‘Baudrillard’, 1.

²²³ Andrew Tatusko, ‘The Theological Challenge of Cyberspace and the Logic of Simulation’, *The Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 2, 2 (April, 2001), <http://www.jcrt.org/archives/02.2/index.html?page=tatusko.shtml>, accessed 25 October 2006.

²²⁴ Tatusko, ‘Challenge’, 6.

²²⁵ See Grimwood, ‘Iconography’, 76-97.

²²⁶ See Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (London: Routledge, 2000), 21-24 and 60-61 for examples.

²²⁷ Hugh B. Urban, ‘The Devil at Heaven’s Gate: Rethinking the Study of Religion in the Age of Cyber-Space’, *Nova Religio* 3, 2 (April 2000): 268-302.

Turning back to Hervieu-Léger, there are distinct points of contact between the concept of religious modernity and Baudrillard's foundational argument that modernity constantly generates its own opposite. Hervieu-Léger writes:

But if one argues ... that modernity and religion are not mutually exclusive (hence that religion retains a creative potential within modernity), one has to accept the paradox that modernity produces what is of essence contrary to it, namely heteronomy, submission to an order endured, received from the outside and not willed.²²⁸

Baudrillard's and Hervieu-Léger's understandings of history and memory, deeply informed as they are by the effects of technological change, are remarkably similar. Hervieu-Léger writes,

The disintegration of collective memory in modern societies is the consequence of two trends that are only apparently contradictory. The first is a tendency towards the expansion and homogenisation of memory, resulting from the eclipse of the idiosyncrasies rooted in the collective memory of differentiated concrete groups ... The overabundance of information available at any moment tends to obliterate a meaningful continuity that would make such information intelligible ... The immediacy of communication singles out the utterance and inhabits its being brought into context ... This process of homogenising collective memory further creates the conditions for a second tendency to develop, that of the limitless fragmentation of individual and group memory ... The contemporary fragmentation of space, time and institutions entails the fragmentation of memory, which the speed of social and cultural change destroys almost as soon as it is produced.²²⁹

Similarly, Baudrillard often writes of the loss of memory, here in relation to identity:

We no longer have the time to seek out an identity in the historical record, in memory, in a past, nor indeed in a project or a future. We have to have an instant memory which we can plug into immediately – a kind of promotional identity which can be verified at every moment ... Being oneself becomes an ephemeral performance, with no lasting effects, a disenchanted mannerism in a world without manners.²³⁰

These points of agreement lead us in the direction of using their two respective understandings of history and memory in a complementary fashion, deploying one to understand and illuminate the other. This is true even though their methods are decidedly different and they have decidedly diverse aims; where Hervieu-Léger aims for clarity, Baudrillard aims for obfuscation. Both in their way seek to explain, and even critique, the

²²⁸ Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, trans. by Simon Lee (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 93.

²²⁹ Hervieu-Léger, *Religion*, 128-129.

²³⁰ Baudrillard, *Screened*, 11-12.

world they see around them, and their conjunction provides valuable clues for understanding both contemporary mass-media culture and religious modernity.

Conclusions

The call of anti-structure is still strong in our highly interdependent, technological, super-bureaucratized world. In some ways, more powerful than ever.

Charles Taylor²³¹

Baudrillard's work, then, when read with the caution such a difficult enterprise demands, provides a number of ways to help think both religious modernity and thick re-enchantment in that it describes a never-silenced undercurrent of exchange, gift, and sacrifice in heavily modernised contemporary cultures. The enchanted order is for Baudrillard a constant, if often almost completely submerged, element within rationalised modernity. His work is also consistent, for the most part, with Weber's work, in particular his Marxist leanings and in his pointed critiques of the inherently self-defeating irrationality of rationalisation. It is rooted in the same conflicts of systems of valuation that were the backbone of Weber's narrative of rationalisation. It is, like Weber's work, an act of questioning and ultimately of resistance to the tide of disenchantment. Baudrillard's narrative of history, like Weber's, is a direct interrogation of the subtraction stories. The congruence between Baudrillard and thick re-enchantment offered in this chapter provides a dual benefit to both the study of Baudrillard and the study of religion. Firstly, though Baudrillard never employs the language of re-enchantment, present in the francophone discourse from the 1980s onwards, reading his work in light of the concept of thick re-enchantment allows for a coherent appraisal of his problematic body of writing, which is too often misunderstood or simply dismissed. Secondly, Baudrillard's varied conceptualisations of both the dominant system of use and exchange value and the possible avenues of resistance to it also provide a tightly-focused study of the dialectical movement of rationalisation and re-enchantment within modern culture. He views modernity not as a matter of the gradual emergence of perennial truths through the subtraction of undesirable, irrational elements. Rather, he sees the emergence of modernity as a process of continuous and ultimately harmful *additions* that accrue to the structure of symbolic exchange, which solidifies human relationships, as it is gradually superseded by the rise of other, more mediated forms of exchange. In this, Baudrillard offers a valuable tool for the study and interpretation of religious modernity.

²³¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 53.

With this lengthy reading of Baudrillard, we come to the end of the theoretical portion of our study. We turn next to an examination of three contemporary authors of fiction as further instantiations of the sorts of work with which the concept of thick reenchantment, aided by Baudrillard's work on symbolic exchange and ruptural events, can grapple. Before we can begin, however, a very brief detour into the art of interpretation is necessary.

I N T E R M I S S I O N

'Indeterminism' is a word with bad vibes. It evokes a picture of the critic as Hamlet, 'sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought'.

Geoffrey Hartman¹

Before moving on to the interpretive portion of this thesis, it is perhaps necessary, given all of the theoretical and conceptual water that has passed under the bridge, to add some depth to a point that was made very briefly in the first chapter. This point is simple: *reading* is a necessary part of the study of religious modernity. Or, to put things as succinctly as possible: *texts matter*. This is tied, fundamentally, to the broader reconsideration of modernity, given that literature, and non-instrumental, non-rational language generally, plays a significant though often unacknowledged role in modernity. To couch this in the language of thick reenchantment: there is a good deal to be gained from the study of the dialectical interplay between instrumental and poetic or literary language in modernity.

As we have seen, poetic language enjoys periodic revaluations in the varied forms of Romanticism, from Friedrich Schlegel through to Jean Baudrillard. The literary – whether in the form of poetry, novels, or, in the contemporary context, certain forms of visual art, narrative film in particular – can perhaps be imagined as a privileged site for the exploration of the 'unthought' (to borrow a term from Michel Foucault) of rationalised language. Foucault, in *The Order of Things*, his difficult account of the rise of the modern subject, in fact in fact establishes the absolute importance of literary language for modernity:

It may be said in a sense that 'literature', as it was constituted and so designated on the threshold of the modern age, manifests, at a time when it was least expected, the reappearance of the living being of language ... literature achieved autonomous existence, and separated itself from all other language with a deep scission, only by forming a sort of 'counter-discourse', and by finding its way back from the representative or signifying function of language to this raw being that had been forgotten since the sixteenth century ... Through literature, the being of language shines once more on the frontiers of Western culture – and at its centre – for it is what has been most foreign to that culture since the sixteenth century; but it has also, since this same century, been at the very centre of what Western culture has overlain. This is why literature is appearing more and more as that which much be

¹ Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Criticism in the Wilderness: The Study of Literature Today* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 265.

thought; but equally, and for the same reason, as that which can never, in any circumstance, be thought in accordance with a theory of signification.²

Insofar as this is true, we can say that literary language *matters* in the study of modernity.

More particularly, the literary plays a key role in the central transformation of religious modernity: the diffusion of the religious from institutional centres and throughout the larger culture. Other scholars have noted this conjunction, if less directly. Literary theorist Frank Kermode notes the crucial point of historical contact: ‘It is worth remembering that the rise of what we call literary fiction happened at a time when the revealed, authenticated account of the beginning was losing its authority’.³ Literary fiction then becomes an important site for examining the complexities of the relationship between modernity and the religious. However, precisely describing any relationship between the religious and the literary is a difficult task, as Franco Moretti acknowledges:

Virtually all book historians agree that the publication of fiction developed, throughout Western Europe, at the expense of devotion. This said, one major question must still be answered: did the novel replace devotional literature because it was a *fundamentally secular form* – or because it was a *religion under a new guise*? If the former, we have a genuine opposition, and the novel opens a truly new phase of European culture; if the latter, we have a case of historical transformism, where the novel supports the long duration of symbolic conventions.⁴

If we were to attempt to answer this question, we would have to come down somewhere *between* the two options which Moretti provides, as he overstates the opposition of religion and modernity.

However, Moretti has a more valuable insight to offer: the novel in particular provides an essential *link* between modernity and never-forgotten forms of narrative that constitute the unthought of modern language. The novel’s ‘most ambitious wager’, he writes, is ‘to be the bridge between the old and the new, forging a symbolic compromise *between the indifferent world of modern knowledge, and the enchanted topography of magic story-telling*. Between a new geography, that we cannot ignore – and an old narrative matrix, that we cannot forget’.⁵ This bridge, it must be remembered, is no temporary structure, but is constantly formed

² Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. unknown (London: Routledge Classics, 1966), 48-49. Foucault concludes that the rise of the modern was reliant on differing kinds of language: ‘With the appearance of literature, with the return of exegesis and the concern for formalisation, with the development of philology – in short, with the reappearance of language as a multiple profusion, the order of Classical thought can now be eclipsed’. Foucault, *Order*, 330.

³ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 67.

⁴ Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel 1800-1900* (London: Verso, 1998), 169 note 30. Emphasis in original.

⁵ Moretti, *Atlas*, 72. Emphasis in original.

and re-formed by the dialectic of rationalisation and reenchantment that characterises religious modernity.

Aside from this close historical connection, the need for such close readings of the literary grows naturally out of the work of Danièle Hervieu-Léger, in particular her linking of the religious with collective memory (which owes a substantial debt to the work of Maurice Halbwachs). For Hervieu-Léger, modernity, and technological development in particular, have a largely corrosive effect on the essential faculties of collective memory, and this in turn has distinct repercussions for the development and maintenance of the religious. Given the centrality of this point, it is worth quoting her at some length:

The affirmation of the autonomous individual, the advance of rationalisation breaking up the 'sacred canopies', and the process of institutional differentiation denote the end of societies based on memory ... The growth of secularisation and the loss of total memory in societies without a history and without a past coincide completely; the dislocation of the structures of religion's plausibility in the modern world works in parallel with the advance of rationalisation and successive stages in the crumbling of collective memory ... The complexity of the world shown in the vast incoherent mass of available information is decreasingly amenable to being ordered in the more or less impromptu ways that collective memory was able to achieve by finding explanatory links. Such links, it is true, contained much that was illusory or mistaken ... but with all their frailty at least they afforded an immediate and effective basis for developing individual and collective systems of meaning.⁶

Though Hervieu-Léger's work is firmly situated in a sociological framework, the repercussions of taking religious modernity seriously go far beyond the empirical subfield of the study of religion. They carry over into considerations of what *sources* are relevant for the study of religious modernity. This dissolution of the field of collective memory demands a concomitant *expansion of the field of study*, which, as Hervieu-Léger notes, confronts the study of religion with the question of limits:

for all the evidence of the fragmentation of religion in modern society, it has to be recognised that religion still makes itself heard, though not always where one expects to hear it. It makes its presence felt implicitly or invisibly throughout the gamut of human expression. Thus instead of thinking of a dwindling religious domain (the institutions of traditional religion) set against the domains of politics, aesthetics, therapy, and so on, one should look for covert signs of religion in every sphere of human activity. The problem is knowing how far to conduct the investigation. Does one limit it to identifying the unobtrusive influence of recognised religions where one does not expect to find them? ... Or should one broaden the horizon in order to display the (invisible) religious argument of modernity and run the risk of seeing the particular nature of the subject matter

⁶ Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, trans. by Simon Lee (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 127-129.

dissolve, running the risk also of allowing the scholar too much subjectivity in the selection of material?⁷

Mark C. Taylor, who like Hervieu-Léger traces the fragmentation of religion in modernity, argues in a similar vein: ‘To appreciate religion’s abiding significance, it is necessary to consider not only its explicit manifestations but also its latent influence on philosophy, literature, art, architecture, politics, economics, and even science and technology. To the tutored eye, religion is often most influential when it is least obvious’.⁸ Following this logic, the academic study of religion is best understood (though there are significant figures within the field who would disagree with this⁹) as an *interdisciplinary locus* to which history, sociology, and various strains of philology, hermeneutics and cultural theory make significant contributions. It is, as Charles Mathewes has it, ‘a fugitive discipline’¹⁰ rather than a discrete discipline in and of itself. A study of religion that has the proper methodological depth and complexity to deal with religious modernity must have the courage and possess the tools to pursue the religious into the darkened corners, abysses and hotly contested borderlands of modernity.

There is nothing revolutionary, or even particularly new, about this. Jonathan Z. Smith notes that reading has always been the essential task of the whole enterprise of religious studies:

The work of the professional scholar of religions does not consist primarily of reading our colleagues’ works but in reading texts, in questioning, challenging, interpreting and valuing the tales men tell and the tales others have told about them. We are, at the very least, true anthropologists in the original Greek sense of the word – gossips, persons who delight in talking about other men.¹¹

In a broader sense, the study of culture has long relied upon such a method, which is consonant with Max Weber’s image of culture as a vast, interconnected ‘web of signification’. In his classic work, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, which is heavily indebted to Weber’s metaphor, the cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz writes: ‘The culture of a

⁷ Hervieu-Léger, *Religion*, 29.

⁸ Mark C. Taylor, *After God* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), xii.

⁹ Among those who consider religious studies to be a particular discipline, perhaps the best known is Mircea Eliade, who argues that religion is a particular aspect of human society that demanded an equally focused and specific method. This attitude led him, controversially, to give precedence to the explanations of religious people themselves over any scholarly perspective. He writes, ‘A religious phenomenon will only be recognised as such if it is grasped at its own level, that is to say, if it is studied as something religious’. Quoted in Daniel L. Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 197. Emphasis in original.

¹⁰ Charles Mathewes, ‘Editor’s Note’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74, 1 (March 2006): 4.

¹¹ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map is not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 298.

people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong ... As in more familiar exercises in close reading, one can start anywhere in a culture's repertoire of forms and end up anywhere else'.¹² Following Geertz's suggestion in the study of religion is fairly uncontroversial; however, what is new here is the breadth of what we must consider as *relevant* to the study of religious modernity, which *necessarily* includes literary or poetic material. Though it is implicit in the general methodology, it is worth bringing to the forefront the simple fact that the texts that matter are by no means limited to those held by believers to be sacred or those that deal with immediately recognisable religious or enchanted content.

Acknowledging the centrality of the literary in modernity and in the study of religious modernity does not necessitate the creation of any elaborate new reading methodology. A simple, if rigorous, practice of *close reading* is sufficient for our purposes, though such a practice must be based on a proper apprehension of the *indeterminate* nature of the text. All texts, and thus all practices of reading, are inherently *open* and any close reading must be tied to this realisation, as the influential literary theorist Geoffrey Hartman argues:

Indeterminacy as a 'speculative instrument' should influence the way literature is read, but by modifying the reader's awareness rather than imposing a method. To methodise indeterminacy would be to forget the reason for the concept. It does not doubt meaning, nor does it respond to an economy of scarcity and try to make reading more 'productive' of meaning. Quite the contrary, it encourages a form of writing – of articulate interpretation – that is not subordinated naively to the search for ideas.¹³

Though close reading has been eclipsed in recent decades by the convolutions of the postmodern and its extreme application of the hermeneutic of suspicion, there have been of late articulate calls for its return to the academic playing field, though with more modest goals. The acknowledgement of the inherent incompleteness of interpretation prevents this from devolving into mere nostalgia for structuralist or New Critical reading methodologies.

To cite a prominent exponent of close reading, Valentine Cunningham, in his slim 2002 volume, *Reading After Theory*, calls for the revaluation of the practice, the revival of

¹² Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 453.

¹³ Hartman, *Criticism*, 269.

'meaning-full, pleromatic, close-up, hands-on textual encounters'.¹⁴ Interestingly, Cunningham calls for the literal reenchantment, even sacralisation, of the text as a reaction against what he sees as the destructive hermeneutic approach of much of postmodern theory (which he designates with an upper-case 'T'). Indeed, Cunningham takes the Eucharist as his model for the properly respectful approach to the text:

There is a law which the revelation offered by Bunyan and claimed by Muir both depend on. Bunyan calls it honesty. Iris Murdoch calls it love – respect for the otherness of the other person ... I call it tact. Tact: the missing element in Theory's misconstruings and misreadings, in precisely its tactile failures, its mishandlings of text and textuality. Tact: gentle touch, caring touch, living touch; appropriate handling, unmanipulative reading ... A careful *attention* ... manifest in the communicant's clean hands, reflective of a 'clean' heart, handles with respect what's offered, which don't pollute or snatch, or otherwise abuse the sacred object that is to be piously ingested.¹⁵

The interpretive chapters which follow offer such detailed, respectful readings of the work of three influential and important contemporary authors as *instantiations* of the sorts of texts that thick reenchantment can be useful in exploring. The texts under examination have been isolated from the much larger mass of possible texts and give a particular focus to this examination.¹⁶ The authors we will be considering all come from the European and North American context; they are also of roughly the same age and share similar demographic backgrounds. The first of these texts appeared in 1991 while the last was published early in 2008. Each of the three chapters will address a single author, discussing the work of the Canadian novelist Douglas Coupland, the American writer Chuck Palahniuk, and the German filmmaker Tom Tykwer, respectively.

There is a dual benefit to the close readings being offered here. Firstly, and more importantly, these texts afford us a view into the cultural realities of religious modernity, albeit through a fictionalised lens. If there is any lesson that the study of religion can take from the postmodern turn, ignoring the epistemic chaos it has caused, it is that fictional texts are valuable sources for the study of human cultures. Even Cunningham, an outspoken critic of much of postmodern theory, concedes this: 'what Theory has really brought home is the utterly main function of literature as a shaper of the realities we perceive ... Theory's sense of literature's agency – its role in the active production of social and political meanings – is a major contribution to a notion of what poeiticity is, of what

¹⁴ Valentine Cunningham, *Reading After Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 167.

¹⁵ Cunningham, *Reading*, 155. He is here referring to John Bunyan's confessional classic, *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

¹⁶ There are a number of suggestions for expanding the field of reading in the Conclusion.

literature is “for”.¹⁷ Historian Joseph Mali notes that this re-evaluation of the worth of the fictional extends even to the field of literature, which has long been considered a privileged locus for the study of culture:

one of the most remarkable developments in the humanities and social sciences in our times has been the reassessment of the novel as a serious ‘method’ of studying human agency in modern society. Unlike earlier generations of scholars, who read novels for ‘inspiration’ or ‘examples’ or further, more procedural, more general inquiries into ‘truths’ about human beings, the new scholars have come to read novels for the particular truths that their characters display in their emotions, reflections, and actions ... [novels can be] both dramatic and thematic illuminations of the moral deliberations that are characteristic of modern society – primarily those that pit individual agents against historical traditions and institutions of their society.¹⁸

Though there is no room here to examine systematically the place of literary language in culture, there are good reasons for arguing that any critical, close reading of a significant text can only be a benefit, however small, to the wider study of the religious. More concretely, Carl Cassegard notes that, from a sociological perspective, literature is a valuable point of reference to *lived* experience:

Although the relevance of literature for sociology can only be demonstrated through interpretation and analysis, in general the specific sociological value of literature studies resides in the privileged access it offers to the way a society is experienced. A fictional form serves not only to convey the emotional aspects of social life but also a flexible intellectual medium for exploring possible solutions to the contradictions underlying them. It offers insights not only about how people feel about dilemmas, but also about how they seek to overcome them. Literature is therefore not simply an object for the sociologist to explain, but also a source for knowledge about society.¹⁹

Thus the study of literary texts can provide a valuable *complement* to more empirical approaches to the study of religion. Secondly, if incidentally, reading these texts in the light of thick reenchantment allows us to make sense of the texts themselves. Employing reenchantment as an interpretive frame allows for a coherent (though never deterministic) reading of a set of important narratives, some of which, particularly Palahniuk’s work, are resistant to articulate interpretation. Just as it furthers our understanding of religion in modernity, thick reenchantment can thus aid in the understanding of specific modern texts.

¹⁷ Cunningham, *Reading*, 43.

¹⁸ Joseph Mali, *Mythistory: The Making of Modern Historiography* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 287.

¹⁹ Carl Cassegard, ‘Murakami Haruki and the Naturalisation of Modernity’, *International Journal of Japanese Sociology* 10 (2001): 80.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH: DOUGLAS

COUPLAND'S GIFTS OF STORY

In every case the storyteller is a man who has counsel for his readers. But if today 'having counsel' is beginning to have an old-fashioned ring, this is because the communicability of experience is decreasing. In consequence we have no counsel either for ourselves or for others.

Walter Benjamin¹



ow, having argued in some detail that modernity produces distinct religious forms and also that rationalisation produces distinct forms of reenchantment, we turn our attention to an illustration of the interpretive value of thick reenchantment in the realm of contemporary popular culture. Here we are reading these texts neither as instantiations of a cultural reenchantment nor as catalysts for a cultural reenchantment. These authors are not apologists for reenchantment but rather witnesses to that elusive but identifiable element within modernity that the concept of thick reenchantment means to identify and explore. These texts are fictional representations of that which eludes simplistic subtraction stories or any universalistic claim that modernity has left the past behind cleanly. The following interpretive exercises are intended also as an illustration of the utility of thick reenchantment as a way to approach fictional narratives. Among the narratives we will be addressing, the work of Canadian novelist Douglas Coupland is likely the most widely known. It is also the most accessible. This chapter is structured in a manner that will become the model for our final three chapters, beginning with a brief discussion of Coupland and his work. Before addressing these texts from the standpoint of the dialectic of enchantment, a brief discussion of their relation to traditional religion is necessary as a way to both set the scene and to fully tease out their relation to both reenchantment and the larger context of religious modernity. Coupland's work is permeated with religious language, symbol and allegory, most of which have their origins in the Christian tradition. The chapter then offers a detailed reading of the two aspects of reenchantment in Coupland's work. Firstly, Coupland establishes, within his diegetic worlds, economies for the symbolic exchange of story as a way to build and maintain authentic, meaningful human relationships in a culture where the pace of life and relentless technological growth have disrupted many traditional means of establishing community. Secondly, Coupland's novels are full of what can rightly be described as

¹ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 86.

ruptural events (though in a slightly different sense to how Baudrillard uses the language of event) in which a secret enchanted world, one that exists alongside and underneath the disenchanting surface of the visible world, becomes very briefly visible. Employing the frame of thick reenchantment to read Coupland's novels and paying particular attention to the economies of symbolic exchange within them allows us to uncover Coupland's ultimate conclusion about contemporary culture: the rationalisation of language and technological-mediated information exchange have robbed language of its power and, ultimately, its very meaning. This has serious consequences, given that Coupland places absolute importance in collective narrative. A culture without a shared set of narratives is for Coupland a culture without coherence or access to anything that exists outside of the mundane world. It is, in short, a culture that is radically disenchanting, a culture that is without stories about the world that help people to make sense of their lives and their place in the community. Against the continuing tide of rationalisation, Coupland places the simple act of storytelling, a reenchantment of language through practices of exchange that are unburdened by considerations of utility or exchange value. Coupland's characters find access to the hidden enchanted world through a process of what we could call, rather clumsily, 're-narration'.

Douglas Coupland and his Work

Michael's theory is that technology creates and moulds generations. When technology accelerates to a critical point, as it has now, generations become irrelevant. Each of us as individuals becomes our own individual diskette with our own personal 'version'. Much more logical.

Daniel, in *Microserfs*²

This chapter will consider all of Coupland's major fiction and will be approaching his considerable body of work largely as a unified *corpus*.³ There is a thematic and stylistic unity to Coupland's works that allows us to approach his work in this way and there is a good deal to be learned in reading his works in relation to each other. The texts in question are as follows.

² Douglas Coupland, *Microserfs* (London: Flamingo, 1996), 242. Emphasis in original.

³ We will be considering all of Coupland's published fiction; however, he has produced a number of other books that we will not be considering, largely for reasons of simplicity. These include Douglas Coupland, Michael Howatson and Ken-ichi Eguchi, *God Hates Japan* (Tokyo: Shoten Kadokawa, 2001), a book only available in Japanese. We will not address any of Coupland's non-fiction books about Canada – Douglas Coupland, *City of Glass: Douglas Coupland's Vancouver* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2001); Douglas Coupland, *Souvenir of Canada* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2002); and Douglas Coupland, *Souvenir of Canada 2* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2004). We will also be neglecting his biographical account of Terry Fox: Douglas Coupland, *Terry: Terry Fox and His Marathon of Hope* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2005). We will likewise be neglecting the film *Everything's Gone Green*, for which Coupland wrote the screenplay. *Everything's Gone Green*, dir. Paul Fox, 95 minutes (Astral Media, 2006). Outside of his writing, though sometimes related to it, Coupland has wide-ranging artistic interests, from sculpture to installation art that must also remain unexamined. See Coupland's official website, particularly <http://www.coupland.com/books/books05.html> for some excerpts and illustrations from *God Hates Japan*, and <http://www.coupland.com/art/index.html> for details on his non-literary artistic pursuits.

Coupland's seminal 1991 novel, *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* (hereafter *Generation*),⁴ is arguably still the most identifiable, and the certainly the most influential, of his works; indeed, it is from this novel that Coupland's (and incidentally Chuck Palahniuk's and Tom Tykwer's) generation takes its most popular name. It remains also the simplest of his novels; in narrative terms, very little of any consequence happens. The novel centres around three young people, narrator Andy and his friends Claire and Dag, who spend much of their time in the retirement oasis of Palm Springs, California telling stories. It is their stories that comprise the bulk of the novel.

Shampoo Planet (hereafter *Shampoo*, 1992),⁵ is a slice-of-life story that recounts six months in the life and loves of Tyler Johnson, an image obsessed young man with conservative political and fiscal leanings. Tyler drifts aimlessly through his home town, an anonymous, decaying city in the Pacific Northwest of the United States, dislocated after an extended backpacking trip across Europe, which also features in the novel.

Life After God (hereafter *Life*, 1993)⁶ is a diminutive book that can be viewed equally as a novel or as a series of very short stories, all illustrated by Coupland with an almost childlike simplicity. The stories follow various narrators, some named, some unnamed, as they confront maturity, family, religious angst and the simple fact of time. Early printings of the book featured the words 'You are the first generation raised without religion' prominently on its flyleaf.

Microserfs (hereafter *Micro*, 1995)⁷ tells the story of a group of Microsoft employees living together in what they call 'Our House of Wayward Mobility'. The story follows the working and personal lives of narrator Daniel – the novel is presented in the form of his personal diary – and his friends as they leave the protection of Microsoft to found a new software company.

⁴ Douglas Coupland, *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).

⁵ Douglas Coupland, *Shampoo Planet* (New York: Pocket Books, 1992).

⁶ Douglas Coupland, *Life After God* (New York: Pocket Books, 1994).

⁷ Coupland, *Microserfs*.

Girlfriend in a Coma (hereafter *Girlfriend*, 1997)⁸ represents something of a departure from Coupland's earlier novels. A work of magical realism, the novel tells a complex, allegorical tale of apocalypse and revelation that is heavily informed by New Testament narratives of salvation and redemption. The novel, which has a shifting cast of narrators and perspectives – some from beyond the grave – relates the story of Richard, his girlfriend Karen, and their friends as they come of age in 1970s Vancouver, on the lush west coast of Canada. Frightened by a prophetic vision, Karen falls into a seventeen-year coma awakens in the future she imagined, only to find her friends and family damaged almost beyond recognition. Eventually only eight people – Richard, Karen, their daughter Megan, born while Karen was in her coma, and their friends – remain alive after the world is visited by a mysterious plague in which people simply lay down and die.

Miss Wyoming (hereafter *Wyoming*, 1999),⁹ which will enter this analysis only sparingly, tells the story of the disappearance and multiple rebirths of Susan Colgate, a faded child actress.

All Families are Psychotic (hereafter *Families*, 2001)¹⁰ is a rollicking, almost slapstick account of the disastrous reunion of the Drummonds family, visiting Florida to witness the launch of the space shuttle with favourite daughter Sarah on board.

Hey Nostradamus! (hereafter *Hey*, 2003)¹¹ is constructed from a number of voices recollecting a horrific shooting incident in a Vancouver high school. The first narrator, Cheryl, a student killed in the shooting, again tells her story from the afterlife. The remaining four narrators, all related in some way to Cheryl, allow the reader to trace the damage the shooting continues to inflict even many years later.

Eleanor Rigby (hereafter *Eleanor*, 2004)¹² tells the simple, poignant story of Liz Dunn, a lonely 42-year-old woman whose life is changed drastically when she is contacted by her son Jeremy, who she put up for adoption when she was sixteen. Jeremy is afflicted with both Multiple Sclerosis and troubling prophetic visions, which he eventually passes on to Liz.

⁸ Douglas Coupland, *Girlfriend in a Coma* (New York: Regan Books, 1998).

⁹ Douglas Coupland, *Miss Wyoming* (New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 1999).

¹⁰ Douglas Coupland, *All Families are Psychotic* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2001).

¹¹ Douglas Coupland, *Hey Nostradamus! A Novel* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2003).

¹² Douglas Coupland, *Eleanor Rigby* (London: Fourth Estate, 2004).

JPod (2006),¹³ which shares a number of similarities with Coupland's early work, is a long, rambling novel that centres on the travails of Ethan and his fellow workers at a video-game company – again in Vancouver – that may or may not be Electronic Arts.

The Gum Thief (hereafter *Gum*, 2007)¹⁴ adopts the fractured style of *Hey*, presenting a series of interrelated narratives in the form of the journal of a depressed middle-aged named Roger. The journal becomes the foundation of a friendship with Bethany, a young co-worker at a Staples office superstore.

We will also be considering passages from *Polaroids from the Dead* in 1996 (hereafter *Polaroids*),¹⁵ an early anthology of journalistic and personal writings.

Coupland has been compared to writers as diverse as John Steinbeck¹⁶ and Arthur C. Clarke.¹⁷ However, he has developed a unique and highly contemporary voice, mixing an arch, aphoristic, self-aware, pop-culture sensibility with meditations on the effects of contemporary culture, and in particular its technological aspects, on communal living. His style is unobtrusive. It is playful without being overly clever, meditative without even becoming distractingly obtuse, funny without being forced, warm and familial without being sentimental. For the most part, and here *Girlfriend* is the most obvious exception, Coupland builds his stories around ordinary people and often ordinary people and the extraordinary, even supernatural, things that sometimes happen to them. His characters are damaged and recognisably human figures but even at the lowest points in his novels, Coupland's tone and voice remain familiar and ultimately forgiving. His primary concern is with human relationships, often with damaged people finding each other and coming together in ways – though usually *not* romantic ways – that allow them to become whole, or to at least begin to repair some of the damage that afflicts them. For Coupland, authentic human contact, even the basic recognition and acceptance of another person, despite their flaws, is an essential and powerful form of *healing*. Family, community and loneliness are

¹³ Douglas Coupland, *JPod* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2006).

¹⁴ Douglas Coupland, *The Gum Thief* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007).

¹⁵ Douglas Coupland, *Polaroids from the Dead* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1996).

¹⁶ Robert McGill, 'The Sublime Simulacrum: Vancouver in Douglas Coupland's Geography of Apocalypse', *Essays on Canadian Writing* 70 (Spring 2000): 255; G. P. Lainsbury, 'Generation X and the End of History', *Essays on Canadian Writing* 58 (Spring 1996): 229.

¹⁷ Veronica Hollinger, 'Apocalypse Coma', in *Edging Into the Future: Science Fiction and Contemporary Cultural Transformation*, ed. Veronica Hollinger and Joan Gordon (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 168.

among the most consistent and important themes in Coupland's work. Coupland weaves the constant search for the profound, for something outside of the visible, throughout his narratives. Woven in and out of these themes, we can find the constant presence of economies of story and storytelling, which this chapter will be examining as iterations of symbolic exchange. Story and storytelling in many ways form the backbone of Coupland's whole body of work and are crucial to his occasionally pointed critiques of contemporary culture. One of the persistent impressions the astute reader gathers from Coupland's work is that contemporary North American culture is a culture without stories, or without stories that have any real historical or cultural significance. It is against the background that Coupland sets out to revalue non-instrumental storytelling language.

Coupland sets the vast majority of his novels to at least some extent in or around Vancouver, British Columbia. The city is indeed his favourite recurring character. His treatment of the city mirrors his style as a whole. Even when at its most alien and threatening, Vancouver remains a comfortable, familiar setting. Its endless generic suburbs, its rainforest parks and the oppressive weather of the Pacific Northwest informs the moods and textures of his novels, although he is rarely, if ever, simply gloomy. The relationship of the city to history and narrative is key to its meaning within Coupland's fictional worlds. He writes, 'We often forget, living here in Vancouver, that we live in the youngest city on earth, a city almost entirely of, and *only* of, the twentieth century'.¹⁸ In *Girlfriend*, a television production assistant for an American television series says, 'they film everything because Vancouver's unique: You can morph it into any North American city or green space with little effort and even less expense, but at the same time the city has its own distinct feel. See that motel over there? That was "Pittsburgh" in a Movie of the Week'.¹⁹ Vancouver then, is at least in part, a blank space with no history or historical consciousness. In this, it retains some of the frontier ethos of the mythic Wild West, as Robert McGill notes, 'Coupland's characters have inherited a space-time model that conflates end times with end spaces, postulates a new heaven and new Earth that

¹⁸ Coupland, *Polaroids*, 73.

¹⁹ Coupland, *Girlfriend*, 88. The fictional series is modelled largely on the American television series *The X-Files*, which ran from 1993-2002 and was shot for many years in Vancouver. The series consisted largely of an argument, personified in the two main characters, FBI agents Dana Scully and Fox Mulder, between scientific empiricism and a view of the world open to magic. The series systematically presented as reality stories and ideas taken from popular superstitions, ghost stories, and urban legend, dealing with everything from tattoo ink tainted with hallucinogens to supernaturally gifted serial murders to alien abductions and UFO lore, the show's central focus.

perpetually slip out of reach, and habitually situates itself on the brink'.²⁰ The specific historical consciousness of the frontier heavily informs both the novels and the characters within them. In *Shampoo*, Tyler's French girlfriend Stephanie tells him, 'I like you because when I think of you as a *yong* boy you are walking over big fields and there are no *skelletons* in the dirt on which you walk',²¹ though she later laments 'You people know so little about history ... Such a tragedy'.²² On the other side of the coin Tyler writes from Europe: 'I think I'm overdosing on history here ... All too many domes and refineries and people praying to gods I'll never even know about, let alone understand ... What I want is to be back home and on the coast in a big glass house on the edge of the planet, on the Olympic Peninsula, say, and just look out over the water and nothing nothing else'.²³ Coupland's plots, his characters, his settings all serve to underline a tension that runs throughout his work between the mundane and the extraordinary, between disenchantment and reenchantment, and finally, between Christianity and a broadly liberal humanism.

Douglas Coupland and Traditional Religion

I said that this was truly random coincidence, except Ethan said I was not only being redundant ('random coincidence'), but that he didn't believe in randomness, which is, I imagine, a tacit admission of religiousness.

Daniel, from *Microserfs*²⁴

Coupland has had, over the years, a good deal to say about religion. Many of his novels deal directly with religious ideas or feature religious characters and his work is likewise permeated with religious, particularly Christian, language. Coupland has a firm and accurate grasp of the realities of the religious milieu that his characters inhabit and out of which they must work out their own relationship to the religious.²⁵ He is also, as Gordon Lynch observes, 'a particularly perceptive commentator on the contemporary search for meaning'.²⁶ Despite the wealth of religious material in his books, Coupland's attitude toward

²⁰ McGill, 'Sublime', 254. McGill also suggests something deeper in Coupland's understanding of his hometown: 'Coupland's portrayal of the city is in keeping with notion of the sublime that critics of aesthetics such as Edmund Burke have developed'. McGill, 'Sublime', 264.

²¹ Coupland, *Shampoo*, 117. The misspellings in the sentence are in the original text and serve, if read phonetically, to indicate Stephanie's speech patterns.

²² Coupland, *Shampoo*, 170.

²³ Coupland, *Shampoo*, 95.

²⁴ Coupland, *Microserfs*, 326.

²⁵ To note one example; in *Generation*, one of Coupland's aphoristic marginal definitions also offers an accurate and admirably concise definition of what Thomas Luckmann calls invisible religion: 'Me-ism: A search by an individual, in the absence of training in traditional religious tenets, to formulate a personally tailored religion by himself. Most frequently a mishmash of reincarnation, personal dialogue with a nebulously defined god figure, naturalism, and karmic eye-for-eye attitudes'. Coupland, *Generation*, 126.

²⁶ Gordon Lynch, *After Religion: 'Generation X' and the Search for Meaning* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002), viii. Coupland's commentary, Lynch suggests, has had a practical effect: 'In fact, one researcher looking at emerging trends in the Christian Church said to me that young people he had met as part of his research were more likely to cite Coupland's novels as important influences for them than the writing of any traditional or mainstream Christian theologian'. Lynch, *After*, 90.

traditional religion, again represented by organised Christianity, is deeply ambivalent, as is his use of religious imagery and religious language. At times, it seems his attitude toward traditional religion is largely dismissive, an attitude that increases with the level of social or theological conservatism he is confronting. A narrator in *Life* writes of an encounter with American evangelical Christian talk radio:

The stations talked about Jesus and salvation and I found it was pretty hard listening because these religious types are always so whacked out and extreme. I think they take things too literally and miss too many points because of this literalism. This had always been the basic flaw of religion – or so I had been taught, and (I realised) I had come to believe. So at least I knew *one* thing for sure that I believed in ... I did not deny that the existence of Jesus was real to these people – it was merely that I was cut off from their experience in a way that was never connectible.²⁷

In 2003, he told an interviewer of his suspicions of organised Christianity: ‘I just can’t bring myself to be part of the revival tent. There’s so much abuse or corruption. You can make any word or passage of the Bible mean whatever you say. It’s so binary: it’s like, you’re either with us or against us. There’s going to be a mass abandonment’.²⁸ Despite this suspicion, Coupland often presents the absence of cohesive religious frameworks in the contemporary worlds as a *loss* and offers in some of his work, *Girlfriend* and *Hey* in particular, what looks like a more-or-less traditional Christian view of salvation. He remains deeply concerned with awakening his audience to a sense of the world beyond the visible. This ambivalence informs almost all of his writing. Like Vancouver, the interplay between absence of religion and the search for meaning and depth permeates his work and forms part of the fabric of its setting and tone. This constant tension places Coupland in a perpetual moment of indecision between Christianity, with its suspect institutional forms, and a vision of the world as enchanted by something beyond the visible.

There is in many of Coupland’s novels a pervasive sense of loss associated with what he sees as an absence of religion, or at least some knowledge of religious tradition. Bethany, a young woman in *Gum*, writes to her friend Roger, ‘I truly wish I’d had religion growing up, because believing in something might shut off my inner voice – and maybe so that I feel like

²⁷Coupland, *Life*, 182-183. This ambivalence is underlined in a later incident, Scout's chance encounter with old friend Dana, who had long experience with hard drugs and in pornography but later converted to an apocalyptic brand of Christianity. Dana tells him, “I pray for you because you have no faith and hence no soul” and proceeds to lambaste him with visions of God descending into suburbia, to which Scout replies, “I may be faithless, but I’m not without a soul. I’ll thank you not to patronize me, either”. Coupland, *Life*, 297-298.

²⁸Brian Draper, ‘Novelist Who’s Telling us a Mystery’, *Church Times* 23 September 2003 (available on-line at <http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/content.asp?id=20903>, accessed 9 September 2008).

I shared something with my family, a common vision'.²⁹ Like Hervieu-Léger, Coupland ties the religious situation to a paradoxical collision of lack and excess that is strikingly reminiscent of Baudrillard's thinking on the end of history, a loss that Bethany captures with her language of 'a common vision'. This comes across perhaps most clearly in '1,000 Years (Life After God)', the final story in *Life*, which Kelton Cobb describes as 'the plea of an unshaped religious consciousness, aware of its own aimless desire, craving an ultimacy that is more satisfying than pure irony can be'.³⁰ Scout, the story's narrator, recalls his experiences in high school:

Ours was a life lived in paradise and thus it rendered any discussion of transcendental ideas pointless. Politics, we supposed, existed elsewhere in a televised non-paradise; death was something similar to recycling. Life was charmed but without politics or religion. It was the life of the children of the children of pioneers – life after God – a life of earthy salvation on the edge of heaven. Perhaps this is the finest thing to which we may aspire, the life of peace, the blurring between dream life and real life – and yet I find myself speaking these words with a sense of doubt. I think there was a trade-off somewhere along the line. I think the price we paid for our golden life was an inability to fully believe in love; instead we gained an irony that scorched everything it touched. And I wonder if this irony is the price we paid for the loss of God. But then I remind myself we are living creatures – we have religious impulses – we *must* – and yet into what cracks do these impulses flow in a world without religion? It is something I think about every day. Sometimes I think it is the only thing worth thinking about.³¹

Death and the afterlife, with all of the conscious and unconscious religious connotations they carry with them, make recurring appearances in Coupland's work, again frequently couched in terms of absence. In *Micro*, narrator Daniel writes of his brother Jed, who drowned when they were both children: 'I'd like to hope Jed is happy in the afterworld, but because I was raised without any beliefs, I have no picture of an afterworld for myself. In the past I have tried to convince myself that there is no life after death, but I have found myself unable to do this ... But I just don't know how to begin figuring out what these

²⁹ Coupland, *Gum*, 248.

³⁰ Kelton Cobb, *The Blackwell Guide to Theology and Popular Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 136. Andrew Tate elaborates on this from a theological perspective: 'as a writer from an avowedly secular background, Coupland's relationship with the religious tradition is neither one of disillusion nor one of reclamation. Rather, his work seeks a new sacred vocabulary constructed from the detritus of an obsessively materialist culture and represents a serious attempt to read an apparently godless world in spiritual terms. For Coupland, this unfocused spirituality is the consequence of an anxiety of choice and the lack of coherence at the heart of the postmodern world. Spirituality, he implies, has not been erased but rewritten by the command economy of consumerism'. Andrew Tate, "'Now – Here is My Secret": Ritual and Epiphany in Douglas Coupland's Fiction', *Literature & Theology* 16, 3 (September 2002): 327-328.

³¹ Coupland, *Life*, 273-274. This insight is crucial to Coupland's understanding of religion, to the point where it appears repeatedly throughout his work: in *Girlfriend*, narrator Richard confides, 'People across the city believed our hillside neighbourhood to be the cradle of never-ending martini-clogged soirées and bawdy wife-swaps. The truth would have bored them silly, as it was middle-class dull to the point of scientific measurement. My mother ... said prophetically that this neighbourhood was "like the land that God forgot". Yes'. Coupland, *Girlfriend*, 41.

pictures are'.³² In other ways, Coupland's novels are fixated on death, particularly the apocalyptic death of masses of people through technological means. Dag, one of the key storytellers in *Generation*, is fond of telling stories of a nuclear holocaust, 'eschatological You-Are-There accounts of what it's like to be Bombed, lovingly detailed, and told in a deadpan voice'.³³ Even Bethany, too young to have lived through the anxiety-ridden heights of the Cold War, imagines an end of the world where 'every living thing on earth except me has died'.³⁴ Again like Baudrillard, Coupland paints a vision of a culture that is at once beset by death and defined by its absence.

The acknowledgement of death also plays an important role in Coupland's work. In *Polaroids*, Coupland tells a parabolic story about an 'enchanted city,' a city charmed but without rain, and a visit paid to it by a skeleton. The story is a scathing condemnation of contemporary culture, and particularly its ignorance of the possibility of an afterlife and a purpose to the enigmatic figure of death. Here Coupland compares the enchanted city, which is in reality a highly disenchanting place, with the genuine enchantment that the interloping skeleton, as both a metaphor for the hidden and as the literal presence of the dead, brings with him. The skeleton tells the city's people, who plead for help in making it rain:

'It is simple ... While you live in mortal splendour – with glass elevators and grapes in December – the price you pay for your comfort is a collapsed vision of heaven – the loss of the ability to see pictures in your heads of an afterlife. You pray for rain, but you also are praying for pictures in your heads that will renew your faith in an afterlife ... I am the skeleton that lies deep within each and every one of you. I am the skeleton just underneath your lips, your eyeballs, your flesh – the skeleton that silently carries both your heart and your mind'.³⁵

The interloping skeleton is repeatedly cast out of the city but the king is forced to call him back using language that mirrors that of the passage quoted above exactly: "We are losing our soul. We realize now that our city's splendour has tricked us into forgetting about death and the afterlife, and that we have secretly prayed for those images to appear to use

³² Coupland, *Microserfs*, 15.

³³ Coupland, *Generation*, 62. In *Life*, the narrator offers an explanation for this fascination: 'In modern middle-class culture, the absence of death in most people's early years creates a psychic vacuum of sorts. For many, thoughts of a nuclear confrontation are one's first true blush with non-existence, and because they are the first, they can be the most powerful and indelible. Later in life, more sophisticated equations for death never quite capture that first intensity – the modern sex/death formula; mysterious lumps; the mental illness of friends; the actual death of loved ones – all of life's painful gifts. At least this is what I tell myself to explain these pictures in my head that will not go away.' Coupland, *Life*, 109. One of the stories in *Life* is called 'The Wrong Sun,' the second half of which – called 'The Dead Speak' – performs a similar narrative function to Dag's stories.

³⁴ Coupland, *Gum*, 74.

³⁵ Coupland, *Polaroids*, 59-60.

and remind us of what lies beyond”³⁶. The skeleton leaves the city with a final message: ‘Accept the fact that as we live, we are also dead and all of your other prayers will be answered’.³⁷ And, in true fairy-tale fashion, they are; rain fills the city and the inhabitants dance ‘in honour of all that is good in this world and all that is good in the next’.³⁸ Death is in fact important in many of Coupland’s works, from *Girlfriend*, which culminates in a very Christ-like act of sacrifice, to *Eleanor*, which turns on the death of the enigmatic visionary Jeremy. The world, Coupland’s work tells us, *needs* death, just as it needs a vision of something that lies outside of the mundane surface of the world. Though there is much more that could be written about the role of traditional religion in Coupland’s work, we are far more concerned with the ways in which Coupland’s work represents those enchanted aspects of modernity that the notion of thick reenchantment means to capture. We will do this primarily through the lens of symbolic exchange, which can help to define the relationship between storytelling and technological information exchange, the primary locus in which the dialectic of enchantment plays in Coupland’s work.

Technology and (De)Narration

It seems important to me to remember that as our world seemingly ‘accelerates,’ the expiry dates on ‘what defines an era’ either shrink or become irrelevant ... Between 1990 and 1996, ideas once considered out on ‘the edge’ or ‘the fringe’ became the dominant ideas in everyday discourse: the vanishing middle; the collapse of entitlement; the rise and dominance of irony; extreme social upheaval bought about by endless new machines ... and the sense that even a place in time as recent as last week can now feel like it happened a decade ago.

From *Polaroids from the Dead*³⁹

The most important manifestation of symbolic exchange in Coupland’s work is the exchange of story. Before discussing this in any detail, however, it is essential to establish a general understanding of the role of narrative in his novels and its relation to technology and technological means of information exchange. Coupland’s novels are deeply marked with what he sees as a *lack* or a *loss* of coherent and meaningful narratives that provide people with a sense of belonging or a stable picture of the world. There are in this aspect of

³⁶ Coupland, *Polaroids*, 61.

³⁷ Coupland, *Polaroids*, 61. This vision of the dancing skeleton reappears in somewhat modified form in *Eleanor*. One of Jeremy’s visions, which takes the form of a narrative about a forsaken community of farmers on a vast prairie who face conflicting information from above. Images of bones and intimations of mortality play an important part in the slowly unfolding story of the farmers. This vision, started by Jeremy and later completed by his mother after his death, is spread across the latter half of the novel. See Coupland, *Eleanor*, 91-92, 98-99, 102, 15-166, and 248. Liz writes of Jeremy and his visions: ‘There had to be somebody out there who made a radical leap – someone who told the others that there existed this place beyond us that was different than anything we’d known, namely the future. And because of the future, all human lives become different, *better* than ours. We could apply our minds to being more efficient in the way we did tasks. And it was someone like Jeremy who told people this. And then someone came along and told people that on top of everything else, not only was there life and death, but there was also life *after* death. And it was someone like Jeremy who told people this. Jeremy’s job was to be a teller, and now he’d decided to pass that job onto me’. Coupland, *Eleanor*, 222-223.

³⁸ Coupland, *Polaroids*, 61.

³⁹ Coupland, *Polaroids*, 2.

Coupland's work strong resonances with both Baudrillard's philosophy of history and Hervieu-Léger's sociology of religion. Coupland captures the tension of his times with two marginal definitions in *Generation*: 'Historical Underdosing: To live in a period of time when nothing seems to happen,' and 'Historical Overdosing: To live in a period of time when too much seems to happen'.⁴⁰ Coupland's characters inhabit a world where it seems that both everything and nothing is happening at one and same time, a vision of history largely informed by the mass media.

It is worth noting a further example of this historical tension from the narrative of *Generation*. Andy visits a Vietnam War memorial, which he intriguingly calls 'both a remarkable document and an enchanted space', once again inscribing his fundamental ambivalence about the religious or the enchanted. Afterwards, Andy muses:

I think to myself, they *were* ugly times. But they were also the only times I'll ever get – genuine capital *H* history times, before *history* was turned into a press release, a marketing strategy, and cynical campaign tool. And *hey*, it's not as if I got to see much real history, either – I arrived to see a concert in history's arena just as the final set was finishing. But I saw enough, and today, in the bizarre absence of all time cues, I need a connection to a past of some importance, however wan the connection.⁴¹

This lack of identifiable historical event – in itself a support for Baudrillard's assertion that history has ended, in that Andy *has* lived through significant historical events but is unwilling or unable to recognise this – is a constant theme in Coupland's work, particularly during the 1990s. In the 'Brentwood Notebooks' – a journalistic examination of the Los Angeles suburb brought into the spotlight by the then-recent (1996) murder trial of O. J. Simpson – he writes,

It has been said that as animals, one factor that sets us apart from all other animals is that our lives need to be stories, narratives, and that when our stories vanish, that is when we feel lost, dangerous, out of control and susceptible to the forces of randomness. It is the process whereby one loses one's life story: 'denarration' ... Up until recently, no matter where or when one was born on earth, one's culture provided one with all the components essential for the forging of identity. These components included: religion, family, ideology, class strata, a geography, politics and a sense of living within a historic continuum. Suddenly, around ten years ago, with the deluge of electronic and information media into our lives, these stencils with which we trace our lives began to vanish, almost overnight, particularly on the

⁴⁰ Coupland, *Generation*, 7-8. Tellingly, the symptoms of both are identical: 'addiction to newspapers, magazines, and television news broadcasts'. Coupland, *Generation*, 7-8.

⁴¹ Coupland, *Generation*, 151. Emphasis in original. It should be recalled, before we make too simple a connection, that Baudrillard viewed the war in Vietnam as a pseudo-event. See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1981), 36.

West Coast. It became possible to be alive yet have no religion, no family connections, no ideology, no sense of class location, no politics and no sense of history. Denarrated ... Denarration seems to be the inevitable end-product of information supersaturation, and because it appears to be an inevitable condition, like a hurricane off the Florida coast, it is not on the moral spectrum.⁴²

This de-narration, which operates on both a cultural and an individual level, deeply informs Coupland's vision of history and its perceived absence. Like in Baudrillard's work, even if significant events happen, there are no longer any collective narrative frameworks to help people to make sense of them. In Coupland's novels, it is largely the effects of technology that has led to this lack of narrative cohesion, this de-narration. In this, his picture of the world bears a not inconsiderable resemblance to Hervieu-Léger's argument that contemporary culture is defined by *forgetting*, one defined by a lack of cohesive narrative. The changes wrought by media and technological saturation have, Coupland's novels tell us, profoundly affected the way people experience *time*, which is, for many of his characters, cast out of traditional narrative frameworks, profoundly out of joint. In *Micro*, Ethan relates, 'People tend to assume that as we get older, years naturally start feeling shorter and shorter – that this is "nature's way". But this is crap. Maybe what's *really* happening is that we have increased the information density of our culture to the point where our perception of time has become all screwy'.⁴³ Similarly, in *Gum*, Roger recalls witnessing a fatal car crash:

The last thing I saw was the car going down quick, Corrine banging the rear passenger window, looking me in the eye. The interior lights were on. And then the car was too deep to be seen. And then there was just water, like the dawn of time. That's how quickly things happen in cars. They shatter time. They destroy it. The car sinking took fifteen seconds, but it's stretched for nearly twenty-five years.⁴⁴

The speed of the contemporary world, here embodied in the automobile, has the paradoxical effect of both accelerating time and freezing moments of terror forever. With no picture of an afterlife and no narrative to make sense of death, Roger remains haunted by his grief and by his inability to interpret death. It is worth briefly mentioning that other

⁴² Coupland, *Polaroids*, 179-180. This de-narration is first and foremost for Coupland a product of the New World; 'Smugly non-denarrated locales such as Europe, now swamped by media technology taken for granted for decades in North America, now suddenly look to North America for clues or answers as to how to cope with the sensation of personal storylessness'. Coupland, *Polaroids*, 180.

⁴³ Coupland, *Microserfs*, 164. In a similar conversation in *Life* Kristi asks, "Is it me, Scout, or is time going all weird for you, too?" Scout responds: "I think so, I think it's the spirit of the age. All these machines we have now. Like phone answering machines and VCRs. Time collapses" Coupland, *Life*, 334. Coupland's point here is all the more convincing in that, only thirteen years later, both of these devices have been rendered more or less obsolete by the relentless march of technological change.

⁴⁴ Coupland, *Gum*, 33. The same mutations are occurring around people's perception and experience of *space*. In *Shampoo*, Tyler asks: 'But then what is geography to Harmony or Pony or Davidson, who speak to people all over the planet every day all at once on their computer nets and modems?' Coupland, *Shampoo*, 76. In *Polaroids*, Coupland draws the simple conclusion, 'Everybody travels everywhere. "Place" is a joke'. Coupland, *Polaroids*, 112.

critics have noted this connection of narrative and history. Veronica Hollinger writes of *Girlfriend*, 'Reading the novel is like reading a fictional affirmation of Fredric Jameson's observation that contemporary Western culture can be defined, in part, through its loss of the sense of a viable future, concomitant with its loss of a sense of history'.⁴⁵

Coupland's assessment of the effects of technology is again deeply ambivalent or at least very finely nuanced. He views technology neither as purely good nor purely bad but something that takes its value in how people use and interpret in their quotidian lives. His characters are often defined for good or for ill by the technologies that surround them, or which make up their working lives. At times Coupland presents a seemingly triumphalist narrative of technological development. A few examples of this will suffice. In *Families*, the ubiquitous narrator muses as astronaut Sarah waits on the launching pad: 'What thrilled her was the knowledge that if everything worked out, she'd conceive a child during the flight, the first child ever conceived up among the stars ... The child's very existence would be proof of human perfection – proof of human ability to rise above the cruel and unusual world – flawless, golden, curious and mighty'.⁴⁶ Perhaps the most poignant positive use of technology comes at the end of *Micro*, which allows the novel to finish on a hopeful note. When narrator's Daniel mother is incapacitated by a stroke, the characters find a way for technology to allow the physically damaged woman to communicate, partially restoring her to the human community: 'Michael said to me, "It got me thinking, that maybe your mother could be linked into a computer, too, and maybe the touch of her fingers could be connected to a keypad. So then she could speak to us ... She could speak to you, Dan"'.⁴⁷ As the novel closes, she talks with family and friends via a computer screen: 'Karla lost it and started to cry, and then, well, I started to cry. And then Dad and then, well, everybody, and at the centre of it all was Mom, part woman/part machine, emanating blue Macintosh light ... Amy said, "This is so first-contact!"'⁴⁸ *Micro* also suggests that technology might allow humanity to experience transcendent knowledge: 'Flight Simulation games are actually out-of-body experience emulators. There must be all of these people everywhere on earth right now, waiting to be pulled out of themselves, eager for just the smallest sign that there is

⁴⁵ Hollinger, 'Apocalypse', 166. In a similar fashion, G. P. Lainsbury sums up *Generation* tellingly as 'a meditation on the end of history'. Lainsbury, 'Generation', 229.

⁴⁶ Coupland, *Families*, 277.

⁴⁷ Coupland, *Microserfs*, 366.

⁴⁸ Coupland, *Microserfs*, 368.

something finer or larger or miraculous about our existence than we had supposed'.⁴⁹ D. Quentin Miller writing of the novel and its conclusion, offers as good a summation of Coupland's attitude toward technology as anything Coupland himself has ever written: 'The posthumanist perspective does not blame machines for robbing people of life, but, rather, places the burden on people to use machines to fulfil human desire ... The union of Daniel's mother and a computer in *Microserfs* is a metaphor for the ideal relationship between humans and their machines'.⁵⁰

On the other hand, it is essential not to downplay the negative implications of technology in Coupland's work. In *Girlfriend*, Karen, upon awakening in the late 1990s for the first time since 1979, is constantly assailed by new discoveries, presented with an attitude that calls to mind the enchanted aspects of communication technologies we saw above in the third chapter: 'Look at this! Look at this! People are always showing Karen new electronic doodads. They talk about their machines as though they possess a charmed religious quality – as if these machines are supposed to compensate for their owner's failings'.⁵¹ Karen replies, 'Hamilton, but what about you – are you new and improved and faster and better, too? I mean, as a result of your fax machine?' [Hamilton replies] 'It's swim or drown, Kare. You'll get used to them ... It's not up for debate. We lost. Machines won'.⁵² Against this loss, which again is primarily envisioned as a loss of coherent narrative, Coupland offers the reader accounts of storytelling as an economy of exchange that allows for the re-narration of a disenchanting world inundated with instrumental language.

Economies of Storytelling, or Gifts of Story

I think it's human to confuse history with time.

Linus, from *Girlfriend in a Coma*⁵³

That story in an essential concern for Coupland is evident in the opening pages of *Generation*. It is equally apparent sixteen years later in the very form of *Gum*. Reenchantment plays itself out in Coupland's work though the symbolic exchange of narrative. Coupland places his economies of storytelling in direct contrast to the

⁴⁹ Coupland, *Microserfs*, 142-143. Earlier in the novel, mulling the possibility of a technological 'Entity' that will become self-conscious, Daniel writes, underling the relationship between technology, enchantment and even salvation noted in earlier chapters, 'Perhaps the Entity is what people without any visions of an afterworld secretly yearn to build – an intelligence that will supply them with specific details – supply pictures'. Coupland, *Microserfs*, 35.

⁵⁰ D. Quentin Miller, 'Deeper Blues, or the Posthuman Prometheus: Cybernetic Renewal and the Late-Twentieth-Century American Novel', *American Literature* 77, 2 (June 2005): 405.

⁵¹ Coupland, *Girlfriend*, 143.

⁵² Coupland, *Girlfriend*, 143.

⁵³ Coupland, *Girlfriend*, 237.

continuing de-narration of culture through the spread of technical, instrumental forms of information exchange. Coupland's exchange of narrative follows Baudrillard's concept of symbolic exchange precisely, in that he imagines them as exchanges that occur outside of political economy, exchanges which solidify individual and communal relationships. Coupland's work, taken as whole, is a powerful statement that the exchange of story is a way to forge community and individual relationships, which both Baudrillard and Marcel Mauss argue is the purpose and the defining characteristic of symbolic exchange.

Generation is still perhaps the most explicit example of Coupland's use of economies of storytelling in diegetic terms. The main characters – Claire, Dag and narrator Andy – are inveterate storytellers. Inspired by a visit to a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous, Andy recalls,

I instigated a policy of storytelling in my own life, a policy of 'bedtime stories', which Dag, Claire, and I share among ourselves. It's simple: we come up with stories and we tell them to each other. The only rule is that we're not allowed to interrupt, just like in AA, and at the end we're not allowed to criticise. This noncritical atmosphere works for us because the three of us are so tight assed about revealing our emotions.⁵⁴

All three characters believe that telling stories has the power to lend coherence and depth to their own lives all the while serving as a way to connect authentically with other people:

[Claire] breaks the silence by saying that it's not healthy to live life as a succession of isolated little cool moments. 'Either our lives become stories, or there's just no way to get through them'. I agree. Dag agrees. We know that this is why the three of us left our lives and came to the desert – to tell stories and make our own lives worthwhile stories in the process.⁵⁵

It is telling that many of these stories involve religion or are heavily informed by religious language or symbolism in one way or another. 'Leave Your Body', one of Claire's stories, is an apt illustration of this tendency. The story is about a wealthy young woman named Linda who, after years of searching for meaning, stumbles upon the teachings of an order of monks and nuns who prescribe seven years, seven months and seven days of meditation and diet for the attainment of a 'state of saintliness'. Wishing for such a state, Linda undertakes the trial in her own garden. Immediately after the end of her mediation, one of the monks who inspired her finds her and chastises her:

⁵⁴ Coupland, *Generation*, 13-14. Of AA, in which a man tells him, "'How are people ever going to help themselves if they can't grab onto a fragment of your own horror? People want that little fragment, they *need* it",' Andy confides, 'I'm still looking for a description of storytelling as vital as this'. Coupland, *Generation*, 13.

⁵⁵ Coupland, *Generation*, 8.

‘You children from Europe ... from America ... you try so hard but you get everything wrong – you and your strange little handcarved religions you make for yourselves. Yes, you were to meditate for seven years and seven months and seven days in my religion, but that’s in *my* calendar, not yours. In *your* calendar the time comes out to just over *one* year’.⁵⁶

Claire, however, allows Linda a kind of victory even as she dies from her exertions: ‘Yes, her skull caved in and turned to dust – and the piece of light that was truly Linda vacated her old vessel, then flitted heavenward, where it went to sit – like a small yellow bird that can sing all songs – on the right hand of her god’.⁵⁷ The ambivalence Coupland shows toward more traditional religious expression is nowhere to be found in Claire’s strange tale of what is recognisably the practice of a highly syncretic invisible religion.

Incidental characters in *Generation* are asked to prove their worth with a story. Tobias, a boyfriend of Claire’s of dubious quality, is asked to respond to the challenge, “‘I want you to tell me something first: after you’re dead and buried and floating around whatever place we go to, what’s going to be your best memory of earth ... What one moment defines what it’s like to be alive on this planet. What’s your *takeaway*?’”⁵⁸ Tobias charms the others with a story about his parents dancing in the summer with a pitcher of lemonade, prompting the following from narrator Andy: ‘Well, who would have thought Tobias was capable of such thoughts? We’re going to have to do a reevaluation of the lad’.⁵⁹ This judgement of value plays into the end of *Generation*, which is also couched in the idea of storytelling community. Andy arrives home from work to find Claire, Dag, and his dogs missing and a note telling him to drive south into Mexico. Earlier in the novel, Dag laid the groundwork for a hotel project: ‘I want to open a place down in San Felipe ... I’d open up a small place for friends and eccentrics only ... We’d spend nights washing zinc salves from each other’s noses, drinking rum drinks, and telling stories. People who told good stories could stay for

⁵⁶ Coupland, *Generation*, 123-128.

⁵⁷ Coupland, *Generation*, 128.

⁵⁸ Coupland, *Generation*, 91.

⁵⁹ Coupland, *Generation*, 96. Story – and the potential for story – appears elsewhere in Coupland’s work as a means of valuation. In *Shampoo*, Tyler uses story as a way of dismissing his summer romance: ‘My time with Stephanie was not a story. I never went from A to B, or anywhere else. Rather, Stephanie offered the promise of pleasures to come. She was an enchanting, utterly foreign, unreachable goal’. Coupland, *Shampoo*, 112. In ‘Little Creatures,’ the opening story in *Life*, the narrator is forced to improvise his young daughter’s bedtime stories after the loss of a storybook. He invents the story of Doggles (the dog with goggles), who blew the chance of a lucrative career because of a drinking problem and of Squirrelly the Squirrel, whose art career is sidelined by having a family. The narrator stops himself in the middle of a story about Clappy the Kitten and laments: ‘stopping myself then and there – feeling suddenly more dreadful than you can imagine having told you about these animals – filling your head with these stories – stories of these beautiful little creatures who were all supposed to have been part of a fairy tale but who got lost along the way’. Coupland, *Life*, 24. Here the narrator confides to that same daughter – the story is addressed second-person to her some time after the incidents it recounts – that his failure to tell worthwhile stories effects negatively his own sense of worth as a parent.

free'.⁶⁰ Stories, and the ability to tell a story, are then for Coupland a way of measuring the worth of a person and a way for his characters to engage both with their own deeper selves and with the prospect of creating intimate personal relationships.

JPod finds Coupland extending this theme into the newly minted century by revisiting his own narratives. In *JPod* we find Coupland picking up threads from his earliest novels. The central characters, the team of software engineers who occupy the workspace called the jPod (a name whose relationship to the ubiquitous Apple iPod media player speaks volumes), represent older, more established, if less articulate versions of the characters in *Generation* working in contemporary equivalents of the jobs from *Micro* or the final chapter in *Life After God*. The world the characters inhabit in *JPod* is one in which Coupland and his novels play integral roles. Some of Coupland's appearances are playful;⁶¹ nonetheless, *JPod* is a complex intertextual novel that is reliant on Coupland's earlier books for its full meaning. Coupland appears in the novel at intervals to lambaste the central character, Ethan, for being shallow, callously flippant and ultimately hopeless, relating his failures to his overreliance on instrumental language and on his lack of coherent stories about either himself or the world. Ethan is living a life that is ruthlessly unexamined. Coupland blames Ethan for his lack of depth but also attributes it at least partially to the fragmentation and incoherence of the culture he inhabits. Other characters share in Coupland's assessment of Ethan's arrested development, his blinkered and shallow existence. Early in the novel, co-worker Mark objects to being subject to a detached, list-based 'Living Cartoon Profile' that Ethan compiles: 'Ethan, there has to be more to my life than this ... You don't understand – I'm *me* – I have a *soul* ... I want to improve my profile now. I demand to be more than just a cartoon character'.⁶² Kaitlin, the newest addition to the jPod who wishes fervently for escape, berates Ethan: 'You feel chilled because you have no character. You're a depressing assemblage of pop-culture influences and cancelled emotions, driven by the sputtering engine of the only the most banal form of capitalism'.⁶³ Here Coupland implicates a vacuous

⁶⁰ Coupland, *Generation*, 116.

⁶¹ Over the course of the novel, he accuses the producers of the television series *Melrose Place* of stealing their basic set-up from *Generation* and reiterates in print for the umpteenth time that he (and everyone else) is sick of the idea of *Generation X*. Coupland even mocks himself on occasion: the novel begins with a brief conversation, "Oh God, I feel like a refugee from a Douglas Coupland novel". "That asshole". "Who does he think he is?" Coupland, *JPod*, 15.

⁶² Coupland, *JPod*, 35.

⁶³ Coupland, *JPod*, 100. This same connection of arch, referential language to a lack of depth appears in other places as well. To take one example from *Girlfriend*: 'You talk in little TV bits. You're never sincere. You're never nice. You used to be a little bit nice once. I don't think you've ever had a real conversation in your life ... When you were young, you were funny, but now you're not young and you're not even boring. You're just kind of scary. When was the last time you had a real conversation with *anybody*?' Coupland, *Girlfriend*, 83.

popular culture as what enables Ethan to live his superficial existence. One of the reasons he refuses to engage seriously in anything is that he never *has* to.

In an uncharacteristic act of hubris, Coupland enters into his fiction to save one of his characters from himself. Coupland appears sitting next to narrator Ethan on an airplane to China, after which Ethan recalls: 'I remember Bree in the coffee room once, talking about Coupland's books as I was waiting for some soup to heat. She said that Coupland said that unless your life was a story it had no meaning, that you might as well be kelp or bacteria'.⁶⁴ Coupland, after a brief and antagonistic conversation, borrows Ethan's laptop and leaves him a message chiding him for being stupid enough to give a stranger access to his laptop and offering some words of wisdom, taking pains to note that Ethan is representative of larger cultural trends:

So maybe you really *want* to be caught doing all the weird stuff you do. Fuck, I feel like Lisa Simpson giving you an on-the-spot quickie analysis but ... are you a moron? How damaged are you? You live in a world that is amoral and fascinating – but I also know your life is everyday fare for Vancouverites, so there's no judgment that way. But, for the love of God, grow up. Or read something outside your normal sphere or use what few savings you have ... and go to a college or university and rebuild your hard drive. This is weird diagnostic shit coming from a stranger, but, Ethan, you're on a one-way course to utter fuckedupedness. I'm not suggesting you stop – but I am saying *wake up*.⁶⁵

There is an irony, perhaps unintentional, that pervades the text, given that Coupland, as he appears in the novel, references American pop culture when he is giving Ethan heart-felt advice.

Throughout the novel, Coupland establishes the value of story and storytelling over and above instrumental, technical, and technologically mediated forms of information exchange. *JPod*, in its very form, sets out to establish the difference between the symbolic exchange of story and other forms of information exchange. The narrative is interspersed liberally with examples of the kinds of language Coupland is criticising, many of them games or competitions between the members of the jPod: letters to Ronald McDonald arguing why the writer is 'his ideal mate',⁶⁶ a race to find the single error in the first 100,000 digits of π ,⁶⁷ races to find the non-prime in a huge list of prime numbers,⁶⁸ or to locate the

⁶⁴ Coupland, *JPod*, 256.

⁶⁵ Coupland, *JPod*, 259.

⁶⁶ Coupland, *JPod*, 45-50.

⁶⁷ Coupland, *JPod*, 331-352.

capital O in a series of more than 50,000 zeros.⁶⁹ Other linguistic or numeric interruptions – most of them examples of advertising, technical, or other forms of purely instrumental language – further disrupt the narrative and include, by way of example: disembodied lists of languages,⁷⁰ random product descriptions or unintelligible snippets of product information,⁷¹ lists of ingredients or nutritional information for junk foods,⁷² biographies of the members of the iPod reimagined as eBay auction pages,⁷³ giant Chinese characters and their translations,⁷⁴ programming code,⁷⁵ and context-free aphoristic phrases like ‘The only real clown is a dead clown’.⁷⁶ Over a long course of convoluted events, and inspired in no small part by Coupland’s intervention, Ethan begins to slowly emerge from his pop-culture-induced haze and to understand the emptiness and ultimate waste of his life and his immersion in a world of instrumental language. Late in the narrative, Coupland reappears asks for Ethan’s newer computer and demonstrates that he is pleased with Ethan’s progress with the highest praise possible in Coupland’s universe: “‘Because my contract says I have to write a book, and it’s easier just to steal your life than to make something up’”, to which Ethan reacts, ‘*My life a story? “Really?”*’⁷⁷ Coupland’s ultimate point in creating this stark contrast between storytelling and operational language and information exchange is perhaps more radical than might be expected; following the logic of this split to its conclusion, Coupland’s work reveals that the purely instrumental use of language has robbed it of meaning. Even further, rationalised language is undermining the very purpose of communication, which, for Coupland, is to make the world sharable.

Given our standing argument that the contemporary telling of reenchantment fits into a long history of enchanted thought within modernity, it is important to note that Coupland is not alone in identifying the erosion of story and storytelling as a peculiar and problematic aspect of modernity. Specifically, it is worth recalling that the Romantic evocation of storytelling and other pre-technological narrative epistemologies are a part of the discourses of both reenchantment and religious modernity, particularly the diffuse

⁶⁸ Coupland, *JPod*, 213-228.

⁶⁹ Coupland, *JPod*, 352-373.

⁷⁰ Coupland, *JPod*, 73-75.

⁷¹ See Coupland, *JPod*, 113-114 and 168-177 for examples.

⁷² Coupland, *JPod*, 141.

⁷³ Coupland, *JPod*, 142-149.

⁷⁴ Coupland, *JPod*, 265-271.

⁷⁵ Coupland, *JPod*, 379.

⁷⁶ Coupland, *JPod*, 423.

⁷⁷ Coupland, *JPod*, 446.

milieu of invisible religion. To cite a more specific example from the larger discourse of the postmodern turn, Walter Benjamin, who significantly refers to 'the gift of storytelling',⁷⁸ writes:

Familiar though his name may be to us, the storyteller in his living immediacy is by no means a present force. He has already become something remote from us and something that is getting even more distant ... Less and less frequently do we encounter people with the ability to tell a tale properly. More and more often there is embarrassment all around when the wish to hear a story is expressed. It is as if something that seemed inalienable to us, the securest among our possessions, were taken from us: the ability to exchange experiences. One reason for this phenomenon is obvious: experience has fallen in value. And it looks as if it is continuing to fall into bottomlessness.⁷⁹

Benjamin relates the decline in narrative to the rise of media technologies in much the same way that Coupland does, recalling at the same time Baudrillard's suspicion of explanation and his general narrative of the end of history:

If the art of storytelling has become rare, the dissemination of information has had a decisive share in this state of affairs. Every morning brings us the news of the globe, and yet we are poor in noteworthy stories. This is because no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information. Actually, it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it ... The most extraordinary things, marvellous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks.⁸⁰

Benjamin, like Coupland, repeatedly stresses the differences between story and mere information exchange: 'The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only in that moment; it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself to it without losing any time. A story is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time'.⁸¹ It is precisely this power and this contrast that Coupland explores in his novels.

⁷⁸ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 91.

⁷⁹ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 83-84.

⁸⁰ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 89. It must be noted that Benjamin's understanding of storytelling is related *negatively* to the rise of the novel, which he argued had disastrous consequences: 'The earliest symptom of a process whose end is the decline of storytelling is the rise of novel at the beginning of modern times. What distinguishes the novel from the story ... is its essential dependence on the book ... The novelist has isolated himself. The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled and cannot counsel others'. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 87.

⁸¹ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 90.

The Novel as an Economy of Storytelling

She was saying that most of us have only two or three genuinely interesting moments in our lives, the rest is filler, and that at the end of our lives will be lucky if any of those moments connect together to form a story that anyone would find remotely interesting.

Andy, from *Generation X*⁸²

In other cases, notably *Hey* and *Gum*, though it is also true of *Girlfriend* to some extent, Coupland's novels are composed of a number of interrelated and interpenetrating stories that in themselves form an exchange of narratives. It is fruitful to take a detailed look at these novels as examples of the symbolic exchange of narrative which extend the point Coupland makes with his diegetic uses of story and storytelling. In this, Coupland mirrors his larger reevaluation of storytelling by creating highly specific *formal* structures of symbolic exchange that allow the characters who create these stories to forge and maintain relationships that they cannot seem to form in other ways.

Gum is presented as a series of different writings in what is ostensibly the personal journal of Roger, a middle-aged man struggling at the beginning of the novel under the burden of a heavy and unnamed tragedy. The novel consists of a number of diverse documents: Roger's entries in his journal; a series of entries written by Roger claiming to be those of young co-worker Bethany; Bethany's real diary entries, written after she discovers the journal at the Staples office supply store where they both work; and letters from Bethany's mother DeeDee, Roger's ex-wife Joan and even her new husband. The rest of the diary consists of Roger's first novel, *Glove Pond*, a satire of Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*⁸³ Bethany also offers her comments on *Glove Pond* and adds her own essays from a creative-writing class, essays about toast being buttered (from the perspective of the toast, of course). Taking up the challenge, Roger and other contributors to the journal offer up their own attempts at writing such 'butterings'. Roger's journal, then, becomes the site for an exchange of stories, in which each party reads and comments on the writings of the other. There is a deliberate low-tech quality to the media of communication that the characters use to communicate. All of the fictional letters and diary entries represented are *physical*

⁸² Coupland, *Generation*, 23-24.

⁸³ Roger says of his novel: 'I don't remember the inspiration, but the words have always sounded to me like the title of a novel or movie from England – like *Under Milk Wood*, by Dylan Thomas – or a play written by someone like Tennessee Williams. *Glove Pond* was to be populated with characters like Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, movie stars from two generations ago, with killer drinking problems, teeter-tottering sexuality, and soft, unsculpted bodies'. Coupland, *Gum*, 5. The story of *Glove Pond* and Roger's life are interrelated. To cite but one example, Kyle Falconcrest, one of the novel's main characters, is writing a novel that is manifestly about someone just like Roger, with a dead child, an estranged wife recovering from cancer, and no capacity for learning from the past. *Glove Pond* also reveals Roger's feelings about his life: 'To Kyle, the office superstore was a slow-motion end of the world in progress'. Coupland, *Gum*, 77.

documents. A change in Bethany's attitude toward the exchange of physical exchange underlines this point. Early in the novel, she writes, 'I should be mad at my mother for writing to you, Roger, but I'm not because that's exactly the sort of depressing thing she does – not only writing a letter during the golden age of email, but also *mailing* it to you with a *stamp*. At *work*. What kind of person gets mail at work?'⁸⁴ Later, she sends a letter to Roger from London, even while her boyfriend is at a nearby Internet café: 'You'll notice I'm using paper and pen again. Screw email. I want to keep our noble storyteller's tradition alive'.⁸⁵

This exchange becomes the basis for renewed human relationships. Bethany is at first disturbed by Roger's attempts at empathy through telling her story and rails against him in his own diary: 'Roger, what a complete loser you are for leaving your diary in the coffee room ... I'm totally creeped out by your description of me and my mother and my life ... You talked about my *body*, Roger – and what I felt like being inside my body. What kind of perv are you?'⁸⁶ She sets out the terms of their exchange as a challenge: 'I can't believe I'm writing to a total perv like you. Well, it's something to kill time here at Shtooples. Here's what I'm going to do. When we see each other, neither of us is allowed to acknowledge that we've written or read these things we've written or read ... It'll make life interesting, which is a supreme challenge in this place'.⁸⁷ Bethany and Roger create a sort of alternative reality that exists only on the page, a hidden relationship that adds mystery and savour to the banal world of dead-end employment. This economy can thus be read as another way of re-narrating a world without coherent and convincing stories. Bethany notes this explicitly, 'Funny how I can ask you these questions on paper but not to your face. BTW, it's fun pretending I don't know all this stuff about you. Are you getting off on it as well? Let's keep it this way. It keeps life interesting'.⁸⁸ She even invites Roger to renew his exploration of her story, asking him to 'Pretend you're me again'.⁸⁹ Later, Bethany makes an explicit connection between their exchange and an imagined and idealised world of the past, where people had more profound relationships:

Thanks for being me again, Roger ... It's weird to describe how it feels, walking around the store knowing that you're walking around these same aisles imagining

⁸⁴ Coupland, *Gum*, 72. Emphasis in original.

⁸⁵ Coupland, *Gum*, 179.

⁸⁶ Coupland, *Gum*, 15.

⁸⁷ Coupland, *Gum*, 18.

⁸⁸ Coupland, *Gum*, 29.

⁸⁹ Coupland, *Gum*, 31.

your way into me – like being possessed – the sensation that there’s a ghost or something slipping in and out of my body whenever it wants. I don’t mind it. It’s what people probably felt like all the time before TV and the Internet. People probably tried harder to get inside each other’s heads in the old days.⁹⁰

Shortly before her half-hearted suicide attempt, the incident that ends the novel and forms its emotional core, Bethany writes to Roger about wanting to escape the narcissism of contemporary life through the exchange of story: ‘The only thing that works is if I try to imagine what it’s like to be inside someone else’s head, try to imagine what *their* inner nagging is. It cools my brain. That’s what I liked about *Glove Pond*, Roger, that you were being someone else. And that’s what I liked a few months back, when you pretended you were me’.⁹¹ The exchange has a transformative effect on Roger. He writes to DeeDee, sounding a distinctly Romantic note: ‘Until I met Bethany I was about as human as a box of discounted tax software. When Bethany accidentally started reading my stuff, suddenly I felt as if ... maybe creativity could save me, maybe I could invent a more desirable world’.⁹² *Gum* presents itself as a living exchange of story that forges friendships and builds empathy between a group of people who would, by their own admission, never have built these things in any other way. Bethany’s failed suicide introduces a jarring note to the novel which tempers the power of the exchange of story to heal wounds, a corrective perhaps to Coupland’s own role in *JPod*.

Hey is a very different form of narrative exchange with more significance for the present discussion. It more fully fleshes out the tension inherent in all of Coupland’s work between longing for religion and being suspicious of its concrete cultural forms and does so in the context of the exchange of narrative. The novel, told from four different perspectives spread across fifteen years, recounts the lasting damage done by a high-school massacre modeled on the shootings at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado in April 1999 (though Coupland shifts the shooting back in time to 1988). In an interview, Coupland said of the novel, ‘It’s like that reality show *Survivor* except that, instead of seeing whose the last person on the island, it’s, who’s the person who ends up being redeemed in the end? ... Who in the end of it is completely transformed in a miraculous way? ... So it’s almost a mystery in that way’.⁹³ Despite his obvious debt to Christian language and ideas, the novel and its

⁹⁰ Coupland, *Gum*, 41.

⁹¹ Coupland, *Gum*, 248.

⁹² Coupland, *Gum*, 222.

⁹³ Douglas Coupland, ‘The Agony Column Interview Archive, 14 June 2003’, available at http://trashotron.com/agony/audio/douglas_coupland.mp3, accessed 11 February 2008.

characters reflect Coupland's fundamental ambivalence toward organised religion, though it may not seem that way on the surface of the narrative. The novel is, however, one of Coupland's most traditional explorations of Christianity, which is deeply inscribed within the pages of the book. The novel begins with verses from 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 that anticipate the central mystery he presents⁹⁴ and ends with language inspired by the Prodigal Son narrative in Luke 15. In between, the novel seems to be enacting a traditional, if rather liberal, Christian narrative of redemption; however, this interpretation requires some nuance. Coupland told an interviewer that the reasons he included the Biblical verses are perhaps more historical than theological: 'It was actually put on the tombstone of a kid who was killed in Columbine. That passage is saying, you never know when your time is going to come. At any moment, you could commit any sin, but at any moment, transcendence could happen. No matter how, there has to be some form of redemption possible. Without redemption, there is no hope. Without hope, you're in hell'.⁹⁵ Coupland turns the whole of novel into an exploration of death and suffering, that begs for a theological reading.

Cheryl, the first narrator and one of the students killed in the massacre, tells her story from a never-defined afterlife - 'wherever *here* is' - where she is surprised to learn that she has been lionised as a martyr by the mass media for something she considers mere coincidence:

In homeroom I sat at my desk and wrote over and over and over on my pale blue binder the words GOD IS NOWHERE/GOD IS NOW HERE/GOD IS NOWHERE/GOD IS NOW HERE. When this binder with these words was found, caked in my evaporating blood, people made a big fuss about it, and when my body is shortly lowered down into the planet, these same words will be felt-penned all over the surface of my white coffin. But all I was doing was trying to clear out my head and think of nothing, to generate enough silence to make time stand still.⁹⁶

Even Cheryl, a faithful recent convert to a nebulous, nondenominational Christianity and a member of the youth group *Youth Alive!*, is ambivalent about religion. She observes, 'it always seemed to me that people who'd discovered religion had both lost and gained something'.⁹⁷ Coupland is here placing his own suspicions of organised Christianity into the

⁹⁴ 'Behold, I tell you a mystery: We Shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, And we shall be changed'.

⁹⁵ Draper, 'Novelist', 3.

⁹⁶ Coupland, *Hey*, 9. Jason later recalls, 'They keep referring to Cheryl and her notebook with God is now here as some sort of miracle, and this I can't understand. It's like a twelve-year-old girl plucking daisy petals. *He loves me, he loves me not*'. Coupland, *Hey*, 111.

⁹⁷ Coupland, *Hey*, 27. She also accuses fellow youth group members of hypocrisy: 'The Out to Lunch Bunch talked about going to heaven in the same breath as they discussed hair colour. Leading a holy life inside a burgundy-coloured VW Cabrio seems like a spiritual contradiction'. Coupland, *Hey*, 33.

mouths of his first narrator, a conflicted young woman who pursues her involvement with *Youth Alive!* despite the suspicions of her parents.

After Cheryl's brief narrative, the novel turns its focus to Cheryl's husband Jason, to whom she was secretly married and who ended the massacre by killing one of the gunmen in self-defence. It is here the reader first meets the novel's key figure, Jason's estranged father Reg. The figure of Reg further underlines Coupland's ambivalence. Cheryl describes Reg in no uncertain terms: 'He was a mean, dried-out old fart who defied charity, and who used religion as a foil to justify his undesirable character traits. His cheapness became *thrift*; his lack of curiosity about the world and his contempt for new ideas were called *being traditional*'.⁹⁸ Jason, the second of the novel's narrators, writing eleven years after the shooting, takes his father to task repeatedly for his righteous hypocrisy and displays similar anger toward his observant brother Kent: 'in the end, he'll always sell you out to his religion. He's actually a pagan that way – he has to make sacrifices, so he sacrificed his family one by one'.⁹⁹ Jason nonetheless understands his own struggles in a framework very much informed by Christianity:

We're all born lost, aren't we? We're all born separated from God – over and over life makes sure to inform us of this – and yet we're all *real*: we have *names*, we have *lives*. We mean something. We *must* ... The universe is so large, and the world is so glorious, but here I am on a sunny August morning with chilled black ink pumping through my veins, and I feel like the unholy thing on earth.¹⁰⁰

Like so many of Coupland's characters, Jason is fond of telling stories, though not the story of the massacre. He addresses his own narrative as a letter to his nephews, revealing in the end that, through an extraordinary series of events, he is actually their father. Jason is also part of an important economy of narrative exchange, one between himself and his girlfriend, Heather. This economy is revealed in Heather's narrative, set three years after Jason's, which reveals that he has mysteriously disappeared without a trace. Their relationship is built upon an ongoing exchange of story that is both playful and deeply serious. Beginning with their meeting in the checkout line at a toy store, the couple create a detailed fictional universe of anthropomorphised animal characters like the frogs Froggles, Walter, and Benihana, all of whom have their own stories. Heather writes:

Well, we all create our private worlds between us, don't we? Most couples I know have an insider's language, even if it's just their special nicknames for the salt and

⁹⁸ Coupland, *Hey*, 23.

⁹⁹ Coupland, *Hey*, 84.

¹⁰⁰ Coupland, *Hey*, 146. Emphasis in original.

pepper shakers. After a while, our characters were so finely honed that they could have had their own theme parks in Japan, Europe and the U. S. Sunbelt, as well as merchandise outlets in the malls. After a life of silence, I think that our characters were Jason's liberation.¹⁰¹

Heather means us to take her use of redemptive language seriously, even literally. She attributes a sacred, quasi-sacramental value to these stories: 'I should add, that when Jason and I fought, the characters went away. To drag our characters into a fight simply wasn't a possibility, any more than suicide or hitting each other. Our characters were immune to the badness of the world, a trait that made them slightly holy. As we didn't have children, they became our children'.¹⁰² Heather's connection of story to a religious sense of the world is explicit and the stories are not an escape from the reality of their damaged lives, but are rather the core of the relationship that allows them both some measure of healing: 'Jason was an accident. No – Jason was God coming down and tampering with the laws of nature to effect a miracle in my life ... So then, *who* put that dorky little giraffe wearing that suspiciously manly sheepskin jacket on the counter at Toys R Us that afternoon? I was his witness. I made him real, and he made *me* real'.¹⁰³ That the stories help Jason and Heather to realise their essential brokenness, which Coupland couches in the traditional language of 'witness' underlines one of Coupland's most consistent thematic elements, which is that damaged people are able to make each other heal with the simple recognition and acceptance of their flawed humanity. It is also important to note that Heather repeatedly establishes the value of this fictive animal universe by comparing it to the utilitarian language she encounters as a court stenographer.¹⁰⁴

In contrast, Reg reveals his ignorance of his son by his ignorance of his capabilities as a storyteller: he reveals, 'I guess what's strange for me here to learn that Jason had an inner world that included all these characters and all the things they said'.¹⁰⁵ Later, telling his own story, addressed to his missing son, Reg writes, 'if you ever read these words, I imagine you'll blush as you do so, but don't. Froggles! Bonnie! Gerard! The characters are pure delight – they're lime sherbet and maraschino cherries – they're almost holy. Your characters – *that* was the sort of thing I ought to have been telling you about at bedtime

¹⁰¹ Coupland, *Hey*, 158.

¹⁰² Coupland, *Hey*, 222.

¹⁰³ Coupland, *Hey*, 215.

¹⁰⁴ See Coupland, *Hey*, 165 and 196 for examples.

¹⁰⁵ Coupland, *Hey*, 180.

rather than squeezing out of you your daily trespass'.¹⁰⁶ Reg's redemption at the close of the novel, his admission of his failure as a father and as a man of faith requires that he *loosen* his ties to a faith that Coupland paints as unforgiving and ultimately inhuman. His encounter with Jason's world of stories and his admission that the characters are 'almost holy' is a crucial moment in his change of heart. Reg's redemption comes from an exchange of narratives – however indirect – with the family he had lost. That he understands this exchange of story in the terms of Luke's gospel reveals perhaps a momentary softening of Coupland's critiques of organised religion. At the very least, it allows Reg his redemption while allowing him to hold onto the core of his religious faith. Reg leaves copies of his own story, in the form of a letter, nailed to trees in the British Columbia wilderness, waiting to be found. He writes,

And you *will* find one of these letters. I know you will ... And when you do find this letter, you know what? Something extraordinary will happen. It will be like a reverse solar eclipse – the sun will start shining down in the middle of the night, imagine that! – and when I see this sunlight it will be my signal to go running out into the streets, and I'll shout over and over, 'Awake! Awake! The son of mine who was once lost has now been found!' I'll pound on every door in the city, and my cry will ring true: Awake! Everyone listen, there has been a miracle – my son who once was dead is now alive. Rejoice! All of you! Rejoice! You must! My son is coming home!¹⁰⁷

This ultimate moment of healing, this answer to the mystery posed by the Biblical verses that open the novel, is tied to Reg's realisation that his son, while profoundly damaged, is worthy of recognition and respect and this is in turn tied to Reg's discovery of Jason through the stories he shares with Heather. That the path to redemption he finds is so markedly Christian adds a degree of confusion as to how the dialectic of enchantment in Coupland's work interacts with more traditional religious considerations. The novel's closing passage brings together Coupland's ambivalent, suspicious attitude toward the Christian tradition and his Romantic belief that story and storytelling can be agents of salvation, or at least of the re-narration of a de-narrated world, which is, for Coupland, a world without meaning.

¹⁰⁶ Coupland, *Hey*, 241.

¹⁰⁷ Coupland, *Hey*, 244. *Microserfs* ends with similar images of lights and the piercing of clouds. See Coupland, *Microserfs*, 371.

Ruptural Events in Coupland

And in that field, when the appointed hour, minute and second of the darkness came, I lay myself down on the ground, surrounded by the tall pithy grain stalks and the faint sound of insects, and held my breath, there experiencing a mood that I have never been able to shake completely - a mood of darkness and inevitability and fascination - a mood that surely must have been held by most young people since the dawn of time as they have crooked their necks, stared at the heavens, and watched their sky go out.

Andy, from *Generation X*¹⁰⁸

The movement of reenchantment in Coupland's novels is not limited to the reevaluation of narrative and communities of storytelling. In a far more literal manifestation of reenchantment, Coupland's diegetic worlds are interrupted at various moments by the fleeting glimpse of a secret, enchanted world that exists under and behind and inside the mundane world. This parallel world is only visible when the smooth surface of things is interrupted by something extraordinary, though many of these moments appear in paradoxically banal forms. These ruptural events, events that break into the normal course and progress of history, again seem like nothing less than fictional affirmations of what Baudrillard called 'the intelligence of evil', the often fleeting awareness of the necessary incompleteness of every narrative or picture of the world. In Coupland's work, this hidden world represents the constant presence of enchantment, which threatens always to interrupt the visible world and lay bare its limitations.

Though they are more important and more visible in his early work, these moments appear in many of Coupland's novels. They are built into and out of the structure of everyday life. We will consider one characteristic example: in *Life*, the narrator of the story 'Patty Hearst' recounts one of these moments in the decidedly mundane setting of a filling station:

As I did this, two glossy smooth old Karmann Ghias, like M&Ms with wheels, pulled up to the pumps from each direction, one red and one yellow. There was a startled awkward moment as the two drivers noticed each other's car. And then the woman at the cash desk said to me from behind, 'Think of what lovely orange babies they'll have'. I laughed and for a brief moment I felt I was part of something larger than just myself, I felt like I had entered a world of magic.¹⁰⁹

Reflecting on this moment later, the narrator muses:

I thought of how every day each of us experiences a few little moments that have just a bit more resonance than other moments - we hear a word that sticks in our mind - or maybe we have a small experience that pulls us out of ourselves, if only briefly - we share a hotel elevator with a bride in her veils, say, or a stranger gives us a piece of bread to feed to the mallard ducks in the lagoon ... And if we were to collect these moments in a notebook and save them over a period of months we would see certain trends emerge from our collection - certain voices would emerge that have been trying to speak through us. We would realize that we have been

¹⁰⁸ Coupland, *Generation*, 3-4.

¹⁰⁹ Coupland, *Life*, 236-237.

having another life altogether, one we didn't even know was going on inside of us. And maybe this *other* life is more important than the one we think of as being real – this clunky day-to-day world of furniture and noise and metal.¹¹⁰

This idea, that such moments open a door into a secret world, is crucial to understanding their meaning. Though they are often couched in religious language and often reflect traditionally Christian themes, these moments are ways of introducing the idea of hidden depths and secret knowledge rather than the acknowledgment of a traditional concept of God or any other explicitly theological belief. Fittingly, this notion of a secret world is made most explicitly in *Life*, Coupland's most focused meditation on the loss of religion. The narrator of 'My Hotel Year' writes of a walk with his neighbour:

Once, on a morning after a particularly noisy night, Cathy and I were walking down Drake Street and we saw a crow standing in a puddle, motionless, the sky reflected on its surface so that it looked as though the crow was standing on the sky. Cathy then told me that she thinks there is a secret world just underneath the surface of our own world. She said that the secret world was more important than the one we live in. 'Just imagine how surprised fish would be', she said, 'if they knew all the action going on the other side of the water. Or just imagine yourself being able to breathe underwater and living with the fish. The secret world is that close and it's *that different*'.¹¹¹

Later in the story, he further establishes the importance of this secret world by drawing contrasts:

Sometimes I think the people to feel the saddest for are people who are unable to connect with the profound ... And then sometimes I think the people to feel saddest for are people who once knew what profoundness was, but who lost or became numb to the sensation of wonder – people who closed the doors that lead us into the secret world – or who had the doors closed for them by time and neglect and decisions made in time of weakness.¹¹²

As is generally the case with esoteric knowledge in the long and varied history of Western esotericism, the knowledge of the secret world within Coupland's fictive universe is open only to a select few.¹¹³ In *Eleanor*, narrator Liz is given a key to the secret, enchanted world (or if we wish to stay with the metaphor of esotericism, she is granted an initiatory experience) when she meets her wayward son Jeremy, a young man given to visions and

¹¹⁰ Coupland, *Life*, 254-255.

¹¹¹ Coupland, *Life*, 38-39.

¹¹² Coupland, *Life*, 50-51.

¹¹³ For an account of the Western esoteric tradition and its deep connections with literature, see Arthur Versluis, *Restoring Paradise: Western Esotericism, Literature, Art, and Consciousness* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004). He summarises, 'I use the word *esoteric* in a religious context to refer to individuals or groups whose works are self-understood as bearing hidden inner religious, cosmological, or metaphysical truths for a select audience. Such a definition can include alchemical, magical, Masonic, or Gnostic groups or individuals, but in any case there is a separation between esoteric ... knowledge for a select audience and exoteric knowledge for the general populace'. Versluis, *Restoring*, 8.

mystical experiences. Liz tells the reader, 'I'd never really thought much about belief one way or the other until Jeremy entered my life. His visions marked the first signs of an awakening within myself'.¹¹⁴ These visions inspire her to look at the mundane world with a new respect for the inherent mystery such ordinary things always hold in Coupland's dialectic of banality and enchantment:

I looked over at the kitchen wall. I looked at the paint, and it struck me that between that paint and the kitchen wall there had to be a space of some sort – even if it was a millionth of an inch thick. I tried to imagine being in a microscopic spacecraft, digging into that paint, searching for that secret charmed space. Perhaps it only exists as a concept, but maybe it's real, too. But I suppose to hunt for it is to kill it. You can only feel it surround you, feel it cover you, feel it make you whole.¹¹⁵

In drawing out continuities between the current reenchantment and other historical views of the modern world as reenchanted, it is worth recalling from an earlier chapter that David Payne argues that the work of Dickens, Thackeray and Eliot indicates 'that Victorian social life, however disenchanted it may seem, must contain some hidden, sacred, and lively essence'.¹¹⁶ In a contemporary setting and in reaction to different conditions of rationalisation, Coupland performs a very similar role.

One further example, from *Generation*, will further solidify the point of these ruptural moments, which are very much like what Baudrillard calls 'singular objects' and, to a lesser extent, 'ruptural events', which Baudrillard imagines on a societal rather than an individual level. As a surprise for his family, Andy places 'hundreds, possibly thousands' of lit candles of every description in his parent's living room, where the family has gathered for Christmas, all of them sitting on tinfoil which reflects their light. Andy creates a 'molten living cake-icing of white fire, all surfaces devoured in flame – a dazzling fleeting empire of ideal light ... we enter a room in which bodies can perform acrobatics like an astronaut in orbit, cheered on by febrile, licking shadows'.¹¹⁷ Andy's mother says when faced with the spectacle, "Do you know what this is like? It's like the dream everyone gets sometimes – the one where you're in a house and you suddenly discover a new room that you never knew was there. But once you've seen the room, you say to yourself, 'Oh, how obvious – of course that room is there. It always has been'".¹¹⁸ The unmasking of a secret world is always in

¹¹⁴ Coupland, *Eleanor*, 139.

¹¹⁵ Coupland, *Eleanor*, 153.

¹¹⁶ David Payne, *The Reenchantment of Nineteenth-Century Fiction: Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, and Serialisation* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 5.

¹¹⁷ Coupland, *Generation*, 146.

¹¹⁸ Coupland, *Generation*, 146-147.

Coupland a fleeting and bittersweet experience rooted in the lack of narrative cohesion and identifiable historical events. Andy reflects:

But there is a problem. Later on life reverts to normal. The candles slowly snuff themselves out and normal life resumes ... But I get this feeling – It is a feeling that our emotions, while wonderful, are transpiring in a vacuum, and I think it boils down to the fact that we’re middle class. You see, when you’re middle class, you have to live with the fact that history will ignore you. You have to live with the fact that history can never champion your causes and that history will never feel sorry for you. It is the price that is paid for day-to-day comfort and silence. And because of this price, all happinesses are sterile; all sadnesses go unpitied. And the small moments of intense, flaring beauty such as this morning’s will be utterly forgotten, dissolved by time like a super-8 film left out in the rain, without sound, and quickly replaced by thousands of silently growing trees.¹¹⁹

However, these fleeting moments often act as the inspirations for the stories the characters tell each other and thus offer another path to the re-narration of the world, this time in the revealing, in narrative form, of the enchanted hidden world that not all people can see. Andy’s final image of trees is telling of the importance of nature in Coupland’s moments of reenchantment, which is by no means confined to *Generation*; indeed, Coupland’s novels treat the natural world with reverence and a Romantic awe. Images of the natural world, of deserts, birds and water in particular, dominate his work. The climaxes of *Life*, *Families*, *Girlfriend*, *Generation*, *Hey*, *Wyoming*, and *Eleanor* all take place either in or in explicit relationship to natural settings, and turn on sharply drawn images of water, sunlight, rain, mountains and stars visible during daylight. Even in *Shampoo*, which features an almost militantly materialistic central character, there are moments which underline this elevation of nature; at one point, Tyler and his girlfriend Anna-Louise weep over a forest clear-cut by loggers, prompting Tyler to lament that ‘the loss is absolute’.¹²⁰ The novel ends with a ruptural moment when Anna-Louise’s apartment is invaded by animals, birds, plants, and water from a collapsed ceiling – the finishes with Tyler’s words: “Wake up – *the world is alive*”.¹²¹ This valuation of the natural world reaches what is perhaps its peak in *Girlfriend* when Jared, a ghostly figure with access to knowledge of the afterlife, says, ‘Heaven’s like the world at its finest. It’s all natural – no buildings. It’s built of stars and roots and mud and snakes and birds. It’s built of clouds and stones and river and lava. But it’s *not* a building. It’s greater than the material world’.¹²² In this single image, Coupland again presents us with the primary tension that underlies all of his fiction. He offers the reader a

¹¹⁹ Coupland, *Generation*, 147.

¹²⁰ Coupland, *Shampoo*, 85.

¹²¹ Coupland, *Shampoo*, 299. Emphasis in original.

¹²² Coupland, *Girlfriend*, 232.

neo-Romantic vision of heaven firmly embedded in a narrative that re-enacts the sacrifice of Jesus.

In several of Coupland's novels, key characters wander bleak desert landscapes, by choice or by happenstance, searching for something indefinable, perhaps searching for that vague sense of the profound that is central to Coupland's work, again in a context that toys with Christian imagery. *Wyoming* closes with an image of the revelatory power of the American desert, one of many places in which a romantic image of the road, reminiscent of classic American novels from artists as diverse as Jack Kerouac and John Steinbeck, plays a crucial role in a Coupland novel:

John ... remembered a single moment during his time away in the wilderness. He wished he had told Doris about it – a single moment in Needles, California, months and months ago, facing west in the late afternoon. There had been a heavy rainstorm over just a small, localised patch of the desert, and from the patch beside it, a dust storm blew in. The sun caught the dust and the moisture in a way John had never seen before, and even though he knew it was backward, it seemed to him the sun was radiating black sunbeams down onto the Earth, onto Interstate 40 and the silver river of endless pioneers that flowed from one part of the continent to the other. John felt that he and everybody in the New World was a part of a mixed curse and blessing from God, that they were a race of strangers, perpetually casting themselves into new fires, yearning to burn, yearning to rise from the charcoal, always newer and more wonderful, always thirsty, always starving, always believing that whatever came to them next would mercifully erase the creatures they'd already become as they crawled along the plastic radiant way.¹²³

To note one further example, Linus, one of the key figures in *Girlfriend*, wanders the roads for four years, exploring the landscapes, both exterior and interior, he encounters along the way. McGill notes the biblical elements of such a journey: 'Linus re-enacts the desert journey of Exodus, but he returns and admits that he has failed'.¹²⁴ Returned home, Linus confides to a friend: 'I thought I was going to see God or reach an epiphany or to levitate or something. But I never did. I prayed so long for that to happen. I think maybe I didn't surrender myself enough – I think that's the term: *surrender*. I still wanted to keep a foot in both worlds'.¹²⁵ Narrator Richard writes, 'I was envious of Linus' venture into nothingness, but also ticked off that he hadn't had a revelation in all of his wanderings. I still lived, as did Hamilton, with the belief that meaning could pop into my life at any moment'.¹²⁶ Richard

¹²³ Coupland, *Wyoming*, 310-311.

¹²⁴ McGill, 'Sublime', 257.

¹²⁵ Coupland, *Girlfriend*, 237. Emphasis in original

¹²⁶ Coupland, *Girlfriend*, 77-78. Ellipsis in original. This experience, of waiting and searching out such moments of meaning, is expressed by other characters; the narrator of 'My Hotel Life' intimates, 'in spite of everything that has happened in my life, I have never lost the sensation of always being on the brink of some magic revelation – that

here is waiting for the type of ruptural moment that so many of Coupland's other figures find along the path of their own stories. Again, like in *Gum*, the healing and transformative power of re-narration is not open to everyone but is reserved only for those who are open to it or, more significantly, those who are *not* explicitly searching for it.

As we have seen, the secret world and ruptural moments needed to access it are central to reenchantment as it is represented in Coupland's writings. This hidden world, which serves as an enchanted other to the mundane world, is again tied up with the Christian tradition in *Girlfriend*, which, of all of Coupland's novels, seems to cry out the most for a theological, even Christological interpretation. The story is littered with traditional Christian language of miracles, blessings, sacrifice, offerings, salvation, the loss and regaining of soul or faith. It is a story of fall and redemption, of apocalypse and revelation. It is, Hollinger writes, nothing less than 'neoconservative salvation history complete with a ritual sacrifice'.¹²⁷ Karen, the titular character, serves as this sacrifice. Tellingly, it is also Karen who has access to the secret world. Karen finds, or is given, access to this world through a visionary experience she has the day before falling into a seventeen-year coma. Jared, the spectre of a long-dead friend, tells her after her reawakening,

you accidentally opened certain doors. You were taking all those diet pills and starving yourself. Your brain did somersaults; you saw things; you caught a glimpse of things to come ... if you remember the note you gave Richard, you yourself wanted to sleep for "a thousand years", and avoid the future. You chose this, not me or anybody else ... You woke up from your coma because you'd be able to see the present through the eyes of the past. Without you there'd be no one to see the world as it turned out in contrast to your expectations. Your testimony was needed. Your testament.¹²⁸

As the last remaining survivors on an earth depopulated by a mysterious plague, Karen and a small group of family and friends are forced to face up to their failure to deal with the world, even living in such extraordinary circumstances for a year, with any depth, a failure that is enacted by any number of Coupland's characters who are wilfully ignorant of the secret world or the need to be aware of it. Ethan, from *JPod*, is only one recent example. Richard, *Girlfriend*'s primary narrator, when faced with this accusation, admits: "There's nothing large in our lives ... tell me – have we ever really gotten together and wished for wisdom or faith to come from the world's collapse? ... Have we had the humility to gather

if only I would look closely enough at the world, then that magic revelation would be mine – *if only* I could wake up just that little bit more, then ...'. Coupland, *Life*, 73-74.

¹²⁷ Hollinger, 'Apocalypse', 168.

¹²⁸ Coupland, *Girlfriend*, 214-215. Emphasis in original.

and collectively speak our souls? What evidence have we given of inner lives?’¹²⁹ Coupland ties this lack of inner life to the sense that there must be something more than the visible, something profound, something hidden:

Richard gets to thinking – he gets to thinking there must be all of these people everywhere on Earth, eager, no *desperate* for just the smallest sign that there is something finer or larger or more miraculous about ourselves than we had supposed. *How can I give them a spark?* he wonders. *How can I hold their hands and pull them all through flames and rock walls and icebergs? With our acts we will shock and captivate them into new ways of thinking.*¹³⁰

Jared gives to his friends an insistent and necessary task, one which Lynch writes is ‘reminiscent of the Great Commission in Matthew’s Gospel’.¹³¹ What Jared demands is what Richard acknowledges he needs to do. The demand is to get others to open themselves to the secret world, open themselves to the vague, always undefined, likely indefinable *something more* that constitutes Coupland’s religious consciousness:

Well, now it’s going to be as if you’ve died and were reincarnated but you stay inside your own body. For all of you. And in your new lives you’ll have to live entirely for the one sensation – that of imminent truth. And you’re going to have to holler for it, steal for it, beg for it – and you’re never to stop asking questions about it twenty-four hours a day, for the rest of your life. This is Plan B. Every day for the rest of your lives, all of your living moments are to be spent making others aware of this need – the need to probe and drill and examine and locate the words that take us beyond ourselves. Scrape. Feel. Dig. Believe. Ask ... Grind questions onto the glass of photocopiers. Scrape challenges onto old auto parts and throw them off of bridges so that future people digging into the mud will question the world, too ... Make bar codes that print out fables, not prices ... Ask whatever challenges dead and thoughtless beliefs ... Even if it means barking on street corners, that’s what you have to do, each time baying louder than before. You must testify. There is no other choice ... You’re going to be forever homesick, walking through a cold railway station until the end, whispering strange ideas about existence into the ears of children.¹³²

This need for questioning intersects even with Coupland’s elevation of storytelling, in that Jared demands that his new missionaries (and there really is no other word for them) replace prices with fables, that they replace the cold calculation of exchange value with the didactic value of the simplest of narrative forms. In this sense, this incessant need to plumb the depths of the world constitutes a variation of the storytelling motif.

¹²⁹ Coupland, *Girlfriend*, 258-259.

¹³⁰ Coupland, *Girlfriend*, 282-283. Emphasis in original.

¹³¹ Lynch, *After*, 96.

¹³² Coupland, *Girlfriend*, 273.

This ceaseless need for questioning, this demand that people search out the enchanted world beneath this one, appears elsewhere in Coupland's work. In *Eleanor*, Klaus Kertesz, the father of the visionary figure of Jeremy, has a history of what the police can only call 'religious assaults'. His arresting officer tells narrator Liz:

Herr Kertesz selects women – though we have no idea how he selects them – and he decides they need a ... religious education ... He follows them around, and he asks them questions ... Like, 'Your life is too easy. You've been tricked into not questioning your soul. Do you know this? ... Unless you change quickly, your soul will freeze itself into one shape forever, and never thaw. You must know this. Have you thought about it?'¹³³

The police cannot understand these assaults, but Liz, having been made aware of the secret depths of the world through her son's visions, has no trouble assimilating them and understanding what Klaus is trying to accomplish. He is making the same charge that ends the narrative of *Girlfriend*; he is demanding that others acknowledge the unplumbed depths of the world and that it can help 'thaw out the soul', to extend Coupland's metaphor. This is re-narration and it is also a path to healing.

Andrew Tate concludes similarly of the search for the profound or the hidden within Coupland's novels: 'This unambiguous emphasis on the need for the transcendent does not, of course, indicate the conversion of the novelist to a kind of Evangelical Christianity or even an Emersonian belief in an Over-Soul. It does, however, signal a commitment in his literature to explore the language and possibilities of belief'.¹³⁴ While addressing the secondary literature, it is important to note that other studies of Coupland have noted the importance of the ruptural moments for Coupland's vision of the religious. Lynch, for one writes of these ruptural events, using a qualified theological language:

Two particular points can be made about the kind of fragmentary experiences of meaning that Coupland narrates in his novels. Firstly, although he does not directly use the word himself, these experiences reflect the theological notion of 'grace'. They are experiences of grace in the sense that they are given to us, they come from beyond us, they are not under our control ... Coupland thus depicts a world in which there is meaning that we can encounter. This is meaning that we occasionally glimpse if we can remain open to signs of kindness, beauty and care around us. One implication of these 'gracious' experiences of meaning is that we cannot make assumptions about where goodness, kindness and healing are necessarily to be

¹³³ Coupland, *Eleanor*, 212-213. Emphasis in original. First ellipsis in original. Coupland is not alone in this conception of religion. For example, in a very different setting, John D. Caputo writes, 'The name of God is the name of the ever open question. Unlike reductionists, who think that the name of God closes every question down, that it supplies a ready-made answer for every possible question, the name of God in my post-modern *Itinerarium* is the name of infinite questionability, of what is endlessly questionable'. John D. Caputo, *On Religion* (London: Routledge, 2001), 134.

¹³⁴ Tate, 'Ritual', 334.

found ... Mediators of kindness and care in Coupland's novels can often be unexpected figures.¹³⁵

These ruptural moments, the paradoxically ordinary/extraordinary moments that are spread across Coupland's novels, and the hidden depths of the world that they reveal, are crucial elements to Coupland's fictional evocation of that irreducible element within modernity we are calling reenchantment. They are also part of his attempts to re-narrate a world that is disenchanted and seen by many of Coupland's characters as largely meaningless.

Conclusions

Linus, there are three things we cry for in life - things that are lost, things that are found, and things that are magnificent.
Jared, from *Girlfriend in a Coma*¹³⁶

Coupland's popular and influential novels offer a vital perspective on the cultural realities of religious modernity. His novels interact with the same conjunction of history, narrative and the religious that Hervieu-Léger takes on in her sociological work in a very different context that helps to flesh out the theoretical model of religious modernity. Coupland is a particularly valuable resource in that he is an avowedly secular writer who wrestles frequently with religious considerations and can neither bring himself to affirm any doctrinal faith nor ignore the essential insights of the Christian tradition. Using thick reenchantment as an interpretive framework – aided in no small part by Baudrillard's thought – allows us to tease out Coupland's central themes and to fully articulate his insightful critique of contemporary culture. These mutual gifts of story act to revalue non-operational language, both oral and written, in a world overrun by instrumental, technical information exchange. Coupland offers also a literary restatement of Baudrillard's key idea: that no system, no matter how seemingly closed, is ever complete and inviolable, something that is visible in Coupland's continual references to a secret world that exists near the surface of our own. This world is only visible in brief, flaring moments and

¹³⁵ Lynch, *After*, 97-99. It is worth citing a few more examples, all of which underline the importance of these moments in Coupland's work. Lainsbury labels these moments both 'magical gestures' and 'transcendental moments' Lainsbury, 'Generation', 186, 229. Andrew Tate tellingly integrates these moments of epiphany into his general understanding of the role of religion in Coupland's work: 'My argument is that Coupland's critique of materialism is informed by aspects of both the Puritan and Transcendentalist traditions in North America. This is most clearly manifested in the writer's use of epiphany as a structuring motif ... The absence of a cohesive established religion in Western life and lack of residual religious memories becomes a defining trauma in Coupland's fiction. These narratives ... feature covert images of conversion, baptism, and parable'. Tate, 'Ritual', 326-327. Tate later admits, however, that, given the ambiguous nature of traditional Christian motifs in Coupland's work, 'Applying the term epiphany to such moments, loaded as it is with Christian and modernist associations, is problematic'. Tate, 'Ritual', 331

¹³⁶ Coupland, *Girlfriend*, 278.

Coupland's novels consistently demonstrate the sometimes surprising forms that these moments might take.

From the comforting images of Coupland's Romantic world of storytellers, we turn to a more unsettling and challenging depiction of the dialectic of enchantment in contemporary culture: the work of the novelist Chuck Palahniuk.

CHAPTER THE SIXTH: CHUCK

PALAHNIUK'S GIFTS OF DEATH

The schema of the spectre is a postcritical, postsecular, post-Enlightenment, postphenomenological paradigm of life/death, of sur-vivance, which means, at one and the same time, of a life that is haunted by death: bygone spirits and spirits yet to come; as also of a death that continues to live: of the power of the non-living to live on, which frames the question of tradition and heritage – and all this in the name of justice.

John D. Caputo¹



he work of the American novelist Chuck Palahniuk offers a virulent critique of contemporary culture that is at the same time a difficult fictional representation of the constant interplay of reenchantment and rationalisation within contemporary culture. Palahniuk frames his critique of commodity culture by establishing within his fiction oppositional economies of symbolic exchange that operate outside the totalising logic and structures of consumer capitalism. Firstly, like Douglas Coupland, his work presents the exchange of narrative as a way to create and maintain human community. To an even greater degree than Coupland, Palahniuk seeks to reclaim the symbolic power of story against the endlessly proliferating operational and commercial uses of language. Like Coupland, Baudrillard, Hervieu-Léger, and, to a lesser extent, Weber, one of Palahniuk's chief concerns is the impact of technology on communication and authentic community. In addition and in relation to the exchange of story, Palahniuk establishes in his fictions a number of economies for the exchange of experience, particularly that of physical pain, through deliberate, even self-inflicted acts of violence. Palahniuk's novels seek to revalue *suffering* and to remove it from its medical and therapeutic settings, recalling – though never recreating – forgotten or undervalued understandings of suffering, some of which have echoes in traditional religion. This chapter follows the previous closely in terms of structure, laying out the basics of Palahniuk's work and his views on traditional religion before moving on to articulate the ways in which the dialectic of enchantment plays out over Palahniuk's controversial, confrontational body of work.

¹ John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion* (Bloomington, ID: Indiana University Press, 1997), 121.

Chuck Palahniuk and his Work

You have a choice. Live or die. Every breath is a choice. Every minute is a choice. To be or not to be.
Tender Branson, from *Survivor*²

In this chapter, we will be touching upon all of Palahniuk's major published works, both fiction and non-fiction, as a more or less unified whole. Even more so than in the case of Coupland, Palahniuk's work reveals a thematic and stylistic consistency that allows for and even encourages this approach.

Fight Club (hereafter *Fight*, 1996)³ is the story of a nameless, troubled young man and his attempts to cure his insomnia, forge genuine human connections, and make a good bar of soap. It is the story of a man driven to insanity by a disaffection so deep that he creates a charismatic and destructive alter-ego named Tyler Durden to help him escape. The novel is a scathing satire of contemporary consumer culture and was turned into a visionary film by director David Fincher in 1999, which we will be considering only peripherally.⁴

Survivor (1999)⁵ is the story of the hyperbolic rise and fall of one Tender Branson, the lone survivor of the Creedish religious community, a renunciatory sect that commits a very public act of mass suicide. Branson is groomed for mass consumption by calculating business interests and turned into a banal televised saviour figure before making a spectacular escape.

Invisible Monsters (hereafter *Invisible*, 1999)⁶ is the story of Shannon McFarland, a young model who goes to extremes in order to free herself of her own beauty and the cultural weight it carries. The novel traces the anarchic adventures of Shannon and the fabulous Brandy Alexander (a transsexual who we learn at the end of the novel is Shannon's long-lost brother) as they cross the wastelands of American culture looking for escape and an endless supply of free pills.

² Chuck Palahniuk, *Survivor* (New York: Anchor, 1999), 161.

³ Chuck Palahniuk, *Fight Club* (New York: Owl Books, 1996).

⁴ *Fight Club*, dir. David Fincher, 139 min. (Twentieth Century Fox, 1999), DVD. I have discussed the film and its reception in detail elsewhere. See Eric Repphun, 'Breaking the Rules: Generation X, Spirituality and *Fight Club*', (Master's thesis, University of Colorado, 2001).

⁵ Palahniuk, *Survivor*.

⁶ Chuck Palahniuk, *Invisible Monsters* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999). *Invisible* is in actuality the first novel Palahniuk wrote. His publishers originally rejected it – with good reason – for being too strange and disturbing. It appeared only after the critical and commercial success of his first two published works.

Choke (2001)⁷ chronicles the life and times of Victor Mancini, a sex addict who supports himself and his mother, institutionalised with Alzheimer's, through various dubious means, both legal and illegal. Victor is looking for a way to escape the easy labels – 'sexual compulsive', 'pervert', 'mentally ill' – which have defined his life. *Choke* was made into a solid if unspectacular film by writer/director Clark Gregg in 2008,⁸ which we will not be considering.

Lullaby (2002)⁹ is a venture into the terrain of magical realism, a thriller about an unlikely surrogate family that forms around the discovery of an effective magic spell that causes instant, painless death. The spell has been inadvertently published as a lullaby in a children's book and lies in wait, its dangers untold, in libraries across the United States. While one half of the family sets out to destroy every copy of the spell, the others wish to possess it and the Book of Shadows, the witch's spell book, from which it comes.

Diary (2003)¹⁰ is another horror-tinged tale of the supernatural, the story of one Misty Marie Wilmot, a small-town girl who has been granted extraordinary visions and artistic skills. The small community of Waytansa Island, threatened by gentrification and overrun by tourists, launches an elaborate ruse to entrap Misty, using her gifts to rescue their community.

Haunted (2005)¹¹ is a collection of stories and free-verse poems built on the narrative of a writer's retreat in old theatre that goes horribly, horribly wrong. A group of struggling novelists, playwrights, and television writers gather to pursue their craft in a congenial atmosphere and then realise, with tragic consequences, that there just might be an easier way to capitalise on the retreat.

Rant: An Oral Biography of Buster Casey (hereafter *Rant*, 2007)¹² relates through first and second-hand accounts the story of Buster 'Rant' Casey, another gifted small-town figure. Rant leaves Middleton and makes his way to the city, where he spreads the rabies virus and

⁷ Chuck Palahniuk, *Choke* (New York: Anchor, 2001).

⁸ *Choke*, dir. Clark Gregg, 89 min. (ATO Pictures, 2008).

⁹ Chuck Palahniuk, *Lullaby*, (New York: Random House, 2002).

¹⁰ Chuck Palahniuk, *Diary* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).

¹¹ Chuck Palahniuk, *Haunted* (New York: Doubleday, 2005).

¹² Chuck Palahniuk, *Rant: An Autobiography of Buster Casey* (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

disrupts the very fabric of social order. Rant may or may not be, via travels in time, his own father and grandfather.

Snuff (2008)¹³ utilises a similarly fractured perspective to tell the story, loosely based on the life of Annabel Chong, of the making of a pornographic film described by one of its participants in no uncertain terms: 'Six hundred dudes. One porn queen. A world record for the ages'.¹⁴

To the list of novels, we will also be drawing on relevant material from the non-fiction books *Stranger than Fiction: True Stories* (hereafter *Stranger*, 2004)¹⁵ and *Fugitives & Refugees: A Walk in Portland, Oregon* (hereafter *Fugitives*, 2003)¹⁶ as well as a brief essay, 'A Church of Story' which first appeared on-line at Nerve.com.¹⁷

Palahniuk's work has been compared to that of Mark Twain, Flannery O'Connor, Vladimir Nabokov, Don DeLillo, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Philip K. Dick, and William Burroughs,¹⁸ among many others. He has been read and discussed in varied contexts, from the perspective of the new physics,¹⁹ through Jacques Lacan and the Freudian Oedipal Complex,²⁰ through Georges Bataille's work on expenditure²¹ as well as Frederic Jameson's thinking on postmodernity,²² as both philosophical and Kierkegaardian existentialism,²³ in relation to repressive new anti-terrorism laws in the United States and the United Kingdom,²⁴ as an

¹³ Chuck Palahniuk, *Snuff* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).

¹⁴ Palahniuk, *Snuff*, 4.

¹⁵ Chuck Palahniuk, *Stranger than Fiction: True Stories* (New York: Doubleday, 2004).

¹⁶ Chuck Palahniuk, *Fugitives and Refugees: A Walk in Portland, Oregon* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2003).

¹⁷ Chuck Palahniuk, 'A Church of Stories', <http://www.nerve.com/personalessays/palahniuk/churchofstories>, accessed 6 February 2008.

¹⁸ See Jesse Kavaldo, 'The Fiction of Self-Destruction: Chuck Palahniuk, Closet Moralizer', *Stirrings Still* 2, 2 (Fall/Winter 2005): 7; Robert Bennett, 'The Death of Sisyphus: Existentialist Literature and the Cultural Logic of Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*', *Stirrings Still* 2, 2 (Fall/Winter 2005): 68; and Eduardo Mendieta 'Surviving American Culture: On Chuck Palahniuk', *Philosophy and Literature* 29, 2 (October 2005): 3-5.

¹⁹ Jeffrey A. Sartain, "'Even the Mona Lisa's Falling Apart': The Cultural Assimilation of Scientific Epistemologies in Palahniuk's Fiction", *Stirrings Still* 2, 2 (Fall/Winter 2005): 25.

²⁰ Paul Kennett, 'Fight Club and the Dangers of Oedipal Obsession', *Stirrings Still* 2, 2 (Fall/Winter 2005): 48.

²¹ Peter Mathews, 'Diagnosing Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*', *Stirrings Still* 2, 2 (Fall/Winter 2005): 84.

²² Krister Friday, "'A Generation of Men Without History": *Fight Club*, Masculinity, and the Historical Symptom', *Postmodern Culture* 13, 3 (May 2003): 21.

²³ Bennett, 'Death', 67, 70; and Antonio Casado de Rocha, 'Disease and Community in Chuck Palahniuk's Early Fiction', *Stirrings Still* 2, 2 (Fall/Winter 2005): 111. *Stirrings Still*, the 'international journal of existential literature', decided an entire 2005 issue to Palahniuk's writings, which concludes with an excellent, if now slightly dated, bibliography. See Jeffrey A. Sartain, 'A Selected Bibliography of Chuck Palahniuk', *Stirrings Still* 2, 2 (Fall/Winter 2005): 143-166.

²⁴ Ruth Quiney, "'Mr. Xerox," the Domestic Terrorist, and the Victim-Citizen: Masculine and National Anxiety in *Fight Club* and Anti-Terror Law', *Law and Literature* 19, 2 (Summer 2007): 327.

examination of masculinity and identity,²⁵ and, most importantly, as contemporary religious parable.²⁶ Of the three authors we are investigating here, Palahniuk is far and away the least accessible and the most controversial. His work has been criticised as being tasteless, excessively violent and as promoting fascism and misogyny, among other unsavoury things. A representative quotation, from Henry Giroux, aimed at the film version of *Fight*, should suffice to gather a general impression of this criticism: '*Fight Club* functions less as a critique of capitalism than as a defence of authoritarian masculinity wedded to the immediacy of pleasure sustained through violence and abuse'.²⁷

Like Baudrillard, Palahniuk's work seems calculated to invite controversy and comment. His work is confrontational, multivalent, extremely violent and very, very bloody. Not one of his novels is free of the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to and few of his leading characters escape incredible physical trials or extreme humiliation.²⁸ From his comments during an interview, it is apparent that Palahniuk sees in the shocking nature of his work a parabolic purpose:

I don't even think of it as shock value. I just do not want to waste my time and I do not want to waste the reader's time by discussing something that is not really, really confronting and really challenging. You know, if you're going to go into one of my stories, you're gonna' come out the other end a slightly different person and not entirely comfortable in the world anymore. And, so, I just find it impossible to sit down and write a story that does not go some extreme place because that's the entire purpose of a story for me.²⁹

Palahniuk's characters are no less shocking. They are largely drawn from the fringes and gutters of contemporary society. Unlike Coupland, who presents us with flawed individuals, Palahniuk's characters are the literally damaged. They are the sick, the addicted, the haunted, the downtrodden, the disaffected, and the compulsive. They are, in short, the

²⁵ See Alex Tuss, 'Masculine Identity and Success: A Critical Analysis of Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*', *Journal of Men's Studies* 12, 2 (Winter 2004): 93-102; and Matt Jordan, 'Marxism, Not Manhood: Accommodation and Impasse in Seamus Heaney's *Beowulf* and Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*', *Men and Masculinities* 4, 4 (April 2002): 368-379.

²⁶ Christopher Deacy, 'Integration and Rebirth through Confrontation: *Fight Club* and *American Beauty* as Contemporary Religious Parables', *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 17 (2002): 61-73.

²⁷ Henry A. Giroux, 'Private Satisfaction and Public Disorders: *Fight Club*, Patriarchy, and the Politics of Masculine Violence', *JAC* 21, 1 (2001): 15. See also Kevin Alexander Boon, 'Men and Nostalgia for Violence: Culture and Culpability in Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*', *Journal of Men's Studies* 11, 3 (2003): 267-276.

²⁸ By way of an illustration, the first of the stories in *Haunted*, called 'Guts', which Palahniuk read in public as part of his promotional tour, became notorious for its effect on its audiences. The story, about incidents of masturbation gone wrong, contains such vivid, visceral imagery and recounts such extreme humiliation that there were many reports of listeners fainting and several reports of injuries incurred by falling listeners. At one point in 2005, Palahniuk claimed that no less than sixty-seven people had fainted during his public performances of 'Guts'.

²⁹ Chuck Palahniuk, 'The Agony Column Interview Archive, 20 May 2005', Available at http://trashotron.com/agony/audio/chuck_palahniuk_2005.mp3, accessed 11 February 2008.

people who most put the lie to the subtraction stories that view contemporary culture as the natural pinnacle of human progress. If there is a glimpse of normalcy, of mainstream society, it lies either on the periphery or in the background of his stories. Palahniuk's choice to focus on marginal, pathetic, and occasionally repellent characters serves as a way to force a confrontation with the dominant modes of valuation within society. He flirts with stereotypes and then subverts them by presenting his marginal characters as complex and often moral figures in a world that has rejected them.

Palahniuk's work can be taken as an enigmatic and at times very difficult whole that is nonetheless unified by a number of common themes. Palahniuk enunciates through his novels a pointed and articulate critique of the closed sign system that constitutes consumer culture. Indeed, this is one of his primary thematic concerns, alongside issues of psychological damage, identity, self-destruction, violence, suffering, a felt lack of meaningful personal experience, and the creation and renewal of authentic human communities. Palahniuk's works dramatise the continual search for authenticity, be it in community, in identity, or in experience. In *Stranger*, he directly addresses the reader with this concern:

The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard defines dread as the knowledge of what you must do to prove you're free, even if it will destroy you ... Kierkegaard says the moment we are forbidden to do something, we will do it. It is inevitable. According to Kierkegaard, the person who allows the law to control his life, who says the possible isn't possible because it is illegal, is leading an inauthentic life ... What's coming is a million reasons not to live your life. You can deny your possibility to succeed and blame it on something else ... You can live Kierkegaard's inauthentic life. Or you can make what Kierkegaard called your Leap of Faith, where you stop living as a reaction to circumstances and start living as a force for what you say should be. What's coming is a million new reasons to go ahead.³⁰

It goes perhaps without saying that Palahniuk responds far more to Kierkegaard's existential leanings than to his theological side and does not imagine this leap of faith in a Christian or even a religious sense. What he does mean by this will only become clear as our investigation of his work proceeds.

³⁰ Palahniuk, *Stranger*, 213-215. He later puts the same words into the mouths of his characters. In *Haunted*, the unnamed narrator recalls, 'And Mr. Whittier said, "This is why Moses led the tribes of Israel into the desert ...". Because those people had lived for generations as slaves. They'd learned to be helpless ... The air will always be too filled with something. Your body too sore or tired. Your father too drunk. Your wife too cold. You will have some excuse not to live your life'. Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 42.

Palahniuk is like Baudrillard in that his methods are obscure, his approach oblique, the surface of his works difficult, his language alternately aphoristic, whimsical and confrontational; in its own way *Haunted*, for example, is as complex and deliberately misleading as ‘The Gulf War did not take place’.³¹ Palahniuk’s novels present a view of contemporary society very similar to that presented in Baudrillard. The image of ‘a copy of a copy’, so reminiscent of Baudrillard’s meditations of simulacra, is a recurring one in Palahniuk’s work.³² The two also return again and again to the problems of reification,³³ commodification, and the overdetermined nature of contemporary culture.³⁴ Again like Baudrillard, the fractures and breaks that characterise contemporary culture are built into the form of Palahniuk’s novels; they are as a rule nonlinear and disjointed – most of the novels begin at or near the end of their narratives and then spiral back through multiple flashbacks to slowly reveal their trajectory. The full intent of Palahniuk’s novels are often revealed only in their final passages, which bring the themes of the work into sharp, often surprising focus. His language is spare, his style minimalistic. His sentences, paragraphs, chapters and novels are short, abrupt and punctuated by repeated linguistic tics he calls ‘choruses’. Literary theorist Jesse Kavaldo describes Palahniuk’s style in hyperbolic (though by no means inaccurate) language:

Imagine what it’s like to have your eyes rubbed raw with broken glass. This is what reading Chuck Palahniuk is like. You feel the shards in your eyes, yes, and then you’re being punched hard, your nose broken ... And after you wipe the pulp from your eyes, you realise something. That the world is not broken. Somehow, the world feels more together than before you started. This is what it feels like to read Chuck Palahniuk. Broken, but something disturbing and beautiful recreated in its place. And when you’re done, you realize that everything really is all right ... Palahniuk uses the term ‘communication’, but I would extend it into communion: peace and love, certainly, but also the need for spiritual embodiment, and even the possibility of salvation in a deadened world.³⁵

³¹ Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War did not take place*, trans. by Paul Patton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

³² See also Palahniuk, *Fight*, 22; Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 379; Palahniuk, *Rant*, 104 and 313; Palahniuk, *Choke*, 151; Palahniuk, *Survivor*, 110; and Palahniuk, *Stranger*, 229 for variations of this theme.

³³ Palahniuk also deals extensively with reification and objectification: in *Haunted* a character confides ‘It’s what we do: turn ourselves into objects. Turn objects into ourselves’. Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 169.

³⁴ In *Lullaby*, the narrator captures this overdetermination with his description of the female lead’s wardrobe: ‘Helen, she’s wearing a white suit and shoes, but not snow white. It’s more the white of downhill skiing in Banff with a private car and driver on call, fourteen pieces of matched luggage, and a suite at the Hotel Lake Louise’. Palahniuk, *Lullaby*, 3.

³⁵ Kavaldo, ‘Fiction’, 3-8. He concludes, ‘despite his efforts to closet them, we do understand that with Palahniuk’s aesthetic imperative ... comes a moral imperative, as well: that we must communicate, love one another, and survive. Unlike Camus, Chuck Palahniuk is generous, and no one’s exile seems irremediable’. Kavaldo, ‘Fiction’, 22.

Kavaldo here points us toward the primary rupture in Palahniuk's body of work; the profound, at times almost insurmountable distance between the surface of his novels and their deeper meaning. Reading Palahniuk can be an uncomfortable, even painful experience, but this is crucial to the way his work functions. He presents a vision of the world as fatally damaged, shows the worst of it, and then confronts the reader, usually very near the end, with something that questions everything that came before.

Though he has been described as a nihilist, Palahniuk's work, underneath and behind the violent, perverse surface, is deeply moralistic. In an interview, he states his case quite simply: 'If you don't believe what other people believe, they call you a nihilist. I'm not a nihilist. I'm a romantic. All my books are basically romances; they're stories about reconnecting with community'.³⁶ Palahniuk perhaps unintentionally leads us towards an important point. Palahniuk can formally be considered a Romantic writer, a contemporary representative of one of the most important through-lines of enchantment within modernity. Odd as this assertion may seem on the surface, there is precedent in the Romantic tradition for figures like Palahniuk. This incompatibility is more a product of a common misunderstanding of the complexities of the Romantic movement. Jerome J. McGann notes 'a commonplace truth about Romantic works which some tend to forget, especially in these happy and upright days when so much emphasis is placed upon Romanticism as a "creative", "enthusiastic", and "celebratory" ideology: that numerous works widely acknowledged to be Romantic are nihilistic, desperate, and melancholy'.³⁷ Azade Seyhan offers us a further clue that Palahniuk may in fact be a Romantic: 'Clearly positioning themselves against the representational conceit of philosophy and the noncontradiction rules of logic, the Romantics demonstrate that the critical adventure of art and literature thrives on moments of discontinuity, rupture, and reversal'.³⁸ Palahniuk's work, which is built almost entirely out of moments of desperation and rupture, can thus be accurately considered as Romantic, demonstrating further the parallel between Romanticism and contemporary manifestations of reenchantment.

³⁶ Laura J. Williams, 'Interview: Knock Out: The Writing of Chuck Palahniuk has More than Just Hipster Cred', http://www.annarborpaper.com/content/issue24/palahniuk_24.html, accessed 6 February 2008.

³⁷ Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 23.

³⁸ Quoted in Jack Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*, revised ed. (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 64.

Chuck Palahniuk and Traditional Religion

The world won't end with a whimper or a bang, but with a discreet, tasteful announcement: 'Bill Riverdale, phone call holding, line two'. Then, nothing.

Victor Mancini, from *Choke*³⁹

Though there is much that could be said about the role of traditional religion in Palahniuk's novels, our primary concern is with how the concept of thick reenchantment, aided specifically by Baudrillard's work on symbolic exchange, can help us to interpret these texts and we will have to limit ourselves to a few comments. Palahniuk's work often deals with religion, however, as was the case with Coupland, the role of religion in his work is no simple matter. There is a good deal of religious language throughout his books, mainly from Christian and Buddhist sources, but in many cases he employs this in an inverted fashion that is again reminiscent of Baudrillard. Palahniuk's attitude toward traditional forms of religion, mostly at least nominally Christian, is highly ambivalent, alternately dismissive and respectful. Palahniuk's fullest treatment of contemporary religion comes in *Survivor*, which reveals some more of the role of traditional religion in his work. Here Palahniuk places religion within the rubric of contemporary commodity culture and subjects it to the same criticisms. The novel recounts the story of the public life of Tender Branson, who moves from the closed world of the isolated Creedish compound to a service job in the outside world (the required role for all but first-born sons in the Creedish movement) to the spotlight as his profit-hungry handlers mould and market him into a new saviour, a saviour with a corporate sponsor, SummerTime Old-Fashioned Instant Lemonade. Through the allegorical construction of Tender's rise and fall, Palahniuk implies that everything, no matter how seemingly radical or marginal, no matter how potentially liberating, is little more than grist for the mill of consumer capitalism. Everything in Tender's world is for sale. Even more damning, everything is fated to become a mere commodity. Contemporary culture is so mundane, safe and banal, the novel suggests, that any successful religion must become vacuous and facile. The novel is at once a satire of televangelism and a critique of how media spectacle turns everything, people included, into fungible forms of capital.

A further extended example will help to further flesh out Palahniuk's take on traditional religion. In *Choke*, Ida Mancini believes her son Victor to be the second coming of Jesus, though in a heavily rationalised way. Indeed, she claims to have been impregnated with an embryo cloned from genetic material taken from the foreskin of the historical Jesus, stolen

³⁹ Palahniuk, *Choke*, 202.

from a reliquary in an Italian church. Victor rails against his mother and against her plans for him as a saviour: 'Nobody's going to trick me into feeling Christlike'.⁴⁰ To prove to himself that he is not a messianic saviour, Victor adopts a new mantra, 'Just keep asking yourself: "What would Jesus NOT do?"',⁴¹ and undertakes a systematic program of self-degradation to prove it. Though it is revealed upon Ida's death that Victor's origins have nothing to do with cloning and less to do with a divine mission, in the distorted logic of Palahniuk, Victor becomes, quite against his will, something of a Christ-like figure, taking upon himself the suffering of the Alzheimer's patients in his mother's ward by accepting blame for the troubles that have befallen them in the past. Victor underlines at this point the absolute importance of coherent narratives of history within Palahniuk's diegetic worlds: 'And the detectives ask me, what was I hoping to accomplish by admitting to other people's crimes? They ask me, what was I trying to do? To complete the past, I tell them'.⁴² Here Victor is a religious figure, in the sense that Hervieu-Léger defines religion, however, there is nothing traditional about the figure of Victor who, by almost any standard, is a deeply areligious man.

The metaphoric complexity piles up even further as the novel closes as Victor and his friend Denny undertake a revealing building project. Denny collects a massive number of rocks, seemingly for little purpose, and hauls the rocks to a vacant lot where he begins to build walls. He has, by his own admission, no plans, no final vision of what he's building. The news media, having discovered this strange spectacle, nonetheless decides that he is building a church. This throws Victor into a rage, 'It's pathetic how we can't live with the things we can't understand. How we need everything labelled and explained and deconstructed. Even if it's for sure unexplainable. Even God. "Defused" isn't the right word, but it's the first word that comes to mind'.⁴³ The novel ends with a characteristic moment that brings together all of the novel's thematic strands together in a surprising juxtaposition that highlights the way all these threads connect:

We can spend our lives letting the world tell us who we are. Sane or insane. Saints or sex addicts. Heroes or victims. Letting history tell us how good or bad we are. Letting our past decide our future. Or we can decide for ourselves. And maybe it's our job to invent something better ...

⁴⁰ Palahniuk, *Choke*, 155.

⁴¹ Palahniuk, *Choke*, 169. Emphasis in original.

⁴² Palahniuk, *Choke*, 279.

⁴³ Palahniuk, *Choke*, 232.

It's creepy, but here we are, the Pilgrims, the crackpots of our time, trying to establish our own alternate reality. To build a world out of rocks and chaos. What it's going to be, I don't know. Even after all that rushing around, where we've ended up is in the middle of nowhere in the middle of the night. And maybe knowing isn't the point. Where we're standing right now, in the ruins in the dark, what we build could be anything.⁴⁴

What Victor calls for here is not the establishment simply of a new church, but a new kind of structure that transcends the need for the established sign structure of the word 'church'. He also underlines the need for the existence of things that are unexplainable and mysterious. He does all of this at the same time he is hammering home the importance of the present moment, free from the weight of history and the weight of language.

This, in a microcosm, is the way in which Palahniuk's work represents that element within modernity that I am calling reenchantment, set out over and against established systems of thought and language, including those of traditional, organised religion. Here Palahniuk's work, like Coupland's, recalls Baudrillard's 'intelligence of evil', the necessary awareness that a world that is fully explained and explainable would be nothing less than unbearable. What Palahniuk seeks in all of his work are things that do not yield to ordinary language: Victor and Denny do not build a church, they build something without a name; Victor is not a saviour or a sick, depraved man, rather he is both and he is neither; This need for anything that escapes the closed system of signs manifests itself time and again in Palahniuk novels in various ways. It is this, perhaps more than anything else, that necessitates the confrontational nature of Palahniuk writing, which itself is a confrontation with, and a subversion of, dominant codes of representation.

Palahniuk's understanding of religion is tied explicitly to narrative. Palahniuk sees himself, perhaps above all else, as a storyteller. In *Fugitives*, he writes, 'I moved to Portland because it's dark and wet, and all my friends from high school moved to Seattle. Because I wanted to meet new people. To hear new stories. That's my job now, to assemble and reassemble the stories I hear until I can call them mine'.⁴⁵ Interestingly, Palahniuk even calls for a 'Church of Story':

⁴⁴ Palahniuk, *Choke*, 292-293.

⁴⁵ Palahniuk, *Fugitives*, 175.

I tell people: The sooner we can tell a story, the quicker we can wear it out and make it a cliché, then the less power the idea will have. Until the past century, religions used to give us a place to tell even our worst stories. Depict our most-terrible intentions. Once each week, you could turn your sins into a story and tell them to your peers. Or to a leader, who'd forgive you and accept you back into your community. Each week, you confessed, you were forgiven, and you received communion. You never strayed too far outside the group because you had this regular release. Maybe the most important aspect of salvation is having this forum, this permission and audience, for expressing our lives as a story ... how about we start a religion? We could call this the 'Church of Story'. It would be a performance place where people could exhaust their stories, in words or music or sculpture. A school where people could learn craft skills that would give them more control over their story, and thus their life. This would be a place where people could step out of their lives and reflect, be detached enough to recognize a boring pattern or irrational fears or a weak character and begin to change that. To edit and rewrite their future. If nothing else, this would be a place where people could vent and be heard, and at that point maybe move forward. It would be a forum safe enough for you to look terrible. Express terrible ideas ... This 'Church of Story' would give people a forum for connecting ... we could give people the permission and structure they need to gather. To tell stories. To tell better stories. To tell great stories. To live great lives.⁴⁶

Here Palahniuk sounds a good deal like Coupland, particularly in *Generation X*; however, as we shall see, Palahniuk builds from this in a wholly different direction. Palahniuk's take on religion mixes together a Romantic view of the power of art, a functional, Durkheimian understanding of religion that is deeply embedded with the salvific and confessional elements in Christianity, a focus on the self in line with Charles Taylor's 'Age of Authenticity', and shares some interesting similarities with Auguste Comte's proposed Church of Humanity. With his explicit connection of story to a traditional of storytelling, his understanding of narrative is profoundly religious, in the technical sense developed by Hervieu-Léger.

The Hell of the Same

At the same time that the taste for risk is lost, so also are the very reasons for living.

Michel De Certeau⁴⁷

Under and behind and inside everything the man took for granted, something horrible had been growing.

The narrator, from *Fight Club*⁴⁸

The worlds of Palahniuk's novels are broken, dangerous worlds. Again displaying considerable agreement with Baudrillard, for whom American life attained a 'mythic banality',⁴⁹ Palahniuk presents a view of the world that is banal in the extreme. There is in

⁴⁶ Palahniuk, 'Church'.

⁴⁷ Michel de Certeau, *Culture in the Plural*, trans. by Ton Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 135.

⁴⁸ Palahniuk, *Fight*, 112.

⁴⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1986), 95. Emphasis in original

Palahniuk's work an analogue of Baudrillard's assertion that living a banal life is a kind of death within life. *Diary* repeatedly references this in one of its 'choruses': 'You have endless ways you can commit suicide without *dying dying*'.⁵⁰ In *Lullaby*, Carl likewise writes of his family, long dead from an inadvertent reading of the culling spell:

There are worse things than finding your wife and child dead. You can watch the world do it. You can watch your wife get old and bored. You can watch your kids discover everything in the world you've tried to save them from. Drugs, divorce, conformity, disease. All the nice clean books, music, television ... There are worse thing you can do to the people you love than kill them. The regular way is to just let the world do it.⁵¹

For Palahniuk, this banality is universal, something that is reflected in his choice of settings. Palahniuk's novels are more often than not set in places that are unnamed and in every way unremarkable. Even in *Diary*, which is set in a very particular (if fictional) place, Waytansea Island, the island remains dislocated and oddly generic. Palahniuk lays much of the blame for the homogenous banality of contemporary American culture on a single-minded consumerism which attaches far too much importance on material, commercially available goods. This critique is anticipated by Weber's writing on rationalisation: 'The idea of man's duty to his possessions, to which he subordinates himself as an obedient steward, or even an acquisitive machine, bears with chilling weight on his life'.⁵² The narrator of *Fight* makes exactly the same point in a different way:

You buy furniture. You tell yourself, this is the last sofa I will ever need in my life. Buy the sofa, then for a couple of years you're satisfied that no matter what goes wrong, at least you've got your sofa issue handled. Then the right set of dishes. Then the perfect bed. The drapes. The rug. Then you're trapped in your lovely nest, and the things you used to own, now they own you.⁵³

Snuff represents the pinnacle of another of Palahniuk's criticisms of consumer culture, that it turns those who live in them into forms of human capital. The men who are participating in the making of a pornographic film which attempts to set a highly quantified record for the number of sex acts performed by a single woman in a single sitting are given numbers and are treated as little more than interchangeable cogs in a giant machine. They are dehumanised not only by the producers of the film and its star, Cassie Wright, but by each other, and even by themselves. The novel also focuses on the various practices of physically

⁵⁰ Palahniuk, *Diary*, 18. See Palahniuk, *Diary*, 40 for another example.

⁵¹ Palahniuk, *Lullaby*, 19.

⁵² Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. by Talcott Parsons (London: Unwin University Books, 1930), 170.

⁵³ Palahniuk, *Fight*, 44.

fragmenting and selling human beings, perhaps exemplified in injection-moulded foam and rubber replicas of the genitals of pornography stars. One of the performers (and one of the narrators) muses, 'How's it feel seeing ... your most private bits heaped in some bargain bin, strangers lifting, squeezing, pinching, and rejecting them the way they would avocados at the supermarket?'⁵⁴ The novel is replete with horror stories of the fate of actors and celebrities who suffer horribly when the tastes of the public change, or technology changes – from silent pictures to sound, from 35mm film to HD digital video – and leaves behind expended human capital. One of the male performers in the film says derisively that the day is, 'Nothing if not a numbers game'.⁵⁵ At several points in the novel, Palahniuk compares such fragmented, heavily quantified sexuality with death, juxtaposing for instance technical descriptions of preparing a corpse for an open casket viewing and Cassie Wright's cosmetic preparations for her record-breaking run.

The banality and commodification of everyday life is the catalyst for much of what happens in Palahniuk's novels, where his characters go to drastic lengths to escape the life, in the words of *Diary's* Misty Wilmot, 'Where every day doesn't start with an alarm clock and end with the television'.⁵⁶ Against this consumer-driven banality, Palahniuk sets oppositional characters who reveal the things that are hidden behind the surface of the world, who, for all intents and purposes are the personifications of the intelligence of evil. Ida Mancini, Victor's mother from *Choke*, describes her aims: "My goal is be an engine of excitement in people's lives ... My purpose is to give people glorious stories to tell ... Our bureaucracy and our laws have turned the world into a clean, safe work camp ... We're so damn structured and micromanaged, this isn't a world anymore, it's a damn cruise ship".⁵⁷ Victor further outlines her philosophy, which underlines Palahniuk's reenchantment as a revaluation of chaos, mystery, and danger over and against a heavily rationalised culture that values only safe, efficient and predictable operation:

The Mommy, she used to tell him she was sorry. People had been working for so many years to make the world a safe, organised place. Nobody realised how boring it would become. With the whole world property-lined and speed-limited and zoned and taxed and regulated, with everyone tested and registered and addressed and recorded. Nobody had left much room for adventure, except maybe the kind you can buy ... And because there's no possibility of real disaster, real risk, we're left with no chance for real salvation. Real elation. Real excitement. Joy. Discovery.

⁵⁴ Palahniuk, *Snuff*, 41-42.

⁵⁵ Palahniuk, *Snuff*, 118.

⁵⁶ Palahniuk, *Diary*, 9.

⁵⁷ Palahniuk, *Choke*, 160-161.

Invention ... Without access to true chaos, we'll never have true peace ... She used to say, 'The only frontier you have left is the world of intangibles. Everything else is sewn up too tight'.⁵⁸

Jeffrey Sartain writes of her rebellion: 'Ida's ideology of adventure, her belief in the restorative power of chaos serves to unbalance comfortable hegemony. She, like many of Palahniuk's other characters, seeks to create meaning and potential for change through random chaotic acts'.⁵⁹ Tyler, the narrator's alter ego in *Fight*, is a similar agent of disorder. In a whole host of mundane jobs (worked while the narrator thinks he is sleeping), Tyler sows tiny seeds of discord and delivers tiny unsettling moments to the people around him. Working as a movie theatre projectionist, he splices single frames of pornography into family films, adding an element of subliminal disorder: 'Nobody complained. People ate and drank, but the evening wasn't the same. People feel sick or start to cry and don't know why'.⁶⁰ Sartain describes Tyler in language that has direct echoes of Baudrillard's language of evil: 'Tyler represents a very highly entropic state, chaotic and anarchistic ... entropic individuals like Tyler are considered evil because they represent a challenge to ordered society, a subversive voice, and carry with them the connotations of death'.⁶¹ Tyler and Ada, then are in some ways like the skeleton in Coupland's *Polaroids from the Dead*; however, Palahniuk does not offer the comfort that Coupland does. There are no people dancing in the rain embracing death. What Palahniuk leaves us with are people poised on the brink of an uncertain future outside the structures of language and history.

Tyler and Ida are manifestations of Baudrillard's ongoing argument that even the most closed of systems generates space for oppositional forces, that even the most rationalised systems generate enchantment, or that these systems produce their own distinct forms of enchantment. In *Fight*, the narrator begs Tyler – and he is unaware that they are one and the same person until fairly late in the narrative – to break him out of the banal rut of his daily life in a fashion that Peter Mathews labels as 'a caricature of the Lord's Prayer':⁶²

Oh, Tyler, please deliver me ...
Deliver me from Swedish furniture.
Deliver me from clever art ...
May I never be complete.
May I never be content.

⁵⁸ Palahniuk, *Choke*, 159.

⁵⁹ Sartain, 'Even', 33.

⁶⁰ Palahniuk, *Fight*, 31.

⁶¹ Sartain, 'Even', 34.

⁶² Mathews, 'Diagnosing', 91.

May I never be perfect.
Deliver me, Tyler, from being perfect and complete.⁶³

Other characters in Palahniuk's novels go even further to break the hold of culture and the closed systems of sign and language. Shannon, the young model who narrates *Invisible*, takes the self-destruction that is needed for freedom to horrifying heights. Tired of her beauty and the complex of cultural assumptions that come with it, she plans a daring escape: 'What I need is a new story about who I am. What I need is to fuck up so bad I can't save myself.'⁶⁴ Her choice of a vehicle of salvation is extreme, even by Palahniuk's standards; she shoots out the driver's window in her car when she is seated at the wheel, which leaves her with no lower jaw:

I wanted the everyday assurance of being mutilated. The way a crippled deformed birth-defected disfigured girl can drive her car with the windows open and not care how the wind makes her hair look, that's the kind of freedom I was after. I was tired of staying a lower life form just because of my looks. Trading on them. Cheating. Never getting anything real accomplished, but getting the attention and recognition anyway ... This is the biggest mistake I could think would save me. I wanted to give up the idea I had any control. Shake things up. To be saved by chaos.⁶⁵

What Shannon strives for in her near-fatal act of self-mutilation is a way out of the closed system of signs by a violation of the accepted discourse of beauty, freedom and corporeality. That these agents of chaos in Palahniuk's worlds are often insane, murderous or simply imaginary does little to undermine the power of the utterances themselves. Indeed, in the context of Palahniuk's renegotiation of values, that his agents of change are so suspect only strengthens the power of their utterances. What is valued in Palahniuk's work is the enchanting voice of chaos, not the calm, reasonable voice of order. There is no denying that Palahniuk's vision of reenchantment is far harsher than that of Coupland. It *must* be, given that Palahniuk's vision of contemporary culture is also much darker than

⁶³ Palahniuk, *Fight*, 46.

⁶⁴ Palahniuk, *Invisible*, 224.

⁶⁵ Palahniuk, *Invisible*, 286. In the same novel, Brandy Alexander, a pre-operative transsexual who, in the novel's final twist, is revealed to be Shannon's long-lost brother Shane, echoes this theme: "'It's not that I want to be a woman ... I'm only doing this because it's just the biggest mistake I can think to make. It's stupid and destructive, and anybody will tell you I'm wrong. That's why I have to go through with it". Brandy says, "Don't you see? Because we're so trained to do life the right way. *To not make mistakes* ... I figure the bigger the mistake looks, the better chance I'll have to break out and live a real life ... Our real discoveries come from chaos" ... A sexual reassignment surgery is a miracle for some people, but if you don't want one, it's the ultimate form of self-mutilation. She says, "Not that it's bad being a woman. This might be wonderful, *if I wanted to be a woman*. The point is", Brandy says, "being a woman is the last thing I want. It's just the biggest mistake I could think to make". So it's the path to the greatest discovery.' Palahniuk, *Invisible*, 258-259. Even Brandy, though, thinks she has not gone far enough for a truly authentic life. She tells Shannon: "'I'm not straight, and I'm not gay ... I'm not bisexual. I want out of the labels. I don't want my whole life crammed into a single word. A story. I want to find something else, unknowable, some place to be that's not on the map. A real adventure ... When I met you ... I envied you. I coveted your face. I thought that face of yours will take more guts than any sex change operation. It will give you bigger discoveries. It will make you stronger than I could ever be". Palahniuk, *Invisible*, 261.

Coupland's. Palahniuk's characters must go to extremes to counter the extremes of reification and disenchantment of contemporary American life.

Perhaps the fullest expression of Palahniuk's critique of media and media technology can be found in *Lullaby*, couched in language that has distinct resonances with that of symbolic exchange. The world of *Lullaby* is haunted by the never-ending babble of the media. Narrator Carl, who works as journalist, laments,

Most of the laugh tracks on television were recorded in the early 1950s. These days, most of the people you hear laughing are dead ...
These people who need their television or stereo or radio playing all the time. These people so scared of silence. These are my neighbours. These sound-oholics. These quiet-ophobics. Laughter of the dead comes through every wall. These days, this is what passes for home sweet home.
This siege of noise ...
This is what passes for civilisation.⁶⁶

Palahniuk describes the power of the mass media as a form of totalitarianism that many people invite upon themselves, which is worse than overt manipulation:

Old George Orwell got it backward.
Big Brother isn't watching. He's singing and dancing. He's pulling rabbits out of a hat. Big Brother's busy holding your attention every moment you're awake. He's making sure you're always distracted. He's making sure you're fully absorbed.
He's making sure your imagination withers. Until it's as useless as your appendix.
He's making sure your attention is always filled.
And this being fed, it's worse than being watched. With the world always filling you, no one has to worry about what's in your mind. With everyone's imagination atrophied, no one will ever be a threat to the world.⁶⁷

Employing a supernatural magic spell, the 'culling song', as a metaphoric device, the novel equates the flood of language, image and sound that permeates contemporary life in Palahniuk's America with other forms of black magic. Carl describes the spell: 'It's an old song about animals going to sleep. It's wistful and sentimental ... In some ancient cultures, they sang it to children during famines or droughts, anytime the tribe had outgrown its land. You sing it to warriors crippled in battle and people stricken with disease, anyone you

⁶⁶ Palahniuk, *Lullaby*, 15-16.

⁶⁷ Palahniuk, *Lullaby*, 18-19. He extends this insight into more philosophical realms: 'I don't know the difference between what I want and what I'm trained to want. I can't tell what I really want and what I've been tricked into wanting. What I'm talking about is free will. Do we have it, or does God dictate and script everything we do and say and want? Do we have free will, or do the mass media and our culture control us, our desires and actions, from the moment we're born?' Palahniuk, *Lullaby*, 228. He makes this point in other ways as well. An example: Brandy, in *Invisible*, tells narrator Shannon: 'You're a product of our language ... and how our laws are and how we believe our God wants us. Every bitty molecule about you has already been thought out by some million people before you ... Anything you can do is boring and old and perfectly okay. You're safe because you're so trapped inside your culture. Anything you can conceive of is fine *because you can conceive of it*. You can't imagine any way to escape. There's no way you can get out. The world ... is your cradle and your trap'. Palahniuk, *Invisible*, 219.

hope will die soon. To end their pain. It's a lullaby'.⁶⁸ Anyone who hears the song dies shortly afterwards and anyone strong enough can kill quickly and precisely by merely thinking the words of the song with intent. The organising theme of *Lullaby* is possession, something that is revealed only at the very end of the novel. In a key passage, Palahniuk draws explicit connections with black magic, mass media saturation and ideology:

According to Mona Sabat people who eat or drink too much, people addicted to drugs or sex or stealing, they're really controlled by spirits that loved those things too much to quit after death. Drunks and kleptos, they're possessed by evil spirits. You are the culture medium. The host. Some people still think they live their own lives. You are the possessed. We're all of us haunting and haunted. Something foreign is always living itself through you. Your whole life is the vehicle for something to come to earth. An evil spirit. A theory. A marketing campaign. A political strategy.⁶⁹

Against this world of endless chatter, Carl imagines a world in which the culling song is released to the public:

In a world where vows are worthless. Where making a pledge means nothing. Where promises are made to be broken, it would be nice to see words come back into power ... It would be a dangerous, frightened world, but at least you could sleep with your windows open. It would be a world where each word was worth a thousand pictures. It's hard to say if the world would be any worse than this, the pounding music, the roar of television, the squawk of radios.⁷⁰

Carl imagines here a world of language returned to its symbolic register, the closed system of signs threatened quite literally with the spectre of death, the only element Baudrillard tells us is utterly unabsorbable, the only thing that no closed system of signs can fully defuse. A world in which words could kill would be witness to the literal reenchantment of language and, though Carl tries to stop the release of the culling song, he is undoubtedly seduced by this deadly vision of a reenchanting world.

⁶⁸ Palahniuk, *Lullaby*, 36. The world of *Lullaby* is permeated with magic. It is a haunted world, in a number of senses. Helen Hoover Boyle, who, like Carl, loses a young child accidentally to the culling song, is a real estate agent who specializes in selling haunted house which guarantee of quick turnover. The novel tells of living rooms where the words 'get out' are mysteriously gouged into hardwood floors, of disembodied screams in the attic, of other horrors. Carl says of Helen's search for houses: 'Forget those dream houses you only sell once every fifty years. Forget those happy homes. And screw subtle: cold spots, strange vapours, irritable pets. What she needed was blood running down the walls. She needed ice-cold invisible hands that pull children out of bed at night. She needed blazing red eyes in the dark at the foot of the bedroom stairs. That and decent curb appeal'. Palahniuk, *Lullaby*, 5. Later in the novel, however, she says, "I hate people who claim to believe in ghosts ... There are no ghosts. When you die, you're dead. There's no afterlife. People who claim they can see ghosts are just looking for attention. People who believe in reincarnation are just postponing their lives". Palahniuk, *Lullaby*, 128-129.

⁶⁹ Palahniuk, *Lullaby*, 259.

⁷⁰ Palahniuk, *Lullaby*, 59-60.

Palahniuk's worlds, like Coupland's, are haunted by another world that exists under, behind and inside the visible world, an enchanted world that threatens the dominant order. Palahniuk's work can be understood as an ongoing search for places and things that are beyond instrumentality, calculation or ordinary language. Palahniuk takes his critique of banal consumer culture and mass media saturation a step further with his reenchantment of suffering.

The Reenchantment of Suffering

Whether life is worth living and when – this question is not asked by medicine. Natural science gives us an answer to the question of what we must do if we wish to master life technically. It leaves quite aside, or assumes for its purposes, whether we should and do wish to master life technically and whether it ultimately makes sense to do so.

Max Weber⁷¹

In a manner that has distinct parallels with Baudrillard's most radical thinking on symbolic exchange, Palahniuk's work draws distinctions between willed and unwilled suffering and death, between suffering endured and suffering explained away with operational medical language. Here again we find manifested the differences between the symbolic and the instrumental, between explanation and exploration. The rationalisation or 'medicalisation', to borrow a word from Antonio De Rocha,⁷² of suffering and death lies in the background of much of Palahniuk's work and the reenchantment of suffering he offers over against this medicalisation is one of the primary themes that run through his work. It is also, far and away, the most radical of the visions of reenchantment under examination here.

The scission between an instrumental and a reenchanting understanding of the body and corporeality is first evident in the role of medicine and medical knowledge in his novels. Technical medical language is another in the long list of things that mediate authentic experience in Palahniuk's worlds; however, the language of medicine is simply one aspect of his critique of rationalised language. For Palahniuk, details are a shield. Operational language is a buffer. Explanation is obscuration. In *Haunted*, Miss Leroy (also known as The Baroness Frostbite), before recounting a horrific story about an unfortunate tourist who falls into a geyser in a national park, distances herself from his suffering with technical language: the narrator recounts, 'It's poetry to hear Miss Leroy spin this out. Skeletonisation. Skin slippage. Hypokalemia. Long words that take everybody in the bar to safe abstracts, far, far away. It's a nice little break in her story, before facing the worst. You

⁷¹ Max Weber, 'Science as a Vocation', in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and ed. by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 144.

⁷² De Rocha, 'Disease', 108.

can spend your whole life building a wall of facts between you and anything real'.⁷³ Similarly, in *Lullaby*, Carl muses, 'The trick to forgetting the big picture is to look at everything close-up. The shortcut to closing a door is to bury yourself in the details. This is how we must look to God. As if everything's just fine'.⁷⁴ In *Choke*, this distance of language and experience is formulated precisely in a characteristic juxtaposition of disparate elements within culture. Victor outlines his mother's philosophy of chaos and disruption:

These cosmetic drugs, she said, those mood equalisers and antidepressants, they only treat the symptoms of the bigger problem.

Every addiction, she said was just a way to treat this same problem. Drugs or overeating or alcohol or sex, it was all just another way to find peace. To escape what we know. Our education. Our bite of the apple.

Language, she said, was just our way to explain away the wonder and the glory of the world. To deconstruct. To dismiss. She said people can't deal with how beautiful the world really is. How it can't be explained or understood ...

'We don't live in a real world anymore', she said. 'We live in a world of symbols'.⁷⁵

Modern medicine is, for Palahniuk, a crucial part of this damaging mediation, this retreat from authenticity.

Palahniuk places much of his discussions of suffering over and against the therapeutic ethos of contemporary culture, an ethos that informs and is informed by the milieu of contemporary religious syncretism in many parts of the West. Support groups for the terminally ill and twelve-step addiction recovery programs feature prominently in his work, particularly in *Choke* and *Fight*, however, their role and value is highly ambivalent. On the one hand, like Coupland's connection of storytelling with the practices of Alcoholics Anonymous, he connects these places with his proposed Church of Story. He writes of his personal experiences in observing these groups:

In so many places, these places – support groups, twelve-step recovery groups, demolition derbies – they've come to serve the role that organised religion used to. We used to go to church to reveal the worst aspects of ourselves, our sins. To tell our stories. To be recognised. To be forgiven. And to be redeemed, accepted back into our community. This ritual was our way of staying connected to people, and to resolve our anxiety before it could take us so far from humanity that we would be

⁷³ Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 338. Likewise, in *Invisible*, which features substantial passages of almost purely medical language dealing with injuries and various surgical procedures, Palahniuk again critiques the distancing effect of utilitarian language and its companion, euphemism. Nurses at the hospital where Shannon recovers from her self-inflicted wounds mask the suffering they are surrounded by with a barrier of language. Shannon recounts that a 'day nurse tried to fix me up with an accountant whose hair and ears were burned off in a propane blunder. She introduced me to a graduate student who'd lost his throat and sinuses to a touch of cancer ... Those were all her words, blunder, touch, tumble. The lawyer's *mishap*. My big *accident*.' Palahniuk, *Invisible*, 35. Emphasis in original.

⁷⁴ Palahniuk, *Lullaby*, 21-22.

⁷⁵ Palahniuk, *Choke*, 150-151.

lost. In these places I found the truest stories. In support groups. In hospitals. Anywhere people had nothing left to lose, that's where they told the most truth.⁷⁶

On the other hand, it is impossible to ignore the fact that Palahniuk is also at times casually dismissive of the whole of the therapeutic ethos as another harmful mediation of the authentically human experience of suffering. There is also no denying that Palahniuk's treatment of genuine pain in these places is at times callous and offhand. In *Fight*, the narrator describes a woman dying of a parasitic infection: 'Chloe was the way Joni Mitchell's skeleton would look if you made it smile and walk around a party being extra special nice to everyone'.⁷⁷ In *Choke*, Victor and Denny are both sexual compulsives and we first meet Victor as a grown man as he picks up women at support group meetings. These meetings provide for him a comforting distance through official language: 'being a pervert here is not your fault. Compulsive sexual behaviour is ... a disease. It's a physical addiction just waiting for the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual* to give it of code of its own so treatment can be billed to medical insurance'.⁷⁸ The narrator of *Fight* makes a similar point about the distancing effects of the therapeutic ethos as embodied in the support group:

At Above and Beyond, we start with the Catch-Up Rap. The group isn't called Parasitic Brain Parasites. You'll never hear anyone say 'parasite'. Everybody is always getting better. Oh, this new medication. Everyone's always just turned the corner. Still, everywhere, there's the squint of a five-day headache ... No one will ever say *parasite*. They'll say, *agent*. They don't say *cure*. They'll say, *treatment*.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Palahniuk, *Stranger*, xix. Mendieta, recognising this connection in Palahniuk's work, argues that 'This twelve-step is in fact an ersatz religion. In it we find ritual, rhythm, and solace from the uncertainty of an overwhelming world turned strange by the monotony of its endless changing. In it we find prayer, and confessions, we find saints and martyrs'. Mendieta, 'Surviving', 6. Authentic exchange is crucial in Palahniuk's work and on occasion he paints the support group as a place of genuine exchange. The narrator of *Fight* intimates that the extremity of the situation in support groups forces an exceptional honesty in exchange: 'If this might be the last time they saw you, they really saw you. Everything else about their chequebook balance and radio songs and messy hair went out the window. You had their full attention. People listened instead of just waiting for their turn to speak ... When the two of you talked, you were building something, and afterward you were both different than before.' Palahniuk, *Fight*, 107.

⁷⁷ Palahniuk, *Fight*, 36.

⁷⁸ Palahniuk, *Choke*, 17. Quantified diagnostic manuals are given harsh treatment elsewhere in Palahniuk's work: in *Survivor*, Tender writes of Trevor Hollis, a clairvoyant who is unwise enough to use his powers in public: 'Nobody wanted to believe in a talent this incredible ... They'd accuse Trevor of being a terrorist or an arsonist. A pyromaniac, according to the *Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. In another century, they'd have accused him of being a warlock'. Palahniuk, *Survivor*, 179. Similarly, in *Haunted*, the free-verse poem about the Countess Foresight, another clairvoyant, drives home the point that official medical diagnostic language narrows the view of the world and the people in it: 'The world will always punish the few people with special talents the rest of us don't recognize as real ... Two hundred years from today, when what she saw, and read, and knew, when it all makes sense. By then, the Countess will be nothing but a prisoner number. A case file. The ash of a witch'. Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 317.

⁷⁹ Palahniuk, *Fight*, 35. Emphasis in original. To cite one more example, a story by Comrade Snarky in *Haunted* takes another satirical look at the support groups which implies that such groups can be as insular and hateful as anything else in society. In the story, a transsexual (or possibly just a conventionally attractive woman – it is never clear which is the case) is degraded and assaulted during her first visit to 'a women-only safe space' where 'consciousness raising ... rooted in complaint' is the goal. 'Being a woman is special. It's sacred', Comrade tells the visitor, 'This isn't just some club you can join. You don't get a shot of oestrogen and show up here'. Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 262. The group reiterates and reinforces the discursive violence they claim to find abhorrent: 'In this case, "no" does mean "yes". It means, "Yes, please". It means, "slap me"'. Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 264.

Again, operational or euphemistic language and narrow, rationalised diagnostic tools serve to distance people from their suffering rather than help them make sense of it.

Over and against this therapeutic mediation of pain and suffering, Palahniuk provides a number of examples of a suffering that is both reenacted and deeply indebted to the history of Christianity. Before moving on to this aspect in Palahniuk's work, some brief comments are needed for context, beginning with a fundamental, yet often overlooked, truth: pain and suffering are not simple physical matters. Physical pain and the responses to it are profoundly *cultural* and changes in society likewise change the ways in which pain is understood, even how it is experienced. Historian Roselyne Rey argues:

Pain is indeed certainly a combination of cultural and social factors: it has not had the same significance throughout the ages nor in the various differences in civilisations ... Moreover, pain involves a codified form of social behaviour which sets the parameters of allowable overt manifestations and regulates the expression of such innermost personal experiences, whether endured in the family bosom or alone in a solitary confrontation with the self ... Pain's expression, whatever form it takes, does not escape the dialectic concerning what must be concealed and what may be revealed.⁸⁰

Religion, as a fundamental strand in the web of culture, plays no small part in this complex. Specifically, Rey argues that suffering in the Western world has been heavily influenced by Christian conceptions of pain and suffering: 'The belief in the redeeming virtues of pain, the idea that suffering individuals were closer to Christ, that their anguish could be offered up in penitence for earthy sins, or even that God put only his elected few through terrible trials were all recurrent themes throughout Church literature'.⁸¹ She admits that the chains of causality are difficult to follow: 'there are few accounts of the ways in which people dealt with pain until the twelfth century when religious preoccupations underwent a shift; this became increasingly focused on Christ's Incarnation and his sufferings on the Cross and may have been responsible for the appearance of a greater concern with bodily suffering'.⁸² Robert Detweiler, who attaches a great deal of importance to pain and suffering, writes simply, 'The pain of the crucifixion retains its power to affect emotionally and is still at the heart of the Western sense of the sacred'.⁸³

⁸⁰ Roselyne Rey, *The History of Pain*, trans. by J. A. Cadden, Louise Elliott Wallace and S. W. Cadden (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 2-4.

⁸¹ Rey, *History*, 184.

⁸² Rey, *History*, 48.

⁸³ Robert Detweiler, *Breaking the Fall: Religious Readings of Contemporary Fiction* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1989), 46-47.

Despite this long influence, which remains in even the most rationalised settings, physical pain in the Western world is today largely understood in a medical and therapeutic manner. Talal Asad notes that the gradual shift from a theologically dominated understanding in which pain is often understood positively to an instrumental understanding in which pain is to be avoided is often recounted as a subtraction story: 'A triumphalist history of the secularisation of pain describes the process as a move from the premodern resignation to suffering and cruelty justified or condoned by religious beliefs, to the accumulation of scientific knowledge and the growth of humanitarian attitudes that lead to the discovery and use of anaesthesia in the nineteenth century'.⁸⁴ Like all subtraction stories, this account of the history of pain lacks nuance and the proper concern for historical continuities. However, these technological and cultural changes in the management and perception of pain have had a paradoxical alienating effect for the sufferer. Rationalisation in the field of medicine, as it has in so many other fields, has led to fragmenting, dehumanising effects. Ariel Glucklich notes the contradictions:

With the invention of anaesthetics pain became strictly a medical problem and a matter that pertains to the body rather than the entire person. The individual in pain evolved into a patient, which is a juridical and ethical category – a possessor of rights over one's body and a temporary resident of a medical institution (the hospital). This replaced the premodern person in pain, who was first and foremost a member of a true community, and whose pain meant something far more significant than tissue damage. The invention and then application of chemicals – ether and chloroform – to anaesthetise patients undergoing surgery and women in labour ranks as one of the great achievements of nineteenth-century medicine. It brought to an abrupt end the most gruesome and frightful aspects of premodern healing, and almost immediately blinded humanity to any value pain might have previously possessed.⁸⁵

The subtraction narratives that are attached to the medicalisation of pain and suffering carry with them the logical connection that anyone who seeks out pain is a survivor from a past that has rightly been discarded. William James notes the effects of this in the very early days of the twentieth century: 'A strange moral transformation has within the past century swept over our Western world. We no longer think that we are called on to face physical pain with equanimity. It is not expected of a man that he should either endure it

⁸⁴ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 46 footnote 64.

⁸⁵ Glucklich, *Sacred*, 179. He continues, significantly linking rationalisation to the dehumanization of the sufferer, 'The rise of anaesthetics was closely associated with the bureaucratising of medicine in Europe and in America, with the reduction of the person to the status of patient and statistical sample ... The unconscious patient, who had taken an active role in surgical and obstetric procedures of old, was now rendered a passive object who could neither guide the doctor nor voice any point of view'. Glucklich, *Sacred*, 187.

or inflict much of it, and to listen to the recitals of cases of it makes our flesh creep morally as well as physically'.⁸⁶ Extending the logic of religious modernity into the realm of suffering, it is necessary to note that the medicalisation of pain has not broken cleanly from religiously informed conceptions of pain. Glucklich argues that the subtraction stories ignore important connections:

The biggest obstacle to understanding the value of sacred [religious] pain is not its feel but our insistence that pain can signify a medical problem only. This is not an intellectual failure or a poverty of the imagination, but the amnesia that descends with the emergence of radically new worldview ... One hundred fifty years of this bourgeois medical psychology have all but erased the memory of pain as an experience that signifies something other than personal disintegration. But perhaps not altogether? Closer examination reveals that 'sacred pain', or pain in the service of higher ends, has not entirely vanished from the modern world, even outside the Vatican.⁸⁷

William R. LaFleur argues this point more explicitly: 'the struggle between the sacred and the secular is not a zero-sum game. Modern medicine constitutes, then, a set of practices in which the *religious* biases and predilections of Europe have been made merely more subterranean, more difficult to detect'.⁸⁸ The story of the rise of medicine must not be seen as a simple stripping away of the ignorance of magical or religious understandings of pain but as a complex movement within history that involves medicine, religion, culture, economics, even the arts. Charles Taylor notes a specific instance of this interpenetration: 'there are remains today of the stance which links illness to sin. Think of the reaction of some people to the AIDS epidemic; or the way people with cancer are often told that they are stricken because of their bad life style'.⁸⁹ He links this to the rise of the therapeutic ethos that Palahniuk critiques so harshly:

One of the most striking fruits of this sense of innate human innocence has been the transfer of so many issues which used to be considered moral into a therapeutic register. What was formerly sin is often now seen as sickness. This is the 'triumph of the therapeutic', which has paradoxical results. It seems to involve an enhancement of human dignity, but can actually end up abasing it ... Now the pathos involved in the triumph of the therapeutic is this: One reason to throw over the spiritual perspective evil/holiness was to reject the idea that our normal, middle-range existence is imperfect. We're perfectly all right as we are, as 'natural' beings. So the dignity of ordinary, 'natural' existence is even further enhanced ... Only now, as afflictions of beings destined for middle-range normalcy, they must be seen as the result of sickness. They must be treated therapeutically. But the person being

⁸⁶ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 221.

⁸⁷ Glucklich, *Sacred*, 7.

⁸⁸ William R. LaFleur, 'Body', in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 48. Emphasis in original.

⁸⁹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 40.

treated is now treated is now being approached as one who is just incapacitated. He has *less* dignity than the sinner.⁹⁰

Palahniuk's characters, who often invite suffering into their lives and imbue it with a transcendental value, are thus further marginalised by the medicalisation of pain and the rise of the therapeutic ethos. Glucklich explains: 'the nineteenth century proves that given the choice between hurting or being medicated, the vast majority would opt for painlessness. On the other hand, since pain was both a medical matter and an option, anyone choosing to hurt had to be, in some sense, abnormal'.⁹¹ Asad similarly notes that the medical understanding of pain renders anyone who suffers as a victim rather than an agent.⁹² By rejecting or forgetting any positive aspects of pain, those that suffer can only be seen as victims. However, outside of medicalised understanding of pain, as Asad and Glucklich both imply, pain can take on deeper resonances and be transformed into authentic suffering. Asad writes, 'What a subject experiences as painful, and how, are not simply mediated culturally and physically, *they are themselves modes of living a relationship*. The ability to live such relationships over time transforms pain from a passive experience into an active one'.⁹³ Context, then, is crucial to the perception of pain, as Glucklich argues: 'There is an enormous difference between the unwanted pain of a cancer patient or victim of a car crash, and the voluntary and modulated self-hurting of a religious practitioner'.⁹⁴ Glucklich draws here a distinction between simple pain and suffering: 'To begin with, pain must be distinguished from suffering; it is a type of sensation usually – though not necessarily – associated with tissue damage ... Suffering, in contrast, is not a sensation but an emotional and evaluative reaction to any number of causes, some entirely painless'.⁹⁵ Palahniuk's characters transform the pain they invite onto their bodies into a willed, positive form of suffering understood as a rebellion against the banality and safety of the therapeutic culture that fears and rejects pain and marginalises those who seek it out as

⁹⁰ Taylor, *Secular*, 618-620. Emphasis in original.

⁹¹ Glucklich, *Sacred*, 195.

⁹² He writes, in the context of European encounters with shamans and magicians, 'This is a secular viewpoint held by many (including anthropologists) that would have one accept that in the final analysis there are only two mutually exclusive options available: either an agent (representing and asserting himself or herself) or a victim (the passive object of chance or cruelty). When we say that someone is suffering, we commonly suppose that he or she is not an agent.' Asad, *Formations*, 79.

⁹³ Asad, *Formations*, 23. Emphasis in original. He cites an example: 'Pain inflicted as punishment can be eagerly embraced by those on whom it is inflicted and transformed into something other than what was intended. Sadomasochism ... is one example, although I shall argue that it should not be identified as merely a secular version of a phenomenon familiar to us from the domain of religion – and therefore as the pathology underlying particular religious practices'. Asad, *Formations*, 85.

⁹⁴ Glucklich, *Sacred*, 6.

⁹⁵ Glucklich, *Sacred*, 11. Here he is referring to the official American Medical Association definition of pain as 'an unpleasant sensation related to tissue damage'.

archaic and deluded. Palahniuk's novels attack the medical, instrumental understanding of pain in the interests of reenchanted suffering and embracing marginalised understandings of physical pain that such medicalisation claims to have removed from the cultural consciousness. Following the logic of this attack, Palahniuk again offers a challenging reversal: those who are the sickest, the least healthy in the eyes of society, are the ones who can see the contemporary world and its fascination with health for the sickness it really is. Here Shannon, the self-mutilating model from *Invisible*, is Palahniuk's most potent representation of this idea.

Suffering can also be, if shared, a powerful tool for strengthening community. Glucklich writes, underlining Palahniuk's use of pain:

religious individuals have hurt themselves because the pain they produced was meaningful and is not only subject to verbal communication, but also figures in our ability to empathise and share. In other words, the symbolic and experiential efficacy of pain derives from the way it bridges 'raw' sensation with our highest qualities as human beings in a community of other humans.⁹⁶

He concludes, 'It is inconceivable that the suffering of Christ on the cross, or that the astounding martyrdom of the saints, of for that matter Rabbi Akiva or Al-Hallaj, would mean anything to anyone unless pain was intrinsically sharable'.⁹⁷As we shall see, Palahniuk seeks the revaluation of suffering as a legitimate, indeed indispensable, aspect of human being.

Suffering, for Palahniuk, is tied up with the spectre of death. Palahniuk is here radical in another way, in that his characters across his work affirm their mortality and many of them participate ritually in death. This is a subversive rechantment of death that goes against the therapeutic ethos, the medicalisation of pain, and the rationalisation of death as a medical matter. It should be remembered here that Weber argued that the movement of rationalisation rendered death meaningless:

Now, this process of disenchantment, which has continued to exist in Occidental culture for millennia, and, in general, this 'progress', to which science belongs as a link and motive force, do they have any meanings that go beyond the purely

⁹⁶ Glucklich, *Sacred*, 44.

⁹⁷ Glucklich, *Sacred*, 63. Glucklich is here arguing against Elaine Scarry's seminal 1985 book *The Body in Pain*, which argues that pain is objectless, incapable of articulation, and ultimately isolating. She summarises: 'Whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unsharability, and it ensures this unsharability through its resistance to language ... Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned'. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 4.

practical and technical? You will find this question raised in the most principled in the work of Leo Tolstoy. He came to raise the question in a peculiar way. All his brooding increasingly revolved around the problem of whether or not death is a meaningful phenomenon. And his answer was: for civilised man death has no meaning.⁹⁸

Given this, it is fruitful to look at Palahniuk's reenchantment of suffering as an instance of what Taylor calls the 'immanent counter-Enlightenment'. He writes, 'One of its major themes is a new understanding of the centrality of death, a kind of answer to the inability of mainstream exclusive humanism to cope with mortality. This finds some of its sources in the religious tradition ... the immanent counter-Enlightenment thus involves a new valorisation of, even fascination with death and sometimes violence'.⁹⁹ He continues, writing in relation to Nietzsche, an important figure in this countercurrent within modernity:

This turn finds a new moral meaning in our dark genesis out of the wild and prehuman. It comes of a rebellion against the standard form of modern anthropocentrism, along the 'tragic' axis, rejecting the too-harmonised picture of life, in which suffering, evil and violence have been painted out. This is a turn against the values of the Enlightenment. But unlike what we usually call the counter-Enlightenment ... it is not in any sense a return to religion or the transcendent. It remains resolutely naturalist. That's why I will refer to it as the 'immanent counter-Enlightenment' ... But just as the secular Enlightenment humanism grew out of the earlier Christian, agape-inspired affirmation of ordinary life, so the immanent counter-Enlightenment grew out of its transcendent-inspired predecessor. Where this primarily happened was in the literary and artistic domains that grew out of Romanticism and its successors. The Romantic movement was one of the important loci of the Counter-Enlightenment, even if it was always much more than this.¹⁰⁰

As a contemporary Romantic and an important teller of the narrative of thick reenchantment, it is possible to add Palahniuk to the list of thinkers and artists Taylor includes in this counter-Enlightenment, from Camus to Beckett to Heidegger.¹⁰¹ Palahniuk is at once a unique, fiercely contemporary voice and part of a long tradition of critique and

⁹⁸ Weber, 'Science', 139.

⁹⁹ Taylor, *Secular*, 373-374.

¹⁰⁰ Taylor, *Secular*, 369-372.

¹⁰¹ He summarises: 'Modern humanism tends to develop a notion of human flourishing which has no place for death. Death is simply the negation, the ultimate negation, of flourishing; it must be combated, and held off till the very last moment. Against this, there have developed a whole range of views in the post-Enlightenment world, which while remaining atheist, or least ambivalent and unclear about transcendence, have seen in death, at least the moment of death, or the standpoint of death, a privileged position, one at which the meaning, the point of life come clear, or can be more closely attained than in the fullness of life. Mallarmé, Heidegger, Camus, Celan, Beckett: the important thing is that these have not been marginal, forgotten figures, but their work has seized the imagination of their age. We don't fully understand this, but we have to take it into account in any attempt to understand the face-off between humanism and faith. Strangely, many things reminiscent of the religious tradition emerge in these and other writers, while it also is some cases clear that they mean to reject religion, at least as it has been understood.' Taylor, *Secular*, 320.

reflection on the modern self-understanding that are tied with the willing confrontation with suffering and the reality of death.

Economies of Exchange as Reenchantment

We don't have a great war in our generation, or a great depression, but we do, we have a great war of the spirit. We have a great revolution against the culture. The great depression is our lives. We have a spiritual depression.

Tyler Durden, from *Fight Club*¹⁰²

The radical revaluation of suffering in Palahniuk's novels is bound up inextricably with his fictional economies of symbolic exchange. He, again like Baudrillard, draws a fundamental distinction between economic exchange and symbolic exchange, though he never uses this particular language. Palahniuk approaches economies of symbolic exchange by using both positive and negative examples. We will take examples of each as an illustration of the movement of symbolic exchange through Palahniuk's work. The two novels that offer the most evident positive examples of such economies are *Fight Club* and *Rant*. What is exchanged in both of these narratives is the authentic experience of sometimes extreme physical pain. There are distinct similarities between the two narratives. Both novels tackle the theme of alienation and the perceived lack of meaningful experience and narrative in the contemporary world. Each of these narratives revolve around a charismatic leader of an antisocial subculture. Both involve willed acts of suffering through the conscious creation of two events that the vast majority of people in contemporary culture strive to avoid: fist fights and car crashes.

The narrator of *Fight* is typical of Palahniuk's protagonists; he is afflicted with insomnia, bored with his life and deeply alienated from the lives of others. That his work as 'recall coordinator' for a major auto company involves the callous calculation of the monetary value of human life implicates him directly in the ongoing process of rationalisation.¹⁰³ As a way out of his disaffection, the narrator unknowingly manifests a charismatic alter-ego named Tyler (for the sake of clarity, I will continue to refer to them as two separate people). The two form 'fight clubs' in order to offer other men – and only men – an opportunity for the mutual exchange of willed suffering through the blunt instrumentality of bare-knuckle

¹⁰² Palahniuk, *Fight*, 149.

¹⁰³ He describes his work: 'Wherever I'm going, I'll be there to apply the formula. I'll keep the secret intact. It's simple arithmetic. It's a story problem. If a new car is built by my company leaves Chicago travelling west at 60 miles per hour, and the rear differential locks up, and the car crashes and burns with everyone trapped inside, does my company initiate a recall? You take the population of vehicles in the field (A) and multiply it by the probable rate of failure (B), then multiply the result by the average cost of out-of-court settlement (C). A times B times C equals X. This is what it will cost if we don't initiate a recall. If X is greater than the cost of a recall, we recall the cars and no one gets hurt. If X is less than the cost of a recall, then we don't recall'. Palahniuk, *Fight*, 30. Emphasis in original.

fist fighting. Physical pain is the primary vector for authentic experience and personal transformation throughout the novel. During a pivotal scene, Tyler badly burns the narrator's hand with lye in the kitchen of the house they share, driving home through violent means that pain is authentic experience: 'Tyler says to pay attention because this is the greatest moment on my life ... Come back to the pain'.¹⁰⁴ Tyler tells the narrator, "“This means something”".¹⁰⁵ Tyler tells him, "“This is greatest moment of your life”".¹⁰⁶ At the end of the scene, the narrator takes his burning hand from Tyler and submits to the pain, turning what was an act of violence into an act of will.

Significantly, the experience of fight club is often described in religious language: 'There's hysterical shouting in tongues like in church, and when you wake up Sunday afternoon you feel saved'.¹⁰⁷ More significantly, willed suffering is also a rupture of the closed system of language. The narrator describes the experience of fight club: 'What happens at fight club doesn't happen in words ... You aren't alive anywhere like you're alive at fight club. When it's you and one other guy under that light in the middle of all those watching. Fight club isn't about winning or losing fights. Fight club isn't about words'.¹⁰⁸ It is important here to underline that fight club is about exchange as well as experience; fighting in the novel must be understood as a relational act. These acts of violence are acts of symbolic exchange. They are acts of exchange outside of use or exchange value that serve, however perverse it may seem, to create and solidify community and individual relationships. Slavoj Žižek notes the importance of this relation in the film version of *Fight* :

The first lesson of *Fight Club* is thus that one cannot pass directly from capitalist to revolutionary subjectivity: the abstraction, the foreclosure of the others, the blindness for the others' suffering and pain, has first to be broken in a risk-taking gesture of directly reaching toward the suffering other – a gesture that, since it shatters the very kernel of our identity, cannot but appear as extremely violent.¹⁰⁹

In economic terms, such an exchange of suffering is useless, even wasteful in that it puts to non-instrumental use bodies that could more profitably and usefully applied elsewhere. Stephanie Remlinger notes this in relation to wounding in the film: 'they are signs of protest as well as real damages to the 'body economic' ... Through hurting themselves the

¹⁰⁴ Palahniuk, *Fight*, 74-75.

¹⁰⁵ Palahniuk, *Fight*, 77.

¹⁰⁶ Palahniuk, *Fight*, 77.

¹⁰⁷ Palahniuk, *Fight*, 51.

¹⁰⁸ Palahniuk, *Fight*, 51.

¹⁰⁹ Slavoj Žižek, 'The Ambiguity of the Masochist Social Link', *Perversion and the Social Relation*, ed. Molly Anne Rothenberg, Dennis Foster, and Slavoj Žižek (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 116.

men destroy human capital, they refuse to be of service or to function efficiently'.¹¹⁰ Instead of bowing to the roles assigned to them and refusing to be identified by their function, the men of fight club offer a symbolic challenge to a system overwhelmingly and unhumanly concerned with operation. Their effort serves no purpose; instead it disrupts their status as objects of exchange and calculation. They are, in their own right, agents of chaos, and of reenchantment. That all of this goes very badly when Tyler creates Operation Mayhem, a gathering of men from fight club which quickly degenerates into a fascistic pseudo-political, pseudo-monastic organisation, fails to dull the power of the original exchanges of pain.

Rant, in many ways, can be seen as a companion piece to *Fight*. However, where *Fight* exists in a recognisable world, even through the skewed and unreliable eyes of the narrator, *Rant*'s construction is considerably more complex, incorporating as it does allegorical elements dealing with both the AIDS epidemic and contemporary fears about terrorism. In many ways, *Rant* is a novel unstuck in time, even more so than Palahniuk's other books. Its structure is fragmented and its ultimate meaning radically indeterminate. There are any number of truths floating around the narrative, but the novel gives very little help to the unfortunate reader who wishes to decide firmly which version of the story to believe. The structure of the novel is that of an oral history, thus the story of *Rant* emerges slowly from a myriad of differing viewpoints, which at times contradict each other outright. The novel is set in the near future, or, as the narrative turns on time travel, an alternate present, and is in fact a dystopian science fiction story, something which becomes apparent only gradually. The world where the novel is set is never fully illuminated; however, it seems very much like the contemporary United States, with a few notable changes. Most importantly, the

¹¹⁰ Stefanie Remlinger, "Fight Club: The Most Dangerous Movie Ever?", in *The Aesthetics and Pragmatics of Violence*, ed. Michael Hensen and Annette Pankratz (Passau: Verlag Karl Stutz, 2001), 147. Significantly, Remlinger argues in relation to this, 'the film is suffused with religious metaphor alluding to the Christian topos of purposeful, redeeming violence and the connection of (self-) sacrifice, resurrection and the coming of a better world – after the apocalyptic Flood of violence they are trying to turn loose'. Remlinger, 'Dangerous', 151-152. It is worth noting that there are a number of other critics and commentators who have pointed to the connection of suffering and the religious in *Fight*, either the novel or the film, which has generated a good deal more secondary source material. Christopher Deacy calls Fincher's film a 'potent religious parable' and argues, '*Fight Club* posits that there is something potentially liberating – even, indeed, salvific – in the use of violence. For, it is suggested, violence has the capacity to provide its practitioners with the vehicle and the agency of defining one's self and of ultimately being able to connect and integrate with other individuals in an otherwise affectless and estranged society'. Deacy, 'Integration', 62. Deacy goes as far as to argue, underlining the act of reading as a form of exchange: 'The appropriation of particular religious terms and teachings in *Fight Club* ... thus transcends mere textual analysis, and could, in essence, be construed as the gateway through which an audience can come to a fuller understanding of how to address some of the core problems that pertain to the human condition'. Deacy, 'Integration', 71. Peter Mathew concludes, at the end of an analysis that owes a good deal to Georges Bataille's thinking on expenditure, which bears some similarities with Baudrillard's symbolic exchange, that 'Fight club becomes the new religion without religion'. Mathews, 'Diagnosing', 92.

population, at least in the generic city where the novel is set, has been divided into Daytimers and Nighttimers. Nighttimers are people who have volunteered, for a few rewards like subsidised housing and free health care, to live their lives only at night and observe a strict curfew during the daylight hours. Nighttimers, a marginalised subculture, make up the vast majority of the informants in the novel's oral history.

Though he is revealed only through the words of others, the novel tells the story of one Buster 'Rant' Casey, whom Palahniuk describes tellingly as

an updated American archetype. Huckleberry Finn or Tom Sawyer, or Thoreau, this sort of half-human but sort of half-animal person who lives a sort of almost animal awareness in that he is always really present and aware of what he is doing at any moment. He's not interpreting the present through the past or he's not interpreting the present in anticipation of the future. Whatever he is doing, wherever he is at, that's really all he's aware of.¹¹¹

Rant, gifted with an almost supernatural sense of smell and taste, comes from a small town where he lives, to downplay the case considerably, a colourful life. Rant, even as a child, seeks out authentic, unmediated experience, often in the form of physical pain. As a child, Rant becomes obsessed with getting bitten by animals. Childhood friend Bodie Carlyle recalls an incident where the two boys go out hunting recklessly for bites: 'Both of us trickling blood out of the little holes in our hands and feet, watching our blood leak out in the sand under the hot sun, Rant says, "This here", he says, "far as I'm concerned, this is how church should feel"'.¹¹² Rant, like Tyler, tries to lead others to authentic experience. His childhood teacher Lowell Richards recalls a Halloween party Rant hosted, where he replaced the grapes and noodles of most children's haunted houses with real eyes and intestines bought from a slaughterhouse:

Rant Casey wasn't evil. He was more like, he was trying to find something real in the world. Kids grow up connected to nothing these days, plugged in and living lives boosted to them from other people. Hand-me-down adventures. I think Rant wanted everybody to experience just one real adventure.

As a community, something to bond folks. Everybody in town seeing the same old movie or boosting the same peak, that doesn't bring folks together. But after the kids came home, their costumes matted with blood, blood under their fingernails for a week, and their hair stinking, that had folks talking. Can't say they were happy, but folks were talking and together. Something really did happen that only belonged to Middleton.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Palahniuk, 'Agony Interview 2007', interview transcribed by the author.

¹¹² Palahniuk, *Rant*, 76.

¹¹³ Palahniuk, *Rant*, 60-61.

Moving from Middleton to the city, and carrying with him a virulent strain of rabies contracted from so many animal bites, Rant stumbles upon a subculture of Nighttimers involved in something they call Party Crashing, which involves teams of people in cars deliberately crashing into each other. Party Crashing, regulated by an elaborate system of rules meant to ensure that only those involved in Party Crashing run into each other and no one outside the culture is injured, is the primary method in the novel for generating authentic, meaningful experience.

Green Taylor Simms, a highly ambiguous character who is given much of the novel's expositional duty, argues that such deliberate crashing is both a deeply subversive act within the highly rationalised realm of traffic control and a renegotiation of an established set of values:

Perpetuating Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny breaks ground for further socialisation – including conformance to traffic laws which allow the maximum number of drivers to commingle on our roadways. In addition, insisting the journey is always a means to some greater end, and the excitement and danger of the journey should be minimised. Perpetuating the fallacy that the journey itself is of little value ... The activity casually known as Party Crashing rejects the idea that driving time is something to be suffered in order to achieve a more useful and fulfilling activity.¹¹⁴

Tellingly, in the context of thick reenchantment, Party Crashing and indeed the whole subculture of the Nighttimers is an unanticipated outgrowth of a long-running, government-sponsored study into the ways to further rationalise the traffic system. This study, in which engineers staged automobile accidents – in the official language, 'Incidence Event Prompting' – to measure their impact on the traffic system, led to the conclusion that the best way to improve the function and efficiency of the traffic system is to split the world into two separate groups who use the roads at different times, thus lessening the load and improving the functionality of the city. Simms notes the contradictions embodied in Party Crashing: 'It's all connected. The I-SEE-U Act [the Infrastructure Effective and Efficient Use Act]. Team slamming. Night versus day ... Our tax money was the springboard for what eventually became the Party Crashing culture'.¹¹⁵ The whole of the Party Crashing lifestyle, a serious challenge to the hegemonic logic of instrumentality is the inadvertent product of attempts to further rationalise urban life. Palahniuk's diegetic reenchantment in *Rant* is thus perhaps the clearest fictional example we have yet encountered of the sorts of

¹¹⁴ Palahniuk, *Rant*, 131-132.

¹¹⁵ Palahniuk, *Rant*, 176.

reenchantment that are produced under and by the continual movement of disenchantment.

Palahniuk's characters relate the experience of Party Crashing, like that of fight club, directly to religious experience. Rant's girlfriend Echo Lawrence recalls: 'But anytime Rant had an orgasm, or the moment after we'd been rammed by another team, right when he blinked his eyes and seemed to realise he wasn't dead, he'd smile and say the same thing. At that moment, Rant would always smile, all dopey, and say, "This is what church should feel like"'.¹¹⁶ Several other informants in the novel relate the experience of being in an auto accident to a liminal experience, following Victor Turner's well-known theory of ritual (indeed the novel quotes from Turner's classic *The Ritual Process*¹¹⁷). Green Taylor Simms explains the connection, which again relates to suffering:

In a car accident, you slow down to dream time. Time gels or freezes until you can recall every moment of every moment of every moment ... Common to almost all spiritual beliefs is the idea of Liminal Time. To ascetics, it can be the moment of greatest suffering. To Catholics, it's the moment the Communion wafer is presented to the congregation. The moment is different for each religion or spiritual practice, but Liminal Time itself represents a moment in which time stops passing. The actual definition is a moment 'outside of time'. That moment becomes the eternity of Heaven or Hell, and achieving even an instant of Liminal Time is the goal of most religious rituals. In that moment, one is completely present and awake and aware – of all creation. In Liminal Time, time stops. A person is beyond time. Being involved in an automobile accident has brought me closer to that enlightenment that any religious ritual or ceremony in which I've ever participated.¹¹⁸

Other Party Crashers describe the experience of being lifted out of time by the singular experience. Echo says, 'That moment, time slows down. All the hundred years of every boring day – they explode to fill that half-moment. That pulse. Here's time squeezed down until it explodes into a slow motion moment that will last for years'.¹¹⁹ In *Rant* the power of this kind of ruptural experience is such that it can grant immortality or allow anyone who is

¹¹⁶ Palahniuk, *Rant*, 215.

¹¹⁷ See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1969), particularly chapter three, 'Liminality and Communitas', 94-130; and, to a lesser extent chapter five, 'Humility and Hierarchy: The Liminality of Status Elevation and Reversal', 131-165.

¹¹⁸ Palahniuk, *Rant*, 213-214. The novel began, as many of Palahniuk's books do, with a collection of true stories other people had told him. This time, the stories were about the experience of car accidents. Palahniuk says, 'Ninety-nine percent of our lives we forget them in the next moment, but the car-accident moments of our lives stay with us for so long and I started thinking, "what about a group of people that were trying to generate more and more of these profound lasting moments in their lives so that they would have more stronger memories?'. Chuck Palahniuk, 'The Agony Column Interview Archive, 4 May 2007', available at: http://trashotron.com/agony/audio/chuck_palahniuk_2007.mp3. Accessed 11 February 2008.

¹¹⁹ Palahniuk, *Rant*, 130.

able to remain willingly in Liminal Time to travel through time.¹²⁰ Here we can see that the power of such ruptural events, tied to the authentic experience of suffering, is raised to the realm of an enchantment that is able to fundamentally alter the shape and direction of the known world. Here the reenchantment within Palahniuk's world becomes strikingly literal.

Again like fight club, the experience of Party Crashing is dependant upon an economy of exchange; a fight requires two people while a Party Crash requires at least two cars acting in concert. Neddy Nelson explicitly uses the language of gift to discuss the experience: 'Isn't it like a gift, somebody slamming you? Don't you get out of the car, all shaky and shocked? Like you're a baby getting born? Or a whole relaxing massage that happens in one-half of a second? Isn't Party Crashing like an electroshock treatment for your depression?'¹²¹ It is also a way of building community, or of establishing *communitas*, the undifferentiated community that Victor Turner describes in *The Ritual Process*.¹²² In the book itself, Dr Erin Shea, an informant bafflingly labelled as a 'Theologist', draws this connection:

Established examples of large liminoid spaces include the annual Burning Man festival in the Black Rock Desert of Nevada, the ConFest held in Australia, the international Rainbow Family gatherings, and the so-called 'Celtic Renaissance' held in Glastonbury, England ... Smaller examples of liminoid spaces include religious pilgrimages, 'road trip' vacations, fight clubs, and Party Crashing events.¹²³

Party Crasher Tina Something connects Party Crashing with both community and the exchange of narrative: 'Your average person will Party Crash so she can be around other people. It's very social, a way to meet people, and sit around telling stories for a few hours ... Even Party Crashing can get boring if you can't find another team flying the designated flag, but at least it's a communal boredom. Like a family'.¹²⁴ Neddy Nelson finds something of the religious in the subculture: 'Haven't oppressed people always gone to church for comfort? There, didn't they meet other oppressed people? Haven't all major revolutions brewed as people complained together and sang songs and got riled up to take violent

¹²⁰ Simms claims that by entering into a permanent Liminal Time he and others involved in Party Crashing will for the first time attain immortality: 'Throughout all mythology, the gods have created themselves as mortals by bearing children by mortal women ... The infinite made finite. It's when you cross this mythology with the Grandfather Paradox that the reverse occurs and mortal flesh might be made divine ... 'the time traveller eliminates his physical origins, thus transforming himself into a being without physical beginning and therefore without end. Simply stated: a god ... In a somewhat hideous parody of the Annunciation, the time traveller would make a pilgrimage to a direct ancestor, ideally the traveller's mother or father, at a time before the traveller's conception – for the purpose of killing that ancestor'. Palahniuk, *Rant*, 265-267.

¹²¹ Palahniuk, *Rant*, 206.

¹²² Turner, *Ritual*, particularly chapters three and four, 'Liminality and Communitas', 94-130, and 'Communitas: Model and Process', 131-165.

¹²³ Palahniuk, *Rant*, 290-291

¹²⁴ Palahniuk, *Rant*, 126-127.

action? Was Party Crashing our church, the way people came together?’¹²⁵ Here Neddy reveals again Palahniuk’s functional, Durkheimian understanding of religion as a form of building and maintaining community. He also recognises that what he is doing is in some way truly subversive. He is also aware of the fact that his experiences with Party Crashing have changed him in some sense.

This exchange of experience and its power to both build community and to create oppositional uses for rationalised space is set against the proliferation of inauthentic, mediated experience. In *Rant*, this opposition plays out against the metaphorical device of ‘boosted peaks’, a technology that has replaced all other visual media in the novel’s dystopian future or alternate present. Through physical implants in the back of the neck, people can either relive the experiences (called ‘transcripts’) of other people or ‘out-cord’, broadcasting and recording, their own experiences. Shot Dunyan, a Party Crasher who works at a shop that hires out transcripts, explains: ‘Your basic experience, what people called a “boosted peak”, is just the file record of somebody’s neural transcript, a copy of all the sensory stimuli some witness collected while carving a jack-o’-lantern or winning the Tour de France’.¹²⁶ These transcripts, once recorded, can be filtered by producers through people on drugs, through celebrity figures, dogs, infants, the blind, the deaf, all of whom add subsequent layers and boosts to the experience. The most popular boosted peaks are of the most mundane, safe and predictable things; the most popular of all being *Little Becky’s Walk on a Warm Spring Day*. Shot complains, ‘All these fat, middle-aged dumbshits just want something to kill time. Nothing dark and edgy or challenging. Nothing artsy ... I work here. Renting out copies of *Little Becky’s Easter Egg Hunt* to people who just want to get through another awful night, alone. These people, boring themselves to death’.¹²⁷ Shot implies that even though the Party Crashers are risking injury and death by staging car crashes, they are dying in a different way than those who sit at home and face the slow living death of mediated boredom. As Baudrillard argues, those who are willingly inviting death are living in a different, more authentic sense than those who avoid death in the comforts of contemporary mass media culture.

¹²⁵ Palahniuk, *Rant*, 228.

¹²⁶ Palahniuk, *Rant*, 114.

¹²⁷ Palahniuk, *Rant*, 114, 121. Mirroring the point Palahniuk makes in *Lullaby*, this new form of mass media is painted as a form of social control. Shot claims, ‘I remember the big media push for everybody to get ported so we could all boost peaks ... The real push was targeted at young adults, ranging from fourteen to forty-five. Among that demographic, not being ported was equivalent to not being able to read ... It’s no coincidence that age group is the people most likely to Party Crash, to drive or ride around as part of a team. But I have to shut up. Hush. We’re not supposed to talk about that’. Palahniuk, *Rant*, 259.

Shot compares the two kinds of experience, the mediated second-hand experience of a boosted peak and the reality of a night of Party Crashing: ‘Most boosted peaks are bullshit compared to even the slowest night spent Party Crashing, spending time in a car with people and music and snack food, always in a little danger. On a secret mission to meet more strangers. Real people. A road trip to nowhere’.¹²⁸ Here, like in Coupland, where strangers meet and become real to each other through exchanging stories, symbolic exchange builds community where there is none. Rant again embodies this tendency. Bodie recalls of Rant’s early life, ‘Instead of boosting peaks, Rant wanted to go fishing. He used to say, “My life might be little and boring, but at least it’s mine – not some assembly-line, secondhand, hand-me-down life’.¹²⁹ The reader is in a sense denied the real experience of Rant’s life, leading us to wonder if the mediating processes of memory and language have already taken hold of the story and begun the process of disenchantment. The antagonism between the two levels of experience come even more to the fore when it is revealed that a person with rabies is unable to boost peaks; something in the physiology of the disease interferes with the technology. Rant deliberately infects people with rabies to prevent them from boosting while others actively pursue infection: one informant remembers, ‘Amber saw getting infected as the ultimate commitment ... Amber said it would stop her from boosting peaks. She wanted to live a real, alive life’.¹³⁰ The rabies, which Rant spreads only to Nighttimers and attributed by some in the novel to a plot by the government to control and even destroy the Nighttimers, has close metaphorical ties to the HIV epidemic of the early 1980s in the United States, originally predominantly afflicting marginalised urban subcultures.¹³¹ It is worth noting the distinct paradox that, though Rant is the crucial figure in all of this, the novel only presents his story through mediating voices who metaphorically ‘boost’ the original story as they pass it onto the reader. Like Operation

¹²⁸ Palahniuk, *Rant*, 178.

¹²⁹ Palahniuk, *Rant*, 73-74.

¹³⁰ Palahniuk, *Rant*, 300.

¹³¹ To underline this, Palahniuk gives the comments of one Galton Nye, a Daytimer city councilman whose statements about rabies closely mirror the worst of the early rhetoric about AIDS, which often came from conservative Christian sources. Nye’s words about the epidemic as ‘a human tragedy of staggering proportions’ veil an obvious hatred of all rabies-infected people, and by extension all Nighttimers, even his own daughter: ‘My heart goes out. I’m not saying anybody deserves to go insane and be gunned down by the curfew police, but please consider how Nighttimers live. The rest of us, who live our lives according to the word of God and common sense, we should not have to foot the bill for their sins ... These so-called victims are people who don’t respect themselves. Or respect God. If they want to thin their own ranks, I say let them’. Palahniuk, *Rant*, 223. For a solid, sympathetic history of the early days of the AIDS epidemic, see Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic*, 20th Anniversary ed. (New York: St. Martin’s, 2007).

Mayhem in *Fight*, perhaps this is a way for Palahniuk to underline the fragility of this kind of resistance to rationalisation.

Reenchantment, as it is represented in Palahniuk's novel is *embodied* in ways that Coupland never imagines, even though he does toy with the importance of the body in places like *Girlfriend in a Coma* and *Life After God*. The revaluation of suffering is of course a matter of the physical, but Palahniuk is, in a sense, fundamentally concerned with the body and the ways it can be bruised, battered, humiliated and otherwise afflicted. Again, he offers a potent reversal of accepted standards of physical health and well-being by presenting intentional suffering as a path to authentic knowledge of both the self and the larger world. These economies of exchange are deeply subversive of political economy in that they involve the intentional abuse of human capital. In a very different context, employing thick reenchantment as an interpretive framework allows us to uncover hidden connections between disparate realms of culture and to make them available for the study of religion. Party Crashing and fight clubs, as sites for the symbolic exchange of pain and the reenchantment of suffering are powerful, if fictional, representations of thick reenchantment through the renegotiation of existing systems of value and by the revaluation of pain into a meaningful form of suffering. By valuing the useless and the wasteful expenditure of human capital, Party Crashing and fight clubs serve to further Palahniuk's pointed critique of consumer culture and its lack of authenticity.

Violations of the Economy of Exchange

A ghost. We'd put a ghost in the old theatre to build the story, to make room for special effects. Oh, we'd haunt this place ourselves, pack it with lost souls. We'd turn our lives into a terrible adventure. A true-life horror story with a happy ending.

The narrator, from *Haunted*¹³²

Just as there are numerous examples of intact, effective economies of exchange within Palahniuk's diegetic worlds, his critique of consumer society, steeped as it is in the comparison of authentic and inauthentic experience, is as reliant, perhaps even more reliant, on the depictions of inauthentic communities and inauthentic economies of exchange. Just as *Fight* and *Rant* offer detailed accounts of such authentic economies of exchange – which are inevitably short lived as Palahniuk's characters either fail to understand them or begin to take them for granted – some of his other novels, particularly *Diary* and *Haunted*, offer counterpoints. For the sake of brevity, and although *Diary* offers an

¹³² Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 84-85.

interesting look at the abuse of artistic enchantment in the interests of utility, we will take *Haunted* as an exemplary case of the violation of symbolic exchange.

Haunted, in many ways the most difficult of Palahniuk's novels, tells the story of the abuse of the authentic experience of suffering and relates the very literal destruction of an economy of story. The novel, at turns funny, chilling and bluntly confrontational, grows directly from Palahniuk's personal experience. He recalls a writer's workshop he attended, where writers pay for the privilege of pitching their stories for potential sale to agents and publishers: 'What people used to endure or enjoy – all those plot-point events of potty training and honeymoons and lung cancer – now they can be shaped to good effect and sold. The trick is to pay attention. Take notes'.¹³³ Several years before *Haunted*, he considers the potential effects of this kind of commodification of experience and personal narrative:

maybe we're headed down a road toward mindless, self-obsessed lives where every event is reduced to words and camera angles. Every moment imagined through the lens of a cinematographer. Every funny or sad remark scribbled down for sale at the first opportunity. A world Socrates couldn't imagine, where people would examine their lives, but only in terms of movie and paperback potential. Where a story no longer follows as the result of an experience. Now the experience happens in order to generate a story ... The story – the product you can sell – becomes more important than the actual event. One danger is, we might hurry through life, enduring event after event, in order to build our list of experiences. Our stock of stories. And our hunger for stories might reduce our awareness of the actual experience ... Or maybe ... just maybe this whole process is our training wheels for toward something bigger. If we can reflect and know our lives, we might stay awake and shape our futures. Our flood of books and movies – of plots and story arcs – they might be mankind's way to be aware of all our history. Our options. All the ways we've tried in the past to fix the world'.¹³⁴

Haunted represents the working out of this tension between authenticity and commodification in the form of a novel. It is at once a satire of reality television, of writer's workshops, of the therapeutic ethos, of contemporary society's lust for scandal and the suffering of others, even of the extremes of Palahniuk's own work. The novel is a collection of short stories and free-verse poems couched in the narrative framework of a writer's retreat where nineteen aspiring writers gather in a rented theatre where they will be locked for three months to allow them to write without distraction. Each of the characters

¹³³ Palahniuk, *Stranger*, 32. He relates, 'Most of the writers here are old – creepy old, retired people clutching their one good story. Shaking their manuscript in both hands and saying, "Here, read my incest story!" A big segment of the storytelling is about personal suffering. There's the stink of catharsis. Of melodrama and memoir. A writer friend refers to this school as "the-sun-is-shining-the-birds-are-singing-and-my-father-is-on-top-of-me-again" literature'. Palahniuk, *Stranger*, 28.

¹³⁴ Palahniuk, *Stranger*, 38.

is given a chance to tell their story to the others, and it is these stories that make up the bulk of the novel, by far Palahniuk's longest. Each of the characters is given a name based on their story and it is only rarely, and by accident that their real names are revealed to the reader. Even by the generous standards one must adopt in relation to Palahniuk's corpus, the stories in *Haunted* are shocking, involving any number of humiliations, mutilations and violent, self-destructive acts. Some of the individual stories are in themselves powerful acts of confession and expiation.

Reading the economy of exchange within *Haunted* through the hermeneutic frame of symbolic exchange allows us to bring a sense of coherence to what is a multivalent text and to fully articulate its critique of commodity culture. Like the stories for sale in the real-life retreat Palahniuk discusses above, the stories that are exchanged in *Haunted* are understood primarily for their exchange value. Unlike the exchange of story in, say, *Generation X*, in *Haunted*, the goal of storytelling is not the building of community or the re-narration of a world without stories. Rather, the people involved in the exchange view their stories and their experiences in the light of the potential *sale* of their experiences for retelling in the cinema or on television. The workshop, in fact, is created with this goal in mind.¹³⁵

Their desires for learning to be better writers, for catharsis and for creating community are quickly abandoned and the inmates set out to experience the retreat with an eye to the potential sale of their stories and the celebrity they imagine will follow from publication. They begin to craft their own actions and reactions to follow the conventions of an increasingly confessional mass media:

Already in our minds, here in the red-and-yellow fake firelight, we could picture the future: the scene of us telling people how we'd taken this little adventure and a crazy man kept us trapped in the old theatre for three months. Already we were making matters worse. Exaggerating. We'd say how the place was freezing-cold. There was no running water. We had to ration the food.¹³⁶

In the beginning, none of these things are actually true as the theatre has ample food, water, and comfort, but as the narrator, whose identity is never revealed, confides, 'our own

¹³⁵ The group is brought together by an advertisement tacked on bulletin boards across the nameless city where the novel is set. It reads: 'WRITER'S RETREAT: ABANDON YOUR LIFE FOR LIFE FOR THREE MONTHS. Just disappear. Leave behind everything that keeps you from creating your masterpiece. Your job and family and home, all those obligations and distractions – Put them on hold *for three months*. Live with like-minded people in a setting that supports total immersion in your work. Food and lodging included free for those who qualify. Gamble a small fraction of your life on the chance to create a new future as a professional poet, novelist, screenwriter. Before it's too late, live the life you dream about. Spaces very limited'. Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 83-84.

¹³⁶ Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 84.

story will have to get a lot more dramatic before it would be worth selling. We need everything to get much, much worse before it's over'.¹³⁷ To ensure this happens, the characters engage in an increasingly violent orgy of self-destruction, ruining the food supply, wrecking the washing machine and the heating system, in the end resorting to cannibalism with the bodies of those who have died (or in one memorable incident, someone who had merely passed out) in the interest of suffering in recognisable, marketable ways, mirroring what Palahniuk writes about the writer's retreat that inspired the novel: 'We see our lives in terms of storytelling conventions ... Maybe a movie starring Julia Roberts, bigger than life and pretty as an angel, is the only afterlife we get'.¹³⁸ They invite all kinds of suffering on themselves, from starvation – 'We'd starve ourselves long enough to get what Comrade Snarky called "Death Camp Cheekbones". The more ins and outs your face has, the better Miss America says you'll look on television'¹³⁹ – to freezing cold, eventually resorting to murder as Miss Sneezzy is killed to prevent her from leaving the theatre. They also aim for the lowest common denominator in their story and strive to keep things simple. Agent Tattletale warns everyone, "'Don't create shades of grey that a mass audience can't follow'".¹⁴⁰ They make ineffectual attempts to escape – 'We still stand at the locked doors and scream for help. Just not too hard or too loud'¹⁴¹ – just to ensure they are playing the proper role in a story entirely predetermined by crass cultural and generic conventions.

The inmates transform themselves into familiar roles in a further bid to make their own lives into saleable material. This casting leads to a grim competition, a hyperbolically violent game of one-upmanship that utterly violates Palahniuk's reenchantment of suffering: 'Whoever can show the worst suffering, the most scars, they'll play the lead in the public mind'.¹⁴² The Duke of Vandals dies while exercising to further accentuate his self-induced starvation. The Reverend Godless violates himself with a splintered chair leg. The Earl of Slander chops off his own fingers, Chef Assassin his toes, the Matchmaker something more intimate, resulting in his own death. They look for villains in the organizer Mr Whittier and his assistant, Mrs Clark: 'We wouldn't last a moment without someone to

¹³⁷ Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 86.

¹³⁸ Palahniuk, *Stranger*, 30-31.

¹³⁹ Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 103.

¹⁴⁰ Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 209.

¹⁴¹ Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 120.

¹⁴² Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 147.

blame'.¹⁴³ They make other inmates into villains or victims, winners or losers, as an imagined and heavily clichéd script dictates. After the death of Lady Baglady, the narrator muses, 'At this point, the future is set. Done. This will be our meal ticket, telling people how we witnessed an innocent human being driven to commit suicide ... Screw the idea of inventing monsters. Here, we just had to look around. Pay attention'.¹⁴⁴ Here we find another group of people being ruthlessly converted to human capital or, even more disturbingly, converting themselves into human capital. As their lack of proper names indicate, these people are their stories, and their stories are always already for sale.

This betrayal of authenticity is again related to mediation. The events in the theatre are constantly being recorded. Echoing Baudrillard's similar preoccupation with representation and imitation, the novel's narrator relates, 'All of us trying to be the camera behind the camera behind the camera. The last story in line. The truth'.¹⁴⁵ All the while, they vie for supremacy, 'Each of us trying to be the camera, not the subject'.¹⁴⁶ There are multiple layers of mediation attending each event: 'Agent Tattletale videotapes the Earl of Slander, who tape-records the Missing Link, all of us looking for a telltale bit of physical business we can relay to an actor, on a set, someday. Some detail to make our version of the truth more real'.¹⁴⁷ In a metaphoric sense, Palahniuk is attacking the contemporary news media's ever-renewing need for story and mild titillation and the public's insatiable appetite for content. The inmates tape over, and over, and over, the events they record, catching each new atrocity as it happens and thinking always of the documentation of the event rather than the experiences themselves. The coherence of narrative is lost in the need for new content:

More and more, we leave room open in every group for Agent Tattletale's camera. We speak so the Earl of Slander's tape recorder will get every word. The same tape or memory card or compact disc getting used, over and over. We erase our past with our present, on the gamble that the next moment will be sadder, more horrible or tragic.

More and more, something worse needs to happen ...

Still, something *more terrible* needs to happen.

For market share. For dramatic appeal.

Something *more awful* needs to happen.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 178.

¹⁴⁴ Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 88.

¹⁴⁵ Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 104.

¹⁴⁶ Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 289.

¹⁴⁷ Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 291.

¹⁴⁸ Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 174.

The tragedy of *Haunted* is that some of the stories the inmates tell each other are compelling, genuine acts of communication and even expiation that get lost in the desperate need to make the story of the retreat into something easily sold, digested, and then quickly forgotten. In the end, the characters in *Haunted* are never able to imagine their lives outside of the circle of mediation or tell their stories outside of the system of signs established and maintained by the mass media.

The inmates are trapped, not in the end by the doors of the theatre but by their own need to remake their own lives in the familiar image of the mass media. Toward the end of the novel, they are offered the chance to leave:

We always do this, Mr Whittier says. For the same reason our children's children's children's children will always have war and famine and disease. Because we love our pain. We love our drama. But we will never, ever admit that ...
If we can forgive what's been done to us ...
If we can forgive what we've done to others ...
If we can leave all of our stories behind. Our being villains or victims.
Only then can we maybe rescue the world.
But still we sit here, waiting to be saved. While we're still victims, hoping to be discovered while we suffer.¹⁴⁹

Against all of this endless mediation and clamouring for attention, Palahniuk allows the reader the occasional glimpse of true horror, of an experience with meaning. In *Haunted*, true horror is horror that silences, that resists language, resists codification or easy characterisation. The novel makes this point through the metaphoric device of the 'Nightmare Box', a recurrent artefact in the stories of Mrs Clark, which involve the disappearance and eventual death of her daughter, aptly named Cassandra. At an art gallery, Cassandra catches a glimpse of 'real reality' contained within the Box, which drives everyone who looks into it to madness. The Matchmaker describes the experience: 'What's in the box is proof that what we call life isn't. Our world is a dream. Infinitely fake. A nightmare. One look ... and your life – your preening and struggle and worry – it's all pointless'.¹⁵⁰ The Nightmare Box underlines the need for the world to be sharable by

¹⁴⁹ Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 382-383. Second and third ellipses in original.

¹⁵⁰ Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 222. This again has an intriguing analogue in Palahniuk's non-fiction; he writes: 'Oh, I'd love to believe in an invisible world. It would undermine all the suffering and pressure of the physical world. But it would also negate the value of the money I had in the bank, my decent house and all my hard work. All our problems and all our blessings could be readily dismissed because they'd be no more real than plot events in a book or movie. An invisible, eternal world would render this world an illusion ... I have no experience with it, so I am unable to take it seriously. It will always seem like a joke. There are no ghosts. But if there are, my dad should damn well tell me himself'. Palahniuk, *Stranger*, 115. This statement, however, falls at the end of a disconcerting non-fiction story about a haunted house and the possible visitation of the spectre of Palahniuk's father, who was murdered in 1999. See 'The Lady' in Palahniuk, *Stranger*, 109-115.

presenting its victims with something so singular it defies description: ‘What’s inside the box is some fact you can’t unlearn. Some new ideas you can’t undiscover ... Plus, only one person can look each time. What you suffer, you suffer it alone. What happens inside the Nightmare Box, it only happens to you. There’s no one you can share it with. There’s no room for someone else’.¹⁵¹ Cassandra’s refuses to talk about her ordeal with the Box, which infuriates her teachers and her peers, finally driving her mother into a murderous rage.

What Cassandra offers, what the Nightmare Box offers, is a story or a piece of information that resists the system of exchanged signs, a singular experience or event that remains forever outside, haunting the system with its incompleteness. The Nightmare Box represents the never-silenced threat of the symbolic. The singularity of the experience of the Nightmare Box is all the more powerful against the novel’s utterly inauthentic economy of story and suffering. The Nightmare Box offers authentic suffering and experience because it is unmediated, esoteric, impossible to articulate. Cassandra Clark tells her mother after her ordeal, “I’m not like you anymore ... I don’t need to brag about my pain”.¹⁵² She is unique in that she does not need to share her experience, knowing perhaps that she will not be believed. Cassandra suggests that there are even further levels of enchantment that even shared experiences of suffering like fight clubs or Party Crashing cannot reach and that the truest enchantments are those that demand nothing less than silence. Walter Benjamin, interestingly, made a similar point about the horrors of WWI, the event which so informed Weber’s work: ‘Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent – not richer, but poorer in communicable experience?’¹⁵³ The inmates and the hosts are aware that there are these other stories, stories like Cassandra’s, authentic stories of suffering that need no exaggeration, no scripting: ‘Some stories, Mr Whittier would say, you tell them and you use them up. Other stories, they use you up’.¹⁵⁴ The Baroness Frostbite reiterates this point: ‘Some stories, she’d say, the more you tell them, the faster you use them up. Those kind, the drama burns off,

¹⁵¹ Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 220.

¹⁵² Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 313. Palahniuk wrestles with this conflicted relationship between story and experience in other places. He writes, in his essay on the ‘Church of Story’: ‘Still, do we do more damage when we share our dark fantasies – when we explore them through a story or song or picture? Or when we deny them? Stories are how human beings digest their lives: by making events into something we can repeat and control, telling them until they’re exhausted. Until they no longer get a laugh or gasp or teary eye. Until we can absorb, assimilate even those worst events. Our culture, it digests events by making lesser and lesser versions of the original ... But the stories we’re afraid to tell, to control, to craft – they never wear out, and they kill us.’ Palahniuk, ‘Church’, 2.

¹⁵³ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 84.

¹⁵⁴ Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 287.

and every version, they sound more silly and flat. The other kind of story, it uses you up. The more you tell it, the stronger it gets ... Telling some stories, Miss Leroy says, is committing suicide'.¹⁵⁵ In a particularly horrific story in a novel full of horrific stories, a dying man tells the Baroness, 'When we die, these are the stories still on our lips. The stories we'll only tell strangers, someplace private in the padded cell of midnight. These important stories, we rehearse them for years in our head but never tell. These stories are ghosts, bringing people back from the dead. Just for a moment. For a visit. Every story is a ghost'.¹⁵⁶ True horror then is horror that haunts, that eludes language, that is not marketable, that is enchanted: 'That's how a scary story works. It echoes some ancient fear. It recreates some forgotten terror. Something we'd like to think we've grown beyond. But it can still scare us to tears. It's something you'd hoped was healed. Every night's scattered with them. These wandering people who can't be saved but won't die'.¹⁵⁷ In a way, this terror can be seen as an apt metaphor for that which cannot be left behind in modernity, that which the narrative of modernity is eager to get rid itself of but which it nonetheless constantly produces.

Haunted, for all of its convolutions, is united by the spectre of death. A careful reading reveals Mr Whittier, the host of the retreat, is a victim of progeria, a premature aging illness which has left him a wizened old man at the age of thirteen. Whittier has hosted these retreats before, pointing to a number of human-shaped stains on the carpet: 'We weren't his first batch of guinea pigs. And until one of those stains came back to haunt him – he told us, we would not be the last'.¹⁵⁸ The narrator says, 'Dangling the key between two fingers, Mr Whittier says, "You can stay here". But when you die, then come back just for a moment. To tell me. To save me. With proof of our eternal life. To save us all, please tell someone. To create real peace on earth. Let us all be – Haunted'.¹⁵⁹ The entire exercise is an attempt of one damaged young/old man to find proof of immortality before his own untimely death and perhaps to forcefully create a genuine community that is united through willed acts of suffering. Unlike fight clubs and unlike Party Crashing, Mr Whittier's attempts fail due to the relentlessly banal way his victims choose to understand their own sufferings. The novel

¹⁵⁵ Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 337.

¹⁵⁶ Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 341-342.

¹⁵⁷ Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 343.

¹⁵⁸ Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 117.

¹⁵⁹ Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 385-386. He underlines this point by telling a fanciful story of a world where the immortality of the soul is proven beyond any doubt and millions decide that death, escape from the endless suffering of earthly life via suicide, is preferable to living. See Palahniuk, *Haunted*, 387-399.

again underlines the differences between authentic exchange of experience through the device of Mr Whittier's continual failures to generate a real haunting and find access to the knowledge of a life after death that he so desperately seeks. It is also implied in the simple fact that it is never clear who the narrator is and if he or she has a story of their own to tell. The novel denies the characters the right, in its very form, to find out who operates camera behind the camera behind the camera, further cementing their absolute failure to discover either authentic suffering or create authentic community.

Conclusions

Rings and other jewels are not gifts, but apologies for gifts. The only gift is a portion of thyself. Thou must bleed for me.
Ralph Waldo Emerson¹⁶⁰

The worlds created by Chuck Palahniuk are witness to the constant presence of spectres both literal and metaphorical; as Carl muses in *Lullaby*, 'We're all of us haunted and haunting ... We're all of us haunting and haunted'.¹⁶¹ In a sense, Palahniuk and Douglas Coupland offer similar critiques of culture and the paradoxically alienating and distancing effects of information technologies and the mass media, though Coupland's assessment of the disenchanting effects of the media is far harsher, as are the ways he envisions resisting this disenchantment. Where Coupland uses the enchanted, as a source of comfort, however ambiguous, Palahniuk seeks rather to discomfort the reader. His ghosts are more restless, less interested in salvation than Coupland's Jared, the ghostly emissary in *Girlfriend in a Coma*. The glimpses Palahniuk offers the reader of the enchanted world are profoundly threatening, as Baudrillard intimates they must be. Reenchantment, as it is represented in Palahniuk's work, is multilayered and tied to both the revaluation of storytelling and of suffering. Palahniuk's novels confront the reader with the demand for a re-evaluation of the dominant codes of value in contemporary society, particularly in the United States. He interrogates these codes with the stories he chooses to tell and by the way he chooses to tell them, in the process offering a revaluation of community, which he creates by way of exchange outside the bounds of economy. His narratives uncover the unthought within modernity, that irreducible element of enchantment that thick reenchantment seeks to capture and explore. In turn, employing thick reenchantment as an interpretive frame allows us to fully bring out and make sense of this interplay within Palahniuk's fiction. His work provides a witness to the world outside of and behind operational language. In the end, what Palahniuk offers is a very hard-edged contemporary Romanticism.

¹⁶⁰ Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Gifts', in *The Logic of the Gift: Toward an Ethic of Generosity*, ed. Alan D. Schrift (New York: Routledge, 1997), 26.

¹⁶¹ Palahniuk, *Lullaby*, 6, 258.

Through his economies of exchange Palahniuk offers a cogent, articulate critique of contemporary rationalised western culture and the rampant commodification that is attendant upon it. Palahniuk's work can be understood, then, as a specific look at the ways in which the conditions of modernity produce religious effects through a revaluation of suffering against medical, therapeutic understandings of pain. Like Baudrillard, Palahniuk argues that true value lies outside the cold calculation of exchange and use value and instead lies in the exchange of things that are useless. Or broken. Or self-destructive. Or haunted.

We turn next to the last of the authors we will be exploring, Tom Tykwer, whose films strike a middle ground between Coupland's comforting voice and Palahniuk's dark visions.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH: TOM

TYKWER'S GIFTS OF LOVE

I fear to breathe any treason against the majesty of love, which is the genius and god of gifts, and to whom we must not affect to prescribe. Let him give kingdoms or flower-leaves indifferently. There are persons, from whom we always expect fairy tokens; let us not cease to expect them.

Ralph Waldo Emerson¹

Of the texts we are studying here, the films of Tom Tykwer are the most obviously concerned with matters of enchantment. This is true first because Tykwer's films are works of magical realism, a genre that is particularly suited for representations of the dialectic of enchantment. Even more than Coupland or Palahniuk, Tykwer focuses on the creation and maintenance of authentic interpersonal intimacy in a radically disenchanted and heavily mediated world. Tykwer focuses more particularly on the foundational relational act of interpersonal love, often personified in a young couple engaged in mostly chaste, platonic relationships, one of whom has an overwhelming gift of love for the other. In this way, Tykwer's work concerns acts of exchange; however, the detailed and ongoing economies of symbolic exchange that we have been focused on are largely absent from Tykwer's films. Nonetheless, many of his narratives turn on the giving and receiving of gifts of love, singular acts of exchange that have the power to reveal hidden layers of meaning and structure to the world. In his films, Tykwer and his characters carve out a place within contemporary disenchanted life that is resonant with human connections that border on the magical. Again like Palahniuk and Coupland, these connections have the ability to heal the wounds inflicted by a disenchanted world. Tykwer's representation of reenchancement also turns on some of the most basic forms of enchantment, those of fate, chance and synchronicity, rudimentary expressions of the basic conviction that there is more to the world than can be apprehended by the senses. Tykwer's work is distinctly Romantic in tone and in its focus on innocence and the purity embodied in the gift of love. This does not mean, by any account, that all is soft and unfocused in Tykwer's worlds; indeed, with his latest film he exposes the true darkness that can be attendant upon reenchancement, which we hinted at in an earlier discussion of Nazi Germany. In the end, Tykwer's foray into the dark is far more unsettling than anything in

¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Gifts', in *The Logic of the Gift: Toward an Ethic of Generosity*, ed. Alan D. Schrift (New York: Routledge, 1997), 27.

Palahniuk's work, given that Palahniuk holds out always the possibility that the hidden aspects of modernity can make the world a more liveable, more human place.

This investigation again has a similar structure to that of previous chapters. We begin with some basic comments on the content and character of Tykwer's work and on the genre conventions of magical realism, which will help us to place Tykwer solidly in his historical context. In a departure from our procedures, we will be staying largely within the structure of individual films when detailing Tykwer's his relationship with traditional religion and reenchantment. The chapter closes with a lengthy discussion of Tykwer's most recent film, *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*, which provides an excellent opportunity to draw together the various strands of this thesis into a single act of interpretation.

Tom Tykwer and his Work

The fairy tale, which to this day is the first tutor of children because it was once the first tutor of mankind, secretly lives on in the story. The first true storyteller is, and will continue to be, the teller of fairy tales.

Walter Benjamin²

At the same time that this chapter expands its hermeneutic framework to consider the medium of film and the particulars of magical realism, it tightens its scope to focus on only four of Tykwer's films, primarily out of the desire to spend more time on his more important films.³ The films under consideration, all feature-length films directed by Tykwer, are as follows.

Lola rennt (hereafter *Lola*, 1998)⁴ begins when Lola, a punkish young woman with flaming red hair, receives a desperate plea for help in an impossible task. Manni, her loutish boyfriend, a petty criminal in the middle of a deal involving stolen cars, has lost 100,000 DM and Lola has twenty minutes to come up with the money before his ruthless boss arrives to collect.

² Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 102.

³ This analysis will not be considering Tykwer's short films: *Because*, dir. Tom Tykwer, 34 min. (Black Out Film, 1990); *Epilog*, dir. Tom Tykwer, 12 min. (Black Out Film, 1992), available on *Cinema 16: European Short Films* (Cinema 16, 2007), DVD; and *True*. Dir. Tom Tykwer. 10 min. (Novem Productions, 2004), available as *Faubourg Saint-Denis* segment, *Paris, Je t'aime*, dir. Tom Tykwer, Tom Tykwer, Alfonso Cuarón, Gus Van Sant, et. Al., 120 min. (Victoires International, 2006). We will likewise be neglecting the features *Die Tödliche Maria*, dir. Tom Tykwer, 106 min. (Liebesfilm, 1993), which he wrote and directed; *Winterschlafer*, dir. Tom Tykwer, 122 min. (X-Filme Creative Pool, 1997), which he directed from a script on which he collaborated with the novelist Anne-Françoise Pyszora; and *Das Leben ist eine Bustelle*, dir. Wolfgang Becker, 115 min. (X-Filme Creative Pool, 1997), which he wrote with Wolfgang Becker but did not direct.

⁴ *Lola rennt*, dir. Tom Tykwer, 80 min. (Sony Pictures Classics, 1998), DVD.

In many ways, *Der Krieger und die Kaiserin* (hereafter *Krieger*, 2000)⁵, is a companion piece to *Lola*, though they are radically different in tone and execution. Tykwer wrote and directed both films, and both star Franka Potente as a fairy-tale heroine. *Krieger* relates the simple story of Sissi, a young nurse at a hospital for the mentally ill, as she pursues the reluctant Bodo, a damaged young man who once saved her life.

Heaven (2002)⁶ is in many ways a departure for Tykwer. Written by Krzysztof Kieslowski and Krzysztof Piesiewicz for a planned trilogy of Kieslowski-directed films, it was offered to Tykwer after Kieslowski's death in 1996.⁷ In the film, Philippa Paccard, a young Englishwoman living in Turin, plants a bomb in the office of a successful but corrupt businessman, which, by sheer accident, kills four innocent bystanders instead of its target. Philippa is arrested and taken for interrogation, where a young Italian police officer falls in love with her and helps her to escape into the Tuscan countryside, where their journey meets an unexpected end.

Perfume: The Story of a Murderer (hereafter *Perfume*, 2006)⁸ represents an even more significant departure. The film is based on the successful and highly influential 1985 German novel of the same name by Patrick Süskind and co-written (in English) for the screen by Tykwer, Andrew Birkin and Bernd Eichinger. The story follows the life of Jean-Baptiste Grenouille, an orphan born in eighteenth-century Paris with an extraordinary, almost supernatural sense of smell. The film details the murderous lengths he goes to create a perfume that he believes will make him whole, as he has no scent of his own.

Tykwer's work has been discussed in relation to writers and filmmakers as diverse as Vladimir Nabokov, Lars Van Trier, Krzysztof Kieslowski, Quentin Tarantino, David Lynch, Wong Kar-Wai, Fritz Lang, Wim Wenders and Walter Ruttmann, among others.⁹ In his early career, he worked primarily in German but has lately produced films in English, French and Italian. He is widely considered as a postmodern filmmaker and his work is often discussed

⁵ *Der Krieger und die Kaiserin*, dir. Tom Tykwer, 135 min. (Sony Pictures Classics, 2000), DVD.

⁶ *Heaven*, dir. Tom Tykwer, 97 min. (Miramax, 2002), DVD.

⁷ The second of the trilogy was shot in French as *L'Enfer*, dir. Danis Tanovic, 98 min. (Asap Films, 2005). The third film, *Purgatory*, has never been produced.

⁸ *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*, dir. Tom Tykwer, 147 min. (Constantin Film Produktion, 2006), DVD.

⁹ See Gertrud Koch, 'Catholic Pictorialism; Religion as Style in the Films of Lars von Trier and Tom Tykwer', in *The Cosmopolitan Screen: German Cinema and the Global Imaginary, 1945 to Present*, ed. Stephan K. Schindler and Lutz Koepnick (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), 225-226; Heidi Schlipphacke, 'Melodrama's Other: Entrapment and Escape in the Films of Tom Tykwer', *Camera Obscura* 21, 2 (2006): 111; Tom Whalen, 'Review: *Run Lola Run*', *Film Quarterly* 53, 3 (Spring 2000): 35; and Karin Hamm-Ehsani, 'Screening Modern Berlin: Lola Runs to the Beat of a New Urban Symphony', *Seminar* 40, 1 (February 2004): 50.

in the context of the larger narrative and aesthetic conventions of the postmodern turn.¹⁰ Like Palahniuk and Coupland, he wears these influences lightly and has forged a unique cinematic voice that has as much to do with the thematic and narrative content of his films as with his style. This of course does not mean that we can ignore or relegate his visuals to the background. Tykwer's visual style is distinctive, his camera precise at the same time it is restless. He relies heavily on a number of distinct and evocative compositions that are repeated throughout the body of his work: tightly framed images of couples, shot from above; circling, prowling shots that isolate people (again often couples) within the circular path of the camera; simple images of falling objects; long, flowing tracks using a helicopter-mounted camera known as a SpaceCam. The cinematic language he uses is highly complex and endlessly referential, calling on motifs from fairy tales, literature, classic and contemporary film. Tykwer even references his own work, either with visual quotations or by using the same actors across a number of films. He does this to such an extent that Heidi Schilipackhe argues: 'Tykwer's films play, at times, like porous, intersecting worlds'.¹¹

Here again Tykwer reveals the similarities he shares with both Coupland and Palahniuk: it is possible again to approach Tykwer's work as a more or less unified whole. We can regard his films as both distinct individual texts and as parts of a larger whole without doing them any unnecessary interpretive violence. He again demonstrates a thematic cohesion, augmented by his particular visual flair. His films return again and again to considerations of coincidence, fate, destiny, synchronicity, and the effect of these elemental enchantments on meaning. He revisits themes of memory, time, sight, and escape. Perhaps Tykwer's most important theme is the magical, salvific power of interpersonal love, which is also crucial to how he represents reenchantment. Even more so than Coupland, his work focuses on how intimate human connections can repair the damage caused by living in the contemporary world. His narratives often centre on a young couple facing either the end or the beginning of a romantic relationship. Like Coupland and Palahniuk, Tykwer is concerned primarily with examining the difficulties of unmediated human relationships in a heavily mediated world. In Tykwer's films such contact takes on a transcendental flavour, as Lutz Koepnick notes:

¹⁰ See Schilipphacke, 'Melodrama's', Whalen, 'Review' and Owen Evans, 'Tom Tykwer's *Run Lola Run*: Postmodern, Posthuman or "Post-theory"?' *Studies in European Cinema* 1, 2 (2004): 105-115; and Robert Z. Lauer, 'Run Lola Run at the Dawn of Postmodernity' *Simile: Studies in Media and Information Literacy Education* 3, 1 (2003): 1-9.

¹¹ Schilipphacke, 'Melodrama's', 118.

What drives most of Tykwer's heroes is a basic desire for contact and embodied communication: an urgent need to experience quasi-mystical fusions with other souls; a yearning to remove any degree of separation between them and literally get in touch with one another ... Unlike religious pilgrims in search of eternal redemption, Tykwer's heroes do not flee out of conventional time and space, they flee into them so as to temporarily transcend from within blocked conduits of communication ... The experience of touching another person's life remains the absolute exception – a miracle.¹²

Something of a throwback to the classical European tradition of *auteur* cinema, which includes such legendary figures as Robert Bresson, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Jean-Luc Godard, Tykwer works consistently with many of the same cast and crew, which further allows us to view these films as the work of a unified authorial voice. Like his predecessors, Tykwer often makes deeply felt and highly personal films. In true *auteur* tradition, he not only writes or adapts the films he directs, but writes, performs, and produces accomplished scores for his films that straddle musical genres, ranging from driving electronic in *Lola* to more classical compositions in *Perfume*. Because of this, music takes on a special importance in his films and often act as extensions of the film's narrative. This is true especially with *Lola*, which features not only Tykwer's score (a collaboration with Reinhold Heil and Johnny Kilme), but also lyrics that make explicit the central thematic elements of the film.

Despite their diverse narratives, Tykwer's films, almost as a rule, can be classified as works of magical realism. In the last chapters, both Coupland's *Girlfriend in a Coma* and Palahniuk's *Lullaby* fit into the genre of magical realism, *Girlfriend* with its ghostly visitations and its supernatural plague and *Lullaby* with its 'culling spell'. However, Tykwer's work falls far more easily into this category of narrative and the magical elements in his work are far more central to their overall meaning than is the case with either Coupland or Palahniuk. As the genre conventions are crucial to the ways in which Tykwer's films represent the dialectic of enchantment in fictional form, it is worth briefly elaborating on the forms of magical realism. Christopher Warnes defines magical realism 'as a mode of narration that *naturalises the supernatural*; that is to say, a mode in which the real and fantastic, natural and supernatural, are coherently represented in a state of rigorous equivalence – neither has a

¹² Lutz Koepnick, 'Free Fallin': Tom Tykwer and the Aesthetics of Deceleration and Dislocation', *The Germanic Review* 82 (Winter 2007): 18-19.

greater claim to truth or referentiality'.¹³ Wendy Faris further suggests 'five primary characteristics of the mode':

First, the text contains an 'irreducible element' of magic; second, the description in magical realism detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world; third, the reader may experience some unsettling doubts in the effort to reconcile two contradictory understandings of events; fourth, the narrative merges different realms; and, finally, magical realism disturbs received idea about time, space, and identity. The 'irreducible element' is something we cannot explain according to the laws of the universe as they have been formulated in Western empirically based discourse ... These irreducible elements are well assimilated into the realistic textual environment, rarely causing any comment by narrators or characters, who model such an acceptance for their readers.¹⁴

Magical realism is thus perhaps an ideal vehicle for the expression and exploration of reenchantment, at least as it has appeared in fictional representation; indeed, Faris argues that magical realism provides a 'space of reenchantment and the healing of phantoms',¹⁵ though it is not clear what, precisely she means by this. She argues, 'magical realism is also imbued with a certain visionary power. Thus the mode constitutes what we might term a remystification of narrative in the West'.¹⁶ Given this, work of magical realism at the very least provides privileged sites for the *study* of what we are calling thick reenchantment and the ways it manifests itself in fictional narrative. Warnes, who dismisses Faris' claims of reenchantment as 'too vague to be useful',¹⁷ nevertheless suggests, with language that stresses recovery, that magical realism may be an ideal place for working out the dialectic of enchantment within modernity: 'The main force of the attraction seems to be that the term's distinctive oxymoronic nature suggests a numinous quality to the everyday, and it thus promises somehow to reconcile the modern, rational, "disenchanted" subject of the West with forgotten but recoverable spiritual realities'.¹⁸ In this juxtaposition of terms,

¹³ Christopher Warnes, 'Naturalising the Supernatural: Irreverence and Magical Realism', *Literature Compass* 2 (2005): 2. Emphasis in original. Wendy Faris offers a similar, if more specific definition: 'Very briefly defined, magical realism combines realism and the fantastic so that the marvellous seems to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them'. Wendy B. Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (Nashville, AB: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 1.

¹⁴ Faris, *Ordinary*, 7.

¹⁵ Faris, *Ordinary*, 167. Faris is here responding to a passage from anthropologist Michael Taussig: 'Before there can be a science of man there has to be the long-awaited demythification and reenchantment of Western man in a quite different confluence of self and otherness. Our way lies upstream, against the current, upriver near the foothills of the Andes where Indian healers are busy healing colonists of the phantoms assailing them. There in the jointness of their construction across the colonial divide the healer desensationalizes terror so that the mysterious side of the mysterious ... is indeed denied by an optic that perceives the everyday as impenetrable, the impenetrable as everyday. This is another history, not only of terror, but of healing as well'. Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 135.

¹⁶ Faris, *Ordinary*, 3.

¹⁷ Christopher Warnes, 'Avatars of Amadis: Magical Realism as Postcolonial Romance', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 40, 7 (2005): 14.

¹⁸ Warnes, 'Naturalising', 1.

'magical realism' shares an interesting formal connection to 'religious modernity' as a simple phrase which places in close proximity two words that are most often understood as polar opposites. It is, as we have seen, not the only narrative form that can successfully engage with the dialectic of enchantment in productive and provocative ways.

Taking into account the historical continuities that are implied by the notion of thick reenchantment, it is crucial to note that neither the concept of magical realism nor its attendant aesthetic forms are purely contemporary matters; they, again, have their roots at least in part in the Romantic movement. Warnes, who traces the roots of the genre as far back as the medieval romance,¹⁹ notes:

Critical work in the field has typically failed to take a long enough view of both the history of the concept of magical realism, which quite evidently has its roots in Romanticism, and the way the literature itself relates back to the romance tradition. The first person to write of a 'magical realist' was not, as is commonly thought, the German art historian, Franz Roh, in 1925, but the Romantic poet and philosopher, Novalis, around 1789.²⁰

Warnes draws this comparison explicitly: 'Novalis reveals the outlines of a committed anti-foundationalism. Along with the emphasis on enchantment and on seeing beyond the physical while still maintaining a place for the real world, the anti-foundationalism resonates strongly with the postmodern moment of literary magical realism.'²¹ Lois Zamora, notes, again using a language of recovery familiar from the discourse on reenchantment, that magical realism has its origins

With the masterful interweavings of magical and real in the epic and chivalric traditions and continuing in the precursors of modern prose fiction – the *Decameron*, *The Thousand and One Nights*, *Don Quixote*. Indeed, we may suppose that the widespread appeal of magical realist fiction today responds not only to its innovative energy but also to its impulse to reestablish contact with traditions temporarily eclipsed by the mimetic constraints of nineteenth- and twentieth-century realism. Contemporary magical realist writers self-consciously depart from the conventions of narrative realism to enter and amplify other (diverted) currents of Western literature that flow from the marvellous Greek pastoral and epic

¹⁹ He writes, 'Notably, magical realism takes from mediaeval romance not necessarily themes of love and adventure, of devotion to one's lady or the allegories of quest, honour and passion, but something altogether more fundamental: the relationship to the real that is implied by the intermingling of the magical and the everyday, the equivalence that is presumed between real and supernatural'. Warnes, 'Avatars', 14.

²⁰ Warnes, 'Avatars', 8. However, Warnes notes, 'Novalis never developed the concept of magical realism. He succumbed to tuberculosis at the age of twenty-nine, and his fragmentary and aphoristic mode of philosophising ... meant that some of his philosophical concepts were destined to remain under-explored'. Warnes, 'Magical', 490.

²¹ Christopher Warnes, 'Magical Realism and German Idealism', *Modern Language Review* 101 (2006): 490.

traditions to mediaeval dream visions to the romance and Gothic fictions of the past century.²²

Magical realism is related to another enchanted genre, the fairy tale, which played an important role in German Romanticism. Novalis and many of the early German Romantics were interested in and created fairy tales. Jack Zipes writes, stressing the fairy tale as a reaction against a growing rationalism:

the utopian landscape etched by Novalis in his fairy tales was created in rebellion against the manner in which reason had already become instrumentalised to serve the arbitrary interests of authoritarian powers. The Enlightenment had become utilitarian and rationalised human production for economic exploitation and profit, thereby warping the people's sense of their own history ... Novalis was already fighting a losing battle with his fairy tales and radical theories ... that did not stop the great German bourgeois minds from writing and using folk and fairy tales to criticise the dehumanizing forces of rationalism and capitalism up to the present.²³

Zipes again couches this in the language of recovery: 'the romantics were consciously aware of revolutionizing an older form of art under new socio-economic conditions which they perceived to be problematic'.²⁴ Even more importantly, he notes further, 'Almost all romantic writers were drawn to the fairy tale and experimented with this form in highly original ways. In fact, it became so ingrained in the German literary tradition that there is hardly a major German writer since the beginning of the nineteenth century who has not in some manner used or created a fairy tale up to the present'.²⁵ It is possible, and instructive, to include Tykwer in this long tradition. Tykwer's films, though not as visibly concerned with recovery, can be understood both as magical realism and as fiercely contemporary examples of this resistant, enchanted strand of Romantic literature. It is also not too far a stretch to say that some of Tykwer's films are intended as nothing less than contemporary fairy tales.

²² Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy Faris, 'Introduction: Daiquiri Birds and Flaubertian Parrot(ie)s'. In *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (London: Durham University Press, 1995), 2.

²³ Jack Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*, Revised ed. (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 105.

²⁴ Zipes, *Breaking*, 48.

²⁵ Zipes, *Breaking*, 62.

Tom Tykwer and Traditional Religion: *Heaven*

I don't believe in promise/ I don't believe in chance/ I don't believe you can resist the things that make no sense ... I don't believe in panic/ I don't believe in fear/ I don't believe in prophecies so don't waste any tears ... But I believe in fantasy, the future's understood/ I don't believe in history/ I don't believe in truth ... I believe/ I believe.

From the song 'Believe'²⁶

Unlike Coupland and Palahniuk, Tykwer does not return at intervals to the questions of traditional religion. Neither are his films as heavily informed by religious language or with religious imagery. However, in *Heaven*, Tykwer engages with traditional Christian themes of redemption, atonement and resurrection. This has perhaps less to do with a change in Tykwer's personal convictions than with the film's provenance. The film, we should recall, was originally written for the director Krzysztof Kieslowski, whose films often engaged explicitly Judeo-Christian narrative and thematic elements while maintaining a critical and metaphoric distance. Some of his best-known and best-loved films, from the *Dekalogue*, a series of ten films that examine each of the Ten Commandments, to his *Trois Couleurs* trilogy, tell stories that resonate with the complex religious inheritance of his native Poland but never stray into confessional terrain.

Even as realised by Tykwer, *Heaven* is no different. The film represents a remarkable fusion of the sensibilities of both filmmakers, matching Tykwer's precise cinematography (by longtime collaborator Frank Griebe) and his distinctive visual tics with Kieslowski's oblique, allegorical narrative style. Fundamentally, the film is a provocative study of the healing of a young English school teacher and suspected terrorist, Philippa Paccard. As the film opens in Turin, Philippa is arrested for a bombing in which four people were killed and the film only gradually reveals that her intended target was a drug dealer whose products are partially responsible for the death of Philippa's husband and at least one of her students. During her arrest and interrogation, she meets Filippo, a young Carabinieri officer and translator who immediately and completely falls in love with the stricken Philippa, rendered insensible by the news that she has missed her target and instead killed four innocent people. Filippo is a man of almost childlike simplicity who engineers Philippa's escape and, further, allows her to commit the murder she had failed at with the bombing. Filippo sees his love for Philippa in mysterious, enchanted terms. Planning their escape, he tells Philippa, 'And then we'll think of what to do next, because I believe there will be something, and that it will be beautiful'. The idea of a hidden structure that exists underneath the seeming chaos of the world is something that Tykwer returns to time and

²⁶ 'Believe', Tom Tykwer, Reinhold Heil and Johnny Kilme, *Run Lola Run: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack* (TVT B00000JG17). Music and lyrics by Tom Tykwer, Reinhold Heil and Johnny Kilme. The vocals, in English in the film, are by Franka Potente, who plays Lola.

again, much like Coupland. For Tykwer, however, it is not story which can reveal this world, but intimate connections between people.

There is a hidden synchronicity in the world that is paralleled in the quasi-mystical connections between Philippa and Filippo that is hinted at in their names and furthered in the score. In one of the very few cases where Tykwer uses music composed by others, the main theme in *Heaven* is taken from Arvo Pärt's minimalist *Spiegel im Spiegel*, which underlines this synchronicity with its implications of mirrors and reflection. The secret layer of connection and meaning is revealed to Philippa and Filippo as they converse in an empty carriage of a speeding train, fleeing Turin into the countryside:

Philippa: Where will we go?

Filippo: I'd like you to take me to the place where you grew up.

Philippa: I don't even know your name.

Filippo: Filippo.

Philippa: When were you born?

Filippo: May 23rd, 1978.

Philippa: Say that again.

Filippo: May 23rd, 1978.

Philippa: At what time? Do you know?

Filippo: In the morning, at eight o'clock.

Philippa: I know exactly what I was doing on May 23rd, 1978. I know exactly. It's my birthday. It was the day of First Holy Communion. I was dressed up like a bride – this white dress and veil my mother had made me. She put the dress on and covered my face with the veil, I burst into tears. I don't know why.²⁷

It is through the connection with Filippo that Philippa is able to find a strange kind of synergistic redemption that the film places in direct relation to traditional Christian notions of redemption, as suggested by the synchronicity of Filippo's birth and Philippa's communion. Wandering dreamlike through the Tuscan countryside, a journey captured in long takes with the camera hovering above the lovers, Philippa moves from a defeated, almost comatose state to something approaching Filippo's childlike nature, something Tykwer underlines visually as the pair begin to resemble each other more and more, wearing very similar clothes and sporting identically shaved heads, which carries with it echoes of monasticism. The transformation of Philippa – Filippo remains essentially unchanged – is mirrored in the larger visual style of the film, which moves from the oppressive streets of Turin, largely framed without a view of the sky, to a lush and open view of the countryside soaked in warm colours.

²⁷ *Heaven*, DVD. All quotations and screen captures are the work of the author and, when relevant, are reliant upon the subtitle translation.

As in many of Tykwer's film, the gift of love offered from one character to another and the bond of love between them is more important than the specifics of each relationship. Philippa and Filippo become lovers and at the same time something more and less than that. Their union only becomes sexual at one point, and is shot from such a distance and with such dream-like detachment that their relationship remains almost determinedly platonic (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Filippo (Giovanni Ribisi) and Philippa (Cate Blanchett) in Tuscany.

The key scene in Philippa's transformation takes place in the small Tuscan town of Montepulciano when Filippo and Philippa take refuge in an ancient Catholic church. Tykwer plays with the tropes of sacramental confession by showing a lingering image of the church's confessional before revealing that Philippa is sitting casually in the pews and confessing to Filippo instead of a priest (Figure 2):

Philippa: I've done a lot of damage and some very stupid, stupid things. I've lied to my mother and to my sister many, many, many times. I was unfaithful to my husband once and I didn't do everything I could to save him ... Four people died because of me, and I can't live with that. I'll never be able to. I shot a defenceless person, which you know. But, what you don't know is, I've ceased to believe.

Filippo: Ceased to believe in what?

Philippa: In sense, in justice, in life.

Filippo: I love you.

Philippa: I know, it's just ... it's just I want the end to come soon.

Tykwer says of the scene:

Of course it all builds towards certain scenes, among them this one, where Filippo, after having heard what she's struggling with, and ... seeing her struggle now with

different eyes, is ready to offer her what has been his offer all through the film, the offer of love ... the offer of love more as a concept than the fact of I'm in love with you, to say that love is something you can hold on to ... can probably even rescue you, at least as a spiritual being. There's of course a strong implication of confession in here but still, to me ... this is not a religious movie, it is a movie that is heavily influenced by spiritual knowledge and that of course recurs to religion and to theology ... They don't go into the confession booth, they don't follow the rituals, they just are inspired by them, which is a small but important difference to me.²⁸



Figure 2: Filippo hears Philippa's confession.

In Tykwer's films, love is often couched in the structure of gift, usually an unequal giving of love from one person to another who is need of such a gift but who nonetheless responds to the imperative of reciprocation to the best of their abilities. Tykwer uses explicitly the language of gift when describing this particular scene. That Tykwer's connects this gift in *Heaven* with a refigured sacramental act is highly suggestive, recalling to mind the relationship of traditional religion to reenchantment in the work of both Coupland and Palahniuk. As it plays with traditional Christian imagery while remaining always outside of it, *Heaven* is much like Coupland's *Girlfriend in a Coma* or Palahniuk's *Choke*, both of which enact an analogous tension between distance from the tradition and relying upon its established meanings. In a very similar fashion, in a later scene with Filippo's father, enacted *outside* of a magnificent cathedral but within the projection of its shadow, Philippa finally is able to reciprocate Filippo's gift and admits that she has fallen in love with him.

²⁸ Tom Tykwer, 'Director's Commentary', *Heaven*, dir. Tom Tykwer, 97 min. (Miramax, 2002), DVD. All excerpts transcribed by the author.

The end of the film completes this journey of the elevation of a damaged person through accepting and returning a gift of love in striking, literal fashion. As the police close in on Philippa and Filippo, a helicopter pilot in training, the couple steals a Carabinieri helicopter and escape, flying straight up from an isolated farmhouse. In the lingering final frame of the film the camera is directed vertically upwards, holding a static frame of the helicopter as it ascends higher and higher until it is lost from sight, leaving a sky with nothing but clouds. This literal transcendence is related, importantly, to the scene in a flight simulator which opens the film. Filippo's flight instructor cautions him, 'Watch your height. Careful. In a real helicopter you can't just keep flying higher'. Filippo asks his instructor a question for which he will receive an answer only at the end of the film: 'How high can I fly?' Tykwer reads the final image literally: 'I have to admit that this scene and especially this shot, is exactly the way I imagined it when I first read the script and was maybe the one other big reason I wanted to do the film. I felt like a film that ends with this kind of endless shot of a helicopter leaving not only this spot but leaving Earth and the characters going to heaven, literally, I thought it was just a really beautiful idea'.²⁹ This final image is as enigmatic as anything in either Coupland or Palahniuk. If it is intended, as the title of the film suggests, to imply an act of redemption, and if we are imply that this redemption is meant for Philippa, which is implied in the narrative as she is the one who is changed the most, we are led to wonder why the final image of the film is an answer to *Filippo's* question. This final image is as ambiguous as the rest of the film, portraying a salvation that is meant for one partner but given to another, an atonement for the sins of five killings that are allowed simply to fade into the background and are forgotten rather than expunged.

Their ascension is a startling inbreaking of an impossible, enchanted moment into what was, until this point, a largely recognisable world that operated under straightforward laws of nature. The film ends in a fashion that toys with the redemption of Philippa through a deliberate confusion of technological, religious and magical means. In the film, it is the love of Filippo that acts as the most important transformative agent, over and against more traditional Christian understandings of redemption and atonement, to which Tykwer repeatedly alludes both narratively and visually but which are undercut always by the innocent, childlike gift of love that Filippo offers Philippa and which transforms and heals her.

²⁹ Tykwer, *Heaven*, director's commentary.

Gifts of Love: Lola rennt and Der Krieger und die Kaiserin
And I forgot the element of chance introduced by circumstances, calm or haste, sun or cold, dawn or dusk, the taste of strawberries or abandonment, the half-understood message, the front page of newspapers, the voice of the telephone, the most anodyne conversation, the most anonymous man or woman, everything that speaks, makes noise, passes by, meets us
head on.
Jacques Sojcher³⁰

In important ways, *Lola* and *Krieger* are companion pieces. Both centre on a young woman – both played by Franka Potente – who enchants the world in which she lives. Like Filippo, both Lola and Sissi (the princess in the title of *Krieger*) hold the key to secret layers of meaning and enchantment in the world. Lola and Sissi are able to do this through simple, unwavering, even naïve, gifts of love. These gifts and their necessary return are agents of reenchantment, like story in Coupland and suffering in Palahniuk. The two women, for all their superficial differences, represent profoundly similar forces in their diegetic worlds, as Schilipackhe notes again: ‘Tykwer’s film oeuvre sometimes reads like disparate scenes from a single film ... Lola and Sissi appear to represent one figure at different points in a nonlinear narrative’.³¹ These films are an amalgam of enchanted narrative forms, mixing elements of the fairy tale, magical realism and formal Romanticism into narrative forms that are fiercely contemporary.

The diptych of films makes explicit that which is visible only in the closing moments of *Heaven*, that there are different levels of reality available only to a privileged few, a crucial element, we should remember, in Coupland’s work. In *Lola*, the existence of this enchanted otherworld is communicated visually by the use of a complex visual scheme in which each level of reality has a distinct look, achieved using different media. Tykwer explains:

The idea was to have, for every level of the film to have a certain aesthetics ... When we go to flashbacks, it was always meant to be black and white. When we go to actions that are not in the presence of Manni and Lola – so the whole world next to them ... which is kind of artificial, was shot on video and the whole world when they are present was shot on 35mm.³²

Much like the final image of *Heaven*, Tykwer here renders the split between the mundane surface of the world and its hidden enchanted in literal and absolute visual terms. In *Lola*, the world inhabited by Lola and Manni, her petty criminal boyfriend, has the crispness and clarity of quality film stock while the rest of the film and, by extension, the whole of the

³⁰ Quoted in Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, vol. 1, trans. by Steven Rendell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xvi.

³¹ Schilipphacke, ‘Melodrama’s’, 121.

³² Tom Tykwer, ‘Director’s Commentary’, *Lola rennt*, dir. Tom Tykwer, 80 min. (Sony Pictures Classics, 1998), DVD. All excerpts transcribed by the author.

disenchanted world has the grainy, washed-out look of cheap video, which flattens and sterilises the world with its limited palette, its coarse structure, and its imprecision.

Lola is the film's solely enchanted element. It is Lola, and only Lola, who has access to the enchanted layer of reality. She is also the only one who is even aware that this hidden structure exists and is thus the only character in her universe who is able to transform the world. What matters in the film is Lola, and, through her gift of love, Manni. She haunts the changing cityscape of Berlin with a magical force that the quotidian life of the city is unable to quell. Lola's boundless, supernatural energy is not only a catalyst for everything that happens within the film; she is in many ways the sole agent in the film, or as Margit Sinka has it, she is 'a univocal agent of change'.³³ The film opens with ominous images of a clock and a large, milling crowd. The camera slows on occasion to focus on a series of people who will become important as the film progresses. For the brief voiceover that accompanies this sequence, Tykwer's choice of narrators is important, as Sinka notes: 'That the best possible future has a chance of being realized is conveyed ... at the beginning with the voice of Germany's consummate fairy tale narrator Hans Paetsch, his audio tapes a household presence in most German children's lives'.³⁴ The narration begins the film with a playful questioning:

Man – probably the most mysterious species on our planet. A mystery of unanswered questions. Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? How do we know what we think we know? Where are we going? How do we know what we think we know? Why do we believe anything at all? Countless questions in search of an answer, an answer that will give rise to a new question and the next answer will give rise to the next question and so on. But in the end, isn't it always the same question? And always the same answer?³⁵

After an animated credits sequence, the narrative of the film opens with a phone call from a frantic Manni, who, through sheer carelessness, has lost 100,000 DM that his boss is coming to collect in 20 minutes. Manni blames Lola, who failed to give him a ride – someone steals her moped – and his side of the conversation is little more than what Grant McAllister uncharitably, if accurately, calls 'puerile whimpering and pessimism'.³⁶ Manni doubts Lola's abilities, screaming, 'See! I knew you wouldn't come up with any idea. I always said someday you wouldn't know what to do. Not when you die, sooner! You said "Love can do

³³ Margit Sinka, 'Tom Tykwer's *Lola rennt*. A Blueprint for Millennial Berlin', *Glossen 11: Aufsätze* (June 2000), <http://alpha.dickinson.edu/departments/germn/glossen/heft11/lola.html>, accessed 18 February 2008.

³⁴ Sinka, 'Blueprint'.

³⁵ *Lola*, DVD. All quotations and screen captures are the work of the author and, when relevant, are reliant upon the subtitle translation.

³⁶ Grant P. McAllister, 'Romantic Imagery in Tykwer's *Lola rennt*', *German Studies Review* 30, 2 (2007): 338.

anything”. So find 100,000 marks in twenty minutes!’ The film never addresses the question as to why Lola, obviously a capable young woman, is so enamoured with Manni, who throughout the film appears as selfish, utterly incompetent and seething with a barely-repressed rage that hints at an undercurrent of violence. Again, as is the case with *Heaven*, the simple fact of their love is what matters in the film. Lola, as the sole agent in the film, makes Manni worthy simply because of her regard. In the end, it is really only Lola who is necessary in the world of the film. Manni can almost be dismissed as a plot element, a necessary object to whom Lola can invest her magical affections.

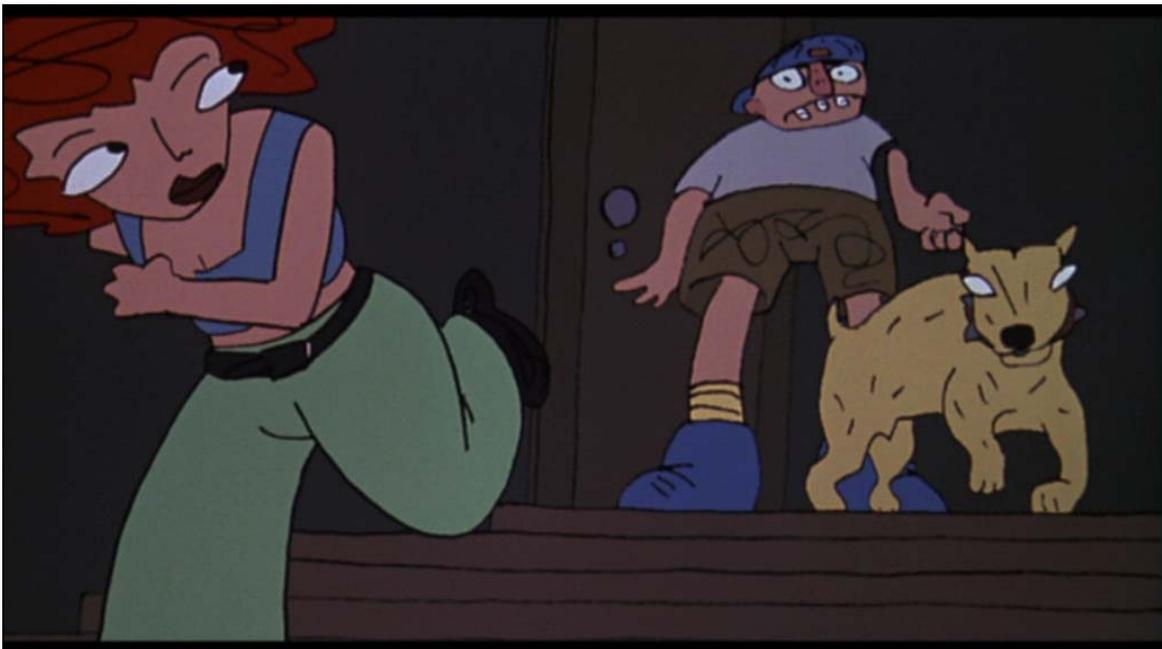


Figure 3: Animated Lola and 'the agents of fate'.

Visually, the film is vibrant, fast, highly kinetic, and relentlessly paced. Its mix of animation, black-and-white, colour film, and grainy amateur video lend Lola's Berlin a fractured, ever-shifting quality. Tykwer transposes the aesthetics of a music video onto a film which has far greater depth than such an aesthetic usually implies. The film gives Lola three chances to succeed, as time loops back upon itself twice in the film, a rupture of space and time that is unexplained save for Lola's enchantments. This rupture and repeat of time is signalled visually in the film in the constant presence of clocks and spirals (Figure 4). What happens, radically different in each round, depends entirely on how Lola deals with what Tykwer calls 'the agents of fate' (Figure 3), a man and a dog that she encounters – in animated form – on the stairs of her apartment complex. She encounters these agents three times and everything else flows from the few seconds she gains or loses during her encounter with them. Lola, with her boundless will and creativity, is able, in each of the

three rounds, to help Manni find the 100,000 DM that he needs to give to his menacing boss. However, during the first two rounds, the money comes with a heavy cost. At the end of the first attempt, Lola is shot by a twitchy policeman. At the end of the second, Manni is struck by an ambulance. In the third, Lola and Manni meet at the end of twenty minutes, both alive and well and, though endless twists of fate, with a spare 100,000 DM.

The three ‘rounds’ of the film are separated by two extended moments of meditative conversation between Manni and Lola, shot in a characteristic Tykwer frame from above (Figure 4). The first of these conversations, which take place somewhere that McAllister calls ‘beyond narrative time and action’, ends with Lola, dying of a gunshot in the normal space of time, contemplating Hamlet’s eternal question:

Manni: Lola, what’s wrong? You want to leave me?

Lola: I don’t know. I think I have to make a decision. But I don’t want to. I don’t want to leave.

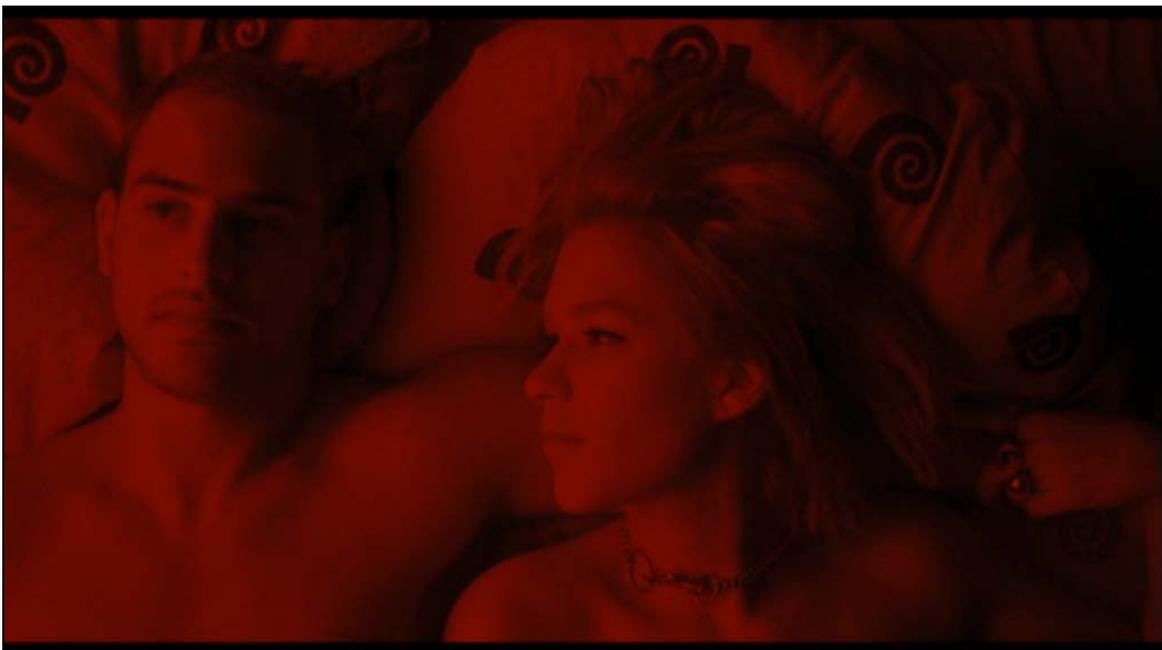


Figure 4: Manni (Moritz Bleibtreu) and Lola (Franka Potente) between life and death.

Spurred by this moment of decision, Lola is able even to command the flow of time. The film implies visually that her decision to live returns her to the point the action where she hangs up the phone in the first round, erasing the tragic consequences of her first attempt to find the money which can save the recipient of her gift of love. Here Lola reveals her inheritance to classic German *Märchen*, as Sinka notes when she compares Lola to another red-headed fairy-tale heroine, Pippi Langstrumpf: ‘When events do not unfold to her liking,

she recreates them until they do'.³⁷ Lola is also the only one who is aware of the fracture of time and is able to learn from mistakes she has made in previous attempts and use this knowledge to help her as she fights to save her lover. We can see this most clearly in the fact that Lola learns about the safety on a pistol in the first round and uses this to help her rob her father's bank in the second. In the second of the bedroom conversations, shot identically to the first, Lola must make a similar decision involving Manni's life. Here again she holds the power of life and death and at this point, it is evident, as it is at various points throughout the film, that she is aware of her own magic:

Manni: Lola? What would you do if I died?
Lola: I wouldn't let you die.
Manni: Yeah, well, what if I were fatally ill?
Lola: I'd find a way ...
Lola: Manni.
Manni: What?
Lola: You haven't died yet.
Manni: No?

Lola's magical agency is not limited to these questions of life and death for her and for Manni. As she crosses and re-crosses the space of the city, Lola runs into a number of people and the film shows, in a rapid-fire montage of images, the influence Lola has on their lives. In one instance of this, a haggard-looking woman pushing a stroller who shouts abuse at Lola as she flies past has three different futures that change with each encounter with Lola; she becomes either a Jehovah's Witness, a criminal, or a wealthy lottery winner. Lola here again shows her role as an agent of the reenchantment of a disenchanted world. Sinka, similarly, writes, 'Lola generates endless possibilities for the people into whom she crashes on her run, particularly for those whose lives seem the most humdrum and inconsequential'.³⁸ Foreshadowing our coming discussion of *Perfume*, it is instructive to note that not all of the futures that Lola generates are an improvement over the lives these people are leading before encountering her magic. On top of all of this, Lola possesses magic scream, straight out of a fairy tale, through which she is able to impress her will onto

³⁷ Sinka, 'Blueprint'. Other critics have made this connection. Tom Whalen writes, 'For what is *Run Lola Run* if not a fairy tale, albeit of the self-conscious, philosophical variety. The film itself is clearly aware of its fairy tale status. Its tripartite structure is the same structural (and magical) three that underlies so many traditional fairy tales'. Whalen, 'Review', 39. Owen Evans suggests a different precursor: 'with her shock of red hair, Lola is surely a modern-day Red Riding Hood'. Evans, 'Postmodern', 113. Grant McAllister, who writes that the film 'is indeed a *Märchen*', suggests that she is more in the tradition of Romantic fairy tale characters: 'Lola ... is reminiscent of Kliest's impetuous and doggedly Romantic goddess Penthesilia. Like Penthesilia, Lola refuses to surrender and repeatedly rises from the dust of violent defeats to win'. Grant P. McAllister, 'Romantic Imagery in Tykwer's *Lola rennt*', *German Studies Review* 30, 2 (2007): 332-333.

³⁸ Sinka, 'Blueprint', 9.

the world, in the end using it to influence the outcome of a roulette game, winning her the money she needs to save Manni.

Again like *Heaven*, *Lola* toys with traditional religious elements but ultimately places its sympathies on the simpler enchantments of fate, chance and the power of Lola's will, as embodied in gift of love. Toward the end of her third run, Lola appears, running at a full sprint down a busy street with her eyes closed, to offer a kind of prayer: 'What can I do? What can I do? Come on. Help me. Please. Just this once. I'll just keep on running, okay? I'm waiting. I'm waiting. I'm waiting. I'm waiting'. Exactly from whom or what she is asking for help is never made clear; McAllister writes, 'It is possible that Lola beseeches divine intervention or calls on *Fortuna* to throw her a lucky hand. However, she might be asking herself for help'.³⁹ She could just as well be calling on luck or chance, a prayer that is answered when she skids to a halt in the middle of the street and sees the casino where she will use her magic scream to win 100,000 DM at the roulette table. It is also just as possible that she jettisons her call for assistance at this point and falls back onto relying on her own will and her own magic. Late in the film, there is also a brief suggestion that Lola has magical powers of healing, couched in visual terms that toy with traditional images of the laying on of hands. As the third round draws to a close, she steps into an ambulance (the same ambulance that kills Manni in a previous round) and saves a security guard from her father's bank (an important figure in all three rounds) from a heart attack by simply holding his hand. Tykwer finds something uncanny in this moment:

This is one of those silent connections between the three episodes that I wanted to make them, in a way, secretly bound with each other or more intertwined with each other. And to have them have this strong connection is somehow irritating because they seem to be so distant to each other. There's kind of an invisible line between them that really is disturbing.⁴⁰

Like Coupland's work, there is in these moments the intimations of a search for a never-defined but all-important *something more* that remains outside the sensible world. Again subverting expectations, the film ends with a humorous freeze-frame two-shot that suspends the action, leaving Lola and Manni in the hands of a fate that has been kind to them both. *Lola* represents in kinetic visual terms the ideas of fate, chance and coincidence,

³⁹ McAllister, 'Romantic', 344.

⁴⁰ Tykwer, *Lola*, 'Director's Commentary', *Lola*.

perhaps the most basic forms of enchantment, the notion that there is a larger and hidden structure to the seemingly chaotic surface of the world.

After the frantic rush of *Lola*, the muted, contemplative, studied aesthetic of *Krieger* seems an absolute departure; however, below the surface, there are compelling reasons to consider the films as a related pair. *Krieger* hinges again on a young couple whose fate is tied wholly to the unlikely magic of a woman with a seemingly indomitable will. The protagonist this time is Sissi, a timid blonde woman who works as a nurse at the Berkenhof mental hospital, where, the viewer learns later, her mother also worked, and where her father, whom she does not know, is a patient. Sissi and Lola, for all their similarities, have a profoundly different presence on the screen. Where Lola is flamboyant, tattooed and dressed in black combat boots, Sissi is plain, almost drab, dressed in a succession of shapeless dresses and her hospital uniform. Where Lola runs, Sissi shuffles, talking small, indecisive steps that give her an almost a naïve, childlike presence not unlike that of Filippo in *Heaven*. Sissi's power of enchantment is like the film, far more understated.

Much of the film's narrative is concerned with Sissi's relationship with Bodo, a young soldier who is haunted by the death of his wife in an accident at a petrol station. Before the film ever brings the couple together, Tykwer shows us moments when they are united by subtle synchronicities, waking at the same moment in bedrooms untold miles apart, meeting and interacting with the same people, all the time being unaware of their connection. The two meet when Sissi is struck by a truck and Bodo saves her life with an impromptu surgical operation involving a pocketknife and a drinking straw. He promptly disappears after she is taken to the hospital and he knows she is safe. Though Sissi is unaware of the synchronous forces that have brought them together, she nonetheless attributes special meaning to their meeting. Under the truck, the viewer shares her thoughts: 'I wish I could have told the man that his sweat smelled tasty. I guess he'd been sucking on a peppermint drop beforehand. Now it's stinging in my lungs ... I felt that if a person wasn't alone, they might be able to find happiness in the outside world, if someone like him was around'.⁴¹ Weeks after the accident, Sissi leaves the hospital obsessed with Bodo, whose name she does not know, and the conviction that there is a meaning in their meeting beyond mere coincidence. Tykwer assists in this by staging their meeting as an

⁴¹ *Krieger* DVD. All quotations and screen captures are the work of the author and, when relevant, are reliant upon the subtitle translation.

elaborate chain of chance and synchronous moments reminiscent of *Lola*; the driver of the truck that hits Sissi is distracted by Bodo as he flees from his pursuers.

Sissi sets out to find Bodo, eventually tracking him to a ramshackle hut on top of a hill where he lives with his protective brother Walter. Their house, constructed for the film, is incongruous and deliberately evocative of a castle on a hill (Figure 5). On her first visit, Sissi's dress resembles traditional German folk costume, furthering the visual references to the fairy-tale presented in the title, which, despite what might be expected, can be understood with no ironic overtones. Bodo's reaction is nothing short of hostile but Sissi maintains an almost childlike fascination with the man who saved her life:

Bodo: What do you want?

Walter: Yeah, what do you want?

Sissi: I wanted to see you again.

Bodo: I don't.

Walter: Goodbye.



Figure 5: Bodo (Benno Fürmann), Walter (Joachim Król) and Sissi (Franka Potente) at the castle on the hill.

Rejected, she departs back to the city distraught. Unable to sleep, or even think, she visits again that night in the pouring rain. Sissi, again like *Lola*, demands something more of the world, a different, more profound level of meaning:

Bodo: What do you want?

Sissi: I'm having trouble sleeping because of you. Once I fall asleep, I dream about you.

Bodo: Are you nuts? You don't even know me!

Sissi: No, but I have to find out if it means anything that you were under the truck or if it was just a coincidence. I want to know if my life has gotta change and if you're the reason.

Bodo: Come on! Goodbye! ... Get lost! Damn it!

Sissi: But why?

Sissi is adamant from her first encounter with Bodo that their meeting is no mere chance. Later in the film, after Walter is killed in a botched bank robbery and Bodo takes refuge at Berkenhof, in his despair, Bodo claims, 'It's all meaningless anyway'. Sissi insists again, 'Nothing's meaningless'. In a direct visual analogue to *Lola*, the two lie on a hospital bed and converse quietly (Figure 6). Bodo begins to get a sense of Sissi's uniqueness. She is in her own way as inexplicable as Lola:

Bodo: What are you doing?

Sissi: You smell good.

Bodo: What planet do you come from anyway?



Figure 6: Sissi and Bodo.

The crux of the film comes as Bodo and Sissi talk alone in a padded cell at the hospital:

Sissi: Listen. You have to decide.

Bodo: Decide?

Sissi: I am going to leave. You can come with me.

Bodo: Why the two of us?

Sissi: I had a dream. We were together in my dream. We were brother and sister, mother and father, wife and husband. And both of us were both.

Bodo: You're crazy.

Sissi: Yes, of course. Maybe it's all wrong. But I thought it was happiness.

Bodo: I don't believe in happiness.

Sissi: You've had too much bad luck.

Bodo: What do you know about my bad luck?

Sissi: I know a little bit. I know about the gas station. I know about your wife. I know about the accident.

Bodo: It wasn't an accident. It was a quarrel. One of many. One of who knows how many.

Pursued by the police to the hospital, the pair escape by jumping off of the roof of the hospital into a pond, eventually driving a borrowed car into the country and encountering

the same petrol station where Bodo's wife committed suicide. In the film's most explicitly magical moment, Bodo *physically* meets his old self in the bathroom and both men get into the car and drive away with Sissi, who, by her mere presence, the film implies, has facilitated the magical meeting of the two Bodos, though she seems to be unaware of the presence of the second man. After driving a short distance, Bodo stops the car and abandons his doppelganger, his embodied sorrow and regret, alone at the side of the road. More so than *Lola* or even *Heaven*, *Krieger* gives us at the end something that looks like a traditional act of redemption or an unambiguous act of healing. Bodo, magically made whole, smiles for the first time and opens himself to Sissi's affection for the first time. He drives on as the pair chastely hold hands. The film ends with the couple arriving at an idyllic farmhouse overlooking the sea.

At the close of the film, Sissi and Bodo are like Philippa and Filippo in that they are both lovers and the embodiment of a generic concept of human love, an indeterminate mix of platonic and romantic love that universalises the film's message about the magical power of human connection in the contemporary world. Koch writes of the redemptive potential of interpersonal love in Tykwer's films, which comes from a combination of traditional Christian concepts and a the general enchantment:

Der Krieger und die Kaiserin offers a narrative of conversion whose climax is located at the end when the converted protagonist bids farewell to his own former sad and melancholic self and embraces a world of love ... The figure of conversion, which drives the aesthetic of so many of Tykwer's films, refers to a long tradition of religious conversions, understood not so much as the conversion from one religion to another, as from a state of sin to one of redemption.⁴²

Tykwer's films are more confused and more complex than this, as we have seen using the framework of thick reenchantment. It is far more accurate to read these films as representations of reenchantment than as anything as traditional and as easily defined as redemption. Like *Heaven* but with fewer references to these long traditions, Tykwer establishes in *Lola* and *Krieger* a magical, transcendental power of human love, embodied in an enchanted young woman whose utter belief in the power of love to solve all problems and transcend any disparity allows her access to hidden abilities and to a secret world

⁴² Koch, 'Catholic', 232. She gives this an intriguing label: 'Tykwer's "Catholicism" is nothing other than the name for a pictorial style, a style enabling us to live in images, a style whose universal function in our predominantly Protestant and ever more global culture is similar to the role of Greek antiquity for the nineteenth century'. Koch, 'Catholic', 233-234.

where seemingly random and natural events take on a deeper meaning. It is through these relationships that the hidden workings of fate and change reveal themselves.

These two films form the heart of the lighter, more romantic side of reenchantment as it appears within Tykwer's works, which also surfaces in the films we are not considering, *Winterschlafer* in particular. Not all of Tykwer's enchantments are focused on such moments of almost childlike sweetness and light, however, and it is to his darkest vision that we turn to conclude our long discussion.

The Enlightenment's Dark Magic: *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*

And that is precisely what the metropolitan denizen teaches himself to do: he lives, not in the real world, but in a shadow world projected around him at every moment by means of paper and celluloid and adroitly manipulated lights: a world in which he is insulated by glass, cellophane, pliofilm from the mortifications of living. In short, a world of professional illusionists and their credulous victims.

Lewis Mumford⁴³

Like Palahniuk's *Haunted* and Coupland's *JPod*, Tykwer's concerns are thrown into stark relief when the author sets out to violate them. *Perfume* is based on the novel of the same name by Patrick Süskind. Süskind's novel, his first, has been highly influential and wildly popular since its publication in 1985 and is widely considered as part of the always *de facto* canon of magical realism. It is worth reading this film in greater detail, as it explores like no other text we are addressing the darker implications of the concept of reenchantment, which is more often, as we have seen, associated with millennial hopes and optimism for the possibilities of a reenchanting world. This is perhaps due more to wishfully thinking than a careful consideration of just what the notion of reenchantment actually means. There is nothing in the concept of thick reenchantment that ensures that reenchantment need always be a positive and commendable movement in history. As a framework for addressing aspects of modernity that the subtraction stories cannot account for, reenchantment is largely value-neutral, even if it is often a matter of value-oriented rationality. There is nothing in this to determine *which values* reenchantment has to serve. Reenchantment, then, must be understood as a potent and potential source of danger, something Weber himself recognised in his own lifetime, even if he did not use the language of reenchantment.

⁴³ Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1961), 546.

The film seems at first to be an absolute departure for Tykwer. It is his only period film. Against the studied Romanticism of his other works, it is violent, confrontational, even disturbing. It is a rich and finely textured allegory that seeks to examine from within the hidden, dark enchantments of modernity. The narrative undermines any easy account of modern history as the triumphant march out of darkness and into the light of perennial truth. Though the film is not about modernity as such, it focuses its metaphoric gaze on Enlightenment rationalism, a crucial element in the development of the forms of modern self-understanding embodied in evolutionary narratives. The film presents an ideal way to draw together all of the diverse elements of this thesis and bring them to bear on a text that presents a picture of a European modernity as unreasonable, as magical and as simply perverse as anything that came before it. Indeed, the film suggests that Enlightenment rationalism has allowed the world and the people within it to realise new depths. *Perfume* represents nothing less than a fictional account of that which is unthought, forgotten or simply ignored by modern narratives of progress and by unilinear theories of rationalisation.

Using thick reenchantment as an interpretive frame, we will be following the course of the narrative in some detail, in the interests of more fully teasing out the way the film manifests the dialectic of enchantment. The narrative itself is deceptively simple: Jean-Baptiste Grenouille, an orphan in eighteenth-century France, gifted, like Palahniuk's Rant Casey, with a supernaturally keen sense of smell, discovers upon reaching maturity that he has no scent of his own, which renders him unlovable and even sub-human. After years of toil as a near slave in a leather tannery, he trains as a perfumer and learns the technological mastery of the world of scent. Yearning to be loved as others are loved, he comes rationally, even scientifically, to a way to enchant the world into loving him. He creates, from the scents of virgin girls he has murdered, a perfume so sublimely beautiful that it holds the power to enchant the whole world into loving him. Upon succeeding, he discovers that his triumph is hollow and commits a strangely beatific act of suicide. Metaphorically, Grenouille, the murderer of the title, is an abominable outgrowth of the rationalising tendencies of modern thought, a monster whose dark magic reaches its full potential only when it is augmented by his technical training and the growing body of scientific knowledge that characterised the age in which he lived. In Enlightenment France, Grenouille is seen as an abomination; indeed, the people who encounter Grenouille and his crimes simply cannot grasp his motives or come to grips with his very existence. However,

the film presents Grenouille not so much as an anomaly but as a fully explicable and natural outgrowth of rationalisation.

The film features an extensive voice-over from an anonymous and wryly amused narrator (John Hurt), who sets the scene of Grenouille's birth at the heart of Europe:

In eighteenth-century France, there lived a man who was one of the most gifted and notorious personages of his time. His name was Jean-Baptiste Grenouille and, if his name has been forgotten today, it is for the sole reason that his entire ambition was restricted to a domain that leaves no trace in history: to the fleeting realm of scent ... In the period of which we speak there reigned in the cities a stench barely conceivable to us modern men and women. Naturally, the stench was foulest in Paris, for Paris was the largest city in Europe. And nowhere in Paris was that stench more profoundly repugnant than in the city's fish market. It was here, then, on the most putrid spot in the whole kingdom that Jean-Baptiste Grenouille was born on the 17th of July, 1738.⁴⁴

From his earliest days, his knowledge of this hidden world sets him apart from the other children in the foetid, overcrowded orphanage where he is raised by the coldly rational Madame Gaillard, who treats Grenouille, and all the other children, as nothing more than sources of income. Grenouille, with his supernatural sense of smell, has access to levels of the world that other people do not. The film casts Grenouille's extraordinary ability in terms of language, calling to mind the ways in which reenchantment plays out in Palahniuk's work:

By the age of five, Jean-Baptiste still could not talk, but he had been born with a talent that made him unique among mankind. It was not that the other children hated him. They felt unnerved by him. Increasingly, he became aware that his phenomenal sense of smell was a gift that had been given to him and him alone. When Jean-Baptiste did finally learn to speak, he soon found that everyday language proved inadequate for all the olfactory experiences accumulating within himself.

Grenouille lives, as many of Palahniuk's characters wish to, outside of the world of conventional language, though he does so because of his gifts, not because of his own will. He survives the orphanage and years as an abused tannery apprentice and grows into a gaunt, silent and scarred young man. Confronted for the first time with the wider world of Paris (outside of the orphanage and the tannery) and the staggering wealth of scents the city has to offer, Grenouille begins his own version of the task of world mastery that is taking place at the same time in salons, laboratories and lecture halls in other, more privileged parts of the city. Tykwer only rarely shows this world. Grenouille serves as the primary guide within the structure of the film itself, forcing the viewer to contemplate the

⁴⁴ *Perfume*, DVD. All quotations and screen captures are the work of the author.

world largely from his perspective. Part of this identification comes through Tykwer's attempts to emulate the world of scent in a visual medium. He does this with jump cuts and vivid close-up shots of the things that Grenouille is able to smell, images which both focus attention on their particularity and isolate them from their context. As Grenouille enters Paris, the camera dissects the city into discrete, disconnected images, breaking the world down to its constituent elements – powdered wigs, cracking oysters, fabric, bread, mud, sewage, high-born women in carriages, horses. The narrator gives the viewer access to Grenouille's hunger:

at last, he was in his element. He was not choosy. He did not differentiate between what are commonly considered to be good smells from bad, at least not yet. He was very greedy. The goal was to possess everything the world had to offer in the way of odours. His only condition being that they were new ones. Thousands upon thousands of odours formed an invisible gruel which he dissected into its smallest and most remote parts and pieces.

Confronting the confusion and majesty of Paris, Grenouille seeks understanding and order by breaking things apart, by removing them from the totality of smells and reifying each of these elements in the desire of possession and mastery.

This is true of people as well as inanimate objects and animals. On this first visit to the city, when the film implicitly connects Grenouille to the emerging project of modern science and its hunger for new knowledge, Grenouille also commits his first murder. Visually, the film depicts Grenouille's fragmentation of the world, and by implication that of emerging modern science, as an act of violence and dismemberment. The camera and the editing break down Grenouille's victims long before he does, reducing them to fleeting glimpses of a naked shoulder, a vein pulsing on a slender throat, red hair flowing in the wind. Grenouille catches the intoxicating smell of a redheaded young woman carrying plums and follows her into a dark courtyard where he, perhaps unintentionally, kills her. Intentional or not, Grenouille doesn't appear to care that she is dead, only that her unique smell is dissipating rapidly as her body cools. He drinks up her scent as it fades, stripping her naked and exploring her body with his nose. He cups his hands to hold onto her scent, but he cannot possess it and it fades, igniting within him to fierce desire to permanently possess scent.



Figure 7: Grenouille (Ben Whitshaw) and his first victim (Karoline Herfurth).

The images of Grenouille with his first victim echo Tykwer's characteristic framing of couples, making Grenouille's violation all the more horrifying (Figure 7). It is instructive to look at this image in contrast to the others, which are part and parcel of Tykwer's portrayal of all-important gifts of love. Where these other images (see Figures 2, 4 and 6) emphasise the reciprocal nature of such gift-giving, the framing of the images in *Perfume*, which repeat throughout the film as Grenouille recalls this first act of violence, emphasise the violation. Where Lola and Manni chat aimlessly about their lives, or Sissi and Bodo try to form a connection, or Philippa and Filippo enact a kind of confession, there is no exchange in this relationship, no giving and taking of gifts, no attempt at genuine connection. While Grenouille is active, the dead woman has been removed from the equation; he takes something she cannot freely offer, nor can she receive or demand anything from Grenouille.

It is telling to note one of the narrative's harshest criticisms of modernity comes across in the fact that Grenouille must *enter* mainstream society to fully exploit his perverse need for world mastery, not shy away from it. Where Palahniuk's characters renounce the bright centre of their culture, Grenouille must embrace the emerging bourgeois world to fully realise his aims. Shortly after his first murder, Grenouille insinuates himself into the laboratory of faded perfumer Giuseppe Baldini by sheer persistence and demands that Baldini teach him: 'I have to learn how to keep smell!' Because of his gifted nose, Grenouille's facility with perfume is nothing short of magical. Testing a perfume that Grenouille improvises for him, Baldini is transported to an enchanted garden, where a buxom young woman whispers, 'I love you' into his enraptured ear (Figure 8). In the novel,

Süskind explicitly makes this connection: ‘It was not a scent that made things smell better, not some sachet, not some toiletry. It was something completely new, capable of creating a new world, a magical, rich world’.⁴⁵



Figure 8: Baldini (Dustin Hoffman, with Carolina Vera-Squella) in Grenouille’s enchanted garden.

Grenouille, who is often treated as little more than human capital, comes to work as an apprentice for Baldini after Baldini purchases him from his master Grimal. Working late in the basement laboratory, Baldini imparts a piece of perfumer’s lore to his new apprentice:

Baldini: Now, pay careful attention to what I tell you. Just like a musical chord, a perfume chord contains four essences, notes carefully selected for their harmonic affinity. Each perfume contains three chords: the head, the heart and the base, necessitating twelve notes in all ... Mind you, the ancient Egyptians believed that one can only create a truly original perfume by adding an extra note, one final essence that will bring out and dominate the others. Legend has it that an amphora was once found in a pharaoh’s tomb and when it was opened a perfume was released after all those thousands of years, a perfume of such subtle beauty and yet such power that for one single moment every person on Earth believed they were in paradise. Twelve essences could be identified, but the thirteenth, the vital one, could never be determined.

Grenouille: Why not?

Baldini: Why not? What do you mean, why not? Because it’s a legend, numbskull.

Grenouille: What’s a legend?

Baldini: Never mind.

It says a great deal about the film’s take on modernity and positivistic science that Grenouille confuses this legend with historical fact and later turns to this story for a model when he begins his murderous final act of creation. It likewise says a good deal that it is this mistake that allows him to be so successful when creating his masterpiece, a perfume containing the scents of thirteen virgins. Grenouille is either not aware of or simply ignores

⁴⁵ Patrick Süskind, *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*, trans. by J. E. Woods (New York: Penguin, 1987), 90.

the implicit distinction in Baldini's story between the technical accuracy of the perfumer's art and the Egyptian story, which is clearly not to be taken as the same level of truth. Grenouille has no need for modern epistemological distinction. Nonetheless, with this syncretism of scientific and mythological ways of knowing, Grenouille is able to replicate the story of the legend, even though it was probably never true in the first place. If we are to pause here briefly to consider Grenouille's metaphoric role in European modernity, it is worth suggesting that he is not unlike the alchemist in his application of rational methods for supernatural aims. Alchemy perhaps played a greater role in the history of modern science than the subtraction stories are willing to admit, as Louis Dupré notes:

Too often the cosmology of the early modern age continues to be viewed as a prehistory of the scientific revolution, as if there had been nothing between the Aristotelian picture and the mechanistic one. Such a view overlooks a prolonged attempt to understand the universe through chemistry rather than through the laws of mechanics. Until the end of the seventeenth century alchemy developed side by side with mechanical physics as an alternative science.⁴⁶

To continue the metaphor, in much the same way that Grenouille is a forgotten product of rationalisation, alchemy, is part of the unthought and often ignored inheritances in positivist science. For Baldini, Grenouille's abilities are uncanny, even worrisome, something he is willing to overlook with the floods of money coming into his shop as customers arrive in droves to buy Grenouille's creations. For Baldini, his new apprentice's strangeness is defused somewhat when Grenouille learns the techniques and the operational language of perfuming, bringing his knowledge and his skill under the comforting umbrella of known registers of utilitarian language. Süskind notes this connection explicitly in the novel: 'The more Grenouille mastered the tricks and tools of the trade, the better he was able to express himself in conventional language of perfumery – and the less his master feared and suspected him'.⁴⁷ If Baldini feels more at ease the more that Grenouille learns, he is being greatly deceived. Grenouille, under the respectable language of the perfumer, is growing ever more powerful, ever closer to the realisation of his dream to capture scent. In an intriguing parallel with Palahniuk's work, operational language becomes a shield for Grenouille's uncanny abilities and his unsettling aims.

⁴⁶ Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 52. It is also worth recalling that alchemy plays a role in contemporary discourses on re-enchantment and the sciences. Morris Berman, for one, considers alchemy an important model for a re-enchanting science, given that it views matter as sentient. Alchemical practice was, he writes, 'the last great coherent expression of participating consciousness in the West.' Morris Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 16.

⁴⁷ Süskind, *Perfume*, 96.

Trading the formulas for one hundred new perfumes for his freedom, Grenouille departs for a journeyman's post in the Provençal town of Grasse, which Baldini calls 'the Rome of scents, the promised land of perfume'. On the way, he is distracted for no less than seven years, living a base, animalistic existence hidden away in a cave in the mountains, revelling in the cold, clean, scentless air but equally horrified to discover that he has no scent of his own, that he is, as others have long suspected, something less than fully human. The narrator tells of the new desire this opens up within Grenouille's heart

For the first time in his life, Grenouille realized that he had no smell of his own. He realized that all his life, he'd been a nobody to everyone. What he now felt was the fear of his own oblivion. It was as though he did not exist. By the first light of next morning, Grenouille had a new plan; he must continue his journey to Grasse. There he would teach the world not only that he existed, that he was someone, but that he was exceptional.

Arriving finally in Grasse, Grenouille takes a post as a journeyman perfumer and expands his repertoire beyond what Baldini was able to teach him. He also continues his experiments in his free time, first trying to capture the scent of a reluctant living prostitute then resorting to simply killing women so he will have bodies to experiment with. Grenouille's experimentation is relentless, passionless and rigorously scientific. After several failed attempts, he finally strikes upon a complex method involving cold enfleurage, digestion, lavage, and distillation that renders the scent of the woman into a single tiny flask. Having robbed these women forcibly of their essence, Grenouille leaves a series of corpses, stripped naked and shorn, for the people and authorities of Grasse to find. In Grenouille's reign of terror, undertaken in the interests of world mastery and in the selfish needs of Grenouille to perfect himself, the narrative finds its metaphorical centre.

Grenouille's application of the scientific method in the interests of possessing 'all the smells in the world' is what allows his magic, and his perversion, to fully flower. Without the equipment and techniques of the perfumer, Grenouille would be condemned to the fleeting sensations of the scent of the living, accessible to him only via his gifts. Faris underlines Grenouille's conjunction of magic and science, which, as we have seen, also manifests itself in the discourses of reenchantment: 'Grenouille's perfuming abilities resemble those of an experimental chemist of genius, so that in addition to the magical powers of its narrative mode, the novel also takes on a quasi-scientific aura, intimately connected to the concrete worlds of natural and constructed chemical compounds'.⁴⁸ Grenouille's perfuming skills

⁴⁸ Faris, *Ordinary*, 74.

bring the reification of the individual inherent in disenchantment and the rise of modern capitalism sharply into focus; the women Grenouille harvests are human capital, literally liquid assets in his quest to manufacture an identity for himself and in his relentless pursuit of the sublime beauty of his thirteen-note masterpiece. In an extended sequence, Tykwer underlines this connection visually. Tykwer intercuts sensuous images of Grenouille's flasks, bottles, and experimentation with blackly comical images of the discovery of the bodies of the murdered women, drawing an explicit visual parallel between the act of manufacture and the act of destruction.

In Grasse, Grenouille meets his only formidable opponent, the wealthy merchant Antoine Richis, whose sublimely beautiful daughter, Laura, Grenouille needs as the thirteenth and crowning note of his perfume. Richis is a deeply rational and practical man, like Grenouille a child of the Enlightenment. The two are opposites and antagonists; however, they also represent the two sides of the dialectic of enchantment. Richis and Grenouille are, Gray notes, both 'systematic, methodological thinkers able to map out a tactical point and pursue it with guile and tenacity ... Richis, of course, comes out the loser in this context – not because his rival has more cunning or better methods at his disposal but because Grenouille has cultivated to perfection the principles underlying enlightened rationality'.⁴⁹ When the town council meets to try to decide what to do about the murders, Richis calls for a rational approach to the seemingly irrational horror in their midst:

We have to put ourselves inside the mind of this man. Each of his victims had an especial beauty. We know he doesn't want their virginity so it seems to me it's their beauty itself that he wants, almost as if he's trying to gather something. His ambitions are those of a collector ... Whatever it is, I fear he won't stop killing until his collection is complete.

For Richis, who suspects early on that Laura is a necessary part of Grenouille's collection, Grenouille's threat is greater than mere murder; the killings are inexplicable, unreasonable even in the deranged logic of murder. Grenouille attacks conventional structures of knowledge and value by not sexually violating his victims and by following an inexplicable but undeniable logic of his very own.⁵⁰ His violation of his victims is symbolic at the same time it is literal, an act of extreme violence, especially considering Baldini's assertion, which

⁴⁹ Gray, 'Dialectic', 501-502.

⁵⁰ Lorna Milne notes the multiple layers of subversion attendant to Grenouille's killing: 'in a hideous inversion of the act of rape, Grenouille, in his first murder, breathes in the fragrance of the dead girl until *he* is fully penetrated, by her scent ... the act of smelling, like a sexual assault, can be seen as an intrusive and irremediable attack perpetrated upon the self of another person, who remains defenceless' Lorne Milne, 'Olfaction, Authority, and the Interpretation of History in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Patrick Süskind's *Das Parfum*, and Michel Tournier's *Le Roi des Aulnes*', *Symposium* 53, 1 (Spring 1999): 28.

Grenouille takes to heart, that ‘the soul of beings is their scent’. Richis is blinded by his understanding of modernity, which only allows him to understand Grenouille by one standard of truth and logic. The town council refuses to listen to Richis’ sobering and rational call, opting instead to fall back on the divine language of the Catholic Church, which Richis, as an Enlightened man, is visibly sceptical of. Tykwer stages here a very brief debate between science and religion:

Judge: This man is a demon, a phantom who cannot be fought by human means. Now, I insist that we call upon our bishop to excommunicate him.

Richis: What good would that do?

Judge: Have you no faith at all in the power our Holy Mother Church?

Richis: This is not a matter of faith. There’s a murderer out there and we must catch him by using our God-given wits.

Judge: I say until we submit to Mother Church, these killings will not cease.

Tykwer plays the following scenes as a perverse comedy and a mockery of both the council and the Church to even slow Grenouille down. The bishop stands up in his cathedral in front of the town and declares Grenouille’s excommunication with all the vigour the corpulent churchman can muster. The scene is intercut with Grenouille, not in the least bothered by his communication, if he is even aware of it, deliberately mixing his perfume from his twelve tiny flasks of oil, awaiting its crowning thirteenth note in the scent of Laura Richis, which he soon has, despite Richis’ best efforts to thwart him using clever ruses that are no match for Grenouille’s supernatural abilities. Grenouille is caught the next morning as he finishes his perfume over an open flame and is taken back to Grasse for interrogation and execution. As Grenouille is tortured, Richis strives in vain to understand his reasoning. Their meeting is a clash of different epistemologies in which there is no exchange or dialogue between sides. The Janus face of Enlightenment rationalism is here brought into sharp focus as it becomes clear that both men are equally rational, equally methodical. The divide between the two remains nonetheless absolute, their positions utterly irreconcilable by any common discourse:

Richis: Why did you kill my daughter? Why?

Grenouille: I needed her.

Richis: Why did you kill my daughter?

Grenouille: I just needed her.

Grenouille is sentenced to a horrific death in the public square. Dressed in blue velvet finery, Grenouille is led to his punishment in front of the entire town. He, through his dark magic, retains the position of power. During the scenes on the platform, Tykwer accentuates the strange and monstrous aspect of Grenouille by placing him dead centre in

the frame. A rare composition in contemporary cinema, such an image has an intensely alienating effect (Figure 9). With a light application of his perfume, Grenouille faces the crowds with equanimity and a wry smile. The executioner is the first to fall under the spell of Grenouille's perfume, shouting, 'This man is innocent!' Spreading the scent with a wave of his handkerchief, the crowd takes up this call. The bishop falls to his knees, declaring, enraptured, 'This is no man, this is an angel'. Even Richis, the last to fall under the spell, lays down his sword and asks for Grenouille's forgiveness as the crowd degenerates into a massive and undifferentiated orgy. Soon everyone is naked, or near to it. The coupling is indiscriminate, men with women, women with women, old with young, bishops with prostitutes. Grenouille has brought about with his technique and his magic a perverse flowering of *communitas*. In his final appearances he possesses a power and an authority, however artificially generated, to control the desires and actions of all those around him. The ambivalent relationship of modernity to enchantment is embodied in these simple narrative and visual moments; unable to stop Grenouille's killing spree nor understand his motives, the secular and ecclesiastic authorities of the day end their relationship with Grenouille by falling under his spell, by embracing against their will everything they claim to be against.



Figure 9: Grenouille on the platform in Grasse.

As Grenouille stands on the scaffolding, all of the forces of early modern French society are unable to do anything but fall under the enchantment of his mastery, born half from his inexplicable sense of smell and half from rational techniques. What Grenouille represents is the forgotten magic that underlies modernity, the hidden agency of ancient, animalistic elements buried within the structure of European modernity, forgotten but always

present.⁵¹ Grenouille, however, feels no satisfaction as he stands above the crowd, a master of the world. Grenouille is, if anything, both disgusted and regretful. In one of the few moments in which Tykwer allows Grenouille some remorse, some ordinary humanity (something Süskind never does in the novel), watching the sea of naked townspeople, Grenouille has flashbacks to his first killing, the girl with the basket of plums. As the whole of the city writhes naked at his feet, caught up in his manufactured reenchantment, the film re-enacts the scene of the murder but shows the plum girl reacting to Grenouille very differently as he approaches her openly. She welcomes him, embraces him, kisses him, returns his singular affection. Grenouille imagines the scene as it could have gone if he were fully human. Grenouille weeps at the thought of her dead, at the thought of the lost opportunity for a living exchange with a living woman rather than his one-sided violation.

Instead of facing up to Grenouille and what he represents, the people of Grasse look away and arrest another man, Grenouille's former employer, who is hanged for Grenouille's crimes, thus balancing the scales of justice and the demand for an exchange for the murdered girls in terms that they are able to understand. The march of order and history has been restored and Grenouille, forgotten in the emerging triumphalist narratives of modernity, is left out of the history books:

The people of Grasse awoke to a terrible hangover. For many of them, the experience was so ghastly, so completely inexplicable and incompatible with their morals that they literally erased it from their memories. The town council was in session by the afternoon and an order was passed to the police lieutenant to immediately begin fresh investigations into the murders. The following day, Dominique Druet was arrested, since it was in his backyard that the clothes and hair of all the victims had been found. After fourteen hours of torture, Druet confessed to everything. With that, the case was closed.

That Grenouille is forgotten only further underlines his historical power, in that he works in a threatening symbolic register and cannot be captured in language. His regret, and the ever-present narrator, follow him back to Paris:

By then, Grenouille was already halfway back to Paris. He still had enough perfume left to enslave the whole world if he so chose. He could walk to Versailles and have the king kiss his feet. He could write the Pope a perfumed letter and reveal himself as the new messiah. He could do all this and more if he wanted to. He possessed a power stronger than the power of money, or terror, or death; the invincible power

⁵¹ Milne notes the historical influence of Grenouille in the novel: 'although he is quite unaware of the coincidence between his destiny and external events, the text clearly suggests a significant synchronicity between, for instance, Grenouille's departure from Paris and the burning of the Pont au Change; or between the Seven Years' War and the seven years (1756-1763) that Grenouille spends hidden in a cave in the Cantal'. Milne. 'Olfaction', 31.

to command the love of mankind. There was only one thing the perfume could not do. It could not turn him into a person who could love and be loved like everyone else. So, to hell with it, he thought. To hell with the world, with the perfume, with himself. On the twenty-fifth of June, 1766, around eleven o'clock at night, Grenouille entered the city through the Porte d'Orléans and like a sleepwalker, his olfactory memories drew him back to the place where he was born.

Grenouille, still dressed in his finery, sees a group of ragged, dirty people huddled around a fire. He upends the bottle of perfume on his head, drawing the attention of the gathered crowd as he is suffused with a warm glowing light. Two women approach him and cry, 'An angel' and, 'I love you'. The crowd falls upon him and literally devours him. There is nothing but a pile of clothes left, and these are stolen by a group of poor children. Jean-Baptiste Grenouille fades into the mists of history, the dark side of Enlightenment and modern science forgotten save for the fragments of finery he briefly wore as the master of the world. Reenchantment is necessarily, as we have argued in conceptual terms, a fleeting, ephemeral, if forever renewed phenomenon not unlike Grenouille and the scraps of his enchantment he leaves behind after his death.

These final images are deeply ambiguous. The narrator finishes his tale in a matter of fact manner: 'Within no time, Jean-Baptiste Grenouille had disappeared from the face of the Earth. When they had finished, they felt a virginal glow of happiness. For the first time in their lives, they believed they done something purely out of love'. It is possible to read this final scene in a number of ways. That Grenouille is identified on at least two occasions as an angel, as a figure from traditional Christian cosmology, is highly significant if we return our attention to the concept of religious modernity. In this context, it is possible to interpret the deeply ambivalent ending of *Perfume* in a different way. What Grenouille, as an angel, represents is the destructive, monstrous aspects of the religious productions of modernity, a murderous hybrid of the religious, the magical and the scientific. This fusion of differing epistemologies can take violent forms, exemplified today in various forms of religious fundamentalism. Similarly, Faris notes:

In magical realist texts irruptions of magic sometimes constitute the surfacing of buried religious traditions, which speak independently of particular themes and styles. In *Perfume*, for example, the magical quality of Grenouille's perfuming abilities transmits a trace of pre-Enlightenment belief in magical powers of enchantment, which operates within the satiric narrative that condemns the beginnings of the scientific age and its culmination in Nazi experimental atrocities, and yet it is not entirely defined by it.⁵²

⁵² Faris, *Ordinary*, 70.

It is more than this, however. Grenouille is not a trace or a survival, he is a production of modernity and the processes of rationalisation. Jean-Baptiste's Christian name implicates him both as a significant religious figure and also the one who comes before something greater, in this case both the French Revolution and modernity as a whole. In *Perfume*, it is a magically endowed, coldly rational and utterly vicious killer of virgins who prepares the way for the modern era, which, the story suggests, is forever haunted by the dark enchantments that lie forgotten in its history by those things it produces and then seeks to forget. It is one of the primary duties of thick reenchantment, as a theoretical frame, to capture these things and bring them to the light.

Conclusions

He who yearns for seeing should go to the cinema.

Max Weber⁵³

Like Coupland, Palahniuk and Baudrillard, Tykwer reveals hidden layers to reality that lie underneath the disenchanting visible surface of the world. Like Coupland, Tykwer's gifts of love can perhaps be a source of comfort. Like Palahniuk, his representation of the secret enchantments that lie underneath the surface of European modernity are disconcerting, disturbing as they do the subtraction stories as an accurate account of modernity. Tykwer's characters, usually young couples deeply in love, bear witness to this reenchantment by offering singular gifts of love to each other. To those who have this gift to give or those who receive it, Tykwer makes a counter-offer; the ability to see enchanted meaning in the mundane world. As we have seen, this is a common concern not only in the current moment of reenchantment but also in its earlier uprisings, particularly in the Romantic period.

Though it is present in all of Tykwer's works, it is with *Perfume* that we see most clearly the dialectic of disenchantment and reenchantment that we argue characterises modernity. The film lays bare the dark magic that no amount of rationalisation has been able to fully drive out of the world. These forms of enchantment, are in fact, constantly renewed and constantly mutating. Without the march of modern scientific rationalism and its focus on technique and world mastery, the magically gifted Grenouille would have remained in the shadows, desperate, isolated and ineffectual. Instead, drawing on the techniques and

⁵³ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. by Talcott Parsons (London: Unwin University Books, 1930), 29.

epistemologies of Enlightenment rationalism, he becomes nothing less than the shadow of modernity itself.

C O D A , O R C O N C L U S I O N S

In the last years of the eighteenth century, European culture outlined a structure that has not yet been unravelled; we are only just beginning to disentangle a few of the threads, which are still so unknown to us that we immediately assume them to be either marvellously new or absolutely archaic, whereas for two hundred years (not less, yet not much more) they have constituted the dark, but firm web of our experience.

Michel Foucault¹



As we come to the end of this thesis, we can at last directly address the enigmatic figure of Hamlet, who has been our unacknowledged guide over much of the terrain we have covered. There is a great deal to be learned from the realisation that Shakespeare's Hamlet, as the quintessentially self-conscious modern man, is particularly troubled by two things. Firstly, when contemplating suicide, worn down by the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, the young prince stays his hand with fearful thoughts of an afterlife inherited from a Christian tradition that he does not believe but cannot bring himself to disregard. Secondly, Hamlet struggles endlessly with the vengeance demanded by his father's ghost. Though Hamlet has confirmed quite rationally the reality of the bloodthirsty, feudal spirit that haunts him, he is unable to act without further confirmation, only to find in the end that the king's spectre has spoken nothing less than the truth. In a sense, Hamlet is representative of modernity itself. While modernity is defined by its relationship to the past and to traditions that it seeks to surpass, it is nonetheless deeply rooted in the Judeo-Christian milieu out of which it emerged and which continues to inform its character. Similarly, modernity imagines itself as rational and has fashioned – again with help from its historical inheritances – strict empirical standards of truth. Nonetheless, modern disenchantment, quite aside from the inherent irrationalities of all forms of rationalisation, generates its own forms of enchantment, an ever-evolving, ever-present, ever-renewed world of spirits, demons, and ways of thinking and acting that fall far outside of instrumental rationality.

In the end, perhaps the most general conclusion we can draw is that no relationship in culture is ever simple, nor are there movements in history that follow a simple trajectory towards a well-defined and never-changing *telos*. This is certainly true of the connections between modernity, rationalisation and the religious. Modernity does not lead to the necessary decline of religion, though the forms of the religious have doubtless been irreversibly changed or relocated by the cultural revolutions attendant upon the historical

¹ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. by A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 199.

narrative of modernity. Furthermore, if we define *the religious* as the creation and maintenance of chains of memory and belief, it becomes quite clear that modernity is paradoxically quite capable of producing its own distinct religious forms. For the academic study of religion to pursue its object(s) with the proper theoretical and critical depth, it is essential to recognise first the fundamental reality of the density of the relationship between modernity and the religious. Conceptually, they are closely linked. 'Religion' and 'modernity' are broad abstractions and each depends on the other for its meaning. Furthermore, the sociological evidence suggests that modernity and the religious, given the right conditions, can be mutually reinforcing. Simplistic frameworks, like that of the classical secularisation thesis, are unable to account for this complexity or for the continual presence, vitality and regeneration of the highly varied forms of the religious in even the most modernised places. Danièle Hervieu-Léger's concept of *religious modernity* allows for and even demands the continual interaction of modernity and tradition, and is thus able to offer a far more credible explanation of the shape and size of the religious landscape of European modernity. The study of religion has made great steps forward since the earliest days when Auguste Comte, Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx argued that religion was, respectably, a survival from primitive human cultures that had no place in modernity, an illusion that would ultimately dissolve under the scientific gaze of psychoanalysis, and a salve for those living under oppressive economic conditions. There is still, however, a good deal of work to be done. Any study of religion with the proper critical and analytical depth to grapple with the complexity of religion in modernity – and we must remember that the study of religion and the generic idea of 'religion' are modern creations – must constantly be aware of the varied roots and prejudices that remain embedded within the field of study itself.

In a parallel fashion, the contemporary world is not experiencing an unprecedented reenchantment simply because it has never been fully disenchanting. The forms of enchantment, like the manifestations of the religious, have nonetheless undergone extensive changes. Any understanding of *Entzauberung* as a unilinear, universal, or irreversible process fails to deal with the constant presence of enchanted or value-rational elements within modern cultures. On the other hand, the concept of *reenchantment*, properly formulated, is a valuable tool for the academic study of religion in that it allows us to account for counter-currents of reenchantment within a pervasive atmosphere of rationalisation both in the intellectual and cultural spheres. The *dialectic of enchantment*, as

proposed by the notion of thick reenchantment, lies at the heart of modernity, not at its fringes. Reenchantment, though necessarily an ephemeral phenomenon, is just as characteristic of modernity as the tidal movement of rationalisation. Recognising this dialectic presents academic religious studies with an adaptable frame of reference for the study of enchantment in modern contexts. This extensive conceptual exploration has been necessitated by the many poorly thought-out uses of reenchantment to date, many of which reinscribe inaccurate and ultimately harmful understandings of modernity even as they seek to argue for alternatives. With the help of iconoclastic thinkers as diverse as Hervieu-Léger, Jean Baudrillard, and Charles Taylor the concept of reenchantment – if understood as a dialectical process rather than the simple *reversal* of a loosely conceived disenchantment, what I have been calling thin reenchantment – can greatly enhance the academic study of religion.

Future Directions in Research

You are not any more different from me than your right leg is from your left, but what joins us is THE SLEEP OF REASON – WHICH PRODUCES MONSTERS.

Georges Bataille²

The argument I have presented here is a necessary first step in what could prove to be a much larger project. Having established a firm theoretical base from which to work, having proposed, fleshed out, and finally demonstrated (if in a less than empirical fashion) the use of reenchantment as a theoretical frame, it should be possible to proceed with some confidence to the study of reenchantment *as a concrete cultural matter*. Though there are many avenues by which we could pursue such a study, I will limit myself to a few suggestions that arise naturally out the material we have already addressed. Firstly, and perhaps most simply, there is an interesting and illuminating study to be made of the ways in which the words ‘disenchantment’ and ‘reenchantment’ are used and understood outside of the confines of the academy, through a survey and interpretation of the meaning the terms are given in popular books, magazines and other media such as the Internet. This could be vitally augmented through interviews with people who are participating in, or have experienced, what they understand as reenchantment.

There are a number of very basic questions that need to be answered before we can make any headway in arguing that the world is being reenchanting (or is *not* being reenchanting, for that matter), or that people in the contemporary West *see* the world as reenchanting. Do

² Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 113. Emphasis in original.

people, as Taylor suggests, understand the world as disenchanted? If so, do they see this as a problem? Is this disenchantment seen as something to overcome, or something to celebrate? How do those who use it employ 're-enchantment'? What hopes or fears do they attach it to? In what ways, and in which contexts is the language of disenchantment and re-enchantment a part of living religious discourse? Who or what are the imagined *agents* of the re-enchantment of the world? What is the role of re-enchantment as an *ideal* or as a *goal* within living religious practices? Is the practice or pursuit of re-enchantment affiliated with more political, environmental or traditional religious organisations? Are those who associate themselves with re-enchantment affiliated with churches or other specifically Christian institutions? Do they practice yoga, meditation, or any other practices associated with the syncretic forms of religious institutions? Do they self-identify as religious or as spiritual? Which traditions, denominations, or groups do they find important to the project of re-enchantment, however it may be imagined? In a more structured context, what are the stated goals of such organisations as The Re-enchantment of Agriculture Project³? How are they active in the pursuit of their vision of re-enchantment? Are these groups affiliated with traditional religious institutions, or with political or ecological movements? How are people involved in such organisations? Is their affiliation loose or is it more structured? Demographically, what sorts of people participate in these organised attempts at re-enchantment? What can this tell us about the shape and character of the narratives of tradition and memory that make up the core of the religious in culture? How do all of these things change when we factor in differences of gender, age, education, occupation, language, location and socio-economic background?

More specifically, our conceptual contemplations have pointed to the importance of both general attitudes to commodities and consumption and the reception of scientific developments and new technologies in the discourse of re-enchantment. A focused study of the role and utility of material culture in religious practice or even in everyday life could yield a picture of the ways in which people enact the enchantment or re-enchantment of commodity culture. Where do people find *value* in their possessions? Is it purely a matter

³ The group, based in Wisconsin, USA, hosts meetings, discussions and performances that explore 'what happens at the intersection of agriculture, the humanities, and the arts'. The project envisions re-enchantment as a form of *recovery* and, in its own words, 'explores agriculture through the arts and humanities, challenging us to reevaluate, illuminate, and celebrate the vital process of growing and sharing food ... Through this project, the not-for-profit Wormfarm Institute is working to renew and reinforce the connections between culture and agriculture. We are looking back, to times and places where agriculture was more intimately interwoven in our lives, when planting and harvest rituals and celebrations were an essential part of community life'. The Re-enchantment of Agriculture homepage, available at <http://www.reenchantment.org>, accessed 14 May 2008.

of use and exchange value? If not, what, specifically, imbues objects with their importance? Is it affective attachment? Is it, as Nicky Gregson and Louise Crewe⁴ suggest, the imagined narratives or biographies given to the objects themselves? The overall question that would drive such study can be stated broadly: what are the symbolic or enchanted extensions that lend to particular consumer goods a value beyond that of utility or monetary exchange?

Thorough analyses of the larger cultural discourses on technology – through various sources including news media reports and personal interviews with representative samples of the population – would clarify attitudes about technology and technological development, and offer another snapshot of the cultural realities of the dialectic of enchantment. How do people use technological means in their religious practice? How are such technologies understood? Are they simple tools, or are they something more? Do people imagine that technology is an *agent* or a *product* of disenchantment or reenchantment? Which technologies in particular are involved in concrete attempts at reenchantment? Are there other, similar moments in the history of technological development that have generated similar dreams or inspired similar nightmares? Again, what does this tell us about the contemporary religious landscape, and the shape of religious modernity as a whole?

Outside of the direct study of cultural usage and personal beliefs, the same questions could be asked of journalistic or even literary discourses. Such materials could provide a valuable resource for comparing directly the religious reactions – not the reaction of religious *institutions*, but ‘the religious’ in the sense we are employing it in this thesis – generated by the arrival of new technologies from the railroad to the telegraph, from the telephone to the Internet. Popular cultural narratives – in varied forms, from folk music to literature to film – from those respective eras would also yield important clues as to how such developments were received in various cultures. Though in a more indirect manner, contemporary narratives looking back on such times of change could add further depth to this picture. By way of example, in relation to the arrival of electricity, there are two recent examples that can help us to trace the cultural reactions to new technologies across the decades. In 2006, two American feature films, Neil Burger’s *The Illusionist*⁵ and Christopher

⁴ Nicky Gregson and Louise Crewe, *Second-Hand Cultures* (Oxford; Berg, 2003).

⁵ *The Illusionist*, dir. Neil Burger, 110 min. (Bull’s Eye Entertainment, 2006).

Nolan's *The Prestige*⁶ (rather loosely adapted from the 1996 novel of the same name by Christopher Priest⁷), offered intriguing and ultimately conflicting meditations on the intertwining of magic with technological development and its public reception in late nineteenth-century Europe. What, if anything, can we learn from the fact that such narratives are considered relevant in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries? How does the citation of earlier times, in the eyes of Martin Harries⁸ an act of reenchantment in its own right, allow people to make sense of the present? This suggests a further question that requires an interview or survey-based approach: how do people use texts or narratives of reenchantment? What role do those who see themselves as involved in reenchantment assign to narrative as a whole? Is storytelling, as Douglas Coupland suggests, a way to reenchanted a world where communication has been rendered meaningless by the profusion of instrumental language and by technological mediation? Does the work of Coupland, Palahniuk or Tom Tykwer, all of whom, Palahniuk in particular, have a devoted fan base, factor into the religious practice of readers or into their understandings of world as disenchanted or meaningless?

Moving away from the sociological and back towards more interpretive work, one of the more obvious ways to proceed is to examine more fully and more critically some of the broader suggestions that this thesis proposes but does not explore in detail. Chief among these is the matter of historical continuity and of the 'moments' of reenchantment that the notion of thick reenchantment argues will recur throughout modern history. The points of connection between the instances when reenchanted thinking and practice become visible need to be drawn out more clearly. The same is true of the related argument, posed here in a speculative manner, that these periodic moments of reenchantment arise particularly during times of crisis and accelerated cultural, economic, technological or environmental change. Lest the concept of thick reenchantment become another unwelcome form of reductionism, these moments need to be approached as specific reactions to specific cultural conditions without assuming an absolute and unchanging reenchantment that repeats itself at intervals. Each of these moments, despite their similarities, will manifest itself in a way that is specific to each respective moment in history and its attendant forms

⁶ *The Prestige*, dir. Christopher Nolan, 130 min. (Newmarket Productions, 2006).

⁷ Christopher Priest, *The Prestige* (San Francisco: St. Martin's Press, 1996).

⁸ Martin Harries, *Scare Quotes from Shakespeare: Marx, Keynes, and the Language of Reenchantment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

of rationalisation. To recall a comparison that has emerged frequently in our discussion, a thoroughgoing study of the similarities and differences between the contemporary discourse of re-enchantment and the Romantic period would be one way in which both to explore historical continuities and to shed new light on these moments themselves. There are any number of ways to conduct such a comparative study, and any number of sources that could be considered as relevant. To note just one example: a direct comparison of important literary or poetic works from both time periods could yield important insights into the overall structure and purpose of re-enchantment within modern history. What are the connections between, say, Palahniuk and John Keats, both of whom seek to revalue suffering, or between Tykwer and Novalis, both of whom produced fairy tales? Though it would admittedly be a difficult task, it might be profitable to explore the attitudes of a range of people during the Romantic period to the natural world, which the Romantic poets and artists set out to elevate. How do these attitudes gathered from historical materials match up with those of a comparable range of people in the contemporary world, during a time when nature is again being revalued? Similar comparisons could be made across the two periods in relation to the respective relationship of the arts to enchantment. Do contemporary enthusiasts or apologists for re-enchantment value the role of the arts in ways that are similar to the Romantic period? Do the artists, either in the present or in the past, themselves see their artistic practice in this light?

Given that the work of the three authors I have chosen for the latter section of thesis were picked, for a number of reasons, from a larger pool of possible texts, there is also a good deal more work to be done in the literary field. Even confining ourselves to the present, there are extensive possibilities given the increased visibility of narratives of enchantment or re-enchantment in recent decades; however, this must not be taken to mean that every text or narrative is as relevant as any other. One must, as always, be selective. The works I have chosen here manifest the tensions inherent in the dialectic of enchantment by revealing or suggesting that there are multiple layers to reality or by presenting an uneasy relationship of the modern present to the pre-modern past. Both of these provide specific strategies for limiting the number of works that are relevant to the study of re-enchantment in fictional contexts. It is worth mentioning a few of the more promising candidates at this point. As was suggested in the seventh chapter, the generic conventions of magical realism are perhaps the ideal form through which to both create and investigate tales of re-enchantment. A thoroughgoing study of the genre and its key texts would be an

illuminating exercise in the project to map more fully the terrain of contemporary reenchantment. As a genre that is most often associated with postcolonial cultures, such a study would also provide a view of reenchantment from the margins of European modernity, rather than from its centre, which is where this thesis has taken its soundings. This also makes magical realism an ideal place in which to study the enchantments associated with what Charles Long called ‘religions of contact’. The work of magical realist authors like Patrick Süskind (who gave us the original telling of *Das Parfum*), Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Haruki Murakami and Salman Rushdie represent an obvious place to begin such an exploration. Rushdie’s infamous *Satanic Verses*⁹ is a fascinating narrative that reveals the intersections of not only disenchantment and reenchantment but also of fundamentalist religion and modernity in a single, almost infinitely dense, cultural artefact. Rushdie’s novel and the *fatwa* issued against him by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini also point to the cross-cultural problems that can arise from fictional narratives in a religious landscape profoundly shaped by tensions that have much to do with the evolutionary narratives of modernity that Taylor calls ‘subtraction stories’.

In less restrictive generic territory, a number of other contemporary works suggest themselves as possibly relevant to the study of the dialectic of enchantment. Again, I will note here only a few. From the United States, Mark Z. Danielewski’s two novels, *House of Leaves*¹⁰ and *Only Revolutions*¹¹, tell of two radically different hauntings, one of a mysterious house on Ash Tree Lane that has a magical and deeply threatening set of hallways growing in, around and through its seemingly mundane structure, the other of a pair of young lovers pursued across the American West by the nefarious presence of history itself, identified in the novel only as ‘The Creep’. Nicola Barker’s *Darkmans*,¹² like *Perfume*, but in a contemporary British setting, tells of a ghostly presence that drifts around the roots of the modern world. The French novelist Michel Houellebecq shares with Palahniuk a hard-edged, borderline nihilistic romanticism (Wouter Hanegraaf describes Houellebecq’s characters as ‘deeply *Romantic* nihilists, who suffer because they desperately want to find something to love’¹³). In novels such as *Plateforme*,¹⁴ *Les Particules Elementaires*,¹⁵ and, most

⁹ Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (New York: Viking, 1989).

¹⁰ Mark Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves* (New York: Pantheon, 2000).

¹¹ Mark Z. Danielewski, *Only Revolutions: A Novel* (New York: Pantheon, 2006).

¹² Nicola Barker, *Darkmans* (London: Fourth Estate, 2007). See Nicola Barker, *Behindings* (New York: Ecco, 2001), a novel about a new religious movement based around the odd charisma of a young man named Wesley.

¹³ Wouter J. Hanegraaff, ‘Fiction in the Desert of the Real: Lovecraft’s Cthulhu Mythos’, *Aries* 7 (2007): 107. Emphasis in original.

¹⁴ Michel Houellebecq, *Plateforme* (Paris: J’ai Lu, 2001).

importantly *La Possibilité d'une île*,¹⁶ which deals with a fictional new religious movement, the Elohim, based largely on the influential and well-publicized Raelian movement, Houellebecq gives us further opportunities to explore the enchantments that remain in a view of the world as fundamentally, even fatally damaged. In the New Zealand context, the novels of Tim Corbalis are relevant, particularly *The Fossil Pits*,¹⁷ which explores the persistence of history, and *Measurement*,¹⁸ which deals, like Baudrillard's work, with the irreducible, unquantifiable aspect of the world. Carl Shuker's *The Method Actors*¹⁹ provides another narrative of the relationship of the present to the past which it seeks to discard, one which also provides a fascinating look at contemporary New Zealand attitudes towards Asia, long an important element in Western narratives of enchantment and reenchantment. In addition, the work of Sarah Quigley, particularly *Fifty Days*²⁰, offers further potential narrative explorations of a reenchanting world. Again this raises the more sociological question as to what people do with text and with story. What narratives in particular play roles in religious practice generally and in reenchantment more particularly?

In the realm of the cinema, the films of Krzysztof Kieslowski, who, we must remember, was the co-writer and intended director of the film that eventually became Tom Tykwer's *Heaven*, offer another potential source for stories and representations that are relevant for the study of reenchantment, as do the films of Germany's Fatih Akin, particularly *Gegen die wand*²¹ and *Auf der anderen Seite*²², which, like Tykwer's, are meditations on the elementary enchantments of fate, chance and coincidence. Additionally, the films of the director Alejandro González Iñárritu and screenwriter Guillermo Arriaga, who have collaborated on the trilogy, *Amores perros*,²³ *21 Grams*,²⁴ and *Babel*,²⁵ exploring the similar themes of hidden connections and the meaning of fate, suggest themselves as further potential sources for exploring the concept and manifestations of reenchantment in the context of popular fictional narratives.

¹⁵ Michel Houellebecq, *Les particules élémentaires* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998).

¹⁶ Michel Houellebecq, *La possibilité d'une île* (Paris: Fayard, 2005). For a short earlier treatment of similar terrain, see Michel Houellebecq, *Lanzarote* (Paris: Flammarion, 2000).

¹⁷ Tim Corbalis, *The Fossil Pits* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2005).

¹⁸ Tim Corbalis, *Measurement* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2002).

¹⁹ Carl Shuker, *The Method Actors* (Washington, D.C.: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2005).

²⁰ Sarah Quigley, *Fifty Days* (London: Virago Press, 2004).

²¹ *Gegen die wand*, dir. Fatih Akin, 121 min. (Arte, 2004).

²² *Auf der anderen Seite*, dir. Fatih Akin, 122 min. (Anka Film, 2007).

²³ *Amores perros*, dir. Alejandro González Iñárritu, 154 min. (Altavista Films, 2000).

²⁴ *21 Grams*, dir. Alejandro González Iñárritu, 124 min. (Focus Features, 2003).

²⁵ *Babel*, dir. Alejandro González Iñárritu, 146 min. (Paramount Vantage, 2006).

Back in the conceptual domain, there are other contemporary thinkers who can help us, though arguably not as much as Baudrillard has done, to *think* reenchantment. Michel de Certeau comes immediately to mind for such a project, his *The Practice of Everyday Life*,²⁶ which outlines a number of ways in which people pursue the ‘micro-emancipatory’ goals Fuat A. Firat and Alladi Venkatesh describe in their influential article ‘Liberatory Postmodernism and the Reenchantment of Consumption’. In this first volume, de Certeau lays out in some detail the ways in which people *use* and interact with their material culture, the ways in which people ‘make do with what they have’. He outlines how such seemingly mundane practices as eating, reading and walking can help people to resist rationalisation. In his essay, ‘Walking in the City’,²⁷ he offers a fascinating and challenging look at living in the contemporary Western city, arguing that every city is in actuality two cities, which exist in a similar dialectic to that of disenchantment and reenchantment. One is the visible, functional city, the other is the city as a constant creation of those who live within it, an unofficial city that, like Baudrillard’s symbolic exchange, is unable to be fully explained or even described. De Certeau presents these two cities in eternal and undecidable dialogue, though the official city continues to dominate the conversation. Rationalised urban space, ‘brutally lit by an alien reason’, designed for utility and heavily quantified, strives to control the denizens of the city. However, this control is never, and can never be, total. The official city generates spaces and practices that run against the grain and refuse both control and quantification. In de Certeau’s words, the city ‘makes room for a void’, ‘opens up clearings’ and allows for ‘a certain play within a system of defined spaces’.²⁸ He summarises:

On the one hand, there is a differentiation and redistribution of the parts and functions of the city, as a result of inversions, displacements, accumulations, etc.: on the other there is a rejection of everything that is not capable of being dealt with in this way and so constitutes the ‘waste products’ of a functionalist administration (abnormality, deviance, illness, death, etc.) ... if in discourse the city serves as a totalising and almost mythical landmark for socioeconomic and political strategies, urban life increasingly permits the re-emergence of the element that the urbanistic project excluded. The language of power is thus in itself ‘urbanising’ but the city is left prey to contradictory movements that counter-balance and combine themselves outside the reach of panoptic power.²⁹

²⁶ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, vol. 1, trans. by Steven Rendell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

²⁷ De Certeau, *Practice I*, 91-110.

²⁸ De Certeau, *Practice I*, 104-106.

²⁹ De Certeau, *Practice I*, 94-95. This disparity among the two cities is for de Certeau a matter of value: ‘The modalities of pedestrian enunciation which a plane representation on a map bring out could be analysed. They

De Certeau concludes, in a manner that recalls both Baudrillard's work and the larger discourse of reenchantment: 'There is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence, spirits one can "invoke" or not. Haunted places are the only ones people can live in'.³⁰ There is also a striking resonance between de Certeau's vision of the unofficial city and Baudrillard's scattered musings on the 'unofficial language' or urban graffiti.

Though a more thorough study of de Certeau's work is necessary, there is ample reason to believe that he offers here a loose method for the study of urban enchantment that offers a myriad of suggestions for further studies in reenchantment.³¹ In the second and final volume of *Practice*, subtitled *Living and Cooking*,³² De Certeau, writing with Luce Girard and Pierre Mayol, tells the story, in painstaking detail, of the daily lives of 'the R. family,' in the Croix-Rousse neighbourhood in Lyon. Based on extensive research and interviews conducted from 1974 to 1978, *Living and Cooking* is a painstaking 'reading' of the R. family, their apartment, their jobs, their neighbourhood and its shops, history, social and economic landscapes. *Living and Cooking* is intriguing and instructive in its own right; however, one of the more compelling parts of the study, viewed from the perspective afforded by thick reenchantment, is the complex relationships that the book establishes between objects and people, which could serve as a model for a concrete, if not precisely quantifiable, exploration of the enchantments of material and consumer culture as well as a way to create a window into the minutiae of how contemporary people conduct their lives in relation to cultural processes of rationalisation. More importantly, such a study, or series of related studies, would afford some insight into how people use their quotidian practices to disrupt the hegemonic logic of instrumentality. Perhaps even more fundamentally, it needs

include the kinds of relationship this enunciation entertains with particular paths (or "statements") by according them a truth value ("alethic" modalities of the necessary, the impossible, the possible, or the contingent), an epistemological value ("epistemic" modalities of the certain, the excluded, the plausible, or the questionable) or finally an ethical or legal value ("deontic" modalities of the obligatory, the forbidden, the permitted, of the optional). De Certeau, *Practice I*, 99.

³⁰ De Certeau, *Practice I*, 108.

³¹ To underline the potential of de Certeau for further studying reenchantment, it is telling to note that Tykwer speaks of shooting *Der Krieger und die Kaiserin* in his native Wuppertal in strikingly similar language: 'You become ever more keenly aware why the place where we grow up is magical ... To me, my trip to school was absolutely mystical. When I got there today, I just see an average city street. Back then it seemed enchanted from start to finish. There were thousands of mysterious nooks and crannies and I endowed them all with meaning in my early morning sleepiness. The trip to school is so important since it happens right after we get up and because we are still fully connected to such fantasies. I'd like to make films that keep in close touch with those fantasies, without being naïve, of course. Or at least being naïve is a way I consider wise'. Tom Tykwer, 'Director's Commentary', *Der Krieger und die Kaiserin*, dir. Tom Tykwer, 135 min. (Sony Pictures Classics, 2000). DVD.

³² Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard and Pierre Mayol, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, vol. 2, *Living and Cooking*, trans. by Timothy J. Tomasik (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

to be asked how many people, and what kinds of people, feel the need to consciously define themselves *against* the rationalised structures of the contemporary world.

Another thinker whose work is immediately suggestive is Georges Bataille, whose related concepts of *accursed share* and *sovereignty* again have strong resonances with Baudrillard's conceptualisation of symbolic exchange. Bataille's work on sovereignty involves many of the same considerations as symbolic exchange, and many of those associated with thick reenchantment: gift, sacrifice, value, exchange, and a renegotiation of the worlds of the past. Bataille's concept of the sovereign is also related, not coincidentally, with his challenging theory of religion, which in turn owes a good deal to Weber's narrative of rationalisation and its identification of religious and economic history.³³ Echoing symbolic exchange, which celebrates the extra-economic and extra-instrumental use of goods, Bataille writes critically of the 'servile man', who 'averts his eyes from that which is not useful, which *serves* no purpose'.³⁴ He opposes the servile to the sovereign: 'The sovereign I speak of has little to do with the sovereign of States, as international law defines it. I speak in general of an aspect that is opposed to the servile and the subordinate'.³⁵ The sovereign, then, stands apart from and opposed to the closed system of political economy, as does symbolic exchange; indeed, Bataille champions the 'opposition to the mercantile spirit, to haggling and self-interested calculation' that is embodied in true exchange.³⁶ To explore the similarities a little farther, there is also a remarkable concord between their understandings of death: for Bataille as well as Baudrillard, the contained system of political economy is a culture of death. Bataille writes: '*Of all conceivable luxuries, death, in its fatal and inexorable form, is undoubtedly the most costly*'.³⁷ Bataille, here echoing Palahniuk as well as Baudrillard, also takes pains to delineate different kinds of death which have different value:

in a fundamental sense, to live sovereignly is to escape, if not death, at least the anguish of death. Not that dying is hateful – but living servilely is hateful. The sovereign man escapes death in this sense: he cannot die *humanly*. He cannot live in an anguish likely to enslave him, to determine the flight from death that is the beginning of servitude. He cannot die fleeing ... The sovereign world does have an odour of death, but this is for the subordinate man; for the sovereign man, it is the world of practice that smells bad; if it does not smell of death, it smells of anguish;

³³ See Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, trans by Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 35-42 and 90.

³⁴ Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, vol. 2, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 15. Emphasis in original.

³⁵ Bataille, *Accursed II*, 197.

³⁶ Bataille, *Accursed II*, 42.

³⁷ Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, vol. 1, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 34. Emphasis in original.

its crowds sweat from the anguish provoked by shadows; death exists in it in a contained state, but fills it up.³⁸

Though again it must be speculative, there is a good deal to suggest on first encounter that Bataille's work, particularly that on sovereignty, offers a further body of theoretical/philosophical work which intersects with the framework of thick reenchantment.

The avenues I have mapped for the future study of reenchantment are highly varied, scattered seemingly indiscriminately across wide swathes of historical, methodological and interpretive terrain. However, the method or methods of the study of religion must suit the object or objects that they hope to engage. The central transformation of religious modernity, the diffusion of the religious from its once-solid homes in institutional structures into the interstices of the wider culture, has significantly widened the field of study for academic religious studies. The concept of thick reenchantment, which has perhaps its greatest value in drawing connections across diverse realms of culture, further expands the possible landscape we must attempt to cover. Having displaced the subtraction stories of modernity and thrown open the territory that is relevant for the academic study of religion, it becomes an urgent task to follow these roads wherever and whenever they may lead. Untold dangers, and untold riches, lie in wait.

³⁸ Bataille, *Accursed II*, 219-222.

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